

# “Here Comes This Dreamer” (Genesis 37:19): Towards a Dreams/ Dreamers Typology in the Hebrew Bible

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Is there anything particularly Israelite about dream narratives in the Hebrew Bible? Do the roles that dreams play in the lives of Jacob, Joseph, Solomon, or Daniel have genuine roots in ancient Hebrew mentality or customs? Studies on some of these narratives have repeatedly pointed out their affiliation to their ancient Near Eastern milieu. Siegfried Hermann’s *Königsnovelle*, which classified together the dreams and night visions of the prophet Nathan, King Solomon, and those of the Pharaohs Sesotris (Senusret) I, Thutmose III, and Thutmose IV under this genre definition,<sup>1</sup> and the discussion of the celestial stairway (Hebrew סִלָּם) in Jacob’s dream in relation to ziggurat-type structures, the *simmilat šamāmi* and other Mesopotamian parallels,<sup>2</sup> are but two famous examples. But comparative studies need not (and at their best do not) blur the distinctive features of each individual culture.<sup>3</sup> The focus of the present contribution is on specifically

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This article is based on a paper presented at the Egyptology and Ancient Israel Section of the Society of Biblical Literature at its annual meeting, San Antonio, November 2004. I am grateful to Dr. Susan T. Hollis who invited me to present “on dreams and their role in the biblical world” and to the other invited panelists, Dr. Kasia M. Szpakowska and Prof. Scott Noegel, who responded to both our papers. Prof. Noegel kindly sent me a copy of his response, to which reference is made in the notes below. Cf. now idem, *Nocturnal Ciphers: The Allusive Language of Dreams in the Ancient Near East*, AOS 89 (New Haven, 2007). The meeting offered me a good occasion to bring my earlier work on the subject into the focus explained in the introductory paragraph and to supplement it with newer research.

1. Siegfried Hermann, “Die Königsnovelle in Ägypten und in Israel,” *WZUL* 3 (1953–1954), 51–62; idem, “2 Samuel vii in Light of the Egyptian Königsnovelle Reconsidered,” in Sarah Israelit-Groll, ed., *Pharaonic Egypt: The Bible and Christianity* (Jerusalem, 1985), 117–28. For a critical appraisal of Hermann’s study and its influence, see M. Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford, 1972), 252–53; Choon-Leong Seow, “The Syro-Palestinian Context of Solomon’s Dream,” *HTR* 77 (1984), 141–42. According to Kasia M. Szpakowska (*Behind Closed Eyes: Dreams and Nightmares in Ancient Egypt* [Swansea, 2003], 58–59, n. 41) the Elephantine inscription concerning Sesotris I does not report a dream, due to a new reading of the relevant word (*rsw.t*) as “enemy hordes” (*rs.tjw*).

2. Alan R. Millard, “The Celestial Ladder and the Gate of Heaven (Genesis xxviii. 12, 17),” *ET* 78 (1966–67), 86–87. For recent summaries with further bibliography, see: Yitzhak (Itzik) Peleg, “Going Up and Going Down: A Key to Interpreting Jacob’s Dream (Gen. 28,10–22),” *ZAW* 116 (2004), 5–6; idem, “What is the *sullām* that Jacob Saw in His Dream at Bethel?” *Shnaton* 14 (2004), 8–14 [Hebrew]. Additions to the Mesopotamian-Babylonian parallels are suggested by Victor A. Hurowitz, “Babylon in Bethel—New Light on Jacob’s Dream,” in Michael Heltzer and Meir Malul, eds., *T’shūrôt LaAvishur: Studies in the Bible and the Ancient Near East in Hebrew and Semitic Languages* (Tel Aviv, 2004), 185–94 [Hebrew].

3. This concern seems to reverberate through several methodological discussions of comparative scholarship, e.g., Walter R. Goldshmidt, *Comparative Functionalism: An Essay in Anthropological Theory* (Berkeley, 1966), 1–31; Shemaryahu Talmon, “The Comparative Method in Biblical Interpretation: Principles and

Israelite aspects of dreams in the Hebrew Bible, if such may be found. This entails a re-examination of some earlier assertions concerning the relationship between types of dreams reported in the Bible and the types (and nationalities) of persons to whom they are attributed (Dreams/Dreamers Typology; see section 4).<sup>4</sup> Apart from this, the nature of the endeavor requires a survey of biblical dream traditions that would seek out the most indigenous elements (sections 3, 5–8). In conducting this survey I rely on some of my earlier work on theophanic dreams, extending it however to cover other types as well.

Before turning to these topics, attention is due to some more general biblical communications (e.g., legislative, prophetic, sapiential) about dreams. The two modes—reports on the one hand and oblique references on the other—do not necessarily yield the same impressions concerning the place of dreams in individual or public life. Some degree of ambivalence can be discerned in each mode of communication; but the general, oblique references are more amenable than reports of specific dreams to the expression of critical attitudes.

### 1. *Of Creeds and Deeds*

Dreams are one of those elements in the life and faith of ancient Israel whose importance seems to grow in direct relation to the pathos of prophetic denunciations of them or to the number of laws or wisdom sayings directed against them.<sup>5</sup> Passages like Jer. 23:23–32; 27:9–10; 29:8–9; Zech. 10:2; Qoh. 5:1–7 (Heb. 4:17–5:6) “protest too much” to be taken abstractly or restricted to the abuses of false prophets.<sup>6</sup> The polemic

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Problems,” in John A. Emerton, ed., *Congress Volume: Göttingen 1977*, VTS 29 (Leiden, 1978) 320–56; idem, “The Navel of the Earth and the Comparative Method,” in Arthur L. Merrill and Thomas W. Overholt, eds., *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam* (Pittsburgh, 1977), 243–68; Repr.: *Literary Studies in the Hebrew Bible—Form and Content; Collected Studies* (Jerusalem, 1993), 11–49; 50–75; Meir Malul, *The Comparative Method in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Legal Studies*, AOAT 227 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1990). It would be only fair to mention that Hermann (“2 Samuel vii in Light of the Egyptian Königsnovelle Reconsidered,” 125) described the relationship of the Israelite *Königsnovelle* to its Egyptian antecedents as “creative adaptation” to the Israelite milieu rather than sheer imitation.

4. The types of dreams used for this analysis must be basically those of the current typology—“message” dream and “symbolic” dream—since they are the ones used also in the assertions to be re-examined, although this typology has some logical and terminological flaws, as pointed out in Scott Noegel’s response and elsewhere (e.g., Robert K. Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel* [Lanham, MD, 1984], 22–23; Jean-Marie Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World*, trans. J. M. Munro [Sheffield, 1999], 23–24). My own proposals regarding the typology of dreams are specified in my book: *Dreams Speak Falsely?: Dream Theophanies in the Bible—Their Place in Ancient Israelite Faith and Tradition* (Jerusalem, 2005), 29–23 [Hebrew]. See also below, sections 3–4, for some modifications that are necessary in the present context.

5. One may compare the various biblical attitudes to the anthropomorphism of God: though well-attested in biblical thought (e.g., Gen. 1:26–27; Exod. 33:20–23), it is banned from representation in the cult (Exod. 20:4–5; Deut. 5:8–9). As stated by Tallai Ornan (“Idols and Symbols: Divine Representation in First Millennium Mesopotamian Art and Its Bearing on the Second Commandment,” *Tel Aviv* 31 [2004], 90–91), “the very ban on depicting the image of God [. . .] implies that He was conceived as having a form in general, and a human one in particular.” Cf. also the distinction proposed (ibid., 91) between “the cognitive layer, which deals with people’s religious feelings and beliefs” and “the cultic layer,” i.e., the way they act.

6. This impression is an exegetical controversy. Some interpreters indeed find here a categorical rejection of dreams as revelatory media, e.g., Ernst L. Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament*, BZAW 73 (Berlin, 1953), 156; Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel*, 87 with further literature; Alexander Rofé,

responds to life situations in which dreams were allowed to shape people's beliefs and expectations, their use and abuse tolerated in religious life and in the political arena; but it often extends to the nature of dreams as such: ephemeral, ambiguous, deceptive, even dangerous. Whether such negative utterances are to be seen as typical of later biblical thought (contrasted with an earlier age of innocence) or rather as distinctive of certain genres, sources, or even individual authors<sup>7</sup>—one factor emerges repeatedly and remarkably: even the keenest critics of dreams among biblical authors could not help being affected in some way by dream traditions nurtured in their community. As illustrations of this tension between creed and deed and as a prologue to the main concern of this discussion there follows a brief consideration of (1) the book of Deuteronomy vis-à-vis the Deuteronomistic history (DtrH), (2) the books of Jeremiah and Zechariah, and (3) Qoh. 5:1–7 [Heb. 4:17–5:6].

(1) Short of forbidding dreaming, the book of Deuteronomy seems to do everything to suppress the mantic or oracular use of dreams. It devotes special legislation to God's communication with his people, sanctioning only one and unidirectional medium: a prophet (Deut. 18:15–22). "I will put my words in the mouth of the prophet" says God, "and he shall speak to them everything that I command" (v. 18).<sup>8</sup> Thus there is no need for a host of mantic specialists to decipher God's will or plan. These belong to the outlawed "abhorrent practices" (תועבות) of the nations of Canaan, for which "God is driving them out before you" (vv. 9, 12). Mantic wisdom must give way to the simpler and more commendable wisdom of following God's "statutes and ordinances" (4:5–6) delivered through his prophet. A "dreamer of dreams" (RSV) is mentioned neither in the long list of mantic and magic specialists (18:10–11), nor as a possible partner to the prophet in delivering the word of God (vv. 15–18), but he *is* mentioned beside the prophet as a (hypothetical) instigator to the worship of foreign gods (13:1–5 [Heb. 13:2–6]). Apparently, in the Deuteronomic outlook such tragic failure is a likelier outcome of dreams than the true word of God. Dreams, then, are more tolerable

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*The Prophetic Stories: The Narratives about the Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, Their Literary Types and History* (Jerusalem, 1988), 149. Many others, however, feel that the protest is not against oneiromancy, supposing that dreams which are free from falsification are still considered trustworthy, e.g., Johannes Hanel, *Das Erkennen Gottes bei den Schriftpropheten* (Berlin, 1923), 130, 131–37; Andreas Resch, *Der Traum im Heilsplan Gottes* (Freiburg, 1964), 46; John Bright, *Jeremiah, AB* (Garden City, NY, 1965), 153; Scott Noegel, "Dreams and Dream Interpreters in Mesopotamia and in the Hebrew Bible [Old Testament]," in Kelly Bulkeley, ed., *Dreams: A Reader on the Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming* (New York, 2001), 59–60 as well as in his response. This approach makes it easier to assume a basic consistency in the biblical (or prophetic) concept of the revelatory significance of dreams. In my view the assumption is not justifiable, and the desired consistency is found flawed whenever exegesis is applied with impartiality (see more below).

