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The Ecstatic Dimension of the Prophetic Act in the Old Testament

-PhD Thesis Summary-

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Key Words: *nābî'*, *chōzeh*, *rō'eh*, *'îš hā' êlōhîm*, dream, vision, sleep, prophecy, deuteronomistic, false prophet, revelation, theophany, trance, possession trance, prophetic behaviour, ecstasy, *ruah*, *hitnabbe*, altered states of consciousness, samanism, subconsciousness.

The quintessence of this work concerns the God-centered prophetic way of life, lived as an ecstasis in the view of a continuous availability for the manifestation of ecstasy as an endowment or rapture by the Holy Ghost. The ecstatic event is related to the ec-static experience, to a new stasis. The dynamics of the work involves the spiral form. Composing elements transcend the structural configuration. Each chapter proposes an articulated approach to certain related topics. Some may challenge the association between prophecy, ecstasy, dream, and vision. However, detailed research could support the substantive compatibility between these apparently disparate elements. Ecstasy cannot be excluded from prophetic manifestation, but neither can it be equated with prophecy.

This thesis consists of four chapters. *The first chapter* proposes an approach to the prophetic phenomenon in an attempt to decrypt the ecstatic element. The first subchapter clarifies certain concepts, such as manifestation, act, intuition, intentionality, givenness, in

terms of phenomenology. Their impact concerns prophetism as a social-historical phenomenon. At the same time, this subchapter deals with the relation between Yahweh's Word and God's Spirit, as this is a fundamental interaction for determining the diachronic stages of ecstasy. Several definitions of the prophet are presented, but there is also an attempt to circumscribe prophecy. We are not proposing a solipsistic approach to the prophet, but rather marking God's intervention, unveiling the prophetic relation, based on the community dimension of the prophet's person. The person becomes the framework of the unveiled relation. This relational topos opens the historic journey towards the ecstatic shadows of the Antiquity's Near East. The second subchapter presents possible information sources that can lead to defining the origin and nature of the Israelite prophecy. They come in the context of the unique Israelite prophetic phenomenon presented by some biblists. The second chapter begins by identifying the main sources mentioning prophets, outside the Hebrew Bible. The Lachish Ostrakon, mentioning the term *nābî*, in the context of a military campaign, remains relevant for the Israelite prophecy. Later, possible proof of the ecstatic phenomenon is mentioned as being found in the Mari Letters and in the Neo-Assyrian sources, but also in the story of Wen Amon in the 9th century, providing clues about the Canaanite ecstasy. While analyzing the terms for the designation of prophets from Mari, we have focused greatly on *muhhûm*, which can be equated to *mitnabbe'*, the ecstatic Israelite. At the same time, particular emphasis was placed on the Neo-Assyrian term *raggimu* described in the same ecstatic perspective. The references provided by the analysis of these prophetic terms underline the existence of an institutionalized prophetism in Antiquity's Near East. Prophets were serving the kings, and ecstasy was a means used to find out the gods' will. The main idea focuses on the prophecy as a means of communication between divinity and humans.

Another focus point was to examine the Deuteronomistic Literature and its implications on the ecstatic writings. Both continuity and dissonance between the Deuteronomistic literature and history are emphasized, given especially by ideological embargos promoted by the Jerusalemite orthodox groups supporting the Davidic monarchy. The prophet is seen more as Yahweh's servant in the Deuteronomistic literature and less as an ardent ecstatic. Prophetic literature is the third information source for decrypting the nature of the Israelite prophecy. Information on the prophets is fragmentary and the literary text does not lead on to any conclusive introspections. These limits, corroborated with a forced historicization of prophecy and distinction between early prophets and classical ones, resonate with the editorial difficulties. All can be also clarified by applying certain geopolitical criteria concerning the content of the prophetic practice and mission in Israel and Judah.

