Introduction

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Writing in the early thirteenth century CE, the great Arab mystic Ibn [al-]ʿArabī (1165–1240) suggests that "The only reason God placed sleep in the animate world was so that everyone might . . . know that there is another world similar to the sensory world."[1] Elsewhere, he states that "Dreams have a place, a locus, and a state. Their state is sleep, which is an absence from manifest sensory things that produce ease because of weariness which overcomes the soul in this plane in the state of wakefulness."[2] By means of the faculty of imagination, IbnʿArabī argues, a dreaming individual is capable of seeing disembodied intelligible entities in the form of corporeal, sensory objects.[3] This is the world of dream-imagination in which the mysteries of God and his creation, otherwise impenetrable to the human intellect and sense perceptions, are unveiled. In seeking to substantiate the importance of dreams as a cognitive tool, Ibn ʿArabī frequently invokes the Prophet's saying that "People are asleep, and when they die, they awake."[4] In his interpretation, the implication of this saying is that "[People] will never cease being sleepers, so they will never cease being dreamers."[5] In other words, dreams are an indispensible instrument of cognition: People should dream in order to grasp the true state of affairs in this world and the next and to remain tuned to the ever changing modes of divine self-disclosure in the objects and phenomena of the empirical universe.

   Although many Muslims, including some thinkers examined in this volume, may not have agreed with Ibn ʿArabī's assertions, they would no doubt unanimously concede the vital importance of dreams and waking visions for Muslim life. The reasons for this are manifold.

Writing from outside the Islamic tradition, the renowned American historian of Islamic civilization, Marshall Hodgson (1922–1968), offers the following explanation of dreams' importance for premodern Muslim societies:

> Both waking and dreaming visions can form a very fruitful resource for personal mythic formation. . . . Such myth formation need not serve merely the delights of a free fantasy. We are learning that there can be dreams of special urgency which can be pointers to areas of crucial importance to the growth of the personality; and this at all levels of that growth, not merely in its correction of elementary neurosis. Dreams readily take on a colouration, in their symbols and format, from social expectations surrounding the dreamer; but they will give those social expectations a profoundly personal relevance, perhaps more so than can readily be achieved in waking consciousness.[6]

According to Hodgson, premodern Muslims did not consider dreams to be simple expressions of the dreamer's repressed phobias, aspirations, and sexual drives, as well as some other types of neurosis, as asserted by Sigmund Freud in his theory of psychoanalysis.[7] Rather, they were concerned with what dreams could tell them about "the world outside the dreamer, things that could not otherwise be known."[8]

Like Ibn ʿArabī, medieval and modern Muslims have considered dreams to be windows into the hidden mysteries of both this world and the next. In this respect, dreams are akin to, and part of, prophecy itself—a notion based on several prophetic statements to this effect cited throughout this volume.[9] For instance, the Prophet is quoted as declaring that with his death "the glad tidings of prophecy" would cease, whereas "true dreams" would endure. This statement implies that dreams and visions are, in the words of one Western scholar, "a form of divine revelation and a chronological successor to the Koran."[10] This is indeed how they have been perceived by many Sufis. As one of the contributors to this volume argues, by virtue of "having access to a persisting suprasensible and suprapersonal knowledge through the medium of dreams and dreaming," the Sufi master or "friend of God" is but a "transposition" of the Prophet.[11]

This is not to say that veridical dreams and visions are necessarily the prerogative of Muslim mystics or society's spiritual and intellectual elite in general. In principle, "each good Muslim could expect guidance from God in dreams."[12] The amazing pervasiveness

of dreams and dream-lore at various levels and among different classes of Muslim society is demonstrated by Part I of this volume. Its chapters discuss the ways in which dreams have been deployed in a variety of non-Sufi contexts: historical, prosopographical, theological, anthropological and multimedia. Given the great importance of dreams and waking visions for mystical Islam, it is only natural that Part II is specifically devoted to their roles in various Sufi communities. As the authors of the chapters in Part II show, the Sufis have put dreams and dream-lore to a broad variety of uses, from training Sufi disciples and prognostication to confirming the special status and authority of individual Sufi masters as well as authenticating spiritual genealogies and mystical orders.

