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Reconstructing the epistemology of classical Islamic dream interpretation: A critical examination of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Thought in the Book of Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb

Ilham Surya[1], Muhammad Imran[1], Muhamad Wuddy Agnia Ihsan[1], Moh Minhaji Hazmin[1], Ahmad Mahrus Mariadi[1], Moh Ikhwan Faidlur Ruhman[1], Ince Atika Ramadhani[1], Darmawangsa[1], Saepul[1], Muhammad Haikal[1]

[1]Magister of Qur'anic and Exegesis Science, PTIQ University Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia
Correspondence: Ilham Surya, Magister of Qur'anic and Exegesis Science, PTIQ University Jakarta, Jakarta, Indonesia.
Correspondence: ilhamsurya101@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The tradition of dream interpretation in classical Islam developed through a symbolic-transmissionist approach that relied heavily on narrations from the Prophet Muhammad and early scholars. This formed a rigid interpretation pattern and gives less space for rational and contextual approaches. This research aims to analyze and formulate Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's thoughts in Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb related to the methodology of dream interpretation. This research is a qualitative study with a library research approach using content analysis and historical-hermeneutic approach to the text of Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb as the primary source. The findings show that al-Rāzī developed a synthesis between spiritual and psychological aspects in interpreting dreams and emphasized the importance of rationality and individual experience in the interpretation process. The approach proposed is systematic-analytical and can be applied across the social and psychological context of the dreamer. Thus, al-Rāzī's thought offers a new epistemological framework that expands the horizons of dream interpretation in Islam that is more contextual and scientific.

KEYWORDS: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, dream interpretation, Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb, Islamic epistemology

Introduction

Dreams are a universal phenomenon that is inseparable from human experience. Despite their internal and subjective nature, dreams have the potential to influence an individual's external reality. An example of this can be seen in the experience of primitive people who, when dreaming of seeing a deceased loved one, concluded that the figure was still alive in another form and space (Freud, 2001, p. 89). This view later evolved into animist beliefs that were the forerunners of many modern forms of religion (Tylor, 1871, p. 385).

Throughout history, the mysteriousness of dreams had led various civilizations to come up with theories to uncover the secrets behind them. In early civilizations, dreams were often associated with the mystical or thought to be a way for gods to convey messages to humans. In Ancient Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations, for example, dreams were understood as prophecies or signs from the gods that could be used to see the future (Bulkeley, 2008, p. 113). Similarly, the Ancient Greek tradition also valued dreams in spiritual practices. In fact, the Ancient Greek tradition developed the activity of dream incubation (deliberately preparing to dream) in the temples of the God Asklepios to find spiritual or healing dreams (Bulkeley, 2008, p. 139; Hughes, 2000). Although, these beliefs and practices were later met with skepticism from philosophers such as Aristotle (1991, pp. 6–9) who considered dreams to have nothing to do with divine intervention, but rather merely as individual physiological and psychological phenomena that could be rationalized .

The effort to rationalize dreams reached its peak in the modern era with the presence of Sigmund Freud with his psychoanalysis approach. In his work entitled *Die Traumdeutung* (The Interpretation of Dreams), Freud viewed dreams as manifestations of latent desires in the human subconscious. According to Freud, the symbols seen in dreams contain hidden messages that are closely related to anxiety or wish fulfillment (Freud, 2010, p. 160). After Freud, another psychoanalytic figure, Carl Gustav Jung, introduced the concept of *collective unconscious* and *archetypes* where Jung viewed that dreams are a window to understand the universal human psychic condition (Jung et al., 1964, p. 21).

The Islamic intellectual tradition is also not immune to this. Islam even gives significant attention to the phenomenon of dreams. In the Islamic paradigm, dreams are not only considered a personal inner experience, but also a means of communication that allows for a connection between humans and the spiritual realm (Bahammam et al., 2018). This belief derives theological legitimacy from the Prophet Muhammad's saying that "a believer's dream is one part of the 64 parts of prophethood" (al-Bukhārī, 1993, p. 6:2563). In addition, the Prophet Muhammad was also known to invite his companions to share their dreams for interpretation (al-Bukhārī, 1993, p. 6:2583). This shows how the position of dreams in Islam not only lies in their spiritual value but also has epistemological foundations that make it a potential source of knowledge. Thus, the treasures of dream interpretation in Islam should not be ignored (Bulkeley, 2002).

