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THE EARLY MUSLIM TRADITION
OF DREAM INTERPRETATION

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INTRODUCTION

Wishing to learn spoken Syriac, I once spent the summer in a Syrian Orthodox monastery in the Middle East. While language instruction consumed the daylight hours, the long summer evenings were free. These were spent on a veranda of the monastery, drinking tea and working through volume after dusty volume of medieval Arabic poetry under the tutelage of a Syrian friend, by profession a professor of Arabic literature. One evening as we were reading some remarkably bad poetry on the glories of Aleppo, my friend opined that of the whole corpus of medieval Muslim literature perhaps a third has been published, while another third remains to be published, while yet another third does not deserve to be published. Whether, in fact, a full third of medieval Muslim literature does not deserve publication is perhaps a matter for contention—and certainly the poetry we were then reading would be a strong contender for that dubious honor. It is the other two-thirds that are here of interest. I suspect that my friend's estimates were right when it comes to Koranic commentary, collections of prophetic traditions, historical treatises, and the like—subjects long of interest to researchers. He was far too optimistic in other instances. A case in point: the many forms of medieval Muslim literature on divination.

Whether by way of physiognomy, geomancy, palmistry, dream interpretation, or any of a dozen other methods, medieval Muslims evinced a lively interest in the arts of divination. The manuscript collections of the Muslim world are replete with hundreds of thousands of texts on these subjects. Despite their ubiquity, few have had the good fortune to attract the attention of researchers. Illustrative in this regard is Fuat Sezgin's magisterial, multivolume history of Arabic literature, the standard manual of reference for early Arabic literature. Notwithstanding the extent of Sezgin's labors, what he delivers belies his title. His is not a history of early Arabic literature, but of select moments in its history. One may note, in particular, his near total disregard of divinatory literature. How could Sezgin devote not a single volume nor even a single section of his projected fourteen volumes to the Muslim literature on divination?¹ Whatever Sezgin's reasons, future authors of

general histories of Arabic literature might do well to structure their works according to the contours of the extant remains. And as for those contours, they have been best characterized by the orientalist Helmut Ritter—with, it should be noted, the approbation of Sezgin—in a programmatic statement on how to catalog Muslim manuscript collections by subject.² Among the twenty-three genres that Ritter distinguished: divinatory literature, a genre subdivided into twenty or so types of divinatory literature. Whether all of these forms of divination occupied the same cultural site in medieval Islam, whether some were more orthodox than others, whether all were equally popular—these are issues for another time. The merit of Ritter's classificatory scheme lies in its accurate reflection of the contours of the extant remains. Like it or not, the manuscript collections of the Muslim world contain a wide variety of works, including a great many on divination.

Given Ritter's characterization of the Muslim manuscript collections, one might think that divinatory literature would receive recognition in the catalogues of manuscript libraries. And sometimes it does—but not always. If those in charge of the libraries that preserve such texts cannot ignore their existence, they can cause them to fade from view, especially through the careful cataloging of them by subject. A single example: in the justly famous collection of manuscripts in the library of Istanbul University, there are no less than twenty-five texts on dream divination, including the only known copy of the Arabic translation of the dream manual of Artemidorus (the most famous dream manual of Hellenic antiquity), what may be the earliest dream manual in Persian, as well as a good number of other rare and unique works. Under what subject are these texts cataloged? Not under *'ilm ta'bir al-ru'yā* (the discipline of dream interpretation), not under *'ilm al-firāsah* (physiognomy, sometimes used to mean divination in general), not under Sufism, philosophy, or medicine (execrable practices utilized in many of the catalogues of manuscripts in Turkish libraries), not even under a nice presentist category like psychology. Rather, the university's dream manuals—and them alone—are listed in the catalog under *Cabala*. While I don't know who was responsible for cataloging the manuscripts of Istanbul University, I am fairly certain that it was not Ritter, its one-time director. Leaving aside the fact that there is no Muslim Cabala, one might just as well have cataloged these dream manuals under *Mummery* or *Jugglery*—the effect would have been the same. Perhaps it is no wonder that the precious copy of Artemidorus' dream manual lay hidden so long, its existence being revealed only in the late fifties through a fortuitous encounter between its future editor and the index cards of a young Turkish researcher named Fuat Sezgin,³ index cards that the latter was unfortunately unable to incorporate into his future history of Arabic literature.