7. Such explanations can be found in some of the monographs on dreams in the Bible. Thus Ehrlich initially emphasized the chronological (pre/post-exilic) dimension, ultimately doubting its capacity to provide a complete explanation (*Der Traum im Alten Testament*, 169–70) and preferring genre distinctions (idem, "Traum," *BHH* 3.2025; Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel*, 62). Documents, genres, and changing *Zeitgeist* are all factors to be reckoned with; yet they cannot account for all the nuances in the evaluation of dreams in biblical literature. As shown below, these are often shades of grey rather than black or white: a degree of ambivalence, rather than absolute faith or utter rejection. A more detailed discussion can be found in my article "Between the 'Chaff' and the 'Grain' (Jer. 23:28): Ambivalence towards Dreams in the Bible and Its Relation to the Ancient Near East," *Shnaton* 12 (2000), 145–64 [Hebrew].

8. Translations from the Hebrew Bible follow the NRSV unless stated otherwise.

than Canaanite “abhorrent practices.” They can hardly be banned. However, they have no place in the (exclusively prophetic) communication between God and his people.

What happens to this ambivalent picture when DtrH comes to the account of Solomon’s dream in the “great high place” (RSV) of Gibeon, in which God grants the king divine wisdom, promising him also unprecedented riches and glory (1 Kgs. 3:5–15; cf. v. 28)? Remarkably, DtrH not only preserved this story, but also supplemented the divine message to Solomon with a warning about the only true wisdom (cf. Deut. 4:5–6, above) in typical Deuteronomistic style: “And if you will walk in my ways keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life” (v. 14).<sup>9</sup> Thus DtrH appears to accept the oracular validity of Solomon’s dream at least.

(2) Taking a wider, canonical perspective, two prophetic books, Jeremiah and Zechariah, contain the bitterest invective on dreaming prophets and their deceit (Jer. 23:23–32; 27:9–10; 29:8–9; Zech. 10:2). In Jer. 23:28–29 dreams and the word of God are diametrically opposed: “Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let the one who has my word speak<sup>10</sup> my true word. What has the chaff to do with the grain? [. . .] Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer that shatters a rock?”<sup>11</sup> It is precisely in the same two biblical books that we find also the closest portrayals of the prophetic personas themselves as recipients of dream-like revelations: Jer. 31:26; Zech. 1:8; 4:1.<sup>12</sup> These reports are not explicitly identified as dreams,

9. For the definition of v. 14 as Deuteronomistic, see, e.g., Ernst Würthwein, *Das erste Buch der Könige, Kapitel 1–16* (ATD 16; Göttingen, 1977), 31, 35; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford, 1972), 246. Perhaps it would be more accurate to define as such only v. 14a, in view of its phraseology and the fact that it renders the gift of long life as conditioned upon “keeping my statutes and my commandments.” See James Montgomery, *Kings, ICC* (Edinburgh, 1951), 103. Other references to dreams in the Former Prophets such as Judg. 7:13 or 1 Sam. 28:6 bear little or no traces of Dtr; see A. Rofé, *Introduction to the Literature of the Hebrew Bible* (Jerusalem, 2009), 52–63.

10. From this point to the end of the quote the translation is mine. The phrase *ידבר דברי אמת* can also be rendered “speak my word faithfully” (NRSV; cf. NEB “in truth”). However, the adverbial use of *אמת* is usually introduced by a prepositional *ב* (*באמת*) as in Judg. 9:15; Ps. 145:18; Jer. 26:15; 28:9; 32:41). In the translation above *אמת* is taken as having adjectival force, as it has in Prov. 22:21. Biblical Hebrew has no adjective from *אמ*, thus the noun may take this role. Cf. *GKC* §131c–d.

11. As already indicated (n. 6), opinions are divided on the attitude reflected in vv. 23–32: denial of the validity of the dream as a revelatory medium or just condemnation of its abuse by false prophets. Hanel (*Das Erkennen Gottes*, 137), who took the latter position, thought that the call upon “the prophet who has a dream” to tell his dream showed that the speaker was not opposed to the notion of divine revelation in dreams; but these words can just as well be intended sarcastically: “Please go ahead, do tell your dream stories, it can be so fascinating; but this is not the word of God.” Cf. Wilhelm Rudolph, *Jeremia*, 2nd ed. *HAT*, (Tübingen, 1958), ad loc.; Artur Weiser, *Das Buch Jeremia, ATD* (Göttingen, 1966), ad loc. The thought that “let the one who has my word” (v. 28b) refers to a prophet telling a dream, demanding only that he tell it truthfully (R. David Kimḥi) ignores the sharp contrast drawn here between the dream and the word of God, for which see also W. McKane, *Jeremiah, ICC* (Edinburgh, 1986), 1.590–91.

12. In Zech. 1:8 *ראיתי הלילה* brings to mind such phrases as *בחלום הלילה* (Gen. 20:3; 31:24; 1 Kgs. 3:5), *במראת הלילה* (Gen. 46:2), or *חזון לילה* (Isa. 29:7), but it also differs from such texts in that it uses *הלילה* with the deictic sense ‘last night’ or ‘the other night’ in a first person account of a revelatory experience. In this it is akin to the prophetic terminology of 1 Sam. 15:16 (as noted in *BDB*, 539). Despite the surreal quality of the visions and the fact that Zechariah reports their occurrence at night in a state compared to sleep (4:1), “it is impossible [. . .] to maintain that he saw the things described in his sleep. A sufficient reason for this assertion is found in the fact that he not only does not say, but apparently takes pains not

their relation to this category remaining liminal,<sup>13</sup> and yet it would be hard to explain why prophets should receive the word of God in their sleep or through visions of the night without assuming *some* relation to the tenet that a dream is a natural medium of prophecy (Num. 12:6).<sup>14</sup>

(3) Qoheleth has nothing good to say about dreams (Qoh. 5:3, 7 [Heb. 5:2, 6]), but his whole admonition on religious practice (5:1–7 [Heb. 4:17–5:6]) seems built on none other than Jacob’s dream in Bethel (Gen. 28:10–22): The terms בית אלהים (house of God), associated with שמים (heaven) and ארץ (earth), נדר נדר (make a vow), מלאך (angel) and the roots חלם (dream), ירא (fear) and זבח (sacrifice) are all common to this short passage and the Jacob–Bethel tradition (Gen. 28:10–22, 31:10–13, 35:1, 7, 14). Qoheleth, however, overturns the set of associations that held them together in the Bethel tradition: a house of God cannot link between heaven and earth since such a link does not exist (5:2b [Heb. 5:1b]). A dream (perhaps believed to prove this notion, cf. Gen. 28:12, 16–19, 22) is nothing but a creation of the mind that comes with “much business” (5:3a [Heb. 5:2a]; cf. v. 7 [Heb. 6]; 2:23).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, in the guise of King Solomon (Qoh. 1:12, 16; 2:8–9), Qoheleth offers his subversive reading of the dream in Gibeon (1 Kgs. 3:5–15; Qoh. 1:12–2:26): the king, disillusioned about his wisdom and wealth, reveals that having “acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me [. . .] I perceived that this also is but a chasing after wind,” that “in much wisdom is much vexation” (1:16–18). Also, having become “great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem,” his numerous possessions and the toil spent in gaining them seem but “vanity and a chasing after wind” (2:11).<sup>16</sup> Finally, the idea that God appeared to the king in his dream bestowing on him wisdom, wealth, and greatness seems challenged by the presumably subjective origins of human nocturnal experiences: “For all their days are full of pain, and their work is a vexation; even at night their minds do not rest” (2:23; compare 5:3a [Heb. 5:2a] mentioned above). Could it be that the king’s pursuit of wisdom and possessions, and not divine revelation, was the source of his dream?

Qoheleth’s use of these earlier narratives as well as the above observations on the Deuteronomistic school and on the prophetic books all underscore the power of

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to say, that he was dreaming” (Hinckley G. Mitchell et al., *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi and Jonah, ICC* [Edinburgh, 1912], 117).

13. Liminal reports are discussed in my articles, “The Shiloh Theophany (I Samuel 3): A Study of a Liminal Report,” *Proceedings of the Twelfth World Congress of Jewish Studies* (Jerusalem, 1999), A.99–107 [Hebrew]; and “A Touch of Support: Ps 3,6 and the Psalmist’s Experience,” *Bib* 86 (2005), 192–212.

14. בחלום אדבר בו—“I speak to them in dreams.” That the speaker here is Yahweh is plain even without the immediately preceding Tetragrammaton, itself syntactically awkward whether joined to its sequel (Masoretic accents, Rashi) or to the foregoing text (Ibn Ezra). A Qumran fragment (4QNum<sup>b</sup>) places יהוה as the subject of the verb ויאמר, a reading preferred by some; see Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20, AB* (New York, 1993), ad loc.

15. This is argued with more detail in my article, “Kohēleth in ‘the House of God’: Text and Intertext in Qoh 4:17–5:6 (Eng. 5:1–7),” *HS* 47 (2006), 7–21. More recently, Aron Pinker adds a non-cultic level of interpretation to the whole passage, but nevertheless acknowledges “the intertextual similarities between Qoh. 4:17–5:6 and the Jacob–Bethel tradition (Gen. 28:10–22, 31:13, 35:1, 7, and 14) and the Solomonic tradition (1 Kgs. 5–9);” Aron Pinker, “Intrusion of Ptolemaic Reality on Cultic Practices in Qoh 4:17,” *JHS* 9 (2009), 4.

16. David M. Carr, *From D to Q: A Study of Early Jewish Interpretations of Solomon’s Dream at Gibeon, SBLMS* (Atlanta, 1991), 140–45.

ancient dream traditions. Skeptic sages, prophetic critics, programmatic historiographers—who could be so judgmental of dreams when expressing their creeds in general modes of communication—all had some use for these dream stories, almost despite themselves. What is it that enabled these traditions to survive the ravages of polemic and skepticism? The grip of a hallowed past? Popular religion and its tendency to preserve such materials? In what follows, the lasting appeal of Israelite dream traditions will be examined from a socio-religious perspective: who was a typical “dreamer of dreams”? What types of dreams were attributed to these typical dreamers and what roles did they play in their lives? What kind of mentality could produce or foster such traditions?