However, although the tradition of dream interpretation in the early Islamic era was rich in religious and cultural aspects, it had various limitations, especially in terms of methodology. One of the main challenges is the reliance on symbolic interpretations that are strongly linked to the cultural and religious context of the time (Hasar, 2017; Sirriyeh, 2011a). This makes dream interpretation work relevant only to people from the same culture (Bulkeley, 2002). Moreover, this emphasis on symbolism leads to interpretations that rely heavily on the interpreter's knowledge and cultural background, which not only limits their universality and objectivity (Aydın, 2024), but also limits the dreamer's own experiential role (Hasar, 2017). The lack of a standardized methodology further exacerbates this problem. Dream interpretation in Islam is often inconsistent, whether it is believed to be derived from divine inspiration (revelation) or derived from a deductive approach based on symbolic analysis (Çörekçi, 2021; Sirriyeh, 2011a). Furthermore, the subjectivity of interpreters who are generally influenced by their personal experiences and beliefs can not only lead to biased and authoritarian interpretations (Barrett, 2013, 2023), but can also be misused for personal gain (Hasar, 2017).

Considering these weaknesses, it is important to propose a new reading of the dream interpretation paradigm in Islam, which not only relies on traditional heritage, but also opens up space for the development of a more rational, reflective and methodological epistemological framework. One of the figures whose thoughts can cover these limitations is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606 AH). As a *mufasseer* (Qur'an's intepreter), theologian, and philosopher, al-Rāzī not only relied on the previous interpretative heritage, but also developed a reading that was based on the harmonization of *aqlī* (reason) and *naqlī* (transtimed knowledge especially from the Qur'an and Prophet Muhammad) arguments (Sa'ari & Mohd Akib, 2017). In addition, al-Rāzī was also known

to be unafraid to confront the thoughts of scholars who were considered to have authority (Langermann, 2002) such as Ibn Sīnā to al-Ghazālī (Adamson, 2017; Mohd Akib et al., 2023). This shows that al-Rāzī was valiant in criticizing existing theories and proposing thoughts that were free from the pressure of the intellectual tradition of his time (Chowdhury, 2025).

Unfortunately, until now there have not been many studies that specifically explore al-Rāzī's thoughts in the context of dream interpretation methodology. The closest study is that of Arroisi, Rahmawati and Rezkyanta (2025), but this study only discusses al-Rāzī's thoughts in outline about the concept of dreams, not in detail on al-Rāzī's thought about the methodology of dream interpretation. Therefore, this study aims to fill the void by conducting a critical examination of how al-Rāzī understood and built the logic of dream interpretation. This research will explore al-Rāzī's critical thinking on the dream verses in Q.S Joseph in his exegesis (*tafseer*) book, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. This research is expected to formulate a new epistemological framework of dream interpretation in Islam that is more rational, applicable, and still in line with Islamic religious propositions.

Methods

This research aims to analyze and formulate Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's thoughts in the book *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* related to the epistemology of dream interpretation. This research is a qualitative study using content analysis and historical-hermeneutic approach to the text of Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb as the primary source. The main focus of this research is al-Rāzī's interpretation of the verses that discuss dream interpretation in Q.S. Joseph (12).

Results and Discussion

A Brief Overview of the Dream Interpretation Tradition in the Early Islamic Era

Since the early Islamic period, dreams have played an important role in the lives of Muslims. Not only as a personal phenomenon, dreams are also positioned as a channel of communication with God. In the Qur'an, there are several major events that illustrate dreams as divine messages such as the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) who dreamed of slaughtering his son, Prophet Muhammad's dream describing victory in the Battle of Badr and other dream stories recorded in Surah Yusuf. This shows that in the view of early Islam, dreams were not just a depiction of the subconscious, but one of God's means of communication to His prophets thus providing an epistemic foundation for the Muslim community at that time (Aydar, 2009).

Several traditions record how the Prophet Muhammad not only accepted dreams as valid, but also actively interpreted them (Yamani, 2009). Companions were often invited to narrate their dreams to the Prophet for interpretation (al-Bukhārī, 1993, p. 6:2583). These interpretations were then recorded and passed down through the generations through various lines of transmission (Aydar, 2009). This makes the dream gain legitimacy as an important source of knowledge and can give direction to the lives of Muslims both in personal and social affairs (Sirriyeh, 2015).

