

Roads to Paradise

Volume 1

Islamic History and Civilization

STUDIES AND TEXTS

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VOLUME 136/1

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Roads to Paradise

Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam

VOLUME 1

Foundations and Formation of a Tradition
Reflections on the Hereafter
in the Quran and Islamic Religious Thought

Edited by

Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson

With the Assistance of

Christian Mauder



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: *Hūrīs in Paradise*, *Mī'rājnāme*, Herat, 1430s. BnF Supplement Turc 190 – Fol. 49r.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gunther, Sebastian. | Lawson, Todd, 1948– | Mauder, Christian.

Title: Roads to paradise : eschatology and concepts of the hereafter in Islam / edited by Sebastian Gunther, Todd Lawson, with the assistance of Christian Mauder.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2017] | Series: Islamic history and civilization, ISSN 0929-2403 ; volume 136 | Includes bibliographical references and index. Contents: Volume 1. Foundations and the formation of a tradition. Reflections on the hereafter in the Quran and Islamic religious thought— Volume 2. Continuity and Change. The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamicate World (Set)

Identifiers: LCCN 2016046348 (print) | LCCN 2016047258 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004333130 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9789004330948 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9789004330955 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9789004333154 (E-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Islamic eschatology. | Future life—Islam. | Islamic eschatology—Qur'anic teaching. | Future life—Islam—Qur'anic teaching.

Classification: LCC BP166.8 .R63 2017 (print) | LCC BP166.8 (ebook) | DDC 297.2/3—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016046348>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0929-2403

ISBN 978-90-04-33313-0 (hardback, set)

ISBN 978-90-04-33094-8 (hardback, vol. 1)

ISBN 978-90-04-33095-5 (hardback, vol. 2)

ISBN 978-90-04-33315-4 (e-book)

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Dedicated to the memory of Michael E. Marmura,

*born in Jerusalem, Palestine, 11 November 1929,
passed away in Antigonish, Canada, 17 September 2009.*

*His unique example and inspiration
as a scholar, friend, teacher, and human being continues.*



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Zum Geleit

Josef van Ess

Jenseits des Todes hat all unsere Erfahrung ein Ende. Wie immer wir uns die Zukunft dann vorstellen, über Projektionen kommen wir nicht hinaus. Zwar zehren diese von unseren irdischen Wünschen; aber sie bleiben doch unbestimmt, und nur unsere Hoffnung verleiht ihnen Leben. Wir sind glücklich, wenn sie uns als Verheißung angeboten werden, in Gestalt einer Offenbarung oder einer „Enthüllung“ (ἀποκάλυψις); ihr schenken wir Vertrauen. An dieser Stelle treten die Religionen in ihr Recht; sie sind am ehesten geeignet, unsere Angst vor dem Tod zu kompensieren. Aber die Menschheit mußte erst lernen, wie man das macht. Die Offenbarungsreligionen sind, historisch gesehen, ein spätes Phänomen. Die existentielle Wirklichkeit, von der man tagtäglich umgeben war, gab den Blick nicht frei auf eine „Lichtung“, die es neben oder nach dem Tod hätte geben können; das Jenseits ließ sich nur ausdenken.

Um der Verheißung nahezukommen, mußte man, so schien es, eine Reise antreten. Diese mochte, wie etwa in der Odyssee, nach Westen führen, wo die Sonne unterging und die Welt zu Ende war, vielleicht aber auch über ein Wasser, das dem bewohnbaren Land eine Grenze setzte – über das Meer, das die Erde umgibt und in dessen Ferne die Inseln der Seligen liegen, oder über einen Fluß, den man mit einer Fähre oder einer Totenbarke überquerte. Allerdings gab es keinen Weg zurück, und vielleicht stieß man in jenen unerforschten Weiten auch gar nicht auf eine Stätte, wo glückliche Menschen lebten, sondern lediglich auf ein Reich der Schatten. Das Hoffen mußte man also gleichfalls lernen. Wie jede Reise, so war auch die ins Jenseits Anlaß sowohl zur Furcht wie zur Freude. Sie erfüllte den, der sie antrat, mit Unruhe und Spannung; ihr Ziel lag im Irgendwo.

Der Islam, unter den Offenbarungsreligionen die späteste, zeigte sich bei diesem Schritt ins Ungewisse unverhohlen optimistisch. Was der Prophet da im Namen Gottes verhieß, war einem glücklichen Dasein sehr nahe. Das erklärt sich vielleicht daraus, daß man damals für einen kurzen Augenblick tatsächlich sich einer Naherwartung hingab; man dachte unmittelbar vor der Schwelle zu einem „ewigen Leben“ zu stehen. Der Koran versprach ein Paradies der Freuden, das jedem, der glaubte, offenstand. Allerdings nur im Verbund einer Gemeinde; die Vorstellung war individuell und kommunalistisch zugleich. In einem Ḥadīṭ, das die koranischen Perikopen vermutlich

schon früh als Nebenüberlieferung begleitete¹, wurde gesagt, daß der Prophet seine Anhänger selber ins Paradies führen werde; er erwarte sie dazu an einem Wasserbecken (*ḥauḍ*), wo sie sich noch einmal erfrischen können – oder vielleicht auch die Waschung vollziehen, damit sie in ritueller Reinheit den heiligen Ort betreten². Gemeinsam lassen sie sich von ihm in eine Stätte immerwährenden Grüns geleiten, einen Garten, der einer Oase gleicht und an einer Stelle im Koran (Sure 18:107) mit einem Wort spezifiziert wird, das persischen Ursprungs ist: *ġannat al-firdaus*. Im Arabischen ist *firdaus* retrograd von seinem Plural *farādis* her gebildet, und dieser entspricht lautlich genau unserem „Paradies“ (aus griechisch *παράδεισος* bzw. letzten Endes altiranisch *pairi-daēsa*). Grün aber galt den Muslimen als die Farbe dieses Ortes, und es ist bis heute die Farbe des Islams geblieben.

Die Gemeinde bestand ursprünglich aus den „Gläubigen“, die im Koran als solche angedredet wurden. Was sie auszeichnete, war eben dieser Glaube gewesen; er hatte ihnen geholfen und würde ihnen nun jenes Glück bringen, das jenseits aller Zeit zu liegen schien. Aber schon bald wurde klar, daß es unter den Muslimen auch solche gab, die das Paradies nicht verdienten. Denn die Einheit der Urgemeinde zerbrach sehr schnell – spätestens in dem Augenblick, wo der dritte Kalif, ʿUtmān (reg. 23/644–35/656), in seinem eigenen Haus von Rebellen, die aus den eigenen Reihen kamen, erschlagen wurde. Man konnte sich nicht darüber einig, wer bei diesem Geschehnis die Guten und wer die Bösen gewesen waren; aber man konnte sich ebensowenig dem Gedanken entziehen, daß die bloße Zugehörigkeit zur Gemeinde nicht ausreichte, um dem Einzelnen das Paradies zu sichern, sondern es dazu auch des rechten Handelns bedurfte. Dies drückte man mit der Vorstellung aus, daß jeder, der ins Paradies will, zuvor noch einmal einer letzten Prüfung unterzogen wird, indem er über eine Brücke schreiten muß, eine Brücke aber, die nun nicht über einen Fluß führt, sondern über einen Abgrund, in dessen Tiefe sich die Hölle befindet. Die Hölle war ursprünglich wohl denjenigen vorbehalten gewesen, die sich um Muḥammads Botschaft nicht gekümmert hatten, den „Ungläubigen“ also. Jetzt verschob sich der Akzent; auch Muslime mußten trittfest sein und darauf achten, daß sie nicht in die Tiefe hinabgezogen wurden.

1 Ich gehe davon aus, daß ebenso wie manche Ḥadīṭe den nachkoranischen Kontext erkennen lassen, in den sie hineingehören, andere noch das Denken der Urgemeinde spiegeln. Über ihre „Echtheit“, also die Berechtigung der Zuschreibung an den Propheten, ist damit vorerst nichts ausgesagt.

2 Vgl. J. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 Bde., Berlin 1991–1997, iv, 543–4.

Zwar ist im Koran von einer solchen Brücke nirgendwo die Rede. Aber die Vorstellung ist gewiß alt. Sie stammte wiederum aus dem vorislamischen Iran und war vermutlich schon im Umlauf, als der Koran zusammengestellt und redigiert wurde. Auch ihr begegnen wir zuerst im Ḥadīṭ, ebenso wie dem Bild vom Propheten an der Wasserstelle. Man las sie bald zwar auch aus dem Koran heraus; aber das Wort, auf das man sich da stützen zu können glaubte (*sirāṭ*), hieß gar nicht „Brücke“, sondern „Weg“ und kam im übrigen aus dem Lateinischen (*strata* = „Straße“). Das ist freilich nur dem Philologen eine Betrachtung wert. Für unsere Belange ist wichtiger, sich bewußt zu machen, daß beim Betreten und Überschreiten dieser Brücke niemand aus der Gemeinde Hilfe leistet. Jeder Mensch ist dort auf sich selbst gestellt, und der Prophet taucht gar nicht auf³. Die Diskrepanz zwischen der kommunalistischen und der individualistischen Sicht, die darin sichtbar wird, hat zu theologischen Problemen geführt, Fragen nach Schuld und Verantwortung oder dem Verhältnis zwischen dem alleinseigmachenden Glauben und der steten Vergewärtigung des Gerichts, die bis heute nicht gelöst sind und sich vielleicht auch bloß dezisionistisch, nicht aber spekulativ befriedigend lösen lassen.

Nun ist es bei Projektionen oder Konstrukten vermutlich immer so, daß manche Fragen offen bleiben. Aber die Fragen wechseln, je nach Herkunft und Zeitpunkt. Wenn es das Paradies nämlich wirklich gab, und sei es auch nur als Verheißung, wo befand es sich dann? In der iranischen Welt bezeichnete *παράδεισος* ein parkähnliches Gehege, das der König sich zur Jagd vorbehielt. Das islamische Paradies dagegen war niemandes Privileg; es war ebenso egalitär wie der Islam selber. Der Islam machte, wenn man ihn einmal angenommen hatte, keine Unterschiede. Man sprach über dem Toten ein Gebet; aber sein Grab war unscheinbar, ohne jede Andeutung seines sozialen Standes. Im Paradies ging niemand auf die Jagd⁴, und auch einer Umfriedung bedurfte es nicht; denn die Wirklichkeit, die man als Vergleich vor Augen hatte, die Oase, war lediglich durch die Wüste begrenzt. Was man sich vorstellte, war eher eine Art Wellness-Center, das allen in gleicher Weise zugute kam (oder zumindest all denjenigen, denen Gott es in seiner Barmherzigkeit zugestand).

Nichts lag näher, als hierfür einen irdischen Ort zu suchen, und manche fanden ihn schon auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, im Tal von Wağğ, wo die Stadt Ṭāʾif

3 Vgl. aber van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 165.

4 Jedenfalls nicht nach der üblichen Auffassung. Eine Ausnahme macht Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī, der in seiner *Risālat al-ğufrān* sich vorstellt, daß vorislamische arabische Dichter, die von Gott ins Paradies aufgenommen worden sind, dort demselben Vergnügen nachgehen wollen, das sie in ihren Versen so ausgiebig geschildert haben. Sie stoßen dabei nur auf das theologische Problem, daß im Paradies niemand getötet werden kann, selbst Tiere nicht.

lag, von der aus Mekka mit Früchten und Obst versorgt wurde. Dort hatte, wie man vom Propheten gehört haben wollte, „Gott seinen letzten Schritt getan“. Zwar wußte man nicht genau, was sich hinter diesem „letzten Schritt“ verbarg, und später meinte man gar Gott durch den Propheten ersetzen zu müssen, der „für Gott“ nach Ṭā'if seinen letzten Kriegszug unternommen habe⁵. Aber diese metaphorische Deutung war durch nichts gerechtfertigt und in ihrer antianthropomorphistischen Tendenz deutlich sekundär. Gemeint war vielmehr: Gott hatte sich auf Erden aufgehalten, als er Adam erschuf, und er hatte sich dazu einen besonders lieblichen Ort (einen *locus amoenus*) ausgesucht, den er erst wieder verließ, als Adam das Gebot übertrat, das ihm auferlegt worden war. Adam wurde dann „in die Wüste geschickt“, und Gott stieg wieder zum Himmel auf, von wo er herabgekommen war, um die Erde zu erschaffen⁶.

Das Tal Wağğ hatte hier dieselbe Funktion wie Jerusalem, von dem man Ähnliches erzählte; wahrscheinlich ist die Vorstellung auch von dorthier übernommen⁷. Gott hatte einen festen Punkt gebraucht, um sein Schöpfungswerk zu vollbringen, den „Gründungsstein“, wie die Juden sagten, den Felsen nämlich, den die Muslime dann mit ihrem „Dom“ überwölbten, und er hatte an diesem Ort mit Adam leben wollen. Warum hätte er sonst sich die Mühe gemacht? Erst als Adam sündigte (Gott „zuwiderhandelte“, wie die Muslime sagen), beschloß Gott, seinen „letzten Schritt“ zu tun und heimzukehren zu seinem Hofstaat, den Engeln.

Nach Jerusalem wird, wie die Juden glaubten, Gott später noch einmal seine Schritte wenden, um nämlich am Ende der Zeiten Gericht zu halten. Sie ließen sich deswegen im Tale Josaphat begraben, um bei der Auferstehung schnell zur Stelle zu sein; man konnte hoffen, daß Gott in seinem letzten Hoheitsakt sich zu dessen Beginn noch nicht in Zorn geredet haben würde. Aber befindet sich an eben dieser Stelle auch das Paradies, wohin Muḥammad seine Gemeinde führen wird, gewissermaßen in spiegelbildlicher Rücknahme von Adams Vertreibung? Das Konstrukt hätte auf diese Weise zwei verschiedene Bildflächen gehabt – wie ein Diptychon, dessen beide Seiten durch ein erdenhaftes Intermezzo voneinander getrennt waren.

Aber da kam nun doch der finale Charakter des Todes der Spekulation in die Quere. Denn vor Anbruch des Jüngsten Tages ist auf Erden ja niemand mehr

5 So Ibn 'Abdallāh ar-Rūmī Yāqūt, *Kitāb Mu'ğam al-buldān*, 5 Bde., Beirut 1955–7, s. v. – Nach der Eroberung Mekkas hatte Muḥammad Ṭā'if belagert, die Stadt aber nicht einnehmen können. Sie war stark befestigt und ergab sich später freiwillig.

6 Kister, M.J., Some reports concerning al-Ṭā'if, in *JSAI* 1 (1979), 1–18, insbes. 18; dazu van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 396.

7 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 395.

am Leben, wohingegen Adam, als er mit Eva die Stätte seines Glücks verlassen mußte, keineswegs schon gestorben war, sondern sein irdisches Dasein erst begann. Zwar werden die Menschen, ehe es zum Gericht kommt, wieder alle zum Leben erweckt, und sie steigen aus ihren Gräbern hervor, die irgendwo auf Erden sind. Aber ihr Tod, der lange zurücklag, war doch auch schon ein Schritt in die Transzendenz gewesen. Denn in ihm trennt sich die Seele vom Körper; so glaubte man zumindest in jenen Regionen und Städten der Alten Welt, wohin der Islam sich verbreitete und wo seine Anhänger längere Zeit nur eine kleine, spekulativ meist noch ungeschulte Herrenschaft bildeten. Der Körper zerfällt; das ließ sich leicht beobachten. Die Seele dagegen scheint übrigzubleiben. Aber sie ist nicht für ein Wellness-Center gemacht. Sie ist feinstofflich, und wenn man sich, um Vergleichbares zu finden, unter den vier Elementen umsah, schien sie am ehesten zur Luft zu gehören. So hieß sie denn auch: *nafs* bzw. *rūḥ*. *Nafs* war das Prinzip der Individuation (die „Person“) und stand nahe bei *nafas*, dem Atem, während *rūḥ*, der Lebensgeist oder das Pneuma, an *rīḥ*, den Wind, erinnerte. Die Seele will darum nach oben; sie schwebt durch die Luft und hält sich, die Erde transzendierend, irgendwo im Himmel auf. Sie merkt, daß sie dort nicht allein ist; denn es gibt da oben natürlich auch die Seelen anderer Verstorbener. Diese ätherischen Wesen schließen sich zu Gruppen zusammen, zu „Heeren“ von guten und bösen „Geistern“, und um sich zu erkennen, beriechen sie sich – gleich den Pferden, wie man behauptete⁸. Auch der Geruch wurde ja durch die Luft weitergetragen.

Aber finden sie dort auch ihr Paradies? Denn noch ist das Ziel nicht erreicht; vorher erwartet sie ja noch das Gericht. Muß man darum die beiden Paradiese, das der Vergangenheit und das der Zukunft, voneinander trennen? Die frühe islamische Theologie hat sich mit dieser Möglichkeit auseinandergesetzt. Damit kam der Faktor Zeit ins Spiel; es ging nicht mehr nur um das Wo, sondern auch um das Wann. Gibt es das zukünftige Paradies überhaupt schon? Noch brauchte man es ja nicht, vor allem wenn man es irgendwo an einem außerirdischen Ort ansiedelte. Zumindest sah man sich nun gezwungen, es in der einen oder andern Form zu entmaterialisieren. Das gefiel später vor allem den Philosophen und Aufklärern. Diese hatten zwar nichts gegen einen Ort der Freuden; aber sie scheuten sich auch nicht, die koranischen Aussagen metaphorisch oder allegorisch zu verdünnen. Sie waren aus der Antike mit der Vorstellung einer Allseele vertraut; in ihr mochten die Einzelseelen nach dem Tode aufgehen.

Allerdings geriet man damit sogleich in neue Aporien. Denn wenn die Seele eines Toten sich in den Sphären mit einer Allseele vereinigt, in der schon viele

8 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 522.

andere Seelen wohnen, gerät sie in Gefahr, jene Individualität zu verlieren, die sie in ihrem irdischen Dasein gewonnen hat. Für diese aber sollte sie, soweit ihre Individualität im körperlichen Handeln Gestalt angenommen hatte, im Paradies belohnt (bzw. in der Hölle bestraft) werden. Wäre es darum nicht besser, von der Annahme einer dem Körper innewohnenden Seele überhaupt Abstand zu nehmen? Manche frühen Theologen sind tatsächlich so verfahren⁹; sie folgten damit einem Menschenbild, das wir auch aus dem Alten Testament, der „hebräischen Bibel“, kennen. Nicht etwa die Seelen werden ja während des Gerichtes gewogen, wie dies einem Christen aus mittelalterlichen Bildern vor Augen steht, sondern die Handlungen. Sie sind es, die juristische Relevanz besitzen; damit gewinnen sie „Gewicht“. Der Mensch wird darum als solcher, als ganzheitliches Wesen, in das Paradies eingehen, und vor dem Gericht werden die Leiber auferstehen, von denen das Handeln ausgegangen war.

Eben diese Auferstehung „im Fleische“ war es, die die Sache für die Philosophen kompliziert machte. Dafür war aber nicht der Islam verantwortlich. An eine derart ganzheitliche Auferstehung hatten schon die Christen geglaubt. Sie hatten auch besonderen Anlaß dazu gehabt; denn Jesus hatte, wie sie sagten, am dritten Tage nach dem Tod sein Grab verlassen und war einigen seiner Anhänger in seiner irdischen Gestalt erschienen. Er hatte „den Tod besiegt“, und man hatte Zeugen, die dies aus visionärer Erfahrung bestätigten. Die Muslime glaubten daran zwar nicht; für sie war Jesus lebend vom Kreuz in den Himmel erhoben worden, nicht als Gottes Sohn, sondern als einer jener Propheten, die letzten Endes alle nach dem von Muḥammad etablierten Modell bei ihrer Mission den gebührenden Erfolg gehabt hatten. Aber das Problem der Transzendenz des Jenseits war damit nicht gelöst. Der Islam hatte zwar, verglichen mit dem mittelalterlichen abendländischen Christentum, den engeren und ungebrocheneren Kontakt zur Antike; aber er wurde zugleich das christliche – bzw. „christlich-jüdische“ – Erbe nicht los.

Das Problem der Transzendenz hat die Muslime an sich auch außerhalb der Philosophie stark beschäftigt. Aber da ging es vor allem um das Gottesbild, um Gottes Einzigkeit und Unvergleichbarkeit; die Kontrahenten waren die Theologen und der Schauplatz die Attributenlehre. Dem Jenseits widmete man in dieser Beziehung weniger Aufmerksamkeit; es war ohnehin zu sehr mit Bildern vollgestellt. Man dachte es sich als einen Ort, zu dem alles Daseiende dereinst zurückkehren wird (*al-ma'ād*, nach Sure 28:85?), wo aber der Mensch keiner Bewährung oder Verpflichtung (*taklīf*) mehr unterworfen ist. Daß diesem Zustand ewige Dauer beschert sein werde, ließ man sich durch den Koran bestätigen. Die Formulierung erwies sich jedoch als nicht ganz eindeutig: „auf

9 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 513–4.

immer darin verharrend“ (*ḥālīdīna fihā abadan*). Was heißt da „immer“¹⁰? Und wer kommt in den Genuß dieser immerwährenden Versorgung? In der Antwort auf solche Fragen wagten wiederum die Philosophen sich am weitesten vor. Al-Fārābī (gest. 339/950) meinte, daß nur die Bürger ideal verwirklichter Gemeinwesen ewigen jenseitigen Lohn erhalten werden, während die Unwissenden und Ungeschickten so, wie sie gelebt haben, auch wieder vergehen¹¹. Aber die Philosophen schrieben für eine Elite; wieweit ihre Spekulationen ins Volk drangen und man dann an sie „glaubte“, ist schwer zu sagen.

Bemerkenswert ist freilich, daß sie ihre Gedanken meist offen äußern konnten; man war nicht dogmatisch festgelegt. Im übrigen verlagerte sich das Interesse von der Ewigkeit *a parte post* zu der *a parte ante*: Hat Gott, der ja selber ewig ist, die Welt in der Urewigkeit geschaffen oder erst in der Zeit? Das war eine rein spekulative Frage, die mit der Offenbarung nur am Rande etwas zu tun hatte. Die Ewigkeit *a parte post* dagegen war vor allem wegen der Höllenstrafe in die Diskussion geraten. Kann das Höllenfeuer ewig währen? Gesühnt werden mit ihm ja immer nur zeitliche Vergehen; da würde ein Fegefeuer reichen. Das war eine Debatte, wie wir sie heute um die Todesstrafe führen; rationale Argumente stießen da schnell an ihre Grenze. Ein Purgatorium hat es denn auch nur in der christlichen Theologie gegeben; die Muslime sind nie auf die Idee gekommen, daß in der Hölle viel zu „fegen“ oder zu „säubern“ sei. Sie gingen das Problem vielmehr von der göttlichen Güte her an; Gottes Barmherzigkeit ist viel zu groß, als daß er irgendeinen Menschen auf immer verstieße, soweit dieser sich nur zum Islam bekennt. Das war im Grunde viel konsequenter durchdacht. Allerdings müssen alle Menschen, ob gut oder böse, nach ihrem Tode bis zum Gericht warten, damit Gott seine Entscheidung trifft. Wohin mit ihnen während dieser Zeit? Man hat für sie da irgendwann eine Art „Zwischenlager“ gefunden, den *barzakh*; im Christentum sprach man von dem *limbo* oder der „Vorhölle“. Eigentlich war das nicht ganz dasselbe¹²; aber

10 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 551.

11 Dazu jetzt U. Rudolph, *Philosophie in der islamischen Welt*, i, 8.-10. Jahrhundert, Mitarb. R. Würsch, Basel 2012, 440–1.

12 In der christlichen Vorhölle befinden sich ja nur große Gestalten aus dem Alten Testament, die Christus noch nicht gekannt haben konnten. Der Islam dagegen hat, auch hierin wiederum egalitär, den Propheten (von denen es eine ganze Menge gab) nie im Jenseits einen besonderen Platz zugewiesen. Allerdings brauchten sie auch nicht auf das Gericht zu warten; nach vorherrschender Auffassung sind sie längst wieder lebendig geworden und leben seither im Paradies (ähnlich wie die „Märtyrer“, s. u.). Gerade deswegen kann, wie man dachte, Muḥammad nach dem Gericht seine Gemeinde am Eingang des Paradieses erwarten; er kommt von innen, diese dagegen von außen. Und natürlich

interessant ist vor allem, daß auf beiden Seiten kaum jemand auf die Idee kam, zu sagen, daß mit dem Tod für den Einzelnen ohnehin alle Zeit ein Ende habe und es für ihn kein „Vorher“ oder „Nachher“ mehr gebe.

Alternativen wie die Seelenwanderung, der zufolge man zur Strafe für eine gewisse Zeit in niedrigere Stufen der Existenz versetzt werden konnte (*tanāsuḥ*), wurden kaum erwogen. Mystiker kannten zwar das Phänomen der Seelenreise; Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (gest. wahrscheinlich 261/874) soll eine solche vollzogen haben. Aber diese führte nach oben statt nach unten; man orientierte sich vermutlich an Muḥammads Himmelfahrt. Auch von schamanistischen Erfahrungen hat man gewußt, spätestens seitdem der Islam nach Zentralasien übergriff, und genauer wohl erst, als die Mongolen Iran unterwarfen. Gemeinsam war diesen spirituellen Erlebnissen, daß Ort und Zeit temporär außer Kraft gesetzt waren; der Mensch wurde „entrückt“. Aber ein System hat man daraus im Islam nie gemacht. Den Paradiesesfreuden, die der gemeine Mann erwartete, lag wohl einfach das „Alle Lust will Ewigkeit“ zugrunde, an das uns Nietzsche erinnert hat. Was aber die Theologen sich ernsthaft fragten, war nur, ob Gott, so wie er vor der Schöpfung einmal ohne die Welt gewesen war (umgeben allein von seinen Engeln, die ihm botmäßig sind und ihm Gesellschaft leisten), auch am Ende aller Tage noch einmal auf ewig allein sein werde.

Solange es das Paradies noch gibt, ist Gott freilich den Seligen noch gegenwärtig. Zwar ist er mit ihnen nicht in jener hausväterlichen Weise vertraut, wie das bei Adam der Fall war; dazu sind ihrer nun ohnehin wohl zu viele. Man stellte ihn sich jetzt eher vor wie den König eines jenseitigen Volkes. Die Seligen kommen ihm darum auch nicht mehr so nahe wie damals Adam; aber sie können Gott zumindest wahrnehmen, in einer Schau (*ruʿya*). Letztere inszenierte man in der Phantasie nach Art einer Theateraufführung, mit Sitzreihen, die vielleicht aufstiegen wie in einer Arena und wo die besten Plätze denjenigen vorbehalten waren, die am gottesfürchtigsten gelebt hatten. Gott sitzt dabei hinter einem Vorhang, und dieser hebt sich von Zeit zu Zeit. Die *visio beatifica* währt also nicht ewig; sie wird nur intermittierend gewährt. Wir haben es quasi mit einer Audienz zu tun; auch der Abbasidenkalif saß, wenn ein fremder Gesandter (ein „Sonderbotschafter“) ihn aufsuchte, hinter einem Vorhang. Worte werden im Paradies allerdings, anders als bei einer Audienz, nicht gewechselt; niemand außer Mose hat, wie man im Islam glaubte, Gott je sprechen gehört, und auch dieser nur auf dem Berge Sinai. Ohnehin bekam

hat man niemanden von ihnen in die Hölle versetzt, wie Dante das mit Muḥammad tut; denn sie hatten ja alle schon den Islam gepredigt. Der Pater W. Schmidt (Wien, gest. 1954) hätte an dieser Stelle wohl seinen „Urmonotheismus“ am Werke gesehen.

man auf die Dauer Bedenken – wegen des Anthropomorphismus, der in einer Schau impliziert schien. Daran knüpfte sich eine lange Debatte: Sieht man Gott tatsächlich mit den Augen (also als wahrnehmbare Person) oder nur mit dem Herzen (also als imaginierte Wesenheit)? Kann man ihn überhaupt sehen¹³? Den Höllenbewohnern wird die Schau natürlich nicht zuteil. Sie sehen allenfalls, wenn sie aus ihrem Abgrund nach oben blicken, ihre glücklicheren Verwandten, die ihnen von ihren Freuden berichten und von dem Schauspiel, das ihnen von Zeit zu Zeit geboten wird – eine psychische Tortur der besonderen Art.

Die Gottesschau ist, wie gesagt, nicht die einzige Freude; sie ist nur die sublimste. In den Pausen war Zeit, anderes zu treiben, und selbst diejenigen, die später die religiöse Seligkeit durch die philosophische εὐδαιμονία (arab. *sa'āda*), also das „Glücksgefühl“, ersetzen, wollten auf dieses Andere vermutlich nicht ganz verzichten. Was sich im Paradies vollzog, läßt sich als Bankett verstehen – oder als Symposion; denn man trinkt dort auch Wein. Vielleicht hatten die Beduinen, an die sich die islamische Offenbarung zuerst richtete, die Anschauung davon aus den Malereien oder Triklinien spätantiker Grabkammern gewonnen, in Palmyra etwa oder in Petra¹⁴. Die Theologen hielten sich mit Stellungnahmen zurück; aber eine Schilderung, in der die koranischen Bilder zusammengefaßt und in eine ekstatische Sprache übertragen werden, findet sich doch schon im *Kitāb at-Tawāḥḥum* des Ḥārīt al-Muḥāsibī (gest. 243/857), eines Mystikers und Seelenkenners, der einer an Profil gewinnenden konservativen theologischen Strömung nahestand. Bei ihm hat sich das Totenmahl der Antike ganz in das Königsmahl im Beisein Gottes verwandelt. Im Christentum hat die sinnliche Kraft dieser islamischen Bilder seit dem Mittelalter Anstoß erregt. Seitdem aber der Jenseitsglaube unter westlichen

13 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 411 ff.

14 Näheres dazu jetzt bei A. Henning, *Die Turmgräber von Palmyra: Eine lokale Bauform im kaiserzeitlichen Syrien als Ausdruck kultureller Identität*, Rahden/Westf. 2013, 69 ff.; in dem bestbekannten Beispiel, dem Turmgrab des Elahbel, sind sieben Männer und eine Frau (!) bei diesem Bankett zugegen (Henning, *Turmgräber* 70). Auch der Gott Dionysos taucht dort auf, durch Weinranken gekennzeichnet (Henning, *Turmgräber* 79–80). Zu Petra vgl. Henning, *Turmgräber* 89, Anm. 658. Ich danke der Autorin für Hilfe bei der Auffindung der Stellen. Sie verweist mich auch auf A. Schmidt-Colinet, *Palmyra: Kulturbegrenzung im Grenzgebiet*, Mainz 1995, 39 ff.; vgl. dazu die Thematik eines palmyrenischen Seidenstoffes Schmidt-Colinet, *Palmyra* 71, Abb. 113. Das Grabmal hieß übrigens *nefeš*, die Grabstätte selber „Haus der Ewigkeit“ (Henning, *Turmgräber* 87). Daß dort tatsächlich nach dem Begräbnis ein Bankett oder Totenmahl stattfand, ist nicht unbedingt gesagt (Henning, *Turmgräber* 89).

Christen stark an Konkretheit verliert, haftet die Reaktion nur noch an der islamischen Vorstellung vom Märtyrertum.

Die „Märtyrer“ sind außer den Propheten die einzigen, die in dem egalitären islamischen Paradies zeitweise eine Sonderstellung einnehmen. Wie im Christentum sind sie „(Blut)Zeugen“ (gr. μάρτυς = „Zeuge“) und nicht bloß Zeugen im Sinne von „Bekenner“. Sie haben am Ġihād teilgenommen und sind dort gefallen¹⁵. Solange und soweit es eine Naherwartung gab, gingen sie ihren Glaubensbrüdern ins Paradies einfach voraus. Als man aber weiterhin auf das Gericht warten mußte, hielt man sie bald für diejenigen, die als Einzige schon im Paradies Platz genommen hatten. Dort trafen sie vorläufig nur auf die Engel, die den Thron Gottes umgaben, vielleicht auch auf Gott selber. Letzteres war freilich manchen, die auf Erden über die Sache nachdachten, schon des Guten zuviel. Sie meinten darum, daß die Blutzeugen, nachdem sie in einem höheren Sinne wieder zum Leben gebracht worden sind, am Eingang des Paradieses warten, bis sich am Ende der Tage die übrigen Gläubigen zu ihnen gesellen; am Ufer eines Flusses (!) sind dort Zelte für sie aufgestellt – das Jenseits als Lazarett. Andere hielten dafür, daß die Märtyrer in weiße Vögel verwandelt werden, die im Schatten des göttlichen Thrones nisten; hier liegt wohl die Vorstellung vom Seelenvogel zugrunde. Von einem der frühen Gefallenen, einem älteren Bruder des Kalifen ‘Alī (reg. 35/656–40/661), erzählte man sich, daß der Prophet ihn im Traume gesehen habe, wie er zwischen den Engeln (die vermutlich den Thron umstanden) umherflog; ihm waren zwei Flügel gewachsen, anstelle der Arme, die ihm im Kampfe abgeschlagen worden waren¹⁶. Von größeren sinnlichen Freuden ist gar nicht die Rede. Die Jungfrauen sind anscheinend noch nicht da. Bei ihnen soll es sich ja auch, wie man bisweilen sagte, um die Ehefrauen handeln; diese mußten sich das Paradies erst einmal verdienen.

Heute sind die „Märtyrer“ das einzige Thema, über das man sich ausläßt, wenn auf das islamische Paradies die Rede kommt – meist mit dem Spott des aufgeklärten Zeitgenossen. Man vergißt dabei, daß die Freuden des Paradieses zwar das sein mögen, was heutige „Märtyrer“ als Lohn für ihr Selbstopfer erwarten, aber doch nicht das Motiv sind für die Tat, mit der sie „Zeugnis ablegen“. Der „Terrorismus“ hat mit dem Koran wenig zu tun. Er ergibt sich nicht aus dem Jenseitsglauben, sondern ist eine politische Reaktion. Man mag über seine Ursachen streiten; aber historisch gesehen gehört der Terrorismus im islamischen Orient, überspitzt gesagt, zum „christlich-jüdischen Erbe“. In Europa war das eklatanteste Beispiel – und eines der frühesten dazu – das

15 Zum Begriff siehe J. van Ess, *Dschihad gestern und heute* (Julius-Wellhausen-Vorlesung des Centrum Orbis Orientalis et Occidentalis 3), Berlin 2012, insbes. 7–23.

16 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 523–4.

Attentat von Sarajevo; jenseits des Mittelmeeres begann diese Art, „Zeichen zu setzen“, mit der Sprengung des King David-Hotels. Terminologisch sah man das je nach Milieu und Zeitpunkt lange Zeit eher positiv; man sprach von „Befreiungskampf“, „Widerstandsbewegung“ oder von „Guerilla“ bzw. „Kleinkrieg“. Die bizarre Diskussion darüber, ob man es hier überhaupt mit Krieg – und bei den „Terroristen“ mit Kriegern (bzw. „Menschen“ im Sinne der Menschenrechte) – zu tun habe, hat diesem Vokabular ein Ende bereitet.

Auch aufgeklärte und „moderne“ Zeitgenossen sind im übrigen nicht immer frei von der Überzeugung, einem Paradies den Weg zu bereiten. Nur daß die westliche Welt es auf die Dauer vorzog, sich einem Glück zu verschreiben, das leichter zu greifen schien; sie schuf sich ihre eigenen Wellness-Center. Im Vorderen Orient wollte man „die Wüste zum Blühen bringen“ – als ob der Garten, von dem man träumte, in die Ödnis hinein erweitert werden könne. Schließlich baute man dann doch bloß eine Mauer; aus dem Paradies wurde auf diese Weise ein Ghetto. Die Hoffnung hat dort keinen Platz mehr. Schon das altiranische *pairi-daēsa* hatte eine Einfriedung gehabt, damit der König ungestört sein Jagdrecht ausüben konnte. Auch das war ein irdischer Ort gewesen. Innerweltliche Paradiese aber sind letzten Endes Utopien, „ortlos“. Ob das für die alten Paradiese, die noch im Himmel angesiedelt waren, ebenso gilt, werden wir erfahren. Freilich ein wenig zu spät.

Acknowledgments

The systematic analysis of various Muslim concepts of eschatology and of the hereafter constitutes a particularly intriguing academic endeavor for scholars of Islam as well as for those in comparative religion, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology, literary studies, and several other disciplines. However, such explorations are of no less interest to a wider public, where academic expertise can contribute a great deal toward a more comprehensive understanding of current political and religious developments in both the Muslim world and the West – a traditional dichotomy that appears more and more flawed with each passing day and thus of severely limited explanatory value.

Scholarly considerations of this kind were the basis of the international conference entitled “Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam,” held at the University of Göttingen, Germany, May 27–31, 2009. The organizers of the conference were honored by the large number of renowned scholars, both “eastern and western,” who accepted the invitation to participate in this meeting. Contributions from a number of wonderfully talented junior scholars also added greatly to the success of this historic academic event. The collected studies now in hand are the main result of the Göttingen conference and the editors are delighted to present in the following pages the more formal and, in most cases, significantly expanded versions of the scholarly presentations given there. In view of the high scholarly quality and the originality of many of these studies, it is safe to say as well that these two volumes go quite beyond what is usually referred to as conference proceedings.

The 54 studies presented in these two volumes have been arranged in eleven thematic chapters or clusters. This arrangement should help the reader navigate the ocean of ideas and research topics encountered here; the chapter headings alone suggest that each of these thematic clusters has its own special analytic *raison d'être*. The bibliographical appendix at the end of Volume Two was prepared by the editors to help facilitate future research on eschatology and concepts of the hereafter in Islam and round off the present publication.

• • •

Thanks are due to a number of colleagues and friends whose substantial support, in one way or another, first made the present publication possible.

First of all, Lale Behzadi (formerly of the University of Göttingen, now Professor of Arabic Studies at the University of Bamberg) must be mentioned, because without her help in drafting the initial applications for funding and

in organizing the 2009 meeting in Göttingen, the Paradise Conference would not have been possible. The Editors also would like to express equal gratitude to the many conference helpers, both faculty and students, from the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Göttingen, especially Akram Bishr and Dr. Mahmoud Haggag as well as those from the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto, in particular Dr. Omid Ghaemmaghami (now Assistant Professor of Arabic, State University of New York, Binghamton). Likewise, Christian Mauder's careful and efficient work has been invaluable throughout the editorial process in ways that deserve special recognition and thanks here.

Thanks are due as well to a number of senior scholars who readily agreed to referee one or more of the contributions included here, as well as to the two anonymous reviewers appointed by Brill to review the entire Paradise manuscript, for their exceptionally careful reading and helpful comments.

Here it is necessary to extend particular thanks to those who submitted their finished work earlier in the necessarily lengthy editorial process needed to produce a work such as this. As with any publication of this kind, the reader must bear in mind that scholarship has continued and that the terms of this or that argument, the discovery of new sources, the development of new critical perspectives will mean that a given chapter may be read today in a new intellectual context. This is in the nature of scholarship. We are grateful beyond measure to all who have contributed to this remarkably wide-ranging yet focused collaboration.

The Editors would also like to thank Dr. Alexey Khismatulin, St. Petersburg Institute of Oriental Studies, and Serdar Güneş, University of Frankfurt/Main, for their assistance in verifying certain information included in the introduction to Volume One and the bibliographical appendix in Volume Two.

The Editors are especially grateful to Professor Emeritus Dr. Tilman Nagel, University of Göttingen, for kindly accepting the invitation to give the Distinguished Lecture at the Opening Ceremony of the 2009 Paradise Conference, and Professor Emeritus Dr. Josef van Ess, University of Tübingen, for generously agreeing to enrich this publication with his intellectually inspiring Foreword.

The Editors herewith gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support of the Göttingen Paradise Conference by a number of foundations and research centers: the German Research Foundation (DFG); the Gerda Henkel Foundation; the Ministry of Science and Culture, State of Lower Saxony; the Göttingen Graduate School "Concepts of Divine, Concepts of the World," the Göttingen Centrum Orbis Orientalis (CORO), Olms Publishers, Hildesheim and New York; as well as Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden.

A warm and very cordial word of thanks goes to Kathy van Vliet, Senior Editor at Brill, Teddi Dols, Brill's IHC Series Editor, Pieter te Velde, our Production Editor, and in particular to Valerie J. Turner, our very diligent freelance copy editor and indexer with Brill, for their invaluable support in bringing to fruition *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*. Finally, it is a great pleasure to record our sincere expression of gratitude to Professor Emerita Dr. Wadad Kadi, University of Chicago, and Professor Emeritus Dr. Hans Hinrich Biesterfeldt, University of Bochum, for accepting this publication in Brill's series *Islamic History and Civilization* (IHC).

The Editors

Göttingen and Toronto, May 2016

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Note on Transliteration and Style

Throughout the volumes, we adhere to the following system of transliteration of Arabic script, which is based on the scheme used in Brill's *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*:

Consonants

ʾ	d	ḏ	k
b	dh	ṭ	l
t	r	ẓ	m
th	z	ʿ	n
j	s	gh	h
ḥ	sh	f	w
kh	ṣ	q	y

Vowels

Long Vowels	Short	Diphthongs
ā	a	aw
ū	u	ay
ī	i	

-a (-at in <i>idāfa</i>)	al and (-)l- (e.g. <i>al-kitāb</i> ; <i>wa-l-kitāb</i> ; no sun letters)
bi-l-kitāb <i>but</i> lil-masjid	Abū l-Walīd; fī l-Qur'ān
b. and bt.	ʿAbdallāh <i>but</i> ʿAbd al-Raḥmān
iyy (final form ī)	uww (final form ū)
no initial hamza, e. g. <i>al-amr</i>	<i>baytuhu</i> , only in poetry, if desirable, <i>baytuhū</i>

Proper names, technical terms, and geographic designations that are common in English are either not transliterated or used in simplified transliteration. Examples of such words include Cairo, Baghdad, Kufa, Sunni and Sunnites, as well as Quran (not Qur'an) and Sura. Examples of words in simplified transliteration are: ʿAbbasids, Ismaʿīli and Ismaʿilis, Shiʿi, Shiʿite, Shiʿites.

Quranic references are noted thus: Q 50:1 or Q 73:2–6, i.e., the number of the Sura in Arabic numerals, followed directly by a colon which is in turn followed by the verse numbers in Arabic numerals. Quranic verse numbering follows

the text now generally known as the “Cairo” or “Egyptian” official version of 1342/1923–4.

The standard system of dating all post-Hijri events is Hijri/Christian, e.g. 786/1384–5 and 786–96/1484–93. Pre-Islamic dates, if not made obvious by the context in which they are used, are indicated by “CE” or “BCE.”

References in the footnote apparatus are given, from their very first appearance on, in brief form. The full bibliographical data of all publications cited may be found in the bibliography included at the end of each contribution. Note that the Arabic article “al-” is disregarded in the alphabetical ordering of the bibliographical entries, while “ibn” is taken into account. The name of the series in which a book appeared and its number within this series are given only when relevant for the proper identification of the book. For typographical reasons, the names of books and articles in English are written in lowercase in the footnotes and the bibliography, but capitalized when they appear in continuous text. For abbreviations of frequently cited periodicals and reference works, see the following list of abbreviations.

Abbreviations

AI	<i>Annales islamologiques</i>
AIUON	<i>Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale di Napoli</i>
AO	<i>Acta orientalia</i>
AO-H	<i>Acta orientalia (Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae)</i>
Arabica	<i>Arabica. Revue d'études arabes</i>
ARW	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>
AS	<i>Arabian Studies</i>
AUU	<i>Accta Universitatis Upsaliensis</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American School of Oriental Research</i>
BEO	<i>Bulletin d'études orientales de l'Institut Français de Damas</i>
BGA	<i>Bibliotheca geographorum arabicorum</i>
BIFAO	<i>Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire</i>
BO	<i>Bibliotheca Orientalis</i>
BSA	<i>Budapest studies in Arabic</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
Der Islam	<i>Der Islam. Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur des islamischen Orients</i>
EI ¹	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 1st ed., Leiden 1913–38
EI ²	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 2nd ed., Leiden 1954–2004
EI ³	<i>Encyclopaedia of Islam</i> , 3rd ed., Leiden 2007–
EIr	<i>Encyclopaedia Iranica</i> , London 1982–
EQ	<i>Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān</i> , Leiden 2001–2006
ER	<i>Encyclopaedia of religion</i> , ed. M. Eliade, New York 1986
ERE	<i>Encyclopaedia of religions and ethics</i>
GMS	<i>Gibb memorial series</i>
HO	<i>Handbuch der Orientalistik</i>
IA	<i>İslâm ansiklopedisi</i>
IBLA	<i>Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes, Tunis</i>
IC	<i>Islamic Culture</i>
IJMES	<i>International journal of Middle Eastern studies</i>
IOS	<i>Israel oriental studies</i>
IQ	<i>The Islamic quarterly</i>
Iran	<i>Iran. Journal of the British Persian Studies</i>
JA	<i>Journal asiatique</i>
JAL	<i>Journal of Arabic literature</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>

<i>JE</i>	<i>Jewish encyclopaedia</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the economic and social history of the Orient</i>
<i>JIS</i>	<i>Journal of Islamic Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern studies</i>
<i>JQS</i>	<i>Journal of Quranic Studies</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic studies</i>
<i>MFOB</i>	<i>Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale de l'Université St. Joseph de Beyrouth</i>
<i>MIDEO</i>	<i>Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire</i>
<i>MO</i>	<i>Le Monde oriental</i>
<i>MSOS</i>	<i>Mitteilung des Seminars für orientalische Sprachen, westasiatische Studien</i>
<i>Muséon</i>	<i>Le Muséon. Revue des études orientales</i>
<i>MW</i>	<i>The Muslim World</i>
<i>OC</i>	<i>Oriens christianus</i>
<i>OLZ</i>	<i>Orientalistische Literaturzeitung</i>
<i>Oriens</i>	<i>Oriens. Zeitschrift der internationalen Gesellschaft für Orientforschung</i>
<i>Orientalia</i>	<i>Orientalia. Commentarii periodici Pontifici Institutii Biblici</i>
<i>Qanṭara</i>	<i>al-Qanṭara. Revista de estudios arabes</i>
<i>QSA</i>	<i>Quaderni de studi arabi</i>
<i>RCEA</i>	<i>Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Revue des Études islamiques</i>
<i>REJ</i>	<i>Revue des Études Juives</i>
<i>REMM</i>	<i>Revue du monde musulman et de la Méditerranée</i>
<i>RHR</i>	<i>Revue de l'histoire des religions</i>
<i>RIMA</i>	<i>Revue de l'Institut des Manuscrits Arabes</i>
<i>RMM</i>	<i>Revue du monde musulman</i>
<i>RO</i>	<i>Rocznik Orientalistyczny</i>
<i>ROC</i>	<i>Revue de l'Orient chrétien</i>
<i>RSO</i>	<i>Rivista degli studi orientali</i>
<i>Slr</i>	<i>Studia Iranica</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Studia Islamica</i>
<i>WI</i>	<i>Die Welt des Islams</i>
<i>WKAS</i>	<i>Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache, Wiesbaden 1970–</i>
<i>WO</i>	<i>Welt des Orients</i>
<i>WZKM</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes</i>

<i>ZAL</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Arabische Linguistik</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>
<i>ZGAIW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften</i>
<i>ZS</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Semitistik</i>

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Introduction

Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson

Concepts of eschatology and the hereafter are among the most characteristic and fundamental elements of faith and spirituality in Islam. Next to the belief in God, the broad spectrum of ideas concerning paradise and hell, salvation and damnation, and eternal bliss and unending wretchedness are central to Islamic religion. Reward and punishment in the afterlife for deeds in this life have given form to religious and scholarly discourse and debate in the Muslim world throughout history. The same themes have also been critical points of encounter, both spiritual and practical, between the Muslim world and “the West.” This is perhaps one of the main reasons the wide range of Muslim deliberations on “life after death” and “the world to come” are significant not only from an intellectual but also from a cultural point of view. Indeed, these debates among Muslim scholars provide us with valuable insights into the thoughts and feelings of individuals and communities living “in” Islam, as they touch upon nearly every aspect of human life. And given the common themes and questions discerned in this discourse, such debates provide a mirror for an audience and culture with a shared Abrahamic tradition.

Since the rise of Islam, concepts of the end of human life and of the world as we know it, namely the last judgment, and eternal life in a hereafter, have deeply shaped the beliefs of Muslims from systematic theologians to the “average” believer. And this has been true whether such concepts of the end have been construed teleologically and historically or spiritually and existentially. The eschatological component of Islam lends dynamic and characteristic form and content to Islamic thought and Muslim life, whether religious, political or cultural, on both the individual and societal levels. Remarkably, this observation is true not only for the various sophisticated eschatological theories advanced by trained Muslim scholars but also for related ideas current in Muslim daily life and lived experience, something we might refer to (however problematically) as lay piety. It applies to Sunni communities as much as it does to Shi’i and other Muslim identities, past and present. Together with the unique oneness and omnipotence of God, concern with the afterlife is a – if not *the* – central religious preoccupation of Islam.

While there are a number of serious studies on the great diversity of eschatological views in Islam, it is frequently and unfortunately the popular (not to say vulgar) references to and preoccupation with “martyrs” and “suicide”

attacks which have made their way into the headlines of newspapers and the consciousness of the public when it comes to the “Muslim paradise” and the “roads” that lead to it. Such preconceptions are more dangerous than the dangers fantasized about. Islamic discourse on paradise and the afterlife is infinitely more complex, subtle, and sophisticated than such uneducated distortions would indicate. Ignoring this intellectual and philosophical depth becomes, in the current context of cross-cultural communication and interdependence, something comparable to a crime against humanity. Just one example of the kind of richness that awaits the unbiased and fair-minded observer of contemporary Islamic culture, in profound contrast to the negative notions mentioned above, is the fact that certain contemporary liberal Muslim thinkers use what may be thought of as the “metaphor of paradise” to express their visions of an Islam-oriented civil society. This instance of “Islamicate paradise discourse,” along with a rich variety of other interpretations, is explored in these collective studies.¹

1 Previous and Current Research

In line with Quranic eschatology, as indicated for example in the widely quoted and contemplated verse: “Soon will We show them Our signs in the external world (*fī l-āfāq*) and in their own souls (*fī anfusihim*) that they may know this is the Truth” (Q 41:53),² “last things” may be considered under two major categories: last things in the “external world” and on the plane of history (*fī l-āfāq*), and last things in the “internal world” within the soul (*fī anfusihim*) on the plane of the timeless (*lā zamān*) and the placeless (*lā makān*). In Islam these two categories are frequently found addressed simultaneously and sometimes with no clear indication of which we should choose or assign priority

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- 1 The term “Islamicate” may require some clarification. It was coined by the American historian and Islamic studies scholar Marshall Hodgson (*The venture of Islam*, Chicago 1974, i, 57–60) in an attempt to refine as much as possible the technical terminology of Islamic studies. Based on the double adjectival “Italianate,” Islamicate is meant to account for phenomena in the cultural sphere of “Islamic” dominance and, at the same time, distinguish between more purely Islamic religious elements, such as *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, *fiqh*, prayer, religious practice in general, mosques, *madrasas*, and so on, and, say, the writings of the Christian philosopher of Baghdad Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus (d. 328/940), the Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides of Cordoba (d. 601/1204), or the modernist Syrian poet Adonis (b. 1930), as well as non-religious architecture, some graphic and fine arts, carpet manufacture, fashion, literature, historiography, philosophy, medicine, science and many other areas of human intellectual and artistic expression, which are products from within an Islamicate – rather than a purely Islamic – milieu or context.
 - 2 Editors’ translation. (Abdel Haleem translation: “We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth.”)

to. Indeed, the message is clear: it is not a matter of “either/or” but of “both/and.”³ As a bridge between antiquity and the so-called middle ages, Islamic discourse – largely in Arabic but certainly not restricted to that language – may be thought to have harnessed much of the eschatological charge of previous “middle eastern” religious discourse – whether religious and scriptural, mystical or philosophical – in the reading, understanding, and performance of the new and distinctive Islamic religious call (*da‘wa*) and identity. Muslim scholars attempted to demonstrate that Islam, on the plane of history, represented an element of a logical and divinely ordained *eschaton* for previous religions and civilizations; they also believed that Islam provided a “guidebook” to a further *eschaton* in the timeless realm. The brief chronology of a few representative works mentioned below testifies to the remarkable and unique role of eschatology, of paradise and the roads leading to it, for Islamic religion and culture.

There is general scholarly agreement that Islam is a “religion of eschatology,” and that the topics of death and the afterlife feature more in its revealed scripture, the Quran, as well as in the prophetic tradition, *ḥadīth*, than comparable texts in other religious traditions. Such concerns inform the general élan of daily praxis and lived experience. They permeate arts and letters as much as theology, philosophy, and mysticism; moreover, they also permeate the natural sciences and related disciplines. Thus it is remarkable, to say the least, that there is still no comprehensive general study of eschatological concepts in Islam available for consultation by scholars and the educated public. William Chittick, in his recent substantial article on Muslim eschatology has stated the situation clearly and succinctly:

The Koran speaks of death, the end of the world, and resurrection more than any other major scripture. The Hadith, or corpus of prophetic sayings, follows suit, as does the tradition in general. The relevant primary literature is vast, and nothing like an adequate survey of important texts has been written.⁴

We might well ask how and why this most important feature of such a major and widely spread religion has been so ignored by generations of “post-enlightenment” scholars. True, there are numerous articles available for consultation, both general and specific. In addition to the excellent summary just mentioned, the late Marilyn Robinson Waldman’s “Islamic Eschatology” (1987) demonstrates the simultaneous richness of the topic and its remarkable

3 W.C. Chittick, Muslim eschatology, in J.L. Walls (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of eschatology*, Oxford 2008, 132–50, here 143.

4 Chittick, Muslim eschatology 132.

neglect.⁵ These articles also suggest the various ways in which the topic can be approached, and point out that eschatology permeates Islamic religious culture in a unique way, from scripture to law, from theology to mysticism, from practice to theory, from art to architecture. As for more specific studies, these may be found under the appropriate headings in such scholarly works as the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the *Encyclopaedia Iranica* and the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, to name three of the most widely consulted reference works in professional Islamic Studies. Here the researcher may find – however inconsistently or variously transliterated from their original scripts – learned articles under the rubrics of such relevant technical terminology as: *ma'ād* (return [to God, paradise]), *ṣirāṭ* (the path [stretching over hell]), *janna* (paradise, paradisaal garden), *jahannam* (hell), *sā'a* (the hour, *eschaton*), *qiyāma* (resurrection), and the like. Indeed, if we were to compile a list of words from Islamic scripture susceptible of an eschatological reading or interpretation, it could be reasonably argued that every word, to a greater or lesser degree, refers to the *eschaton*, however construed. It is perhaps here that we can begin to find an answer to our question above: Why the neglect? Why is there still no comprehensive monograph on the themes of eschatology and concepts of the hereafter in Islam? Is the topic simply so vast, permeating so much of the cultural and religious discourse of Islam that it seems, simultaneously, an obvious and impossible desideratum? One example may help us focus more clearly on the problems, or cluster of problems, that bedevil the hope for a universal or comprehensive treatment of Islamic eschatology. Here we refer to the example given by Sufism. In the chronology of scholarship offered below we encounter numerous discrete studies on aspects of the thought of Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240) by a variety of scholars; his thought may be considered primarily eschatological to the extent that Sufis and like-minded Muslim philosophers and believers are inclined to view the “meeting with God” as an event to be realized in the pre-mortem state, not restricted to the hereafter. As Chittick says, “most Sufis and many philosophers . . . justify their approach by stressing the need to actualize the return to God here and now, before one is compelled to meet God.”⁶ As such, within Sufism and the related, more purely existential or mystical modes of Islam, eschatology is an ever-present concern and as such is implicated in – and pertains to – all aspects of life “in the world.” One may consider, therefore, the distinctively Islamic institution of the *sunna* of the Prophet, which also pertains to all aspects of life in the world, as simultaneously symbolic and iterative of this state of affairs in which law, theology, philosophy, and Sufism all find a

5 M. R. Waldman, Eschatology: Islamic eschatology, in L. Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of religion*, iv, Detroit 2005, 2836–40.

6 Chittick, Muslim eschatology 138.

common center for contemplation and action and are thus ready topics for eschatological research, as will be seen below. So, the scope of eschatological studies in Islam is wide indeed, too wide for a single author to approach, let alone hope to ever achieve anything even remotely resembling a complete and comprehensive study. It remains true that, even though it is the centerpiece of the Islamic religion, until now it has not attracted a thorough systematic treatment covering its vast and powerful lexicon and the way in which the scriptural passages touching “eschatology” have been digested, elaborated and embodied in the emerging dynamic and rich Islamic cultural and intellectual traditions.

Eschatology is the domesticated Greek word used today in theology and religious studies (since the middle of the nineteenth century) to refer to the scholarly investigation of the so-called “four last things”: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. As such, it is by analogy adapted here from its original Christian context; it provides a category for the concerns of the present work, a collection of nearly sixty scholarly investigations of aspects of what falls under the general Quranic Arabic word *ma‘ād*, “return.” The Quran teaches that humanity is on its way back to the presence of God whence it has journeyed throughout the long, painful history of its collective and individual sojourn on earth.

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Before introducing and giving brief summaries of each chapter of our two volumes, we believe it is useful to present a short and necessarily incomplete historical account of eschatological studies in European languages so that we may better place the present work as both a culmination of previous work and an opening for future research. This summary should be seen as something of a preliminary sketch for a future critical and thorough history of the topic.

We begin with Edward Pocock’s (d. 1691) *Porta Mosis*, a translation of six sections of Maimonides’ commentary on the Mishnah (Arabic text in Hebrew characters, with Latin translation, 1655), to which this Oxford scholar added *Notae miscellaneae* (published as an independent book in 1705). These *Notae miscellaneae* (especially its seventh, 78–page chapter) represent probably the first notable scholarly treatment of the eschatology of Islam in Europe. Some time later, Theodor Arnold included a 33-page treatment of Islamic eschatology in his German translation (1746) of George Sale’s English translation of the Quran. In addition, there is Ignaz Goldziher’s discussion of the semi-eschatological role of the *mujaddid* (renewer) held by the tradition to appear at the turn of each century: “Zur Charakteristik Ġelāl ud-dīn us-Sujūṭī’s und seiner literarischen Thätigkeit” (1871). In 1872, in his *Muhammedanische Eschatologie*, Moritz Wolff, through an edition and German translation of ‘Abd al-Raḥīm

al-Qāḍī's *Daqā'iq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār*, made accessible to a broader Western readership – for the first time – a key text of Muslim eschatological thought. Josef Bernhard Rüling's Leipzig dissertation, *Beiträge zur Eschatologie des Islam* (1895), deals extensively with three main topics: eschatology in the Quran, eschatology in the *sunna* and the Muslim dogmatists, and eschatology in philosophical and apologetic writings. Paul Casanova's radical and controversial interpretation of Quranic eschatology, *Mohammed et la fin du monde* (1911–1913) strongly argues that the birth of Islam was an apocalyptic movement that expected the imminent end of the world and “kingdom of heaven,” a theory taken up again in recent scholarship, as will be seen below. In the process, he also reviewed and critiqued numerous pertinent theories from other earlier European Orientalists, such as Aloys Sprenger, William Muir, Theodor Nöldeke, and Snouck Hurgronje among others. In 1922, the great French scholar Louis Massignon published his magisterial study of the life of Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), *La passion de Husayn ibn Mansūr Hallāj: Martyr mystique de l'Islam, exécuté à Bagdad le 26 Mars 922: Étude d'histoire religieuse* (republished 1975). Such a work is important for the history of eschatology because it orients the question toward the individual spiritual life, a life which, as Chittick observed in the above-mentioned study, is frequently concerned with a pre-mortem “eschaton.” Massignon's influence, as will be seen, has been decisive for eschatological discourse that focuses on the mystical or spiritual dimension in the study of Islam. At the same time, R.A. Nicholson, a British contemporary of Massignon (and teacher of the celebrated poet and philosopher Muḥammad Iqbāl), began his profoundly influential work on Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), which resulted in the magnificent and in some ways unparalleled translation of the *Masnavī* in 8 volumes (1925–1940). Again, the focus here is on the mystical or spiritual eschatology of a Sufism broadly construed. Ragnar Eklund's *Life Between Death and Resurrection According to Islam* (1941) concentrates on the “eschatological center” of Islam, especially the intermediate state in the grave, and with a focus on Ibn 'Arabī continues to keep the topic of “mystical eschatology” in the forefront while at the same time pointing to the invaluable contributions of other Scandinavian scholars such as Henrik S. Nyberg, Tor Andrae, and Frants Buhl. It is during this period as well that the prolific and influential student of Massignon, Henry Corbin, began producing a body of scholarship primarily focusing, whether in the language of philosophical studies, mystical studies or a combination of both, on the eschatological “field.” The entire *oeuvre* of Henry Corbin is principally concerned with Islamic eschatology, which he saw as offering an antidote to the Heideggerian “*Sein-zum-Tode*” (Being towards death) of mid-twentieth-century notoriety, in a form he derived from Mullā Ṣadrā (among others) and framed as “being towards resurrection.” The vastness of this field is indicated in his *opus*

magnum, *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (4 vols. published in 1971), a scholarly testament to this hopeful eschatology, which contains a great deal of material first published in an earlier form from the late 1940s onward. Another important French study dating from this period and touching upon the eschatological dimension of Islam is that of Louis Gardet, *Introduction à la théologie musulmane: Essai de théologie comparée* (1948). In the mid-1950s another remarkable work from Scandinavia adjusted the focus of eschatological research once again: Geo Widengren's comparative study, *Muhammad, the Apostle of God, and his Ascension* (1955) takes seriously the time and place of the Islamic sources and reads them for what might be thought a conversation with other contiguous religious traditions, in which eschatological motifs and symbols are seen to travel across confessional boundaries in the consolidation of a comparatively recent Islamic religious identity.

Concern with Islamic eschatology continued throughout the 1960s beginning with Corbin's *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection: De l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shi'ite* (1960); Hermann Stieglecker's survey of eschatological concepts included in his *Die Glaubenslehren des Islam* (1962), which covers topics such as death, happenings in the grave, the signs of "the hour," resurrection, "reward and punishment," as well as various dogmatic teachings, in addition to images of eschatology, the so-called *visio beatifica* and, last but not least, apologetic eschatology. J.B. Taylor's comparative study "Some Aspects of Islamic Eschatology" (1968); L. Gardet's *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme* (1967); T. O'Shaughnessy's thematic study of the Quranic data, *Muhammad's Thoughts on Death* (1969), and Fritz Meier's brilliant and somewhat provocative (though badly translated) essay, "The Ultimate Origin and the Hereafter in Islam" (1971) all point to the continued recognition of the unequaled centrality of eschatology for the Islamic religion. Helmut Gätje's chapter on eschatology in his *Koran und Koranexegese* (1971) provides and discusses passages drawn from various classical Arabic exegetical sources, on "the hour," the last judgment, resurrection and judgment, as well as on paradise and hell. Annemarie Schimmel's classic *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975) and various other of her works, such as "Creation and Judgment in the Koran and in the Mystico-Poetical Interpretation" (1979), offer discussions of eschatological themes and preoccupations. Her work, along with that of Corbin, sought to refine and orient the methodological perspective frequently impeded by the unachievable ideal of a theoretical detached, "pure" objectivity toward something more realistic and sensible. It is interesting that both scholars have been criticized for avoiding or minimizing the importance of social and historical factors in their analyses of mystical and eschatological phenomena. We should also note the publications of A.T. Welch, "Death and Dying in the Qur'an" (1977) and Walter Beltz who studied, from a comparative religious studies point of view, the human

'longing for paradise' in his *Sehnsucht nach dem Paradies: Mythologie des Korans* (1979), with lengthy chapters on the end of time, hell, paradise, and the beginning of new life. In addition, several specialized books appeared at this time on topics from a Shi'i worldview, such as Mahmoud Ayoub's *Redemptive Suffering in Islam: A Study of the Devotional Aspects of Ashura in Twelver Shi'ism* (1978) and Syed Husain Mohammad Jafri's *Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam* (1979).

A groundbreaking work by Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Saḥl at-Tustarī* (d. 283/896) (1980) points to the existence of, and explores in depth, a vibrant and creative eschatological discourse in *tafsīr*, an area of research examined earlier by Gätje but here centered on the hermeneutics of one influential Sufi teacher. At the same time, the first monograph devoted to salient aspects of Islamic eschatology was given to the field by J.I. Smith and Y.Y. Haddad with *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (1981), an overdue and illuminating study of mainly Sunni eschatological discourse. Mystico-philosophical eschatology is explored in James Winston Morris' translation and introduction to *Mullā Ṣadrā: The Wisdom of the Throne* (1981) while Hamid Algar's translation and introduction to *Najm al-Dīn Rāzī: The Path of God's Bondsmen from Origin to Return* (1982) presents and explores the same theme from an earlier period of Islamic intellectual history. Abdulaziz Sachedina's *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdī in Twelver Shi'ism* (1981) offers the first scholarly exploration of the dogmatic eschatology of Twelver Shi'i messianism. Daniel Gimaret, Jean Jolivet, and Guy Monnot, in their meticulous translation and annotation of the remarkable "heresiography," the *Kitāb al-Milal wa-l-niḥāl* of Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), published in two volumes as *Livre des religions et des sectes* (1986–93), draw attention to the importance of eschatology in the formation of religious identities in "medieval" Islamic religious culture. During this decade several other scholars publishing in French, especially those whose works deal with Sufism and Ibn 'Arabī, should be mentioned: Michel Chodkiewicz *Le Sceau des saints: Prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn Arabī* (1986) and *Un Océan sans rivage: Ibn Arabī, le livre et la loi* (1992), which emphasize in different ways the centrality of eschatology for the spiritual life of Islam. In German, Angelika Neuwirth's "Symmetrie und Paarbildung in der Koranischen Eschatologie" (1984) sheds brilliant light on the characteristic and definitive structure of eschatological discourse in the Quran. In English, concern with mystical eschatology also bears the influence of Corbin. For example, William Chittick's numerous studies dating from the 1970s until today, of which we mention here his chapter "Eschatology," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations* (1987), the *Sufi Path of Knowledge* (1989), and

his later *Imaginal Worlds* (1994) as outstanding examples. Carl Ernst, the prolific student of Annemarie Schimmel, has also enriched the literature of mystical eschatology with his *Words of Ecstasy* (1985), to mention only one of his many important contributions. In addition, there is the above-mentioned excellent summary treatment of Islamic eschatology as a whole by Waldman (1987).

Corbin's influence lives on in other scholarship on eschatology undertaken during the 1990s. For example, two of his former students, Mohammad A. Amir-Moezzi and Christian Jambet, have published numerous works treating various aspects of this ubiquitous theme. We should take note of Amir-Moezzi's study of the early teachings of the Twelver Shi'i Imams, *Le Guide divin dans le shi'isme originel: Aux sources de l'ésotérisme en Islam* (1992), and of his later edited volume, *Le Voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam: Ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels* (1996). Jambet's concern with a philosophical interpretation of the eschaton may be traced from his *La Grande résurrection d'Alamût: Les formes de la liberté dans le shi'isme ismaélien* (1996) to his more recent study of the eschatological dimension in Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy, *L'Acte d'être: La philosophie de la révélation chez Mollâ Sadrâ* (2002). Indeed, the contribution to the present publication by Hermann Landolt may be considered to some degree a response to what might be called a vibrant and productive "French school" of studies in Islamic philosophical eschatology. Denis Gril's numerous studies of Ibn 'Arabī and the "akbarian" tradition also bespeak a concern with eschatology, for example his *Le Dévoilement des effets du voyage* (1994). Paul Ballanfat's studies of the important mystic Rūzbihān al-Baqlī (d. 606/1209), *Le Dévoilement des secrets et les apparitions des lumières: Journal spirituel du maître de Shîrâz* (1996), also deserve to be mentioned here.

Representative works of other eschatological scholarship in the 1990s include Kevin Reinhart's "The Here and the Hereafter in Islamic Religious Thought" (1991); Muhammad Abdel Haleem's "Life and Beyond in the Qur'an" (1995); and Josef van Ess's rich and comprehensive chapter on Islamic eschatology, in his *Theologie und Gesellschaft* (vol. iv, 1997; see also Professor van Ess's *Geleitwort* to the present publication). This chapter covers Muslim concepts of the earthly and heavenly paradise, along with its *Wirklichkeitsweite*, that is, the wide-ranging spectrum and relevance of the concepts of the hereafter, as one may understand this term. Two important works of Fred Donner focus on early Islamic history and the topic of eschatology and apocalypse: "Piety and Eschatology in Early Kharijite Poetry" (1997) and his forthcoming book, *Was Early Islam an Apocalyptic Movement?* (Cambridge). Several Russian academics have contributed to the contemporary study of Islamic eschatology. In this context, it is interesting to note that during the Soviet period there was basically no systematic research on Islamic eschatology by Russian scholars.

The sensitivity of the ideas developed by Muslims on the end of the world as we know it and on the hereafter apparently prevented the appearance of more detailed Russian language studies on these topics. Notwithstanding this situation, we may refer here to more recent thematically related encyclopedia articles by Michail B. Piotrovskiy, Director of the Hermitage (1991), and the Russian philologist and senior Islamic Studies scholar, Tawfiq Ibrahim (1991). Their countryman, Andrey Smirnov (Deputy Director of the Institute of Philosophy, Russian Academy of Sciences, 1993, 2014), a scholar of Ibn 'Arabī, has also contributed numerous studies dealing with eschatology.

Ulrich Rebstock's "Das Grabesleben" (2002) discusses the specifically Islamic concept of "the life in the grave" (*barzakh*), while Tilman Nagel's "Der Prophet und die Weltgeschichte" in *Der Koran* (2002) deals with eschatological issues in the context of history and the history of revelation. Fred Donner's student David Cook opened new lines of investigation in his pioneering *Studies in Muslim Apocalyptic* (2002), while Willem Bijlefeld's "Eschatology" (2004) studied pertinent Muslim and Christian data. Other important studies include Maria M. Dakake, "The Soul as *barzakh*: Substantial Motion and Mullā Ṣadrā's Theory of Human Becoming" (2004), and Denis Gril's *Saint et sainteté dans le christianisme et l'islam: Le regard des sciences de l'homme* (2007). Angelika Neuwirth, in her celebrated book *Der Koran: Frühmekkanische Suren* (2011), offers unique perspectives on eschatological issues in Islam's revealed scripture by studying suras whose overall themes are eschatological.

A few contemporary scholars whose contributions to the present publication are important as perhaps *de facto* introductions to their preoccupation with eschatology, represent a recent and happy reversal of the above-mentioned neglect of the topic. Christian Lange's relevant publications include the article "Where on Earth is Hell? State Punishment and Eschatology in the Islamic Middle Period" (2009), the monograph *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions* (2016) as well as the edited volume *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions* (2016). Nerina Rustomji has also recently published a monograph on the topic: *The Garden and the Fire: Heaven and Hell in Islamic Culture* (2009). Mohammed Rustom studies the creative cross-fertilization of eschatological and hermeneutic themes in Mullā Ṣadrā with his timely book, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mulla Sadra* (2012), and Mohammad Khalil's *Between Heaven and Hell: Islam, Salvation, and the Fate of Others* (2013) focuses on the increasingly crucial implications of Islamicate eschatological discourse for inter-religious dialogue.

The editors of the present offering have themselves published separate discrete examinations of various aspects of Islamic eschatological discourse: Sebastian Günther's "«Gepriesen sei der, der seinen Diener bei Nacht

reisen ließ» (Koran 17:1): Paradiesvorstellungen und Himmelsreisen im Islam – Grundfesten des Glaubens und literarische Topoi” (2011), is a detailed contribution to the study of the “heavenly journey” in Islamic thought, while “Eschatology and the Qur’an” (Oxford, forthcoming) provides a systematic survey of the topic. Todd Lawson’s longstanding concern with the apocalyptic substrate of the Quran is reflected in several publications, “Duality, Opposition and Typology in the Qur’an: The Apocalyptic Substrate” (2008) and the more recent “Apocalypse” for the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought* (2012). His earlier “Le Coran et l’imaginaire apocalyptique,” translated by G. Rivier for *Religions et Histoire* 34 (2010) summarizes distinctive apocalyptic features of the Quran. Apocalyptic eschatology was further explored in two other publications: “Divine Wrath and Divine Mercy in Islam: Their Reflection in the Qur’ān and Quranic Images of Water” (2008), and a book, *Gnostic Apocalypse and Islam: Qur’an, Exegesis, Messianism, and the Literary Origins of the Babi Religion* (2011). The combination of epic and apocalyptic literary themes and motifs in Quranic eschatology is explored in Lawson’s recent “The Qur’ān and Epic” (2014).

Studies in eschatology by scholars unfortunately not represented in this publication include, among others, the above-mentioned David Cook, Maria Dakake, and the recent radical interpretation of early Islamic history (heavily dependent upon the scholarship of Fred Donner and the earlier Paul Casanova) by Stephen J. Shoemaker, *The Death of a Prophet: The End of Muhammad’s Life and the Beginnings of Islam* (2012). As this manuscript goes to press, we note with great pleasure the announcement of a new project and call for papers focusing on Islamic eschatology, sponsored by the Oriental Institute of the Czech Republic, published under the title *Death, Graves and the Hereafter in Islam: Muslim Perception of the Last Things in the Middle Ages and Today* as a special issue of the prestigious serial, *Archiv Orientální* (guest edited by B. Ostránský and M. Melčák).

The approach offered here – to bring together numerous studies employing a variety of methodologies, focusing on multiple time periods and various types of sources – is a natural result of the richness, the depth, and the singular importance of the eschatological nature and content of Islamic religious culture. By celebrating such richness, we hope to move beyond some of the various constraints and limitations of past studies, which were frequently restricted to the rather rarified and sometimes ponderous and seemingly impenetrable scholastic *kalām* discourse, to take account of philosophers and mystics, artists and poets from the entire history of Islam. But even within the *kalām* tradition, we may be led to understand the value of Meier’s observation that, if the basic structure of eschatological thought is not original with Islam, “in the scholastic reworking of

the problem of God's determination, . . . lies one of the most significant accomplishments of Islamic theology."⁷ Eschatology, one may well say, is the air which Islam breathes. The table of contents above demonstrates how pervasive and – perhaps paradoxically – life-giving this air remains. It deserves all our respect and interest as we strive to achieve a proper understanding of Islam through a willingness to explore and study it on its own terms. Of course, we have no doubt that in advancing this new approach we will come upon new, previously unforeseen, constraints and limitations. Yet, even so, the initiative is a natural if overdue response to the distinctive genius of Islam.

2 Thematic Scope and Critical Questions

Roads to Paradise focuses on two main, interrelated sets of themes. The first thematic complex concerns the explicit statements in the Quran and the prophetic tradition on the nature of human existence following death, and the discussions of these statements by medieval and modern Muslim scholars. Given the large array of relevant topics here, several research questions arise. One may ask, for example, what the Quran, the prophetic tradition, and Muslim scholarship actually say about events at the point of death. What happens, according to these views, to the body and to the soul after a person has passed away? Is the postulated postmortem resurrection purely spiritual? Or are there conceptions of a physical rebirth as well? How does the human soul reach paradise (or hell, for that matter), and what are the practical implications for the transition from this world to the next? What does existence in the hereafter actually look like? And in what way will an individual's or a community's actions and existence on earth be judged in the hereafter? Are there any points of intersection, or even encounter, between the present world and the world to come?

The second semantic complex relates to the end times, the *eschaton*, or *al-sā'a*, as "the hour" is called in Arabic in reference to the apocalyptic "end of the world" and the transition to a divinely created new world, the eternal "Kingdom of the Heavens and the Earth" (Q 3:189, 42:49, 57:3, 6) which belong to God. Throughout the history of Islam, Muslims (and others) have contemplated and interrogated the powerful language and the explicit descriptions of the "end" so dramatically depicted in the Quran. An impressive example of this is Sura 81, "The Rolling Up" (*al-Takwīr*), verses 1–14, where it is stated:

7 F. Meier, The ultimate origin and the hereafter in Islam, in G.L. Tikku (ed.), *Islam and its cultural divergence: Studies in honor of Gustave E. von Grunebaum*, Urbana, Chicago, London 1971, 96–112, here 112.

When the sun is shrouded in darkness,
 when the stars are dimmed,
 when the mountains are set in motion,
 when pregnant camels are abandoned,
 when the wild beasts are herded together,
 when the seas boil over,
 when the souls are sorted into classes,
 when the baby girl buried alive is asked
 for what sin she was killed,
 when the records of deeds are spread open,
 when the sky is stripped away,
 when Hell is made to blaze
 and Paradise brought near:
*then every soul will know what it has brought about.*⁸

Likewise, there are the many reassuring Quranic visions of eternal joy and life in the hereafter, some of which have come to be seen as emblematic, if not definitive, of Muslim faith. These include verbal pictures of the dwellers of paradise inhabiting lush gardens: "They will have Gardens of lasting bliss graced with flowing streams. There they will be adorned with bracelets of gold. There they will wear green garments of fine silk and brocade. There they will be comfortably seated on soft chairs. What a blessed reward! What a pleasant resting place!" (Q 18:31). But there is also hell, "a wretched destination" (e.g., Q 8:16), and place of dire recompense – "Is there not ample punishment for the arrogant in Hell?" (e.g., Q 39:60), for "the disbelievers" (Q 39:32), and "the wicked" (Q 82:14), who will be roasting therein and branded with hellfire "on their foreheads, sides and backs they will be told, 'This is what you hoarded up for yourselves! Now feel the pain of what you hoarded!'" (Q 9:35).

3 Eschatological Categories

To define the term "eschatology" as it is used here, we specify four categories as follows. (For a fuller treatment of these terminological issues, we refer the reader to F. Donner's contribution in this collection.)

1. INDIVIDUAL ESCHATOLOGY: issues related to the "last things" with reference to the origin and ultimate destiny of the individual soul, and the meaning

8 In this introduction, all quotations from the Quran follow Abdel Haleem's rendering of the Quran unless otherwise indicated; *italics added*.

of life and death. This includes questions about resurrection and the stages of postmortem existence, the hope for and quality of postmortem existence, the threat of perpetual suffering and the promise of everlasting happiness, the perception of the last days of humankind as a context for the production of knowledge especially for moral and ethical pedagogy, and the roles of suffering and martyrdom (individual or communal) in this world and the next. This would also include issues of the possibilities (and feasibility) of eternal life with reference to theological, philosophical, mystical, and natural scientific approaches to the “last things,” the states of body and soul after death, eternal life in the hereafter, and to Islamic cosmology, as well as religious, legal, and ethical considerations of the last judgment and their relevance for this world.

II. UNIVERSAL ESCHATOLOGY: eschatology in the sense of the “end of the world” and the function of the hereafter, including Quranic teachings on revelation and salvation; temporal and personal or existential closeness of “the hour”; the perception of God as the only savior of humankind; the negation of a permanent existence of this world and human life in it; the “eschatological wedding” between humanity – *insān/nās* – and the Divine, as well as humankind’s “return” to paradise. This set of questions also includes the liberal and secular approaches to issues concerning the “end of the world” and the hereafter.

III. TOPOGRAPHIC ESCHATOLOGY, that is, the Muslim views of the landscape of the hereafter. The ideas relevant here concern life in the grave, the *barzakh* (i.e., the “place” between death and resurrection, the commencement of eternal existence); the stages, hierarchical or otherwise, of existence after death; the events and locations of judgment day; cosmogony, as well as the geography and other specifics of paradise and hell.

IV. HISTORICAL ESCHATOLOGY: this relates to events and developments in Islamic history, including, for example, messianic movements (as disruptive or stabilizing, crises or response to crises, as formative and productive factors in Muslim society); predictions of armed conflicts and views of the “apocalypse” as the destruction of the world; postulated signs of the end of the world and their meaning for various religious-political movements; individual and collective martyrdom; eschatological ideas as a driving force of cultural efflorescence in Muslim society, as well as religious rules and regulations that are relevant to and echo eschatological concerns in various ways.

4 Sources and Approaches

Next to the Quran, important eschatological ideas are encountered in such texts and literary genres as the prophetic traditions, Quran commentaries, philosophical-theological treatises, historical writings, compilations on law, and

rhetorical and lexicographical works, as well as in manuals on mysticism, to mention just a few main sources. Interestingly, since the rise of Islam the structures of the heavens (and, for that matter, of paradise and hell) have not only occupied Muslim natural scientists, but have also found stunning expression in Islamic art and architecture, and in the incredibly rich (and universalizing) poetic traditions in Islamic lands, and in belles-lettres (the tradition associated with the category of *adab*), a symbol of civilized cultural and literary discourse.

As will be seen in the following pages, the studies presented here deliberately strive to go beyond traditional philological-historical and “*kalām*-based” analyses of Quranic and frequently extra-Quranic ideas in eschatological texts composed in Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Indonesian or any other “Islamic” language. In fact, many of the chapters effectively combine approaches commonly associated with disciplines such as theology, philosophy, history, literature, law, anthropology, education, ethics, the fine arts, and other related fields of study.

Several contributions make skillful use of synchronous and diachronic comparative approaches, along with novel research strategies and tools offered by literary theory, gender studies, new historicism, structuralism, and deconstruction among other methodologies represented below. Our aim is obviously to be as un-dogmatic as possible with regard to approach and method. Such innovative ways of investigating the textual and artistic expressions of Islamic eschatology have significantly widened the horizons of scholarly assessment and interpretation offered in this publication. In addition, interdisciplinary approaches have proven useful. Likewise, evidence from the Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian history of ideas as well as elements of ancient Arabian and the wider Mediterranean cultural and intellectual history were made part of the discourse on the “roads to paradise” in order to help formulate deeper insights and generate a more accurate and contextualized knowledge of the multifarious aspects of Islamic eschatology.

Taking these few principal considerations as a basis, we set out below further details on the structure of this publication and the specific issues addressed in individual chapters to help the reader navigate the fascinating world of Muslim concepts and visions of eschatology and the hereafter.

5 Key Issues and Themes of Current Studies in Islamic Eschatology

Volume I: Foundations and Formation of a Tradition: Reflections on the Hereafter in the Quran and Islamic Religious Thought.

The introductory chapter, “Preparing for the Journey, the Paths to Reality are as Diverse as the Souls of Humanity,” begins with Professor Tilman Nagel’s

"Paradise Lost," in which the author provides an overview of ways in which the border between this world and the world-to-come are blurred in Islam and the Muslim religious imagination. In particular, he examines the types of questions asked about paradise in Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī's (d. 974/1567) collection of legal opinions, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya* (Rulings regarding prophetic traditions), the Quranic concepts of divine justice and inheriting the Promised Land, and the similarities and differences between the Quranic, Judeo-Christian, and Miltonic stories of Adam and the Garden. Mahmoud Zakzouk's "The Path to Paradise from an Islamic Viewpoint" then outlines the basic tenets of Islam by describing the straight path leading to paradise as it may be read in the Quran. In centering his analysis on what may be thought a central controlling "sacred metaphor" of the path, Professor Zakzouk discloses valuable features of what has been referred to as "the mind of the Quran."

Part 1, *Paradise, Hell and Afterlife in the Quran and Quranic Exegesis*, begins with Muhammad Abdel Haleem's "Quranic Paradise: How to Get to Paradise and What to Expect There." The author provides a meticulous linguistic analysis of the Quran that addresses three specific questions: "Who will get to paradise?", "What qualifies them to do so?", and "What can they expect when they get there?" Through a close reading of the Quranic text, he examines misinterpretations and mistranslations of Quranic descriptions and terminology, and shows how an attentive reading can clarify these issues and rectify misapprehensions.

Angelika Neuwirth's "Paradise as a Quranic Discourse: Late Antique Foundations and Early Quranic Developments" presents a thorough intertextual study of the image of paradise in the Quran. She analyzes the literary shape of paradise to demonstrate how the Quran rearranged pagan imagery, and how the depiction of paradise evolved within the Quran itself. She looks at how the image of the banquet, the dual symmetry in Q 55, and the complex concept of *waḥy* make use of pre-Islamic poetic presuppositions and tropes, and how the Quran creates a simultaneously new and familiar conceptualization of paradise from them.

In Todd Lawson's "Paradise in the Quran and the Music of Apocalypse," the apocalyptic character of the Quran is highlighted by focusing on three distinctive and definitive Quranic motifs or themes: the pre-creational Day of the Covenant (Q 7:172), divine presence (*sakīna*), and what is referred to in broader studies of apocalyptic texts as the "glory motif." These three themes are seen to interact and resonate with one another during the act of reading, yielding a compelling music of ideas and religious images. The conclusion is that apocalypse as revelation is a major preoccupation, mode, and discourse

of the Quran, one that provides unity to the text by imparting and circulating an “electricity of apocalypse” through all of the various subthemes, histories, laws, and directives in the Quran. From this perspective, the Quran may be considered an apocalypse. Paradise is thus seen as an apocalyptic motif of the Quran.

In Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila’s “Paradise and Nature in the Quran and Pre-Islamic Poetry,” the garden metaphor is seen as central to all Quranic descriptions of paradise. The author maps out the standard formula of the Quran’s constructs of *janna*. He then goes on to describe how, in Quranic depictions, rain and thunder occur only in earthly gardens, and that they signify eschatological calamity and destruction. Although this is markedly different from the use of rain and thunder in pre-Islamic poetry, there are still subtle similarities that suggest the possible influence of poetry on Quranic descriptions of nature.

Asma Afsaruddin’s “Dying in the Path of God: Reading Martyrdom and Moral Excellence in the Quran” explores how a Sunni concept of military martyrdom evolved out of the pre-modern exegeses of the phrase “slain on/in the path of God” in Q 2:154, 3:157–8 and 3:169. This chapter traces the way in which these verses were first understood as explanations of the paradisaal state of those slain at the battles of Badr (2/624) and Uḥud (3/625), and then later used to orient the believer toward the hereafter, which allowed the concept of military martyrdom to be read back into these verses.

Sebastian Günther’s “The Poetics of Islamic Eschatology: Narrative, Personification, and Colors in Muslim Discourse” discusses four different categories of medieval Arabic-Islamic literature: the Quran, the literature of prophetic traditions, the biography of the Prophet, and the classical eschatological literature. The author explores how Quranic eschatological visions were developed by Muslim scholars, and how the symbols, images, and structure of these works reinforce Islamic articles of faith. In the course of this analysis, the chapter pays special attention to paradise as depicted in the story of the Prophet Muḥammad’s *miʿrāj* (ascension to heaven) and the symbolic meaning of the relationship between eschatological events and colors in al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) popular book *al-Durrat al-fākhira fī kashf ʿulūm al-ākhirā* (The precious pearl disclosing knowledge of the hereafter).

Part 2, *The Pleasures of Paradise*, begins with Andrew J. Lane’s “‘Reclining upon Couches in the Shade’ (Q 35:56): Quranic Imagery in Rationalist Exegesis” which examines how the rationalist school of exegesis interpreted Quranic imagery of the hereafter and paradise. The chapter explores how al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī interpreted the images of the throne of God, angels, couches, silk, and gardens, in comparison to the mystical interpretation of al-Sulamī

and al-Baqlī and the traditionalist interpretation of al-Bayḏāwī. This analysis argues that the commentaries all have a rationalist thread, differing only in degree.

Ailin Qian's "Delights in Paradise: A Comparative Survey of Heavenly Food and Drink in the Quran" looks at how the paradisaal food, wine, spices, and tableware mentioned in the Quran reflect pre-Islamic rituals, how these images function in Islamic eschatology and secular life, and how the spiritual is connected to the material. This is highlighted through a comparison with the ceremonial food and drink mentioned in ancient Chinese texts, in order to illustrate the broader assertion that both material and spiritual rewards are used to encourage moral action.

Maher Jarrar's "Strategies for Paradise: Paradise Virgins and Utopia" analyzes the rhetorical and allegorical portrayal of the Quranic *ḥūrīs* (traditionally understood as "paradise virgins") in relation to the longing for and vision of paradise in three different groups: circles of ascetics and early mystics, literalist Sunni and Shi'i groups, and later mystics. The chapter looks at how in these groups *ḥūrīs* have been understood as transfigured earthly women, created by one's good works and appearing in visions or distracting from the vision of God, and as a reward for those at a lower level of paradise.

Nerina Rustomji's "Beauty in the Garden: Aesthetics and the *Wildān*, *Ghilmān*, and *Ḥūr*" addresses the complex nature of paradisaal aesthetics in connection to *ḥūr*, *wildān mukhalladūn* (eternal youths), and *ghilmān* (slave boys). These figures function both as beings that populate and as objects that fill the garden. An analysis of their descriptions in eschatological guidebooks and in poems illustrates how the nature of paradisaal beauty is transformative even though otherworldly rewards are described in terms of an earthly model.

Part 3, *The Afterlife in Sunni Tradition and Theology*, is introduced by Aisha Geissinger's "'Are Men the Majority in Paradise, or Women?' Constructing Gender and Communal Boundaries in Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj's (d. 261/875) *Kitāb al-Janna*." The author discusses the socio-political issues raised by descriptions of paradise in the highly esteemed and influential books of canonical *ḥadīth*. She demonstrates that the pre-modern conception of the body and gender in social hierarchies makes the presence of female human bodies in paradise problematic. Given that descriptions of female bodies were used to illustrate moral decay, she questions how a body that represents death and decay can exist in paradise.

Christian Lange's "The 'Eight Gates of Paradise' Tradition in Islam: A Genealogical and Structural Study" explores Muslim paradise as myth by analyzing

the tradition about the “eight gates of paradise.” It investigates the mythic symbolism of Muslim eschatology and its dialogue with the here and now. It explores the narrative beginnings of the “eight gates of paradise” in *ḥadīth*, then looks at explanations, and possible non-Islamic sources. It ends by using the tradition of eight gates to analyze the eight categories of people entering paradise, as outlined in the *Daqāʾiq al-akḥbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* (The meticulous accounts referring to paradise and hell) by the otherwise unknown ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Aḥmad al-Qāḍī (fl. fifth or sixth/eleventh or twelfth century).

Feras Hamza’s “Temporary Hellfire Punishment and the Making of Sunni Orthodoxy” discusses the historical development of the Sunni concept of temporary hell and how the doctrine won acceptance by being associated with the concept of the intercession (*shafāʿa*) of the Prophet on the day of judgment. The chapter begins by looking at discussions of temporary hellfire in the works of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 149/767) and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣanʿānī (d. 211/827), then proceeds to trace its development in the classical exegesis of Q 5:37, 11:107, 19:68–72, 3:192, and 7:46, and discusses how it became consolidated as part of prevailing Sunni orthodoxy.

Niall Christie, in “Paradise and Hell in the *Kitāb al-Jihād* of ‘Alī b. Ṭāhir al-Sulamī (d. 500/1106),” looks at how a particular book employed threats of punishment to urge a righteous Muslim response to and mobilization against the Crusaders. Christie shows how al-Sulamī used the structure of first elaborating and detailing the torments of hellfire, then giving descriptions of paradise, to emphasize that internal piety rather than a desire for the rewards of paradise should be the motivation for taking up *jihād*.

Wilferd Madelung’s “Al-Ghazālī on Resurrection and the Road to Paradise” analyzes views of the highly authoritative theologian and mystic al-Ghazālī on resurrection, expressed in his late work, the *Masāʾil al-maḍnūn* (Questions of the withheld science). In his early thought, al-Ghazālī had upheld a literal view of the resurrection of the body, but, as Madelung points out, in this later text he offers metaphorical interpretations of such concepts as the balance (*mīzān*) and the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*), as a result of which his conception of resurrection became compatible with the cosmology of the philosophers.

Dorothee Pielow, in “Sleepless in Paradise: Lying in State between This World and the Next,” discusses various aspects of the meaning of sleep in Islam; she provides examples from the Quran, popular books of dreams (*tafsīr al-aḥlām*), and folklore. The chapter explores the role sleep plays as a link between life and death, and focuses on it as an earthly phenomenon that will not exist in paradise, as a period of waiting, a religiously undesirable state, and as the state in which nightmares, but also visions and revelation occur.

Part 4, *A Wise Man's Paradise – Eschatology and Philosophy*, opens with Michael E. Marmura's "Paradise in Islamic Philosophy," the slightly revised version of a study which Professor Marmura had submitted a few days prior to the Göttingen conference, before it became clear that he would unfortunately not be able to attend. In this magisterial chapter, characteristic of the late scholar's numerous incisive and illuminating contributions to the study of Islamic philosophy, we are treated to a discussion of how eschatology figures in the works of four major medieval Islamic philosophers, each of whose approaches differs in characteristic ways. They are al-Kindī (d. ca. 256/870), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), and Ibn Bājjā (d. 532/1138). As Professor Marmura himself says in the article, "the eschatology [of these] major philosophers is testimony to both the range and the ambiguity of some of their statements." Eschatology thus may be considered as occupying a central place in medieval Islamic philosophy.

Thomas Würtz's "The Orthodox Conception of the Hereafter: Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 793/1390) Examination of some Mu'tazilī and Philosophical Objections" discusses Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's Ash'arī understanding of the hereafter, and the influence Ibn Sīnā's philosophy had on it. This is accomplished by analyzing Ibn Sīnā's conception of "return" (*ma'ād*) alongside Taftāzānī's conception of "return" and bodily resurrection in the last section of his *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* (Commentary on the main fields of [theological] investigation) and by also looking at how Ibn Sīnā influenced his thinking on resurrection, the creation of paradise and hell, and the value of repentance.

Hermann Landolt's "'Being-Towards-Resurrection': Mullā Ṣadrā's Critique of Suhrawardī's Eschatology" presents an analysis of Mullā Ṣadrā's eschatological metaphysics as 'being-towards-resurrection' in contrast to the Heideggarian formula of 'being-towards-death.' He acknowledges the importance of Henry Corbin's work on Ṣadrā, while at the same time addressing the problematic nature of Corbin's positioning of his philosophy in continuity with the *ishrāqī* or illuminationist school of Suhrawardī. This chapter argues that Ṣadrā's 'ascensional élan' aligns with the thought of the Brethren of Purity and the Isma'īlis, and demonstrates this by examining extensive passages of text.

In "A Philosopher's Itinerary for the Afterlife: Mullā Ṣadrā on Paths to Felicity," Mohammed Rustom studies Mullā Ṣadrā's seemingly contradictory positions that there is a cessation of punishment in hell and that the nature of hell is eternal. He shows how Ṣadrā reconciles a form of eternal punishment with God's all-encompassing mercy, and discusses how, since all the divergent paths lead back to God, hell can have a "pleasurable" nature for its eternal residents.

Part 5 is devoted to *The Path beyond this World – Vision and Spiritual Experience of the Hereafter*. Simon O'Meara's "Muslim Visuality and the Visibility of Paradise

and the World” looks at visuality in early and medieval Sunni Arab-Muslim urban culture and its historically and culturally constructed hermeneutic. From a reflection on photographs of the *madīna* of Fez, Morocco, he analyzes Quranic statements and *ḥadīths* on the present world and paradise to show how the religious command to lower the gaze is juxtaposed with paradise’s unrestricted visibility.

Maryam Moazzen’s “A Garden beyond the Garden: ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī’s Perspective on Paradise” explores ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī’s ontological system in his *Tamhīdāt* (Preambles), and discusses the symbolic nature of heaven and hell. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s articulation of the oneness of being is rooted in a symbolic dualism that is important for ontology and spiritual psychology. Heaven and hell are states of the soul, and Moazzen explores how the soul’s understanding of divine love leads the individual to the inner state of heaven.

Katja Föllmer, in “Beyond Paradise: The Mystical Path to God and the Conception of Martyrdom in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Conference of the Birds*,” draws attention to Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s (d. ca. 617/1220–1) eschatological vision in the *Mantīq al-ṭayr*. She demonstrates how ‘Aṭṭār understood paradise as a station on the Sufi spiritual path and talks of the meanings that love, death, and martyrdom embody. She provides key social, religious, and literary context for understanding not only ‘Aṭṭār’s place in his own time, but also how contemporary Western and Iranian scholars have understood him.

Part 6, *Unity In Variety – Shi‘ism and Other Muslim Identities*, commences with Omid Ghaemmaghami’s “‘And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord’ (Q 39:69): *Qā’im* and *qiyāma* in Shi‘i Islam.” The author analyzes the relationship between the Ariser/Savior and Resurrection (*qā’im* and *qiyāma*) in Shi‘i *ḥadīth* collections and Quran commentaries that have previously received little attention. He provides a comprehensive list of phrases and Quranic verses that are glossed as signifiers of the *qā’im* and/or *qiyāma*, and through a discussion of specific images and *ḥadīth*, illustrates how the day of resurrection is the day on which the *qā’im* appears, and how this reveals a symbolic shift in time in Shi‘i apocalyptic literature.

Elizabeth Alexandrin’s “Paradise as the Abode of Pure Knowledge: Reconsidering al-Mu‘ayyad’s ‘Isma‘ili Neoplatonism” discusses al-Mu‘ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī’s (d. 471/1078) view that the reward of paradise is intellectual, and how this interpretation is rooted in al-Sijistānī’s definition of paradise as the abode of pure knowledge. She explores al-Mu‘ayyad’s descriptions of paradise in both literalist and allegorical terms in connection with the Isma‘ili *da‘wa* and heaven in *potentia* and heaven in *actu*. This discussion highlights the way al-Mu‘ayyad integrated Islamic messianism and Quranic eschatology with Neoplatonist philosophy to formulate his Isma‘ili soteriology.

S.J. Badakhchani's "Notions of Paradise in the Isma'ili Works of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī" highlights the symbolic and hermeneutical aspects of paradise in Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's (d. 672/1274) surviving Isma'ili eschatological texts. Ṭūsī's conception of paradise articulates a spiritual resurrection of the soul that relies on spiritual exegesis (*ta'wīl*). The rewards and punishments of heaven and hell can also be states of the soul, and thus the spiritual and imaginative state of the earthly soul shapes the nature of the otherworldly paradise and hell.

Jamel A. Velji's "Apocalyptic Rhetoric and the Construction of Authority in Medieval Isma'ilism" investigates how the medieval Isma'ili texts, the *Kitāb al-Kashf* (Book of unveiling) and the *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* (Seven chapters of our master), use the language of apocalypse to identify objects and events in Isma'ili history from the early Fatimid period and the Nizārī period with symbols in the Quran. Through a discussion of Isma'ili hermeneutics pertaining to eschatology and typology, he shows how the symbol of paradise is re-signified within Isma'ili sacred history.

Alexey A. Khismatulin's "Just a Step away from Paradise: *Barzakh* in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq Teachings" scrutinizes the teachings of the community of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq concerning the eschatological doctrine of the *barzakh* as an intermediary place of experience between this world and the next. According to the teachings of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq, the *barzakh* designates a place in the human cycle of 1,000 lives that leads to perfection. The author provides an introduction to this little-studied tradition, and then focuses on the role of the *barzakh* in the teachings of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq. He analyzes the Quranic exegetical origins of the related doctrine and the main features of the *barzakh* world as described by Nūr 'Alī Ilāhī (d. 1394/1974).

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov's "'Paradise is at the Feet of Mothers': The Ḥurūfī Road" looks at the role played by the human bodily form in Ḥurūfī eschatology, and how the figure of Eve is the key to paradise in the *Jāwidān-nāma* by Faḍlallāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394), the founder of this community. He analyzes the Ḥurūfī metaphysical doctrine of language, the human form as the most complete locus of manifestation of the divine attributes, and then illustrates that Eve, the original form of all humans, provides the key to enlightenment and the return to paradise, which is the return to the original knowledge represented by the mother.

Mohammad Hassan Khalil's "Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought" studies movements from Islamic history that have espoused *tanāsukh* (reincarnation). Based on his analysis of these philosophers, Shi'i so-called *ghulāt* (exaggerators) sects, Mu'tazilis, and Sufis, he discusses the function paradise serves for them and the ways in which Quranic passages are used to maintain their doctrines. He addresses the dif-

difficulties in a position that states that the Quran supports reincarnation, while also focusing on the positive and contemporary reasons for supporting it.

Volume II, Continuity and Change: The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamicate World, continues these various interrelated lines of thought in Part 7, with considerations of *Paradise and Eschatology in Comparative Perspective*.

Fred M. Donner, in his “A Typology of Eschatological Concepts,” offers a detailed catalog of concepts around which eschatological thought is structured in order to provide terminology to facilitate future comparative work. He defines the term ‘eschatology’ and highlights some of the difficulties of defining eschatological systems. In the process of outlining these categories, he draws examples from a wide array of ancient to contemporary eschatological systems.

Martin Tamcke, in “The ‘World’ in its Eschatological Dimension in East-Syrian Synodical Records,” investigates how the collection of East-Syrian synodical records from 410–775/76 CE reveals the way this Christian church made a distinction between the present world and the eternal world. Looking at passages from the records, Tamcke explores how the vision of the future world shaped life and societal interactions for this church.

Expanding on this theme of the connection between Oriental Christianity and Islam, Sidney H. Griffith’s “St. Ephraem the Syrian, the Quran, and the Grapevines of Paradise: An Essay in Comparative Eschatology” analyzes certain insights offered by modern scholarship on Syriac and the Quran, and points out the lack of attention given to the use of classical Syriac literary imagery by Arabic-speaking Christians in the Quranic milieu. He illustrates that the parallels between Ephraem the Syrian’s *madrāshê* or hymn ‘On Paradise’ and the Quran are due to a Quranic dialogical development of a narrative motif that is also present in the *madrāshê*.

Another contribution by Martin Tamcke, “Paradise? America! The Metaphor of Paradise in the Context of the Iraqi-Christian Migration” explores the meanings that the metaphor of paradise has for modern Iraqi-Christians by looking at the writings of Sargon Boulus and Jean Benjamin Sleiman. America is described as a paradise of hope and freedom, a refuge from the political and cultural problems in Iraq, while Iraq is described as the lost paradise of a nostalgic past. The chapter discusses the tension between these metaphors and the problems faced by those wishing to emigrate.

Part 8, *Eschatology and Literature*, begins with Waleed Ahmed’s contribution to the study of “The Characteristics of Paradise (*Ṣifat al-janna*): A Genre of

Eschatological Literature in Medieval Islam.” The author argues that a group of texts generally referred to as *ṣifat al-janna* (The characteristics of paradise) constitutes a distinct literary genre within the larger category of specifically Sunni Muslim eschatological literature. He looks at the historical development of the genre, outlining its formal characteristics and the unique way in which such texts utilize Quranic material and prophetic traditions. The author also points out differences between these eschatological works and some other examples of texts that are not part of the genre. He does so, above all, in order to demonstrate how Muslim scholars developed this distinct genre within the socio-cultural context of Sunni Islam.

Mahmoud Hegazi’s “‘Roads to Paradise’ in *Risālat al-ghufrān* [Epistle of forgiveness] of the Arab Thinker al-Maʿarrī” explores the theme of “roads to paradise” by scrutinizing how the conception of salvation in the writings of Abū l-ʿAlāʾ al-Maʿarrī (d. 449/1057) is based on *tuqā* (piety), and *tawba* (repentance). Hegazi describes the levels of paradise and hell in the text and the eschatological vision employed in it. Moreover, he shows how al-Maʿarrī’s text differs from those of other authors insofar as his paradise is inhabited mainly by *aṣḥāb qalam*, “men of letters and scholarship,” and his descriptions are based on poetry rather than religious texts.

Roberto Tottoli’s “Muslim Eschatology and the Ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad: Describing Paradise in *Miʿrāj* Traditions and Literature” draws our attention to the historical development of descriptions of paradise in the *miʿrāj* (ascension to heaven) literature. He looks at the controversial position of descriptions of paradise in early material, and then at the features of paradise mentioned in the Quran and eschatological literature, to show how the later medieval *miʿrāj* narratives elaborated on these brief descriptions and contributed lengthy, sustained depictions of the “architecture” and “habitat” of paradise.

Samar Attar’s “An Islamic *Paradiso* in a Medieval Christian Poem? Dante’s *Divine Comedy* Revisited” argues against the widely accepted view that Dante’s *Divine Comedy* is a uniquely “western” work, by looking at the historical contact between the Muslim and Christian worlds prior to and during Dante’s lifetime and examining the Islamic literary and philosophical material that was circulating in Europe at the time. A thematic comparison of Dante’s work with the philosophical novel *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* by the Spanish Arab scholar Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185), and an exploration of the possible Muslim sources for Dante’s *Beatrice* offer the conclusion that Dante must be understood in a multi-cultural context.

Claudia Ott’s “Paradise, Alexander the Great and the *Arabian Nights*: Some New Insights Based on an Unpublished Manuscript” shows how an Arabic pseudo-Callisthenes manuscript of the Alexander romance may draw a parallel

between the mysterious location of paradise and the origin of the *Arabian Nights*. The chapter proceeds to trace a postulated transmission route of the *Arabian Nights* from pre-Islamic Persia to the pre-modern Arab-Muslim world, and illustrates that *janna* (paradise, or garden) is used in this text as a metaphor for love.

Walid A. Saleh in his “Paradise in an Islamic ‘*Ajā’ib* Work: *The Delight of Onlookers and the Signs for Investigators* of Marīb. Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624)” looks at the previously unstudied *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn wa-āyāt al-mustadillīn* (The delight of onlookers and the signs for the investigators), and the place of heaven in this author’s new formulation of the ‘*ajā’ib* or marvels of creation genre that includes the Islamic cosmological world. The chapter discusses the ‘*ajā’ib* genre, how Marī’s work continues and refutes the ‘*ajā’ib* work of al-Qazwīnī, and how the work reflects the changing understanding of history in the early Ottoman Empire. Of special value in this context is the Arabic edition of the introduction to *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* in an appendix.

Suha Kudsieh’s “Expulsion from Paradise: Granada in Raḍwā ‘Āshūr’s *The Granada Trilogy* (1994–8) and Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995)” explores how Raḍwā ‘Āshūr and Salman Rushdie move away from a restorative poetics of nostalgia that sees al-Andalus as a lost paradise, and engage instead in a reflective nostalgia that questions the religious and political turmoil in Eastern societies. Kudsieh looks at how ‘Āshūr (who views al-Andalus as a historical reality with a deeply hidden destructive side) and Rushdie understand Muslim Spain as an unreal society from the start and thus, together, subvert a rather romantic vision of the past.

Part 9, *Bringing Paradise Down to Earth – Aesthetic Representations of the Hereafter*, begins with Maribel Fierro’s “Madīnat al-Zahrā’, Paradise, and the Fatimids,” which examines the construction of the Madīnat al-Zahrā’ from 329/940–1 onwards and its architectural and ideological associations with paradise. The architectural ‘heavenly symbolism’ and its connection with paradise are explored through an analysis of scholarship on vegetal decoration, the description of the gardens of paradise in Q 55, and exegetical literature. She also discusses the political and religious motives behind ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III’s use of paradisaic allusions, and how these helped him to assert his authority as a Sunni caliph in opposition to the Fatimids.

Tehnyat Majeed, in “The *Chār Muḥammad* Inscription, *Shafā’a*, and the Mamluk Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya,” takes a close look at how the Mamluk-era Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya represents an intersection between the spiritual and material worlds that allowed Sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn (d. 689/1290) to obtain *baraka* (blessing) while maintaining his earthly royal status. The chapter explores the architectural design of the mausoleum and the *chār*

Muḥammad inscriptions and their link to the eschatological role of the Dome of the Rock, and how these allusions also create a tie between the Prophet Muḥammad as intercessor (*shāfi*) and Qalāwūn.

Karin Rührdanz's "Visualizing Encounters on the Road to Paradise" studies figurative representations of paradise and the "road to paradise" in fourteenth- to seventeenth-century book illustrations from Iran, Central Asia, and the Ottoman Empire. She analyzes these representations as a means of visualizing the imagined. The detail, or lack thereof, in the paradisaal depictions in illustrated manuscripts of texts such as *Majālis al-'ushshāq*, *Mi'rāḡ-nāmes*, and *Fālnāmes* illustrate how representations shifted over time and in changing political landscapes.

Ulrich Marzolph's "Images of Paradise in Popular Shi'ite Iconography" analyzes how paradise and martyrdom are visualized in depictions of the battle of Karbala (61/680) from the Qajar period and in modern murals in Tehran. He looks at the placement of paradise and the symbols representing paradise and martyrdom in examples from these two periods to show how images from the Qajar period form part of the visual memory of Shi'ite culture, and how they continue to influence contemporary visual depictions and public consciousness of martyrdom.

This section concludes with Silvia Naef's "Where is Paradise on Earth? Visual Arts in the Arab World and the Construction of a Mythic Past." Here the author examines pictorial representations in the Arab world that idealize past traditions and times and imbue them with a timeless "paradisaal" meaning. She first gives a brief overview of how art in the Arab world was affected by Western artistic trends and traditions, then looks at specific paintings that engender nostalgia for a fictional, idealized past, a paradise on earth sullied by modernization and secularization.

Part 10, *Heavens and the Hereafter in Scholarship and Natural Sciences*, opens with Ingrid Hehmeyer's "The Configuration of the Heavens in Islamic Astronomy," which explores the importance of the seven heavens in the Quran and in descriptions of the Prophet Muḥammad's night journey (*isrā'*) and subsequent ascension to heaven (*mi'rāj*). The author traces the roots of the symbolic significance of the seven heavens from ancient Mesopotamia, Greece, and Rome to the development of Muslim astronomy. She also demonstrates how Islamic astronomy, as a science concerned with the natural heavens, developed from religious motivations concerning the location of the direction of prayer, the prayer times, and the periods of fasting.

In "The Quadrants of *Shar'ā*: The Here and Hereafter as Constitutive of Islamic Law," Anver M. Emon posits a quadrant model of analysis (which takes into account concerns for both the here and the hereafter) as a useful

instrument for gaining a better understanding of Islamic legal reasoning. By applying it to a number of legal issues, the author demonstrates that this model might better explain the work of Muslim jurists than the modern legal/moral dichotomy. This highlights how shifting concerns for the here and now, as well as eschatological concerns, influenced the rationale of juristic rulings.

The late Ludmila Hanisch, in “Perceptions of Paradise in the Writings of Julius Wellhausen, Mark Lidzbarski, and Hans Heinrich Schaeder,” examined thematically relevant issues in modern scholarship. She addresses the specifics of the relationship between Orientalist studies and the study of Christian theology that existed in German universities until the mid-twentieth century. More specifically, she discussed the careers of the three German scholars of Semitic and Oriental philology mentioned in her title. By describing how their earlier religious and theological training inspired their scholarship, her chapter illustrates the subordinate role eschatological issues played in their research.

Part 11, *Paradise Meets Modernity – The Dynamics of Paradise Discourse in the Nineteenth, Twentieth, and Twenty-First Centuries*, is the final section of this book.

Edwin P. Wieringa’s “Islam and Paradise are Sheltered under the Shade of Swords: Phallocentric Fantasies of Paradise in Nineteenth-Century Acehese War Propaganda and their Lasting Legacy” addresses the rhetorical use of the sensual rewards of paradise in nineteenth-century poems from the Aceh War in Indonesia as a tool for recruiting adolescent boys as *mujāhidīn*, “religiously motivated warriors.” The chapter illustrates that the intent of the poems was transformed to construct an Acehese identity as “defenders of Islam.” While the poems served to recruit young boys to fight, Wieringa argues that the promises of paradise in this literature, in a modern context, also serve as an incentive for resistance and peaceful protest.

In “Eschatology between Reason and Revelation: Death and Resurrection in Modern Islamic Theology,” Umar Ryad illustrates the multifaceted views on eschatological issues in modern Muslim thought. He presents an overview of selected Muslim scholars’ attempts to revitalize a new *kalām*, or discursive theology. He explores the unique ways in which each scholar, starting with Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1762) and ending with Ḥasan Ḥanafī (b. 1935), sought to address classical eschatological issues in terms of the scientific and philosophical theories of their day, thereby strengthening what they considered to be a vulnerable cluster of teachings in the modern world.

Martin Riexinger’s “Between Science Fiction and Sermon: Eschatological Writings Inspired by Said Nursi” portrays the life of the well-known and widely read twentieth-century Kurdish scholar, his eschatological teachings, and his influence on contemporary Turkish authors associated with the Nurcus, the followers of Said Nursi. Riexinger explores how other twentieth-century

religious leaders and writers such as Fethullah Gülen and Harun Yahya are influenced in their eschatological thought by Nursi's views on science and religion, and how they engage in current scientific debates in their religious teachings, interpret "eschatological signs," and utilize modern media to disseminate their work.

Liza M. Franke's chapter, "Notions of Paradise and Martyrdom in Contemporary Palestinian Thought," on the discourse surrounding female martyrs, the *istishhādiyyāt*, is based on interviews she collected in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. She looks at how female martyrdom is perceived as a "rite of passage," considers whether the *istishhādiyyāt* can be considered martyrs or enter the garden as "virgins," and how in popular encomiums the *istishhādiyyāt* are depicted as Palestinian brides that will nurture the land.

Ruth Mas' "Crisis and the Secular Rhetoric of Islamic Paradise" concludes this broad and deep spectrum of thought-provoking studies with an analysis of the contemporary Franco-Maghribi scholar Nadia Tazi and her discourse on *janna* as a rhetoric of crisis that pairs paradise with terror. The author scrutinizes the structure of this pairing, and the way Tazi situates Muslims in modernity. The author critiques Tazi's understanding and use of Lacoue-Labarthe's concept of "hyperbology" and her use of the Lacanian emphasis on the male subject. In addition, she discusses those Lacoue-Labarthe ideas that may offer a different reading of the crisis, taking special account of female subjectivity.

6 Appendices

Appendix I is a bibliography of both primary and secondary literature on the various topics connected with eschatology and the hereafter. It is a compilation of the most important research mentioned in the various articles in this publication, enriched by a large number of additional studies collected by the editors. This bibliography is intended to provide quick access to some of the most important primary texts in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish (unfortunately it was not possible to include work done in other Islamic languages such as Urdu and Indonesian), along with a number of related studies published in major European languages. Considering the vastness of the topic, it is clear that this bibliography is a preliminary effort. Yet, it is presented here in the hope that it may serve as a basis for future research on eschatology and concepts of the hereafter in Islam.

With these thoughts, the editors of *Roads to Paradise* wish the reader an inspiring and enjoyable intellectual journey perusing the highly varied yet deeply interrelated studies offered in these two volumes.

**PREPARING FOR THE JOURNEY –
CONFERENCE OPENING ADDRESSES**

*The Paths to Reality are as Diverse
as the Souls of Humanity*



Paradise Lost

Tilman Nagel

Some time ago my colleague Sebastian Günther told me about the conference on Muslim concepts of paradise he was busy organizing, and he asked me to say a word of welcome to the scholars who would contribute to this scientific event. Furthermore, he proposed that I should sketch out my own opinion on the subject. I agreed quite rashly, for at that time I did not know whether I had an opinion of my own on the Muslim paradise depicted so vividly in the Quran and *ḥadīth*. Nevertheless, when I started to write this paper I had to admit that it would not be appropriate just to address a few expressions of our high esteem to our guests, just hint at my speculations concerning the papers which were going to be read, and then retreat from the speaker's desk as though I should pretend to be the arbitrator, who would refrain from any substantial statement. This, of course, would be impossible. Therefore, while pondering the speech I had promised to my dear colleague, I was feeling somewhat uneasy, because I became aware of my incompetence on the matter. "Begin with the easy part of the job," I said to myself, "and finally you will find a way out of the dilemma."

I followed this idea, and looking back on the recent history of Islamic studies in Göttingen I realized that 1974 was the last time that our institute had organized an international meeting comparable to this one, which I have the honor to inaugurate today. You see that an event like this is of very rare occurrence for us. All the more it is a very great pleasure for me to bid you a warm welcome. The staff of the Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies with Professor Günther at its head, and Professor Lawson of the University of Toronto, are grateful to you for having undertaken long and perhaps inconvenient journeys to attend this conference. We all hope that you will enjoy your stay in Göttingen, the hours of fruitful work ahead of you, and the hours of leisure as well, paradisaal leisure, I am tempted to say. No, excuse me, this was a slip of my tongue or rather a slip of my thought, because in paradise, I assume, there will be no leisure at all, as there will be no work at all.

Well, it seems to be a queer universe you are going to talk about for the next few days. The conditions of life in the hereafter completely differ from what we are accustomed to in this world. But do they in fact differ completely? Studying Muslim texts like the *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya*, written by Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī (d. 974/1567) one may become doubtful about this truism. Ibn Ḥajar deals

with many questions he has been asked by his countrymen, the sophisticated and the simple-minded as well; they all felt anxious concerning the world to come, and they craved reassurance that there will not be too great a difference between their lives in post-Mamluk Egypt and Hijaz and their expected lives in paradise.

A woman who was married to more than one husband – one after the other of course – will she find herself in paradise married to the last of them or to the most handsome of them? This seems to be a very complicated problem; Ibn Ḥajar dwelled on it at length without finding a clear-cut solution. Will someone enter paradise with a beard? This time the answer is quite easy: It is only the prophet Moses who continues to have a beard in paradise.¹ Will the Muslims' young children be in paradise, serving the adult Muslims? And what about the children of the unbelievers – will they be in hell, or will they enter paradise, because, when they died, they were not yet liable for their unbelief? Again Ibn Ḥajar went into the details of the history of Muslim theology, and finally he pointed to the famous *ḥadīth* which says that every newborn child is a Muslim due to natural disposition (*fiṭra*).² Furthermore, people wonder if the *ḥūrīs*, the young male servants (*al-wildān*), and those who are tending the fires of hell will ever die; they will not, Ibn Ḥajar stated.³ But this answer led him to another serious question: It is said that boys will still be boys after having been resurrected. Will they be married to the *ḥūrīs*, and will they enjoy eternal life, as is promised to the *ḥūrīs*?

On the day of resurrection every child will be in the state of the time of death, but on the arrival in paradise, his age will be augmented so that he turns out to be a young adult (*bāligh*), and then he will marry women of this world as well as *ḥūrīs*; the male servants in paradise are of the same race as the *ḥūrīs*.⁴ Will the demons (*jinn*) be allowed access to paradise? They will, on the condition that they believe in Muḥammad; they are real beings, only the Muʿtazilites deny this; and as they are real beings in this world, they will exist in the hereafter.⁵

It would be futile to attempt to harmonize the ideas put forth by Ibn Ḥajar in the course of his discussions. Even the results of his reasoning, summarized in the short sentences of his *fatwās*, are not without contradictions. But this is not the point I want to make. The questions he dealt with give us a vivid

1 Ibn Ḥajar, *al-Fatāwā al-ḥadīthiyya* 48 ff.

2 Ibid., 106.

3 Ibid., 163.

4 Ibid., 183.

5 Ibid., 122 ff.

impression of the manner people would conceive of the relations between this world and the world to come: The conditions of life in the hereafter differ from those prevailing in this world, but these differences can be described by referring to what is common to us here and now. What will change in the hereafter is clearly expounded in the Quran and in the *ḥadīth* – paradise seems to lose its secrets. Now one might argue that all religions discuss ways of coping with the horrors of the day of judgment and with the eternity of reward and punishment provided that their followers believe in a world to come. This is right, I admit, but I must underline the peculiar religious and intellectual suppositions with respect to which a Muslim scholar like Ibn Ḥajar tackled the issue. *It is the remarkable phenomenon of the disappearing border between this world and the hereafter which matters.* This border will become indistinct, events predicted to happen in the world to come tend to foreshadow their expected occurrence already in this world, and finally they will occur in this world.

Let me give you an example! “O my Lord, give me jurisdiction, and join me to the upright, and appoint for me a secure reputation among the latest generations, and place me among the inheritors of the Garden of Delight . . .” Abraham beseeches God in Q 26:83–5.⁶ The believer who keeps to God’s commandments strictly and faithfully will inherit paradise after the day of judgment. This is a promise Muḥammad takes for granted throughout the revelations he promulgates in the Meccan period of his prophetic activities (cf. Q 19:63 or 23:11). “This is the Garden: you have been made heirs of it for the works you have been doing,” God proclaims in Q 7:43; access to paradise is the fair recompense for following God’s guidance, though the believers know that their obedience has been determined in advance through God’s unfathomable decree and must not be considered as the result of their own merit.⁷ Yet there is another type of Quranic preaching, prominent during the Meccan period, which describes the procedure of inheriting the promised land as an event of the past, which took place in this world. Those peoples who did not comply with God’s orders were annihilated, and it was God himself who inherited their properties, their

6 Bell (trans.), *The Qur’ān translated*; I quote this translation throughout this paper.

7 Man’s belief or disbelief is determined by Allah in advance (cf. Q 6:125 and 39:22; cf. van Ess, *Zwischen Ḥadīṭ und Theologie* and Nagel, *The history of Islamic theology* 69). Though Sunnite theology never did revise this position, many contemporary Sunni Muslims would maintain when embarking on a dialogue with non-Muslims that it had been their own decision to believe in being determined through divine decree. This assertion which seems to be advanced during the debates just for tactical reasons – stringent determinism would contradict the assumed adaptability of Islam to the world of today – is not in keeping with Sunni theological thought.

land (Q 15:23, 19:40, 21:89) in order to place them into the hands of those obedient to him and believing in him: Pharoah used to oppress the believers, but he and his army were drowned. God “wished to bestow favor on those who had been weakened in the land, and to make them leaders, and to make them inheritors” (Q 28:5) – and this might happen once again in the near future. In the same Sura Muḥammad states that God announced: “How many a town have we destroyed which exulted in its profusion? These are their dwelling-places, uninhabited since then except a little, and we have become the inheritors!” (Q 28:58). In Sura 7, composed about one and a half years before the *hijra*, Muḥammad mentions such a transfer of heritage from the haughty to the upright three times (Q 7:100, 128, 137). This Sura contains some of the sharpest threats Muḥammad directs against his countrymen while in Mecca. For the sake of brevity, I have to skip some five years now. In Sura 33 Muḥammad deliberates on his victory at the battle of the ditch and tries to justify the cruel treatment the Banū Qurayza were subjected to. “And (God) brought down from their towers those of the People of the Book who backed (the enemies), and cast terror in their hearts; part you killed, and you took prisoner a part. And God caused you to inherit their land and their dwellings and their properties and land which you had never trodden . . .” (Q 33:26–7).

In Muḥammad’s view God’s justice will come true in the hereafter, though it may also come true in this world. As time passed, in Medina the worldly aspect of divine justice asserted itself sharply; the events he and his followers met with came to be interpreted as the last and final case of God’s transferring the heritage of land from the infidels to the true believers. It is the concept of *fay*, i.e., of the infidels’ land and properties restituted by God to the true owners without any preceding fighting, which Muḥammad proclaims in Sura 59 in order to justify the expulsion of the Banū l-Naḍir.⁸ What has been promised to come about in the hereafter is being translated into reality here and now, in the community of those who converted to the true religion. The hackneyed statement that in Islam religion and politics are just one single entity is a faint, but crucial echo of this fusion of what had been clearly differentiated at the beginning of Muḥammad’s preaching.

During the centuries to come Muslim theology and cosmology did much work to elucidate the consequences of the disappearance of the distinct border between this world and the hereafter. Of course popular edifying texts continued to display much zeal to depict the horrors of hell and the joys of paradise and to warn the negligent against the terrible consequences of frivolity. But if one plunges into the vast medieval literature on the Prophet and his

8 Cf. Nagel, *Mohammed* 360–2.

functions as perceived by the average Muslim, one becomes aware of a current of thought which counterbalances that intimidating vision of the day of judgment and its possibly fateful outcome, a current of thought which might be summed up as follows: The first being to be created by God was the cosmic Muḥammad, i.e., the single creature totally guided by God; then everything that has existed, is still existing, and will exist in this world was brought forth by God from that Muḥammad, the Perfect Man. In principle, this world cannot fall into damnation, because, through the Perfect Man, it is tied to the Creator existentially. The history of this world is divided into two periods, the first comprising the time from the very beginning up to the date of the Prophet's birth, the second comprising the centuries of Islam. This second period will come to its end when this world is totally dominated by Islam and its laws. Those who profess to cling to the Prophet's guidance will enter paradise in any case, regardless of whether or not they actually obeyed the commandments of this guidance. Al-Būṣīrī's famous *Burda* is a striking example of this interpretation of Islam.⁹

But I have to leave the fascinating universe of later medieval Islam, to return to the Quran. In Sura 2 Muḥammad tells us that God taught Adam the names of all created beings. Then Satan beguiled Adam and his wife into committing a sin and both were expelled from paradise. But even at this moment God appears as the compassionate one:

Adam chanced upon certain words from the Lord, and he relented toward him . . . We said: "Get ye down from (Paradise) together, and if ever there come to you guidance from Me, then whoever follows My guidance, fear will not rest upon him nor will he grieve. But those who have disbelieved and counted our signs false – they are the people of the Fire, therein abiding" (Q 2:35–7).

If I am not misled, the peculiar Islamic relationship between this world and the hereafter is already palpable in these few sentences. They are quite different from what we read in the Old Testament:

And to Adam (God) said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree, of which I commanded you 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles I shall bring forth to you and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall

9 Cf. Nagel, *Allahs Liebling* 316–56.

eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you are taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:17–19).

Adam is not taught the names of all created beings, he has to find them on his own (Gen 2:20); in paradise everything had been at his disposal, in this world he has to work hard to make his living.

Unlike the Adam of the Quran, the Adam of the Old Testament actually loses paradise; God makes sure that he stays outside: He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:24). But Adam barter a precious immaterial treasure against the joys of paradise: the ability to discern good from evil. Therefore it is only after the expulsion from paradise that man becomes a real human being. In the Quran there is no allusion whatsoever to this momentous idea. The Muslim Adam is conceived of as God's vicegerent in this world. If he obeys God's guidance, there is no need to know the difference between good and evil. And it is just to understand this fundamental meaning of guidance that God has bestowed reason upon him. Making use of reason in an independent way, e.g., to know right from wrong, is extremely dangerous and might lead man directly into disbelief. The episode about Iblis and his disobedience to God is the Quranic warning example of independent reasoning: God tells him to prostrate himself before the body of Adam which has just been shaped out of clay, but Iblis refuses to do so, because he himself consists of fire, which, in his opinion, is much nobler than clay.

Indeed, if this world is totally determined by a never resting creator, human reason cannot be instrumental in making one's way through it. The only reality which may be established through the correct use of reason is the unlimited power of God and His likewise unlimited authority as a legislator, who is not responsible to man for what He orders him to do.¹⁰ By way of contrast, according to the Old Testament and its European interpretation, civilization, ethics, and human existence as a whole begin with Adam's expulsion from paradise. "It was from out the rind of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world. And perhaps this is that doom which Adam fell into of knowing good and evil; that is to say, of knowing good by evil." In these words John Milton (d. 1674) expresses the gist of the Biblical story in his *Areopagitica*. Man has to bear the consequences

10 Cf. note 7. In the Muslims' view, knowledge cannot be produced by man, but exists beyond man's capacity of reasoning and independent of it. Cf. Rosenthal, *Knowledge triumphant* and Nagel, *The history of Islamic theology* 272–5.

of his original sin, it is true, but these consequences are equivocal – man has lost his innocent life in paradise, but he has been indemnified for this loss in a most copious way: He has been given the chance to create a universe of his own, and he has been granted the opportunity to purify himself in order to regain paradise. “That which purifies us, is trial, and trial is by what is contrary,”¹¹ Milton says, summing up the positive results of that event which seems to be altogether disastrous only at first sight.

Milton's views, of course, met with criticism, directed against the frivolity some of his contemporaries discerned in them. But looking at his great epic *Paradise Lost* from a point of view beyond such scruples, be they reasonable or not, one must underscore that no one in European literature has dealt with this subject in such a consistent manner as Milton did. What he treats in his epic has been characterized as the “fortunate fall of man”: Native, unconscious righteousness is replaced by conscious righteousness derived from good reasons. Passion, which might lead man astray, can be overcome, and the powers of reason will exhibit their noble effects, causing a sublime joy not to be experienced in paradise:

... only add
 Deeds to thy knowledge answerable, add faith,
 Add virtue, patience, temperance, add love,
 By name to come called charity, the soul
 Of all the rest: then wilt thou not be loath
 To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess
 A Paradise within thee, happier far.¹²

The loss of paradise is tantamount to the initiation into humanism. The Biblical story can be interpreted as the “fortunate fall,” an interpretation which only seems feasible if salvation as guaranteed by Christ is presupposed. Tackling this question would lead us to many further problems which lie beyond the subject of this symposium. Bearing Milton's idea in mind, let us return to Islam and the Quran! Adam's expulsion from the garden here looks just like misfortune. As bad luck would have it, he and his wife made a serious mistake; God could not shut his eyes to it, he had to punish them. But when the time of punishment is over, both will be restored to the former conditions of life. I would like to state as a hypothesis that in Islam the indistinct border between this world and the hereafter results in the “loss of the loss of paradise” and its

¹¹ Bidell, *Das Konzept des Bösen* 7.

¹² Ibid., 60.

fortunate consequences, i.e., man's creative capacities are set free. Perhaps it is for this reason that in the edifying medieval Muslim literature the detailed catalogue of all the horrors man must endure in his grave and afterward on the day of judgment is much more prominent and elaborate than the description of the joys of paradise, which is limited to a few stereotypes. This is only a vague impression, and I may be mistaken. But now and then one comes across the idea that immediately after the end of judgment God will stop His ongoing act of creation, everything will pass away, and, except Himself, there will be nothing but void and vacuum – a vision which causes terrific anxiety. You see, I have good reasons to look forward to the papers which will be presented at this symposium.

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The Path to Paradise from an Islamic Viewpoint

Mahmoud Zakzouk

Throughout the long history of mankind people of various cultures have developed beliefs in the afterlife as a place of reward and punishment. The only remaining wonder of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the pyramids, are a monument set in stone to this belief in a continuing existence after death. Islam teaches us as well that in the afterlife, on the day of judgment, people will be judged. Faith and good deeds done during one's lifetime will be rewarded with paradise. If, however, one loved this "transitory world," as it is called in the Quran (Q 75:20), too much and disregarded the hereafter, then one will be punished with hell, the place of no hope and full of suffering. On the day of judgment it is no longer possible for one to make up for one's corruption by worldly temptations and for one's unjust and merciless deeds. The Quran therefore warns again and again to contemplate life and its origin and man's true destiny. The clear significance of what happens in this life, the Quran reminds us repeatedly, can only be known only in view of the hereafter.

The tenets of Islam with regard to eschatological concepts such as paradise, hell, the day of judgment, and eternity are best explained in view of its understanding of humankind and especially its duties on Earth. Man's role as God's vicegerent on Earth, although excellent, is nevertheless limited in scope and power. He is obliged to take responsibility for himself and for the Earth. He is a representative and not an absolute ruler and must obey the instructions transmitted to him. Faith leads him to search for the "face of God, the Almighty." His living space, the creation which he did not create and which he cannot sustain by himself, has been entrusted to his stewardship. The special position of man in this creation is explained in the Quran as being due to the fact that, in contrast to other creatures which, as the Quran states (Q 3:83) all obey God, man was created a free being. He can therefore freely choose to follow his destiny and therefore follow the straight path which has been determined for him, or he can neglect his human duties and stray onto wrong paths, thus increasingly losing himself. If he follows his destiny, and thus acts responsibly and follows his conscience, he will be richly rewarded (Q 16:30). If he strays onto wrong paths, but recognizes his mistakes and sincerely regrets them, he is granted another chance to live a fulfilled life with a new path being opened to him. "If only he (man) would race up the steep path," it says in the Quran (Q 90:11), and

strive for good, selfless deeds, patience, and mercy. God's lifeline (Q 3:103), His guidance, is only received by those who truly regret "what their hands have forwarded," as the Quran states (Q 78:40), namely their unjust deeds.

However, only in the gardens of paradise in its various chambers (Q 29:58) will people receive all that they desire (Q 16:31). There they will forever live as their souls have desired, as the Quran teaches. Here their search for the "face of God" (Q *passim*) will finally be rewarded (Q 92:20). Paradise is God's abode (Q 3:198), the garden of eternity, reward and homecoming (Q 25:15). He who reaches paradise will dwell therein forever and will not wish to leave (Q 18:108). "As We produced the first creation, so We shall bring it back again," says the Quran (Q 21:104). The eternal delight of the soul, everlasting enjoyment, as the Quran expresses it (Q 9:72), is "God's good pleasure; that is the mighty triumph."

1 The Choice of the Path

From a general point of view it seems that there are many paths available to man to achieve the ultimate goal of his desires, the realization of his life in its abundance. However, the issue of their relevance arises repeatedly, especially when we become disappointed again and again in our efforts.

The Quran thus recommends that man develop his reason, the most precious of God's gifts, in order to think independently and not to follow the masses. Reason, occasionally also referred to as the "heart" in the Quran, is the light that aids us in finding the right path destined for us. "And God summons to the Abode of Peace," teaches the Quran, "and He guides whomsoever He will to a straight path" (Q 10:25).

God breathed some of His spirit into man when He created him, as the Quran teaches us (Q 15:29). He is closer to us than our jugular vein (Q 50:16), it is explained, and He answers anyone who calls out to Him (Q 2:196). In their search for God, mystics like to refer to the Quranic verse (7:172) which states that God told man when He created him that He is his Lord and Creator, and that man must obey Him. Because of this innate knowledge, man cannot claim on the day of judgment that he did not know his obligation to obey God. The revelations in the Quran remind all human beings of their true Lord and their true destiny, which consists in serving Him (Q 76:29). "Surely this is a reminder," states the Quran. "So he who will may take to his Lord a way" (Q 76:29). Accordingly, Sufis or Islamic mystics, attempt to submit themselves as unconditionally as possible to the will of God, who, as He transmits in His revelations, only wants salvation and happiness for humankind. The love of the

mystic for God, as the well-known Islamic philosopher and mystic al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) once said, is “a state that is tasted (i.e., experienced personally) as reality by him who proceeds on this path (of the mystics).” As al-Ghazālī also expressed, the spirit of man “is something divine . . . and cannot be grasped by the human mind.”¹

On this topic, the Quran states that God has put faith in the hearts of those who believe in Him and the day of judgment, and “He has confirmed them with a Spirit from Himself” (Q 58:22). “To God belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth,” states the Quran (Q 16:77). To the question concerning her opinion about paradise, the mystic Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 185/801), famous for her love of God, answered: “Oh my Lord, if I pray to You out of fear of hell, burn me in it, and if I pray to You in hope of paradise, so banish me from it, but if I pray to You for Your own sake, then do not conceal from me Your eternal beauty.”²

2 The Straight Path of Faith and Good Deeds

If we return for a moment to the teachings of religion and thus to the origin of all human conceptions of happiness, morality, responsibility, and human fulfillment, we receive more detailed insight into how these ideas are to be understood and how they can be realized, and thus how we can reach the paths that lead us to paradise.

The paradise described by the revelations marks the beginning and the end of human history. It is the vision of a perfectly happy life at the beginning of creation and then again at its end, in eternity. The first paradise, a life of innocence and lasting bliss (Q 9:21), we can imagine in our desires, but we cannot imagine the coming paradise in eternity in the same sense, for we are not able to truly imagine eternity. As the Quran teaches us, only faith imparts knowledge of the last things to us – meaning the day of judgment, the hereafter, and eternity – and with it a life of constantly sought, voluntary good deeds. He who desires paradise, it says, strives for it with his actions. Man erroneously always thinks he knows what he is doing. Strictly speaking, however, this is a mistake. Only in the hereafter, as the Quran teaches us repeatedly, will the veils be taken from his eyes, and he will be told what he has done. “Unto Him shall you return,” the Quran warns repeatedly. “Then He will tell you of what you have been doing” (Q 6:60, see also 58:7).

1 Ghazālī, *Ihyā’* iii, 4.

2 Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya in ‘Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-awliyā’* i, 30.

The Quran encourages man to reflect on his destiny, as his own deeds determine his fate in this and the coming world. Thus, he should let himself be guided in his actions by reason. When man strays from the path destined for him, the straight path of Islam, the voluntary submission to God and His will, he will occupy “the lowest of the low” (Q 95:4–6). However, when he realizes his destiny he receives, as the Quran states, a reward that has no end: paradise. Moreover, he already receives rewards in this world. “We have certainly created man in the best of stature; then We return him to the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they will have a reward uninterrupted” (Q 95:4–6). The Quran stresses that no one is burdened with more than they can carry (Q 2:286, 7:42, 46:16). “Those who believe and do deeds of righteousness,” promises the Quran, “unto them the All-merciful shall bestow love” (Q 19:96).

3 The Denial of the Message of the Straight Path

He who denies the truth of the revelations and only believes in the temporal and material world, i.e., this world, but not in the next world, should prove, the Quran teaches, that he has power over creation. However, he is not capable of this; he cannot even, as the Quran expresses, “possess . . . so much as the skin of a date-stone” (Q 35:13). Another example (Q 2:258) mentions the Prophet Abraham, who responded to a king who claimed to be the almighty one who rules over everything: “See, God raised the sun in the East, why don’t you raise it from the West.” Thus he silenced him. To be precise, we are not even capable of controlling the smallest part of creation. Our ability to understand creation and thus ourselves is limited, as experience shows us. This begins with our knowledge of time, which touches our entire life. It is not truly possible for us to imagine that there is a limit to time, and to conceive what was before time or what may be after its end. On the other hand, we are completely capable, when we think about it, to grasp these limits to our understanding and thus also to anticipate that life and creation keep secrets from us. We have then begun to expand our intellectual horizons.

Strictly speaking, the only thing we know of time is that it is not really in our hands. We do not know how much more of it is available to us. We often feel that it seems to be sliding through our fingers. When we want it to pass quickly, it seems to move much too slowly. On the other hand, when we want a lot of time, it passes much too quickly. What we can finally ascertain when we think about time more closely, is that first and foremost, we can use our time,

the time that is given to us, either in a way that is meaningful for our lives – or we can waste it. Eternity cannot be defined with temporal concepts. However, in our experience of the timeless beauty of creation we can come close to it, as when we experience and observe in our lives the timeless relevance of such basic human values as love or justice. If we bring to mind these and similar considerations on the limitations of our knowledge, and if we see that we can transcend these limitations by way of certain experiences, then we have a suitable starting point to further pursue questions on paradise and the paths leading there.

In antiquity, the concept of the eternal cycle of things was taught. With the religions of revelation, however, a linear notion of time developed. It is only at the end of time as we know it, the day of judgment, that will man recognize, so it is revealed, what he has made of himself and his life through his deeds. Until then, we can only speculate on eschatological questions, or we can believe in the religious teachings concerning these issues. God alone, says the Quran (Q 6:59), knows the key to the unseen.

What does the Quran teach us as to why man had to leave the peace and joy of paradise to lead a temporally limited life on Earth with all its difficulties, uncertainties, and insecurities? According to Islamic teachings which paths lead back to paradise?

4 The Lost Paradise and the Teachings of God's Rightful Guidance

According to Quranic teachings, Adam and Eve had to leave paradise because they did not obey God and ate from the fruits of the forbidden tree. They allowed themselves to be tempted, because the fallen angel Satan, in order to harm them, led them to believe that this tree was only forbidden to them because it was the tree of eternity and royal supremacy (Q 20:120). Their desire to seize eternity and power by means of the fruits of the forbidden tree, i.e., their arrogance, thus made them lose their peaceful and happy life in the garden of paradise. Instead, their deeds resulted in their condemnation to mortality and a life in uncertainty and fear. The Earth was assigned to them as a temporary abode, where, as the Quran says (Q 20:123), there is hostility among people instead of the peace of paradise.

When Adam realized what kind of fate he had been condemned to for his disobedience, he regretted his mistake. He regretted his defection from God and his disobedience toward Him. Thus, he turned back to Him and obeyed again. As the Quran states (Q 2:37–8), “Adam received certain words from his

Lord, and He turned toward him.” God told him that He would send His guidance to mankind. Those who followed this divine guidance did not need to fear and would not become sad. However, those who did not follow God’s rightful guidance would be lost forever. In the Islamic view, Adam is the first of many prophets that were sent to mankind to remind them of their true destiny. In His message to Adam, God stresses the responsibility of man for the salvation of his soul. He points out that this is of the utmost importance for every individual and that it is therefore wrong to demand piety from others while forgetting oneself, as this only means that one does not possess reason (Q 2:44).

Even the role model for Muslims, the Prophet Muḥammad, only “transmitted” divine revelations, as the Quran teaches us (Q 28:56). It was not his duty, so it was revealed to him, to lead people to faith, as only God gives faith and right guidance. Every day in their prayers, Muslims ask God for His guidance, to lead them to “the straight path, the path of those upon whom He has bestowed favor, not of those who have evoked His anger or of those who are astray” (Q 1:6–7).

5 The Prophet Muḥammad as Role Model

As a role model for humankind, the Prophet Muḥammed referred to the selfless loving mother, at whose feet, as he said, lies paradise. He stressed repeatedly that one should risk one’s life in the defense of the weak and the wrongly persecuted. According to his understanding, religious life should be defined by the way we behave toward our fellow human beings. “He who does not show mercy toward humankind,” he taught, “will not receive God’s mercy.” He thus also said that a man would be judged according to how he treats his wife. He said that in general, religion is about proper, considerate, and just behavior. With regard to the question how to judge one’s own behavior, he said that when we listen to our conscience, we know what to do or what to avoid: “Piety is good behavior. Sacrilege is that which disturbs the soul and what you do not want other people to know.”

The Prophet is clearly presented as a role model in the Quran, even though he considered himself to be an imperfect human being, who, like all people, required God’s mercy for his salvation. He said: “Search for the golden mean and the right and know that none of you will be saved based only on your deeds.” They said: “Not even you, oh Messenger of God?” He said: “Not even I, unless God surrounds me with His mercy and grace.”

6 The Search for Knowledge as the Path to Paradise

It is stated in the Quran that since man is destined to be God's vicegerent on Earth, God taught Adam "the names of all things" (Q 2:31), which not even the angels knew. This knowledge enables man to avert harm and the shedding of blood on Earth (Q 2:30 ff). A well-known saying of the Prophet thus states: "For those who go out in search of knowledge, God levels the road to paradise."

Islam stresses the decisive role of reason in human life and thus warns against accepting opinions and conceptions without examination. He who merely follows the masses, says the Quran, will stray from his path. "... if you follow the majority of those on Earth," it is stated in the Quran, "you will be led astray from the path to God. They only follow their presumptions and are only guessing (instead of knowing anything for certain)" (Q 6:116). Thus, certainty is essential in the search for truth. This certainty about the truth has to be acquired by man himself in his search for knowledge. Only then will he be able to understand and follow the countless signs of God in the world and in himself that are repeatedly mentioned in the Quran (Q 2:118). On the other hand, it is a sign of ignorance if one thinks that one can do without the search for knowledge and says: "Why does Allah not speak to us or there come to us a sign?" (Q 2:118).

The messages of God are only understood by those who have already acquired certainty in their search for knowledge. Therefore it is stated in the Quran: "We have shown clearly the signs to a people who are certain" (Q 2:118). Those who originally strove for certainty, but then gave up in their search thereof, are warned in the Quran (Q 41:52) that they have become completely lost and are in deep conflict. However, if they continue in their search, it is stated: "We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth" (Q 41:53).

It is a contradiction to search for truth on the one hand, but to want to determine at the same time what this truth should look like and when it should appear on the other hand, as this is not within our control. "Is it not sufficient concerning your Lord," asks the Quran "that He is, over all things, a Witness?" (Q 41:53).

7 Conclusion

Paradise, the Quran teaches us, is basically available to all people of good will who believe in God and strive to do good deeds (Q 29:58). "Those are they from

whom We shall accept the best of what they have done, and We shall pass over their evil deeds,” states the Quran (Q 46:16).

The new moon on the minarets of mosques symbolizes the new beginning that is available to every person who opts for it. It gives us the chance to live fulfilled lives in this world and in the world to come. We must change ourselves if we want our lives to change. It is among the duties of Muslims to acknowledge all religions of revelation as valid paths toward God. Furthermore, Muslims should treat all people, regardless of their religion or their ideologies, with friendliness. That is how, according to the Quran, they act justly. “Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just,” is stated in the Quran (Q 60:8). Even when they are unjustly attacked, Muslims are encouraged to signal their readiness for peace if their attackers decide to abandon violence and fighting (Q 2:190). An Islamic tradition states that we should live in this world as if it will last forever, but that we should prepare for the next world as if it will come upon us tomorrow.

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PART 1

*Paradise, Hell, and Afterlife in the Quran
and Quranic Exegesis*



Quranic Paradise: How to Get to Paradise and What to Expect There

Muhammad Abdel Haleem

1 Introduction

The afterlife is an inevitable reality in Islam, the crucial point of which is judgment, followed by requital, whether it be bliss in paradise or torment in hell. Since the Quran is the supreme authority in Islam, the starting point of everything Islamic, and is considered by Muslims to be categorically and thoroughly authentic, this article on paradise examines the subject only in relation to the Quran.

The subject occupies a very important position in the text and naturally much has been written about it by Muslims and non-Muslims. This study examines three questions: Who will get to paradise?, What qualifies them to do so?, and What can they expect when they get there? The examination is based on close linguistic analysis of the text of the Quran. This requires extensive quotation from the text to let the Quran itself speak about the subject. The material is examined critically, paying attention to the context, the questions of quantity and quality, the relative values the Quran assigns to any given rewards, and the way paradise is presented in the Quran in general. This examination shows that much of what has been written – by Muslims and non-Muslims alike – on the three questions formulated above involves the misinterpretation of some aspects of the Quranic picture of paradise and the mistranslation into English of some crucial terms.

2 Inevitability of Judgment

The resurrection and judgment are fundamental in Islamic theology. Without them, the creation of humans would be in vain. “Did you think We had created you in vain, and that you would not be brought back to Us? Exalted be God!” (Q 23:115–6).

Without them, divine justice would be compromised: “Would We treat those who believe and do good deeds and those who spread corruption on

earth as equal?" (Q 38:28). "What makes you, then, deny the judgment? Is God not the most just of all judges?" (Q 95:7–8).

Justice entails final recompense: whatever recompense people may have in their life on earth is not comprehensive, or lasting; it is also mixed with the imperfections of this world (Q 2:155, 42:30, 87:17). Thus the divine scheme from the beginning was to have two worlds, *al-ūlā* ("the first") and *al-ākhirā* ("the last"), each word occurs in the Quran 115 times. Linguistically, it is impossible to use one of these two terms without it recalling the existence of the other. A good prayer for Muslims is to ask God to grant them happiness in *al-dārayn*, the two homes.

This scheme is unalterable. There is no escape from the day of resurrection: "Say [Prophet], 'God gives you life, then He causes you to die, and then He gathers you all to the day of resurrection about which there is no doubt'" (Q 45:26), "a day that cannot be averted" (Q 42:47).

There is no escape from judgment either. "People will come forward after resurrection in separate groups to be shown their deeds" (Q 99:6). "Every soul will be repaid in full for what it has done. God knows best what they do" (Q 39:70).

3 Who Will Reach Paradise?

Anyone, male or female, found at the judgment to have the required qualifications will get to paradise: "Anyone,¹ male or female who does good deeds and is a believer will enter paradise and will not be wronged by as much as the dip in a date stone" (Q 4:124). "Those who believe and do good deeds will have gardens of bliss" (Q 31:8; see also Q 4:57, 122). God promises this to them: "This is a true promise from God. Who speaks more truly than God?" (Q 4:122; see also Q 3:194, 28:61, 40:8), and "... the true promise that has been given to them" (Q 46:16).

They will not be alone but will have the company of all the good members of their families. "They will enter the perpetual gardens along with their righteous ancestors, spouses, and descendants" (Q 13:23). They will be in the best company: "among those God has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, those who bore witness to the truth and the righteous – what excellent companions these are!" (Q 4:69). All these are the people of paradise.

1 The pronouns used in the Quran to introduce these statements are *man* and *alladhīna*, both of which are particles of generalization and inclusiveness (*ta'mīm*).

4 What are the Qualifications for Entry into Paradise

It is clear throughout the Quran that there are two essential qualifications for entry into paradise: *īmān* (“belief”) and *‘amal ṣāliḥ* (“good deeds”), which frequently collocate in the Quran² making it clear that one without the other is not enough. Paradise is a reward for “what [the blessed believers] have done” (Q 56:24). So fundamental is *‘amal* that “God has created death and life to test you and reveal which of you is better in actions” (Q 67:2).

4.1 *Belief*

An important question is, “belief in what?” Quranic exegetes seem to take this as known and do not comment on it. The answer can be sought in the Quran itself.

The Messenger believes in what has been sent down to him from his Lord and so do the believers. They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures and His messengers – we make no distinction between any of His messengers. They say, ‘We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, our Lord. To You we all return!’ (Q 2:285).

This is not just for the believers in the message of Muḥammad but it applies right from the beginning. When Adam and his wife were sent out of the garden: “We said, ‘Get out, all of you, but when guidance comes from Me, as it certainly will, there will be no fear for those who follow My guidance nor will they grieve’” (Q 2:38). The Quran also states:

God took a pledge from the Children of Israel. We made twelve leaders arise among them and God said, ‘I am with you: if you keep up the prayers, pay the prescribed alms, believe in My messengers and support them, and lend God a good loan, I will wipe out your sins and admit you into gardens graced with flowing streams’ (Q 5:12).

Here belief and required actions are the same as those required of Muḥammad’s followers and the result is the same, their sins will be wiped out and they will be admitted to gardens.

After listing Zechariah, John, Mary and Jesus, Abraham, Moses and Aaron, and Ishmael and Idrīs, the Quran continues:

² There are about 60 citations in the Quran of *āmanū wa-‘amilū ṣāliḥāt*. See ‘Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu’jam al-mufahras* 411–2.

These were the prophets God blessed, from the seed of Adam, of those We carried in the Ark with Noah, from the seed of Abraham and Israel – and those We guided and chose. When the revelations of the Lord of Mercy were recited to them, they fell to their knees and wept... those who repent, who believe, who do righteous deeds will enter the garden. They will not be wronged in the least: they will enter the garden of lasting bliss promised by the Lord of Mercy to His servants (Q 19:58–61).

There are in addition sundry references with regard to Moses in Q 7:156, 169–70; Abraham in Q 28:82–5; and Joseph in Q 12:101 asking to join the righteous in paradise. The Quran tells us that the scriptures of Abraham and Moses (Q 87:17–19) testify that the hereafter is better and more lasting. More generally: “The [Muslim] believers, the Jews, the Christians, and the Sabians – all those who believe in God and the last day and do good deeds will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve” (Q 2:62; see also Q 4:163, 5:69).

In respect to the People of the Book, the Quran emphasizes:

... they are not all alike. There are some among the People of the Book who are upright, who recite God’s revelations during the night, who bow down in worship, who believe in God and the last day, who order what is right and forbid what is wrong, who are quick to do good deeds. These people are among the righteous and they will not be denied the reward for whatever good deeds they do (Q 3:113–5).

With regard to belief in God as a requirement for entry to paradise, it should be noted that the Messiah (Jesus son of Mary) is quoted in the Quran as saying: “Children of Israel, worship God, my Lord and your Lord. If anyone associates others with God, God will forbid him the garden, and hell will be his home” (Q 5:72). Significant also is the fact that belief in God’s messengers should be without distinction between them, i.e., one should not believe in some and not in others: “God will give due rewards to those who believe in Him and His messengers and make no distinction between any of them” (Q 4:150–1). In the Quran they all preach the same fundamental message, the later ones confirming the earlier (Q 3:3, 82).

The entry requirement being the same for all, the Quran stresses that, with regard to the requirements of belief and good deeds, Muslims have no right to expect any different treatment from that given to the People of the Book or vice versa:

It will not be according to your hopes, or those of the People of the Book: anyone who does wrong will be requited for it and will find no one to protect or help him against God; anyone, male or female, who does good deeds and is a believer will enter paradise and will not be wronged by as much as the dip in a date stone (Q 4:124).

4.2 *Good Deeds*

Amal, in its various forms, occurs over 380 times in the Quran, and is strongly connected with entry into paradise: “This is the garden you have been given as your own because of what you used to do” (Q 43:72).

The emphasis is on good deeds and the Quran frequently repeats the collocation *alladhīna āmanū wa-‘amilū l-ṣāliḥāt* (“those who believe and do good deeds”). A sure way of identifying good deeds is to trace the ones the Quran itself lists as good deeds that lead to the garden. For example:

Hurry toward your Lord’s forgiveness and a garden as wide as the heavens and earth prepared for the righteous, who give both in prosperity and adversity, who restrain their anger and pardon people – God loves those who do good – those who remember God and implore forgiveness for their sins if they do something shameful or wrong themselves – who forgives things but God? – and who never knowingly persist in doing wrong. The reward of such people is forgiveness from their Lord and gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will remain. How excellent is the reward of those who labor! (Q 3:133–6).

There is a similar long list in Q 25:64–76, ending with,

Those who pray, “Our Lord, give us joy in our spouses and offspring. Make us good examples to those who are aware of You.” These servants will be awarded the highest place in paradise for their steadfastness. They will be met with greetings and peace. There they will stay – a happy home and resting place.

Likewise

We have commanded man to be good to his parents: his mother struggled to carry him and struggled to give birth to him . . . when he has grown to manhood and reached the age of forty, he [may] say, “Lord, help me to be grateful for Your favors to me and to my parents; help me to do good

work that pleases you; make my offspring good.” We accept from such people the best of what they do and overlook their bad deeds. They will be among the people of paradise, the true promise that has been given to them (Q 46:15–6).

and “The righteous fulfill their vows . . . for the love of Him, they give food to the poor, the orphan and the captive . . . ‘We feed you for the sake of God alone. We seek neither recompense nor thanks from you’” (Q 76:7–9). It is important to note that, in these lists, the Quran does not speak of any single deed that will lead to *janna* but gives a whole set of deeds. That is why each passage should be read as a whole, as shown above. In this way it becomes clear how the Quran itself speaks about these deeds and we understand more perfectly the comments it makes on them, which give them their respective values and show the Quran’s persuasive rhetoric (*targhib*). When Muslims read these passages, especially in Arabic, they experience the contents in a way that cannot be obtained by extracting and analyzing them. For example, when Q 46:15–6 is reduced to the instruction to be good to parents, it loses its persuasive force.

Sometimes the Quran does not list deeds as entry requirements, but just states more generally “those who believe and do good deeds,” or simply talks about *al-muttaqīn* (“those who are mindful [of their Lord],” Q 44:51, 52:17, 54:54, and 77:41), or *man khāfa maqāma rabbihi* (“those who fear [the time when they will] stand before their Lord,” Q 55:46, 79:40). These two descriptions cover every good deed because such people will stay away from whatever is bad and do whatever is good.

5 What Awaits Those Qualified to Enter?

Although the Quran tells us that the joy of paradise is kept hidden: “No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them as a reward for what they have done” (Q 32:17), let us attempt to explore what is revealed through hints and images (*mathal*) of this joy. We begin from the beginning. “On the day when you see the believers, both men and women, with their light streaming ahead of them and to their right, ‘The good news for you today is that there are gardens, graced with flowing streams, where you will stay. That is the supreme triumph’” (Q 57:12). After being given such excellent news,

Those who were mindful of God will be led in throngs to the garden. When they arrive, they will find its gates wide open and the keepers will say to them “Peace be upon you, you have been good. Come in, you are

here to stay,” and they themselves will say, “Praise be to God, who has kept His promise to us and given us this land as our own. Now we may live wherever we please in the garden. How excellent is the reward of those who labor!” You will see the angels surrounding the Throne, glorifying their Lord with praise (Q 39:73–5).

6 Where is the *Janna*?

The Quran does not specify where exactly the *janna* will be. This is perhaps part of the mystery of paradise which makes it part of *al-ghayb* (“what has been kept hidden”) for the pious. What is given in the Quran is only a *mathal* (a likeness) of something indescribable. Accordingly, the exact structure of paradise is not specified. However, the Quran tells us that “its breadth is like the breadth of the heaven and earth” (Q 3:133, 57:21), so it cannot be anywhere on earth as we know it. It is also described as being *‘ālīya* (“high or lofty,” Q 69:22, 88:10). It has *abwāb* (“gates,” Q 13:23, 30:13, 39:73), which are opened to welcome the blessed, with angels to greet them, whereas the gates of hell are closed and are opened when a consignment of the damned arrives (Q 39:71).

7 Names of Paradise

Janna is the generic name that occurs more than 66 times in the Quran, the dual *jannatān* occurs twice in relation to the next world and twice in relation to this world, and the plural *jannāt* occurs 69 times. The root of the verb *j-n-n* indicates being covered and protected, in this world this relates to being concealed and protected from the sun by the branches of trees. Some suggest that *janna* is taken from the Hebrew word *gan* (Genesis 2:8).³ However, the root is well known in Arabic: *junna* is a shield, *jinn* are unseen. Speculation about non-Arab origins⁴ remains speculation. Whatever may be said in that respect, the fact is, when the Prophet Muḥammad recited the Quran to the Arabs, he naturally used words they would understand, simply because they were part of the language they knew and used. Whatever foreign origin there may have been does not in any case affect the whole picture of paradise in the Quran. Christians and Jews see paradise in the Quran as different from the one in their texts, or they would not have criticized the Islamic version. The Quran is an

³ Kinberg, Paradise 12.

⁴ Ibid., 13–5.

Arabic text. The Muslims who received it were native speakers of Arabic. They knew what the words meant. They also believed that everything that was said about paradise was meant to be seen as a reward for good deeds.

The word *janna/jannāt* comes in *idāfa* constructs as *jannat al-ma'wā* ("garden of abode," Q 32:19, 79:39), *jannat al-na'īm* ("garden of bliss," e.g., Q 22:56, 31:8). *Janna* is also described in a number of ways, *dār al-salām* ("home of peace, wholeness," Q 6:127, 10:20) and *dār al-khuld* ("the eternal home," Q 41:28). People in paradise are said to be in *maqām amīn* ("a secure dwelling," Q 44:51). Paradise is also described as *al-dār al-ākhirā* ("the last home," Q 40:39) and *al-husnā* ("the best," Q 10:26, 13:18). The Quran also speaks of *jannāt al-firdaws* (Q 18:107). Whatever the origin of the word *firdaws* when it came into Arabic in pre-Islamic times,⁵ the general meaning for Muslims is that of a high, selected place in paradise, hence the common phrase *al-firdaws al-a'lā* ("the lofty paradise"). All the names and adjectives of paradise give the picture of a good and highly desirable place.

8 *Janna, Jannāt, Jannatān*

Al-janna as a singular refers to the garden, the abode of the good, in contrast to *al-nār*, the fire, the abode of the bad. As such, *al-janna* collocates with the word *aṣḥāb* ("the companions," Q 36:55), *udkhulū* ("enter [imperative]," Q 43:70), *abshirū* ("rejoice in the good news," Q 41:30), *ūrithtumūhā* ("have been given as an inheritance," Q 43:72), *mathal* ("the likeness of," Q 13:35, 47:15), *uzlifat* ("brought near," Q 50:31, 81:13), *farīq fī l-janna* ("a group in the garden," Q 42:7), and *baytan fī l-janna* ("a house in the garden," Q 66:11). When it is indefinite, or in the plural and the dual, it is a garden inside the main garden.⁶

Jannāt in the plural indicates greater privilege from God and collocates with *lahum* ("for them," Q 85:11), *jazā'uhum* ("their reward," Q 98:8), *athābahum* ("He rewarded them," Q 5:85), *la udkhilannahum* ("I will admit them," Q 3:195), *yubashshiruhum bi-* ("He gives them the good news of...", Q 9:21), *wa'ada* ("He promised," Q 9:72), *a'adda lahum* ("He prepares for them," Q 9:89), and *fī jannāt* ("in gardens," Q 22:56). In very few places does it appear with the definite article *al-*. Out of the 69 occurrences 40 appear with *anhār* ("streams") and 29 without.

Jannatān (two gardens) occurs only twice, in Sura 55, verses 46 and 63. Two gardens are for the better class of believers and two others for the less deserving. Annemarie Schimmel observes that "the Quranic description of

⁵ Badawi and Abdel Haleem, *Dictionary* 700.

⁶ The word *janna* is also used to signify an ordinary garden, as in Q 18:39 and 68:17.

paradise is rather consistent . . . but our imaginative faculty becomes slightly confused when, in Surat al-Rahman, (Sura 55:36–73), two gardens are mentioned, with two fountains of running water and two kinds of every fruit . . .”⁷ J. Wansbrough discussed the two versions occurring at the end of Sura 55 and argues that version A [55:46–61] represents an elaboration of version B [55:62–77] “both by rhetorical device and exegetical gloss.”⁸ He goes on to reduce the whole figure to one garden. However, this ignores the context of the Sura itself, which is built on duality from beginning to end, and the principle that different parts of the Quran explain each other. Indeed two and a half lines after the end of Sura 55, in Sura 56 we have an explicitly expressed tripartite division similar to the one in Sura 55, one for those brought near, another for those on the right hand, and the third of the trio refers to the fire. The two gardens in Sura 56 are different in quality, like those in Sura 55, and this conclusively proves that the numbers are as stated in 56 and cannot be reduced in the way Wansbrough argued.⁹

Nor is there any need for our imaginative faculty to be confused: Surat *al-Raḥmān* mentions two pairs of gardens as understood by Annemarie Schimmel. The question arises, “Why two gardens for those brought near and two for the less deserving?” The answer to this can be found in the Quran, when it refers to the people of Sheba: “There was a sign for the people of Sheba. In their dwelling places: two gardens, one on the right and one on the left: ‘Eat from what your Lord has provided for you and give Him thanks, for your land is good and your Lord most forgiving’” (Q 34:15). Two gardens – one on the right and one on the left – represent the ultimate luxury.¹⁰ This is further confirmed in the parable of the two gardens in Surat *al-Kahf* (Q 18:32ff.), where the use of two gardens shows more privilege given by God. So *jannatān* in Sura 55 cannot, as suggested by Schimmel, be explained as merely “caused by the necessity of the rhyme in the dual, provoked by the initial word ar-Rahman.”¹¹

9 Essential Components of Paradise

The essential component of paradise is flowing water. This is logical since God says, “We made every living thing from water” (Q 21:30). No garden can exist

7 Schimmel, *Celestial garden* 17.

8 Wansbrough, *Quranic studies* 25–9.

9 See Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Quran* 167–81.

10 The Quran’s explanation makes more sense than all the speculation given by Qurṭubī and quoted in Kinberg, *Paradise* 15.

11 Schimmel, *Celestial garden* 17–8. See also A. Neuwirth’s contribution to this volume.

without water, whether in the damp equatorial heat, the dry heat of Arabia,¹² or the well-watered lands of the temperate zones.¹³ Springs and fountains are “flowing” (*tajrīyān*, Q 55:50) and “gushing” (*naḍḍākhātān*, Q 55:66); the righteous cause the spring to gush (Q 76:6). Such verbs indicate life, energy, and plenty.¹⁴ But water comes mainly in the form *tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhār*, literally “running from beneath it” or “beneath the trees,” *anhār* is always in the plural and always running, which seems to bring a healing effect. “We shall have removed all ill-feeling from their hearts: streams will flow at their feet. They will say, ‘Praise be to God who guided us to this: had God not guided us we would never have found the way’” (Q 7:43). The question now is what are *nahr* and *anhār*? The normal translation is “rivers.” This, however, does not seem to fit the image. To have rivers everywhere under paradise or under the trees would be too wet. Nor does the translation “rivers” agree with the original root verb *n-h-r*, which means to flow. *Nahr* is *al-mā’ al-‘adhb al-jārī* (“fresh running water”).¹⁵ *Anhara l-‘irq* means the vein kept flowing.¹⁶ What seems to be important in paradise is fresh, running water, so the most suitable translation in the context of *jannāt tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhār* seems to be “gardens graced with running streams.” In Q 47:15 there is a description of “rivers of water, forever pure, rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, and rivers of honey clarified and pure”; all these rivers are running and seem to suggest a fresh, plentiful, and continuous supply rather than some specific kind of river, whether larger or small.¹⁷

Annemarie Schimmel writes that “the most famous detailed description of **these rivers** can be gathered from Sura 47:16ff. . . . The idea of **the four rivers** . . . Thus agreeing with the concept of four rivers, which many Western writers seem to repeat and some relate it to the four rivers in Genesis.”¹⁸ Bell, for example, says: “The details have their parallels in Christian and Jewish literature.” He quotes Horowitz and Grimme.¹⁹ There are in fact, as mentioned in the quote above, more than four rivers and they are not necessarily taken from any Biblical source. What is described is in fact **four types of drink**, each type

12 Schimmel, Celestial garden 14.

13 Astronomers continue to search for signs of water on planets as the essential basis of all life.

14 These and other special characteristics are shown in all the language used by the Quran to describe paradise. See Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Quran* 103–5.

15 Mar’ashlī and Mar’ashlī, *Ṣiḥāḥ* ii, 615.

16 Muṣṭafā et al., *Muḥjam al-wasīṭ* ii, 957.

17 There were no major rivers in Arabia.

18 Schimmel, Celestial garden 15.

19 Bell, *Quran translated* ii, 515 note 1.

in plentiful supply, described as rivers (*anhār*).²⁰ Nor is there any need to go to the Bible for a source or parallel.²¹ In fact the source is in the Quran itself, in Q 16:65–9, where the **four types of drink** are mentioned in exactly the same order as they are in Q 47:15ff. – water, milk, wine, and then honey. All are given to show the power and grace of God to all people, not just the believers. In fact this passage and this part of the Sura are addressed in a Meccan Sura to the polytheists of Mecca, who consumed all these four drinks and this predates 47, a Medinan Sura.

Other components of paradise include tall, shady trees²² laden with an unceasing supply of fruit that hangs within reach, and is not forbidden. The blessed, with their spouses (Q 36:56) will be seated comfortably (*muttaki'īn*, often mistranslated as “reclining”),²³ on upholstered seats (*surur*, Q 56:15) and *arā'ik* (Q 83:23), which are things to sit on, not beds but chairs. Seated on them, the people of paradise will look around (*yanẓurūn*, Q 83:23, 35), clearly enjoying the scene around them. There will be what delights the eyes (Q 43:71) and nothing to jar the ears: “There you will hear no idle talk” (Q 88:1), “no vain or lying talk” (Q 78:35). They will wear green silk garments and gold and silver bracelets (Q 18:31, 76:21).

The Quran describes food and drink in paradise, mainly fruit such as they choose, meat of any bird they like (Q 56:21), wine that never intoxicates or loosens their tongues in idle talk (Q 52:23), *wa-saqāhum rabbuhum* (“and their Lord gives them a pure drink,” Q 76:21) (what an honor!) flavored with ginger (Q 76:17) – a very healthy diet one may say. The Arabs who first received the Quran were people who celebrated with meals of camel, goat, and sheep meat but none of this is mentioned in paradise. What is described in paradise is more in the nature of light snacks which, together with everything else given in paradise, will be offered by God who will tell the blessed: “This is a reward for you: your striving has been thanked” (Q 76:22).

20 *Anhār min mā', wa-anhār min laban, wa-anhār min khamr, wa-anhār min 'asal.*

21 Genesis 2:10. The four rivers here are geographical.

22 Among all the luscious gardens and plentiful streams, lofty buildings are provided for believers (Q 25:75, 29:58, 39:20).

23 *Taki'a jalasa mutamakkinan* means “he sat well established in his position”; *al-muttaka'* “is what you sit on, an upholstered chair with a back and two arms”; *al-muttaki'* is “*man istawā qā'idan 'alā wiṭā' mutamakkinan*” (“he who sits upright on something under him, in an established position”), Muṣṭafā et al., *Mu'jam al-wasīṭ* ii, 1052.

10 Women in Paradise

The fact that God will not allow the deeds of believing women to be wasted but will reward them in paradise (Q 3:156) with a comprehensive list of rewards, and will tell them that their efforts are thanked, has been subject to criticism by some: "Thoroughly studied, but also criticized in non-Islamic circles is the topic of the women granted the faithful as a celestial reward in the Quranic Paradise."²⁴

To describe the women as being "granted to the faithful as a celestial reward" is a misrepresentation of the Quranic picture. "As a reward" is mentioned in the Quran not just referring to women but to the whole picture of what has been promised in long passages, e.g., Q 52:17–28, 55:46–60, 56:11–26, 76:7–22. To think that the reward is "women for men" shows a very odd selectivity and reductionism. The Quran tells us that "God has promised the faithful, men and women, gardens graced with flowing streams, there to stay, and goodly dwellings in eternal gardens and – greatest of all – God's good pleasure" (Q 9:72).

In Q 33:35 "God has prepared forgiveness and a rich reward . . . for Muslim men and women, believing men and women, obedient men and women, truthful men and women, patient men and women . . ." In Q 36:56, "the people of paradise, . . . and their spouses, are seated on chairs in the shade . . ." so the believing women of this world will be resurrected, judged, and rewarded in paradise. Just as men will be "created anew in a form they do not know" (Q 56:61), God will create women anew (*ansha'nahunna*), "virginal, loving, of matching age (*atrāb*)" (Q 56:35): everyone will be young again, male and female. They will not be suffering from old age. They will praise God, who settled them in the everlasting home where no toil or fatigue will touch them (Q 35:35). The women seen in paradise are *kawā'ib* (Q 78:33). Much has been made of this *kawā'ib*, which occurs only once in the Quran. As the authors of *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*²⁵ explain, "*al-kā'ib wa-hiya l-jāriya ḥīna yabdū thadyuhā li-nuhūd*" – a *kā'ib* is "a young girl when her breast shows as it develops," so what is intended here is clearly their youthfulness rather than the "swelling breasts" that regularly recur in Western writing.²⁶ According to Lane, *jāriyatun kā'ib* is a girl whose breasts are beginning to swell, or become prominent or protuberant,²⁷ so the first meaning here is that the breasts are beginning to swell. It should be remembered that the

²⁴ Kinberg, Paradise 18.

²⁵ Mar'ashlī and Mar'ashlī, *Ṣiḥāḥ* ii, 397.

²⁶ E.g. Schimmel, Celestial garden 15.

²⁷ Lane, *Lexicon* vii, 2616.

dictionaries mention a *jāriya* – young girl. Those who exaggerate the physical aspects of the Quranic paradise choose a further stage in her development. In colloquial bedouin Arabic people express the same concept by saying *al-bint bazzazat* (the girl has developed breasts), even when they are just beginning to appear. The boys will be *wildān mukhalladūn* (Q 76:19), of an age matching the girls. In fact, any physical description of the people of paradise is very sparse: *ḥūr ʿīn*, with beautiful large eyes is mentioned only twice (Q 52:20, 56:22). “They are like rubies and brilliant pearls” (Q 55:56). The physical description for both men and women is: “You will recognize in their faces the radiance of bliss (*naḍrat al-naʿīm*)” (Q 83:24). Nowhere are they seen in any sexual situations or even sleeping. In fact, what is clear in the descriptions is that they are sitting in groups all the time,²⁸ facing each other. “We shall remove any bitterness from their hearts. [They shall] be seated, facing each other, as brothers . . .” (Q 15:47). “They will be honored in gardens of bliss, seated facing each other” (Q 37:42–4), “on seats lined up in rows” (Q 52:20). “They pass around a cup which does not lead to any idle talk or sin” (Q 52:23).

Given these sparse descriptions Muslims usually express great surprise that many Westerners seem to criticize the physical pleasures in the Quranic paradise. Some have expressed their disapproval of such Western thinking in strong language.²⁹

11 Physical and Non-Physical Rewards in Paradise

As Ibn Rushd explains, the representation of existence in the afterlife as being bodily and not merely spiritual, is more suitable for the majority of people, as it is easier to understand and more moving.³⁰ Figurative representation of spiritual realities may be appropriate only for speculative thinkers, whereas the simpler religious explanations are aimed primarily at the great majority.

28 The guilty person, in contrast, will suffer on his own (Q 44:44, 53).

29 On a recent visit to Morocco, the issue of the image of the Islamic paradise in the West was raised at a meeting with a group of Muslim scholars. The quick reaction was, as I recall: “We do not take our criteria of what is good paradise or inferior paradise from such people. Europeans and Americans consume more food and drink than whole continents in the rest of the world, and they cannot sell anything without having scantily-clad young women advertising it. It must be because they are obsessed with food and women that they pick on this in the Quranic paradise, change the true description and blow it out of all proportion, and do not see the real extent of the spiritual joy and bliss which far outweigh any physical description.”

30 Ibn Rushd, *Manāḥij* 245.

Scriptures address human beings of all varieties of mental, psychological, and cultural backgrounds, at all times and in all parts of the world. "We sent you [Prophet] only to bring good news and warning to all human beings (*kāffatan lil-nās*)" (Q 34:28). Such minimal physical descriptions as are present in the Quran would thus be fitting for some of the people the Quran addresses. Similarly, the philosopher Abū Maṣṣūr al-ʿĀmirī (d. 381/992) said "It is inevitable that the rewards [in paradise] should be made in a way that is pleasing (and torment be made in a way that is painful) and that its nature cannot be apprehended except by giving a standard or a gauge for it of what human senses have experienced."³¹ The fact is that human beings are not angels and should be addressed as human beings. When the Meccans requested that an angel, not a human, be sent to them as a messenger of God, the answer was decisive: "Say [Prophet], 'If there were angels walking about on Earth, feeling at home, We would have sent them an angel from heaven as a messenger'" (Q 17:95).

According to the picture given in the Quran, when humans go to paradise they will not be turned into angels; they will still be a class of creatures different from the angels. The angels will be carrying the throne of God (Q 69:17), or "surrounding the throne, glorifying their Lord with praise" (Q 39:75). They also come and greet the new arrivals in paradise and welcome them (Q 13:23–4, 39:73).

Even the physical comforts of paradise are shown in the Quran as a mark of honor and appreciation from God (Q 70:35, 76:22), a grace from Him (Q 44:57).

In Q 47:14, in addition to the plentiful supplies of four different drinks (*anhār*), "and fruit of every kind," the blessed will have "the forgiveness and pleasure of their Lord."

When provision is attributed to God in the plural of majesty, it ensures a very special privilege, e.g., *adkhalnāhum* ("We have made them enter"), *amdadnāhum* ("We have provided them"), and *zawwajnāhum* ("We have joined/paired them"); when provision is attributed to Him in the singular, it is given in the form of *rabbuhum* ("their Sustainer") (e.g., Q 2:63, 3:169, 42:22, 45:30, 68:34, and 76:21) or in the form of "My servants" (Q 21:105, 89:29).

Being seated comfortably with their spouses, surrounded by beautiful scenery, wearing green silken robes, does not in any case detract from feeling spiritual. One does not have to be naked or shabbily clothed, sitting in a rough place, or segregated by gender in order to feel spiritual. "Say, 'Who has forbidden the adornment and the nourishment God has provided for His servants?' Say, 'They are [allowed] for those who believe during the life of this world: they

31 Al-ʿĀmirī, *Kitāb al-ʿĪlām* 138.

will be theirs alone on the day of resurrection” (Q 7:32). “Should the reward of good be anything but good?” (Q 55:60).

The people of paradise feel that they have been given such good things as a grace from God, which enhances their spirituality and makes them more thankful. Even before they reach paradise, they receive the blessing of being protected from the fire of hell and they themselves are aware of this and thankful for it (Q 35:35, 52:27). When they are inside paradise, they have a chance to see the sufferings of those in hell and recognize the blessing of God in not being there (Q 37:57). The Quran always brings out the contrast between hell-fire and the garden of paradise. The believers have long recognized that whoever God sends to hell is put to shame (Q 3:192).

On the day of judgment, after being spared the suffering and shame of being taken to hell,

the believers, both men and women, will be seen with their light streaming out ahead of them and to their right and they will be told, “The good news for you today is that there are gardens graced with flowing streams where you will stay. This is truly the supreme triumph” (Q 57:12);

You, soul at peace, return to your Lord, well pleased and well pleasing; go in among My servants; and enter My garden (Q 89:27–30).

The greater honor of being among God’s servants comes first.

He will admit them by the gate of honor, by a gate that is well pleasing to them (Q 4:31, 22:59).

For them there will be no fear, no grief, no shame (Q 10:62, 66:8).

God will thank them (Q 2:158, 76:22).

The blessed will have a sure footing with their Lord (Q 10:2).

They will live securely in gardens and rivers, secure in the presence of an all-powerful sovereign (Q 54:54–5).

There will be radiant faces, looking toward their Lord (Q 75:22–3).

God is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him (Q 98:8).

God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens graced with flowing streams, where they will remain; good peaceful homes in gardens of lasting bliss; and – greatest of all – God’s good pleasure: that is the supreme triumph (Q 9:72).

They will have the good company of their good spouses, parents and children (Q 13:23, 52:22).

... [they] will be among those He has blessed: the messengers, the truthful, those who bear witness to the truth, and the righteous. What excellent companions these are! (Q 4:69).

They will be in *dār al-salām* (the home of peace) (Q 6:127).

They rejoice that they will not die (Q 37:59).

They are there forever and will not be expelled (Q 15:48).

In fact examination of the Quran reveals that the number of references to spiritual and moral rewards in paradise exceeds those to material rewards.³²

12 Figurative Language

With all the descriptions and details given in the Quran, it still states that what has been given is only *mathal al-janna* ("a picture of the garden," Q 13:35, 47:15). In the description of the purity of boys in paradise, the Quran uses similes: they are *ka-amthāl lu'lu' maknūn* ("like hidden pearls," Q 52:24) the same simile is used for the women in Q 56:23. In Q 37:49 another simile is used: *ka'anna hunna bayḍun maknūn* ("as if they were hidden eggs").³³ In Q 76:19, the *wildān mukhalladūn*, people forever young in paradise, are also described metaphorically as *ḥasibtahum lu'lu'an manthūra* ("you would think them scattered pearls"). The fruit the people of paradise are given will resemble what they were given before (Q 2:25).

What God has for the righteous is better (*khayr*, Q 3:198) and more lasting (*abqā*, Q 87:17) than the life and rewards of this world. The Quran does not say how much or in what way it is better. According to Arabic rhetoric, leaving it unspecified indicates that what is talked about is indescribable. It must be remembered that on that day "the earth is turned into another earth, the heavens into another heaven" (Q 14:48). Ibn 'Abbās, a prominent companion of the Prophet Muḥammad, aptly observed, "There is nothing this world shares with *al-janna* except the names of things."³⁴ What is described is only what the good receive on arrival, *nuzūlan* (Q 18:107; 41:32). *Nuzūl* is what has been prepared for a guest.³⁵ The command *udkhulū* ("Enter") is used in several places (Q 7:49, 15:46, 16:32, 39:73, 43:70, 50:34). In many situations, the Quran says no

32 Draz, *Moral world* 158–65.

33 Arabs described beautiful women as being as precious as ostrich eggs, protected from the dust with feathers.

34 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* i, 174.

35 Muṣṭafā et al., *al-Mu'jam al-wasīṭ* 915.

more than “they will have whatever they wish for.” See Q 25:16, 39:34, 42:22, and 50:35, where God says: “They will have all that they wish for there, and We have more for them.”

With all the details the Quran gives of paradise, it remains in reality part of *al-ghayb* (“the unseen/unknown”) and one of the first characteristics of the believer is that they believe in *al-ghayb* (Q 2:3). “No soul knows what joy (*qurrat a’yun*) is kept hidden in store for them [the believers] as a reward for what they have done” (Q 32:17). The expression *qurrat a’yun* has been variously translated “comfort to the eye” and “joy, bliss.” When God restored Moses to his mother, it was so that *taqarra ‘aynuha* (“her eye might be comforted, and not grieve,” Q 28:13). What is kept hidden now will become clear and real when the good arrive in paradise, and it is no wonder that even after being there for a long time, they will not wish to leave (Q 15:41, 18:108). Why should they desire to leave when they have already achieved *al-fawz al-‘azīm* (“the supreme achievement,” e.g., Q 57:12).

In the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, after describing the women granted to men as a “celestial reward” and the delicacies of eating and drinking in palaces, the author of the article on paradise goes on to say, “Such pleasures and those like them are often defined as ‘[the great] triumph’ (*fawz*).” This seriously misrepresents what *al-fawz al-‘azīm* stands for in the Quran. The author gives a list starting with Q 4:13, which mentions nothing of the physical details being discussed. It merely says “God will admit whoever obeys God and His Messenger to gardens graced with flowing streams, and there they will stay: ‘that is the supreme triumph.’” Q 5:119 is also cited but again does not mention the details: “God will say, ‘This is a day when the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. They will have gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain forever. God is pleased with them and they with him: this is the supreme triumph.’”

Cited also in the list is Q 9:72, but all we have in the verse is: “God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens graced with flowing streams where they will remain. Good, peaceful homes in gardens of lasting bliss and, greatest of all, God’s good pleasure: that is the supreme triumph.” Q 9:89 and 100, also included in the author’s list, are even briefer. See also Q 45:30: “Those who believed and did good deeds will be admitted by their Lord into His Mercy: that is the clearest triumph.” Similarly, Q 48:5, 57:12, 61:12, 64:9, and last on the list 85:11: “Those who believe and do good deeds will have gardens graced with flowing streams: that is the great triumph.”

None of these mention the delights claimed in the *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān* to be *al-fawz al-‘azīm*. The true blessing of paradise for the believers, then, is to be admitted by their Lord to the joy kept hidden in store for them (Q 9:72 and others, see above) “and, greatest of all, God’s good pleasure.”

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Paradise as a Quranic Discourse: Late Antique Foundations and Early Quranic Developments*

Angelika Neuwirth

1 Introduction

Eschatology is certainly among the central discourses of the Quran. Its prominence is largely due to the challenge encountered by the Quranic community that had to counterbalance the extremely powerful mundane pagan ideology that predominated in its Arabian milieu: the ideology of *murawwa*, i.e., “heroism,” “tribal pride,” which expressed itself in a heroic and at the same time hedonist, “*carpe-diem*-life style,” embodied by the Bedouin hero and portrayed by the ancient Arab poet.¹ This anthropocentric understanding of the world, eloquently voiced in ancient Arabic poetry, is taken up as a primary target of the early Quranic message. Excessive worldliness and unlimited confidence in man’s autonomous power in the Quran is countered by a new, theocentric eschatological thinking. Quranic eschatology is projected through multiple images that during the first Meccan period of the Prophet’s ministry crystallized into an elaborate drama² often conjured up in the Quran. Yet, although the diverse events leading up to the last day – such as the cosmic cataclysm, the awakening of the dead, and the ensuing punishment of the sinners in hell – all play an important role in the message of eschatology, these are only secondary textual emplotments when compared with the core piece of Quranic eschatology, the image of paradise.

As a prevalent Quranic motif, paradise not only exerted a sustainable influence on the spiritual life and the socio-political *Weltanschauung* of the Prophet’s contemporaries and later recipients of the Quran,³ but it also equally inspired classical Arabic literature and art. Whereas this complex reception history of the Quranic paradise motif has been amply studied, the particular

* A concise version of this chapter will appear in Neuwirth, *Scripture* 76–101.

1 For the concept of *murawwa* see Montgomery, Dichotomy; see also Neuwirth, *Scripture* 53–75.

2 Smith, Eschatology 44–54.

3 Jarrar, Martyrdom 87–108.

literary shape of the Quranic paradise itself has seldom been submitted to investigation. Traditional Muslim scholars as well as Western critics have usually taken the numerous impressive descriptions of paradisaical scenarios simply as a Quranic “peculiarity,” an iconic *fait accompli*. They usually do not inquire into these narratives’ possible dialectical relation vis-à-vis earlier images of paradise,⁴ let alone their ideological function in relation to the Quranic message. Instead, a teleological approach is pursued in which not late antique, but Islamic exegetical texts are consulted – texts that are built on a much later and very different vision of the world and the hereafter⁵ – to explain the unique features of the Quranic paradise.

Though it is true that this kind of anachronistic approach is prevalent in contemporary scholarship, remnants of an earlier scholarly tradition remain. This tradition, which was established in the nineteenth century, succeeded during the short period of one century – between 1833 and 1935 – in laying the foundation for a historically conscious model of Quranic studies both in terms of methodology and the selection of comparative material. This scholarly tradition, initiated by Abraham Geiger (1833),⁶ one of the founders of the reform movement of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*,⁷ focused on late antique intertexts of the Quran, primarily the Jewish and Christian traditions, but paid equal attention to the pagan Arabian traditions. It was Josef Horowitz whose path-breaking essay “Das Koranische Paradies” (1923) was to open scholars’ eyes to the multiple literary layers that underlie the Quranic imaginations of the eschatological beyond. Furthermore, it was the role of the last representative of that tradition, Heinrich Speyer (1931),⁸ to throw light on the primordial paradise, and submit its narrative references to a source-critical investigation. Some modern contributions on the subject – by Walid Saleh,⁹ Patricia Crone,¹⁰ Gabriel Reynolds¹¹ who has focused on Syriac textual predecessors, and the present writer,¹² – have proceeded in a similar vein. The historical approach based on the search for “intertexts,” i.e., late antique traditions echoed in the Quran, is pursued systematically in the recently established research project

4 As an exception, Horowitz, *Das koranische Paradies* 1–16 deserves to be mentioned.

5 Kinberg, *Paradise* 12–20.

6 Geiger, *Judenthume*.

7 Hartwig et al. (eds.), *Geschichte*; Hartwig, *Anfänge*; Hartwig, *Gründerdisziplin*.

8 Speyer, *Erzählungen*, for more about Speyer see Rosenthal, *History* 113–6.

9 W. Saleh, *Etymological fallacy* 649–98.

10 Crone, *Quranic pagans* 387–99.

11 Reynolds, *Qurʾān and its Biblical subtext*, cf. the review by Neuwirth.

12 Neuwirth, *Symmetrie* 445–80; Neuwirth, *Psalms* 733–78.

*Corpus Coranicum*¹³ which, however, goes an important step further. Beyond the identifying of formal and semantic convergences between pre-Quranic and Quranic texts, it endeavors to reconstruct the peculiar negotiation processes that appear mirrored in the individual Quranic reflections of the earlier traditions. It thus pays attention to the *Sitz im Leben* of individual reworkings of Biblical and post-Biblical traditions in the Quran, i.e., their theological and moreover educational function in the process of the emergence of a Quranic community.

The following exploration of the Quranic paradise follows the same approach. The strikingly different features of the Quranic imagination of paradise vis-à-vis the Jewish and Christian imaginations have until now not been investigated with regard to their historical foundations, nor has their impact on the Quranic community been examined. The two vantage points, Jewish/Christian and Quranic images of paradise, evince conspicuous divergences: whereas the Jewish and Christian traditions – following the narrative of Gen 2 – focus on the primordial paradise, it is noteworthy that the Quran, first and foremost, presents the hereafter as a utopian place awaiting the righteous in the future, and tells us only a few details about the lost primordial garden, whose inhabitants, Adam and Eve, become significant only at a later stage of the Quranic development.¹⁴ Initially, it is the eschatological paradise that the Quran depicts in vivid and sensual detail.¹⁵ It is true that Judaism and Christianity equally developed images of an eschatological beyond,¹⁶ late antique Jewish apocalyptic literature and rabbinic writings know about a transcendent abode awaiting the just, yet these texts do not always describe the

13 Marx, Ein Koranforschungsprojekt 41–54, and see Corpus coranicum: <http://www.bbaw.de/en/research/Coran>.

14 Neuwirth, Qurʾān, crisis and memory 113–52.

15 S. Saleh, *La vie future*; Smith and Haddad, *Death and resurrection*; Afsaruddin, Garden 282–7; al-Azmeh, Rhetoric 215–31.

16 Brock, *St. Ephrem* 49, refers to the First Book of Enoch (second century) 61:12; it is however hard not to realize that the entire corpus of “apocalypses of ascension” is primarily interested in the heavenly representations of the temple, not in a garden scene, cf. Schäfer, *Ursprünge*; and Rosenkranz Verhelst, *Himmel und Heiligtum*. Brock further refers to the Jewish Palestinian Targum on Gen 3:24: “He drove out Adam. Now He had caused the Glory of His Shekhina (Divine Presence) to dwell above the Garden of Eden from the very beginning, between the Cherubim . . . he created the Law and established the Garden of Eden for the righteous, so that they might eat from it and enjoy its fruits, seeing that they had kept the commandments of the Law in this world.” There is more ample evidence of a vivid portrayal of the eschatological paradise in Christian tradition as Ephraem and his predecessors attest.

image of a garden, and if they do, such descriptions are little more than projections of the primordial paradise; they do not claim iconographical traits of their own. Though certainly a theologically significant phenomenon, the Jewish and Christian eschatological paradise – though identical with the primordial garden – is primarily a place where the just among men will be assembled to enjoy the radiance of the Divine Presence.¹⁷ In Christian tradition paradise additionally is loaded with a particular theological function: to repair the broken image of Adam's paradise where his primordial transgression occurred and stained mankind with the birthmark of original sin. In contrast, the Quranic eschatological paradise, *al-janna*, is an ideal space of bliss in its own right, disconnected from the locus of Adam's transgression. Only in later periods does this depiction become loosely connected to that mythical scenario.

2 About the Methods and the Texts

Only a flashback to the earlier developed images of paradise can help to disclose the intertextuality of the Quranic paradise with its diegetic predecessors and/or referents. This is a necessary undertaking. Comparative textual studies on the tropological similarities between the Quran and other extant texts at the time of the Quran's transmission can help to clarify the peculiar function of descriptions of paradise in the Quran. We have to imagine that the Quran – or rather the community of the Prophet – debated and re-adapted earlier pagan and monotheistic images. This was not accomplished by simply copying such images, but by negotiating them and moreover occasionally “cleansing” them of their allegorical dimensions. This understanding of the Quranic genesis implies a process, not of authorial writing, but of intra-communal debate – one that extended from the beginning of the Quranic proclamation until Muḥammad's death. It is therefore necessary to explore not only extra-Quranic intertextuality but also intra-Quranic intertextuality as well, i.e., the constant revisiting of earlier proclaimed Quranic texts that during the proclamation were reviewed and modified according to diverse newly discovered theological aspects.

It is noteworthy that this negotiation was carried out without any polemical bias vis-à-vis the earlier traditions; these were not explicitly rejected but rather amalgamated into a new overall imagery. Paradisal imagery for the Quranic community acquired surplus momentum, however. First, paradise narratives constituted a crucial instrument in promoting the new eschatological

17 bBer 17a and 1 Cor 13:12.

theology.¹⁸ But they also possessed another even more momentous function, which has until now been ignored in scholarship: paradise imagery served to counterbalance and ultimately to replace particular powerful pagan perceptions of reality that were predominant in the minds of the contemporaries of the Quran. I am referring here to the ancient Arab poet's lament about the contingency of reality and the transitoriness of human achievements in particular, articulated in the introductory section of the *qaṣīda*, the *nasīb*. Suzanne Stetkevych convincingly summarizes the message presented by the *nasīb*:

What society, culture, had created – both temporary and permanent encampments – nature has erased; what was once settled, cultivated, is now grown wild. Essential to this dialectic is the ephemeral and transitory quality of all that is cultural or cultivated as opposed to the permanence and perpetuity of the natural . . . [The *nasīb*] thus tells us that what man makes is ephemeral – abodes of a shorter or a longer stay – but the mountains, untamed nature, are eternal.¹⁹

Labīd expresses this idea:

*Balīnā wa-mā tablā l-nujūmu l-ṭawālī'ū / wa-tabqā l-jibālu ba'danā
wa-l-maṣānī'ū . . .*

*Wa-mā l-nāsu illā ka-l-diyāri wa-ahluhā / bihā yawma ḥallūhā wa-ghad-
wan balāqī'ū.*

We vanish but the rising stars do not / Mountains remain when we are gone, and fortresses . . .

People are just like abodes; one day filled with folk / the next day barren wastes.²⁰

Quranic descriptions of paradise, as will be demonstrated, serve to invert the predominant imagery of pagan thought by re-arranging its elements to form the counter-image of everlasting bliss.

The following observations are limited to early Meccan Suras which have been thoroughly studied in the recently published Concise Commentary,²¹ i.e., Q 78, 88, 83, and 55. Q 55, which presents the climax of Quranic descriptions of

18 Neuwirth, *Der Koran I*.

19 Stetkevych, *The mute immortals speak* 19.

20 Ibid., quoting Labīd in Ibn Qutayba, *al-Shi'r* 151.

21 Neuwirth, *Der Koran I*.

paradise, has particular prominence. Due to our limited space, the two Meccan Suras that chronologically succeed Q 55, Q 56 and Q 52 (also discussed in the Concise Commentary), remain excluded from our present investigation. Nor will there be reference to later Meccan paradise-related texts. A summary of the peculiar features of the later paradise depictions has been given by Stefan Wild;²² yet their intra-Quranic development and their theological status in relation to the later proclamation still await investigation.

3 Quranic Developments

From early times onward the Quranic community has been concerned with the fate that awaits humans after the last judgment. Since the earlier – cyclical – perception of time was replaced by the new view of time as passing in linear motion from creation to the eschatological rendering of account²³ the door was open for an imagination of life in the Beyond. Already in early Meccan Suras the eschatological fate of the condemned, the ‘Evildoers,’ as well as the ‘Just,’ the God-fearing (*mani ttaqā*) is discussed. Yet, it is not the latter who are placed in the foreground, but rather their negative counterparts, the arrogant (*mani staghnā*), who are blamed for refusing to accept (*kadhhaba*) the monotheist message and who, at the same time, are accused of neglecting their social duties, i.e., those contemporaries who still adhere to the anthropocentric worldview of ancient Arabia. They are threatened with punishment in the future, a future that in the earliest texts is still far from concrete. Even in such Suras as Q 104 *al-Humāza* (The Clatterer),²⁴ which is completely dedicated to the condemnation of a reprehensible type, his punishment is not yet located in a determinable infernal space but remains confined to the mythical realm, where a gluttonous monster is prepared to devour the blameworthy individual.

Only midway through the early Meccan proclamation²⁵ do we find a stronger focus on the eschatological events in detail. Already some of the first Suras – Q 80, 79, 75, and 70 – had thrown light on the situation of humankind on the last day, focusing in particular on the isolation of man from his clan as the most menacing prospect. Short sections of these Suras – Q 80:38–9,

22 Wild, *Virgins of paradise* 627–47.

23 Tamer, *Zeit und Gott*; see also Neuwirth, *Koran als Text der Spätantike* 211–4 and 607–12.

24 For a commentary on the entire Sura, see Neuwirth, *Der Koran I* 145–55. The translation of Quranic texts and Sura names is that of Arberry.

25 We are following here the sequence of the Suras proposed in Neuwirth, *Der Koran I*.

40–2; 79:37–9, 40–1, and Q 75:22–3, 24–5 – had already presented contrastive verdicts on the fates of the condemned and the blessed. These texts did not yet however involve iconic depictions. More differentiated diptycha²⁶ (contrastive images) are found only later, in Q 78:21–6, 31–6 and Q 88:2–7, 8–16. It is Q 78, which as the first Quranic text, depicts the situation of the blessed in terms of a banquet (Q 78:31–6) – an image that is more fully developed in the slightly later Q 88:8–16. In both cases, the depiction of paradise is anticipated by a mirror image depicting the space of the condemned. Only in Q 78 and Q 88, thus, is the breakthrough achieved: by this point the Quranic beyond has accumulated sufficient imagery to be compatible with earlier depictions of a transcendent place of bliss, whether this be the Jewish and Christian place of consummate nature or the late antique *locus amoenus*, “delightful place,” although this place in the Quran has always been understood as counter to hell. Paradise and hell constitute a diptych.

3.1 *The Early Meccan Paradise Descriptions Previous to Q 55*

The earliest detailed Quranic paradise description is found in Q 78:31–6; it is preceded by its negative mirror image, a depiction of hell, Q 78:21–6:

21 *inna jahannama kānat mirṣādā*
 22 *lil-ṭāghīna maʿābā*
 23 *lābithīna fihā aḥqābā*
 24 *lā yadhūqūna fihā bardan wa-lā sharābā*
 25 *illā hamīman wa-ghassāqā*
 26 *jazāʿan wifāqā*

21 Behold, Gehenna has become an ambush,
 22 for the insolent a resort,
 23 therein to tarry for ages,
 24 tasting therein neither coolness nor any drink,
 25 save boiling water and pus,
 26 for a suitable recompense.

31 *inna lil-muttaqīna mafāzā*
 32 *ḥadāʾīqa wa-aʿnābā*
 33 *wa-kawāʾiba atrābā*
 34 *wa-kaʿsan dihāqā*

26 For a detailed description of the literary genres and subgenres of the Quran see Neuwirth, *Studien zur Komposition*.

35 *lā yasma'ūna fihā laghwan wa-lā kidhdhābā*
 36 *jazā'an min rabbika 'aṭā'an ḥisābā*

31 Surely, for the God-fearing awaits a place of security,
 32 gardens and vineyards,
 33 and maidens with swelling breasts like of age,
 34 and a cup overflowing.
 35 Therein they shall hear no idle talk, no cry of lies
 36 for a recompense from thy Lord, a gift, a reckoning.²⁷

The depiction is limited to only a few features, which together evoke the scenario of a banquet: the inmates of the *mafāz*, the place of bliss, will be accommodated in gardens and vineyards to enjoy wine drinking in the presence of beautiful maidens, being aloof from the idle talk and false accusations put forward by their erstwhile opponents. Though this depiction is constructed as a reverse projection of the image of hell promised to the evildoers, who are offered nothing to cool the heat they suffer from the blaze surrounding them but only hot and disgusting libation, it should not be understood as a mere inversion of the description of hell. Whereas the image of hell seems to follow a novel, Quranic design, paradise, in contrast, partakes of the imagery of Biblical heritage: the filled cup, *ka's dihāq*, echoes Ps 23:5 *kosi rewayah*, the vineyard, *a'nāb*, whose shade is enjoyed by the just alludes to Micah 4:42. As to the framework of a banquet, there are predecessors in the imagery of the Qumranic community. Their "ritual meal... is both a foreshadowing and a quasi-sacramental anticipation of the great eschatological messianic banquet that is often referred to in other religious writings of the period, e.g. the New Testament."²⁸ As against that, Horovitz²⁹ has pointed to the closely related depictions of banquets in ancient Arabic poetry equally featuring young and beautiful women. The image of women accompanying or receiving the dead in their postmortem abode is known not only from Iranian tradition³⁰ but equally from Greco-Roman culture.³¹ The image should have been familiar to

²⁷ Arberry's translation.

²⁸ Klausner, Eschatology 623.

²⁹ Horovitz, Das koranische Paradies 1–16.

³⁰ Tisdall, *Original sources* 235–8.

³¹ Jarrar, Martyrdom 87–108; W. Saleh, The woman 123–45. In Jewish tradition – as attested in the late compilation *Yalqut Shimoni* – the presence of sexuality can at least be deduced from the statement that the blessed will be granted the enjoyments of the three stages of the human life cycle every day, cf. Rosenkranz Verhelst, Himmel und Heiligtum 44.

the listeners of the Quran since the maidens seem not in need of introduction, they are only alluded to through the mention of their characteristic attributes. In Q 78, they simply form part of the luxurious equipment of the “garden,” and it is only in the somewhat later Q 55 that they are assigned to the blessed as partners, and in Q 52, the last proclamation in the first Meccan period, that they are finally married to them.

The next detailed depiction of paradise is Q 88:8–16³² and it is also preceded by a description of hell, Q 88:2–7:

- 1 *hal atāka ḥadīthu l-ghāshiya*
- 2 *wujūhun yawma'idhin khāshi'a*
- 3 *'āmilatun nāṣiba*
- 4 *taṣlā nāran ḥāmiya*
- 5 *tusqā min 'aynin āniya*
- 6 *laysa lahum ṭa'āmun illā min ḍarī'*
- 7 *lā yusminu wa-lā yughnī min jū'*

- 1 Hast thou received the story of the Enveloper?
- 2 Faces on that day are humbled,
- 3 labouring, toilworn,
- 4 roasting at a scorching fire,
- 5 watered at a boiling fountain,
- 6 no food for them but cactus thorn,
- 7 unfattening, unappeasing hunger.

- 8 *wujūhun yawma'idhin nā'ima*
- 9 *li-sa'yihā rāḍiya*
- 10 *fī jannatin 'āliya*
- 11 *lā tasma'u fihā lāghiya*
- 12 *fihā 'aynun jāriya*
- 13 *fihā sururun marfū'a*
- 14 *wa-akwābun mawḍū'a*
- 15 *wa-namāriqu maṣfūfa*
- 16 *wa-zarābiyyu mabthūtha*

- 8 Faces on that day jocund,
- 9 with their striving well-pleased
- 10 in a sublime garden,

32 For a commentary on the entire Sura see Neuwirth, *Der Koran I* 474–83.

- 11 hearing there no babble;
 12 therein a running fountain,
 13 therein uplifted couches
 14 and goblets set forth
 15 and cushions arrayed
 16 and carpets outspread.

This paradise description responds to a particularly dire description of hell, where the inmates, again, are refused cool drink to ease their suffering from the heat of the blaze that surrounds them. In this text, furthermore, they are fed not with food edible for humans, but with the fodder of animals, bushwood, which is gloomily presented as “unfattening, unappeasing.” In contrast, the just are promised entrance to an elevated place (whose particular status, however, remains unspecified). It is – as in Q 78 – a place safe from disturbing idle talk. As in Q 78 it is a garden, which in this text is watered by a fountain. No mention of female companions is made, whose presence may perhaps be assumed as self-understood. Instead the focus is placed on the equipment of the space with urban furniture: there are sofas in the style of antique *klinai*, cushions, *namāriq*,³³ carpets, *zarābī*³⁴ – both obviously, as their foreign names suggest, precious Iranian import ware. In rabbinic descriptions the “righteous [are] sitting at golden tables (bTaan 25a) or under elaborate canopies (Ruth rabba 3:4) and participating in lavish banquets (BB 75a).”³⁵ There are also the indispensable vessels of any banquet scenario: cups awaiting the guests. Nature retreats into the background, urban furniture and equipment take its place. Paradise acquires the character of a courtly banquet.

In contrast to these images, Q 83:22,³⁶ a text that within the proclamation process immediately follows Q 88, contains only a brief reminiscence of the pomp laid bare in Q 88. The depiction, this time, is not preceded by a reverse image describing hell:

- 22 *inna l-abrāra la-fī naʿīm*
 23 *ʿalā l-arāʾiki yanẓurūn*
 24 *taʿrifu fī wujūhihim naḍrata l-naʿīm*
 25 *yusqawna min raḥīqin makhtūm*

33 For *namāriq* see Jeffery, *Foreign vocabulary* 181.

34 For *zarābī*, *ibid.*, 150.

35 Bamberger, *Paradise* 628 (there “Ruth rabba 3:4” is erroneously rendered as “Ruth 3.4”), cf. Rosenkranz Verhelst, *Himmel und Heiligtum* 46.

36 For a commentary on the entire Sura see Neuwirth, *Der Koran I* 484–98.

- 26 *khitāmuḥu miskun wa-ḥi dhālika fa-l-yatanāfasi l-mutanāfisūn*
 27 *wa-mizājūhu min tasnīm*
 28 *ʿaynan yashrabu biḥā l-muqarrabūn*

- 22 Surely, the pious shall be in bliss
 23 upon couches gazing:
 24 thou knowest in their faces the radiancy of bliss
 25 as they are given to drink of a wine sealed,
 26 whose seal is musk – so after that let the strivers strive –
 27 and whose mixture is Tasnim,
 28 a fountain of which do drink those brought nigh.

In this case the depiction is tied to the reality of the addressees of the Quran who are made observers of the blessed in paradise: their bliss is recognizable from their faces, as the addressees would immediately discern. Paradisal recompense is particularly generous and attractive. This should be an incentive for the Quran's audience to emulate the earthly behavior of the blessed. In this description, no trace of a particularly lush nature, nor any mention of female companions is found. Instead the entire scene is filled with a description of the urban aspects of the place: the paradisaal wine, its seal, its water of mixture, *mizāj*,³⁷ the luxurious furniture³⁸ – and the pleasant looks of the inhabitants of paradise.

3.2 *Sura 55 – A Hermeneutical Turning Point*

Q 55, Surat *al-Raḥmān*³⁹ contains the most elaborate description of paradise in the entire Quran. Hence, a brief introduction is necessary. The Sura is one of the most poetic texts in the Quran and exemplifies a central *theologoumenon*: the symmetry of the divine order of creation, not only on the semantic level, but equally in grammatical and phonetic terms. Symmetry is thus not only pointed out to the listener as part of the content of divine speech, it is equally displayed in terms of structure, a procedure made possible by a unique device offered by Arabic morphology, i.e., the dual form. The excessive use of the dual, by virtue of its prominent position in pre-Islamic poetic compositions, implies an aesthetic claim that is unfamiliar to most Jewish and Christian scriptural

37 The promise of flavored wine – deduced from Cant 8:2 – is part of a rabbinic (though later compiled) description of paradise, see Rosenkranz Verhelst, *Himmel und Heiligtum* 32.

38 For *arā'ik* see Jeffery, *Foreign vocabulary* 52.

39 For a commentary on the entire Sura see Neuwirth, *Der Koran I* 576–620; for a comparison of the Sura to Psalm 136, see Neuwirth, *Qur'ānic readings of the Psalms*.

texts: a claim to poeticity. The poetic character of the Quran has often been dismissed as merely “ornamental,” constituting an obstacle to the reader’s immediate grasp of the message. In the case of Q 55, the poetic style is clearly part of the message itself. Symmetry in this text is as much a characteristic of the signified as it is of the sign itself. For the harmoniously balanced order is manifest in binary structures exhibited in the “clear speech” of the Quran. The prooemium of the Sura even gives precedence to the communication of word over creation:

- 1 *Al-Raḥmān*
- 2 *‘allama l-Qur’ān*
- 3 *khalaqa l-insān*
- 4 *‘allamahu l-bayān.*

- 1 The All-merciful –
- 2 he taught the Koran,
- 3 he created man,
- 4 he taught him clear speech/clear understanding.

In view of the fact that the divine Word, *qur’ān*, and by extension the recitation of the Quran itself, is considered as the most sublime speech act, *bayān* can be understood as an evocation of Quranic language. At the same time, it may denote the human capacity for clear speech based on clear understanding. Thus, two phenomena that are inherent in the world since the act of creation itself – namely, the harmonious order of beings, and the distinctness and clarity of speech as a medium of communication – thematically permeate the entire Sura.

The text can thus be read as an exposition of the interaction of the primordial ensemble evoked in the beginning – *khalaq* (creation) and *qur’ān* (divine instruction) – which, according to the Quranic paradigm, in a linear motion leads up to the dissolution of both elements at the end of time. The duality thus constitutes an intrinsic part of the Quran’s natural theology: that God has created the world as a manifestation of His presence, as a “text” no less than His verbal manifestation in revelation, and that He has created man in order that he may understand both His verbal and His “creational” self-expression. Both readings gain their urgency from their eschatological objective. Q 55, with its insistence on symmetry and dualistic structures, is the poetic orchestration of a theological claim. On the basis of these observations, the sophisticated linguistic shape of the text proves highly significant, and indeed functional, something that the Sura has been continuously denied in Western scholarship,

which has consistently found fault with the dual forms and dismissed them as merely the result of rhyme constraints.⁴⁰

3.3 *The Paradise Sections of Q 55*

- 46 *wa-li-man khāfa maqāma rabbihi jannatān*
 47 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 48 *dhawātā afnān*
 49 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 50 *fihimā 'aynāni tajrīyān*
 51 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 52 *fihimā min kulli fākihatin zawjān*
 53 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 54 *muttaki'īna 'alā furushin baṭā'īnuhā min istabraqin*
wa-janā l-jannatayni dān
 55 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 56 *fihinna qāṣirātu l-ṭarfi*
lam yaṭmithhunna insun qablahum wa-lā jānn
 57 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 58 *ka'annahunna l-yāqūtu wa-l-marjān*
 59 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 60 *hal jazā'u l-'ihsāni illā l-'ihsān*
 61 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 62 *wa-min dūnihimā jannatān*
 63 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 64 *mudhāmmatān*
 65 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 66 *fihima 'aynāni naḍḍākhatān*
 67 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 68 *fihimā fākihātun wa-nakhlun wa-rummān*
 69 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 70 *fihinna khayrātun ḥisān*
 71 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 72 *ḥūrun maqṣūrātun fī l-khiyām*
 73 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 74 *lam yaṭmithhunna insun qablahum wa-lā jānn*
 75 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*

40 For an exception, see Lawson, Duality. See also M. Abdel Haleem's contribution to the present publication.

- 76 *muttaki'īna 'alā rafrafīn khudrin wa-'abqarīyin ḥisān*
 77 *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān*
 78 *tabāraka smu rabbika dhī l-jalāli wa-l-ikrām*

- 46 But such as fears the Station of his Lord, for them shall be two gardens –
 47 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 48 abounding in branches –
 49 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 50 therein two fountains of running water –
 51 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 52 therein of every fruit two kinds –
 53 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 54 reclining upon couches lined with brocade, the fruits of the gardens nigh
 to gather –
 55 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 56 therein maidens restraining their glances, untouched before them by any
 man or jinn
 57 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 58 lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral –
 59 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 60 Shall the recompense of goodness be other than goodness?
 61 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 62 And besides these shall be two gardens –
 63 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 64 green, green pastures –
 65 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 66 therein two fountains of gushing water –
 67 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 68 therein fruits, and palm-trees, and pomegranates –
 69 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 70 therein maidens good and comely –
 71 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 72 houris, cloistered in cool pavilions –
 73 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 74 untouched before them by any man or jinn –
 75 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 76 reclining upon green cushions and lovely druggets –
 77 O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?
 78 Blessed be the Name of thy Lord, majestic, splendid.

After an elaborate portrayal of creation (Q 55:1–36) and judgment (Q 55:37–45) with their *binary* juxtapositions, there is the promise (Q 55:46) *li-man khāfa maqāma rabbihi jannatān* (“but for such as fears the Station of his Lord, for them shall be two gardens”). This is the only verse where the dual form cannot be explained in terms of any of the paired phenomena mentioned earlier in the text. This exception calls for an explanation. A parallel case appears in the second description of paradise, where again *two* gardens are mentioned (Q 55:62), *wa-min dūnihimā jannatān* (“and besides these shall be two gardens”). *Jannatān* (literally, “two gardens”) is best interpreted with reference to the conventions of ancient Arabic poetry, which often uses dual forms in topographic contexts to denote only one extended place, or – even more probably – with reference to the understanding of some classical Arabic philologists as an expression of infiniteness: “garden after garden, infinite gardens.”⁴¹ The text depicts (twice: Q 55:46–61, 62–77) the image of the blessed residing in a garden with lush nature; Q 55:48: “abounding in branches,” and plenty of fruit; Q 55:52: “therein of every fruit two kinds.” In the first garden scenario (Q 55:46–60), one might understand Q 55:50 *‘aynāni tajriyān* (“two fountains of running water”) as a mechanistic concession to congruence with *jannatān*; however, this is clearly impossible in the case of the phrase *min kulli fākihatīn zawjān* (“therein is a pair of every fruit”) that immediately follows Q 55:52, since in this case a basic Quranic perception is evoked that is expressed in various texts, cf. Q 51:49: *min kulli shay’in khalaqnā zawjayni, la ‘allakum tadhakkarūn* (“and of everything we have created a pair, that perchance you might remember”).

41 The understanding of the dual form *jannatān* (Q 55:46–76) proposed in Western scholarship as due to constraints of rhyme is found already with al-Farrā’, *Ma’ānī al-Qur’ān* 118; and al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān* iii, 299, as quoted by Wansbrough, *Quranic studies* 25. Wansbrough, however, fails to mention that the use of dual forms for a singular *metri causa* is a most frequent phenomenon in ancient Arabic poetry, where even fixed conventions emerged like the poet’s stereotypical address of two friends in the *nasīb* (see e.g., Nöldeke, *Delectus* 8.5, 12.14 etc.) or the phenomenon of two slanderers (Nöldeke, *Delectus* 8.8); see the additional examples collected by Gandz, *Mu’allaqa*; and Goldziher, ‘Ijādat al-marīḍ 185–200. Dual forms without numerical value are particularly frequent in toponyms; once these dual forms are transferred into extra-poetical contexts, they continue to convey their poeticity. This fact has been noted by a number of Arab classical philologists, see Neuwirth, *Symmetrie* 447–80. The apparent doubling of the gardens is less extraordinary than it may look. The play with the possibilities of Arabic morphology, familiar from poetry, should have caused far less problems to contemporary listeners than to later readers, who were predisposed and limited by the positivist approaches of Islamic exegesis.

The blessings of lush vegetation and plenty of water are complemented by the presence of beautiful maidens.

In accordance with the Sura's characteristic construction of the created world from *paired* elements, these maidens are compared to *two* complementary objects, in one case a variation of an observation expressed in the hymnal part is presented: Q 55:58: *ka-annahunna l-yāqūtu wa-l-marjān*, "lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral" (cf. Q 55:22: *yakhruju minhumā l-lu'lu'u wa-l-marjān*), and in the other case *two* qualifications (Q 55:72) are described. In spite of the prominence of the maidens' virginity (Q 55:56–74), no erotic dynamic between them and the blessed is perceivable. The blessed remain as motionless as the maidens themselves, transfixed in their luxurious seats. The last verse of the second description that focuses on the furniture and textiles of the space again introduces a *binary* juxtaposition: Q 55:76, *muttaki'ina 'alā raḥḥān khudrin wa-'abqarīyin ḥisān* ("reclining upon green cushions and superb rugs"). The final proclamation introduces a last contrasting *pair*: the antithetical manifestations of *jalāl* ("majesty," comparable to the rabbinic *mid-dat had-dīn*, the power of exerting judgment and thus punishment) and *ikrām* ("generosity," comparable to the rabbinic *middat ha-raḥamīm*, the power that manifests itself in generous forgiveness). The text closes with a doxology.

The description in Q 55:46–78 – unique in the Quran – according to its literal sense thus presents a "double paradise image": Not only are there "two gardens" instead of one, but the duplicated garden is also presented twice, figuring in two subsequent, slightly divergent descriptions (Q 55:46–61, 62–78). Expectedly, these duplicated paradises are replete with paired topics – a phenomenon that has long puzzled scholars. The frequent dual forms should not be taken in their literal, numerical sense, but as figures in a highly poetical and playful demonstration of linguistic virtuosity. One has to remember that Q 55 pursues a particular hermeneutical trajectory: to demonstrate the harmonious and balanced structure of creation. It follows that any proper description of the symmetry of creation demands an equally sophisticated, "dual-loaded" language to match its ontological harmony. Duality and opposition also point to their "opposite," viz. oneness.⁴² The thesis that language is on a par with creation is a major topic of the Sura and has been discussed in detail elsewhere.⁴³

Furthermore, some semantic peculiarities that seem to have exerted considerable influence on the later readers' perception of the Quranic paradise should be noted. What was already looming in the earlier paradise descriptions becomes evident in the elaborate portrayal of Q 55: the Quranic paradisa-

42 See Lawson, *Duality*.

43 Neuwirth, *Koran als Text der Spätantike* 433–48.

abode presents itself as surprisingly distinct from both the Jewish and Christian eschatological paradise.⁴⁴ Though it is meant as a reward granted to the virtuous in general, the space is obviously a gendered space. Those invited to enter the garden are male persons, who are honored according to the decorum of contemporary courtly hospitality. Part of their reward is the enjoyment of the erotic company of beautiful maidens, whom they find present at the site; Q 55:56, 58: “therein maidens restraining their glances // lovely like rubies, beautiful like corals,” Q 55:71, 73: “therein maidens good and comely // hours cloistered in pavilions.”⁴⁵ They are – indirectly – assigned to be their sexual partners; this thought seems to underlie the assertion that they are “untouched before them by any man or jinn,” Q 55:56, 74. There should be no surprise that this gendered social image of paradise later called for an adjustment: later Suras and even secondary additions to early Suras (Q 52:21) contain promises securing the participation of the families (Q 13:23, 36:56: wives) of the inhabitants of paradise, as well, in the eschatological bliss.⁴⁶ Yet, the image of the eschatological paradise first arises in the shape described above: as a space promising courtly enjoyments to a privileged male elect.

Another peculiarity unknown from the Jewish and Christian vision of paradise is the fact that the blessed are surrounded by luxurious furniture and precious textiles; Q 55:75: “green cushions and lovely druggets,” as well as furniture of courtly luxury; Q 55:84: “couches lined with brocade.” These observations raise the question: How can the presence of the corporally erotic, on the one hand, and the traces of material civilization, even luxury, on the other hand, be explained? More precisely: What is their function?

44 In Judaism, eschatological perceptions of paradise had been developed in particular in apocalyptic works such as the first book on Enoch (second century BC), and the Targums (Aramaic translations) at Genesis. In Christianity, the Genesis story in the Pshitta (Syriac Bible) itself reflects an understanding of paradise as both primordial and eschatological.

45 The designation “Houri” used by Arberry is derived from the plural form “*hūr*” of the Arabic adjective *aḥwar*, *ḥawrāʾ*, meaning “having eyes in which the contrast between black and white is particularly intense.” In Q 55:73 the word *hūr* is not yet the designation of “virgins of paradise” but rather a qualification of the “maidens good and comely” mentioned in Q 55:71. The word, which was not known as a technical term before its introduction through the Quran, has been questioned as to its traditionally accepted meaning designating women, see the controversy raised by the hypothesis of Luxenberg who claimed a completely different meaning (“grapes”), Wild, Virgins of paradise; and W. Saleh, The etymological fallacy. Also see, in particular, Sidney Griffith’s contribution to the present publication.

46 See Nerina Rustomji’s contribution to the present publication. For the addition to Sura 52 see Angelika Neuwirth, *Der Koran I* 685–709.

4 Paradisal Imaginations in Late Antiquity

It is sometimes forgotten that the Quran is neither directly derived from the Bible nor necessarily from Biblical tradition exclusively. This is particularly evident in the case of its depiction of paradise. Here, other textual precursors need to be taken into account. The presence of the erotic in the hereafter – looked upon from a broader perspective – is not as extraordinary as it may appear at first sight. Once we leave the Biblical model of the afterlife aside, there is ample evidence for the presence of women who accompany men postmortem. For example, in the pagan context, the antique goddess of victory, Nike, carries off the dead warrior to his postmortem abode.⁴⁷ Iranian lore knows of female figures attending the male dead as well.⁴⁸ And even in Biblical tradition, Church fathers from the time of Irenaeus (third century CE) have discussed whether or not corporal sexual relations should be imagined as continuing in paradise.⁴⁹ Proto-monastic ideals would, however, eventually win the day. Later authorities, such as the Syrian theologian Ephraem of Nisibis (c. 306–373) in his *Hymns on Paradise*, rigorously spiritualized sexuality; yet at the same time Ephraem's poetry leaves no doubt that he, too, imagined paradise not free from erotic terms. He states in his second *Hymn on Paradise*:

*Ṭūbaw l-man da-hwā rgīgā l-pardaysā
d-rā'eg w-bāla' leh b-tar'eh l-shappīrā
b-ūbeh mḥabbēb leh b-karseh mnaṣṣar leh
ṣārē w-sā'em leh b-gaw mā'aw
w-en dēn g'aṣ men (')nāsh pāleṭ w-shādē leh
d-tar'eh hū d-buḥrānā d-rāḥem bnay (')nāshā*

Blessed is he for whom Paradise yearns.

Yes, Paradise yearns for the man whose goodness makes him beautiful;

it engulfs him at its gateway,

it embraces him in its bosom, it caresses him in its very womb;

for it splits open and receives him into its inmost parts.

But if there is someone it abhors,

It removes him and casts him out;

This is the gate of testing

That belongs to Him who loves mankind.⁵⁰

47 Lumpe and Bietenhard, *Himmel* 173–212.

48 Tisdall, *Original sources* 235–8. See also S. Günther's contribution to the present publication, especially note 56.

49 Jarrar, *Martyrdom* 87–108.

50 Brock, *St. Ephrem* 84.

In the seventh *Hymn* eroticism becomes even more explicit:

*Aynā d-men ḥamrā šām hwā b-purshānā
 leh šāwhān yattīr gupnaw d-pardaysā
 wa-ḥdā ḥdā sgūlāh mawshṭā tettel leh
 w-en dēn bṭūlā hwā tūb a'lih
 l-gaw 'ūbhen dakyā d-metṭūl iḥīdāyā
 lā npal b-gaw 'ūbā w-'arsā d-zuwwāgā.*

The man who abstained, with understanding, from wine,
 will the vines of Paradise rush out to meet, all the more joyfully,
 as each one stretches out and proffers him its clusters;
 or if any has lived a life of virginity, him too they welcome into their
 bosom,
 for the solitary such as he has never lain in any bosom nor upon any mar-
 riage bed.⁵¹

The two visions of paradise are, however, distinctly and distinctively different. In comparison with Ephraem's allegorically tuned poetry, the female eroticism in the Quran appears rather realistic and hence more in line with its pagan predecessors. This anti-allegorical trend fits with a common characteristic of the Quran, one that may be described as a text-critical program of analysis intending to de-allegorize Christian readings of Biblical narratives.⁵² So Ephraem's poetry (though probably not unfamiliar to the Quranic community as other parallel evidence would suggest) and its treatment of paradise bears little resemblance to the Quranic scenario of an assembly of privileged men and beautiful women in a luxurious ambience. Thus it is not Ephraem's hymns that can explain or solve the quandary regarding both the physical presence of women and the traces of material culture in the Quranic paradise. Indeed, both of these latter traits are difficult to reconcile with the vision of a purely spiritual abode. Nor is an explanation available through a reference to the rabbinic imagination of the heavenly abode, "Gan 'Eden"/"Garden of Eden," where "the righteous are sitting at golden tables or under elaborate canopies" (cf. Q 18:29), since here the two elements of lush nature and the erotic companions are missing – we should recall that according to bBer 17a there will be no sensual enjoyment in Gan Eden.⁵³

51 Ibid., 125. (I owe the transcription of the Syriac original to the kind support of my associates Yousef Kouriyhe and David Kiltz, Corpus Coranicum.)

52 Neuwirth, *Koran als Text der Spätantike* 590–5.

53 Bamberger, *Paradise* 628.

5 The Pagan Subtext

It is helpful to remember that the Quran is last but not least the heir to the most sophisticated pagan Arabic poetry. As early as 1923⁵⁴ Josef Horovitz assumed that Quranic paradisaical scenarios reflect banquet scenes from ancient Arabic poetry. Looking closely at the Quranic descriptions we do not, however, find a banquet in the vein described by the ancient poets, but rather a static tableau portraying groups of men and women in a place of lush nature that at the same time bears courtly traits, being furnished with aesthetically refined artifacts. Although this is not a reference to any particular episode of ancient poetry, it is a poetical reference and, in fact, quite a universal one. Descriptions of paradise – this is the thesis raised in our paper⁵⁵ – are a response to the more general outlook expressed in the ancient Arabic *qaṣīda*. They constitute nothing less than an inversion of the image presented in its initial part, the elegiac and nostalgic *nasīb*, which depicts the previously inhabited encampments revisited by the poet as a wasteland, a landscape of ruins, stripped of its civilization, relinquished by its inhabitants and “mute,” inaccessible to communication. One of the most famous ancient Arabic *qaṣīdas*, by the poet Labīd, starts with the words: “Effaced (literally: extinguished) are the abodes,” *‘afati l-dīyāru*. These words, or similar uses of the same cultural metaphor, formulate and evoke in the audience’s mind the stereotypical beginning of a large number of poems, all of which conjure up the emptiness of space and a “muteness,” a loss of communication. Frequently these descriptions of deserted campsites are used metaphorically as inscriptions on the body: The traces of the deserted campsites are reminiscent of the faint lines engraved on a wrist, or – which is even more revealing – they develop into the evocative trope of rock graffiti or inscriptions, *wahy*. There is, then, a meaningful message immanent in the writing and in the deserted space, a message which is hidden from the beholder. To the poet-hero, both the “extinguished” campsite and the lost beloved, who is the second main topic of the *nasīb*, are negations: allegories of irreversible time, irretrievable meaning, and unrecoverable emotional fulfillment. The place is perceived as desolate since the luxuriously furnished caravans have taken the women away (and with them the poet’s beloved), to be swallowed by a mirage. The *nasīb* thus serves to express an *aporia*.

Nature defies the poet, not responding to his ever-repeated question of “*ubi sunt qui ante nos in mundo fuere?*” (where are those who were before us in the

54 Horovitz, Das koranische Paradies 1–16.

55 As put forward earlier in Neuwirth, Psalms 711–7.

world?)”⁵⁶ about the whereabouts of the formerly pulsating social life, the reliable social structures, and the aesthetically formidable equipment of the living space with its promise of erotic pleasure. All culture and human achievement falls prey to time or is obscured by nature. In the end, the familiar topos of popular Hellenistic philosophy reminds the listener that nature alone is capable of cyclically renewing itself; man is destined to perish and decompose. For the ancient Arab poets, it is nature’s eternity that underscores the transitory nature of man and his achievements. The poet Labīd, an older contemporary of the Prophet, says: *Balīnā wa-lā tablā l-nujūmu l-tawālī’u, wa-tabqā l-jibālu ba’danā wa-l-maṣānī’u* (“We vanish but the rising stars do not, mountains remain when we are gone and fortresses”). Time does not affect nature, which is eternal (*khālid*), allowing repeated recurrences ad infinitum. In contrast, man is caught and “consumed” by time, in a concept popularly associated with *dahr*, fate.

It is this perception of nature as overwhelming man and his culture that the Quran has come to refute: God himself commands fate and reshapes the time of man, which now ranges from the primordial creation of the world and the coincidental or even preceding creation of the logos – to the end of the world on judgment day, when man will redeem the pledge of divine instruction. Q 55:1–4 foregrounds the sequence of the creational act: *al-raḥmān / ‘allama l-Qur’ān / khalaqa l-insān / ‘allamahu l-bayān*. The verse group expresses a close connection between divine instruction of the logos (*qur’ān*) and man’s innate faculty of understanding (*bayān*).⁵⁷ The Quranic description of paradise not only reverses the erstwhile bleak and threatening conception of nature into something ever-green and fruit-bearing, but it also preserves a high level of civilization: precious cushions and carpets, cups filled with wine that had been sealed with musk, and moreover the presence of beautiful young women, known from the *nasīb* as icons of a meaningful and enjoyable life. Paradise is a space where man is reinvested with his own cultural paraphernalia.

6 The Plural Functions of the Quranic Paradise

This hypothesis which tries to offer an explanation as to why the Quran introduces such a courtly image of paradise would remain mere guesswork were it not for the second connection between the *nasīb* of the *qaṣīda* and the Quranic

⁵⁶ The sustained presence of the late antique topos has been demonstrated by Becker, *Ubi sunt*; and made much of by Wansbrough, *Quranic studies*.

⁵⁷ On the Quranic logos theology, see Neuwirth, *Koran als Text der Spätantike* 158–63.

paradise, which we already alluded to: the Quranic re-interpretation of *wahy*.⁵⁸ The fact that the *qaṣīda* both laments the transitory nature of human achievements *and* complains of the “non-readability” of reality, which is regarded as a situation of collective loss, has seldom been recognized in scholarship. The poet who has halted to recall the deserted campsite of his former sojourn with his beloved is confronted not only with his loss, but with a hermeneutical *aporia* as well: Where are those people who used to furnish the place with social life and its pleasures, why has the erstwhile populated place fallen into ruin? The poet turns to the traces of the campsite in order to “ask them,” to search for the meaning of his present apprehension of reality. The ruins he addresses, however, remain mute, thus reminding him of an unreadable inscription, a *wahy* that bears a message linguistically incomprehensible to him. The ruined encampments as well as their symbolic representation, the faded or unreadable writing (*wahy*), leave the poet with the *aporia*, well known from Hellenistic poetry,⁵⁹ the unresolved question about the meaning of unretrievable history. Writing that is expected to provide a solution, proves in no way helpful. It is realized as an undecipherable sign system that only enhances the feeling of the vanity inherent in human achievement. Writing then, represented by *wahy* in pre-Islamic poetry, plays a rather ambivalent role by evoking the perception of loss.

Wahy is an important term in ancient Arabic poetry; it denotes any non-verbal “sign language,” among which the non-decipherable writing, the mirror image of the deserted and withered encampment is the most prominent. This term thus bears a pronounced negative connotation due to its prominent employment in the poet’s lament about the contingency of worldly reality. It is all the more striking to find that this ‘*wahy* of loss,’ a *wahy* representing the meaninglessness of history, has been inverted in the Quran. *Wahy* in the Quran denotes inspiration, it successively acquires the meaning of revelation as such. The Quranic *wahy* is likewise a non-verbal message. It is however conveyed to a person who, thanks to his prophetic gift, is able to “translate” the otherwise unintelligible *wahy* into human verbal language for his listeners and thus change it into a significant communication. In its Quranic re-employment, *wahy* is given a new inverted meaning. It comes to denote the most important medium of communication to be imagined: communication with the divine articulated in the Quranic message. One might have expected the introduction of a term to denote God’s communication to his elect as something famil-

58 On *wahy* in ancient Arabic poetry, see Montgomery, *Dichotomy*; the Quranic reinterpretation is discussed in Neuwirth, *Koran als Text der Spätantike* 711–6, see also Neuwirth, *Discovery*.

59 Becker, *Ubi sunt*.

iar or shared with other monotheist cultures, such as an Arabic rendering of the Greek *apokalypsis*, or the Syriac *galyutha*. The Quran, however, refers to the core corpus of Arabic literary articulations by ingeniously using the poetic term *wahy* and inverting its meaning. *Wahy* thus has come to denote the exact opposite meaning of unintelligible sign language. The poet's bleak psychological state and his inability to comprehend reality have been proven to be obsolete discursive fields. The new Quranic definition of *wahy* henceforth renders the term a positive force, one that clarifies existential and material ambiguity through the divine and definitive knowledge and inspiration of God.

7 Conclusion

Sura 55 has been demonstrated to be a re-working of a Biblical psalm, Ps 136.⁶⁰ The psalm text like the Sura in its introductory section records the events of primordial creation; it shifts however, in its core section, to a completely different topic, i.e., God's interventions in the history of His elect people. It is at this point that the Sura diverges from the psalm; in the Quranic perspective God's presence is less manifest with regard to His care for people in situations of political crisis than in the universal act of creation with its eschatological fulfillment in paradise on the one hand and the communication of His word on the other. Yet the Quran does engage in a discourse of history as well: Quranic descriptions of paradise provoke reflections on history and historical consciousness by rewriting ancient Arabic poetry. The refrain of Psalm 136 "God's grace lasts forever," echoed in the refrain of Q 55 "O which of your lord's bounties will you and you deny?" – connects with an inversion of the ancient Arabic conception of all-overpowering time, and claims that "God disempowers devastating time."

This shift in interest from history to eschatology is accompanied by a particular and well-defined meta-discourse: the hermeneutical accessibility of the cosmos, God's presence in language. The Quran attempts nothing less than to render the undecipherable understandable, to decode the message of enigmatic writing, *wahy*, that so haunted the ancient poet. *Wahy* reappears in the Quran to denote revelation, the hermeneutical field of inquiry and mode of meaning par excellence. With this paradigmatic turn, the Quran offers its listeners a new promise: divine faithfulness is not derived from the Biblical narrative of salvation, but rather from God's liberation of man from the aporetic crisis that is so expressively pronounced in ancient Arabic poetry. Subsequently, in this new conceptualization of paradise, an equally new plenitude of meaning

60 Neuwirth, Psalms 733–78.

is staged: The old pagan poetic tropes of loss, the campsites lying in ruins, the beloved having departed, are inverted and reinterpreted to provide a comprehensive and socio-historical relevant narrative. Thus the hermeneutical inaccessibility of reality's "sign language," as propounded poetically in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry, is discursively reversed. The Quranic manifestation of paradise, though amalgamating different well established traditions, introduces a substantially novel dimension into the eschatological thought of its time. It hence clearly betrays and even celebrates its late antique multi-cultural milieu of genesis, but it equally proves to be essentially new and challenging.

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Paradise in the Quran and the Music of Apocalypse

Todd Lawson

These people have no grasp of God's true measure. On the Day of Resurrection, the whole earth will be in His grip. The heavens will be rolled up in His right hand – Glory be to Him! He is far above the partners they ascribe to Him! the Trumpet will be sounded, and everyone in the heavens and earth will fall down senseless except those God spares. It will be sounded once again and they will be on their feet, looking on. The earth will shine with the light of its Lord; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; the prophets and witnesses will be brought in. Fair judgment will be given between them: they will not be wronged and every soul will be repaid in full for what it has done. He knows best what they do.

Q 39:67–70

• • •

An apocalypse is a supernatural revelation, which reveals secrets of the heavenly world, on the one hand, and of eschatological judgment on the other.

JOHN J. COLLINS, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* 150

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The Quran may be distinguished from other scriptures of Abrahamic or ethical monotheistic faith traditions by a number of features. The first of these is the degree to which the subject of revelation (as it happens, the best English translation of the Greek word ἀποκάλυψις / apocalypsis) is central to its form and contents. In this the Quran is unusually self-reflective, a common feature, incidentally, of modern and postmodern works of art and literature. It is not only a revelation but repeatedly identifies itself as revelation and this identification is also revelation. It is acutely and uniquely self-referential as far as content,

form, and function are concerned.¹ In short, the Quran may be thought of as the “main character” of the Quran. In studies of the Quran, the word “revelation” is usually a translation of *tanzīl*, “sending down” a word with a very different semantic shape than apocalypse, which means “to uncover” (and is thus akin to ἀλήθεια / *aletheia*). However, there are other Quranic words that also denote or connote revelation; some of these have a closer semantic relationship to apocalypse. Such etymological diversions notwithstanding, it is beyond discussion or dispute that revelation is the form, contents, function, and self-image of the Quran.

So heavy with apocalyptic expectation, the Quran also distinguishes itself from other scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths in the degree and intensity with which it dwells on the question of afterlife *and* the vividness of that afterlife. In this context, the afterlife may be understood as a theater for the dramatic performance and operation of the glory of God at a most intense level. Revelation is intimately linked with what is called in Biblical and apocalyptic studies, a “glory motif.”² There are, besides revelation and paradise, many other moments of glory in the Quran, but in the following exploration of paradise we will restrict reference to two: covenant and divine presence (*al-sakīna*). Paradise, covenant, and divine presence are discussed and explicated through reference to the Quranic literary features of enantiodromia (the interplay of duality, opposition and symmetry) and typological figuration. The hope is to demonstrate that these topics and literary functions are among those parts of the Quran that carry the apocalyptic theme most vividly.³ Naturally, the more standard ideas of eschatological judgment and the afterlife are also touched upon. This chapter is organized as follows: first, a brief outline of the history of apocalyptic scholarship in Biblical and related studies; second, then a brief outline of the study of apocalypse in Islamic and Quranic scholarship; third,

1 Madigan, *Self-image*. This Quranic self-awareness is unique in world literature and may be related to the very interesting phenomenon of its personification in the *ḥadīth* literature, as when the Quran appears as a person at the end of time. On this distinctive literary device in classical Islamic literature, see S. Günther's article in this volume.

2 This was first emphasized in Koch, *Ratlos* (cf. Collins, *Imagination* 9–11); see also W.R. Cook, *Glory*. For glory in the Islamic cultural sphere see, e.g., the works of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, *al-Maqtūl* (d. 578/1191) in general and his commentators, including the essential studies of Henry Corbin. For the recognition of a glory motif in the Quran, Lawson, *Duality*. An interesting connection between the literary motif and material culture is suggested by a reading of Winter, *Radiance*.

3 As in Leemhuis, *Apocalypse*, quoted above.

paradise as an apocalyptic motif in the Quran: covenant, glory, and divine presence (*sakīna*); and fourth, a brief conclusion setting forth the main results.⁴

1 Apocalypse as Literary Genre

In this context, it is important to first point out that the word apocalypse denotes only “unveiling” or “revelation.”⁵ It does not denote “destruction” or “catastrophe” or even necessarily eschatology.⁶ It only connotes these things by what might be thought literary accident. From this point of view, what came to be a very important book entitled *The Apocalypse of St. John* (known also as *The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ*) was profoundly and powerfully concerned with eschatology and the “end of the world” as that world was perceived to be a wicked impediment to the plan of God. So, the otherwise unremarkable or at best, possibly unusual, word acquired considerable heft and presence when it was chosen as the title for the last book of the New Testament as we know it today. Indeed, there seems to have been a considerable early inner-Christian debate whether or not the Apocalypse of St. John should be considered part of the canon. (For example, it is not in the original Syriac Peshitta.⁷) It is this “literary accident” that has led to the eventual prominence and notoriety of the term as a designation for a category of literature and a designation for the attendant cosmic events and prophecies in what we refer to somewhat solipsistically as Western culture. Prior to this “accident” it had not any history as a marker of genre, as a type of eschatology or social/religious movement, though certainly there had existed books and writings concerned with these topics.⁸ Because of its somewhat accidental use as the title of the last book of the New

4 Here one is inspired by Northrop Frye and his desire to see and explain how “Biblical imagery and narrative had set up an imaginative framework . . . within which Western culture had operated down to the eighteenth century and is to a large extent still operating.” Frye, *Great code* xi.

5 See part II for a discussion of the relevant Quranic terminology.

6 “[T]he word *apocalypse* is often associated with the end of the world, or with some great catastrophe. This analogous usage of the word apocalyptic is inevitably imprecise, as resemblance is a matter of degree . . . The expectation of an ‘end’ of history, or of a new era of radical change, has been enormously important in Christian tradition, but also in Judaism and Islam, and while it is often the subject of a vision or a revelation, it can also be communicated in other ways.” J.J. Collins, *Apocalypse: An overview* 410b.

7 My thanks to C. Mauder for this and several other important refinements.

8 Smith, *On the history* 14.

Testament⁹ (for which it also happens to be the first word of that text) and because of the remarkable, dire, dramatic, entertaining, exotic, frightening, and comforting contents of that book, “apocalypse” has also come strongly to connote (and incidentally denote) all of those things – i.e., the content of the book – as well. Thus, apocalypse is a technical, generic designation and applies first to form and second to content.

The Book of Revelation shares a suggestive concept, if not titular word, with one of the more frequent names by which the Quran itself is known and referred to, namely *The Revelation* – *al-tanzīl*. Like the Quran, its contents are determined by the distinctive historical, psychological, and social conditions of the audience to whom it was first addressed.¹⁰ This audience was, of course, the early Christians suffering not only Roman and Jewish oppression and persecution but also the disarray and insecurity attendant upon the lack of clearly demarcated and universally acknowledged strong and effective leadership. Thus, the purpose of this particular revelation (Grk. *Ἀποκάλυψις Ἰωάννου* = *The Apocalypse of John*): to comfort and reassure the community through a narrative of more or less constant intensity that ultimately they would triumph against the forces of evil (what is referred to in the literature as an “apocalyptic reversal,” i.e., of fortune).¹¹ As Hanson states:

In the pressing need to define spiritual identity in the face of challenge, and to sustain hope, a basic perspective is nevertheless identifiable around which apocalyptic systems grow: it is the perspective of apocalyptic eschatology which furnishes a way of viewing reality which denies the apparent superior position of opposing groups of any validity vis-à-vis divine purpose.¹²

Far from being a narrative of despair and destruction it is a narrative of hope. (It is only a narrative of despair for those who may be identified as the holders of power and authority condemned by the revelation/apocalypse.) The mode of the message, divine revelation, is in the service, among other things, of establishing the highest possible authority for this comforting and encouraging information. But the mood of the discourse is along the lines of sharing a

9 Ibid., 18: “... what was the source from which both it and Paul derived this somewhat unlikely term for such material?”

10 Such is an implication of the existence of the traditional Quranic auxiliary study of the media or occasions of revelation (*‘ilm asbāb al-nuzūl*).

11 Murphy, *Fallen* 48–55.

12 Hanson, *Dawn* 433.

divine secret with the audience.¹³ The wealth of frequently strange and “supernatural” detail is in the service of creating a special “reality effect” and lending credence to the proposition that all of this irrefutable information – including the details of judgment (who will be rewarded and who will be punished) – comes from an unseen, mysterious, all-knowing, and divine source. It is, of course, also entertaining in the etymological sense of “gripping.”¹⁴

But the content of the Book of Revelation, it has been argued, is not responsible for its place of prominence in the Bible. Rather, it is the ascription of that book, its revelation and composition, to “John” – now generally further specified as John of Patmos – who until fairly recently was usually identified as the author of the Gospel of John, i.e., the disciple John and the author of the various epistles bearing his name. It is likely that this identification, more than the actual contents of the book, has made it such an object of veneration, meditation, and exegesis, and that has assured its continued and important place in the canon. It should be remembered, however, that there are many other texts that never made it into the canon although they were attributed to important Biblical figures, such as the Gospel of Peter, the Gospel of Thomas, the Acts of Thomas, Paul’s Third Epistle to the Corinthians (which is, actually, accepted as canonical by the Armenian Church) or the Apocalypse of Peter. Thus, there seems to have been something about the *Apocalypse of John* beyond the mere attribution to the disciple that made members of the early church accept it as part of their scripture, while they were not willing to accept similar claims brought forward with regard to other similar texts. This “something” is doubtless the contents of the book. Another argument claims that such content would otherwise have cast the document beyond the pale of acceptability, and it would have languished with other similarly fantastic and/or dubious texts on the margins of the theological library had it not been for the attribution.¹⁵ Over the last century, the study of apocalypse has burgeoned, producing a more or less distinct and self-contained area of scientific study broadly termed “apocalyptic” or “studies in apocalypticism.”¹⁶ Whereas formerly, while the

13 Cf. Smith, On the history 12.

14 Ibid., 13 (*ad* Ezekiel 33:32). On the reality effect see Barthes, *Rustle* 141–8.

15 Bull, The end 661. See also the remarks in Smith, On the history 18, suggesting that the popularity of the term as the name of a literary genre grew especially in pagan circles in the third and fourth centuries CE. It is also the case that the word began to be substituted by translators of Jewish texts after about the second century CE, when, for example the vision in Daniel 10 came to be called an apocalypse, where the earlier Greek of the Septuagint used a different verb.

16 Even a brief account of this intellectual history is beyond the space limitations of the present chapter. In the bibliography and the footnotes the reader will find reference to

Book of Revelation was certainly considered just that, and was to be fully and gratefully received as the divine word in Christianity, there was at the same time a disinclination to encourage its study or in fact to pay too much attention to it. It meant *something*, but we must not meddle in things beyond our abilities, and clearly the strangeness of the Book of Revelation indicated in no uncertain terms that it was largely “over our heads” – a mystery.¹⁷ As Collins points out, “Theologians of a more rational bent are often reluctant to admit that such material played a formative role in early Christianity. There is consequently a prejudice against the apocalyptic literature which is deeply ingrained in biblical scholarship.”¹⁸ The last few generations of Biblical and related scholarship, however, have attempted to grapple earnestly, and with minds freed from such prejudice, with what it has simultaneously sought to define as a genre. This highly variegated and productive process finally issued in the (perhaps apocalyptic) year 2000, in the 3-volume *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*. There, a broad and concise definition of apocalypse is offered: “the belief that God has revealed the imminent end of the ongoing struggle between good and evil in history.”¹⁹ This definition is reduced from one formulated previously by the same author:

[Apocalypse is a] genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is *mediated by an otherworldly being* to a human recipient, *disclosing a transcendent reality* which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages *eschatological salvation*, and spatial insofar as it involves another, *supernatural world*. . . . [Its purpose is] to interpret present, earthly circumstances in light of the supernatural world and of the future, and to influence both the understanding and the behavior of the audience by means of divine authority.²⁰

some of the most important works in modern apocalypse studies. One of the purposes of this chapter, and one of the points one hopes to be forgiven for repeating from time to time, is that studies of the Quran, in the first place and Islamic-related literature and groups in the second place, are virtually completely absent from this monumental and impressive library of scholarship. Exceptions are noted below.

- 17 Such non-theologians as Francis Bacon (d. 1626) and Isaac Newton (d. 1727) however devoted much energy to a study of Revelation. Force and Popkin (eds.), *Newton*, passim, and 216–20.
- 18 Collins, *Imagination* 1–2.
- 19 Collins, McGinn and Stein, General introduction, in Collins (ed.), *Encyclopedia of apocalypticism* vii.
- 20 Collins, Introduction to volume 1, in Collins (ed.), *Encyclopedia of apocalypticism* xiii (quoting Collins, *Morphology* 9. Italics added.)

Reading these definitions, especially the second, the question immediately arises as to why the Quran and Islam have not been of more interest to scholars of apocalyptic. We forbear from responding to such a question until the conclusion. For now, suffice it to say that even in this recent encyclopedia, which sees as its primary purpose the exploration of the apocalyptic element in the “three Western monotheistic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” Islam, in fact, occupies comparatively little space and the Quran itself even less.²¹ In the meantime, it is widely acknowledged that there are “apocalyptic” aspects to the Quran (e.g., the so-called “hymnic” Suras), just as there is near universal resistance to considering the entire text – as we do here – a *bona fide* apocalypse.²² To be clear, it is also assumed that a text can be more than one thing at the same time and to say that the entire text is an apocalypse does not exhaust the possibilities or circumscribe the field of inquiry. Rather, we hope for the opposite: to widen the approach. The Quran today remains virtually unknown as a subject of apocalyptic scholarship as this has come to be largely and quite variously configured. It has not really been invited to (or if invited has not attended) the rather sumptuous banquet of contemporary apocalyptic scholarship.²³

Current scholarly consensus is adamant that a great disservice to at least the genre of apocalypse is done if the term is taken to mean destruction *tout court*. Rather the term is now understood to stand for a composition whose nature, as indicated in one of the epigraphs above, may be very briefly summarized as: “a supernatural revelation, which reveals secrets of the heavenly world, on the one hand, and of eschatological judgment on the other.”²⁴ In order that the reader may be assured that the identification of the Quran as apocalypse does not depend solely upon the lexicological and terminological accident of the equivalence “revelation/apocalypse,” we provide in Table 6.1 a brief list of key constitutive elements of the genre as now recognized in apocalyptic studies, studies no longer restricted to Biblical and apocryphal texts but which take into their purview the study of world literature, whether ancient, modern or contemporary and in a variety of languages representative of a variety of cultures.²⁵

21 Arjomand, *Classic* 239–44 for the section on the Quran; Amanat, *Modern*.

22 See, for example, the comments in D. Cook, *Studies* 269–74.

23 All of the above comments and observations pertain to so-called Western scholarship (an odious formulation). The problem of the study of the apocalyptic nature of the Quran in the Islamic tradition is another matter entirely and is not touched upon here.

24 Collins, *Dead Sea scrolls* 150 (apocalypse as a genre receives a good discussion at 45–7).

25 As embodied in the landmark *Encyclopedia of apocalypticism*.

TABLE 6.1 *Apocalyptic themes and motifs with Quranic cognates*

Apocalypse	Quran
cosmogony	Quranic creation narrative
primordial events	day of the covenant, Q 7:172
recollection of past	stories of the prophets and their communities
<i>ex eventu</i> prophecy	Surat <i>al-Rūm</i>
persecution	persecution and rejection of prophets and followers; year of the elephant, Ma'rib dam
other eschatological upheavals, the end	<i>al-sā'a</i> , <i>al-amr</i> , <i>al-wāqī'a</i> , <i>al-ākhirā</i>
judgment/destruction of wicked	punishment/leading astray
judgment/destruction of the world	<i>al-sā'a</i> , <i>al-amr</i> , <i>al-wāqī'a</i>
judgment/destruction of otherworldly beings	<i>jinn</i>
cosmic transformation	<i>khalq jadīd</i>
resurrection	passim
other forms of afterlife: angels and demons	heaven, hell, <i>barzakh</i>
pseudonymity/anonymity	authorship of the Quran
ambiguity and multivocality	passim (cf. <i>tafsīr</i>)
glory motif	divine presence, <i>tajallī</i> , <i>sakīna</i> , <i>al-ḥaqq</i> , divine names, signs, the word, the book
illocution	e.g., numerous <i>qul</i> passages
aurality	oral composition and aural reception, <i>tajwīd</i> /performance tradition
cultural hybridism	numerous loanwords, hybrid eschatology (perso-semitic)
orchestration of authorial voices	various grammatical persons as actor, actant, narrator in Quran
literary forms and devices	<i>saq'</i>
time and history periodized and determined	time fully controlled and transformed, periodized
enantiodromia	passim
otherworldly revelator/angel	Gabriel
closure	<i>yawm al-dīn</i>
truth	<i>al-ḥaqq</i>
revelation	<i>tanzīl</i> , <i>ba'th</i> , <i>kashf</i> , <i>bayān</i> , <i>ḥaqq</i> , <i>āyāt</i>

Over-reliance on such lists has been criticized because they tend to be much too abstract, schematic, and imprecise.²⁶ It has been argued that apocalypse is best thought of as entailing three levels of analysis and study: genre, eschatology, and social movement. The study of apocalypse as “literary genre” would bracket off all considerations of history and theology to focus on the literary form and contents of the particular apocalypse being studied. The study of apocalypse as “eschatology” concentrates on the religious and theological ideas about only the “end things.” Thus it goes beyond the more purely literary investigation to isolate the way in which a particular text, or indeed social movement, teaches about and considers the last things. These last things can pertain to the more purely historical events in “time” or they may refer to the last things as they pertain to a more existential or spiritual realm, the realm of the soul. Most commonly, eschatology refers to a combination of both of these “fields of action.” Finally, the study of apocalypse as “social movement” is an investigation into the history and culture of groups or religions whose primary identity is derived from and constructed on a view of the immediate future and rescue from tyranny, wickedness, and persecution.²⁷ Their actions and teachings are all connected to a great cosmic or catastrophic event about which they alone have accurate (secret) knowledge. A table such as the above may be thought, therefore, to “indiscriminately mix the three levels” of analysis and “include features which are randomly distributed among the writings in question” (namely Jewish, Greco/Roman, Christian and Zoroastrian apocalypses). In Hanson’s words they are “too abstract to define such a living entity.”²⁸ Yet, such a list, as the above table perhaps indicates, seems to speak with startling pertinence to the literary form and contents of the Quran.

With such considerations in mind, it is of immediate interest to observe that, in fact, all of the items in the above list occur with greater or lesser frequency and intensity in the Quran and that the Quran, studied as apocalypse, may offer the student of the genre new aspects to consider, or the opportunity to consider a familiar problem in their Quranic manifestation: the topic of the Quran as divine and serious entertainment (viz., ‘that which holds’). The dramatic aspects of apocalypse, in which the Quran itself is the main character of the revelation, is surely also of some interest in the attempt to elucidate the charismatic hold it has on the reader.