## 2. *Typical Dreamers*

“Dreamer of dreams” in Deut. 13:1 (Heb. 13:2) may designate either someone predisposed to prophetic dreams (NRSV: “those who divine by dreams”) or just a casual dreamer (like the lay dreamers in the Mari letters), in which case it does not support the notion of *typical* dreamers. This notion is even less pertinent to the contemporary empirical study of sleep and dreaming which reveals that people dream every night, as a natural component of recognizable, quantifiable sleep cycles in human beings.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the incidence of dream accounts in ancient Near Eastern writing, including the Hebrew Bible, does not and cannot be expected to reflect this state of things. Actual dreams were seldom recorded, and most dream accounts were probably composed rather than recorded.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, these accounts often tend to cluster around certain figures, both in literary texts and in historical or monumental epigraphy. In the ancient Near East, Gilgamesh, Hattushili III, Ashurbanipal, and Nabonidus all represent such figures.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes they seem to magnetize dream accounts, since they also feature in, or become involved with, the dreams of their family members, peers, subordinates, and even (real or potential) opponents. I use the term “typical dreamer” for this phenomenon, although the sources may portray such a figure as a focus of dreams no less (in the case of Ashurbanipal—more) than as a dreamer.

17. Nathaniel Kleitman, *Sleep and Wakefulness*, rev. ed. (Chicago, 1963), 92–107; William C. Dement, “The Psychophysiology of Dreaming,” in Gustave E. von Grunebaum and Roger Callois, eds., *The Dream and Human Societies* (Berkeley, 1966), 77–107; J. Allan Hobson, *Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep* (Oxford, 2002), 35–52.

18. The situation may be slightly different with the genre known as dream books—collections of dream omens with their prognostications from ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the classical world. See A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East: With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book* (Philadelphia, 1956), 241–45. The omens, collected by “systematic scholarly activity,” seem to reflect events and feelings typical of the common people. This, however, does not necessarily suggest that these dreams were “actually seen by any specific person,” the idea being rather to offer possibilities “applicable to any number of people,” as Szpakowska notes regarding the Ramesseid Dream Book (*Behind Closed Eyes*, 5).

19. Possible explanations of the uneven distribution of dream accounts resemble those of the negative attitudes (see n. 7 above), in attributing the predilection for dreams to specific individuals, genres, sources, or periods. Oppenheim (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 187, 199) saw “revealing examples” of the influence of authors and compilers on the frequency of dream reports both in “the Elohist source of the Old Testament” and in “the Gospel of Matthew” (cf. Matt. 1:20–21; 2:12, 13, 20, 22; 27:19), but was wise enough to leave the other possibilities open.



### 3. Joseph and Daniel

Branded “dreamer” (or “master of dreams”) by his scheming brothers (Gen. 37:19), Joseph is a pertinent biblical example, since his story unfolds through dreams: his own dreams set off the plot and raise expectations for his elevated status (vv. 5–11), and his wisdom in interpreting dreams (Genesis 40–41) initiates the fulfillment of these expectations.<sup>20</sup> Joseph insists that it is God who both reveals in the dreams “what he is about to do” (41:25, 28) and provides the interpretation (40:8; 41:16), so the true “master of dreams” is none other than God. Perhaps the end sanctioned the means: glorifying the God of Israel whose emissary defeats the wise men of Egypt at their own game of dream interpretation may have helped render these foreign-flavored dream accounts more agreeable to the Israelite palate.

As already noted by Yehezkel Kaufmann, Joseph is not a typically Israelite dreamer. The story, which abounds with Egyptian features, places him in Egypt for most of his life, where he excels in interpreting the dreams of Egyptian officials.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, Joseph’s own dreams, though dreamt when he is still in Canaan, come true in Egypt, and they differ from those of his father Jacob in that they are of the “symbolic” type, like the dreams he interprets for the Egyptian king and ministers. They also differ from the dreams of the Egyptians in their greater transparency, being spontaneously comprehensible (predicting Joseph’s supremacy or reflecting his aspirations: Gen. 37:8, 10), and not requiring specialized interpretation;<sup>22</sup> but as regards the

20. With the Hebrew term *בעל החלומות*, literally “master/lord of dreams,” the author is perhaps anticipating Joseph’s gift of dream interpretation. The brothers use the term to mock Joseph, but ironically it foreshadows the way he would rise to power (cf. Gen. 50:20; Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph [Genesis 37–50]*, VTS 20 [Leiden, 1970], 90). Oppenheim (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 240) explains that “master of dreams” “might have been the designation of a person who habitually (perhaps owing to some kind of shamanistic disposition) receives dream-revelations,” like the designations for dreamers in Deut. 13:3 and Jer. 27:9. He compares this quality with those of the Akkadian *šā’ilu* priest and the Greek *oneiropolos* both of whom combined the role of seeking information from the deity through dreams with that of dream interpretation (ibid., 222–24). Despite these interesting parallels, it seems that Joseph’s dreams and his dream interpretation are depicted as intuitive and spontaneous, and they may represent two different types of charisma, as argued by Ze’ev Weisman (“The Charismatic Personality in the Old Testament” [Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1972], 228–30). Ron Pirson’s “The Lord of the Dreams” is, despite the fashionable ring, a little doubtful in the sense intended (*The Lord of the Dreams: A Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37–50*, JSOTSup 355 [Sheffield, 2002]; see the review by Walter E. Brown, *RBL* 6 [2004]; <http://www.bookreviews.org>).

21. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *History of the Religion of Israel* (Jerusalem, 1969), 1.508 [Hebrew]; Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York, 1966), 218. The Egyptian features and their bearing on the date of composition have been interpreted in very different ways: Redford, *Biblical Story of Joseph*, 187–243; Nili Shupak, “The Joseph Story: Legend or History?” in Michael V. Fox et al., eds., *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran* (Winona Lake, 1996), 125\*–33\* [Hebrew]; eadem, “A Re-examination of the Dreams of the Egyptian Officials and Pharaoh in the Joseph Narrative (Genesis 40–40),” *Shnaton* 15 (2005), 55–95 [Hebrew]. This article focuses on the Egyptian features in these dreams. John Gee discussed some of these features in his paper presented at the Egyptology and Ancient Israel Section of the Society of Biblical Literature at its annual meeting, San Antonio, November 2004. See John Gee, “‘There Needs No Ghost My Lord Come from the Grave to Tell Us This’: Dreams and Angels in Ancient Egypt,” 17–19; [http://216.12.134.73/PDF/Gee\\_Dreams.pdf](http://216.12.134.73/PDF/Gee_Dreams.pdf).

22. Transparency is defined by the response to the dream on the part of the dreamer and/or his fellow-men, as reported in the narrative, and not on how the dream appears to the reader. An auditory message dream that produces a response of obedience (e.g., Gen. 20:3–7, 14) is clearly transparent. However, the dream of the Midianite soldier (Judg. 7:13–14) is transparent, since it is interpreted spontaneously by the

appearance of visual objects with transferred meaning, they are nevertheless “symbolic” (or “allegorical”).<sup>23</sup> More often than not “symbolic” dreams in the Bible are dreamt by non-Israelites: two sovereigns of world powers, Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar (Genesis 41; Daniel 2; 4); two Egyptian ministers (Genesis 40); and a Midianite soldier (Judg. 7:13–14). The “symbolic”-transparent dreams of Joseph (Genesis 37), an Israelite with Egyptian affinity, thus seem to occupy a middle position between the (usually enigmatic) symbolic dreams that generally befall non-Israelites and the (usually transparent) auditory “message” dreams (e.g., Solomon’s in 1 Kings 3; Jacob’s in Gen. 31:11, 13), that, as shown below (section 4), are more usual with Israelites.<sup>24</sup> Thus a tripartite classification of ancient dreams reports (e.g., “message”-theophanic; “symbolic”-transparent; “symbolic”-enigmatic) may be more useful here than the more widespread binary division that recognizes only “message” dreams and “symbolic” ones (see the chart in section 4).<sup>25</sup>

Apart from Joseph, the only other Israelite who has a “symbolic” dream is Daniel (Daniel 7) who, like Joseph, is brought to a foreign court and is also endowed with divinely inspired wisdom (Dan. 1:17; 4:6–8, 18; cf. Gen. 41:38–39) to interpret the enigmatic “symbolic” dreams of the king (Daniel 2; 4).<sup>26</sup> Again, the gifted interpreter’s own dreams and night visions are more transparent than those of the non-Israelites: Daniel has the mysterious dream of Nebuchadnezzar revealed to him in a night vision

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hearer, although the link between the interpretation and the dream may well remain obscure to the reader. On the relative transparency of Daniel’s dream (Daniel 7) see below.

23. “Allegorical” is probably a more accurate designation for this representation of one entity by another (e.g., sun and moon = father and mother; cows or ears of grain = years). It was also the one used by Artemidorus Daldianus (*Oneirocritica*, 1 §2; 4 §1; Robert J. White, ed., *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica* [Park Ridge, NJ, 1975], 15, 185–86), on whose classification the current one is based. See A. Caquot, “Les songes et leur interprétation selon Canaan et Israël,” in Serge Sauneron et al., eds., *Les songes et leur interprétation* (Paris, 1959), 106, 111; Jean-Marie Husser, *Le songe et la parole: Étude sur le rêve et sa fonction dans l’ancien Israël*, BZAW 210 (Berlin, 1994), 6, 11–12. According to Nili Shupak (“Re-examination of the Dreams,” nn. 32, 38, 41), the dreams of Joseph and the Midianite soldier (Judg. 7:13–14) are not symbolic, since they are immediately understood. Cf. eadem, “A Fresh Look at the Dreams of the Officials and of Pharaoh in the Story of Joseph (Genesis 40–41) in the Light of Egyptian Dreams,” *JANES* 30 (2006), 113, n. 38. This conclusion seems to be based on the multiple-criteria categorization and the general lack of clarity in the current system: “symbolic” dreams are usually defined both by the dominant sensory medium (visual) and by their degree of transparency (enigmatic); thus it can be argued that a dream is not symbolic when one of these qualities is absent (the enigmatic quality, in this case).

