

# Licit Magic – GlobalLit Working Papers

## No. 2

### PERSIAN DREAM WRITING (*KHĀB-NĀMA*):

WITH TRANSLATIONS FROM *KHĀBGUZĀRĪ* (12<sup>TH</sup> OR 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY), AND

*'AJĀ'IB AL-MAKHLŪQĀT WA GHARĀ'IB AL-MAWJŪDĀT* (12<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY)



**Kayvan Tahmasebian**

**Birmingham 2021**

University of Birmingham  
Global Literary Theory

# Licit Magic – GlobalLit Working Papers

No. 2

Rebecca Ruth Gould, *Editor-in-Chief*

Nasrin Askari, Kristof D’hulster, Hadel Jarada, Bakir Mohammad, Michelle Quay, Kayvan

Tahmasebian, *Consulting Editors*

**Licit Magic – GlobalLit Working Papers** comprises translations of and commentaries on key works of poetics, rhetoric, literary theory, and related areas of inquiry from the literatures of the Islamic world. Together with its website (<https://globallit.hcommons.org>), online publication (<https://medium.com/global-literary-theory>), newsletter (<https://medium.com/global-literary-theory/newsletters/licit-magic-global-literary-theory-newsletter>), and twitter feed (@balaghas), the Working Papers are one of five venues of interim science communication of GlobalLit. Global Literary Theory is an ERC-funded project directed by Rebecca Ruth Gould and based at the University of Birmingham since 2018, that brings into comparison the literary traditions of the Islamic world, including Arabic, Persian, and Turkic traditions.



All working papers are downloadable on <https://globallit.hcommons.org/licit-magic-working-papers/>. This series is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 759346). This working paper (No.2) is also part of Marie Skłodowska-Curie-funded project (Grant agreement No. 842125).

Cover image: © “Zahhak is Told His Fate,” Folio 29v from *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings) of Shah Tahmasp, created circa 1524 by Sultan Mohammad, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

## Headnote: Persian Dream Writing from Medieval to Modern Times<sup>1</sup>

The broken history of dream writing in Persian is permeated with extant, partially extant and non-extant dream interpretation manuals and encyclopedias as well as sporadic references, in poetry and prose, to the dreams that prophets, kings, Shi'ite imams, Sufi saints and interpreters dreamed, recounted, and interpreted. The main resources for premodern Persian dream writings are the Qur'an, the biblical stories according to the books of exegesis (*tafsīr*), the kings' and other senior courtiers' dreams in histories and chronicles (*tārīkh*), Sufi's dream visions in hagiographies (*tadhkira*) as well as in the stories of the Prophet's ascension (*mi'rāj-nāma*), dream interpretation manuals (*khāb-nāma*), encyclopedias, and—as translated below—anthologies of wondrous things (*'ajāyib-nāma*).

The major part of oneiric writings in Persian are in the form of oneiromancy (*khābguzārī*) extant in dream interpretation manuals since the eleventh century. The typology and exegesis of dreams in these writings were inspired to a great extent, through translation and adaptation, by Arabic and Syriac traditions. Some of the most notable influences are *Interpretation of Dreams* (*Ta'bīr ar-ru'yā*) by the most famous dream interpreter in the Islamic world Ibn Sīrīn (d. 729), the pseudepigraphic treatise *Division of Dreams* (*Taqīm ar-ru'yā*) attributed to the sixth Shi'ite Imam Ja'far as-Šādiq (d. 765), the pseudepigraphic *Book of Daniel* (*Kitāb-i Dānyāl*) presumably translated by Khalīl Iṣfahānī at the order of Caliph al-Mahdī (d.785), and the translation of Artemidorus' treatise, *Oneirocritica*, into Arabic by Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq (d. 823) at Caliph al-Ma'mūn's order. Tradition holds that al-Ma'mūn's dream gave rise to the immense Graeco-Arabic translation movement in 'Abbasid Baghdad: the caliph visits Aristotle in a dream and asks what beauty is. The dream motivated the caliph to have manuscripts of Greek philosophical and scientific works imported from Byzantium, and translated.<sup>2</sup>

Previous studies have surveyed the literary reservoir of Persian dream writing.<sup>3</sup> In his didactic *mathnawī*, *The Enclosed Garden of Truth and the Law of the Path* (*Ḥadīqat al-*

---

I have used two different transliteration systems in this article. Words that appear in pre-modern contexts are transliterated according to the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES) transliteration system. Words that appear in modern contexts (roughly after 1850) are transliterated according to a simplified system that is as close as possible to the spoken form.

