

One criterion employed in isolating the E document from the rest of the pentateuchal narrative is the characteristic use of dream-theophanies as a medium of divine revelation.¹ It is held that, far from being coincidental, or a matter of style, this usage represents a distinct religio-philosophical stage of development in the history of Israelite religion, *viz.* a stage more sophisticated than J, and less sophisticated than P.² After a brief discussion of several verses which have been thought to typify this aspect

¹ Cf. S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (reprint: N.Y., 1956), p. 119; H. H. Rowley, The Growth of the Old Testament (N.Y., 1963), p. 25; E. A. Speiser, Genesis (N.Y., 1964), pp. xxx-xxxi. For additional references see note two.

² For the classic statement of the ideological distinction (with reference to modes of revelation) between J/E and P, see J. Wellhausen, Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel (reprint: N.Y., 1957), p. 336ff.; between J and E, see H. Gunkel, The Legends of Genesis (reprint: N.Y., 1964), p. 104 and especially p. 134: "J is characterized by the most primitive theophanies, E, on the other hand, by dreams and the calling of an angel out of heaven, in a word by the least sensual sorts of revelation."; also, W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament, (reprint: N.Y., 1958), p. 55: "There are features which suggest that E originated in a slightly more advanced community than J, particularly certain theological assumptions. These may be summed up by saying that the anthropomorphism, which is so pronounced a feature of J, is somewhat mitigated in E.... Revelation comes less often by theophany than by dreams - indeed the dream is a characteristic feature of E."; M. Weber, Ancient Judaism (reprint: N.Y., 1967), p. 210ff.

of E, the present study will endeavor to test the validity of drawing ideological conclusions from the attestation of dream theophanies in the Pentateuch in the light of ancient Near Eastern literature.

The supposition that dream-theophany in the Pentateuch is a hallmark of the E document would seem to be supported by verses such as Gen. 20:3; 31:10-11; 24; 46:2.³ These verses clearly employ the divine name "Elohim" in contexts where the Deity, or a divine messenger, appears before man in a "dream" (נראה לילה, חלום לילה).⁴ Yet several verses have long been noted as exceptions to any formula which would assign all dream-theophany passages exclusively to E.⁵ Further, there are several glaring inconsistencies to be found in generally accepted source divisions which would also argue against an unequivocal association of dream-theophany with the E document.

Thus, in Genesis 15 two distinct divine oracles are preserved, one is delivered "in a vision" (vv. 1-11), while the other is introduced by the notice "And sleep⁶ overcame Abram..." (vv. 12 ff.). S.R. Driver, in his classic commentary on Genesis,⁷ followed by the more recent treatment of E.A. Speiser,⁸ assigns both modes of divine communication to J. The usage of "sleep" in v. 12, however, serves to introduce an oracle delivered in a dream⁹ (i.e. during sleep). Yet, the

³ See the list assembled in Driver, Introduction, p. 119.

⁴ Heb. חלום לילה is simply an idiom for "dream"; contrast Speiser's translation of הלילות הליילה in Gen. 20:3 and 31:24 as "in a dream one night" (p. 147) and "in a dream that night" (p. 241). This idiom may be compared to Heb. חלום/חזיון לילה (Job 33:15; Isa. 29:7) and נראה לילה (Gen. 46:2), both of which are the equivalent of Akk. tabrīt mūšī, a synonym of šuttu "dream."

⁵ E.g., Gen. 26:24 & 28:13-16 cited by Driver, Introduction, p. 119 (bottom). See the discussion of the seven verses in Genesis which are the chief instances of dream-theophany in the Pentateuch (Gen. 15:1ff.; 20:3; 26:24; 28:13; 31:10-11; 31:24; 46:2) in U. Cassuto, The Documentary Hypothesis (Jerusalem 1961), pp. 59-63.