24. Husser (*Le songe et la parole*, 240–41) remarks that the differences between the dreams of Joseph (Genesis 37) and the Midianite (Judg. 7:13–14), on the one hand, and the dreams of the Egyptians (Genesis 40–41), on the other hand, have not been sufficiently emphasized. He further demonstrates how these two categories differ also in their terminology and in the formulas introducing the dreams.

25. For such tripartite classifications see, e.g., Moshe Sister, “Die Typen der prophetischen Visionen in der Bibel,” *MGWJ* 78 (1934), 399–430; Ze’ev Weisman, “Patterns and Structures in the Visions of Amos,” *Beit Mikra* 14 (1969), 44, 56 [Hebrew].

26. For a detailed discussion of the magic-mantic wisdom features expressed in the Bible by derivatives of חֹכֶם and in the figures of Daniel and Joseph with their ancient Near Eastern roots (Ugaritic Danel etc.), see Hans-Peter Müller, “Magisch-mantische Weisheit und die Gestalt Daniels,” *UF* 1 (1969), 79–94. The wisdom elements in the stories of Joseph, Daniel, and Esther were illuminated from a different angle by Shemaryahu Talmon, “‘Wisdom’ in the Book of Esther,” *VT* 13 (1963), 419–55; cf. also Gerhard von Rad, “The Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom,” in idem, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. T. Dicken (Edinburgh, 1966), 292–300. Drawing justifiably critical responses from later scholars, von Rad’s basic insight of sapiential motifs in the story is still upheld by some, particularly with respect to Genesis 40–41. For a review of research see Husser, *Le songe et la parole*, 231–36.



(2:19) and the interpretation of his own dream-vision is integrated into it (7:16–27) as in some prophetic visions (e.g., Amos 7:7–9; 8:1–3).

It is well observed that while Daniel is modeled on Joseph, “Daniel 2 is not just a carbon copy of Genesis 41,” but rather an “emphatic overstatement and dramatization” partly due to “apocalyptic rereading.”<sup>27</sup> The apocalyptic concern of the dreams in the book of Daniel marks an important shift in the dream’s role of foretelling the future: No longer confined to the dreamer (Genesis 37; 40) or to his people (Genesis 41; Judg. 7:13–14), the dream now has world history as its stage, with the dreamer as the player or medium that God employs to reveal his mysteries about “what is to be” (Dan. 2:28–29), thus affirming his absolute sovereignty. Perhaps this shift—particularly the theological intensification that comes with it—marks the final “appropriation” of the symbolic dream by Israelite-Jewish faith in the post-prophetic age, but it also marks a significant departure from the highly personal framework of dreams that is generally maintained in the earlier literature, e.g., in the dreams of Joseph, Jacob, and Solomon (see below). The terminology is revealing, too: in Dan. 7:1–2 the dream blends into vision, the following report repeatedly referring to the visual medium (the phrase *חָזַתְתִּי*, “I saw” or “I watched,” occurs eight times in vv. 2–14).<sup>28</sup> This vagueness of distinction between dream and vision, with terms derived from *חָלַם* and from *חָזַן* (or their equivalents) used together, continues in apocryphal and apocalyptic reports of revelations.<sup>29</sup> However, the dream’s role of conveying divine secrets is not the innovation of Jewish apocalyptic. Some two thousand years before the apocalyptic parts of the book of Daniel, the Sumerian story of Lugalbanda (ll. 337, 339) described the dream as “a closed archive basket of the gods.”<sup>30</sup>

#### 4. *Is the So-Called “Israelite Dream” Rightly So Called?*

Joseph’s dreams differ in type from those of other Israelites in the Hebrew Bible, most notably his father Jacob (Gen. 28:10–22; 31:11, 13; cf. 46:1–5). These, as well as Solomon’s (1 Kgs. 3:5–15), are theophanic dreams of the auditory “message” type. Here the divine presence does not require oblique statements as in the Joseph story or in the book of Daniel, because it is manifest in the dream itself: God appears to the dreamer and delivers his message in plain words. According to Kaufmann, the explicit, direct manner of the “prophetic [i.e., message] dream accords better with the spirit of Israelite enquiry of God” (whereas the enigmatic symbolic dream requires a science of dream interpretation which is “part of pagan wisdom”). He goes so far as to name it an “Israelite” dream: “Solomon’s dream is characteristically Israelite: Yahweh reveals himself and speaks with him.”<sup>31</sup> A. Leo Oppenheim generalized, “‘symbolic’ dreams are experienced by ‘gentiles’; to his own people the Lord speaks in ‘message’ dreams

27. Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives*, 119.

28. Husser (ibid., 122) thinks that the dream is mentioned “only as a means of transition” and the sequel reports a vision.

29. E.g., 1 En. 83; 85–90; cf. 2 Macc. 15:12–13; 2 Bar. 53; 2 En. 1:2–6; A. Oepke, “övap,” *TDNT*, 5.232.

30. Herman L. J. Vanstiphout, “Reflections on the Dream of Lugalbanda (A Typological and Interpretative Analysis of LH 322–365),” in Jiri Prosecký, ed., *Intellectual Life of the Ancient Near East: Papers Presented at the 43rd Rencontre assyriologique internationale* (Prague, 1998), 397–412.

31. Yehezkel Kaufmann, *The Religion of Israel*, trans. and abr. Moshe Greenberg (Chicago and London, 1960), 93–94; cf. idem, *History of the Religion of Israel*, 1.507–8 [Hebrew].

and not in ‘dark speeches’ ([לֹא בְּחִידָת] Num. 12:8).<sup>32</sup> Both scholars seem to have overlooked the contrary cases of Abimelech king of Gerar (Gen. 20:3–7) and Laban the Aramean (31:24)—“gentiles” who have “message” dreams. Moreover, the preference for “message” dreams in ancient Near Eastern royal inscriptions sheds a different light on the Israelite preference: it suggests that as a type this dream is probably not more “Israelite” than it is Egyptian, Assyrian, or Ugaritic.<sup>33</sup> An instructive illustration of this point is the message regarding a seven-year famine in the dream of a Pharaoh: in the Bible, this is a “symbolic” enigmatic dream (Genesis 41), but in an Egyptian document, the Famine Stela, Djoser (3rd Dynasty) hears about the end of the famine from his god Khnum in a “message” dream, Kaufmann’s “Israelite” dream!<sup>34</sup> Perhaps it would be more accurately designated the indigenous dream of ancient Near Eastern royalty or the dream of the deity’s elect.

Nevertheless, the principle pointed out by Kaufmann and Oppenheim does carry some conviction, especially when modified as follows: in the Hebrew Bible there seems to be an almost systematic relationship between how close a dream is to matters Israelite and its degree of transparency. When the tripartite classification discussed above is adopted, it becomes evident that the more Israelite the context of the dream (its subject or the dreamer), the more transparent is the dream, as shown in the following chart (Fig. 1).

(1) Jacob, the eponymous ancestor, and King Solomon have “message” dreams. Here the subjects as well as the dreamers are Israelite. Jacob’s dream in Bethel has

| Dreamer →<br>Dream Type<br>↓ | Israelite                                                                  | Non-Israelite                                                                             |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. “Message”                 | Jacob (Gen. 28:10–22;<br>31:11, 13; cf. 46:1–5)<br>Solomon (1 Kgs. 3:5–15) | Laban (Gen. 31:24)<br>Abimelech (Gen. 20:3–7)                                             |
| 2. “Symbolic”<br>transparent | Joseph (Gen. 37:5–11)<br>Daniel (Daniel 7)                                 | A Midianite (Judg. 7:13–15)                                                               |
| 3. “Symbolic”<br>enigmatic   |                                                                            | Egyptian officials (Genesis 40)<br>Pharaoh (Gen. 41:1–37)<br>Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2; 4) |

Fig. 1: Dream Types in Israelite and Non-Israelite Contexts in the Hebrew Bible

32. *Interpretation of Dreams*, 209.

33. Ibid., 209–10. For a similar preference in Ugaritic epic poetry, see Karl Jaroš, *Die Stellung des Elohisten zur kanaänischen Religion* (Freiburg, 1982), 34–36. See also Redford, *Biblical Story of Joseph*, 91; Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives*, 38, 56, 71. On the late and rare appearance of a symbolic royal dream in Egyptian records (= that of the Nubian Pharaoh Tanutamani, 25th Dynasty), see Szpakowska, *Behind Closed Eyes*, 47, 55–56.

34. “The Tradition of Seven Lean Years in Egypt,” trans. John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 31–32). In the Gilgamesh Epic (VI 111; *ibid.*, 85) and Ugaritic (Aqhat C i 43; *ibid.*, 153), the motif is not related to dreams. The date of the Famine Stela (Ptolemaic period) and the possibility that it is totally fictitious (Redford, *Biblical Story of Joseph*, 98, 206–7; Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* [Berkeley, 1973–1980], 3.94–95) do not considerably alter the impressions concerning the preferred form of a royal dream. A forgery would also make use of traditionally accepted forms and patterns of reporting such events in order to gain credibility.

a visual element (Gen. 28:12–13a) that elicits a response in the style of a dream interpretation (v. 17b; cf. Judg. 7:14), but the core is a divine verbal message. It stands to reason that the visual element was not intended to carry a message of its own or even to complement the verbal message (although these possibilities have been tried time and again throughout the history of interpretation), but to present the theophanic deity.<sup>35</sup> The dream about the goats (Gen. 31:10, 12) is not listed in the chart since it cannot be properly classified according to the current system; being visual but not “symbolic” (the goats and the sheep represent themselves, so that the interpreting angel does not identify their significance). Like Jacob’s other dreams it is transparent, but probably a late apologetic insertion into the story of his conflict with Laban.<sup>36</sup> The non-Israelites Abimelech and Laban have “message dreams” too, but their dreams are primarily (Abimelech) or entirely (Laban) concerned with safeguarding the well-being of the Israelite patriarchs (Abraham and Jacob, respectively). As shown below (section 4), such dreams are also known elsewhere in the ancient Near East, so that this seems to be a special pattern within the “message” dream.