<sup>1</sup> The author wishes to thank Rebecca Ruth Gould and Kristof D'hulster for their valuable review and feedback.

<sup>2</sup> Muḥammad b. Iṣḥāq Ibn al-Nadīm, *Kitāb al-Fihrist: mit Anmerkungen*, vol. 2, ed. Gustav Flügel (Leipzig: Vogel, 1872), 243.

<sup>3</sup> For a topical bibliography of dream interpretation manuscripts in the Islamic world in Arabic, Persian, Turkic, and Urdu, see Mohammad 'Ali Salehi Marzijarani, "Kitāb-shināsī-yi khāb-guzārī," *Nuskhā-pājuhi* 3 (2006): 201-290; also see Hossein Ziai, "Dreams and Dream Interpretation," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. VII, Fasc. 5,

*ḥaqīqa wa sh-sharī‘at at-ṭarīqa*) (circa 1131), Sanā‘ī Ghaznavī dedicated a chapter, entitled “Allegory on Dream and its Interpretation [*at-tamthīl fī r-ru’yā wa ta’bīruhu*],”<sup>4</sup> to the symbology of eighty “wonderful [*‘ajība*]” stock dream images. The cataloguing of a series of dream images with their interpretation constitutes the core of all subsequent interpretation manuals, which were written mostly in prose. The partially extant *Dream Interpretation* (*Khābguzārī*) by an anonymous writer in the twelfth or thirteenth century, presumably translated from Arabic sources, comprises three earlier seminal treatises in the field: *Book of the Prophet Daniel* (*Kitāb-i Dāniyāl-i payghambar*), *Book of Ibn Sirin* (*Kitāb-i pīsar-i Sīrīn*), and *Book of Kirmānī* (*Kitāb-i Kirmānī*);<sup>5</sup> Ḥubaysh b. Ibrāhīm Tiflīsī, the author of *Collected Interpretations* (*Kāmil at-ta’bīr*) (circa 1203), compiled his important *khāb-nāma* from a rich variety of Arabic sources;<sup>6</sup> Ismā‘īl b. Nizām al-Mulk Abarqūhī, the author of *Royal Interpretation* (*Ta’bīr-i Sulṭānī*) (circa 1362), adds a short preliminary chapter on the relation of dreams to the faculty of imagination (*quvvat-i mutakhayyila*) to his comprehensive glossary of dream images and their interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

Along with exegetic tradition, a narrative element permeates Persian dream writing, which has received far less attention by the scholars: the accounts of the dreams and dream visions of historical or mythical figures. Although directly or indirectly involved with oneiromancy, these personalized accounts differ in structure and purpose from the stock images in the exegetic tradition of dream writing. Whereas a *khāb-nāma* is generally patterned upon a “description-interpretation” model, these dreams and visions are recounted for the wonder they create in the audience. They are stories of the coincidence of dream and reality as when a dreamer’s dream, a visionary’s foretelling, or an interpreter’s interpretation is incredibly realized.

Sporadic descriptions of Sufī masters’ dreams or dream interpretations are cited in hagiographies and Sufi manuals such as Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Memorial of the Saints* (*Tadhkirat al-awliyā’*) (thirteenth century) or *Al-Qushayri’s Treatise* (*ar-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*) (1045-1046)<sup>8</sup>. *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’* includes a *Book of Ascension* (*mi’rāj-nāma*)

---

pp. 549-551; For a study of Persian dream interpretation manuals as a literary genre, see Mokhtar Komeili, “Khabnāma-nivīsī dar zabān va adab-i fārsī,” *Gowhar-e Guya* 8 (2008), 151-177.

<sup>4</sup> Ḥakīm Majdūd b. Ādam Sanā‘ī, *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa wa sh-sharī‘at at-ṭarīqa*, ed. Moḥammad-Taqī Modarres Rażawī (Tehran: Sepehr, 1950), 120-125; part. ed. and tr. John Stephenson as *The First Book of the Hadiqatu’l-ḥaqīqat; or, the Enclosed Garden of the Truth* (Calcutta, 1911).