DREAM INTERPRETATION AND DIVINATION

The present study is concerned with just one type of divination, dream interpretation. Researchers can study how medieval Muslims interpreted dreams through

the manuals that they composed on the subject. Some of these works are short, roughly the length of, say, the Gospel of Matthew. Others are enormous, in some cases, up to fifty times that work's length. In terms of format, they are best likened to dictionaries. They consist generally of two parts: an introduction, usually rather brief, offering an overview of the author's methodology, and then a list of dream symbols and their meanings. In most cases these lists are organized by subject—dreams of fish, weapons, flowers, occupations, and so on. As for the meanings of the dreams, these are generally stated under the form of a condition: "If one dreams of a yellow rose, this will happen. If one dreams of a red rose, that will happen. If one dreams of a petunia, this other thing will happen." Thus the authors proceed, listing the three hundred and ninety-two types of flowers, only then to turn their attention to another, equally elaborate and detailed class of dream symbols.

The number of dream manuals written by medieval Muslims is nothing short of staggering. Over thirty years ago, Toufic Fahd undertook to compile a general survey of medieval Muslim divinatory literature.⁴ As part of his survey, Fahd prepared a preliminary bibliography of works on dream interpretation.⁵ One cannot overemphasize the significance of Fahd's labors. For the first time, researchers could glimpse something of the importance of this tradition to medieval Muslims and something of the scope of the extant remains.⁶ Although Fahd confessed that his was only "a first step toward a massive study,"⁷ he was able to call attention to 158 different dream manuals in Arabic, as well as another 23 in Persian and Turkish—all but a few accessible only in manuscript form.⁸

The majority of the works identified by Fahd stem from the later Middle Ages. From the earliest period of the Muslim oneirocritic tradition, up to the early fifth century A.H., Fahd could find only three extant works, the earliest of which was written in 399/1008. My own research has uncovered further works, more than trebling the corpus of early dream manuals. Among these texts, whether newly discovered or for the first time accurately identified: a dream manual written by the last Šaffārid amir of Sijistān, the earliest example of a dream manual in verse, and a corpus of four dream manuals composed by a single North African jurist. In sum, around a dozen dream manuals are now known to be extant from the earliest period of the tradition—enough, in fact, that one can now analyze its earliest history in some detail.

While the aforementioned works have survived, other early dream manuals have not. Indeed, far more have disappeared than have been preserved. Even so, it is sometimes possible to uncover information about these lost works. Fragments are at times preserved in later texts: late medieval oneirocritic compilations can occasionally shed important light on lost dream manuals. In other cases, the medieval Muslim biographical and bibliographic tradition has preserved knowledge of lost works. A systematic survey of these fragments and testimonies adds approximately fifty other, early dream manuals to the number discovered so far.

The large number of early dream manuals should not be lightly passed over. It offers a superficial if telling indication of the importance of dream interpretation

to Muslims of the early Middle Ages. Indeed, to judge from number alone, one would have to conclude that the interpretation of dreams was as important to these Muslims as the interpretation of the Koran. Some sixty dream manuals were composed during the first four and a half centuries of the Muslim era. During that same period, very nearly exactly the same number of Koranic commentaries were composed.⁹ In short, early Muslims composed as many commentaries on their dreams as they did on their Koran. Whatever else it was, dream interpretation was popular. As such it merits the attention of researchers, if only that we might understand why it was so widely cultivated and why it attracted the attention of such famous figures as the litterateur Ibn Qutaybah, the historian Ṭabarī, and the philosopher Ibn Sīnā.