26 Baukham, Rise.

27 As in A.Y. Collins (ed.), *Early*. See now Shoemaker, *Death*.

28 Hanson, *Dawn* 429.

2 Apocalypse in the Study of Islam and the Quran

In general, studies of the Quran avoid the word apocalypse and its derivatives, even though it certainly embodies enough apocalyptic subject matter to at least raise the question of whether or not it is an apocalypse. One of the reasons this may be so relates to an early twentieth-century dispute in Islamic studies among French, German, and Dutch scholars. The effects of this dispute may be thought to haunt contemporary Quran scholarship. In 1911, Paul Casanova published his famous – soon to be considered infamous – *Mohammed et la fin du monde*, in which he sought to put forth a completely new view of the eschatology of the Quran and Muḥammad's views on the "end times." According to this theory, the Quran contains the same eschatological ideas as the New Testament. Casanova read the history of Islam, the life and career of the Prophet Muḥammad, and the travails of the early community in the context of apocalyptic eschatological tension. Casanova differentiates three stages:

1. In the first period, Muḥammad expects the imminent end of the world;
2. In the second, he hesitates and explains that he does not know any longer whether the hour is near or far;
3. In the third period, he is completely preoccupied with his duties as military leader and legislator for the community now formed; he lets the question finally fall and dedicates himself to the necessities of the present hour completely.²⁹

The Casanova thesis was quickly discredited, first by Becker³⁰ and then by Hurgronje,³¹ and his ideas remained marginalized for several decades by dint of the apparently more appealing interpretations of Islamic history and the life of Muḥammad put forth by such eminent scholars as Richard Bell, Montgomery Watt, Harris Birkeland, and the robust and influential ensuing tradition.³² Today, as has been recently pointed out by Shoemaker, many of these arguments against Casanova would be judged quaint and/or biased. How contemporary Islamic studies, whether by Muslim scholars or "Westerners" has come to avoid privileging the eschatological and apocalyptic content so much in evidence in

29 Casanova, *Mohammed* 68–83.

30 "Die Methode Casanovas stellt alles, was Goldziher und Snouck Hurgronje mühevoll erarbeitet haben, direkt auf den Kopf." (Becker, *Islam* 544).

31 Snouck Hurgronje, *Mohammedanism* 25–8.

32 Shoemaker, *Death* 121–36. See now also Cuypers, *Une apocalypse coranique*.

the Quran itself, is a fascinating story which Shoemaker sees as beginning in the nineteenth century, specifically in the methodological debates between two great German scholars, Ewald and Baur, about the study of early Christianity and the ministry of Jesus. The effects of the debate have continued to make themselves felt until today. Shoemaker's final word on the subject is germane:

Indeed, when the eschatological traditions of the Qur'ān and early Islam are evaluated according to the same standards used in reconstructing the historical Jesus, the results suggest a need to move beyond modern scholarship's prophet of social justice in order to recover, as once was similarly necessary in the study of the historical Jesus, the eschatological warner who stands at the origin of this global religious tradition.³³

3 Paradise as Apocalyptic Motif

Paradise is a distinctive, defining theme of the Quran due to the frequency with which it is encountered, either as "paradise (i.e., garden), *janna*" (which, together with its plural form *jannāt* occurs over 120 times in the Quran), or by one of the several other synonyms or near synonyms denoting it. Some of these auxiliary terms are: *ʿadn* (Eden) (6),³⁴ *al-naʿīm* (grace) (7), *firdaws* (paradise) (2), *al-maʿwā* (refuge) (2). Kinberg has noted other Quranic words that through exegesis eventually came to be understood as synonyms for paradise:³⁵ *dār al-salām* (abode of peace) (2), *dār/jannat al-khuld* (eternal abode/garden) (1 each), *dār al-muqāma* (eternal abode) (1), *maqām amīn* (secure place) (1), *maqʿad al-ʿīdīq* (seat of honor) (1), *dār al-muttaqīn* (abode of the pious) (1), *dhāt al-qarār* (high ground) (1, Q 23:50), *ṭūbā* (blessed) (1), *ʿillīyyūn/ʿillīyyīn* (exalted realms or creatures) (1 each), *rawḍa* (meadow) (1), *rawḍat al-jannāt* (heavenly meadow) (1), *ḥusnā* (best, most beautiful, bliss) (17), *al-ākhirā* (the hereafter) (71), this includes usages in which *dār* (abode, dwelling place) also occurs. Unlike the others, the term *dār* may refer to either paradise or hell, depending upon context.³⁶ A number of Quranic words or concepts not mentioned by

33 Shoemaker, *Death* 136.

34 Numbers in parentheses here and elsewhere refer to the number of times the given word or root occurs in the Quran.

35 Kinberg, *Paradise* 12–15.

36 For discussions of Quranic eschatological terminology see also the other contributions in part one of the present publication in general and those by M. Abdel Haleem and J. Hämeen-Anttila in particular.

Kinberg may also evoke paradise: *riḍwān* (divine good pleasure, approval and acceptance) (8), *salsabil* (fountain in paradise) (1), *kawthar* (frequently understood as a river in paradise) (1), *sakīna* (divine presence) (6, see above), and even the root *s-l-m* (divine peace) (140). In the same way, words such as *kufīr* (ingratitude, unbelief) or *al-ghayb* (the unseen) (48) suggest hell (and therefore paradise through enantiodromia) or the invisible spiritual realm which is, of course, the final destination of souls (*al-ma'ād*). In addition, such important passages as Q 7:172 (see below), and its mythic presentation of a time and place beyond time and place in the divine presence, may also be considered a direct reference to the presence of God – in other words, paradise. With these various usages – and many more yet to be marshaled but for which there is no space here to do so – paradise is implicated in most (if not all) of the Quran, either through direct reference or through the rhetorical gesture of referring to something by mentioning its absence (apophasis, aniconism) or its opposite (enantiodromia, paralipsis, irony).

So, paradise, a myth and symbol of such amplitude, is not only multiple and variegated with regard to its comfort, ease, and pleasures, landscape, vegetation, inhabitants, and weather, it is also multiple and variegated with regard to the numerous terms and adjectives with which the Quran refers to it.³⁷ (In the Bible it is only in Revelation that we find anything approaching the *sustained*, sumptuous descriptions found here.³⁸) The promise and description of paradise certainly continues, bolsters, and elaborates strong ethical and moral thematic elements³⁹ and the general élan of the Quran we are so accustomed to identifying as the *raison d'être* of the afterlife: an inducement for acceptable behavior and an argument against bad behavior: *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-nahy 'an al-munkar*. However, paradise is also a message of mercy and forgiveness and is thus concerned or speaks to an additional dimension of a personal existential awakening. In the eschatological logic of the Quran, paradise (*al-janna*, *al-jannāt*, *al-firdaws*) is a subset of the broader category of the afterlife or hereafter, *al-ākhirā*. In keeping with this (largely binary) eschatological and apocalyptic logic,⁴⁰ its mention immediately brings into view several related categories and topics. The primary topic is hellfire (*al-nār*, *jahannam*, *al-jahīm*).

37 On the issue of myth in the context of Islamic apocalypses, see Lange in this volume and his reference to Beltz's important book on the mythology of the Quran, *Sehnsucht nach dem Paradies*.

38 Cf. also the relevant passages from the Old Testament, e.g., Isaiah 11–12; 24–27, 35, 60–66; Daniel 7; Amos 9:7–15; Micah 4–5.

39 D. Cook, *Moral*.

40 Lawson, *Duality*.

Following this come the specific and characteristic geography, material culture, and inhabitants associated with these “places” (*al-kāfūr*, *al-kawthar*, *ḥūrīs*, *nahār*). The mention of such pleasures – comfort, ease, water, wine, milk – also stimulates the Quranically educated imagination to register opposing, related categories and topics in addition to hell and those things associated with these “places” (e.g., *al-zaqqūm*, *al-ghislīn*, fruit as repulsive as the heads of devils: *ka-annahu ruʿūsul-shayātīni*).⁴¹ As an example of eschatological symbolism, both scenarios are of course poised in “fearful” or apocalyptic symmetry with life on earth, pre-mortem. They reflect both each other and the existential verisimilitude of being in the world. This dynamic of duality also pervades the rest of the Quranic text so that whenever oppositions are encountered, and they are encountered very frequently, paradise and hell are also part of the subtext. Paradise is a space where divine mercy is made effective and real. Such associations are simply unavoidable for the “Quranized” consciousness,⁴² and a prime example of the symphonic manner in which the Quran generates both meaning and aesthetic experience.⁴³

5 The Glory Motif

Of the several literary and religious textual features isolated and characterized by recent scholarship as elements of apocalypticism or criteria by which apocalypticism may be identified, the so-called “glory motif” figures prominently.⁴⁴ Glory is a word that combines power, authority, presence, and light.⁴⁵ The original Hebrew word *kvod* connotes “heaviness” and solidity (perhaps along the lines of the Arabic *ṣamad*), but in its usage throughout the Bible it acquired

41 “Symmetry, in any narrative, always means that historical content is being subordinated to mythical demands of design and form.” Frye, *Great code* 43. Indeed the interplay of duality is another distinctive feature of the Quran not found to the same degree in other scriptures of the Abrahamic tradition. See Abdel Haleem and Neuwirth in this volume; Neuwirth, *Symmetrie*; Lawson, *Duality*.

42 Nwyia, *Exégèse* 178.

43 Neuwirth, *Symmetrie*.

44 Koch, *Rediscovery* 28–33, isolated glory among seven other features.

45 Weinfeld, *Presence*, provides an excellent overview of the relationship between presence and glory in the Hebrew Bible. For glory as apocalyptic motif, see Koch, *Rediscovery* 28–33; J.J. Collins, *Imagination* 9–11. See also Kugel, *God*; W.R. Cook, *Glory*; Arbel and Orlov (eds.), *Letters*; Merkur, *Cultivating*; Fox, *Glory*. A fascinating study of the phenomena in early Islam is van Ess, *Youthful*. For Quranic studies of glory outside the Quran but within Islamic intellectual history, see e.g., Corbin, *Man*.

TABLE 6.2 *Quranic Arabic roots related to the glory motif*

Aspect of the Motif	Root
glory as power and authority	‘z-m (128); ‘z-z (119); j-b-r (10); k-b-r (161); m-j-d (4)
Light, fire and appearance	ḏ-w-ʾ (6); j-l-l (2); j-l-w (5); n-w-r (194); s-f-r (12); s-n-w (3); sh-r-q (17); ṭ-l-ʿ (19); w-h-j (1); w-q-d (11); z-h-r (1); z-h-r (59)
communication (including understanding, learning)	ʾw-l (368); ʾw-y (418); ʿ-r-f (70); b-sh-r (123); b-y-n (523); d-b-r (44); dh-k-r (292); f-h-m (1); f-q-h (20); k-l-m (75); k-sh-f (20); l-b-b (16); n-dh-r (130); n-ṭ-q (12); n-z-l (293); q-l-b (168); sh-ʿ-r (38)
presence, propinquity, immediacy and relation	ʿn-d (201); ḥ-w-l (25); l-d-n (18); q-b-l (294); q-r-b (96); s-k-n (69); w-j-d (107); w-l-y (231); w-ṣ-l (13)
praise and glorification	ḥ-m-d (68); s-b-ḥ (60); s-l-m (140)

other features. From being protected and hidden in the ark of the covenant after the exile it became portable beyond the holy of holies as when it visited the prophet Ezekiel in the form of the throne-chariot (*merkabah*) of God (Ezekiel 10) where the glory of God is especially visible in the fiery wheels “within wheels.”⁴⁶ Ultimately, the meaning of glory is “that which makes it possible to perceive or sense the presence (Hebr.: *shʿkhina*) of God or the Lord.” Thus, light and splendor are frequently associated with the idea as is the more abstract notion indicated by the word “presence.” (We will return to the Arabic cognate for *shʿkhina*, *sakīna*.) For the purposes of this very brief and preliminary examination of the glory motif in the Quran we must be content simply with listing some relevant Arabic roots.

The table above does not take into consideration all of those key prepositions which in the proper context communicate proximity to or contact with divine glory (e.g., *bayna* (with or without *yaday*), *bi-*, *ʿinda*, *ladā*, *li-*, *maʿa*, *min*, *qurb*). Nor does it take into full consideration the ubiquitous theme and feature of the divine names and attributes. But there can be no doubt about the presence and prominence of a glory motif in the Quran. Indeed, it may be said

46 Merkur, *Cultivating*, discusses Islamic topics, though not the Quran.

that the glory of God is made manifest whenever revelation occurs. And, as with most topics in the Quran, a positive and a negative perspective are also traceable. A negative aspect of glory (*fakhr*) is highlighted and condemned in numerous passages: "And turn not thy cheek away from people in [false] pride, and walk not haughtily on earth: for, behold, God does not love anyone who, out of self-conceit, acts in a boastful manner." (Asad's translation, Q 31:18; cf. also 57:20 and 20:131) Such condemnation, in obvious conversation with pre-Islamic usages, serves here to offer a foil against which the status of the divine is drawn more finely. This is in perfect harmony with the binary mode of discourse so prominent throughout the Quran.

Pursuing the motif or topos of glory in the Quran, then, quickly becomes an exercise in looking at both the forest and the trees at the same time, and brings into sharper focus the oft-quoted words of Constance Padwick that the Quran is of a special order: "these are not mere letters or mere words. They are the twigs of the burning bush, aflame with God."⁴⁷ On the one hand, the entire "recital" is a theophany: a manifestation of God, appearance of the divine; and on the other, the theophanic text is replete with words and ideas and verbal gestures each of which may be thought to indicate an occurrence of the divine presence or to be understood as doing so. *However, it is also clear, perhaps even before a thorough survey of the vocabulary of glory is available, that glory as power, presence, and mode of communication is a major theme of the Quran.* Hundreds of verses are indicated in the roots and topics mentioned above. Certainly such glory is indicated in the opening epigraph of this paper, quoting Q 39:67–9. Indeed, it may be said that the glory of God is made manifest when revelation occurs. Glory in the Quran is an example of the coalescence of form and function: the glory and greatness of God is the main message of the revelation that is an action of this same glorious God. Nowhere in the Quran (or perhaps for that matter any place else, except perhaps the beatific vision in Dante) is this idea of divine form and function as glory and revelation made more explicit than in the sublime and ravishing Light verse (Q 24:35).

God is the Light of the heavens and the earth;
 the likeness of His Light is as a niche wherein is a lamp
 (the lamp in a glass,
 the glass as it were a glittering star)
 kindled from a Blessed Tree,
 an olive that is neither of the East nor of the West
 whose oil wellnigh would shine, even if no fire touched it;

47 Padwick, *Devotions* 19.

Light upon Light;
 (God guides to His Light whom He will.)
 (And God strikes similitudes for men,
 and God has knowledge of everything.)⁴⁸

This expresses the luminous aspect of glory; however, the equally famous Throne verse (Q 2:255) expresses the power, authority, and [omni-]presence of glory:

God
 there is no god but He, the
 Living, the Everlasting.
 Slumber seizes Him not, neither sleep;
 to Him belongs
 all that is in the heavens and the earth.
 Who is there that shall intercede with Him
 save by His leave?
 He knows what lies before them
 and what is after them,
 and they comprehend not anything of His knowledge
 save such as He wills.
 His Throne comprises the heavens and earth;
 the preserving of them oppresses Him not;
 He is the All-high, the All-glorious.⁴⁹

Q 7:143 became a *locus classicus* for later medieval exegetes such as Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240) in their attempts to explicate the works of divine self-manifestation, *tajalli*. It is the Quranic version of Moses's encounter with God:

When Moses came for the appointment, and his Lord spoke to him, he said, "My Lord, show Yourself to me: let me see You!" He said, "You will never see Me, but look at that mountain: if it remains standing firm, you will see Me," and when his Lord revealed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble: Moses fell down unconscious. When he recovered, he said, "Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance! I am the first to believe!"⁵⁰

48 Arberry translation and versification.

49 Arberry translation and versification.

50 Abdel Haleem translation.

The final key verse is 41:53, the famous “signs” passage in which the function and distribution of the signs of God’s glory and presence are made clear: they are everywhere, in the cosmos and in the souls of individuals. It is understood, of course, that they are also in the Quran since it is a Quranic verse that communicates this knowledge. “We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves (*fī l-āfāq wa-fī anfusihim*), until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth (*hattā yatabayyana lahum annahu al-ḥaqq*). Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?”⁵¹ This last verse, more than any other, emphasizes the Quranic theory of signs, which, in the present context, is also a theory of glory and its transmission by and from its glorious source. It explains why the natural world is a reflection of this glory: the sun, moon, stars, the water, the change of seasons. The natural realm is perceived as a meaningful, “musical” symphony of glory.⁵²

5 Typological Figuration

In the context of the present discussion, glory is of course remarkable in itself and as a marker of apocalypse. The apocalyptic symmetry, which may be thought to generate the light of glory, is at work not only in the trope of duality but also in typological figuration. The connection among the three central poles of glory mentioned above, paradise, covenant, and divine presence (*sakīna*), is

51 Abdel Haleem translation, Arabic transliteration added.

52 Returning to the question of pre-Islamic “glory” before leaving this too brief discussion of Quranic glory, it is of some interest to note its function in the *Burda* poem of Ka’b b. Zubayr where it may be thought to symbolize the question at hand: In line 48 of the poem as given by Ibn Ishāq, the Prophet is presented as a light from which illumination is sought. In the alternate reading, the Prophet is a sword from which illumination is sought. However, it is important to note that in both readings it is the illumination that is the center of attention, its essence is untouched by the place, manner or mode of appearance. In an important study, Stetkevych demonstrates that glory as illumination and presence was very much a part of the poetic resources of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry. (S.P. Stetkevych, *Mantle* 70–150.) This calls to mind the renowned story surrounding the conception of the Prophet Muḥammad. When his father, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-Muṭallib was on his way to the home of Āmina bt. Wahb (the Prophet Muḥammad’s mother), a light was seen shining from his brow. After the conjugal visit during which the Prophet was conceived the light was no longer visible. (Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* i, 115–6.) Thus the Quran’s concern with light as supernatural glory is a natural theme common to its time and place. (See also, for example, Annus, Mesopotamian precursors and Winter, Radiance, for related discussions of other pre-Islamic phenomena.) It is therefore no wonder that it is such a prevalent expectation of the Quran’s audience.

expressed through this powerful literary device of extraordinary imaginative vigor. Though typological figuration has been a key to understanding the composition and audience of the New Testament,⁵³ it has not really attracted the wide attention of Quran scholars. However, whatever attention it has attracted has been sufficient to demonstrate its intimate connection to the Quranic production of meaning.⁵⁴ The figure is so pervasive in literature that we sometimes forget it is functioning and it becomes transparent. So, in the Bible Egypt frequently stands for evil, darkness, and oppression.⁵⁵ Babylon and Rome in the Bible function as antitypes and also represent the original Egyptian evil. Jonah delivered from the fish is seen by Christian readers as a prefiguration of Christ's resurrection. In Roman mythopoeic history, Augustus is simultaneously Romulus, Aeneas, and Caesar.⁵⁶ Mary may be, as in the Quran, identified through typological figuration with Maryam of the Hebrew Bible,⁵⁷ and the ark of the covenant in Christian thought.⁵⁸ Jesus, through the Christian reading of the Hebrew Bible and prophetic history is seen as the second Adam, or a figuration of the prophet Joseph,⁵⁹ Moses (based on Deuteronomy 18:15), Elijah or John the Baptist (Luke 9:7–9) or the Lamb of God. This literary device also serves to identify the Prophet Muḥammad with every other prophet sent by God in an exclusive brotherhood of specially chosen emissaries of truth (*al-ḥaqq*) and bearers of revelation, just as his community represents all earlier prophetic communities intent on vanquishing and combating evil to worship the one true God.⁶⁰ Even if the functioning of the device is so pervasive as to be transparent or undetected, like water for a fish, it nonetheless remains a very powerful component of the imaginative habitat of Quranic consciousness.

From its own – perhaps somewhat “imperialistic” – point of view, Islam is the third in a series of three stages of what might be called a succession of typological readings or exegeses of scripture: (1) Hebrew Bible; (2) New

53 Goppelt, *Typos*; Auerbach, *Figura*.

54 Zwettler, *Mantic*; Stewart, *Understanding*; Lawson, *Typological*.

55 A notable exception is Isaiah 19:25b: “Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

56 Hardie, *Metamorphosis*.

57 Cf. the Quranic Maryam, e.g., at Sura 19. “Christian commentators on the Koran naturally say that this is ridiculous, but from a purely typological point of view from which the Koran is speaking, the identification makes good sense.” (Frye, *Great code* 172. See now Abboud, *Mary*.)

58 Kreuzer, *Ark*.

59 Fairbairn, *Typology* 126.

60 Zwettler, *Mantic*.

Testament; (3) Quran.⁶¹ These three scriptures are united in their concern with divine glory and presence. And, we see from this Islamic perspective that this same typological hermeneutic simultaneously unites and distinguishes each of these scriptures and communities. The workings of typological figuration and interpretation, especially in the instance of Abrahamic religion, has perhaps been best characterized by Northrop Frye. Frye's words on this are most instructive:

Typology points to future events that are often thought of as transcending time, so that they contain a vertical lift as well as a horizontal move forward. The metaphorical kernel of this is the experience of waking up from a dream, as when Joyce's Stephen Dedalus speaks of history as a nightmare from which he is trying to awake. When we wake up from sleep, one world is simply abolished and replaced by another. This suggests a clue to the origin of typology: it is essentially a revolutionary form of thought and rhetoric. We have revolutionary thought whenever the feeling "life is a dream" becomes geared to an impulse to awaken from it.⁶²

The aptness of this insight for the Islamic instance and the literary workings of the Quran would appear to be borne out by the very fact and reality of what might be called the "revolutionary élan" of the formative years of Islam. Thus, a "mere literary device" is both imbued with and expresses the imaginative energy of apocalypse, another term for which might be "spiritual revolution," "paradigm shift" or "enlightenment." The apocalyptic revolution, as Collins says, is first and foremost "a revolution in the imagination."⁶³

6 Covenant

Glory and divine presence permeate the Quran and are encountered when it is encountered. In the Quranic historiography of revelation, the very first instance of their appearance is at the day of the covenant (*ahd*, *mīthāq*), recounted at Q 7:172:

61 Indeed, exegesis as such is a well-attested mode for the apocalypticist: Collins, *Imagination* 205–10; Lawson, *Gnostic* 1–20.

62 Frye, *Great code* 82–3.

63 Collins, *Imagination* 215; Goppelt, *Typos*; Auerbach, *Figura*; Frye, *Great code*; Collins, *Dead Sea scrolls* 204.

When your Lord took out the [yet unborn future generations of] offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, "Am I not your Lord?" and they replied, "Yes, we bear witness." So you cannot say on the Day of Resurrection, "We were not aware of this."

This is the day on which all were part of a greater unity, that of humanity, Banū Ādam.⁶⁴ Such primordial unity had been a secret, but now it is disclosed and in the process of disclosure solves numerous problems facing the young community, not least of which is the problem presented by the "chaos of religions" (sometimes referred to as the "sectarian milieu") out of which Islam may be seen to have arisen.⁶⁵ With the doctrine of the covenant, the unity of humanity under one God is not a mere "political" expediency but an eternal, inviolable, sacred truth. The luminous spirit of that day of intimacy (Ar. *unsūyya* > *nās*, *insān*) and unity in the covenant, an occasion for the manifestation of divine glory, circulates through every word and letter of the Quran. And through typological figuration the reality of the primordial covenant is enhanced, elaborated, given substance; it is repeated through the line of prophets and in the recitation of the Quran.

Apocalypse is characterized by urgency and intensity. Paradise and hellfire are two mutually exclusive and, paradoxically, mutually enhancing tropes of intensity.⁶⁶ They are also spatial. From a literary point of view, they balance each other. As for time, the counterpart of space, there are two similarly balancing tropes of intensity.⁶⁷ The epic scope of the Quran proceeds from or begins with the first of these intensity tropes, namely the day of the covenant described at Q 7:172. When God posed the key Quranic question: Am I not your Lord? All humanity, there assembled for the occasion, responded with an enthusiastic (in the literal sense) and immediate: Yes indeed!⁶⁸ The presence of God on the day of the covenant is repeated and fulfilled on the day of

64 Note the words used to refer to the two previous scriptures in Arabic: *al-'ahd al-qadīm* = "the older or former testament/covenant" and *al-'ahd al-jadīd* = "the new testament/covenant," cf. e.g.: *al-Kitāb al-Muqaddas ay kutub al-'ahd al-qadīm wa-l-'ahd al-jadīd* ("The Holy Book, namely the books of the old or former testament/covenant and the new testament/covenant"), Beirut 1951. Strictly speaking, the main title should be understood as: "The Book Deemed Holy [by God]."

65 Wansbrough, *Sectarian*; Lawson, Coherent chaos.

66 The trope of intensity was first suggested as a characteristic of the Quran as apocalypse in Lawson, Duality 25.

67 Abdel Haleem (trans.), *The Qur'an* ix–xx.

68 For a recent comprehensive study of what emerges as *the* central mytheme of the Quran and Islam, see al-Qāḍi, *Primordial*.

judgment which in its symmetry with the great gathering on the day of *a-last*⁶⁹ provides literary and apocalyptic balance. The Quranic covenant is the place where everything began. The return may be thought to be to that same place of the covenant, though now embellished with the effects and contents of the process or “adventure” of consciousness: paradise. Its lavish description may be seen as a way in which this intensity – an intensity of nearness, presence, expectation, and encounter (*ittiṣāl*, “attaining connection with,” or *ma‘īyya*, “propinquity, nearness” as distinct from *ittiḥād*, “unification with”) – may be repeated, replayed, re-experienced through precisely remembrance (another name for the Quran – *al-Dhikr*). As such, then, the Quranic paradise is made “present” through a literary, imitative recital (*ḥikāya*) and melismatic prolongation and continuance of this first moment (dramatized here as consciousness) which in the characteristic supra-logical atmosphere of myth, is beyond space and time “before creation.” That it is beyond time and place, however, does nothing to vitiate or weaken the spiritual and existential intensity of the drama of the covenant. Quite the reverse, its mythic voice produces the opposite effect.

Apocalypse communicates the intuition that time is that which keeps everything from happening at once, and language is that which articulates meaning out of the undifferentiated transcendent – from our pre-enlightened point of view – *massa confusa* to keep everything from being said at once and to thus be understandable and meaningful here in the sublunar realm.⁷⁰ Put another way, it reminds us of the true nature of reality and history.⁷¹

Between the beginning and the end, however, divine presence recurs in various forms. This presence is of course an apocalypse, whether from the point of view of the revelations themselves, the “miraculous signs” which have been placed in the souls, in the cosmos, and in the book (Q 41:53) or the

69 As it is universally known in the Islamic world, the day of “Am I not” echoes the sacred question from Q 7:172: *a-lastu bi-rabbikum* = Am I not your Lord?

70 Cf. Stock, *Augustine* 32–242.

71 Something of the idea is captured in this characterization from Franz Rosenthal: “The entire world in all its variety was created by the one creator at one particular moment. It follows that oneness was the ideal state for it at all times and that to which it should always aspire. As the beginning was one, so the expected end of the world is one for everyone and everything. Whatever is and takes place in between these two definite points of created time, no matter how varied in detail, follows a set overall pattern. Thus the history of the past and of the future, including that of the present, is fundamentally uniform. No distinction between the three modes of time need be made by the observer of human history.” Rosenthal, *History* 430.

more dramatic descent from time to time of the apocalyptic “divine presence” (*sakīna*, see below).⁷²

The day of the covenant remains solidly and firmly established in the mind of the Quran, the mind of Islam and Muslims as the beginning of everything; most importantly, as the beginning of consciousness and the beginning of history. Such is a major component of what might be termed Islamic “soul formation” or religious and spiritual imagination: the education of the soul (cf. *alma mater*). From a literary point of view, such intensity may only be balanced by its opposite, namely the end of everything or the destruction of the world, time, and consciousness of these “things.” A word from the Islamicate mystical vocabulary for this event is annihilation, *fanāʾ*. The Quranic word for it is the Hour, *al-sāʿa*. Paradise functions in this context as a promise of intensified or “abundant” (cf. John 10:10) life and the continuance of the primordial intensity of love and intimacy indicated at Q 7:172. Indeed, the entire Quran and its contents may be thought of as a (perhaps operatically) prolonged instance of textual melisma – to borrow a technical term from the tradition of religious chant in the Christian tradition – in which the controlling “syllable” is precisely the covenant mytheme of Q 7:172.⁷³ Such revelatory music provides both a causal and typological argument for the unity of the Quranic prophets and their communities.⁷⁴ In this, all contents also simultaneously refer to and depend upon the promised denouement of *al-ākhirā*.⁷⁵ The light surrounding all Quranic

72 Lawson, Apocalypse 39.

73 On the pervasive feature of melisma in Arabic music in general and in Quran recitation in particular, see Nelson, *Art* 127, 128, 132, 148, 235. My thanks to Prof. G. Sawa for valuable discussion on this topic.

74 Levitin, *Your brain* 6. See also Jarret, *Drifting*. The question is not so much how the Quran itself might have changed from one generation to the next – from pre-canonical to pre-exegetical. Rather, the revealing question concerns how and in what ways the audiences from generation to generation changed. How did their “musical expectations” both differ from and relate to the expectations of the Quran’s first hearers. For the example of *al-sakīna* see Goldziher, La notion 11.

75 Melisma is a prominent distinguishing feature of Arabic music even as it has fallen out of favor in other cultural contexts. This bespeaks the profound appreciation of the relationship in Arabic literature and poetics between sound and sense and its continued vitality. The type of ideational melisma suggested here is a natural implication of this and the kind of characterizations found, for example, in Scholem, *Major trends* 130–5, in discussing the kabbalistic contemplations of Abu Lafia as structured on a “music of pure thought.”

statements is the glorious and awesome relationship between the day of the covenant and the end.⁷⁶

One of the chief accomplishments of typological figuration is the manipulation or control of time, in the same way music may be thought to control and exploit time and its illusions of movement and sequence. Thus, the reading act may become a “technique of ecstasy” in the sense that the ephemeral self – as a construction or function of space/time – is escaped and the true identity of the reader/believer is instantly “found” (cf. *wajd* “ecstasy” derived from *wajada* “to find” from which is derived *wujūd* “existence, being”) at the primordial moment of the covenant “beyond time and space,” the day of *a-last*.⁷⁷ Time, after all, has the habit of making us think that only the present is real.⁷⁸ Quite apart from this collapse or erasure of historical time which Quranic typological figuration accomplishes,⁷⁹ existential and “normal” historical time is also quite malleable in the hands of the apocalypticist. Through historical periodization – another marker of apocalypse⁸⁰ – (*jāhiliyya* ≠ *islāmiyya*, or the “times” of the various pre-Islamic prophets and their communities) and similar narratological turns, “dumb” and “amorphous” time is transformed into eloquent, teleological, and monumental or epic history.⁸¹ Muḥammad’s virtuoso performance is no exception. With the replacement of mindless time (*dahr*) and formless space with Quranic history and place and then the erasure of this same construction to return to “the presence of God” at the “moment of covenant” a formidable, imaginative power is deployed. To be in Quranic time and space is to be at the beating heart of apocalypse where past, present, and future all meet and whose worldly/*dunyawī* distinctions somehow disappear altogether. Instrument and music merge. Performance and performer, as in a dream, become one. After all, it is a relatively recent development in Western culture, which saw the severe separation of two previously rather imperfectly delineated groups: performers and audience. And “literal reading” of scripture is also a relatively recent preoccupation. Ancient readers tended to read

76 Cf. Bowering, *Time* (EQ) 286–7.

77 Al-Qāḍī, *Primordial*; Zwettler, *Mantic*; Frye, *Fearful symmetry*; Auerbach, *Figura*; Lawson, *Duality*.

78 G. Bowering, *Ideas of time in Persian Sufism*, in *Iran* 30 (January 1, 1992), 77–89; Stowasser, *Time sticks*.

79 Lawson, *Duality*.

80 In addition to J.J. Collins, *Imagination*, see Funkenstein, *Perceptions*.

81 Baumgarten, *Apocalyptic time*; Funkenstein, *Perceptions*; Garcia Martinez, *Apocalypticism*; VanderKam, *Calendars*; Rosenthal, *History*.

typologically and poetically.⁸² To chant the Quran, a *reminder* (though the word seems very pallid in the present context) of the covenant, is to cause the divine presence (*sakīna*) to descend and literally to enchant the now sacred space. The architecture and structure of such enchantment is sturdier than a cathedral.⁸³ The divine presence, so conjured, communicates and anticipates something of the essential reality of paradise.

A suggestive example for comparison with the experience of Quranic space/time is found through the medium of the magnificent fresco in the crypt of the cathedral of Anagni. Surrounded by the images and events disclosed in the Apocalypse, the biblical Book of Revelation, which adorn the contours of the ceiling of the crypt (see illustration below) and conceived by an unknown artist from the twelfth century, one may be moved to ponder how this virtuosic, essentially artistic, performance struck the medieval beholder.⁸⁴ The natural questions arising to our beholder are: did all of these events already happen? Are they destined to occur in the future? Or, are they actually happening now? The crypt itself answers “Yes” in the grammatical mood of simultaneity to all three questions and the observer nods assent. This understanding or reading derives partly from the skill of the painter and partly from the observer’s own experience of being in this particular apocalyptically-charged, enchanted “divine” space.

Obviously, in the case of the Quran the reader/auditor is surrounded, absorbed in, and engulfed not by graphic images, but by the sonorities and meanings of the Quranic theophany, which include frequent, sumptuous depictions of paradise. The noetic and experiential effect (cf. *ḥāl*) may be thought similar: awareness, enlightenment, recognition.⁸⁵ Prophetic utterance is somehow timeless, and constitutes a tense of its own – the “prophetic perfect.”⁸⁶ Now the world is experienced as singular and undifferentiated – a reflection of the transcendent unity of God, ontologically prior to what might

82 Frye, *Great code* 6–17 and his discussion of the phases of language. See also the numerous supportive examples in Günther (ed.), *Ideas* and Neuwirth et al. (eds.), *Myths*.

83 Hajjaji-Jarrah, *Enchantment*.

84 Ravasi, *Crypt* 38.

85 With regard to the move away from such “mythic thinking” in western intellectual history, the following comment is suggestive: “Leibniz believed in the *Prisca Theologia* just as much as Newton did, but he could envision submarines, airplanes and all kinds of things absent from ancient texts. For that matter so could Roger Bacon and Leonardo da Vinci. Past perfect and future perfect only began to be separated during Newton’s lifetime. It would take the eighteenth century to accomplish this separation, at a cost well-documented by Romantics and conservatives of every subsequent generation.” (Coudert, Newton 42.)

86 Wilson, *Red* 128.



FIGURE 6.1 *Anagni cathedral crypt.*

be considered an iterative, melismatic process of creation. It is as if the past, the present and the future are all “in the same room.” In this case, the room is an enchanted (“sung into being”) “room” defined and produced by the recitation. The room is the Quran. So, even though the original covenant “has occurred” somewhere in the remote and mysterious placeless and timeless (*lā makān* and *lā zamān*) it is potentially revived and relived at every moment of passing time with the same message: we are all now united as we were “then.” The process, the content, and the form the message takes is apocalyptic, revelatory: *al-ḥaqq*. On the day of the covenant, glory was experienced fully and completely. In the world (*dunyā*), glory is experienced intermittently. While it may be that some spiritual athletes (ἄσκησις / *áskēsis* < asceticism) and virtuosi experience it more steadily, it remains at best, we are told, a fleeting and interrupted experience. Paradise, however, is the promise of a return to the primordial presence of glory and intimacy indicated at Q 7:172. Thus glory connects what has been characterized as the three cardinal periods of Islamic time: the primordial covenant – the life in or of the world – and the hereafter.⁸⁷ One dramatic symbol of this intermittency (and simultaneous eternity), during the ephemeral vagaries of being in the world, is found in the Quranic word *sakīna* and its various descents in time.

87 See above, fn. 71, the long quotation from Rosenthal.

7 Divine Presence: *Al-sakīna*

The function of this distinctive Quranic “character,” scholars agree, relates to the experience of the divine presence and glory pre-mortem, as it were.⁸⁸ The *sakīna*, undoubtedly an emblematic evidence of Islam’s Abrahamic genealogy, occurs in the Quran when important “sacramental” requirements are felt: first, under the tree of oath-taking at al-Ḥudaybiya (6/628), we have a typical figuration of the cosmogonic day of the covenant (highlighted above) and a simultaneous celebration of an Abrahamic genealogy for which it is also an instance of typological invocation. Al-Ḥudaybiya was of course inestimably important for the future of Islam, establishing as it did a détente between the Prophet Muḥammad and the Quraysh of Mecca. Second, the divine presence “descends” at the battle of Badr (2/624), when help and encouragement were sorely needed. Third, it appears during the *hijra* (began 26 Safar 1/13 June 622) when the Prophet and Abū Bakr were seeking refuge in the cave and *sakīna* descended and inspired confidence and faith so that the Prophet could also encourage his companion. The circumstances of the three remaining instances are akin to the above: the establishing of authority, the reassuring of both Muḥammad and the believers, and an experience of the presence and glory of God.

As a sign of the divine presence, *sakīna* is also an example of the many ways in which the glory motif functions in the Quran. Indeed, it may be said that the glory of God is made manifest when revelation occurs. What distinguishes the other world from this world, in the logic of the Quran, is the added degrees and intensities of propinquity, either to divine reward (nearness) or divine punishment (remoteness). *Al-sakīna* is a timeless (though periodic) emblem (and personification) of this intensity, mentioned six times in this form of the verbal root *s-k-n*. To give a clearer idea of the way in which the Quran privileges this spiritual reality, we list here the six verses in the order in which they appear in the *muṣḥaf*:⁸⁹

- 1 Their prophet said to them, “The sign of his authority will be that the ark [of the covenant] will come to you. In it there will be [the gift of] tranquility (*fīhi sakīnatun*) from your Lord and relics of the followers of Moses and Aaron, carried by the angels. There is a sign in this for you if you believe.” (Q 2:248)

88 Goldziher, La notion; Fahd, *Sakīna*.

89 Abdel Haleem translation, Arabic transliteration added.

- 2 Then God sent His calm down to His Messenger (*thumma anzala Allāhu sakīnatahu ‘alā rasūlihi*) and the believers, and He sent down invisible forces. He punished the disbelievers – this is what the disbelievers deserve. (Q 9:26)
- 3 Even if you do not help the Prophet, God helped him when the disbelievers drove him out: when the two of them were in the cave, he said to his companion, “Do not worry, God is with us,” and God sent His calm down to him (*fa-anzala Allāhu sakīnatahu ‘alayhi*), aided him with forces invisible to you, and brought down the disbelievers’ plan. God’s plan is higher: God is almighty and wise. (Q 9:40)
- 4 It was He who made His tranquility descend into the hearts of the believers (*huwa l-ladhī anzala l-sakīna fī qulūbi l-mu’minīna*) to add faith to their faith – the forces of the heavens and earth belong to God; He is all knowing and all wise. (Q 48:4)
- 5 God was pleased with the believers when they swore allegiance to you under the tree: He knew what was in their hearts and so He sent tranquility down to them (*fa-anzala l-sakīna ‘alayhim*) and rewarded them with a speedy triumph. (Q 48:18)
- 6 While the disbelievers had fury in their hearts – the fury of ignorance – God sent His tranquility down on to His Messenger (*fa-anzala Allāhu sakīnatahu ‘alā rasūlihi*) and the believers and made binding on them [their] promise to obey God, for that was more appropriate and fitting for them. God has full knowledge of all things. (Q 48:26)

In all but one case (Q 2:248) the *sakīna* is sent down directly by God and is thus, in line with the Quranic technical lexicon, a revelation or apocalyptic event – an obvious event (and trope) of intensity and encounter with the divine presence echoing the primordial encounter described at Q 7:172.⁹⁰ In the *ḥadīth* literature, as is well known, this virtue or “sacramental value” is extended to apply to the “normal” recitation of the Quran by the believer. Thus, the idea that whenever the Quran is chanted this same glorious, reassuring, peace-inducing presence descends with the recitation and conditions the space in which it is chanted which space thus becomes, literally, enchanted. Such enchantment is of course exponentially enhanced and intensified through the verbal artistry of the Quran.⁹¹

90 Ryan, Descending; see also Ghaemmaghami’s chapter in the present volume, especially concerning the descent of the *qā’im*.

91 For a masterful article on this, see Hajjaji-Jarrah, Enchantment.

8 Conclusion

In addition to all of the above tabulated and listed elements present in the Quran, several of them may be thought to converge and indeed be harmonized in the controlling topos (or perhaps better *temenos* / τέμενος) of paradise, which then emerges as *the center of apocalyptic synergy in the Quran*.⁹² Paradise accounts, directly, for a significant portion of the contents of the Quran, significantly more than the 500 or so verses of content dedicated to legal and prescriptive matter.⁹³ However, if we consider indirect references to paradise, the situation is even more impressive. From this perspective even the “unapocalyptic,” “rational,” “unpoetic,” “unhymnic” laws and regulations of the Quranic legal code may also be thought to pertain to and evoke paradise inasmuch as their obedience or disobedience has direct bearing on whether the individual will be admitted to paradise or its counterpart, hell, in the postmortem drama of salvation and damnation of the Quran. It has been shown, in Biblical and apocalyptic scholarship (including studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Qumran community) that calendars and other legal prescriptions, rather than being the opposite of apocalyptic, actually harmonize with the apocalyptic vision of a text or series of texts, depending upon context.⁹⁴ This, in fact, is one of the more persuasive elements in judging the Quran an apocalypse, as opposed to simply noticing this or that apocalyptic verse or Sura. The mood and mode of apocalypse actually takes over the entire text.

It is superfluous to attempt a differentiation between chronologically later revealed so-called Medinan and the chronologically earlier revealed so-called Meccan Suras on the subject of paradise, even though the actual topic of the last day is less explicit in the Medinan Suras.⁹⁵ The idea unites both periods in that there is a direct correspondence between an individual's deeds and their “eschatology.” The subject or “target” of apocalypse – of revelation – is precisely humanity, whether as individual or community. Paradise, as noted, is the key to understanding the spirit of Islam.⁹⁶ It certainly continues and reinforces the strong ethical and moral élan we are so accustomed to identifying as the *raison d'être* of the afterlife. But it also adds an overlay, an additional dimension of a personal existential awakening and experience by repeating or replaying the

92 Such harmony is an essential feature of the Quran's music of apocalypse.

93 Hallaq, *Law* 150.

94 VanderKam, *Calendars*; cf. also the Dead Sea scroll entitled Community Rule; Collins, *Was the Dead Sea sect*; Roth, *Dead*.

95 Kinberg, *Paradise* 18–9.

96 *Ibid.*, 19.

experience of presence indicated at Q 7:172. Here the much-loved and much-quoted *ḥadīth* of the Prophet is germane: “Men are asleep and when they die they awake.”⁹⁷ The moments of descent when the event of the covenant is recalled (cf. *dhikr*) are in this connection so many preludes or foretastes of the great awakening referred to in the *ḥadīth*. Such foretastes of paradise, through the evocation of glory and intimacy indicated in the myth of the covenant, abound. With these prefigurations of awakening (enlightenment/apocalypse), the subject may indeed “ascend” through various stages (cf. e.g., here the traditional 100 “abodes” of *al-janna*, in which *firdaws* – paradise – is frequently, though certainly not always, the highest) until the presence or vision of God is experienced. A defining and controlling model for this is the prophet’s journey and ascension, which came to figure prominently early on, both as an exegesis of otherwise mute and mysterious Quranic statements and as an example to be emulated or aspired to.⁹⁸ It may be added that the traditional interpretation of this powerful, living, spiritual *Bildungsmythos* as a somewhat comedic explanation of the institution of the ritual prayer service (*al-ṣalāt*) is an obvious ploy for taming the otherwise potentially destabilizing and perhaps “dangerous” image of a profound personal and authoritative spiritual or mystical experience. The story is an attempt at domesticating the apocalypse. Doubtless, this was sincerely felt to be for the best. The familiar term *visio beatifica* and its English translation is, in this context, misleading and thus avoided.

Paradise as an otherworldly “supra-rational” location is, as in the above table, a recognized marker of apocalyptic literature. But, paradise is especially interesting because of the number of other apocalyptic themes that are directly connected to it: triumph of good over evil; judgment; strange and fantastic beings; typological figuration; enantiodromia; glory motif; true home; the foil and consummation for time/history and periodization; synesthesia; and divine presence. In this, paradise may be thought the chiasmic center of the entire Quran, where the other contents of the book meet as spokes of a wheel.⁹⁹ It was an earlier wheel, after all, that represented the “escape” of *kvod*, divine glory, from the now “occupied” temple to join and comfort the Jews in their painful exile. *Kvod* is at the very foundation for the study of the glory motif in the Hebrew Bible. Glory in the Quran is known by a number of names and situations. It is frequently “brought to light” through duality, opposition,

97 Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i mathnawī* #222.

98 Günther, *Paradiesevorstellungen* 44–9.

99 On importance of chiasmus in the Quran, see Cuypers, *Le festin*; Ernst, *How to read*.

and symmetry in the Quran, and their narrative and doctrinal issue of typological figuration and oneness (*wahda/tawhīd*).¹⁰⁰

The consideration of the Quran as an apocalypse invites questions about the nature of apocalypse, what it has meant, what it means in current scholarly discussions, and why the category is or is not useful in the study of religion and literature generally and in the study of the Quran and Islam specifically. It is hoped that the discussion above demonstrates the unique usefulness of such methodological tools as a generic notion of apocalypse for the study of the Quran. We have seen that when paradise is described in the Quran it is certainly not mere literary allusion. Rather, due to the complexity, interconnectedness, harmony, and mutual resonances of the images – that is to say the literary nature of the discourse – along with their eternal/final implications, one might refer to the cultivation of an “apocalyptic sensorium.” It is such a sensorium that is now in operation and deployed and employed by the audience, believer, and reader. The eyes and ears that register the descriptions of paradise are organs of the imagination – an apocalyptic or revelatory imagination. The secret of paradise is revealed in the Quran through this sensorium. The apocalyptic sensorium is the one that leads beyond the earthly diurnal world to a new (but not completely different¹⁰¹) realm.

A more intense trope than the end or destruction of the world can hardly be imagined and, in literary and perhaps psychological terms, this “negative intensity” is balanced by the positive intensity of paradise and its Quranic description-cum-celebration. Intensity is a “venue” or “occasion” (cf. *sabab*) for truth telling, as in natural catastrophes, wars, famines, funerals, weddings, and births. During such occasions one delivers oneself of the truth. Thus, the “mere” notion of “the Truth” (cf. *al-ḥaqq*) carries apocalyptic resonances of certainty and finality. Such truth and honesty are demanded by virtue of the Hour and end of days imagery. Intensity is also encountered, read, and experienced in numerous other Quranic passages, or – perhaps better, at various Quranic “moments” (sing. *waqt*, cf. *al-sā‘a*). Some of these more conspicuous instances are the “moment” and very idea of revelation (= ἀποκάλυψις / apocalypse), *bayān*, *kashf*, *tanzīl*, *ḥaqq* (cf. ἀλήθεια / aletheia), which is, of course, everywhere in the Quran, and may be thought particularly “thickened” at such celebrated passages as the Light verse, the Throne verse, the Night of Power

100 Lawson, Duality; Lawson, Apocalypse; Lawson, Typological; Lawson, Le Coran et l'imaginaire.

101 As argued in Nagel's contribution in this volume.

or the descent of the heavenly table, *al-mā'ida*.¹⁰² All descents/revelations are moments of disclosure, encounter, and intensity. The language used to describe them is therefore perforce experienced as a trope of intensity and understood also as topos or topoi of intensity since such communication is the main event of the Quranic apocalypse: meaning and form are perfectly fused. The Quran is more concerned with revelation than with anything else, including God/Allah, prophets, and community. From this perspective, each of these separate subjects function as occasions or modes of revelation (literally *asbāb al-nuzūl*). However important they are for Islamic religious thought and practice, they are second in importance to the event (cf. *al-wāq'i'a*) of revelation, without which there would be no knowledge of any kind. It is useful here to think of such "major themes of the Quran" as first order or meta-occasions of revelation/apocalypse and the traditional *asbāb* as secondary or subsidiary or contingent occasions of revelation.

It is not being argued here that the Quran be somehow squeezed into a category determined by etic, non-native, invasive or "neo-colonialist" considerations and "outsider" practitioners in a gesture of "neo-Orientalism." Rather the opposite idea is key: the Quran, because it embodies so much in common with current scholarly notions and definitions of apocalypse (while simultaneously displaying obvious departures), may offer insight about such a genre and its structures, limitations, and dynamics. To the extent that the New Testament acquires meaning in the context of a Holy Bible having a beginning, middle, and end (Genesis, Life of Christ, Revelation), it is also the case that it is an apocalyptic text read and imagined by an apocalyptic community.¹⁰³ To the extent that the Quran focuses on revelation, the day of judgment, paradise, and hell it is also the book of an apocalyptic community, a book in which every letter and every word, every verse and every Sura is imbued with the same intensity and "presence" (cf. *sakīna*). One might suggest that paradise in the Quran, while certainly an eschatological theme, is also something more. A provisional taxonomy may go something like this: eschatology in the key of speculative or dialectical theological, philosophical, and mystical "religious" discourse is a subject and result of logocentric scholarly pursuit. Eschatology in the key of

102 Cf. the holy descent of the banquet in the Dead Sea Scrolls . . . It is a symptom of the current state of our studies that there is no reference at all to Qumran in Cuypers' magnificent and truly groundbreaking study of the fifth Sura. See, with caution, Gallez, *Messie*.

103 As such a term is used to refer, for example, to Qumran. See Collins, Was the Dead Sea sect; Collins, *Dead Sea scrolls* 45–7 and 130 where he characterizes both the Essenes and the early church as apocalyptic communities. See also Collins, *Imagination* 145 and passim Vermès, *Jesus*. On Qumran see also the more recent VanderKam, *Apocalyptic tradition*.

prophecy is something else. To articulate an only somewhat circular argument, the distinctive nature of Islamic apocalyptic may be understood more perfectly by focusing on the Quran, in contradistinction to extra Quranic material and historical events. And, it brings us closer to understanding the nature of a sacramental dimension in reading the Quran. As Hodgson said so eloquently:

For the Qur'ân continued, as in Mecca and Medina, to be a monumental challenge. In its form, it continued, even after the ending of active revelation with Muḥammad's life, to be an event, an act, rather than merely a statement of facts or of norms. It was never designed to be read for information or even for inspiration, but to be recited as an act of commitment in worship; nor did it become a mere sacred source of authority as the founding of Islam receded into time. It continued its active role among all who accepted Islam and took it seriously. What one did with the Qur'ân was not to peruse it but to worship by means of it; not to passively receive it but, in reciting it, to reaffirm it for oneself: the event of revelation was renewed every time one of the faithful, in the act of worship, relived the Qur'ânic affirmations.¹⁰⁴

Suppose our knowledge of the Quran began only recently with a discovery of mysterious scrolls in a desert cave. Suppose there was no Muslim community, no Islamic history, no Islamic science or civilization to help us read these scrolls. Is it conceivable that we might mistake these Quran scrolls for the central text of a long vanished apocalyptic community whose ideas about the next world, colorful and fantastic as they appear, nonetheless are understood to make perfect sense in the context of one of the more prevalent genres of late antiquity? There seems to be little reason for us to continue to avoid referring to this powerful and glorious imagery of a transcendent realm and its role in the reward and punishment – the judgment – of good and evil, as apocalyptic.

The prejudice of Church scholasticism toward the Book of Revelation mentioned above may have been inherited and elaborated by modern and some contemporary Quranic scholarship, through a long and complicated process and result in a kind of strange “political correctness” in the present instance. Note this strong statement transcribed from a medieval and dismissive critique of the Quran's paradise discourse: “All these descriptions of paradise suit only stupid ignorant people who are inexperienced and unfamiliar with reading texts and understanding old traditions, and who are just a rabble of

104 Hodgson, *Venture* i, 367.

rough Bedouins accustomed to eating lizards and chameleons.”¹⁰⁵ Surely, the descriptions of paradise in the Quran are no more outlandish or fantastic than the contents of the Book of Revelation. Perhaps it is the tendency to think of “apocalyptic” as simultaneously irrational, marginal, and peripheral to a conceptualized necessary mainstream that has caused a *de facto* tendency, out of well-meaning respect – to not to consider the Quran an apocalypse (whatever else it may *also* be).¹⁰⁶ Of course, not all judgments have been so negative.¹⁰⁷

Another reason for the neglect of such a potentially fruitful and stimulating method for the study of the Quran centers on the undesirable (and accidental) associations with the mere word “apocalypse” and its untutored and colloquial acceptance as destruction and violence. A third possible reason for such neglect relates to the role of “narrative” in most definitions (and instances) of the apocalypse genre. The perceived absence of a continuous narrative, or the perceived presence of a deeply flawed and defective narrative layer of the Quran, has long been a bulwark of western studies of the Quran. Recent scholarship, however, has drawn attention to a robust (but heretofore elusive, if not totally unrecognized) chiasmic narrative structure in the Quran, a structure that derives from oral “composition” and is found throughout history in orally composed poems and narratives. The “discovery” of the ring or chiasmic structure of the Quran’s longer Suras and sequences of shorter Suras has shone floods of light on the study of Quranic narrative.¹⁰⁸ Sometimes referred to as “Semitic rhetoric,” this structure entails the deployment of a series of symmetries which direct attention toward the center of the composition that thus emerges as the main point of the text both physically and conceptually, in contrast to the main point of a text being located at the conclusion, as is the case in other types of compositions. In addition, various distinctive features of the text, such as duality and typological figuration, have been shown to provide a coherent and powerful narrative spine or stream for the entire book.¹⁰⁹ It emerges that the Quran may be simultaneously an apocalypse and whatever else it so obviously is: prophetic scripture of ethical monotheism. The two modes need not be mutually exclusive. Furthermore, current work on the epic

105 Kinberg, Paradise 12. Kinberg continues, that such statements “transcribed by Jews in Hebrew characters and translated from Arabic into Latin, taught the Spanish Christians how to fight Islam in the most vigorous and harsh way.”

106 Cook, *Studies*.

107 Leemhuis, quoted above as one of three envoys from his Apocalypse, 111–2.

108 Cuypers, *La composition*; Cuypers, *Une apocalypse*; Cuypers, *Le festin*; Ernst, *How to read*.

109 Lawson, Duality.

dimension of the Quran is likely to shed more light on the fascinating topic of the narratological complexity and coherence of the Quran.¹¹⁰

The purpose here has been to highlight the Quranic mode and mood of apocalypse as expressed through the theme of paradise and precisely as that which constitutes the pre-canonical¹¹¹ or pre-exegetical setting of the text. Thus do we understand or hear the voice of the Quran – before it became an object of study by the learned Muslim and non-Muslim traditions – in its originary musicality. By musicality is meant that the grammar of the performance and the grammar of a text merge – audience and performance merge so that the audience is part of the performance or revelation. There is circularity and closure, a sense of “home” very much akin to the effect of music.¹¹²

Paradise in the Quran is a comprehensive and symmetrical depiction of the world we know; yet it somehow takes us out of that world through a gnostic or noetic apocalypse taking place in the imagination. These striking artistic qualities somehow suffuse the entire text of the Quran and lend it its specific identity and unmistakable character. Certainly, such qualities are also found in other scriptures (e.g., the Song of Songs, the Book of Nahum), but their pervasiveness throughout the entirety of the Quran (a book of approximately the same length as the New Testament) is quite remarkable. These features and their profusion are simultaneously what seem to set the Quran apart from other scriptures while paradoxically providing a link to them. But most importantly, they may provide evidence for the ebbing of an originary apocalyptic imagination as it gave way to a more domesticated Islam. In terms quite foreign to the present instance, it helps us understand how in Islam heresy became orthodoxy. Obviously, the apocalyptic imagination did not disappear completely. Recent scholarship has discovered and analyzed the apocalyptic center of such various historical Islamic (and therefore religio-political) movements as the ‘Abbasid rise to power,¹¹³ the various claims to religious authority among Muslims in general,¹¹⁴ the rise of the Ottomans,¹¹⁵ the Safavids,¹¹⁶ the Ḥurūfīs,¹¹⁷ the Babis and the Baha’is,¹¹⁸ the Aḥmadiyya,¹¹⁹ as well as even more

110 Lawson, *The Qur’an and epic*.

111 Neuwirth, *Negotiating*; Lawson, *Duality*; Ernst, *How to read*.

112 See Günther’s contribution to this volume.

113 Yücesoy, *Messianic*.

114 Cook, *Studies*; Rubin, *Apocalypse*.

115 Fleischer, *Lawgiver*; Fleischer, *Mahdi*.

116 Quinn, *Historical* 63–9; Babayan, *Mystics*.

117 Bashir, *Messianic*.

118 Lawson, *Gnostic*; Amanat, *Resurgence*.

119 Friedmann, *Prophecy*; Valentine, *Islam*.

recent and contemporary phenomena.¹²⁰ However, the source of such apocalyptic imaginative and spiritual energy in the Quran – whether as text or document, scripture or prophecy – remains to be fully understood, described, and appreciated.

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Paradise and Nature in the Quran and Pre-Islamic Poetry

Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila

Nature is mentioned in both pre-Islamic poetry and the Quran.¹ In the former, verdant nature is mostly described in the *nasīb* (amatory prologue), but occasionally also in extended similes in other parts of the *qaṣīda* (polythematic ode). Desert descriptions of the *riḥla* (narration of the poet's journey) are mainly irrelevant for comparison with the Quran, which does not contain similar descriptions.² The Quran focuses on nature mainly in the semantic range of the garden/Paradise. In addition, rain and thunder, comparable to similar elements in the poems, are mentioned, mainly in stories and parables related to divine punishment, the former also as a sign of God (*āya*). Otherwise, Quranic nature descriptions comparable to those of poetry are rare.³

The Quran describes two different Paradises.⁴ The original home of Adam and the scene of the Fall is mentioned in dozens of verses, although it is never extensively described. The eschatological Paradise is mentioned in hundreds of verses, but it, too, is rather rarely described *in extenso*.

The Quranic words for Paradise are manifold, partly loans from other languages, partly of Arabic origin. The basic element for the concept is the word *janna* “garden” (pl. *jannāt* – *jinān* is not used in the Quran) used either absolutely (*al-janna*, (*al*)-*jannāt*) or in genitive constructions (*jannat/jannāt X*). Paradise, thus, is primarily conceived of as a garden, or a set of gardens. The

1 Both corpora have their own problems of authenticity. A partial aim of this paper is to elucidate the relations between the two corpora by a close study of selected features in both. All translation of the Quran are based on those of N.J. Dawood.

2 It should be emphasized, though, that desert descriptions form the majority of nature descriptions in pre-Islamic poetry, cf., e.g., Schoeler, *Naturdichtung* 13. In the Quran, nature is always related to man, which may explain why the empty desert receives so little attention there, despite its overwhelming presence on the Arabian Peninsula.

3 One passage reminiscent of the themes of the *qaṣīda* is worth pointing out, i.e., Q 74:50–1, *ka-annahum ḥumurun mustanfirah *farrat min qaswarah* – “like frightened asses fleeing from a lion.” Bellamy’s proposed emendation of the crucial word (see most recently Bellamy, *Textual criticism* 245–6) is rather fanciful.

4 Later tradition has created a more complicated system of Paradises, but this is a post-Quranic development.

garden metaphor is central to all Quranic Paradise descriptions. Other words denoting Paradise either have no clearly definable etymological meaning in Arabic (*al-firdaws*) or have rather general and abstract meanings (*naʿīm*; *maʿwā*). All these are, moreover, mainly used in genitive constructions with *janna/jannāt*. There is no word for 'Paradise' in the Quran that is not used in connection with *janna/jannāt*, except for expressions construed with *dār* "abode" (*dār al-salām*, *dār al-ākhira*, *dār al-khuld*, *dār al-muqāma*) which have a rather vague and non-descriptive sense ("the abode of peace," etc.).⁵

The word *al-janna*, less often in the plural *al-jannāt* (e.g., Q 42:22), is sometimes used as a name for Paradise without any defining additions (e.g., Q 2:111). The recurrent use of the word in this sense later gave the word a strong religious connotation and *ḥadīqa* and *bustān* replaced it in the earthly sense.⁶ In the Quran, *janna/jannāt* is equally attested in both senses. The dual *jannatān* is used in Q 55:46–59, 62–76, in a Sura rhyming in *-ān*.

The name *al-firdaws* is used in Q 18:107, defining *jannāt* (*jannāt al-firdaws*), and independently in Q 23:11.⁷ The word lacks an Arabic etymology. Another word lacking an Arabic etymology is *ʿadn* ("Eden"), which is only used in connection with *jannāt* (pl.).⁸ A possibly Persian loanword denoting a verdant

5 Even these expressions are etymologically associated with nature, *dār* in pre-Classical Arabic refers in the first place to the pasturing area of the Bedouin, not so much to a house, which may already have become the word's first meaning in Quranic Arabic. The word *dār*, usually in the plural, *diyār*, is very evocative in Arabic poetry. J. Stetkevych, *Elegiac lexicon* 64, takes it as one of the keywords of the *nasīb* and argues that it contrasts with *jinān*, the former evoking the lost paradise, the latter the future paradise. While I do not completely agree with Stetkevych, there is something similar in the Quran where *diyār* are often the earthly abodes from which the believers have been forced to withdraw in *hijra* narratives, and *al-janna* (never *jinān*) is the future Paradise promised to them. The parallelism, though, is broken by the use of *janna* for Adam's lost Paradise and the use of *dār al-ākhira* for the future life. Cf. also *ʿāqibat al-dār* in Q 6:135 and 28:37.

6 In the Quran, *ḥadāʾiq* (always in the plural) is only used for earthly gardens in parables (Q 27:60; 78:32; 80:30). *Bustān*, a Persian loanword, is not attested in the Quran.

7 Ultimately from Avestan *pairidaēza*, through Pahlavi/Greek and Syriac (*pardēs*), from which the Arabic plural *farādīs*, the singular being a back-formation. The same etymology is behind the English word, through Greek *paradeisos*. The etymological meaning of the Avestan word, "a (garden/park) surrounding a castle," had become obsolete for the Arabs for whom the word was a nontransparent place name.

8 In Q 6:12, further *jannāt* seem to be located within *jannāt ʿAdn*: *wa-yudkhillukum jannātin tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anḥāru wa-masākina ṭayyibatan fī jannāti ʿAdn* – "He will admit you to gardens watered by running streams and to pleasant mansions in the gardens of Eden." Technically, *fī jannāt ʿAdn* could define only the *masākin* (mansions), but I would rather take it as defining the *jannāt tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anḥār*, too. Hence, these *jannāt* would seem to be located within the *jannāt ʿAdn*.

meadow and also found in poetry, *rawḍa*, is used in Q 30:15 (*fa-hum fī rawḍa*) and in the plural (*fī rawḍāt al-jannāt*) in Q 42:22.⁹

Jannāt may further be qualified by (*al*)-*naʿīm*, the singular, *jannat naʿīm* “garden of delights,” being used in Q 56:89 and 70:38. Independently, *naʿīm* is used for Paradise in Q 82:13, 83:22, and 102:8 (*al-naʿīm*). In Q 32:19, the expression *jannat al-maʿwā* is used for Paradise, for which cf. also Q 79:41 (*fa-inna l-jannata hiya l-maʿwā* – “the garden is the place of refuge”).¹⁰ *Jannat al-khuld* (“garden of eternity”) (Q 25:15) emphasizes the eternal aspect of the garden.

Jannāt (without the definite article) is often coordinated with *ʿuyūn* (“fountains; springs”) as in Q 15:45, quoted below, and Q 51:15 (*inna l-muttaqīna fī jannātin wa-ʿuyūn* – “the righteous shall dwell amidst gardens and fountains”). In Q 77:41, there is a variant *fī ṣilālin wa-ʿuyūn* – “amidst shades and fountains,” not conditioned by the rhyme, and “*jannāt wa-naʿīm*” is used in Q 52:17 (quoted below). Here, too, the variant does not seem to be due to the exigencies of the rhyme.

The expression *jannāt wa-ʿuyūn* is also used for an earthly “paradise,” Egypt, from which the Egyptians are driven, or lured out, pursuing the Hebrews (Q 26:57 *fa-akhrājnahum* (i.e., the Egyptians) *min jannātin wa-ʿuyūn* – “We made them leave their gardens and their fountains”). Cf. also Q 44:25–8 (about the Egyptians):

*kam tarakū min jannātin wa-ʿuyūn * wa-zurūʿin wa-maqāmin karīm **
*wa-naʿmatin kānū fihā fākihīn * ka-dhālika awrathnāhā qawman ākharīn*

How many gardens, how many fountains, they left behind them!
Cornfields, and noble palaces, and good things in which they took delight.
Thus, that which once belonged to them We gave to other men.

Likewise, in Q 26:134, God has given the people of Hūd *jannātin wa-ʿuyūn*, and some verses later, Q 26:147–8, the same is said about the Thamūd, who had

9 In the Quran, the word does not specifically denote “garden,” but in general “a place with luxuriant vegetation.” Ambros, *Concise dictionary*, s.v., is not convinced of the word’s Iranian etymology (cf. Modern Persian *rūdh*, *rōdh* < Avestan *raodha*). For the use of the word in contemporary poetry, cf., e.g., the famous *rawḍa* scene in ‘Antara’s *muʿallaqa*, discussed below.

10 Q 53:14–6, is unclear and most probably does not refer to Paradise. *Maʿwā* is also used in its ordinary sense of “abode” in eschatological passages. The rather positive etymology of the word (“place of refuge”) makes it probable that Q 79:39 is ironic or at least has ironic overtones.

their time *fī jannātin wa-ʿuyūn *wa-zurūʿin wa-nakhlīn ṭalʿuhā haḍīm* – “amidst gardens and fountains, cornfields and palm trees laden with fine fruit.”

A further expression referring to Paradise is *al-ghuraf* (“the Mansions”) (Q 25:75), or *ghuraf* (Q 39:20) or *al-ghurufāt* (Q 34:37). Q 29:58 (*lanubawwīannahum min al-jannati ghurafan tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhāru khālīdīna fīhā* – “We will lodge them forever in the mansions of the garden, where rivers roll at their feet”) clearly sets the *ghuraf* within *al-janna*, but in the other cases, the word may have been used as a place name.

Paradise is, thus, often mentioned in the Quran, but the majority of the passages, if they contain any description at all, limit themselves to one standard formula, viz., *tajrī min taḥtiḥā* (or *-him*) *l-anhār*,¹¹ often without any further descriptive elements. This may have replaced an older formula *jannāt wa-ʿuyūn*, which seems functionally equivalent to the formula *jannāt tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhār*.¹² There seems to be a development in the Quranic Paradise descriptions from *jannāt wa-ʿuyūn* to *jannāt tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhār*, with perhaps an intermediate expression *jannāt wa-nahar* in Q 54:54 (*inna l-muttaqīna fī jannātin wa-nahar* – “the righteous shall dwell in gardens where a river flows” – the use of the singular instead of the expected plural is explicable by the exigencies of the rhyme -VCVr).

The formula *tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhār* is occasionally also used for earthly gardens, as in, e.g., Q 2:266 (in a parable):¹³

a-yawaddu aḥadukum an takūna lahū jannatun min nakhīlin wa-aʿnābin tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhāru lahū fīhā min kulli l-thamarāti . . .

Would any one of you wish to have a garden planted with palm trees, vines, and all manner of fruits, and watered by running streams . . .

The only passage where these rivers (or brooklets) of Paradise are described in any detail comes in Q 47:15:

11 Q 9:100, *wa-aʿdalāhum jannātin tajrī taḥtaḥā* [sic] *l-anhār*.

12 Cf. also Q 55:50, where the expression *fīhimā ʿaynāni tajrīyān* – “each is watered by two flowing springs” seems to have a somewhat similar function.

13 Cf. also Q 6:6, *wa-arsalnā l-samāʾa ʿalayhim midrāran wa-jaʿalnā l-anhāra tajrī min taḥtiḥim . . .* – “We have sent down for them abundant water from the sky and given them rivers that roll at their feet” and Q 43:51, where the Pharaoh says: *yā qawmī a-laysa lī mulku Miṣra wa-hādhihi l-anhāru tajrī min taḥtī* – “My people, is the kingdom of Egypt not mine, and are these rivers which flow at my feet not mine also?”

mathalu l-jannati llatī wu'ida l-muttaqūna fihā anhārun min mā'in ghayri āsinin wa-anhārun min labanin lam yataghayyar ṭa'muhū wa-anhārun min khamrin ladhdhatin lil-shāribīna wa-anhārun min 'asalin muṣaffan wa-lahum fihā min kulli l-thamarāti wa-maghfiratun min rabbihim...

This is the Paradise which the righteous have been promised. There shall flow in it rivers of unpolluted water, and rivers of milk for ever fresh; rivers of delectable wine and rivers of clearest honey. They shall eat therein of every fruit and receive forgiveness from their Lord...

According to the various elements they contain, the descriptions of Paradise in the Quran can be formalized as:

	A	B	C	D
name of Paradise	+ (formula)	+ (eternity)	+ (eating)	+ (erotica)

Further elements E (luxury, mainly clothing and jewelry), partly overlapping with the element C, and F (shade) may also be added.¹⁴ The peace and quiet and other non-physical features of the Paradise may also be mentioned, but these do not contain descriptive elements. Rather few Paradise descriptions in the Quran add further elements.¹⁵

The presence of the various elements is optional and the order in which they appear varies, though they tend to come in the order given above. The individual elements may be brief or elaborate and a passage may contain several separate elements of the same class. In general, the earlier descriptions are freer and more variable, whereas in the later Suras the descriptive pattern becomes more rigid.

¹⁴ For examples, see appendix A.

¹⁵ The width of Paradise is sometimes summarily mentioned (e.g., Q 3:133, *ilā...jannatin 'arḍuhā l-samāwātu wa-l-arḍu*... – “a Paradise as vast as heaven and earth”; cf. also Q 57:21). In addition, well-being and freedom from toil may be mentioned, as in Q 15:45–8, *inna l-muttaqīna fī jannātīn wa-'uyūn * udkhulū bi-salāmin āminīn * wa-naza'nā mā fī ṣudūrihim min ghillīn ikhwānan 'alā sururīn mutaḡābilīn * lā yamassuhum fihā naṣabun wa-mā hum minhā bi-mukhrajin* – “The righteous shall dwell among gardens and fountains; in peace and safety they shall enter them. We shall remove all hatred from their hearts, and they shall recline on couches face to face, a band of brothers. Toil shall not weary them, nor shall they ever leave their Paradise.” The gates of Paradise are mentioned in several verses. The sky of Paradise is nowhere described, but it seems that it should be conceived as cloudless – Paradise being the place of light in the symbolism of the Quran – and hence shade becomes essential.

The element B (eternity) is usually expressed by the root *kh-l-d*,¹⁶ but it may also be expressed otherwise, as in Q 15:48 (*wa-mā hum minhā bi-mukhrajīn* – “nor shall they ever be driven out from it”) or Q 18:107–8 (*kānat lahum jannātu l-firdawsī nuzulan* * *khālīdīna fihā lā yabghūna ‘anhā ḥīwalan* – “they shall forever dwell in the gardens of Paradise, desiring no change to befall them”). The eternity aspect is here expressed, not only as unperishability, but also in human and voluntary terms: the blessed will not want any change in their situation nor will they be driven away. In parables, the perishability of earthly gardens is often contrasted, implicitly or explicitly, with the eternity of the garden.

Clothing and jewels are associated with luxurious parties, where seats (*arā’ik, surūr*), alien to contemporary Bedouin hospitality, give an additional sense of luxury. The *wildān* (“youths”) attested in several passages should probably be interpreted as part of the luxury of Paradise, although later they received a clear erotic overtone.

The descriptions of Adam’s Paradise are less extensive. The initial formula A is always lacking. Elements B – obviously, as Adam and Eve were driven out of their Paradise – and D are only present in a distorted form, the former as the untrue promise by Satan and the latter as shameful sexuality, whereas element C is sporadically explicit (e.g., Q 2:35 *kulā minhā raghadan* – “Eat of its fruits to your hearts’ content”) and always implicit, due to the theme of the forbidden fruit. In addition to food, the element of luxury (E) finds a certain inverted parallel in Adam’s Paradise. In contrast to the luxurious clothing and jewelry of the eschatological Paradise, Adam covers his nakedness with leaves, as in Genesis, too (cf. Q 7:22). The element F is also only present implicitly in, e.g., Q 20:117–21:

fa-qulnā yā ādamu inna hādhā ‘aduwwun laka wa-li-zawjika fa-lā yukhrijannakumā min al-jannati fa-tashqā * (*inna laka allā tajū’a*)^C (*fihā wa-lā ta’rā*)^E * (*wa-annaka lā taẓma’u fihā*)^C (*wa-lā taḍḥā*)^F * *fa-waswasa ilayhi l-Shayṭānu qāla yā Ādamu hal adulluka ‘alā (shajarati l-khuldi wa-mulkin lā yablā)*^B * (*fa-akalā minhā*)^C (*fa-badat lahumā saw’ātuhumā*)^D (*wa-ṭafiqā yakḥṣifāni ‘alayhimā min waraqi l-janna*)^E

We said: “Adam, Satan is an enemy to you and to your wife. Let him not turn you out of Paradise and plunge you into affliction. Here you shall not hunger or be naked; you shall not thirst, or feel the scorching heat.” But Satan whispered to him, saying: “Shall I show you the tree of

16 Q 50:34 calls the day of entering Paradise *yawm al-khulūd*. For the use of the root in poetry, see J. Stetkevych, *Elegiac lexicon* 100–3.

immortality and an everlasting kingdom?" They both ate of its fruit, so that they beheld their nakedness and began to cover themselves with leaves.

Paradise is directly contrasted to earthly gardens in, e.g., Q 25:8 (*aw takūnu lahū jannatun ya'kulu minhā* – "Why does he not have a garden to provide his sustenance?" – with reference to the prophet who does not have a garden of his own. Q 25:10 answers this: *tabāraka lladhī in shā'a ja'ala laka khayran min dhālika: jannātin tajrī min taḥtihā l-anhāru wa-ya'jal laka quṣūran* – "Blessed be He who, if He wills, can give you better things than these; palaces and gardens watered by running streams"). Earthly and heavenly gardens are contrasted, the former inevitably represented as inferior. Of course, the passage does not explicitly speak of a heavenly garden, but the phrasing makes this clear enough. The Quran sees earthly gardens in the light of the everlasting heavenly garden.

When we compare the descriptions of the two Paradises, eschatological and primeval, to those of earthly gardens in the Quran, we may note that elements D and E are always lacking in earthly gardens. Element B (eternity) is implicitly present, in an inverted form, in the sense that most parables deny the eternity of earthly gardens and emphasize their perishability (-B). The formula *tajrī min taḥtihā l-anhār* is rarely used (e.g., Q 2:66; 6:6, quoted above).¹⁷ Instead, a similar formula (A') *wa-anzala min al-samā'i mā'an fa-akhraja bihī min al-thamarāt* ("and He has sent down water from the sky to bring forth fruits," e.g., Q 2:22) is used abundantly in slightly differing variants. Likewise, element E is only referred to. Element C is present, but here it is the cultivation of edible fruits and corn that is mentioned, not so much their consumption. The difference may be seen in comparing the Paradise descriptions with Q 18:32–44, a garden parable of two men which is very much food-oriented:

*wa-ḍrib lahum mathalan rajulayni ja'alnā li-aḥadihimā jannatayni min a'nābin wa-ḥafafnāhumā bi-nakhlīn wa-ja'alnā baynahumā zar'an * kiltā l-jannatayni ātat ukulahā wa-lam tazlim minhu shay'an wa-fajjarnā khilālahumā naharan * wa-kāna lahū thamarun... * wa-dakhala jannatahū wa-huwa ḡālimun li-nafsihī qāla: mā aẓunnu an tabīda hādhihī abadan...¹⁸*

17 Cf. also Q 14:32, *Allāhu... wa-anzala min al-samā'i mā'an fa-akhraja bihī min al-thamarāti rizqan lakum... wa-sakkhara lakumū l-anhār* – "It is God... who sends down water from the sky with which He brings forth fruits for your sustenance... He has created rivers for your benefit" (presumably for traveling).

18 Note the eternity aspect.

Give them this parable. Once there were two men, to one of whom We gave two vineyards set about with palm trees and watered by a running stream, with a cornfield lying in between. Each of the vineyards yielded an abundant crop . . . And when, having thus wronged his soul, he entered his vineyard, he said: "Surely this will never perish!"

The other man replies (Q 18:40–2):

*fa-‘asā rabbī an yu’tiyani [sic!] khayran min jannatika wa-yursila ‘alayhā ḥusbānan min al-samā’i fa-tuṣbiḥa ṣa’īdan zalaqan * aw yuṣbiḥa mā’uhā ghawran fa-lan tastaṭī’a lahū ṭalaban * fa-uḥīta bi-thamarihi fa-aṣbaḥa yuqallibu kaffayhi ‘alā mā anfaqa fihā wa-ḥiya khāwīyatun ‘alā ‘urūshihā . . .*

"My Lord may give me a garden better than yours and send down thunderbolts from heaven upon your vineyard, turning it into a barren waste, or drain its water deep into the earth so that you can find it no more." His vineyards were destroyed, and he began to wring his hands with grief at all that he had spent on them: for the vines had tumbled down upon their trellises.

Perhaps the most important single element in Paradise is water, present in the form of *anhār* and *‘uyūn*.¹⁹ Rain, however, is lacking in Paradise, which may be surprising, taking into account its frequency and importance in contemporary poetry. When rain is mentioned in the Quran, it is related to earthly life and seen as one of God's signs (*āyāt*). It is usually linked with the idea of revivification: the barren earth suddenly revives and bursts with new life. This idea is also familiar in the poems' descriptions of rain, which often end in the description of this new growth. There, however, it does not seem to have any religious overtones.

19 The word *anhār* is also attested in the Quran in the singular (*nahar*, three times, Q 2:249; 18:33; 54:54). Besides a brooklet or river, it may also indicate an artificial irrigation channel, as in, e.g., Q 27:60–1: *amman khalaqa l-samāwāti wa-l-arḍa wa-anzala lakum* [note that nature is for humankind] *min al-samā’i mā’an fa-anbatnā bihi ḥadā’iqā* [natural meadows or artificial gardens?] *dhāta bahjatin mā kāna lakum an tunbitū shajarahā . . . * amman ja’ala l-arḍa qarāran wa-ja’ala khilālahā anḥāran* – "Surely worthier is He who made the heavens and the earth. He sends down water for you from the sky, bringing forth gardens (meadows?) of delight. Try as you may, you cannot cause such trees to grow . . . Surely worthier is He who established the earth and watered it with running rivers." If *ḥadiqa* is understood as a garden surrounded by walls (cf. Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*, s.v.), then *anhār*, too, could be understood as artificial channels, even though created by God.

The image is realistic in the Arabian Peninsula. Why, then, does it not rain in Paradise? The underlying reason seems to be that in both the poems and the Quran, the idea of rain is intimately linked with a change in the status of the soil. It is the dry, barren soil that suddenly, overnight, turns into luxurious growth. In Paradise, such changes are inconceivable: rain is out of place in an eternally verdant garden not subject to the annual cycles of dying and returning. Brooklets and springs are not closely tied to similar changes and their permanent, perennial, and changeless nature makes them better suited to Paradise.

A possible additional reason for this lack of rain (and clouds) in Paradise is the strongly dualistic imagery of light and darkness. On earth, God's mercy (i.e., rain) may be preceded by clouds and, implicitly, darkness, but in Paradise everything is pure light. Trees may gently shade the believers and protect them from the sun, but the sky remains a pure, untainted, and cloudless light.

Earthly rain, however, is described in several parables of the Quran, which in their poetic force are rather unusual and comparable to poetic descriptions. The lack of rain in Paradise is, thus, not due to a lack of ability to describe rain (for examples, see appendix B).²⁰

In contrast to the Quran, in poems water is mainly present as rain water, or torrents and ponds created by rain.²¹ There are few references to brooklets. The Arabian Peninsula has no permanent rivers, in contrast to *wādīs*, and hence brooklets are associated with artificial irrigation. Pre-Islamic poems never describe artificial gardens – later favored by 'Abbasid poets – and fields and kitchen gardens remain outside the Bedouin ethos and hence receive only occasional, passing mention in poetry, as in a verse by 'Alqama (*al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* 120, v. 11), which describes the irrigation of a garden ("*tasqī madhāniba qad zālat 'aṣṣifatuḥā / ḥadūruḥā min atīyyi l-mā'i maṭmūmū*").²² These themes were not unknown to poets, even though they showed only marginal interest in them.

The habitat of the Bedouins was watered almost solely by rainwater. The agricultural areas in the oases were, however, dependent on underground

20 Note that the genre *waṣf al-maṭar* ("description of rain") favored by philologists, such as Ibn Durayd (d. 321/933), and if we believe them, Bedouins, also found its way into *ḥadīths*, as is seen from, e.g., Ibn Abi l-Dunyā's *Kitāb al-Maṭar wa-l-ra'd wa-l-barq wa-l-riḥ*.

21 Salt water, implicitly present in the form of seas, is here left outside the discussion, as is also the brackish or boiling water served to the inhabitants of hell. Suffice it to say that the descriptions of hell in the Quran usually contain inverted forms of the elements C-F. The element A is not attested, whereas B is present without inversion.

22 Discussed by Sells, Guises 130–5, who translates this as: "Spilling water into channels / as grain husks part / from the ripening fruit, / the flooded slopes flowing over" (132).

water resources. The Quran sides here with agrarian Arabia and distances itself from the Bedouin ethos. However, rain is not absent from the Quran. Rain, without mention of thunder, is a sign of God's power. It is closely linked to food and fodder (e.g., Q 16:10: rain > water > trees > fodder). Heavy rain may have both beneficial and destructive effects, as in, e.g., Q 2:264–5:

*ka-mathali ṣafwānin 'alayhi turābun fa-aṣābahū wābilun fa-tarakahū ṣaldan lā yaqdirūna 'alā shay'in mim mā kasabū... * ka-mathali jannatin bi-rabwatīn²³ aṣābahā wābilun fa-ātat ukulahā ḍi'fayni fa-in lam yuṣibhā wābilun fa-ṭall...*

Such men are like a rock covered with earth: a shower falls upon it and leaves it hard and bare. They shall gain nothing from their works... like a garden on a hillside: if a shower falls upon it, it yields up twice its normal crop; and if no rain falls upon it, it is watered by the dew.

In the Quran, contrary to the poems, thunder and lightning are mostly associated with fear and terror, and (beneficial) rain is rarely mentioned in connection with them. Either they are eschatological disasters falling upon an unbelieving people and wiping them away to the last man – the prophet and the believers having made their escape earlier – or natural bad weather which fills people with fear and awe. It may be that the light/darkness dualism of the Quranic imagery is at least partly responsible for the perception of thunder in negative terms, rather than the more positive terms of the poetry – in reality, thunder was in many ways beneficial in the area, although obviously also potentially destructive, both inland and at sea.²⁴

Despite its aspect of terror in the Quran, thunder does have some positive associations, too. This contradictory attitude toward thunder, which we might label “sacred” (fear) vs. “profane” (hope), is manifest in the Quranic word pair *khawf wa-ṭama'*, twice mentioned in connection with lightning (*barq*):²⁵

23 Cf. J. Stetkevych, *Elegiac lexicon* 61–2 (*dār* as a high place).

24 The destructive aspect of thunder is strongly present in a *qaṣīda* by Labīd, whose brother, Arbad, was struck dead by a bolt of lightning (*Dīwān*, no. 23, see also Smoor, *Elegies* 56–7). In the poems, there is a tendency to see thunder in positive terms in the *nasīb*, see below, and perhaps more realistically in the other parts of the poem.

25 The formula is also used in Q 7:56 and 32:16, in a different context (*yad'ūna rabbahum; wa-d'ūhu khawfan wa-ṭama'an* – “pray to Him with fear and hope”).

Q 13:12–3: *huwa lladhī yurikumū l-barqa khawfan wa-ṭamaʿan wa-yunshīʿu l-sahāba l-thiqāl * wa-yusabbihu l-raʿdu bi-ḥamdihī wa-l-malāʾikatu min khīfatihī wa-yursilu l-ṣawāʾiqa fa-yuṣību bihā man yashāʾ.*

It is He who makes the lightning flash upon you, inspiring you with fear and hope, as He gathers up the heavy clouds. The thunder sounds His praises, and the angels, too, for awe of Him. He hurls His thunderbolts at whom He pleases.

Q 30:24: *wa-min āyātihī yurikumū l-barqa khawfan wa-ṭamaʿan wa-yunazzilu min al-samāʾi māʾan fa-yuḥyī bihī l-arḍa baʿda mawtihā.*

Lightning is another of His signs, a source of fear and hope. He sends down water from the sky and with it He quickens the dead earth.

In the *nasīb*, thunder is associated with rain, and the poet, remembering his beloved, may become nostalgic when observing thunderbolts. Rain, with concomitant thunder and lightning, is further associated with abundance and growth, not terror as in the Quran.²⁶

The different attitude toward thunder is mirrored in the location of man vis-à-vis thunder. In the *nasīb*, the poet sees the storm far away and lets his eyes follow it to the other side of the horizon, observing it in a detached way. He may also merely imagine the scenes (especially the growth of vegetation after the storm), without seeing them himself. It is as if the poet's mind, as in *ṭayf al-khayāl* (the vision of the beloved), traverses space and observes the effects of the storm without the poet himself being bodily at the scene. For example, both Labīd (*Dīwān* 64:54, *aqūlu wa-ṣawbuhū minnī baʿīdun* – “I say when it rains far away from me”) and Imruʿulqays (*muʿallaqa*, v. 73 = al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ* 102, *buʿda mā mutaʾammalī* – “distant was the place to behold”) make it explicit that the storm is far away and the poets observe it rather unemotionally. The poet-subject feels a slight sleeplessness (Labīd, *Dīwān* 64:45, *ariqtu laḥū*) instead of terror.²⁷ Lightning is an entertainment to be observed, not a divine punishment to be dreaded, and the poet does not admonish his audi-

26 In the *nasīb*, thunder, rain and lightning are also associated with lost love and forlorn hope, cf., e.g., von Grunebaum, *Kritik* 30.

27 Cf. ʿAbīd b. al-Abras, *Dīwān*, no. 28 (also attributed to Aws b. Ḥajar, *Dīwān*, no. 5). ʿAbīd, *Dīwān* 28:6, *yā man li-barqin abītu l-layla arqubuhū* – “Ho! who will help me to watch the lightning flash through the night” (trans. Lyall).

ence to travel around and see the consequences, as the Quran repeatedly does (SYR + *fī l-arḍi* + *kayfa kāna ‘āqibatu lladhīna*).

In a poem by Aws b. Ḥajar, there is a line (*Dīwān* 5:20) that compares the pounding of the rain on pebbles to a player of a game (*ka-annahū fāḥiṣun aw lā‘ibun dāḥī* – “as if it were a bird scraping the ground or a player scattering pebbles”). The Quran does not present its parables in such easy terms. It is the *jidd* (seriousness) we meet there, not the *li‘b* (jest). In the Quran, man and his relation to God, is the center of interest. Man is under the thunder, in the very eye of the storm, and the storm is depicted from the point of view of someone feeling strong emotions about the thunder and the lightning above him. The storm is the sign of God’s power to the frightened human being. Even when they are not explicitly related to man, the Quranic nature scenes are man-oriented:²⁸ Paradise awaits his arrival (just as hell bellows in anticipation of its victims) and the gardens are described in a way that implicitly, if not explicitly, takes man as the center of interest. In a poetic meadow, there may be flies buzzing and flowers growing by and for themselves, but in Paradise there are fruit (for man to eat), *ḥūrīs* (for man to love), wine (for man to drink), and so forth.²⁹

Nature, obviously, also mirrors the emotions of the poet, whether the barren desert through which he valiantly traverses or the traces of an abandoned campsite by which he stops to weep. In the verdant scenes, however, the human agent is present on a different level. He is not physically there in the meadow nor is he supposed to *penetrate* it. It is a mentally conceived image of something existing independently of the poet, a kind of parallel universe, which has no links to the poet on the level of the “reality” of either. The poet does not wander into the meadow, stand under the storm or walk upon the revived ground afterwards. He produces a mental, and further a verbal, image of all this. In the famous meadow scene of ‘Antara (see below), it is the beloved’s breath that, in an extended simile, creates the meadow in its own image.

Despite their positive attitude toward rain, and even storms, in the poems the descriptions of the following morning are more equivocal. They contain scenes of verdant luxury as well as traces of nocturnal destruction. The former find a parallel in the Quran in the revivification of the soil after rain as God’s sign, and the latter share many features with the Quran’s description of storms in the parables or the eschatological descriptions of calamities befalling a sinful people.

28 Or, to be exact, in part human-oriented, and in part specifically man-oriented.

29 Cf. Q 27:60–1, quoted above, n. 19.

In the Quran, the final, eschatological calamity is often simply described as implicitly or explicitly destructive rain (e.g., Q 7:84, Lot: *wa-amṭarnā ‘alayhim maṭaran*, cf. 26:173; 27:58, etc.)³⁰ or a thunderbolt (*ṣā’iqā*).³¹ After the destruction, the sinners lie here and there on the soil, like scattered flies (*ka-l-farāshi l-mabthūth*, Q 101:4) or like green blades devoured (Q 105:5, *ka-aṣṣin ma’kūl*). The devastations of the morning following the day of punishment clearly resemble similar descriptions in the poems. The Quranic devastations are briefly described in, e.g.:

Q 54:19–20: *innā arsalnā ‘alayhim riḥan ṣarṣaran fī yawmi naḥsin mustamirr * tanzī’u l-nāsa ka-annahum a’jāzu nakhlin munqa’ir*.

On a day of unrelenting woe We let loose on them a howling wind which snatched them off as though they were trunks of uprooted trees.

Q 54:31: *innā arsalnā ‘alayhim ṣayḥatan wāḥidatan fa-kānū ka-hashīmi l-muḥtaẓir*

We sent upon them a single cry, and they became like the dry twigs of the sheep-fold builder.

Q 69:7: *fa-tarā l-qawma fihā ṣar’ā ka-annahum a’jāzu nakhlin khāwiyah*

You might have seen people lying dead as though they had been hollow trunks of palm trees.

Q 15:66: *inna dābira hā’ulā’i maqṭū’un muṣbiḥin*

The wrongdoers were to be utterly destroyed next morning.

30 Cf. also Q 15:74, *wa-amṭarnā ‘alayhim ḥijāratān min sijjil* – “We rained clay stones upon them.”

31 The word *ṣā’iqā*, though, does not seem quite unequivocal. In Q 41:13, both the ‘Ād and the Thamūd are implied to have been destroyed by a *ṣā’iqā* (*andhartukum ṣā’iqatan mithla ṣā’iqati ‘Ādin wa-Thamūd*). For the Thamūd, see Q 41:17, this *ṣā’iqā* is not further described, but for the ‘Ād the word seems to imply an icy wind (Q 41:16, *fa-arsalnā ‘alayhim riḥan ṣarṣaran*), for which cf. *ṣaq’a* (“intenseness of cold”) and *ṣaqī’* (“hoar-frost”) from the parallel root *ṣ-q-’*; see Lane, *Lexicon*, svv. Obviously, the use of words here may not be quite exact, but it does warn us against simply translating *ṣā’iqā* in all its occurrences as “thunderbolt” without further study. The respective verb is used in Q 39:68 (*ṣā’iqā*) and Q 52:45 (*yus’aqūn*).

In the Quran, the catastrophe befalls a part of mankind and is full of religious meaning. In the poems, it is the flora and fauna of the desert that is destroyed by the nocturnal storm. Even though the focus is on the refreshing effect of rain, the devastating effect of the storm may be highlighted in the scene of the next morning, which often ends the description of the storm the poet has been observing from afar. 'Abīd b. al-Abrāṣ, *Dīwān* no. 28 (= Aws b. Ḥajar, *Dīwān* no. 5) ends his storm scene with: *fa-aṣbaḥa l-rawḍu wa-l-qī'ānu mumrī'atan* – “and in the morning the meadows all were green in the light” ('Abīd, *Dīwān* 28:15 = Aws, *Dīwān* 5:24, trans. Lyall). Here the storm is seen in terms of life-giving rain, despite its terrifying effects. In the rain description of al-Mutanakhkhil 1:11–21 (al-Sukkārī, *Sharḥ* 1254–8), there is a rather static and undramatic scene of implied destruction (v. 19):

*fa-aṣbaḥa l-īnu rukūdan 'alā l-
awshāzi an yarsakhna fī l-mawḥalī*

Next morning the wide-eyed antelopes stood still
on high places, not to get stuck in the mud.

The lack of movement, expressed by the root *r-k-d* “to be motionless,” seems to imply devastation. Nothing moves. This is clearer in, e.g., a poem by Abū Dhū'ayb (*Dīwān* 25:5–14 = al-Sukkārī, *Sharḥ* 197–201), v. 13:

*ka-anna l-ḡibā'a kushūḥu l-nisā
'i yatfūna fawqa dhurāhā junūḥā*

The gazelles were like waists of women,
driven around, lying on their sides.

Here the dead animals are shown not in the ominous silence of the next morning, but floating in the torrent right after the rain.

Both the Quran and the poems, hence, mention nightly storms and subsequent scenes of devastation in the morning. The difference lies in the positive connotations of thunder associated with rain in the poems. The devastation is but half the story, the luxurious growth being the other, more important half. The Quran separates rain from thunder (except in connection with the formula *khawfan wa-ṭama'an* – “in fear and hope”), seeing the former as a sign of God's mercy and might, the latter as his awful retribution. In the Quran, thunder – darkness – terror – punishment are concepts that belong together. In the *nasīb*, on the other hand, thunder and lightning are associated in nostalgic tones with

lost love and forlorn hope. However, despite the almost antithetical attitudes toward storms and thunder in the Quran and the *nasīb*, the two do have common themes, as has been shown.

Let us take another example where the Quran and the poems are seemingly different, but ultimately turn out to be related. This is the erotic theme (element D) that is rather prominent in Paradise descriptions. Erotic themes are, evidently, common in the poems, too, yet they are rarely explicitly related to nature scenes: there are few descriptions of bathing beauties or a secret rendezvous in the meadow.

Meadow scenes in the poems, however, are related to erotic themes on a metaphorical level. The poems refer to the virginity of the secluded meadow and the whole scene is often an extended simile growing out of the description of the beloved in the *nasīb*. 'Antara's (*mu'allaqa*, vv. 15–9 = al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ* 311–5) meadow, e.g., grows out of an extended simile describing the breath of the beloved:

*aw rawḍatan unufan taḍammāna nabtahā
ghaythun qalīlu l-dimni laysa bi-ma'lamī
jādat 'alayhi kullu bikrin tharratin
fa-tarakna kulla ḥadīqatin ka-l-dirhamī
saḥḥan wa-taskāban fa-kulla 'ashīyyatin
yajrī 'alayhā l-mā'u lam yataṣarramī
fa-khalā l-dhubābu bihā fa-laysa bi-bāriḥin
gharidan ka-fi'li l-shāribi l-mutarannimī
hazijan yaḥukku dhirā'ahū bi-dhirā'ihī
qadḥa l-mukibbi 'alā l-zinādi l-ajdhamī*

Fragrant as an untouched meadow,
bloom and grass,
sheltered in rain, untrodden
dung-free, hidden.

Over it the white,
first clouds of spring
pour down, leaving small pools
like silver dirhams.

Pouring and bursting,
evening on evening
gushing over it
in an endless stream.

The fly has it all to himself,
 and is not about to leave,
 droning softly,
 like a wine drinker humming a tune.

Then buzzing, elbow on elbow,
 like a one-armed man
 kindling a fire,
 bent down over the flint.³²

This gives a basically erotic flavor to the whole simile, which is further strengthened by the emphasized virginity of the untouched meadow.³³ The whole simile comes close to the Quranic Paradise descriptions, but with certain differences. Instead of introducing *ḥūrīs*, or earthly beauties, on the scene, 'Antara divides the erotic connotations into two, viz., his beloved (the starting point of the simile) who, let it be emphasized, is not present in the meadow, and the metaphorical virginity of the meadow. Likewise, instead of mentioning items of luxury (element E) present in the meadow, 'Antara merely *compares* water to a silver coin (*ka-l-dirhamī*). At least five common elements between the Quran and the poem may be found in this brief passage:

	'Antara	the Quran
scene	meadow	garden
water /rain		brooklets
luxury	<i>ka-l-dirhamī</i>	luxury items
virginity	meadow	<i>ḥūrīs</i>
women	beloved	<i>ḥūrīs</i>

32 I quote the superb translation of Sells from his *Desert tracings* 49–50.

33 Sells sees the unreachability of the meadow in somewhat different terms, as a lost garden existing in memories, but I cannot fully agree with his analysis. He sees in the poems an equation between the meadow (which he calls the garden) and the beloved, which is obvious. Further, he speaks of (Guises 131) “a symbolic analogue of the beloved, the lost garden.” “Lost,” however, is here somewhat speculative and depends on Sells’ reading of the poems in a mythopoetic way, which I find less than convincing, though his readings do contain interesting ideas. Sells also emphasizes, perhaps even too strongly, the erotic undertones of the meadow/garden descriptions.

The drives informing the texts are, obviously, totally different from each other. For ‘Antara, it is perhaps pure delight that lies behind the description in the passage, while the Quranic Paradise descriptions are used for serious exhortation.

The virginity of the meadow is further strengthened by the (male) poet’s absence – he himself is not even there, penetrating the virgin meadow. The poet describes natural phenomena, looking at them as if through his mind’s eye, without himself being at the scene – the emphasis on secluded and virgin nature actually make it improper for a man to be present, representing as he does a threat to the virginity of the meadow. The meadow stands metaphorically for the beloved.³⁴

‘Antara, of course, was not the only poet to use this theme. There were many others, such as Salama b. al-Khurshub (*al-Mufaḍḍaliyyāt* 6:3):³⁵

wa-mukhtāḍin tabīḍu l-rubdu fihi
tuḥūmiya nabtuhū fa-hwa l-‘amīmū

Many a meadow wherein the dust-colored (ostriches) lay their eggs
– its greenery forbidden (to men), growing plentifully.³⁶

As these poetic descriptions are, in all likelihood, older than the Quran, we have to take them as the basis against which we have to read the Quranic text.³⁷ Hence, one might say that in the Quran, the metaphoric virginity and the

34 Sells, *Guises* 156, describes the meadow/garden as lost, to be regained only through memory: “When viewed as a group, these elements can constitute the mythopoetic world of the lost garden. Though there is no theological definition of this lost garden or meadow, it comprises within the context of the *qaṣīdah* a world of the sacred as intense as early Islamic notions of paradise, which feature some of the same elements. We might speak of this sacred world as transcendent in the sense that it is beyond the world of the poet and unattainable by him. While the Islamic garden can be regained in the future, the *qaṣīdah* garden is part of an irretrievable past, and can be reached only through memory.” I do not, though, agree with this placing of the meadow/garden firmly in the past. It does have nostalgic overtones, in as much as the movement of the poem is away from the beloved and toward the goal, but it also has a presential aspect. ‘Antara’s meadow scene, e.g., does not contain a single explicit reference to the past. It is outside of time, in the frozen world of eternal, atemporal metaphors.

35 Also discussed by Eksell, *Descriptions* 42–3.

36 In his commentary, al-Anbārī, *Sharḥ* 311–5, explains *tuḥūmiya* with a reference to fear – men do not dare to graze their flocks there. However, I cannot quite see why this should be so.

37 Perhaps it should be emphasized that the dating and authenticity of both corpora are neither secure nor beyond doubt. Traditional datings of both may be taken as working

erotic overtones of the poems in a certain sense materialize in the character of the *ḥūrīs*, the eternal virgins, seen in erotic terms in the Quran. The Quran spells out what the poems only imply.

The same metaphorical relation is also found in descriptions of clothes. In many poems, colorful Yemeni (or Ḥīran) cloth is mentioned as a metaphor for a field of flowers.³⁸ In the Quran, this is paralleled by real, valuable materials (*sundus, istabraq*). As in the metaphorical virginity of the meadow, transposed to the literal virginity of the *ḥūrīs*, so here, too, the luxurious metaphors of flowers are made concrete in the luxurious materials themselves. Likewise, silver coin, used in 'Antara's poem as a metaphor for the brightness of the water, is raised from the metaphorical level to the level of reality: the poets, through their mind's eye, see silvery reflections and flowerbeds which remind them of Yemeni clothes, but the inhabitants of Paradise have their silver vessels and their silken clothes. The metaphor has become real or, put in other words, Paradise is itself a grand metaphor for the earthly luxury of meadows.³⁹ It is striking that this has been taken so far that many real things in the poems (water in the pool; flowers) are neither described nor even mentioned in the Paradise descriptions at all, but are only represented by the luxurious materials which are used metaphorically for them in the poems.

The paradisaal and earthly gardens of the Quran exist for man, either as a heavenly reward for the righteous or as a parable of his toil on earth. His not being on the scene would take away the *raison d'être* from the whole parable or Paradise description. Nature is there for the poet to imagine and describe from outside, but for the believer to enjoy, or fear in the case of storms, from within. Man's presence is dispensable in the poem but essential in the Quran.⁴⁰

Finally, what is the relation between the Quran and the nature scenes in the poems? A point which I have hitherto left aside is that the Islamic idea of Paradise as a garden is obviously derived from Jewish and/or Christian sources. Paradise is expressly linked to the Torah and the Gospel in, e.g., Q 9:111

hypotheses, but one should not lose sight of the fact that the secure tradition of both corpora begins at least a century or two after their supposed composition.

38 Cf. Schoeler, *Naturdichtung* 27, with examples by, e.g., Ṭarafa and al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī.

39 Paradise descriptions contain further metaphors, though. For example, in Q 37:49, 55:58, 56:23, and 76:19, all quoted in appendix A, luxury items are mentioned metaphorically in connection with the *ḥūrīs* or, in the last instance, the *wildān* of Paradise.

40 One might add that for the poet, the meadow is a solitary place, but the Quran speaks of Paradise almost as a social event: the believers are there almost without exception in the plural (*khālidū/ina fihā (abadan)*) and where singulars are used, they are mostly grammatical singulars (*man* + sg.).

inna llāha shtarā min al-mu'minīna anfusahum wa-amwālahum bi-anna lahumu l-jannata... wa'dan 'alayhi ḥaqqan fī l-Tawrāti wa-l-Injīli wa-l-Qur'ān

God has purchased of the faithful their lives and worldly goods and in return has promised them the garden... Such is the sure pledge which He has made them in the Torah, the Gospel and the Quran.

And the similarities, both lexical and thematic, are clear and uncontestable.

However, in the nature descriptions there are also remarkable similarities with contemporary Arabic poetry. These similarities are partly hidden. That is to say, the similarities are not obvious and not on the surface level: what is metaphorical in the poems has become real in the Quran. These hidden similarities are important testimonies. We may easily claim that the exegetes invented verses containing suitable lexical or grammatical items for their use and that, hence, such verses are of suspect value, but it seems difficult to claim that they were so subtle as to invent hidden similarities that are not obvious and that, moreover, were not put into use in Quranic commentaries – few, if any, of the verses discussed in this paper can be found in the *tafāsīr*.

The similarities may perhaps not be strong enough to prove it beyond doubt, but they do make it extremely probable that, in all likelihood, the Quran was born in a context where these poems circulated and that it was influenced by them, at least when it comes to nature descriptions.

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Appendix A: Examples of Paradise Descriptions in the Quran

Q 3:15: *jannātun (tajrī min taḥtihā l-anhāru)*^A (*khālīdīna fihā*)^B (*wa-azwājun muṭahharatun*)^D

Gardens watered by running streams, where they shall dwell forever with wives of perfect chastity.

Q 2:24: *wa-bashshir...anna lahum jannātin (tajrī min taḥtihā l-anhāru)*^A (*kullamā ruḏiqū minhā min thamaratīn rizqan qālū hādihā lladhī ruḏiqnā min qablu wa-utū bihi mutashābihan*)^C (*wa-lahum fihā azwājun muṭahharatun*)^D (*wa-hum fihā khālīdūn*)^B

Proclaim good tidings...They shall dwell in gardens watered by running streams: whenever they are given fruit to eat they will say: “This is what we used to eat before,” for they shall be given the like. Wedded to chaste wives, they shall abide there for ever.

Q 4:57: *sa-nudkhiluhum jannātin (tajrī min taḥtiḥā l-anhāru)*^A (*khālīdīna fihā abadan*)^B (*lahum fihā azwājun mutahharatun*)^D (*wa-nudkhiluhum ḡillan ḡalīlan*)^F

We shall admit them to gardens watered by running streams, where, wedded to chaste wives, they shall abide for ever. We shall admit them to a cool shade.

Q 18:31: *ulā'ika lahum jannātu 'Adnin (tajrī min taḥtiḥimū l-anhāru)*^A (*yuḥallawna fihā min asāwira min dhahabin wa-yalbasūna thiyāban khuḍran min sundusin wa-stabraḡin muttaki'īna fihā 'alā l-arā'ik*)^{E41}

They shall dwell in the gardens of Eden, with rivers rolling at their feet. Reclining there upon soft couches, they shall be decked with bracelets of gold and arrayed in garments of fine green silk and rich brocade.

Q 36:55–7: *inna aṣḥāba l-jannati l-yawma fī shughulīn fākihūn * hum (wa-azwājuhum)*^D (*fī ḡilālīn*)^F (*'alā l-arā'iki muttaki'ūn*)^E * (*lahum fihā fākihātun wa-lahum mā yadda'ūn*)^{C42}

On that day the dwellers of Paradise shall think of nothing but their bliss. Together with their wives, they shall recline in shady groves upon soft couches. They shall have fruits and all that they desire.

Q 37:40–9: *illā 'ibāda llāhi l-mukhlaṣīn * ulā'ika lahum (rizqun ma'lūm * fawākiḥu wa-hum mukramūn)*^C * *fī jannāti l-na'īm* * (*'alā sururin mutaḡābilīn * yuṭāfu 'alayhim bi-ka'sīn min ma'īn * bayḍā'a ladhdhatin li-l-shāribīn*)^E * *lā fihā ḡhawlnu wa-lā hum 'anhā yunzaḡūn* * (*wa-'indahum ḡāṣirātu l-ṭarḡī 'īn * ka-annahunna bayḡun mahnūn*)^D

But the true servants of God shall be well provided for, feasting on fruit, and honored in the gardens of delight. Reclining face to face upon soft couches, they shall be served with a goblet filled at a gushing fountain, white, and delicious to those who drink it. It will neither dull their senses nor befuddle them. They shall sit with bashful, dark-eyed girls, like sheltered eggs of ostriches.

Q 38:50–4: *jannāti 'adnin mufattaḡatan lahumū l-abwāb* * (*muttaki'īna fihā yad'ūna fihā bi-fākihātīn kathīratīn wa-sharāb*)^{E+C} * (*wa-'indahum ḡāṣirātu l-ṭarḡī*

41 Cf. Q 22:23 and 35:33. Element B is present in Q 22:35, as *dār al-muḡāma*.

42 *Fī shughul* sounds ironical toward the inhabitants of Hell. It also emphasizes the reality of Paradise as a place without toil.

atrāb)^D * *hādhā mā tū'adūna li-yawmi l-ḥisāb* * (*inna hādhā la-rizqunā mā laḥū min naḥād*)^B

The gardens of Eden, whose gates shall open to receive them. Reclining there with bashful girls for companions, they shall feast on abundant fruit and drink. All this shall be yours on the Day of Reckoning; Our gifts shall never fail.

Q 43:70–3: *udkhulū l-Jannata antum (wa-azwājukum)*^D (*tuḥbarūn* * *yuṭāfu 'alayhim bi-ṣiḥāfin min dhahabin wa-akwābin wa-fihā mā tashtahihi l-anfusu wa-taladhdhu l-a'yunu*)^E (*wa-antum fihā khālidūn*)^B * *wa-tilka l-jannatu llatī ūrithtumūhā bi-mā kuntum ta'malūn* * (*lakum fihā fākihātun kathīratun minhā ta'kulūn*)^C

Enter Paradise, you and your spouses, in all delight. You shall be served with golden dishes and golden cups. Abiding there forever, you shall find all that your souls desire and all that your eyes rejoice in. Such is the Paradise you shall inherit by virtue of your good deeds. Your sustenance shall be abundant fruit.

Q 52:17–20, 22–4: *inna l-muttaqīna fī jannātin wa-na'im* * *fākihīna bi-mā ātāhum rabbuhum wa-waqāhum 'adhāba l-Jahīm* * (*kulū wa-shrabū hanī'an*)^C *bi-mā kuntum ta'malūn* * (*muttaki'īna 'alā sururin maṣfūfatin*)^E (*wa-zawwajnāhum bi-ḥūrīn 'in*)^D *... **wa-amdadnāhum (bi-fākihātin wa-laḥmin mim mā yashtahūn* * *yatanāza'ūna fihā ka'san lā laḥwun fihā wa-lā ta'thīm*)^C * *wa-yaṭūfu 'alayhim (ghilmānun lahum ka-annahum lu'lu'un makhnūn)*^E

But in fair gardens the righteous shall dwell in bliss, rejoicing in what their Lord will give them. He will shield them from the scourge of hell. He will say: "Eat and drink in joy. This is the reward of your labors." They shall recline on couches ranged in rows. To dark-eyed *ḥūrīs* We shall wed them. . . . Fruits We shall give them, and such meats as they desire. They will pass from hand to hand a cup inspiring no idle talk, no sinful urge; and there shall wait on them young boys of their own as fair as virgin pearls.

Q 55:46–76:⁴³ *wa-li-man khāfa maqāma rabbihī jannatān* * **refrain** * *dhawātā aḥnān* * **refrain** * *fihimā 'aynāni tajrīyān* * **refrain** * (*fihimā min kulli fākihātin zawjān*)^C * **refrain** * (*muttaki'īna 'alā furushīn baṭā'inuhā min istabraqīn wa-janā l-jannatayni dān*)^E * **refrain** * (*fihinna qāṣirātu l-ṭarfi lam yaṭmithhunna insun*

43 The recurrent formula *fa-bi-ayyi ālā'i rabbikumā tukadhdhibān* – "which of your Lord's blessings would you deny?" has been abbreviated as **refrain**.

qablahum wa-lā jānn)^D * **refrain** * (*ka-annahunna l-yāqūtu wa-l-marjān*)^{D+E}
 * **refrain** * *hal jazā'u l-iḥsāni illā l-iḥsān* * **refrain** * *wa-min dūnihimā jannatān*
 * **refrain** * *mud'hāmmatān* * **refrain** * *fihimā 'aynāni naḍḍākhatān* * **refrain** *
 (*fihimā fākihātun wa-nakhlun wa-rummān*)^C * **refrain** * (*fihinna khayrātun*
ḥisān * **refrain** * *ḥūrun maqṣūrātun fī l-khiyām* * **refrain** * *lam yaṭmithhunna*
insun qablahum wa-lā jānn)^D * **refrain** * (*muttaki'īna 'alā raḥraḥin khuḍrin*
wa-'abqariyyin ḥisān)^E

But for those that fear the majesty of their Lord there are two gardens /**refrain**/ planted with shady trees. /**refrain**/ Each is watered by a flowing spring. /**refrain**/ Each bears every kind of fruit in pairs. /**refrain**/ They shall recline on couches lined with thick brocade, and within their reach will hang the fruits of both gardens. /**refrain**/ They shall dwell with bashful virgins whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before, /**refrain**/ virgins as fair as corals and rubies. /**refrain**/ Shall the reward of goodness be anything but good? /**refrain**/ And beside these there shall be two other gardens/**refrain**/ of darkest green. /**refrain**/ A gushing fountain shall flow in each. /**refrain**/ Each planted with fruit trees, the palm and the pomegranate. /**refrain**/ In each there shall be virgins chaste and fair, / **refrain**/ dark-eyed virgins sheltered in their tents/**refrain**/ whom neither man nor jinni will have touched before. /**refrain**/ They shall recline on green cushions and rich carpets.

Q 56:12–24, 27–38: *fī jannāti l-na'im* * *thullatun min al-awwalīn* * *wa-qalīlun min al-ākhirīn* * ('*alā sururin mawḍūnah* * *muttaki'īna 'alayhā mutaḡābilīn* * *yaṭūfu 'alayhim wildānun*)^E (*mukhalladūn*)^{B44} * (*bi-akwābin wa-abārīqa wa-ka'sin min mā'in*)^E * *lā yuṣadda'ūna 'anhā wa-lā yunzifūn* * (*wa-fākihātīn mim mā yatakhayyarūn* * *wa-laḥmiṭayrin mim mā yashtahūn*)^C * (*wa-ḥūrun 'īn* * *ka-amthālī l-lu'lu'i l-maknūn*)^D * *jazā'an bimā kānū ya'malūn* * ... * *wa-aṣḥābu l-yamīni mā aṣḥābu l-yamīn* * *fī sidrin makhḍūd* * *wa-ṭalḥin mandūd* * (*wa-ḡillīn mamdūd*)^F * (*wa-mā'in maskūb* * *wa-fākihātīn kathīrah* * *lā maḡtū'atīn wa-lā mamnū'ah*)^C * (*wa-furushīn marfū'ah*)^E * *innā ansha'nāhunna inshā'a* * (*fa-ja'alnāhunna abkārā* * '*uruban atrābā*)^D * *li-aṣḥābi l-yamīn* ...

in the gardens of delight: a whole multitude from the men of old, but only a few from the later generations. They shall recline on jeweled couches face to face, and there shall wait on them immortal youths with bowls and ewers and a cup of purest wine (that will neither pain their heads nor take away their reason);

44 Grammatically, *mukhalladūn* is an attribute of the *wildān*, not of the believers, but it nevertheless takes up the eternity aspect.

with fruits of their own choice and flesh of fowls that they relish. And theirs shall be the dark-eyed *ḥūrīs*, chaste as hidden pearls: a guerdon for their deeds. . . . Those on the right hand, what are they? They shall recline on couches raised on high in the shade of thornless *sidrahs* and clusters of *ṭalḥ*; amidst gushing waters and abundant fruits, unforbidden, never-ending. We created the *ḥūrīs* and made them virgins, loving companions for those on the right hand.

Q 76:12–21: *wa-jazāhum bimā ṣabarū jannatan (wa-ḥarirā * muttakī'ina fihā 'alā l-arā'iki)*^E (*lā yarawna fihā shamsan*)^{F45} *wa-lā zamharirā * (wa-dāniyatan 'alayhim ṣilāluhā)*^F (*wa-dhullilat quṭūfuhā tadhililā*)^C * (*wa-yuṭāfu 'alayhim bi-āniyatin min fiḍḍatin wa-akwābin kānat qawārīrā*)^{A6} * *qawārīran min fiḍḍatin qaddarūhā taqdīrā * wa-yusqawna fihā ka'san kāna mizājuhā zanjabilā*)^{C+E} * (*'aynan fihā tusammā salsabilā * (wa-yaṭūfu 'alayhim wildānun mukhalladūna idhā ra'aytahum ḥasibtahum lu'lu'an manthūrā * wa-idhā ra'ayta thamma ra'ayta na'iman wa-mulkan kabūrā * āliyahum*)⁴⁷ *thiyābu sundusin khuḍrun wa-stabraqun wa-ḥullū asāwira min fiḍḍatin wa-saqāhum rabbuhum sharāban ṭahūrā*)^E

He will reward them for their steadfastness with robes of silk and the delights of Paradise. Reclining there upon soft couches, they shall feel neither the scorching heat nor the biting cold. Trees will spread their shade around them, and fruits will hang in clusters over them. They shall be served with silver dishes, and beakers as large as goblets; silver goblets which they themselves shall measure: and cups brim-full with ginger-flavored water from the fount of Salsabil. They shall be attended by boys graced with eternal youth, who to the beholder's eyes will seem like sprinkled pearls. When you gaze upon that scene you will behold a kingdom blissful and glorious. They shall be arrayed in garments of fine green silk and rich brocade, and adorned with bracelets of silver. Their Lord will give them pure beverage to drink.

Q 78:31–5: *inna li-l-muttaqīna mafāzā * ḥadā'iqā (wa-a'nābā)*^C * (*wa-kawā'iba atrābā*)^D * (*wa-ka'san diḥāqā*)^C * *lā yasma'ūna fihā laghwan wa-lā kidhdhābā*

45 Obviously, in the meaning of excessive sunshine. *Zamharir* probably means excessive cold (see Tottoli, Qur'an), coming functionally close to element F, as the believers are similarly protected from excessive sunshine and excessive cold.

46 Here and in the next verse I vocalize *qawārīr* as it is written. The recitation treats this as a diptote.

47 Why not *'alayhim*?

As for the righteous, they shall surely triumph. Theirs shall be gardens and vineyards, and high-bosomed maidens for companions: a truly overflowing cup. There they shall hear no idle talk nor any falsehood.

Q 88:10–6: *fī jannatin ‘āliyah * lā tasma‘u fihā lāghiyah * fihā ‘aynun jāriyah * (fihā sururun marfū‘ah * wa-akwābun mawḍū‘ah * wa-namāriqu maṣfūfah * wa-zarābiyyu mabthūthah)*^E

in a lofty garden. There they shall hear no idle talk. A gushing fountain shall be there, and raised soft couches with goblets placed before them; silken cushions ranged in order and carpets richly spread.

Appendix B: Examples of Descriptions of Rain and Storm in the Quran

Q 7:57–8: *wa-huwa lladhī yursilu l-riyāḥa bushran bayna yaday raḥmatihī ḥattā idhā aqallat saḥāban thiqālan suqnāhu li-baladin mayyitin fa-anzalnā bihī l-mā’a fa-akhrajnā bihī min kulli l-thamarāti kadhālika nukhriju l-mawtā la‘allakum tadhakkārūn * wa-l-baladu l-ṭayyibu yakhruju nabātuhū bi-idhni rabbihī wa-lladhī khabutha lā yakhruju illā nakidan kadhālika nuṣarrifu l-āyāti li-qawmin yashkurūn.*

He sends forth the winds as harbingers of His mercy, and when they have gathered up a heavy cloud, He drives it on to some dead land and lets water fall upon it, bringing forth all manner of fruit. Thus He will raise the dead to life. Perchance you will take heed. Good soil yields fruit by God’s will. But poor and scant are the fruits which spring from barren soil. Thus We make plain Our revelations to those who render thanks.

Q 13:17: *anzala min al-samā’i mā’an fa-sālat awdiyātun bi-qadarihā fa-ḥtamala l-saylu zabadan rābiyan wa-mimmā yūqidūna ‘alayhi fī l-nāri btighā’a ḥilyatin aw matā’in zabadun mithlūhū ka-dhālika yaḍribu llāhu l-ḥaqqā wa-l-bāṭila fa-ammā l-zabadu fa-yadhhabu jufā’an wa-ammā mā yanfa‘u l-nāsa fa-yamkuthu fī l-arḍ.*

He sends down water from the sky which fills the riverbeds to overflowing, so that their torrents bear a swelling foam, akin to that which rises from smelted ore when men make ornaments and tools. Thus God depicts truth and falsehood. The scum is cast away, but that which is of use to man remains behind.

Q 24:43: *a-lam tara anna llāha yuzjī saḥāban thumma yu'allifu baynahū thumma yaj'aluhū rukāman fa-tarā l-wadqa yakhruju min khilālīhī wa-yunazzilu min al-samā'i min jibālīn fihā min baradin fa-yuṣību bihī man yashā'u wa-yaṣrifuhū 'an man yashā'u yakādu sanā barqihī yadhhabu bi-l-abṣār.*

Do you not see how God drives the clouds, then gathers them and piles them up in masses which pour down torrents of rain? From heaven's mountains He sends down hail, pelting with it whom He will and turning it away from whom He pleases. The flash of His lightning almost snatches off men's eyes.

Q 30:48–51: *Allāhu lladhī yursilu l-riyāḥa fa-tuthīru saḥāban fa-yabsuṭuhū fī l-samā'i kayfa yashā'u wa-yaj'aluhū kisafan fa-tarā l-wadqa yakhruju min khilālīhī fa-idhā aṣāba bihī man yashā'u min 'ibādihī idhā hum yastabshirūn * wa-idhā kānū min qabli an yunazzala 'alayhim min qablihī la-mublisūn * fa-nẓur ilā āthāri raḥmati llāhi kayfa yuḥyī l-arḍa ba'da mawtiḥā inna dhālika la-muḥyī l-mawtā wa-huwa 'alā kulli shay'in qadīr * wa-la-'in arsalnā riḥan fa-ra'awhu musfarran la-ẓallū min ba'dihī yakfurūn*

It is God who drives the winds that raise the clouds. He spreads them as He will in the heaven and breaks them up, so that you can see the rain falling from their midst. When He sends it down upon His servants they are filled with joy, though before its coming they may have lost all hope. Behold then the tokens of God's mercy; how He gives fresh life to the dead earth. Likewise, He will bring back the dead to life. He has power over all things. Yet if We let loose on them a searing wind they would return to unbelief.

Q 78:14–6: *wa-anzalnā min al-mu'ṣirāti mā'an thajjājā * li-nukhrija bihī ḥabban wa-nabātā * wa-jannātin alfāfā*

We sent down abundant water from the clouds, bringing forth grain and varied plants, and gardens thick with foliage.

Dying in the Path of God: Reading Martyrdom and Moral Excellence in the Quran

Asma Afsaruddin

It is often popularly assumed today that martyrdom, especially in the military sense, is fundamental to the Islamic worldview and therefore it must be a well-developed concept in the Quran, Islam's foundational text. But a firm acquaintance with the Quran reveals that martyrdom is at best an inchoate concept within it, not encapsulated by any single, specific term. The term *shahīd* used almost exclusively in later literature to refer to a martyr, military or otherwise, does not occur in the Quran in this sense. In the Quran *shahīd*, and its cognate *shāhid*, refer to a legal witness or eyewitness, and it is used for both God and humans in appropriate contexts (for example, Q 3:98; 6:19; 41:53). Quranic phrases commonly understood to refer to the military martyr include *man qutila fī sabīl Allāh/alladhīna qutilū fī sabīl Allāh* ("those who are slain in the path of God") (cf. Q 2:154; 3:169)¹ and variations thereof. These phrases are therefore not without ambiguity and do not clearly refer to the military martyr, although the Quranic contexts for a number of verses employing these phrases suggest it, as does the exegetical literature.

In order to retrieve some of the earliest meanings assigned to being "slain in the path of God," this chapter focuses on a discussion, first, of two critical Quranic verses (Q 2:154 and 3:169) which employ this expression or a variant thereof – based on a survey of their exegeses by some of the most important Quran commentators through time. This is followed by a discussion of two verses (Q 3:157–8) which refer to the moral excellences of both those who die naturally and those who are slain in the path of God. A diachronic survey of the exegeses of these critical verses allows us to assess how military martyrdom in particular was read into these specific Quranic verses and construed by leading exegetes over time as a meritorious act of religiosity and piety, reflective of the greater moral excellence of the brave warrior.

In this essay we are primarily looking at Sunni works – first, because of the constraints of length, and second, because of the fact that martyrdom acquired certain connotations exclusive to the Shi'i tradition and requires separate

1 All translations of Quranic verses are mine.

treatment. The principal Sunni exegetical works consulted here are the early commentary composed during the Umayyad period by Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767);² the early but hard-to-date exegesis titled *Tanwīr al-miqbās*, purportedly containing the exegesis of the famous Companion ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abbās (d. ca. 68/687–8);³ the early ‘Abbasid *tafsīr* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827);⁴ the acclaimed commentaries of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923)⁵ and al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076)⁶ from the height of the ‘Abbasid period; the commentaries of the Mu‘tazilī exegete al-Zamakhsharī (d. ca. 538/1144);⁷ the rationalist Ash‘arī exegete Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) from the Saljuq period; and of the Andalusian exegete al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272)⁸ in the seventh/thirteenth century, corresponding to the early Mamluk period in the Islamic East. This selection allows us to obtain representative samplings of views from a variety of exegetical perspectives and historical eras in the pre-modern period.

1 Exegeses of Quran 2:154 and 3:169

Quran 2:154 states: “Do not say regarding those who are slain in the path of God that they are dead; rather they are alive but you are not aware.” Quran 3:169 states: “Do not consider as dead those who are slain in the path of God; rather they are alive and well-provided for in the presence of their Lord.”

With regard to Quran 2:154, the early Umayyad exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān says that it was revealed concerning the fourteen Muslims who were slain at the battle of Badr (2/624), eight from among the *anṣār* (Medinan Helpers) and six from among the *muhājirūn* (Meccan Emigrants). He then proceeds to list them all. According to Muqātil, the revelation of this verse served to inform the believers that those who were slain in the path of God were not dead but alive, reaping their reward in paradise in the presence of God. The souls of the martyrs (*al-shuhadā’*) resided near the lote-tree closest to the throne of God (*sidrat al-muntahā*).⁹

2 For whom see Sezgin, *Geschichte* i, 36–7; Plessner, Muqātil b. Sulaymān.

3 For a discussion of the dating of this work, see Rippin, *Tafsīr Ibn ‘Abbās* 38–83; Motzki, *Dating* 147–63.

4 For whom, see Motzki, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī.

5 See, for example, Bosworth, al-Ṭabarī.

6 See, for example, Sellheim, al-Wāḥidī.

7 See, for example, Versteegh, al-Zamakhsharī.

8 See, for example, Arnaldez, al-Ḳurṭubī.

9 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* i, 151.

As for Quran 3:169, Muqātil comments that it was also revealed concerning those killed in the battle of Badr, who are not to be regarded as dead but as alive, enjoying the fruits (*al-thimār*) of heaven. God renders the souls of the martyrs as green birds which flit about in heaven under candelabra suspended over the divine throne, he continues. When they alight on these candelabra, God appears before them and asks them if He can provide anything more. He asks the same question of them three times. On the third occasion, they wish aloud that their souls could be returned to their bodies, so that “we may fight in your path again.” On having experienced God’s generosity toward them, they wish to go back and inform their brethren of the joys that await them and that if they should encounter fighting, “they should hasten themselves toward martyrdom” (*saru’ū bi-anfusihim ilā l-shahāda*). Upon which God informed them that He was about to reveal Quran 3:169 to His Prophet so that he may inform their brethren about their situation.¹⁰

The author of *Tanwīr al-miqbās* briefly comments that Quran 2:154 refers to those faithful who were slain during the battle of Badr. They are not like the other dead but alive in heaven enjoying its bounties. The exceptional honor that is bestowed on them is not known to us.¹¹ Quran 3:169 is a reference to those slain at Badr and at Uḥud, who are not dead but alive and blissfully happy in the presence of God.¹²

In his early *tafsīr* work, ‘Abd al-Razzāq says in reference to Quran 2:154 that the souls of the martyrs are in the form of white birds. He quotes earlier authorities to support this view. Thus, he relates from Ma‘mar (d. 209/824–5) that al-Kalbī (d. 204/819 or 206/821) was of the opinion that they were in the form of green birds eating from the fruits of paradise and taking refuge in the candelabra under the divine throne.¹³

‘Abd al-Razzāq cites similar reports in regard to Quran 3:169. According to Ma‘mar relating from Qatāda (d. 117/735), the souls of the martyrs are in the form of white birds eating the fruits of paradise. He then cites the report from al-Kalbī related by Ma‘mar given above which depicts the souls in the form of green birds.¹⁴

In al-Ṭabarī, we find a much more detailed description of the next world and a more extensive taxonomy of the type of heavenly rewards awaiting specific

¹⁰ Ibid., i, 314.

¹¹ Al-Fayrūzābādī (ed.), *Tanwīr al-miqbās* 27.

¹² Ibid., 78–9.

¹³ ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 298.

¹⁴ Ibid., i, 421. For the issue of the souls of martyrs residing in birds in paradise, see also S. Günther’s contribution to the present volume.

categories of believers, indicating the extent to which this issue had begun to exercise the minds of exegetes by the late third/ninth century. He begins by commenting that in this verse God addresses the believers and exhorts them to seek His help while patiently obeying Him in their *jihād* against their enemies, forsaking all that constitutes disobedience to Him, and carrying out the rest of their religious obligations. They are also commanded not to say regarding those who are slain in the path of God that they are dead (*mayyit*), for the dead are lifeless and deprived of their senses, unable to enjoy pleasures and experience bliss. Rather,

those among you and from the rest of My creation who are killed in the path of God are alive in My presence, [immersed] in life and bliss, [enjoying] a blissful existence and glorious provisions, exulting in what I have bestowed on them of My bounty and conferred on them of My generosity.

He quotes the early authority Mujāhid (d. between 100/718 and 104/722) who understood this verse as referring to those who are alive in the presence of their Lord and partaking of the fruits of heaven and enjoying its fragrance, even though they are not actually within it (sc. heaven).¹⁵

According to Qatāda, the souls of the martyrs (*al-shuhadā'*) take the form of white birds (*ṭayr bīḍ*) which eat the fruits of heaven and reside in the celestial lote tree. He says that there are three possible outcomes for the one who fights in the path of God (*lil-mujāhid fī sabīl Allāh*): (1) one who is killed in the path of God remains alive and provided for (*ṣāra ḥayyan marzūqan*); (2) one who survives, having been granted victory and compensated with a great reward (*ajran 'aẓīman*); and (3) one who dies (of natural causes) is given a handsome provision (*rizqan ḥasan*) by God. According to al-Rabī'a (d. 136/753) and 'Ikrima (d. 105/723–4), however, the souls of the martyrs take the form of green birds in heaven.¹⁶

But what if someone remonstrates that the generous compensation promised to the “one slain in the path of God” (*al-maqtūl fī sabīl Allāh*) is also generally applicable to any pious believer? After all, as al-Ṭabarī notes, a number of reports record that the Prophet Muḥammad distinguished the states of the believer and the unbeliever in general in the following manner: in the case of the unbelievers, the “doors” of their graves would be opened toward heaven so that they may smell its fragrance. They further implore God to hasten the last hour so that they may hasten toward their dwellings in paradise, and be

¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* ii, 42.

¹⁶ Ibid.

reunited with their families and children there. As for the unbelievers, the “doors” of their graves are opened toward the fire, and they smell its putridness and its vile odors while gazing at it. They seek to delay the last hour, fearful of the grievous fate that God has prepared for them. So al-Ṭabarī’s interlocutor may well ask – what, if anything, distinguishes the state of the one killed (*al-qatīl*) in the path of God from the rest of humanity, believers and unbelievers, who, according to these reports, are all alive in the *barzakh* (the intermediary world after death between this one and the next), albeit in vastly different conditions?¹⁷

The answer to this question is as follows, continues al-Ṭabarī. The martyrs are distinguished from other believers by the fact that they alone are privy to the delicious food of heaven in the *barzakh* before their resurrection and which they continue to savor after their resurrection. This is how God has privileged them over everyone else. According to a report from Ibn ‘Abbās, the martyrs are near Bāriq, a river at the gate of paradise, under a green dome (according to ‘Abda, in a green garden), where they are given their provision from heaven morning and night. Another report from Ibn Bashshār al-Sulamī (or Abū Bashshār, a transmitter for whom no biographical information is available) says that the souls of the martyrs are under the white domes of paradise. Inside each dome await two wives (*zawjatān*). Every day their sustenance comes in the form of a bull and a whale. The bull contains every kind of fruit in heaven and the whale contains every kind of drink available in paradise.¹⁸

Al-Ṭabarī then proceeds to reply to those who protest that these reports cited by him cataloging the pleasures awaiting the martyrs are not mentioned in Quran 2:154, which merely gives information about their state – whether they are dead or alive. Al-Ṭabarī replies by simply asserting that these reports give information about the pleasures enjoyed by the martyrs, alluded to by God in the related verse Quran 3:169, which refers to their provision (*yurzaqūn*). In Quran 2:154, continues al-Ṭabarī, God forbids humankind to say that the martyrs are dead and does not mention details that are provided in these reports. The last part of Quran 2:154 refers to the fact that humans cannot see the martyrs and are therefore not aware that they are indeed alive. They are apprised of this only through God informing them of this fact, says al-Ṭabarī.¹⁹

With regard to Quran 3:169, al-Ṭabarī understands it to contain a reference specifically to those Companions killed at Uḥud. The verse served to inform the Prophet that he should not regard them as dead – that is devoid of feeling

¹⁷ Ibid., ii, 42–3.

¹⁸ Ibid., ii, 43.

¹⁹ Ibid.

and the ability to experience pleasure. Rather, “they are alive in My presence, delighting in My sustenance, exulting and rejoicing in what I grant them from my generosity and mercy, bestowing on them the abundance of My reward and provisions.”²⁰

Al-Ṭabarī next relates several reports which detail the pleasures awaiting the souls of the martyrs. He cites a *ḥadīth* from Ibn ‘Abbās in which Muḥammad relates that those who had been slain at Uḥud would be transformed into souls residing in green birds that would frequent the rivers of paradise, eat of its fruits and alight on golden candelabra in the shadow of the divine throne. When these martyrs wished out loud that they could inform their brethren on earth about their blissful state, God caused these verses (Q 3:169–70) to come down. As we recall, Muqātil had cited a similar report in his exegesis of this verse but without attribution. A report almost identical to Muqātil’s which additionally refers to God’s querying of the martyrs three times if they required anything more, is also quoted by al-Ṭabarī on the authority of ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652–3). Similar and variant reports are recorded by al-Ṭabarī from Masrūq b. al-Ajda‘ (d. 63/682–3), Ibn ‘Abbās, Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh (d. 78/697), and Qatāda. A variant report from al-Rabī‘a briefly combines two exegetical strands and states that the souls of the martyrs take the form of both green and white birds and that these martyrs had been slain in Badr and Uḥud. Truncated versions of these reports are additionally attributed to Masrūq ‘Abdallāh (b. Mas‘ūd), al-Suddī (d. 128/745), al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/723) and others.²¹

A variant report which points to the paranetic purpose of some of these exegetical reports is worthy of note. The report is attributed to Ibn Ishāq, who stated,

God told His Prophet Muḥammad, peace and blessings be upon him, that [the verse] “Do not consider those who are slain in the path of God to be dead; rather they are alive and provided for in the presence of God,” would induce the believers to seek the rewards of paradise and mitigate the enormity of fighting.²²

In regard to Quran 2:154, al-Wāḥidī briefly explains that people used to say that those who had been killed in the path of God were dead and no longer able to enjoy the good things of the world. This verse was revealed to counter

²⁰ Ibid., iii, 513.

²¹ Ibid., iii, 513–6.

²² Ibid., iii, 515.

such perceptions. In connection with His saying, “they are alive,” the exegetes cited the *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says, “The souls of the martyrs are lodged inside green birds who flit about among the fruit trees of paradise and drink from its rivers, taking refuge at night among the lighted candelabra hanging by the divine throne.”²³

As for Quran 3:169, al-Wāḥidī cites the *ḥadīth* narrated by Ibn ‘Abbās, recorded also by Muqātil and al-Ṭabarī (see above), as its occasion of revelation. A fuller version of this *ḥadīth* which includes divine querying of the martyrs three times is recorded on the authority of ‘Abdallāh (b. Mas‘ūd) and a variant shorter version of it is attributed to Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh.²⁴

Al-Zamakhsharī cites the following statement from al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) in reference to Quran 2:154: “Indeed, the martyrs are alive in the presence of God, their provisions laid out before their souls. Thus, they are engulfed by happiness and bliss just as fire is laid out before the souls of the Pharaoh’s people morning and night. And they are engulfed by pain.”²⁵ He cites Mujāhid’s exegesis (as given by al-Ṭabarī above) and also refers to unnamed scholars who were of the opinion that perhaps the verse means that God assembles the severed parts of the martyr’s body and revives them and confers upon them, to the minutest part, His bounties. Others were of the opinion that the verse was specifically revealed concerning the martyrs of Badr, who were fourteen in number.²⁶

As for Quran 3:169, al-Zamakhsharī dwells on possible variant readings of the verse (*yaḥsabanna* instead of *taḥsabanna*; and *quttilū* instead of *qutilū*) but the essence of the verse, he says, is that those who are slain in the path of God are alive and eat and drink like normal live human beings; this serves to underscore the exceptionally blissful existence they are granted by God.²⁷

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī has a lengthy exposition on Quran 2:154, thus signaling the theological significance of this particular subject by his time. He begins by pointing out that this verse has its parallel in Quran 3:169, and that Quran 2:154 must be read in the context of the verse preceding it which states, “O those who believe, believe and implore the help of God with patience and prayer, for God is with the patiently forbearing.” Thus, al-Rāzī says, God adjures believers to seek His help with patience and prayer

23 Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* i, 236.

24 Ibid., i, 519–20.

25 Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāfi*, 347.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., i, 657–8.

in establishing My religion, and if you are required in this endeavor to struggle against My enemies with your wealth and your bodies, then you should do so and incline yourselves [to that]. But do not think that your selves will thereby perish; rather know that your slain are alive in My presence.²⁸

Al-Rāzī then proceeds to cite the *ḥadīth* from Ibn ‘Abbās which situates the verse in the context of the battle of Badr, with a complete list of the fourteen slain men. Other unnamed sources (*‘an ākharīn*) stated that this verse was revealed when the unbelievers and the Hypocrites stated jeeringly that the Muslims were exposing themselves to death while seeking to satisfy Muḥammad, in which there would be no benefit.²⁹

Al-Rāzī next launches into an extensive discussion of what the possible implications of this verse are for understanding the state of the martyrs after physical death. To summarize, he says that the majority of the commentators are in agreement that those who are obedient to God (*al-muṭī‘ūn*) attain their reward in their graves, even though their bodies are lifeless. He refers to the well-known Mu‘tazilī scholar al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816) who said that this verse contains a rejoinder to “the polytheists who do not know that the one who is killed for the faith of Muḥammad, upon him be peace and blessings, is alive in the faith and guided by His Lord.” Other verses that can be adduced to support such statements are Q 82:13–14; 4:145; 22:56; 40:11, 46; 71:25, and others.³⁰

Al-Rāzī then goes on to rehearse some of the debates already familiar to us to a certain extent concerning whether a special status reserved only for the martyrs is indicated here and whether they enjoy their reward physically in heaven or spiritually in their graves. Al-Rāzī believes that the verse does indicate a special status for the martyrs, although their status is lower than that of the prophets and the truthful ones (*al-nabiyyūn wa-l-ṣiddīqūn*; cf. Q 4:69). He also inclines toward the view that the martyrs enjoy their rewards spiritually, for no one will be physically resurrected until the day of judgment, and the disembodied soul is capable of experiencing pain and pleasure. On the day of resurrection, the souls will be united with their bodies, leading to a “fusion of the physical states with the spiritual.”³¹

With regard to Quran 3:169, al-Rāzī says that the verse was revealed to counter the assumption that *jihād* leads to being killed (*qatl*), as was said about

28 Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr* ii, 125.

29 Ibid., ii, 215.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., ii, 126–8.

those who left for the battle of Uḥud, as of course being killed is something undesirable (*makrūh*) to be avoided. Being killed, however, continues al-Rāzī, is determined by God as is natural death; there is no avoiding either when ordained by Him. But the verse provides another cogent response to allay such anxieties: that being slain in the path of God is not something undesirable. How can it be undesirable when the slain individual is alive with God after his death and is destined for an honorable status and closeness to God? He is furthermore given all kinds of provisions and basks in pure bliss and joy. Which intelligent person will then assert that this manner of dying is undesirable?³²

This verse, continues al-Rāzī, was specifically revealed concerning those slain at Badr and Uḥud, and to reprimand the Hypocrites who had desisted from taking part in the fighting on account of their fear of being killed. God elucidated the merits of fighting in these battles in this verse so that it would serve as an impetus for Muslims to emulate those who had fought in these campaigns and were slain. Those who forsake the military *jihād* may or may not attain the good things of this world, which are paltry and contemptible, but those who embark upon it have without doubt attained the bounties of the next world, which are great, enduring, and everlasting; this proves that undertaking to fight is better than forsaking it.³³

Al-Qurṭubī defers the full treatment of “martyrs and the laws pertaining to them” until his exegesis of the related verse Quran 3:169 (discussed below). In brief, he comments in regard to Quran 2:154 that it is possible to aver that if God revives the martyrs after their death to confer His bounties on them, then He can also revive the unbelievers to punish them, and there is proof for that in the torments of the grave. When one says that the martyrs are alive, it does not mean that “they will be resurrected” (*sa-yuḥyawn*) after death, for that is true of everyone. Rather, it refers to some different state as indicated by His saying “But you are not aware” and means that the martyrs are dead and alive at the same time, a state that cannot be compared to any other.³⁴

With regard to Quran 3:169, al-Qurṭubī says that the verse concerns the “martyrs of Uḥud” (*shuhadā’ Uḥud*), although others say that it referred to Bi’r Ma’ūna.³⁵ God intended Uḥud to serve as a test to distinguish the hypocrite from the sincere believer (*al-munāfiq min al-ṣādiq*) and that whoever was slain

32 Ibid., iii, 425.

33 Ibid.

34 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi’* ii, 168–9.

35 Bi’r Ma’ūna refers to a well on the road between Mecca and Medina, where a group of Quran reciters (*qurrā’*) sent by Muḥammad at the invitation of the Banū ‘Amir were slain by the Banū Sulaym; cf. Ibn Hishām, *The life of Muhammad* 433–6.

fighting was assured of a noble status and life in His presence, he asserts. Here al-Qurṭubī cites the *ḥadīth* from Ibn ‘Abbās which describes the souls of the martyrs at Uhūd taking the form of green birds and enjoying the bounties of heaven. He also cites the *ḥadīth* from Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh in which the Prophet assures him that his father who had suffered martyrdom (*ustushhida*) had been granted a special audience with God and that when he wished that people on earth would know of his fate, the verse was revealed. A variant report attributes the occasion of revelation to Ḥamza b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib and Muṣ‘ab b. ‘Umayr when they expressed a similar wish in the presence of God.³⁶

Al-Qurṭubī goes on to document that there are those who believed that the verse referred specifically to Uhūd, while others thought it was a reference to Badr. Those who thought it referred to Bī‘r Ma‘ūna included Ibn Ishāq. In general, the verse sought to give comfort to those still alive who were lamenting the fate of the slain, lying in their graves, while they continued to savor the good things of this world.³⁷

Like al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī ponders the meaning of “being alive” after having been killed, citing many of the same authorities as the former. Interestingly, among those whose bodies “are not consumed by earth” (i.e., do not decay) al-Qurṭubī includes the martyrs with prophets, scholars, callers to prayer, market inspectors (*muḥtasibūn*), and Quran reciters (*ḥamalat al-Qur‘ān*). Additionally, he lists the various funerary practices (bathing the body, manner of praying over the deceased, and so on) that developed on account of the special status accorded to the martyr, and the differences of opinion regarding these practices among the legal scholars such as Mālik (d. 179/796), al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820), Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767), and Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), and cites variant *ḥadīths* to document different positions. Al-Qurṭubī also indicates the differences of legal opinion concerning the funerary practices that apply to different types of martyrs: one slain by brigands (*bughāt*) vs. one slain by unbelievers, or one who dies on land or at sea.³⁸ It is clear from this extended discussion that by al-Qurṭubī’s time a sophisticated legal discussion had ensued about different categories of martyrdom and the treatment to be accorded to the martyr by those responsible for his burial; the discussions signify an almost cultish significance attached to this topic in later juridical discussions.

Al-Qurṭubī goes on to list several *ḥadīths* and reports in this section, some of which were not listed by the other exegetes we looked at; these further elucidate the fate of the martyr in the next world. He lists a *ḥadīth* which declares

36 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘* iv, 261.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., iv, 262–7.

that a martyr's debt, unlike his other sins and shortcomings, will not be erased; another *ḥadīth*, not directly pertaining to a martyr, warns that righteous deeds alone will not save the believer from the fire if he or she has also slandered or cursed a person, spilled blood, or engaged in backbiting. Both these *ḥadīths* have the effect of imposing a ceiling on the otherwise unusually exalted status ascribed (by al-Qurṭubī's time) to the military martyr in the next world.³⁹

As for the *rizq* (sustenance, daily provisions) the martyrs will enjoy in the hereafter, it includes closeness to God, a noble status before Him, and the opportunity to engage in seemly praise of Him, says al-Qurṭubī. Their souls will exult in the good things of paradise, a state which will be enhanced when their souls are eventually reunited with their bodies.⁴⁰

2 Exegeses of Quran 3:157–8

This verse states, "If you are slain in the path of God or die (*wa-la-in qutiltum fī sabīl Allāh aw muttum*), then there is pardon and mercy from God better than what they amass (*yaḥmaʿūn*) [in this world]. Whether you die or are slain (*wa-la-in muttum aw qutiltum*), you will be assembled before God" (Q 3:157–8).

Muqātil comments briefly that according to these two verses, when believers are slain in the path of God or die without being slain (*fī ḡhayr qatl*), then they are assured of forgiveness from God for their sins and His mercy, which is better than their accumulated wealth. They are warned about the day of resurrection in the next verse, regardless of their manner of dying.⁴¹

Interestingly and in contrast to the other exegetes, the author of *Tanwīr al-miqbās* understands this verse as an address to the lukewarm or hypocritical Muslims (*ma'shar al-munāfiqīn*) in Medina, and a reminder that whether they are slain in the path of God or die in their homes while being sincere (in their faith) (*wa-kuntum mukhlīṣīn*), God will pardon their sins and spare them punishment, all of which is better than what they have amassed of wealth in this world. Furthermore, whether they die in their own land or while traveling or are slain in some military campaign (*fī ḡhazā*), they will be gathered before God.⁴²

Al-Ṭabarī says that God addresses His faithful believers (*ʿibāduhu al-mu'minūn*) in this verse, reminding them that they should never doubt, as

39 Ibid., iv, 265–7.

40 Ibid., iv, 268.

41 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* i, 309.

42 Al-Fayrūzābādī (ed.), *Tanwīr al-miqbās* 77.

do the Hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*), that all matters are in God's hands, and that He gives life and takes it away. The faithful should strive in the path of God and fight the enemies of God, secure in the knowledge that if they should be slain in battle or die while traveling, they have reached their appointed time of death. God has promised them pardon and mercy for their striving in His path and informed them that dying in the path of God (*anna mawtan fī sabīl Allāh*) or being slain for His sake (*aw qatlan fī llāh*) is better than all the accoutrements of the good life on earth that they had collected, which hold them back from striving in His path and meeting the enemy. Dying or being slain in the path of God is better – if only they knew – than all the amassed wealth of humans, as this wealth delays them from engaging in the military *jihād* and implants in them a fear of dying or being killed.⁴³

With regard to the next verse (Q 3:158), al-Ṭabarī comments that God addresses the believers and reminds them that whether they die or are slain they will return to Him and be resurrected and they will be judged for their actions. He warns them, therefore, to choose what will cause them to draw closer to God and to paradise and earn His approval, such as striving in the path of God and acting out of obedience to Him (*wa-l-ʿamal bi-ṭāʿatihi*), over worldliness and accumulation of perishable goods which leads to disobedience of God and avoidance of *jihād*.⁴⁴

Al-Wāḥidī comments that the verse addresses the believers and assures them that should they be slain during fighting (*fī l-jihād*) or die (naturally), God will forgive them, and His forgiveness is better than all the goods of this world, in the accumulation of which they are distracted from fighting in the path of God (*al-qitāl fī sabīl Allāh*). He points out, however, that the famous Quran reciter Ḥaṣṣ (d. 180/796) had understood *yajmaʿūn* to refer to “those beside you” (sc. those other than the believers) who were busy amassing wealth on account of which they had forsaken fighting. The next verse, continues al-Wāḥidī, serves as a reminder that whether they die away from the battleground or are slain while fighting (*mujāhidūn*), they will be gathered before God. It thus warns believers to be mindful of the day of resurrection.⁴⁵

According to al-Zamakhsharī, these verses are a reference to the unbelievers who falsely stated that if their kinsmen had not migrated and fought, they would still have been alive. The Muslims rejected this idea, because that would have been tantamount to wrongfully desisting from justified fighting (*al-taqāʿud ʿan al-jihād*). The verse continues by assuring the believers that if

43 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* iii, 193.

44 Ibid.

45 Al-Wāḥidī, *al-Wasīṭ* i, 511–2.

they should meet their end either by dying or by being slain in the path of God, then what they will reap of God's forgiveness and mercy for perishing in the path of God (*bi-l-mawt fī sabīl Allāh*) is better than all their accumulated riches.⁴⁶

Al-Rāzī says that this verse was a rejoinder to the doubting Hypocrites and affirmed that there is no escape from death; people will either be slain or die of other causes. If either occurs in the path of God while seeking His approbation, then it is better than the pursuit of all the pleasures of this world which confers absolutely no benefit on humans after death. The beauty and cogency of this riposte, says al-Rāzī, cannot be surpassed. This is so because it affirms that when the individual undertakes *jihād* he empties his heart of all desire for this world and orients himself to the hereafter. When he dies (*idhā māta*), it is as if he is delivered from his enemy and attains the Beloved (*al-maḥbūb*). In contrast, if he were to remain in his home fearing death and intent on amassing wealth, it would be as if he had been veiled from the Beloved (*al-ma'shūq*) and cast into "the house of exile" (*fī dār al-ghurba*). The first circumstance leads to perfect bliss while the latter to complete misery.⁴⁷

After a brief grammatical discussion of the conditional and apodictic clauses of this verse, al-Rāzī comments that the overall meaning of the verse is that should "you die or be slain in your travels and your military campaigns," you will attain divine pardon. So why should the rational person desist from doing so? The direct address indicated by the use of the second person in the first part of Quran 3:157 indicates that it is the believers who are being addressed, while the verb *yajma'un* conjugated in the third person, as affirmed in the reading of Ḥaḍḍ from 'Āṣim, refers to the Hypocrites who are engrossed in the accumulation of transient material things. Thus the verse asserts to the faithful that God's pardon is better than all the material possessions of this world. Al-Rāzī proceeds to exhort the reader to follow the counsel contained in this verse, the essence of which is that all worldly things perish whereas the next world is eternal and there is nothing more enduring and blissful than attaining divine pardon and approbation. Quran 3:158 affirms that this is the ultimate purpose of our earthly sojourn.⁴⁸

Al-Qurṭubī deals with these two verses rather briefly and remarks that they essentially admonish the believers not to flee from fighting (*min al-qitāl*) and from the general religious obligations that they have been commanded to carry out; otherwise they will meet with a painful punishment. Their return is

46 Al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāfī*, 646.

47 Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥfīr al-kabīr* iii, 403.

48 Ibid., iii, 403–4.

to God and He is the sole master of their destiny, and “God the Glorious and Exalted knows best.”⁴⁹

3 Summary and Analysis of Exegeses

A comparison of early and later exegeses of Quran 2:154 and 3:169 reveals how a cult of military martyrdom progressively came to be articulated and read back into these verses, despite the lack of overt reference in these verses to military martyrs and to any assumption of their higher status vis-à-vis other believers who die, for example, while emigrating in the path of God. Muqātil understands both verses to refer to those slain in the battle of Badr while the *Tanwīr al-miqbās* adds those slain at Uḥud as referents in Quran 3:169. Al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī list an alternative exegesis for Quran 3:169 that relates it to the expedition of Bi'r Ma'ūna in which a group of Quran readers were killed. We note that by the time of al-Ṭabarī, a full-fledged doctrine appears to have emerged regarding the exceptional rewards and status conferred upon the fighter in the path of God (*al-mujāhid fī sabīl Allāh*) in general, whether he is slain or victorious and dies later of natural causes. The Quranic referents to those slain in the path of God are no longer understood to be restricted primarily to the martyrs at Badr and Uḥud, as was the earlier understanding of Muqātil and the author of the *Tanwīr al-miqbās*. Most valuably, al-Ṭabarī records the objections raised by some in assigning such an exalted status specifically to the military martyrs when the Quranic verses themselves make no such reference to it. Furthermore, some pointed out that all human beings, believers and unbelievers, are alive in the *barzakh* awaiting final resurrection; how can the slain martyr be assigned to a different state? Al-Ṭabarī responds to these objections by invoking the authority of Companion reports which detail the posthumous pleasures reserved exclusively for military martyrs as indications of their privileged status and the sensate/sensual nature of their being alive.

Rizq mentioned in Quran 3:169 is generally understood from Muqātil onward to be at least a partial reference to delicious celestial fruit reserved for such martyrs. Al-Qurṭubī also understands *rizq* to be a reference to the special closeness that only martyrs will enjoy with God in the next world. Companion reports describing the souls of military martyrs assuming the form of green or white birds flitting about in heaven sampling its pleasures and alighting upon the lote tree closest to the divine throne are mentioned almost ubiquitously in the exegetical literature. The paranetic intent of some of these reports which catalog

49 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'* iv, 240.

these various pleasures reserved only for the slain fighters – to exhort the faithful in the post-prophetic period to continue to undertake the combative *jihād* for the cause of Islam – is explicitly mentioned in the report emanating from Ibn Ishāq recorded by al-Ṭabarī, and also emphasized by al-Rāzī. Regardless of the – at best – tenuous connection with Quran 3:169, all post-Ṭabarī exegetes we surveyed routinely refer in the context of this verse to these heavenly pleasures accorded to the martyrs before their bodily resurrection as a measure of their special status before God. Al-Rāzī indicates to us that this exegesis was still contested in his time; in response to those who remained skeptical that this verse in any way refers to a distinctive status reserved solely for military martyrs, he simply affirms that this is so, although their status was lower than the prophets and the *ṣiddiqūn* (cf. Q 4:69). Al-Qurṭubī similarly emphasizes that these two verses refer to a special state of being alive for the martyrs killed in the early battles of Islam. Interestingly, he considers these martyrs to be of the same rank as prophets, scholars, callers to prayers, market inspectors, and Quran reciters – all occupations and acts of service which are assumed to contribute equally to the common good of the Muslim polity and thus qualify in his view as equal striving in the path of God. The increasing attention paid to military martyrs and their legal status is reflected in al-Qurṭubī's reference to a taxonomy of martyrs that had emerged by his time and the special funerary practices to be observed for different categories of martyrs.

With regard to Quran 3:157–8, the commentators are in agreement that these verses make no distinction in merit between the believer who is slain in the path of God (understood to be the military martyr) and the believer who dies of natural causes. Both are equally assured of forgiveness and mercy from God. The *Tanwīr al-miqbās* uniquely regards these verses as being directed not toward the believers but toward the Hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) who are warned about their desire to accumulate wealth and are urged instead to strive sincerely to serve God, in the course of which if they die or are slain, will earn for them forgiveness and generous reward in the next world. It is highly significant that a superior status for the military martyr vis-à-vis the non-military martyr is not read into this verse: the believer who is slain on the battlefield and the believer who dies peacefully in his bed are acknowledged to be morally equivalent, the critical yardstick being the sincerity of their faith and not the manner of their dying. This verse (and its exegeses) is thus a highly important corrective to the cult of military martyrdom which emerged later in certain quarters; the verse thus emphasizes sincerity of faith and purpose as the common link between the pious combatant and non-combatant and downplays the importance of military activity in itself.

4 Concluding Remarks

Our brief exegetical survey reveals that the concept of “dying in the path of God” was a contested and fluid term among the exegetes and remained closely connected with the act of witnessing to the truth of God’s religion and His messengers, helping therefore to forge a link between the Quranic terms *shahīd/shuhadā’* as witnesses and the later deployment of these terms in extra-Quranic literature as almost exclusive references to martyrs – military and non-military. After all, public witness to the truth could be accomplished in a number of ways – through the daily commission of acts of faith, as well as through fighting valiantly on the battlefield for the sake of God. When one died in the course of or after having undertaken such acts of faith, one could achieve martyrdom – whether one is killed or dies of natural causes. The specific historical reasons for this secondary semantic development of the terms *shahīd/shuhadā’* as martyrs, broadly speaking, and, more narrowly, as military martyrs are not obvious.

It is safe to state, however, that this development is related to the continuing dialectics among various groups of Muslims that started in the formative period of Islam concerning the best way to strive in the path of God and to realize the divine will, both in one’s own life and in the collective life of the community. The concept of *faḍl/faḍīla* (“virtue” or “moral excellence”) had a strong bearing on the different ways the critical Quranic command to “strive in the way of God with your wealth and selves” (cf., for example, Q 9:20; 8:72; 4:95) came to be interpreted by various exegetes, scholars, and pious people in general. A detailed survey of the variegated interpretations of this injunction over time should properly be the subject of another study.⁵⁰ In brief, we should quickly note that in exegesis of Quran 9:20, for example, which contains this injunction, al-Ṭabarī says that this verse refers to God’s judgment of three groups of people: those who took pride in their roles as providers of water during the pilgrimage; the custodians (*bi-l-sidāna*) during the pilgrimage (these two groups are referred to in Quran 9:19); and those with faith in God who strive in His path. God showed a clear preference for this last group when He described “those who believe” as those among the Meccan pagans who had affirmed the unity of God, abandoned the houses of their people, and strove against the polytheists in the religion of God (*fi dīn Allāh*) with their wealth and their selves. They are victorious, he says, in having thereby

50 A more comprehensive treatment of this important Quranic injunction is found in my book *Striving in the path of God*.

earned paradise and won deliverance from hellfire.⁵¹ “Striving” in this verse thus clearly includes the believers’ emigration and abandonment of their previous lives and wealth in Mecca in an effort to fulfill the will of God. In regard to Quran 8:72, another verse which refers to striving with one’s wealth and self, al-Ṭabarī does not explain further the manner of this striving against the polytheists of Mecca.⁵² The referent in these two important verses is not understood as a specific group and military defense of Islam is not explicitly read into them by al-Ṭabarī.

Like al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī emphasizes that Quran 9:20 read in conjunction with Quran 9:19, establishes the greater excellence of faith and *jihād* in general over providing water to the pilgrims and the building of the Ka’ba itself. Quran 9:20, al-Rāzī says further, extols four specific traits, which are as follows: 1) faith (*al-īmān*); 2) emigration (*al-hijra*); 3) striving in the path of God with one’s wealth (*al-jihād fī sabīl Allāh bi-l-māl*); and 4) striving with the self (*al-jihād bi-l-nafs*). Those who possess all these traits enjoy the highest rank of moral excellence and refinement (*fī ghāyat al-jalāla wa-l-rif’a*) for humans possess but these three – the soul, body, and wealth. The soul attains happiness through faith while the body and one’s wealth are properly exerted and spent, even depleted, for the purpose of emigration and constant striving, all of which lead to triumph in the end, as the verse promises. Al-Rāzī’s description of the perfect *jihād* in the context of this verse is holistic, which leads to an exemplary disregard for this world, contempt for positions of leadership and renown, and progression from one’s status as the servant of God to basking in His presence (*min al-‘abdiyya ilā l-‘indīyya*).⁵³

It is in al-Rāzī’s exegesis of Quran 8:72 that we notice a more particularistic construction of moral excellence. In his opinion, the verse praises in particular the emigrants (*muhājirūn*) because only they, he stresses, “were the ones who had believed, emigrated, and striven with their wealth and selves in the path of God.”⁵⁴ The third activity refers to their separation from their homeland where they had lost their homes, properties, and farms, and were vulnerable before their enemy. They had to spend large sums of money to undertake the emigration and finance military expeditions (*al-ghazawāt*). As for the exertion of their selves (*al-mujāhada bi-l-nafs*), this is a reference to their marching off to Badr to fight (without adequate preparation or resources) a much larger

51 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* vi, 337–8.

52 Ibid., vi, 294.

53 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* vi, 13–14. I have taken the liberty of distilling a longer treatment of these ideas into this one paragraph.

54 Ibid., v, 515.

and stronger army, having overcome their desire for the life of this world.⁵⁵ Here *jihād* with one's self clearly has a strong military dimension, according to al-Rāzī. The verse clearly recognizes merit in the *anṣār* as well because of the hospitality and fellowship that they extended to the *muhājirūn*, but, says al-Rāzī, only the latter group possessed the merit of precedence in accepting Islam (*sābiqa*).⁵⁶ Al-Rāzī's views encode the prevailing Sunni consensus that greater moral excellence was to be imputed specifically to the Meccan emigrants to Medina because of their precedence in converting to Islam and for having taken part in the earliest battles of Islam, a status that no other group of Muslims could aspire to.⁵⁷

Such a consensus crystallized into a certitude that moral excellence (*faḍl/faḍīla*) so constructed had the stamp of divine approbation and that individuals possessed of such moral excellence were deserving of generous posthumous rewards. Assigning greater otherworldly merit to worldly actions was after all a powerful way of signifying the greater moral excellences of such actions in *this* world. Over time an influential number of scholars understood military martyrdom to be a major constituent of moral excellence, and this conviction was progressively read back into key Quranic verses which refer to "dying/being slain in the path of God" and "striving in the path of God with one's wealth and self." The concept of moral excellence and its contested definitions over time have left their traces in the rich exegetical literature of Islam, as in other literatures. A detailed study of these relevant literatures promises to provide most useful insights into the shifting constructions of self and communal identity in Islamic thought and history, not least of all into how conceptualizations of martyrdom, military and non-military, played a role in this process.

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“God disdains not to strike a simile” (Q 2:26)

The Poetics of Islamic Eschatology: Narrative, Personification, and Colors in Muslim Discourse

Sebastian Günther

Dedicated to Professor Dr. Manfred Fleischhammer
on the Occasion of his 88th birthday, 22 July 2016

The belief in life after death, in an apocalyptic end of historical time, salvation, and God's ultimate and eternal “kingdom of the heavens and the earth” (Q 3:189, 42:49, 57:5) constitutes the foundation for several articles of Islamic faith.¹ It underscores the belief in the One and Almighty God, and is manifested in such basic tenets of Islamic faith as the belief in the immortality of the soul, in bodily resurrection, divine judgment, and the existence of paradise and hell as real, physical worlds.²

The Quran speaks of death and resurrection, of the end of this world, and of the world to come more than any other major scripture, and it does so in a remarkably explicit and evocative manner.³ These eschatological statements in the Quran are reiterated – and some are significantly expanded – in various branches of medieval Arabic-Islamic scholarly literature. The latter include the literature of Islamic prophetic traditions, Quranic commentaries and certain

1 The quotation in the title of this article was taken from T. Khalidi's translation of the Quran. All other quotations from the Quran follow A. Arberry's rendering, unless indicated otherwise. For the translation of individual Quranic terms, I also consulted Abdel Haleem's English and Paret's German translations.

2 The various “orthodox” (Sunni) eschatological approaches agree that there is a resurrection of the body. The human “soul” (*nafs*, or *rūh*, the “spirit that proceeds from God,” depending on the definition of the term) rejoins the resurrected body and is, thus, immortal. According to these views, however, a soul would not be immortal without a resurrected body. For a discussion of this issue, see Marmura, *Soul: Islamic concepts*; Homerin, *Soul*; Sells, *Spirit*; and Netton, *Nafs* (which includes *rūh*). See also Wensinck, *Muslim creed* 129–30, 195, 268.

3 Eschatological events are described, above all, in Quran 23:101–18; 37:35–47 and 60–6; 39:68–75; 69:13–37; 70:1–35 and 76:12–22. Cf. also Stieglecker, *Glaubenslehren* 749–55; Chittick, *Muslim eschatology* 132 and M. Abdel Haleem's contribution to the present publication.

theological-dogmatic and spiritual-mystical texts, as well as the *‘ulūm al-ākhirā* literature, the genre of Arabic writing expressly devoted to Islamic eschatology.

The first part of the present study identifies and discusses certain key ideas and images of eschatology evident in the Quran; the second examines their recurrence and elaboration in the literature of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad (*sīra*). In addition to the Quran itself, our main sources for examination are the famous *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Compilation of authentic prophetic traditions) by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and *Sīrat al-nabī* or *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya* (The biography of the Prophet), by Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. 150/767–8), a text revised and published two generations later by ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām (d. 218/833). In the third part of this study, we turn to what may be called the classical eschatological literature of Islam. Following a brief appraisal and classification of this genre, special attention is given to *al-Durra al-fākhira fī kashf ‘ulūm al-ākhirā* (The precious pearl revealing the knowledge of the hereafter), a work commonly attributed to the authoritative Sunni theologian and mystic Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). This book stands out in the eschatological literature for its particularly imaginative narrative descriptions of death, resurrection, and the various aspects and events of divine judgment. Moreover, it is exceptional in that it presents these themes in its own, particularly well-crafted framework of discussion and analysis – a fact that has significantly contributed to its great popularity among Muslims until today.

Thus we hope to show that the Quranic visions of the apocalyptic end of the present world and of the timeless duration of the hereafter – along with the creative development of these ideas by major Muslim scholars – provide unique insights into the perceptions of pious Muslims throughout history concerning the final destiny of humankind. Analyzing the wealth of images and symbols, the highly poetic language, and the complex web of arguments, all embedded in the often remarkably refined narrative structures of Arabic eschatological texts, may help us to better understand the ways in which descriptions of the next world, understood both (and sometimes simultaneously) as literal *and* figurative references to the hereafter, are instrumental for Muslim authors in communicating, vivifying, and reinforcing fundamental articles of Islamic faith.

1 Eschatology and Afterlife in the Quran

The Quran is very clear about the cycle and final objective of ‘life coming into being,’ ‘death,’ ‘being brought back to life at the day of resurrection,’ and ‘eternal existence.’ In Surat *al-Baqara* (“Chapter of the Cow”), the question is

raised: “How [can] you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and [God] gave you life, then He shall make you dead [again and], then He shall give you life; then unto Him you shall be returned?” (Q 2:28). God is the one who “calls unto Paradise – and pardon – by His leave” (Q 2:221). Yet, paradise and eternal happiness are promised only to those who obey God and his Messenger, to those who are righteous, truthful, and who bear witness to the truth (Q 4:69):

On the Day [of Judgment when] the Trumpet is blown, and when We shall muster the sinners... (Q 20:102–104). [On] that day their excuses will not profit the evildoers, nor will they be suffered to make amends (Q 30:55–7). [But for] God’s friends, no fear shall be on them,... for them [there] is good tiding in the present life and in the world to come (Q 10:62–4).

Numerous Quranic statements warn in powerful ways of the apocalypse associated with *al-sā’a* (“the hour”), as the Quran calls the all-decisive *eschaton* (from Greek ἔσχατα, “the final things”) on several occasions. Other names for “the hour” are *al-ḥāqqa* (“the indubitable” or “inevitable [reality of the hour],” Q 69:1–3), *al-wāqī’a* (“the occurring [hour of terror],” Q 56:1) and *ghāshīya* (an “overwhelming [hour of punishment],” Q 12:107). An especially evocative description of the arrival of “the hour” is included in Sura 81, *al-Takwīr* (“Shrouded in Darkness”). Here humankind is warned:

When the sun shall be darkened,
when the stars shall be thrown down,
when the mountains shall be set moving,
when the pregnant camels shall be neglected,
when the savage beasts shall be mustered,
when the seas shall be set boiling,
when the souls shall be coupled,
when the buried infant shall be asked for what sin she was slain,
when the scrolls shall be unrolled,
when heaven shall be stripped off,
when Hell shall be set blazing,
when Paradise shall be brought nigh,
then shall [every] soul know what it has produced (Q 81:1–14).

According to Muslim tradition, two Quranic chapters – Sura 32 (*al-Sajda*, “The Prostration”) and Sura 76 (*al-Dahr*, “The Time”; also known as *al-Insān*, “Man”) – were given a certain preference by the Prophet Muḥammad in prayer because “they contain reminders of creation, the return to God, the creation of

Adam, the entry into Paradise and Hell, and mention of things past and things yet to come whose occurrence is on a Friday.⁴ These Suras conspicuously emphasize both the belief in God and the adherence to an ethical lifestyle as preconditions for divine reward:

As for those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, there await them the Gardens of the Refuge, in hospitality for what they were doing. But as for the ungodly, their refuge shall be the Fire; as often as they desire to come forth from it, they shall be restored into it, and it shall be said to them, 'Taste the chastisement of the Fire, which you cried lies to.' And We shall surely let them taste the nearer chastisement, before the greater; haply so they will return [to the right path] (Q 32:19–21).

The Quranic rhetorical device of directly addressing the audience intensifies the impact that such eschatological warnings have on their recipients. Other such references draw a similarly vivid, but highly appealing mental picture of the afterlife:

And if you were to look around, you would see bliss and great wealth: they will wear garments of green silk and brocade; they will be adorned with silver bracelets; their Lord will give them a pure drink. [It will be said], "This is your reward. Your endeavors are appreciated." (Q 76:20–2). [But] We have prepared chains, iron collars, and blazing Fire for the disbelievers . . . (Q 76:4).⁵

The pictographic style of the Quranic passages on paradise and hell thus serves to reaffirm Muslims in their faith, while it also has the potential to make a lasting impression on those who have not yet accepted Islam; those who must be convinced before they adopt the Islamic religion. The explicit prospect of the eternal delights and happiness to be granted the faithful in the hereafter on the one hand, and the description of how the wicked will agonize in hell on the other, perfectly fulfill the dual mission of reassuring Muslim believers and calling upon non-Muslims to convert to Islam.⁶

4 لما اشتملنا عليه من ذكر المبدأ والمعاد وخلق آدم ودخول الجنة والنار وذلك مما كان ويكون في يوم الجمعة; cf. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zād al-ma'ād* 202–3; trans. in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Provisions*, trans. At-Tamimi 28. Note here the eschatological nature of Friday itself.

5 Trans. Abdel Haleem.

6 See also Subtelný, *The Jews* 56–9 (on the ascension narrative as a missionary text). For the question of the duration of paradise and hell, see Abrahamov, *The creation* 87–102.

Accordingly, paradise is identified in the Quran as the *jannat naʿīm* (“garden of bliss and pleasure,” Q 56:89). Its dwellers rest on “couches lined with brocade” (Q 55:54), on “green cushions and lovely rugs” (Q 55:76). They will be offered to “eat and drink with wholesome appetite!” (Q 69:24). Paradise is a *rawḍa yuḥbarūn* (a “garden, in which they will delight,” Q 30:15).⁷ Even more evocative Quranic descriptions of paradise refer to “purified spouses” (Q 2:25); “wide-eyed maidens, restraining their glances” (Q 37:48; 55:56); and maidens “untouched beforehand by man or jinn.” Likewise, “young boys serving wine” are mentioned on more than one occasion (Q 56:17; 76:19).⁸

The Quranic paradise is the *jannat al-khuld* (“garden of eternity,” Q 25:15). It is “recompense and homecoming,” “promised to the God-fearing” (Q 25:15) and to “those who suffered hurt in [God’s] way, and fought, and were slain” (Q 3:193). “They shall have what they desire, dwelling [therein] forever” (Q 25:15–6). This “is a promise binding upon thy Lord” (Q 25:16). The unbelievers and sinners, however, will go to hell where “boiling water and the roasting” in the fire (Q 56:88–94) await them. They will experience a symbolic ‘second death,’ the death of the soul; as the Quran states, they “have lost their souls, dwelling [in hell] forever” (Q 23:104).

The Quran provides uniquely detailed descriptions of the geography of the world beyond human sensory perception. As for the structure of the heavens, for example, it is recurrently stated that God created “seven heavens” (Q 67:3) or “firmaments” (Q 78:12). Hell, in turn, is said to have “seven gates” (Q 15:44). Later writings on eschatological issues echo this idea in their development of the concept of seven celestial abodes of paradise and seven abodes of hell.⁹

7 Interestingly, regarding the rewards of another life, Plato in his *Republic* also alludes to the basic concepts of future bliss, where the blessed rest “on couches at a feast, everlastingly drunk, crowned with garlands; their idea seems to be that an immortality of drunkenness is the highest meed of virtue.” (Cf. Plato, *The republic*, book ii, 52).

8 As for the issue of the meaning of the Quranic expression *ḥūr ʿīn* (a term traditionally understood as “wide-eyed [maidens] with a deep black pupil” or “white skinned women,” denoting the “virgins of paradise,”) see Jarrar, Houris 456–7, as well as S. Griffith’s contribution to the present publication. Furthermore, see Beck, *Eine christliche Parallele* 398–405.

9 For example, al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* iv, esp. 520 (on paradise), 515 (on hell); al-Maqdisī, *Ṣifāt* 68; see also Kinberg, *Paradise* 12–5 (with a discussion of the names and numbers of paradise gardens); Gwynne, *Hell* 419. In contrast, an oft-quoted tradition associated with the Prophet Muḥammad states that God created “Two gardens [of paradise] whose vessels and their contents shall be of silver, and also two gardens whose vessels and their contents are of gold.” Cf. al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance*, trans. Winter 234–5; al-Qāḍī, *Muhammedanische Eschatologie*, trans. Wolff 189–92. See also the Quranic notion, “And besides these shall be two [other] gardens” (Q 55:62). For the possibility of the dual indicating the plentitude of

In elucidation of the Quranic realms of paradise, prominent medieval Muslim scholars such as Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī (fl. probably fifth–sixth/eleventh–twelfth centuries) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) offer two different explanations.¹⁰ According to these authors, the expressions *janna* and *dār al-jinān* refer to the original “garden” of paradise; the primordial garden in which Adam and his wife lived until they were seduced by Satan and expelled from paradise when God commanded them to “descend” (Q 2:35–6). However, the Quran commentator and historian al-Ṭabarī also states that the imperative *ihbiṭū*, “descend” or “get down,” is ambiguous, as it implies not only the physical climbing-down from a mountain into a valley but also the descent from paradise onto earth.¹¹ Interestingly, the modern historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907–86) suggests in this context as well that Adam and Eve’s *descent* from paradise to earth is a symbol for *the fall* of humankind and the *severance* of its direct communication with the divine.¹² Along similar lines, Muslim scholars offer an alternative

gardens, rather than the number two, see A. Neuwirth’s contribution to this volume. However, it is noteworthy as well that the concept of the “seven heavens” is already known from the mysteries of the ancient Indo-Iranian god Mithra. Likewise, the “seven realms of paradise” are found in the rabbinical literature; cf. Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 39.

10 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hādī al-arwāḥ* 27–49 (on the different opinions regarding the garden of paradise in which Adam lived), 76–82 (on the names of paradise and their meanings; here twelve Quranic names of paradise are given, four of which appear to be synonyms for certain of the seven main abodes; these additional names are: *dār al-muqāma* (“abode of everlasting life,” Q 35:35); *maqām amīn* (“secure station,” Q 44:51), *dār al-ḥayawān* (“abode of [true] life,” Q 29:64), *maq’ad al-ṣidq* and *qadam al-ṣidq* (“abode of confidence,” Q 54:55; “abode of sure footing [with the Lord],” Q 10:2); al-Qāḍī, *Daqā’iq al-akḥbār* 40–1. For Ibn al-Qayyim, see Holtzman, Ibn Qayyim Al-Jawziyyah. On the “seven planetary divinities” of the Babylonians, and the possible development of this idea (via Persian and gnostic sources) into the concept of the “seven heavens” evident in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen* 11–7. See also I. Hehmeyer’s contribution to the present publication.

11 Al-Ṭabarī begins his comments on *ihbiṭū*, an imperative masculine plural, by stating that it relates to the meaning of “someone descended [*habaṭa*] to such-and-such a region or to such-and-such a valley, when he settles down in that [place]”; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān* i, 534 (on Q 2:36); al-Ṭabarī, *The commentary*, trans. Madelung i, 257–9). However, the location and nature of the garden that Adam and Eve left – whether it is atop a mountain or in heaven, and whether it is identical with the (Biblical) garden of Eden or not – are matters of dispute among Muslim theologians. For a brief discussion of this issue, see al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance*, trans. Winter 235, note A.

12 Eliade, *Images* 157.

explanation for this term when they state that the word *janna* can also be a designation for the first and lowest 'heavenly' domain of paradise.

Amongst the many other names referring to gardens of paradise are: *dār al-salām* ("abode of peace"), *jannāt al-ma'wā* ("gardens of refuge");¹³ *jannāt al-khuld* ("gardens of eternal retreat"), and *jannāt al-na'īm* ("gardens of comfort and happiness"). Furthermore, the term '*adn*', the high domain of "equilibrium and perpetuity," is believed to be the Quranic equivalent of the Biblical garden of Eden.¹⁴ Finally, there is *jannāt firdaws* or *al-firdaws*, according to most commentators the seventh, highest, largest, and most beautiful garden of paradise, where the throne of God floats and where the rivers of paradise, which run through all the gardens of paradise, rise.¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī maintains that a huge tablet made of golden-green crystal, with all the deeds of humanity inscribed on it, is located here, as is the gigantic heavenly lote tree, *sidrat al-muntahā*, which marks the boundary "beyond which none may pass" (Q 53:14).¹⁶

In Islamic mysticism, then, this location and the lote tree, "being a tree at which the knowledge of every person reaches its limit," stand for the mystery itself. It is the place where "the spirits of the believers are gathered . . . in the form of green birds which fly freely in paradise until the Day of Resurrection, stamped (*marqūm*) with [the seal] of [God's] good pleasure (*riḍā*) and satisfaction (*riḍwān*)."¹⁷ Furthermore, the lote tree is linked to the "Muḥammadan Light" (*nūr muḥammadī*), created "within a column of light" (*nūran fī 'amūd al-nūr*) a million years before creation, with the essential "characteristics of

13 Kinberg, Paradise 12–20.

14 The motif of the garden is present throughout the Bible, beginning with the statements that "And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed" and "... the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" (Gen 2:8 and 15; Marks (ed.), *The English Bible: King James version* i, 17–8).

15 According to Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), '*adn*' is the highest of the heavens, or their citadel (*qaṣaba*). Other traditions, however, cited for example by Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), indicate that *firdaws* is the highest of all the heavens. Cf. al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance*, trans. Winter 235, note B. On the rich vocabulary in the Quran in reference to the hereafter and the various opinions found in Muslim traditions on its structure and specifics, see Kinberg, Paradise 12–20; and Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 23–6.

16 See also Rippin, *Sidrat al-Muntahā* 550.

17 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, trans. Keeler and Keeler 273. Al-Tustarī states also, "On the other hand the spirits of the disbelievers are gathered at *sijjīn* beneath the lowest earth, under the cheek of Satan, may God curse him, branded with hostility ('*adāwa*) and wrath (*ghaḍab*)." For the lote tree, see also Chittick, *The Sufi path of love* 220–3; and Vitestam, *As-sidra(-t?) al-muntahā* 305–8 (on the grammar of the expression). For the image of birds in paradise as representing the martyrs, see also A. Afsaruddin's contribution to this volume.

faith" (*ṭabāʿ al-īmān*). It is this light which appeared to God "a million of years before [the act of] creation," as the early mystic Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) explains.¹⁸

Remarkably, these ideas were taken up again by ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī, a scholar, of whose life almost nothing is known except that he apparently lived in the fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth century. At the very beginning of his popular account of *Daqāʿiq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* (The meticulous accounts referring to paradise and hell), al-Qāḍī expressly refers to the *nūr Muḥammad* (the "Light of Muḥammad"), also called *al-rūḥ al-aʿẓam* ("the mightiest spirit") as the first of all of God's creations. This reference is an indication of this author's strong mystic inclinations, rather than an attempt on his part to disseminate in his book knowledge of the origin of the universe as commonly propagated in Sunni circles (according to which, for example, God created the heavens and the earth in six days).¹⁹

The Muʿtazilite exegete Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) explains further that the heavenly lote tree represents the ultimate limit of all knowledge; even the knowledge of the angels ends here and no one knows what lies beyond. It is perceived to be the place of absolute spiritual peace and fulfillment.²⁰

2 Visionary Journeys to the Hereafter in the *Ḥadīth* and *Sīra* Literature

Both the corpus of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and the literature of the Prophet Muḥammad's biography (*sīra*) include abundant information on the hereafter. The accounts of Muḥammad's famous "journey by night" (*isrāʾ*) from the Sacred Mosque (in Mecca) to the Furthest Mosque (in Jerusalem; see also Q 17:1) and his "ascension to heaven" (*miʿrāj*) from the Temple Mount are arguably and by far the most prominent examples in this regard. Several other traditions in the *ḥadīth* literature, however, although closely connected to the *miʿrāj* story in terms of general theme and outline, present a somewhat different account of a prophetic vision of the hereafter. These *ḥadīth* texts reveal

18 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, trans. Keeler and Keeler 77, 213. See also Rubin, Pre-existence and light, esp. 83–104 (on the substance of Muḥammad as light).

19 Al-Qāḍī, *Daqāʿiq al-akhbār* 2. See also Peterson, Creation 472–80, esp. 476, with the Quranic references for God's creation of the heavens and the earth in six days and of humankind; the article also addresses the question of whether the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* is Quranic or not.

20 Wanes, Tree(s) 360.

a sophisticated narrative composition which serves to effectively perpetuate Quranic concepts of the afterlife while at the same time blending into them – *and hence Islamizing* – a considerable number of extra-Quranic ideas.

2.1 *Al-Bukhārī's al-Ṣaḥīḥ: The Prophet's Dream of Paradise and Hell*

The compilation *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* by the third/ninth-century scholar al-Bukhārī, the most authoritative among Sunni Muslims, includes two accounts of the Prophet's visit to the hereafter. One of these particularly elaborate narratives is included in the section titled the "Kitāb al-Janā'iz" (Book of demise and funerals); the other is part of the "Kitāb Ta'bīr al-ru'yā" (Book of dream interpretation).

Initially just an assortment of bits and pieces of information, this account of the Prophet's vision of the hereafter grew through the oral communication process to become a multifaceted story with salient features of fictional literature.²¹ It tells of a dream that the Prophet Muḥammad had one night, and then shared with the attendees of a gathering. In this dream, Muḥammad travels to the hereafter, which in this text is called *al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*, "the holy land." He is accompanied on his visionary journey by the archangels Gabriel and Michael, who show him various domains and regions of the hereafter. At the end of the account, the angels explain to Muḥammad the meanings of the places they had visited.

More specifically, the account is as follows: Muḥammad first visits hell, where he is shown two men, one sitting and the other standing. The standing man holds an iron hook in his hand and pushes it so deep into the mouth of the sitting man that it reaches the back of that man's throat. The torturer then pulls the hook, tearing out one side of the seated man's mouth, and then does the same to the other side. But the mouth of the tortured man heals immediately, and the torturer repeats this act of violence, inflicting the same wounds on the sitting man again and again. In the next location which Muḥammad visits with his two heavenly companions, he is shown a man who is lying flat on his back, while another man crushes the supine man's head with a rock. When the man's crushed head returns to normal, the torturer crushes it again and again. At yet another location, as Muḥammad relates, there was

21 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iii, 623–4, no. 1386; see also xiv, 479–81, no. 7047. An even more elaborate version of the account of the Prophet Muḥammad's visionary journey to the hereafter is given in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*. For these references, along with an English translation and an analysis of this *ḥadīth*, see Günther, Fictional narration 455–63.

a hole like an oven with a narrow top and wide bottom. Fire was kindling underneath. Whenever the flames went up, the people [in the huge oven] were lifted up so high that they were almost blown out [of the hole], and whenever the fire died down, the people went down into the hole again. There were men and women, all of them naked.²²

Next, the Prophet sees a man standing in the middle of a river of blood and another man standing on the river bank with stones in front of him. Whenever the man in the river of blood tried to reach the riverbank, the man standing there would throw “a stone in his mouth, thus causing him to retreat to his former position.”

Continuing on, the Prophet is now taken to a very different domain: paradise. First, he finds himself in “a garden of lush green, with a huge tree, and an old man and some children sitting near its trunk.” Then Muḥammad is asked to climb up the tree and enter a most beautiful house, inhabited by men, women, and children. But Muḥammad is once again requested to climb higher. He now reaches a house superior to and more stunning than the one he had seen before. This location houses both old and young people.

When he arrives at this highest point of his visionary journey to the hereafter, the two angels explain to Muḥammad the meanings of the different locations and scenarios they had shown him. They tell him that the first domain, hell, is where “sinners are punished for their misdeeds.” Of the person whose cheek was continuously being torn open, they say, “he was a notorious liar” in his life on earth. The one whose head was being crushed repeatedly was “a man whom God had taught the Quran but who used to sleep at night [instead of reciting the scripture] and not live according to the Quran’s teachings during the day.” Furthermore, the people burning in the fire of the big oven were adulterers, and the man in the river of blood a usurer.

As for the second domain, paradise, “the old man sitting at the base of the tree is Abraham (the first Muslim who built the Ka’ba, according to Muslim tradition), and the children around him are the offspring of humankind.” The first blissful house in heaven is “the abode of common believers” and the second, “the abode of the martyrs.”

The extent to which these highly symbolic descriptions dwell on Quranic imagery of the afterlife is remarkable. And yet this *ḥadīth* clearly did not simply adopt Quranic ideas and images of the hereafter to incorporate them into its own story. Rather, it appears to have transformed them such that they became significant constituents of a full-fledged work of imaginative literature in the

22 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iii, 623; trans. in Günther, Fictional narration 456–7.

service of an eschatological narrative. Thus the “poeticization” of perceptions of the hereafter emerged as a most effective tool for religious instruction: First, the literary communication of information on the hereafter provides detailed knowledge of the existence, structure, and purpose of a world that humans are unable to perceive with their senses. Second, it strengthens people’s belief in a life after death, and in paradise and hell as physical places of divine reward and punishment. Third, the fictionalized presentation of the hereafter effectively communicates important principles of Islamic faith and practice, including the significance of – and reward for – martyrdom as well as the Muslim obligation to recite the Quran on a regular basis. Furthermore, they relate key principles of human ethics, such as the injunctions against lying, committing adultery, and practicing usury.

The *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad’s visionary journey to the hereafter concludes with the two angels showing the Prophet of Islam his seat in paradise. However, when Muḥammad attempts to place himself on this seat, the angels tell him that his lifetime is not yet complete and that his seat will await him in the future. This final episode subtly yet clearly conveys the orthodox Islamic creed that every thing and every action has been predestined by God, including each person’s lifespan. If seen from this perspective, the Prophet’s vision of the hereafter (as presented in al-Bukhārī’s *ḥadīth* compendium) serves as a powerful means for instructing and reassuring Muslims of several religious teachings essential to Islam.

2.2 *Ibn Hishām’s Sīra: The Prophet’s Ascension to Heaven*

The previous *ḥadīth* on Muḥammad’s vision of the hereafter is clearly related to the famous *mi’rāj* story, according to which Muḥammad climbed up to heaven on a ladder, visited seven celestial spheres, and was eventually initiated as a prophet. However, these two stories differ from one another in such major points as literary structure, content, and objective.²³

As is known, the most popular *mi’rāj* account is part of the earliest *Sīrat al-nabī* by the aforementioned historian Ibn Ishāq, a text revised and published two generations later by Ibn Hishām. According to this biographical and hagiographical source, Muḥammad traveled in one night from Mecca to the “furthest place of worship, whose precincts God has blessed” (Q 17:1). In Ibn Ishāq’s biography this “furthest place of worship” is expressly identified as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; it is from here that Muḥammad ascended to heaven before being taken back to Mecca that same night.

23 See also R. Tottoli’s and K. Rührdanz’s contributions to the present publication.

Ibn Ishāq's account of Muḥammad's night journey and ascension to heaven, however, also records that among the first Muslims there was a larger number of people who were unwilling to believe in such miraculous journeys and, for this reason, renounced Islam. The response to these apostates was, according to Ibn Ishāq, already given in the Quran, where God confirmed to Muḥammad that: "The vision We showed you [on your Night Journey (as this reference is traditionally understood)] was only a test (*fitna*) for people, as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran. We warn them, but this only increases their insolence (Q 17:60)."²⁴ The dogmatic significance of the *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* story is even more explicit in the *'aqīda* or dogmatic literature, which lists the belief in Muḥammad's night journey and his ascension to heaven among the Islamic creeds.²⁵

The ascension through heavenly spheres, combined with the idea that such blissful journeys begin at the highest place of what is thought to be the center of the world, is a well-known feature of several ancient cultures, including the Vedic religion of India and the Roman mysteries of the Sun-god Mithras.²⁶ Thus, the idea is not necessarily uncommon and certainly not unknown in the milieu of ongoing interreligious debates so characteristic of the medieval Muslim world. In the case of Islam, however, it is remarkable that the ancient concept of a privileged person traveling to heaven for the purpose of religious

24 وما جعلنا الرؤيا التي أريناك إلا فتنة للناس والشجرة الملعونة في القرآن ونخوفهم فما يزيدهم
إلا طغيانا كبيرا – Trans. Abdel Haleem. This quotation concludes the passage in the *Sīra*,
where it is reported that Abū Bakr, the later caliph, was the one who confirmed the truth-
fulness of Muḥammad's account of his night journey and who was, thereafter, called Abū
Bakr *al-Ṣiddīq*, "the Truthful"; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* i, part 2, 367.

25 See, for example, one of the earliest creeds as included in the *Fiqh akbar* II, ascribed
to Abū Ḥanīfa (80–150/699–767), the epitome of the Ḥanafī school of law; this creed is
translated in Wensinck, *Muslim creed* 197. See furthermore Ghulām Khalīl's *Kitāb Sharḥ
al-sunna* 7b–8a.

فعليك بالتسليم والإقرار... والإيمان بأن رسول الله، صلى الله عليه وسلم، أُسري به إلى
السماء؛ وصار إلى العرش وكلم الله، تبارك وتعالى؛ ودخل الجنة؛ وأطلع إلى النار؛ ورأى
الملائكة؛ ونُشرت له الأنبياء؛ ورأى سرادقات العرش والكرسي وجميع ما في السماوات
وما في الأرضين في اللحظة. حمله جبريل على البُراق حتى أداره في السموات. وفُرِضَ له
الصلاة في تلك الليلة؛ ورجع إلى مكة في تلك الليلة، وذلك قبل الهجرة.

Ghulām Khalīl's (d. 275/888) treatise seems to be the oldest surviving authorial text on
Islamic dogma; cf. Jarrar and Günther, *Ergebnisse* 16.

26 In the mystery cults, the Greek form of this god's name, Mithras, was predominant. See
also Eliade, *Images* 48–9.

initiation is reformulated and very creatively incorporated into the Islamic belief system.²⁷

Another significant aspect is the way that both the *mi'rāj* story in the biographical literature and the narrative of Muḥammad's dream journey to the hereafter in the literature of prophetic traditions emphasize the pivotal role of the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Al-Bukhārī's account of Muḥammad's sojourn in the hereafter even suggests that the Holy Land is the place where the gates to both heaven and hell are located. This point is taken up again in the Muslim eschatological literature where it is stated that on the day of resurrection Isrāfīl, "the burning one" of the four Islamic archangels, "blows the Trumpet on the Rock of the Blessed House," i.e., Jerusalem, signifying the revivification of the already resurrected but still dead bodies and the beginning of divine judgment.²⁸ This narrative concurs with the idea expressed in the Bible (and in pre-Biblical Semitic thought), that Jerusalem is "the seat of the future paradise," while in the Jewish tradition the very abode of the wicked – hell – is located directly below the walls of Jerusalem.²⁹

The reappearance and transformation of these ancient apocalyptic concepts concerning the Holy Land and Jerusalem in the Muslim tradition bears witness to a remarkably dynamic process of cross-cultural fertilization of apocalyptic ideas that must have taken place during the first three centuries of Islam. This view is supported by modern scholarship which suggests that Jewish converts to Islam, in addition to storytellers, preachers, scholars of the prophetic tradition, historians, and Quran commentators, were apparently the main transmitters of Jewish lore to Muslim tradition.³⁰

27 See also Widengren, *The ascension*, esp. 77–85 (on hermetic-gnostic literature in Arabic); Widengren, *Muḥammad*, esp. 55–95 (on relevant Mandaean, Manichean, Christian, and Shi'i perceptions).

28 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 42; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 46. The Arabic term in question is *bayt al-maqdis* or, more commonly, *bayt al-muqaddas*, an Arabic synonym for Jerusalem that refers to the Hebrew name for the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, *bēt ha-miqdash*.

29 Montgomery, *The holy city* 24, 28, and 32. See also van Ess, *Theologie* iv, 389 and 395 (on Jerusalem as the seat of paradise on earth); and van Ess, *Vision and ascension* 47–62. See also the more recent work by Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, esp. 63, 78–81, 103–7 (on early Muslim traditions from the eighth century and earlier claiming, for example, that the gates of paradise will be opened over Jerusalem, but referring also to the idea that the part outside Jerusalem's eastern wall is to be identified with hell); see also the recent study by Stager, *Jerusalem as Eden* 36–47.

30 On the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam and its unique role in Islamic eschatological literature, see Livne-Kafri, *Jerusalem in early Islam* 382–403, esp. 382. On the importance and

3 Death, Resurrection, and Judgment in Eschatological Writings

3.1 *Classical Genres of Arabic Writing on Eschatology and the Hereafter*

The different kinds of classical Arabic writing expressly devoted to Islamic eschatology and the hereafter are still little known to Western readers. The great popularity of these books in the Islamic world, however, attests to the importance of scholarly *and* imaginative treatments of topics such as death, eschatology, and the hereafter for Muslims throughout history, and shows how firmly rooted these eschatological ideas are in Muslim life and culture.³¹

The expression *ʿulūm al-ākhirā* ("branches of knowledge of the hereafter") is used by Muslim scholars in reference to Arabic writings devoted to Islamic eschatology in the broadest sense of the term. It serves best as the generic term for Arabic-Islamic eschatological literature as such. This genre can be divided into four sub-categories: (1) The literature of *al-fitan wa-l-malāḥim* ("dissensions and fierce battles"). This specific designation is often found in book titles of "a kind of Islamic apocrypha that combines historical commentaries with eschatological stories."³² These works deal with the "the signs and conditions of the *eschaton*" (*ashrāt al-sāʿa*), while they also address "the crucial affairs taking place prior to the day of resurrection" (*al-umūr al-ʿizām allatī takūnu qabla yawm al-qiyāma*), as the renowned religious scholar and jurisprudent Abū l-Fidāʾ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) determined.³³ But this literature also includes treatments of the *barzakh* (Q 23:100), the intermediate state between death and resurrection. Furthermore, there are (2) writings that focus on *al-qiyāma* ("the resurrection") and the events taking place on judgment day, complemented by (3) works that deal exclusively with *al-janna wa-l-nār* ("the garden and the fire") and offer specific and quite elaborate descriptions of the various domains of paradise and hell. (4) The sub-category *al-adab al-ukhrawī*, the belletristic

criticism of preachers (*wuʿāz*, sing.: *wāʿiz*) and storytellers (*quṣṣās*, sing.: *qāṣṣ*) as authorities of the (oral) transmission of religious knowledge in pre-modern Islamic society, see Berkey, *Popular preaching* 23–37, 46–59, 65–6, 71, 83–8, 95; and Athamina, *Al-Qasas*, esp. 64–5.

31 For a discussion of the spectrum of Muslim works devoted to "heavenly journeys," see Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 15–56. See also the insightful study by Tottoli, *Muslim eschatological literature* 452–77. On death rites and related beliefs about the afterlife among Muslim communities, see also Halevi, *Muhammad's grave*, esp. 197–233.

32 El-Hibri, *Parable and politics* 16. See also the discussion of this literature in Cook, *Studies in Muslim apocalyptic* esp. 230–68 (on the idea of "moral apocalypse" in Islam, in connection with political events, religious establishments, and certain attitudes toward cities).

33 Ibn Kathīr, *Kitāb al-Nihāya* 3.

“literature on the hereafter,”³⁴ occupies a special place among the writings on “knowledge of the hereafter.” These books stand out for their fiction-like and entertaining character of presentation, and their refined literary style. Perhaps the most pioneering examples of this literature are the *Risālat al-ghufrān* (‘The epistle of forgiveness’) by the famous philosophical poet and writer Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1057) and *al-Risāla al-Kāmilīyya fī l-sīra al-nabawīyya* (‘The treatise of Kāmil on the Prophet’s biography’) by Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 687/1288), a brilliant physician and philosopher.³⁵ However, while al-Ma‘arrī wrote a kind of Arabic *Divine Comedy*, in which a poet visits paradise and there encounters pre-Islamic poets whose paganism God had “forgiven,” Ibn al-Nafīs composed what could be called a theological science fiction narrative. Remarkably, the final two chapters of Ibn al-Nafīs’ work attempt to offer a scientific explanation of the religiously significant scenarios of the apocalypse.

3.2 *Al-Ghazālī’s al-Durra al-fākhira*

3.2.1 Contents and Structure

One of the truly remarkable classical Arabic texts exclusively devoted to Islamic eschatology is *al-Durra al-fākhira fī kashf ‘ulūm al-ākhirā* (‘The precious pearl revealing the knowledge of the hereafter, mentioned earlier’), a work traditionally ascribed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.³⁶ This treatise was drafted after

34 Cf. Ṭulbā, al-Ramz fī l-adab al-ukhrawī 90–1; Ṭulbā, Adab al-riḥla 283.

35 See also M. Hegazi’s contribution on al-Ma‘arrī in the present publication.

36 The authenticity of the *The precious pearl* as an original work by al-Ghazālī is a matter of debate in modern scholarship. While some scholars (such as M. Asín Palacios, W. Montgomery Watt, and H. Lazarus-Yafeh) doubt its authenticity, others (such as I. Goldziher and, more recently, M. Smith) argue in favor of it. Contemporary Muslim scholars generally hold the view that it is an original work of al-Ghazālī’s. I would argue in favor of the latter view, for several reasons: Apart from the fact that al-Ghazālī’s full name is given at the beginning of the book, a number of indications within the text itself support the perception that *The precious pearl* is indeed a work from al-Ghazālī’s pen. These indications include: (a) At the end of chapter 3, the author notes, “all of these [issues in question here] we have already discussed in the *Kitāb al-Ihyā’*,” i.e., al-Ghazālī’s *magnum opus*. Moreover, (b) at the end of the book the author states, “we have mentioned the story [of so-and so] . . . in the *Kitāb al-Ihyā’*.” (c) The author of *The precious pearl* finally also suggests that this work represents a “purposefully drafted abridged version” (*wa-qaṣadnā al-ikhtisār*) of the treatment of ideas already dealt with “in other works” (*fī ghayri hādha l-kitāb*); cf. al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 109. Nonetheless, these pieces of information are far from conclusive and the possibility still remains that a third party familiar with the *Ihyā’* could have constructed them. An in-depth stylistic analysis of *The precious pearl* would need to be undertaken in order to come to a more definite judgment about the authorship of this book. Based on the technical observations

al-Ghazālī's multi-volume *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The revitalization of the studies of religion, or perhaps better: Invigoration of the knowledge of religion) and appears to be an extract of the latter's fortieth and last book. In contrast to the more complex, scholarly treatment of death and afterlife in the *Ihyā'*, the straightforward and literary style of *The Precious Pearl* indicates that the latter was composed for a wider, more general readership.

Al-Ghazālī relies heavily on two sources in *The Precious Pearl*, often by way of literal quotation: the Quran and the prophetic traditions. In particular, al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* is frequently quoted either by title or by the name of its compiler. Thus, *The Precious Pearl* addresses in great detail three of the four main eschatological themes: death, the transformation or transcendence of history, and judgment day. The fourth theme, the final consignment to paradise or hell, although repeatedly referred to in the book, does not receive any specific treatment. One can define the main topics of *The Precious Pearl* as follows:

- (i) THE PRIMORDIAL COVENANT: God's preordination – each mortal is fated to enter paradise or hell; the divine breath of life in the womb;
- (ii) DYING: the soul's departure from the body;
- (iii) DEATH OF THE BLESSED: the soul's journey through seven heavens to the throne of God and its return to the lifeless body; personification of the good person's deeds;
- (iv) DEATH OF THE WICKED: interrogation in the grave; personification of the bad person's deeds; instructions from the deceased to the living;
- (v) EVENTS IN THE GRAVE: *barzakh*, the intermediate state between death and resurrection;
- (vi) DAY OF RESURRECTION: (a) the arrival of "the hour" and destruction of the earth; (b) the trumpet's first blast – the signal of the day of resurrection; revivification of the earth and resurrection; (c) the trumpet's second blast, heralding the arrival of God's throne; the seeking of the resurrected for the messengers' intercession with God; (d) the proclamation that the

presented here, however, one may be inclined to perceive this book as being authored by al-Ghazālī himself until the opposite has been proven conclusively. I draw attention to these considerations, despite the fact that the questions which certain modern scholars have raised about the book's authenticity are not of primary concern to our present study, simply because for many centuries of Islamic history *The precious pearl* has been held by Muslims to be an authoritative example of Islamic eschatological writing. For more details on this discussion, see Smith in al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 5–6. A French translation of *al-Durra al-fākhira* was published by Gautier (1878) and a German translation by Brugsch (1924).

Prophet Muḥammad alone can intercede; the arrival of paradise and hell as special personified entities at the place of judgment; setting up the Balance; (e) the determination of the status of the prophets and their respective communities; (f) individual reckoning and judgment of peoples' deeds; entrance of the judged into paradise or hell; (g) God's rolling-up of the heavens and earth.

- (vii) **AUTHORIAL CONCLUSION:** contextualization of the importance to acquire knowledge of the hereafter.³⁷

3.2.2 Pictorial Language and Dogmatic Teachings

3.2.2.1 *Death and What Happens Next*

Al-Ghazālī commences his “disclosure of the knowledge of the hereafter” by stating that the Quranic idea that *kullu nafsin dhāʾiqatu l-mawt* (“every soul will taste death”), is “attested in His book in three places, for God desired three deaths for the world.”³⁸ On a cosmic level, the author explains that these three kinds of death refer to the tripartite structure of the universe:

- a) “the earthly world” (*al-ʿālam al-dunyawī*) inhabited by humans, animals, and plants;
- b) “the dominion of power” (*al-ʿālam al-malākūtī*) inhabited by the angels and jinn; and
- c) “the dominion of might” (*al-ʿālam al-jabarūtī*) inhabited by the highest angels (*al-muṣṭafawn min al-malāʾika*), including: the cherubim (*al-karūbiyyūn*), other spiritual beings ruling the celestial spheres (*rūḥāniyyūn*), the bearers of God's throne, and the companions of the pavilion of God.

All three worlds will be destroyed and will vanish on doomsday, the *yawm al-dīn*, before God establishes his eternal “kingdom of the heavens and the earth.”³⁹ On a more specific level, the tripartite structure of the universe, along with the divine determination of three major eschatological events, serve as a framework for the author's division of the book into three thematic segments: (1) death on earth, (2) the transcendence of history, and (3) judgment day.

As for the fundamental questions of life and existence in this world, the author begins his discussion of the matter with a reference to the traditional Islamic view that “life is not identical with the soul.” Rather, it is said to be

37 See also Smith in al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 13–6.

38 Q 3:185; 21:35; 29:57; but see also 44:56.

39 For the various names of doomsday in the Quran, see Günther, Day, times of 500.

“a combination of soul and body.” Death occurs when the soul is separated from the body. Then, the fortunate soul, which is the size of a bee and bears human characteristics, slips out of the body “like the jetting of water from a water-skin” and is received by two angels “with beautiful faces, wearing lovely clothes and sweet-smelling fragrances” who wrap the soul in sublime silk. But the soul of the profligate “squeaks out like a skewer from wet wool.” Ugly, black-garbed guardians of hell squeeze it out of the body and wrap it in sackcloth while it “shudders like quicksilver.” The unfortunate soul also bears human characteristics, but is the size of a locust. In the hereafter, the size of the profligate soul is larger than the one of the believer. At this stage, the dying person imagines that his belly is filled with thorns. His forehead sweats, his eyes see falsity, and his body turns yellow due to the magnitude of his suffering. Hearing is the last faculty that the dying person loses. After leaving the body, the soul loses none of the intelligence or knowledge it acquired on earth.⁴⁰

Immediately after the person has passed away, angels take the fortunate soul to the seven heavens until they reach the throne of mercy. The description of this journey of the soul to the heavens instructs the reader in several fundamental teachings of Islamic faith and practice. For example, it conveys the idea that each of the first ‘five heavens’ through which the soul ascends represents one of the ‘five pillars of Islam.’ Hence, arriving at the first heaven correlates to the utterance of the Muslim profession of faith, and to sincere belief. The second heaven signifies correct performance of the ritual prayers. The third stands for sharing one’s wealth and living a decent, God-fearing life. The fourth relates to the observance of fasting and other dietary regulations of Islam; and the fifth to the performance of the pilgrimage “without pretense or hypocrisy.” Continuing the journey, the arrival at the sixth heaven is equated with genuine piety toward one’s parents. Finally, reaching the seventh heaven corresponds to praying all night, giving alms in secret, and providing for orphans. Having arrived at the seventh heaven, the souls of the most pious and of the martyrs remain at this supreme location until judgment day. All other souls, however, return to earth to be reunited with their respective bodies.⁴¹

These basic religious teachings are presented in an exquisitely wrought narrative framework, and the reader is familiarized with this religious knowledge through hints and subtle suggestions rather than straightforward dogmatic instruction. The refined rhetoric of these passages, together with their imaginative pictorial language and the systematic presentation of arguments, further enhances the persuasiveness of the theological principles contained

40 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 2–11; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 19–25.

41 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 11–4; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 26–7.

therein.⁴² The measured exposition of information guides the reader through *The Precious Pearl*, and the gradual process of becoming acquainted with the arguments on both the rational and poetic levels helps him or her eventually accept these creeds and live by them.

On this didactically well-prepared ground, al-Ghazālī continues in this vein by contrasting the destiny of the fortunate soul with that of the profligate's soul. It is suggested that the soul of the wicked will be transported, like the fortunate soul, to the first heaven, but shall be denied entry (Q 7:40). In fact, it will fall from heaven and be dropped by the wind in a far distant place (Q 22:31). When it reaches earth, the guardians of hell take charge of it.⁴³

3.2.2.2 "Life" in the Grave

All souls are reunited with their bodies before burial. The soul attaches itself at "the breast from the outside" (*bi-ṣadr min khārij al-ṣadr*) of the body of the deceased and, together in the grave, body and soul await the day of resurrection.⁴⁴ Until that day the deceased experience various degrees of reward and punishment in the grave, including views of paradise and visions of hell, depending on whether the person lived a pious or a sinful life on earth (Q 40:46).

The reader of *The Precious Pearl* further learns that there are four kinds of people of the tomb: There are those whose bodies become dust and whose individuality fades away; the souls of these people are doomed to wander in the realm below the earthly heaven until the arrival of "the hour." Then there are those whom God allows to slumber until judgment day; those whose souls, after a period of only three months in the grave, mount the green birds that fly with them to paradise where they remain until the day of resurrection; and finally those who, instead of going directly to paradise, may opt to remain on earth until "the hour" comes – on earth they circle through the three worlds. This opportunity, however, is reserved to prophets and saints alone.

Only for the third group among the people of the tomb is a further characterization offered, with a reference to a canonical prophetic tradition. According to this tradition, "the soul (*nasama*) of the believer is a bird perched on the trees of the garden." Furthermore, "the spirits of the martyrs (*arwāḥ al-shuhadā*) are

42 "Rhetoric is the use of organized arguments to promote the acceptance of a point of view that may lead to a course of action. Although its principal purpose is persuasion, rhetoric also professes the aims of truth and aesthetic value," as suggested by Back, *Rhetoric as communication* 130.

43 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 7, 11, 18; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 23, 25–6, 29–30.

44 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 33.

residing in the crops of the green birds (*fī ḥawāṣil ṭuyūr khudr*) perched on the trees of the garden.”⁴⁵ Remarkably, this association of the soul with a bird calls to mind the ancient Egyptian tradition, on the one hand, that the soul is a bird, *Ba*. On the other hand, the archetypal representation of the soul as a bird is also evident in Islamic mysticism. For example, in the *Risālat al-ṭayr* (Treatise of the birds) the polymath Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) suggests that humans may achieve salvation based on their own work and efforts. The epistle with the same title traditionally ascribed to al-Ghazālī, however, contends that a person’s salvation depends on his faith.⁴⁶

3.2.2.3 *Resurrection and Divine Judgment*

Al-Ghazālī’s account of death (as the cessation of all biological functions of life) and life in the tomb (as the intermediate state of the deceased) culminates in the final and lengthiest part of his book: a dramatic portrayal of the resurrection and divine judgment. Through the visualization of these powerful, overwhelming events the author underscores once again several core issues of Islamic religious faith and ethics, with one theme always at the center of the focus: the unconditional acceptance of *tawḥīd*, the belief in God the One, Almighty.

Most impressive here are certain passages in *The Precious Pearl*, in which the author paraphrases the catastrophic occurrences described in the Quran. In *The Precious Pearl* he states that as a result of these apocalyptic events everything in both the material and spiritual worlds – in fact all forms of existence – will be destroyed by God and will vanish. In “this scene of stark emptiness . . . like before creation,” to quote Jane I. Smith, there will be nothing but God:

Then God extols His own praise as He so desires; He glorifies His eternal existence and His lasting power and never-ending dominion and victorious omnipotence and boundless wisdom. Three times He asks, “To whom

45 Ibid.; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 40.

46 See Faris, Al-Ghazzali’s epistle of the birds 46–53. Other works of later times relevant to this context are the mystical epic of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 617/1220), *Maṭīq al-ṭayr* (*The Speech [sometimes “logic”] of the birds*, also rendered as *The conference of the birds*), and various poetic treatments of the soul as a “bird” by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (“the Martyr”); cf. Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 27–8, 51 (esp. note 63) and the contribution by K. Föllmer in this publication.

belongs the Kingdom this day?" No one answers Him so He answers Himself, saying, "To God who is one alone, victorious!"⁴⁷

For the day of judgment, al-Ghazālī suggests, God will create a new, "second earth which is an earth white with silvery light," just as the Quran proclaims it:

[Upon] the Day [of Resurrection] – when the earth is turned into another earth, the heavens into another heaven, and people all appear before God, the One, the Overpowering – you [Prophet] will see the guilty on that Day, bound together in fetters, in garments of pitch, faces covered in fire (Q 14:48–50).⁴⁸

The divine balance made of two scales will be set up for judgment; the scale to the right of the throne is made of light, and the one to the left of darkness. All the deeds of humans will be precisely weighed on these scales, and even the person's hands and feet will testify to his or her actions. God will judge each person individually – a key idea of divine judgment known in ancient Egypt as well, where it was believed that the soul was individually examined in the presence of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead.⁴⁹

Al-Ghazālī evokes the idea that, on that day of reckoning (*yawm al-ḥisāb*, Q 38:16, 26, 53; 40:27), God commands that paradise be adorned and brought near those resurrected and awaiting judgment. Paradise will offer "lovely fresh breezes, the most fragrant and delicious imaginable" that invigorate the soul and give life to the heart. But God will also command that hell be brought near, a hell "which walks on four legs and is bound by seventy thousand reins." In spite of its reins, hell will break free and storm, "clattering and thundering and moaning," toward the crowd of people at the place of judgment. Everybody will fall on their knees, even the messengers. The Prophet Muḥammad alone will, by the command of God, seize hell by its halter and command it to retreat.⁵⁰ This image of the Prophet Muḥammad subduing hell emphatically highlights the unique power and supremacy of the Prophet of Islam over all the rest of God's creation. At the same time, it evokes the image of Jesus who, in Matthew 16:18,

47 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 39; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 44–5; see also Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 72.

48 The quotation from the Quran follows Abdel Haleem's translation. See also al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 54; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 54–5.

49 MacGregor, *Images* 58–60; Hornung, *Im Reich des Osiris* 215, 220–4.

50 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 67–8; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 61–2.

promises that his community (lit., “my church”) will not be overcome even by the strongest parts of hell (lit., “the gates of hell”).

3.2.2.4 *Colored Banners and Prophetic Leaders*

Muslims believe that the Prophet Muḥammad – being a sign of “mercy for the world” and “a bearer of glad tidings and an admonisher to all human-kind” (*raḥmatan li-‘ālamūn; kāffatan li-l-nās, bashīran wa-nadhīran*; Q 21:107; 34:28) – represents the peak and the ultimate conclusion of God’s continuing revelations, which had been communicated through a long line of prophets and messengers. This idea is echoed beautifully in a dramatic passage at the end of *The Precious Pearl*, where al-Ghazālī describes the scenario on judgment day when the fortunate are assembled in groups, assigned to certain prophets, and prepared to be led into paradise.

This passage highlights the ethical characteristics and merits of certain pre-Islamic messengers and prophets (as the Islamic tradition views them), for the purpose of doctrinal instruction. The exposition begins by stating that, after the disobedient and wrongdoers have been pushed into the vaults of hell, only those who submit to the will of God (*muṣlimūn*), the doers of good works (*muḥsinūn*), those who know [God] (*‘arifūn*), those who affirm the revelation (*ṣiddīqūn*), the martyrs (*shuhadā’*), the righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*), and the messengers (*mursilūn*) remain at the place of judgment. From among the God-fearing, the fortunate will be grouped according to degree of merit and suffering on earth, and a prophet will be assigned to each group as their leader.

THE BLIND, it is stated, are those most worthy to look upon God first. They are awarded a **white** banner (*rāya*), put into the hands of the Arabian Prophet Shu‘ayb. THE PEOPLE OF AFFLICTION AND WITH INFIRMITIES, those characterized by patience, forbearance, and knowledge, are awarded a **green** banner, put in the hands of the Prophet Job (Ayyūb). THE PEOPLE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, whose patience, forbearance, and knowledge are similar to that of the aforementioned group, are awarded a **red** banner, put in the hands of the Prophet Joseph (Yūsuf). THE LOVERS OF GOD, who have the same characteristics as the two groups mentioned before and who, in addition, were never annoyed with any earthly circumstances, are given a **yellow** banner, put in the hands of Aaron (Hārūn). THOSE WHO WEEP OUT OF THE FEAR OF GOD, the closest to the martyrs and the religious scholars, are given a **multicolored** banner “because they wept for different reasons”; their banner is put in the hands of Noah (Nūḥ). THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS – the ink of whose toil is outweighed only by the blood of the martyrs – are first given a **saffron** banner, put in the hands of John (Yaḥyā). But one of the scholars requests that God allow the scholars, as had been confirmed in a prophetic tradition, to intercede

on judgment day for those who helped them during their times of hardship on earth. Upon receiving this request, God awards the religious scholars a **white** banner in place of the saffron. This white banner is then placed in the hands of Abraham (Ibrāhīm), for Abraham was the one granted the most revelations and wisdom. THE POOR, for whom life on earth was “a prison,” are awarded a **yellow** banner, placed in the hands of Jesus (ʿĪsā). Finally, THE RICH, to whom God enumerates their God-given riches so many times that it takes Him five hundred years, are awarded a **multicolored** banner, put in the hands of Solomon (Sulaymān).⁵¹ On that day, the messengers, prophets, and religious scholars are seated on thrones of various heights, each according to his rank, with the messengers, as the only lawgivers, seated on the highest thrones.

This magnificent panorama of events and the meticulous categorization of eight different groups of believers rewarded with admittance to paradise – in addition to their association with banners of specific colors and their assignment to certain prophets – certainly appeals to readers of *The Precious Pearl*. It offers a vision that stimulates the imagination on several levels: First, the detailed portrayal of the various groups – addressing their physical attributes (such as their bodily challenges and disabilities), intellectual and spiritual characteristics (degrees of sincerity of belief and depth of religious knowledge), and socio-economic situations (living in hardship or wealth) – is universal. This depiction reflects a broad spectrum of the social stratification found in particular in religiously-based societies. Second, the association of certain groups with specific colors is suggestive not only because colors generally play a significant role in Muslim civilization, but more importantly, the Quran teaches that colors, hues, and shades are divinely created. They are intended to express and celebrate the diversity of God’s creation. Colors and hues are considered to be signs of God, which He granted to humankind and to all living beings so that they may perceive, distinguish, and learn.⁵²

51 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 85–9; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 70–6.

52 “Surely in that are signs for a people who consider. And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and the variety of your tongues and hues. Surely in that are signs for all living beings” (Q 30:22). See also Q 39:21 and 35:28. It is to be noted as well that the Quran mentions only five colors as such: white, black, yellow/gold, red, and green. Blue as a “true color” is absent, although it occurs in Q 20:102 where it describes eye color and denotes evil. Cf. Rippin, *Colors* 363. The best color, of course, is the “dye of God” (*ṣibghat Allāh*), not specified as to chromatic wavelength, at Q 2:138.

Viewed in light of the indications provided by both the Quran and certain classical Muslim scholars on the symbolic meaning of colors, the colors mentioned in *The Precious Pearl* offer quite interesting insights.⁵³

White, as an achromatic color with zero saturation, is commonly associated with brightness, innocence, purity, and a fresh beginning. In his doctrine of photisms, the Persian mystic Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 654/1256) states, “light visualized is *white light*; it is a sign of Islam.” He also states that the color white and white or silvery light represent wholesomeness and, consequently, Islam as the supreme representation of peace and harmony. Al-Rāzī’s concept, however, is already tangible in al-Ghazālī’s description of the post-apocalyptic “earth white with silvery light,” that is, the state of the earth when existence reaches fulfillment and eternal peace on a cosmic scale. The consistency of al-Ghazālī’s views with those of al-Rāzī is even more clearly evident in the assignment of white banners to THE BLIND, “the worthiest to first look at God,” since it connotes the perception of innocence and purity. But the white color of the banner may also be understood simply as pointing to the blind themselves, as the eyes of sightless persons often become white. In addition, the assignment of THE BLIND to the eloquent preacher and prophet Shu‘ayb, “the one who shows the right path,” as his name indicates, further highlights the ethical virtues of THE BLIND and their elevated worthiness of divine reward.

Likewise, the white banners assigned to THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS bring to mind the Biblical and Islamic idea of “white” representing both light and enlightenment. This view is reinforced by al-Ghazālī himself when he states in *The Precious Pearl* that THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS were assigned to the Prophet Abraham, because Abraham is “the one to whom the most revelations

53 Based on these and other statements on colors in the Quran – in addition to the meanings of colors in ancient Arabic poetry and in the Greek theories of color as they became known to the Arabs in early Islam especially through eminent Arab authors and translators such as ‘Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (third/ninth century) and Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 260/873) – certain medieval Muslim scholars devoted much thought to hues and shades of color. These considerations are included in works of classical Islamic philosophers, especially al-Kindī (d. 356/873), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and, above all, Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), as much as in those of philologists, natural scientists, theologians, and mystics. On colors in the Islamic context, see, above all, Corbin, *Man of light* 131–43; furthermore, Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen* 27–54 (on individual colors), 233–382 (on the meanings of colors and the system of color terminology in pre-Islamic poetry); Morabia, *Lawn* 698–707; Müller, *Die Farben des Koran* 117–45 (on the meaning – and the chronological development in the use – of color terms in the course of the Quranic revelation); Rippin, *Colors* 361–5; Scarcia Amoretti, *Lunar green and solar green* 337–43; and Spies, *Al-Kindī’s treatise* 247–59.

[and wisdom] were given." Consequently, the color white supersedes the color **saffron** (a tone of golden yellow, as discussed above), the color that was assigned to THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS before it was replaced by white.⁵⁴

In the Quran, **green** connotes freshness, relaxation, and luxuriousness. It is reminiscent of nature, vegetation, and lush gardens, often in explicit reference to the gardens of paradise. It carries the notion of earthy humidity, but also the virtue of being salutary for the vision and other senses as it sets the mind at peace. Green is generally seen in Islam as the color of paradise. In Islamic mysticism, the color green is more specifically "the sign of the life of the heart" while the *visio smaragdina*, "the outburst of green," represents a specific degree of "visionary apperception" or perception of new experience in relation to past experience (a crucial activity in Sufi learning and for spiritual advancement). Association of THE PEOPLE OF AFFLICTION AND WITH INFIRMITIES with the color green not only appears to convey the notion of calm and reward for those who experienced great suffering on earth, but also offers them an immediate prospect of the freshness and wholeness of paradise. The Prophet Job, described in the Quran as one who was afflicted by great suffering but who never lost faith in God (Q 21:83), appears to embody both the archetype and the natural leader of all those in pain and distress.

Red refers in the Quran to the multicolored nature of God's creation (Q 35:27–8). However, it also conveys such qualities as intensity, high visibility, and distinctiveness. Some of these meanings apparently live on in Islamic mysticism, where the "red light" is the dominant note in the mystical vision, and is in fact both an image and a cause of "nostalgia and a burning desire" to unite with the divine. Yet the color red also stands for the sun, fire, and heat in general. Thus, association of THE PEOPLE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS with a color of the radiance and intensity of red, and with the Prophet Joseph who is admired in Islam for his particularly strong commitment to God and his exceptional righteousness (of which the Quran, in Sura 12:4–102, speaks in the most detailed of its narratives on Biblical figures), clearly marks those in this group as particularly strong believers.

Yellow (often synonymous with gold) is associated in the Quran with brightness, shininess, and purity. For the mystics, yellow is "the sign of the fidelity of faith." But it also indicates a "lessening of activity." THE LOVERS OF GOD in al-Ghazālī's account perfectly express these notions, especially as they appear to be in a state of constant, glowing spiritual devotion. However, THE LOVERS

54 In contrast, the "black light" (Pers.: *nūr-e siyāh*) was extolled by certain mystics of later times as "a very delicate spiritual state into which the mystic enters just before *fanā'* (annihilation)"; cf. Izutsu, *Paradox* 300–2.

OF GOD represent the great passion which believers find in their affection for God on the one hand, and the reduction of all worldly activities to a minimum on the other. At the same time, they are patient and “never annoyed with any earthly circumstances,” as al-Ghazālī confirms. The leader of THE LOVERS OF GOD, Aaron, the brother and companion of Moses and himself a prophetic messenger (Q 10:75–6; 21:48), is viewed in the Quran as someone who almost sacrificed his life in a zealous effort to urge the Israelites to believe in God, instead of making the calf of gold and succumbing to idolatry. Aaron thus seems to be the perfect choice as the leader of THE LOVERS OF GOD.

Multicoloredness is the result of an effective blending of colors. While in the Quran the multiplicity of colors, hues, and shades is “evidence for God’s handiwork in creation”⁵⁵ and for that creation’s diversity in appearance, in Islamic mysticism the beauty of the rainbow’s multicolored spectrum is viewed as a wholesome representation of all the spiritual heavens; that is, the inner heavens of the soul and the seven planes of existence. This kind of distinction through diversity is evident in THOSE WHO WEEP OUT OF THE FEAR OF GOD who wept “for different reasons,” as al-Ghazālī states. Due to their intense fear of God, they are led by Noah, viewed in Islam as a prophet and messenger whose message was refused by the wicked and sinful people despite his God-inspired warning, “. . . truly, I fear for you the chastisement of a dreadful day” (Q 7:59).

The dual notion of purity and reward recurs when THE POOR are awarded a banner of **yellow**, a color we encountered earlier. The leader of THE POOR, Jesus, often mentioned in the Quran as a messenger and the one who announced Muḥammad’s coming (Q 61:6), is particularly venerated by Muslim ascetics and mystics for his poverty, humility, and detachment from worldly life – a view given much consideration by al-Ghazālī in both his monumental scholarly opus, *The Revitalization of the Studies of Religion*, and his later writing, *The Precious Pearl*.⁵⁶

Finally, the **multicolored** banner assigned to THE RICH seems to refer to the large range of their treasures. Their representative and leader, Solomon, is considered in Islam to be a prophet and divinely appointed king. God bestowed on him many riches and abilities, but he nonetheless reigned justly and remained grateful and faithful to God throughout his life (Q 27:15–9).

55 See also Rippin, *Colors* 361.

56 See also Zwemer, *Jesus Christ in the Ihya*, esp. 148.

3.2.2.5 *Personifications of Deeds and Ideas*

The great wonders of the day of judgment continue as every thing and every concept existent on earth appears in human form. The Quran appears as a man with a beautiful face and figure. Similarly, the Islamic religion, *dīn*, emerges as a person – an idea somewhat resembling *daēnā*, the female personification of the “visionary soul” (who guides the deceased along a narrow path to the other world) in Zoroastrianism.⁵⁷ The world comes into sight as a hoary old woman and people are told: “This is the world, over which you used to envy and hate each other!” Likewise, Friday, the day of the Muslim communal prayer, approaches “in the image of a bride being led in procession, as lovely as can be.”⁵⁸

Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that these personifications of things and ideas are to be understood literally, even though acceptance of such an understanding in the here and now may be difficult. He insists that these personifications are not merely symbolic and explains that, with their physical representation in the material world, expressions such as earth, Islam, the Quran, prayer, fasting, and patience refer to real and solid things, while by their innermost nature, they belong to the spiritual world. Therefore, the Quran exists “as a person” and Islam “as something spiritual” through the will of Almighty God. Whosoever recognizes this truth will encourage a literal understanding of the scripture and a spiritual approach to the world. This is why literalists would never speak of the “creation of the Quran,” as the rationalist sect of the Jahmīs does. The author of *The Precious Pearl* maintains that the Jahmīs (apparently a derogatory or code word for Mu‘tazilīs) are ignorant of the spiritual reality of existence and in error when they argue, “the soul is annihilated at death.”⁵⁹

57 According to the *Hādōxt Nask (Book of scriptures)*, a Middle Persian text composed prior to the fourth century CE, the personified Daēnā, the mobile and seeing soul, appears to the deceased at “the end of the third night,” at the dawn of the fourth day, after he or she had passed away. Daēnā will be carried to the deceased by a wind from the south. Daēnā will have the shape of a maiden. She is of lovely appearance, has white arms and firm [lit., high] breasts. She is strong, tall, and beautiful. Daēnā is noble and looks like a 15-year-old. Altogether, she is more stunning than the most beautiful creature. See Piras (ed., trans. and comm.), *Hādōxt Nask* 69–70, 82–94. I am very grateful to Dr. Kianoosh Rezanian, Göttingen, for drawing my attention to these passages in *Hādōxt Nask* 2:7 and 2:9. See also Kellens, *Hādōxt Nask*.

58 See al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 107–9; al-Ghazālī, *Die Kostbare Perle* 116–7; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 87–8.

59 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 109; al-Ghazālī, *Die Kostbare Perle* 117; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 88.

Although the author feels very strongly about the rejection of any metaphorical approach to the Quran, he presents his views carefully and rationally when he says:

I have been on guard against all allegorical interpretations of the *ḥadīth* and disclaimed those who reject it. In the same way I have avoided describing the balance, considering the speech of those who describe it by similes to be an error, and have relegated it to the concerns of the spiritual (*malakūtī*) world. For good and evil actions and the weights of accidents cannot be gauged for certain but by the spiritual (*malakūtī*) balance.⁶⁰

Of course, one must bear in mind in this context that the personification of ideas and deeds, put forward so firmly in *The Precious Pearl*, is neither unique to al-Ghazālī nor to orthodox Islam. Also, several ancient mythologies tended to personify ideas and powers (as divinities), or view death as a living being. In certain Biblical texts, too, death is personified as a malevolent power and paralleled with hell.⁶¹

At the end of *The Precious Pearl*, al-Ghazālī straightforwardly addresses his readers by calling upon them to be immune to error. Here he instructs the true believers to strictly “follow the path of the *sunna* and avoid the innovations occurring in the *sharīʿa*,” the divinely revealed law, since only those who follow the example of the Prophet and live a life that is in accordance with the prophetic tradition may hope for salvation and eternal happiness in paradise.

4 Conclusions

We hope that our voyage through examples from four very different categories of classical Arabic texts – the Quran, the literature of prophetic traditions, the biography of the Prophet, and the eschatological literature – contributes to an illustration of the true wealth of ideas and depictions of the hereafter considered by the majority of Muslims to be authoritative and, indeed, foundational to the Islamic religion and way of life. In conclusion, a few additional observations are in order.

First, the remarkably vivid imagery and symbolic language of the Quranic references to paradise and hell evoke intensive sensory perceptions that

60 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 69–70; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 63.

61 See, for example, Jes 28:15, 18; Jer 9:20; Hab 2:5; 1 Cor 15:26; Rev 6:8; 20:13–4.

stimulate both the mind and the heart. These often highly poetic descriptions help to establish, whether openly or implicitly, a direct connection between two distinctly different realms: the present world and the hereafter. As a result of this process taking place in the mind, plain textual representations of the afterlife appear to be transformed into a clearly delineated, though dynamic, geography of the unseen. Abstract concepts of a supernatural reality, inaccessible to conventional means of knowledge acquisition, thus become something concrete, tangible, and comprehensible to the human mind. The explicit pictorial language in the eschatological passages of the Quran, which we discussed in the first part of this study, empathically calls to mind that what humans may experience after death is entirely different from life in this world. However, as noted by Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), an influential Muslim translator and commentator of the Quran, the Quranic similes, allegories, and parables for the hereafter also lead to “a kind of ‘visualization’ of the consequences” resulting from deliberate action, or omission thereof, in this world.⁶² Moreover, as Sayyid Quṭb (1906–66), the prominent Muslim theorist and author of perhaps the most popular Quran commentary in the contemporary Muslim world, observed, by “palpable fancied images,” the artistic portrayal, representation, or depiction in the Quran (*al-taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qurʾān*) “designates intellectual meanings, psychological states, perceptible events, visual scenes, human types, and human nature. It then elevates these images it draws, and grants them living presence or regenerating power . . . As for events, scenes, stories and sights, it renders them actual and immediate, pulsating with life and dynamism.”⁶³

Analysis of the range of ideas and stylistic devices in the Quran relevant in our thematic context – from eschatological and apocalyptic ideas at the one end to concepts of eternal life and salvation on the other – is obviously pivotal to a better understanding of the Quranic revelation as such. In fact, examination of the eschatological ideas in the Quran may even allow a fuller appreciation of certain spiritual motivations animating Muḥammad’s prophetic mission. This seems to be particularly true when we consider that Western scholars researching the Quran have only just begun to study the interconnection between apocalypse and salvation in Islam in more depth.⁶⁴

62 Asad (trans.), *The message* 990. For the definition, use, and interpretation of these rhetorical devices in the text and context of the Quran, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen* 426–38 (on simile); Beamont, *Simile* 13–8; Gilliot and Larcher, *Language and style* 109–35, Heath, *Metaphor* 384–8; and Zahniser, *Parable* 9–12.

63 Quṭb, *Taṣwīr* 36; Boullata’s translation (slightly adjusted), cf. his *Literary appreciation* 356.

64 See, in particular, the pioneering studies by Cook, *Studies in Muslim apocalyptic* 1–33 (introduction), and T. Lawson, *Duality, opposition and typology in the Qurʾān*, esp. 25–6 and

Second, similes, allegories, and complex verbal pictures are certainly not unusual in religious texts. This is evident, for example, in the many parables and allegorical narratives in the Bible. Nonetheless, the vivid descriptions of paradise and hell in the Quran, along with the remarkably elaborate and imaginative eschatological narratives by later Muslim scholars deserve special attention for the descriptive diction and style with which they emphasize the inescapable consequences for all those who fail to heed the Quran's passionate warnings of the final cosmic apocalypse. But even more than these powerful rhetorical or narrative features that address the mind and the emotions, it is the richness of symbolic imagery, metaphors, and colors so distinctive to these eschatological texts that effectively facilitates two fundamental objectives of the Quranic message as understood by generations of Muslims: the one is *missionary in its nature*, as non-Muslims are called upon to understand that acceptance of the Quranic message and Islam means salvation and eternal life; and the other is *dogmatic in its essence*, as it provides Muslims with reaffirmation of, and instruction in, Islamic doctrine. The latter point was highlighted by Abū 'Alā' al-Mawdūdī (1903–79), one of the most important though controversial Islamist thinkers of the twentieth century, but also by Sayyid Quṭb, just mentioned. While al-Mawdūdī emphasized, for example, that “graphic scene[s] of the life in the Hereafter” have been depicted in the Quran “in order to warn the disbelievers of the consequences of the rejection of the Articles of Faith,” Quṭb noted that for Muslims, belief in the afterlife, paradise and hell is inseparably connected to belief in God, and denial of an afterlife is considered blasphemy in orthodox Islam.⁶⁵

Third, it must be emphasized that in their writings medieval Muslim authors of eschatological works have very creatively blended Quranic concepts with extra-Quranic materials. These extra-Quranic eschatological elements are evidently part of a *pool of ideas and images* fostered by various cultures and religions of the ancient and medieval Near and Middle East. In other words, the *openness* and *integrative attitude* of Islamic civilization in classical times

35–41 (on “Typological Figuration and the Apocalypse of Reunion”); Lawson, *Apocalypse* 38–9; and Lawson, *Gnostic apocalypse and Islam*, esp. 1–20 (introduction).

65 This idea is present throughout al-Mawdūdī's and Quṭb's commentaries. Al-Mawdūdī, for example, states in his explanation of Sura 6 (note 136), “to believe in ‘meeting with one's Lord’ means . . . [to] be convinced that a life of responsibility based on the belief in the life of the Hereafter is far better than an irresponsible life based on its rejection . . .” (cf. also [al-]Mawdūdī, *Towards understanding* ii, 295, the wording in the printed edition differs slightly from the online version); see also Quṭb, *In the shade* vi, 254 (on Q 7:169–70).

toward the multifaceted cultural heritage of the wider Mediterranean world, including the apparent capacity of Muslim scholars to assimilate, Islamize, and thus revivify certain ancient ideas and symbols concerning the ultimate destiny of humanity must be identified as an important factor that has helped, throughout the centuries, to attract interest, capture imagination, and persuade people to adopt Islam as their religion and way of life. This insight applies in particular to the fascinating descriptions of the hereafter we have examined here from such highly authoritative texts as those by Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hishām, al-Bukhārī, and al-Ghazālī.

Fourth, the classical books on Islamic eschatology, of which al-Ghazālī's *The Precious Pearl* is a particularly popular example, highlight two principal ideas: (a) through death the soul is freed from the body and returns to heaven where its origins lie and where it truly belongs; and (b) death means awakening and becoming alert rather than falling asleep or into agony. This leads ultimately to the conclusion that the present world is in a state of sleep, and is awakened to *reality* and becomes *cognizant* only in the hereafter, when it is in a state that abides eternally in the presence of God. While these views – mirroring the famous prophetic saying that “People are asleep and when they die they awake”⁶⁶ – are salient features throughout al-Ghazālī's *The Precious Pearl*, they become even more evident in the writings of later Muslim scholars, especially in those of the mystics, of whom the influential Persian “existential” philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) is probably the most prominent.⁶⁷

Yet, one distinguishing feature in both the Quranic passages and the classical Arabic texts on Islamic eschatology examined here, and the one that perhaps stands out the most, is the human longing to *come full circle* and to *return to paradise* – an idea which appears to be as deeply rooted in Islam as it is in other major religions.

66 The Arabic original of this famous saying reads: *الناس نيام فإذا ماتوا انتبهوا*. It is attributed sometimes to the Prophet Muḥammad, other times to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the fourth “rightly-guided caliph.” Al-Ghazālī quotes it on several occasions in his *Ihyā*, without, however, giving an *isnād* (cf., for example, al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance* 124, with references to al-Shawkānī's *al-Fawā'id* and al-Suyūṭī's *Durar*). This saying is not included in the six most widely accepted (Sunni “canonical”) compendia of *ḥadīth*.

67 See also H. Landolt's and M. Rustom's contributions to the present publication.

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FIGURE 9.1 The Prophet Muḥammad's Night Journey to Heaven, miniature from *Yūsuf wa-Zulaykha* by the poet-theologian Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), Bukhara 1095/1683–84, fol. 10 recto, reproduced with kind permission of The David Collection, Copenhagen/Denmark.

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PART 2

The Pleasures of Paradise



“Reclining upon Couches in the Shade” (Q 35:56): Quranic Imagery in Rationalist Exegesis

Andrew J. Lane

1 Introduction

In this study, I examine how some of the more rationalist threads of Quran commentary, or so they have come to be called, interpret Quranic verses that use rich imagery to speak about the hereafter; I then compare these rationalist interpretations with those of mystical and more traditional exegetes, to see to what extent one may consider certain interpretations to be rationalist in nature. Naturally, it is not possible to examine all commentaries on all of the Quranic verses that speak of the next life; nor is it even possible to examine all of the research that went into the preparation of this study. Consequently, I present only a sampling of the Quranic commentary on the life of the hereafter here.

Since the time of Goldziher and other early scholars of modern Islamic studies, the *Kashshāf ‘an ḥaqā’iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-‘uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta’wīl* (The discoverer of the truths of the hidden things of revelation and the choicest statements concerning the aspects of interpretation), the Quran commentary of the Mu‘tazilī grammarian and man of letters Abū l-Qāsim Maḥmūd b. ‘Umar al-Zamakhsharī (467–538/1075–1144), has been viewed to one extent or another as an example of, if not *the* example of, rationalist exegesis.¹ However, al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary is not the only one that has been associated with the rationalist trend in interpretation. For example, Rippin notes that the commentaries of the Shi‘ite writers al-Ṭūsī (385–459 or 460/995–1066 or 1067) and al-Ṭabrisī (470–548/1077 or 1078–1153) “provide more detailed and thorough-going examples of the Mu‘tazilite tendency.”²

1 For al-Zamakhsharī, cf. Versteegh, al-Zamakhsharī; Madelung, al-Zamakhsharī; and my *Commentary* (and 141–2 for scholarly views on the rationalism of the *Kashshāf*). References to the volume and page number of the *Kashshāf*, and the references to the editions of the other commentaries used here, are not given since the same material can be found in any edition of these exegetical works by referring to the Quranic references themselves.

2 Rippin, *Tafsīr*, in *ET*² 85.

Consequently, the material from the *Kashshāf* will be supplemented by material from the relevant passages in al-Ṭūsī's *al-Tibyān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān* (The explanation in Quranic exegesis).³ As for the mystical interpretation of the Quran, I use Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī's (325 or 330–412/937 or 942–1021) *Ziyādāt ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr*, the “appendix” to his voluminous Quran commentary, *Ḥaqā'iq al-tafsīr* (The truths of exegesis), written sometime after 370/980; and Abū Muḥammad Rūzbihān b. Abī Naṣr al-Baqlī's (522–606/1128–1209) *Arā'is al-bayān fī ḥaqā'iq al-Qur'ān* (The brides of explanation on the truths of the Quran).⁴ For the more traditionalist interpretations

3 For al-Ṭūsī, see Amir-Moezzi, al-Ṭūsī. It has been suggested that an important source for al-Ṭūsī's commentary is that of the Mu'tazilī scholar 'Alī b. 'Isā l-Rummānī (296–384/908–994). A brief survey of some of the secondary literature, however, gave no indication that al-Ṭūsī used al-Rummānī's commentary, although al-Mubārak clearly indicates that he was aware of it and considered it to be among the best of the Mu'tazilī commentaries, even if its author was longwinded on the matter (al-Mubārak, *al-Rummānī* 96–7). Furthermore, only a small part of al-Rummānī's commentary still exists, and that which does is in unedited manuscript form; it is, therefore, practically impossible to verify the truth of such a position. The connection between al-Rummānī and al-Zamakhsharī, on the other hand, has been made in the literature. Relying on biographical sources, al-Mubārak notes that al-Zamakhsharī profited from al-Rummānī's commentary and enlarged on it; the same point is made by Brockelmann (cf. al-Mubārak, *al-Rummānī* 56, 96; Brockelmann, *Geschichte*, Suppl. i, 175). However, as my study of al-Zamakhsharī's *Kashshāf* has shown, it is difficult to draw a direct link between one author and another, one text and another, even when one has access to the texts, which is not the case for al-Rummānī's commentary; on the latter, cf. my *Commentary* 5–6. Cf. also Flanagan, al-Rummānī, who relies on al-Mubārak.

4 Here I am using Böwering, *Minor Qur'ān commentary*; and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, *Arā'is al-bayān*. It is interesting to note that these mystical commentaries touch on only a very small percentage of the Quranic text. This, though, is probably the result of the genre's method. Rippin writes that “a passage of the Qur'ān can be the jumping-off point (a “keynote”) for a meditation on a topic seemingly unconnected to the text itself but derived from images contained within the personal experience of the individual Ṣūfī” (Rippin, *Tafsīr* 85). Al-Sulamī was an important Sufi hagiographer and Quran commentator, and a prolific author. His many writings may be categorized as Sufi hagiographies, Sufi commentaries on the Quran, and treatises on Sufi traditions and customs. Cf. Böwering, al-Sulamī. Rūzbihān al-Baqlī was a Persian Sufi author, known for his fondness for the shocking ecstatic sayings of earlier Sufis. He founded a *ṭarīqa* at the mosque of Shiraz where he preached for 50 years. Although this institution did not last, many of his works did. One of these was his Quran commentary which built on previous commentaries by al-Sulamī and al-Qushayrī. Cf. Ernst, Rūzbihān. Al-Qushayrī, Abū l-Qāsim 'Abd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin (376–465/986–1072), was a mystic and theologian who spent most of his life in Nishapur. Although his studies covered most of the traditional Islamic sciences, his works dealt mainly with mystical topics. One of these works is his mystical Quran commentary, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, which he composed before 410/1019.

I looked to al-Bayḍāwī's (d. ca. 685/1286) *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-ta'wīl* (The lights of revelation and the secrets of interpretation) which Robson describes as "largely a condensed and amended edition of al-Zamakhsharī's *Kashshāf*," whose Mu'tazilī views al-Bayḍāwī tried either to modify or refute, if he did not simply omit them all together.⁵ This short commentary, therefore, gives an indication of what was considered to be the more traditional or orthodox thread of commentary, and indicates what were considered to be rationalist interpretations of the passages studied.

The main source for the Quranic references to be studied below is Şoubḥī El-Şaleḥ's *La vie future selon le Coran* (The next life according to the Quran). This short, modern book is divided into an introduction and five main parts, the first of which gives an inventory of the Quranic references to heaven and hell (a few of these appear to be inexact but these are the rare exception and not the rule). When this inventory is examined, it is striking just how much raw material there is available in the Quran on the next life, both heaven and hell; the quantity is staggering and analyzing it all would require a book. Following this initial section on the basic Quranic data, there are four sections, each devoted to one kind of exegesis: traditionalist, rationalist, mystical, and modern. It is only in the first, however, that El-Şaleḥ gives a detailed presentation of the interpretation of an important number of Quranic verses.

With respect to the rationalist exegesis that interests us here, El-Şaleḥ refers to two sources: the *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* (The book of triumph) of the Mu'tazilī theologian and jurist Abū l-Ḥusayn 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Khayyāt (ca. 220–300/835–913) and the *Kashshāf* of al-Zamakhsharī (467–538/1075–1144).⁶ He writes that the *Kashshāf* is the principal source for his study of rationalist exegesis, and notes that al-Zamakhsharī does not give a personal interpretation of Quranic

(A rather impractical six-volume edition of this commentary was published by the Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī in Cairo in 1968.) Halm writes that in all his works he "tried to reconcile mystical practices, suspected by so many scholars, with the principles of the *Sharī'a*." Cf. Halm, *al-Kuṣhayrī* v, 527.

5 Al-Bayḍāwī (d. ca. 685/1286) was the chief judge of Shiraz and had a reputation for learning; he wrote on a number of topics though his works, usually based on those of others, were noted for their brevity. Cf. Robson, *al-Bayḍāwī* i, 129; and my comments on the *Anwār al-tanzīl* in *Commentary* 89–90.

6 Although El-Şaleḥ refers to the *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* in his section on rationalist exegesis (*La vie future* 70), in his *ET*² article on al-Khayyāt van Ess refers to this book as a refutation of Ibn al-Rāwandī's (early third/ninth to mid-fourth/tenth century) *Kitāb Faḍīḥat al-Mu'tazila*, one of eight refutations that al-Khayyāt wrote against works of the latter. Van Ess says al-Khayyāt was a theologian and jurist, and the foremost representative of the Baghdad school of the Mu'tazilis in his time.

references to heaven and hell but, rather, echoes the thinking of his Mu'tazilī masters. Despite his statement that the *Kashshāf* is the primary source for rationalist exegesis, there are very few references to it in the book; in fact, there are only two.⁷ As for the *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, El-Ṣaleḥ admits that this book gives very little information of use for his study of the rational exegesis of the Quranic verses dealing with heaven and hell.⁸

Notwithstanding its shortcomings, El-Ṣaleḥ's work remains an invaluable tool for discovering Quranic references to heaven or paradise and the life of the blessed therein (and that of the damned in hell). Because of the great number of references and the impossibility of dealing with all or even a large number of them, in this chapter I focus on a very limited number of verses that speak about the throne of God, the angels, some aspects of the life of the blessed in paradise, and finally, the garden (or gardens) of paradise itself. The presentation will follow the same pattern for each theme examined: first I present the rationalist commentary of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī, complemented by the mystical exegesis of al-Sulamī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, and then, finally, the more traditional/orthodox commentary of al-Bayḍāwī. On the basis of this analysis, I make some concluding remarks concerning a specifically rationalist commentary on paradise in the Quran.

7 El-Ṣaleḥ refers to al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on Q 10:5 which, he says, supports the Mu'tazilī view that the eternal reward was absolutely equal for all believers; this statement appears to be an error (*La vie future* 82; see below, however, re. al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on the same idea at Q 17:21). El-Ṣaleḥ uses al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on Q 10:26 to show that the Mu'tazilī method was critical of the *ḥadīth* and had reservations with respect to its use. He even quotes a passage where al-Zamakhsharī apparently ridicules a tradition as *marqū'* ("patched together") that would support views opposed to his own (El-Ṣaleḥ, *La vie future* 74). A note in the *Kashshāf*, however, says that this tradition was, in fact, *ṣaḥīḥ*. The word *marqū'* could be an oversight by the author or a later copyist; the same note in the *Kashshāf* says that the word means the tradition was false and a fabrication (al-Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf* ii, 326, n. 2).

8 Four topics are discussed in the chapter on rationalist exegesis: the vision of God, the creation of paradise and hell with respect to the creation of the world, judgment with respect to the blessed and the damned, and the destruction of paradise (El-Ṣaleḥ, *La vie future* 73–82). Here the author discusses Mu'tazilī positions on these subjects, as opposed to offering rationalist interpretations of relevant passages from the Quran.

2 The Throne Verse (Q 2:255)

The first element of life (and the “material culture” obtaining) in paradise that I examine here is the throne of God; for such a topic, there is no better place to begin than with the Throne verse, Q 2:255. This is a rather long verse but here we focus specifically on the part that speaks about the throne itself. The verse reads:⁹ “His Throne (*kursī*) comprises the heavens and the earth; the preserving of them oppresses Him not.”

The first thing we note about this verse is that the word translated here as “throne” is *kursī*; another word that we find for “throne” in these verses is *‘arsh* (e.g., Q 69:17; 25:59 below). Here we see al-Zamakhsharī interpreting a passage in what might be called a complete way, giving first more rationalist and then more traditional interpretations. We can summarize his points in the following schematic presentation:

1. The word *kursī* does not mean more than what it usually means in everyday language; it is a place where one sits – a seat – and nothing more.
2. The passage “His Throne comprises the heavens and the earth” has four aspects:
 - (i) It means that the throne was not narrower in extent than the heavens and the earth. However, there is no real throne, no sitting, and no sitter. It is only an image, a way of representing something else (*takhyīl, taṣwīr*),¹⁰ in this case the greatness/glory (*‘aẓama*) of God.
 - (ii) The word *kursī* is an image of God’s knowledge (*‘ilm*)
 - (iii) The word *kursī* is an image of God’s dominion (*mulk*).¹¹
 - (iv) It has been transmitted that there are two seats, the *kursī* and the *‘arsh*, and that the former is in front of the latter; below the *kursī*

9 English translations of the Quran follow Arberry (trans.), *Koran*.

10 This is supported by a reference to Q 39:67 (“when the whole earth is His handful . . . and the heavens are rolled in His right hand”). No one imagines, al-Zamakhsharī says, that this passage, which refers to the day of resurrection, is saying that the earth will be in God’s hand or that the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. In his Arabic-French dictionary Kazimirski says *takhyīl* means a figure of speech in which a word is used that has two meanings, one of which is more common and better known and immediately comes to mind, while the other is less well known but is brought to mind by the first; and it is this latter meaning that an author is using (Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire* i, 658). Here, however, al-Zamakhsharī does not seem to be using the term with this technical sense.

11 The reason for the last two of these interpretations is the same: God’s knowledge and dominion are called a throne in order to name them by their place (*makān*), since knowledge is the seat (*kursī*) of the knower and dominion is the seat of the sovereign.

are the heavens and the earth; and next to the *‘arsh*, the *kursī* is like something very small. It was also transmitted on the authority of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (21–110/642–728) that the *kursī* and the *‘arsh* are one and the same thing.¹²

Al-Ṭūsī’s commentary on Q 2:255 includes remarks that are similar to some of al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary. For example, al-Ṭūsī’s first remark is that the reference to God’s throne (*kursī*) is a reference to His knowledge (*‘ilm*); this was received on the authority of a number of sources, one of whom was Ibn ‘Abbās.¹³ Al-Ṭūsī then refers to al-Ḥasan’s statement given above, that the *kursī* and the *‘arsh* are the same, but then adds that an anonymous source (whom he later says is a Companion) said that the *kursī* was a couch (*sarīr*) beneath the *‘arsh*.¹⁴ After giving a final explanation, that the throne (*kursī*) refers to the foundation or root of God’s dominion (*mulk*), he adds that all of this can be admitted as probable.

Al-Ṭūsī then returns to the idea of knowledge and explains why the reference to God’s throne can be taken to mean His knowledge. His explanation is based on what is commonly said: that scholars are called seats because they are the basis on which one relies, just as they are called the tent pegs (or poles) of the earth (because they hold everything in place), or are called the root that is relied on. He then goes into an explanation of the etymology of the word which need not detain us here. However, in so doing he also introduces the idea that the throne (*kursī*) can refer to the sovereign’s dominion (*mulk*).

Al-Ṭūsī then raises an interesting point, what he calls the point of view concerning the creation of the throne. Here he is responding to the Mujassima, the

12 This latter account appears to correct the former interpretation. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was a Successor and a famous preacher during the Umayyad period in Basra; in his sermons he warned his fellow citizens against committing sin. Cf. Ritter, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Al-Ḥasan was an important source for much of al-Zamakhsharī’s traditional material; see my *Commentary*.

13 Ibn ‘Abbās is “considered one of the greatest scholars, if not the greatest, of the first generation of Muslims,” and the father of Quranic exegesis. Cf. Veccia Vaglieri, ‘Abd Allāh b. al-‘Abbās. However, identifying him as the author of works and interpretations ascribed to him in the exegetical tradition is not an easy task. Cf. Rippin, *Tafsir Ibn Abbas*.

14 This is the first encounter with the word *sarīr* although it will come back later in the presentation of the seats of the blessed in paradise. In the *Lisān al-‘arab* Ibn Manẓūr (630–711/1312–1233) defines *sarīr* as *muḍṭaja’* which can be translated as “couch” or “bed” but literally means “a place where one lies on one’s side.” He gives the verb *iḍṭaja’a* to mean, first, “to sleep” and then “to lie down on one’s side on the ground” (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab* xviii, 361; xxxiii, 219). For a short note on Ibn Manẓūr, cf. Fück, Ibn Manẓūr.

anthropomorphists or “corporealists” who held that God was corporeal and gave Him bodily attributes. They claimed that the throne was a body (*jism*) that the angels carried; this was an act of adoration of God, as humans do but to a greater extent. However, al-Ṭūsī says that God did not create the throne in order to sit upon it, since God is above that and sitting is an attribute of bodies and if God needed to sit then He would be a created (or generated) body (*jism muḥdath*); and God cannot be a created body since His eternity has already been established.