<sup>5</sup> *Khāb-guzārī*, ed. Iraj Afshār (Tehran: Enteshat-e farhang-e Iran, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> Abu l-Faẓl Ḥabīsh b. Ibrāhīm at-Tiflīsī, *Kāmil at-ta’bīr*, ed. Mokhtar Komeili (Tehran: Miras-e Maktub, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> Ismā‘īl b. Nizām al-mulk Abarqūhī, *Ta’bīr-i Sulṭānī*, ms. 61912, Ketabkhaneh-ye majles-e showra-ye melli.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *ar-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* (al-Qushayri’s Treatise), ed. Badi‘ al-Zaman Foruzanfar (Tehran: ‘Elmi Farhangi, 1983), 696-721.

in which Bāyazid Bastāmī (d. 874), the early Muslim Sufī known as the “King of Sufis [*Sulṭān al-‘arīfīn*],” recounts a dream vision of his meeting with God. *ar-Risāla al-Qushayriyya* dedicates a full chapter to Sufīs’ dream and visions. The Persian encyclopedia *The ‘Alā’ī Book of Pleasure (Nuzhat-nāma-yi ‘Alā’ī)* by Shahmardān b. Abi l-Khayr Rāzī (fl. second half of the eleventh to early twelfth century) contains a dream interpretation manual, “On interpreting dreams [*Andar Ta ‘bīr-i ru ‘yā*].”<sup>9</sup> The last of the fourteen chapters in the manual is dedicated to “anecdotes [*nawādir*]” of Ibn Sīrīn’s interpreting wonderful dreams. “Book of dream interpretation [*Kitāb-i ta ‘bīr ar-ru ‘yā*],” included in the twelfth-century Persian encyclopedia, *Sea of Precious Virtues (Baḥr al-Fawā’id)* by an anonymous writer, starts with a chapter on the wonders of dreams (*‘ajāyib-i khāb-hā*), and ends with a chapter on the dreams of the dead (*khāb-hā-yi raftigān*).<sup>10</sup> In his famous anthology of wonders, *The Marvels of Creation and the Oddities of Existence (‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt)*, Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Hamadānī (also known as Ṭūsī) (circa 1161–1178) recounts several marvelous dreams in the chapters he dedicates to the account of dreams and spiritual states (*fī dhikr-i l-manāmāt wa ḥāl-i arwāḥ*), and to the interpretation of the dreams (*fī ta ‘bīr ar-ru ‘yā wa kayfiyyatihā*).<sup>11</sup>

These accounts of dreams and dream visions, scattered through various other genres such as mirrors for princes and travelogues, employ dreams as a literary device. The equivalent for *visio* in Persian sources is *wāqi‘a* (semi-awake dreams) or *mukāshafa* (revelation). As dreams which are recounted in order to rather arouse wonder in the audience than elicit interpretation, they are centered around marvelously realized dreams. As a literary device, however, dream visions have no formal feature that singularly distinguishes them from a narrative in general. “From the kings’ palace, three warriors suddenly appeared, two older ones and a younger one. They were as tall as a cypress and had the haloes of a king. Belted like kings and walking like kings, with bull-headed maces in their hands, they fought fiercely with Ṣāḥḥāk, struck his head with the bull-headed mace. The younger warrior fastened him from head to toe. He fastened Ṣāḥḥāk’s hands with a strip firmly, and bridled his neck. He was dragged by the group to Mount Damāvand.”<sup>12</sup> This story does not differ

<sup>9</sup> Shahmardān b. Abi l-Khayr Rāzī, *Nuzhat-nāma-yi ‘Alā’ī*, ed. Farhang Jahanpur (Tehran: Mo’asseseh-yi ‘elmi farhangi, 1983), 461-504.

<sup>10</sup> *Baḥr al-Fawā’id*, ed. Mohammad Taqī Daneshpajuh (Tehran: Bongah-e tarjomeh va nashr-e ketab, 1966), 412-424. For a translation, see *The Sea of Precious Virtues=Baḥr al-Fawā’id: A Medieval Islamic Mirror for Princes*, tr. Julie Scott Meisami (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1991).