In subsequent developments, early works exploring dream interpretation began to appear, one of the most famous of which was Ibn Qutaybah's Ta'bīr al-Ru'yā (Sirriyeh, 2011a). This work compiled dream interpretations based on the history of the Prophet Muhammad and the Companions, as well as symbols in dreams that are considered to have certain meanings. However, the approach taken by Ibn Quthaybah and similar scholars tended to be normative and symbolic which generalized the meaning of dreams without considering the psychological or social context of the dreamer. For example, in his work, it was mentioned that a person who prays but turns his back on the Kaaba will become an apostate. Ibn Qutaybah's interpretation wass based on the correspondence of the dream symbol with Q.S Āli 'Imrān (3): 187 which discusses the condition of disbelievers who always turn themselves away from Allah's promise (Ibn Qutaybah, 2007, p. 232). Here, it can be seen that the interpretation given does not focus on the background of the dreamer, but rather focuses on the relationship between the dream symbol and the Qur'ān, which seems forced.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*

The realization of the limitations of the symbolic model developed by this early generation of Islamic scholars then encouraged later thinkers to offer a more reflective and contextual approach. One of the thinkers who made a major contribution in this regard was Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, a scholar who tried to combine *naqlī* arguments with rational approaches such as *kalam* (Islamic theology), philosophy, and science (Faruque, 2017). His full name is Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. He was born in 544 AH/1149 CE in the city of Rayy, an intellectual center now located within modern Iran. His father, Ḍiyā' al-Dīn (d. 559

AH/1164 CE), was a prominent *khāṭib* (preacher) in the city. Due to his father's status as Rayy's chief orator, al-Rāzī became known by the nickname *Ibn Khāṭib al-Rayy* (the Son of Ray's Preacher). His early education was forged directly under his father's guidance in the fields of *kalam* and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), a background that placed him in the Ahs'ari intellectual tradition from an early age. Not surprisingly, al-Rāzī later emerged as one of the most influential thinkers in the *Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah* school, especially in the disciplines of theology and philosophy (Shihadeh, 2006, pp. 4-5).

Of his many works, Mafātīḥ *al-Ghayb*, also known as *al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, was al-Rāzī's *magnum opus* in the field of Qur'ānic interpretation. This work began to be written in 595 AH/1199 CE and was completed towards the end of his life in 603 AH/1207 CE. *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* was a *tafseer* (exegesis) that covers all of the Qur'ān and is the main representation of the *tafsīr bi al-ra'y* approach with a phylosophical character. al-Dhahabī categorized this work as part of *tafsīr bi al-ra'y al-jā'iz*, or rational-based interpretation that is still within the limits allowed by Shari'ah. It not only addressed the linguistic and legal aspects of the Qur'ān, but also contained in-depth explorations of issues of metaphysics, theology, natural science, logic, and classical philosophy.

There are two main reasons why *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* is used as the main reference in this study. First, from a methodological point of view, the *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* reflects a synthesis between theological reasoning and philosophical reflection that is highly developed. Since it was written in the final phase of al-Rāzī's life, this book can be said to be a representation of al-Rāzī's complete thought. Secondly, the discourse on dream interpretation in Islam is closely related to Surah Yusuf, the only surah (chapter) in the Qur'ān that explicitly describes the process of dream interpretation in three different cases. Since al-Rāzī's *tafseer* is the only work that comprehensively discusses Surah Yusuf, it is then become the main source for this study. Although there was debate among *tafseer* historians as to whether al-Rāzī completed all parts of his commentary, primary sources indicated that the commentary on Surah Yusuf was the part that was authentically written by al-Rāzī himself (al-Dhahabī, 2000, p. 208).

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Paradigm of Dream Interpretation
Epistemological Source of Dream Interpretation: *Ladunni* or *Ta'aqquli*?

In the study of dream interpretation, there are two major paradigms that differ from each other, namely the paradigm that views dream interpretation as a divine inspiration that can only be accessed by a few people (*ladunni*), and the paradigm that considers dream interpretation as a skill that can be known by anyone who learns it (*ta'aqquli*). The first paradigm sees dreams as messages from God given to selected individuals, such as prophets or spiritual leaders. In the Islamic tradition, dreams that are considered true are often explained by religious figures such as prophets or Sufi sheikhs who have divine insight (Sirriyeh, 2011b). History shows that many cultures regarded dreams as tools of divination or divine communication, with the aim of predicting future events or providing guidance from God (Hodgkin, 2020). Although this paradigm limits access to dream interpretation knowledge to certain people only, it does not mean that others cannot know about it. This is where the path of transmission comes into play, the results of interpretations made by the Prophet Muhammad and the righteous were recorded and transmitted from generation to generation until today.

