

Praenotandum, 4.04.2018: This review was published in *Numen* 40, 3 (1993): 349-350. I have made a few minor editorial changes in the text.

Jedrej, M.C., & Rosalind Shaw (eds.) 1992, *Dreaming, Religion and Society in Africa*. Leiden: E.J. Brill (= *Supplements to the Journal of Religion in Africa*, 7), 194 pp., bibliographies, index, ISBN 90-04-08936-5, cloth with dustcover, (price).

Dreams have been a sorely neglected subject in the study of religions in Africa as well as worldwide in the last decades. In my recollection, Sylvia Thrupp's *Millennial Dreams in Action* (1970) was the last book to sport 'dreams' in its title - even though that collection of studies deals with millennialism and hardly with dreams. So, this book is to be hailed as a major event.

The book has ten contributions, an introduction, and a four page afterword by Roy Willis. This book is not on 'feral dreams', those that are dreamt by every human but elude our memory. It is about 'domesticated dreams': the few dreams that are not only recollected, but also recounted and brought into the social interaction of humans. So, it is not about the neurobiology and psychology of dreaming as a mental activity, but on the socio-psychological functions, the sociology and cultural morphology of the recounted dream. It studies the differential attention paid by societies, groups, and persons to dreams, the negotiation and manipulation of the meaning of recounted dreams - which are transformed in these processes -, and their use for explaining behaviour or events other than routine, for constituting the 'self' of the members of a society, and for laying claim to privileged knowledge and to certain statuses.

The introduction has two parts. It first presents a survey of the dichotomous approaches to the ethnography of the dream in classical anthropology, based on some opposition between 'the primitives' and 'us' in respect of the use of dreams. Then it sets out the reasons for the poor attention to dreams in the ethnography of Africa in this century. In its second half, the 'polyphony' of theoretical approaches used by the contributors to this volume is discussed.

The first four articles emphasize various 'interactionist' perspectives. Pamela Reynolds discusses the role of dreams in the processes of individuation and socialisation among the Zezuru Shona of Zimbabwe, particularly of children and healers. Rosalind Shaw describes the complex cosmology of the Temne of Sierra Leone and how fame is acquired by Temne diviners through 'accomplished dreaming'. Keith Ray analyses the role of vocational dreams in the selection of candidates for high ritual offices among the North-central Igbo of Nigeria. Roy Dilley shows that the Tukulor weavers of Senegal believe that they are given their designs in dreams, as well as other mystical and technical help, by *jinn* that are connected with their craft. But he shows also that they derive their low position in society from this cosmological connection, the *jinn* being held to be inferior as sources of 'knowledge' to Allah and his angels.

A second group of three contributions offers symbolist perspectives. Ladislav Holt analyses the semiotics, or rules of dream interpretation, of the Berti, a Muslim people on the borders of Sudan and Ethiopia. The Berti do not cultivate dream telling. The Yansi of Zaïre do: they begin each day by discussing their dreams, and may even discuss them at night, immediately after they have dreamt one. Mubuy Mubay Mpier discusses their semantics of

dream interpretation and its application to daily life. M.C. Jedrej analyses dreams of ordinary people, those of the custodians of certain temples, and the role of a 'dream cult group' among the Ingessana of Sudan in a structuralist manner.

The last three contributions deal with dreaming in African Christianity. Peter McKenzie analyses the transformations and continuities of Yoruba dreaming in the nineteenth century under the influence of conversion to Christianity. Richard T. Curley's contribution is on conversion dreams, as the gate to full membership, in an independent church in Cameroun. They offer public testimony of the church's ability to transform lives and express its collective consciousness as a community of elect. Lastly, Simon Charsley critically surveys the study of dream recounting in 'independent' churches. Even though in that part of African ethnography relatively much attention was paid to this research topic, the actual interest in dreams proves often to have been patchy and their use variable. For which use he proposes a new classification.

A few minor points of criticism. I for one would have been happy to have had the usual extra page of bio-bibliographical information on the contributors. More serious is the scarcity and, in the paper of Holt, the total lack of information on the whereabouts of the people discussed and other general information for the uninitiated. Only Willis, in his brief afterword, touches upon neurobiology, and thus upon the common human ground of dreaming. As the domesticated dream is the product not only of social interaction in the telling of a dream but also of the feral dream dreamt, and as the transition between states of association and dissociation is fluid and multiform, neurobiology does have important analyses to contribute to a scholarly understanding of this psycho-social phenomenon. Their incorporation would allow the study of dreams to be linked to another neglected avenue of revelation, the vision, as well as to better studied ones, such as spirit possession and divination.

Lastly, the text is fully unhyphenated. As a result, words are widely strewn out over a line usually, with lots of white showing between them, when the next line begins with a long word. That is not what one expects from expensive Brill books.

It is hoped that the trails which Jedrej, Shaw and the others have blazed in this book will be trodden by others. If dreams and visions will receive as much scholarly attention as have spirit possession and, more recently, divination, the sorely neglected subject of 'revelation' may perhaps be in for fresh attention also.

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