Chapter II

The Dream in Islamic Civilization:
Taxonomy, Methodology and Interpretation

Roger Caillois has talked about two types of problems puzzling the human mind about dreams. Firstly, the ‘logical’ aspect that deals with the images inside the dream; secondly, the ‘philosophical’ aspect that deals with the degree of reality that one attributes to dreams. The latter aspect depends on the relationship between sleeping and waking states. Now, within the Islamic tradition there is no one uniform perception as far as the physiological problem of the dream is concerned. Even though there is hardly any genre of Islamic literature that is bereft of reference to dreams, explanation for the causality of dream is confined to discussion in oneiric manuals, encyclopaedias of Islamic sciences and texts devoted to philosophy and mysticism. In contrast to prolific mention of dreams, sleep, which is the requisite precondition for dreaming, is hardly subjected to analysis. In the textual narrative of dreams in my sources, however, the two aspects of dreaming, as problematized by Caillois, seem to merge into one word – khwāb – that designates both ‘content’ (‘images’ what one sees in dreams) and ‘form’ (process of sleeping and dreaming) of dreaming.

Since time immemorial visions in dreams have seem to man to conceal a meaning that is mysterious, yet open to understanding, so that a competent interpreter should be in

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a position to elucidate them. From this have stemmed innumerable ‘dream books’ whose purpose is to decipher the hidden meaning of dreams. In order to locate this logic, however, the dreams first need to be categorized because only certain type of ‘true’ dreams may be subject to any interpretation, while the ‘false’ dreams cannot be logically analyzed. To this extent the method of dream interpretation in the Islamic civilization primarily shows concern only for the oneiric value of the dream and not for the process of sleep that initiates this condition. The Islamic practice of istikhāra (a practice akin to the Mediterranean incubation) can be cited as an exception here, as the process of initiating dream through prescribed formulae is to be followed before the individual retires for sleep inorder to experience a certain type of dream.

The philosophical problem of dreams is concerned with the relationship between the waking and the dreaming states, the order of their importance, and the possibility of their working together. In other words, this problem deals with the interaction of the dreaming and waking states. The question to be asked here relates not only to the meaning of the vision seen in the dream, but also to the significance of the act of dreaming itself. Is the world of dreams another universe? Is it more real, equally real or less real than the waking state? Various approaches to these questions determine the extent of importance given to dreams in any given cultural tradition. Generally dreams are defined as a function of imagination. What is the nature of this imagination in Islam? Is it merely fantasy as some modern thinkers define it, or does it have a substantial existence?

I have addressed the ‘logical’ and ‘philosophical’ aspects of the dream in the Islamic civilization in three separate sections of this Chapter. As far as the ‘content’
matter of the dream is concerned it has been explored within an oneiric framework that is defined in the textual tradition of *taʾbīrnama*. The original theoretical and normative framework within which medieval Muslims evaluated dreams developed from a varied heritage: pre-Islamic Semitic, Greek and Islamic. Rooted in this heritage is the view of dreams as interaction between the dreamer and invisible powers. This provided justifications for pursuing the tradition of *taʾbīrnama*, sometimes arranged in alphabetical order like 'dream keys' that enabled the interpretation of each oneiric image as auspicious or inauspicious. The availability of oneiric manuals created a situation wherein an individual could, independent of the *muʿabbir*, evaluate his or her dreams. Further, some *taʾbīrnama* may also explain the process of decoding the dream that is based on four criteria: classification of dreams; rules of conduct for the dreamer; rules of conduct for the *muʿabbir* (interpreter of dreams); and various methods of dream exposition. This meant that the science of *taʾbīr* could be learnt by non-specialists of the subject. In other words, the religious culture that gave meaning to dreams in Islam did not assume any particular structure – such as the Church in medieval Christianity – to function as mediator between the hidden forces responsible for dreams and humanity. Dreams, however, as a medium providing immediate access to hidden forces and knowledge, tend to bypass mediation. But this privilege of self evaluation of dreams was possible for only those individuals who fulfilled the literary criteria required of a *muʿabbir*. The majority of those untrained in the specific cultural ethics of Islamic civilization were dependant on the services of a professional *muʿabbir* or non-professional interpreters who claimed access to hidden knowledge. With respect to its 'form', the dream in Islam is not simply a
conduit for communication between the corporeal world and the unseen world, but according to one section of the Muslim society – the sufis – it has an ontological status outside the dreaming body. I have studied this aspect of the dream in a separate section.

In the Islamic tradition both these aspects of dreaming, in fact, converge at certain points of reference. First, the ‘true’ type of dreams are derived from a sublime world; secondly, the dream follows its interpretation and thus finds an existence into the dreamer’s waking reality; and thirdly, there is a technique for inducing dreams that establishes a linkage between the dreamer and the other world. This intrinsic quality of the dream – to permeate the barrier between the world of our ordinary existence and the realm of sublime creation – contains a mysterious source of power that becomes apparent in the act of narration and interpretation of the dream. In Arabic, the word for interpretation of dream is ta’bīr – that is derived from the root ‘ḅr’ meaning ‘to cross over’. This implies that to interpret a dream the muḥabbir (interpreter) has to discover the hidden meaning of the message that is conveyed in a symbolic language. In order to give an interpretation he has to ‘cross over’ from the world of ordinary physicality and apparent meaning into the sphere of imaginal existence to perceive the hidden message conveyed to the dreamer. The process of decoding and inducing a dream, thus illustrate power. In the previous Chapter I have illustrated the legitimate position of the dream and its social significance in the Islamic society since its inception. Continuing with the same theme I shall now discuss the social significance of decoding the dream.
On the taxonomy of dreams in Islam

Dream classifications are, generally speaking, absent from the modern day theories of dreams. This is primarily because these theories are basically derived from the psychoanalytical school where the dream is treated as either an object of religious superstition or as an aspect of an individual’s experience. Nevertheless, dream classification is an integral aspect of most pre-modern dream traditions that are inseparably bound with cultural belief systems and are thus essentially related to religion. At the outset I must specify that dream classification is significantly different from classification in natural sciences. Unlike the latter, where observation and classification go hand in hand to define fixed categories, dream classification essentially deals with dynamic processes. The important question in this case concerns the perception of the dream and the way in which, for specific individual and social reasons, it becomes associated with certain kinds of experience. Sometimes, the meaning of a dream is not fixed and is subject to variable factors affecting dreams. It is, therefore, difficult to confine any dream to a particular category. Nevertheless, identifying and describing such a system of classification is not sufficient. It is necessary to examine how the people of a particular culture used these schemas, and the ways in which these classificatory systems themselves represent the worldview of the actors.
The earliest reference to dream types is found in the Quran where a distinction is made between two terms – *ru’ya* and *azghāsu’il ahlām.* The term *ru’ya* is derived from Semitic *r-‘y* giving rise to formations expressing ‘sight’ and ‘vision’, and one of the aspects of vision is nocturnal vision, the dream. In the Quran it is used for true or sound dreams that shall attain fulfilment. In the Semitic languages the dream is expressed through the root *h-l-m*, that is also used for indicating nocturnal pollution. In the Quran, *hulm* is not used in the prejorative sense. But the term *ahlām* (plural of *hulm*) appears twice in verses (xii, 44 and xxi, 5), preceded by *azghās*, meaning ‘incoherent and confused dreams’, and once unqualified in the former of these verses in the expression *ta’wil al ahlām* or ‘interpretation of dreams’. In the context of the Islamic dream tradition, however, *ahlām* (plural of *hulm*) are false dreams. The base character of these is symbolically expressed in the word *azghās*. The term *azghās* signifies handful of dried grass and weeds, but is applied figuratively to such dreams on account of their resemblance in worthlessness and want of arrangement.

A study of *ta’bir* texts reveals that there are certain, essential and semiotically vital, characteristics of *ru’ya* and *ahlām* that are elementary in understanding their nature.

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2 For derivation of these terms and their usage in the Quran cf. T. Fahd, “Ru’ya” in *EP*, vol. viii, p. 645.
3 See Chapter I for detail of these verses.
4 In Sura xii, verse 44, the term is used to describe the Pharoah’s dream; the other verse is a reference to Sura xxi, verse 5 that relates the ridicule of Muhammad on Meccans, see ’Abdu’llah Yusuf ’Ali’s English translation of the Quran, *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Beirut – Lebanon: Dar al Arbia, 1968, pp. 566 and 823 respectively.
5 According to Ibn Sīrin, in Arabic, grass is known as *azghās*. Every species of grass that is there, whether wet and dry, green and yellow, and red that which appears in this manner is like this type of dream that is known as *azghāsu’il ahlām*, as cited by Tīflīsī in *Kāmil ut-ta’bir*, edited by ’Ali Kuchīkī, Tehran: Aftab, second edition (S.H. 1371), p. 13. For a discussion of Tīflīsī’s text see Chapter I, “On the evolution of oneirocritical texts in Islamic tradition”.

