Dreams and Visions in Islamic Societies. Edited by Özgen Felek and Alexander D. Knysh. Albany: NY: State University of New York Press, 2012. 322 pages.

An outgrowth of a panel presentation at the annual Middle East Studies Association Conference and a follow-up conference convened at the University of Michigan, this fascinating collection of essays is designed to reorient contemporary academic discussion of Islamic oneirology by moving beyond discussions of dream analysis and taking dreams themselves seriously as expressions of individual and social values. In the collection's introductory essay, Alexander D. Knysh outlines a new approach to dreams and visions in Islamic societies that moves beyond both the simplistic reduction of dreams to divine revelation and the Freudian psychoanalytic approach that reduces them to the neuroses of the subconscious. Knysh argues instead for an integrative approach to the individual, social, and cosmological dimensions of dreaming that emphasizes the mutually productive relationship between values and dreams. By analyzing variant approaches and interpretations across broad social and historical divisions, the contributors to this collection highlight the diversity and complexity of Islamic conceptions of dreams and point toward their capacity to inform new understandings of Islamic culture and society.

The eight essays that make up the first section of this remarkable collection significantly broaden and expand the existing literature on dreams and visions in Islamic societies by focusing precisely on the social dimensions of dreams and dream interpretations. In "Dreaming the Truth in the *Sirā* of Ibn Hishām," Sarah Mirza underscores Knysh's contention that dreams cannot be reduced to mere divine revelation and the symbolic recognition of the religious authority of the dreamer by highlighting the interest of early Muslim society in dreams and visions across religious and gender lines. More importantly, Mirza complicates earlier analyses of dream interpretation by moving beyond intellectual discussions of symbolism and meaning and underscoring the social significance of communal activity involved in the narration and interpretation of prophetic dreams. Maxim Romanov's essay, "Dreaming Ḥanbalites: Dream-Tales in Prosopographical Dictionaries," builds upon this notion of dream discussion and interpretation as a social act by underscoring the significance of dreams in Ḥanbali sources as an integral element of communal sanctification. Romanov, in fact, shows that the vast majority of dreams described in these sources did not even require interpretation, but could instead be read as straightforward affirmations of religious status. This connection between dreams and communal identities is further advanced in Omid Ghaemmaghami's "Numinous Vision, Messianic Encounters: Typological Representations in a Version of the Prophet's *ḥadith al-ruʾyā* and in Visions and Dreams of the Hidden Imam," which uses Shiʿi accounts of the youthful appearance of the Hidden Imam in dreams across a broad historical period to highlight the relationship between dreams, meaning, and history. In drawing a connection between Muhammad's vision of God in the *ḥadith al-ruʾyā* and these later dream encounters with the Hidden Imam, Ghaemmaghami argues that Shiʿi scholars drew meaning from the typological convergence of type and antitype that vindicated Shiʿi historical narratives in the face of communal suffering.

If dreams brought new meaning to communal understandings of society and history, Derek J. Mancini-Lander suggests in "Dreaming the Elixir of Knowledge: How a Seventeenth-Century Poet from Herat Got His Name and Fame" that they were no less significant to the dreamer's own self-perception. In a close reading of the Safavid era poet ʿAbd Allāh Bihishtī Haravī's *Nūr al-Mashriqayn* ("The Light of the Two Easts"), Mancini-Lander illustrates the central role of dreams in self-narratives about an individual's place within a broader vocational community. While this discussion necessarily builds upon Romanov's

