



DREAMS AND DREAM INTERPRETATION

DREAMS AND DREAM INTERPRETATION

i. In pre-Islamic Persia. See Supplement.

ii. In the Persian tradition.

ii. IN THE PERSIAN TRADITION

Dreams and their interpretation (*k̄vāb*, *ro'ya*; *k̄vāb-gozārī*), an integral part of the Persian world view, as well as the Shī'ite notion of "inner prophethood" (*nobowwat-e bāṭen*; Fahd, 1966b, p. 351). Dreams are divided into two main categories: those that occur only during sleep (*k̄vāb*, *nawm*, *ro'ya*) and those that occur while awake or in a state of semiwakefulness (*wāqe'a* "vision," *ro'ya*). They are further subdivided into those that are "true" and "false" (*ḥolm*, *ažgāt-e ahlām*, etc.). "True" dreams include those experienced by believers (*mo'menūn*), saints (*awlīā'*), and prophets (*anbīā'*), both those that require interpretation and those that do not (Ebn Sīrīn, 1302/1884, p. 5).

A three-part typology of dreams can be drawn from the work of R. G. A. van Lieshout (pp. 12-34) and G. E. von Grunebaum (pp. 11-20). Type 1 is the



“passive” or “enstatic” dream, of which there are three subtypes: a “recognizable” visual perception or a symbolic form; a message conveyed by a figure, recognized by the dreamer; and, less frequently, an “objective record,” for example a piece of paper (*bāb*) found in the morning or marks on the dreamer’s body (MacEoin, p. 56). Type 2, the “active” or “ecstatic” vision, is more prevalent in the Islamic and Persian experience than in the Greek tradition; it occurs in a special state “between sleep and wakefulness.” The dreamer experiences either unusual ecstasy, awe-inspiring yet with cognitive elements; a departure from the body, often guided by an angel; or transformation into a winged creature that flies to fantastic realms. Type 3 is the dream that must be interpreted; this type is more often reported in popular literature, where dreams show the way to treasure, warn of imminent danger, or bring cures and the like.

In epic, legends, and popular tradition. In Persian myth and epic literature many dreams of kings and heroes are recounted. In one of the darkest mythic episodes, in the version compiled by Abū Maṣūūr Ṭa‘ālebī, the evil king Žaḥḥāk dreams of his own demise: Three men enter his palace and kill him. His dream interpreters warn that he is to be brought down by a prince named Ferēdūn, as yet unborn, whose mother is descended from King Tahmūraṭ. Zāl foresees his marriage to Rūdāba in a dream. According to the *Bundahišn* and the *Kār-nāmag*, Bābak dreams that the sun and moon appear from Sāsān’s forehead and cover the land (Ṭa‘ālebī, *Ġorar*, pp. 12-14, 36, 221-22; cf. *Ḳvāb-gozārī*, p. 5). The only named interpreter of dreams in this work, however, is Bozorgmehr (see [BOZORGMEHR-E BOḲTAGĀN](#)), who, while still a youth, gains royal favor by explaining Anōšīravān’s dream after the *mōbeds* (priests) have failed (Ṭa‘ālebī, *Ġorar*, p. 299).

In the *Šāh-nāma* eighteen dreams are reported, most of them not mentioned or in different versions from those mentioned by Ṭa‘ālebī. For example, Žaḥḥāk dreams of three men who strike him with a bull-headed mace and imprison him on Mount Damāvand (ed. Mohl, I, p. 37). Many dreams are predominantly informative, as when a horseman informs Sām that Zāl, the son whom he has abandoned in the wilderness, is alive (I, p. 111). Perhaps the most graphic dream recounted in the *Šāh-nāma* is that of Afrāsīāb, who sees a desert full of serpents and a sky full of eagles; the wind blows his banner to the ground, and a hundred thousand Iranian soldiers carry him off to Kāvōs. The astronomers (*aḳtar-šenāsān*) and wise men (*beḳradān*) then interpret the destiny in store for Afrāsīāb (II, pp. 130-31; cf. Sīāvoš’s dream of his own destiny, I, pp. 193-94).