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In the case of *ru'yā* these are: one that it predicts the future event or events. Second that it is encoded, usually in a symbolic manner, that is, the dream significance or the message is not the same as the dream narrative that must be interpreted to yield a message. Not all sound dreams, however, are allegorical as some are also theorematic or direct dreams, that do not need interpretation and take place exactly as they are seen. Although, oneirocritics have always kept the distinction between *ru'yā* and *azghāṣu'l ahlām* as their fundamental point of reference, some identify a third category of dreams. Imām Ja'far Sādīq has proposed a three fold division of dreams – the first is known as *muḥkam* (clear message dream), the second dream type is *mutashābiḥ*, and the third is *azghāṣu'l ahlām*. Unfortunately, Tiflisī has not defined the *mutashābiḥ* for us. However, since the literal meaning of *mutashābiḥ* is allegory, one can conjecture that this refers to the allegoric dream type that is distinct from the clear, message type dream but simultaneously belongs to the category of sound dreams. The latter aspect is also conveyed in the term *muḥkam* (literally: clear, conspicuous, incontrovertible) that is used by Ibn Sirīn to indicate true dreams. Thirdly, the veracity of *ru'yā* is beyond questioning as it results from God's order conveyed to man in sleep. The term, *aḥkām* (plural of *hukm* = order) is also used by oneirocritics to simultaneously express irrevocability of the Divine command in such a dream. In contrast to the *aḥkām* that are rendered by God, the *ahlām* results from Satan's influence and lead's the dreamer astray. Such a dream has no purpose for the Muslim, and it is not worthy of any interpretation.

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7 *Kāmil ut-ta'bir*, p. 13.
What is the function of dreams and why are they significant for Muslims? In addition to the Quranic typology of dreams, one may recall the prophetic hadīs in which Muhammad reassures his followers about the continuation of mubashshirāt that were to guide believers after his death. This is one of the primary reasons cited by Jā‘bir Maghribī, a traditionist and author of a book on dreams known as Kitāb irshād-i Jā‘bir Maghribī, for the occurrence of true dreams. True dreams occur for purpose of tabashīr or communicating news to man from the lauh-i mahfūz (the heavenly tablet that records the fate of all human beings) through a specially appointed angel of God, the malakū‘l ru’ya. When someone desires a prediction about the affairs of this world or those of the After world, this angel, on God’s command shows a dream in order to advise Muslims, and to seize proof for non-believers for the Day of Judgement. Then there is khwāb-i tahzīr (admonishing dream) shown by angels to man for warning him about things that take one away from submission so that he avoids them. Lastly, there is khwāb-i ilhām or dream of inspiration from God wherein angels instruct the dreamer about compulsion of prayer, merit of hajj, evening prayers and alms, that removes one away from sins. Yet another explanation illustrating the import of ru’ya is attributed to Dānyāl who is a prophet in the Semite prophetology known for his interpretation of dreams. He divides dreams into two: those showing true state of passing events, and those that foretell the result of human undertaking. These two categories are further divided into four types: first, khwāb-i āmr or commanding dream; second, zajr or prohibitive/warning dream;

8 See Chapter 1 above.
third, munẓīr or admonisher; and khwāb-i mubashḥīr or dream of good news. From the point of view of their origin, ruʿyā are, thus, divinely inspired dreams that are shown to man by an angel appointed by God. As the authenticity of these dreams is beyond doubt, tremendous significance is attached to their instructive and predictive functions.

Explanation is also provided for the occurrence of false dreams. According to Ibn Sīrīn aḥlām are seen on account of three factors: imbalance of body temperaments, insinuations of the Devil, and those defined by the soul (...azghāsuʾ l aḥlām khwāndand az sīh gūnā buwad, barkhī az aḡḥalab-i tabīʾ wa baʿẓī az numāyish-i dev wa barkhī az hadiyat-i [haddi] nafs). Tīflisī has explained the influence of body temperaments at some length in the fifth section of his introduction to the Kāmil ut-taʿbīr. A man overcome by a bloody temperament will see in his dream a lot of meat, halwā (a sweet), wine, and red things; listen to music of flute and harp; he will be fat and of cheerful countenance, but his dream will not be true. If a man’s temperament is overcome by yellow bile (ṣafrā) due to eating of bile producing things like garlic, onion, pepper which have a hot and dry essence, he will see fire, lamps, lanterns and warmth in dream. The muʿabbīr will determine from his lean and fast movements and talkative nature about his temperament and know that dreams of such a person are false. When phlegm (balgham)

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10 Ibid., p. 12.
11 Kirmānī states the dream that appears to be true is brought to man by one of the heavenly angels who predicts from the lauh-i malḥīṣ (heavenly tablet of fate) about things that man should do or desires. Or, the angel creates fear in the dreamer, on account of a sin committed, so that he seeks refuge in God and fears Him and seeks protection till wickedness of that dream is removed and he (the dreamer) attains well being. Ibid.
12 Ibid., p. 13.
dominates due to excess of butter, meat, milk, and the like, such a person dreams of moisture, rain, lightening, stream, snow and white things. He is depressed and his dreams are untrue. When saudā or black bile dominates due to consumption of salt meat, pickles, brinjal, and the like, the person dreams of fearful things like snake, scorpion and darkness. He bears a melancholy disposition and his dreams are not true. 

This psychosomatic nature of dreams is explained in terms of the co-relation between balance of bodily humors and dreaming, and is identified as an influence of Hippocrates. 

Muslim oneiromancers reject all those dreams that proceed from the mind being preoccupied with any engrossing idea that interests it in waking state, and then summons up the same idea in sleep. One of the three circumstance described by Jā’bir Maghrībī for the occurrence of false dream is when people see in sleep all those thoughts that they had experienced in waking state. Such a dream is known as khwāb-i himmat or residual/thought dream (khwāb-i himmat ān buwad ki mardum dar bīdārī chizi āhī andishānd wa chun ba-khwāb humān andisha’rā ba-khwāb bīnand wa ān khwāb rā āstī na-bāşhad wa ta’wil-i wai rāṣt na-bāşhad). Such is the case of the lover who see his beloved in sleep, or of the man who sees his profession like the weaver who dreams of weaving cotton, or the ironsmith of iron. In a somewhat similar manner, one who dreams of being trapped in snow and ice and on waking finds himself lying without any covering, or if someone dreams of heat or sitting in the sun and on waking finds himself wrapped in a cover, such dreams are false and similar to khwāb-i ‘illat or dream of pain/hurt that is

13 Kāmil ut-ta’bīr, op. cit., pp. 11-12.
15 For Jā’bir Maghrībī’s typology of ahlām, see Kāmil ut-ta’bīr, op. cit., p. 14.
experienced when a person overcome by discomfort of pain experiences fearful or wicked nocturnal vision. Then there is khwāb-i dewān or a dream from the Devil in which impossible things are seen and such a dream cannot be expounded. Further, oneirocritics have also described the circumstance of frequent occurrence of such dreams in four groups of people: those of ill-disposed minds; drunkards; those who eat coarse food like brinjal, salted meat, lentil and pickles; and to minor children.

The growing complexity of the typology expresses a heightened awareness of the difficulty in ascertaining the origin and signification of dreams in a given cultural context. Here, a mention may be made of Abdu'l Ghanī al-Nābulusī (1641-1731), who after recounting the basic threefold division of dreams goes on to enumerate at least five kinds of true and seven kinds of false dreams, in his Taʿfīr al anām fi taʿbīr al manām. True dreams reflect tranquility, repose, splendid garments, apetizing food, and displays minimum confusion. These are of five types: trustworthy, manifest dream as a part of prophecy; dreams of glad tidings; dreams revealed by Siddīqūn, the angel of dreams; symbolic dream; and dreams that exert an overpowering influence on the dreamer. For example, if he dreams of playing an instrument in the mosque and thereafter he turns to God in repentance. The false dreams originate in the self, in desire, ambition, and confusion; sexual dreams that necessitate ablution; warnings from the Devil; dreams shown by socerers; falsity shown by Satan; dreams shown by variance of humors; and

\[16\] For Ibn Sīrīn's examples of the same see ibid., p. 18.
\[17\] Ibid., p. 13.
“reversion”, that is, when a dreamer sees himself in the present as if he were twenty years younger.\footnote{18 For Nābulusī’s classification see, G. E. von Grunebaum's "The Cultural Function of the Dream as Illustrated by Classical Islam" in R. Caillios and G. E. von Grunebaum edited The Dream And Human}

The above typology of dreams in relation to encoding may be defined in the following way. Dreams, that are clear message dreams, require no interpretation and they happen as experienced. The second type of dream conveys significant meaning but is coded and needs exposition. The third category of dream with respect to encoding is that which conveys false messages to the dreamer. The message itself might be encoded and it evil significance revealed only after it has been related to the mu’abbir. In most cases it is left up to the dreamer to infer the nature of his dream – if the dreamer feels that his vision is of an auspicious nature, he may proceed to seek its interpretation. But if the dreamer feels that his vision is an inauspicious one he is advised to keep it to himself and not disclose it to anyone for fear of bringing harm to the listener. The latter are seldom referred to in the oneiric manuals. Dream classification may be related to other domains - such as the dream’s ontological status, which varies from fully objectified externality (as in clear message dreams), to pure subjective fantasy (azghāsu‘l ahlām type of dreams). There is a third possibility that of dreaming dreams between the two poles of external and subjective existence. These are dreams with no ‘real’ messages as such. Anthropologists would call these ‘realist’ or ‘physicalist’ dreams because these dreams are linked to physical causes, and are believed not to warrant any interpretation because they come from the body. Examples of such dreams include categories illustrated by Jā’bir.
Maghrībi. Such dreams are extensions of waking perceptions of the dreamers that do not call for interpretation. According to anthropologists one way of understanding the lack of interpretability in case of such dreams is the ‘absent’ symbolic, that is ‘negative social’ value attached to them. In other words, such dreams lack social significance and can be meaningful only for their dreamer.\textsuperscript{19}