In the Quran commentary of al-Sulamī we find remarks that are similar to some of al-Zamakhsharī’s metaphorical and traditional interpretations. Like al-Zamakhsharī, too, al-Sulamī was not immune from giving anonymous sources, not infrequently introducing a comment with an “It has been said” (*qīla*) or “One of them/Some of them [have said].” For the Throne verse, al-Sulamī says that “His Throne comprises the heavens and the earth” refers to God’s knowledge (*‘ilm*) though he does not say more. Echoing one of the traditional interpretations, al-Sulamī says that the throne is in the heavens and that, next to it, the earth is like a speck.¹⁵

In the Quran commentary of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī we find five explanations concerning the throne of God, nearly all of which offer a more mystical understanding of the expression. Rūzbihān offers no sources for these, although in some cases he gives the anonymous *qīla*. These can be summarized as follows:

1. God’s throne is the heart of the knower (*‘arīf*) which encompasses the heavens and the earth, since it is the source (*ma’dīn*) of all divine and mystical knowledge which has neither end nor limit.¹⁶
2. God’s throne is the world of the kingdom (*‘ālam al-malakūt*), the place around which turn (*maṭāf*) the spirits of those with knowledge of the glory of the almighty (*arwāḥ al-‘arīfīn li-jalāl al-jabarūt*).¹⁷
3. The *kursī* and the *‘arsh* are the two *qiblas* of the people of the apocalypse (*ahl al-ḥidhān*).¹⁸

15 Al-Sulamī, *Ziyādāt*, in Böwering (ed.), *Minor Qur’ān commentary* 19.

16 For more on knowledge in the Sufi tradition, cf. Arnaldez, Ma’rifa.

17 This recalls the pilgrimage to Mecca, in which the *maṭāf* is the pavement on which the *ṭawāf* is performed.

18 For my understanding of this expression, cf. Fahd, *Djafr* and Fahd, *Malḥama*.

4. It has been said that the throne (*al-ʿarsh wa-l-kursī*) is a manifestation of power (*iḡhār li-l-quḍra*) but saying such a thing is out of place (*lā maḥallan li-l-dhāt*).¹⁹
5. It has been said that the *kursī* is in the heavens, and that the earth, in comparison to it, is like a speck.²⁰

In the *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʿwīl*, the Quran commentary of al-Bayḍāwī, we find that this author takes the reference to the throne in Q 2:255 to be a representation of God's majesty (*ʿaẓama*) and nothing more; there is, in fact, no throne and no sitter. After clearing that up, al-Bayḍāwī gives some of the interpretations already seen in the *Kashshāf*, saying that the throne is a metaphor (*majāz*) for God's knowledge (*ʿilm*) or dominion (*mulk*). Following this, however, al-Bayḍāwī seems to veer toward a more anthropomorphic interpretation, saying that it has been said that the *kursī* is a body (*jism*) in front of the *ʿarsh* that encompasses the seven heavens. He supports this view with a tradition of the Prophet, in which he says that the seven heavens and the seven earths are, in comparison to the *kursī*, like a ring in a desert; and the *ʿarsh* surpasses the *kursī* as the desert does the ring. Al-Bayḍāwī even suggests that the *kursī* is the zodiac. However, he quickly comes back down to earth and points out that at its root, *kursī* is the name of what is sat upon and that its meaning does not go beyond the seat of the sitter, a point already made by al-Zamakhsharī with respect to the meaning of the word.²¹

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- 19 Here Rūzbihān al-Baqlī is not rejecting God's attributes but appears to be saying that the throne is not a manifestation of God's power, or of God's power alone. Although the text in the edition may be faulty (I read it as *iḡhār li-l-quḍra lā maḥallan li-l-dhāt*), it seems to imply that accepting such a position would imply that God acted before He had knowledge (*qabla ʿilmihī*). However, he does not elaborate. *Dhāt*, of course, can also be a reference to God.
 - 20 I am taking the Arabic text here, which has *dāl-rāʾ-tāʾ marbūṭa*, to be an oversight on the part of the editors, and so I am reading it as *dhāl-rāʾ-tāʾ marbūṭa*, *dharra* (speck), as it is also to be found in al-Sulamī's commentary on which Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's work is based. On the other hand, the text could be correct with *dāl-rāʾ-tāʾ marbūṭa* and read *durra* (pearl) which would also fit the context.
 - 21 Al-Bayḍāwī ends with the etymology of the word: It is as if *kursī* is to be traced back to "compacted" (clay) (*al-kirs*, *al-mulabbad*). The idea of the root word, *kirs*, is "pressed together," "compressed," "compacted" or "matted" like wool. Earlier in his comments, al-Bayḍāwī says that the *kursī* is in front of the *ʿarsh* and for that reason it is called a *kursī*. This seems to imply that the *kursī* is something that is pressed down or trod on, like a footstool; the actual relationship between the *kursī*, which is God's throne in the verse, and the *ʿarsh* is never clearly explained. The Throne verse is not, of course, the only reference to the throne of God in the Quran; nor is it the only verse on which al-Zamakhsharī

3 The Angels

Another important element of paradise is angels. A number of verses speak about them, one of which is Q 25:59 which is also connected to the subject of the previous section: “Who created the heavens and the earth, and what is between them, in six days, then sat Himself upon the Throne (*‘arsh*), the All-compassionate: ask any informed of Him!” In his commentary on this verse, al-Zamakhsharī does not speak about the throne, here called *‘arsh* and not *kursī*. Instead he speaks about the number of angels (eight) who bear up the throne (*ḥamalat al-‘arsh*). Al-Zamakhsharī also gives the number of other things as well, some of which are easier to know than others. For example, he says that there are twelve angels guarding hell, seven heavens, twelve months, and five prayers.

Although in his commentary on Q 25:59 al-Zamakhsharī refers to the eight angels who bear up the throne of God, the verse itself does not refer to them directly; however Q 69:17 does: “and the angels (*malak*) shall stand upon its (i.e., heaven’s) borders (*arjā’*), and upon that day eight shall carry above them the Throne (*‘arsh*) of your Lord.” In his commentary on this verse, we see al-Zamakhsharī’s wide knowledge and use of traditional material, for he gives a number of traditional interpretations. First, he notes the difference between the two plurals for “angel,” *malak* and *malā’ika*, noting that the former is more general than the latter. The “borders (of heaven),” (*arjā’*), are its sides (*jawānib*) and they will split on the day of resurrection; they are also the abode of the

comments on the throne of God. A quick survey of other verses shows that in some of his commentary, al-Zamakhsharī limits himself to metaphorical interpretations (cf. his comments on Q 17:42–3, 20:5) and these interpretations are reflected in, for example, the earlier commentary of al-Sulamī. In his commentary on such verses as Q 11:7 and 9:129, on the other hand, we find that al-Zamakhsharī tends toward much more traditional interpretations. In his commentary on Q 11:7 “And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His throne (*‘arsh*) was upon the waters,” al-Zamakhsharī actually says that the throne and the water were created (*makhliūq*). He then adds that it has been said that the water was “borne upon the wind,” which seems to imply that the wind was also created before the rest of creation, but then adds that God knows best. Al-Bayḍawī echoes most of what al-Zamakhsharī says, noting one interpretation that said that the water was the first creation (*ḥādith*) after the throne. The edition of al-Ṭūsī’s commentary that was used seems to be faulty here; he may be saying that the water was on something changeable or unstable and that this was greater than the water (or maybe even simply very great), to give a lesson for the one who observed and reflected.

angels who flock to the edges of heaven and the borders around it.²² He then mentions that the reference to “eight” at the end of the verses is to the angels bearing up the throne. His comments on this can be briefly listed as follows:

1. A tradition transmitted on the authority of the Prophet states that the Prophet said that today there are four angels holding up the throne but that on the day of resurrection God will reinforce them with four more, so that they will be eight.
2. It was transmitted that they are eight angels (*amlāk*) whose feet are at the boundaries of the seventh earth, and that the throne is above their heads and they have their heads bowed and are praising God.²³
3. It was also said that one of these angels (i.e., probably one of the four, as opposed to the eight) has the likeness of a human being, one is like a lion, one is like a bull or ox, and one is like an eagle.²⁴
4. It was also transmitted that there are eight angels (*amlāk*) with the physical appearance of mountain goats; the distance between their cloven hooves and their knees is that of seventy years’ travel.²⁵
5. On the authority of Shahr b. Ḥawshāb,²⁶ the formulas of praise spoken by these eight angels are also given.

22 The remark concerning the “splitting” of heaven’s borders is based on what is said in the previous verses: “then, on that day, the Terror shall come to pass, and heaven shall be split, for upon that day it shall be very frail” (Q 69:16).

23 The word used here is *amlāk* which I have translated as “angels” though it was not found with this meaning; *amlāk* is, in fact, the plural of several words: *malk*, *malik*, *milk*, *mulk*, and *muluk*, the first of which means “possessor” or “one who possesses.” The word cannot be an oversight since al-Zamakhsharī has just spoken about the plurals of *malak* (“angel”); furthermore, the same word can be found in both al-Ṭūsī and al-Bayḍāwī (see below) and so it is not a simple error on the part of a later copyist of the *Kashshāf*. Al-Zamakhsharī is probably thinking that those who bear up the throne hold it firmly, a meaning that would fit the verb *malaka* (“to seize,” “to acquire,” “to lay hands on”); so *amlāk* should be taken simply as a synonym for *ḥamala* (“bearers,” “carriers”).

24 Here we see imagery that can also be found in the Book of Ezekiel (1:10), where the creatures that bore up the throne of God in the prophet’s vision each had four faces, those of a human, a lion, a bull, and an eagle. These images have also been traditionally associated with the authors of the four gospels of the New Testament.

25 The word used here is *azlāf*, the plural of *zīlf* which means “cloven hoof.” These creatures, though, may stand upright.

26 It is interesting to note the quality of al-Zamakhsharī’s source here. Shahr b. Ḥawshāb (d. between 100/718 and 112/720) was an early Successor, some of whose transmitted material was at times labeled *munkar*. He was accused of having brought *munkarāt* into circulation on the authority of *thiqāt*, i.e., reliable authorities. “In later usage, as from the

6. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is quoted as saying that God knows best the number of angels there are, whether it is eight or eight thousand; and al-Ḍaḥḥāk²⁷ says that there are eight rows or classes (*ṣufūf*) of angels, the number of whom only God knows.
7. Finally, the eight angels under discussion could be made from spirit or from another creation, for God is able to create anything.²⁸

In comparison to al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on the first verse given above, Q 25:59, al-Ṭūsī's commentary is quite meager. In fact he makes only two comments:

1. Creation began on Sunday and ended on Friday.
2. This passage is the completion of the account and what follows in the verse is the beginning of a new discourse.²⁹

Al-Ṭūsī's commentary on Q 69:17 focuses on the meaning of the word *arjā'* (translated here as "borders") and includes an etymology and a discussion of the number of angels bearing up the throne; for the latter, he draws on a number of traditional sources. First, he notes that *arjā'* means ("sides" (*nawāḥin*), a synonym of *jawānib* used above), and that the singular, *arjā'*, means "the side of a well." He says that this word is derived from the verb "to hope" since the side is the place where one hopes for safety when fearing a fall. This meaning, that *arjā'* means *nawāḥin*, he later attributes to a number of early sources (Sufyān al-Thawrī, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, and Qatāda),³⁰ although he also gives another

second half of the 2nd/8th century, *munkar* became virtually synonymous with *mawḍū'* 'fabricated' in *Ḥadīth* analysis, pertaining to *isnād* as well as *matn*." Cf. Juynboll, *Munkar*.

27 Abū l-Qāsim al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim al-Balkhī al-Hilālī al-Khurāsānī (d. 105/723) was a traditionist who is also credited with a Quran commentary. He taught at a school in Kufa out of charity; it was said that the school had three thousand children and that he used to ride up and down among his pupils on a donkey (cf. Lane, *Commentary* 365–6 and the references there).

28 This is supported by a reference to Q 36:36: "Glory to Him, who created all the pairs of what the earth produces, and of themselves, and of what they know not."

29 The full verse reads: "who created the heavens and the earth, and what between them is, in six days, then sat Himself upon the Throne (*ʿarsh*), the All-compassionate: ask any informed of Him!"

30 Sufyān al-Thawrī (97–161/716–778) was a representative of early Islamic law, tradition, and Quran interpretation. Cf. Raddatz, Sufyān al-Thawrī. Qatāda b. Dīʾāma was a Successor who was blind from birth and became known, among many other things, for his phenomenal memory and his knowledge of Quranic exegesis. Cf. Pellat, Qatāda b. Dīʾāma.

account, this time attributed to al-Ḍaḥḥāk, which says that the angels stand on the sides (or borders) of heaven because when the people see hell and flee from it, the angels drive them back. Al-Ṭūsī also quotes Ibn ‘Abbās concerning the angels holding up the throne; the latter said that there were eight rows or ranks (*ṣufūf*) of angels, not simply eight angels, and that their number is known only to God. Finally, al-Ṭūsī quotes a tradition of the Prophet concerning the eight angels who hold up the throne; that number, he says, makes it known that the throne is great and needs two angels on each corner to carry it, for less than eight would be insufficient.

Though al-Sulamī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī do not comment on Q 25:59 or Q 69:17, al-Bayḍawī does. In his commentary on Q 25:59, al-Bayḍawī merely says that he has already spoken about the passage in question or a part thereof (he assumes that his reader has read his commentary up to this point and knows the passage to which he is referring). On Q 69:17, he has a number of short comments:

1. The first word in the passage, *malak*, always translated by the plural “angels,” refers not to an individual angel but to the class or group generally recognized as angels.
2. The word *ajrā’* means *jawānib* (“sides,” similar to what was given by earlier commentators) and this reference to the borders or sides of heaven may be a depiction (*tamthīl*) of the destruction of heaven through the destruction of its edifice and its inhabitants flocking to its edges. If this description is taken literally, the Quranic passage could be saying that the destruction of the angels would take place immediately after this.³¹
3. As for those above whom the throne is carried – the verse reads: “eight shall carry above them (*fawqahum*) the Throne of your Lord” – al-Bayḍawī says that they are the angels on the borders of heaven, or they could be

31 This is an interesting interpretation since the orthodox position that al-Bayḍawī represents holds that the blessed will dwell in paradise for all eternity. See, for example, Gardet, *Djanna* ii, 451, a position echoed in Kinberg, *Paradise* iv, 12 and Bashir, *Eternity* ii, 54. On the other hand, Q 39:67, for example, speaks of the heavens being rolled up in God’s right hand on the day of resurrection, and Q 55:26–7 says that all that abides on the earth will perish (*fānin*) but the face of God will remain. So the Quranic text also leaves open the door to the ideas expressed by al-Bayḍawī. Finally, though, it became the orthodox position that “the annihilation of the whole world (including the destruction of heaven and hell, which, however, will not happen, as is known by revelation) is possible, *djā’iz*, considered as something in God’s power . . . This world (*dunyā*) will be destroyed, but not heaven and hell” (van den Bergh, *Abad* i, 2).

the eight referred to in the verse since they could have been intended by the pronoun “them” (-*hum*).

4. With regard to the eight specifically mentioned in the verse, al-Bayḍāwī says that they are angels (*amlāk*) and gives most of the explanations that have already been seen in the other commentaries: (i) there are four angels today but on the day of resurrection God will increase their number to eight; (ii) there are eight classes of angels whose number only God knows; (iii) the number represents the magnitude or grandeur of the throne, in accordance with what is seen when rulers come out to judge the common people (thus linking it to the judgment in the following verse (Q 69:18): “On that day you shall be exposed, not one secret of yours concealed”).

4 Life of the Blessed in Paradise

4.1 *The Couches of the Blessed*

In the Quran God is not the only one to have a seat in the next world. On numerous occasions, the Quranic text speaks of the seats of the blessed in paradise, too. Here we find vocabulary different from that related to the throne of God. For example, at Q 36:56 the text speaks about “couches” (*arāʾik*): “They and their spouses, reclining upon couches (*arāʾik*) in the shade.” One might well take this to be an image of eternal rest, so to speak. However, al-Zamakhsharī is not content to say that this is a metaphor for the toil- and worry-free life of the inhabitants of paradise. He gives the following explanations of the “couch” (*arīka*, singular of *arāʾik*):

1. It is the couch (*sarīr*) in the *ḥajala*, the curtained canopy or alcove for the bride.³²

32 The word *sarīr* has several plurals: *asirra*, *surur*, and *sarāyir*, the first two of which are used in the commentary on the next two verses. The word *ḥajala* can also mean a decorated couch on which the new bride appears wearing all her finery, or wearing a rich veil. This connection between the couches of the blessed in paradise and the bridal chamber or alcove is interesting, but it is important not to read too much into it. Already in the next section al-Ṭūsī gives another definition for *arīka*, and Ibn Manẓūr gives the following definitions for *arīka* (some of which are followed by his source between parentheses), after referring to Q 36:56 quoted above: (i) the couch in the *ḥajala* (Quran commentators); (ii) the floor coverings (*furush*) in the *ḥajala* (al-Zajjāj); (iii) the couch, but actually it is what is spread on the floor, whether it is in the *ḥajala* or elsewhere (anonymous, i.e., *qīla*); (iv) an upholstered, decorated couch in a cupola or house, but if there is no couch

2. It could also be the *firāsh* in the *hajala* (which would be anything spread on the ground for sitting or sleeping).

This reference to the *hajala* also appears in al-Zamakhsharī's commentary on Q 83:22–4, which speaks of the blessed in bliss, "upon couches (*arā'ik*) gazing." Here again al-Zamakhsharī explains *arā'ik* as the couches (*asirra*) in the bridal canopies or alcoves (*hijāl*).

Likewise, in Q 88:13 there is also a reference to the "raised or uplifted couches" (*surur marfū'a*) of the blessed. Here al-Zamakhsharī gives two explanations for the word "raised":

1. It refers to the height of the couches, i.e., how high they are lifted; or the height of their ceiling (implying the curtained canopy of the *hajala*). The height would enable believers to see the wealth and splendor that their Lord has bestowed upon them.
2. It was also said that *marfū'a* means "hidden" or "concealed" (*makhbū'a*).³³

In his commentary on the first of these verses, Q 36:56, al-Ṭūsī says that the shade referred to in the verse ("They and their spouses, reclining upon couches (*arā'ik*) in the shade") is a veil or curtain (*sitār*) against the glare of the sun and its hot wind, and so the people of paradise are comfortable in the shade which is neither hot nor cold. He adds, though, that it could be a canopy or awning (*kann*). As for the couches, we find something similar to what has been already seen:

1. The word *arā'ik* ("couches") is the plural of *arika* which means pillow or cushion (*wisāda*); these are the seats of sovereigns.

in it, it is still a *hajala* (anonymous); (v) the couch in the *hajala*, in front of which couch is a curtain – the couch is not called an *arika* by itself; and (vi) everything that can be leaned or reclined on, i.e., a couch (*sarīr*), a floor covering (*firāsh*) or the ceremonial bed of a bride (*minaṣṣa*) (anonymous) (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* xlii, 389–90). Al-Zajjāj (ca. 230–311/844–923) was an Arabic grammarian. Cf. Versteegh, al-Zadjdjād.

33 This could mean that the interior is hidden by a veil or curtain (*sitr*), keeping the explanation in line with what has gone before. However, al-Zamakhsharī may have something else in mind. The verb from which *marfū'a* is derived means "to raise" but has taken on other meanings that developed from this basic meaning. However, I have not found "to hide" or "to conceal" among them. The closest would be, perhaps, "to withdraw, put away, remove, do away with" something. Al-Zamakhsharī could be saying that the couches have been put away until the appointed time. Cf. Lane, *Lexicon* iii, 1122 at the root *r-f-ʿ*.

2. Quoting 'Ikrima and Qatāda, he says that *arā'ik* refers to the curtained canopies over the couches (*surūr*) and leaves it at that.³⁴

In his commentary on Q 83:22–4, al-Ṭūsī repeats material already seen, saying: (i) the *arā'ik* are couches (*asirra*) (Ibn 'Abbās), (ii) they are made of pearls (*lu'li*) (Mujāhid), and (iii) the *arika* (sing.) is the couch in the *ḥajala* from which the blessed look toward the wealth and honor God has given them.³⁵ Similar to what was noted before, he says that the *ḥajala* is like the dome over the couches (*asirra*). As for his commentary on Q 88:13, which speaks of the “raised couches” (*surur marfū'a*) of the blessed, al-Ṭūsī's short explanation is as follows: “It is so that the believer may see by sitting on them all the wealth that is around him.”

Al-Sulamī does not comment on either Q 36:56 or Q 88:13; and his short commentary on Q 83:22–4 makes no mention of the couches of the blessed. Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, by contrast, comments on the couches of the blessed in his commentary on Q 83:22–4 and Q 88:13. In his commentary on the former, which speaks of the blessed in bliss “upon couches gazing” (*'alā l-arā'ik yanẓurūna*), he quotes an earlier source, Ibn 'Aṭā, who said that the couches are those of knowledge (*al-ma'rifa*; i.e., the knowledge of God), from which they gaze toward what they have known (*al-ma'rūf*), and those of proximity (*al-qurba*; i.e., proximity to God, one of the stages of degrees of mystical union), from which they gaze toward the Merciful (*al-ra'ūf*), i.e., God (this is one of the ninety-nine most beautiful names of God).³⁶ In his commentary on the latter, Q 88:13, which speaks about raised couches, Rūzbihān al-Baqlī writes that the raised couches are the couches of the spirits (*arwāḥ*) of the blessed which are raised from eternity without beginning (*azal*) to eternity without end (*abad*). They do not sink into struggles (in this world; *muqāwamāt*) or

34 Schacht refers to 'Ikrima (d. 105/723–4) as “a distinguished member of the generation of Successors (*tābi'ūn*), and one of the main transmitters of the traditional interpretation of the Quran attributed to Ibn 'Abbās.” Cf. Schacht, 'Ikrima.

35 Regarding Mujāhid's comment: I have not found the word *lu'li* as such, so it may be an error and should read either *lu'lu'* (pearl) or its plural *la'ālī'*. Mujāhid b. Jabr al-Makkī (21–100 or 104/642–718 or 722) was a Successor famed as a Quran reader and as a source of exegesis; he is connected to the school of Ibn 'Abbās. Cf. Rippin, *Mudjāhid* b. *Djabr*.

36 Ibn 'Aṭā' (d. 309/922) is Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Adamī. He was a Sufi Quran commentator in Baghdad and a friend of al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922). During his life he experienced profound tragedy and frequently had controversies with other Sufis. He died after being beaten to death on the order of the vizier. His mystical Quran commentary was a source for al-Sulamī. Cf. Böwering, *Scriptural “senses”* 361, n. 67 and Böwering, *al-Sulamī* 812 (see the bibliography).

proximity to (or concern with?) (this world; *al-mudānāt*), but travel repeatedly (*sayyāra*) from the essence of God (*al-dhāt*) to the attributes (*al-ṣifāt*), and from the attributes to the essence.³⁷

On the same three verses al-Bayḍāwī's commentary for Q 36:56 focuses mainly on grammar; he merely notes that the couches (*arā'ik*) are adorned. In his commentary on Q 83:22–4, he repeats what we have seen before, referring to the couches in the canopies from which the blessed look out over paradise. In his commentary on the third verse, Q 88:13 which speaks of “raised couches,” al-Bayḍāwī says that the adjective “raised” means that the couches have raised ceilings (or canopies), or they are large or of high value.

4.2 *Aspects of the Life of the Blessed*

The throne of God and the couches of the blessed are merely part of a wide variety of images of opulence that we find in Quranic references to life in paradise, the garden (*janna*) or gardens (*jannāt*), in the plural. For example, the word “silk” (*ḥarīr*) appears in the Quran on three occasions in descriptions of the clothing of the blessed in paradise: Q 22:23, 35:33, and 76:11–4).³⁸ It is only in his discussion of the last passage that al-Zamakhsharī comments on it. This Quranic passage reads:

So God has guarded them from the evil of that day, and has procured them radiancy and gladness, and recompensed them for their patience with a

37 Rūzbihān al-Baqlī then says that al-Kharrāz said that the couches (*surur*) are the secrets (*sarā'ir*) that are raised beyond reflection or contemplation (*naẓar*) to (the level of?) the substitutes (*a'wāḍ*) and the beings (*akwān*). This passage, as it is in the edition at hand, is not clear and may contain an error. Nevertheless, the reference to substitutes (*a'wāḍ*) may concern the substitutes mentioned in the writings of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, but there they are referred to as *abdāl*. These are the saints who are intercessors for humanity. Cf. Massignon, *Essay* 28 and Ernst, *Rūzbihān* 53. The *akwān* may be another category of saint, though nothing specifically related to mysticism was found for this word. Most likely the word is used simply for rhetorical effect; a similar use of language can be found elsewhere in Rūzbihān's commentary. Cf. Heinrichs, *Tadjnis*.

Al-Kharrāz is Abū Sa'īd Aḥmad b. 'Īsā, whom Massignon describes as “an independent mystic” who put forward the doctrine of *fanā' wa-baqā*, though this did not originate with him; one of his works was the *Kitāb al-Sirr*. Madelung writes that he “strove to combine a doctrine of ecstatic mysticism with orthodox support of the religious law.” He died in Cairo in 286/899. Cf. Massignon, al-Kharrāz; Massignon, *Essay* 201–3; and Madelung, al-Kharrāz (iv, 1083 for quote).

38 Another word that is translated as “silk” is *sundus*. Cf. Q 18:31 which says that the blessed in paradise “shall be robed in green garments of silk (*sundus*) and brocade, therein reclining upon couches.” The word *sundus* can also be found in Q 44:53 and Q 76:21.

garden (*janna*), and silk (*harīr*); therein they shall recline upon couches (*arā'ik*), therein they shall see neither sun nor bitter cold (*zamharīr*); near them shall be its shades (*zilāl*), and its clusters hung meekly down (Q 76:11–4).³⁹

Here he asks why silk is mentioned with paradise. He answers by saying that God rewards the inhabitants of paradise for their patient endurance of altruism (*īthār*) and the lack of food and clothing it leads to, with a garden (*bustān*) in which there is wholesome food and silk, that is, magnificent dress.

In paradise, the same Quranic passage says, “they shall see neither sun nor bitter cold (*zamharīr*),” to follow Arberry’s translation. This, al-Zamakhsharī says, means that the weather in paradise is moderate, neither too hot nor too cold. Then on the weather in paradise, he quotes a tradition which says exactly the same thing: “The weather in paradise is moderate, neither hot nor cold.”⁴⁰

Al-Zamakhsharī, though, also says that *zamharīr* in this verse refers to the moon (*al-qamar*), although in Arberry’s translation and others it is taken to refer to “bitter cold,” and it is this understanding that is probably behind the previous comments on the climate of paradise.⁴¹ Understanding the passage, then, to mean “the blessed shall see neither sun nor moon,” al-Zamakhsharī explains that this means that paradise is light, and so those who live there need neither sun nor moon.⁴² This eventually leads him to explain the causes of

39 Arberry, whom I am following here, translates the Arabic plural *zilāl* with the English plural “shades” although other translators give it with the singular “shade.”

40 In his entry for *z-m-h-r* in the *Lisān al-‘arab*, Ibn Manẓūr says that *zamharīr* means “intense cold.” He then quotes a verse from al-A’shā that seems to draw together images already noted in the commentary on these verses:

من القاصراتِ سُبُوفِ الْحِجَا لَمْ تَرَ شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمْهَرِيرًا.

Among the brides kept behind the curtains of their alcoves she saw neither sun nor cold.

The word *a’shā* means “night-blind”; it was the surname of a number of early Arab poets. Cf. Gibb et al., al-A’shā, and the articles on two of these poets.

41 In his commentary on this verse, al-Bayḍāwī says that it has been said that *zamharīr* means “the moon” (*al-qamar*) in the language of the Ṭayy, an Arab tribe. Cf. Shahīd, Ṭayyī’ or Ṭayy. Lane gives a number of meanings for *izmaharra*: “to shine” (stars), “to become red from anger” (eyes), “to grin” or “to become stern” (face) (Lane, *Lexicon* iii, 1252 at the root *z-m-h-r*); Kazimirski adds “être très-froid (se dit d’un jour de froid)” (Kazimirski, *Dictionnaire* i, 1014 at the root *z-m-h-r*). All of this can also be found in the *Lisān al-‘arab* (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘arab* xviii, 330).

42 He then goes into a number of grammatical explanations, all of which are introduced by “It is possible that . . .” It is interesting to note the presence of a similar idea on the light

the shade referred to in verse 14: “near them shall be its shades (*ẓilāl*).” Here al-Zamakhsharī replies that there is another garden casting its shade near them, since Q 55:46 refers to the “two gardens” promised to those who fear God.⁴³

In his commentary on Q 76:11–4, al-Ṭūsī gives a series of short explanations for the words of interest to us here: (i) the *janna* is a garden (*bustān*) that has been concealed by trees, (ii) silk (*ḥarīr*) is what the inhabitants of paradise wear, (iii) the *arā’ik* are the canopies or alcoves in which there are couches (*asirra*), according to Ibn ‘Abbās, Mujāhid, and Qatāda, (iv) and there they will suffer from neither sun nor cold – the word *zamharīr*, he says, means “as cold as possible”; he supports this with a reference to Mujāhid – and, finally, (v) the shade that is near them (“near them shall be its shades”) means that “the shadows of the trees of that garden (i.e., paradise) are close to them.”⁴⁴

In his commentary on Q 76:11–4, al-Sulamī focuses more specifically on verse 12: “and recompensed them for their patience with a garden, and silk.” However, he is not concerned with the garden and the silk; instead his interest is on the reasons the blessed will be recompensed. He writes:

[and recompensed them for their patience] for their having borne patiently our obedience, and so their recompense for having borne patiently their obedience [to us] was the garden and silk. If they had been patient with

of paradise in the Book of Revelation, which speaks about the new Jerusalem: “I saw that there was no temple in the city since the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple, and the city did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it” (Rev 21:22–3), and again: “It will never be night again and they will not need lamplight or sunlight, because the Lord God will be shining on them” (Rev 22:5). The Book of Revelation also contains passages on the throne of God and on a city built with precious stones.

43 Q 55:46: “But such as fears the Station of his Lord, for them shall be two gardens.” At the other two verses that mention silk, al-Zamakhsharī does not say anything about it, although in his comments on Q 35:33 he devotes some time to the bracelets of gold and the pearls with which the blessed will be adorned.

44 Al-Ṭūsī’s explanation seems not to fit with what has been seen before, for the text as it is now says that the *arīka* is not the couch (*sarīr*) but the canopy or alcove (*ḥajala*) itself. This could be an error in the text, but the fact is that he says more or less the same thing twice in as many lines: (i) *al-arā’ik: wa-hiya l-ḥijāl fihā l-asirra* and (ii) *al-arīka wa-hiya l-ḥajala sarīr ‘alayhi shibh al-qubba* (i.e., a bed over which there is a kind of cupola). As seen already, the word *arīka* has several definitions, so what al-Ṭūsī says here could simply be one more, if he is not making a mistake. Al-Ṭūsī adds a short note saying that al-Zajjāj said that “a couch is anything that can be reclined upon.”

us and for us, their recompense would have been boundless, as God says “Surely the patient will be paid their wages in full without reckoning.”⁴⁵

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī does not comment on the silk worn by the blessed in paradise. His attention, rather, is drawn to the mixture they drink and to the fountain named Salsabīl (Q 76:17–8).

In al-Bayḍāwī’s commentary on Q 76:11–4, we find material similar to some of what has already been seen but with some additional material. In his commentary on the recompense of the blessed in paradise, al-Bayḍāwī says that they are rewarded for having been patient in carrying out their duties, and in avoiding what was forbidden, and the love of wealth. As for the garden (*janna*), he simply says that it is a garden (*bustān*) that offers food for the blessed. With respect to the weather in paradise, al-Bayḍāwī says that a mild wind (*hawāʾ*) blows over the pious, a wind that is neither intensely hot nor painfully cold. Finally, he says that the shade referred to in verse 14 of the passage (“near them shall be its shades”) is a reference to another garden that was promised to the believers by God, and he supports this by quoting Q 55:46 as al-Zamakhsharī did before him.

5 Eden: The Garden(s) of Paradise

Al-Zamakhsharī’s commentary on this last passage, Q 76:11–4, in which he refers to a second garden promised to the believers, is interesting because it raises the question of the actual topography of paradise; Q 35:33 even begins with the words “gardens of Eden” (*jannāt ʿAdn*) and Q 18:107 speaks about the “gardens of paradise” (*jannāt al-firdaws*).⁴⁶ It is true that al-Zamakhsharī frequently says that passages in which the word “garden” (*janna*) is found were also recited with the plural “gardens” (*jannāt*) (e.g., Q 3:15).⁴⁷ So it would seem that *jannāt* is merely a variant reading of *janna* and that the garden of Eden

45 Al-Sulamī, *Ziyādāt*, in Böwering (ed.), *Minor Qurʾān commentary* 213.

46 This verse reads: “Gardens of Eden they shall enter; therein they shall be adorned with bracelets of gold and with pearls, and their apparel there shall be of silk (*harīr*).” The word *al-firdaws* appears twice in the Quran, at Q 18:107 just mentioned and at Q 23:11 which speaks only of paradise (*al-firdaws*). On the latter, al-Zamakhsharī says that the word is feminine since it is an interpretation of the word *janna* which is also feminine. He says that *al-firdaws* is a “spacious garden (*bustān*) that brings together all sorts of fruit,” a description similar to others for *janna*.

47 Here al-Zamakhsharī is saying that there were two variant readings of the verse, one with the singular and one with the plural. Cf. Paret, *Ḳirāʾa*.

or of paradise, the abode of the blessed, might be envisaged as a series of gardens. Nevertheless, in other passages, it is not entirely clear what the name Eden refers to. His commentary on Q 9:72 is a good example of this; it speaks both of gardens (*jannāt*) and gardens of Eden (*jannāt 'Adn*). “God has promised the believers, men and women, gardens (*jannāt*) underneath which rivers flow, forever therein to dwell, and goodly dwelling-places (*masākīn ṭayyiba*) in the gardens of Eden (*jannāt 'Adn*); and greater, God’s good pleasure; that is the mighty triumph.”

In his commentary, al-Zamakhsharī makes the following points:

1. According to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, the goodly dwelling places referred to in this verse are “palaces of pearl, ruby and (green) chrysolite.”
2. “Eden” is a proper name; this is supported by a reference to Q 19:61, which also speaks of the gardens of Eden that God has promised.
3. As to what the name “Eden” refers to, the following list is given:
 - It is the abode of God. In a tradition transmitted on the authority of Abū l-Dardā’,⁴⁸ the Prophet says that “Eden is the abode of God (*dār Allāh*) which no eye has seen and which has not occurred to the mind of any human (i.e., no one has dreamed of it).”⁴⁹ Muḥammad then adds that only three groups inhabit Eden: the prophets, those who are trustworthy and truthful, and the martyrs; and that God said, “Blessed are those who enter you.”⁵⁰
 - Second, it has been said that Eden is a city in the garden (of paradise).
 - Third, it has also been said that it is a river with gardens along its banks.⁵¹

48 Abū l-Dardā’ (d. ca. 32/652) was a Companion and an authority on the Quran, though he did not convert until after the battle at Badr. Cf. Jeffery, Abu ‘l-Dardā’.

49 Here we hear echoes of Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 2:9 (which can be traced back to the prophets Jeremiah and Isaiah): “we teach what scripture calls: *the things that no eye has seen and no ear had heard, things beyond the mind of humans, all that God has prepared for those who love him.*”

50 Besides the idea that some are closer to God than others, this explanation raises the idea that some of the inhabitants of paradise, i.e., those who inhabit the abode of God, actually see God.

51 In his commentary on Q 88:8ff, al-Zamakhsharī refers to a number of items in the description of paradise: the running fountain, the aforementioned raised couches, the goblets set forth, the arrayed cushions, and the silken carpets outspread. We learn, for example, that the cushions are of leather and the carpets are velvet-like and have fine fibers; and it goes on. The details are almost endless.

In al-Ṭūsī's commentary on Q 9:72, we find much of the material (or variants thereof) that has already been seen in al-Zamakhsharī's commentary, though at this verse al-Ṭūsī gives other interpretations that do not appear in the *Kashshāf*, though they resemble points seen elsewhere in this study. Concerning the gardens, he says that they are "gardens concealed by trees." As for the rivers, he points out that the text could be saying that the rivers run under the trees, not under the gardens; he notes that it has been said that the rivers of the garden are "furrows in the ground." With regard to the goodly dwelling places, he quotes al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī's description as given above. After giving the etymology of the name Eden (*ʿAdn*) – it means to remain forever – he says that it was transmitted that Eden is a garden where only the prophets, the martyrs, and the righteous live.

Al-Sulamī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī do not comment on Q 9:72. We now turn to al-Bayḍāwī, who begins his comments by saying that the goodly dwelling places are so because the soul finds them delightful or because life in them is good. He then quotes an anonymous tradition that describes these dwelling places; the description is that given in the previous commentaries where the source was al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He again describes the gardens of Eden in terms of sojourning there for eternity and refers to the Prophet as the source of the saying that Eden was the abode of God, which no eye has seen and which has not occurred to the mind of any human, and that only three groups inhabit this place: the prophets, those who are trustworthy or truthful, and the martyrs. As mentioned above, al-Zamakhsharī refers to "garden" (*janna*) and "gardens" (*jannāt*) on several occasions. Likewise, in his commentary on Q 35:33, which begins with "gardens of Eden," al-Bayḍāwī notes that in a variant reading, this passage reads "garden" in the singular. Although al-Bayḍāwī goes on to clarify what the blessed are wearing in paradise, which includes explaining some of the variant readings of the passage, he does not touch upon what this passage means concerning the reality of life in the next world.

6 Concluding Remarks

This study set as its goal an examination of how the more rationalist thread of Quran commentary interpreted some of the rich imagery to be found in the Quran to describe paradise. Because of the limited amount of space, only a select few images and verses were chosen, despite the vast amount of material available. In order not to limit the study to just one representative of the rationalist thread, both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī were selected. In order to have points of reference from outside this rationalist line, the mystical (*ṣūfī*)

commentators al-Sulamī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, and the more traditional or orthodox commentator al-Bayḏāwī were also chosen. From this very brief survey, nevertheless, a number of points can be noted.

First, although al-Sulamī's commentary is very limited, he nevertheless did comment on a few of the verses that were studied here. Two of these dealt with verses that spoke about the throne of God. Interestingly, one of his comments tends toward a metaphorical exegesis while the other tends toward a more traditional exegesis. He says that "His Throne comprises the heavens and the earth" (Q 2:255) refers to God's knowledge and, in the next line, says that the earth, in comparison to the throne (which is in the heavens), is like a speck. It is noteworthy that al-Sulamī's commentary is not specific to the mystical tradition of exegesis. The statement that God's throne is an image or metaphor of His knowledge can be found in the other three commentaries. Likewise, his comment on the relative size of the throne is similar to comments in the other three commentaries, although these focused on the size of the *kursī* in comparison to the *'arsh* (a word that also refers to God's throne). Interestingly, al-Sulamī's two short comments, which give both the more rationalist metaphorical and the more realistic traditional interpretations side by side without additional comment or explanation, are a prime example of the exegesis of the other three commentators.

Rūzbihān al-Baqlī also devoted some time to the image of the throne of God in his commentary. In fact, of all the images of paradise studied here, it is the one that garnered the most attention. He gives five explanations, three of which are of a decidedly mystical nature; two, however, are similar to those that were encountered in the other commentaries. One of these concerns the throne as a manifestation (*iḡhār*) of God's power. Rūzbihān's language gives the impression that the throne is a concrete reality but he does not say more on this aspect. Rather, he appears to reject the idea that the throne is a manifestation of God's power (alone), since this leads him to the conclusion that God acted prior to having knowledge. That being said, he continues his commentary on the verse without saying more. The second remark found in Rūzbihān's commentary that also appears in the other commentaries concerns the size of the earth in comparison to the throne; he says that next to the throne, the earth is like a speck. This remark was also found in the commentary of al-Sulamī, something that is not surprising since al-Sulamī's work was a source for the *Arā'is al-bayān*.⁵²

52 In the other commentaries, we also find similar comparisons involving the *'arsh*, the *kursī* or both, though none had this specific one.

When we look at the commentaries of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī, who are considered representatives of the more rationalist approach to exegesis, we see that each presents views that are both metaphorical and traditional. Although a comparison of the details of these two commentaries clearly shows that their authors do not give the exact same material, such a comparison also shows that the broader lines of their exegeses are similar. Both, for example, say that the throne of God represents knowledge and dominion. Only al-Zamakhsharī explicitly makes the point that there is no real throne, no sitter, and no sitting; nevertheless, al-Ṭūsī says more or less the same thing in his response to the Mujassima who held that God was corporeal and gave Him bodily attributes. Next to these more rationalist interpretations, though, the authors also attempt to explain the relationship between the *kursī* and the *ʿarsh*: where one is in relation to the other and the universe, and which is larger; and yet all of this ends with a statement from a traditional source, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, who said that the two were the same. In fact, al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī seem to contradict their own more rationalist statements given above: in his commentary on Q 11:7 al-Zamakhsharī says that the throne was created (cf. note 21 above) while al-Ṭūsī, when speaking about the eight angels who bear up the throne (cf. Q 69:17), says that the throne is great and needs two angels on each corner to carry it. The ease with which the rationalist and the traditional interpretations abide side by side in the commentaries, and are perhaps even combined there, is nicely illustrated by al-Ṭūsī when he writes: “Ibn ‘Abbās said, ‘His throne is His knowledge.’”

In the discussion of the angels we find more traditional material than in the discussion of the throne of God. None of this, however, can be found in the commentaries of al-Sulamī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī; neither of whom makes any comments on the angels in their commentary on the verses that were examined. Al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī, on the other hand, do. Interestingly, there is very little material in common between them; it is as if each was using threads of the tradition that were completely different from and independent of those used by the other. One place, however, where they do share ideas, if not sources, is in the discussion of the borders of the heavens, an idea that immediately gives paradise a spatial image; it has dimensions, for the angels stand around its borders. The question of these borders provoked some discussion by the commentators, who connected it to the splitting of the heavens on the day of resurrection. Al-Bayḍāwī (see above at note 31) specifically raises the possibility that the heavens will be destroyed with all who are in it, thus hinting at a paradise that is not eternal. The other authors, however, see the borders as the place of the angels at the end of the world, for whatever their mission will be at that time. With regard to the angels themselves, al-Zamakhsharī is unique

in presenting an abundance of traditional material in his commentary, some of which calls to mind passages from the Bible (though this is not to imply that al-Zamakhsharī had any kind of contact with the Bible).

Looking at the lives of the blessed in paradise as reflected in these rationalist commentaries, we find that both al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī rely on traditional material for their explanations of the couches of the blessed in paradise. It is striking how much material was presented to explain the nature of these couches: they were raised, they had canopies, they had veils, they were made of pearls. Likewise, both commentators offered comments on the climate of paradise. On the other hand, the silk robes worn by the inhabitants of paradise receive less attention. In his commentary, al-Zamakhsharī asks why they wear them and answers that God has rewarded them with magnificent dress (among other things); al-Ṭūsī simply states that they wear silk. Neither looks for anything more metaphorical or symbolic. For these commentators, it is a reality, not a figure of speech. The mystical commentators, al-Sulamī and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, on the other hand, have a different approach. Both avoid giving descriptions of the luxuries of paradise altogether. Al-Sulamī is more interested in why the blessed are so rewarded while Rūzbihān al-Baqlī only gives a few comments on the couches in paradise (at Q 83:22–4 and Q 88:13), couches that are of a purely mystical nature. This being said, it does not mean that al-Sulamī considered the silk, food, climate, and other elements in the description of paradise to be any less real than the others did; it is merely that he was more interested in the matter of how to reach paradise than in the details or reasons for its descriptions.

When it comes to the garden of Eden or simply Eden, it is, first, unclear what is being referred to, at least in the passages that were studied. Neither al-Sulamī nor Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, the mystical commentators, makes any reference to it. Al-Zamakhsharī gives several explanations, only some of which are reflected in al-Ṭūsī's commentary. Nevertheless, they do have al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī in common; he is the source for a description of the dwelling places of the blessed in paradise; likewise, they also share a tradition (each with his own variant) concerning who inhabits Eden. Despite al-Zamakhsharī's discussion of the name Eden, it would seem that the "garden," the "garden(s) of Eden" and the "garden(s) of paradise" (*al-firdaws*) are, to a certain extent at least, interchangeable.

I included al-Bayḍāwī's commentary, the *Anwār al-tanzīl*, in order to have a traditionalist/orthodox viewpoint, in addition to the mystical commentaries, from which to judge the rationalist commentaries of al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī. First, if metaphor were an indication of a rationalist commentary, then al-Bayḍāwī's would fall into this category, too (as would al-Sulamī's and maybe even Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's, if their comments on the Throne verse are any

indication). He repeats al-Zamakhsharī's comments that there is no throne and no sitter, and even notes that the throne is a metaphor for God's knowledge, majesty, and dominion. Like al-Zamakhsharī, whose Mu'tazilī views he ostensibly amends or refutes, he compares the *kursī* and the *'arsh*, although he does not quote al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī on their being identical, as the rationalists did. Likewise, in his commentary on the verses dealing with the angels, he supplies much less material than al-Zamakhsharī did for the same verses, and contents himself with a note on the plurals of the word "angel" (*malak*) and with some comments on what will happen on the borders of heaven on the day of resurrection, as the others had done before him. Unlike al-Zamakhsharī, however; as indicated, he hints at the destruction of paradise, its inhabitants, and its angels. Al-Bayḍāwī also has little in common with al-Ṭūsī on this topic, noting only that the number of angels that bear up God's throne remains unknown.

With respect to the life of the blessed in paradise, we again find that the *Anwār al-tanzīl* has much less traditional material than does the *Kashshāf*. In fact, we find that very realistic traditional material from the *Kashshāf* is often not echoed in the commentary of al-Bayḍāwī. This is surprising since, as noted at the beginning, al-Bayḍāwī's commentary is supposed to have been mainly a condensed and amended edition of al-Zamakhsharī's, whose rational Mu'tazilī explanations were to have been expunged as the *Anwār al-tanzīl* was written. One would expect, therefore, to find the more traditional elements from the *Kashshāf* in al-Bayḍāwī's commentary. Also, while he speaks about the goodly dwellings of the blessed as "palaces of pearl, ruby and (green) chrysolite," he also says that they are good because the soul finds them delightful, thus moving away from the more concrete reality of life in paradise. In brief, then, al-Bayḍāwī follows al-Zamakhsharī fairly closely. If he does not have everything that is in the *Kashshāf*, it is not because it is rationalist heresy; it is more likely because he simply chose not to put it into his own commentary or to replace it with something from another source.⁵³ For example, it is interesting to note that al-Bayḍāwī has a comment similar to al-Sulamī's comments on why God rewards the blessed in the next life.

The previous examination of rationalist, mystical, and traditional commentary on Quranic passages that speak about the life of the blessed in paradise indicates that there are no real differences between them when it comes to rationalist interpretations. Four of the authors used traditional and rationalist interpretations to one degree or another, the latter of which are no less orthodox than the former; even Rūzbihān al-Baqlī, whose commentary tended

53 The question could be asked as to what Mu'tazilī heresy was by the second half of the thirteenth century, and what al-Bayḍāwī actually refuted or removed from the *Kashshāf*.

toward a more comprehensively mystical interpretation, was not immune to using other material just as al-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī were not averse to using what may have come from the mystical tradition (cf. the commentary on Q 76:11–4 above).⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the great majority of the comments by al-Zamakhsharī and al-Ṭūsī fall under the traditional rubric, and this is clearly seen by the sources they quote (for example: Ibn ‘Abbās, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Mujāhid, Sufyān al-Thawrī, Qatāda, ‘Ikrima), many of whom are associated with the exegetical tradition.

In light of this tentative conclusion, we can add a word or two concerning some remarks about al-Zamakhsharī made by El-Şaleḥ in his book *La vie future selon le Coran*. What is said here with respect to al-Zamakhsharī could probably be applied, to one extent or another, to al-Ṭūsī and to other exegetes or scholars whose work has been classified too quickly by those who did not devote enough attention to the former’s work. In his book El-Şaleḥ says nothing new about the *Kashshāf* but instead merely repeats almost standard statements about it: that in the *Kashshāf* al-Zamakhsharī is preoccupied with the Mu‘tazilī principles of divine unity (*tawḥīd*) and justice (*‘adl*), and devotes himself to defending them; and that he studies the subsidiary principle of “the promise and the threat” (*al-wa‘d wa-l-wa‘id*), and refutes the opinions of his opponents.⁵⁵ More specific to our interests here, but along the same lines, El-Şaleḥ writes that al-Zamakhsharī energetically opposes such ideas as the vision of God in paradise, the concrete presence of God on His throne, and other anthropomorphic details.⁵⁶ Moreover, El-Şaleḥ is surprised that al-Zamakhsharī accepts the materialism of the joys and pains of the next world, following the example of other Mu‘tazilīs, and is even more surprised by his use of traditions to support notions that are purely Mu‘tazilī in nature, that is, purely rationalist, especially since most of what he uses is weak. This would reflect al-Zamakhsharī’s “method,” if we wish to use that word, which was always to quote the Mu‘tazilī interpretation first and then one or more traditionalist interpretations, on the condition that they did not contradict his

54 It would be interesting to see, through a more detailed study of the texts, the extent to which mystical elements from both al-Sulamī’s main commentary and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī’s *Arā’is al-bayān* made their way into exegetical works of the rationalist and traditionalist traditions, thus weakening even more, perhaps, the boundaries between categories of exegesis.

55 For the principles of the Mu‘tazilīs, see Gimaret, *Mu‘tazila*, especially vii, 786ff.

56 For each of these positions, El-Şaleḥ gives a reference or two to the *Kashshāf*. He gives volume and page number, but not the Quranic verses al-Zamakhsharī is referring to. When I tracked down one of these references (based on the assumption that the edition he used is the one in the bibliography of his book), it seems to be incorrect.

doctrine.⁵⁷ Al-Zamakhsharī's rare use of traditions in these traditionalist interpretations "proves," El-Ṣaleḥ says, that the Mu'tazilīs granted the tradition only a secondary importance.⁵⁸ I might add that I do not wish to sound overly critical of El-Ṣaleḥ's valuable contribution. However, when it comes to his notes on the *Kashshāf*, he transmits the same general ideas that have been around for a good while now, but which are not quite as accurate as he might have thought they were. In El-Ṣaleḥ's standard, one might say, summary of what al-Zamakhsharī is doing in the *Kashshāf*, we see a number of discrepancies with what the text itself says.

First, al-Zamakhsharī's use of traditions is anything but rare; he makes reference to such reports on more than 1,350 occasions. In fact two medieval authors, al-Zayla'ī (d. 762/1360 or 1361) and Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī (d. 853/1449), composed works based on the traditions that are to be found in al-Zamakhsharī's *Kashshāf*.⁵⁹

Second, concerning the claim that al-Zamakhsharī energetically opposed such ideas as the vision of God in paradise, the concrete presence of God on His throne, and other anthropomorphic details; as shown in the study of his commentary on such elements as the throne of God and the angels that bear it up, the thrones of the blessed, the silk they wear, and the climate they enjoy, al-Zamakhsharī is hardly energetically opposed to anything. Instead he simply passed on the traditional material he had received, usually without much comment and rarely with criticism or an effort to adjudicate between competing interpretations or apparent contradictions. The same could be said for his Mu'tazilī positions which, as we see, can also be found in the most orthodox exegetical works. Here, too, he does little more than list standard interpretations, without attempting to decide which if any are the best. It is left for the reader to decide.

El-Ṣaleḥ's remark,⁶⁰ then, that in his commentary on Q 17:21 al-Zamakhsharī *had* to accept that there would be distinctions between believers in the next world and that there would be degrees in paradise, something opposed to his

57 El-Ṣaleḥ, *La vie future* 70–1.

58 This would also be indicated by the use of the dubious term *qīla* ("It has been said") to introduce these traditions. El-Ṣaleḥ, *La vie future* 74.

59 The first and more important of these two works, although its author is less famous, is Jamāl al-Dīn Abū Muḥammad 'Abdallāh b. Yūsuf al-Zayla'ī's (d. 762/1360–1) *Risāla fī takhrīj aḥādīth al-kashshāf wa-mā fīhi min qīṣaṣ wa-āthār*; it has been published as *Takhrīj al-aḥādīth wa-l-āthār al-wāq'ia fī tafsīr al-Kashshāf li-l-Zamakhsharī* by Dār Ibn Khuzayma. The second work is an abridgement of al-Zayla'ī's work, al-Ḥāfiẓ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī's (d. 853/1449) *al-Kāfi al-shāfi' fī takhrīj aḥādīth al-Kashshāf*.

60 El-Ṣaleḥ, *La vie future* 82.

Mu'tazilī position, misses the point. Al-Zamakhsharī did not *have* to accept this view any more than he *had* to accept the stairways of the angels or a throne that was created before anything else. This is what was passed on by the tradition, of which he was a part, and so he continued what earlier exegetes such as Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid b. Jabr, al-Ḍaḥḥāk, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī had stated. The only possible indication that al-Zamakhsharī preferred the Mu'tazilī interpretations is that, in what we have seen, he presents them first, as in the case of the Throne verse. While this does not reveal his preferences, it does at least suggest what his theological school might be.

Third, while we have seen that al-Zamakhsharī presents the Mu'tazilī interpretations of the text first, one could ask if, contrary to El-Ṣaleḥ's claims, his more traditionalist interpretations that follow do not, in fact, contradict his doctrine. This, however, would be the wrong question. It might be better to ask why al-Zamakhsharī went into such detail to describe the throne of God, for example, if it just meant God's power, glory, dominion or knowledge and there was no real throne with someone sitting on it. One can admit that al-Zamakhsharī accepted that eight angels would hold up the throne of God, since Q 69:17 says so; however, what would be the rationalist basis for the rest of the commentary? In what way do the traditions cited on the authority of the Prophet, Ibn 'Abbās or al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī support notions that are purely Mu'tazilī in nature, as El-Ṣaleḥ claims?⁶¹ In truth, they do not. Likewise there is no real contradiction in al-Zamakhsharī's position on Q 17:21, contrary to what El-Ṣaleḥ implies. There are simply two parallel threads of commentary at work: the minor, Mu'tazilī-inspired, metaphorical interpretation and the major, tradition-inspired, anthropomorphic interpretation; the traditions cited are part of the latter and are in no way connected with the former.

As noted above, al-Zamakhsharī's *Kashshāf* is not a rationalist commentary on the Quran any more than any of the others studied here are; or, at best, it is a question of degree, for the rationalist thread runs through all the commentaries. The *Kashshāf* is a traditional work which occasionally offers some Mu'tazilī-inspired but not Mu'tazilī-specific interpretations on a relatively small number of Quranic passages. However, it also contains much traditional material, and even more, it would seem, than the touchstone of post-Mu'tazilī orthodoxy, al-Bayḍāwī's *Anwār al-tanzīl*. Without the almost unlimited supply of traditional material, a detailed line by line Mu'tazilī commentary on the Quran would have been very hard to write. Not only would the *Kashshāf* have been even shorter than it is now, but it would have been completely cut off, for the most part, from the exegetical tradition itself and probably destined for

61 El-Ṣaleḥ, *La vie future* 71.

the dustbin of history. Ultimately, deanthropomorphization (*tanzīh*) was more suited to theological treatises while exegesis was the domain of anthropomorphization (*tashbīh*).

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Delights in Paradise: A Comparative Survey of Heavenly Food and Drink in the Quran

Ailin Qian*

*inna laka allā tajū'a fihā wa-lā ta'rā
wa-annaka lā tazma'u fihā wa-lā taḍhā*

There is therein (enough provision)
For thee not to go hungry,
Nor to go naked
Nor to suffer from thirst,
Nor from the sun's heat
Q 20:118–9¹



1 Introduction

Images of food and drink² are inseparable from man's vision of the next world. For example, in the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* (the Pahlavi *Divina Commedia*), the hero was given food, wine, and a narcotic (*mang*) before his journey to heaven and hell.³ While food and drink can be the ladder to the hereafter, in many other cases it is seen as the reward for the dwellers of heaven. For example, *The Larger*

* The author would like to express her gratitude to Professors Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson for their insightful suggestions and critical reading of an earlier version of this article. She would also like to thank the following: Drs. Hilary Smith and Carla Nappi, who provided her with important information relating to Chinese medicine; Mr. Christian Mauder, who patiently assisted her during the editing and proofreading of this article; and last but not least, the anonymous reviewer, who offered significant comments and detailed suggestions.

1 Ali (trans.), *Meaning* 789.

2 In this paper, the singular food and drink should be understood to mean various foods and drinks.

3 Haug and West (trans.), *Arda Viraf* 11.

Sutra on Amitāyus informs us that in the Buddha-land various foods and drinks of “a hundred flavors” will appear spontaneously according to one’s wishes.⁴

As for the Quran, details about exquisite delights in paradise are almost exclusively provided in Meccan Suras. The variety and eternal availability of the heavenly food and drink, as well as the subtle links between them and mundane enjoyments must have aroused enthusiasm among early Muslims. This paper aims to analyze those charming images of paradisaal delights by discussing their names, content, consumers, and even containers, in the hope that we may highlight their functions in Islamic eschatology and their representations in secular life.

2 The Aromatic Reward

Sura *al-Insān* (Q 76) contains one of the most detailed descriptions of the heavenly delights in the Quran.⁵ The righteous (*al-abrār*) are promised “a garden and (garments of) silk.” They shall recline on raised thrones, enjoying the shade of trees and bunches of fruit. Their servants are immortal youths as charming as “scattered pearls.” “Vessels of silver and goblets of crystal” will be passed round, and the blessed shall drink of a cup mixed with fountain water and exotic spices such as camphor (*kāfir*) and ginger (*zanjabīl*). Sura 76 clearly demonstrates that these enjoyments are the reward (*jazāʾ*) of the righteous for “they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive,” and they did not desire thanks from those they helped. In the aforementioned *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*, the hero saw thirsty and hungry souls of “those wicked whose food and clothing, in the world, were consumed by themselves, and not given by them to the good and worthy.”⁶ The two scriptures, in this example one commanding right and the other forbidding wrong, make it clear that enjoyments of this world and the next are closely related. Worldly wealth should be a key, not a barrier, to heavenly happiness.

Sura *al-Wāqīʿa* (Q 56) also confirms that those nearest to God (*al-muqarrabūn*) will have “rest and fragrance (*rayḥān*) and a garden of bliss.” Why do these names of aromatics appear in the Quranic descriptions of heaven? Does the Quran use them to differentiate rewards in the afterlife from mundane good things (*al-ṭayyibāt*) that are allowed (*uḥilla*) to the believers?⁷ Do perfumed

4 Inagaki and Stewart (trans.), *Pure Land Sutras* 263.

5 Ali (trans.), *Meaning* 1571–5.

6 Haug and West (trans.), *Ardā Wīraf* 198.

7 For a short discussion of food in the Quran, see van Gelder, *Of dishes* 22–3.

substances have certain natures that are pleasing and satisfactory to deities in other religions? A short survey of aromatics and sacrifice in the ancient Near Eastern and Greek traditions may help us to answer these questions.

In Sumerian mythology, aromatics are often related to the immortal and divine. Dilmun, or the Sumerian “land of the living” can be interpreted as “the land of aromatics and cedars.”⁸ According to the myth *Enki and Ninhursag*, eight plants including “caper” and “cassia”⁹ are made to sprout in this paradise of the gods. In the flood story preserved in the *Gilgamesh Epic*, Utnapishtim describes how he made offerings to the gods:

I sent out a drink offering upon the ziggurat of the mountain:
seven and seven cult-vessels I set up.
Beneath them I poured cane, cedar, myrtle.
The gods smelled the fragrance –
the gods smelled the sweet fragrance –
and the gods like flies gathered over the sacrificer.¹⁰

Then the delighted deities gave the sacrificer immortality, partly as a reward of his aromatic offerings. For the Sumerians, aromatics should be enjoyed by the deities,¹¹ the majority of whom “are extolled in their hymns as lovers of the good and the just, of truth and righteousness.”¹² This group of complementary concepts, i.e., aromatics, immortality, and morality, can also be found in Islamic eschatology. In the aforementioned Sura 76, for example, the righteous ones are rewarded with spiced wine for their high ethical and moral conduct. In other words, the Quranic aromatics (accompanied by immortality) symbolize the divine-like behaviors of the dwellers of heaven.

Aromatics play an important role in libation practices in many religions. They are also essential to the sacrificial ritual of burnt offerings.¹³ “[L]ong

8 Kramer, Dilmun 20–1.

9 Kramer, Enki 16–9.

10 Gardner and Maier (trans.), *Gilgamesh* 239, 242. Also see Tigay, *Evolution* 227.

11 The close relationship between aromatics and divinity is hinted at in the fragrant plant of immortality, which Gilgamesh sought but unfortunately failed to protect. See Gardner and Maier (trans.), *Gilgamesh* 249–51.

12 Kramer notes that several Sumerian deities “had the supervision of the moral order as their main function.” The goddess Nanshe, for example, was praised as someone “who knows the orphan, who knows the widow, knows the oppression of man over man.” See Kramer, *Sumerians* 124.

13 In the Biblical version of the aftermath of the flood, Noah offered burnt offerings whose soothing aroma pleased God. And in Aristophanes’s *The Birds*, we find that the hungry

before spices were introduced into Greece, the most archaic type of sacrifice consisted in burning pungent shrubs.”¹⁴ As an important source of their spices, Arabia was praised by Greeks as a country redolent of a marvellously sweet odor. Herodotus notes that it is “the only country which yields frankincense, myrrh, cassia, cinnamon and ladanum.”¹⁵ Ancient Greek historians believe that the burning land of Arabia produces the most and best perfumes, “for the sun draws away the moisture which, like the material of corruption abounds in bodies.”¹⁶ The aromatic substances are dry, hot, incorruptible, fragrant, and are close to the heavenly fire. When frankincense and myrrh are thrown into the sacrificial fire, a communication between the world of men and that of gods is established. And the gods’ share of the sacrificial ritual “is the smoke from the charred bones, the smell of perfumes, and incorruptible spices.”¹⁷

3 The Heavenly Wines

The previous section reveals the relationship of aromatics and immortality in the religious traditions of the ancient Near East and Greece. The fragrant and incorruptible nature of the aromatics has led to their importance for sacrificial rituals. At the same time, the culinary and medicinal uses of aromatics were never neglected by classical authors.¹⁸ Analogously, can we regard the paradisaical enjoyments mentioned in the Meccan verses as a credible reflection of pre-Islamic ritual practices, or even feasts and banquets, known to the Arabs? First we look at the names of the heavenly wines mentioned in the Quran.

Although drinking alcohol is taboo in Islam (Q 5:90), the prohibition is only valid for this world. Q 47:15¹⁹ clearly informs us that the righteous ones (*al-muttaqūn*) shall enter the garden where flow the rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey. The paradisaical water, milk, and honey are incorruptible and display

Olympian gods complained that not a whiff of sacrificial smoke could get through the newly-built aerial colony, the Cloud cuckoo land.

14 Detienne, *Gardens* 39.

15 Ibid., 5. He quotes from Herodotus's *History*, Book III, 107. We should note that in fact the sources of these aromatic substances included east and central Africa, Southeast Asia, China, and India. See Miller, *Spice trade* 42–7, 74–7, 102–5, 107–8.

16 Detienne, *Gardens* 10. He quotes from Plutarch's *The Life of Alexander the Great*.

17 Detienne, *Gardens* vi.

18 Miller, *Spice trade* 2–11. For instance, Apicius the epicure mentioned more than four hundred recipes of food and wine, most of which called for spicing.

19 Both Suras (5 and 47) are “most commonly agreed to be Medinan,” see Jones (trans), *The Qurʾān* 11.

supreme purity and quality. Similarly, the wine in the garden does not cause intoxication²⁰ and is a joy to those who drink (*ladhdhatin lil-shāribīna*).²¹ In a word, the heavenly beverages²² are different: they are always available for the dwellers of paradise but lack the disadvantages of their earthly counterparts.

In pre-Islamic Arabia wine was regarded as a luxury, and its trade was mostly controlled by Jews and Christians.²³ Probably for this reason, images of cups (*ka's*) and fountains (*ʿayn*) are to be found in some of the most fascinating Quranic passages about paradise. In these verses related to wine, we are not surprised to find some foreign words that reflect both its rarity and exhilarating characteristics. But it is surprising that these foreign words are more or less related to aromatics.

In a previous study,²⁴ we reexamined the word *raḥīq* in Q 83:25–8:

yusqawna min raḥīqin makhtūmin
khitāmuḥu miskun: wa-ḥi dhālika fa-lyatanāfasi l-mutanāfisūna
wa-mizājūhu min tasnīmin
ʿaynan yashrabu bihā l-muqarrabūna

Their thirst will be slaked with pure wine sealed:

The seal thereof will be musk: and for this let those aspire, who have aspirations:

20 Q 37:47. For some Sufi poets such as Ibn Fāriḍ (d. 632/1235), drunkenness is their way of obtaining union with God. See al-Daḥdāḥ (ed.), *Dīwān Ibn al-Fāriḍ* 472–500; Nicholson, *Mystics* 184–8. We also suppose the reason Ardā Wīrāz took *mang* together with food and drink is for the narcotic to enable him to have visions of hell and heaven. In contrast, the citizens of the Quranic paradise do not need to be drunk or drugged in order to have visions or to experience true happiness. Therefore the heavenly drinks are not intoxicating.

21 Ali (trans.), *Meaning* 1318.

22 The mention of milk and water in Q 47:15 also reminds us of the Zoroastrian Parahaoma, “a concoction made from twigs of the pomegranate plant (*urvarām*) pounded with the juice of the sacrificial plant, the Haoma, and mixed with sacrificial milk (*jīvām*) and water (*zaoθra*).” See Hintze, *Avestan literature* 3. The 72 chapters of the *Yasna* will be recited during the ritual consumption of Parahaoma. The Quran probably did not originate as a liturgical text as the *Yasna*, but it does contain “a few elements drawn from the prayer liturgy” (see Donner, *Recent scholarship* 35). Therefore we cannot completely rule out the possibility that the prototypes of heavenly beverages are the ritual drinks (i.e., consumed by the priests or used as libations) known to pre-Islamic Arabs.

23 Sadan, *Khamr*.

24 Qian, *Spice*. Also see Haupt, *Arab. tājir*, 31–2. The author is grateful to the anonymous reviewer for this reference.

With it will be (given) a mixture of Tasnīm:
A spring, from (the waters) whereof drink those nearest to Allah.²⁵

The word *raḥīq* appears only once in the Quran. It is often rendered as pure and unadulterated wine (*khamr ṣīrf lā ghishsh fihā*).²⁶ For more than a century, Western Arabists almost unanimously traced its origin to the Syriac or Aramaic *rḥiq* ("far, remote"), for wines could well have been imported to pre-Islamic Arabia from distant Syria and Iraq.²⁷

However, *raḥīq* is modified by *mufalfal* ("spiced with pepper") in the penultimate line of Imru' al-Qays's (d. ca. 550 CE) *Mu'allaqa*.²⁸ Thus we recall that some Quranic exegetes tend to interpret *khitāmuḥu misk* ("The seal thereof will be musk") as the mixture of *raḥīq* and musk.²⁹ In classical times, wine amphorae often had resin seals which not only kept air out, but also imparted a turpentine taste to the contents. Likewise, the heavenly *raḥīq* sealed with musk is sure to be infused with the sweet aroma of this precious perfume.

Therefore we manage to link the Arabic *raḥīq* etymologically to the Biblical Hebrew word *reqaḥ* (spiced wine), which is, in turn, related to the Akkadian *riqqu* (an aromatic plant). The proposed etymology of *raḥīq* seems to agree with the aforementioned verse (Q 56:89), that those nearest to God are promised to have "rest, fragrance (*rayḥān*) and a garden of bliss," for *rayḥān* could literally mean fragrant herbs. The Quranic *raḥīq* as a kind of wine mixed with aromatics and spring water is also attested in two parallel descriptions about the heavenly drinks in Sura 76:

innā l-abrāra yashrabūna min ka'sin kāna mizājuhā kāfūran
ʿaynan yashrabu bihā ʾibādu l-lāhi yufajjirūnahā tafjīran . . .
wa-yusqawna fihā ka'san kāna mizājuhā zanjabilān
ʿaynan fihā tusammā salsabilān

As to the righteous, they shall drink of a cup (of wine) mixed with Kāfūr –
A fountain where the devotees of Allah do drink, making it flow in
unstinted abundance . . .

25 Ali (trans.), *Meaning* 1618–9.

26 See al-Ṭabarī's explanation of Q 83:25. We have used the *tafsīrs* accessible online at al-islam.com: <http://quran.al-islam.com/arb/>

27 See Sadan, *Khamr*.

28 Imru' al-Qays, *Dīwān* 69.

29 Cf. al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* of Q 83:26.

And they will be given to drink there of a cup (of wine) mixed with Zanjabīl –
A fountain there called Salsabīl.³⁰

In his commentary on Q 37:45, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) quotes al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/723) saying that cup (*ka's*) often stands for wine (*khamr*) in the Quran. What makes heavenly wine superior to mundane drink, as seen in the case of *raḥīq*, also lies in its mixture (*mizāj*) with fountains or springs such as Tasnīm, Kāfūr, and Zanjabil/Salsabil. Translators of the Quran such as Yusuf Ali and Alan Jones³¹ prefer to maintain these words in their transliterated forms, although *kāfūr* literally means camphor and *zanjabīl* means ginger. If the two more abstract proper names (Tasnīm and Salsabīl) still invite some associations related to their literal meanings, namely “height” and “easiness (to swallow),”³² it seems more probable that both *kāfūr* and *zanjabīl* are to be understood literally as their counterpart *misk* is in Sura 83. For us, the three Quranic descriptions display a strikingly similar structure:

	Q 83:25–8	Q 76:5–6	Q 76:17–8
Name of wines	<i>raḥīq</i>	<i>ka's</i>	<i>ka's</i>
Aromatics	<i>misk</i> (musk)	<i>kāfūr</i> (camphor)	<i>zanjabīl</i> (ginger)
Heavenly fountains	Tasnīm	Kāfūr	Zanjabil/Salsabil

Each of these aromatics occurs just once in the Quran, a fact that accords with their rarity in pre-Islamic Arabia. It also puts them in the important category of *hapax legomena* about which recent scholarship has found much to say.³³ Nevertheless, the link between the aromatics and heavenly wines is reinforced through the almost formulaic structures of these passages. We would ask, besides the apparent pleasing scents of the aromatics, do they have other common feature(s) that explain their choice as garnishments of the paradisaal drinks?

³⁰ Ali (trans.), *Meaning* 1571–2, 1574.

³¹ Jones (trans.), *The Qur'ān* 549–50.

³² Lane, *Lexicon* iv, 1405, 1447. Al-Ṭabarī confirms in his *Tafsīr* that *salsabīl* stands for the quality (*sifa*) of the fountain, rather than its name (*ism*).

³³ See Elmaz, *Hapaxlegomena*.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, each of the three aromatics is defined as containing a pungent flavor and a warm or hot nature.³⁴ Musk is especially helpful to enhance blood circulation and is used to treat abdominal masses that result from eating melons and fruits.³⁵ While camphor brings a soothing taste and “guards against the scorching heat,”³⁶ ginger is an excellent sudorific and can dispel internal cold.³⁷ All three Quranic aromatics can be used to cure diseases such as diarrhea and stomach ache.³⁸ When they are mixed with wine, the volatile compounds of wine may increase their fragrances and strengthen their medicinal functions.

Musk, camphor, and ginger are among the spices and perfumes native to India, China, Southeast Asia, and East Africa. They had long been traded to the Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, Parthians, and Sasanians among others. Physicians and pharmacists of the early Roman Empire mention the properties of ginger.³⁹ Camphor and musk were among the commodities listed by the Sogdian traders of the fourth century CE.⁴⁰ When Byzantine troops invaded Iran in 626, ginger was among the booty that they brought back from the Sasanian palace at Dastagerd.⁴¹

“The appeal of spices was the ‘bite’ of their scent or taste.”⁴² Long before the revelation of the Quran (as mentioned in the previous section), aromatics had been widely used in the world as incense for temples, palaces, and homes. The physicians who follow the classical humoral theory or that of yin-yang and five elements used them to maintain the balance of the human body. The abundance of aromatics also led to a more complex and exquisite diet. In our discussion of flavored wines, it is interesting to note that the Byzantines followed the Romans in making *konditon* (Latin *conditum*), which were wines “flavored

34 Li, *Compendium* 1620, 1969, 2868. According to *Peri Trophon Dynameos* (On the power of foods), which is a short handbook by an unknown Greek nutritionist, musk is hot and dry by nature while camphor is moist and cold. See Dalby, *Flavours* 141–2.

35 Li, *Compendium* 2869.

36 Dalby, *Dangerous tastes* 23.

37 Liu, *The essential book* ii, 92.

38 Xie et al. (comp.), *Handbook* 273, 408–9, 431–2. Note diarrhea and stomach ache are caused by different pathogenic factors. For example, ginger can cure gastro-abdominal pain due to pathogenic cold. Musk can be used to treat acute heartburn and bellyache, and camphor can treat acute bellyache brought by sunstroke.

39 Dalby, *Dangerous tastes* 22.

40 De la Vaissière, *Sogdian traders* 43–54. The Sogdians were active in long distance commerce with the Chinese, Sasanians, Byzantines, and the Turkic peoples.

41 Theophanes, *Chronicle* 332. Quoted from Dalby, *Flavours* 47.

42 Miller, *Spice trade* vii.

with pepper, cinnamon, cloves, aromatic herbs, honey, and minerals.”⁴³ Some popular tavernas in Constantinople offered *phouska* (Latin *posca*) which were “specialty drinks flavored with cumin, fennel, anise, and thyme.”⁴⁴ According to Mark 15:23, Roman soldiers gave Jesus wine mixed with myrrh, a spice native to Arabia and East Africa. Such a Roman/Byzantine fashion could have spread to Arabia before the sixth century, for poets such as Imru’ al-Qays and Ḥassān b. Thābit⁴⁵ (d. ca. 40/659) both referred to the peppered wine in their verses.

On the other hand, the aromatics used in these Roman/Byzantine wines are relatively more common than musk, camphor, or ginger. Arab traders of the seventh century might have known the values and properties of the Quranic aromatics. However for the majority of the Arab community, these rare commodities were never seen or tasted. That is why the soldiers took camphor for salt and used it in cooking after capturing the Sasanian royal palace at al-Madā’in.⁴⁶ Only a monarch such as the Sasanian king could afford wines flavored with these aromatics, for they were extremely valuable at that time: at Turfan in 743 CE a gram of musk cost about 1.7 grams of gold.⁴⁷

4 The Goblets

Misk, *kāfūr*, and *zanjabīl* are all believed to have entered the Arabic language via Persian.⁴⁸ The Sasanians may have used them to flavor wines, for more than a thousand years before the revelation of the Quran, the Achaemenid kings were already well-known in ancient Greece for their love of drinking. In the beginning of the *Acharnians* which was produced in 425 BCE, the Greek dramatist Aristophanes (ca. 450–388 BCE) humorously depicts two ambassadors who just came from the “Grand Monarque” of Persia:

AMB: Then, at the receptions, we drank, force perforce, from cups of crystal and gold (*ex hyalinōn ekpōmatōn kai chrysidōn*), sweet (*hēdyn*) untempered (*akraton*) sack.

DIC: (*Aside*) O unsacked burgh of Cranaüs! Art blind to the mockery of these envoys?

43 Rautman, *Daily life* 104.

44 Ibid.

45 Al-Barqūqī, *Sharḥ* 367.

46 Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* 264.

47 De la Vaissière, *Sogdian traders* 53.

48 Jeffery, *Foreign vocabulary* 153–4, 246–7, 264.

AMB: (*Continuing in a superior tone*) Since orientals (*hoi barbaroi*) think none are men but those who are most potent at guzzling and potting –⁴⁹

For the Greeks, to drink unmixed (*akraton*) wine was “a barbarous trait” of the Celts, Scythians, and Persians etc.⁵⁰ The Greeks and Romans largely diluted their wines, “especially those of the stronger kind.”⁵¹ Ratios of water and wine in the mixtures, according to Plutarch, could be 3:2, 2:1, and 3:1.⁵² The Byzantines also diluted their wines, and “the modern Greek word for wine, *krasi*, comes from the Byzantine *kerannymi* – ‘to mix.’”⁵³

Thus we recall *kāna mizājuhā kāfūran/zanjabīlan* in Sura 76. The vagueness of *kāfūr* and *zanjabīl* confirms that we should understand *mizāj* as the mixture of both aromatics and springs, for pre-Islamic Arabs were very likely familiar with the two processes that make wines flavorful and less intoxicating. Similar to the Greek wines, the heavenly drinks are diluted with fountain water, then poured into goblets (sing. *kūb*), beakers (sing. *ibrīq*) and cups (sing. *kaʿs*) of the righteous ones.

W.J.M. Starkie notes in his translation of the *Acharnians* that *hyalinōn* of line 74 is the first mention of crystal or glass in classical Greek. He also suggests that in Aristophanes’s time crystal could be compared to gold in value. Perhaps it is not drinking the unmixed wine but rather using cups of crystal and gold that caused Dikaiopolis, who was familiar with the ceramic kylix used in Greek symposia, to doubt the credibility of “these envoys.” Crystal and gold are precious materials. Even today we admire the electrum and silver tumblers found in the royal tombs of Ur,⁵⁴ and the rock crystal ewer made for the Fatimid caliph al-ʿAzīz (d. 386/996).⁵⁵ These containers were made for the rulers, but they still cannot compete with the heavenly vessels and goblets described in Quran 76:15–6:

*wa-yuṭāfu ʿalayhim bi ʾāniyatin min fiḍḍatin wa-akwābin kānat qawārīra
qawārīra min fiḍḍatin qaddarūhā taqdīran*

49 Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 26–9, ll. 73–8. The transliterations are mine.

50 Ibid., 27, l. 75 n.

51 Kirwan, *Host and guest* 282.

52 Ibid., 282–3. If a wine with an alcohol content of 15 % abv (alcohol by volume) was used as the base, then the strength of the final beverage (made according to Plutarch’s ratios) will be around 4 % to 6 % abv, quite close to that of beer.

53 Kislinger, *Christians of the East* 199.

54 Zettler and Horne (eds.), *Treasures* 133–4, Figs. 105–7.

55 Bloom and Blair, *Islamic arts* 252–3, Fig. 135.

And amongst them will be passed round vessels of silver and goblets of crystal

Crystal-clear, made of silver: they will determine the measure thereof (according to their wishes).⁵⁶

The amazing vessels in paradise display the characteristics of silver and crystal at the same time. According to *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, the Prophet forbade Muslims to wear silken garments, and to drink in gold or silver vessels. The Quran confirms that silver and gold decorations are trappings (*matāʾ*) of this transitory life (Q 43:35). However, in the gardens of eternal bliss, the righteous ones shall be adorned with gold or silver bracelets, wear green garments of silk (*sundus*), recline on carpets lined with rich brocade (*istabraq*),⁵⁷ and drink the heavenly nectars from the crystal/silver cups.

Just as we tried to provide some historical and social background to the formation of these Quranic images, it is also necessary to note that the idea of the garden, which was probably inspired by the customs of Greeks⁵⁸ and Persians⁵⁹ to some extent, influenced Muslim poets, litterateurs, craftsmen, and builders of palaces throughout the Islamic world. For example, the four rivers of water, milk, wine, and honey in the garden remind us of the Persian *chahār bāgh* ("four[fold] garden"), the traditional garden scheme that is symbolized with watercourses intersecting at right angles.⁶⁰ Although the *chahār bāgh* is

56 Ali (trans.), *Meaning* 1573.

57 Q 18:31, 55:54, 76:21.

58 The heavenly banquet described in the Quran can be compared to the symposium of ancient Greece. "The participants, all male aristocrats, wore garlands and leaned on the left elbow on couches, and there was much drinking of wine, served by slave boys." See "Symposium," in *Encyclopædia Britannica online*, academic edition: <http://proxy.library.upenn.edu:4120/eb/article-9473433>. Q 52:24, 56:17–8, and 76:19 all mention the handsome and forever young servants in the garden. Ancient Chinese believed that *yīn shì nán nǚ* ("Food, drink, man, woman") are basic desires of human beings (see Sun, *Rites* ii, 607). Analogously, the Quranic food and drink should be understood together with other enjoyments like clothing, ornament, furniture, dwelling, and especially, pearl-like servants and fair wives. However we are unable to give such a fully developed discussion of food and drink in the scope of this paper.

59 Besides the names of the three Quranic aromatics, there are other Persian words in the Quranic description of the garden. For example, the Persian origin of *istabraq* in Q 18:31 has been agreed upon. Arthur Jeffery suggests the possible Greek, Lydian, and Akkadian origins to the word *sundus*, which was regarded as a Persian word by medieval Arab scholars such as al-Kindī. See Jeffery, *Foreign vocabulary* 58–60, 179–80.

60 Blair and Bloom (eds.), *Images of paradise* 81–2.

pre-Islamic in origin, Q 47:15 may have contributed to its spread in the Islamic world from India to Spain.

Similarly, the above-cited verses (Q 76:15–6) may have encouraged the development of the Islamic luster technique in ceramics. It is known that potters of Samarra (ninth century) and Cairo (tenth to twelfth century) used oxides of silver and copper to paint on glazed slipwares. The slipwares were then fired at a low heat (about 600°C) so that “the oxygen-free atmosphere ‘robbed’ oxygen from the metallic oxides, leaving a thin film of metal on the surface of the glaze.”⁶¹ It is noteworthy that the technique, before being applied to earthenwares, was actually developed by glassmakers in Egypt and Syria. “The earliest dated example is a broken beaker inscribed with the name of an Egyptian governor who served for only a month in 773.”⁶² Perhaps it is not a mere coincidence that the technique was created to decorate cups – the glass beaker with a shining metallic sheen is the most eloquent representation of the heavenly vessels described in the Quran.

5 The Foods

Because of the similar nature of glass and glaze, the luster technique was quickly developed to decorate glazed earthenwares. “It is often claimed that lusterwares allowed diners to enjoy the pleasures of eating from gold or silver without having to suffer the moral consequences.”⁶³ Moreover, they are usually large in size⁶⁴ although they cannot be compared with the gigantic tenth-century Khurasani slip-painted platter,⁶⁵ or the underglazed fritware dish of Ottoman Iznik.⁶⁶

The sizes of these containers correspond to the communal way in which food was often served in Islamic society. Similarly in the garden, dishes (*ṣiḥāf*) and goblets of gold will be passed round to its dwellers (Q 43:71), who comfortably recline on the encrusted thrones (*surur mawḍūna*, Q 56:15). The rivers that flow beneath their lofty mansions (*ghuraf*, Q 29:58, 34:37, 39:20) are gurgling.

61 Bloom and Blair, *Islamic arts* 110.

62 Ibid., 111, Fig. 60.

63 Ibid., 113.

64 Ibid., 112, Fig. 62 (D. 27cm) and 251, Fig. 134 (D. 24cm).

65 Ettinghausen, Grabar, and Jenkins-Madina, *Islamic art and architecture* 119, Fig. 188 (D. 46.8cm).

66 Bloom and Blair, *Islamic arts* 281, Fig. 150 (D. 45cm).

Fragrances waft in the breeze. It is indeed a jovial and social feast, full of pleasures of all senses.

As compared with the depiction of wines, there are fewer details about heavenly food in the Quran. The righteous ones shall have anything they desire of fruit (*fākiha*) and meat (*lahm*) in the hereafter (Q 52:22, 56:20–1). “Anything they desire of” (*mimmā yashtahūna*) is an umbrella term. But it leaves room for personalized imaginations. The readers already learned that God created wholesome foods such as dates, olives, pomegranates, and cattle on earth. He also promised a much better afterlife to the pious. If *ka*’s stands for wine in the garden, then *ṣiḥāf min dhahab* (“dishes of gold”) can well be understood as exquisite heavenly dishes that are beyond any description.

Because of their aromas, mixtures, and even containers, the Quranic wines have enduring charms. On the other hand, the unspecified dishes in the garden are also perpetually pleasing, for their contents can update themselves whenever the readership or the time changes.⁶⁷ Badīʿ al-Zamān al-Hamadhānī (d. 398/1008), the so-called originator of the Arabic *maqāma* genre, gives a fine description in his *al-Maqāma al-majāʿiyya* (Maqāma of the famine):

What sayest thou to a white cake on a clean table, picked herbs with very sour vinegar, fine date-wine with pungent mustard, roast meat ranged on a skewer with a little salt, placed now before thee by one who will not put thee off with a promise nor torture thee with delay, who will afterwards follow it up with golden goblets of the juice of the grape? Is that preferable to thee, or a large company, full cups, variety of dessert, spread carpets, brilliant lights, and a skilful minstrel with the eye and neck of a gazelle? If thou desirest neither this nor that, what is thy verdict regarding fresh meat, river fish, fried brinjal, the wine of Quṭrubbul picked apples, a soft bed on a lofty place, opposite a rapid river, a gushing fountain, and a garden with streams in it?⁶⁸

This “delicious” paragraph of the *maqāma* is put in *saʿj* (rhymed prose) which is the same style of the Quran. With images such as golden goblets, spread carpets, a large company, and a garden, it can be read as an enlarged version of the Quranic paradise. Here we also notice a much more detailed description of food as compared with “anything they desire of fruit and meat.”

67 On the imaginative description of the heavenly delights in al-Ghazālī’s *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, see van Gelder, *Of dishes* 23.

68 Prendergast (trans.), *The Maqāmāt* 103–4. For the Arabic text, see al-Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt* 127–9.

This *maqāma* is set “in Baghdad in a famine year.”⁶⁹ The rogue hero al-Iskandarī is pictured as “a youth with a lisp in his tongue” (*dhū luthghatin bi-lisānih*) who greets the narrator ʿĪsā b. Hishām with the exact question that Moses poses to Sāmīrī (*mā khaṭbuka*, see Q 20:95). Al-Hamadhānī may intend for his hero to be taken as a pseudo-prophet who refers to the Quranic paradise. When the rogue hero finishes the question which contains many names of dishes and drinks, the hungry narrator immediately answers that “I am the slave of all three.”⁷⁰ The Quran encourages “the giving of food in a day of privation” (Q 90:14).⁷¹ Instead of giving real food (such a moral deed, *ṣāliḥa*, is to be heavily rewarded in the afterlife, according to Sura 76), the rogue simply feeds the narrator with a reference to the Quranic images. Of course he is making a joke by switching the cause and the result. Such lofty pleasures cannot be of this world; they only belong to the dwellers of the garden.

6 The Soul Summoner

In the *al-Maqāma al-majāʿiyya*, al-Iskandarī is pictured as a pseudo-prophet who lures ʿĪsā to the wonderland he fabricates with flowery *sajʿ*. When we examine the enjoyments of the garden, it is important to note that they are often mentioned together with a horrible depiction of the fire:⁷²

What makes Hell worst of all is its eternity, the single attribute it shares with Paradise. Paradise and Hell are quite deliberately each other's opposite, yet each implies the other. If Hell is hot, Paradise is temperate, without sun or moon (58:13); on the Day of Judgment all are friendless, but Paradise is convivial and social; if Hell is thirst, Paradise has an abundance of water, and so on. To understand Paradise, one must always remember Hell . . .⁷³

Therefore a discussion of heavenly food and drink is not complete without a mention of their counterparts in hell. Q 47:15 not only describes the purity and incorruptibility of paradisaal water, milk, wine, and honey, but also compares them to the eternal fire and boiling water that cuts up the bowels of the

69 Prendergast (trans.), *The Maqāmāt* 103.

70 Ibid., 104.

71 Ali (trans.), *Meaning* 1652.

72 Cf. Q 76:4, 83:15–6.

73 Reinhart, *The here and the hereafter* 16.

sinner. Similarly, Sura 56 respectively lists the reward of the companions of the right hand (*aṣḥāb al-maymana*) and the “entertainment” (*nuzul*) of the companions of the left hand (*aṣḥāb al-mash’ama*) on the day of doom. “[F]ood and drink are important elements in contrasting the ultimate *locus amoenus* of Heaven with the dystopia of Hell, where the food is the fruit of the *zaqqūm* tree that boils in the bowels (56:52, cf. 37:62, 44:43).”⁷⁴ In contrast to the abstract, heavenly proper names (such as Tasnīm and Salsabīl) that invite delightful associations, the name *zaqqūm* and its very obscurity “strengthens its horrible nature.”⁷⁵

Food and drink, with their particular smell and taste, always demarcate the borders between the inside (homeland/heaven) and the outside (foreign/hell). Here we introduce a poem from the Chu kingdom (770–223 BCE), *Summons of the soul*, where a similar technique of contrasting the inside and the outside is used. *Summons of the soul* is believed to have been composed by the minister and poet Qu Yuan (ca. 339–278 BCE) during one of his exiles, when he learned the style and characteristics of folk rituals. The purpose of this poem was to lure the soul of his king, who died as a foreigner, back to the highly idealized Chu homeland. The poet first warns the soul not to wander off: “everywhere outside – east, north, south, west, above, below – is dangerous and horrible.”⁷⁶ For example, the west is a place that holds many perils:

The Moving Sands stretch on for a hundred leagues.
 You will be swept into the Thunder’s Chasm, and dashed in pieces, unable
 to help yourself;
 And even should you chance to escape from that, beyond is the empty
 desert,
 And red ants as huge as elephants and wasps as big as gourds.
 The five grains do not grow there; dry stalks are the only food;
 And the earth there scorches men up; there is nowhere to look for water;
 And you will drift there forever, with nowhere to go in that vastness.
 O soul, come back! Lest you bring on yourself perdition.⁷⁷

After expounding on the unlivable nature of the world outside, the poet offers cajolements to the soul: “come back here, where everything is comfortable and

74 van Gelder, *Of dishes* 23.

75 Ibid.

76 Hawkes, *Songs* 221.

77 Ibid., 225; Zhu, *Collected commentaries* 125b–6a.

delightful; here you will have a good time.”⁷⁸ The Chu people had depended heavily on aromatics in their ritual and culinary practices.⁷⁹ The Chu homeland is where departed souls could find peace and fragrance and is highly comparable to the Quranic paradise. Here is the poet’s list of various foods and drinks, which constitutes just one part of the enjoyments that the soul will find in the Chu homeland:

Rice, broom-corn, early wheat, mixed with yellow millet;
 Bitter, salt, sour, hot and sweet – there are dishes of all flavours . . .
 Braised chicken, seethed terrapin, high-seasoned, but not to spoil the taste;
 Fried honey-cakes of rice flour and malt-sugar sweetmeats;
 Jade-like wine, honey-flavoured, fills the winged cups;
 Ice-cooled liquor, strained of impurities, clear wine, cool and refreshing . . .
 O soul, come back! Here you shall have respect and nothing shall harm you.⁸⁰

Obviously the homeland is described in sharp contrast with the west where “the five grains do not grow.” The formulaic “O soul, come back” is remarkable in both the threats and blandishments of the poet. Here lies the purpose of the soul-summoning ritual: the shaman endeavors to resuscitate the dead or cure the ill “by catching his soul before it had gone too far away.”⁸¹ As compared to the harms of the outside, the delights of the inside are described in a much more detailed fashion. Clearly, the poet wants to comfort rather than to intimidate the soul of his king.

Why do we find the scheme of *Summons* similar to that of the Quranic account of hell and heaven? We can establish some links between the Prophet Muḥammad and the soul summoner, for example the Prophet also warns his people not to go astray, and encourages them to stay on the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), that is, to abandon the outside and to secure the comfort and delight of the inside. His purpose is clearly stated in *al-Fātiḥa*.

While the catalogue of luxuries in the *Summons* is prepared for the royal soul that is summoned back, the pleasures of the Quranic garden, especially the heavenly food and drink, will be enjoyed by a much larger group of people: the righteous ones (Q 13:35, 15:45), those who believe and work righteousness (*alladhīna āmanū wa-‘alimū l-ṣāliḥāti*, Q 18:30, 22:23), and those who leave their

78 Hawkes, *Songs* 221.

79 See Dalby, *Dangerous tastes*, chapter 5.

80 Hawkes, *Songs* 227–8; Zhu, *Collected commentaries* 130a–1a.

81 Hawkes, *Songs* 219.

homes in the cause of Allah and are then slain or die (*alladhīnā hājarū fī sabīli l-lāhi thumma qutilū aw mātū*, Q 22:58).⁸² While we may say that the Quranic garden borrowed some elements from the Greek symposium, they are also different since the former welcomes both righteous male and female believers (Q 40:40) but the latter only accepts male aristocrats as members. While the Quran does not present the heavenly enjoyments as hierarchical; in the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* the blessed souls shall have specific rewards that match their occupations and ranks in this life.⁸³

7 Conclusion

In contrast to the material rewards in the Quranic garden, there are other views about food and drink in the afterlife or rebirth. According to Theravāda Buddhism, he who did good deeds in a previous birth does not need to make fires to cook in this life because delicious food will appear when he thinks of eating.⁸⁴ The Pure Land branch of Mahāyāna Buddhism maintains that in the Buddha-land, no one actually eats the food although it appears according to his wishes. Its dwellers shall be “free from attachment to the sense of taste.”⁸⁵ In this way, they are close to some Chinese Daoists who aspire to obtain immortality so that they can do without eating or drinking. Nevertheless, Pure Land Buddhism does not negate the form of food or drink in the Buddha-land, nor does it forget to mention their containers made of seven jewels, for material enjoyments (jeweled trees, bathing pools, palaces, clothing, incense, flowers, etc.)⁸⁶ are important to its believers’ imagining of absolute perfection.

It occurs to us that the Sufi poet Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (d. 672/1273), in the famous *Masnawī* story “Moses and the Shepherd,” shows his tolerant attitude toward the shepherd who wishes to serve God milk and sacrifice his herd for Him.⁸⁷ We also notice that Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, the second/eighth-century Sufi saint, declares that she does not worship God in hope of paradise or for fear of hell.⁸⁸

82 Cf. Qu Yuan’s hymn to the Chu martyrs (*Guo shang*), Hawkes, *Songs* 116–7; Zhu, *Collected commentaries* 44b–5b.

83 For example, the reward of a householder (*kadagxwadāy*) shall surpass that of a shepherd (*shubān*). See Haug and West (trans.), *Arda Viraf* 39–41.

84 Frye (trans.), *The wise and the foolish* 214.

85 Inagaki and Stewart (trans.), *Pure Land Sutras* 263.

86 Ibid., 258–63.

87 Rūmī, *Masnawī* 101.

88 Nicholson, *Mystics* 115.

“The heart’s the essence, words are mere effects.”⁸⁹ If the heart is pure, it does not matter by which form the believer chooses to worship God. Neither the material prayer of the shepherd nor the spiritual verses of Rābi‘a can make God “any purer,” but they help the believers to “gain in eloquence and godly ways.”⁹⁰ Therefore, it is not necessary for the spiritual to scorn the material, or for the former to “spiritualize” the latter. Different religions and beliefs may or may not advocate material rewards of paradise. But we should understand that the spiritual and the material are just two forms of one essence, i.e., to encourage people to do good and shun evil.

In the introduction, we suggested the importance of heavenly food and drink to arouse enthusiasm among early Muslims. We believe that providing the historical background to the formation of these Quranic images will not harm their paradisaal charms. The aromatic drinks and dishes, as well as other Quranic blisses and joys, can go back and forth from the here to the hereafter. Put differently, practices of the mundane world could have inspired scriptures, and the descriptions of food and drink in the scriptures could in turn influence the culinary art in the mundane world. Whether as earthly pleasures or as heavenly rewards for righteous Muslims, these drinks and dishes have enjoyed everlasting popularity and developed in both the material and spiritual forms.

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89 Rūmī, *Masnavi* 103.

90 Ibid.

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Strategies for Paradise: Paradise Virgins and Utopia

*Maher Jarrar**

Utopia (lit., “no place”) – perceived as a general term for imaginary ideal societies, whether *here and now* or in the *hereafter* – is a theme that has been treated in most societies and cultures. It could be a worldly messianic state, an Elysian field or a garden, a city beyond, an imagined island, or a presentation of a positive and possible alternative to the social reality intended as a model to emulate or aspire to.¹

In this paper I attempt an analysis of the Quranic portrayal of the paradise virgins (*al-ḥūr al-ʿīn*; hereafter *ḥūrīs*) and their rhetorical and allegorical deployment in various Islamic narratives, in an effort to situate them within their religious/human-social milieu. Although Islam does not maintain a belief in the concept of original sin, nevertheless, as in the other two Abrahamic religions, Islam perceives of human existence as a state of exile. Exile here is meant in the sense of a *liminal* location² or as an existence “outside” and away from an “original,” previous state of being. Exile is a state of *ibtilāʾ* – of trial and affliction caused by the fall. If the holy scriptures of the Jews and Christians have little to say about the geography of the hereafter and the conditions of its dwellers, the Quran provides a vivid and colorful picture of the abodes of the hereafter. Whereas resurrection in Judaism leads to a “New Golden Age,” to a “renewed Jewish commonwealth free from foreign oppression”;³ in Christianity, the apostle Paul, building on Luke (20:34–6), reveals that the redeemed Christians are transformed into spiritual bodies, they “become like angels and are not liable to death,” but will enjoy the presence of Jesus and

* A first draft of this paper was read at the Leucorea-Kolloquium, *Sehnsuch nach dem Paradies*, organized by the Leucorea Stiftung and the Martin-Luther-Universität, Halle, 16–19 May 2007. I would like to thank Professor Dr. Sebastian Günther (Göttingen) for his continuous support and inspiration.

1 See Levitas, *The concept of utopia* 11–3.

2 Turner, *The ritual process* 94; Turner, *Blazing the trail* 133, 148–63.

3 McDannell, *Heaven* 10; for later Jewish understandings and descriptions of paradise, see Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt* 161–204; and Jepsen, *Paradies im Alten Testament* 97–8.

of the Father.⁴ In contrast to the Judaic and Christian understandings, in the Quran the immediacy of heaven is portrayed as an eternal habitat with a variety of terraces layered according to the ranked hierarchy of their dwellers who experience eternal joys in new transformed bodies.

This paper is not preoccupied with the location of heaven, its geography and hierarchy, the duration of hell and paradise, and other related theological issues; these themes have been the subject of a number of studies.⁵ Josef van Ess has dedicated a brilliant chapter to the topic of Islamic eschatology in his seminal magnum opus, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*.⁶ Rather, in this paper I try to present a survey of the aesthetics of three different approaches within Islam – literal, ascetic, and gnostic-mystical – and their endeavors to articulate this future-directed nostalgia for paradise and its virgins.

Paradise virgins (*ḥūrīs*) are mentioned eight times in the Quran as a heavenly reward for the believers.⁷ The possible, pre-Islamic origins of the *ḥūrīs* have been studied extensively since the last quarter of the nineteenth century.⁸ Most recently, Luxenberg, a nom de plume for an otherwise anonymous scholar, has published a book that attempts to trace their origin through a linguistic “misreading” of Syriac sources.⁹ In this, he is carrying on a long tradition in Oriental studies.¹⁰ This work sparked much debate and serious critique.¹¹

Muslims believe that they have God’s final word of revelation that leads to salvation. It is a message expressed in clear Arabic: “We have sent it down as

4 McDannell, *Heaven* 35; but see also Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt* 162–9; and Lincoln, *Paradise now and not yet* 33–87.

5 Cf. for example, Gardet, Djanna; Kinberg, Paradise; Günther, Tretet ein ins Paradies.

6 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 543–61.

7 Q 2:25; 37:48–9; 38:52; 52:20; 55:56, 70–6; 56:35–7; 78:33. For the Islamic tradition, see Wensinck, *Concordance* i, 526. For *paranetic* books, Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws* 68–84; anonymous, *Kitāb al-Aẓama* 148–55, 163; al-Sarrāj, *al-Lumaʿ* 345; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ṣifat al-janna*; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, ed. Ināyat and Zahwa 2032–4; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Tadhkira* 2633–40; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat al-janna* 96–8, 102–14, 153–7; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hādī l-arwāḥ* i, 331–93; ii, 2–20; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Rawḍat al-muḥibbīn* 262–80; Ibn al-Naḥḥās, *Mashārīʿ al-ashwāq* ii, 764–96; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 95–190; al-Ḥamdān, *Bushrā l-muḥibbīn* 39–82; al-Ḥanafī, *Hādī l-anām* 74–102.

8 Jarrar, Houris 456–7; and see Berthels, Die paradiesischen Jungfrauen 263–88; Horovitz, Die paradiesischen Jungfrauen; Künstlinger, Die Namen und Freuden 629–32; Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds* 69–75; Andrae, *Les origines de l’Islam et le Christianisme* 151–61; Beck, Eine christliche Parallele 398–405; Macdonald, Islamic eschatology 352–60.

9 Luxenberg, *Die Syro-Aramäische Lesart des Koran* 221–60.

10 See n. 8 above.

11 Cf. Neuwirth, Qurʾan and history 1–18; de Blois, Book review 92–7. See also Sidney Griffith’s contribution to the present publication.

an Arabic Qur'an; perhaps you will understand" (Q 12:2).¹² Muslims of the early nascent community of Mecca and Medina were enthusiastically committed to a strong and "literal" belief in the revealed speech of God. Early Muslims understood the Quranic representation of hell and paradise as an immediate demonstration of higher experiences and realities.¹³

The vivid and spectacular Quranic narrative of paradise was further attested and underwent supplementary coloring in the narrative of Muḥammad's ascension to heaven, the *mi'rāj*. This tradition builds on Quran 17:1 "Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Furthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, to show him of Our wonders," and Q 53:1–18 as well as Q 81:19–25. Early Muslim exegetes and traditionists perceive all three Quranic citations as referring to Muḥammad's nocturnal journey and his visionary experiences in heaven.¹⁴

Early narrative variations of the *mi'rāj* were already in circulation among different Muslim communities of Arabia, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt as early as the third quarter of the first Islamic century.¹⁵ These narratives became vastly popular and widespread; they became hot issues in theological disputes starting in the second century. For literalists, the ascension and the mention of paradise and its pleasures were understood in plain terms. Indeed, the belief in the Quranic description of paradise and in Muḥammad's ascension to heaven formed, from an early time, part of a dogmatic belief which later filtered into some Sunni and Shi'i orthodox creeds from the third/ninth century on.¹⁶

12 Quran translations are those of Khalidi.

13 Ḥaṇẓala al-Kātib, one of the scribes of the Prophet Muḥammad, relates that paradise and hell were discussed once in the presence of the Prophet; their description was so vivid that they thought that they saw them with their own eyes (*ra'ya 'ayn*), Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iv, 178; al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'* 190; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh* xv, 324.

14 See Widengren, *Muhammad*; Schrieke and Horovitz, *Mi'rādī*; Bencheikh, *Mi'rādī* in Arabic literature; Sells, *Ascension* 176–81; Böwering, *Mi'rāj* 6058–62; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 387–95.

15 It seems that Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) knows only of a night journey (*isrā'*) to Bayt al-Maqdis (Jerusalem), *al-Maghāzī* 48–9; but we find a *mi'rāj* tradition attributed to him by his student Yūnus al-Ayālī (d. 159/775), al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il* ii, 379–80. On the question of dating the early *mi'rāj* tradition and its relation to "royal ideology," (as Widengren calls it, *Muhammad* 199) see now Busse, Jerusalem. The debate among modern scholars has an ideological background relating to the symbolism of Jerusalem, cf. Georgi, *Khabar al-isrā' wa-l-mi'rāj* 73–105.

16 For Sunni dogma, cf. Wensinck, *Muslim creed* 197, 242–7; Ghulām Khalīl, *Sharḥ al-sunna*, no. 44; al-Ṭahāwī al-Ḥanafī, *al-'Aqida* 29; al-Ājurri, *al-Shar'ā* 481; al-Shirāzī, *al-Ishāra* 37–8. For Shi'i dogma: al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt* 100; and cf. al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfī* i, 442–3; al-Majlisī, *Bihār* xviii, 290–1.

Nevertheless, other voices among rational theologians and certain mystics articulated a shifting understanding of these verses to more figurative and allegorical meanings.

Muḥammad's ascension to heaven presented an upward movement that corresponds to or counters the downward movement from heaven that was represented by the descent of the final word of God, the Quran, revealed through the archangel Gabriel. In the narrative of the *mī'rāj* it is Gabriel who escorts Muḥammad through the lower gates of heaven, along the seven ascending heavens, up to the heavenly lote tree of the boundary, where Muḥammad experienced a marvelous, unprecedented Islamicate *visio beatifica*.¹⁷

Theologically, the "ascension" raised many difficult questions that needed to be dealt with: Was Muḥammad carried there physically? Or was the journey undertaken in a dream vision? Sunni Muslims, namely the *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā'a* and later Ash'arīs argue for a physical ascension; this in contrast to the Mu'tazila who argue for a vision experience in dream (*ru'ya fī l-manām*).¹⁸ Shi'i Muslims and a number of mystics also insist that the ascension was of a physical nature and explain the difficulties by arguing that Muḥammad was created out of the light of God's throne and accordingly his body was not dense but of the nature of light and could easily penetrate the heavenly spheres.¹⁹ Another crucial matter which caused much ink to be spilled was the question of whether or not the veils of light that conceal God were lifted for Muḥammad so that he may have seen God's face. The *beatific vision* became widely accepted

17 On the beatific vision, van Ess, *The flowering of Muslim theology* 45–78.

18 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* xv, 2–14; Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* i, 399–400; al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma'* 156; al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-Mī'rāj* 65–8; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il* ii, 365; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān* x, 208–10; 'Iyāḍ, *al-Shifā* i, 187–95; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān* xxvii, 16; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'is* 445, 447–9; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Āya al-kubrā* 105–10; al-Majlisī, *Bihār* xviii, 282–92; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 387–91.

19 Al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) in his *Tafsīr*, see Böwering, *The mystical vision* 210 and 212–4. In Sunni Islam, the idea that the Prophet Muḥammad was created from primordial light is attributed to Qatāda b. Dī'āma al-Sadūsī (d. 117/735), Pellat, Qatāda; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 135–46; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma' al-bayān* vi, 57 (Q 5:15); al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-ma'ānī* vi, 87 (Q 5:15); and cf. van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 137. In his book of the *Mī'rāj* 67–8, al-Qushayrī, while asserting that the ascension was physical, relates a long statement from the mystic Abū 'Alī l-Daqqāq (d. 405/1015 or 412/1021) stressing that the innate nature (*sirr*) of Muḥammad was of light; al-Aẓma, *al-Mī'rāj* 84–6. See concerning this Neoplatonic understanding of Muḥammad's light (*nūr*), al-Ghazālī, *The niche of lights* 12–3; al-Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār* 462. This trend also appears in a book on the qualities of Muḥammad by the Mālikī al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ (d. 544/1149), a prestigious Ash'arī scholar from the Islamic West (Morocco and Islamic Spain), 'Iyāḍ, *al-Shifā* i, 16–8 and cf. Andrae, *Die Person Muhammeds* 319–22.

in orthodox Sunni traditonists' circles from the beginning of the second/eighth century,²⁰ while the Mu'tazila and the Shi'a deny it categorically.²¹

Muḥammad's encounter with one of the paradise virgins (*ḥūrīs*) in the upper heaven beyond the seventh heavenly sphere is relevant to our theme.²² Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī (d. 74/693),²³ one of the Prophet's companions, narrated a long tradition of the *mi'rāj* that appears in the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad written by Ibn Ishāq (d. 150/767–8). It is found in the reworked version of Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833) that reflected a consensus among scholars and acquired wide acceptance.²⁴ According to this version, the Prophet says,

Then Gabriel took me into paradise and there I saw a paradise virgin (trans. Guillaume: damsel) with dark red lips and I asked her to whom she belonged, for she pleased me much when I saw her, and she told me I belong to "Zayd b. Ḥāritha."²⁵ The messenger of God gave Zayd the good news about her²⁶ when he met him after having returned from his *mi'rāj*.²⁷

- 20 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 411–5; for Sunni sources: Wensinck, *Muslim creed* 62–7, 179, 193, 229; Ghulām Khalīl, *Kitāb Sharḥ al-Sunna*, nos. 7 and 42; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* v, 393–7; al-Ṭaḥāwī, *al-Aqida* 26; al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 25–40; al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt* 153 (for the Murji'a); Ibn Khuzayma, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* 167–230; al-Ājurri, *Kitāb al-Taṣḍīq bi-l-naẓar*; al-Mutawallī, *Mughnī* 46–9; Iyād, *al-Shifā* i, 195–202; van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt* 213–8.
- 21 Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt* 213–9; al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī* iv, 233–4, for the Mu'tazila; and al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi* i, 95–100; al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd* 104–19; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* iv, 26–50 and xviii, 283; Newman, *The formative period* 116, for the Shi'a.
- 22 According to a tradition related by Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938) with a transmission chain that leads to Anas b. Mālik, Muḥammad met the *ḥūrīs* in Jerusalem during his nocturnal journey (*isrā'*) while they were sitting left of the rock, see Ibn Kathīr, *al-Taḥfīz* v, 113; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'is* i, 383–4.
- 23 Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh* xx, 373–99.
- 24 Cf. Jarrar, *Prophetenbiographie* 36.
- 25 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra* i, 407; Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad* 186; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* xv, 112; al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* 214, 217; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il* ii, 394; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Ba'th wa-l-nushūr* 123–4; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh* xix, 372; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* v, 123; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Khaṣā'is* i, 420–1; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Āya al-kubrā* 80; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 123, citing a tradition from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq.
- 26 On Zayd b. Ḥāritha see Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh* xix, 342–73.
- 27 Some traditions from the popular *mawḍū'āt* genre which figure in internal Muslim dogmatic rivalries and polemics mention that during his ascension the Prophet met *ḥūrīs* who told him that they were created for 'Alī, 'Uthmān, or 'Umar (Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh* xxix, 172; and xxxii, 12; al-Dhahabī, *Mizān* i, 127; and ii, 52; al-Isfarāyīnī, *al-Tabṣīr* 109).

Other traditions mention that Muḥammad encountered *ḥūrīs* in paradise, but these do not specify their number or link them to any particular person on earth.²⁸ The *mi'rāj* texts that were documented in early Shi'i traditions claim that during the ascension, the Prophet was given some fruits of the lote tree of the boundary by the *ḥūrīs*; from their juice, the sperm that brought forth his daughter Fāṭima was formed in his loins. The Shi'i sources mention that heaven and the *ḥūrīs* were created from the light of Fāṭima and her son, the martyred grandson of the Prophet, al-Ḥusayn.²⁹

All these traditions, along with the employment of this motif in various literary and oratory genres from the first Islamic century, refer to an early reception of the theme and elaborate the various Islamic groups that attempted to use it as a means to secure authenticity for dogmatic beliefs. The theme of the paradisaal virgins (the immediate passage of the martyrs to the *ḥūrīs* directly upon their "heroic" death)³⁰ was mentioned among the partisans of al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī during the battle of Karbala (61/680)³¹ in a sermon by the Khārījī rebel Ṣāliḥ b. Musarriḥ (d. 76/695)³² and also in a verse by the royal Umayyad prince al-Walīd b. Yazīd (d. 126/743) where he ridicules this tenet.³³ The motif of the *ḥūrīs* was also employed as material for public storytellers and orators who wove it into narrative designs for use in paranetic and devotional settings.³⁴

In a previous study published in 1993, I followed the theme of the *ḥūrīs* in the circles of fighters on the Byzantine-Arab frontiers from the first/eighth century down to the times of the Crusades. I argued there that these traditions (*akhbār*) share a common theme which reveals two facets: death/paradise virgins or death/eros.³⁵ These narratives are a reflection of a society of males who had a peripheral social status and were not able to conform to society's

28 Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Ba'th wa-l-nushūr* 198; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xviii, 293, 332–3. The *ḥūrīs* also appear in the medieval Latin manuscript from Spain, *Liber scala Mahomenti*, Arabic translation from the French, Ṣalībā, *Mi'rāj Muḥammad* 227–332; al-'Aẓma, *al-Mi'rāj* 110, 163.

29 Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd* 114–5; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 107; and a similar tradition in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 119, 120, 142–3, 151; xviii, 351; xxv, 16–7; xxxiii, 2–4; see also Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḥ* xxxii, 129. Cf. Klemm, *Die frühe islamische Erzählung* 72.

30 Jarrar, *The martyrdom of passionate lovers* 324.

31 Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ* v, 423; al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār* 79.

32 Al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ* vi, 218 (events of the year 76/695); van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 555.

33 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 556.

34 Jarrar, *The martyrdom of passionate lovers* 318.

35 *Ibid.*, 328–30.

norms, and thus sought a refuge in a newly self fantasized world, a society of ascetic-warriors.

A comparison between the early reports and later, long narratives reveals that the later stories achieved a life of their own as a separate genre. The motif of the "paradise virgins" coupled with *jihād* and martyrdom also appears in historical narratives. It recurs in modern Islamic literature on *jihād*, especially in pamphlets, martyrs testimonies, and commemorations from different parts of the Islamic world.³⁶ These stories went through many stages before they developed into a genre; they emerged in the milieu of the late first and early second/eighth-century ascetics and storytellers of Syria and Basra at a time when there was still no clear dividing line between storytelling and *ḥadīth*. Their origins were short reports whose first "setting in life" (*Sitz im Leben*) was in the communicative act of the revelation and its *Sitz in der Literatur* in the Quranic exegetic literature;³⁷ they served to incite to a zeal for piety and the ascetic life.

In what follows, I delineate three approaches to the same tenet of the paradise virgins in milieus other than those of the ascetic-warriors: the first approach is a survey of some early reactions and interpretations in the circles of pious ascetics and early mystics; second is a follow-up of the development of this theme among literalist Sunni and Shi'i groups; and the final approach is that of the treatment of this theme by gnostics or mystics.

Early Quranic exegesis, especially that of orthodox Sunni and Shi'i groups, understood the *ḥūrīs* as a reward for pious and devout male lives, and as compensation for the deprivation they imposed upon themselves in this life.³⁸ Heaven for many a "literalist" is, moreover, an anthropocentric, sensuous city of marble palaces; its soil is made of musk and saffron, and it is lit with celestial lights. Among these "literalist" theologians and dogmatists resurrection was perceived as a bodily act; a reanimation or a re-forging of the decayed flesh. They believed in the corporeality of the resurrected human being: the same body we bear in our lives will be enlivened when the trumpet is blown at the day of judgment and will be united with the soul. Body and desire are connected; hence, pleasure in paradise is always realized and whatsoever one wishes is instantly consummated.³⁹

These exegetes understood the *ḥūrīs* as "extremely beautiful, wide-eyed virgins whose color is the white of pearls. They do not menstruate, do not bear

36 Ibid., 336–7.

37 See Richter, *Exegese als Literaturwissenschaft* 121, 145–7; Assmann, *Der literarische Text* 126.

38 See, e.g., Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣiḥḥat al-ṣāfiya* ii, 414.

39 See al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 215–31.

children, and are pure and clean of any bodily excretions.”⁴⁰ Their age is thirty-three.⁴¹ The task of interpreting the *ḥūrīs* brought with it many difficulties: first, who are these virgins exactly, and how are they comparable to earthly women? How are they created and from what substance? These questions actually stem from a different query, whether paradise and hell were already created, i.e., before the creation of Adam, or whether they will be created for the first time on the day of judgment.⁴²

These questions gave ample material for theological considerations. Those exegetes who believed that heaven and hell were created at the beginning of time supported their position with the fact that the Prophet Muḥammad met some *ḥūrīs* during his ascension to heaven. Verse 56:35 poses particular problems: the verb used there in connection with the creation of the virgins, “*ansha’a*” (أَنشَأَ), could mean either “created” (1) in the past tense or (2) an opposing reading in the future tense, “which would mean a re-creation or a new creation.” Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. ca. 150/767) indicates that they were created in paradise;⁴³ accordingly, paradise has already been created. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal advanced a similar understanding when he claimed that the *ḥūrīs* do not die when the trumpet is blown on the day of judgment, because they were created for perpetuity (*lil-baqā*).⁴⁴ Those who understood the verb as “re-creation” – i.e., in a future time – tended to understand that the *ḥūrīs* are actually earthly women. Al-Kulaynī attributes a saying to Imām Jaʿfar al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) affirming that the Shiʿa are the [true] believers, their women are good-natured and pure (*ṭayyibāt*), each one of them is a wide-eyed paradise virgin (*ḥawrāʾ* ‘*aynā*’) and each male is righteous (*ṣiddīq*).⁴⁵ Some traditions attributed to the Prophet confirm that earthly women – even if old, ugly, and

40 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* i, 137; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, ed. ‘Ināyat and Zahwa 2035; Ibn Kathīr, *Šifāt al-janna* 102; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 342–5; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 139–40.

41 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* iii, 314, 443; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* 349.

42 Sunni as well as Shiʿi creeds establish that heaven and hell were already created at the beginning of time: Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Aqida* 62, 77; Ghulām Khalīl, *Kitāb Sharḥ al-Sunna*, no. 8, 32, 56; al-Ṭaḥāwī, *al-Aqida* 51; al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbīh* 130–4; al-Isfarāyīnī, *al-Tabṣīr* 109; al-Mutawallī, *al-Mughnī* 58–9; al-Šadūq, *al-Iʿtiqādāt* 85; al-Šadūq, *al-Tawḥīd* 114–5; al-Ṭūsī, *Ikhtiyār* 491; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 119, 133, 146, 205; xviii, 293. This is also the opinion of Mullā Šadrā al-Shirāzī (d. 1046/1636), *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya* ix, 223. Contrary to this opinion, the Muʿtazila assert that heaven and hell will be created first on the day of judgment, cf. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 205; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 538; iii, 34, 53, 82, 473; iv, 13, 555–6.

43 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* iii, 309, 310; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 352.

44 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 352.

45 Al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl min al-kāfi* viii, 300.

bleary-eyed – will be recreated and transfigured into this new form of the paradise virgins.⁴⁶ The Prophet is supposed to have soothed an old, grey-haired woman by promising her that she will be transformed into a paradise virgin.⁴⁷ This understanding offered in an indirect way a solution to the problem that arose as to whether only men would enjoy sensual pleasures in heaven. The old women who enter paradise are transformed back into virgins and the men into beardless, smooth-faced youths.⁴⁸ To what extent such an explanation found understanding among women is very difficult to detect.

On the other hand, some exegetes interpreted the above mentioned tradition attributed to the Prophet to mean that the transfiguration of the earthly woman into a paradise virgin was her re-creation, a way for her to rejoin her earthly husband, who would, in any case, receive two *ḥūrīs* as a reward; in some traditions their number goes up to seventy-two.⁴⁹ These exegetes argued that the verb “re-create” does not necessarily mean recreating the woman in her earthly bodily form, and that moreover, God is capable of recreating a woman out of saffron, pearls, and light. Some argued that the *ḥūrīs* were in fact already

46 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 351, 357–9, comments on this disagreement; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* xxvii, 107 referring to traditions from: 1. Yazīd b. Abān al-Raqāshī from Anas b. Mālik, 2. from Qatāda 3. al-Ḥasan from Umm Salama 4. Saʿīd b. Jubayr from Ibn ʿAbbās (commenting on Q 56:35–7); al-Ṭūsī, *Tafsīr* ix, 485 referring to a tradition from al-Balkhī quoting Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (commenting on Q 44:54); al-Bayhaqī, *al-Baʿth wa-l-nushūr* 199–200; al-Ṭabrisī, *Tafsīr* i, 132 (commenting on Q 2:25) and quoting al-Shaʿbī and al-Kalbī (commenting on Q 44:54); al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* xxix, 166–7; al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār* 585; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr* viii, 141–2; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifāt al-janna* 103–5; al-Majlisī, *Bihār* viii, 110, 213; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* xxvii, 122–3; al-Ḥamdān, *Bushrā l-muḥibbīn* 45–6, 54; Smith and Haddad (Women in the afterlife 41) argue that “the verse clearly refers to earthly wives, as the *ḥūr* do not sin.”

47 Al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, no. 3296; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Baʿth wa-l-nushūr* 200.

48 Ritter, *Ocean* 193; see also al-Majlisī, *Bihār* xvi, 295; ii, 193.

49 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawāḥḥum* 39–42 speaks of a large number of *ḥūrīs*; on the number of the *ḥūrīs* see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's comment, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 369 and al-Ḥamdān (a modern Saʿūdī author), *Bushrā l-muḥibbīn* 72. In Anonymous, *Kitāb al-Azama* 151 and Ibn al-Naḥḥās, *Mashārīʿ al-ashwāq* ii, 769 the number is 70. For traditions that mention the number of the *ḥūrīs* as 72, see ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf* iii, 883; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws* 71; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iii, 76; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Baʿth wa-l-nushūr* 205; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 364–7; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifāt al-janna* 106–7; Ibn al-Naḥḥās, *Mashārīʿ al-ashwāq* ii, 787; Smith and Haddad, Women in the afterlife 46. For traditions that exaggerate the number of the *ḥūrīs*, al-Majlisī, *Bihār* viii, 121, 198; al-Ḥanafī, *Ḥādī l-anām* 82.

created from light and saffron.⁵⁰ Other exegetes maintained that one wins – so to speak – a place in heaven through one’s good and pious works during this life.⁵¹ The rewards are accordingly understood in terms of scale: good deeds ascend directly to heaven – among other celestial things – they appear in the form of paradise virgins who are there joyously waiting for the arrival of their pious spouses.⁵² Accordingly, one creates – or “buys” (in line with a mercantile-juristic worldview) – one’s own dwelling in heaven; hence the *ḥūrīs* were not created but one creates them, as it were, with one’s own good works. One can find many examples in the sources to that effect: the Baghdadi ascetic, Abū Yaḥyā l-Nāqid (d. 285/898), “bought from God a *ḥawrāʾ* for [the price of] four thousand complete readings of the Quran; upon finishing the last reading he heard a *ḥawrāʾ* addressing him, saying: ‘I am the one you have bought.’”⁵³ The association of good works (prayer, fasting, and charity) with the idea of buying or acquiring *ḥūrīs* in the hereafter is widely current in prophetic paraenetic and admonitory traditions.⁵⁴

To what extent can this approach be regarded as “self-righteousness”? It is not the intention nor is it within the scope of this paper to address the intricate question of the relation between faith and good works.⁵⁵ It suffices to remark here that in the absence of the doctrine of original sin in Islam, the notion of God’s grace (*lutf* or *niʿma*) takes on a totally different meaning from similar terms in Christianity. Man is created for the single purpose of worshipping God and being thankful to Him.⁵⁶ No good work can be achieved without God’s guidance (*hudā*).⁵⁷ By internalizing the goodness of the act and through

50 Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Baʿth wa-l-nushūr* 201; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat al-janna* 102; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 366, 370–7; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* viii, 121–2; al-Majlisī mentions two traditions from Jaʿfar al-Šādiq in which the *ḥūrīs* grow (*nābitāt*) at a river side in paradise and whenever one is pulled out another springs up instantly to take its place, *Biḥār* viii, 121, 162.

51 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* xxvii, 102; and see Anonymous, *Kitāb al-ʿAẓama* 151; al-Mufīd, *al-Ikhtisāṣ* 332; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* i, 382; al-Ḥanafī, *Ḥādī l-anām* 81–8; al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawāḥḥum* 44.

52 Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya* x, 32.

53 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* ii, 414.

54 See, e.g., Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh* li, 225; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* i, 660–2; Ibn Qudāma, *Kitāb al-Tawwābīn* 143; al-Dhahabī, *Mizān* i, 15; and iii, 565; Bahāʾ-i Walad in a Friday sermon in Balkh, Meier, *Bahāʾ-i Walad* 247.

55 On this theme see Izutsu, *The concept of belief* 159–203; Izutsu, *Ethico-religious concepts* 108–11. For a study of moral thought in the field of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, see Reinhart, *Before revelation*.

56 Izutsu, *Ethico-religious concepts* 183–249; Chittick, *Worship*.

57 Chittick, *Worship* 224–5.

pure faith and sound intention (that needs to be rightly directed and firmly maintained by continual, inward striving, and self-examination) the believer finds his own moral dignity.⁵⁸ Moreover, the acceptance of good works and the reward of paradise can only be achieved through God's grace (*lutf* and *minna*).

In his celebrated *Asrār-nāme* (Book of secrets) the mystic 'Aṭṭār (d. 627/1229) argues that

Paradise and hell are closer to you than the strap of your shoe. The Prophet beheld heaven and hell in a portion of the wall, ate grapes of paradise while praying, and certainly always beheld the Ḥūrīs. Since his eye could see the angel Gabriel, for him paradise was certainly already present on earth.⁵⁹

"You only find here what you've sent," so some *ḥūrīs*, who appeared in visions, have told a number of these pious men and women.⁶⁰ It is significant to note that the theme of paradise virgins had a vital impact on the worldview and the daily practices of some Muslim ascetics in the second/ninth and third/tenth centuries that had renounced active life. In fact, the level of their self-restraint led them to experience day and night visions in which they truly lived and conversed with the *ḥūrīs*.⁶¹

In this regard 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd (d. 177/793?)⁶² influenced his students in Basra. Indeed, he was well known for his curious and colorful visions of

58 For an overview on Islamic ethics, see Stelzer, Ethics.

59 Ritter, *Ocean* 194–5.

60 Ibid., 191 citing 'Aṭṭār's *Muṣibat-nahme*; cf. Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya* ix, 272; vi, 169–170; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ* xxxvii, 226–7.

61 Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt* 289, 438. The following ascetics and Sufis had visions of the *ḥūrīs*: 'Abd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd: Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya* vi, 169, 173; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* iii, 323–4; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ* xxxvii, 226–7, 232–3; al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ* 51, 56. Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī: Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya* ix, 272, 283; x, 14; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla* 62; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ* xxxiv, 136–7, 148; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* iv, 224–5; al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ* 378; al-Ḥanafī, *Ḥadī l-anām* 85; al-Ḥamdān, *Bushrā l-muḥibbīn* 79–80. Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī: al-Qushayrī, *Risāla* 413; Ibn Abī l-Ḥawārī: Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya* x, 14, 32, 33; al-Munāwī, *al-Kawākib al-durrīyya* i/ii, 536. Muṭaḥhar al-Sa'dī: al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ* 52. Numayr al-Majnūn: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* iii, 187. Rābi'a al-Shāmiyya: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* iv, 303; al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ* 191. Sariyy al-Saqāṭī: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* ii, 374; al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ* 51, 56. 'Utba al-Ghulām: al-Qushayrī, *Risāla* 565. Anonymous ascetics: al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb* iii, 107; al-Qushayrī, *Risāla* 565; al-Yāfi'ī, *Rawḍ* 52–53, 55.

62 Van Ess argues for an earlier date, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 96–100; and see his biography in Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'riḫ* cv, 52–62; Ibn al-Jawzī *Ṣifat al-ṣafwa* iii, 321–5; Massignon, *Essai* 191–7; Pellat, *Milieu Basrien* 99–105.

the *ḥūrīs*.⁶³ His students also experienced visions while traveling in the desert, but were warned to pay heed to the feet of these women, for if their feet were animal-like with hoofs it was likely that they were *jinn* rather than the true *ḥūrīs*.⁶⁴ ‘Abd al-Wāḥid’s nephew, Bakr, went as far as to preach that both the *ḥūrīs* and God, in His grace, could be seen in dreams.⁶⁵ Later “orthodox” theologians (the *ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā’a*) scornfully invalidated such beliefs and they derisively labeled those who believed that glimpses of heaven and of the *ḥūrīs* can be experienced on earth as “the spiritualists” (*al-rūḥāniyyūn*).⁶⁶

Interestingly enough, ‘Abd al-Wāḥid’s own wife, the famous Rābi’a, the mystic from Basra, preached a love relationship with God. She denounced the whole idea of one’s ability to see the *ḥūrīs* in visions.⁶⁷ Moreover, she commented on the Quranic verse 36:55 (“Preoccupied with joy, they and their spouses, reclining on cushions under the shade”), saying, “How unfortunate and wretched are the inhabitants of paradise, for they are preoccupied with their spouses.”⁶⁸ Her comment is intriguing. On the one hand, it might reflect her disparagement toward a kind of unworthy preoccupation that overtakes life in heaven. On the other hand, it might allude to the hierarchy of paradise, indicating that the inhabitants of *firdaws*, i.e., the uppermost level of paradise, will prefer to be preoccupied by the vision of God, *visio beatifica*. Accordingly, Rābi’a seems to have adopted a minimalist paradigm about the nature of a theocentric paradise.

In fact many early pious ascetics denounced and rejected the delights of paradise as a distraction from God, who will reveal Himself in the hereafter in His beauty and godliness to those who love Him. For lovers of God the hope of paradise and fear of the punishment of hell are not suitable reasons for doing good deeds.⁶⁹ Abū Muḥammad al-Kharrāz used to say

[H]e whose determination in the vision of the hereafter is concentrated on the *ḥūrīs* and the [heavenly] palaces and his preoccupation revolves around the comfort of heaven and its ornament, is different from

63 Jarrar, The martyrdom of passionate lovers 331–2.

64 Al-Sarrāj, *al-Luma’* 545; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 98.

65 Meier, *Bahā’-i Walad* 348; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* ii, 110.

66 Al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbīh* 92 (They claimed that their spirits gaze at the kingdom of heaven and that with their spirits they survey paradise and have intercourse with the *ḥūrīs*...).

67 Whereas her namesake, Rābi’a al-Shāmiyya the wife of Aḥmad b. Abī l-Ḥawārī (d. 230/845), used to have glimpses of them (*rubbamā ra’aytu al-ḥūr al-‘īn yastatirna minnī*), Ibn al-Jawzī, *Ṣifat al-ṣāfiya* iv, 303.

68 Badawī, *Shahīdat al-‘ishq al-ilāhī* 84.

69 Ritter, *Ocean* 539–40.

someone who is preoccupied by the company of God and the *beatific vision* of His magnanimous face.⁷⁰

Sufi music and songs (*samāʿ*) reminded some Sufis of the singing of the *ḥūrīs*⁷¹ in paradise.⁷² Ascetics from Basra seem to have played a crucial role in understanding the blurring of the boundaries between the earthly world and *ḥūrīs* of the hereafter. As I argue above, the ascetics in particular committed their lives to the idea that the paradise virgins were an indispensable reward for their pious lives and lifestyles that caused them much physical and bodily suffering.⁷³

This fascination of the ascetics and early mystics with the *ḥūrīs* could be attested in several sources: Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī (d. 235/850), a student of the above-mentioned ʿAbd al-Wāḥid b. Zayd, reports that he remained for years seeing the *ḥūrīs* and dreaming of them;⁷⁴ Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 261/874) is said to have dreamt of them and remained muddled for days thereafter.⁷⁵ Al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) was accused by rival literalist Ḥanbalīs of going to weddings in order to leer voyeuristically at the women there, so that he might have a fantasy image of the *ḥūrīs*.⁷⁶

Al-Muḥāsibī, a prolific writer and pious ascetic, wrote a small book of a paranetic nature entitled *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* (Imaginary representations) on life after death, torture in hell, and the sensual and delightful existence in paradise. Al-Muḥāsibī describes heaven as an anthropocentric habitat, where the pious meet with their heavenly wives and servants. It is essentially a matter of transformation in a new body. The people of paradise enter its abodes with their earthly bodies that were resurrected from the tomb. They wash their bodies in a heavenly well to purify them from the dust of the tomb and the scorching of hellfire which afflicted them while passing over the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*); accordingly, they become fresh, splendid, and luminous.⁷⁷ Upon entering paradise, whose soil is made out of saffron and musk poured over a loam of silver producing saffron meadows and beautiful trees, they are allowed to look at God's

70 Al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-ṣūfiyya* 289; similar views were articulated by other Sufis and by Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, see Gramlich, *Muḥammad al-Ġazzālīs Lehre* 79–80, 475.

71 For the singing of the *ḥūrīs*, see Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Wasf al-firdaws* 64–8; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* ii, 2–11; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣīfat al-janna* 112–3; al-Ḥamdān, *Bushrā l-muḥibbīn* 57–60; al-Ḥanafī, *Ḥādī l-anām* 96–102.

72 Al-Sarrāj, *al-Lumaʿ* 345; al-Mihānī, *Asrār al-tawḥīd* 216.

73 Al-Ḥamdān, *Bushrā l-muḥibbīn* 79–80.

74 Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla* 62; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilya* vi, 157; ix, 270.

75 Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla* 413; but see Ritter, *Ocean* 540.

76 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 199.

77 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawahhum* 35–6.

veils and are promised a beatific vision. At this point one's "spouses, children, servants, youthful boy-waiters, and butlers" (*nūdiya fī azwājik, wa-wuldānik, wa-khuddāmik, wa-ghilmānik, wa-qahārimatik*) are called to welcome him and they rejoice at his arrival the same way the earthly family of a long-absent man would celebrate his homecoming.⁷⁸ This is not a family reunion in which one is reunited with parents. Apparently, the spouses, children and entourage are heavenly rewards that are unrelated to a previous earthly family – if one had had such a family. The speech, moreover, is addressed to the single male individual who is seen as severed from his earthly family. This becomes clear when the spouses are associated with the *hūrīs* in connection with Quran 55:72 (Dark-eyed, confined to pavilions).⁷⁹ The only companions from earth are the "friends in God," they will be in pairs dressed with comparable clothes of similar colors and even their saddles will have the same colors.⁸⁰ In this luminous paradise familiarity with earthly things is perpetuated and the pleasures engage all the senses; the *hūrīs* are especially sensually portrayed.⁸¹ Ages would pass by (*wa-qad maḍat al-aḥqāb min al-duḥūr . . . al-azmina al-ṭawīla*)⁸² during which time the paradise "individuals" satisfy their desires before they are called together and are adorned with jeweled crowns and are driven on their highbred, paradise camels to the lote tree of the boundary (*tūbā* or *sidrat al-muntahā*). There, the more than a thousand thousand and thousands of thousands (*alf alf, alf alf*)⁸³ paradise inhabitants will make the first stop, where they will be invited to the banquet of God (*mā'idat al-Raḥmān*). After the banquet, the veils will be lifted and "God will appear to them in His majesty; they will look at Him unable to envisage Him – and they would never be able to do so because He is the pre-eternal (*al-Qadīm*) and no one of his creatures resembles Him."⁸⁴ God will welcome and bless them and will send them back to continue their heavenly, gratifying existence after they have gained more radiance and luminosity.⁸⁵

Al-Muḥāsibī's paradise is mainly anthropocentric although the *visio dei* is perceived as the core around which it rotates: the inhabitants of paradise know that they are God's neighbors; they are allowed to look at the veils of light

78 Ibid., 39.

79 Ibid., 40–1.

80 Ibid., 56.

81 Ibid., 44–7, 50–1.

82 Ibid., 48 and 51.

83 Ibid., 55.

84 Ibid., 59; cf. van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt* 214–5.

85 Al-Muḥāsibī, *al-Tawāhhum* 59–60.

when they first enter, and are, moreover, promised the *beatific vision* which is eventually accomplished. The book is unique in its profound and exceptional prose style. It makes paradise tangible and invites the reader to a mental, imaginary journey through the realms of hell and heaven, in this it touches on the psychology of the human being.

Al-Muḥāsibī was not the first to single out the theme of paradise in book form. A decade before him, Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 238/853) of al-Andalus treated the same subject in his book *Kitāb al-Firdaws*.⁸⁶ The book is not a narrative like that of al-Muḥāsibī, but rather a classification of *ḥadīths* according to chapters. While al-Muḥāsibī's paradise does not reveal any hierarchy, Ibn Ḥabīb's has different levels.⁸⁷ Its inhabitants even enjoy the *beatific vision* – according to one tradition – while seated in a hierarchical order on pulpits made out of pearls.⁸⁸ *Kitāb al-Firdaws* offers fanciful descriptions of the *ḥūrīs* and the sensual pleasures of an anthropocentric paradise, which proposes the possibility of family building.⁸⁹ However, al-Muḥāsibī's book remains unparalleled in its narrative form and stylistics.

During the third/ninth century, the “official” *ḥadīth*-compendia reserved a chapter on the descriptions of hell and heaven. Among literalist orthodox Sunni authors in particular this genre, which expounded on the various aspects and details of paradise, enjoyed great circulation. The aim of these books was mainly to accentuate the belief in heaven and hell as material and tangible consequences of life. This genre became very popular and many books and pamphlets have been composed up to the present day.⁹⁰

It is noteworthy that later “orthodox” literalists worked extensively on this theme. They drew particular pleasure and interest from painting the *ḥūrīs* and heaven in words in exaggerated ways. Interesting in this regard is the not uncommon distortion of the things and beings of paradise into oversized luminosity. Such depictions render the *ḥūrīs* as huge, luminous, celestial beings that are so fine and transparent that the eye can see through them. One might explain the expressive style of these mainly oratory works of pious storytellers as a rhetorical allegory built around a sensuously embellished spatiality and luminosity. Thus the subjects lose their actual substance in order to hint at a reality that transcends worldly existence and is greater than it. It creates a

86 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws* 68–84.

87 Ibid., 50–5.

88 Ibid., 83.

89 Ibid., 70.

90 Cf. also Waleed Ahmed's contribution to the present publication.

marvelous, enchanted, and extraordinary space that can be compared to some of the spaces of the *Arabian Nights*, and thus has an entertainment value.

With al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) we are confronted with a double understanding of the pleasures of paradise and accordingly, with the reality of the *ḥūrīs*. This relates to his “perplexing habit of speaking differently to different audiences,” as Ibn Rushd puts it.⁹¹ Indeed, al-Ghazālī articulated different views in different books, according to the audience he is targeting. He thus conveys rather a double truth about the eschatological nature of existence in the hereafter; this is brought about through his very special understanding of the central “ontological” role of the heart:⁹² on the one hand, it is a corporeal reality which alludes to a literal understanding of the Quranic narrative and, on the other hand, a psychological reality which is based on an esoteric understanding that is in line with Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical position.⁹³

Ritter argues that according to al-Ghazālī,

[T]here is a form of gradation based on what is desired in place of the thing given up. On the lowest level are those who are filled with fear about the hereafter. They desire something negative, namely not to be punished in the grave and in hell-fire. The second level is that of those who desire paradise with its pleasures, its *Ḥūrīs* and palaces. The third level is that of those who have their heart oriented only to God, who desire to enjoy gazing at His Face in tranquility.⁹⁴

It is this esoteric and allegorical trend that was taken over and elaborated by gnostic and Neoplatonic mystics. Bahā’-ī Walad (d. 628/1230), the father of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī understands the geography of paradise and the *ḥūrīs* as an inner manifestation of an enchanting space and of beautiful forms. Fritz Meier explains that “internal manifestations and appearances of enchanting landscapes and beautiful forms are closely connected with the mystical feeling of pleasure (*Lustgefühl*).”⁹⁵ This does not characteristically imply that no sorrows and pain occupy the inner world of the mystic. According to Bahā’-ī Walad, the incomprehension and confusion that befall the human spirit in connection with the descriptions of the *ḥūrīs* and the gardens of paradise does not mean that they do not exist; he rather understands them as different states

91 Gianotti, *al-Ghazālī’s unspeakable doctrine* 19.

92 Cf. *ibid.*, mainly 15–8, 168–76.

93 Cf. Sayyid Bay, *Nazariyyat al-naḥs* 298–307.

94 Ritter, *Ocean* 202. This classification reminds us of Rābī’a’s opinion referred to above.

95 Meier, *Bahā’-i Walad* 244.

(*aḥwāl*) and meanings (*maʿānī*) of the beatific vision.⁹⁶ Answering a Šūfī *pīr* who reproached him, claiming that through his description of paradise and the *ḥūrīs* he is directing the attention of the audience away from God, Bahāʾī Walad argued that these are only different aspects of mystical experiences of God.⁹⁷

The mystic Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), from al-Andalus, interprets the *ḥūrīs* as pure, marvelous celestial bodies, without any kind of evil, flawless.⁹⁸ Again, the Persian gnostic Ḥaydar al-Āmulī (d. after 787/1385) adopts a minimal theocentric paradigm; for him the real paradise is God-centered and consists only of an everlasting enjoyment by way of a contemplative spiritual beatific vision (*mushāhada*).⁹⁹

In the seventeenth century, Mullā Ṣadrā al-Shirāzī (d. 1046/1636) the Neoplatonic philosopher of being and existence, argued that existence in the afterlife is different from our worldly being (*nashʾat al-ākhirā ghayr nashʾat al-dunyā*); it is a perfect kind of existence in which human souls obtain perceptive bodies corresponding to different levels of existence.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, the *ḥūrīs* and other pleasures of paradise are an illusory felicity (*saʿāda ghayr ḥaqīqīyya*) meant as a reward for the good but imperfect souls that have not achieved a longing for the secondary intelligibles; i.e., those souls which have not emerged from potentiality to actuality.¹⁰¹ Ṣadrā perceives this “physical paradise” (*al-janna al-jismānīyya*) as tantamount to the perceptible images (*ṣuwar idrākīyya*) within the imaginative soul, alluding to what this soul hankers after. Therefore these images do not have any material or separate existence outside this imaginative soul.¹⁰²

Studying the literary depictions of the *ḥūrīs* we can discern different rhetorical strategies: First, we find a literal, philological approach represented by the Quran exegetes.¹⁰³ Second are the strategies employed by popular orators who

96 Ibid., 245 and 254.

97 Ibid., 246–8.

98 Ibn ʿArabī, *Tafsīr* i, 20; ii, 592.

99 “Man lam yakun musliman wa-lā muʾminan bi-l-tawḥīd, lam yadkhul al-janna al-ḥaqīqīyya allatī hiya al-mushāhada, wa-yakūn min ahl al-nār al-ḥaqīqīyya allatī hiya al-ḥirmān wa-l-ḥijāb ʿan al-maḥbūb.” Al-Āmulī, *Jāmiʿ al-asrār* 69, 111–2 for *mushāhada*.

100 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿālīya* ix, 165–6; 282–8, 393; and see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Wisdom of the throne* 164–6, 241–5.

101 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿālīya* ix, 201.

102 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿālīya* ix, 480; and see: Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 100–7; Morris, *The Wisdom of the throne* 241–5.

103 Heath in his brilliant study on aspects of the hermeneutic methods of al-Ṭabarī, Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn Sīnā addresses the question of “how does one explicate truths which are by nature ineffable?”, *Creative hermeneutics* 205.

turn to “naïve allegory” which induces in the listener/reader a trance or dream state, creating what Victor Nell calls a “ludic” or perhaps escapist state of reception.¹⁰⁴ Third, we find a mythopoetic strategy of total metaphor, as employed by the mystics (Ibn ‘Arabī in particular), as Heath illustrates.¹⁰⁵

With the gloomy mood of pessimism that has today taken hold of many factions in Muslim and Arab societies, the politics of paradise has gained renewed élan among youth who are the victims of belligerent military neo-colonial intervention and of atrocious regimes that combine totalitarian traits with aggressive neo-liberal economic policies. These conditions mark an increase in religious fervor, in fundamentalist exegesis, and in a widespread interest in eschatological preoccupations¹⁰⁶ and, accordingly, have led to a boom in the publishing of books and pamphlets about paradise and the *ḥūrīs*. Yet, it is interesting to observe a different prevailing trend among modern, liberal writers and theologians who tend toward a more skeptical approach, namely, a God-centered heaven.¹⁰⁷

The utopian visions of paradise and its virgins and of the millennium have an obstinate hold on the consciousness of many youth, generating an existential urge to cross over from this *liminal* location to the promised, luminous and extravagant “meta-reality” of the hereafter.

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104 Nell, *Lost in a book* 72–4.

105 Heath, *Creative hermeneutics* 209.

106 See for example al-Barri, *al-Dunyā ajmal min al-janna* 52–3.

107 I am thinking here of the comments on the paradise virgins by Maḥmūd Shaltūt in Egypt, Muḥammad Shaḥrūr and Ibrāhīm Maḥmūd in Syria, and ‘Abd al-Karīm Soroush in Iran.

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Beauty in the Garden: Aesthetics and the *Wildān*, *Ghilmān*, and *Ḥūr*

Nerina Rustomji

It is somewhat obvious that *al-janna* (literally, the garden) is meant to be beautiful, but beauty in *al-janna* is in a category of its own. The aesthetic promise of the cosmological garden is based on notions of perfection and completion: the landscape of the garden is transformative so believers enjoy life without the taint of earthly limitations, problems, and pollutions. As a result, beauty understood through earthly experience, substance, or time is categorically different from the possibility of beauty in the afterworld. The only way to approximate perfection in the earthly world is through image and metaphor. While there are reflections of the garden in mosaic, illustrated manuscripts, and landscape architecture, the richest repository of the imagery of the garden can be found in textual passages in the Quran, *ḥadīths* (traditions of the Prophet Muḥammad), and eschatological manuals. Beauty is conveyed in these texts through passages that simultaneously dazzle and overwhelm. With the constant invocation of bricks of gold and silver, paths of saffron, scents of musk, untouched pearls, green silk, inner linings of brocade, companions pure as pearl, and silk carpets, contemplating the garden requires an appreciation that depends on a certain kind of aesthetic conditioning. However, that aesthetic conditioning, developed through imagining an increasingly opulent, sumptuary, and sensual realm, can lead to sensory overload. After all, how much cosmic beauty can a reader truly comprehend?

The Quran introduces the wonder of the landscape of the garden through “swift glimpses” of the future life.¹ One contemplates one’s future life through a narrative of place, object, and feeling. Quranic verses form the core of *ḥadīths* about the garden, but even in *ḥadīths* and then in later eschatological texts, descriptions of the garden continue to develop. This development takes two forms. Conceptually, the garden is based on the idea of accentuation, so each wondrous spectacle is both stunning and everlasting.² Historically, the descriptions become more involved over time. For example, a greater number and

¹ Reinhart, Here and the hereafter 16.

² Al-Azmeh, Rhetoric for the senses 220.

variety of precious goods and jewels appeared over the centuries, so where the Quran refers to *yāqūt* or “gems,” twelfth-century texts specify those gems as red ruby, green chrysolite, and red and yellow coral.³ While the Quran locates luxury in terms of textiles, later texts focus on precious metals and scents so that by the twelfth century, al-Qāḍī’s *Daqā’iq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* lists seven different levels of heaven, each with its corresponding jewel and metal. The fact that the garden becomes filled with things over time demonstrates that even afterworlds have histories whose material culture forms a distinct chronology.

When considering the aesthetics of the garden, it is useful to focus on its grandeur and developing material culture. However, when we step away from both the amplification and the inventory, we are faced with a simple, beguiling question: Where does the beauty of the garden reside? Is it in the precious metals and gems? The various types of silk and green garments? The pure retinue who serve the believer in their untouched state? In nearness to the throne of God? Islamic articulations of paradise are not denuded of worldly landscapes and relationships and so the garden is a place that can appear mundane. For that reason, descriptions of objects are the main way that beauty is understood. But does the beauty of the garden reside in *objects*? The problem with understanding the nature of beauty in the garden through objects is that different objects become more prominent over time, and this raises a difficult question: Do the developing descriptions of the garden result in the need to tailor one’s afterworld to changing notions of beauty or in the need to dazzle the next generation tired of previous generations’ otherworldly expectations? Because of the reliance on metaphor and image, the garden may be described through a landscape of objects, but the objects themselves do not help us understand the nature of paradisaal beauty.

In previous work, I have argued that while the garden is understood through descriptive formulas, the power of the invocation of the garden is a result of the linking of ethical and aesthetic perfection.⁴ The intertwining of ethical expectation on earth and aesthetic expectation in the garden produced two vital structures. It created an ethical framework for earthly living that drew upon a calculus of which action would yield entry into the garden. It also produced a paradise that was filled with rewards that had both material articulation and spiritual significance. Things of the garden – silks, brocades, gold,

3 Al-Samarqandī, *Kitāb Ḥaqā’iq D4*; al-Qāḍī, *Daqā’iq al-akhbār* 76.

4 Rustomji, *Garden and the fire* 40–62.

silver, saffron, musk – were more than just materials. Instead, their material character was transformed into objects of sanctity to be enjoyed by believers only after leading righteous lives on earth.

In order to reflect further on the nature of paradisal aesthetics, in this paper I focus on two rewards that both exemplify and challenge the idea of beauty: female companions and male youths. Female companions called *ḥūr* (sing. *ḥawrā'*) are mentioned explicitly four times in the Quran, and in three instances they are qualified with the adjective *ʿīn*. Quranic commentators interpret these *ḥūr ʿīn* as fair women (*ḥūr* derives from the root *ḥ-w-r* which connotes “whiteness”) with beautiful wide eyes (*ʿīn*). Like the *ḥūr*, male youths referred to as *wildān mukhalladūn* (eternal youth) and *ghilmān* (slave boys) are also conceptually complex rewards for the believer because they function both as beings that populate and objects that fill the garden. They appear in Quranic verses, and they are a constant presence in *ḥadīth* and later eschatological manuals. Like objects, their bodily substance is part of the landscape of the garden. Yet, unlike objects, they are animate, and they have social functions. The *ḥūr* provide companionship, and the *wildān mukhalladūn* and *ghilmān* act as a servant corps who pour drinks, offer food, and tend to the running of the believers' households. Even though they both form a servant class, the *ḥūr*, *wildān mukhalladūn*, and *ghilmān* differ in their agency in *ḥadīths* and eschatological manuals. The *wildān mukhalladūn* and *ghilmān* are represented more conventionally as objects. They are the silent servants who keep the garden running. By contrast, the *ḥūr* become active, vocal figures in the landscape of the garden. While both types of servants demonstrate what it means to be ideally beautiful, it is the *ḥūr* who behave in the manner of the most perfected of believers and are constituted as one of the loveliest of rewards. When reading the eschatological manuals, one may be aware of the *wildān* and *ghilmān*, but is dazzled by the *ḥūr*.

The servants and companions exemplify beauty both physically and spiritually. Physically, they are composed of the substance of paradise; spiritually, they exemplify the purity of paradise. Yet, by studying the descriptions and narrative significance of the youth and companions, we can also learn about the ways that they challenge the concept of beauty. Part of the paradox of servants as paradisal rewards is that they labor in a realm that does not allow for labor. In the case of the *wildān* and *ghilmān*, the labor is muted, since they are silenced, but in the case of the *ḥūr*, the labor is transformed by the active agency of the *ḥawrā'* who waits for and calls out to the believer. Beauty in the garden resides in the servants, then, whose functions show us both the garden's promise and limitation.

1 Servants in Paradise

The garden requires servants, but it requires them to be nearly invisible. As a realm that is the reward for a life of labor, the garden is meant to be a space where no inhabitant toils. Labor in this sense does not just encompass the strenuous tasks of daily life, but also any sort of work that creates the semblance of daily life. A labor-free life means that the inhabitants' sole occupation is enjoying eschatological rewards in the form of delightful landscapes, food and drink, and companionship across the generations and through time. Life is simply resplendent in the garden, and that resplendence is not tainted by any need to exert oneself. When the inhabitant desires a dish of flesh or fowl (Q 52:22, 56:21), it appears. When the inhabitant desires to drink the drink that does not intoxicate (Q 37:47, 52:23), it is poured forth in a cup from a clear-flowing fountain (Q 37:45). This vision of paradise, where one satisfies any desire, is predicated upon a class of beings who fulfill the wishes of inhabitants immediately. The sole purpose of the servants and companions is to cater to the needs of the believers. It is not surprising, then, that in Arabic the word *ghilmān* (sing. *ghulam*) signifies male slaves and the references to *wildān* share and evoke attributes of the *ghilmān*.

While the servants of the garden appear in texts, they do not dominate the vision of paradise. Nonetheless, scholars have been interested in their presence and have suggested that the *wildān* and *ghilmān* and also the figure of the *hūr* may have an earthly reflection. In the pre-Islamic and Islamic poetic tradition, the young boy was the one who poured drinks. Often idealized in terms of beauty, the young males or cupbearers (*suqāh*) became standard tropes in pre-Islamic poetry. Meanwhile, singing slave girls or musicians (*qiyān*) provided entertainment and companionship.⁵

Some pre-Islamic and 'Abbasid poets made explicit linkages between the paradisaal youths and earthly boys (as we see below). However, commentators of the Quran and writers of eschatological manuals from the seventh to fourteenth century CE reflected upon the aesthetic and functional role of the servants and companions and focused more on classification. Some of the commentators noted the social stratification that the presence of the servants created in the realm of the garden, and they sought to understand the implicit hierarchy between those who serve and those who were being served. Servants, while animate beings, labor on behalf of the inhabitants and can be categorized alongside the other marvels of the garden. Servants are beings who are also things. Yet, they are things that can be animated by a sanctified, righ-

5 Stetkevych, *Intoxication and immortality* 223; Wendell, *Denizens* 41.

teous spirit. Like the silks, libations, and jewels, the servant as object is pure in character and form.

What kind of paradise has a laboring servant class? To be in the garden to serve is the ultimate goal for the *wildān mukhalladūn*, *ghilmān*, and *ḥūr*. There is no sense of exploitation in the garden. Nor is there consideration of the servants and the quality of their lives. These servants, then, are unlike the earthly servants and slaves who can create complications, dramas, and insurrections. Instead, they are purified in substance and in purpose: they are in the garden to serve. In this sense, the servants are beings, objects, and also mechanisms that allow for the inhabitants' pleasures.

2 *Wildān and Ghilmān*

In the garden, beauty not only adorns and surrounds believers, but believers are also served by a retinue of servants and companions that exude spiritual and physical beauty. The Quran explicitly mentions youths who serve the believers in three verses (Q 56:17, 76:19, 52:24). Two designations are used: *wildān mukhalladūn* and *ghilmān*. In the two verses that use the terms *wildān mukhalladūn*, the focus is on the youth and their everlasting quality: "Round them will serve youths of perpetual freshness" (Q 56:17) and "And round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness)" (Q 76:19). Yet, the pleasing nature of the youths is also demonstrated by an allusion to the *wildān mukhalladūn* as pearl-like in their presence: "If thou seest them, Thou wouldst think them Scattered Pearls (*lu'lu'an manthūran*)" (Q 76:19). The allusion to the youth as pearls extends into another verse that describes the *ghilmān* as "Youths (handsome) as Pearls well-guarded (*lu'lu' maknūn*)" (Q 52:24).

The reference to the youths as having pearl-like qualities signals both the spiritual value and social placement of the servants. On a spiritual level, the use of pearls in these passages, as throughout Quranic verses, is to indicate the purity and luminescent, shimmering beauty. The everlasting spiritual purity and the intimation of immortality share characteristics with the archetype of the young boys of Arabic poetry. In the realm of the *qaṣīda* or ode, the *wildān mukhalladūn/ghilmān* and the *sāqin* both symbolize "eternal youth."⁶ The difference between the otherworldly and earthly youth rests in their sexual significance. While the Quranic verses do not designate the youth for sexual purposes, the archetype of the *sāqin* has an explicit sexual connotation in

6 Stetkevych, *Intoxication and immortality* 223.

pre-Islamic and 'Abbasid poetry.⁷ The genre of early 'Abbasid wine poetry or *khamrīyya* celebrates the beauty of boys. In the following verses by the Arabic poet Abū Nuwās (d. 198 or 200/813 or 815), the beauty of the boy is expressed through the metaphor of the pearl:

A beautiful lad came carrying the wine
 With smooth hands and fingers dyed with henna,
 And with long hair of golden curls around his cheeks
 Whenever he approached he made a promise with his eyes
 And he addressed us with alluring eyelashes
 If you had seen them,
 You would have thought them more than human:
 As if they were instead concealed pearls.⁸

While this verse depends on the powerful metaphor of the concealed pearl, in the following verse, the connection to sexuality is made far more explicit.

I have a lad who is like the beautiful lads of Paradise
 And his eyes are big and beautiful
 His face is as the moon in its full perfection
 And you think he is mysteriously struck by a magician
 Because he is so tender and pretty
 We spent three nights together as if we were in Paradise
 Doing nothing but making love and pleasure.⁹

The verses compare the nights with the boy with the promise of paradise; yet, they also conflate the beauty of the youth with the *ḥūr* who are known for their big, beautiful eyes. In the satirical verses, then, the poet enjoys paradise on earth through the coupling with the beautiful boy who is described as having the attributes of the *ḥūr*. With a focus on beauty and sexual companionship, the separate categories of *wildān* and *ḥūr* become conflated.

While the mention of the pearl signals the purity and beauty of the youth, the Quran also offers contextual correspondences. Each of the three verses situates the youth within "Gardens of Bliss" (Q 56:12–9). As the believers recline and enjoy each other's company, the youth serve (Q 56:19, 52:23–5, 76:13–9) during the banquet-like setting. The youth then are not only instrumental in

⁷ Ibid., 224.

⁸ Wright, Masculine allusion 11.

⁹ Ibid.

serving the non-intoxicating drink (Q 56:18–9) or a drink from the fountain Salsabīl (Q 76:17), but they act as features of the purified landscape. While the verses pair the youth with the cups and vessels from which believers drink,¹⁰ their presence in the text provides a vision of paradise as opposed to a functional explanation of how life in paradise is administered. Instead, the role of the *wildān mukhalladūn* and *ghilmān* is to imbue the landscape with the sheer spectacle of shimmering beauty.

Quranic commentaries about the *wildān mukhalladūn* and *ghilmān* focus on the attributes of beauty and the classification of the boys. A brief sampling of commentators from the tenth to fifteenth centuries offers a useful lens into how theologians from the early tenth to sixteenth century understood the servants' significance.¹¹ The topic of greatest concern for the commentators is to emphasize that the supratemporal parameters of the garden extended to the servant youth. As a result, the servants were able to stand outside the aging process and would not die or grow old.¹² Furthermore, the commentators are taken with the different ways the youths are compared to pearls. What it means to be scattered or well-guarded like a pearl becomes a central question. "Scattered," for example, is beautiful because the youth are not just in one location. Instead, the youths are so numerous that they are strewn about.¹³ "Well-guarded" is also interpreted as being inside of the pearl with the explanation that the inner part is the most protected and beautiful.¹⁴ In this sense, the commentators focus on what makes the youth beautiful. Their consideration leads to an overwhelming sense that the youth are beautiful because the effervescent quality of youth, which is ephemeral on earth, is extended indefinitely and always accessible in the garden. The youth's inner beauty, then, is projected upon the landscape of the garden.

10 Behrens-Abouseif, Cups and vessels.

11 The commentaries include al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*, al-Qummī's (fourth/tenth century) *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, al-Zamakhsharī's (d. 538/1144) *al-Kashshāf 'an haqā'iq al-tanzīl wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-ta'wīl*, al-Ṭabarsī's (d. 548/1153) *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, al-Qurṭubī's (d. 671/1273) *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Ibn Kathīr's (774/1373) *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-karīm*, and al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *Tafsīr al-jalālayn*.

12 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 56:17, 76:19; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* 56:17, 76:19; al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* 56:17; al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma'* 56:17; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'* 56:17, 76:19.

13 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 76:19; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* 76:19; al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* 76:19; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'* 76:19.

14 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'*; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*; al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* 52:24; al-Ṭabarsī, *Majma'* 52:24.

Aside from glossing the everlasting nature of the youth's pearl-like qualities, some commentators discuss the status of the youth and assert that the *wildān* were the Muslim children who had died young¹⁵ or non-Muslims, designated by the term *kuffār* (unbelievers) or *mushrikūn* (polytheists).¹⁶ While the commentators create a religious stratification in the garden, they do not specify who constitutes the unbelievers or the polytheists. Are they the peoples of the book or the polytheists before the coming of Islam? No matter the answer, the linking of the youth with earthly Muslim or non-Muslim children illustrates that the youth undergo a cosmic transformation. The transformation of the youths into the spiritually pure and aesthetically stunning beings of paradise indicates how the youth both exemplify and challenge the notion of beauty. The youth exemplify beauty because of their pure, everlasting, and pearl-like quality. If one considers the few traditions that accord the *wildān* a non-Muslim origin, then the youth are situated as servants in paradise as both a punishment and a consolatory reward. The non-Muslim youths have not been placed in paradise as reward because their purpose is to labor; nonetheless, they assume a spiritually pure bodily form in resplendent paradise rather than existing in torturous hell. Their punishment, then, is eternal labor rather than reward; however, their consolation is that the realm of their labor perfects everyone, even servants. The religious status of the youth, then, indicates both the cosmic potential of paradise (everyone is beautified), but also the realities of earthly social and religious stratification.

3 *Ḥūr*

Like the *wildān* and *ghilmān*, the *ḥūr* represent an untouched purity in the Quran. One verse accords them the same pearl-like beauty: “*ḥūr ʾin* like pearls well-guarded” (Q 56:22–3). Another verse refers to the *ḥūr* as “restrained” (*maqṣurāt*) (Q 55:72). In the Quran, there are two verses that position the *ḥūr* as wives: “we shall join them with companions with big beautiful eyes” (*zawwajnāhum bi-ḥūr ʾin*) (Q 44:54, 52:20). There are yet other verses that do not specify the *ḥūr*, but refer to companions with similar phrases that convey purity and modesty: “restraining their glances” (Q 37:48, 38:52, 55:56), “like gems and small pearls whom no man or jinn before them has touched” (Q 55:56), “companions of equal age” (Q 78:33), “virginal” (Q 56:35–7), and “pure companions” (Q 2:25, 3:15, 4:57).

15 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ* 56:17.

16 Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* 56:17; al-Ṭabarsī, *Majmaʿ* 56:17; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ* 56:17.

The essential, yet mysterious attribute of the *ḥūr* is their eyes, and Quranic commentators devoted much of their attention to the actual meaning of the term *ḥūr*. Part of the explanation of the term rests with the concept of fairness (like an eggshell)¹⁷ or with the intense contrast between black and white like the eyes of a cow or gazelle.¹⁸ Given the tradition in *ḥadīths* that the *ḥūr* are so fair that one can see the marrow of their bones in the way one can see red liquid in a glass, the prominent idea that is conveyed by the commentaries is that the companions have white complexions contrasted by dark eyes.¹⁹

Aside from understanding the concept of the *ḥūr*, some commentators also reflected upon the status and station of the companions and questioned if they were like the women on earth. Part of the ambiguity of the answer depends on how companionship is configured. While commentators suggest that the males will be wed to the *ḥūr*, it is unclear if the *ḥūr* are rewards like the objects of paradise or if they are categorized as wifely companions. As a result, there is an ambiguous relationship between *ḥūr* and wives. This distinction is brought into high relief when al-Qurṭubī reports that there is disagreement about which is better – earthly women or the *ḥūr*.²⁰

While the commentators carefully consider these enigmatic rewards, in the Islamic eschatological tradition, the *ḥūr* are exquisitely aesthetic beings and an embodiment of perfection. They are literally made up of the things of the garden. A common tradition suggests that the *ḥūr* are composed of saffron, musk, amber, and camphor, and their hair is raw silk. From knee to toe, they are made of saffron, from knee to breast musk, breast to neck amber, and neck to head camphor.²¹ From one glimpse, one scent, one touch of the *ḥawrā'*, believers will experience all the wonders of the garden: gold, silver, light, saffron, musk, silk. It is for this reason that the *ḥawrā'* is such a singular figure in the garden.

Writers of eschatological manuals recorded the *ḥadīths* that specify the sense of smell, touch, and sound that surround the *ḥūr*, but also placed the *ḥūr* within the narrative drama of the garden. In the manuals, the *ḥūr* change from being reward to being the most visible females in the garden. For example, in the collection of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), male believers greet each other in a Friday market where *ḥūr* move through the landscape, amazing the men

17 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 44:54; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'* 44:54.

18 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi'* 52:20; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'* 44:54; al-Maḥallī and al-Suyūṭī, *Tafsīr al-jalālayn* 44:54.

19 Wendell, Denizens 41.

20 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi'* 44:54.

21 Al-Ghazālī, *Remembrance* 130.

through sight and smell.²² The wives of the believers, by contrast, remain at home to greet their husbands who have become more beautiful through the course of the day.²³ In Ibn Ḥabīb's (d. 238/853) *Kitāb Wasf al-firdaws*, the *ḥūr* receive and greet believers in their homes. Ibn Ḥabīb reaffirms that "Written on the chest of the wife of the believer of the people of the garden is You are my love, I am your love, my eyes are only for you and my soul leads to you."²⁴ In al-Muḥāsibī's (d. 243/857) *Kitāb al-Tawahhum*, it is the *ḥūr* who welcome the believer to his palace after he tours its grounds with its gardens of saffron and dunes of musk. As the *ḥawrā'* walks to the believer, even the saffron plants awake.²⁵ In al-Qāḍī's (d. ca. sixth/twelfth century) *Daqā'iq al-akḥbār*, wives do not appear in paradise and instead the *ḥawrā'* is the beloved of the believer. In the believer's palace, the *ḥawrā'* is surrounded by her own servant girls (*al-jāriya*) each of whose beauty is also dazzling.²⁶

In the eschatological manuals, the *ḥūr* are not just the prime females of the garden, but become a metonym for the garden. As a result, the figure of the *ḥūr* exemplifies the nature of beauty in paradise because the *ḥūr* are made up of the sensual landscape of the garden, but also provide a model of perfection of human, and particularly, female behavior. The challenge with the *ḥūr* is not in their function, but in how their function relates to the natural station of female believers who have been awarded a place in the garden. By asserting the sheer power of the image of the *ḥūr*, eschatological writers highlight not only the sumptuous quality of paradise, but also provide an ideal female figure that eclipsed other feminine models.

4 Conclusion

We return to the question posed at the beginning of our discussion – what is beauty in the garden? Beauty is the formulation of a world that reminds believers that their earthly lives must be lived in accordance with respect for the majesty of God and acknowledgment of earthly consequences. In one's earthly life, beauty is invoked through allusions to, discussions of, and reflections upon the garden. In the garden, beauty is made manifest through the geographical and social landscape that reminds believers that they are the blessed who deserve

22 Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi'* iv, tradition 2533.

23 Ibid., iv, tradition 2564.

24 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Wasf al-Firdaws* 223.

25 Al-Muḥāsibī, *Kitāb al-Tawahhum* 149.

26 Al-Qāḍī, *Daqā'iq al-akḥbār* 80.

true reward. Part of the landscape of reward are the *wildān*, *ghilmān*, and *hūr* who not only contribute to the pleasing nature of the landscape, but are physically endowed with spiritually pure materials, such as pearls, and sumptuous materials such as saffron, musk or amber in the case of the *hūr*.

The servants exemplify the nature of beauty through their cosmic composition and their function, which is meant to meet the needs of the believer. Yet, in both the case of the servant boys and the female companions, notions of beauty carry intimations of displaced earthly groups. In the case of the servant boys, the displacement involves not only being servile in a realm without labor, but also in the possibility of their non-Muslim status. In the case of the *hūr*, the displacement takes place because they provide a model of feminine beauty and companionship that stands apart from the companionship provided by earthly wives.

Beauty has its complications when applied to rewards that are also beings. Yet, while the sources reflect these disjunctions, they do not dwell on them because the nature of paradisaal beauty is transformative. The garden may be modeled on earthly landscapes and relations, but it also presents a purified superlative version of them. Just as the believer delights in a non-intoxicating drink which provides pleasure without the taint of drunkenness,²⁷ so the believer delights in servant boys and female companions whose ontological purpose is to cater to the believer's wants and desires which are purified from earthly taint. The significance of these transformations is in the way they force us to reconsider the correspondence between earthly models and otherworldly rewards. The *wildān* and *ghilmān* may share characteristics with the *sāqin* and the *hūr* with the singing girl or concubine, but that does not mean that the servant boys are sex objects or the *hūr* sex slaves.

Studying the servants and companions of the believers allows us to understand the principles of beauty in the garden in ways that are not possible when we discuss objects such as wine, silk, carpets, silver, and gold. By both exemplifying and challenging the idea of beauty, the believer's retinue demonstrates that the beauty that results in spiritual perfection is one that engages with earthly characteristics, but transforms them in ways that emphasize spiritual purpose and purity. In the garden, then, beauty resides in the landscape, but even more so in the *wildān*, *ghilmān*, and *hūr* whose purpose is to labor and to delight.

27 Kueny, *Rhetoric of sobriety* 15.

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PART 3

The Afterlife in Sunni Tradition and Theology



“Are Men the Majority in Paradise, or Women?” Constructing Gender and Communal Boundaries in Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj’s (d. 261/875) *Kitāb al-Janna**

Aisha Geissinger

The *ḥadīth* literature is arguably the most important source of medieval Muslim representations of paradise. While the Quran famously contains vivid descriptions of paradise, the amount of detail that it provides is dwarfed by that in the *ḥadīth*. Moreover, the Quran soon came to be read by Muslims through the prism of the *ḥadīth*, as is evident from a number of surviving works of classical Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*).

The quantity of *ḥadīth* about paradise that were in circulation, as well as the importance that was attached to the topic is reflected in their presence in *ḥadīth* compilations. In the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,¹ the celebrated *ḥadīth* compilation of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj al-Qushayrī al-Naysābūrī (d. 261/875), an entire chapter, the *Kitāb al-Janna wa-ṣifāt naʿīmihā wa-ahlīhā* (“The chapter of the garden and the characteristics of its bounties and its inhabitants”) presents a variety of *ḥadīths* about paradise, as well as other aspects of the hereafter.

Ḥadīths on paradise tend to be regarded as very simple descriptions of the delights awaiting believers in the next world. However, not only do some individual *ḥadīths* of this type, when examined closely, prove to be significantly more complex than they appear at first sight, but this is even more true of Muslim’s *Kitāb al-Janna* as a whole, which – far from simply portraying the afterlife – has as much if not more to say about earthly matters. As will be shown, when the *Kitāb al-Janna* is read and analyzed as a literary whole, it becomes evident that a central concern of this text are the theological implications of belief in a physical resurrection and eternal life in paradise in

* I would like to thank Laury Silvers for reading several drafts of this paper, and Walid Saleh for his comments on it. My thanks also go to the participants at the Rethinking Islamic Studies workshop at the American Academy of Religion annual conference (November 2011), as well as the anonymous reviewers for their helpful remarks. Of course, any errors of fact or interpretation are mine alone.

1 A “*ṣaḥīḥ*” (lit. “authentic”) is a type of *ḥadīth* collection which in the compiler’s judgment is entirely composed of traditions that are sound.

resurrected bodies. The ramifications of these beliefs are not presented in this text as merely doctrinal; rather, through their elaboration, particular stances are expressed about the location of inter- and intra-communal boundaries, as well as questions of earthly social order. The gender of these resurrected bodies is of central importance to these discourses. Moreover, as the pre-modern commentarial genre indicates, not only did these contentious matters continue to be of keen interest to the medieval Muslims who penned commentaries on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, but gendered bodies remained an important vehicle for negotiating these questions.

As is well known, the Quran presents the inhabitants of paradise enjoying physical pleasures such as eating, drinking, and sex. Sunnis in the formative period,² having decided that paradise is both perfect and eternal, held that neither ritual impurity nor decay could have any place in it – and yet (hu)man³ bodies, which eat, drink, and have sex are, by definition, haunted by both. While the Quran maintains that paradise and what it contains is superior to this world, it is not presented as a wholly otherworldly realm; on the contrary, the inhabitants of paradise will declare, “We have been given this before” (Q 2:25).⁴ Such affirmations of the interconnections between this world and the next underpin the *Kitāb al-Janna*’s use of *ḥadīths* in order to construct an “other world” that nonetheless remains intimately tied to this world, and functions as a space in which theological controversies and questions of social order can be negotiated. In this chapter, Michel Foucault’s concept of *heterotopia* is used as an interpretive lens in order to examine how negotiations of this type take place. As will be shown, gendered bodies are an important medium for such negotiations.

The Quran famously portrays vivid glimpses of diverse scenes from the end of the world, the day of judgment, as well as paradise and hell. These textual “snapshots” of unseen realms vigorously assert the reality of life after death in the face of the skepticism of Muḥammad’s pagan audience. The *Kitāb al-Janna*, however, presupposes an audience/reader who inhabits a significantly different religious and cultural context, in which the existence of an afterlife is generally accepted; the focus of disagreement is its contours. In a world in which most religious communities already possessed their own, often highly detailed textual maps of the hereafter or other unseen realms,⁵ the *Kitāb al-Janna* in the

2 I.e., the period in Muslim history extending from the life of Muḥammad (d. 10/632) until 338/950.

3 The reasons for this terminology are discussed below.

4 All Quranic quotations in this study are from the Quran translation of M.A.S. Abdel Haleem.

5 Such as the Christian *Apocalypse of Peter* and the Zoroastrian *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmāg*.

form that it has come down to us⁶ attempts to provide Muslims with a comparably systematic overview of paradise and hell.

Many of the traditions which appear in the *Kitāb al-Janna* were already well-known, having been grouped together elsewhere for admonitory and other purposes. This is evident from the following sources: the sub-chapter on the characteristics of paradise in the *Muṣannaf*⁷ of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827), the chapter on paradise in the *Muṣannaf* of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849), the chapter of “heart-melting traditions” (*riqāq*) in the *Sunan*⁸ of al-Dārimī (d. 255/869), as well as the chapters on the beginning of creation, and of *riqāq* in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection of Muslim’s teacher, al-Bukhārī (256/870).⁹ Like these sources, the *Kitāb al-Janna* in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* brings together a selection of the available traditions about the afterlife,¹⁰ but in its present form at least, it is distinctive in its arrangement. When it is read as a whole text, it becomes evident that it is structured so that the audience/reader is taken on a virtual tour of worlds unseen – of paradise and hell, with brief glimpses of the pre-resurrection existence in the tomb and the day of judgment. Foucault speaks of “*heterotopias*” or “other spaces,” where real places in a given culture

6 It is unclear exactly when the contents of the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, as well as the order of the *ḥadīths* in the chapters became fixed. This is a common historical problem in the study of texts from the formative period; see Motzki, *The author and his work* 1–31. Jonathan Brown asserts that the composition of several *mustakhraj* works on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* by contemporaries of Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj indicates that it was regarded as complete at the latter’s death, cf. J. Brown, *Canonization* 386. Whatever the case, by the time the medieval commentaries on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* were penned, it had a fixed form. Therefore, in my view, a literary reading of the *Kitāb al-Janna* as a whole text when studying its significance for medieval Muslims is fully justifiable. The question of this text’s earlier form will not be addressed here. It should be noted that al-Mundhirī’s *mukhtaṣar* (epitome) indicates that the order and contents of the *Kitāb al-Janna* were not always regarded by medieval scholars as unalterable; for this work, see note 15, below. However, the significance of this is unclear at present, as the *mukhtaṣar* genre and its relationship to *ḥadīth* commentary have received scant critical scholarly attention to date.

7 A *muṣannaf* (“topically arranged book”) is a type of *ḥadīth* compilation in which the contents are arranged according to themes.

8 A *sunan* (lit. “customary practices,” sing. “*sunna*”) is a type of *ḥadīth* collection that is made up of chapters devoted to various topics, often of a legal nature, with an emphasis on prophetic *ḥadīths*.

9 In addition, the chapter on paradise in the *ḥadīth* compilation of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) provides a roughly contemporaneous indication of the traditions in circulation on this topic.

10 The *Kitāb al-Janna* contains a total of 57 *ḥadīths* (excluding repetitions, as well as alternate *isnāds*).

are “simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted.”¹¹ As will be shown, through its inclusion of particular *ḥadīths* that focus and elaborate upon some aspects of the Quranic portrayals of paradise while giving little or no attention to others, the *Kitāb al-Janna* sketches a place that already exists and is yet to be, that is beyond this world and yet is also fundamentally tied to Earth – and in particular, to (hu)man bodies. As such, paradise is constructed as a realm that perpetually passes judgment on earthly events.

This examination of the *Kitāb al-Janna* begins with an overview and analysis of the structure and main themes of this text as a whole, with a particular focus on the ways that portrayals of gendered bodies are used as vehicles for commenting on an array of this-worldly intra-communal theological debates (often between Sunnis and Muʿtazilīs), as well as socio-political concerns. Following this, the *ḥadīth* from which this chapter takes its title – “Are men the majority in paradise, or women?” – is analyzed in detail.¹² This *ḥadīth*, which is a good example of the complexity that can be found in some *ḥadīths* of this type, provides a particularly apt illustration of the inherent instability of the category of “women” in this text.¹³

One methodological problem that has to be addressed in any modern literary analysis of a pre-modern text – particularly when a topic which is so contentious in our world, such as gender, is involved – is how to avoid, to the extent possible, anachronistically reading contemporary concerns into them. Therefore, several medieval commentaries on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, authored by al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ (d. 544/1149), al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), and al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505),¹⁴

11 Foucault, *Of other spaces* 24.

12 For a recent overview of contemporary *ḥadīth* scholarship, see: Motzki, Introduction xiii–liii. Motzki notes that few studies exist that examine *ḥadīths* using modern literary analysis. This paper owes its genesis in part to the approach pioneered by Sebastian Günther in two articles: Günther, *Fictional narration and imagination*; and Günther, *Modern literary theory*. While some literary studies have been carried out on individual *ḥadīths*, I am not aware of any that examine an entire *ḥadīth* chapter as a literary unit.

13 Gender has only just begun to be systematically historicized in the study of pre-modern Muslim history. For a ground-breaking effort to bring together the study of Muslim history, literature, and critical theories of sexuality, see Babayan et al. (eds.), *Islamicate sexualities*.

14 These commentaries are interrelated – al-Nawawī frequently quotes al-Qāḍī ʿIyāḍ, while al-Suyūṭī often cites al-Nawawī – so they provide insight into continuities and discontinuities in the medieval interpretation of this text. The study of the textual genre of *ḥadīth* commentary (*sharḥ*) is indispensable for any comprehensive study of the complex and multifaceted roles played by the *ḥadīth* in medieval Islam. However, it is only beginning to receive the critical scholarly attention that it deserves; see for example Tokatly, *The*

as well as the *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* authored by al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258)¹⁵ have been utilized as sources for the *Kitāb al-Janna*'s medieval interpretation.

1 Situating Paradise

Through the citation of *ḥadīths*, the *Kitāb al-Janna* provides a virtual tour of the afterlife, which comprises paradise, hell, the grave, and the day of judgment.¹⁶ In so doing, this text elaborates selectively on several themes that are evident in the Quran's depictions of the afterlife. Nonetheless, their assumed audiences are significantly different.

In the Quranic text, the resurrection and the life hereafter in their very bodiliness are a decisive refutation of the Arab pagans who disbelieve Muḥammad's message, and ridicule the power of his god to create, destroy, bring back to life, and finally call human beings to account. The *Kitāb al-Janna*'s delineation of the unseen realms is also a vindication of Muḥammad's prophecy, but in relation to scripture-bearing religious others – particularly Christians, and possibly Jews – rather than pagans. Nonetheless, although the *Kitāb al-Janna* lays claim to the Biblical tradition,¹⁷ the primary purpose appears to be to undercut rival Muslim theological positions rather than to convert outsiders.

Beginning on an exclusionary note, the first *ḥadīth* in the *Kitāb al-Janna* relates that Muḥammad said, "Paradise is encompassed by loathsome things, while hell is encompassed by lusts."¹⁸ As a number of the traditions related in this chapter include or imply theological claims that were the subject of heated debate, the audience/reader is reminded that entry into paradise is difficult, because outward appearances are usually misleading. Having defined paradise

A'lām al-Ḥadīth of al-Khaṭṭābī 53–91. A detailed study of the commentaries on the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* – though much needed – is beyond the scope of this chapter.

15 This is an abridged version of the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*. The reordering of the *ḥadīth* it contains, as well as the excision of some of the *ḥadīth* variants and additional *isnāds* is intended to promote familiarity with the text among the medieval lay public, by making it easier to use and memorize. Therefore, it provides some insight as to how the *Kitāb al-Janna* was interpreted for the edification of popular pre-modern audiences.

16 In its present form, this structure of the *Kitāb al-Janna* is further highlighted by nineteen chapter headings. However, the earliest manuscripts lack these headings, cf. J. Brown, *Canonization* 386.

17 The term "Biblical tradition" is used here in the widest possible sense, encompassing not only the Bible, but also various (and varying) traditions of interpretation and elaboration, both written and oral, associated with it in late antiquity.

18 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1192.

as the abode of a chosen few, the remainder of the text provides further details about the highly contentious matter of who might hope to be counted among those who will enter it.

Then, the audience/reader is presented with the following *ḥadīth qudsī*:¹⁹

... the Prophet said, "God, the Mighty and Glorious, said: 'I have prepared for my righteous servants what no eye has seen, and no ear has heard, and has never occurred to the heart of any person.' This is confirmed in the Book of God – "No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them as a reward for what they have done" (Q 32:17).²⁰

Through this side-by-side quotation of a Quranic verse and a divine saying attributed to Muḥammad that echoes a well-known Biblical verse – a verse from the New Testament, which in turn quotes the Hebrew Bible while radically reinterpreting it²¹ – this *ḥadīth* boldly writes Quranic representations of paradise into the Biblical tradition.

While there are some general similarities in Biblical visions of the world to come and Quranic descriptions of the afterlife,²² the divergence is particularly stark when it comes to their respective treatments of the bodies of the saved. Christian observers were not slow to point this out, and it soon became a staple in anti-Muslim polemic.²³ While it is possible that the wish to counter such polemic may have played a role in the effort to write Quranic visions of paradise into the Biblical tradition, some Muslim sources suggest that a motivating concern was the surprise or incomprehension of religious Others when they encountered the frank bodiliness of these depictions.²⁴

19 *Ḥadīth qudsī* ("sacred *ḥadīths*") present Muḥammad conveying what God has revealed to him, but in his own words (in contrast to the Quran, which is believed by Muslims to be God's words).

20 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1192.

21 Cf. 1 Cor 2:9, "But as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, no ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.'" For the Hebrew Bible antecedent of this New Testament verse, see Isaiah 64:4, "From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him" (*Revised Standard Version* translation). For a *ḥadīth* that explicitly ascribes this statement to the Torah, see Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* vii, 34.

22 See for example the description of the New Jerusalem in Rev. 21:10 ff., with its references to gold, pearls, rivers, light, etc.

23 See for example Hoyland, *Seeing Islam* 229.

24 See for example Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* vii, 33.

Such incomprehension posed a theological problem for Muslims. The Quran designates Muḥammad as the latest in a long line of prophets – and most of these figures also appear in the Hebrew Bible or the Christian New Testament.²⁵ Moreover, it presents all of the prophets from the earliest times down to Muḥammad as bearers of the same basic message (e.g., Q 42:13). How then were Muslims to account for the marked differences between the Quran's presentation of the afterlife and that found in the Bible? This issue was all the more pressing because it had important ramifications for how the nature of the (hu)man being is to be understood. For several centuries before the rise of Islam, Jews and Christians had already been carrying on often acrimonious inter- and intra-communal debates about the nature and place of the body and sexuality in relation to society.²⁶ Muslims, having positioned themselves as the inheritors of the Biblical tradition, had to determine their own stance in this already bitterly contested terrain,²⁷ and the hereafter was a key site for such negotiations.

2 Depicting Paradise and Its People

Following these introductory *ḥadīths*, the *Kitāb al-Janna* then moves to the depiction of paradise itself. Several traditions vividly portray paradise as unimaginably vast; so great is its breadth that there is a tree that casts a shadow so long that a rider can travel under it for one hundred years and still not pass through it.²⁸ The awe-inspiring height of the paradisaal realm is conveyed through a tradition which relates that the people of paradise will see the people

25 For the role of Biblical prophets in the Quran, see Tottoli, *Biblical prophets in the Qurʾān* 7–11.

26 For example, is a human being a body animated by a spirit, or a soul temporarily lodged in flesh? Is celibacy the ideal, or marriage? If celibacy is the ideal, at which stage of life is it best adopted? If the ideal is marriage, how is a man to keep a balance between worldly cares and religious study? For overviews of these and other debates, see Boyarin, *Carnal Israel*; P. Brown, *The body and society*.

27 While the beginnings of this process are visible in the Quran, such as the short passage which refers to Christian monasticism and finds it wanting (Q 57:26–7), this is chiefly a post-Quranic development.

28 Cf. Q 56:28–30 “They will dwell amid thornless lote trees and clustered acacia with spreading shade.” This verse and the immense paradisaal tree are explicitly connected in a tradition; cf. al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmiʿ*, *Abwāb šifāt al-janna* 573.

of the upper chambers (*ahl al-ghuraf*)²⁹ – that is, the prophets – as people on Earth see the stars in the sky.³⁰ Another tradition avers that “the Sayhān, the Jayhān, the Euphrates and the Nile are all among the rivers of paradise.”³¹

These *ḥadīths* fashion tangible connections between paradise and Earth. Earthly rivers exist also in paradise. Moreover, such mundane sights as a man riding in the shade of a tree, or social features of medieval society such as the vast social distance between elites and commoners grant the discerning believer a glimpse of the unseen. The *Kitāb al-Janna* forges numerous links between earthly (hu)man bodies and the hereafter through its presentation of paradise in such anthropocentric terms.

Most of traditions in the *Kitāb al-Janna* that describe features of paradise either include or focus on its inhabitants. As a result, as the audience/reader gains a somewhat clearer picture of its topography, and the lives of those who dwell there are brought into view:

In paradise there is a market-street, and they³² will go there every Friday. Then, the north wind will blow and scatter [musk]³³ on their faces and garments, increasing their loveliness and beauty. So, they return to their wives, increased in loveliness and beauty. Their wives will say to them, “By God! You have increased in loveliness and beauty since leaving us.” And they will answer, “And you yourselves, by God, have increased in loveliness and beauty since we left.”³⁴

In this tradition, an idealized late antique gendered social and spatial pattern – men’s Friday gatherings in the markets in this world, and the seclusion of their wives at home – prefigures paradise. Significantly, this tradition’s portrayal of paradise’s male and female inhabitants flits between equivalence and non-equivalence, parallel and distinction. Both are described in similar terms, and exchange parallel reciprocal compliments. It is their occupation of sharply differentiated spaces that produces and graphically underlines the gendered distinction between them – an important point to which we shall return.

29 Cf. Q 25:75 “These servants will be rewarded with the highest place (*al-ghurfa*) in paradise for their steadfastness . . .”

30 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1193.

31 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1196.

32 Masculine plural.

33 Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād, *Sharḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 364.

34 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1194.

The question of whether paradisaal existence would last for all eternity was a hotly debated point during the formative period; the *Kitāb al-Janna* comes down on the Sunni side of the question³⁵ through its depictions of the inhabitants of paradise. Several traditions assert that their clothing will never wear out, and they will live forever in health, youth, and abundance.³⁶

The bodies of the people of paradise are vividly described in a number of *ḥadīths*. Several echo and elaborate upon the Quranic division of the blessed into two groups: “the foremost” (*al-sābiqūn*) and “those of the right hand” (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*).³⁷ Those in the first group to enter paradise will glow like the full moon, while those in the second will shine like stars. None of them will spit, blow their noses, urinate or excrete. Their combs will be made of gold, their braziers will burn aloeswood, and they will be sixty cubits tall, like their father Adam. Each of them will have two wives, and the marrow of their leg-bones will be visible from beneath their flesh.³⁸ Others affirm that paradise’s inhabitants will eat and drink,³⁹ yet they will not excrete. When Muḥammad is asked how this could be, he responds that it will be sufficient for them to belch and perspire, and their perspiration will smell like musk.⁴⁰ While the (hu)man body is central to *Kitāb al-Janna*’s theological assertions, it also poses complex theological problems. For, if paradise is envisaged as a realm of eternal perfection, how can (hu)man bodies – dogged by ritual impurity⁴¹ and decay as they are – be contained in it? This question is addressed in these *ḥadīths* by severing the pleasures of eating, drinking, and sex from ritual impurity and the cycle of

35 The Muʿtazila argued that no one or nothing can be eternal but God, so in their view, paradise cannot be eternal; for this debate, see al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt* i, 405–6.

36 This tradition concludes by quoting the latter part of Q 7:43 “A voice will call out to them, ‘This is the garden you have been given as your own on account of your deeds.’”

37 Q 56:8 ff.

38 This is an elaboration of the description of the *ḥūrīs* in Q 55:58 “like rubies and brilliant pearls.” A tradition interprets this verse as meaning that “the marrow of their legs will be visible from beneath their clothes, just as one can see the thread [running] through a jewel,” see Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaʿ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* vii, 40.

39 Cf. Q 56:18–21 “... and cups of a pure drink that causes no headache or intoxication; [there will be] any fruit they choose; the meat of any bird they like.”

40 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1195.

41 In Islamic law, a person’s state of ritual purity – i.e., the requisite state for the performance of the *ṣalāt* and several other rituals – is broken by a number of bodily processes, including urination, excretion, menstruation and childbirth, as well as by certain acts, such as sexual intercourse; see Reinhart, *Impurity/no danger* 1–24.

birth-decay-death, so that the former can be enjoyed for all eternity without the latter.⁴²

3 (Hu)man Bodies in Paradise

In the *Kitāb al-Janna*'s depiction of paradise, the gendered bodies of its inhabitants are central. At this point, it is important to take a closer look at the conceptualizations of gender and sexuality which inform these depictions.

Today, gender is often thought about in binary terms: males and females are commonly regarded as two different types of human being, as "opposite" sexes who are "naturally" attracted to each other sexually. Since this is also assumed by many to be a straightforward reflection of biological "facts," it is all too easy to approach texts such as the *Kitāb al-Janna* with the presupposition that it is also based on these assumptions about gender.⁴³

However, in the late antique world, there were several different medical and philosophical conceptualizations of gender, as the writings of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen in circulation during that period variously indicate. Such differences resulted not only from the state of anatomical knowledge, but also from the roles played by cultural assumptions in interpreting biological phenomena.⁴⁴ As a result of the translation movement during the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, these writings were translated into Arabic, and they had a significant and long-lasting impact on medieval Muslim discussions and debates about bodies and gender.⁴⁵ The theories of Galen in particular would

42 A tradition expresses this idea very succinctly: "The people of paradise will have sex with women, and they will not give birth. [In paradise], there is neither sperm (*manī*) nor death (*maniyya*)," 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 420.

43 I have discussed the question of how to read gender in *ḥadīth* texts in more detail in Geissinger, *Gender and Muslim constructions*, Chapter One.

44 This issue is not unique to late antiquity, nor to medieval Muslims. Given that interpretation is itself a culturally mediated act, interpretations of anatomy or biological phenomena cannot stand outside of culture. For a discussion of these questions in the contemporary context, see Butler, *Gender trouble*.

45 For a detailed overview of these theories of Hippocrates, Aristotle, and Galen, as well as their impact on several medieval Muslim thinkers, see Gadelrab, *Sex differences* 45–52. I would like to thank Noor Naga and Laury Silvers for drawing my attention to this article. For the impact of these theories as they pertain to medieval Muslim ideas about reproduction and anatomy, see Musallam, *Sex and society*.

appear to have had some impact on *ḥadīth* discourses.⁴⁶ This may stem in part from the fact that most of the earliest translated medical texts were Galenic.⁴⁷

Galen did not see gender as a binary. Rather, in his view, all human beings could be located somewhere on the one spectrum or scale of humanness that was thought to exist. On this scale of humanness, males are the most highly developed in physical, intellectual, and spiritual terms, while females are seen as less developed “males,” and therefore as innately deficient. He theorized that the elements of heat and dryness must be present to a sufficient degree for a given body to develop to its full potential – i.e., to become an adult male. When moistness and coldness predominate instead, the result would be a female body.

This way of thinking about bodies and gender has been variously described as “the one-sex body,”⁴⁸ “the imperfect-man model”⁴⁹ or as the categorization of people as either “men” or “not-men”;⁵⁰ here, I refer to it as the “(hu)man body” for reasons of clarity.⁵¹ It was congruent with several late antique discourses, including religious myths such as the story of the creation of Eve from Adam’s rib.⁵² As such, it is perhaps not surprising that it would come to be taken up to varying extents in some Muslim institutions, cultural products, and texts.

A general feature of the *Kitāb al-Janna* that evidently accords with this conceptualization of gender is its presentation of males as the best exemplars of human potential (whether for good or for evil). In the traditions discussed thus far, and in the *Kitāb al-Janna* as a whole, the generic (hu)man bodies depicted are apparently male. While it is grammatically possible to assume the

46 Several *ḥadīths* even appear to echo Galen’s theories on human reproduction; for a well known example, see Musallam, *Sex and society* 50. The question of the influence of Greek medical theories on the *ḥadīth* literature is a complex issue that requires further research.

47 Gadelrab, *Sex differences* 57.

48 Laqueur, *Making sex*.

49 Ze’evi, *Producing desire* 23.

50 Rowson, *Gender irregularity* 55.

51 I agree with Ze’evi that the expression “one-sex body” does not sufficiently highlight the fact that this way of seeing gender categorizes women as imperfect males. However, for the purposes of this study, I find that terminology that appears to shunt females into “imperfect men” or “not-men” categories, while insightful in its own way, nonetheless tends to undo the work of making gender visible as a key category of analysis in these texts.

52 Gen. 2:8–24. While the Quran does not state that Adam’s (unnamed) wife was created from his rib, this story became part of the classical Muslim textual tradition through *ḥadīths*, as well as exegetical works; see Stowasser, *Women in the Qur’an* 25–38.

presence of females among the “people of paradise” as a group (as when they are depicted as a collectivity receiving reassurance from God that paradise is their eternal abode, for example),⁵³ this is not made explicit.⁵⁴

Yet, this earthly notion of the (hu)man body (with all of its implications for gendered roles) does not translate effortlessly into the paradisaal realm in this text. The inhabitants of paradise, as we have seen, not only do not urinate or excrete, but apparently are also unencumbered by excess saliva or mucus; their bodies are “dry” and thus paradigmatically “masculine.” The Quranic promise of “pure spouses”⁵⁵ as well as the belief that the cycle of birth-decay-death is absent from paradise would arguably entail that paradisaal female bodies likewise be free of all bodily excretions, including menstruation.⁵⁶ However, this would also banish from the afterlife what was regarded as a key distinction between earthly “male” and “female” bodies, because it marked the latter as innately flawed, thus underwriting the gender hierarchy.⁵⁷

But the *Kitāb al-Janna* is not intended to relativize or undermine gendered hierarchies, whether in this world or the next. The collapse of such hierarchies (and the chaos that it was assumed would inevitably follow) would vitiate the perfection of paradise. This denouement is avoided in this text by clearly delineating the categories of “masculinity” and “femininity” in paradise through sexual roles. While the Quran contains a few evocative portrayals of earthly

53 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1193.

54 This is not simply a reflection of the Arabic grammatical rule that a group of men and women (even if it contains only one man) is described using the masculine plural. There are ways of making the presence of women explicit, and the *Kitāb al-Janna* does just that in two instances; see below.

55 Q 2:25 “[Prophet], give those who believe and do good the news that they will have gardens graced with flowing streams . . . They will have pure spouses and there they will stay.”

56 E.g., al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb Bad’ al-khalq* iv, 304. However, the *Kitāb al-Janna* makes no mention of menstruation whatsoever.

57 In a well-known tradition Muḥammad tells an assembly of women that most of the inmates of hell will be female. When a woman asks why, he replies that they curse too much and are ungrateful to their husbands, adding, “. . . I have seen no one more deficient in reason and religion (*nāqisāt ‘aql wa-dīn*) . . . than you.” When the woman questions this, he responds, “As for your deficiency of reason, the witness given by two women is equal to the testimony of one man; that is deficiency in reason. That you spend [some] nights not performing the *ṣalāt*, and break the fast during Ramadan indicates your deficiency in religion,” see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān* 90. The mention of women missing prayers and fasts refers to the ban on performing these rituals during menses. For the circulation of this tradition, see Juynboll, *Some isnād-analytical methods* 379–81.

women entering paradise,⁵⁸ and depicts polymorphous “snapshots” of paradisaal eroticism in which the (male) inhabitants of paradise enjoy the company of cup-bearing youths⁵⁹ as well as *ḥūrīs*,⁶⁰ the picture outlined in the *Kitāb al-Janna* is more starkly hierarchical. In the latter, paradisaal “masculine” sexuality is depicted as unambiguously active and assertive, and moreover, as requiring multiple female partners for its satisfaction.⁶¹ By contrast, paradisaal “feminine” sexuality is presented as passive and receptive. The question of whether these paradisaal females are human or *ḥūrī* is, as shall be seen, left unclear. This distinction is important, as earthly women would potentially have some opinions or desires of their own, but *ḥūrīs* are believed to have been expressly created for the sexual enjoyment of paradise’s male inhabitants – and to be perfectly content in that role. The female inhabitants of paradise are barely accorded any independent existence in the *Kitāb al-Janna*; they appear almost solely as men’s paradisaal reward.⁶² Indeed, as we will see, when independent, self-directed female figures do appear elsewhere in this text, they are most often presented as problematic.

Nonetheless, gender in the *Kitāb al-Janna* is not only presented as a “biological” or sexual reality; it is also (if not even more so) depicted as a social phenomenon. In classical Muslim texts – and also, in late antique and medieval lived realities – “maleness” and “femaleness” are internally fractured cultural

58 Q 48:5 “so as to admit believing men and women into gardens graced with flowing streams, there to remain . . .”; Q 57:12 “On the day when you see the believers, men and women, with their light streaming out ahead of them and to their right . . .”

59 Q 52:24 “Devoted youths like hidden pearls wait on them”; see also Q 56:17–8 and Q 76:19. For the homoeroticism of these portrayals, see Stetkevych, Intoxication and immortality 223–24; Saleh, Etymological fallacy 689, esp. note 52. *Ḥadīths* mentioning these youths were in circulation in the formative period – see Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, *Kitāb al-Janna* vii, 35, 38, 47 – but they are absent from Muslim’s *Kitāb al-Janna* (and many other similar works).

60 For portrayals of *ḥūrīs* (Arab. *ḥūr al-ʿayn*), in the Quran, see for example Q 44:54; 52:20; 55:56, 58, 70, 72, 74; 56:22–4.

61 The Quran does not clearly indicate whether polygyny will exist in paradise. However, Q 55:72 “Dark-eyed [maidens], sheltered in pavilions” is elaborated in a *ḥadīth* asserting that the inhabitants of paradise will have tents made of single hollow pearls, so large that a man’s wives will be unable to see the others; see Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaf*, *Kitāb al-Janna* vii, 42; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1196.

62 While a tradition in the *Kitāb al-Janna* also asserts that there will be no celibate males in paradise, this text depicts male paradisaal existence as variegated; it is neither limited to domestic space nor to the company of their wives. By contrast, their wives are portrayed as the passive objects of men’s desires or actions. They do not even seem to socialize with other paradisaal females.

constructs,⁶³ cross-cut by the highly consequential distinction between free persons and slaves, as well as by other social categorizations of varying importance, such as religion, sect, age, and lineage. As a result of such internal fractures, all males do not have greater social status or power than all females, nor are all females precluded from exercising autonomy or authority in all circumstances; some free, elite women own male slaves, for example. In the unseen realms depicted in the *Kitāb al-Janna*, some of these internal fractures in its constructions of “maleness” and “femaleness” are highlighted, while others are ignored, elided or even inverted. Its portrayals of gendered bodies are not direct reflections of the social or legal ideals (or lived realities) familiar to its “original” audiences/readers. Rather, these are idealizations that serve several interrelated theological and polemical purposes.

4 Hell, the Resurrection, and the Grave

Having provided the audience/reader with a striking portrayal of paradise, the text then turns to other aspects of the hereafter. Again, (hu)man bodies are central to these depictions. Hell holds horror upon barely imaginable horror, so its fire will behave like burgeoning floodwaters, rising inexorably until it covers the ankles, knees, waists, and chests of the damned.⁶⁴ A number of traditions address the much-debated doctrine of the torment of the grave in considerable detail.⁶⁵ Angels come to the recently interred and interrogate them about their beliefs, welcoming the believers but cursing the damned. A dead person’s final abode (whether in paradise or hell) will be shown to them morning and evening as they lie in the grave awaiting the resurrection, and the damned must endure the torment of the grave. Those upholding a literal belief in this doctrine are brutally vindicated in this text, with the *ḥadīth* asserting that if the living could hear the sounds of this torment, they would cease to bury their dead.⁶⁶

63 I owe this nomenclature to Najmabadi, Are gender and sexuality useful categories 12.

64 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1197.

65 For the doctrine of life in the grave, see Rebstock, *Grabesleben*. Belief in the torture of the grave became a mark of Sunni belief in contradistinction to other sects, as the Khārijīs, most of the Mu‘tazila and some of the Murjī‘a did not accept this doctrine; al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 400–1. For a detailed discussion of depictions of the torture of the grave in Muslim texts from the formative period, see Halevi, *Muhammad’s grave* 197–233.

66 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1203–6.

Some of the physical indications by which the people of paradise and the people of hell can be distinguished on earth are also described. The damned are corpulent and haughty, while by contrast, the inhabitants of the garden are the poor and the weak, though their humble, disheveled appearance in this world leads many people to scorn them.⁶⁷ Here, the elaboration of two Quranic themes – criticism of the pagan elites who scorned Muḥammad's message, and eschatological reversal – link this world to the next, while also positioning the hereafter as sitting in judgment on the corruption of the Muslim elites of the day.

It is only as the *Kitāb al-Janna* approaches its conclusion that any *ḥadīths* attributed to a female transmitter appear. In one, ʿĀisha bt. Abī Bakr (d. 58/678) recounts that Muḥammad stated that people will be resurrected barefoot, naked, and uncircumcised; when she asks him if the women and men will not be looking at one another,⁶⁸ he responds that they will be far too preoccupied to do that.⁶⁹

This *ḥadīth* calls attention to several features of the *Kitāb al-Janna* as a whole, by disrupting these features, specifically, the near-absence of *ḥadīths* attributed to female transmitters, the linguistic occlusion of women's presence in most of the groups which it portrays, and the depiction of females as passive objects of male desire. ʿĀisha's query makes women's presence among "the people" (*al-nās*), as well as the existence of women's own sexual subjectivities explicit. But significantly, the literary effect of this intervention reinforces rather than subverts the androcentricism of the text. As soon as attention is called to women's presence, the moral threat that they can be expected to pose to the community (and even at this most solemn and terrifying of events!) is highlighted – and by a *female* speaker, no less.⁷⁰

The decline of the moral-social order, graphically evidenced by the ever-decreasing stature of (hu)man beings since the time of Adam,⁷¹ warns believers that the day of judgment cannot be far off. An array of *ḥadīths* presents a succession of striking vignettes of sinners and sinful behavior found in the

67 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1199–200.

68 "*Al-nisā' wa-l-rijālū jamī'an yanzurū ba'duhum ilā ba'd.*" This inversion of the word order one would normally expect (men and women; *al-rijālū wa-l-nisā'*) suggests that women are the initiators.

69 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1201.

70 I do not argue that this is the "original" meaning of this *ḥadīth*, just that this is what it conveys in this particular text. Its "original" import (serious question, joke, or ...) is likely unknowable, and its "meaning" may well differ, depending on the literary context.

71 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1196.

past, present, and future: One tells of Muḥammad's vision of an eminent pre-Islamic Arab ancestral figure with his intestines spilling out of his body in hell, another refers disparagingly to the man who beats his wife or female slave by day and then sleeps with her at night. Yet other *ḥadīths* recount Muḥammad's premonitions of a decadent Muslim society yet to come. It is predicted that the day will come when moral restraint will be so lacking that a man watching over a tribe's grazing animals and finding nothing to lay his hands on but their slave-girl would proceed to have sex with her – as is said to have occurred in pre-Islamic times. In these *ḥadīths*, while both male and female bodies exemplify certain kinds of sinful behavior, it is prone, passive female bodies that serve as canvases upon which the depravity of the age is graphically displayed and its nearness to the apocalypse measured.⁷²

Another *ḥadīth* predicts that a time is coming when men armed with large whips “like the tails of oxen” will hit the populace, and one will see women, who are “clothed [yet] naked, with heads like camels’ humps,” who (it is implied) are seeking to seduce males. So far are these women from paradise that they will not even be able to catch a whiff of its scent.⁷³ While in the *ḥadīths* discussed above, earthly female bodies are depicted as the passive recipients of men's violent and/or sexual acts, here we have a portrayal of women as agents. But here again, independent female action is presented as inevitably lascivious, and thus as a moral threat to the community.

These “clothed [yet] naked” women stand in negative contradistinction to the wives of the people of paradise in the *Kitāb al-Janna*. The bodies of both are exposed, and both are depicted as tempting to male onlookers. Yet, the visibility of the marrow of the leg-bones of the wives of the people of paradise signifies their unearthly beauty, and thus the pleasure awaiting their male consorts in the hereafter. By contrast, the “clothed [yet] naked” women's display of their bodies represents both their own moral bankruptcy, and the publicly visible moral decline that is believed to be a principal sign of the impending apocalypse.

5 Medieval Commentary

Through its citation of traditions, the *Kitāb al-Janna* makes theological assertions, and weighs in on credal issues – many of which implicate the (hu)man body – that were vigorously debated during the formative period. In this text,

72 For women in classical Muslim apocalyptic literature, see Saleh, *Woman as a locus* 123–45.

73 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1200.

the afterlife sits in judgment on the theological debates occurring in this world, by offering final vindication to those holding the “correct” beliefs on these questions. Brooking no debate on these matters, the *Kitāb al-Janna* polemically implies that non-Sunni Muslims are like the Christians who fell into *de facto* polytheism after Jesus’ passing⁷⁴ and hence are not “true” monotheists.

For their part, the commentators elaborate on these themes of the *Kitāb al-Janna*, and further sharpen the text’s polemical thrust against those who diverge from Sunni theological claims, as these had developed by their respective eras. Rather disingenuously, they present Sunni theological stances as reflections of the faith of the generic simple believer – in polemical contradistinction to the beliefs said to be held by various scholars (*‘ulamā’*), philosophers, esoterically-oriented thinkers, and those fond of theological disputes – few of whom indeed (in al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ’s view) will manage to enter paradise.⁷⁵

Nonetheless, there is more to this apparent valorization of credal simplicity than meets the eye. An interpretive issue that concerned these commentators is the question of when to employ a metaphoric approach in reading these *ḥadīths*. The tradition stating that the people of paradise will have “the hearts of birds” is an example of one that they regarded as open to a metaphoric reading.⁷⁶ Also, they provide non-literal readings for *ḥadīths* that they regard as theologically unacceptable (due to their anthropomorphism) if understood literally. Therefore, they maintain that the tradition stating that God created Adam in his image (*‘alā ṣūratihī*) had to mean that Adam was created in accordance with his (own) human form, rather than in the divine image.⁷⁷ Similarly,

74 One dramatic *ḥadīth* portrays Muḥammad interceding for his Companions on the day of judgment. However, when he is told that he is unaware of their doings after his death, he will recite Q 5:117–118 – “I was a witness over them during my time among them. Ever since You took my soul, You alone have been the watcher over them: You are witness to all things and if You punish them, they are Your servants . . .” Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1201. This Quranic verse attributes these words to Jesus himself on the day of judgment, in response to God’s questioning him if he did in fact teach his followers to worship him and his mother as gods.

75 Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 378.

76 Suggested meanings include the idea that the people of paradise are soft-hearted, or perhaps God-fearing; see al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 373. Al-Nawawī suggests that it could refer to their trust in God; al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 175.

77 Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 374; al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 176; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dibāj, Kitāb al-Janna* vi, 187; cf. Gen. 1:27 – “So God created man in his own image. . . .”

possibilities of non-literal readings are provided for the traditions stating that God will put his foot on hell in order to cram in the last of the damned.⁷⁸

An important underlying issue in a number of these interpretive determinations is how the commentators negotiate the relationship between this world and the next. On one hand, they are clearly aware of the implications of the belief that paradise is eternal for earthly conceptions of time. Thus, al-Nawawī (and following him, al-Suyūṭī), asserts that the *ḥadīth* that depicts the male inhabitants of paradise congregating each Friday cannot be taken literally, because time as we know it on earth does not exist there.⁷⁹ However, they also resist the impulse to posit a radical distinction between this world and the next. So, when discussing the rivers of paradise, al-Nawawī, after attempting to identify the earthly locations of the Sayḥān and the Jayḥān, asserts that all of the rivers named in that *ḥadīth* do have a real existence in paradise – which, according to the Sunnis, has already been created and now exists.⁸⁰

In a similar vein, the commentators emphatically affirm that the people of paradise actually eat and drink. As is apparent from the foregoing, their interpretive stance on this issue does not stem from an inability (nor even from a principled disinclination) to read *ḥadīths* metaphorically. Rather, they self-consciously affirm this belief in the face of religious others – both without, but primarily within the community. Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ observes that this vision of paradise is not in accord with the views of the Bāṭiniyya (Isma‘īlis), the philosophers, or the Christians, as they interpret the pleasures of paradise metaphorically. He also takes the opportunity to disparage the Mu‘tazilī belief that paradise is not eternal. One’s belief in the literal physical pleasures (eternally) enjoyed by the people of paradise thus becomes the mark of belonging to the communal body of the saved, the *Ahl al-sunna*.⁸¹

The textual roles played by specifically female bodies in the *Kitāb al-Janna* are selectively elaborated by medieval commentators. The image of the female body as the religiously approved yet potentially perilous focus of male sexual desire receives particular interpretive expansion. Both al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ and al-Nawawī elect to include a strikingly lengthy and detailed discussion of the *ḥadīth* about the “clothed [yet] naked” women, with a number of suggestions as to which body parts these women will reveal, how they will style their hair,

78 Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 380; al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 180–1. These are fascinating examples of some of the complexities involved in Muslim re-readings of the monotheism, divine imagery, and key myths of the Biblical tradition.

79 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 169; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Dibāj, Kitāb al-Janna* vi, 180.

80 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 175.

81 Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 367; and similarly, al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 171–2.

and what provocative actions they are being condemned for.⁸² Tellingly, these commentators have comparatively little to say about the *ḥadīths* in the *Kitāb al-Janna* that present images of violence and oppression as signs of the nearness of the day of judgment. The vivid image of the men armed with large whips “like the tails of oxen” who will hit the populace is said to refer to the servants of the governor’s police,⁸³ but despotism is apparently less of an inversion of the religiously legitimated social order than free women who publicly transgress the codes of comportment appropriate to their station, unrestrained by their male relatives.⁸⁴ Thus, for medieval commentators, brutal government functionaries or abusive patriarchs⁸⁵ make a less apt symbol of the impending apocalypse than the “clothed [yet] naked” women.⁸⁶

Significantly, al-Nawawī likens both paradise and hell to female bodies, passively awaiting male penetration. When commenting on the opening tradition, “paradise is encompassed by loathsome things, while hell is encompassed by lusts,” he writes that both of these abodes are veiled (*maḥjūb*) by desired and disliked things respectively, and the one who “rends the veil” of either of these two realms enters it.⁸⁷ Accordingly, the believer should “rend the veil” concealing paradise by pursuing hardships, such as carrying out acts of worship and reforming blameworthy character traits. However, he warns against “rending the veil” of hellfire by engaging in prohibited acts, such as “unlawful sexual intercourse (*zinā*), looking at strange women, backbiting, and playing musical instruments.”⁸⁸

82 Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 387–8; al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 188–9.

83 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 188.

84 If these women were slaves, their public exposure would not be depicted as scandalous.

85 The *ḥadīth* that mentions the man who beats his wife or slave woman and then sleeps with her at the end of the day receives little comment. Al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ states that this *ḥadīth* forbids hitting women, and that hitting them does not accord with the noble character traits (*makārīm al-akhlāq*) a believer should possess; al-Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 385. However, al-Nawawī adds that this *ḥadīth* prohibits beating women “except when discipline necessitates it”; al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 186. (Al-Suyūṭī does not comment on this point.) This issue evidently does not command much interest because even violence deemed “excessive” (while uncouth or sinful) does not pose a challenge to the patriarchal social order that these commentators are constructing. For a detailed discussion of this issue in classical *tafsīr* and *fiqh* texts, see Chaudhry, *Domestic violence*.

86 For apocalyptic discourse as an upside-down world, see Saleh, *Woman as a locus* 144–5.

87 “*Fa-man hataka l-ḥijāb waṣala ilā l-maḥjūb*.”

88 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* xvii, 163–4. While al-Suyūṭī largely follows al-Nawawī in his comments on this *ḥadīth*, he omits the veil-tearing imagery.

A particular type of free, Muslim masculinity is iterated by these medieval commentators. This idealized, earthly masculinity is characterized by the exercise of dominance and control (of social subordinates, and of the man's own sexual desires), as well as by the penetrating ability to discern what is religiously approved among the many tempting possibilities – whether these be physical pleasures or doctrinal opinions. Femininity here is iterated almost entirely in subordinate relation to this vision of masculinity. Therefore, the possible subjectivities of female believers, which the *Kitāb al-Janna* itself only obliquely alludes to, receive no attention in these commentaries.

6 Constructing the Paradisal Male and the Paradisal Female

Having read the *Kitāb al-Janna* as a whole text and examined how several of its key themes are taken up in medieval commentary, it remains to discuss one *ḥadīth* that has been selected here for detailed analysis. No fewer than four variant versions of this *ḥadīth* are included in the *Kitāb al-Janna*. Significantly, this *ḥadīth* brings together several important topics already touched on above, in a particularly striking way:

‘Amr al-Nāqid and Ya‘qūb b. Ibrāhīm al-Dawraqī both informed me on the authority of Ibn ‘Ulayya (and the wording is from Ya‘qūb): Ismā‘īl b. ‘Ulayya reported to us from Ayyūb, on the authority of Muḥammad [b. Sīrīn]:

They bragged – or, they conferred together – “Are men the majority in paradise, or women?”

Then Abū Hurayra said, “Didn’t Abū l-Qāsim⁸⁹ say, ‘The first group that will enter paradise will resemble the moon when it is full, and those that follow them will glow like the shining stars in the sky. Each man of them will have two wives; one will be able to see the marrow of their leg bones from beneath the flesh. There will be no celibates in paradise.’”⁹⁰

In this *ḥadīth* (henceforth, the “first-group *ḥadīth*”), this world and the next are explicitly linked, and an orderly, harmonious paradise stands in pointed contrast to an earthly community’s contention over a doctrinal issue. When

89 I.e., the Prophet Muḥammad.

90 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1194.

we examine this complex *ḥadīth* in tandem with its variants,⁹¹ it becomes even more apparent that difficult questions regarding communal division and unity, hierarchy and egalitarianism, as well as physicality and eternity are being worked out, with gendered bodies as vehicles for these textual negotiations.

This *ḥadīth* begins with a rudimentary frame story, an anecdote which sets the stage for Abū Hurayra's recounting of a description of the people of paradise which he credits to Muḥammad. Significantly, the alternate chain of transmitters (*isnād*) given in the *Kitāb al-Janna* for this particular version of the *ḥadīth*⁹² relates a slightly different frame story, so that the occasion for the recounting of Muḥammad's words becomes Abū Hurayra's response to a debate between some early Muslim men and women:

Ibn Abī 'Umar reported to us from Sufyān, on the authority of Ayyūb, on the authority of [Muḥammad] Ibn Sirīn: Men and women argued regarding who is greater in number in paradise. Then they asked Abū Hurayra, and he said: "Abū l-Qāsim said" – similar to the report of Ibn 'Ulayya.⁹³

The inclusion of this alternate *isnād* not only calls attention to the linguistic ambiguity of the expression, "the people of paradise" (*ahl al-janna*) by raising the question of what proportion of these people are female, but also inserts a brief moment of non-male subjectivity into a text that seldom acknowledges such perspectives. Here, rather than simply being the objects of male discussion and debate, some early Muslim women seemingly intervene in the discourse.⁹⁴ While once again the literary effect of this intervention is to reinforce rather than subvert the androcentric nature of the text as a whole, it does raise the specter of communal doctrinal disagreement. Significantly, the other variants of the "first-group *ḥadīth*" in the *Kitāb al-Janna* that lack the frame

91 For a typology of *ḥadīth* variants, see Speight, A look at variant readings 79–89. While there are a large number of variants of this *ḥadīth*, and these appear in *ḥadīth* collections such as the *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* among others, the focus of this discussion is on those cited in Muslim's *Kitāb al-Janna*.

92 If Muslim regards a given tradition's *isnād* as defective in some way, he provides one or more extra *isnāds*. He also recounts variant versions of traditions when these contain additional information; see Juynboll, Muslim's introduction to his *Ṣaḥīḥ* 267. For reasons that will become evident, it appears that both of these considerations are operative in the case of this tradition.

93 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1194.

94 I.e., their intervention here is likely intended as a literary device, rather than as an allusion to an actual incident, given that variant versions of this frame story were well known; see below.

nonetheless implicitly address the issue of communal division through their emphases on paradisaal harmony. The audience/reader is told that the people of paradise will be as one, with no dissension among them.⁹⁵

Such harmony does not result from sameness, however. In this *ḥadīth*, the saved are differentiated depending on whether or not they belong to the first group that enters paradise. (One variant also specifies that among the people of paradise, there are other ranks in addition to these two.)⁹⁶ Their positions in this hierarchy are marked by the luminosity of their bodies. Yet, while it might be assumed that such physically visible (and apparently permanent) ranks would be accompanied by considerably different bodies, this *ḥadīth* and its variants suggests the opposite. All are equally free of bodily excretions and secretions – and hence, from the cycle of birth-decay-death – and apparently have the same level of sexual potency.

While the categories of both “maleness” and “femaleness” are internally fractured in the “first-group *ḥadīth*” as well as in the *Kitāb al-Janna* as a whole, their fractures take significantly different forms. The *Kitāb al-Janna* notes the widely variable degrees of power and social status possessed by males in this world, but frequently elides or relativizes these. Earthly social hierarchies are inverted in the hereafter, with the tyrannical, luxury-loving Muslim elites (and the pagan Arab ancestral figures that some of them take pride in) consigned to the depths of hell, along with the influential partisans of theological views that depart from Muḥammad’s teachings.⁹⁷ By contrast, humble believers will be exalted in paradise.⁹⁸ The fractures within “masculinity” that the *Kitāb al-Janna* elects to emphasize are religious and theological in nature – those between Muslims and others, between the righteous and the sinful, and between “true” believers and those who are misled by blameworthy innovations (*bid’a*). “Simple” and doctrinally sound faith enables the inhabitants of paradise to come together, even across otherwise daunting differences in status.⁹⁹ This vision of paradisaal

95 As one variant has it, there will be “no disagreement among them nor enmity; their hearts will be as one heart”; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1195.

96 “The first group that will enter paradise from my community will resemble the moon when it is full; then those following them will glow like the brightest stars in the sky. Then those [coming] after them [have various] stations”; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1194.

97 As is well known, the *miḥna*, or attempt by the ‘Abbasid caliph al-Ma’mūn to force judges to publicly endorse the Mu’tazili doctrine that the Quran is created, began in 218/833, and continued for about fifteen years (i.e., when Muslim was in his late twenties).

98 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* 1197, 1200, 1201.

99 In one *ḥadīth*, upon hearing that the prophets will dwell in the upper chambers of paradise, some of Muḥammad’s Companions ask him if they will be able to visit these realms.

concord serves as a rebuke to Muslim social fissures and doctrinal factionalism on Earth, while at the same time ensuring that this seemingly egalitarian emphasis on faith does not risk calling into question the rightness of those earthly social hierarchies that are deemed religiously legitimate.

By contrast, the fractures within the category of “femininity” in the *Kitāb al-Janna* as a whole are between earthly and paradisaal females. Thus, the latter variously serve as vehicles for the construction of masculinity, pietistic admonitions directed at earthly women, and theological negotiations between bodiliness and eternity.

A noteworthy feature of the “first-group *ḥadīth*” is the indeterminacy of the category of “women.” Medieval commentators puzzled over this *ḥadīth*, for presumably, if each man in paradise will have two wives, this would necessitate that twice as many women as men enter paradise. However, not only does a well-known and widely circulated *ḥadīth* have Muḥammad say, “I looked into paradise, and saw that the majority of its inhabitants are the poor, and I looked into hell, and saw that the majority of its inhabitants are women,”¹⁰⁰ but another *ḥadīth* in the *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* states in unmistakably emphatic terms that there will be few women indeed among the dwellers of paradise.¹⁰¹

One possible solution to this conundrum is that the “wives” mentioned in Abū Hurayra’s response to the question of whether men or women are in the majority in paradise are *ḥūrīs* rather than earthly women. One of the variant versions of the “first-group *ḥadīth*” (which, however, lacks the frame story) actually specifies that these wives will be *ḥūrīs*.¹⁰² The Salafī autodidact Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999 CE) argues in favor of this view in his editorial comments on al-Mundhirī’s *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*,¹⁰³ reflecting al-Mundhirī’s interpretation.¹⁰⁴ Yet, as accepting this would entail interpreting Abū Hurayra’s

He responds that those who had believed in God and in the prophets can do so; see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1193. While faith can bridge this gulf, the gulf nonetheless remains.

100 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Riqāq* viii, 306; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Riqāq* 1154. For the circulation of this *ḥadīth*, see Juynboll, Some *isnād*-analytical methods 363–71.

101 “*Inna aqall sākini l-janna al-nisā*”; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Riqāq* 1154.

102 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 1194.

103 Al-Mundhirī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. al-Albānī, *Kitāb Ṣifat al-janna* 523, note 1. For al-Albānī’s general approach to the *ḥadīths* in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, see Amin, Nāṣiruddīn al-Albānī 149–76.

104 Al-Mundhirī entitles the fourteenth chapter of the *Kitāb al-Janna*, “The smallest [group] among the inhabitants of paradise will be women.”

answer as a non sequitur,¹⁰⁵ it is not the most plausible explanation – unless one also interprets the men's question as referring not to earthly women at all, but to the number of *ḥūrīs* in paradise.¹⁰⁶

However, al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ asserts that the most obvious (*ẓāhir*) meaning of this *ḥadīth* is that (human) women will outnumber men in paradise, although he also notes the existence of other *ḥadīths* asserting that most of the denizens of hell will be women. Attempting to reconcile them, he concludes that when taken together, these *ḥadīths* affirm that “the majority of the children of Adam are women; so therefore, they are the majority of the people of the garden and of the people of the fire. They [i.e., the wives] are all human – and if not, it is related that each of the people of the garden will have a large number of *ḥūrīs*.”¹⁰⁷ In this *ḥadīth*, as well as the commentary associated with it, “women” and “wives” are far from being self-evident or even clearly defined categories. These “wives” of the male inhabitants of paradise might appear to be human women or *ḥūrīs*, depending on the questions that the audience/reader brings to this *ḥadīth*, but it is impossible to be sure. Thus, the query posed to Abū Hurayra remains perpetually unanswered.

On one hand, such uncertainty has a well-known admonitory function. While al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ favors the opinion that this *ḥadīth* refers to women rather than *ḥūrīs*, in his view, even if this turns out not to be the case, the (male) inhabitants of paradise will not lack for wives. Earthly women are thus rendered superfluous in paradise. Al-Mundhirī's *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* is even more pointed, beginning with the *ḥadīth* under discussion here. This question – “Are men the majority in paradise, or women?” – is thus given a prominence that it lacks in Muslim's *Kitāb al-Janna*.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, it is answered in the fourteenth chapter. Entitled “The smallest [group] among the inhabitants of paradise will be women,” this chapter contains just one *ḥadīth*:

105 I.e., that this tradition means that when Abū Hurayra was asked this question, he elected not to answer it. Instead, he related a *ḥadīth* about *ḥūrīs*, thus changing the subject.

106 A possible historical explanation is that the text has become corrupted. Comparisons with other extant versions of this tradition yield variants that appear to stem from scribal attempts to “clarify” the circumstances that led to Abū Hurayra's being asked such a question. This is suggested by the nature of the variations, which often involve Arabic letters with similar shapes; see for example: 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaḥ, Kitāb al-Jāmi'* xi, 417; Ibn al-Zubayr, *Musnad al-Ḥumaydī* ii, 282. However, the focus of this study is on the literary functions of this *ḥadīth* as we now have it in the *Kitāb al-Janna*, as well as how medieval commentators understood it, rather than on its historical origins.

107 Al-Qāḍī 'Iyāḍ, *Sharḥ, Kitāb al-Janna* viii, 366.

108 Al-Mundhirī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim, Kitāb al-Janna* 520. In Muslim's *Kitāb al-Janna*, this *ḥadīth* appears in the sixth chapter.

On the authority of Abū Tayyāḥ, (who) said:

Muṣarrif b. ‘Abdallāh had two wives. [One day], he came from the home of one of them. The other wife said, “You are coming from the home of so-and-so?”

He responded, “[Actually], I am coming from the home of ‘Imrān b. Ḥuṣayn – and he related that the Messenger of God said, ‘The smallest [group] among the inhabitants of paradise will be women.’”¹⁰⁹

In contrast to the idyllic picture of the people of paradise entering the garden accompanied by their two wives and dwelling together in peace forever, this earthly man has two human wives who are apparently not on the best of terms, and his visit to one has annoyed or upset the other. While there could be any number of reasons for this, her reaction is simply dismissed.¹¹⁰ Here, not only are women pronounced unlikely to enter paradise, but their hopes of salvation are tied to their unquestioning acceptance of patriarchal prerogatives.

The admonitory character of this discourse, as well as its role in legitimating patriarchal social structures is apparent. However, as the notion that (earthly) women are superfluous has parallels in some other idealized realms constructed by medieval Muslims as well (as can be seen in literature¹¹¹ and law¹¹² for example), this idea is not simply a manifestation of admonitory impulses or attempts to exert social control.

109 Al-Mundhirī, *Mukhtaṣar Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, *Kitāb al-Janna* 523. This *ḥadīth* is taken from the chapter of “heart-melting traditions”; see Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Riqāq* 1154.

110 It is implied that her reaction stems from “jealousy” and pettiness. It should be borne in mind that this *ḥadīth* is a pietistic construction that elects to occlude considerations of survival that often underlie struggles between co-wives in lived reality.

111 See for example Fedwa Malti-Douglas’ analysis of a range of medieval Muslim literary texts in which the absence or elimination of women is presented as necessary for the ideal society, or for male identity development or philosophical enlightenment (Malti-Douglas, *Woman’s body* 67–110).

112 Medieval Islamic law constructs a world in which Muslim women are in theory unnecessary. While the legal system *produces* Muslim women – daughters as well as sons born to a Muslim man are legally Muslims – there is no ritual or legal procedure that requires the presence of *Muslim* women in order for it to be religiously valid. Theoretically, this ritual and socio-political system as envisaged by medieval jurists could reproduce itself down through the generations, even if no Muslim woman ever prayed, or fasted, or performed the *ḥajj*, or learned the Quran, and even if all Muslim men chose only to marry (and/or take as concubines) women from other religious communities. For a critical overview of medieval jurists’ views on marriage and related issues, see Ali, *Sexual Ethics*.

The concept of the (hu)man body, as we have seen, constructs earthly female bodies as innately flawed. Therefore, envisioning them within a perfect realm such as paradise becomes a challenge, for if they are not deficient in some way, then how are they “female” (and not “male”)? And if they are “female,” how are they not flawed?¹¹³ On Earth, female bodies are necessary in order to ensure the continuation of the species, but in a realm where everyone lives forever, reproduction is not only unnecessary but anomalous at best.¹¹⁴ While female bodies are central to paradise as it is constructed in the *Kitāb al-Janna*, these bodies need not be of (earthly) women. Through the presence of female bodies, this text depicts paradise as an eternal abode of physical, erotic pleasure that does not entail ritual impurity, decay or death. *Ḥūrīs* could apparently be more readily imagined as absolutely untouched by such earthly deficiencies, as well as free from character flaws or any other manifestation of “female” inferiority.¹¹⁵

7 Conclusion

Muslim’s *Kitāb al-Janna* elaborates selectively on several key Quranic notions about the afterlife, and addresses a number of complex theological issues. When the text is read as a literary whole, it becomes apparent that it reflects Sunni attempts to work through some of the theological implications of the Quran’s insistence on bodily resurrection and its vivid portrayals of the afterlife, as well as the notion that paradise is eternal, perfect, and beyond time. In so doing, Muslims write Quranic visions of paradise into the Biblical tradition, and thus try to stake out a position in an already highly contested terrain. The paradisaal *heterotopia* sketched in the *Kitāb al-Janna* is a domain where theological controversies of the formative period – and hence, the boundaries of the

113 This conundrum can result from any conceptualization of gender in which female bodies are constructed as innately deficient, not only those influenced by Galen’s theories.

114 A few *ḥadīths* acknowledge that some men might desire that a child to be borne for them in paradise. In this case, their wish is granted, but it is presented as an oddity nonetheless; see Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Kitāb al-Muṣannaḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna* vii, 36 – and the presence of pregnancy, nursing, and growth in paradise is sharply limited, as these are completed in just one hour; see al-Dārimī, *Musnad*, *Kitāb al-Riqāq* iii, 1873. It is not made clear who the mothers of such children would be.

115 See for example al-Māturīdī’s comments on the “pure spouses” mentioned in Q 2:25, where he gives the interpretation of “pure” as meaning “from bad character and inferiority (*danāʾ*)”, unlike the women of this world, who are not secure from those” (al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt* i, 405).

community – are negotiated, and the shape of the “ideal” socio-political order delineated. Sunni standpoints are eternally vindicated, against the views of the Mu‘tazila and others. The medieval commentaries examined in this study indicate that these issues continued to attract the attention of *ḥadīth* scholars.

In both the *Kitāb al-Janna* and its medieval commentaries, gendered bodies are an important medium for negotiating these complex matters. While these bodies are broadly conceptualized in terms familiar to people at the time, the (hu)man body is re-envisioned in paradisaal terms in the *Kitāb al-Janna*, in order to address particular theological and social questions. Many of the highly consequential fractures within the category of “masculinity” that existed in people’s lived realities are ignored or elided, while theological differences among men are highlighted. Doctrinally “correct” faith is presented as a bridge which can traverse otherwise daunting social distances.

By contrast, the category of paradisaal “femininity” is both fractured and inherently unstable, due to the contradictions it embodies. This indeterminacy – *ḥūrī*, or human? – feeds an admonitory discourse, in which the *ḥūrīs*’ purity, seclusion, and exemplary contentedness serves as a foil for earthly women. As a corollary, this discourse is usually unable to accommodate the possibility of praiseworthy action or autonomous aspirations on the part of earthly women. Yet, the underlying issue here ultimately stems from more general theological considerations. Paradisaal female bodies in the *Kitāb al-Janna* are made to bear most of the weight of the theological complexities involved in envisaging (hu)man bodies – subject as they are on earth to impurity, decay, and death – into an imagined eternal and perfect realm.

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The ‘Eight Gates of Paradise’ Tradition in Islam: A Genealogical and Structural Study

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1 Defining Paradise as Myth: Synchronicity and the Study of Cobwebs

Myth is not fiction; unlike folktales and other fictitious narratives, myths are true for those who use them.¹ Taking this act of *epochè* as its point of departure, this article proposes to explore the Muslim paradise as myth.² But are the images and ideas about paradise developed in Islamic tradition adequately described by this term? Myths, one might object, are set in a primordial past, not in a distant future, as is the case, at least on the face of it, with eschatological narratives.³ However, views on what the term ‘myth’ signifies

* In the process of researching and writing this article, I have accumulated many debts to friends and colleagues. I have particularly benefitted from conversations and exchanges with Ehud Benor, Christoph Boehinger, Gerald Hawting, Robert Hillenbrand, Andreas Kaplony, Simon O'Meara, George Wilkes, Yuhana Vevaina, and Nick Wyatt, to all of whom I would like to extend my thanks. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the European Research Council (Project no. 263308: “The here and the hereafter in Islamic traditions”) during the last phases of writing this article. Needless to say, all remaining mistakes are mine.

- 1 Leach, Introduction 6. Earlier anthropologists writing in the tradition of James Frazer tended to stress that myths are “incorrect.” See Csapo, *Theories* 25–57, esp. 48. Also inclining toward this view is Beltz, *Mythen* 261–85, which is the only sustained scholarly attempt known to me that addresses the Muslim paradise and hell as mythical narratives. Overall, Beltz's study assumes the applicability of the concept of “myth” rather uncritically, showing little interest in the problem of definition. On Beltz's contribution to *Religionswissenschaft*, which he practiced still largely under the constraints of pre-unification GDR, see Boehinger, Walter Beltz, esp. 493.
- 2 According to Annemarie Schimmel, “the genre of eschatological myths” in Islam is “particularly rich.” See Schimmel, *Deciphering* 126. Schimmel, however, does not explore this mythical material at any length (cf. 237–9). One thus has to agree with al-Azmeh, Rhetoric for the senses 219 that a “study of [paradise] narratives as myth is still missing from scholarship on the Islamic paradise.”
- 3 This is an element in some of the most influential and sophisticated definitions of myth. See for example, Bascom, Forms 4; Eliade, Cosmogonic myth 75. Note, however, that scholars of myth sometimes speak of myths of the future. Stolz, for example, speaks of “myths of the end

differ greatly,⁴ and indeed most definitions stress that myth altogether transcends historical time.⁵ In such a perspective, what characterizes mythic time is not so much that it belongs to a distant past or future, but that it is a *different kind* of time. Myths, in fact, tell of events outside time, as opposed to legends and apocalyptic narratives, which speak of events that are temporally distant, but diachronically connected to the here and now.⁶ The time of myth, for those who use it, is eternal or sacred time; in the words of Mircea Eliade, it is an *illud tempus* that is uncontaminated by the “terror of history.” Mythic time, in a word, is not time at all, but rather its opposite: eternity. In the Islamic eschatological tradition, this theme is given expression, inter alia, by the prophetic *ḥadīth* that on the day of judgment, time will be brought forth in the form of a white ram and slaughtered between paradise and hell.⁷

Connected to the question of mythic time is a second issue. This is the problem that myths are commonly understood to tell a story with a beginning (often describing a situation which is unstable or unstructured) and an end (which brings a moment of stability and order).⁸ What happens in paradise and hell, on the other hand, is not an event that unfolds in linear fashion, but rather, an endless repetition of the same. The pleasures and torments of paradise and hell re-occur *ad infinitum*. The *ḥūrīs*, in Aziz al-Azmeh’s phrase, are “recursively virginal,” since their virginity is restored after every defloration by the inhabitants of paradise.⁹ In a similar vein, the sinners in hell are recursively mutilated: After each mutilation they suffer at the hands of the myrmidons in hell, their bodies grow back on them into their previous, unharmed shape (cf. Q 4:56).¹⁰

However, more recent definitions of myth, particularly structuralist ones, lean toward understanding myth primarily in terms of its quality of permanence,

of time” (“Endzeit-Mythen”). See Stolz, *Mythos* 11 616. Frye has suggested that utopias are to be included under the category of “myth,” and that eschatology is utopian or “speculative myth.” See Frye, *Varieties* 25–6.

4 Cf. Strenski, *Theories* 1–2.

5 Jamme, *Mythos* 515.

6 Cf. Bascom, *Forms*. In the words of Rosenthal, for medieval Muslims, as for medieval Christians, the apocalypse was the “history of the future.” See Rosenthal, *History* 23, referring to Jaspers, *Ursprung* 181.

7 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 1760; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 2188; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iii, 9; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* v, 315; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’* iv, 534.

8 Stolz, *Mythos* 11 613.

9 Al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric* for the senses 225.

10 See also Ibn al-Mubārak, *Musnad* i, 77; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan* iv, 705; al-Tha’labī, *Kashf* vi, 57; Asin, *La escatología* 428.

that is, its power to bind past, present, and future together in a single reversible moment.¹¹ The point of myth, according to this understanding, is not to tell a story in syntagmatic progression. The significance of myth lies, rather, in its underlying paradigmatic meaning. In the language of structural linguistics, myth should be understood as *langue* rather than *parole*. In this perspective, myth can be characterized as a "system which is simultaneously present to the mind,"¹² a system of symbols and signs that can be evoked at any time to inform the present moment. And indeed, it is a characteristic (particularly?) of Muslim representations of paradise and hell, be they traditionalist, philosophical, mystical or otherwise, that they are "simultaneously present to the mind": *janna* and *jahannam* are conceived to have a direct and immediate impact on human existence, to the extent that the very notion of them belonging to an *afterlife*, *afterworld* or *hereafter* is misleading. In fact, it often seems preferable to speak of the Islamic paradise and hell as belonging not to the next world but simply to an "otherworld" that is in continuous and intimate conversation with this world. Also pursuing this line of thought, Tilman Nagel has referred to the tendency of Islamic religious literatures to stress the synchronicity of *dunyā* and *ākhirā* as "the remarkable phenomenon of the disappearing border between this world and the hereafter."¹³ The topic deserves separate and full study; I cannot within a few pages hope to do justice to all the issues raised here. My purpose in making these preliminary reflections is to highlight the way Muslim paradise narratives exhibit many of the formal features stressed in common definitions of myth, particularly with respect to the idea of 'reversible' mythic time. I thus hope to mitigate the discomfort that some readers may feel in approaching Muslim paradise narratives as myth. "The abolition of time and history," as Eric Csapo summarizes the structural view of myth, "is what raises life and perceptions from the chaos of the phenomenal world to a sphere of pure logical relations, a world of Platonic forms, full of peace, stability, and meaning."¹⁴

As I would like to suggest, one of the benefits of approaching Muslim paradise narratives as myth is that they appear in a new light, conducive to a range of interpretive methods which hitherto have been largely absent from studies about them. To consider these narratives as myths allows one to embrace a different and arguably more constructive attitude toward them. The study of myth in the tradition of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Edmund Leach insists that

11 Lévi-Strauss, *Structural study* 209.

12 Csapo, *Theories* 220.

13 Nagel, *Paradise Lost*, in the present publication.

14 Csapo, *Theories* 237.

myths follow their own kind of logic, that they are not simply prelogical, arbitrary inventions. Contrast this with the attitude of Fritz Meier who, echoing Bultmann's agenda to de-mythologize scripture,¹⁵ laments the fact that Islamic eschatology is "hidden . . . behind a decorative structure of baroque traditions."¹⁶ One gathers from this statement that scholars are called to weed out these "baroque" elements in Muslim eschatological narratives, in the same way in which one might remove cobwebs from a painting by an old master stored in a forgotten attic. According to Meier, it is only *behind* these structures that something like an ultimate, existential meaning can be recovered. However, attention deserves to be given to the very structures Meier would like us to discard. The study of the surface structures of Muslim paradise narratives, the cobwebs so to speak, may in fact reveal an underlying deep structure full of meaning.

In this perspective, Muslim paradise narratives may turn out to be a form of *pensée sauvage*, a *seemingly* arbitrary way of thinking, but one which has its own kind of coherence, and is therefore worthy of close inspection. According to Lévi-Strauss's famous phrase, the categories and symbols of myth are "good to think,"¹⁷ and so are the constitutive elements of Muslim narratives of paradise and of hell. These narratives, as can be argued, constitute an idiom in which the realities of life on earth, especially those that push comprehension to its limits, can be verbalized and made amenable to the mundane processes of human thought. The Muslim eschatological imagination, in a form at once symbolic and concrete, structures the otherworld in a way which allows people to come to terms with their own conflicted life experiences. Hence the often startling correspondences between images of earthly and otherworldly beauty, or indeed between those of earthly and otherworldly suffering and pain.¹⁸

The structural similarities between the world of the here and now and the otherworld of Muslim imagination are manifold, and much remains to be said about the genealogy and function of these correspondences in areas as diverse as Muslim social and political organization, ritual and law, esthetics, and other arenas of intellectual activity. Here, however, a reading is proposed of one specific eschatological text, a description of the eight gates of paradise, in the more technical sense of structuralism as a method of interpretation. In the spirit of open inquiry into uncharted waters, what is offered here is a structuralist thought experiment rather than a full-blown theory of the Muslim hereafter.

15 Cf. Hübner, *Mythos* 1 607.

16 Meier, *Ultimate origin* 103. In a similarly disparaging way Schimmel states, *Deciphering* 238: "the descriptions of Paradise were materialized and clumsified by imaginative people."

17 Lévi-Strauss, *Totemism* 162.

18 On this latter analogy, see Lange, *Justice* 150–75.

Bracketed by these introductory reflections and the concluding structuralist analysis of the 'eight gates' tradition, the middle section of this paper explores emic as well as etic accounts of the origins of this eschatological tradition. This, in effect, results in two rather heterogeneous studies, one of the genealogy (sections 2 and 3), another of the structuralist aspects of the tradition (section 4). As for the genealogical approach, the paper argues that the tradition has its roots in a milieu around the turn of the first Muslim century in which the Temple Mount in Jerusalem was associated with paradise on earth and the octagonal Dome of the Rock was seen as the Solomonic Temple rebuilt. Turning from the question of the number of paradise gates to a consideration of the various categories of the blessed associated with each of the gates, the structuralist analysis reveals that the 'eight gates' tradition is deeply involved in contestations about the legitimacy of social activism, affirming the need to acquiesce to state authoritarianism.

2 The 'Eight Gates' Tradition: Emic Accounts

The tradition that shall be scrutinized here is a *ḥadīth* which speaks of the eight gates leading into paradise. In its fully developed, late form, the *ḥadīth* reads as follows:

Ibn 'Abbās, God be pleased with him, said: The garden has eight gates made of gold inset with precious stones. On the first one is written: *There is only one God; Muḥammad is the messenger of God*. This is the gate of the prophets, messengers, martyrs, and generous people (*al-askhiyā'*). The second gate is the gate of those who pray, performing the ritual ablutions and the prayer sections (*arkānuhu*) in their entirety. The third gate is the gate of those who give alms voluntarily (*bi-ṭayyib anfusihim*). The fourth gate is the gate of those who command right and forbid wrong. The fifth gate is the gate of those who pluck out desires (*shahawāt*) from their souls and deny them [i.e., do not indulge in] passion (*hawā*). The sixth gate is the gate of pilgrims (*al-ḥujjāj wa-l-mu'tamirūn*). The seventh gate is the gate of those who practice *jihād* (*al-mujāhidūn*). The eighth gate is the gate of the God-fearing (*al-muttaqūn*) who avert their eyes from what is forbidden (*al-maḥārim*) and do good deeds, such as piety toward parents and gifts to relatives and others.¹⁹

19 Al-Qāḍī, *Daqā'iq* 75–6.

The idea that paradise has eight gates appears at a fairly early stage in the formation of Islamic eschatology. It should be noted that the notion is absent from the Quran, which only mentions that hell has seven gates, but leaves open how many gates there are to paradise. There is a clear parallelism at work in the Quran's paradise and hell passages, and it is therefore not surprising that Muslim eschatologists should have sought, from early on, to complement the number of gates to hell with a corresponding number of entries into paradise. In a *ḥadīth* preserved in 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī's (d. 211/827) *Muṣannaf* the Prophet predicts that the eight gates of paradise will be opened to those who perform the prayer correctly, including proper ablutions and recitation of the *shahāda*.²⁰ The idea that paradise has eight gates is also transmitted separately,²¹ which may suggest that the version reported by al-Ṣan'ānī reflects an advanced stage of development in which two older traditions, one specifying acts of devotion that ensure access to paradise, the other making a claim about heavenly architecture, have become fused.²²

In neither of these early 'fused' versions is a full list of names of the gates given, nor are the corresponding groups of the blessed fully described. Such lists appear to have grown over time but did not come about early enough to enter any of the canonical *ḥadīth* collections, even if one encounters a full set of names as early as the middle of the third/ninth century, in the work of the Andalusian eschatologist Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 238/853).²³ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (d. 281/894) only knew traditions which name four gates, that is, the "gate of prayer," "gate of charity," "gate of *jihād*," and "gate of the lush [garden?]" (*Bāb al-ṣalāt*, *B. al-ṣadaqa*, *B. al-jihād*, *B. al-rayyān*)²⁴ or five, that is, the "gate of those

20 Al-Ṣan'ānī, *Muṣannaf* i, 46. See also Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf* i, 13, vi, 113; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat al-janna* 167; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat al-janna* ii, 9.

21 Al-Dārimī, *Sunan* ii, 427.

22 A more detailed analysis of the *isnād* of this tradition may challenge or at least refine this suggestion in important respects. Versions of the *ḥadīth* appear in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*, Ibn Abī Shayba's *Muṣannaf*, and in al-Nasā'ī's, al-Tirmidhī's and Ibn Māja's *Sunan* works, as well as in later collections. Cf. also Robert Tottoli's contribution to this publication (at fn. 29). The resulting *isnād* tree is quite complex, featuring several common links and 'dives.' I draw from this the preliminary conclusion that the idea of eight gates was present among the *muḥaddithūn* from at least around three generations after the death of the Prophet, that is, toward the end of the first century AH.

23 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf al-firdaws* 10. The tradition mentions the gates of *al-muṣallīn*, *al-ṣā'imīn*, *al-ṣādiqīn*, *al-mutaṣaddiqīn*, *al-qānītīn*, *al-dhākīrīn*, *al-ṣābirīn*, *al-khāshī'īn*, and *al-mutawakkilīn*. This suggests that it grew out of a milieu in which ideas of ascetic piety (*zuhd*) were important.

24 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat al-janna* 170.

who pray," "gate of those who fast," "gate of those who perform *jihād*," "gate of those who give alms," and "gate of those who keep connection [with family members]" (*B. al-muṣallīn*, *B. al-ṣā'imīn*, *B. al-mujāhidīn*, *B. al-mutaṣaddiqīn*, *B. al-wāṣilīn*).²⁵ In Abū Nu'aym's (d. 430/1038) *Ṣifat al-janna* [What the garden is like] one finds another version (with the same *isnād* as in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's tradition with five names) which names six gates, that is, the "gate of those who fast," "gate of those who seek [knowledge?]," "gate of those who perform the *hijra*," "gate of those who pray," as well as two gates that remain unspecified (*B. al-ṣā'imīn*, *B. al-tālibīn*, *B. al-muhājirīn*, *B. al-muṣallīn*, *B. kadhā*, *B. kadhā*).²⁶ However, the most full-fledged version of the 'eight gates' tradition (the one quoted above) is that which appears in the text variously ascribed to Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) or the otherwise unknown 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. Aḥmad al-Qāḍī (death date unknown).²⁷ Roberto Tottoli has recently discussed the wide circulation of this popular eschatology, commonly known as *Daqā'iq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* (The subtle traditions about paradise and hell), which he considers to be "probably the most diffused text dealing with the afterlife in Muslim literature."²⁸ So, even though this version does not appear in any of the late medieval manuals such as al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *al-Durra al-fākhira* (*The Precious Pearl*), al-Qurṭubī's (d. 671/1272) *al-Tadhkira fī aḥwāl al-mawtā* (Memoir about the conditions of the dead), or Ibn al-Qayyim's (d. 751/1350) *Hādī l-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ* (Urging souls forward toward the lands of happiness), it can be regarded as fairly representative and influential.

The first question that comes to mind when considering this cluster of traditions is why eight gates are mentioned rather than seven. The Quran only speaks of the "seven heavens" (*sab' samawāt*, Q 67:3) and the "seven firmaments" (*sab' shidād*, Q 78:12), as in general the number seven dominates in early and medieval Islamic cosmology. Likewise, eschatological *ḥadīths* typically describe seven layers (*ṭabaqāt*, *darajāt*) of paradise, in the same way in which the Prophet, during his *mi'rāj*, is usually shown through seven heavenly realms.²⁹ While the seven heavens are not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible or the Gospel, the Quranic view here parallels the cosmology developed in Christian and Jewish late antique apocalyptic and pseudoepigraphic

25 Ibid., 173–4. I owe clarification on the expression *B. al-wāṣilīn*, as well as many other helpful comments of a more general kind, to the anonymous reviewer.

26 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat al-janna* ii, 9–10.

27 On the authorship and genealogy of this text, see now Lange, *Paradise and hell* 108–12.

28 Tottoli, *Muslim eschatological literature* 475.

29 Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey* 175–234.

writings.³⁰ As in most ancient pre-Islamic Near and Middle Eastern traditions (including in Zoroastrianism), the number eight does not play any major role in the Quran.³¹

The number eight in this cluster of traditions may therefore seem an oddity; but its place was vigorously claimed and defended in the Muslim literature about paradise. In fact, not only eight gates but eight gardens became typical of the imagery of paradise. In other words, the notion of eight gates appears to have colonized the way in which the heavenly gardens were imagined. We can observe this gradual process by establishing a relative chronology of variants in the various manuscripts of *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*. In the manuscript used by John MacDonald, which bears the title *Kitāb Ḥaqā'iq al-daqa'iq* (Book of the true natures of the subtleties) and claims to be the work of the afore-mentioned al-Samarqandī, the 'eight gates' tradition is immediately followed, without further explanation, by a description of the seven gardens of paradise.³² A second stage seems to have been reached in the version of the text on which Moritz Wolff based his 1872 edition. Here one also encounters eight gates and seven gardens, but following the name of the seventh garden the text adds that this garden has "two gates";³³ as one presumes, this information was added at a later stage in the transmission of the text in order to explain the fact that the seven gardens have eight gates. This 'solution' to the problem, however, was not deemed satisfactory by the redactor of the version of *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* published under the name of 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī. In this text, an eighth garden is added.³⁴ If it is correct that the version of *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* circulating as the work of al-Qāḍī was collated in the fifth/eleventh century,³⁵ and that the *Kitāb Ḥaqā'iq al-daqa'iq* was attributed posthumously to Abū l-Layth

30 See *The Book of the Secrets of Enoch, Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs, IV Ezra, The Ascension of Isaiah*, and the *Apocalypses of Moses, Ezra, Job, Isaac, Jacob*. Cf. MacDonald, *Islamic eschatology* vi 343, 379 note 70. See Horowitz, *Cosmic geography* 217: "A tradition of seven heavens and seven earths was popular in the Near East during the later part of the first millennium B.C.E. and the first millennium C.E."

31 Although there is an exception in that "eight" (*thamāniya*) carry the throne of God (Q 69:17). For a discussion of the meaning of this expression, see below.

32 (Pseudo-)Samarqandī, *Ḥaqā'iq* 366.

33 Wolff (ed.), *Aḥwāl al-qiyāma* 106: "wa-sābi'uhā jannāt 'Adn wa-hiya . . . mushrifā 'alā l-jinān kullihā wa-lahā bābān."

34 Al-Qāḍī, *Daqā'iq* 76: "wa-thāminuhā dār al-qarār."

35 As Smith and Haddad, *Understanding* 206 fn. 11, suggest, however without giving reasons for this dating. In fact, the text is difficult to date with any degree of precision. Cf. Tottoli, *Muslim eschatological literature*.

al-Samarqandī,³⁶ the process of colonization described here occurred around the fifth/eleventh century. However, this is speculative, since no convincing dating of *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* has so far been proposed. At any rate, in late medieval Islam the eight gardens of paradise coexisted, if not exactly harmoniously, with the idea of the seven heavenly realms. *Hasht bihisht* ("eight paradises") is both the title of an epic by the Indo-Persian poet Amīr Khusraw (d. 725/1325)³⁷ and the name given by the Safavid Shāh Sulaymān (r. 1076–1105/1666–94) to a palace pavilion in Isfahan, and there are multiple other examples of the idea of eight gardens in medieval and late medieval Islamic arts, architecture, and literatures, both Sunni and Shī'i.³⁸

Both emic and etic accounts of the origin of the idea of eight gates can be given. Let us first consider the former and turn our attention to medieval Muslim strategies for pinpointing the origin of the tradition. Muslim authors offered a number of *ex eventu* explanations to account for the apparent abnormality of the number eight. One proposed explanation was that a verse in the Quran in fact implied the existence of eight gates. The verse in question is Q 39:73: "Until when they reach it [paradise], its gates are opened and its

36 It is unlikely that *Kitāb al-Ḥaqā'iq wa-l-daqā'iq* is a work of al-Samarqandī, as it pretends to be; it seems much more likely that the text was connected with his name some time after his death in 373/983. On the one hand, al-Samarqandī, the popular preacher and author of parenetic works, seems like a plausible author. In his *Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn*, one finds chapters on the 'terrors' (*ahwāl*) of the day of resurrection, as well as on paradise and hell (*Tanbīh* 27–43). Another well-known collection of eschatological *ḥadīths*, the text known as *Qurraṭ al-'uyūn*, is also ascribed to him, even if there is doubt about this attribution, too: see Sezgin, *Geschichte* i, 450. However, a comparison between the chapters on paradise and hell in *Tanbīh al-ghāfilīn* and the relevant passages in *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* quickly demonstrates that the two texts are unlikely to have been written by the same author. First, while al-Samarqandī tends to give relatively complete *isnāds*, the *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* barely mentions the *ṣaḥāba* to whom traditions are traced back. Second, the *Tanbīh* features 31 traditions about hell and 25 traditions about paradise. In *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*, on the other hand, the number of traditions about hell is increased to 38 and the number of traditions about paradise is decreased to 18. Finally, as for content, there is relatively little overlap between the two texts. Only seven of the 25 paradise traditions in the *Tanbīh* (i.e., roughly a third) reappear, in one form or another, in the 18 paradise traditions of *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*. As for hell, only 17 of the 31 traditions (i.e., roughly half) in the *Tanbīh* can be found among the 38 traditions in *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*.