The second paradigm, on the other hand, focuses on the ability to understand dreams through a more scientific and systematic approach, such as psychoanalytic theory. The psychoanalytic approach was pioneered by Freud who suggested that dreams can be interpreted through symbolic representations of the unconscious mind (Robbins, 2004). Psychoanalysis views that the symbols that appear in dreams are a form of communication from each individual's subconscious regarding their anxieties or hopes. Modern approaches in psychoanalysis also emphasize the process of association, where individuals are guided to discover the meaning of their own dreams, without relying on authoritative interpretations (Barrett, 2023). Symbolic association has also been used in the early Islamic tradition, but it still has a number of limitations as mentioned earlier (Sirriyeh, 2011b).

These two paradigms reflect fundamental differences in the way dreams are understood. One side emphasizes the divine element and the other considers dreams as part of a psychological process that can be learned by anyone. The fundamental differences between these two paradigms can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Differences between the two paradigms of dream interpretation

Aspect	Divine Inspiration	Learnable Skills
Basic	Religious texts and figures who claim to have divine insight	Empirical theories such as psychoanalysis and neurobiology
Focus	Predicting the future or conveying divine messages	Understanding the unconscious mind and symbolic representations
Methods	Inspirational interpretation by selected individuals	Deductive interpretation and association process
Accessibility	Limited to those who claim to have divine insight	Can be learned and applied by anyone who has the necessary knowledge and skills

In addressing these two paradigms, al-Rāzī in his interpretation of Q.S. Yūsuf (12): 4-5, did not take for granted the notion that Prophet Joseph's (Joseph) knowledge of dream interpretation comes solely from revelation. Instead, he read the dynamics of the verse as an indication that the knowledge of dream interpretation was already circulating and culturally recognized within the family of Prophet Ya'qub (Jacob, Joseph's father). According to al-Rāzī, Prophet Jacob's concern about Joseph telling his brothers about his dream was not because the dream contained exclusive revelation, but because the dream could be easily understood by people who were familiar with dream interpretation, in this case his own brothers. Therefore, he concluded that this knowledge was not only comprehensible, but can also be acquired and mastered by the general public, including the children of Prophet Jacob who were not prophets. As al-Rāzī explained:

> "*Indeed, Jacob a.s. loved Joseph and his brothers so much that it was for this reason tha Joseph's brothers were jealous of him. This was apparent to Jacob a.s. through many signs. So when Joseph a.s. recounted the dream, the interpretation of which was that his brothers and parents would submit to him, he said: "Do not tell your brothers your dream, for they will know its interpretation and they may plot against you."* (al-Rāzī, 2000, pp. 18 - 420).

This quote shows that al-Rāzī placed the science of dream interpretation in a more rational framework, namely as a product of the skill of analyzing dream symbolism understood through certain social and psychological contexts. In this case, al-Rāzī also distinguished between revelation as a source of absolute truth and dream interpretation as a result of relative reasoning. This thinking opens up space for the idea that dream interpretation is a discipline that can be formulated, taught and tested.

Q.S. Yūsuf (12): 6 gives further indication of Prophet Jacob's understanding of the meaning of his son's dream, which according to him was a sign that Joseph was the one chosen by God. In interpreting the words "your Lord chose you", al-Rāzī offered two complementary yet theologically and linguistically different interpretations. First, he raised the possibility that the word "chose" refers to prophethood. However, he immediately pointed out that although Joseph did eventually become a prophet, there is no explicit indication in the wording of the verse that could definitively show that prophethood was the main intention of the verse. Based on this, al-Rāzī proposed an alternative interpretation:

> "*Others say: 'What is meant is elevation of status and exaltation of position, not specifically referring to prophethood, because there is no explicit indication in the wording.'*" (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:420).

Furthermore, al-Rāzī also examined the argument that Prophet Joseph's ability to interpret dreams was the result of revelation given directly by God. This argument was often reinforced by the narrative that Prophet Joseph was able to know that the two young men imprisoned with him had dreamed, even before they said so. However, al-Rāzī critically rejected this premise and proposed a more psychological and empirical reading of the text. According to al-Rāzī, the Prophet Joseph only saw indications of anxiety and sadness on their faces. Therefore, he asked questions regarding their emotional state, and only then did they reveal that the dream they had experienced had disturbed their minds. Al-Rāzī asserted:

"Perhaps the Prophet asked them about their sadness and anxiety, and they replied: 'We have seen this dream.'" (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:453).

