

Story 961 (1977 Tape 6)

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Mohammed Rides upon Burak¹

When Prophet Mohammed went to heaven--I mean at the time of the Miraç²--Gabriel went to heaven too. Gabriel saw three

¹ Burak is a word so enmeshed in legend that it is difficult to discuss. Mentioned in many hadiths--traditions connected with Mohammed and/or the Koran--Burak is described variously as an ordinary horse or mule or donkey but, in later phases of the myth, as a magic horse, a flying horse. It is associated both with (1) Mohammed's famous "night journey," and (2) his ascension to Heaven.

As beast of burden for (1) Burak could have been just an ordinary horse, IF the destination of that "night journey" was, as some commentators on the Koran claim, to a place on the outskirts of Mecca. On the other hand, IF the destination was, as a majority of authorities now claim, to Jerusalem, then it would have required a very unordinary mount to go that distance and back in the same night.

Although many associate Al-Burak with Mohammed's ascension to heaven, this derives from the legend of the more documentable earlier trip. Although the word winged used in reference to the mount that bore Mohammed on his "night journey" seems to have been a figurative means of describing its great speed, the image of a winged horse was --in fact it had to be--taken literally in picturing Mohammed's riding to heaven. In both (1) and (2) the horse was mentioned as being white.

Even the etymology of burak is in dispute. The most logical source of the name would seem to be baraq, the Persian word for horse.

See entry for this tale in ATON Notes volume for a copy of the discussion of Burak that appears in the Encyclopaedia of Islam, I (Leiden: Brill, 1960), pp. 1310-1311.

² Miraç (or Mirac) is a special Moslem term used to refer to Mohammed's ascension to heaven. The narrator speaks of it here as being the "night journey."

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Buraks in heaven. He saw that one of these Buraks was crying continuously. Gabriel said to the creature, "O Burak I observe that your two companion Buraks are happy. They are enjoying themselves grazing, laughing, and playing. Why is it that you are crying? What is the reason for your tears?"

The Burak answered Gabriel. He said, "40,000 years ago my ears heard a sound. That sound was 'O Mohammed!' I heard that sound only once, but I fell in love with it immediately. Since that time I have not eaten a morsel of food or drunk a drop of water. I should like, more than anything else, to see him /Mohammed/ before I die. All my prayers to God have been asked for that privilege."

Gabriel answered, "If this is your major concern, then come with me. I can grant your wish right away.

Gabriel put Prophet Mohammed on the back of Burak.³
Then all rode together to the Mescidi Aksa.⁴

³ One of the elements of the Burak myth was the beast's refusal to allow Mohammed to mount its back until Gabriel had brought it to obedience.

⁴ A mescit (mescid) is a small mosque, often private, part of an estate. The Mescidi Aksa, in Jerusalem, stands close to a more famous and much larger mosque, the Mosque of Omar, built in 691. This ancient religious structure, the first domed mosque, became better known as the Dome of the Rock, although its own dome, built in the Byzantine manner, was made entirely of wood.