37 Cf. Schimmel, *Deciphering* 80, who also notes that Persian anthologies with titles like *Gulistān* ("Rose Garden"), or *Bahāristān* ("Spring Garden") will often feature eight chapters, recalling the gardens of paradise.

38 In a poem in Yunus Emre's (d. 720/1320–1) *Divan*, the two grandsons of the Prophet, al-Ḥusayn and al-Ḥasan, are called the "kings of the eight paradises." Quoted in Schimmel, *Karbala*. Later Ottoman poetry also counts eight gardens. See Gibb, *History* i, 37.

guardians say to them: ‘Peace be upon you!’”³⁹ (*hattā idhā jā’ūhā wa-futiḥat abwābuhā wa-qāla lahum khazanatuhā salāmun ‘alaykum*). This verse presents us with yet another oddity: If one assumes, as Muslim exegetes did, that *futiḥat abwābuhā* (“its gates are opened”) is the main clause, or ‘answer’ (*jawāb*), to the preceding conditional clause *idhā jā’ūhā* (“when they reach it”), the conjunction *wa-* in *wa-futiḥat* fulfils no discernible grammatical function. However, in the traditional Muslim view, nothing in the Quran is redundant. As the doctrine of *ijāz* affirms, the Quran’s stylistic attributes are unmatched in their perfection. An alternative explanation for the occurrence of *wa-* in *wa-futiḥat* therefore had to be found. Thus, Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr (d. 463/1071) proposed that this *wa-* is in reality a hidden *wāw al-thamāniya*, a “*wāw* of eight [things].” As he explains, the Quran, in a number of verses, places a *wāw* between the seventh and the eighth word in a chain of counted items. For example, Q 9:112 describes the believers as “[1] those who repent, [2] those who worship, [3] those who praise [God], [4] those who travel [in God’s cause], [5] those who bow, [6] those who prostrate, [7] those who command right and [8] those who forbid wrong” (*al-tā’ibūna l-‘ābidūna l-ḥamīdūna l-sā’ihūna l-rākī‘ūna l-sājidūna l-āmīrūna bi-l-ma’rūfi wa-l-nāḥūna ‘an al-munkar*).⁴⁰ The *wāw* in Q 39:73 thus alludes to the fact that eight gates are opened for those who reach paradise.⁴¹

This account of the problem, however, was so tenuous that most rejected its validity.⁴² For example, Ibn al-Qayyim comments that “this is a weak argument which rests on no proof.” The Arabs, according to Ibn al-Qayyim, do not accept it, nor do the masters of the Arabic language (*a’immat al-‘arabiyya*). As he reasons, “it is merely an inference (*istinbāt*) of some latter-day scholars (*ba’d al-muta’akḥḥirīn*).”⁴³ Ibn al-Qayyim prefers to follow the opinion of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth-century authorities Abū ‘Ubayda, al-Mubarrad,

39 All translations from the Quran in this paper have been compared to Arberry’s and Paret’s translations, but are essentially my own.

40 Cf. for another example, Q 66:5.

41 Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Tamhīd* vii, 187. In a different fashion, the *wāw al-thamāniya* was used as an argument to explain the number eight by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who observed that the number seven symbolizes paucity, as in the prophetic *ḥadīth* that “the unbeliever will eat [only] in seven *am‘ā*” (*wa-l-kāfir ya’kulu fī sab‘a am‘ā*), while the number eight is a symbol of plenty, which is what in other contexts is indicated by the *wāw al-thamāniya*. “And since the garden is a place of plenty,” al-Rāzī concludes, “it has eight gates.” See al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr* xxv, 138.

42 Abū l-Layth al-Samarqandī already knew the argument but rejected it on the grounds that the number of the eight gardens is known simply and exclusively through (prophetic) tradition (*khbar*). See al-Samarqandī, *Bustān* 91–2. Also al-Qurṭubī, *Tadhkira* ii, 180, rejects the argument as weak.

43 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* 45.

and al-Zajjāj that the *jawāb* for *idhā jā'ūhā* is simply omitted (*maḥdhūf*) by way of an ellipsis, and that *wa-futiḥat abwābuhā* marks the beginning of a new sentence.⁴⁴

Avoiding speculation about the *wāw al-thamāniya*, other authors preferred to explain the eight gardens on the basis of doctrinal considerations. Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) reaffirms that the number of the heavenly gardens is eight, and he explains this by suggesting that "there are as many of them as there are virtues, just as the gates of hell are of the same number as the vices."⁴⁵ However, while a prominent *ḥadīth* does indeed state that the number of grave sins is seven,⁴⁶ the idea that there are eight 'cardinal' virtues in Islam is more difficult to pin down. How, then, did al-Ghazālī develop this idea?

It seems unlikely that al-Ghazālī derived the number eight from the ethical tradition of antiquity, despite the fact that he was, as is well known, conversant with Greek philosophy and its Muslim proponents such as al-Kindī (d. ca. 256/870), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), including in the field of philosophical ethics.⁴⁷ Greek philosophers, beginning with Plato, usually listed four cardinal virtues, namely wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice.⁴⁸ Plotinus (d. 270 CE), in the *Enneads*, had upped the ante from four to eight by counting not only four 'lower' or 'political' virtues but an additional four 'higher virtues' of a more intellectual kind, which help to bring about *apatheia*, the ideal state of the soul which is free from affects.⁴⁹ However, Plotinus's exposition was not echoed in Islamicate philosophical ethics. Most writers in this tradition, whether al-Kindī,⁵⁰ Ibn Sīnā,⁵¹ Yahyā b. 'Adī (d. 363/974),⁵² the

44 Ibid.

45 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* iv, 536; al-Ghazālī, *Remembrance*, trans. Winter 235. Al-Ghazālī names four gates: the gates of prayer, fasting, charity, and *jihād*, the same as in al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ii, 671; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ii, 711; al-Qurṭubī, *Tadhkira* ii, 168–9.

46 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iii, 1017; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* i, 92. On the problem of grave sins (*kabā'ir*), see further Stehly, *Un problème*; Lange, *Justice* 101–5; Lange, Ibn Ḥazm 432–7; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 584; Günther, *Commandments* 39.

47 For a good overview, see Winter, Introduction, in al-Ghazālī, *Remembrance*, trans. Winter.

48 Klein, *Kardinaltugenden* 695a–b. Aristotle does not highlight any special cardinal virtues.

49 Stemmer, *Tugend* 1544b.

50 Al-Kindī's work *On ethics* is lost, but in his epistle *Fī ḥudūd al-ashyā'*, he discusses a number of primary and secondary virtues. See his *Rasā'il* i, 177–9. Cf. Walzer, *Akhlāq*.

51 In his *Fī 'ilm al-akhlāq*, Ibn Sīnā preserves Plotinus's intellectualist notion that virtues help to purify the soul, but in addition to the four Platonic virtues of temperance, courage, wisdom, and justice he assumes a great number of subsidiary virtues, and the number eight again does not appear to play any significant role. See Fakhry, *Ethical theories* 86.

52 See Yahyā b. 'Adī, *Reformation*, trans. Griffith xxxiv, 29–45. Ibn 'Adī lists twenty virtues (*akhlāq ḥasana*).

influential Ibn Miskawayh (d. 421/1030),⁵³ or Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064),⁵⁴ focused on the four platonic virtues, which they usually render as *ḥikma* (“wisdom”), *‘iffa* (“temperance”), *shajā’a* (“courage”), and *‘adāla* (“justice”). They often combined this with the Aristotelian definition of virtue as the mean between two extremes, that is, two opposite vices.⁵⁵ Since each of the cardinal virtues were thus declared to lie between two vices, if anything one would surmise that thinkers in this tradition would have counted eight vices rather than virtues of the same number. As for al-Ghazālī himself, in *Mizān al-‘amal* (The criterion of action) and *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*), he discusses the four cardinal virtues (*ummahāt al-faḍā’il*) of wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice. He says that it is from these four virtues that all other virtues result, but he does not mention the number eight.⁵⁶ Instead, as is the case in most if not all Muslim philosophical ethics, he proceeds to develop a plethora of subsidiary virtues whose number far surpasses eight.⁵⁷

Why, then, does al-Ghazālī speak of “eight virtues” corresponding to the eight gates of paradise? Although he does not say so, al-Ghazālī must have conceived of a combination of the four philosophical virtues with a rather different set of virtues, those that consist of ways of trusting and soliciting divine assistance. In separate discussions in *Mizān al-‘amal* as well as in the *Iḥyā’*, al-Ghazālī consciously parallels the four philosophical virtues and enumerates four such ‘theological’ virtues: trust in God’s guidance (*hidāyat Allāh*), in His guidance (*rushd*), in His disposing people to that which is right (*tasdīd*), and in His support (*ta’yīd*).⁵⁸ For al-Ghazālī, human happiness (*sa’āda*) can only be achieved if philosophical virtues are rooted in the acknowledgment of the necessity of divine assistance. He thus achieves for Islam what St. Thomas achieved for Christianity, namely, he identified a catalogue of basic virtues that encompasses both philosophical and theological virtues.⁵⁹ Al-Ghazālī’s

53 Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb* 38.

54 Ibn Ḥazm, *Akhlāq* 57, trans. Tomiche 71.

55 Ibn Miskawayh, *Tahdhīb* 45–8; Ibn Ḥazm, *Akhlāq* 79, trans. Tomiche 102.

56 Al-Ghazālī, *Mizān* 264; al-Ghazālī, *On disciplining*, trans. Winter 20–2.

57 Al-Ghazālī, *On disciplining*, trans. Winter 41–5. Cf. Ṭūsī, *Nasirean ethics*, trans. Wickens, 82–5.

58 Sherif, *Ghazali’s theory* 80.

59 Klein, Kardinaltugenden 695a-b: While Ambrosius (d. 397) used the concept of “theological virtues” for the first time in Biblical exegesis, Thomas of Aquinas, in his *Summa* combined the four cardinal virtues of antique philosophy with the three “theological virtues” (faith, love, hope). For a discussion of the relationship between philosophical and theological virtues in al-Ghazālī, see Sherif, *Ghazali’s theory* 83–6, 162, 164. See also Goldziher, *Richtungen* 203, fn. 3, who notes that al-Ghazālī connects the idea of a combination of

explanation of the eight gates to paradise, which he reached by alluding to the eight combined philosophical and theological virtues, seems to be his own innovation, without any anchor in the tradition. As interesting as al-Ghazālī's theory of eight virtues may be, it does little to explain the origin of the 'eight gates' tradition and therefore is, like the theory of *wāw al-thamāniya*, a gesture of clutching at straws.

Even more far-fetched is Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1209) proposal to connect each of the eight gates of paradise to the verses of Surat *al-Fātiḥa*.⁶⁰ As he muses, "in this way, when you recite this Sura and ponder its mysteries (*waqfa 'alā asrārihā*), the eight gates of the garden open up to you."⁶¹ Here we enter into the area of fanciful, if poetic, intuition. Indeed, the question as to why there are eight gates to paradise mystified Muslim commentators to the degree that some concluded that a special mystical insight was necessary to answer it. In a story in a sixth/twelfth-century Sufi commentary of the Quran, a Muslim mystic, captured by the Byzantines, interrogates their bishop about the number of doors to heaven (i.e., eight) and hell (i.e., seven), and what is written on the door of the garden (i.e., "There is no god but God and Muḥammad is the messenger of God"), whereupon the bishop, touched by the mysterious "light of faith" emanating from the Muslim mystic, is led openly to denounce his Christian faith and convert to Islam.⁶² The idea that the number of gates to paradise demonstrates God's all-encompassing love and mercy toward mankind also belongs in a Sufi context. In the *ḥadīth*, the number of eight gates to

"dianoetic and ethical virtues," known from the Greek tradition, with Q 35:10, in which it is stated that "goodly words (*al-kalim al-ṭayyiba*) and righteous deeds (*al-'amal al-ṣāliḥ*) ascend to God."

- 60 According to al-Rāzī, the eight gates of paradise are [1] *B. al-Ma'rifa*, which "opens up" to the believers when they recite a number of preparatory formulas (such as *Allāhu akbar*, *subḥānaka Allāhumma bi-ḥamdika*, and *a'ūdhu bi-llāhi min al-shayṭāni l-rajīm*) before reciting the actual Sura *al-Fātiḥa*, [2] *B. al-Dhikr*, "and this is when you say *bi-ismi llāhi al-raḥmāni l-raḥīm*," [3] *B. al-Shukr*, "and this when you say *al-ḥamdu li-llāh rabbi l-'ālamīn*," [4] *B. al-Rajā'*, "and this is when you say *al-raḥmān al-raḥīm*," [5] *B. al-Khawf*, "and this is when you say *māliku yawm al-dīn*," [6] *B. al-Ikhlāṣ al-mutawallid min ma'rifat al-'ubūdiyya wa-ma'rifat al-rubūbiyya*, "and this is when you say *īyāka na'budu wa-īyāka nasta'īn*," [7] *B. al-Du'ā' wa-l-taḍarru'*, "and this is when you say *ihdīnā l-ṣirāṭa l-mustaqīm*," [8] *B. al-Iqtidā' bi-l-arwāḥ al-ṭayyiba al-ṭāhira wa-l-ihdīdā' bi-anwārihim*, "and this is when you say *ṣirāṭa l-ladhina an'amta 'alayhim ghayri l-maghḍūbi 'alayhim wa-lā l-ḍāllīn*." See al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr* i, 223.
- 61 Ibid. On the salvific efficacy of reciting Sura *al-Fātiḥa* according to Sufi doctrine, see Ernst, *Guide* 89.
- 62 Al-Maybudī, *Kashf* vi, 545. The story is discussed in Sands, *Šūfī commentaries* 133–5.

paradise is at times contrasted with the seven gates of hell.⁶³ Sufi authors found here an illustration of the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* that “My mercy outweighs my wrath.”⁶⁴ The idea is announced, *inter alia*, by Rūmī (d. 672/1273),⁶⁵ and reverberates over the centuries well into the twentieth century.⁶⁶

3 The ‘Eight Gates’ Tradition: Etic Accounts

It was not until modern times that the question of the eight gates of paradise was given a new and more solid framing. The Ibadi scholar Muḥammad b. Yūsuf Aṭafayyish (d. 1332/1914) connects the eight gates of paradise to the four gardens mentioned in the celebrated Sura *al-Raḥmān* of the Quran. As Aṭafayyish observes, most people think there are seven gardens of paradise, but “it is also said that there are four gardens, because of what He said [in the Quran]: ‘For those who fear the station of their Lord shall be two gardens, and below them there shall be two more gardens’ (Q 55:46).”⁶⁷ At the same time, Aṭafayyish continues, quoting Q 39:73 (*wa-futiḥat abwābuhā*), “God has made it clear that the gardens have gates,” then adding the prophetic tradition that paradise has eight gates. “Perhaps,” he concludes, “this is because each of the four gardens has two gates” (see Fig. 15.1).⁶⁸

Aṭafayyish’s fundamental insight, albeit not fully spelled out, is that the notion of eight gates may have something to do with the dual structure of Sura *al-Raḥmān*. The use of the dual *jannatān* in this Sura may thus have given rise to the notion that the number of the gardens in paradise is four, or a multiple of four such as eight. As Annemarie Schimmel writes,

our imaginative faculty becomes slightly confused when in Surat-ar-Rahman Sura 55/46–75 two gardens are mentioned, with two fountains of running water and two kinds of every fruit... this description gave room for detailed attempts to figure out the geography of paradise into which the two times two gardens would fit.⁶⁹

63 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat al-janna* ii, 18.

64 Al-Ṣanʿānī, *Muṣannaḥ* xi, 411; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iii, 1166.

65 Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth-i mathnawī* no. 64, quoted in Schimmel, *Deciphering* 80.

66 See, for example, Ahmet Kayhan (d. 1998), a Turkish Naqshbandī *shaykh*, as reported in Bayman, *Secret of Islam* 86–8.

67 On the survival of this idea in later tradition, cf. Radtke, *Weltgeschichte* 341–2.

68 Aṭafayyish, *Junna* 87.

69 Schimmel, *Celestial garden* 18.

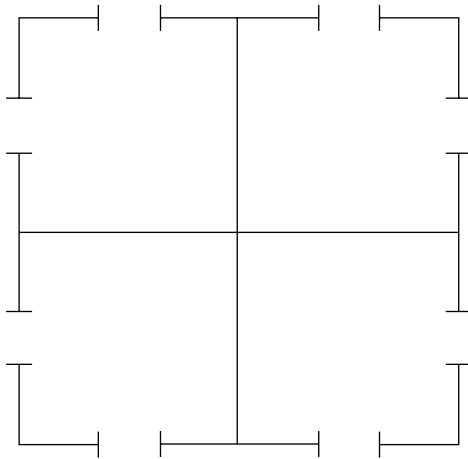


FIGURE 15.1

In other words, structural constraints, that is, a peculiar Quranic use of the Arabic dual form in Sura *al-Raḥmān*, may have given rise to the notion of the eight gates of paradise.⁷⁰ What makes this explanation appealing is that it is relatively straightforward. One immediately thinks of the analogy in Islamic architecture: Arguably, the floor plans of *Chahār bāgh* gardens (cf. Fig. 15.1) and *Hasht bihisht* palace buildings result from structural constraints (symmetry and statics) more than any 'deeper' underlying metaphysical agenda such as, for example, the desire to create paradise on earth.⁷¹ What makes the explanation problematic, on the other hand, is that it leaves unanswered the question as to how exactly eight gates came to be extrapolated from the four gardens of paradise mentioned in Sura *al-Raḥmān*. Against what one might have expected, nothing in traditional Islamic eschatological literature supports Aṭafayyish's suggestion that there are two gates for each of the four gardens of paradise.

Let us examine a last set of hypotheses about the origin of the 'eight gates' tradition. Perhaps it is possible to trace the notion of eight gates leading to the heavenly realm to non-Islamic sources. It is tempting to see a connection with the Babylonian notion that the godhead inhabits the eighth level of the ceremonial temple tower.⁷² As Heinen observes in his classic study of

70 On duality and symmetry in the Quran, cf. Neuwirth, *Symmetrie und Paarbildung*; Lawson, *Opposition and duality*.

71 Cf. Allen's scathing critique of Western scholars' tendency to read paradise into Islamic art. See Allen, *Imagining paradise*.

72 Schimmel, *Mystery* 156. Unfortunately, Schimmel does not cite her sources for this contention, and I haven't been able to verify her claim. A seven- or eight-level ziggurat may be

medieval Islamic cosmology, “the number eight is not altogether foreign to ancient cosmological contexts,”⁷³ noting that some of the oldest Babylonian texts “indicate something like a universe of 8 different spheres, beginning with the sphere of the moon.”⁷⁴ He goes on to note that this is related to the idea one finds in chapter 11 of 2 *Enoch* (probably written in the first century CE), namely, that all stars are subordinated to eight great ones which bear the chariot of the sun. These eight stars, he suggests, are the “eight ones” which, according to the Quran, carry God’s throne above the angels (Q 69:17: *wa-yahmilu ‘arsha rabbika fawqahum yawma’idhin thamāniya*).⁷⁵ The ‘eight gates’ tradition, in other words, may derive from Q 69:17, but looking back to a much more ancient Judeo-Christian and Babylonian pedigree.⁷⁶ However, it is still a rather long shot from the eight stars of ancient Near Eastern cosmology to the eight gates of the Islamic paradise. While the scenario is not entirely implausible, perhaps we do not have to look so far into the past for an answer. An origin in Near Eastern cosmology of the centuries immediately before and after the rise of Islam would in any case be more likely.

One can exclude a Mazdaean influence with a certain degree of certainty. Though rich in cosmological and eschatological speculation, the two Middle Persian texts closest to the formative period of eschatological *ḥadīth*, the *Bundahishn* and the *Dēnkart*, have nothing to say about the eight gates of heaven, and very little on the number eight in general (as in the Quran, the

“an ideal” but no such structures are actually known to have existed (personal communication from Nick Wyatt).

73 Heinen, *Islamic cosmology* 202. The oldest surviving attempt at a representation of the whole world, the Babylonian map of the world from around 600 BCE, shows eight remote regions of the world, arranged concentrically around the central disk of land surrounded by the sea. For an analysis and reconstruction of this map, see Wyatt, *Space and time* 81–2.

74 Heinen cites Neugebauer, *Exact sciences* 99–100.

75 As is well known, Islamic tradition has seen in these “eight” a set of eight angels. See al-Qazwīnī, *‘Ajā’ib* i, 56. Also arguing for this interpretation is Nallino, *Raccolta* v, 196. Cf. Schimmel, *Mystery* 157.

76 Also Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 25–6, leans toward an ancient Near Eastern derivation. A Jewish background is suggested by MacDonald, *Islamic eschatology* vi 342, who states, a bit obscurely, that the number eight is “matched by the Jewish [Rabbinic] tradition that those who would aspire to the highest heaven in order to reach ‘Arabot must first pass through seven gates,” referring to Ginzberg, *Legends* i, 69. Both Jewish Merkabah mysticism and a number of Gnostic texts speak of an eighth heaven. See Charlesworth, *Old Testament pseudepigrapha* i, 136, 236, 238; ii 704. Another way of looking at the problem is this: If there are seven heavens or gardens, each with one gate, and if God resides *beyond* them, then another (eighth) gate would indeed seem to be required to lead into this realm “beyond.” However, neither Rabbinic nor Muslim tradition seems to offer this as an explanation.

number seven dominates). A connection with Ptolemaic cosmology, which superseded Biblical-Quranic cosmology particularly after the advent of the 'Abbasids in 750 CE, is more readily conceivable. The *Almagest* counts seven planetary spheres and an eighth sphere of fixed stars. Perhaps in the 'eight gates' tradition, we are witness to the transition from a Biblical-Quranic model of seven heavens built on top of the (flat) earth to a geocentric Ptolemaic cosmology which counts eight orbs (*aflāk*).⁷⁷ The *Almagest* was first translated into Arabic under al-Ma'mūn (r. 197–218/813–33),⁷⁸ but Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* was known to Arabic-reading scholars slightly earlier, in the second half of the eighth century.⁷⁹ However, even if Ptolemaic notions circulated in Muslim learned circles before 800, the idea of eight gates is likely to have originated at an earlier point in time (see above). In addition, if indeed the tradition derives from cosmological models (whether Ptolemaic or Babylonian), one would also expect it to use terminology denoting the vertical, heavenly aspect of stratified "layers" of the firmament, such as *ṭabaqa*, *daraja*, or *aflāk*, rather than "gates" (*abwāb*), which points to a more horizontal, terrestrial conception.

Let us therefore note a final possible background: the "earthly paradise" Jerusalem and in particular, the *ḥaram al-sharīf* with the Dome of the Rock at its center.⁸⁰ Since Biblical times the Temple Mount was conceived as a "mythopoeic realization of heaven on earth," and the Solomon Temple, as has been suggested, replicated the garden of Eden in its iconography of flowers and trees.⁸¹ To pass through the gates of the Temple Mount, then, was to enter paradise. This ancient idea survived into Islamic times, whether in Rabbinical,⁸²

77 For this process, cf. van Bladel, Heavenly cords.

78 See Kunitzsch, *Almagest* 17–34.

79 Sezgin, *Geschichte* v, 167.

80 The other 'earthly paradise' of note in Islam is the sanctuary in Mecca. Mecca's many connections with the garden of Eden have recently been discussed by Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 63–7 and passim. However, the most important early sources on Mecca's sanctuary do not indicate that the number eight held any specific significance for the gates leading into the Meccan sanctuary, or for the sanctuary in general. For example, Ibn 'Abd Rabbih (d. 328/940), in the geographical section of *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, says that the number of gates in the enclosing wall of the mosque is 23. See the translation in Shafī', Description 424. The same number is given in al-Azraqī (d. ca. 250/864), *Akhbār Makka* i, 323–9, who then proceeds to count 24 gates, five on the eastern side, seven on the southern side, six on the western side, and another six on the northern side of *al-masjid al-ḥarām*.

81 Stager, Jerusalem.

82 The Temple Mount's luminal nature as the place where heaven and earth meet is expressed, *inter alia*, in the rabbinical idea that the Rock is the "barrier" in Gen. 1 that separates the two waters, that is, the earth below and the sky above.

Christian⁸³ or Muslim literature.⁸⁴ According to the latter, the Rock sits on top of one of the gates of paradise (*‘alā bāb min abwāb al-janna*),⁸⁵ or is itself the gate to paradise.⁸⁶ According to another tradition, the Rock marks the epicenter of the garden: the four rivers of paradise spring from underneath it (cf. Psalm 46:5; Ezekiel 47:1–12).⁸⁷ In this latter conception, the entry gates to this sacred ground are located in the near periphery: the east wall of the *ḥaram al-sharīf*, which to this day features the so-called Gate of Mercy, was sometimes equated with the Quranic wall “with a door in it; inside it will be mercy, and outside it, in front of it, punishment” (Q 57:13).⁸⁸ Once one passed the gate to the Muslim sanctuary and entered its central edifice, the observer found himself surrounded by the paradise mosaics of the inner octagonal arcade of the Dome of the Rock. All in all, it appears reasonable to suggest that Muslims living in the century after the building of the Dome of the Rock associated the *ḥaram* with the earthly paradise and by extension, its gates with the gates of the garden, thus providing an early Islamic illustration of the phenomenon of the “disappearing border between this world and the next.”

However, what is the significance of the number eight for the *ḥaram*? The octagonal shape of the Dome of the Rock comes most readily to mind, replicated, on a smaller scale, in the Dome of the Chain and in the number of arches, pillars, and columns of both structures.⁸⁹ The number eight, however, is also imprinted into the Jewish history of the site. Though it lacks any intrinsic symbolic import in Judaism, the number eight is noteworthy for its being

83 High ‘Abbasid Christian tradition connects the Rock with Jacob’s dream of the “gate to heaven.” Here is where God spoke to Jacob when he saw the angels descend and ascend. See the tenth-century Sa‘īd b. Biṭrīq, *Ta’rīkh* ii 18, 1–3, cited in Kaplony, *Ḥaram* 522. See further Creswell, *Early Muslim architecture* 32; Busse, ‘Omar b. al-Ḥaṭṭāb 107–10.

84 For all three Abrahamic traditions’ views of the Temple Mount, see Kaplony, *Ḥaram*, from which much of the information used in this section is derived. See also, much shorter but still richly informative, Kaplony, *Mosque of Jerusalem*.

85 Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *‘Iqd* vii, 256. Cf. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem* 79.

86 Al-Ṭabarī reports from Wahb b. Munabbih that “David saw the angels with their drawn swords sheathing them and climbing a golden ladder from the Rock to heaven.” See al-Ṭabarī, *History*, trans. Brinner 151. See further Kaplony, *Ḥaram* 511.

87 Al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il* 69 (no. 111), cited in Kaplony, *Ḥaram* 359.

88 Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *‘Iqd* vii, 256, cited in Kaplony, *Ḥaram* 456. There were also views opposed to this identification. Ibn Kathīr, for example, insists that “paradise is in the highest heavens and hell in the deepest places below.” See Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem* 106.

89 Kaplony, *Ḥaram* Bo40.5.a, states that “[i]t has been assumed that the eight walls . . . symbolize Paradise; this may well be.”

connected to the Temple.⁹⁰ In particular the prophet Ezekiel has a predilection for the number eight in the Temple structure.⁹¹ Numerous scholars have proposed that the Umayyad rulers considered the Dome of the Rock as the rebuilt (Solomonic) Temple.⁹² Muslim rituals performed in and around the Dome of the Rock under the Umayyads probably meant to echo Jewish ceremonies held at the Temple,⁹³ perhaps even including the Temple sacrifice.⁹⁴ There are also important architectural and decorative continuities: Priscilla Soucek has drawn attention to the "parallels between the literary traditions connected with Solomon's Temple and the decoration" of the Dome of the Rock.⁹⁵ Significantly, not only Muslims, but also Jews seem to have viewed the Dome of the Rock as the new Temple. Jewish *ex eventu* prophecies from the seventh and eighth centuries CE predict that "the nation of Muḥammad shall build the Temple of Jerusalem."⁹⁶ Jews appear to have regularly visited the Temple Mount to lighten the lamps in the Dome of the Rock, until 'Umar II forbade the practice.⁹⁷

In conclusion, the 'eight gates' tradition may have originated in a milieu in which the Dome of the Rock was celebrated as the rebuilt Temple, and in which this Temple, because of its ancient Jewish but also its recent Muslim symbolism, was considered to have eight gates. The number of gates to the *ḥaram* platform in the second and third Islamic centuries appears to be impossible to determine with precision, oscillating between eight and thirteen.⁹⁸ But if the 'eight gates' tradition does indeed allude to the gates to the *ḥaram*, it would

90 Abrahams, Numbers 336.

91 Ezekiel, in his Babylonian exile, has a vision in which God transports him back to Jerusalem to witness a "new temple." Ezekiel 40:31, 34, and 37 mention stairways with eight steps leading to various vestibules in the courts of the Temple, while Ezekiel 40:41 speaks of eight tables next to the gate (i.e. four on each side) on which sacrifices are to be performed.

92 Busse, Sanctity of Jerusalem 454–60; Crone and Cook, *Hagarism* 10; Kaplony, Mosque of Jerusalem 101, 106–14.

93 Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem* 162.

94 As Sibṭ b. al-Jawzī reports in *Mir'āt al-zamān*, 'Abd al-Malik used to perform sacrifice by the Rock on *ʿĪd al-aḏḥā*. Cited in Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem* 54.

95 Soucek, Temple of Solomon 95.

96 Kister, Traditions 186. See also Crone and Cook, *Hagarism* 10, on the mid-eighth-century *Secrets of R. Simon Ben Yoḥay* which speaks of a "second king who restores the breaches of the Temple." Cook and Crone identify this "second king" with 'Abd al-Malik. The text has been published by Lewis, Apocalyptic 308–39, esp. 325, 327.

97 Al-Wāsiṭī, *Faḏā'il* 43.

98 Cf. Kaplony, *Ḥaram*. Note that Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem* 50, counts eight gates to the *ḥaram* in the Umayyad period.

have been first brought into circulation toward the beginning of this period, that is in the decades immediately following the construction of the Dome of the Rock.⁹⁹

4 A Structural Reading of the 'Eight Gates' Tradition

As intriguing as the question of the origin of the idea of eight gates may be, no answer to this puzzle will help us understand the actual content of the tradition transmitted in the cluster of texts known as *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*. Let us return, then, to the question of why this tradition assigns the following eight specific groups of the blessed to the eight gates: (1) "prophets, messengers, martyrs, and generous people," (2) "those who pray, performing the ritual ablutions and the prayer sections in their entirety," (3) "those who give alms voluntarily," (4) "those who command right and forbid wrong," (5) "those who pluck out desires from their souls and deny them [to indulge in] passion," (6) "pilgrims," (7) "those who practice *jihād*," and (8) "the God-fearing who avert their eyes from what is forbidden and do good deeds, such as piety toward parents and gifts to relatives and others."

At first sight, this choice seems indeed arbitrary, the list heterogeneous or even chaotic. For example, three of the five 'pillars' of Islam are included (prayer, alms-giving and pilgrimage) – but why not the other two? One also notices that a number of terms in this list of the virtuous make a somewhat unexpected appearance, such as *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-nahy 'an al-munkar* (henceforth "AMNM") in group four, or are oddly matched within their respective group, such as the "generous" (*askhiyā*) in the first group, who keep company with the prophets and martyrs. What kind of contextual factors motivated the inclusion of these groups of people while others remained excluded and why in this hierarchized sequence? I shall attempt to formulate some answers to these questions by applying a structural method of analysis.¹⁰⁰

99 According to A.E. Harvey, who unfortunately provides no evidence for his claim, Herod's temple had eight gates. See Harvey, *Companion* 396. It should be noted, however, that the Solomonic Temple played a more important role in the collective memory of Islamicate peoples, the Herodian temple having a largely Hellenic-Roman character. See Soucek, *Temple of Solomon* 77.

100 I am taking my inspiration here from Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the myth of Oedipus. See Lévi-Strauss, *Structural study* 213–9.

The first step in such an analysis is to reduce the complexity of the tradition to its gross constituent units or “mythemes.”¹⁰¹ This shall be done by classifying the actions of each group according to a set of binary oppositions, thus creating a number of “bundles of relations.” A basic binary that informs the ‘eight gates’ tradition (as well as many other eschatological traditions) is that between immanence and transcendence. The ‘eight gates’ tradition presents a model by which a number of types of human actions on earth are correlated with the same number of heavenly abodes. The binary underlies not only the tradition as a whole; also the object of each type of action can be characterized as primarily transcendent or immanent in nature. The types of action either express (1) a desire to seek direct communion with God, while their consequences for human society occupy a secondary rank (take prayer as an example), or (2) they aim to challenge, change or improve human society on earth (for example, AMNM). In other words, the types of action that appear in the tradition are variously directed toward the transcendent or the immanent realm. A first binary opposition, then, results from the *objects of action*, that is, whether they are immanent or transcendent.

A second binary serves to capture the *modes of action* in the tradition. From the appearance of AMNM one can infer that the tradition shows an interest in the question of social activism. AMNM, a cornerstone of Muslim religious ethics, was often seen as potentially dangerous, not least because it latently threatened to undermine the sanctity of the private sphere.¹⁰² Also striking and unusual in the overall pattern of the tradition is the phrase praising those “who avert their eyes from what is forbidden (*al-mahārim*)” in the eighth group – another indication that the tradition is concerned with issues of privacy. The modes of action in the tradition can thus be categorized according to whether the actions tend to have a public dimension or to stay within the private sphere of the individual and his or her kin.

With this we come to posit two primary binary oppositions (and two secondary ones) which structure the tradition:

Transcendent/immanent (God/society)
 Activist/quietist (public/private)

This gives us four possible combinations, or “bundles of relations”: transcendent activism (TA), transcendent quietism (TQ), immanent activism (IA), and immanent quietism (IQ). The way in which these combinations are distributed

101 Lévi-Strauss, Structural study 210–1.

102 For the embattled history of this concept, see Cook, *Commanding right*.

TA	TQ	IA	IQ
Prophets, messengers, martyrs, <i>askhiyā'</i>	those who pray, performing the ablutions etc.		
those who give alms voluntarily		those who command right and forbid wrong	
			those who pluck out desires from their souls etc.
	Pilgrims		
		those who practice <i>jihād</i>	
			the God-fearing who avert their eyes from what is forbidden etc.

over the tradition may offer us further clues for interpretation. The following chart, in which the “bundles of relations” are arranged in vertical columns (from left to right: TA, TQ, IA, IQ), shows this distribution.

In explanation of this arrangement, let us begin by noting that the type of action characteristic of prophets, messengers, and martyrs tends to be activist and directed toward communion with God. Actors in this group carry a public agenda for improving society, and their acts, whether as receivers of revelation or of fighters “on the path of God,” put them in particular proximity to the realm of the transcendent. (Let us pass over the *askhiyā'* in this first group for a moment; we shall come back to them in due course.) Praying, the second type of action, is likewise an act of seeking communion with the transcendent, but it lacks the activist dimension of prophecy and martyrdom, and is therefore categorized as a quietist mode of action. Third, alms-giving (*zakāt*), as one of the five pillars, is an act directed toward the transcendent, but as

	Type of action	transcendent/ immanent	activist/ quietist	
1	Prophets, martyrs, <i>askhiyā'</i>	T	A	T + A
2	Prayer	T	Q	
3	Voluntary alms-giving	T	A	
4	AMNM	I	A	
5	Desire control	I	Q	T + Q
6	Pilgrimage	T	Q	
7	<i>Jihād</i>	I	A	I + A
8	Obedience to law	I	Q	

FIGURE 15.2

opposed to prayer, it has an active effect on society and can therefore be considered an activist mode of action. This activist character of alms-giving is also underlined by the addition of the phrase “voluntarily” (*bi-ṭayyib anfusihi*), which indicates that the tradition conceives alms-giving not as an act done reluctantly and privately, but willingly and openly. Fourth, AMNM is an activist mode of action directed toward the improvement of human society, that is, it is a form of immanent activism. Fifth, “control of one’s desires” can be interpreted as a kind of AMNM directed toward oneself. For this reason, we shall consider it here as an instance of immanent quietism. Sixth, pilgrimage, as one of the five pillars, emphasizes communion with the transcendent but is largely a private act (even though carried out in public during the *ḥajj* or *ʿumra*). Seventh, *jihād* is a form of immanent activism, similar to AMNM, though (usually) more violent. Eighth, “obedience to the law” is an immanent and quietist mode of action; rather than subverting or actively changing society, it tends to safeguard appearances – the protection of privacy is clearly enunciated in the eighth group, which tellingly includes “those who avert their eyes from what is forbidden.”

As Figure 15.2 shows, the four possible permutations of the two conceptual binaries appear in the tradition in regular distribution, that is, twice each.

Certain natural resemblances between the two terms forming each of the pairs are immediately visible, such as exist, for example, between prophecy and almsgiving, prayer and pilgrimage, AMNM and *jihād*, controlling one's desire and obedience to the law.

The balance achieved in this model suggests an answer to the question as to why only three of the five pillars appear in the tradition. The two missing pillars are not included out of considerations of symmetry, that is, in order to safeguard an even spread over all four types of actions. The acts of fasting and declaration of the *shahāda* are of the TQ type, of which the tradition already features two (prayer and pilgrimage).¹⁰³ The symmetric pull exercised by the tradition has a number of other ramifications as well. As I have suggested, the addition of the formula *bi-ṭayyib anfusihi* to the "giving of *zakāt*" serves to convince audiences of the deliberate, or activist, nature of the action. The symmetric structure of the tradition constrains group three into being of the TA type. This also explains the rather surprising appearance of the *askhiyā'* in the first group. Since "those who give alms" in group three and the "generous people" in group one are relatives, so to speak, a seemingly natural connection is established between the two groups, or gates. In consequence, both appear as instances of the TA type, even though prima facie alms-giving does not exactly seem to fit the bill. In sum, the tradition exhibits a much stronger structural stability than is immediately obvious to the eye.

We may now proceed to question the purpose or *function* of this symmetry. The structure of the tradition establishes a homology between two pairs of binary oppositions: it suggests that TA is to TQ what IA is (or possibly ought to be) to IQ.

TA: TQ :: IA: IQ

The pair TA: TQ, because of its position on top of the model (gates 1, 2, 3 and 6), claims logical priority over the other pair. The types of action – "transcendent activism" and "transcendent quietism" – complement each other harmoniously, since the former is carried out by the few, while the latter is the default mode of behavior for the great majority of believers. By contrast, in real life there is always tension between IA and IQ. In the history of Islamic political

103 Note that the "gate of fasting" and the "gate of the *shahāda*" are mentioned in other traditions, but did not make it into the tradition in *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*. See al-Ṣan'ānī, *Muṣannaf* i, 46 (the gate is opened for those who say the *shahāda*); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iii, 1188 (the *al-rayyān* gate is opened for those who fast); al-Qurṭubī, *Tadhkira* ii, 179 (*Bāb al-rayān*), 180 (stating that the *shahāda* will open *all* the doors of the garden); Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 48.

thought, forms of “immanent activism” such as AMNM or *jihād* were always looked at with a measure of suspicion; political quietism was generally recommended by the classical *fuqahā*, not to mention the ideologues of state power.¹⁰⁴ Proponents of IA always threatened to undermine this privileged status of IQ, and thereby, social stability. Now, the latent contradiction between IA and IQ is resolved in the ‘eight gates’ tradition through the suggested homology with TA: TQ. This of course is not really a ‘solution’; rather, like similar homologies in mythical literature, the homology “serves to alleviate concern” by “establishing a *pseudological* resolution.”¹⁰⁵ By assigning IA a place in its “system” of types of behavior, the tradition alleviates widespread fears that *jihād* and AMNM engender social unrest.

At the same time, it is possible to read a more normative and slightly more sinister twist into the homology TA: TQ:: IA: IQ. Only select people practice TA but many practice TQ. By analogy it could thus appear ‘natural’ that few people should practice IA, while many should practice IQ. If read in this light, the tradition not only alleviates concern, but also serves to legitimate state authoritarianism, which precludes all non-state actors from social activism.

5 Conclusions

We cannot decide here which of the two functions of the tradition discussed in the preceding paragraph ought to be regarded as more important; the answer to this question is likely to depend on one’s understanding and definition of the function of myth, that is, whether it is thought to provide taxonomy or ideology.¹⁰⁶ What this study of one particular eschatological tradition has tried to accomplish is twofold. First, it seeks to contribute to our understanding of the historical development of Muslim eschatological literature, an area of scholarly inquiry that still awaits full treatment by scholars of Islam. As the discussion in sections two and three of this article demonstrates, the search for origins of eschatological ideas in Islam is a complex task that quickly

104 This is of course an overgeneralization. Alternative views of the legitimacy to engage in social activism, even without the consent of the powers that be, were developed in a variety of Muslim discourses. See Lange and Fierro, *Aspects of public violence* 1–2.

105 Csapo, *Theories* 224.

106 According to post-structuralist definitions, myths do not “write themselves” as the structuralists would have it, but rather, they are cultural products reflecting and advancing the interests of those who write or collect them. In this vein, Bruce Lincoln declares that myth is “ideology in narrative form.” See Lincoln, *Theorizing myth* 147.

mushrooms into speculation but seldom produces indisputable results. This search remains essential for the scholarly understanding of Muslim eschatology, but one must not be completely transfixed by the question of origins alone. Therefore, second, this study has analyzed a popular eschatological text from the point of view of the structural study of myth, thus laying bare some of the possible psychological and social functions of the eschatological imagination in medieval Islam. As the results of this analysis suggest, eschatological narratives should be taken seriously in all their complexity and seeming arbitrariness. They deserve to be studied with the same interpretive tools, including formalist and structuralist tools, that cognate disciplines in the humanities have so fruitfully applied to non-Islamic mythical literature.

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Temporary Hellfire Punishment and the Making of Sunni Orthodoxy

Feras Hamza

This chapter is concerned with the development of the idea of temporary hell in early Islam. Almost all of the classical Sunni creeds contain one or two articles of faith that affirm the eventual salvation of a group of people who have been in hell. These individuals are mostly identified as the Muslim grave sinners (*ahl al-kabā'ir*), though in certain versions they are ambiguously identified as 'the monotheists' (*muwahhidūn*). The salvation of these individuals, as it is described in the creeds, is tied to, and comes as a result of, the Prophet's eschatological intercession (*shafā'a*); but at other times, the deliverance is simply on account of God's mercy.¹ This is captured by Abū Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–6) in his creed as follows: "They, the people of the *sunna* and *ḥadīth* (sc. Sunnis), believe that by reason of the intercession of God's Messenger, God will bring out a group of monotheists from Hell, according to what has been related from the Messenger of God."² Another similar statement is made by the Mālikī al-Qayrawānī (fl. mid fourth/tenth century): "Through the intercession of the Prophet for the grave sinners of his community, God takes him [the grave sinner] out of Hell."³

The concept of a purgatorial hellfire was apparently a modification of the Quran's otherwise explicit depictions of an eternal and unrelenting hellfire for sinners – the counterpart to the paradisaal garden of the righteous. This well-known binary opposition in the Quran's recurring descriptions of the two post-mortem abodes seems to allow for no third eschatological alternative. Indeed it is the eternality of both abodes that reinforces, for the believer, the starkness of the contrast and heightens the rhetorical impact of one of the Quran's central themes. But by allowing for a purgatorial rehabilitation, and thus

1 This is true of the Ḥanbalī creeds (for which, see Laoust, *Profession*; Watt, *Creeds* 30–1); but also of the creeds of Ibn Māja and al-Tirmidhī (see Watt, *Creeds* 36; Wensinck, *Creed* 125), of the Ḥanafīs (Wensinck, *Creed*, 188), of the Ash'arīs (Watt, *Creeds* 44, 50, 53, 78, 88), of the Mālikīs (Watt, *Creeds* 70) and of the Māturīdīs (Watt, *Creeds* 82).

2 Watt, *Creed* 44.

3 Ibid., 70.

ultimately the salvation, of the grave sinners of the Muslim community in the next world, the concept vindicated the legitimacy of their membership of this same community in this world: all professing Muslims, whether sinful or not, gravely so or otherwise, would eventually gain admission into paradise. The elaboration of this concept and its consolidation within mainstream orthodoxy was a Sunni project, an anti-sectarian impulse that ultimately neutralized a long standing and intractable early Muslim controversy, first precipitated by the Khārijī schism, over the status of sinning believers.⁴

The development of this concept of temporary hellfire should be of interest to the historian not only because it emerged gradually over time, that is, at the end of a bitter debate about the status of sinning Muslims (sc. Muslim grave sinners),⁵ but also because it was not obviously a Quranic idea,⁶ and it reflects something fundamental about the consolidation of a distinct Muslim worldview, that which would become the majority tradition, and, concomitantly, the crystallization of a distinct Sunni religious identity. The idea of a temporary hellfire punishment for Muslim grave sinners came to circulate in various *ḥadīths* from about the second/eighth century and what may be considered the major proto-Sunni group,⁷ that is, the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth* of the second/eighth to third/ninth centuries gradually incorporated such *ḥadīths* into their exegeses of specific Quranic verses, thereby legitimating the concept until it was finally established in the creeds of the classical period. The fact that they went about legitimating this idea in *tafsīr*, for one, is in itself revealing, suggesting that for Sunni traditionalists the commentarial genre was the discipline *par excellence* for negotiating and delineating orthodox ideas and, in effect, for creating what for them was orthodoxy itself.⁸ And yet, for Sunnism the concept of a temporary hellfire punishment was just one of several doctrinal developments

4 On the question of sinning believers and the significance of the controversy for early Islamic sects, see Crone and Zimmerman, *Sālim*.

5 An obvious analogy would be the development of the idea of Purgatory in medieval Christianity and its establishment as dogma (see Le Goff, *Purgatoire*).

6 Though, of course, the proponents of the concept of temporary hell eventually legitimated the idea precisely because they were able to tie this concept to certain exegeses of Quranic verses, as we shall see below in the exegeses to certain key Quranic passages.

7 By proto-Sunnism (on which, see Zaman, *Religion*) I mean the period before that of Classical Sunnism as it ultimately emerged around the fifth/eleventh century as consisting of the four schools of law (Ḥanafī, Mālikī, Shāfiʿī and Ḥanbalī) and of the two schools of theology (Ashʿarī and Māturīdī).

8 I say this because although the genre of *fiqh* and *ḥadīth* collection were undoubtedly important for the articulation of 'orthodox' doctrine, in the earliest period *tafsīr* included both of these elements.

that could be seen as indicative of a distinct Sunni religious outlook, what may be termed an anti-sectarian, *jamāʿī* religious impulse.⁹ Be that as it may, the idea of temporary hellfire was not easily absorbed by the mainstream tradition and it was only after a period of debate and controversy (mainly prompted by various rationalist and scripturalist interpretations of the Quran) that the doctrine won acceptance. When it did so, it was because it had become associated with another very important early Muslim idea: the Prophet's intercession (*shafāʿa*) for his community on the day of judgment.¹⁰

For what concerns the exegetical making of temporary hell, we may begin with the earliest reliable sources of such traditionalist activity, the commentary of the well-known exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and the *Muṣannaf* of the traditionist ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827).

1 Temporary Hellfire in Early Muslim Exegesis

In his exegesis for a verse which describes *jahannam* as having seven gates,¹¹ Muqātil states that the fire (*al-nār*) is made up of layers one on top of the other

9 There are numerous such 'typically Sunni' positions beginning with Shāfiʿī's 4-source juristic theory where the two earliest legal approaches (one Ḥanafī, and broadly rationalist, and one traditionalist represented by the *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*) were to some extent reconciled, even though the latter was prioritized. The 'victory of Sunnism,' as perceived by Sunnis themselves, was also effected by the neutralizing of the *qadar* debate (between proponents of free will and predestinarians) through the famous Ashʿarī doctrine of *kasb*. There was also the settling, albeit uncomfortably, of the question of God's attributes by means of the *bi-lā kayf* position adopted by Ḥanbalī traditionalism as a middle-way approach between 'Muʿtazilī metaphors' and the mild (but popular) anthropomorphic conceptions of God that circulated in numerous *ḥadīths*. Mawārdī, arguably, did the same for Sunnism on the question of the caliphate, as did al-Ghazālī on the status of Sufism.

10 The question of the Prophet's *shafāʿa* was also fiercely contested by early Muslims, but there is ample evidence to suggest that unlike temporary hell, the doctrine of the Prophet's eschatological intercession was a very early idea (it is recorded on the Dome of the Rock's interior mosaics). The debate (between Muʿtazilīs and traditionalists) was over identifying the group of individuals who would benefit from this privilege of intercession granted to the Prophet. This theme is also significant for the development of a Sunni religious identity and I deal with it in the above-mentioned monograph.

11 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* ii, 430 on Q 15:44. This order, however, is not sustained throughout his commentary. In his exegesis at Q 74:35, the last three gates are re-ordered thus: *saqar* (5th), *jahīm* (6th), and *hāwiya* (7th) (Muqātil, *Tafsīr* iv, 498) (al-Ṭabarī reproduces this order in his *Tafsīr* xiv, 35). This last would seem to be Muqātil's preferred arrangement since with regard to Q 4:145 (viz. "the hypocrites are in the lowest level of the fire"), he states that the

But the difficulty with such an infernal scheme is the structural oddity of having gates one on top of the other (as the commentators would have the seven hells), as opposed to gates being different points of entry to one structure at a horizontal level. Indeed, there is evidence that there was some dispute over this issue. In a *ḥadīth* preserved in the *Muṣannaḥ* (*Compilation*) of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) one detects a marked concern to explain that the gates of hell are indeed on top of each other:¹⁴

Ismā'īl b. 'Ulyyā ← Abū Hārūn ← Ḥiṭṭān b. 'Abdallāh: 'Alī said: "Do you know what the gates of hell look like?" "Yes, they are like these doors." "No, they are like this . . ." and he described them as being like layers one on top of the other (*a-tadrūna kayfa abwāb al-nār? qālū: na'am, naḥwa ḥādhihi l-abwāb, qāla: lā, wa-lākinnahā ḥākadhā, fa-waṣaḥa aṭbāqan ba'duhā fawqa ba'd*).

But what is the purpose of such a scheme? The answer is given away in a slightly garbled passage preserved by Muqātil and appended to Q 104 (*Sura al-Humaza*) even though it is not a direct exegesis of the Sura:

When the wretched one enters the fire, an angel flies him through its gates, containing all sorts of punishments, and the gate of *al-ḥuṭama* is opened for him, and that gate is one of the gates of *jahannam*, whose fire is so intense that it devours other fire and it has been burning incessantly from the moment God, Mighty and Majestic, created it to the moment he [the wretched one] enters it. When that gate is opened and the fire catches him, it engulfs him burning his skin, his flesh, his nerves, and his bones except for his heart and his eyes, for with these one retains awareness and is able to see . . . and so when *al-muwaḥḥidūn* [sc. those who professed the oneness of God] exit through the uppermost gate which is *jahannam* . . .¹⁵

The passage continues beyond the above citation to describe how the gates of hell are finally nailed closed, so that no one can ever leave. The interesting detail for our purposes is the brief line describing the *muwaḥḥidūn* exiting from hell through its uppermost gate, *jahannam*. The reason, then, for the scheme of the gates, as proposed by Muqātil and the *Muṣannaḥ* traditions, is to establish the idea that *jahannam* is an 'exitable' section of hell, so to speak, that resembles something akin to an escape hatch, simply because it constitutes

14 Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaḥ* vii, 73 (no. 34116); cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xiv, 35.

15 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* iii, 839–40.

the top layer. This reasoning is revealed by a classical *ḥadīth* which identifies a group of people in hell as *jahannamiyyūn* (i.e., those of *jahannam*), and what distinguishes this group is that they are eventually released from hell.¹⁶

Muqātil identifies those who get out of hell (*al-jahannamiyyūn* of the *ḥadīth*) as *al-muwahḥidūn*. Here one might pause to consider the heresiographical literature which identifies Muqātil as one of the Murji'a who extended to the *muwahḥidūn* a special status.¹⁷ One of the earliest representations of Murji'i theology is the *Kitāb al-ʿĀlim wa-l-muta'allim*. This Murji'i treatise was dated by Schacht to the second half of the second century,¹⁸ which, as it happens, is as close as one can get to Muqātil (d. 150/767). As van Ess has noted,¹⁹ the author of the treatise uses three categories to classify people in the next life: *ahl al-janna* is for the Prophet and whoever was mentioned by him as belonging to paradise (sc. *ʿashara mubashshara*), *ahl al-nār* is strictly for the *mushrikūn* or *kuffār*, while *al-muwahḥidūn* is reserved for all other Muslims. All those other Muslims will then include some whose record of deeds may not merit them paradise, or may even land them in hell. Gilliot remarks on Muqātil's theological disposition, stating that although the dogmatic statements ascribed to him by the heresiographical tradition cannot always be substantiated,²⁰ his commentary does in fact betray such tendencies.²¹ Versteegh also notes certain

16 Al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), *Jāmiʿ* iv, 243–4 (*Kitāb al-Riqāq*, *bāb* no. 51), and 467–8 (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, *bāb* no. 25); al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122), *Maʿālim* ii, 402–3; the *ḥadīth* is known to Shīʿites, too: al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), *Majmaʿ* ii, 474 for Q 3192, and *Majmaʿ* v, 366 for Q 11105–8.

17 Al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935–6), *Maqālāt* 151–4. Murji'ism now has a good pedigree in Islamicist scholarship. As a movement it was primarily an anti-sectarian response to the factionalism that ensued during the first two civil wars in the form of Khārijism and proto-Shīʿism, somewhat pre-figuring classical Sunnism which would eventually subsume Murji'ism along with its theology. However, the Murji'is cannot be thought of as identical to the other main constituents of Sunnism, the *ahl al-ḥadīth* (traditionalists), since many early Murji'is, it seems, preferred a more scripturalist/rationalist approach (cf. Abū Ḥanīfa) and were not concerned to accord *ḥadīth* the overriding authority which the traditionalists assigned it. See Madelung, Murdji'a; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* i, 201.

18 Schacht, *Kitāb* 100.

19 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* i, 201.

20 Al-Ashʿarī (*Maqālāt* 151) accuses him of believing that God does not (eternally?) punish a *muwahḥid*; Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl* iv, 205, attributes to him the saying that where there is faith a sin can do no harm; this is also Shahrastānī's accusation: *Milal wa-l-niḥal* 165, "a sin does not harm the one who professes God's oneness and believes in it (*ṣāhib al-tawḥīd wa-l-īmān*)."

21 Gilliot, Muqātil 39–85; Muqātil's background in Balkh would have predisposed him to Murji'ism; on the spread of Murji'ism in Balkh, see Madelung, Murdji'a.

traits peculiar to Muqātil's exegesis, in particular with regard to the way in which Muqātil provides glosses and paraphrastic comments in the text of his commentary. Most of the time, these lexical explanations relate to the clarification of the Quranic text at points where Muqātil feels the reader might not be aware of the intended meaning. Sometimes, however, his paraphrasing is not merely intended to convey the full grammatical sense of the verse, but also seems to disguise – as Versteegh has it – ‘ideological motives.’²² The fact that Muqātil applies the same method of paraphrasing whenever there is any reference to religion or to believers, which he explains with the terms *tawḥīd* or *ahl al-tawḥīd/al-muwahḥidūn*²³ respectively, is then particularly worthy of note. But although Versteegh himself does not say that much, it is clear that Muqātil's preference for the term *tawḥīd* is a corollary of his views on hell and eternal punishment. For Muqātil, *islām* and *īmān* are one and the same thing, reducible to the belief in the oneness of God (sc. *lā ilāha illā Allāh*). Although the identification of Muqātil as an extreme Murji'ī is intended as a derogatory label,²⁴ it is nevertheless compatible with what Muqātil's exegeses reveal, namely, that so long as an individual professed the oneness of God he would eventually be saved. And if such an individual were to end up in hell, he would be able to get out. This classification can be gleaned from Muqātil's commentary on the following verses of Sura *al-Zumar*:²⁵ “And those who disbelieved (*kafarū*) are led forth in droves to *jahannam* . . . while those who feared their Lord are led forth in droves to the garden” (Q 39:71–3).

Muqātil interprets *kufṛ* in this verse specifically as a rejection of *tawḥīd* (*alladhīna kafarū bi-l-tawḥīd*).²⁶ It is important to bear in mind the way in which the distinct fates of the believers and the unbelievers are juxtaposed

22 For instance, Versteegh suggests that, “the constant replacement of *muslimūna* in the text of the Qurʾān with *mukhlīṣūna* . . . has to do with the fact that according to Muqātil there can be no real Muslims before the mission of Muḥammad” (Versteegh, *Grammar* 213). On the grammatical and semantic side, Muqātil almost always replaces *laʾallā* with *likay* or *fasada* with *ʾamila al-maʾāṣī*, to cite but a few examples (a full list is given by Versteegh, *Grammar* 211–2).

23 The term *tawḥīd* means to proclaim the oneness of God as in the *shahāda*, thus *muwahḥid*; in this discussion *tawḥīd* has nothing to do with the Muʿtazilī term concerning God's attributes (see Gimaret, *Tawḥīd*; and Gimaret, *Doctrine*).

24 Extreme Murji'ism was applied by the Sunnis to those who held the view that ‘belief’ was mere profession of faith, to the exclusion of works. Cf. Plessner and Rippin, Muqātil b. Sulaymān, but the authors' remark that there is no evidence of Murji'ī theological leanings in any of Muqātil's work is clearly inaccurate.

25 Quran translations are taken from Arberry (trans.), *Koran* with minor modifications.

26 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* iii, 688–9.

in these verses. Muqātil makes the point that the unbelievers are those who reject *tawhīd*, for the very reason that in his mind the members of the other group are those who profess *tawhīd*: they are the *muwaḥḥidūn* or the *ahl al-tawhīd*. In the case of Muqātil, the connection between *tawhīd* (monotheism) and *īmān* (belief) is subtle but fundamental. It is this link that establishes the basis for his view that certain people will be able to get out of hell, and that these people will be the sinning believers of the Muslim community.

The exegesis at Q 74:39–42 is another example of how Muqātil's theological ideas determine his understanding of the Quran. Here, he takes the opportunity to distinguish between the fates of two groups of people who end up in hell, the ordinary non-believers (who remain in hell) and the sinning believers (who are able to get out of hell): "Except for those of the right hand, they enquire amongst each other in the gardens about the criminals, [wondering] what has landed you in *saqar*?" (Q 74:39–42).

Muqātil comments that the situation described in the above verses takes place when God has brought out the *ahl al-tawhīd* from hellfire, and the other believers (those already in paradise) wonder why some people have remained in the fire.²⁷ In other words, Muqātil understands *mā salakukum fī saqar* as "what has kept you in *saqar*?", and not as the natural reading would be "what has landed you in *saqar*?" Muqātil wants to establish that it is possible to get out of hell, precisely because, according to his reading of Q 74:39–42, some people (professing believers) will come out of hell and, moreover, will find the opportunity to chide those who remain there, now forever. Those who have escaped because they professed *tawhīd* will mock others who remain stuck in hell. Evidently then, there is something to be said for the mere profession of *tawhīd*: it can get you out of hell.

It is not always clear, however, that those taken out of the fire are actually taken out of *jahannam*, as can be seen in the case of Muqātil's exegesis at Q 74:39–42. Indeed, in many instances in which one encounters a *ḥadīth* or exegesis to the effect that people can get out of hell, whether in the commentaries or *ḥadīth* collections, the word *al-nār* is the term used to refer to hell. What this seems to suggest is that once it was established that one could get out of hell – by getting out of *jahannam* – it was no longer necessary to refer to this hell in all instances using the name *jahannam*. Or else, this original idea was simply lost.²⁸

27 Ibid., iv, 499.

28 For example, in al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* there is a description of how the angel Gabriel is commanded by God to go and extract someone from hell after it had been shut up for ages

Further examples of Muqātil's conviction that remaining in hell eternally is not for those who profess *tawḥīd* come in his exegesis on two sets of verses. The first is Q 6:128: "He says: the fire is your abode, in it you shall be for all eternity, except what God wills (*illā mā shā'a Allāh*), your Lord is wise and all-knowing." Muqātil states that the proviso, "except what God wills (*illā mā shā'a Allāh*)," is intended for those who professed the oneness of God (*al-muwaḥḥidūn*): "And He makes an exception for the people of *tawḥīd* in that they will not be made to reside there forever (*wa-stathnā ahl al-tawḥīd annahum lā yukhalladūna fihā*)."²⁹ Instead of reading the proviso as a simple rhetorical reiteration of God's power to do what He pleases (as one often finds in the Quran), Muqātil takes this phrase to stand for a specific eventuality, which is that time when the *muwaḥḥidūn* will be taken out of hell. Muqātil also does this in the case of another set of verses, the only other place in the Quran where this proviso appears in a context of hellfire punishment. But what is interesting about this second set of verses is that, unlike Q 6:128, the proviso in Q 11:105–8 is also used to describe the situation pertaining to those who will enter paradise:

Some of them are wretched and some are fortunate: as for the wretched they shall be in the fire, for them there is sighing and wailing there: in it they shall dwell eternally the length the heavens and the earth endured except what your Lord wills (*illā mā shā'a rabbuka*), your Lord does what He pleases: as for the fortunate, they shall be in the garden, in it abiding eternally for the length the heavens and earth endured, except what your Lord wills (*illā mā shā'a rabbuka*), a gift uninterrupted (Q 11:105–8).

Muqātil says that the phrase "except what your Lord wills (*illā mā shā'a rabbuka*)" in both the contexts of hell and paradise is a reference to the *muwaḥḥidūn*: "*fa-istathnā l-muwaḥḥidīn alladhīna yakhrujūna min al-nār* (and so He has made an exception in the case of those who profess the divine oneness, being the ones who will exit from the fire)."³⁰ In other words, the first verse describes the eternity of punishment for the "wretched" in hell and then makes an exception for those who will not be in hell eternally: the *muwaḥḥidūn*. The appearance of *illā mā shā'a rabbuka* in the second verse, relating to the people of paradise, becomes a reiteration of what was intended by the same proviso in the preceding verse about hell. Clearly, the exegesis is intended to defend

(al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xxx, 294–5); although the description is in the exegesis of Q 104, in which the term *ḥuṭama* for hell occurs, the word used to refer to hell is simply *al-nār*.

29 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* i, 589.

30 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* ii, 298–9.

the plausibility of the idea of temporary hell. Admittedly, the verses are problematic because of the occurrence of the *istithnā'* with reference both to the people of hell and those of paradise. But either we accept the 'exception' in both cases or look for an alternative in both cases. In other words, one presumably ought to read *illā mā shā'a rabbuka* either as a simple emphatic intended to convey the message that God can do what He wishes, or as a proviso to the predicament of both those in paradise and those in hell: people might exit from paradise as well as hell. The last part of the verse about paradise, '*aṭā'an ghayra majdhūdh*' ("a gift uninterrupted") makes the former reading, that is to say that God can do what He pleases, the more natural one. For Muqātil, however, these verses present an exegetical opportunity to insert a modification of the Quran's basic eternal hell/eternal paradise scheme, in order to validate his Murji'ī stance that even though the *umma* may be divided into Khārijīs, Shi'ites and whatever else, eventually they will all be saved because they are all essentially *muwahhidūn*.

We will re-encounter this type of schematic reading of Quranic verses in al-Ṭabarī's commentary, and it is there that the context of these polemics becomes clear. Although Muqātil has provided us with the clues to the development of a temporary hell, his method of exegesis is peculiar to him: the absence of any *ḥadīths* for the most part means that we cannot go beyond the commentary itself. As such, Muqātil's evidence only shows that by the time he wrote his commentary, *ante* 150/767, the idea of temporary hell for Muslims was already around. Put differently, by the middle of the second/eighth century both certain Murji'īs and traditionalists in Iraq were proposing that belief (*īmān*) should be defined merely by the profession of *lā ilāha illā rabbuka*, for by holding this simple tenet, every professing Muslim, however sinful, would eventually be guaranteed deliverance from hell. The politics of this theology of the afterlife is clear: if all Muslims ultimately belonged together in paradise, they are surely, despite endemic schism, one community in this life.

One may recapitulate as follows: Through the conception of a hell vertically arranged in seven layers, there was an attempt to interpret *jahannam* as the uppermost level, which in turn meant that it was an 'exitable' hell. In the opinion of the exegetes, this became a suitable place for a particularly controversial group of individuals: the *ahl al-tawḥīd* or more precisely (because they end up in hell) the grave sinners of the Muslim community. However, once it was established that it was possible to get out of hell, it no longer mattered whether that part of hell was called *jahannam* or simply *al-nār*. The notion of a purgative hell in the form of *jahannam* had served its purpose by establishing that for Muslim sinners hell would be temporary. Once the idea of a purgative hellfire was established, it may no longer have been necessary to refer to this

purgative place as specifically and only *jahannam* – this might explain why in the later classical creeds, the generic term *al-nār* appears instead to denote that purgative punishment.

It is now appropriate to turn to a slightly later period, after the authors of classical Sunnism had emerged. But before we turn to the commentary of al-Ṭabarī, there are some clues to the development of this concept of temporary hellfire in the intervening period. For between the period in which Muqātil (d. 150/767) was writing and that to which al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) belonged, there are some two hundred years of controversy. One can detect some of this controversy in works such as the famous early *ḥadīth* compilation, the *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827).

2 Temporary Hellfire and the Early Controversy

Although Muqātil takes it for granted that people can exit from hell, more specifically, that the Muslim sinners will exit from hell, there is evidence to suggest that the issue of a temporary hell was controversial. At least, by the time ‘Abd al-Razzāq was compiling his *Muṣannaf* (ca. 143–184/760–800), the question of whether one could exit from hell was still being contested. In the *Muṣannaf* we find the following chapter heading: *Bāb man yakhruju min al-nār* (Chapter dealing with those who shall exit from hell).³¹ The section contains nine *ḥadīths* that depict scenes from the day of resurrection in which people (sometimes unidentified) are able to exit from hell. It is clear by the content and phrasing of the narratives that this group of traditions is a focus of polemics.

The first *ḥadīth* concerns the question, allegedly put to the Prophet, of whether people will be able to see God on the day of judgment (sc. *ru’yat Allāh*).³² This was a known point of controversy in early Islamic theology.³³ More interesting is the fact that the *ḥadīth* continues, without interruption, and relates how a bridge is cast over hell (*jahannam*) and how all will have to cross it. The entirely unrelated narrative, unrelated to the vision of God that is, also describes how the Prophet is the first to cross the bridge, the path of which is now strewn with large thorns, thus making the crossing an even more wretched endeavor. Many people are seized by the flames of the fire (on account of their sins) as they attempt to cross. This establishes that at this point people are in hellfire, and so the narrative promptly picks up again:

³¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 407.

³² Ibid., xi, 407ff. (no. 20856).

³³ See Gimaret, *Ru’yat Allāh*; van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 411–5.

When God finishes judging his servants, and wishes to take out of the fire those whom He wants to forgive, those who had professed there is no god but God, He orders the angels to take them out, and they (the angels) distinguish them on account of the marks left on them from prostration; God has forbidden that the fire should consume the mark of prostration on the son of Adam.

The juxtaposition of this narrative alongside another that constitutes a known controversy within the same *ḥadīth* cannot be overlooked. But before addressing the remaining *ḥadīths* of this section, a note should be made about the main point of the *ḥadīth* above: when God has completed the judgment and consigned people to paradise and hell, He decides to take out of hell all those who professed His oneness and He commands the angels to take them out.³⁴

The remaining *ḥadīths* reiterate the same message, namely that escape from hell is possible. In one of the traditions the Prophet states:³⁵

‘Abd al-Razzāq ← Ma‘mar ← Qatāda, and from Thābit ← Anas that the Prophet said: “Certain people will exit from the fire after they have been scorched by fire (*saf’un min al-nār*) as a punishment for some sins which they had committed, but after that God in His mercy takes them out.”

The point of this *ḥadīth* is that people may end up in hell on account of their sins, but will only stay there the length of time necessary to expunge the sins. And as if one has failed to realize that the issues detailed here are controversial, a third *ḥadīth* confirms this by listing other similarly contested issues: ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is reported to have said,

after you (have passed) there will come those who will not believe in stoning (*rajm*), or the (coming of) the false Messiah (*dajjāl*), or the basin (*al-ḥawḍ*), or the punishment in the tomb (*‘adhāb al-qabr*) and they will not believe that a people will be able to exit from the fire.³⁶

34 But note how the angels recognize them from among the rest of the inhabitants of hell because of the prostration marks on their foreheads which God had forbidden the fire to consume: in contrast to Muqātil, it is being suggested that ‘works’ alongside profession of God’s oneness are necessary for salvation. This latter statement is classical Sunnism.

35 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 411 (no. 20859).

36 Ibid., xi, 412 (no. 20860).

The next *ḥadīth*, a prophetic one, simply states, “people will get out of hell (*inna qawman sa-yakhrujūna min al-nār*).”³⁷ It is clear then that the purpose of this group of *ḥadīths* is to stamp out any objections to the idea of a hell from which one can exit. Particularly interesting also are two anecdotes included in this section of the *Muṣannaḥ*. In the first, the concept of temporary hell is disputed in a dialogue and the identity of the disputants is given:

‘Abd al-Razzāq ← Ma‘mar ← al-Ḥakam b. Abān heard ‘Ikrima say, ‘When God has finished dispensing judgment to His creatures, He brings out a book from underneath the Throne in which is written ‘My mercy overrides My wrath and I am the Most Merciful.’ And so a number of people are let out of hell equivalent to the number of those in paradise’ – or he said: ‘twice the number of those in paradise...’ Somebody then said to ‘Ikrima: ‘Abū ‘Abdallāh! But God says: They wish to exit the hellfire but they shall not.’ He responded: ‘How dare you! Those are the ones who are its true inhabitants’ (*ūlā’ika ahluhā lladhīna hum ahluhā*).³⁸

The appearance of ‘Ikrima (d. 105/723–4) in the dispute is noteworthy. ‘Ikrima was the famous *mawlā* of Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687–8) and a Basran student of his. More importantly, the biographers record that he sympathized with some Khārijī opinions.³⁹ The Khārijīs, of course, were a problem for the traditionalists, and for the Murjī’īs specifically, because they had maintained that the Muslim who was in ‘error’ (i.e., by not belonging to a Khārijī community) forfeited his status, and thus, his salvation. Whereas the early Murjī’īs accorded this Muslim sinner the dubious label of ‘misguided believer’ (*mu‘min ḍāll*, not necessarily to extend him salvation but to keep him within the community in this life), the later Murjī’īs, particularly the traditionalists among them (sc. Muqātil), contrived to save him in the next life as well. If the accusations of Khārijī sympathies on ‘Ikrima’s part can be sustained, then the point of the story is immediately evident. With all of his Khārijī sympathies, ‘Ikrima at least knew how to interpret Q 5:37 ‘properly’: only those who ‘belong in’ hell are in it forever (the question of who ‘properly’ belongs in hell is one we shall

37 Ibid., xi, 412 (no. 20861).

38 Ibid., xi, 411 (no. 20858).

39 Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* v, 18–21: ‘Alī b. al-Mudaynī accuses him of being a Najdite. Mālik does not mention him in his *Muwattaʿa*’ because he considered him to have been a Ṣufrīte. ‘Aṭā’ (b. Abi Rabāḥ), on the other hand, considers him to have been an Ibādī, while Abū Maryam thinks he might have been a Bayhasī; Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* ii(2), 133; see also Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* vii, 267, where his Ṣufrism is ascribed to his North African background.

return to). For now, it suffices to note that the story aims to discredit Khārijī intransigency on the fate of Muslim sinners in the next world: some Muslims may go to hell in the next world, but because they do not really belong there, they shall exit from it.

The second interesting anecdote, from the point of view of identities revealed, is the following:

‘Abd al-Razzāq ← Ma‘mar ← someone ← Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb said: ‘I said to Jābir b. ‘Abdallāh: ‘You know the verse “They wish to exit the hellfire but they shall not” (Q 5:37), nevertheless, you claim that some people will get out of hell.’ He replied: ‘I swear that this verse was revealed to the Prophet and that we believed in it before you did, and I swear that I heard the Prophet say: ‘What if I were to tell you that certain people will get out of hell?’ Ṭalq then said: ‘Then, of course, I would not argue with you, by God.’⁴⁰

A brief biographical notice of Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb (d. btw. 90–100/708–718) is useful here. Ṭalq was a Basran whose Murji‘ism was of sufficient concern to the biographical tradition that the preservation of this anecdote seems to be a deliberate effort to establish his Sunni credentials. He was also well-known for his asceticism and this positive trait might have given added motive to present him as a rehabilitated Murji‘ī.⁴¹ Ṭalq took part in the revolt of Ibn al-Ash‘ath (ca. 82/701) and was among those who were given sanctuary by ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz when the latter was governor of the Hijaz. The reader acquainted with these historical events might recall that others who sought refuge there included prominent traditionists such as Mujāhid (d. 104/722), Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/713),⁴² ‘Aṭā b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732), and ‘Amr b. Dīnār (d. 126/743). Unimpressed by the light-handed treatment afforded to the Iraqis by the governor of the Hijaz, al-Ḥajjāj persuaded the then-caliph al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik to

40 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 412 (no. 20862).

41 Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilya* iii, 63–6.

42 Madelung has noted Sa‘īd’s Murji‘ism: the fact that Sa‘īd belonged to the enigmatic circle of Ibn ‘Abbās’ pupils which, Madelung remarks, was associated with *irjā’* seems to confirm the identification (Madelung, *Qāsim* 231, and note 19 thereat). His Murji‘ism is also suggested by the following exchange with al-Ḥajjāj, “Ḥajjāj: ‘What do you say regarding ‘Alī, is he in paradise or hell?’ Sa‘īd: ‘If I were to enter either, I would be able to see its inhabitants and then I would know.’ Ḥajjāj: ‘What about the caliphs?’ Sa‘īd: ‘I am not responsible for them.’ Ḥajjāj: ‘Which of them do you admire most?’ Sa‘īd: ‘The one most satisfactory to my Creator.’ Ḥajjāj: ‘And that is?’ Sa‘īd: ‘Knowledge of that rests with Him.’ Ḥajjāj: ‘Are you refusing to tell me the truth?’ Sa‘īd: ‘I would hate to lie to you’” (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iv, 330).

remove 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz and assign in his place Khālid al-Qasrī. The latter then managed to arrest the Iraqi rebels. As native Hijazis, 'Aṭā' and 'Amr made use of their Meccan connections and were subsequently set free (Madelung suspects them to have been Murji'īs of sorts).⁴³ These last had clearly sympathized with the Iraqis, Sa'īd and Ṭalq, and as Meccans there would have been no reason to arrest them. As it happens, all were students of Ibn 'Abbās whose circle is often associated with *irjā'*.⁴⁴ The others were dispatched to al-Ḥajjāj. Ṭalq died on the way, while Sa'īd was executed and Mujāhid remained in prison until al-Ḥajjāj died a year later. If we accept the authenticity of the anecdote as going back to the time of Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb (the above events may have provided the occasion for Ṭalq's encounter with an aging Jābir b. 'Abdallāh (d. 78/697), most probably in one of the latter's seminars in Medina),⁴⁵ then what we have here is evidence that troubling theological questions were already being tackled by Muslim scholars soon after the second civil war, and more importantly, that early Murji'īs, like Ṭalq, did not know about the idea of a temporary hell.⁴⁶

For now, we can note that the idea that one could exit from hell was not widely known by the beginning of the second century, not even by Murji'īs.⁴⁷ The Ṭalq story, however, reappears in a much later work, the *Ḥilya* of Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038). Here, although the verbal exchange and the purpose of the story are almost identical to those in the *Muṣannaf* version, there is an added twist. Ṭalq narrates:⁴⁸

43 Madelung, *Qāsim* 233.

44 Ibid., "Aus diesem Kreis ist offenbar das Irğā' hervorgegangen," and at note 33, "Es ist wohl kein Zufall, daß der Mekkaner Murğī'it 'Abd al-Mağīd b. 'Abd al-'Azīz b. Abī Rawwād gerade von Ibn al-'Abbās das Wort überliefert: 'Die Qadariten sind Ungläubige, die Schiiten Verworfene, die Ḥarūrīten Neuerer. Die Wahrheit wissen wir nur bei den Murğī'iten.'".

45 See Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba* ii, 45, where we are told that Jābir had a study circle (*halaqa*) in Medina toward the end of his life. Jābir is reportedly the last of the Prophet's companions to die in Medina, at the age of 94.

46 If we reject the authenticity of the anecdote, then we might suppose that the retrojection of second and third-century polemics surrounding temporary hell and *shafā'a* onto this Hijazi scene are simply intended to show that, as far as the traditionalists were concerned, there could be no debate on this issue since, as Jābir asserts, it was settled during the time of the Prophet. Unfortunately, it is the Islamicist's historical and methodological approach that determines how he or she weighs the evidence.

47 The implication of an early Murji'ī finding the idea that one can exit from hell a novelty, as Ṭalq does, is in itself very interesting, but not one that can be dealt with here. I take up this question of the Basran Murji'a in my forthcoming monograph.

48 Abū Nu'aym, *Ḥilya* iii, 66.

Abū 'Amr b. Ḥamdān ← al-Ḥasan b. Sufyān ← Shaybān b. Farrūkh ← al-Qāsim b. al-Faḍl ← Sa'īd b. al-Muhallab ← Ṭalq said: 'No one used to be more vehement than myself in denying *shafā'a*, until, that is, I met Jābir b. 'Abdallāh. I recited to him every single verse from God's Book I could remember in which God refers to (the status of) those who (want to) exit from hell. He (Jābir) said to me: 'O Ṭalayq, O Ṭalayq! Do you think you know the Book of God and the *sunna* of His Prophet better than I do?' I responded humbly: 'No.' He said: 'Those whom you mentioned (i.e., in the verse) are the ones who belong there in it, like the *mushrikūn*. As for the others, they are people who have committed sins and who have been punished for them in it (sc. hell) and then have been taken out.' He (Jābir) then placed his hands on his ears, and said: 'Silence. I verily heard the Prophet say, 'they are taken out of hell after they have been in it' when we used to discuss that same verse that you recited.'

In terms of punishment in the afterlife, this version in Abū Nu'aym makes the same point as the one in 'Abd al-Razzāq, except that now *shafā'a* is being used to get people out of hell. In addition, the point is made explicit that some people end up in hell only for the length of time required to expiate certain sins. What is crucial to this version of the Ṭalq story is the use of the term *shafā'a*: the reason Ṭalq rejects *shafā'a* is precisely because it was being used to get people out of hell. It is the idea of temporary hell that Ṭalq finds puzzling. Indeed, it would seem that *shafā'a* appears in this version because by the time it was circulating, *shafā'a* was the principal method by which it was believed that people would exit from hell. In other words, from about the fourth/tenth century the Sunni traditionalists were concerned to establish the idea of a temporary hell by explaining it with *shafā'a*. Indeed, if Ṭalq had wanted to contest *shafā'a* he should have recited to Jābir all those verses in the Quran which, on the face of it, deny *shafā'a*, and not, as he does, recite those verses which describe how people cannot exit from hell.⁴⁹ In short, it would have made better sense for him to start his story by saying: "*kuntu min ashadd al-nās takdhīban bi-qawm yakhrujūna min al-nār* (I used to be one of those who strongly denied that a people would exit from the fire)." Therefore, at some point between the time of 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* (ca. 184/800) and Abū Nu'aym's compilation (ca. 391/1000), judging by the Ṭalq story, *shafā'a* had become associated with people exiting from hell.

Further, in 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* there are other traditions which state that people get out of hell, but none of them specify that they do so through

49 The verses are Q 2:167; 5:37; 22:22; 32:20.

shafā'a: in the *Muṣannaf* the controversy revolves around the issue of exiting from hell.⁵⁰ As a work of emerging Sunni traditionalism, 'Abd al-Razzāq's *Muṣannaf* would have been concerned to make this point to Khārijī and Murjī opponents. This is evidenced by the fact that the *Muṣannaf* preserves two stories, cited above,⁵¹ in which the doctrine that people can escape from hell have for their protagonists a suspect Khārijī (sc. 'Ikrima) in one and a known Murjī (sc. Ṭalq) in the other. If the *Muṣannaf* had been concerned to make the point to Mu'tazilīs, it would undoubtedly have had a story in which getting out of hell was linked to the *shafā'a* of the Prophet: exactly the situation in Abū Nu'aym's version. By the time Abū Nu'aym was composing his biographical work, the issue of getting out of hell had long been a point of controversy between the Mu'tazila and the traditionalists.⁵² Consequently, the traditionalists were introducing *shafā'a* in order to reinforce the idea of an 'exitable' hell. This is suggested by the fact that in the *Muṣannaf*, the *ḥadīth* of the type '*sa-yakhruju qawmun yukadhdhibūna bi-* (there will emerge a folk who will deny the...)' does not count *shafā'a* among its list of items which the 'people will deny.'⁵³ In later *ḥadīth* works, however, *shafā'a* is invariably included.⁵⁴

3 Temporary Hellfire in Classical Exegesis

3.1 *Exegesis of Q 5:37*

The Ṭalq-Jābir debate over people exiting from hell is reflected in a similar report preserved in the commentary of al-Ṭabarī. 'Ikrima, who, as has been mentioned, was also involved in a debate over the meaning of Q 5:37,⁵⁵ in this instance transmits a debate between Nāfi' (d. 66/685) and Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687–8):⁵⁶

Yazīd al-Naḥwī ← 'Ikrima ← Nāfi' b. al-Azraq said to Ibn 'Abbās: 'Not only are you blind in your eyes, but also in your heart, how can you claim that people can get out of hell, when God has said: "And they shall not exit

50 See 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, 411–3 (nos. 20859, 20860, 20861, and 20863).

51 See *ibid.*, xi, 411–2 (no. 20858, for the 'Ikrima story, and no. 20862 for the Ṭalq story).

52 Wensinck and Gimaret, *Shafā'a*.

53 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, no. 20860.

54 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* i, no. 156.

55 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf* xi, no. 20858.

56 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* vi, 228.

from it (*wa-mā-hum bi-khārijīna minhā*)” (Q 5:37)? Ibn ‘Abbās said: ‘Be careful! Read what preceded it, it is talking about the unbelievers.’

It should be pointed out that the figures of Nāfi‘ and Ibn ‘Abbās loom large in the exegetical tradition. First, Nāfi‘ is the paradigmatic Khārijī villain and his appearance in the tradition usually reflects a polemical situation.⁵⁷ Also, Ibn ‘Abbās himself is a larger-than-life figure in the Muslim historical tradition, which views him as the father of Quranic exegesis: he is frequently a mouthpiece for both Sunni⁵⁸ and, as has been shown, Shi‘i traditionalist dogma.⁵⁹ In addition, a body of literature exists, known as the *Masā’il Nāfi’ b. al-Azraq*, which is supposedly a series of philological questions relating to the Quran that Nāfi‘ posed to Ibn ‘Abbās: Nāfi‘ asks Ibn ‘Abbās about a Quranic word, to which Ibn ‘Abbās provides an answer and supports it by adducing poetry (*shawāhid*).⁶⁰

Given the problems posed by this literary relic and the fact that we have already seen two similarly constructed dialogues over Q 5:37 (one between Ṭalq and Jābir and another between ‘Ikrima and someone else), the authenticity of this encounter between Nāfi‘ and Ibn ‘Abbās will again depend on the reader’s methodological approach to early Islamic history. In any case, whether authentic or not, the anecdote shows once more the way in which the traditionalist exegetical approach managed to distinguish the status of Muslim sinners from that of unbelievers in hell. In al-Ṭabarī’s commentary below, we come across further instances of Ibn ‘Abbās and Nāfi‘ disputing the issue of hell. We have no reason to doubt the historicity of Ibn ‘Abbās’ encounters with Nāfi‘, but it is hard to be sure of the precise content of their discussions. For the sake of simplicity, however, I refer to them by name when discussing their arguments, fully aware that such arguments might have been attributed to them by others at a later date.

3.2 *Exegesis of Q 11:107*

In al-Ṭabarī’s commentary the majority of the exegeses offered for Q 11:105–8 state that people will get out of hell. At the same time, al-Ṭabarī concedes that there were differences of opinion among the exegetes with regards to the pro-

57 Cf. Rippin, Ibn ‘Abbās 15–25.

58 Gilliot, Portrait 127–84, esp. 178 ff; Rippin, Criteria.

59 Madelung, ‘Abd Allāh b. ‘Abbās 13–25.

60 On the problems relating to the internal content of this body of *Masā’il* and its transmission, see Boullata, Poetry 27–40. The 188 questions have been published by ‘Ā’isha ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, *I’jāz* 278–507.

viso, and it is among these differences that we can detect the identity of some of the dissenters. We shall first group the exegetical opinions as al-Ṭabarī does. The first group takes the proviso to be a reference, exactly like Muqātil did, to the *ahl al-tawhīd* whom God will take out of hell after they have spent some time in it.⁶¹

- (a) ‘Abd al-Razzāq ← Ma‘mar ← Qatāda: It has been related to us that some people will be scorched by fire on account of some sins, but then they are taken into the garden.
- (b) Bishr ← Yazīd ← Sa‘īd ← Qatāda: It has been related to us that some people will be scorched by fire on account of some sins, but then God, by virtue of His grace, will take them into paradise; those people are called *al-jahannamiyyūn* (people of Gehenna).
- (c) Shaybān b. Farrūkh ← Abū Hilāl ← Qatāda who recited the verses (Q 11:106–7) and then said: Anas told us that the Prophet said, ‘a people will get out of hell’; and then Qatāda said: ‘we do not say what the people of Ḥarūrā’ say.’
- (d) Mu‘āwiya ← ‘Āmir b. Jashib ← Khālīd b. Ma’dān: of *lābithīna fihā aḥqāban* (enduring therein for ‘ages’) (Q 78:23)⁶² and of *khālīdīna fihā illā mā shā’a rabbuka* (abiding therein forever except what your Lord wills) (Q 11:107) that they both refer to the *ahl al-tawhīd*.

First, it is useful to note that the Basran (Qatāda, d. 117/735) and the Syrian (Khālīd b. Ma’dān, d. 103/721) traditionists agree on the concept of temporary punishment for the Muslim sinners of their community. Moreover, in the case of the Basrans the point seems to reflect local grievances, since Qatāda makes use of the exegetical occasion to take a swipe at the Khārijīs, who rejected the idea of a temporary hell. In fact, in Basra it was not just the Khārijīs who did not believe in a temporary punishment in hell, but other traditionists too. These appear next in the summaries of exegetical narratives given by al-Ṭabarī, and though they also understand that the proviso is intended as a reference

61 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xii, 116–8.

62 This verse is understood by some traditionists, Syrians and Iraqis, as indicating a finite stay for those in hell on account of the use of the term *ḥuqb*, ‘an age’; opinions vary as to the duration of a *ḥuqb*, but the suggestion seems to be that it is finite. Consequently, there is a tendency to associate it with the sinners from among the *ahl al-qibla* and to encourage the view of a temporary hell. Not all the traditionists agree, however, and some understand *aḥqāban* as denoting an infinite period (al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xxx, 9ff).

to the *ahl al-tawhīd*, they believe that it means God will forgive them outright without punishing them in hell first:

‘Abd al-Razzāq ← Ibn al-Taymī ← his father ← Abū Naḍra ← Jābir (b. ‘Abdallāh) or Abū Sa‘īd (al-Khudrī) or another companion: this statement *illā mā shā’a rabbuka innā rabbaka fa’ālan li-mā yurīd* (except what your Lord wills, for He surely does what He wants) (Q 11:107) applies to the Quran as a whole. Wherever it says *khālidīna fihā* (abiding therein forever) in the Quran, it also applies; I heard Abū Mijlāz say, ‘that is what is due to him, but if God wills it, He will waive his punishment.’ (*qāla: hādhihi al-āya ta’tī ‘alā l-Qur’āni kullihi. yaqūl: haythu kāna fī l-Qur’ān ‘khālidīna fihā’ ta’tī ‘alayhi. qāla: wa-samī’tu Abā Mijlāz yaqūl: huwa ‘adhābuhu fa-in shā’a Allāhu tajāwaza ‘an ‘adhābihi.*)⁶³

It is interesting that the only persons who appear under this second category of opinions are Basrans. The last person in the *isnād* before the confused part is Abū Naḍra (d. 106/724), a Basran traditionist.⁶⁴ The implication of the statement “*ta’tī ‘alā l-Qur’āni kullihi* (applies in the same manner across the Quran)” seems to be that some did not take the proviso to have precise content, i.e., that it is a specific reference to the *ahl al-tawhīd* who are punished temporarily in hell. They seem to be suggesting that one has always known that God does what He pleases and on this occasion, or any occasion where *illā mā shā’a Allāh* appears, there can be no difference. But it seems that the adherents of this opinion were not about to concede that God would punish some people in hell temporarily. This opinion is further supported by the statement of another Basran traditionist, Abū Mijlāz (d. 106/724), whose exegetical opinion we shall encounter again.⁶⁵ What Abū Mijlāz says is that the one whom the verse (Q 11:107) condemns to hell eternally is deserving of that punishment: if God decides to subject him to it, then it was his proper due. On the other hand, God could, if He so wished, forgive him and not punish him at all, in hell or otherwise (and this is Abū Mijlāz’ understanding of the *istithnā*’).

In sum, the Sunni traditionist exegetes, with the exception of some noted Basrans, attempted to find justification for the idea that one can exit from hell. The verses of Sura *Hūd*, discussed above, provide clear evidence of the Sunni exegetical tradition’s attempt to find authority for the idea of temporary

63 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xiii, 118.

64 Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb* x, 302–3: his full name is al-Mundhir b. Mālīk b. Qit’a, and was widely recognized as trustworthy (*thiqa*).

65 Ibn Sa’d, *Ṭabaqāt* xii(1), 157.

punishment for Muslim sinners. This process, however, can be detected in the exegetical narratives to other Quranic verses.

3.3 *Exegesis of Q 19:68–72*

In this instance, a polemical confrontation over the question of hell involves, once again, Ibn ‘Abbās and Nāfi‘. Ibn ‘Abbās is concerned to make the point that *all* will have to pass through hell before going to paradise: the exegetical strategy behind this will soon become clear. The point of contention revolves around the interpretation of the root *w-r-d* as it appears in Sura *Maryam*:

By thy Lord, We shall muster them and the Satans, then we shall parade them about *jahannam* hobbling on their knees. Then We shall pluck forth from every party whichever of them was the most hardened in disdain of the All-merciful; then We shall know very well those most deserving to burn there. Not one of you there is, but he shall go down to it (*wāriduhā*); that for thy Lord is a thing decreed, determined. Then We shall deliver those that were godfearing; and the evil-doers We shall leave there, hobbling on their knees (Q 19:68–72).

The *isnād* to the exchange which provides the first exegesis to the meaning of *wurūd*, and which involves Ibn ‘Abbās and Nāfi‘, stops at the Meccan ‘Amr b. Dīnār (d. 126/743). At this point he relates the incident second-hand from alleged eyewitnesses:⁶⁶

‘Abd al-Razzāq ← Ibn ‘Uyayna ← ‘Amr said: ‘I was told by those who heard Ibn ‘Abbās dispute with Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq:

Ibn ‘Abbās: ‘*wurūd* means *dukhūl* (entering).’

Nāfi‘: ‘No, it does not.’

Ibn ‘Abbās recites Q 21:98 (Indeed you and what you worship besides God shall be fuel for hell, and you will come to it – *innakum wa-mā ta‘budūna min dūni llāh ḥaṣabu jahannama antum lahā wāridūn*): ‘Is that not *wurūd*?’ He then recited Q 11:98 (On the day of resurrection he will be at the forefront of his people and will bring them to the fire, verily an evil place to come to! – *yaqḍumu qawmahu yawma l-qiyāmati fa-awradahumu l-nāra wa-bi’sa l-wirdu l-mawrūd*): ‘Is this not *wurūd*? As for you and I, we shall both enter it. Who knows whether we will get out or not. I certainly cannot see you getting out of it, not while you deny it.’

Nāfi‘ laughs.’

66 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* vi, 108–9; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* ii(2), 11.

In a second exegesis the exchange between Ibn ‘Abbās and Nāfi‘ continues thus:⁶⁷

al-Qāsim ← al-Ḥusayn ← Ḥajjāj ← Ibn Jurayj ← ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ said that Abū Rāshid al-Ḥarūrī (sc. Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq) on hearing this (i.e., discussion of *wurūd*) said: “They do not hear the slightest sound from it (*lā yasma‘ūna ḥasīṣahā*)” (Q 21:102).

Ibn ‘Abbās: ‘Woe unto you! Are you insane? What about His words “He (sc. Pharaoh) will go before his people on the day of judgment and lead (*w-r-d*) them into hellfire, woeful indeed is this leading and the place led to” (Q 11:98) and “We shall drive the criminals to hell like thirsty cattle driven to water” (Q 19:86) and “There is none of you but will come to it” (Q 19:71). By God those before us used to pray, ‘God, take me out of the fire unhurt and send me to paradise safe and sound.’

What the English renditions fail to convey is the fact that Ibn ‘Abbās is concerned to make the point to Nāfi‘ that the root *w-r-d* implies ‘entry’ and nothing less. The problematic aspect of these verses is significant for an understanding of how the traditionalists dealt with the issue of temporary hell. According to the traditionalists, one could exit from hell. It is clear from Arberry’s translation that he understood *wurūd* as ‘going down to,’ without necessarily implying ‘entering.’⁶⁸ This meaning of ‘approaching with the intention of reaching the edge of’ should stand as the preferred meaning since otherwise the verse would mean that all people, believers included, will have to enter hell and only afterwards will they be saved and admitted into paradise (*thumma nunajjī lladhīna ttaqaw*). Not only does it seem bizarre that the *ahl al-janna* should pass through hell on their way to paradise, but it also presupposes that *najāt* means ‘being saved by being taken out of’ and not ‘being saved by being protected from.’ Two Quranic statements, however, militate against such a presupposition. For one, it is clearly stipulated in other Quranic verses that once in hell, one could not hope to get out. For another, there are several verses to the effect that salvation constitutes being *spared* hell, and not being rescued from it after having been consigned to it. In fact, none of the above Quranic occurrences of the root as cited by Ibn ‘Abbās require that the meaning strictly be ‘entry’; each of the verses uses the sense of ‘going toward’ in different scenarios: Q 21:98 describes how those who worship others besides God will be sent off to

67 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* vi, 109; this one is not preserved in ‘Abd al-Razzāq.

68 Lane, *Lexicon* 1(viii), 2935: “came to it or arrived at it, whether he entered it or not; he approached with his camel a watering pool.”

(end up as fuel for) hell (that they will enter hell is implicit in their fate as evil-doers but *not* in the verb); Q 11:98 depicts Pharaoh leading his followers toward hell; while Q 19:86 relates how ‘the criminals’ are herded toward hell ‘like cattle to a watering-pool.’ That aside, it should be noted that all of the verses cited by Ibn ‘Abbās in defense of *wurūd* meaning ‘entry’ specifically address ‘malefactors.’ In particular, this is brought out by the fact that *wāridūn*, applied to those sent off to hell, in Q 21:98 is contrasted three verses later by *mub‘adūn* (Q 21:101) referring to those destined for paradise. Moreover, the use of the root *w-r-d*, primarily used of camels being driven to a watering pool,⁶⁹ sits better with a reference to the people of hell since the Quran itself makes a derogatory comparison between the predicament of those in hell and camels.⁷⁰ For once, it seems, Ibn ‘Abbās himself does not read “what has preceded it (sc. the verse).”⁷¹

Nāfi‘, however, does resist Ibn ‘Abbās’ exegesis and this comes out in the second exchange cited above. This second exchange begins rather abruptly in that it starts immediately with Nāfi‘ stating, “they do not hear the slightest sound of it (*lā yasma‘ūna ḥasīсахā*).” Presumably, this is part of the same exchange taking place between Nāfi‘ and Ibn ‘Abbās, but is given as a separate tradition by al-Ṭabarī. What Nāfi‘ is referring to is the following sequence of verses of Sura *al-Anbiyā*:

Surely you and that which you worshipped apart from God are fuel for *jahannam*; you shall go down to it. If those had been gods, they would never have gone down to it, yet every one of them shall abide therein forever. There shall be sighing therein for them and naught they shall hear. But as for those unto whom already the reward has gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far from it neither shall they hear any whisper of it, and they shall dwell forever in that their souls desired (Q 21:98–102).

Nāfi‘’s point, against Ibn ‘Abbās, is that *wurūd* does not mean ‘entry,’ and that the people of paradise are protected from hell. For Nāfi‘, then, *wurūd* would mean what one expects it to mean, and that is, ‘going toward and reaching the edge of.’ The clincher for Nāfi‘ would have been to adduce Q 28:23 which describes how Moses reaches the watering pools at Midyan by using the root *w-r-d*, an instance in which it is clear that *wurūd* signifies ‘approaching and finally reaching the edge of’ (it does not mean that Moses entered the pools).

69 See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*.

70 Q 56:54–5: *fa-shāribūna ‘alayhi mina l-ḥamīm fa-shāribūna shurba l-ḥīm* (“And drink on top of that from boiling water, lapping it up like thirsty camels”).

71 See above, Ibn ‘Abbās rebukes Nāfi‘ for not reading the verse preceding Q 5:37.

As a Khārijī, Nāfi' finds the suggestion that believers will enter hell, for whatever reason, simply preposterous. We will come to why Ibn 'Abbās does not opt for the obvious reading like Nāfi' shortly. Clearly, Nāfi' wants to show Ibn 'Abbās that elsewhere in the Quran where God uses *wurūd*, He is pointing to the predicament of the people of hell, especially since God simultaneously assures those who have already been rewarded that they will be distanced from hell and will not hear the faintest sound from it. Again, to Nāfi' it is incomprehensible that everyone should be sent to hell and only afterwards would the 'God-fearing' be saved. The confusion which ensues from, and actually allows for, Ibn 'Abbās' reading is the sequence of the two verses in Sura *Maryam* and the abrupt change of pronominal address in the Arabic: "*wa-in minkum illā wāriduhā kāna 'alā rabbika ḥatman maqḍiyyan thumma nunajjī lladhīna ttaqaw wa-nadharu ẓ-ẓālimīna fihā jithiyyan*. (There is none of you but will come to it: a [matter that is a] decided certainty with your Lord. Then We will deliver those who fear God, and leave the wrongdoers in it, fallen on their knees)" (Q 19:71–2).

The unexpected change of address from the third person plural, in which God describes what He will do to the criminals and their devils, to that of the second person plural gives the impression that now God is including others in His address, namely the readers, which would inevitably include believers. Added to this, the *thumma* (then) of the following verse connects the *najāt* of those 'who were godfearing' (*alladhīna ttaqaw*) with the immediately preceding context: the *wurūd* that 'everyone' (*wa-in minkum*) has to experience. Furthermore, the second verb of verse 72 is *n-dh-r*, which implies that something is left behind and is not included in the act of 'deliverance' (*najāt*).

In sum, if the *in minkum* is read as a continued address to those of the preceding verse, i.e., the malefactors (and unexpected change of pronominal address is not uncommon in the Quran), the *wurūd* is not a point of contention, whether it means 'going toward' or 'entering' we know that, either way, those addressed will end up in the hellfire. If, on the other hand, we are to read the change of address to a second person plural literally, so that it would invariably include believers as part of a general audience, then the question is the exact meaning of *wurūd*. For Nāfi', who clearly does not take *wurūd* as meaning 'entry,' there is no inherent difficulty in the verses. For Ibn 'Abbās, the difficulties of the Quranic text provide the opportunity for exegetical maneuvering. Besides, here was an opportunity to put a Khārijī in his place. The point behind Ibn 'Abbās' understanding of *wurūd* is that it introduces the idea of people being able to get out of hell, precisely by having everyone (Muslims included) literally go through hell; it is also a dogmatic response to Khārijī insistence that

once one goes to hell, one cannot leave it, or put differently, that hell was an eternal abode for all of its inhabitants.

There is still a third exegetical option. This ensues from a subtle change of vocalization to *thumma* by reading the first consonant with a *fatha*. Ibn Mas'ūd has an alternate reading of *thamma*.⁷² Now, verses 71 and 72 would have the following meaning: "There is none of you but will come to it: a [matter that is a] decided certainty with your Lord. There We will deliver those who are wary of God, and leave the wrongdoers in it, fallen on their knees (*wa-in minkum illā wāriduhā kāna 'alā rabbika ḥatman maqḍiyyan thamma nunajjī lladhīna ttaqaw wa-nadharu ḡ-ḡālimīna fihā jithiyyan*)" (Q 19:71–2).

The advantage of this reading is that it does not have to explain why the believers might end up in hell; it is a reading one can imagine Nāfi' would have preferred. The problem is that once the *ḥadīth* of Ibn 'Abbās interpreting *wurūd* as 'entry' was established, giving rise to the theological problem of believers entering hell, traditionalists were forced to come up with a way out for them. These efforts can be detected in the traditions that follow the *wurūd* polemic in al-Ṭabarī's commentary. One Syrian tradition suggests that when the people of paradise are secure in their garden-abodes they wonder what happened since God had promised them "entry into the fire (*wurūd 'alā l-nār*)." The prompt reply arrives that they indeed passed through the fire, but since it was extinguished (*khāmida*) they did not realize they had gone through it.⁷³ The heavy presence of Meccan exegesis is obvious in the case of these traditions: the first one is transmitted by 'Amr b. Dīnār, the second is related by 'Aṭā' b. Abī Rabāḥ, and a third by Mujaḥid.⁷⁴ But there were also some Iraqis who were of the opinion that *wurūd* meant 'entry'.⁷⁵ Others, however, held that *wurūd* did not refer to the believers, but that God intended the unbelievers. Subscription to this last view included 'Ikrima, another of Ibn 'Abbās' pupils, but true perhaps to his Khārijī leanings, he seems to agree with Nāfi' rather than his teacher on this

72 Jeffery, *Materials* 59; cf. Bayḍāwī, *Anwār* iv, 13.

73 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xvi, 109; al-Ḥasan b. 'Arafa ← Marwān b. Mu'āwiya ← Bikār b. Abī Marwān ← Khālīd b. Ma'dān: "*qāla ahlu l-janna ba'da mā dakhalū l-jannata a-lam ya'idnā rabbunā l-wurūd 'alā l-nār? qāla: qad marartum 'alayhā wa-hiya khāmida (aw qāla: jāmida)*" (After the people of Paradise have entered Paradise they say, 'Did our Lord not promise us that we would enter the fire?' Someone replies, 'You have verily been through it but it was extinguished (or 'solidified')'). Cf. Zoroastrian 'hell': "... and for him who is righteous, it will seem as if he is walking through warm milk; and for him who is wicked, it will seem as if he is walking in the flesh through molten metal," Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* i, 242.

74 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xvi, 110.

75 Ibid.

issue. Another option favored by some Basrans (Maʿmar b. Rāshid, d. 154/770 and Qatāda) was to interpret *wurūd* as the crossing over of *jahannam*.⁷⁶ This in turn leads to suggestions that *wurūd* for believers means one thing, and that is ‘crossing over,’ while for the unbelievers it means ‘entering.’ Consequently, because it is at this ‘crossing’ that the believers will be most in need of help, in traditional exegesis it became the physical point where *shafā’a* takes place. But here, however, *shafā’a* involves asking God to make the crossing safe.⁷⁷

3.4 Exegesis of Q 3:192

One of the other ways in which the traditionalists found support for the idea of a temporary hell is by making a distinction between those who ‘merit’ hell, and as a result go there eternally (commonly identified as the *ahl al-nār alladhīna hum ahluhā*), and those who do not merit such a label, but who might have to endure a temporary chastisement in hell as a sort of rehabilitation before being allowed into paradise. One can see this at work in the commentary on Q 3:192. The verse is formulated as a short supplication to God, spoken from the point of view of the believers, to guard them from hell, since those whom God sends to hell are ‘disgraced’: “Lord, those whom you send into the fire are verily disgraced; indeed, the unjust have no supporters” (Q 3:192).

As we saw in the debate over the interpretation of the term *wurūd*, the traditionalists – by insisting on a specific semantic value for this Arabic verb, namely ‘entering,’ even when ‘going down toward’ or ‘going to the edge of’ has stronger lexicographic support – are able to make an argument in support of the notion of a temporary hell. Already in Muqātil’s commentary we can sense an effort to make the distinction between ‘eternity’ in hell and ‘temporary period’ in hell. Muqātil finds it necessary to state that the meaning of the verse is that he whom God sends eternally to hell has been disgraced by Him.⁷⁸ In al-Ṭabarī, on

76 Cf. popular eschatology regarding the *ṣirāt* (the figurative ‘path’ of Sura *al-Fātiha*) as a bridge over hell that human beings have to cross to get to paradise. Those who belong in hell fall by the wayside, while those of paradise cross safely. The idea makes its first ‘orthodox’ appearance in the *Fiqh Akbar II* (Wensinck, *Creed* 232). Consider here Zoroastrian descriptions of eschatological judgment that are noteworthy: the individual’s judgment takes place on arrival at the ‘Bridge of the Separator.’ The idea is that this crossing can either lead to the House of Song (paradise) or the House of Lies (hell). Some versions of this myth state that the damned soul will find the bridge uncrossable as it, the bridge, constricts to an impossible degree and so the soul falls off and plunges into the depths of hell (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism* i, 237).

77 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xvi, 112.

78 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* i, 321: “*Ya’nī man khalladtahu fī-l-nāri fa-qad ahantahu* (In other words, he whom you have made to abide forever in the fire you have verily demeaned).”

the other hand, the traditionalist effort is much more conspicuous. The meaning of the root *kh-z-y* is 'to disgrace, render base or despicable, or to shame'.⁷⁹ What the first exegesis given by al-Ṭabarī offers is the reassurance that *kh-z-y* does not apply to a believer. Why? Because a believer is not really disgraced even if he has to endure some punishment in hell before going to paradise: God only disgraces the hardened unbelievers, i.e., *mushrikūn* or *kuffār*. The effect of this interpretation is to support the idea that there is a temporary hell after all. Other exegetical narratives suggest that the verse refers specifically to those who 'do not exit from the fire':⁸⁰

Abū Hilāl ← Qatāda ← Anas: *rabbanā innaka man tudkhili l-nāra fa-qad akhzaytahu* (Lord, verily the one whom you admit into the fire you have disgraced): 'Who stays there eternally (*man yakhlud*).'

ʿAbd al-Razzāq ← al-Thawrī ← a man ← Ibn al-Musayyab: 'It refers only to those who do not exit from it (*hiya khāṣṣa li-man lā yakhrūju minhā*).'⁸¹

Ḥajjāj ← Ibn Jurayj: '[This] refers to the one who will endure in it forever (*huwa man yakhludu fihā*).'

It is important to note that most of the exegetical narratives only go back to a companion or the following ('successor') generation (*tābiʿūn*), which might prompt more confidence in their authenticity. A more interesting exegetical narrative is one in which al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is questioned about the reality of *shafāʿa* in the light of the above verse, and another verse from the Quran (Q 5:37), to which al-Ḥasan responds affirmatively by stating that there are people who belong to hell and who cannot get out of it. Others, al-Ḥasan continues, have been sent there by God on account of sins they had committed. But God then releases these individuals, since He knows that they had believed in him:⁸²

al-Muthanna ← Abū l-Nuʿmān ʿĀrim ← Ḥammād b. Zayd ← Qubayṣa b. Marwān ← al-Ashʿath al-Ḥimlī:

I said to al-Ḥasan: 'O Abū Saʿīd, is it true this *shafāʿa* that you are talking about?' He said: 'Yes.' I said: 'But Abū Saʿīd, what about what God says [sc. in Q 3:192 and 5:37]?' He said: 'By God, do not think you can outdo me [with that argument]; hell has inhabitants who never get out, as God says.' I said: 'So, why then are some sent there and then get out?' He said:

79 Lane, *Lexicon* 1(ii), 735.

80 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* iv, 211.

81 Also in ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr* i, 142.

82 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* iv, 211.

‘On account of sins they committed in this life, for which God requited them and sent them to hell; but knowing that they in their hearts had faith and professed belief in Him, He then takes them out of it.’

The attribution of the views expressed in the above narrative to al-Ḥasan might provoke suspicion, since attempts to give weight to a particular view by ascribing it to a well-known authority is widely recognized by Islamicists.⁸³ While there is no direct citation of *ḥadīth* above, the explanation given by al-Ḥasan is so similar to traditionist explanations of why all those that go to hell do not stay there permanently, that one has to wonder whether al-Ḥasan had actually come by his explanation through *ḥadīth*. On the one hand it is acknowledged that al-Ḥasan was not a traditionalist when it came to *ḥadīth*,⁸⁴ and on the other, the view ascribed to al-Ḥasan above is not entirely incompatible with what is known of his own views. But, again, which of the two views one accepts will depend on the modern scholar’s own methodological approaches to Muslim history. Nevertheless, there are several interesting points to be gleaned from the narrative. First, al-Ḥasan knows the ‘scripturalist’ reading of Q 3:192 and Q 5:37, and is ready to counter it, as he so unabashedly claims: “You have no argument against mine (*lā tastaṭīʿu ʿalayya shayʿan*).” Second, he also knows that the issue at stake is sinning believers, since we are told that it is on account of this that they merit both paradise and hell. Finally, the reasoning that God takes believers out of hell because He knows that in their hearts they professed belief in Him is classical Sunni doctrine. This doctrine is a fusion of two elements: 1) faith (*īmān*) in God (regardless of conduct, i.e., without ‘works’) deserves the status of *muʾmin* (a Murjiʿi idea) and 2) God takes monotheists out of hell (a traditionalist one). The combination of the two elements is precisely what can be found in the exegesis of Muqātil b. Sulaymān: it is this combination that classical Sunnism eventually absorbed.⁸⁵

3.5 *Exegesis of Q 7:46*

Although the *aʿrāf* (the heights) passage is not obviously linked to the idea of temporary hell, it does establish the basis for it by connecting two elements. The first is the notion that the fate of a group of people on the day of judgment will not be decided by their deeds, since their deeds cancel out. The second is that the Prophet’s intercession will be used to get them out. It is a combination of these two elements that provides the context for the salvation of Muslim

83 Juynboll, *Tradition* 85.

84 Cook, *Dogma* 120.

85 Cf. Madelung, Sunni doctrine 235.

sinner on the day of judgment, and also paves the way for the possibility of a 'purgative' period in hell. Muqātil identified this group, whose fate could not be decided through their deeds, as being from the Muslim community who eventually will be saved and allowed entry into paradise thanks to the intercession of the Prophet.⁸⁶ The Quranic verses with which Muqātil is concerned are from Sura *al-A'rāf*, Q 7:46–9, and center on the elusive meaning of the Sura's title:

The inhabitants of paradise will call to the inhabitants of the fire: 'We have found that which our Lord promised us true; have you found what your Lord has promised you true?,' 'Yes,' they will say ... (Q 7:44).

And between them is a veil, and on the Heights are men knowing each by their mark and they call to the inhabitants of paradise: 'Peace be upon you.' They have not entered it though they are eager to. And when their eyes are turned toward the inhabitants of the fire they shall say, 'Our Lord, do not Thou assign us with the evil-doing people.' And those of the Heights shall call to certain men they know by their sign: 'Your amassing has not availed you, neither your haughtiness. Are these the ones you swore God would never reach with mercy?' 'Enter paradise; no fear upon you, nor shall you sorrow' (Q 7:46–9).

The stumbling block for the exegetes seems to be the interpretation of 'those of the heights' (*aṣḥāb al-a'rāf*). Almost all the exegetical authorities agree that the *a'rāf* itself is some sort of lofty partitioning between paradise and hell, and this sense derives from 'urf.⁸⁷ The Meccans (Mujāhid), the Kufans (al-Sha'bī, d. 104/722) and the Basrans (Qatāda) all take *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* to be a reference to those whose good deeds and bad deeds have balanced out and as a result, 'logically,' they merit neither paradise nor hell.⁸⁸

Mujāhid (1st opinion): 'The *a'rāf* are a screen [constituting a partition] between paradise and hellfire (*al-a'rāf hijāb bayn al-janna wa-l-nār*).'

al-Suddī: 'They are the rampart (*huwa al-sūr*).'

Mujāhid (2nd opinion): 'Those of the *a'rāf* are a people who went on raids in the name of God but were disobedient to their parents. When they were killed, God withheld them from hellfire on account of their

86 Muqātil, *Tafsīr* ii, 39–40: "*Aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* are from the *umma* of Muḥammad; their good and bad deeds are equally balanced so they are imprisoned on the *ṣirāt* because of their sins, but then they enter the garden thanks to the intercession of the Prophet."

87 Lane, *Lexicon* 1(v), 2015a.

88 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* viii, 188–9.

having been killed for Him, but He also bars them from entering paradise because they had been disobedient to their parents: they are the last people to enter paradise.'

The only dissenting opinion on the interpretation of 'those of the heights' is that of the Basran Abū Mijlāz.⁸⁹ Al-Ṭabarī does not seem to have much regard for his opinion, since he relegates Abū Mijlāz's opinions to the end of the exegetical narratives offered for the verses in question. That Abū Mijlāz's opinion was a dissenting one is evidenced by the sheer quantity of traditions that are transmitted on his authority. While on average one narrative is accorded to each of the standard traditionists (Meccan, Kufan, other Basran), no less than seven narratives are reproduced on the authority of Abū Mijlāz, in each one a different person disputes his opinion.⁹⁰ He states that the term *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* is a reference not to humans (Banū Ādam), who by their deeds have deserved neither damnation nor salvation as the other authorities have it, but instead to angels who are watching the eschatological drama from high above. We shall take the side of Abū Mijlāz for the sake of argument, and offer the reader a guided rendering of the *a'rāf* verse based on his suggestion:

wa-baynahumā hijābun wa-'alā l-a'rāfi rijālun ya'rifūna kullan bi-simāhum...

And between them [those of paradise and those of hell] there is a veil, and atop the Heights there are men [angels] who recognize each [of the people of paradise and the people of hell] by their mark.

wa-nādaw aṣḥāba l-jannati an salāmun 'alaykum lam yadkhulūhā wahum yaṭma'ūn...

And they [the angels] call to those of paradise saying 'peace be upon you'; they [the people of paradise] have not entered it yet, but they are eager.

wa-idhā ṣurifat abṣāruhum tilqā'a aṣḥābi l-nāri qālū rabbanā lā taj'alnā ma'a l-qawmi ḡ-ḡālimīn...

And when they [the people of paradise] turn their eyes toward those of hell, they say: 'Lord, do not assign us with the evildoing lot.'

89 Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd al-Sadūsī al-Baṣrī, see Ṣafaḍī, *Wāfi* xxiv, 392.

90 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* viii, 193-4.

*wa-nādā aṣḥābu l-a'rāfi rijālan ya'rifūnahum bi-simāhum qālū mā aghnā
'ankum jam'ukum wa-mā kuntum tastakbirūn a-hā'ulā'i lladhīna aqsa-
tum lā yanāluhumu llāhu bi-raḥmatin dkhulū l-jannata lā khawfun
'alaykum wa-lā antum taḥzanūn*

And those atop the Heights [the angels] call to certain men [of those in hell] they know by their signs, and they say to them, 'Your amassing has not availed you, nor your haughtiness; are these the ones you swore God would never reach with mercy? Enter paradise, fear not and be not sorrowful.'

As it happens, Abū Mijlaz's instinct that it is angels who are meant by the term *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* is supported by other verses in the Quran. For one, the angels are commonly portrayed as the ones who receive the consignments of people destined for both hell and paradise; they are the celestial 'ushers' who welcome the 'fortunate' into paradise,⁹¹ and the divine scourge who rebuke the 'damned' before submitting them to eternal torture.⁹² Consequently, they could very plausibly be the voice behind the benediction (*salāmun 'alaykum*) of verse 46, the rebuke of verse 48, and both the rhetorical question and the good tidings of verse 49.

In short, the reading that results from taking the *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* to be angels is far less tortuous than that of the other exegetical traditions. Indeed, if we are to read *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* as people awaiting 'final sentencing,' which is not impossible, we have to make one difficult adjustment. The issue turns on who exactly is delivering the words of verse 49: "Are these the ones you swore God would not reach with mercy? Enter paradise, fear not and be not sorrowful." The direct speech indicated by the interrogatory *a-* before *hā'ulā'* suggests that the verse is continuing a live address from a preceding verse. Verse 48, it just so happens, does indeed end with a statement made in direct speech: "They say: nothing has your amassing availed you, nor your haughtiness." In other words, the voice of verse 49 is the voice of verse 48. Yet if the voice of verse 48 is that of the men waiting in limbo for a decision on their final destination, as our exegetes would have it, the difficulty is immediately apparent: the men of verse 48 are now talking about themselves and have granted themselves entry into paradise. Of course, one does not have to assume a continuance of speech between verses 48 and 49, but it is clearly easier to do so. Predictably, the exegetes have God as the voice of verse of 49.

91 Q 16:32. See also Q 13:24; 39:73.

92 Q 4:97; 8:50; 16:28–9; 7:37; 39:71.

Although Abū Mijlaz' reading is unpopular, the identification of *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf* with angels does offer an arguably simpler reading of the *a'rāf* passage. The problem is that in the first mention of *a'rāf* (verse 46), the term *aṣḥāb* is not used, but instead the Quran identifies them as *rijāl*. The objection the exegetes, including al-Ṭabarī, sustain is that Abū Mijlaz has inadvertently accorded angels a masculine gender. Abū Mijlaz is quick to point out, however, that this is exactly what angels must be if they are not female. The subtlety in Abū Mijlaz' defense is that the Quran, on frequent occasion, makes biting remarks against those who claim that the angels were female.⁹³

Once again, it is the Basran identity of our dissenter that is noteworthy here. Apart from the fact that he does not opt for the somewhat difficult reading of the *a'rāf* passage by understanding anything other than angels for 'those of the heights,' Abū Mijlaz does not seem party to the standard traditionalist hermeneutic, namely: the adducing of Quranic support for the concept of temporary punishment in hell so that the occasion then arises for introducing as dogma, the belief in eschatological intercession, first and foremost that of the Prophet, which in turn provides the guarantee of salvation for that group of sinners whose fate seems to be uncertain. But in the case of the *a'rāf* passage, their fate is not uncertain at all, for judging by the Quranic text, regardless of whether one takes angels or humans for *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf*, the group in question are granted entry into paradise (Q 7:49). Nevertheless, the narrative surrounding the exegesis of the *a'rāf* produces suggestions by the exegetes as to how those 'detained' on the 'heights' are eventually forgiven and allowed into paradise. In this case, we have a long tradition related by the Kufan exegete al-Suddī (d. 128/745), which establishes Muḥammad as the intercessor par excellence on the day of judgment:⁹⁴

Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn ← Aḥmad b. al-Mufaḍḍal ← Asbāṭ ← al-Suddī relates how when the consignments have been made to hell and paradise, those detained on the *a'rāf* are granted permission to ask for intercession (*udhina lahum fī-ṭalab al-shafā'a*). They make the first plea to Adam who, considering himself unworthy of such an honor, directs the desperate group to seek the intercession of Abraham; the pattern is repeated and they ask Moses, and in turn Jesus until, finally, they turn to Muḥammad, finding him the only one of sufficient stature and confidence to beseech God on their behalf.

93 Q 17:40; 35:150; 43:19; 53:21, 27.

94 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* viii, 199; the tradition can also be found in the classical collections, see Ibn Māja, *Sunan* ii, 1442 (no. 4312); al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ii, 70.

There are a few other, shorter, exegetical statements that further support this traditionalist 'hermeneutical project' of legitimating the doctrine of temporary hellfire for Muslim sinners. For instance, in Q 78:21: "*innā jahannama kānā mirṣādān li-l-ṭāghīna ma'āban lābithīna fihā aḥqāban* (Verily, *jahannam* is an ambush, for the insolent a resort, therein to tarry for ages)," the traditionalists attempt to work out the precise length of a *ḥuqb*.⁹⁵ Some, though, point out that *aḥqāban* means 'in cycles' so that the punishment never comes to end, while others say one punishment comes to an end, but a new one takes its place.⁹⁶ The most interesting comment is that, according to the Syrian traditionalist Khālīd b. Ma'dān (d. 103/721), the verse in question refers to the *ahl al-qibla*. In Khālīd's opinion the verse can be taken together with *illā mā shā'a rabbuka* (sc. the *istithnā'* of Q 6:128 and 11:107) as indicating the possibility of salvation for the grave sinners of the Muslim community, since they are 'those who profess the Oneness from among the people of the *qibla*' (*al-muwahḥidūn min ahl al-qibla*).⁹⁷ These minor passages aside, however, it is Q 5:37, as well as the *istithnā'* verses of Q 11:107, the *wurūd* verses of Q 19:71, the interpretation of *kh-z-y* in Q 3:192, and the *a'rāf* of Q 7:46 that constitute the principal Quranic passages used by the traditionalists in order to establish the concept of a temporary hell in classical Islam.

4 Conclusion

We may now restate the above discussion in broader historical terms. At the time of Muqātil the idea of Muslim sinners getting out of hell was already around, but it is difficult to say how widely accepted the idea was, even among traditionists. By the time of 'Abd al-Razzāq, however, the idea was an important element of traditionalist exegesis, even as it was facing opposition from non-traditionalist circles. The *ḥadīths* in the *Muṣannaf* are efforts to iron out that opposition. At the same time, we see the intrusion of traditions that focus on the Prophet's eschatological intercession (*shafā'a*). This intercession, however, originally emerged separately from temporary hell⁹⁸

95 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xxx, 6; fantastic figures are suggested, a *ḥuqb* is 80 (next-world) years, a year being 360 days with each day being 1000 years (= 28,800,000?).

96 On account of there being many 'types' of punishment in hell, see Q 38:56–8.

97 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xxx, 7 (lines 33–35).

98 The Prophet as intercessor seems to be a much older idea (cf. the Dome of the Rock's inner mosaic inscriptions). I devote a much longer section to the development of *shafā'a* in my forthcoming monograph.

and by 184/800, as the evidence of the *Muṣannaf* suggests, it functioned in various ways: in order to protect the Muslim community from hell; or, so that God would forgive the sins of the Muslim community (such *ḥadīth* probably came into circulation after the civil wars, when the community had become increasingly schismatic). However, even by 184/800 it was still not explicitly associated with Muslim sinners exiting from hell and the proponents of *ḥadīth* were still at pains to establish exegetical authority for the concept of a temporary hellfire. In response to the resistance to their effort, eventually the Prophet's *shafā'a* was used to confirm the eventuality that Muslim sinners will ultimately escape eternal hell. The emergence, and subsequent transformation, of the very *jahannamiyyūn* tradition testifies to that development. The *Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq established that a 'people' would exit from hell. By al-Bukhārī's time these 'people' had become identified as *jahannamiyyūn*. By the time Ibn Māja (d. 273/887) and al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) put together their *ḥadīth* collections, however, this 'Muslim purgatory' had found an authoritative articulation: *la-yakhrujanna qawmun min ummatī min al-nār bi-shafā'atī yusammawn jahannamiyyīn*, "Verily a group from my community shall exit from the hellfire thanks to my intercession and they shall be known as the 'people of *jahannam*.'"⁹⁹ Islamicists might still disagree over the definitive date for the emergence of classical Sunnism, but if the definition of the question of ultimate salvation can be a measure of the coalescence of a community's religious perspective, then surely one major feature of 'Sunnism' had already appeared well before the coming together of the four schools of law in the fifth/eleventh century.

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Paradise and Hell in the *Kitāb al-Jihād* of ‘Alī b. Ṭāhir al-Sulamī (d. 500/1106)

Niall Christie

1 Introduction

In the years 498 and 499 (1105) according to the Islamic calendar, in the Mosque of Bayt Lihyā in the Ghūṭa, the rural area surrounding Damascus, a Muslim religious scholar named ‘Alī b. Ṭāhir al-Sulamī (d. 500/1106) publicly composed a text entitled *Kitāb al-Jihād* (*The Book of the Jihād*). Al-Sulamī composed his text in response to the invasion of portions of the Levantine region by crusaders from Europe, who had taken a number of cities including Jerusalem. In his work he exhorted his listeners, and the wider Muslim community, to take up arms against the European invaders, fighting in the military *jihād* in return for earthly benefits and, more importantly, the promise of divine approval and eternal life in paradise.

The information available about al-Sulamī himself is, sadly, very limited, consisting only of brief entries in four biographical dictionaries. From these we learn that although he initially composed his work at Bayt Lihyā, al-Sulamī himself was first and foremost a teacher of Arabic at the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, where he had a circle of students. He was also recognized as being a *thiqa*, a reliable transmitter of *ḥadīth*. It is evident from the *Kitāb al-Jihād* itself that he was also something of a polymath, for his work is a multi-genre text that, while primarily intended as a discussion of and call to the *jihād*, also includes features of *faḍā’il* works (books on the merits of a particular place, in this case the Bilād al-Shām, Greater Syria, with a particular emphasis on Jerusalem and Damascus), judicial and theological texts, and grammar treatises, as well as collecting poetry relevant to his arguments. Thus al-Sulamī presents the historian with an engaging but rather elusive figure. The surviving manuscript of al-Sulamī’s work is in many ways as disjointed as his biography; it comprises only four, though mostly complete, parts of what was at least a twelve-part work (Parts 2, 8, 9, and 12), plus an additional fragment of the treatise bound at the end of Part 8. However, even though incomplete, this manuscript presents us with a text that is vital to crusade studies, representing a unique insight into a contemporary Muslim’s reaction to the arrival of the First

Crusade. In the process it presents a detailed discussion of *jihād*, its conduct and, most importantly for the wider topic under discussion in this volume, al-Sulamī's views on the rewards of paradise, the torments of hell, and how to gain the former and avoid the latter.¹

Al-Sulamī's work seems to have had limited immediate influence, even though Part 2, the section of it that calls most explicitly for a Muslim response to the crusaders, was dictated in public again once before and once after his death, with the latter reading taking place in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. In each case the audience was in the first instance a small circle of religious scholars, themselves unable to mobilize armies against the Franks; however, it is clear that al-Sulamī wanted his call to reach beyond his immediate listeners and particularly to the political authorities of the region, who are singled out for special criticism for their lack of opposition to the crusaders, and it does seem likely that al-Sulamī's ideas, along with the ideas of other preachers of the time, influenced the later preaching of the *jihād* against the crusaders. This *jihād* eventually saw its fruition in the conquests of Frankish territory by 'Imād al-Dīn Zangī (d. 541/1146), Nūr al-Dīn (d. 569/1174), and Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn (Saladin, d. 589/1193). However, he himself never saw his preaching have significant effect, dying only a year after he assembled his work.²

It is helpful to summarize briefly the numerous techniques al-Sulamī employs in his attempts to motivate his listeners. In an attempt to shame his listeners into action, he criticizes Muslim rulers and their subjects for their neglect of regular military expeditions against non-Muslims on the frontiers, something that he sees as particularly worthy of censure due to the fact that these rulers have instead pursued politically-motivated wars against other Muslims; he threatens his listeners with both eternal damnation in the next life and subjugation by the Franks in this one if they do not desist from their misbehavior; and he promises his listeners both earthly and heavenly rewards for their efforts, including the shares of the spoils to which they will be entitled, the opportunity to take part in the fulfillment of eschatological prophecies about armies of Muslims fated to conquer their enemies until the day of judgment, the opportunity to earn divine favor instead of the anger that

1 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb*. This manuscript has recently been the subject of two critical editions, one by Suhayl Zakkār in 2007 and a second, also including a translation and introductory study, by Niall Christie, published in 2015; see Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* and Christie, *Book*. On al-Sulamī and his work see, in addition to the preceding, Sivan, *Génèse* 197–224; Hillenbrand, *Crusades* 105–8.

2 On the impact of al-Sulamī's work, see in particular Hillenbrand, *Crusades* 108–16; Sivan, *Génèse* 204–6; Christie, *Religious* 57–72.

led God to inflict the crusaders on the Muslims, and, for those who die in the *jihād*, the joys of rich heavenly dwellings, servants, and wives. We have discussed these motivational techniques elsewhere,³ but in this article we look in more detail at al-Sulamī's depictions of paradise and hell, examining how his depictions of these are affected by his overall agenda and his perception of the socio-political context in which he lived, and thus we gain insight into the types of relationships that existed between preachers and their societies in the aftermath of the arrival of the First Crusade. We use al-Sulamī's text as a case study for this wider volume of articles, demonstrating how the theological teachings that have been highlighted in other articles were applied and at times transformed in actual preaching practice in late fifth/early twelfth-century Damascus. In the process we see the results of the tension between official teachings on the one hand and the preacher's attempt to tailor his message to his audience on the other.

2 Depictions of Punishment

As indicated above, al-Sulamī uses a mixture of promises of rewards and threats of punishment in his attempts to motivate his listeners, deploying both the "carrot" and the "stick," as it were, in an effort to elicit a response. It is noteworthy, however, that punishment has a greater presence in the earlier parts of his work than does reward. Punishments receive attention throughout Part 2 of al-Sulamī's text and then receive almost no attention in the other parts of his work, while rewards continue to be referred to throughout the rest of the text. Within this it is striking that in Part 2 of the *Kitāb al-Jihād*, the punishments are referred to more explicitly and described in much more detail than the rewards, so there is a general emphasis on punishment in the early part of al-Sulamī's work that later transforms into an emphasis on reward. We trace this transformation in what follows.

Al-Sulamī's initial emphasis on punishment is perhaps not surprising; he starts by depicting the *jihād* as a duty that rulers have neglected, hence prompting the invasion by the Franks.⁴ Al-Sulamī himself clearly finds this neglect to be utterly reprehensible:

³ See Christie, *Book* 16–24; Christie, *Motivating* 1–14; Christie, *Jerusalem* 209–21.

⁴ Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 174b–5a; Christie, *Book* 42–3 and 206; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 45; Sivan, *Génèse* 207 and 215.

The most astonishment is what one feels at a sultan who takes pleasure in life or remains where he is despite the appearance of this calamity, of which the outcome is conquest by these blasphemers, expulsion from the country by force and subjugation, or staying with them in degradation and servility, with the killing, capture, torture, and torment by night and day that this involves. By God! By God, you community of sultans of this country, and those aides, soldiers and others from the local militia, stalwart auxiliaries, and lords recently acquired with wealth and passed as inheritance among yourselves, families and close friends,⁵ who follow them, go out, lightly or heavily armed, and fight the *jihād* with your wealth and your selves.⁶

Given this viewpoint, it is understandable that al-Sulamī initially threatens his listeners with punishments, including the perils of hell or denial of paradise, more emphatically than he offers them rewards. These last threats merit closer attention.

Upon examining al-Sulamī's depictions of hell in particular, one is first struck by his choice of terminology. The word that al-Sulamī uses most often for hell is *al-nār*, the fire.⁷ This is the word used most commonly in the Quran to indicate hell, but it is worth noting that in using this particular term so frequently al-Sulamī chooses a word that refers not to hell in an abstract sense but rather with a striking emphasis on the torments that await sinners. Al-Sulamī seeks to highlight the burning fires of hell rather than any other feature. To emphasize the point, al-Sulamī explicitly warns his listeners of the eternal torments that the Fire represents, describing it as a "*nāran dhāt lahab* (fire with flames)" that is "*sharr makān wa-aswā' munqalab* (an evil place and worst final destiny)."⁸ Later he re-emphasizes each of these aspects separately, citing 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb's famous statement to Abū Sufyān at Uhūd in 3/625, "Our casualties are in paradise, and your casualties are in the Fire, *being punished*,"⁹ and also noting in a quotation of poetry that "Disgrace of souls on the day

5 Probably a reference to Mamluks.

6 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 177b; Christie, *Book* 48 and 211; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 49; Sivan, *Génèse* 209–10 and 217–8.

7 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 177a, 182b, 183b–4a, 186b, 8b and 9b; Christie, *Book* 47, 58, 60–1, 66, 129 and 130; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 49, 57–9, 63, 112–3; Sivan, *Génèse* 209 and 217. On *al-nār* see in the first instance Fahd, *Nār* 957–60; Gwynne, *Hell* 414–20, esp. 414.

8 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 177a; Christie, *Book* 47 and 210; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 49; Sivan, *Génèse* 209 and 217.

9 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 9b; Christie, *Book* 130 and 295; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 113. Emphasis added.

of calamity¹⁰ is more lasting for them.”¹¹ Al-Sulamī is at pains to present condemnation to hell as a truly frightening fate, filled with torture and pain that never ends.¹²

In addition to *nār*, al-Sulamī also occasionally uses the terms *jaḥīm* and *saʿīr* to refer to hell. Both of these carry many of the same connotations as *nār*, referring specifically to the burning or fire of hell, and may have been chosen by al-Sulamī for the reasons outlined above.¹³ Notable by its absence, however, is the term *jahannam*, which by al-Sulamī’s day had become an expression used by Muslim scholars for a temporary hell for sinners who did not deserve eternal damnation.¹⁴ Al-Sulamī does not want to offer a soft option; he is determined to make the punishment that awaits those who neglect the *jihād* as terrifying as possible, and so his depictions of hell firmly present it as a place of fiery torment from which there is no escape. In this way he seeks to frighten his listeners, and anyone to whom his message might be passed on, into action against the Frankish threat.

While al-Sulamī has no qualms about frightening his listeners into action, he nonetheless clearly indicates that those who undertake the *jihād* must do so with the right intentions. He illustrates this with a *ḥadīth* about the first three people who are brought before God on the day of judgment: a Quran reciter, who claims that he learned the Quran so that he could devote himself to it night and day; a rich man, who claims that he gave generously to the poor out of a desire to do charitable works; and a man who was killed in the military *jihād*, who claims that he waged war in obedience to Quranic injunctions. In the discussion that follows, it is revealed that all three only acted as they did for the repute that it would bring them, and in the end the transmitter of the *ḥadīth*, the Prophet’s Companion Abū Hurayra, declares, “Then the Messenger of God, may God bless him, struck my knee and said, ‘O Abū Hurayra, those three are the first members of God’s creation who will be judged, but the fire will be kindled with them on the day of resurrection.’”¹⁵ The message is clear: Muslims must undertake the *jihād* out of a desire to obey God, rather than from selfish motives, otherwise the fires of hell await them on the day of judgment,

10 Meaning the day of judgment.

11 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 218a; Christie, *Book* 159 and 328; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 135.

12 On the torments of hell, see Rustomji, *Garden* 73–4, 79–83 and 117–22.

13 On *jaḥīm*, see initially Newman, al-Jaḥīm 324. On *saʿīr* see Gibb et al., *Saʿīr*, 872. On both see Gwynne, *Hell* 414; Wild, *Hell* 259–63.

14 See Hamza, *Temporary hellfire punishment*, in the present publication; Gardet, *Djahannam* 381–2.

15 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 181b–2b; Christie, *Book* 57–8 and 220–1; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 57.

and indeed this *ḥadīth* follows a section in which al-Sulamī urges his listeners to seek reconciliation with God through, first, *jihād* against themselves to remove their disobedience to God, and then right conduct in their external actions (the “greater” followed by the “lesser” *jihād*).¹⁶

Correct action continues to be advocated with the threat of hellfire as al-Sulamī’s work proceeds, for his next major *ḥadīth* concerns the fate of a man who fought heroically on the battlefield, making his comrades believe that he must be bound for paradise, but then committed a major sin by killing himself after he received a serious wound. Since suicide is strictly forbidden in Islam, this man’s action condemned him to hell, and the point is emphasized when the narrator records the comment of the Prophet (who had divined the man’s true fate):

A man may indeed spend much effort on what seems to the people to be the deeds of the denizens of paradise and still be one of the denizens of the fire, and a man may likewise do what seems to the people to be the deeds of a denizen of the fire and still be one of the denizens of paradise.¹⁷

Right intention leads to right action, and since intentions are not always immediately apparent, actions provide proof of whether they are good or not. Al-Sulamī himself uses this *ḥadīth* as an illustration to caution his listeners against “pursuing hypocritical aims and love of renown and praise,”¹⁸ even though it is not explicitly stated in the narrative that the *mujāhid* (warrior in the *jihād*) in question had sought any fame or recognition.

Al-Sulamī’s exhortations to right conduct are further emphasized when he notes that a *mujāhid* who dies a debtor would not be able to enter paradise even if he returned to life again, fought on, and was killed a second time.¹⁹ In similar vein, and rather more pertinent to al-Sulamī’s own aims, is his comment that a ruler who does not look after his subjects will also be forbidden paradise.²⁰ Thus we continue to see good and law-abiding conduct singled out

16 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 180b–1a; Christie, *Book* 55–7 and 218–20; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 55–6; Sivan, *Génèse* 211 and 219.

17 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 183b–4a; Christie, *Book* 60–1 and 223–4; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 58–9.

18 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 183b; Christie, *Book* 60 and 223; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 58.

19 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 187a; Christie, *Book* 68 and 231; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 65.

20 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 189a; Christie, *Book* 71 and 234; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 67; Sivan, *Génèse* 213 and 220.

for particular attention, with failure to adhere to it explicitly linked to failure to attain paradise.²¹

Before moving on from al-Sulamī's depictions of punishment, it is worth paying brief attention to one more mention of hell that appears in his work. He recounts the following *ḥadīth*:

The Messenger of God, may God bless him, was asked about the "People of the Heights." He said, "They are people who have been killed for the cause of God, be He exalted and honored, disobeying their fathers. Their dying for the cause of God protected them from the fire."²²

The "People of the Heights," in Arabic *aṣḥāb al-a'rāf*, are first referred to in Quran 7:46–9, where they seem to be a group of people who have not been allowed into paradise but have also not been condemned to hell. They seem, however, to be promised entry to paradise at a future date, although exactly when this will take place is not specified.²³ What is notable about al-Sulamī's depiction of them is that he avoids any references to the people's relationship to paradise. To present an image of a people who have not yet been admitted to paradise does not dovetail with his desire to encourage his listeners with heavenly rewards and threaten them with hellish punishments. Thus he focuses only on the fact that the People of the Heights died fighting for the faith and were thus saved from hell, the torments of which he has been depicting in graphic detail. In this way he is careful about what information he provides, manipulating his use of this motif to serve his overall agenda.

3 Depictions of Reward

We may now move fully into a discussion of the rewards that al-Sulamī offers his listeners, and as indicated above we confine our description to al-Sulamī's depiction of paradise, which he presents as one of the several rewards available to those who participate in the *jihād* against the Franks. Again the terminology he employs is worth considering: when he names paradise, al-Sulamī almost exclusively uses the term *janna* (garden), the term most frequently used

21 Al-Sulamī was of course not alone in advocating right conduct as a prerequisite for attaining paradise while on the military *jihād*; see for example Rustomji, *Garden* 18–9.

22 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 186b; Christie, *Book* 66 and 229; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 63.

23 Brinner, *People* 46–8.

in the Quran to refer to it.²⁴ In doing so he immediately sets up a contrast to his depiction of hell, conjuring up the image of a pleasant garden as opposed to burning fires. Two of these uses of the word *janna* refer specifically to *jannat al-na'im* (the gardens of delights)²⁵ and *jannat al-ma'wā* (the garden of rest),²⁶ further emphasizing the idea that paradise is a place of relaxation and pleasure where the fires are notably absent. In particular, according to some scholars *jannat al-ma'wā* is a part of paradise reserved for martyrs, while *jannat al-na'im* is associated with the giving of rewards,²⁷ ideas that al-Sulamī would have seen as important in his efforts to motivate his listeners. Indeed, al-Sulamī pays specific attention to *jannat al-ma'wā*, as is discussed below.

However, al-Sulamī's first references to paradise are rather more indirect. His first hint of paradise as a reward for participation in the *jihād* appears in the following passage:

One of al-Shāfi'ī's followers reported to us . . . "That is to say that the *jihād* is a type of departure for battle by which it is sought to exalt the word of God, be He praised, to demonstrate His religion, to suppress by it His enemies, the polytheists, and to achieve the reward that God, be He praised, and His Prophet promised to whomever fought the *jihād* in His cause. There will be no gaining the enemies' wealth, women and children until there are, of those who come to face the enemy, enough to fight them in the expedition."²⁸

At this point it is by no means clear that "the reward that God, be He praised, and His Prophet promised to whomever fought the *jihād* in His cause," mentioned above, is intended to refer to heavenly joys; however, it seems likely, given that al-Sulamī later makes more explicit references to such delights, that these were among the promised rewards that he had in mind.

However, al-Sulamī's next reference to paradise is only marginally less obscure. With reference to the opportunity that the Muslims have to fight

24 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 183b–4a, 187a, 189a, 9b and 220a; Christie, *Book* 60–1, 68, 71, 130, and 163; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 58–9, 65, 67, 113 and 138; Sivan, *Génèse* 213 and 220. On *janna* see Gardet, *Djanna* 447–52; Kinberg, *Paradise* 12–9.

25 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 183b; Christie, *Book* 60; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 58. At times al-Sulamī uses *janna* in one of its plural forms, reminding us that paradise was seen as consisting of a number of gardens.

26 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 220a; Christie, *Book* 163; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 138.

27 Kinberg, *Paradise* 14.

28 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 175b; Christie, *Book* 44 and 208; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 46; Sivan, *Génèse* 208 and 216.

in the *jihād*, he states, "Take it with the good fortune granted by God, be He praised, from nearby and this mundane world. You will gain it from a finest winner [i.e., God] and will also gain a glory whose raiment will remain on you for many ages to come."²⁹ Again, al-Sulamī refers to both earthly and heavenly rewards, the latter part of his comment likely being intended to refer to eternal life in paradise.

The next hint at heavenly rewards that appears in al-Sulamī's work is a comment that "if one does not desire God's face by an act, then it is futile and the one who does it errs."³⁰ This appears as part of his more sustained exhortations to right conduct, which we have discussed earlier, and reminds us that up until this point al-Sulamī prefers in general to employ threats and criticism rather than to promise rewards, even though he has by this time employed some offers of earthly rewards in his attempts to motivate his listeners.³¹ Indeed, it is only toward the end of this part of al-Sulamī's text that we see a clear indication of a heavenly reward for (in this case) martyrs in the military *jihād*:

So strive to aid [God], so that you will give aid against all enemies and fulfill the duties of the *jihād* as you were ordered to do, so that you will join the *mujāhidīn* and the pious. If you are killed in the process you will be with God among the martyrs.³²

At last al-Sulamī gives his listeners a categorical promise of paradise, having up to this point for the most part only criticized them repeatedly for their neglect, and given them graphic threats of hell and punishment but limited attention to rewards earthly or heavenly. This passage forms a climactic moment in al-Sulamī's argument, demonstrating to his listeners that martyrdom in the military *jihād* will indeed enable them to attain paradise.

This passage signals a change in al-Sulamī's emphasis, in that the subsequent surviving parts of his work place a much greater emphasis on martyrdom and the attractions of paradise than they do on the torments of hell. Indeed, having "broken the seal," as it were, on the topic of martyrdom, al-Sulamī then gives us numerous examples of martyrs from the past. These include the Prophet's son-in-law Zayd b. Thābit; Ja'far b. Abī Ṭālib, the brother of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib;

29 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 177a; Christie, *Book* 47 and 210; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 48; Sivan, *Génèse* 209 and 217.

30 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 181a; Christie, *Book* 57 and 220; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 56; Sivan, *Génèse* 212 and 220.

31 See Christie, *Motivating* 9–12; Christie, *Jerusalem*.

32 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 190b; Christie, *Book* 74 and 237; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 70.

and ‘Abdallah b. Rawāḥa, one of the Prophet’s secretaries, all of whom died at the battle of Mu’ta in 8/629.³³ All three of these figures are described as having been martyred (*ustushhida*). By the same token, in an extended account of the battle of Uḥud provided by al-Sulamī as part of his narrative we are told of the Prophet’s Companion Nu’mān b. Mālik b. Tha’laba, who died as a martyr (again using *ustushhida*) at the battle,³⁴ while we are also told later of a group of Muslims who, when the rumor spread that the Prophet had been killed, “were bewildered by that, and some were killed, with God thus bestowing honors on them (*akramahum*) at the hands of the polytheists.”³⁵ With each example of a noble figure from the past who died as a martyr, al-Sulamī reinforces the importance of being prepared to die fighting in the military *jihād*. In the last case, while those who died are unnamed, we are reassured that their deaths were a means by which God honored them; thus he strongly implies that they subsequently received heavenly rewards. To further reinforce the point, as his narrative of the events at Uḥud proceeds, al-Sulamī tells us of Companions of the Prophet who responded to the rumors of his death with the exhortation, “Whether the Messenger of God, may God bless him, has been killed or not, fight on behalf of your religion, as your Prophet used to fight for it, until you meet God as martyrs (*shuhadā’u*).”³⁶ As noted previously al-Sulamī also recounts ‘Umar’s later comment to Abū Sufyān that the Muslim dead had passed on to paradise, while their enemies’ dead were in hell being punished.³⁷ In this way al-Sulamī establishes a firm link between dying as a martyr and the rewards of paradise.³⁸

However, even as al-Sulamī changes his emphasis in his work, he continues to remind his listeners of the importance of the return to piety and good intentions that he has highlighted earlier in his work. Both those who are injured fighting in the military *jihād* and those who pray are described as being pleasing to God, and al-Sulamī notes that God will lead both fighters and those who pray on the day of judgment.³⁹ In addition, he reminds his audience that

33 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 199a; Christie, *Book* 90–1 and 252–3; Zakkār, *Arba’at kutub* 81–2. On the death of Ibn Rawāḥa in particular see also al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 2a; Christie, *Book* 118–9 and 282; Zakkār, *Arba’at kutub* 104.

34 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 6a; Christie, *Book* 125 and 289; Zakkār, *Arba’at kutub* 109.

35 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 7b; Christie, *Book* 128 and 292; Zakkār, *Arba’at kutub* 111.

36 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 8a; Christie, *Book* 128 and 292–3; Zakkār, *Arba’at kutub* 111–12.

37 See above and al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 9b; Christie, *Book* 130 and 295; Zakkār, *Arba’at kutub* 113.

38 For further discussion of the link between martyrdom and paradise, see for example Rustomji, *Garden* 59–61.

39 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 214a and 195b; Christie, *Book* 150, 85, 318, and 245; Zakkār, *Arba’at kutub* 128 and 77.

rewards offered by God are better than those of this world,⁴⁰ and also notes the following:

What makes courage more beautiful in words and deeds, and is the most beautiful of them, is that which is used in waging *jihād* against the enemies of the religion and fighting them on land and sea. Its origin is conforming to fate and destiny, in their conclusion and decree; wishing to follow the order of God, be He exalted; fear of disobedience to Him; and desire for the abundance of His reward and eternal life in His paradises.⁴¹

In this passage al-Sulamī sums up what for him are the main virtues of a *mujāhid*: acceptance of destiny, a desire to obey God and avoid sinful acts, and ambition only for divine rewards and paradise. Thus he presents the ideal *mujāhid* as someone who has no desire for earthly goods and is entirely focused on striving for God and the faith in both his internal piety and his external actions. In this way al-Sulamī continues to urge his listeners both to return to a more pious mentality and way of life and to fight hard on behalf of Islam in the hope of heavenly rewards.

This link between martyrdom and paradise referred to above becomes far more explicit toward the end of al-Sulamī's work, where he provides four *ḥadīth* reports about individuals who received visions of their dwellings in paradise while either asleep or unconscious.⁴² Each *ḥadīth* follows broadly the same structure, though each varies in its details: the individual in question, while participating in the military *jihād*, sleeps or is rendered unconscious for a time. Eventually he awakes, initially disoriented, but recovers and is able to tell his companions of his experience. He reveals that while he was asleep he received a vision of his eventual home in paradise, specifically *jannat al-ma'wā* (the garden of rest), the section of paradise reserved for martyrs, although it is only actually named as such in one of these stories.⁴³ The narrator indicates that he has been promised a dwelling made and furnished using precious metals or stones, and has met his heavenly wife (or wives), a woman who is the epitome of beauty and perfection. However, before he could enjoy

40 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 204b; Christie, *Book* 101 and 265; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 90; referencing Q 4:94.

41 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 217b; Christie, *Book* 157 and 326; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 133.

42 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 218b–22b; Christie, *Book* 160–9 and 329–37; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 135–43. The fourth *ḥadīth* is incomplete, but is explicitly presented as a recapitulation of the second.

43 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 220a; Christie, *Book* 163 and 332; Zakkār, *Arba'at kutub* 138.

closer intimacy with her, she fended off his outstretched hand and revealed that he would be with her soon, with the time of his death being specified. He then woke up. The narrative then proceeds with the receiver of the vision dying, either very shortly afterwards or after a more extended period of fighting enthusiastically.

Such *ḥadīth* reports were standard fare in books on *jihād* from the period, and indeed two of the *ḥadīth* reports that al-Sulamī cites clearly recall or repeat ones found in the *Kitāb al-Jihād* of the jurist and *mujāhid* ‘Abdallāh b. al-Mubārak (d. 181/797), who wrote the earliest known work specifically on the topic of *jihād*.⁴⁴ However, a number of common features of the narratives given in al-Sulamī’s work deserve closer analysis, in order to determine the effects he hoped they would have on his particular audience.

To begin, in all four *ḥadīth* reports we are told that the *mujāhid* in question is suffering in some way when the vision comes to them; in the first the visionary, a young man called Sa‘īd b. al-Ḥārith, is suffering because of his insistence on constantly praying or studying the Quran in addition to his normal duties;⁴⁵ in the second and fourth accounts, the unnamed *mujāhids* are suffering from, respectively, mental and physical exhaustion;⁴⁶ and in the third *ḥadīth* the visionary, named Ziyād b. ‘Abdallāh, has been rendered unconscious by shrapnel from a siege engine.⁴⁷ Thus in each case al-Sulamī offers the promise of paradise to subjects at a time of dire need, paralleling the situation in the Levant that he sees around him, with Muslims suffering in territory occupied by the Franks while the rulers of unconquered territories do nothing to help.⁴⁸ In other words, he seeks to suggest that just as the Muslim community of the Levant as a whole experiences difficulties stemming from external enemies and internal disunity, all those Muslims of the region who are eligible to fight are promised the heavenly rewards that these *ḥadīth* reports describe,

44 Compare al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 221a–b; Christie, *Book* 165–6 and 334–5; Zakkār, *Arba‘at kutub* 140–1 with Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb* report no. 149, 122–4 and al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 221b–2b; Christie, *Book* 166–8 and 335–6; Zakkār, *Arba‘at kutub* 141–2 with Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb* report no. 145, 118–20. In the second case al-Sulamī actually cites Ibn al-Mubārak in the chain of transmitters who related the story to him. For discussion of other examples of stories of people who saw paradise before their deaths, see Rustomji, *Garden* 36–9. For discussion specifically of the heavenly wives, see Rustomji, *Garden* 94–6 and 111–5.

45 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 218b–9a; Christie, *Book* 160–1 and 329–30; Zakkār, *Arba‘at kutub* 136.

46 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 221a and 222b; Christie, *Book* 165, 168, 334, and 336; Zakkār, *Arba‘at kutub* 140 and 142.

47 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 222a; Christie, *Book* 167 and 335; Zakkār, *Arba‘at kutub* 141.

48 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 175a and 177b; Christie, *Book* 43, 48, 207, and 211; Zakkār, *Arba‘at kutub* 45 and 49; Sivan, *Génèse* 207 and 215, 209–10 and 217–8.

provided that they rise up in the *jihād* against the enemy. It is worth noting as an aside that Saʿīd b. al-Ḥārith's enthusiastic piety also makes him a particular model for al-Sulamī's listeners.

In addition, in all four of the *ḥadīth* reports the women who await the visionaries are referred to using the Arabic term *zawja* (wife).⁴⁹ The importance of this title should not be underestimated; the women presented to the *mujāhidūn* (warriors in the *jihād*) in question are not concubines or partners in anything other than the sense of legitimate spouses, married to the fighters by God.⁵⁰ This is important in the context of al-Sulamī's greater purpose, which as indicated above was to advocate participation in the *jihād* combined with a genuine return to internal piety and external right conduct. From this perspective it is particularly telling that in the *ḥadīth* reports that he presents the wives do not introduce themselves by name, with the exception of the third *ḥadīth*, in which one wife names herself as *fulāna* ("So-and-so"), thus still remaining essentially nameless. The personal identities of these women are not important; what is important is that they are the legitimate wives of the *mujāhidīn*, assigned to them as their rewards for their valiant efforts in the *jihād*. For al-Sulamī, correct conduct and piety remain paramount.

It is in this context that one should also read both the fact that in each *ḥadīth* the *mujāhid* is fended off when he attempts to touch his wife, and the fact that the wife then informs him of the time when he will rejoin her in paradise.⁵¹ Again, right procedure and moral correctness remain dominant concerns for al-Sulamī, reflecting his overarching agenda.

One final point remains to be considered with regard to the content of these *ḥadīth* reports. As hinted above, it is clear from these *ḥadīth* reports that each *mujāhid* is expected to proceed directly to paradise upon his death. As others have noted,⁵² martyrdom is the one means by which a Muslim may experience the joys of paradise before the day of judgment, and this aspect, as emphasized by the "scheduling" of the protagonists' progress to paradise in the *ḥadīth* reports discussed, provides a powerful impetus to al-Sulamī's audience; if they participate in the military *jihād* to which he urges them, and if they die,

49 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 220a, 221b, and 222a; Christie, *Book* 163, 166, and 167; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 138, 140, and 142.

50 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 221b; Christie, *Book* 166 and 334; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 140. In the second *ḥadīth*, the *jihād* fighter had decided to get married when he returned from the expedition, not knowing that God had already chosen a (heavenly) wife for him.

51 Al-Sulamī, *Kitāb* 220a, 221b, and 222a–b; Christie, *Book* 163, 166, 167, 332, 334, and 336; Zakkār, *Arbaʿat kutub* 138, and 141–2.

52 See for example Afsaruddin, *Dying in the path of God*, in the present publication.

they will receive immediate heavenly rewards, bypassing the rigors of the grave and the need to wait for the resurrection. Thus by presenting *ḥadīth* reports that include such details, al-Sulamī strengthens the force of his preaching.

It is worth reminding ourselves that, as far as we can tell from the fragmentary manuscript, al-Sulamī's discussion of these paradisaic joys comes only toward the end of his work, long after his discussions of reconciliation of the self with God, purity of intent, and right conduct. This implies that he did not wish such images to be the major motivation for his listeners' participation in the *jihād*. The only major topic that comes later in al-Sulamī's work is his discussion of the distribution and use of plunder, suggesting that this was the only motivating factor that he saw as being less important. In structuring his text this way al-Sulamī clearly sought to encourage his listeners to act out of a desire to serve God and do good, rather than from a desire for sensual rewards.

4 Conclusion

In his depictions of paradise and hell, al-Sulamī employs a number of strategies intended to stimulate his listeners to action. Many of these reflect strategies employed by earlier preachers in similar circumstances,⁵³ but it is clear that al-Sulamī tailored his use of these motifs to suit the circumstances in which he found himself and the impact that he hoped to have on his listeners. On the level of individual narrative elements, the graphic nature of al-Sulamī's depictions of paradise and hell are intended simultaneously to frighten and to encourage his audience into undertaking the *jihād*. Those who persist in their neglect of the *jihād* are threatened with hell, a place of burning flames and torments from which there is no escape. In contrast, those who return to piety and participate in the *jihād* are offered paradise, a place of eternal rest and comfort with plentiful food, riches, heavenly wives, and servants, as well as the opportunity to be with God. That said, it should also be noted that even al-Sulamī's most graphic presentations of the comforts of paradise are recounted in a way that is intended to highlight the importance of moral rectitude and correct behavior. Thus piety, good conduct, and heavenly joys go hand in hand.

The interaction of al-Sulamī with his socio-political environment is, however, most clear when examining the overarching structure of his use of paradise and hell motifs in his work. The first extant part of his work demonstrates a gradual shift of focus: al-Sulamī begins by employing widespread threats of

53 See for example the discussion of al-Sulamī's similarities to Ibn Nubāta al-Fāriqī (d. 374/984–5) in Christie, *Book* 26–30.

hell and depictions of its torments in order to criticize the Muslims for their neglect of the *jihād*; he only gradually introduces hints at paradisaal rewards that are made explicit only at the end of the section. The remaining parts of his work give increasingly explicit depictions of these rewards, though with periodic reminders that piety and obedience to God should remain his listeners' main motivations, as noted above. In this way, even as he moves away from an explicitly critical stance, al-Sulamī continues to counsel his listeners on how they should pursue their relationships with God and each other, while simultaneously exhorting them to go out and fight the crusaders.

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Al-Ghazālī on Resurrection and the Road to Paradise

Wilferd Madelung

In his famous refutation of the philosophers, the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) censured the philosophers' denial of the physical resurrection of man as the last of three of their doctrines constituting unbelief (*kufṛ*) in Islam. He argued at length that bodily resurrection was rationally possible even if one granted their view of the immateriality of the human soul. Scripture, the Quran, unambiguously affirmed bodily resurrection in terms which must be accepted literally. Metaphorical interpretation of scripture was permissible only where the absurdity of the literal meaning could be demonstrated.¹

The *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* was composed when al-Ghazālī was a young scholar viewing Islam and the world essentially from the Ash'arī theological perspective of his teacher Abū l-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī. In his later career, however, al-Ghazālī's outlook on the world radically changed. Although he never distanced himself in public from his early condemnation of the philosophers, he in fact adopted the systematic thought and world view of Ibn Sīnā and his school in his teaching to the select few of his intimate students, presenting it in his writings as the authentic Sufi vision of Islam. God in his view thus was no longer the freely choosing agent and Creator of the universe in time ex nihilo, who would annihilate the present world and then resurrect mankind from death for their final judgment and eternal life in paradise or punishment in hellfire. Rather God was the eternal cause of a universe eternally emanating from Him in which creation out of nothing and resurrection, understood as a restoration of what had been annihilated, were inconceivable. Al-Ghazālī thus was compelled to abandon the Quranic description of the resurrection and its circumstances and seek an interpretation of them consistent with the cosmology of the philosophers.

Al-Ghazālī set forth his esoteric teaching in a number of writings collectively designated as *al-Maḍnūn bih 'alā ghayr ahlih*, texts restricted from those unqualified to comprehend them, most of them still unpublished. Among

1 See Marmura's introduction in al-Ghazālī, *Incoherence*, trans. Marmura, xxi.

these texts is a collection of responses, *Masā'il al-maḍnūn*, to questions put to him by his intimate disciples. In several of them al-Ghazālī undertook to explain how the Quranic pronouncements about the resurrection and the events attending it could be reconciled with the view of God and the universe espoused by the philosophers. These responses were quoted by the Mu'tazilī Rukn al-Dīn b. al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141) in his refutation of the philosophers, *Tuhfat al-mutakallimīn fī l-radd 'alā l-falāsifa* (Gift for the theologians in refutation of the philosophers), while describing the philosophers' doctrine about the circumstances of the human soul in the hereafter. Ibn al-Malāḥimī does not name al-Ghazālī and speaks of the author as being alone with these interpretations of Islamic eschatology, noting that the philosophers generally did not write about this subject in their books.²

Al-Ghazālī's discussion of the resurrection, *qiyāma*, in the *Masā'il al-maḍnūn* was brought on by a quotation of the *ḥadīth*: *Man māta fa-qad qāmat qiyāmatuhu*, "Whoever dies, his resurrection is taking place (at that time)." This *ḥadīth* evidently implied that the human immaterial soul survived the death of the body, in accordance with the views of the philosophers, and seemed to negate a universal resurrection of all mankind at the end of time, as envisaged by the traditional Islamic creed. Al-Ghazālī protests that what was meant in this *ḥadīth* was not the absolute resurrection, but a particular resurrection that he had explained in detail at the beginning of the *Kitāb al-Ṣabr* (Book of steadfastness) of his *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revitalization of the Studies of Religion*). There he had indeed described the particular, minor resurrection to which the *ḥadīth* alluded as a personal resurrection at the time of physical death in which all the horror (*hawl*) and the circumstances of the general, major resurrection, such as the shaking of the earth and the folding up of the sun, would be anticipated for the individual.³ The date of the general, major resurrection, on the other hand, was a secret of God withheld from creation. Yet its occurrence at an unknown date was rationally not impossible. On the principles of the *kalām* theologians, al-Ghazālī explained, it was possible as they referred its advent to the Will (*mashī'a*) of God, even though in relation to the omnipotence and the essence of God all times were alike.

The possibility of the occurrence of the resurrection on the basis of the philosophers' principles evidently was more difficult to explain for al-Ghazālī. The philosophers unanimously agreed that the origin of all events in the world was

2 Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuhfat al-mutakallimīn*, ed. Ansari and Madelung 186–194. My thanks are due to Dr. Afifi al-Akiti, Oxford, who kindly provided me with the relevant texts from his edition of the *Masā'il al-maḍnūn* under preparation.

3 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* iv, 50–52.

in the different motions of the heavenly spheres. Events thus occurred in regular cycles governed by the recurrence of the revolutions of the heavenly bodies and their conjunctions. It was not necessary, however, to suppose that each cycle would return exactly like the previous one or that it must precede one exactly like it. That, al-Ghazālī affirmed from the perspective of the philosophers would be a weak imagination (*khayāl ḍaʿīf*). Rather, it was admissible according to them that a cycle would occur that was preceded by a similar one but was followed by a dissimilar one. Thus there might occur in some cycle animals of strange shapes that had never been witnessed before. It was not unlikely that the cycles basically corresponded with each other, yet differed in their particular shapes that resulted from their differing arrangements.

This was comparable to somebody throwing a stone into water, and producing a circular shape on it. Then, if he were to throw another stone like it before the motion produced by the first one had ceased, it would not produce the same shape on the water as did the first, since the water at the time of the first stone's throw had been still, while at the time of the second stone's throw it was moving. The same cause thus would produce different results. Likewise it was not impossible that pre-eternal Providence envisaged a cycle differing from all previously witnessed cycles. This would bring about change in the world the like of which had never happened before. The pattern (*namat*) of this novel cycle, which abrogated the previous norm, would then continue even though individual occurrences might change. The advent of this strange shape of cycles would thus mark the date of the resurrection, which would be a comprehensive occasion gathering all spirits (i.e., all human souls) in a universal rising at a particular date – a date that the human mind is incapable of knowing. Since there was no proof in *kalām* theology or philosophy for the absurdity of such a resurrection, belief in it in accordance with the revealed law was obligatory.

The resurrection as conceived here by al-Ghazālī was far removed from the traditional expectation of the end of time, earth and all life on it and of the permanent separation of mankind into paradise and hell. Rather it was a radical internal transformation of earth itself which did not affect the philosophers' dogma of the eternity of the physical world and its being governed by the endless cyclical revolutions of the heavenly spheres.

Among the preliminaries of the resurrection in Sunni eschatology was the questioning of the deceased in the grave by the two angels Munkar and Nakīr. Belief in the questioning in the grave was founded only on *ḥadīth*, not on the Quran, and posed a problem for *kalām* theologians, as it implied a temporary return to life of the buried body before the resurrection. Mu'tazilī and

other rationalist theologians thus mostly denied the belief as unreasonable. Al-Ghazālī criticized this denial on the basis of his vigorous affirmation of a self-subsistent immaterial human soul independent of the body as also conceived by Ibn Sīnā and his school. The soul was not an accident necessarily inhering in a body, but rather a self-subsistent substance temporarily dressed with the body. The soul thus could persist after its separation from the body at the time of death. Indeed it knows itself and knows its Creator and His attributes without any need for the sense perception of the body, which merely distracts man from this knowledge. The Sufis at the beginning of their path thus strive to free themselves from all perception and awareness of anything but God. The body was temporarily subjected to its management by the soul. After its separation from the body, it was not unreasonable for the enduring soul to be returned (*ʿāda*) to it in the grave and then separated again until resurrection. This could happen for sovereign heavenly grounds beyond human comprehension. Under these circumstances, it was obligatory to believe what has been revealed about the separation and return.

In concord with his concept of a self-subsistent immaterial human soul, al-Ghazālī now interpreted some of the apparently material circumstances of the resurrection mentioned in the Quran metaphorically, while still insisting that belief in their reality was obligatory. Thus it is obligatory, he affirmed, to believe in the *mīzān*, the scale on which the good and evil actions of the resurrected would be weighed at the time of the judgment. As the soul was a self-subsistent substance independent of the body, a body which functioned as a veil between it and comprehension of the realities, it was possible after death that God would reveal the effect of all works of the deceased on bringing him close to God or removing him through a mediate cause (*sabab*) in a single moment. The definition of *mīzān* was anything by which increase and decrease are distinguished. In the world of sense perception, this might be the well-known scale, or the balance by which weight is measured, or the astrolabe for measuring the movements of the sun and the sphere, or the ruler (*miṣṭara*) for the measure of lines, or the meter (*ʿarūḍ*) for the measurement of the movements of sounds. It was in God's power to represent the real scale to the human senses and imagination as He willed.

Similarly one must believe in the *ḥisāb*, the final reckoning. The *ḥisāb*, al-Ghazālī explained, signified a gathering together of dispersed amounts and making known their sum. Every human being had an account of dispersed acts that were beneficial or harmful and which brought him close or removed him (from God), acts whose extent he did not know and which were not present individually in his mind. If it was within the power of God to reveal at one

instant to all mankind their dispersed acts and the sum of their effects, He must indeed be the fastest and strongest Reckoner, and this is known to be within the power of God.

A major tenet in the traditional Sunni creed concerning the resurrection and judgment was the *shafā'a*, the intercession of the Prophet for the faithful of his community. From the perspective of the philosophers with their concept of a depersonalized God whose indirect rule of the universe was confined to a remote providence, intercession in its traditional, literal sense obviously was an absurdity. Al-Ghazālī insisted that it is obligatory to believe in it and offered a drastic reinterpretation of its meaning. *Shafā'a*, he argued, means a light shining from the divine presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-ilāhiyya*) upon the substance of prophethood (*jawhar al-nubuwwa*, i.e., the Prophet) that spreads from it to every substance whose relationship with the substance of prophethood has become solid by strength of love for him, constant following of his *sunna*, and frequent remembrance by praying for him.

Its likeness is the light of the sun when it falls upon water and is reflected to a particular place on a wall, not to all of it, because of the particular angle of the reflection. Just as physical light is thus directed by specific relationships, spiritual light follows specific relationships in its spread. Whoever is overcome by *tawḥīd*, the Unicity of God, his relationship with the divine presence becomes firm, and *tawḥīd* shines light on him directly without a mediator. Those, however, who are overcome by practice of the *sunna*, imitation of the Prophet and love of following him, their relationship (to the divine presence) could become firmly established only through the mediator whom they need to receive the light, just as the wall that is not exposed to the sun needs the mediation of the water that is exposed to the sunlight.

This meaning, al-Ghazālī continued, is also the reality of intercession on earth, such as that of the vizier who is close to the king. The king's concern for the vizier requires his concern for those connected with the vizier. Thus the word of the vizier in informing the king about whoever is connected with him is called intercession by way of metaphor. God the omniscient, however, is in no need of being informed, and if the king knew the reality of the relationship of the page to the vizier he would dispense with the vizier's word. When God wished to represent the reality of intercession by a likeness that appeals to sense perception and imagination, he did so in terms that were familiar in (human) intercession. An indication for the [aptness of the simile of the] reflection of light for such relationships was that everything mentioned in the Quran about response to intercession was connected with the Prophet, such as visiting his grave, responding to the muezzin's call to pray for him, and whatever else strengthened the bond of love and relationship with him.

In traditional belief, the road to paradise included the *ṣirāṭ*, the path for the resurrected bodies over the bridge of hell, which would be quickly crossed by the saved, while the condemned would fall from it into the blazing fire. The *ṣirāṭ* in this meaning is not mentioned in the Quran, but it is graphically described in *ḥadīth* as being fine like a hair. Al-Ghazālī's philosophical interpretation of the *ṣirāṭ* deprived it of its material image and its other-worldly location. The *ṣirāṭ*, he explained, is real as stated by the religious law, but what is said, that it is fine like a hair, does not do it justice. Rather, it is like the geometrical line that separates sunlight from shade. It has no breadth at all and signifies the exact mean between the two extremes of opposite ethical character traits, such as liberality between profligacy and stinginess, courage between recklessness and cowardice, humility between vainglory and self-abasement, and so on. The mean between the two extremes of excess and neglect was in moderation (*qaṣd*) whose line was as fine as that separating light from shade. It signified the perfection of human beings in their assimilation to the angels who are free of such opposing traits. Humans, however, cannot totally break loose from them and follow the mean, which is the straight path (*ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*). God likened this straight path that every human is required to follow to a geometrical line without breadth. Whoever adheres to it without lapse, its habit will become his nature and quintessence (*ṭabīʿa khāmiṣa*), and he will move on the path without swerving. The *ṣirāṭ* over the bridge of hell had, in al-Ghazālī's interpretation, become identical with Aristotle's golden mean in human ethics.

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Sleepless in Paradise: Lying in State between This World and the Next

Dorothee Pielow

If a man could pass through Paradise in a dream, and have a flower presented to him as a pledge that his soul had really been there, and if he found that flower in his hand when he awake – Aye, what then?¹

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE



The state of sleep is often the subject of discourse in both Oriental and Occidental literature. For example, it is described as a “refreshing or love potion,” a “mild bath” that “surrounds our shaking body that it may be cleansed of sweat, dirt and blood; that it may be strengthened, renewed, rejuvenated, unknowingly rejoined with its original bravery and desire.”² Or, according to the Quran, it is no less than one of God’s “signs” (Q 30:23).

The path to paradise (or to hell, for that matter), according to Islamic tradition, is that of sleep and not of wakefulness. It is the state of death in which the soul has not yet quite freed itself from the fugacious body.

Sleep in the Islamic religious tradition is a gift from God, a prefiguration of death. Now uncanny, now inspirational in the life of humans, sleep forms the bridge between the finite and the infinite world. In addition, mystical deep sleep and dreams are trance-like states enabling fantastic experiences and revelations. In the end sleep is considered a form of mercy, and the final sleep of death – that eternal sleep – is the ultimate climax of all forms of sleep and the deliverance from all earthly burdens, fears, and woes.³

This contribution serves to enlighten several aspects of the meaning of sleep in Islam, to elucidate sleep as a state to be approached with cautious

¹ Coleridge, *Anima* 282.

² Mann, *Schlaf* 32.

³ Günther, *Tageszeiten* 54.

ambivalence, one that despite all positive characteristics that are conferred on it, must in the end be overcome: There is no sleep in the great Beyond!

1 The Yearning for Eternal Sleep in Paradise

"You are born and raised to die. To reach the afterlife you must live life and taste death. To enter into paradise, you must fulfill holy tasks. To be tossed into the fires of hell, you must perform unholy deeds."⁴ This simple piece of Islamic wisdom crystallizes in a nutshell some very basic thoughts. According to Islamic belief true life begins with one's death; death is the desired-for liberation from the many trials and tribulations of life – the transformation from the transient world to one that is changeless and eternal. Up to that point the believer has the duty and the task of living a life agreeable to God so that he may, on the day of judgment, enter into paradise and receive his reward of never-ending bliss and the pleasures of the garden of Eden. This paradise is where the saved ones are, it is their home for all eternity, and everything is present there that the soul desires, that pleases the eye – and much, much more according to the Quran (Q 50:31–5). Being in paradise serves to compensate one for all the good things one has done during life on earth (Q 43:72). The residents of paradise have the very characteristics often mentioned in the Quran: a steadfast belief in the One God and the performance of righteous deeds on earth (Q 7:42). The path to paradise is not easy; life is in and of itself a difficult process full of all sorts of dangers. Diseases, poverty, natural catastrophes, and plagues are but some of the awful things that humans have to endure during their lifetimes, and that continually test their faith in the righteousness and their love for God. Also, and perhaps even more dangerous, humans are prone to their lowly appetites – all the bad and ugly features we harbor like envy, hate, jealousy, and malevolence, the dark regions of the heart that have to be kept under control throughout life. This darkness within the human soul aspires to nothing but evil, always. The Quran says in this respect: "The (human) soul is certainly prone to evil" (Q 12:53).⁵ Evil, personified by the Devil, wants to hinder humans from ever reaching paradise (Q 20:117). Human beings harm themselves through their evil deeds and evil thoughts – through their sins – and if they do not enter paradise but rather land in hell they must accept the consequences of their actions (Q 7:23). For the godly, however, the path to paradise is paved with evil temptations to be fended off by doing good

4 <http://www.ansary.de/Islam/WeisSpruche.html>.

5 The translation of the Quran used throughout this article is that of Yusuf Ali.

(Q 13:22). Thus, life is a continual struggle against both internal and external dangers, a difficult, arduous path that gives rise to a desire for eternal peace. In paradise, so the expectation goes, life will be like eternal sleep: a place of blissful, relaxed tranquility, free from all the burdens that make life so difficult. It should not come as a surprise that the notions of paradise in the three major Abrahamic religions are similar; all of them describe paradise as both a place and a state free of all negative feelings and tribulations.⁶

The Quran provides extensive descriptions of paradise – a place resembling a beautiful garden with plentiful shade, where the inhabitants rest on brocade beds, carry on pleasant conversation, and are treated to all sorts of pleasures. It is a place of rapture, wine, fruits, and streams, where virgins recline on pillows, soft carpets, and luxurious couches – life is relaxed, all is at ease. Yet, these resting places are not there for sleeping: In paradise there is neither suffering nor tiredness (Q 35:35). Sleep is, we learn, purely an earthly phenomenon, important only in the here and now, for in paradise (for that matter in hell as well) there is no sleep! It is difficult for the living to imagine life in paradise wholly without sleep, for one passes the eternal time with no sense of day or night, busy with doing – nothing! And yet there is no boredom, no strain in paradise. Life for those in paradise is happy, completely content: Sleep is not missed.

Although sleep is the very embodiment and measure of eternal peace, we learn that in paradise it is completely irrelevant. The act of nonsleep is what unites the dead with God and his angels (who, too, need no sleep) and imparts to humans a very different ontological sense.

2 **Being Awake is Better than Being Asleep!**

The deep longing for perfect sleep may be found in many familiar expressions: “to sleep perchance to dream” or “eternal peace.” Everyone is acquainted with the longing for a good night’s sleep after an arduous day replete with physical or mental stress, topped only by a sweet dream and the feeling of complete relaxation. Sleep is a basic innate human need, and it is connected with a desire for regeneration, freedom from all the pains, fears, and sorrows that life brings. It is a state of total quietude, without which no creature can survive. The world the sleeper slips into is completely different from the one experienced in a conscious and wakeful state of mind: a land without time and borders but full of colorful images; or a state that leaves behind no remembrance in subsequent wakefulness – an agreeable if sometimes eerie feeling. Night after night

6 Pielow, *Stachel* 30.

the sleeper returns to a state of unconsciousness, defenseless against all the dangers of the outside world, unsure whether he will ever awake. But because sleep is just as much a part of life as being awake, most of us simply learn to accept it and rarely waste another thought on it. No one can go without sleep anyway; sleep deprivation leads to a certain death. Is sleep not the gift of rejuvenation, a state of grace for both the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the stupid and the smart, the diligent and the lazy among us? And woe to him who fails to find sleep, the poor soul tortured.

Sleep is mentioned many times in the Quran. Sleep overcomes us, so it goes, as a matter of course in the night. "He it is Who makes the night as a robe for you, and sleep as repose and makes the day (as it were) a resurrection" (Q 25:47; cf. Q 78:9–11). Refreshing sleepiness is the best thing there is when grief has befallen us (Q 3:154), it gives us a feeling of security (Q 8:11). Sleep is a great mystery, for while asleep we relinquish the soul, and it returns into the human body only upon awakening; though the souls of those whose death is a certain thing are retained (Q 39:42). Night after night this strange act by which body and soul are severed is consummated, and sometimes the punishment of God suddenly overcomes us while sleeping (Q 7:97). Finally, sleep is a state inherent to and characteristic of earthly life. Unlike humankind, God never sleeps, He never tires nor rests (Q 2:255)!

In the Sunni call to morning prayers it is said: "Prayer is better than sleep," which means that sleep is certainly necessary, but being awake is the more proper and righteous state. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, sleep is rarely praised as a desirable state. The Old Testament includes the admonition: "Do not love sleep or you will grow poor, stay awake and you will have food to spare" (Proverbs 20:13). Only sleep earned through hard work is good sleep: "The sleep of a laborer is sweet, whether he eats little or much, but the abundance of a rich man permits him no sleep" (Ecclesiastes 5:11).⁷

All the more mysterious is the report from the garden of Eden given in Genesis 2:21–3, where God puts Adam into a deep sleep in order to form Eve from his rib. Putting him to sleep is portrayed as a mystical event that turns off all alert senses. In Hebrew such a deep sleep is called *tardema*. In Islamic thought, on the other hand, the idea of sleeping in paradise is completely absurd; the Quran says quite simply: "He created you (all) from a single person, then created, of like nature, his mate" (Q 39:6). This is a very important and central statement about the role of sleep in Islam: The Islamic believer is not confronted with the rather irritating idea that God somehow turns off his

⁷ Cf. also Gen. 15:12; Proverbs 6:9, highlighting the negative aspect. However, there are also some additional positive examples: Gen. 31:40; Job 3:13.

senses during sleep – as if administering a powerful shot of anesthesia. Much as wakefulness is praised as the better state of affairs in this life, so it is held to be the only possible state of consciousness in the afterlife.

3 Death, Deep Sleep, and the Miracle of Nonsleep

In Islamic belief, being dead is often described as a state of sleep. “Sleep is the (little) brother of death” is a well-known saying; something similar is recorded from Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1057), one of best-known Arabic poets and writers: “Death is a long sleep that never ends; sleep is a short death that is revived.”⁸

One could in fact refer to sleep as a “precursor of death”: The loss of clear consciousness and self-control associated with our slipping off to sleep bears a great resemblance to the moment of death in which the soul is permanently divided from the body. The deceased often look like they are sleeping – and in both cases the human being has crossed a definitive threshold and stepped over into a dark and unknown realm. Since the fall of humankind in the garden of Eden the Bible and the Quran both see death as a universal law that demands tribute from each and every earthly creature. A number of verses in the Quran explicitly note that everyone will experience death (Q 21:35). But for the believer, death does not necessarily mean the end, but rather the transition into another, otherworldly state in which true life actually begins. The death of a believer means the beginning of eternal bliss! Different from the nonbeliever, on the other hand, who suffers horribly at death, the soul of the believer will be “gently lifted” up by the angels of death, Munkar and Nakir, saying the words: “Peace be upon you; enter ye the Garden, because of (the good) which ye did (in the world)” (Q 16:32). This metaphysical event resembles the state of sleep – a period of waiting, somewhere between the physical passing of the body and the release of the soul. The deceased will see both paradise and hell before arriving at the final destination, to be determined on the day of judgment.

Because of the similarity between sleep and death one often speaks of the dead as “merely sleeping,” although they are clearly not. Very deep sleep is often even mistaken for being dead, which is why being buried alive is such a traumatic motif in tales of all sorts. The literature is full of reports about such cases of apparent death-like states: the fairy tale of Snow White, who took a bite from the poisoned apple and “lay dead” before her seven little friends, is a good

8 Quoted from Schimmel, *Träume* 34.

example. Sleeping Beauty – and her entire entourage including all the plants and even the wind – had to hold out for 100 years in this state of suspended animation until being kissed back to life. Then there is the tale of the man from the mountains, Barbarossa, who came back to life whenever his people needed him. These examples demonstrate that sleep is a process that “extracts” us from life in a strange and slightly uncanny way, putting us in an abeyance between life and death and keeping us there for a while. Barbarossa’s cave sleep may also be found in Islamic tradition, where it is linked with the idea of a death-like sleep during which the sleeper experiences an unconscious “timeout.” In this respect, the Islamic legend tells the story of the *aṣḥāb al-kaḥf*, the Seven Sleepers, found in Sura 18 entitled “The Cave,” which stretches across several verses and was later profusely described and commented on by many scholars.⁹ There is also the story of the “cave people,” who according to Christian tradition lived around the year 251 CE, when the Emperor Decius came to Ephesus to observe the sacrifices for the pagan gods and the persecutions of the Christians. Seven Christians, all sons from respected families, set up a plan to hide in a cave in order to pray to God in complete quietude. Decius, however, gave the order to find the seven and succeeded by locating them in the cave. He had the mouth of the cave closed tight with large rocks and thus buried them alive. Some 200 years later a cattle shed was to be built in Ephesus, and the workers used the stones blocking the entrance to the cave. When the cave was opened, God breathed new life into the seven boys. The Islamic variation of this story notes at this juncture: “How long have ye stayed (here)?” They said, “We have stayed (perhaps) a day, or part of a day” (cf. Q 18:19). The Quran says they slept 309 years, and adds that God turned the bodies of the seven boys to ward off decay, and put a dog at the entrance of the cave to guard them. Finally, the legends says that

For God it is easy to safeguard humans from their enemies if they trust Him. For God it is easy for a man to die and be resurrected. For death is like a long, deep sleep. When a man dies, it is to him as if he had been only hours or a day in this world, and on the Day of Resurrection it is as if he had been in the grave only a short time, like the night that seems so short when awakening in the morning, although it was just as long as the day. Then man regrets not having better used his time while alive. God knows the secrets of the heavens and the earth; the days and the nights, the months and the years lie in His hand, and He alone lets them pass as

9 E.g., al-Ṭabarī, al-Masʿūdī, and al-Zamakhsharī, for the sources see Kandler, *Siebenschläfer* 17–9.

He chooses. But many men do not always want to think about the signs of God. They would rather debate how many boys were in the cave and how many years they slept there. But only God knows their number.¹⁰

The Islamic legend of the Seven Sleepers is a beloved story in popular Islamic belief, but is revered as well among the more learned Muslims, in part because of the allegorical meaning of the hidden sleeping boys as a symbol for belief in the true religion.¹¹

The legend of ‘Uzair (Ezra) is much like the original Christian legend of the Seven Sleepers; echoes of it may be seen in Q 2:259. Ezra was a Jewish scribe who, in 458 BCE, led the Jews from Babylonian exile. The story is told that one day he came upon an abandoned city and wondered how it would look in a hundred years. So God caused him to fall into a hundred-year sleep, which Ezra later claimed had lasted at the most a day or a part thereof. Here, too, we find the motif of long-lasting sleep.

A further, very revealing Islamic depiction concerns the nonsleeping or nondying human being. Here, too, sleep is an act of godly mercy. The distinguished figure of the *mahdī* belongs to this category. As conceived of by the Twelver Shi‘a, he lives on after many centuries in concealment – thus he is not dead – and will return to save the world.

The figure of Ahasver stems from a Jewish legend. Ahasver is the poor shoemaker who, as Jesus passed by his house carrying his cross and wanting to rest a moment, pushed him off and told him to keep moving. He was then cursed with the words: “I want to stand here and rest a bit, but you shall go away until I return.”¹² The legend goes on to report that Ahasver has since been damned to travel the world. The idea of the permanent traveler who never rests can also be found in the Islamic world. Here, the one who set out on an eternal journey is Khidr, the ‘Green One’ who, unlike Ahasver, is an entirely positive character. The basis for his story is found in Sura 18 (verses 65ff.), where the story is told of Moses meeting up with a servant of God who is identified in the *tafsīr* literature as Khidr.¹³ It is said that anyone he meets shall receive wisdom and insight. Khidr is likewise the bearer of particularly efficacious offers of assistance. Among the Sufis he is held to be the master of all those who have

10 Quoted according to the text of the Islamic University Community (IHG) published online at http://www.ihg-net.de/cms/front_content.php?idcat=231.

11 See Kandler, *Siebenschläfer* 5.

12 From the legend of the chronicle of the monk Matthäus Parisiensis (1250); see Halbach, *Ahasvers Erlösung* 159ff. and Sandler, *Ahasverus* 159ff.

13 Friedlaender, *Khidr* 693–5.

no human master.¹⁴ He is well known throughout the Islamic world, and in Europe he is known well enough to have inspired European poets. In his *West-Eastern Divan*, Goethe speaks of “Chiser’s source,”¹⁵ and Gustav Meyrink paid tribute to him in his novel *The Green Face*.¹⁶ Not sleeping, these examples tell us, can be interpreted as an exceptional form of mercy.

A later, very famous example for sleepless nights should also be mentioned: the story of the fairy-tale collection of the *Arabian Nights*, which depicts a prince apparently suffering from severe insomnia. For a series of 1001 nights Shahrazād has to tell the demanding Prince Shāhriyār tales and myths to entertain him. By the end this not only saves her life, she had also borne him three children during this time.

4 The Power of the Night and Dreams

The nighttime, traditionally associated with sleep, takes on a great importance in Islamic belief. Muḥammad, we should remember, received his first revelation apparently while asleep:

He (Gabriel) came to me . . . while I was asleep, with a coverlet of brocade whereon was some writing, and said ‘Read!’ . . . So I read it, and he departed from me. And I awoke from my sleep and it was as though these words were written on my heart¹⁷

The miracle of the Prophet’s trip on the miraculous beast Burāq from Mecca to a place called the “farthest place of worship (*al-masjid al-aqṣā*)” also took place at night.¹⁸

Not only the nighttime, but dreams,¹⁹ too, are closely associated with sleep. Sleep provides the sleeper not only hours of rejuvenation through deep unconsciousness, it also presents him with fantastic visions that make the state of

14 For more details, see Franke, *Begegnung* 242ff.

15 Goethe, *Divan* 9.

16 Meyrink, *Gesicht* 139.

17 Ibn Ishāq, *Life*, trans. Guillaume 106. See also Sellheim, *Offenbarungserlebnis* 4–5. The text revealed to the Prophet at this encounter was Q 96:1–5.

18 For more detail cf. Schrieke, *Himmelsreise* 130, and Horovitz, *Himmelfahrt* 159–83.

19 Dream interpretation in Islam has been discussed many times and in depth, for this reason I only touch on it superficially here. For a more detailed treatment, see Kinberg, *Morality* and Schimmel, *Träume*.

stupefaction one of inspiration as well. It was during the night and during a dream that Abraham recognized that he should offer up his son as a sacrifice (Q 37:102), and the most famous dream story of the Quran, Sura 12, which deals with Joseph, begins in verse 4 with the words: "O my father! I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon: I saw them prostrate themselves to me." The message emanating from a tangible religious dream is pregnant with truth. This we learn in a *ḥadīth*: "The true dream is sent by God, empty dreams are of the Devil."²⁰

Many important Islamic philosophers were influenced by Aristotle's teachings on the soul, specifically his pondering the phenomena of sleep and dreams. Only the body can truly die, whereas the immortal soul is above and beyond both sleep and death. When the soul is asleep then it attains its true nature and can both see and foretell the future. This idea was especially important for the mystics. The religious and spiritual search for God and for cosmic enlightenment can be precipitated by the act of sleep deprivation or by entering into a trance-like state of sleep for many days to sharpen the senses. The dream as a source of inspirational, religious experience reminds us of the old custom of temple sleep, once part of the initiation rituals. A number of such rituals were handed down from the mysteries of ancient Egypt; these were intended to raise and expand the consciousness of the adept. Thereafter the seeker became the knower, the ruler of their own spirit, soul, and body. Sleep transported them to the sacred place for several days and nights by putting them into a deep trance and letting them travel with a sanctified priest. Such "temple sleep" or "mystery sleep" was meant to enable a "soul flight" to hidden parts of one's inner life, whereupon one spoke of the "sleep of enlightenment."²¹

Many dreams and sayings attributed to Muḥammad about sleep and dreams have been passed down. "Anyone who sees me in a dream sees my true self, for Satan cannot take on my form"²² is an example of one such statement. This serves as the basis for the popular idea of truly speaking with the Prophet when he appears in a dream. Sometimes the Prophet exhorts you in a dream, sometimes he thanks you for something or gives some good advice about how to make life better. Some people believe that during a dream the Prophet is really and truly in the sleeper's room, and that his odor can be sensed the

20 "Al-ru'yā l-ṣāliḥa min Allāh wa-l-ḥulm min al-Shaytān," cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 39.

21 Leven, *Medizin* 563.

22 "Man ra'ānī fī l-manām fa-sa-yarānī fī l-yaqāza wa-lā yatamaththalu al-Shaytān bī," cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 42.

morning after.²³ Given the power bestowed on certain dreams in the Quran²⁴ and the fact that Muḥammad himself ascribed a great meaning to dreams,²⁵ it comes as no surprise that dream interpretation plays an important role in Islam and that books of dreams (*tafāsīr al-aḥlām*) are very popular. According to Islamic belief dreams always contain a message that may be deciphered with the help of a book of dreams. If someone has a problem, he is told to concentrate on it before going to sleep and a dream will appear with an answer to the problem. Dreams are also said to guide one to a course of action, to confirm whether a plan is good or not. Interpreting dreams is still considered to be both a great art and a science. The interpretation of religious dreams is a field unto itself, in which – besides meeting the Prophet – angels, the holy scripture, paradise, and hell all play major roles. For example, the color green is a symbol for paradise – both for Muḥammad and for Islam in general – such that anyone dreaming of something green is, in the interpretation of the books of dreams, dreaming about paradise.²⁶ Of course, the gardens of bliss abound in all things green, and in the Quran it is also said that the blessed shall be clad in green (Q 76:21). Further, dreams of a thunderstorm, rain, clouds, the sea, rivers, ships or watermills, represent God, the resurrection, paradise and hell, according to one of the most well-known book of dreams, the *Muntakhab fī khulāṣat al-kalām fī taʾwīl al-aḥlām* (Selection of the essentials of discussion about

23 See in more detail Schimmel, *Träume* 230–5 and Kinberg, *Morality* 15.

24 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 49; Abū Hurayra narrated: “I heard God’s Apostle saying: ‘While I was sleeping, I saw myself standing at a well, on it there was a bucket. I drew water from the well as much as God wished. Then Ibn Abī Quḥāfa (i.e., Abū Bakr) took the bucket from me and brought out one or two buckets (of water) and there was weakness in his drawing the water. May God forgive him his weakness. Then the bucket turned into a very big one and ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb took it over and I had never seen such a mighty person amongst the people as him in performing such hard work, till the people drank to their satisfaction and watered their camels that knelt down there.’” See also on the water drawn by Abū Bakr and ‘Umar: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* v, 13; on ‘Ā’isha: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 46; on the Antichrist: al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 75.

25 Muḥammad is said to have sought help with decisions by interpreting dreams, e.g., anticipating the outcome of a battle with many fallen Muslims or seeing Jesus and the Antichrist in a dream. Twice he is said to have dreamed of a young woman and thereupon married ‘Ā’isha, who at 9 years was over 40 years younger than him, cf. for instance al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 46–7. Muḥammad claimed to have seen his successors in a dream scooping water from a well: The first Caliph Abū Bakr is reported to have drawn only a little water, the second caliph ‘Umar, on the other hand, drew much water with great force, cf. al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 49.

26 Cf. Q 55:63; for more details see <http://www.derislam.at/islam.php?name=Themen&pa=showpage&pid=112>.

the interpretation of dreams), attributed to Ibn Sīrīn (d. 110/728).²⁷ Dreams of paradise serve the sleeper as an important sign of whether he will someday enter the real paradise. A glimpse of paradise is a message about the deeds of the one who sees it. Seeing oneself enter and abide in paradise may be judged as a positive message concerning one's deeds. Seeing fruits and other things to eat in paradise is an indication of a pious and righteous life. But if, in the dream, one encounters such fruits and does not partake of them or is unable to do so, then one shall not reach the safety of true belief and shall not benefit from it. Anyone who sees himself drinking from the fountains of paradise or who is dressed in the proper gowns may have the hope of obtaining righteousness both in this life and in the afterlife. Walking through paradise and the presence of virgins mean comforts in this life.²⁸

The important meaning of nighttime in Islam was mentioned above. Despite all the positive and often inspirational qualities night may have, in the fearful fantasy of folk beliefs it embodies something irrational and has always been associated with ghosts, devils, and spirits of all kinds. The most feared (female) demon among Islamic peoples, Umm al-Layl, the Mother of the Night, does just what her name suggests – she engages in mischief at night while people are asleep – and she is thought to be the bringer of many diseases.²⁹ Then there is the Arabic figure of nightmare, a figure who sits on top of people in their sleep and gives them awful dreams. Nighttime is the time in which the *jinn* and the demons of the earth emerge and try to seduce the believers. Muḥammad himself was acquainted with these ideas, and there are sayings attributed to him that reveal that he, too, saw the sleeping person as subject to ghosts and demons while in a state of unconsciousness. The following prophetic tradition illustrates this:

قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: يعقد الشيطان على قافية رأس أحدكم إذا هو نام ثلاث عُقَدٍ يضرب كلَّ عقدة عليك ليل طويل فارقد. فإن استيقظ فذكر الله انحلت عقدة، فإن توضأ انحلت عقدة، فإن صلى انحلت عقدة، فأصبح نشيطاً طيب النفس، وإلا أصبح خبيث النفس كسلان.

27 Cf. Sezgin, *Geschichte* i, 66; Sezgin, *Geschichte* suppl. i, 102. One may assume that the books of dreams ascribed to him are in fact pseudo epigraphic.

28 See Klopfer, *Traumbuch* 54–5.

29 In detail in Pielow, *Lilith*.

The Prophet, God bless him and grant him salvation, said: Satan binds three knots behind the neck of everyone of you who sleeps and tightens each knot by whispering: 'You have a long night before you, so sleep now.' And whenever anyone of you awakes and thinks of God, one knot is loosened. And when you perform your ritual ablution, one knot is loosened. And when you have finished the prayer, a knot is loosened. Then you can go your way, merry and content; otherwise you will begin the day unhappy and tardily.³⁰

5 Conclusion

For all humans sleep is without doubt an important link between life and death. It is sometimes even depicted as a state that links the heavens and the earth, since the religious dream can bring the human soul closer to God. The dreamless state of death is furthermore a state that bridges the wait until the day of judgment. That is the last sleep to be slept before the beginning of an existence that knows no sleep. On the final day not only the world, but also all things good and evil shall become meaningless – and sleep, too, shall lose its meaning when everything is in a state of wakefulness. Being awake is simply better than being asleep! For those in hell, on the other hand, this will surely not be the case: They shall suffer the endless torment of not being able to forget their desire for eternal, gentle quietude, and they shall desire nothing more than to be annihilated once and for all time, a state not unlike deep sleep (Q 25:13–4).³¹

30 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ii, 65.

31 It is not surprising that, in light of the importance of sleep for human life, there are today a number of internet portals dispensing advice to Muslims, among other things, about getting proper sleep. A light meal before going to bed is suggested, as is keeping a regular bedtime rhythm; advice is also given on whether to sleep on the left or on the right side, on the back or on the stomach. All of this is grounded in the Sura quoted above (Q 18:18), where it is said: "And we turned them [the Seven Sleepers] on their right and their left sides." There are also two times of the day that are not as efficacious: shortly before sunrise until about 40 minutes after sunrise; and in the time between the afternoon prayers until sundown. Someone who insists on sleeping during these times is said to be plagued by insomnia and physical weakness. See <http://www.fontaene.de/archiv/nr-41/Schlaf.html>.

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PART 4

*A Wise Man's Paradise –
Eschatology and Philosophy*



Paradise in Islamic Philosophy

*Michael E. Marmura**

That the concept of paradise, of a state of bliss in the hereafter, is central to the eschatology of the Islamic philosophers is hardly unexpected. This state consists in the soul's dwelling in the realm of the divine, blessed by the eternal light of God's infinite knowledge and goodness. This state is attained by the virtuous soul that, in its mundane existence, pursued philosophical truth and worshipped the source of all truth, namely God, and subdued all the vices of animal passions.

While the views of the Islamic philosophers on this topic all seem to embrace this concept, their approaches are divergent and their statements often cryptic. The eschatology of four of the major philosophers¹ is testimony to both the range and the ambiguity of some of their statements. The four philosophers we consider are Kindi (al-Kindī, d. ca. 256/870), Alfarabi (al-Fārābī, d. 339/950), Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 428/1037), and Avempace (Ibn Bājjā, d. 532/1138).

1 Kindi

Closely related to the Christian translators of Greek philosophy and science, Kindi was the first of a series of Islamic philosophers who were physicians and scientists. Many of his numerous works are lost. Statements about the hereafter, however, are encountered in some of his extant treatises. These, as we will indicate, raise questions of interpretation.

* The editors decided to keep this chapter largely in the form as submitted by the author. They are grateful to Dr. Damien Janos (Montreal) for his help in preparing its final version.

1 The philosophers considered here belong to the period which, for convenience, we term "formative," that is, the period from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. This is not to belittle the achievements and originality of the numerous subsequent Islamic philosophers. But the foundation of the thought of the latter was laid down largely by the philosophers of the formative period.

The longest of his extant treatises, the metaphysical, *Fī l-falsafa al-ūlā* (On first philosophy),² says little about eschatology.³ It does provide, however, the philosophical framework of his statements elsewhere on the subject. A first short chapter, a veritable introduction of philosophy to the Islamic world, includes Kindi's definition of philosophy as "knowledge of the true nature of things to the extent of human capability."⁴ It also includes his statement exhorting his fellow Muslims "not to be ashamed of deeming truth good and acquiring truth from wherever it comes, even if it comes from races remote from us and nations different from us."⁵ He then devotes a lengthy second chapter to prove the world's temporal creation *ex nihilo*. This has a bearing on his views of the hereafter.

The proof has two main parts. The first endeavors to show the impossibility of the existence of an infinite quantity. The argument is detailed, but its main point is that if one supposes an infinite, one can in principle remove a finite part from it. But then the remainder would still be an infinite. We would thus end up with two unequal infinities – for Kindi, a contradiction. Since past motions constitute a quantity, they cannot be infinite. Adopting the Aristotelian definition of time as the measure of motion, Kindi argues that time coexists with motion. Hence it also must be finite. As such, the world must have had a beginning at a finite moment in the past.

The second part of the proof, also discussed in detail, is that the body of the world as a whole cannot be static.⁶ Hence, if the world has a beginning in time, its creation does not mean that an existing static body has been set in motion. Such a body cannot exist. Therefore, the world's coming into existence means its creation by fiat, out of nothing.⁷

2 In al-Kindī, *Rasā'il* 97–162. For an English translation of this work with an introduction, notes, and commentary, see Ivry, *Metaphysics*.

3 For a discussion of the issue that some sections of this treatise are not extant, see Adamson, *al-Kindī* 9, 19, 205ff.

4 Al-Kindī, *Rasā'il* 97.

5 Ibid., 103.

6 According to the argument, we observe at times particular instances of bodies that are not in motion. Being static, however, cannot be a defining characteristic of bodies as such, since we observe bodies that are in motion. When considering the body of the world, we note that it is not only subject to locomotion but is constantly undergoing other forms of change and motion which involve the world's composite nature. Hence, being in motion is a defining characteristic of the created world.

7 This accords with traditional Islamic belief, and is a departure from Aristotle, who held the world to be eternal – this even though Kindi reveres Aristotle and regards him as the most outstanding of the Greek philosophers (*mubarriz al-yūnāniyyīn fī l-falsafa*), al-Kindī, *Rasā'il*

There are three of his extant treatises that pertain in one way or another to the question of the hereafter.⁸ The first⁹ and shortest is entitled *That there exist substances that are not bodies*. This treatise does not address itself specifically to the concept of the hereafter, but provides a prelude to these discussions. The language of the treatise has its obscurities. Its reasoning is intricate and, depending on one's understanding of it, can seem flawed.¹⁰ What is relevant to our purpose, however, is that the argument is intended to demonstrate Kindi's belief that souls are immaterial substances.

The next treatise to be considered is entitled, *A Discourse on the soul: Summary of the book[s] of Aristotle and Plato and the rest of the philosophers*.¹¹ After a brief introductory statement, he writes: "You have asked me, may God, The Exalted and Magnified, grant you the good fortune of your obedience to Him, to summarize for you a discourse on the soul, and bring to you the purpose the philosophers pursued in this, with a summary of Aristotle's book on the soul."¹²

103, line 1. The third and fourth chapters discuss the unities and pluralities of things in the world. These pluralities, however, are always divisible into unities. Their unities hence are not intrinsic to them. Their existence in them is not essential, only accidental. But what is accidental must ultimately derive from a cause that is essentially one. Such a cause is the True One, God, who is utterly devoid of multiplicity and from whom the accidental unities of the world emanate. Without these unities the world cannot exist. Since it exists, the giver of unities exists. And the giver of these unities, these emanations from the Essentially One, is the giver of the world's existence. For a detailed discussion of this, see Marmura and Rist, *Divine existence and oneness* 338–54; repr. in Marmura, *Probing* 337–51.

8 All three are addressed to an unnamed person.

9 Al-Kindī, *Rasā'il* 265–9.

10 Kindi argues that life in animate bodies is not intrinsic to them. Thus, when there is death, the lifeless body remains a body. Life is hence an accident that comes to the body from the outside. When we consider the essence of this life, it turns out to be soul. Is this soul, then, an immaterial substance? Kindi answers that it is. For the species "soul" characterizes its individual instances. But the species is a universal, an immaterial substance: therefore its individual instances are immaterial substances. If we read Kindi aright, however, the species of material substances, being universals, are immaterial. If we follow what seems to be the pattern of Kindi's argument, would not the individual instances of the immaterial species be also immaterial? This point is neither raised nor clarified.

11 Al-Kindī, *Rasā'il* 272–80.

12 Ibid., 272–3.

Kindi begins a summary of Aristotelian, Platonic, and Neoplatonic theories of the soul, as well as a related theory attributed to Pythagoras. He writes:¹³

The soul is a simple entity, endowed with nobility and perfection, and is of great standing.¹⁴ Its substance [derives from]¹⁵ the substance of the Creator, honored and magnified is He, [in a manner] analogous to the [derivation] of sunlight from the sun. He has shown¹⁶ that the soul is separate from this body, different from it, and that its substance is a divine, spiritual substance, as can be seen from the nobility of its nature, and its opposition to what afflicts the body by way of appetites and irascibility.¹⁷

This is followed by a brief elaboration on the last sentence above, which introduces the ethical element that becomes part and parcel of this eschatology. He tells us that the function of the soul is to control human irascibility, prone to commit the great enormity (*al-amr al-ʿaẓīm*). It prevents the expression of anger in the way a good rider controls his horse when it is about to bolt. It is by curbing the animal passions that the soul is purified. The ethics, largely Platonic and Neoplatonic, tally with what Kindi says in his *Risāla fī l-ḥīla li-dafʿ al-aḥzān* (Epistle on the device of dispelling sorrows).¹⁸ After this brief elaboration, Kindi writes:

When the soul, which is from the light of the Creator, honored and magnified is He, separates from the body, it knows everything in the world, nothing being hidden from it. The proof of this¹⁹ is the statement of Plato when he says: “Many of the ancient, righteous philosophers, by

13 The name given is Ariqūras; according to the editor, in all probability Pythagoras is intended. Al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil* 276, note 3.

14 *Dhū shaʾnin ʿaẓīm*. *Shaʾn* has different meanings depending on context. It could mean, for example, “function,” “business,” “state of affairs,” “status,” “importance.”

15 More literally, “is of the substance of . . .”

16 Reading the verb in the active voice as *bayyana*, where the subject as the editor suggests is in all probability Aristotle. It could be read *buyyina* in the passive where it would translate, “it has been shown.”

17 Al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil* 273.

18 The gist of the epistle is that sorrows are due to human attachments to transient mundane things. The “device” for dispelling such sorrows is to disregard the mundane and pursue what really matters, knowledge of the eternal verities. In addition to the Platonism of this ethics, it includes an element of Stoicism. For an English translation and discussion of this work, see Jayyusi-Lehn, *Dispelling of sorrows* 237–51.

19 *Wa-l-dalīl ʿalā dhālik*, could also translate as “the indication of this.”

reason of divesting themselves of the world, shunning sensory things, and confining themselves to reflection and the search for the true nature of things, knowledge of the hidden became unveiled to them, and they attained knowledge of what people concealed in themselves and the secrets [of their] hearts.” If this is the case when the soul is still tied to the body in this dark world where – had it not been for the light of the sun, it would be in utter darkness – how then would it be when the soul is stripped from the body, separated from it, and comes to the World of the Truth, wherein dwells the light of the Creator? Plato Spoke the Truth with this argument, hitting the mark with a sound demonstration.²⁰

The rest of the treatise includes further elaboration on this theme, which suggests the process of the soul’s purification could extend after death and would involve ascent into the celestial spheres. At each stage, further purification would take place. This is a theory attributed to Pythagoras. Eventually, the purified soul reaches the divine realm where it lives eternally in blissful proximity to its Creator. The treatise concludes with Kindi’s statement:

O ignorant human! Do you not know that your stay in this [mundane] world is as the twinkling of an eye and that you will be in the True World, remaining in it everlastingly? You are but a transient wayfarer in the [worldly] affair, by the will of your Creator, honored and magnified is He. Most of the philosophers have known this and we have summed it up from their statement that the soul is a simple entity.

Understand what I wrote to you. You will then be happy. May the exalted God bring you happiness in [this] your world and in your world to come.²¹

It is clear in this treatise that the views of the Greek philosopher discussed indicate that paradise is the eternal dwelling of the pure, untarnished soul, in the realm of the divine. This raises the question: Is Kindi simply explaining this concept of paradise to his addressee? And if this is the case, is he not recommending this eschatology, as the concluding words above indicate? And, if Kindi is recommending it, did he himself also subscribe to it?

The tone of this treatise and the ethics it entails strongly suggest that Kindi indeed subscribes to this philosophical concept of paradise. How then would one interpret his statement about bodily resurrection in the third treatise? This

20 Al-Kindi, *Rasā'il* 274.

21 Ibid., 280.

is the treatise entitled, *Risāla fī kammīyyat kutub Aristātālīs wa-mā yuhtaju ilayhi fī taḥṣīl al-falsafa* (On the quantity of Aristotle's books and what is needed in attaining philosophy).²² The listing of Aristotle's works (with brief comments on them) is comprehensive.

The account of Aristotle's works, however, is interrupted and resumed later. The interruption is a reminder that there are modes of knowing that do not require training in logic, mathematics, natural science or metaphysics. This is knowledge that is revealed to God's apostles. It comes to them instantaneously through God's will, "His perfecting their souls, illuminating them for the truth, by His help, direction and divine message."²³ Speaking of the Quran, Kindi states that it conveys its message in compact thought and succinct argument, clear and accessible to all.

To illustrate this, he quotes Q 36:77–86, reporting an atheistic questioning of bodily resurrection and the reply to it.

Who shall quicken these bones when they are decayed?", the atheist asks. The Quran replies: "Say, 'He shall quicken them, who originated them the first time; He knows all creation,' " ... until (or up to) His words ... "Be' and it is."²⁴ "What proof for the illuminated minds, [Kindi continues], is clearer and more succinct than [the argument] that if the bones came to exist out of nothing,²⁵ that once decayed it would be possible for them to exist [again]?" He then argues that gathering together separate remnants is easier than creating them out of nothing. For God, however, to create them *ex nihilo* and then bring them back into existence is the same, "neither stronger nor weaker." "For the power that creates can bring back that which it has obliterated."²⁶

22 Ibid., 363–82.

23 Ibid., 373.

24 The above translation is that of A.J. Arberry. The full text of this translation reads: "Has not man regarded that we created him of a sperm drop? Then lo, he is a manifest adversary. And he has struck for Us a similitude and forgotten his creation; he says, 'who shall quicken the bones when they are decayed?' Say: 'He shall quicken them, who originated them the first time; He knows all creation, who has made for you out of the green tree, fire and lo, from it you kindle.' Is not He, who created the heavens and the earth, able to create the likes of them? Yes indeed; He is the All-creator, the All-knowing; His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be' and it is."

25 Reading *ba'da an lam takun* as a correction to what seems to be a printing error that reads *bal in lam takun*, al-Kindī, *Rasā'il* 374, lines 2–3.

26 Al-Kindī, *Rasā'il* 374.

He continues to reason that this power can create from opposites, as the verse tells us about God's making for humankind fire from green trees. Then, in response to those who deny God's creation of the heavens, Kindi argues that, unlike human action, which depends on matter and takes place in time, the divine act needs neither; it creates the heavens and the earth *ex nihilo* instantaneously. God simply commands something to exist by saying "'Be,' and it is."²⁷

In this discussion one can interpret Kindi as saying that bodily resurrection for humans in the hereafter is possible for God. It *need not* follow that He in fact resurrects human bodies. But *if it did not* follow, this would defeat the whole point of the argument and what the Quran is affirming, which Kindi also implicitly affirms.

This brings us to the difficulty we meet in understanding Kindi's concept of paradise. Is it confined to the immaterial soul in its eternal proximity to God, or does it entail bodily resurrection, which normally means belief in a paradise described in the Quran in physical terms? The relation between these two concepts remains unexplained. We do not know whether Kindi discussed it elsewhere in some of his writings that are not extant.²⁸

2 Alfarabi

Closely related to the circle of Christian Aristotelians in Baghdad, Alfarabi was noted as a commentator on the *Organon* and other works of Aristotle. He was the leading logician of his time.²⁹ He was also noted for formulating a Neoplatonic emanative cosmology. Within the framework of this cosmology he developed an influential political philosophy that is intimately related to his eschatology.³⁰ A brief account of this cosmogony is hence in order.

The celestial world is an eternal emanation from God. It proceeds in successive stages.³¹ It begins with an overflow from God of a first intellect. This intellect goes through two eternal acts of cognition, knowledge of God and knowledge of itself. From these two acts, two things emanate respectively: another intellect and a celestial body, that of the outermost sphere that is

²⁷ Ibid., 374–5.

²⁸ See, for example, note 3 above.

²⁹ Among other things, Alfarabi was the most important musical theorist of his time. See Sawa, *Music performance*.

³⁰ For the influence of this philosophy on subsequent Islamic philosophers, see Marmura, *Philosophers' conception* 87–102; repr. in Marmura, *Probing* 391–408.

³¹ One stage is prior to a succeeding stage, not in time, but in existence.

devoid of stars. The second intellect goes through two similar acts of cognition, from which another intellect emanates and the sphere of the fixed stars. The process is repeated by the second and successive intellects, resulting in the emanation of successive celestial spheres.³² The last of the emanated celestial intellects is the Active Intellect, which governs our terrestrial world.

The terrestrial world comes into being through the action of the celestial bodies. Both the celestial and terrestrial worlds are hierarchical, but in different senses. In the celestial world the beings closer to God are on a higher order of perfection. The celestial world is a harmonious world, ruled by reason, as each sphere is governed by an intellect. This rational harmony is determined by the very process of emanation. There is also a hierarchy in the terrestrial world, where the lowest existent of matter is prime matter. As matter acquires a complexity of forms, it ascends into higher levels of existence culminating in animal life. The highest beings in the animal kingdom are the humans. Endowed with free will, it is up to humans to build for themselves a rational harmonious society. Such a society (if it were to exist) would not be necessitated by the “mere” process of emanation. This is the basic difference between the hierarchical order of the celestial and terrestrial worlds.

The intellectual capabilities of humans vary. The majority are incapable of philosophical thinking. There is also variance in the powers of those capable of philosophical thought. Among those having such capability, the highest rank is attained by the philosopher-prophet who receives the intelligibles from the Active Intellect instantaneously. As will be indicated shortly, what the prophet reveals to the masses is a symbolic version of this knowledge. A corollary of this is that the philosophers alone can give a philosophical interpretation of this symbolic version. The non-philosophical masses must accept it literally.

How does Alfarabi explain this instantaneous reception of the intelligibles by the philosopher-prophet? To see this, one must turn to his theory of the human soul. According to this theory, in the acquisition by humans of the abstract intelligibles, the Active Intellect plays a necessary role. By its act of illumination, similar to the action of light on colors, it changes the images acquired by the senses into immaterial forms. The rational soul, initially an intellect in potency is a material entity. Once transformed by the Active Intellect’s illuminating action, it becomes an actual intellect (*‘aql bi-l-fi’l*), thereby acquiring an immaterial status. At a higher stage, this actual intellect becomes the object of its own knowing, becoming thereby “the acquired intellect” (*al-‘aql al-mustafād*). In the case of the philosopher-prophet, a higher state of cognition is attained. The prophet’s acquired intellect receives the Active Intellect.

32 Namely, the spheres of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon.

The result is a composite in which the prophet's acquired intellect acts as the matter and the Active Intellect as the form.³³ The Active Intellect now "indwells" (*halla*) in the prophet's mind.

The difference between the philosopher-prophet and the ordinary philosopher is that the former is endowed with an exceptionally powerful rational faculty and an exceptionally powerful imaginative faculty. The prophet's rational faculty, when it joins the Active Intellect, becomes inundated with the intelligibles it receives from the latter. Now, the imaginative faculty, not being an intellectual faculty, is incapable of receiving these intelligibles. The function of the imaginative faculty is to imitate. The intelligibles received by the prophet's rational faculty are now imitated by the prophet's imaginative faculty. It "translates" them, so to speak, into particular images that give concrete, non-abstract instances of them, or images that symbolize them. These symbols and concrete instances are expressed in language that the non-philosophical majority can understand.

This language is descriptive and prescriptive, imitative of the theoretical and practical aspects of the soul, respectively.³⁴ The descriptive, for example, would assert that there is one God, the Creator, and would affirm His attributes and creative acts, without giving them any philosophical explanation. The prescriptive relates to conduct, what humans ought to do or ought not to do. These form the basis of the religious law.

While the function of the Active Intellect has a special relation to the philosopher-prophet, it also has a relation to the non-prophetic philosophical souls. Alfarabi writes:

The Active Intellect is concerned with the care of the rational animal, seeking to bring him to the highest rank of perfection...whereby the human attains the rank of the Active Intellect. This is realized only [when³⁵ the human] becomes separated from bodies, [i.e.] not requiring for his subsistence anything beneath him by way of body, matter or accident, and [that he] remains permanently in this state of perfection.³⁶

In the above passage, Alfarabi refers to the immaterial soul that attains ultimate happiness in the hereafter, a soul that remains "permanently in the state of perfection." As we shall see shortly, according to Alfarabi not all souls attain this

33 Al-Fārābī, *Ārā'* 103; al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsa* 79.

34 Al-Fārābī, *Milla* 46–7.

35 Literally, "in that."

36 Al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsa* 32.

happiness. Indeed, there are souls that at death cease to exist. This brings us to Alfarabi's political philosophy, the details of which are beyond our scope here. Essentially, it is Platonic. The "virtuous" city (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*), Alfarabi's ideal political and social entity, adopts and adapts many of the characteristics of Plato's *Republic*. The philosopher-prophet is in a sense Plato's philosopher king in Islamic garb. There are also distinctive Islamic elements in this theory. For example, this community will have lawmakers referred to in Islamic terms as *fuqahā'* and theologians referred to in Islamic terms as *mutakallimūn*.³⁷ The Active Intellect is referred to in Quranic terms as "the faithful spirit" (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*, Q 26:193) and "the holy spirit" (*rūḥ al-quḍus*, e.g. Q 2:87 and passim). Alfarabi's conception of the "virtuous" political entity is more universal in scope than Plato's ideal city. Alfarabi refers to the "virtuous nation," consisting of "virtuous cities," and envisions a "virtuous world," consisting of "virtuous nations."³⁸

The model that the philosopher-prophet envisions for the establishment of a virtuous political society is the harmonious rational, celestial world. The underlying motive of establishing such a virtuous political entity is the pursuit of happiness. This is the good in itself. Ideally, this happiness consists in the actualization of the human rational soul. For Alfarabi, there is no bodily resurrection. With death, the virtuous soul, now totally separated from matter, attains eternal happiness in the celestial realm. It, moreover, retains its individuality and attains continuous added joy as other virtuous souls, each retaining their respective individuality, join it.³⁹ This, for Alfarabi, is paradise.

Alfarabi discusses those "cities" or political entities that are not virtuous and which he terms "ignorant."⁴⁰ These are ignorant because they follow erroneous concepts of what constitutes true happiness. They consist of "the indispensable," "the vile," "the timocratic," "the despotic," and "the democratic." They mistakenly identify sheer survival, wealth, pleasure, honor, power or freedom, with true happiness. Those belonging to such political entities and who follow their erroneous concepts of happiness do not survive death. With death they disintegrate and become part of the process of generation and corruption. Then there are immoral political states where both the leaders and the citizens know what true happiness is, but deliberately forsake it for pleasure, power,

37 Al-Fārābī, *Milla* 75–6.

38 Al-Fārābī, *Ārā'* 96; al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsa* 69–70.

39 Al-Fārābī, *Ārā'* 114–5.

40 The term Alfarabi uses is *jāhiliyya*, a term that also characterizes the pre-Islamic age in Arabia, so called because of its widespread ignorance of belief in one God and because of its tribal hubris and the pessimism and hedonism expressed in much of its poetry.

and so on. In the hereafter their souls live in eternal torment, ever seeking celestial happiness, but never attaining it. There are also “erring cities” where the leadership alone has knowledge of true happiness but deliberately forsakes it. The leaders alone are eternally punished, whereas the rest of the citizens, like those of the ignorant cities, have no afterlife.⁴¹

The real question that remains unanswered in the extant works of Alfarabi is the destiny in the hereafter of those who had not attained philosophical knowledge, but who had led righteous lives, following the teachings and demands of the revealed religion. Since there is no bodily resurrection in Alfarabi’s philosophy, the question arises: what happens to these non-philosophical, yet righteous souls?⁴² As we shall see, his successor, Avicenna, raises this question and suggests an answer to it.

3 Avicenna

A towering figure in the history of Islamic philosophy, Avicenna was a master logician, metaphysician, and political philosopher. His metaphysical system is noted for its analytic as well as synthetic approach wherein he strove to construct a coherent worldview. He was also one of Islam’s great physicians and a scientist of note. The bulk of his numerous extant writings have been published.⁴³ Most of them are in Arabic, but they include important works in Persian as well. His philosophy is close to that of Alfarabi, whom Avicenna admired, and there are striking similarities in their thought, but also distinct differences.

As with Alfarabi, Avicenna’s eschatology has to be understood in terms of his emanative scheme. Unlike Alfarabi’s emanative scheme, however, for Avicenna the celestial realm that proceeds from God consists of triads, not

41 Al-Fārābī, *Ārāʾ* 141ff.; al-Fārābī, *al-Siyāsa* 87ff.

42 The possibility that Alfarabi treated this in some lost work cannot be ruled out. As we shall see when we discuss Avicenna, one of Avicenna’s followers and commentators, namely, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) suggests that Alfarabi may have done so. But no concrete evidence is given.

43 These include his chief medical work, *al-Qānūn fī l-ṭibb* (*The canon of medicine*), his philosophical magnum opus, the voluminous *al-Shifāʾ* (*The healing*), and *al-Najāt* (*The salvation*) that summarizes some of the main ideas of the *al-Shifāʾ*. The essentials of his philosophy are given in his *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt* (Pointers and remarks) that includes in its last sections an expression of his mystical ideas. His works include mystical writings in the form of symbolic narratives. The most important of his works in Persian is the *Dānishnāme-yi ʿalāʾī* (The book of sciences dedicated to ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla).

dyads. Underlying this triadic scheme is Avicenna's doctrine of essence. Apart from the divine essence, any existing essence, considered strictly in itself, excludes the notion of existence. Since it exists, its conception cannot include what is self-contradictory. Its existence must be possible. While this is a necessary condition, it is not sufficient. Its existence must also have a proximate cause that necessitates it. For Avicenna the proximate cause is an essential cause, a cause that coexists with its effect. Such a proximate cause must also be necessitated by another proximate cause. A chain of such coexisting causes would constitute, according to Avicenna, a quantity that cannot be infinite. It must have a beginning in an ultimate uncaused cause, a being whose existence is necessary in itself, whose very essence is existence. This is God, the Necessary Existent.

God eternally contemplates Himself as the cause of all existents other than Himself. This act of self-knowledge necessitates the existence of a first intellect. Such an intellect is in itself possible, but is necessitated by another. It eternally contemplates three things: God as being necessary in Himself, its own existence as necessitated by God, and its own existence as in itself only possible. These three cognitive acts necessitate the existence of three things, respectively: (1) another intellect, (2) the soul of the outermost sphere of the universe, and (3) the body of this sphere that is devoid of stars. The second intellect goes through a similar triadic act of contemplation, resulting in the necessary existence of another intellect, the soul of the sphere of the fixed stars, and the body of the latter sphere. The three-fold acts of contemplation are repeated by every successive celestial intellect, resulting in the emanation of the souls and bodies of the celestial spheres,⁴⁴ terminating with the Active Intellect, from which the terrestrial world emanates. The process is now reversed. It begins with the emanation of prime matter, which, however, cannot exist without forms. These forms are the four elements – earth, water, air, and fire. As these elements combine, new forms emanate from the Active Intellect, the giver of forms, resulting in more complex inanimate existents. As these, in turn, undergo further combinations, they necessitate the emanation of new forms, which bring about the existence of organic beings, plants and animals. The various combinations of animal bodily humors determine the emanation of the different animal species,⁴⁵ and ultimately of the human rational soul.

44 The number and order of the spheres are the same as Alfarabi's. See note 32 above.

45 "Behold the wisdom of the Creator. He began and created principles [i.e., the four elements]. He then created from them humoral 'mixtures' (*amzija*) and prepared each mixture for a distinct species." Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt* ii, 327.

The human rational soul comes into existence at a moment in time when a body appropriate for its reception and for becoming its instrument is formed. Its existence is an emanation that is necessitated by the celestial principles.⁴⁶ The different combinations of humors determine the strength or weakness of the emanated human rational souls. For Avicenna, as in Alfarabi, the rational souls of the masses are weak. They lack the capacity for understanding abstract philosophical thought. They must accept the language of revelation literally and must not be exposed to its philosophical interpretation.

Avicenna speaks of two types of revelation. One type is confined to the imaginative faculty.⁴⁷ The person receives this type of revelation from the celestial souls as distinct from the celestial intellects. Unlike the celestial intellects that have knowledge of terrestrial particulars only in a universal way, the celestial souls know the terrestrial particulars in their particularity.⁴⁸ This knowledge is transmitted to humans, normally in dreams and in the form of images that symbolize it. This constitutes true knowledge only when properly interpreted.⁴⁹ Prophets receive these as the symbolic language of revelation and can do so in their waking hours.

The second and higher type of revelation comes to the prophet's intellect from the celestial intellects.⁵⁰ It comes as intuitions of the middle terms of syllogistic thinking. Received instantaneously, without the prior cogitative preparatory activities of the soul, the prophet's soul "flares up with intuition." Some of this knowledge can descend to the prophet's imaginative faculty (as in Alfarabi), which will imitate it as symbols. Avicenna's eschatology relates to both types of prophetic revelation.

Avicenna devoted a treatise to the hereafter, entitled, *Risāla Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma'ād* (An Aḍḥawite treatise on the return).⁵¹ The treatise is representative of

46 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Nafs* 207.

47 Ibid., 154ff.

48 See Marmura, God's knowledge 299–331; repr. in Marmura, *Probing* 71–95.

49 Avicenna differentiates between *ta'bīr* [dream] interpretation, normally confined to non-philosophers, and *ta'wīl*, metaphorical interpretation, confined to philosophers. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Nafs* 6.

50 Ibid., 218–20.

51 *Aḍḥawiyya* refers to al-Aḍḥā, the feast of sacrifice, the date on which the treatise was dedicated to a certain Abū Bakr b. Muḥammad. "The Return" has acquired the meaning of the return of the dead to life in the hereafter, and sometimes refers to "the hereafter," and for Avicenna, the continuation of the existence of human souls in the hereafter. The first printed version of the above-mentioned treatise, edited by S. Dunyā, was published in 1949 in Cairo. Since then, in addition to the two manuscripts used by Dunyā for his edition, Francesca Lucchetta used a Manchester manuscript and a Leiden manuscript

Avicenna's eschatology with some minor variations on the theme in different works. It includes criticisms of various views of the hereafter – those encountered in Islamic theology (*kalām*), in transmigration theories, and in other religions, particularly Christianity. He is highly critical of the Christian doctrine that upholds bodily resurrection, yet maintains that reward and punishment in the hereafter are spiritual. He writes:

What is this spiritual reward and punishment and how are they portrayed to the masses so that they would desire and fear them? No! nothing of this is portrayed to them other than their being like angels. If it were portrayed to them regarding the matter of spirituality other than this, they would go astray in understanding it . . . What the masses imagine of the affair of the angels, even if they do not say it, is that the angels are miserable, having neither pleasure nor rest, neither eating, drinking, nor marrying, and that they praise and worship [God] night and day and are not rewarded for it.⁵²

The last chapter of the *Risāla* is devoted to the fate of human souls in the hereafter. Some souls are perfect and purified. Some realize that they have intellectual perfection and if, in addition to this, they purify themselves from bodily dispositions, they attain eternal bliss in the contemplation of the celestial principles and God. This is paradise. Souls that realize that they are capable of intellectual perfection, but in their mundane existence have been sullied by animal passions, do not attain eternal bliss immediately. They eventually achieve it when, in the hereafter, their animal dispositions are gradually erased. Those souls that knew their capability to attain intellectual perfection but deliberately did not seek it, endure eternal torment, ever seeking eternal bliss, but never attaining it.

There are then deficient souls, unaware that they are capable of intellectual perfection, and souls of imbeciles and children, also incapable of awareness of such perfection. All such souls remain in the hereafter without absolute happiness and without absolute misery. This brings us to the destiny in the hereafter

and consulted also the Latin translation of the Italian physician Alpago (d. 1522) for a new Arabic edition, with a face to face Italian translation and with an introduction and notes, published in 1969 in Padua entitled *Epistolla Sulla Vita Futura*. Another edition edited by H. 'Āṣī was published in 1984 in Beirut. The editor also used Dunyā's edition and two other manuscripts, a Berlin manuscript and an Istanbul manuscript, but this edition takes no account of Luchetta's edition.

52 Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla*, ed. 'Āṣī 113, lines 9–14; Ibn Sīnā, *Epistolla* 94–9.

of the souls of the non-philosophical masses. Some of these have followed the precepts of the religious law and have led righteous lives, and some have not. If then, as Avicenna holds, there is no bodily resurrection, how are the righteous rewarded and the unrighteous punished as promised in the revealed law? The answer to this is suggested very briefly in the *Risāla*, but the fullest explanation is offered in another treatise, *al-Mabda' wa-l-Ma'ād* (lit., The beginning and the return),⁵³ much of whose content is reproduced (with some minor modifications) in the *Metaphysics of the Healing* (*al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-shifā*).⁵⁴ The treatise begins with the statement that “the ignorant souls,” that is, the non-philosophical souls, “if virtuous, but not yearning for the intelligibles by way of [seeking] certainty, when [in the hereafter] they separate from matter, they continue to exist.” This is “because every rational soul is immortal.” He adds that even “illusory happiness (*al-sa'āda al-ẓanniyya*),” that is, happiness in the realm of the imagination, as we will shortly note, would be realized for such a soul, because “God’s mercy is vast, and salvation over perdition is [favored by Him].”

Avicenna then states that “one of the scholars who is not indiscriminate in what he says, made a possibly [correct] statement,”⁵⁵ i.e., in effect, a possible explanation. We are not told who this scholar is, but this unknown philosopher suggests that in the hereafter the souls of the non-philosophical masses become attached to a celestial body. He does not at first indicate what this body could be. Whatever it is, souls would attach to it, as it is needed to activate the believed forms within these souls. These are the beliefs instilled by the revealed scriptures in the masses in their earthly existence. In the hereafter they remain dormant in their imaginative and estimative faculties, and can only be activated by a celestial body. He adds, “if the person’s beliefs within himself and his acts necessitate happiness,” the individual will envision and experience what is good. This is paradise as described in the scriptures. Conversely, the wicked will experience the scriptural descriptions of eternal punishment.⁵⁶

The scholar then suggests that the celestial body needed to activate the beliefs dormant in the souls of the masses is generated from air, smoke or vapor. It is affiliated with the temperament in the terrestrial world named “spirit,” but differs from it. In the terrestrial world “spirit” is a subtle material substance that connects the rational soul with the bodily organs. With the body’s death

53 This work was used effectively by Jean Michot in his significant study, *Destinée de l'homme*.

54 Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics* 335, par. 24–356, par. 25.

55 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabda' wa-l-Ma'ād* 114.

56 Ibid.

it ceases to exist. The celestial spirit, by contrast, is immaterial and eternal. By its attachment to the souls of the non-philosophical masses in the hereafter it enables the virtuous to imagine the joys of the physical paradise described in the scriptures. These joys are experienced in all their vividness in the imagination. In the case of the wicked souls, the imaginative experience is that of physical torment.

Speaking specifically about the virtuous philosophical souls, this scholar states:

The truly happy ones enjoy the proximity with each other. Each would apprehend intellectually its own essence and that which connects with it, not in the way bodies are connected, where space becomes confined through congestion, but by way of the connection of one intelligible with another, whereby there is increase of spaciousness with the crowding.⁵⁷

This statement tallies with part of what Alfarabi says in his *Ārāʾ*.⁵⁸ Probably because of this, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, as we have mentioned,⁵⁹ in his commentary on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*, says, "I believe that [the unnamed scholar] is Alfarabi." This, however, is conjecture. There is no evidence for this in Alfarabi's extant works.

Much of the substance of this treatise is included in Avicenna's *Metaphysics*.⁶⁰ It is given in the context of his statement about the destiny of imbeciles and children in the hereafter, where he tells us that what is being said about them is applicable to the masses. He begins by stating that what some scholars have said appears to be true, namely, that under certain conditions the souls of children and imbeciles will experience in their imaginative and estimative faculties the joys of physical rewards. One notes here that Avicenna is no longer speaking about the views of one scholar but of a number of scholars. He also says that the celestial bodies play an essential role in activating the dormant believed forms in the imagination, but does not identify the celestial bodies in question. He also reminds the reader that "the forms in the imagination are not weaker than the sensible [forms], but greater in influence and clarity as one sees in sleep."⁶¹

57 Ibid., 115.

58 See note 39, above.

59 See note 42, above.

60 See note 54, above.

61 Ibn Sīnā, *Metaphysics* 336, lines 20–2.

These statements in the *al-Mabda'* and the *Metaphysics* indicate that Avicenna favors this explanation, even though he does not explicitly endorse it. At the same time he does not register any objection to it. One surmises that this is a theory that he actually holds, particularly since without it his eschatology would remain incomplete. It is a theory, associated with Avicenna, that left its impact on subsequent Islamic religious thought.

4 Avempace

Avempace (Ibn Bājja, also known as Ibn al-Šā'igh), was the first of the three most renowned philosophers of Islamic Spain. His successors were Ibn Ṭufayl (d. 581/1185) and Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 595/1198).⁶² His influence on Averroes was marked and acknowledged by the latter. Avempace was born in Saragossa around the end of the eleventh century and died in Fez in 532/1138.

An original mind, he seems to have been constantly diverted from his scientific and philosophical pursuits by administrative duties. (He was in the service of various Almoravid rulers or their allies). In the introductory statement to his *Ittiṣāl al-'aql bi-l-insān* (Treatise on the conjunction of the human rational soul with the Active Intellect),⁶³ dedicated to his friend and student, the vizier Ibn al-Imām, he writes:

I thought it my duty to hasten and convey to you this science whose demonstration I have discovered and whose wording I have properly arranged . . . To discuss it, however, according to the pattern of [the philosophical] art would be longer [than what I am sending to you], clearer in explanation and would include a greater number of syllogisms and premises of greater strength. Shortness of time and the endless succession of tasks (*tawātur al-ashghāl*) that engage me prevented me from establishing it in this manner. Time permitting, I will establish it according to the [philosophical] art and dispatch it to you.⁶⁴

He concludes the treatise as follows:

62 This is not to underestimate the philosophical insights, frequently in the form of "visions," of the great mystic Ibn 'Arabi (d. 638/1240), who was born in Islamic Spain.

63 Ibn Bājja, *Rasā'il* 153–73.

64 Ibid., 155.

May God grant you strength, I have affirmed this discourse at a time disrupted by those coming to me and departing from me. When I read it I saw in it a shortcoming in explaining what I wanted to explain . . . I found the ordering of the wording in some places not the best. Time, however, did not allow me to change it. In this I rely on you, as I have witnessed [such reliability] in you. If you find this kind of [imperfection], change the ordering of the expression into that which is more eloquent (*al-aḫṣaḥ*). In this, God willing, be my deputy,⁶⁵ [acting] on my behalf.⁶⁶

The one Islamic philosopher whom Avempace greatly admired and tended to follow was Alfarabi. (There is no reference to Avicenna in his writings. He mentions the theologian and mystic al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), in a critical comment on this mystic's autobiography). In his political philosophy, Avempace adheres to the basic principles set down by Alfarabi. There are, however, some differences. Avempace's main concern is with the manner in which the philosopher can survive and pursue his philosophical activity in a society alien to philosophy. In such a society, he argues, the philosopher has to isolate himself, has to become "a solitary," a *mutawahhīd*, in order to pursue his philosophical calling. Recognizing full well that isolation is contrary to the basic dictum that man is a political/social animal, that such isolation is in itself an essential evil, he argues that in the case of the philosopher, whose survival as a philosopher depends on isolation, this becomes an accidental good.⁶⁷

He follows Alfarabi in regarding the Active Intellect as the last of the series of celestial intellects emanating from God. This is the intellect that directly affects the terrestrial world and the process of the various levels of human cognition. Two main questions regarding his eschatology arise in some of his main works, notably *Tadbīr al-mutawahhīd* (The governance of the solitary)⁶⁸ and *Risālat al-ittiṣāl* (The treatise on conjunction).⁶⁹ The first question is whether his metaphysical system allows individual immortality for the immaterial human soul. The second is what he means by a cryptic statement concerning the destiny of the non-philosophical souls in the hereafter.

With regard to the first question, one must begin with Avempace's terminology. He holds the Aristotelian position that the material forms in the terrestrial world exist externally to the human soul. Once apprehended by the faculties

65 More literally, "Be my deputy in this, with the deputation I experienced you to have, God willing."

66 Ibn Bājja, *Rasā'il* 172–3.

67 Ibid., 90–1.

68 Ibid., 37–96.

69 Ibid., 153–73.

of the human soul, Avempace maintains, they become “spiritual forms.” The lowest of these are those apprehended by the senses and which reside in the common sense. On a higher level are the spiritual forms that reside in the imaginative faculty and memory. Then there are spiritual forms on yet a higher level, beginning with forms abstracted from matter but which are related in different degrees to both the soul and the material external world. The highest level of spiritual forms is utterly immaterial – they are the pure spiritual forms. These consist of the Active Intellect and the Acquired Intellect when it conjoins with the Active Intellect and becomes one with it, and the intelligibles associated with them. The intellectual conjunction or union (*al-ittiṣāl*) of the human intellect with the Active Intellect is the highest form of human cognition.⁷⁰ The intelligibles acquired through “conjunction” have an autonomous existence, to be considered in their own right, not in relation to the material forms.

In one place, Avempace maintains that it is only a minority of humans that attain union with the Active Intellect. This is the minority engaged in philosophical thought. The majority of humans live in shadows, never attaining conjunction with the Active Intellect. Giving his version of Plato’s parable of the cave in Book VII of the *Republic*, Avempace writes:

The state of the masses with respect to the intelligibles is similar to the state of those possessing sight in a cave where the sun does not appear to them. Rather, they see all the colors in the shadow. Those within the [inner] space of the cave see while they are in a state similar to darkness. Those in the entrance to the cave see the colors in the shadow. The masses in their entirety see the existents in a state similar to the state of [being in the] shadow, and will not see that light at all. For this reason, just as there is no existence of light separated from colors for the people in the cave, there is no existence for that intellect⁷¹ for the masses and [thus] they are unaware of it. As for those engaged in theoretical

70 This is based on Avempace’s classification which consists of the following types: (1) The forms of the circular bodies, that is, the bodies of the celestial spheres; (2) the Active Intellect and the Acquired Intellect and the intelligibles found therein; (3) the material intelligibles, abstracted from the material forms in external reality; (4) the ideas in the faculties of the human souls, that is, those existing in the common sense, the imagination, and memory; (1) and (2), are basically not material; (3) are not spiritual in themselves, but relate to the material forms in external reality; (4) represents an intermediary, mediating class between the spiritual and material forms. Ibn Bājjā, *Rasā’il* 49–50.

71 That is, the Active Intellect. Avempace follows Alfarabi who argues that such an intellect is utterly immaterial. See the short treatise, *al-Wuqūf ‘alā l-‘aql al-fa‘āl* (Cognizance of the Active Intellect), in Ibn Bājjā, *Rasā’il* 107–9.

reflection, their position is similar to the one who leaves the cave for the open space and perceives the light separated from colors. He would see the colors as they are. As for the happy ones (*al-su'adā'*), they see nothing similar to [ordinary] seeing as they become the thing (*al-shay'*) [seen].⁷²

For Avempace, in the hereafter all philosophical souls that adhered to the philosophical ideal find eternal bliss in a permanent union with the one intellect. This is their paradise. The question that arises is whether these souls retain their individuality in the hereafter once separated from the body. Avempace's language suggests that they do not. There is uncertainty, however, about what position he actually holds, evoked by a cryptic statement to be considered shortly.

In the above passage, he speaks of the "one intellect," which in a previous discussion he refers to as "the actual intellect."⁷³ This "one intellect" relates to different individuals, but remains one and the same. He illustrates this with the example of a magnet which can be covered with wax, pitch or some other material and yet retain its identity and action as a magnet.⁷⁴ Another example is a knight wearing one type of armor who may not be recognized as the same individual when wearing a different type.⁷⁵ Hence, one and the same existent may appear in different guises that individuate it, but in reality it is one and the same. He explains this paradox of the existence of many intellects as due to the relationship – a transient relationship, as we shall note – of the one intellect to many subjects. He also raises the question of the intelligibles, are they one or many? He identifies them with the intellect and as such they are one. They can also be related to individual human minds, and have their subsistence in this relationship. However, this relationship is transient and once it ceases, the individual mind ceases. The example he gives is the relationship of a father to an only son. If the son dies, the relationship ceases and the father who "was a father is no longer a father."⁷⁶

There is good reason to think that "the one intellect" is the Active Intellect. The "actual intellect" becomes "actual" as it acquires its actualization from the Active Intellect when it unites with it. It is reasonable to suppose that with the separation of souls from the body after death, they become one soul, absorbed, so to speak, in the Active Intellect. As such, these souls would

⁷² Ibid., 168–9.

⁷³ Ibid., 161–2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 161.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 164, lines 1–2.

not retain their individuality. This interpretation, however, seems to be at odds with what he says in the following cryptic passage:

It is clear that this intellect, which is one, is God's reward and blessing for those of His worshipers with whom He is well pleased. For this reason it is not the one that is rewarded and punished. Rather, it [itself] is the reward and blessing [bestowed] collectively on [all] the faculties of the soul. Reward and punishment are for the appetitive soul. It is the one that sins and does the right act. Thus whoever obeys God and does what pleases Him, [God] will reward him with this intellect, and endow him with the light by which he is guided.

[On the one hand,] the one who disobeys Him, [God] veils him from Himself, whereby [the individual] remains enclosed in the dark recesses of ignorance until he separates from the body, [remaining thereafter] veiled from Him, continuing in His wrath – this in degrees not apprehended by thought. For this reason God completed knowledge thereof with the religious law. [On the other hand], the one for whom God has given this intellect, when he separates from the body, remains a light among lights, praising God, declaring His holiness, together with the prophets, the righteous ones, the martyrs, and the pious, being a companion to [all] these.⁷⁷

This passage leaves many a question unanswered. Before turning to some of these, we will begin with an interpretive comment on what Avempace is saying.

When speaking of the “one intellect,” which he refers to as the “actual intellect,” as we interpret this, he is speaking of the Active Intellect with which the human intellect conjoins. Clearly, it would not be the entity that is either rewarded or punished. This intellect – the Active Intellect – is an emanation from God and is in itself good and beyond evil. It itself is the reward and blessing bestowed on the souls that obey God and please Him. Reward and punishment are only for the appetitive soul, which in humans is the desiring, motivating soul, endowed with free will.⁷⁸ It is this faculty that is either rewarded or punished according to its choice of obeying or disobeying God.

The idea of obedience to God implies a revealed law. Explicit mention of this law is made in what immediately follows. This is the statement about the punishment of the wicked souls. The full extent of this punishment, we are told, cannot be grasped by human thought. For this reason, “God completes

77 Ibid., 162.

78 This is discussed in the *Risālat al-widāʿ* (Epistle of farewell). Ibn Bājja, *Rasāʾil* 122, 124, 126, particularly in 124–5.

knowledge thereof with the religious law.” This indicates that these wicked souls retain their individuality in the hereafter. This also seems to apply to the above-mentioned virtuous soul that remains in the hereafter as “a light among lights praising God, declaring His holiness, together with the prophets, the righteous ones, the martyrs, and the pious, being companions to all of these.”

The statement about the religious law providing knowledge that reason cannot provide suggests an affinity with Kindi’s thought. Kindi remarks that there is knowledge that comes instantaneously to prophets through God’s “perfecting their souls and illuminating them with the truth.”⁷⁹ In support of this, Kindi invokes and comments on a Quranic verse. Avempace makes no Quranic invocation, and offers no explanation of how this view of knowledge fits within his metaphysics.

5 Concluding Remark

In the eschatology of these four philosophers there is a tension between their concept of “an intellectual paradise,” consisting in the eternal proximity of the immaterial rational soul to God, and the Quranic description of a physical paradise. This tension remains for the most part implicit in much of what they say. The one philosopher who explicitly recognizes it and poses a theory that would ease it is Avicenna. He suggests that in the hereafter, the immaterial souls of the non-philosophical masses, who in their mundane existence have obeyed the commands of the revealed law and have lived virtuous lives, experience eternally the Quranic joys of a physical paradise by means of their imaginative faculties. For Avicenna, however, this paradise remains on a lower level than the philosophers’ “intellectual paradise.” It is the concept of an intellectual paradise that in one way or another dominates the eschatology of all four of these philosophers.

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The Orthodox Conception of the Hereafter: Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 793/1390) Examination of Some Mu'tazilī and Philosophical Objections

Thomas Würtz

1 Introduction

Belief in life after death is an integral part of Islam. This dogma was proclaimed by Muḥammad and soon gave rise to a controversy with his opponents in Mecca. It is also considered an integral part of some final judgment as known from Christianity, followed by an afterlife in a paradise garden or in hellfire. This second existence is also connected with an idea of justice, because dwelling in paradise or hell is considered the result of human behavior during one's first, earthly existence. In the early history of Islamic theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) it seemed to be uncontested; the second creation and the bodily existence of human beings in the hereafter were seen as being within the capability of an almighty God. In the emerging debates between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arī school in the ninth and tenth centuries some eschatological matters were discussed, as we see later, but the existence of paradise and hellfire and their material character were not called into question.

The situation changed after the arrival of Greek philosophy in Muslim thought and the discussion thereof. Islamic eschatology was now challenged by the ideas of the Islamic philosophers, especially al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), who considered the path to the hereafter as a spiritual resurrection instead of a second material creation. Theologians rejected this idea, the belief in the eternity of the material world, and the view that knowledge logically demonstrated is more true than revealed knowledge in the holy book. Nevertheless, the argumentation established by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā deeply influenced the theology of that time: The logical method of argumentation came to be fully accepted in the Ash'arī school from the time of al-Ghazālī.¹ Also in their terminology, the late Islamic theologians followed the conception of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics, which is based on the difference between what is necessary and what is possible. God himself is described as

¹ Rudolph, Neubewertung der Logik 73–5.

necessarily existing (*al-wājib al-wujūd*) in contrast to all other created things, which are possibly existing (*al-mumkin al-wujūd*).² In the end, the Ash'arī position came to be widely accepted and seemed, from an outside perspective, to be victorious over that of the philosophers, although the internal philosophical influence on Islamic theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) cannot be denied.

In the later *kalām*-theology of the seventh/thirteenth century, which is under consideration here, the discussion of eternal destiny becomes mingled with older debates involving questions not based on philosophical challenges, but rather consisting of debates between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arī school.³

Against this background, in what follows I show how the renowned scholar Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (722–93/1322–90) presents the Ash'arī conception of the hereafter. Like his predecessors al-Bayḍāwī (d. 716/1316) and al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), he refutes the philosophical and theological objections. But on examination of the details of his theological argumentation, we find several instances of the influence of medieval Islamic philosophy. This may be shown in the analysis of the Arabic term for resurrection, the above-mentioned question of bodily or spiritual resurrection, and the question of whether paradise and hell should be considered as already created abodes existing alongside our earthly world or as subjects of creation at doomsday. Another question of interest deals with the value of the repentance of one's sins as counterbalancing misdeeds in the final judgment. Before doing so, we should have a short look at the author and his work.

2 Taftāzānī and *Sharḥ al-Maqāsid*

Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī was well known for the breadth of his learning, which covered mainly theology, rhetoric, and law.⁴ He was born in Taftāzān in 722/1322 as the descendant of a family well established in scholarship for several generations. His grandfather Fakhr al-Dīn was a judge (*qāḍī*). After his education he started teaching at several courts in the northeast part of what is now Iran and Afghanistan. Later on, he lived in Khwārazm, but when this town was seized by the conqueror Tīmūr (d. 807/1405), he joined the group of famous scholars living at Tīmūr's court in Samarqand, although he refused Tīmūr's first invitation, because he was planning a journey to the Hijaz⁵ – most

2 Madelung, *At-Taftāzānī und die Philosophie* 231.

3 Fakhry, *History* 203–5.

4 Madelung, *Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī* 95.

5 Khwāndmīr, *Tārīkh-i ḥabīb* iii, 545.

probably to fulfill the pilgrimage, this may be considered a kind of self-imposed exile to escape the wishes of Tīmūr, similar to al-Ghazālī's retreat.⁶ But al-Taftāzānī had to accept the second invitation and spent the last decade of his life in Samarqand. It is during this time that he finished his great theological works, in particular *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid*, which is of special interest here.⁷ He was treated with great honor by Tīmūr, but then he lost in a debate with al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) and is said to have lived in severe grief about this until his death in 793/1390.⁸

According to a remark by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), by the year 1400 al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* was already known in Egypt and at al-Azhar University, where it is still in use today.⁹ *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* begins in the style of a *summa theologica* by presenting the traditional ideas of twelfth-century Islamic theology following the above-mentioned orthodox Ash'arī school of Muslim theology. It contains not only the dogmatic positions, but according to the tradition of Islamic *kalām*-theology also the objections to these positions and their refutations. The structure of the *Sharḥ* follows the typical pattern of theological dogmatic works, which resemble each other in structure, like the *Ṭawālī' al-anwār* of 'Abdallāh al-Bayḍāwī or the famous *Kitāb al-Mawāqif fī 'ilm al-kalām* of 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī.¹⁰ His detailed argumentation fits the description of traditional *kalām* according to the concept of "exhaustive investigation and disjunction" (*al-sabr wa-l-taqṣīm*).¹¹

The chapter of greatest interest here may be found in the last section, which is about *al-sam'īyyāt* (literally "things which are heard"), i.e., affairs known only by revelation and not through reason, although reasoning plays a significant role in elaborating on the topic. This last section contains a chapter about the resurrection and the place of return (*ma'ād*), which means the hereafter. It will be shown why the expression "place of return" became the preferred theological term for the hereafter.

6 Lange, *Justice* 96.

7 Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab* vi, 320.

8 Madelung, Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī 95–6.

9 Among these theological works there is, first of all, the very popular systematic handbook *Sharḥ al-'aqā'id al-Nasafiyya* (Commentary on the creed of al-Nasafi), which was used for teaching at several *madrasas* soon after his death. *Sharḥ al-'aqā'id al-Nasafiyya* was furnished with numerous commentaries and was used as an introduction to *kalām* theology at al-Azhar in Cairo until 1961. *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* is still in use at al-Azhar University – at least the chapter concerning resurrection and the hereafter (*al-ma'ād*) is part of the curriculum at the advanced level.

10 Madelung, At-Taftāzānī und die Philosophie 229; Watt and Marmura, *Der Islam II* 468.

11 Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī* 99.

3 The Resurrection as a Return

As mentioned, the idea of resurrection is fundamental to Islamic faith. A first approach can be made by comparing the Quranic expression for this dogma to the term later used by theologians like al-Taftāzānī when he dealt with topics of eschatology.

In the Quran, resurrection is mentioned as a return (*ma'ād*) only once (Q 28:85), but as a rising up (*qiyāma*), i.e., from the tomb, 70 times.¹² Furthermore, *qiyāma* comes closer to our image of resurrection, which is connected with the concrete picture of leaving the lying position in the grave. Yet this Quranic term, i.e., *qiyāma*, is rarely used in theological writings, though we do find it in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Uṣūl al-dīn*,¹³ and it occurs in more recent publications on eschatology. Beside this there are expressions such as *al-yawm al-ākhir* or *aḥwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al-ākhirā* (the last day or the circumstances of the dead and the affairs of the hereafter)¹⁴ that are used to refer to eschatological topics. However, we find the Arabic word *ma'ād*, which means return as well as the place of return, in all the later theological works like al-Rāzī's *Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Ījī's *Mawāqif*, and al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ* as the technical term for resurrection.¹⁵ How can this change be explained? A closer look at the period and context of al-Ash'arī as the founder of the orthodox conception shows that, in his *Kitāb al-Luma'*, there is no chapter on resurrection, neither as *qiyāma* nor as *ma'ād*.¹⁶ In the presentation of al-Ash'arī's teachings in Ibn Fūrak's *Mujarrad*¹⁷ there is also no comprehensive chapter on resurrection. However, we can find some eschatological topics mentioned at the end of the comprehensive *ma'ād* chapters of al-Ījī or al-Taftāzānī in the *Kitāb al-Luma'* or the *Mujarrad*. Obedience and disobedience, reward and punishment or different kinds of sins (*kabā'ir* and *ṣaghā'ir*) are allotted in the chapters concerning the attributes of God (*ṣifāt*),¹⁸ just and misleading [acts] (*ta'dil wa-tajwīr*),¹⁹

12 Bormans, Resurrection 434–5.

13 Al-Rāzī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*.

14 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Tadhkira*.

15 Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal* 537; al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 371; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 82. Among later Ash'arī theologians, only al-Bayḍāwī names the chapter on eschatology in the *Tawālī'* "*al-ḥashr wa-jazā'*," i.e., the resurrection assembly and the recompense.

16 Al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma'*.

17 Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*.