The question that critically arises in this discourse is: If Joseph's interpretation of the dream did not rely entirely on revelation, how could he have known immediately that the two young men with him in prison were the king's servants? Furthermore, how was the Prophet also able to identify exactly which one of them was the drinker and which one was the food carrier, without any explicit information from them?

al-Rāzī answered this question through a sharp inferential approach. He id not assume that the Prophet Joseph acquired this knowledge through revelation, but rather through reasoning about the symbols that appeared in the dreams of each of the young men. According to al-Rāzī, the dreams experienced by the two young men inherently contained clues about their professions. He stated:

"The dream of each of them corresponds to his profession; for one of them sees in his dream that he is pressing wine, while the other seems to be carrying bread on his head." (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:453).

This analysis illustrates that knowledge of the dreamers' social status and profession can be accessed through a precise symbolic reading of the content of their dreams. Here, al-Rāzī demonstrated that dream interpretation can function as a semiotic-based intellectual activity, not just as a transcendent medium of revelation. He articulated how the Prophet Joseph used representational indicators in dreams as a basis for logical inference.

Furthermore, al-Rāzī highlighted the problems that arise if dream interpretation is only considered as an exclusive product of revelation. In the historical context of the Prophet Joseph, if only he and his father, Prophet Jacob, had the ability to interpret dreams, then there should be no other actors playing a role in the tradition of interpretation. However, the Qur'anic narrative itself implies that this science has had a wider social presence.

This is made clear in al-Rāzī's interpretation of Q.S. Yūsuf (12): 43-46, which narrated the Egyptian king's dream: seven fat cows were eaten by seven skinny cows, and seven ears of wheat were green and seven were dry. This dream shook the king psychologically as he felt there was a hint of evil contained in it, although he did not understand its specific meaning. This anxiety prompted the king to consult his dream with the court officials who were usually relied upon in matters of interpretation.

Interestingly, the king's advisors collectively claimed to be unable to interpret the dream. However, al-Rāzī refused to interpret their statements as a form of total ignorance. He explained that the court dream interpreters were not denying the existence or validity of the science of dream interpretation, but rather acknowledging their epistemological limitations to deal with certain types of dreams. In this regard, al-Rāzī systematically distinguished two types of dreams based on their structure and legibility:

"And know that those people (the interpreters of dreams in the palace) do not deny that they have knowledge of the science of dream interpretation. Rather, they explain that the science of dream interpretation is divided into two types: First, the kind of dreams that are organized and well-organized, so that they are easy to transform from imaginary images to the ultimate meanings that are intellectual and spiritual. Secondly, the type of dreams that are chaotic and disorganized, with no clear structure, and these are called adlghāts (mixed dreams). They said that the king's dream belonged to the adlghāts. Then they said that they had no knowledge of interpretation for this type. It is as if they said: 'This dream is a mixture of various elements and whatever is so, we are unable to understand it and our intellect is unable to reach it.'" (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:464).

The statement confirms that in al-Rāzī's view, the reluctance of the king's advisors to interpret the dream was not due to a lack of cognitive capacity, but because they recognized the complexity of the dream's structure. They identified the king's dreams as *adlghāts*, which are fragmentary and symbolically incoherent. However, their statement implicitly opens up the epistemic space that there could still be a person with sufficient depth of knowledge to interpret even the seemingly chaotic types of dreams.

From this analysis, al-Rāzī constructed a hierarchy of knowledge in the science of dream interpretation.

He distinguished three epistemological levels that are reflected in this story. The first level is intuitive awareness like that of the king, which is knowing that dreams carry meaning, although not understanding what that meaning is. The second level is the ability to interpret structured dreams, as possessed by the court interpreters. The third level is the capacity to interpret complex and multifaceted dreams, which in this case was only possessed by the Prophet Joseph.

Thus, al-Rāzī presented an intellectual map that shows that dream interpretation is not the exclusive domain of revelation alone, but rather a spectrum of *kasbi* (can be acquired) knowledge that can be studied, trained, and mastered to varying degrees. Dream interpretation is not simply the result of transcendent illumination, but also the expression of a rational and semiotic process involving intellectual sensitivity to symbols, context and the inner structure of human beings.

One of the critical arguments often raised in the epistemological discourse of dream interpretation is that if dream interpretation is exclusively sourced from revelation, then its meaning is esoteric, closed, and inaccessible to ordinary human reason. In this framework, the activity of interpreting dreams would be reduced to a mystical process that can only be done by individuals who receive direct inspiration from God, with no rational potential to be analyzed or tested. However, al-Rāzī expressly rejected such epistemic implications. He argued that the interpretation of dreams by the Prophet Joseph is a form of *tafsīr ‘aqlī* i.e. interpretation that is within the reach of human reason, not merely the result of revelation.