<sup>11</sup> Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Hamadānī (also known as Ṭūsī), *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt*, ed. Manuchehr Sotudeh (Tehran: Bongah-e tarjomeh va nashr-e ketab, 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Firdawsī Ṭūsī, *Shāhnāma* (Book of Kings), ed. Jalal Khaleqī Motalq (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 58.

structurally from a realist description of Żahhāk's fate. However, the described images would gain a different symbolic value if the story is identified as the account of the dream of the brain-eating despot Żahhāk.

The excerpts translated here are dream writings from *Khābguzārī*, and *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* by Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd Hamadānī (also known as Tūsī). The famous *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt* by Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī, written in Arabic in thirteenth century, is adapted from the work of Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd's work, which has itself grown out of a dream, according to its author: "In the morning, I dreamt the whole world was flooded, and I was walking by. I saw a magnificent palace. A woman came out riding a mount. She gave me the mirror she had in her hands and said 'the world resembles a ravenous dragon. It has been eating men for thousands of years and is still hungry.'"<sup>13</sup> The author interprets the mirror in his dream as "something that shows you what you could not see otherwise," and likens his encyclopaedia of the wonders of the world to such a mirror.

Green sees in the theory and practice of dreamers and visionaries in Islamic history "rich contributions to both theories of the imagination and the description of its expression in dream and visionary experience."<sup>14</sup> Writing dreams for their wondrous content has implications for the studies of classical Islamic literary theory that locates the literary in the receding of language away from verisimilitude, as condensed in the principle *aḥsan ash-shi'ru akdhabahu* (the best poetry is that which lies the most).<sup>15</sup> The title of the seminal textbook of classical Persian *balāgha*, *Gardens of Magic in the Subtleties of Poetry* (*Ḥadā'iq as-siḥr fī daqā'iq ash-shi'r*) by Rashīd ud-Dīn Waṭwāt (d. 11-82-83) testifies to the transformative power of imagination and its crucial role in creating literary pleasure—the "licit magic."<sup>16</sup>

With the early twentieth century modernist turn in Persian literature, writing dreams and dream visions realized their enormous emancipatory potential for political and social critique. Constitutionalist revolutionary writers, such as Mirza Yusof Mostashar ad-Dowla in *One Word* (*Yek Kalama*) (Paris, 1871), Sayyed Jamal ud-Din Vaez, Malek al-Motakallemin, and Sheykh Ahmad Kermani in their co-authored satirical drama, *True Dream* (*Ro'yā-ye*

---

<sup>13</sup> *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Nile Green, "The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 13.3 (2003): 287.

<sup>15</sup> See Rebecca Ruth Gould, "The Persian Translation of Arabic Aesthetics: Rādūyānī's Rhetorical Renaissance," *Rhetorica* 34.4 (2016): 339-371.

<sup>16</sup> For the element of wonder as a characteristic of classical Persian verse, see Dick Davis, "On Not Translating Hafez," *New England Review* 25.1-2 (2004): 310-18.

*sādeqa*) (1900-01), ‘Abd al-Rahim Talebuf in *The Ways of the Charitable (Masalek al-mohsenin)* (Cairo, 1905), and Zeyn al-‘Abedin Maragheh in *Ebrahim Beyg’s Travel Diary (Siyahatnama-ye Ebrahim Beyg)* (volumes 1-3, 1905-1908), employed dreams as a device for their sharp critiques against tyranny and their hopes for freedom and justice to come.

In addition to the constructive role assigned to dreams, modernity highlighted a negative cultural value to *khāb*—the common Persian word for both “sleeping” and “dreaming” — as opposed to *bīdāri* (wakefulness). While the former came to be associated with ignorance and unconsciousness, the latter symbolized enlightenment and consciousness. An important source of history of the Constitutional movements in Iran (1905-1911), Nazem al-Eslam Kermani’s diaries (1905-1909), highlights this usage in its title, *History of Iranian Awakening (Tārikh-e bidāri-ye Irāniān)*. The usage is not peculiar to modern Iran and is rooted in Sufi teachings. Sanā’ī Ghaznavi ends his versified *khāb-nāma* in *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa* with a moral in which *khufta* (the asleep) metaphorizes the ignorant (*ghāfil*): “The asleep can be easily awakened. The ignorant are no different from the dead.”<sup>17</sup>