18 Al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma'* 8–9.

19 Ibid., 70–4.

faith (*īmān*)²⁰ and promise and threat (*al-wa'd wa-l-wa'id*)²¹ in *al-Luma'* or in chapters discussing the names for works of obedience and disobedience (*asmā' al-ṭā'āt wa-l-ma'āṣī*)²² and sins (*dhunūb*)²³ in *Mujarrad*. Generally speaking, we find discussions of eschatological topics in the context of the definition of who is a believer and who is an unbeliever.²⁴

However, a single and rather small chapter in Ibn Fūrak's writing does have eschatological themes as its special content. It deals with events after an individual's death and at doomsday, like the crossing of the bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) above the hellfire, the weighing of human deeds (*mīzān*), and reaching the basin in paradise (*hawḍ*).²⁵ Al-Taftāzānī is also concerned with these elements of the world to come, but he gives only a short statement concerning their existence. The other themes already mentioned like obedience and disobedience or sin are dealt with by al-Taftāzānī in a later section – the last third of the chapter on resurrection. We can see that these eschatological topics, rather widely distributed in earlier works, are combined in later theological works into a comprehensive chapter. But a more important change – and one that leads us to the question of the term *ma'ād* – is the fact that before the explanation of common eschatological topics al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ* includes five paragraphs (*mabāḥith*) concerning the philosophical discussion of whether a restoration of the vanished nonexistent (*i'ādat al-ma'dūm*) or a bodily resurrection is logically possible.²⁶ In this regard there is only one paragraph in Ibn Fūrak's chapter on persistence (*baqā'*), disappearance (*fanā'*), restoration (*i'āda*), and second beginning (*ibtidā'*),²⁷ which insists that everything that existed at one time can be created a second time.²⁸ One of the terms we find here is restoration (*i'āda*) and the thing to be restored (*mu'ād*), which is closely related to resurrection. Both terms for restoration (*i'āda*) and the thing to be restored (*mu'ād*) are derived from the same Arabic root as *ma'ād*, but the first one designates a process rather than a place, which is implied by the term *ma'ād*. Even if *mu'ād* seems to be very close to *ma'ād*, it is not a place but the substance that is restored. This difference in the meaning of the two words is

20 Ibid., 75–6.

21 Ibid., 79–80.

22 Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad* 149–57.

23 Ibid., 157–60.

24 Ibid., 149–50.

25 Ibid., 170–3.

26 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 82–111.

27 Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad* 237–43.

28 Ibid., 242.

corroborated by the fact that the paragraph is not imbedded in the context of eschatology, but grouped together with chapters concerning physical properties of substances and attributes. *Ma'ād* signifies the hereafter in opposition to our world, whereas *mu'ād* is just an expression for every element that can come into existence again. Nevertheless, the paragraph under consideration here develops some arguments that have been repeated by later authors seeking to prove the possibility of bodily resurrection.

We have observed that in al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ*, the discussion of restoration and persistence is combined with the topic of resurrection and discussed in a broader frame. From this we can argue that the general pattern of theological manuals of this time, which start with a long epistemological introduction, is sometimes also repeated in the chapters on specific subjects. This does not answer the question of why the term *ma'ād* is chosen as a title for the whole chapter on eschatology, which is shaped by later Ash'arī authors in a way that is very different than the presentation of the founder himself. It is especially interesting that the use of the term as a notion of a place is new and its appearance is still unanswered.

When considering the influence of philosophical terminology on the *kalām* theology of this time, it seems logical to look at the philosophical works themselves. The term *ma'ād* appears in the title of one of the best known works of Ibn Sīnā, i.e., his *Risāla al-Aḍḥawiyya fī l-ma'ād* (Epistle on the afterlife for the feast of sacrifice).²⁹ *Ma'ād* as return may be found in Ibn Sīnā's cosmological history as the reverse movement of the emanation or creation process beginning with the first cause from which the world originated. This first movement is a cosmic development, in which celestial spheres that are associated with the planets appear. Each of these celestial spheres is further from the first perfect cause. The last one is that of the moon, where the whole process of emanation is no longer purely intellectual or spiritual, but rather becomes material. As a result, we live on the earth under the moon in a world made of the four material elements of fire, water, earth, and air.³⁰ In Ibn Sīnā's conception, human beings, though living in the material sphere under the moon have immortal souls and are thus combinations of spiritual souls and material bodies. Here the first movement comes to an end. The second movement, which takes place in Ibn Sīnā's cosmological history, is the return – *al-ma'ād*. This return means that the human soul is separated from all material, i.e., bodily, affairs that determine our existence on earth. The end of this second movement is the return to the spiritual origin of everything. This whole conception

29 Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla*.

30 Nasr, *Introduction* 203–6.

can be seen as a reformulation of a Neoplatonic concept in the terms of medieval Islamic philosophy.

However, Michot argues that the use of *ma'ād* in a Neoplatonic conception like that of Ibn Sīnā is already an accommodation to *kalām* theology. He argues that "*Kitāb al-Ma'ād*" is the common name for the chapter dealing with eschatological topics – "est habituellement le titre donné au chapitre des fins dernière."³¹ But as we have seen, the existence of a chapter on eschatological matters and its designation as "*Kitāb al-Ma'ād*" seems to be a later development that occurred in Ash'arī theology only after the debate with Ibn Sīnā's position. One might argue that the term became familiar in the *kalām* of the Mu'tazila, but Josef van Ess states that *ma'ād* replaced the older terms, and he does not state that this change took place during the period of the early Mu'tazila, which he analyzed in his major work in great detail. He suggests that there might be a reason that the verb *a'āda* has the meaning of repetition which functions in the discussion as a proof of the divine omnipotence. God was not only able to create at the beginning of all time, but He is also able to repeat His creation as He wills.³² The result was the shift from the common Quranic expression *qiyāma* to *i'āda*. But van Ess' argument does not explain the use of *ma'ād*, with its spatial meaning. Gimaret also analyzes the divine name *al-mu'id*, the one who brings back to existence; he explains that this is the capacity to change the ontological quality of a thing from non-existence to a new existence, without implying place or the creation of a new place.³³ But the notion of place is what is crucial for later theologians like al-Taftāzānī.

This observation makes it very improbable that the shift in terminology happened in the development of the Mu'tazilī *kalām* and renders it once again more probable that Ibn Sīnā is crucial for the development of theological terminology in *kalām* theology. It seems very important to notice that the point under consideration here is not the usage of *ma'ād* as a word, which may appear in the context of eschatology in the works of Muslim scholars, but its usage as the central technical term for eschatology and as a title of a chapter in later Sunni theological works. Michot himself also speaks about Ibn Sīnā's conception of *ma'ād*, which is highly complex and which "is situated at the crossover (*carrefour*) of physics, metaphysics, psychology, and anthropology as well as moral and religion and other disciplines as well."³⁴ Of course the crossover is an intellectual one, but it implies a spatial notion of talking about physics and

31 Michot, *Destinée* 9–10, reference 46.

32 Van Ess, *Theologie* iv, 558.

33 Gimaret, *Noms* 298.

34 Michot, *Destinée* 13.

even if it is considered by Ibn Sīnā as an intellectual place, this may be the core reason why the later theologians tried to reshape the very same term *ma'ād* as a material space. This becomes more clear when we compare his definition of return with that displayed by al-Taftāzānī.

In Ibn Sīnā's conception of *ma'ād* as a return of the soul to its origin in immaterial cosmic spheres, the recombination of the immortal soul and the dead body does not make any sense. This recombination would even deny the meaning of the two movements described earlier. For him, the description of a bodily resurrection as given in numerous Quranic verses has to be taken as purely metaphorical according to the common use in the Arabic language.³⁵ It is a colorful and vivid presentation for people who cannot understand the full reality demonstrated in philosophical terms.³⁶ According to Ibn Sīnā, the truth is that the deeds of humans during their earthly existence do influence the fate of their souls in the hereafter inasmuch as the human soul after death either remains attached to physical needs and comforts or feels freed of such earthly matters and rises to the immaterial state. The former would be the equivalent of life in hell, the latter to heavenly pleasures as depicted in the Quran.

Ibn Sīnā's own conception, also called "spiritual resurrection," was branded by al-Ghazālī as unbelief.³⁷ Al-Taftāzānī agrees that it is not acceptable to interpret the Quranic description of corporal punishment and blessing allegorically (*lā yaḥtamilu aktharuhā al-ta'wīl*) with the intention to prove the conception of spiritual resurrection. It is interesting to see, however, that after the discussion of philosophical objections against bodily resurrection, the expression for return (*ma'ād*) which we examine in more detail, also became the standard theological term for al-Taftāzānī and many other theologians. But we can also detect some differences within this group of later works on *kalām*: While al-Ījī begins immediately with the discussion of the possibility of the return to existence,³⁸ al-Taftāzānī opens the chapter with a definition of its title *ma'ād*. He ascribes to the notion of *return* several specific meanings in the context of eschatology, i.e., return from the annihilated into existence, return to life after death, and a recombination of spirits and bodies.³⁹ Taking over the terminology of Ibn Sīnā, he gives it a quite different content, the only link seems to be the fact that it relates to the further destiny of human existence. The influence of philosophical reasoning on *kalām* is important because the

35 Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla* 49–53.

36 Ibid., 57.

37 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* 226.

38 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 371.

39 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 82.

change in naming implies the concept of *return*, and this seems to imply more than the concrete picture of *rising* (*qiyāma*). Beyond that, the dogma of the hereafter and the process of restoration, known to former authors as *iāda*, became imbedded in a conception of a place of further existence. Returning could now also be interpreted as the return of the soul to the body, which had been separated after death. Thus, the notion of *ma'ād* continues until today to be used in theological manuals, for example at al-Azhar University, which follows the Ash'arī *kalām* tradition, it is formulated in the writings of al-Ījī and al-Taftāzānī.⁴⁰ It can be argued that this expression is selected only by authors who adopt the concept of a pre-existing soul⁴¹ and a soul that is separated from the body at the moment of death and which continues to exist until it is reunited with the resurrected body on judgment day.⁴²

Nevertheless this place of return in *kalām* theology is a notion of a material hereafter consisting of hell and paradise, whereas Ibn Sīnā envisioned a return to purely spiritual celestial spheres. This leads to the discussion about spiritual or bodily resurrection.

4 Spiritual Resurrection?

A discussion about how resurrection is to be considered in theological works first seems rather surprising, as one finds numerous verses predicting a bodily resurrection without any doubt, for example: "Look further at the bones, How We bring them together and clothe them with flesh." (Q 2:259),⁴³ or: "The day when the earth will be rent asunder from (men) hurrying out, that will be a gathering together – Quite easy for us" (Q 50:44). In Q 28:85 the noun *ma'ād* is used: "Verily, He Who ordained The Quran for thee, will bring thee back to the Place of return."

But why did theologians decide to discuss this matter in such detail? To understand this discussion, we must look at some of the arguments Ibn Sīnā puts forward against the idea of bodily resurrection. Some of his arguments belong to metaphysics, like his consideration that God's acts do not change –

40 The book in use at the University of Damascus, for example, has a chapter on eschatological contents entitled: "The world to come, its circumstances and the responsibility of a human being towards God." It describes the events at the judgment day without dealing with philosophical objections. Al-Khann, *Mabādī*.

41 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 90.

42 Ibid., v, 98.

43 All Quranic quotations in this paper are based on Yusuf Ali (trans.), *The glorious Qur'ān*.

though in his view exactly this would happen if we consider a second creation following the pattern of the first creation, because there it makes no sense for the All-knowing and All-mighty God to destroy something and then restore it in the same way using matter. For Ibn Sīnā, with the entry of the soul into a body the individuation of the soul begins, but after death the soul gains further perfection, albeit without a corporal body, which means that death takes away the inclination of men toward corporal pleasures.⁴⁴ The theological answer is that the change in God's will would happen only if He renounces the resurrection announced and promised in the Quran several times.

But how does Ibn Sīnā, as a Muslim, deal with this striking Quranic argument, which, based on the verses presented, appears very convincing to faithful Muslims? In his *Risāla*, Ibn Sīnā argues that even theologians concede that all verses of the Quran that ascribe human attributes to God are to be regarded as allegories, so that, for example, His hand becomes His power. Following Ibn Sīnā, the same should be done in the case of the verses concerning bodily resurrection, as al-Fārābī did before. He concludes that these verses only appear to be about corporal blessing or punishment to make the ordinary people understand that there will be a reward in the world to come. However, as mentioned above, only a philosopher is able to know that the reward will be purely spiritual in nature. Like the most important theologians before him, such as al-Ghazālī, al-Bayḍāwī, and al-Ījī, al-Taftāzānī argues that there is a great difference between the allegorical interpretation of God's hand as His power, on the one hand, and the allegorical interpretation of the whole Quranic conception of paradise and hellfire as a colorful description of a truly spiritual second existence on the other. So, it is indeed impossible to find a place that could be described as the place of God in the full meaning of the expression – which would imply that this place of God's presence is located on the right or on the left with respect to a human being. Here we need an allegorical interpretation. But it is a very different thing to say – and this is what al-Taftāzānī does say – that *all* events with corporal reward predicted in the Quran concerning doomsday and the hereafter can truly take place.⁴⁵ Here, we should believe in the literal meaning of the Quranic word. Otherwise, if there were not a hell or a paradise like those described in the revelation, the message of the Prophet would turn out to be close to falsehood (*kadhḥ*) or misguidance (*taḍlīl*).⁴⁶

Although al-Taftāzānī confirms that the revelation has to be understood according to its literal meaning, he uses the philosophical argument that the

44 Gardet, *Pensée* 98–105.

45 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 93.

46 Ibid., v, 93.

truth does not reach simple-minded people in every case. He does this when he refutes a very strict literal interpretation that speaks of a complete bodily resurrection of the very same material body, i.e., out of rotten bones and dust (Q 56:47; 36:78). Al-Taftāzānī talks about this issue in only a few lines, but he finishes his refutation of the identical bodily resurrection at the end, stating that the truth would not reach the minds of people who believe in this.⁴⁷ We return to the content of this issue below; here it is important that al-Taftāzānī raises the very same philosophical argument *against* the notion of bodily resurrection from the very same material.

But why does al-Taftāzānī as a theologian not accept the bodily resurrection, i.e., the resurrection of the body from the very same material, and attack Ibn Sīnā's conception of a spiritual resurrection? To understand this, we have to look once again at Ibn Sīnā's argumentation. The philosopher protested in his *Risāla* against bodily resurrection not only on metaphysical grounds but also added physical grounds, one of which we emphasize here.

In the Aristotelian tradition he speaks of form (*ṣūra*) and matter (*mādda*), out of which a human being is composed. But it is only the form, i.e., the soul that survives.⁴⁸ Human acts originate from this inherent form – and thus only the form or the soul can be rightfully punished or rewarded, whereas the matter, i.e., the body, turns into dust after death. If a new human being is to be built up from this matter, it would be another human being, and the matter used would not be subject to some “pre-deserved” punishment or reward.⁴⁹ The problem of identity is even more critical when we consider what can happen in a region where cannibalism is practiced. If a man cannibalizes another man and part of the cannibalized man becomes part of the cannibal, would the portion cannibalized be restored to life within the cannibal or as part of the cannibalized person? Whatever the case, one of the two could not be restored to life completely as himself.⁵⁰

The theological answer to this objection is based on the consideration that there is a difference between the original atomic body particles (*al-ajzā' al-aṣliyya*) and the particles of the body resulting from its feeding (*al-ḥāṣila bi-l-taghdhiya*).⁵¹ That is why the original atomic particles of the one cannibalized would be residue for the cannibal. The cannibal's body would not change, because, on the physical level, the act of cannibalism equals the act of feeding,

47 Ibid., v, 96: “*lam yakhtir bi-bālihim.*”

48 Ibn Sīnā, *Risāla* 64–5.

49 Ibid., 65.

50 Ibid., 79.

51 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 95.

i.e., nourishment enters one's body and subsequently leaves it. The cannibalized person dies and his body ceases to exist, but this is not completely different from a death under other circumstances. So, based on this difference bodily resurrection of both can indeed take place. This part of al-Taftāzānī's answer to Ibn Sīnā's objection may be found already in the *Ṭawālī' al-anwār* of al-Bayḍāwī⁵² and the *Mawāqif* of al-Ījī,⁵³ but al-Taftāzānī goes on to say if an unbeliever eats a believer, it would seem to be unavoidable that either parts of the unbeliever would enter into paradise or parts of the believer would go to hell.⁵⁴ This would be quite unjust, because in the latter case the believer would be brutally cannibalized and then punished in the hellfire. Here al-Taftāzānī adds dimension to the question of one's destiny in paradise or hell by combining the physical issue with a moral aspect, which is a different context than Ibn Sīnā's thought of a region far away, known only by hearsay.

In both cases, the distinction between the original atomic body particles and particles of the body resulting from its feeding called bodily residue (*faḍl*) could perhaps be seen as a concession to philosophical argumentation, as the position of the identical resurrection of the body, which seems to be the teaching of the Quran, is reformulated as seen above. Now, we see why al-Taftāzānī argues against those who adhere to the absolute literal meaning, which is repudiated by the original philosophical thesis that the truth does not reach the simple-minded. It becomes clear that al-Taftāzānī, on the one hand, refutes this argument when it is directed toward bodily resurrection (as in the case of Ibn Sīnā, who favored a purely spiritual resurrection). On the other hand, al-Taftāzānī himself uses the argument when he refutes the conception of the bodily resurrection of the same body; this becomes impossible to defend after conceding that the body is divided into atomic particles and bodily residue.

Al-Taftāzānī was dealing with those who argued for the identical bodily resurrection based on the literal meaning of the Quran. But the Mu'tazila also argued that the identical body had to be resurrected. They hold that justice is obligatory (*wājib*) even for God, and that consequently reward or punishment must reach the exact same person who committed a sin or acted in obedience to God's law. This led them to the concept of the identical bodily resurrection as well. Al-Ash'arī refuted the dogma of the necessity upon God himself, but the Ash'arī theologian al-Taftāzānī began using Ibn Sīnā's physical objection, which says that identical resurrection is not logically thinkable, as only essential parts of the body (*al-ajzā' al-aṣliyya*) can be resurrected. Because not all of

52 Al-Bayḍāwī, *Ṭawālī'* 221–2.

53 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 373.

54 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 94–5.

the identical material is resurrected, the recompense in turn also cannot reach the very same material, as held by the Mu'tazila.⁵⁵ Implicitly it may follow for al-Taftāzānī that the impossibility to punish the very same material leads to the denial of justice as being obligatory for God in the strict sense of the Mu'tazila. Thus, he reinforced a dogma which was held by the Ash'arī school in general.

5 The Existence of Paradise and Hell

There is another example in which al-Ījī and al-Taftāzānī use philosophical language in a theological controversy. This debate is not advanced by a philosophical objection to a crucial theological position, as in the example of resurrection. On the contrary, it is a controversy between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arī school dealing with the interpretation of some Quranic verses concerning the moment of the creation of paradise and hellfire. Al-Ījī and al-Taftāzānī adhere to the traditional Ash'arī position that stresses that both places had already been created in accordance with Q 3:131–3, where paradise is described as a place for the God-fearing and hell is said to have been prepared for the unbelievers. However, for the majority of the Mu'tazila the advance existence of paradise and hell did not make sense. For them, it is unimaginable that God should create something without having any immediate use for it. Rather, they believe that both abodes will be created at the moment when the resurrection itself takes place.⁵⁶ Furthermore, al-Taftāzānī follows the identification of paradise with the garden in which Adam and Eve dwelled, as outlined by al-Ījī, and adds that it would be a mockery against religion to claim that they lived in a garden here on earth.⁵⁷ This identification stresses the position that both abodes have already been created, thus contradicting the view of the Mu'tazila. He refers to the Mu'tazilī Abū Hāshim (d. 321/933), the son of al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915–6),⁵⁸ and 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025).⁵⁹

Whereas he refutes the argument that paradise and hell would be of no use at the moment as simply weak, like al-Ījī he deals in a very detailed manner with another point, which concerns a problem in the interpretation of the verse: "Everything will perish except His Face" (Q 28:88). The Mu'tazila interpreted this verse in the sense that everything will be annihilated except His

55 Ibid., v, 92.

56 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 375.

57 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 108–9.

58 The works of Abū Hāshim are lost, see Gardet, Al-Djubbā'ī.

59 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 108.

Face. The annihilation of *everything* except God would even include the hereafter, so that paradise and hell would also be annihilated for at least a moment, if they already existed. But God also promised eternal food (*akluhum dā'im*) for the inhabitants of paradise (Q 13:35), and this would be in danger if paradise were to disappear.⁶⁰

Al-Ījī opens the discussion in his *Mawāqif* with the consideration about what the expression “eternal food” could mean: On the one hand, it could be understood as a continuous stream of food, so that for everything that is eaten new food is delivered. On the other hand, taken literally, this is not even imaginable.⁶¹ Then he puts forth a further consideration based on philosophical arguments, and says that the meaning of perishable (*hālik*) could be the possible weakness of its ontological condition as possible being (*mumkin*).⁶² As mentioned above, *possible* is a very important category of Ibn Sīnā's ontology and became part of his theological terminology. Here it seems to be introduced in the theological debate as a special argument, too.

Al-Taftāzānī starts with the very general statement that there is a consensus on this question, and that texts exist with a very clear meaning in this regard. Then he refers to an earlier chapter, where he also argued that the meaning of perishable (*hālik*) is just possible (*mumkin*), which is defined as “something that does not attain existence except with regard to its cause.”⁶³ Here, we see that he employs the same terminology as al-Ījī, though al-Taftāzānī's argumentation is a bit more detailed and points more clearly to Ibn Sīnā's conception in the *Shifā'* itself: “We thus say: That which in itself is a necessary being has no cause, while that which in itself is a possible being has a cause.”⁶⁴ Al-Taftāzānī takes the need for a cause into his definition of the destructible, whereas al-Ījī only says because of the *weakness of the possible being*. This formulation does not refer to the origin of the weakness mentioned by al-Taftāzānī who notes the need for a cause as the crucial fact rendering a thing destructible: because the thing can cease to exist if the cause is missing. Al-Bayḍāwī says simply that it is destructible because nonexistence comes over it.⁶⁵ To understand how the reading of destructible as possible in al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ* is helpful in the discussion of the existence of hell and paradise before doomsday, we

60 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 375; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 109.

61 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 375.

62 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 375: “*al-murād annahu hālik fī ḥadd dhātihi li-ḍa'f al-wujūd al-inkānī*.”

63 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 102: “*al-ma'nā annahu hālik fī ḥadd dhātihi li-kawnihi mumkinan lā yastahiqq al-wujūd illā bi-l-naẓar ilā l-'illa*.”

64 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'* 30.

65 Al-Bayḍāwī, *Tawālī'* 225: “*li-anna l-'adam yaṭra' 'alayhi*.”

have to consider the whole metaphysical concept of Ibn Sīnā. There we find the division between the necessary being – *al-wājib al-wujūd* – and the possible being – *al-mumkin al-wujūd*. If we compare this conception with the division in the Quranic verse, it seems quite clear that in this case “everything will perish” (*kull shay’ hālik*) is read as a characterization of all created things, which are only possible in existence. “His Face” (*wajhuhu*) – as *pars pro toto* for God – is read as the necessary being. With regard to this allegorical meaning of the verse, it is not predicted that everything will be annihilated at one point in time, as it was interpreted by many scholars before. This gave rise to the problem of how the destruction of paradise and the promise of eternal food in paradise could be reconciled.

Ibn Sīnā’s ontology appears to be very helpful here, but it is rather surprising because of the fact that Ibn Sīnā’s argumentation – that “the cause of a thing does make it necessary, although it is never necessary in itself” – is seen as a departure from the radical contingency doctrine of the *kalām* theology.⁶⁶ But the whole issue of causality related to this problem is not mentioned by al-Taftāzānī or al-Ījī.

This might be the reason the ontological concept of Ibn Sīnā is mentioned only briefly in the writings of these theologians. Al-Ījī concludes in the *Mawāqif* that if paradise were to be annihilated, it would be for just one single moment (*ānan*).⁶⁷ Al-Taftāzānī ends this discussion by saying that even in heaven meals start and end, and that there could be a moment’s break in between them when annihilation could take place.⁶⁸ Perhaps we are allowed to add here what seems implicit, i.e., that this short break could easily take place without disturbing the eternal blessings of the inhabitants of paradise.

6 Repentance

The third point to be examined here is repentance, which was not part of the major discussions of philosophers and theologians, but rather emerged in the earlier theological debate between the Mu’tazilīs and the Ash’arīs. Nevertheless, it adds one more interesting aspect to the picture, namely, how al-Taftāzānī paves the “road to paradise” in his *Sharḥ*.

As we have seen, the Mu’tazilīs argued that the same body that committed sins should be punished, and that the promise given in the Quran should be

66 Goodman, *Avicenna* 66.

67 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 375.

68 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 109.

fulfilled in paradise. Concerning the destiny of the sinner, the Mu'tazila argued that someone who has done works of obedience as well as misdeeds will be in hell eternally if he did not repent, because only repentance can absolve the sinner.⁶⁹ Al-Taftāzānī refutes this according to the consensus of Muslim scholars: Anyone who has converted to Islam will be in paradise eternally, whereas anyone who renounces Islam will go to hell forever.⁷⁰ If we take this for granted, it would be disgraceful if the Muslim who has committed only one sin were punished like someone who renounced Islam completely as a religion. In a later paragraph on repentance (*tawba*) the question is discussed further. There, al-Taftāzānī follows al-Ījī again when he argues that repentance is defined as remorse (*nadam*) because of the evil of one's sins. Repentance is not accepted if it was made because of damage to the body resulting from committing the sin.⁷¹ When repentance takes place in the light of hellfire it is also invalid, because it happens in desperation.⁷²

Al-Taftāzānī enters the debate with the Mu'tazilī Abū Hāshim as to whether the decision to refrain from another sin is connected with the ability to commit the sin again. Of course, al-Taftāzānī, too, holds that repentance should include the wish to refrain in the future, but therein lies the problem: one may not have the ability to sin, which may render the act of refraining meaningless. For example, someone who is impotent is unable to commit adultery (*zinā*'), and someone who is dumb cannot defame (*qadhif*).⁷³ Whereas the Mu'tazila claimed that repentance is not fulfilled in this case, he argued that the decision (*'azm*) is linked to remorse (*nadam*) and not to future refraining (*tark*).⁷⁴

This position comes close to an outlook orientated toward human feelings and not the purely logical debate. This is emphasized even more when he says that the Mu'tazila considered remorse to include the continual cognitive decision to repent, whereas emotions are not necessary for this act. Al-Taftāzānī explains this when he says that it is too easy just to say: "I repent," as the Mu'tazila asked for, because sighing, grieving, and crying are vital parts of repentance as remorse.⁷⁵ In the long run, it is too hard to be obliged to repent at every moment as the Mu'tazila expected, because this turns the

69 Watt and Marmura, *Der Islam II* 233.

70 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 131–5.

71 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 380; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 163.

72 Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif* 381; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 163.

73 Al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ* v, 164.

74 Ibid.

75 Ibid., v, 165.

act into a duty that effectively cannot be fulfilled.⁷⁶ Beyond that, al-Taftāzānī holds that according to the Mu‘tazilī position, it is not possible to repeat repentance every time the sin enters one’s to consciousness, because if one does not repent again, this may be taken as a hint that one wishes to repeat the sin. For him it is more comprehensible to say that the sinner might wish to repress it (*ḍaraba ‘anhu ṣaffhan*), and that this is more probable than the wish to repeat it or to repent it promptly, which was the two-part option put forward by the Mu‘tazila.⁷⁷ With this statement, al-Taftāzānī completes his more psychological approach to the matter of repentance.

Taken together, we can detect a tendency in al-Taftāzānī’s *Sharḥ* to withdraw from the more technical discussion and to introduce a more psychological approach into the theological argumentation, which is not to be found in the *Mawāqif* of al-Ījī. Once the discussion finally reaches the question of the hereafter, we find that al-Taftāzānī’s *Sharḥ* presents a picture not only to prove the possibility in physical terms, but also to depict it as psychologically comprehensible, as in the case of repentance and its relevance for one’s eternal destiny.

7 Summary

The special character of al-Taftāzānī’s presentation of the hereafter in the *Sharḥ* becomes apparent first because of the range of previous discussions about this topic, which cover arguments of the Mu‘tazila and the Islamic philosophers – defending the Ash‘arī paradigm in general. He gives broad space to physical matter like the restoration of the annihilated body or the circumstances of bodily resurrection until it comes to questions of eternal destiny, which are also dealt with elaborately and with very detailed argumentation about deeds and misdeeds (omitted here).

Al-Taftāzānī refutes positions of the Mu‘tazila and of Islamic philosophers, but already the designation of the chapter as *ma‘ād* can be seen as resulting from the philosophical and theological debates that took place earlier and that influenced each other. In some of the details we can find even small changes in the dogma according to philosophical thinking, like his view that the body will not be restored in exactly the same way as it was before. Sometimes he reverses the arguments of one opponent against the other as seen in the case of cannibalism, where he used Ibn Sīnā’s objection to Mu‘tazilī theologians and their thoughts on the necessity of regarding God. Al-Taftāzānī even used an exe-

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid., v, 169.

getical argument derived from the philosophers against those who believe in a resurrection of the identical body, saying that there is sometimes a sort of symbolic language in the Quran. This is very surprising given al-Taftāzānī's refutation of this thought at the beginning of the discussion and the fear of theologians that, once the symbolic nature of the Quranic language is accepted, many statements made by the prophets could lose their strong character of obligation. Nevertheless, it shows that al-Taftāzānī's *Sharḥ* takes the philosophical objections seriously.

Furthermore, the ontological concept of Ibn Sīnā with its strong differentiation between *necessary* and *possible* appears in the discussion about the existence of paradise and hell before the judgment day, i.e., in a topic based on revelation. Al-Taftāzānī uses the conception here to corroborate the Ash'arī position against the Mu'tazila, as we have seen. However, he wrapped this argument in standard arguments. It is not possible to decide from reading the texts whether this caution is due to a his reluctance to use a philosophical solution within a theological, exegetical matter or due to the conception of causality, which Ibn Sīnā based on the grounds of ontology, but which was repudiated by the theologians.

At the very beginning of the chapter al-Taftāzānī himself emphasized that there is a certain foreignness (*ajnabiyya*) between topics like the return of the annihilated body and the method of argumentation in his work, on the one hand, and the language and the message of the Quran on the other.⁷⁸ The sophisticated presentation of theological positions is not a process only seen today, in reviews of theological history. It was felt and even expressed by al-Taftāzānī, too. Nevertheless, we find al-Taftāzānī's consideration with regard to repentance deeply obliged to a psychologically comprehensible argumentation. This element of self-reflection when considering the effect of its presentation for the reader may be a reason for its undisrupted use as a handbook for lessons in *kalām* at al-Azhar.

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⁷⁸ Ibid., v, 82.

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‘Being-Towards-Resurrection’: Mullā Ṣadrā’s Critique of Suhrawardī’s Eschatology

Hermann Landolt

1

The late Henry Corbin coined the expression ‘being for beyond death’ (*être pour au-delà de la mort*)¹ in order to mark a sharp contrast between Martin Heidegger’s core concept of ‘being-towards-death’ (*das Sein zum Tode*) and the eschatological inspiration of another by now famous philosopher of pure ‘being’ and/or ‘existence’ (*wujūd*),² whose significance had, however, captured little attention in the West until the French scholar really placed him on the map: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, the Shī‘ī philosopher of Safavid Persia better known as Mullā Ṣadrā (ca. 979/1571–2 to 1045/1635–6 or to 1050/1640–1).³ Corbin, whose unique understanding of Islamic philosophy as a spiritual endeavor in its own right continues to divide opinion,⁴ also distinguished himself early in his career as the first translator of Heidegger into French.⁵ He was, therefore, presumably also the first to perceive certain analogies between the twentieth-century German critic of academic *seinsvergessenheit* and the

1 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 80. See also Corbin’s fundamental study of ‘le vocabulaire de l’être’ in his edition and translation of Mullā Ṣadrā, *Le livre des pénétrations*, intro 62–70.

2 For an overview of the semantic varieties and history of the Arabic term *wujūd* see Leaman and Landolt, *Wuḍūd* (a.).

3 For these dates, as well as updated information on Ṣadrā’s life and works in general, including a very comprehensive bibliography, see Rizwi, Mulla Sadra. Particularly relevant for our theme are three studies by Corbin’s eminent disciple, Christian Jambet. See Jambet, *Se rendre immortel* [contains a fully annotated translation of Ṣadrā’s *Risāla fī l-ḥaṣhr* with an introduction]; Jambet, *L’acte d’être* [an excellent general study, English trans. by J. Fort, *The act of being*]; Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* [in my view a somewhat too spiritualist and ‘Cartesian’ interpretation of selected Ṣadrīan texts presented exclusively in French translations]. Of great interest is Jambet’s most recent essay, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie*.

4 Gutas, *The study of Arabic philosophy*. Gutas acknowledges Corbin’s merits for having drawn attention to the continuation of ‘Arabic philosophy’ after Averroes but denies any relevance of Islam to this tradition.

5 Landolt, *Henry Corbin* (1903–1978); Landolt, *Henry Corbin’s understanding of Mullā Ṣadrā*.

pre-modern Iranian thinker of the 'act of being' (*l'acte d'être*), as would seem to be implied in his frequently cited comment to the effect that Ṣadrā's innovative thesis of the 'primacy of existence' (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), as opposed to the 'primacy of quiddity' (*aṣālat al-māhiyya*, the view held notably by his own teacher, Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631–32)),⁶ amounted to nothing less than a 'revolutionary' overturn of the 'venerable metaphysics of the essences.'⁷ However, unlike more recent comparative essays on Ṣadrā and Heidegger,⁸ Corbin himself chose not to carry those analogies any further, nor did his *herméneutique spirituelle* have much in common with the 'existentialist' approach associated with the name of his famous Egyptian colleague, Abd el-Rahman Badawi.⁹ Skeptical in general of the virtues of comparative philosophy if unsupported by a phenomenological *wesensschau*,¹⁰ Corbin in fact rather opted for a fundamental incompatibility of twentieth-century European 'existentialism' with Ṣadrā's 'existential metaphysics.' Far from 'privileging' man's 'presence to this world,' as he put it, and drawing upon a 'universe of being which is hierarchically graded in an ample series of degrees and worlds,' this metaphysics, he suggested, points to man's liberation from this world through a notion of 'presence' engaging him *hic et nunc* in his *posthumous becoming*.¹¹

Without entering into the depth of Heidegger's thinking about the finality of being-in-the-world,¹² one can certainly say that nothing could be further from Ṣadrā than an 'existentialist' preoccupation with death, which of course does not mean that he ignored or denied the reality of human mortality as

6 See now Brown, *Time, perpetuity, and eternity*. Also see my remarks in Landolt, Henry Corbin et la question.

7 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 77ff.

8 Açıkgenç, *Being and existence*. Also see the less analytical but lively discussion in Kamal, *Transcendent philosophy*.

9 Badawi's 1940 thesis, *Le problème de la mort dans la philosophie existentielle*, was written in Cairo under the supervision of Alexandre Koyré. It was published in Cairo in 1964.

10 Corbin, *Philosophie iranienne* 22.

11 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 80 (slightly paraphrased here; emphasis mine). Also see Corbin in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Le livre des pénétrations*, intro 70–9.

12 A helpful analysis can be found in Allemann, *Hölderlin und Heidegger* 91–4. Alleman's conclusion is that Heidegger's thought was – in contrast to the romantic poet's whom the philosopher greatly admired – ultimately nihilistic, not 'mystical.' See also Emmanuel Lévinas' Heideggerian meditations in Rolland (ed.), *La mort et le temps*, especially 25–59, and El-Bizri, *Uneasy interrogations*. A mystical interpretation of Heidegger's 'being-towards-death' seems to have influenced Hellmut Ritter's classic *Das Meer der Seele* of 1955 (English trans. by J. O'Kane with the editorial assistance of B. Radtke as *The ocean of the soul* 42 and 656).

such. What animated him was, first of all, a profoundly Muslim vision of life in process towards its proper end and fulfillment in the hereafter (cf. Q 29:64), an Aristotelian *telos* to be fully actualized beyond this transitional world, and a frankly Neoplatonic (rather than 'gnostic,' see below) conception of the 'return' (*ma'ād* = *epistrophé*) of the many to the One. Essentially, his thinking can be seen as a philosophical meditation on the multivalent Quranic notion of *nash'a*, the 'creation' of human life in stages of generation, formation or configuration, with the most significant message doubtless being the promise (or threat) of the 'second' or 'ultimate growth' (*al-nash'a al-ākhirā*),¹³ one of the many Quranic expressions referring to the resurrection. It could perhaps be characterized more appropriately, if one is allowed to adapt Heideggerian language, as a philosophy of *being-towards-resurrection*.

This is of course a theme with a strong resonance within the Islamic tradition itself, though not necessarily in what is deemed 'Islamic' by 'fundamentalists' of all countries and times: the idea of the human being on its way to the 'major resurrection' (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) in stages paralleling the scale of nature, which is, as was first shown by Yves Marquet,¹⁴ at the core of the philosophy of the classical pro-Shi'i Neoplatonists known as the 'Brethren of Purity' (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā') and their Isma'ili 'cousins'.¹⁵ It was also famously given expression by the great post-classical Sufi poets 'Aṭṭār (d. 618/1221 or 627/1230) and Rūmī (d. 672/1273),¹⁶ among others. Here is a translation of 'Aṭṭār's particularly subtle version:

Why did you come to exist? When you did, a task fell upon you.
What am I saying? A steep mountain path is before you!

13 Cf. Q 29:20, 53:47, and 56:62, variously translated as 'naissance' (Blachère), 'growth' (Arberry), or 'Verleihen von Existenz' (Paret). For stages of 'growth' or 'configuration' within the present life cf. also Q 22:5–7, 23:14, 40:67. Quranic translations in this contribution are usually though not always from Arberry (trans.), *The Koran interpreted*.

14 Marquet, *La philosophie*, especially 383–403.

15 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* ii, 135 and 138–9 (cf. Marquet, *La philosophie* 162–3 and passim). Also see Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 297; trans. in Diwald, *Arabische Philosophie* 322–3. Diwald's reference (ibid.) to a 'typisch sufische Lehrvorstellung,' which she finds in Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), does not prove her general thesis that the Ikhwān were Sufi rather than Shi'ite. I borrow the expression 'pro-Shi'ite' as well as the translation of the Ikhwān's name as 'Brethren of Purity' from Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*. For a preliminary outline of a possible Isma'ili undercurrent in Ṣadrā, see my introduction to Badakhchani (ed. and trans.), *Paradise of submission* 1–11 and 244–7.

16 Nicholson (ed. and trans.), *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī* iii, vv. 3901–8. Cf. i, vv. 3165–8 and Nicholson's commentaries ad loc.

What offense did you commit that you were brought [down here], my friend?

Spiritually (*dar rāh-i ma'nā*) you are [meant to be] the marrow of every skin.

The minerals are the marrow of the elements (*arkān*), but then,

The plants are the marrow of the minerals.

From there the animals became the marrow of the plants,

After that, the marrow of the animals turned human.

From the humans, the Prophets became the quintessence, and

From among them, the 'Lord of lords' [i.e., Muḥammad] in particular.

Through these seven skies¹⁷ one spiritually

Must go up to the Court of the Master [i.e., God].

Whatever is far from the perfection of the Origin,

Truth-perceiving Nature is running away from it.

You were an inanimate thing, became a living one

When you were a 'nothing' you became a 'thing.'

What I mean is that in accordance with the original order

You should not stop the work for one moment.

From stage to stage you should step forward and

Free yourself from the knots of the net, one after the other!¹⁸

Ṣadrā develops this focal theme most prominently in the two concluding chapters of his '*summa philosophica*,' the *Four Journeys*,¹⁹ which are entirely devoted to the subject of spiritual *and* bodily 'return' [to God] (*al-ma'ād al-rūḥānī* and *al-ma'ād al-jismānī*), respectively, with the *latter*, on 'bodily return,' being the final chapter. There, as well as in his separate *Risāla fī l-ḥaṣhr* ('Treatise on resurrection'),²⁰ which is in fact a variant of the same final chapter of the *Four Journeys*, he attempts to demonstrate that all beings of Nature are bound to

17 The 'seven skies' presumably refer to the 'skins,' counting from the elements through the minerals, plants, animals, humans, prophets, and the Prophet Muḥammad, who evidently constitutes by himself the seventh stage. It should be noted that prophets are not simply humans but constitute a species by themselves as the 'sixth stage' of this heptadadic ascent. Given that the 'seven skies' are mentioned *after* the Prophet Muḥammad, one might even see here a poetic reference to the 'seven *īmāms*' of Ismā'ilism!

18 'Aṭṭār, *Asrār-nāma* 66–7 (vv. 1049–58), cf. trans. Tortel, *Le livre des secrets* 101–2. This passage should be seen in relation to another famous passage on the 'symbol of bodily resurrection' from the *Asrār-nāma* (vv. 706–23), on which see my 'Aṭṭār, Sufism and Ismailism.

19 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* [i.e., *al-Ḥikma al-muta'āliya fī l-asfār al-'aqlīyya al-arba'a*, henceforth *Asfār*, known as *The Four Journeys*] ix, 121–382.

20 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fī l-ḥaṣhr*.

‘revert’ in their own ways to ‘perfection,’ with the significant restriction that only the human being, the one that recapitulates the creation of all previous species in its own development from birth to death, is intrinsically capable of going all the way down to this ultimate end – provided one is a [true] believer having chosen the ‘straight path’ (Q 1:6). For Ṣadrā, then, the truth of Quranic assertions such as “O Man! Thou art labouring unto thy Lord laboriously, and thou shalt encounter Him”²¹ can be understood rationally in this sense, provided one has the ‘right’ understanding of the reality of existence ‘in motion,’ which is to say, his own. As if to make sure that this essential point will not be missed, he introduces this final chapter with a detailed though very condensed recapitulation of his whole philosophy in eleven ‘principles’ (*uṣūl*),²² which will have to be reduced and abbreviated here to a bare minimum, though an effort to render technical vocabulary as literally as possible has been made.

(Principle 1): The fundamental reality in every thing’s being existent (*al-mawjūdiyya*) is existence (*al-wujūd*) itself, whereas quiddity is secondary; for it is by existing in its particular ‘mode of being’ (*naḥw wujūdihi al-khāṣṣ bi-hi*) that a thing is *really* what it is, not by its quiddity or ‘thingness.’ Contrary to what ‘most of the recent philosophers assumed,’ existence is not a mental abstraction having no concrete counterpart but belongs, rather, to the concretely existing ipseities (*al-huwiyyāt al-‘ayniyya*) that have no mental counterpart, and to which only pure contemplation or ‘witnessing’ (*al-‘irfān al-shuhūdī*) can point.

(II): Individual existence by which things differ from each other is identical with their particular mode of being. What the philosophers call ‘differentiating accidents’ to be superadded to the essence are only signs and concomitants occurring by way of exchange to the individually existing ipseity, which remains the self-same throughout.

(III–V): Existence itself is in its very non-composite nature susceptible of ‘attenuation’ (*taḍa‘uf*) and ‘intensification’ (*ishtidād*). By virtue of the ‘motion of intensification’ (*al-ḥaraka al-ishtidādīyya*), then, a substance is by nature

21 Q 84:6. This verse is (among others) quoted by Ṣadrā in an important section of his *Risāla fi l-ḥudūth* to show the Quranic basis of his philosophical doctrine of ‘substantial motion’ (on which see below). Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fi l-ḥudūth* 25; trans. in Talgharizadeh, *Die Risāla fi l-ḥudūth* 100.

22 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 185–97. A different version summarized in eight principles is found in Mullā Ṣadrā’s *Ta’līqāt* on al-Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* (on which see below); this has been translated by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 652–3 and Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 101–3 as well as, most recently, by M. Fakhry in Nasr et al. (eds.), *An anthology* 157–8. A full translation of the ‘Eleven Principles’ discussed here can be found in Peerwani (trans.), *Spiritual psychology* 515–25.

capable of 'essential transformation' (*al-istiḥāla al-dhātīyya*), and the parts of a single continuous motion do not exist severally but as a whole. Matter is only the carrier of a thing's potentiality; the essential reality of a composite substance is its 'perfect form' (*al-ṣūra al-kamālīyya*, i.e., its entelechy).

(VI): Individual unity, which is identical with an individual thing's act of being (*wa-hiya 'ayn wujūdihi*), is not restricted to one degree but exists in a continuum, although this rule does not apply in the same way to immaterial and material substances. In the material body, due to its existential deficiency, opposite qualities such as blackness and whiteness cannot coexist whereas they do coexist in the soul. The more the human being becomes non-material (*tajarrud*), 'substantiated' (*tajawhur*) and intensified in terms of [perceptive] power and perfection, the greater its comprehension of all things will be.

Thus he proceeds gradually in perfection, until he fully integrates (*yastawfi*) the structure (*hay'a*) of all existence in his soul, that is, in his essence (*dhāt*). He is then "transformed," as the Shaykh [Ibn Sīnā] said in the *Metaphysics of The Healing*, "into an intelligible world which parallels the sensible world in its entirety and directly witnesses that which is the absolute bounty, the absolute good, the absolute beauty; uniting with it, receiving the imprints of its likeness (*mithālihi*), entering its way, becoming of its substance."²³

(VII): The root of the identity of a person is the soul, not the natural body which may be exchanged with an 'imaginal' form (*ṣūra mithālīyya*), as in dreams or in the world of the grave and the 'Isthmus' (*barzakh*) up to the day of resurrection (*yawm al-ba'th*), or with a form pertaining to the [ultimate] hereafter (*ṣūra ukhrawīyya*). Despite all these transformations, the person's identity remains the same because of the unity of the continuum. Existential particularities occurring on the way of this 'substantial motion' (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*) do not matter; what matters is the soul, itself on the way to becoming a purely non-composite, intellectual entity.

If it be asked whether the body of Zayd, for instance, is the same at the time of adolescence, infancy, and old age, both the negative and the

23 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 189. The reference is to Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', Ilāhiyyāt* book ix, chapter 7, 426; trans. by Anawati in Ibn Sīnā, *La métaphysique du Shifā'* ii, 159. Ṣadrā apparently understands the passage as referring to the soul's union with the Intellect, not with the Absolute itself. For him, the Absolute cannot be a 'substance.' Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 246.

affirmative answers will be correct under two different considerations. One is in consideration of the body *qua* matter, in which case it is in itself an entity here and now actualized (*amr muḥaṣṣal*). The second is to consider it *qua* genus, in which case it is an undetermined entity (*amr mubham*). In the first sense, the body is a part of Zayd, not what can be predicated of him [so the answer is no], whereas in the second sense, it can be predicated of him and is one with him [as a logical element of the definition, so the answer is yes]. If, however, the question is whether Zayd the adolescent is he who was a child and he who will become mature and [reach] old age, then there is only one answer, namely, yes. . . .

[VIII:] The imaginative power (*al-quwwa al-khayālīyya*) is a substance that subsists neither in any location of the body or its parts, nor does it exist in any dimension of the natural world. It is entirely separate from this world, a reality occurring in a substantial world that is intermediate between the two worlds, [i.e., between] the world of separate intellectual [substances] and the physical world of material [substances]. To establish this point with decisive proofs and arguments has been our unique contribution.²⁴

[IX:] The forms of imagination, indeed the forms of perception [in general], do not inhere in the soul as their substratum or in any other location. Rather, they subsist by virtue of the soul in the manner the act subsists by virtue of the agent, not in the way an attribute (*al-maqbūl*) subsists through the recipient subject (*al-qābil*). Similarly, vision, according to us, does not [occur] through the imprint of the figure of the seen object in a bodily member such as the pellicle, as was the opinion of the Naturalists, nor through the emission of rays [from the eye], as was assumed by the Mathematicians, nor through a 'knowledge-relation' (*idāfa 'ilmīyya*) that the soul would have with the external form when the conditions are met, as the Ishrāqīs believed. . . . As for the last-mentioned view, which is the one opted by the Shaykh Abū Naṣr [al-Fārābī] in the *Harmonization of the Two Views* and by the Slain Shaykh [i.e., al-Suhrawardī, see below] in the *Wisdom of Oriental Illumination*, we have already invalidated it.²⁵ Know, then, that the soul's vision – or, rather, its perception in general – is other

24 This is the principle most emphasized by Corbin. Ṣadrā himself returns to it frequently; see e.g., Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* viii, 177–200; ix, 221–2. He evidently wishes to distinguish himself thereby from Ibn Sīnā's pure intellectualism as expressed by the latter in his *al-Risāla al-Aḍḥawīyya* (see below, n. 34).

25 The references are to al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Jam'* 13–6; and (presumably) al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Hikmat al-ishrāq* §§99–104. It should be noted that neither al-Fārābī nor al-Suhrawardī

than its imagination [only] as long as it is connected to the body. In the first case [i.e., vision and general perception], it is in need of external matter and particular conditions [must be met] whereas in the second case [i.e., imagination], there is no such need. But when [the soul] leaves this world, the difference between imagination and sense perception no longer obtains, because the faculty of imagination, which is the storehouse of the senses, has been strengthened as it [too] has left the material body; weakness and deficiency have vanished from it, and the faculties have united and returned to their common principle [i.e., the soul]. The soul, then, does with its faculty of imagination what it [used to] do with the other faculties: it sees with the eye of imagination what it used to see with the physical eye, and its power, its knowledge, and its desire have become one. So, its perception of desirables is its very power and [capacity to] make them present to itself . . .

[x:] Just as quantitative forms and bodily shapes and figures [normally] result from the active principle with the participation of passive matter in accordance with its [degrees of] preparedness and receptiveness, so they may also result on the part of active principles and their modes of perception without the participation of matter. To this kind belongs the existence of the celestial spheres and the stars [which result] from the intellectual principles by way of direct origination (*ikhtirāʿ*) through mere acts of conceiving (*taṣawwurāt*), since there was no matter prior to the prime bodies that would have preceded them. Also to this kind belong the imaginal forms (*al-ṣuwar al-khayālīyya*) which emanate from the soul by virtue of [its] formative faculty (*al-quwwa al-muṣawwira*), such as bodies and shaped magnitudes that may well be greater than the cosmic spheres in the external world, or large wastes, deserts, tall mountains, cities, gardens, and trees such as were not created in the lands. These do not subsist in the body of the brain, nor do they inhere in the faculty of imagination . . . not even in the universal world of images (*ʿālam al-mithāl al-kullī*),²⁶ as we have explained earlier. No, they are in the kingdom of the soul, its [own] world and region, which is external to this material world. . . . Otherwise, everyone of sound sense would see them, which is not the case. . . . But there is no difference between them and that which

actually used the term *idāfa ʿilmīyya*; but it is clear that Ṣadrā thereby distinguishes himself not only from the classical *falāsifa* but also from al-Suhrawardī.

26 Presumably meaning al-Suhrawardī's *ʿālam al-mithāl* (see below). Ṣadrā refuses to consider *any* recipient since the forms exist by virtue of the act of the agent exclusively (above, Principle IX).

the soul sees [in the material world] through the power of the senses, except that they are [in this world] unstable and of weak substantiation due to the soul's preoccupation with other things. . . . Indeed, supposing that these preoccupations . . . were eliminated from it and its attention would be devoted exclusively to the act of imagination and form-conceiving, then the forms and bodies it conceives and creates (*taf'aluḥā*) through the faculty of imagination would be of the utmost possible solidity and firmest existence, and their effect would be stronger than that of material objects of perception, as we are told about the saints and the reality of miracles. Now, if this is the state of the soul . . . while it is still in this world . . ., what will it be, do you think, once it has cut its ties to the world completely, its power having grown strong, its activity firm? . . .

Ṣadrā's 'Eleventh Principle' is by itself a kind of a summary of the preceding ten. It leads directly to the main point by interpreting a famous passage from the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, i.e., the Arabic version of parts of the *Enneads* of Plotinus (d. 270 or 271)²⁷ in which the relationship of the noetic archetype to its 'imitations' in less elevated realms is discussed in terms of three ontological levels called the 'first,' the 'second,' and the 'third' man, respectively, and which the Arabic version in addition identifies as the 'intellectual' (or 'noetic,' *'aqlī*), the 'psychic' (*naḥsānī*), and the 'bodily' (*jismānī*) man. Ṣadrā interestingly turns the order upside down and speaks of the 'bodily man' as the 'first,' the 'psychic' as the 'second' and the 'intellectual' as the 'third':

[XI:] As you have already learned, the various worlds and stages of growth (*ajnās al-'awālīm wa-l-nasha'āt*) are, despite their innumerable multitude, reducible to three, although because of their interrelation the house of existence is [properly speaking] one: The lowest is the world of natural forms that are subject to generation and corruption. The intermediary [stage] is the world of the forms of perception by the senses [*qua*]

27 Badawī (ed.), *Aflūṭīn 'ind al-'Arab* 146, 1–9 (= Plotinus, *Enneads* VI, 7.6, 8–16). The same reference is also discussed earlier by Ṣadrā in the *Asfār* (ix, 97ff.) and in his *Risāla fi l-ḥashr* 349; trans. in Jambet, *Se rendre immortel* 135. Jambet has identified another ten quotations from the *Theology*, though surprisingly not this one (*Se rendre immortel* 188). Most of these are also found in the final chapter of the *Four Journeys*. In his *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, ed. Khwājawi, *Tawḥīd* i, 206–7, Ṣadrā uses the same model (though without explicit reference to 'Aristotle') but extends the notion of 'body' even further to give a positive interpretation of the controversial qualification of God himself as a 'body' by the Shi'ite theologian Hishām b. al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795–6; cf. Corbin, *De la philosophie prophétique* 60–6).

separate from matter, [which is only] the carrier of possibilities and preparedness [for] receiving opposites. The highest is the world of the intellectual forms and divine archetypes (*al-muthul al-ilāhiyya*).

You should know that the human soul is unique among all existents in that it [alone] has these three modes of generated beings while remaining permanent as an individual (*shakhṣ*). Thus, one [and the same] human being has from the beginning of childhood a natural way of being, with regard to which he is a 'mortal human' (*insān basharī*). Then he progresses in this existence, becoming step by step purer and more subtle in his substantiation (*tajawhurihi*), until another way of being becomes actual for him, which is psychic. In this respect, he is a 'psychic human belonging to the other world' (*insān nafsānī ukhrawī*), suitable for resurrection (*ba'th*) and arising (*qiyām*), having psychic limbs. This is the 'second human.' Then he may again be transposed gradually from this way of being, so that an intellectual way of being becomes actual for him. In this respect, he is an 'intellectual human' (*insān 'aqlī*), having intellectual limbs. This is the 'third human,' as was mentioned by the Teacher of the philosophers in the book *Theology*.²⁸ And these transpositions and transformations, by which one [and the same] individual travels on the 'way of truth [God]' (*sabīl al-ḥaqq*) up to the ultimate end, are unique to the human species. For, even though all things are turned toward the divine presence, yet the one that remains on the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), ending up eventually at its ultimate term, is not found in any other among the generated species than this one. For others, it will, then, be inevitable, supposing that they are in migration (*law furiḍa sulūkuhū*) toward the sacred presence, that their species be transposed to another through [the process of] generation and corruption, and that they reach first the gate of humanness and then, from there, the gate of the sacred presence.

As for the sequence of these three stages of growth in the ascending order of the return to God most high, it is in the reverse order of the initial descent from Him, though in another mode; for the initial chain is in the mode of immediate origination (*ibdā'*), without time and motion, whereas the chain of return is with motion and time.²⁹ Thus, man has ways of being prior to his advent (*ḥudūth*) as a material individual; and it is for this reason that the divine Plato asserted for the human souls an intellectual way of being prior to the advent of the body. Likewise, it is established in our true religion that the single human mortals (*afrād*

28 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 194 (see above, n. 27).

29 On time see also below n. 54.

al-bashar) have individually distinguished ways of being prior to their natural existence, as God indicated by this [Quranic verse]: ‘And when your Lord took from the sons of Adam their offspring from their loins . . .’ [Q 7:172]. And there are many traditions from our holy *imāms* to the effect that the spirits of the prophets and their legates were created from the clay of Elysium (*ṭīnat ‘illiyīn*) before the creation of the heavens and the earths, and that their bodies were created from [something] beneath that clay, as were the spirits of their followers and their Party; and that the hearts of the Hypocrites were created from the clay of Sijjīn [cf. Q 83:7–8], and that their bodies, and likewise the hearts of their followers, were created from [something] beneath that ugly clay. This tradition and similar ones point to the fact that man has ways of being prior to this one.

Thus the human being, on account of the primordial creation (*al-fiṭra al-aṣliyya*), turns gradually to the other world, returning to a goal he is meant to reach. Beginning with his material, this-worldly existence, [he turns] toward his formal, other-worldly existence, because the relationship of this world to the other is that of imperfection to perfection, or of the child to the mature person. And this is why in this [primary] existence, he is, like children because of their weakness and imperfection, in need of a cradle, which is place, and of a wet-nurse, which is time; but when his [motion] in his substance reaches its highest intensification, he leaves existence in this world for an existence in the other world, being prepared for the departure from this house to the ‘house of [true] dwelling’ (*dār al-qarār*, Q 40:39).

What happens up to this limit in the existence of the soul as an autonomous substance and form – which [limit] is referred to [in the Quran] as the ‘blowing of the trumpet’ (*naḥkh al-ṣūr*), necessitating natural death and departure from this stage of growth – applies equally to the believer and to the unbeliever, to the monotheist as well as to him who adds to the One (*al-mushrik*) and him who makes Him nugatory (*al-mu’aṭṭil*). For there is no contradiction between this [degree of] existential perfection and the absence of a need for corporeal matter, on one hand, and the suffering and punishment in the infernal fire and the perception of the painful torment, on the other; no: the [former] rather confirms the [latter]! This is because the intensification of existence necessitates departure from the material coverings and apparel, which in turn necessitates intensified perception of pain, torments, and of the results of the ugly deeds, evil acts, diseases, and ailments of the soul, which were overlooked in this material world due to the insensibility of nature and a covering placed over the inner sight. So, when the veil is gone, the pain

arrives! Thus, as long as the soul has not traversed all the limits (*ḥudūd*) – [first] the natural ones, then the psychic ones – the [human being] will not attain the neighborhood of God nor deserve to abide in His immediate presence.

Death, then, is the first station of the other world and the last station of this world, and after his departure from this world, man may become a captive in one of the *barzakhs* in between the two ‘houses’ – this world and the other world – for a longer or shorter period of time. And it may be that he ascends fast, by virtue of either the light of [true] knowledge, or the power of the deeds of pious obedience, or due to a divine attraction, or the intercession of the advocates (*al-shāfiʿūn*) – but the ultimate advocate is He who is the most merciful of all merciful ones.

As will have been noticed, Ṣadrā speaks here with some hesitation of a ‘supposed’ migration of lower-than-humans to the sacred presence, even though his whole doctrine requires that all things are in some way ‘in motion’ toward It (see below). The reason for this apparent hesitation is quite obviously that such a ‘migration’ could hardly be distinguished from an upwards *trans*-migration across the various species through the process of generation and corruption. In other words, it would come dangerously close to a certain kind of transmigrationism (*tanāsukh*), which is precisely what he consistently tries to avoid. Instead, he proposes a subtle theory of a universal transmigration of ‘being’ itself tending toward ultimate unity, which makes it possible for him to reject not only conventionally ‘orthodox’ conceptions of bodily resurrection in one’s own, arbitrarily re-created material body, but also any concrete metempsychosis in other material bodies, or *tanāsukh* as normally understood and usually deemed ‘heretical.’³⁰ As noted by Corbin,³¹ this double rejection corresponds almost exactly to the position taken by the Ismaʿili philosopher-poet Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 465/1072) against the more ‘concrete’ version of *tanāsukh* propounded (according to him) by his fellow-Ismaʿili *dāʿī* of the fourth/tenth century, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī, in his *Kashf al-mahjūb*.³² On this issue, however, Ṣadrā’s arguments are in fact mostly taken from Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) who, as is known, had already rejected both ‘bodily return’ and various kinds of *tanāsukh* in his so-called ‘esoteric’ *Risāla al-Aḥḥawīyya*.³³ Yet in Ṣadrā’s opin-

30 Freitag, *Seelenwanderung*. My review in *Bulletin critique des Annales islamologiques*. For Ṣadrā’s attitude in particular, see Kamada, *Metempsychosis*.

31 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 89, n. 119.

32 For more on Sijistānī see Landolt, *Kashf al-mahjūb* of Sejzi.

33 Anawati, *Un cas typique*. A more recent study is Jaffer, *Bodies, souls and resurrection*.

ion, precisely that *Risāla* leaves something to be desired. Perhaps one reason for his dissatisfaction is that the master-philosopher had also rejected there the idea of a 'subtle body' (*jism laṭīf*) he attributed to the Ḥarrānīan scientist-philosopher Thābit b. Qurra (d. 288/901). For Ibn Sīnā, even that 'subtle' body is still a material body, not something to be considered for the return to God.³⁴

2

As with 'existentialism,' and doubtless in sympathy with a more 'traditionalist' trend of thought as advocated notably by his frequent Iranian companion on the Path, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Corbin also refused to see any form of modern 'evolutionism' – which he dismissed rather categorically as a reductionist theory that has 'passed in the West to the status of a dogma' – in Ṣadrā's much-discussed theory of 'substantial motion' (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*), that is, his conception of the Aristotelian category of substance as being *essentially*, not *accidentally*, 'in motion' toward an end.³⁵ He certainly recognized that this theory implies at its core a fundamental 'un-rest of being' (*in-quiétude de l'être*) and entails a continuous process of ontic metamorphosis from the lowest to the highest modes, from inorganic matter to the highest forms of spiritual life. But, he strongly insisted on the profoundly eschatological nature of this process and its ending up in a human realm beyond the reach of science. He therefore preferred to speak of a world 'in *ascension*' rather than 'in *evolution*,' or of an '*ascensional élan* of being' based on a 'gnostic' conception of the 'threefold growth of Man' in the traditional domains of body, soul, and spirit, and tending toward what he termed a 'metaphysics of the resurrection.'³⁶ His

34 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Risāla al-Aḍhawīyya*, 109, 118–9, 158. For Ṣadrā's citations of the *Aḍhawīyya* see e.g., Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 150–1 and his *Ta'liqāt* (on al-Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*); trans. by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 607–9 and 612–5.

35 Recent useful analyses of this concept are Burrell, Mulla Sadra on 'substantial motion' and Eshots, "Substantial motion."

36 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 78ff., 84, 88, 93, 115–22. Corbin's *élan ascensionnel* is, of course, reminiscent of Henri Bergson's *élan vital*. See also Rahman, *The philosophy* 36, 108, 119–20 and especially 266–9. In Rahman's view, too, "it would be a grave error to . . . read into Ṣadrā doctrines of twentieth century western existentialism and Bergsonian evolutionism, etc." Rahman nevertheless pointed to certain similarities with Henri Bergson's *Evolution créatrice* and, with some reservations, Muḥammad Iqbal's "view of the dynamic process of reality resulting in the evolution of a more concrete and spiritual self-hood for man." He also saw "certain interesting features resembling Hegelianism" while cautioning at the same time that there is "no trace of any explicit formulation of the characteristically

concern was to make it absolutely clear that this relates to a 'prophetic philosophy'³⁷ that extends to the spiritual world by recognizing the existence of the *barzakh*, the Quranic 'Isthmus,' as an *imaginal* reality *sui generis* between matter and mind. As we have seen (cf. above, Principles VIII–X), it is indeed the faculty of imagination (*al-quwwa al-khayālīyya*) defined as a self-subsisting 'substance' mediating between the physical and the metaphysical worlds, which is according to Ṣadrā reactivated and intensified after an individual's physical death due to the soul's then unimpeded immateriality and increased power. It is thus in a position to unify and replace the variety of senses that were needed only in the material world. The true but ordinarily hidden forms of individuals therefore appear in the *barzakh* as 'imaginal' bodies of various species, unpleasant or pleasant as the case may be, which are projected by the soul in an intensified form on its own 'spiritual matter' (*hayūlā naḥsāniyya, mādda rūḥāniyya*).³⁸ This being so, there is simply no need for any recreation of a deceased's physical body for the sake of a 'real' punishment or reward of the same in the hereafter, and *tanāsukh* understood as a transplantation of the soul to another physical body (which would be absurd anyway, Ṣadrā frequently argues, given that the individual soul, having already reached a state of actuality, cannot fall back into mere potentiality by another physical birth) is by the same token eliminated as well. His understanding of the *barzakh* certainly implies an unusual concept of space, which Corbin liked to compare with the notion of spiritual extension or *spissitudo spiritualis* as maintained against Descartes' dichotomy of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* by his English counterpart among the 'Cambridge Platonists,' Henry More,³⁹ a point which may also explain his profound if somewhat ambiguous remark that Ṣadrā

Hegelian doctrine of the generation of its opposite or anti-thesis by a thesis." On the inappropriateness of projecting Darwinism pure and simple on classical Islamic philosophies of Nature in general, which projection has plagued Oriental Studies since Dieterici's *Der Darwinismus im X. und XI. Jahrhundert* of 1878, see Nasr, *Islamic cosmological doctrines* 71 as well as several other works of the same scholar, notably Nasr, *Islamic life and thought* 34 and especially 141, n. 41, and the more balanced remarks by Lenn E. Goodman in his introduction to *The case of the animals* 24–8. A very perceptive study is De Smet, *The sacredness of nature*. On my own view with regard to Ṣadrā, Corbin, and Teilhard de Chardin see below.

37 Corbin, *De la philosophie prophétique* 49–116.

38 E.g., Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* viii, 392–3 and xi, 225; also Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-ʿarshiyya*, Arabic 283–4; trans. in Morris, *The wisdom of the throne* 243–4. Cf. Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* 172ff.

39 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 92. Cf. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists* 31ff.

‘refused the dilemma.’⁴⁰ Of course Corbin did not intend to derive this idea historically from any Western Renaissance Platonism but saw it essentially as Ṣadrā’s ‘existential version’ of an *ishrāqī* concept of the hereafter, namely, the visionary world of the ‘Iranian,’ ‘oriental-illuminationist’ (*mashriqī* = *ishrāqī*) thinker Shihāb al-Dīn Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (executed in 587/1191) which is usually called *‘ālam al-mithāl* or, in Corbin’s rendering, *mundus imaginalis*. As a result of his analysis of this ‘imaginal’ world, he concluded by stating that “the philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā is *par excellence*, like all Shi‘ite philosophy, of eschatological inspiration, which is why it sounds like a prophetic philosophy that offers to humans the choice of the perspective of their future palinogeneses.”⁴¹

It may not be out of place here to recall that it is thanks to Corbin’s labor of love that we now have not only what is still the most reliable critical edition of the full Arabic text of al-Suhrawardī’s main philosophical work, the *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*,⁴² but also a French translation of Part Two (that is, the one on *ishrāq* properly speaking) with important extracts from the *Commentary* (*Sharḥ*) on that work by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311 or 716/1316) and, more importantly for our purpose, Ṣadrā’s voluminous *Glosses* (*Ta’līqāt* or *Ta’ālīq*) upon both that commentary and (mostly, in fact) the Suhrawardian original.⁴³ This major translation work, which was published posthumously as *Le livre de la sagesse orientale*,⁴⁴ remains indispensable for a proper study of Ṣadrā’s eschatology as well; it naturally also constitutes the major source for Corbin’s interpretation.⁴⁵ However, it also must be pointed out that Corbin’s

40 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 85.

41 Ibid., iv, 121. On the freedom of choice – alien to Ṣadrā according to Rahman’s interpretation (Rahman, *The philosophy* 267) – see below.

42 In Corbin (ed.), *Œuvres philosophiques*. A new critical edition with a full English translation has been published by H. Ziai and J. Walbridge as *The philosophy of illumination*. More recently still, a full German translation has been published by N. Sinai as *Philosophie der Erleuchtung*. As the numbered sections are the same in all these editions and translations, references will normally be given henceforth to paragraphs (§) only.

43 The Arabic text of all three works together is available in the venerable lithograph edition known as *Sharḥ ḥikmat al-ishrāq* completed after two years’ work in mid 1315/1898, with Ṣadrā’s *Ta’līqāt* in the margin, 35–537, (sometimes covering the *entire* margin), and followed (margin 537–65) by al-Fārābī’s *Maqāla fī l-jam‘ bayn ra’yay Aflātūn wa-Aristū* (sic). For the *Ta’līqāt* this lithograph edition is the one used by Corbin and here as well. A new edition of Ṣadrā’s *Ta’līqāt* was planned by the late Hossein Ziai. Regrettably only Part One has been published as *Addenda on the commentary*. Post-scriptum: Most recently, a complete edition of the *Sharḥ ḥikmat al-ishrāq* including Ṣadrā’s *Ta’līqāt* has been published in two volumes, in 2009 and 2012, respectively. See Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta’līqāt* [new ed.].

44 Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 437–669.

45 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 54–122; Corbin, *Le thème de la résurrection*.

vision of Ṣadrā's 'Shi'ite philosophy,' implying as it does some sort of *ishrāqī* continuity from al-Suhrawardī's 'project' of reviving the wisdom of ancient Iran to Ṣadrā's 'fulfilment' in Safavid times, is problematic for a number of reasons,⁴⁶ and not least because it was precisely in al-Suhrawardī's version of *ishrāq* that Ṣadrā perceived – in effect repeating a point against pure 'essentialism' already made by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) – that 'venerable metaphysics of the essences' he claimed to have overcome: a doctrine of emanation of pure quiddities of 'light,' the Intellects, at the expense of the reality of their own 'existence.'⁴⁷ Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, al-Suhrawardī's 'oriental' *ishrāq* fundamentally suggests a *descent* of the life-giving 'light' from the superior lights upon Man, the 'major gate' (*bāb al-abwāb*) through which they have to pass in the first place in order to animate lower beings of nature and end up in matter, the 'obscure substance' (*al-jawhar al-ghāsiq*).⁴⁸ This clearly constitutes a stark contrast, as Corbin himself briefly noted,⁴⁹ to Ṣadrā's ideas. For the latter, everything begins in a timeless act of creation (*ibdā'*) conceived as a radical attenuation (*taḍa'uf*) of being to its weakest mode, matter, which is followed immediately by intensification (*ishtidād*) in a *gradual ascent* through

46 Counter-arguments have been elaborated by John Walbridge in several works on al-Suhrawardī. See especially Walbridge, *The wisdom of the mystic east*.

47 The crucial passage criticized by Ṣadrā is al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Hikmat al-ishrāq* §193; trans. by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 176. Corbin *ibid*, note (b.) also provides a (probably un-edited) translation of Ṣadrā's gloss *ad locum* (from the lithograph ed. 416, not 216). This gloss can be translated as follows: "We have earlier shown through decisive proofs that it is *existence* which more than everything else deserves to have a concrete reality (*ḥaqīqa 'ayniyya*)... That which emanates from the cause of emanation is nothing else than the 'existential ipseity' (read: *al-huwiyya al-wujūdiyya*), not the universal quiddity (*al-māhiyya al-kullīyya*), for (the latter) 'did not even smell the perfume of existence.'" This latter phrase is a quotation from Ibn 'Arabī's discussion of the ontological status of the *a'yān thābita* in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 76. But it was Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī who first argued Ṣadrā's 'existential' point philosophically, see my Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī 373–4. According to Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī's commentary (trans. by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 368), the two opposing views with regard to the priority of essence or existence are to be identified simply as *ishrāqī* and Peripatetic, respectively. Ṣadrā himself did not, however, agree with his own position being qualified as Peripatetic either, as is clear from his long discussion of the question in chapter VII of his *Kitāb al-mashā'ir* (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Le livre des pénétrations* §89ff.). Here, too (*Kitāb al-mashā'ir* §97), having rejected al-Suhrawardī's 'essentialist' position at length as 'the view of the Stoics' (!), Ṣadrā in reality joins Ibn 'Arabī, summarizing a famous passage on three levels of 'existence' from the latter's *Kitāb Inshā' al-dawā'ir*, ed. Nyberg in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-'Arabī* 15–6.

48 Al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Hikmat al-ishrāq* §§229–32.

49 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 87–8.

the scale of nature and involves all beings out of an inborn desire for perfection, until they reach that same major gate (*ḥadd al-insāniyya wa-bābuhā*)⁵⁰ through which they have to pass before they may 'ascend' even further.

Ṣadrā explains his idea of the 'ascent' in great detail in the final section of the *Physics* of the *Aṣfār* (the second *Journey* of the *Four*), titled "That natural existents differ in excellence and nobility and that the corporeal matters are prepared to receive the existential flux (*al-fayḍ al-wujūdī*) gradually, so that there exists [only] one single nature turned to perfection, migrating to the sacred world, ascending from the lowest stage to the highest."⁵¹ This process starts from pure matter *qua* receptive of primary forms (i.e., length, breadth, and depth), followed by the stages of the elements and the minerals in various degrees of 'ascent,' and continuing throughout the 'horizons' (*ufuq*) of the plants, the animals, and man and their respective subdivisions, each acquiring more perfection by degree. An interesting point is that the activity of nature comes to an end where soul's activity begins, that is, according to Ṣadrā, at the primary degrees of the animal 'horizon,' just above the higher plants, so that purely immaterial, 'imaginal' (*khayālīyya*) forms also begin to be active at this pre-human level of existence. What is specific to the human 'horizon' then, is the voluntary acquisition of additional virtues pertaining to the Intellect (*al-ʿaqlīyyāt*), "until one reaches the 'highest council' (Q 37:8, 38:69) and the most elevated angels." This voluntary effort and struggle presupposes a degree of free choice and a kind of voluntary 'motion' which is not identical to natural 'growth' and may indeed lead in the wrong direction if the wrong choice has been made, but nevertheless parallels the phases of the greater *continuum* of upwards 'motion' through the domains of nature. On the other hand, it also entails the need for spiritual assistance through the guidance of a prophet (*nabī ḥādīn*), a [Sufi] shaykh (*shaykh murshid*), a teaching master (*ustādh muʿallim*) or, more generally, a 'sage' (*ḥakīm*).⁵²

50 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 160 and many other passages, especially the long section 13 of the final chapter (ix, 243–72).

51 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* v, 342–50.

52 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* v, 347–9. Note that the term *imām* is not spelled out by Ṣadrā in this context; but see below for a connection with Shiʿism. In another passage (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 256) he refers to the 'universal soul' (*al-naḥs al-kullīyya*) – equivalent of the Quranic 'Lote-Tree of the Boundary' (Q 53:14–6) – as the first 'boundary' of all souls on their way to the 'garden of the refuge,' i.e., to the still higher 'universal Intellect' (*al-ʿaql al-kullī*). Also see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* vii, 263 for the necessity of a 'perfecting agent' (*mukammil*) who must be an intermediary from the world of Intellect (*mutawassit ʿaqlī*). In his Quranic *Commentary* on the notion of the 'straight path' (Q 1:6), Ṣadrā similarly distinguishes between two kinds of motion for humans on the path: one, 'necessary by

At the beginning of this lengthy passage, Ṣadrā makes it clear that all this is to be understood, “not as a *quantitative* continuity but in the sense that every stage of perfection in existence requires the propinquity of that which follows it in tending toward existential perfection.”⁵³ There can be no empty stage, he adds, between any two stages of higher and lower intensity or weakness, respectively, so that it would be conceivable that one or more degrees have not yet been realized; for that [i.e., such a ‘missing link’]

is inadmissible in our view. The proof for this derives from the Rule of the Nobler Possibility (*qā'idat al-imbkān al-ashraf*) and another rule, namely, the Rule of the Meaner Possibility (*qā'idat al-imbkān al-akhass*). The former is inherited from the ‘First Teacher,’ whereas we have established the latter with the help of God.⁵⁴

Both these ‘rules’ could, of course, be said to reflect standard Neoplatonized Aristotelianism in so far as they require a chain of intermediary causes and effects between the First Cause and the world. The difference between the two complementary aspects is nevertheless significant because the first concerns the descending order of things in timeless existence and requires an exclusively *ontological* primacy of the final cause of the ‘meaner possible’ at every level, i.e., the ‘nobler possible’ precisely, whereas the second applies to the ascending order and requires the priority *in time* of the ‘meaner possible,’ i.e., the material, ‘preparatory’ causes.⁵⁵ It is the ‘Rule of the Meaner Possible,’

nature’ (*iḍṭirārīyya*), the other, ‘by choice’ (*ikhtiyārīyya*), and derives from this the need for ‘guidance’ – adding, however, that the true guide is God. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān* i, 111ff. For the same distinction between two kinds of motion see also Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār*, ix, 284 and Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* 290.

53 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* v, 342: *lā bi-ma'nā al-ittiṣāl al-miqdārī... bal bi-ma'nā anna kulla martabatīn kamālīyyatīn min al-wujūd yanbaghī an takūna mujāwiratan li-martabatīn yalīhā [sic] fī l-kamāl al-wujūdī.*

54 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* v, 342 The ‘First Teacher’ normally means Aristotle, here presumably rather Plotinus, the author of the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*. However, it was al-Suhrawardī who insisted particularly on the rule of the ‘nobler possibility’ (e.g., al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Hikmat al-ishrāq* §153). On *imbkān akhass* see also Mullā Ṣadrā *Aṣfār* vii, 257, 272.

55 On *time* as a necessary part of the ‘upwards’ motion, see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* v, 195 (Principle x1 translated above) and Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 232; but see also Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 266, where Ṣadrā appears to admit (if the text is correct) that time is already implied in the ‘downward motion’ from the Intellect to Soul. Also note that according to Ṣadrā, time as such, like motion, matter, and potentiality, “belongs to those things that do not really

I would suggest, which makes it possible to establish a connection with the *temporal* sequence of prophets and *imāms* on this common Earth in Shi'ism (see below).

3

Another argument in support of the typological difference between al-Suhrawardī's *ishrāq* and Ṣadrā's existential 'motion' as suggested here can be taken from a very similar distinction made by Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī (fl. second half of seventh/thirteenth century), one of the relatively early admirers and commentators of al-Suhrawardī and an *ishrāqī* thinker himself, between two different types of transmigrationism that are both to be distinguished from the 'vulgar' kind of 'concrete' metempsychosis mentioned above. It may be noted here *en passant* that Shahrazūrī, writing during the half century when Iran was ruled by the Mongols and Islam was not the 'official' religion of the country, evidently felt free to discuss transmigrationism in its various forms without having to label it immediately as heretical, as was the norm in most other epochs of Islamic history. In his monumental work on the branches of 'universal' philosophy known as the 'divine tree' (*al-shajara al-ilāhiyya*), Shahrazūrī offers an extensive and systematic discussion of various philosophical views regarding the "Modalities of the Souls after their Separation from the Human Bodies and Explaining the Conditions of Spiritual and Bodily Return."⁵⁶ He begins by distinguishing three different views: either all souls are completely separated from bodily matter after death, or some souls are while others remain attached, or all souls remain attached. The first view, identified as Peripatetic, is of course the very opposite of the third, which represents a materialistic conception of the soul as a bodily entity itself and therefore perpetually in transfer among other material bodies or, in short, *tanāsukh* as commonly understood. Shahrazūrī subsequently refutes both these opposite views, adding about the materialistic view that he could not find any philosopher among the Ancients or others ever holding it, and that it may be extinct now.⁵⁷

exist, except in so far as they are prepared to receive forms and other perfections" (Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 263).

56 Shahrazūrī, *Rasā'il al-Shajara* iii, 468–531 (section 14 of Epistle v). This section has been analyzed in an important article by Sabine Schmidtke. See Schmidtke, The doctrine of the transmigration.

57 Shahrazūrī, *Rasā'il al-Shajara* iii, 468 and 475–6. With his third view, Shahrazūrī probably means certain *kalām* doctrines, which he does not, however, discuss *per se*.

By contrast, the intermediate view is held according to him by “the most excellent philosophers and the exemplary ones among the learned of all religions.”⁵⁸ This ‘excellent’ view is, then, itself subdivided into two main schools or ‘sects’ (*madhhab*, *firqa*) which Shahrāzūrī describes in detail. He explicitly identifies the first with the view of ‘the author (*ṣāhib*) of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* and whoever followed him and agreed with him on that,’ presumably meaning the Isma‘ilis,⁵⁹ whereas he presents the second view as the one held by ‘the sages of Persia,’ some of India, Babylon, and Greece ‘up to Plato and his followers,’ those of Egypt ‘such as Agathodaimon and Hermes’ as well as ‘other travelers on the Path and masters of unveiling’ – meaning quite obviously al-Suhrawardī and his ‘oriental’ sages.⁶⁰ In so far as the status of the souls *after* their separation from the body is concerned, the views of these schools are quite similar: they both agree that only those souls that have already attained complete separation from matter in this life are *not* subject to any transmigration since these *are* already in the world of the Intellect;⁶¹ and their views regarding the destiny of individual souls that still have to ‘migrate’ for the sake of perfection differ only in details. But a sharp distinction between the two ‘schools’ is manifest in so far as the status of souls *prior* to their attachment to human bodies is concerned. For the *ishrāqī* school, human bodies are the *only* ones prepared to receive souls through *direct* emanation from the separate Intellect, so that animals and lower species, not being so prepared, can only receive imperfect souls from human bodies and there can be no ‘upwards’-transmigration from lower species to humans or from man to man at all.⁶² For the ‘Ikhwān-school,’ on the contrary,

the souls are different in essential reality and species, ... having been [so] created by the Creator at once (*daʿʾatan wāḥidatan*), and the bodies follow them in being brought to existence [in such a way that] every soul has what suits it as body to be used as instrument for the gradual

58 Shahrāzūrī, *Rasāʾil al-Shajara* iii, 468 and 476–7.

59 Shahrāzūrī, *Rasāʾil al-Shajara* iii, 477; Schmidtke, The doctrine of the transmigration 245. I suspect that by saying ‘whoever (*man*) followed him and agreed with him on that’ Shahrāzūrī means, in fact, the Nizārī Isma‘ilis whom he may well have known but, for obvious reasons, does not name. The question of the real identity of the ‘Brethren’ cannot be discussed here. For example, they can, at times, be quite ‘*ishrāqī*’ (e.g. Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, *Rasāʾil* iii, 285, 392; trans. in Diwald, *Arabische Philosophie* 294–5 and 420, respectively).

60 Shahrāzūrī, *Rasāʾil al-Shajara* iii, 477 and 495ff. Cf. Schmidtke, The doctrine of the transmigration 246–7.

61 Shahrāzūrī, *Rasāʾil al-Shajara* iii, 468.

62 Ibid., iii, 495ff. and 499ff.; cf. Schmidtke, The doctrine of the transmigration 246.

actualization of perfection. Because of their essential and specific difference the souls attach themselves [to bodies] in keeping with their degree, from the highest celestial stars and spheres in descending order to the [terrestrial] elements and their particles, and similarly to the composites such as minerals, vegetables, and animals.⁶³

Thus not even the atoms of this world are without a soul attached; and although the souls attached to the celestial spheres are nobler and 'closer to the First Perfection,' even those attached to the atoms, elements and composites of the terrestrial world receive a *direct* emanation from the Universal Soul, which is why they are called 'particular souls.' They are gradually transferred in ascending order through the three realms of nature up to Man. If the souls, then in human form, attain perfection in *theoria* and *praxis*, they will ascend further, attaching themselves to the heavenly spheres one by one due to their acquired habit of governing a body until they reach the 'greatest paradise' (*al-firdaws al-akbar*), i.e., the subtlest all-surrounding sphere (*al-falak al-aṭlas*) and then detach themselves completely, returning to their home as spiritual intellects (whereas those souls attached to the spheres in the first place separate themselves from them and become pure angels); otherwise, the souls fall back beneath the human form and eventually ascend once more. Once the process of perfection of the terrestrial souls is complete, they leave the corporeal world altogether and the Universal Soul separates itself from its 'temple' (*haykal*), the World. This, then, is the equivalent of the total annihilation of the World and the major resurrection (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) after long periods of perfecting in virtue and knowledge.⁶⁴

To be sure, Ṣadrā's theory is not identical with either of Shahrazūrī's two 'excellent schools.' In fact he refutes the arguments of both the 'upwards' and the 'downwards' transmigrationists one by one, having most likely Shahrazūrī's text in mind;⁶⁵ but the similarity of his own views to those of the 'upwards-transmigrationists' is nevertheless striking.

63 Shahrazūrī, *Rasā'il al-Shajara* iii, 477–8.

64 Ibid., iii, 478–82 (abbreviated).

65 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 2–77. The anonymous authority he quotes here systematically for refutation is probably none other than Shahrazūrī himself. The text at the end of a passage on p. 8 (as well as in Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād* 329, cf. Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* 139) which makes Ṣadrā ascribe to the Ikhwān a doctrine of 'downward-transmigration' down to the minerals as described by Shahrazūrī in the context of the *ishrāqī* school (Shahrazūrī, *Rasā'il al-Shajara* iii, 497) appears to go back to an old textual corruption. The words *wa-ilayhi mayl Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* clearly do not belong there but should be placed one line below after *al-qā'ilīn bi-l-naql min jihat al-ṣu'ūd*.

As a matter of fact, it does not seem to have been noticed that Ṣadrā sometimes repeats arguments of the Brethren of Purity almost literally without marking his quotations as such. One example is his argument to suggest that the ‘spiritual matter’ of forms perceived in the hereafter is both different from and related to the sensible matter of this world by way of an analogical hierarchy of the organs of perception being more ‘subtle’ the higher one ascends. In brief, he argues as follows:

Fresh water (*al-mā’ al-‘adhb*) is ‘subtler’ than earth in its receptivity, air is likewise subtler than both, and the same applies, respectively, to physical light and the pneuma (*al-rūḥ al-naḥsānī*), the limit of material subtlety. Most of those who speculate in the sciences are unaware of this point. They fail to consider it and to see that the substance of the soul has [also] various degrees of perfection and deficiency, with the lowest degree of subtlety in the soul being far more subtle than the subtlety of the substance of physical light.⁶⁶

This is clearly taken from the Ikhwān’s argument regarding the spirituality of imagination, where we read:

Consider, for example, fresh water (*al-mā’ al-‘adhb*). Being subtler in its substance than earth, it is swifter in its receptivity of savors and colors, accepting them more smoothly and easily because of its subtleness, freshness and the flowing (*ṣayālān*) of its substance. Likewise air, being subtler than water, and more intensely flowing, is swifter in its receptivity when accepting sounds and fragrances, and more easily accepts [such ‘forms’] than water. Likewise brightness and light, being subtler than air, is subtler and swifter in its receptivity when accepting colors and shapes, and is more intensely spiritual. What, then, of the subtleness of the soul and its spirituality! Perhaps this is obscure to many of those who speculate about the finer points of how knowledge is gained from sensible objects. How, then, will they speculate about spiritual matters? Indeed the substance of the soul is by far more subtle and intensely spiritual than the substance of light and brightness, and the proof for this is the fact that it can accept the records of all *sensibilia* and *intelligibilia* together. Thus . . . man has

66 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 222–3 (abbreviated here); also Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda’ wa-l-ma’ād* 439–40. Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* 174–5 indicates as his source a remotely similar passage from Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-‘arshiyya*, Arabic 282; trans. in Morris, *The wisdom of the throne* 241 but he apparently translates one of the two aforementioned passages.

become capable of imagining and apprehending by the power of imagination what he cannot [seize] by the sensory powers; for the former is spiritual, while the latter are corporeal, and because the latter perceive their objects in the corporeal substances from outside, whereas the power of imagination pictures and forms them in its own essence.⁶⁷

In addition, it should also be recalled that the one anonymous scholar (*muḥaqqiq*) of 'imaginal' matters eschatological, who receives from Ṣadrā in the *Ta'liqāt* exceptionally high praise as his only true predecessor among the religious scholars (despite his rather unfair explicit criticism of the same scholar's free usage of the term *tanāsukh*), has turned out to be none other than Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111).⁶⁸

4

In one crucial passage in the *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, al-Suhrawardī postulates the existence of an independent 'world of immaterial shapes' (*'ālam al-ashbāḥ al-mujarrada*) or 'suspended images' (*al-muthul al-mu'allaqa*) on the basis of his own visionary experience which, as he himself claims, confirmed to him the reality of bodily resurrection (*ba'th al-ajsād*) and of 'all prophetic promises.' He defines this reality as a *separate* realm of obscure or luminous images and as a 'fourth world' distinct from the three realms of bodies, souls, and intellects as well as from the completely separate Platonic archetypes (*al-muthul al-Aflātūniyya*) of pure 'Light.'⁶⁹ For Ṣadrā, by contrast, there can be no such 'fourth world' since these 'images' are for him the result of the soul's own 'intensified' creativity in 'ascension.' His 'answer to al-Suhrawardī' in the *Ta'liqāt*,⁷⁰ to which I turn shortly, amounts in my view to a critique rather than a confirmation of an eschatology that ends up in a purely *imaginal* world.

67 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 417; Italian trans. in Baffioni, *L'Epistola* 88–9.

68 Badakhchani (ed. and trans.), *Paradise of submission*, intro (by Landolt) 247, n. 31. Surprisingly, it has been suggested in the most recent translation of the relevant passage from the *Ta'liqāt* (in Nasr et al. (eds.), *An anthology* 151, n. 1; cf. Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 650–2 and Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 100–1) that the anonymous scholar cited here by Ṣadrā should be al-Suhrawardī! It is clear from a parallel passage in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 151f. that al-Ghazālī is meant, not al-Suhrawardī.

69 Al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. §§246–8; trans. by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 214ff.

70 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt*, lithogr. ed. 512–9, margin; partial trans. by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 655–69.

In Ṣadrā's many interpretations and visualizations of the final events, two major themes, which correspond to the Sufi dialectics of 'annihilation' and 'perpetuation' or 'disappearance' and 'higher existence' (*fanā*/*baqā*), can be distinguished. He often shows himself satisfied with letting the process end with final annihilation and perpetuation in God. For example, interpreting Q 39:67–9 and 14:48 in combination, he proposes the following *ta'wīl*: the earth of resurrection that will 'shine by the light of its Lord' (Q 39:69) will be a living 'psychic form' (*ṣūra nafsāniyya*) capable of receiving 'intellectual illuminations' (*ishrāqāt 'aqliyya*) from its Lord. It may possibly be the same earth as the present one, Ṣadrā reasons, for it must still be existing when it is seized by angelic hands as God's 'handful' (Q 39:67) to be 'changed to other than the earth' (Q 14:48), that is, to be transmuted by way of a kind of angelic 'digestion' (*al-quwwa al-ghādhiya*) to take that nobler 'psychic form,' whereas the heavens, being 'rolled up' in God's 'right hand' (Q 39:67), will completely disappear (*fanā*) in Intellect, being united (*ittiḥād*) with it, although Intellect itself is also bound to disappear as such while remaining perpetually (*baqā*) in 'the Truth' (*al-ḥaqq ta'ālā*).⁷¹ But then, in his 'answer to al-Suhrawardī' just referred to (see the full text and translation in the appendix), Ṣadrā comes up with a condensed and highly allusive version of his whole theory of 'being-towards-resurrection,' which culminates in a magnificent vision of the final emergence of Man as a whole – body, soul, and spirit together, with body and soul subsisting only through the spirit identified with the Intellect. After the total annihilation of the world and *beyond* the *barzakh*, in a truly eschatological *event* expected to happen after a time span of 50,000 years in accordance with the mysterious motions of the Quranic 'Lord of the stairways' (cf. Q 70:3–4 and 22:47), the 'second blast of the trumpet' (Q 39:68) will initiate a new emergence of plurality in a unique theophany (*tajallī*) of the 'supreme spirit' (*al-rūḥ al-a'ẓam*) in the 'most perfect place of manifestation' (*al-maẓhar al-akmal*) for the as yet hidden divine names to appear in the 'supreme place of manifestation' (*al-maẓhar al-a'ẓam*). As a consequence of this appearance of the 'hidden names,' which even the Prophet Muḥammad did not know, the divine throne will be expanded and the ultimate abode will be widened so that "Man (*al-insān*) emerges in a complete and ultimate birth (*inshā'an tāmman ukhrawiyyan*) . . . and the [true] believer enters paradise under the powerful form of the Adamic creature in perfection (*'alā al-khalq al-qawī al-Ādamī kamālan*)."

Commenting on this powerful eschatological figure, Corbin, taking it for granted that it must refer to the now 'hidden' twelfth *imām*, the *mahdī* or *qā'im*

71 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 266–7. Variant in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fī l-ḥaṣhr* 359; trans. in Jambet, *Se rendre immortel* 153.

of Twelver Shi'ism, concluded that "the 50th millenary corresponds, then, to the millennium of the *mahdī*, 'in Shi'ite terms the *parousia* of the Twelfth or hidden *imām*'" while at the same time also evoking certain parallels from "Isma'ili Gnosis."⁷² Yet he did not elaborate on this interesting ambiguity, nor did he seem to be willing to give much weight to the difference between this major eschatological event embracing the faithful collectively under the umbrella of the primordial Adam in perfection, and the mere post-mortem appearance of individual souls in their specific differences in the mirror of the *barzakh*. Instead, finding himself in agreement with an otherwise not frequently quoted 'metaphysician of the traditional school,' namely, Frithjof Schuon,⁷³ he oddly chose to close the discussion with a few sarcastic remarks regarding the kind of evolutionism defended against then prevailing Church doctrine by the French Jesuit biologist Teilhard de Chardin, whose famous 'point Omega' amounts, of course, to a modern bio-sociological interpretation of the traditional Christian belief in Christ as the 'Alpha and Omega' or the 'second Adam.'⁷⁴

By referring here to Teilhard's views as "a theologico-philosophical improvisation based on science and technique, and which pretends to give back to Man his 'cosmic dimension' whereas it is quite simply inhuman," Corbin manifestly wished to avoid once again any suggestion of a similarity between Šadrā's eschatology and the scientific 'dogma of evolutionism,' although his peculiar way of drawing attention to the Jesuit biologist's views perhaps rather betrays his own awareness of a profound similarity in the first place. However that may be, it seems to me that there is *mutatis mutandis* a remarkable structural affinity precisely between Teilhard's unconventional notion of evolution from the

72 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 119. For the number 50,000 Corbin refers to seventh/thirteenth-century Ṭayyibī Isma'ili speculations (cf. Corbin (ed. and trans.), *Risālat al-mabda'* §54) but surprisingly does not mention a more obvious Nizārī Isma'ili model, which is found in the *Paradise of submission* (*Rawḍa-yi taslīm* or *Taṣawwūrāt*) composed in 640/1243 at Alamut under the supervision of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (see Badakhchani (ed. and trans.), *Paradise of submission*, text §175). To my knowledge, an equally obvious Twelver Shi'ite model does not exist, nor does Corbin refer to any.

73 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 121 with reference to Schuon, *Comprendre l'Islam* 39.

74 Teilhard de Chardin, *Le phénomène humain*; Teilhard de Chardin, *La place de l'homme*; Teilhard de Chardin, *Le milieu divin*; authorized German trans. as *Der göttliche Bereich*. Cf. Benz, *Zum theologischen Verständnis*; Benz, Teilhard de Chardin. For an informative and reasonably critical assessment of Teilhard's views (including his alleged political hesitations between fascism and communism) from a liberal point of view, see Passmore, *The perfectibility of man* 239–59 (chapter xii).

'biosphere' to the 'noosphere'⁷⁵ and its 'convergence' on a personalized level of consciousness toward 'Omega,' or 'Christ,' and our Safavid philosopher's quasi-alchemical transmutations of Nature into Spirit, *especially* if these are to be seen as ending up with a Shi'ite *parousia* at the end of time, another 'Omega,' one might say. A comparison with Teilhard's intuitive apperception of the final appearance of 'Christ' could even serve as an eye-opener for an eschatological theme *par excellence* which would distinguish a truly 'Shi'ite' conception of Being and Time not only from a Heideggerian one, but also from a radically 'gnostic' rejection of, or contempt for, the created, temporal world, namely, the expectation of a final revelation, not in another prophetic 'Book' to be sure, but in the *human form* of the ultimate *imām*. Not unlike Teilhard's evolutionism, which due to its teleological core is, in fact, the very opposite of 'orthodox' Darwinism, Ṣadrā's 'world in ascension' implies the recognition of a continuous process of revelation toward the final emergence of Man 'in perfection' – and indeed a perfection of 'cosmic dimensions' as it ends up in nothing less than an expansion of the divine throne. Of course he did not extrapolate his conclusions from an *empirical* science (and even less from a privileged position of the Shi'ite 'clergy,' for that matter), but from a logical, Aristotelian classification of the differences between the various existing species as seen in relation to the activities of the Neoplatonic 'persons' of Nature, Soul, and Intellect.

5

The aim of the present contribution is not to debate 'evolutionism' but to clarify some of the issues involved, and to offer an interpretation of Ṣadrā's 'ascensional élan' more in line with the ascensional ethos of the Brethren of Purity and the Isma'ilis than with either al-Suhrawardī or any specifically *Twelver* Shi'ite 'gnosis,' which is evidently what Corbin had in mind when speaking of a 'Shi'ite philosophy.'⁷⁶ Despite the fact that our Mullā obviously belonged to

75 In this connection one might also evoke the recognition of the existence of social structures as a *barzakh*, so to speak, between Nature and Culture in the structural anthropology of Claude Lévi-Strauss which, though based on an empirical science, implies in its own way something like the creation of immaterial *forms* by a Platonic world-Soul. By contrast, I do not understand on what grounds Christian Jambet ventures a similarity between Ṣadrā and the early nineteenth-century esoteric nostalgic of the Ancien Régime, Joseph de Maistre. See Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* 153–4.

76 Note that the expression *La philosophie shī'ite* (with the definite article) figures emblematically on the French title page of H. Corbin's and O. Yahya's edition of Sayyid Ḥaydar-i Āmulī's *Jāmi' al-asrār*.

the tradition promoted by the Safavids to the status of state religion of Persia, and clearly asserts – at least in his commentary on the *Uṣūl al-kāfī*, the *imāmī ḥadīth* collection by Muḥammad b. Ya‘qūb al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941) – his own acceptance of the belief in the existence of no more than twelve successors of the Prophet succeeding one another from ‘Alī to the *mahdī* or *qā’im*,⁷⁷ I am afraid I am not convinced that his allusions to what is known in Sufism as the ‘Perfect Man’ (*al-insān al-kāmil*) should be narrowed down to the *parousia* of the *Twelfth*. In any case, his *philosophical* reasoning for the necessary existence of the *imām* qua ‘Perfect Man’ does *not* specify the identity of the latter, as we shall see in a moment; and his (more or less explicit) professions of Twelver Shi‘ism did not prevent his colleagues in the clergy from accusing him of heresy or worse.⁷⁸

An explicit *philosophical* connection with Shi‘ism as a whole, not *Twelver* Shi‘ism specifically, is established by Ṣadrā in a ‘very condensed page’⁷⁹ of this commentary. Explaining one of the most famous and widely accepted Shi‘i traditions from Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, the last *imām* common to Isma‘ilis and Twelvers, and a highly respected Sufi model, “If the earth were to ever be without an *imām*, it would go down,” Ṣadrā writes:

The philosophical cause (*al-sabab al-limmī al-ḥikmī*) for that is this: When God created the existents arranged [in ranks of] nobility and meanness according to His habit of immediate origination (*sunnat al-ibdā’*), so that they reached their lowest term and their lowest center, namely, elementary matter and especially earthly matter, which is the source of meanness and coarseness and of distance from subtleness, He wanted them thereby to ascend (*yartaqīya bi-hā’*?) to their utmost term in nobility and elevation, with a surplus resulting for them through mixture and composition and endless numbers of individuals [succeeding each other] for the sake of the preservation of the species and their permanence as long as He wished and wanted. Thus He placed in each of those recurring existents what is [relatively] nobler and higher as the cause of perfection (*sababan kamāliyyan*) and as final cause (*‘illatan ghā’iyyatan*) of what is [relatively] meaner and lower. So He created the earth for the sake of the

77 See Corbin, *En Islam iranien* i, 303–10.

78 Cf. Amir-Moezzi, *The spirituality of Shi‘i Islam* 334, n. 81.

79 Cf. Corbin, H., *En Islam iranien* i, 305 referring to p. 461 of the unpaginated lithograph edition (of 1282/1865–6) of Mulla Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfī* [= p. 462 in the paginated reproduction published Tehran, 1391/1971] = *Kitāb al-Ḥujja*, Bāb 5, no. 10; = Mulla Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfī*, ed. Khwājawi ii, 487–8.

plants, the plants for the sake of the animals, and the animals for the sake of the humans; and the final degree of Man, who is the final term of [all] these beings, is that which is in the rank of the *imāmate*, I mean, the 'Perfect Man' (*al-insān al-kāmil*), who is the sovereign of the earthly world and the representative of God in it. Thus the earth and what is in it was created only for his sake. And whatever was created for the sake of something [higher] would come to naught if that [higher] thing did not exist. Thus the meaning of [the *imām*'s] saying, "If the earth were to ever be without an *imām*, it would go down," is this: If it were supposed to be devoid of an *imām*, it would perish and fall from the rank of existence.

A little later⁸⁰ he adds:

As you have learned, the order of the causal chain of existence that proceeds from the First is principally from the nobler to the meaner and from the higher to the lower. Whoever looks at the states of the existents and the relation between some of them will know that the lower and less perfect does not come into existence except through the higher and more perfect, by virtue of essential causality (*sababīyyatan dhātīyyatan*) and natural anteriority (*taqadduman ṭab'īyyan*), even though the existence of the lower and less perfect becomes the principle [needed] for preparing matter for [the reception of] the emanation of the higher and more perfect. Thus the animal is the essential cause for the existence of the sperm, being anterior to it in essence, and likewise the plant for the seed. As for the sperm, it is the cause preparing the existence of the animal, being anterior to it in time, not in essence, and likewise the seed for the plant. So in general, the nobler species is anterior to the meaner species in the causal chain of the beginning, even though some individuals of the meaner [species] are anterior in time to some individuals of the nobler, as we have mentioned by way of the example of sperm and animal, seed and plant.

Now if you argue that this thesis, i.e., 'the thesis of the nobler possibility' (*qā'idat al-imkān al-ashraf*) is valid only for those immediately originated entities (*al-ibdā'īyyāt*) whose existence does not depend on the suitability of a recipient and the preparedness of matter, but is not valid for those created in time (*al-mukawwanāt al-zamāniyya*) and which

80 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi* 466 (= *Kitāb al-Ḥujja*, Bāb 6, no. 1: "If only two men remained on the earth, one of them would be the *ḥujja*," from the same *imām* Ja'far) = Mulla Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, ed. Khwājawi ii, 502–4.

occur in the world of motions (*ḥarakāt*), oppositions (*aḍḍād*), and contingencies (*ittifāqīyyāt*) (for it happens often that a 'nobler possible' does not come into existence due to an external obstacle or the lack of a preparedness) – [to this objection] we reply:

The rule applying to the universal species and natures in their essences is the [same] that applies [in the first place] to the immediately originated entities; for the dependence of a natural species such as '[celestial] Sphere,' 'Man' or 'Horse' and the like on a proper preparedness is not by essence, but by means of concomitant accidents and states of passivity.

If you [then] argue that [even] on this basis, what you are up to does not follow, because [whether we talk about the ranks of] the *ḥujja* or other than the *ḥujja* or the *imām* or the human flock, they are altogether of one [and the same] species, and the individuals belonging to one and the same species are similar, without there being any anteriority in essence for one of them over the others, nor is there any essential attachment [distinguishing] some of them in relation to others – we reply:

How preposterous! The similarity between human individuals exists only on account of [their] bodily matter and natural birth (*al-nash'a al-ṭabī'īyya*), before the material,⁸¹ simple souls in them come out from *potentia* into *act* through an actualization of excellent or vile habits and characters. But with regard to the spiritual birth (*al-nash'a al-rūḥāniyya*), they fall under many species that are countless. And what is said [in the Prophet's words in the Quran] "Say: I am only a human similar to you!" [Q 18:110] is meant only in the former regard, not the latter. The species of the Prophet and the *imām* is a noble, elevated species, nobler than all the celestial and elemental species. So the relation of the species of the *ḥujja* to the other humans in existential ranking is like the relation of Man to the other animals, and like the relation of the animals to the plants, or the plants to the minerals. You have already learned the state of the matter between the noble and the mean species concerning anteriority and posteriority in existence as we have described it. God said, addressing Man: "and He created for you all that is in the earth" [Q 2:29] because [the human] is the noblest of the earthly beings, so [man] became the cause for their existence, and the final term of their creation in essence. If man were removed from the earth, all other beings would be removed – minerals, plants, and animals. Likewise, if the *ḥujja* were removed from

81 I.e., potential. According to Ṣadrā's well-known formula, the human soul is itself "corporeal with regard to its advent in time, spiritual with regard to its permanence (*al-naḥsu jismāniyya al-ḥudūth, rūḥāniyya al-baqā*)."

the earth, all humans would be removed. Thus [the *imām*'s] saying, "If only two men remained on the earth, one of them would be the *ḥujja*," is firmly established.

6

One suggestion may nevertheless confirm Corbin's continuity, in a sense. As we have seen in Ṣadrā's 'Answer to al-Suhrawardī' (see appendix) those divine names which were hidden even to the Prophet Muḥammad are said to be brought forth at the final resurrection by the appearance of *al-maẓhar al-a'ẓam*, the 'supreme place of manifestation.' Given Ṣadrā's intimate familiarity with the Shaykh al-ishrāq, he may have been thinking here of that 'supreme, luminous, paracletic place of manifestation' (*al-maẓhar al-a'ẓam al-anwarī al-nūrī al-fāraqilī*) which was evoked in these terms by al-Suhrawardī in his *Hayākil al-nūr* with explicit references to the Paraclete of the Gospel of John and to Quran 75:19.⁸² It should be noted, however, that al-Suhrawardī did not suggest any Shi'ite identity for this luminous 'place of manifestation'; he only intimated, perhaps with some Isma'ili resonance, that it is the mission of this mysterious figure to bring the 'original meaning' (*ta'wīl*) or 'explanation' (*bayān*) of prophetic revelation (*tanzīl*) 'after' the fact (*thumma*).⁸³ It was Sayyid Ḥaydar-i Āmulī, the fourteenth-century Twelver Shi'ite Sufi admirer of the celebrated Andalusian Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) – himself a 'crypto-Shi'ite' in Corbin's (in this regard particularly controversial) view⁸⁴ – who identified this figure with the Twelver Shi'ite *mahdī* coming at the 'end of time.'⁸⁵ But contrary to what one might expect, Ṣadrā seems to prefer keeping silent about him. Indeed, as has recently been pointed out,⁸⁶ there is virtually no trace of any explicit reference to Āmulī in the entire *Four Journeys*; and what may be even more 'disturbing' is the fact that Ṣadrā quite frequently refers with great respect to Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350), Āmulī's main target among the conspicuously Sunni interpreters of Ibn 'Arabī's doctrine of *walāya*.

82 Al-Suhrawardī, *Hayākil al-nūr* 88.

83 For context see my Suhrawardī between philosophy 114–5.

84 Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 68; see Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* (reviewed by Landolt in *Bulletin critique* 1987, 83–5); also Landolt, Henry Corbin (1903–1978).

85 Al-Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār* 103–4. The fundamental study of this motif is Corbin, *L'idée du Paraclet*.

86 Cf. Ernst, Sufism and philosophy in Mullā Ṣadrā.

Āmulī does not identify the *mahdī* with the primordial Adam directly but he certainly connects them through two slightly but significantly different Shi'ite lines of prophetic and Imamic successors from the beginning to the end. The second of these schemas has only six, not seven law-giving prophets from Adam to Muḥammad via Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, each of the six being succeeded by twelve 'legatees' (*awṣiyā'*), respectively.⁸⁷ Despite its Twelver form (and despite Āmulī's frequent polemics against the Isma'ilis), this second chain rather appears to reflect the originally Isma'ili model of the same six prophetic 'enunciators' (*nuṭaqā'*), the 'seventh *nāṭiq*' being, of course, the *qā'im* or 'Lord of the resurrection.'⁸⁸ As beautifully understood by Nāṣir-i Khusraw and certainly implied in the very structure of Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī's *Kashf al-mahjūb*, this is what is meant by the Quranic hexameron – the 'six days of creation' culminating in God's 'sitting on the throne' (Q 25:59) – with the 'throne' meaning the *qā'im-i qiyāmat*.⁸⁹

A slightly different computation of the '50,000 years' is found at the very end of Ṣadrā's *Risāla fī l-ḥaṣhr* (Treatise on resurrection). He there indicates that the measure of the 'day of separation' (*yawm al-faṣl*, e.g., Q 37:21) at the 'major resurrection' (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) is a 'day of a thousand years' (from Q 32:5 and 22:47), whereas the measure of the 'day of union' (*yawm al-jam'*, e.g. Q 42:7) at the 'supreme resurrection' (*al-qiyāma al-ʿuẓmā*) is a 'day of fifty thousand years' (from Q 70:4), adding that

this is the divine day (*al-yawm al-ilāhī*) from among the days of the everlasting, eternal year, which ['day'] superior senses of perception apprehend as comprising seven weeks of seven 'days of Lordship' each, in accordance with the circuit of the seven planets (*sayr al-kawākib al-sab'a*), each having one day for itself alone and six days in common with the six others. So the duration of these planetary cycles (*al-adwār al-kawkabīyya*) altogether amounts to the result of the multiplication of seven by seven, or forty-nine. The whole, then, eclipses and leap years being taken into account, amounts to 50,000 years. But God knows best.⁹⁰

87 Al-Āmulī, *Jāmi' al-asrār* 238–42. Note that Āmulī does not identify his source for this second doctrine!

88 For this Isma'ili model see Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre* 18–37. For the Nizārī version see Badakhchani (ed. and trans.), *Paradise of submission*, chapters 16 and 26.

89 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* 163–5.

90 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fī l-ḥaṣhr* 370; trans. in Jambet, *Se rendre immortel* 171 (the text edition cited by Jambet seems to have a variant here).

While this planetary computation of the ‘supreme resurrection’ probably derives from esoteric milieus around the Isma‘ili-influenced Sufi ‘Azīz-i Nasafī (seventh/thirteenth century),⁹¹ another computation of millenaries, found in Ṣadrā’s *Risāla fī l-ḥudūth* (On beginning in time), seems more in line with the classical Isma‘ili concept, although this is far less obvious and could even be interpreted as a hint at important figures like himself living at a time just after the first millenary after the Prophet Muḥammad had been completed. Referring there to the ‘six days of creation’ he explains that

these days are six thousand years from the time of Adam, the father of mankind, to the time of the descent of the Quran upon Muḥammad . . . , because every day among these days of Lordship is as a thousand years; and this is because whatever is of graded existence (*tadrījī al-wujūd*) is such that the time of its beginning is itself the time of its permanence, being in a process (*tadrījān*). And this is one among the great secrets of revelation (*asrār al-tanzīl*).⁹²

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- 91 Landolt, Nasafī. Note that the term *al-qiyāma al-‘uẓmā* is rather rare. ‘Azīz-i Nasafī uses it in two contexts: a) when describing an esoteric doctrine of millenary cycles in tune with planetary motions he ascribes to the ‘transmigrationists’ (*ahl-i tanāsukh*), according to whom a *qiyāma ṣughrā* (minor resurrection) happens every thousand years, a *qiyāma kubrā* every 7,000 years, a *qiyāma ‘uẓmā* every 49,000 years (‘Azīz-i Nasafī, *Kitāb al-Insān al-kāmil* 415–7; see also Meier, The problem of nature 182; and Ridgeon, ‘Azīz Nasafī 193); b) when describing the doctrine of the ‘monists’ (*ahl-i waḥdat*) according to whom the same pattern, with an additional *qiyāma wuṣṭā* as nr. 2, rules the spiritual development of an individual from (1) physical birth to (2) intellectual discernment to (3) the certitude of a prophet to (4) the total vision of a *walī* (‘Azīz-i Nasafī, *Kashf al-ḥaqā’iq* 209–11).
- 92 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fī l-ḥudūth* 25; trans. in Talgharizadeh, *Die Risāla fī l-ḥudūth* 99. Ṣadrā also discusses the hexameron of the prophetic ‘millenaries’ in his *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, ed. Khwājāwī iii, 122–3, where he clearly identifies the ‘seventh day’ with the day of resurrection, God’s ‘sitting on the throne’ and the full appearance of everything hidden during the preceding cycles of prophecy. The position of the Prophet Muḥammad is, however, somewhat ambiguous here. On the one hand (p. 122), his mission is like the ‘morning twilight’ of this seventh day, whose luminosity ‘increases’ until the time of the appearance of the *qā’im* or *mahdī*. On the other hand (p. 123), he appears as the sixth since it is on that day that “appearance begins and increases among the elite (*al-khawāṣṣ*), as has been mentioned.” (See also the article by Omid Ghaemmaghami in the present publication. The Editors.).

Although Ṣadrā's 'computations' of the final events are obviously not to be taken literally, I am not so sure that they are to be understood exclusively as 'meta-historical' and as totally devoid of any 'millenarism' as Jambet insists.⁹³

7

Before we close this discussion, it seems best to let Ṣadrā speak once again for himself on two kinds of 'resurrection' he clearly distinguishes: the 'minor resurrection' (*al-qiyāma al-ṣuġhrā*) and the 'major resurrection' (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*).⁹⁴ He writes in the final chapter of the *Four Journeys*:

The 'minor resurrection' is well-known: "He who dies, his resurrection has just arisen." But the major resurrection is undetermined in terms of time, a Promise of God. Whoever determines it by assigning to it a specific moment of time is a liar . . . For everything occurring at the major resurrection, there is something corresponding to it at the minor resurrection. The key to knowledge about the day of resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*) and the return (*ma'ād*) of all creatures [to God] is [experiential] knowledge of the soul (*ma'rifat al-naḥs*) and its degrees [of experiencing existence], and death is like [another] birth, so you may compare the hereafter with the present world, and the major birth with the minor birth. "Your creation and your upraising are as but as a single soul" (Q 31:28). There is no doubt that the hereafter only comes about through the removal of the veils, the withdrawal of the coverings, the appearance of the true realities, and the unveiling of the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*, i.e., God) in true oneness, and so, everything appears in it in its essential, true form. Thus, he who wants to know what is really meant by the major resurrection, the appearance of the Truth in true oneness, the return of all things to Him, and the disappearance of all things from their particular ipseities (*ḥuwiyyātihā al-juz'iyya*) . . . , let him meditate on the principles articulated earlier [in this book], such as the fact that every lower turns toward a higher, every thing returns to its origin and every [external] form returns to its [essential] reality, and the thesis that the natural as well as the soul-substances

93 See Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* 157–8.

94 For *qiyāma ṣuġhrā/kubrā* in Ṣadrā's works, see principally Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 277–81; trans. in Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* 226–31 and partial trans. here; Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Ḥikma al-'arshīya*, Arabic 261–3; trans. in Morris, *The wisdom of the throne* 186–90. Further references in Jambet, *Mort et résurrection* 165–72.

are in motion toward their [respective] final terms (*ithbāt al-ḥarakāt al-jawhariyya al-ṭabīʿiyya wa-l-nafsānīyya ilā ghāyātihā*), and that all caused [“things”] return to their causes, and that the celestial souls [i.e., the direct movers of the spheres] join their [ultimate] goals, the intellects. He whose heart is enlightened by the light of certitude can surely see the transmutation (*tabaddul*) of all particular parts of the universe and their concrete realities, natures, and souls at every moment . . . Every motion and transmutation necessarily has a final term where it comes to an end at one point in time, and its final term also has a final term, so that [all] end up at a final term which has no [further] term, and in which all terms converge. This final term has one divine day – nay: one single glance or less (cf. Q 16:77), comprising all points of time, time spans and instants in which [all] ends occur, just as all beginnings originate from one beginning, one principle from which all principles branch out, and from which all effective agents and effects gush out. Likewise, he who can see that all human powers – those of perception as well as those of motion, despite their disparities and differences in terms of substrate, number, and individual, and [also despite] the differences of their quiddities in terms of species and essential reality – revert [lit., are re-assembled, *ḥashr*, i.e., at the ‘minor resurrection’] to one spiritual non-composed essence (*dhāt*), [i.e., the soul], return to it and are annihilated in it, and then are awakened from it in the hereafter [i.e., the *barzakh*] in a different, more excellent, and more sublime mode than they were first in this world. [That one] will find it easy to accept as true the return of all creatures to God, and then their being and re-emergence from Him a second time [i.e., the ‘major resurrection’], in a more perfect and more sublime mode [of existing] than in the ‘first growth.’⁹⁵

In accordance with a famous *ḥadīth* about whose authenticity no questions are normally raised in the family of Muslim philosophers and Sufis, “He who dies, his resurrection has just arisen” (*man māta fa-qad qāmat qiyāmatuhū*),⁹⁶

95 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 277–80.

96 *Ḥadīth* from Anas b. Mālik, said to have been transmitted on ‘weak’ authority by Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, accepted as genuine by al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* iv, 421 (as well as by many others including, first, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ; see below). However, the same al-Ghazālī insinuates in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* 217 that it only reflects a ‘belief’ of the ‘philosophers,’ presumably because it was also cited by Ibn Sīnā in his *Fī ithbāt al-nubuwwāt* 55. It is also frequently quoted by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī (executed 525/1131), who interprets it however as referring to mystical, not physical death (e.g., *Tamhidāt* 177, 322).

the 'minor resurrection' coincides with the moment of an individual's physical death, which is, of course, 'known' in terms of time. By contrast, the 'major resurrection' refers to the Quranic 'day of resurrection' (*yawm al-qiyāma*), a 'promise of God' which is not to be determined in terms of time, as Ṣadrā does not fail to point out. His allusion to "Whoever determines it by assigning to it a specific moment of time is a liar" may well be a reference to the famous proclamation of the resurrection on 17 Ramaḍān 559/8 August 1164 by the Nizārī Isma'īli Lord of Alamut which – in the words of its eminent historian, Farhad Daftary – "amounted to a religious revolution."⁹⁷ It is nevertheless *timed*, as we have seen, in accordance with the heavenly motions of the 'Lord of the stairways' and in a way that is bound to recall Isma'īli models both Nizārī and Ṭayyibī.⁹⁸ Moreover, it would seem that the expression *al-qiyāma al-kubrā* belongs originally to classical (i.e., pre-Nizārī or Ṭayyibī) Isma'īli usage, referring on the one hand to the advent of an ultimate *imām*, the *ṣāhib al-qiyāma al-kubrā*⁹⁹ and, on the other hand, to the 'cosmic' moment at which the Soul, having been 'in motion' from imperfection to perfection since its emanation from the Intellect, reaches perfection by uniting with it.¹⁰⁰ Coupled with the 'minor resurrection' meaning physical death, it was probably first introduced to a more general audience by the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'),¹⁰¹ and was then widely used with various different meanings by later Sufis, especially those marked by the powerful stamp of Ibn 'Arabī.¹⁰² By contrast, the paired expression *al-qiyāma al-ṣuḡhrā/al-kubrā* is not used at all, as far as I can see, by

97 Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* 359.

98 Above, n. 72.

99 An explanation of the 'major resurrection' (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*) was in fact the specific topic of al-Sijistānī's *al-Risāla al-bāhira* (Hirji (ed.), *Ṭaṣḥīḥ-i intiḳādī* 37, 12). See also al-Kirmānī, *Kitāb al-Ri'yāq* 202, 10.

100 See Shahrastānī's section on the classical Isma'īlis, which is an excellent summary especially of Sijistānī's doctrine, in *Kitāb al-Milal*, particularly 193, 12–6 and 194, 7–13; trans. by Gimaret in Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions* i, 556–8 with notes.

101 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* ii, 49–50, 183; cf. i, 448 and iii, 333–4; see also Marquet, *La philosophie* 383–403.

102 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* iii, 389. In another passage (cited, among many others, by Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣḥār* ix, 336; also see Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 111–2), i.e. *Futūḥāt* iii, 250 (trans. Chittick, *The self-disclosure of God* 351), Ibn 'Arabī uses the more conventional paired expressions 'particular'/'universal' resurrection (*q. juz'īyya/kullīyya*) as an equivalent. In still another passage (*Futūḥāt* i, 311; trans. by Gloton in Ibn 'Arabī, *De la mort à la résurrection* 172), Ibn 'Arabī, citing the *ḥadīth* again, clearly follows the Ikhwān (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* iii, 398; cf. Marquet, *La philosophie* 394) by stating his agreement with the 'opponent' (of bodily resurrection) in so far as the 'minor resurrection' (*q. ṣuḡhrā*) is concerned, explaining that death, then, really means an 'assembly' (*ḥashr*) or 'union' (*jam*) of the

al-Suhrawardī; and his commentator Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī uses it in a totally different sense.¹⁰³ Furthermore, Ṣadrā's idea of 'substantial motion' may be traced at least in some of its elements to the Andalusian shaykh's understanding of another Quranic expression for the resurrection, the 'new creation' (*khalq jadīd*, Q 50:15),¹⁰⁴ (if not further back to the 'resurrectional process' suggested with so much insistence by Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī in the final chapter of his *Kashf al-mahjūb*) but hardly to al-Suhrawardī.

In any event, it will be useful to recall here that Ṣadrā placed himself squarely within a long tradition of Muslim reception of the Aristotelian legacy as adapted and modified by the Neoplatonists. This is quite evident not only from his unacknowledged borrowings from the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, but also from his numerous explicit quotations in support of his own views, especially in his treatises on resurrection, from the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*. The latter had an unprecedented revival in Safavid Persia where it enjoyed, it seems, even the royal interest of Shāh 'Abbās I.¹⁰⁵ Indeed it was this Aristotle alias Plotinus who should be ranked, according to Ṣadrā, among the 'perfect friends of God' (*min al-awliyā' al-kāmilīn*);¹⁰⁶ and although his quotations from the *Theology* are outweighed by far more extensive quotations from Ibn 'Arabī, they are, unlike the latter, never followed by any criticism. Ibn 'Arabī is represented here with a great number of lengthy passages on imagination (*khayāl*) cited directly from *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*Meccan Openings*). In these passages, Ṣadrā finds precious support for his own theory of the eschatological role of human imagination as the one reality fully activated, so to speak, in the *barzakh*. However, Ibn 'Arabī receives not only praise but occasionally also criticism. In particular, Ṣadrā takes issue with him at Chapter 302 of the *Meccan Openings* where the Shaykh Akbar appears in his view to re-affirm a rather more conventional, 'materialistic' conception of the 'body of resurrection'.¹⁰⁷ For our philosopher, the 'ultimate body' cannot possibly be

individual soul with the Universal Soul, while leaving the question of the status of 'bodies' at the 'final resurrection' (*al-nash'ā al-ākhirā*) open at this point.

103 See Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī's note in al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Hikmat al-ishrāq* in Corbin (ed.), *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques* 175–6; trans. by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 362–3.

104 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* 125. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fi l-ḥudūth* 6–28, esp. 25ff.; trans. in Talgharizadeh, *Die Risāla fi l-ḥudūth* 99 and 103–108, notes. Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice* 149ff. (part ii, chapter i, 4) speaks of *la récurrence de la création* whereas Izutsu, *A comparative study* 197–207 prefers 'perpetual creation.'

105 Mīr Dāmād's *Jadhawāt*, which also contains many quotes from the *Theology*, was dedicated to this king.

106 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 109.

107 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 253–5 and 270–2.

the re-constituted *physical* body of this world and not even the *imaginal* body of the *barzakh*, but only a purely noetic or ‘intellectual’ (‘*aqlī*’) body – the one he finds in the *Theology of Aristotle* and in the notion of the ‘divine body’ of the Shi‘ite theologian Hishām b. al-Ḥakam.¹⁰⁸

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108 See above, n. 28.

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Appendix

Mullā Ṣadrā's 'Answer to Suhrawardī': His gloss on *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* §248¹⁰⁹

a) Translation

Al-Suhrawardī:¹¹⁰

This [fourth] world [of the 'suspended images'] is what we call the 'world of immaterial shapes' (*al-ashbāḥ al-mujarrada*). It is through it that the resurrection

109 Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 664ff., gloss #629; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 115–21.

110 Arabic text in Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* §248. Instead of *ba'th al-ajsād* as the Corbin edition has it, Ziai and Walbridge (cf. n. 42) prefer the reading *ba'th al-amthāl* and consequently translate it as "the resurrection of images." This reading (based on a single manuscript) seems, however, highly doubtful; it was certainly not Ṣadrā's, and it has not been followed in the recent German translation by N. Sinai, either.

of the bodies (*ba'th al-aqsād*) and the divine shapes (*al-ashbāḥ al-rabbāniyya*) can be verified as real, and all prophetic promises are fulfilled.

Mullā Ṣadrā:¹¹¹

Know that, as has already been pointed out,¹¹² God shaped existence (*khalaqa al-wujūd*) as three worlds: an immediately sensed world (*dunyā*), an 'isthmus' (*barzakh*), and an ultimate world (*ukhrā*). He created the body out of the immediately sensed world (*al-dunyā*), the soul (*al-naḥs*) from the isthmus (*al-barzakh*), and the spirit (*al-rūḥ*), i.e., the intellect (*ay al-'aql*), out of the ultimate world (*al-ukhrā*), and established for the transformations of Man within His worlds three intermediaries that rule over the transfer: the angel of death [for the bodies], the 'terrifying blast' of the trumpet (*naḥkhat al-faza'*, Q 27:87) [for the souls], and the blast of the trumpet that 'strikes down with lightning' (*naḥkhat al-ṣāq*, Q 39:68) for the spirits.¹¹³

As long as man is present in this world, its rule is one of direct visibility due to the nature of the body being witnessed and directly involved in actions and rules, whereas the soul and the spirit are only implicated (*mundarijatāni*) in its existence but hidden under its veil, and the means of subsistence (*imdādāt*) reach [the soul and the spirit] through [the body].

When God wants the transfer of the soul to the abode of the *barzakh*, He lets the body die through the angel of death. The soul is, then, reborn in the *barzakh* through the 'second birth' belonging properly to the soul (*al-nash'a al-thāniya al-naḥsāniyya*), and in forms (*ṣuwar*) [related to the horn, *ṣūr*] of Isrāfīl.¹¹⁴ [Now] it is the soul that is witnessed as it is directly involved in the laws of the *barzakh*, with the means of subsistence reaching it in the first place, and through it the body and the spirit indirectly. This is because it is [here] the one directly visible, being formed in its proper form in accordance with its character and [acquired] habits.

111 Arabic text in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt* in Shīrāzī: *Sharḥ* (lithogr ed.) 518, margin.

112 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Ta'liqāt*, glosses #620 and #621; trans. by Corbin in Jambet (ed.), *Sagesse* 656–64; new English trans. by M. Fakhry in Nasr et al. (eds.), *An anthology* 165–70.

113 The reading of this sentence (including supplemental words in brackets) is confirmed by the passage below where *naḥkhat al-faza'* is related specifically to the transfer of the souls from the *barzakh* to the ultimate abode, as well as by a passage in Mullā Ṣadrā, Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya 312. This *risāla* is not to be confused with Ṣadrā's more famous *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya* (cf. Iṣfahānī in Mullā Ṣadrā, Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya, intro 35–6).

114 For traditionally assumed relations between the 'horn' (*ṣūr*) of the angel of resurrection and the 'forms' (*ṣuwar*) of the souls see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 274ff.; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Maḥfātih al-ghayb* ii, 747–8.

The *barzakh* is a distinct world between *dunyā* and *ākhirā*, indeed a 'dwelling place' (Q 40:39), like the morning twilight between the night and the day. It is the dwelling place of the souls and the spirits that have been transferred from this world from the beginning of time [and shall be transferred] until the moment of its consummation by the rising of the final hour and the 'great catastrophe' (Q 79:34). Several Quranic verses refer to this: "and there, behind them, is a *barzakh* until the day that they shall be raised up" (Q 23:100); "there they shall have their provision at dawn and evening" (Q 19:62) – which means: in the abode of the *barzakh*, as well as the two verses "the fire, to which they shall be exposed morning and evening" (Q 40:46) and similarly: "As for the wretched, they shall be in the fire" (Q 11:106). This means – but God knows best – the garden of the *barzakh* and the hell of the *barzakh*, for the duration of the 'eternal sojourn' in them is determined by the duration of the heavens [cf. Q 11:107–8]. When their rule is fulfilled by the ultimate change – as in God's word: "Upon the day the earth shall be changed to other than the earth, and the heavens, and they sally forth unto God, the One, and the Omnipotent" (Q 14:48) – the duration of their sojourn in both will be ended. All this [happens] because something from [man's] terrestrial createdness [remains] in the constitution (*nash'at*) of the *barzakh* and the circles of the abode of life (*dār al-ḥayawān*, cf. Q 29:64). Being in between the two worlds, [the *barzakh*] has in itself traces from both, just as the soul is in between the two worlds of body and spirit.

When God wants the transfer of the souls from the abode of the *barzakh* to the abode of true reality (*dār al-ḥaqīqa*), at the moment the terrestrial Adamic day has been completed – which means seven days of the days of the Lord, as is indicated in the verse "Surely a day with thy Lord is as a thousand years of your counting" (Q 22:47), and given that the day of the 'Lord of the stairways' (Q 70:3) enters into [the comprehension of] the 'day of God' [cf. Q 45:14 and 14:5] and is [by itself] approximately one week of which every day is the equivalent of seven among the days of divinity, as He says: "To Him the angels and the Spirit mount up in a Day whereof the measure is fifty thousand years" (Q 70:4; i.e., $7 \times 7000 + 1000$) – the souls are transferred from the abode of the *barzakh* by the terrifying blast of the trumpet (*naḥkhat al-faza'*). As God says: ["On the day the trumpet is blown, and terrified are all in the heavens and earth, excepting whom God wills, and every one shall come to Him, all utterly abject" (Q 27:87), and] "For the trumpet shall be blown, and whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth shall be thunderstruck, save whom God wills" (Q 39:68). These [i.e., those exempted] are those that have already experienced the 'blast' and the 'lightning' (*al-naḥkha wa-l-ṣa'q*).¹¹⁵ He further explains that the 'terrifying blast'

115 See Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 277. According to Ibn 'Arabī as quoted ibid. by Ṣadrā, those exempted are "those that have already experienced the major resurrection (*al-qiyāma*

(*naḥkhat al-faza*) concerns specifically the transfer of the souls from the abode of the *barzakh* by saying “and every one shall come to Him, all utterly abject” (Q 27:87), but He also points to the [ultimate] birth as spirit and intellect, saying: “Then [God] causes the ultimate growth to grow” (Q 29:20). As for that ‘striking blast’ [of Q 39:68], it is the end of the period determined by Him, that is, the fifty thousand [years].

Then, right from that blast, He gives new life to the supreme spirit by the ‘second blast’ (Q 39:68), by a surplus of preordained theophany (*bi-mazīd iqtidā’ al-tajallī*, cf. Q 50:35) in the most perfect place of manifestation of the hidden divine names, to which [the Prophet] had alluded by saying: “I praise Him by praises by which I do not know Him yet.”¹¹⁶ So, from this most complete theophany appears the supreme manifestation (*al-maẓhar al-a’ẓam*), and from it appear the hidden names. Through them the throne is expanded, and from its expansion the circles of the ultimate abode are expanded, and from the widening of its circle Man (*al-insān*) emerges by a complete and ultimate birth (*inshā’an tāmman ukhrawiyyan*). [Now] it is the Spirit that is witnessed and directly involved with the rules of the ultimate and the *barzakh* in its very existing. It is through the spirit, then, that the means of subsistence indirectly reach the body and the soul, and the [true] believer enters paradise under the powerful form of the human creature in perfection (*‘alā l-khalq al-qawī al-Ādamī kamālan*).

b) Arabic text edited from the lithograph ed. (NB: Words and sentences in ⟨...⟩ have been supplied by the editor)

قوله قدّس سرّه “وبه تتحقّق بعث الأجساد” إلى آخره: اعلم أنّ الله سبحانه خلق الوجود ثلاثيّة [ثلاث في الأصل] عوالم – كما مرّ – أيّ دنيا وبرزخا وأخرى. فخلق الجسم عن الدنيا، والنفس من البرزخ، والروح – أيّ العقل – عن الأخرى، وجعل الوسائط الحاكمة الناقلة لتنوّعات الإنسان في عوالمه ثلاثا [ثلاثة في الأصل]: مَلَك الموت (لِلأجسام)، ونفخة الفَرْع (لِلأنفس)، ونفخة الصَّعَق لِلأرواح.

فإذا كان الإنسان في هذه الدار، كان الحكم فيها ظاهرا للطبيعة الجسم وهو المشهود المباشر [+ للباشر في الأصل] للأفعال والأحكام، والنفس والروح مندرجتان في وجوده مخفيتان تحت حجاب، والإمدادات متّصلة بهما بواسطته.

al-kubrā.” According to Ṣadrā’s own interpretation (ibid.; also see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Risāla fi l-ḥaṣhr* 369; trans. in Jambet, *Se rendre immortel* 170), they are pure spirits or timeless Platonic forms.

116 *Ḥadīth* quoted (in a slightly different form) by Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ii, 552, 13–4 (chapter 251; for variants and earlier sources see Chittick, *The Sufi path* 153 and 399). Ṣadrā also quotes a variant in Mullā Ṣadrā, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* ii, 714.

فإذا شاء الحق نقل النفس لدار البرزخ أمات الجسم بواسطة ملك الموت ثم ينشأ [كذا] النفس في البرزخ النشأة الثانية النفسانية صوراً إسرائيلية ويكون [كذا] هي المشهوددة المباشرة للأحكام البرزخية، والإمدادات متصلة بها أولاً وبالجسم والروح بواسطتها ثانياً، إذ هي الظاهرة المصورة بصورتها المناسبة لأخلاقتها وملكانها.

فالبرزخ عالم مستقل بين عالمي الدنيا والآخرة، يعني دار القرار كالفجر بين الليل والنهار، وهو مستقرّ الأنفس والأرواح المتقلة عن هذه الدار من بدو الزمان إلى حين انقضائه بقيام الساعة الأخرى والطامة الكبرى. وله آيات تشير إليه: قال الله تعالى وَمَنْ وَرَّاهُمْ بِرِزْقٍ إِلَى يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ - لَهُمْ رِزْقُهُمْ فِيهَا بُكْرَةً وَعَشِيًّا، يعني دار البرزخ. وقوله و[كذا] النَّارُ يُعْرَضُونَ عَلَيْهَا غُدُوًّا وَعَشِيًّا، وكذا قوله فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ شَقُوا فِي النَّارِ الْآيَتِينَ، يعني - والله أعلم - جنة البرزخ وجهنم البرزخ، لأن مدة الخلود فيهما مقدورة بدوام السموات. فإذا انقضى حكمهما بالتبديل الأخرى في قوله يَوْمَ تُبَدَّلُ الْأَرْضُ غَيْرَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَوَاتُ وَبَرَزُوا لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ، انقضت مدة الخلود فيهما. كل ذلك لما في نشأة البرزخ ودوائر [دائر في الأصل] (دار) الحيوان من إنشائته الدنيوية لأنه بين العالمين فيه أثر من كل منهما كما أن النفس بين العالمين، عالم الجسم وعالم الروح.

فإذا أراد الله نقل الأنفس من دار البرزخ إلى دار الحقيقة حين كل اليوم الدنيوي الآدمي - وهو سبعة أيام من أيام الرب بقوله وَإِنْ يَوْمًا عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ كَأَلْفِ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ، ودخل في يوم الله يوم ذي المعارج، وهو قرب أسبوع كل يوم منه سبعة أيام الربوبية لقوله تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ - نقلت الأنفس من دار البرزخ بنفخة الفرع، كما قال الله تعالى (وَيَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَفَرَعَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ وَكُلُّ أَتَوْهُ دَاخِرِينَ، وَ) نُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَصَعِقَ مَنْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا مَنْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ، وهم الذين سبقت لهم النفخة والصعق. ثم يتبين أن نفخة الفرع مختصة بنقل النفوس من دار البرزخ بقوله تعالى وَكُلُّ أَتَوْهُ دَاخِرِينَ، وأشار أيضاً إلى النشأة الروحية العقلية بقوله ثم (اللَّهُ) يُنْشِئُ النَّشْأَةَ الْآخِرَةَ. وهذا الصعق هو نهاية الأجل المسمى عنده، أي الخمسين ألف.

ثم يحیی من هذا الصعق بالنفخة الثانية بمزيد اقتضاء التجلي الروح الأعظم في المظهر الأكل للأسماء الباطنة الإلهية التي نبه عليها بقوله فأحمده بمحامد لا أعرفه (بها) الآن. فن هذا التجلي الأتم ظهر المظهر الأعظم وعنه ظهرت الأسماء الباطنة وعن الأسماء الباطنة اتسع العرش وعن اتساعه اتسعت دوائر الدار الآخرة وعن توسع دائرتها أنشئ الإنسان

إنشاءً تاماً أخرىً كانت الروح هي المشهودة المباشرة للأحكام الأخروية والبرزخية في وجودها، وصارت الإمدادات متصلةً بالجسم والنفس بواسطة الروح، ودخل المؤمن الجنة على الخلق القوي الآدمي كلاً.

c) Arabic Text in Lithogr. Ed. 518, Margin

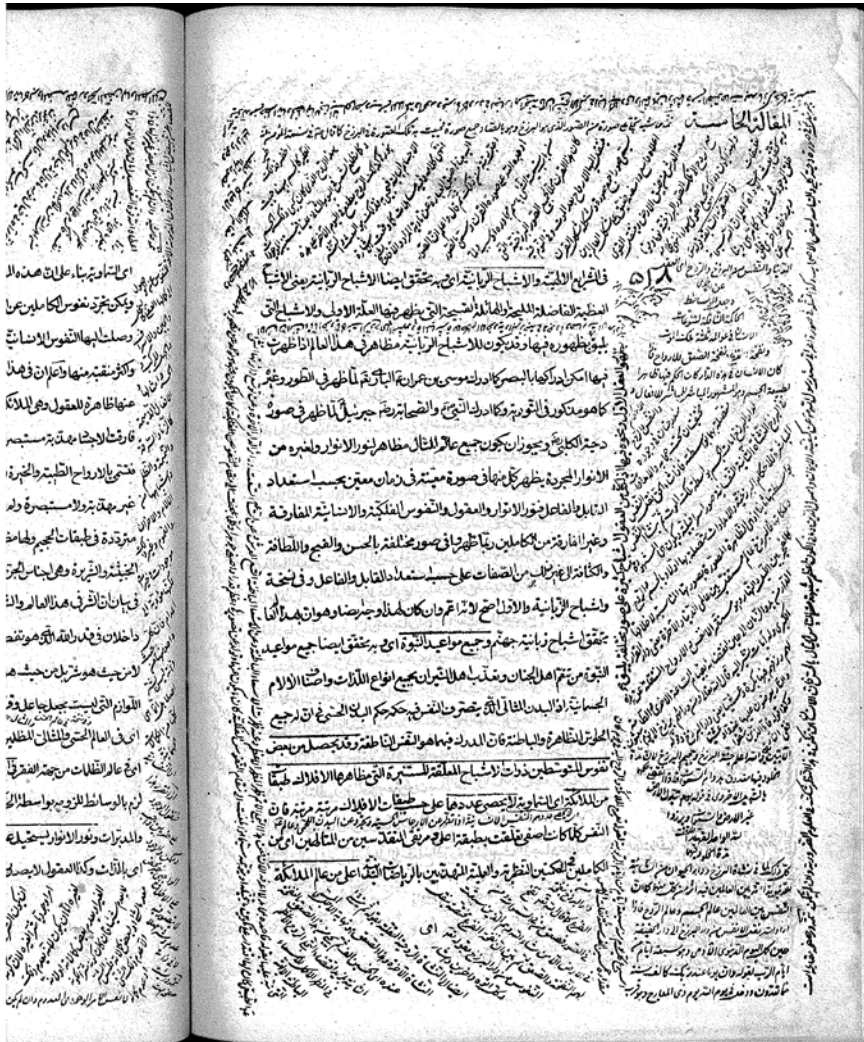


FIGURE 22.1 Arabic text in lithogr. ed. 518, margin.

A Philosopher's Itinerary for the Afterlife: Mullā Ṣadrā on Paths to Felicity*

Mohammed Rustom

In Islamic thought, the eternal nature of hell and its pains has, for the most part, been a given. I say “for the most part” because we also encounter classical Muslim authors belonging to a variety of intellectual persuasions who believed in (1) the finite nature of hell itself,¹ and/or (2) some form of cessation of punishment in hell. Among the most prominent voices in the Islamic tradition who leaned toward hell’s finite nature were Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350).² The famous Spanish Sufi Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240) was the strongest advocate for the actual cessation of punishment in hell, while also maintaining a belief in its eternal and even “pleasurable” nature.³ This position seems to have influenced the first Ottoman *shaykh al-islām* and important interpreter of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274), Muḥammad b. Ḥamza al-Fanārī (d. 834/1431).⁴

Another thinker who closely followed Ibn ‘Arabī on the question of the nature of hell is the famous Safavid philosopher Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640), commonly referred to as Mullā Ṣadrā.⁵ Ṣadrā is best remem-

* Thanks go to Mohammad Hassan Khalil and the present volume’s editors for their comments on the penultimate draft of this article. For an extended version of the ideas presented here, see Rustom, *The triumph of mercy*, chapters 6–7.

1 For treatments of hell’s temporal nature in early Islamic thought, see Abrahamov, *The creation and duration*; Hamza, *To hell and back*.

2 For Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim’s positions on hell’s finite nature, see Hoover, *Islamic universalism*; Khalil, *Islam and the fate of others*, chapter 3.

3 The most comprehensive treatment of this dimension of Ibn ‘Arabī’s soteriology is to be found in Chittick, *Ibn al-‘Arabī’s hermeneutics*. See also Khalil, *Islam and the fate of others*, chapter 2.

4 See Winter, *Ibn ‘Arabī’s hagiology* 157, n. 97.

5 For Ṣadrā’s life and work, see Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī*; Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī*. It should be noted here that the present article does not discuss Ṣadrā’s belief in hell’s pleasurable nature, since there are a number of textual problems which need to be dealt with before this point can be adequately addressed. For a full exposition of this aspect of Ṣadrā’s thought, see Rustom, *The triumph of mercy*, chapter 7.

bered as the philosopher most haunted by the question of being or existence (*wujūd*). For Ṣadrā (as for Ibn 'Arabī), all things that exist are nothing but delimited modes of a single, unitary reality. The cosmos therefore is a conglomerate of various manifestations of the degrees of intensity and diminution of being. This principle, commonly referred to as “the fundamentality of being” (*aṣālat al-wujūd*), lies at the heart of all of Ṣadrā's teachings.⁶

Ṣadrā's thorough knowledge of the religious sciences allowed him to harmonize his philosophical teachings with Islam's fundamental dogmas. Thus, when he approached the question of the afterlife,⁷ he attempted to understand the statements in scripture concerning the nature of suffering in hell within his all-embracing ontology. Since for Ṣadrā all things come from the One (the Source of all being) and must return to the One, the theological concept of hell, which is a place of torment, anguish, suffering, and distance from the One, must be finite; for all creatures, regardless of their actions, must eventually return to their original Source. Yet, as we will see, for Ṣadrā the picture is far more complicated than this basic intuition may suggest.

1 The “Nearest” of Paths

Ṣadrā first tackles the question of the problem of eternal punishment in hell in his *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād* (The origin and the return). This text is his first full-length book, and was completed in 1015/1606,⁸ when Ṣadrā was roughly thirty-six years old. Although this is Ṣadrā's earliest book, it already represents his mature thinking, and like all his other books, is written from the perspective of the fundamentality of being. Indeed, the date of its completion coincides with the time he began writing his magnum opus, *al-Hikma al-muta'aliya fī l-asfār al-arba'a al-'aqliyya* (The transcendent philosophy: On the four intellectual journeys), a project which was not completed until some twenty-two years later.

6 For recent discussions of Ṣadrā's ontology, see Bonmariage, *Le réel et les réalités*; Kalin, *Knowledge in later Islamic philosophy* 86–102; Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and metaphysics*; Rustom, *The triumph of mercy*, chapters 1 and 4. For lucid explanations of Ṣadrā's philosophy in general, see Chittick's introduction in Ṣadrā's *The elixir of the gnostics*; Jambet, *The act of being*, part 1; Nasr, *Islamic philosophy* 223–33.

7 A number of studies have been written on various aspects of Ṣadrā's eschatology. See, in particular, Āshtiyānī, *Ma'ād-i jismānī*; Corbin, *En islam iranien* iv, 84–115; Jambet, *Mort et résurrection en islam*; Rustom, *The triumph of mercy*, chapters 6 and 7.

8 Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shirāzī* 64.

In the context of his discussion of common mistakes among people on the interpretation of eschatological realities, Ṣadrā introduces another mistaken belief to which most people adhere, namely the fact that (a) grave sinners (*ahl al-kabā'ir*) will reside in hell for eternity (*khulūd*), and (b) God's mercy will never reach them. In refuting this belief, Ṣadrā calls attention to the fact that such a perspective both engenders despair among those aspiring toward God and contradicts the primary purpose of revelation, which is to provide for human beings a path to salvation:

They do not know that God's mercy is all-encompassing, that His forgiveness takes precedence, and [that] the shortcoming is from us. They do not realize that this opinion is one of the things on account of which man despairs of God's mercy and thus diminishes in [both his] desire for the pleasures of the garden and in [his] awe of the chastisements of the fire. For those seeking God, heading toward Him, and longing to meet Him, having little desire and awe makes the path leading to God and His dominion distant.

Every belief and position that is inconsistent with God's mercy and guidance and makes the path leading to Him distant is undoubtedly false. For such a position is inconsistent with the establishment of revealed religions and contradicts the sending of messengers and the revealing of scriptures, since the purpose behind all of these is nothing but to lead creatures close to their Lord's mercy by way of the nearest of paths and the easiest of means.⁹

This passage is significant for a number of reasons. Not only does it give us a window into Ṣadrā's early thought on the question of eternal suffering, but it also provides us with a clear picture of his view of the goal of religion and revelation. As we will see below, it is not insignificant that Ṣadrā ends this passage by saying that the purpose behind revelation is to provide for human beings the "nearest of paths" and "easiest of means" to their Lord's mercy.

Ṣadrā's most extensive engagement with the problem of the eternal nature of suffering in hell can be found in the last *safr* of the *Asfār* (the section dealing with psychology and eschatology) under the subheading, *fī kayfiyyat khulūd ahl al-nār fī l-nār* ("On how the people of the fire abide in the fire eternally").¹⁰

9 Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād* 460–1. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* vii, 374. All translations from the Arabic (including Quranic verses) are my own.

10 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* [i.e., *al-Ḥikma al-muta'āliya fī l-asfār al-arba'a al-'aqliyya*, henceforth *Asfār*], ix, 346–62. For an English translation of this section, see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Spiritual*

He begins this section by saying that the question of eternal chastisement is a theologically difficult problem, and one concerning which there are differences of opinion, both among the exoteric scholars (*'ulamā' al-rusūm*) and the people of unveiling (*ahl al-kashf*).¹¹ He summarizes the position of those who believe that God's chastisement is not eternal. They maintain that since all people are created with love (*'ishq*) for existence and longing for its perfection, their essential end is their source, which means that they all end up in goodness because all things seek God and yearn to meet Him as He is the source of love and longing. There are indeed obstacles on the way to Him, but they are not eternal, for if this were the case, then people would be unable to search for what is good.¹² With a well-known *ḥadīth* in mind, Ṣadrā then says that since love is essential and dislike is accidental, the people who love to meet God do so as a result of an intrinsic quality (*bi-l-dhāt*), whereas those who dislike meeting Him do so in an accidental manner (*bi-l-'araḍ*).¹³

As for those who uphold the view that hell and its chastisements are eternal, Ṣadrā explains their position, playing, it seems, the role of devil's advocate. He states that without sin, pain, and difficulties, the hierarchic order (*niẓām*) of the cosmos would become corrupted, and this would nullify God's wisdom. Thus, the order of things can only be upheld through the existence of lowly and base things. Since divine wisdom demands that people have different ranks, levels, and capacities, His decree requires that some of these people be felicitous or blessed and some wretched.¹⁴

Ṣadrā clearly does not favor this position. In fact, he says that since each party – whether felicitous or wretched – comes about by virtue of God's will and in accordance with a particular divine name, they will still return to their essential natures. Returning to one's essential nature itself entails delight and

psychology. If we were to assume that the *Asfār*'s order reflects the manner of its chronological composition, then this would place Ṣadrā's treatment of this problem closer to 1037/1628, roughly two decades after he dealt with the issue in his *Mabda'*. It should further be noted that Ṣadrā also addresses the issue of hell's eternity in his *Tafsīr āyat al-kursī*, which was completed some seven years after the *Mabda'*. See Rustom, *The triumph of mercy*, chapter 6. In this section of the present article, I confine my discussion to the *Asfār*, since it presents, in a more developed form, the corresponding arguments that can be found in the *Tafsīr āyat al-kursī*.

11 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 346–7.

12 Ibid., ix, 347. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 235–6.

13 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 347. The *ḥadīth* in question reads, "Whoever loves to meet (*liqā*) God, God loves to meet him; and whoever detests to meet God, God detests to meet him." See Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Riqāq*, no. 41.

14 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 348. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 236–8.

bliss. Yet the contrary qualities of the divine names must still obtain. Be they God's attributes of beauty (*jamāl*) (which are manifested through such divine names as "the gentle," "the kind," and "the loving"), or His attributes of majesty (*jalāl*) (which are manifested through such divine names as "the overpowering," "the vengeful," and "the wrathful"), God's names must always have their respective loci which manifest His infinite self-disclosures.¹⁵

Ṣadrā cites a passage from Ibn 'Arabī's *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) which states that people will enter either heaven or hell on account of their actions, and will remain in their respective abodes by virtue of their intentions. Although this means that there will be people in hell who are eternally tormented, Ibn 'Arabī says that this torment will be agreeable to their natures, meaning their "torment" will actually be pleasure. This is primarily because, as the *ḥadīth qudsī* or sacred saying says, "My mercy triumphs over My wrath" (*inna raḥmatī taḡlibu ghaḍabī*),¹⁶ which means that God will not simply punish His servants without allowing mercy to predominate. In fact, Ibn 'Arabī asserts, were the people of hell to enter heaven, they would feel pain because its "pleasures" would not be agreeable to their natures.¹⁷

Ṣadrā also cites a passage from the famous commentary upon Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*) by Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350). The text in question states that God's chastisement is not eternal. Rather, it is there to purify people, just as gold and silver are placed in fire in order to separate base metals from pure substances.¹⁸ Thus, chastisement in hell is there insofar as humans need to be purged of the base characteristics that they acquired on earth and which prevent them from being in God's company.

There is clearly a contradiction in the reports cited by Ṣadrā. Ibn 'Arabī says that the chastisement is eternal, but that it is somehow pleasurable for those subjected to it because it is agreeable to their natures. Qayṣarī, on the other

15 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 348–9.

16 In another version, God says, "My mercy outstrips (*sabaqat*) My wrath." For both traditions, see Graham, *Divine word* 184–5.

17 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 349, citing Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, Beirut edition iii, 648. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 239; Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, Beirut edition ii, 207; Cairo edition xiv, 214 (cited in Chittick, Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics 165). See also Ibn 'Arabī, *De la mort* 217–8.

18 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 349–50. The idea that punishment is a form of cleansing is not unique to Qayṣarī. For similar points made by other Muslim thinkers, see Khalil, *Islam and the fate of others*, passim. It is interesting to note that the other well-known *Fuṣūṣ* commentator, 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d. 736/1335), also upholds a position on the non-eternality of hell, although perhaps not as explicitly as Ibn 'Arabī and Qayṣarī. See Lory, *Les commentaires ésotériques* 129–32.

hand, says that punishment in hell is simply there to purge people of their sins. Thus, once they are purified, they will no longer be chastised. Ṣadrā assures us that there is actually no contradiction between these two accounts:

If you say that these statements which indicate that the cessation (*inqiṭā'*) of chastisement for the people of the fire is inconsistent with what I have just said concerning the lastingness of pain for them, I say [the following]: I do not agree that these are inconsistent with one another (*munāfāt*), for there is no inconsistency between the non-cessation (*'adam inqīṭā'*) of eternal chastisement for the people of the fire, and its cessation for each of them at one [particular] moment.¹⁹

What Ṣadrā means by this statement is not altogether clear. We know that he is defending a position which reconciles the idea of some form of abiding punishment in hell with God's all-encompassing mercy. Several pages later, he clarifies his point. He says that the statements of the "people of unveiling" regarding the cessation of punishment in hell are not inconsistent with those Quranic verses which speak of chastisement in hell. Here, Ṣadrā again draws on Qayṣarī's statement that something can be both chastisement and mercy at one and the same time: "the existence of something as chastisement in one respect does not negate its being mercy in another respect."²⁰

How, then, can something be punishment and mercy at one and the same time? Although he alluded to a solution earlier when he spoke of the intrinsic and accidental qualities with respect to those loving/disliking to meet God in the afterlife, Ṣadrā returns to this question later in the text. He cites Ibn 'Arabī's meditation on the fact that since God created people for the sole purpose of worshiping Him, their innate disposition (*fiṭra*) is to only worship Him.²¹ As Ibn 'Arabī argues elsewhere, one of the verses upon which this argument is based is Q 17:23, "And your Lord has decreed (*qaḍā'*) that you worship none but Him." For Ibn 'Arabī, the "decree" in this verse is not merely prescriptive (*taklīfī*), but engendering (*takwīnī*), meaning that it is in the very nature of things, based on the divine decree, that God is the only object of worship in the

19 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 350. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 237, n. 238; Nasr, *Islamic intellectual tradition* 292, 301, n. 71.

20 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 353, citing Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ* i, 436.

21 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 350–51, citing Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, Beirut edition iii, 24 (translated in Chittick, Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics 162). Cf. Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, Beirut edition iii, 465 (translated in Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 338). For the concept of *fiṭra* in Islam, see Gobillot, *La conception originelle*.

cosmos.²² Thus, when people worship gods other than God, they do so because of their belief that their worship will bring them closer to God, which explains Q 39:3, “We only worship them to draw us closer to God.”²³

Since God’s creatures ultimately worship none but Him, albeit in different forms, they are all faithful to the divine injunction in Q 17:23. Ṣadrā notes that behind all forms of worship lies essential worship, and that that which is accidental, namely what comes about by virtue of the choices man makes during his life, will be accounted for. Thus, the human constitution (*nash’a*), which is accidental and animal-like, will face torment, whereas the substance related to man’s soul (*jawhar naḥsānī*) will not endure corruption.²⁴ This means that the lowly qualities which a person acquires during his stay on earth will eventually be effaced through torment and chastisement in the afterlife. After this period of torment, he will return to his innate disposition (*fiṭra*). As for the one who had incorrect and false beliefs concerning God, his suffering will also come to an end, but he will be unable to return to his innate disposition and will thus be “transferred to another innate disposition.”²⁵

Yet by virtue of the economy of the divine names, there are some who must indeed reside in the fire, that is, who have been destined to come under the purview of God’s names of majesty and wrath. Ibn ‘Arabī takes his lead from two important texts, one a verse from the Quran and the other a *ḥadīth*. Q 7:36 refers to the “people of the fire” (*aṣḥāb al-nār*) as residing in it eternally (*hum fihā khālidūn*). And the Prophet says, “none will remain in the fire except for those who are its folk (*alladhīna hum ahluhā*).” These passages give Ibn ‘Arabī cause to explain his position on why punishment in hell is a good thing for its inhabitants: since hell was always meant to be their home and is therefore suitable to their natures, were they to leave it, they would suffer immensely on account of departing from their homeland (*mawṭin*).²⁶ This means that were the “people” or “folk” of the fire to be taken out of hell and led into the garden, they would actually suffer pain because their constitutions would not be suited to the joys of the garden. The reason their constitutions are not suited to

22 For Ibn ‘Arabī’s argument as laid out in the *Futūḥāt*, see Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 342–3, 381.

23 Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 353, where he cites Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, Beirut edition ii, 225; Cairo edition xiv, 361. See also Chittick, *The self-disclosure of God* 86–7.

24 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 351.

25 Ibid. This, Ṣadrā explains, is the sense in which they will have “eternal” punishment, since they will suffer from “the punishment of compound ignorance” (*adhāb al-jahl al-murakkab*). Cf. Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 101–2.

26 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 352, citing Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, Beirut edition iii, 24 (translated in Chittick, *The self-disclosure of God* 188).

other than the fire, Ibn 'Arabī tells us, is because God has given them a constitution which is only suitable for residence in hell.²⁷

Mullā Ṣadrā stands in complete agreement with Ibn 'Arabī concerning the pleasurable nature of residence in hell for those who are meant to abide there forever. At the same time, he notes that he considers Ibn 'Arabī's understanding of the terms *aṣḥāb* and *ahl* used in the aforementioned Quranic verse and *ḥadīth* to be weak. Ṣadrā understands the terms *aṣḥāb* and *ahl* to have relational meanings, which means they do not indicate "residence."²⁸ He then seems to disagree with Ibn 'Arabī again, noting that the only way the people of the fire's departure from their homeland could be an intense chastisement would be, if by "departure," the "natural homeland (*al-mawṭin al-ṭabīʿī*) is meant."²⁹ Although Ibn 'Arabī speaks of a constitution being given to the people of the fire so that they can bear and derive pleasure from its torments, it is unclear whether there is any real disagreement here between Ṣadrā and Ibn 'Arabī's positions. This is because they both indicate that hell will, in one manner or another, be a necessary permanent abode for some people whose natures are/will be suited to it. Ibn 'Arabī refers to this nature as a "constitution," while Ṣadrā refers to it as a "natural homeland."

Where Ṣadrā stands in clear agreement with Ibn 'Arabī is on how hell will become agreeable:

There is no doubt that the entry [into hell of] the creature whose end is that he should enter hell – in accordance with the divine lordly decree – will be agreeable (*muwāfiq*) to his nature and will be a perfection of his existence. For the end, as has been stated, is the perfection of existents. The perfection of something which one finds agreeable to his nature (*al-muwāfiq lahu*) is not chastisement with respect to him. It is only chastisement with respect to others who have been created in higher ranks.³⁰

Since Ṣadrā understands the fire to be the natural homestead for some people, it is a form of perfection for them in accordance with the principle of substantial motion (*al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya*), namely that all things are constantly moving toward their substantial perfection as they ascend the scale of being.³¹

27 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 352. See also Chittick, Ibn al-'Arabī's hermeneutics 165.

28 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 352.

29 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 352. Cf. Hatem, Pure love in Mulla Sadra 298.

30 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 352.

31 For helpful treatments of substantial motion in Mullā Ṣadrā, see Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 84–95; Dehbashi, *Transubstantial motion and the natural world*; Kalin, Between physics and metaphysics.

The most important point which emerges from this discussion is that Ṣadrā sets forth an argument for how punishment in hell can be eternal while not compromising the fundamentality of God's mercy.

2 Being and Mercy

The foregoing discussion naturally leads to one important question: what, exactly, does Ṣadrā mean when he speaks of “the creature whose end is that he should enter hell?” The reason hell comes about, Ṣadrā tells us in the same discussion in the *Aṣfār*, is because of the configuration of the cosmos itself. The cosmos is nothing but differentiated modes of God's creative and engendering word (*kalām*).³² Hence, the duality which emerges in the cosmos is a natural and necessary result of the dispersion of God's word which becomes fragmented the further it falls away from its source. The two “rivers” which proceed from the ocean of oneness, therefore, account for the ontological roots of both good and evil.³³

Because hell exists by virtue of the “left” side of the river, and insofar as the “left” represents God's names of wrath and majesty, it must necessarily manifest God's qualities of wrath. Although the river branches off into two, it comes from the same source of water. This source of water is nothing other than God's mercy, which for Ṣadrā is a synonym for being (*wujūd*), as is the case for Ibn ‘Arabī.³⁴ Thus, the very nature of being itself necessitates mercy, since revelation is nothing but the deployment of being. This explains why, as Ṣadrā says in no uncertain terms in the previously-cited passage from the *Mabda’*, that any position which goes against the basic teaching of God's mercy is false, for such a position would have to negate being itself, which is impossible.

In one of his last and certainly most profound works, *Tafsīr sūrat al-fātiḥa* (a philosophical and mystical commentary upon the Quran's opening chapter),³⁵ Ṣadrā drives this point home. He says that being and mercy are the

32 For the role played by God's word in Islamic cosmology in general and Ṣadrā's thought in particular, see Rustom, *The triumph of mercy*, chapters 1 and 5.

33 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 355–6.

34 For the identification of *wujūd* with *rahma*, see Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 70. See also the pertinent remarks in Qūnawī, *I'jāz* 319; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 48. Cf. Lawson, Divine wrath and divine mercy in Islam 250.

35 For Ṣadrā's Quranic works in general, see Rustom, *Approaching Mullā Ṣadrā*; Rustom, *The nature and significance*. For a study of the *Tafsīr sūrat al-fātiḥa*, see Rustom, *The triumph of mercy*, chapters 2–7.

same reality, and that mercy is essential whereas wrath is accidental.³⁶ In other words, since all things arise from being and return to being, they are nothing in and of themselves, which means that their qualities are at best incidental to their true natures. Things which seem to be “evil,” such as sickness or pain, spring up therefore within being, but by virtue of being’s diminution and not its perfection. Yet since they are modes of being, their source is good, even if they bring along with them some temporary harm. This temporary harm and perceived evil is a necessary part of the structure of reality, which, by its nature, is graded and multi-level. The multi-level nature of the stratification of being entails that those modes of being which come about at the lower end of the scale of being be more dense, dark, tenebrous, material, and hence “evil.” Thus, sicknesses and tribulations are simply the deprivation of existence. Stated another way, they are “non-existence.”³⁷

In theological language, we can say that since things arise out of mercy and return to mercy, whatever negative qualities become attached to them must naturally peel away. Creatures who return to God with negative qualities call upon His wrath. And, just as negative qualities are accidental, so, too, is the inherent quality of wrath which they engender. Wrath only arises out of mercy, which means that God’s wrath is nothing but mercy. But because God’s mercy outstrips His wrath,³⁸ and because Q 7:156 says that God’s mercy encompasses all things, the essentiality of mercy will necessarily outstrip the accidentality of wrath.³⁹ This is why Ṣadrā goes on to exclaim in his *Tafsīr sūrat al-fātiḥa*, following Ibn ‘Arabī, that “the end for all is mercy.”⁴⁰ Yet despite the fact that the end for all is mercy, Ṣadrā also insists that the routes individuals take to return to their source of mercy are radically divergent.

36 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 70–1. Cf. Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 151–2; Mullā Ṣadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 217. For the essential nature of mercy and the accidental nature of wrath, see Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ* 177–80. Helpful discussions can also be found in Chittick, Ibn al-‘Arabī’s hermeneutics 158ff.; Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 113; Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism* 99ff.

37 See Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 71.

38 See n. 16 above for this *ḥadīth qudsī*.

39 Mullā Ṣadrā makes this point explicitly at *Tafsīr* i, 70–1.

40 Ibid., i, 71. For the statement in Ibn ‘Arabī, see Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 120, 130, 226, 338.

3 Divergent Paths

Q 1:6 contains a prayer – part and parcel of Muslim daily praxis – to be guided upon the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). Meditating upon this verse, and closely following a related discussion in the *Asfār*,⁴¹ Ṣadrā says that each individual has a path that he or she must traverse, and which ultimately leads to God:

Know that the path (*ṣirāṭ*) is not a path except by virtue of one's traversing it. An allusion has been made to the fact that every creature is heading toward the direction of the Real, heading toward the Causer of causes (*musabbib al-asbāb*) in an innate manner of turning (*tawajjuh gharīzī*) and a motion of natural disposition (*ḥaraka jibillīyya*). In this motion of natural disposition, diversion and fleeing from what God has fixed for each of them cannot be conceived with respect to them.⁴²

This path that an individual traverses belongs to that person in an “innate manner of turning” and in a “motion of natural disposition.” But it would seem that, despite the fact that everyone is heading to God in an innate manner of turning, there are nevertheless differences among them in the routes of their return, and, ultimately, their final fate.

We can only understand the different routes people take to their destination (which is in accordance with their innate disposition) once we have understood the nature of the path itself. The path, according to Ṣadrā, is nothing other than the human soul:

The path is spread out for you as a sensory bridge (*jīsr maḥsūs*) extended over the surface of hell, its start being in [this] place, and its end being at the door of heaven. Whoever witnesses it will know that it is of your [own] design and construction, and that it was an extended bridge in this world over the surface of your [own] hell in the fire of your nature within which was the shadow of your reality.⁴³

41 The relevant section in the *Tafsīr sūrat al-fātiḥa* is in *Tafsīr* i, 111–23, which is based on *Asfār* ix, 284–90. The latter also serves as the basis for a similar discussion in Mullā Ṣadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 191–7.

42 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 111, based on *Asfār* ix, 284. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Maḥfūṭ* 732–4. Ṭūsī, *Āghāz wa-anjām* 7, may be an indirect source for this passage.

43 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 122, based on Mullā Ṣadrā, *Asfār* ix, 289. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 196. See also Dakake, *The soul as Barzakh*.

Şadrā's doctrine of substantial motion posits that change can occur within the category of substance itself, this being an important departure from traditional Aristotelian substance metaphysics. Şadrā also tells us that the soul is "corporeal in temporal origination, spiritual in subsistence (*jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa-rūḥāniyyat al-baqāʾ*)."⁴⁴ Since the very substance or essence of the soul partakes in motion or change, the distance it traverses is nothing other than itself.⁴⁵ Thus, the higher the soul ascends the scale of being, the more real it becomes, meaning the more it strips itself of its materiality and returns to its true nature.

One of the implications of the identification of the soul with the path is that, because all of one's actions in this world are imprinted upon the soul, the nature of the human soul itself determines the route one will take in its journey back to God. The state of the soul, in other words, will become imaginalized in the next world (that is, it will take on a corporeal and spiritual form, much like the contents of our dreams),⁴⁶ thus creating a pathway for it to its ultimate place of residency. The soul extends from hell to heaven by virtue of the fact that hell for Şadrā is, from one perspective, nothing other than the corporeal world in which the soul is pinned down by matter.⁴⁷ If the soul cannot rise beyond the prison of corporeality, it will reside in hell, that is, it will remain in its fallen state. Souls which have become fully actualized will, on the other hand, enter heaven, which was their original home.⁴⁸

God's pre-eternal decree is what determines a soul's starting point, and, because of the limitations imposed upon the human soul by virtue of its inborn capacity, its end as well. This explains why Şadrā is adamant about the fact that each soul has its own mode of return back to God which is specific to it alone. As he puts it, every soul comes from "a specified point of origin among the spirits' points of origin"⁴⁹ which necessitates that each soul comes from a point of origin unique unto itself and unsuitable for other souls. Since for Şadrā the point of one's origin is also the point of one's return, the place to which one returns is also specific for each individual. If the point of origin and place of return for each soul is different, then surely the path that each

44 See Mullā Şadrā, *Aṣfār* viii, 333–4, 350.

45 Mullā Şadrā, *Tāfsīr* i, 112. Cf. Mullā Şadrā, *The wisdom of the throne* 193.

46 For the Şadrian teaching on the imaginalized nature of the soul in its posthumous states, see Rustom, *Psychology, eschatology, and imagination*.

47 See Mullā Şadrā, *Aṣfār* ix, 356.

48 Mullā Şadrā, *Tāfsīr* i, 175.

49 *Ibid.*, i, 108.

soul treads along (namely what it “becomes,” for the soul is the path itself) will be different.

When humans ask God to guide them upon the straight path in Q 1:6, they therefore ask for nothing but guidance upon their own path, which will lead to their own personal and individually unique state of felicity. This is why Ṣadrā goes on to make a subtle distinction between the different paths available to a person and the path appropriate to him:

It is just as God says, “And do not follow the paths (*al-subul*), for they will divert you from God’s path (*sabīlihi*)” [Q 6:153], that is, the path which is for you contains felicity and salvation, for if this were not the case, then all paths would lead to God, since God is the end point of every purpose and the final goal of every endeavor. However, not everyone who returns to God will attain felicity and salvation from dispersion and chastisement. For the path to felicity is one: “Say: ‘This is my path (*sabīlī*). Upon insight I call to God myself and those who follow me” [Q 12:108].⁵⁰

Ṣadrā surprises us here. He says that the path that is particular to an individual brings about his felicity and salvation. Had this not been the case, then all paths would lead to God. But by virtue of the nature of being, we know that all paths do in fact lead to God. What Ṣadrā seems to have in mind here is that since each individual has a path to God specific to him, the other paths which are available to him are not actual options in terms of his return to God. A person has the option to tread upon them, but the truth is, in accordance with his innate disposition, there is only one path that is open to his soul, and it is that path that must be followed. Ṣadrā then says that not everyone who returns to God will attain felicity. This is because, in accordance with the divine decree, there are some who must end up in misery and wretchedness, and some who must end up in felicity. Thus, while all souls return to God, some meet the aforementioned divine attributes of beauty, whereas others meet the divine attributes of majesty.

Yet there is a further complication: Ṣadrā clearly does not have in mind a cut-and-dried presentation of the nature of the afterlife where some end up in bliss and others suffer eternally. He upholds a belief that people will be purged of sins, and hence the necessity for some form of suffering in the next life. Yet he maintains that the different grades of individuals, whether felicitous or damned, will become differentiated through their encounter with God in terms of His names of beauty and majesty. According to a *ḥadīth qudsī*, on the day

⁵⁰ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 42, citing *Tafsīr* iv, 51–2.

of judgment, after the angels, prophets, and believers have all interceded for those in hell, for them to be taken out of it and placed in heaven, only the intercession of God's name "the Most Merciful of the merciful" (*arḥam al-rāḥimīn*) will remain.⁵¹ Since "the Most Merciful of the merciful" or "the All-Merciful" (*al-raḥmān*) is the only name that will intercede on behalf of all people, Ṣadrā tells us, those who meet God's names of majesty in the next life will eventually come face-to-face with God as the All-Merciful, a name which will subsist among God's servants for all eternity:

As for the other paths, all of their goals are first toward God [in terms of His names of beauty and majesty]. Then, at the end, the All-Merciful will take over for God [in terms of His names of beauty and majesty], and the property of the All-Merciful will subsist amongst them for eternity, whose subsistence has no end. This is a strange affair! I have not found anyone upon the face of the earth who knows it as it truly should be known!⁵²

Ṣadrā also discusses this phenomenon in symbolic terms. Employing the imagery and language of Ibn 'Arabi and his followers, he speaks of the structure of the cosmos in terms of God's "two hands." As the Prophet tells us, God has two hands and they are both blessed and "right."⁵³ But each hand does not manifest the same attributes. One hand gives preponderance to God's attributes of mercy and the other to God's attributes of wrath.⁵⁴ From this perspective, we can speak of God's "left" and "right" hands, or the divine qualities which manifest leftness and rightness. Just as two human hands are in opposition to each other, so, too, are the qualities denoted by God's two hands. Each of God's hands is nothing other than a corollary of the different types of souls which have come about through the downward flow of the river of existence. Thus, the hands' properties manifest themselves in accordance with the attributes of the people who fall under their sway.

Because God's two hands are "right," they are both naturally good. This idea again accords with a point Ṣadrā makes in the *Asfār*, namely that despite the outward appearance of a thing as wrath and punishment, inwardly it is mercy.⁵⁵

51 See Mullā Ṣadrā's use of this tradition at *Tafsīr* i, 72, 157–8; iii, 338. Cf. Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 396, n. 24. For the text of the *ḥadīth*, see Graham, *Divine word* 190.

52 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 42.

53 Mullā Ṣadrā refers to this tradition at *Tafsīr* i, 49. For the two hands of God in Islamic thought, see Murata, *The Tao of Islam* 81–114.

54 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 149.

55 Cf. *ibid.*, i, 157. Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 159–61, which closely follows Qūnawī, *I'jāz* 475–8.

This does not mean that both of God's hands are equal. Insofar as His hands are distinct from one another and differences are to be found among God's creatures, those who corrupted their souls will be taken to task. With this point in mind, Ṣadrā offers a reading of Q 39:67. The verse states that the entire earth will be in God's grip (*qabḍa*) on the day of resurrection and the heavens will be folded in His right hand. Ṣadrā understands this to mean that all things will be enfolded back into God's mercy, despite the disparity among creatures with respect to their place of return.⁵⁶ That is to say, the scroll upon which the entire cosmic drama was written will simply be rolled up and returned to its original author.

As regards Ṣadrā's use of myth to explain his soteriology, he devotes much more time to God's feet than to His hands. This is partly because any talk of God's "feet" in Islamic thought automatically calls to mind two other important Quranic symbols – the divine throne (*'arsh*) and footstool (*kursi*). The image of God's two feet as sources for the diversity in the cosmos allows Ṣadrā to explain how multiplicity and opposition result from harmony, and how wrath and mercy become fragmented from mercy itself. The throne is the seat or locus of mercy in accordance with the divine command "Be!" According to Q 20:5, God's name the All-Merciful is seated upon the throne.⁵⁷ And while the All-Merciful sits on the throne, His feet are placed upon the footstool.⁵⁸ Taking his lead from Ibn 'Arabī and his followers, Ṣadrā makes the following observation:

In His establishing Himself upon the throne, He also has two feet which were placed upon the footstool. The one which designates the foot of firmness [cf. Q 10:2] gives fixity (*thubūt*) to the people of the gardens in their gardens, while the other one, which designates the foot of domination (*jabarūt*), gives fixity to the people of hell in hell.⁵⁹

The footstool ontologically stands at a level lower than the throne and also acts as the locus through which the polarity of God's divine names – symbolized by the two feet – become operative in the cosmos. Although the two feet existed before they came to rest upon the footstool, the latter allows the properties of the feet to become actualized, that is, materialized. It is clear from Ṣadrā's discussion concerning the path of the soul that the place unto which

⁵⁶ Cf. Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 151.

⁵⁷ Cf. Jambet, *The act of being* 414.

⁵⁸ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 154–5. Cf. Chittick, *Imaginal worlds* 110–2; Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 359–61.

⁵⁹ Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 149. Cf. Murata, *The Tao of Islam* 85–8.

each foot alights is the heaven and hell of the soul respectively, since the path traversed by the individual will ultimately lead him back to his own reality, that is, heaven or hell.

Since the cosmos and all that it contains came about by virtue of the All-Merciful extending His two feet and allowing their properties to take on corporeal form, how will the cosmos cease to exist? Quite naturally, this will happen when the All-Merciful's feet are folded up, thus allowing all properties in the cosmos – whether they manifest God's wrath or mercy – to return to their source of mercy. Drawing on Ibn 'Arabī's *Futūḥāt*, Ṣadrā drives home the point that, in the end, the "staff" which supported God's two feet will be cast aside, and both heaven and hell will be filled with repose and tranquility:

The feet will not be contracted except from the root from which they became manifest, namely the All-Merciful. So they only give mercy, for by virtue of wisdom, the end returns to the beginning, except that between the beginning and end there is a path . . . The journey is where one can expect to find fatigue (*maẓinna*), misfortune, and toil . . . At the end of the sojourn, God's walking staff (*'aṣā al-tasāyur*) will be cast aside, and repose (*rāḥa*) in the abodes of permanence and perdition will reign.⁶⁰

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60 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* i, 155, paraphrasing Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, Beirut edition iii, 462 (for a partial translation of the original passage, see Chittick, *The Sufi path of knowledge* 360–1); also cited by Mullā Ṣadrā, but worded slightly differently, at *Aṣfār* ix, 357.

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PART 5

The Path beyond this World – Vision and Spiritual Experience of the Hereafter



Muslim Visuality and the Visibility of Paradise and the World

Simon O'Meara*

The notion that vision is a bodily sense with a cultural location is accepted across many fields of art history today. The field of Islamic art history has, for the most part, yet to respond to the questions posed by this cultural embodiment of vision; instead it implicitly retains its trust in the traditionally inscrutable, disembodied gaze of scholarship. In part, this reluctance to engage with these new questions can be explained by the paucity of primary sources from which the different cultural locations of vision in historical Muslim societies might be ascertained. An exception to this shortage of material is the corpus of *ḥadīths* and traditions pertaining to paradise and the world, in which vision is the implicit or explicit subject matter. The aim of the present chapter is to analyze some of these *ḥadīths* and traditions, with the ambition of preparing the groundwork for an account of Muslim visuality.

This chapter concerns the contrast in visibility and visual practices of paradise and the world (*al-dunyā*), as represented in the prophetic *ḥadīth* and Islamic traditions (sing. *khabar*) more broadly. As I show, at its most extreme, the visibility of the world is restricted; that of paradise, limitless. This disparity is important not just in and of itself, but also because it helps lay the foundations of an account of Muslim “visuality.” Following the art historian, W.J.T. Mitchell, by this term I mean “the social construction of visual experience,”¹ such that by the expression “Muslim visuality” I mean the construction of visual experience in Muslim societies, historical or contemporary. In other words, if it is axiomatic that vision is a naturally occurring bodily sense with a gendered, historical, and cultural location, then “Muslim visuality” names the problematic embedded in this gendered, historical, and cultural location of vision with regard to Muslim societies. It is not the truism that people see things differently that visuality problematizes and pursues, but the visual culture and visual practices

* The support of the European Research Council (Project no. 263308: “The here and the hereafter in Islamic traditions”) enabled the completion of this chapter.

1 Mitchell, *Interdisciplinarity* 540.

of this or that society, its "scopic regimes." These help determine what is visible and what is not for the society in question.

Although the study of visibility has yet to make any significant impact in Islamic art history, there is no material reason why it has not. For materials are there, sources exist; but they take the field beyond its traditional realm of "images and visual objects to the visual practices, the gendered, socio-historically specific ways of seeing and being seen, that make up the world of human visibility."² Contrarily, there are a number of non-material reasons why this problematic has largely been avoided in Islamic art history, including an uncritical trust in the traditionally inscrutable, disembodied gaze of scholarship, and more pressingly, an awareness of the very breadth of the problematic. How, for example, does one articulate Muslim visibility spatio-temporally so that it does not become another monolithic explanation of Islam? For present purposes, however, this last matter is not of concern, as the element of Muslim visibility addressed in this chapter is enshrined in widespread traditions and, frequently, fundamental *ḥadīths* of Sunni Islam, such that it might be said to pertain to all Sunni Muslim visibility, regardless of period and society. Nevertheless, because of the regional trajectories and histories that these traditions and *ḥadīths* tend to have, it is more accurate to refer to the element of visibility addressed here as broadly belonging to early and medieval Sunni Arab-Muslim urban culture.

To substantiate this chapter's opening statement that the present world possesses a restricted visibility, at least for the period and urban centers of the region under discussion, and that paradise possesses an unrestricted visibility, the following threefold demonstration is undertaken. First, a photographic representation, inevitably truncated, of the streetscape of Fez, Morocco. The form of this *madīna* dates to no later than the eighth/fourteenth century and is typical of the final, pre-modern stage in the historical development of the Arab-Muslim *madīna*, widespread throughout the Middle East and North Africa.³ The typicality of this streetscape is what renders this part of the threefold demonstration meaningful: it provides a succinct way of helping to contrast the visibility of the world (understood as the inhabited, built world) with that of paradise.

The second part of the demonstration is the citation of canonical *ḥadīths* pertaining to the restrictive visual practices expected of individuals in this inhabited, built world, that speak to, but in no wise explain, the infolded vistas

2 Mitchell, *Interdisciplinarity* 542, said with reference to the traditional horizons of art history.

3 Raymond, *La structure spatiale* 35, 42. For an English treatment of this development, see O'Meara, *A legal aesthetic* 1–2.

FIGURE 24.1 *Derb Bou Hajj.*FIGURE 24.2 *Derb al-Keddan.*FIGURE 24.3 *Qalqaliyine.*FIGURE 24.4 *Oued Chorfa.*

recorded in these photographs. This part of the demonstration is also only intended as a means of succinctly helping to draw a contrast between this world and paradise with regard to their cultural – lawful – visibility. The third and final part of the demonstration is the citation of traditions and *ḥadīths* showing the extreme openness of paradise.

Commencing this demonstration with the streetscape of the *madīna* of Fez, the photographs are not only of vicinal cul-de-sacs, where one might expect visibility to be limited, but also public thoroughfares. In an earlier publication on medieval Muslim urbanism, I referred to this type of space as neither open nor closed, but ajar (See figs. 24.1–24.8).⁴

Concerning the second part of the demonstration, namely, the restrictions placed on visual practices in the present world, in the Quran the following pair of verses is found, the first for men, the second for women: “Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and preserve their genitals [from view] (*yaghuḍḍū min absārihim wa-yahfazū furūjahum*). That is purer for them. Truly God is well acquainted with what they do. And tell the believing women to lower their

4 O'Meara, *Space* 70.

FIGURE 24.5 *Rahbat Zebib.*FIGURE 24.6 *Derb Masmouda.*FIGURE 24.7 *Sidi al-Aouad.*FIGURE 24.8 *Gezira.*

gaze and preserve their genitals [from view]" (Q 24:30–1).⁵ Implicit in these verses is a direct connection between the activity of the eyes and the genitals, a connection that the *ḥadīth* develops. Examples include, "Every eye is a fornicator" (*kullu 'ayn zāniya*);⁶ "The fornication of the eye is the look" (*zinā' al-'ayn al-naẓar*);⁷ and "The look is a poisonous arrow of the Devil" (*al-naẓra saḥm min siḥām Iblīs masmūma*).⁸ While one might object and claim that these verses and *ḥadīths* pertain to vision, not visibility, I would respond that visibility is inseparable from vision, because always relative to it, always conditioned by it. If one understands one of the Quranic names of God, *al-Baṣīr*, to mean

5 See also Q 40:19, "[God] knows the eyes' treachery and what the breast hides." All translations from the Quran are by the author unless otherwise indicated.

6 Al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Ādāb, Bāb* 35, no. 2786; also collected, with a minor variation, by al-Dārimī and Ibn Ḥanbal.

7 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Qadar*, no. 6421; also collected by al-Bukhārī, al-Dārimī, and Ibn Ḥanbal.

8 Al-Ḥākim al-Nisābūrī, *al-Mustadrak* iv, 314.

the “All-Seeing,” then only in God’s perfect vision is there perfect visibility, exactly as implied by the verse, “From God nothing is hidden” (Q 3:5).

As a result of these and other Islamic injunctions, in early and medieval Sunni Arab-Muslim urban culture looking is a fraught and significantly proscribed activity, as the following *ḥadīths* indicate:

The Prophet said, “Avoid sitting on roadsides.” His companions said, “O Messenger of God, there is no other alternative but to sit there to talk.” Thereupon the Messenger of God said, “If you have to sit at all, then fulfill the rights of the road.” They asked, “What are these rights?” He replied, “Lowering the gaze (*ghaḍḍ al-baṣar*); refraining from doing harm to others; responding to greetings; and commanding the good and forbidding the evil.”⁹

The Messenger of God said, “A man must not look at a man’s private parts (*ʿawra*) nor must a woman look at a woman’s private parts.”¹⁰

A man was peering into the Prophet’s living rooms (*ḥujar*) through a hole. The Prophet had a comb and with it he was massaging his head. He said, “Had I known you were looking, I would have stabbed you in the eye with it. The requirement of seeking permission before entry was decreed because of the gaze.”¹¹

The Prophet said, “Whoever peers into a house without permission, [the occupants may] gouge and blind in the eye.”¹²

If the foregoing visibility of the inhabited, built world, as typified by the *madīna* of Fez, and the visual practices expected of its inhabitants, as recounted in the *ḥadīth* are juxtaposed with reports concerning the visibility and visual practices of paradise, the contrast between the two realms becomes apparent. The final part of the demonstration comprises this juxtaposition.

9 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Libās*, no. 5293; also collected by al-Bukhārī, al-Dārimī, and Ibn Ḥanbal.

10 Al-Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Adab*, *Bāb* 38, no. 2793; also collected by Muslim, Ibn Ḥanbal, and Ibn Māja.

11 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Istidhʿān*, *Bāb* 11, no. 6241; also collected by Muslim, Ibn Ḥanbal, al-Nisāʾī, and al-Tirmidhī.

12 Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, *Kitāb al-Adab*, *Bāb fī istidhʿān*, *Bāb* 136, no. 5172. Since presenting this paper and revising it for publication, I have belatedly come across two important studies of a medieval work of Islamic law related to vision, *Aḥkām al-naẓar bi-ḥāssat al-baṣar* by the Almohad jurist, Ibn al-Qaṭṭān al-Fāsī (d. 628/1231). These studies are Chaumont, *Le notion de ʿawra*; and Maghen, *See no evil*.

Although the abundant visibility of paradise is implicit in the Quran, for example, “*‘alā al-arā’iki yanẓurūna*” (Q 83:23), translated by Yusuf Ali as “On thrones (of dignity) will [the elect of paradise] command a sight (of all things),” it is explicit in the *ḥadīth* and traditions. Hence, I now turn to this literature and reports allegedly descriptive of paradise. As hinted at by Aziz al-Azmeh, these reports reveal a scopic economy that is almost pornographic in nature, so ethically disengaged from the object of sight is the viewing subject, and so keenly pleasure consuming.¹³ This is true whether the reports are third-person descriptions, similar to a visitor recording a view, or involve an embedded process of looking, similar to a play within a play, as exemplified in the Quranic verse just quoted, in which the elect possess the totalizing gaze. It is perhaps not surprising to learn, therefore, that the ground of paradise is said to be a silver mirror: one sees reflected therein one’s desires.¹⁴

Appropriately, the gratifying visibility of paradise begins at the entranceway. The gates’ exterior is seen from the interior and the interior from the exterior (*abwāb al-janna yurā ẓāhiruhā min bāṭinihā wa-bāṭinuhā min ẓāhiriḥā*).¹⁵ It is as if matter were no longer bound by the laws of physics; or vision no longer were. The same ocular phenomenon is also known within paradise: a *ḥadīth* alleges that “there are rooms in paradise whose interiors are seen from their exteriors and whose exteriors are seen from their interiors” (*inna fī l-janna la-ghurafan yurā buṭūnuhā min ẓuhūrihi wa-ẓuhūruhā min buṭūniḥā*).¹⁶

Remaining within paradise, another report alleges that, just as “red wine is seen through clear glass” (*ka-mā yurā l-sharāb al-aḥmar fī l-zujāja al-bayḍā*), so the thigh marrow of the 72 consorts (*azwāj*) allocated to each male inhabitant is clearly visible beneath the 70 dresses each consort wears.¹⁷ Related to this scopic economy, should a denizen of paradise wish to change the appearance of one of his consorts or his own, he may visit the “market of images,” the *sūq al-ṣuwar*, and there choose a new one. If he finds a look he likes for her, thereafter “she goes about in it for him” (*wa-idhā ishtahā li-zawjatihi šūra rakibat la-hu fī-hā*).¹⁸

The viewing subject’s penetrative gaze can also traverse, unchecked and unweakened, untold distances. According to a tradition, the people of paradise can spot the white hairs in the black beards of men from a distance of

13 Al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 219, 226.

14 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Budūr* 511.

15 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Waṣf al-firdaws* 9.

16 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* ii, 449, no. 1338; cf. Ibn Ḥabīb, *Waṣf al-firdaws* 14.

17 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Waṣf al-firdaws* 63.

18 *Ibid.*, 55.

one thousand years;¹⁹ and when these people look up to the windows of the castles in paradise, they can see the faces of the prophets and the other religious exemplars who inhabit them “like stars on the horizon.”²⁰

The extreme visibility of paradise is further revealed in the reports that describe its spatial dimensions. These dimensions are almost inconceivable to ordinary human comprehension and frequently listed in temporal terms as x-number of days, nights or years’ journey, as exemplified below; yet they may be traversed in the “blink of an eye” (*ṭarfāt ‘ayn*).²¹ As al-Azmeh observes, space in paradise is “inconsequential and is the mere indication of spatial sumptuousity,”²² for in the descriptive economy of paradise what matters is extreme spectacle: the eye has it all. The eye has it all, too, in that so much of paradise, including the homes, some of their furnishings, the terrain (*ard*) and trees, is lustrous and lithoidal: made of shining, precious metals and glinting, precious and semi-precious stones, corals, marbles, and pearls.²³ It is a paradise not for living in, but looking at; and its symbol is arguably the *ḥūrīs*, the eternally virginal maidens who eagerly await the arrival of the elect. One of their most common names, *ḥūr ʿīn*, translated literally as wide-eyed with a deep black pupil, is a direct reference to the consuming gaze.²⁴

The climax of this spectacular, ocularly gratifying nature of paradise takes the form of the elect beholding God. As preserved in a protracted narrative recorded in a work attributed to the respected scholar Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), this culminating moment occurs at a reception banquet thrown for the new arrivals. With reference to al-Azmeh’s abridged translation, the narrative unfolds as follows:

[First,] the reception is preceded by a procession of the Blessed, led by Adam, Muhammad and the other prophets. In the blink of an eye they all traverse the span of a silver castle the length of 1000 years’ march, then that of a golden castle of the same dimensions. Also in the blink of an eye the procession traverses the 3000-year span of a castle made of green emerald and a 4000-year castle of red ruby. Just as instantly, the throngs

19 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Budūr* 592.

20 Ibid., 513. With wholehearted thanks to Christian Lange for providing the three foregoing traditions from al-Suyūṭī.

21 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Janna* 61.

22 Al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 224.

23 As noted by Bouhdiba, *Sexuality* 83.

24 As noted by Bouhdiba, *ibid.* See also Griffith, St. Ephraem the Syrian, in the present publication.

traverse a fifth castle, 5000 years long and made of sapphire, and a sixth, 6000 years long and made of chrysolite, and four further castles of various precious stones and up to 10,000 years long. After all these distances have been covered, the procession glimpses, at a distance of 10,000 years, the lights of the divine enclave which, when reached, proves to be a green meadow 1000 years by 1000 years, with innumerable castles, each with the name of one of the elect inscribed on its door. They then proceed to an even larger meadow, with two rows of trees, each tree bearing 70,000 castles; within each castle are 70,000 couches of gold, each 300 yards long...²⁵

[Second,] a most sumptuous banquet then proceeds, with exquisite foods served by the angels out of containers made of gold and gems, followed by the perfuming of the Faithful with musk and amber sprayed by the fluttering wings of birds dipped in perfume... And [when this is finished] God says: welcome O my worshippers and guests. Angels: delight my worshippers with music. The Angels then proceed to fetch the musicians of paradise, they being the huris and flutes (*mazāmīr*). The flutes are attached to branches of trees, each branch carrying 70,000 flutes. A breeze blows from below the divine Throne and enters the flutes and makes them sound tunes the better of which were never heard. God then tells the huris: [delight] my worshippers [with music]...²⁶

[Lastly,] when they awaken from their [delight], the Lord the most elevated says to them: my worshippers, have you any other wishes? And they say: yes; it remains for us to see your gracious Face (*baqiya al-naẓar ilā wajhika al-karīm*). The Lord the most elevated then says: O Cherub, lift the veil (*hijāb*) between me and my worshippers. The angel then lifts the veil, and a wind blows upon them that causes their clothes to shine, that beautifies their faces and clears their hearts and pleases their bodies [and makes their horses gambol and birds sing. Should ever the inhabitants of the world (*dunyā*) get sight of all this in paradise, they would die desiring it.] Then the Lord the most elevated then says to Cherub: lift the greatest veil between me and my worshippers. And when this is lifted off His Face he calls: who am I? And they say: you are God. God says: I am peace, you are the peaceful (*al-muslimūn*), I am the [guarantor of faith],²⁷ you are

25 Al-Azmeh, Rhetoric for the senses 228, translation slightly adjusted; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Janna* 61–2 for the original Arabic.

26 Al-Azmeh, Rhetoric for the senses 229; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Janna* 63–7 for the original Arabic.

27 *Al-Mu'min*, one of the names of God.

the [faithful], I am the beloved²⁸ and you the beloved; this is my Speech: hear it, and this is my Light: behold it, and this is my Face: view it. So they look at the Face of the Truth the most elevated, with no intermediaries and no veils, and when the lights of Truth shine upon their faces, their faces are illuminated, and they remain looking at the Face of Truth for three hundred years (*fa-yanzurūna ilā wajh al-Ḥaqq jalla jalāluhu bi-lā wāsiṭa wa-lā ḥijāb fa-idhā ruḥḥat anwār al-Ḥaqq 'alā wujūhihim ashraqat wa-makathū thalātha mī'at sana shākhīṣina ilā wajhihi ta'ālā*).²⁹

In conclusion to the foregoing demonstration concerning the visibility of paradise and the world, although paradise belongs to the unseen realm mentioned in the first part of the Quranic verse, “God is the knower of the unseen (*al-ghayb*) and the visible (*al-shahāda*)” (Q 59:22), and the world belongs predominantly to the visible realm mentioned in the same verse, in an unexpected way the reverse is true. Paradise is open to the eye, abundantly; and the world is somewhat closed to the eye, at least for the pre-modern, urban Muslim. The first is externalized, spread open; the second is internalized, folded onto itself. This eventuality is especially unexpected given the tendency for Muslim philologists and exegetes to consider the most frequent Quranic word for paradise, *al-janna*, to be derived from the Arabic root *j-n-n*, “to conceal, to screen from perception” (*ḥāssa*).³⁰ Said derivation finds support in a Quranic verse concerning paradise, namely, “No soul knows what delights of the eye are hidden for them as a reward for what they were doing” (Q 32:17).³¹

Without further study, including especially an analysis of the Quranic *ghayb/shahāda* dichotomy, drawing conclusions regarding the disparity between the two economies of visibility would be premature. Regarding, however, the

28 The Arabic text I have before me has *maḥjūb*, hidden, instead of *maḥbūb*, beloved. Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Janna* 69.

29 Al-Azmeh, Rhetoric for the senses 230; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Janna* 69 for the original Arabic. To show that the act of gazing at God in paradise is not isolated to this non-canonic *ḥadīth*, the following *ḥadīth* is cited from Muslim's canonic collection. “Ṣuhayb reported the Apostle saying: When the elect of paradise [first] enter paradise, God asks: Do you wish Me to give you anything more? They say: Have you not brightened our faces? Have you not made us enter paradise and saved us from the fire? God removes the veil, and of things given [to them] nothing is dearer to them than the sight of their Lord (*al-naẓar ilā rabbihim*), the Mighty and the Glorious.” Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Imān*, no. 347.

30 See, for example, al-Rāghib al-Iṣḥānī, *Mufradāt* 203–4.

31 Cf. the prophetic *ḥadīth* in which God is alleged to say: “I have prepared for my pious servants [in paradise] what no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and no human heart has ever perceived.” Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Janna*, no. 6780.

chapter's stated aim of preparing the groundwork for an account of the construction of visual experience in Muslim societies, viz. Muslim visibility, the same disparity can be used in the following way. It can be taken as a map of the Islamic basis of early and medieval urban Sunni Arab-Muslim visibility, for the disparity embodies the fault line separating what can be seen by mortals from what cannot. The interpretation of the sensory data entering the eye is informed by what this divide defines.

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A Garden beyond the Garden: ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī’s Perspective on Paradise

Maryam Moazzen

Whatever you read in my writings or hear of what I say, you do not hear from my tongue, you hear them from my heart. You hear them from the spirit of the Chosen One (*muṣṭafā*) – peace be upon him – and whatever you hear from the Chosen One, you hear from God because “Nor does he speak out of desire. It is naught but revelation that is revealed.”

Q 53:3–4¹



Although the basic eschatological narrative and, in particular, the woeful condition of sinners on the day of resurrection is depicted in the Quran in a graphic manner, the ambiguous nature of many verses of Islamic scripture has led some Muslim theologians, philosophers, and mystics to re-examine or re-imagine scripture’s eschatological and soteriological notions.² The fate of

* I would like to express my gratitude to Professors Hermann Landolt and Nasrullah Pourjavady for their constructive comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 17. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s *Tamhīdāt* and the Quran are my own.

2 See for example the following verses in which God describes the torture that sinners will endure in the hereafter: Q 11:106, 14:16–7, 14:49, 15:43–4, 17:13, 17:71, 22:19–21, 25:11–4, 36:65–6, 37:18–27, 37:62–8, 55:44, 67:7–8, 69:30–2, and 89:23. There are also very detailed descriptions of the heavenly rewards for the faithful. See for example, Q 25:15–6 and 55:48–76. Quranic descriptions were supplemented by prophetic traditions and a number of eschatological manuals whose authors describe the state and fate of human beings in the hereafter. ‘Abdallāh Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī’s *Kitāb al-Tawāḥhum* that is translated into French by A. Roman as *Une vision humaine des fins dernières* and Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī’s *al-Durra al-fākhira* that is translated by L. Gautier under the title of *La perle précieuse* are examples of these manuals. For analysis of these manuals and other eschatological monographs, see Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* and Rustomji, *The garden and the fire*.

human beings is perhaps the most complex issue they debated. For centuries, Muslim theologians and philosophers have presented their reasoned speculations and Sufis have expressed their visions. While literalist (*ẓāhirī*) 'ulamā', along with the majority of Muslims, imagined that if they observed religious duties and rituals they would be going to an endless party in paradise where all bodily pleasures and excesses are provided, the majority of Sufis and some philosophers argued that the vision of God in the intellectual or spiritual sense of a beatific vision is the greatest joy.³ Since the beginning of Islamic history the vision of God has been not only a focal point of Islamic spirituality, but has also shaped much of Muslim theologians' thought.⁴ There were, however, significant differences among the theologians and Sufis regarding this vision of God. The Mu'tazilis generally denied the possibility of beatific vision. They argued that the verses of the Quran and any *ḥadīths* indicating such a vision must be interpreted allegorically.⁵ The Ash'arīs, on the other hand, maintained that it is rationally plausible and scripturally established that man will see God in the hereafter. They argued that the Quranic verses that imply the vision of God must be accepted without specifying how.⁶ Sufis like traditionalists (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) and the Ash'arīs generally maintained that the faithful would see God in paradise. But mystics such as Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) emphasized that although the vision of God is the privilege of the select few in the heavenly abode, some will still see God in this world.⁷ In his *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, 'Alī b. 'Uthmān al-Jullābī l-Hujwīrī (d. 465–9/1072–7) quotes Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī (d. 246/861), and Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874 or 264/877–8) among others who insist that God can be contemplated (*mushāhada*) in

3 The distinction between paradise and the vision of God is a typical Sufi trope and dates back to the time of Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya (d. 185/801). For her views on God and paradise see 'Aṭṭār Nishābūrī, *Tadhkirat* 142. Hujwīrī reports that Ḥasan Baṣrī, a contemporary of Rābi'a, also criticized people who do good in order to receive rewards. See Hujwīrī, *The Kashf*, ed. and trans. Nicholson 86–7; 'Aṭṭār Nishābūrī, *Tadhkirat* 102. Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī also said: "Paradise hath no value in the eyes of lovers, and lovers are veiled by their lover . . . The way of lovers is from oneness to oneness." Hujwīrī, *The Kashf* 107. For more on the issue of the vision of God, see M. Jarrar's contribution to the present publication.

4 For instance see al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* i, 95–100, 138–9. For more information see Pourjavādy, *Ru'yat* 46–72.

5 For more information on the Mu'tazilis' views on beatific vision see Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī* iv, 224–31; Pourjavādy, *Ru'yat* 54–63.

6 For more on the Ash'arīs' views on the beatific vision, see al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma'* 4, 63–5; al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna* 13, 17, 25–7; al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf* 72–4; Pourjavādy, *Ru'yat* 88–108.

7 Böwering, *The mystical vision* 165–75.

this world.⁸ Sufi masters developed more detailed ontological and soteriological theories with regard to the vision of God and mankind's destiny based on such verses as "There exists nothing except God, everything is perishing save His face" (Q 28:88), and their own mystical experiences. Some argued that there is absolutely nothing in the world that could stand face to face with God. Abū l-Ḥasan Nūrī (d. 205/907) said, "Nobody saw my Lord save my Lord Himself."⁹ Abū Bakr al-Shiblī (d. 334/946) similarly held that "There is no one else in paradise but God Most High."¹⁰

This study aims to present the eschatological ideas of the famed mystic philosopher and Sufi martyr, Abū l-Ma'ālī 'Abdallāh b. Abū Bakr Muḥammad Hamadānī, known as 'Ayn al-Quḍāt (d. 525/1131), with reference mainly to his *Tamhīdāt* [Preambles], wherein he offers in his own lucidly articulated innovative ontology an integrated approach to the vexing question of human destiny.¹¹ He presents an elaborate and cohesive view of the world based on an intricate ontological structure, a web of complex mystical and philosophical ideas, as well as prophetic traditions and Islamic scripture. His text puts forward an ontological system in which all the paradoxes and the tension of opposites are resolved and heaven and hell, and reward and punishment have become symbolic concepts because all is One.¹²

1 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's Ontology

In order to understand 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's eschatological views, one needs to have a clear understanding of his ontology and spiritual psychology. For 'Ayn

8 Hujwīrī, *The Kashf* 329–33. In his *Risāla*, Abū l-Qāsim Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) holds that God can be known through presence (*muḥāḍara*), unveiling (*mukāshafa*), and contemplation (*mushāhada*). See Qushayrī, *al-Risāla* 40.

9 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 306.

10 Ibid., 136, 234, 256.

11 Landolt asserts that 'Ayn al-Quḍāt was born in 490/1097, not 492/1099 as 'Afif 'Usayrān maintains. Therefore, at the time of his tragic death he was thirty-five years old. For more information see Landolt, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadhānī.

12 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 256, 287, 293. At the beginning of his career, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt believed that one must accept what the prophets said regarding the events of the hereafter. In his *Zubdat al-ḥaqā'iq*, he writes: "As a blind man cannot distinguish the colors through any but the sense of seeing he must believe in what others say about the colors and accept their opinion, the faithful must like the blind accept the events of the hereafter based on the verses of the Quran." 'Afif 'Usayrān's introduction in 'Ayn al-Qudat, *Tamhīdāt* 70–6. For more information see: 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Nāmahā* ii, 357.

al-Quḍāt, God is self-existent from eternity; God is infinite, having no relation to space or time. He is not only the supreme beauty but also the light of the heavens and the earth. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt sees the universe owing its existence to divine light, which reveals, unveils, illuminates, clarifies, and removes darkness, obfuscation, and ignorance.¹³ In his *Tamhīdāt*, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt argues that the light of heaven represents the light of Muḥammad that comes out of the eternal East, while the earth's light represents Satan that comes from the endless West.¹⁴ Thus he traces the whole phenomenological existence of heaven and earth to the divine light, but through the intermediary, symbolic lights of Muḥammad and Iblīs (Satan).¹⁵ According to 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, the lights of Muḥammad and Satan are expressions of God's beauty (*jamāl*) and majesty (*jalāl*). This implied dualism is at the same time monism in the sense that it penetrates not only the entire world but also the essence of divine Being.¹⁶ 'Ayn al-Quḍāt asserts that these binary symbolic oppositions are necessary

13 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 256–7.

14 Ibid., 126. In another passage of the *Tamhīdāt*, 'Ayn al-Quḍāt quotes Sahl b. 'Abdallāh al-Tustarī and Shaybān al-Rā'ī (d. 158/774–5) who heard that Khidr had said: "The first thing that God created was the light of Muḥammad from His own light. God kept this light for one hundred thousand years, each day of which is a thousand worldly years. In each day He looked at this light [i.e., the light of Muḥammad] seventy thousand times. Following each look, seventy thousand other lights emerged from this light. Thus from this light all other existences and creatures came about." 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 268. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt here appears to be alluding to a prophetic *ḥadīth* that is widely quoted in Shi'ite sources, according to which Muḥammad is reported to have stated: "Allah had created me from light, and He created that light a thousand years before Adam." Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib* i, 183.

15 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's discussions of light and darkness, the light of Muḥammad, and the dark light of Satan, find their genesis in the teachings of earlier Sufis, including Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126), Maṣṣūr Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) and many others. On al-Tustarī's theory of light, see Böwering, *The mystical vision* 149–52. The significance of Muḥammad and the Muḥammadan light is discussed by Ḥallāj as well. See Massignon, *The passion of al-Hallāj* i, 131–2. There are Shi'ite traditions in the *ḥadīth* books indicating that both Muḥammad and the *imāms* were brought into being before the creation of the world. It is recorded that in the beginning was only the world of shadows, wherein God created the Prophet and the *imāms* in the form of divine light to illuminate that pre-existent place. This primordial light possessed by the cosmic Muḥammad and the cosmic *imāms* passed to Adam at the moment of earthly creation. See Ibn Bābūya, *Ilal* 431–3, 435–6. For a detailed study of the pre-existent spirits of the Shi'ite *imāms*, as well as that of Prophet Muḥammad see Rubin, Pre-existence and light 62–119.

16 'Ayn al-Quḍāt writes: "Dear friend! When the point of the divine magnitude expanded from the single essence to the circle of pre-eternity and post-eternity, it did not stop in anything, so that it was in the world of essence that it spread out the scope of His

because were it not for darkness, there would be no light. Imperfection itself makes completion manifest and allows for the various levels of existence and knowledge to be actualized.

Dear friend, the wisdom (*ḥikmat*) is this: everything that is, was, and will be, may not and must not be any different [from what there is now]. There can never be whiteness without blackness. Heaven is not proper (*lāyiq*) without the earth. Essence (*jawhar*) cannot be imagined without accident. Muḥammad could not exist without Iblīs. There can be no obedience without disobedience or unbelief without faith. Such is the case with all the opposites. This is the meaning of the saying, “Things become distinguished through their opposites.” Muḥammad could have no faith without Iblīs’s unbelief. If it were possible for God not to be “the Creator, the Maker, the Form-giver” [Q 59:24], then it would be possible for Muḥammad and the faith of Muḥammad not to be. If it were conceivable that He was not “the Mighty, the Supreme, the Compeller” [Q 59:23], then it would be conceivable that Iblīs and his unbelief did not exist. Thus it is clear that Muḥammad has no happiness without the wretchedness of Iblīs. Abū Bakr and ‘Umar would not exist without Abū Jahl and Abū Lahab.¹⁷

In his *Zubdat al-ḥaqā’iq*, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states that beings owe their existence to the light that emanates from the face of God. He emphasizes that God faces the world, but the cosmos has no face to turn toward God, because everything in the world is in itself and by itself a sheer nothing. In fact, where there is God no other self-subsisting thing ever existed, or exists, or will exist in the future.¹⁸ Furthermore, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt says that there is no hierarchy in existence – only a single relationship of simultaneity and equidistance between the Source of Being (i.e., the Face of God) and everything or, between Being and non-being. Because he argues that in the domain in which God is, there is neither space nor time and all things are essentially non-things in the “domain beyond

attributes. This is nothing other than divine beauty, homologue of Muḥammad and the divine Majesty, homologue of Iblīs.” ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 73.

17 Ibid., 186–7, in another passage of his *Tamhīdāt* ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, based on his visionary experience, elaborates a theory of theophany expressed through images of the face of God. See *ibid.*, 116–7.

18 For more information see Izutsu, *Creation and the timeless order* 132–5. See also ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 263–5.

intellect," that is, the divine presence.¹⁹ He argues that in reality, the time of Adam is just as close to us as this present moment of ours and there is no distinction between pre-eternity and post-eternity in terms of their reality.²⁰ He criticizes Ibn Sīnā by pointing out that he confused the empirical dimension with the divine dimension when he established his proof of God's existence based upon the causal connections between things. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt says, "Ibn Sīnā represents God as something temporal (*zamānī*) and if he had been in possession of a pure, uncontaminated view, he would have seen no distance between God and any contingent thing; he would have recognized the existential equidistance of all things from Him."²¹

The *ẓāhir-bāṭin* (exoteric-esoteric) dichotomy, similar to the dual structure of light and darkness, has a pronounced significance in 'Ayn al-Quḍāt's ontology. He says that whatever we see is a mixture of light and darkness that have borrowed their existence. Humans are capable of seeing the outer aspect of being because there is an existential affinity between them. 'Ayn al-Quḍāt also mentions that the Quran has an apparent or literal meaning, the *ẓāhir*, which must be distinguished from its inner meaning, which is hidden in the *bāṭin*. In his opinion, anyone who distinguishes between the Real and symbols of the real, and between Muḥammad and Iblīs, and between *ẓāhir* and *bāṭin* is still engaged within the realm of attributes only. And whoever sees the Quran as only black letters written on white paper and sees Muḥammad as a form, a body, and a figure is merely an *'adat parast* (tradition-worshiper); thus he is no better than a worshiper of idols.²²

Like other mystics, he believes that as soon as a man knows his soul or self (*nafs*), he will know his Lord.²³ This knowledge of self, which entails an existential transmutation, comes about as the result of the purification of the soul (*nafs*) in the kiln of the divine love, the flames of which exceed hell's fire in

19 For a full examination of the very original ontological theory of 'Ayn al-Quḍāt see Izutsu, *Mysticism and the linguistic problem* 166–170; Izutsu, *Creation and the timeless order* 136–40; Landolt, *Mystical thought* 187–204.

20 Izutsu, *Creation and the timeless order* 134–8. See also 'Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 263–5.

21 Izutsu, *Mysticism and the linguistic problem* 167–8.

22 'Ayn al-Quḍāt writes: "Both the Quran and Muḥammad have an external appearance and an inner reality, and what you see from the Quran are black letters written on a white paper, but in reality the Quran is light" ('Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 2–3, 12, 176–7, 320).

23 'Ayn al-Quḍāt uses the word *nafs* to mean self, soul, mind or essence depending on the context. In some cases, he seems to be evoking two or more of these meanings simultaneously.

intensity.²⁴ ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt argues that the purified soul reflects God’s light with almost no loss or distortion. He understands this level of the *naḥs*’ transformation as a rare achievement. The mystic whose soul reflects the divine light sees the world in a new light. He sees the entire cosmos as a matrix of signs pointing to One Reality. In such a way, he realizes, in his inner being, the true understanding (*ta’wīl*) of the hidden meaning of the cosmic and Quranic symbols, including the symbolic events at the end of time. He also comes to discover that whatever God has created in heaven and on earth, He created their equivalents in the human soul. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt holds that hell, paradise, the bridge (*ṣirāt*), and scale (*mīzān*) are all to be found within the human soul:

Seek the grave in yourself. The Chosen One [i.e., Muḥammad] every day prayed: “O God, I seek refuge in You from the torment of the grave.” The grave is the humanness (*basharīyat*) of the human. Have you not heard that the Great One [i.e., the Prophet] was asked, “Is there torment in the grave?” He answered: “the grave is nothing but torment.” They asked him: “Is man going to suffer in the grave?” He said: “the grave is all suffering,” which is to say that human existence itself is a torment. The grave of the seeker is the body . . . The first thing that will be revealed to the seeker is the condition of the grave. The first symbol that he sees is the grave. For example, the snake, scorpion, dog, or fire, which are promised to those who shall suffer in hell, these will be shown to him symbolically. These are all in and of the inner being of a man. Thus they are always with him. The questioning of Munkar and Nakīr is within you . . . you must find the bridge also in yourself . . . Heaven and hell are also in you. You must seek them within you, and to every one they are presented differently.²⁵

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt argues that by recalling the hidden meanings of cosmic and scriptural symbols and signs, one goes beyond the external and the visible, which enclose the hidden internal reality, and discovers the invisible, the *bāṭin*, and the One.²⁶ According to him, the hidden meaning of these symbols cannot

24 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 287, 298–9. A trope repeated in the teachings of earlier Sufis including Abū l-Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 425/1033) who said: “One is a Sufi who is not. The Sufi is a day that has no need of sun, a night that needs neither moon nor star, and a non-existence that needs no existence.” Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns* 304.

25 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 288–90.

26 Henry Corbin has discussed the significance of *ta’wīl* for the Shi‘ites and Sufis. For example, see Corbin, *Temple and contemplation*, in particular, the introduction and the first two chapters.

be comprehended by human intellect because it is conditioned by time and space. Only the human soul can interpret them, provided it returns to its origin and to the state, which Dhū l-Nūn al-Miṣrī describes, “as [it] was when [it] was before [it] was.”²⁷ The most “orthodox” of the Sufis held that the spirit and soul, being created, could not be regarded as identical with the Creator; ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, however, claims that the human spirit and the purified serene soul are, in their nature, akin to the divine. In fact, he says the spirit was pre-existent before it was joined to the body in this world.²⁸ When one transcends the boundaries of rational thinking and enters into the divine world, according to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt “a window is opened in his soul toward the domain of the supra-sensible order of things and the divine light will appear in his inner being. He experiences a state in which his rational power breaks down and in which he will be annihilated in the illumination of the overpowering light of eternity.”²⁹ In his *Tamhīdāt*, he writes:

But, dear friend, know that if they [God] want to allow a man into himself and enlighten him into his own self, he will gain sight; “And if you obey Him you will be on the right path.” [Q 24:54]. It is thus that the illumination of the light of God gives man eyes, and ears, and tongue. “By Him was I hearing, and seeing and speaking and by me He hears and by me He sees and by me He speaks,”³⁰ are descriptions of the attributes that adorn the seeker. At this stage he has gone beyond the earth and the heavens and has sloughed off his self and his humanness. He has arrived “at the day when earth is transformed” [Q 14:48]. He has inhaled the scent of “who has known his self” and tasted the wine of who “has known his Lord.” “Indeed, God created Adam after the visage of mercy” has appeared to him.³¹

27 Al-Kalābādhi, *Kitāb al-Ta’arruf*, ed. and trans. Arberry under the title of *The doctrine of the Sūfis* 105.

28 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 150–1. See also Baqlī Shīrāzī, *Sharḥ-i shathīyyāt* 204–5. For an excellent examination of Muslim philosophers’ and Sufis’ theories on the spirit, soul, and body see Murata, *The Tao of Islam* 225–319.

29 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Zubdat* 58, 26, 27, and passim. See also Izutsu, *Mysticism and the linguistic problem* 154–5.

30 Here ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt refers to a divine saying (*ḥadīth qudsī*) known as *ḥadīth al-nawāfil* that God reportedly said: “. . . when I love him, I become for him ear, sight, and tongue. So it is through Me [i.e., God] that he [i.e., the beloved servant] hears, through Me that he sees, and through Me that he speaks.” For the full text of this *ḥadīth* and a discussion of it, see Graham, *Divine word and prophetic word* 99, 173.

31 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 270–1.

2 'Ayn al-Qudāt's Spiritual Psychology

'Ayn al-Qudāt constructs his spiritual psychology based on the opposing principles of body-soul (*qālib-nafs*) and spirit-heart (*rūḥ-qalb*), good and evil, and lover and the Beloved. In this view, every human being has two motivations: one from the All-Merciful and the other from Satan. The body and the soul (*nafs*) are satanic, while the spirit and heart are divine. He says: "The first thing that came into the body was the soul. If the heart had come first, it would have never let the soul into the world. Relative to the heart, the body is dense and the soul has the attribute of darkness. These two have developed friendship and familiarity."³² As 'Ayn al-Qudāt sees it, the body that comes from the inferior world and the heart, which is a subtle substance (*latīfa*) originating from the superior world, have no inherent relationship, but God has established between them an intermediary and a bond which is their dragoman or interpretive guide. This subtle substance, which is the fundamental reality of man, is none other than the human soul and spirit.

Although 'Ayn al-Qudāt gives spirit and heart higher status in terms of their purity, the soul plays an important role not only in his psychology but also ontology. He marshals his ontological views on the basis of soul. *Nafs*, according to 'Ayn al-Qudāt, has immense possibilities. He describes the human soul as an entity unbounded in its becoming. On the one hand, the carnal soul, which is Satan's most versatile weapon, incites people to commit evil; on the other hand, the soul can develop into an invaluable tool to know God. To the extent that a soul refuses to submit to God's commands, it remains imperfect, but if the soul is a true servant of God, it will emerge from the various kinds of darkness into the One Light.³³ In effect, the manner in which human destiny unfolds can be understood in terms of the relative predominance of heart over body and the condition of the soul. 'Ayn al-Qudāt argues that the way to God is within the human soul:

My dear friend, finding the path [to God] is obligatory, but the way to God almighty is to be found neither on earth nor in heaven. It is not even in paradise or the throne (*'arsh*). The path to God is within you. It is the meaning of "within your souls" [Q 41:53]. Those who seek God, they find Him in themselves because He is in the heart, and the heart is in their inner being. It will surprise you to know that whatever is in the heavens and on the earth, God has created them in you. And whatever He has

³² Ibid., 195.

³³ Ibid., 8–9, 14, 145–6, 56–9.

created in the tablet, the pen, and paradise, He has created them identically in you and your inner being. Whatever is in the world of divinity, He has created their reflection in your soul (*jān*).³⁴

He adds:

You do not know this [yet]. Wait until you see the world of symbol (*‘ālam-i tamaththul*). Then you will know what things are . . . understanding the symbol is not easy . . . insofar as you are you and you are with you, you are not and when you are not you, everything is you.³⁵

In ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s opinion, God created human beings to reflect His beauty, without flaw, in the mirror of their souls.³⁶ This calls for the transmutation of the self in order to reflect the Absolute Truth. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt states that the *modus operandi* of transforming the soul to make it capable of knowing God – and the means of spiritual hermeneutics – is divine love. In his opinion, because love is what takes the servant (*‘abd*) to God, love is an obligation (*farḍ*).³⁷ Divine love is an empowering love that “burns up whatever [is in the heart] but the Beloved,”³⁸ just as a moth cannot live without the flame and as soon as it reaches the flame, burns up.³⁹ Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s teacher, said that: “When love is real the lover becomes the nourishment for the Beloved, since the Beloved cannot be contained within the capacity of the lover. The flame is not nourishing the moth; the moth is nourishing the flame. For a fleeting instant it becomes its own beloved.”⁴⁰ Hence, divine love transforms the hierarchical relationship between Lord and servant and converts it into the relation between lover and the Beloved, into a nuanced reciprocity. In ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt’s words: “When the love of the lover is complete, the beholder and the Beheld are unified, then the lover is the Beloved and the Beloved is the lover.”⁴¹ Despite all that divine love does for man, he laments that

34 Ibid., 286–7. See also section 35 of ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 23.

35 Ibid., 287.

36 Ibid., 58, 272–4.

37 Ibid., 97.

38 Ibid., 238. See also Baqlī Shirāzī, *Abhar al-‘āshiqīn* 109.

39 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 99.

40 al-Ghazālī, *Savānīh* 32. See also ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 99–100.

41 ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, *Tamhīdāt* 115. Having said this, he emphasizes that “This is not incarnation, it is the perfection of union and oneness. In the religion of seekers of truth, there is no other faith but this.” In another passage of his *Tamhīdāt*, he writes: “The lover and the Beloved [the witness and Witnessed] are one in reality, but separate on the level of

many people do not have the courage and strength for love and choose ignorance . . . A whole world wants to go to paradise. Not a single person seeks love, because paradise is the bounty of the self and of the heart (*dil*), while love is the reward of the soul (*jān*) and of the truth (*ḥaqīqat*) of the soul (*rūḥ*).⁴²

He argues that the paradise promised to the masses is the prison of the elites just like the world is the prison of the faithful.⁴³

3 Conclusion

The thrust of 'Ayn al-Qudāt's ontology is to explain the Oneness of existence in terms of the universe's nature and the relationship between beings and God. He asserts that beings owe their borrowed existence to the light emanating from the face of God, which is personified as the light of Muḥammad and the dark light of Iblis. He emphasizes that the relationship between God and things is simultaneous and equidistant. He postulates that the cosmos is a unified whole based on the dualistic structures of light-darkness, visible-invisible, evil and good, and so forth. These dualities are symbolic and complementary. 'Ayn al-Qudāt visualizes the entire cosmos as an array of symbols similar to the Quranic symbols that point out toward One Reality and require esoteric interpretation. The recognition of signs and the ability to explore both their original and hidden meanings depends upon the evolution of the individual soul. In his opinion, the human soul has great potential. It can be the darkest possible entity or the most luminous possible entity. 'Ayn al-Qudāt envisions the soul as having the capacity to be transformed. This transformation is imagined as a seeker's journey to purify his soul from the dross of externalism and conventionality, bring it back to its primordial existence, and make it ready to meet God and to rejoin the Absolute Light, the apogee of the mystical experience.⁴⁴

discourse . . . if you pay close attention, sometimes we are His witness and sometimes He is our Witness." 'Ayn al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt* 295. See also Baqlī Shirāzī, *Abḥar al-ʿāshiqīn* 138, 142, 145–6.

42 'Ayn al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt* 111. Here he refers to this prophetic *ḥadīth*: "This world is a prison for the faithful, but a paradise for unbelievers."

43 'Ayn al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt* 135.

44 'Ayn al-Qudāt believes that some people in this world can achieve the vision of God and some will meet Him in the hereafter, cf. 'Ayn al-Qudāt, *Tamhīdāt* 106.

‘Ayn al-Quḍāt emphasizes that man will be able to see God only through God, meaning that man must transcend his own existence unto God Himself and see Him with His own eyes, since no one can see God but God Himself. Divine love, which is seen as a trial by fire more intense than hellfire in which the humanness of man is burned up, is the means of transforming the soul into a mirror through which God shines. Divine love not only takes the seeker beyond all concerns for paradise and punishment but also transforms the servant-Lord relationship to a lover-Beloved relationship. ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt describes paradise and hell in relation to one’s ability to see the Beloved. He writes: “Love is the path and the sight of the Beloved is paradise and separation [from Him] is fire and torment . . . This also is entirely within the soul.”⁴⁵ According to ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt, if man has a purified soul, he is already in paradise, a paradise that Muḥammad spoke of: “Verily God has a paradise, in which there are no *ḥūrīs*, no palaces, no milk, and no honey.” This is also the paradise that Shiblī spoke of: “There is, and will never be, anyone in paradise except God.”⁴⁶

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Beyond Paradise: The Mystical Path to God and the Concept of Martyrdom in ‘Aṭṭār’s *Conference of the Birds*

Katja Föllmer

1 Introduction

Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s (d. 586/1190 or 617/1220–1) allegory of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*Conference of the Birds*) is of great importance for our understanding of Islamic mysticism and the Persian literary heritage generally. This work is not merely a document of the period before the Mongol invasion in the thirteenth century CE; it illustrates the changing values of Sufism in its particular Iranian socio-political contexts.

With this in mind, it is worth looking at ‘Aṭṭār’s vision of eschatology as reflected in the *Conference of the Birds* by examining ‘Aṭṭār’s ideas on paradise in the context of the Sufi path of spiritual experience. I argue that the work reflects unorthodox ideas about death, martyrdom, and the unity with God, taking up widespread conventions and concepts of traditional Islam such as the hierarchy of the various paradises, worshiping God for the hope of paradise, or a joyful life after death, and giving them a new meaning and significance. In relation to the soul’s spiritual advance on the path to God, ‘Aṭṭār dismisses the distinction between this world and the hereafter. The author not only strengthens the idea of mystical experience, he also calls for a more tolerant life in general. The representation of Shi‘ite Isma‘ili ideas in the Sunni author’s work confirms his aim to overcome religious conflicts. For a better understanding I first describe the religious context and the literary tradition that influenced the work of ‘Aṭṭār, before I discuss the subject in detail.

2 Islamic Mysticism in Khurasan in ‘Aṭṭār’s Lifetime

At the end of the eleventh and the beginning of the twelfth century CE, Nishapur in Khurasan – where ‘Aṭṭār spent most of his life – was a flourishing center of trade on the famous Silk Road. It was also the center of the earliest

ascetic movement in Islam¹ and the center of Persian mysticism generally. After the decline of Sufism in Baghdad, which had been led by such figures as al-Junayd (d. 298/911), al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), and Shiblī (d. 334/946), Khurasani Sufism became increasingly influential. Some of the most important mystics of the time, such as Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874 or 264/877–8, known as Bāyazīd), Abū Saʿīd b. Abī l-Khayr (d. 440/1049), and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), were of Khurasanian descent. There Muslims met Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, and Zoroastrians, and there are clear traces of syncretism, especially in Persian Sufism.² The exchange of ideas and the cultural uniformity in the Islamic empire was significant for this formative period in Islamic history.³ Khurasani Sufism included both wandering dervishes, who devoted their entire life to their quest, and more moderate mystics, primarily from social elites. The initial conversion to Sufism by some craftsmen may have given rise to mass conversion of various local or provincial guilds and corporations.⁴

In the late tenth and early eleventh centuries CE Sufis gradually began to organize themselves in orders, with an independent hierarchy. They developed traditions of formulating and transmitting spiritual knowledge and their own methods of legitimization. Increasing numbers of Sufis lived in *khānegāhs*, the formalized centers for Sufi activity.⁵ Abū Saʿīd b. Abī l-Khayr attracted the *ʿulamāʾ* to Sufism so that even al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī “ended up as Sufis.”⁶ On the latter’s initiative Sufi orders were institutionalized, the first of which emerged in Nishapur in Aṭṭār’s lifetime.⁷ Sufi masters found recognition and acknowledgment in public discourse as a source of authority and sanctification. They bestowed legitimacy on political figures.⁸ The Ghaznavid as well as Saljuq sultans and their viziers are reported to have been their devotees and instrumentalized them for their political aims.⁹

1 Schimmel, *Ornament of the saints* 91.

2 About Zoroastrian elements in Persian Sufism see Zarrinkoob, *Persian Sufism* 145–7.

3 About cultural uniformity see Lambton, *Changing concepts* 28.

4 Zarrinkoob, *Persian Sufism* 177.

5 Malamud, *Sufi organizations* 428. The first independent institutions of higher (religious) learning, *madrasas* and *khānegāhs*, were established in Khurasan with the support of the Ghaznavid and Saljuq rulers who were searching for legitimacy and support from Islamic clerics and Sufis. The Saljuq vizier Nizām al-Mulk in particular encouraged the establishment of such institutions of learning that were later adopted in Baghdad.

6 Graham, *Abū Saʿīd* 135.

7 Zarrinkoob, *Persian Sufism* 159–60.

8 Safi, *Politics of knowledge* 138–9.

9 For instance, Ṭughril Beg’s vizier paid his respects to Shaykh Abū Saʿīd, see Dabashi, *Historical conditions* 156–7; a number of stories in the *Asrār al-tawḥīd* (Secrets of oneness) illustrate the

After the assassination of the patron of Shāfiʿī-Ashʿarī Sunnism, the Saljuq vizier Nizām al-Mulk, reportedly by Nizārī Ismaʿīlis, and especially in the last years of Saljuq reign, the sultanate was weakened by family rivalries. The Khurasani people suffered from poverty, insecurity, and violence from invading Turkmen tribes. The struggle for power between the religious groups of the Ḥanafīs and Shāfiʿī Ashʿarīs made the situation worse for the people. Much of the Sunni religious tradition had already become specialized elitist knowledge.¹⁰ The need for a powerful ruler was evident, and the turn toward mysticism which enabled the people to express their emotional and spiritual needs was practically inevitable. The Sufi movement was no longer limited to the elites of Khurasani society; but it became popular to the extent that it moved away from the Sufi ideal of the independent individual way of mystical experience to institutionalized orders.

The assumption that ʿAṭṭār was in contact with, and influenced by Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā (d. ca. 617/1220), the founder of the Kubrāwiyya order, has not been proven. On the other hand, it is undeniable that ʿAṭṭār met Najm al-Dīn al-Kubrā's disciples, Majd al-Dīn al-Baghdādī (d. 633/1219) and Saʿd al-Dīn al-Hammūʿī (d. 650/1252–53).¹¹ Despite being Sunnis, both Kubrā and Baghdādī showed Shiʿite tendencies in that they attributed an important role to ʿAlī.¹² The conflicts between the Kubrāwiyya and Khurasani *shaykhs* in Nishapur may have had an impact on him.¹³ In such circumstances, ʿAṭṭār found fertile ground for his rejection of the focus on religious differences, and appeal to return to the Sufi ideal. It is unknown whether he went to a *khānegāh* or had his own disciples.¹⁴ Information about his teachers and his affiliation with a specific mystical school has not been found.¹⁵ Since he did not claim to have had a Sufi *shaykh* as his master nor did he associate with a Sufi order, Nasr calls him an “observer of the Sufi scene . . . who did not really live within the Sufi tradition.”¹⁶ In addition, ʿAṭṭār defended the non-institutional independent individual mystical experience of his predecessors such as al-Ḥallāj

deferential relationship between Sufi *shaykhs* and nobles such as the contact between Abū Saʿīd and the vizier Nizām al-Mulk (d. 485/1092) or Bābā Ṭāhir (d. after 446/1055) and Sultan Ṭughril Beg (d. 455/1063), see Dabashi, *Historical conditions* 163–6; Safi, *Politics of knowledge* 137–41.

10 Endreß, *Islamische Geschichte* 87.

11 Meier, *Fawāʾih al-Jamāl* 40–5; Pazouki, *Sufi saints* 67–8.

12 Meier, *Fawāʾih al-Jamāl* 64.

13 Zarrinkoob, *Ṣidā-i bāl-i Sūmurgh* 36.

14 Ibid., 38.

15 Shāfiʿī-Kadkanī, *Huwwiyat-i tārikhī-i ʿAṭṭār* 30.

16 Nasr, *Some observations* 5.

and Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī. He definitely accepted the essential concepts of the later period of Sufi development whereas he rejected the concepts of brotherhood and institutionalized Sufi orders in general.¹⁷ Furthermore, sympathies for Twelver Shi'ism and the Isma'ilis are attributed to the Sunni author.¹⁸

Intellectual efforts in the eleventh century CE led to a development by which theological, cosmological and theosophical ideas and systems were integrated into the experience of the mystic.¹⁹ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī finally combined ascetic and mystical Sufism with the orthodox *sharī'a* tradition, providing a theoretical coherence for Sufism that was able to withstand the Mongol invasion and even to grow despite the political fragmentation after the downfall of the 'Abbasids.²⁰ 'Aṭṭār did not generally reject orthodox elements, but brought them into line with his idea of gnosis.

Important Khurasani Sufi masters such as Bāyazīd, Kharāqānī (d. 425/1033), Abū Sa'īd b. Abī l-Khayr, and Abū Ḥamid's brother Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126) shared a characteristic, namely the superiority they attributed to love over knowledge.²¹ 'Aṭṭār also sought to find the roots of the true aims and values of mystical Islam through the concept of love, as is evident in the *Conference of the Birds*.²²

Ibn Sīnā, in contrast, emphasized the concept of intellectual abstraction and encompassing knowledge to determine the degree of a person's perfection.²³ For him, philosophical knowledge will help one find deliverance.²⁴ Ibn Sīnā also admitted that "the intellect has nothing to do with sensibles."²⁵ This is later emphasized and singled out by 'Aṭṭār with regard to faith and love for the divine. The only knowledge 'Aṭṭār appreciated was the 'wisdom of faith.' This is clearly shown, e.g., by his rejection of Greek philosophy, which he notes in the epilogue of the *Conference of the Birds*:

17 Zarrinkoob, *Persian Sufism* 178.

18 Meier, *Fawā'id al-Jamāl* 64; Landolt, 'Aṭṭār 13–21.

19 Radtke, *Erleuchtung und Aufklärung* 53; already Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), one of Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī's teachers, brought about a connection between Sufism and the institutional framework of the Shāfi'i law school and Ash'ari theology, which remained dominant in Khurasan until 'Aṭṭār's lifetime, see Malamud, *Sufi organizations* 430.

20 Endreß, *Islamische Geschichte* 71.

21 Pourjavady, *Introduction*, in al-Ghazālī, *Sawānīḥ* 2.

22 On his concept of love as compared with that of Ḥāfiz (d. 792/1390), see Föllmer, *Aspekte mystischer Dichtung*.

23 Heath, *Allegory and philosophy* 80.

24 *Ibid.*, 93.

25 *Ibid.*, 83.

Kay shinasī dawlat-i rūḥānīyān
Dar mīyān-i ḥikmat-i Yūnānīyān
Tā az ān ḥikmat nagardī fard tu
Kay shawī dar ḥikmat-i dīn mard tu? . . .
Kāf-i kufr īnjā biḥaqq al-maʿrifah
Dūstar dāram zi fā-yi falsafah . . .
Līk ān ʿilm, az chi wa-chun rah zanad
bishtar bar mardum-i āgah zanad . . .
Ḥikmat-i Yathrib basat, ay mard-i dīn
*Khāk bar Yūnān fishān dar dard-i dīn . . .*²⁶

How can you find the fortune of angels in the wisdom of the Greeks?
 As long as you don't turn away from it [Greek philosophy], how will you
 become a man of the wisdom of faith? . . .
 The U of unbelief in real gnosis is better than the P of philosophy for
 me . . .
 But the sciences asking for how and what mostly confuse men of spiritual
 knowledge . . .
 The wisdom of Medina is enough for you, oh man of belief. Forget Greece
 for the acquaintance with faith . . .

ʿAṭṭār, possibly following Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), described
 a world that was different from both the purely intellectual and the physical
 world. In this respect, his concept of knowledge is primarily based on Sufism
 rather than on Ismaʿilism. Despite this, as we later see, the author also leans
 toward Ismaʿli ideas.

The popularization of mysticism in Iran, and the religious and political con-
 flicts in Khurasan at the time, caused ʿAṭṭār not to focus on a specific school or
 ideology, but instead to emphasize the shared concept of contemplation as a
 unifying factor. He writes in the epilogue of the *Conference of the Birds*:

Har ki īn barkhʷānd mard-i kār shud,
Wa ān ki īn daryāft barkhurdār shud.
Ahl-i šūrat gharq-i guftār-i manand,
Ahl-i maʿnī mard-i isrār-i manand
Īn kitāb ārāyish ast ayyām rā
*khāṣṣ rā dādah naṣīb wa-ʿamm . . .*²⁷

26 ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 439.

27 Ibid., 436.

Everybody who reads this [*Manṭiq al-ṭayr*] is a man of action and will benefit from the things he finds here.

Those who pay attention to appearances will drown in my words.

Those who are searching for sense are the men of my secrets.

This book is an adornment of these days for the noble as well as the humble ...

3 Literary Aspects and the Story of the *Conference of the Birds*

In the Persian literary tradition, ‘Aṭṭār is usually mentioned as a follower of Sanā’ī (d. 525/1131) and as the predecessor of the famous Sufi poet Rūmī. Opinions regarding the relative chronology of ‘Aṭṭār’s compositions vary.²⁸ In contrast to other poets of the time, ‘Aṭṭār – who as a druggist had his own income and did not need a patron²⁹ – was one of the first to address, through his poetry, the common people and not the ruling and intellectual elite. Sufism in general, as Ritter notes, gave the lower classes a new self-awareness.³⁰ ‘Aṭṭār developed a narrative style with a clear and easily recognizable structure,³¹ within an allegorical storyline containing various popular anecdotes and legends about famous Sufis and kings.³²

The epic *mathnawī* poem *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* begins with the author praising of the uniqueness and greatness of God and His creation, the exalted status of the Prophet Muḥammad and the first four caliphs. The introduction includes narrative and descriptive elements – mostly legends and forms of popular

28 Zarrinkoob states that, clearly, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* must have been ‘Aṭṭār’s last work, Schimmel and Ritter avoid a chronological ordering of ‘Aṭṭār’s works, Zarrinkoob, *Šidā-i bāl-i Sīmurgh* 89. Kermani suggests that ‘Aṭṭār’s last work is probably not the *Conference of the Birds*, but the *Muṣibat-nāma* (Book of suffering), Kermani, *Schrecken Gottes* 46.

29 Ritter, *Muslim mystics* 2.

30 Ibid., 2–3.

31 De Bruijn, *Comparative notes* 372; the *mathnawī* form he used may go back to pre-Islamic Iranian didactic narrative, which was later adapted to the Arabic metrical principles of *‘arūd*, de Bruijn, *Comparative notes* 365. This kind of poetry was relatively widespread, but ‘Aṭṭār’s poetry in particular was often the subject of criticism by Iranian scholars of literature. For example, Zarrinkoob finds lyrical weaknesses concerning meter and expression, Zarrinkoob, *Šidā-i bāl-i Sīmurgh* 119, 181. To summarize, as Bürgel states, ‘Aṭṭār’s main interest is “to convey ... the message of love and the pain of love,” not to create a literary masterpiece, Bürgel, *Some remarks* 207–8.

32 ‘Aṭṭār’s masterly skills of storytelling are mentioned by Zarrinkoob, *Šidā-i bāl-i Sīmurgh* 97–110; on ‘Aṭṭār’s didactic methods see Waley, *Didactic style* 215–40.

oral epics confirming religious and ethical norms, as is usual for example, in the *ḥadīth* tradition³³ – emotional interjections, explicit instructions, and self-reflections.

The frame story that follows starts with a gathering of the birds with the hoopoe as their spiritual leader. They feel the need to go to their king, Sīmurgh, who lives behind the legendary mythical mountain Qāf. First, the hoopoe explains the necessity for the birds to overcome their individual weaknesses in order to follow the path to God and to reach the king. He comments on the attachment of each bird to earthly things, and illustrates his instructions with anecdotes to encourage them in searching for spiritual experience. The first anecdote of each chapter and station primarily depicts the subject mentioned in the main storyline, whereas the following anecdotes are often associations linked by small details. The story of *shaykh* Ṣanʿān who fell in love with a Christian girl strengthens the birds' determination to choose the spiritual path. At the prospect of the unknown challenges and uncertainties of the journey, they feel their virtue and hope vanish and their doubts rise. The hoopoe's advice helps the birds to dispel their fear and to start the journey. To reach the king's palace they have to transit seven valleys corresponding to mystical stages: the valley of pursuit (*ṭalab*), love (*ʿishq*), intuitive knowledge and gnosis (*maʿrifat*), renunciation of heart and soul (*istighnāʾ*), union with the divine (*tawḥīd*), the valley of astonishment and perplexity (*ḥayrat*), and the valley of annihilation and death (*faqr* and *fanāʾ*) until they reach the palace of the king. At the end, only a few birds manage to reach their goal. Just when they lose hope of seeing God, they observe a light which gives them a new, pure soul. At the threshold to God's presence the thirty birds (*sī murgh*) recognize themselves as identical with King Sīmurgh. The Persian mythological bird Sīmurgh on the mountain Qāf is a metaphor for the indescribable presence,³⁴ a common symbol in Iranian mythology used for instance by Firdawsī (d. 411/1020) in his *Shāhnāma*.³⁵

The content of 'Aṭṭār's allegory is not new. The Middle Persian book of *Artā-Virāz* (*Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*) may have been its Iranian predecessor.³⁶ Furthermore, form and ideas can also be found in Arabic prose as well as in

33 Ernst, From hagiography to martyrology 309–11.

34 According to Keshavarz, Flight of the birds 125.

35 Since the rule of the 'Abbasids Persian mythology gained influence in the Arabic tradition, see Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen* 60.

36 Rypka, *History* 180; the work describes the extra-terrestrial soul journey of Ardāy Wīrāz including a vision of heaven and hell also known from earlier Zoroastrian sources such as the Denkard and the inscriptions of Kirdīr.

Persian poetry. The connection of Sufism with Persian poetry is said to have begun with Abū Saʿīd b. Abī l-Khayr's recitations of poems instead of Quran or *ḥadīth*.³⁷ Bāyazīd was perhaps the first to describe the mystical experience through the image of a flight through the heavens.³⁸ Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī both wrote treatises with the title *Risālat al-ṭayr* in Arabic prose. Ibn Sīnā, who is known for his great appreciation of Greek philosophy, was also a mystical thinker despite the Sufi aversion to his more technical writings.³⁹ He is regarded as having enriched Sufi poetry by the theme of the soul's journey, symbolized by a bird, to the ultimate station, bringing mysticism and philosophy together.⁴⁰ This treatise was the earliest Arabic source for the story of the journey of the birds. Ibn Sīnā considered the soul immaterial, immortal, and independent of the body. He rejected the idea of bodily resurrection and developed the concept of the soul's final end. This concept describes intellectual progress and an interaction between the rational soul and the celestial intelligences.⁴¹ Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, also called Shaykh al-Ishrāq or al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl, "the Martyr,"⁴² translated it into Persian.⁴³ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's Arabic text of the birds' journey was also translated into Persian by his younger brother Aḥmad al-Ghazālī.⁴⁴ These visionary works and their translations into Persian prose constituted a framework for various didactic lyric Persian poems, including 'Aṭṭār's *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*.⁴⁵ Bürgel states that, whereas in Ibn Sīnā's tale the birds have to fly over eight peaks representing the eight astral spheres, 'Aṭṭār transformed these peaks into mystical valleys through which the birds have to pass. Al-Ghazālī in his *Mishkāṭ al-anwār* (*The Niche of Light*) used this symbol for the various grades of the mystical seeker's hearts,⁴⁶ whereas the valley in 'Aṭṭār's allegory symbolizes the inner stages of the soul's development toward the final mystical aim. 'Aṭṭār borrowed

37 Zarrinkoob, *Persian Sufism* 158.

38 Schimmel, *Ornament of the saints* 94; Bāyazīd imagined that he was a bird during his spiritual journey through the heavens, Sells, *Early Islamic mysticism* 219, 242–50.

39 Schimmel, *Mystical dimensions* 19.

40 Taghi, *Two wings of wisdom* 16–7; about the ambiguous relationship between rationalism and mysticism in Ibn Sīnā's works and Islamic allegory see Heath, *Allegory and philosophy*; Bausani gives a translation of Ibn Sīnā's *Risāla* in Bausani, *Religion in Iran* 182–5.

41 Heath, *Allegory and philosophy* 63–9.

42 On him see, e.g., Hossein, *Knowledge and illumination*; Aminrazavi, *Suhrawardī and the school of illumination*; Schmidtke, *The doctrine of the transmigration of soul*.

43 Shāfiʿī-Kadkanī, Introduction, in 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 113–8.

44 See Aḥmad al-Ghazālī, *Dāstān-i murghān*.

45 Thackston, *Mystical and visionary treatises* 5.

46 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāṭ al-anwār* 131.

from al-Ghazālī's text the birds' decision to choose a king, the description of suffering during the spiritual journey to Sīmurgh, as well as the first refusal at the court of the 'King of the Birds.'⁴⁷ In contrast to al-Ghazālī, 'Aṭṭār added further stages to the mystical path: the arrival of the birds in the presence of Sīmurgh, which corresponds to the state of perplexity (*ḥayrat*) and the states of renunciation and annihilation (*faqr* and *fanā'*), until the spiritual seeker reaches the final and ineffable state of absolute permanence in God (*baqā'*).⁴⁸ Shāfi'ī-Kadkanī states that the treatise of Aḥmad al-Rijā'–Chāchī (d. 516/1122) may have been 'Aṭṭār's immediate source for the journey of the birds to their king, Sīmurgh.⁴⁹ However, only 'Aṭṭār combined the poetic ambitions of Abū Sa'īd with numerous prose treatises about spiritual flight in his *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*. Later, Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) developed this principle further and composed the famous didactical treatise *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*.

The literary structure of 'Aṭṭār's *mathnawī*, with a central storyline and anecdotes illustrating particular religious or mystical ideas, resembles *Kalīla wa-Dimna*, originally an Indian tale and the oldest known literary source with a similar structure,⁵⁰ whose origins can be traced back to pre-Islamic times. In Islamic times, the popular tales of the *One Thousand and One Nights* are based on this model.⁵¹ 'Aṭṭār picked up this form of instructive narrative and made his famous allegory an amalgamation of moral advice and the literary and spiritual traditions of his time.⁵²

4 'Aṭṭār's Mystical and Religious Thought in the *Conference of the Birds*

'Aṭṭār's praise of God and His creation in the beginning is followed by a laudatory passage on the Prophet Muḥammad. References to the Prophet

47 Bürgel, Some remarks 200.

48 Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen* 434.

49 Shāfi'ī-Kadkanī, Introduction, in 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 125.

50 Ibid., 112–3; the fables and anecdotes of *Kalīla wa-Dimna* were popular and widespread since its translation into Arabic by Ibn al-Muqaffā'. The text contains a main frame, a dialog between a king and a philosopher, and other stories.

51 Gerhardt, *Art of story-telling* 9, 377–416: the popular stories of the *One Thousand and One Nights* have a different origin, and fragments can be traced back to the ninth century CE. The popular collection has a main story which forms the framework surrounding one or more other framed stories. The embedded stories are often didactic in character.

52 Shāfi'ī-Kadkanī, Introduction, in 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 110.

Muḥammad, who holds the highest place in the spiritual ranks of Sufism,⁵³ and the first four caliphs are commonly found in Sufi biographical writing. Unlike the mainstream Sufi tradition, ‘Aṭṭār did not assume that the Prophet’s spiritual wisdom could only be transmitted directly to his cousin and son-in-law ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib.⁵⁴ The author’s religious understanding and criticism is reflected in his highly emotional defense of the legitimacy of the Prophet’s successors in discussions of the controversies between Sunnis and Shi’ites.⁵⁵ He disapproved of the division of the Islamic *umma*, and appealed to the people to concentrate on the divine goal and to avoid earthly disputes over succession. ‘Aṭṭār meant to compose a “manual” for those who choose the mystical path of spiritual experience. The central storyline symbolically refers to the particular stages of mystical experience and reflects his recognition that love of outward forms, reason, and philosophy prevents the mystic from entering the spiritual sphere. Thus, Zarrinkoob comes to the general conclusion that ‘Aṭṭār’s mysticism has strong connections to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Aḥmad al-Ghazālī’s mystical understanding.⁵⁶

The frame story starts with the election of the hoopoe as wise leader of the birds, master of mysteries and connoisseur of secrets, and thus relates to the Quranic tale of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, Bilqīs. This election as first step on the mystical path was not a collective decision but a choice by lot. The chosen leader is known and acknowledged by all other members of the group and functions as “instructor to the ignorant,” “reminder to the negligent,” and “guide to the seeker.”⁵⁷ The hoopoe is conscious of being chosen by God and aware of his elite status, as is illustrated in the tale.⁵⁸ With the exception of the hoopoe, ‘Aṭṭār did not construct a hierarchy among the birds seeking guidance. Here, one might detect a link with al-Junayd’s conception of spiritual election based on the principle of *walāya* (friendship with God).⁵⁹

At the second stage, the birds must learn to overcome their passions, their fears, weaknesses and pains, and to vanquish their rational thinking in order to find the divine light through spiritual experience and gnosis. The hoopoe gives them instructions before they begin their mystical journey to God.

53 His ascension to heaven is acknowledged as a prototype of the spiritual rise of the mystic to God’s entity, see Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen* 50–1.

54 Ernst, From hagiography to martyrology 31; Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen* 51.

55 ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 252–9: 479–616.

56 Zarrinkoob, *Ṣidā-i bāl-i Sīmurgh* 157ff.

57 ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 303: 1611–31.

58 ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 263: 691–3.

59 See Karamustafa, *Walāya* 64–70.

He convinces them by means of parables and anecdotes to follow the path to the divine and then leads the birds to God's presence at the third stage.

The three stages of experience mentioned above seem to have parallels with the three stages of the Isma'ili author Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī's (d. ca. 322/934) concept of veiling:⁶⁰ In the first stage, the birds are prevented from perceiving the existence of God by the darkness of their preoccupation with their own passions (veil of total darkness). In the second stage, the birds represent philosophical rationalists who are enfolded by a mixture of veils of light and darkness. The veils of light are caused by their realization that the existence of creation is dependent on an agent; however, their failure to identify the agent with God constitutes a veil of darkness. In the third stage those who are veiled by the infinite light of the divine are burned by the splendors of the divine's face. 'Aṭṭār combined this structure with the motif of divine love, which is only achievable through spiritual experience and esoteric knowledge (*bāṭin*), not by intellect and sensual feeling (*ẓāhir*).

Such implicit ideas are combined with the mention of famous early Sufis and ascetics who play an important role as mystic archetypes in 'Aṭṭār's anecdotes by illustrating his instructions and ideas. In particular, these archetypal figures include the Baghdadis, such as al-Junayd and al-Ḥallāj, Rābi'a al-'Adawiyya from Basra (d. 185/801), as well as early Khurasani Sufis like Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī and Abū Sa'īd. These, according to 'Aṭṭār, embody the essential idea of Islamic mysticism, the individual mystical experience and gnosis: the absolute obedience to and love of God. His references to famous mystic figures seem to confirm that 'Aṭṭār was in agreement with al-Junayd that the spiritual elite should be acknowledged by the general public. In embellishing the central storyline with anecdotes about mystics, 'Aṭṭār obviously used another idea from al-Junayd, who stated:

They pass their lives in good and fine works, and thus they leave behind them for their fellow men a praiseworthy memory and the brilliance of their light shines clearly for their fellow creatures. He who makes a choice from the brilliance of their light is illuminated thereby, he who follows in their footsteps is guided on the right path, and he who follows their mode of life will be happy and never depressed.⁶¹

Contemporary mystics are not mentioned in 'Aṭṭār's allegory, but we find references to historical persons such as Maḥmūd of Ghazna (d. 421/1030), the

60 Cited in Hajjaji-Jarrah, *Āyat al-Nūr* 173.

61 Cited in Karamustafa, *Walāya* 69.

prominent ruler of the Ghaznavid Empire, and his slave Ayāz. This particular love relationship is used as an allegory of Maḥmūd's humility and devotion to God, the Beloved, in spite of his power and wealth. There are also anecdotes of lunatics to show God's arbitrariness or to explain the failure of rationality and conventional logic to help those on the mystical path.

Another important point is 'Aṭṭār's attitude toward non-Islamic religions. In his view, religions like Christianity or Zoroastrianism do not play an essential role for the mystic. The author expressed an attitude that may seem surprising to orthodox Muslims when he explained that, for example, the stereotype of Zoroastrians as heretics (*kāfir*)⁶² and Christians as idol worshipers ought to be unimportant on the way to God.⁶³ On the other hand, in the tale of Shaykh Ṣanʿān he stressed that Islam is the only path by which humans can find God. Another passage tells of Maḥmūd of Ghazna's destruction of an idol,⁶⁴ and in contrast, in another anecdote a good unbeliever or idol worshiper is shown to be better than a wicked believer.⁶⁵

5 Death and the Role of Paradise in 'Aṭṭār's Allegory

'Aṭṭār's worldview is generally dominated by melancholy; he considered the Earth small, desolate, and void. For him it was a place of violence and death where material things and pleasures are ephemeral. Even from a religious perspective he assumed that the Earth is without value and morality in the eyes of God, and belongs instead to the Devil. Suffering is the tragic fate of humans and even prophets.⁶⁶ 'Aṭṭār's mystical writings encourage an ascetic lifestyle and the rejection of ephemeral external things in order to govern one's animal impulses (*nafs*), strengthen one's inner values, and purify the soul.

'Aṭṭār's most prominent attitude toward death is that it is inescapable for earthly beings. As mystical seekers, humans can reduce their fear of their inevitable death. Fear of death should be unknown to Sufis, while dying for the love for the divine should be the highest satisfaction. The best illustration of this attitude is al-Ḥallāj's courageous behavior in the face of his inevitable death when he smeared his own blood on his face to show that he, now red-faced,

62 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 412: 3952.

63 Ibid., 313: 1851–70.

64 Ibid., 375: 3144–60.

65 Ibid., 354: 2702–25.

66 For details see Kermani, *Schrecken Gottes*.

will die in honor.⁶⁷ 'Aṭṭār also stated that no one whose heart is near to God can die. Death does not mean the end of life but a separation and delivery of the soul from material existence on earth.⁶⁸ 'Aṭṭār's description of the death of the many souls on the mystical path is to be understood allegorically: those human souls were not able to overcome the various difficulties on the way to God.