⁶ LXX ὕπνος, hence (?) Speiser, p. 111 "trance," as opposed to the more neutral and hence preferable translation "sleep, slumber" (Targum: שנתא, and cf., Job 33:15 הנומיה // הרדמה). Cf. the idiom הרדמה נפלה with Akk. rehū(m) / maqātum ša šitti (e.g., Gilg. XI:220; *ibid.*, V:iv, 7).

⁷ S. R. Driver, The Book of Genesis (Westminster Commentaries: London, 1913), p. 174.

⁸ Genesis, pp. 110-111.

⁹ Cf. Job 33:15.

failure to assign the latter to E reflects inconsistency in the documentary provenance assigned to dream (=unconscious state) - theophanies. Further, the implied lack of distinction between the *חזון* "vision" and the *חלום* "sleep" begs the question whether or not different modes of revelation necessarily indicate different documentary sources.

Similarly, the conventional source division of the dream-theophany recorded in Genesis 28:12ff. manifests inconsistency in the application of the dream-theophany as a criterion for isolating the E document. Thus, the episode in question has been sub-divided into two distinct events: (1) A dream in which Jacob sees angels going up and down a ladder of infinite height (vv. 12, 17-18 = E); (2) An encounter of Yahweh, who, standing at the head of Jacob, speaks to him directly (vv. 13-16 = J).¹⁰ Aside from the criterion of divine names, Speiser¹¹ supports this difficult division¹² specifically on the criterion of dream-theophany. Yet, to establish two distinct and respectively complete events, critical scholars, including Speiser, are forced to attribute v. 16 to J.¹³ The verse reads *וַיִּקָּץ יַעֲקֹב מִשְׁנֹנוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר* "Jacob awoke from his sleep and said...." which certainly implies that the allegedly separate account of Yahweh's appearance (as distinct from the appearance of angels in a dream) also took place during a dream!¹⁴ As such, the dream, as a medium, is hardly a distinguishing characteristic of the E source in this passage.

It should be born in mind that v. 16 contains considerably more than an implication that Jacob saw Yahweh, as well as the angels of Elohim, in a dream. In biblical passages relating dreams, notice of the dreamer's awakening, in a transitional statement such as v. 16, is an attested

¹⁰ Driver, *Genesis*, p. 264; Speiser, p. 217.

¹¹ "God communicates with Jacob in a dream, as is customary in E: whereas J speaks of Yahweh as standing beside Jacob and addressing him directly" (p. 219).

¹² Note, for example, the sequences of *וַיַּחֲזֶה* which syntactically link vv. 12 and 13. Further, Yahweh's appearance at the top of the ladder (as opposed to his physical appearance standing beside Jacob) in this dream may be compared to two of Amos' visions, see Amos 7:7; 9:1.

¹³ This attribution is not incongruent with Driver's view (*Genesis*, p. 265) that both Yahweh and the angels of Elohim appear in dreams, and the remarks which follow are directed primarily against the interpretation of Speiser.

¹⁴ Further, the notice of Jacob's awakening can hardly belong to J if the only reference to Jacob's having slept (v. 11b = Speiser's 12a) is attributed, by both Driver and Speiser, to E !

convention. Both Gen. 41:7 and I Kings 3:15, for example, employ the formula וַיִּקָּץ וַיֹּהֲנֶה חֲלוֹם PN awoke, and behold, it was a dream." Note also that a similar notification of awakening, as a transitional device,¹⁵ follows dreams in Sumerian,¹⁶ Akkadian,¹⁷ Egyptian,¹⁸ Ugaritic,¹⁹ and Homeric²⁰ texts as well. Accordingly, it should be clear that v. 16 similarly cannot be dissociated from the account of the dream of Jacob and attributed to a supposed account of a direct theophany seen while Jacob was awake.

The above discussion would seem to indicate that no consistent distinction can be drawn between J and E with respect to the use of dream-theophanies as the medium of revelation. Yet this observation only serves to highlight the central question: Is there a genuine qualitative and chronological distinction in the Pentateuch between dream-theophany and corporeal theophany (or manifestation)? The remainder of this study will seek to define the distinctions that may, and may not, be made between the various media of divine revelation in the ancient Near East, and by extension, in the literature of ancient Israel.