Dream visions helped modern Iranian writers circumvent censorship by disclaiming any agency over their imagination. The spontaneity of the dream was assumed to justify its audacious content. Writers assumed the role of dreamers for a freer expression of their forbidden ideas. Meanwhile, as the most intimate aspect of human life, dreams are inaccessible to and escape the surveillance of oppressive political regimes. Free circulation of dreams in the public sphere can pose serious threat to the mechanisms of censorship. Writing dreams, the most uncensored aspect of human life, is essential for any freedom-seeking movement. Dream writing, as Koselleck has argued, teaches us how dreams and history constantly shape and re-inscribe each other.<sup>18</sup>

### **Suggested reading:**

Nile Green, “The Religious and Cultural Roles of Dreams and Visions in Islam,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 13.3 (2003): 287-313.

Fedwa Malti-Douglas, “Dreams, the Blind, and the Semiotics of the Biographical Notice”, *Studia Islamica* 51 (1980): 137-162.

---

<sup>17</sup> *Kitāb-i Ḥadīqat*, 125.

<sup>18</sup> See Reinhart Koselleck, “Fiction and Historical Reality,” in *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, tr. Sean Frazel and Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018): 10-23.

Louise Marlow (ed.), *Dreaming Across Boundaries: The Interpretation of Dreams in Islamic Lands* (Boston, Massachusetts: Ilex Foundation, 2008).

A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East. With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 46.3 (1956): 179-373.

Hossein Ziai, "Dreams and Dream Interpretation," in *Encyclopedia Iranica*, Vol. VII, Fasc. 5, 549-551.

**Keywords:**

Dream writing – dreams – oneiromancy – *khābnāma* – *‘ajāyibnāma* – imagination – censorship





## Translations:

### From *Khābguzārī*- Nebuchadnezzar's Dream<sup>19</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar had a dream on a Sunday night. He swore to kill all oracles who could not interpret his dream. Thus, he killed seven hundred oracles. None could interpret his dream, nor could know the dream he had because he had forgotten his dream.

Then, God almighty sent me to him with the knowledge of interpretation so that I could see what he saw in his dream. I realized that he would be, in the end, murdered or burnt. He dreamt his head was of copper, his skin of zinc, his body of silver, his ankles of clay,<sup>20</sup> and his legs of glass.

Copper meant his death, as God almighty says “there will be sent, against you both, heat of fire and flash of brass.”<sup>21</sup> Silver meant wealth, as silver is sovereignty and wealth everywhere. But clay and glass, seen in his ankles and legs, meant something unfounded (*nāpāydār*, also meaning “without leg”) because people stand on their legs.

My interpretation was that he would live for no more than forty days. I informed him and this came to pass not a day less or more.

Daniel said Nebuchadnezzar had yet another dream, which he revealed to me. My interpretation was he would live for only three more days. I informed him. He ordered his men not to sleep and guard him. On the third night, he went out to see if anyone of his men had slept. God almighty had overtaken the men by sleep. No one was awake. Nebuchadnezzar wandered alone in the camp. He swore he would kill all of them the next day. On return to his place, he stumbled upon a sleeping man's sword bandolier. The man jerked awake, thought Nebuchadnezzar was a thief, drew his sword, and killed him.

**Another legend** of Nebuchadnezzar holds that after he killed many people in Jerusalem, he took all Daniel's relatives captive. It happened that Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which he forgot but made him fearful for his sovereignty and himself. He called all his sorcerers and oracles for interpreting that dream for him. All said, “We cannot. Tell us what you saw, then we can interpret.” He hanged them all from trees.

---

<sup>19</sup> This excerpt is my translation of “Andar khāb-i Bukhtunnaṣr,” from “Kitāb-i Dāniyāl-i Payghambar [The Book of Daniel the Prophet],” in *Khābguzārī* (pp. 27-31).

<sup>20</sup> The original word is سلافن. I took it to be سفالين.

<sup>21</sup> Quran 55:35. The translation is taken from *The Quran*, ed. Jane McAuliffe (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company).

