CHAPTER I

Understanding the Dream in Islam: the Evolution and Legitimation of Ta'bir

The intricacy of the dream as an occurrence during sleep, recollection and narration of the same on waking, and its subsequent interpretation, all these are expressive of culturally specific themes, patterns, tensions and meanings. Sometimes, the presence of extraneous or non-indigenous traditions in a given dream culture creates further complexities. This seems to be the case of Islamic dream tradition that incorporates in itself elements of non-Arab Semite and ancient Greek oneiric traditions. In addition, the dream – dream event and its interpretation – is not static but conditional to variations of time, place, season, and temperament of the dreamer that create intricate conditions for decoding dreams. In a complex civilization like Islam, which developed, and stratified, with extraordinary rapidity, no one expects to find just one attitude towards any phenomenon. This is true of the dream as there evolved different perceptions about issues relating to its causation, classification, and interpretation. Although, these perceptions may be identified as the orthodox, philosophical, sufi, and the popular notions, these never actually crystallise into any distinct schools of oneirocritical thought. There is, however, a basic code of Islamic oneiric belief that has been defined and recorded in dream manuals since the second century of Islam. The Muslim scholarly class accepted this dream code as legitimate, and therefore, it represents the classical or the established position on dreams in the Islamic civilizational ethos.
Any attempt to study the social and cultural relevance of dreaming in traditional civilizations must cater to two questions. The first is to study the function of dream in society, and the second is to understand the social framework of oneiric thought. Both the problems are tightly tied together for it may be that the society provides a framework for oneiric thought to make it usable.\(^1\) This seems to be the case of dreaming in Islam. In the following essay I have made an attempt to reconstruct the framework of oneiric thought and its codification as featured within the classical dream tradition in Islam. The first section of this essay is devoted to discussion of pre-Islamic Arab and Greek dream elements, and their assimilation within the Islamic dream tradition through the legitimizing agencies of the Quran and the *ahādīṣ* (singular, *ḥadīṣ* meaning the tradition of Prophet Muhammad). The second section of this essay delineates the process of codification of this tradition in the oneiric manuals and also provides a reflection on the intellectual attitude towards the dream in Islam.

I

**Antecedents of ta‘bīr or the science of dream interpretation in Islam**

Of the various forms of divination practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia, oneiromancy seems to be the first to have acquired legitimacy in Islam. The interpreter of dreams in pre-Islamic Arabia seems to have been the *kāhin* (pl. *kahana* or *kuhhān*).\(^2\) It is a term of

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controversial origin belonging to the Canaanite, Aramaic and Arab traditions. The earliest usage of the term was to designate one who performed priestly functions: offered sacrifices to the deity in the name of one of these groups, represented the group to the deity, and communicated the will of the deity by interpreting signs by divination. The evolution of this function and the related prerogatives follow the social evolution of these three groups. With their transition from a pastoral to an agricultural civilization, their conception of the deity and the service due to him changed to suit the conditions of daily life. As the pre-Islamic Arabs led a nomadic life, where it was usually the head of the family or tribe who offered sacrifices, in the manner of the patriarch of the Old Testament, and in which frequent migrations prevented the establishment of an official form or place of worship, it reduced the scope of kāhin as a priest. Instead, his divinatory role was preferred. This aspect of the kāhin's function is covered generically by the term `arrāf, and specifically by names derived from the divinatory specialities that he practiced, such as `ā’if and zājir (diviner of the flight of birds), qā’if (augur of footprints), khatib (spokesman and messenger), tabib (medicine man), khabir (valuer). The oracular and ecstatic functions of the kāhin, however, are more overtly expressed in the kāhina, the sorceress, who like the ecstatic prophetess of Ma’rib, had divinatory powers and was in charge of an oracle. The Arab kāhin had not developed beyond this stage when the advent of Islam brought about his disappearance because of the absence, in his nomadic environment, of a permanent stable kingship which would have organized a priesthood if

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only to keep it under control. This lack of organization resulted in making the kāhin the sole repository of supernatural knowledge in pre-Islamic Arab society.

With the coming of Islam the only legitimate means of communication with the new deity, Allāh, was through His messenger, the Prophet Muhammad. There were to be no soothsayers in the new community of Muslim Arabs but the memories and habits of pre-Islamic traditions lingered and sought a legitimate acceptance in the new creed. At the popular level this accretion is conveyed through legends of dreams and stories of the kāhin. These legends portray the kuhhān, who spoke either in verse or rhymed prose called saj, as soothsayers, magicians and oneiromancers. These legends also describe them to be individuals of terrible physical appearance, which leads us to think that in popular imagination there existed a connection between physical infirmities and possession of superior powers to establish contact with demons, the souls of ancestors, or hidden realities. Even though, after Islam, there were no more kuhhān, there was a continuation of men who wrote treatises on dreams and also practiced dream interpretation.

The legends about dreams serve as a kind of letter of nobility or ancestral record for the Arabs who, after accepting Islam, depicted for themselves the golden age of the

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4 The formal expression of oracular utterance in pre-Islamic Arabia was known as saj. It was set in short rhymed phrases, with rhythmic cadence and the use of obscure vocabulary. It was used most often by the kāhinās in their magical formulae for cursing, prayers of deprecation and charms, and it was believed to be understood by jinn and animals. The Quran fully legitimized saj; however, there was reticence on part of new believers because the Prophet is accused of being a soothsayer. See “Saj” sections I & 3 by T. Fahd and Aff Abdesselem, in EP, vol. 8 (1995), pp. 732-738.

5 Jean Lecerf has referred to two kuhhāna – Saffīh (lit. as flat as a pancake) and Shiqq (lit. broken) – who are soothsayers and oneiromancers in Arab folklore. Saffīh had no bones in his body except for in his head, and this was attached to the centre of his chest. Whenever he wished to move he had to be rolled like a carpet. Shiqq means half a person or broken into two, and this could mean that he was a hemiplegic, paralyzed on one side. For details see J. Lecerf, “The Dream in Popular Culture: Arabic and Islamic”, op. cit., pp. 367-67; Also cf. T. Fahd “Saffīh b. Rabi’a” and “Shikk” in EF, vol. 9 (1997), pp. 84-85 and 440 respectively.
patriarchs. Among these accounts, one is about a break in the dam of Ma'rib situated between Sanā' and Hazramut in Yemen. The incidence concerns the kingdom of Saba (Biblical Sheba), at a distance of about fifty miles from Sanā', which attained a high degree of prosperity and civilization on account of the dam of Ma'rib. Only an allusion is made to this incidence in the Quran by way of admonition to those who disbelieved the message of the descendants of Abraham whose religion the Prophet was sent to revitalize. According to the most widespread version, the dam burst in the reign of `Amr bin `Amir and the catastrophe was announced in a dream to his wife Turaifa, who was the most famous kāhina (sorceress) of her time. In the dream Turaifa saw the country covered by a great advancing cloud, and there was a clash of thunder, hail and bolts of lightning. These manifestations were taken to symbolize a flood. She was sure of an impending catastrophe and said so in an oracle of rhymed verse. The transparent symbolism of such a dream of divination does not require great clairvoyance, except for the fact that it involves a royal dream that has the special privilege of direct interpretation, which dreams of a simple mortal lack. This is important because it is precisely this dream and myth that affords proof that the Arabs had kings in their pre-Islamic days.

6 T. Fahd refers to Turaifa as the wife of `Amr Muzayqiya' ancestor of the tribe of this name. She is also said to have, before dying, initiated Sāṭīḥ and Shiqq, the two legendary soothsayers from pre-Islamic Arabia, after spitting into their mouths when they were a day old and declared them her successors in the art of kihāna (divination), see Fahd's "Satīḥ b. Rabī'a", op. cit., p. 84-85. For the mythical representation of the kāhina as the guiding spirit of Berber resistance to the Arab invaders after the collapse of Byzantine power marked by the fall of Carthage in A.D. 692-3, cf. M. Talbi's "Al-Kāhina", op.cit.

7 The episode of the dike, however, is chronologically more recent, and cannot be placed further back than four centuries before Islam. According to the historians of South Arabia three breaks in the dike occurred in 450, 542, and ca. 570 respectively. J. Lecerf, "The Dream in Popular Culture: Arab and Islamic", op. cit., pp. 366-367.
There is another widely disseminated legend containing divinatory dreams and premonitions of a catastrophe that announced the birth of Prophet Muhammad. It forms a part of the cycle of *a'lam al nubūwat*, that is, of the miraculous signs that confirm the truth of prophetic mission of Muhammad. A dream of the Grand Mobed (the high priest of the Iranian ecclesiastical hierarchy) disturbed the king of Persia, Kisrā Anūsherwān. The dream itself is not very puzzling, he saw wild horses led by camels crossing the river and invading the country in Persian Iraq. The king convened a council to discuss the dream and it was learned that an earthquake during the night had toppled a wing of the palace and extinguished the sacred fire. The king, not being able to find any explanation from his magicians, asked the Arab king of al Hīrā, al Nu‘mān bin al Munzīr (an anachronism) to send him someone who could explain this dream. Al Nu‘mān sent an expert 'Abdu'l Māsih Bukayla al Ghassānī who in turn sought the help of Saṭīḥ, his maternal uncle, who was on his deathbed. Saṭīḥ did not understand until the envoy spoke to him in verse. He delivered an oracle, “The recitation will become abundant”. The reference is to the Quranic recitation that indicated the coming fall of the Persian kingdom and its conquest by the Arabs. Saṭīḥ died after delivering the oracle.8 The death of the kāhin immediately after stating the prediction of this omen is symbolic of the connection between Saṭīḥ, as representing pre-Islamic Arabia, and the beginning of Islam as indicated in the birth of Muhammad.9

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8 I have related this legend on the basis of its presentation by T. Fahd, “Kāhin”, *op. cit.*, and J. Lecerf, *ibid.*, pp. 367-369.
9 Saṭīḥ or Saṭīḥ bin Rabī‘a is further assimilated into the Islamic culture by Arab traditionists who have assigned him a place in their genealogical system and have created a paternity that links him to the Ghazzanid branch of the tribe of Azd, see T. Fahd, “Safīh b. Rabī‘a”, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
Legitimation of dreams through Quran and Ḥadīṣ

At the level of the elite, pagan traditions of dreaming suffered some resistance before these were finally assimilated within the new civilizational ethos of Muslim Arabs. In the Quran there are verses of exorcism and, therefore, the Quraish at Mecca were mislead into considering the Prophet as a poet or a diviner. Muhammad vehemently denied this charge (Quran lxix, 41-42) and forbade soothsaying as a profession, but he exercised the function of interpreting dreams. Authorization of any practice or belief in Islam is acquired on the basis of Quranic injunction and prophetic ahādīṣ to legitimate the topic under discussion. This is also true of the present subject as the Quran and the hadīṣ verify the authenticity of dreams as a revelation of the Divine decrees, and the sacredness of their character was sealed by a prophetic declaration that dreams are a portion of prophecy. With this seal of approval ideas, images, symbols and legends from the pre-Islamic Semitic past and the Greek oneiric traditions, were accommodated within an officially sanctioned Arab Muslim tradition of dream interpretation that was codified and preserved in the oneiric manuals.

