Book Reviews

Dreaming in the World's Religions: A Comparative History
Kelly Bulkeley. New York: New York University Press, 2008.
ISBN: 978-0-8147-9957-4. Pp. 331.
Reviewed by Annie Michal Ross, Independent Scholar

A committed interdisciplinarian, Kelly Bulkeley has customarily engaged with the phenomenon of human dreaming through a variety of academic lenses, from the neuroscientific to the psychological to the religious, often within one text. *Dreaming in the World's Religions: A Comparative History* does not represent a departure. It is in some respects, as the title would suggest, a relatively straightforward overview of the ways in which dreams have been understood and utilized in the context of religion, both diachronically and cross-culturally. Bulkeley's stated premise is unambiguous: "I do not argue that dreaming is the origin of religion as such," he writes; "rather, my thesis is more focused: dreaming is a primal wellspring of religious experience" (6; emphasis in original). In actuality, Bulkeley is operating with several theses simultaneously. Evidence of his various research interests arises repeatedly throughout the account, and the spectre of the religion/science binary underlies the entire project without ever being directly challenged. Instead, the author attempts a modest détente. As if to preempt a rationalist dismissal of the spiritual dimension in his work, he takes pains to establish the historical coexistence of skeptical and reverent approaches to dream analysis. By the book's conclusion, Bulkeley's attention to the sociobiological functions of dreaming threatens to overshadow the religiously experiential aspects. Yet despite its divided focus, *Dreaming* is a worthwhile starting point for anyone interested in comparative religion, dream theory, and/or the interaction between conscious and unconscious intelligence.

Bulkeley organizes his survey into ten chapters, each a general account of how a given culture has explained the meanings and usefulness of dreaming over time. Several of the chapters are devoted to specific religio-philosophical traditions ("Hinduism," "Buddhism," "Christianity," "Islam"), whereas the rest feature distinct traditions within a geographical region (e.g., "Religions of the Fertile Crescent"). This structure is addressed in the introduction, where Bulkeley defends his decision as an imperfect but necessary compromise between chronological, environmental, and evolutionary factors. The first chapter, "Hinduism," enables him to draw upon a remarkably long written history that began with the *Vedas*, anthologies of hymnody

and ritual instruction that originated in oral form centuries before their transcriptions. (Estimations vary as to when the *Vedas* were recorded; Bulkeley posits a time frame between the 13th and 10th centuries BCE.) The Vedic references cited illustrate Bulkeley's contention that the ontology of dreams—the matter of their "reality"—has occupied religious thinkers for millennia, without consensus.

One of the more tantalizing leitmotifs in *Dreaming* first materializes here, namely, that a "close connection between sleep and death" is witnessed within different schools of religious thought. In the *Rig Veda*, for example, Sleep is a deity "[d]welling between and beyond the opposition of life and death" (26). Dream-communion with the deceased, above all with one's ancestors, has been a conspicuous feature of Chinese, African, ancient Egyptian, and aboriginal Australian religious cultures. Similarly, the Muslim idea of *Alam al-mithal* describes "a realm of images between the material and spiritual worlds in which the human soul could journey either in waking visions or nocturnal dreams ... [and] could interact with the souls of the deceased, gain prophetic knowledge of the future, and receive divine guidance" (203). These prized experiences have habitually been cultivated by means of dream incubations, preparatory rituals that Bulkeley refers to as "a species-wide spiritual practice" (139). Those who recognize parallels with the rites of shamanistic initiation will not be surprised to find several such correlations in *Dreaming*, especially in the chapter discussing "Religions of China."

Of course, not all religious traditions have historically cultivated or even welcomed the potency of dreams. The fact that sleep and death are so commonly associated suggests a central existential fear, one to which the author is attuned. He points to Homer's *Odyssey* (a veritable stockpile of dream psychology) and its allusion to the *demos oneiron*, or Land of Dreams, which Bulkeley characterizes as "the last stop on the way to the final residence of the dead ... a place as distant from ordinary life as one could go without actually dying" (145)—an image haunted by the susceptibility inherent to unconsciousness. Some of Bulkeley's strongest work in *Dreaming* regards manifestations of this seemingly universal uncertainty, particularly when he situates it in specific historical contexts. By grounding the Torah's contradictory messages regarding dreams (divine prophecy, or malevolent illusion?) in the framework of threats to the survival of early Judaism, Bulkeley succinctly gathers mystical, social, and textual elements into a coherent whole. Likewise, because he addresses the adaptations made by indigenous African, Oceanic, and American communities to the incursions of Christian colonialism, the author supports his sweeping claim that "dreams will become an increasingly important source of personal inspiration and cultural meaning-making in direct proportion to the severity of a crisis situation" (227).

In the main, *Dreaming* is most successful when Bulkeley does not encumber his narrative with intermittent forays into scientific disquisition. He is an adept,

accessible writer, and it is frustrating to repeatedly encounter what feel like unnecessary rationalizations in the midst of his prose. The relationship between dreams, neuroscience, and human evolution is fascinatingly complex, and not at all incidental to the centrality of dreaming in religious experience, but Bulkeley often substitutes gloss for depth by foregrounding the mind/brain features of dreaming at the expense of exploring the interplay between the sacred and mundane aspects. *Dreaming in the World's Religions* is thus rather misleadingly named. Perhaps the very notion of a comparative survey cannot do justice to the complexities he wishes to interrogate. Fortunately, the scholar who longs to delve more deeply into any or all of Bulkeley's concerns can begin by consulting the book's excellent bibliography, a treasure trove of both contemporary and time-honoured research resources.

We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom

Tisa Wenger. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
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Reviewed by Samira Mehta, Emory University

Religion is a contested term in Native American studies, a term that came from Christianity and was imposed on Native American traditions across the continent. Tisa Wenger's *We Have a Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Indian Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* dives into the center of the controversy, tracing the development of the idea of "religion" in Southwestern Indian life. In doing so, she brilliantly illustrates the concrete ways in which the intellectual category of religion shaped the ways in which a community's religious practices framed by outsiders, but also by themselves. While her rich history of the intersection of Pueblo customs and American law will doubtless be useful for those within American Indian studies, her historically routed mediations on the category of religion makes this book essential reading for everyone who studies American religions, and arguably many others in religious studies as well. Wenger's meticulously researched and theoretically sophisticated work is exceptional in any number of ways, principally in her sensitive read of both what was gained and lost for the Pueblo communities in the shift from culture to religion. Additionally, through comparative work in her introduction, Wenger locates this particular example of American colonialism in a broader post-colonial conversation.

Wenger moves chronologically through southwestern tribal interactions with Christian missionaries, artists, and the government agencies "responsible" for their territories. Her earliest chapters tease out the ways in which Catholic and Protestant