The most natural distinction that may be made regarding dream revelations, both in Israel and the ancient Near East, is between the ambiguous revelation and the clear divine message. Several scholars have made this general distinction, although their terminology is not uniform.²¹

¹⁵ Cf. A. L. Oppenheim, The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, new series; 46/3 (1956), p. 191, hereafter = Dreams.

¹⁶ H. Frankfort, et. al., Before Philosophy (Harmondsworth: Pelican Books), p. 206. (translation of Gudea, Cyl. A).

¹⁷ Cf. Gilg. V:iv, 8-9.

¹⁸ J. A. Wilson (translator), "A Divine Oracle through a Dream," ANET, p. 449a.

¹⁹ IK:154-5: krt yb̄t wh̄lm // Cbd il whdrt. Ginsberg translates ybt in ANET, p. 144b as "awoke" though he had previously translated it as "looked," on the basis of Akk. hātu in The Legend of King Keret, BASOR 55 2-3 (1946), pp. 17,40, hereafter = Keret. In all events, the couplet indicates a shift from the relating of the dream to his subsequent actions, with at least the implications of his having awakened.

²⁰ Cf. Iliad, Book ii: ll. 41ff.; Odyssey, Book iv: l. 829f.

²¹ "Symbolic" vs. "theological/message dream" cf. Oppenheim, Dreams, pp. 184-5, 190; idem, Encyclopedia Biblica, III, (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 145a (in Hebrew); "symbolic-enigmatic" vs. "prophetic" cf. Y. Kaufmann, The Religion of Israel (English translation: Chicago, 1960), p. 93; "artificial (=inductive)" vs. "natural (=intuitive)" cf. C. J. Gadd, La Divination en Mésopotamie ancienne (Paris, 1966), p. 22, hereafter = Divination.

IF A CASE WERE TO BE MADE FOR THE LESSER POTENCY OF revelation, as opposed to direct theophany, it would have to be based on this distinction. That is, the ambiguous dream is less personal than a direct divine message, be the latter in a dream or otherwise. The ambiguous dream requires an interpreter, and thus naturally falls into the same category as omens, auspices and the like. Consequently, when the Old Testament speaks derogatorily of the חלוֹם "dreamer,"²² and links his activities with an אִוֶּה or כִּוֶּה,²³ or with קֶסֶם,²⁴ כַּשֵּׁף²⁵ and הַרְפִּיָּים,²⁶ all of which denote some form of divination, one cannot assume that the lesser prestige of his activities extended to direct dream theophanies.

Though there existed a variety of distinct, yet equally legitimate, means by which man might know the will of God,²⁷ apparently there also existed some hierarchy of prestige with regard to these methods. In Numbers 12:4-9²⁸ we have a qualitative distinction between God's speaking מֵרָא (ב) "directly and plainly" to Moses, as opposed to בְּחִידוֹת "in riddles," by which he might address others. Also, in this passage חלוֹם "dream" and מֵרָא "vision" are cited as legitimate vehicles²⁹ through which revelation is imparted to a "prophet of Yahweh,"³⁰ though the latter is contrasted to Moses, being beneath his exalted station, and not possessing his unique prerogatives.³¹ At the very least, this passage testifies to the simultaneous existence (at the time of J) of alternate legitimate methods of divine communication, and any evolutionary theory of revelatory media must take this into account.

The distinction between direct theophany revelation and ambiguous dreams is evident in the Gilgamesh epic. Thus, when Ea protests his innocence with regards to the

²² Cf. Deut. 13:2-6.

²³ Loc. cit.

²⁴ Jer. 27:9; 29:8.

²⁵ Jer. 27:9.

²⁶ Zech. 10:2.

²⁷ Cf. I Sam. 28:6; Joel 3:1ff.