The existence in paradise after death is usually imagined as a perfect life where the transformation of the physical into the spiritual existence and the process of enlightenment are complete. Only a select few souls can eventually perfect themselves and achieve their goal which is beyond paradise. In the mystical stage of annihilation (*fanā'*), when the smallest remainder of human feeling and even the human soul is released, one may receive a new divine soul from God. This brings the birds a new kind of self-awareness, which makes them understand that they are the same as the king himself.

If one assumes that 'Aṭṭār accepted al-Junayd's belief that the seeker will gain happiness and not be depressed at the end of the path, this may correspond more or less to the feeling one will have in paradise after the sufferings of earthly life. However, this assumption is not reflected in the *Mantiq al-ṭayr*. 'Aṭṭār focused on the spiritual experience of love for the divine that is accompanied by fear, doubt, and pain. The seeker needs these unpleasant sentiments and must deal with them, not in the hope of the promised paradise, but in the awareness of unity with and permanence in God (*baqā'*), which is preceded by astonishment (*ḥayrat*) and final annihilation (*fanā'*).

'Aṭṭār's paradise was not the residence of the divine, as is illustrated by an anecdote where the residents of paradise describe their circumstances, and state that God only comes there from time to time.

Ahl-i jannat jumla gūyand: īn zamān
khushī-yi firdaws barkhāst az miyān
Zān-ki mā rā dar bihisht-i bar-kamāl
ruy binamūd āftāb-i ān jamāl
Cun jamāl-i ū bi mā nazdik shud
hasht khuld az sharm-i ān tārik shud

67 Schimmel, Martyr-mystic Ḥallāj 166; 'Aṭṭār, *Mantiq al-ṭayr* 335: 2300–11.

68 This refers to Ibn Sīnā's concept of the soul in the afterlife: a select few can achieve perfection, others only meet with partial success. They dwell in an intermediate state, the *bar-zakh*, happy that they are near their goal and suffering because they have not yet attained it. The highest, immortal rational soul has the potential for perfection. See Heath, *Allegory and philosophy* 68, 71.

Dar furūgh-i ān jamāl-i jān-fishān
*khuld rā na nām bāshad na nishān.*⁶⁹

All residents of the paradise (*jannat*) say: When the sun of His beautiful face ascends in front of us in the perfect paradise (*bihisht-i bar kamāl*), the loveliness of the highest paradise (*firdaws*) begins to disappear. When His beauty approaches us the eternal paradise (*hasht khuld*) becomes dark with shame. In the splendor of His magnificent beauty, paradise (*khuld*) has no name and no sign.

It is worth mentioning that he did not use the different words for paradise (*jannat*, *bihisht*, *khuld*, *firdaws*) in a hierarchical sense, but rather as synonyms. The *‘illiyyūn* was more important for ‘Aṭṭār than the highest paradise *firdaws*. This higher garden of paradise is reserved for rational thinkers and philosophers: “The rose garden of paradise (*gulshin-i jannat*) is not for the friends of God, because the *‘illiyyūn* is for those with intellect and reason.”⁷⁰ While many early Sufis saw paradise as the only ideal place to meet God,⁷¹ ‘Aṭṭār used the idea of paradise as a rational mental construct in contrast to the mystical aim of unity with the divine. Thus, paradise becomes a place where souls have the opportunity of cognition, e.g., when Maḥmūd’s soul recognizes the importance of divine sovereignty there.⁷² The intermediate state between this and the other world (*barzakh*) is not mentioned, because he did not conceive of a barrier between these two worlds. Since paradise and its hierarchical subdivisions were not important for the author, he did not offer colorful descriptions of paradise or hell, but used these images as metaphorical opposites to support his argument.

As is mentioned in the first part of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, ‘Aṭṭār described the weaknesses of various birds, including the peacock, who is the bird associated with paradise. Its weakness is its passion for paradise. ‘Aṭṭār explained that paradise is small in comparison to God, and argued that it distracts the seeker from Him. Near the beginning of the story, at the starting point of the bird’s mystical journey, ‘Aṭṭār described paradise as a small drop in comparison to the divine ocean.⁷³ Later, in response to the question from a disciple as to why Adam was expelled from paradise, the voice of God says that paradise would

69 ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 379: 3225–8.

70 Ibid., 374: 3123.

71 Vakily, Notes on Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī 407.

72 ‘Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 274: 933–43.

73 Ibid., 269: 835–40.

detract attention from Him. Those who live for anything other than God will be expelled as if all of them were Adam.⁷⁴ The anecdote of Rābi'a confirms the rejection of paradise: she refused to worship God in the hope of paradise and self-interested motives. Rather, she raised the teaching of the Sufi doctrine to a high spiritual level and stated that God does not need a paradise and hell to be worshiped.⁷⁵ 'Aṭṭār agreed with her view, but he did not reject paradise in general. He considered it a station of recognizing one's failures and weaknesses on earth while following the spiritual path. He illustrated this in an anecdote about Maḥmūd of Ghazna, pointing to another weakness of seekers: the love of sovereignty on earth. Maḥmūd realizes in paradise that his wealth and power on earth was nothing compared to the divine sovereignty.⁷⁶

The first part of the allegory ends with the famous tale of Shaykh Ṣan'ān, an acknowledged Sufi master who was not free from imperfection: he worshiped a Christian girl as an idol and an incarnation of the divine. His love for the girl was stronger than his religious belief. But his affection was not returned. He took on many burdens and even converted to Christianity. After a long time the *shaykh's* troubles were brought to an end with God's advice and the help of his disciples. The Christian girl realized her mistake and converted to Islam before she died. Here 'Aṭṭār illustrates the mutual dependency of master and disciple. Even a master has to learn by negative experiences and needs the support of a group of disciples who can implore God to bring him back to the way. He also pointed out that love for the divine must transcend all boundaries, even though this means going to hell, or choosing death to be near the Beloved. The desire for spiritual unity with the Beloved is stronger than conventional aspirations, and abolishes opposites like paradise and hell, belief and disbelief. The *shaykh's* return to Islam and the visionary experience through mystical practices carried out by the *shaykh's* disciples reflect the post-classical Sufi tradition of Najm al-Dīn Kubrā by which 'Aṭṭār was obviously influenced.⁷⁷

References to paradise and hell accumulate in the second stage, where the hoopoe has to convince the birds that they must subdue their passions and their rational intellect. Here, the author prefers to point out contradictions, saying that, for example, a murderer and a criminal can be in paradise,⁷⁸ the one privileged by a short glimpse of a pious man, the other as sign of God's

74 Ibid., 269: 841–9.

75 Smith, *Studies in early mysticism* 188.

76 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 274: 933–43.

77 See Lewisohn and Shakle, Introduction xix.

78 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 306–7: 1700–6; 315: 1888–98.

mercy for everybody.⁷⁹ When the hoopoe says: "Paradise and hell are the image of your beneficence and your anger,"⁸⁰ the implication is that paradise and hell are only reflections of the intellect. The argument of the author goes further: if paradise is merely seen as a symbol of perfection, it is no more than a bribe and promise of lustful joy,⁸¹ and 'Aṭṭār compared the distracting role of paradise to a prison equivalent to death.⁸² The garden of paradise becomes perfect only through the presence of the divine. Without the sight of the Friend, paradise has no value.⁸³

Regarding the mystical journey the author noted that only the heart, love, and pious devotion to the divine are important. A place in paradise can be a station along the spiritual journey, but is not the destination. Thus, death is no longer the ultimate end of the development of the soul. Rather, it is only the release of the soul from its earthly covering, so that it can continue on the mystical path until the soul is annihilated and reaches *baqā'*. Suffering as main motif in 'Aṭṭār's poetry does not end with earthly death. Souls suffer even in paradise because of their distance from God.

Here, this world and the hereafter are not distinct opposites and the Sufi must release himself from this notion. This is illustrated in a paradigmatic anecdote about the Sufi *shaykh* Abū 'Alī Rudābar. At the time of his death the *shaykh* refused to let his soul go to paradise because he only wanted to let it go to God Himself.⁸⁴ In another anecdote, Abraham, while waiting for an order from God Himself, refuses to give his soul to 'Azrā'il, the angel of death.⁸⁵ In doing so he seemingly went against the Sufi requirement to sacrifice the soul along the mystical path. But the anecdote rather strengthens the importance of God. He is the only authority to whom the soul's release can be related.

In an anecdote about a stormy ocean, 'Aṭṭār raises the hope of bringing an end to pain and suffering and achieving immortality through a drop from the spring of paradise, an allegory for the unreachable Beloved.⁸⁶ The anecdote outlines the Sufi's essential feeling and longing. 'Aṭṭār thus saw no need for further explanations or illustrative anecdotes here, and continues the storyline.

79 According to Ritter the ascendance of unbelievers to paradise is part of a Mu'tazila doctrine which presumes for God a maximum amount of kindness, Ritter, Muslim mystics 5.

80 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 316: 1903.

81 Ibid., 269: 834; 372: 3075–9.

82 Ibid., 328: 2160–5.

83 Ibid., 379: 3221–39.

84 Ibid., 372: 3075–88.

85 Ibid., 391–2: 3485–515.

86 Ibid., 277: 1001–7.

The last station of the mystical journey, after being released from the non-essential elements of the soul, ends with the tale of a king who falls in love with the son of his minister. After a long period of suffering, the lover and the beloved are united. The tale has an open, but promising end, and the author probably did not feel the need for, or indeed the possibility of verbal expression to describe that mystical stage of *baqā*.⁸⁷ He concludes by saying that he cannot express this experience with words.⁸⁷ In compliance with a general feature of mystical experience, this stage cannot be mediated by rationalization. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī wrote in his *Mishkāt al-anwār*: "... not every mystery is to be laid bare or made plain ..."⁸⁸ and,

... the words of the lovers passionate in their intoxication and ecstasy must be hidden away and not spoken of... In relation to the man immersed in this state, the state is called in the language of metaphor 'Identity'; in the language of reality 'Unification.' And beneath these verities also lie mysteries which we are not at liberty to discuss.⁸⁹

In the *Mantiq al-tayr* the mystical way of experiencing the issue of "permanence," the ultimate spiritual aim that can give indescribable freedom, satisfaction, and happiness, does not exclude eschatological issues of resurrection and paradise and hell. 'Aṭṭār did not deny these, but he used them as conventional paradigms of the intellect to make the mystical idea comprehensible to the reader. The author was aware of the existing descriptions of the pleasures of paradise and the torments of hell, but he offered them as a means to allude to an indescribable spiritual experience. Furthermore, 'Aṭṭār used not only a specific symbolic language, but also employed psychological methods to gain the full attention and interest of the reader. Perhaps a distinguishing feature of the Persian text, in contrast to its Arabic predecessors, is that it contains additional, specifically Iranian features like the mystical bird Sīmurgh, from pre-Islamic Iranian mythology, as a symbol of the divine unity, which were not incorporated in earlier Persian versions. 'Aṭṭār's contemporary al-Suhrawardī in particular referred to pre-Islamic Iranian concepts of illumination and angels and in his mystical narratives also used the symbol of Sīmurgh for the divine presence.⁹⁰

87 Ibid., 435: 4473–82.

88 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-anwār* 77.

89 Ibid., 106–7, 108.

90 Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen* 260–1; e.g., Thackston, *Mystical and visionary treatises* 35–41, 88–9; an extract from al-Suhrawardī's visionary tales is translated in Bausani, *Religion in Iran* 203–8.

References to early Sufis were used to represent certain ideas. Rābi'a, for instance, embodied absolute devotion to God when she wanted paradise to be set on fire and hell to be filled with water, so that pure love of God could be distinguished from a selfish fear of hell or hope of paradise.⁹¹

6 'Aṭṭār's Concept of Martyrdom

In sum, 'Aṭṭār's allegory is of great importance for its Persian audience not only because of its literary value but also because of its portrayal of Islamic mysticism. Common notions and conventions of 'Aṭṭār's time are used in the text. From the beginning, this genre focused strongly on the prophetic paradigm and the *ḥadīth*. It is not unusual for literary works of the classical period to begin with an introduction praising God and His creation, followed by a laudatory passage on the Prophet Muḥammad and the first four caliphs. When referring to the controversies between Sunnis and Shi'ites, 'Aṭṭār emotionally defended the legitimacy of the Prophet's successors, and appealed to people to avoid earthly disputes over succession and to concentrate on the divine goal.

Already, Bausani noticed that, from his point of view, philosophy, Sufism, and Isma'ili gnosis differ only in their accentuation,⁹² and these different accentuations can emerge from the work of a single author. Ibn Sīnā's work already contained motifs with Isma'ili tendencies, and al-Suhrawardī created a synthesis of mysticism and (perhaps crypto-) *imāmī* gnosis. Thus, it is not surprising that 'Aṭṭār's mystical poems could also be interpreted in an Isma'ili fashion.⁹³ This is, for instance, discernable in his meditations on death and resurrection.⁹⁴ The birds must wait for their resurrection, a subject that was of great importance for the Isma'ilis in Alamut.⁹⁵ The Isma'ili concept of annihilation of everything but God can also be found in 'Aṭṭār's work as well as the need for a leading intermediary figure like the hoopoe. The allegory's prevailing motif of love for a perfect young man as an allegory for divine love accompanied

91 Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen* 66.

92 Bausani, *Religion in Iran* 212.

93 Ibid., 147–8.

94 Landolt, 'Aṭṭār 13–21; The assumed sympathy of some Sunni Sufis for the Shi'ite Isma'ilis was the result of the Shi'ites' political involvement to strengthen local power against hostile invaders, rather than from an affinity with their religious beliefs and traditions. Furthermore, Isma'ili doctrine is supposed to be attractive for the masses, because it is thought to meet their emotional needs, see Zarrinkoob, *Šidā-i bāl-i Sīmurgh* 36.

95 Landolt, 'Aṭṭār 14.

by self-negation also has Isma'ili resonances.⁹⁶ Therefore, Isma'ilis considered 'Aṭṭār one of their masters, especially after their defeat at Alamut when they began to dissolve into Sufism.⁹⁷

Whereas the Isma'ilis brought new vitality to the tradition of martyrdom and made it a noble act of honor that would directly culminate in unity with God,⁹⁸ 'Aṭṭār designated martyrdom rather as the individual spiritual experience of self-abandonment, as a station on the way to God, and offered anecdotes about the great mystics al-Ḥallāj and al-Junayd as examples. Neither the imminent execution of al-Ḥallāj nor the assassination of al-Junayd's son distracted either mystic from their absolute concentration on God.⁹⁹ 'Aṭṭār presented God as the omnipresent light and creator. He also had the idea of God as a person and "perfect man," who is the cosmos itself. 'Aṭṭār's concept of God as transcendent power goes together with complete self-negation of the human individual. This was an extreme Isma'ili position.¹⁰⁰ 'Aṭṭār's apparent acceptance of Shi'ite Isma'ili ideas was presumably intended to avoid doctrinal differences in order to stress the communality of the Muslim community.¹⁰¹

Parallels to esoteric teaching including subjects like divine love, cosmology, ritual practice, eschatology, and ethical behavior are clear,¹⁰² but 'Aṭṭār did not espouse the religio-political idea of martyrdom in order to liberate society from corrupt rulers.¹⁰³ He therefore did not mention *imām* Ḥusayn's martyrdom as an example for his mystical concept. Among the Sufis of his time al-Ḥallāj generally became the symbol for spiritual martyrdom, even though his role was controversial. Whereas on the one hand he symbolizes love and union with the divine through suffering, on the other hand his eccentric behavior and audacity caused many people to ignore or blame him. Al-Ḥallāj's behavior was believed to lead to the abuse of the concepts of spirituality as a license to avoid the observance of religious law.¹⁰⁴ The apprehension that people might

96 Bausani, *Religion in Iran* 149.

97 Ibid., 148.

98 Dorraj, Symbolic and utilitarian political value 502.

99 'Aṭṭār, *Maṭīq al-ṭayr* 435–6.

100 Bausani, *Religion in Iran* 149.

101 Landolt, 'Aṭṭār 11.

102 Virani, *Symphony of gnosis* 504.

103 This might be surprising given the fact that the Saljuq rulers and their powerful vizier Nizām al-Mulk were outspoken adversaries of the Isma'ilis. Even the Ash'arī scholar and mystic, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, considered the Isma'ilis, with their belief in the need of an infallible *imām*, dangerous for Sunni Islam, see Schimmel, *Mystische Dimensionen* 139–40.

104 Ernst, *From Hagiography to martyrology* 314.

misinterpret al-Ḥallāj's actions led Sufis to be reticent about him in public.¹⁰⁵ As a consequence, Ernst states, Sufis cultivated their own form of martyrology in private.

As was demonstrated above, 'Aṭṭār did not describe al-Ḥallāj's martyrdom in the context of a religious controversy, but rather emphasized his courageous acceptance of death for the love of the divine.¹⁰⁶ Martyrdom, in 'Aṭṭār's thinking, encompasses more than this. It includes the choice of the mystical path and love for the divine, as well as the whole range of experiences during the spiritual journey. This means that martyrdom, in 'Aṭṭār's understanding, has a rather individual, existential or "gnostic" sense: to gain self-awareness without the intention of gaining political or religious power.

7 Conclusion

The benefit of worldly enjoyments and the promise of an ideal life in the hereafter do not correspond to 'Aṭṭār's understanding of the mystical path. He did not deny the existence of paradise and hell, but emphasized that neither truly exists in God's unity: "There is only one threshold to the eight paradises and no more than one bolt to the seven hells. All of this is immersed in His unity, and when it is immersed it is completely annihilated."¹⁰⁷ For this reason 'Aṭṭār maintained a middle position in the development of the spiritual significance that paradise was to gain, which was again modified by Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1033/1624) in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries CE. Sirhindī combined orthodox and Sufi ideas to create a spiritual interpretation of paradise which has been accepted, for instance, by the Naqshbandī Sufis: "The trees and rivers and whatever is in Heaven are the results of right actions . . . And whatever of Divine Perfections have been placed in the garment of goodness of words and deeds, in Heaven those perfections will be manifest in the guise of pleasures and luxuries."¹⁰⁸ 'Aṭṭār's concept does not mean a passive turning away from the world, but contemplation and consciousness of internal values, blaming every kind of extreme and fanatic separatism.¹⁰⁹ Martyrdom

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 315.

¹⁰⁶ In other work ascribed to 'Aṭṭār we find further Ḥallājian motifs, see, in detail Ernst, *Losing one's head*.

¹⁰⁷ 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* 235: 43–4.

¹⁰⁸ Cited by Vakily, *Notes on Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī* 413.

¹⁰⁹ On the criticism of Sufism in the early twentieth century CE, see Jazayery, *Kasravi's analysis* 197; and Jazayery, *The debate on Persian poetry* 317.

is not an aggressive action against others, but rather a testing of one's own limits. Schimmel calls 'Aṭṭār's poetry "hymnic," both from a religious and a poetic point of view.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, 'Aṭṭār masterfully used different levels of meaning, combining the real sense of the word with its allegorical significance. In this way the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* is timeless. It can be considered an appeal for individual contemplation of true values, which can be of great influence even today.

'Aṭṭār's work is also fascinating aside from its religious intention and literary qualities. It is probably its complexity and ambiguity, which carries existential, metaphysical, and social meaning:

Although the specific Sufi connotations and possible allegoric interpretations of his [i.e., 'Aṭṭār's] verses are obvious, at the same time – often in the basic meaning of the word – they acquire existential, metaphysical, or social meanings. . . . The fact that 'Aṭṭār's unjust ruler can represent God does not mean that 'Aṭṭār did not, at the same time, have the unjust ruler in mind.¹¹¹

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110 Schimmel, Aspects of mystical prayer 117.

111 "So unübersehbar die spezifisch sufischen Konnotationen und Allegorisierungsmöglichkeiten seiner Verse bleiben, entfalten sie zugleich – und häufig schon ihrem Wortsinn nach – existentielle, metaphysische oder soziale Bedeutungen. . . . Daß der ungerechte Herrscher bei Attar zugleich für Gott steht, heißt nicht, daß Attar nicht auch den ungerechten Herrscher im Blick gehabt hätte." Kermani, *Schrecken Gottes* 49–50.

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PART 6

*Unity in Variety – Shi‘ism and Other
Muslim Identities*



“And the Earth will Shine with the Light of its Lord” (Q 39:69): *Qā'im* and *qiyāma* in Shi'i Islam*

Omid Ghaemmaghami

1 Introduction

Throughout the Quran, the Hour (*al-sā'a*) corresponds to the day of resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*), perhaps the book's most recurring and salient theme and certainly the primary concern of Islamic eschatology.¹ As one would expect, the day of resurrection is likewise a prominent *leitmotif* in Islamic literature. Muḥammad is often called “the apostle of the end of time”² and a well-known *ḥadīth* ascribed to him encapsulates humanity's inexorable movement toward a fast-approaching *telos*: “The Hour and I have been sent like these two – and he pointed to (or joined) his index and middle fingers.”³ Numerous Traditions

* The author wishes to thank Todd Lawson, Moojan Momen, Mina Yazdani, and Sasha Dehghani for their comments on an earlier draft.

1 On the origins and nature of Islamic eschatology and apocalypticism in the Quran, see Lawson, *Apocalypse*; Lawson, *Duality*; Lawson, *Gnostic* 1–20; Leemhuis, *Apocalypse*; Arjomand, *Islamic* 239–248; Yücesoy, *Messianic* 36–58. On Islamic conceptions of the day of resurrection, see Gardet, *Qiyāma*; Sachedina, *Messianism*; Ringgren, *Resurrection [Islam]* 7766–7; Waldman, *Eschatology: Islamic eschatology*; Hamblin and Peterson, *Eschatology*; Smith, *Eschatology*; Borrmans, *Resurrection*; Stowasser, *The end*; Hermansen, *Eschatology*, which includes a brief and unfortunately error-ridden section on Shi'i messianism; and Chittick, *Muslim eschatology*, which focuses exclusively on mystical and philosophical sources and with the exception of one of Mullā Ṣadrā's (d. ca. 1050/1640) works, does not consider any Shi'i sources.

2 See, e.g., al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ* xxviii, 11; Mullā Ṣadrā, *Tafsīr* vi, 33. A related epithet is “Prophet/Messenger of the fierce battle at the end of time (*al-malḥama*),” al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xvi, 116; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz* xi, 463; Arjomand, *Islamic* 246.

3 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iii, 124. This *ḥadīth* (= Tradition with a capital T henceforth) is recorded on the authority of Anas b. Mālik (d. ca. 91–3/709–11) in a number of the earliest Sunni *ḥadīth* collections and is understood as implying the close proximity between the rise of the Prophet and the day of judgment. Other variations are given by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, and al-Tirmidhī. The Sunni varieties are studied in Bashear, *Muslim apocalypses* 75–99. The Tradition is also transmitted by Shi'i scholars, e.g., al-Mufid, *al-Amālī* 211–2; al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154), *Majma'* vii, 71. Sunni and Shi'i scholars have interpreted this *ḥadīth* to mean that with the prophetic

(= *aḥādīth/akhbār*) in Sunni and Shi'i⁴ sources promise that the Hour will not come until a descendant from the Prophet appears to spread justice throughout the world.⁵ In some Sunni sources, the appearance of this messianic figure is numbered as one of many signs or portents (*'alāmāt/ashrāt*) that will herald the day of resurrection.⁶ In many Shi'i sources, the messianic figure known as the *qā'im* (and eventually identified with the *mahdī*), is the focus of the eschaton, which is informed if not dominated by his promised appearance.⁷

No two scholars have contributed more to the understanding of the religious dimensions of Twelver Shi'i eschatology than Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi and Abdulaziz Sachedina. In their works, the two have traced the broad contours of the events that are to occur at the eschaton as described in *imāmī* sources: The *mahdī's* appearance will be heralded by spectacular signs and cosmic disturbances. He will manifest himself as a comely youth in Mecca then proceed to Kufa to establish his capital, renew the lost sense of the sacred, and spread justice and equity throughout the world. According to some Shi'i *aḥādīth*, he will introduce a new *amr* (cause or command, but more specifically in eschatological texts, "revelation, period or dispensation"⁸), a new *sunna*, a new book, and new laws,⁹ which according to Amir-Moezzi,

mission of Muḥammad, we have entered the end times. See for example, Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ* iii, 122. It is worth noting that in the same work, Ṣadrā relates the Hour to the appearance of the *qā'im*, stressing that the *imāms* appeared one after another and humanity now awaits "the coming of the Hour through the agency of their *qā'im*, the *mahdī*." Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ* ii, 609. See also, Mullā Ṣadrā, *Sharḥ* iii, 123: "*tamām al-zuhūr wa-rtifā' al-khiṭā' fī ākhirihi 'ind khurūj al-mahdī l-qā'im*." Ṣadrā is here citing from the *tafsīr* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kashānī (d. between 730/1330 and 736/1335) wrongly ascribed to Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) in a frequently cited published edition. See (Pseudo-) Ibn 'Arabī, *Tafsīr* ii, 340; the word *al-qā'im*, however, does not appear here.

- 4 Unless otherwise noted, the terms *imāmī* and Shi'i in this chapter refer to the proto-Twelver/Twelver (*ithnā-'asharī*) branch of Shi'i Islam.
- 5 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 436. Cf. al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl* 431–2.
- 6 See now Arjomand, *Islam in Iran*. For a compilation of Sunni eschatological Traditions, see Sa'īd and 'Abd al-Raḥīm (eds.), *Mawsū'at*.
- 7 According to the Twelver Shi'a, the *qā'im-mahdī* has been in a state of concealment (*ghayba*) since the late third/ninth century. See Momen, *An introduction* 161–71; Sachedina, *Islamic*; Madelung, *Qā'im*; Ter Haar, *Muḥammad al-Qā'im*; Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 99–123; Amir-Moezzi, *Aspects* 213–28; Amir-Moezzi, *Eschatologie*; Amir-Moezzi, *Fin* 53–72; Amir-Moezzi, *Eschatology*; Amir-Moezzi, *Islam*; Ourghi, *Schittischer*; Ḥa'irī, *Ṣāhib*.
- 8 Cook, *Studies* 232–3. The word *amr* in *aḥādīth* about the *qā'im* has clear eschatological and apocalyptic connotations. See below.
- 9 Ardabili, *Ḥadiqat* ii, 943–4. Some of the *aḥādīth* stating that the *qā'im* will bring new laws are mentioned by Nūrī, *Najm* 132–4.

“seems to indicate a new religion abrogating Islam.”¹⁰ Various prophets, *imāms*, and their most faithful votaries will reappear. Their enemies will also return and an apocalyptic battle will ensue between the *mahdī*’s companions and the forces of ignorance. Having corrected the course of history which went tragically astray the moment the Prophet died and having re-established the lost Adamic paradise – in some ways a more potent refiguration of Medina at the time of the Prophet – the *mahdī* will either die of natural causes or, according to some *aḥādīth*, be killed by the remnants of darkness. A period of turmoil, uncertainty, and chaos will then elapse before the end of the world and the day of resurrection.¹¹

The last chapter of this story is the focus of this article. Amir-Moezzi’s study of the earliest sources led him to conclude that “the Mahdi will prepare the world for the Resurrection, and a more or less short time will pass between the victory and the Last Judgment.”¹² Sachedina directly posited the question of the *qā’im*’s relationship with the *qiyāma* in the penultimate chapter of his monograph on the twelfth *imām* and advanced the same conclusion. Both are alluding to the following *ḥadīth* found in the two earliest extant Shi’i *ḥadīth*

10 Amir-Moezzi, *Eschatology* 577. See also Momen, *An introduction* 169. The Shi’i scholar Aḥmad al-Aḥsā’ī (d. 1241/1826), *Kitāb al-Raj’a* 90, had these and other *aḥādīth* in mind when he wrote that the *qā’im*’s appearance will mark the beginning of a new day, a new religion (*dīn jadīd*), and a new creation. Cf. Corbin, *Youthfulness* 71 (Original French: Corbin, *L’homme* 231–2); Kohlberg, *Authoritative* 310–1.

11 According to some Traditions, after the *qā’im*’s death, other *imāms* and certain of their initiates and friends will come back to earth, exact revenge on the enemies of the *ahl al-bayt* and rule the world until the day of resurrection. This is commonly referred to as the Return (*al-raj’a*). See Amir-Moezzi, *Raj’a*; Momen, *An introduction* 166; Kohlberg, *Radj’a*; Turner, *Islam* 215–38; Ayoub, *Redemptive* 228–9; and the recent study, al-Sanad, *al-Raj’a*; for Shi’i Traditions about *al-raj’a*, see al-Ḥurr al-‘Āmilī, *al-Īqāz*. Based on such Traditions, the celebrated Shi’i scholar [al-Sharīf] al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044), *Rasā’il* iii, 146, states that after the *qā’im*, other *imāms* will appear and rule the world “for a long time.” Other Traditions indicate that after the *qā’im* dies, eleven or twelve other *mahdīs* will appear and control the world. See al-Maḥmūdī (ed.), *al-Uṣūl* 268; al-Ṭūsī (d. 459 or 460/1066–7), *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 478. In a treatise dating from 1127/1715 and written to defend the legitimacy of the Safavid monarchy, a certain Muḥammad Yūsuf, surnamed Nājī, interprets such Traditions as referring to sons of the hidden *imām* who live with him on the Green Island (referring to the famous story of the Green Island in the White Sea). See Nājī, *Risālah* 183–5. Other scholars, e.g., al-Baḥrānī (d. 1107/1695–96 or 1109/1697–98), *Tabṣīrat* 4, speculate based on their reading of specific Traditions (e.g., al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā’il* 433 (no. 398), 436, (no. 406)) that the day of resurrection will immediately follow the *qā’im*: “*wa-‘alayhi taqūm al-qiyāma*.”

12 Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 122–3; Amir-Moezzi, *Fin* 57.

collections, Aḥmad al-Barqī's (d. ca. 280/893–4) *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* and al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī's (d. 290/902–3) *Baṣā'ir al-darajāt*:

By God, the earth will continue to have a Proof (*ḥujja*)¹³ who knows what is permissible and what is prohibited and who will call [people] to the Way of God [cf. Q 16:125]. The Proof will never be cut off from the earth except for [the last] forty days prior to the day of resurrection.¹⁴

The prominent Buyid-era scholar Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, more commonly known as al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022), no doubt had the above *ḥadīth* and others like it in mind when he averred near the end of his *Kitāb al-Irshād* that “the majority of Traditions maintain that the *mahdī* of this *umma* will depart [the earth] forty days before the resurrection,” and that these forty days will be filled with chaos and confusion.¹⁵

13 On the term Proof (*ḥujja*) as a designation of all of the *imāms* and an epithet of the twelfth *imām* in particular in early Shi'i sources (as well as a chief *dā'ī* in Isma'ili literature), see Dakake, *Hojjat*.

14 Al-Barqī, *Kitāb al-Maḥāsin* 236; al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir* 484; al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il* 433–4; al-Ṣadr, *Tārīkh* 935. The *ḥadīth* goes on to say that when the Proof (i.e., the *imām*) is removed from the earth, the gate of repentance (*bāb al-tawba*) will close and the wicked who remain on earth will be judged on the day of resurrection. Similarly, the *imāmī* heresiographer, Sa'd b. 'Abdallāh al-Ash'arī al-Qummī (d. 299/911–2 or 301/913–4), *Kitāb al-Maḥāṣin* 102, states that the *qā'im* will continue to subsist until the day of resurrection (*ilā an taqūm al-sā'a*). Cf. *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Bāqir in which he states that the *qā'im* will live for 19 years after his rise. Fifty years of chaos (*al-harj*) will follow his death after which a descendant of the *ahl al-bayt* (different from the *qā'im*) who is called *al-manṣūr* (the one aided (by God); cf. Q 37:172) will rule the world for 309 years and take revenge on those who killed the *qā'im* and his companions, al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* ii, 326; al-Mufid, *al-Ikhtisāṣ* 257 has *al-muntaṣir* instead of *al-manṣūr*.

15 Al-Mufid, *al-Irshād* ii, 387; al-Kāshānī, *Nawādir* 294, no. 5; Madelung, *Qā'im*; Ayoub, *Redemptive* 224; Arjomand, *The shadow* 160; Blichfeldt, *Early* 9. Howard mistranslates *al-harj* (chaos and confusion) as “ease” in his translation of *Kitāb al-Irshād*: see al-Mufid, *Kitāb al-Irshād: The book of guidance* 554. Cf. al-Ṭabrisī, writing in 509/1115–6, who gives *al-faraj* (freedom from difficulties) instead of *al-harj*, al-Ṭabrisī, *Tāj* 116. See also al-Nisābūrī (d. 508/1114–5), *Rawḍat* 266; al-Bayḍā'ī (d. 877/1472–3), *al-Ṣirāt* ii, 254, who maintain that the forty days between the death of the *mahdī* and the day of resurrection will be marked by *al-harj* and “the signs of the resurrection of the dead to face judgement.” The various traditions that mention forty days between the passing of the *qā'im* and the day of resurrection are cited in Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat* 681–7. The notion that the earth will be bereft of an *imām* for forty days contradicts many other *aḥādīth* stating that the world can never be devoid of a *ḥujja*, e.g. al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 100–1.

In what follows, the relationship between *qā'im* and *qiyāma* will be reconsidered in light of a number of texts found in the Shi'i *ḥadīth* collections and Quran commentaries that have received little to no attention in the secondary literature on Islamic eschatology in general and Shi'i Islam in particular. It will be seen that in addition to the outline presented above, Shi'i sources paint another image that has been hidden in plain sight: the day of resurrection is the appearance of the *qā'im*; the *qiyāma* is the *qā'im*.¹⁶

2 The *qā'im* and the Quran

The Quran is a key source of *imāmī* eschatological doctrines.¹⁷ Although the figure of the *mahdī/qā'im* is not mentioned directly, hundreds of Quranic locutions and verses are glossed in Shi'i *ḥadīth* and *tafsīr* sources as signifiers of the *qā'im* and/or his appearance.¹⁸ The *qā'im* is, *inter alia*, "the path OR the

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- 16 In Shi'i creeds, the sections on the *qā'im* and the resurrection are always separate. For a pre-modern example, see al-Ṣadūq, *A Shi'ite* 57–74 (sections on eschatology) and 86–7 (section on the *qā'im*); for a modern example, see Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ite* 165–71 (eschatology), 211–4 (the twelfth *imām*). Sobhani, *Doctrines* 120–41 (= Subḥānī, *Manṣūr-i* 181–211), likewise presents the traditional Shi'i beliefs about resurrection as separate from those that concern the twelfth *imām* in his compendium of Shi'i beliefs and practices. See also Lari, *Resurrection*, written by a Shi'i scholar to explain the doctrines of Islamic eschatology, but deafeningly silent on the twelfth *imām*. The same absence can be observed in Muharijani, *Twelve-Imām* 139–42.
- 17 Cook, *Studies* 281; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 95. On *imāmī* Shi'i exegesis, see also Bar-Asher, *Exegesis* ii. in Shi'ism; Keeler, *Exegesis* iii. in Persian; Lawson, *Exegesis* vi. in Aḳbārī and post-Safavid esoteric Shi'ism; Lawson, *Hermeneutics*; Steigerwald, *Twelver* 373–85.
- 18 The best published collection of *imāmī aḥādīth* that interpret verses from the Quran about the twelfth *imām* is al-Hay'a al-'Ilmiyya fī Mu'assasat al-Ma'arif al-Islāmiyya, *Mu'jam* vii, which includes detailed references for each of the *aḥādīth* mentioned. One of the earliest collections of such Traditions is Abū 'Abdallāh al-Jawharī's (d. 401/1010–1) *Mā nazala min al-Quran fī ṣāḥib al-zamān*, which has not survived. On this work see, al-Najāshī (d. 450/1058–9), *Rijāl al-Najāshī* 86; al-Ṭihrānī, *al-Dharī'a* xix, 30 (no. 153). See also al-Nilī (d. after 803/1400–1), *Muntakhab* 21–42; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja*, completed in 1097/1686, which glosses 120 verses from the Quran as having been revealed about the *qā'im* (on this important work, see Tabriziyan, *al-'Allāma* 148–50; Madelung, Bāḥrānī, Hāšem; al-Oraibi, *Rationalism* 341); al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* li, 44–64; al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* i, 58–242; al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* i, 53–103; 'Ashūr, *Mawsū'at* ix, 106–55; al-Shāhrūdī, *al-Imām* 64–73; Abū Ma'āsh, *al-Imām*; 'Abidīnzādah, *Mahdī*; Mardānī, *Mahdaviyyat*; Badrī, *Awālim* 165–280; al-Ibrāhīmī, *I'raf* 11–24; 'Alā' al-Dīn, *al-Qur'ān*; Wā'ilī, *Jaysh*; Vasram and Toussi, *Mahdī*; al-Abṭaḥī, *Zubdat*; Chā'irī, *Mu'jam-i*; the 43 articles found on the website of the

bridge" (Q 1:6, *passim*),¹⁹ "the Book" (Q 2:2),²⁰ "the unseen" (Q 2:3; 10:20),²¹ "the upholder (*qā'im*) of justice" (Q 3:18),²² the one the believers are called on to "defend" (Q 3:200),²³ "good company" (Q 4:69),²⁴ "a people (God) loves, and who love Him" (Q 5:54),²⁵ "the power" (Q 11:80),²⁶ "the remnant of God" (Q 11:86),²⁷ "the truth" (Q 17:81; 41:53; 51:23),²⁸ "[God's] blessings outward and inward"

Shi'i seminary (*hawzah 'ilmiyya*) in Qum (<http://www.hawzah.net/Hawzah/Subjects/Subjects.aspx?LanguageID=1&id=63301>); Mahdīpūr, *Kitābnāmah-yi* i, 808 (s.v. index, 'āyāt-i mu'awwalih bihi zuhūr-i ḥaḍrat'); al-Kūrānī al-Āmilī, *al-Mu'jam* 903–40 (= Persian translation: *Dānishnāmah-yi*); Aqīl (ed.), *Mawsū'at* 727–934; Ṭabāṭabā'ī et al., *Mu'jam-i mahdaviyyat*; and other sources referenced in this chapter. For a general introduction to *imāmī ḥadīth* sources, see Kohlberg, *Shi'i Hadith* 299–307; Kohlberg, Introduction; Ahmad, *Twelver* 125–45; Kazemi-Moussavi, *Hadith*.

- 19 Nūrī, *Najm* 60. Translations of Quranic verses follow Arberry (occasionally with minor changes).
- 20 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 17, who cites a *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Ṣādiq interpreting *al-kitāb* as "the period ('*ahd*) of the *qā'im*," which "seems to be based on an understanding of *kitāb* as 'an appointed term' [similar in meaning to the important Quranic word *ajal*]," Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, Notes 73.
- 21 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 29; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* li, 52; lii, 124. See also al-Baḥrānī, *al-Mahajja* 7–8; al-Jazā'irī, *Kitāb Riyāḍ* iii, 129; al-Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 248; Abū Ma'āsh, *al-Imām* 15–6. According to al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 348, the unseen is "the days of the family of Muḥammad," a likely reference to the appearance of the *qā'im*. This meaning is made explicit by al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* ii, 283, who, citing al-Bursī, states that the days of the family of Muḥammad are three: the day of return, the day of resurrection, and the day of the *qā'im* (in this order).
- 22 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 29.
- 23 Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba* 34.
- 24 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* i, 142–3.
- 25 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* i, 150. The author of this work, Sharaf al-Dīn 'Alī al-Ḥusaynī al-Astarābādī al-Najafī (fl. tenth/sixteenth century), was a student of the well-known Shi'i jurist, Nūr al-Dīn al-Karakī, known as al-Muḥaqqiq al-Thānī (d. 549/1533). His main source for writing *Ta'wīl al-āyāt* was Ibn al-Juḥām's (d. ca. 328/939) two volume work, *Mā nazala min al-Qur'ān fi ahl al-bayt*. See al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* i, 7–8. On Ibn al-Juḥām's work, which has not survived in its entirety but was reconstructed from later sources and published as Ibn al-Juḥām, *Ta'wīl*, see Kohlberg, *A medieval* 369–71, no. 623; Kohlberg, Introduction 169. Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* i, 284, states that he had access to half of Ibn al-Juḥām's work (likely volume 2) which covered the exegesis of Quran 17:73 to the end of the work. Therefore, many of the interpretations cited below from al-Najafī's *Ta'wīl al-āyāt* likely have a *terminus post quem* of Ibn al-Juḥām's lifetime.
- 26 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* i, 336.
- 27 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 245. Cf. Rayshahri, *The scale* 94. See also al-Majlisī, *Kitāb-i Raj'at* 190.
- 28 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 808 (on this work and its author, see the recent study by Amir-Moezzi and Ansari, Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī); al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 541; al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī

(Q 20:19),²⁹ “the remembrance” (Q 20:113),³⁰ “the even path” (Q 20:135),³¹ one of God’s righteous servants “who shall inherit the earth” (Q 21:105),³² “a neglected well” (Q 22:45),³³ “the distressed one” (Q 27:62),³⁴ “help from thy Lord” (29:10),³⁵ “the lote-tree beyond which there is no passing” (Q 53:14),³⁶ “the light of God” (Q 61:8),³⁷ “the dawn” (Q 89:1),³⁸ “the morning brightness (of the sun)” (Q 91:1),³⁹ “the day – when it reveals its glory” (Q 91:3),⁴⁰ “the day when it shines in brightness” (Q 92:2),⁴¹ “the inviolable city” (Q 95:3),⁴² and the one who will manifest “the religion of the true” (Q 98:5).⁴³ Moreover, the

(fl. second half of fourth/tenth century), *Kifāyat* 189; al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* ii, 615; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 161; Nūrī, *Najm* 51–2; Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 224.

29 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl*, 433, no. 6; al-Nīlī, *Muntakhab* 39–40.

30 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 65.

31 Al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* i, 323. Also cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xxiv, 150 and al-Baḥrānī, *Ghāyat* iv, 217. The latter has the same *isnād* but there is a slight variation in the text of the *ḥadīth*.

32 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* i, 14. See also Maʿrifat, *Imām-i* 37.

33 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 85; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* iii, 893; al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr* iii, 383; al-Ḥuwayzī, *Tafsīr* iii, 507; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xxiv, 101, no. 5; Nūrī, *Najm* 47. Cf. al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣāʾir* 505; al-Yaman (attr.), *Kitāb al-Kashf* 50 (on this work, see below); al-Ṣadūq, *Maʾānī* iii (nos. 1–3); Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib* iii, 88; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Hidāya* i, 432–5 (nos. 620–7) (on this work, see Tabriziyan, *al-ʿAllāma* 166–7); al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 94.

34 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 205; al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr* ii, 57; al-Nuʿmānī, *al-Ghayba* 188. The same interpretation is offered in al-Yaman (attr.), *Kitāb al-Kashf* 42.

35 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 139.

36 Nūrī, *Najm* 56.

37 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 258, no. 91; al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 365.

38 Al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* ii, 793. Here, al-Najafī explains that the *qāʾim* has been figuratively named “the dawn” (*al-fajr*) because *al-fajr* marks the rupture (*infijār*) of night and the dawn of a new day: “Night is an allusion to his being concealed but when he appears, the darkness of the night of oppression will be dispelled. The dawn of justice will then break, the sun of the one true religion (*al-dīn*) will rise, and the banners of certitude will appear.” See also al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 262; al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 256; Nūrī, *Najm* 61–2; al-Ḥāʾirī, *Ilzām* i, 97.

39 Al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 200. See also, Nūrī, *Najm* 60.

40 Al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr* 563. Cf. al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* ii, 803, 805; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xxiv, 72; Majlisī, *Hayat* 351; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt* v, 192; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 263; Nūrī, *Najm* 90.

41 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 425; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 265; Nūrī, *Najm* 90; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 217.

42 Nūrī, *Najm* 47.

43 According to a *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Ṣādiq, “the religion of the true” (Q 98:5) refers to “the religion (*dīn*) of the *qāʾim*,” al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* ii, 831; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xxiii, 370; al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 280; Nūrī, *Najm* 67; al-Ḥāʾirī, *Ilzām* i, 103. See also al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt* 187. On Abū Baṣīr, see Modarressi, *Tradition* 395.

qā'im's appearance is described as the day when "wherever you may be, God will bring you all together" (Q 2:148),⁴⁴ "a near time" (Q 4:77),⁴⁵ the day when "those who reject faith give up all hope of your religion – yet do not fear them, rather fear Me" (Q 5:3),⁴⁶ "the day the interpretation (of the Book) (*ta'wīluhu*) comes" (Q 7:53),⁴⁷ "the day of the most great pilgrimage" (Q 9:3),⁴⁸ the day when God will "proclaim (the Religion of Truth) above every religion" (Q 9:33; 48:28; 61:9),⁴⁹ the day when the believers "will overcome" (Q 30:3),⁵⁰ "the day of victory" (Q 32:29),⁵¹ "the day when the caller will cry out" (Q 50:41),⁵² "that which ye are promised, and by the Lord of heaven and earth, it is as surely true as that you have speech" (Q 51:22–3),⁵³ "the break of dawn" (Q 97:5),⁵⁴ and "the declining day OR the age" (Q 103:1).⁵⁵

2.1 The Hour

The convergence of *qā'im* and *qiyāma* is stressed at the beginning of one of the most important eschatological and apocalyptic *aḥādīth* in the Shi'i corpus transmitted on the authority of one of al-Ṣādiq's closest disciples, Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fi (d. late second/eighth century).⁵⁶ In his *Islamic Messianism*,

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- 44 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* i, 66; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 18; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* i, 353; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* lii, 291; al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* i, 53–4.
- 45 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 42; al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* i, 258.
- 46 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* i, 292.
- 47 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* i, 235–6.
- 48 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* ii, 76; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 274; al-'Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 123.
- 49 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* ii, 87; al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 258, no. 91; al-Nilī, *Muntakhab* 27–9. According to al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 598, "the Religion of Truth [or God]" will be proclaimed under "the guardianship of the rule of the *qā'im*." See also al-Ṣadūq, *al-I'tiqādāt* 95 (= al-Ṣadūq, *A Shī'ite* 86); al-Baḥrānī, *Bahjat* 195; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Hidāya* ii, 359–60, no. 1278; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* li, 98; liii, 4, 33–4; al-Shīrāzī, *al-Mahdī* 143; Mubārak, *Bashā'ir* 134.
- 50 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 107.
- 51 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 445; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* iv, 403; al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* i, 81. Cf. al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 196.
- 52 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 346.
- 53 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 175, 176–7.
- 54 Al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr* 582. See also al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 268; al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 818, 821; Nūrī, *Najm* 62; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 219. Cf. the recent study by Hassan Ansari about Nuṣayrī interpretations of Quran 97 as transmitted in *imāmī* sources, Ansari, *L'héritage*.
- 55 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 596; al-Nilī, *Muntakhab* 314; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 270; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 220; al-Majlisī, *Hayat* 481–2. See also Lawson, Quran commentary 150–1, note 17.
- 56 Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fi was one of the trusted deputies of the sixth and seventh *imāms* (Ja'far al-Ṣādiq and Mūsā al-Kāẓim) and a number of *aḥādīth* have been transmitted on

Sachedina provides an abridged translation and gloss of this lengthy *ḥadīth*, appropriately called ‘the Mufaḍḍal Apocalypse’ in a recent study;⁵⁷ yet for reasons that remain unclear, he ignores its opening lines.⁵⁸ The same neglect can be observed in the works of two Shi‘i scholars⁵⁹ and is repeated in a study by Colin Turner.⁶⁰ In this *ḥadīth*, al-Ṣādiq expatiates on the circumstances that will surround the appearance of the *qā’im*. He begins by negating the notion that a time can be appointed for the *qā’im*’s appearance. When Mufaḍḍal asks why, al-Ṣādiq responds:

Because he is the Hour (*li-annahu huwa al-sā’a*) concerning which God said: “They will question thee concerning the Hour, when it shall berth. Say: ‘The knowledge of it is only with my Lord; none shall reveal it at its proper time, but He. Heavy is it in the heavens and the earth’” (Q 7:187). And he is the Hour concerning which God said, “They will question thee concerning the Hour, when it shall berth” (Q 79:42). [And he is the Hour concerning which God] said, “with Him is the knowledge of the Hour” (Q 43:85). He did not say that anyone other than Him (has this knowledge). [And he is the Hour concerning which God] said, “Are they looking for aught but the Hour, that it shall come upon them suddenly? Already its portents have come” (Q 47:18; cf. 43:66). [And he is the Hour concerning which God] said, “The Hour has drawn nigh: the moon is split” (Q 54:1). [And he is the Hour concerning which God] said, “What shall make thee know? Haply the Hour is nigh” (Q 33:63). [And he is the Hour concerning which God] said, “Those that believe not therein seek

his authority. On him and the works attributed to him, see Modarressi, *Tradition* 333–7; Halm, *Die Islamische* 214–7; Madelung, *Khawṭābiyya*; Sachedina, *Islamic* 215, note 27; Modarressi, *Crisis*, s.v. index ‘Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju‘fī’; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 240–1; and now, Asatryan, *Mofazzal*; Asatryan, *Heresy*.

57 Anthony, *The Mahdī* 465–72.

58 Sachedina, *Islamic* 161–6. The *ḥadīth* is also referred to in Amanat, *Resurrection* 195; Kohlberg, *The term* 678.

59 See ‘Abdallāh al-Shubbar’s (d. 1242/1826–7) survey of Shi‘i doctrines, Shubbar, *Ḥaqq* 319; and a Persian translation of the *ḥadīth* by Ismā‘īl Ṭabarsī Nūrī (d. 1321/1903), Nūrī, *Kifāyat* ii, 867. Emphasizing the significance of this Tradition, Nūrī states that most *imāmi ‘ulamā’* have cited it in their works, by which he likely means studies on the hidden *imām* and *al-raj‘a*.

60 Turner, *The “tradition of Mufaḍḍal”* 175–95. In an earlier work, Turner, *Islam* 242, note 130, acknowledges the purport of the opening lines of the *ḥadīth* but is quick to dismiss it: “The ‘knowledge of the Hour’ (*‘ilm al-sā’a*) is presented in the Koran as knowledge of the day of reckoning and not the rise of the Mahdī as posited in the Tradition [of Mufaḍḍal].”

to hasten it; but those who believe in it go in fear of it, knowing that it is the truth. Why, surely those who are in doubt concerning the Hour are indeed in far error" (Q 42:18).⁶¹

The ploc or repetition of the keyword "Hour" in these verses mentioned by al-Šādiq serves to intensify his assertion: the Hour of the *eschaton* is none other than the appearance of the *qā'im*. With each verse, the association of the two becomes increasingly compelling. Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1698), who recorded this *ḥadīth* in his *Biḥār al-anwār* and summarized it in two of his Persian works, maintained, based on these lines, that all (*hamigī*) of the verses in the Quran that mention the Hour have been revealed about the *qā'im*.⁶² The *ḥadīth* is likewise the first Tradition adduced by the prolific Qajar era traditionist, Ḥusayn Nūrī Ṭabarsī (d. 1320/1902) in recording "the Hour" (*al-sā'a*) in his list of 182 names and epithets of the *qā'im*.⁶³

61 Al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* liii, 1–2; al-Astarābādī (d. 1087/1676–7 or 1088/1677–8), *al-Raj'a* 101; al-Kāshānī, *Nawādīr* 252; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 216–7; al-Aḥsā'i, *Kitāb al-Raj'a* 153; al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* ii, 521; al-Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* i, 90–1; ii, 208; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 191–2; Šābirī, *al-Āyāt* 252–3; Zayn al-Dīn, *Mu'jam* 321; Badrī, *Āwālim* 283–4. Al-Majlisī identifies his source for this *ḥadīth* as al-Ḥasan b. Sulaymān al-Ḥillī (d. after 802/1399–1400). See al-Ḥillī, *Mukhtaṣar* 398–9. Al-Ḥillī's source is al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/957–8 or 358/969). See al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya* 297–8 (on this work and its author, see Friedman, *Kaṣībī*; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-Ālawīs*, 17–34, 250–1). In the two published Persian translations of vol. xiii of al-Majlisī's *Biḥār al-anwār*, the phrase, "Because he is the Hour (*li-annahu huwa al-sā'a*)," is translated as, "The time of his appearance is the Hour when . . . (*waqt-i ḡuhūrash 'ibarat ast az sā'ati kih . . .*)." Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, trans. Urūmīyah-ī ii, 301; and "Because the time of his appearance is that same Hour that . . . (*zīrā waqt-i ḡuhūr-i ū hamān sā'ati ast kih . . .*)." Al-Majlisī, *Mahdī-i maw'ūd*, trans. Davānī 1145; an identical translation is provided in Chārī, *Mu'jam-i* i, 207. A similar translation is given in an English translation of al-Baḥrānī's *al-Maḥajja*: "Because it is the hour . . ." al-Bahraani [sic], *The Qa'em* 215. These translators appear to understand the masculine pronouns *hu* and *huwa* (known in Arabic as *ḍamīr al-amr* or *ḍamīr al-sha'n* and *ḍamīr al-ta'kid* respectively) as referring back to the matter of the time (*waqt* or *tawqūt*) of the *imām*'s appearance. While this reading is grammatically tenable, I prefer to read it as a reference to the *qā'im* himself, following al-Majlisī and Nūrī (see the next two notes).

62 Al-Majlisī, *Kitāb-i Raj'at* 129; al-Majlisī, *Ḥaqq* 372. The same is repeated by the Shi'i scholar Mīr Muḥammad Šādiq Khātūnābādī (d. 1272/1856), Khātūnābādī, *Kashf* 122.

63 Nūrī, *Najm* 56. Cf. a text ascribed to al-Khaṣībī in which the Prophet is described as follows: "He is Muḥammad, the greatest name, the most august veil, the most great master . . . and he is the day of resurrection (*wa-huwa yawm al-qiyāma*) and each and every day mentioned in the Book of God . . ." al-Khaṣībī, *Rasā'il* 78; cf. also a sermon attributed to 'Alī in which he declares that he is the Hour, al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 319 (cf. Dihdār-Shīrāzī,

A different *ḥadīth* also transmitted on the authority of Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fī echoes the purport of the above report while drawing attention to the controversial question of the Quran's correct recitation. Here, al-Ṣādiq initiates Mufaḍḍal in the secrets of the Shi'i Quran by reciting Quran 42:17–8 as, "Those who believe in (the Hour) seek to hasten it, while those who do not believe are fearful of it even though they know that it is the truth." Mufaḍḍal interjects that this was not the way the believers in Iraq read this verse, reciting it instead the way it currently appears in the Vulgate: "Those who do not believe in (the Hour) seek to hasten it, while those who have faith are fearful of it even though they know that it is the truth" (Q 42:17–8). Upon hearing this alternate reading, al-Ṣādiq exclaimed:

Woe unto you! Do you [still] not know what (the Hour) is?! . . . I swear by the one true God, it is nothing save the rise of the *qā'im* (*wayḥak a-tadrī mā hiya . . . wa-Allāh mā hiya illā qiyām al-qā'im*). Why would those who do not even believe in (the Hour) wish to hasten it?! I swear by God, only the [true] believers [i.e. the Shi'a] will seek to hasten it. [The non-Shi'a] will have robbed it of its true meaning in their envy of you. Know this, O Mufaḍḍal!⁶⁴

The *imāms* give the same interpretation for other Quranic verses that mention the Hour. Three additional examples follow:

1. According to a *ḥadīth* ascribed to the fifth *imām*, when asked about the verse, "Are they looking for aught but the Hour, that it shall come upon them suddenly, when they are not aware?" (Q 43:66), Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. between 114/732 and 118/736) responded that it refers to "the Hour of the *qā'im*, peace be upon him. It shall come upon them suddenly."⁶⁵
2. Commenting on Quran 19:75, "Until, when they see that they were threatened, whether the chastisement, or the Hour, then they shall surely know who is worse in place, and who is weaker in hosts," al-Ṣādiq stated,

As for "Until, when they see that they were threatened," this is the appearance of the *qā'im*, peace be upon him, for he is the Hour (*wa-huwa al-sā'a*).

Sharḥ 80; Amir-Moezzi, *Remarques* 211); and a *ḥadīth* cited in Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib* iii, 387 and al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 182.

64 Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il* 450–1; al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Nawādir* 387–8; al-Shaftī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* i, 187–8; Ṣābirī, *al-Āyāt* 290.

65 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wil* ii, 571.

As for the meaning of “then they shall surely know,” on that day, they shall surely suffer the punishment of God that descends upon them at the hands of His [i.e., God’s] *qā’im*. This is the meaning of “who is worse in place,” that is to say, in the eyes of the *qā’im*, “and who is weaker in hosts.”⁶⁶

3. In one of the earliest surviving Shi‘i *tafsīr* works, al-Qummī (d. after 307/919) begins his commentary on Quran 54:1: “The Hour is approaching and the moon has been cleft asunder,” by stating that, “the day of resurrection is drawing near. Now that the Messenger of God has passed, all that remains to occur is the day of resurrection.” In other words, the next great momentous event after the death of Muḥammad is the eschaton, the day of resurrection being analogous in potency and power to the rise of the Prophet. He then maintains in an almost *prima facie* manner that the Prophet and the *imāms* have defined “the Hour” as “the advent of the *qā’im*.”⁶⁷

One may be tempted to see these *aḥādīth* as nothing more than attempts to prepare the reader for the intensity of the *qā’im*’s appearance. Some scholars have argued that terms such as “the Hour” and “the Event” are used in the Quran to refer to both the appearance of the *qā’im* and the day of resurrection.⁶⁸ This interpretation is based in large part on *aḥādīth* like the following ascribed to the Prophet and narrated by the eighth *imām*, ‘Alī al-Riḍā: “The likeness (of the coming forth of the *qā’im*) is as the likeness of the Hour. ‘None shall reveal it at its proper time but (God). Heavy is it in the heavens and the earth. It shall

66 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 257.

67 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 340; al-Majlisī, *Bihār* xvii, 351, li, 49; al-Shirāzī, *al-Mahdī* 138. See also Arjomand, *Islamic* 252. On al-Qummī, see now Amir-Moezzi, ‘Alī. In a sermon attributed to him, the first *imām* ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib proclaims that he is “the one who causes the day of resurrection to rise” (*qayyīm al-qiyāma*) and “who establishes the Hour” (*muqīm al-sā’a*). Al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 319; cf. Dihdār-Shirāzī, *Sharḥ* 103; and al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 118 (referenced in Lawson, *Gnostic* 171, note 44), where ‘Alī is described as the master of heaven and hell. Amir-Moezzi translates *qayyīm al-qiyāma* and *qayyīm al-sā’a* (as found in the manuscript of the *Khuṭbat al-bayān* used by him) as “le Préposé de la Résurrection” and “le Préposé de l’Heure.” Amir-Moezzi, *Remarques* 212. See also a *ḥadīth* mentioned in al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* ii, 86, where the rise of the *Qā’im* (*yaqūm qā’imunā*) and the rise of the Hour (*taqūm al-sā’a*; cf. Qur’ān 30:55) seem to be one and the same.

68 See for example, al-Shirāzī, *al-Mahdī* 83, and Sobhani, *Doctrines* 120, who maintains, “Nobody knows the time when the Imam will appear; this, like the time appointed for the Day of Resurrection, is known only to God.”

come upon them suddenly' (Q 7:187)."⁶⁹ It could be argued that by analogizing the advent of the *qā'im* with the uncertainty that surrounds the Hour, the above *aḥādīth* and exegetical comments seek to call attention to the *qā'im*'s appearance and the injunction in some *aḥādīth* that forbid determining its time (*al-naḥy 'an al-tawqīt*). However, conjoining the appearance of the *qā'im* to the day of resurrection is not exclusive to interpretations of the Hour; many other eschatological verses of the Quran are likewise interpreted as symbols and signifiers of the *qā'im*.

2.2 The Day of Resurrection

One of the most striking *aḥādīth* of this kind is a Tradition ascribed to al-Ṣādiq: "Regarding the words of God, 'By the night as it conceals (the light)' (Q 92:1): (al-Ṣādiq) said, [this refers to] the rule [or cycle/turn] of the devil (*dawlat Iblīs*) [which will last] until the day of resurrection which is the rising of the *qā'im*. [As for] 'by the day as it appears in glory' (Q 92:2), [this refers to] the *qā'im* when he rises."⁷⁰

Traditions of this type are summarized in the Quran commentary of al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1138/1726):⁷¹

In [a *ḥadīth* recorded in] *ʿIlal al-sharāʿi* (The reasons underlying the religious laws of God), *imām* al-Ṣādiq says: "The day of resurrection has been called *qiyāma* because it is the day on which humanity will rise to be judged [by God]."⁷² The esoteric interpretation of (*al-qiyāma*) is the rise of the *qā'im* and the return of humanity to this world . . . In a *ḥadīth* narrated

69 Al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl* 347; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* li, 154; Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *Shiʿite* 212–3. See also, Abū Maʿāsh, *al-Imām* 144–6; Mubārak, *Bashāʾir* 17, 127–8; and the *ḥadīth* cited in al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 185 stating that the *mahdī* will be sent in the middle of the Islamic dispensation and Jesus will appear at the end (*al-mahdī awsaṭuhā wa-ʿĪsā ākhiruhā*). Other *aḥādīth* are inconclusive. See, for example, a *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet in al-Irbilī, *Kashf* ii, 968.

70 Al-Najafī, *Taʾwīl* ii, 807. Also cited in al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* xxiv, 398; al-Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Ithbāt* v, 193; al-Qummī al-Mashhadī, *Tafsīr* xiv, 311; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* v, 679; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 266; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Lawāmiʿ* 546 (on this work, see Tabriziyan, *al-ʿAllāma* 147–8); al-Baḥrānī, *al-Hidāya* ii, 506, no. 1493; al-Aḥsāʾī, *Kitāb al-Rajʿa* 218–9; al-Ḥāʾirī, *Ilzām* i, 102. My translation of *dawla* as rule or cycle follows Clarke, *Early* 202; Clarke, The rise 52, while keeping in mind that the word implies a turn, change or radical transition from one state or condition to another. Cf. a poem ascribed to al-Ṣādiq: "Every community has a *dawla* which it eagerly awaits; and our *dawla* will appear at the end of time," al-Ṣādūq, *al-Amālī* 578, no. 791. See also Ardabili, *Ḥadīqat* ii, 944.

71 On him, see Corbin, ʿĀmeli; Lawson, Akhbārī 195–201; Amir-Moezzi, al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī.

72 Al-Ṣādūq, *ʿIlal* ii, 470.

on the authority of Jābir, al-Bāqir, [when asked about the meaning of] (God's) utterance, "the day of resurrection," said: 'It is the rise of the *qā'im*' and this [interpretation] is supported by (other *aḥādīth* we have cited).⁷³

2.3 *The Light of God*

In the closing verses of Sura *al-Zumar*, we find perhaps the most detailed and vivid description of the day of resurrection. According to these verses, on that day, the entire earth will be held in God's grasp. The trumpet will sound (cf. Matthew 24:31, 1 Thessalonians 4:16), causing almost everything to swoon away. A second trumpet will sound and suddenly, everyone will stand and look forward. The dramatic *dénouement* of the Quran's eschatological narrative is reached in the verse that immediately follows: "And the earth will shine with the light of its Lord. The Book will be laid open. The Prophet and the witnesses will be brought forward. It is judged between them with truth and they will not be wronged" (Q 39:69). Every soul will then be compensated for its deeds. The unbelievers will be sent to hell and the believers to paradise.

In explaining the meaning of this verse, al-Ṣādiq asserts: "When our *qā'im* rises, the earth will shine with the light of its Lord."⁷⁴ In a separate but related *ḥadīth* cited by al-Qummī in his *tafsīr*, the same *imām* declares that "the Lord of the earth is the *imām* of the earth." But as Mufaḍḍal b. 'Umar al-Ju'fi's next question reveals, not just any *imām* is meant: "What will happen when he appears?" To which al-Ṣādiq responds that when the (awaited) *imām* [i.e., the *qā'im*] manifests himself, the people will no longer need the light of the sun and the moon for the *imām*'s light will suffice them.⁷⁵

Elsewhere, a *ḥadīth* ascribed to the Prophet states that after the *mahdī* appears, Jesus will descend and pray behind him after which the "the earth will

73 Al-ʿAmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 278. On this work, see Mavani, *Religious* 76–7.

74 Al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 468; al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād* ii, 381; al-Nīlī al-Najāfī, *Surūr* 62–3; Ardabili, *Ḥadiqat* ii, 943; al-Majlisī, *Bihar* lii, 322; al-Shāhrūdī, *al-Imām* 285. Cf. Sabzavārī, *Kifāyat* 680. See also al-Aḥsāʾī's gloss of this *ḥadīth*, al-Aḥsāʾī, *al-Arbaʿūn* 273–9.

75 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 253; al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalāʾil* 462 (no. 443); al-Majlisī, *Hayat* 263; Khātūnābādī, *Kashf* 212–3; al-Shirāzī, *al-Mahdī* 115; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 177–8; Amir-Moezzi, *Remarques* 203; Ayoub, *Redemptive* 227. See also Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 138, who correctly identifies this *ḥadīth* as an eschatological tradition and notes that it "places the Imam on an equal footing with God." According to a different *ḥadīth* from al-Ṣādiq, by the spread of the *imām*'s light is meant the absence of evil, sin, and corruption throughout the world, see al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Nawādir* 388. Contemporary writer ʿAlī ʿĀshūr interprets the light of the *imām* as the scientific advances that will be made when he appears, see ʿĀshūr, *Sirr* 246. On the unique conceptions of light in Shiʿi Traditions, see Rubin, *Pre-existence and light*.

shine with his (the *maḥdī's*) light and his rule will stretch from the east to west (i.e., he will rule the entire world).⁷⁶

Commenting on the same verse, Rajab al-Bursī (d. ca. 843/1411) has cited a tradition on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687–8): "The light of the Lord is the *imām*."⁷⁷ A *ḥadīth* ascribed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) interprets the locution "God guides whomsoever He wills to His light" from the well-known light verse (Q 24:35) as "*al-qā'im al-maḥdī*."⁷⁸ Moreover, in at least three visitation prayers, the *qā'im* is invoked as "the light of God" or simply "the light."⁷⁹ It is based on this interpretation that Nūrī has listed "Lord of the Earth" (*raḥb al-arḍ*) in his catalogue of the names and epithets of the *qā'im*.⁸⁰ As observed by Amir-Moezzi, according to Shi'i sources, "the hidden imam is sometimes

76 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 265–6. Cf. al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* li, 71, who although he references al-Ṣadūq as his source, has "and the earth will shine with the light of its lord" rather than "with his (the *imām's*) light."

77 Al-Bursī, *al-Durr* 166. Commenting on the verse, "Believe, therefore, in Allah and His Messenger, and in the Light which we have sent down" (Q 64:8), al-Bāqir states, "By God, until the day of resurrection the Light is the *imāms* from the family of Muḥammad. By God, they are the Light of God which He has sent down. By God, they are the light of God in the heavens and on earth... the light of the *imām* that [shines] in the light of the believers is more luminous than the shining sun during the day. By God, it is they who illumine the hearts of the believers..." al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 371. Elsewhere, in the recently published *Mashāriq al-amān*, al-Bursī states that it has been narrated that, "The Lord of the earth is the *imām* who is the light of God among His servants in His lands," al-Bursī, *Mashāriq al-amān* 208. Cf. al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 264–5; al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār al-yaqīn*², fol. 133 (on the author, see Lawson, The dawning 261–76). See also al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 687, where "the Light" mentioned in Quran 64:8 is interpreted as the *imām*.

78 Al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 159.

79 Qummī, *Kulliyāt-i* 59, 526, 528.

80 Nūrī, *Najm* 55. Versions of these *aḥādīth* may have also contributed to legends surrounding the putative birth of the twelfth *imām*. One such report states that at the time of his birth, a brilliant light appeared from the infant *imām* and reached the horizon. White birds then descended from the sky and rubbed (*wa-tamsaḥ* – from which is derived the word *al-masīḥ* (the messiah or one anointed with holy oil)) the newborn's head, face, and body with their wings. The report continues that when this phenomenon was recounted to Ḥasan al-'Askarī, he laughed and said that the birds were angels who had come down to seek the blessings of the newborn and that these same angels will be his helpers when he appears (presumably from occultation), see al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 396; 'Āshūr, *Mawsū'at* ixx, 10–1. A separate report maintains that the *imām* has a house called *bayt al-ḥamd* with a light inside that will continue to shine until he rises with the sword, see al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 467. Cf. in a sermon ascribed to 'Alī, he declares that he is the one who gives light to the sun, moon, and stars, see al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 319.

said to be made of light himself; he has no shadow (*la yakūn lahu ḡilla*); at the time of his Return, the earth will be filled with a light.”⁸¹

2.4 The Call of the Caller

The concluding verses of Sura *al-Zumar* (“Chapter of the Troops”) are similar to the final verses of Sura *Qāf* (“Chapter of Qāf”): “Listen for the day when the Caller will call from a nearby place” (Q 50:41). According to a *ḥadīth* ascribed to ‘Alī, “When a caller calls from the sky that truth is with the family of Muḥammad, the *mahdī* will appear on people’s tongues. They will rejoice and forget all save him.”⁸² Elsewhere, ‘Alī affirms that the appearance of “a man from among my descendants” will be announced from the sky by a caller.⁸³ It is said that the caller will stand above the *mahdī* on a cloud inviting the people to accept him as the caliph of God.⁸⁴ As for the next verse, “The day when they in truth will hear the Cry – that will be the day of coming forth” (Q 50:42), according to al-Qummī, “the Cry” is “the Cry of the *qā’im* from heaven – that is the day of coming forth.” Al-Qummī cites a *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Ṣādiq to support his reading.⁸⁵ It is worth recalling here that one of the other Quranic appellations used for the day of the judgment in this verse, *khurūj*, is the same verbal noun found in many Shi’i *aḥādīth* to refer to the appearance or rise of the *qā’im*.

2.5 The Descent of God

Conjoining the *qā’im* with God is one of the most striking glosses provided in Shi’i *aḥādīth* and early *tafsīr* works on the eschatological verses of the Quran. An oft-cited *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Bāqir defines the day when the *qā’im* rises as one of the “days of God” mentioned in Quran 14:5 and 45:14.⁸⁶ Commenting on

81 Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 222. For other Traditions on the light topos, see the chapter in al-Baḥrānī, *al-Yatīma* 79–95, called “the *imāms* are light.”

82 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Malāḥim* 53. See also a different *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Ṣādiq and mentioned in al-Nīlī al-Najafī, *Surūr* 47: “A caller will call from the sky in the name of the *qā’im* . . .”

83 Al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya* 118. The *ḥadīth* states that the descendant of ‘Alī who appears will be accompanied by, *inter alios*, the companions of the cave (*aṣḥāb al-kahf*; Q 18:9–16). This *ḥadīth*, with some small variations, is also cited in al-Daylamī, *Irshād* ii, 128.

84 Nūrī, *Najm* 54. Cf. the prophecy of Jesus in Luke 21:27 about the Son of the Man appearing in a cloud; and the anonymous voice from the cloud during the Transfiguration of Jesus (Luke 9:35) affirming to Jesus’s disciples that he is God’s Son and commanding them to obey him.

85 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 327. For other similar *aḥādīth* interpreting the call and the Cry as the appearance of the *qā’im*, see al-Ṣaghīr, *al-Imām* 138–141.

86 Al-Ṣadūq, *Ma’ānī* 365–6; al-Astarābādī, *al-Raj’a* 38–9; Tūnihī, *Maw’ūdhnāmih* 147; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 190–1, where al-Bāqir identifies the days of God as (1) the day the

Quran 3:140, al-Ṣādiq states, “Since the moment God created Adam, we have seen the cycle of God and the cycle of the devil (Iblīs) but what has happened to the cycle of God? The cycle of God will (commence again) with the rise of the *qā'im* alone.”⁸⁷ When al-Bāqir was asked about Q 2:133, “When (Jacob) said to his sons, ‘What will you serve after me?’ They said, ‘We will serve thy God and the God of thy fathers Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, One God; to Him we surrender,’” he responded intriguingly that the verse was revealed about the *qā'im*.⁸⁸ The *qā'im* is also identified as “one of the signs of thy Lord” (Q 6:158) that will appear on the day of resurrection.⁸⁹

One of the most noticeable examples of this gloss is found in Muḥammad al-ʿAyyāshī’s (d. end of third/ninth–beginning of fourth/tenth century)⁹⁰ commentary for Quran 2:210: “Are they waiting for anything less than that God should come down to them overshadowed with clouds along with the angels? The matter has already been decided and unto God shall all matters return.” According to three *aḥādīth* ascribed to al-Bāqir, by God in this verse is meant the *qā'im* who will descend from the sky among seven canopies of light (*sabʿ qibāb min nūr*)⁹¹ on the day of judgment to separate truth from falsehood. As for “the matter [that] has already been decided,” the *qā'im* will brand the disbe-

qā'im rises, (2) the day of the return (*yawm al-karra*), and (3) the day of resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*). An identical *ḥadīth* is ascribed to al-Ṣādiq, al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* ii, 576, and an almost identical *ḥadīth* is ascribed to the fourth *imām*, ʿAlī b. al-Huṣayn, al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirāʾāt* 136. Cf. the Tradition ascribed to an unnamed *imām* in al-Qummī’s *tafsīr*: “The days of God are three: (1) the day of the *qā'im*, (2) the day of death (*yawm al-mawt*), and (3) the day of resurrection,” al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* i, 367; al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* i, 241; Rafati, *The development* 120. See also al-Majlisī, *Hayat* 385. These Traditions suggest that the appearance of the *qā'im* is different from the day of resurrection and support the notion that the *qā'im*’s appearance is one of the many portents of the last day. Cf. al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 348, who identifies the days of God as (1) the day of return (*yawm al-raʿa*), (2) the day of resurrection, and (3) the day of the *qā'im*, in that order.

87 Al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr* i, 199; Mubārak, *Bashāʾir* 62.

88 Al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr* i, 61.

89 Al-Ṣādūq, *Kamāl* 30, 316, 334–5; al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr* ii, 173; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 69; al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 90. Cf. al-Najafī, *Taʿwīl* i, 168.

90 On him, see Poonawala, ʿAyyāshī; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 56–8; Madelung, *Religious* 84–5.

91 *Qibāb* (sing., *qubba*) denotes a cupolaed structure, most often a shrine. Cf. Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-ʿAlawīs* 112–5, who discusses *qubba* (pl. *qibāb*) in early sources, in particular Nuṣayrī literature, where it is used as a synonym of *kawr* and *dawr* and defines historical cycles of time (e.g., *al-qubba al-fārisīyya* = period of the Persian kings before the rise of Islam) or prophetic dispensations (e.g., *al-qubba al-mūsawīyya* = the dispensation of Moses).

lievers on their snouts⁹² in a reference to Quran 68:16 which also immediately conjures the image of the Behemoth (*dābbat al-arḍ*), a creature mentioned in the Quran (e.g., Q 34:14) who, according to *aḥādīth*, will appear on or before the day of resurrection and distinguish between believer and infidel in a manner that is reminiscent of, though not identical with, the actions of the Beast in the Book of Revelation.⁹³ Shi'i exegete Dāvar-Panāh (d. 1384 SH/2005) points out that Quran 2:210 has been interpreted by the *imāms* as referring to three days: (1) the day of resurrection, (2) the day of the return (*raj'at*), and (3) the day of the appearance of the *qā'im*.⁹⁴

Elsewhere, a *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Riḍā commenting on Quran 89:22, "and thy Lord comes, and the angels rank on rank," states that "God is not described as coming and going for He transcends moving from place to place. What is meant [by this verse] is that the *amr* of God and the angels will come rank on rank."⁹⁵ The *amr* of God, as we will see shortly, is defined as the *qā'im* and his rise.

2.6 The Trumpet and the Amr

According to a *ḥadīth* recorded by al-Sayyārī, when asked about the verse, "For when the trumpet is sounded" (Q 74:8), al-Ṣādiq said, "When his (i.e., the *qā'im*'s) name is blown in the *qā'im*'s ear (cf. Q 94:4) and he is permitted to rise, [that day will be a harsh day, for the unbelievers not easy' (Q 74:9–10)]."⁹⁶

92 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* i, 103; al-Lāhijī (fl. eleventh/seventeenth century), *Tafsīr-i* i, 194; al-Kāshānī, *Tafsīr* i, 243; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 81; 'Aqīl (ed.), *Mawsū'at* 750; Sindawi, *The sea* 464 (note 88). Cf. al-Shahrastānī (d. 1386/1967), *al-Hay'a* 139, where the author argues a similar *ḥadīth* of the *imām* "riding the clouds" (originally recorded in al-Ṣaffār al-Qummī, *Baṣā'ir* 408–9) as foretelling space travel! On al-Shahrastānī, see Ende, *al-Shahrastānī*.

93 *Dābbat al-arḍ* is also one of the names of the *qā'im* in Shi'i sources, see Nūrī, *Najm* 54, though it is more commonly applied to the first *imām*. According to a Shi'i *ḥadīth*, the Prophet called 'Alī *dābbat Allāh* and said that Quran 27:82 was revealed about him, see al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 130. According to another *ḥadīth*, 'Alī declared that he was *dābbat al-arḍ* (Q 34:14), see al-Hillī, *Mukhtaṣar* 460, 461; cf. Dihdār-Shirāzī, *Sharḥ* 74. Al-Majlisī, *Ayn* 486, states that according to credible *aḥādīth*, *dābbat al-arḍ* is 'Alī who will appear after the hidden *imām* and live until the day of resurrection. See also al-Aḥsā'i, *Kitāb al-Raj'a* 201–16. On the *dābba*, see Cook, *Studies* 120–1; Cook, *An early* 60, 92–3; Arjomand, *Islamic* 239; Blichfeldt, *Early* 4; and the recent study by Tlili, *The meaning* 167–87.

94 Dāvar-Panāh, *Anwār* iv, 42.

95 Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawḥīd* 162.

96 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 168; for alternate translation, see Kohlberg and Amir-Moezzi, *Notes* 254. The same *ḥadīth* with a slight variation is cited in al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 732; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* v, 525: "When a trumpet is blown in the *qā'im*'s ear, he will be permitted to rise."

Elsewhere, according to a *ḥadīth* narrated on the authority of Mufaḍḍal, al-Ṣādiq declares about the same verse: “An *imām*, triumphant and concealed, [will appear] from among us. When God wishes to make His *amr* (viz., cause, command or revelation [see above]) manifest, He will place a dot on his heart. He will then appear and carry out the *amr* of God.”⁹⁷ These Traditions are reminiscent of another *ḥadīth* interpreting Quran 16:1: “God’s *amr* comes; so seek not to hasten it.” According to al-Ṣādiq, the *amr* of God mentioned in this verse is “our command/revelation, meaning the rise of the *qā’im*, (he who will rise from) the family of Muḥammad. God has commanded us to not hasten (his appearance).”⁹⁸ The *amr* of God in several other verses of the Quran is likewise interpreted to be the *qā’im*. In interpreting Quran 16:33: “Do they look for aught but that the angels shall come to them, or thy Lord’s *amr* shall come?,” al-Bāqir said that by *amr* is meant “punishment, death, and the emergence of the *qā’im*.”⁹⁹ Al-Riḍā is said to have told his followers to wait patiently for the *amr* of God “for when the master of creation (*sayyid al-khalq*) rises, they will say: ‘Alas for us! Who roused us out of our sleeping place? This is what the All-merciful promised, and His Messengers spoke the truth.’ (Q 36:52).” Al-Najafī adds that by “master of creation” is meant the *qā’im*.¹⁰⁰

2.7 The Day of the Appointed Time

Several *aḥādīth* interpret the eschatological locution “day of the appointed time (*yawm al-waqt al-ma’lūm*)” (Q 15:38, 38:81), as the day of the *qā’im*’s

97 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 201; al-Najafī, *Ta’wīl* ii, 732; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 249; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* v, 525; Nūrī, *Najm* 89. Cf. a version of the *Khuṭbat al-bayān* recorded in Dihdār-Shirāzī, *Sharḥ* 106, where ‘Alī declares: “I am the Trumpet.”

98 Al-Najafī, *Ta’wīl* i, 252. See also al-Lāhijī, *Tafsīr-i* ii, 694, who based on this and other *aḥādīth*, declares that what is meant by (*murād*) *amr Allāh* throughout the Quran is the *qā’im*; al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 73; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 137. Cf. al-Majlisī, *Kitāb-i Raj’at* 173. Al-Ṣādiq states in a different Tradition: “Whoever waits for our *amr* and endures patiently what harm or trepidation he may encounter will be in our circle tomorrow,” al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 690; Rayshahri, *The image* 479. In a related *ḥadīth*, one of al-Bāqir’s disciples says, “I asked (al-Bāqir) about this *amr*, when will he appear?” He answered, “When you expect that he will come from one direction [or in one manner] and he appears from a [different] direction [or in a different manner], do not reject him!” Ibn Bābūya, *al-Imāma* 94; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* lii, 268, no. 157.

99 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 385. In a sermon attributed to ‘Alī, he declares that he is the *amr* of God, see al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 319; Dihdār-Shirāzī, *Sharḥ* 98.

100 Al-Najafī, *Ta’wīl* ii, 492; Turner, *Islam* 221. On the meaning and significance of *amr* in other Shi‘i *aḥādīth* about the *qā’im*, see now Ghaemmaghani, *Seeing* 37–8 (note 79).

appearance.¹⁰¹ It is “the day of the advent of our *qā'im*,” avers al-Riḍā, and “through him, God will purify the earth from injustice and cleanse it of tyranny.” In perhaps a careful reference to the secrecy that surrounds this teaching, al-Riḍā adds that whoever abandons *taqiyya* – that is, fails to protect the secret doctrines of the *imāms* from the uninitiated – before the advent of our *qā'im* is not among the acolytes of the *imāms*.¹⁰² When asked about this verse, al-Ṣādiq is said to have declared:

Do you think it is the day when God will resurrect humanity?! [No!] God gave (Iblīs) respite to the day when He will raise (*yab'ath*) our *qā'im*! God will raise our *qā'im* in the Masjid al-Kūfa. Iblīs will then appear, fall on his knees before him and cry out, ‘What a dreadful day!’ (The *qā'im*) will take (Iblīs) by his forelock and behead him. That is the day of the appointed time.¹⁰³

2.8 The Day of Judgment

According to al-Bāqir, “those who believe in the day of judgment” (Q 70:26) are those who believe in the appearance of the *qā'im*.¹⁰⁴ In his commentary on the verse, “And we used to deny the day of judgment” (Q 74:46), Furāt b. Ibrāhīm al-Kūfī (d. early fourth/tenth century)¹⁰⁵ cites the following *ḥadīth* from al-Ṣādiq: “That is the day of the *qā'im*, which is the day of judgment (*wa-huwa yawm al-dīn*).” Al-Kūfī then interprets the following verse, “Until there came to us (the Hour) that is certain” (Q 74:47), as another allusion to “the days of the *qā'im*.”¹⁰⁶

2.9 Other Eschatological Verses

Many other Quranic verses and locutions traditionally read as signifiers of the day of resurrection are interpreted as referring to the *qā'im*. For example, “He

101 Al-Ṭabarī al-Ṣaghīr, *Dalā'il* 440; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* lii, 376, lx, 221; al-Shīrāzī, *al-Mahdī* 111; Mubārak, *Bashā'ir* 190–1.

102 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 346; Khātūnābādī, *Kashf* 144–5; Mubārak, *Bashā'ir* 191–2; Ṣābirī, *al-Āyāt* 212–3; Zaidī, *Qayamat-e-Sughra* 49. On *taqiyya* as preserving the secret teachings of the *imāms*, see Kohlberg, *Taqiyya*. On the distinction between initiated and non-initiated believers in Shi'i Traditions, see Amir-Moezzi, *Seul* 206–7.

103 Al-'Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* ii, 242. Cf. a very similar *ḥadīth* ascribed to the fourth *imām*, 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Zayn al-'Ābidīn (d. ca. 93/712), cited in al-Nīlī al-Najafī, *Surūr* 81–2.

104 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 808; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Mahajja* 247; al-'Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 149.

105 On him, see Bar-Asher, Forāt; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 29–31.

106 Al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr* 514.

is nothing but a reminder unto all beings, and you shall surely know his tiding after a while (*ba'da hīn*)" (Q 38:87–88) is glossed as "at the appearance of the *qā'im*."¹⁰⁷ Regarding the verse, "Ah, if thou couldst see when they are terrified, and there is no escape, and they are seized from a place near at hand, and they say, 'We believe in it/him'; but how can they reach from a place far away, seeing they disbelieved in it/him before, guessing at the Unseen from a place far away?" (Q 34:51–3), the pronoun "it/he" is defined as "the rise of the *qā'im*"¹⁰⁸ and "there will no escape at the time of the *qā'im*'s appearance."¹⁰⁹

When asked about the meaning of the first part of Quran 19:76, "And God shall increase those who were guided in guidance" (Q 19:76), al-Ṣādiq is said to have responded, "He shall increase them (on that day) in guidance upon guidance because they are followers of the *qā'im* for they will neither reject nor deny him."¹¹⁰ A nearly identical interpretation is given by al-Ṣādiq's son, Mūsā al-Kāẓim (d. 183/799), to a similar verse: "Until, when they see that which they are promised, then they will know who is weaker in helpers and fewer in numbers" (Q 72:24). Al-Kāẓim states that, "by this verse is meant the *qā'im* and his helpers."¹¹¹ According to his son, 'Alī al-Riḍā (d. 203/818), the verse refers to the appearance of the *qā'im*, together with 'Alī, at the time of the Return (*al-raj'a*).¹¹² Elsewhere, "the day which they are promised" (Q 70:44), when the dead will issue forth from their graves with great haste, is interpreted by al-Bāqir as "the day of the appearance of the *qā'im*."¹¹³ "The place of return" (Q 28:85) is likewise interpreted to mean the return of the *qā'im* and the *imāms*.¹¹⁴

The verses in the Quran that speak of the end of the world followed by its revivification (e.g., Q 30:19; 30:24; 30:50; 57:17) have traditionally been interpreted as God giving life to the dead on the day of resurrection. In a Tradition attributed to al-Bāqir however, the *imām* declares, "God will lend new life to the earth after its death through the *qā'im*. By 'its death' is meant the disbelief of its inhabitants for the disbeliever is dead."¹¹⁵ Commenting on these verses, 'Alī is said to have said, "That is to say, God will lend new life to the earth through

107 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 808; al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 510; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* li, 62; al-Kāshānī, *al-Wāfi* xxvi, 440; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Burhān* iv, 687; Ḥā'irī, *Ilzām* i, 85.

108 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 478.

109 Al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 114.

110 Al-Kulaynī, *Uṣūl* 257.

111 Ibid., 259.

112 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 391.

113 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 726.

114 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* i, 25; ii, 147.

115 Al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 60. This *ḥadīth* is also cited by the Isma'īlī *dā'ī* and Fatimid chief judge al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān (d. 363/974) in his *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, al-Nu'mān, *Sharḥ* iii, 356.

the justice of the *qā'im* upon his appearance after its death at the hands of the oppression of the wayward leaders of religion."¹¹⁶ A third *ḥadīth* ascribed to al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī states that God will revivify the earth after its death through the *qā'im* and cause the religion of the truth to become manifest.¹¹⁷

3 Analysis and Conclusion

Three conclusions can be drawn from the texts that have been presented in this chapter. First, they challenge readers to renegotiate principles of Shi'i cosmology, epistemology, and eschatology while inviting new ways of defining such deep-seated concepts as the final destruction, the resurrection, the gathering, the last judgment, heaven, and hell. The title *qā'im* is usually translated as "he who will rise" or "rising one," but in light of the Traditions we have discussed, it would be just as appropriate to translate *qā'im* as "the Resurrector"¹¹⁸

116 Al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba* 32; Arjomand, *The consolation* 552; Mavani, *Doctrine* 88. A similar *ḥadīth* is narrated by al-Ṭūsī on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās, al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-Ghayba* 175.

117 Al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn* i, 68, no. 36. Cf. Ḥaydar al-Āmulī's (d. after 787/1385) highly original interpretation of the famous prophetic *ḥadīth*, "God will then send down one of my descendants who will fill the earth with equity and justice, even as it hath been filled with injustice and tyranny." Al-Āmulī, *Jāmi'* 102: "That is to say, (the *qā'im*) will fill the earth of each and every (human) heart with knowledge and the affirmation of the Oneness of God, after they had been filled with *shirk* and ignorance. For what justice is there greater than filling the (human) heart with *tawḥīd* and knowledge? And what oppression greater than its destruction by *shirk* and ignorance?"

118 This translation has been offered for *qā'im* before, e.g., Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 69, 83, 89, 91, 102, 104, 187 (note 316), 188 (note 327), and 214 (note 550), where the two principal meanings of *qā'im* in Shi'i sources are given as "Resurrector" (related to resurrection or *al-qiyāma*) and "he who rises up"/"he who stands up [to establish the truth]" (related to the uprising or *al-qiyām*); Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu'est-ce* 118, who give "Résurrecteur" as "un des multiples sens du mot *qā'im*"; Amir-Moezzi, *Seul* 213; Hamdani, *Between* 35. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 214 (note 556); Cook, *Studies* 195, who states that the appellation *qā'im* serves "to emphasize the sudden appearance (*qiyām*) of the messianic figure" (Cf. prophecies in the Gospels about the sudden reappearance of Jesus, e.g., Matthew 24:36, and the statement found in the Babylonian Talmud that three things come upon us by surprise: a scorpion, a found object, and the Messiah. My thanks to Todd Lawson for the latter. See Rajak, *Jewish* 166, for references.) Shi'i sources provide three principal meanings for *qā'im*. Perhaps the most frequently encountered reason is that he will rise (*qā'im*) to exact revenge on those who persecuted the *ahl al-bayt*, in particular, the third Imam, Ḥusayn b. 'Alī. See al-Ṣadūq, *Ilal* i, 160. Another *ḥadīth* affirms that he has been named the *qā'im* because he will rise in the future at a time when people will have

or “the Riser of the Resurrection.”¹¹⁹ “The hereafter (*al-ākhirā*),” “paradise” and its pleasures signify his appearance.¹²⁰ In Tradition after Tradition, the *imāms* maintain that the optimal road or bridge (*ṣirāṭ*) to paradise is recognition of the *imām* of the age. “You are in paradise,” al-Ṣādiq tells his disciples, “Supplicate God lest He casts you out of paradise.” When his confused votaries respond, “but we are in this world,” al-Ṣādiq asks: “Do you not believe in our Imāmate? . . . This is the meaning of paradise! Whoever believes in him [i.e., in the *imām* of one’s age] is in paradise. Beg God to not deny you (paradise)!”¹²¹

On the other hand, those verses in the Quran that speak of terror, destruction, and the horrors of the last day are reappraised as punishment meted out by the *qā’im* to the disbelievers and the enemies of the *imām*. “The great

forgotten him. See al-Ṣadūq, *Ma’ānī* 65; al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl* 352; al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā’ij* iii, 1172 (note 1), who has *fawt* in place of *mawt*. A third meaning is that he will rise with or through the power of truth. See al-Mufid, *al-Irshād* ii, 383. Cf. al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Iṣlāḥ* 217, where the prominent Isma’īli philosopher, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934) states that the *qā’im* was named *al-qā’im bi-amr Allāh* (he who carries out the *amr* of God) because “to obey (the *qā’im*) is to obey God.” On al-Rāzī, see Halm, Abū Ḥātem Rāzī. Curiously, none of these authorities have posited a connection between the title *al-qā’im* and the divine name, *al-qayyūm* (‘self-subsisting’; Q 2:255; 3:2; 20:111).

119 Arjomand, Millennial 222, 224, offers this as a translation of *qā’im al-qiyāma*. See also Arjomand, Islamic 252, where he suggests an important parallel from Daniel 12:1–2.

120 For example, al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 366, where paradise as described in Quran 61:11–3 will be realized “in this world through the victory of the *qā’im*.” See also al-Najāfī, *Ta’wīl* ii, 736; al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 72 (referenced in Lawson, Coincidentia); Lawson, *Gnostic* 171, note 44. Cf. Newman, *The formative* 153.

121 Al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn* 161; al-Rashtī, *Durar* 159. Cf. *ḥadīth* attributed to al-Ṣādiq and found in the work attributed to Mufaḍḍal b. ‘Umar al-Ju’fī (attr.), *Kitāb al-Haft* 170 (on this important proto-Nuṣayrī text, see Halm, *Die islamische* 112, 240–74; Bar-Asher, *Scripture* 241; Arjomand, Islamic 260; Turner, The “tradition of Mufaḍḍal” 185–6; Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-‘Alawīs*, 243–4, 263–4; and now, Asatryan, Heresy, esp. 140–241). Cf. two other Traditions: (1) “Whosoever enters the *walāya* of the family of Muḥammad [i.e., whoever is loyal to them and loves them] enters paradise and those who enter the *walāya* of their enemies enter the fire,” al-‘Ayyāshī, *Tafsīr* ii, 160. Cf. al-‘Āmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 118 (referenced in Lawson, Coincidentia); (2) *ḥadīth* of the Prophet transmitted by Zayd b. ‘Alī: “Whoever loves us, the *ahl al-bayt*, for God, will be resurrected with us and we will welcome him to paradise with us. O Abū Bakr, whoever clings to us will be with us in the highest summits [of paradise] . . . were it not us, God would neither have created this world nor the world to come . . . God is known through us. God is worshiped through us. We are the [only] path to God . . . and from us will appear the Mahdī, the *qā’im* of this *umma*,” al-Khazzāz al-Rāzī, *Kifāyat* 300.

catastrophe" (Q 79:34) is the rise of the *qā'im*.¹²² The death that will seize the unbelievers twice on the day of judgment (Q 74:19–20) is defined as "the scourge of chastisement after chastisement" inflicted by the *qā'im*.¹²³ "The overwhelming event" (Q 88:1) is the *qā'im* and his sword.¹²⁴ The return of the *qā'im* is the moment when humanity will witness the might of God (Q 40:84).¹²⁵ "The torment" (Q 11:8)¹²⁶ and "the most great torment" (Q 32:21) will be meted out by the *qā'im* at the end of time.¹²⁷ "A fire that flames" (Q 92:14) is the inferno of the *qā'im* who will slay 999 out of every 1,000 men.¹²⁸ The unjust and those who turn away from the truth will suffer the consequences in his fire.¹²⁹ Finally, the eschatological verse, "the sinners shall be known by their mark, and they shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet" (Q 55:41) is interpreted by al-Ṣādiq as having been "revealed about the *qā'im*. He will recognize them by their mark, and then, he and his companions will address them with the sword."¹³⁰

The second implication of the texts presented in this chapter is a historical one. Equating the day of resurrection with the appearance of the *qā'im* is not unique to proto-Twelve and Twelver Shi'i sources. In fact, this interpretation is highly reminiscent of fourth/tenth century Isma'ili speculations on judgment and resurrection. As observed by Badakhchani, "[I]n accordance with the Ismaili theory of cyclical sacred history comprising seven eras of prophetic revelations, the *qiyāma* will be initiated by the advent of the Resurrector (*qā'im*) who will end the era of exoteric (*ẓāhir*) religion and disclose to humanity its innermost, esoteric (*bāṭin*) truths."¹³¹ Isma'ili scholars conceived history as taking place in seven cycles (*adwār*, sing. *dawr*), each

122 Al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 226. On "the Great Catastrophe," see Khurram-shāhī, *Ṭammāt* 454.

123 Al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 395.

124 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 787; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Maḥajja* 261; al-Baḥrānī, *al-Hidāya* ii, 485–6, no. 1466. Cf. al-ʿĀmilī al-Iṣfahānī, *Muqaddimat tafsīr* 122.

125 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 532. Al-Najafī gives al-Qummī's *tafsīr* as his source but this *ḥadīth* is not found in the published version of al-Qummī's *tafsīr*. See also al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* i, 325: "the might of God" (Q 21:12) will be felt when the *qā'im* rises.

126 See al-Nu'mānī, *al-Ghayba* 247–8; al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* i, 223, who has "the punishment is the *qā'im*." See also al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* i, 322, 323; al-ʿĀmilī, *Tarjamat* 81.

127 Mubārak, *Bashā'ir* 298; Abū Ma'āsh, *al-Imām* 360; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 171. Cf. al-Sayyārī, *Kitāb al-Qirā'āt* 132.

128 Al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr* 567; al-Raḍawī, *al-Mahdī* 217–8.

129 Al-Majlisī, *Hayat* 331.

130 Al-Najafī, *Ta'wīl* ii, 639.

131 Badakhchani, *Shi'i* 12.

founded by a speaking-prophet (*nāṭiq*) who – with the exception of the first and last – revealed a new religious law (*sharīʿa*).¹³² The seventh and final *nāṭiq* is the *qāʾim*, whose appearance will mark the eschaton. Rather than bring a new *sharīʿa*, the *qāʾim* will usher in a “new religious order”¹³³ and “fully reveal the esoteric truths (*ḥaqāʾiq*) of all the preceding revelations.”¹³⁴ In a work attributed to Abū Muḥammad ʿAbdān (d. 286/899), the earliest and most prolific propagandist (*dāʿī*) of the pre-Fatimid Ismaʿīli mission (*daʿwa*), we read that “the world was established in seven cycles, the seventh of which is that of the Qāʾim around whom [all other] cycles revolve and with whom the matter that runs through the six Speaker-Prophets reaches completion.”¹³⁵

The Ismaʿīli scholar, Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 346/957),¹³⁶ unequivocally defines the day of resurrection as the day of the appearance (*yawm zuḥūr*) of the *qāʾim*.¹³⁷ This interpretation is especially developed in the *Kitāb al-Kashf* (The book of the unveiling), a book that is attributed to Jaʿfar but is in fact a compilation of six pre-Fatimid Ismaʿīli exegetical treatises.¹³⁸ In the *Kitāb al-Kashf*, we read that by “the last day” (Q 2:8) is meant the Lord of the [final] age, i.e., the *qāʾim*,¹³⁹ and “the day of resurrection is the appearance of the speaker-prophet [again, the *qāʾim*] and his rise.”¹⁴⁰ “The day of judgment and separation” (Q 78:17) is defined as “the *mahdī* through whom God distinguishes between truth and falsehood, believer and infidel. He is the appointed time of the *amr* of God and its ultimate goal and [he is] the seventh of the seven

132 See Nomoto, An introduction 14; Halm, Dawr; Madelung, Aspects 55. The topos of seven cycles of history is also encountered in early Nuṣayrī sources. See Bar-Asher, The Iranian 217. On the Ismaʿīli cyclical view of sacred history, see Daftary, Cyclical 151–8.

133 Nomoto, An early Ismaili view of other religions 150.

134 See Daftary, Hidden 8; Daftary, Carmatians; Nomoto, An early Ismāʿīli-Shīʿī thought 20–1.

135 Madelung and Walker, The *kitāb al-rusūm* 134. On the author, see Madelung, ʿAbdān.

136 On him, see Haji, Jaʿfar; Halm, Djaʿfar; Halm, *The empire* 287–8; Hamza et al. (eds.), *An anthology* 30–1.

137 Al-Yaman, *Sarāʾir* 112. Referred to in Hollenberg, *Interpretation* 72.

138 On the *Kitāb al-Kashf*, see Corbin, *Cyclical* 186; Morris, *The master* 26, 57; Madelung, Das Imamāt 52–8; Halm, The cosmology 79; Daftary, *The Ismāʿīlīs* 98; Daftary, *Ismaili literature* 122; Gillon, Une version; Ansari, Chand; and now Velji, Apocalyptic (in this publication).

139 See Hussain, *The occultation* 16. Hussain, *The occultation* 15–6, appears to have appreciated this point without exploring its implications: “The Ismāʿīli writer Maṣṣūr al-Yamān [*sic*] (ca. 4th century AH) agrees with al-Kulaynī that some Quranic verses which apparently deal with the Day of Judgment actually concern the appearance of *al-Qāʾim* after his occultation.” See also Carney, Esoteric 119–33, esp. 133.

140 Al-Yaman (attr.), *Kitāb al-Kashf* 39.

speaker-prophets.”¹⁴¹ The *qā'im* is “the Great Announcement” (Q 78:2).¹⁴² “The trumpet” (Q 74:8) will be sounded to herald his appearance,¹⁴³ “the sky will be cleft asunder and turn crimson like red leather” (Q 55:37),¹⁴⁴ and “the torment” (Q 2:165) will be meted out.¹⁴⁵ The last part of Quran 33:21, “whosoever hopes for God and the last day, and remembers God” means, “that is, whosoever hopes for God and the *mahdī* [who will rise] from the progeny of ‘Alī and to whom the Messenger of God referred. He is the last day and the last of the *imāms* and the last of the speaker-prophets.”¹⁴⁶ After Quran 11:98, “He shall go before his people on the day of resurrection, and will have led them down to the fire: evil the watering-place to be led down to!” (Q 11:98), the exegete adds, “by the sword of the *qā'im*” on the day of resurrection which is “the day of the rise of the *qā'im*, the appearance of his *amr*, and the uncovering of his veil. This is the day that they have been promised . . . At the time of his appearance, through his sword, God will kill all those who oppose him, and whoever is killed by the sword of the *qā'im* will enter the fire.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, several of the verses that speak of the encounter with God on the day of judgment are interpreted as the appearance of the *qā'im*, such as Quran 2:210¹⁴⁸ and 72:25.¹⁴⁹ Commenting on Quran 89:22: “and thy Lord comes, and the angels rank on rank,” “thy Lord” is interpreted as the *qā'im* while the angels are the *qā'im*’s “friends, helpers, and those who propagate [his message].”¹⁵⁰

Another prominent Isma‘ili scholar, Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 361/971–2), famously rejected the idea of physical resurrection and maintained that “the *qiyāma* concerns the advent of the *qā'im*, the Messiah, which signals the end of one era and the commencement of another, a time of reward and punishment, of paradise and hellfire.”¹⁵¹ Al-Sijistānī believed that the appearance of the

141 Ibid., 147.

142 Ibid., 31.

143 Ibid., 42.

144 Ibid., 29.

145 Ibid., 40. Similarly, “the *qā'im* is the coming chastisement whom none can avert (cf. Q 52:7–8),” Ibid., 30.

146 Ibid., 140.

147 Ibid., 122–3.

148 Ibid., 100–1.

149 Ibid., 90.

150 Ibid., 70.

151 Walker, *Early* 134, 140. Cf. excerpts of al-Sijistānī’s *Kitāb al-Mahjūb* in Landolt, Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī 129–30, as well as al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* 181 (*fī ma‘rifat al-qiyāma*). See also Walker, *Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī* 71–7; Walker, Ismaili eschatology. On al-Sijistānī, see Daftary, *The medieval* 53–4.

qā'im (Muḥammad b. Ismā'īl who was believed to have been in occultation) was imminent. It would appear that he discussed the relationship between the *qā'im* and the Hour in a lost section of his *Ithbāt al-nubuwwa*.¹⁵²

[Al-Sijistānī] liken[ed] the history of mankind to a fetus in the womb of its mother. There are . . . seven distinct stages of growth and development and then in the final stage it emerges . . . Man undergoes six successive cycles of development – one for each of the lawgiving prophets – until the coming of the Messiah, the seventh stage, at which point history will end and he will be born into the light of paradise.¹⁵³

According to the well-known Isma'īli *dā'ī*, Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020–1), "L'avènement du Qā'im viendra achever ce retour: la résurrection (*ba'ʿt*) n'est autre que la réintégration de l'âme et du corps sublimé dans le Plérôme."¹⁵⁴ The celebrated Isma'īli poet, philosopher and *dā'ī*, Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. between 465/1072 and 471/1078) identified the *qā'im* with the eschatological "great announcement" (Q 78:2) and "the *amr* which belongs wholly unto God" (Q 82:19),¹⁵⁵ stating that "the Qā'im/Resurrector . . . combines three dignities: those of Legislator Prophet (*Nabī*), Vice-director (*waṣī*) and Resurrector (*Qā'im*)."¹⁵⁶ Another eminent thinker, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), wrote that "the cycle of Muḥammad – peace be upon him – was the beginning of the cycle of the resurrection, and the resurrection is particular to the Imam who is the lord of the resurrection [*qā'im-i qiyāmat*]."¹⁵⁷

As Corbin observed, according to Isma'īli thought, "it is the function of the Hidden Imam, at the time of his appearance, to reveal the esoteric sense of all the Divine Revelations; it is precisely this which is the *Qiyāmat* (resurrection)."¹⁵⁸ This function is perhaps best captured in appellations the Isma'īli authors used for the *qā'im*, such as *khudāvand-i rastakhīz* (lord of the final rising of

152 See Walker, *Early* 141.

153 Ibid., 141.

154 DeSmet, *La Quiétude* 372. On al-Kirmānī, see Daftary, Ḥamid-al-Din Kermāni.

155 See Madelung, Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī 86–7.

156 Bausani, *Religion* 174.

157 Ṭūsī, *Paradise* 140. This interpretation also features prominently in Nuṣayrī sources. In the *Kitāb al-Ṭā'a matā taqūm al-sā'a*, 'Alī tells Salmān al-Fārisī that "the day of resurrection is the inevitable day of the Hour which is the day of the appearance of the expected *qā'im*, the awaited Proof, the *qā'im* of the age, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan." Abū Mūsā and al-Shaykh Mūsā (eds.), *Kutub al-'Alawīyyīn* 362, 392, 423 (citation from 362).

158 Corbin, *Swedenborg* 94.

liberation),¹⁵⁹ *khudāvand-i qiyāmat* (the lord of the final rising),¹⁶⁰ *qā'im al-qiyāma* (the *qā'im* of the resurrection¹⁶¹ or simply, the resurrector),¹⁶² *ṣāhib al-qiyāma* (the master of the resurrection), and *ṣāhib dawr al-kashf* (the master of the Cycle of Unveiling).¹⁶³

As one might expect, some of these titles are also found in Twelver Shi'i works. For example, the relationship between the *qā'im* and the *qiyāma* is evident from a poem attributed to 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib said to have been written for his son al-Ḥusayn. In this poem, 'Alī advises his son to be patient and endure the calamities that God has decreed for him. He promises al-Ḥusayn that God will manifest the *qā'im*, who will avenge the wrongs that have been committed against them both. In one of the verses of this ode, 'Alī prays, "may God send down [to us] our *qā'im*, the lord of the resurrection (*saqā Allāh qā'imanā ṣāhib al-qiyāma*)."¹⁶⁴

It is no surprise that the proto-Twelver and Twelver Shi'i conceptions of the *qā'im* discussed in this chapter resemble many of the teachings of the Isma'ili *du'ā(t)*, considering the porous development of these traditions from the

159 Sijistānī, *Kashf* 80 (on this work, see Landolt, *Kāshf al-mahjub* of Sejzi); translated in al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*: Unveiling the hidden 128; Corbin, *Cyclical* 161.

160 Sijistānī, *Kashf* 80–3; translated in al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*: Unveiling the hidden 128–30.

161 Madelung, *Qā'im* 457: "Isma'īlī doctrine added a further dimension to the concept of the *Qā'im* describing him as *Qā'im al-qiyāma*, 'the *Qā'im* of the Resurrection', who shall act as the Judge of mankind, and attributing a cosmic rank to him above that of prophets and imāms." See Ghālib, *al-Imāma wa-qā'im al-qiyāma*. Corbin translates *qā'im al-qiyāma* at times as "the Imam of the Resurrection," Corbin, *History* 69, 88; Corbin, *Swedenborg* 130; Corbin, *Temple* 162. Cf. Badakhchani, *Shi'i* 12, who renders the locution as "Lord of the Resurrection."

162 Corbin, *Cyclical* 68, 161, 185, 186; Corbin, *History* 99.

163 See Nomoto, *Early* 278, note 72, 282, 314–20; Daftary, *The Isma'īlīs* 235–8; Crone, *The nativist* 465. The *qiyāma* was of course famously declared in 559/1164 by the Nizārī Isma'īlī *imām*, Ḥasan II (d. 561/1166) who proclaimed the Great Resurrection or the Resurrection to end all Resurrections (*qiyāmat al-qiyāmāt*) and declared himself the *qā'im al-qiyāma*. See Daftary, Ḥasan II; Daftary, Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ; Daftary, *The Isma'īlīs* 387–9; Daftary, *The medieval* 69–70; Corbin, *History* 95; Arjomand, *Islamic* 252; Madelung, *Religious* 103; Jambet, *La Grande*. Cf. al-Shahrastānī who identifies 'Alī as the *qā'im* of the day of resurrection, an idea that was likely introduced by Ḥasan-i Ṣabbāḥ and is shared by later Nizārī-Isma'īlī writers. See Steigerwald, *Al-Shahrastānī's* 270, 273, note 42.

164 Al-Majlisī, *Bihār* xlv, 267. The verb *saqā* literally means to irrigate or supply and give (water) for drinking, and is also said of God in the sense of sending down rain. An abridged version of the poem that includes this line is recorded in a collection of poems ascribed to 'Alī but the line itself is missing. See al-Karam, *Dīvān* 23–4.

same matrix. However, what is surprising is that scholars who have explored the theological aspects of early Twelver eschatology have not considered the parallels in early Ismaʿili thought. It may be at the nexus of the two that a core is found.¹⁶⁵

Beginning in the late fourth/tenth century, a rationalist orientation was vivified and quickly supplanted the traditionist approach of the previous generation as Twelver Shiʿi scholars moved away from the esotericism that Corbin aptly called “the discipline of the arcane.”¹⁶⁶ As part of the new “hermeneutics of compromise,”¹⁶⁷ Shiʿi scholars “relinquished any desire to elaborate a cyclical view of the Imamate.”¹⁶⁸ Al-Mufid is often credited with fostering this break from the radical traditionalism of the early period. As a result, in some of the Shiʿi exegetical works produced in the late Buyid period, we find no mention of the *qāʾim* in the commentaries on many of the verses mentioned above.¹⁶⁹ This stream of interpretation was clearly revived in the Safavid period by many of the Akhbārī scholars whose works have been referenced in the preceding

165 It is also worth noting that this Shiʿi conception of the eschaton as appearance of the *qāʾim* has at least some analogues in certain Zoroastrian eschatological texts. For example, according to the Avesta, “When the dead rise, the Living Incorruptible One [i.e. the Zoroastrian savior] will come and life will be transfigured.” Ringgren, *Resurrection* 7763. The righteous will be saved and creation will be renewed. One of the more noticeable similarities is that the last Saoshyant (the Zoroastrian messianic figure) – who as Corbin, *En Islam* ii, 162, observed, is to Zoroaster what the twelfth *imām* is to the Prophet Muḥammad – will be accompanied by “the Light of God.” Cf. Shabahang, *Entre l’Iran*. It is of no minor significance that many of the early Shiʿi exegetes and *ḥadīth* compilers whose works we have studied were based in the Iranian cities of Qum and Rayy where they were undoubtedly exposed to Zoroastrian ideas. Moreover, the major Ismaʿili thinkers of the period were all Iranian and presumably well-informed of Zoroastrian messianic beliefs.

166 Corbin, *History* 37. On the genesis of this “epoch-making shift” in the Buyid period, see Bar-Asher, *Scripture*; Amir-Moezzi, *The divine* 134; Lawson, *Hermeneutics*. As Lawson demonstrates in several studies (esp. Lawson, Akhbārī), after being ignored or jettisoned for nearly six centuries, many of the Traditions found in the earliest works were resurrected in the Akhbārī renaissance of the Safavid period.

167 Lawson, *Hermeneutics*.

168 Amanat, *Resurrection* 12.

169 For example, al-Ṭūsī maintains that the earth will shine with “the justice of its Lord” (*bi-ʿadl rabbihā*), al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān* ix, 47; al-Ṭabrisī, *Majmaʿ* viii, 414. Not surprisingly, this is the same interpretation provided in many Sunni exegetical works from the classical period. See for example, the *tafsīr* attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Fayrūzābādī, *Tanwīr* 391 and the *tafsīr* of al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ* xv, 282. Similarly, one can contrast the interpretation for Q 16:33 given in al-Qummī, *Tafsīr* ii, 385 with the interpretation found in al-Ṭūsī, *al-Tibyān* vi, 377.

pages. Nonetheless, several modern works devoted to Shi'i eschatology fail to refer to the *qā'im* or attempt to modulate the effect of the *aḥādīth*. For example, in a Persian translation of one of the Traditions presented above, the translator, clearly uncomfortable with the text before him, interpolates the word "lesser" before the day of resurrection to distinguish the *imām's* appearance as the lesser resurrection (*qiyāmat-i aṣghar*) as opposed to the 'real' day of resurrection.¹⁷⁰ Although the term lesser or minor resurrection is found in other texts, it is not mentioned in this particular Tradition.¹⁷¹

A third and perhaps most obvious implication of the *aḥādīth* presented above is that with the *qā'im's* appearance, the ethos of waiting (*intizār*) that characterizes Shi'i Islam at last comes to an end. Rather than following the *qā'im's* universal initiation, the *qiyāma* is the *qā'im's* universal initiation. The opaque antinomies, the disquieting tensions, the evident irony of why the *qā'im* would establish God's rule just before it collapses at the end of time are not only overcome, but they are shown to have been illusory. The *qā'im* and the *qiyāma* are two sides of the same coin: the latter a Quranic symbol for the former. Eschatology is teleological: it is a goal-direct activity. It is both disintegrative and integrative. As God renews the world and renews creation,

170 Raḍavī, *Sīmā-yi* 238. Cf. In a footnote to an English translation of the same *ḥadīth*, the translator, perhaps disconcerted by the notion that the *yawm al-qiyāma* is defined as the day of the *qā'im*, comments awkwardly, "One should note that the Day of Qiyamah does not translate to the Day of Judgment," al-Bahraani, *The Qa'im* 271. See also Lari, *Resurrection*, a study of eschatological themes that does not mention the *qā'im*.

171 A detailed historical study of the terms Lesser and Greater Resurrection and the distinctions drawn between them remains a desideratum. Some initial comments about their use in Shi'i sources can be registered: Rajab al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 412, states that the *qā'im* is the face of God, the seal of aeons and the Lesser Resurrection (*al-qiyāma al-ṣuḡhrā*), and that the verse "The day We shall gather from every nation a troop" (Q 27:83), refers directly to him. Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsā'i (fl. ninth/fifteenth century), identified *al-qiyāma al-ṣuḡhrā* with the soul entering the imaginal realm after death while waiting for the Greater Resurrection. See Madelung, Ibn Abī Ġumhūr 149. Kāzīm al-Rashtī, *Sharḥ* iii, 65, defines the Lesser Resurrection as the appearance of the *qā'im* and the Return. In some contemporary Shi'i sources, a distinction is made between "the specific gathering" (*al-ḥaṣhr al-khāṣṣ*) and "the general gathering" (*al-ḥaṣhr al-'amm*), the former referring to "the return of some of the dead to life" and the latter to the universal day of judgment. Markaz al-Risāla, *al-Raj'a* 8–9; Amir-Moezzi, *Fin* 55–6. This distinction is not made in pre-modern sources, but one of the epithets of the *qā'im* mentioned in the Safavid work, *Tadhkirat al-a'imma*, is "the Gatherer" (*ḥāshir*) (see Nūrī, *Najm* 52), which is likewise one of the names of the Prophet in both Sunni and Shi'i sources, based on a famous Tradition of the prophet declaring that he is the one at whose feet people will congregate on the day of resurrection. See Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iv, 80; al-Irbilī, *Kashf* i, 32; Arjomand, *Islamic* 246.

the *qā'im* resurrects the dead and remedies the human predicament.¹⁷² A symbolic shift in time can be discerned in Shi'i apocalyptic literature. History is thus both cyclical and linear; in other words, spiral.¹⁷³

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- 172 Al-Ṣadūq, *al-Tawhīd* 277 (referenced in Amir-Moezzi, *Cosmogony* 319; Ṭabāṭabā'ī, *Shi'ite* 171). See also Amir-Moezzi, *Fin* 67–9. On uniquely Shi'i cosmological Traditions, see al-Shahrastānī, *al-Hay'a* 338–9. Cf. Isma'ili sources such as Madelung and Walker, *The kitāb al-rusūm* 135, where the formation of a new creation is identified as the appearance of the *qā'im*; Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's thoughts about the new creation achieved with the *qā'im*'s advent in his *Rāḥat al-'aql*, on which see DeSmet, *La Quiétude* 371, and the chapter by Elizabeth Alexandrin in this publication; Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī's (d. 548/1153–4) comment that prophecy has not ended with Muḥammad and that the day of resurrection is in fact a new genesis (*al-nash'a al-ukhrā*, Q 53:47), Mayer, *Keys* 57. Cf. the *Khuṭbat anā 'indī mafātīḥ al-ghayb* attributed to 'Alī in which he declares, "I am he who resurrects the dead" (*anā munshir* [var., *nāshir*] *al-amwāt*), al-Bursī, *Mashāriq anwār* 319. Cf. Amir-Moezzi, *Remarques* 213.
- 173 I am drawing here from Lawson's illuminating discussion of the "hermeneutic spiral," see Lawson, *Gnostic* 140–1. See also Dehghani, *Martyrium* 230. Cf. Friedman's insightful study of the spiral concept of time in Nuṣayrī thought. See Friedman, *The Nuṣayrī-'Alawīs* 112–5. The latter is represented in such passages from the *Kitāb al-Haft wa-l-aẓilla*: "(Al-Bāqir said:) 'Before our father Adam [i.e., the father of all humanity] there were six Adams [i.e., six Adamic cycles]. The day of resurrection came upon them [i.e., upon their communities] (*qāmat 'alayhim al-qiyāmāt*) and they were judged and entered heaven and hell,'" al-Ju'fī (attr.), *Kitāb al-Haft* 163. In other words, the day of resurrection is the end of one Adamic cycle and the beginning of another. Cf. al-Ju'fī (attr.), *Kitāb al-Haft* 161, 162, 164, 165, and 166 where al-Ṣādiq declares that as long as there is a creation in need of guidance, God will send Messengers, which seems to directly challenge the orthodox doctrine of the seal of prophethood. In the same text, it is said that during his occultation, the *qā'im* is in the many cities located beyond Mount Qāf that encompasses the earth and he will remain there until the day of resurrection which again appears to be the same as the day of his appearance, al-Ju'fī (attr.), *Kitāb al-Haft* 169. See also Arjomand, *Islamic* 260.

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Paradise as the Abode of Pure Knowledge: Reconsidering al-Mu'ayyad's "Isma'ili Neoplatonism"

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In the dynamic process of creation and resurrection, the individual “seeks the benefits of the intellect in order that the collectivity of human souls may one day rise to intellectual eternity, and thereby, to salvation.”¹ Religious history is thus the history of human perfection and ultimately, of human redemption and salvation. It may even be the case that through the vehicle of individual souls the Universal Soul realizes its potential perfection in actuality.²

This essay addresses how al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 471/1078) maintains that the rewards of paradise are intellectual. The ultimate reward of paradise is the reward of pure knowledge, the pure knowledge of *ta'yīd*, or “divine support,” that comes from Universal Intellect as God's first creation. In his major Arabic opus, the *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* (The Mu'ayyadian lectures), al-Mu'ayyad provides commentaries on the concept of heaven *in potentia* and *in actu*. These commentaries offer an excellent opportunity to reconsider the sources of his “Isma'ili Neoplatonism” through a critical examination of select works by Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī (d. ca. 361/971–2).

Building on recent work contesting the term “Isma'ili Neoplatonism,” this study suggests that al-Mu'ayyad's lectures indicate how Isma'ili soteriology integrates aspects of Neoplatonist philosophy with Islamic messianism and Quranic eschatology.³ Identifying Isma'ili authors with the term Neoplatonism has been a heuristic device for corroborating the significance of their philosophical contributions to Islamic intellectual history. For example, H. Halm and P. Walker have proposed paradigms for addressing a set of issues and for understanding concepts and technical terms in one particular period of Isma'ili texts. They do so namely by referring to the Isma'ili Neoplatonism of the “Persian school,” including such authors as al-Nasafī (d. ca. 331/942), al-Rāzī

1 Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* 244.

2 Ibid.

3 DeSmet, *La doctrine avicennienne* 77–89.

(d. ca. 322/934), al-Sijistānī, al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1020–1) and al-Muʾayyad.⁴ Employing different frameworks and approaches may draw out new readings of the primary sources themselves. Indeed, further research may help to establish how the didactic context of Ismaʿīli *daʿwa* teachings influenced the redaction and codification of Ismaʿīli doctrinal works as well as the employment of Ismaʿīli Neoplatonist philosophy.

To rethink the nomenclature of Ismaʿīli Neoplatonism, this essay will first consider Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī's definitions of paradise as the abode of pure knowledge before turning to al-Muʾayyad's *al-Majālis*. Since little attention has been paid to situating al-Muʾayyad's thought *vis à vis* his predecessors in the Ismaʿīli tradition, this essay takes as a primary concern explicating a set of key concepts and structural affinities in al-Muʾayyad's main work that have a point of origin in al-Sijistānī's older Ismaʿīli teachings. As well, this approach allows for a few glimpses into the diversity of the medieval Islamic tradition and its potential for competing interpretations of the rewards of paradise.

Cosmological processes in Ismaʿīli thought constitute the same circular schema that may be found in Neoplatonism. Tenth to eleventh-century Ismaʿīli thought is continually emanationist and so, its creationist cosmology reflects the same point of origin and point of return, the one, Intellect.⁵ The following examples of the similarities between al-Muʾayyad's and Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's treatment of paradise and the fate of individual souls in his Arabic *Rāḥat al-ʿaql* (Peace of mind) briefly illustrate this point. After the *qā'im*'s advent, there is the possibility of realizing a new creation (*al-khalq al-jadīd*) (cf. Q 50:15) in the formation of a new human being through a second birth and arising (*al-nashʾa al-ākhirā*) (cf. Q 29:20). The new formation is worthy of the return and reunification with the source of God's creation, the creative command of God. "Stripped" or denuded of corporeal form and matter, subtle forms are resurrected, parallel to individual souls, whereas the bodies and souls of the damned remain perpetually in dense matter. "Saved" souls are reunited at the moment of resurrection in one form, the form of the Universal

4 Brett, The realm of the Imam 431–9; Brett, Making of Ismāʿīlism 25–39; Corbin, *Cyclical time and Ismaili gnosis*; Jambet, *La grande résurrection d'Alamūt* 9–29, who divides Ismāʿīlism into four periods, the first being the "theological" and the second when the Fatimid systems were developed. The final two are the period of "reform" Alamut Ismāʿīlism, and then of post-Alamut doctrine. See in addition Corbin, Nāṣir Khusrāu and Iranian Ismāʿīlism iv, 528–9; Corbin, *Cyclical time and Ismaili gnosis* 32, 37–47; Nanji, An Ismāʿīlī theory; al-Nuʾmān, *Majālis wa-l-musāyārāt*, 273–4, para. 136; 276, para. 138.

5 DeSmet, *La quietude* 370.

Soul.⁶ This process marks the unveiling of the pure knowledge of *ta'yīd* that is connected to the progressive movement in God's creation from potentiality to actualization.

An additional point concerning the rewards for those individuals who have secured salvation is the question of the time, rather than the place, or the double negation (a concept particular to Isma'ili thinkers like al-Sijistānī) of the very same, the not "non-time," the not "non-place," where individual souls are resurrected and attain their final abode. These soteriologically significant events occur after the appearance of the *qā'im* with the Greater Resurrection. Not all Isma'ilis of the Fatimid period, however, were of the same mind about the advent of the *qā'im* and the period that follows between his manifestation and the Great Resurrection (*al-qiyāma al-kubrā*).⁷

Prior to al-Mu'ayyad, such thinkers as Ja'far b. Manšūr al-Yaman (d. ca. 346/957), al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī developed the concept of the imamate in different directions. While there were debates within Isma'ilism about the function of the imamate in practice, these authors departed nonetheless from the shared foundation of how the concept of the imamate had been articulated doctrinally in the early Fatimid period.⁸ The works of al-Mu'ayyad's close contemporaries al-Šūrī (d. ca. 487/1094), al-Mālījī (fl. 450–52/1058–60), and Nāšir-i Khusraw (d. between 465/1072 and 471/1078) suggest that tacit antagonisms over the function of the imamate and whether its existence is necessary until the time of the Great Resurrection persisted throughout the Fatimid period. While al-Šūrī and al-Mālījī contended with theories of the number of heptads of *imāms*, one other question followed concerning the distinctions between the *mahdī* and the *qā'im*; for example, do the *mahdī* and the *qā'im* have the same role in the events that will take place at the end of the cycles of prophecy?⁹

Al-Mu'ayyad maintains that the advent of the *qā'im* signifies more than the end of the chain of *imāms*. At the end of the seven cycles, the *qā'im*'s appearance marks the fulfillment and perfection of the role of the ranks of religion and the prophetic cycles. Symbolically the "first" and the "last" *imām*, the *qā'im* "seals" the cycles of the *imāms*.¹⁰ However, in other instances, al-Mu'ayyad is much

6 Ibid., 371.

7 Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* 218–9.

8 Ibid., 207–9; Madelung, *Das Imamāt* 43–135.

9 Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* 218–9.

10 Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* i, ed. Ghālib, *Majlis* no. 93, 363; al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* ii, ed. Ḥamīd al-Dīn, *Majlis* no. 116, 94, ll. 1–16. In the course of *Majlis* no. 116, there are seven ranks of *imāms* in the cycle/epoch near its return.

more oblique in his treatment of the imamate, the time of the appearance of the *qā'im*, and the *qā'im*'s identity. Therefore, before turning to al-Sijistānī, it is important to note the interconnections between the key concepts of creation and resurrection and the function the Isma'ili *da'wa* serves as a catalyst in God's creation. The Isma'ili *da'wa* and the acquisition of knowledge through *ta'yīd* allow for these two perfecting processes to take place on all levels of existence, further emphasizing the ways in which the rewards of paradise are conceptualized as "intellectual."

1 Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī: The Abode of Pure Knowledge

Diagrams are provided in al-Sijistānī's Arabic works *Kitāb Ithbāt al-nubuwwāt* (The book on the proof of prophecies) and *Kitāb al-Yanābī* (The book of the wellsprings). These diagrams clarify the relationship between God's creative command, the sublunar realm of the Soul, the degrees of distinction between the prophets, and the orientation of the individual human being toward the Muslim testimony of faith (*shahāda*), "There is no God but God and Muḥammad is His Messenger."¹¹

In *Kitāb al-Yanābī*, al-Sijistānī circumscribes the relationships between the human being's body, the testimony of faith, the world and Universal Intellect. Elements of his Neoplatonist thought and approach to Quranic interpretation contribute to his conceptualization of the abode of pure knowledge as well as the cosmology entailed in Isma'ili doctrines: its schematic structure of principles, pillars, forms and ranks; its dynamic formation, growth and development, and lastly, creative and passive principles. He states that those who investigate the diagrams, "... will learn that their body and their world are in agreement with their religion, which is the one by which God is professed. This person will know also that his return concurs with religion and his world and his body."¹²

In al-Sijistānī's presentation of the four realms of Isma'ili cosmology, the dual aspect of the soul, or its bipolarity, receives particular attention. The soul requires the body in order to obtain the adornment (*zīna*) of the world of Intellect.¹³ The fifth/eleventh-century philosopher Ibn Sīnā explains how the "divine colors" are manifested to the soul at the time of its unification (*ittiṣāl*) with the uppermost angelic realm (*al-malakūt al-a'lā*). As DeSmet has

¹¹ Al-Sijistānī, *Wellsprings of wisdom* 82–3.

¹² Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Yanābī* 59; al-Sijistānī, *Wellsprings of wisdom* 81, "Wellspring" no. 23, para. 115.

¹³ DeSmet, *La doctrine avicennienne* 78.

argued, al-Sijistānī's theory of the soul's movement between the world of the intelligibles and the world of the senses shares this primary distinction that Ibn Sīnā articulates. Ibn Sīnā's Arabic *Kitāb al-Inṣāf* (The book of impartial judgment) proposes a dynamic model which breaks from earlier commentaries on Plotinus and the Plotinian tradition.¹⁴ The material realm (i.e., body) is the means of perfecting the soul and functions as a necessary tool, reflecting the integration of Empedoclean doctrines. A distinction, however, can be made between Ibn Sīnā and the Isma'īli authors of the "Persian School" in that he introduces an additional faculty to explain the ranks of intellect and the process of perfection: the "perfecting faculty" (*al-quwwa al-kāmilīyya*).¹⁵

Paradise is the final abode of the individual souls and its most refined and subtle rewards are intellectual. The idea of the individual soul seeking its redemption through intellect and the soul requiring form resonates strongly with al-Sijistānī's eschatology, in particular, in his Persian *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Revealing the concealed), as well as in his Arabic works *Kitāb al-Ifṭikhār* (The book of the boast), *Risālat al-bāhira* (The treatise of dazzling brilliance), and *Kitāb al-Yanābir*.¹⁶ According to al-Sijistānī, the Intellect serves as the "first messenger" (*al-sābiq/aql mujassam*) to the grades of God's creation, like the ranks of religion in the time of the prophetic cycles. It must return down to the Soul in order to "raise" (i.e., to resurrect) things out of their limits and denude (*mujarrad kardan*) them of corporeal qualities until they are perfect, subtle, and complete.

The First Intellect guides the Universal Soul (*naḥs-i kullī*) to recognize the stages (*darajāt*) of God's creation and unity (*tawḥīd*) due to the fact that the First Intellect is identified with God's command (*amr*) and act of origination.¹⁷ From the perspective of the dyad of pure pairedness (*zawjīyya*), the Soul is the necessary passive recipient of the Intellect's overflowing light (*ifāda/istifāda*).¹⁸ The Soul, as the "follower" (*al-tālī*) of the Intellect, continuously receives assistance from the "predecessor" (*al-sābiq*) of its "pure pair" (*al-zawj al-mahḍ*, cf. Q 2:25; 3:15).¹⁹ More specifically related to the ontology of the seven treatises in the *Kashf al-mahjūb*, the self-sufficient and bestowing nature of the First Intellect's shining light as well as the Soul's passive and receptive

14 Ibid., 79.

15 Ibid., 87.

16 Al-Sijistānī, *Risālat al-bāhira* 37–50; Madelung, al-Sijistānī and metempsychosis 131–43; Walker, Metempsychosis 230–6.

17 Al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 2, ll. 12–4; 17–20.

18 Alibhai, *Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī* 20–1.

19 Ibid., 29–32.

loci define the two roots from which all created existents stem. Only God is truly singular (cf. *fardāniyya*).²⁰

Both the First Intellect and the individual human being occupy pivotal and mediating roles in al-Sijistānī's universe of creation and "recognition" (*shinākhtan*).²¹ Different modes of knowing or lines of transmission exist between substances and qualities on the basis of homologous or hierarchical relationships in which perhaps a doubled Golden Chain of Being may be discerned.²² The dialogue and communications between the active First Intellect and the passive Soul, whether on the level of universals or particulars, forms one line of transmission and well-spring (*chisma*) open to the individual human being. God's *amr* and *ta'yīd* are identified with the First Intellect and received by the prophets (*payghambarān*), the *imāms*, the legatees, the *awliyā'* and the *guzīdagān*. It is the source of the pure knowledge (*'ilm-i maḥẓ*) of God's oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), divine revelation, the scriptural message (*sharī'at*), and religious instruction (*ta'lim/amūkhtan/riyāẓat*).²³

On the one hand, in the first treatise of the *Kashf*, al-Sijistānī pinpoints in the discussion of God's *tawḥīd* the necessity of each existent's position and the First Intellect in relation to the perfection of the Soul. On the other hand, he defines what cannot necessarily be transcended in relation to the First Intellect's substance. Within the framework of the *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, the final creation is tantamount to the last prophetic cycle, where one side is creation and the other side, toward the unknowable God, is resurrection. Resurrection, implicit in the context of the first treatise and explicit in the last, does not

20 Al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 8, ll. 13, 15; 15, l. 10.

21 Alibhai, *Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī* 61–4, 149–66; Kamada, The first being 11–3, 15.

22 See the discussions in Madelung, Aspects of Ismā'īlī theology 51–65; and Walker, *Early philosophical Shīism* 98–101 of the motif of the "Chain of Being" in relation to Ismā'īlī cosmology and doctrines of the imamate in the pre-Fatimid and Fatimid periods. Alibhai, *Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī* 70, seems willing to present the position of *ta'yīd* in al-Sijistānī's Ismā'īlī thought in the light of epistemological and ontological considerations and not solely on the basis of its probable political and social implications in the Fatimid period. He states the following on the matter of the Ismā'īlī "adjustments" to Neoplatonist thought: "One is the concept of substance, already noted earlier, as the common foundation of both the spiritual and the bodily domain. The other is the abandonment of the mystical dimension of Neoplatonism. Instead of the soul turning inward and upward toward the One, it is the idea of divine assistance (*ta'yīd*), the transmission of divine wisdom and divine guidance from upper to lower levels . . . to regard the spiritual and the corporeal domains as parallel domains insofar as they are equally recipients of guidance which comes from their common source, the Intellect."

23 See al-Sijistānī, *Wellsprings of wisdom* "Wellspring" no. 39, 108–9.

entail the transformation of the categories the Unknowable God designated for His creation in the first act of creation. The pairedness of existents is maintained in both creation and resurrection.²⁴ In this respect, the First Intellect instructs and trains the Soul first to recognize and then to trace the particulars of the branches back to the two universal roots and their common point of origin. Human beings likewise simultaneously recapitulate the First Intellect's training of the Soul and embody the gradated levels of understanding concerning God's creation.

The rewards of paradise are equated with Intellect and the pure knowledge of *ta'yīd*. In al-Sijistānī's *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, chapter 11 commences with a discussion of the rewards of the afterlife. Individual souls experience a happiness that is tantamount to the acquisition of the purity of knowledge (*ṣafwat al-'ilm*) according to the individual's capacity to accept the spiritual colors (*al-aṣbāgh al-rūḥāniyya*) [cf. Q 2:138]. It is at this point on the continuum of human perfection that the substance of the soul (*jawhar al-naḥs*) becomes angelic, possessing spiritual forms (*al-ṣuwar al-rūḥāniyya*). In this context, al-Sijistānī bases his description of the abode of rewards based on specific Quranic verses, alluding to Q 41:31, "We are your protectors (*awlīyā'ukum*) in this life and in the hereafter: Therein shall you have all that you shall desire; therein shall you have all that you ask for."²⁵ Al-Sijistānī's explanation (*tafsīr*) of this statement covers the following: first of all, the location of this abode; and second of all, whether or not the Quranic terminology for heaven refers to one or more abodes.²⁶ One passage from the *Kitāb al-Yanābī* concisely sums up the soteriological implications (the rewards of paradise or the punishments of hell) of the individual's active or passive response to the rank of the messiah, the lord of resurrection. Human beings are of two classes, "... one class are those who believe in the messiah and attest to his truth and await his appearance. These acquire that light, take comfort therein, and rejoice. The other class disbelieve in him and disregard his proper rank. They are burned and punished in this same light."²⁷ The permanency of pure knowledge rests on the fact that it is tantamount to

24 Al-Sijistānī, *Kashf* 83–4, ll. 18–19, 1–12.

25 Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* 206–7. Translations of Quranic passages throughout this study are based on the King Fahd Holy Qur'ān Printing Complex (trans.), *The holy Qur'ān*.

26 Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* 210–1. See DeSmet, *La quiétude* 371. In some contexts, al-Kirmānī maintains that the intermediary resting place of the souls is the *barzakh*, prior to the return of the *qā'im*. The soul therefore does not go immediately to paradise after death.

27 Al-Sijistānī, *Wellsprings of wisdom*, "Wellspring" no. 36, 103.

the light of Intellect and is not subject to the transformation of generation and corruption (*kawn wa-fasād*) governing the sublunar realm of the Soul.

2 Al-Mu'ayyad: Paradise *in potentia* and *in actu*

In the fifth/eleventh-century Fatimid Isma'ili collection of lectures, the *Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya*, al-Mu'ayyad suggests that for humanity the paradise of knowledge is often lost. Knowledge may be regained, however, through the Isma'ili *da'wa*, the potential heaven on earth. In the afterlife, the *da'wa* is actualized as the abode of heaven, but in fact, all of God's creation is drawn upward in the constant movement toward perfection as the Creator moves created being from *in potentia* (*bi-l-quwwa*) to actuality (*bi-l-fi'l*). In the emanation of God's second creation (*al-khalq al-thānī*), the individual whose soul has secured salvation experiences in noetic terms a continual progression and perfection in the spiritual world of the afterlife.

Al-Mu'ayyad's theory of heaven *in potentia* and *in actu* reflects the further consolidation of Isma'ili Neoplatonist thought. In his main work, al-Mu'ayyad maintains the cosmology and prophetic anthropology al-Sijistānī sets forth in *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*, *Kitāb al-Yanābīṣ*, and *Risālat al-bāhira*, while refining the discussion of movement (*istiḥāla*) in and between the two realms, the natural (*ṭabīʿī*) and the spiritual (*naḥsānī*). As noted previously, the natural realm results from the influences of the upper celestial bodies (planets) (*al-ajrām al-ʿuḥwiyya*) on the lower celestial bodies (*al-ajrām al-suflīyya*). The spiritual realm results from the effusions (*ifāḍāt*) of the Universal Intellect and the Universal Soul in particular souls (*al-anfus al-juzʿiyyāt*).²⁸ As well, al-Mu'ayyad elaborates upon particular philosophical concepts from al-Kirmānī, such as those emphasizing the “second birth” of the human being.

Al-Mu'ayyad's descriptions of paradise purposefully range from the “literalist” to the “allegorical,” which is quite indicative of the lecture format of the *Majālis*. In *Majlis* no. 101 from volume 2, al-Mu'ayyad moves from the apparent, literal meaning to the hidden, allegorical meaning suggested by Q 2:25. The apparent meaning of paradise is the garden (*al-bustān*). The word heaven (*janna*) requires two definitions, the first being “gathering or harvesting fruit” (*mujtanā al-thamar*) and the other is “harvesting something.” He explains that people regard it as the garden because it is a place of trees, blossoms (*al-nuwwār*), green vegetation and flowers, and gathering fruits. When it exists in the natural creation (*al-khalqa al-ṭabīʿiyya*), it distinguishes some of

28 Al-Sijistānī, *Risālat al-bāhira* 38–9.

the places with luxuriant trees, flowers with pure scents and delicious tasting fruits, and is called “paradise.”²⁹ On another interpretive level, the garden is the cause of the arising of the divine forms created in the abode of the afterlife and its subsistence, tantamount to the *daʿwa al-taʿwīl*, which distinguishes in particular the family of the Prophet. The definition of paradise is therefore one that combines and brings together these two aspects, alluding to the gathering of fruit, and what the gathering intends by its meaning. The “fruits” that one ultimately “gathers” in paradise are the “divine fruits” al-Muʿayyad refers to as at the endpoint of the forms, the “divine forms.”

The benefits of *taʿyīd* (conceptualized as light/*nūr*) emanate and overflow from the Intellect onto the elite members of the *daʿwa* who have attained proximity to God.³⁰ In the ascent of the subtle soul, the human being may potentially strive to attain the abode of purity (*dār al-ṣafāʾ*) and the vicinity of the upper ranks (*mujāwara al-ḥudūd al-ʿulwiyya*) of paradise. In the ascending cycle, at the upper ranks, density (*kathāfa*) accepts the influences of the subtle (*athār al-laṭāfa*) according to its capacity to accept these influences. One of the prime examples al-Muʿayyad employs to explain this is as follows: the light of the faculty of divine support comes from the upper ranks, from which the “divine fruits” (*al-thamarāt al-malakūtiyya*) are also derived, for the “divine forms” are at the endpoint of all forms.³¹ The origination of the “divine forms” (*nashʾa al-ṣuwar al-malakūtiyya*) occurs in the abode of purity.³² In the descending cycle, the very same influences of the subtle reach the world of corporeality and density (*dār al-kathāfa*) safeguarded by “coverings” (*aghṭiyya*) and “shells” (*qushūr*).³³

At this stage of progressive development and transformation, the individual “becomes consubstantial with the substance of the angels” (*al-tajawhur bi-jawhar al-malāʾika*).³⁴ This consubstantiation is the first degree among the degrees of the afterlife.³⁵ It also points to the natural movement and

29 Al-Muʿayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyya*, ed. Ḥamīd al-Dīn ii, 5–6.

30 Ibid., ii, 5–6.

31 Ibid., ii, *Majlis* no. 65, 409; *Majlis* no. 61, 387, ll. 40–1.

32 Ibid., ii, *Majlis* no. 48, 299, ll. 99–101.

33 Ibid., ii, *Majlis* no. 48, 298, ll. 89–91. Al-Muʿayyad, *Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyya* iii, *Majlis* no. 80, 256, ll. 6–12.

34 DeSmet, La polémique ismaélienne 94–5. Kraus, Beiträge zur islamischen Ketzer-geschichte 93–129, 355–79; al-Muʿayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyya* i, *Majlis* no. 5, 22, ll. 15–7. Al-Muʿayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyya* ii, *Majlis* no. 51, 316, ll. 70–1: the individual who has become a rational, intelligent human being is the “isthmus between the two seas” (*barzakh al-baḥrayn*), between the animals and the angels.

35 Al-Muʿayyad, *al-Majālis al-Muʿayyadiyya* i, *Majlis* no. 76, 323.

progression from the perception of one rank, to the next higher rank directly above it in the hierarchy, and then, from the physical ranks of religion to their spiritual counterparts in the realm of the pure intelligibles.

The potential for an increasingly subtle progression of corporeal forms re-emerges as a defining feature of the collectivity of the *da'wa* as heaven *in potentia* (*al-janna bi-l-quwwa*). The members of each *ḥadd* (degree/rank) symbolize a potential heaven. The potential heaven of each *ḥadd* leads to the permanency and the eternity of the heaven *in actu* (*al-janna bi-l-fi'l*) in creation's modalities of origination, "arising," and resurrection.³⁶ The ranks of religion serve the function of allowing individuals to have access to heaven, where "the possessors of divine support (*aṣḥāb al-ta'yīd*), who are the bearers (*ḥāmilūn*) of the revelation of God (*waḥy Allāh*), His book and His messengership, and their legates and the *imāms* of their epoch are heavens (*jannāt*). Through them one attains the heaven that is paradise (*dār al-khuld*)."³⁷

In order to clarify his position on the definition of paradise and the salvific function of the Isma'ili *da'wa*, al-Mu'ayyad states that it is heaven *in potentia* and *in actu*. The meaning of heaven *in potentia* is that one cannot attain "gardens of eternity, those that God Most Gracious has promised to His servants in the Unseen" (Q 19:61), except through the *da'wa al-ta'wīl* (the calling of allegorical interpretation). Next in his commentary are the verses "and besides these two, there are two other gardens" (Q 55:62), and "the fruit of the gardens will be near [and easy of reach]" (Q 55:54). Al-Mu'ayyad then explains that while the definition of heaven is gathering fruits, the *da'wa* is the definition of heaven's specific and particular meaning, signifying by it the prophets: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad. An important component of his commentary is his discussion of subtle forms in the progression of forms.

36 Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* ii, *Majlis* no. 3, 18, ll. 32–5. Al-Mu'ayyad explains that two Quranic verses, Q 55:62 and 55:54, attest to the account of *al-janna bi-l-quwwa* and *al-janna bi-l-fi'l*. See in addition, al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* i, *Majlis* no. 12, 106–7. Al-Mu'ayyad also states that each of the prophets, the *awṣiyā'* and the *imāms*, in and of themselves, are heaven. See i, *Majlis* no. 14, 67, ll. 8–11. Also, in ii, *Majlis* no. 1, 8, ll. 102–4, ii, *Majlis* no. 3, 18, l. 40: "We stated that the heavens are the *ḥudūd dīn Allāh* according to the definition of *ta'wīl* (*fi ḥadd al-ta'wīl*).³⁷ In ii, *Majlis* no. 1, 6, ll. 65–9: "the *da'wa* of *ta'wīl* is the special domain (*al-mukhtaṣṣa*) of the family of the Prophet . . . and it is the heaven in potential (*al-janna bi-l-quwwa*) that brings about the heaven *in actu* (*al-janna bi-l-fi'l*).³⁸ Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* iv, Ms. 720 (Ar), folios 47b–48a: the *da'wa* is heaven *in potentia*, like the sperm (*al-nuṭfa*) is the human being *in potentia* (*al-insān bi-l-quwwa*). On folios 142b–143a, al-Mu'ayyad explains how the heaven established *in potentia* is the *al-da'wa al-ta'wīliyya* (the calling of allegorical interpretation).

37 Al-Mu'ayyad, *al-Majālis al-Mu'ayyadiyya* ii, *Majlis* no. 2, 12, ll. 31–3.

Revelation and scripture likewise share the same features and aspects in common with all other existents in God's creation, further clarifying the relationship between *tanzīl*, *ta'wīl*, and *ta'yīd*.³⁸

Majlis no. 122 and *Majlis* no. 123 of the second volume introduce other arguments on the soul's existence after death. Al-Mu'ayyad confirms that there is agreement between the four religions (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) on the existence of "pure subtle angels." He maintains that this agreement supports the argument that souls exist without the body after death. The rewards of the afterlife, such as eating and drinking in paradise, are thereby in keeping with earlier arguments presented on how the soul is "stripped" of the body and corporeality after death. From this perspective, the "fruits" of paradise allude to the "divine fruits," which are the "divine forms," the stable, pure, and permanent knowledge that exists in the abode of purity, where the *da'wa*, too, has acquired its most perfect and subtle form.

Many of the above-mentioned issues on resurrection and the final abode revisit inevitably the body-soul dyad, and how its development and transformation determines the individual's afterlife experiences. Transmigration, therefore, remains an important component of the debate on resurrection and the final abode of individual souls for al-Mu'ayyad as is the case with his predecessors, al-Sijistānī and al-Kirmānī. Regretfully, it is beyond the confines of this paper to address in more detail the medieval Isma'ili stance on transmigration. Let us in conclusion, however, briefly revisit DeSmet's points on Isma'ili Neoplatonist schema and the main theme of this paper: why intellectual rewards are the rewards of paradise. The fact that for al-Mu'ayyad, the loss of knowledge can be equated with the absence of *ta'wīl*, the *imām*, and the *da'wa*, has soteriological ramifications, as does the neglect, ignorance or "rebellion" against the Fatimid doctrine of *tā'a* (obedience to the *imām*). However, at the end of the prophetic cycles, the *qā'im* will render the exoteric and corporeal aspects of revealed religious law null and void. Humanity will be restored to "Adam's Lost Paradise,"³⁹ for, as in the case of al-Sijistānī's cosmology, the once "hidden forms" will be "... resuscitated through the radiant luminous knowledge (*al-'ilm al-bāriq al-lāmi'*)."⁴⁰ In this sense, too, only the pure knowledge of *ta'yīd*, the light of Universal Intellect, is permanent.

38 Ibid., ii, *Majlis* no. 101, 6, ll. 68–72.

39 Nomoto, *An early Ismā'ili-Shī'ī thought* 20.

40 Ibid., 30.

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Notions of Paradise in the Ismaʿili Works of Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī

S.J. Badakhchani

Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Ḥasan Ṭūsī, one of the most eminent Muslim philosophers, scientists, and astronomers of seventh/thirteenth-century Iran, was born on 11 Jumādā 1 597/17 February 1201 in Ṭūs, a suburb of present-day Mashhad, and died on 18 Dhū l-Ḥijja 672/25 June 1274 in Baghdad. Over 150 books and treatises on a variety of subjects and of differing lengths are attributed to him. At a young age, he is known to have adopted the Nizārī Ismaʿili faith and, during his association with the Ismaʿilis lasting approximately thirty years, he composed a number of books devoted to Ismaʿili doctrines in the Alamut period. English translations of his most important Persian works from this period have already been published. These works are *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* (*The Paradise of Submission*),¹ a comprehensive compilation of his lectures delivered at Alamut, and the earlier, autobiographical essay, *Sayr wa-sulūk* (*Contemplation and Action*),² and his three shorter treatises on Ismaʿili thought, namely *Āghāz wa-anjām* (*The Beginning and the End*), *Tawallā wa-tabarrā* (*Solidarity and Dissociation*), and *Maṭlūb al-muʾminīn* (*Desideratum of the Faithful*).³

Among other Persian works by Ṭūsī, informed by Ismaʿili thought to varying degrees and also available in English, is *Akhlāq-i Nāṣirī* (*The Nasirean Ethics*), which is probably his most famous composition.⁴ An earlier treatise on ethics, *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashamī* (*The Muḥtashamid ethics*),⁵ and a dissertation on Islamic mysticism entitled *Awṣāf al-ashrāf* (*Attributes of the nobles*),⁶ compiled after the fall of Alamut, preserve aspects of Ismaʿili thought and are only available in the original Persian. A few obscure and hitherto unpublished Ismaʿili Ṭūsian works await proper editions and translations. They are *Risāla*

1 Ṭūsī, *Paradise of submission*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani.

2 Ṭūsī, *Sayr wa-sulūk*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani.

3 Ṭūsī, *Shiʿi interpretation of Islam*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani.

4 Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean ethics*, trans. Wickens.

5 Ṭūsī, *Akhlāq-i Muḥtashamī*.

6 Ṭūsī, *Awṣāf al-ashrāf*.

dar ni'mat-hā, khushī-hā wa-ladhdhat-hā (*Treatise on Comfort, Happiness and Joyfulness*); *Mujārāt*, which consists of his debates with unidentified persons and a letter to the people of Qazvin;⁷ and an Arabic treatise entitled *al-Dustūr wa-da'wat al-mu'minīn lil-ḥuḍūr*, which most probably comes from his pen.⁸ Finally, an exception among this genre of Ṭūsī's works is *Jabr wa-ikhtiyār* (*Free Will and Predestination*) which was edited and published in 1956 in the original Persian by Muḥammad Taqī Mudarris Raḍawī, and subsequently rendered into English by Parviz Morewedge.⁹

In this paper on Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī's notions of paradise as conveyed in his Isma'ili works, our main points of reference will be the *Rawḍa-yi taslīm*, *Sayr wa-sulūk*, *Āghāz wa-anjām*,¹⁰ and his works on ethics.¹¹

In the Islamic tradition,¹² the main schools of eschatology have been those of the Sunni and the Shi'i denominations. In the Shi'i context, the more elaborate texts belong to the Twelver community,¹³ in contrast to the Isma'ili texts which, because of their esoteric character and destruction by opponents, are rare.¹⁴ Those that have survived, as in the case of Ṭūsī's writings, are highly abridged and concise. Ṭūsī's eschatological writings should therefore be considered an example of the efforts of an Isma'ili scholar¹⁵ to present a point of view that, while corresponding to the tenets of the Quran, often manages to

7 For details see Raḍawī, *Aḥwāl wa-āthār* 591–4.

8 The scribe of this treatise, Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Ya'qūb al-Ṭayyibī, records in the colophon that he heard the treatise from the illustrious *dā'ī* Naṣīr al-Dīn. See Tāmir (ed.), *Arba'a rasā'il* 101.

9 Ṭūsī, *Risāla-yi jabr* 8–27; Ṭūsī, *Metaphysics*, trans. Morewedge 1–46.

10 I have not reproduced or quoted texts from the *Āghāz* because in this treatise Ṭūsī's main concern is to highlight, in the manner observed by people of insight, how the Quran depicts the process of life in the hereafter. His objective is to provide definitions, from an esoteric point of view, of almost all the Quranic terms and expressions related to Islamic eschatology. He does not summarize, nor sum up his deliberations. The conclusions derived from his elaboration pave the ground for what we read in his other Isma'ili works such as the *Maṭlūb al-mu'minīn* and in particular the *Rawḍa*.

11 In Ṭūsī, *The Nasirean ethics*, trans. Wickens 71–4, Ṭūsī speaks of the hereafter (*ma'ād*) and paradise (*bihisht*) in terms similar to those we find in the *Rawḍa*. See Ṭūsī, *Paradise of submission*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani 90–1 and 108–9.

12 For a summary of eschatological events in the Quran, see Waldman, *Islamic eschatology* 152–6 and Arnaldez, *Ma'ād* 892–4. See also Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding*.

13 See Moezzi, *Eschatology in Imami Shi'ism* 575–80.

14 See Farhad Daftary's introduction to the Persian translation of his *The Isma'ilis: Their history and doctrines*: Daftary, *Tārīkh wa-'aqāyid-i ismā'īliyya* 15–6.

15 See Ṭūsī's preamble to *Āghāz wa-anjām* in Ṭūsī, *Shi'i interpretation of Islam*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani 1–2.

arrive at conclusions distinct from those of the classical Sunni and Twelver Shi'i approaches.

The discourse on eschatology, both in its theological and philosophical contexts, apart from the doctrine of bodily resurrection, depends on the acceptance of the existence of a human faculty called the soul or spirit, without which the eschaton¹⁶ or life in the hereafter – be it Hades, Tartarus, Gehanna, Sheol, paradise or hell – would be meaningless.

The early Greek philosophers had conflicting views regarding the essence of the soul and its relation to the human body. For example, Democritus and Leucippus were of the opinion that the soul is “a sort of fire or heath,” whereas Diogenes and the Pythagoreans spoke of the soul as “something identical with the particles in the air.” According to Anaxagoras soul and mind was the same thing, and for Thales the soul was the primary cause of movement.¹⁷ Further developments are found in Plato¹⁸ and Aristotle¹⁹ who speculated on the subject in a more profound and sustained manner. On the whole, Greek philosophers had reached the conclusion that souls, unlike bodies, are neither material nor perishable but, as a result of their attachment to the body, become subject to reward and retribution.

Considering that most early Muslim philosophers were familiar with the Greek writings available to them,²⁰ their definitions of the soul are in principle almost identical.²¹ Muslim thinkers, however, were not satisfied with the attributes and properties of the soul as described by Greek philosophers. Contrary to the Aristotelian thesis that the soul is a “form” or “perfection” inseparable from the body, and on its own stripped of knowledge, Ibn Sīnā and other Muslim philosophers argued that the soul is not a “form” or perfection, but rather a “sustainer” (*mudabbir*) and can exist without a body.²² Among Muslim

16 From the Greek *eschaton*, meaning the “last” or “last thing.”

17 For details see Aristotle, *On the soul* 21–30. Cf. Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfirīn* 287–92.

18 Plato, *Dawra-yi āthār-i Aflātūn*, trans. Luṭfī iii, 48ff; ii, 614ff; i, 523.

19 Aristotle, *On the soul* 39–89.

20 See Fakhry, *Metaphysics*; Mahdi, *Rational tradition*.

21 For example, Aristotle's view that “soul is the first actualization of a potentially living organism” (Aristotle, *On the soul* 3) is replicated in Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd* 14 and Ṭūsī, *Paradise of submission*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani 36. For the Isma'ili philosopher Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī, the soul is “a living substance stripped of knowledge at the beginning but gaining perpetuity by means of acquired knowledge and deeds.” Al-Kirmānī, *al-Maṣābiḥ* 40; al-Kirmānī, *Master of the age*, ed. and trans. Walker 49.

22 See Muṭṭabawī, *Jawhariyyat nafs* 48–9; and also the Ghālib (ed.), *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* iii, 239–42 and 290.

philosophers, it is Ibn Sīnā who defined and argued most elaborately for the human soul and furnished proofs for its existence.²³

In the monotheistic tradition of revealed religions and Islam in particular, the belief in life after death and paradise and hell are basically aimed at the pursuit of a just, righteous, and ethical approach to worldly life. The highly picturesque and contrasting depictions of paradise and hell in the Quran have the ultimate objective of persuading mankind to choose either the path of good or its opposite. In the words of M.R. Waldman:

This marvelously wrought dichotomy underscores the need for humans to choose. Fire and Garden appear not for their own sake, but as signs of God's mercy or wrath... One earns one's fate by choosing to adhere or not adhere to clearly specified spiritual and behavioral norms. Judgment is as fair as a business transaction: one's deeds are weighed in the balance, neither wealth nor kin availing. If one has been faithful and grateful, accepted his signs and messengers as true, prayed and given charity, one is awarded. If one has been faithless and ungrateful, given the lie to the signs and messengers, given God partners, prayed insincerely or not at all, and been selfish with and prideful of one's material goods, one is punished. In this instance of the radical transvaluation common to the monotheistic religions, what one valued is taken away and what one did not value becomes an eternal reward.²⁴

While there is general consensus among various Muslim denominations and schools of thought on the existence of the soul and its continuity in the hereafter, there appears to be a fundamental disagreement on the nature of this phenomenon. In other words: is it possible to conceive of the Quranic evocations of paradise and hell in a literal and physical sense comparable to that of "this world," or is it more reasonable to regard these as symbolic expressions requiring allegorical interpretation? That is precisely how Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī begins to address the issue in question:

If the real Paradise and Hell, as is the belief of the majority of Muslims, were made of [various types of] physical matter (*mawādd-i jismānī*) and composed of material things – for example, if Paradise were a garden of immense extent adorned with streams, trees, beautiful maidens, palaces, water, milk, honey, wine and other various delicacies of eating

23 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt* ii, 319–23.

24 Waldman, *Islamic eschatology* 153.

and drinking as they count them; and if Hell were, for example, a pit of awesome length, width and depth, eternally and endlessly filled with fire, snakes and countless terrifying scorpions which sting and bite, and, as they have said, [enormous chains] set on fire and red hot with knots in them like mountains, by which the inmates of hell are thrown into the fire and tortured – there would have been no difference at all between this world and the hereafter. On the contrary, Paradise is situated at the ‘uppermost height’ (*a’lā ‘illiyyin*) and Hell at the ‘lowermost depths’ (*asfal-i sāfilin*),²⁵ the magnitude of both realms being of such an extent that no one’s estimation (*wahm*) and reflection (*fikr*) can possibly comprehend them. The information given by the Prophets in such physical descriptions of Paradise and Hell are all descriptions presented in accordance with the intellectual capacity of ordinary people and expressed in order to either encourage or frighten them, so that they might incline to obedience and abstain from disobedience.²⁶

For Ṭūsī, such an elucidation, if it is to be in accord with the words of the Quran, requires the belief in “spiritual resurrection,” which can only be explained through spiritual exegesis (*ta’wīl*) and the unlocking of the Quran’s symbolism. Of course, in this short introductory treatment of Ṭūsī’s notion of paradise, there is no room to trace the background of his argumentation, or to analyze the various hermeneutical perspectives (theological, philosophical, spiritual, and esoteric) pertinent to the subject. Suffice it to say that Ṭūsī constructs his idea of a “spiritual paradise” in complex technical terms, including the realms of discord (*taḍādd*), gradation (*tarattub*), similitude (*mushābahat*), distinction (*mubāyanat*), and that of divine unity (*waḥdat*). It would also be pertinent to note that Ṭūsī’s narratives on this subject are comprehensive and scholarly, as well as consistent with earlier classical Isma‘ili literature.

For classical pre-Fatimid and Fatimid Isma‘ili authors, such as the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā,²⁷ Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī,²⁸ Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī,²⁹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw,³⁰ and following them Nāṣir al-Dīn Ṭūsī in the Nizārī period, the most vivid expression that defines their understanding of “spiritual paradise” is the

25 The expressions *a’lā ‘illiyyin* and *asfal-i sāfilin* are derived from the Quran 83:18 and 95:15.

26 Ṭūsī, *Paradise of submission*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani 57.

27 Ghālib (ed.), *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* ii, 49–51; iii, 301–20.

28 Al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār* 74–97 and al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-mahjūb* 83–93. See also Walker, *Abū Ya‘qūb al-Sijistānī* 78–83.

29 Al-Kirmānī, *Rāhat al-aql*.

30 Khusraw, *Khwān al-ikhwān* 15–21, 120–3, 164–7.

Quranic expression “*ḥayawān*” for describing the abodes of paradise and hell as living realities: “Verily, the abode of the hereafter is life indeed” (Q 29:64).³¹ Etymologically, *ḥayawān* means true and authentic life, that is, something different from mere physical existence which, although appearing palpable and tangible to our sense-perceptions, is actually lifeless. Ṭūsī draws this distinction between the two worlds clearly in the following passage from the *Rawḍa*:

As for this world (*dunyā*) and the hereafter (*ākhirā*): *dunyā* is an Arabic word derived from the cognates *dunuww*, *adwan* and *danī*. *Dunuww* means ‘closeness,’ *adwan* means ‘deeper,’ and *danī* means ‘worthless.’ The purport of this [etymology] is that *dunyā* signifies that which is near to human sense-perceptions and human perceptions close to it; ‘deeper’ alludes to the most profound abyss (*asfal*); whereas ‘worthless’ refers to the ignoble conditions of nothingness and extinction. These ‘heavens’ and ‘earth,’ [cosmological] ‘fathers and ‘mothers’ (*ābā’ wa-ummahāt*),³² this above and below, behind and before, right and left, length, breadth and depth, doors and walls, trees, springs and flowers, gold and silver, property and animals, are called ‘this world’ and ‘worldly’ because this world appertains to the [realm of] the senses, and our senses are near to it and it is close to our senses; otherwise, this world is not really those things. Rather, [what is referred to as] *dunyā* is the realm of similitudes (*kawn-i mushābahat*), where the followers of truth and of falsehood, the true and the false, correct and incorrect, the veracious person and the liar, good and evil, the wicked and the good, all seem to be the same. [It is] a state in which all contradictory things are similar to each other, in which man is so bewildered and veiled from the truth that he cannot differentiate and distinguish between any of these things. The hereafter is the realm of clear distinction (*kawn-i mubāyanat*), where right and wrong, the followers of truth and of falsehood, the veracious person and the liar, truth and lie, good and evil, the wicked and the good, are distinguished from each other. It is a state in which all things deceptively similar to each other are clearly distinguished, where right from wrong and the righteous from the

31 The translations from the Quran in this article are based on Yusuf Ali (trans.), *The holy Qur’ān*.

32 The *ābā’* are the seven heavenly bodies of medieval cosmography, usually referred to as *ābā’-i ‘ulwī*, whose movements through the twelve signs of the Zodiac are believed to influence the combination of the four basic elements (*ummahāt*) of fire, air, water, and earth, thus generating variations in the species of plant, animal, and human kingdoms (*mawālīd*).

wrongdoers are made distinct and clearly apparent by the grace of divine gnosis (*maʿrifat-i ilāhī*).³³

In other words, when one talks about paradise and hell, reward and punishment, or even religion in its essence, one is referring to another, spiritual realm of existence quite distinct from the earthly one. But this opposition between the two realms of similitude and distinction is for Ṭūsī not simply one of the illusory life of humans in this world against the spiritual realities of the hereafter. On the contrary, the two realms are equally operational in both the worlds. In the context of human experience on earth, he compares it to the difference between fantasy and actuality, or lunacy and sanity. In fact, so critical is it for the soul's well being to discriminate between truth and falsehood in this world as much as the next, that it determines one's existential status as a living being or one of the dead, as Ṭūsī explains below:

Furthermore, the relation between this world and the Hereafter can be compared to that of a child to an adult or a lunatic to a sane person. The child imagines things for which there is absolutely no basis. For example, he may see an image in the mirror and assume that it exists [independently] like himself. He is aware of neither his own infantile state nor of the state of maturity. But the adult knows that whatever the child knows or sees is baseless fantasy. He knows his own state of maturity and the child's infantile state. The lunatic perceives existing things as non-existent and non-existent things as existent, while the sane person sees things as they actually are, whether existent or non-existent. Whosoever's original nature at the point of birth has not been altered by perverted fantasy and false suppositions, even if from the standpoint of external appearance and [temporal] relations (*bi-ḥukm-i zāhir wa-idāfa*) he appears to have entered into this world, from the standpoint of interior reality and truth, he is, in fact, not in this world. In the same way, there may be a person who appears to exist visibly in this world, although in reality he has never entered it, whilst another may appear to have departed from it, although he has never, nor indeed, ever will, leave the world. [There are others] still, who have directed their attention from this world to the next, while another has turned his attention from the Hereafter to this world.³⁴

33 Ṭūsī, *Paradise of submission*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani 87.

34 Ibid., 88–9.

Developing these deliberations further by way of a series of philosophical and psychological postulates, Ṭūsī arrives at more nuanced and sophisticated understandings of the natures of what are called paradise and hell. He asserts that these abodes of delights and torments are not absolute and exclusive to the afterlife, as conceived in the popular imagination based on a literal reading of the Quran, but also found in the perpetually changing existential states of the soul experienced by humans here and now in the physical world.

Both Paradise and Hell are products of man's mental conceptions (*taṣawwūr*) and such conceptions are of no more than three categories: sensory (*ḥissī*), psychical (*naḥsī*) and intellectual (*ʿaqlī*). If one's mental conception begins [at the level] of sensory perception and proceeds no further, then such a conception makes of itself a sensible hell for him within his soul, his soul being in its very own hell. If one's mental conception begins at the psychical level and proceeds no further, that conception will effect in him a glimpse of his paradise within his soul, his soul sensing the influence of its inner heaven. If one's mental conception proceeds from intellectual knowledge and remains at that level, this conception will become a real paradise within the soul for him, his soul being in its very own paradise. The real Paradise is also the upright intellect (*ʿaql-i mustaqīm*) – that is to say, reason united with Divine Volition (*amr*), so that, for example, one ascends from the senses to the estimative imagination (*wahm*), from imagination to soul (*naḥs*) and from soul to intellect. [In other words], one's sensuality is converted into estimative imagination, then into soul and ultimately into intellect, [until it] comes to rest content with the gnosis of pure intellect, 'returning to his Lord pleased and well-contented' (Q 89:28). The real Hell, on the other hand, is that of the perverted intellect (*ʿaql-i mankūs*), that is to say, the reason which is separated from Divine Volition, so that, for instance, [it descends from] the intellectual to the spiritual, from the spiritual to the estimative imagination, and from the estimative imagination to the senses. [Hence], one's intellect descends [to the level of] soul, then the imagination, then to sense perception, and from there it falls into the Inferno and the most horrid place.³⁵

If, as maintained by Ṭūsī, paradise and hell are the products of our mental conceptions and intellectual or spiritual capacities, it follows that these states

35 Ibid., 56–64.

are forever in a state of flux and transformation, emerging in humans at the time of birth and thereafter developing as the child progresses through each stage of his life through youth, maturity, old age, death, and beyond. Ṭūsī puts forward this proposition on the basis of a progressive hierarchy of “relative perfections” in the natural order, extending from the mineral, plant, and animal kingdoms to the human and angelic worlds. Thus, every progressive movement from one species to another, or the attainment of a qualitative attribute by that creature, constitutes a “relative paradise” and its counter effect represents a “relative hell”:

[As for] relative paradises, they are relative perfections, and we can say this, if the following analogy, taken from the example of minerals, plants, animals and humans is extended to the angels and the sacrosanct hierarchies (*ḥudūd-i qudsī*) . . . from minerals to precious gems, to plants, to animals, to man, to angels and up to the sacrosanct hierarchy, it has been so arranged that everything that is superior [in degree] resembles a paradise for the degree below it, and every degree resembles hell in relation to the degree above it. Applying now the same analogy exclusively to man, it can be said that when a child is born to its mother, every perfection which becomes attached to its body and its senses, which are the tools for the perfection of its soul, resembles its paradise, and every deficiency through which it has to pass in order to reach [perfection], is comparable to its hell. For example, the condition of the womb in which it was [conceived], was its hell; and the wide expanse of this world into which it has entered is like its paradise. The condition in which it could not open its eyes to sunlight was like its hell; its condition when it reaches that stage is like its paradise. The conditions in which it could not talk or walk was like its hell; its condition when it reaches that stage, resembles its paradise. The condition in which it could not read and write was like its hell; its condition when it reaches that stage is like its paradise. The condition in which it had not yet attained puberty – the innate intellect (*‘aql-i gharīzī*) having not yet become attached to it, and it did not know the manners and arts of entertainment, war, [modes of] command and decision-making – was like its hell; its condition when it reaches that [later] stage resembles its paradise. The condition in which it is estranged from knowledge of the subtleties of truth and falsehood, good and evil, veracity and lying – not having yet attained knowledge of the conditions of the physical and the spiritual worlds through knowledge of its own body and soul, and the understanding of [the saying of the Prophet] ‘He who

knows himself, knows his Lord,³⁶ – is its hell; and the condition when it reaches that [same] stage, is its paradise.³⁷

It is important to note that Ṭūsī does not deny the Quranic promise of paradise and hell in the afterlife, nor does he dispute the corresponding rewards and retributions to be anticipated there. However, it is the resurrected soul and not the physical body that has perished which is subjected to such delights or torments by way of its imaginative faculty:

The soul's activity and comprehension requires the participation of the faculty of imagination (*quwwat-i khayāl*), which acts as an intermediary between the corporeal and the spiritual faculties. When the soul leaves the body, an imaginal body (*hay'atī az khayāl*) remains with the soul. Just as in this world when a person dreams. He sees different circumstances through the mediation of the imagination and physical sight, so too in the Hereafter, the spirits see different things and situations through the mediation of the imaginal body and they become aware of their own condition and the condition of others as well. The state of the spirit of the righteous in the Hereafter can be compared with someone who has a delightful and pleasing dream, so that he abides in joy, delight and rapture. The state of the spirits of evil folk resembles that of a person who has an extremely unpleasant and distressing dream, causing him to abide in great fear and terror, becoming anxious and distressed. The only difference is that dreams last an hour or two, but the condition in the Hereafter is of eternal duration.³⁸

Ṭūsī is likewise unequivocal in conforming to the Quranic teaching that paradise and hell are altogether the effects of the degree to which one is alienated from, or in proximity to, the divine presence of God:

The realm of reward (*thawāb*) is called Paradise and the realm of punishment (*iqāb*) is called Hell. There is only one real Paradise, and that is eternal reward, everlasting perfection and infinite existence; the meaning of

36 This maxim, which has its antecedents in classical Greek philosophy, found its way into the Islamic milieu and was attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad in al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār* ii, 32; it is also often cited in Sufi sources.

37 Ṭūsī, *Paradise of submission*, ed. and trans. Badakhchani 60–2.

38 Ibid., 86.

all this is the attainment of [the presence of] God in all His aspects. There is also only one real Hell, and that is eternal punishment, everlasting disappointment and eternal non-existence; the meaning of all this is being outcast from God [’s presence] in every sense of the word.³⁹

The realm of similitudes – where both the followers of truth and falsehood, the veracious and the liars, the good and the wicked, resemble each other, and where the godless devil is occupied in arbitration and disputation – is absolute Hell (*dūzakh-i muṭlaq*). [On the other hand], the realm of distinction, where the followers of truth are distinguished from the followers of falsehood, the veracious from the liar and the good from the wicked, and where the godless devil cannot approach the presence of the Most High – is absolute Paradise (*bihisht-i muṭlaq*).⁴⁰

By way of conclusion, it may be recapitulated that in his Isma‘ili works, Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī embarks upon a detailed and comprehensive outline of an eschatological theory which can be defined as “spiritual” and “hermeneutical.” As already noted, in his *Maṭlūb al-mu‘minīn* and *Tawallā wa-tabarrā*, the matter is dealt with in brief. In *Rawḍa-yi taslīm* the exposition covers a much wider spectrum, but it is in *Āghāz wa-anjām* that we see the building blocks of his deliberations on the subject. Ṭūsī’s eschatology is, in its general formulations, consistent with the exegetical writings of Ibn Sīnā,⁴¹ but its singularity lies in the distinctive doctrinal framework and vocabulary of classical Isma‘ili thought, and in particular that of Alamut Isma‘ilism, in which his discourse is articulated. Notwithstanding this orientation, Ṭūsī’s deliberations were subsequently adopted by the Twelver Shi‘i philosophers of the Isfahan school as one of their texts, so much so that an Arabic translation of *Āghāz wa-anjām* was copied, with minor changes and without acknowledgement of the author, in the *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb* (Keys to the unseen) of Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shīrāzī, better known as Mullā Ṣadrā.⁴²

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39 Ibid., 57.

40 Ibid., 137.

41 Cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Mi‘rāj-nāma*.

42 Mullā Ṣadrā, *Maḥāṭib al-ghayb*, ed. Khwājāwī, 993–1073 and Rizvi, Review 106–7.

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Apocalyptic Rhetoric and the Construction of Authority in Medieval Isma‘ilism¹

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The apocalypse as a phenomenon of religious studies involves, in its most basic definition, a disclosure of ultimate destiny concerning the end of history.² This disclosure by its very nature operates to recalibrate the sacred around the tenets of this newly revealed religious message. In its redefinition of what is sacred – which one can think of as a recalibration of the axis of theodicy – the apex of sacredness often correlates to the extent of the belief in this new message. Those who obey all tenets of these new beliefs and religious proscriptions are rewarded, and those who do not face a far more challenging path. There is often no place for interstitiality in the apocalypse. We can think about Paul and other Jewish-Christian missionaries insisting that Gentiles could now fully join the Jesus movement – but only if they renounced their native deities and worshiped the one true God of Israel (a theology, in turn, grounded in the eschatological imagery of Jewish apocalyptic texts such as Isaiah).³ We can also think of the Quran’s insistence, particularly in the early Meccan Suras, that true religion (*dīn*) is belief in ultimate divine judgment (Suras 95 and 107 are excellent examples).⁴ There is also a sense of urgency associated with the apocalypse, intertwined with the notion that the time we are in now is unlike any other moment in history. We see the effects of apocalyptic disclosure all around us: from the rise of major religious traditions such as Christianity and Islam, to various sectarian movements within those traditions and outside of them, and to the emergence of new religious movements.

1 Special thanks are due to the organizers of the Paradise conference, as well as to Professors Elizabeth Alexandrin, Alnoor Dhanani, and Racha El-Omari for their kind assistance with various elements of this article.

2 This definition is adapted from O’Leary, *Arguing the apocalypse* 5–6.

3 Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews* 29–37.

4 Michael Sells, among others, has observed that in these early Meccan Suras in particular, *dīn* can also mean the day of reckoning. See, for instance, his *Approaching the Qur’ān* 35, 94–5, 124–5. For a recent exploration of the apocalyptic dualities of the Quran, see Todd Lawson, *Opposition and duality*. For a discussion of the apocalyptic élan of the early Islamic movement, see Fred Donner, *Muhammad and the believers*, especially 78–89.

This paper highlights some of the ways in which the eschatological or apocalyptic symbols of the Quran – paradise, hell, and the day of judgment, for instance – were deployed in two cases of transition for the medieval Ismaʿilis: the early Fatimid period and the Nizārī period. A brief examination of the *Kitāb al-Kashf* (Book of unveiling) and the *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* (Seven chapters of our master) illustrates an elision of some of the Quran's apocalyptic symbols with specific historical events or hierarchies of the *daʿwa*.⁵ While Ismaʿili *taʿwīl* (esoteric interpretation) was, in part, predicated on the notion that objects in this realm opaquely refract those of the next – thus allowing objects and events in Ismaʿili history to become equated with symbols of the Quran – an examination of the *taʿwīl* of specifically apocalyptic passages in these two cases may provide insights into ways in which authority itself was (re)constructed during these periods. Deployment of apocalyptic symbolism often helps to redefine the axis of the sacred, as it did for both the early Fatimids and Nizārīs. As authority becomes more routinized in both of these cases, this apocalyptic symbolism often becomes more “mystical” or noetic in nature. This redefinition of the sacred seems to reflect at least two important uses of apocalyptic: its ability to transform authoritative structures with relative ease, and its ability to maintain authority and dictate modes of praxis even after apocalyptic is decoupled from certain historical moments.

Before embarking on our discussion of the *Kashf* and the *Haft bāb*, we must first introduce the methods and technical terms associated with Ismaʿili exegesis. Daftary offers a concise summary:

By the 890s, in elaborating their distinctive religious system, the Ismailis emphasized a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (*zahir*) and the esoteric (*batin*) dimensions of the sacred scriptures and the religious commandments and prohibitions. Accordingly, they held that the revealed scriptures, including especially the Qurʾan, and the laws laid down in them had their apparent or literal meaning, the *zahir*, which had to be distinguished from the inner meaning or true spiritual reality (*haqiqa*) hidden in the *batin* . . . The hidden truths could be made apparent through *taʿwīl*, esoteric exegesis, the process of educing the *batin* from the *zahir* . . . The Ismaili *taʿwīl* was distinguished from *tanzil*, the actual revelation of scriptures through angelic intermediaries, and from

5 The term *daʿwa* means “mission or propaganda; in the religio-political sense, *daʿwa* is the invitation or call to adopt the cause of an individual or family claiming the right to the imāmate; it also refers to the entire hierarchy of ranks . . . within the particular religious organization developed for this purpose,” Daftary, *The Ismāʿilis* 559.

tafsir, explanation of the apparent or philological meaning of the sacred texts. In the era of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad had been charged with delivering the Islamic revelation, *tanzil*, while 'Ali was responsible for its *ta'wil*. 'Ali, designated as the *sahib al-ta'wil*, or 'master of *ta'wil*,' was thus the repository of the Prophet's undivulged knowledge and the original possessor of Islam's true interpretation after the Prophet, a function retained by the 'Alid imams after 'Ali himself.⁶

Isma'ili hermeneutic was predicated upon the distinction between the apparent (*zāhir*) and the hidden (*bāṭin*). The truth (*ḥaqīqa*) embedded within the *bāṭin* was, in the era of Islam, entrusted to 'Alī and his *imāms*. This entire hermeneutical system presupposes both 1) an interpreter close to the divine; and 2) a plurality of spiritual structures that lay behind what we can only see opaquely in this realm without proper divine guidance. *Ta'wil*, then, becomes an "anagogical hermeneutic,"⁷ an exercise not only of elucidating literal meaning but of simultaneous spiritual ascent, a movement of the soul toward the reality of the unseen. To submit to *ta'wil* was not only an acknowledgment of the presence of this symbolic realm, but was the most intimate expression of devotion one could have for the exegete. This act of submission (*islām*) reified the individual relationship between *murīd* ("committed one") and *murshid* ("guide"), while making the locus of communal authority the exegete and his appointed agents.

Our discussion begins with an exploration of Isma'ili apocalyptic in North Africa toward the end of the third/ninth century, when Isma'ili *dā'īs*, or "summoners," deployed rhetoric concerning the imminent arrival of the *mahdī* to help drive their revolution against the 'Abbasids. The details of this revolution are masterfully recreated in a number of excellent works by Professors Brett, Halm, and Walker, among others. This paper explores the apocalyptic rhetoric of an early Fatimid text, the *Kitāb al-Kashf*. The *Kashf*, written in six chapters, was probably edited and/or compiled by the Fatimid *dā'ī* and master of *ta'wil* Ja'far b. Manṣūr al-Yaman, who died around 346/957.⁸ This text is remarkable for a number of reasons. For our purposes, it brilliantly illustrates how apocalyptic symbolism in the Quran can easily be resignified – here to argue for the

6 Daftary, *Intellectual traditions* 89.

7 Corbin, *History of Islamic philosophy* 38.

8 See the discussion of this in Madelung, *Das Imamāt* 52–8, as cited in Morris, *Master and the disciple* 57, note 57. For a discussion of the relationship between secrecy and Isma'ili *ta'wil* in the *Kashf*, see Ebstein, *Secrecy*. For an extensive discussion of Ja'far's corpus and the nature of his *ta'wil* see Hollenberg, *Interpretation*.

coming of the *mahdī*⁹ and the legitimacy of the Fatimid hierarchy. I examine two modes of apocalyptic resignification that occur in this text: the first is the *taʿwīl* of certain Quranic descriptions of the end of time. The second is the *taʿwīl* of Quranic typologies, those that either uphold the divine message, or oppose it. These modes of *taʿwīl* frequently occur together, resulting in a narrative that, through symbolic elision, simultaneously harnesses and transposes the Quran's apocalyptic structure to the plane of Fatimid history.

One of the most vivid examples of this resignification occurs with our author's *taʿwīl* of Quran 2:8–9,¹⁰ “And of the people are some who say ‘We believe in God and the Last Day (*al-yawm al-ākhir*)’; but they are not believers. They think to deceive God and those who believe, but they deceive [only] themselves and perceive [it] not.” Our author writes,

He [God] means by this the Shiʿa who fall short in the knowledge of the truth, that they say “we believe in God and the last day” [but do not believe it]. And the last day is the *mahdī*, the master of the age, blessings be upon him (*al-yawm al-ākhir al-mahdī ṣāḥib al-zamān*).¹¹ God the Mighty and Exalted will make known the secrets of their beliefs (*qawlihim*), and He says “but they are not believers. They think to deceive God and those who believe.”

Our author then likens the Shiʿa who refuse belief in the *mahdī* to those who believe in the first two caliphs¹² and who follow them, and in turn likens those people to followers of Pharaoh. To be sure, our author then equates the unbelievers of the last day to all unbelievers throughout history, invoking Quran 2:12: “Unquestionably, it is they who are the corruptors, but they perceive [it] not.”¹³

9 The *Kashf* employs both *mahdī* and *qāʾim* to refer to the eschatological figure. The Ismaʿilis believed that history was organized into seven eras, each of which was inaugurated by a different “speaker,” or *nāṭiq*. The first six cycles were inaugurated by the speaker-prophets, Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad, each of whom brought a new religious law. Each of these prophets was succeeded by a series of divinely appointed individuals entrusted with interpreting the *bāṭin* of these laws. The seventh *nāṭiq* is the awaited *mahdī* or *qāʾim* who will not bring a new religious law but will reveal all previously hidden truths. See, for instance Madelung, *Religious trends* 94.

10 All Quranic references are from the Ṣaḥīḥ International translation, unless otherwise specified.

11 Ghālib (ed.), *Kashf* 26.

12 Ibid., following Ghālib's readings in notes 5 and 6.

13 Ibid.

Our author simultaneously accomplishes three tasks: first, he elides a symbol of the end time – here the *yawm al-ākhir* – with the historical *mahdī*. Second, he defines “they” in the phrase, “they think to deceive God,” as the Shi’a who profess belief in this *mahdī* but do not truly believe in him. Finally, he consigns those disbelieving Shi’a to the place of typological oblivion, and therefore equal not only to the Pharaoh but to all corruptors throughout history. Symbolic elision through the rhetorical structure of *ta’wīl* on these two levels – typology and eschatology – not only redefines the ultimate reality (*al-yawm al-ākhir*) as a person, but casts those people who do not believe in him as equivalent to the worst of corruptors.

A similar pattern of this eschatological resignification occurs in the sixth chapter of the *Kitāb al-Kashf*, here with reference to the apocalyptic verses of Sura 78. After reproducing 78:17, which reads, “Indeed the Day of Judgment [or sorting out] is an appointed time” (*inna yawm al-faṣl kāna mīqātan*), our author simply writes “the day of sorting out is the *mahdī*, may he be blessed” (*yawm al-faṣl huwa al-mahdī*). Our author continues, “by whom God sorts between truth and falsehood, believer and denier, and he is an appointed time of God’s command and its fulfillment, and [he is] the seventh of seven *nātiqs*.” Our author continues his *ta’wīl* of the Sura: “the Day the Horn is blown” (Q 78:18) is in actuality the day the *da’wa* is made public. “And the mountains are removed and will be [but] a mirage” (Q 78:20) our author equates to the *ḥujjas*,¹⁴ who will become subservient to the newly manifested *mahdī*.¹⁵

The day of judgment here is more than simply the *mahdī*, it is the “appointed time” of his appearance. Further, the elision of the Quran’s eschatological symbols with structures of power in the Isma’ili hierarchy – the *mahdī* as the appointed time; the *da’wa*; and the *ḥujjas* as the mountains which become like mirages – allows for the ultimate realities of all of history to unfold exclusively through this hierarchy. In other words, the Quran’s eschatological realities now fall under the exclusive purview not of the formerly transcendent divine alone, but of the emerging Fatimid hierarchy. Witness how the Quran’s eschatological narrative of ontological reversal becomes a script for the arrival of the *mahdī*.¹⁶

14 *Ḥujja* is literally the “proof” of the *imām*. While the *Kashf* employs multiple definitions for this term, here our author seems to refer to dignitaries in the Isma’ili hierarchy through whom the *imām* could become accessible in his absence. See the discussion in Daftary, *The Ismā’īlīs* 118.

15 Ghālib (ed.), *Kashf* 147–8.

16 Michael Brett argues, based on his reading of the terms *ḥujja* and *imām* as parallel with the historical proclamation of the *mahdī* as God’s *ḥujja*, that the *Kashf* “... looks like the textbook of the revolution that brought the dynasty to power.” Brett, *Rise* 124.

At the end of time the mountains – which seem like permanent fixtures of the natural realm – will be flattened, here like a mirage. Similarly, the *ḥujjas*, proofs of the *imām*'s existence in his physical absence, will become like a mirage and yield their authority to the newly manifested pivot of the universe, the *mahdī*. This ontological reversal also involves the disclosure of all hidden truths. The blowing of the horn signals the public emergence of the normally secret *da'wa* and its ranks. The opening of the heavens is resignified as the disclosure of the hidden knowledge of the *imāms*, which seems to encompass both the ranks of the *da'wa* and the details of its membership. At the end of time it will be apparent that the *imām* secretly knew and taught each of these members of the *da'wa* structure through his *abwāb*, members of the *da'wa* whose rank was just below that of the *imām*.¹⁷ Upon the *mahdī*'s arrival, all divine truths will be unveiled for everyone to witness – in this narrative, the divine truths are the judgment of the *imām*, his knowledge, and the ranks and membership details of the *da'wa*.¹⁸

Reflecting Professor Landolt's findings that "*walāyah*"¹⁹ as a socioreligious concept seems indeed exclusive: one turns either to the right or to the wrong side, and the two sides are always engaged in battle . . ." ²⁰ the *Kashf* also employs typologies of belief to argue that those who disbelieve in the *walāya* of 'Alī, his progeny, and the *mahdī* are the divine's antagonists. In his *ta'wīl* of Quran 47:1, which states "Those who disbelieve and avert [people] from the way of God – He will waste their deeds," our author writes:

[T]he clear path (*al-sabīl al-wāḍiḥa*) he is the commander of the faithful, blessings be upon him, and he is the right path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaḳīm*). And whoever disbelieves in his *walāya*, and encounters God in that [disbelief], God will nullify his work, misguide his effort, make him dust scattered, and will make him fall prostrate in the fire. [God] will repay him on the day of judgment.²¹

17 Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* 216–7.

18 I am currently in the process of tracing the evolution of apocalyptic symbolism in Ja'far's corpus.

19 Literally "friendship, assistance" and "authority, power," Landolt, *Walāyah* 316. In Shi'ism, *walāya* is "devotion to 'Alī and 'the imams from the house of the Prophet,' that is, descendants of 'Alī who are considered imams," Landolt, *Walāyah* 319.

20 Ibid., 317.

21 Ghālib (ed.), *Kashf* 37.

Resignification of the path of God as the commander of the faithful – explicitly identified as 'Alī at other points in the text – is supported here by an eschatological narrative that explicitly rewards the “types” of individuals who believe in the *walāya* of 'Alī. At other places in the text, based in part on the reading of Q 25:31 reproduced in the *Kashf*: “And likewise We made for each Prophet an enemy from among the criminals,” the narrative of sacred history itself is constructed around these typologies. In the case of this text, sacred history is simply a progression of the battles between groups of people who support the *imāms* throughout history, and those who do not. It is the day of judgment – the advent of the *qā'im* – that ultimately will reward those who uphold proper Islam through their support for the *imāms*.²²

In his *ta'wīl* of the verse Q 20:108, in which the divine discusses judgment at the last day, our author writes:

“On that day will they follow the Caller (straight): no crookedness (can they show) him” (Q 20:108).²³ The caller (*dā'ī*) in this passage is the *qā'im* with his sword. There is no doubt concerning his arrival, and there is no repelling his call (*da'wa*). “[A]ll sounds shall humble themselves in the Presence of (God) Most Gracious: nothing shalt thou hear but the tramp of their feet (as they march)” (Q 20:108).²⁴ ... [T]he tramp of their feet is the movement of footsteps until the commander of the faithful finishes disputing with his enemies in the eschatological return after which there is no return. This is the meaning of the saying, “Then is one who has deserved the decree of punishment [to be guided]? Then, can you save one who is in the Fire?” (Q 39:19). He means by that whoever has lost [his] dispute on that day merits the *walāya* of the wrongdoers. The sword of the *qā'im*, blessings be upon him, will take him, and [the *qā'im*] will not save him from the fire “then fear the Fire, whose fuel is men and stones, prepared for the disbelievers” (Q 2:24).²⁵

22 This dualistic vision of Shi'i history – the perpetual battle between the *imāms* and their followers as epitomes of “the good” engaged in a struggle against everyone else – has been noted by M. Ali Amir-Moezzi, among others. See, for instance, his *Seul l'homme* 194. James Morris observes that many of the themes in this early Isma'ili work are shared with early Twelver literature; he writes that the *Kashf* “is a sort of compilation and adaptation of pre-existing Shi'i themes and interpretations, often shared by common Twelver Imami Traditions,” Morris, *Master and the disciple* 58, note 61.

23 Ali (trans.), *The glorious Kur'an*.

24 Ibid.

25 Ghālib (ed.), *Kashf* 80–1.

Here the Quranic Caller – the divine – is resignified as the *qā'im* with his sword. His “call,” his advent, is inevitable; it cannot be forestalled. The shuffling of footsteps associated with divine judgment is resignified as the movement of footsteps of those who will be judged by the *qā'im* in the final eschatological return. There is no return after this – this return is the final eschatological scenario indicated by the Quran. At this final moment of history, *walāya* itself becomes the ultimate barometer of the *qā'im*'s final judgment; those who possess conviction regarding *walāya* for anyone other than him will be shown their error before being subjected to “the fire.” Here eternal punishment is in no uncertain terms the judgment of the *qā'im*, which is equivalent to hell for those who disbelieve in him.²⁶

At this point we might ask the question regarding how our author resignifies paradise. Part of the *ta'wīl* of these famous verses – “O reassured soul, Return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him], And enter among My [righteous] servants and enter My Paradise” (Q 89:27–30) – yields an answer. In one interpretation of this verse, our author writes that the reassured soul is the soul of the believer. Righteous servants are, in fact,

the *imāms* and the *nātiqs*, blessings be upon them. He who does not enter into obedience to them is not a believer, but he who takes up their obedience and recognizes them in their eras has merited divine contentment and pleasure. Here paradise is the *hujja*, upon him be peace, because every *imām* can only be reached through his *hujja*, and the *hujjas* are the gates to the *imāms*.²⁷

Our author goes on to say that in some explanations, the Lord in this verse refers to the commander of the faithful; “he is the lord of the bond of faith (*uqdat al-īmān*) and its master, upon him be peace.”²⁸

Righteous servants who inhabit paradise become the *imāms* and law-giving prophets throughout history; paradise itself becomes the *hujja*, that exclusive means of accessing the *imām* when the latter is physically absent from his believers, as he was during the writing of the *Kashf*.

26 Another vision of the eschatological battle described in the *Kashf* has been discussed by Shin Nomoto in his masterful dissertation on Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934). There he writes that the *qā'im* will “... conquer Makkah and Madinah with the support of the Archangel Gabriel (Jabrā'il) at the end of time, and with his advent God's religion will be perfected,” Nomoto, *Early Ismā'īlī thought* 120, Cf. Ghālib (ed.), *Kashf* 48–50.

27 Ghālib (ed.), *Kashf* 72.

28 Ibid.

Though our exploration of the *Kitāb al-Kashf* has been all too brief, we can make some preliminary remarks about the relationship between apocalyptic resignification and authority. Elision of apocalyptic symbols such as paradise or the day of resurrection with elements or persons associated with the Fatimid cause – the *ḥujja*, the *da'wa* or the *mahdī* – serves to shift exclusive divine control of processes normally associated with ultimate reality to the hands of certain historical figures inhabiting the plane of temporal history. Resignification of the Quran's apocalyptic symbols is supported by resignified dualities and typologies throughout the text. These two modes of resignification go hand in hand. Those who do not uphold the *walāya* of 'Alī and the *imāms*, for instance, are cast as corruptors throughout history, as are those who disbelieve in the *mahdī* and his arrival. This resignified eschatological narrative, in turn, may have served as an important tool for the construction and maintenance of communal boundaries around the imminent expectation of the *mahdī/qā'im* figure, which will come to liberate the Shī'a in the final eschatological return. It was this eschatological expectation that was instrumental in helping the Fatimids achieve their victory in North Africa.

At this point, I move our discussion of apocalyptic and authority forward by more than 250 years, from the Fatimid court of North Africa to the mountain fortress of Alamut in Persia.

On 17 Ramaḍān 559/8 August 1164, at noon, Ḥasan 'alā *dhikrihi l-salām* ("upon whose mention be peace") – the leader of the Nizārī Isma'īli community and representative of the hidden *imām* – proclaimed to his adherents that the end of the world had arrived. The announcement was truly spectacular: Ḥasan gathered representatives from the major Isma'īli strongholds throughout Persia, and at his seat in the mountain fortress of Alamut, told the community that the hidden *imām* had a special message for his elect community. Daftary reconstructs this event as follows:

The *imām* of our time, Ḥasan declared, has sent you his blessings and compassion; he has called you his special chosen servants, he has relieved you of the duties and burdens of the Shari'a, and has brought you to the *qiyāma*, the Resurrection. Ḥasan then delivered a *khuṭba* in Arabic, claiming that his address represented the exact words of the *imām*.²⁹

A central message of this *khuṭba* was a reformulation of Ḥasan's position over the community. Ḥasan was now to be considered far more than a *dā'ī* of the *imām*; he was now to be obeyed in all matters, and his words were to be

29 Daftary, *The Ismā'īlīs* 387.

considered as the *imām*'s.³⁰ The declaration of the *qiyāma* and its subsequent theological explication in the *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* – a document written more than forty years after the event by a member of the Isma'ili *da'wa*³¹ – is a remarkable illustration of the elegance with which deployment of apocalyptic symbolism may shift the locus of authority of a community and restructure its trajectory in the process.³² In inaugurating the *qiyāma*, Ḥasan effectively terminated sacred history, triggering, according to Isma'ili notions of the events of the end time, the disclosure of all hidden truths.

The invocation of apocalyptic – more specifically, the invocation of this symbolic elision characteristic of apocalyptic doctrines – allowed Ḥasan to claim and then maintain absolute authority over the community, and thereby shift the locus of authority from the hidden *imām* to himself. Apocalyptic architecture actualized this authoritative shift in at least two registers.

First, at the declaration of the *qiyāma*, the *khuṭba* that Ḥasan read from the hidden *imām* disclosed that Ḥasan's words were to be considered as authoritative as those of the *imām* himself. Ḥasan effectively elided the *imām*'s position with his own; it was now Ḥasan who possessed ultimate authority over the community. Ḥasan's invocation of apocalyptic symbolism inaugurated the *telos* of history in which all hidden truths are manifest. The elision of the authority of the hidden *imām* with that of Ḥasan becomes subsumed in the *qiyāma* as a normative characteristic of the end time. This "divine disclosure" is commensurate with the *qiyāma*'s characteristics of revelation, ontological reversal, and

30 Ibid.

31 I am indebted to Professor Jalal Badakhchani of the Institute of Ismaili Studies for providing me with the Persian edition of the text and his preliminary translation of it. He has also identified the author as Ḥasan Ṣalāḥ Munshī. All citations in this text are from his unpublished translation. I provide corresponding page numbers to Hodgson's translation of the *Haft bāb*, as cited in his *Order*.

32 The observation that the *qiyāma* resulted in some kind of "renewal" is not new; Hodgson writes that the doctrine of the resurrection formed "a positive charter for spiritual renewal . . . Theological doctrines are especially important in a community like that of the Nizārī Ismā'īlīs, which depended so much on a continual revitalizing of their distinctive group orientation," Hodgson, *Ismā'īlī state* 457. The observation that apocalyptic or "millenarian" doctrines can renew or even help generate a new society has been put forth by a number of scholars studying the phenomenon from a wide variety of fields. For a recent overview in the Islamic case, see Garcíá-Arenal, *Messianism and puritanical reform*. On the rhetoric of apocalyptic movements and social transformation outside the Islamic tradition see O'Leary, *Arguing the apocalypse*, esp. 6. Work on Melanesian religions is particularly interesting, especially Trompf, *Payback*. A comparative approach is taken up by Lanternari's *Religions of the oppressed*.

permanent reification of all hidden truths. In the *qiyāma*, there is no need for *ta'wīl* – and for true believers there is no apparent difference between the *bāṭin* and the *ẓāhir*, the hidden and the apparent, the signified and the signifier.³³ As Jambet writes, “*haqīqat*, ou réalité-essentielle, se rend visible dans la personne physique du Seigneur de la Résurrection.”³⁴ Here, invocation of apocalyptic symbolism effected and made permanent the elision of signifier (Ḥasan, the *ẓāhir*) with the signified (the hidden *imām*, the *bāṭin*).³⁵ *Qiyāma* symbolism allowed the entire symbolic potency of the office of imamate to become overlayed, fused, and materialized onto the person of Ḥasan. This fusion created a new and permanent *haqīqa* that was disclosed to everyone in Alamut, in a grand ceremony in which the absolute leadership of the community was shifted to Ḥasan and his progeny.

The second register at which apocalyptic architecture solidified this authoritative shift can be found in the *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā*. The *Haft bāb* tells us that in each of the seven cycles of Isma'ili history, a religious figure called the *qā'im* of the *qiyāma* – the resurrector of the resurrection – is secretly the true repository of divine wisdom. This figure, hidden throughout all of history until the *qiyāma*, even bestows this wisdom upon the prophets themselves.³⁶ Each prophet and his people also attest to the return of this person at the end time, though this figure is known by different names in various cycles of history. The *Haft bāb* identifies this figure as 'Alī and then as all *imāms*; the unique space of the resurrection allows the unfettered manifestation of the true identity of the *qā'im* of the *qiyāma*. This eternal figure is the locus of divinity appearing in different guises throughout history. Indeed, all of time leads up to this moment in which he appears openly and in his totality in the form of Ḥasan 'alā *dhikrihi l-salām* (“upon whose mention be peace”), he is the totality of the imamate, the Lord of Alamut, the master of the resurrection.

In addition to symbolically eliding the *qā'im*'s symbolic functions with the person of Ḥasan, the *Haft bāb* also engages in a detailed discussion regarding what constitutes paradise and hell in this new realm. In interpreting Quran 29:64, “Indeed the world of the Hereafter is life, if only they knew,” the

33 Buckley, The Nizārī Ismā'īlites' abolishment 50–1. See also Jambet, *La grande résurrection d'Alamūt* 85.

34 Jambet, *La grande résurrection d'Alamūt* 85.

35 The idea that the Fatimid *ta'wīl* was predicated upon a system in which the signifier points to that which is signified (and unchanging) is taken from Tahera Qutbuddin's *Fatimid da'wa poetry* 105–10, in which she discusses the *mathal* (symbol or likeness) being a symbol for the immutable and normally hidden *mamthūl* (what is signified).

36 Madelung, Ismā'iliyya.

Haft bāb states that in this realm, incorporeal concepts such as the divine tablet, the Holy Spirit, the Soul and the Intellect “are all human beings.”³⁷ Our text states:

Heaven and Hell are also to be considered as human beings. Lord ‘alā *dhikrihi l-salām* says: “Whoever wishes to see the person of [God’s] bounty and the person of eternal Paradise must look at the man who calls the people to God and divinity and refrains them from [attractions] of the world. Whoever wants to see the person of punishment and the person of the eternal Hell, he should look at a person who prevents people from God and divinity and encourage[s] them towards worldly things . . .”³⁸ In another place he [says] “we summon people to God and divinity, so that they may obtain His recognition and worship.”³⁹

This symbolic elision of the identity of the *qā’im* of the *qiyāma* with the historical person of Ḥasan, along with the materialization of heaven and hell as human beings, is of paramount importance here. Heaven itself is not just any man. It is “the person who calls the people to God,” later in the text identified as “we [who] summon people to God and divinity.” This is the *qā’im* of the *qiyāma* and his progeny. Improper identification and obedience to anyone else will preclude the follower from reaching the divine, since, after all, this *qā’im* of the *qiyāma* is the true locus of divinity throughout all of history.⁴⁰

We conclude this paper with the following thoughts concerning the connections between the two systems of apocalypticism discussed here. First, in both cases, symbolic elision, characteristic of apocalyptic doctrines, is a significant means by which shifts in authoritative structures are accommodated with relative ease. Here we see how the symbolic elision of eschatological concepts

37 Badakhchani (trans.), *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* 24; Hodgson, *Order* 315.

38 Badakhchani (trans.), *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* 23–4; Hodgson, *Order* 314.

39 Badakhchani (trans.), *Haft bāb-i Bābā Sayyidnā* 28; Hodgson, *Order* 318.

40 One major effect of this apocalyptically mediated divine disclosure is, as Corbin mentions, the inauguration of a more spiritualized form of Islam – one which is more directed toward personal spiritual ascent – and bears striking resemblances to certain Sufi themes and structures. See the discussion in Corbin, *Trilogie ismaélienne* 257–76. Hodgson, too, makes a similar observation, writing that the *qiyāma* came to be symbolically interpreted as “The end of earthly life . . . the moment when the inward meaning of reality became evident and what mattered henceforth would be a purely spiritual life of inward states of the soul,” Hodgson, *Ismā’īlī state* 459. Here my argument explicitly links the nature of these apocalyptic disclosures to authoritative shifts. This carries forward Hodgson’s observations that correlate the authority of Ḥasan (and the Nizārīs) to the doctrine of the *qiyāma* (e.g. Hodgson, *Order* 148ff., 289–93; Hodgson, *Ismā’īlī state* 461).

with historical persons or events, coupled with the typological (re)structuring of history, work together to shift authoritative structures and create a new trajectory for a community based upon a redefined axis of the sacred. Second, we note Corbin's statement that Shi'ism is dominated by an eschatological ethos⁴¹ and Jambet's claim that Ḥasan's *qiyāma* revived the mahdist spirit of early Shi'ism, particularly in its Qarmatian iteration.⁴² Both statements raise very important questions for the study of Shi'i apocalyptic, particularly with respect to the contours of these claims and their relationships to "sectarian" division. What was the nature of these apocalyptic claims, and how did they potentially serve as a locus for division among the early Shi'i? What were some of the mechanisms by which mahdist manifestations were subsequently attenuated and routinized? And when did these same movements manifest mahdism again?

While these questions may take lifetimes to answer, we may posit that in our case, the *qiyāma* effectively broke the shackles of the *sharī'a*,⁴³ allowing it to be discarded and reformulated around the pivot of Ḥasan's authority. If this is true, then we can end on a truly apocalyptic note, for the end of time in the *qiyāma* yields a return to a similar mode of *ta'wīl* practiced in the *Kashf*. Obedience to the correct holders of authority throughout history is of paramount importance in both systems; it is only the person of the *imām* who changes.

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Just a Step away from Paradise: *Barzakh* in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq Teachings

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To an independent scholar

*And beyond them is a barzakh,
until the day they are raised*

Q 23:100¹



Literally, *barzakh* means a (hidden) isthmus or barrier between two things, and etymologically it seems to be derived from the Persian *pardah* (“a veil”). In Islamic eschatology, the term is traditionally understood as the intermediate state or world (between this world and paradise) in which every human soul has to live after its death until the arrival of the day of resurrection.² Since medieval times and later on, the term has additionally been provided with such definitions as *‘ālam al-ṣuwar* (“the world of images”), or *‘ālam al-amthāl* (“the world of similitudes/likenesses”), and explained as *hawarqaliyā/hūrqaliyā*, which is said to be of unclear origin descending either from the Hebrew *habal qarna’yīm* (“vapor flashing”), or it may be an Arabic corruption of the Biblical Hebrew *ha-raqī‘a*, which is “the firmament standing between heaven and earth.” At any rate, to clarify the state of the human soul in that world, some Persian authors interpreted the expression as *qālīb-i mithālī* (“a similar form”), or *badan-i hūrqaliyāyī* (“a vapor flashing body”), or they took a definition from theosophy, that is, the astral body.³

1 The translation is based on the *English translation of the holy Quran* with Commentary by Maulana Muhammad Ali, however, slightly altered by the author of the present study. Some popular translations give “behind them” or “before them” instead of “beyond them.”

2 For different views and interpretations see Bashier, *Ibn al-‘Arabī’s barzakh*.

3 Mu‘īn, *Farhang* iv, 5221; vi, 2310; Dihkhudā, *Lughatnāma*; both authors refer to the first scholar who introduced this term into usage, namely, Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī

The problem under discussion in the present paper concerns the future destiny of this body as it is pictured in the teachings of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq (or “Followers of the True/Real”): whether or not it is possible for a soul or, strictly speaking, for a human spirit, to return from the world of *barzakh* to the material one. The Quranic citation given above seems to state that no one who has passed into the *barzakh* state is allowed to return to his previous state but has to wait there until the day of resurrection.

Before speaking about the *barzakh* world in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq teachings, it seems necessary to briefly identify the Ahl-i Ḥaqq and to say a few words about their teachings in general. In the middle of the twentieth century, V.F. Minorsky (1877–1966)⁴ attempted to examine the Ahl-i Ḥaqq teachings by editing and studying their texts; following him W.A. Ivanow (1886–1970) wrote:

As we are still very far from knowing the AH [i.e., Ahl-i Ḥaqq] tradition in its entirety, it is impossible to offer any suggestion about the sequence of religious strata, whether or not it was really Christianity-Sunnism-Ismailism, in its darwishized form, and ultimately the ‘reformed’ beliefs of the AH. A point which is beyond doubt, however, is that the general basis of the AH religion, despite various heterogeneous relics of antiquity and Christianity found in it, is Islamic, more precisely – Shi‘ite.⁵

With many suppositions and much conjecture, the origins of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq beliefs remain unclear; this is largely because of the lack of primary sources (written mostly in Kurdish and partly in Persian and Turkish) available to scholars. Recently, the situation has changed substantially;⁶ however, our knowledge of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition is still meager.

1 A Short Prehistory

The Ahl-i Ḥaqq trace their history to the thirteenth century, to their founder Sultan Ishāq, who is considered to have been a direct descendant of the Shi‘i *imām* Mūsā al-Kāẓim, a manifestation of the Divine Essence (*mazhariyyat*),

(ca. 549–87/1155–91) in his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. For possible etymologies see Lambden, On the possible.

4 Minorsky, Notes.

5 Ivanow (ed. and trans.), *The truth-worshippers* 70.

6 This is, above all, due to publications and research made by the late master of an Ahl-i Ḥaqq branch, and, in fact, the founder of an independent esoteric school, Nūr ‘Alī Ilāhī/Ostād Elāhī (1895–1974).

and a “renewer” of the former tradition. Initially and nominally, the Ahl-i Ḥaqq community represented an ultra-Shi‘ite sect which adapted certain Shi‘i and Sufi ideas. However, as happens in many religions, after Sultan Iṣḥāq’s physical death,⁷ the Ahl-i Ḥaqq community separated into several families and branches that differed in ideology and ritual practice. Until the twentieth century, adherents of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq were mostly ethnic Kurds mainly living in northwestern Iran, where they made up the majority of the population of several towns and villages. In the twentieth century, W.A. Ivanow pointed out the tendency of an Ahl-i Ḥaqq branch led by Ḥājj Ni‘mat Allāh Jayḥūnābādī Mukrī (1871–1919), the author of the *Furqān al-akhbār* and a few other books, to go beyond the limits of the current Ahl-i Ḥaqq tradition contemporary to the author’s lifetime: “It appears to be a reformist or sectarian composition, promoting a new set of ideas. When I inquired about the book in 1948 of certain sectarians who were supposed to be well-informed, they knew nothing about it.”⁸

Today, this “new set of ideas” has undoubtedly become a separate teaching, at least in the form described by a son of Ḥājj Ni‘mat Allāh, the late Nūr ‘Alī Ilāhī/Elāhī, whose scholarly systematization, innovations, and renewal resulted in the appearance of a new religious, philosophical, and esoteric school – the “school of the way toward spiritual perfection.” He said: “I have extracted the essence of what is needed for Religion and is called Religion from all the religions. And whatever instructions, prescriptions, political aspect and the like that are not essential for Religion have been excluded by me.”⁹ With this view on religion, the school established its own religious doctrine, terminology, and ritual practice as well.¹⁰

2 Religious Doctrine

Since the new insight into religion adopted in the school does not touch upon its eschatological doctrine, it is logical to consider its several key dogmas which

7 In his speeches, Nūr ‘Alī Ilāhī says that Ḥājjī Bektāsh (d. 669/1270), the founder of the Bektāshiyya Sufi brotherhood, is “the same Sultan [Iṣḥāq].” Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 510 (Speech 1403), or more clearly “a spiritual teacher can be present in two places at the same time, for example, as Sultan Iṣḥāq in Iran, while in Turkey under the name of Ḥājjī Bektāsh.” Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* ii, 40 (Sp. 116). For a more or less official biography of Sultan Iṣḥāq see Ilāhī, *Burhān al-ḥaqq* 41–3.

8 Ivanow (ed. and trans.), *The truth-worshippers* 28.

9 Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 639–40 (Sp. 1667).

10 General information with a bibliography can be found in Mir-Hosseini, *Breaking the seal* 175–94.

deal with the *barzakh* as those originally related to the Ahl-i Ḥaqq teachings and/or representing an eschatology common to monotheistic religions.

With regard to human beings, there are two types of creation: the special and perfect ones, created directly by God without intermediation of cause and effect; they were created in order to fulfill a certain purpose (some of the prophets, saints, and *imāms* belong to this category). These return to their Creator at an appointed time. The second type is the natural one; these are subject to the law of cause and effect.

Every natural being (including the human) obeys the law of cause and effect and has to move toward its perfection starting from its own particular point: minerals to plants, plants to animals, animals to a human being, and the human being to an angel, in order to finally come as close to God as possible. This is the transitional movement traversing the ascending arc¹¹ and the return to the Creator through the process of perfection. At each stage of this evolution, the being is supplied with a soul, which corresponds to its stage, and then a soul of the next stage is added to it: the mineral soul, the plant soul, the animal soul, and the human-animal (*bashar*) soul. The transitional movement before the human-animal stage takes place in groups, i.e., a group of minerals transforms into a group of plants, then the latter transforms into a group of animals and finally into an individual human being. For example, one million sacrificed sheep can be transformed into one human being.¹²

Thus, at the stage of the human being its soul is composed, in fact, by the four souls mentioned above. Following the Quranic definition (Q 12:53), this human soul is named *naḥs-i ammāra* (“domineering self,” or “commanding soul”), which aims to serve the human body. On this level, almost every human individual (there are some exceptions) is granted an angelic soul, or strictly speaking, the truly human spirit. Historically, the idea of such an evolution was elaborated by Neoplatonists long before the rise of Islam. However, in traditional Islamic cosmology, the idea seems to have its own origin in the Quran (see below). Closer to the lifetime of Sultan Ishāq, the famous Sufi master and poet Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273) describes the same process of perfection and return to God in his *Mathnawī*, the “Persian Quran,” as this poem was named by another Sufi poet, the Naqshbandiyya *shaykh* ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492):

11 I omit here the philosophical and theological conception of the companion arc descending down to creation. For more details see Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 262 (Sp. 794, 795); Elahi, *Knowing the spirit* 67.

12 Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 320 (Sp. 941).

I died to the inorganic state and became endowed with growth,
 and [then] I died to [vegetable] growth and attained to the animal.
 I died from animality and became Adam [man]:
 why, then, should I fear? When have I become less by dying?
 At the next remove I shall die to man,
 that I may soar and lift up my head amongst the angels;
 And I must escape even from [the state of] the angel:
everything is perishing except His Face [Q 28:88].
 Once more, I shall be sacrificed and die to the angel:
 I shall become that which enters not into the imagination.
 Then I shall become non-existence: non-existence saith to me,
 [in tones loud] as an organ: “*Verily, unto Him shall we return*” [Q 2:156].¹³

According to the Ahl-i Ḥaqq principal idea, what has been described by Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī is the human spirit, which has to move toward its perfection through the cycle of successive lives in different human bodies. This cycle consists of 1,000 lives at the maximum but, in certain cases, can also be less than 1,000, or in very rare cases even one. Reaching the last, the one thousand and first life means achieving the divine perfection, amalgamation with God and the appearance of a perfect human being (*insān-i kāmīl*). This idea is based on specific interpretations of some Quranic verses, as well as on direct indications in the *Kalām-i saranjām* (The final words) – the collection of sayings by the great masters of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq including those ascribed to Sultan Ishāq. We are curious to examine the Quranic basis for these conclusions.

3 Exegetical and Traditional Reasons

One can say without exaggeration that the entire history of Islam represents the continuous interpretation of the Quran and *ḥadīths* using different ways and methods; this is especially true of matters related to Islamic eschatology. The Ahl-i Ḥaqq teachings are no exception. Every human spirit has its limited period of journeying in this world. Its limits are determined in the Quran: “He directs the divine Affair from Heaven down to Earth; then it ascends to Him in a Day whose extent is a thousand years of what you all account” (Q 5:32).

“A thousand years” are understood as 1,000 successive bodily lives that are given to everybody to complete the path to his spiritual perfection and reach

13 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, trans. Nicholson iv, 218–9. See also: Chittick, *The Sufi path* 72–82.

the Divine Essence.¹⁴ The maximum period for the spirit's journey is equal to fifty thousand years as determined also in the Quran: "To Him ascend the angels and the Spirit in a day the measure of which is fifty thousand years" (Q 70:4).

Hence, the average lifespan for a spirit in each human body is taken to be fifty years per lifetime, or more precisely, each two bodily lives are equal to 100 years (the proportion may vary: 80:20; 60:40; 50:50 etc.). The spirit should visit the *barzakh* world after each bodily life. Of course, if somebody completely fulfills everything that was prescribed and ordered by God, he can achieve spiritual perfection even within one human lifespan. If he fails to attain spiritual perfection in 1,000 lives, then he is sent to the "lowest of the low" (Q 95:5) which is a relative definition – relative to his previous status as it differs from that of others (e.g., to reduce a general to the ranks).¹⁵

Following the Ahl-i Ḥaqq understanding of another verse in the Quran, there is an additional indication about the cycle of successive lives: "... And some of you die, and some of you are kept back unto the vilest state of life (*ardhal al-ʿumur*), that after knowing somewhat, they may know nothing..." (Q 22:5).

Here the word combination *ardhal al-ʿumur* which sometimes is translated as "the vilest state of life," or "the worst part of life," or "extreme old age," or "the feeblest old age," is interpreted as the period of childhood and one's inability to speak, like the state of a free bird put in a cage.¹⁶

A key Arabic root, one which plays an important role in relation to the cycle of successive lives, is *b-d-l* and its derivatives that cover the general semantic field "substitution." The root covers two kinds of substitution. The first is ordinary and deals with the so-called "change of skins," or clothes, during this cycle: "Surely those who disbelieve in Our signs, We shall certainly roast them at a Fire. As often as their skins are wholly burned/ready, We shall substitute other skins for them, that they may taste the chastisement" (Q 4:56).

Although formal interpretation of this *āya* implies that this kind of punishment would take place in hell, the "replacement of skins" is understood as the substitution of a human body after its physical death, which is made for a human spirit living inside this body to start its next life, after staying in the *barzakh* world for a certain amount of time.

14 On Islamic concepts of reincarnation also see Mohammad Khalil's contribution in this publication.

15 Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 290–1 (Sp. 850), 646 (Sp. 1679).

16 Ibid., i, 383 (Sp. 1098).

The second kind of substitution happens rather rarely and depends on the highest Power. It occurs when a human spirit living in a separate body in this material world is replaced with another, advanced spirit. The latter is sent to enter the same body while the former goes to live in a new physical environment. For example, this second exceptional or extraordinary act was made by one of God's servants (al-Khiḍr) who was accompanied by Mūsā (Moses), namely the formal killing of a child. The purpose was for God to replace the child's spirit (but not the child himself as this is explained by more traditional interpretation) with a better one (Q 18:80–1).¹⁷

Spiritual substitution has been discussed in Islamic theology since the rise of Islam onwards, particularly, with regard to the belief in the existence of the "substitution saints" (*abdāl*). For example, in the *Kashf al-mahjūb* (Revelation of that which is veiled), the Sufi *shaykh* al-Hujwīrī (d. 465–9/1072–7) describes the hierarchy of 355 saints, 40 of which are named *abdāl*; the famous Sufi 'Alā' al-Dawla al-Simnānī (d. 736/1336), in his *al-'Urwa li-ahl al-khalwa wa-l-jalwa* (Relation of the people of seclusion and openness), depicts this category of saints in detail and cites a *ḥadīth* transmitted by Ibn Mas'ūd (d. 32/653) in which the Prophet explains substitution in the hierarchy of 356 *abdāl* with their pole (*qutb*). Using the *Kashf* by al-Hujwīrī and the *'Urwa* by al-Simnānī, the Naqshbandiyya *shaykh* Ya'qūb Charkhī (d. 851/1447) wrote a special compilation – the *Risāla-yi abdālīyya* dedicated to them. Their existence was also noted by Rūmī: "Who is the Abdāl? He that becomes substituted, his wine is turned into vinegar by Divine substitution."¹⁸

In Nūr 'Alī Ilāhī's school tradition, there are several reports about cases of spiritual substitution. One of them concerns the spiritual substitution of Nūr 'Alī Ilāhī himself when he was 11 years old; this report describes both this phenomenon and his impressions of it.¹⁹ Another key idea in the Ahl-i Ḥaqq teachings deals with the Divine Essence that has successive manifestations (or *maẓhariyyāt*) in the human form, a form capable of reflecting It, whether the special beings or the natural ones which achieved their perfect state. Within the limits of Islamic theology, this idea is common to and originates from the Shī'a and later Sufi beliefs.²⁰

17 Ibid., i, 626 (Sp. 1638).

18 In the order of references: al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf* 214; al-Simnānī, *al-'Urwa* 530; Charkhī, *Abdālīyya* 1–36; Rūmī, *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī* 466. Nicholson's translation is slightly different: "Who is the *Abdāl*? He that becomes transmuted, he whose wine is turned into vinegar by Divine transmutation." Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, trans. Nicholson iv, 224.

19 Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 581–5 (Sp. 1563).

20 Cf., for example, al-Ḥallāj's "*Anā l-ḥaqq*."

4 The *barzakh* Descriptions

For all people the hereafter starts immediately upon their death. What will happen then to the ordinary human spirit? According to the Quran (23:100), almost every human spirit goes into *barzakh*, and the *barzakh* state will last for the spirit until the day of resurrection. The question is: When does the day of resurrection come, and the *barzakh* state end? Traditionally, all people are considered by Islamic eschatology to be resurrected together on the same day. Hence, once one has died, every one in the *barzakh* state has to wait for this day and for all the other people to die.

According to the school eschatology, the human spirit must enter the *barzakh* after each period of life and subsequent death in this world, immediately or within a certain interval. The latter happens in the case of suicide, sudden death, or madness, which cause the human spirit to leave its body in a stupefied, shocked, and stunned state. Then, the human spirit has to come back to this world again and appear in a new physical body, with the exception of those human spirits which either have achieved perfection or completed the cycle of 1,000 successive lives without it. Three cases are not considered in the 50,000 years, i.e., the maximum timeframe for the spirit's journey mentioned above, namely: when a person is punished for his bad deeds and actions so that he or she is to be sent into this world in the form of an animal; when a person practices a false religion, i.e., a religion whose founder was not sent by God (incidentally, Buddha and Zoroaster are true messengers of God); when the length of a baby's life does not exceed forty days, a so-called forty-day baby. Their bodily lives are not taken into calculation.²¹ The main features of the *barzakh* world are described by the late Nūr 'Alī Ilāhī as outlined below.

4.1 Location

The *barzakh* world is the intermediate world between this world and the eternal abode. Each planet, including our planet, has its own *barzakh*, hell, and paradise located in the specific atmosphere of the planet. The *barzakh* inhabitants have no idea about other planets. Inhabitants of hell and paradise from the same planet can see each other; however, without the permission from the Highest, they do not know anything about the destiny of their fellows from other planets.²²

As for hell and paradise, they are traditionally considered to be the places where human spirits are punished or rewarded for their bad or good deeds.

21 Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 17 (Sp. 6), 106–7 (Sp. 300), 299 (Sp. 879).

22 Ibid., i, 288 (Sp. 842).

In the school teachings, these places are located between the lowest and uppermost points the human spirit can reach. After being recompensed, the human spirit is sent back to the world in order to continue its cycle of successive lives, so its stay there is temporary. Alternatively, the human spirit has no need to visit paradise or hell, but goes directly to the world of perfection.²³

4.2 *Space*

In terms of space, the *barzakh* world has no limits. It is said that if all people from the first to the last are gathered at the same time in the *barzakh* world, it will suffer no loss in its width and capacity. Moreover, without any damage to itself, it can memorize and preserve all human recollections and apprehensible things even beyond one's imagination.

4.3 *Time*

The *barzakh* world has no true time. But every *barzakh* spirit has its own time scale, which depends on destiny and the previous deeds of the spirit, so that one solar year on the Earth can be equal, for example, to one second in the *barzakh* world or vice versa. However, such an individual time scale does not imply any illusion, imaginary vision, or fantasy as in dreams. It would be the true time and the absolute reality for each *barzakh* spirit, and this time never goes backwards.²⁴

4.4 *Environment*

The *barzakh* has an environment which is similar to that of this world. That is why it is defined as the world of similitudes/likenesses (*‘ālam al-mithāl*). Nevertheless, this material world differs from the *barzakh* world in the way the female womb for an embryo differs from the open, free environment for the newborn infant. The *barzakh* consists of the immaterial spiritual reproductions or sensations (*nasha’āt*) that it takes in from this world and embodies there. If the *barzakh* spirits want to be known by us or introduce themselves to other spirits, some of them can assume the similitude of any of their former physical bodies, while others can use the last one they had before the last death.

²³ Ibid., i, 290 (Sp. 850).

²⁴ Ilāhī, *Ma’rifat al-rūh* 103–5; Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 288–9 (Sp. 843); Elahi, *Knowing the spirit* 90–1.

5 Purpose of the *barzakh*'s Creation

The *barzakh* world was created by God with the sole purpose of compensation for the losses and errors committed by man in the past which caused him to stop on the way to perfection. Generally, there are two means of this compensation.

The first one implies the availability of all necessary conditions, which are prepared in the *barzakh* (with reproductions of the milieu and surroundings taken from this world) in order to punish or to strengthen the spirit without any contact with the world's inhabitants. In this case, it is hard or even impossible for some spirits to be aware of their actual location. If they fail in their *barzakh* ordeal, they return to the material world. In the opposite case, a *barzakh* spirit may complete its journey to perfection and never return to a physical body again.²⁵

The second way of compensation in the *barzakh* implies that a *barzakh* spirit (or even a group of the *barzakh* spirits) is temporally or constantly joined with a man (or animal) who lives in this world. The latter does not even suspect that he is being used by the *barzakh* spirit. The spirit of a sinner is connected with one who experiences pain and suffering in this world. Such a spirit is under the influence of the same feelings and emotions as its material partner, but they are much more intensive; thus, the spirit is punished. The spirit of a good-natured and kind man is connected with a righteous man on Earth, in order to use the latter's deeds for its own benefit and strengthening.²⁶

6 Duration of Stay in the *barzakh* World

Nobody knows how long a human spirit must stay in the *barzakh*. The duration of the stay is different for each spirit and depends on the calculation of the Highest. A spirit can be sent back to this world immediately upon appearing in the *barzakh*, or be held there for a long time, in order to experience punishment and torments, or he can complete the way to perfection there. In the latter case, it is considered to be a kind of leniency.²⁷

25 Ilāhī, *Ma'rifat al-rūh* 101–2; Elahi, *Knowing the spirit* 89–90.

26 Ilāhī, *Ma'rifat al-rūh* 109–10; Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 237 (Sp. 732); ii, 6 (Sp. 3); Elahi, *Knowing the spirit* 92–3.

27 Ilāhī, *Āthār al-ḥaqq* i, 327 (Sp. 958), 289 (Sp. 846).

7 Conclusion

The descriptions given in this study plainly show that the *barzakh* is not a waiting lounge where the human spirits or souls sit or stand until the day of resurrection occurs, but it is a place where they continue their lives full of feelings, suffering, and experiences which seem to be much more intense than those in their physical bodies in the material world. The day of resurrection comes *individually* to everyone whose spirit has either run out of 1,000 successive lives or has otherwise completed its way to perfection. The latter case appears to be what both Christian²⁸ and Islamic/Sufi traditions consider as the second/new birth (*wilādat al-thāniya*) upon which the human spirit is no longer subject to the law of cause and effect:

Mohammed, then, was a hundred (spiritual) resurrections here and now, for he was dissolved (naughted) in dying to (temporal) loosing and binding.

Ahmad (Mohammed) is the twice-born in this world:
he was manifestly a hundred resurrections.²⁹

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28 Jesus answered him, "Most certainly, I tell you, unless one is born anew (or: again/from above/twice), he can not see the Kingdom of God." See Gospel of John 3:3.

29 Rūmī, *Mathnawī*, trans. Nicholson vi, 299 (b. 750–1 and further).

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“Paradise is at the Feet of Mothers”: The Ḥurūfī Road¹

Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

1 Introduction

The Ḥurūfī doctrine was founded in the second half of the eighth/fourteenth century by Faḍlallāh Astarābādī (d. 796/1394).² Like some other messianic leaders in the history of Islam, Faḍlallāh attempted a reconsideration of the foundational principles of Islam on the basis of the spiritual inspiration which he claimed to have received, in his case near the age of forty. This inspiration was focused on the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the separate letters of the Arabic alphabet, and more particularly on the mysterious letters placed at the beginning of some Quranic Suras (*al-ḥurūf al-muqattaʿa*). In several currents of Islam, and probably more particularly in Ismaʿilism, the science of the letters of the alphabet (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) is described as the elite knowledge reserved for the prophets and the “saints” (*al-awliyāʾ*), a knowledge disclosing divine secrets and powers.³

This inspiration enabled Faḍlallāh to develop a metaphysical doctrine of language and scripture which determined his specific approach to the great themes of the Islamic religious worldview, such as cosmogony, anthropology,

1 This article was written during my stay as Alexander von Humboldt post-doctoral fellow at the Institut für Islamwissenschaft of the Freie Universität in Berlin. I wish to express my gratitude to Humboldt Foundation and to the Institut für Islamwissenschaft, and in particular to my scientific host, Professor Sabine Schmidtke, for the excellent conditions of my residency and research.

2 For a general presentation of Ḥurūfī history and doctrines see, Ritter, *Die Anfänge*; Bashir, *Fazlallah*.

3 For general information on the Islamic “science of letters” and its ramifications see Ebstein, *Mysticism and philosophy*; Fahd, Ḥurūf; Gril, Introduction; Lory, *La science des lettres*; Melvin-Koushki, *Quest*. More specifically, on early Ismaʿīlī doctrines see Guyard, *Fragments*; Halm, *Kosmologie*; Vajda, *Les lettres et les sons*; and for sources: Jaʿfar b. Maṣṣūr al-Yaman, *Kitāb al-Kashf*, in particular 46–51; Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-Zīna*, in particular chapter 1, 72–93; al-Sijistānī, *Kitāb al-Iftikhār*.

and prophetology. The question of the hereafter, of hell and paradise, is naturally part of this enterprise of reinterpretation.

The main source for Faḍlallāh's doctrinal views is his *Jāwidān-nāma-yi kabīr* (The great book of eternity), which is considered a sacred book by Ḥurūfī adepts. This voluminous work (in manuscripts containing 500 folios on average) is still unpublished. Our account of the Ḥurūfī doctrinal positions is based on the manuscript in the British Library, Oc.Or. 5957 (eighteenth or nineteenth century). The references for quotations in this chapter are given according to this exemplar.⁴

The *Jāwidān-nāma* is apparently an encrypted text. Among other obstacles which hinder access to its contents, the most important is the fragmented composition of the work. It is indeed bereft of any thematic organization. The passages related to any given topic are divided and scattered throughout the text. The only method for reconstructing a coherent presentation is to bring together relevant passages and try to organize them in a meaningful way. This is essentially what is attempted comprehensively in my book.⁵ The present chapter is an application of this method to the reconstruction of Faḍlallāh's views on paradise.

An anonymous note annexed to our manuscript of the *Jāwidān-nāma* contains a kind of a detailed plan for the thematic organization of the text. It suggests distributing the fragments into six great thematic chapters.⁶ The topic of paradise is included in the fourth chapter of this plan, which reads:

The fourth chapter (*ibtidā'*, "beginning") is that of the [eschatological] return, of the reward at the last gathering . . . [This chapter contains] the explanation of the world of the theophanic imagination (*'ālam-i mithāl*), of dreams . . . of the resurrection, of the straight path (*ṣirāṭ*), of the final accounting (*ḥisāb*), of the book, of the people of the right and the people of the left (*aṣḥāb-i yamīn wa-aṣḥāb-i shimāl*), of the weighing of actions (*mīzān-i a'māl*) of the offspring of Adam, of paradise and hell, happiness

4 On the *Jāwidān-nāma-yi kabīr*, its manuscripts, its structure, and its contents see Mir-Kasimov, *Jāwidān-nāma*. This work, which is the *opus magnum* of Faḍlallāh, is sometimes referred to as the *Jāwidān-nāma-yi shish ibtidā'*, in order to distinguish it from another work attributed to Faḍlallāh and mentioned in some sources under the title of *Jāwidān-nāma-yi ṣaghīr*.

5 Mir-Kasimov, *Words of power*.

6 I did not find this note in any of the three other manuscripts of the *Jāwidān-nāma* that I was able to consult: Istanbul Millet Kütüphanesi, Ali Emiri Farsi 920; Cambridge Library, Ee.1.27; and Basel Universitätsbibliothek, M.VI.72.

and sorrow... of the encounter with God (*liqāʾ*)... of the inhabitants of paradise... of the heavens of light, emerald and ruby, of the pleasant things [such as] pearls, gardens, fruits, earth of musk and saffron, clothes of green brocade... of the multi-colored clay, of basil (*rayḥān*)... of the [sweet] melodies (*alḥān*), of milk, honey, wine and flowing waters, of the divine and royal form (*ṣūrat-i khudāʾi wa-pādhshāhī*), of the dwellers of hell and their unbearable sufferings, of chains, description of suffering, of wrath (*qahr*), artifice (*makr*) and deception (*shayd*), of Satan who did not bow down [to Adam] and who prevents the descendants of Adam from doing so. All [passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma*] related to these topics belong to this chapter (lit. “to this house” (*khāna*)) (fols. 482b–483a).

The mention of the “divine and royal form” in relation to paradise alludes to the Ḥurūfī doctrine of the epistemological significance of the human bodily form as the perfect locus of manifestation (*mazhar*) of the divine attributes and therefore the sum of the salvific knowledge leading to paradise.

Indeed, according to Ḥurūfī cosmogonical views, the universe is created by means of 28/32 primordial “words” (*kalima*, pl. *kalimāt*), ontological elements of the divine Word,⁷ which is the first emanation of the divine essence.⁸ These “words” are the basic elements of the divine names, they are the primary eternal attributes of God. As the first manifestation of the otherwise unknowable divine essence, the Word with its 28/32 “words” reveals the divine truths contained in the essence. It represents therefore the knowable aspect of God, and

7 The terminology of the *Jāwidān-nāma* can be confusing, and one of the most confusing terms is *kalima*, which can refer, depending on the context, to several interrelated concepts. Therefore, I use “Word” (with capital W and without quotation marks) for *kalima* in the sense of the all-comprehensive divine Word, the Word of the divine Command, personified in the *Jāwidān-nāma* as Jesus, with reference to the Quran and to the Gospel of John. I use “word” or “words” (with lowercase w, between quotation marks), for all other possible meanings, which are further specified in the text.

8 It is impossible to examine here in depth aspects of Ḥurūfī doctrine concerning the relationship between the series of 28 and 32. In some developments the former is included in the latter ($32 = 28 + 4$), in others the two series are considered complementary ($28 + 32 = 60$). The statement that 28 and 32 are the original characteristics of the divine essence is founded in the *Jāwidān-nāma* on the numerological elaborations which aim at proving that these numbers govern the structure of the universe as well as the constitution of the human body and human languages. The latter refer more specifically to the 28 letters of the Arabic and 32 letters of the Persian alphabets. However, it would be reductive to limit the relationship between 28 and 32 to this last aspect. Therefore, I use 28/32 in this chapter as a kind of acronym designating the total number of primordial “words.”

each of the 28/32 “words” takes part in this revelation and manifests a fragment of this supreme knowledge. Two important steps can be distinguished in the genesis of the universe.

The first step is that of the purely “phonetic” manifestation of the primordial “words” resulting from the differentiation of the original Word. At this stage, the “words” represent the transcendental, formless, and simple phonemes, the first elements of meaning (*ma'nā*, pl. *ma'ānī*) or truth (*ḥaqīqa*, pl. *ḥaqā'iq*) coming from the unfathomable divine essence. Combinations of these phonemes bring into existence the names, which constitute the metaphysical meaning, the *raison d'être*, the essential reality, the archetypes of any possible or actual being or object to come, be it mental, imaginary or material.

The 28 divine “words” are single (*mufrad*) and abstract (*mujarrad*)... without length, width, depth or color. [They are] eternal and limitless; they are founded on the essence of the Oneness like the sunlight is founded on the sun. [They are] unified within the essence of the eternal King, undivided and invisible. No imaginative or mental power can reach them or penetrate behind the veils [hiding] their essence. They manifest themselves in all created objects, but their essence cannot be separated from the created objects by any effort of mind or imagination. If they were separated from the objects... the objects would not remain in existence... It is therefore clear that they are the eternal attributes of the eternal King, inseparable from the essence of [divine] Oneness. They can be heard in the [divine] names. All names of objects of the two worlds are composed of 28 “words” of the [divine] name, which are His Word and His eternal attributes. By the means of attribution of names [to the created objects], these 28 “words” of the divine name reach all things and manifest themselves in these objects, at the level of essence as well as on the level of attributes. This is true of the [objects seen] in dreams as well as of [the objects] of the physical world, imagination or worlds of intellects (*'uqūl*) and souls (*nufūs*) (fols. 312b–313a).

The second step is the appearance of the visible form. The first forms, the 28/32 letters (*ḥarf*, pl. *ḥurūf*), appear, following a law of correspondence or “balance” (*istiwā'*), as the counterparts of the 28/32 primordial phonemes.⁹ These

9 The correspondence between the invisible truths and visible forms is essential to the Ḥurūfī doctrine. A detailed discussion of this complex theory would divert us from our purpose here. Let us just mention that the central concepts related to this subject are, in addition to balance, measure (*andāza*), and the fundamental identity of the name and the named (*ism wa-musammā'*).

letters are the simple elements of form (*ṣūra*), loci of manifestation (*maẓhar*, pl. *maẓāhir*) of the primordial phonemes and their ontological meanings. As the combinations of phonemes bring into existence the names, the respective letters come together to constitute the visible forms (either subtle or physical), the loci of manifestation of these names and their innermost meanings.

Among all the forms produced in the course of creation, there is only one particular form that expresses not a partial combination, but the total set of 28/32 phonemes. In other words, this particular form is the locus of manifestation of the entire Word; it summarizes the totality of the emanations of the divine essence, and to this extent, it is the visible aspect of God. This unique form is the form of the human body, created “in the form of God (and in the form of the Merciful).”¹⁰

There is thus an essential link between the visible form of any object and the ontological meanings that have brought it into existence. In this sense, every visible form is potentially a sign, a “science” (*‘ilm*) by which invisible metaphysical truths can be known. But only the human form can lead to the most complete knowledge of the divine truth available to a created being. According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, this knowledge was available to Adam in paradise, because God taught Adam “all the names” (Q 2:31),¹¹ revealing thus to Adam the metaphysical meaning of his (Adam’s) own bodily form.

According to the Ḥurūfīs, the way to paradise entails rediscovering the link between the visible form and its transcendental meaning. The starting point for this process is the realization of the fact that the form of any existing object is a combination of a certain number of 28/32 basic elements, the ontological

10 For the references and variants of these two well-known *ḥadīths* see, for example, Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 123–36; Kister, *Ādam* 137–9. The *Jāwidān-nāma* identifies “Merciful” with Eve, using an etymological argument (*raḥmān*, “Merciful,” comes from the same Arabic root as *raḥim*, “uterus, womb”). For more details, see Mir-Kasimov, *Les dérivés*; and now also *Words of power*. This kind of statement is probably the basis for the accusations of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) directed against the Ḥurūfīs. However, even if at first glance many expressions found in Ḥurūfī works give the impression of straightforward anthropomorphism (for example, the phrase “the form of Adam is the form of God” is repeated throughout the text of the *Jāwidān-nāma*), in fact the relationship between Adam and God is determined by the Ḥurūfī definition of form as locus of manifestation. The *Jāwidān-nāma* admits that the divine essence is unknowable in itself and cannot be seen or imagined. But the emanation of this essence, the Word, reveals an aspect of the essence, it is the *Deus Revelatus*. Adam is the locus of manifestation of this revealed aspect of God, of the divine Word. This definition is very close to the early Shī‘ī concept of the cosmic *imām* (cf. for example Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide*, 114–118).

11 The translations from the Quran in this article are based on Yusuf Ali (trans.), *The holy Qur’ān*, slightly modified when necessary.

“letters.” The next step is the initiation into the meaning of the link between these letters and the corresponding ontological phonemes of the original Word, which are elements of metaphysical meaning or truth.¹² Anyone who has the knowledge of the basic elements of this “alphabet” of the Creation is enabled to decipher, to “read” any existing form, including the form of the human body, the most perfect among all forms. This gives the seeker access to the supreme knowledge contained in the human form, and brings him to the gate of paradise.

The question of how to recognize the basic elements contained in the form of the human body and face occupies therefore a central place in the Ḥurūfī soteriology. It is interesting that male and female bodily form and facial features play in this context distinct and well determined roles.¹³ As we will see below, the female form, that of the mother, occupies a central place on the Ḥurūfī road to paradise because of its particular relationship to the basic elements of form. In this context, the well-known prophetic utterance, “The paradise lies at the feet of mothers” receives a specific significance.¹⁴

I first attempt to identify the most characteristic features of the Ḥurūfī description of paradise and of its location on the basis of the relevant textual evidence, and then discuss the specific paths that lead there according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*.

2 “Paradise at the Feet of Mothers”: Definition and Location of the Ḥurūfī Paradise

It seems that in Ḥurūfī texts paradise is primarily the place where the divine Word and its 28/32 metaphysical elements can be perceived clearly and immediately in the forms of objects and beings. This conception of paradise is an adaptation to the Ḥurūfī context of the theory of the “world of theophanic imagination” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*, *‘ālam al-khayāl*), an intermediary world between the physical world and the world of pure metaphysical truths. The theory of the world of imagination was well-developed in Islamic mystical

12 This was, as we mentioned at the beginning, the content of the revelation that Faḍlallāh claimed to receive.

13 Cf. Mir-Kasimov, *Les dérivés*.

14 This *ḥadīth* is quoted in the *Jāwidān-nāma* in the form “*al-janna taḥta aqdām al-ummahāt*.” The references can be found in Furūzānfar, *Aḥādīth* 157. Ibn Māja, *Sunan* no. 2781, quotes a similar *ḥadīth* but with different wording: “Stay at her [your mother’s] foot. For there is paradise (*ilzam rijlahā fa-thamma al-janna*).”

philosophy by the time of Faḍlallāh.¹⁵ Several passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* make an explicit connection between paradise and the world of imagination.¹⁶

The vision of paradise in the *Jāwidān-nāma* seems not to be restricted to the hereafter: it is available already in this world. However, in the physical world perception of the absolute, metaphysical meanings of things is veiled by the relative, conventional meanings conveyed by the physical senses and crystalized in the conventions of human languages. This statement is perfectly in line with the theories on the relationship between the “true” (*ḥaqīqī*) and “metaphorical” (*majāzī*) dimensions of the theophanic manifestations developed in Islamic mysticism and more particularly in the Iranian mysticism of love, the technical vocabulary of which is easily recognizable in the related passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma*.¹⁷

The *Jāwidān-nāma* further suggests that conventional meanings reside in compound lexical units. They are associated with words, and cannot be expressed by single phonemes and letters that compose these words. As to metaphysical meanings, they can be conveyed by simple phonemes and letters as well as by compound words.¹⁸ Therefore, the conventional meanings can

- 15 The first Muslim author whose works contain an extensive and systematic theory of the world of the theophanical imagination is probably Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), though Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) certainly discussed it. Cf. Corbin, *Histoire* 285–305; Corbin, *En Islam iranien* ii, and al-Suhrawardī, *Kitāb Hikmat al-ishrāq*. It became an important topic in Muslim philosophical theology and mysticism in particular following the spread of the influential writings of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240). See Corbin, *L’imagination*. For the specific conception of the world of imagination in the Iranian mysticism of love, cf. Pūrjavādī, ‘Ālam-i khayāl.
- 16 As for example this passage (fol. 203b): “When they attain the secret knowledge concerning their creation, and after they go over the straight path they will arrive at paradise “whose width is that [of the whole] of the heavens and of the earth, prepared for the righteous” (Q 3:133), and they will find the “good word [which] is like a good tree” (Q 14:24), that is to say, the world of theophanic images (*‘ālam-i mithāl*), [that] of incorporeal souls (*nufūs-i mujarrada*) and of figures of eternal delight (*ashkāl-i azalī wa-abadī-yi farah-bakhsh*).”
- 17 Theoretical foundations of the Iranian mysticism of love were developed in the works of such authors as Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muḥammad al-Daylamī (fourth/tenth century), *Kitāb Atf al-alif al-mā’lūf ‘alā l-lām al-ma’ūf*; Aḥmad al-Ghazālī (d. 520/1126), *Kitāb Sawānīh*; and Rūzbihān al-Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 606/1209), in particular *Kitāb ‘Abhar al-‘āshiqīn*. The technical vocabulary of this branch of Islamic mysticism was further developed in the works of Persian mystic poets. For an analysis of the historical evolution of this vocabulary see, Pūrjavādī, *Bāde-yi ‘ishq*.
- 18 This statement is in line with the general positions of the Islamic mysticism of letters and of the exegetical techniques developed on their basis, especially in the Shī‘ī milieu (cf. note 3).

be removed by breaking or splitting (*shikastan, kasara, shaqqa*) the words and the images of empirical “reality.” This action of breaking, which destroys the conventional compound forms and sets free the simple elements immediately related to the metaphysical meanings, is symbolized in the *Jāwidān-nāma* by the Biblical episode of the broken Tablets of Moses. According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*’s interpretation, the fragmentation of the Tablets of Moses is the first step of the ontological hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*) which brings the word of the revelation from a human language back to its original meaning within the divine Word.¹⁹ However, the accomplishment of this *ta’wīl* presupposes the knowledge of the correspondence between the elements of form (“letters,” in the sense specified above) “revealed” by breaking and the elements of the metaphysical meaning. We have already mentioned that, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, this knowledge was given to Adam when God “taught Adam all names” (Q 2:31). It was then transmitted in the line of prophets and “saints” (*awliyā*), and revealed in its most complete form to Faḍlallāh, the event that availed him the title of master of ontological hermeneutics (*ṣāhib-i ta’wīl*).²⁰

The knowledge of correspondences between the elements of form and elements of metaphysical meaning is essentially *the* key to the Ḥurūfī paradise: it gives whoever possesses it the power to perceive any material form in its

19 For a more detailed discussion of the Ḥurūfī interpretation of the broken Tablets cf. Mir-Kasimov, Some specific features.

20 For a more detailed account of the events related to Faḍlallāh’s enlightenment see Ritter, Die Anfänge, and Bashir, *Fazlallah*. The Ḥurūfī texts suggest that the knowledge of the true meaning of the letters of the alphabet was unfolded gradually in the line of prophets. *Hidāyat-nāma*, a Ḥurūfī work attributed to one of Faḍlallāh’s followers, Sayyid Ishāq Astarābādī, observes that the Torah contains 22 letters (with reference to the Hebrew alphabet), the Gospels contain 24 (Greek), the Quran contains 28 (Arabic), but only Persian (the language of Faḍlallāh’s works) contains the complete set of 32 letters, and it is therefore the language of the final revelation (cf. Astarābādī, *Hidāyat-nāma* 2). For similar ideas on the unfolding of the knowledge of the letters of the supreme name of God in the Shi’i *ḥadīth* literature see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide* 230–2. The title *ṣāhib al-ta’wīl* is also strongly evocative of the Shi’ite concept of *imām*, as the threshold (*bāb*) of the divine knowledge, the “speaking Quran” (*al-Qur’ān al-nāṭiq*) and the only person endowed with the power of ontological hermeneutics (*ta’wīl*). The exegesis of all sacred books is more specifically the task of the last *imām*, the *qā’im*, expected as savior at the end of time. For the exclusive authority of the *imām* in Quranic exegesis according to the early Shi’ite sources see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide*, index “ta’wīl”; Amir-Moezzi and Jambet, *Qu’est-ce que le shī’isme?* 139–79, and Bar-Asher, *Scripture and exegesis*, in particular 93–101. For the specific role of the *qā’im* see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide*, 289–91; Sachedina, *Islamic messianism* 61. For the Ismā’ili approach, see Daftary, *The Ismā’ilis*, index “ta’wīl”; and Poonawala, *Ismā’ili ta’wīl* 199–222. See also Poonawala, *Ta’wīl*; Walker, *Bāṭiniyya*; Halm, *Bāteniya*.

innermost reality, that is, as the locus of manifestation of the divine Word. Some evidence found in the *Jāwidān-nāma* suggests that this type of perception can be achieved spontaneously in dreams.²¹ The highest degree of such an experience is attained in prophetic revelation, in particular that represented by the heavenly ascension of Muḥammad.²² The prophetic experience is indeed essentially an experience of the direct, immediate connection to the source of the divine Word, which is the source of all sacred books. Since, according to the Ḥurūfī definition, the place where this Word becomes visible is paradise, *the Quranic descriptions of paradise are only a natural expression of Muḥammad's encounter with the divine Word.*

At this point it is useful to quote some excerpts from the *Jāwidān-nāma* that provide textual evidence for my synopsis of the Ḥurūfī definition of paradise. The commentary on the Quranic verses 13:23–4 and 39:73–4 in fol. 284b reads: “Paradise means the one divine Word, which is the basis of the significations of the 31 remaining ‘words.’” The passage in f. 224b also identifies paradise with the one Word of God: “[O Adam!], dwell thou and thy wife in the garden’ (Q 2:35), that is, in the one Word (*ay dar kalima-yi wāḥida*).” *Paradise is essentially the perception of the divine Word in visible objects.* It is an eternal station because the Word is eternal:

When a human being enters paradise, which is the eternal world, he takes part in the divine eternal existence (*baqā-yi khudā*) because he reaches the eternal Word, and he perceives himself as a divine Word. The divine Word is potentially present in all existent objects, in apparent [manifestations] as well as in the mental [representations] (*che dar khārij wa-che dar dhihn*) (fol. 371b).

The following excerpt states that all images seen by the Prophet Muḥammad during his heavenly journey are essentially manifestations of the divine Word:

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- 21 The relationship between dreams and prophetic revelation is widely admitted in Islam: according to a well-known *ḥadīth*, dream is a part of prophecy. See, for example, Lamoreaux, *Dream interpretation*; Lory, *Le rêve*; Lory, *La vision de Dieu*; Brunner, *Le charisme*; Fahd and Daiber, *Ru'yā*; Kinberg, *Ibn Abī al-Dunyā*; Kinberg, *Legitimation*. See also Dorothee Pielow's contribution to the present publication. More specifically, on the role of dreams in the Ḥurūfī context, see Mir-Kasimov, *Le "Journal des rêves"*.
- 22 The *Jāwidān-nāma* thus adheres to the opinion that the heavenly ascension happened in a dream. For the debate in Muslim theology on the question of whether Muḥammad accomplished his heavenly ascension in sleep or awake, see Schrieke and Horovitz, *Mir'ādj*; and also the discussion and references in Gilliot, *Coran*.

One [part?] of the heavenly ascension [of Muḥammad] was accomplished through a dream. He saw the oft-frequented house (*bayt al-ma'mūr*), the gates [of paradise], angels, the Lote-tree of the boundary, the bodies and the spirits of the sons of Adam in heaven because their innermost reality (*ḥaqīqa*), the reality of the heavens, of the tree, of [all] objects and bodies is the same. The external and the internal heavens (*āsmān-i ṣāḥir wa-bāṭin*) are the loci of manifestation of the Word (fol. 67a).

The relationship between paradise, the heavenly journey of Muḥammad, and the power of dream interpretation is highlighted in the following passages. The prophet Joseph is the central figure representing the power of dream interpretation as a feature of ontological hermeneutics (*ta'wīl*) in the *Jāwidān-nāma*:

[The Grace mentioned in Q 57:21]: “A Garden [of bliss], the width whereof is as the width of heaven and earth, prepared for those who fear God... that is the *Grace* of God, which He bestows on whom he pleases...” is [the power] of dream interpretation (fol. 123b).

It is because [the events of the heavenly ascension of Muḥammad] are related to the world of dreams [that Joseph said, Q 12:101]: “[O my Lord! Thou hast]... taught me something of the interpretation of dreams and events,” and “true vision [dream] is the forty-sixth part of prophecy” (fol. 122b).

Joseph possessed this power because the knowledge of “the names” taught by God to Adam had been revealed to him. The *Jāwidān-nāma* establishes a similarity between the stars, the sun, and the moon bowing down to Joseph (Q 12:4) and the angels bowing down to Adam following divine instruction (Q 2:34):

[Joseph says] “I did see eleven stars and the sun and the moon: [I saw them prostrate themselves to me!]” (Q 12:4). The sun and the moon prostrated themselves to Joseph because God manifested the true form of Adam in Joseph. He [Joseph] became thus the Word of God, and [consequently] he knew the exegesis (*ta'wīl*) of the divine Word (fols. 123b–124a).

On the one hand, the *Jāwidān-nāma* describes paradise as the place where the one divine Word can be seen in the variety of images, and on the other hand it states, as we mentioned in the introduction, that the most perfect locus of manifestation of the divine Word is the human body. This parallelism suggests the identity between paradise and Adam. Indeed, some passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* express this idea quite plainly as, for instance, in the following excerpt:

“He taught Adam all names” (Q 2:31), which means that he [Adam] was the first to receive the knowledge of the divine essence. At the end, [this knowledge] will return to him [to Adam]... “By the star when it goes down... for indeed he saw him at a second descent” (Q 53:1, 13) which means, he saw God “near the Lote-tree of the boundary” (Q 53:14) which alludes to the form of Adam... “Near it is the garden of abode” (Q 53:15). The “Lote-tree of the boundary” is Adam because he is the boundary of the created (*muntahā-yi makhlūqāt*), and the garden of abode is near Adam.²³ Adam is thus someone who is close to God and to the garden of abode. From one point of view, it is Adam who is in paradise, because [it is said]: “[O Adam!] dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden” (Q 2:35). However, from another point of view, it is paradise which is in Adam, because of the divine Unity (*tawḥīd*) (fol. 106b).

Paradise is thus essentially the proper place of Adam and of all human beings who attain the knowledge of the human bodily form as the locus of manifestation of the divine Word. Several passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* express this idea explicitly: “The earth of paradise is the station (*maqām*) proper to Adam, its dust is from musk and from saffron” (fol. 243a); “[Paradise] is the station proper to Adam, from where he fell and came to earth” (fol. 338a).