It should be emphasized that Muslim dream interpretation is quite different from the forms of dream interpretation practiced in modern psychoanalysis. Muslim oneirocrits were not concerned with dreams for the light they might shed on the workings of the unconscious. They studied dreams because they believed that by properly interpreting them it was possible to discover things about the world outside the dreamer, things that could not otherwise be known. Dream interpretation offered Muslims a royal road that led not inward but outward, providing insight not into the dreamer's psyche but into the hidden affairs of the world. In short, the aim of dream interpretation was not diagnosis, but divination.

Unlike the ever humble and unpresuming advocates of psychoanalytic techniques of dream interpretation, Muslim oneirocrits claimed to offer nothing less than access to divine prophecy. On the day before his death, they said, the prophet Muḥammad announced in the mosque of Medina that "when I am gone there shall remain naught of the glad tidings of prophecy, except for true dreams." While the prophet's death would signal the end of Koranic revelation, God would continue to reveal himself to the Muslim community through dreams. Muslim oneirocrits never tired of citing this tradition. It contained key elements that in conjunction with others helped them to develop a theology of dreams. In this theology, the true dream was understood to be a form of divine revelation and a chronological successor to the Koran. In it, each good Muslim could expect guidance from God in dreams. At the same time, it presented dreams as no less than the bearers of "revelation" (*wahy*) and "prophecy" (*nubūwah*), two highly significant terms also used to describe the Koran—lofty claims, to be sure, especially to the extent that dream interpretation offered a form of access to God that was unmediated, thus circumventing the vaunted institutions of Koran and Sunnah.

It has not always been acknowledged that Muslim dream interpretation is a form of divination. At times, modern Muslims have treated it as a precursor crying in the wilderness, seeking to make straight the way for Sigmund Freud. Such a strategy is evident, for instance, in the work of one author who sought to find confirmation in the Muslim dream manuals of the existence of a "universal oneiric language," the contents of which presciently foreshadowed the discoveries of Freud.¹⁰ Other Muslims have also sought to elide the differences between

the techniques of medieval and modern oneirocrits. This can be seen, for instance, in the popular editions of late medieval dream manuals, to this day widely circulated in the Middle East and elsewhere. Almost invariably their introductions link Muslim dream interpretation to psychoanalysis. Sometimes this is done in a subtle fashion: by providing lists of "the great and marvelous interpreters of dreams," lists that begin with the more important medieval Muslim oneirocrits and invariably end with Freud.¹¹ Usually, it is left to readers to infer that the whole edifice of psychoanalysis was thus really discovered by the scholars of medieval Islam. At other times, more explicit claims are made. One might note, for instance, a recent English adaptation of a series of medieval dream manuals—adaptation rather than translation, in that the text has been updated for modern Muslims, including now clues for interpreting dreams of missile launchers, supermarkets, oil refineries, and the like.¹² To lend the work an air of authority, its translator solicited a forward from a famous Muslim scholar, who sought to legitimize this sort of literature by suggesting that it shows ever so clearly that the findings of modern psychoanalysis were long ago discovered "by the sages and prophets of traditional cultures and religions"—most notably, it seems, by those of Muslim persuasion.

While such interpretive strategies are, I think, indefensible, they are not distinctly Muslim. There has been a similar tradition of western scholarship on the dream manual of Artemidorus. This tradition's foibles and crotchets, its "ethnocentric and Whiggish tendencies," have been laid bare in inestimable fashion by S. R. F. Price.¹³ Nor for that matter need these strategies proceed in just one chronological direction. By eliding the differences between his own form of dream interpretation and the techniques of the ancients, Freud himself had sought to provide psychoanalytic dream interpretation with a venerable pedigree.¹⁴ Notwithstanding the long history of these interpretive strategies, I would submit that it is simply untenable to turn a blind eye to the radical differences that distinguish ancient forms of dream interpretation from the various uses to which dreams have been put by modern psychoanalysts.