II

\textit{Methodology for interpreting dreams}

The systematic fashion in which Tiflisī has organized his considerable volume of material and the way in which he also uses the older popular tradition of auspicious and inauspicious omens and dream symbols are some of the most fascinating aspects of the \textit{Kāmil ut-ta'bir}. For decoding a dream much depends upon context and systematic consideration of the field of dream interpretation generally. For the \textit{mu'abbir}, symbols have a language of their own, to be decoded through the various methods of dream interpretation that are discussed in the oneiric manuals: the symbolical, the reciprocal and antithetical, the etymological, interpretation by addition and subtraction, the interpretation based on Quran and \textit{ḥadīṣ}, and the interpretation by classifying dreams according to \textit{jins}, \textit{sinf}, \textit{ṭab‘}. Techniques are also prescribed for recollecting forgotten dreams. These various methods of dream exposition are rooted in the socio-cultural tradition of Islam. This is clearly evident in the conduct prescribed for the dreamer and the \textit{mu'abbir}.

\textsuperscript{19} For the “realist” or “physicalist” type of dreams see the comments of Benjamin Kilborne on A. Oppenheim’s study of dreams in Ancient Mesopotamia in his “On classifying dreams” in Barbara Tedlock, \textit{Societies}, Berkley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966, pp. 8-9.
In the fourth faṣl of his introductory, Tiflisī cites a prescription of rules for the
dreamer on the authority of Kīrmānī who states that, “Everyone who desires to know the
auspicious sign and proof of the soundness of his dream, he should with diligence and
ritual purity, sleep on to his right side, and should invoke God at the time of sleep” (har ki
khwāḥad ki durustī’ khwāb-i khwābī khwesh ṭa ba dalīl wa ’alāmat-i nek ṭa bāyad jahad
kunad ṭa bā jahārat bar pehalu’i ṭāst ba-khwābad, wa ba hangām-i khusrān khudā’i
ṭa ’alā ṭa yād kunad).20 The dreamer is cautioned against excess of food before sleeping,
because this causes the brain to be obscured by the vapours, the thoughts become
disturbed and distressful dreams arise. Nor should the sleeper be fasting as this causes
weakness of temperament. If a person is neither full nor hungry he will see a sound dream
and will not forget it.

In the thirteenth faṣl of his prolegomena Tiflisī elaborates on these rules and
states that if a person has an auspicious dream he must give alms and thank God for it on
waking. If it is a distressed dream (khwāb-i shorīda) he must pray to God for respite from
the Satan and turn on to the other side. To avert the consequences of an evil dream,
besides prayer, the dreamer may follow the custom of spitting three times over the left
shoulder. The latter seems to be a Jewish practice that has not been mentioned by Tiflisī
but is found in the earliest ta’bīrīnāma compiled by Ibn Qutayba.21 The dreamer must

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20 Kāmil ut-ta’bir, op. cit., p. 16.
21 See M. J. Kister, “The interpretation of dreams. An unknown manuscript of Ibn Qutayba’s ’Ibārat al-
ru’yā”, reprinted in M. J. Kister ed, Society And Religion From Jahiliyya To Islam, Britain/USA/Norfolk:
VARIORUM, 1990, section xiv, p. 72.
consult a *mua'bbir* for an interpretation of his dream because, as has been mentioned earlier, the basic function of dream in the Islamic belief system is to give signs of divination or to warn against unwelcome events. Further details are prescribed about the manner in which the dreamer must approach the interpreter, the nature of the interpreter, and the auspicious time at which the application for an exposition must be made. Here, perhaps the most significant duty enjoined on the dreamer is that he must relate his dream as seen. He must neither exaggerate nor abbreviate because “a true dream is a portion of the forty-sixth part of prophecy” (*khwāb rāst juzwi-ast az chiḥal u shish juz-i paighambarī*). And a warning is given according to a tradition that the Prophet said that “A true dream is [sent] from God to the dreamer, therefore whoever speaks less or more [about it] be warned!” (*Khwāb rāst mī-buwad bīninda' rā az khudāy ta'āla' pas har ki kam u bīsh goyad, bi-nigarad*).22

The duties enjoined on the interpreter are even more onerous than those prescribed for the dreamer. From the esteemed value assigned to dreams in the Islamic culture and the sublime status assigned to the art of oneiromancy, it is natural that the requirements imposed on the interpreter of dreams are manifold as regards character, qualifications and knowledge. Making an observation about the character of the interpreter Tiflisī quotes Dāniyāl that the *mu'abbir* must be knowledgable but humble (*dānā wa ḥalīm*), he should be removed from disobedience and error (*ma'siyat wa khata'*), he should know *zajar* and *fa'l* (augury from birds and other omens) for

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22 Kāmil ut-ta'bir, op. cit., p. 29.
interpreting certain dreams.\textsuperscript{23} The reason for multiple qualifications stems from the peculiar nature of this science. Tiflisī observes:

Ibn Sīrīn states that this science holds rank above all other sciences because the origin of every science does not change and it cannot be compared to ta'bīr. And its (ta'bīr) method is excellent because, every science has a method but, this science changes its origin due to the condition of men, on their appearance and profession, rank and status, and language. And also changes with time... and every scholar is independent of [knowledge] of any other science but for his own. The mu'aubbir, however, for the practice of 'ilm-i ta'bīr, should know Quran and traditions of the Prophet, proverbs of the Arabs and Persian, verses and current sayings, rare poems and fragments, and possess the knowledge of language...\textsuperscript{24}

All these features that qualify the changing nature of dream interpretation point to the fact that the principles of decoding are not to be discovered in divine messages, but in the day to day life of the dreamer. This emphasis on a comprehensive approach to ta'bīr is significant because it reveals the diversity of application of the dream in the Islamic civilization. Simultaneously, the passage also indicates the superior status of the science of ta'bīr vis a vis other sciences. Socially, the import of this passage conveys that, eventhough, the qualifications required of a mu'aabbir sound onerous, they were not

\textsuperscript{23} In fact Tiflisī has devoted the eight section of his introduction to interpretation by using fa'il and zajar, see \textit{ibid}, pp. 21-22.

\textsuperscript{24} Tiflisī states: \textit{Ibn Sīrīn goyad har ki martabat in 'ilm bar girad 'ilmhā az ān ast zirā ki har 'ilmī rā talab kunad aslāsh mukhtalīf na-gardad wa qiyyāsash ta'bīr na-pāztrad wa tāriqa-i o neku huwd zirā ki har 'ilmī ba-tariqi buwad magar in 'ilm ki āsl ba-gardad az ultiwāl-i mardum har hai'at u sanā'at, wa qadr u diyānat, wa kalima'i willādat ki har ultiwālī-f-i waqthā homi gardad... Badān ki har 'ilmī ki dānād mustaghni buwad az 'ilmī digarān ān mu'abbir ki ba'ītad ba-zārūrat 'ilmī ta'bīr qurān dānād wa akhayyār-i haqrat mustafawi wa amṣāl-i 'arab wa ājam wa āsh ar wa mārād wa ashhāq-i nā'mat wa al-fāq-i mulkāwāli ya'nī digar fīrāt girīftan... See \textit{Kāmil ut-tā'bir}, op. cit., pp. 10-11; see Appendix II/1 for Persian text. Also see a similar passage in Ibn Qutayba's \textit{Ibārat al ru'yā}, however, the author does not refer to Ibn Sīrīn in this case, M. J. Kister, \textquote{The interpretation of dreams. An unknown manuscript of Ibn Qutayba's \textit{Ibārat al-ru'yā}}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 74-75.
impossible to cultivate by someone who was literate by medieval standards. This explains the several instances of dreams in Islamic literature where the dreamer does not recourse to the *mu`abbir* for an exposition of his dream, but is satisfied by interpreting the experience for himself.

Here I would like to comment on a rather superficial comparative analysis between methodology of Artemidorus and Muslim oneirocritics made by an anthropologist, Benjamin Kilborne. On the basis of some field work done in Morocco this anthropologist states: “It is worth emphasizing that the prosaic, concrete system of Artemidorus in which meanings vary depending on the dreamer and the dream situation is quite unlike the more idealized system of dream interpretation which Islam and other religions seem to encourage”. In fact the relativity of meanings assigned to dream symbols in *ta`bîr* texts is further displayed in instructions given to the *mu`abbir* in the manner that he should interrogate the dreamer.