²⁸ Apparently J, yet note Driver's statement (Introduction, p. 62) that chapter 12 probably belongs to E.

²⁹ Cf. especially Job 33:14-15.

³⁰ Reading in Num. 12:6 < נְבִיאָה > יְהוָה as already surmised by Ibn Ezra (cf. his commentary ad loc.).

³¹ Since v. 7 (לֹא בֶן עֲבָדֵי מֶשֶׁה) indicates a definite contrast, we might infer that the חלוֹם/מֵרָא of the "prophet of Yahweh" is the equivalent of the חִידוֹת (by which God does not reveal his will to Moses) in v. 8. Thus, all three terms would refer to the ambiguous dream, rather than to dream-theophany.

saving of Utnapishtim, he states:³²

anāku ul aptâ pirišti³³ ilāni
rabûti Atrahasis šunāta
ušabrišumma pirišti ilāni išme

I did not reveal the secret of
the great gods; I showed
Atrahasis (=Utnapishtim) a
dream, and thus he perceived
the secret of the gods.

The imparting of an ambiguous dream is thus evaluated as somewhat less of a divine committal than a personal encounter, or direct revelation. Although Utnapishtim is in fact addressed directly,³⁴ had the dream been imparted it most probably would have been ambiguous or symbolic. No instance of a direct dream-theophany is attested in the entire epic, while there are quite a few ambiguous dreams recorded throughout.³⁵

Further, in a Sumerian inscription we find that Gudea, Ensi of Lagash, receives both an ambiguous dream, and a direct dream-theophany from the god Ningirsu.³⁶ The message of both dreams concerned the rebuilding of Ningirsu's temple, but while the first dream (ambiguous) required expert interpretation, the second was a direct presentation of building details. It is interesting to note that Gudea had to merit the second, more direct, encounter through the building and presentation of a war chariot to Ningirsu. This

³² Gilg. XI:186-7.

³³ For pirištu "secret" (not piristu !) see M. Held, *JAOS* 79 (1959), p. 174 n. 87.

³⁴ Ea's statement is inconsistent with XI:20-47, where there is no indication that Utnapishtim was either asleep or dreaming. Ea's reference to the pirišti ilāni most probably refers to the knowledge of the impending disaster, rather than the explicit building instructions. The former may well have been originally imparted in a symbolic dream which has not been preserved (cf. Atrahasis: Fragment II, col. i:1-4 in A. Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels*, Chicago, 1949, p. 109) while the latter were subsequently spoken directly to Utnapishtim (cf. Atrahasis 11. 8-15), as in our text.

³⁵ E.g. Gilg. I:v, 26-38 (cf. II:i, 3-14); I:vi, 8-15 (cf. II:i, 26-36); V:iii, 32-43; V:iv, 1-22. The least enigmatic dream is in VII:iii, 1-16, but the latter is still hardly a dream-theophany in which a direct divine message is issued. Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, (Chicago, 1964), pp. 221-2, observes that the revelational dream-theophany was generally alien to the "Eastern" culture of Mesopotamia, while the ambiguous, omen-like dream was the norm.

³⁶ Gudea, Cyl. A, cited in Frankfort, *Before Philosophy*, pp. 204-6.

fact may be interpreted as an indication that a qualitative distinction between the symbolic and theophanic dream did exist in Sumer.

It should be stressed, however, that the distinction between direct revelation and revelation through symbolic dreams is not to be exaggerated. In the Gilgamesh epic, the hero both directly encounters a divinity (e.g. Ishtar),³⁷ and receives communication from the gods in ambiguous dreams.³⁸ Further, in the Ugaritic Epic of Baal, a deity (!) is apprised of the fact that Baal is still alive, not through direct communication, but by means of an ambiguous dream.³⁹ In short, there does not seem to be any discernible ideological consistency in determining the usage of one medium over the other in these cases.