The third subchapter presents the prophetic titles found in the Hebrew Bible. The five prophetic titles are: *nābî'*, *chōzeh*, *rō'eh*, 'īshā' ēlōhîm and *qōsēm*. Since the references to the last prophetic title concerns the divination practice more, it has not been examined in detail. Special attention is given to analyzing the Akkadian origin of the term *nābî'*, but also to the denominative verb *nb'*. The issue that occurred and led to numerous debates concerns the active or passive meaning of this verb root. The question raised was whether the correct translation of the noun *nābî'* is the called or the one who calls. This semantic delimitation of *nābî'* offers the possibility of more detailed research on the meanings of the forms *hitpael* and *nifal* of the root *nb'* having ecstatic implications. The prophetic designation *chōzeh* presents the prophet as having visions. The Hebrew term originates from the root *חזן*. The accent falls on the visual aspect of the divine revelation. Since Gad was the first prophet designated as *chōzēh*, this prophetic title was connected to the prophecy from the court. At the same time, the analysis of the text in I Kings 9, 9 testifies for the idea that in the pre-monarchy period *nābî'* was called *chōzēh*. The prophetic title *rō'eh* derives from the verb *ra'ah*, used in the introductory formula of the vision description. It concerns the prophet's visionary dimension. *Rō'eh* was assimilated to the urban area and sacrificial ritual. The connection between ecstasy and the temple cult can lead to amplifying the use of this prophetic title. The last analyzed prophetic title, 'īshā' ēlōhîm, is translated by "the man of God". This prophetic title plays a fundamental role in the anthropological mentions regarding the peripheral prophecy and ecstatic manifestations associated to it.

The last subchapter of chapter I is about the issue of the language of Theophany experiences. It is entirely focused on the narratives of the calling and their importance in identifying the ecstatic hypostases. The callings of Moses, Elijah, Gideon, are mentioned but also the inaugural narratives concerning Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The update of the revelation is given by the human response to the divine presence. Particular importance is given to the patterns of the prophetic calling narratives. We must specify that there is no universal pattern that can be applied to all the narratives of the calling. Each narrative of the prophetic calling has its own dynamics. All these prophetic experiences do not suspend the prophet's personality.

The *second chapter* of the thesis begins with a critical presentation of the research conducted over the 20th and 21st centuries on the topic of ecstasy. The retrospection and the analysis of these sources begin with the writings of Gunkel and Holscher, and ends with the relatively recent mentions of Marti Nissinen. The actual issue that occurred concerns how the prophetic oracle was conveyed. Certain critics sustained that the prophetic oracle was

conveyed in ecstatic state. This chapter approaches the imprecations of ethnographic studies on determining the biblical prophetic behavior. It presents the opinions of critics who supported the existence of a stereotypic prophetic behavior. In this respect, the second subchapter of chapter II examines the semantic meanings of the term ecstasy. Beyond a definition of ecstasy as getting outside of oneself, this chapter presents approaches that are similar to the trance behavior. Trance would be the psychological equivalent of ecstasy.

In the third subdivision of this part, ecstatic typologies are examined. We begin with an approach of ardent ecstasy specific to Dionysian and Dervishism cults and we reach the forms of biblical ecstasy. The two main ecstatic groups presented concern the preservation of the prophet's personality during the ecstatic manifestations. The first group of the biblical ecstasy concerns keeping the personality and sensorial capacities, and can be compared to the contemplation of art works, where the symbol plays a special role. Special attention was given to the collocation the hand of Yahweh, but also to the phrases "*so said the Lord*" or "*the word of God has come*". The second ecstatic type is the intrinsic ecstasy related to the soul's journey, having a more striking mystical dimension. This ecstatic form has been compared to trance, where concentration is absorbed by only one idea, with a transition of the mind occurring from the periphery towards the center, suspending the senses. An example for this type of ecstasy is described in Ezekiel 40-48.