This argument was presented by al-Rāzī in his explanation of Q.S. Yūsuf (12): 47-49, when Prophet Joseph interpreted the King of Egypt's dream as an indication of the three economic phases that the country would experience: seven years of fertility, seven years of famine, and one year of abundant blessings thereafter. al-Rāzī broke down the interpretation into two distinctive components. First, the part relating to the seven years of fertility and seven years of drought, according to him, is something accessible to human knowledge. He asserts that the relationship between the fertile and dry seasons is an empirical agricultural pattern that is commonly known in society. In al-Rāzī's view, the interpretation of the dream does not require revelation as the sole source of epistemic legitimacy, but rather historical observation and logical reasoning about seasonal and economic patterns.

However, the second part of the interpretation, the prediction of a year of abundance after the famine, presents a more complex layer of meaning. In deciphering it, al-Rāzī offered two hermeneutic approaches. The first approach is *ta'abbudī*, accepting that the details of the conditions of that year, as mentioned in the Qur'ān: *"In that year the people were given rain and they squeezed"*, is information that can only be known through revelation. Al-Rāzī stated:

> *"Assuming that the change from drought to fertility can indeed be understood from the dream, but the details of the condition, namely His words: 'In that year the people were given rain (relief) and they pressed (fruits)', cannot be known except through revelation."* (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:466).

However, al-Rāzī did not stop at this approach. He immediately proposed a second option that is much more rational and contextual. He interpreted the term *aġāth* in the verse not as an explicit instruction from revelation, but as an idiom that can be interpreted symbolically within the framework of Arabic language. According to him, the phrase means *"Allah saved them from distress"*, which in this context means that the community was saved from suffering due to the previous drought. In this view, the blessed year does not need to be understood as a prophetic revelation containing supernatural information, but as the logical result of an agrarian cycle that is already known empirically:

> *"The meaning, then, is that man is saved from the suffering of drought."* (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:466).

This approach opens the horizon that dream interpretation can be a space for dialogue between the symbolic structure in dreams and the objective reality that can be recognized through reasoning. Al-Rāzī even strengthened his argument by presenting an alternative interpretation of the word *ya'sirūn* ("squeeze") in the verse. According to him, the word does not have to be interpreted narrowly as the activity of squeezing fruits, but can also refer to the activity of squeezing milk from livestock that experience increased production in fertile

periods. He wrote:

"*This is very logical for farm animals that live in the fertile period.*" (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:466).

Through this explanation, al-Rāzī showed that dream symbols do not always require reference to the revelatory dimension, but can be deciphered through correlations with natural, economic, and social phenomena recognized in everyday life. He outlined that the process of dream interpretation can be a combination of intuition, historical experience, and linguistic structures that can be interpreted with the tools of reason.

In this way, al-Rāzī has a unique position in Islamic scholarship: on the one hand, he respects the position of revelation as the highest source of truth, but on the other hand, he advocated an epistemology that provides space for human reason to take an active part in the process of symbolic interpretation. Dream interpretation in al-Rāzī's perspective is not the exclusive domain of prophets, but rather a branch of knowledge that can be studied, developed, and practiced by humans through scientific methodology and analytical approaches.

Systematics of Dream Interpretation in the View of Fakhruddin al-Razi
Significance of Dreams and the Limits of Rationality
al-Rāzī in his interpretation of Q.S. Yūsuf (12): 44 proposes a categorization framework for the types of dreams based on their structure and potential to be interpreted. He stated that not all dreams are worthy of being the object of interpretation. In this regard, al-Rāzī systematically differentiated between significant dreams and dreams that belong to *adlghāts aḥlām*, i.e. mixed dreams or what is commonly referred to as "flower sleep".

According to al-Rāzī, the main difference between these two types of dreams lies in their symbolic organization and coherence. He explained:

"*However, they explain that the science of dream interpretation is divided into two types: First, the type of dreams that are organized and well-organized, so that they are easy to transform from imaginary images to the ultimate meanings that are intellectual and spiritual in nature. Secondly, the type of dreams that are chaotic and disorganized, with no clear structure, and these are called adlghāts (mixed dreams). They said that the king's dream belonged to the adlghāts. Then they said that they had no knowledge of interpretation for this type. It is as if they said: 'This dream is a mixture of various elements and whatever is so, we are unable to understand it and our intellect is unable to reach it.'*" (al-Rāzī, 2000, p. 18:464)

The quote shows that for al-Rāzī, dream legibility (the capacity of dreams to be transformed into intellectual meaning) is the main indicator of the validity of dreams as objects of takwil. However, he did not stop at this binary categorization. He implicitly suggested that among what the majority considers *to be adlghāts*, there are types of dreams that outwardly appear random and unsystematic, but actually contain latent symbolic structures that can be read and interpreted by someone who has knowledge over symbols and the condition of the human soul.