Upon hearing this, Daniel told his prison guard, “Go tell the king you know a man who can tell you what you saw in your dream, and interpret it. Do not fear because God will give me the knowledge, and you will be honoured by the king.” The prison guard went to Nebuchadnezzar, and gave him the good news he had from Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar ordered Daniel to be taken to him. No one could appear before the king but in prostration.

Nebuchadnezzar was surprised when Daniel did not prostrate to him. He ordered the guards to let him go and leave them alone. When they were gone, he asked Daniel why he did not prostrate. Daniel replied, “God has inspired me to interpret your dream. He did not instruct me to prostrate to you or to anybody else. I was afraid if I did against his will, he would take back the insight he had given to me and make punish me in your hands.”

Nebuchadnezzar said, “Do you know what I saw in my dream?” He said, “I know.” Nebuchadnezzar said, “Tell me.” He said, “you saw an idol, its feet on the earth, its head on the sky, its chest of gold, its waist of silver, its hands of copper, its ankles of iron, and its legs of clay. And you marvelled at its sight. Then a stone fell down on its head from the sky and smashed it into dust as though it would scatter in the world with a breeze. The stone grew larger so that it took over all the earth. Then, wherever you looked, there was the sky above you, and stone beneath you.” Nebuchadnezzar exclaimed, “Brilliant! That’s right. Now interpret it for me.”

Daniel said, “The idol represented the peoples in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end. The gold you saw represented this age you belong to and this people you rule over. The stone<sup>22</sup> that fell down on the idol was the end time’s faith. There comes a prophet from Arabs who breaks all other faiths just like the stone broke the idol. The faith grows in magnificence on earth so that all on earth accept his faith, just like the stone that took over the earth.”

Pleased by these words, Nebuchadnezzar said, “No one lays a hand on me but you. I’d like to reward you,” and he offered many things to Daniel. Daniel did not accept anything but staying with the king. After a while, Nebuchadnezzar’s men became jealous with Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar had another dream worse than the previous one, which he forgot. He became worried. Daniel was called. Nebuchadnezzar told him what happened and ordered him to let him know what he saw in his dream.

Daniel said, “You saw a tree grew green and huge, its top on the sky. All the birds of the world had gathered on the tree. And you marvelled at its sight. An angel descended with

---

<sup>22</sup> In the original, it is *سليم امتى*, which does not make sense.

an axe hanging from its neck, looking at the tree. It cried out to another angel, “What am I ordered to do with this tree? Should I destroy it, or leave it there in part?” The other angel replied, “No, leave it there in part.” The angel struck the tree with the axe once. It shed all its branches and leaves, and all the birds scattered away from the top, and all the animals that were resting in its shadow departed. The tree was abandoned without shadow and withered.”

Nebuchadnezzar said, “This is precisely the dream I saw. Now interpret it for me.”

Daniel said, “Know that the tree is you, the birds are your children and your relatives, and those around the tree are your people who live in your shadow. God will do the same to you as He did to the tree.”

Nebuchadnezzar asked, “What will he do to me?”

Daniel said, “He will afflict your body so that you acknowledge His power. There will remain no creature into which you will not transform. It will be thus for seven years. Yet, you will be superior to all creatures you live with for seven years. Then you’ll change into a human being again just like you are now.”

Nebuchadnezzar asked, “Does your God accept my repentance from all my evil deeds?”

Daniel said, “He will never accept anything from you until when He executes his decree on you and reveals His power to you.” Upon hearing this from Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar went back to his home, said farewell to his family, and was gone.

### **From *Khābguzārī*: Al-Mahdī’s Dream<sup>23</sup>**

The translator of this book from Syriac into Arabic, Khalīl Iṣfahānī, says that Caliph Al-Mahdī had a dream which he forgot. In the morning, he was sad. He told his vizier, “I had a dream which I forgot. Can you find a man who can find this dream of mine? If it is good omen, it will be another favour to me, so that it washes my sorrow away.”

The vizier said, “O Caliph! Khalīl Iṣfahānī, translator of *The Book of Daniel* can do this. He is the only one on earth that can do this.”

Al-Mahdī sent a messenger out. Khalīl was brought to the caliph in just ten days.

Khalīl said, “I arrived in Baghdad. It was Sunday, and I did want not go to him. I chose Monday because the sign of Monday is Jupiter.”