CONTEXT, HISTORY, AND DISCIPLINARY BOUNDARIES

It has been said that "the good historian is like the ogre of the fairy tale: he knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies."¹⁵ Because dream manuals are basically long lists, often rather tediously long lists, it might well be imagined that they do not readily exude the scent of human flesh. The soporific state they induce on reading is not the least of the difficulties confronting the researcher. Much more serious: these texts are authorless. I mean this not in the sense that they lacked authors. They obviously did not, and usually we know who their authors were. These texts are authorless in the sense that their authors seldom spoke with their own voices. They expressed themselves, rather,

through the compilation and crafting of earlier materials. In short, they did not write their own dream manuals, but pillaged earlier texts and skillfully mounted the spoils in their own works. As for the authors, they are seldom heard, except occasionally at the interstices, as they linked together materials appropriated from earlier works, making arguments and refuting opponents largely without ever speaking in their own voices.

With authors who fade all too easily from view behind the seeming anonymity of compilation, dream manuals present a forbidding facade to researchers. One of the primary aims of this study will be to breach this facade of anonymity behind which the authors sought to conceal themselves, to see whether it is not after all possible to detect in these works the scent of human flesh. While there are many ways that such texts might be approached with this end in view, here I am primarily concerned with understanding the circumstances surrounding the composition and circulation of the early dream manuals. I shall attempt, in short, to understand the early Muslim oneirocritic tradition in its social and cultural contexts. In this regard, my first goal in this study will be to answer three distinct but interrelated questions, all of which contribute to an understanding of this tradition's social and cultural contexts.

First, just who among the early Muslims were writing and reading dream manuals? To answer this question fully, it is not enough simply to discover their names and a little bit about who they were—although such information is obviously indispensable, especially as this study seeks to offer the first general account of this tradition's early development. A full answer to this question demands that broader patterns be sought. This is now possible. A great deal of information about both the writers and the readers of this literature has survived, enough that one can step back from the details and investigate the social and cultural contexts in which these texts were produced and consumed. In this regard, I am especially concerned to determine whether the religious scholars or ulema were implicated in the writing and reading of dream manuals. It was the ulema who were the self-proclaimed arbiters of orthodoxy and orthopraxy; it was they who defined the contours of what came in time to be considered normative or sharʿi Islam. To determine their role in the production and consumption of this literature is thus partly to determine whether dream interpretation itself should be considered an aspect of sharʿi Islam.

Second, was there a single oneirocritic tradition? We are dealing with a corpus of texts written over a period of several hundred years, with authors hailing from one end of the Muslim world to the other. Do these texts exhibit a single tradition of dream interpretation? or multiple traditions? The diversity of the early oneirocritic tradition might be evident in any number of ways. Most obviously, it might be displayed in the interpretations being offered for individual dream symbols. Did a yellow rose mean the same thing to the oneirocrits of fifth-century A.H. North Africa as it did to those of second-century Iran? The diversity

of the tradition might, however, be evident in other, less obvious ways as well. Of particular concern is the epistemic foundations of the dream manuals: how their authors determined what counts as knowledge, the types of sources to which they appealed, and how they constructed arguments on the basis of those sources. Factors such as these must also be taken into account in any attempt to investigate the diversity of the early oneirocritic tradition. That said, in the final analysis an examination of the diversity of this tradition is interesting primarily for the light it can shed on the social and cultural contexts of dream interpretation, especially if the corpus of early texts evinces a diversity that can be correlated with different stages in the development of the tradition, different classes of the Muslim intellectual elite, or perhaps even different regions of the Muslim world.

As suggested above, the authors of the dream manuals made some lofty claims as to what they could deliver. My third question is simply this: Did anyone other than the authors of the dream manuals and their readers give credence to these claims? In particular, did the ulema as a whole subscribe to this theology of dreams? There are a number of ways that one might answer this question. I focus on the authoritative sources to which Muslim oneirocrits appealed to defend the legitimacy of dream interpretation. The authors of the dream manuals could, albeit with some difficulty, call on the Koran to justify their interest in dreams. They could find there expressions that, if properly interpreted, could be taken to suggest that Muslims ought to take an interest in their dreams. They could also cite sayings ascribed to Muḥammad, sayings that seemed to legitimize their interest in dreams. Did the ulema understand these sources to bear the same meaning? Did they read the Koran as legitimizing dream interpretation? Did they know the same prophetic traditions, consider them authentic, and interpret them in the same way? How these questions are answered has important implications for how the social and cultural contexts of dream interpretation are understood. In particular, they help to specify further whether dream interpretation should be considered an aspect of sharʿi Islam.