discussion of dreams as tools for affirming and elevation and individual's status, Mancini-Lander makes a much broader argument about the utility of dreams in facilitating the transmission of knowledge in Islamic societies. Like Mancini-Lander, Gottfried Hagen is interested in the role of dreams in not only signaling status within a religious or political community but also constructing new forms of understanding society and history. Hagen's essay, "Dreaming ʿOsmāns: Of History and Meaning," insists on moving beyond an analysis of dreams as fictional or factual subversions or affirmations of Ottoman history and to instead interrogate dream narratives as historiographical devices that reveal an Ottoman "philosophy of history." Hagen's analysis suggests that dreams functioned as both markers and explanations of historical meaning and served to transform chaotic chronicles of Ottoman history into coherent narratives of historical processes and events. While Hagen underscores the utility of dreams in affirming particular historical narratives, Fareeha Khan's essay, "Sometimes a Dream Is Just a Dream: Inculcating a 'Proper' Perspective on Dream Interpretation," shows that the capacity of dreams to subvert such narratives sometimes led to a more ambivalent approach to dream interpretation. Khan's analysis of approaches to dreams and visions by the modernist and reformist *ʿulama* of Deoband underscores the fundamental importance of authority in the interpretation of dreams. The deep ambivalence of Deoband scholars like Mawlānā Ashraf ʿAlī Thānawi and Muḥammad Taqī ʿUthmānī toward the interpretation of dreams did not reflect any basic incoherence or contradiction in their understanding of the religious significance of dreams but rather indicated an uneasiness with the capacity of dreams to challenge or subvert religious authority. The scholars' insistence on "proper perspective" in the interpretation of dreams thus signaled a conscious attempt to extend religious authority over dream worlds and to stave off potential challenges from below.

Perhaps the single most interesting and innovative aspect of the treatment of dreams and visions in this collection is the treatment of dreams in the modern era by the final two essays of the first section. In "Dreams Online: Contemporary Appearances of the Prophet in Dreams," Leah Kinberg illustrates the contemporary dynamics of dream interpretation in Islamic societies. Perhaps affirming the fears and concerns of Deobandi scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the democratization of dream discourse made possible by the internet revolution has posed new challenges for contemporary religious authorities. While Kinberg shows that the recurrent appearance of the Prophet Muhammad in contemporary dreams has facilitated active online discussions that underscore the continued relevance of dreams and visions in Islamic societies, her analysis also illustrates the new dilemmas posed by modern technology. Classical Islamic scholars, Kinberg notes, were quite cognizant of the dangers presented by fabricated dream narratives, but the anonymity of modern technology has rendered these threats far more troubling to contemporary scholars. The famous *fatwa* of the Saʿudi Salafi scholar ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Ibn Bāz against the transmission of a well-known chain letter narrating a dream vision of the Prophet Muhammad to Shaykh Ahmad, an attendant at the Shrine of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina, illustrates the modern tension between religious authority and religious community in the internet era, as the profusion of Ibn Bāz's *fatwa* has failed to arrest the transmission of the dream narration. Muhammad alZekri builds upon Kinberg's discussion in his own essay, "Transforming Contexts of Dream Interpretation in Dubai," with an analysis of modernity and dreams across three generations that foregrounds historical processes of change and contestation. While Khan and Kinberg have underscored the threats to religious authority posed by the democratization of dream interpretation in the modern era, alZekri shows that the rise of multimedia capitalism has also facilitated the extension of male authority over a domain of dream interpretation traditionally dominated by women. Still, alZekri is careful not to describe this process as a

linear progression of patriarchal hegemony and domination, noting instead the historical processes of "shifting hegemonies and counter-hegemonies." The dynamics of dream interpretation on popular Salafi television shows in Dubai, where female callers communicate with male authorities in a process that simultaneously affirms female hegemony over dream interpretation within the traditional household and asserts the position of religious authorities as the final arbiters of such interpretations, neatly illustrates the complexities of these processes.

