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“Whoever Has Seen Me in their Dream has Certainly Seen Me”: Visions of the Prophet as a Path to Certainty

Mystical experience disrupts the epistemological hierarchy of the historical-rational tradition, at times fundamentally challenging its ability to grasp the particulars of lived religion. Šūfī rhetoric articulates knowledge gained from direct experience, through the vessel of the heart and given form by the imaginal faculty, as trumping knowledge based on suppositions and intellectual rationalisation. This is often exemplified in a person with sight viewing an object in comparison to the blind who must use other means to comprehend that object, or like someone who tastes honey compared to one who has merely heard of what honey tastes like. Thus, the heart and imaginal faculty tangibly perceive religious experiences that the intellect cannot fully comprehend. Since those who have not experienced mystical truths do not have a true point of reference, they are not included amongst the people of taste (*ahl al-dhawq*). Later philosophy sought to incorporate unveiling and rational rumination towards a holistic enterprise of seeking truth. But perhaps the most challenging of such experiences for Muslim intellectuals committed to the centrality and privileged position of the intellect are oneiric anecdotes in which their ultimate corporeal authority, the Prophet Muhammad is directly accessed. Afterall, the *ḥadīth* of “Whoever sees me in their dream has surely seen me” (*man raʿānī fī manāmihi fa-qad raʿānī*) with its variants is widely considered a sound tradition according to Sunnī *ḥadīth* criticism. A longer tradition incorporating this phrase in the Shīʿī *ḥadīth* corpus is a solitary report (*khābar al-wāḥid*) and considered weak, yet that has not prevented the widespread reporting of dreams in which the Prophet and the Imāms appear in wider Shīʿī literature. If methods to validate the *sunnah* of the Prophet and attribute sayings and actions to him, seemingly cannot complete with a direct vision of him, can scholars of the historical-rational method tolerate truths that their epistemology did not produce or is incapable of producing? What is the epistemological status of dreams of the Prophet according to mystical thinkers who accept the validity of dreams and unveilings? This paper investigates the reception of this cluster of traditions attributed to the Prophet validating direct experience of him through dreams and what the implications of such a tradition are for the position of dreams in mystical ways of knowing.



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