The recognition of the general availability of truthful insights to mystics and nonmystics alike often is offset by the widely held belief that special training and expertise may be required to unravel dreams' subtle symbolism, unless, of course, they are clear and unequivocal.[13] Indeed, very early on, interpreting dreams became a special art, even a profession. Originally, relatively uniform and homogenous, by the end of the tenth century CE the tradition of dream interpretation became fragmented into "a number of competing legacies, each grounding [it] on a distinctive epistemic foundation."[14] Some were strictly Islamic ("*sharīᶜa*-minded") in that they consistently traced their origins back to the beliefs and practices of the first Muslim community under the Prophet's leadership. Such methods of interpreting dreams tended to legitimize themselves by reference to the Muslim scriptures. Others were more cosmopolitan, creatively combining traditional Islamic beliefs with dream-lore derived from non-Islamic sources (Greek, Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and Hindu).[15] Naturally, the Sufis forged their own, distinctive oneirocritic tradition, as the chapters collected in Part II finely demonstrate.

On the whole, dreams and the art of their interpretation are so intimately intertwined that on occasion it is impossible to draw a clear distinction between the two without damaging their organic co-existence in various sociocultural contexts. This is hardly surprising because the very account of a dream or vision by a dreamer or visionary already constitutes their initial interpretation.

As we emphasize the social and cosmological aspects of dreams and visions, we should keep in mind that they were, and still are, seen by Muslims not only as divinations and explanations of outside events, that is, messages from the unseen world of divine mystery, but also as reflections of the inner world of the dreaming person.[16] Dreams and visions thus offer "a constant balance between the private

world of latent images, fears and hopes, and outside reality, cosmic as well as social."[17] To divine the implications of dreams and visions for any given individual, Muslim experts on dream interpretation have stressed the necessity of taking into account the dreamer's personality, gender, social status, trade, depth of faith, and other personal circumstances. For, as some of these interpreters have cogently argued, the same symbol may portend different things for different people under different circumstances.[18]

As "expressions of both inner and outer voices," dreams in Islamic contexts are intimately linked to society's aesthetical, ethical, and social values. In a two-way process, these values both mold and are being molded by dreams and dream-lore. Likewise, dreams shape, and are decisively shaped by, personal and collective notions of self and society.[19] The reciprocity of the process of shaping and being shaped cannot be emphasized too strongly.[20] Seen from this vantage point, dreams and visions constitute an essential part of society's functioning and self-perception.

Although "dream cultures"[21] may vary from one Muslim society or epoch to another, the prophetic endorsement just cited and the unequivocal evidence found in the Qurʾān itself[22] have assured the continuous relevance of dreams and visions for Muslim communities worldwide. The chapters collected under this cover are an eloquent testimony to both diversity and cultural specificity of dream-lore. At the same time, they show the continuing importance of dreams for Muslims regardless of their social, cultural, and intellectual backgrounds.

Muslims' preoccupation with dreams, visions and their interpretation has successfully withstood the test of time. It is almost as profound at present as it was in the past. No wonder, therefore, that the recent decades have seen the growing interest among academics in various aspects and roles of dreams and dream interpretation in Islamic societies. Beginning with a seminal volume on dreams edited by G. E. von Grunebaum and Roger Caillois in 1966,[23] there has been a constant stream of publications on the subject by Western and Western-trained scholars of Islamic societies and cultures. The most recent ones place special emphasis on dream interpretation as a means of empowerment, education, and spiritual guidance, on the one hand, and subversion of societal conventions and authority contestation, on the other.[24] Although complementing these earlier studies, the chapters gathered in this volume place more emphasis on dreams as such rather than on how they have been perceived and explicated by oneirocritic professionals. Furthermore, the chronological scope of this study is broader in that it encompasses uses of dreams and dream-lore in contemporary Islamic societies and on the Internet.