The interpreter should commence his inquiry by acquainting himself with the name of the dreamer and that of his father. He may even write it down, so as to draw an omen from it. If the name is of one of the prophets, then the interpretation will be auspicious. But if the names are of contrary import, then the dream has an evil import. Names of the prophets are favourable and Tiflisî has devoted a part of the sixteenth *fâsîl* in the beginning of the *Kâmil ut-ta`bîr* for the significance attached to seeing various prophets in dream.\(^{25}\) The interpreter should then proceed his inquiry and find out about the religion of the applicant, his rank and condition in life, his profession, occupation and

habits. The foremost duty of the interpreter is to listen carefully to the dream of and obtain details about it. According to Kirmānī, the mua'bbir must consider three things with regard to the images seen in dream. The first is the jins or the genus/kind, as birds, animals, animate or inanimate objects seen in dream. The second is sind, the species, as to whether the tree is a medlar or a palm, the bird is an ostrich or a peacock. This will lead to the knowledge of the character and country of the dreamer. For example, one who sees ostrich and palm is an Arab for both these are unknown in Persia; and one who sees peacock and medlar is a Persian for these are not found in Arabia. Thirdly, nu'a or tab'ī the manner and circumstances of objects seen, when and where are they seen, and how are these features related.26

This signifies a changeable character of interpretation and is illustrated in two interpretations of the same dream given by Ibn Sīrīn. Two different persons approached him with the same dream, in each case the dreamer saw himself performing the part of muezzin in calling the people to prayer. To the first Ibn Sīrīn foretold pilgrimage; to the other he predicted accusation of theft. When asked, Ibn Sīrīn explained that in the first person he had seen the marks of good countenance and he based his interpretation on the basis of the Quranic Sura “and proclaim unto mankind the pilgrimage”. For the second person’s appearance he was not pleased and used the following Quranic verse for exposition “… then a herald proclaimed: Ho cameleers you are robbers.”27

26 Ibid., pp. 26-27.
The meaning of dream also changes with changes in the religion and social grouping of the dreamer. As far as the first variable is concerned Ibn Sīrīn states that "dreams are conditional to two factors – either these are of believers or of non-believers" (khwāb az do ṭāl bīrūn nīst – ya mu’min ast, ya kāfir), further "there origin is of thirteen types" (ašl în bar sīz-dah nu’a ast). Ibn Sīrīn enlists the thirteen variants in the order of their relative significance. Dream of the qāzi (judge) is better than all others because he renders justice; the dream of the fuqaha (jurisconsults) are better than that of the ‘ulamā’ (theologians); then the dream of the free (āzād) is better than that of slaves (bandagan); the dream of a man is better than that of a woman because God had one hundred and twenty four thousand prophets and that men are superior to women; the dream of the mastūrān (law abiding) is better than that of sinners; the dream of the rich (tawāngirān) is better than that of the darwesh (mendicant) because the hand that gives is better than the hand that receives; dream of the major (bālīghī) is better than that of the minors (na-bālīghān).28

Another kind of dream stratification is traced to Kirmānī who refers to the relative merit of dreaming in contrasting pairs of social groups. Thus, the dreams of Muslims are better than those of non-believers; dreams of the knowledgable (dānā) are better than those of the ignorant (jāhil); those of the pious (sālih) are better than dreams of sinners (fāsiq); those of good men are better than dreams of bad men; dreams of the old are better and truer than those of young; and dreams of the young are truer than those of children.29

29 Ibid., p. 20.
In contrast to Ibn Sirīn's wider stratification that encompasses the religious, functional, class and gender based grouping, Kirmānī provides for a moralistic division of society. Reference to such stratification indicates that the oneiromancer is addressing many kinds of dreamers. The order of sequence is important as it reflects the society's response to the dream phenomena. But this stratification must not be confused with any kind of dream hierarchy that was observed in some Mediterranean societies. I am referring here to dream classification in ancient Mesopotamia where the "message" dream in which the deity communicates with the dreamer appears only to kings and priests. Such a dream was then recorded in a highly stylized fashion of one-sentence units that were known as "omens".30

The Islamic dream tradition is more egalitarian in approach, a feature that matches the Greek tradition as defined by Artemidorus in his Oneirocritica. But the egalitarian aspect in Islam was functional to an extent that it did not discriminate against qualitative dreaming on the basis of an individual's economic, political or social status. Here, the boundary of meaningful dreams was hedged up against the non-believer. This principle was a reiteration of the basic premise of ta'bīr that meaningful dreams are harbingers of good news from God.

Finally, in working out the interpretive principles of comparative dream interpretation of different social groupings, the Muslim oneiromancers develop a distinct language of symbols. In other words, the same symbol had a variety of complementary meanings depending on the identity of the dreamer. I may recall here the example of Ibn

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30 For dream classification in ancient Mesopotamia see A. Leo Oppenheim, "Mantic Dreams in the Ancient Near East" in The Dream And Human Societies, op. cit, pp. ; and for an anthropologist's assessment of this
Sīrīn’s two distinct interpretations of the same dream that occurred to two people when they saw themselves in the role of a muezzin. Further other features that are characterized as jins, sinf and nuʿa also influenced interpretation. This means that rather than distancing the dreamer and the interpreter from day-to-day concerns, dream interpretation brings them closer. The principles of interpretation are to be discovered not in any divine messages, but in the world of daily experience. The oneiromancer built on his vocabulary of symbols by keen observation of human behaviour he saw around him. In fact the system developed is rather mundane and is rooted in customs, habits, and psychological motivations and symbolic meanings collected either from a pre-Islamic past or understanding derived from observation at first hand. Thus by calling attention to the richness of everyday existence, by applying methods of everyday observation to behaviours around him the Muslim interpreter can be seen as having developed what Freud is now known for: a multivalence of symbols or “overdetermination”, one symbol having a variety of meanings for different people, and a method of relating dreams to the various hidden meanings of social and individual life.

Another method of interpretation is by antithetical means. According to Jaʿfar Şādiq there are several dreams that appear to paralyze and terrorize the dreamer and their interpretation is contrary to this content. Therefore grief, affliction and terror seen in dream become joy and happiness and bring peace and tranquility to the dreamer.31 Sometimes the dream is also interpreted etymologically. The Arabic vocabulary with its

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31 Kāmil ṣat-taʿbir, op. cit., p. 17.
manifold meanings for the same groups of consonants and the case of forming many
metathese furnishes numerous possibilities for the application of this method. This is
subdivided into three – the interpretation by etymology of the word; the interpretation by
adding consonants and syllables to the word; and interpretation by omiting syllables and
consonants of the word. There are several instances of this method in the Ḥayāt al ḥaiwān
of ad Damīrī. For example, Jamāl means beauty, but oit also means a camel; or Pigeon
(hamam) on the head of a sick man predestined death for himān means death.32

The interpretation could sometimes be maqlūb or reciprocal. That is an object,
which is dreamed of, indicates another and that which is indicated again means the
original object seen by the dreamer. In the fifteenth faṣl of his introduction, Tiflisī has
provided a few examples on the authority of Ibn Sīrīn. Thus mashaf, a sacred book that is
the Quran, indicates wisdom, and wisdom in dream indicates the Quran. Dreaming of
plague indicates a battlefield, and the battlefield in turn indicates plague. Sometimes
interpretation is made by refering to reciprocal results. For example purchasing a male
salve is bad, therefore, to sell one is good. And if a female slave is brought it is good, but
to sell one is bad.33

The import of the dream varies according to the time and season of dreaming. For
example if someone sees a dream at night that he is sitting on an elephant, he will
undertake an important affair from which he will derive much benefit. But if he sees this

32 See Joseph De Somogyi, “The Interpretation of Dreams in Ad-Damīrī’s Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān” in the JRAS
33 Kāmil ut-ta’bir, op. cit., p. 31.
dream in the morning he shall divorce his wife, and hence suffer trouble and grief.\textsuperscript{34} In another dream referred to by Tiflisî, the interpretation changes according to the season. A person, in a dream gathered seventy leaves of a tree and Ibn Sîrîn told him that he would be hit seventy times with a stick. It so happened. The next year this person saw the same dream and again asked for an interpretation. Ibn Sîrîn predicted that the person would get seventy thousand silver coins that year. When the man asked the reason for the changed interpretation, the mu'abbir replied that the first time the dreamer sought an interpretation it was autumn and trees had shed leaves, and the first prediction was applicable. The second time when the interpretation of the same dream was inquired it was spring and trees had new leaves, and Ibn Sîrîn predicted seventy thousand dirhams for the dreamer that was fulfilled.\textsuperscript{35} In the fourteenth faṣl, Tiflisî explains the relative merits of days of the week on which dreams should be interpreted. The early part of Saturday (shanmba, the last day Muslim week), is of evil omen for a dream; but the early part of the first day of the week – yakshanmba is good and so is Monday (do-shanmba). Tuesday (sih-shanmba) is bad and so is Wednesday (chihār-shanmba) because this is the day when the Prophet destroyed the armies of Hud and Samud. Thursday is considered as auspicious and Friday announces honour and exaltation.\textsuperscript{36} In the Kitāb al taqsīm of Imām Ja'far Śādiq omens for different days of the month are enumerated.