This approach is close to the interpretive model proposed by Carl Gustav Jung in analytical psychology. Jung emphasized that dreams, even the most seemingly bizarre and chaotic, often contain *archetypal* symbols rooted in the structure of the human collective unconscious. These symbols can be unraveled through contextual and historical readings of individual lives (Jones, 2007). In this regard, al-Rāzī has intuitively opened up the possibility that even seemingly unsystematic dreams, if interpreted by those with a depth of symbolic knowledge, can reveal psychological and even transcendental realities.

To support this claim, al-Rāzī again refered to the context of the king's dream story in Q.S. Yūsuf (12): 44. He pointed out how the royal officials were unable to interpret the dream due to their limitations in identifying the symbolic structure of complex and unusual visuals. They regarded the king's dream as *adlghāts*, and therefore expressed their inability to interpret it. Herein lies al-Rāzī's subtle critique of overly textual or *symbol dictionary-based* models of dream interpretation.

The inability of the court interpreters to give meaning to the king's dream was not due to the absence of meaning, but rather to the stagnation of their methods. In al-Rāzī's view, dream interpretation cannot be reduced

to the activity of matching symbols with standardized meanings, but rather requires a deeper understanding of the psychological and sociological conditions of the dreamer's subject. Prophet Joseph succeeded in interpreting the dream not because he had exclusive access to certain symbols, but because he understood the mental, social, and historical context of the king.

In other words, al-Rāzī expanded the epistemological horizon of dream interpretation from a mere linguistic-symbolic approach to a holistic hermeneutic approach. He implied that Prophet Joseph's success in interpreting the king's dream was the result of a combination of symbolic intelligence and sensitivity to the dynamics of the dreamer's reality. Therefore, dreams that are considered meaningless by some people, can actually contain deep meaning if read by someone who has adequate epistemic and spiritual capacity.

The Relationship between Visual and Dream Meaning

al-Rāzī formulated an important aspect of dream epistemology, namely that there is a significant correlation between the visuals that appear in dreams and the dreamer's mental dynamics in the waking state. In the context of psychological dreams, visuals do not stand as arbitrary entities, but rather as symbolic forms of latent emotional states, such as anxiety, hope, and threat (Grenell, 2008). al-Rāzī developed this view in his interpretation of the story of the two young men in prison in Q.S. Yūsuf (12): 36-42.

The first case is of a young man who had previously served as the king's food steward. In his dream, he saw bread above his head and crows eating the bread. al-Rāzī read the visualization of bread as a representation of his profession, namely as a cook or royal food manager. Meanwhile, the presence of crows is interpreted as a symbol of death. Prophet Joseph's interpretation of this dream was that the young man would be found guilty and sentenced to death by crucifixion. This interpretation, in al-Rāzī's view, is not only the result of prophetic inspiration, but can also be explained psychologically and rationally.

Al-Rāzī understood that the young man harbored deep anxiety, knowing that he had been caught poisoning the king's food. In his conscious state, the young man was very likely experiencing fear and high mental distress at the almost certain death sentence that was handed down to him. However, as a form of psychological defense, he displayed a *denial* mechanism, a natural response when individuals are faced with an unbearable reality. This is where the role of dreams becomes significant. The visuals in dreams, namely bread and crows, serve as a channel for sublimation of anxiety that cannot be faced directly in the conscious state (Meyer, 2021).

In other words, according to al-Rāzī, these dream visuals are not only symbolic, but also adaptive. That is, the dream conveys a message about the threat being faced by the individual, but in a more subtle and psychologically acceptable way. The bread serves as a reminder of the context of the profession and the crime, while the raven serves as a metaphor that conveys the meaning of death without directly displaying the visual of execution.

The second case concerns the young man serving the king's drink. The visual in his dream depicts him pressing grapes and serving them to the king. The Prophet Joseph interpreted that this young man would be released and restored to his former position as a palace servant. Just like the first case, al-Rāzī viewed that this interpretation can also be explained through a psychological framework. The young man was convinced of his innocence and was merely a victim of circumstances. His belief that he will be acquitted breeds intense hope, although it does not completely dismiss the anxiety of a possible unfavorable court outcome.