The next subchapter of chapter II is notable for presenting the perspective of cultural anthropology on trance behavior. A series of features of trance behavior are mentioned, but also a number of distinctions between the types of trance found in 488 societies studied by E. Bourguignon. The relevance of this subchapter resides in specifying the psychological fundament of ethnographic configuration. Thus, the symptoms of trance states, possession trance, but also the features of non-trance states are described. All these trance typologies were connected to the degree of development of early societies and not only. In societies with agricultural specificity, especially the possession trance was present, while simple trance was more common in societies where hunting practices predominated. An important aspect in this subchapter is the positioning of the dream and vision as manifestations related to visionary trance. Everything revolves around the occurrence and manifestation of amnesia. The presence of amnesia is a criterion based on which a certain trance typology can be distinguished. The imaginative factor must not be forgotten either. Since ecstasy is, by nature, a phenomenon of creativity, imagination plays an important part in defining it. In trance states, imagination is vivid and dynamic, that is why hallucinations occur. In the possession trance, on the contrary, imagination is passive, and physical manifestation has a special dynamics. In

each society there is a certain type of trance. There are civilizations where all three types of trance were identified.

Another subchapter of chapter II focuses both on possession and on the prophetic stereotypic behavior. Possession is presented in terms that are developed from the terms related to possession trance, only this time there is a distinction between pathogenic possession and endogenous possession. Possession was considered the result of influences by spirits and ghosts on the human being. The degree to which the supernatural agent manages to control the person and substitute it is very important. Possession, as opposed to trance, is conditioned by the cultural theories of the society of that time. Any type of possession is related to a series of expectations from the audience. There is a pattern known even by those who manifested a possessive behavior. These indicators could validate or invalidate a certain behavioral typology. This is the junction point with the stereotypic prophetic behavior involving social recognition. In case of prophets, the stereotypic prophetic behavior is often confounded with the symbolic act. Hypostases where Isaiah and Ezekiel walk naked - defying normality - are relevant. Moreover, the case of prophet Hosea, who marries a prostitute, can also be invoked. These examples support symbolic prophetic acts through which prophets wished to convey a certain message to the Israeli people. An example of stereotypic prophetic behavior can be that manifested by Saul, immediately after the meeting with Samuel. The event is described in I Kings 10, 5, 7-9. Similar examples can be mentioned in I Kings 18, 10; 19, 18-24; III Kings 18. Based on these mentions about possession, we can also discuss the differentiation between central moral prophecy and peripheral prophecy. These sociological dissociations help point out the connection between ecstasy and institutionalized prophecy, but can also lead to clarifying the ecstatic behaviors of Elijah and Elisha, seen as peripheral prophets. References to Elijah and Elisha introduce the debate on the manifestation of Shamanic trance in Ancient Israel. Sleep played an important role in inducing Shamanic trance. Thus, one can say that this Shamanic trance involves non-possession and the soul's journey towards unification with the divinity. Various features of the Shamanic ecstasy are presented, but also a series of possible textual instances with Shamanic notes. Both induced and pathological trance would be related to the same anatomical pattern. Thus, a unitary perspective on Shamans' trance would be underlined. It is interesting that dreams could have been behind the Shamanic trance. Elijah and Elisha have been compared to Shamans not only because they wished to keep the traditional society, but also because of their association with the peripheral prophecy and the group of the oppressed and the disadvantaged.