Too often the cultural discourses of early Islam have been studied as if they existed in a vacuum, being treated as if they were unrelated to pre-Islamic discourses and qualitatively distinct from the discourses of non-Muslims. They have, in short, too often been assumed to lack both a history and a context. In this study, I hope to suggest that such an approach to the cultural discourses of early Islam is neither profitable nor justified and that much light can be shed on the Muslim oneirocritic tradition if an attempt is made to historicize it and contextualize it, to examine whether it was related to pre-Islamic traditions of dream interpretation and to investigate whether Muslims and non-Muslims may have shared and contested a common tradition of dream interpretation. It is this attempt to historicize and contextualize the early oneirocritic tradition that forms the second goal of this study.

Muslims were not the first in the Near East to interpret dreams. This type of divination had a long history, and Muslims were not ignorant of that history.

Further, the understanding of dreams forged in Muslim circles exercised an irresistible appeal to those outside the fold of the faithful. Muslim oneirocrits stood, thus, at the center of two metaphorical streams. One welled up in the past and flowed toward the Muslims. The other sprang up among Muslims and flowed outward. This metaphor is imperfect if it is understood to suggest that influence operates only in one direction, from source to recipient. This is not the case: influence is sterile without a desire to appropriate, a desire that takes hold the resources of the past and molds them in ways relevant to the needs of the present. It is in this sense alone that Muslims can be said to have been influenced by earlier techniques of dream interpretation and in turn to have influenced others. A full examination of the history and context of the early Muslim oneirocritic tradition is an immense topic, one beyond the scope of the present study. I limit myself to just three of its trajectories, ones that can be traced in some detail given the surviving evidence.

First, as a result of the near total darkness that overshadows the first hundred years of Muslim cultural history, any inquiry into the origins of the Muslim oneirocritic tradition can only be speculative. As yet, one cannot know whether the interpretation of dreams was something indigenous to the Arab conquerors of the Near East or something they learned from their subjects and converts. By the second century A.H., when at last we have access to written sources, a tradition of dream interpretation is both well in place and distinctively Muslim. While a search for origins may be impossible, one can analyze what happens over the next two or three centuries as this seemingly indigenous, Muslim tradition confronted earlier, non-Muslim forms of dream interpretation. Of particular interest is the reception given by Muslims to the dream manual of Artemidorus. This work, the most famous dream manual of Hellenic antiquity, was translated into Arabic in the third century A.H. by the Christian physician Ḥunayn b. Ishāq.¹⁶ While many of the Muslim dream manuals examined here made use of Artemidorus' dream manual, each took a different stance toward it: Artemidorus meant different things to different people. And as will be argued, to understand the varied reception of his work is to understand, in part, how and why the Muslim oneirocritic tradition developed as it did.

Second, no Muslim ever read the dream manual of Artemidorus. What they read was Ḥunayn's version of that text, which was not so much a translation as an adaptation. There were many things about Artemidorus that would have been offensive or unintelligible to readers in the early Islamic period, whether Muslim or Christian. Most important, Artemidorus was a pagan, and accordingly his dream manual was replete with references to pagan deities and pagan religious rites. To make matters worse, Artemidorus lived and wrote in a distant age. Much had changed since the second century A.D. Many of the civic institutions that Artemidorus mentioned (the gymnasium, for instance, or city councils) were no longer features of the society of his later readers. When Ḥunayn set himself to translate Artemidorus' dream manual, he was thus faced with the daunting task of creating

a version that was intelligible to his contemporaries. To understand how Ḥunayn accomplished this task is key to understanding the Muslim reception of Artemidorus, and thus ultimately, how and why the Muslim tradition of dream interpretation developed as it did.