The reality of dreams was based on the story of Yūsuf (Joseph) recounted to the ahl-i kitāb (People of the Book), Jews and Christians, as well as on the stories recounted

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10 Fritz Meier has shown in his study that dream, poetry and religious inspiration were linked in the popular consciousness of pagan Arabs who judged this trinity negatively. Doubting Meccans, therefore, rejected the results of Muhammad’s ecstacies as “a tangle of dreams, trickery, and words of a poet” (Quran xxi, 5). The Muslim profession of faith made no impression on them, and they asked if they should abandon their own gods on account of a crazy poet? (Quran xxxvii, 34-36), for Quranic verses see Abdu’l-lāh Yūsuf ‘Alī’s English translation of the Quran, The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary, Beirut – Lebanon: Dar al Arabia, 1968, pp. 823, 1195 and 1196. References to the Quran are indicated by Roman numerals that refer to the Quranic chapter, and the number following it indicates the verse cited from a particular
by transmitters of legends and prophets. Not all dreams are true, and the denial of the authenticity of dreams is based on the premise that content and form of dreams are conditioned by difference in the temperaments of men and the preoccupations of their minds, or due to Satanic insinuations. The story of Yusuf and his skill as an interpreter of dreams takes up the entire subject of a chapter in the Quran, declared from inspiration to be “the most beautiful of the stories” (xii, 3). The story revolves around three major dream narratives that unfold the life and mission of Yusuf, the youngest but one of the twelve sons of Ya’qub, decendent of Abraham through Issac. Yusuf’s experience of a dream about eleven stars and the sun and the moon prostrating before him (xii, 4-5) was a prediction of his exaltation in rank above his brothers and parents later in life. His skill as an interpreter of dreams is proved when he deciphered the dreams of his fellow prisoners (xii, 36) and that of the Pharaoh of Egypt (xii, 43). Each of these dreams...
belongs to the category of true dream known as ru'yā-i sādiq, and in each case Yusuf's predictions about them holds true for the future. In dream manuals he is often addressed as Yusuf Siddiq or the witness of truth, an epithet otherwise reserved for Abū Bakr, because he knew the truth through his understanding of dreams. Although, all prophets in the Islamic prophetology, with exception of Muhammad, had received their prophecy in sleep, the knowledge of dreams is said to be the mu'jiza (miracle) of Yusuf.16 It is, thus, not unexpected to find Yusuf as the patriarch of dreamers and dream expounders. A similar mode of communication had prepared Abraham, father of the line of Semitic prophecy, to offer his son in sacrifice to the gods (xxxvii, 102).17 And it was through a dream that God conveyed the triumphant entry of the partisans of Islam into the sacred shrine of Mecca after the successful expedition of Hudaibiyat (xlviii, 27).18 Instances other than these are cited from the Quran to strengthen the position of dreams as an authentic source of information in Muslim society.19

Without collecting the numerous sayings of Muhammad from the various sources of hadīṣ collections, I shall mention a few traditions that are most commonly referred to followed by seven years of distress, which will succeed by a year of abundance when people will press wine and oil. Ibid, p. 566.


17 The reference is from the Surah Sāffāt wherein Abraham relates his dream to his son Ismāʿīl, "O my son! I see in the vision that I offer thee in sacrifice: Now what is thy view!" The son said: "O my father! Do as thou art commanded: Thou will find me, if God so wills one practising patience and constancy!" See The Holy Quran, op. cit., pp. 1204-1205.

18 In this verse of the Surah Faith there is a recollection of Prophet Muhammad's dream just before he decided on the journey which resulted in the Treaty of Hudaibiyat. In a dream God had announced to him, "Ye shall enter the sacred mosque, if God wills, with minds secure, heads shaved, hair cut short, and without fear", ibid, p. 1399.

19 For other references to dreams in the Quran see Fritz Meier "Some Aspects of Inspiration by Demons in Islam", op. cit.
in Islamic texts where dream narratives are mentioned. The contents of these traditions show the importance Prophet attached to dreams and their signification. The purpose of the ensuing discussion is to explain how the reliability of dreams was constructed in order to assert that dreams might function as a means of guidance. Leah Kinberg, in a study exclusively based on the literal dreams from early Islamic period, has shown that this involved a process similar to the one which took place in building the reliability of hadīth.

In fact, as far as legitimation is concerned dreams are seen as a functional parallel to hadīth.20

According to a commonly quoted saying attributed to the Prophet: Mission and prophecy have come to an end, and there will be no messenger or prophet after me. The tradition goes on to say that this idea troubled the people, so the Prophet encouraged them by saying that the good tidings (mubashshirāt) will remain. The people then asked him the nature of mubashshirāt, and the Prophet defined them as good dreams (ru‘yā) of Muslims.21 An early and widely current tradition assesses a good dream, by stating on the

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authority of the Prophet, that it is one out of forty six parts of prophecy. This tradition established a relationship between prophecy and dreams because it regarded dreams as cotinuation of Prophet’s preaching, or as a part of prophecy. Thus, the usage of dreams in the Islamic community was legitimized by presenting them as bearers of the Prophet’s words.

Another way of validating the position of dreams was to refer to Prophet’s own interest in dreams. There are several traditions that tell us about the Prophet asking his believers every morning about their dreams of the previous night.

It is reported from Salmān that I have heard from the Prophet that he said to his friends: “When any of you sees a dream he likes, he should thank God and relate it amongst friends and believers. And if the dream is displeasing he should recite a few times “God preserve me from Satan the accursed” and seek refuge in God from the wickedness of Satan. Do not relate this dream to anyone so that no injury or loss occurs (from its narration)”.

True, good and sound dreams were of course those of the Prophet. The earliest extant treatise on dreams, the 'Ibārat al ru'yā, compiled by Ibn Qutayba mentions several examples. The Prophet saw in his dream that he rode a camel with a ram behind him and

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22 In the Kāmil ut-ta' bīr a tradition of the Prophet is cited by Abū Zar who states “Dreams constitute one of the forty six portions of the prophetic mission”, ibid., pp. 9-10. The forty sixth portion of prophecy is reference to the first six months of Muhammad’s inspiration, in which he received Divine communication through dreams. After this he received revelations through Gabriel. These first six months of Muhammad’s mission are a forty-sixth portion of the twenty-three years of Muhammad’s mission as a prophet. Also see M. J. Kister, “The interpretation of dreams, An unknown manuscript of Ibn Qutayba’s “Ibārat al-ru'yā”, op. cit, p. 71.

23 Wa az Salmān marwišt ki guft az rasūl-i khwādā shanidam ki bā yārān-i khwud hamī guft, “Chun kāsī az shuma khwāb pasandīda bīnad bāvdī ki khudā'i ta'āla' rā sipār-dārī kundad wa bā-dostān wa mu'mīnān hamī goyad wa agar khwāb pasandīda [na]bīnad wa mard-i mušlih bīwad chand martaba ba-goyad "a'zī billāh min al shaitān al rajīm" wa az sharr-i dīv panāh ba-haq ta'āla' burd wa az hīch kāšī ān khwāb rā na-goyad rā az ān hīch zāvar na gazandī ba-wai na-rasad”. See Kāmil ut-ta' bīr, op. cit, p. 10. For Persian text see Appendix 1/2.

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that the edge of his sword was broken. The Prophet predicted that he would kill a leader of the troops of the enemy symbolically represented by the ram, and that a man from his family will be killed as indicated by the broken edge of his sword. In fact, the leader of the enemy Ṭalḥa bin abī Ṭalḥa and the uncle of the Prophet, Ḥamza, were both killed in the battle of Uhud. In another dream the Prophet saw reddish-white and black sheep (ghanām) coming to him. He interpreted the reddish-white ones as referring to non-Arabs, and the black ones as referring to the Arabs. He predicted that non-Arabs would embrace Islam and join the Arabs.

There are other traditions that record Muhammad’s role as an expounder of other people’s dreams. According to a tradition Abū Bakr saw himself in a dream clad in Yemeni garment and treading on human excrements, and he had two moles on his chest. The Prophet interpreted it by saying that for two years he would rule as Caliph. Not all dreams, however, were worthy of exposition and Salmān Fārṣī reports a tradition to this effect. I shall quote the tradition and Tiflīsī’s explanation of the same in detail:

It is a tradition from Salmān, may God be pleased with him, that an Arab approached the Prophet of God, may God grant him peace and salvation, and said, “O Prophet, I have seen such a dream last night” and related that distressed dream. The Prophet said, “O Arab what did you eat the previous night?” He said, “O Prophet last night dates were cooked and I ate plenty and was tired”. God’s Prophet said that, “There is no interpretation for this dream and it should not be correct”. Subsequently, we know that [if] a man is satiated or hungry or tired, the interpretation of his dream is not correct. And

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on account of this oneiromancers interpret several dreams the exposition of which is not
correct. For this reason it should be known that the mu'abbir should not be ignorant of
knowing these things, and should ask about such things from the questioner [dreamer
who is desirous of an interpretation], and after this interpret the dream so that what is
said [by the oneiromancer] comes to be correct and true. And the signs of the rightness of
dream are known in this manner.27

The basis of legitimized usage of dreams was further strengthened by another
saying, which declares that a vision of the Prophet in dream is deemed equal to his actual
appearance. This saying of the Prophet is widely circulated and can be found in two basic
formulae: “Whoever has seen me in a dream has certainly seen me in wakefulness”, and

“Whoever has seen me in a dream will certainly see me in wakefulness”. Another phrase
is appended to this saying: “The Devil does not take my form”.28 In other words, seeing
the Prophet in a dream is like seeing him in reality. This saying, therefore, indicates that it
is not just the physical meeting or hearing of the Prophet that guides people on rules of
conduct, his vision in sleep is sufficient to influence the interests of an individual or the
community at large. It is, hence, clear from the perception expressed in this tradition that,

26 M. J. Kister, ibid, p. 80, fn. 61.
27 Riwayat ast az Salmān razi allāh ‘ānhu, ki mardī ‘Arabī ba-khidmat-i rasūl-ī khudā sallā allāh ‘alayhi
wa sallam āmād wa ‘arz kard “Yā rasīl allāh dosh chunin khwābā dida-am” wa khwābī āshufta āghāz
kard. Rasūl-ī khudā farmūd “Ay a’rābī dīshab chi khwurdā būdî?” ‘Arz kard “Yā rasūl-allāh dosh
khurmā pukhtia wa bisyār khwurdā-būdam wa nīz mānda būd”. Rasūl-ī khudā farmūd kī “In khwāb rā
ta’bīr nīst wa durust na-bāshad”. Pas dānīstīm kī mard sair būwad yā gūrsna yā mānda shuda ta’wil
khwāb-i o durust nī-āyad. Wa az in sabab mu’abbirān bisyār khwābāhā rā ta’bīr mī-kunand ta ta’wil-i ān
durust mī-nīyād. Az in sabab kī yād karda bāshad pas mu’abbir bāyad kī az dānistan in chizhā ghāfīl
nabāshad wa chunin chizhā rā az sā’il ba-pursad wa bā’d az ān ta’wil-i khwāb kunad ta ānchi goyad
durust wa rāst āyad wa ‘alāmāthā’i durust ‘i khwāb chunin būwad kī yād karda-shud. See Kāmil ut-tā bīr,
op. cit., p. 16. After citing this tradition Tīfīsīf goes on to explain a basic rule of Islamic oneiric tradition
according to which over eating results in distressful dreams. For the Persian text see Appendix I/3.
28 Cf. L. Kinberg, “Literal Dreams and Prophetic Hadīts in classical Islam – a comparison of two ways of
of Ibn Qutayba’s “Ibārat al-ru’yā”, op. cit., p. 73 n. 27; Also I. Goldziher, “The Appearance of the Prophet
in Dreams”, JRAS (1912), pp. 503-506.
eventhough, the Prophet has died, his guidance may reach any generation of his believers whenever necessary, with no barrier of time or place, in the same way as it reached his companions during his life time. Practically, this means that in order to justify a certain idea, a dream anecdote of the Prophet could have been made up and words of approval could have been ascribed to him in the same way as it could have been done by using the medium of hadīṣ. It is not uncommon thing in Islamic literature to find both theological doubts and questions of practical controversy solved by the Prophet, who appears in a dream. Such decisions extend from isolated cases affecting individuals to matters affecting the interests of the community at large. In both cases the message serves as a means of testing the legality of any new idea.

The above saying raised theological debates as to its hidden meaning. The question about seeing the Prophet after his burial, his appearance to several people at the same time, and the question whether the Prophet is seen in his own form, or may be seen in different guises, concerned theologians. An analysis of the dream process and these issues in particular is available in the writings of the eleventh century theologian and sufi al-Ghazālī's explanation of the appearance of God in dreams. According to al-Ghazālī, God being above form and shape cannot in fact be seen in ru'yat allāh, what appears to the dreamer is a likeness, a symbol (misāl). By an analogy to the symbolic vision of God, what one sees when one has a vision of the Prophet in a dream is Muhammad's image or symbol rather than the actual person of Muhammad.29 Among the traditions adduced to

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resolve this issue, we find a common formula followed by an addition which may imply a
more permissive way of dealing with the question of the appearance of the Prophet in
dreams: “Whoever has seen me in a dream has certainly seen me in wakefulness, because
I can be seen in any form”.