The period of ta'wil or the time of fulfillment of dream is directly related to the time when the dream was dreamt. According to Ja'far Śādiq a dream that is seen in the

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 24.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 25.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 29.
morning will be fulfilled within a few days. And the dream that is seen at night may come to pass within six months, or it may take a year, or even as long as twenty years to actualise just as in the Quran Yūsuf’s dream of warning about the famine in Egypt. It is also possible that a dream may come to pass after forty years just as in the case of Prophet Muhammad’s dream in which he saw the premonition of Imām Ḥusain’s death. Ja’bir Maghribī makes similar comment about the soundness of dreams seen towards the morning because the heavenly angels bring these dreams from the lauh-i mahfūz to the dreamer.

Here I would like to comment on the notion of oneric time in Islam, and the relationship between this dream time and the microchronic time that determines the daily and yearly rituals like the routine of day and night, monthly and seasonal cycles. On the other hand, the dream time is also related to the macrochronos or cosmic time dealing with the processes in nature and universe as is evident from the nature of causation and actualization of dream prediction in Islam. As we have been given to understand the basic belief about dreams is that sound dreams are God’s gift to man; that they are the mubashshirat or glad tidings shown to man after the death of the Prophet Muhammad; and that the dreams in which the Prophet appears cannot be false as the Devil cannot take the physical form of the Prophet. The carefully detailed prescriptions for the dreamer and

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37 Moshe Idel in his study of astral dreams in Judaism has referred to different notions of the time. There is the notion of private time consisting of birth, youth, maturity and death, and the oneric time is a special form of private, conscious time; then there is the microchronic time that refers to the rhythms of daily and yearly rituals; historical time dealing with events of groups and nations, described as mesochronos; and the cosmic time, dealing with processes of nature and universe, which is called macrochronos time. A person may inhabit some of these times at the same time. See idem “Astral Dreams in Judaism, Twelfth to Fourteenth Centuries” in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in Comparative History of Dreaming*, edited by David Schulman and Guy G. Stroumsa, Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 235-251.
the mu`abbir – first for the purpose of seeing a sound dream and then securing its interpretation, indicates the innate urge to control the dream. In other words, the process of dreaming and the process of exposition were related to control over the cosmic time.

One technique for exercising control over cosmic time in Islam is the use of *istikhāra* that has been described by scholars as a practice akin to the observance of incubation in the Mediterranean world. This was a technique known to the Mediterranean antiquity and associated with the cult of Asklepios of Epidorus. Incubation involved the practice of sleeping in a sacred place, usually in the sanctuary of a god whose oracle was sought in order to dream a cure to ailments of body and soul, and to seek guidance and knowledge of the future from the divine being. Toufy Fahd has observed that there are only traces of incubation in orthodox Islam as in the therapeutic usage of dreams. The practice called *istikhāra* consists of a recital of a special prayer with the expectation of an answering dream. This practice is an Islamic substitution for incubation, a substitute because the element ordinarily thought essential – all night vigil in a sanctuary – has been eliminated. In the light of my own reading of certain sufi sources, I shall like to draw attention to an alternate function of *istikhāra* as an instrument of monitoring the master’s

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38 Cf. Toufy Fahd, “*Istikhāra*” in *EP*, vol. iv, eds. E. van Danzel et.al, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978, pp. 259-260; In all of Islamicized North Africa, however, it is a common practice to sleep in the shrine of a marabout in order to dream there. Jean Lecerf has cited a few examples from Egypt of dreaming cures in a sacred sanctuary, see idem, “The Dream in Popular Culture: Arabic and Islamic” in *The Dream and Human Societies*, op.cit, pp. 365-379. In common parlance, however, the term *istikhāra* means conciliating divine favour, which is usually obtained by seeking a good augury in the Quran or a revered text like the *Dīwān* of Ḥāfīz. In my sources the term specifically refers to the practice that is somewhat akin to incubation in the Mediterranean world. I shall, therefore, be discussing *istikhāra* only with reference to dreams and not any other means of divination.
control over his disciples. I have discussed these aspects of *istikhāra* in the third Chapter of this thesis.

Further, oneiric time is also linked to historical time that deals with certain events that have been pre-determined for the Muslims. One such historical event is the appearance of the Mahdī or ‘Guide’ at the end of every century in Islam. An average Muslim also expects the appearance of a Mahdī in historic time. Some visionary will preempt or confirm his arrival in his oneiric time and consequently seek legitimacy for leadership of the *ummat*.

The oneiric manuals even provide techniques for recovering forgotten dreams. In the ninth *faṣl* Tīfīsī has given us the detail of two distinct methods of Jaʿfar Ṣādiq and Ibn Sirīn. According to Jaʿfar Ṣādiq if someone has forgotten his dream and desires to know it the *muʿabbir* should inquire the name of such a person and count the numerical value of the letters of his name, add them up and from this subtract by nines, and consider the remainder (*Haẓrat Ṣādiq farmāyad ki chun kāsī khwābī dida-bīd wa farāmosh karda wa khwāhad ki khwāb wai rā ba-dānad, ṣarīqāsh ān ast ki nāmash ba-pursad wa harfīyī nāmash rā ba-shumārad wa jama` kunad wa az ān pas nuh-nuh tarah kunad wa baqī rā nigah ba-dārad...*). The method is further illustrated with examples. If nine remains, it indicates that the dream has been of cities, which is of evil implication; and if eight remains, travel or marriage was seen in dream; and if seven remains, of oxen and harvests and corn; six indicates seeing angels and holy men in dream, which denotes completion of undertakings at hand; five implies miller and arms; four indicates the same;
if three remains someone has related a secret; two implies seeing someone who will benefit the dreamer in religious and worldly affairs; and one recalls seeing a great man or a king, this predicts that the dreamer will attain his desire and be delivered from his troubles. These elucidations are derived from the passages of the Quran in which such number occurs, and with which the muʿabbir is adequately acquainted. For instance in the case where nine is the remainder the interpretation is derived from the following Quranic verse: “And there were nine men in the city who acted corruptly in the earth, and behaved not with integrity”. 39

In the same section Tīflisī has observed another method detailed by Ibn Sīrīn. A person who has forgotten his dream should put his hand to his body. If the hand is elevated to the head a mountain was seen; if the hand is on the fore head it means a hill or land were seen; if on the eye a waterfall; if the hand rests on the nose a valley was seen in the dream and so on. Here the interpretation is obviously founded on the resemblance between each limb and the object it indicates. After this application the muʿabbir can discover and interpret the questioner’s dream which was forgotten. What is the rationale for such interpretation? The systematic sequence in bodily parts, from the head to the toe of the foot, relating to the physiogamy of the earth is derived from the culturally grounded conceptions and perceptions of the self, the body and bodily parts. Here we may recall the Islamic conception of human body as a composition of four humors – blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile – that reflect the qualities of earthly elements – water, mud, air and fire. As a logical extention of this analogy between physical components of the

39 Ibid., pp. 22-23.
human body and the material make-up of the corporeal world, is the metaphor of comparison between physical parts of the human body and the geographical contours of the earth. To this extent dream interpretation is an expression of the worldview of the Muslims.

In the minds of the oneirocritics the method of their discipline was well defined. In the tenth section of his introductory Tiflisî expresses his reservation about those who suggest efficacy of interpretation without the knowledge of ta’bir. He refers to Kirmānî at this point who categorically refuted a common belief in his day that anybody could interpret dreams without the adequate knowledge of ta’bir.

Kirmānî states that there is a belief amongst the common people that anyone can interpret someone’s dream without the knowledge of the science of interpretation of dreams. Whatever they say is incorrect and absurd, and does not have any truth in it. According to their custom, the scholars state that no one should recite their dream before someone who is not knowledgable [about dream interpretation].

The interpretation of dreams was not simply based on a typology of dreams, their stimuli, and the material content, but it also set the dream images and their meanings in relation to different contexts of the waking world. The dream was an extension of our waking selves but not in the sense that Freud suggested. Only those extensions were acceptable that were reprocessed through angelic beings who had prior knowledge of earthly events. Further an allegorical dream need not be the exclusive concern of the

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40 Tiflisî in the 10th section, ‘Dar guzârdan-i khwâb ba qaul-i jâhilân’ states the opinion of Kirmānî in these words: Kirmānî goyad ba nazâi mardumân ‘ammâ yaqín chinân ast ki har ki khwâb kasti râ ta’bir kunad ba nadâm-i ta’bir tilmî, niz hamân buwad ki wai gufta buwad, wa in mâhâl buwad wa ghâlat wa hîch qâl nadârâd. Lekin hukamâ az fariqa ma’al rawâ nadâshtâ-and ki kasti khwâb pesh-i nâdân goyad. See Kâmîl ut-ta’bir, op. cit., pp. 23-24; Appendix II/2 for the Persian text.
dreamer, the mu'abbir knows of certain dreams the interpretation of which is significant for someone else known to the dreamer. Sometimes a dream is significant for the parents of the dreamer, such is the case of dreams of minor children. While sometimes a dream dreamt by a wife is significant for her husband. This indicates another way in which the dream was linked to the physical reality of the dreamer.

