Studying Dreams, Prophecy and Violence from Early Christianity to Early Islam

Friday 9 October

Date: Friday 9 October
Time: 1pm-3pm
Venue: Australian Catholic University
Level 11
Tenison Woods House
8 – 20 Napier Street, North Sydney

Abstract

Cultural and religious understandings of dreaming and its interpretation in the first millennium are of enduring relevance to those forced to live with the consequences of religious conflict today. Although dream interpretation has commonly been recognised as a rich part of western culture and society from Classical Antiquity to the present day, it has been noted by Hornblower et al (2012: 478) that the development of dream theory from Jewish to Christian to Muslim sources has until now not been attempted. Due to their essentially private nature, dreams and their interpretation were never successfully regulated by Christian or Muslim authorities. It is in their shared attempts to regulate the dream life of early Christians and Muslims, and to use the dreams of both leaders and their followers as tools of social or religious guidance or in some cases, control, that we may discover the common cultural roots of Jewish, Christian and Muslim dream interpretation.

In this study of dreams and their interpretation from 400 to 1000 CE, my attention is focussed on dreams identified as revelations, and their nexus with religion and religious violence. This introduction to the project offers a brief overview of the relevant primary sources on dreaming, and a survey of pre-modern and contemporary methods of approach to dreams and their interpretation. After a brief discussion of how dreams and spiritual authority were inextricably linked in Late Antiquity, I survey scriptural, late-antique Christian and early Islamic models of dream interpretation, with a focus on the exalted role they gave to revelatory dreams up to the end of the first millennium.