(2) In the middle category each dream has both Israelite and foreign features. The “symbolic” dreams of Joseph and Daniel that are understood spontaneously (Joseph) or contain their own interpretation (Daniel) represent a lesser degree of transparency than the auditory self-explanatory “message” dreams in the first category. Here the interpretation has to be *stated*, but there is no special difficulty in obtaining it. The circumstances of these dreams are not as plainly Israelite as those of the dreams in the first category: the Israelite dreamers end up in powerful positions in foreign courts. It is true that Joseph’s dreams occur when he is still in Canaan, but their realization falls within the Egyptian part of his “biography” (Gen. 42:6 [cf. v. 9]; 43:26).<sup>37</sup> The Midianite soldier’s dream, like those of Laban and Abimelech in the first category, is that of a foreigner about the divinely sustained supremacy of his Israelite opponent; but unlike Abimelech and Laban, the Midianite has a “symbolic” dream that is immediately understood and interpreted by his comrade. The report of the dream and its interpretation are intended as a favorable omen to Gideon, whom God directs to visit the Midianite camp for this purpose (Judg. 7:9–11). Thus the effect of the omen depends on the spontaneity of interpretation and on the fact that it features an enemy soldier expecting defeat from “the sword of Gideon son of Joash.” Therefore a “symbolic”-transparent dream seems exactly suited to the needs of the mixed (Israelite/non-Israelite) context.

35. See more on this at the end of this section. Attempts to find in v. 12 a message for Jacob have pointed out, e.g., the downfall of the Roman empire, the last of the four kingdoms (e.g., *Gen. Rab.* 68:12; *Pirke de-R. Eliezer* 35); his being accompanied by angels in his homeland (*Tg.Ps.-J.*) as well as abroad (*Gen. Rab.* 68:12; Rashi); encouragement in finding a wife (Diane Lipton, *Revisions of the Night: Politics and Promises in the Patriarchal Dreams of Genesis*, *JSOTSup* 288 [Sheffield, 1999], 66–69, 77) and a symbolic presentation of entering and exiting the promised land, favoring the former (Peleg, “Going Up and Going Down”).

36. Note the stylistic resemblance to Zechariah’s visions (אֵלֶּי וְאָרָא Zech. 5:5; בְּרִידִים 6:3, 6; the interpreting angel) and the impossible timing of this revelation: when Jacob is directed to leave Laban so that he would not benefit from the new sheep; see Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, 4th ed. (Berlin, 1963), 38; Herman Gunkel, *Genesis*, 6th ed., *HKAT* (Göttingen, 1964), 342; Ehrlich, *Der Traum*, 132–34.

37. This position is somewhat different from the one taken in my book (*Dreams Speak Falsely?*, xv, 353), where the emphasis was on the oversights in the generalizations by Oppenheim and Kaufmann but no attempt was made to offer an alternative inclusive dreams/dreamers typology.

(3) The “symbolic”-enigmatic dreams of the third category are non-Israelite, not only as regards the dreamers but also the content, be it personal (Genesis 40), national (Genesis 41), or apocalyptic-theological (Daniel 2; 4).

This general account of the biblical dreams/dreamers typology is clearly not meant to suggest that biblical authors selected dream-types following a set of prescribed rules. Nor is it intended to preclude or replace other possible explanations for the use of specific dream types in given contexts. Thus for instance, the decreasing degrees of transparency of the dreams in the Joseph story may well serve the literary structure,<sup>38</sup> or they can be attributed to different literary components.<sup>39</sup> The exclusively “symbolic” typology of the dreams in this story—especially vis-à-vis the “message” dreams that characterize Jacob—may have something to do with its sapiential atmosphere that promotes human deduction and resourcefulness rather than direct divine intervention.<sup>40</sup> Finally, the fact that Pharaoh has enigmatic dreams—rather than “message” dreams that are more typical of ancient Near Eastern royalty—may also be explained as a polemic against pharaonic self-glorification: Pharaoh has enigmatic dreams as would any ordinary mortal, and he is not privy to direct divine revelation that characterizes Egyptian royalty.<sup>41</sup>

Apart from the Israelite quality of message dreams there is also the question of their quality as dreams. To put it bluntly: Could such dreams have formed part of ancient Israelite life, or is this format no more than a stylistic device to convey communiqués from God? Wolfgang Richter had no doubt that the latter was the case: the dream experience was more properly reflected in the type found in the Joseph story—visual, dramatic, symbolic, even enigmatic. Richter traced the “artistic” pattern and style of these accounts to the practices of dream interpreters in ancient Israel (of which, admittedly, little is known).<sup>42</sup> But when a dream report is no more than a conversation or a divine speech, its *Sitz im Leben* is to be sought at the desks of Elohist authors or pious interpolators rather than in any dream experience. Thus Richter considered the visual component of Jacob’s dream in Bethel (Gen. 28:12) to be an independent dream tradition, but God’s speech (vv. 13–15)—a later interpolation.<sup>43</sup> While part of this speech may well result from a later expansion (vv. 13b\*–14), the proposition that the Bethel dream consisted primarily of a dumb show has been justly rejected.<sup>44</sup> It would have

38. E.g., Leah Mazor, “The Literary Formation of the Dreams in the Joseph Story,” *Al Ha-Perek* 18 (2001), 78–82 [Hebrew].

39. Cf. the analytical observations proposed by Hermann Gunkel, “Die Komposition der Josephgeschichte,” *ZDMG* 76 (1922), 68–70; Weisman, “The Charismatic Personality,” 225, 230; George W. Coats, *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for the Joseph Story*, *CBQMS* (Washington, DC, 1976), 19–32; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis, 1986), 21–25.

40. Weisman, “The Charismatic Personality,” 226; Shlomo Bahar, “Expressions of Sympathy to the Clan of King Saul in the Scroll of Esther,” *Beit Mikra* 48 (2003), 42–53 [Hebrew].

41. Shupak, “A Re-examination of the Dreams of the Egyptian Officials and Pharaoh,” 95; eadem, “A Fresh Look at the Dreams,” *JANES* 30 (2006), 138.

42. Cf. Husser (*Dreams and Dream Narratives*, 171): “[T]he evidence is slender and does not permit us to advance any firm conclusions on the subject,” and “given the relative silence of the Ugaritic sources, . . . the absence of presage lists in Israel is not only the result of theological censure, but of a general tendency in the west Semitic world to prefer inspired divination to deductive [methods].”

43. Wolfgang Richter, “Traum und Traumdeutung im Alten Testament: Ihre Form und Verwendung,” *BZ* 7 (1963), 202–20.

44. Albert de Pury, *Promesse divine et légende culturelle dans le cycle de Jacob* (Paris, 1975), 352–79.

probably been to no avail to argue against Richter that the divine promises to Jacob are partly paralleled by those made to the Egyptian crown prince (later Thutmose IV) in his midday dream inscribed on the Sphinx Stela at Giza.<sup>45</sup> The prince's dream account and others like it have come under similar suspicion, since "proper dreams are visual, as we know. They may contain a short saying but not long speeches."<sup>46</sup>

Doubts regarding authenticity have been cast even on the vivid accounts of dream prophecies found in some of the 18th century B.C.E. Mari letters.<sup>47</sup> The first such account to be published was the dream of Malik-Dagan reported in a letter of Itur-Asdu to Zimri-lim king of Mari.<sup>48</sup> In his dream Malik-Dagan visits the temple of Dagan in Terqa, and the god addresses him with a question concerning Zimri-lim's war against the Benjaminites. Finally the deity dispatches the dreamer with a message to Zimri-lim: the king should deposit "a full report" before Dagan (i.e., in the Terqa temple), in exchange for which Dagan will grant him victory over the Benjaminites. With an increasing number and variety of dream prophecies from Mari already known, the relevance of Georges Dossin's theory about a forgery in the interests of the Terqa temple as also of A. Leo Oppenheim's assertion that Malik-Dagan's dream was in fact a prophetic vision recast as a dream—is quite reduced.<sup>49</sup> The most pertinent comment here is probably that of Martin Noth: if Malik-Dagan's dream account was a sham, then it still had to rely on a general belief in the appearance and validity of such dreams.<sup>50</sup>

Judgments from 20th century western scholars, about what might have constituted a "proper dream" in the ancient Near East, seem somewhat presumptuous today, when the culture-dependent nature of dream patterns is better understood. Perhaps the real culprit behind the exclusive sway of the symbolic-enigmatic dream stereotype in western scholarship is no other than Sigmund Freud. Following his personality theories, which entailed such mechanisms, Freud tended to ignore the existence of other, more coherent styles of dreaming.<sup>51</sup>

Since there is no special reason to doubt that "message" dreams were a viable style of dreaming in ancient Israel, our next concern is with their cultic or mental roots.

45. "A Divine Oracle Through a Dream," trans. John A. Wilson (*ANET*, 449); Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 252 #15. The parallels can be seen in the divine promise to be with the dreamer and to give him the land (or the earth) "in its length and breadth," although the meaning of this promise is different in each of the two contexts.

46. Karola Zibelius-Chen, "Kategorien und Rolle des Traumes in Ägypten," *Studien zur Alt-ägyptischen Kultur* 15 (1988), 288.

47. Approximately twenty of some fifty prophetic documents found in the Royal archives of Mari report or mention dreams: Jean-Marie Durand, *ARM* 26, ##224–40, 142, 196, 208.

48. Georges Dossin, "Une révélation du dieu Dagan à Terqa," *RA* 42 (1948–1949), 125–34; *ARM* 26, #233. Dossin thought the report was a forgery in collaboration with the priests of Dagan in Terqa. Cf. Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 195.

49. See previous note. For the rejection of Dossin's theory, cf. Durand, *ARM* 26, 475.

50. Martin Noth, "History and the Word of God in the Old Testament," *BJRL* 32 (1950), 200.

51. Zvi Giora, *The Dream and Human Nature* (Tel Aviv, 1982), 16–19 [Hebrew]. According to Scott Noegel, Freudian stereotypes may be responsible for some false assumptions also concerning symbolic dreams, especially regarding the ubiquity of puns ("Dreams and Dream Interpreters in Mesopotamia and in the Hebrew Bible [Old Testament]," in Kelly Bulkeley, ed., *Dreams: A Reader on the Religious, Cultural, and Psychological Dimensions of Dreaming* [New York, 2001], 52). Cf. also Frederick H. Cryer on the sociology of Max Weber and its effect on the "school" of Alt and Noth: "sociological views inform our understanding of society, and hence of history, even in ways we do not ourselves perceive" (*Divination in Ancient Israel and Its Near Eastern Environment: A Socio-Historical Investigation*, *JSOTSup* 142 [Sheffield, 1994], 14).