III

Interpretation – dealing with the philosophical aspect of the dream

According to a universally accepted premise, in monotheistic religions the cosmic reality is bifurcated into two separate and unreconcilable parts – ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’; ‘sensory’ and ‘suprasensory’; ‘profane’ and ‘sacred’. A direct communication between these two parts is considered to be quite impossible. This is especially true for iconoclast-monotheistic religions. But the religious intent to transcend the ephemeral and reach the Divine is common to all religions. The vehicle for affecting this transcendence is the human imagination. In the non-iconoclast and pantheistic religions human imagination relates an image or an icon to an allegorical representation of the Divine. In iconoclast religions, such as in Islam, human imagination as a vehicle of transcending the ephemeral creates an imagery of visions and theophanies. The theologians of Islam had a problem with this imagery. They recoiled from the visions and theophanies because there is a danger of associating imagery with God. Despite the theologians apprehension there was an innate curiosity among the earliest philosophers and mystics of Islam to explain the

41 Ibid., pp. 16-17.
visionary phenomena that was, in fact, an intimate aspect of Muhammad's own experience of revelation. Both, the philosopher and the mystic, explained this experience in terms of communication between the world of physical realities and the world of spirits as a function of human imagination. The perception of imagination, however, varied in case of the two disciplines.

Of somewhat similar nature is the problem of dreams in Islam. The sound dream is a forty-sixth part of prophecy, states an Islamic tradition attributed to the Prophet. This statement implied that while prophecy had come to an end with Prophet Muhammad, messages of divine origin could still be communicated through dreams, although on a smaller scale than prophecy. For philosophy it meant that in a state of suspension from the outer senses, a state that occurs during sleep or in deep contemplation, the human intellect could become united with the Universal Intellect and thus have access to transcendental truths. For Sufism it meant that divine inspiration (i̊lhām) could be granted to the 'friends of God' (auliya‘ allāh). The nature of this minor revelation could be either transparent or opaque – in which case it was subject to interpretation. In face of opposition from the theologians and in view of the need to explain their mystical visions, the spirituales of Islam developed the notion of the 'third world' – halfway between the world of possible perception and the world of intelligibility – within which their experiences acquired form. Sufis have described this world as the world of symbols or idea-images and have called it the 'ālam-i miṣāl.43

43 The genesis of the idea of ʻālam-i miṣāl can be traced to Platonian and Iranian concepts of cosmology according to which the cosmos is divided in distinct spheres of existence. The highest sphere of existence is the world of absolute divine transcendence and the lowest sphere is the world of sensual perceptions. In
In their prophetology, the Muslim philosophers had laid great emphasis on the function of imagination in prophetic revelation. The human soul provided it is pure and strong enough, can contact the unseen in waking life as well as in dreams. All that is required to achieve is a withdrawal of the soul from the tumult of sensory life to establish contact with the Active Intellect. But just as in dreams the role of imagination is fundamental and transforms purely spiritual truths into symbols, so in waking life when a prophet receives revelation, it becomes clothed in form of images and figures. Just as dreams require interpretation (ta‘bir), so does revelation require a symbolic interpretation (ta‘wil). Through this process the prophetic word is carried back to its original esoteric sense. This is essentially a Greek doctrine that was incorporated into Islamic philosophy by al-Fārābī A.D. (d. 950) who modified it by associating divinity with the notion of the Active Intellect.\textsuperscript{44}

In the introduction of the Al-risāla al-manāmiyya, which is also known as Ta‘bir al-ru‘yā or Ta‘wil al-ru‘yā,\textsuperscript{45} Ibn Sīnā A.D. (980-1037) states that he had followed several Greek and Arabic works on dream-visions and their interpretation. But this does not mean that his treatise is a mere repetition of earlier philosophers’ views on dreams. Ibn Sīnā’s efforts were unique to the extent that he for the first time dealt with the physiological

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\textsuperscript{45} See Chapter I above for a discussion of the text.
functions of sleep and defined the faculties involved in the process of dreaming.\textsuperscript{46} Ibn Sīnā’s discussions concentrate on the ‘contemplative essence’ or ‘spirit’ that resides in the human brain and has the faculty of intellect as its most worthy component because it controls all other human faculties, like those associated with perception and movement. When the sense perception and physical movements are at rest the body is in a state of rest or sleep.\textsuperscript{47} During sleep, however, the faculty of intellect, which comprises of three other faculties – imagination, reflection and memory – continues to work. The process of dreaming – its experience, recollection, and interpretation – is a function of the faculty of intellect. When the body is asleep the imaginative faculty sees a series of images on account of three reasons. These images may be inspired from things seen during waking, some originate from ideas transferred by the reflective faculty, and some other images may be affected by changes in humoural balance of the body. The imaginative faculty then transfers these impressions to the reflective faculty. The latter screens these impressions with the help of conjecture and discretion. These impressions are then preserved by the faculty of memory till such time as the person wakes up from sleep and recollects the dream experience. Now, the manner in which the imaginative faculty


\textsuperscript{47} Ibn Sīnā has discussed sleep in chapter 3 of his treatise see the translation by M. Mu’id Khan, “Kitabū Ta’bīr ir-Ruya of Abū ’Ali B. Sīnā”, ibid., pp. 26-27.
perceives these images determines the nature of the dream. These styles of image perception determined three types of false dreams that are not worthy of interpretation.\(^48\)

Ibn Sīnā then goes on to discuss the real dream (al-ru'yā al-haqqā) that occurs when an external agent thrusts certain images on the dreamer. The nature of the external agent is the same as determined in Aristotle’s *De Sensu et Sensato* about dream-visions.\(^49\)

The true spiritual dream-vision consists in a representation (tasawwur) of the Universal Intellect (al-'aql al-kullī) accorded to an individual during sleep. In other words, these dreams are revealed by God to man through the intermediary agency of this Intellect for the purpose of imparting information, instruction and warning. Such dreams are of two types – literal dreams that are self-explanatory; and symbolic dreams that need interpretation.\(^50\)

Even though Ibn Sīnā establishes the crucial role of imagination in the process of dreaming he does not attribute definite figures to images. Hence the issue of relationship between the dream and the material world remains, somewhat, ambiguous.

The philosophers did not accord an ontological status to the dream outside the experiencing body. The ontological reality of the images was first effected within Sufism

\(^48\) In chapters 2-5 of his treatise Ibn Sīnā has made a detailed study of various psychic faculties and specially the relation between the function of animal spirit and sleep, and the role of imagination in dreaming, see *ibid.*, pp. 23-30; and S. Pines, “The Arabic recension of *Parva Naturalia* and the philosophical doctrine concerning veridical dreams according to *al-Risāla al-Manāmiyya*”, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-110.

\(^49\) This treatise is known as *Al-hass wa'l-mahsus* and this title is applied to the whole collection of treatise known as *Parva Naturalia*. Ibn Sīnā has devoted the ninth chapter of his *Taḥlīl al-ru'yā* to “Aristotle’s views about this power”, see M. Mu'īd Khan, *ibid.*, p. 48-49; S. Pines has examined in detail the relationship between Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of dreams and Aristotle’s *De Sensu et Sensato* in his article mentioned above.

\(^50\) M. A. M. Khan, “Kitāb Ta‘bīr ir-ruya of Abū 'Ali b. Sīnā”, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49 & 51-54; also S. Pines, “The Arabic recension of *Parva Naturalia* and the philosophical doctrine concerning veridical dreams according to *al-Risāla al-Manāmiyya* and other sources”, *op. cit.*, 112-113; The Arabic terminology used
and is an attempt to explain certain dogmatic beliefs, particularly of an eschatological nature. It is in the eighth chapter of the last book of the *Ihyā′ 'ulūm ad-dīn*, the author Abū Hamīd al-Ghazālī A.D. (d.1111), offers an exposition of dreams while dealing with certain matters of eschatological belief. After death, says al-Ghazālī, a person is transported from the ‘world of possession and sense perception’ (‘ālam al-mulk wa ash shahāda) to the ‘world of angelic kingdom and the unseen’ (‘ālam al-malakūt wa’ l ghāʾib). Dream visions also come from the latter realm and therefore, the perception of the true dreamer resembles the non-corporeal perception of the soul in the world to come. Both relate to the mode of ‘inner seeing’ (mushāhada) that is independent of the outer senses. For example, while explaining the tradition about the ‘punishment in the grave’, al-Ghazālī asserted that serpents that assail a wicked person in his grave are not just spiritual realities but ‘real things’ that are objectively existent, although these are perceptible through ‘another sense’ with which everyone is not endowed. In this connection al-Ghazālī points out to the phenomenon of terrifying dreams wherein one endures real fright and pain but this experience is real only for the dreamer, and this is unlike the serpents in the grave that are objectively existent but perceptible through another sense.

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31 For Al-Ghazālī’s exposition of dreams see Sara Sviri, “Dreaming Analyzed and Recorded: Dreams in the World of Medieval Islam” in *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, op. cit., especially pp. 256 & 257.