Indeed, in many cases, it would seem that in the ancient Near East the distinction between symbolic dreams, dream-theophanies, and corporeal revelation is more a matter of literary preference than of theological necessity. Thus, in Ugaritic literature, alongside the symbolic dream mentioned above, there is preserved a quite lengthy, and quite explicit, direct dream theophany in the Keret epic.⁴⁰ Yet, in the same text there is also record of a corporeal encounter between Keret and the gods, during which he receives divine blessings insuring the fertility of his new bride.⁴¹ Further, in the Aqhat epic, a similar blessing, imparted by El to Danel, is recorded as follows:

[byd/bd y]iḥd il ḥbdh
ybrk [dn]il mt rpi
ymr ḡzr [mt h]rnm⁴²

[By the hand] El takes his
servant, blessing Daniel
the Rapha-man, beatifying
Ghazir the Harnamiyy-man.⁴³

In both the Keret and Aqhat texts no mention of a dream is made, and the implication is that the blessings were per-

³⁷ Gilg. VI: 1-79.

³⁸ See texts in note 35.

³⁹ IAB 3-4:4-5, 10-11 bḥlm // bšrt (cf. IK:35-6 bḥlmh // bšhrth).

⁴⁰ IK: 154-5. Note that the terminology for the dream-theophany is the same as that for the symbolic dream (cf. n. 42 below).

⁴¹ IIIK 2:19-20.

⁴² IID I:35-7. For the restoration (byd) see A. Herdner, Corpus, p. 80, n. 5. Compare our text with IIIK 2:18-20 (restored); cf. Ginsberg, Keret, p. 22.

⁴³ Translation: Ginsberg in ANET, p. 150a.

sonally delivered by El during a direct, physical, encounter.⁴⁴

More striking is the fact that Homeric dream-theophanies, by their very nature, make absolutely no distinction between corporeal and mental perception during the dream revelation. Thus, the divinity "fashions" (ποίησε) and "sends" (πέμπει) an "image" (εἶδωλον), likened to a friend or relative, to the mortal recipient; this disguised image speaks the divine message at the side of the sleeping dreamer.⁴⁵ At the same time, Homer depicts direct confrontation between gods and men in the conscious state.⁴⁶ Accordingly, it is clear that the sharp chronological and theological demarcation distinguishing corporeal theophany (J), and dream theophany (E) claimed to obtain in the Pentateuch, is unparalleled in the epic literature of the ancient Near East.

The same conclusion may be reached after a perusal of ancient Near Eastern historical (and "quasi-historical") texts. In Egyptian records we find instances of a dream-theophany reported by Thutmose IV,⁴⁷ a corporeal theophany witnessed by Thutmose III,⁴⁸ and the verbatim text of "a command heard from the great throne, an oracle of the god himself" issued to Hatshepsut.⁴⁹

Moreover, "prophetic" documents among the Mari letters attest to a variety of reported theophanies and instances of revelation. One letter describes the dream of one Malik-Dagan in which he dreamt that Dagan spoke to him

⁴⁴ Apparently Ginsberg (ANET, p. 150b) assumes that Daniel is ultimately informed of El's blessing via a messenger, and that our text does not depict a direct confrontation. Yet the parallel passage in the Keret epic (see above, n. 42), where El blesses Keret directly, as well as the language of the Aqhat passage itself ([byd y]ihd il ^cbdh) lends our interpretation a measure of support. The interpretation of Ginsberg, however, is hardly inimical to the point at issue. That is, two different modes of revelation (direct and indirect) would then be attested in two otherwise identical contexts. This would surely be an indication that the corporeal and dream encounters with the deity are mutually interchangeable in Ugaritic epic.

⁴⁵ Odyssey iv: 795-841; see also Iliad ii: 5-34. On the pronounced corporeality of the dream-messenger see E. R. Dodds, The Greeks and the Irrational (Berkeley, 1951), p. 104.

⁴⁶ Cf. Odyssey xx: 32.

⁴⁷ J. A. Wilson in ANET, p. 449a.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 446-7.