To avoid fabrication of such dreams, a pair of hadîṣ warnings, similar to the
admonitions instituted against perjurers of hadîṣ, was created. These warnings are as
follows: “He who lies about his dream will have to tie a knot in a small barley corn on the
day of judgement”; and: “He who lies about dreams will have to join a barley corn on the
day of judgement”. These may be compared to the hadîṣ warnings that consign
fabricators of prophetic sayings to hell. The severity of the measures taken against
forgers of dreams testifies to the significant role they played in IslamIt must not be
assumed that authorization through dreams was possible only through Prophet’s visionary
appearance. Although the traditions from which we concluded similarity between hadîṣ
and dreams mentions dreams in which the Prophet appears, but the warnings about lying
in dreams refer to dreams in general. Other traditions widen this idea to include God,
prophets in general, angels, the sun, the moon, and the stars. It is significant that the Shi’a

York/Koln: E. J. Brill, 1996, pp. 211-213; Also see G. E. von Grunebaum, “The Cultural Function of the
Dream in Classical Islam”, op. cit., p. 16; A more detailed discussion is available in a 17th century
hagiographical work from the subcontinent Malfüzât-i Hażrat Saiyid Ḥasan Rasûlmumâ. I have discussed
this issue in Chapter VI below.
30 See L. Kinberg, “Literal Dream and Prophetic Hadîts in classical Islam – a comparison of two ways of
legitimation”, op. cit., p. 285, fn. 16.
31 Ibid., pp. 286-287.
32 The two widely cited teachings are: “He who lies in my name let him take his place in Hell”; and “He
who lies in my name deliberately let him take his place in Hell”, see ibid, p. 287; N. Bland, “On the
Muhammedan Science of Ta’bir or Interpretation of Dreams” in JRAS of Great Britain and Ireland, pp.
118-171, specially see pp. 131-132; Kâmil ut-ta’bir, op. cit., p. 29.
sources record the tradition about the appearance of the Prophet in a dream with meaningful additions. According to these Satan will not appear in the form of the Prophet, or in the guise of any of his trustees (ausiyā, that is the Shi‘a Imāms), nor in the form of anyone of the Shi‘a.\(^{33}\)

Another set of traditions defines three categories of dreams. The author of the Ḳāmil ut-ta‘bīr records a saying of Muhammad as reported by Ṭabdullāh Ṭubbās: The Prophet said there are three types of dreams. The first kind of dream is from God and is a bashārat for believers during their lifetime. The second kind is due to waswās (evil insinuation) of the devil that brings grief to believers. And the third kind of dreams are azghāṣu‘l aḥlām (confused dreams which cannot be interpreted).\(^{34}\) It is also reported by Ṭabdullāh Ṭubbās and Salmān that the Prophet has said, a true dream is a waḥy (revelation) from God to the believer so that he is warned about the future good and wickedness.\(^{35}\) By suggesting that whatever appears to be a good dream is good indeed, these traditions imply that a dream will never lead its followers astray. But how is an individual to judge the genuineness of a dream? The responsibility to make a right judgement in this matter is of the dreamer. This idea is strengthened by another ḥadīṣ, mentioned earlier, wherein it is said that: If any of you sees a dream he likes, it is from Allāh; he should thank God for it and tell it to others. This means that inorder to decide whether a certain dream is of a Divine origin or not, a human judgement may be made


\(^{34}\) Ṭabdullāh Ṭubbās gazad ki rasūl-i khudāi šallā ‘alāh ‘alayhi wa sallam farmūd ... didan-i khwāb bar sīh qīsm ast. Yak qīsm az khudāy ta‘āla bashārat mu‘minān rā dar zindagāntī ʾishān, dūyum qismatī az waswāsī ʾādī ast ki mu‘minān rā anduḥāgin gārdānād, qīsm styum khwāḥhāyi ʾāṣhūta wa mukhtalīf. Ḳāmil ut-ta‘bīr, *op. cit.*, p. 12 and Appendix 1/4 for Persian text of the same; N. Bland has noted the same tradition but from a different transmitter, Masud ibn ʿAbdullāh, in his article “On the Muḥammedan Science of Ta‘bir or Interpretation of Dreams”, *op. cit.*, fn. 5, p. 127.

\(^{35}\) Ḳāmil ut-ta‘bīr, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
and the idea is comparable to another Prophetic saying in the context of hadīṣ What Muslims consider good is good in the eyes of God.

Further, the distinction between good and bad dreams is based mainly on their content. The dreamer’s identity is generally insignificant, as long as he is known to be a pious Muslim. In other words, when a righteous Muslim has a dream, its soundness is beyond question. This argument is an additional measure used to construct the reliability of dreams, by connecting the credibility of the dreams with the piety of their dreamers. I shall elaborate on this aspect in the next Chapter.

The efficacy of comparing dreams and hadīṣ is further strengthened in another saying which mentions: “In the End of Days a believer’s dream will not be false, and the most reliable in dreams will be the most reliable in hadīṣ.” The mention of those who transmit hadīṣ along with those who narrate dreams supplies further proof of the high status that was accorded to dreams as a reliable source in classical Islam. On the basis of these traditions, the usage of dreams is considered legitimate in the Islamic civilization.

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36 Rules of Islamic oneiromancy, however, state that interpretations of dreams vary in accordance to the personality of the dreamer. Therefore, Kinberg’s assumption that the content of dream is rarified from the identity of the dreamer is to be treated with caution. See Kinberg, “Literal Dreams and Prophetic Hadits in classical Islam – a comparison of two ways of legitimation”, op. cit., p. 291.

37 The correlation between the dream content and its deliverer has been compared to the basic idea which underlies the technique of al jarḥ wa al taʿdīl, namely that the trustworthiness of hadīṣ transmitters indicates the genuineness of the hadīṣ. In the case of dreams, however, there was no need for it. In this sense dreams remind us of the ethical hadīṣ the isnāds (chains of transmitters) of which were not so stringently examined, as they were in the case of legal hadīṣ, since they were not used to fix the Sunna. In fact, dream-tellers need not be concerned about the chains of transmitters to support their claims, since through the medium of dream they could bridge any gap of time or space without any intermediaries. See ibid, p. 291-292.

38 Ibid, p. 287.
Legitimation of dreams through the appearance of the dead

Another category of true dreams is one in which a dead person appears to the dreamer. The validity of such a dream is based on a saying of Ibn Sīrīn: “Whatever the deceased tells you in sleep is truth (haq), for he stays in the world of truth (dar ul haq).” This saying is not focused on the Prophet’s appearance, but it rather recognizes the authenticity of any dead person who appears in dreams. Here the source of dream, and not the Prophet, provides authenticity. This tradition of concourse between the living and the dead in sleep is a highly developed one in Islam. In the Quran, on one occasion, the word manām (dream) is treated as annalogous to death (xix, 42). According to this verse God takes the souls at death, and of those who do not die during their sleep. The verse itself continues by affirming that God keeps the souls of those for whom he has decreed death and returns the souls of the sleepers until their appointed life span is completed. Although the verse itself provides the context but does not specifically suggest the meeting and communication of the two types of souls. Writers of the Muslim eschatological literature, extend this analogy further to express the view that the souls of the living in sleep share a condition with those of the dead, and that by the means of that shared circumstance they are said to interact and communicate. Several medieval

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40 This is a reference to Surā Zumar, for the appropriate verse see The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary, op. cit., pp. 1249-1250.
41 For a discussion of this aspect of Islamic eschatological belief see Jane. I. Smith, “Concourse Between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature” in History of Religions, vol. 19 (1979), pp. 224-236; Leah Kinberg has studied the significance of the appearance of the dead in dreams in classical Islamic literature on the basis of Ibn Abī al Dunyā’s Kitāb al-manām and has emphasised that such dreams are primarily a means of instructing morality see her § 2.2 Dreams as a major means of interaction between the dead and the living, in her Introduction to Ibn Abī al Dunyā: Morality in the Guise of Dreams (A
Muslim scholars touch upon the question of where the spirits meet. According to al-Tabarî spirits of the living and the dead meet in sleep. Ibn Kasîr, who basically follows al-Tabarî, states that the meeting of the two types of souls happens in the highest assembly of the al-mâla' al-a'la', a phrase used to refer to angels that are admitted into the presence of God. Ibn Qayyim Jawziyah opines that they meet in Heaven. Al-Suyûtî further qualifies this and states that the soul of the sleeper is sent to firdaus, the highest level of the Garden in Paradise. In general, however, the souls or the spirits of the deceased are said to be in the barzakh, which is understood as the barrier between the living and the dead (xxiii: 99-100, lv: 20).42 This concept was broadened to refer to the time or place occupied by the dead while waiting for the Resurrection. In other words, communication between the living and the dead takes place during sleep where the sleeper's soul ascends to the Heaven and there interacts with the souls of the dead.43 The most immediate proof of this is the fact that the living while asleep, often see the dead, who both seek and give information.

What is the nature of this communication? In Islamic literature there are numerous instances in which a dead person appears in a living person’s dream advising, instructing, preaching, or just relating about his/her position in the Afterworld. This communication

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43 The Islamic cosmological patterns identify different spheres of existence and one of these is the 'âlam-i mişâl or the world of idea-images. From the sixth century onwards this idea experienced a constant evolution in the works of Muslim thinkers. The explanation for dreams, visions and other supernatural phenomenon are said to occur in this sphere. I have discussed the notion of the 'âlam-i mişâl in the following chapter.
could be either auditory or visual. The dreamer analyzes the content of the sign or the message given in the dream and acts accordingly. The purpose of sleep encounter then is to impart to the living information known only to the dead and, of course, to God. For example, the dreamer may receive news about a buried treasure. Related to this kind of communication are stories in which the dead warn the living to be more responsible to those who have passed on, and sometimes wrongs committed in this world can be righted.

In the *Bushra al-ka'ib biliqa'i al-habib* of al-Suyūṭī there is the story about a man whose wife had died. He saw a group of women in his dream but did not notice his wife amongst them. Upon asking the reason he was told it was because he had given her insufficient burying cloth and she was shy to go out with them. Acting on the advice of the Prophet, the man buried a saffron robe along with the body of one of the *ansār* who had just died, and that night in his sleep he again saw those women, his wife now proudly among them in her new yellow garment. In another narrative related by al-Ghazālī in his *al-Durrah al-fākhira* the unfortunate circumstance of a man suffering in his grave because the washer during the burial preparation had lacerated the body on a nail sticking out of the washing room.44 Similarly, there are dreams in which certain practices are discouraged or approved, such as the practice of lamentation over the dead and visitation of the dead in the cemetery, respectively.45

On the basis of Abī al-Dunyā’s *Kitāb al-manām* Leah Kinberg has identified two basic patterns of dreaming the dead. In most cases the dreamer does not take part in

45 For references and a few more examples of the same type of dreams cf. *ibid.*, pp. 230-231.
conversation with the apparation of the deceased. The dreamer seldom sees a vision and in mostly acts in accordance to words he has heard. But in some of these dreams, the dreamer has a vision. There are several common motifs observed in such dreams that are indicative of rewards a pious man can hope for. In most cases he sees Paradise, its magnificent gardens and palaces, and beautiful women.\(^{46}\) There is another pattern of dreams where the dreamer is in active conversation with the deceased person who appears in the dream. Here the dreamer questions the apparition about the nature of death, happenings in the grave and deeds preferred in heaven. Therefore, the dream meeting between the dead and the living is for the specific purpose of information and instruction about eschatological matters. The message in these dreams is aimed at rectifying the conditions of the dead, encouraging a virtuous life of those living on this earth by issuing instructions and admonition, and they also act as assurances to the living that their loved ones are happy in their new surroundings. In general then the meeting between the living and the dead in eschatological texts like the *Kitāb al-manām* is for the purpose of communication and edification.