Third, it was a Christian who mediated the work of Artemidorus to Muslims. There were also Christians who, in or around the fourth century A.H., began to take an interest in Muslim techniques of dream interpretation. Two Christian dream manuals survive from this period: one is in Greek and is of Byzantine provenance; the other is in Arabic and was written by a Nestorian in Baghdad. These works are the first Christian dream manuals ever written, and both, I argue, made direct use of Muslim sources. While it is now possible to analyze the identity of their sources, the interest of these Christian dream manuals does not end there. These two works were written in different cultural contexts and their authors were confronted with different problems as they sought to appropriate and engage the Muslim oneirocritic tradition. These different problems, in turn, entailed different strategies of appropriation and engagement. To understand these strategies is, in part, to understand the extent to which Christians and Muslims in the early medieval Near East may have shared and contested a common oneirocritic tradition.

To trace the above-mentioned trajectories is to go part of the way toward historicizing and contextualizing the Muslim tradition of dream interpretation. Even so, a full investigation of this tradition's history and context would require additional research. It was not only Greeks who taught Muslims about the interpretation of dreams. Echoes of the voices of Persian and Indian sages are also encountered. So also, these two Christians were not the only non-Muslims to appropriate and engage the Muslim tradition of dream interpretation. There were further Christians who did the same, as well as Jews and others. These are issues that this study does not take up in detail: although I often allude to the fuller history and context of the Muslim oneirocritic tradition, I do not attempt to investigate it in depth. And yet, while I am content to trace just a few trajectories, it is my hope that enough is elucidated to show that the cultural discourses of early Islam were not *sui generis* and that it is only by historicizing and contextualizing them that one can begin to understand them.

This study, then, has two major goals. The first is to discern the contours of the Muslim oneirocritic tradition: in short, to write an internal history of the tradition, with a particular eye to the social and cultural contexts in which works on this subject were produced and consumed. The second is to historicize and contextualize this tradition: in short, to place it against a broader historical backdrop and to situate it within a broader framework. Uniting these goals is a methodological experiment, an attempt to break down some of the disciplinary boundaries that characterize the study of the cultural history of the early medieval Near East.

Muslim cultural discourses have too often been treated as if they were capable of being studied apart from their history and context. At the same time, Byzantinists

and scholars of oriental Christianity have too often been content to study their respective cultural spheres without reference to the world of Islam, except perhaps as some developmental terminus or intractable other. What I hope to suggest here is that these disciplinary boundaries can with profit be blurred. Much light can be shed on the cultural discourses of early Islam if attention is paid to how they were related to pre-Islamic discourses. Insight into these same Muslim discourses can be gained if one is open to the possibility that non-Muslims may have played a role in their articulation, not only as mediators of pre-Islamic materials, but also as integral participants in the discourses themselves. At the same time, the cultural discourses of Byzantium and of the various oriental Christian communities can be better understood if an attempt is made to interpret them against the backdrop of a broader canvas, one that includes the discourses of Islamic civilization. In short, what is needed is an interdisciplinary approach to the cultural history of the early medieval Near East. Such an approach is not entirely novel. Even so, its validity and usefulness need to be emphasized, now more than ever.

The changing contours of the discipline of Islamic studies since World War II have meant that fewer students are coming to the study of early Islam from backgrounds in Classics or Semitics. Linguistic versatility in the study of early Islam now usually means that—in addition to Arabic—an Islamicist studies Persian or Turkish, but not Greek, Syriac, or Hebrew, let alone Armenian, Georgian, or Coptic. Today, a comparative study of slavery in early Islam means that one will compare Muslim institutions of slavery in North Africa, Syria, and Persia, while ignoring potentially fruitful comparisons with similar institutions in the empires of late antiquity. A study of early Muslim jurisprudence now too often means the study of Muslim jurisprudence alone, with little or no attention to the possibility that Muslims may have drawn on the legal resources of non-Muslims, whether late Romans, Persians, or Jews. Similarly, an examination of the early history of Arabic theology is too often focused solely on Muslim works, while ignoring some of the earliest theological texts in Arabic, simply because they were written not by Muslims but by Christians and Jews. To the extent that these observations reflect the present state of the discipline, the study of the cultural history of early Islam risks becoming insular. Now more than ever, it is simply too easy to treat early Muslim cultural discourses as if they lacked a history whose roots were struck deep into the past of the Near East and as if they lacked a context broader than themselves.