---

<sup>23</sup> This excerpt is my translation of “Andar khāb-i Mahdī,” from “Kitāb-i Dāniyāl-i Payghambar [The Book of Daniel the Prophet],” in *Khābguzārī* (pp. 37-39).

When I went to Al-Mahdī, he said to me, “I had a dream which I forgot. Can I find it with you or not?”

I said “O Caliph! A soothsayer looks into the people’s gestures, and is inspired by people’s movements, then he will judge.”

Al-Mahdī roared, “Great God! All of you come and claim to what you don’t know.” Then he pressed his hands against his head and rubbed them all over his eyes and face. He beat on his thighs with his fists.

Upon seeing this, Khalīl intuited the omen, and said, “O Caliph! I can tell you what your dream was, and you will know that God gives this knowledge his chosen ones.”

“Tell me,” he said.

“You saw you were in the mountains,” Khalīl said.

“May God reward your magic!” Al-Mahdī said.

“May God protect us from magic. When I saw the caliph rubs his head, I realized there was nothing above his head but the sky, and nothing above the earth but mountains.”

“True! What else did I see?” he asked.

“Then you saw you descended the mountain to a vast flat plain. You saw two salty springs in the plain,” Khalīl said.

“How do you know?” He asked.

“Because your brow looks like a flat plain, and the two springs like the two eyes. I saw you touched it with your majestic hand,” Khalīl said.

“You are right. What else did I see?” He said.

“Then you reached a mountain top. There you met a man from your tribe Quraysh.”

“How do you know the man was from Quraysh?”

“From your beating on your thighs with your fists.”

Al-Mahdī marvelled, “Incredible! Where did you acquire this knowledge?”

“From *The Book of Daniel*,” he replied.

Al-Mahdī ordered twenty thousand dinars to be given to him and ordered that the man would never be admitted again.

Khalīl had learnt this dream [interpretation] from the son of Sīrīn and from Sa‘īd b. al-Mosayyib. By this story, we mention the way Prophet and those who preceded him divined.

**From 'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt- On Dreams and Spiritual States<sup>24</sup>**

Know that dream is a matter of spirit, and an amazing wonder. Pure souls travel and sense the pure world. This is a part of prophecy. It may be either Satanic or true.

Amīr Ṭāhir, the governor of Khurasan, dreamt he died in such and such a month of such and such a year, in water and fire. The dream upset him.

After he was defeated in Sarakhs by his enemy, he was locked in a hot bath until he was killed from heat.

### **Anecdote**

Imam Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā lampooned Khāja Sanā'ī and called him materialist (*dahrī*) and heretic (*zindīq*). One night, he dreamt of the Prophet who told him, “Muḥammad! Why do you badmouth the dead, especially Sanā'ī, who was our panegyrist? This is not a good reward for his panegyrics.”

Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā jerked awake, frightened. He asked where Sanā'ī was buried. “In Ghazni,” he was informed.

He rode an ass to Ghazni, sat on his grave, apologised, and prayed for forty days, until he visited Sanā'ī in dream. “Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā! Did you have a path to the bottom of my heart to ensure I was a materialist [*dahrī*] or heretic [*zindīq*]?” he asked.

“No. I did repent,” he replied.

He said, “You did not hold your tongue. Go and hold your pen, and hold your hand.”

He woke up and returned.

When he reached the borders of Khurasan—and he was exhausted—he wondered should one badmouth God's creatures, one would be hugely tormented.

When tribes of Ghazni rebelled against Sultan Sanjar, the Sultan summoned Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā, and asked, “What is the *fatwa* [religious judgment] about these Turks who have rebelled against me?”

---

<sup>24</sup> This excerpt is my translation of “Fī dhikr-i l-manāmāt wa ḥāl-i arwāḥ” in 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt (pp. 472-474).

“They are rebels [*khārijī*] and it is right for their blood to be shed,” he said, and wrote down the *fatwa*.

Sanjar kept the *fatwa* close to him. Upon the Ghoz’s triumph, Sultan Sanjar was imprisoned and Khorasan was occupied. Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā was arrested, and his mouth was filled with dirt until he perished.

The lesson is that prophecy is finished with the Prophet Muhammad. No one can bring news from the other world, except in dreams.