As already mentioned, Part I deals with dreams, waking visions, and dream interpretation in non-Sufi contexts. Arranged in roughly chronological order, it opens with a discussion by Sarah Mirza of the role of dreams in Ibn Hishām's biography of the prophet Muḥammad. Significantly, in this seminal source, the Prophet is not the only one who sees true dreams and visions. Moreover, a few other dreamers discussed in Mirza's chapter are not even Muslims. Some of them belong to the non-Muslim camp, which makes their dark predictions—obtained through dreams—of the final triumph of the Muslim community ever more dramatic and indubitable. Naturally, the Prophet himself being the protagonist, his revelatory dreams and visions of encounters with the Divine and his messengers occupy the center stage of Ibn Hishām's account of Muḥammad's prophetic mission.

The chapter by Maxim Romanov questions some common assumptions regarding the sternness and sobriety of the Ḥanbalī religiopolitical school that have commonly been contrasted with the "fanciful," "superstitious," and socially "irresponsible" attitudes ascribed to the Sufis. In analyzing biographies of medieval Ḥanbalīs, both leaders and rank-and-file, Romanov brings out the same indulgence in dreams and dream-lore that is routinely associated with Sufi communities. In the Ḥanbalī biographical narratives, dreams play a wide gamut of roles from confirming the veracity and lofty status of certain Ḥanbalī scholars to asserting the supremacy of the Ḥanbalī theological and legal "way" (*madhhab*) as a whole.

That fascination with dreams and dream-lore was not the exclusive preserve of Sunni communities is evident from Omid Ghaemmaghami's illuminating discussion of Twelver Shīʿī dreams about encounters with the Hidden Imām. Drawing a parallel between the tradition describing the Prophet's vision of God in the form of a handsome youth and the numerous Shīʿī stories about appearance of a youthful Hidden Imām in dreams and visions of his followers, Ghaemmaghami concludes that, for the Shīʿīs, the visionary appearances of the Imām represented "the countenance of God upon which His friends have set their affections." Through dreams and visions, argues the author, God's tangible and, on occasion, also visible presence among his faithful servants is maintained, helping the Shīʿīs to cope with their minority status and the historical injustices inflicted on them by the Sunni majority.

With Derek Mancini-Lander's chapter "Dreaming the Elixir of Knowledge," we enter the realm of Persian *belle-lettres*. In examining the life story of a poet from the Safavid epoch (1502–1722), Mancini-Lander shows the critical role that dreams played not only in the poet's artistic evolution and self-perception, but also in how he was viewed

by his society and poetic peers. Dreams accompany the protagonist throughout his entire life from early childhood to his eventual promotion, "sanctioned in heaven," to the rank of the foremost poet of his age. Significantly, these dreams appear at and determine the critical turning points of his spiritual and artistic journey. In the words of Mancini-Lander, "they facilitated the transmission of simulacral, yet practical, even somatic, forms of knowing," thereby enabling "total reorientations" not only in the poet's external existence, but in his poetic craft as well. In this way, dreams serve as an effective and indispensible means of the poet's personal and professional growth and self-identity.

In his chapter on "Dreaming ʿOs̱māns," Gottfried Hagen addresses the role of dreams in premodern Ottoman dynastic historiography. He shows that although modern historians of the Ottoman Empire have routinely dismissed dream narratives found in imperial chronicles as "obvious fiction," premodern Ottomans took dreams very seriously indeed. For them, dreams were as real as the historical events they predicted or attempted to explain. Dreams were, in Hagen's words, "taken for real by the actors in the narrative, by [the] author of the account, and, finally, by his audience." As such, dreams possessed "high explanatory value" for both Ottoman chroniclers and their audiences. In attributing meaning to seemingly senseless historical events and catastrophes, they helped the Ottoman populations, or at least the empire's learned elite, to find "orientation in a world that would otherwise be experienced as chaos" and, in so doing, to come to terms with inexplicable dramas (and traumas) of historical process.