Moreover, even through dreams, there are other means to interact aside from the sleeper's soul ascending to Heaven. There are many cases in which the deceased descend from the Afterworld and return to this world to pay a visit to the living. This idea is manifest in many anecdotes of this kind: "Somebody came to me in my dream". The same idea is also expressed in anecdotes that tell of the living yearning to meet their loved ones after their death. There may be anecdotes that stress the fact that the manner in

\(^{46}\) For example, the idea that in Heaven a woman serves as a reward for good deeds is clearly expressed in the dream of Sarī Saqāfī, one of the famous ascetics of third century Islam. Sarī Saqāfī used to drink cold water, which was probably not in accordance with the Islamic concept of *zuhd*. In a dream he sees a beautiful woman and hears her saying that she favours those who do not drink cold water. See Kinberg, "Interaction between this World and the Afterworld in early Islamic tradition", vol. 29-30 (1986), p. 298.
which the deceased comes to visit is very similar to the manner of visits he/she paid before his death. This is evident in a dream anecdote about the agreement made between Jamīl bin Murrah and Muwarriq al-'Ijī that has been mentioned in the Kitāb al-manām of Ibn Abī al-Dunyā. In this anecdote the narrator emphasizes the fact that when the deceased paid a visit to his living friend his behaviour and external appearance were still the same. After Muwarriq’s death, Jamīl’s wife sees him in a dream. She sees him coming as he used to come, knocking as he used to knock. She opened the door and invites him to enter as she used to do when he was alive. But the visitor then says: “How can I enter, I have already tasted the taste of death: I just came to inform Jamīl what God has done to me.”

Visitations from the dead are not always meant for instructing about eschatological matters. There is an instance related in the Durrah in which the father in his sleep is called to task for the carelessness of his children:

Someone has related this story: Our father engaged for us a teacher to teach us our lessons at home. Then the teacher died, and after six days we went to his grave to visit him, reminding each other of God’s will. Someone passed by us selling a plate of figs, which we bought and ate, throwing the stems on to the grave. When night came, the father saw the dead man in a dream, and said to him, “How are you?” “Fine”, he replied, “except, for your children took my grave for a garbage pile, and spoke about me, saying that I was nothing but an infidel.” The father reprimanded us, and we said [to each other], “Glory be to God. He continues to bother us in the hereafter just as he did on the earth.”

48 See Jane Smith, “Concourse between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature”, op. cit., p. 231.
When we add this perception of the dead visiting the living on this earth, to the one mentioned above, that the dreamer’s soul may ascend to Heaven and interact with the dead, we can say that according to Islamic belief, communication between this world and the next through dreams can take place in two ways: (1) The dreamer’s soul may ascend to another world where it interacts with souls of the dead; (2) The deceased may visit the living through dreams. In other words, dreams provide proof of a two-way communication between this world and the Hereafter.

In the opinion of Leah Kinberg dreams that serve as a means of communication with the Afterworld are essentially literal, that is, the message in such dreams is clear and does not require any interpretation as such. As the message in these dreams is clear “they are not related to the genre of oneirocriticism...Consequently these dreams do not occur in oneirocritical works, but rather in eschatological literature, and randomly in other genres, such as biographical and polemical works”.

I would say that Kinberg’s analysis of the nature of such dreams is restricted to her study of the Kitāb al-manām that is essentially a source dedicated to literal dreams of the dead. Dreams that relate about the circumstance of the dead or the ones in which there is an active communication between the living and the deceased could be symbolic in nature. In fact, symbols are subject to more than one interpretation, which indicates the complexity evident in dreams about death. Such dreams are mentioned in Islamic dream keys under the alphabet “mīm”. In fact symbolic interpretations of such dreams are discussed in detail in the Kāmil ut-ta’īr of Muhammad Tiflisī who has detailed at least seven distinct symbols related to death and

49 See Kinberg’s “Interaction between this World and the Afterworld in early Islamic tradition”, op. cit., fn. 50, p. 295.
each of these is illustrated with examples of dreams connected with signs indicating death. For example, Tiflisī has explained the first symbol “murdan” (to die) in the following manner:

Daniyal states that if someone sees in dream that he is dead (ba-murd) and all are lamenting over him till the time that he is washed and shrouded and buried, this indicates that there will be corruption of faith. And if he sees that he is placed in a bier (dar janāza’ nihādand) and people are walking before and after him, it indicates fame, but his faith will suffer. Some say that [if] there are several people on his funeral, he will rule (ḥukm kunad). If he sees that he was dead and is alive, it indicates that he has repented from sin. And he will have a long life. If he sees that he is inside a graveyard (goristān) it indicates that he will journey with the ill informed.50

In the same passage Tiflisī notes a different interpretation for the ritual washing of dead in case of the dreamer. He reports:

Ja’bir states that to see sudden death (marg-i mufażāt) in dream indicates relief to the believer and trouble for the infidel... If he [dreamer] sees that he is dead and they are washing him, it indicates that his faith is resolute”.51

Other symbols described by Tiflisī include a dead person’s coming to life (murda zinda shudan); giving something to a dead person (murda rā chīzī dādan); a weeping

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50 Tiflisī reports the following interpretations for “murdan”, meaning to die in dream. Dāniyāl ‘alayhi sallam mī goyad agar ba-khwāb bīnad ki ba-murd wa hama bar wai ba-giristand ta waqṭī ki wai rā ba-shustand wa ba-kafan dar gor kardand. Īn hama dalīl bar fasād-i dīn buwad. Agar bīnad ki o rā dar janāza nihādand wa mardum az pesh-o pas-i o mī raftand, dalīl buzurgi buwad, ammā dar dinash nuṣūn buwad. Wa ba ‘ẓī goyand ki bar chinān mardum ki bar janāza’i o būdand hukm kunad. Agar bīnad ki murda būd wa zinda shud dalīl ki az gunah tauba kunad wa ‘umarash darāz buwad. Agar bīnad ki darμiyān-i goristān buwad dalīl ki bā-jāhīlān safar kunad. See Kāmil ut-ta ‘bir, op. cit., p. 371; see Appendix 1/5 for the Persian text.

51 Ja’bir goyad ki didān-i margī mufażāt dar khwāb dalīl bar rāhat-i mu’mīn wa ‘agāh-ī kāfīr buwad... Agar bīnad ki ba-murd wa o rā ba-shustand dalīl ki dar dīn sābit buwad. Ibid, see Appendix 1/6 for the Persian text.
corpse (*murda nāīdan*); copulation with a dead man (*ba murda mujamā‘at kard*); if placed before a dead person (*az pas-i murda shudan*); to clothe a dead person (*murda jāma poshīdan*); and interpretation of the corpse’s shroud (*ta‘wīl kafan-i murda*).\(^{52}\)

I may mention here that dreams are not the only means of interaction between the living and the dead. In addition to the phrase ‘in sleep’ as descriptive of the period of interchange between souls, the word *ru‘yā*, vision, is also used to characterize the experience whereby the living encounters the dead. According to al-Suyūṭī such a vision may come during sleep, which is most often the case, or it may be when one is awake, but the latter is to be judged as one of the miracles (*karāmāt*) of the saints in their heightened states of consciousness.\(^{53}\) Other ways of communication which do not occur in sleep, for example, communication with people who come back to life after their clinical death and tell of their experience, or people who stay in the vicinity of a graveyard and witness the fate of the dead.\(^{54}\) Mention may be made here of the Uwaisī motif (specially, where initiation is claimed through a visionary association with a deceased *pūr*) and the Naqshbandī practice of the *kashf-i qabūr* (inspiration sought from the grave of the dead), that will be discussed in the following chapters.

\(^{52}\) For details see *ibid*, pp. 372-373.

\(^{53}\) As referred by Jane Smith, “Concourse between the Living and the Dead in Islamic Eschatological Literature”, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

\(^{54}\) For means of interaction other than the dream see L. Kinberg, “Interaction Between This World And The Afterworld In Early Islamic Tradition”, *op. cit.*
II

On the intellectual location of ta’bīr

Reservations were expressed in works of fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) regarding the usage of dreams in legal matters, especially when they sanctioned practices that were in contradiction to the Sunna (custom of the Prophet Muhammad). For example, Ibn al-Ḥāj (d. A.D. 1336) in his Kitāb al-Mazal presents dreams as part of prophecy, but rejects dreams that touch upon legal matters, and cites three arguments. Firstly, one cannot be obliged to do anything while sleeping. Secondly, 'ilm and riwāya (knowledge and customary practices) should be learned only from someone who is awake and fully conscious. And lastly, the Prophet commanded adherence to only two things – the Quran and the sunna of the Prophet.55

Nevertheless, this taciturnity on part of the legalists does not relegate the social signification of dreams. In the Islamic literature questions of theological doubts and practical controversy are resolved by the decision of the Prophet who appears in a dream. The following dream noted by Ignaz Goldziher is an appropriate illustration of this. A man was employed by its owner to drive his ox from one place to another. On the way robbers attacked him, and he escaped only by surrendering to them the ox entrusted to his charge. Thereupon the question of law arose: was the agent bound to compensate for the property entrusted to him, or did the danger to his life amount to vis major and so displace the liability. Ahmad bin Abī Ahmad bin Ṭabarī, known as Ibn al-Qaṣṣ (d. A.D.

55 In the opinion of L. Kinberg these reservations may explain why examples on dreams deciding on legal matters are so rare, cf. Kinberg’s Introduction to Ibn Abī al Dunyā: Morality in the Guise of Dream, op. cit., pp. 36-37.
946-7), who was the renowned jurist of the century, and lived in Tarsus, maintained the former view, while Abū Ja'far al Hannatī held that the man should be exempt from liability of compensation. At this point, according to Tājuddin Subkī, the qāżī (judge) Abū 'Alī al Zajjājī, a pupil of Ibn al Qass, saw the Prophet in a dream, and seized the opportunity of asking him to decide the point of controversy between his teacher and al Hannatī. The Prophet pronounced his decision in favour of the questioner's teacher.56

This is an instance of instruction imparted to individuals, but there are a number of instances where doubts on religious questions affecting the entire community were decided by the means of such visions. A disputed point about a ritual was whether when holding prayer over the dead (salāt-i janāza) the corpse may be borne into the precincts of the mosque, or whether the rite should be performed outside. The famous sufi Ibn 'Arabī was desirous of settling the question so far as his place of dwelling, Damascus, was concerned. He dreamed of a corpse that was carried into the mosque, and he also saw the Prophet who disapproved of this and ordered the corpse to be removed outside.57

The pattern of theological argumentation through dreams is also reflected in dreams of Quran readers and Quranic readings that indicate the complexity involved in the evolution of the science of Quranic readings (ʿilm al-qir'at).58 The narratives in this theme are dated between the second and the early fifth century of Islam, a period that fits the time in which canonization of the qir'at was accomplished. The dreams related in

56 Ignaz Goldziher, "The Appearance of the Prophet in Dreams" in JRAS (1912), p. 503.
57 Ibid, pp. 504-505.
this sphere reflect the two stages of this process. There are dreams that preserve the competition and arguments between Quranic readers and their followers; in others harmonization of readings is reflected. Furthermore, there are dreams of two disputed Quran readers, Ibn Mujăhid, the compiler of the seven readings and his contemporary Ibn Miqsăm, who refused to follow any particular authority on this subject, preferring to decide for himself the best reading. The comparisons between the two different ways in which these images are presented convey the tendency to canonization particular at that time. I shall cite brief examples of either case.