SCRIBES AND SELECTIVE MEDIATION

Other questions might be asked of the early Muslim oneirocritic tradition. How, for instance, were the forms of dream interpretation enshrined in texts related to nonliterary forms? Might there not have been competing forms of dream interpretation—scholarly, bookish forms and regionally diverse popular forms? What

about the social roles played by dream interpreters? Might not dream interpreters have competed with other religious specialists (saints, for instance, or jurists) for recognition as mediators between this world and the next, between the God who sends revelation and the humans who receive it? And what of those oneirocrits who did not happen to be male? Might there not have been female interpreters of dreams and perhaps even distinctively female modes of dream interpretation? Such questions are easier to ask than answer. The sources, or at least those known to me, shed little light on such issues.

The types of information preserved in the extant sources effectively limit the questions that can be asked of the early Muslim oneirocritic tradition. This is clear. The nature of the extant sources limits researchers in another, more grievous way as well. For a medieval book to be preserved, it was necessary that it be copied: it was necessary that there be later scribes and patrons who took an active interest in its preservation. Not all early materials were of equal interest to these later scribes and patrons, and the choices they made as to what should be copied have largely determined the contours of the extant remains. The interests and concerns of these later Muslims have, in effect, acted as a filter, selecting some materials for preservation and letting others pass into oblivion through neglect. This type of scribal filtering is important. It is no less important than other, more dramatic instances of selective transmission—the compiler, for instance, who has access to three sources but chooses to cite only one. In both cases, later tradition selectively mediates earlier tradition.

Ibn Qutaybah's (d. 276/889) is the earliest extant Muslim dream manual. While this work was once very popular, today it is preserved in full in just a single manuscript. Other texts utilized in this study have also just barely survived, in just one or a handful of manuscripts. Yet other texts here studied were more fortunate, existing today in thirty or forty copies. And there were yet other dream manuals, from the later Middle Ages, that were truly classics, surviving today in hundreds of copies. Later tradition clearly exercised a form of selective transmission: some works were widely copied; others were not. It was also this later tradition that was responsible for letting the majority of early dream manuals disappear. Why were these texts not transmitted? Were their contents at odds with later consensus? Were they supplanted by later, more systematic and thus more useful syntheses? While answers to these questions can only be speculative, one can conjecture that the surviving works were preserved precisely because they contained nothing offensive to the sensibilities of later Muslims.

Although this is ostensibly a study of the early Muslim tradition of dream interpretation, it is more accurately a study of that tradition after it has been vetted by later Muslims. What is at issue is not the early tradition itself but what later Muslims chose to bequeath of it. There may well have been a dozen competing versions of dream interpretation in the early centuries of the Muslim era; and if so, as shall be seen, all but one have largely disappeared. As for the version

that has survived, it enjoyed its good fortune only insofar as it complemented the views of later Muslims. I do not wish to suggest that it is therefore impossible to discover anything useful about the early Muslim tradition of dream interpretation. I only wish to caution the reader, suggesting in advance that much of the seeming homogeneity discovered in the course of this study may be illusory, a result of the selectivity of later tradition.