With the emergence of Islamic modernist and reformist thought in the latter part of the nineteenth century CE, some Muslim scholars adopted a more cautious or even outright critical attitude toward dreams and dream interpretation. Fareeha Khan's chapter "Sometimes a Dream is Just a Dream" examines the ambivalent approach to dreams characteristic of the reformist Deobandi movement that originated in northern India in 1867. Its major representatives up to the present have felt that Indian Muslims put too much faith in dreams, visions, and all manner of premonitions at the expense of fulfilling their basic religious obligations as outlined in the manuals of the Deobandi school. As long as dreams were conducive toward the overriding goal of improving and reforming the beliefs and practices of the subcontinent's Muslim masses, the Deobandi leaders were prepared to accept them as sources of "absolute guidance." If, however, for one reason or the other, dreams or visions were perceived as an impediment to or distraction from this all-important objective, the Deobandi

scholarly elite demanded that they be dismissed as inconsequential or even outright harmful. By espousing this selective view of dreams and visions, the Deobandi leaders have effectively harnessed them to their overarching task of inculcating in their audiences sober reformist attitudes in which the miraculous and fanciful had no major role to play. In a sense, the Deobandi ambivalence toward dreams and visions is articulated in opposition to what they considered the overzealous and uncritical acceptance of dreams within traditional Sufi circles, which are the subject of Part II.

The last two chapters of Part I address the role of dreams and dream interpretation in contemporary Muslim societies. Leah Kinberg's chapter, "Dreams Online," shows how the ancient Muslim belief in the veracity of dreams in which the Prophet appears to the dreamer is played out in the age of the Internet. The vigorous rejection by high-ranking religious scholars of certain dream narratives circulated via Internet blogs and forums indicates that something vital is at stake here. Wittingly or not, such narratives floating in cyberspace can challenge or even undermine the authority of official Muslim scholars as the sole legitimate exponents of "correct" Islam. In this way, dream accounts posted on the Internet become a means and sites of subversion and contestation of the traditional structures of religious authority.

Part I concludes with Muhammad alZekri's chapter on female dream interpretation in present-day Dubai (the United Arab Emirates [UAE]). It shows how the ability to interpret dreams used to be a means of empowering the otherwise disenfranchised female half of the population of this Gulf state, only to be supplanted gradually by male-dominated Salafī TV forums and telephone "hot-lines" seeking to disseminate "politically correct" religious guidance among the UAE's younger audiences. As increasing numbers of Muslims in the Gulf region gain direct, unmediated access to the Muslim scriptures, thanks to the rapid spread of mass education, the art of dream interpretation becomes ever-more deeply rooted in textual sources, such as the Qurʾān, ḥadīth, and their exegesis. As alZekri vividly demonstrates, this text-based approach inexorably supersedes and marginalizes the folkloric, oral methods of making sense out of people's dreams that were predominant in the not-so-distant past. Nonetheless, the rapid spread of new information technologies and direct access of the public to media outlets have not marginalized or discredited dreams and dream-lore as such. They continue to play a vital role in the Muslim societies of the Gulf and beyond.

In sum, alZekri's and Kinberg's studies show that, as in the premodern and early modern age, nowadays dreams and dream

interpretation remain both sites and means of asserting and contesting religious and social authority, with modern information technologies facilitating and "democratizing" the process.