The night when Ibn Mujăhid dies, his neighbour has a dream. In his dream he hears a voice saying: “Tonight died the one who has been rectifying God’s revelation [Quran] (muqawwim wahyi-llâh) for the last fifty years”. On the next morning the neighbour hears that Ibn Mujahid has died the previous night. It is most probable that the title muqawwim wahyi-llâh does not refer to one specific reading, but rather to Ibn Mujahid’s effort toward the canonization of the seven readings in his Kitâb as-sab’a fi’l qirâ’ât. The dream approves of Ibn Mujähid’s work and naturally authorizes all the seven Quran readers who are included in this work.59 In contrast to this laudatory dream, Ibn Mujahid’s opponent, Abū Bakr bin Miqsäm, the great grammarian of the Kûfân School and reader of the Quran, is presented in a condemnatory dream. Abû Ahmad al Farâzhî (d. A.D. 1016), a reader of Quran from Baghda’d, sees himself in a dream praying amongst people, all facing the qibla, except Abû Bakr bin Miqsâm. The latter was standing with his back to the qibla. The dreamer connects this to Ibn Miqsâm’s deviation from the

qir'at of the imāms. In a most tangible way this dream shows the fate of those who do not keep what should have been kept. Praying in the opposite direction conveys the Lord's rage, and is common in descriptions of the manner in which the sinners and infidels lie in their graves.\textsuperscript{60}

Another aspect of theological debating in the early centuries of Islam was the dispute among the adherents of the four mazāhib. Several years ago Ignaz Goldziher had mentioned the fact that the rivalries among the mazāhib are reflected in ḥadīṣ sayings.\textsuperscript{61} More recently, Leah Kinberg has called to attention the fact that this rivalry is also reflected in dreams, in the very same manner as in ḥadīṣ. In her study Kinberg has used dreams to expose the controversy between those who supported free interpretation of legal matters (ahl-i ṭāʾy) and those who claimed the authority of the Quran and ḥadīṣ and disallowed self-reasoning (ahl-i ḥadīṣ). In the dreams that date from the third century of Islam, this controversy is reflected in terms of condemnation of Abū Hanīfah, the earliest jurist who is said to represent the ahl-i ṭāʾy, and praise of Ahmad bin Hanbal who represents the ahl-i ḥadīṣ. As the general tendency in such dreams is anti-ahl-i ṭāʾy and pro-ahl-i ḥadīṣ, these dreams reflect the social reality of ninth century Islamic civilization where the latter group overcame the former.\textsuperscript{62}

Besides theology, the mystical tradition in Islam has shown a tremendous concern for the dream. In a monotheistic and iconoclast religion such as Islam, the distance between the Divine and the individual is insurmountable. Therefore, the quest to

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, p. 234.
maximize the proximity with the Divine is realized only through a visionary experience, either in a state of sleep or wakefulness. The intention of the sufi is to imitate the Prophet’s experience of the ascent into Heaven, but there is a qualitative difference in the latter case. The Prophet had been physically transported into Heaven and had received the Revelation (wahy) from God, whereas the sufi can imitate the experience only in terms of a vision in which he receives a minor kind of revelation called ilhām. Nevertheless, in both cases the individual is in receipt of an exclusive knowledge that is derived from a divine source. In the sufi world-view this knowledge is a source of divination and, hence explains the miracles of the auliya’ allāh (literally, friends of God, i.e saints). Sufi literature, which deals with the practical ethics and moral council, recounts the detail of discourses, preserves biographical notices of sufis, or contains records of correspondence between the master and disciple, is rich in information about the visionary experience of sufis. In fact, the concern for the dream is so intense that sufis have authored treatise that exclusively deal with the subject of dreams. The Khwāb u khayāl is a manual on dreams that was compiled by Pir Muhammad on the 12th Ramzan A.H. 1180 in Lakhnau. The author observes that if a dream is laudable and good the inquirer has to consult dream collections of sufis, orators, and philosophers for its interpretation. And in this treatise, that he has named Khwāb u khayāl, he has presented these dreams along with their examples in three chapters. The first chapter is ru’yā ‘inda ‘l šūfiya’ (dreams according to

62 For examples of various dreams related to controversies among the mazāhib see Leah Kinberg “The Legitimization of the Madhahib through dreams” in Arabica, Tome 32 (1985), pp. 47-79.
63 The Khwāb u khayāl of Pir Muhammad belongs to the manuscript collection of Jawahar Museum at the Aligarh Muslim University. I have consulted a microfilm of the same preserved by the Noor Microfilm Centre, see Catalogue of Microfilm of the Persian and Arabic Manuscripts vol I, Maulānā Azad Library, Aligarh, New Delhi: Noor Microfilm Centre, 1999/2000, no 129/3. The present manuscript was copied by Nawwāb Ahmad on the 17th Ramzan A.H. 1266 in Delhi, and has been identified as Ta’birāt-i khwāb according to the title mentioned by the copyist on the last folio, eventhough, the author has categorically
sufis); the second chapter is called *ru'yā `inda'l mutakallamīn* (dreams of orators); and the third chapter is *ru'yā `inda'l ḥukama* (dreams according to philosophers). This work cannot be classified as a *ta'birnāma* or a dream manual because it does not deal with the usual dream symbols. Nevertheless, Pir Muhammad's explanation of dreams in this text is principally based on the oneirocritical rules that were defined within the classical dream tradition.

Within the Islamic cultural tradition the dream acts as a conduit of communication between the sufi and the society. For instance, certain varieties of African traditional religion share common patterns of dreaming with the Islamic culture. This creates an opportunity for the sufi to act as an incubator and interpreter of dreams for the African people, and this process creates a scope for religious mixing which is often the beginning of conversion.

Dreams are not simply reflective of the religion inspired sentiments in the Islamic civilization, but these also play a significant role in the secular affairs as well. The *Faraj al- mahmūm fi ta'rikh `ulamā` al-nujūm* of Razī al-Dīn bin Tāwūs is a thirteenth century treatise on astrology and astrologers. Although the main purpose of the work was to provide biographical details of astrologers and astronomers, the text contains several examples of dreams. These examples are introduced in the context of astrological predictions, alongwith the material dealing with the astrologers.

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64 Ibid, folio 1(b).
Modern histories of ancient science are almost totally silent on dream interpretation in general, and the tendency is to treat it along with such false or 'fossil' sciences as alchemy, astrology and physiogamy. Even those works which perceive that the classification of knowledge is problematic, generally impose a modern definition of science, thereby excluding oneiromancy. By contrast, the history of science in more recent periods has moved away from the preoccupation with similarities between the past and the present science to concern for the place of thinkers in the web of contemporary knowledge. In other words, in its former emphasis on the progress of discoveries, the history of science was inherently Whiggish, it is now strongly contextualized. Therefore, the intellectual location of ta'bir should be identified in relation to the contemporary patterns of argument. Accordingly, it is to be observed that ta'bir was classified as a branch of the natural physical sciences in the manner of medicine and alchemy by encyclopaedists like Amuli.

The Nafāʾis al fumūn fī ʿarāʾis al ʿayūn is an encyclopaedia that was compiled by Muhammad bin Mahmūd Amulī in ca. A.H. 742/A.D. 1342. The work is divided into

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69 For some information on the Nafāʾis al fumūn and its author cf. Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the British Museum by Charles Rieu, vol. 3, pp. 435-438. I am greatful to Dr. Khwaja Piri, Director of Noor Microfilm Centre, for allowing me to consult a lithograph of the Nafāʾis al fumūn from his personal collection. Sarrah Muhammad Mehdi Algilpaigani had copied the text in 1309/1892 and wrote it in fair Nastāliq. It is a fairly voluminous text with 35 lines to a page. Occasionally there are illustrations on the
two parts, and each is known as a *Qism*. The first *Qism* deals with the modern or Muslim sciences that treat eighty-five sciences under four heads or *maqālāt* (discourses) discussing *adabīt* (literary sciences), *shari‘at* (legal sciences), *taṣawwuf* (Sufism) and *ˈilmī muḥāwarī* (branches of controversial knowledge). The second *Qism* deals with seventy-five sciences from the pre-Islamic times that are classified under five heads. The first two discourses in this *Qism* are devoted to *ˈilm-i ḥikmat* or practical and speculative aspects of philosophy. The second and the fifth discourses are devoted to *ˈilm-i riyāzī* (mathematics) and its related branches like astronomy, geometry, arithmetic, etc. While the fourth discourse is on *ˈilm-i furū‘i ṣabi‘i* or branches of natural sciences and is descriptive of ten kinds of knowledge like *ˈilm-i ṭibb* (medicine), *kīmiya* (alchemy), *sīmiya* (magic), *ˈilm-i firāst* (physiogamy), *nujūm* (astrology), *ˈilmu‘l harfu‘ul ṣabi‘at* (physical crafts including veterinary, falconary, agriculture), etc. The article on *ta‘bir* is the third *fan* (art) of the ten sciences mentioned in this discourse. The placement of *ta‘bir* along with other sciences by Muhammad Āmulī is symptomatic of the intellectual location of this subject in the Islamic culture.

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margins to elucidate textual matters. For a list of contents see the *fihrist qism-i-awwal* and *fihrist qism-i-duwam* after the title page.

70 The article on *ta‘bir* is fairly comprehensive and is divided into twelve sections, each called a *fasl*, see *Nafā‘īs, Ibid*, pp. 121-135. These sections, with pages in brackets, are as follows: i. On the nature of sleep and its causes; conditions of health required for it; and the conduct of the *mu‘abbir* (pp. 121-122); ii. Dreaming of Divine Glory and spiritual beings, prophets and saints, șūltāns and kings, jinns and devils, the resurrection and day of judgement, heaven and hell, and the like (pp. 122-123); iii. Dreams about seeing the human body and its parts, and things related to them (pp. 123-126); iv. [Dreaming] about the uses man makes of his limbs (pp. 126-127); v. [Dreams] of animals (pp. 128-129); vi. About celestial objects, the sky and stars (pp. 129-130); vii. Of terrestrial objects (pp. 130-131); viii. About orchards and gardens, trees and fruits, and the like (pp. 131-132); ix. Minerals and things made from them (pp. 132-133); x. instruments of art, household utensils, implements of war, and musical instruments (pp. 133-134); xi. About food, drinks, eating, clothes and perfume (pp. 134-135); xii. About remarkable dreams (p.135).
In the mind of the compilers of oneiric manuals, however, there is a distinction maintained between other sciences, on the one hand, and ta'bir on the other hand. In the Kāmil ut-ta'bir Tiflisī observes that according to Ibn Sirin the dignity of one who beholds this knowledge is superior to those of all other sciences. The reason for this is that the basis of all other sciences are not changeable, but this perception is not acceptable in the case of ta'bir. The method of this science is excellent because while the origins of every other science known are not changeable, the basis of this science changes due to the external circumstance of the person, his profession, position, virtue, belief and variance in time of dreaming. Ibn Qutayba seems to echo this opinion as in his introduction to the 'Ibārāt al-ru'yā he states:

“For every scholar of some branch of the sciences the tool of his science can be sufficient for practising it, but the oneirocritic has to be a scholar of Qur’an and hadith in order to interpret dreams according to their ideas, to be acquainted with Arab proverbs and rare verses of poetry, to have a knowledge of Arabic etymology and of current colloquial speech. Besides he has to be an “adīb”, gentle sagacious, endowed with the capacity to judge the countenance of the people their character features, their rank and state, to have a knowledge of analogy and an acquaintance with the principles of oneiromancy”. Further Ibn Qutayba mentions that only with God’s guidance and help the mu‘abbir will be pious and pure of sins and get his lot of the “heritage of the prophets”. This emphasis on a comprehensive approach to ta'bir is significant because it reveals the diversity of application of dreams in various aspects of life in the Islamic civilization.

In view of the modern epistemological concern of scientific disciplines, the methodology of ta'bir, as indicated in the dream manuals, is based on three elements namely - tradition, analogy and experience in the said order of precedence. Ibn Qutayba’s
earliest extant composition on Muslim oneiromancy is a faithful rendition of the tradition that had been carried down to his day by a chain of transmitters. He stresses that he derived his material from “the science of al Kirmānī and others” and undertakes to explain the principles of oneiromancy overlooked by the former scholars. Muhammad Tiflisī was steeped in the works of his predecessors, indeed he claims to have consulted at least twenty books on the subject of dreams. They cover the whole period during which dream books were written from the second century to Tiflisī’s own day.