Among the few places in the *Šāh-nāma* where the angel Sorūš appears is Gōdarz's dream, in which the angel, seated on a cloud, informs him of God's command (II, p. 239). The angel provides a nonsymbolic message, which results in action without the necessity for interpretation. In another such "clear" dream Ṭōs sees a radiant "candle" rising from the water; on it Sīāvoš is seated on an ivory throne, manifesting the full Kayanid glory (*farra-ye kayānī*; III, p. 36; cf. IV, pp. 114 ff.). When Ferdowsī himself dreamed that Daqīqī assured him that his endeavors in compiling the *Šāh-nāma* were not in vain, the dream needed no interpretation because the message was clear, not symbolic (IV, pp. 180 ff.). The most elaborate dream episode in the *Šāh-nāma*, consisting of nine interrelated but separate dreams, is that involving the Indian king of Qannūj (V, pp. 57 ff.). These dreams are, however, symbolic and must be interpreted. The only person capable of doing so is Mehrān, a wise ascetic who lives in the wilderness with the animals and eats mountain herbs. According to him, the dreams are a warning of an imminent attack by [Alexander](#), which the king is not to resist (V, pp. 136 ff.). The only place in the *Šāh-nāma* where the term "dream interpreter" (*gozāranda-ye k'āb*) occurs is in the episode of Ƙosrow Anōšīravān and Bozorgmehr, in which Ferdowsī also expressed his own views: "Enlightened souls see in dreams all existing things" (VI, pp. 122, 123-24). In the final dream episode reported in the *Šāh-nāma* [Bahrām Čōbīn](#) regains his courage in his battle against the Arab invaders as the result of a dream and rearranges his army effectively (VI, pp. 306 ff.).

In Persian legends and popular narratives political authority is bestowed through dreams, as exemplified, for example, in tales about [Abū Moslem Ƙorāsānī](#). In one such dream the Prophet Moḥammad, accompanied by Gabriel, appears to Abū Moslem and grants him the ax and other regalia of the *fotowwa*, emblems of his authority. He receives his sword from Salmān Fārsī (Lecerf, p. 374). In the *Abū Moslem-nāma*, a romance by Abū Ṭāher Ṭarsūsī (pp. 2 ff.), each of Abū Moslem's forty companions, many of them representatives of guilds, dreams of events to come (Mélikoff, pp. 63-64) and receives magical powers, so that the blacksmith can make Abū Moslem's sword, the wood carver his ax, and so on. Abū Moslem's dream of the Prophet is typical of a genre that includes almost every royal figure, including Shaikh Ṣafī-al-Dīn, eponymous ancestor of the Safavid dynasty, who derived his authority from dreams of investment with miraculous powers (*ƙawāreq-e 'ādāt wa ƙarāmāt*; Eskandar Beg, pp. 10-11, 13 ff.). Shah Ṭahmāsb claimed to have seen and conversed in a dream (*wāqe'a*) with Imam 'Alī, who foretold his victories in battle with the Uzbeks and others (*Taḍƙera*, pp. 15, 23 ff.). The [Ahl-e](#)



Ḥaqq still equate true inner dream with divine revelation (Mokrī). Other Persian legends of this genre are to be found in such popular works as *Firūzshāh-nāma*, *Dārāb-nāma*, *Qeṣṣa-ye Ḥamza*, and *Dāstān-e Samak-e ‘Ayyār* (see Hanaway; Meyerovitch; cf. Chauvin).