The six essays that constitute the second half of this collection build upon the far more expansive and familiar body of historical writing on dreams and dream interpretations in Sufi literature. In "Dreams and Their Interpretation in Sufi Thought and Practice," Jonathan G. Katz synthesizes the debate about dreams and visions in Sufism. Drawing an interesting parallel between the prominence of dreams to both Sufi saints and Huron Indians, Katz argues that dream interpretation in both societies underscored the cultural and communal implications of mystical visions. While Katz's discussion of dreams as important signifiers of religious authority and status within Sufi hierarchies echoes the analyses of Romanov and Mancini-Lander in non-Sufi contexts, his discussion of the democratization of visions of the Prophet Muhammad in Islamic North Africa after the fifteenth century, aided explicitly by manuals with instructions for producing such visions, offers a new framework for understanding Sufi egalitarianism. In "Behind the Veil of the Unseen: Dreams and Dreaming in the Classical and Medieval Sufi Tradition," Erik S. Ohlander expands upon Katz's discussion by focusing on dreams and visions in Sufi texts produced in the Muslim East between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. Ohlander contends that Sufi dreams were important not only as a means of signifying religious statues within the Sufi orders but also as a way of grounding symbolic meaning in communal understandings of Sufi identities within the much broader Muslim community.

The final four essays in this collection extrapolate on the exceptionalism of dreams in Sufi narratives and understandings of self, community, and divinity. Elizabeth R. Alexandrin's discussion of the gnostic dimensions of Sufi dreams in "Witnessing the Lights of the Heavenly Dominion: Dreams, Visions and the Mystical Exegeses of Shams al-Dīn al-Daylamī" shows that Sufi dreams were intimately imbued with esoteric dimensions of meaning that functioned as an extension of prophetic revelation. In "Narrating Sight: Dreaming as Visual Training in Persianate Sufi Hagiography," Shahzad Bashir illustrates the role of dreams in mediating the exceptional relations between Sufi masters and disciples in a manner that moved far beyond the mere signaling or affirmation of authority and instead encompassed a unique set of tools that disciplined and shaped Sufi practices. Özgen Felek argues in "(Re)creating Image and Identity: Dreams and Visions as a Means of Murād III's Self-Fashioning" that the relationship between religion and power in the world of the Ottoman Sultan Murād III allowed political leaders to fashion their own self-image as pious rulers ordained by God through the narratives of dreams and visions. Finally, in "The Visionaries of a *Ṭarīqa*: The Uwaysī Sufis of Shāhjahānābād," Meenakshi Khanna tells the remarkable story of Sayyid Ḥasan Rasūlnumā, and Indian Sufi master whose ability to help his disciples produce their owns and visions of the Prophet Muhammad allowed him to compete with the established Sufi leaders despite lacking a similar genealogical and historical pedigree.

As a collection, these essays offer a variety of innovative approaches to the study of dreams and dream interpretations in Islamic societies and is a useful tool even for historians and other scholars not directly interested in Islamic oneirology. The essays of Hagen and Felek, in particular, provide a new paradigm for thinking about dreams and narrative in Ottoman historiography that calls to mind Hayden White's

work on meaning and narrative. Romanov, Mirza, Ghaemmaghami, and Mancini-Lander all help to situate dreams and dream interpretation in a broader social and cultural context than has been traditionally attempted. Khan, Kinberg, and alZekri, meanwhile, have highlighted the importance of dreams in the modern Islamic world and helped to show how the historical processes of modernity have transformed the meaning and contestation of dream interpretation. Like all works of academic scholarship, however, this collection is not without its drawbacks. The essays that constitute the "Sufi part" of the collection's second half, while incredibly interesting in their own right, fail to build upon the transformative interventions of the first half. Instead of broadening the scope and boundaries of contemporary discussions of dreams and visions in Islamic societies, these latter essays build upon and add intellectual depth to the existing body of scholarship on dreams in Sufi thought and practice. This distinction would perhaps be less apparent if the Sufi essays were integrated into the general chronological thrust of the collection's first half. The essays of Khan, Kinberg, and alZekri, in particular, point toward a new horizon for future scholarship on Islamic oneirology, as the novelty and ingenuity of each essay raises further questions about the historical processes occurring in this period that have yet to be excavated and interrogated. In conclusion, this collection offers a major intervention into the existing body of academic literature and should appeal not only to those interested in discussion of Islamic mysticism - the traditional domain of oneirologists - but also to those interested in the broader social and cultural dimensions of religious community in Islamic history.

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