In his cosmic dimension, as the “Lote-tree of the boundary,” Adam is also identified with the eighth heaven where the *Jāwidān-nāma* seems to locate paradise.²⁴ This identity comes from a structural similarity: Heaven is divided into 360 degrees, or six times 28 and six times 32. Heaven is therefore the place of manifestation of the complete set of the 28 and 32 original “words,” the only all-inclusive form of which is Adam. The eighth heaven is that of the constellations which encompass the seven planetary heavens. Just as Adam was the

23 Several arguments are advanced in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to explain why Adam is the boundary or pinnacle of creation. They include the following: (a) the first emanation of the divine reality comes to the Lote-tree of the boundary, which is identical to Adam, and it is from this point that it is further conveyed to the lower levels of the universe (fols. 131b–132a); (b) no form can contain more than the maximum number of 32 primordial letters contained in the form of Adam, and therefore Adam is the most perfect form, the last limit between the world of forms and the world of pure divine reality (fols. 208b–209a); (c) Muḥammad saw God near the Lote-tree which represents Adam (and in fact, he saw God *in the form of* Adam), because the knowledge of the divine essence had been given to Adam first and was then transmitted from Adam to the angels. The form of Adam is therefore the form of God; it represents the limit of the knowable manifestation of the divine reality (fols. 415a–b).

24 For the different points of view in Islamic theology on the location of paradise, its levels, and its relation to the Eden of Adam, see Gardet, *Djanna*.

first to receive from God the “knowledge of the names” which he taught afterwards to the angels, the eighth heaven receives the first emanation of the divine essence, which is further distributed to the lower levels of creation. These emanations include the metaphysical meanings, which manifest themselves as the images of paradise, and which were shown to prophets and in particular to Muḥammad in his heavenly ascension. The most beautiful of these images is the vision of God Himself in human form, the form that is the most comprehensive expression of divine attributes. All these images are potentially contained in the objects of the physical world, because the external form of any object is the locus of manifestation of some divine “words.” Therefore, anyone who discovers the secret of the divine Word can contemplate the images of paradise in ordinary objects and beings, especially in the human form which is the most perfect of them all, and thus attain the eternal condition of paradise:

When he [Muḥammad] penetrated the secret of the real [nature] of the stars, heavens, and things created in six days by the divine imperative “Be!” – and all these things are the attributes of the [divine] command and of God [Himself] – and when he [thus] penetrated the secret of the divine Word, the emanation of paradise (*ḥayḍ-i behisht*) [including the images such as] *ḥūrīs* and eternal youths and other [inhabitants of paradise] . . . poured continuously into his spirit. Such was the form in which he contemplated the divine words and God [Himself, as he (Muḥammad) said]: “I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form”²⁵ . . . Because the essence of the heavens, of the Earth and of [all] bodies contains potentially (*bi-l-quwwa*) the *ḥūrīs*, the springs [of paradise], the rubies, the towers of emerald and the [clothes of] green brocade. If you understand the potentiality of this essence with its attributes, the eternity of eternities will be given to you in actuality (*bi-l-fiʿl*) (fol. 120a).²⁶

One of the natural consequences of the Ḥurūfī definition of paradise as the locus of manifestation of the divine Word is the statement that every object

25 For references to this *ḥadīth*, cf. Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 143–54.

26 Cf. also the similar passages fols. 123a–b and especially fols. 115a–116b, which focus on the idea of the likeness between Adam, the heavens, and the divine words. The human bodily form is the key to the understanding of this likeness, which was revealed to the prophets. This is why Muḥammad was able to contemplate the images of paradise. Anyone who achieves this understanding is able to see divine words in any object; every object “speaks” to him/her as the locus of manifestation of the divine words, and he/she therefore enters into paradise immediately.

in paradise is endowed with speech. Since the human bodily form is described as the counterpart of the divine Word, this speech is essentially the “language of the human form”:

All things are, actually and potentially (*bi-l-fi'l wa-bi-l-quwwa*), loci of manifestation (*maẓāhir*) of the Word; they are what makes God visible (*ru'yat-i khodā'i hastand*). Consequently, in the world of spiritual unveiling (*'ālam-i kashf*), Eve and all other [beings and objects] are endowed with speech (fol. 369a).

Why did the prophets see God who showed himself in human form and spoke to them? Because God speaks by means of inspiration (*waḥy*), which means by allusion (*ishāra*), to those who are able to understand His writing in human form. This understanding shows itself in the [visible] form of the speech that appears in splendor before the prophets. You have no difficulty understanding human writing [when you spell a written word] in your mind. The divine writing on the human face is just the same in relation to the divine Word. The divine “words,” which can be heard in the world of theophanic imagination are similar to [the “words”] which can be read on the human face. This kind of reading is the eternal and innermost truth (*ḥaqīqa*) of conventional (*majāzī*: lit. metaphorical) reading and writing. Anyone who is able to read this kind of writing is able to “read” the divine inspiration (*waḥy*). He/she is thus able to hear divine “words” that are not articulated by mouth and tongue (fol. 188b).

The eight gates of paradise are also identified with the form of Adam, while the seven gates of hell²⁷ allude to the form of Eve, in the sense that whoever abandons the knowledge expressed in the bodily form and the facial features of Eve goes to hell:

On each of the eight gates of paradise are written four words (*kalima*). This makes in sum 32 [primordial “words”] which constitute the form of Adam, who is the means (*wāsiṭa*) leading to paradise. And on each of the seven gates of hell . . . are written three lines. This makes 21 in sum, referring to the form of Eve and the writing of her face . . . Indeed, *al-ḥamd* [the opening Sura of the Quran, *Sūrat al-Fātiḥa*], which is in the form

27 Eight gates of paradise: Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Īmān* no. 46; al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Ṭahāra* no. 108 (cf. Wensinck, *Concordance* i, 302). The seven gates of hell are mentioned in Q 15:44.

of Eve contains seven verses and 21 “words,” and anyone who forsakes it goes to hell²⁸ ... “And verily, hell is the promised abode for them all! To it are seven gates: for each of those gates is a [special] class [of sinners] assigned” (Q 15:43–4), “paradise lies at the feet of mothers” (fols. 24a–b).

For a better understanding of the central role of the female form and face on the Ḥurūfī road to paradise, it is useful to remind the reader of some details of the relationship between the male and the female bodily forms as the loci of manifestation of the divine knowledge.²⁹ According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the form of the female body is the original form of every human being, male or female. It is on the body and face of women that the most basic lines of the divine writing can be seen most clearly. This is why the form of Eve is the key without which a more complex writing represented by the form of Adam cannot be deciphered. We have seen that, for the Ḥurūfīs, the human form is literally the divine book, the most complete copy of the divine alphabet and the counterpart of the Word. Eve is therefore literally the “mother of the [human] book.” She is the “opening chapter” of the book of Adam. Just as the opening chapter of the Quran (*fātiḥat al-kitāb*) is believed to summarize all significations contained in the Quran, the form of Eve summarizes the form of Adam. All humans, male and female, receive their bodily form from their mothers. Their original form is therefore the form of their mothers. According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, this form is characterized by seven facial lines: the hairline, two lines of eyebrows and four lines of eyelashes. Before they reach adulthood, humans of both sexes thus have the “form of Eve.” This is the form of “youth,” representing the most basic lines of the divine writing. The mention of “youth” in the Quranic descriptions of paradise (*ḥūrīs* and eternal youths (*ghulām*, pl. *ghilmān*, Q 52:24)), as well as the well-known *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad describes his vision of God in the form of a beautiful young man (*shābb*) allude, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, to this fact.³⁰ As for the form of Adam, it corresponds to the form of the adult man, with seven additional lines (shaped by beard and moustache). As mentioned above, for the Ḥurūfīs paradise means the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the form of Adam,

28 Here “word” (*kalima*) means the name of the letter (*alif bāʾ*, etc.). The form of Adam is constituted by 32 letters and there are 21 letters (without repetitions) in the opening Sura of the Quran (*thāʾ, jīm, khāʾ, zayn, shīn, zāʾ* and *fāʾ* do not appear in this Sura).

29 For a more detailed discussion of this topic, cf. Mir-Kasimov, *Les dérivés*.

30 For the references of this *ḥadīth* see Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme*, 154–64. Many passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* state that it is the *female* form that is the form of the visible manifestation of God.

and this is impossible without the knowledge of the form of Eve. The return to paradise is then essentially the return to the form of Eve. Whoever can read the writing of this form – or, according to another expression used in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, “anyone who reaches the knowledge of the original nature (*khilqa*) of the mother” attains the knowledge of his or her own original form, and can therefore gain access to the knowledge of the form of Adam, that is, to paradise.

Another argument used in the *Jāwidān-nāma* in order to assert the epistemological significance of the female form is that Eve was created *after* Adam. The *return* to Adam thus begins with Eve; Eve is the deepest level of the esoteric writing of God, and the seven lines on her face represent the seven depths of the Quran:

“The Quran has an apparent and an inner [meaning], and its inner meaning contains [another] inner meaning, and so on until the seventh level of depth.”³¹ The limit of the seventh level is the writing on the face of Eve, because she is the last of the created things [after the heavens, heavenly bodies, the four elements, and Adam]. Seven lines of writing on the face of Eve [the line of hair, eyebrows, and eyelashes] were created after the members of her body . . . The seven depths of the Quran are [these] seven lines on the face of Eve who is the last to be created (fols. 307a–b).

In this regard, the interpretation given in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to the Quranic verse 17:71 is particularly interesting. This verse begins with the words: “One day We shall call together all human beings with their [respective] *imāms* (*bi-imāmihim*).” “Which means,” adds the *Jāwidān-nāma*, “with their [respective] mothers (*ay bi-ummahātihim*)” (fol. 265b), because:

In a sense, *imām* [can be considered as] the plural of *umm* [mother].³² Indeed, on the day of resurrection (*qiyāma*) all [humans] will return to their mothers, that is, either to Eve or to someone who is in the form of Eve, because this is the [only] form able to manifest the 28 letters of the

31 “*Inna lil-Qurʾān zahran wa-baṭnan wa-li-baṭnihi baṭnan ilā sabʿa abṭun.*” For references of this *ḥadīth*, see Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iii, 218.

32 It seems that the prophetology of the *Jāwidān-nāma* includes *imāms* among the *ummiyyūn*, the “motherly” prophets and saints of the last prophetic cycle. The *Jāwidān-nāma* would thus adhere to the Shiʿi concept of the *imām* as a divine guide. However, this last position, explicitly stated in later Ḥurūfī works, is not clearly formulated in the *Jāwidān-nāma*. Cf. Mir-Kasimov, Notes 218–33, and his *Ummis versus Imāms*. For other meanings of the term *ummiyyūn*, see Günther, *Ummi*.

Quran and four other letters, [or the complete set of] the 32 uncreated letters (fol. 307b).

According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, this is the reason all inhabitants of paradise, including Adam, have the bodily form of Eve:

Anyone who enters paradise has the form of Adam.³³ Adam and any other inhabitant of paradise is in the form of Eve, the mother, because the original nature (*khilqa*) of Adam appeared from the original nature of the mother. From this point of view, the original nature of Adam is that of Eve (fol. 244b).³⁴

At the moment a human being is conceived, the sperm of the father has no proper form. The form is given to the embryo by the mother. Therefore, it is the female and not the male principle which is essential for the form and the manifestation:³⁵

The sperm contained in the loins of Adam was like smoke and blackness³⁶ . . . when it came into the womb of the mother and caused the appearance of the form of the mother in the womb of the mother . . . Men and women, anyone who comes into existence from his or her mother, has in the beginning the bodily form of the mother. Also at the end, he or she will have the form of the mother in paradise: that of a *ḥūrī*, of a youth or of any other [inhabitant] of paradise, because he or she will attain then [the understanding] of the original nature of the mother. Otherwise, [if he or she] is not in the form of the mother, he or she will never be among the inhabitants of paradise, neither in this world nor in the other (fol. 262a).

Necessarily, all young men, *ḥūrīs*, prophets and saints have in paradise the form of Eve. Indeed, the sperm of Adam does not contain this form

33 This statement is part of the *ḥadīth* according to which God created Adam in his form. Cf. Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 123.

34 Similar ideas are expressed elsewhere in the *Jāwidān-nāma*: Eve is the form of Adam in paradise (fol. 27a); both Adam and Eve have the form of youth (that of Eve) in paradise (fol. 266a).

35 For the form as mother in the thought of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241/1826), founder of the Shaykhī school, see Corbin, *En Islam iranien* iv, 267ff.

36 Allusion to Q 41:10–11: the heaven which was smoke at the beginning of the creation, before it was differentiated into seven heavens.

in actuality (*bi-l-fi'l*); it (this form) is produced from the form of Eve. This is why it is said: "Certainly, paradise lies at the feet of mothers" (fol. 57b).

The division of the human face, which makes the lines of the divine writing on it visible, is shown on the face of Eve. Similarly to the broken Tablets of Moses, this division manifests the most basic elements of the divine Word:

Without the lines on the face of Eve, it would be impossible to discern clearly the composition of the 32 lines on the face of Adam. The face of Eve is in a sense the standard [which shows the] distribution [of the facial lines] symbolized by the broken Tablets of Moses and conforming to the original nature. This is why the faces of all inhabitants of paradise bear the lines of Eve, and this is why it is said: "Paradise is at the feet of mothers" (fols. 405a–b).

In the following sections of this chapter I briefly examine the Ḥurūfī reading of the fall from paradise and attempt to sketch the road(s) leading back.

3 Paradise and Hell: Knowledge and Ignorance

The central point of the Ḥurūfī interpretation of the fall from paradise is the relationship between earth, which is the element of Adam and Eve, and fire, the element of Satan. According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, earth is the most noble among the four elements because it is the only one able to maintain a given form; neither water nor air or fire have this property. The form is what makes possible the manifestation of the divine knowledge, and Adam made of earth is therefore superior to angels and *jinn* made of more subtle elements. This is why, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the knowledge of the names was first taught by God to Adam, and then Adam taught it to the angels who bowed down before him.

However, Satan refused to obey God and to bow down to Adam. According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, Satan was unable to recognize the nobility of earth and the divine knowledge conveyed by the form of Adam. This is why he said: "I am better than he: Thou didst create me from fire and him from clay" (Q 7:12). As a result of his rebellion, Satan did not receive the knowledge of the names, and therefore he and the demons that followed him remain forever in ignorance. This is why the demons have no access to the heavens (Q 15:17–8; 37:8–10; 72:8–9) which, as we saw above, are the locus of manifestation of the 28 and 32 "words" of the divine Word. Doomed to ignorance, Satan creates obstacles

for humans and tries to lead them astray from the knowledge contained in the human bodily form. Those who follow Satan go to the fire, which is his element.³⁷ The fire “covers their faces” (Q 14:50) and hides the lines of their facial features and bodies, which are the expression of the divine knowledge. Therefore, they are unable to realize the knowledge potentially contained in the human body and are reduced to the lower forms of life.³⁸ Such is the condition of hell and its inhabitants.

The fall from paradise, described in Q 7:12–25 alludes, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, to the loss of the “raiment” of the human form, locus of manifestation of the divine knowledge. “Satan stripped them [Adam and Eve] of their raiment (*libās*) because he [Satan] is [made] of fire, and thus does not possess such a raiment [of bodily form] which is the locus of manifestation of the 32 ‘words’”³⁹ (fol. 389b).

Indeed, unlike the earth which is the material of the bodies of Adam and Eve, the fire does not maintain a given form and therefore cannot be a locus of manifestation of the divine Word. Moreover, among the three elements that do not maintain form – water, air, and fire – the latter is the most subtle and the less likely to keep a given form. Humans who do not realize the knowledge contained in their own bodily form render themselves unable to “maintain” this form. They find themselves consequently in the fire, the element that has a similar property.

Among the natural elements, fire is the most remote in terms of its ability to receive a form in order to express the Word of God, and earth is the closest. Fire is more distant than air, water, and earth because it is the most subtle [among the four elements]. This is why [Satan] said: “I am better than he” (Q 7:12). The Lord of Unity endowed earth with the capacity to receive a form, and [earth] became the locus of manifestation for

37 The *Jāwidān-nāma* contains the idea that people are predestined to end either in paradise or hell, depending on the events that took place long before their actual appearance on earth. This idea is developed in interpretations of passages from the Quran and *ḥadīth* related to the Primordial Covenant (Q 7:172), to the people of the right and the people of the left, etc. (cf. for example fols. 154b, 161a–b). The knowledge of the human self as the locus of manifestation of the divine words was given to the prototypes of the humans drawn from the loins of Adam at the time of the Covenant. It is because they saw their real selves that the prototypes of the humans were able to answer “Yes!” to the divine question “Am I not your Lord?” (cf. fols. 418a–419a).

38 This is suggested in the passages related to the transformations taking place in the food chain. See Mir-Kasimov, *Words of power* 88–9, 206–7.

39 Allusion to Q 7:27.

the expression of the divine Word . . . “The companions of the fire” who say: “pour down to us water” (Q 7:50) are those who are deprived of the capacity to maintain a form or an image, who did not have [this capacity] in the past and will not have it in the future, just as Satan said: “Thou didst create me from fire” (Q 7:12). Those who possess [outwardly] a human form in this sensible universe, but did not find out how [this form] expresses the [divine] Word, did not realize what makes humans really human. They are with Satan, because the fire is the origin of Satan, and they are the companions of the fire. Consequently, in the next world, they will be tortured either by fire or by water boiling on fire (fols. 192b–193a).

The previous quotation suggests that humans who do not realize the knowledge of the divine Word contained in their own form are not wholly human. This idea is further developed in other passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma*: the fact that the “fire covers their faces” (Q 14:50) leads humans to regress into lower forms of beings (animals, plants, and minerals).⁴⁰

The main resource of Satan is the evil word, the opposite of the 28/32 pure divine “words.” But, since all that exists is created from the 28/32 divine “words,” the evil word has no other origin than the pure word: “Satan prevents [people] from accessing the real knowledge of their selves by means of the evil word, whose origin (*aṣl*) is pure”⁴¹ (fol. 160a). Combining verses from different Suras, the *Jāwidān-nāma* suggests that the forbidden tree in paradise, which caused the fall of Adam and Eve, symbolizes the evil word mentioned elsewhere in the Quran:

God said to Adam: “Approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression” (Q 2:35). This is the same tree as “the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran” (Q 17:60). “An evil word is like an evil tree, it is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth, it has no stability” (Q 14:26)⁴² (fol. 192b).

40 Cf. for example, fol. 194a.

41 This may be similar to some statements about the non-existence of evil in Mazdaism. Cf. Shaked, Some notes. There is evidence of some Mazdaist vocabulary in the *Jāwidān-nāma* (cf. further, fol. 165b), but at the present stage of research, it is difficult to say how profoundly the Ḥurūfī doctrine was influenced by Mazdaism, if at all.

42 This passage is an example of the “thematic” interpretation of the Quran in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, extended elsewhere in the text also to the *ḥadīth* and Biblical material. An interpretation of the Quranic verses is not explicitly expressed in commentary following the text of the verse, but suggested by the fact of juxtaposition of two or more verses. In the cited fragment, we have the juxtaposition of three verses taken from three different

When Adam followed the advice of Satan and approached the tree of the evil word, he approached the condition of Satan who does not know the names taught to Adam. Therefore, approaching the tree, Adam lost the knowledge of the names and his status as God's vicegerent, and fell into the ignorance that is the lot of Satan. Indeed, the essential difference between the evil (or corrupt) word and the good one is that the former cannot rise up to God, to the source of Adamic knowledge:⁴³ "Indeed, the author of any imperfection is and will be the corrupt word, opposed to the pure word mentioned in [the verse]: 'To Him mount up [all] words of purity' (Q 35:10). The corrupt word is [the word] which cannot mount up to Him (fol. 53a)." Such is also the condition of the demons that cannot access heaven. The demons followed Satan who refused to bow down to Adam and did not receive the knowledge of the divine names, which Adam taught the angels. Since, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the entire universe is created by these names, Satan, demons, and humans who follow them are not aware of the principles of creation and the organization of the universe, including the creation of their own persons. Because of this ignorance, the gates of heavens which, as already mentioned, is the locus of manifestation of the Word and, as such, perfectly identical to the body of Adam, are forever shut to demons. According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, Quranic passages concerning the punishment of demons striving to approach heaven or to eavesdrop on the heavenly assembly (Q 15:17–8; 37:8–10; 72:8) allude to this fact:

The demons did not bow down to Adam, and their descendants [do not have access to the secrets] of the creation of the heavens and of the earth... Satan does not know that he is Satan, i.e., that he was created by the Imperative *kāf* and *nūn*... because these [names of the letters] *kāf* and *nūn* contain 28 and 32 [primordial] "words" which constitute the grandeur of Adam. The [*ḥadīth*] "God created Adam in his form and in the form of the Merciful" alludes to this fact, and the angels bowed down because Adam taught them the *kāf* and the *nūn* [of the divine imperative], by which are created Adam, Satan, and [all other] beings and objects. Adam is the teacher and the locus of manifestation [of the divine imperative and of the 28/32 primordial "words"]. This is why it is said [concerning demons]: "[I called them not to witness]... their own

Suras, which have in common the word "tree" (*al-shajara*). This same method was likely expected to be applied to the fragmented contents of the *Jāwidān-nāma* itself: cf. Mir-Kasimov, *Jāwdān-nāma*.

43 We see in the next section that the "good word" is essentially the word of prayer, one of the ways to paradise.

creation" (Q 18:51), and also: "[So] they should not strain their ears in the direction of the exalted assembly but be cast away from every side" (Q 37:8) because they cannot access heaven, and if they do "Except such as snatch away something by stealth, and they are pursued by a flaming fire, of piercing brightness" (Q 37:10). The demons cannot attain the [knowledge concerning] the creation of heaven and of the earth and understand its secrets, this is why [it is said that] they cannot access heaven (fol. 97a).

Applied to the spiritual quest of the individual human being this means that it is impossible for anyone to enter heaven by means of satanic inspiration and the imaginative activity of the lower self (*nafs*):

"We have indeed decked the lower heaven with beauty [in] the stars" (Q 37:6) because it is in this heaven that [Muḥammad] saw Adam, and "We have guarded them [the heavens] from every demon accursed" (Q 15:17)... it is therefore clear that it is impossible to enter heaven by satanic inspirations (*ilhāmāt-i shayṭānī*) and by the imaginations coming from the lower self (*takhayyulāt-i nafsānī*). The secret of the verse, "He revealed to His servant what He [meant] to reveal" (Q 53:10),... can be attained only by divine inspirations (*ilhāmāt-i ilāhī*) and by an influx from the invisible realm (*wāridāt-i ghaybī*)... such is the knowledge [of paradise which will be witnessed at the end of time] and to which alludes [the *ḥadīth*]: "I have prepared for my faithful servants that which no eye has seen, no ear heard, no human heart ever felt"⁴⁴ (fols. 277a–b).

However, the essential difference between Satan and humans, including those humans who follow Satan, is that Satan altogether rejected the mercy of God, while Adam, according to the well-known *ḥadīth* often quoted in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, was created and put in paradise in the form of the Merciful: "Satan did not bow down to Adam. And Adam was in the form of the Merciful; he was the name of the Merciful and of God [Himself]"⁴⁵ (fols. 266b–267a). Therefore,

44 1 Corinthians 2:9, Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb Bad' al-khalq* no. 8, *Bāb Tafṣīr sūrat al-Sajāda* no. 1, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* no. 35; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Īmān* no. 312, *Kitāb al-Janna* nos. 2–5; al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan, Bāb Tafṣīr sūrat al-Sajāda* no. 2, *Bāb Tafṣīr sūrat al-Wāqī'a* no. 1; Ibn Māja, *Sunan, Kitāb al-Zuhd* no. 39; Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* nos. 5 and 334 (cf. Wensinck, *Concordance* i, 47). The English translation is quoted from Gardet, *Djanna*.

45 For the relationship of the terms "mercy" (*rahma*) and "womb" (*rahim*) to Eve in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, see note 10.

mercy, the condition of paradise, is essential for the human bodily form, and not wrath which is the condition of hell.⁴⁶ For the demons trying to approach the heavens, every second of the 360 degrees of the heavenly sphere irradiates wrath.⁴⁷ But for humans, the form of their bodies and the features of their faces constitute an essential link with divine mercy. If they turn to the knowledge of themselves, hell will no longer be able to hold them in captivity, and they will return to paradise which is their original condition.⁴⁸ For humans, the knowledge of the self means the knowledge of the divine Word, which manifests itself in the human bodily form. This realization leads to the state of unity, wherein the entire universe is seen as a manifestation of the divine Word.

As mentioned in the introduction, access to the real dimension of the divine Word implies a separation from the conventional level of language. The conventional meaning is entirely founded on pure imitation (*taqlīd*), and therefore has no ontological value in itself. Moreover, it veils the real meaning of the objects as well as that of the words and the sounds of language, which are originally the expression of the 28/32 primordial “words.”⁴⁹ Whoever discovers the divine Word in his/her self is able to pass from convention and imitation to the understanding of the real, ontological meaning of things. This is the passage from the evil word to the good word, and therefore from hell to paradise:

If he/she [the seeker] attains the knowledge of his/her own essence, he/she is liberated from the hell of darkness and ignorance. This is what the prophets saw during spiritual unveilings: spirits speaking the eternal Word of the divine unity. [The person who has attained such knowledge] cannot stay in hell, because those who are unified by [discovering] the secret of the speech and of the speaker are necessarily liberated from hell. When the word of the spiritual realization (*kalīma-yi taḥqīq*), aware

46 Cf. for example fol. 123b, commentary on the tree of *zaqqūm* (Q 44:43).

47 Cf. fol. 121a.

48 The damnation of humans is thus provisional, while the damnation of Satan is definitive. For similar ideas in the thought of Rūzbihān Baqlī Shīrāzī, and in particular for the essential link between God's attribute of Wrath and Satan, see the substantial study of Ballanfat, introducing his edition of four texts of Rūzbihān, *Quatre traités* 168–71.

49 Conventional meaning holds that the rational description of the thing by something other than the thing itself corresponds to the external, relative aspect of the thing. The real meaning is inherent to the thing itself, it is in the same relationship with the thing as “the ray of the sun with the sun.” It resides in the form of objects, in the graphical and phonetic aspect of words and letters. The conventional, relative meaning is expressed in Ḥurūfī works by the term *iṣṭilāḥ*, as opposed to *ma'nā* or *ḥaqīqa*, the true, absolute meta-physical meaning.

of its own essence and attributes, defeats the word of blind imitation (*kalima-yi taqlīd*) set in the non-reality (*nā-ḥaqq*), it is Ormazd who defeats Ahriman, and God [defeats] Satan (fol. 165b).⁵⁰

4 Roads to Paradise

What are the specific ways of escape from the hell of convention, imitation, and satanic stratagems? How can one get back into paradise, which is “the station of Adam repented and returned to the condition mentioned in the verse, “O Adam! Dwell thou and thy wife in paradise” (Q 2:35)” (fol. 165a)? We have seen that the necessary condition of return into the lost paradise is the acquisition of the true “form of Adam,” which means, in the Ḥurūfī interpretation, gaining the knowledge of the innermost meaning of the human bodily form as the locus of manifestation of the divine Word. The return to paradise is thus essentially a return to the knowledge of one’s self, and the key figure in this return is that of Eve or the mother, who bestows on humans their bodily forms and preserves the basic knowledge of their meaning.

The most accessible way to the knowledge of one’s real self is the discernment and the reading of the divine writing on the human body and face:

God wrote by the hand of His might the 28 letters, which represent the science of the 28 [primordial] “words.”⁵¹ From this science of the face of Adam it is possible to attain [knowledge] of the original human nature, which leads [in turn] to the 28 eternal divine “words,” which lead to divine unity, which is the fundamental essence of the 28 “words.” “He who knows himself knows his Lord”⁵² (fol. 403a).

50 This is another example of Mazdaist vocabulary in the *Jāwidān-nāma* to which we referred above (note 40). Ormazd (Avestan “Ahura Mazda” (Lord of Wisdom)), and Ahriman (Avestan “Angra Mainyu” (Evil Spirit)) are deities of the pre-Islamic Iranian pantheon. See Boyce, Ahura Mazdā, and Duchesne-Guillemin, Ahriman. After the coming of Islam, the references to the old religion were still broadly cultivated by Iranian thinkers and poets. One of the central figures in the synthesis of the ancient Iranian wisdom and Islam was Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) also mentioned above.

51 Note that in the *Jāwidān-nāma*, ‘science’ is defined as the locus of manifestation in which a metaphysical truth becomes visible and therefore knowable.

52 For the references of this utterance attributed to, among others, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, see Furūzānfār, *Aḥādīth* 167.

“Whoever attains [this writing] will live eternally [because] he [will have thereby] attained the palace of eternity [paradise]” (fol. 134a). The 28/32 divine “words” appear then before his eyes as innumerable images of paradise: “When he discovers that the 32 [primordial] “words” constitute his real being, these 32 “words” manifest themselves [before the seeker] in hundreds of thousands of images, such as the eternal youths of paradise and the *ḥūrīs*.” (fol. 284b). But such discernment is given only to the chosen, to prophets and saints; other humans need their guidance:

Only divine providence can lead to the knowledge of the original nature of Adam and of his descendants, as in the case of Muḥammad when he chose the milk during the night of his heavenly ascension. Gabriel said: “You chose the original nature (*fiṭrat*),” which means, you attained [the knowledge] of the original human nature (*khilqat-i insānī*) (fols. 448a–b).

According to the *Jāwīdān-nāma*, the distinctive feature of the prophets and saints, who offer such guidance at the actual, last period of the cycle of prophecy, is their privileged relationship with the most fundamental elements of the divine Word, with the “mother of the book” (*umm al-kitāb*, Q. 3:7, 13:39, 43:4) and the knowledge contained in the form of the “mother,” in the sense that we discussed above in section two. These saint guides are characterized essentially as “motherly” (*ummī*), in the etymological sense of the Arabic root ‘-m-m. We have already seen an example of such “etymological” interpretation of the concept of the *imām*.⁵³

The first *ummī* prophet was Jesus, “His Word which He bestowed on Mary” (Q 4:171), because with Jesus the divine Word took a human form spontaneously in the womb of Mary without the participation of a physical father. In other words, the coming of Jesus proves that the human form is the natural locus of the manifestation of the Word, and not only the result of biological heredity. The second *ummī* prophet was Muḥammad (so called in the Quran 7:157–8), because the message of Muḥammad inaugurates the revelation of the “mother of the book,” represented by the combinations of 14 isolated letters at the beginning of some Quranic suras (*al-ḥurūf al-muqatta’a*). After Muḥammad, this final, “motherly” stage of the prophetic cycle continues until the revelation of the complete set of the 28/32 letters. As the locus of manifestation of this complete divine alphabet is Adam, the completion of the

53 See *supra* citation from the fol. 307b. This Ḥurūfī understanding of the term *ummī* bears significance also to the interpretation of the expression *al-nabī al-ummī*, an important epithet of the Prophet Muḥammad, see Günther, Illiterate.

prophetic cycle means the actual manifestation of Adam, restored to the fullness of the knowledge of the names, which he possessed at the moment of creation. The consequences of the fall thus redeemed, the righteous of humankind will re-enter paradise where they belong.⁵⁴

The letters of the divine writing are contained in the external form of any existing object; they lead to the understanding of the divine truth contained in created things: “The forms, the soot and the blackness⁵⁵ of the 32 [primordial] “words” . . . contain the path which leads to [the knowledge of] God and [of] all things. It is [therefore] possible to attain [this knowledge] by the means of writing” (fol. 60a). Therefore, anyone who attained the knowledge of the divine alphabet of the creation is enabled to “read” the universe and understand the divine will and intention in it.

Many passages of the *Jāwidān-nāma* describe the structural details of the human bodily constitution and of the human face which reveal their relationship to the 28/32 primordial “words” and letters.⁵⁶ Although this form is inherited by all humans, few are able to realize its profound significance and thus become fully human:

All descendants of Adam have [outwardly] the form [of Adam], be they Christians, Jews, Muslims or unbelievers. [Outwardly], they have all received the legacy of Adam. But, along with this legacy of external form, there is also an inner legacy (*mīrāth-i bāṭin*) of the knowledge of names that [Adam] taught the angels . . . To obtain this inner legacy just as you inherited your external form, you must learn the number and the nature of these names. Otherwise, you are not the descendant of Adam as to his innermost reality (*farzand-i ma'nā*). (fol. 406a) . . . Anyone who ignores his [Adam's] original nature (*khilqat*) and his innermost reality has no right to inherit the earth [which is the element of Adam], and is therefore liable to be killed (*wājib al-qatal ast*) (fol. 407a).

Indeed, if all humans fully realized the inheritance of Adam and perfect knowledge of their selves, they would discover that their innermost reality

54 The material concerning Jesus, Muḥammad, and the final stage of the prophetic cycle includes a wide variety of passages which cannot be outlined within the limits of this paper. For a more detailed discussion, see Mir-Kasimov, *Étude* 356–478 and Mir-Kasimov, *Words of power* 273–84 and 339–86.

55 Soot and blackness of the ink.

56 Cf. for example fols. 59a–60a.

is essentially the same. All humankind would then be unified within a single community:

The difference among them is neither that of the external form (*ṣūra*) nor that of the principles of speech (*aṣl-i kalām*). The difference comes from the conflicts between the compound [lexical units?] (*ikhtilāfāt-i tarkīb*), because they have not yet found the way [to the knowledge] of their real selves.⁵⁷ When they discover their selves and their original nature, there will be no difference in the innermost meaning [among them] just as there is no difference in the external form [of their bodies]. All [human-kind] will then be unified within a single religious community (*umma wāḥida*) (fols. 159b–160a).

As mentioned in the introduction, the human form is the only form in the entire universe that is the locus of manifestation of the complete set of the 28/32 primordial “words.” This is why humans are the only species endowed with speech. Any other form is only a partial expression of the divine Word. Thus, humans are privileged because they need nothing other than their own bodily form, the perfect counterpart of the supreme divine name, in order to access the highest possible knowledge of God.⁵⁸

All other beings must first evolve until they become food for humans and so enter into the constitution of the human body. Only then do they have a chance to enter paradise.⁵⁹ From this point of view, the need to eat and drink is an expression of a tremendous transforming power which allows humans to

57 “Principles of speech” refer to the phonemes of human languages which, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, are essentially the same for all languages, though their number may vary from one language to another. These phonemes are the counterpart of the ontological phonemes, or “words” of the divine language, the sum of which constitutes, as we have already seen, the innermost reality of the human being and is wholly manifested in the human bodily form. The expression *ikhtilāfāt-i tarkīb* refers most probably to the divergence of the human languages, due to the fact that the compound lexical units, i.e., words, associated with the same rational concept, vary from one language to another. This idea is expressed more explicitly in several other fragments of the *Jāwidān-nāma*. For a more detailed analysis of the *Jāwidān-nāma*’s linguistic theories, see Mir-Kasimov, *Words of power*.

58 Cf. for example fols. 244a, 268a, 384a.

59 This is another aspect of the Ḥurūfī theory of transmigration already mentioned above in a different context. The formulation of this theory in the *Jāwidān-nāma* seems different from some later Ḥurūfī texts, in particular from the terminological point of view. See Mir-Kasimov, *Words of power* 419–26.

take part in the evolution of the lower forms of being and to bring them to their counterparts in paradise:

Before God, the condition that necessitates food and drink is more perfect than the opposite. And so it is for the following reason. When things, in their evolution, acquire the bodily form of minerals, plants, and fruits, they become . . . food for Adam. They are thus transformed into the sperm of Adam and then reappear [in the external world] from the body and form of Adam, whom “God created in the form of the Merciful.” So are born the prophets and Muḥammad, upon them be peace. This is why the condition of those whose existence necessitates food and drink is superior to the condition that is exempted from such a necessity. This is why the spiritual entities in paradise eat and drink, and all their food is endowed with speech . . . as it is said: “[God] hath given us speech, [He] Who giveth speech to everything” (Q 41:21) (fols. 110a–b).

The way of love is a privileged way of self-knowledge.⁶⁰ According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, beauty is the essential property of manifestation of the primordial “words.” In other words, the beauty of any visible form is a sign of the divine “words” expressed in this form. One of the consequences of such a definition of beauty is that it can be “measured” in proportion to the quantity of original “words” that manifest themselves in any given form.

From this point of view, the human form is the most beautiful of all, because it expresses the complete set of 28/32 “words.” Beauty inspires love, and love is essentially the desire to know and unite with the divine “words” expressed by the visible form. The love for a human being is therefore essentially the desire to attain knowledge of the complete divine Word, which ultimately leads to paradise.

All of the universe is moved by the love of the human form. All heavenly spheres and planets revolve around the earth of Adam.⁶¹ But no heavenly sphere, no *jinnī* or angel, and no other being in the whole universe can attain the full accomplishment of their love, because their own original form is not human.

60 For a more detailed discussion of the Ḥurūfī theory of love and beauty, see Mir-Kasimov, *Étude* 314–8, and Mir-Kasimov, *Words of power* 111–39.

61 The idea of love as a cosmic principle underlying the rotation of the heavenly spheres, which are moved by their desire to reach the Intellect from which they proceeded, was developed in Islamic philosophy, in particular in the works of Ibn Sīnā. See Corbin, *History* 243ff.

Only a human being can come to the perfect realization of the divine knowledge through the love of another human being.

Love is therefore the royal way to paradise. In the case of profane love, the lover is not aware of the real motivation of his or her feelings. But when the lover's self is purified from the concupiscent passion of the lower ego, he or she comes to discern the divine writing in the body and on the face of the beloved. This perception is the perception of paradise, because in paradise the lines of the divine writing can be clearly seen on the faces of *ḥūrīs*, eternal youths, and other inhabitants.

The union of two lovers, each of them possessing the form of the mother, or the form of the youth in the sense mentioned above, means the union of the two halves of the divine Word. The amorous union thus restores the knowledge of the complete divine Word, and therefore, the condition of paradise for the two lovers. This theory is developed in the *Jāwidān-nāma* mainly in the interpretations of the Quranic story of Joseph and the wife of al-ʿAzīz (Biblical Potiphar), known as Zulaykhā in the Muslim tradition:

Zulaykhā fell in love with Joseph because she saw Joseph as a locus of manifestation of the Word . . . The perfection of Zulaykhā is in her attraction to Joseph, because Joseph is the locus of manifestation of the complete knowledge [of the Word] (fols. 217a–b).

Zulaykhā saw the Seven Twofold on the face of Joseph,⁶² she saw there the real [meaning] of her own self and her own image. And Joseph saw in Zulaykhā his own beauty. This is why he was attracted [to her] . . . : “And [with passion] did she desire him, and he would have desired her” (Q 12:24). This was an essential attraction (*mayl-i dhātī*) . . . and the attraction for the *ḥūrīs* and youth in paradise will be of this kind (fol. 238a).

The ritual prayer (*ṣalāt*) is another specific way to paradise. According to tradition, Muḥammad received the prayer at the end of his heavenly journey, when he had gone past the Lote-tree of the boundary and spoke with God.⁶³ The prayer therefore makes it possible for the believer to repeat the prophetic experience of intimacy with God. This approach to the prayer is expressed in

62 “*Sabʿan min al-mathānī*” (Q 15:87). According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, this expression refers to the seven “motherly” lines on the human face that represent the divine writing: the hairline, two lines of the eyebrows, and four lines of the eyelashes.

63 For this element of the story of the heavenly ascension, see Widengren, *Muḥammad* 104–5.

many well-known *ḥadīths*, such as “Prayer (*ṣalāt*) is the heavenly ascension (*miʿrāj*) of the believer,” and “Prayer is the key to paradise.”⁶⁴

The *Jāwidān-nāma* places this general Islamic idea of ritual prayer in the specific context of Ḥurūfī doctrine: the ritual prayer (*al-ṣalāt*) is the token of the 28/32 primordial divine “words” given to humankind before their open manifestation in the physical world at the end of time. The numbers of the primordial “words” can indeed be found in the number of *rakʿas* of the ritual prayer: the 17 *rakʿas* of the prayers on ordinary days and the 15 *rakʿas* on Friday make 32, and the 17 *rakʿas* with the 11 *rakʿas* of the prayers on a journey make 28. The prayer is therefore structurally equal to Adam, who is the locus of the manifestation of the 28 and 32 “words” of the divine Word *par excellence*. The following extract states that paradise is supported by the ritual prayer, because the latter is structurally equal to the divine Word and to its loci of manifestation, as well as to Adam and the heaven of the fixed stars and constellations:

Paradise rests on (*mawqūf*) the prayer because the prayer is created in accordance with the same measure as Adam. [Indeed], “the length of Adam is 60 cubits in the sky,”⁶⁵ and the eternal attributes of God [the primordial “words”] are 28 and 32 [that is, 60], just as [the *rakʿas* of] the prayer, and just as 360 degrees [of the heavenly sphere, that is, six times 28 and six times 32] . . . The prayer goes to heaven, from which it came down on the night of the heavenly ascension, and reaches paradise “the width whereof is as the width of heaven”⁶⁶ (Q 57:21) (fols. 127b–128a).

By his or her prayer, the sincere believer who has attained the knowledge of the primordial “words” of the mother of the book elevates the words of the prayer to paradise and thus actualizes the original metaphysical meanings of these words. The images of paradise then appear before his or her eyes. For such a person already in this world the condition of paradise is realized. Thus, he or she definitely escapes from the blind imitation and convention that otherwise lead to hell:

Without the knowledge of the prayer, it is impossible to access paradise . . . [This prayer] came from heaven and it returns to heaven. This is why it

64 For the place of the ritual prayer in the Muslim tradition and its structure, see Monnot, *Ṣalāt*.

65 For references, cf. Gimaret, *Dieu à l'image de l'homme* 123–4; Kister, *Ādam* 138–9.

66 From the point of view of its nature and structure, the prayer is equal to paradise, and paradise is equal to the heavenly sphere.

is said that “the prayer is the heavenly ascension of the believer” ... “To Him mount up [all] words of purity; it is He Who exalts each deed of righteousness” (Q 35:10). [The worshiper] elevates the words of purity, which are the foundation of the divine Word. The “deeds of righteousness” in accordance with the [external] form of the prayer and the act of adoration [which is its inner meaning] ... bring up ... the innermost meanings of these words and deeds, so that [the worshiper] can contemplate in a dream, [already] before his or her death, various images [of paradise] and paradise [itself], “the width whereof is as the width of heaven and earth” (Q 57:21). God shows [the worshiper] in actuality that what exists in potentiality, and “those who were blind in this world, will be blind in the hereafter” (Q 17:72). To the extent that [the worshiper] is able to express the real essence of these meanings, he or she literally enters paradise. The prophets give the promise of this paradise to *those who believe in the invisible*.⁶⁷ [The invisible] is part of paradise, and [the promise of the prophets is] particularly [addressed] to the believers who, by means of faith based on imitation and external adoration (*īmān-i taqlīdī wa-parastish bi-ẓāhir*), apprehend the spiritual station [of the real prayer]. They thus escape from ignorance and darkness and come to the station [to which the verse applies:] “Nor will they there taste death, except the first death” (Q 44:56) (fol. 124b).

Is paradise the final station on the way to God, or is it possible to go further and beyond? We have seen that, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, paradise is the place where the divine Word is immediately visible in a great diversity of forms. The limit of these forms is the form of the human being, which is the most perfect locus of manifestation of the Word, the “Lote-tree of the boundary.” This boundary is also the limit of the world of theophanic imagination, where paradise is situated. Beyond this limit, there are no forms and no images: there lies the domain of pure reality, of the undifferentiated Word with its 28/32 phonemes independent of any visible manifestation. It is the world of the transcendent divine unity:

The detachment from the external form [of the letters and of the things, similar to the transition from the graphic symbols of letters to the phonemes] leads to the intellection of the essence (*taʿaqqul-i dhātī*) which is exempt from form, indivisible, and beyond the reach of the imagination.

67 Allusion to Q 2:3.

[This essence] encompasses all things, and all things are its loci of manifestation (fol. 460b).

According to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, only when a human being realizes this experience of unity beyond all forms can he or she utter in full knowledge the formula of the *shahāda*: “There is no deity but God.” Only then can he or she fully understand and repeat the “Yes!” of the Primordial Covenant, and realize that this “Yes!” comes not only from the prototypes of humans drawn from the loins of Adam, but that every existing atom is endowed with speech and recognizes his lord.⁶⁸

Jesus, the first *ummī* prophet (in the sense that we specified above) and the Savior expected at the end of time, is the prophet most specifically identified in the *Jāwidān-nāma* with the transcendent stage of manifestation of the divine Word independent of any form or other visible manifestation. In the following quotation knowledge of the divine unity beyond form and paradise is likened to the second birth mentioned by Jesus:

Whoever possesses a bodily form (*shakl wa-ṣūra*) cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, which is the Word [unrelated to any form of visible manifestation], unless he or she is born anew. Indeed, Jesus said: “Except a man be born again (*man lam yūlad marratayn*) [he cannot see the kingdom of God].”⁶⁹ This is because in that place [in the kingdom of heaven] one sees without the [intermediary of] forms and bodies which serve to express meanings in dreams. Whoever entered [this kingdom] attained . . . the secret of the creation (or “of the original nature,” *khilqat*) of [all] forms and meanings” (fol. 387b).

5 Conclusion

The discourse on paradise in the *Jāwidān-nāma* is founded on the metaphysical approach to language and writing typical of Ḥurūfī thought. Although sharing many common ideas with other Islamic trends, such as Shi‘ism, Sufism, mystical philosophy or Iranian mysticism of love, the Ḥurūfī presentation often brings forth highly original, often unexpected interpretations. Particularly interesting is the free, creative use of the scriptural materials, often combining

68 Cf. the long passage at fols. 471b–474a.

69 Gospel of John 3:3, quoted according to the King James Bible.

Islamic and extra-Islamic (Jewish and Christian) sources.⁷⁰ As we have seen, the figure of the Mother is central to the Ḥurūfī conception of paradise. She is, at the same time, the giver of the bodily form and the bearer of the original metaphysical meaning of this form, of the knowledge of the original divine Word, which opens the gates of paradise. All the specific ways leading to paradise which we outlined in this article – prophetic revelation, self-knowledge, love, prayer – are essentially ways to return to the original knowledge represented by the Mother. This is, according to the *Jāwidān-nāma*, the profound meaning of the prophetic utterance: “Paradise lies at the feet of mothers.”

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70 See Inventory of Biblical Citations, in Mir-Kasimov, *Words of power* 475–8.

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Which Road to Paradise? The Controversy of Reincarnation in Islamic Thought

Mohammad Hassan Khalil

1 Introduction

It is commonly assumed that reincarnation is antithetical to the Quranic Weltanschauung. The notion that Islamic scripture tolerates, let alone endorses the view that after death human souls are incarnated in different human (or animal) bodies in this world is rejected by both mainstream Muslim theologians and mainstream Islamicists. Nevertheless, Islamic history has witnessed a number of disparate movements that have espoused *tanāsukh* (reincarnation, metempsychosis) in one form or another. In what follows I briefly survey these movements and explore the possibility of a Quranic doctrine of reincarnation.

2 Muslim Reincarnationists

As Paul Walker observes, in addition to rejecting the notion that the soul maintains an intractable connection to a particular physical body, Muslim reincarnationists tend to deny bodily resurrection.¹ Walker provides a list of three groups whose attitudes “are the most obviously vulnerable and theoretically susceptible, either to a real attachment to the idea of transmigration of souls or, more commonly, to the charge of holding a belief in it.”² Two of these groups are the philosophers (*falāsifa*), particularly those influenced by Plato, such as Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 339/950),³ and certain Shi‘ites, particularly Isma‘ilis. As Walker notes, a careful examination of their representative writings demonstrates the challenges – and in many cases, impossibility – of

¹ Walker, *Metempsychosis* 219.

² *Ibid.*

³ Walker also gives the example of Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925). See Walker, *Metempsychosis* 220, 222ff.

characterizing them as *true* proponents of metempsychosis.⁴ Definitive, however, is the *rejection* of metempsychosis articulated by the philosopher Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037),⁵ the Ismaʿīli thinker Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. ca. 411/1020–1),⁶ and the Twelver theologian al-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022).⁷ (As an important aside, the majority of Shiʿite theologians do not consider the return, *rajʿa*, of the hidden *imām* an instance of reincarnation; instead, they conceptualize it as a return in his original body.⁸) According to Walker, it is with esoteric “offshoots” of Shiʿism, namely, the so-called *ghulāt* sects, “that true religiously-grounded ideas of metempsychosis continue to find a place.”⁹

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- 4 Walker, *Metempsychosis* 222ff. See Madelung, Abū Yaʿqūb al-Sijistānī (on the controversial and aberrational nature of reincarnationism during the Fatimid era); Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 273 (on the Ṭayyibī Ismaʿīli rejection of *tanāsukh*). Although the Syrian Nizārīs espoused some form of metempsychosis, it seems that “their ideas on metempsychosis were essentially of a symbolic nature and related mainly to the destiny of souls whose possessors had gone astray.” Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 372. The case of the Nuṣṭawīs, reincarnationists who interpreted the notion of the hereafter “spiritually” was unusual. Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 422.
 - 5 Ibn Sīnā refutes the Platonic conception of transmigration on the grounds that it would be a logical absurdity for souls to enter foreign bodies. To Ibn Sīnā’s mind, a “human body cannot come into existence without a soul, nor human soul without a body, even though the mature soul survives the breaking of the bond between the two.” If a deceased person’s soul were to enter a preexisting body, that body would necessarily possess two souls: one “natural to it and another of foreign origin,” the latter of which would “have no functional relationship to that particular body.” Walker, *Metempsychosis* 235. See Ibn Sīnā, *De Anima* 234; Day, Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra’s arguments; Wan, Ibn Sina.
 - 6 Walker, *Metempsychosis* 236.
 - 7 Ibid., 229; McDermott, *Theology* 362ff. See Kamada, Transmigration of soul 105–14, where Kamada discusses Shaykh al-Mufīd’s refutation of *tanāsukh*, and his response to his teacher Shaykh al-Ṣadūq Ibn Bābūya’s (d. 381/991) belief in the “eternity” and “pre-existence of souls.” Cf. later discourses by certain Illuminationist philosophers on the “pre-eternity of the soul,” as described in Schmidtke, The doctrine of the transmigration of soul.
 - 8 Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 65.
 - 9 Walker, *Metempsychosis* 219, note 1. These include the Druzes, Ahl-i Ḥaqq, and Nuṣayrīs (or Alawites). Among them, some maintain that the “process of the transmigration of souls would take place in cycles, perhaps indefinitely, with each cycle (*dawr*) consisting of a specific number of thousands of years.” Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 65. According to the Druzes, a limited number of souls are incarnated in new human bodies shortly after death. See Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 190. For a discussion of the internal differences among contemporary Druzes regarding reincarnation (some do not espouse it), see Bennett, Reincarnation 87–104. As Bennett notes in Reincarnation 88, the Druzes tend to refer to reincarnation as *taqammuṣ*, which is derived from *qammaṣa* (“to clothe with a shirt”). This implies that each soul is “clothed” by various human (never animal) bodies. On the reincarnationist doctrines of the Ahl-i Ḥaqq, see Khaksar, Reincarnation.

(This also applies to the belief “in the infusion or incarnation (*ḥulūl*) of the divine essence in the human body, especially in the body of the imāms.”¹⁰) Walker does not explore the writings of the Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophers; however, his conclusion seems to hold true with some notable exceptions, such as the seventh/thirteenth-century Kurdish reincarnationist Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī (d. in or after 687/1288).¹¹

We are left with Walker’s third group: select Muʿtazilites.¹² In Walker’s words, “aside from the highly radical sects,” these are Islam’s “real *aṣḥāb al-tanāsukh*,”¹³ that is, adherents to the concept of reincarnation. Though a minority within Muʿtazilism, about whom we know very little, their views have attracted considerable attention. These theologians reportedly held that when God created people, He placed them all (and not simply Adam and Eve) in the garden. Those who were truly righteous were permitted to stay; those who were truly unrighteous were placed in the fire; and those who had not amassed a sufficient measure of either good or evil deeds were placed in this world. If, after one life in this world, the latter had not yet proven themselves to be either truly righteous or truly unrighteous, then – presumably on account of God’s justice – they would be incarnated in other human or animal bodies. The quality of their new bodies would reflect their relative goodness or evilness. Those who were relatively more righteous than unrighteous, for instance, would acquire bodies that were relatively more beautiful.¹⁴ This reincarnation-for-justice proposal is an alternative to the relatively more popular and less controversial belief that individuals with equal good and evil deeds would be consigned to the temporary limbo of “the heights” (*al-aʿrāf*) between heaven and hell.¹⁵ The heresiographers provide us with the names of two prominent

10 Daftary, *Ismāʿīlīs* 64.

11 Griffel, *Divine actions* 73ff. See Schmidtke, *Theologie* 230–3. Madelung, Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī’s synthesis 149; and Schmidtke, *Theologie* 221, maintain that Ibn Abī Jumhūr al-Aḥsāʾī (d. soon after 906/1501), who was influenced by al-Shahrazūrī, was also a reincarnationist. Griffel, *Divine actions* 74ff., however, contends that what Ibn Abī Jumhūr had in mind was an *afterlife* phenomenon of souls entering bodies that reflect their spiritual status – “a major departure” from al-Shahrazūrī’s metempsychosis. Griffel, *Divine actions* 78.

12 Walker, *Metempsychosis* 219.

13 *Ibid.*, 226.

14 Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal* 61–3.

15 See, for instance, Ibn Taymiyya, *Fatāwā* xvi, 177; Riḍā, *Tafsīr* viii, 431–5. This view is supported by certain contested prophetic traditions. The Quran refers to “the people of the heights” (Q 7:46–49), but does not mention who they are or why they are on “the heights” in the first place. On account of their elevation, some regard them as righteous believers

Mu'tazilites who reportedly upheld the reincarnation-for-justice position: Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ (or, according to variant accounts, Khābiṭ or Ḥā'iṭ, d. 232/847) and Faḍl b. al-Ḥadabī (or al-Faḍl al-Ḥadathī, d. 257/871). Both were disciples of the Basran Mu'tazilite theologian al-Nazzām (d. 231/845), who was apparently not himself an advocate of metempsychosis.¹⁶

Although it is unclear whether these Mu'tazilites had theodicy in mind, their reincarnation-for-justice position arguably circumvents a problem that later proved to be a thorn in the side of the Mu'tazilites. According to legend, Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–6) abandoned Mu'tazilism on account of the failure of his master al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915–6) to resolve the classic “three brothers” dilemma: One lives a righteous life, another lives an unrighteous life, and the other passes away as an infant. According to al-Jubbā'ī, the first will be in heaven, the second in hell, and the third in a state of limbo. This stance, however, is ostensibly incongruous with Mu'tazilite notions of divine justice: If the deceased infant had only lived a full life as a righteous believer he would have spent the rest of eternity in paradise. If, instead, he had been spared punishment in the fire because he was destined to become wicked, this would leave unresolved the question of why God would not simply take the life of the second brother before committing the transgressions that would seal his fate.¹⁷ Assuming the reincarnation-for-justice position is inclusive of deceased infants, it arguably allows theologians to uphold the Mu'tazilite conception of divine justice while adequately accounting for the fate of one who

or even angels, rather than people or *jinn* in limbo. See Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī's (d. 310/923) discussion of this in *Tafsīr* x, 209–35. Cf. Nadarbek Mirza's modern discussion of this, but from a reincarnationist perspective, in Mirza, *Reincarnation* 48–9.

- 16 Al-Shahrastānī, *Milal* 60–3; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq* 273–6; Walker, *Metempsychosis* 219, 226ff. Another Mu'tazilite student of al-Nazzām who reportedly espoused a similar reincarnationist doctrine was Aḥmad b. Ayyūb b. Mānūs. See al-Shahrastānī, *Milal* 62. As Paul Kraus notes in al-Rāzī, *Rasā'il* 174–5, the Zāhirite theologian Ibn Ḥazm reportedly included Aḥmad b. Ḥābiṭ in a list of individuals who allegedly believed that incarnation could occur in non-human bodies. According to al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153–4), Ibn Ḥābiṭ also purportedly held that each animal community must have a “messenger” (*rasūl*) of its own. This is because “all the creatures that crawl on the earth and those that fly with their wings are communities like yourselves” (Q 6:38), and “every community has been sent a warner” (Q 35:24). See al-Shahrastānī, *Milal* 63.
- 17 Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt* iv, 267–8; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* xv, 89; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Shifā'* ii, 253. Rosalind Gwynne asserts that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) was likely the first to associate al-Ash'arī with the “three brothers” dilemma. See Gwynne, *Three brothers*. Whatever the story's authenticity, its significance lies in its function as a popular critique of Mu'tazilism.

passes away without ever having qualified as a *compos mentis*. It also serves as an alternative to the view that deceased infants, those who are not of sound mind, and “unreached” adults who never received God’s message (*ahl al-fatrah*) would be assigned a special messenger on the day of judgment. This messenger-of-resurrection would command his people to enter the fire. Those who obey would be admitted into paradise; those who disobey would be consigned to hell.¹⁸ This dramatic test is ostensibly difficult to harmonize with the “standard” test assigned to most people in this world, leading some theologians to suggest that, at least in the case of “unreached” adults, God will simply judge them according to what they knew to be true and good.¹⁹ The reincarnation-for-justice proposal, however, presents another possibility: Through metempsychosis, *everyone* in this world will eventually be assigned a “standard” test before the last day. But whereas the more popular notion of a messenger-of-resurrection assumes a brief test reserved for a relatively small group of special cases, the reincarnation-for-justice proposal presupposes a lengthy process involving a larger pool of individuals. As we shall soon see, there may be a conservative, much less controversial alternative to the Mu‘tazilite reincarnationist proposal.

To Walker’s list, I add one more group: certain Sufis. Like most Muslims, a majority of Sufis do not subscribe to a belief in metempsychosis. In addition, some Sufi philosophers, such as Mullā Ṣadrā, produced refutations of reincarnation.²⁰ Yet not only have some Sufis – particularly modern ones – been “real *aṣḥāb al-tanāsukh*,” but they may also be some of, if not the most influential reincarnationists in the Muslim world.

For these mystics, reincarnation is the means by which one attains spiritual perfection. In a relatively popular yet short work called *Reincarnation and Islam*, which was published in 1927, a Karachi lawyer and Sufi theosophist named Nadarbek K. Mirza (fl. first half of the fourteenth/twentieth century) asserts that the Quranic notion of individual progression toward God requires the acceptance of reincarnation. Islamic scripture does not make this obvious

18 See, for instance, Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ* 137; Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Jawāb* i, 273–4; Ibn Taymiyya, *Fatāwā* xi, 686; Ibn Taymiyya, *Fatāwā* xvii, 308–10. For a discussion of some of the disparate views in Muslim scholarly discourse regarding the fate of deceased children, see Smith and Haddad, *Understanding* 168–82.

19 See, for instance, Riḍā, *Tafsīr* i, 339.

20 Day, Ibn Sina and Mullā Ṣadrā’s arguments; Kamada, Metempsychosis; Kamada, Transmigration of soul. According to Kamada, Transmigration of soul 114–5, Mullā Ṣadrā “definitely rejects the notion of *tanāsukh* in the general sense,” but “confirms the type of *tanāsukh* in which the soul takes different forms in the hereafter according to his conducts in this world” (emphasis mine).

to the casual reader, Mirza speculates, because of the context in which it was revealed: "When materialism was all-powerful, when God was all but forgotten, when pleasures of the body were the only end in life, it would have been a dangerous principle to lay before the people, the idea that if they failed to-day they could make [it] up to-morrow."²¹

Avoiding the accusation that he is simply borrowing from Hinduism,²² Mirza reminds his readers that Islam is the final, comprehensive religion; it necessarily encompasses the divinely-inspired teachings of old, which, in this case, are presumed to include various non-Abrahamic traditions. Thus, Mirza freely employs terms like *karma* and *mokṣa* when speaking of Quranic reincarnationism.²³ He also intimates that the Prophet Muḥammad was an incarnation of previous prophets, such as Adam and Abraham, and possibly even Krishna and Buddha.²⁴ It is only through many lives, he explains, that one can attain perfection. The physical paradise depicted in the Quran lies toward the end of this path to perfection, but it is by no means the *final* destination; the end is liberation from the physical body and *saṃsāra*, the cycle of birth, death, and reincarnation.²⁵

According to Mirza, we may not recall our previous lives (because we are now clothed in new bodies with new brains),²⁶ but the doctrine of reincarnation

21 Mirza, *Reincarnation* 5. See Mirza, *Reincarnation* 35.

22 As al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 442/1150) remarked centuries earlier, reincarnation is a characteristic doctrine of the Hindus: "Whoever does not profess it is not [Hindu]." Al-Bīrūnī, *Tahqīq* 24.

23 Mirza, *Reincarnation*, passim, especially 1–8, 44–5.

24 Mirza, *Reincarnation* 50–4. Mirza, *Reincarnation* 54, ascribes the view that Muḥammad is an incarnation of Krishna and Buddha to certain Ismaʿīlis.

25 Mirza, *Reincarnation* 42–3. In this light, Mirza, *Reincarnation* 38, 47–8, asserts that we have good reason to reread the Quranic affirmation that God "has created you stage by stage" (Q 71:14) and that "you will progress from stage to stage" (Q 84:19). What is more, he argues that there may be Quranic evidence for *mokṣa*, or liberation from *saṃsāra*, in Q 90:2, which Mirza quotes as follows: "You shall be made free from the obligations in this city." As he notes, the term "city" has long "symbolized the physical body, as the five senses stand for the five gates thereof" (Mirza, *Reincarnation* 43). Leaving aside this uncommon interpretation, Mirza's quoted translation of Q 90:2, based on the translation provided by Maulana Muhammad Ali (d. 1951) of Lahore, is also uncommon. The overwhelming majority of exegetes assume that this verse "*wa-anta ḥillun bi-hādha al-balad*" is addressed to Muḥammad, and that "the city" is Mecca. Abdel Haleem (trans.), *The Quran* 422, translates this verse as follows: "and you [Prophet] are an inhabitant of this city."

26 Mirza, *Reincarnation* 28–9. As Mirza explains, even if one does not recall previous lives, these lives leave imprints on the soul and define one's "inherent character." Mirza points to the following Quranic passage – typically regarded as a depiction of torture in hell – as evidence of reincarnation: "We shall send those who reject Our revelations to the fire. When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that

provides the most satisfying explanation for some otherwise troubling or mystifying features of creation. For instance, he notes, it allows one to understand why some children are born with genetic defects – a form of “chastisement” that could only result from sins of a prior life.²⁷ This is because God is just, and “anything bad [that happens to you] is from yourself” (Q 4:79).²⁸ This, of course, presents us with another way of approaching the “three brothers” dilemma: As a form of punishment, God killed the infant brother on account of his previous wickedness.

Lest one assume that Mirza’s claims are frivolous, he cites various *ostensibly* corroborating statements of certain prominent Muslim mystics. Consider, for instance, the following words attributed to al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922):

Like the herbage,
I have sprung up many a time
On the banks of flowing rivers.
For a hundred thousand years
I have lived and worked and tried
In every sort of body.²⁹

Along these lines, the following is ascribed to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273):

I am but one soul
But I have a hundred thousand bodies . . .
Two thousand men have I seen who were I;
But none as good as I am now.³⁰

Besides Mirza, other writers, including certain Hindu and Hindu-inspired thinkers (such as Huston Smith), point to the following lines of Rūmī as evidence of the latter’s reincarnationism:³¹

they may continue to feel the pain” (Q 4:56). Interestingly, when quoting his preferred translation of this verse, Mirza omits the brief reference to “the fire”: “As for those who are disbelievers . . . so often as their skins are thoroughly burned, we will change them for other skins that they may taste of chastisement.”

27 Mirza, *Reincarnation* 23–4.

28 Ibid., 40–2.

29 Ibid., 58. For a similar attempt to paint al-Ḥallāj as a reincarnationist, see Chitkara and Sharma, *Religion* 139.

30 Mirza, *Reincarnation* 55.

31 See, for instance, Najemy, *Mystical* 62; Smith, *Why* 268; Chitkara and Sharma, *Religion* 138–9; Ramananda, *Way* 202; Shahin, *Islam and Hinduism*; Shahin, *Kashmiri Sufism, Islam*

I died as mineral and became a plant,
 I died as plant and rose to animal,
 I died as animal and I was Man.
 Why should I fear?
 When was I less by dying?
 Yet once more I shall die as Man, to soar
 With angels blest; but even from angelhood
 I must pass on: all except God doth perish.
 When I have sacrificed my angel-soul,
 I shall become what no mind e'er conceived.
 O let me not exist! For Non-existence
 Proclaims in organ tones "To Him we shall return!"³²

Although it may be tempting to regard these and similar declarations as proof that certain Sufi giants were reincarnationists, we must not forget that these are the ecstatic musings of mystics. One could just as easily read these passages as poetic expressions of either the unity of existence or the evolution of the soul (within a single body) as it deepens its understanding of the nature of the all-encompassing God, His creation, and the hereafter. Such readings – unlike the reincarnationist proposal – would be consistent with what we already know of al-Ḥallāj, Rūmī, and a great many other Sufis. With this in mind, consider the following words attributed to al-Ḥallāj and cited by Rūmī:

Kill me, o my trustworthy friends,
 for in my being killed is my life . . .³³

According to Annemarie Schimmel, this passage "lends itself to a purely mystical interpretation and seems to exclude a pseudoscientific understanding of such verses."³⁴ Like the other aforementioned Sufi passages, we need not interpret these words literally. But here we can already observe a problem

and Hinduism. Mirza cites a slightly different version of these lines of Rūmī in Mirza, *Reincarnation* 46.

32 Rūmī, *Mathnawī* iii, 3901–6, trans. in Schimmel, *Mystical* 321–2. Mirza, *Reincarnation* 46–7, draws a parallel between these lines of poetry and Q 18:37 (incorrectly cited as 17:37), specifically, the rhetorical question (presented in the parable of the two men and their gardens), "Have you no faith in Him who created you from dust, then from a small drop of fluid, then shaped you into a man?"

33 Schimmel, *Mystical* 322.

34 Ibid.

that defines the reincarnationist controversy, not only when approaching the works of mystics, but also, as we shall soon see, the Quran itself: defining “life” and “death.”

In any case, it is the reincarnationist interpretation of Sufi verses such as those cited above that has provided much ammunition for contemporary advocates of metempsychosis. Moreover, the contemporary advocates are diverse, with members of a secret Egyptian Sufi society³⁵ on one end of the spectrum, and South Asian enthusiasts of Sultan Shahin, a prominent journalist and editor of *New Age Islam*, who was himself inspired by the reincarnationism of Kashmir’s Rishī-Sufi order and the modern thinker Murtuza Husain Abdi on the other.³⁶ It is worth noting that these groups and individuals tend to promote principles of religious pluralism, and often extol the virtues of Hinduism and Buddhism.³⁷ Although marginal, this form of Islamic reincarnationism appears to be growing, and has already attracted the attention of a number of academics.³⁸

35 Although this Cairo-based society permitted me to peruse their unpublished reincarnationist articles, I was unfortunately not given permission to cite either these articles or even the name of the organization. It was only through a relative that I discovered this coterie. It would appear that its members, some of whom are prominent and well-known outside the society, are divided between reincarnationists and others who prefer not to dwell on the matter.

36 Shahin, *Islam and Hinduism*; Shahin, *Kashmiri Sufism, Islam and Hinduism*. Shahin cites a series of articles by Murtuza Husain Abdi called “Reincarnation – Islamic conceptions.” Interestingly, Abdi quotes a tradition, reported by the Shi’ite traditionist and exegete ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummī (d. 328/939), that presents no less than the *imām* Ja’far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) affirming the phenomenon of reincarnation before entry into “the heaven world,” cited in Shahin, *Kashmiri Sufism, Islam and Hinduism*. This contradicts another report cited by the Shi’ite traditionist Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1698) and narrated by Ja’far al-Šādiq’s one-time student Hishām b. al-Ḥakam, in which the *imām* is quoted as saying that reincarnationists (*aṣḥāb al-tanāsukh*) “leave behind them the true way of religion, paint themselves in errors, and graze themselves [sic] freely in the pasture of carnal desires.” Kamada, *Transmigration of soul* 106; al-Majlisī, *Biḥār* iv, 320f.

37 This is despite the fact that many scholars of Buddhism maintain that the Buddha’s teachings are technically incongruous with reincarnationism, as the latter involves a persistent self; if the self is transitory, one could only speak of rebirths, not reincarnation.

38 See, for instance, Jane Smith and Yvonne Haddad’s brief discussion of Nadarbek Mirza’s reincarnationist views in Smith and Haddad, *Understanding* 8.

3 Reincarnation and the Quran

Beyond appealing to contentious conceptions of Islamic universality and justice, can reincarnation be justified scripturally? Are there any Quranic statements that at least hint at the possibility that the deceased may be reincarnated in this world? Many advocates of *tanāsukh* would respond with an emphatic yes. While affirming life after death, the Quran arguably suggests a *cycle* of reincarnation, and not simply resurrection, by drawing on the analogy of *seasonal* vegetation:³⁹

God sends water down from the sky in due measure – We revive dead land with it, and likewise you will be brought forth (*tukhrajūn*) (Q 43:11).

We drive [heavy clouds] to a dead land where We cause rain to fall, bringing out all kinds of crops, just as We shall bring out (*nukhriju*) the dead (*al-mawtā*) (Q 7:57).

[Have you ever wondered] how God made you spring forth from the earth like a plant, how He will return you into it and then bring you out (again) (*yukhrijukum ikhrājan*)? (Q 71:17–8).⁴⁰

Thus, we read in Q 3:27 that God merges “night into day and day into night” – a recurring phenomenon – and brings “the living (*al-ḥayy*) out of the dead (*al-mayyit*) and the dead out of the living.” This idea is reiterated in one of the most striking passages invoked in reincarnationist literature, Q 2:28:⁴¹ “How can you ignore God when you were deceased/lifeless (*amwātan*) and He gave you life (*yūḥyikum*), then (*thumma*) will cause you to die (*yumītukum*), then will give you life (again), then to Him you will be brought back?” Assuming that the term *amwāt* (sing. *mayyit*, from the root *m-w-t*), here means “deceased,” or, more precisely, “that which was once alive but is now dead” – rather than simply “lifeless,” or “that which is not living and has never lived” – we have before us what could appear to be strong evidence of a reincarnationist paradigm.

As traditionally understood, however, the sequence in Q 2:28 pertains to the initial creation (“you *were* lifeless [rather than deceased] and He gave you life”) followed by death and resurrection on the last day (“*then* will cause you to die,

39 This argument appears in, *inter alia*, Mirza, *Reincarnation* 32–4; Shahin, *Islam and Hinduism*; Shahin, *Kashmiri Sufism, Islam and Hinduism*.

40 My translation of the Quran loosely follows Abdel Haleem’s *The Quran*.

41 See, for instance, Mirza, *Reincarnation* 20–1; Shahin, *Islam and Hinduism*; Shahin, *Kashmiri Sufism, Islam and Hinduism*.

then will give you life [again], *then* to Him you will be brought back”). In his discussion of this passage, the famous exegete Abū Ja‘far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) presents various interpretations of the term *amwāt*: It refers to the period before birth, when people were lifeless and unworthy of being mentioned,⁴² either as dust (before the creation of Adam) or as drops of fluid (*nuṭaf*, sing. *nutfa*) in the loins of their parents; it refers to the looming death we are all familiar with, in which case the second death would follow the second life in the graves (*qubūr*), which would precede everlasting life in the hereafter; it refers to a form of death that followed the initial creation of humanity, “when your Lord took out the offspring from the loins of the Children of Adam and made them bear witness about themselves, He said, ‘Am I not your Lord?’ and they replied, ‘Yes, we bear witness’” (Q 7:172). According to the latter interpretation, the second life begins in the womb, which is why God “creates you in” – rather than “relocates you to” – “your mothers’ wombs” (Q 39:6). Never once does al-Ṭabarī mention the possibility of cyclical reincarnation. He himself favors the first interpretation, specifically the view that *amwāt* in Q 2:28 refers to humanity’s lifelessness as drops of fluid.⁴³

The same is true of other well-known exegetes, including the Mu‘tazilite al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144)⁴⁴ and the polymath Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209).⁴⁵ Al-Zamakhsharī considers the question, how could drops of fluid, which are inanimate, be described as *amwāt*? Should not this term be reserved for that which was once animate and then died? As al-Zamakhsharī observes, however, the Quran elsewhere describes other inanimate entities as being *amwāt*. Q 16:21, for instance, refers to the false gods of pre-Islamic Mecca as “lifeless (*amwātun*), not living.” Because these gods are presumed to have been fabricated, they could never have been alive.⁴⁶ Although al-Zamakhsharī never mentions reincarnationists here, this observation serves as a strong counterargument against them.

Even if, however, we were to accept the possibility of a reincarnationist reading of Q 2:28, there remain other scriptural obstacles confronting the espousers of *tanāsukh*. As we have seen, the Quran draws on the analogy of seasonal vegetation in affirming that the deceased “will be brought forth (*tukhrajūn*)”

42 See Q 76:1.

43 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* i, 443–51.

44 Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāfi*, 150–3.

45 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr* ii, 138–41. Al-Rāzī here is open to the idea that *amwāt* refers to the lifelessness of people before the first creation, when they were merely dust.

46 Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāfi*, 151. Although these false gods are “created, they are dead, not living” (Q 16:20–1). Al-Zamakhsharī’s other examples are not as compelling: “a lifeless land” (*baldataṇ maytan*) (Q 25:49) and “the lifeless earth” (*al-arḍ al-mayta*) (Q 36:33).

(Q 43:11). Although it is tempting to regard this as evidence for cyclical reincarnation, passages such as Q 20:55 seem to suggest that being “brought forth” (and similar notions derived from the Arabic root *kh-r-j*) means being resurrected, rather than reincarnated: “From the earth We created you, into it We shall return you, and from it We shall bring you forth (*nukhrijukum*) a second/another time (*tāratān ukhrā*)” (Q 20:55).⁴⁷ According to Q 40:11, which often appears in the exegetical discussions of Q 2:28, the denizens of the fire will say, “Our Lord, twice You have caused us to die/be lifeless (*amattanā ithnatayn*) and twice You have brought us to life (*aḥyaytanā ithnatayn*)” (Q 40:11). If we interpret the term “twice” (*ithnatayn*) literally, then the unrighteous individuals described here would have had at most two lives before the day of judgment. Most Muslim reincarnationists, however, have more than two lives in mind when they speak of the evolution of the soul through metempsychosis. Additionally, the two periods of lifelessness mentioned in this passage may be accounted for if we recall the various interpretations of *amwāt* cited by al-Ṭabarī in his commentary on Q 2:28. These two periods, therefore, might refer to pre-birth lifelessness and physical death at the end of this life; physical death at the end of this life and death following life in the graves; or death following the initial, pre-birth creation of humanity (when everyone submitted to God) and physical death at the end of this life. According to al-Rāzī, most people – and not simply the denizens of the fire – develop through two stages of lifelessness – pre-birth lifelessness (either as dust or drops of fluid) and physical death at the end of this life – and two “lives” – this life and life following the resurrection. The exceptions, al-Rāzī continues, are those special cases of people who underwent an additional death and were granted an additional life:⁴⁸

Remember when you [Israelites] said, ‘Moses, we will not believe you until we see God face to face.’ At that, thunderbolts struck you as you looked on. Then We revived you after your death, so that you might be thankful (Q 2:55–6).

Then, when you Israelites killed someone and started to blame one another – although God was to bring what you had concealed to light – We said, ‘Strike the [body] with a part of [the cow]’: thus God brings the dead to life and shows His signs so that you may understand (Q 2:72–3).

47 See Q 71:17–8.

48 Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥsīn* ii, 140.

Consider those people who abandoned their homeland in fear of death, even though there were thousands of them. God said to them, 'Die!' and brought them back to life again; God shows real favor to people, but most of them are ungrateful (Q 2:243).

[T]ake the one who passed by a ruined town. He said, 'How will God give this life when it has died?' So God made him die for a hundred years, and then raised him up, saying, 'How long did you stay like that?' He answered, 'A day, or part of a day.' God said, 'No, you stayed like that for a hundred years (Q 2:259).'⁴⁹

Interestingly, al-Rāzī includes as additional examples the Sleepers of the Cave (Q 18:9–26)⁵⁰ and Job's family (Q 21:84) – even though the Quran never explicitly states that they expired before being revived – and he omits the example of Jesus raising certain individuals from the dead (Q 5:110). In any case, many reincarnationists would probably hold that al-Rāzī and others misconstrue the norm when they aver that, with the exception of the aforementioned special cases, human development involves only two periods of lifelessness. It is true that, according to Q 2:28, everyone is lifeless/deceased (*amwāt*) before birth, then given life, then caused to die, then given life. But, some would insist, when the unrighteous in Q 40:11 remark that God *caused them to die* twice, they are describing a reality that is particular to them, as we can only speak of God *causing to die* those who were previously alive. Accordingly, the sinners' second death is, to quote the modernist exegete Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), a "spiritual death" that occurs when they are informed of their fate in hell.⁵¹ This interpretation, incidentally, parallels what we find in the New Testament, specifically the Book of Revelation: "Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire" (Rev 20:14); "Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Whoever conquers will not be harmed by the second death" (Rev 2:11).⁵² The Quran itself declares that the people of paradise will only experience the "first death" (*al-mawta al-ūlā*):

49 Cf. Mirza, *Reincarnation* 24–7, where Mirza presents these last two verses (Q 2:243 and 259) as possible examples of reincarnation.

50 Al-Rāzī cites only Q 18:21.

51 Asad (trans.), *Message* 813, note 9. This would presumably be the only kind of "death" that the damned would experience in the afterlife. As we read in Q 87:13, they will "neither die nor remain alive" in the fire.

52 Quoted according to the *New Revised Standard Version*. Cf. Epistle to the Hebrews 9:27.

Then [one of the inhabitants of heaven] will say [to his blessed companions], Are we never to die again after our first/earlier death (*mawtatanā al-ūlā*)? Shall we never suffer? This truly is the supreme triumph! (Q 37:58–60).

After the first/earlier death (*al-mawta al-ūlā*) they will taste death no more. God will guard them from the torment of hell (Q 44:56).

Whatever the case may be, al-Rāzī's observation is significant for reasons that he himself would not have necessarily appreciated: The Quran makes mention of special classes of people who undergo more deaths and are given more lives than most others *before* awaiting their judgment on the last day. Just because the Quran describes the righteous as having experienced one death and the unrighteous as having been made to die twice, one need not think that these are the only possibilities. Those individuals who were miraculously brought back from the dead during the eras of Moses and Jesus, for instance, and who made their way to paradise might be expected to express their joy slightly differently: "Are we never to die again after our first *two deaths*?" This in fact lends some credence to the possibility of a conservative alternative to the Mu'tazilite reincarnation-for-justice position: Only those who qualify as special cases, which would include here deceased infants, "unreached" adults, and those who had equal good and evil deeds, might be afforded at least one additional life in this world through metempsychosis; everything else concerning creation and resurrection would be in accordance with the majority Muslim view.

Perhaps here we have given up too easily on the not-so-conservative reincarnationists – the only reincarnationists who actually appear in our sources. Those among them inclined to the esoteric would undoubtedly challenge the common interpretations of the aforementioned Quranic passages. They might problematize our one-dimensional understanding of terms such as "life" and "death" by pointing to Quranic statements such as the following: "Do not say that those who are killed in God's cause are dead; they are alive, though you do not realize it" (Q 2:154). If the righteous can be killed without being counted among the dead, if the unrighteous can experience "spiritual deaths," and if all of humanity could have existed and submitted to God before birth,⁵³ then perhaps we have reason after all to rethink the Quranic Weltanschauung.

53 One would assume that many non-recarnationists who accept this interpretation of Q 7:172 would acknowledge that they have no recollection of this event. And yet the verse continues, "So you cannot say on the day of resurrection, 'We were not aware of this.'" The implication is that this act of submission has left an "imprint" on the souls – not necessar-

As we have seen, Islamic scripture teaches that the people of paradise will no longer taste death following “the first/earlier death” (*al-mawta al-ūlā*). If we interpret *al-mawta* to mean “physical death,” and if we interpret *al-ūlā* to mean “the first,” we are left with little or no room for *tanāsukh*. The esoteric reincarnationist, however, might insist that we have no reason to restrict ourselves to this particular interpretation. The Quran itself often employs the term *al-ūlā* to refer to all that pertains to this life:

The present life (*al-ūlā*) and the life to come (*al-ākhirā*) belong only to God (Q 53:25).

God condemned [Pharaoh] to punishment in the life to come (*al-ākhirā*) as well as in this life (*al-ūlā*) (Q 79:25).

The future (*al-ākhirā*) will be better for you than the past (*al-ūlā*) (Q 93:4).

Thus, one might argue that *al-mawta al-ūlā* in the passages above refers to the end, or “death,” of the cycle of reincarnation. This would account for the two deaths of the unrighteous: the end of their cycle of reincarnation and their “spiritual death.” This unconventional reading would not necessarily be undermined by the fact that the Quran elsewhere uses the terms “dead” and “death” to refer to physical death (as in, for instance, the aforementioned miracle narratives, in which individuals are brought back from the dead). There are, after all, multiple levels of truth in the Quranic universe, at least according to multitudes of exegetes, theologians, and mystics. Consider, for instance, Q 55:17, a verse that refers to God as “Lord of the two risings and Lord of the two settings.” Some exegetes take this to refer to the “extreme points of sunrise and sunset in summer and in the winter.”⁵⁴ The Quran elsewhere, however, refers to God as “Lord of the sunrises (*al-mashāriq*) and sunsets (*al-maghārib*)” (Q 70:40). We have no reason to regard this as a contradiction: God is the Lord of the two “extreme points” of sunrise and sunset, and the Lord of *all* the points in between. Thus, one could argue, people undergo many physical deaths, but only one “death” of the cycle of reincarnation – an “extreme” transition – and, in the case of the unrighteous, a “spiritual death” – another “extreme” transition.

In the final analysis, the great hurdle of Islamic reincarnationism is addressing why the Quran – to say nothing of the *ḥadīth* corpus – would be *evasively*

ily the minds – of all people. Along these lines, one might hold that reincarnation leaves similar “imprints.”

54 Asad (trans.), *Message* 938, note 7.

ambiguous about such a *major* feature of our existence. It is one thing to conceal, quite another to sidetrack. This, of course, does not mean that the reincarnationist project is doomed to fail. (Islamic scripture's repeated affirmation that unbelievers will remain in hell did not prevent the traditionalist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) and his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) from creating psychological space for the possibility that even unbelievers might one day be saved.⁵⁵) But the hurdle is quite high. Consider, for instance, the following passage: "When death comes to one of [the evil ones], he cries, 'My Lord, let me return so as to make amends for the things I neglected.' Never! This will not go beyond his words: a barrier (*barzakh*) stands behind such people until the very day they are resurrected (*yawm yub'athūn*)" (Q 23:99–100).⁵⁶

According to the aforementioned Sufi theosophist Nadarbek Mirza, this passage in fact corroborates his reincarnationist claims.⁵⁷ In arriving at this conclusion, he assumes that the "barrier" (*barzakh*) is temporary (notice the use of the term "until"), and that the closing phrase of Q 23:100 should be translated as, "until the day they are raised," not "resurrected." Thus, Mirza writes, when one dies, "he is *raised* to the consciousness of his real Self, if only for a moment of time. The Soul then begins to descend and . . . he is ultimately reborn in a physical body."⁵⁸

There is a problem here, however, that Mirza fails to address, and it involves the term employed at the end of Q 23:100, *yub'athūn*, from the root *b-ʿ-th*. In three Quranic passages (Q 7:14; 15:36; 38:79), Satan (Iblīs) beseeches God to grant him "respite" from His chastisement "until" – assuming the common understanding – "the day people are resurrected (*yawm yub'athūn*).⁵⁹ If, however, we choose to translate *yawm yub'athūn* as the "day people are raised (to the consciousness of their real selves before being reborn)," it would be unclear why Satan's reign would end at that point. A reincarnationist resolution here would have to involve a controversial rethinking of Satan and/or the nature

55 See my discussion of this in Khalil, *Islam and the fate of others*.

56 Consider also the following statements: "Every person (*nafs*) will *taste* death, then it is to Us that you will be returned" (Q 29:57; emphasis mine); "Give out of what We have provided for you, before death comes to one of you . . . God does not reprieve a soul when its turn comes" (Q 63:10–11). One, of course, might argue that a "person" (*nafs*) is not the same as a "soul" (*rūḥ*) (notwithstanding the common tendency to translate *nafs* as "soul").

57 Mirza, *Reincarnation* 12–7.

58 Ibid., 16 (emphasis the author's). As Mirza explains, the consciousness of the newly deceased soul first "passes immediately to the Astral Plane. There he dwells for a certain number of days or months or years, but more often centuries, according to the life he had been leading on earth. Thence he proceeds from plane to plane" before being raised to "the consciousness of his real Self."

of the “respite.” But there is more. The following Quranic passage employs the term *yawm yub‘athūn* in an apparent reference to a *single* “day,” the day of humanity’s *collective resurrection*:

[Abraham said,] ‘It is He [God] who guides me . . . He who will make me die and then give me life again; and He who will, I hope, forgive my faults on the day of judgment. My Lord, grant me wisdom; join me with the righteous; give me a good name among later generations; make me one of those given the garden of bliss – forgive my father, for he is one of those who have gone astray – and do not disgrace me on the day when all people are resurrected (*yawm yub‘athūn*): the day when neither wealth nor children can help, when the only one who will be saved is the one who comes before God with a heart devoted to Him (26:78–89).

Elsewhere, the Quran uses a related term, *al-ba‘th*, in another apparent reference to the day of judgment:

On the day the hour comes, the guilty will swear they lingered no more than an hour – they have always been deluded – but those endowed with knowledge and faith will say, ‘In accordance with God’s decree, you actually lingered till the day of resurrection (*yawm al-ba‘th*): this is the day of resurrection, yet you did not know.’ On that day the evildoers’ excuses will be of no use to them: they will not be allowed to make amends (33:55–7).

One, of course, could imagine some reincarnationist approaches to these passages. For instance, the reason the evildoers described in the passage above “will not be allowed to make amends” is that their consignment to a lower level of existence cannot be overturned; they cannot return to their previous lives. This and other atypical interpretations, however, highlight the challenge of justifying metempsychosis scripturally.

4 Conclusion

Muslim reincarnationists seeking to reconcile their beliefs with Islamic scripture are confronted with a daunting task. Even the aforementioned conservative alternative to Mu‘tazilite reincarnationism – that is, a one-time, pre-judgment day incarnation in another human body, for special cases only – finds little or no textual support. Yet, it also faces little or no textual resistance, especially if we limit ourselves to the Quran and possibly those limited *ḥadīths* classified as

widely transmitted (*mutawātīr*). Some theologians, therefore, might regard it as attractive because it could be employed to resolve some profoundly knotty theological problems – the fate of deceased children, the “unreached,” etc. In contrast, the reincarnationism that was actually adopted by not only certain Mu‘tazilites, but also some Sufis and various members of Shi‘ism’s so-called *ghulāt* sects, is much more radical: It appears to challenge scripture head-on, presents this-worldly metempsychosis as the norm, and, at least according to some, may even include incarnation in animal bodies.⁵⁹

It does not help reincarnationists that we have no concrete evidence that either the Prophet or any of the early Muslims tolerated a doctrine of *tanāsukh*. Much like Nadarbek Mirza, the modern reincarnationist Murtuza Husain Abdi (fl. second half of the fourteenth/twentieth century) speculates that, although the Prophet and certain successors affirmed the reality of metempsychosis, they refrained from sharing this knowledge with the larger community; and as the early Muslims placed more and more emphasis on political stability, discussions of *tanāsukh* became more and more obscure.⁶⁰ Skeptics would dismiss Mirza and Abdi’s claims as revisionist wishful thinking. This, however, need not bother reincarnationist mystics, who may assert that, through divine inspiration (*ilhām*), they have acquired extraordinary insights that allow them to penetrate the *true* meanings of God’s words (not to mention the words of other mystics). Such an assertion might convince others that reincarnationism is indeed scripturally indefensible. But as our world becomes proverbially smaller, and as certain members of various religious communities attempt to accentuate their commonalities, we should expect to encounter a growing body of Muslims searching for evidence – or at least hints – of a reincarnationist paradigm within and beyond the Quran.

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59 Reincarnationists open to the idea of human-to-animal reincarnation might also find hints of this phenomenon in passages that refer to Sabbath-breakers being transformed into apes and swine (Q 2:65; 5:60; 7:166).

60 Bjorling, *Reincarnation* 98.

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Roads to Paradise

Volume 2

Islamic History and Civilization

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Roads to Paradise

Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam

VOLUME 2

Continuity and Change
*The Plurality of Eschatological Representations
in the Islamicate World*

Edited by

Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson

With the Assistance of

Christian Mauder



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LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: *Hūrīs in Paradise*, *Mī'rājnāme*, Herat, 1430s. BnF Supplement Turc 190 – Fol. 49v.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Gunther, Sebastian. | Lawson, Todd, 1948– | Mauder, Christian.

Title: Roads to paradise : eschatology and concepts of the hereafter in Islam / edited by Sebastian Gunther, Todd Lawson, with the assistance of Christian Mauder.

Description: Leiden ; Boston : Brill, [2017] | Series: Islamic history and civilization, ISSN 0929-2403 ; volume 136 | Includes bibliographical references and index. Contents: Volume 1. Foundations and the formation of a tradition. Reflections on the hereafter in the Quran and Islamic religious thought— Volume 2. Continuity and Change. The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamicate World (Set)

Identifiers: LCCN 2016046348 (print) | LCCN 2016047258 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004333130 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9789004330948 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9789004330955 (hardback : alk. paper) | ISBN 9789004333154 (E-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Islamic eschatology. | Future life—Islam. | Islamic eschatology—Qur'anic teaching. | Future life—Islam—Qur'anic teaching.

Classification: LCC BP166.8 .R63 2017 (print) | LCC BP166.8 (ebook) | DDC 297.2/3—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016046348>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: “Brill”. See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 0929-2403

ISBN 978-90-04-33313-0 (hardback, set)

ISBN 978-90-04-33094-8 (hardback, vol. 1)

ISBN 978-90-04-33095-5 (hardback, vol. 2)

ISBN 978-90-04-33315-4 (e-book)

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PART 7

*Paradise and Eschatology in
Comparative Perspective*



A Typology of Eschatological Concepts

Fred M. Donner

The present article offers a set of categorizations that will, it is hoped, offer a consistent, comprehensive, and unambiguous way to classify the many diverse concepts that flourish in eschatological thought. This classification emerged from my own frustration in trying to understand the existing scholarship on eschatology, much of which I found confusing and unclear because different scholars appear to use different terms to refer to comparable concepts or practices, or use the same term in divergent ways. Terms like “post-millennial” or “apocalyptic” often seem to be predicated on unspoken, or at least unclarified, assumptions about the groups and concepts to which they are applied.

The word *eschatology* (derived from Greek *ta eschata*, “the last things”) developed in Western scholarship as a designation for those traditions that claim to know how things will “end up” at the end of normal life. That is, such traditions claim to describe the ultimate fate of an individual (or of the individual’s soul), or of a community, or of the whole cosmos. Or, more simply put, they describe what happens after we die – which, of course, we the living cannot know from direct experience.

Although the concept of eschatology as a scholastic category has been used by Christian theologians since at least the seventeenth century, the term eschatology is a relatively recent coinage in English and most other modern languages. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *eschatology* first appeared in print in English in 1844. It was first used in discussions of religious traditions, particularly Judaism and Christianity, that feature an explicitly articulated notion of an afterlife or comparable “other-worldly” realm that one can experience only after death. The term eschatology, however, sometimes came to be applied also to phenomena that are not linked to a time after the end of the world, but rather anticipated at some future time in the present world, such as expectations involving the raising (or restoration) of a community to a dominant or triumphant political position – often through the arrival of an earthly and this-worldly messiah who brings worldly salvation. In recent years, the term eschatology has even been extended into an entirely different context: that is, in discussions of “medical eschatology” – hospice or other care

provided by health practitioners to the terminally ill at the end of life.¹ In the following pages, we focus on the more traditional notions of eschatology.

Eschatological concepts vary tremendously in content. Many, but not all, share the belief that in the fullness of time there will occur a fundamental *change* or *transformation* in the world, often described as the dawning of a “new era” or “new eon,” in which conditions are in some way radically different from the (ordinary, present) era that preceded it. (This is especially true of the so-called “apocalyptic” eschatologies, on which we have more to say later.) The purpose of eschatological schemes is thus to situate the subject – whether it is the individual, community, or cosmos – in the context of the new era. In doing so, they invariably describe the status of the subject as markedly different from its status in the present: so, for example, the downtrodden in this era may become those in positions of authority and power in the new era. As Sigmund Mowinckel observed, eschatological schemes revolve around the perception of a profound duality.² This perceived duality may be either a distinction between the present time and a future eon or time, different from our own; or a distinction between the present world and some other world, a separate realm or space that is physically apart from our own world (but may coexist with it in time).

Beyond this common assumption of some kind of fundamental duality, the specific features of different eschatological schemas are structured around a limited repertoire of conceptual categories. The goal of this paper is to present, in preliminary form, a tentative catalog of these conceptual categories. We can thus describe specific eschatological schemas as being either *linear* or *cyclical*; or we can describe them as being *other-worldly*, *this-worldly*, or *composite*; they can be characterized as *religious* or *secular*; they can be *moral* or *amoral*; they can be *positive* or *negative*; they can be *individual*, *communal*, or *cosmic*; they can be *serial* or *catastrophic*; they can be *evolutionary* or *cataclysmic*; and they can be *future-oriented* or *realized*. It is of course possible that they can be characterized in other ways as well, but that must be left for future scholars to determine. The remainder of this essay is devoted to providing a very brief discussion and defense of the aforementioned categories, with a few examples to illustrate how they show up in known eschatological traditions.

1 I thank Dr. Gregor Prindull (Göttingen) for calling this usage to my attention.

2 Mowinckel, *He that cometh* 144, 263–6.

1 Linear vs. Cyclical Eschatologies

Perhaps the most basic conceptual distinction in eschatological schemes is between those whose cosmology is strictly *linear* and those that embrace a *cyclical* cosmology. A linear conception posits a single timeline for the world and for the life of the individual. The individual has a single birth and proceeds through life to a single death; the world as we know it proceeds from a single definite point of creation to a single definite end-time, when the world (and maybe time itself) will cease to exist, or be destroyed; there will be, as the phrase common to some such schemes has it, a “Last Day” after which there will be no further existence in the world. Christianity and Islam offer familiar examples of strictly linear eschatologies. Cyclical schemes, on the other hand, such as the *saṃsāra* chain of birth-life-death-rebirth in some forms of Hinduism and Buddhism, portray the individual as being repeatedly (and eternally) “recycled” into the world; in some forms of these traditions, there is no “end,” as the world and universe, no less than the individual, are continually dying and being reborn. This recycling may continue until, through progressive enlightenment and the acquisition of sufficient *karma*, the individual attains – if he ever does – some permanent terminal state; this may be the *mokṣa* or “release,” that is, the reunion of his soul with a perpetual “World of the Fathers,” as in Vedic Hinduism or the Upanishads; or it may be the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, which is either release from the birth-life-death-rebirth cycle of *saṃsāra* (as in Theravāda Buddhism), or the realization of the interconnect-edness of all things and the detachment from all desires, emotions, and ignorance (as in Mahāyāna Buddhism).³

While in the long run – the very long run – both linear and cyclical systems seem to share the idea that the individual will (or at least may) end up in some final state, so that in some sense the cyclical systems also have an underlying linearity, the two conceptualizations differ profoundly in the way the individual’s life is construed within the respective systems. In linear systems, each of us has but one life, and our ultimate fate after death depends on what we do in this life: there is, in short, a kind of urgency because our single life has a definite and inescapable “deadline,” namely our own ever-approaching death. In cyclical systems, on the other hand, the individual has “other chances” to attain escape from the troubles of this life – in future lives to which he may be reincarnated – although of course in those systems the way one behaves in

3 MacGregor, *Images* 64–6, 84–6, 90–2, 119–21; Moreman, *Beyond the threshold* 97–137; Nattier, Buddhist eschatology; and Knipe, Hindu eschatology, offer good overviews of these concepts, much more complex than can be presented fully here.

this life determines how much *karma* one acquires and, therefore, is also crucial to whether one moves closer to escaping the cycle of *samsāra*/rebirth. We might therefore observe that, from the perspective of the individual, it matters little whether one chooses to pursue virtue in order to escape eternal damnation in hell (as in a linear eschatology) or in order to escape reincarnation in the next life as a lower being (as in some cyclical eschatologies). The matter is made more complex by the fact that in some cyclical systems, such as certain forms of Hinduism, there has developed the idea that the deceased may go to a heaven or vividly-described hell (perhaps on the way to eventual reincarnation?). This, too, seems to introduce an aspect of linearity in systems that are putatively cyclical.

2 Religious vs. Secular Eschatologies

Eschatologies can also be differentiated according to whether they are motivated by secular or by religious values. In religious eschatologies, the events that are predicted as part of the scenario leading to the end of time are decreed by God (or the gods); in secular eschatologies, on the other hand, the end is brought about by the workings of the blind forces of nature, which is not intentional and does not know or care about human existence; or it is brought about by human agency, which is intentional and ought to know better, but is heedless or ignorant and so fails to stave off the dire consequences.

The best example of a secular eschatology is, perhaps, Marxism-Leninism.⁴ It rails against a present “sinful age,” complete with corruption of the rulers/hegemony, oppression of the workers and poor, and other ills, and offers hope of a cataclysmic change ushering in a “new era” that will be marked by the overthrow of capitalist interests and the privileged classes, the end of capitalist exploitation, an egalitarian society, and the “dictatorship of the proletariat.”

3 This-Worldly, Other-Worldly, and Composite Eschatologies

Eschatologies can be differentiated according to whether they describe the ultimate fate of the subject individual or group as belonging to this world or to some other world or realm. This-worldly eschatologies describe a new eon dawning here on earth, but at some time in the future through the normal passage of time – albeit, perhaps, a lot of time. Other-worldly eschatologies, on the

4 Cohn, *Pursuit of the millennium* 100–1, 307–10.

other hand, see either a new eon beginning with the end of time and history, so that, in effect, a new creation is inaugurated, different from this world; or else they see man's existence after death as taking place in some other realm spatially separated from the present world. This other realm may exist parallel to the normal world of eschatological hope in which we live. In some cases, the realm to which the deceased depart is separated from the present world both temporally (i.e., it begins with an end-time that marks the end of history) and spatially (i.e., in some non-terrestrial world).

3.1 *This-Worldly Eschatologies*

Zoroastrianism – Zoroastrian cosmology presents history as the struggle of Ahura Mazda, the god of good, against Aingra Mainyu, the god of evil. The goal of the individual believer is to strive in every way to free himself from the forces of evil (usually associated with materiality/the physical world), and to join the forces of good (associated with the spirit and symbolized by light). The culmination of normal history will be a final judgment, during which the earth will be purged by a flood of molten metal; those people who are evil will be scalded by it, but the righteous will walk through it “as though through warm milk.” Evildoers will be subjected to a period of painful punishment, but will eventually repent and be rehabilitated, to join the righteous in a world now purified of all evil and disease, where everyone will live in peace, plenty and harmony. The world is certainly transformed beyond recognition by this process of purging and judgment, but it remains, in Zoroastrian cosmology, this same world we inhabit. The dead are not removed to an ideal paradise; rather the earth itself becomes paradise.⁵

Early Israelite messianism – Another this-worldly schema was found among the early Israelites. Some of the early Israelite prophets foretold a new age when a mighty king of Israel would deliver the Israelites from bondage and oppression by their enemies, and even subject their enemies to servile status. In early Israelite usage, the term *messiah* (Hebr. *māshīaḥ*) meant someone who was anointed by Yahweh – that is, recognized and commissioned by God to undertake a special task for God's people Israel – and early kings are usually styled *māshīaḥ*; but the term lacks at this early stage the transcendent, semi-divine overtones it would acquire in the intertestamental period (ca. 200 BCE–100 CE). In the early prophetic period, we find rather “a future hope of a coming kingdom . . .” in David's line, “. . . an earthly kingdom, political

5 Ara, *Eschatology in the Indo-Iranian traditions* 195–217, offers a good survey.

in character, nationalistic in outlook and military in expression.”⁶ This is not, in fact, an eschatological concept properly speaking, in that it did not deal with the “end of the world,” but only with a change of Israel’s political situation in this world. Israel would no longer be a weak, oppressed, and reviled community, but would evolve into a powerful nation in this world and would prevail over all those enemies that had formerly oppressed it (there is a strikingly vindictive quality to this formulation). It seems to be only in the intertestamental period that the notion of *messiah* acquires its more supernatural qualities, as a redeemer who transcends time, space, and death and allows his people to enter a beatific afterlife; this is particularly prominent in Christianity, of course, and takes the notion of *māshīah* into the realm of other-worldly eschatology.

Jehovah’s Witnesses – The Protestant Christian sect known as Jehovah’s Witnesses, which arose in the United States in the 1870s, teaches that in the eventual millennial kingdom, the majority of the righteous will live forever on earth. The Witnesses reject the idea of hell, preaching that deceased sinners simply cease to exist after death. They do not dispense entirely with the notion of other-worldly realms, however, for they also hold that a minority of the righteous will ascend to heaven to rule with Christ. The main emphasis of their doctrines, however, seems to be on a this-worldly future, eternal life on the earth we know for the majority of righteous people.⁷

Marxist eschatology – Certain secular ideologies foresee an ultimate fate for the world, or for a nation, in a manner that resembles closely the concepts we call eschatological in religious traditions. Marxism, as noted above, can be seen as a secular eschatological scheme that predicts a new era dawning in this world with the overthrow of capitalist society and its bourgeois manifestations. This would result in the creation of a universal classless society, marking the end of the present era of class struggle, capitalist oppression, poverty, etc. There is in such an ideology, of course, no hint that the “life to come” will be anywhere but on the earth we know, albeit one transformed in ways that would make it almost unrecognizable to us.

Doomsday predictions of various kinds sometimes also belong to the category of this-world eschatologies; for example, the warnings or predictions of global environmental disaster or of a global nuclear holocaust that will end life

6 Russell, *Method and message* 265; cf. also Arnold, Old Testament eschatology 25: “[Israelite eschatology] longs for, indeed expects, a period when Yhwh triumphs over evil, redeems his people Israel, and finally rules the world in peace and salvation.” See also Mowinckel, *He that cometh*, esp. 122–4, 125–37.

7 A summary of these doctrines is presented in the Witnesses’ newsletter, *The Watchtower* 130.21 (1 November 2009). They seem to be derived from a reading of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 40–55).

on earth “as we know it” (as the phrase usually has it) can be considered forms of this-worldly eschatology.

Hindu eschatology – The rebirth of the individual in this world as part of the *saṃsāra* chain of birth-life-death-rebirth is a basic concept of both Buddhist and Hindu thought. As noted above, however, Hinduism’s rich traditions whereby individuals may escape the *saṃsāra* chain and (if virtuous) move to a permanent abode in heaven, or (if sinful) be consigned to horrible punishments in hell, introduces the notion of other-worldly realms in what seems to have begun as a cyclical and this-worldly eschatological scheme.

3.2 *Other-Worldly Eschatologies*

More familiar, perhaps, are other-worldly eschatologies. In the Ancient Near East several versions of the trope of the Underworld fit this description.

Ancient Near Eastern eschatologies – Sheol, the underworld of the ancient Hebrews referred to in the Hebrew Bible, seems to exist as a parallel universe where the *repa’im* or shades of the dead lead a sad, shadowy, and unchanging existence. There can be no communication between the two worlds; when Joseph’s father Jacob is told of Joseph’s death (Genesis 37:35), he laments that he will have to “go down to Sheol to my son, mourning.”⁸ The implication is that he will spend eternity in Sheol unhappy. As Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10 describes it, “... the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward ... there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.” The Homeric Tartarus or House of Hades, similarly, or the underworld of Mesopotamian myths, the “Land-of-no-return” where the dead exist in a state resembling sleep, seem similarly to be places where the shades of the deceased are “warehoused” indefinitely, distant realms that generally have no contact with the real world in which we live.⁹

Mainstream Christian eschatology derives from the Gospels’ emphasis on Jesus as the messiah and on his resurrection to reign in heaven, as well as from elaborate scenarios for the end-time (as presented with pathological vengefulness, for example, in the Book of Revelation). These are shaped around a basic plot in which the “natural” world and time come to an end when God raises people for the last judgment.¹⁰ The fate of individuals is then decreed by God

8 All quotations from the Bible follow the *Revised Standard Version*.

9 Albinus, *House of Hades* 41–2, 51–6; Cumont, *After life* 44–90; James, *The ancient gods*, 179–91.

10 Revelations 21:1 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.”

on the basis of their record in life; they go to hell or heaven, in either case not a place that is part of this world or of the normal continuum of time.

Muslim eschatology involves similar scenarios played out in a heavenly or other-worldly realm or realms. The ultimate destinations of individuals, “the garden” (*al-janna*)/paradise or hell depending on how they behaved in this life, is in neither case portrayed as being part of the natural world; rather, they are depicted as perfect utopias or dystopias – places either of endless pleasure and bliss, or of endless torment. In paradise, for example, righteous men are rewarded by, among other things, having a limitless supply of nubile sexual partners, ever-virginal, willing, with no complications of family ties or pregnancy – and enjoyment of them is guilt-free because God has provided them to the righteous for just this purpose, as a reward for their steadfastness in their former lives on earth. So this is obviously not some kind of purified real world, but a fantasy realm where the sometimes irksome realities of life in the natural world (such as menstruation and in-laws) simply do not exist.¹¹

3.3 *Composite Eschatologies*

Some eschatological scenarios involve two or more phases, beginning in this world and ending up in some other world. Millenarian scenarios belong to this category of eschatology, which we can term *composite eschatologies*. The eschatological scheme presented in the Book of Revelations, for example, posits a first phase of cataclysmic wars and strife in this world, and unspeakably gruesome tribulations (Rev. 6–19), to be followed by a thousand-year period when Satan is locked up by an angel and the martyrs for Christ are resurrected and reign in glory with Christ – presumably reigning over a world in which peace prevails, as Satan is out of the picture. Upon Satan’s release, however, the world is again plunged into tribulation; the evil “nations which are at the four corners of the earth, that is Gog and Magog,” attempt to besiege the righteous, until their forces, and the devil with them are cast by God into a lake of fire and brimstone, to suffer forever, after which the last judgment ends the earth and consigns all resurrected souls to either heaven or hell (Rev. 20–21). All of these ultimate destinations seem to be other-worldly ones, beyond the realm of normal time and space.

Muslim eschatology also involves, in some cases, a kind of millenarian vision, according to which the actual last judgment is preceded by a lengthy period of wars, marked by the appearance of the Dajjāl or Antichrist and then the second coming of Jesus, who will vanquish the Dajjāl to inaugurate the millennium – a prolonged period of bliss on earth – which will eventually be

11 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 164–8.

followed by the judgment. Those Muslim traditions that speak of the *mahdī* or eschatological deliverer also belong to this category, for they foresee the arrival of the *mahdī* as marking the beginning of an expected era “when the world will be filled with justice as it had earlier been filled with injustice.”¹² This preliminary, this-worldly phase will eventually give way to the end-time, last judgment, and final dispatch of all souls to heaven or hell.

While secular eschatologies are always this-worldly, we cannot say that religious eschatologies are always other-worldly. As noted above, the original idea of Jewish messianism was built around the notion of a triumphant restoration of the Kingdom of David in this world, not (or not only) in the next, and Zoroastrian visions of the period after the final judgment set it in this world, purified of all evil.

4 Moral vs. Amoral Eschatologies

Many eschatological schemes involve explicit or implicit moral judgments that determine the fate of the individual or community in the afterlife. The good will go to heaven, the wicked to hell, depending on their behavior in this life. Moral eschatologies involve some kind of final judgment, on the basis of which one's destination in the afterlife is determined. Obviously, such moral eschatological schemes constitute pseudo-narrative devices contributing powerfully to the maintenance of moral imperatives in the culture that produces the eschatology in question.

Not all eschatologies, however, are moral. If, for example, the eschatological schema portrays everyone as going to the same underworld after death, without any judgment, the eschatology is amoral, because one's fate in the afterlife is not portrayed as contingent upon one's moral behavior in this life. The examples from antiquity described earlier – early Israelite concepts of Sheol, or Homeric views on the underworld/Tartarus, or ancient Mesopotamian traditions about the underworld – can be classified as amoral eschatologies because everyone, whether prince or pauper, hero or traitor, eventually finds his way to the sad, shadowy realm of the underworld, and all are equally trapped and miserable there. It seems that in some schemes, the same kind of injustices and tensions that exist in this world may be replicated in the netherworld.¹³ Similarly, predictions of global environmental disaster, which will destroy

12 See Madelung, al-Mahdī 1232–3. For specific references to prophetic *ḥadīths* with this phrase see Wensinck, *A handbook* 139, under “mahdī.”

13 For a Roman example, see Cumont, *After life* 72.

everyone, are amoral in character (however much their proponents may moralize against those who fail to act to thwart the impending doom).

The amoral eschatologies of antiquity seem, however, to have been gradually modified in a number of instances, developing first certain exceptions to their amoral quality (that is, to their tendency to view everyone as having the same fate after death), and then a sometimes quite elaborate moralism. In Greek myth, even at a fairly early stage, the idea that individuals are not judged on their way to Tartarus and hence are treated the same there was modified slightly by the acknowledgment that certain individuals guilty of crimes especially hateful to the gods would be subjected by them to endless torture in the underworld; for example, Sisyphus was condemned to push a heavy rock up a steep hill, only to have it slip away near the top and roll to the bottom again, forcing him to repeat the chore endlessly throughout eternity. The ancient Egyptian concepts of the underworld, which seem originally also to have been essentially amoral, later developed an elaborate judgment scenario in which the soul of the deceased would be judged by Osiris, the god of the underworld, by placing it in a balance opposite a feather. If the deceased had, during his life, paid sufficient attention to the cult of the dead, then his soul would be light and would pass the test, allowing him to live a shadowy eternal existence in the underworld. If his soul failed the test, however, it would be devoured by the crocodile-headed Attim, resulting in the much-feared "second death," or total annihilation of the person's soul. "If condemned, the deceased could not become a transfigured spirit; rather, he had to vanish from the created cosmos, and **that** was the second death."¹⁴

5 Positive vs. Negative Eschatologies

Many eschatologies are a form of soteriology – that is, they predict and, it is thought, help to realize the salvation of the subject individual or group. As such, they can be called *positive eschatologies* in that they anticipate a positive fate for the subject individual or community. Some eschatologies, however, are negative; that is, they anticipate the destruction of the subject group or individual. Secular "doomsday" eschatologies, of course, such as those anticipating a nuclear holocaust, can be classified as negative eschatologies.

Of course, an eschatological scheme that must be considered positive from the perspective of the subject group or individual may contain negative predic-

14 Assmann, *Death and salvation* 76 and 73–7 on Egyptian judgment generally; Moreman, *Beyond the threshold* 14–8.

tions about the eventual fate of others, particularly about the subject group's opponents. A good example is provided by the Quran, which describes how on the day of judgment Pharaoh will lead his unbelieving people down to hell, even as the believers find salvation (Q 40:45–50).

6 Individual, Communal, and Cosmic Eschatologies

An eschatology can be termed *individual* when it focuses on the fate of a single person (that is, of his or her soul), and describes or predicts whether, after death, that person attains salvation and how salvation is affected. The frequently heard pious comment that persons who have recently died have already gone to their appointed place in heaven (from which they are often described as “looking down on we who remain behind”) or in hell, rests on the assumption that one's ultimate fate is determined solely by the belief and behavior of the individual. Ancient Near Eastern religious traditions (including early Israelite beliefs), which portray the individual as going after death to a gloomy existence in an underworld (in the early Israelite case, Sheol) can also be placed in this category of individual eschatologies. The final destination of the individual is not dependent on his or her membership in any larger community, but is simply a reality that must be accepted.

Some eschatologies, however, focus not on the fate of individuals per se, but on the fate of a whole community, and so can be termed *communal*. Messianic movements presaging the triumphant restoration of a people or nation or state in this world can be placed in this category. Although the community that is the subject of the eschatology is made up of many individuals, the presence or role of any particular individual in the community's anticipated fate is purely incidental; the point is that the community will be restored as a collectivity, not that any present individual will necessarily experience this event (although the expectation of such a prediction's imminent fulfillment can galvanize many individuals with hope that they will experience it).

Other-worldly eschatologies, too, can be communal; as noted above, in the Quran, all the dead are described as being raised on judgment day and judged by God *as communities*, and each community goes to its destined fate apparently as a community; thus one reads of Pharaoh leading his community down to hell, while the Prophet Muḥammad leads his followers to paradise.¹⁵ Such

15 Q 11:97–8. Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 26–9, discuss the tension between the individual and his community, and the idea of intercession as part of the Muslim community.

imagery, of course, raises the question of whether in eschatological schemas of this kind mere membership in the community outweighs the role of individual belief and behavior (virtue vs. sin) in deciding one's ultimate fate in the after-life, a theological question that often generates heated debate. The focus of such debates is usually the two "problem cases," namely what is the fate of the sinful member of the subject ("righteous") community, or of the virtuous person belonging to the "wrong" (unbelieving) community.¹⁶ Such deliberations often result in the creation of many nuances or degrees of "reward" and "punishment" in an eschatological system; so that, for example, sinful members of the subject community are described as enjoying a lesser level of bliss than righteous ones, but a higher level of bliss than righteous non-believers. In general, it seems that this tension between a focus on the individual as opposed to the community generates a great deal of complexity for eschatological systems.

Eschatologies can be called *cosmic* when they presage the ultimate fate of the entire world. Many communal eschatologies of a religious variety have a cosmic dimension, in that the salvation of the subject community is seen as part of a larger final end-time when the whole world as we know it comes to an end. But, as we have seen, not all communal eschatologies are necessarily cosmic (this-worldly messianism, for example), and some cosmic eschatologies, such as scenarios of environmental disaster (or plans for environmental salvation) take as their subject of salvation or destruction no particular human community, but rather the whole of humanity, or even all life on earth.

7 Serial vs. Catastrophic Eschatologies

Some eschatologies describe the ultimate fate of individuals as taking place independent of one another, so that the eschatological fate of various individuals who die at different times can be considered *serial*. For example, a system that posits that believers go to heaven, and unbelievers to hell, immediately upon their death, sees these events as separate consignments of individual souls to their fated places, and implies (if it does not state explicitly) that the judgment of each individual takes place separately, and that the afterlife realms to which the deceased are consigned exist forever in parallel with the natural world. Hence they are always available to receive new inmates. Ancient

16 A Muslim student once informed me that I had a positive reputation among his fellows at the university, who considered me a *kāfir ṭayyib*, "virtuous unbeliever." Although flattered, I did not press him to clarify for me what long-term implications this status might have.

Egyptian, Mesopotamian, and Greco-Roman eschatological schemes seem to follow this pattern.

Other eschatological schemes, however, anticipate a situation in which all souls are consigned at the same time, usually as communities of believers (destined for paradise or the "overworld") or unbelievers (destined for the underworld). Quranic judgment imagery, or that of the Book of Revelation, can be taken as an example. Such schemes assume that a single last judgment of souls will take place at the end of time, for which all dead souls are raised. Because this single last judgment by definition marks the end of the normal continuum of time, it is often described as taking place immediately following a cosmic cataclysm or series of catastrophes that end the world as we know it and inaugurate the events of the last judgment. For this reason, such schemes can be called *catastrophic eschatologies*. They include most eschatologies usually called "apocalyptic," although the most widely-accepted definition of "apocalypse"¹⁷ does not explicitly include catastrophic events as a feature of such texts; nonetheless, many apocalypses contain visions of cataclysmic events (often, as noted with the Book of Revelation, imbued with a distinctly vengeful and sometimes sadistic quality).

The corollary of a single last judgment for which all souls are raised is that once people die, their souls must be stored somewhere, to be awakened at the end-time for the judgment; in Islamic tradition, which subscribes to the view of a single collective judgment, this generated many contradictory views on what the dead souls actually experience before finally being raised for the judgment at the end-time. The Quran itself states clearly that the deceased cannot hear anything the living may say to them (Q 27:82), and it also emphasizes the absolute impermeability of the *barzakh* or barrier that separates the world of the living from that of the dead, so that the existence of the deceased in the grave, before the judgment, seems conceptually analogous to that of the deceased in the underworld of ancient myth (Hebrew Sheol, Greek Tartarus). But later Islamic tradition developed various scenarios, sometimes elaborate ones, describing what happens to the souls of the deceased in the interim between death and judgment, including the ability to hear and observe the bereaved mourning over one's own body, terrifying inquests by examining

17 The definition, developed by a working group of the Society of Biblical Literature in the 1970s, defines apocalypse as "...a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world." See Collins, Introduction: Towards the morphology of a genre 9.

angels, the so-called *‘adhāb al-qabr* or “punishment of the grave” (which seems to pre-judge the judgment), heavenly journeys during which the souls of the deceased obtain glimpses of paradise, the reunion of the soul with the body in the grave, favors enjoyed by the souls and bodies of the righteous during their wait for judgment day (such as a window in the coffin through which a refreshing breeze from paradise wafts), etc. On the other hand, some Muslim thinkers rejected categorically most such speculations on what happened to the souls of the deceased.¹⁸

The notion of a single last judgment sometimes clouds the distinction between this-worldly and other-worldly eschatologies. In Zoroastrianism, for example, the dead are apparently immediately required to cross over an abyss via the Chinvat Bridge, leading to a heavenly realm; the righteous do so with no problem, but the sinful find that the bridge narrows until they fall into the abyss and enter a hellish underworld, where they suffer grievously. Needless to say, this heaven and hell are both otherworldly realms. The deceased are then warehoused in these abodes until the final judgment, after which they return to the purified earth. While the scheme is thus this-worldly in the long term, in the middle term it involves other-worldly destinations – which appear, however, to be only temporary, and cease to be needed (or cease to exist?) after the final judgment and purification of the earth, to which all people belong.

8 Future-Oriented vs. Realized Eschatologies

Most eschatologies are explicitly *future-oriented*, that is, they anticipate final events that are destined to take place at some time in the future (whether determinate or indeterminate). All predictions of a last judgment, etc., obviously fall into this category.

Some eschatological schemes, however, see the fate of the subject group or individual as having taken place in the past. The Bible's or the Quran's descriptions of the destruction of various sinful communities, for example, such as the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, seem to be eschatologies oriented to the past rather than the future. We can call such stories eschatological because they are related as lessons meant to inform those who are still living, i.e., those to whom the stories are told, warning them to avoid the errors of these already “judged” communities. We can call such schemes exercises in *realized*

18 See Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 31–61.

eschatology (following loosely the terminology of C.H. Dodd)¹⁹ because the fate of the community in question has been realized. It goes without saying that a fully past-oriented eschatology implies a this-worldly eschatology (such as the fate of Sodom, in this world) because the end of time clearly has not yet come.

Most interesting are instances of *partly-realized eschatology*, that is, schemes in which the events of the present are portrayed as the beginnings of the end-time or cataclysmic events associated with the last judgment. Such eschatologies combine both an other-worldly orientation with the notion that the other-worldly fate of the subject group is not only imminent (i.e., in the near future) but already heralded (partly realized) by this-worldly events taking place in the present time. The early Christians seem to have understood Jesus' teachings within a framework of eschatological expectation prevalent in Judaism of the first century CE, and argued that with Jesus' death and resurrection the end-time had actually begun to be realized.²⁰ It has been suggested that certain groups in the earliest Islamic community also understood the dramatic events of the early Islamic conquests as evidence of the nearness of the last day, as "signs of the hour" marking the dawning of a new age presaging the last judgment.²¹ These hypotheses are suggestive but remain to be more thoroughly tested.

The protean forms of eschatological concepts provide a rich field of study. It is hoped that the categories identified above can help provide compact and unambiguous descriptive terminologies that will facilitate comparative work by making it possible for scholars from diverse fields more readily to grasp the essential characteristics of various traditions' eschatological schemes.

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19 Dodd, *Parables of the kingdom* 51: "It represents the ministry of Jesus as 'realized eschatology,' that is to say, as the impact upon this world of the 'powers of the world to come' in a series of events, unprecedented and unrepeatable, now in actual process."

20 Aune, *The cultic setting of realized eschatology*.

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The “World” in its Eschatological Dimension in East-Syrian Synodical Records

Martin Tamcke

It is clear that the texts which comprise the collection of East-Syrian synodical records beginning in 410 CE and ending with a synod in the early Islamic period, in 775–76 CE, do not reveal a uniform understanding of what the concept “world” stands for.¹ The world as the entirety of everything that exists can be understood in the texts as positive, negative, or neutral. However, in the early texts, the driving force of faith is understood in contrast with the world; and the world is understood as that which culturally, socially, and religiously determined the Iranian homeland of the East-Syrian Christians.

According to the writings of Catholicos Mar Abā (540–552), which were recorded in the synodical records, the good path begins with the fear of God. The wealth of this ephemeral world could never equal the fear of God and, without this, the beauty of man and the orders of angels would be “infinitely abhorrent.”² Only he who is open to imagine the perfection amidst all imperfections creates a standard that allows everything to be questioned since the present world in the end does not guarantee satisfactory wealth or beauty. Human beings attain their splendor only through a splendor that exists outside them by keeping a higher or, so to speak, more forward-looking perspective in mind. It is by this perspective that human actions and behavior are judged.

The idea that even the hierarchy of angels receive their splendor and beauty only through the fear of God may have originated in the *vita angelica*. It is, moreover, also a substantial declaration about the core and the scope of what the fear of God means with regard to the world.

The fear of God alone is set apart from all of the interconnectedness in our present lives and actions. It bears witness to the eternal world in so far as it

1 Until a comprehensive critical edition of the *Synodicon orientale* is available, students of this text have to use the editions of Chabot (who offers an edition on the basis of several manuscripts with French translation) and Braun (who gives only a German translation, but based on a different manuscript and thus valuable for comparison).

2 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 80 (Syriac text) / 333 (French translation); Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 128.

does not subject human beings to the laws of the ephemeral, but rather, on the contrary, immunizes them against them. This occurs with a proper dash of morality, and two ways and realities are set in contrast:

And each desire that does not focus its ambition on this [fear of God] is completely disgraceful and the man condemned to hell is the one who did so and thereby caused his own pain. All wisdom and science that is not rooted in it [the fear of God] and whose aim is not guided by it is vain and tasteless and causes all sorts of harm to its possessor. All powers that are not supported by it and solidified by it are irrelevant. But, whoever focuses on it, lends it his 'mental ear,' and guides his will and his speech toward its community, plans nothing without it and regulates his entire behavior in the course of his temporal life according to it, in which there is space for everyone who wants to perform good deeds.³

The difference between a human being of this ephemeral world and a human being who lives in the fear of God – that is, a human being in the sphere of influence of the eternal world – is thus a difference in behavior and in the inner rationale behind human acts. In place of an undisguised desire that establishes itself, the act of a human being who fears God is not simply contrived from mechanisms in the world and used for its own establishment, but rather formed by an ethical purpose and related to an immovable, ethical standard. He who does good in this manner and is filled with the fear of God is, according to the explanations of Mar Abā, "living in truth in the house of Christ."⁴ This world and the present life, however, are the only places in which justice and proper behavior and acts are practiced.

The idea which Mar Abā epitomizes in the metaphors of the ephemeral and eternal worlds is characterized by Catholicos Ezekiel (570–582) by using the image of successive temporal appearances, as can be seen when he speaks of the "future world" as opposed to the present world. To sell priesthood titles for payment, i.e., positions generally described as "noble" or as "the world and everything that is in it," means for those willing to be involved in such dealings that they are buying "the hell and the pain that is reserved for the godless in the future world."⁵ Furthermore, this reflection about the future world as opposed

3 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 80 / 333; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 128.

4 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 80 / 333; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 128.

5 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 122–3 / 381; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 181; cf. also the statements of Catholicos Ishō'yahb I, who speaks of God as the wise regent "of this and the future world," Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 193 / 452; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 274.

to this present world serves to give special importance to ethically demanded behavior. Priesthood, always in danger of becoming estranged from its orientation toward the things to come, must therefore be regarded as "noble" in order to prevent it from being seen exclusively from a financial perspective. And this is precisely because an opposite reality attempts to turn it away from this orientation.

A third way in which the opposite poles of human existence can be understood is through reference to a higher and lower world (heaven and hell), both created by God. The good and the just, then, are associated with both the present and the future world. In this way of speaking about human existence, both the horizontal and vertical characterize the intellectual coordinates of the world.⁶ This idea is found in the statements of Catholicos Ishō'yahb I (582–596). In his introduction to the synodical records, he professes God as the

founder and regulator of both worlds, the mortal world that was created with a beginning and has a temporal end, and the eternal world that is above the measurement of time, was created with a beginning (as though it were ephemeral) but that continues without end according to the will of the grand regulator who adorned man with the light of reason, which is supported, strengthened, and enlightened by the use of appropriate rules.⁷

The Church of the East does not recognize original sin as it is taught by the Western churches. The prominent place of reason (not only in this text) has consistently led to discussions regarding to what end church rules and regulations are needed. Their necessity is seen, for the most part, as due to the limitations of human reason with regard to responsible behavior. God created both worlds, but in the ephemeral world eternity is permitted to exist in the light of reason and its ancillary rules.

These rules are brought to life in the Bible, as Biblical books serve the world by providing guidance.⁸ The prophets wrote of their affliction "so that the memory [about them] would not disappear from the world."⁹ The canons of the church, which in the wake of the Biblical laws, claim the power to regulate

6 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 193 / 452; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 273–4.

7 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 130 / 390; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 192.

8 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 230 / 494; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 352 (letter from Catholicos George to Mina).

9 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 204 / 466–7.; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 292 (letter from Catholicos Sabrishō' I to the hermits from Barkitai).

the lives of those that are united here (in this world) as those that live for the future world and who thereby allow these rules to become actual in the present one as “high walls and impregnable castles that protect their observer from all harm.”¹⁰ Catholicos George I (661–680) says similarly that God gave the world “helpful laws” to test the volition of his creatures, indeed “so that we and the angels would like to prove our free will.”¹¹ Monks comply with the orders given by those above them and do not act without their knowledge, “which would be not only inappropriate for monks and hermits but also for those that simply live in the world.”¹² Even if this applies primarily to monks, in the end it applies to all human beings as well.

The stance toward monasticism in the Church of the East expressly documents how the policy of the church changed over the course of time. Originating from a proto-monastic tradition in which all members of the congregation lived like monks, the church's policy began to change in the fifth and the beginning of the sixth century until monasticism was relegated to the periphery of the church and it became a requirement that all representatives of the episcopate, even the catholicoi, be married. Then, at the beginning of the seventh century, monasticism regained its dominant position and bishops and catholicoi were once more required to be celibate. These changes in the policy of the church are reflected in the synodical records, and they are explainable by historical changes that demanded appropriate reactions from the church.

In the end, the only function of the world is to serve as a laboratory for man's reason, thereby making it possible for him to learn. The good Lord “created this world, rich in variety, change, and ordeals and full of contradictions in wisdom,” for instruction, testing, differentiation, as well as a step by step proof “of the spiritual and physical beings of reason of this world, so that the autonomy and freedom of the will of all rational creatures would be recognized.”¹³ This strict division between the worlds implies that the present world must be overcome through means found in the present world, namely reason in autonomy and freedom of will. Faith is not the loss of free will nor of autonomy, it is rather what the will utilizes and what autonomy requires.

10 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 97 / 355; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 148 (synod of the Catholicos Joseph).

11 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 231 / 495–6; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 353–4 (letter from Catholicos George to Mina).

12 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 206 / 468–9; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 295 (letter from Catholicos Sabrishōʿ I to the hermits from Barkitai).

13 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 230 / 494; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 353 (letter from Catholicos George to Mina).

He who has knowledge of the other world sees to the material requirements of the church in this world with, for instance, donations for the construction and upkeep of the church. One lives symbolically in anticipation of the future world, and all deeds in this world will affect the future life. The theological rationale for such sponsoring is ambitious, direct, and deliberate. "Because the true believers know that there is a world of eternal reward for them, they give God gifts to construct, furnish, and preserve the holy temples, churches, convents, hospices, schools, and episcopal residences, so that they may conceal their sins, purify their souls, and preserve their race."¹⁴ Such benevolence transforms the seemingly lost possession into an eternal possession, or as Catholicos Ishō'yahb I said, "it makes, so to speak, the ephemeral possession into an eternal possession."¹⁵

In this way, from a certain perspective, belonging to the other world decreases one's margin of profit, because of the voluntary donation of gifts as a symbolic obtaining of (God's) love. It contains, however, a shockingly far-reaching soteriological message regarding the purposefulness of such behavior. With respect to the behavior that results from belonging to the eternal world there are two types of people: the man of the world (*Weltmensch*) and the man of spirit (*Geistmensch*). Affiliation with the future (eternal) world does not lead only to the willingness to donate, it also leads to behavior that establishes boundaries with respect to the rest of society. Thus, Canon 37 of the synods of Catholicos Ezekiel expressly commands "that, from now on, Christians should no longer send their daughters away to learn worldly music."¹⁶ Clergymen were urged to stop educating 'worldly people' because this would belittle the dignity of the church.¹⁷ Ethical behavior in the spirit of the future world was considered noble. The church's dignity is vulnerable to interactions in which those involved are not able to account for the motivation of the believers, especially the priests, because they, in their steadfast connection to this world, are blind to the fact that the others belong to a different, opposing world.

The synod of Catholicos Joseph (552–567, d. 576) describes the death of his predecessor Mar Abā in 551–2 with the words "[he] departed from this world."¹⁸ One leaves this world and, thus, belonging to the future world becomes the

14 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 143 / 405; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 209 (synod of Ishō'yahb I, Canon 7).

15 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 143 / 405; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 209 (synod of Ishō'yahb I, Canon 7).

16 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 127 / 386; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 187.

17 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 127 / 386; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 187 (Canon 36).

18 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 96 / 353; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 146.

only important goal. To what degree the symbols of Catholicos Ishō'yahb 1 show a self-contained theology of the Church of the East of the resurrection and a future life may be questioned. This is also due to the fact that the cited formulation is given as a quote from the west-Nicene tradition. However, it is now believed that this acknowledgment comes from the east-Syriac understanding of the world. From this understanding the ephemeral is differentiated from the eternal, the spiritual from the material, above from below, and that which belongs to the 'now' from that which belongs to the future. Non-Christian courts are to be avoided¹⁹ and the same is true for the holidays of other religions: "no Christian is permitted to attend a non-Christian celebration or accept anything that is given to him as a result of it."²⁰ Pubs and picnics are also to be avoided altogether.²¹ Instead, one is to practice a spiritual transformation for which the priests serve as examples. Consequently, priests are not allowed "to wear elegant clothing, lead a carnal lifestyle, live with a childish mentality capricious as the weather, or act like worldly people, but rather they must try to live as far as possible in accordance with the future life."²²

Thus, 'world' can be understood horizontally or vertically with concept pairs such as above and below, ephemeral and eternal, temporal and non-temporal, present and future. To perceive responsibility in the world therefore means to distance oneself from the established societal, cultural, religious, and social life and instead dedicate oneself to the parallel church-society that in the form of the church is a stepping-stone to the future, eternal, or higher world. Thus, the future world is the guiding principle for the conduct of life in the present world. Human beings are, as it were, without splendor if they do not bear the splendor of the future world toward which they strive. In this way the future world influences the acts and behavior of human beings in the present. The future world contains the perfection that, because it is only *there* and can be experienced *here* only in the intention of reaching the future world, makes all life here a field of ethical probation and simultaneously frees the present world from attributions of "permanent" religious meaning and exaltation. Here, nothing equals that which becomes visible *there*; but in the best case there exists a non-thing, which exists as a potential completely free from religious attributions; and this non-thing corresponds either to the claim of belief, or it

19 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 155 / 415; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 225.

20 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 158 / 417–8; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 228.

21 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 158–9 / 418; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 229; cf. Braun's note 142.

22 Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 176 / 435–6; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 252 (synod of Ishō'yahb 1, Canon 7).

is simply filth. With respect to this world it is obsolete, ephemeral, lackluster, and low.

The separation of the worlds that is introduced from belief in the present world can originally be traced back to the experience of Christ:

The entire world requires the appearance of our savior, but humankind requires this especially in that he lifts us from the guilt of sin, delivers us from the bondage of death, saves us from the indignation found in the slow decomposition we call death, and gives us the most splendid, eternal life, the complete knowledge of his divinity and the lasting attachment of being in the glory of his majesty born out of grace toward human beings and the spirits.²³

In this way life in the world is determined as a life outside of the above, future, and unending world. Paul Tillich's primary claim – "The divine life participates in every life as its ground and aim"²⁴ – is actually taken up by the Church of the East but only as an entirely Christological claim that the divine life is, when it comes to acts grounded in reason, an internal driving force that allows human beings to remain human beings without allowing them to receive any amount of divinity. And so it naturally makes sense that the separation characterized by the Church of the East between the divine and human in Christology, in which the divine only exists in human beings as it exists in a temple, as it were, has a parallel in the separation from the divine world and this ephemeral world. Even if the ephemeral world is thought of as finite, even if it is only filth, the world here is still nothing other than the world here and in it nothing other than the laws of reason apply; these laws of reason, which indeed remain the medium for shaping the world, are taken from another world, as it were, and utilized in this one.

The synods of the Church of the East assume an already disenchanted world and make this disenchanted world into a test area, so to speak, where the present and future worlds of Christ find one another but do not unite nor simply remain separate, but rather exist in the acts and life that originate in the mind and aim toward the life ahead. But this ideal is no mere representation of the modern idea of withdrawing from the world. Even the disempowerment and relativization of the claim of this world aim at something else: A life lived within the borders of the material, economic, political and religious world here, but lived as a representation of an alternative, eternal, intrinsically

²³ Chabot, *Synodicon orientale* 234 / 499; Braun, *Buch der Synhados* 357.

²⁴ Tillich, *Systematic theology* i, 245.

spiritual world. Further to this, the deliberate disempowerment of this world from the beginning facilitates its role as a place of ethical probation and makes the way of life of the believers a permanent declaration of war against a world that follows rules that differ from the ethics established in the Bible. This alternative view scrutinizes the world so that it is seen as something temporary in which the final thing – the true “abode” or goal – is reflected in anticipation.

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St. Ephraem the Syrian, the Quran, and the Grapevines of Paradise: An Essay in Comparative Eschatology

Sidney H. Griffith

1 Syriac and the Arabic Quran

For many years, scholars engaged in the study of the Quran and of Islamic origins have been aware of the fact that works written in pre-Islamic Late Antiquity, in the dialect of Aramaic known as Syriac, offer them one of several sure paths into the religious thought-world of Arabian Christianity. It was into this world that the Arabic Quran appeared of a sudden in the first third of the seventh Christian century. Historically speaking, this is only to be expected; the Arabic-speaking Christian communities in the milieu in which Islam was born, be they from Sinai, Palestine, Transjordan, Syria, lower Mesopotamia, or even southern Arabia, all belonged to communities whose liturgies, doctrines, and ecclesiastical associations were of primarily Aramaic expression.¹ As for Syriac itself, there is an interesting, if not a very compelling, reference to it already in early Islamic tradition to the effect that some Syriac books had come to Muḥammad's attention. According to the report deriving from his well-known secretary, the Prophet is alleged to have said to Zayd b. Thābit, "Do you know Syriac well? Some books have come to my attention. I said, 'No.' He said, 'Learn it.' So I learned it in nineteen days."²

Alphonse Mingana, writing in 1927, estimated that seventy percent of the "foreign influences on the style and terminology" of the Quran could be traced to "Syriac (including Aramaic and Palestinian Syriac)."³ Noting this high incidence of Syriac etymologies for a significant portion of the Quran's 'foreign vocabulary,' Arthur Jeffrey wrote in 1938 that "one fact seems certain, namely that such Christianity as was known among the Arabs in pre-Islamic times was

1 See the helpful survey in Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*.

2 Ibn al-Ash'ath al-Sijistāni, *Kitāb al-Maṣāḥif* 6. I am grateful to Prof. David Powers of Cornell University for bringing the passage to my attention.

3 Mingana, Syriac influence.

largely of the Syrian type, whether Jacobite or Nestorian.”⁴ He noted further that numerous early Islamic texts mention Muḥammad’s contacts with both Syrian and Arabian Christians, and this observation prompted Jeffery to conclude that these texts “at least show that there was an early recognition of the fact that Muḥammad was at one time in more or less close contact with Christians associated with the Syrian Church.”⁵

More radically, and most recently, Christoph Luxenberg has been exploring what he calls the ‘Syro-Aramaic’ reading of the Quran.⁶ His method involves the use of the Syriac lexicon and the consultation of Syriac grammatical usages to help in the reading of certain passages in the Quran, to explore the possibility that a more historically intelligible reading of hitherto obscure passages might be attained, often found to be congruent with earlier, Aramaean Christian ideas and formulations.⁷ Luxenberg’s ongoing work has inspired a number of other researchers, who have pushed his ideas further, virtually re-inventing early Islamic history in ways that have evoked considerable controversy.⁸ On the one hand, these inquiries have underlined the importance of Syriac for Quranic studies; on the other hand, in the enthusiasm for finding new readings and new interpretations, based on perceived grammatical and lexical possibilities, sometimes too little attention has been paid by these scholars to the usages of classical Syriac literature that underlay the religious idiom of Arabic-speaking Christians in the Quran’s milieu. The present writer has undertaken cautious soundings in this area in previous essays⁹ and now he approaches it again, this time in the context of the Quran’s eschatology, and particularly in connection with Christoph Luxenberg’s widely publicized reconstruction and

4 Jeffery, *Foreign vocabulary* 20–1.

5 Ibid., 22.

6 See Luxenberg, *Die syro-aramäische Lesart* (English trans., *Syro-Aramaic reading*, ed. Mücke).

7 Luxenberg was preceded in this enterprise by Günter Lüling, who had argued that about a third of the Quran as we now have it is built on the foundation of an earlier Christian, strophic hymnody that was concealed under successive layers of text. According to him, this early Arabic, Christian hymnody, which celebrated an angel-Christology, was at home among the pre-Islamic Arabs and had a place in Christian liturgy in the then-Christian Ka’ba in Mecca. See Lüling, *Über den Ur-Qur’ān*; Lüling, *Der christliche Kult*; Lüling, *Die Wiederentdeckung des Propheten Muhammad*. For a more personal discussion of his idea and its reception among scholars see Lüling, *Preconditions for the scholarly criticism*.

8 See, e.g., Ohlig and Puin (eds.), *Die dunklen Anfänge*; Ohlig (ed.), *Eine historisch-kritische Rekonstruktion*; Ohlig and Gross (eds.), *Schlaglichter*.

9 See Griffith, *Syriacisms in the ‘Arabic Qur’ān’*; Griffith, *Christian lore and the Arabic Qur’ān*; Griffith, *An-Naṣārā in the Qur’ān*, forthcoming.

reinterpretation of the Quran's thrice repeated phrase *hūr ʿīn*¹⁰ to mean 'white, crystal(-clear), (grapes)' instead of the traditional 'wide-eyed/dark-eyed *hūrīs*.'¹¹ In the process, Luxenberg puts some stress on the importance of the proper understanding of a passage in one of Ephraem the Syrian's (c. 306–373) Syriac *madrāshê* 'On Paradise,' and it is precisely in connection with these Syriac liturgical poems that the present study unfolds.

2 The Quran and Ephraem the Syrian's *Madrāshê* 'On Paradise': The Views of Modern Scholars

2.1 *Tor Andrae*

The late Swedish scholar Tor Andrae (1885–1947) is undoubtedly the modern researcher who has, to date, most systematically investigated what he considered to be Muḥammad's and the Quran's indebtedness to Christian eschatology in its Syriac expression.¹² In his seminal study, *Der Ursprung des Islams und das Christentum*, he specifically draws attention to the importance in this connection of Ephraem's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise' and he spends some time unfolding the connecting themes between these Christian, liturgical compositions and the Quran. What Andrae perceived was not a direct literary connection between Syriac texts and the Quran. Rather, he spoke of "one and the same homiletic scheme," and he offered it as his opinion that "whatever Muhammad received from Christianity, he got from oral preaching and personal contacts."¹³ More specifically in regard to the works of Ephraem, and taking his cue from a remark made by Hubert Grimme to the effect that in his descriptions of paradise, Muḥammad "must have benefited much from recalling images used by Ephrem,"¹⁴ Andrae averred that "in fact, on this point, there is a surprising

10 See Q 44:54; 52:20; 56:22.

11 See Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic reading* 247–83.

12 Andrae first published the results of his research on this theme in a series of three long articles: Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams*, in *Kyrkohistorisk Årsskrift* 23, 149–206; 24, 213–92; 25, 45–112. Subsequently the articles were collected into the volume, Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams*. This volume has been translated into French in Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam*. In later works Andrae continued to appeal to Syriac sources, most notably in Andrae, *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glaube* (English trans., *Mohammed: The man and his faith*). See also Andrae, *I Myrträdgården* (English trans., *In the garden of myrtles*).

13 Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams* 45–6; Andrae, *Les origines de l'islam* 145–6.

14 Grimme, *Mohammed* ii, 160 note 9.

relationship between Muhammad and the Syrian preacher.”¹⁵ And Andrae proceeds to list a number of convergences between the very concrete, even sensual descriptions of the garden of paradise in Ephraem’s *madrāshê* and passages in the Arabic Quran. It is at this juncture in his discussion that Tor Andrae made the very controversial observation that in a stanza of one of Ephraem’s *madrāshê*, “one can even point out in his words a hidden allusion to Paradise’s virgins.”¹⁶ Andrae quotes the passage in his own German translation from Ephraem’s *madrāshâ* VII:18:

Wer bis zu seinem Hingang sich des Weines enthalten hat, wird von den Weinstöcken des Paradieses sehnsüchtig erwartet. Jeder von ihnen reckt ihm seine hängende Traube entgegen. Und wenn jemand in Virginität gelebt hat, den empfangen sie (fem.) in ihrem reinen Schoße, weil er als Mönch nicht in dem Bette und Schosse irdischer Liebe fiel. Von den Weinstöcken, deren Trauben sich herabsenken, sodass sie bequem zu erreichen sind, spricht auch Muhammed (Q 76:14).¹⁷

In his later publication, *Mohammed, sein Leben und sein Glaube*, Andrae expanded on this passage to say:

To be sure, Afrem occasionally points out that this is only an attempt to give some idea of a joy which no earthly mind is able to grasp. But most of his listeners and readers no doubt remained quite oblivious to his feeble attempts to spiritualize his sensual images. Popular piety certainly

15 Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams* 52; Andrae, *Les origines de l’islam* 151. It is interesting to note that in his later book on Muhammad, Andrae makes this point more apodictically. He says, “Christians have often pointed out that Mohammed depicts eternal bliss merely as an endless and unrestricted satisfaction of extremely primitive sensual desires. The polemical ardour should be damped by what seems to me to be the irrefutable fact that the Koran’s descriptions of Paradise were inspired by the ideas of this Christian Syrian preacher.” Andrae, *Mohammed: The man and his faith* 87.

16 “Der Wein, den die Seligen genießen, fehlt auch nicht bei Afrem, selbst eine versteckte Anspielung auf die Paradiesjungfrauen könnte man in seinen Worten hineindeuten,” Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams* 54; “Même une allusion cachée aux vierges du Paradis pourrait être trouvée dans ses paroles,” Andrae, *Les origines de l’islam* 153.

17 Andrae, *Der Ursprung des Islams* 54; *Les origines de l’islam* 153–4. The Quranic verse quoted speaks of the garden’s “low-hanging, pickable [fruit] (*quṭūfuhā*)” (Q 76:14). The Arabic word *quṭf* (pl. *quṭūf*) is normally understood to mean a bunch of grapes. See Lane, *An Arabic-English lexicon* viii, 2991. All translations from the Quran are based on Fakhry (trans.), *Interpretation*.

interpreted this daring imagery in a crass and literal sense, and under such circumstances one cannot blame a citizen of pagan Mekka for doing the same thing.¹⁸

2.2 Dom Edmund Beck, OSB

Two modern scholars in particular have contested Tor Andrae's view that Ephraem the Syrian's words can be taken to prefigure in any way the 'wide-eyed/dark-eyed *hūrīs*' of Islamic tradition; both the Syriac-scholar, Dom Edmund Beck OSB (1902–91), and Christoph Luxenberg have opposed it. Beck made his critique from the perspective of the proper understanding of Ephraem's stanza in its context in *madrāshā* VII 'On Paradise.'¹⁹ In particular, he proposed that Andrae had been misled in his interpretation by a faulty reading in the text of the *madrāshā* as it appears in the *Editio Romana* of Ephraem's complete works.

As it happens, the Syriac word for 'grapevine,' *gupnā* (pl. *gupnē*), is grammatically feminine, a point that, according to Beck, escaped the attention of both the editor of Ephraem's text of *madrāshā* VII:18 'On Paradise' in the *Editio Romana* and Tor Andrae. Specifically, in the first half of the stanza, quoted above in Andrae's German version, when the text says of the one who in this life abstained from wine, that he "wird von den Weinstöcken des Paradieses sehnsüchtig erwartet," the Syriac participle translated as 'he is eagerly awaited' by the grapevines was wrongly written in the Roman text in the masculine form, i.e., *sāwhîn*²⁰ instead of the correct, feminine form, *sāwhān*. This error in turn, according to Beck, prompted Andrae to look for an un-expressed, feminine antecedent for the third person feminine plural suffix attached to the term 'bosom'/'*Schosse*' ('*ūbheyn*) in the second part of the stanza, when the text speaks of the one who had lived in virginity, and characterizes him as the one "den empfangen sie (fem.) in ihrem reinen Schosse." Not recognizing that the grapevines (fem.) were the ones who, according to Ephraem, would then receive such a one into their pure bosom, Andrae was misled to think the text was discreetly speaking of some unmentioned, pure virgins, on the order of the Quran's 'dark-eyed *hūrīs*,' who would be awaiting the monk in paradise. Along the way, Beck also corrects what he perceives to be inexact renderings of

18 Andrae, *Mohammed: The man and his faith* 88.

19 See Beck, *Eine christliche Parallele*; a précis of the article appeared in a French translation in Beck, *Les Houris du Coran*. See also Beck, *Hymnen über das Paradies* 16–8. Subsequently Beck published a critical edition of Ephraem's *madrāshē* 'On Paradise,' along with a German translation, in Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*.

20 See the Syriac text translated by Andrae in Mobarak and Assemani, *Opera omnia* iii, 584.

the Syriac in Andrae's version of the stanza, but these are minor matters.²¹ The important point for Beck was his satisfaction that he had successfully removed the textual basis for Tor Andrae's suggestion that Ephraem had anticipated the *ḥūrīs*. What is more, Beck also showed that, as in other passages of the *madrāshê* 'On Paradise,' so in this one, Ephraem was evoking the imagery of a lush garden and speaking of the over-hanging trees and grapevines of paradise that offer their bunches of grapes to the blessed. As a case in point, he cited the example of *madrāshâ* IX: 3 & 4, where Ephraem uses much the same imagistic language.

Should you wish
 to climb up a tree,
 with its lower branches
 it will provide steps before your feet,
 eager to make you recline
 in its bosom above,
 on the couch of its upper branches.
 So arranged is the surface of these branches,
 bent low and cupped
 – while yet dense with flowers –
 that they serve as a protective womb
 for whoever rests there.
 Who has ever beheld such a banquet
 in the very bosom of a tree,
 with fruit of every savor
 ranged for the hand to pluck.
 Each type of fruit in due sequence approaches,
 each awaiting its turn:
 fruit to eat,
 and fruit to quench the thirst;
 to rinse the hands there is dew,
 and leaves to dry them with after
 a treasure store which lacks nothing,
 whose Lord is rich in all things.²²

21 Beck's own version of the stanza is as follows: "Wer des Weines * in Klugheit sich enthielt, – dem eilen freudiger * die Weinstöcke des Paradieses entgegen – und jeder wird seine Trauben * ihm darreichen. – Lebte er auch noch jungfräulich, * dann führen sie ihn ein – in ihren reinen Schoss, * weil er als Asket – nicht gefallen ist in den Schoss * und in das Bett der Ehe." Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso* clxxv, 28, vii:18.

22 Translated by Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 137.

2.3 Christoph Luxenberg

Christoph Luxenberg, who paid close attention to Beck's refutation of Tor Andrae's suggestion that the 'dark-eyed *ḥūrīs*' of Islamic tradition were anticipated in Ephraem the Syrian's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise,' argues that in fact there are no such things as *ḥūrīs* in the Quran at all.²³ After a brief review of the standard scholarship, including the view that the notion of the 'virgins of paradise' is due to Persian influence on the later exegetical tradition, Luxenberg, who pledged to proceed on 'purely philological' grounds in his examination of the matter, nevertheless begins his examination with the re-affirmation of his basic, non-philological, and presumed operating principle. He says it is not the case that "the Prophet had misunderstood Christian illustrations of Paradise, but rather that the later Islamic exegesis had misinterpreted the Koranic paraphrase of Christian Syriac hymns." And he goes on at the same place to say: "The Koran takes as its starting point the axiom that the *Scripture* preceding it (the Old and New Testament) has been revealed. Understanding itself as a component of this *Scripture*, to be consistent it derives from this the claim that it itself has been revealed."²⁴ From this premise, and the corollary that the Quran "takes the *Scripture* as its model," Luxenberg observes that "there would be such an *inconsistency*, if the likes of the *ḥūrīs* . . . were not to be found in the *Scripture*. Then the Koran, against its usual assertion, would have thus produced proof that it had not come from God."²⁵ But, says Luxenberg, "The Koran is not to blame if, out of ignorance, people have read it so falsely and projected onto it their subjective, all too earthly daydreams."²⁶ And with this assertion, having on a priori, hermeneutical grounds ruled out any interpretation of the Quran's words and phrases that would admit of any hint of *ḥūrīs*, or any other explicit sexual imagery in its depiction of the joys of paradise, Luxenberg applies his signature philological method not only to the *rasm* of the phrase *ḥūr īn*, but to all the passages in which the Quran's language has been thought to evoke just such imagery.

In the most notable instance of the application of his philological method, which has even attracted the attention of the popular press far and wide, Christoph Luxenberg first of all attended to the enigmatic phrase at the heart of the matter, the canonical Quran's twice repeated utterance, "*wa-zawwajnāhum bi-ḥūrīn īnin*" (Q 44:54 and 52:20). Stripping away the customary vowel markings and diacritical points from the basic Arabic script, and presuming the Arabic scripture's original intention to yield a 'Syro-Aramaic' reading, with

23 See the long discussion in Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic reading* 247–83.

24 Ibid., 249.

25 Ibid., 250.

26 Ibid., 250.

attention to other Quranic passages, and the reminder that “with the supposed *ḥūrīs* the Koran would be contradicting *Scripture*,”²⁷ Luxenberg delves into the Syriac grammar and lexicon for a likely alternative reading consistent with the prominent imagery of grapes and grapevines. But first, on Arabic lexical and grammatical grounds he argues that the conventional reading is impossible and having thus disposed of the ‘imagined *ḥūrīs*,’ which, he says, “disappear *ipso facto* into thin air,” he says:

Thus, too, would be removed the related contradictions in the Koran and objectivity would be restored to the Koranic statement cited above to the extent that the claim, documented in the *Scripture*, according to which one is neither *married* nor *given in marriage* in Paradise (Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 20:35) is now confirmed.²⁸

With the *ḥūrīs* thus removed, Luxenberg then moves to the task of putting what seems to him to be the proper construction upon the Quran’s words in the problematic, key phrase under consideration, i.e., *ḥūr ʾīn*. It is at this juncture that he recalls Edmund Beck’s rejection of Tor Andrae’s suggestion that the *ḥūrīs* might have been adumbrated in Ephraem the Syrian’s *madrāshê* ‘On Paradise’²⁹ and Beck’s further indication of the prominence of the imagery of grapes and grapevines in Ephraem’s depiction of the garden. Taking his cue from here, Luxenberg found his interpretive frame of reference for the enigmatic Arabic phrase in the realm of viticulture, and with this insight in mind he explored the orthographic, grammatical, and lexical possibilities of the bare Arabic *rasm*, the un-vowelled, un-pointed, original script. After some detailed grammatical and lexical explorations, and with the image of garden bowers in mind, construed of grapevines, with their over-hanging clusters of grapes, Luxenberg proposed the now famous ‘Syro-Aramaic’ reading, “We will make you comfortable under white, crystal(-clear) (grapes).”³⁰

Against the background of this signal accomplishment, and still deploying his usual philological method, Luxenberg proceeds to re-adjust the understanding of other Quranic passages that have been read in connection with

27 Ibid., 254.

28 Ibid., 256–7.

29 Citing Beck’s rejection of Andrae’s mistaken understanding of the feminine referent in Ephraem’s stanza, Luxenberg makes the curious remark, “In the end it was also this that led the Arabic exegetes of the Koran to this fateful assumption.” Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic reading* 259.

30 Ibid., 251.

the *hūrīs* or with reference to other women in paradise, so that their hitherto unrecognized evocations of the imagery of grapes and grapevines might come to light. But for the present purpose one might let the review of this 'Syro-Aramaic' re-reading of these Quranic passages rest here for the moment. It remains only to mention that at least one other scholar has sought to further adjust Luxenberg's re-construction of this imagery.

In an interesting review of Christoph Luxenberg's work, along with a number of suggestions of his own for consulting possible early Christian antecedents for a number of other Quranic phrases, Jan M.F. van Reeth suggested an alternative to Luxenberg's reading of the phrase, "*wa-zawwajnāhum bi-hūrīn īnin*."³¹ Against the background of a deep study of the development of the 'grapes and grapevine' motif in Biblical and patristic sources, which he suggests is lying behind the passages in Ephraem the Syrian's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise,' van Reeth proposed that the Quranic phrase in question might better be read as a calque on the Syriac phrase, *kūrâ dâ'ēnbên*, attested in the Syriac of *Second Baruch* "which could be rendered into Arabic as *kūr* 'n-b or *khūr* 'n-b: a certain measure of grapes, of wine."³² In a long footnote in a later edition of his work, Luxenberg rejected van Reeth's suggestion,³³ but the latter's sketch of the early development of the 'grapes and grapevines' motif in early Christian literature nevertheless remains a valuable contribution to the discussion.

On the one hand, while Christoph Luxenberg's philological soundings are impressive in their ingenuity, if not always in their verisimilitude, he neglects finding instances of the actual currency in Syriac literature of phrases like his postulated "white, crystal(-) (grapes),"³⁴ construed on the basis of grammatical and lexical possibilities alone. And on the other hand, he does not consider the full context of the passages to which he refers in Ephraem the Syrian's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise,' where marital metaphors definitely do appear, as we shall see, along with the 'grapes and grapevines' motif in the author's depiction

31 See van Reeth, *Le vignoble du paradis*. See also van Reeth, *L'Évangile du Prophète*.

32 Van Reeth, *Le vignoble du paradis* 515.

33 See Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic reading* 263 note 324.

34 At one point in defense of his suggestion that the Syriac feminine adjective *hewwārtâ* 'white' has been used in Syriac to apply to grapes, Luxenberg cites the authority of R. Payne-Smith's *Thesaurus Syriacus*. But the reference is not in fact to grapes but to a white grapevine, in a Syriac translation of a phrase in the Greek *Geoponica*, viz., *ἡ λευκὴ ἀμπέλος*. See Payne-Smith, *Thesaurus Syriacus*, col. 1230. Similarly, the citation from the dictionary of Manna actually refers to a grapevine. See Manna, *Vocabulaire Chaldéen-Arabe* 229a. What is more, the only instance of the appearance of the adjective 'white' (*hewwārê*) in Ephraem the Syrian's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise' is in reference to the "new, white garments" of the just in the garden. See Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VI:9.6.

of the joys and pleasures of the garden of paradise. What is more, it appears from his own words, quoted above, that it was not philology in the first place, but a pre-conceived line of *scriptural* reasoning, and an idiosyncratic view of the Quran's origins, that first prompted Christoph Luxenberg to reject the *ḥūrīs* of the Islamic exegetical tradition; he then used 'Syro-Aramaic' philology to produce another reading of the Arabic phrases actually appearing in the Quran.

3 Ephraem the Syrian's Syriac *Madrāshê* 'On Paradise'

While they have often been mentioned in the present discussion, in fact not much attention has actually been paid in the studies we have reviewed to Ephraem the Syrian's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise' and their multiple images of the joys and pleasures of the garden of paradise. The collection of fifteen *madrāshê* 'On Paradise' are preserved in an early sixth-century manuscript, written in the city of Edessa in the year 519 CE by an otherwise unknown scribe named Julian.³⁵ In the manuscript, they are all presented in the same meter-melody, with the exception that *madrāshê* XIII and XIV appear in a continuous, alphabetical, acrostic pattern of stanzas, a feature that binds these two pieces together, somewhat out of step with the presentation of the other *madrāshê* in the collection. This arrangement suggests that in spite of the fact that they are now presented as separate compositions, numbers XIII and XIV must once have circulated as a single composition. And it is quite possible that they and other parts of the collection were not originally by Ephraem, but were later included in the portfolio.³⁶

The Syriac *madrāshâ* is a genre of liturgical poetry set to music. In Ephraem's hands it also became the literary genre of choice for winning and holding the allegiance to Nicene orthodoxy of the Syriac-speaking Christians in Syria/Mesopotamia and the frontier regions between the Roman and Persian empires in the fourth and fifth centuries.³⁷ It is a 'teaching song,' a distinctive genre in its own right; it is not just hymnody,³⁸ nor is it simply a poetic

35 See Beck's discussion of British Library Ms. add. 14571 in Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso* clxxiv, 3. Beck's edition and German translation are now standard. The *madrāshê* have been translated into both English and French, in English in Brock, *Hymns on paradise*, and in French in Lavanant and Graffin, *Hymnes sur le paradis*.

36 See Palmer, Restoring the ABC 147–94; Palmer, Nine more stanzas.

37 See Griffith, The clash of *Madrāshê* in Aram.

38 See Lattke, Sind Ephräms *Madrāshê* Hymnen?

recitative. Rather, the *madrāshê* composed by Ephraem the Syrian were poetically metered recitatives set to music.³⁹ In the Divine Liturgy, they were publicly performed after the solemn reading from the scriptures; they explored the scriptural themes meditatively and they were sung by trained choirs, with congregational responses after each stanza. In all likelihood their tunes were catchy and their words and phrases would have been eminently memorable.

In Ephraem's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise,' the point of departure seems to have been a passage from the Gospel according to Luke:⁴⁰

One of the robbers who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!" But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power." And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39–43)

Ephraem says he heard this passage proclaimed in the liturgy. He put it this way at the beginning of one of the *madrāshê*:

A statement that delighted me
 shone forth in my ears
 from the text that was read
 about the story of the robber.
 It gave consolation to my soul,
 due to the multitude of her faults,
 that the One pitying the robber
 would lead her
 to the very garden (*gantâ*) whose name
 I had heard and was overjoyed.
 My mind cut loose its reins
 and proceeded to meditate on it.⁴¹

Ephraem described the manner of his meditation on paradise in other songs in the collection. In the first one, he speaks of his reading about paradise in the Torah, "the treasury of revelations," as he styled it, in which "the story of the

39 See McVey, Songs or recitations.

40 See Griffith, Syriac/Antiochene exegesis.

41 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VIII:1.

garden is revealed." Here in the Torah, Moses, "who teaches all men his celestial texts, the master of the Hebrews taught us his doctrine." And Ephraem goes on to sing:

Gladly did I come to
 the story of Paradise,
 which is short to read
 but rich to investigate.
 My tongue read the stories,
 clear in the account of it,
 and my mind flew up to soar
 in awe.
 It searched out its glory,
 not indeed as it is,
 but as it is given,
 to mankind to apprehend.
 In my mind's eye
 I saw Paradise.⁴²

In yet another song in the collection, Ephraem very evocatively describes his first-person journey to paradise, led there by the lines of the book of Genesis. With the Quran and later Islamic tradition in mind, one might even think of Ephraem's adventure as a spiritual *mi'rāj* avant le lettre.⁴³ He says:

I read the opening of this book
 and was filled with joy,
 for its verses and lines
 spread out their arms to welcome me;
 the first rushed out and kissed me,
 and led me on to its companion;
 and when I reached that verse
 wherein is written
 the story of Paradise,
 it lifted me up and transported me
 from the bosom of the book
 to the very bosom of Paradise.

⁴² Ibid., 1:1, 3–4.1.

⁴³ On the importance of this event in the development of Islamic theology, see van Ess, *The flowering of Muslim theology* 45–77.

The eye and the mind
 traveled over the lines
 as over a bridge, and entered together
 the story of Paradise.
 The eye as it read
 transported the mind;
 in return the mind, too,
 gave the eye rest
 from its reading,
 for when the book had been read
 the eye had rest,
 but the mind was engaged.
 Both the bridge and the gate
 of Paradise
 did I find in this book.
 I crossed over and entered;
 my eye indeed remained outside
 but my mind entered within.
 I began to wander
 amid things not described.
 This is a luminous height,
 clear, lofty and fair:
 Scripture named it Eden,
 the summit of all blessings.⁴⁴

As he came down from his mental journey amid the glories and wonders of the garden, Ephraem reflected:

I was in wonder as I crossed
 the borders of Paradise
 at how well-being, as though a companion,
 turned round and remained behind.
 And when I reached the shore of earth,
 the mother of thorns,
 I encountered all kinds
 of pain and suffering.

44 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, v:3–5, in the English translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 103–4.

I learned how, compared to Paradise,
 our abode is but a dungeon;
 yet the prisoners within it
 weep when they leave it.⁴⁵

In the course of his meditation on the story of paradise in the Bible, Ephraem conjures up in his *madrashê* a kaleidoscopic, verbal icon of the joys and pleasures of human destiny in the hereafter. He envisions the scriptural account of the garden of Eden as embodying a typological sketchbook of paradise in the end time. As Dom Edmund Beck put it, in these *madrāshê* 'On Paradise,' Ephraem "umfasst das Thema *de Paradiso* 'Primordiologie' und Eschatologie zugleich."⁴⁶

As Tor Andrae and others have mentioned, a notable feature of Ephraem's descriptions of the after-world in the garden of paradise is their appeal to the senses, albeit for him, as one scholar has put it, "The bodily senses become symbols of another kind of perception, namely spiritual perception."⁴⁷ However that may be, in the travelogue of his mind's journey into the garden of paradise, Ephraem describes the beauties of Paradise Mountain in terms of vision, taste, and even scent. He speaks of a beauty that "no paints can portray,"⁴⁸ where "scented breezes blow with varied force" over a banquet "where those who minister never weary in their service."⁴⁹ The trees, with their branches form a bower that invites the blessed to recline in their bosom, and "as the saints recline; below them are blossoms, above them fruit."⁵⁰ Ephraem envisions each season as yielding its best produce in paradise and he uses an earthy image to make the point. He says,

45 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, v:13, in the English translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 106–7. Note that Ephraem, like Muḥammad after him, had companionship in paradise, but unlike Gabriel as Muḥammad's guide, Ephraem speaks of "well-being, as though a companion," in Brock's translation. A more literal rendering might be: "The company of the wholesome stayed and turned back." One notices here the counterpoint between the Islamic concreteness and the Syrian Christian abstraction.

46 Beck, *Hymnen über das Paradies* ix.

47 Botha, The significance of the senses 28. See also Botha, Honour and shame.

48 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, iv:9.

49 Ibid., ix:7.

50 Ibid., ix:5.

The air of this earth
 is as wanton as a prostitute
 with whom the twelve months
 consort:
 each one in turn
 makes her comply with its own whims
 while she produces fruits
 from them all;
 whereas the chaste and pure air
 of Paradise
 is unpolluted in its purity
 by the dalliance of the months.
 There the abundant flow
 of their produce is ceaseless,
 for each month bears its own fruit,
 its neighbor, flowers.
 There the springs of delights
 open up and flow
 with wine, milk, honey
 and cream.⁵¹

Ephraem makes a major point of the fact that not only the souls of the just, but their bodies, too, are destined to enjoy the delights of paradise. He says, "The soul cannot have any perception of Paradise without its mate, the body, its instrument and lyre."⁵² And so, in a beautiful stanza he envisions the following scenario unfolding:

In the delightful mansions
 on the borders of Paradise
 do the souls of the just
 and righteous reside,
 awaiting there
 the bodies they love,
 so that, at the opening
 of the Garden's gate,

51 Ibid., x:5–6, in the translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 149–50.

52 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, viii:2, in the translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 132.

both bodies and souls might proclaim,
 amidst Hosannas,
 “Blessed is He who has brought Adam from Sheol
 and returned him to Paradise in the company of many.”⁵³

In one of the most poignant of the *madrāshê* ‘On Paradise,’ Ephraem turns his attention to the many classes of people in the church’s congregations, who will also be represented among the blessed in paradise, and he describes the conditions of their bliss. He speaks of the ‘mourners,’ who were a special order of ascetic hermits in the Syriac-speaking communities, the poor, baptized men and women, virgins, youth, married people, children, the elderly, the lame, those who fast, the saints who abstain from wine and from marriage, and finally the martyrs.⁵⁴ And as if to recognize that most people in the Christian congregations were married, in one stanza of another *madrāshâ* he likens the perennial fruit of the trees of paradise in the several seasons to the extended human family, and to the perennial productivity of the institution of marriage in human society. He says,

That cornucopia full of fruits
 in all stages of development
 resembles the course
 of human marriage;
 it contains the old,
 young, and middle-aged,
 children who have already been born,
 and babies still unborn;
 its fruits follow one another
 and appear
 like the continuous succession
 of human kind.⁵⁵

In fact, with this image of marriage in mind, on a broader reading of Ephraem’s *madrāshê* it emerges that much of the lush imagery, the grapes and the grapevines, the fruits and the flowers, the trees and the fragrances, all go together in Ephraem’s imagination to furnish paradise as a setting for what he calls the

53 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VII:11, in the translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 135.

54 See Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VII:3–19.

55 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, X:12, in the English translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 152.

'bridal chambers' (*gnānê*) of the blessed, bridal chambers "of glory (*shubḥâ*),"⁵⁶ "of light (*zaliqâ* and *nuhrâ*),"⁵⁷ and even "of joys (*ḥadwâthâ*)." ⁵⁸ In paradise, Ephraem says that one sees the disciples, "On high in their bridal chambers,"⁵⁹ where God also gave Adam "a chaste bridal chamber."⁶⁰ Ephraem says further, in paradise, "The virgin who rejected the marriage crown that fades, now has the radiant marriage chamber that cherishes the children of light."⁶¹ And referring in broad strokes to the happiness of the blessed in paradise, Ephraem wrote:

There all fruit is holy,
 all raiment luminous,
 every crown glorious,
 every rank the most exalted –
 happiness without toil,
 delight that knows no fear,
 a marriage feast (*ḥlûlâ*) which continues
 forever and ever.⁶²

From the broader perspective of Syriac literature, it emerges that in terms of the marital imagery of paradise, with its bridal chambers and banquets, Ephraem in fact is reflecting an ancient tradition that dates from at least as early as the early third century and reaches well beyond Ephraem's own time in the liturgies of the Syriac-speaking Christian communities.⁶³ As "one of the most common terms used as a metaphor for the Kingdom of Heaven," Sebastian Brock concludes:

One could fairly say that the image of the Bridal Chamber permeates Syriac liturgical poetry, serving essentially as a metaphor for the place of union between the divine and the human realms. The eschatological Bridal Chamber of Light/Joys represents the fulfillment of the potential Bridal Chamber of Adam and Eve.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, XIII:10.

⁵⁷ Ibid., VII:15 and 24.

⁵⁸ Beck, *Hymnen de Virginitate*, XXIV:3.

⁵⁹ Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, I:6.

⁶⁰ Ibid., XIII:3.

⁶¹ Ibid., VII:15.

⁶² Ibid., XIV:8, in the translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 8.

⁶³ See Brock, The bridal chamber.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 179 and 189.

Brock's mention of "the potential Bridal Chamber of Adam and Eve" refers to the view of Ephraem and other early Syriac-speaking Christians that had they not sinned, Adam and Eve would have been united in a Bridal Chamber in primordial paradise. This view seems to have been elaborated by Christian exegetes in contrast to a view espoused in Jewish circles, according to which "Adam and Eve were united in a Bridal Chamber in Paradise before the fall."⁶⁵ In one of his verse homilies 'On Creation,' the Syriac poet Jacob of Serugh (c. 451–521) portrayed the aborted marital consummation vividly. He wrote:

God made Adam a bridegroom in this great Bridal Chamber that He had decorated,
He adorned Eve as a virgin bride, and gave her to Adam,
providing, in her dowry, the sea, dry land and air.
All the Ages gathered for the great wedding feast He had made,
the bridal couple were radiant in their crowns and their garments;
He had covered them with glorious light and splendid radiance.
He left them on their own among the trees with their fruits,
having given them as a wedding present every kind of tree and fruit.
The Garden rejoiced at the beloved bride and groom.
As for the Tree of Life, He had hidden it in Eden's great Bridal Chamber,
to be there for the bridal couple of light once they had been fulfilled.
But the Tree of Knowledge, full of death, stood beautifully outside.
And so that they would know who was the Lord who had honored them,
He established the law that they should not eat of the tree.
He gave the whole Garden to the new children He had acquired;
He appointed only one tree to test them.
The mischief-maker barged in and sowed discord in that banquet;
he stole the bride, he whispered his lie, he deceitfully led her astray.
The wretched little hawk came to stand among the innocent doves;
he chased them out of the wide nest of Eden.⁶⁶

One notices the prominence of light, and the related concept of glory, in the passages that speak of the Bridal Chambers of paradise in the Syriac texts, a feature that recalls the importance in the Syriac exegetical tradition of the originally Jewish idea of Adam's 'robe of glory/light' in paradise.⁶⁷ This luminous

⁶⁵ See Brock, The bridal chamber 184. See also Anderson, Celibacy or consummation.

⁶⁶ De Saroug, *Quatre homélies métriques*, text iv ll. 156–79, in the English translation of Brock, The bridal chamber 185, augmented by the present author.

⁶⁷ See Brock, Clothing metaphors; Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis*.

dimension of the imagery serves the purpose of reminding the reader that in the view of Ephraem, and of the other Syriac writers in whose works the theme appears, the sensual images of paradise are meant as metaphors. As P.J. Botha put it,

The reason why Ephrem perceives Paradise in such dazzling colours, scents, sights and delights is that this is a place that is so intimately associated with the presence, and therefore the honour, of God. The 'awe' he experiences for Paradise, is the same 'awe' one should have for God.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, in the writings of Ephraem the Syrian and the Syriac liturgical tradition in general one does find, contrary to Christoph Luxenberg's views, an abundance of marital and sexual imagery in the descriptions of the joys of the garden of paradise. What relation this lush imagery in Syriac literature might have to the depictions of paradise in the Arabic Quran is another matter.

4 Paradise, Ephraem the Syrian, and the Arabic Quran

The Quran's evocations of the beauties and delights of the garden of paradise are *sui generis*; they stand on their own,⁶⁹ yet in many features they are hauntingly familiar to readers of eschatological poetry in Syriac. It is for this reason that Tor Andrae, whose hermeneutical approach to the Quran included a search for what he considered to be the sources of the Arabic scripture, turned to Ephraem the Syrian's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise' to look for narrative parallels. He found them in a number of places, but he was particularly drawn to the passage in *madrāshâ* VII:18 that speaks of the clusters of grapes and the grapevines that in paradise would, as it were, stretch out their arms to draw the earthly ascetic into the bosom of their embrace. In the text, as Tor Andrae mistakenly read it, there seemed to him to be no immediate antecedent for the feminine plural pronoun that identified the ones into whose bosom in the garden the celibate ascetic would be enfolded, so, as we have seen, it put Andrae in mind of the Quran's 'dark-eyed *ḥūrīs*,' and he wondered if in this particular passage (i.e., *madrāshâ* VII:18.5) Ephraem might be indirectly alluding to a similar reward in the afterworld for the life-long, sober ascetic in this world. Andrae further opined that most of Ephraem's listeners and readers "no doubt

68 Botha, Honour and shame 54.

69 See Rustomji, *The garden and the fire*.

remained quite oblivious to his feeble attempts to spiritualize his sensual images. . . . and under such circumstances one cannot blame a citizen of pagan Mecca for doing the same thing.”⁷⁰ While Dom Edmund Beck rightly pointed out that the pronoun in question actually refers to the preceding ‘grapevines’ (*gupnê*), feminine in Syriac, and not to some subliminally summoned female companions, who, therefore cannot be the literary ancestors of the *hūrīs* of Islamic tradition,⁷¹ he did not call attention to the imagery of the ‘bridal chambers of light,’ embowered within the garden’s canopy of trees and grapevines, with their dangling grape clusters, that awaited the blessed in Ephraem’s vision of paradise. So, as we have seen, marital bliss does in fact figure in Ephraem’s *madrāshê* as a metaphor for heavenly joy, albeit not in the Quran’s vivid and fetching descriptions of the *hūrīs*.

But what is one to make of the echoes of Syriac eschatological visions and parallel imagery that so readily seem to the readers of Syriac to shine through the Quran’s Arabic diction? It is basically a question about Quranic hermeneutics. And one principle that should certainly apply is that the meaning of the Arabic Quran cannot authentically be reduced to the parameters of its presumed conceptual background in the language of one of its predecessor narratives; it has its own textual integrity and frames of reference.⁷² Nevertheless, the Arabic Quran did not come down into a religious or scriptural vacuum. The Arabic scripture clearly presents itself in dialogue with both the canonical and apocryphal scriptures of the earlier communities of Jews and Christians, and with much Jewish and ecclesiastical lore. In all likelihood, Arabic-speaking Jews and Christians were in fact in the Quran’s original audience. And in the Christian instance, as one has argued elsewhere, it is becoming increasingly evident that the theological and liturgical heritage of these Arabic-speaking Christians lay in Syriac sources, a situation that in some instances has even left its traces in the ‘Syriacisms’ to be found in the Quran’s evocation of Christian lore and Arabic usage.⁷³

But there are no ‘Syriacisms,’ either linguistic or thematic, in the Quran’s eschatology, yet it is still hauntingly familiar. Ephraem’s and Jacob of Serugh’s Syriac descriptions of the garden of paradise, right down to and including the marital and sexual imagery, are in part from the same thought-world as the descriptions in the Arabic Quran, revealing at the very least the latter’s inten-

70 Andrae, *Mohammed: The man and his faith* 88.

71 See Beck, *Eine christliche Parallele*.

72 See Saleh, *The etymological fallacy*.

73 See the studies mentioned in note 9 above.

tion to address an audience within that same frame of reference. It is not, as Tor Andrae supposed, a matter of finding in these Syriac texts the sources of Muḥammad's or the Quran's language and imagery. Rather, the coincidence of image and expression bespeaks the Quran's familiarity with the imaginative world of its Arabic-speaking audience, living within the range of the Syriac-speaking churches of Late Antiquity, to whose liturgies and modes of expression Arabic-speaking Christians were manifestly indebted. What is different, and comparative eschatology reveals many differences, is basically the difference between Christianity and Islam. For the Christians, paradise is paradise restored and the just are led into its lush garden by the crucified and risen Messiah, Jesus, Mary's son and son of God, the new Adam, who will have harrowed Hell to lead the old Adam and the blessed, whom the Messiah has redeemed, to their eternal reward, themes that are everywhere in the Christian texts. By way of contrast, for Muslims, whose Quran critiques these Christian beliefs as "going beyond the bounds of religion" (Q 4:171) and "transgressing the bounds of the truth" (Q 5:77), the garden of paradise is for "those who have believed and have done good works" (Q 2:25; 4:57), for "those who are God-fearing (*muttaqīn*)" (Q 3:15; 44:51; 52:17; 78:31), for "the true servants of God" (Q 37:43; 38:49), and for "those who believe in Our signs and are submissive (*muslimīn*)" (Q 43:69).

Furthermore, by comparison with the images of paradise as we find them in Syriac Christian texts written before the time of Islam, and which doubtless circulated at least partially in oral translation in the milieu of the Arabic-speaking Christians of Arabia, there is an enhanced concreteness in the Arabic Quran's descriptive language, not least in the marital imagery. In addition to the "chaste spouses" (Q 3:15; 4:57), for example, there are also in the Quran's garden those described as *ḥūr ʿīn* (Q 44:54; 52:20), for whom, it is true, there are no exact analogues in the earlier scriptural traditions.⁷⁴ This is an instance in which the Quran has given further development and specificity to a narrative motif that appeared metaphorically and in a different guise in the Christian imagination, reflecting at the very least a different anthropology, a different view of human bodiliness, and a different conception of ultimate human happiness. Ephraem put it this way:

74 In this connection, Walid Saleh has called attention to the intriguing idea that in addition to earlier scriptural traditions, the Quran might also reflect images found in Hellenic mythology that might also have been current in its milieu, such as the image of Ganymede and of the goddess Hera, the *boōpis*, the 'oxen-eyed.' See Saleh, The etymological fallacy 39–40.

Far more glorious than the body
 Is the soul,
 And more glorious still than the soul
 Is the spirit,
 But more hidden than the spirit
 Is the Godhead.
 At the end
 The body will put on
 The beauty of the soul,
 The soul will put on that of the spirit,
 While the spirit shall put on
 The very likeness of God's majesty.⁷⁵

In terms of Late Antique depictions of the afterworld, Ephraem's *madrāshê* 'On Paradise' and the Arabic Quran can both be seen to have chosen their colors from virtually the same imagistic palette to portray somewhat different models of ultimate human happiness. Reading the eschatological passages in the Arabic Quran against the background of widely circulated Syriac liturgical texts such as Ephraem's *madrāshê* or Jacob of Serugh's *mémrê* allows one to bring into focus not only the Quran's close familiarity with the religious discourse of others in its own milieu, but all the better, by way of comparison and contrast, to discern the new, Islamic turn given to earlier eschatological themes. Ephraem's imaginative journey to paradise, led by scripture's verses to contemplation's luminous, divine beauty, stands in contrast to Muḥammad's bodily Night Journey and Ascension into the heavens.

As for the grapes and the grapevines of paradise, it is interesting to observe that according to their respective traditions both Ephraem the Syrian and the Prophet Muḥammad had visions of the heavenly vines with their clusters of grapes, reaching into their daily lives. Envisioning the church, with its daily Eucharistic liturgies, Ephraem wrote:

The assembly of the saints
 is the type of Paradise. [cf. Q 89:29–30]
 Its fruit, which enlivens all,
 is plucked in it every day;
 in it, my brothers, there is pressed out,
 the clustered grapes [of Paradise], the enliverer of all.⁷⁶

75 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, 1X:20, in the translation of Brock, *Hymns on paradise* 143.

76 Beck, *Hymnen de Paradiso*, VI:8.

In the Islamic community, an early prophetic tradition reports Muḥammad's account of his vision of paradise in the context of what is called the Eclipse Prayer. The Prophet said: "I saw the Garden and I reached out for a bunch of grapes from it, and if I had taken it you would have been able to eat from it for as long as this world lasted."⁷⁷

These two passages, with their common imagery of the grape cluster, when read together reveal both the Christian's conception of a realized eschatology, disclosed in the church's sacramental liturgy in this world, and the Muslim's act of envisioning the garden materially and concretely as a defining feature of Islam's own distinctive, eschatological vision,⁷⁸ according to which neither lifelong virginity nor celibacy, as in the Christian view, would epitomize or signify human striving for perfection.

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77 A tradition recorded in the *Muwattaʿ* of Malik Ibn Anas, *al-Muwattaʿ of Malik ibn Anas*, no. 12.1.2, as quoted by Rustomji, *The garden and the fire* 23.

78 In this connection, see also M. Jarrar's contribution to this publication.

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Paradise? America! The Metaphor of Paradise in the Context of the Iraqi-Christian Migration

Martin Tamcke

For sixteen hundred years, Christian authors from the Mesopotamian area have been thinking about paradise in various contexts. The metaphor, even when it takes effect in eminently theological writings, is open to many interpretations and is used in very different contexts. Behind supposedly Christian-theological terms there may loom ideas from other religious traditions including the pagan.¹ In fact, the metaphor of paradise was soon used in non-theological contexts as well. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the works of the most important representative of the Syrian Renaissance² in the realm of eastern Syrian culture, ‘Abdishō‘ bar Berikā (d. 1318),³ whose influential poetic work – the Paradise of Eden⁴ – was conceived as a deliberately artistic challenge to Arabic poetry and was meant to demonstrate the artistry and superiority of the Syriac language over the Arabic.

As it has happened in European and widely secularized societies, in the Christian orient the use of the metaphor of “paradise” is no longer exclusively theological but it has been adapted to carry religious connotations sometimes only as distant memories.⁵ Just like in Western societies, the metaphor is used

1 See the controversy between Carl Brockelmann and Paul Krüger. Brockelmann believed he could find traces of pre-Christian, pagan practices in the Christian sources of that area; Krüger on the other hand vehemently rejected this approach. He pointed to the distinctly theological character of the writings and their roots in the life of the church (cf. Brockelmann, *Ein syrischer Regenzauber*; Krüger, *Die Regenbitten Aphrems*. For a discussion of this controversy see Tamcke, *Die Christen vom Tur Abdin* 121–51).

2 Cf. Teule, *The Syriac renaissance*.

3 Cf. Tamcke, Ebedjesus (‘Abdiso‘ Bar Berika); previously published as Tamcke, Ebedjesus.

4 Cf. Tamcke, ‘Abdiso Bar Brika, Paradaisa da-‘den.

5 Cf. Ebel, *Das versprochene Paradies*; Buschmann, *Religiöse und biblische Motive in der Werbung*; Buschmann and Pirner, *Werbung, Religion, Bildung*; Klie, *Spiegelflächen*; Börner, *Auf der Suche nach dem irdischen Paradies*; for more on the changing ideas of paradise in the course of history see Krauss, *Das Paradies*.

in connection with wholesome and pleasant or beautiful things such as milk with honey. This drink is traditionally considered the “food of paradise.”⁶

1 Paradise between Reality and Unreality

From the last quarter of the twentieth century as Christian oriental communities have come under more pressure, their tendency to migrate to other continents that seem to promise better living conditions has increased.⁷ Their longing to live in these countries and enter these societies was so strong that the promised way of life was imagined as “paradise.” For several Christian authors of eastern Syrian heritage in Iraq, looking to America has become so much a part of their thinking and their strategies for survival that as soon as they are exposed to actual interaction with American reality their perspective is inevitably challenged.

Such is the case with Sargon Boulus.⁸ Born into a family of Assyrian refugees on 19 February 1944 close to Lake Habbaniyya near Baghdad, he later moved with his family to Kirkuk in northern Iraq. In 1962 he went to Baghdad, in 1967 he crossed the Iraqi-Syrian border on foot and – with no money or identification – reached Beirut, where he took an active part in the revival of the leading Arabic literary magazine *Shiʿr*. From 1969 on he lived in the United States of America most of the time. After a long illness he died on 22 October 2007 in Berlin.⁹ Sargon Boulus wrote his poems in Arabic, a language he had learned from his mother amidst a family speaking “Syriac.” His life was marked by seemingly incompatible contradictions even before his arrival in America. On one hand there was the early suffering when he and his family were refugees (his father was a carpenter, ironed laundry, and worked as a traditional healer), and living in a makeshift clay and tin hut, in which four families lived separated only by sheets hanging on ropes. This stood in stark contrast to the professional who translated the works of poets of the Beat generation (Plath and Lowell) into Arabic and who could plainly say about his emigration to the United States that America was to him the opportunity for a new dream. With

6 Khoury, *Königreich der Fremdlinge* 60.

7 After the Russo-Persian War (1826–8) and especially in the aftermath of the pogroms against the Assyrians in the Hakkari Province, the first Assyrian migrations began already around the middle of the nineteenth century, cf. Tamcke, *Nach Russland*.

8 For biographies of Sargon Boulus see Boulus, *Mittenaus, Mittenein*, 115–6; Taufiq, *Über den Autor und sein Werk*; Nijland, Sargon Boulus.

9 Cf. Naggar, *Generation Zufall*.

his migration to America, however, the past did not end; home did not simply stay behind in Iraq. "I never left Iraq. As far as you may go, you will return to the same sources, to their origins in childhood and in relatives, to drink from them. You do not stop returning to the past while living in the present."¹⁰

A key incident during childhood was his first encounter with English women. The British occupation troops in Iraq had gathered the Assyrians close to their military basis in al-Habbaniyya, after these had repeatedly become victims of pogroms. Sargon Boulus' father was among those working for the English. He often brought his son with him into the English camp.

My father used to work for the English and one of my first and very cherished memories is when as a kid my father used to take me to the place of his work, which was a camp where only the English lived with the Iraqi workers (mostly Assyrian). We used to see these English ladies in summertime among their flowers and lawns, a totally different woman from the women that I knew like my mother, my sisters and the other women in my family. Here was another type of image of humanity, let's say, and I was like sneaking a view through the trees, from far away into these gardens. For me, I think now, that's a vision of paradise, paradise meaning something very flowery, full of colour.¹¹

What he describes here in an interview with Margaret Obank can be found in similar form in his autobiographical text "Poetry and Other Mysteries":

My father used to work for the English, and one of my first and very cherished memories is when as a kid my father used to take me to the place of his work, which was a camp where only the English lived, surrounded by an enormous fence. We used to see these English ladies in summertime having their tea, half naked, among their flowers and well kept lawns, a totally different kind of female from our mothers and sisters who were wrapped in black most of the time, and looked as if they had just returned from a funeral. It was like sneaking through a chink in the wall of paradise, finding yourself in another world. Of course I wasn't aware at the time that they were occupying the country, I was too young to know.¹²

10 Quoted from Tamcke, *Die konfessionelle Dimension* 168, taken up again in a shorter form in Tamcke, *Christen in der islamischen Welt* 140–1.

11 Obank, Sargon Boulus talks about his life in poetry.

12 Forum Internationale Zusammenarbeit für Nachhaltige Entwicklung (ed.), *fize-Geburtstagsparty*.

The cultural distinctness of the West fascinated him and found his approval. While his own Christian oriental culture, surrounded by Islamic culture, was restrictive, the Western world seemed liberated. And exactly in what was possible in the Western world, he found himself. What is interesting about the two texts is that despite the differences in the two versions of the same situation, not only the event is clearly the same, but also the metaphor for what was seen: namely, paradise as metaphor for the observed reality of European existence that was so different from the reality of his own Assyrian-Arabic existence in Iraq. What he saw there as a European alternative to his own world was so extraordinary that he could not grasp it without recourse to the term "vision." He was looking at an unfamiliar reality that he nevertheless felt close to. He had had, speaking in terms of classic mysticism, a revelation, a vision.

Paradise, located this way between reality and unreality, is described by Boulus only vaguely in character as "very flowery, full of colour." This rich coloring contrasts with the colorless monotony of his own culture. Things have a different, richer taste and are full of color. Sargon Boulus was not only one of "the most important Arabic poets of the present,"¹³ he acted as an unremitting advocate and mediator for Western authors, mainly modern authors, in the Arabic world. His emotional ties to the West led him to follow his yearning for paradise. Through the desert on foot, without a passport he was incarcerated as an illegal migrant in Beirut, but finally departed, with the help of the American embassy there, for America, never to return permanently to Iraq or the Middle East. Asked about how he could just leave his Arab home, he replied "I believe it is the imagination. When I read something, I can imagine it. My reading has filled me with dreams. I followed my imagination."¹⁴ Belonging to two worlds is a familiar feeling for oriental Christians from early childhood on. It has turned them into driving forces for the modernization of their home countries.¹⁵ But it also led to a situation in which the majority of the population among which they lived continued to slander them as a fifth column of the West. And when the dynamics of their mediative role are impeded too much, they emigrate.

2 Escaping from a 'Lost' Paradise

The inclination to migrate to America, and to Europe as well, has increased even after the American occupation of Iraq, despite the fact that the coincident

13 Naggar, *Generation Zufall*.

14 Ibid.

15 Cf. Tamcke, *Die orientalischen Christen und Europa*.

disillusion with America has become apparent among Christians all over the country. The will to emigrate has not decreased. The difficult situation for Christians in the Middle East and their looking to America now explicitly finds its expression in terms of hell and paradise. Hell, that is Baghdad, the Iraqi home. Paradise, that is America.

In his book on the situation of Christians in his country, Jean Benjamin Sleiman, the Latin archbishop in Baghdad (born in 1946 in Lebanon), uses the metaphor "paradise" repeatedly. On the one hand there is a simple line from the admired West to the metaphor. "Since ancient times the West has been taken for a kind of paradise, a place of retreat and refuge."¹⁶ Even if the duration of Western orientation is enhanced by Sleiman into an almost mythical dimension of an unimaginable time frame, the modern kind of Western orientation is relatively recent; it begins with the failing Ottoman Empire, and becomes more genuine still with the taking over of the mandate by Great Britain after the defeat of the Ottomans.

Ever since the Christians in Iraq have been afflicted by measures against the people of the Middle East, this treatment has put a damper on their traditional ties to the West, which they demonstrated several times during the last century: they are now met, according to Baghdad archbishop Sleiman, with the same distrust by the West as the Muslims in their country and consider this, as those do, to be a "degradation."

The move to a distant country, to America most of all, has become increasingly difficult. Hope that often survived only because of the thought of a possible emigration dwindles. The pressure against Christians in the country, however, who are seen as the secret allies of the Americans, is increasing. "While Christians in Iraq are being discriminated against ever more vehemently, the 'paradise,' into which they want to emigrate, moves further and further away from them every day."¹⁷ Nevertheless, exactly because it has become more and more difficult to leave the country and head for the West, the hope to be among the few who succeed in emigrating increases. "To escape the 'lost paradise,' one is willing to use all means necessary to reach a new 'paradise' like the USA, considered the 'promised land' par excellence."¹⁸

Paradise is far away, in a world that is believed to be ideal. Paradise is almost unattainable, but it is real. Paradise is that world in which desperately missed freedom is to be found – freedom that has not materialized despite all the promises made surrounding the new constitution of Iraq.

16 Sleiman, *Der Aufschrei des Erzbischofs von Bagdad* 95.

17 Ibid., 98.

18 Ibid., 115.

Indeed, this idealization of America is tied to an almost religious belief which, regardless of all the frustrating experiences with Americans, seems to be without alternative the driving source of future plans made by Iraqi Christians. Only the idealization of the Iraqi past as a lost paradise counteracts the lure of a paradise named America. But this paradise of Iraq is already only an object of nostalgia, an act of looking back; it is tied to past times that are forever gone. The future is not something their own country's lost paradise can still offer. The future only beckons from outside and beyond the ocean in that other world, where the burden of social and religiously sanctioned humiliation no longer has to be carried.

From there lure freedom and equality, there is a society that one can be an integral part of without carrying the yoke of an ostracized and marginalized minority.

3 Immigration to a 'New' Paradise?

The lost paradise: that is Iraq; but the paradise which all hope lies upon: that is still America. The fact that very real aspirations of Christian existence in Iraq are tied to America, which is attributed with the metaphor of paradise, seems at first to imply an empty use of the metaphor. The unreal that is also part of the metaphor is doubled in the non-perception of the by no means simple shining American reality. It is not paradise itself that unleashes the strength to leave home for the unfamiliar, and yet, the appropriation of the unfamiliar takes place exactly because in light of its religious connotation the unfamiliar is turned into something already familiar, into the always already alluring unreal-real. Where life is only determined by terror and unrest, the foreign and, in terms of civilization, seemingly superior is seen as paradise, as promising as a world in complete contrast to daily oppression. All this may not have much to do with theological teachings or religious imagery, but a reality is enhanced and removed from the reality of conflict, such that movement results. That movement, while it might not lead to paradise, will end in the departure from a world in which the realization of one's own values and wishes become increasingly difficult to attain and at times even the hope for them is lost.

If America wasn't paradise it might lose its respectability. As it is, as paradise it can overcome the sobering reality of the encounter with the Americans in Iraq, "in the middle of hell."¹⁹

19 Ibid., 77.

Sleiman surely did not intend to simply comply with this belief of his fellow believers and countrymen; rather he fought for Christians to stay in Iraq. However, he testifies to those mechanisms he cannot control when he cannot express the continued attractiveness of America for his people in any other way than with a comparison to paradise.

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PART 8

Eschatology and Literature



The Characteristics of Paradise (*Ṣifat al-Janna*): A Genre of Eschatological Literature in Medieval Islam

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Modern scholarship has paid considerable attention to the themes and formulations of Islamic eschatology in the Quran, Muslim traditions (*ḥadīths*), and a range of classical Islamic works. Thus far, however, there has been virtually no interest in analyzing the various categories of Muslim eschatological literature as literary genres. A group of works usually entitled *Ṣifat al-janna* (The characteristics of paradise) represents, as I propose here, one of these genres. It includes:

- *Wasf al-firdaws* (The description of paradise) by Abū Marwān ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb b. Sulaymān al-Sulamī (d. 238/853), hereafter referred to as Ibn Ḥabīb,
- *Ṣifat al-janna* by Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (d. 281/894),
- *Ṣifat al-janna* by Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (d. 430/1038),
- *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ ilā bilād al-afrāḥ* (The guide of souls to the land of delights) by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350)
- and *Ṣifat al-janna* by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373).¹

1 Ibn Ḥabīb's *Wasf al-firdaws*, despite its title, incorporates two short chapters on the departure of the soul from the body and the torment of the grave. The two chapters appear at the end of the book and it is not clear whether they belong to *Wasf al-firdaws* or to another work that was copied along with it. Manuscripts of this work were not available to the author. The work is mentioned in al-Ziriklī, *al-A‘lām* 157–8 and a Spanish edition of one of its manuscripts is also available, see Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Wasf al-firdaws*. Since the section on paradise constitutes by far the largest portion of *Wasf al-firdaws* and, as will be clear in the next few pages, it shares the genre's defining features, it was decided to include it in the present study. Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid b. Aḥmad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Ḥanbalī (d. 643/1245), known as al-Ḍiyā’ al-Maqdisī, is recorded in *Sīyar a‘lām al-nubalā’* to have written a certain *Ṣifat al-janna* work of two volumes (al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar* iii, 3544–5). Neither an edited copy nor a manuscript of this work has been available to the author, except for an incomplete electronic version circulating on the Internet. The work is thus not included in the present study. *Ṣifat al-janna* by Ibn Kathīr is originally a chapter in his book *al-Nihāya*

The principal aim of the present study is to demonstrate that these works share definable formal characteristics and goals and thus constitute a distinctive literary genre. In so doing, I also offer an account of this genre's development and significance in the scholarly and socio-cultural context of Sunni Islam.²

The notion of genre has a long and convoluted history during which its definition and even its validity have been contested. Shared conventions of form and content have been traditionally acknowledged as defining aspects of literary genres and since the 1920s, owing to the scholarship of the Russian formalists,³ shared function has also become widely recognized as a core element in identifying genres. Modern scholarship has also identified and explored some principal dimensions of genre, of which the socio-cultural, ideological, and historical dimensions appear particularly promising for our analysis.⁴

By being instruments of action in their context, genres are not only distinctive ways of responding to social conditions or situations they at the same time influence their social context.⁵ Genres are also cultural; as Deborah Dean maintains, "genres are cultural in the sense that they occur in and respond to what [Amy J.] Devitt calls a 'macro level of context' – a context broader than the immediate situation of the genre – or culture."⁶ Not detached from the socio-cultural dimension of genres is their ideological dimension, first articulated by Mikhail Bakhtin particularly with reference to the genre's content.⁷ As David Duff asserts, paraphrasing Bakhtin's view, "all genres, of literature and speech, are not simply sets of devices and conventions, but 'forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world,' ways of 'conceptualising reality' that are stored within the 'genre memory.'"⁸ Recognizing these dimensions has at least one clear implication: genres, studied carefully, could offer significant insights into many facets of their context. In this regard, we are not

fi l-fitan wa-l-malāḥim with the title *Ṣifat ahl al-janna wa-mā fiḥā min al-na'īm*. It exhibits, as I demonstrate below, the genre's function and features and therefore has been considered in the analysis.

2 The scope of the present study does not include Shi'i scholarship. Further research is certainly needed on Shi'i works on paradise that could be considered instances of the genre of *ṣifat al-janna*.

3 Duff, *Modern* 7.

4 Ibid., 1–19; Dean, *Genre* 3–26.

5 Dean, *Genre* 11.

6 Ibid., 16.

7 Duff, *Modern* 10.

8 Ibid.

discussing origins of content. We are examining how the connotations of the genre's textual substance bear witness to its function.

As for the relationship of genres (and their development) to history, despite the fact that this has long been identified, it is still frequently debated in literary criticism.⁹ The debate seems to center on how to delimit the synchronic, diachronic, continuous, and discontinuous in the historical development of genres.¹⁰ As opposed to outlining a comprehensive literary history of the emergence and development of the genre of *ṣifat al-janna* we are interested in the more modest task of merely identifying this historical genre. We mainly focus on describing the continuous aspects in the genre's history, from a synchronic perspective, without however failing to note its discontinuous and diachronic development. This will be demonstrated in the course of this study and in its final section where we attempt to make the distinction between *ṣifat al-janna* works as a genre and some other typical examples of works on paradise in Sunni Islam, specifically: the chapters on paradise in Muslim b. al-Ḥajjāj's (d. 261/875) *Ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Tirmidhī's (d. 279/892) *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, *Daqā'iq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* attributed to 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. Aḥmad al-Qāḍī, *al-Durar al-ḥisān fī l-ba'th wa-na'im al-jinān* attributed to al-Ṣuyūṭī (d. 911/1505), and the chapter on paradise in *al-Tarḥīb wa-l-tarḥīb* (The [moral] suasion and exhortation) of Abū Muḥammad Zakī l-Dīn al-Mundhirī (d. 656/1258). The first two steps of our inquiry are dedicated to the examination of the form(s) through which *ḥadīths* and Quranic material, respectively, are utilized in *ṣifat al-janna* works. The content and function of these works are dealt with in the study's third section. Adopting this order of presentation is necessary; as will be clear in the following pages, the distinctive approach to *ḥadīths* and Quranic material evident in *ṣifat al-janna* works has bearing on their content and function.

Before proceeding to the first section of the study, note should be taken of some general qualities of the composition of *ṣifat al-janna* works. The compilers of these works belong to the Sunni branch of Islam, specifically to the Mālikī, Ḥanbalī, and Shāfi'ī schools of jurisprudence (*madhhabs*) of this tradition.¹¹

9 According to Duff, the historical nature of genres was first recognized in the Romantic period. See Duff, *Modern* 4.

10 See for instance Jauss, *Theory* 127–47. These issues seem to be particularly pressing for those who see genres as the principal dynamics through which literary history unfolds.

11 Ibn Ḥabīb was a Mālikī and a zealous advocate of this school of law (*madhhab*) in Muslim Spain (Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh* i, 459–62; Huici-Miranda, Ibn Ḥabīb 775), Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Ibn al-Qayyim were Ḥanbalīs (see respectively, Ibn Abī Ya'lā, *Ṭabaqāt* ii, 36–42; Dietrich, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā 684; Ibn Rajab, *al-Dhayl* v, 170–9; Laoust, Ibn Qayyim al-Djāwziyya 821–2), and Ibn Kathīr and al-Iṣfahānī were Shāfi'īs (see respectively Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt* viii,

They were all prominent scholars of their time, erudite in a wide range of Islamic sciences (particularly jurisprudence and theology). Perhaps even more informative, all of these scholars, with the exception of Ibn Ḥabīb, were acknowledged as prominent traditionists (i.e., *ḥadīth* scholars) and authorities on the sciences of *ḥadīth* and its transmission. Consistent with these affiliations, the material in *ṣifat al-janna* works is exclusively culled from the Quran and the vast depository of traditions attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad, his companions, and the generation of their successors (*al-tābiʿūn*). It is also not surprising that the compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works do not present any allegorical or mystical commentary on the body of material they cite.¹² In fact, there is virtually no explication of the content (*matn*) of the traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works. That is to say, meaning is almost exclusively communicated through the traditions' content, not the compilers' own words.¹³

1 The Literary Genre of *Ṣifat al-Janna* and *Ḥadīth* Sciences

Without exception, the compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works cite multiple traditions in relation to every theme they discuss. They also mention the chains of transmission (*isnāds*) of all these traditions. The work of Ibn Ḥabīb is, to some extent, an exception here. It contains, alongside the traditions with complete *isnāds*, many traditions with partial or no *isnāds*.¹⁴ Nevertheless, bearing in

397–9; Laoust, Ibn Kathīr 817–8; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* iv, 18–25; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* i, 816–8; Pedersen, Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī 142–3).

12 Neither does al-Iṣfahānī present this material in his *Ṣifat al-janna*. Besides being a jurist and a traditionist, Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī has also been described as a Sufi. One of his most popular works, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ*, comprises a rich collection of sayings by Muslim mystics of earlier generations, see al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt* iv, 18–25; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar* i, 816–8.

13 It should be noted that Ibn al-Qayyim does not completely adhere to this scheme; he comments on the content of several traditions in his *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ*. See for example Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 69, 87. It is not clear why there has been no contribution by Ḥanafīs to the genre of *ṣifat al-janna*. This might relate to the Ḥanafīs limited use – compared to scholars of other Sunni *madhhabs* – of prophetic traditions in their scholarship, being traditionally classified among the proponents of individual reasoning (*ahl al-raʾy*). On points of doctrine, Ḥanafīs also differ slightly from other Sunni *madhhabs* (see below).

14 See for example Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 9–12, 15, 30–1. Ibn Ḥabīb's *Wasf al-firdaws* was in all probability written between 195/810 and 238/853, around the period when the mention of complete *isnād* chains had become a necessary scholarly practice. Authors of Muslim biographical dictionaries criticized Ibn Ḥabīb for his deficient knowledge of *ḥadīth* and

mind that Ibn Ḥabīb's *Wasf al-firdaws* emerged during the formative period of *ḥadīth* sciences, I propose that the citation of *isnāds* represents the first formal characteristic of the genre of *ṣifat al-janna*.

Muslim scholars came to classify traditions, primarily, into three main categories based on authenticity and authority: sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*), accepted (*ḥasan*), and weak (*ḍaʿīf*). Traditions that were frequently assessed as weak are abundant in *ṣifat al-janna* works, alongside sound and accepted traditions. Several examples of this category of traditions are adduced in the different sections of the article and in footnotes below. Due to space limitations, I only discuss two examples here.

The compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works transmit a lengthy tradition attributed to the Prophet which touches on, among other themes, the following: a tree in paradise called *ṭūbā*, the believers' vision of God in paradise, and paradise's luxurious palaces. Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī transmit this tradition through two different *isnād* strands which nevertheless originate from Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 114/732–118/736), known as al-Bāqir and recognized as the fifth *imām* by the Shīʿites. Al-Bāqir is, to use Joseph Schacht's term, the common link in the *isnād* chain of this tradition.¹⁵ No intermediary transmitters from the generation of the companions or their successors are named in the two *isnād* strands as al-Bāqir's informants.¹⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr both transmit the tradition and criticize its *isnād* extensively.¹⁷ Ibn al-Qayyim concludes his critique by asserting that the tradition should not be attributed to the Prophet. He states that it should only be considered as Muḥammad al-Bāqir's own speech and that some weak transmitters erred and attributed it to the Prophet (*wa-ḥasbuhu an yakūna min kalām Muḥammad ibn ʿAlī fa-ghalaṭa fihī baʿd hāʾulāʾi al-ḍuʿafāʾ fa-jaʿalahu min kalām al-nabī*).¹⁸ In his evaluation of the tradition, Ibn al-Qayyim transmits the views of scholars such as Ibn ʿAdī l-Jurjānī (d. 363/974) and al-Dāraquṭnī (d. 385/995) on the unreliability of its *isnād* strands.¹⁹ Ibn Kathīr considered this tradition weak as well. He explicitly asserts that the tradition is *mursal* (i.e., narrated from the successor directly on the authority of the Prophet without mentioning a companion),

its sciences, see Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh* i, 459–62. The criticism is late and was most likely rooted in the clumsiness of Ibn Ḥabīb's *isnāds*.

15 Schacht, *The origins* 171–2.

16 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 80–3; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 242–8.

17 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 193–5; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 216–8.

18 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 195.

19 Ibid.

odd (*gharīb*), and weak.²⁰ Ibn Ḥabīb also transmits the tradition but through an incomplete *isnād* chain that does not reach the authority the tradition supposedly originates with, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (16–81/637–701) in this case. Moreover, in his *isnād* Ibn Ḥabīb does not name an intermediary transmitter, a companion of the Prophet, from whom Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya would have received the tradition. Ibn Ḥabīb's tradition is thus also weak by Sunni Muslim scholars' standards; it is at best *mursal*.²¹

Another example of weak traditions transmitted in *ṣifat al-janna* works is the tradition stating that the width of the gates of paradise, or the gate from which the Muslim nation will enter, is three days' journey.²² Except for al-Tirmidhī's *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, the six Sunni canonical *ḥadīth* books (*al-kutub al-sitta*) do not transmit this tradition. Al-Tirmidhī actually comments negatively on the authenticity of this tradition's *isnād*, mentioning that, according to al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), a certain Khālīd b. Abī Bakr in the lower segment of the *isnād* chain is reputed to have transmitted objectionable (*munkar*)²³ traditions from

20 Al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb* 797–8; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 218. The term *gharīb* could signify a critique of the *isnād* and/or the *matn* of a tradition. According to Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, when it pertains to both it means that the tradition was transmitted from an earlier authority (a companion or a successor) through a single narrator from the later generations (if this narrator is unreliable then the tradition should be considered weak). When the term *gharīb* pertains to a critique of the *isnād* only, it means that the content of the tradition is known through other *isnād* chains originating from different companions but the particular *isnād* chain under scrutiny is unique because it transmits the tradition on the authority of a companion that no other transmitter had related. See Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ulūm* 270–1.

21 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 86–9. The tradition mentioned above is neither transmitted in the so-called six canonical *ḥadīth* collections nor in the vast majority of the *ḥadīth* reference collections reputable among Sunni Muslims, such as that of Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ*; Ibn Khuzayma, *Ṣaḥīḥ*; al-Dāraquṭnī, *Sunan*; al-Dārimī, *Sunan*; al-Bayhaqī *al-Sunan*; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam*; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ*; al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab*; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*; Mālik, *Muwatta'*. This tradition represents a case in which a report attributed to Shi'i figures is discredited. In this particular case, we have a broken link in the tradition's *isnād* (in all of its transmission strands) and this justifies considering the tradition weak according to Sunni *ḥadīth* criticism criteria. Whether there are other traditions attributed to Shi'i figures in *ṣifat al-janna* works and how these traditions are presented and evaluated are issues that need further investigation.

22 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 167–8; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 26–7; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 55; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 20–1.

23 The *munkar* category is defined by Jonathan Brown: "in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries to criticize a report attributed to the Prophet, . . . [as] (*munkar*), could mean that the report was reliable but was narrated by only one chain of transmission, that this version

Sālim b. ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Umar (the successor who is the transmission source of Khālid).²⁴ The tradition is transmitted in the *ṣifat al-janna* works of Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī, with the same *isnād*, without any comment on its *isnād* or *matn*.²⁵ Ibn al-Qayyim transmits the tradition as well, but his collective commentary on the traditions concerning the width of the gates of paradise indicates that it also has problems of reliability.²⁶ Ibn Kathīr also transmits this tradition but criticizes it, transmitting al-Tirmidhī’s opinion.²⁷ Other reputable Muslim scholars criticized this tradition as well. For instance, Ibn al-Jawzī al-Tamīmī (d. 597/1201) reproduced al-Tirmidhī’s assessment concerning the tradition²⁸ and al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348 or 753/1352–3) singled out this particular tradition as being among Khālid b. Abī Bakr’s objectionable traditions (*manākīr*).²⁹ Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) also transmitted this tradition but immediately contrasted it with the *ḥadīth* transmitted in the *ṣaḥīḥ* books.³⁰ In contrast, Aḥmad b. ‘Alī al-Tamīmī (known as Abū Ya‘lā l-Mawṣilī) (d. 307/919) transmitted the tradition without any comment on its *isnād* or *matn* and Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) in his *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* mentioned Khālid among the trustworthy transmitters of *ḥadīth*.³¹

This last example bears witness to the fact that there is no complete consensus among Muslim scholars that a certain body of traditions is weak. Not only because there is no consensus on all classification criteria but also because when agreement on a particular criterion exists the scholars’ assessment may differ; the aforementioned appraisal of the reliability of Khālid b. Abī Bakr as a *ḥadīth* transmitter is a case in point. There have been, however, traditions that a majority of Muslim scholars criticized (although they were not necessarily in full agreement) for problems such as those identified above, for example for having weak links. My purpose in pointing to this type of *ḥadīth* here is to draw attention to one of the main characteristics of *ṣifat al-janna* works that stem

of the *ḥadīth* narrated through a certain *isnād* was unreliable but other authentic versions existed, or that the report was entirely forged.” See Brown, How we know 174. In cases of *ḥadīth* criticism, the particular significance of the term *munkar* can be recognized by reading the scholar’s critique of the tradition in question.

24 Al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 684.

25 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 167–8; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 26–7.

26 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 55.

27 Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 20–1.

28 Ibn al-Jawzī, *al-‘Ilal* ii, 930.

29 Al-Dhahabī, *Mizān* ii, 409.

30 Al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Ba‘th* 168.

31 Al-Tamīmī, *Musnad* ix, 407; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Kitāb al-Thiqāt* vi, 245. Ibn Ḥibbān also stated that Khālid b. Abī Bakr sometimes errs (*yukḥṭi‘u*).

from the conventions of the scholarly tradition within which they emerged. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ (d. 643/1245) in his *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth* (widely known as *Muqaddimat Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ* – The introduction of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ) states that *ḥadīth* scholars have generally allowed the narration of weak traditions in matters of *moral suasion* (*targhīb*), dissuasion (*tarhīb*), anecdotes (*qīṣaṣ*), and commendable behavior (*faḍāʾil al-aʿmāl* or *adab*), as long as they were not deemed forged (*mawḍūʿ*) and did not conflict with the precepts of the law (the forbidden and the allowed) or matters of religious doctrine (*ʿaqīda*) established by sound and accepted traditions.³² Paradise, as the reward of righteous beliefs and actions, belongs to the *targhīb* category and *ṣifat al-janna* works clearly reflect this license articulated by Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ. It is the proliferation of weak traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works that, I suggest, gives them their second constitutive characteristic as a literary genre.³³

The *ṣifat al-janna* works of Ibn Ḥabīb, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī reflect yet another scholarly convention articulated in Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's *ʿUlūm al-ḥadīth*. Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ states that *ḥadīth* scholars have also allowed the narration of weak traditions on the above-named group of topics without pointing out their weakness.³⁴ In these three works one invariably finds no criticism of the *isnāds*, be they reliable or weak. Thus, effectively, weak traditions are presented on an equal standing with *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan* traditions. As the preceding examples show, in the late works of Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr we see a clear break with this attitude. While Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr still transmit most of the weak traditions transmitted by their predecessors they prefer to assess their *isnāds*; in fact they do so with virtually all the traditions they transmit. These two scholars indicate, for example, whether the tradition has been transmitted in one or more of the six canonical *ḥadīth*

32 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *ʿUlūm* 103.

33 The tradition stating that the lowest in rank in paradise is in the sixth stratum below the seventh is another example of weak traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works. This tradition is transmitted by Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī without any comment on its *isnād* or *matn* (al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 290). Ibn Kathīr criticized it as *inqitāʿ* (i.e., a discontinuous *isnād* chain) and *gharīb* (Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 104). Ibn al-Qayyim also criticized it for *isnād* and *matn* problems and considered it *munkar* (Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 116–7). In the vast majority of *isnād* criticism cases, including the above mentioned examples, Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr usually transmit the opinions of different *ḥadīth* scholars concerning the *isnāds* under scrutiny, thus substantiating their critique of these *isnāds* and confirming that the tradition is regarded weak by various authorities. Ibn Ḥabīb does not provide full *isnāds* for many of the traditions he transmits and this renders them weak traditions (see n. 14).

34 Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *ʿUlūm* 103.

books (usually by naming the compiler). In many cases, they explicitly assess the overall value of the *isnād* (e.g., *ṣaḥīḥ*, corresponding to the *ṣaḥīḥ* valuation criteria of al-Bukhārī or Muslim, *mursal*, or *munkar*). In their works Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr also identify the unreliable and uncreditable *ḥadīth* transmitters.³⁵

When we turn to the *matn* of the traditions, specifically to the issue of *matn* criticism, it is somewhat surprising that Ibn Ḥabīb transmits a very limited number of traditions with conflicting *matns* in his *Wasf al-firdaws*.³⁶ On the other hand, judging from their *ṣifat al-janna* works, it seems that Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī were not overly concerned with the issues of *matn* criticism. As the examples adduced below demonstrate, the traditions with problematic *matns* that they transmit could be classified into two categories: weak traditions that conflict with traditions considered authentic and weak traditions that conflict with each other.³⁷ In either case, *matn* conflicts do

35 See for example Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 89–90, 136, 168–9; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 80, 100, 104. It is worth mentioning that Muslim scholars believe that weak traditions can be used to substantiate other weak traditions, and consequently elevate their degree of authenticity. A good example of this process is the presence of *mutābaʿāt* (sing. *mutābaʿa*, lit., tracking or continuation). A *mutābaʿa* for a weak tradition would be another identical tradition, in *matn*, transmitted through a different *isnād* strand that originates from the same trustworthy persons (*thuqāt*) at the root of the *isnād* of the weak tradition under consideration, i.e., it originates from the same transmitter from the generation following the successors, the same successor, or the same companion of the Prophet (see Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ, *Ulūm* ii, 82–5). The works of Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn Abī l-Dunyā do not reflect this method of reevaluation, or, in fact, other methods of reevaluation. Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī on the other hand transmits additional *isnād* strands for several weak traditions; some of which could be interpreted as *mutābaʿāt* (e.g., the *ḥadīth* stating that the first to be called to paradise are those who thank God in good and bad circumstances [*al-sarrāʾ wa-l-ḍarrāʾ*] in al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 107–8). Ibn Kathīr also cites additional *isnād* strands for some traditions as evidence of *mutābaʿāt*; Ibn al-Qayyim does this much less (see for instance Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 34–5; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 116 (the *ḥadīth* reporting that the lowest in rank in paradise could wander in his domains for two thousand years) and Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 144–5 (the tradition on the believer wishing for a son in paradise)).

36 An example of the few traditions with conflicting *matns* in his *Wasf al-firdaws* is the tradition on the number of levels of paradise (Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 20).

37 Several of the traditions that are considered reliable and that conflict with weak traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works have been transmitted in the six canonical *ḥadīth* collections. They are thus considered to have the rank of *ṣaḥīḥ* or *ḥasan* by way of scholarly consensus (*ijmāʿ*). As erudite scholars, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī were certainly aware of these authentic traditions, whether they transmitted them in their *ṣifat al-janna* works or not. It would hence be implausible to ascertain that the *ḥadīths* with conflicting *matns* in their *ṣifat al-janna* works lie outside the criteria of *matn* criticism, which

not provoke any response on the part of these two authors, either on the *matn* or the *isnād* level. An important question now is whether Ibn Ḥabīb utilized *matn* criticism. One certainly cannot dismiss the possibility that Ibn Ḥabīb was particularly attentive to *matn* problems. It is, on the other hand, possible to argue that the limited instances of *matn* conflicts in his *Wasf al-firdaws* is an accidental consequence of the relatively modest number of traditions he acquired (compared to later compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works) that relate to paradise.³⁸ Add to this the clumsiness of Ibn Ḥabīb's *isnāds*, the absence of any commentary on the traditions he transmits, and the nature of the *ṣifat al-janna* works of Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, and with regard to *matn* criticism we might be more likely to believe that Ibn Ḥabīb did not engage in systematic *matn* criticism. In contrast, in their *ṣifat al-janna* works Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr offer several cases of implicit and explicit *matn* criticism, in which they criticize many traditions with problematic *matns* transmitted by Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī (or Ibn Ḥabīb).

Ibn al-Qayyim criticizes, for example, the *matn* of a tradition which reports on the number of wives for the man with the lowest rank in paradise. The tradition mentions that the width of the seat (*miq'ad*) of any of these wives will be one mile. Ibn al-Qayyim takes issue with this detail. He asserts that the authentic tradition (transmitted in the *ṣaḥīḥ* books) reports that the height of men and women in paradise is sixty cubits.³⁹ According to Ibn al-Qayyim, it is improbable that the seat of a person of this height would be one mile. Ibn al-Qayyim then criticizes the *isnād* of the problematic tradition by indicating that two of its transmitters are considered unreliable by several scholars. He then concludes that the tradition should be regarded as *munkar*.⁴⁰ Ibn Abī

requires the scrutiny of weak traditions against *ḥadīths* acknowledged as authentic by scholarly *ijmā'*.

38 Ibn Ḥabīb transmits 256 traditions in his *Wasf al-firdaws*. Ibn Abī l-Dunyā transmits a higher number, 364 traditions. Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's work comprises 454 traditions and Ibn Kathīr's work 446. Ibn al-Qayyim transmits more or less a similar number of traditions as Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī and Ibn Kathīr (these numbers are based on the editors numbering of the traditions in the contemporary editions of these works and include the repeated traditions). We should bear in mind that Ibn Ḥabīb was a scholar from Islamic Spain. Acquiring knowledge at his time required traveling to the Islamic East and staying there for a period of time. It is possible therefore that he was not able to collect as many traditions as his eastern peers. The biographical data available concerning him indicates that he learned many traditions through acquired written material only, not by listening to *ḥadīth* transmitters, see Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Tārīkh* i, 460–1.

39 See for example al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* 817–8; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* xvii, 251–2.

40 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 116–7.

l-Dunyā and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī transmit both the problematic tradition and the one that mentions sixty cubits without any comment on their *isnāds* or *matns*.⁴¹ Furthermore, both transmit other weak traditions (also without any comment on their *isnāds* or *matns*) that report that the height of men and women in paradise is seventy or ninety miles, thus directly contradicting the *ṣaḥīḥ* tradition that notes sixty cubits.⁴²

Other examples of *matn*-problematic traditions are those that report the number of wives that every man will marry in paradise.⁴³ The tradition indicating that every man in paradise will have two paradisaal female companions (*ḥūrīs*) and seventy women from “*aḥl mirāthihi min al-dunyā*” (lit., the people of his inheritance from the people of this world) is a good point with which to begin. Ibn Kathīr transmits this tradition but also states that it is very odd (*gharīb jiddan*).⁴⁴ In an unmistakable instance of *matn* criticism, he asserts that this *ḥadīth* contradicts a reliable tradition – committed to the traditionists’ memory (*maḥfūz*) – concerning the number of paradisaal wives assigned to the believer in paradise, that is, seventy *ḥūrīs* and two earthly wives.⁴⁵ He then points out that a certain Khālīd b. Yazīd b. Abī Mālīk in the *isnād* chain of this *ḥadīth* was criticized by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) and Yaḥyā b.

41 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 53, 194; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* 99–100, 109.

42 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 194; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 109. A similar case of *ḥadīths* with problematic *matns* in *ṣifat al-janna* works is reflected in the traditions that report on the width of the gates of paradise. Traditions report the following different values: the distance between Mecca and a city called Hajar (probably an ancient city in the Arabian Peninsula), forty years’, three days’, or seven years’ journey. Ibn Kathīr does not address this particular *matn* criticism case. On the other hand, Ibn al-Qayyim offers a detailed *isnād-matn* critique of these traditions, the result of which is that he considers the Mecca-Hajar tradition the ultimate authority on the width of the gates of paradise. Ibn al-Qayyim utilizes *matn* criticism when he concludes that the tradition of three days’, although he must have been aware of the critique of its *isnād*, agrees with the *matn* of the Mecca-Hajar tradition. Ibn al-Qayyim states that the horseman riding a fast horse and traveling continuously would take, more or less, three days to travel the distance between these two cities. While Ibn Ḥabīb only transmits the version that states that it is forty years’ (with a different *isnād*), Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī transmit the four traditions. They comment neither on their *isnāds* nor on their conflicting *matns*. See respectively Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 54–5; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 21–3, 25, 26–7; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 18–22; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 168–9; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 9.

43 Ibn Ḥabīb mentions only one value concerning the number of paradisaal wives assigned to the believer (seventy-two). See Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 79.

44 Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 131. On the issue of the *ḥūrīs* see also S. Griffith’s contribution to the present publication.

45 Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 131.

Ma'īn (d. 233/847).⁴⁶ The problematic *ḥadīth* is transmitted in Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's *Ṣifat al-janna* without any comment despite the fact that it contradicts another tradition on the issue that Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī also transmits (assigning seventy-three *ḥūrī* wives to the believer in paradise).⁴⁷

Ibn Kathīr also transmits a tradition which assigns the following number of wives to the believer in paradise: four thousand virgins, eight thousand single/widowed women (*ayyim*), and a hundred *ḥūrīs*.⁴⁸ He asserts that this tradition is also *gharīb jiddan*.⁴⁹ Ibn Kathīr's critique of this tradition is largely formed with respect to its *isnād*. Nonetheless, he probably considered that the number of wives reported in it contradicts the number he considers more authentic (as above). Ibn Abī l-Dunyā relates two traditions similar to this exaggerated report criticized by Ibn Kathīr, both offering incompatible numbers.⁵⁰ Moreover, they conflict with another tradition that he transmits which states that the lowest in rank in paradise will have seventy-two wives.⁵¹ The exaggerated report criticized by Ibn Kathīr, with the same *isnād* but with the slight change, from *ḥūrīs* to *jawārin* (slave girls/maids), is also transmitted by Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī.⁵² In Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī's work it conflicts with the number of wives mentioned in two other reports that he cites in the same chapter.⁵³ Neither Ibn Abī l-Dunyā nor Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī comment on the *matn* or the *isnād* of any of these traditions. In contrast, Ibn al-Qayyim transmits many of them but criticizes their *isnāds* and considers them of uncertain reliability.⁵⁴ For Ibn al-Qayyim, the only authentic reports concerning the number of wives of the believer in paradise are those transmitted in the *ṣaḥīḥ* books. The number mentioned there is two wives only. Ibn al-Qayyim, however, does not proceed to critique the conflicting *matns* of the wives traditions with reference to the *ṣaḥīḥ* reports of two wives, probably because there is a qualification for the two wives mentioned in the latter which does not allow the exclusion of the possibility that the believers might have more wives in paradise.⁵⁵

46 Ibid.

47 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 205.

48 Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 195.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 194–5, 201.

51 Ibid., 161, 194–5, 201.

52 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 212–3.

53 Ibid., iii, 206, 218.

54 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 168–70.

55 Ibid. The tradition of two wives is also cited in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 195–6; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 83–5; and Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 132–3. In this regard, Ibn Ḥabīb only relates the

2 The Genre of *Ṣifat al-Janna* and Quranic Exegesis

Quranic material and the exegetical traditions are only marginally present in *ṣifat al-janna* works compared to non-exegetical traditions. Not only because of the copiousness of the latter but also because the compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works mostly quote selected Quranic verses in relation to the themes they discuss (if Quranic descriptions are available). The interpretation of these selected verses is usually accomplished by citing traditions in which the verses occur alongside their interpretation. This is particularly the case in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nuʿaym al-Iṣfahānī's works. In Ibn Ḥabīb's *Wasf al-firdaws*, alongside this type of tradition, there is also a section dedicated to the explication of Quranic verses relevant to paradise. Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr also transmit exegetical traditions of this sort but cite a number of Quranic verses independently as well. In Ibn Kathīr's work, these verses figure frequently at the beginning of his chapters; on occasion, they appear with very brief paraphrastic commentary. Compared to Ibn Kathīr, Ibn al-Qayyim presents a considerably lengthier commentary on such verses (frequently of a philological nature). The following examples are intended to help us fathom the approach to Quranic exegesis employed in *ṣifat al-janna* works.

Q 13:29 reads: "(As for) those who believe and do good, a *felicitous* final state (*tūbā*) shall be theirs and a goodly return."⁵⁶ The word *tūbā* mentioned in this verse has prompted varying interpretations in Muslim exegetical literature. Al-Ṭabarī reports that ʾIkrima (d. 105/723–4), among others, considered "*tūbā* shall be theirs" to mean blessings, or good things, are theirs (*niʿma mā lahum*).⁵⁷ Al-Ṭabarī also mentions two views attributed to Qatāda b. Diʿāma al-Sadūsī (d. 117/735): one indicates that *tūbā* means *ḥusnā* (which could be translated "a pleasant outcome") and the other asserts that *tūbā lak* means *aṣabta khayran* (i.e. [you] acquired good things).⁵⁸ In addition, al-Ṭabarī reports that Ibn ʿAbbās

traditions which indicate that the believers will have seventy-two wives in paradise (Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 79).

56 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of the Quran are according to Muḥammad Ḥabīb Shākir (trans.), *The Qurʾān*. The translation of this verse is Shākir's with my minor modification (the italicized word).

57 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xiii, 519–20. Al-Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* has been chosen as a *tafsīr* reference in the present study because it transmits one of the most comprehensive collections of views with regard to any verse. The views al-Ṭabarī cites are frequently transmitted in later exegetical works, with more or less variety. For the interpretation of the verses discussed in this paper, the reader may also consult the following medieval Muslim *tafsīrs*: al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf*; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ*; and al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr*.

58 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xiii, 521.

(d. 68/687–8) interpreted *tūbā* to mean delight and solace for the eyes (*farah wa-qurraṭ ‘ayn*).⁵⁹ The above-mentioned views indirectly assert the Arabic origin of the word *tūbā*. The reports attributed to Qatāda do so explicitly, stating: “it is a word from the speech of the Arabs” and “it is an Arabic word” (*wa-hiya kalima min kalām al-‘Arab* and *hādhihi kalima ‘arabiyya*).⁶⁰ Other reports suggested that *tūbā* may be the name of paradise in the Abyssinian language (*al-ḥabashiyya*) or the Hindi language (*al-hindiyya*).⁶¹ Al-Ṭabarī also gives a lengthy list of reports which assert that *tūbā* is a great tree in paradise. At the end of the list, he adduces some traditions attributed to the Prophet that confirm this view.⁶²

Commenting on *tūbā* in their *ṣifat al-janna* works, Ibn Ḥabīb, Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī, Ibn al-Qayyim, and Ibn Kathīr present only the prophetic traditions which indicate that it is a tree in paradise.⁶³ Ibn Abī l-Dunyā cites these traditions along with one additional view which indicates that *tūbā* is the name of paradise in Abyssinian.⁶⁴

The interpretation of Q 108:1 is offered in a similar fashion. The verse speaks of *al-kawthar* as being given to the Prophet by God. Again, in the exegetical literature there are several interpretations of *al-kawthar*. It is interpreted as great wealth (*khayr kathīr*), as a basin in paradise, or as a river in paradise.⁶⁵ Ibn Ḥabīb, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī opt to present the interpretation of *al-kawthar* as a paradisaal river and neglect the other views.⁶⁶ Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr transmit one additional interpretation: *al-kawthar* as *al-khayr al-kathīr*.⁶⁷ It must be noted here that some of the prophetic traditions interpreting *al-kawthar* as a river and *tūbā* as a tree were considered reliable by scholarly consensus (*ijmā‘*).⁶⁸ The next example is different insofar as there are no prophetic traditions that pertain to the verse in question.

Q 36:55 reads: “inna aṣḥāba al-janna al-yawm fī shughul fākihūn” which may be translated “the people of Paradise have joy in all that they do.” The sexual

59 Ibid. Other reports that interpret *tūbā* in the same vein are also transmitted in al-Ṭabarī’s *tafsīr*. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xiii, 519–22.

60 Ibid., xiii, 521.

61 Ibid., xiii, 522.

62 Ibid., xiii, 523–9.

63 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 36–8; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 241, 248; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 89–91; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 125–6.

64 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 83–6.

65 Al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xxiv, 679–90.

66 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 27–8; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 89–90; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 168–71.

67 Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 68–75; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 134.

68 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 125–6, 134; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 89–91.

intercourse between men and women in paradise (*jimā' ahl al-janna*) is not discussed at any point in the Quran. The Quran simply mentions *zawwajnāhum* (lit., we joined them in pairs).⁶⁹ In the exegetical literature there are several interpretations of Q 36:55; for example, Mujāhid b. Jabr (died between 100/718 and 104/722) and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) are reported to have asserted that *fī shughul fākihūn* means *fī ni'ma* (that is, enjoying good things or good fortune). Another view, attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and others, asserts that *fī shughul fākihūn* means that the believers will be fully occupied with the blessings of paradise and not be thinking of those in hellfire and their torment.⁷⁰ The compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works, however, cite only one exegetical view with regard to Q 36:55. It explains the phrase "*fī shughul fākihūn*" to mean that the people of paradise will be busy with the deflowering of virgins.⁷¹

The preceding examples epitomize the distinctive exegetical approach employed in *ṣifat al-janna* works. There is a tendency in these works to present a very limited range of interpretations for the Quranic verses related to paradise, even for those that prompt multiple interpretations in the exegetical literature. In fact, it is not uncommon to find a single interpretation adduced with regard to such verses in *ṣifat al-janna* works. It could not possibly be a coincidence that this attitude is evident in the works of Ibn Ḥabīb, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, and Ibn Kathīr.⁷² Ibn al-Qayyim's *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* again is something of an exception. Ibn al-Qayyim not infrequently presents several interpretations of the verses he cites, particularly when there are no prophetic traditions concerning their interpretation that could be considered reliable.⁷³ Sometimes he also utilizes philology and cites poetry as explicative evidence; both are exegetical approaches not attested to in the *ṣifat al-janna* works of his peers.

The *ṣifat al-janna* works of Ibn Ḥabīb and Ibn Abī l-Dunyā emerged during the formative stage of Quranic exegesis, the pre-Ṭabarī period. Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, Ibn al-Qayyim, and Ibn Kathīr on the other hand operated in the context of the mature scholastic tradition of Quranic exegesis that was largely

69 See Q 44:54; 52:20.

70 See the various interpretations of the verse in al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* xix, 459–64.

71 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 77; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 193–4; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 209–10; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 174–5; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 141.

72 See for example, Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 16 (the interpretation of Q 93:5); Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 138, 152–3, 182 (respectively, the interpretations of Q 56:15; 8:4; 19:85); al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 40–1 (the interpretation of Q 21:105); al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 115–6 (the interpretation of Q 35:34); and Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 56, 191 (respectively, the interpretation of Q 32:17 and 30:15).

73 See for example his interpretation of Q 55:54, 76 (Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 152–4).

defined by al-Ṭabarī's seminal work *Jāmi' al-bayān*. The citation of multiple interpretations for any verse from a multitude of exegetical traditions, usually alongside the author's own preference or interpretation, is characteristic of the classical Muslim exegetical tradition. This suggests that the tendency to offer a single interpretation for each verse in *ṣifat al-janna* works is intrinsic. Notwithstanding the relative divergence of Ibn al-Qayyim from the norm thus described, it constitutes the third distinctive characteristic of *ṣifat al-janna* works as a literary genre.

Before we proceed to examine the content and function of *ṣifat al-janna* works, we should take stock of the previous analyses and the implications of the features thus far identified in these works in terms of the significance of the material they transmit. Clearly, the works of *ṣifat al-janna* maintain a high degree of uniformity but also exhibit variation. This is all too natural otherwise works belonging to a certain genre would be dull copies of each other and would not exhibit authors' ingenuity. The keenness of Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr in identifying the degree of reliability of the traditions' *isnāds* and the considerable attention they pay to *matn* criticism could be for a variety of reasons, one being that both were working within a fully mature and reformed scholarly tradition of *ḥadīth* criticism.⁷⁴ Such innovative manipulations of the material do not detract from Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr's participation in the genre. For, in their works, they principally maintain the three defining characteristics of the genre I suggested above. It becomes even clearer that

74 In the centuries separating Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr from Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, works by scholars such as al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī and Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ significantly contributed to advancing, refining, and stabilizing technical criteria of *ḥadīth* criticism and its terminology. On the issue of *matn* criticism especially, the earliest extant work that offers a "systematic discussion and application" of *matn* criticism (titled, *al-Manār al-munīf fī l-ṣaḥīḥ wa-l-ḍa'īf*) was actually an achievement of Ibn al-Qayyim himself (Brown, *How we know* 145). It is also evident that compendia of forged *ḥadīths* first appeared late in the fourth/tenth century (Brown, *How we know* 145). Thus, seemingly, the lack of attention to issues of *matn* criticism evident in the *ṣifat al-janna* works of Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī, in contrast to those by Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr, lends support to the position that systematic *matn* criticism, at least in explicit form, was a late development in *ḥadīth* sciences. This contention however sets aside Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ's two statements (mentioned above) concerning the early scholarly permission to narrate weak traditions on the topic of *targhīb* without pointing out their weakness. We need not achieve a resolution for this problem here; I should nonetheless suggest that the findings offered in this study might add to the discussion on the development of *matn* criticism in Islam.

their works belong squarely to the genre of *ṣifat al-janna* when we discuss the content and function of these works in the next section.

It was pointed out earlier in this study that *ṣifat al-janna* works were composed by scholars of great stature who were considered authorities in a range of Islamic sciences. These scholars culled their material exclusively from authoritative texts, the Quran and *ḥadīths*. If we couple this with some of the recurrent features in *ṣifat al-janna* works, such as the citation of *isnāds* and the common absence of commentary on or provision of allegorical meanings for the *matns* of the traditions, it is fairly plausible to conclude that these works present their content as authoritative and literal. It must also be noted that the compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works effectively suppressed the diversity of interpretations available for many of the Quranic verses they quote. That is to say, the multitude of interpretations available for these verses and the criteria according to which the selection(s) from among these interpretations were made were concealed from the users of these works. It should be conceded, too, that all the traditions in the *ṣifat al-janna* works of Ibn Ḥabīb, Ibn Abī l-Dunayā, and Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī were in effect presented as genuine. This includes the doubtful information conveyed by the weak traditions. In theory, of course, interested or specialist Muslims had the opportunity to examine, for instance in works of *tafsīr*, the other interpretations available for the Quranic verses interpreted in *ṣifat al-janna* works. The presence of the *isnād* chains also meant that a user of a *ṣifat al-janna* work, if he had the knowledge and the resources required, could scrutinize the authenticity of the quoted traditions on his own. Nevertheless, one could certainly argue that the majority of believers, those without significant training in the Islamic sciences, still had access to the material transmitted in *ṣifat al-janna* works, directly or through sermons by public preachers, storytellers and the like,⁷⁵ and were unsuspecting and willing recipients of the works. The overall corollary therefore is that a gap between the scholars and the general public was inevitable; the scholars' assessment of the nature of the exegetical material and the veracity of the traditions they transmitted in their *ṣifat al-janna* works were, on many occasions, not disclosed to the genre's audience.

75 The *wu'āz* (public preachers) and storytellers were repeatedly criticized by medieval Muslim scholars for propagating false *ḥadīths* and for having no knowledge of *ḥadīth* sciences, and thus being unable to differentiate between authentic, weak, and forged traditions. See, for instance, Pedersen, *The criticism* 215–31.

3 The Content and Function of *Ṣifat al-Janna* Works

There is remarkable consistency in *ṣifat al-janna* works in terms of the themes they deal with;⁷⁶ attested to not only in the wide overlap in the material transmitted in these works but also in the titles of their various chapters.⁷⁷ It was remarked that the prophetic traditions constitute the most sizeable part of the content of *ṣifat al-janna* works. Nonetheless, it is not only this extensive use of traditions (epitomized in the citation of multiple traditions for every theme and the inclusion of a multitude of weak traditions) that gives these works a distinctive nature in terms of content. It is also that these works are keen to draw on the Quran and by necessity its exegesis (the exegetical traditions). The essential disposition of the works of *ṣifat al-janna* is a concern to offer the most comprehensive exposition of paradise possible based on Islam's most authoritative sources: the Quran and the Sunna (the teachings of the Prophet). This gives these works their fourth and perhaps most distinguishing characteristic as a literary genre.

The largest thematic group of material in *ṣifat al-janna* works correlates explicitly with their titles; it deals with the depiction of paradise proper as well as the many felicities its inhabitants will enjoy. This group comprises a wide range of themes: for instance, paradise's vegetation, rivers, animals, and atmosphere.⁷⁸ Paradise's human inhabitants as well as their food, drink, clothing, palaces, and social life are also described in considerable detail.⁷⁹ The vast

76 Despite the wide time frame over which these works were produced, it is rare to find a theme or an issue that is not common to them. One such case is *al-a'rāf* (the heights), which is only present in Ibn Ḥabīb (*Wasf* 51–2). Since al-A'rāf is identified as a location between hellfire and paradise, it is probable that later authors of *ṣifat al-janna* works did not include it in their works because they did not believe that it belongs to the subject of paradise proper. Despite this remarkable topical unity in the genre, there are some differences with regard to the variety of traditions cited in relation to each theme in *ṣifat al-janna* works. As we would expect, not every compiler possessed the exact collection of traditions the others had or, equally, desired to transmit the same traditions his peers transmitted.

77 There is great similarity in the organization of *ṣifat al-janna* works. For instance, all these works have chapters on the gates of paradise, its trees, rivers, the *jīmā' ahl al-janna* (sexual relationships in paradise), the food of the people of paradise, and the paradisaal wives.

78 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 24–31, 36–41, 66–8, 73–5; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 73–98, 109–19, 180–1; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 148–51; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 52–4; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 151–71, 180–3, 185–94, 261–7; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 122–38, 186–7, 195–6; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 63–102, 172–81, 203–08.

79 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 14–7, 32–41, 45–7, 57–65, 68–72, 80–93; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 42–70, 80–4, 109–46, 155–66, 177–200, 214–21; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 124–30, 135–47, 157–9; al-Iṣfahānī,

majority of these descriptions are offered by traditions that go significantly beyond the Quranic descriptions, when the latter are available. Several studies have examined this material in terms of the various characteristics of paradise narratives in Islam.⁸⁰ Our concern here is to illustrate the overall significance conveyed by this material; the next few examples should suffice for this purpose.

Ṣifat al-janna works inform us that every other brick (*labina*) in the structures of paradise is made of gold or silver. The mortar of paradise is musk, its sand is saffron, and its pebbles are pearls.⁸¹ Its palaces, rooms, and tents are beyond count, grand, and extraordinarily luxurious.⁸² The believer will dwell therein in extreme comfort served by a multitude of servants and will enjoy endless sustenance of food and drink.⁸³ And despite variations in the believers' rewards, everyone will be content with their lot for there is no distress, envy, or hatred in paradise.⁸⁴ Paradise is hence represented as a place with everlastingly and perpetually abundant beauty, pleasures, and fulfillment, where all phenomena, spaces, and structures are grand in scale and supernaturally luxurious. This portrayal of paradise reflects an afterlife where comforts, abundance, and felicities replace toil, and a state of perfect and peaceful existence prevails. This first type of material does not merely describe paradise and life in it, above all it communicates to the believers a particular formulation of salvation, its meaning and its worth.⁸⁵

Ṣifat ii, 78–135; al-İṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 141–50, 172–85, 194–231, 249–95; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 107–19, 138–57, 187–90. Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 35–59, 103–122, 167–71, 209–22. On the issue of food in paradise see also A. Qian's contribution to the present publication.

80 See for example al-Azmeh, Rhetoric; Rustomji, *The garden and the fire*.

81 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Waṣf* 7; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 43–4; al-İṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 157–9; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 103–4; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 43–4.

82 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Waṣf* 14–7; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 80–3, 144, 210–3; al-İṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 230, 242–8, 252; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 108–10; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 51–9.

83 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Waṣf* 58–9; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 146; al-İṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 210–1; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 168; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 55.

84 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Waṣf* 21–2; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 151–2; al-İṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 146–7; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 90, 115.

85 Sebastian Günther insightfully points out the importance of taking into consideration the “mode of statement” and the “character of portrayal” exhibited by traditions when reflecting on their significance, see Günther, *Modern* 172. The traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works present their content predominantly as a record of non-fictional narratives.

The second theme we can identify here consists of a group of traditions which addresses the status of the Prophet Muḥammad⁸⁶ and the Muslim community in the afterlife. Traditions report that the gates of paradise will only open for the Prophet Muḥammad and that he will be the first to enter paradise.⁸⁷ The intercession of the Prophet is also affirmed. God will grant him the right to intercede in favor of the believers and he is the first among God's prophets to be granted this right.⁸⁸ Also, several traditions relate that the Prophet asked the believers to pray that God will grant him *al-wasīla* (lit., medium or instrument) or that he hoped that God will grant it to him. *Al-wasīla* is identified in these traditions as the highest place in paradise, only one of God's servants is entitled to it.⁸⁹ As for the Prophet's community, various traditions report that the majority of the people of paradise will be Muslims, specifically two-thirds of its inhabitants.⁹⁰ Other traditions assert that Muslims will enter paradise before all other nations⁹¹ and that the language spoken in paradise is Arabic.⁹² Overall, the excellence of the medieval Muslim community is noticeably reflected and affirmed in the traditions describing the Prophet and his community's status in paradise.

The third thematic group of material I was able to isolate has conspicuous theological connotations. Some of the traditions in this group revolve around the question of whether paradise has already been created. These unequivocally express the Sunni view in this regard; paradise has already been created and it awaits the believers.⁹³ The beliefs and actions that lead to paradise are

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- 86 It is worth noting that the status of the Prophet Muḥammad is the subject of several groups of Muslim traditions. For instance, Sebastian Günther has identified several traditions on the Prophet's night journey and ascension (*al-isrā' wa-l-mi'rāj*) that describe the Prophet's status in relation to previous prophets (see Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 40). On the Prophet's night journey see also the contributions by R. Tottoli and K. Ruehrdanz in the present publication.
- 87 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 41; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 172–3; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 33–4; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 87–8; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 13–5.
- 88 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 30–1; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 88; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 15.
- 89 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 22–3; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 154; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 68–9; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 40–2.
- 90 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 43–4; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 75; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 95–6; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 233–4, 242.
- 91 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 41; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 101–2; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 88–9; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 233.
- 92 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 162–3; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 112–3; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 280; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 253.
- 93 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 5–6, 10–3; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 57, 62, 72; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 41–8; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 18–27, 45–9; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 226–9, 245–50.

mentioned in some traditions as well. The Ḥanbalī, the Shāfiʿī, and the Mālikī *madhhabs*, to which the compilers of our *ṣifat al-janna* works adhered, came to adopt the view that faith (*īmān*) is believing by verbal confession (*bi-l-qawl*) and inward certitude (*taṣḍīq*, or *iʿtiqād bi-l-qalb*). They also believed that faith increases and decreases through actions (*ʿamal*).⁹⁴ Besides this, there is a wide belief in Sunni Islam that those who profess faith by verbal confession and inward belief will eventually enter paradise.⁹⁵ The traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works convey to us a picture that is in accordance with these precepts. It is reported that those who confess the *shahāda*, i.e., there is no god but God, will (eventually) enter paradise, for the price of paradise (*thaman al-janna*) is the belief in God's unity.⁹⁶ Other traditions clearly differentiate between the believers who will enter paradise; they will dwell in different levels or attain special rewards and merits in paradise according to their deeds (corresponding to the *ʿamal* component of faith).⁹⁷ There are also traditions which bring together the "belief and deeds" components of faith. They emphasize the idea of adhering to Islam (as traditions sometimes call it, [dwelling in] *al-dār* "the house").⁹⁸ Here the price of paradise (*thaman al-janna*) is the belief in God, the Prophet Muḥammad as His messenger, God's revelations, and acting on those beliefs by practicing the rituals, avoiding what God has forbidden, and embracing what He has commanded. Belonging to this group also are the traditions which interpret "and more" (*wa-ziyāda*) in Q 10:26 ("For those who do good is the best [reward] and more [thereto]. Neither dust nor ignominy cometh near their faces. Such are rightful owners of the Garden; they will abide therein") and "more" (*mazīd*) in Q 50:35 ("There [i.e., in paradise] they have all that they desire, and there is more with Us") as denoting the believers' vision of God in paradise, a theological view held by mainstream Sunni Muslims.⁹⁹

94 For a comprehensive study of the conception of *īmān* in the four Sunni *madhhabs* consult al-Khamīs, *Iʿtiqād*. On the Ḥanbalī and the Mālikī view that *īmān* increases and decreases and the contrary beliefs of the Ḥanafīs regarding this issue see Watt, *The formative* 131–5.

95 Watt, *The formative* 127.

96 Al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 71–4; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 71–2; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 15, 23.

97 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 20, 22; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 143, 151, 173–4; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 104; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 65–8; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 30–2.

98 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 20; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 30–2; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 64, 70–3; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 182–3.

99 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 92; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 105; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 225–9; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 206–9, 221–2, 234–9, 243; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 158–66. The interpretation of these two verses is another example of the univalent mood of Quranic exegesis evident in *ṣifat al-janna* works.

Usually, there is commentary on this third type of material in the *ṣifat al-janna* works of Ibn al-Qayyim and Ibn Kathīr. This commentary reflects their theological pertinence unequivocally and in some instances it is explicitly polemical, for example against the Muʿtazilīs who held different views concerning the creation of paradise and the definition of faith.¹⁰⁰ Ibn al-Qayyim has even dedicated one of the longest chapters in his *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ* to marshal evidence in support of the doctrine of the vision of God in paradise and to censure the various Muslim factions denying it.¹⁰¹

The fourth, and last, group of materials I highlight here consists of *ḥadīths* with patent social undertones. Traditions from this group give assurances of entrance to paradise or ascribe privileged status in it to certain moral models: The just arbiter (*ḥakam ʿadl*),¹⁰² the just ruler (*imām ʿadl* or *sulṭān muqṣit*),¹⁰³ charitable persons (*al-mutaṣaddiqūn*),¹⁰⁴ those who treat other Muslims with compassion and maintain good relations with their relatives (*raḥul raḥīm raqīq al-qalb li-kull dhī qurbā wa-muslim* and *al-wāṣilūn [al-raḥīm]*),¹⁰⁵ those who spread peace (*man afshā l-salām*) and talk kindly to others (*alāna al-kalām*),¹⁰⁶ the slave not hindered by slavery from obeying God, and the poor with chil-

100 See for example Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 18–27, 46–9, 70–2; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 226–7. In contrast to the Sunnis, the Muʿtazilīs believed that paradise has not been created yet. For them *imān* was neither the inner nor outward confession of belief; it is nothing but “the performance of all religious duties, obligatory and supererogatory.” Cf. Watt, *The formative* 134–5. *Ṣifat al-janna* works convey the following perception regarding the “road to paradise”: Inward and outward confessions of faith are essential to enter paradise which is above all obtained by God’s grace and forgiveness. Deeds, while still affecting faith (they decrease or increase its amount), mainly decide the Muslim’s rank in paradise. Ibn al-Qayyim conveys this perception in his work explicitly, see Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 72–3. On the other hand, in the Muʿtazilīs’ view actions are decisive with regard to one’s admittance to paradise. Cf. Watt, *The formative* 138, 229.

101 See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 204.

102 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 143; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 109.

103 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 14; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 94; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 236.

104 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 66; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 173–4, 180; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 94.

105 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 71; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 173–4; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 94; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 236, 238–9.

106 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 15; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 108–10; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 53–5. Ibn al-Qayyim transmits that *ifshāʾ al-salām* (i.e., spreading peace) means “shaking the hand of one’s brother [in Islam] and greeting him” (*muṣāfaḥat akhika wa-taḥīyyatuhu*), see Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 108–10. Ibn Kathīr provides a similar interpretation; see Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 54–5. For Ibn al-Qayyim, *atyaba al-kalām* (another expression of *alāna al-kalām*) is to say: “God is exalted, praise to God, and there is no God but God” (*subḥān Allāh wa-l-ḥamd li-llāh wa-lā ilāha illā llāh*), see Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 108–10.

dren who are still virtuous (*muta'afif*).¹⁰⁷ The Muslim duty of *jihād* (the duty to participate in military service to defend Islam) and the status of the *jihād* martyrs (*al-shuhadā'*) in paradise is the subject of some traditions as well. The distinguished reward of *al-mujāhidīn* (those who take part in *jihād*) is articulated clearly.¹⁰⁸ Likewise the status and reward of the *shuhadā'* in paradise is clear: they are among the first to enter paradise, they enter paradise from an exclusive entrance (*bāb al-jihād*), they have exclusive access to a certain palace in paradise, and, along with the prophets and righteous men, they belong to the highest ranks of paradise.¹⁰⁹

Belonging to this fourth group as well are the traditions that denounce certain moral behavior: for instance, severing one's relationship with his relatives (*qāṭi' al-raḥim*),¹¹⁰ disobeying one's parents (*al-'āqq*, pl. *al-'āqqūn*),¹¹¹ falsely claiming a man as one's father (*man idda'ā ilā ghayr abihī*),¹¹² and killing *dhimmīs* (the people of the book living under Muslim governments) or members of groups in alliance with Muslims (*naḥṣan mu'āhida*).¹¹³ The individual who commits any of these lapses is described as not being able to smell the fragrance of paradise (*lam yuriḥ rā'iḥat al-janna*), a metaphor for a diminished prospect of admittance to paradise. It is also reported that the woman who causes pain to or troubles her husband (*tu'dhī zawjahā*) will be the subject of the prayers of her husband's paradisaal wife; she will call on God to fight her (*qāṭalaki Allāh*).¹¹⁴ Most of the moral precepts described in this fourth group are not concerned with an individual's self-improvement, rather they pertain to the individual's relationships with others; they are in essence social.

It would certainly be inaccurate to consider *ṣifat al-janna* works as being dedicated to the description of paradise only, as a cursory reading of their titles may indicate. The examples adduced above reveal that a significant portion of the traditions cited in these works do not pertain to the description of paradise proper. Yet, these traditions figure consistently in the genre. In light of the preceding content analysis, *ṣifat al-janna* works are better described as

107 Al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 104; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 90, 94; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 220, 236.

108 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 61; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 151, 170, 173–4; al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 50; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 65; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 17, 23, 29.

109 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 14, 20, 22, 66; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 143, 150–1, 170, 173–4; al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 104; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 132, 162–3, 220–1; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 65, 68, 90, 190, 193, 213.

110 Al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 42–3; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 177; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 120.

111 Al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 42–3; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 177.

112 Al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 43–7; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 120; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 172–3.

113 Al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 45; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 119; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 173–5.

114 Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 206; al-Isfahānī, *Ṣifat* i, 114; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 172; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 136.

compilations on paradise, in which the subject of paradise is both a religious ideology, pertaining to salvation and theological dogma, and an index of social relevance.

The main function of the genre is certainly didactic: first, it imparts to believers a description of paradise and its many felicities, thereby conveying a certain formulation of salvation. Second, it indoctrinates believers with the ideology of mainstream Sunni Islam (beliefs and dogma) insofar as it concerns the topic of paradise. Third, but no less important, it instructs the believers on the salvific worth of actions in accordance with faith and certain behavioral models.

The genre's social function is closely intertwined with these didactic purposes. In medieval Muslim societies, knowledge, culture, law, institutions, and the individuals' morality and functioning within the community were largely articulated through the prism of religion. In such contexts, religious ideology is of course not separate from social reality, nor is the topic of paradise. The reward of salvation (the first thematic group) is closely tied to right belief and dogma (the third group) as well as to right actions (the third and fourth). The particular formulation of the concept of faith in the traditions of the third group and the emphasis on the Prophet's intercession in the second assure the believer admittance to paradise, however without encouraging moral laxity. The incentive to moral excellence is attested in the emphasis of many traditions of the third group on actions in accordance with faith. Moreover, social moral prescriptions, as precepts from the *sunna*, and their salvific worth came to be the subject of a fair number of traditions in the genre (the fourth group of material).