Dreams in religion. Dreams have an especially important place in Shi‘ism; the infallible imams are all considered to have had “true dreams,” which served as sources for their continued inspiration by God, even though revelation had ended with the Prophet (Corbin, tr., p. 385). The imams are considered to have been especially adept at interpreting symbolic dreams, which gave them access to esoteric knowledge. A work on dream interpretation, *Taqṣīm*, has been widely attributed to the sixth imam, Ja‘far al-Ṣādeq (for the inclusion of this book in a work by Teflīsī, see below). According to later Shi‘ite jurists (see Majlesī), it was a major source of esoteric knowledge. One of the earliest jurists, Moḥammad b. Ya‘qūb Kolaynī (d. 329/940), whose *al-Oṣūl men al-kāfi* served as a model for development of Shi‘ite jurisprudence, also wrote a work on dream interpretation, *Tabīr al-ro‘yā* (see Kolaynī, p. 8). Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī (d. 1110/1698) quoted from Kolaynī’s work on dream interpretation in his own chapter on the subject (pp. 176 ff.), where he also referred to *Ketāb al-taḥrīr ‘an al-a‘emma*, a collection of reported teachings on dreams by the imams. One of the significant principles stated there is that the dreams of “believers” are true (*ro‘yā al-mo‘men ṣahīḥa*). The imams or other “signs” may appear to any believer, who will thus also gain access to esoteric knowledge. The occultation of the twelfth imam, who possessed a higher visionary knowledge (in Henry Corbin’s terms a hierognosis; tr., p. 382), is of special significance in the Shi‘ite view of dreams, for he “resides” in Ḥūrqalyā, a realm of the imagined world and may thus be “seen” through dreams (Corbin, tr., p. 405). Dreams thus inform the believer of “inner” knowledge (*bāṭen*) not apparent when he is awake and not associated with phenomenal existence. The believer must, however, perform certain acts in order to prepare for the imams to appear, inform, and guide him in dreams. The conditions are elaborated at length in several Shi‘ite works (e.g., Nūrī, pp. 417-20).

Dreams also play a central role in legitimizing the Shi‘ite institution of *welāya*, that is, the guardianship of the elect over the multitude. This channel is, for example, fully described in Shaikhi literature, especially by **Shaikh Aḥmad Aḥsā‘ī** (d. 1241/1826), who considered the authority of his own investiture dreams to be undisputed (MacEoin, p. 57). These dreams were closely paralleled in the visionary experiences of Moḥammad-‘Alī the **Bāb**, who



reported a dream in which he drank blood from the severed head of Imam Ḥosayn (MacEoin, p. 84 n. 44; cf. Amanat, pp. 168-69). Bahā'-Allāh, too, placed special emphasis on the revelatory function of dreams (pp. 34-35).

Among Persian works on dream interpretation Ḥobayš Teflīsī's *Kāmel al-ta'bīr* (13th century; p. 3) occupies a special place; in it the author refers to the earlier *Ketāb-e oṣūl* of Dāniāl-e Ḥakīm, *Taqṣīm* of Ja'far al-Šādeq, Ebn Sīrīn's *Ketāb-e jawāme'*, Ebrāhīm Kermānī's *Dastūr*, Jāber Mağrebī's *Ketāb-e eršād*, Esmā'īl b. Aš'at's *Tabīr*, Mo'menī's *Kanz al-ro'yā*, *Tabīr* of Abdūs, Ḥall (Jamal in the printed text) *al-dalā'el fi'l-manāmāt*, and *Īzāḥ al-ta'bīr* of Ṭāmūsī (see *Kvāb-gozārī*, p. 6; Afšār, pp. 1-9; for other works on dream interpretation, see Fahd, 1966a, pp. 330-63; Storey, II/3, pp. 466-72). The anonymous *Kvāb-gozārī* of the twelfth or thirteenth century has only partially survived; it is similar to Teflīsī's work and includes an extensive introduction to the subject of dream interpretation, in which the main koranic passages and pertinent prophetic traditions are cited.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(For cited works not found in this bibliography, see "Short References.") Ī. Afšār, "Andar fawāyed-e loğawī-e kāmel al-ta'bīr," in S. Ḥ. Naşr, ed., *Majmū'aye maqālāt-e taḥqīqī-e kāvar-šenāsī-e ehdā' be Hānrī Māsa/Mélanges d'orientalisme offerts à Henri Massé*, Tehran, 1341 Š./1962, pp. 1-9.

Ālamārā-ye Šāh Esmā'īl, ed. A. Montazer-Šāḥeb, Tehran, 1349 Š./1970.

A. Amanat, *Resurrection and Renewal. The Making of the Babi Movement in Iran, 1840-1850*, Ithaca, N.Y., 1989.

Bahā'-Allāh, *Haft Vādī, Chahār Vādī*, Hofheim-Langenhain, Germany, 1988.