Oppenheim thought of a basically cultic prototype, namely incubation. He linked this to “the towering size of the dream-appearance,” a typical motif in such dreams: the sleeper lies “at the feet of an image, conditioned by appropriate ritual preparations,” and “the characteristic setting of the incubation seems to reach into the dream.”<sup>52</sup>

Incubation, divine revelation sought by ritual means, known from ancient Greece and Hellenistic Egypt, raised a lively debate when applied to ancient Near Eastern sources.<sup>53</sup> Remarkably though, in the two major traditions of theophanic dreams in the Hebrew Bible, Gen. 28:10–22 and 1 Kgs. 3:5–15, there are some intimations of a sought theophany (Gen. 35:3 [“the God who *answered* me in the day of my distress”]; Hos. 12:4 [Heb. 12:5]; 1 Kgs. 3:4–5), although the idea is rejected or marginalized in favor of other emphases, such as the discovery of a new sacred place (מקום) by Jacob or the divine initiative in the election of Solomon. Moreover, what Oppenheim called “the towering size” of the deity seems somehow borne out by the סלם “set up on the earth” and reaching to heaven (Gen. 28:12). Although usually it is not directly associated with the theophanic deity, the link may have been closer at an earlier stage in the tradition history. The rare Hebrew word מַצֵּב (“set up”) has alliterative-etymological echoes in the words describing God standing next to Jacob (or on the סלם), i.e., נָצַב (v. 13) and the pillar that Jacob erects the following morning, i.e., מַצֵּבָה (v. 18). It is possible that at some stage these were conceived as three manifestations of the same entity. Thus before being decorated with (Elohistic) angels the סלם may have embodied a divine mountain, initially representing the theophanic deity.<sup>54</sup>

These hypothetical links with a possible incubatory setting, do not yet explain the incidence and the roles of “message” dreams in the lives of some biblical dreamers.

### 5. A “Royal Road” to God

Jacob is undoubtedly the most typical dreamer of the three patriarchs. He earns this title not so much by being the only patriarch whose encounters with God are explicitly identified as dreams (Gen. 28:12; 31:10, 11),<sup>55</sup> as on account of the central position given to these dreams (together with the night vision in Beer-Sheba—Gen. 46:1–5) in his “biography.” They occur, like three *rites de passage*, at the major turning points of the Jacob cycle, providing it with a superstructure of divine guidance. Compared with Jacob’s dreams and night vision, the encounter at Peniel (32:23–33), to which similar functions

52. Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 190. On the towering size of the dream-appearance in Mesopotamian and Egyptian dream reports see *ibid.*, 189. However, Oppenheim considered also theophany itself as the *raison d’être* of “message” dream reports: “They record theophanies which for religious or literary reasons are styled as dreams” (*ibid.*, 191–92).

53. Julian Obermann, *How Daniel Was Blessed with a Son: An Incubation Scene in Ugaritic*, JAOS Supp. 6 (Baltimore, 1946), 10; Ehrlich, *Der Traum im Alten Testament*, 19–27, 44–45; Resch, *Der Traum im Heilsplan Gottes*, 114–15; Baruch Margalit, *The Ugaritic Poem of Aqht*, BZAW 182 (Berlin, 1989), 260–66; Husser, *Le songe et la parole*, 30, 44; Sally A. L. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals*, AOAT 258 (Münster, 1998), 217–39. See also below, n. 67.

54. This merits a separate study. Cf., however, C. Houtman, “What Did Jacob See in His Dream at Bethel?,” VT 27 (1977), 337–51, esp. 347.

55. Nocturnal theophanies and messages to Abraham (Genesis 15; 22:12–14; 22:1–3) and Isaac (26:24) are never entitled dreams and fall into the category of liminal reports.

are sometimes attributed,<sup>56</sup> looks like a passing episode. The divine “man” (vv. 24, 30) refuses to reveal his name, so Jacob would not be able to invoke him in the future. Contrariwise, the dreams and night vision establish a lasting personal relationship: God introduces himself to Jacob (28:13a; 31:13; 46:3), calls him by his name (31:11; 46:2), encourages him (note the *Heilsorakel* formula אל תירא “do not be afraid” in 46:3; 28:13 LXX), promises to be with him (28:15; 46:4) and most of all—guides his subsequent steps or confirms those he has already taken. This guidance is always related to Jacob’s migrations, which lends some support to the idea that this type of dream may have its roots also in the nomadic way of life.<sup>57</sup>

Association between dreams and long journeys has also a more general angle: in a comparative study of 63 societies conducted by anthropologist Roy D’Andrade a direct relation was discovered between the significance attached to dreams in any given society, especially to dreams in which the dreamer requests the help of supernatural forces, and the distance that young men have to take from the parental home upon their marriage in that society. Moreover, personal responsibility for making a living (vs. collective responsibility) makes for the greater significance attached to dreams according to his findings. D’Andrade ascribed this to the anxiety caused by these experiences.<sup>58</sup>

Returning to Jacob, the personal, familial god—“the God of . . . your father” (28:13; 46:3) who conducts his communication with this patriarch mainly through dreams—is identified as an El-type deity (31:13; 46:3), “the god . . . Bethel” (31:13, literally “abode of El”).<sup>59</sup> Only in the final episode in this long-standing personal oneiric communication, namely the night vision at Beer-Sheba, did a later Elohist introduce a divine promise to transform Jacob the man (or the clan) into a nation (46:3).<sup>60</sup> With this ultimate national transformation the three dream or vision episodes of divine guidance that embrace Jacob’s biography acquire the aspect of a dynamically developing relationship that progresses towards this goal. On the literary level as well, the dreams play a unifying role in Jacob’s “biography”: they join together the originally separate narrative complexes of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 27; 32–33), Jacob and Laban (Genesis 29–31), as well as (through Gen. 46:1–5) the story of Joseph and the Egyptian bondage.

56. Ronald S. Hendel, *The Epic of the Patriarch: The Jacob Cycle and the Narrative Traditions of Canaan and Israel*, HSM 42 (Atlanta, 1987), 63–64.

57. Gustav Hölscher, *Die Profeten: Untersuchungen zur Religionsgeschichte Israels* (Leipzig, 1914), 84; Rolf Rendtorff, “Die Offenbarungsvorstellungen im Alten Israel,” in Wolfhart Pannenberg et al., eds., *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1961), 25, n. 16; Baruch Margalit, “The History of El (ca. 3500–500 BCE),” *Amurru* 3 (2004), 355–75.

58. As reported by Carl W. O’Neill, *Dreams, Culture, and the Individual* (San Francisco, 1976), 25. This study was conducted on societies whose economy was based on fishing, hunting, and animal raising rather than agriculture.

59. The strongest biblical evidence for the existence of an Israelite deity by this name is Jer. 48:13, where Moab’s Chemosh is paralleled by Israel’s Bethel. See Otto Eissfeldt, “Der Gott Bethel” in idem, *Kleine Schriften* (Tübingen, 1962–1979), 1.214–16; Erhard Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1984), 186–90 for reviews of more evidence and literature.

60. In the Yahwistic redaction the national promise appears already in the dream of Bethel (28:13b–14). On the relation between these literary components in the Jacob stories, see Ze’ev Weisman, “The Interrelationship between J and E in Jacob’s Narrative: Theological Criteria,” *ZAW* 104 (1992), 177–97.

To summarize, dreams seem to form Jacob's main, regular, straightforward, and highly personal channel of communication with God; his "royal road" to God, so to speak, with apologies to Freud.<sup>61</sup>

#### 6. *Supporting-Role Dreamers*

It is now possible to give a fuller explanation to the "message" dreams that befall the non-Israelites Abimelech (Gen. 20:3–7) and Laban (31:24). The nocturnal messages to Balaam (Num. 22:8–20) belong here as well, despite the absence of dream terms (these are prophetic liminal reports, like the coming of "the gods at night" to his namesake in the Deir 'Alla inscription).<sup>62</sup> There is an unmistakable recurrent pattern in all these episodes that distinguishes them from Jacob's dream narratives: God (אלהים) "came" to the dreamer/seer at night, warning him not to harm a divinely protected individual (Abraham, in Abimelech's dream; Jacob, in Laban's dream) or nation (Israel, in Balaam's nocturnal revelations). Unlike Jacob's dream narratives these reports are curiously reticent about sleeping and waking, divine visions, or cultic significance.

The royal inscriptions of Hattushili III and Ashurbanipal may help us figure out how this pattern originated. Both kings describe how their own gods (Ishtar and Ashur, respectively) appear in their support in the dreams of potential rivals or enemies.<sup>63</sup> Hattushili III and Ashurbanipal themselves are both typical dreamers, and so is Jacob, the subject of Laban's dream. It seems therefore that the pattern of supporting-role dreamers derives from the "biography" of a typical dreamer. The god (or goddess) who supports and protects this dreamer and who guides him in his own dreams appears on his behalf also in the dreams of his fellow-humans.

It is interesting that this pattern is particularly clear in the case of Laban within the "biography" of the typical dreamer Jacob; but Abraham, who eventually turned "prophet" (Gen. 20:7), is no dreamer, and Abimelech—or the author, to be precise—unsatisfied with this passive, amoral role, does not so much support as steal the show. Abimelech's dream becomes a "prophetic" dialogue about divine justice, now focusing on the dreamer himself, demonstrating how he was "kept" from sinning (Gen. 20:6). This kind of dream is acclaimed in the speech of Elihu (Job 33:15–18) and probably condoned even by the severe critic Sirach, whose advice it is to ignore dreams

61. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 4th ed., trans. and ed. James Strachey (London, 1975), 796: "The interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind." For an interesting study of the use of this and related metaphors by Freud, see Diane Jonte-Pace, "Turning Away at the Navel of the Dream: Religion and the Body of the Mother at the Beginning and End of Interpretation," in Bulkeley, ed., *Dreams*, 295–306.

62. Jacob Hoftijzer and Gerrit van der Kooij, eds., *Aramaic Texts from Deir 'Alla* (Leiden, 1976); Meindert Dijkstra, "Is Balaam also among the Prophets?," *JBL* 114 (1995), 47–48; Husser, *Le songe et la parole*, 190.