Part II opens with a concise survey by Jonathan Katz of the perceptions of dreams and visions in Islamic mysticism as articulated by its major representatives from the premodern epoch. The author then proceeds to discuss "how reportage of dreams, either by the [Sufi] *shaykh*s themselves or their disciples, was instrumental in securing popular reputations for sanctity" and in validating Sufi "claims to religious and political leadership." Katz's chapter demonstrates that "the most intimate and private of noetic experience—the dream and vision—could also, paradoxically, serve a most public role." This, argues Katz, is particularly true of the dreams in which the Prophet himself appears to Sufi masters to confirm their veracity and their status as guides of their constituencies. According to Katz, such prophetic appearances in Sufi dreams place "the dream at the very heart of communal religious experience."

Whereas Katz's chapter focuses on the dreams of some major Sufi masters from eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North Africa, his conclusions easily can be extrapolated to other parts of the Muslim world. This is made clear by Erik Ohlander's study of the claims to "post-prophetic heir-ship" that the Sufi *shaykh*s of the Muslim East have consistently substantiated by reference to their revelatory experiences in dreams and visions. In sum, as both Katz and Ohlander convincingly show, in Sufi communities worldwide, dreams and visions fulfill the task of indispensible image-, authority- and status-building devices.

The theme of the superiority of Sufi gnosis, often obtained through dreams and visions, is explored in Elizabeth Alexandrin's chapter on the mystical exegesis of the twelfth-century Sufi gnostic Shams al-Dīn al-Daylamī. In al-Daylamī's narrative, the Qurʾān, or rather, a specific selection of Qurʾānic verses, serves as the "primary touchstone" by which the veracity of dreams and visionary experience can be ascertained. For instance, al-Daylamī is fully convinced that the Qurʾān supports the notion that certain elect individuals (such as prophets) can obtain "the vision of God" already in this life. In al-Daylamī's view, this ability does not disappear with the cessation of prophecy. Rather, it is now transferred to Sufi "friends of God" whom God has granted "the vision of the heart." By virtue of this intuitive faculty, the Sufi visionaries can contemplate subtle immaterial entities that ordinary human beings are incapable of seeing, including the light of the Universal Intellect, glimpses of the Afterlife, and even of God himself. Unlike the dreams and visions of ordinary people, the Sufi

visionaries cannot err in either their dreams or their interpretation, because they draw their revelatory insights from their meditation on the esoteric aspects of the Qurʾān, which contains nothing but truth.

Shahzad Bashir's chapter on dream narratives from Persian Sufi hagiographies dating back to the Mongol and Timurid periods explores the pedagogical role of dreams in mediating relationship between Sufi masters and their disciples. The appearance of the former in the dreams of the latter fulfills more than the purpose of guidance, admonition, and instruction. It also serves as a means for the disciples to receive and for the masters to provide protection at the time of need. Furthermore, by furnishing sophisticated and often surprising explanations of their disciples' dreams, the *shaykh*s assert their authority as infallible guides of human consciences. Bashir links dreams to the Naqshbandī practice of *rābiṭa* ("bond") that requires the disciple to constantly visualize the master in his mind's eye in order to imprint the master's image on his consciousness. As an essential pedagogical tool and means of communication, Bashir argues that in Naqshbandī Sufism seeing the *shaykh* in reality or a dream is not a passive activity but one that "needs to be cultivated through deliberate practice." Once obtained, this "televisual" communication between the master and his disciple does not cease with the master's death. No longer available in the flesh, the *shaykh* and his guidance can now be accessed through his appearances in the disciple's dreams. In this way, argues Bashir, dreams serve as the vital, incessant "continuation of the relationship as it existed before the master's demise."