V. Chauvin, "Les rêves du trésor sur le pont," *Revue des Traditions Populaires* 13, 1898, pp. 193-96.

H. Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī*, Paris, 1958; tr.



R. Manheim as *Creative Imagination in the Šūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, Princeton, N.J., 1969.

Moḥammad Ebn Sirīn, *Montakab al-kalām fī tafsīr al-aḥlām*, Cairo, 1302/1884; repr. Cairo, 1963.

T. Fahd, “Les songes et leur interprétation selon l’Islam,” in A.-M. Esnoul et al., eds., *Les songes et leur interprétation. Sources orientales II*, Paris, 1959.

Idem, *La divination arabe*, Leiden, 1966a.

Idem, “The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society,” in G. E. von Grunebaum and R. Caillois, eds., *The Dream and Human Societies*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966b, pp. 351-63.

Abū Ḥāmed Ġazālī, *Eḥyā’ ‘olūm al-dīn. Ketāb dekr al-mawt IV*, Cairo, n.d., pp. 504-11.

G. E. von Grunebaum, “Introduction. The Cultural Function of the Dream as Illustrated by Classical Islam,” in G. E. von Grunebaum and R. Caillois, eds., *The Dream and Human Societies*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 3-21.

W. Hanaway, “Formal Elements in the Persian Popular Romances,” *Review of National Literature* 21, 1971, pp. 139-61.

Kvāb-gozārī, ed. Ī. Afšār, Tehran, 1346 Š./1967.

Moḥammad b. Ya‘qūb Kolaynī, *al-Oṣūl men al-kāfī I*, tr. M.-B. Kamare‘ī, ed. M.-B. Behbūdī and ‘A.-A. Ġaffārī, Tehran, 1382/1962.

J. Lecerf, “The Dream in Popular Culture. Arab and Islamic,” in G. E. von Grunebaum and R. Caillois, eds., *The Dream and Human Societies*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 366-79.

R. G. A. van Lieshout, *Greeks on Dreams*, Utrecht, 1980.

D. MacEoin, *From Shaykhism to Babism. A Study in Charismatic Renewal in Shī‘ī Islam*, Ph.D. diss., The University of Cambridge, 1979.

Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī, *Behār al-anwār. Ketāb al-samā’ wa’l-‘ālam*, bk. LXI, Qom, n.d., pp. 151-244.



- J. Matīnī, “Kvābhā-ye Ahūrā’ī-e Ābtīn,” *Īrān-šenāsī* 3/2, 1991, pp. 369-81.
- I. Mélikoff, *Abū Muslim, le “porte-hache” du Khorassan. Dans la tradition épique turco-irannenne*. Paris, 1962.
- E. Meyero-vitch, “Les songes et leur interprétation chez les Persans,” in A.-M. Esnoul et al., eds., *Les songes et leur interprétation. Sources orientales II*, Paris, 1959, pp. 175-87.
- M. Mokri, “Les songes et leur interprétation chez les Ahl-e-Haqq du Kurdistan,” in A.-M. Esnoul et al., eds., *Les songes et leur interprétation. Sources orientales II*, Paris, 1959, pp. 191-204.
- Mīrzā Ḥosayn Nūrī, *Najm-e tāqeb dar aḥwāl-e Emām-e ḡāyeb*, Tehran, 1306/1888. *Taḍkera-ye Šāh Ṭahmāsb*, Berlin, 1343/1924.
- Moḥammad b. ‘Alī Tahānawī, *Kaššāf eṣṭelāḥāt al-fonūn I*, ed. A. Sprenger, Calcutta, 1862, pp. 597-606.
- Abū Ṭāher Ṭarsūsī, *Abū Moslem-nāma (Ḥamāsa-ye Kōrāsānī)*, ed. E. Yaḡmā’ī, Tehran, 1355 Š./1976.
- Abu’l-Faẓl Ḥobayš b. Moḥammad Teflīsī, *Kollīyāt-e kāmel al-ta’bīr . . .*, Tehran, n.d.