Secondly, the argument from analogy or transition by way of similarity was the commonest method of interpretation of dreams. Accordingly, symbolic interpretation is given to the dreams corresponding to the subjects seen in them. For example, this method is frequently combined with the interpretation of such qualities of animals as are attributed to them in popular belief. This procedure is most extensively used in the Ḥayāt al ḥaʾwān, a zoological encyclopaedia compiled by ad Damīrī. Accordingly, a lion in a dream represents a vehement, unjust, and unreliable king. Its hair, flesh, or bones represent riches acquired from a king or an enemy. Eating its head signifies acquiring a kingdom. Its roar indicates menace from a king or even death. A fox represents a woman or a cunning man. A chameleon exemplifies a king’s minister or regent; religious sedition; magician woman; lamentation for the dead. A hawk designates somebody belonging to the ruling class. A parrot represents an unlucky and a lying man;

71 Ibid.
73 See fn. 93 below.
philosopher; servant or an orphan, and so on. There is a branch of ta’būr that enables the dreamer to recollect forgotten dreams. One of the methods that enabled such reconstruction was based on analogy between the parts of human body and the object dreamed of. According to the method recommended by Ibn Sīrīn the dreamer was required to put his hand on any part of his body. If he put his hand to his head, a mountain was seen in the dream; if the hand is raised to the forehead, a hill or land was seen; if on his eye, a waterfall was seen; and if the hand touches the nose, a valley was seen, and so on. After the dream has been recollected in this manner, the method of application is the same for its interpretation.

The argument based on experience is rather underplayed as emphasis is always placed on the traditions recorded from earlier oneirocritics. Although, the mu’abbir was always instructed to observe the merit of an individual case in great detail beginning with the personal aspects of the dreamer, conditions of dreaming and the factual details of the dream itself, these observations were again subject to test of tradition of previous oneirocritics. Unlike the strong empiricist approach observed in Artemidorus’ Oneirocritica, the methods of Muslim oneirocritics sought linkages with tradition for bettering claims to legitimacy in the Islamic worldview.

Lastly, it must be kept in mind that the boundaries of ancient disciplines are not coterminous with their modern analogues. Therefore, in the Greek tradition it is not surprising to find Galen, a contemporary of Artemidorus, who is often seen as a white-

76 Cf. Joseph De Somogyi, “The Interpretation of Dreams in Ad-Damiri’s Hayāt Al-Hayawān” in JRAS (1940), pp. 1-20. For symbolical interpretations of animals see pp. 3-12.
77 Kāmil ut-ta’būr, op. cit., pp. 23.
coated doctor, writing on dreams or discerning diagnosis of diseases through dreams.\(^78\)

Given the contemporary world view of Muslim oneirocritics a few centuries later, it is not amazing either to read about the dream experience of Jālīnūs (Arabic for Galen), in works on ta'bird. In the Naqā'is al funūn Āmulī has described two categories of dream, namely the true and the false type and has further elaborated this division into subcategories. In the course of these discussions Āmulī has used the dreams of Jālīnūs to illustrate one of the two sub-categories of true dreams. He has mentioned:

The first type [of dream] is of two kinds. One is the sarīḥ [lit. clear, evident or truth] that does not need any interpretation and this is from the merciful signs of God for advising man at a time when he is helpless. As for example, Jālīnūs states, in the book on bleeding that a pearl [tumor] became manifest between my membrane and heart. Every treatment that I knew of, I did, none was effective. When there was no hope for health [cure], I saw a dream that a person came before me and said, bleed the vein between the thumb and the index finger of the right hand and let it pass till as much blood flows from it that it brings cure. When it was morning I called a bleeder, bled that vein, and that measure of blood that was told, I caught, and was cured.\(^79\)

Another dream is cited from the Kitab hilat al barā′ about a person who suffered from an enlarged tongue and a cure was prescribed to him in a dream.

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\(^{78}\) For the place of Galen in the Greek history of dreams see S. Pines, “The Future of Dreams: From Freud to Artemidorus”, op. cit., p. 23.

\(^{79}\) Āmulī states: Qism awwal badā qism shawad yakū sarīḥ ki batā'wil ibtiyāj nadārad wa ḍin az asār-i rāḥmat-i īlāhi buwad ki bevaqt-i ḵiro māndi banda rā badān ḥidāyat kunad. Chunānki Jālīnūs dar Kitāb-i fāsād awurdā ast ki marā dar miyān-i ḥijāb wa kahd dur mī padīd āmad har 'īlājī ki dānīstam, kardam, ḥīch sād nadāst. Chun ummīd-i sīḥṣat namānad. Shab khwāb didam ki shakhsī pesh-i man āmad wa guft, "Ragī ki miyān-i khunṣar wa bincar ast az dast-i chap bagushā'ī wa bagūzār tā chāndin khūn az wai barawad ki shifā' yābī". Chun raz shūd fasāād rā jalāb kardam ān rag bagushādām wa ān miqdār-i khūn ki gufta būd ba-girīstam, shifā' bāsīl shud. See Naqā'is al funūn, op. cit., p. 122; also see Appendix 1/7.
A person had such a large tongue that it did not fit in his mouth. Every treatment that he tried was to no avail. One night he saw in dream [rather, heard] gargle with the water of khass leaf. He did the same [and] was cured.80

Although, Galen asserts that dream interpretation alone cannot serve as a reliable tool of diagnosis, since a clear-cut distinction between the different dream types (meaningful, useless for medical purposes, prognostic) is not simple, his belief in distinct dream types was solid enough to refer a dreamer elsewhere if his dream was related to some other specialist.81 To what extent Galen’s understanding of dream is used as a tool for diagnoses in the Islamic context? This in itself is a theme for research. In the context of the present discussion it may suffice to say that elaborate citations such as the above dreams of Galen, point to yet another social aspect of the dream in Islam.

III

On the evolution of oneirocritical texts in Islam

It was during the Abbasid period that manuals of ta’bīr developed into an independent literary genre. Names of some interpreters of dreams were famous even before the reign of the Abbasids. For example, in the Umayyad period, there lived Sa`īd bin al Musayyab during the Caliphate of ʿAbdu’l Malik (r. A.D. 685-705), whose interpretations have been preserved by Ibn Sa’d (d. A.D. 845) in his biographical work,

80 Dar kitiib Hilat al barii` awurda ast ki shakhést rā zabān buzurg shuda būd chinānki dar dahān namī ganjīd. Har ʿilājī k kardand sūd nadāsht. Shabī dar khwāb did ki ba āb-i barg-i khass maqma`a kun, hamchnūnān kard, shifā` yāft. Ibid; see Appendix I/8 for the Persian text.
the *Kitāb al-tabaqāt*. The impression created by reading these interpretations is that by the time of Ibn al Musayyab dream material of the oral tradition was in the process of being codified on the model of *ḥadīṣ* and ancient Arab poetry. 82

To this period belongs Abū Bakr Muhammad Ibn Sīrīn (A.D. 654-728), the first renowned Muslim interpreter of dreams, who was a cloth merchant by profession and a traditionist. In fact, although Ibn Sa’d in his *Kitāb al-tabaqāt* does mention Ibn Sīrīn’s ability to interpret dreams, he does not stress on this, whereas he does include a whole list of dreams interpreted by Sa’īd bin al Musayyab. 83 Further, there is no known collection of dreams or any oneiric treatise available from this period. No evidence exists from before the fourth/tenth century that Ibn Sīrīn left any oneirocritical writing, although, sources from the third/ninth century attest to the existence of interpretations bearing his name. It is very likely that lists of dreams and their interpretations were put together at first for private use. Later these were copied and elaborated, as the legend of Ibn Sīrīn developed to make him, as it were, the prophet of Arab oneiromancy. Some of the better known works on *ta’bīr* that are ascribed to Ibn Sīrīn, such as the *Ta’bīr al ru’yā, Muntakhabu’l kalām fi ta’bīr al aḥlām* and *Taṣfīr al-manām*, on account of the diversity of their titles, contents and the late character of writing, seem to be works of forgers anxious to acquire

82 For examples of his interpretations as recorded by Ibn Sa’d see, T. Fahd, “The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society” in *The Dream and Human Societies*, op. cit., pp. 357 & 358.
83 Ibn Sīrīn was so renowned for his piety and for the reliability of the Prophet’s traditions which he transmitted that it was said about him: “When the deaf man (Ibn Sīrīn was deaf) relates traditions clasp your hands” (probably as a sign of intense interest aroused by his statements). Much less is known about his activity as a *mu’abbir*, although this finally eclipsed his performance as a *muḥaddīṣ*. For a brief history see T. Fahd, “Ibn Sīrīn” in *EP*, vol. 3 (1975), pp. 947-948.
for their writings the prestige of a tābiʿī (someone who lived in the generation after Muhammad).  

The impulse for compilations was guided by the psychological needs of the Umayyads and Abbasids who sought legitimation for rule through various means of which dreams were one. The Umayyad Caliph 'Abdu'l Malik saw himself urinating four times in the miḥrāb. Ibn al Musayyab interpreted it, saying that four of his sons will rule as Caliphs. The dream was in fact fulfilled, and four of his sons were Caliphs. In the chronicles of the Abbasids there are deftly forged dreams to support the claims of a triumphant pretender. For example, Baihāqī cites a dream in his Kitāb al-mahasin wa l-masawi according to which before his accession the second Abbasid Caliph al-Mansūr A.D. (754-775) saw himself at Mecca. The door of the Ka'ba was open and a man emerged from it calling out the name, 'Abdu'llāh bin Muhammad. In the dream Mansūr stood up along with his brother. The man then added the name of Ibn al Harisiyya. Mansūr's brother entered and stayed for a minute before coming out. Mansūr saw a flag in his hand, but he had hardly walked five steps when the flag fell from his hands. (This is clearly an allusion to the brief reign of the first Abbasid Caliph as-Saffāh A.D. (750-754), the brother of al Mansūr). In the dream the same man came out again and called out for 'Abdu'llāh. This time when Mansūr arose his uncle, 'Abdu'llāh bin 'Alī, arose with him, but as he climbed the steps, Mansūr blocked him and entered before him and found

84 ToufY Fahd has presented a history of Muslim oneirocritic literature in a brief, yet factually rich treatment of dream manuals in Islamic culture in, “The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society” in The Dream and Human Societies, op. cit., pp. 351-363.
himself before his father and the Prophet. The Prophet had a flag that he gave to Mansūr instructing him that it was for him and his children. Bāhiqī further records that telling this story to a member of his family, Mansūr said, “You must record this dream on a parchment with a pen of gold, and tell it to your children and grandchildren”.86 Thus in chronicles we find dreams which interpret facts of everyday life, such as the psychological need of the Abbasid Caliphs for Prophetic investiture and to legitimate claims of a successful pretender to the throne.

Another treatise of this genre is said to be the Dāstūr fi 't tā'bir by Abū ʿĪshāq Ibrāhīm bin ʿAbdu’llāh al Kirmānī who lived in the period of Khalīfā al Mahdī who ruled from A.D. (775-785). Although, his work is not available to us, he has been used extensively by later dream interpreters. However, the earliest extant Muslim compilation of dreams that is available to us is the ʿIbārat al ruʿyiā, also known as Taʾbir al ruʿyiā, compiled by Ibn Qutayba (A.D. 828-889).87 The author stresses that he derived his material from al Kirmānī and others, and he undertakes to explain the principles of oneiromancy overlooked by previous scholars.88 This passage in Ibn Qutayba’s compilation indicates that his treatise forms a continuation of an earlier Muslim tradition of oneiromancy. A study of this work reveals that by the middle of the third century of Islam, ideas about dream classification, methods of interpretation, and symbolisms

86 Toufy Fahd “The Dream in Medieval Islamic Society”, op. cit., p. 345.
87 Toufy Fahd had mentioned about existing fragments of Ibn Qutayba’s Taʾbir al ruʿyiā in the above article. The actual treatise, however, was discovered and subsequently edited on the basis of two different manuscripts by M. J. Kister in 1974. I have referred to Kister’s article, “The interpretation of dreams. An unknown manuscript of Ibn Qutayba’s “Ibārat al-Ruʿyā”, op. cit.
88 Ibid., p. 68.
gathered from the pre-Islamic Jewish and Greek oneiric traditions were also assimilated into Islamic dream manuals.