The next subchapter is dedicated to hypostases where possession as ecstatic manifestation is due to ruah Yahweh. The subchapter begins by describing the different perspective on the action of ruah Yahweh in the early prophets and the classical ones. The causes of elliptic mentions of ruah Yahweh in classical prophets are identified. At the same time, these textual instances do not mean a complete disruption between ruah Yahweh and the prophetic gift, but a careful expression meant to discourage ardent prophetic manifestations of *n^ebi'im* or early prophets. The verbs accompanying charism and ecstasy produced by the Holy Ghost are presented. The penultimate subchapter concerns the written proof supporting the stereotypic prophetic behavior. The difference between the proof about the action of ruah Yahweh and those presenting the specific prophetic behavior, resides in the noticeable aspect of the latter and the description of the verbal forms supporting the operationalization of the manifestation. The exegeses of the texts in Nm. 11,4-35 and I Kings 10,10-12; 19,18-24 support the idea of using the forms *hiṭpael* and *nifal* of the root *nb'* to describe the prophetic manifestation. If the presence of the form *hiṭpael* can support the ardent ecstatic manifestations, especially in early prophets, we cannot say the same about the form *nifal* of the root *nb'*. The latter was identified with the manifestation of a prophetic behavior regarded as prophetic discourse. The fall of Israel under the Assyrians has led to the fusion of the two families. *Hiṭpael* took the meaning of the form *nifal* of the root *nb'*. This explains the lack of ardent references to the prophetic act in the books of prophet writers. A special remark is provided by the text in Nm. 11,25-27 telling about Eldad and Medad who have made prophecies although they were outside the Tabernacle. Beyond suppressing the authority and legitimacy of Moses, this shows God's initiative in provoking and in the occurrence of ecstatic states, but also their non-association with ardent forms. Since it is mentioned that the elders have not made any other prophecies later, it draws attention on a limited duration of the ecstatic experience, despite its openness to the unlimited.

The texts in I Kings 10, 10-12; 19, 18-24 present two ecstatic behaviors, evaluated differently. The first ecstatic hypostasis has been positively evaluated by the audience, while the second one was seen as pejorative. In none of these hypostases does ecstasy involve speaking any prophetic words. This was a possible cause for Israelites to deny taking on the cultural pattern of mediumistic possession trance. Another interesting observation with regard to the two hypostases of the ecstatic manifestation in the case of Saul is related to the contagion of the ardent experience. The presentation of all these texts that are for and against ecstatic manifestations must take into consideration the editorial interferences and the interests of Jerusalemite groups regarding the spread of a certain semantic direction.

Chapter III presents features of dreams and visions identified in the Hebrew Bible. The identification criteria for these revealing manifestations is the presence of the terms *ch^alôm* and *chāzôn.*, and their derivatives, in the biblical texts. In the Old Testament the root *hlm* appears 114 times: the noun *ch^alôm* 65 times, the Aramaic noun *helom* 27 times, and the verbal form *ch^alām* appears 27 times.

The first subchapter of this chapter discusses the psychoanalytic and philosophical dimensions of dreams. The binder of the two perspectives is the dream experience, but also the importance of the consciousness field in shaping the oneiric experience. The interdisciplinary presentation of the dream creates the framework for emphasizing the processual nature of the oneiric phenomenon. A dream reality can be invoked beyond its ephemeral nature. Dreams are a vehicle towards a new state of consciousness. At the same time, it can be how ecstasy manifests itself. In this respect, the therapeutic function of dreams can be specified, but also its impact on the cerebral activity, as mnestic site. The processual nature and the dream experience are important vectors that can bring a significant contribution to understanding biblical dreams. Naturally, the biblical dream is a revealing environment where initiative belongs to God, but it is not unknown to the prophetic consciousness field.

The next subchapter presents the relation between sleep and dream, from a neurobiological perspective. Identifying an anatomical pattern of the dream manifestation during sleep can lead to a unitary perspective on all meta-psychic manifestations: ecstasy, dream, vision. Both REM and NREM sleep support the possibility of the manifestation of reflexive consciousness in the oneiric phenomenon. Even if the decrease in the activity of the dorsolateral frontal cortex leads to a passive consciousness in REM sleep, it can be involved in a different intensity, and in another form, hence the distinction between the first and second consciousness manifested in the oneiric phenomena. The presence of the same anatomical pattern in these metapsychic phenomena, with intensified activities in the hypothalamus, hippocampus and limbic system areas, supports the resolution of a terminological distinction between dream and vision. There are many places in the Hebrew Bible where the two terms are used interchangeably. The clarifications of neurobiology leading to the identification of features of REM sleep and dreams related to this sleep confirm the preservation of the integrity of the prophet's personality within the oneiric manifestations.