63. Hattushili claims that his goddess appeared in the dreams of the nobles who were deposed by Urhi-Teshup, his predecessor, saying that she would turn over the whole land to Hattushili her protégé (Oppenheim, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 254 #28). Ashurbanipal writes that his god showed Gyges, king of Lydia, the "pronunciation of my name" telling him to "lay hold of the feet of Ashurbanipal" (*ibid.*, 249 #8). This may be a rare case of a written dream message (Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams*, 16–17, where another example from the time of Ashurbanipal is analyzed). Oppenheim (*Interpretation of Dreams*, 202) linked these reports of Hattushili and Ashurbanipal to each other, but not to the dreams of Abimelech and Laban.

altogether, “unless they are sent by intervention from the Most High” (Sir. 34:6). The transformation of Abimelech’s dream was made possible by a series of late interpolations (Gen. 20:4–6, 7 [כי נביא הוא ויתפלל בעדך], 17), that revised the story for an even more scrupulous morality than that of the primary Elohistic text.<sup>64</sup> The ease of performing such revisions is one “advantage” of transmitted literature over the more authentically preserved epigraphy of the ancient Near East.

#### 7. “Moving about in a Tent and a Tabernacle” (2 Sam. 7:6): *Socio-Religious Roots*

The foregoing discussion points to the life story of Jacob as a possible core of the Israelite “message” dream tradition. The religious profile of Jacob, the tent dweller (Gen. 25:27) whose God guides his life journey in dream and vision, has been traced back to that of an El worshiper.<sup>65</sup> Such a prehistory would lend an interesting nuance to our exploration of the roots of the Israelite “message” dream, particularly in light of the Ugaritic texts of Kirta and Aqhat, both of them “sagas” comparable with the patriarchal ones in the Book of Genesis.<sup>66</sup>

El is also the deity offering personal guidance to the heroes of these epic poems, to Kirta in a dream (*KTU* 1.14 I 26–40) and to Danel in an incubatory—but apparently wakeful—vision (*KTU* 1.17 I 16–26).<sup>67</sup> It is true that unlike Jacob, the childless Kirta, and Danel are both guided in the delicate matters of procreation. When El instructs Kirta to make a journey, it is not a personal migration as in Jacob’s dreams, but a military campaign with the goal of obtaining a wife. It is also true that in both poems

64. Note the repeated dream statement (v. 6); the synthesis of different statements of the sibling relationship between the patriarch and his wife (v. 5; cf. v. 2; 12:19; 26:6, 9 with 12:13); the theodicean retrospect (v. 6); the abrupt need for curing Abimelech from an unspecified malady by the prayer of Abraham the prophet (v. 7a; 17). Some of these verses have already been recognized as secondary by others. See, e.g., C. Westermann, *Genesis 12–36: A Commentary*, trans. J. J. Scullion (Minneapolis, 1985), on v. 7; Cuthbert A. Simpson, *The Early Traditions of Israel* (Oxford, 1948), 80, 630, n. 1; Yair Zakovitch, *An Introduction to Inner-Biblical Interpretation* (Even-Yehuda, 1992), 39 [Hebrew]; and apparently also Christoph Levin, “Gerechtigkeit Gottes in der Genesis,” in A. Wénin, ed., *Studies in the Book of Genesis: Literature, Redaction and History* (Leuven, 2001), 355. Cf. also my article, “The Dream of Abimelech (Genesis 20:3–8) and its Place within the ‘Ancestress in Danger’ Tradition,” in Meir Ayali et al., eds., *Tura 2: Studies in Jewish Thought* (Tel Aviv, 1992), 19–38 [Hebrew].

65. Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel* (Cambridge, MA, 1973), 42–43. Cf. also n. 59 above.

66. Otto Eissfeldt, “Mythus und Sage in den Ras-Schamra-Texten,” in idem, *Kleine Schriften* (Tübingen, 1962–1979), 2.495–98. Eissfeldt contrasted “the narratives of Keret and Dan’el” with the Baal texts which he styled “myths.” The distribution of dreams in these texts seems to correspond to this distinction: in the Kirta and Aqhat texts El appears to the heroes in a dream or vision (see below), whereas in a Baal text El is apparently the dreamer himself (*KTU* 1.6 III 4–21); trans. Dennis Pardee; otherwise Baruch Margalit, “Ninth-Century Israelite Prophecy in the Light of Contemporary NW-Semitic Epigraphs,” in M. Dietrich and I. Kottsieper, eds., *Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf: Studien zum Alten Testament und zum Alten Orient* (Festschrift Oswald Loretz) (Münster, 1998), 524.

67. Obermann, *How Daniel Was Blessed*, 10. This widely followed definition of Danel’s six day supplication ritual has been challenged by Margalit, *The Ugaritic Poem of Aqhat*, 260–66, and Husser, *Le songe et la parole*, 44–54. Their argument that Danel is not sleeping (hence not dreaming) on the seventh day, I find irrelevant, since incubation does not necessarily entail dreaming, and it may evolve into a direct encounter. In Psalm 17 an incubatory procedure culminates in a real theophany; see Johannes Lindblom, “Theophanies in Holy Places in Hebrew Religion,” *HUCA* 32 (1961), 104. Psalm 3 may well be a similar case, as I have argued in “A Touch of Support: Ps. 3,6 and the Psalmist’s Experience.”

we have, at least “on the surface, an urban milieu in which the primary figure is the king,” possibly in line with circumstances in Ugarit at the time these texts received their form.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, some thoughtful readers have drawn attention to points that do not fit this supposed milieu, such as the list of filial duties in the poem of Aqhat, that lacks any mention of royal tasks, and is found savoring of “an earlier religious stage [. . .] brought to Ugarit as a nomadic clan religion by a ruling class just settling down,”<sup>69</sup> or the familial emphasis in the depiction of royal marriage and procreation and other family motifs in the Kirta text, taken to suggest “roots going back to the period of incipient settlement.”<sup>70</sup> Is it possible that personal guidance in a dream and vision by El, probably a tent dweller himself,<sup>71</sup> also harks back to such roots?

Going back in time some four centuries, we find in Mari an important instance of dream oracles attributed great significance in a population that is partly semi-nomadic with tribal consciousness and terminology.<sup>72</sup>

Given this background it is hardly surprising that in a speech thought to reflect a North-Israelite objection to a permanent, central temple (2 Sam. 7:5–7) the God of Israel declines the proposed “house of cedar” declaring his long-established preference for a tent dwelling. This message comes to Nathan the prophet in a nocturnal revelation. The history of Nathan’s message—a prophetic liminal report rather than a dream—is nevertheless almost visible: it combines North-Israelite tribal emotions with the prophetically transformed “message” dream tradition.

This survey would not be complete without mention of the once widespread (and now much disputed) attribution of theophanic dreams to E (the Elohist).<sup>73</sup> Whereas J (the Yahwist) had no qualms about depicting direct encounters between divine and human—so went the typical argument of literary-historical criticism—E “originated in a slightly more advanced community” mitigating J’s bold anthropomorphism by presenting divine revelations as dreams or as angels calling from heaven.<sup>74</sup> Reiterat-

68. Claus Westermann, *The Promises to the Fathers*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia, 1980), 168–69 (“The Significance of the Ugaritic Texts for the Patriarchal Narratives,” *ibid.*, 165–86).

69. Klaus Koch, “Die Sohnesverheissung an den ugaritischen Daniel,” *ZA* 24 (1967), 211–21, esp. 217–18, as translated by Westermann, *Promises to the Fathers*, 166.

70. Westermann, *ibid.*, 168, 170, 177.

71. According to Margalit (“The History of El,” 356, 358), it seems to be “common knowledge that the Ugaritic El dwelt habitually in a tent (Ug. *dd* [. . .]),” reflecting “a by-gone pastoral-nomadic way-of-life while his residence in the subterranean Deep underscores the pivotal role that wells and springs play” in the survival of the semi-nomads. Other authorities seem to recognize only the latter (“the fountainhead of the two rivers / bedding of the two floods”) with the sacred Mount Zaphon as El’s places of residence: Wolfgang Hermann, “El 𐎗𐎎,” in K. van der Toorn et al., eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden-Cambridge, 1999), 275, 278. However, El-Creator-of-the-Earth (*el-ku-né-er-ša* < Semitic \**l qn(y)rš*) in a Hittite mythological text (cf. *ANET*<sup>3</sup>, 519) does dwell “in a tent at the sources of the river Mala, i.e., the Euphrates,” a tradition traced to Canaanite origins: W. Röllig, “El-Creator-of-the-Earth,” *DDD*, 280.

72. See n. 47 above; Abraham Malamat, *Mari and the Bible* (Leiden, 1998); Moshe Anbar, *Prophecy, Treaty-Making and Tribes in the Mari Documents during the Period of the Amorite Kings* (Jerusalem, 2007), 33–89, 195–267 [Hebrew].

73. Robert K. Gnuse, “Dreams in the Night: Scholarly Mirage or Theophanic Formula? The Dream Report as a Motif of the So-called Elohist Tradition,” *BZ* 39 (1995), 28–29; 34; 49–53; *idem*, “Redefining the Elohist,” *JBL* 119 (2000), 201–20. A comprehensive review of the controversy is offered by Tzemah Yoreh (“The Elohist Source: Its Structure and Unity” [Ph.D. diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2003], 1–11).

74. W. O. E. Oesterley and T. H. Robinson, *An Introduction to the Books of the Old Testament* (repr. New York, 1958), 55, as quoted by Lichtenstein, “Dream Theophany.”

ing earlier doubts<sup>75</sup> with added support from ancient Near Eastern writings, Murray Lichtenstein put together an impressive case against E being defined as an independent document on the basis of an assumed evolutionary development of revelatory media.<sup>76</sup> He argued, first, that the distinction between (supposedly Elohist) dream theophanies and (supposedly Yahwistic) corporeal theophanies is not consistent with generally accepted source divisions. Particularly problematic are Gen. 28:16 reporting Jacob's awakening, but assigned to J, and Gen. 15:12 with Abram's תרדמה (which Lichtenstein renders "sleep") not assigned to E. Second, he argued that in biblical and ancient Near Eastern writings, "symbolic dreams, dream-theophanies, corporeal theophanies, and the like, are mutually interchangeable," since they may convey the same message (e.g., "fear not" occurs in a vision—Gen. 15:1; in a nocturnal revelation—Gen. 26:24; and in a night vision, which he identifies with a dream—Gen. 46:3).<sup>77</sup> Moreover, these different media sometimes co-occur in the same piece or literary corpus: the 21st century B.C.E. Gudea cylinders pass from enigmatic dream to a direct dream theophany, both informing Gudea, Ensi of Lagash, concerning the building of a temple to the god Ningirsu.<sup>78</sup> In Ugaritic literature there is a symbolic dream of a deity about the revival of Baal, but also Kirta's direct dream theophany as well as a corporeal appearance of El to bless Kirta. Lichtenstein concludes that the distinction between them "is more a matter of literary preference than of theological necessity."<sup>79</sup>

Lichtenstein was right to point to certain overlaps in the use of revelatory media in the Bible and other ancient writings, and his argument contributes to curbing dogmatic tendencies in the application of literary analysis and in its theological interpretation. Nevertheless, he was drawn to some sweeping generalizations that are not justified by the evidence provided. Well aware of a certain hierarchy of media both in the Gudea text and in the Bible (Num. 12:4–9),<sup>80</sup> Lichtenstein goes on to present the inconsistencies in Ugaritic literature. It is not clear why this corpus is expected to be more uniform in the style of divine-human encounters than the aforementioned texts. After all, here too we have different genres<sup>81</sup> and contexts that may explain the variety. El's appearance to bless Kirta is a public occasion, while his instructions on producing offspring are given in the intimate setting of Kirta's room. The partial synonymy between revelatory media does not prove that they are completely "interchangeable." In brief, the way is still open for other directions of characterizing E and its relation to dreams.