In the opinion of some scholars like Toufy Fahd, elements of Greek oneiromancy—especially classification of dreams according to precise categories of symbols, were introduced into the Islamic dream tradition through an Arabic translation of Artemidorus’ *Oneirocritica* (*The Interpretation of Dreams*) by Hunain bin Ishāq (d. A.D. 873) under the patronage of Caliph al-Ma’mūn. M. J. Kister, however, doubts any direct influence of Hunain bin Ishāq’s translation on Ibn Qutayba’s *‘Ibārat al ru’yā* on account of the following reasons. First, Ibn Qutayba’s treatise seems to have been intended as a response to the unorthodox trend of oneiromancy that was prevalent in Iraq during his day. His treatise is, therefore, addressed to the Muslim scholarly classes that were well versed with religious and literary skills necessary for Islamic oneirocritics. Secondly, Ibn Qutayba differs from the work of Artemidorus in that he stresses on an Arabo-Islamic symbolism in interpreting dreams. Lastly, Ibn Qutayba does not mention Artemidorus, although Ibn Qutayba, who died ten years after Hunain bin Ishāq, must have seen his translation or at least must be acquainted with it. Rather than chasing the beginnings of Greek ideas into Islamic oneiric tradition, it will perhaps be more fruitful for us to understand the features reflecting Greek influence on the nature and interpretation of dreams in Islam.

Traces of Jewish lore are conspicuous in *ta’bīr* texts. The idea of interpretation based on the Quran, followed by Ibn Qutayba and later oneirocritics, is reminiscent of the Talmudic interpretation that is based on the Torah. Another principle, related to the Talmud, whereby the dream is fulfilled according to its interpretation is recorded as an
utterance of the Prophet. Sometimes passages from the Talmud are verbally quoted in Muslim compilations. One of the better known stories to illustrate this principle is about a woman, who saw in a dream that a beam broke down from her roof. She came twice to Rabbi El'azar and he interpreted it saying that she would give birth to a male child. So it happened in both cases. Then she dreamt again that the roof broke down. She came to Rabbi El'azar but did not find him and his student interpreted the dream by saying that her husband would die. When the Rabbi heard about it, he accused his students of having caused the death of the man by their interpretation, because the dreams are fulfilled according to their interpretation. Closely reminiscent is the story about a woman who went to the Prophet and told him that she saw in a dream a beam of the roof of her house breaking down. The Prophet interpreted it by saying that her husband would return. So it happened. After some time she had the same dream and went to the Prophet, but did not meet him, and related her dream to Abū Bakr. The latter interpreted it by saying that her husband would die. Ibn Qutayba attempts to justify the two different interpretations by the fact that either the countenance of the woman changed or the time of the two dreams was different. Tiflisi has also mentioned the same dream and has justified the varied interpretation with the same explanation. A Further influence of the Jewish tradition may be traced in the Islamic ritual of istikhāra. Hitherto, scholars have proposed to match the likeness of istikhāra to the Mesopotamian dream tradition of incubation. The ritual of performing the 'astral dream' in the Jewish tradition, however, has made me

89 For reference in Ibn Qutayba's text see M. J. Kister's "The interpretation of dreams. An unknown manuscript of Ibn Qutayba's 'Iblārat al-ru'yā', op. cit., pp. 100-101; Tiflisi has mentioned this dream as a tradition of the Prophet transmitted by Ahmad bin Sa'id who received it from 'Abdu'llāh, see Kāmil utta'bir, op. cit., p. 25.
ponder on the possibility of its influence on inducing dreams in the Islamic tradition. I
have discussed this aspect in the following Chapter.

Another important treatise on Arab-Muslim oneirocritics, *al Qādirī fi taḥīr* by
Abū Saʿīd Nasr al Yaʿqūb al Dīnāwārī is dedicated to the Caliph Al Qādir al Billāh whose
rule spread from A.D. (991 to 1031). This treatise is an immense compilation of oneiric
material reflecting various aspects of man’s social and personal life in the tenth century
Baghdād. After Dīnāwārī dream treatises followed with great rapidity. Some of the more
illustrious compilers of oneiric manuals were Abū Tāhir Yaḥyā bin Ghannām al Maqdisī
(d. A.D. 1294) and Abū Ḥabīl as Sālimī of the late fourteenth century had gathered
the heritage of Ibn Sīrīn in a book entitled *al Ishāra ila ʿilm al Ḥara*. There is Khalīl bin
Shāhīn az Zāhirī (d. A.D. 1468) whose *al Ishārat fi ʿilm al Ḥarät* was based on the same
theme as that of Sālimī. A summation of most of these contributions was made in the
*Tafsīr al anām fi taḥīr al-manām* by ʿAbduʾl Ghanī al Nābulusī (d. A.D. 1731),
apparently the latest authority on Muslim dream interpretation, and the popularity of
which is attested by the fact of its publication more than once at Cairo and Būlāq.91

It may be concluded that the symbolic constants of Arab oneiromancy developed
continuously over the centuries and by the third/ninth century was compiled into a written
code of principles, laws, and procedures, drawn from uninterrupted oral traditions. As far
as the structure of the oneirocritical treatise is concerned, it always includes the
following two sections, although in a highly unbalanced proportion. The first section is
rather brief and comprises of a theoretical introduction to the general rules that explain

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91 The development of dream treatises in the Islamic civilization is clearly illustrated in the inventory in
which 181 treatises have been identified and located, see the list prepared by Toufy Fahd for an inventory of
about causation and classification of dreams; duties of the dreamer and of the mu`abbir; and the different methods of interpreting dreams: etymological, antithetical, symbolical and the ones based on Quran, hadīṣ, current verses and proverbs. The second section contains the major portion of the oneirocritical manual and is concerned with objects seen in dreams and their relation to reality, often followed by justifications and examples. The internal organization of the material takes the form of hierarchical lists of beings or objects likely to be seen in dreams. The general pattern is reflected in al Dināwari’s Muntakhab al kalām and Ibn Sīrīn’s Ta`bīr al ru`yā.92

The Ta`bīr al ru`yā of Ibn Sīrīn is, perhaps, the most popular dream guide for Muslims of the subcontinent. This treatise has been published several times in its Arabic original along with its Urdu translation, and is readily available in bookstores and pavement stalls set outside the dargāhs (tomb shrines) of sufi saints. I have consulted a translation, Ta`bīrnāma`i khwāb, by Habīb Ahmad Ḥāshmī that was published first in 1978. The text comprises of twenty-five chapters and the first chapter deals with the conduct of the oneirocritic, nature of dreams and the rules of dream interpretation. The subsequent chapters contain various items that are susceptible to be seen in dreams in an hierarchical order. The sequence of themes, from the second to the twenty-fourth chapters proceeds in a descending order of beings and things seen in dreams. For example, beginning with a chapter on dreams of Allāh; dreams of angels, prophets, the pious and scholars of Islam (`ulamā’), the Ka`ba, azān (call for prayer), ḥajj; dreams of the sky, sun, moon, stars, the Day of Judgement, heaven, and hell fire; rain, lightening, thunder,

water bodies, mud and boats; dreams about land, mountains, forests, eruptions, and earthquakes; dreams about trees, fruits, vegetables, orchards; different drinks and milk; to see women, men, parts of human body; to see matters related to marriage and women; dreams about death and the dead; attires and tablecloth; about precious stones and metals; dreams about vessels and similar things; horses, mules and asses; to see meat, and colours; animals that cause trouble; about snakes, scorpios and like animals; water animals; dreams of birds; to see games and like activity; miscellaneous objects. The twenty fifth chapter of the text is devoted to interpretations of different chapters of Quran seen or recited in dreams and does not, however, fit in appropriately with the descending order of things.

The practical use of such lists, however, was problematic. In an attempt to make the use of such treatises easier, lists were compiled where the oneirocritical themes are classified in alphabetical order. Such was the structure of the ‘keys to dreams’, that served as encyclopaedic dictionaries of dreams. A typical example is of the Kitāb kāmil ut-ta‘bīr or ‘The Book of Complete Dream Interpretation’ that was compiled towards the end of twelfth century by Shaikh ʿAbū’l Fażl Ḥusain bin Muhammad Ibrāhīm al Tiflīsī and is dedicated to Şuṭṭān Maʿṣūd ibn Naṣīruddīn (r. A.D. 1173-1192). Noting the purpose of

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Saiyid Habib Ahmad Hashimi as Taʿbīrānmaʿi khwāb, op. cit., content list pp. 3-4.
93 Tiflīsī informs us about his patron and the circumstance of his composition but he does not provide any dates see Kāmil ut-ta‘bīr, op. cit., p. 9; The author of the Kashf al zanīn states that Shaikh Abū al Fażl Ḥusain Hubaysh bin Ibrāhīm bin Muhammad al Tiflīsī died in A.H. 629, and that he had compiled the Kāmil ut-ta‘bīr for Qilīj Arslan Rūmī after he had written the Şīhḥat al abdān, the Kashf al zanīn ʿan asamī al kutūb waʿl funān of Mustafa bin ʿAbd Allah Qistantī Rūmī Hanafi, vol. 2, Beirut: Dar ul Afaq, 1982, pp. 1379-80; This source is also cited in the inventory prepared by Fahd who has dated Tiflīsī’s death in 600/1203. He has also located a copy of the manuscript of the Kāmil ut-ta‘bīr in the Bankipore Catalogue, vol. 11, No. 1071, see Fahd’s La divination arabe, op. cit., p. 357, no. 124.
this compilation Tiflisî states that he had not seen any satisfactory treatise in Persian on his subject, among the works published before him. He goes on to say that he has compiled the present book with considerable effort and provides a list of twenty works that he has consulted, as proof of his diligence. Finally, selecting the opinion of six masters of this science, namely, Dâniyâl, Imâm Ja'far Šâdiq, Muhammad ibn Sirîn, Ibrâhîm Kirmânî, Jábir Magârîbî and Ishmail ibn Ash'as, Tiflisî organized about a thousand dreams and their interpretations in an alphabetical order. Considering the bulk of this material, the author goes on to justify the title of his work Kâmîl ut-ta'bîr by saying that, “We have named this work as the Kâmîl ut-ta'bîr because there is no other work about this science in Persian as complete as this” (Nâm in kitâb râ Kâmîl ut-ta'bîr nihâdîm zîrâ ki dar ûn 'ilm az in Kâmîltar ba-fârsî nasâkhta-and). Even though, this portion was the author's principal object in writing a new work, and the cause of his grandiose claim, it is his introduction to the dream manual that is of a far greater value to us. Tiflisî's prolegomena describes the excellence of the science of ta'bîr. This part of the treatise comprises of sixteen sections, each called a fašî, that deal with various aspects of dreaming in the Islamic civilization - its causation, classification and interpretation. The

94 The list of books consulted by Tiflisî is mentioned in his preface, these are: Usûl-i Dâniyâl, Kitâb-i taqûsîm-i Haqrat ja'far Šâdiq, Kitâb-i jawâmî-i Muhammad bin Sirîn, Dastûr-i Ibrâhîm Kirmânî, Irshâd-i Jábir Magârîbî, Kitâb-i ta'bîr Ibrâhîm bin Ash'as, Kanz al ru'yâ'i Mamânî, Ta'bîr al bayân 'Abdus, Kitâb ta'bîr-i Hâfiz ibn Ishâq, Kitâb Jamâl al dalâîl, Kitâb Izhâh al ta'bîr fâkhri, Kitâb khâfî al ru'yâ, Kitâb ta'bîr ma'arîf Tâwûs, Kitâb mu'afrah al ru'yâ, Kitâb tuhfat al mulûk, Kitâb minhâj al ta'bîr Khalîd-i Iyshââhî, Kitâb muqaddamat al ta'bîr, Kitâb Hâqaqî al ru'yâ, Kitâb wa'îze' Muhammad Sahûneh, Kitâb mu'tafaraq az kalmât, see Kâmîl ut-ta'bîr, op. cit, pp. 5-6.

95 Ibid, p. 6.

96 For Tiflisî's introduction see ibid, pp. 9-39. It is obvious that the copy of the manuscript of the Kâmîl ut-ta'bîr consulted by N. Bland in his “On the Muhammedan Science of Tabir or Interpretation of Dreams”, op. cit., had some variation from the current version of the printed text that I have used. Bland gives the
sixteenth faṣl is the longest and is devoted to interpretation of dreams in which angels and prophets appear. The compiler of the text states that “the masters of this industry relate interpretations of seeing (dreams of) angels and prophets at the beginning of their book, (and) I will relate the benefits of seeing them in this faṣl”. The second part of the treatise is a commentary on alphabetically arranged dream subjects along with their interpretations as recorded from the traditions of master oneiromancers mentioned by Tiflisī.