The theme of royal dreams with a mystical slant is explored in Özgen Felek's chapter on the self-fashioning of the Ottoman sultan Murād III (r. 1574–1595). In the epistolary accounts of his dreams submitted to his spiritual preceptor, the Sultan portrays himself as a universal Islamic ruler and an accomplished Sufi. The latter identity, argues Felek, is not static—we see the Sultan evolve from a humble novice to the self-appointed deputy of his master followed by his visionary promotion to the rank of the spiritual "pole" of the universe. In a similar vein, he transforms himself into Ḫıżır, Muḥammed, and ʿAlī, thereby asserting his claim to be the supreme spiritual and temporal Muslim ruler of the age and the unifier of Islamdom. As Felek cogently demonstrates, although [self-]image was as important for early modern Muslims as it is for us today, we would hardly take seriously an image built on one's own dreams. This was certainly not how Murād III saw things. For the Sultan, dreams were a powerful and effective way to fashion his image for both his contemporaries and the generations to come.

Meenakshi Khanna's chapter, which concludes the "Sufi part" of the volume, addresses the legacy of Sayyid Ḥasan Rasūlnumā (d. 1692), an Indian Sufi whose principal claim to fame was his ability to maintain constant contact with the Prophet in his dreams and waking visions. No less importantly, he was capable of "showing" the Prophet to his disciples in their dreams—a gift that he had acquired by cultivating the Uwaysi style of mystical experience, namely one that dispenses with long apprenticeship under a living Sufi master by putting its practitioner in direct contact with the Prophet himself. In the context of seventeenth-century India, Sayyid Ḥasan's claims to be able to keep and put others (his disciples) in touch with the Prophet allowed him to compete—successfully it seems—with the traditional Sufi orders that derived their legitimacy and high social standing from their venerable spiritual genealogies and institutions built around them. As the Prophet's direct and unmediated interlocutor, Sayyid Ḥasan's authority was unimpeachable, for, according to the Prophet's often cited saying: "Whoever has seen me in a dream, has seen me in truth, for Satan cannot impersonate me in a dream."[25]

In summary, the reader is invited to enter the fascinating world of dreams and visions as experienced and described by Muslims of vastly diverse intellectual and social backgrounds living in different historical epochs. The contributors hope that their collective study will pave the way for future research on this important and as yet understudied subject.

Notes

1. Quoted in William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-'Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 119; here and in the quotations that follow I omit the Arabic terms that appear in Chittick's translations.

2. Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 120.

3. Ibid., 115–16; and idem, *The Self-Disclosure of God: Principles of Ibn al-'Arabi's Cosmology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 358–59.

4. Although this saying is commonly attributed to the Prophet in Sufi literature, it is not found in any of the standard *ḥadīth* collections; see Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 396, n. 7.

5. Ibid., 231.

6. Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) 3 vols., vol. 2, 466.

7. Ibid.; Anthony Shafton, *Dream Reader: Contemporary Approaches to the Understanding of Dreams* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 51–52; cf. David Shulman

and Guy Stroumsa (eds.), *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative Aspects of Dreaming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 12.

8. John Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 4.

9. See, for instance, Erik Ohlander's chapter in this volume.

10. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim*, 4.

11. See Ohlander's chapter in this volume.

12. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim*, 4.

13. Louise Marlow, "Introduction," Louise Marlow (ed.), *Dreaming Across Boundaries: The Interpretation of Dreams in Islamic Lands* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2008), 6–7.

14. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim*, 76.

15. Ibid.

16. Dror Ze'evi, *Producing Desire: Changing Sexual Discourse in the Ottoman Middle East, 1500–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 102.

17. Shulman and Stroumsa (eds.), *Dream Cultures*, 6.

18. Ze'evi, *Producing Desire*, 106.

19. Ibid., 104.

20. Marlow, "Introduction," 2.

21. Schulman and Stroumsa (eds.), *Dream Cultures*, 3.

22. Such as the story of Joseph (Yūsuf) in *sūra* 12 that depicts this Biblical prophet as the model interpreter of dreams (see verses 36–55; cf. verses 4–5).

23. *The Dream and Human Societies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

24. Marlow (ed.), *Dreaming*; and Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim*; see also Chapter 4 in Ze'evi, *Producing Desire.*

25. Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ bi-sharḥ . . . al-Nawawī* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1987), 18 vols., 15:22–23.