75. E.g., Paul Volz and Wilhelm Rudolph, *Der Elohist als Erzähler: Ein Irrweg des Pentateuchkritik*, BZAW 63 (Gießen, 1933), 20–21; Sigmund Mowinckel, *Erwägungen zur Pentateuch Quellenfrage* (Trondheim, 1964), 112–13.

76. Murray H. Lichtenstein, "Dream Theophany and the E Document," *JANES* 1 (1969), 45–54.

77. *Ibid.*, 53–54; It should be added that according to the Septuagint version the formula "do not fear" is found also in a dream with the full terminology derived from חלום: Gen. 28:15. Lichtenstein's set of examples for this formula also includes the message to the Aramean king Zakir "through seers and (divine) messengers" (*KAI* #202, 13) as well as the goddess Ishtar's appearance to King Ashurbanipal in answer to his fervent prayer for help against the Elamite invasion: Streck, *Assurbanipal*, 190, 23 (K2652).

78. D. O. Edzard, *Gudea and His Dynasty*, *RIME* 3/1 (Toronto, 1997), 68–101.

79. Lichtenstein, "Dream Theophany and the E Document," 51.

80. *Ibid.*, 49–51.

81. See n. 66 above.



A tradition corpus that grew in Northern Israel over a long period,<sup>82</sup> “E” has also been characterized as the main and older stratum in the narratives on Jacob,<sup>83</sup> which in turn are more ancient than those on Abraham and Isaac,<sup>84</sup> and as affected by Canaanite religion.<sup>85</sup> In these circumstances, it would be natural to find also in E’s partiality for dreams a reflection of life realities in Northern Israel. The tribal, even nomadic, mentality, kept alive in this highly divisive land of charismatic upheavals<sup>86</sup> must have affected the way authors conceived of the role played by God (or by El) in human affairs and of his communication with humankind. Rather than national pre-figurations who are granted promises for generations to come, the patriarchs in E are essentially individual, their relations with God progressing on a dynamic and personal level. This is where the “message” dream gains importance and appeal as a mode of encounter with the divine. With its use of the auditory medium it can mediate the most personal guidance, its tone of communication capable of a whole range of nuances, from announcement through warning, to advice, request or instruction (vs. the sheer announcement of the future to which “symbolic” dreams are usually restricted).

#### 8. *Solomon*

At first sight, the dream in Gibeon (1 Kgs. 3:5–15) seems to disprove everything said in the foregoing section. If “message” dreams were part of a nomadic heritage that took root particularly in northern Israel, then how is it that the second king in the one and only Judean dynasty was initiated into the role of a wise king through such a dream?

Originating possibly in a Solomonic chronicle (1 Kgs. 11:41), the story of the dream in Gibeon is read as a highly sympathetic prologue to the reports on Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 3–10), perhaps as court propaganda of Egyptian *Königsnovelle* fame<sup>87</sup> or of its Canaanite counterparts.<sup>88</sup> Possible goals might be: legitimating Solomon’s

82. Otto Procksch, *Das nordhebräische Sagenbuch: Die Elohimquelle* (Leipzig, 1906), 175ff.; Gunkel, *Genesis*, lxxvii–lxxxiii; Alan W. Jenks, *The Elohist and North Israelite Traditions*, SBLMS (Missoula, MT, 1977); John F. Craghan, “The Elohist in Recent Literature,” *BTB* 7 (1977), 24.

83. Ze’ev Weisman, *From Jacob to Israel* (Jerusalem, 1986), 93–130 [Hebrew].

84. Blum, *Die Komposition der Vätergeschichte*, 5–270.

85. Jaroš, *Die Stellung des Elohisten zur kanaänischen Religion*, 32–50, 246. Jaroš describes E as “tolerant” of Canaanite religion, but this seems somewhat anachronistic.

86. Northern Israel was “a kingdom based on revolution by the will of God,” according to Albrecht Alt (“The Monarchy in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah,” in idem, *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, trans. R. A. Wilson [Oxford, 1966], 246). Alt perhaps went too far in portraying charismatic kingship as an ideal or a principle of government, but his various critics could not deny the differences between the histories of two kingdoms that he pointed out; e.g., Timothy C. G. Thornton, “Charismatic Kingship in Israel and Judah,” *JTS* 14 (1963), 9; Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel*, BZAW 142 (Berlin, 1977), 171–83.

87. See n. 1 above.

88. Seow (“The Syro-Palestinian Context”) argues that Solomon’s dream is more closely related to Ugaritic and Syro-Canaanite texts than to the Egyptian *Königsnovelle* that has overwhelmed scholarship since Siegfried Hermann’s study. Seow makes a good case for the Phoenician-Canaanite affinity of 1 Kings 3, particularly as regards the themes and patterns in the God-king dialogue. Nevertheless it is important to remember that affinity is not identity (see n. 3 above), so it seems to me unnecessary to assume (ibid., 149) that Solomon in the ancient tradition “answered Yahweh in the manner that Kirta did [KTU 1.14 I 52–II 4], outlining first what he was not requesting and then stating what he wanted.”

accession, promoting recognition of his kingship by both North and South, and the promulgation of a new royal typology that combines wealth, glory, and wisdom. These goals are observable throughout the story and down to its finest details, such as worship in both Gibeon and Jerusalem (vv. 4, 15), and the complex theophany formula (v. 5), which likewise combines a northern component, a dream theophany formula (“in a dream by night God said”) with a Jerusalemite component, a divine vision formula (“the Lord appeared to Solomon”; cf. Gen. 22:14b; 2 Sam. 24:16–17).

This is not to say that Solomon’s dream is no more than a propaganda device. The account reveals deep awareness of the personal nature of the dream experience and of some archetypal functions associated with it. The royal ideology that it reflects is presented in highly personal terms (contrast Psalms 2, 72, 89; 2 Samuel 7). Almost anticipating the Jungian notion of introspection in dreams,<sup>89</sup> Solomon’s dream acquaints him with a hitherto neglected aspect of the self (cf. 1 Kgs. 2:6, 9), which is to become dominant ever after. The superiority of “(divine) wisdom” (1 Kgs. 3:28), to wealth and glory is related to values nurtured by nascent (court) wisdom (cf. Prov. 3:13–18), but also to the *Urmensch* myth (cf. Gen. 3:22; Ezek. 28:3–5, 12–19).<sup>90</sup> It is interesting that despite many references in ancient Near Eastern writing to royal wisdom and to its divine origin,<sup>91</sup> a king’s request from his God to be granted wisdom so as to be a better ruler seems to remain a so far unparalleled Israelite contribution. Its affinity to wisdom, particularly to the calling of a wise king, is a quality that Solomon’s dream shares, despite its different typology, with those of Joseph (Genesis 37).<sup>92</sup>

## 9. Conclusion

As in many ancient cultures so also in the biblical world, dreams afforded a visit to the twilight zone of the divine, bridging across gaps in time, space, or being. Only rarely was this experience exposed as reflecting no more than the dreamer’s own wishes, bodily needs or fears (Isa. 29:8; Qoh. 5:3 [Heb. 5:2]; Song 5:2–6[?]; Sir. 34:5; 40:6–7). Nevertheless, ambivalence accompanies dream reports even at their finest hour, as evident from Jacob’s double response to Joseph’s second dream (Gen. 37:10–11) or from his response to his own dream in Bethel: awe-struck recognition of divine presence (28:16–18) but also a vow (vv. 20–22) that turns the divine promise received in the dream (v. 15) into a bilateral agreement, playing it safe. This ambivalence is best seen as a deep structure of the Hebrew mentality, possibly of the human mentality in general.

Several other features discussed above are likewise general or archetypal rather than uniquely Israelite. Preference for auditory “message” dreams in indigenous contexts, tendency to rely on dreams among young leavers of parental homes, associations

89. “Dreams, then, convey to us in figurative language—that is, in sensuous, concrete imagery—thoughts, judgments, views, directives, tendencies, which were unconscious either because of repression or through mere lack of realization”; Carl G. Jung, “General Aspects of Dream Psychology” §447, in idem, *Dreams*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ, 1974), 34.

90. For a pertinent exposition of the relationship between dream and myth, see Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, trans. P. Mairet (New York, 1960), 13–20.

91. Leonidas Kalugila (*The Wise King* [Lund, 1980]) has collected a variety of such sources; see esp. *ibid.*, 25, 30, 47–68.

92. Weisman, “The Charismatic Personality,” 223–39.

between dreaming and dream interpretation as two types of inspired wisdom, typical dreamers and supporting role dreamers—biblical literature has all these in common with other cultures and traditions in the ancient Near East and elsewhere.

A more typically Israelite quality can perhaps be found in some of the contexts and specific uses of dreams, on the one hand, and in their tradition history, on the other: an oneirically-guided national patriarch (section 5), a king who asks for wisdom (section 8), a supporting role dreamer who transforms the paradigm by pointing to its inadequate morality (section 6) and the prophetic transformation of the dream into a vision or a nocturnal “word” (sections 3, 7). More generally, it is the capacity for adapting the disputed heritage to ever changing roles and realities that maintained its appeal in later generations, aiding the survival of dreams and dreamers alike.