Nevertheless, consultation of such dictionaries was not always easy. Dreams may be experienced under various circumstances, where the work to be consulted is not within reach, and since the dream is a fleeting experience it may soon be forgotten, there would be fear of losing its benefit. This concern led to versification of oneirocritical material, after the pattern of materials of didactic nature. A versified Persian treatise on dreams was published by M. Hidayet Hosain way back in 1932. This treatise is attributed to Imām Ja'far Sādiq (d. A.D. 765) who is considered to be the fountainhead of Islamic occult sciences. It is possible that this treatise is a Persian versification of Imām Ja’far’s Kitāb al taqṣīm that was originally composed in Arabic. The only oneirocritical principle mentioned in the prefatory is related to oneiric time. The rule is stated as follows:

If you have any dream when you are asleep at night, find
Out the time of that dream (when you are awake).

impression that Tiflisī’s text is divided into sixteen sections, arranged rather illogically, with the first fifteen of these devoted to classification of dreams and rules of their interpretation, and the last section containing nearly one thousand subjects of dreams is alphabetically arranged, see idem, pp. 124-125.

97 Kāmil ut-ta bīr, op. cit., pp. 6-7.
Remember all those things which you see. As the effect of each [dream] will depend on the time when you saw the dream.\textsuperscript{99}

The notion of time is a symbolic aspect of Muslim oneiromancy and to this extent is explained as part of the procedure for interpreting dreams in oneirocritical works. The basic principle underlining this conception is that oneiric time is directly related to the actualization or realization of the dream’s interpretation. But the conception of oneiric time is varied. While most dream works discuss this concept in terms of hours and seasonal time, Ja'far Šādiq’s treatise deals with the monthly date cycle and its bearing on dreams. The second part of this treatise describes ninety-three items seen in dreams and their interpretation.

The organizational patterns of oneiric texts, discussed so far, are concerned with thematically arranged symbolic dreams that require interpretation. On the other hand, there exist monographal accounts with only one dream theme and usually this happens to be the record of dreams about Prophet Muhammad. Such accounts are of literal dreams in which the message delivered, most often through verbal communication, is clear and needs no further explanation. Mention must be made here of the Kitāb al-manām of Ibn Abī al Dunyā (A.D. 823-894), a collection of three hundred and twenty seven dream narratives, mostly literal, that present some clear communication between the dead and the living. In these dreams the dead instruct the living to perform certain duties during their lifetime. The uniform pattern of presentation suggests that literal dreams had a well

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid., p. 569.
developed literary style and that their formulation was standardized somewhere around the middle of second/eighth century prior to Ibn Abî al Dunyâ’s time.¹⁰⁰

I may point here that unlike the oneiric manuals mentioned above, the Kitâb al-manâm is a different kind of dream collection that is not concerned with the method and operation of Muslim oneirocriticism but is interested in using these narratives for an edifying purpose. While most of the dreams in ta’bîr works are symbolic, with the exception of a few literal ones, and in need of some kind of interpretation, dreams in the Kitâb al-manâm are clear and explicit and can be understood upon envisioning or hearing them, without further inquiry or interpretation. In the course of time, both literal and symbolic dreams enjoyed popularity in Islamic literature. The process and the motives, however, were different. Symbolic dreams began to be gathered together in order to demonstrate different methods of dream interpretation, and encouraged by the Abbasid Caliphs developed into a distinct genre of Muslim oneirocriticism (ta’bîr) with a form of dictionary like works. Literal dreams, however, could not fit into the genre of ta’bîr due to their different style and intent. They were not formed for oneirocritical purpose, but rather for moral counsel. In spite of their wide distribution in edifying writings, they have never become a separate genre.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ For the unique structure of Ibn Abî al Dunyâ see Leah Kinberg’s, § 2.4.4 Uniformity that did not develop into a distinct genre, in Introduction to Ibn Abî al Dunyâ’s Morality in the Guise of Dreams (A Critical Edition of Kitâb al-manâm), op. cit, pp. 27-28.
¹⁰¹ Ibid., § 4.9 K. al-Manam and ta’bîr works (= Muslim oneirocriticism), pp. 43-44; § 4.9.1 Symbolic and literal dreams, pp. 44-45; & § 4.9.2 Muslim oneirocriticism and literal-deifying dreams, pp. 45-46.
The *Kitāb taʾbīr al ruʿyā* of Ibn Sīnā (d. A.D. 980-1037) represents the philosophical treatment of dreams. Unlike the other works, mentioned above, that deal with methods of interpretation and symbolic objects of dreams, Ibn Sīnā’s work seems to have been the first of its kind to discuss the nature of sleep and causes of dream scientifically. The first part of this treatise comprises of thirteen chapters that deal with these issues. Chapters fourteen to thirty nine deal with the oneirocritical principles, different methods of interpretations and variations due to changes in environment and the personality of the dreamer, differentiation between good and bad dreams, and the conduct of the oneirocritic. The arrangement of the oneirocritical section of the *Kitāb al taʾbīr al ruʿyā* appears to be unique, as the thematic arrangement is neither hierarchical nor alphabetical. The first chapter in this section (i.e chapter forty) deals with child-birth. Thereafter, next sixteen chapters (forty one to fifty six) concern facial and bodily parts beginning with head, hair of head, forehead and eyebrows, extending to the feet and entire bodily parts. These are followed by fifty four chapters that deal with themes related to miscellaneous activities of human beings, different kinds of food, clothes, ornaments, themes related to the dead and death, sickness, madness and intoxication, sexual activities, interpretation of strange dreams, arts and crafts. Then there is a group of sixteen chapters that deals with beings and things in the ascending order: different kinds of animals; birds; beasts; acquatic animals; serpents and reptiles. Themes related to geographic terrain – mountains, deserts and water plains; atmospheric phenomena - rain, torrent, clouds; and planetary bodies - sky, stars, sun; the moon and stars, are described in the next seven

chapters. This order is the exact reverse of the hierarchy of themes as stated in Ibn Sīrīn’s *Ta‘bīr al ru‘yā*. The final chapter, numbering one hundred and twenty eight, lists the strange dreams known to the author. In view of the richness of oneiric material, and in spite of its philosophical approach, this treatise may be classified as a work of *ta‘bīr*. Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of the subject was much influenced by that of the Greek philosophers like Aristotle, and he has drawn frequent comparisons between the Greek and the Arab views on aspects of sleep and dream, which have been considered in the following Chapter.

In this Chapter, I have tried to show how the pre-Islamic belief in dreams acquired a legitimate inclusion in the Islamic society. The primary function of the dream in pre-Islamic Arabia was divination as is evident from the legends of the *kuhhān*. The conduct of the Prophet consecrated this usage but he forbade the profession of the diviner. Instead of the *kuhhān* we have the *mu‘abbir* who is groomed in niceties required of a Muslim *adīb*. The oneirocritics, of whom Abū Bakr the first Caliph was one, made this art prolific and Arab oneiromancy was born. It was nourished at the outset by inexhaustible sources of the oral tradition, in which the symbolic constants, certain techniques and oneirocritical style and cliches began to be established. The elaborate texts on dream interpretation point to the extent to which *ta‘bīr* had developed in the early centuries of Islam under royal patronage. There was hardly any aspect of life that was untouched by the dream phenomena. But how exactly was the dream interpreted? What were the principles of *ta‘bīr* and what was their social relevance? In the Islamic

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103 For a list of chapters see *ibid.*, pp. 17-22.
cosmological conceptions what was the status of the dream? I have tried to explore these issues in the following Chapter.
APPENDIX I

1. Piyaamir (ص) فرمودند که ای پاپان بعد وفاتی بلقعلو و لاباقلقطعان می‌شوند. به این‌نکه از وفات من وحی مقطعان شود و می‌می‌شوند مقطعان نگردند. ایشان عرض کردن پیامبر فرمودند «الرقطیا العصاملاة النقریا المرعیة الصالحیة که عینی دیدن خواهیا صالح پسنیدعد بود اگر مارد پسنیدعد بیند یا کسی دیگر بیند.

2. و از سلمان مرویست که گفت از رسول خدا شنیدم که ای پاپان خود همی گفت چون کسی از شما خواب پسنیدع بیند باید که خدا تعلیق را برای داری کند و باید به همان همی گود یا اگر خواب [نه] پسنیدع بیند و مارد مصالح بود که شیطان نمی‌تواند رو برود و هیچ کسی آن خواب را تغییر نمی‌دهد. خریدار بود و گزندی به وی نرسد.

3. روایت است از سلمان رضی الله عنیه که مردی اعرابی به خدمت رسول خدا (ص) آمد و عرض کرد، ای رسول اللہ دوش چنین خوابی دیدم و خوابی آشته آگاه کرد. رسول خدا فرمود، ای اعرابی دیکب چه خوابی دیدی؟ عرض کرد، ای رسول اللہ دوش خرا پختی و بسیار خورده بودم و نیز مانده بوده. رسول خدا فرمود که، این خواب را تغییر نمی‌دهد و درست نیاید. پس دانستیم که مرد سیر بود یا گردد یا مانده شده تاولیخ خواب او درست نیاید. و از این سبب معریان بسیار خوابها را تغییر می‌کنند. که تاولیخ آن درست می‌نیاید. از این سبب که یاد کرده باشد پس متعیب باید که از دانستین این چیزها گفته نباید و چنین چیزها را از سائل پیرسند و بعد از آن تاولیخ خواب کند تا آنچه گویید درست و راست آید و علامتهای درستی خوابی چنین بود که یادکردند شد.
عبدالله عباسی که رسول خداوندی الله علیه وآله و سلّم فرموده که دیدن خواب بر سه قسم

است یک قسم از خداوندی باشیه، مبنی بر مؤمنان را در زندگی ایشانی، دو قسم قسمتی از وسواسه

دو قسم که مؤمنان را اندوه گین گرده، قسمی مهم خوابهای آنفته و مختلف.

داهنال (ع): می‌گوید اگر به خواب بیند که به‌فرد و همه برای پیش‌بینی تا وقتی که وی را

بی‌خواب و با کفین در گور کردن این همه دلیل بر فساد دین بود. اگر بیند که او را در جنابه

نهاشند و مردم از پیش و پس از می‌رفتند دلیل بر گزگی بود. اما در دینش نقصان بود و بعضی

گویند که بر چنان مردم که بر جنایه و یا نقصان حکم کردند اگر بیند که مرده بود و زنه در دلیل که

از کنون به‌کن و بعمرش دراز بود. اگر بیند که درمیان گورستان بود دلیل که با جاهلان سفر

کنند.

صارفگوید که دیدن مرگ مواجهات در خواب دلیل بر راحت مؤمن و عذاب کافر بود... اگر بیند

که بمرر ای و را بی‌خواب دلیل که در دین ثابت بود.

قسم اول بدو قسم شود یکی صریح که به تاویل احتیاج ندارد و این از آثار رحمت الهی بوده که

وقت فرا ماندی بنده را بداند هداشتن کند. چنانکه جالب‌تر در کتاب فصل آورده است که مرا

درمیان حجاب و کبد در می‌بدید آمد. هر علاچی که دانتوست کردم هیچ سود ندارد. چون

امند صحت نماند شب خواب دیدم که شخصی پیشیم من آمید و گفت رگ‌میان خصوصی و بنصر

امست از دست چپ به‌کشانی و بگذار تا چنین خون وز و پرود که شفاپایی چون روز شد
فضاد را طلب کردم. آن رگ بگشادم و آن مقدار خون که گرفته بود بگرفتم شفا حاصل شد.

در کتاب حیله البره آورده است که شخصی را زبان بزرگ شده بود چنانه در دهان نمی‌گیند. هر علاجی که کردنده سود ندارد، شیب در خواب دیده که به آب برق خس مضمونه کن همچنان کرد، شفا یافت.