Another section of this subchapter discusses the meanings of sleep in Ancient Israel. Sleep was perceived by Jews as a gift from God. It was a revelational framework. In the Old Testament there are three terms designating sleep: *num*, *yasem* and *radham*. *Num* means “to nap”, *yasen* “to sleep”, while *radham* is used to describe a deep sleep. The stages of deep

sleep are described using the terms *senah* and *tardemah*. In these stages, conscious thinking is pulling away from will. We often encounter the term *tenumah* meaning the presence of a presleep stage. Beyond these terminological explanations, it is worth underlining the Greek translation of the term *tardemah* by *ekstasis*, hence emphasizing the connection between ecstasy and deep sleep. This specification will support the pursuit regarding the dialectic of the visionary in the Old Testament.

The second subchapter of chapter III involves a biblical perspective on blending the elements of oneiric processual nature. The first part of this chapter mentions the researches of the criticism on oneiric biblical phenomena. The entire criticism pursuit is based on Leo Oppenheim interpretation of dreams. Biblists of the German school, who examined the oneiric classifications and literary analyses of the biblical texts about dreams and visions, have mostly followed the analytical structure proposed by Oppenheim. Most biblists applied the literary paradigm on the dream analysis. It was closely connected to the cultural pattern of the era. Among those who tackled the topic, we can mention: Robert Gnuse, Diane Lipton, Shaul Barr, Jean Marie Husser, Frances Dailey Flannery, etc..

At the same time, we presented the determinations and the semantic meanings of the root *hlm* and its derivatives, found in the written texts. An interesting parallel can be suggested by the Egyptian root *rswt* used in designing the dreaming state. This root leads to the idea of a possible vision manifested in the dream. The etymological parallel suggests two possible roots at the base of the emergence of the noun *ch^alôm*. One of them would mean “to become healthy or strong”, while the other one would involve dreaming. The connection between the verbs “see” and “dream” remains fundamental, and can be decisive for the presentation of the oneiric framework. The following sections of this subchapter present the dreams identified in the Hebrew Bible, their typology and the constituent patterns. The Hebrew Bible contains mostly message dreams, but also a few symbolic dreams and incubation dreams. The message dreams are also called prophetic dreams and they were usually addressed to Jews, while symbolic dreams were meant for pagans. Incubation dreams were related to the practice of falling asleep in a sacred place, in order to provoke an encounter with divinity. They do not have a highly ecstatic relevance.

The next section of this chapter is dedicated to the connection between dream and vision, emphasizing the pattern of symbolic vision. The vision designated by the Hebrew term *chāzôn* is presented as a content of the dream. It is more common in the prophetic and apocalyptic literature. Although the Hebrew terminology does not imply a clear distinction between dream and vision, the latter was connected to the diurnal visionary experiences. The

descriptions of the visions do not include mentioning the sleep. In order to support interchangeability of the two terms, we can also invoke the option of the written text editor.

The presentation of some message dreams and of some symbolic ones that are relevant for the topic discussed in this thesis completes the picture of chapter III. The dreams in Joseph's narratives present God as provident, as a real interpreter of the Pharaoh's dreams. The dream in Gn. 37 presents certain symbolic elements, however the premonitory nature of this oneiric event presents Joseph in a prophetic light. The interpretation of the cupbearer's and baker's dreams by Joseph implies a psychoanalytical decryption. We can invoke a series of natural and ceremonial elements standing and the base of the interpretation, that Joseph was aware of. Such background of the interpretation can be represented by knowledge of the customary liberation of prisoners, on the occasion of Pharaoh's anniversary. For the current research, Joseph's dreams and the officials' dreams, as well as Pharaoh's dreams, provide information regarding the reception of the oneiric phenomenon in Israel. It is associated with sleep, but also with a certain form of consciousness. The second dream we analyzed includes both oneiric elements and visionary components. The vision of the stairway in Gn. 28, 12 and the apparition of God can counterbalance the message dream described earlier. In Jacob's dream, the combination of the elements of the message dream with those of the symbolic dream explain the final form of the text, based on the Elohistic and Yahwist documents. The function of Jacob's dream is to legitimate the patriarch status and consecration of Bethel, and the vision of the stairway can be placed in the nocturnal context of oneiric visionary experiences.