### **Anecdote**

It is said that, in his angry return from Maḥmūd the Ghaznavid, Ḥasan Firdawsī went to Mazandaran. He met Rustam, son of Zāl, in his dream. “Rustam, I praised your bravery and made you world-renowned. What is my reward?” he asked.

“Return to Tus. A treasure is buried in such and such a place. Seize it so that no one sees. Don’t ask anything from Maḥmūd the Ghaznavid. The treasure would suffice you,” he replied.

He woke up and went to Tus. He built up a house on the treasure’s place. His life was blessed.

### **Anecdote**

It is said that Sultan Maḥmūd the Ghaznavid met, in a desert, a madman sitting in seclusion. “I had a dream this evening, Maḥmūd!” he said.

“What did you see?”

“I saw I was sitting on your throne, and Ghazni belonged to me. Ayāz was standing beside me, and I was commanding.”

“Then what?” Maḥmūd asked.

“I woke up; I opened my eyes to nothing,” he replied.

“What do you mean?”

“Tomorrow, when you’ll close your eyes to nothing of this kingdom, we’ll be equal.”

Maḥmūd was impressed by his words. He fell down from his horse. “I was asleep. You woke me up,” he said, awakened. For this reason, ‘Alī says “People are asleep. When they die, they are awake.” That is enough for our chapter on dreams. Here comes a chapter on the interpretation, the uses, and the nature of dreams.

**From ‘Ajā’ib al-Makhlūqāt wa Gharā’ib al-Mawjūdāt- On the Interpretation of the Dream and its Nature<sup>25</sup>**

Know that the interpretation of dreams is a noble art. Dream is the soul’s return to the *bāṭin* (the innermost depth). Soul is made of the finest meaning. For this reason, the Prophet said “Dream [*ru’yā*] is one part of the twenty-six parts of prophecy.”

If we were asked, “One had such and such a dream, and saw such and such in dream, and one knows it is in wakefulness one sees all this. How can we distinguish between dream and wakefulness? At times, we might be dreaming, but would suppose ourselves to be awake.”

We would reply, “Question wrongly put. We perceive dream and wakefulness by our rational mind—when one is awake and the other is asleep in one’s presence. When one wakes up, he informs the other what was dreamt. Also know that a dream reflects the dreamer’s humour. If a choleric man dreams, he sees all fire and light. A melancholic man sees all horror and darkness. A phlegmatic man sees all rivers and seas. A sanguine man sees all gardens and music. Some dreams are temptation: a hungry man eats bread and a thirsty man drinks water in their dreams. A true dream is delicate premonition and a kind of divine inspiration.

The best time for dreaming is at dawn and at noon and in the spring. The worst are winter dreams. Daytime dreams are more impressive than the night-time ones.

“Inform me of how you feel after you pass away, if you can,” ‘Azīf b. al-Ḥārith asked the dying ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Āyiz. ‘Azif visited him in dream when he died. “We were saved and found God. The Generous God forgave all sins but *iḥrāz*. “What is that?” I asked. He replied “When a man becomes vilified.”

### **Anecdote**

In the book *Ḥillat al-bar’*, Galen says once one man’s tongue grew so big it did not fit in his mouth. Nothing cured it. He dreamt he chewed lettuce and gargled the juice. He did the same, and his tongue was healed.

---

<sup>25</sup> This excerpt is my translation of “Fī ta’bīr ar-ru’yā wa kayfiyyatuhā,” in ‘*Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā’ib al-mawjūdāt* (pp. 474-476).



Caliph al-Mu‘taṣim dreamt such and such cameleer was arrested. When he woke up, he summoned and enquired the jailor. A man had indeed been unjustly arrested and jailed.

### **Anecdote**

One man grew a stone in his bladder. He dreamt that a man named ‘Alī gave a bird to him. “This bird is called such and such. Take it to the nest in such and such a place. Burn it, and eat the ashes. The stone will be removed.”

He did so when he woke up, and got rid of the stone.

These dreams are rare, and exist in different strengths. Know that Satan appears in any disguise except that of prophets, angels, the sun, the moon, and the hereafter. Meeting angels in dreams means blessing and grace. If one, who has had a nightmare, recites “I take refuge in the Lord of Jesus, Moses, and Abraham from the evil I saw,” Allah Almighty will remove evil from them.