CONSTANTINOPLE · 10TH CENTURY

The Dream Book of the Byzantine Emperors

III · Jewels, Beasts and Birds



What your dream foretells — wealth, love or power

ACHMET SON OF SEREIM · CHAPTERS 230–304

BOOKS OF WISDOM · NO. 102

The Dream Book of the Byzantine Emperors

III. Jewels, Beasts and Birds

The Byzantine dream book of Achmet, son of Sereim — what dreams foretell of wealth, love, power and death. Book III of three: Chapters 230–304. Complete translation from the Greek after the Paris edition of 1603, with notes, a foreword and commentary

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PREFACE

The lion is the king. An eagle on the roof means a husband in high office. The peacock promises famous wealth and a beautiful wife. Pearls are wisdom and joy, while the diadem is the kingdom itself. The third book is Achmet's treasure chest and menagerie in one. The Dream Book of Achmet, son of Sereim, is one of the largest Byzantine books of dreams, composed around the tenth century and written for the court. It has roots in Arab tradition, and it gathers explanations from three "teachings": Indian, Persian and Egyptian. They are given by the interpreters Syrbacham, Baram and Tarphan, and Sereim and the caliph Mamun appear along the way. Here a dream is never the same for everyone: it is read one way for a king, another for a rich man, a poor man, a woman.

We give the whole work, about 300 chapters, in three books. This is the third and last, chapters 230 to 304. It holds clothing and animals, horse saddles and donkeys, camels, oxen, foods, then treasures (cinnamon, diadems, pearls, rings, thrones and coins), beasts, birds and insects, and at the end the opening of veins, the beard, and words on how to interpret dreams.

What you will find here. Almost every animal in a dream is a person: the lion is the king, the leopard and the bear an enemy, the hyena an evil woman, the cat a thief. A king who tames a lion in a dream will subdue another kingdom, and whoever rides an elephant or a serpent will become a holder of power. To eat the flesh of a lion or find a lion's skin means gaining an enemy's gold. If a king hunts with a tamed eagle, he will have a son who will rule after him in mighty strength. The whitest horse is the empress, and a black donkey announces a profit in gold. The cinnamon tree is a king's dream. If a woman sees that she is wearing leggings, a son is promised, and a king who shows two rings gains yet another son. Pearls are wisdom and joy, but too many coins mean cares. Sugar promises a sweet life

If they are of wool, or of linen, or of cotton, these are judged to mean wealth, but not power.

If any of the garments mentioned are torn, he will go from affliction to affliction.

If he sees that he sews and joins them together, then he too will set his affairs in order in the same measure.

If they are short and high, like tight-fitting ones, he will hope for great joy, but will find less, in proportion.

If a king sees that he has put off the filth he had, he will cast off the care he had.

If he sees that he has put on new purple, his affairs will turn out more glorious and more splendid.

If he has put on old garments, as is his custom, then through the washing he will find freedom from care, but because of their age his affairs will remain as they were.

If he sees that he has put on torn garments, he will receive a new, unaccustomed evil, because the dressing itself was unaccustomed.

If he cast them off, he will escape such an evil.

233. On Stallions and Mares, from the Teaching of the Indians, Persians and Egyptians

The noble horse, the "pharas"[1], is judged, according to the interpretation of such dreams, to signify height and dignity; likewise the mare "pharas" signifies a noble woman; ordinary horses are judged to mean lesser power and glory, and likewise ordinary mares, women of lesser standing.

If someone sees in a dream that he rode a swift and prancing "pharas," he will find the greatest renown and height, and distinction before the people.

1 "Pharas" (Arabic "faras"): a horse; here a particularly noble steed, bred for the race and for war.

give others a share of his power. For this is hard for any other to see, except the greatest, or one about to be exalted.

If he sees that he has sold yokes of oxen for gold, the farm-steward subordinate to him will rule, and he will be afflicted in proportion to the amount of gold he received.

If a king sees that he has given oxen as a gift to an acquaintance, he will exalt him and make him a ruler; but if to a stranger, he will receive affliction from enemies among his own people.

If a king sees that herds, and unruly beasts, were brought to him: if they were bound, he will receive foreign rulers in chains and very great joy.

If they are brought in herds and led under yokes, he will subdue very great nations.

If a king sees that he has ordered plowing oxen to be slaughtered, his rulers will be in danger because of them.

If they are unruly, the calamity will turn against foreigners.

If a king sees that he has sent out herds of unwearied oxen to be pastured in his own land, he will settle that land with foreigners.

If someone sees that he was gored by an ox: if he is under authority or is a very great man, he will fight with an equal and will be harmed by him in proportion to the goring; but if he is one of the common people, he will be harmed by a ruler.

If he sees that he was kicked by an ox, the suffering will be less.

If he sees that he rode a rose-colored ox, he will find power, and illness among his children or his wife.

If someone sees that a strange ox came into his house, great men will enter his house; and if the ox gored, they will harm him, but if not, in no way.

If someone sees that in a foreign land an ox with three horns, or four, or more, was grazing, a ruler will come into that land and will rule over them for as many years

If he gathered figs from a fig tree, ripe ones, he will find very much gold and wealth from a rich man, because of the multitude of seeds inside the figs. If unripe, he will find a lawsuit and strife from such a man.

If he ate apples, he will find good according to the sweetness of the apple.

If sour ones, he will find bitterness and illness.

If pears, he will find benefit from a hard man and a moderate profit.

If Indian nuts, from strangers and foreigners he will find joy and wealth.

If he sees common nuts, he will find profit from a very great man and a gardener, with toil.

If he sees that he eats oil, he will cast off affliction and find joy in proportion to the sweetness of the oil.

If someone presses olives for oil, he will find good in proportion, with toil.

If he eats cakes, he will find a desirable good.

If he eats a sugar sweet, called "paludin"[1], he will find affliction and illness, because of its color and the fire, in proportion to the eating.

If he ate a man's head, he will find a quantity of gold and wealth that comes from injustice.

244. On Footwear, Leggings and Trousers, from the Teaching of the Persians

If someone sees that he is wearing new shoes, he will meet with distress and bonds.

But if he casts them off: if he is a prisoner, he will put off his bonds; if he is in distress or anxiety, he will cast these away.

1 "Paludin" (Latin "paludium"): a sweet made of sugar cane; the Latin translator notes it as the local name.

If a woman sees that she found a spindle or a spindle-whorl or a needle, she will bear a daughter.

250. On the Mirror, from the Teaching of the Persians

If someone sees that he found a mirror and looked at himself in it, he will find a brother, because of the likeness of what he saw, in proportion to the beauty of the mirror.

The brother of the one who sees it will find shame, or, if he has no brother, the elder friend.

If he sees that he cleaned it, he will admonish and remove the shame of his brother or his friend.

If he sees that it was broken, or stolen, or lost, he will be parted from his own, from those who die.

If he sees that he found another and not his own, he will be saved, or he will find others.

251. On Sugar, from the Teaching of the Egyptians

If someone sees that he is eating sugar[1], he will find joy and sweet wealth.

If he sees that he is eating sugar cakes, he will find good days according to the size of the cakes.

If he ate one, he will find one good day, or a month, or a year.

If he sees two, more; likewise in proportion.

If he sees that he ate sugar daintily, he will find wealth for long and very many days.

If he sees that he also gave some of it to others, he will do good to others as well.

1 Sugar (*σάχαρ*, from eastern languages) — in those days a costly commodity.