But sometimes a veridical vision, which is a smaller kind of prophecy, may be revealed to certain pious people during their lifetimes. Al-Ghazālī explains that in a state of ritual and inner purity the veil covering the heart is lifted and a vision of the future is revealed to the heart. The heart is like a mirror upon which forms (ṣuwar) and meanings (maʾni) from the Heavenly Tablet (lauh-i mahfūz), that records all created and pre-ordained phenomena from the beginning of creation to its end, are reflected. The incorporeal forms that exist in the unseen realm are reflected on this Tablet, and the unveiled heart (free from sensual concerns) mirrors the images reflected in this Tablet. In other words, visions from the world of the unseen may flash and become reflected upon the heart. This is best achieved in sleep, since in sleep the organic senses lie dormant. The faculty of imagination (khayāl), which continues to work in sleep, translates the incorporeal forms reflected on the heart of the dreamer during sleep into analogous images, which are then stored in memory (tāfz). When the dreamer wakes up he remembers only the images. These images require interpretation, since these are the symbolic representations of the truths reflected form the lauh-i mahfūz. The muʾabbir derives meanings hidden behind the dream images by making relevant associations. ⁵³

Al-Ghazālī thus makes an attempt to tie the Islamic eschatological belief and sufi images on the one hand, with some concepts drawn from the current philosophical theories referred to above, on the other hand. The problem of defining the relationship between eschatological matters and material reality is henceforth defined in terms of an

ontological status given to life after death. But the issue about the dream-vision and its ontological status remained undefined.

Shihabuddin Suhrwardi (d. A.D. 1191) finally took this step. The Shaikh-i ışhrāq (Master of Illumination) formally announced the possibility of a new realm between the physical and spiritual spheres of existence. Suhrwardi called this intermediary realm as the ‘realm of suspended images’ (al-musul al mu’allaqah) or of ‘pure images’ (al-ashhāb al mujarradah). He ascribed esoteric experiences to this realm and also affirmed that it is here that the resurrection of the body takes place, the divine figures of angels become real and all the eschatological statements of the Prophet Muhammad come true. This is the beginning of the creation of the ʿālam-i miṣāl that was constructed for the purpose of serving as a place where the miraculous is somehow made ‘normal’.54 The entire idea of this intermediary realm is obviously rooted in the theory of imagining power. One must be careful in stating this criterion and not confuse it with what we call as hallucination. Sufi theosophers like Ibn ʿArabī (d. A.D. 1240) and Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī (d. A.D. 1640) have consciously explained this difference. I shall comment on this towards the end of this section, and like to continue with Ibn ʿArabī’s exposition of dreams and visions. Ibn ʿArabī stands at the peak of the centuries long development of theories and analyses of dream and imagination. Well versed in the Aristotelian philosophy, he combined the function of the imaginative faculty with insights inspired by his mystical tradition and experiences. According to Ibn ʿArabī imagination (khayāl) belongs to an intermediary

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realm – it is a barzakh.\(^{55}\) It is an isthmus, between the existent and the non-existent, and yet has an ontological status in his cosmological conception. In other words, when one perceives imagination, one perceives the existent and the non-existent at the same time.\(^{56}\)

In the Sufism of Ibn `Arabī the entire creation is a result of Divine Imagination.\(^{57}\) The Absolute yearned in lonliness, and according to the tradition, “I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known so I created the world”, the Absolute produced a creation as a mirror for His manifestations (tajalliyāt). The resultant creation, in the metaphysical-ontology of Ibn `Arabī, is conceptualized in five successive planes of Being (wujūd) or levels of Divine self-manifestation.\(^{58}\) The five planes constitute an organic system of correspondences in such a way that the things of a lower plane serve as symbols or images for the things of the higher planes.\(^{59}\) Thus, whatever exists in the plane of ordinary reality (which is the lowest of all Divine Presences) is a symbol exemplification (mišāl)

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\(^{56}\) In his extensive study of imagination and the world of the imaginal in Islamic mystical philosophy, Henri Corbin has explained this doubling in the essence of the plane of imagination (ḥazrat al-khayāl) by using the analogy of the ‘veil’. Imagination has two possibilities, since it can reveal the hidden only by continuing to veil it. Sometimes this veil can become so opaque as to imprison us, and sometimes it is transparent. Cf. H. Corbin, Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn ‘Arabi, Princeton: Princeton University press, 1969, p. 187.


\(^{58}\) The structure of these planes (ḥazrat), as described by al-Qāshānī is as follows: the plane of Essence (zār) is the world of absolute non manifestation; the plane of Attributes and Names (ulūhiyya); the plane of Action or Lordship (rubūbiyya); the plane of images (mišāl) and imagination (khayāl); the plane of senses and sensible experience (mushāhada), see T. Izutsu, Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts, op. cit., p. 20; An alternate cosmological sequence is suggested in the following descending order of planes of Being: the Divine essence itself is known as ḥāhūt; the world of Divine Nature revealing Itself in Its perfect qualities (lāhūt); the world of spiritual existence beyond form (jabarūt); the world of imagination or similitudes (‘alam-i mišāl); the world of angelic beings (malakūt); and the world of human bodily forms (nāsūt), see S. H. Nasr, Three Muslim Sages, Delmar: Caravan Books, 1976, p. 113.

\(^{59}\) T. Izutsu, ibid., pp. 11-20.
for a thing existing in the plane of images, and everything that exists in the latter is a form
reflecting a state of affairs in the preceding plane.

For Ibn `Arabî, dreaming is a function of imagination that is common to both the
gnostic and the common people. In sleep when the outer senses of perception are in a
state of rest, a person may see corporeal things that do not possess any real corporeal
forms. These objects exist in the `alam-i mişâl. In case of the gnostics, however, there
may be certain states such as ‘absence’ (ghâ‘iba), ‘annihilation’ (fanâ), and ‘obliteration’
(mahw), during which the psychic attention is directed inward rather than toward the
world of sense perception. In such states, the rational soul (nafs-i nâtiqa) contemplates
with its inner organs the images that have been stored in the treasury of the imagination
(khazînat al-khayâl). These images have been stored there by the activities of the outer
organs and senses. Ibn `Arabî like his predecessors, assigned imagination the role of a
mediator between the realm of intelligibles (that have no material form) and the realm of
bodily senses, so that it may translate intelligible ideas into formal images. By performing
this function, imagination brings together two realms – that of meaning and sensory form,
and hence facilitates a coincidentia oppositorum (al-jam` bayn al-azdâd). It is through
this function of the khayâl that human beings, especially during sleep and also in extreme
mystical states, can perceive something of the spiritual world, which is the world of
reality (haqîqa).\textsuperscript{60} Thus in dreams, through the imaginative faculty, even divine attributes
can be perceived in corporeal form. The auliya‘ allâh, according to Ibn `Arabî, see

\textsuperscript{60} W. C. Chittick, \textit{The Sufi Path of Knowledge}, op. cit., p. 115.
images of highly spiritual beings like angels, prophets, the heavenly throne (‘arsh), and even God. What is to be observed here is that all these things do not possess any body (jasad) of their own, what is seen in the dream is actually an ‘embodiment’ (tajassud) of angels, prophets, or even God.\(^{61}\)

If dream images are sensual personifications of non-sensual realities, they need to be interpreted by someone who has access to knowledge of the intelligible world. The interpreter (mu‘abbir), like imagination itself, is mediating, crossing over, between the dreamer, the dream images, and the intelligible meanings that lie behind these images. He is also mediating between his own imaginative faculty and that of the dreamer. This mediation is expressed in the Arabic term assigned to interpretation – \(\text{ta‘bir}\) which is derived from the root \(b - r\) meaning ‘to cross over’. It is the mu‘abbir who passes from the sensory form of the dream to the meaning which has put on the clothing of form. The cosmic Imagination may or may not coincide with the imagination of the interpreter. If it does it is called his understanding (\(\text{fa‘fh}\)).\(^{62}\)

It is clear that the entire structure of Ibn `Arabi’s cosmology is based on the notion of imagination. But this imagination is not to be confused with the ‘imaginary’ which is a product of human fantasy. He distinguishes between an imagination conjoined to an imagining subject (\(\text{khayāl muttaṣil}\)) and a self-subsisting imagination dissociable from the subject (\(\text{khayāl munfaṣīl}\)).\(^{63}\) The former due to its conjoined nature lives and dies with the

\(^{61}\) Ibid., p. 116.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., p. 119.

subject. The imagination separable from the subject, on the other hand, has an autonomous and subsisting reality in the world of idea-images. ‘Exterior’ to the imagining subject, it can be seen by others in the outside world, but in practice these others must be mystics. Thus the ṭalām-i miṣāl is guaranteed an objective status, independent and distinct from the working of the individual psyche.