Al-Rāzī read the visual of squeezing grapes and presenting them to the king as a symbol of the young man's subconscious hope. Wine in this context symbolizes life, work, and productive social relations. The activity of squeezing and serving the grapes becomes an idealized image of the future he hopes for. However, the appearance of this visual also reflects an inner tension: on the one hand the young man tries to calm himself with optimistic images, but on the other hand he remains in the uncertainty of the final outcome.

Through these two cases, al-Rāzī developed an implicit principle that dreams are not only an inward projection, but also a form of *coping mechanism of* the human psyche in dealing with a reality that cannot be fully managed consciously. Al-Rāzī's explanation showed a hermeneutic precision that parallels the approach of modern psychology, especially the classical psychoanalysis pioneered by Sigmund Freud. Freud asserted that dreams are unconscious attempts to fulfill repressed desires or face fears that cannot be confronted directly in the real world (Meyer, 2021). In Freudian terminology, visuals in dreams are "symbolic packaging" of unconscious

impulses that undergo distortion in order to be accepted by consciousness (Gottesmann, 2010).

Thus, al-Rāzī's contribution lies not only in his ability to interpret symbols narratively, but also in his attempt to contextualize dream visuals as dynamic representations of the dreamer's inner turmoil. This view places dream interpretation as a multidimensional process involving sensitivity to symbols, narratives, and individual psychodynamics, while proving that the classical heritage of interpretation has epistemological affinities with modern theories on dreams and the unconscious.

Epistemological Implications of Fakhruddin al-Razi's Thought on the Tradition of Dream Interpretation in Islam

There are three main implications of al-Rāzī's framework that are worth highlighting. First, al-Rāzī did not deny the possibility of dreams as spiritual communication or *ruḥānī*, especially in the context of prophethood and *istikharah* (dream incubation in Islam in the form of a prayer), but he simultaneously asserted that most human dreams can be explained through rational psychological processes. This is an important distinction that distinguishes his approach from the more exclusive and dogmatic styles of dream interpretation.

Secondly, al-Rāzī's contribution lies in transforming the approach to dream interpretation from a closed system based on fixed symbols to an open system that is analytical and contextual. In his view, symbols in dreams are not universal and fixed as assumed by Ibn Sīrīn's approach, but rather relational to the dreamer's life experience, psychological background, and social structure. Therefore, al-Rāzī positioned the dream interpreter not merely as the inheritor of a symbolic dictionary, but as a hermeneut who interprets dream visuals within the framework of the dreamer's inner dynamics and external conditions.

Third, al-Rāzī's approach has a wide applicative potential, as it is not bound to certain individual entities, such as saints or takwil experts who have *karāmah* (spiritual gift), but is open to anyone who develops analytical competence towards symbols and human psychodynamics. This paves the way for the birth of a dream interpretation methodology that can be used in the context of spiritual counseling, Islamic psychoanalysis, and even dream-based therapy in contemporary approaches.

Conclusion

The thinking of al-Rāzī in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* substantially provided a corrective to the symbolic rigidity that characterized the post-Ibn Qutayhbah tradition of Islamic dream interpretation. The symbolic approach, despite having roots in prophetic transmission and the wisdom of the saints, has in many cases lost its elasticity in understanding the complexity of the contemporary human psyche. In this context, al-Rāzī emerges as a figure who combines the rigor of classical scholars with methodological acumen compatible with modern analysis.

Al-Rāzī's thought opened a new horizon for Muslims in understanding dreams as entities that do not always have to be interpreted metaphysically, but can be read as a mirror of human anxiety, hope, and existential tension. Dream interpretation, in his view, is a field of science that can be studied, developed, and tested with ratio and experience. Thus, his approach provides an opportunity for the birth of an epistemology of dream interpretation that is not only Islamic, but also scientific.

Limitations of the Study

This study is grounded in the analysis of al-Rāzī's thoughts as presented in *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, a tafseer work he completed in the later years of his life. The exclusive focus on this text is aimed at examining the intellectual framework of al-Rāzī's thought at its zenith of maturity. However, it is plausible that early notions regarding dreams can be traced back to al-Rāzī's earlier works, spanning his theological, philosophical, and psychological writings. Consequently, comparative studies across al-Rāzī's various works remain essential, including a more comprehensive examination of his approach to the relationship between dreams and ʿilm al-nafs (Islamic psychology). Such efforts are necessary to construct a well-rounded, transdisciplinary theory of Islamic dream interpretation.

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