Later tradition gave the gift of life to some works; others it let pass into oblivion. It also seems to have filtered out nearly all hints of dissent occasioned by the interpretation of dreams. I simply cannot believe that early Muslims were in total agreement as to the nature of dream interpretation and as to the role it should play in the good Muslim's life. Nevertheless, such is very nearly the picture that emerges from the extant sources. It is only on the rarest of occasions that one can detect the distant echoes of the controversies once occasioned by dream interpretation, echoes now quite faint and well-nigh unintelligible. The famous jurist Shāfi'ī (d. 204/819) once proclaimed:

I have left behind in Iraq something that the Manicheans concocted, calling it dream interpretation. It is with it rather than the Koran that they occupy themselves.¹⁷

By chance, Shāfi'ī's saying has been preserved in a later compilation. What it meant when first uttered, if indeed it is authentic, what its original context was, what debates it played a role in—these are matters that cannot now be known. Two things alone are certain. First, the *extant* sources do not support Shāfi'ī's version of the origins of Muslim dream interpretation. Second, the arguments of the advocates of dream interpretation carried the day—and it was those advocates and their descendants who tried to filter out dissenting voices.

These cautionary remarks must be kept in mind throughout the course of this study. Researchers cannot but deal with oneirocritic texts that have received the imprimatur and nihil obstat of later tradition, ferreting out where possible polemical subtexts and using them to reconstruct now silent debates. As a whole, however, we, the modern voyeurs, can view the early Muslim oneirocritic tradition only with the help of Muslims of a later age. As yet there is no cache of desert documents to help us, no Nag Hammadi corpus or Dead Sea scrolls, no means of gaining an unmediated access to the oneirocritic traditions of an earlier age.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS STUDY

I begin in chapters 1 and 2 by constructing a history of the early development of the Muslim tradition of dream interpretation. Among the many issues treated in these first two chapters, the most important for the overall thematic of this study are how an indigenous form of dream interpretation arose among Muslims already by the second century A.H. and how this tradition evolved over the course

of the next three centuries, eventually fracturing into a number of competing legacies, in part through the varied reception of Ḥunayn's expurgated version of Artemidorus. Chapter 3 seeks to determine whether there was a single Muslim tradition of dream interpretation. Chapter 4 examines the social contexts in which early Muslim dream manuals were produced and consumed, and the extent to which the ulema were involved in this process. Chapter 5 turns to the afterlife of the Muslim oneirocritic tradition in two Christian contexts—among those living under Muslim rule and among those of Byzantium—and the various strategies that Christian oneirocrits had to employ to appropriate and engage Muslim techniques of dream interpretation. I conclude with some reflections on how early Muslim cultural discourses might best be studied, especially to the extent that they are enmeshed in a context that predates the rise of Islam and are capable of diffusion beyond the borders of Islamic civilization. An appendix contains what I hope is a fairly exhaustive account of the sixty or so Muslim dream manuals composed in the first five centuries of the Muslim era.

It should be emphasized that this study is concerned with the early Muslim tradition of dream interpretation, from its inception in the second century A.H. to the early fifth century. This early tradition I divide into two parts: its "formative period" (early second century to mid-fourth century) and what I characterize as the period in which it fractured (late fourth and early fifth centuries). How these periods differ is explained in chapters 1 and 2. But why follow the history of this tradition only to the early fifth century? Was there something special about the dream manuals written after this date, something that marked them off from earlier texts? Judging from the hundreds of later Arabic, Persian, and Turkish dream manuals that I have examined—the short answer is no. Most later texts work within lines that had already been laid down in the earlier tradition. Later texts do not innovate wholly new types of dream interpretation as much as they probe the potential resources of earlier types. This is not to say that some of these later works are not interesting. Some are, especially those that toy with the boundaries of dream interpretation and other disciplines: Sufi self-examination, for instance, or philosophic reflection on the physiology of dreams and the nature of prophecy. But these are stories for another time. Here I am content to trace the history of Muslim dream interpretation from its birth in the second century A.H. to its maturation in the early fifth, leaving for another time the study of its senescence. By coincidence, and it really is a coincidence, the early fifth century also marks the end point of Sezgin's masterful history of early Arabic literature. Let this study be considered, then, as a supplement to Sezgin's project of making known the riches of the early Arabic literary tradition, in all its diversity.