The theory of ontological gradations as developed by Ibn `Arabī was further elaborated by Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī.64 The most difficult issue resolved by Mullā Ṣadrā was that of the type of relationship between the Absolute Being and particular beings. As long as the issue of the hierarchical gradation of Being was not adequately addressed, the philosophers could challenge the existential status of mystical experience. The primary theses on the basis of which Mullā Ṣadrā addressed this problem was the notion that only those who have intimately experienced a mystical ‘unveiling’ (kashf) of the hierarchical gradation of Being are alone capable of providing a veracious proof for the demonstration of these ontological stages. Secondly, the theory of imagination, as developed by Ibn `Arabī was further developed by Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī to formulate an organic relationship between the different spheres of existence. He explained that nothing could exist at the lowest level unless it has passed through the upper grades of existence. And conversely, that nothing moves to a higher grade of existence without having passed through the

intermediary grades. This means that everything in this world has a triple existence. From the realm of Pure Intellect, a thing ‘descends’ into the `alam-i miṣāl and then to the physical realm. Similarly in the ‘ascent’ where things return to the Primordial Source, the `alam-i miṣāl is again traversed.

When the gnostic experiences dreams and visions, he is aware that these are occurrences belonging to the ‘imaginal world’. The apparitions of figures and lights are symbolic of the actual Reality. Therefore, the visionary seeks their interpretation (ta‘wil). Through the process of ta‘wil the gnostic discovers the esoteric meaning of visions. When the sufi experiences the `alam-i miṣāl and through it acquires the knowledge of the spiritual realm, he is said to ‘return’ to the Primordial Source. In the process of mystical ‘return’ the `alam-i miṣāl functions as an isthmus (barzakh) between our phenomenal reality and the World of Incorporeality. This intermediary function of the `alam-i miṣāl is elaborated in the mystical philosophy of the eighteenth century theologian and sufi Shāh Wali Allāh Dihlawī A.D. (1703-1762). He opined that the `alam-i miṣāl “serves for the manifestation of the World of Immaterial Entities (`alam-i arwāḥ) (above it) as well as the forms reflected from the material world (below it)”.

For him it represents a ‘World of Prefiguration’ in which things and events are shaped before they are embodied in actual existence on the earth. These prefigurations appear in the same way as an architect draws the shape of a house on paper before he builds it in

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66 For the significance of ta‘wil in Sufism see H. Corbin, “The Visionary Dream in Islamic Spirituality”, op. cit., pp. 381-387.
empiric reality. In other words, all Divine Planning is first visualized in and by the 'ālam-i miṣāl. This realm thus functions as the intellectual centre of the universe.68

It is through this theory of 'ālam-i miṣāl and its prefiguration function that Shāh Walī Allāh explains the visionary experience of sufis and their predictive function. For the sufis divinatory dreams are explained in terms of miracles (karāmat) or the khawāriq-i 'ādat (lit. breaking of habits, otherwise miracles) that are bestowed by God on the auliya‘ allāh. Shāh Walī Allāh has explained this phenomenon in his Hama‘at. He states that:

Of the various miracles, knowledge of the future events is one. And this happens in various ways. Sometimes in sleep (manām) a resemblance/form/likelihood of the future event appears and from that place the reality of that event is perceived with [the help] of interpretation or exposition, or without them. And sometimes in [state of] vigil/waking (yaqṣa) a resemblance of that (event) appears before him and quickly disappears. And sometimes in a state between waking and sleep, and sometimes in imaginative faculty a resemblance of that event appears, without any form or colour. Just as someone in his imagination draws a picture of love or hate. And sometimes the unseen voice (hātif) is heard from outside [that predicts the event].69

68 Ibid., p. 23.
Shāh Wālī Allāh is obviously referring to four distinct types of visionary experiences namely, the dream seen in sleep, vision of waking state, or that which is seen in between sleep and waking, and the auditory dream. His explanation about the predetermination of such events is elucidated in his theory of miracles. According to this theory when a sufi crosses the stages of sulūk and reaches a station where events of the unseen are unveiled for him. This is the realm of spirits (‘ālam-i nafūs) and in this station the sufi attains whatever he prays for. By God’s grace miracles are made possible for the auliyā’ allāh in this station. Regarding Kirmanī the predetermination of events Shāh Wālī Allāh explains that every event first acquires a form in the sublime assembly (mala’i a’lā) and sometimes the angels of the lower realm (mala’i sāfila) acquire knowledge of that event. But sometimes the knowledge of the future event is revealed to a person who has risen above the beastial instinct and concentrates on the mala’i a’lā, the form of that event which is already prefigured in the spiritual realm is then reflected on this person’s reason.70

In Islam the intellectual tradition never tires of discussing the imaginal realm. This is the locus where the spiritual realities are seen in the visionary experience and all eschatological events mentioned in the Quran and the hadīṣ take place as mentioned. If on the Day of Resurrection, as reported by the Prophet, death is brought in the form of a salt coloured ram and slaughtered, this is because the imaginal existence allows abstract meanings to take on concrete form. And if all the works performed during the lifetime of

70 But this is conditional on two things. One is that the person should have affiliation for this event, and this affiliation should be more than any other inclination he has. Secondly, the knowledge of future events is
an individual are placed in the scales, the good deeds in the right pan and the bad deeds in
the left, this is because imagination brings about the subtilization of corporeal activities.
This visionary realm is considered the self-revelation of God. This is the realm where the
angel of Revelation physically manifests himself, where the impossible becomes possible
and miracles take place. 71 Despite the fact that ‘ālam-i miṣāl had become an integral part
of the sufi spiritual culture in Hindūstān, the attitude of individual sufis could vary. In this
context it will be significant to note the views of a Naqshbandī sufi, Shaikh Ahmad
Sirhindī A.D. (1624), who accepted the ‘ālam-i miṣāl as other sufis did, but he sought to
divest it of its ontological status and declared it to be a mere experience. In a letter to a
disciple the Shaikh counselled: ‘‘ālam-i miṣāl is for seeing not for being; the place for
being is either the spiritual world or the physical world’’. 72

In this Chapter I have tried to locate the logical and the philosophical aspects of
the dream in the Islamic civilization. The emphasis has been on the classification and
methodological tools required in the interpretation of dreams in the textual tradition of
ta’bīrnāma. However, the dreams as they appear in the narratives of chronicle sources,
biographies and letters of the sufis, and so on, seem to have borrowed little from the
ta’bīrnāma. The logic of the narrative and interpretation of dreams in these sources is,
generally speaking, quite different from that of the dream keys. The narratives consider
dreams both in their totality and in the unique personal or social situation of the dreamer,

71 For a more elaborate account of the happenings in this realm see W. C. Chittick’s Introduction to The Sufi
Path of Knowledge, op. cit.
72 F. Rahman, Selected Letters of Shaikh Ahmad Sirhindī, Karachi: Iqbal Academy, 1968, p. 63; also cf.
while the dream keys might appear to fragment oneiric content into isolated images, interpreting them according to an alternative logic, regardless of the context. This contrast might appear to be so strong that it may make one wonder whether the dream keys were ever used in a frequent or systematic fashion in the medieval society. In the following Chapter I have concentrated on patterns of dreaming as related in the sufi hagiographical texts that were authored in the northern part of the subcontinent between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries. It will be seen that while the sufi perception of causation and classification of dreams conforms to the tradition of the ta'birnāma, the interpretative aspect of the visionary experience varies with respect to the immediate context of the narrative.
APPENDIX II

ابن سیرین گوید هرکه مرتب این علم برگیرد علمها از آنست زیرا که هر علمی را طلب کند
اصلش مختلف نگردد و قیاسش تعبیر نپذیرد و طریق ار تیکو بود زیرا که هر علمی به طریقی
بود مگر این علم که اصل بگرد از احوال مردم بر هستند و صناعت و قدر و دبایت و کماله
و لادن که بر اختلاف وقتها همی گردید...بدان که هر علمی که دانست مسئول بود از علم دیگران
معبر که باید به ضرورت علم تعبیر قرآن دانید و اختصار حضرت مصطفی و امثال عرب و عجم
و اشعار و نواحی و اشفاق نعمت و الفاظ منتداول یعنی دیگر فارغ فتنه و نیز باید زیرک و عارف
بود و شما و احوال مردم را نیکو شناسد به قیاس و اصول را نیکو دانید و با این همه
مستغیب نباشد...

کرمانی گوید به نزد مردمان عادم پیش چنانست که هرکه خواب کسی را تعبیر کند به نادانی
tعیبر علمی نیز همان بوده که چگونه بود و این محل بود و نگل و هیچ اصل ندارد. لیکن
حکما از طریق مال روا نداشتند که کسی خواب پیش نادان گوید.

پس از جمله خوارا ابکشاف حوادث مستقبله است و این بجند طریق می یا باند. گاهی در منام
حاله متمن متّمل می شود و ازان چا بحقیقت آن کار مطلع می کرد به تعبیر و ناولی یا بی‌آن و
گاهی در نظر به حضور و چیزی متمن شود و زود محور گردید و گاهی در حالی میان یقظه
و منام و گاهی در وقت واحمه صورت آن حاله متمن متّمل می شود و بی‌آن که نفید و لونی
باشد. چنانچه صورت مجید کسی پا صورت غصب کسی در واحمه پندا می شود و گاهی
صورت یافت از خارج نشیده می شود.