Chapter IV proposes an approach of dreams as possible vehicle of a false prophecy. Beyond the recognition of the literary and theological function of dreams, there is also the option of seeing it as a false divination and prophecy. In the Hebrew Bible we find a diachronic perspective on dreams. In patriarchic narratives, in historical books and the apocalyptic literature, dreams are presented in a favorable light. In prophetic and sapiential literature, dreams are replaced by vision or excluded because of the obstruction of the prophetic movement. This chapter emerged as a result of our desire to explain the absence of dreams in the biblical corpus between III Kings 3 and Dn. 2. The first subchapter presents the leverages of receiving dreams at the level of biblical texts. The theological and literary purposes of inserting dreams in biblical narratives are presented.

The second subchapter discusses the criteria for the differentiation between the true and false prophecy. The main limitations opposing a precise definition of true prophecy are presented. These limitations lead to exposing the insufficiency of criteria that can satisfy the

requirements of a clear dissociation between true and false prophecy. This paradoxical perspective can lead to asserting the idea that false prophecy becomes true by means of an adequate historical connection. Special attention is given to the relation between prophecy and prediction. This perspective is extremely important for describing the features of premonitory dreams and prophetic oracles. This subchapter also includes a radiography of places mentioned in the written texts where false prophets can be found. This pursuit led to shaping the profile of the false prophet. The presentation of their characteristics included, especially elements of psychological nature. After focusing on the prophet, we moved on to the analysis of the prophetic message, in order to decrypt the coordinates of the Hebrew prophetism. The detailed presentation led to not circumscribing the prophet within its own manifestation.

In the third subchapter we presented the relation between dream and false prophecy, in the texts of Dt. 13, 2-6, and Jr. 23, 25-27. The two texts were chosen based on the identification of certain editorial traces specific to the Deuteronomic literature and history. The first text presents the dream in the context of a test trying the Israelites' faith. The second text shows the lack of credibility of false prophets' dreams. Jeremiah does not attack the dream as a means of revelation, but rather its content spread by the false prophets.

To conclude, we can assert that there is an integrative relation between prophecy, ecstasy, dream, and vision. Prophetism cannot be reduced to ecstasy, but neither can it lack ecstatic manifestations. Dream and vision were seen as means of revelation, although in the editorial history of the Hebrew Bible there were certain gaps that led to neglecting the oneiric perspective. Jews have acknowledged dreams as a communication channel between God and man. It is true that not all dreams are revealing manifestations, but within the biblical narratives the role of oneiric phenomena is to present God's plan for the chosen people. We cannot present just one single valid objective criterion for authenticating the meta-psychic phenomena manifestations, however, the most relevant criterion is not fulfilling the predictions, but rather focusing on a God-centered way of life. Thus, the ecstatic, oneiric or visionary event acquires new overtones and fits the availability and accessibility of prophetic thought and way of life, which allow the manifestation of divine initiative and freedom together with the ineffable nature of the prophet. The attempts of excessive psychologization of the relation between Divinity and human beings shall lead to the disintegration of the experience of the prophet's relational dimension, which is not circumscribed to the analytical and critical limitations.

Interpretive mentions of ecstatic prophetic manifestations lead to the transgression of ecstasy as a subjective condition and underline the community aspect of the prophetic pursuit. Thus, ecstasy manifests as a dialogue of the love between God and man.