⁴⁹ Idem, The Culture of Ancient Egypt (Chicago, 1951), pp. 169-70; see also the Saite oracle quoted by Gadd in Divination, p. 34.

while, in his dream, he was prostrating himself in that god's temple.⁵⁰ Alongside this revelation are reports of divine messages spoken directly to the dreamer.⁵¹ Another letter introduces a reportedly received divine message with the term ina tēretim "through oracles,"⁵³ rather than with the more common ina šuttim "in a dream."

Variety in the media of direct revelation is also evident in the annals of Ashurbanipal. For example, it is recorded that "Ishtar who dwells in Arbela" imparted a dream to the king's troops, promising them her leadership and protection:

kī'am iqbīšunūti umma
anāku allak ina maḥar
Aššurbanapli šarru ša
ibnâ qātāya⁵⁴

And so did she speak to them
saying: "I shall march in
front of Ashurbanipal, the
king whom I created."

Yet, we also hear of Ishtar's having answered Ashurbanipal directly in a moment of fervent prayer: ...lā tapallab iqbâ "...Fear not", she said to me."⁵⁵ It should be recalled that a similar message was delivered to the Aramaean king Zakir (אל חזקל "Fear not"),⁵⁶ but in a distinctly less direct manner (בְּיַד חֲזִינִין "through seers and (divine) messengers.")⁵⁷ In these texts this formulaic⁵⁸ message is delivered through a variety of media, without any significant theological or evolutionary determinants. Once both the divine message heard directly by Ashurbanipal, and that delivered to Zakir, are viewed alongside several

⁵⁰ Dossin, RA 42 (1948) pp. 125ff.

⁵¹ ARM XIII, 112:5-6, 7-8.

⁵² ARM III, 40:13; II, 90:19; XIII, 114:11.

⁵³ For a discussion of this term at Mari cf. A. Malamat, "History and Prophetic Vision in a Mari letter," Eretz Israel V (1958), p. 72 (in Hebrew). For the text of the letter, cf. pp. 67-70.

⁵⁴ Streck, Asb., p. 48: 97-101.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 190: 23.

⁵⁶ KAI 202:13. Cf. Job 32:6 and Sefire II:C, 6 in J. Fitzmyer, The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire (Rome, 1967), pp. 82-3, 91).

⁵⁷ KAI 202:13. For the reading עֲדִי "messengers" (not עֲרִי), see most recently the study of R. Degen in Leshonenu 32 (1968), pp. 409-411. Note Ugaritic mlak // tcdt "delegation" (IIIAB B:22,26,30) and dl1 // cdd (IIAB VII:45-47). Cf. Ginsberg's observations on cdd in Eretz Israel V, 1958, p. 62*.

⁵⁸ Cf. the dream of the Hittite king Hattusilus, quoted in Oppenheim, Dreams, p. 254.

biblical verses e.g. Gen. 15:1 (J); 26:24 (J); 46:2-3 (E) where the identical exhortation (אל תירא "Fear not...") is respectively delivered במחזה "in a vision," בלילה ההוא "during that night," and במראה הלילה "in night visions (=dreams)," it would seem only reasonable that a similar perspective be adopted toward the biblical material as well.

The various evidence presented above warrant reconsideration of the thesis that dream-theophany may be considered the exclusive prerogative of a single Israelite period or school of thought. The lack of either genuine chronological distinctions,⁵⁹ or of ideological consistency, with regard to the representation of theophany-direct revelation in the ancient Near East is manifest in both literary and historical texts. Symbolic dreams, dream-theophanies, corporeal theophanies, and the like, are mutually interchangeable both in a given period, and, occasionally, in the same text. Consequently, both the evolutionary theories of biblical revelation media, as well as the validity of their implications for source divisions in the text of the Pentateuch, must be seriously questioned.

⁵⁹ As against the oversimplified evolutionary/chronological schema devised by Gadd, *Divination*, p. 23, the material simply does not lend itself to iron-clad classification.