With all these traditions considered, the genre certainly seems to affirm and sustain several social structures, particularly behavioral ones. Concomitantly, by propagating a unified set of theological beliefs and guidelines as regards paradise the genre promotes unity and harmony. Equally important, the genre affirms the community's self-image as a whole, its righteousness and excellence among the nations (the second group of material). Overall, thus, the genre of *ṣifat al-janna* could be viewed as a vehicle that stabilizes both the ideological and socio-cultural context within which it emerged.¹¹⁵

115 It is worth mentioning also that several traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works explicitly confirm that the Prophet's immediate successors, the caliphs Abū Bakr (d. 13/634) and 'Umar (d. 23/644), are granted a place in paradise, thereby confirming the legitimacy of the institution of the caliphate as opposed to the imamate ideology of the Shi'ites. This could also be seen as an ideological connotations of the *ṣifat al-janna* genre. See Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 9;

The combination of the four characteristic conventions of *ṣifat al-janna* works, their distinctive content, and their function represents a process for treating the topic of paradise that is unique to these works. In my view, it indubitably sets them apart as a literary genre distinctive from other works on paradise in Sunni Islam.

4 The Genre of *Ṣifat al-Janna* and Other Works on Paradise in Sunni Islam

The chapters on paradise in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Tirmidhī's *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* were compiled with different criteria than the genre of *ṣifat al-janna*.¹¹⁶ Muslim and al-Tirmidhī were principally interested in transmitting prophetic *ḥadīths* that pertain to paradise. Thus, in their chapters on paradise they do not attest the Quranic verses that relate to paradise and the associated exegetical traditions, most of which are not attributed to the Prophet. Furthermore, Muslim was interested in transmitting *ḥadīths* from the *ṣaḥīḥ* category and al-Tirmidhī was interested in transmitting *ḥadīths* from the *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan* categories. Therefore, the whole host of weak traditions that constitute a significant bulk of the traditions adduced in *ṣifat al-janna* works were simply rejected by Muslim and al-Tirmidhī.¹¹⁷ These are not the only reasons that make their chapters on paradise distinct from *ṣifat al-janna* works. Several traditions that appear consistently in *ṣifat al-janna* works are transmitted by Muslim and al-Tirmidhī, but not in chapters related to paradise. For example, in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muslim relates a *ḥadīth* concerning *al-kawthar*; it appears in the chapter on prayer (*Kitāb al-Ṣalāt*). In *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* by al-Tirmidhī only one tradition

Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 142, 169–71; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 35–6; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 180–1, 251; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 87, 109; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 16–7, 248.

116 Ibn Māja dedicates a very small subchapter (*bāb*) to paradise in his *Sunan* (under the chapter entitled *al-zuhd*). It is too short and “thin” to warrant a comparison with *ṣifat al-janna* works, see Ibn Māja, *Sunan* ii, 1447–53. On the chapter on paradise in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* see also A. Geissinger's contribution to the present publication.

117 There are numerous examples of weak traditions on paradise absent from the chapters on paradise in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Tirmidhī's *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*. For instance, the *ḥadīths* reporting the height of the inhabitants of paradise in miles (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 194; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 109) and also the *ḥadīths* reporting the number of the paradisaal wives of the believers in thousands (Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 201; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 212–3). For the exegetical tradition concerning Q 36:55 (*inna aṣḥāba al-janna al-yawm fī shuḡhul fākihūn*), see Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 77; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 193–4; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* iii, 209–10; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Hādī* 174–5; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 141.

on *jihād* and *shuhadā'* is transmitted in the chapter on paradise (*Kitāb Ṣifat al-janna 'an rasūl Allāh*).¹¹⁸ The rest of the traditions on *jihād* and *shuhadā'*, while consistently cited in the genre of *ṣifat al-janna*, are either absent or transmitted in chapters other than those on paradise. The chapters on paradise in Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ* and al-Tirmidhī's *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* cannot be considered part of *ṣifat al-janna* genre, which has a narrower purpose and scope.

The chapters on paradise in the hyperbolic eschatological treatises, of which *Daqā'iq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* by 'Abd al-Raḥīm b. Aḥmad al-Qāḍī and *al-Durar al-ḥisān fī l-ba'th wa-na'im al-jinān* attributed to al-Suyūṭī are examples, cannot be considered instances of the *ṣifat al-janna* genre either. First, the authors of these treatises discuss at length the torment of the grave, the details of the day of reckoning, and hellfire (among other themes). They only touch on paradise in the closing sections of their works. Second, the Quran figures very rarely in these works and the exegetical traditions are virtually nonexistent. Third, the groups of traditions of theological and social connotations discussed above are also virtually absent from the sections dedicated to paradise in these works. Fourth, and perhaps most important, the traditions transmitted in these two works are, by the standards of Muslim *ḥadīth* scholars, of very dubious origins. The embroidered accounts, at times quite fanciful, given in these traditions betray their purpose: attracting the audiences' attention. Compared to the traditions adduced in the works of *ṣifat al-janna*, it is quite clear that most of those transmitted in *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* and *al-Durar al-ḥisān* are of different intensity in respect to fantastic descriptions. Given the lack of *isnāds*, save a few direct attributions to the Prophet and certain companions, it is not surprising that Muslim *ḥadīth* scholars considered the traditions cited in such treatises equivalent to those of the much-criticized *quṣṣās* (storytellers).¹¹⁹

The chapter on paradise in *al-Targhīb wa-l-tarhīb* by al-Mundhirī on the other hand bears the greatest resemblance to the works of *ṣifat al-janna*.¹²⁰ Like the compilers of these works, al-Mundhirī cites, alongside *ṣaḥīḥ* and *ḥasan ḥadīths*, numerous weak traditions. Citations from the Quran and exegetical traditions are also attested in his chapter on paradise and these resemble those

118 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 148–9; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 697, 698.

119 Al-Qāḍī, *Daqā'iq* 103–15; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durar* 33–49.

120 Abū l-Qāsim al-Jawzī l-Aṣbahānī (d. 535/1140) dedicates a very small subchapter to paradise (*bāb fī l-targhīb fī l-janna wa-l-tashmīr li-talabihā*) in his work *Kitāb al-Targhīb wa-l-tarhīb*, widely known as *Qawām al-sunna*. It is quite short, consisting of only thirty traditions, and too incomprehensive to warrant a comparison to *ṣifat al-janna* works, see al-Aṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-Targhīb* i, 537–50.

in Ibn Abī l-Dunyā and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī’s *ṣifat al-janna* works. Moreover, al-Mundhirī touches on virtually all the themes pertaining to the description of paradise and its felicities. Altogether, al-Mundhirī adduces around one hundred fifty traditions in his chapter on paradise, considerably fewer than those transmitted in the earliest example of the genre, that of Ibn Ḥabīb, and one-third of those transmitted by Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī (see note 38). Several of al-Mundhirī’s traditions are considerably lengthier and multi-thematic compared to those transmitted in *ṣifat al-janna* works. This compensates, in part, for the deficiency in the number of traditions he adduces. Still, in comparison to the works of *ṣifat al-janna*, he offers a very poor presentation of some themes: for instance, the theme of paradise’s rivers and the theme of paradisaal chanting.¹²¹

The purpose of al-Mundhirī’s work is, however, very different from the genre of *ṣifat al-janna*. Al-Mundhirī aspires to cultivate commendable behavior and to warn against deplorable behavior, all based on the *sunna*. This orientation dictates that he divide his work, voluminous in nature, into chapters, each of which is dedicated to a particular issue of *targhīb* and *tarhīb*. The result is that many of the traditions frequently transmitted in *ṣifat al-janna* works appear in his *al-Targhīb wa-l-tarhīb* in chapters other than that on paradise. For example, virtually all of the traditions on the distinguished status of the Prophet Muḥammad and the Muslim community in the hereafter are absent from his chapter on paradise,¹²² as are the traditions on the conception of faith.

121 Four thematic traditions about the rivers of paradise are absent from al-Mundhirī’s work: the tradition mentioning that four rivers on earth originate from paradise, the traditions concerning a river called *al-baydakh* or *al-baydah*, the traditions speaking of rivers in paradise that produce slave maidens, and the traditions which indicate that the rivers of paradise spring from *al-firdaws* (the highest stratum of paradise). Compare al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb* 784–5 to Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 89–98; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 151–71; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 63–81; and Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 131–8. Ibn Ḥabīb’s account of the rivers of paradise is richer than that of al-Mundhirī, particularly because he combines both traditions and Quranic verses in his presentation, see Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 27–31. For the theme of paradisaal chanting, compare al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb* 793–4 to Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf* 73–5; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat* 187–90; al-Iṣfahānī, *Ṣifat* ii, 268–73; Ibn Kathīr, *Ṣifat* 191–200; Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 182–6.

122 The traditions concerning the following themes are absent from al-Mundhirī’s chapter on paradise (entitled *al-Targhīb fī l-janna wa-na‘thā*): The gates of paradise will open first to the Prophet Muḥammad; the Prophet is the first to enter paradise; the Prophet is the first to be granted the right to intercede on behalf of the believers; Muslims will be the majority of the inhabitants of paradise; Muslims will enter paradise before all other nations; and the language spoken in paradise is Arabic, see al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhīb* 776–803.

Moreover, al-Mundhirī adduces only one tradition from the type prescribing the salvific worth of certain social moral models in his chapter on paradise.¹²³ The vast majority of the traditions of this type are cited in other chapters of his work.

It should be noted also that al-Mundhirī does not mention the full *isnāds* of the traditions he transmits. He predominantly cites the final two authorities to which the tradition is attributed and the reputable authority (Muslim, or al-Bukhārī, etc.), if any, that transmitted it. He uses keywords at the beginning of the traditions together with brief notes on their *isnāds* to indicate his assessment of their reliability.¹²⁴ Al-Mundhirī asserts that he adopted this scheme based on a request from some of his pious students that he compile a comprehensive work on *targhib* and *tarhib* not congested with lengthy *isnāds* and their criticism.¹²⁵ In his view, the purpose of citing *isnāds* is to differentiate between traditions in terms of their reliability, a task which is only possible for erudite scholars. Citing full *isnāds* is thus meaningless to the inexperienced and it obscures the edifying purpose of the traditions.¹²⁶

We should take into consideration that al-Mundhirī was writing in the seventh/thirteenth century, at which point there existed a well-established scholarly *ḥadīth* tradition and three examples of the genre; one of which, that of Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī, was among the most comprehensive of *ṣifat al-janna* works in terms of the scope of traditions. In terms of technical conventions, al-Mundhirī’s scheme of treating *isnāds* is certainly exceptional. It circumvents the long-established scholastic tradition of citing *isnāds* that had long been honored by the compilers of *ṣifat al-janna* works.¹²⁷ When compared to Ibn Abī l-Dunyā’s and Abū Nu‘aym al-Iṣfahānī’s *ṣifat al-janna* works, al-Mundhirī’s chapter on paradise represents a regression, particularly in terms of richness and comprehensiveness. Though it is still possible to argue that it belongs to the genre of *ṣifat al-janna*, albeit a somewhat poor and deviant example of it. I am, however, inclined to consider it on or outside the genre’s boundaries.

123 Ibid., 784.

124 See al-Mundhirī’s introduction, *al-Targhib* 23–4.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid.

127 It should be mentioned that al-Mundhirī lists his sources as books not as *isnād* chains, and provides a list of the controversial transmitters included in his compilation. See al-Mundhirī, *al-Targhib* 8–25.

5 Conclusion

The analysis presented in this study demonstrates that the *ṣifat al-janna* genre was amenable to the conventions and developments of the scholastic tradition from which it emerged. But regardless of whether there was commentary on the authenticity of the *isnāds* or critique of the *matns* of the traditions in *ṣifat al-janna* works, they continued to serve their function. The commentaries on the *isnāds* and *matns* in the late *ṣifat al-janna* works should be analyzed within the frame of a culture adjusting itself from within, without losing its fundamental structures. These developments were certainly informative for the users of the genre; especially with regard to differentiating between weak and reliable traditions. They continue in today's works on the topic of *al-targhib wa-l-tarhīb*. In the introduction of his *Ṣaḥīḥ al-targhib wa-l-tarhīb* (The sound [traditions] of moral suasion and exhortation), the renowned modern traditionist Muḥammad Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Albānī (d. 1999) insists that for the sake of presenting the *sunna* to the nation well (*nuṣṣan lahā*), it is imperative to make clear distinctions between sound and weak traditions.¹²⁸ This trend is also reflected in the modern editions of *ṣifat al-janna* works, in which the majority of editors provide extensive evaluation of the authenticity of the traditions, from which the present author has benefited.

The research objective of this paper was not to investigate whether the material transmitted in the genre of *ṣifat al-janna* is a byproduct of its ideological or social connotations and function, nor has this paper intended to imply any sort of appraisal of such issues of provenance. This analysis only demonstrates that a significant part of the content of this genre is certainly germane to the ideological and socio-cultural systems within which it transpires; put differently, it demonstrates that the consistent inclusion of certain characteristic content in the genre defines major aspects of its function. It might be worthwhile to assess the representation of paradise conveyed by traditions, or by non-*ṣaḥīḥ* traditions, in comparison to that in the Quran. One of the recurrent shortcomings of modern scholarship on Muslim paradise narratives has been to overlook such distinctions, particularly the distinctions between the various categories of Muslim traditions that Muslim scholars themselves have made. This study points out that a contextual analysis of Muslim paradise narratives and an appreciation of their significance requires attention to such distinctions. For instance, in terms of authenticity, irrespective of the lingering skepticism in certain Western – and for that matter “Eastern” – scholarly

¹²⁸ Cf. al-Albānī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-targhib* i, 15.

quarters as to the value of *isnāds*,¹²⁹ the classification of traditions that Muslim scholars established based on this technical device, although it sometimes led to conflicting results, has a central value to Muslims and should be considered in any serious contextual analysis. Above I have paid attention to such issues. Nonetheless, given the sizeable content of *ṣifat al-janna* works and the extended historical period over which they were produced, it was not feasible to present a comprehensive account of their form and content within the confines of a single paper. The analysis I presented is only intended to offer an adequate characterization of their value as representative of a distinctive genre. Future studies will certainly present further refinements.

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129 This is despite the work of scholars such as Harald Motzki and Gregor Schoeler. See for instance, Motzki, *The origins*; Motzki, *Muṣannaḥ*; Schoeler, *Schreiben und Veröffentlichen*; Schoeler, *Mündliche*; Schoeler, *Weiteres zur Frage*; Schoeler, *Die Frage*.

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“Roads to Paradise” in *Risālat al-ghufrān* of the Arab Thinker al-Ma‘arrī

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Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1057) was one of the most important figures in the history of Arabic literature.¹ His concept of religion, however, was a matter of dispute in classical Arabic biographical works because of some isolated critical verses. Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654/1257) wrote in his *Mirāt al-zamān* (The mirror of the age) a detailed biography of al-Ma‘arrī, in which some skeptical statements and several verses about his religious belief were given.² Ibn al-Jawzī’s judgment about al-Ma‘arrī refers to his uncertain belief, doubts, and some Brahmanical, Manichean, and atheistic points of view, as expressed in a few of his verses. It is noteworthy that al-Ma‘arrī’s *Risālat al-ghufrān* (The epistle of forgiveness)³ was not mentioned in that text.⁴ In this connection, the Arab historian Ibn al-‘Adīm (d. 660/1262) wrote his book *al-Inṣāf* (The just treatment).⁵ In modern studies such as that of the Egyptian scholar Shawqī Ḍayf an evaluation has been attempted through al-Ma‘arrī’s poetic works.⁶ Moreover, the Egyptian scholar Ḥāmid ‘Abd al-Majīd, who has published many works of al-Ma‘arrī, wrote on this topic in his critical edition of *Sharḥ al-mukhtār min Luzūmiyyāt Abī l-‘Alā’* (The explanation of selections from Abū l-‘Alā’⁷ “*Luzūmiyyāt*”).

This paper aims to analyze the *Risālat al-ghufrān* in respect of views relevant to the theme “roads to paradise.” There are several writings in Arabic-

1 Brockelmann, *Geschichte* i, 295–7; Suppl. i, 449–54.

2 Al-Ma‘arrī, *Ta’rīf* is a collective volume containing most biographies of al-Ma‘arrī in classical Arabic works. For the text of Ibn al-Jawzī, see 143–81.

3 Al-Ma‘arrī, *Risālat al-ghufrān* 21–68.

4 Most biographies of him contain excerpts from his poetry.

5 Ibn al-‘Adīm, *al-Inṣāf*. See al-Ma‘arrī, *Ta’rīf* 384–578.

6 Ḍayf, *al-Baḥth al-adabī* 42–60.

7 ‘Abd al-Majīd in Ibn al-Sayyid al-Baṭalyawsī, *Sharḥ al-mukhtār*. The statements “*man sallama al-amra lil-bārī fa-qad salima*,” “*maghfirat Allāhi marjuwwatun*” and “*majjadtu wāḥidan*” (543–4) lead to the conclusion that al-Ma‘arrī confessed to the rightness of religion and devotional worship. In this dispute, the text of *Risālat al-ghufrān*, which contained in a literary form discussions and quotations of several persons about roads to paradise, has not been dealt with. For more studies on al-Ma‘arrī, see Badran, Vernunft 61–84.

Islamic culture on the life in the hereafter from various points of view. The importance of the *Risālat al-ghufrān* in this regard lies in its various dialogues in paradise and in hell about creeds and deeds in life, which lead to specific consequences in the hereafter.⁸

The *Risālat al-ghufrān* was written by al-Ma‘arrī as a response to the *Risāla* of his friend Ibn al-Qāriḥ. Al-Ma‘arrī described it as preaching the acceptance of the Islamic *sharī‘a* and blaming those who deviate from a major principle (*aṣl*), or who diverge widely from a minor aspect of Islamic law (139).⁹

The terms used in the *Risālat al-ghufrān* for forgiveness and mercy are *ghufrān* and *maghfira* (177, 185, 251, 286, 218). These are explained as *al-khalāṣ min al-nār* (178), i.e., freedom from hell. These are closely related to *raḥmat Allāh* (the mercy of God, 219), *raḥmat rabbinā* (our Lord’s mercy, 182), or *raḥma dā‘ima* (everlasting mercy, 344). Forgiveness is a consequent result of good manners, characterized as *mūjib lil-raḥma* (185, literally “leading to forgiveness”). The main concepts of forgiveness and mercy are explained in *Risālat al-ghufrān* with the support of many Quranic verses: one ought not despair of God’s mercy and should be sure that God forgives all wrong deeds. God, however, does not forgive polytheism even though other mistakes/sins may be forgiven. Only *kuffār* (unbelievers) have no hope of God’s mercy. In this context the repentance (*tawba*) of any person combined with *shafā‘a* (intercession) leads to forgiveness (203, 228, 447, cf. Q 39:53; 4:116; 7:87).

Many terms are in diametric opposition, such as those pertaining to earthly life on the one hand and the life in the hereafter on the other, such as the days of life (*ayyām al-ḥayāt*) on the one side and eternity (*baqā‘, al-ta‘bīd*, and *al-khulūd*, 185, 186, 296) on the other. Earthly life has many names, the most frequent are *al-dār al-‘ājila* (201, 254, 260, 268, 279, 286, 288, 293, 338), *al-fāniya* (153, 175, 191, 231, 288, 257, 355), *al-khādī‘a* (164, 216, 280, 358), and *al-dhāhiba* (251, 257, 280, 293), meaning that life is short, vanishing, misleading, and fleeting. Several words for this concept are used only once: *al-dār al-mākira*, *al-gharūra*, and *al-sākhira* (362, 358, 147, 181) to mean the cunning, the deceptive, and the mocker, and also *al-sābiqa*, *al-khāliya*, and *al-mādiya* (181, 293, 395) to mean the last and previous. Earthly life is also *dār al-shaqwa* (241), i.e., the home of hardship. These words are used many times in combination with the noun *al-dār* or *al-dunyā*, so *al-dār al-fāniya* or *al-dunyā al-fāniya*.

8 It is not our aim here to select specific items that are parallel to that in other creeds, such as Greek mythology or the Brahmanic religion, rather it is to know al-Ma‘arrī’s views through a synchronic approach.

9 All numbers given in brackets designate pages of the *Risālat al-ghufrān*.

The term used in the *Risālat al-ghufrān* to express the concept of life in the hereafter is the Quranic *al-ākhirā* (216). A distinction is then made between one's fate in paradise or in hell, with regard to several levels or "sub-paradises": *firdaws* (272, 364), *al-janna* (373), *al-jinān* (372), *al-na'im* (237), *al-khuld* (296) and *baqā' al-ta'abbud* (185), i.e., eternity and eternal abode on the one hand. Other persons, however, are in hell, called *al-nār* and *al-jahīm*. The constructions used for the first were *ahādīb al-firdaws* (372), *ghītān al-janna* (372) and *rimāl al-janna* (372), to mean plateaus of paradise, parks of paradise, and sands of paradise. It was also called *jannat 'adn* (218) as in the Quran and *al-na'im al-dā'im* (238), i.e., permanent bliss or pleasure. There are, conversely, a few constructions combined with words for hell: *atbāq al-jahīm* (298), *ahl al-nār* (289, 351, 389), *aṣḥāb al-nār*, and *khazanat al-nār* (352) to mean levels of hell, people in hell, and wards of hell.

A distinction is made between people of this earthly life, *ahl al-ājila* (521, 629) on the one hand, and people of the life hereafter, *ahl al-ākhirā* (521), on the other. The persons in paradise are named *al-shukhūṣ al-firdawsīyya* (206) or *ahl al-khulūd* (185), meaning paradise persons, people in paradise, or people of eternity. The groups represented in paradise according to *Risālat al-ghufrān* are prophets, their followers, angels, poets, scholars, writers, singers, servants, martyrs, paradise virgins – called *al-hūr al-'īn* (284), *hūr al-jinān* (286) or *hūrīyyat al-jinān* (288) – and also some supernatural creatures – *jinn* – who confessed to the truth of Islam. In this context, monotheism is the religion of all prophets; the basic religious problem is that of paganism (186). Moreover, people in paradise are described as intelligent and as having no interaction with stupid people (185). No discrimination because of color is attested. The high status of several Afro-Arab poets is elaborated. Also, a black slave woman who served, during her earthly life, in the famous Dār al-'Ilm ('House of Knowledge') in Baghdad, is placed in paradise as a reward for her help to scribes (287). No discrimination because of gender is attested. Many women, accordingly, have places in paradise, for example the poetess al-Khansā', while her brother Ṣakhr is consigned to hell (308–9). Contrary to various views about blind people in our present world, some of them are able to see in the hereafter, for example, the controversial poet Bashshār b. Burd (d. 168/784) is described as being able to see his own suffering in hell (310). Persons in paradise are described as young and vital in spite of their age at death, as is the case with the pre-Islamic and early Islamic poet Labīd (d. ca 31/661) who was very old when he died (215). There is no use of force – described as a *jāhiliyya* trait – in paradise. No hatred continues in the hereafter, so in the next world there is no rivalry between the philologists Sibawayhi (d. ca 180/796) and al-Kisā'ī (d. 189/805) or between the grammarians al-Mubarrad (d. 286/900) and Tha'lab (d. 291/904). The contrast

between our world and paradise is also aesthetic; so there, ugly women become beautiful (287).

The dialogues, verses and stories illustrate al-Ma'arrī's concept of salvation. The main concept is *al-tuqā*, piety (187). There are stories about the possibility of prophetic *shafā'a* (intercession) on the day of judgment for some persons because of good deeds. Khadija (d. 620 CE), the Prophet's first wife, his sons and daughters, his cousin 'Alī (d. 40/661) and his descendants are placed in paradise. The relevance of good expression, i.e., *al-kalim al-ṭayyib* or *al-kalima al-ṭayyiba* (cf. Q 35:10; 14:24–5), is emphasized in paradise; it is described in the Quran as a good fruitful tree. In this respect, the image of the pre-Islamic sacred tree *dhāt al-anwāt* is given (140, 142). Good expression is more important for the salvation of any person than even the character and behavior of his own children.

Al-ṣidq, that is, telling the truth, is a road to paradise and is at the same time most uncommon in earthly life. Faithful sincere people are fortunate in the hereafter. So the poet al-Ḥuṭay'a (d. after 41/661) is in paradise because of his *ṣidq*. Good behavior is a prerequisite for admittance to paradise. This includes the avoidance of unlawful food such as carrion and of unacceptable sexual relations, i.e., adultery (178). The road to paradise is presented in various stories in a way that emphasizes the importance of asceticism, worship, and hard work (287).

Faith in monotheism is, according to al-Ma'arrī, a prerequisite for admittance to paradise. The pre-Islamic poets such as Zuhayr and Labīd are described as having two palaces in paradise because they avoid *bāṭil*, wrong things, and they believe in God and the day of judgment (183, 184, 186). The pre-Islamic poet Nābighat Banī Ja'da has a place in paradise because he confessed to the creed of the *ḥanīfiyya*, the pre-Islamic Arabian monotheism attributed to the preaching of Abraham (202). Thus, in one of the above-mentioned dialogues, some verses on drinking are said to have been falsely attributed to him (208–9).

The pre-Islamic poet 'Adī b. Zayd (d. ca. 600 CE) is described as being in paradise, because – as a result of his Christian faith – he praised morality, trust, and sincerity in one of his poems (188). Al-Nābigha al-Dhubaynī, the pre-Islamic poet, believed in monotheism and performed the pilgrimage (*ḥajj*) to Mecca (202). The pre-Islamic poet A'shā Qays believed in God, resurrection, and judgment, and intended to be a Muslim (180–1).

To be a poet, however, is not enough for salvation. Tamīm b. Muqbil (d. after 37/657) is reported to have had no excuse for his poetry or *rajaz* (247). His problem is clear in the aim of some of his poems, where the objective was to have access to kings; as such it is a condemned craft (309). The late Umayyad and early 'Abbasid poet Bashshār b. Burd is assigned a place in hell; he was

good in verbal art (*maqāl*) but deficient in creed (*mu'taqad*). Al-Ma'arrī, as a fellow poet, wished *tawba*, repentance, for him because of some of his fine verses (310).

Contrary to the popular view favoring the pre-Islamic poet and hero 'Antara (fl. in the sixth century CE), he is assigned his place in hell (322), mainly because he drank and denied the possibility of innovation in poetry (323). Al-Ma'arrī comments that, even so, it is difficult to imagine him in hell (324). The same fate is shared by the pre-Islamic poet and tribal knight 'Amr b. Kulthūm (fl. in the sixth century CE, 329). The pre-Islamic poet ʿArafa (fl. most probably in the sixth century CE) has the same infernal fate; he regretted being a poet and wished to be in paradise with the common people.

The Christian Umayyad poet al-Akhṭal (d. 92/710) is described to be also in hell because of his poems (345), his frequent encounters with Yazīd, the son of the Caliph Mu'āwiya (d. 39/680) and also because of his sarcastic verses about some Islamic rituals (350). Yazīd is described as *safih*, i.e., "a fool." In hell, al-Akhṭal regretted his attitude in life (350).

The early Muslim Ḥassān b. Thābit (d ca. 40/659) was famous as the first poet to praise the Prophet, so his place is in paradise, in spite of his "free" verses (235).

Many philologists are depicted in paradise. Among them are those concerned with the transmission of classical Arabic poetry, the *ruwāt* (206). These are examined about various textual issues, their attribution, and explanation (207–8). To write such a good book as *al-Ḥujja* (The proof, on Quranic readings) was the achievement of Abū 'Alī al-Fārisī (d. 377/987); for this he is in paradise, despite those few questionable remarks in this otherwise excellent book on morphological items (255). He is praised also because he refrained from bloodshed. Great respect is expressed by Ibn al-Qāriḥ and al-Ma'arrī for those philologists of that time (56, 531).

The contrast between good and bad deeds can be deduced from a poem attributed to a *jinn*. He pretends to commit many sins: he is not ascetic, he scorns religion, has no respect for the great institution of Sunday, he defaces the Pentateuch, destroys crosses, opposes God, praises the rule of the sinful and unwise, promotes religious deviation, brings charges of adultery against chaste women, and tempts priests (300). Devilish actions are illustrated in poems: uncontrolled sexual behavior with and to women, participation in drinking sessions, the encouragement of injustice, the denial of truth, the misleading of wise people and so on (294–5). However, it is emphasized that *tawba* is in all cases possible (296).

To avoid drinking in this world is a cause for salvation. *Khamr* (wine) is available in paradise only for those who have avoided it in life (181) and for other

persons before *tahrīm al-khamr*, i.e., the prohibition of wine in Islam (184). One problem discussed in *Risālat al-ghufrān* is that of the different names for drinks, such as *qahwa* (here: wine), *nabīdh* (an intoxicating drink, wine), and *tilā'* (grape syrup, 512, 556).

Al-Ma'arrī's refusal and condemnation of drinking is attested also in various non-Muslim creeds. The Indians, for example, do not accept a king who drinks (555). The use of the word *khamr* and similar words is differentiated with regard to their usage in life or the hereafter, to express two distinct concepts (142–53). It is precisely the "honey of paradise": *ʿasal al-janna* (166) and *ʿasal al-jinān* (164), which is different from the *khamr* of earthly life.

Ethical dangers are described in *Risālat al-ghufrān*: hypocrisy (381–2), committing serious mistakes in writing and orthography (412), and pretending religious affiliation without belief (420).

Zanādiqa (freethinkers, apostates, also dualists) and atheists (*mulḥidūn*) invent doubts and are fond of criticizing the mission of prophets (30, 434), they pretend to know the future (450–1), pretend to have special spiritual power (452–3), believe in *tanāsukh*, the transmigration of the soul from one creature to another (458–9), believe in incarnation as some Sufis pretend (454–5), and exaggerate in their praise of Ismaʿīlī *imāms* (461).

The second part of *Risālat al-ghufrān* is a literary response to the epistle of Ibn al-Qāriḥ. Both he and the author, it is pointed out, have significant things in common, such as attitudes toward some specific persons and creeds. The problem of politically motivated groups hiding behind religious slogans or nomenclature is discussed in a large number of cases. Al-Manṣūr al-Ṣanādīqī's preaching in the third/ninth century in Yemen encouraged uneducated people to abandon Islamic rites in order to have free access to sex and drinking (438–9). Some leaders of those groups proclaimed themselves *imāms* and prophets, others gods (439–41).

The materialistic aim of such people is expressed through the words *mutakassib bi-l-tadāyyun* (442), i.e., profiting through pretended religiosity. They aim at *jibāyat al-māl*, i.e., collecting money through tricks and deceit (442), and they attempt to rule and to mislead. In this context al-Ma'arrī offers some stories about the Ismaʿīlī group of the Qarmatians in al-Aḥsā' (442–3).

The importance of peace is stressed by reference to the poem of the pre-Islamic Zuhayr who praises the two men who put an end to tribal wars (388).

The ethical aspect is illustrated in several verses with examples: one should have a testament with God (389), not insult any Muslim (389), and not give any false statement (389).

In this respect, it is noteworthy that the concept and terms of violence, aggression, and war do not exist in *Risālat al-ghufrān*; in fact they do not figure in

the roads to paradise. Most of the people in paradise were *aṣḥāb qalam*, men of letters and scholarship, and not *aṣḥāb khayl*, men of horses – i.e., soldiers (195).

Al-Ma'arrī's view of life and people is rather pessimistic (477). Every individual who concentrates on the affairs of our world regrets it later on (491). Salvation is possible through *tawba* (508). Faith and spirituality are for God and not for people (516). Al-Ma'arrī's point of view recognizes that religiosity in general is a human instinct, but reason can decide (464). Theoretical knowledge is not an end, but deeds in life situations are the most important (464).

The importance of the *Risālat al-ghufrān* lies – as far as our topic is concerned – in dealing with the roads to paradise. Other authors have a different approach. For example, in Ibn Shuhayd's (d. 426/1035) *al-Tawābi' wa-l-zawābi'* (The familiar spirits and demons) poems are cited, but no discussion on salvation is offered. Like al-Ma'arrī's *al-ghufrān*, Ibn al-Qāriḥ's *Risāla* also emphasizes that real *adab* is *adab al-naḥs*, i.e., the training of the soul/self, not *adab al-dars*, i.e., the rules of book learning (292, 309, 314, 268, 272, 267, 410). Both works were written as moral reactions to events, conspiracies, politically motivated groups, and other creeds. They share, therefore, similar themes and concerns. Both are against hypocrisy (24, 515), *zanādiqa* (30, 428), atheists (30, 428), the Qarmatians (34, 442) and the mystic al-Ḥallāj who died in 309/922 (36, 452). Moreover, both refer to famous poets and freethinkers such as al-Mutanabbī (28, 29, 414, 424), al-Walid b. Yazid (32, 443), Ibn al-Rāwandī (38, 467), al-Shalmaghānī (38, 463), Ibn al-Rūmī (40, 476), and Abū Tammām (41, 483). Both have great respect for philologists (169–74). The problem of concepts, terms, and views of *khamr* is discussed in both works (52, 142, 555, 558). The main difference between the components of these works concerns Isma'ilis, who are criticized only in *Risālat al-ghufrān* by the poet al-Ḥasan b. Hānī (461). It was not proper for Ibn al-Qāriḥ, who was in close relation with the Isma'ili rulers, to pen such a critique (58, see also 21).

The interest of al-Ma'arrī's contribution to Arabic and Islamic eschatological thought lies in his citations of a large amount of poetry and other material in a new narrative form; he frankly describes people mentioned partly in paradise and partly in hell. A textual comparison with books of Islamic theology, such as those of famous scholars such as al-Ash'arī (d. 324/935–6) and al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), reveals a significant difference.¹⁰ They concentrate on death, suffering, the burial, the tomb, the resurrection, and judgment. They mainly cite religious texts and not poetry as such. They contain statements, but no dia-

10 Books of Muslim theologians consulted include al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*; as well as al-Ash'arī's books, *al-Luma'*; *al-Ibāna*; and *Māqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*.

logues similar to that in al-Ma‘arrī’s *Risālat al-ghufrān*, which is thus significant to our general theme in aim, content, and literary form.

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Muslim Eschatology and the Ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad: Describing Paradise in *Mi'rāj* Traditions and Literature

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Paradise and hell on the one hand and the ascension (*mi'rāj*)¹ of the Prophet Muḥammad on the other are two main chapters of Muslim belief and major subjects of many traditions. Along with these traditions, both general topics gave rise to two distinct literary genres over the centuries and throughout Muslim cultures. This is not surprising given the relevance and prominence of eschatological themes in the Quran and the importance of the experience of the night journey and the ascension in the sacred biography of the Prophet.

Even more significant in this regard is the fact that some traditions and literary works combine aspects of these differing topics and make reference to the ascension of the Prophet in eschatological descriptions or, vice versa, insert eschatological hints into *mi'rāj* narratives. In a recent publication I reviewed the significance of the mention of categories of damned people in hell which Muḥammad saw during his ascent to heaven in some of these traditions, and I pointed out how the insertion of these descriptions of the damned emerged and were included or excluded in different versions throughout the literary genre of the *mi'rāj*.² The same can also be done with regard to paradise and its descriptions since some *mi'rāj* traditions and narratives state that Muḥammad was not shown only the damned and hell but also made a proper tour of paradise during his ascent. The insertion and use of paradise descriptions into *mi'rāj* narratives and literature, and how and when this happened constitutes the subject of this contribution.

There are a number of issues that arise in addressing this topic. First, I hope to provide more evidence pertaining to the development of the literary genre of the *mi'rāj*, so as to show how the elaboration of motifs and narrative details

* My thanks are due to Todd Lawson for reading a first draft of this paper and for his suggestions.

1 Though *mi'rāj* means only ascension/ladder, I use the term throughout the article to indicate both the night journey (*isrā'*) and the ascension and to make reference to traditions and literature including both.

2 See Tottoli, *Tours of hell*.

burgeoned in the Middle Ages, thus evidencing the significance of the topic and, consequently, of the literature about it. Along with this I wish to give further testimony to the relevance of the *mi'rāj* narratives in the context of the eschatological traditions and narratives and to see how these narratives preserved and included particulars of some relevance to eschatology as a whole. The results expected are thus twofold. First, to analyze the growing proliferation over time of eschatological material and in particular of traditions on paradise from early *ḥadīth* reports to the late medieval literature (after the fifth/eleventh century). Second, to discuss how the description of paradise as included in the *mi'rāj* literature contributed to the eschatological reports and even added a significant re-elaboration of the details on the description and landscape of paradise.³

1 Paradise in Early *Mi'rāj* Traditions

The night journey and the ascension to heaven of the Prophet Muḥammad are the topic of many traditions and substantial literary works. Though a vision of paradise and hell are usually considered a fundamental part of this experience, the situation in Arabic sources is not so clear-cut. As a matter of fact, only a few early traditions on the *mi'rāj* include a description of paradise and hell, and further, only some of them include eschatological details.

The first topic is thus the relation between *mi'rāj* narratives and eschatology. When Quranic exegesis started to connect the ascension of Muḥammad to Q 53:1–18, where there are some verses introducing the lote-tree of the boundary and other elements pointing to the heavens and paradisaal abodes, a vision of paradise could be read into the experience of the *mi'rāj* and pave the way for the insertion of eschatological elements into it. This could have somehow constituted a pretext for relating eschatological descriptions of paradise, on one side, and *mi'rāj* narratives on the other. But this was not always the case as is clear if we address the question from two perspectives: first, that of the *mi'rāj* in Muslim literature on paradise as a whole and, second, that of paradise and eschatology in early *mi'rāj* traditions and literature.

Eschatological literature as a whole devotes little space to traditions and statements connected to the night journey or the ascension of the Prophet. For instance, if we take into consideration a number of statements of the Prophet

3 I deal only with verses and reports discussing or even picturing the structure of paradise and its contents and not with what is said about the moral related to paradise when describing people destined to it.

describing visits to paradise or visions of it, we notice that only a few of them make explicit mention of the fact that the visit took place during the ascension to heaven, and not, for instance, during a dream or in another unspecified situation.⁴ Further, although an examination of a large body of texts shows that a number of reports explicitly relates the night journey or ascension to heaven to the fact that Muḥammad entered paradise and saw or did something, the number of texts that do so is rather limited.⁵ Thus, interestingly enough, it can be safely stated and stressed that eschatological literature displays little interest in these traditions.⁶ Also, it seems that though paradise is mentioned in various reports as a place Muḥammad entered, early *ḥadīths* seem to treat the question with care when coming to a possible connection with his ascension. For this reason eschatological discussions mostly avoid references to the *mi'rāj*, or when they do mention it, it is clear that the question is evoked as a testimony to the real and present existence of paradise. Indeed, it is this problem of the existence of paradise which emerges as the main question and which in turn suggests prudence on the topic of the actual ascension.⁷ This is the

4 On these traditions see Rustomji, *The garden and the fire* 36–9.

5 A long list of references, coming also from Shi'i literature, can be easily traced through the libraries of texts now stored electronically. I limit myself to quoting the main sources, see for instance al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 3159: "(Muḥammad and Gabriel) did not abandon the back of Burāq until they saw paradise, hellfire..." (trans. by Colby, *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative* 130); al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Ba'ṭh wa-l-nushūr* 112, nos. 118 and 146, no. 188. On the topic more generally and from the literature I have taken into consideration, see also Ibn Māja, *Sunan* ii, 812, no. 2431; al-Qurṭubī, *Kitāb al-Tadhkira* 960; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-awsaṭ* vii, 16; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz al-'ummāl* vi, 210, no. 15374; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Budūr al-sāfira* 397: "during the *mi'rāj* Muḥammad saw on the gate of paradise..." and 438: "during the *mi'rāj* he entered paradise..."; Abū Nu' aym, *Ṣifat al-janna* i, 168, no. 151; cf. also al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr* xxii, 137. There are many more examples. For instance, a version of the report about the castle seen by Muḥammad and destined for 'Umar is introduced by the statement that Muḥammad saw it during the *mi'rāj*, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* xx, 153. Other reports connect the visit to other episodes: him hearing Bilāl or on the night Muḥammad entered paradise, he ate its fruits and drank its water etc., see Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rīkh madīnat Dimashq* 35, 40.

6 See, for instance, Ibn Abī l-Dunyā's *Ṣifat al-janna* 103, no. 341, where the short description of a vision of paradise at the end of a long *mi'rāj* narrative is mentioned with the *isnād*, but with no mention of the ascension or where this vision took place. There is also an explicit tradition, not included in canonical traditions and mostly excluded by eschatological tracts, in which the Prophet simply states that the night of the night journey he saw paradise and hell in heaven, see Ibn Rajab, *al-Takhwīf min al-nār* 68.

7 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hādī l-arwāḥ* 18 and all of the chapter on the topic: 18–25; see also Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya* 448, 450, and above all 520, in a chapter dedicated to *wujūd al-janna*.

procedure, for instance, in works such as those of al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) or ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qaḍī (fl. sixth/twelfth century) which include no more than a couple of references when dealing with eschatological details of things that happened to – or were seen by – the Prophet during his night journey or his ascension.⁸

If, however, we take into consideration the traditions of the night journey and the ascension and thus include early long and short reports about it, the situation appears a bit more complex. If only the so-called canonical collections of *ḥadīths* or works mostly relying upon these materials are taken into consideration, it can be firmly stated that the majority of the reports included in these works does not mention eschatological abodes and limits the question to the mention of the lote-tree of the boundary or some other supposedly paradisaical elements but does not explicitly address paradise as such. References to eschatology and to paradise in particular in reports about the *mi‘rāj* of Muḥammad are few and of little relevance to the details that are mentioned. In relation to hell and the description of the damned we have already discussed the question and suggested that for some reason the inclusion of this topic was a point at issue and a sensitive question to be touched in subsequent reports and later longer literary versions in connection with the obvious moral questions indicated by the categories of sinners mentioned and included.⁹

The case of paradise, instead, appears more problematic and elusive. What is more significant, to begin with, is that only one of the long sayings of Muḥammad included in al-Bukhārī and Muslim’s works mentions anything at all about this event, and it only adds a few words stating clearly that Muḥammad was made to enter paradise. From Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhri (d. 124/742) through Anas b. Mālīk (d. most probably 91–3/709–11), the report tells us that after meeting the various prophets in the seven heavens, and after visiting the lote-tree of the boundary, we learn that the Prophet stated: “Finally I was led into paradise, there were pearly cupolas and its earth was musk” and nothing more.¹⁰ Though short, at the end, and isolated, since most of the other reports

8 See for instance al-Qurṭubī, who introduces an eschatological tradition with no mention of paradise and states that it is “in the *ḥadīth al-mi‘rāj*” (*Kitāb al-Tadhkira* 935, and cf. 960 quoting Ibn Māja above and ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qaḍī, *Daqā’iq al-akhbār* 76: on the night of the night journey he “was shown all the paradises” (*jami‘ al-jinān*)).

9 Tottoli, *Tours of hell*.

10 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* i, 116, no. 349; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* i, 149, no. 263; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iv, 144; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 249, no. 7363; al-Isfarāyīnī, *Musnad* 120; Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur‘ān* iii, 180; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* iii, 11; Ibn ‘Asākir, *Ta’rīkh madīnat Dīnashq* iii, 491, 492; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz al-‘ummāl* xi, 387, no. 31839; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* v, 195; see the discussion in Juynboll, *Encyclopedia* 692. Many other sources could be added,

do not include this, it is indeed a relevant sentence, pointing to the *imaginaire* we discuss later on in connection with paradise. It is not much when compared to the lists of sinners and the damned included in early reports, nor to later extensive tours of paradise, but it constitutes definite evidence that according to some early narratives on the *mi'rāj* a visit to paradise was included. Of course, along with this, there are also, in the *ḥadīth* literature, some other short reports, mentioned above, where a vision of paradise or something in it is connected to the night journey or the ascension. But these, as we have seen above, are relatively few in the corpus of eschatological literature and of less significance with regard to the history of the literature on the night journey and ascension where the early long *ḥadīth* reports are more important.

Of further significance in this connection is that of other early works that also attest to the circulation of narratives mentioning paradise and which ultimately did not find, apart from the one just discussed, their way into *ḥadīth* collections. The example of Ibn Sa'd (d. 230/845) and his *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt* is significant in this regard. He introduces the paragraph on the topic stating that the Prophet "used to ask his Lord to show him paradise and hell" followed by a pair of traditions with their *isnāds*.¹¹ In the same way, some of early works of Muslim literature, though not properly considered *ḥadīth* collections, are nonetheless equally important; these include, for instance, the biography of the Prophet by Ibn Hishām (d. 218/833) and early Quranic commentaries. Ibn Hishām includes a long report according to which the Prophet stated that Gabriel made him enter paradise where he saw a servant girl awaiting and destined for Zayd b. Ḥāritha. This detail is recalled also in eschatological reports and it constitutes the only reference to what Muḥammad saw in paradise according to the *Sīra*.¹² A similar situation also emerges in early commentaries of the Quran, for instance those which we have already discussed in relation to the description of sinners and punishments, which also include a vision or a visit to paradise and thus display a general interest in eschatological elements.¹³

for instance the works on the life of Muḥammad, such as those of Ibn Sayyid al-Nās or al-Ḥalabī, where they deal with the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet.

- 11 Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā* i, 213; on the relevance of this passage, see also Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey* 58.
- 12 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya* i, 272; see on this Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey* 56; and for other traditions including this motif see Colby, *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative* 194, 212.
- 13 It is not necessary here to discuss all these sources at length. See the sources mentioned in Tottoli, *Tours of hell*; and the commentaries, for instance, by Muqātil and al-Qummī.

This evidence shows that in early Islam along with the reports quoted in *ḥadīth* collections, most of which do not include any hint of the eschatological abodes, some other reports that do mention a visit to paradise circulated and found their way into major literary works. The reasons for this situation are probably related to a general, fundamental conception of the experience of the Prophet which was slightly different from that of critics and collectors of the sayings of the Prophet. On the one hand, the visits to hell and paradise gave the story the outline of an apocalypse according to Near Eastern religious concepts and expectations, thus introducing the Prophet Muḥammad to a well-known genre of religious narratives in which the vision of hell and paradise was a fundamental element in such an experience or story. On the other hand, Muslim scholars of traditions for some reason had difficulty with this story, difficulties that may have been connected to theological questions which were likewise probably related to intramural Muslim debates, such as the question of the actual existence of paradise and also questions related to the problem of the vision of God. In this context, the exclusion of *mi'rāj* versions that included eschatology was also to avoid directly addressing certain sensitive issues in Muslim theological debates and, more indirectly, to take, at the same time, a position in these debates.

Later authors who collected these *ḥadīth* reports on the topic show, though sometimes with slightly differing attitudes, how this body of literature – or at least those traditions deemed to belong to this genre – displays a general reluctance to mention paradise and hell as a feature of Muḥammad's ascension. If we take into consideration the example of three long collections of *ḥadīth* reports on the *mi'rāj*, such as those found in the Quranic commentary of al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), the history of Damascus of Ibn 'Asākir (d. 571/1175), and the work on the signs of the prophecy by al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), we notice that no useful details on the structure of paradise can be found and that in general the shorter reports relating visions of paradise with this episode of Muḥammad's life are not addressed. All of them quote the *ḥadīth* with the brief mention of paradise from Ibn Shihāb mentioned above; it constitutes the major evidence for the question of the visit to paradise during the *mi'rāj*.¹⁴ Other hints are also brief, such as one in which Adam is described as being on the right of the gate of paradise and laughing when looking at it, or simple statements to the effect that Muḥammad also entered paradise, but these statements give no more detail.¹⁵ Something more can be found in a later

14 Al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* ii, 382; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq* iii, 491, 493.

15 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* xvi, 13, 20; Ibn 'Asākir, *Ta'rikh madīnat Dimashq* iii, 505; al-Bayhaqī, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa* ii, 371, 401.

commentary such as that of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), who included more *miʿrāj* reports mentioning paradise. Along with the usual quotation of the *ḥadīth* going back to Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī, we find mention of the story of Adam, a pair of other references, and a final section in which some of the shorter visions are collected.¹⁶ Further, in al-Suyūṭī and also in some other sources, we find a version of the report going back to Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī (d. ca. 74/693) that contains the description of the damned and which mentions that Muḥammad entered paradise.¹⁷

This detail is significant: it verifies that the version typified by the inclusion of the eschatological details on hell and the damned also includes mention of paradise. But along with this, it shows that the simple mention of paradise was deemed enough in the wide context of the long *miʿrāj* reports. It means that according to these few versions Muḥammad also entered and visited paradise but no detail is given. But that reports including it and also including and displaying longer treatments of the motif of the tour of paradise existed quite early is attested to by Ibn Saʿd, Ibn Hishām, and the well known long tradition quoted by al-Suyūṭī in his *al-Laʿālī l-maṣnūʿa fī l-aḥādīth al-mawḍūʿa* (The artificial pearls on the fabricated *ḥadīths*).¹⁸ We thus understand that for some reason paradise as a place that exists and was seen by Muḥammad during the historical experience of the night journey and the ascension was a controversial theme. And above all there was no space for reports insisting on this description that involved a long visit and a visualization of the eternal abode. The writers of canonical collections preferred to avoid the question as much as possible, but the circulation of other reports including this motif prompted some versions to include at least a brief mention of a visit to paradise.

16 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* v, 189, 190, 195 (Ibn Shihāb), 200 (the voice of paradise), 206, 214, 218–89 (shorter visions).

17 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* v, 197; see also al-Bayhaqī, *Dalāʾil al-nubuwwa* ii, 394.

18 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Laʿālī l-maṣnūʿa* i, 62–74. This tradition was first noted by M. Asín Palacios (*La escatología musulmana* 23–30) and was recently discussed further. For its relevance to the evolution of the tour of paradise in *miʿrāj* traditions and literature, see Colby, *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative* 167. On paradise see 73–4, where there is a long description of what Muḥammad saw in paradise, thus attesting that a *ḥadīth* or at least a narrative in *ḥadīth* style had a comprehensive section on this. What is more relevant is that the details of this long description are all taken from eschatological short *ḥadīths* on castles, mansions, tents, and trees of paradise. That is, it is nothing new but it is evidence of how details scattered in sound eschatological sayings of the Prophet could constitute a problem for authors of works on *ḥadīth* or *ḥadīth*-oriented literature, when these details are inserted in the long narratives on the *miʿrāj* of the Prophet Muḥammad.

2 Elements for a Description of Paradise from the Quran and *ḥadīths*

What early *mī'rāj* narratives could not include – i.e., a description of paradise giving a perception of its architecture and permitting a proper visit from Muḥammad – should be first of all sought in the Quran and eschatological literature as a whole, where a lot of space is dedicated to the paradise that awaits Muslims. It is indeed necessary to examine these sources and note what emerged along with early *mī'rāj* narratives and thus determine if *mī'rāj* narratives could have known of other contemporary reports useful for introducing a visit to paradise in the experience of the Prophet.

The question of the description of paradise that emerges from early Muslim traditions has been recently dealt with by Nerina Rustomji in her monograph on paradise and hell. She speaks of an architecture of paradise originating from the literature, and I also touch on this briefly below. There the main feature is the display of the various elements mentioned in the traditions, where the most relevant particulars are gates, mansions, and layers of paradise along with major physical elements such as rivers, trees, and so on. Muslim *ḥadīth*-oriented¹⁹ literature thus contains a description or even a real topography, since “by following the progression from throne to rivers, readers would be able to create a map of the garden.”²⁰ Literature of traditions on paradise, as Rustomji rightly asserts in her work, in fact introduces a series of motifs related to the objects mentioned in connection to paradise according to the different purposes of the various texts. In some cases it is a chronological listing of them so as to deal with them in the order given by the sequence of eschatological times, some others are actual tours of paradise.²¹ What Rustomji asserts is indeed the significant question for our topic and the question that we try to answer: can motifs and scattered elements in single units of the early traditions and then the later works that collect them prompt a proper tour of paradise including an idea of its architecture?

2.1 *The Quran*

Let us start from the beginning, the Quran. Given the centrality of the eschatological themes in the holy text, many indications and suggestions relating to an architecture of paradise can be found, though, according to Quranic style, they

19 With “*ḥadīth*-oriented” I mean literature that relies mainly on *ḥadīths* (sayings of the Prophet), but also includes reports and statements going back to Companions and Successors, and literature constructed mainly from their literal quotations.

20 Rustomji, *The garden and fire* 115–7, in part. quotation from 117.

21 Ibid., 106–7.

are not organized in a coherent picture. Notwithstanding this, we learn from it that the term most often used to mention paradise is *janna* meaning “garden” and it occurs more than eighty times. This is no doubt a first and fundamental indication inasmuch as it defines paradise first of all as a place with, for example, trees and that which is “naturally” found in a garden. A few passages among the many specify something of special relevance to our discussion: the Quranic paradise has gates and gatekeepers (Q 39:50, 73; cf. 13:23 one gate), and there is a mention of two (Q 34:15; 55:46, 62) or more gardens (*jannāt*), with the plural term occurring over forty times. Some passages name the people destined for paradise and state that there will be “mid thornless lote-trees, serried acacias, and spreading shade and outpoured waters” (Q 56:28–31). One specific tree is indeed mentioned, though context and contents of the verses are not completely clear. It is the lote-tree of the boundary (Q 53:14–5), a mysterious tree that apparently demarcates the boundary of the heavenly abode. Shades and fountains appear together in another verse (Q 77:41) to indicate where godfearing people will dwell. In fact, along with trees, various bodies, and “modes” of water (and whatever is connected to this), another major feature appears in the Quranic description of paradise: various fountains and springs which in some cases are even given specific names in the text (see Q 76:18; 83:27; 108:1). Rivers in paradise are also often mentioned and evoked as one of the major rewards awaiting those destined for it. The most relevant passage in this regard is that which mentions rivers of water, milk, wine, and rivers of honey (Q 47:15).²² In this connection, many other frequent passages simply mention a garden or gardens underneath which rivers flow (Q 2:25, *passim*, more than thirty times).

The Quranic picture of paradise thus has both clear and scattered elements, and this prompts subsequent exegetical elaboration. According to the contents of the holy text only, paradise is a garden or gardens, and as such it contains a profusion of trees with sheltering shade and above all lasting waters such as flowing springs and rivers as the reward for believers. The mention of gates suggests that it is also somehow enclosed and protected, but no details of its dimensions, the nature of the enclosure or other more specific elements are given. Further, other names such as *firdaws*, *ʿadn*, or expressions denoting paradise are of less importance in this regard, since they bear no further information on the true nature of paradise, though later exegetical literature

22 See on this Tottoli, *Due fiumi* 1225–8.

sometimes interprets these somewhat obscure Quranic designations to distinguish various paradises from others.²³

2.2 The Ḥadīth Literature

With regard to the picture presented by the sayings of Muḥammad, the main data reveals that it is not typologically different than that of the Quran, since it follows the Quranic line of thought strictly, though it adds bountiful details and images. Though this is not the place to discuss at length *ḥadīth* reports about paradise, it is necessary to provide some information. The most important feature, as already stated, is that *ḥadīth* literature as a whole works like an expansion of the Quranic data, strictly following the Quranic parallel between paradise and a garden. Thus, the mention of paradise in the Quran, or paradises through the use of the singular, dual, and plural (*janna*, *jannatān*, *jannāt*), along with the other names and expressions such as *firdaws* and *ʿadn* became the key point in the description of the gardens of paradise.²⁴ A saying going back to the Prophet through Abū Mūsā l-Ashʿarī states, for instance, that paradise comprises two silver gardens and two golden gardens wherein everything is made of silver or gold.²⁵ According to some versions, these four gardens/paradises are those of *firdaws*.²⁶ *Firdaws* appears in one other significant report, where it is affirmed that it is the navel (*surra*) of the paradise,²⁷ along with other reports that stress its position among all the paradises.²⁸

Ḥadīth reports take Quranic data and add some elements that align with them in small narratives. One major element already explicitly mentioned in the Quran is the gates (*bāb*, pl. *abwāb*), thus recalling paradise as an enclosed space with few access points. *Ḥadīth* reports insist on this and also state that

23 On all of them see Kinberg, Paradise 12–5. About the Quran and later exegetical and traditional additions, see also El-Şaleḥ, *La vie future* 15–8, 29–43; Rustomji, *The garden and the fire* 63–76, 83–97.

24 See for example, Ibn Ḥibbān, *Şaḥīḥ* ix, 242, no. 7348, from Umm Ḥāritha.

25 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* vii, 162, no. 19702; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Şaḥīḥ* ix, 240, no. 7343; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunna* vii, 541, no. 4276; Ibn Abī ʿĀşim al-Shaybānī, *al-Sunna* i, 420; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-şaḥīḥ* iv, 674, no. 2528. See on this tradition Juynboll, *Encyclopedia* 20.

26 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muşannaf* viii, 90; al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, 73, no. 529; al-Dārimī, *Sunan* ii, 790, no. 2718; al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ* x, 397–8; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān* vi, 202.

27 Hannād b. al-Sarī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* i, 67, no. 49, Mujāhid, *Tafsīr* i, 382; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān* vi, 202, where among the various interpretations it is also stated that *firdaws* is a garden full of trees.

28 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* xxi, 149; cf. Yaḥyā b. Sallām, *Tafsīr* i, 211: it is a mountain in paradise from where the rivers of paradise originate.

they are eight;²⁹ or, they mention a gate of paradise or one or more specific gates destined for specific pious believers, while others add other details.³⁰ Additional information on the nature of paradise as a space and a place can be argued by collating and juxtaposing various reports. In a report in which Abū Hurayra is asked about the structure (*binā*) of paradise, he answers that it is made of one golden brick and one silver brick, with a pavement of perfumed musk with pebbles of pearl and jacinth and the dust of saffron.³¹ Some reports are quite significant because they make use of the term *ḥā'it*, a term usually indicating a “wall,” a “wall of enclosure,” i.e., a walled fence surrounding a garden or an orchard.³² Walls are also evoked and numbered in other reports that note this detail.

Mention of buildings or similar references to what exists inside these gardens is of great relevance for a reconstruction of its architecture. We come to know that paradise also includes or will include buildings of various kinds. There is, for instance, frequent mention of a castle or castles in paradise, or

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- 29 On all this see Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* vi, 132, no. 17368; al-Dārimī, *Sunan* ii, 788–9, no. 2714; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *al-Mustadrak 'alā l-ṣaḥīḥayn* iv, 607; al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 427, no. 3257; Ruwaynī, *Musnad* ii, 200, no. 1034; al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb Ṣifat al-janna* 51; al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-īmān* iii, 296–7, no. 3084; al-Rayyān is the gate for those who fast. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* vi, 464, no. 18818. The tradition stating that paradise has eight gates while *jahannam* has seven is the most attested one on this point. A further detail is given by al-Suyūṭī, *al-Budūr al-sāfira*, 393: seven gates are closed and one open. There is one version stating that paradise has seven gates, see al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz al-'ummāl* xiv, 452, no. 39220; on seven, eight or even ten gates in Muslim traditions, see the discussion by J.P. Monferrer Sala in 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws: La descripción del paraíso* 53, note 57; and cf. also al-Qurṭubī, *Kitāb al-Tadhkira* 957: gates are more than eight. See also C. Lange's contribution to the present publication.
- 30 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ* viii, 81–2; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 241, nos. 7345–6; al-Haythamī, *Majma' x*, 397; dimensions of the gates are discussed by Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* iv, 73–5.
- 31 Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iii, 452, no. 9750; Hannād b. al-Sarī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* i, 106, no. 130; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 672, no. 2526; al-Dārimī, *Sunan* ii, 789, no. 2717; al-Haythamī, *Majma' x*, 396–7; cf. also Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ* viii, 67; al-Baghawī, *Maṣābiḥ* ii, 372, no. 2298; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 241, no. 7344. According to a report in 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qaḍī, *Daqā'iq al-akhbār* 80, the Prophet saw angels in paradise building castles made of golden and silver bricks.
- 32 'Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Musannaḥ* xi, 416–7, no. 20875; Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, 428, nos. 251–2; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunna* vii, 549, no. 4287; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz al-'ummāl* xiv, 494, no. 39401; see also al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Ba'th wa-l-nushūr* 157, no. 214: “inna Allāh aḥāṭa ḥā'it al-janna . . .”

mention that paradise is indeed a castle itself.³³ These castles are described with many prodigious details and fantastic dimensions.³⁴ In other instances Muḥammad sees a castle in paradise, but, e.g., it awaits ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb;³⁵ the same may be said of other structures destined for other main characters of early Islamic history. Other traditions mention rooms or chambers in paradise (*ghurfa*, pl. *ghuraf*), and also tents. However paradise does not only include buildings and constructions thought to be destined for humans, there are also other elements relating more to its geographical extent. There is mention of a sea or seas in paradise, which are connected to the rivers already mentioned in the Quran, though some reports state that in paradise there are also gulfs or abysses (*qirʿān*), and even ships with golden oars.³⁶

Trees play a major role, following the importance accorded to this feature in the Quran itself. The reports on the topic are many; suffice it here to mention the one most frequently affirmed: there is even a tree so huge that a rider can travel under its shade for a hundred years.³⁷ Along with the Quranic trees such

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- 33 See, for example, Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ* viii, 79 (there are many golden, silver, jacinth castles, etc., quoted also by al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* iv, 238); this is indeed the report discussed by Ibn al-Jawzī, in his *Kitāb al-Mawḍūʿāt* ii, 424; and al-Suyūṭī, *al-Laʾālī l-maṣnūʿa* ii, 376; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 238, no. 7337; and al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ* vi, 329, no. 6543.
- 34 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ* viii, 80; al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz al-ʿummāl* xv, 834, no. 43316; al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ* x, 420; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ* ix, 164, no. 9430; al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* xiii, 142: here this castle is called *ʿadn* (see also various versions in x, 179, 181–2, commenting on *jannāt ʿadn* in Q 9:72; see in fact al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kaṣf wa-l-bayān* v, 68, Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr* ii, 789; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr* iv, 237), and later on, still commenting on the same Q 13:23, it is stated that *ʿadn* is the name of the town (*madīna*) of paradise, see al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* xiii, 142.
- 35 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 424, no. 3242; Hannād b. al-Sarī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* i, 104–5 nos. 127–8; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* ii, 339.
- 36 Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* 431, no. 272.
- 37 ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Musannaḥ* xi, 417 nos. 20876–8 (no. 20878 connects the report with the exegesis of Q 56:30, in fact see al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, *tafsīr* of Q 56:30); al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 426, nos. 3251–2; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 2175–6, nos. 2826–8; Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ* viii, 71; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* iii, 370, no. 9254, passim; iv, 220, no. 12071 passim; Hannād b. al-Sarī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* i, 97, no. 113; al-Dārimī, *Sunan* ii, 795, nos. 2733–4; Ibn Māja, *Sunan* ii, 1450, no. 4335; Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 250, no. 7369; al-Ḥumaydī, *al-Musnad* ii, 479, no. 1131; al-Baghawī, *Maṣābiḥ* ii, 370, no. 2284; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 671, nos. 2523–4; cf. also al-Suyūṭī, *Jāmiʿ al-aḥādīth* iii, 12, no. 7637, 14, no. 7644 (different versions); see also al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ* x, 414. The explanation given by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād is quite interesting, see Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* (*ziyādāt* by Nuʿaym b. Ḥammād) 430, no. 266: it is the *shajarat al-khuld* (Q 20:120, the tree of eternity), i.e., the tree

as the lote-tree of the boundary (Q 53:14) and the mysterious *tūbā* (Q 13:29), which are also treated in *ḥadīth* literature, golden date palms are also mentioned. A complete list of the places or geographical details included in this literature would be very long: in paradise in fact there are markets, mountains, hills, and also animals, especially horses.³⁸

Thus, strictly following the Quran, *ḥadīth* literature adds elements to the description of paradise, but we have no comprehensive, lengthy description of the nature of paradise. To be sure, all the elements serve the purpose of conveying a sense of the place,³⁹ but this is achieved by detailing the prodigious dimensions of its various features, mostly Quranic, rather than by describing the organic architecture of a place awaiting faithful inhabitants. Traditional literature based upon *ḥadīth* reports cannot but try to give a list of Quranic verses and single sayings of the Prophet, rich in detail but not really yet a proper organic description of what is in paradise and how it appears. Early Muslim beliefs and traditions did not build a proper description of the abode of paradise. Such a description emerges neither from the Quran nor from the *ḥadīth* and those single reports referred to above, notwithstanding the vast amount of pertinent material attested in this regard.⁴⁰

3 Collecting and Ordering *Ḥadīths* as a Way of Describing Paradise

There is a way for traditional literature, i.e., literature relying upon the reworking of *ḥadīths* and *ḥadīth*-oriented material, to mark their specific outlook and thus justify the need for new works: to choose among the existing materials and versions, to include or to exclude and, when needed, to add some words to explain choices. In terms of our topic, to understand the way eschatological works organize their descriptions of paradise by collecting small eschatological units is a way to analyze and describe the literary genre, and thus to observe whether or not the emerging landscape is actually constructed through the literary activity of collecting, collating, and assessing *ḥadīths*.

connected with the creation and fall of Adam and Eve (and cf. another tradition about a tree in paradise: 429–30, no. 263). According to al-Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *al-Bad' wa-l-ta'rikh* i, 183, this tree is indeed the lote-tree of the boundary.

38 See, for example, al-Tirmidhī, *al-jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 681, nos. 2543–4. On the topic see the materials collected and discussed by Canova, Animals in Islamic paradise and hell.

39 As stated by al-Azmeh, Rhetoric for the senses 222. A brief summary of this description of paradise is given in Reinhart, The here and the hereafter 16–7.

40 See in fact also El-Šaleḥ, *La vie future* 35.

Much eschatological material is quoted in *tafsīrs* but it is obviously scattered among the comments on the various verses relating to paradise described above. Only some of the longest commentaries have long parts of relevance, such as, for instance, the work of al-Ṭabarī, who compiled more than ten reports focused upon *firdaws* mentioned in Q 18:107.⁴¹ But in general, exegetes reproduced the material discussed above and tried to identify the various expressions found in the Quran, such as the meaning of *firdaws*, *jannāt* 'adn, and others. The case of *ḥadīth* works is different and more interesting, as is assessing how they organize material and how they treat questions related to paradise.

A major concern in this literature is evidently the theological questions connected to paradise.⁴² Some of the *ḥadīth* collections of the *muṣannaf* type – i.e., those that organize reports according to topic and divide them into various chapters (usually named *kitāb*, lit., “book”) and paragraphs (usually named *bāb*, lit., “chapter”) – mention a description of paradise similar to other debated topics, such as the description of hell, the question of temporary punishment for Muslim sinners in hell, the basin (*ḥawḍ*) of the Prophet, or the meaning of the Quranic term *kawthar* (Q 108:1). For this reason, a major author such as al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) quoted the various sayings on the topic, but did not collect all of them in a specific chapter. In fact he included them in the chapter on the creation of the world, in a short paragraph on “what is reported in description of paradise and that it is created” and later on, in the *Kitāb al-Riqāq*, in another paragraph on the “description of paradise and hell” (*bāb ṣifat al-janna wa-l-nār*)⁴³ where some of the sayings quoted above are also repeated. A similar intent, but one served by a greater interest in the topic is displayed by Muslim (d. 261/875), whose work is among the so-called canonical collections; he dedicates to the topic a single book including more than eighty reports, though most are devoted to moral questions rather than a physical description of the eternal abode.⁴⁴

These two differing positions well represent the relevance of the topic for the collection of sayings of the Prophet: the question to be dealt with is the characteristics/description (*ṣifa*) of paradise and thus most of the collections must touch the topic, though some dedicate more space to it than others, and others, instead, limit their interest to the simple mention of a few major reports.

41 Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān* xvi, 37–8.

42 On these, along with the perceived conceptions of other religions, see Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *al-Baḍʿ wa-l-taʾrīkh* i, 183–200; and El-Saleh, *La vie future* 29–31.

43 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 423–7; vii, 255–61.

44 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 2174–206.

The first type, along with Muslim, is well represented by Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965), who devoted a long chapter to the description of paradise, a chapter that displays a clear organization in the materials included: it begins with reports on its physical description (i.e., on *ṣifat al-janna*), and then addresses moral questions about the inhabitants (*ahl al-janna*) and those who will deserve it.⁴⁵ Similarly, Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) has a specific chapter on paradise (*Kitāb al-Janna*), and al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) also has a chapter on the description of paradise (*Kitāb Ṣifat al-janna*), together with some early *zuhd* works that focus on the topic.⁴⁶ Among later works, al-Haythamī entitled a chapter the “Book of the people of paradise” (*Kitāb Ahl al-janna*).⁴⁷ ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 211/827) includes, in apparently no order, a few reports on the topic in a paragraph in his final long general chapter. Among the others, al-Dārimī (d. 255/869) has a short paragraph in the *Kitāb al-Riqāq*, Ibn Māja (d. 273/887) in the *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, and al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122) in several paragraphs in various chapters in his *ḥadīth* collections.⁴⁸ Needless to say, apart from these works, there are also works in which these reports are not collected in a specific unit, but are included among other topics. Finally, the state of the question is well exemplified by the way the two major later works on forged *ḥādīths* by Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 597/1201) and al-Suyūṭī treat the subject. Ibn al-Jawzī highlights the topic by giving it a specific chapter titled *Kitāb Ṣifat al-janna*, while al-Suyūṭī collects some reports in the chapter on resurrection.⁴⁹

From this cursory portrait it is clear that, as might be expected, the major concern of *ḥadīth* works is theological; the attitude toward paradise relates to the relevance allotted to the topic of the actual existence of paradise and its creation, and this is in accordance with the attitude of each author and with the fact that, whatever the position of a given author, there are Quranic verses and sayings of the Prophet deemed trustworthy such that these reports must be included.

45 Ibn Ḥibbān, *Ṣaḥīḥ* ix, 238–75. This is made explicit also in al-Muttaqī l-Hindī, *Kanz al-‘ummāl* xiv, which includes a chapter on *ṣifat al-janna* (451–64) and then one on *ahl al-janna* (464–514); on this see also al-Bayhaqī, *Kitāb al-Ba‘th wa-l-nushūr* 164f.

46 Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf* viii, 67–90; al-Tirmidhī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* iv, 671–700; see also Hannād b. al-Sarī, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* i, 47–136; Ibn al-Mubārak, *Kitāb al-Zuhd* 424–32 (*Fī ṣifat al-janna*).

47 Al-Haythamī, *Majma‘* x, 396–422.

48 ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Musannaf* xi, 413–21; al-Dārimī, *Sunan* ii, 788–97; Ibn Māja, *Sunan* ii, 1447–53; al-Baghawī, *Maṣābiḥ* ii, 370–6; al-Baghawī, *Sharḥ al-sunna* vii, 530–52 (consisting of various paragraphs in the *Kitāb al-Fitan*).

49 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-Mawḍū‘āt* ii, 423–32; al-Suyūṭī, *al-La‘ālī l-maṣnū‘a* ii, 376–80.

Something more can be argued from eschatological literature, i.e., those collections of traditions on paradise or on related topics such as death, or the end of the world. There are indeed some significant points in this regard: first, we must take into consideration the fact that a number of specific works are dedicated to the description of paradise and mostly titled *Ṣifat al-janna* (Characteristic(s) of paradise). A tendency displayed in the early collection activity is evidenced by the monograph of ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. 238/853) – it is rich in alternative reports (amounting to a total of 317) – and the narrower work by Ibn Abī l-Dunyā (d. 281/894) who did not organize or divide the materials into those offering a proper description of the physical elements in paradise and those details pertaining to the people living therein.⁵⁰ This is the tendency followed, for instance, by Abū Nu‘aym, who includes quite a number of reports (454), but gives canonical and non-canonical reports on the same topics although not in a strict order. And the same is true of the monograph on the subject by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350), who makes theological arguments the main focus of a discussion based on quotations and comments on traditions on the main questions related to the description of paradise.⁵¹ The fact that traditions could be ordered in the way we have discussed above is attested by some other works. Ḍiyā’ al-Dīn al-Maqdisī (d. 643/1245), for instance, collected 212 *ḥadīths* and organized them in a perfectly perceptible order: first the *binā’* (structure) of paradise, starting with gates and stopping with paradise markets, then he proceeded to traditions on the people of paradise. A major eschatological treatment such as the *Nihāya* by Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) organizes the reports in the same way, starting from the gates and then, later on, moving to the traditions dedicated to the food of people in paradise, and coming finally in the long second part to a description of the people of paradise.⁵² Though not so strictly organized, this broad outline is also followed by al-Suyūṭī in his lengthy final part on paradise in his eschatological treatise.⁵³

Some of these tendencies are also displayed in the major work on eschatological traditions, i.e., the *Tadhkira* by al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), who describes paradise after hell and, like some of the sources quoted above, inserts a paragraph between the two when they are discussed in this order, i.e., a chapter on the last to leave hell and to enter paradise. Though quoting various *ḥadīth* reports to substantiate his argument, the work of al-Qurṭubī displays his major

50 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Wasf al-firdaws*; Ibn Abī l-Dunyā, *Ṣifat al-janna*.

51 Abū Nu‘aym, *Ṣifat al-janna*; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ*.

52 Ibn Kathīr, *Nihāya* 433–522.

53 Al-Suyūṭī, *al-Budūr al-sāfira* 375–495.

interest as an exegete. The chapter on paradise covers many pages;⁵⁴ it begins with the Quranic quotations, in particular with the question of the number of paradises – one, two, or several – according to the Quranic data, before reaching the issue of the *ṣifat al-janna*. The organization is, broadly speaking, common, it displays the distinction between the *ṣifa* and the reports of the benefits that await believers, and then it includes paragraphs on what can be considered more in line with *ahl al-janna*.⁵⁵ Though it offers various comments and explanations on the reports, it is evident that al-Qurṭubī follows the Quranic and traditional data to substantiate a description that combines various scattered elements but he does not provide an organized description of how paradise is built. His major concern is to explain the numerous reports and data, giving preference to the exegetical discourse rather than offering a critical discussion of the contents and versions of the traditions.

Many other works on eschatology dedicate chapters and paragraphs to the description of paradise, but they do not change the portrait given thus far. And this picture is no different if we examine other literary genres. Abū l-Shaykh al-Iṣfahānī (d. 396/1006), in his *Kitāb al-ʿAẓama* (The book of the sublime), dedicates a number of pages, including forty-one reports, under the title “mention of [various Quranic] paradises (*jannāt*) and their description.” The emphasis here is on the vastness of the paradise “system” in relation to God’s creation. This is indeed the topic of the work itself. What is more relevant is the first long report, which can be traced back to Wahb b. Munabbih, that lists the various paradises in a sort of cosmology rich in colorful and stereotyped descriptions.⁵⁶ What follows is a collection of *ḥadīths*, partly from canonical works and partly not.

We can add a few words at the end of the discussion of the way *ḥadīth*-oriented works quote and organize traditions and reports on the architecture of paradise. Only a broad division between the proper description of paradise and the traditions on the people destined for paradise can be seen in later works and thus considered the result of an evolution in the literary genre.

54 Al-Qurṭubī, *Kitāb al-Tadhkira* 929–1053.

55 Al-Qurṭubī (*Kitāb al-Tadhkira*) deals with the first people to enter paradise (974f.), *ḥūrīs* (985f.), food for people there (994f.), wives in paradise, birds and animals therein (997f.). At the end another long paragraph discusses the exegesis of some Quranic verses on the topic. In the part on the description of paradise we find the usual paragraphs on the rivers (938f.), trees (944f.), gates (953f.), grades (960f.), rooms (963f.), castles (968f.) etc.

56 Abū l-Shaykh, *Kitāb al-ʿAẓama* 202–5, no. 575.

4 The Tour of Paradise in Late *Mi'rāj* Literature

Apart from *ḥadīth* and exegetical reports and related traditions, the topic of the night journey and the ascension of the Prophet is touched upon in a number of literary works sufficient to constitute a proper literary genre, one which emerged from and was based on these traditional reports but which added to and treated all the early formative elements differently. These later literary works on the *mi'rāj* add further relevant particulars and reflect a clear tendency to literary creativity, remaking, and enlarging. They represent a collection of numerous works dedicated to the *mi'rāj*, works of varying length and mostly unpublished and in some cases reaching hundreds of pages. These works emerged and spread from the fifth/eleventh century onwards, with the ninth/fifteenth and tenth/sixteenth centuries as particularly productive. A look at the manuscript holdings in the National Library (Dār al-Kutub) in Cairo or in Al-Azhar Library shows, for instance, that hundreds of copies preserve some forty or fifty works on the *mi'rāj*, attesting to the relevance of the theme in this period. Thus far, this literature has not received specific attention by researchers on the topic nor have students of literature paid it much attention, apart from the recent studies by Frederick Colby.⁵⁷ It is indeed a significant body of literature, displaying some specific features and attesting to a peculiar evolution in the treatment and discussion of the question of the night journey and ascension and specifically the matter of the ensuing visit to paradise and hell.

I am not going to give a comprehensive description of this literature, but only a survey based upon fifteen works, some published and some other still in manuscript form, ranging from the work by al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) to a few unpublished and anonymous late works on the *mi'rāj*. These works are evidence of different attitudes and are all reworkings of the story which likely relies on rich evidence from early *ḥadīths* and other reports. According to the way authors include and treat the motifs constituting the story some peculiarities of these works and their relation to the preceding traditions and narratives can be ascertained or at least suggested. It is easy to detect a major division between the works considered, one that is quite common in medieval religious literature, namely the division between strictly *ḥadīth*-oriented literature and those works that display a more narrative or even popular character (I use the

57 See above all his dissertation: Colby, *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative*, where other late medieval literature on the *mi'rāj* is discussed in a part that was not included in his monograph (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey*). See also S. Günther's contribution to this publication.

word “popular” for the sake of simplicity and with full caution, knowing the manifold problems inherent in the use of such a term).

In *ḥadīth*-oriented literature, we find a variety of attitudes toward the topic of paradise. Some works give space to the motif of the tour of paradise and others do not. These different attitudes attest once more to the problems related to the description of paradise that derives from Muḥammad’s ascension, in line with the problems already displayed in early reports, but here, where they appear in larger and more elaborate retellings, the narrative setting gives us further information on the question. Here the mention of paradise is a question of quotation or omission: sometimes reports on this are chosen and inserted, sometimes they are omitted. Whatever the different attitudes of these authors might be, *ḥadīth*-oriented works give less space to paradise.

Most typical of this attitude are a number of works, such as the one by Najm al-Dīn al-Ghayṭī (d. 984/1576), the author of the most widely-diffused work on the topic of the ascension of the Prophet, as attested by the many extant manuscripts. His version of the *miʿrāj* mentions the usual references to paradise or paradisaal elements: the gate of paradise (and that of hell) in relation to Adam, the lote-tree of the boundary, the river al-Kawthar. These come just before a short mention of Muḥammad entering paradise and a very short description of what was inside, that which the “eye has not seen, nor ear heard.”⁵⁸ Here it is remarkable that the structure and disposition of elements are similar to that of the more popular narratives which will be described below, but without physical details. He, in a certain way, absorbed the scheme but not the contents. Though quite short, the indication that Muḥammad entered paradise is a clear attestation that *ḥadīth*-oriented works could not but include explicit mention of the tour of paradise. Along the same lines is the work of Abū l-Khaṭṭāb b. Dihya (d. 635/1236) which follows strictly whatever the *ḥadīths* say on the question: paradise was shown to Muḥammad. This is clear in various passages of the work, which does not include any organic narrative describing the tour of paradise, though it obviously accepts that the tour of paradise was an established part of the ascension.⁵⁹ Similarly, Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn al-Barzanjī (d. 1103/1691) includes a brief description of paradise in which he provides a few particulars including the mention of the maiden promised to Zayd b. Ḥāritha.⁶⁰ There is also Muḥammad b. Yusūf al-Ṣāliḥī al-Shāmī (d. 942/1536)

58 Al-Ghayṭī, *Qiṣṣat al-miʿrāj* 20–2; on his treatment of the topic, see Colby, *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative* 383.

59 Ibn Dihya, *al-Ibtihāj fī aḥādīth al-miʿrāj* 23, 43, 49–50, 111, 137, 148–52; on his treatment of the topic, see Colby, *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative* 266.

60 Al-Barzanjī, *al-Isrāʾ wa-l-miʿrāj* 22.

who dedicated three works to the theme. In his *Khulāṣat al-faḍl al-fā'iḳ fī mi'rāj khayr al-khalā'iḳ*, the main intent is exegetical and the discussion centers, for instance, on the location of *jannat al-ma'wā*, in which the "heaven paradise" is found, along with a comprehensive analysis of other related terms and questions. Thus the narrative construction of the whole story is not addressed, nor is there mention of the tour of paradise.⁶¹ In this kind of work the exegetical or the *ḥadīth*-oriented contents are strictly related to theological concerns and a general, though implicit, criticism of popular narratives. Abū l-Irshād al-Ujhūrī (d. 1066/1656), for instance, who produced another long work on the ascension of Muḥammad, is interested first of all in the identification, description, and explanation of the various details and elements, mainly those which are Quranic, scattered throughout the work and not those restricted to the section on paradise.⁶²

Perhaps one exception to this situation is found in the *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* by al-Qushayrī, which is a collection of *ḥadīths* followed by a few chapters dedicated to specific topics related to theological and exegetical issues. In one of these al-Qushayrī explicitly states that one of the purposes of the *mi'rāj* was to make it possible for God to show Muḥammad paradise and hell with his eyes.⁶³ Among those works where scant attention is given to the topic, al-Qushayrī appears as the more sensible author. He includes a report of a short tour of paradise in which Muḥammad enters and leaves along with Gabriel, and a longer one that describes paradise as comprising four paradises with its degrees, rivers, eight gates, and other details.⁶⁴ Colby defined the long narrative that includes this description as a "revised Ibn Ishāq version," rightly pointing out its similarity to the report on the question in Ibn Hishām's *Sīra* and underlining that al-Qushayrī's version adds some popular details.⁶⁵ With regard to the facts of its description, the version of the tour of paradise mentioned in it is more in line with later popular versions since it includes some details as later developed, though not yet fully elaborated. This attests to al-Qushayrī's striking and perhaps unusual interest in the general question and in the various

61 Al-Shāmī, *Khulāṣat al-faḍl al-fā'iḳ*, cf. 118, 172, 178, 183, 184, 266, 284, 343.

62 Al-Ujhūrī, *al-Nūr al-wahhāj* 149, 151, 191, 223, 280, 299–304, 315.

63 Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* 26, 69, cf. 108.

64 Ibid., 51–3, 61–2.

65 Colby, *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative* 236–7. This is indeed the same report which al-Samarrai, *The theme of the ascension in mystical writings* 247–8, considers as probably interpolated into the work because of the "contradictions between this and what al-Qushayrī states in another part of the work" (247). And this is mainly because of the "incredible and fanciful description of Heaven and Hell" (248).

details found outside the “canonical” sayings. In fact, though basing his discussion on the *ḥadīth* literature and further introducing those transmitted by Anas b. Mālik as the most sound, he adds some popular narratives.

Instead, what we called above popular retellings are for the most part not strictly *ḥadīth*-oriented narratives, and though they are no doubt based upon the contents of traditional reports they do not simply quote them, rather they rework them in a continuous narrative setting. Later narratives, though displaying differing attitudes and adding versions of the same motifs, share some common features. First of all those mentioning a tour of paradise usually include long treatments of the topic. This body of literature states simply that Muḥammad entered paradise and saw many wondrous things; these things were all seen by the eye of the Prophet. This is one major common point in the later narrations of the *mi'rāj*: the architecture of paradise appears as the Prophet reviews what he saw while proceeding through paradise: prodigies are enhanced and described as something never before seen or never heard of, yet encountered during Muḥammad's procession. That is, they are given in specific, circumscribed spatial dimensions. As a result of this, a set of narrative possibilities emerges to introduce these descriptions.

A key work in this process of enriching and enhancing the narrative stabilization of motifs constituting the *mi'rāj* story is no doubt the differing versions on the *mi'rāj* attributed to the mysterious Abū l-Ḥasan al-Bakrī (fl. sixth/twelfth century?). While the short version of his *Ḥadīth al-mi'rāj* includes only a brief visit to paradise, one which states that Gabriel took Muḥammad to paradise and that he saw there various castles including the one destined for the first four caliphs, the longer version dedicates more space to the topic.⁶⁶ Though not as long as those in Ibn 'Abbās' versions, here we find that Gabriel comes with the Prophet to the gate of paradise and a voice from inside asks who is at the gate. What is peculiar here, especially in relation to the other versions discussed below, is that the voice is not yet identified. In other versions, such as the Ms. Cairo Dār al-Kutub, Ta'riḫ Taymūr 205 (Anonymous, *Qīṣṣat al-mi'rāj*), the voice is simply identified as belonging to the guardian (*khāzin*) of paradise.⁶⁷ Someone answered and opened the gate, then Muḥammad was

66 Al-Bakrī, *Ḥadīth al-mi'rāj* (short version) 177a; al-Bakrī, *Ḥadīth al-mi'rāj* (long version) 88a–89a. On the relevance of al-Bakrī's texts expanding narremes of the story of the ascension, see Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey* 128.

67 Anonymous, *Qīṣṣat al-mi'rāj*, Ms. Cairo Dār al-Kutub, Ta'riḫ Taymūr 205, fols. 67b–71a on the tour of paradise. In this version Muḥammad enters paradise and first describes its floor, more white than milk, with prodigious particulars. Tents, castles, rooms, and rivers are listed according to what the Prophet sees while entering; and there is a large space to

brought by Gabriel to see castles and other buildings, rivers, and trees in great number.

The same or similar or even expanded details in the motifs included in the tour of paradise are further reworked by the various other sources. One major feature, the fact that the description is given by Muḥammad while traveling through paradise, has been already mentioned. One other useful example of the dynamics at work in the elaboration of the tour of paradise which offers something new can be found in the formulas introducing the description of paradise. While the work by al-Bakrī introduces Muḥammad and Gabriel through the unnamed figure answering and opening the gate, a number of other works identify this anonymous agent as the angel Riḍwān, the custodian of paradise; his is the voice they heard, who opens the gate and then escorts Muḥammad on this tour. The so-called "Modern Standard"⁶⁸ version of the *mi'rāj* ascribed to the Prophet's cousin Ibn 'Abbās (d. ca. 68/687–8) and its related versions include this detail. The longer description of paradise among the versions ascribed to Ibn 'Abbās is given in the *Mi'rāj al-nabī*. Here Gabriel accompanies Muḥammad to the gate of paradise and calls to Riḍwān who bids them enter and then, following Gabriel's order, takes Muḥammad by the hand and shows him paradise. What follows, then, is a version of the various details giving substance to the prodigious contents of paradise, in line with elements from traditions and other literature: cupolas, gates, eight hundred million castles, *ḥūrīs*, trees, and rivers, all before arriving at the explicit Sunni

visit which is further enhanced by a shift in the narration when it is stated that Gabriel brings him [Muḥammad] inside to go around (*yaṭūfu*) paradise. Here, as in the manuscript above, a long description of the *ḥūrīs* underlines the benefits awaiting the believers, while at the end of this long section, Gabriel opens the gate of a tent and further shows him prodigious elements, so that Muḥammad asks him to let him in paradise.

- 68 The so-called Modern Standard version is what Colby (see in particular his *Constructing an Islamic ascension narrative*) calls the version that has been printed several times and diffused in modern Arab world. A comprehensive study of the origins of this edition, its relation to the extant manuscripts, and its various versions, thus a combination of textual criticism and bibliographical studies, has yet to be undertaken. It appears that this version was first printed at the beginning of the twentieth century in Damascus or Cairo, and from there taken and printed in many Arab and Muslim countries, but mostly in Egypt. It became a sort of major version of the story of the *mi'rāj*, mostly discussed and criticized by authors of modern works on the topic, and translated in other languages (Turkish, English, Spanish, and most recently also Italian). The recent publication or discussion of other versions of this work (for example, Ibn 'Abbās, *Mi'rāj al-nabī*; the relation of this version to the Modern Standard printed version is discussed in Tottoli, *Two Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 708–9) indicates clearly that the Modern Standard edition was one of the versions circulating under the name of Ibn 'Abbās.

characterization that emerges from the list of the four castles which Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, and ‘Alī (the first four “rightly guided caliphs”) are destined for.⁶⁹ The so-called Modern Standard version contains the same introductory role for Riḍwān but omits the second half of the description; the longer version introduces the gates and what is written on them.⁷⁰ A work relying on Ibn ‘Abbās’ long version, such as the Ms. Cairo Dār al-Kutub, Majmū‘a 9684 (Anonymous, *al-Mi‘rāj al-sharīf*) follows the short description of the Modern Standard version but adds quotations of some *ḥadīth* reports which no doubt served the anonymous author to enhance the trustworthiness of his narration.⁷¹ The various versions of this work, such as those attributed to al-Bakrī, are indeed significant case studies that show, better than works by different authors, how the various motifs and the tour of paradise were reworked.

The introductory detail in which Riḍwān appears can be also found in the story of the *mi‘rāj* written by Mūsā b. Ḥājji Ḥusayn al-Iznīqī (d. 833/1430). Here Riḍwān also leads Muḥammad to a visual perception of the eternal abode, full of prodigies but now in a comprehensive picture. In this case, specific dimensions are given for the wall of paradise: it is seventy years (of walking) wide. Then the narration of Ibn ‘Abbās’ versions is followed, or at least the clear reference to the list of castles, rivers, and trees, and further also we find the pro-Sunni mention of the four *rāshidūn*.⁷² Along these lines there is also Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Mālikī’s unpublished and long *Kitāb Mi‘rāj al-nabī* which collects and repeats the various details. Muḥammad and Gabriel knock on the gate of paradise and Riḍwān opens and bids them enter; then Gabriel tells Riḍwān that God ordered him to show Muḥammad paradise. The visual perception of paradise is enhanced by the dimensions given: the length of the walls of paradise are one thousand years of walking, and, in another passage, seventy parasangs; the gates are listed with the writing that adorns them. The usual prodigies follow: castles, rivers, horses, tents, trees, various animals, and finally the *ḥūrīs*, their creation, then the names of the eight paradises with castles, trees, and fruits in each. And after all this Muḥammad even asks Gabriel

69 Ibn ‘Abbās, *Mi‘rāj al-nabī*, ed. Ṣalībā, 291–8.

70 Ibn ‘Abbās, *al-Isrā‘ wa-l-mi‘rāj* 40–3; this printed version abruptly interrupts the narration; it adds a few lines on the rivers and then comes suddenly to the descent to earth.

71 Anonymous, *al-Mi‘rāj al-sharīf*, Ms. Cairo Dār al-Kutub, Majmū‘a 9684, 27b–30b. This work is also preserved in Anonymous, *al-Mi‘rāj*, Ms. Riyadh King Saud University 7514, see in part. 30b–33b.

72 Al-Iznīqī, *Kitāb al-Mi‘rāj*, fols. 19b–21b. On the same line we also find Zayn al-Dīn (d. 1002/1594), who follows Ibn ‘Abbās including the introduction of Riḍwān, see Zayn al-Dīn, *al-Najm al-wahhāj* 24b–25b.

to allow him to stay there.⁷³ This feature is further enhanced in one other version which we mention as our last example. Ms. Cairo Dār al-Kutub, Ta'rikh 748 (Anonymous, *Qiṣṣat al-mi'rāj*), introduces the tour of paradise with Riḍwān, and states that he (Riḍwān), Muḥammad, and Gabriel walked through paradise. After the names of the eight paradises, he adds that in paradise there are towns (*madā'in*) built with high walls (*aswār*) with castles inside, along with tents and domes. One further significant feature, also attested in other versions, is the description of the wall of paradise, which is made up of bricks not only of gold and silver, but also of gemstone and jacinth, and which is ninety thousand parasangs long.⁷⁴ Something similar can be found in other versions which, though not so explicit in the visual description of paradise, nevertheless, dedicate a long chapter to the vision of paradise.

It is interesting to note that the various *mi'rāj* works show how the motif of Riḍwān is the result of a specific development of a detail introduced in later reports. As in the case of al-Bakrī introduced above, some versions display a sort of middle version: Muḥammad comes to the gate of paradise, knocks and an unnamed angel answers so that Gabriel and Muḥammad enter. Here the angel is not identified as Riḍwān.⁷⁵ The most significant work attesting to how this motif emerged and was inserted into narratives, is the well-known *Book of the Ladder*, containing a long description of paradise.⁷⁶ It is indeed a double description of paradise thus evidencing how the translator from the Arabic (the Jew Abraham) relied on differing sources and combined some of them to formulate a new text on the *mi'rāj*. In the case of the tour of paradise, there is first a description starting from the wall with many details that emerge from Muḥammad's questions to Gabriel. The rivers, the seven (*sic*) paradises and their walls, towns, castle, *ḥūrīs*, food, the *ṭubā* tree (chaps. XXX–XLIV) are all mentioned. Then Muḥammad meets Riḍwān (chaps. XLV–XLVIII) who takes him by the hand through all the paradises with their rivers, trees, fruits, and

73 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Mālikī, *Kitāb Mi'rāj al-nabī* fols. 65b–77b. Probably similar to this work is *al-Sirāj al-wahhāj fi laylat al-isrā' wa-qiṣṣat al-mi'rāj* by Muḥammad Ḥalām al-Bābīlī (Aleppo n.d.) used by Bencheikh, *Le voyage nocturne de Mahomet*, in his reworking of the story (81–119); it contains – according to Bencheikh – a long chapter on the description of paradise.

74 Anonymous, *Qiṣṣat al-mi'rāj*, Ms. Cairo Dār al-Kutub, Ta'rikh 748, fols. 12b–16a. This is only a small sample from later mostly anonymous works dedicated to the topic which display the same features. A comprehensive inquiry into the rich collections of manuscripts is necessary to establish how paradise is described in *mi'rāj* literature.

75 See on this regard Scherberger, *Das Mi'rāğnāme* 105–6.

76 Cerulli, *Il "Libro della scala"* 101–45, nos. XXX–XLVIII.

women, in a narrative reprise of the visual review of the main features of paradise typical of later *mi'rāj* works.⁷⁷

But the motif of Riḍwān opening the gate and showing Muḥammad paradise is just a small sample of how an original element emerged and was introduced into the motif and thus the whole story. Other details give a further taste of novelties introduced by later versions. For instance, the well-known description of the wall as made of golden and silver bricks was attested in sound *ḥadīths* and from there repeated in all *mi'rāj* literary traditions and works. Some of these versions add that along with golden and silver bricks, there are also gemstones, jacinth, and green chrysolite,⁷⁸ or pearl, red jacinth, and green chrysolite, or other similar lists.⁷⁹ The point is clear: the *ḥadīth* report establishes the content of the description of the wall, and later reports enhance the details of it, adding new particulars that deviate somewhat from the literal contents of the sayings of Muḥammad though following the same general drift. Further particulars could be added; these not only enrich the description with prodigious details but also add others with a view to giving a more factual verisimilar description, when, for instance, some sources state that the mortar (*tīn*) between the bricks is musk. The fantastic dimension of the prodigies

77 The two narratives are evidently taken from two different sources. Apart from the detail of Riḍwān, the first description is evidently remade by the translator who underlines specific points in Muslim beliefs, as displayed through the question-answer construction of the narrative. The second seems to be a tour of paradise, including Riḍwān, which follows those described above and bears the signs of a more integrated narration. It is interesting to note that similar variants of the role of Riḍwān and the constructions of narrative can be seen in Aljamiado literature. Though some versions do not include this motif, others do and give a visual description similar to the popular Arabic narratives just discussed, see for example, Anonymous, *Ḥadīš de cuando subió el-annabī Muḥammad a los cielos*, Ms. Madrid Junta 9, fols. 31a–33b. I am indebted to Juan Carlos Villaverde for providing me with a transcript of this manuscript taken from a PhD dissertation (Laureano García, *Tradiciones musulmanas* 232–6) and for a number of other Aljamiado manuscripts including differing versions of apparently the same dynamics and elaboration of the motifs of the tour of paradise, quite similar to the Arabic sources but also with the introduction of original details. The question requires further inquiry to enrich the knowledge of the Muslim *mi'rāj* literature and, above all, underline the relevance of Aljamiado testimonies for the study of Muslim literature and Islamic studies in general. On Aljamiado versions of the *mi'rāj*, see Rueter, *Aljamiado narratives of Muhammad's ascension*.

78 See for example al-Mālikī, *Kitāb Mi'rāj al-nabī* fol. 68a.

79 Al-Iznīqī, *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* fol. 20a; see for example already in al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* 51–2: bricks of gold, silver, pearl, red jacinth, green gemstone, yellow jacinth, and green chrysolite; cf. Anonymous, *Ḥadīš de cuando subió el-annabī Muḥammad a los cielos*, Ms. Madrid Junta 9, fol. 31a: gold, silver, and pearl.

described is enriched along with the addition of details pertaining to human experience and as such constituting a sort of “domesticated” imagination.

Along with this, the visual landscape encountered by this prophetic entrance to paradise and his traveling through it with Gabriel or with Gabriel and Riḍwān is the most significant novelty introduced by the *mi'rāj* literature, a novelty which offers a distinctive elaboration of the structure of paradise. The tour of paradise in late *mi'rāj* narratives represents a further step in the collection and elaboration of the description of paradise, different from that offered by *ḥadīth*-oriented literature and, no less relevant, from the testimonies of eschatological literature. In fact, a narrative reconstruction of paradise is given in some other texts. The anonymous *Kitāb al-ʿAzama* published recently by K. Abu-Deeb,⁸⁰ but known under different titles with differing versions, such as *Kitāb al-ʿAjāʾib wa-l-gharāʾib* (The marvels of unfamiliar things) ascribed to ʿAbdallāh b. Salām (d. 43/663),⁸¹ for instance, includes a narrative description of paradise. Notwithstanding this and although given in a continuous narration, this long description includes mostly if not only particulars taken from the Quran and *ḥadīths*: paradise is under the throne, there are several gardens with different names, there are rivers, tents, walls, castles – all of them described with numerous prodigious particulars in line with what is already known from traditional literature.⁸² It is really a *ḥadīth*-oriented description of paradise without ever quoting specific *ḥadīths* and without the comprehensive description of the ascension of Muḥammad.

5 Conclusions

A few conclusions can be drawn after this review of traditions on paradise and the *mi'rāj* literature. The Quran and *ḥadīth* literature do not contain an all-inclusive description of paradise, though both sources mention many physical details, with the purpose, usually, of emphasizing the marvelous elements which are in paradise or for the moral message vis-à-vis the people destined for it. Some *mi'rāj* traditions and *ḥadīths* include the mention and a limited description of paradise, mostly in accord with what is found in other sayings

80 Abu-Deeb, *The imagination unbound*; he simply revised and published a text from a manuscript in Oxford, Bodleian Library (Hunt 353).

81 See for example Ms. Gotha A745. On this work, see the description by Raven, *A Kitāb al-ʿazama*.

82 See Abu-Deeb, *The imagination unbound* 141–60. Wim Raven is working on a critical edition published and updated on-line: see <http://kitabalazama.wordpress.com>.

of the Prophet. But in general, these do not allot much space to the question, generally less than to the description of hell and sinners. Notwithstanding this, the inclusion of the mention of paradise and hell is attested early in *mi'rāj* traditions, though later canonical collections came to include only one long version and a few details of Muḥammad's visit to paradise during his ascension to heaven. Some hypotheses may be suggested to help explain this. Most probably the relevance of the story of the night journey and ascension of the Prophet and its contents prompted, early on, the inclusion of eschatological details so as to build a proper apocalypse connected with the figure of Muḥammad. Such an apocalypse would require a vision of paradise and hell, in line with contemporary cultural and religious expectations.⁸³ This, however, came to constitute a problem, and, especially with regard to the vision of paradise which, for theological reasons, was related to the problem of the actual existence of paradise and its location. On a second level, other problems arose in regard to the related question of the meeting with God. For this reason canonical collections of *ḥadīth* most probably preferred not to include longer reports on the *mi'rāj* and rarely mention eschatological details.

There is another factor which could have prompted the inclusion or at least mention of the visit to paradise and hell. This factor relates to popular taste, which was no doubt much interested in eschatological details, a taste which the authors and compilers of our sources may have sought to address directly. Other recent works on the *mi'rāj* literature underlined the function of some late literary versions as proselytizing texts aimed to inspire or prompt conversion to Islam.⁸⁴ This also could have been a function of these reports: the more complete the description of the Prophet's apocalypse, the more entertaining would be the resulting portrait of the Prophet Muḥammad, which would then correspond more closely to existing Near and Middle Eastern religious beliefs and literary motifs. Such a context helps us understand how the insertion of eschatological traditions into early versions of the *mi'rāj* reports later came to be handled with care for theological reasons.

Later on, the picture changes. It seems clear that after the fifth/eleventh century, and mostly in the ninth/fifteenth and the tenth/sixteenth centuries,

83 Or said differently: "the night journey and ascension discourse became widely circulated and discussed partially because it was an entertaining tale, but also partially because of what was at stake, namely the empowerment that one gains by controlling the content of otherworldly secrets." Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey* 166.

84 See for example Gruber, *The Prophet Muḥammad's ascension* 108–239; Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's night journey* 172–3; Scherberger, *The Chagatay Mi'rājnāma* attributed to Ḥakīm Süleymān Ata 87–8.

the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet became the topic of many literary works. These works have not been the subject of particular interest by researchers on this topic. Notwithstanding, they are relevant as a distinct body of literature since they attest to a further elaboration of the story of Muḥammad's ascent to heaven. Along with this, as regards a specific topic such as the description of paradise, they attest to the emergence and insertion or exclusion of a comprehensive description of paradise granting a sort of visual definition that complies more with the need for a simple, clear-cut, and popular image in place of the simple repetition of well-known Quranic and *ḥadīth* material. The many *ḥadīth*-oriented works written in the same centuries bear witness that some other authors tried to counterbalance this tendency and to impose a reconstruction of paradise more in line with traditional reports.

Thus some works avoided even the mere mention of the vision of paradise, let alone prolonged treatment of the description of the *mi'rāj*. Some others offered something more, thus showing their own characteristic attitude toward the topic and underlining a specific stand in relation to the question of the function of paradise during the ascension of the prophet. Needless to say this is not only related to the question of eschatology in *mi'rāj* narratives, but as already emphasized in studies by Colby, it can be seen at work with regard to all the topics or better, as Colby himself has it, the various narremes constituting the story of the ascension. In this regard the most significant aspect of some of these later remakings of the story of the ascension of Muḥammad is that they go a step further in the description of paradise during the *mi'rāj* and give a first notion of the interconnected and harmonious architecture of paradise, i.e., a full description of its physical dimensions and landscape.

At this point there is only one thing to ponder, and this is why all this happened in these later times. This is not an easy question to answer. The study of many other examples from different genres has recently underlined how literature after the fifth/eleventh century displays new sensibilities and a distinct development in the elaboration of traditional elements. The case at hand could be another one of these, further strengthened by the fact that Quranic and traditional accounts had already paved the way for an organic description of paradise as a garden or an orchard. Whatever the reason and the historical motivations behind the evolution of the eschatological description of paradise and its insertion in *mi'rāj* narratives, in the above we have seen a clear testimony to the richness of Muslim literary elaboration in the late Middle Ages. The importance of eschatology and of the ascension of the Prophet and the rich early literary portrayals did not stop later authors from reworking existing narrations and creating new literary elaborations whatever theological or exegetical concerns may have prompted them to write anew on these subjects.

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An Islamic *Paradiso* in a Medieval Christian Poem? Dante's *Divine Comedy* Revisited

Samar Attar

*God is the Light
Of the heaven and the earth,
The parable of His Light
Is as if there were a Niche
And within it a Lamp
The Lamp enclosed in Glass
The glass as it were
A brilliant star
Lit from a blessed Tree,
An olive, neither of the East
Nor of the West,
Whose Oil is well-nigh
Luminous,
Though fire scarce touched it;
Light upon Light!
God doth guide
Whom He will
To His Light.*

Q 24:35¹



In his article “Dante and Islam” which was published in 1973, Sir Richard William Southern, a notable English medieval historian, argued that

Medieval Europe was extremely resistant to cultural influences except in the single area in which Islam acted as a link with ancient Greek thought.

¹ Ali (trans.), *Kur'an*.

Nothing that has a specifically Islamic inspiration took root in the west. The west had enough of its own. That was all . . . [Miguel Asín Palacios] was wrong to think that Dante's mind especially was filled with images drawn from Islamic sources . . . [Dante] was a wholly western man.²

Southern's argument is certainly not unique in this regard. It may represent the attitude of many western scholars who believe that the West differs from other civilizations not only in the way it has developed but also in the distinctive character of its values and institutions. Westerners are indebted only to other Westerners. They constitute a unique breed of human beings.³ Unfortunately, once the distinction between the Orient and the Occident is accepted as a starting point in research, the notion of the encounter between Islamic civilization and the West, particularly in the medieval period, is either marginalized, or ignored.

Asín Palacios was a Catholic priest and Professor of Arabic at the University of Madrid. In 1919 he published a monumental book entitled *La Escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (Muslim Eschatology and the Divine Comedy) in which he traced the influence and religious thought of medieval Islam on Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Asín considered Muḥammad's nocturnal journey and ascension from Jerusalem to the throne of God as the basic models that had influenced the great Florentine poet. But he also referred to other Muslim journeys and traced in particular the influence of some Neoplatonic mystics, such as the Spanish Muslim Ibn 'Arabī on Dante's allegory. The book was abridged and translated into English by Harold Sutherland and published in London in 1926, and then reprinted in 1968. Although there was heated argument among scholars at the time concerning the validity of Asín's thesis and the emergence of a trickle of studies since then, there is no doubt that Dante's scholars have largely ignored these claims and continued to teach and write on Dante either as the perfect embodiment of Christian Western culture, or as the ultimate rebel against religious authority and the corruption of the pastors of the church.⁴ But in either case, Dante remains a unique 'western man,' absolutely oblivious to foreign Islamic ideas during his troubled age.

2 Southern, Dante and Islam 143–4.

3 The most prominent advocate of this position is Samuel P. Huntington in his book *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*.

4 See for instance what Harold Bloom writes on Dante's *Divine Comedy* in his book, *The western canon*. Bloom criticizes American professors who teach the *Comedy* as something religious. "The theological Dante of modern American scholarship," he observes, "is a blend of Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and their companions. This is a doctrinal Dante, so absolutely

My aim in this paper is twofold: first, to show that Dante may have used other Islamic sources beside the ones mentioned by Asín, with special reference to Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* (composed most probably between 1177 and 1182); and second, to explore why the majority of Western scholars still turn a blind eye to the issue of Islamic and Arabic influence on the culture of Christian Europe.

It is true that Dante lived in Florence from the year he was born in 1265 to January 1301 when he was exiled, and as a result became a wandering intellectual till he died in Ravenna, Italy, in 1321. But the very air he breathed wherever he lived was heavily impregnated with the influences of Islamic culture. The university professors in Europe, the clergy, regardless of their religious order, and the emerging European intellectuals were all engaged in reading, discussing, or contesting Islamic ideas not only in philosophy, but also in literature, theology, and science. Many Arabic and Islamic sources became available in Latin translations. Thanks to Alfonso the Wise (1221–84) King of Castile and Leon from 1252, many Arabic books were translated into Spanish, then Latin. But other sources were transmitted orally for decades. Europeans used them without even being aware of their origin most of the time. It is true, as critics maintain, that Dante had European models for his various books, but these models were not enough to fully enrich his imagination. During his lifetime, Dante would have had many opportunities to get to know firsthand or through friends and mentors a variety of Arabic-Islamic sources for eschatological, literary, philosophical, or mystic journeys to heaven and hell. In 1264 the Italian Bonaventura of Siena made a French and Latin translation of the Prophet Muḥammad's nocturnal journey to the throne of God from a Spanish version, which was based on an Arabic manuscript. A copy of this translation is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale. Another entitled *Liber scale Machemeti* can be found in the Vatican Library. R. W. Southern dismisses the idea that the manuscript had any possible influence on Dante. He argues that even if it

came into Dante's hands he would no doubt have thought it a very poor thing. Yet in its general plan of Heaven and Hell it is a good deal nearer

learned and so amazingly pious that he can be fully apprehended only by his American professors... An alternative to the Eliot-Singleton-Freccero Dante emerges, a prophetic poet rather than a theological allegorist" (Bloom, *Western canon* 78, 80). Consult also Barolin, *Undivine*; Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans*; Scott, *Understanding Dante*. Arabists, or Islamists, such as Max Scherberger (*Das Mi'rāḡname* 26–31), might still stir up the issue of Dante's debt to Islamic sources but Dante's scholars are largely oblivious to the argument of their Orientalist colleagues.

to the plan of the *Divine Comedy* than any existing Christian vision. It has more order, more discussion, more geographical exactitude, and though highly inartistic, it is 'literary' in the sense that no Christian reader would be inclined to take the journey as a genuine revelation.⁵

Of course, this manuscript is only one version of Muḥammad's nocturnal journey.⁶ There are many more and richer versions, but perhaps still not discovered in European languages. This does not mean that they did not exist. The topic was of extreme interest, particularly to Christian theologians who were engaged at the time in translating the Quran and everything related to the Muslim prophet.⁷ It was the Spaniard Paulo Alvaro (died about 862) who once complained that his

fellow Christians delight in the poems and romances of the Arabs; they study the works of Muhammadan theologians and philosophers, not in order to refute them, but to acquire a correct and elegant Arabic style. Where today can a layman be found who reads the Latin commentaries on the Holy Scriptures? Alas! The young Christians who are most conspicuous for their talents have no knowledge of any literature of language save Arabic: they read and study avidly Arabic books; they amass whole libraries of them at vast cost, and they everywhere sing the praises of Arabic lore.⁸

This comment, which was made in ninth-century Cordoba, Spain, could be applied to a certain extent over the following centuries, and to the years in which Dante lived in Italy. We have no proof that Dante knew Arabic, but we do know from his works that he must have been very familiar with some aspects of Arabic and Persian poetry. He certainly did not learn his craft as a poet only from Ovid, or other Western masters, but also from the infidels, his own enemies, and the troubadours who were deeply influenced by them. Even his

5 Southern, *Dante and Islam* 141.

6 The narrative of Muḥammad's ascension developed from the first verse of Sura 17 of the Quran. The prophet was carried from Mecca to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. It was the Sufis who used this verse along with other stories on Muḥammad's journey to create numerous legends dating back to the ninth century.

7 The first translation of the Quran into Latin was commissioned by Peter the Venerable and was done by the Englishman Robert of Ketton in the first half of the twelfth century. Other translations followed.

8 Alvaro, *Indiculus luminosus*. Quoted in English by Desmond, *Early Islam* 143. Cf. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* 515–6.

greatest creation, Beatrice, may be linked to the long series of exalted women in Arabic history and literature. Dante's familiarity with Islamic philosophy, particularly the daring philosophical notions about the significance of reason and the irrelevant role of conventional religions, the Illuministic school, and theories in optics, astrology, and astronomy is very evident in his work, but particularly in the *Comedy* that was called *Divine* some 200 years after his death.

Thus Southern's thesis, which confidently asserts that no specific Islamic inspiration has ever taken root in the West because the West has enough native inspiration of its own, must be carefully scrutinized. People of all races and religions have always lived in a global village, throughout history. Ideas, or images, or songs, or poems may not have traveled as quickly, or on such a large scale as they do nowadays, but nevertheless they did manage to infiltrate other places. There were always enough travelers, merchants, missionaries, diplomats, scholars, students, prisoners of war, and warriors to carry these ideas, or tunes to distant shores. No nation can totally resist the cultural influences of other nations.

1 Historical Background

1.1 *The Crusades and Dante's Ancestor: 1097–1291*

Whether as merchants, or as Christian warriors, the Italians participated in the crusades from the outset. On 26 November 1095 Pope Urban called the faithful from the city of Clarendon, in the southeast of France to wrest the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem from the Muslims. Most participants of the first crusade who rushed to please the Pope were Franks and Normans. On 15 July 1099 Jerusalem fell. Horrible massacres took place there.⁹ Dante assigns Duke Godfrey, the commander-in-chief of the Christian armies who was crowned King of Jerusalem, to the abode of the just in Canto XVIII along with Robert Guiscard, Duke of Apulia and Calabria who triumphed over the Saracens and Greeks in Sicily and southern Italy.¹⁰ But Dante highlights the second crusade in particular in his *Paradise*, because a certain ancestor of his had joined the troops led by Conrad III of Germany and Louis VII of France between 1147 and 1149. In Canto XV where the warriors of God are to be found, Cacciaguida, Dante's ancestor, describes his own death.

9 For historical information on the crusades consult Runciman, *History*; Maalouf, *Arab eyes*; Mayer, *Crusades*.

10 Dante, *Comedy: Paradise*, Canto XVIII, 46–48.

Later, I rode at Emperor Conrad's side,
 Who belted me among his chosen knights,
 My service left him so well satisfied;
 And in his train I marched to foreign fights
 Against those infidels that, through the sin
 Of the Chief Pastors, have usurped your rights.

There was I reft by the vile Saracen
 From this deceitful world whose vanities
 Win many souls and ruin all they win;

And came from martyrdom unto this peace.¹¹

In sum, Dante's *Paradiso* is heavily populated with warriors against Islam and Muslims not only during the crusades, but in earlier times as well. Roland and Charlemagne soar like falcons in the abode of the just. Both are venerated as the champions of Christendom and the enemies of Islam in the second half of the eighth century. William, Count of Orange, known as Guillaume au Curb Nes and Reynald, or Reneward, called "Rainouart au tinel," a converted Saracen, also feature in this paradise. Both men are important figures in the medieval French narrative epics.

Then Roland on the track of Charlemayne
 Sped and my keen eye following – as it does
 The flight of one's own falcon – watched the twain;

After, my sight was drawn along the cross
 By William, Reynald, and Duke Godfrey – three
 Fires, and a fourth, which Robert Guiscard was;

Whereon the soul that had discoursed with me,
 Moving and mingling with those myriads bright,
 Showed me his art of heavenly minstrelsy.¹²

On the contrary, men who tarry in their fight against Saracen and carry on wars at home with Christians, or play the role of evil counselors in this matter are placed in hell. Count Guido da Montefeltro, a Lord of the Romagna, refers to

11 Ibid., Canto xv, 139–148.

12 Ibid., Canto xviii, 43–51.

the loss of Acre and accuses Pope Boniface VIII of not devoting his complete resources to the recovery of the important city-port.¹³

1.2 *Norman Sicily: 1060–1250*

Although the relationship between Europe and the Arab-Muslim world was very tense during the twelfth century as a consequence of the crusades, Norman Sicily continued to play an important role as a transmitter of Arabic culture. The Norman kings adopted methods of toleration, almost unknown at that period, in ruling a population composed of races differing in language, customs, and religion. Greek, Latin, and Arabic were used in official circles simultaneously. Arab and Muslim scholars thrived in the kingdom. Trade between the island and the Muslim world was at its peak. Although Jerusalem was recaptured by Saladin (Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn al-Ayyūbī) in July 1187, that is, seventy-eight years before Dante's birth, Norman Sicily continued to act as a medium for the transmission of ancient and medieval learning not only to Italy, but also to the rest of Europe.¹⁴

Only fifteen years before Dante's birth Syrian and Iraqi scholars flourished in the court of the semi-Oriental Emperor, Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1215–50), who ruled both Sicily and Germany and held the title of emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. Arabic was one of his official languages. He himself was able to read and write Arabic. Philosophers, mathematicians, astronomers, writers, poets, singers, dancers, craftsmen, and translators filled his court. The twice-excommunicated emperor also patronized Provençal troubadours. In 1224 he founded the University of Naples, the first such university established by a definite charter in Europe. In it he deposited hundreds of Arabic manuscripts in different fields, some of which he had his own translators render into Latin. Aristotle and Ibn Rushd (Latinized: Averroes) were taught there. Thomas Aquinas, who was later to influence Dante's work, was a student at the university for six years. One of the most prominent translators for Frederick II was Michael Scot, a scholar who made a Latin summary of Aristotle's biological and zoological works for the emperor from Arabic; he also served as the astrologer of the court. Dante condemns him with the magicians and soothsayers in the

13 It was then the Prince of the New Pharisees drew * his sword and marched upon the Lateran – * and not against the Saracen or the Jew, * for every man that stood against his hand * was a Christian soul: not one had warred on Acre, * nor been a trader in the Sultan's land. Dante Aligheri, *Comedy: Inferno*, Canto xxvii, Circle Eight: Bolgia Eight, 82–87.

14 For historical information on Norman Sicily consult Hitti, *History of the Arabs*.

Inferno and accuses him of mastering every trick of magic fraud.¹⁵ Frederick II also maintained some relationships with an Andalusian Murcian by the name Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq b. Sabʿīn (1217–69), who wrote *Asrār al-ḥikma al-mashriqiyya*, or *The Mysteries of Illuministic Philosophy*. The emperor wished to know from this prominent Sufi, who was residing at the time at Ceuta in Morocco, something about the eternity of matter, the nature and immortality of the soul, the object of theology, and other such issues. In Sicily Ibn Sabʿīn's answers became known as *al-Ajwiba ‘an al-as’ila al-ṣiqilliyya* (The responses to the Sicilian questions) and were given to the emperor between 1232 and 1242. The subject matter would have greatly interested and perhaps was even known to Dante when he began writing his *Comedy*.

On the political and commercial fronts, Frederick II kept his interest in the world of Islam, particularly through his strong ties with the sultan of Egypt, al-Kāmil Muḥammad (1218–38), a nephew of Saladin. With the help of the latter, Frederick II even reclaimed Jerusalem after his marriage with the heiress, Isabelle of Brienne. He went on a crusade in 1228 against the will of the pope, Gregory IX, who had previously excommunicated him. The peace treaty signed at Jaffa on 18 February 1229 between al-Kāmil and his friend Frederick II was supposed to help both rulers: Al-Kāmil would have more time to settle his internal and external affairs, while Frederick II would enhance his reputation in Europe. On 18 March 1229 the emperor walked into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and put the crown on his own head since the patriarch refused to crown him as king of Jerusalem. But the treaty angered both Christians and Muslims. The pope in Rome condemned it.¹⁶

Dante placed Frederick II in *The Inferno* with the ‘Heretics.’¹⁷ For him the emperor was reputed to be an Epicurean who was solely interested in temporal

15 The other there, * the one beside him with the skinny shanks * was Michael Scott, who mastered every trick * of magic fraud, a prince of mountebanks. Dante Aligheri, *Comedy: Inferno*, Canto XX, 114–117.

Scot is a scholar of the first half of the thirteenth century. He was from the British Isles, though his exact place of birth is not known. His reputation as a wizard entered into the myths and legends of Europe, particularly in the border area of Scotland. He learned Arabic at Toledo in Spain and gained sufficient knowledge to translate important works from Arabic into Latin. He then went to Sicily and was known in papal circles. Eventually, around 1220, Frederick II invited him to his court. In his ballad “The Lay of the Last Minstrel” (1805), Sir Walter Scott immortalized the translator's reputation. For more information on Michael Scot, Alfonso X of Castile, Averroes and Dante, see Watt, *Influence* 61–79. Cf. also Metlitzki, *Matter* 41–54.

16 For more information on the crusade of Frederick II see Mayer, *Crusades* 219–30.

17 Dante Aligheri, *Comedy: Inferno*, Canto x, Circle Six, 119.

happiness and consequently denied eternal life. Yet in Canto XIII, Dante has Pier della Vigne, who is placed with 'The Violent Against Themselves,' speak of Frederick II as one worthy of honor.¹⁸

It is no wonder that until now the Italian nationalists think of Dante as their hero. Islam, Muslims, and the crusades dominated his world. The crusaders were still there on the Syrian coast in Tarsus, Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, and Acre when he was an adult and still living in Florence, not only as a writer and poet, but also as a politician. Only in 1291 did the last crusader city, Acre, fall to the Muslims. As a result of the crusades, Italian ports flourished and the norms of life in general began to change. The influence of the Norman kings on Italy in particular and on the rest of Europe in general is immense.

1.3 *Muslim Spain: 710–1492*

The Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula lasted for nearly eight centuries, from 710 to 1492. Like Sicily, Spain was an important transmitter of Muslim learning and culture even after the Christian re-conquest was almost complete by the middle of the thirteenth century. But during Dante's life, Muslim Granada, the jewel of Europe, still flourished.¹⁹ A large number of Arabic philosophical, scientific, and literary works were translated into Spanish and Latin, particularly during the reign of Alfonso the Wise (1252–84) and transmitted to Europe.²⁰ One such literary manuscript was a collection of fables of Indo-Persian origin, *Kalila wa-Dimna*, which later became the main source for La Fontaine's (1668–94) *Fables*. In 1264 Alfonso the Wise also ordered *The Book of the Ladder*, or *al-Mi'rāj* to be translated into French and Latin from an existing Castilian version. The translator was a Sienese notary called Bonaventura da Siena. Dante's mentor, Brunetto Latini, happened to visit Toledo at the time of the translation.

In Muslim Spain, poets celebrated earthly, erotic, or divine love. One of the most important voices was Ibn Ḥazm (994–1064) who was born in Cordoba into a family that had recently converted from Christianity to Islam. He was imprisoned several times for his political associations. By the end of his life he had abandoned politics and led a life of seclusion. His most popular work is

18 I am he who held both keys to Frederick's heart... * I swear to you that never in word or spirit * did I break faith to my lord and emperor * who was so worthy of honor in his merit. Dante Aligheri, *Comedy: Inferno*, Canto XIII, Circle Seven: Round Two, 58, 73–75. Note that Frederick's mother the Empress Constance is placed in *Paradise*, Canto III.

19 For historical information on Muslim Spain consult Hitti, *History of the Arabs* 493–591; Dozy, *Spanish Islam*; Chejne, *Islam and the West*.

20 See Procter, *Alfonso X of Castile*.

Ṭūq al-ḥamāma (*The Dove's Necklace*), a treatise on courtly and Platonic love. Written many decades before the first troubadour lyrics of Provence, it may have served as a useful textbook for emerging poets in southern France. Ibn Ḥazm also includes in his treatise his own poetry that extols Platonic love.²¹ Another poet and politician was Ibn Zaydūn (1003–71) who wrote the most sensitive lyrics about the loss of his beloved Wallāda, the daughter of the king of Cordoba, a distinguished poet herself and a beautiful woman. There were many more love poets in Muslim Spain who undoubtedly influenced Romance vernacular lyrics in southern Europe and beyond: Ibn Quzmān (d. 1160), the wandering minstrel of Cordoba and al-Tuṭīlī, a blind poet who invented new forms in poetry and died as a young man in 1129.

But, perhaps, it was Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240), who was born in Murcia and flourished mainly in Seville (until 1202) that was likely to have inspired Dante the most. He died in Damascus twenty-five years before Dante was born. Ibn 'Arabī was a mystic poet who had his Beatrice, too: A beautiful Persian woman and a learned religious scholar by the name Niẓām. He met her in Mecca along with a group of Persian mystics. His love poems dedicated to her describe his symbolic rendering of the path of the mystic. Her beauty was related to the divine reality. Ibn 'Arabī's *Tarjumān al-ashwāq* (*The Interpreter of Longing*) is an allegory that could be read on different levels. But his critics accused him of heresy and of composing erotic poetry. As a result, he felt obliged to write a commentary on his deep religious experience and show how truth may be expressed in different ways.

His most influential book is *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*). In a chapter entitled "The Alchemy of Happiness," there is an esoteric allegory of the ascension of man to heaven. Another book by the name *al-Isrā' ilā maqām al-asrā* (*The nocturnal journey toward the station of the most magnanimous one*), Ibn 'Arabī develops the theme of the Prophet's ascension to the seventh heaven. Asín refers to these books as possible sources for Dante's vision of paradise. He argues that Christian theologians, such as the Spaniards Raymond Lull and Raymond Martin, were very familiar with Ibn 'Arabī's concept of this spiritual paradise at the time Dante was composing his *Comedy*.²² Furthermore, he observes:

21 Ibn Ḥazm, *Ring*, trans. Arberry.

22 Asín Palacios, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, trans. Sutherland 140. Note that Dante's notion of paradise as pure light may be also borrowed from Ibn Masarra (883–931) of Cordoba who is the founder of the Illuministic school, or pseudo-Empedoclean philosophy. According to this school, God should be interpreted as light and our process of

In the Moslem world two antithetical ideas flourished almost simultaneously – the coarse and sensual paradise of the Koran, and the spiritual picture of the philosophers and the mystics. In the Christian world, the same two ideas existed – the materialistic conception, equivalent to that of the Koran, which flourished prior to the *Divine Comedy*, and the spiritual picture, which was solely the work of the Florentine poet.²³

Dante himself professed to have created new means, unknown to other Christians, to behold God:

... I make my way above
still in these swathings death dissolves. I came here
through the Infernal grief. Now, since God's love
incloses me in Grace so bounteous
that he permits me to behold His court
by means wholly unknown to modern use.²⁴

Dante's new heaven has nothing to do with the earthly paradise of other Christians who preceded him. It is the heaven where rational souls reside according to their understanding.²⁵ In this sense, it is akin to that of Ibn 'Arabī, al-Ghazālī (Latinized: Alghazel, 1058–1111),²⁶ and Ibn Rushd (Latinized: Averroes, 1126–98). Furthermore, Dante's astronomical paradise is related to the Sufi mystical treatment of astronomy and astrology. Beatrice, the lost beloved, does not symbolize the sinful and the forbidden as one would expect in the literature of the Christian Middle Ages. Rather, she can easily be categorized with the long list of female guides clad in mantles that seem as if made of

cognition as an illumination from above through the intermediary of the spirits of the spheres. Ibn Masarra's ideas were transmitted to the Augustinian scholastics.

23 Asín Palacios, *Islam and the Divine Comedy*, trans. Sutherland 141.

24 Dante Alighieri, *Comedy: Purgatorio*, Canto XVI, 37–42.

25 Compare with the Muslim mystic interpretation of the Verse of Light (Q 26:35) contrasted with Darkness, Q 26:40 in Ali (trans.), *Kur'an*. Also consult *Mishkāt al-anwār (Niche for Light)* by al-Ghazālī, ed. 'Afīfī, and the English translation by Gairdner.

26 Note that al-Ghazālī was partly translated into Latin before 1150. He exerted a great influence on Jewish and Christian scholasticism. See for instance his book *al-Durra al-fākhira* (The precious pearl), an eschatological treatise on death, translated into French by Gautier. The Arabic original is also included. Here the heavenly maiden is to accompany the virtuous dead until judgment day. On this issue see also S. Günther's contribution to the present publication.

light in Muslim mystic poetry. All these females are instructors along the path to union with God.

It is not only through books, or discussions with Italian university professors, or theologians, or poets that Dante might have accumulated some knowledge of Arabic and Islamic sources, but also through contact with his mentor Brunetto Latini (1220–94) who was sent to Seville on an embassy to Alfonso el Sabio of Castile to seek help for Florence against the Sienese. Like Dante, Latini was born in Florence.²⁷ He was a prominent Florentine Guelph and the author of various works in prose and verse that Dante admired. Latini would have had firsthand knowledge of Islamic philosophy and literature in Spain.

2 Visions of the Afterworlds

There is no doubt that Dante modeled his own journey to the afterworlds on that of Virgil's Aeneas, at least in part. Both travel down through hell accompanied by a guide until they reach Satan himself in the lowest pit. Both are ferried across a river to the kingdom of the dead. Both converse with sinners guilty of various crimes. But Dante lingers more in that gloom-hidden abode than Aeneas and gives us more detail about his journey using certain Islamic eschatological motifs and ideas. *Purgatory* and *Paradise*, however, owe little to Virgil's *Aeneid*. Another source that might have inspired Dante is *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (*On the Consolation of Philosophy*) written in the sixth century by a Christian Roman statesman and philosopher, Boethius, who was imprisoned at Pavia, and finally tortured to death in 525. In his book Boethius represents philosophy as a gracious and beautiful woman. It is likely that this figure partly

27 As a result of the defeat of the Guelphs at the battle of Montaperti, Latini was exiled from his native city. He took refuge for some years (1260–6) in France. When he returned to Tuscany in 1266 he held high offices for some twenty years. He was interested in philosophy in particular and was a great orator. His two principal works were *The book of the treasure* and *The little treasure*. From the latter poetic allegorical journey Dante learned a number of his devices. Although Latini was Dante's mentor and friend, he was condemned in the *Inferno* to eternal suffering, scorched by fire from above and below, in the seventh circle of hell. Grouped with the sodomites who committed violence against nature, Latini ran in endless circles. But Dante's reunion with his mentor and friend was very warm, as the following lines indicate: 'O my son! May it not displease you,' he cried, * 'if Brunetto Latino leave his company * and turn and walk a little by your side.' * And I to him: 'With all my soul I ask it * Or let us sit together, if it please him * Who is my Guide and leads me through this pit.' Dante Alighieri, *Comedy: Inferno*, Canto xv, 31–36.

inspired Dante to create Beatrice, who is a very different woman. Furthermore, Boethius' attitude toward Neoplatonism may have fascinated Dante.²⁸ For all these reasons, perhaps, Boethius, the persecuted philosopher, was placed in *Paradise* in Canto x. But many other Islamic sources may have supplemented the *Aeneid*, and *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, and consequently helped Dante enrich his imagination and create his national Christian poem that became canonical throughout western history.

In his article "Dante and Islam: History and Analysis of a Controversy" Vicente Cantarino argues that

the diffusion of the Mohammedan legend in Christian Europe has been proved by literary documents, namely the *Libro della Scala*. To reject a priori any other contacts between Christian and Muslim lore, through literary or oral channels, would be to adopt a position that can hardly be reasonable. For we know now that toward the end of the 12th century, there was written an allegorical and philosophical treatise on the soul's journey into the Other World. It was composed in either Sicily or Catalonia, and shows an obvious and deep influence of Avicenna's philosophy and also of Ibn Gabriol. This proves that by the beginning of the 'Duecento' such philosophical allegories of Arabic descent were known in Christian Europe.²⁹

3 Echoes from *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān*

Although the first translation that we know of *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān* into Latin and other European languages was completed after Dante's death, it is likely that the story of the boy born on a desert island had been orally transmitted

28 Many critics suggest the comparison between Book vi of the *Aeneid* and Dante's *Comedy*. See for instance Gilson, *Dante and philosophy*, trans. D. Moore 66. Others refer to the influence of Boethius and the philosophy of Neoplatonism on Dante. Consult, for instance, Holmes, *Dante* 19, 39.

29 Cantarino, *Dante and Islam* 187. Note that here Cantarino is referring to Ibn Sinā, or Avicenna, the most illustrious Persian physician and philosopher (980–1037); Dante places him in limbo along with Aristotle, Plato, Empedocles, and Averroes. As for Solomon ben Gabriol (Avicebron, Avencebrol), he was an Arab Jew who died in Valencia, Spain in 1058. He was a teacher of Neoplatonism in the West. His book, *Yanbū' al-ḥayāt* (*The fountain of life*) was translated into Latin in 1150 and inspired the Franciscan school. See Hitti, *History of the Arabs* 580–1.

throughout Spain and Italy, or even summarized, or translated in one way or another during the twelfth, the thirteenth, or the early first half of the fourteenth century.³⁰ At times the similarities between Ḥayy and Dante are very striking. Although Ḥayy does not understand the relevance of hell and paradise, reward and punishment, or why the prophets have to create such concepts, he himself embarks on a journey to see the Mover of the Universe, or the Ultimate Truth.³¹

Dante was thirty-five years old when he felt the urge to seek the True Way and cleanse himself from worldliness and errors. This was Ḥayy's exact age when he turned his gaze toward heaven. Both men highlight the inner light that shines on them and helps them see their way. But while Ḥayy journeys alone and depends on his own reason, Dante needs a guide who symbolizes reason, and this he finds in the celebrated pagan Roman poet, Virgil. Ḥayy attempts alone to ascend from earth to heaven, but realizes that there are prerequisites for such ascension, and that human reason has its limitations. In order to reach the very throne of the Mover of the Universe, one has to cleanse one's self of earthly desires and be guided by intuition and the inner light. Dante, too, attempts to reach the pinnacle of joy and come to the Light of God. Virgil offers to guide him but only as far as Human Reason can go. The sinner has to recognize his sins and those of others. He must renounce his sins by ascending through purgatory, and only then may he reach his goal. Another guide, Beatrice, symbol of divine love, must take over for the final ascent, for Human Reason is limited. Finally, St. Bernard, the symbol of Contemplation, will help the seeker fix his gaze on the intense light and behold God. But regardless of how much the two men differ in approaching their ascent, both are endowed with free will and immense capacity for compassion and love.

In Dante's *Comedy*, there are seven distinct heavens, that is, seven stars in the Ptolemaic system: The Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. In addition there are the spheres of the Fixed Stars, the Crystalline Heaven, and finally the Empyrean, or the abode of God. In each heavenly

30 In 1349 Moses of Narbonne translated Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* into Hebrew. During the second half of the fifteenth century Pico Della Mirandola, one of the most significant figures of the Renaissance, translated *Ḥayy* into Latin. Dante could not have seen the Hebrew translation because he died in 1321. But he is likely to have known something about *Ḥayy* through oral channels, or perhaps some written abstracts of the novel. See Attar, *Roots*.

31 I have consulted the Arabic versions of *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān* published by Dār al-Mashriq, ed. Nādir; Dār al-Āfāq, ed. Sa'd; the 5th edition published by Damascus University, ed. Ṣalībā and 'Ayyād; and the English translations of Goodman and Kocache.

sphere, Dante meets a variety of souls and converses with them. Then Beatrice disappears. St. Bernard of Clairvaux, the Abbot of the Benedictine Order, comes to lead him to the vision of God. Through contemplation, Dante reaches the state of ecstasy in which the souls of the blessed gaze directly upon God. It is important to remember however that in 1144 St. Bernard, the symbol of contemplation and piety, had preached a new crusade against the Muslim infidels. Ḥayy, on the other hand, refers only to the Moon, Saturn, the Sun, the Fixed Stars, and the Highest Celestial Sphere, or what he calls *al-falak al-a'lā*.³² He does not speak of specific souls on his journey to the Mover of the Universe. He has no need for any guide except himself. Eventually, he recognizes the existence of one true being – this he does without the help of prophets, or religious institutions, or men who may be viewed as very objectionable to some of us today – and succeeds in glimpsing the divine world.

Light metaphors are abundant in both allegories. It is by the illumination of the mind rather than by sense impressions that Dante ultimately comes to know God. His ascent beyond the senses symbolizes the progress of the soul in its advance toward knowledge of the Ultimate Truth. The sun is the symbol of intellectual illumination and ultimately of God Himself. In *Ḥayy*, light metaphors are used in reference to this perfect, beautiful, omniscient, and omnipotent Being. They are associated with the science of optics. The properties and phenomena of both visible and invisible light are carefully examined. In his yearning to see the divine light, Ḥayy realizes that reason alone is not enough, it must be supplemented with intuition. It is only when he experiences total annihilation that he sees the highest sphere that has no physical body.

It could be compared to the image of the sun as seen in a polished mirror. It is neither the sun nor the mirror nor is it anything other than them. He saw signs of such perfection, glory and beauty in the essence of that non-material sphere so great as to be beyond description... In a state of ultimate pleasure, happiness... and joy, his vision showed him the essence of Truth...³³

Ḥayy endeavored to see the divine light, which shines within each one of us. His story shows how an individual can progress to perfection if he so desires.

32 We know that Ibn Ṭufayl had very advanced and useful theories in astronomy unlike those of Ptolemy and al-Bīṭrījī, his own pupil (d. 1185–86); unfortunately his manuscripts are lost.

33 Ibn Ṭufayl, *Journey*, trans. Kocache 48.

The concept of equating joy and happiness to brilliant light in both Dante's and Ibn Ṭufayl's works is very striking. Dante, too, speaks of

Pure intellectual light, fulfilled with love,
Love of the True Good, filled with all delight,
Transcending sweet delight, all sweet above.³⁴

But the progress to perfection is arduous. One of the many stages of the spiritual journey involves the renunciation of one's worldly possessions. In *Paradise* St. Thomas Aquinas tells the story of St. Francis who declared himself to be 'the bridegroom of poverty.' Later Dante sees Francis himself among the ranks of the blessed in the Empyrean. It is important to note that the Italian St. Francis of Assisi (Francesco Bernardone: 1182–1226), who once lived comfortably as the son of a rich wool merchant, was one of Dante's heroes. He "spoke Provençal, the language used by the troubadours . . . His own poetry" as Idries Shah suggests, "... strongly resembles in places that of the love poet Rūmī . . ." ³⁵ At the age of twenty-five, Francis became seriously ill and vowed to devote himself to a life of religion. He renounced all his worldly possessions. In 1219, Francis went to Egypt in a vain attempt to convert the Muslim sultan to Christianity. Espousing poverty like St. Francis, Dante attacked the excessive wealth of the church in his *Comedy* and did not hesitate to put some of the popes in hell.³⁶ Nick Havely writes in his book *Dante and the Franciscans*:

Soon after the death of Clement v on 20 April 1314, Dante wrote a letter to the Italian cardinals assembled at Avignon to elect the next Pope. Accusing them repeatedly of abusing the 'bride of Christ', of leading the chariot of the church astray, and of failing to act as true pastors; he cited, as the root cause of their betrayal, their pharisaical greed and their 'marriage' to avarice.³⁷

34 Dante Aligheri, *Comedy: Paradise*, Canto XXX, 40–42.

35 Shah, *The Sufis* 228. Shah relates "'The Song of the Sun', hailed as the first-ever Italian poem . . . composed after the saint's journey to the East" to the numerous poems written by Rūmī and dedicated to the sun (see 231–4). Note that St. Francis was one of the first poets to encourage popular hymn singing in the vernacular. See Jacobs, *Music* 23–4.

36 See Dante Aligheri, *Comedy: Inferno*, Canto XIX, Circle Eight: Bolgia Three. The Simoniacs (sellers of ecclesiastic favors and offices).

37 Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans* 1.

Ḥayy, on the other hand, espoused poverty as a principle, both on his desert island and in society. He was content with very little; he ate 'no more than just what would satisfy his hunger.' He even formulated a thesis about the preservation of plants, animals, and water. In society, Ḥayy observed that many people were greedy and loved to amass excessive fortunes. Buying and selling were the major activities in their cities. Passion controlled men's lives. No one was interested in learning or using reason. Everyone was seeking pleasure, or satisfying some lust. Religion was understood literally and religious rites were performed mechanically. Ḥayy saw a potential hazard in commerce. Wealth is not only likely to create conflicts in society, it also creates masters and slaves. For Ḥayy, man is born equal to his other fellowmen. Commerce only disrupts this notion of equality and subsequently destroys human freedom. He himself owned nothing and had no desire to own anything. Nevertheless, he came to understand the craving of some men for buying and selling when he lived among other human beings. His conclusion was that commerce, if not regulated by a just king, would lead to greed and moral corruption.

Abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, and trust in God are stages in the journeys of both Ḥayy and Dante. But there are also literary devices that unite both of them: Reality and mirrors, faint and intense light, visions that disappear in a flash, the perpetual motion of the lovers/seekers who continuously circle, from their own free will, as heavenly stars around the Prime Mover. The differences between the two men are obvious.

According to one version of the story concerning his birth, Ḥayy was born on an island that enjoyed the most perfect temperature on earth and received its light from the highest possible point in heaven. He had no parents and no religion. He did not know humans. Nevertheless he managed to survive in a natural state, free of society, history, and tradition. He invented his own tools, clothed himself, tamed animals, and fortified his dwelling against possible attacks from wild beasts. Eventually, and after being occupied with such earthly matters – gathering food, building shelter, preserving natural resources, observing, and experimenting – Ḥayy began to turn his gaze toward heaven. Dante, on the other hand, was an Italian Christian soldier, poet, and politician. His great-great grandfather was a crusader who died in a foreign land fighting against the Muslims. He was thirty-seven years old when he was exiled from Florence and sentenced to be burnt alive should he ever return to the city of his birth. His enemies accused him of corruption. It was the appropriate time for him to think seriously about his own spiritual failure, and the active pursuit of the love of good.

Ḥayy believed that the body would perish after death. But Dante adhered to the notion that the body would be united with the soul after the last judgment

whether we are assigned to heaven, or hell. In *Paradise*, Canto XIV, Solomon explains to Dante the relationship between grace, vision, love, and radiance. He assures him that

... when we put completeness on afresh
 All the more gracious shall our person be,
 Reclothed in the holy and glorious flesh³⁸

Ḥayy's journey through heaven concentrates on the One True Being and the desire of the traveler to meet Him face to face. Dante, on the other hand, populates all the heavens with souls representing the stages of spiritual attainment both in the active and contemplative life. Along with Beatrice, he moves from heaven to heaven. Emperors, warriors, politicians, and theologians who dabbled in politics are to be found bathed in light: Justinian, Emperor of Constantinople who is chiefly renowned for his great codification of the Roman Law; Dante's ancestor who marched to foreign lands; Charlemagne, the Emperor of the Franks and his nephew Roland; Robert Guiscard, Duke of Apulia and Calabria; Duke Godfrey, the commander-in-chief of the Christian armies in the First Crusade, and many more. Most of them have some relation to the Arabs, or the Muslim infidels. But there are also troubadour poets (Foulquet of Marseilles who repented for his worldly life), mystics (the Scottish Richard of St. Victor), and professors of philosophy who admired Averroes, or disagreed with him (Albertus Magnus, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Sigier of Brabant) among many others. The majority, of course, are Christians, both men and women, but there are a few Jews and some virtuous pagans as well.

In sum, the journey of Ḥayy and Dante to the abode of the Mover of the Universe describes a significant shift from the collectivity and group values of medieval culture to the recognition of individual needs and possibilities. The personal search for the Ultimate Truth is highlighted in both allegories. In Dante's case, the church helps in this personal quest, but the traveler's own reason and love are indispensable for salvation. In this context the journey is not performed as an act of obedience to please ecclesiastic authority. Rather, it is enacted as a personal drive for perfection.³⁹ But Ḥayy, who is a natural man free of religion and history, is bound to fix his gaze on heaven after he solves his daily problems. This is the logical consequence of growing up entirely alone on a desert island.

38 Dante Aligheri, *Comedy: Paradise*, Canto XIV, 43–45.

39 See Cantor and Klein (eds.), *Dante and Machiavelli* 3–9.

In his book *The Mystics of Islam*, Reynold A. Nicholson observes that

mystics of every race and creed have described the progress of the spiritual life as a journey or a pilgrimage . . . The *Sufi* who sets out to seek God calls himself a "traveler" . . . ; he advances by slow "stages" . . . along a "path" . . . to the goal of union with Reality.⁴⁰

The Sufi passes seven stages before he journeys in the Real, by the Real, to the Real and becomes himself a reality. According to the author of the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* (lit., The book of flashes) the Sufi must traverse all the stages of repentance, abstinence, renunciation, poverty, patience, trust in God, and finally satisfaction; he should experience whatever states it pleases God to bestow upon him, otherwise he will never become a 'knower' or 'Gnostic,' and will never realize that knowledge, knower, and known are One.⁴¹

Both Ḥayy and Dante choose to forsake their earthly abode in search of the Divine Light. The journey toward the Prime Mover of the Universe means above all journeying away from all sins. At every stage where they halt they traverse a station on the way to the Light. Ḥayy violates the mystic code when he decides to go alone without a guide, while Dante adheres to the rites of the journey.

4 Divine Beatrice

No real Western model for Beatrice was ever discovered by Dante's scholars. There are numerous suggestions, but none are totally satisfactory. George Holmes, who is oblivious to any Islamic influence on Dante, argues that Boethius' "'Lady Philosophy' was probably the inspiration for Dante's new lady, a very different figure from Beatrice."⁴² Karl Vossler on the other hand suggests something more feasible. He believes that Guido Cavalcanti (1257–1300), Dante's personal friend, a noted poet whose poetry exalts women, and a reputed heretic known to be an Averroist, influenced Dante's literary and intellectual development. He cites Cavalcanti's last song, addressed to his beloved from exile, as an example of mystical tenderness.⁴³ Another critic, John A.

40 Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam* 28.

41 Ibid., 29.

42 Holmes, *Dante* 19.

43 Vossler, *Medieval culture*, trans. Lawton ii, 146–8.

Scott, is puzzled to see learned Beatrice attack the follies of preachers and considers her truly astonishing for Dante's age. He argues,

St. Paul had forbidden women to teach (1 Tim. 2.12): They were to be subject to men especially to priests... Instead, as Joan Ferrante has brilliantly documented 'only Beatrice and God are infallible in the *Commedia*... Dante gives the office of major theologians in his heaven to someone whose sex would have shocked virtually all the doctors of the church.'⁴⁴

But had Dante's scholars looked elsewhere to Muslim Spain and Norman Sicily they might have discovered many Arab and Muslim women who were very alive in the popular imagination, not only as a means to reach the Divine, but in certain cases as the Divine themselves. Also, women teachers/preachers were abundant in Muslim history. The most illustrious mystic poet, Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240), who is believed to be among those who influenced Dante, had "studied under the Spanish woman Sufi Faṭīma b. Waliyya";⁴⁵ in his love poems he emphasized the connection between human beauty and divine reality. Like other Muslim mystics and love poets, Ibn 'Arabī was able to perceive the beautiful woman, his muse, and the divinity at the same time. Another poet, Ibn Ḥazm led a life of exile not very different from that of Dante, wrote a treatise on love and lovers in which he included his own love poetry. His beloved was not an ordinary human being, but the light that helped him reach the ultimate Light.⁴⁶ Love here becomes a redeeming religious force. It is an ennobling experience. The beloved is a saint, and through love the lover is able to understand hidden truths and behold the Divine.

Sigrid Hunke refers briefly to an old Arabic attitude to love, whereby women are worshiped as divine objects, she states that this notion traveled to Europe in the Middle Ages, and even elevated Mary, the mother of Christ, from the servant of God to someone associated with Him. She argues that these new ideas invaded France, Italy, Sicily, Austria, and Germany from Muslim Spain. But according to her, the poets who later became known as Troubadours, or courtly love poets, did not seriously believe in these ideas and used them only to attract women. Thus, Ovid's views on the female as a vain, frail, and inconstant creature whose main goal in life is to deceive men and be deceived by

⁴⁴ Scott, *Understanding Dante* 331.

⁴⁵ Shah, *The Sufis* 140.

⁴⁶ Hunke, *Allahs Sonne über dem Abendland*, trans. Baydūn and Dasūqī 521.

them remain the cornerstone in treating women in the West to this day.⁴⁷ But Dante is the exception to the rule. His Beatrice evokes the memory of sacred women, such as Laylā, ‘Abla, Buthayna, Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya, Nizām, and many other unnamed women in Arabic or Persian love poetry.⁴⁸ In numerous Islamic works the mystic heavenly bride is a spiritual being who has surely anticipated Dante’s lost beloved. In her book *Spain To England*, Alice Lasater observes that

In two . . . major medieval eschatological works, the *Commedia* of Dante and the fourteenth-century Middle-English vision *The Pearl*, with the introduction of a lost beloved female as a guide through paradise, appears a tradition which the Islamic Sufis had developed from the ninth century. The female guide as conceived by the Islamic mystics and as found in *The Pearl* and Dante’s *Paradiso* in no way resembles the Celtic fairy mistress who lures mortal heroes into a never-never land, but rather fills the role played in other Christian visions by various saints and angels in guiding and instructing the dreamer.⁴⁹

5 Conflicting Views on Dante’s *Commedia*

In his dismissal of Asín’s thesis that Dante may have had a sympathetic attitude to Islamic culture for placing important figures from Islamic history in limbo and not in hell, Richard Southern minimizes the significance of such a scheme. He argues that Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) are

47 Ibid., 523–4.

48 Laylā is usually referred to in the epithet Majnūn Laylā (lit., the man who is crazy about Laylā). This ancient Arabic legend has spread to different parts of the world. It extols the power of undying love. Laylā’s father gives her away in marriage to another man. Consequently, her lover becomes insane and sets out to wander half-naked in the desert living among wild animals. His poems about Laylā, whom he transforms from an ordinary being into something extraordinary – a goddess – have influenced not only the Persians and the Turks, but also the Hungarians, among others. However, love that enters through the eyes, attacks the heart, and destroys the lover’s strength is viewed as something destructive, for it leads the lover to sheer madness. Buthayna is another example of an idolized woman. She is the beloved of Jamīl al-‘Udhri (d. 701); she too is married to another man. But her lover remains loyal to her until death. His poetry exalts chaste and unrequited love. Poems by both Majnūn and Jamīl are set to music and sung to this day in the Arab world. Rābi‘a al-‘Adawiyya (717–801) of Basra was a famous mystic woman and a revered guide along the mystic way.

49 Lasater, *Spain to England* 61.

not considered simply Muslims, but scholars who figure among the ancients. As for Saladin, however, who captured Jerusalem in October 1187 and defeated the crusaders, Dante preferred to portray him not as a historical figure, but as a character found in popular romances. Southern believes that Dante detested Islam – not only because he placed its Prophet and his son-in-law with ‘The Sowers of Discord’ at the bottom of hell, but also because of the death of Dante’s ancestor in the land of the infidels. As for the praise of the modesty of Muslim women by Dante’s friend Forese in *The Purgatorio*, Southern claims that Dante’s aim is to show that even barbarians and Saracens are more modest than those in Florence. On the whole, Southern sees *The Divine Comedy* as an outcry against corruption in Italy and a passionate hatred of the vices of Florence in particular. For him, Dante is outraged not so much by the existence of Islam as a religion, but against the Christian church that refuses to be reformed and the clergy who failed to convert Saladin and other Muslims to Christianity. This interpretation leads Southern to believe that “Nothing that has a specifically Islamic inspiration took root in the west. The west had enough of its own.”⁵⁰

Other critics oblivious to the influence of Islamic sources on the *Comedy* suggest different interpretations. In his book *Medieval Culture: An Introduction to Dante and His Times*, Karl Vossler argues that

The Divine Comedy . . . is evidently intended to convert no heathen, to refute no heretic, to convince no doubter . . . , to carry on no battle for the faith. Here and there polemic and didactic intentions emerge from it, but they run their course, one and all, within the Christian community, and never is there to be noted an assault or sally against the heathen. There is not even a rallying-cry for a crusade against Islam.⁵¹

Yet one wonders why Dante seems to be so confused and confusing at times. Does he admire Muslim civilization? Or does he detest it? Is he attracted to Arabic poetry or philosophy? Or is he repulsed by it? Does he accept Averroes’ teaching? Or does he reject it? Does he support more crusades to the East? Or is he sick of wars and conflicts? Does he side with his friends and mentors who admire Muslim civilization? Or is he totally on the opposite side? Who is this Dante that so many scholars wrote about? Is he the true Christian believer they depicted? Or is he masquerading as a firm supporter of the crusades and the enemy of Islam? Why does he not acknowledge any Arabic influence? Yet,

⁵⁰ Southern, *Dante and Islam* 143.

⁵¹ Vossler, *Medieval culture* 211.

he enumerates endless Western sources? What is puzzling is that one can find proofs for each side of the argument. Those who think that Dante is the model Christian and the enemy of Islam cling to the story of his ancestor who died in the Holy Land fighting the Muslims. The reward of the 'righteous' warrior was paradise. On the other hand, the lower part of hell is a city of mosques where heretics are severely punished. They are the skeptics who deny the soul's immortality and are associated in one way or another with Averroes and Islamic philosophy. Here one finds Cavalcanti, the father of Dante's friend Guido, and Frederick II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire. In the lower hell one also meets Dante's mentor Brunetto Latini among the violent against nature. Latini, too, had something to do with the learning of the Muslims. But it is Michael Scot, the translator of Arabic books, who languishes further down in hell among the fortune-tellers. He is referred to as the "wizard," never to be trusted; he tricked people and associated with a heretical emperor who admired Arabic science and literature and encouraged its dissemination all over Europe. Just one circle above Satan, one meets Muḥammad, the Prophet of Islam, and his son-in-law 'Alī. Both men are condemned to hell for causing religious discord in the world. In sum, all traitors of the Christian church, or traitors of the empire are condemned to eternal hell. Aldo Bernardo suggests that Dante's ultimate goal is

to depict as vividly as possible how man can be saved and become eternal through the use of his free will . . . To achieve his goal Dante had to undertake a reproduction of the entire universe, of the senses and of the spirit. What's more, he had to create an impression of infallibility which in his day meant simply abiding by the teachings of the Church and of the Church Fathers. By taking these teachings and using them as foundations for a portrayal of the universe as presumably seen through the eyes of the Christian code, Dante hoped to help lead Mankind from the miseries of this world to salvation and true happiness.⁵²

But those who believe that Dante either admires Muslim civilization, or is simply a heretic himself who masquerades behind a true Christian face, cite other proofs. Averroes and Avicenna who have supposedly created havoc in the medieval Christian mind are not suffering in hell. They are placed in limbo where there is no pain, or real punishment. The most conspicuous example of those who are spared from hell is the Muslim king and warrior Saladin. Although he is placed by himself apart from others, such as "the good Brutus"

52 Bernardo, *Dante's Divine Comedy* 47–8.

who once conspired to murder Caesar, and below Aristotle, he does not seem to be suffering from anything in limbo. Supporters of this theory argue that Dante was suspected of being a heretic in his own religious views during his lifetime, and that he had to be very careful in presenting these views. Heretics were usually punished, not only in Italy but also in the Islamic world. It is likely that Dante's contradictions stem from this fear of being branded as a heretic. Thus, Averroes is referred to in limbo as the philosopher "of the Great Commentary." But in *The Purgatorio* he is criticized for his views on the unity of the Possible Intellect by Statius who nevertheless still calls him "a wise head." Other scholastics were less generous in their criticism, but were not cited in Dante's *Commedia*. Indeed Averroes' views on the Possible Intellect enraged both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas such that the latter accused the Muslim philosopher of being the "perverter" of Aristotle's philosophy.⁵³ Paul A. Cantor argues that Dante is an Averroist, although modern Dante scholars disagree. He suggests that "Limbo is precisely an allegorical representation of Averroes's idea of the Possible Intellect. The eternal conversation of the philosophers in Dante's Limbo is a metaphor for what Averroes meant by the immortality of human thought."⁵⁴ Supporters of an uncanonical Dante raise many other issues to prove their point. What is Sigier of Brabant, the notorious Averroist professor at the University of Paris, doing in paradise? How can Dante beatify and glorify an Averroist, while he himself is supposedly a confirmed Thomist? At the end of his life did the professor really regret his opposition to his bitter opponent St. Thomas Aquinas in their dispute over the teaching of Aristotle in the light of the commentary by Averroes, as Abbé F. Van Steenberghen claims?⁵⁵ Or did St. Thomas seem to forget his foe by calling him "That's the eternal light of Sigier, who,/ Lecturing down in Straw Street, hammered home/ Invidious truths, as logic taught him to?"⁵⁶ The list of controversial people in the *Commedia* seems to be endless. But it is Beatrice, the ordinary woman from Florence who was transformed into a divine being that seems to excite the imagination of the supporters of this theory the most.

53 For Statius' criticism of Averroes, see Dante Alighieri, *Comedy: Purgatorio*, Canto xxv, 61–66. For the criticism by prominent Christian scholastics consult Zedler's preface to her translation of St. Thomas Aquinas's *On the unity of the intellect against the Averroists*. Note that Dante was publicly accused of being an Averroist in 1327, six years after his death. On this topic see Fortin, Dante and Averroism.

54 Cantor, *The uncanonical Dante* 147.

55 See Gilson, *Dante and philosophy*, trans. Moore 225–81, 317. See also Kibre, *Dante and the universities* 367–71.

56 Dante Alighieri, *Comedy: Paradise*, Canto x, 136–138.

Elevating the status of a woman to that of God is something unheard of in the Christian medieval world. Harold Bloom argues that Dante's

heretical intensity has been masked by scholarly commentary which even at its best frequently treats him as though his *Divine Comedy* was essentially versified Saint Augustine. But it is best to begin by marking his extraordinary audacity, which is unmatched in the entire tradition of supposedly Christian literature, including even Milton. Nothing else in Western literature . . . is as sublimely outrageous as Dante's exaltation of Beatrice, sublimated from being an image of desire to angelic status, in which role she becomes a crucial element in the church's hierarchy of salvation.⁵⁷

6 Conclusion

Unfortunately, Dante scholars, or American comparatists who believe that Dante is either a true Christian believer, or a heretic, often turn a blind eye to the possible Islamic sources or resonances in the *Commedia*. For them it is absolutely irrelevant to delve into such an esoteric subject.⁵⁸ The fact that any aspiring intellectual in thirteenth- or fourteenth-century Europe might have been familiar with some aspects of Arabic and Islamic literature, philosophy, and science and thus flourished, seems to be of no interest to them. Thus Dante is not studied in a proper historical context. Rather, he is examined within his own narrow circle in Florence. When citing important contemporary and literary events, scholars may refer to St. Thomas Aquinas, Brunetto Latini, Guido Cavalcanti, Roger Bacon, St. Francis, or even some English and French monarchs, but their comments always remain exclusively Western. One will never know that these figures had anything to do with Islamic learning, or the East. Even the names that Dante himself mentions in his *Comedy*, such as Averroes,

⁵⁷ Bloom, *Western canon* 76.

⁵⁸ See, for instance, Gilson, *Dante and philosophy* 66. In a footnote Gilson writes, "There has been a suggestion of Muslim sources with regard to this point (Señor Asín Palacios). It goes without saying that I do not intend here to express any opinion on a thesis which this is not the place to examine. I endeavor to confine myself to what is certain. Now it is certain that Dante was long familiar with Virgil, and whatever we may think of the thesis of Señor Asín Palacios, we cannot ascribe to it a comparable degree of certainty." Other scholars do not even refer to Asín's thesis or include his book in their bibliography.

Avicenna, Saladin, Mahomet, and 'Alī are usually omitted from the glossary as insignificant.⁵⁹

Arabic and Islamic visions of the afterworld were familiar in Europe as early as the eleventh century. But modern Dante scholars and American comparatists do not concern themselves with the seventh-century Muḥammad's journey to hell and heaven, or with other literary journeys such as that of Ibn Shuhayd's (992–1035) travel through the valley of the demons,⁶⁰ or al-Ma'arrī's (973–1057) humorous and controversial journey to paradise and the abode of Satan.⁶¹ Mystical journeys to heaven by mystic poets, such as Ibn 'Arabī, Farīd al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār (1145–1221),⁶² Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī (1207–1273),⁶³ or by rationalist philosophers, such as Ibn Ṭufayl are also out of the range of their studies. Even love poetry and poets like Ibn Ḥazm, Ibn Zaydūn, Ibn Quzmān, and al-Tuḡlī are totally ignored. The founder of the Illuministic school in Cordoba, Ibn Masarra, the philosopher al-Suhrawardī, or the scientist Ibn al-Haytham, the principal Muslim physicist and student of optics are also ignored.⁶⁴ For them Dante did not acknowledge any debt to anyone of them in his *Commedia*. Therefore, according to this logic, they do not have to pay any attention to those

59 See, for instance, the "Glossary of Proper Names" in *Comedy: Paradise*, trans. Sayers and Reynolds, 356–394. Cf. Bernardo and Pellegrini, *A critical study*. This latter publication is meant to help generations of American students to appreciate Dante, the Italian poet who thoroughly absorbed the thought of Greco-Roman antiquity and the Judeo-Christian world. It is noteworthy that *Islam and the Divine Comedy* by Asín Palacios is not even mentioned in the "Selected Criticism." One has to read *A dictionary of proper names and notable matters in the works of Dante*, compiled by Paget Toynbee and revised by Charles S. Singleton in order to find Arabic and Islamic names, such as Alghazel, Alfragano, Alfarabio among others. The author, however, states that Dante does not always acknowledge his debt as in the case, for instance, of Alfraganus on "the projection of the shadow of the earth as far as the sphere of Venus, *Paradise*, ix, 118–19" (Toynbee, *A dictionary* 27).

60 Ibn Shuhayd, *Risālat al-tawābi' wa-l-zawābi'*, trans. Monroe.

61 Al-Ma'arrī, *Risālat al-ghufrān*.

62 Farīd al-Dīn al-'Aṭṭār, *Conference*, trans. Nott.

63 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, *Poems*, trans. Nicholson; Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī, *Tales*, trans. Arberry.

64 In 1191 at the age of thirty-six al-Suhrawardī, a celebrated Persian mystic, was executed as a heretic in Aleppo, Syria. His major work was *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, or *Wisdom of Illumination*. Ibn al-Haytham (Latinized: Alhazen), the principal Muslim physicist and student of optics, was born in Basra, about 965 and died around 1039. He wrote more than one hundred books on mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and medicine. His most important book is on optics. It is entitled *Kitāb al-Manāẓir*. The Arabic original is lost, but the twelfth-century Latin translation has survived. Almost all medieval writers on optics base their works on Alhazen's *Opticae thesaurus*.

foreign poets, thinkers, or scientists. Dante most likely had not heard of all of them, but he certainly would have known bits and pieces about some of them since the period in which he lived was saturated with Arabic lore. American comparatists either deny or marginalize any interaction between cultures that seems to them irreconcilable. This is mainly due to their neglect of the study of history. Thus Dante could understandably learn from his Roman ancestors and other Europeans, but certainly not from the Arabs and Muslims even though the latter were the dominant players on the cultural and political stage in the medieval world. In this sense, American comparatists hardly differ from a British medievalist historian such as Sir Richard William Southern who propagates Kipling's ideas that East is East and West is West, and the two can never meet.⁶⁵ But when making some concessions, Southern accepts the borrowing theory only as long as it relates to original Greek sources transmitted to and by alien cultures to Europe.

Maria Rosa Menocal, a Spanish comparatist and a rare sympathizer with the interaction theory between Islamic culture and the West, suggests that she knows the answer to the riddle of the "Arabic influence" on Dante. She argues that Dante is

a true believer and a true defender of the faith. He finds himself in the most embattled position imaginable, that of seeing his most respected elders, the most prestigious intellectuals of the time, and even his own best friends, won over to a philosophical system that, in his own view, can only lead to ultimate perdition. Thus the 'Arabic influence' on Dante's work is an overwhelmingly negative one, representing an intellectual and artistic revolution that would undermine everything he believed was important and redeeming in Christian society. In this context, and understanding his belief that he was, as the pilgrim, the model Christian and the scribe of Christ, it is not incongruous to imagine that in setting out to write an apologia he hoped would stem the tide of defections, in making his case for the benefits of fundamental Christianity, he would, consciously or not, have chosen to write a counter-text to the *mi'rāj*, which he believed was part of Islamic sacred writings and which described a sensuous and self-fulfilling paradise in which the prophet of that religion had the mysteries of his faith explained to him by his guide, a text replete with both astonishing similarities to Dante's *Commedia* and, perhaps more significant, important counterpoints.⁶⁶

65 Cf. Bassnett, *Comparative literature* 17–20.

66 Menocal, *Role* 130.

Menocal believes that Dante suppressed the Arabic influence on him, mainly because he felt threatened. She never doubts that he must have known the story of the *mi'rāj*, i.e., Muḥammad's ascension to the throne of God either through "Peter the Venerable's allusions to it or through one of the translations by Bonaventura da Siena."⁶⁷ She also cites Dante's knowledge of some of the Muslim and Arab philosophers. According to her, Dante was utterly revolted by what he saw and heard, whether in terms of Averroist philosophy, or un-Christian poetry of selfish love, or of excommunicated emperor and dangerous heresies. All these factors supposedly created a challenge for the Florentine poet. His anxiety becomes apparent and as a result he has no choice but to suppress his original sources and thus he prefers to be silent about them. Indeed, she argues that "The repression of the influence of the Arab world on the rest of Europe may well be dated to Dante, and, among other things, it may supply part of the answer to the question of why formative influences on the courtly poetry of Provence and Sicily are left conspicuously unaddressed."⁶⁸

Dante may have detested everything about Islam and Muslim learning as Menocal and other scholars argue. But he also seems to have admired everything about Islam and Muslim learning, in spite of having placed the city of mosques in the lower part of hell and imagined the torture of the prophet Muḥammad and his son-in-law. There is no doubt that Dante was familiar with some Islamic visions of the afterworld, including Muḥammad's ascension to the throne of God. He also must have heard about this un-Christian love poetry coming from Sicily and Muslim Spain. But at the same time, he ought to have heard of a different kind of poetry, that is, the mystical one that was dedicated to the love of God. He would certainly have read something about the sensuous Muslim paradise, but equally he would have known something else about this other paradise that the Sufis described in detail. As for why he preferred to suppress his Arabic and Islamic sources in the *Commedia*, this can likely be attributed to his love-hate relationship with the enemy. Avicenna, Averroes, Saladin, Michael Scot, and Frederick II are either in limbo, or hell, but they are all splendid models in their respective fields. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis, and St. Bernard who reside in heaven have torn themselves away from the enemy and managed to find their true selves at the end of their ordeal. But they had to absorb the enemy and his learning first, before liberating themselves from him. Dante would love to follow their path. His long poem would be his difficult trial. He would endeavor first to resemble the enemy to the point of disappearing in him. But along the way he would gradually shed his love-hate

67 Ibid., 127.

68 Ibid., 131.

complex and be his own self. Eventually he would walk once more beneath the stars. His love would move the sun and other celestial bodies. No one then would dare to say that his *Divine Comedy* is an example of the imitation of an enemy's journey to hell and heaven. He would create his Beatrice emulating the mystic female guide, emphasizing the connection between human beauty and divine reality, but he would camouflage her origin. He would use the mystics' numbers in structuring the *Comedy* and play on the metaphors of darkness and light throughout the poem. His heaven, too, would have echoes from al-Ghazālī, Ibn Ṭufayl, Ibn 'Arabī, and other Muslim mystics and philosophers. Its most learned inhabitants would be the nearest to the Ultimate Light. In his search for happiness he would have to be transformed into a new being, a purified and complete soul. Endowed with free will, love, and understanding, and purged of sin he would be drawn upwards to the abode of God. Like Ibn Ṭufayl, he, too, would speak about the inadequacy of language, of his own human power to express what he saw on his miraculous journey. But at the end he would produce an Italian nationalist Christian vision of the afterworld expressed in a new language through which he would regain total possession of himself.

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Paradise, Alexander the Great and the *Arabian Nights*: Some New Insights Based on an Unpublished Manuscript

Claudia Ott

...and behind them there is nobody else and nothing else but high mountains,
and above the peaks of the high mountains is paradise hanging between heaven and earth
like a huge town which God bordered from every side with winds and storms.¹

The Arabic Alexander tradition consists of a heterogeneous group of texts which share only one feature: their protagonist is Alexander the Great, in Arabic (al-)Iskandar/Dhū l-Qarnayn. Among them we find texts belonging to the tradition of Pseudo-Callisthenes, i.e., the late classical Greek Alexander Romance, based on its Syriac translation. Other Arabic Alexander books can be classified as wisdom literature, still others as an independent branch of the Dhū l-Qarnayn traditions, while a fourth and quite large group of manuscripts contains texts of the semi-oral genre of the *sīra shaʿbiyya*, the Arabian epic.²

One of the most important witnesses of the Arabic Pseudo-Callisthenes tradition is a text preserved in a unique manuscript in Paris, dated 1104/1693.³ Its title is *Sīrat al-malik Iskandar Dhū l-Qarnayn*.⁴ The author of the work remains anonymous, but the copyist of this particularly beautiful manuscript has left

¹ “*Wa-laysa warāʾahum aḥadan (sic!) illā l-jibālu l-shāmikhātu wa-l-jannatu fawqa ruʿūsi l-jibāli l-ʿāliyati l-shāmikhāti wa-hiya bayna l-samāʾi wa-l-arḍi wa-hiya shibhu l-madīnati l-ʿazīmati qad ḥaffahā llāhu bi-l-riyāḥi l-ʿawāṣifi min kulli jānibin.*” *Sīrat al-malik Iskandar Dhū l-Qarnayn*, Ms. Paris BN Arabe 3687, fol. 74b, lines 10–2 (see figure).

² Cf. Doufikaer-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus* passim.

³ The date is given in both the Islamic and the Coptic Calender: “the 18th of Dhu l-Ḥijja, the holy month of the Arabic year 1104, equivalent to the 18 Misrā of the Coptic year 1409”; see Doufikaer-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus* 58.

⁴ According to Faustina Doufikaer-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus* 60, note 178, two more manuscripts of the same text could be traced. A critical edition of all three manuscripts is in preparation.

us his name: Yūsuf Ibn ‘Aṭīya, known as Quzmān. Several Christian-Arabic manuscripts of the last decades of the seventeenth century originate from the same scribe, who was apparently a Coptic Christian.⁵ Moreover, the contents of this manuscript show a moderate, but not exclusive Christian influence. As Faustina Doufīkar-Aerts puts it: “Christian and Islamic elements alternate in a ‘brotherly’ fashion.”⁶ According to Doufīkar-Aerts, this manuscript is not only the most important exponent of the Alexander Romance in Arabic, but can also be characterized as a missing link between the Syriac and the Ethiopian Alexander Romance.⁷

1 Alexander and Paradise

In this manuscript, we find an unexpected piece of information about paradise. It is related to Alexander’s exploits to the boundaries of the world and the wall against Gog and Magog, both of which form major motifs in the Arabic Alexander tradition: Alexander the Great erects a barrier in order to protect mankind from the apocalyptic hordes of Gog and Magog who were believed to live in the extreme north.⁸ The Arabic text is quoted above in transliteration and English translation; the original is displayed in the photograph of the manuscript.⁹ It is a short but nevertheless most interesting passage. Alexander the Great has just asked his messengers about the remotest edges of the earth in the North and East, beyond Persia and China. And the messengers report to him that nothing other than paradise lies beyond them, “hanging between heaven and earth.”

2 The Arabian Nights

In this passage of the Alexander Romance, paradise is located “beyond Persia and China,” which is almost the same exotic, fascinating, and dangerous region where the *Arabian Nights* have their origin. This may be pure coincidence – it

5 On the name Quzmān and its linkage to Coptic circles see Doufīkar-Aerts, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus* 58, note 173.

6 Ibid., 71–2.

7 Ibid., 59–66.

8 See van Donzel and Schmidt, *Gog and Magog*, passim.

9 *Sīrat al-malik Iskandar Dhū l-Qarnayn*, Ms. Paris BN Arabe 3687, fol. 74b, lines 11–3 (see figure).

seems interesting anyway to have a closer look at this analogy. The *Arabian Nights* explicitly mention “the islands of India and China”¹⁰ or otherwise “the peninsulas of India and Indochina”¹¹ as the location of the frame story of Shahriyār and Shahrazād; besides that, the main literary motifs of the frame story of the *Arabian Nights* are rooted in Indian literature. The basic idea of the *Arabian Nights* is expounded in the frame story, which consists of the so-called prologue, the night formulas, and the various endings. In our context, the prologue is the most interesting. It is made up of three parts, all of which have their roots in Old Indian – Pali and Sanskrit – literature, but which are first woven into one single story in the *Arabian Nights*. The partition into three parts goes back to the French folklorist, Emmanuel Cosquin, who first published his ideas in 1909.¹² Cosquin’s analysis was discussed by Enno Littmann in the afterword to his German translation of the *Arabian Nights*.¹³ In their fundamental study on the *Arabian Nights*, Heinz and Sophia Grotzfeld give another detailed record of these ideas.¹⁴ According to Grotzfeld, the first part of the prologue tells the story of two kings and brothers, who are betrayed by their wives and who give up their rule because of their disappointment at this betrayal. This motif is found more than once in the *Tipiṭaka*, a Buddhist collection of stories, part of which was translated into Chinese in 251 CE. The second part of the prologue is the story of the ‘Ifrit and the Maiden: a Demon keeps a young woman captive in a glass case to prevent her from being unfaithful to him. She, however, betrays him whenever he is asleep. Two men, who are traveling the world to find someone who was more cruelly tested and abused than themselves, are witnesses to this scene. The story can be found in *Jātaka* No. 436, which is similarly a part of the Pali Buddhist Canonical tradition. The third part of the prologue, which forms the actual setting of the *Arabian Nights*, is the story of a young woman who, night after night, tells stories to a cruel king, in order to put off her own execution. To do this, she enlists the help of a woman – Shahrazād’s younger sister Dīnār(a)zād (or Dunyāzād) in the *Arabian Nights*. For this part of the prologue, Sanskrit prototypes can be found in the commentaries on the canonical Jaina texts. Apart from the frame story,

10 “Jazā’ir al-Hind wa-l-Šin.” *Alf layla wa-layla*, ed. Būlāq 3; Lyons and Lyons (trans.), *The Arabian nights* i, 3.

11 “Jazāyir (sic!) al-Hind wa-Šin al-Šin,” Mahdi (ed.), *The thousand and one nights* i, 56; Haddawy (trans.), *The Arabian nights* 3.

12 Cosquin, Prologue-cadre.

13 Littmann (trans.), *Erzählungen* vi, 666–7.

14 Grotzfeld, *Erzählungen* 50–67.

parallels to Indian literature can also be traced in many of the stories told by Shahrazād in the course of the *Arabian Nights*.¹⁵

Several works of old Indian literature have been transmitted to “the West,” i.e., into Arabic, through Middle Persian Literature. Perhaps the most important of these is the *Pañcatantra*, which, by order of the Sassanian king Khusraw I. Anushirwān, was translated from Sanskrit into Pahlavi by the royal physician Burzōye (or Barzūya, Barzawayhi) around 570 CE and from Pahlavi into Arabic by ‘Abdallāh b. al-Muqaffa’ (d. 139/756) under the new title of *Kalīla wa-Dimna*. If we trust Ibn al-Nadīm and the other Arabic literary sources, the frame story of the *Arabian Nights* went the same route. Its main motifs were collected for the first time in Persia in a book entitled *Hazār afsān* (*A Thousand Tales*),¹⁶ then translated from Pahlavi into Arabic under the new title of *Alf layla* (*A Thousand Nights*), later *Alf layla wa-layla* (*A Thousand and One Nights*).¹⁷ Although it is not clear whether the work called *Alf layla* is a direct translation of *Hazār afsān* or rather a kind of transformation of the latter, there is no doubt that these two works are very closely related to each other. Astonishingly, a source from the middle of the third/ninth century, ‘Abdallāh b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Kātīb – whose work on secretaries and scribes was quoted by Ibn Qutayba and printed as early as 1973, but only recently discovered as a source for the history of the *Arabian Nights* – ascribes the translation of the *Kitāb hazār afsān* to the above-mentioned famous translator of Middle Persian literature, Ibn al-Muqaffa’.¹⁸

3 Paradise in the Nights

As we have seen, the *Arabian Nights* (Middle Persian *Hazār afsān*, Arabic *Alf layla*) and the concept of paradise (Old Persian *pairi-daeza*, Arabic *firdaws*)¹⁹ appear to follow similar historical trans-cultural trajectories, both moving from pre-Islamic Persian culture to that of the pre-modern Arabic-Islamic world. But are there other links between paradise and the *Nights*, with regard to the contents?

15 See Alsdorf, Belege; and Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Encyclopedia* ii, 603–4 with further bibliographical references.

16 The Persian title *Hazār afsān* is commonly quoted in Arabic literary sources up to the fourth/tenth century. The content of *Hazār afsān* is recorded in detail at the end of the fourth/tenth century in the *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm: Cf. Ott (trans.), *Tausendundeine Nacht* 643–4 and Pellat, *Alf layla wa layla*.

17 The complete title *Alf layla wa-layla* is documented for the first time in 1155 CE. See Goitein, Evidence, reprinted in Marzolph, *Reader* 83–6.

18 Cf. Chraïbi, *Nuits* 24–6.

19 Cf. Leisten, *Gärten* 47.

Although the setting of most of the stories takes place either in the city or the desert, the *Arabian Nights* evoke almost every possible association of garden and paradise.²⁰ Some gardens are explicitly compared with paradise, as is the case with Hārūn al-Rashīd's garden on the bank of the Tigris, where a pair of lovers crept in unnoticed. In the description of this garden, the quotation of Q 13:4 emphasizes the association with paradise:

They entered through a vaulted gateway that looked like a gateway in Paradise and passed through a bower of trellised boughs overhung with vines bearing grapes of various colors, the red like rubies, the black like Abyssinian faces, and the white, which hung between the red and the black, like pearls between red coral and black fish. Then they found themselves in the garden, and what a garden! There they saw all manner of things, "in singles and in pairs." The birds sang all kinds of songs: the nightingale warbled with touching sweetness, the pigeon cooed plaintively, the thrush sang with a human voice, the lark answered the ringdove with harmonious strains, and the turtledove filled the air with melodies. The trees were laden with all manners of ripe fruits: pomegranates, sweet, sour, and sour-sweet; apples, sweet and wild; and Hebron plums as sweet as wine, whose color no eyes have seen and whose flavor no tongue can describe.²¹

Paradise-like gardens serve as the setting for many a love episode in the *Arabian Nights*. The first rendezvous of Nūr al-Dīn and Shams al-Nahār, the favorite mistress of the caliph, takes place in the palace Qaṣr al-Khuld, the name of which derives from the Quranic term for paradise: *jannat al-khuld* (Q 25:15).²² And when the lovers Anīs al-Jalīs and Nūr al-Dīn b. Khāqān sail from Basra to Baghdad, even the "City of Peace" itself gleams like paradise in the light of their love:

A place whose citizens are subject to no fear²³
And safety is the master there.
For its people it is a decorated paradise,²⁴
Its wonders being plain to see.²⁵

20 Cf. Ott, *Paradies*; and Marzolph and van Leeuwen, *Encyclopedia* ii, 561–3.

21 Haddawy (trans.), *The Arabian nights* 365.

22 Cf. Haddawy (trans.), *The Arabian nights* 301.

23 This wording is also a part of the Quranic description of paradise, cf. e.g., Q 2:274.

24 "*Ka-annahū jannatan muzakhrāfatan* (sic)." Mahdi (ed.), *The thousand and one nights* i, 456.

25 The English translation – except for the word "paradise" – has been quoted here after Lyons and Lyons (trans.), *The Arabian nights* i, 72.

Even unrequited love provokes associations of paradise. The harsher the rejection of the beloved, the more likely his or her favorable qualities are to be a paradise-like oasis in the midst of a dry and barren desert:

You have a hidden secret in men's hearts,
 Folded away, concealed and not spread out.
 Your beauty puts to shame the gleaming moon
 While your grace is that of the breaking dawn.
 The radiance of your face holds unfulfillable desires,
 Whose well-known feelings grow and multiply.
 Am I to melt with heat, when your face is my paradise,
 And shall I die of thirst when your saliva is Kauthar?²⁶

Paradise as a metaphor is particularly interesting in those stories of the *Arabian Nights* where the relation between two lovers is secret, forbidden or impossible. To these lovers, the fulfillment of their love seems like paradise on earth. And if, however rarely, they manage to be united like Nūr al-Dīn and Anīs al-Jalīs, whom we find sleeping on a bench in the park with their arms wrapped round each other, their union is a real Eden:

Glory to God who caused this moon to rise,
 Bringing together lover with lover.
 For who has seen the sun and moon at once
 In Eden or on earth; who has ever?²⁷

Certainly, these few and scattered observations cannot provide a comprehensive understanding of paradise in the *Arabian Nights*. Nevertheless, we see that paradise seems to be a (somewhat) natural element of the stories. Within the stories, the main connotation of paradise is love, no matter whether love is fulfilled, rejected or merely a wishful desire, or whether a love episode takes place in a paradise-like setting.

As we have already seen, the literary history of the *Nights* is also connected with paradise, both ideas following the same route of transmission. But at the end of the day, the genesis of the *Nights* still seem as mysterious as the location of paradise. This mystery causes even Alexander the Great to stop short and check with his messengers:

26 Ibid., i, 162–3.

27 Haddawy (trans.), *The Arabian nights* 300.

But how, then, can the four rivers flow from paradise
 Shayḥān, Jayḥān, al-Dijla and al-Furāt,
 if this paradise is suspended
 between heaven and earth?²⁸

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28 "Fa-qāla lahum Dhū l-Qarnayni kayfa khurūju l-anhāri min al-jannati a'nī l-anhāra l-musammāta Shayḥān wa-Jayḥān wa-l-Dijla wa-l-Furāt wa-hiya hādhihi l-jannatu l-mu'allaqatu bayna l-samā'i wa-l-arḍi?" *Sīrat al-malik Iskandar Dhū l-Qarnayn*, Ms. Paris BN Arabe 3687, fol. 74b, lines 11–3.

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ولا عصاة فمنها من خلقتم المفردة ورويتهم الشعة
 وان هذا الحصون الخربة الذي تراها في ارضنا و
 النلال العظام الذي تراها جردت وفتواها واولاد
 القتل كلهم واما ارض قار من قار فتحو اخصوا فتم
 الكبار المشبعة ويا ذون ماوكمها وحيابنها وبنين
 بينها وبناتها الكبار واخلعواها كما تم فقال لهم الملك
 ذوا القرنين فهل رايتهم وراهم احدكم في الامم فقالوا ايها
 ورايتهم لنفاس يعني النجاسين روس الكلاب اناسا
 لا يدري ما عدهم ورايتهم اسماءهم اسماء النقادون عليها
 وليس ورايتهم احدكم الجبال الشاخنة والجنة فوق
 روس الجبال العالنه الشاخنة وهي بين السماء والارض
 وهي شبه المذنبه العظيمة قد جعلها الله بالريح
 العواصف من كل جانب فقال لهم ذوا القرنين
 كيف خرج الامم من الجنة اعني الامم المسماه
 شيخان وحيخان والرجلة والفرات وهي هذه الجنة
 المعلقة بين السماء والارض وما رايتكم تدركون انهم
 رايتوها فقالوا لا ان الله تعالى فادراكهم
 الامم

FIGURE 42.1 Sirat al-malik Iskandar Dhū l-Qarnayn, Paris, BNF, Ms. Arabe 3687, fol. 74b.
COURTESY OF THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DE FRANCE.

Paradise in an Islamic *‘Ajā’ib* Work: *The Delight of Onlookers and the Signs for Investigators* of Mar‘ī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624)*

Walid A. Saleh

In researching the influence of the Nishapuri school of *tafsīr* on subsequent Islamic intellectual history, I encountered an unpublished and unstudied work by Mar‘ī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624).¹ One of the leading Ḥanbalī scholars of eleventh/seventeenth-century Cairo, Mar‘ī l-Karmī was originally a native of Ṭūl Karm in Palestine. This work, *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn wa-āyāt al-mustadillīn* (The delight of onlookers and the signs for investigators), was clearly popular, given the number of extant copies available in library collections.² My initial interest in this work was motivated by Mar‘ī l-Karmī’s extensive use of Aḥmad al-Tha‘labī’s (d. 427/1035) Quran commentary, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ‘an tafsīr al-Qur’ān* (Investigation and explanation of the exegesis of the Quran). Soon, however, I developed an appreciation of this work that goes beyond its relationship to *tafsīr*.

This article is both a study of the function and place of paradise in *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* and an introduction to the work. Its aim is to draw attention to this fascinating work and to highlight its significance. In my opinion it is one of the most important works of *‘ajā’ib* (the marvel of creations genre) from the post-classical period (fourteenth to eighteenth century CE).³ Since Mar‘ī l-Karmī relies heavily on an earlier *‘ajā’ib* work (*Kanz al-asrār wa-lawāqih al-afkār* – Treasure of secrets and the harbingers of thoughts), itself still unpublished and much less well known to modern scholarship than Mar‘ī l-Karmī’s, this chapter

* Research for this work was made possible by a generous grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) to research the history of *tafsīr*.

1 On the Nishapuri school of *tafsīr* which consisted mainly of al-Tha‘labī and al-Wāḥidī (d. 468/1076), see Saleh, *The Nishapuri school*.

2 We are extremely fortunate to have an autograph copy of this work. The copy is Gotha Manuscript Orient A-746, which was written in 1022/1613. My edition of the introduction uses also British Library manuscript Or. 5948. A large number of copies of the work are also available at Princeton University Library.

3 I am preparing a critical edition of this work.

is also an indirect introduction to this early work (see below). The *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt* of al-Qazwīnī (the use of the term *ʿajāʾib* in this title is clearly defined and discussed below) is still by far the best known specimen of this genre, despite the eagerness with which scholars have treated the category of *ʿajāʾib* in histories of Arabic literature. Moreover, *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* is a work that is both literary and religious at the same time. This is a consciously constructed work that uses the tropes and methods of secular belles-lettres to construct an Islamic literary text. Islamic religious literature is the least researched of genres, lying as it does between two worlds (Arabic belles-lettres and Islamic studies), with the result that this literature is not assigned a role when we configure Islamic intellectual history. Recently Roberto Tottoli has reawakened the interest of scholars in this type of Islamic literature, and this article attempts to build on his work.⁴

1 Marʿī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī's Biography

Marʿī b. Yūsuf al-Karmī (d. 1033/1624) was a leading intellectual figure of the Arab Ottoman period. Because Marʿī l-Karmī stemmed from the dark centuries of Arabic Islamic cultural life, the Arab Ottoman centuries, until recently he has not garnered any serious attention. Indicative of his previous marginality is the fact that he has no entry in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Marʿī l-Karmī is, however, not an unknown figure. As one of the chroniclers of Ibn Taymiyya's merits he has secured for himself a position in the secondary literature, and, inadvertently, the dedication of Salafī editors who will soon make all of Marʿī l-Karmī's works available.⁵ Thanks to the concerted

4 Tottoli, Muslim eschatological literature 452–77. A remark is in order about the significance of basing our work on more than the available published material from the Middle East. My investigation of manuscript library collections in Istanbul, Cairo, London, Berlin, Paris, and Dublin has radically altered my perception of my work as a scholar of medieval Islam. For despite the tremendous endeavor of Arab and Muslim scholars in publishing this corpus, most of it is still unpublished. Utilizing this unpublished corpus is essential if our work is to escape the constraints of the publishing politics of the Middle East. A fuller picture of Islamic intellectual history is impossible without incorporating manuscript works side by side with what is available in print. Needless to say, my awareness is accompanied by a deep appreciation for the editors of the vast extant library of Islamic literature and their tireless efforts.

5 Marʿī l-Karmī wrote two books on Ibn Taymiyya, both of which are published: *al-Kawākib al-durriyya fī manāqib al-mujtahid Ibn Taymiyya* (Beirut 1986) and *al-Shahāda al-zakiyya fī thanāʾ al-aʾimma ʿalā Ibn Taymiyya* (Beirut 1985).

efforts of these Salafī scholars we are now more aware of his scholarly output. Most critical editions of Mar'ī l-Karmī's works contain studies on the man and his works, which have increased in detail as more and more of them are made accessible.⁶ Michael Winter, to his credit, is the only scholar to have dedicated an article in English to one of the works of Mar'ī l-Karmī.⁷ Thus, despite the availability of many of his works, there is so far no comprehensive study of Mar'ī l-Karmī's intellectual output.

If modern scholars are finding their way back to Mar'ī l-Karmī, his contemporaries were fully aware of his significance. Al-Muḥibbī (d. 1111/1699), the chronicler of the eleventh/seventeenth century, was laudatory in his biography of Mar'ī l-Karmī, describing him as "one of the great scholars of the Hanbalites in Egypt."⁸ Al-Muḥibbī assures us that no scholar could find a flaw in Mar'ī l-Karmī's scholarship, despite his many enemies. Mar'ī l-Karmī taught at al-Azhar and became a professor at Sultan Ḥasan Mosque in Cairo. Most of al-Muḥibbī's biography is devoted to listing the titles of Mar'ī l-Karmī's works – at least 70 in number.⁹ The range of topics Mar'ī l-Karmī covers is unusually varied, from legal *fatwās* to an epistle on the new habit of smoking; from textbooks on law to two works on plagues. Some of Mar'ī l-Karmī's works were translated into Ottoman Turkish and one of his *inshā'* works was published early on in Istanbul in Arabic.¹⁰

2 The Conundrum of the 'ajā'ib Category

Thanks to the pioneering work of Syrinx von Hees, we are now aware that it is problematic to use the term '*ajā'ib*' in literary studies of medieval Arabic and Islamic literature.¹¹ The most famous of the titles that come to mind bearing this term is of course '*Ajā'ib al-makhluqāt*' of al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1262), yet that work is not a work of '*ajā'ib*', if by '*ajā'ib*' we understand fantastic or unreal features and characters.¹² As von Hees has clearly demonstrated in several

6 The most detailed of these introductions is by Shu'ayb al-Arna'ūt, the editor of *Aqāwīl al-thiqāt* 29–43.

7 Winter, Seventeenth-century Arabic panegyric 130–56; see also Melchert, Mar'ī ibn Yūsuf.

8 Al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar* iv, 358–61; the quotation is on page 358.

9 For a detailed list of the works of al-Karmī see the introduction of *Shifā' al-ṣudūr* 10–6.

10 See Winter, Seventeenth-century Arabic panegyric 133, for the Ottoman translation and the *inshā'* collection.

11 See von Hees, The astonishing 101–20, for references to her other works on the subject.

12 Von Hees, *Enzyklopädie als Spiegel*.

of her publications, this is an encyclopedic scientific work that attempts to categorize the entities in existence in the world into an organized compendium of knowledge.¹³ The term *‘ajā’ib* as used in the title of al-Qazwīnī has little to do with the fantastic or unreal or the unscientific: the word is used to invoke the wondrous nature of creation as demonstrating the majesty of God. And although in this title the word certainly *does not* refer to the fantastic or unreal, secondary literature has taken it to mean exactly that.

There is thus a real confusion in the secondary literature which, thanks to von Hees, is now resolved. It is because of this confusion that von Hees implores scholars to stop using the term altogether. Yet, the term *‘ajā’ib* is too useful to discard (although I am in full agreement with von Hees’ analysis), and may be used as long as we realize that it was a term with a variety of meanings. Von Hees rightly takes C.E. Dubler, the writer of the *‘ajā’ib* entry in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, to task for not mentioning any work of literature that fits his description of the genre as developing from a literature concerned with “tangible reality to the realm of fancy.”¹⁴ In his defense, there is actually a body of literature that does constitute what I would call Islamic *‘ajā’ib* literature – works that do cover the intangibles; this is the Islamic cosmological and eschatological literature that was available from early on in Islam and was, unlike what Dubler surmised, a constitutive element of Islamic culture and not a later degeneration.¹⁵ The problem with Dubler’s statement, apart from the fact that he produced no evidence to support this (faulty) historical evolutionary analysis, is that it is a value judgment and not a reflection of the facts; he valorized the early, supposedly scientific, phase of the literature and decried the subsequent decadence it allegedly suffered, although one is left with little information about what he meant by this.

There was actually a parallel world of *‘ajā’ib* Islamic literature, one that mirrored the Hellenistic heritage of the *‘ajā’ib* which was cultivated by the literati in Islamic culture (i.e., the Qazwīnī-type material). The two functioned in two different realms and the *‘ajā’ib* of al-Qazwīnī made no room for the *‘ajā’ib* of Islamic cosmography. The Islamic cosmographic and Islamic *‘ajā’ib* material were moreover a tradition searching for a form. One can document several forms that this material inhabited, from eschatological literature to *mi’rāj* narratives, from *ḥadīth* collections to cosmological tractates. Yet it did not find a full articulation in a single form until the work of Mar’ī l-Karmī (although the work of Muḥammad al-Ṣinhājī (d. ca. 798/1393) needs to be investigated

13 Von Hees, al-Qazwīnī’s *‘Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt* 171–86.

14 Von Hees, *The astonishing* 103.

15 As demonstrated in Heinen, *Islamic cosmology*.

in more detail).¹⁶ A complete history of the development of this material has yet to be documented, but Mar'ī l-Karmī's *Bahjat al-nāzirīn* represents a major development in this genre, a coming together of the different strands of Islamic material, whether from the high cultural sphere of the Islamic sciences (*tafsīr*; *ḥadīth*, scholarly commentaries, and related works) or from popular works (of the type studied by Tottoli), to fashion a comprehensive presentation of Islamic "folk" cosmological and 'ajā'ib material.¹⁷

One of the main characteristics of al-Qazwīnī's work is its total disregard of Islamic cosmology and its entities.¹⁸ The only common denominator between the two is the angelic world. This is not a capitulation to Islamic cosmology on the part of al-Qazwīnī's scientific paradigm, so much as a coincidence of material: al-Qazwīnī's world could accommodate angels as it accommodated a single God. Otherwise Islamic entities were simply inadmissible in this world. Al-Qazwīnī, devout as he was, was in no mood to give his readers the dimensions of the throne of God (*al-'arsh*) or the magnitude of His chair (*al-kursī*).¹⁹

16 In this case I think a fuller analysis of al-Ṣinhājī's work *Kanz al-asrār* might alter my historical analysis. My only defense is that I intend to carry out a fuller analysis of *Kanz al-asrār* and am fully cognizant of the situation.

17 There are already some studies that help us grasp the outlines of 'ajā'ib material. Anton Heinen's work, *Islamic cosmology*, which documents the Islamicization of cosmological treatises, has unfortunately never been carried further. Meanwhile Roberto Tottoli's work on the eschatological treatise *Aḥwāl al-qiyāma* (The circumstances of resurrection, which is the same work as pseudo-Ghazālī's *al-Durra al-fākhirā* — *The Precious Pearl*) shows how little we know about this material. I am hoping that by bringing attention to *Bahjat al-nāzirīn* I can contribute to the attempts of scholars working on Islamic literature to outline the development of this genre. I also hope to draw attention to the close relationship between the cosmological Islamic literature (such as that studied by Heinen) and the 'ajā'ib eschatological literature (such as that studied by Tottoli).

18 The term "Islamic cosmology" is understood here to denote discourses influenced by Islamic religious concepts that address the origins and eventual fate of the universe, paying special attention to supernatural elements, entities, and powers such as angels, demons, and miraculous aspects of the landscape of paradise and hell. It is not intended to refer to the more scientific or philosophical studies produced by Muslim scholars.

19 See al-Qazwīnī's dismissive remarks about the fact that some early Muslims have equated *al-kursī* with the eighth sphere, while *al-'arsh* was equated with the ninth sphere. He is deferential to this effort, but hardly able to take it seriously; his tone betrays a determination not to contaminate his cosmology with Islamic entities: "wa-qad aḥabb ba'd al-salaf al-tawfiq bayna al-āyāt wa-l-akhbār wa-qawl al-ḥukamā' fa-za'am anna al-kursī huwa al-falak al-thāmin alladhī dhakarnā si'atahu wa-'ajā'ibahu, wa-l-'arsh huwa al-falak al-tāsi' alladhī huwa a'zam al-aflāk. Wa-Allāh ta'ālā a'lam bi-ṣiḥḥat ḥādihā al-qawl aw fasādihi. . . ." al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib al-makhluqāt* 87–9.

The pious might talk about these things, and one might be forced to admit their existence, but they are hardly a fit subject for a scholarly work; hence al-Qazwīnī leaves them out. Al-Qazwīnī describes nothing that philosophy could not countenance. In many ways, Marʿī l-Karmī was left with no option but to fashion an *ʿajāʾib* work in which the Islamic “entities” are re-embedded in the world and “science.”

3 *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn wa-āyāt al-mustadillīn*

Although Marʿī l-Karmī never deigns to mention al-Qazwīnī nor uses the word *ʿajāʾib* in the title of his work, there is no doubt about what he was attempting to do, or rather undo, in his *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*. His was both a continuation and a refutation of al-Qazwīnī’s work, and as such, it inserts itself in a deliberate manner in the genre of *ʿajāʾib*. *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* fashioned itself as a refutation and rehabilitation of the philosophical scientific mode of writing about the wonders of creation. The beings that al-Qazwīnī left out of his catalogue of the various components of the universe, paradise, hell, God’s throne, His celestial chair, His book of records, the primordial pen, the day of judgment, death, the events of the apocalypse – the host of beings that were part and parcel of the mythical world of the Quran and the world it generated – these beings were given center stage in *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*. The world that al-Qazwīnī denied by not describing or refusing to include in his book *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt* were now given an existence that was independent of the usual genres in which such Islamic entities usually appeared. Thus instead of *ḥadīth*, *tafsīr*, or eschatological treatises where such a cosmology was elaborated, Marʿī l-Karmī used the form of the *ʿajāʾib* genre to fashion an Islamic cosmological world. The framework of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* is that of the wonders of creation genre, but the content has been thoroughly Islamized, perhaps as a way of harmonizing “science and religion.”

Bahjat al-nāẓirīn is divided into ten chapters.²⁰ The sum total of the information presented in these ten chapters is found in one form or another in previous works. Indeed, Marʿī l-Karmī stated that he used at least 500 sources for his book (which is most certainly an exaggeration). Two books deserve special mention because of the frequency with which they were quoted, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān* of al-Thaʿlabī and *Kanz al-asrār wa-lawāqih al-afkār* of Muḥammad al-Ṣinhājī.²¹ *Kanz al-asrār*, a still unedited work, is beyond

20 See Appendix I for the content of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*.

21 The relationship of Marʿī l-Karmī’s work to that of al-Ṣinhājī’s *Kanz al-asrār* is a topic for another article. It is clear that Marʿī l-Karmī modeled his work after that of al-Ṣinhājī.

doubt the work most heavily utilized by Mar'ī l-Karmī. Mar'ī l-Karmī, moreover, mentions a long list of authors and book titles including *al-Durra al-fākhira* of al-Ghazālī (pseudo-Ghazālī; as I mentioned, it is the same as *Aḥwāl al-qiyāma* mentioned above) and *al-Hay'a al-saniyya* of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).²² It is however important to emphasize that Mar'ī l-Karmī has assembled material not usually gathered together in order to fashion a new form of writing. Chapter 1, "On the Higher Spheres," and chapter 2, "On the Lower Spheres," are the only material from 'ajā'ib works proper (although here the Islamic cosmological elements dominate the presentation). The remaining eight chapters are what we usually encounter in eschatological treatises or *ḥadīth* collections. The arrangement of this disparate material and its presentation transforms Mar'ī l-Karmī's work into something new.

If we analyze the sources of Mar'ī l-Karmī we can document that he was tapping into several Islamic literary genres. There were the Quran commentaries; the *ḥadīth* collections and their commentaries (*shurūḥ*); ascension narratives; eschatological and apocalyptic works (he highlights two in particular, the already mentioned *al-Durra al-fākhira*, and Nu'aym b. Ḥammād's *Kitāb al-Fitan*); history books; cosmological treatises; and theological treatises. The inclusion of the apocalyptic material (*ashrāt al-sā'a*, i.e., the signs of the hour literature), a genre that early in Islam grew to be an independent form of writing, proves that Mar'ī was attempting to fashion a world of seamless continuation, from the creation to the end of the world, passing through the events of the apocalypse.²³ Not only was he reformulating the 'ajā'ib genre, he was expanding its content by including (historical) events instead of only "spiritual" or "supra-rational" entities.

It should be evident that the genre of 'ajā'ib was unsuitable for an Islamic cosmographic outlook.²⁴ How did Mar'ī l-Karmī then reconceptualize the genre? The introduction of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* plays a fundamental role in refashioning and repositioning the Islamic material into the mold of 'ajā'ib

Kanz al-asrār was as popular as *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*, if not more so, given the high number of manuscripts of the work. I used manuscript Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Arabe 1400. One hopes that an edition of *Kanz al-asrār* will resolve many issues regarding the consolidation of this genre as a literary form.

22 On *al-Durra al-fākhira* see Tottoli, Muslim eschatological literature; on *al-Hay'a* see Heinen, *Islamic cosmology*.

23 For a preliminary classification of this literature, see S. Günther's contribution to this publication. See, moreover, Saleh, Woman.

24 The term "cosmographic" is understood here to denote a discourse that maps the general features of the universe, using methods that are considered scientific by those who employ them.

works.²⁵ Mar'ī l-Karmī used several stratagems to align his work with the marvels of creations genre. First, although Mar'ī l-Karmī did not use the word *'ajā'ib* in the title of his book, he could hardly wait to use it in a phrase in the work itself. His first sentence is, “we thank the Lord that expanded our breasts and enlightened our hearts to contemplate (*naẓar*) the wonders of His kingdom (*'ajā'ib al-malakūt*).” The claim here is that this book is about “looking” at the marvels of the created entities. Soon the introduction discusses the science of observation (*'ilm al-naẓar*) and induction (*al-istidlāl*) as being the highest ranks of science. Mar'ī l-Karmī informs the reader that one ought to study the created beings (*maṣnū'āt al-ṣāni'*) in the world in order to understand the wisdom and perfection of God. Only through personal individual endeavor could one attain certitude in faith, which allows one to reflect on this world and its marvels. These statements are much in line with what one finds in the introduction of al-Qazwīnī's *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, where investigation and observation are the basis of our acquired knowledge of the world. This appeal to the science of observation is carried out to align the book with al-Qazwīnī's book. Here, however, it is employed for a different purpose: the same act of “observation” according to Mar'ī l-Karmī allows the observer to eventually discern divine secrets (*al-asrār al-ilāhīyya*), and this results in an increased capacity for revelatory knowledge (or knowledge attained through mystical experience, *kashf*). The term *al-kashf* is the ubiquitous Islamic term for acquiring knowledge through non-sensory means. This acquired revelatory knowledge transports the observer to a state of certitude (*yaqīn*), the highest level of knowledge, where one knows that what one knows is true. The introduction thus mixes two sets of technical terminology, the philosophical (natural history) and the mystical; this admixture allows the author an entry into the structure and form of a genre that has so far been the domain of natural sciences.

The second stratagem is genealogical. Mar'ī l-Karmī informs the reader that he is aware that there is a long tradition of marvels of creation (*'ajā'ib*) works, and that he has looked at many such works. The implication is that the reader should think of Mar'ī l-Karmī's work as descending from this line of works. These works were, however, according to the author, unsatisfactory for several

25 See Appendix II for an edition of the introduction of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*. The long excursus into jealousy between scholars, a feature of the professorial compositions of the Islamicate world, is probably directed against the scholar al-Maymūnī (Ibrāhīm b. Muḥammad b. 'Īsā, d. 1079/1669); on him see al-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām* i, 67. Mar'ī l-Karmī does not mention him by name but we know of the rivalry between the two from al-Muḥibbī, *Khulāṣat al-athar* iv, 360.

reasons. They were either too short and thus left out material, or they were too long, causing the reader to be bored and lose interest; others had faulty information. The main reason for Mar'ī l-Karmī's dissatisfaction with previous works, however, was the fact that they did not follow the methodology of scholars who work on prophetic traditions (*sunan al-muḥaddithūn*). The authors of these works followed the methods of historians (*al-mu'arrikhūn*) and what he calls fabricators (*al-waḍḍā'ūn*). Here is the parting of the ways between the older form of 'ajā'ib works and Mar'ī l-Karmī's work. He bases his work on the Quran, Quran commentaries, traditionalist material, and the prophetic Sunna. Mar'ī l-Karmī informs the reader that he avoids the material from historians and fabricators. The Quran and the Sunna are thus positioned as counter-sources for the information provided by "mere" human agency. Despite this negative assessment of the previous 'ajā'ib genre of works, Mar'ī l-Karmī nonetheless positions himself as continuing this genre – however flawed it is, according to him. The implied model of his work is thus made known only in negative terms. He still refuses to mention al-Qazwīnī by name, yet it is clear that he wants to write a work in the same style. It is this implicit connection Mar'ī l-Karmī draws to 'ajā'ib literature that makes me hesitant to discard the term. Thus we should all take heed of von Hees' work when we approach 'ajā'ib works, but still use the term now that we know its various definitions.

The third stratagem Mar'ī l-Karmī uses to align his work with the 'ajā'ib genre is his deployment of the fundamental division of the world into the higher realm (*al-ālam al-uhwī*) and the lower realm (*al-ālam al-suflī*). This traditional division is exactly the division offered by al-Qazwīnī in his *'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*. The outer garb of Mar'ī l-Karmī's work is thus the same as the 'ajā'ib genre.

4 Paradise in *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*

The study of a work that stems from the post-classical period presents the investigator with interesting problems. How does one approach such a text, a text of compounded genealogy, when much of its material is already centuries older? One might be tempted to dismiss the work as derivative, especially since this is the usual reaction to such material. Its collage-like nature is thus used against the work. The exemplars and sources for many of the texts from the post-classical periods are available, staring us in the eye, increasing the urge to go back to the originals. In the case of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* the author himself, Mar'ī l-Karmī, admits to his indebtedness to the *Kashf al-asrār* of al-Ṣinhājī and *al-Durra al-fākhira*. The first implication of the nature of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*

is that a purely descriptive discussion of its contents is out of the question as the details of the Islamic concept of paradise, to which Marʿī l-Karmī adds almost nothing new, are already well-known.

Fortunately, these post-classical texts present a great opportunity for studying the context in which they functioned and thus for re-examining the content as constitutive of new meanings. What we lack in the area of “originality” in subject matter is made up in the wealth of information that we have about the context of the text and, therefore, about the transformation of the old into something new. We know the author, we have an autograph copy of the work and the copies made of it; we have its sources, and we know much about the political and intellectual atmosphere of the period. The problem is thus one of research priorities and methodological approach.²⁶

My approach to *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* has been to contextualize the text and reinterpret its content, and to describe it intellectually and historically. In the first part of this chapter I have shown how the text was original insofar as it transformed and appropriated a genre of writing to create a new form, an Islamicized *ʿajāʾib* format. In the remaining part of this chapter I now attempt to understand what function such a text was fulfilling and in what way its content was indicative of its function and thus new insofar as it was a transformation.

Chapter 8 of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* is dedicated to paradise (*al-janna*), coming before chapter 9, which is dedicated to hell. This positioning of paradise is peculiar. Paradise in previous works was usually discussed last.²⁷ Far more intriguing is the fact that Marʿī l-Karmī added a new chapter (chapter 10) after his discussion of paradise and hell, a theological chapter on the implications of the existence of paradise and hell. The previous literature that dealt with paradise and hell did not usually engage in theological discussions of this nature, these being confined to theology works proper. Is hell eternal – meaning is paradise the only merciful option for a merciful God? Theodicy was the central

26 Today it is sometimes almost forgotten that most of the manuscripts of the Islamic world were written and copied in what we call the post-classical period. Most of them are actually from the Arab-Ottoman centuries. Yet, even in collections in European countries and North America, thousands of manuscripts from this period languish uncatalogued. Ironically, the fact of the matter is that the two centuries immediately following the conquest of the Near East by the Ottomans are still understudied, although they are amply documented.

27 Thus, for example, in Wolff's edited text of *Aḥwāl al-qiyāma*, paradise comes last. See Wolff (ed. and trans.), *Muhammedanische Eschatologie*. The same is true of al-Ṣinhājī's *Kanz al-asrār*, where paradise is the last item in the book; see Bibliothèque nationale de France Arabe 1400, fols. 8a–9a.

issue raised in chapter 10. The question is thus: how do we understand this work at this particular moment in the Arab-Ottoman East?

First, I see *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* as a bold reaffirmation of the visionary understanding of existence and of history; more importantly it is the triumph of the state of *al-kashf* (unveiling), which I discussed before. Here is a world presented as it ought to be, or as it is really is, described through a quasi-visionary means. The world, what really matters of the world, is its eternal entities, those that will abide in existence, not the created realm that will be annihilated when the world ends. The 'ajā'ib that one should thus marvel at is the 'ajā'ib *al-malakūt*, i.e., of the divine realm, not the 'ajā'ib *al-makhlūqāt*, i.e., of the created beings. This is divine geography. What counts of the world is precisely what we are unable to confirm the existence of through sensory processes or through the mental activities of the philosophers or the rationalists, a clear rebuttal to al-Qazwīnī's world.

To appreciate this work, however, we have to see it as the product of the passing of the first Muslim millennium and of the intellectual and political situation of the Arab-Ottoman East at the beginning of the eleventh/seventeenth century. The anxiety over the coming of the apocalypse had abated, and the fact that the world did not end when the year 1000/1591 came to pass was a relief. Muslim scholars had, by the beginning of the tenth century (around 911 *hijrī* or so) agreed, after much wrangling, that the world would end around 1500 of the *hijrī* calendar.²⁸ Yet this anxiety did not come to an end – if one takes into consideration the amount of apocalyptic writing stemming from the eleventh/seventeenth century. There were two visions of human history that were based on the apocalyptic paradigm. The first, which can be described as the more traditional vision, saw human history and in particular the history of the Muslims as culminating in a total disintegration of the social fabric of the Muslim polity. In this view Islamic history was reaching its lowest point. Mar'ī l-Karmī, however, was unique in proposing a radically alternative vision: for him, Islamic history was reaching its zenith.²⁹ Muslims were living in the

28 The story of the debate about the coming of the year 1000 *hijrī* is yet to be written. The most important treatise on the topic is al-Suyūṭī's *al-Kashf 'an mujāwazat hādhihi l-umma al-alf*, which settled the debate about the issue. For the significance of this treatise see my forthcoming study *The coming of the first Muslim millennium*. On al-Suyūṭī's treatise see *al-Ḥāwī lil-fatāwī* ii, 86–92. On the influence of contemporary apocalyptical and messianic expectations on Ottoman concepts of political rule, see Fleischer, *The lawgiver* 160–71. On the influence of apocalyptic and messianic expectations on 'Abbasid political culture, see Yücesoy, *Messianic beliefs*.

29 See the treatise studied by Michael Winter. Winter, however, misses the apocalyptic significance of this "historical" document. To Mar'ī l-Karmī, Ottoman dynastic history was

fullness of time, in the shadow of the glorious Ottomans, the embodiment of history and the dynasty that would see the Muslims delivered to God. His small treatise on the Ottomans was one of the few, if not the only treatise, of a Muslim utopian vision of history offering a radical understanding of the meaning of the Islamic apocalypse. Mar'ī l-Karmī was, however, still convinced that the world would end soon. A utopian apocalyptic vision is still an apocalyptic one, and Mar'ī l-Karmī did write on the coming of the apocalypse.³⁰ Indeed chapter 5, the middle chapter of *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*, is about the signs of the hour and chapter 6 covers the end of the world.

In this light, *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* is a summation of history. It is a summary of the world and of human history from the first moment of creation to the beatific vision. This is a universal history starting from the creation of the very first thing and ending with the very last state of the human condition. It is a record of the things of significance, a parallel world to the perishable universe.

Scholars of the late Mamluk and early Ottoman Arab provinces have long noticed the decline in the art of historical writing after the Ottoman conquest. The destruction of an independent state based in Cairo with Arabic as its official language and the use of Persian and Ottoman Turkish, so the analysis went, caused a serious blow to the art of historiography in the Arab East. The evidence for this view so far is formidable. The last century of Mamluk rule in the Near East witnessed a proliferation of historical writings unprecedented in the Muslim world (the famous Ibn Khaldūn belongs to that century). One looks in vain for any comparable historical writings in Arabic from the time after the demise of the Mamluks and the coming of the Ottomans. There is much to recommend an analysis that sees in the demise of the Mamluks the main reason for the decline in the tenth/sixteenth and eleventh/seventeenth centuries of Arabic historiography.³¹

Yet I would like to propose another way of understanding the situation. It is not that scholars stopped being concerned with history, but rather that what history meant then underwent a major transformation. History in the shadow of the apocalypse is apocalyptic history. Thus understood, the Arab-Ottoman

the apogee of Islamic dynastic history precisely because he had a utopian vision of the Islamic apocalypse. Things were improving as the Muslims approached the end of times, not deteriorating.

30 See his treatise *Farā'id al-fikr fī l-imām al-mahdī l-muntaẓar*, Princeton Garret Collection no. 1006H. The treatise was written the same year as *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*.

31 However, it should be noted that there existed a robust tradition of vivid historiographical writing in Ottoman Turkish during these centuries, on which cf. e.g., Fleischer, *The law-giver* 172–3; Fleischer, *Royal authority* 199–217; Fleischer, *Bureaucrat* 7–8, 44–6, 235–307. Cf. on early Ottoman historiography also Meier, *Perceptions of a new era*.

scholars were rather busy writing historical works, but these were now of a different order. The measure of history was now cosmic, not dynastic. It is this vision that allowed Mar'ī l-Karmī to mix genres, to attempt to create a new form of writing where marvel at creation means seeing the unseen, and where human history is cosmic history. Paradise (*al-janna*) in this sense is more than a promise; paradise is the meaning of history and its culmination. Paradise and paradisaal life become central, and *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn* mirrors the concerns of the Quran. Paradise is the only central abiding entity in this world.

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Appendix 1: Marī's *Bahjat al-nāẓirīn*'s Contents in Detail

- 1- Chapter One: Higher Spheres
 - a- What was Created First?
 - b- The Pen
 - c- Table of Records
 - d- Throne
 - e- Throne Carriers
 - f- *Kursī* (Celestial Chair)
 - g- The Cosmic Trumpet
 - h- Paradise (deferred to Chapter Eight)
 - i- The Cosmic Tree
 - j- Heavens
 - k- Sun
 - l- Moon

- m- Planets
 - n- Angels
 - o- Major Angels
 - p- Rain
 - q- Clouds
 - r- Thunder and Lightening
 - s- Winds
 - t- Day and Night
- 2- Chapter Two: Lower Spheres
- a- Seven Earths
 - b- The Qāf Mountain
 - c- The Measure of the Circumference of the Earth
 - d- The Seven Climes of the Earth
 - e- On the Seas
 - f- On Some Major Islands
 - g- Rivers and Springs
- 3- Chapter Three: The Creation of Human Beings and the *Jinn*
- a- Ensoulment
 - b- On the Whisperings of the Devil
 - c- On the Descent to Earth
 - d- On the Primordial Covenant
 - e- The Lifespan of Adam
 - f- Eve
 - g- The Progeny of Adam
 - h- The Creation of the *Jinn*
 - i- The Progeny of Satan
 - j- Why do Amulets and Talismans have an Effect on *Jinn*?
 - k- Are *Jinn* Morally Responsible for their Actions?
- 4- Chapter Four: On Death
- a- What is the Soul?
 - b- What is Sleep?
 - c- On Dreams
 - d- Does One's Lifespan Change according to God's Will?
 - e- On the Proper Attitude to Death and Asceticism
 - f- The Angel of Death
 - g- The Experience of Dying and the Woes that Accompany Death
 - h- The "Pulling" of the Soul from the Body

- i- The Manner in which the Souls of the Unholy are Dealt With
 - j- The Grave
 - k- The First Inquisition by the Two Angels of the Graves
 - l- The Torments and the Pleasures of the Grave
 - m- On Souls, or, What Experiences Pleasure and Pain?
 - n- On Visitations to Cemeteries

- 5- Chapter Five: The Harbingers of the Apocalypse
 - a- The Age of the Universe
 - b- The Minor Signs that Herald the End
 - c- The Major Signs: Ten of Them

- 6- Chapter Six: The End of the World and the Destruction of the Universe
 - a- The First Blast of the Trumpet
 - b- Transformation of the Universe
 - c- The Death of all Creatures
 - d- General Resurrection

- 7- Chapter Seven: On Judgment and the Assembly of Human Beings
 - a- Standing in Attendance Waiting for God
 - b- The Humiliation of Humanity
 - c- On Intercession
 - d- The Coming of God
 - e- The Dragging of Paradise and Hell
 - f- Humanity Paraded before God
 - g- Books of Deeds
 - h- The Balance
 - i- On the Judgment of Humanity
 - j- On the Judgment of the Beasts
 - k- On the Testimony of Inanimate Beings against the Transgressions of Humanity
 - l- The Judgment on Believers
 - m- The Duration of the Judgment
 - n- Those who Escape Judgment
 - o- The Rich and the Poor
 - p- Igniting Hell
 - q- The Well of Water
 - r- The Bridge over Hell into Paradise
 - s- Disputes and Injustices among Human Beings

- t- The Dismissal of Humanity from the Audience
 - u- Private Intercession
 - v- Intercession
 - w- God's Mercy

- 8- Chapter Eight: Paradise
 - a- Descriptions of the Inhabitants of Paradise
 - b- Descriptions of Paradise; Where is it?
 - c- The Maidens of Paradise (*Hūrī* Eyed)
 - d- The Lowest Rank in Paradise

- 9- Chapter Nine: Hell
 - a- Describing Hell
 - b- Gates of Hell/Levels of Hell
 - c- Valleys and Mountains
 - d- Snakes and Scorpions
 - e- Chains and Fetters
 - f- Garments of the Residents of Hell
 - g- Food of Hell
 - h- Drinks of Hell
 - i- The Custodians of Hell (*Zabāniya*)
 - j- The Cries of Humanity
 - k- Claustrophobia
 - l- The Least Tormented
 - m- The Most Tormented

- 10- Chapter Ten: Miscellaneous
 - a- Is Hell Eternal?
 - b- The Slaughter of Death
 - c- How do the Monotheists Suffer?
 - d- Sinners from among the Believers do not Suffer Eternally
 - e- The Limbo (*al-A'rāf*)
 - f- The Children of Believers Who Die Young
 - g- Nations who did not have Prophets; the Fool, the Deaf and the Decrepit
 - h- *Jinn* and Their Judgment
 - i- The Names of the Day of Resurrection
 - j- On Harmonizing Contradictory Reports about the World to Come
 - k- The Beatific Vision

Appendix II

كتاب بهجة الناظرين وآيات المستدلّين
تصنيف الشيخ الإمام والعالم العلامة والبحر الحبر الهمام
المعترف من فيض ربّه العليّ
الشيخ مرعي بن يوسف المقدسيّ الحنبليّ
غفر الله له ولوالديه ومشايخه
وإخوانه وسائر
المسلمين والمسلمات
والمؤمنين
والمؤمنات
آمين [و]

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم وصلى الله على سيدنا وصحبه وسلم . ربنا آتانا في الدنيا حسنة وفي الآخرة حسنة . ربنا آتانا من لدنك رحمة وهيئ من أمرنا رشدا . نحمد من شرح صدورنا ونور قلوبنا للنظر في عجائب الملكوت . ونوحد من توحد في ملكه فأوجد العالم وجعل أوله إيجاد أنوار سيد بني آدم وخلق الموت والحياة . ولا يلحقه العدم والموت . ونمجد من خلق اللوح والقلم ونقدس من أوجد العرش والكرسي وغيرهما من العدم . وتوكل على الحي الذي لا يموت ونشهد بالربوبية لخالق الأرض والسماء ومسخر السحاب ليحمل الماء . ومرسل الرياح لواقح للزمن والشجر والنبات والقوت . ونشهد بالرسالة لسيد العالمين وأشرف المرسلين المخبر لنا بما غاب عنا من حشر ونشر وجنة ونار إخبار كشف ويقين وثبوت . صلى الله عليه وعلى آله وأصحابه أولي البصيرة والحقيقة والشرعية الذين حازوا أجل الأوصاف وأشرف النعوت وسلم تسليما كثيرا .

وبعد فيقول أحقر الوري وأذل الفقراء مرعي بن يوسف المقدسيّ الحنبليّ : اعلم أنّ من أجل العلوم في القدر والشأن وأعظمها في السرّ والبرهان علم النظر في مصنوعات الصانع يستدلّ عليه والنظر في عجائب الملكوت يرشد إليه . فالناظر يطلع على الأسرار الإلهية والبدائع الربانية ويحصل له زيادة الكشف واليقين والمعارف الجمّة والخير المبين . ويرتقي من عالم الأكدار إلى عالم الأنوار ولا يصير مقلدا في معرفة الواحد القهار . والمقلد قد اختلف في صحة إيمانه وتكلم أهل الكلام في حاله وشأنه .

وقد صنف الأئمة في عجائب الملكوت كتباً جمّة وأبدعوا فيها الغرائب إرشادا للأمة . وقد وقفت منها على ما يسر الوقوف عليه مولاي المعين وتأملت معانيها فإذا هي بدور

سوافر للناظرين . إلا أنّ منها ما هو [اظ] الموجز المخّل والمطنب المملّ ، لم يف بالمقصود ولم يستوعب المطلوب المحمود . ومنها ما فيه المقبول والمردود . ولم يجرأ فيها غالبا على سنن المحدثين ويمسكون بنقول المؤرخين وأقوال الوضعّاعين . فلما رأيت ذلك ووقفت على ما هنالك دعاني داعي المشيئة والإلهام إلى جمع مؤلف فريد في هذا المقام متكلمًا فيه على العالم العلويّ والسفليّ من لدن مبتداه إلى آخر منتهاه وماذا يصير له أولى وأخرى . ليكون بالقبول أولى وأخرى . جانحًا في ذلك لنقول المفسرين وأقوال المحدثين وستة سيد المرسلين . ومجانبا غالبا لأقوال المؤرخين ونقول الوضعّاعين .

وقد نقل ما في هذا المؤلف الفريد والجمع الحسن المفيد من نحو خسارة مؤلف أو يزيد باعتبار مواد أصوله . وقد اجتهدت في تحرير نقوله وبيان طريق تسهيله وإيضاح أبوابه وفصوله . فأصبح كاسمه بهجة الناظرين وآيات المستدلّين . فهناك كتابا لم يسمح الزمان في هذا الفنّ بمثله ولم ينسج ناسج على منواله وشكله . ودونك مؤلفا يوضح المسائل ، محرّر الدلائل ، سهل العبارات ، يبين الإشارات ، عبارته فائقة ، وألفاظه راقية . جمع الفوائد من الكتب الصحيحة فأوعى وأبدع الغرائب ، وترك الأقوال المرجوحة فصار من أكثر كتب هذا الفنّ نفعا . ولعمري إنه لجدير بأن يرسم بماء العيون ومداد الذهب . وأن يرقم في صحائف الورق فضلا عن الورق بأحسن خط من كتب . فإنه جنة فيها ما تشتهي الأنفس وتلذّ الأعين وروضة يكلّ عن وصفها الشفاه والألسن . وليس الخبر كالعيان . وستقرّ به بعد التأمل العيان . فما كلّ من صنف أجاد ولا كلّ من قال وفي بالمراد . والفضل مواهب والناس في الفنون مراتب . والخلائق يتفاوتون في الفضائل . وقد تظفر الأواخر بما ترك الأوائل . وكلّ لله على خلقه من لطف وجود ، وكلّ ذي نعمة محسود والحسود لا يسود . هذا والفقير معترف بقصر الباع مغترف من بحر غيره [و٢] للاتّفاع . مقرّ بقصور عبارته وجهاء . وسماحك بالمعديّ خير من أن تراه .

وهذا المؤلف في الحقيقة لا بدّ أن يقع لأحد رجلين . إمّا عالم محبّ منصف فيدعوي بالحسنى ويدفع بالتي هي أحسن بما هو من صفته . وإمّا جاهل مبغض متعسّف فلا اعتبار بموافقه ولا بمخالفته . وإمّا الاعتبار بموافقة المحبّ المنصف لا بالمبغض المتعسّف .

إذا رضيت عني كرام عشيرتي فلا زال غضبانا عليّ لثامها

وسميته بهجة الناظرين وآيات المستدلّين . جعله الله خالصا لوجهه الكريم . وسببا للفوز لديه بجنّات النعيم . وصبّ عليه قبول القبول فإنه أكرم مسؤول وأعزّ مأمول . وقد جعلته في عشرة أبواب ليكون أسهل لطرائق الصواب . وعلى الله اعتماد دي وركوبي . وإليه فوّضت أمري في حركتي وسكوني .

تنبيه : نقل هذا الكتاب من كتاب الله الذي جمع علم الأولين والآخرين . ومن تفسير الثعلبي ، وتفسير الرمخشري ، وتفسير الإمام فخر الدين الرازي ، وتفسير مكّي ، وتفسير ابن عطية ، وتفسير الكواشي . ومن البخاري ، ومسلم ، والترمذي ، والنسائي ، وابن ماجه ، وابن حبان ، وابن مندة ، وابن منصور ، وابن جرير ، وابن المبارك ، وابن راهويه ، وابن عساکر ، وابن المنذر ، وابن مردويه ، والطبراني ، والبيهقي ، والحاكم ، والبزار ، والدارقطني . ومسند أحمد ، والطبراني ، وابن أبي شيبة ، وابن أبي حاتم ، وابن أبي الدنيا . والموطأ ، وأبي داود ، وأبي يعلى ، وأبي الفرج ، وأبي [الشيخ ، وأبي نعيم] ³² ونعيم بن حماد ، والديلمي ، وهناد ، والأصبهاني ، والخطابي ، والخطيب . والإحياء للغزالي ، والدرّة الفاخرة له . ومن كتب التواريخ كمسالك البكري ، وبهجة النفوس ، والجغرافية ، وخريدة العجائب . ومن الهيئة السنية للحافظ السيوطي ، وشرح الصدور له ، والبدور السافرة له . ومن شرح البخاري للحافظ ابن حجر ، والروح لابن القيم ، وبحر الكلام للزبيدي ، [٢٢] وشرح العقائد للسعد ، ومن تذكرة القرطبي . ومن كز الأسرار ولواحق الأفكار ، وهو أجل هذا الفن إلى غيره من التصنيفات المفيدة والرسائل العديدة . فصار مجتمعاً في هذا المؤلف ما هو متفرقاً في كتب كثيرة غيره . والله أسأل لا ينساني من مريدة وخير إنه على ما يشاء قدير وبالإجابة جدير .

لطيفة : ما ورد في الأحاديث في الحسد وذم الحسود : قد أحبت أن أذكر في صدر هذا الكتاب ما يسهّر ذوي الفضائل والألباب ممن بلغ في الرتبة لأن يحسد وبما يرتدع به الحسود ويكمد . روى القاسم بن أصبغ وأبو بكر بن أبي شيبة بإسنادهما عن الزبير بن العوام رضي الله عنه أن رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قال : "دب إليكم داء الأمم قبلكم الحسد والبغضاء - البغضاء هي الحالقة لا أقول أنها تخلق الشعر ولكن تخلق الدين - والذي نفسي بيده لا تدخلوا الجنة حتى تؤمنوا ولا تؤمنوا حتى تحابوا ألا أبنتكم بما ثبت ذلك افشوا السلام بينكم . " وفي الحديث "أن الغل والحسد يأكلان الحسنات كما تأكل النار الحطب . " وعن أبي هريرة رضي الله عنه أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم قال : "لا تباغضوا ولا تحاسدوا ولا تتاجسوا وكونوا عباد الله إخوانا . " وفي الحديث إن لنعم الله تعالى أعداء قليل من أعداء نعم الله يارسول الله قال "الذين يحسدون الناس على ما أتاهم الله من فضله . " وعن معاوية أنه قال لابنه "يا بني إياك والحسد فإنه يبين فيك قبل أن يبين في حاسدك . " وقال بعض الحكماء إياكم والحسد فإن الحسد أول ذنب عصي الله به في السماء وأول ذنب عصي الله به في الأرض يشير إلى إبليس وقايل . وروى عن الأحنف بن قيس قال "لا راحة لحسود ولا وفاء لبخيل ولا صديق لملوك ³³ ولا مروءة لكذوب ولا سؤدد لسيئ الخلق . " وقال ابن سيرين

32 الزيادة من مخطوطة المتحف البريطاني.

33 في مخطوطة المتحف البريطاني: لملوك.

”ما حسدت أحدا على شيء من الدنيا فإن كان من أهل الجنة فكيف أحسده وهو صائر إلى الجنة وإن كان من أهل النار فكيف أحسده وهو صائر إلى النار.“ وقال الحسن البصري ”يا بن آدم لم تحسد أخاك فإن كان الذي أعطاه الله عز وجل لكرامته عليه فلم تحسد من أكرمه الله وإن كان غير ذلك فلا ينبغي لك أن تحسد من مصيره إلى النار.“ وقال بعضهم ليس [و] شيء أضّر من الحسد يصل إلى الحاسد خمس عقوبات قبل أن يصل إلى المحسود: غم لا ينقطع، ومصيبة لا يؤجر عليها، ومذمة لا يجهد بها، ويسخط عليه الرب، ويغلق عليه أبواب التوفيق.

وقد ورد في ذم الحاسد آثار كثيرة وأخبار شهيرة ولقد أحسن بعض الفضلاء حين قال:

ألا قل لمن كان لي حاسدا أتدري على من أسأت الأدب
أسأت على الله في فعلة لأنك لم ترض لي ما وهب
فجازاك منه بأن زادني وسد عليك وجوه الطلب

وأعلم أن من أشد الناس تحاسدا العلماء لا سيما في زماننا هذا. ابتلاهم الله بذلك نعوذ بالله من ذلك. وروى ابن السكن بإسناد عن ابن عباس ”قال استعملوا علم العلماء ولا تصدقوا بعضهم على بعض فوالذي نفسي بيده لهم أشد تغاير من التيوس في زربها.“ وروى مقاتل بن حيان وعطاء الخراساني عن سعيد بن المسيب عن ابن عباس قال ”خذوا العلم حيث وجدتم ولا تقبلوا أقوال الفقهاء بعضهم على بعض فإنهم يتغايرون تغاير التيوس في الزريبة.“ وعن مالك بن دينار قال ”يؤخذ بقول القراء والعلماء في كل الأقوال إلا قول بعضهم في بعض. فلهم أشد تحاسدا من التيوس تنصب لها الشاة الصارف فيقتلها هذا من هنا وهذا من هنا.“ وعن ابن وهب أنه قال ”لا يجوز شهادة القراء بعضهم على بعض يعني العلماء لأنهم أشد تحاسدا وتباغضا.“ وعن مالك بن دينار قال ”أجيز شهادة القراء على جميع الخلق ولا أجيز شهادة بعضهم على بعض.“ وكذلك قال سفيان الثوري. وروى سحنون عن ابن وهب عن عبد العزيز بن أبي حازم قال سمعت أبي يقول ”العلماء كانوا يقولون فيما مضى من الزمان إذا لقي من هو فوقه كان ذلك يوم غنيمة وإذا لقي من هو مثله ذكره وإذا لقي من هو دونه لم يزه عليه. حتى إذا كان هذا الزمان، فصار الرجل يعيب من هو فوقه ابتغاء أن ينقطع عنه الناس حتى يروا أنه ليست بهم حاجة إليه، ولا يذكر³⁴وا يزهو على من هو دونه فهلك الناس.“

34 في مخطوطة المتحف البريطاني: ولا يذكر من هو مثله.

فإذا وقع [٣] مثل هذا في زمانهم وزمن السلف فلا أن يقع مثله في الخلف أجدر سيما لما جبل عليه أبناء هذا الزمان من الأتراب والأقوال من جحد الفضائل مع قيام الدلائل ويحبون لأنفسهم دون غيرهم الرئاسة والتعظيم ويسارعون إلى نبذ من تلوح عليه شواهد العلم بالقول الذميمة . ويتقدون على من صنف كتابا ويلتهبون بانتقادهم العثرات ويحسبون السيئات حسابا ويضربون صفحا عن الحسنات . فأصبحت أعراض المصنفين أغراض سهام السنة الحساد ، ونفائس تصانيفهم معرضة بأيديهم ، تنتهب فرائدها ثم ترميها بالكساد ، ولقد أحسن الإمام أبو حنيفة رضي الله عنه حيث حسدوه فقال :

إن يحسدوني فإني غير لائمهم قلي من الناس أهل الفضل قد حسدوا
فدام لي ولهم ماي وما بهم ومات أكثرنا غيظا بما يجد

إذا تقرّر ذلك فلنشرع في المقصود من الكتاب بعون الملك الوهاب :
الباب الأول في ذكر العالم العلوي . الباب الثاني في ذكر العالم السفلي . الباب الثالث في ذكر خلق الإنس والجن . الباب الرابع في ذكر الموت وما يتعلق به . الباب الخامس في أشرار الساعة . الباب السادس في قيام الساعة وخراب العالم وتغير نظامه . الباب السابع في ذكر الحشر والموقف والحساب وما يتعلق بذلك . الباب الثامن في ذكر الجنة ونعيمها . الباب التاسع في ذكر النار وعذابها . والباب العاشر في ذكر مسائل متفرقة . وقد ذكرت في كلّ باب عدّة فصول كما سترها فيما سيأتي إن شاء الله تعالى .

Expulsion from Paradise: Granada in Raḍwā ‘Āshūr’s *The Granada Trilogy* (1994–8) and Salman Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh* (1995)¹

Suha Kudsieh

The legacy of al-Andalus and its romanticized *convivencia* has proven versatile enough to accommodate recent reinterpretations by a wide variety of authors, including Amin Malouf (*Leo Africanus*, 1986), Antonio Gala (*La pasión turca*, 1993), Tariq Ali (*Shadows of the Pomegranate Tree*, 1993), Raḍwā ‘Āshūr (*Thulāthiyyat Gharnāṭa*, in English: *The Granada Trilogy*, 1994–8),² Salman Rushdie (*The Moor’s Last Sigh*, 1995), and Diana Abu-Jaber (*Crescent*, 2003), among many others. Miguel Angel de Blunes observes that the reinterpretations are informed by present-day sensibilities more than historical fact.³ Modern authors typically build on the allegorical depiction of al-Andalus as an earthly paradise, epitomized by the beautiful gardens of al-Ḥamrā’ (Alhambra) Palace, where people of various religions, ethnicities, and languages coexisted in harmony; hence, the loss of al-Andalus mirrors the loss of Eden, and the fall of Granada in 897/1494, with the subsequent expulsion of Jews and Muslims, is akin to the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from paradise.

The allegorical depiction of al-Andalus can express Spain’s desire to assert national difference from the rest of Europe,⁴ as well as from the Orient, by stressing its unique Islamic heritage and civilization. This difference attains a more poignant value for modern Muslims who hold out the Andalusian *convivencia* as a model that epitomizes Islam’s tolerance and acceptance of diversity, refuting the current stereotypical depiction of Muslims in Western

1 I would like to thank Umar Ryad for his helpful comments and the audience’s feedback in the panel entitled “Paradise meets Modernity” in *The Roads to Paradise* conference, held 27–31 May 2009 at the University of Göttingen. I also would like to thank the editorial team and John Detre for his editorial comments and suggestions.

2 Raḍwā ‘Āshūr’s name also appears as Radwa Ashour, especially in English. I have opted to write it as it is pronounced in Arabic. The first part of the trilogy was published in 1994, the second in 1995, and the third in 1998.

3 Blunes, Introducción x.

4 Gilmour, Turkish delight 79.

media as hard-line fanatics. For Arab literati, the waning of al-Andalus and the expulsion of its citizens foreshadows the loss of Palestine and the exile of its people; while the gradual elimination of the party kingdoms in al-Andalus by the united Christian-Spanish front, which are reincarnated today in the powerful West and its local allies, is seen as an ominous precursor of the disintegration of the Arab world into puppet states engaged in petty quarrels with their neighbors.⁵

In this paper, I focus on two novels that depict the moment of loss, that is to say, the fall from grace that led to the expulsion of Muslims from Spain's earthly paradise: *Thulāthiyyat Gharnāṭa*, written by the Egyptian novelist Raḍwā 'Āshūr (b. 1946) in Arabic and published in 1994–8; and *The Moor's Last Sigh*, composed by the British-Indian writer Salman Rushdie (b. 1947) in English and published in 1995. Both novels grapple with the thorny issues of hybridity, cultural diversity, and ineffective heroes, themes that occur frequently in postcolonial literature. Moreover, although 'Āshūr and Rushdie draw on works written by their literary predecessors, both authors break away from previous literary traditions. 'Āshūr is the first Arab author to move the setting of her novel from the courts and palaces of the city, where the rulers and aristocracy reside, to the streets of Granada to examine the travails and responses of the ordinary people who bore the brunt of the tragic events that unfolded after the ruling elites surrendered the city to the Spaniards.⁶ Similarly, Rushdie is the first South Asian author to depart from the literary tradition established by his forerunners,⁷ which venerated the glorious legacy of al-Andalus, and

5 Gana, Search 229.

6 The Andalusian topos is more deeply entrenched in Arabic literary tradition than in its South Asian counterpart. It goes back to the late nineteenth century when several Arab writers, such as 'Alī b. Salīm al-Wardānī (1861–1915), Aḥmad Zakī (1867–1934), and Muṣṭafā Farrūkh visited Spain and published their accounts (see Granara, *Extensio animae* 50–1). The short stories, poetry collections, and novels written in Arabic are too numerous to survey in this brief note, but Granara provides an excellent overview in his article entitled “*Extensio animae*.” Al-Ju'aydī examines the work of several Palestinian poets whose poems retell the fall of al-Andalus as an allegory for the loss of Palestine. Regarding novels, it should be noted that almost all the relevant novels in Arabic depict events that take place in palaces or royal courts.

7 The well-known Muslim poet and philosopher, Muḥammad Iqbāl, who was born in British India (1877–1938), wrote a collection of quatrains, *ghazals*, and poems inspired by his visit to Spain in 1933. It was entitled *Bāl-i Jibrīl* (*Gabriel's Wing*) and was published in 1935, cf. Nourani, Garden. Unlike Iqbāl's earlier works, which were written in Farsi, *Bāl-i Jibrīl* was written in Urdu. One of the most celebrated poems in the collection is the *Masjid-i Qurtuba* poem, in which Iqbāl describes his feelings when he visited the mosque of Cordoba, which reminded

to foreground the complex socio-religious forces that have shattered India's image as an emblem of tolerance and pluralism.

Both authors move away from the poetics of Andalusian nostalgia. Unlike their predecessors who were captivated by the myth of al-Andalus as an inter-faith paradise, they invoke the past to question why current Eastern societies are plagued by fanaticism and radicalism. Thus, while previous authors indulged in *restorative* nostalgia, 'Āshūr and Rushdie engage in *reflective* nostalgia. According to Boym, the former reconstructs "emblems and rituals of home" to restore the past, whereas reflective nostalgia "cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space."⁸ From a reflective stance, al-Andalus is a convenient metaphor for exploring the cultural and religious crises in Egypt and India, where the mythic past is juxtaposed with a polarized present dominated by menacing discourses of ethnic and religious exclusion.

For Boym, "Restorative nostalgia evokes national past and future; reflective nostalgia is more about individual and cultural memory."⁹ In a sense, 'Āshūr and Rushdie fuse individual and cultural memory together. For example, 'Āshūr married the well-known Palestinian refugee and poet Murīd al-Barghūṭī (1944–present) in 1970. She opposed Anwar Sadat's peace negotiations with Israel in the late 1970s. In 1977 and on the day of his visit to Israel, al-Barghūṭī was deported from Egypt due to his political activism. He was not allowed to return to Egypt until 1994, which meant he was separated from his wife and son for almost twenty years.¹⁰ 'Āshūr's novel bears the imprint of those personal

him of the grandeur of the Mughal Empire. The collection articulates Iqbāl's pan-Islamic vision, according to which all Muslims share one civilization and are united by the same culture. Another South Asian author who was inspired by the legacy of al-Andalus is Tariq Ali (1943–present). His historic novel *Shadows of the pomegranate tree*, written in English and published in 1992, depicts the struggle of the Hudayl clan after the fall of Granada. At first, they carry on with their carefree pursuits, but the Spaniards and the Inquisition's radical policies compel them to rebel, albeit belatedly. The uprising is quickly crushed and the family are expelled from their idyllic homeland. Ali stresses the legacy of al-Andalus as an Islamic oasis where different religions co-existed peacefully. He also attempts to dismantle stereotypes associated with current Muslims in Britain and in the West, namely that they are fanatical, terrorists, narrow minded, and anti-women, by depicting the Hudayl family as tolerant and liberal, almost secular.

8 Boym, *Nostalgia* 49.

9 Ibid.

10 Al-Barghūṭī lived in Budapest, Hungary, as a PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization) representative. It was the couple's decision that 'Āshūr stay in Cairo so that their son, Tamīm, would grow up fluent in Arabic (see <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/Archive/2003/622/profile.htm>).

trials: Salīma, the educated daughter of Abū Ja'far, is married to Sa'd, a poor refugee from Malaga who lost contact with his family after escaping to Granada. Sa'd decides to join the ranks of the revolutionaries, spending most of his time hiding in the mountains, away from Salīma and their daughter, 'Ā'isha. Malaga in the novel corresponds to Palestine, and Granada to Cairo. The novel's pervasive pessimism suggests 'Āshūr's disillusionment with the signing of the Peace Treaty of Camp David in 1978 and the Egyptians' passive acceptance of the treaty.

Rushdie's personal journey takes a different course. His earlier novel *The Satanic Verses*, published in 1988, caused a major controversy among Muslims in Britain and elsewhere. The title refers to an incident reported by Ibn Ishāq and al-Ṭabarī, the two well-known historians and exegetes from the eighth and ninth century, respectively, regarding the Quranic verses that Muḥammad, the Prophet of Islam, retracted because they were inspired by Satan and not by God.¹¹ The controversy triggered a series of demonstrations and public burnings of Rushdie's novel in Britain, where he resided, and in India, where he was born. Ironically, these acts echoed the burning of Islamic and Arabic books at the hands of the Spaniards in al-Andalus. In 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini (1902–89), the Supreme Leader of Iran, announced a *fatwā* (an Islamic juristic ruling or edict) that declared Rushdie an apostate, exhorting Muslims to kill him. The *fatwā* forced Rushdie into hiding for several years. *The Moor's Last Sigh* was the first novel he published after the controversy. It was the product of exile, "of not being able to visit India for eight years since the Iranian *fatwā* sent him into hiding."¹² Another event that influenced Rushdie was the destruction of the Babri Mosque¹³ in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, in 1992 at the hands of Hindu extremists. The demolition triggered huge riots in India, leaving more than 2,000 people dead. Rushdie's cynicism toward religions that stake a claim about tolerance is reflected in *The Moor's Last Sigh*. Following this brief overview of the circumstances behind the writing of each novel, I examine the themes of paradise and the fall from grace as they unfold through the actions

11 Sawhney, *Satanic* 263.

12 Narain, *Histories* 56.

13 The mosque was built around 934/1528 at the behest of Sultan Bābur (888–937/1483–1530), the first Mughal emperor, on a site where an ancient Hindu temple was demolished. Hindus believe that Lord Rām, one of the Hindu deities, was born in that location. For more details about the history of the mosque and the controversy surrounding it, refer to Arshad Islam's article, Babri Mosque. Salman Rushdie discusses the politics surrounding the mosque and the rise of Hindu extremism in *Homelands* 26–33.

of ineffective and anti-heroic characters, whose failures rupture their families and destroy their communities.

One striking aspect in ʿĀshūr's novel is the paucity of accurate historical details. She utilizes the rough outlines of the fall of Granada to investigate current events in Egypt without explicitly recalling the brilliant history of al-Andalus. According to ʿĀshūr, all her novels are attempts to cope with defeat.¹⁴ Her decision to steer away from writing a historical novel is intentional because, "Historical novels have a bad reputation: The imaginative recreation of an earlier period has often been problematic. This genre is traditionally associated with propaganda values and the romantic glorification of the past."¹⁵ ʿĀshūr is referring here to nationalist propaganda, to the historical interpretations produced by Jurjī Zaydān, Aḥmad Shawqī, and ʿAlī al-Jārim, early twentieth-century writers whose works rallied readers to embrace Arab nationalism and celebrated the diversity of al-Andalus as a political model.¹⁶ The story of al-Andalus also served as a moral lesson, an exemplum, warning readers against the grave consequences of separatism and political in-fights: divisions would lead to the downfall of Arabs, as it happened during the reign of the Petty Kings (*mulūk al-ṭawāʾif*) in al-Andalus (423–53/1031–61). However, the political and social conditions in Egypt and the Middle East changed after 1960s such that by the end of the twentieth century, Arab nationalism became a dead end for Arab literati rather than a *raison d'être*.¹⁷ Therefore, ʿĀshūr chooses a different approach to narrating the events that led to the fall of Granada.

ʿĀshūr does not dwell on the glorious past or depictions of an idyllic Granada; instead, she focuses on how ordinary people reacted to the treaty and the loss of the city. Overall, they received the news rather passively, entrusting the task of resistance to their defeated Muslim rulers. In the novel, the residents of Granada exchange rumors and gossip about the fate of the rulers but are loath to join the guerrilla fighters who attack the Christian Castilians from their mountain base. One group of onlookers comments,

14 Ashour, Eyewitness 87.

15 Ibid., 90.

16 Granara, Nostalgia.

17 Rashid Khalidi differentiates between "Arabism," a popular concept among the masses in the Middle East, and "Arab nationalism," an ideology that Arab regimes manipulated to entrench their totalitarian governments. He adds that the humiliating defeat of the Arab forces in 1967, and Sadat's break up with the Arab block, after signing the peace treaty with Israel, tarnished the nationalist ideology and weakened it, cf. Khalidi, *Demise* 265–6.

It does not matter what happened to Ibn Abī Ghassān [the last defender of the city]; this is not his time or ours. Let us carry what we can of our belongings and roam God's vast lands, or we surrender our fate to God and to our new masters in order to survive.¹⁸

The reaction is defeatist: the Muslims of Granada appear eager to abandon their Eden without waiting for an eviction order. When the treaty is signed, they draw solace from traditional sayings regarding the inescapability of God's decree, convinced that the stipulations of the treaty are the best that could be hoped for under the circumstances. Thus, "they wept and signed (*bakaw wa-waqqa'ū*)."¹⁹ Another group is in denial. Since they could not avert the fall of the city, they comfort themselves with dreams of divine intervention. For instance, Abū Ja'far blames the last sultan for igniting the war between the Muslims and the Spaniards, musing to himself, "Who knows what will happen tomorrow? ... Granada will remain protected, by God's permission and his will."²⁰

Āshūr plunges her readers into the moment of the fall by depicting a cocooned community that relies on superstition and hearsay, passively awaiting divine intervention. The community bears a striking resemblance to current Egyptian society, especially since a considerable segment of the population is illiterate. For example, slaves and concubines are missing from the novel, and the attitude toward women is extremely traditional. Most women in the novel direct their energies toward cooking, rearing their children, and looking after the men. The only exception is Salīma, who is preoccupied with pursuing her education and copying scientific and medical treatises. When Sa'd, Salīma's husband, complains to Ḥasan, her brother, about the way his sister neglects him, Ḥasan advises him to beat her: "Beat her, Sa'd. Beat her harshly until she comes to her senses! (*Iḍribhā yā Sa'd. Iḍribhā ḍarban mubrihan hattā tafīqa.*)"²¹ After following Ḥasan's advice and drawing tears from Salīma,²² Sa'd realizes the importance and the value of the books to his wife. The fact that the two male figures who are closest to Salīma are unable to fathom the significance of her efforts to preserve al-Andalus' repository of scientific and medical knowledge demonstrates women's marginalization within their families, especially when they break the traditional roles assigned to them by a patriarchal society.

18 Āshūr, *Gharnāṭa* 11. All translations from Arabic into English are mine.

19 Ibid., 12.

20 Ibid., 13.

21 Ibid., 124.

22 Ibid., 125.

The incident also illustrates the couple's inability to communicate and express their opinions to each other, even as they struggle to resist the draconian decrees imposed upon them by the Spaniards. Furthermore, it highlights the plight of female literati within traditional societies, and the ebbing importance of education.

Several decades later, in the isolated village of Ja'fariyya, the men vent their anger over the grim political prospects and their paralysis to act by regularly beating the women (*yatafashshashūn fī zawjātihim*). Hearing the cries of their female neighbors, women feel lucky because they were not the ones being beaten, knowing however that their turn would soon come.²³ The vicious cycle of violence against women illustrates the fragmentation of the family unit and, ultimately, Muslim society.

By portraying the abuse of women, 'Āshūr dismantles the myth of gender equality in al-Andalus. According to Nada Mourtada-Sabbah and Adrian Gully, Andalusian women are thought to have enjoyed a certain level of general emancipation and a great degree of personal freedom when compared with their medieval counterparts elsewhere; nevertheless, the balance of evidence is inconclusive because the details about those women as narrated by historians and anthologists are sparse. Pierre Guichard is of the opinion that the apparent emancipation of Andalusian women demonstrates society's schizophrenia regarding the position of women rather than "a particular emancipation stemming from the atmosphere of the time."²⁴ 'Āshūr's depiction of the treatment of women points not only to a patriarchal society, but also to a regressive, phobic society that shuns strangers, including Muslims who do not share the same blood ties.

In a revealing incident that exemplifies the hardening of Muslim society in al-Andalus, 'Alī, the grandchild of Salīma and Sa'd, stumbles upon the village of al-Ja'fariyya while searching for his aunts, who were married off to Muslims from Valencia several decades earlier. The village and its closely-knit tribal community, which practice female honor killing, represent ultra conservative enclaves in the Middle East, like Upper Egypt. 'Alī falls in love with Kawthar, whose name alludes to a lake or river in paradise.²⁵ Kawthar's family does not marry their daughters off to strangers, even if they happen to be

23 Ibid., 420.

24 Mourtada-Sabbah and Gully, High positions 184.

25 *Al-Kawthar* is the title of the Sura 108 of the Quran. Addressed to the Prophet Muḥammad, the first verse states that God has given al-Kawthar to Muḥammad, meaning he will enter paradise. It may also mean that God has given the Prophet great "abundance," meaning great progeny or great faculties, that is to say, abilities to reason.

Muslims. When Salsabil, Kawthar's sister, whose name also refers to a spring in paradise,²⁶ falls in love with a Muslim who is not a member of her clan, her father and brothers covertly kill her. Kawthar informs the Spanish commissioner of the murder, thus endangering her own life. Instead of supporting Kawthar and protecting her, the Muslim community ostracizes her. She eventually marries Sancho Lopez and becomes pregnant. When 'Alī questions Sancho's religion and asks whether he is a Christian, Kawthar replies, "Haven't we also become Christians? (*A-lam na'ud naḥnu aẓdan naṣārā?*)"²⁷ She reminds 'Alī of the unacknowledged truth, which he cannot perceive, that the Muslims' identity has been twisted and deformed: although they practice their traditions in secret, they are officially Christians. Moreover, Kawthar's decision to marry a good man who happens to be a Christian instead of a Muslim (and her subsequent death) hint at the erosion of diversity within the remaining pockets of Muslim communities, which have become increasingly withdrawn. This is further evidenced when Kawthar's family manages to track her whereabouts and kills her. The elimination of both girls by their family illustrates the self-destructiveness of the remnants of Andalusian society. Their close-mindedness precipitates their inevitable fall. The aggression against women and fear of diversity, even among Muslims, challenges the idyllic myth of al-Andalus and invites readers to reflect on the erosion of hybridity and cosmopolitanism in modern Arab societies.

Another issue that 'Āshūr puts into relief is the destructive influence of the weakened political leaders who betray the Muslims in Granada. For example, Abū 'Abdallāh, who rose to power in Granada with the support of the people al-Bayaṣīn, signs the treaty of surrender with the Spaniards in return for thirty thousand pounds.²⁸ Some members of the Muslim nobility, including the sultan's sons, convert to Christianity. Yūsuf, the minister who negotiated in the name of the people and prepared the official and secret treaties, decides to convert and become a monk.²⁹ The famed warrior and fighter al-Thaghīrī is jailed and eventually acquiesces and converts to Christianity.³⁰ Those events have abysmal consequences for the defeated community. The account of betrayals and secret treaties is reminiscent of how Egyptians felt when President Sadat signed the peace treaty with Israel. The importance of strong political leadership is underscored when Roberto informs 'Alī, "The problem, lad,

26 See Q 76:18, which refers to a spring called Salsabil.

27 'Āshūr, *Gharnāṭa* 444.

28 Ibid., 23 and 26.

29 Ibid., 27.

30 Ibid., 47.

is that our leaders were smaller than us. We were more mature, tolerant and able, but they were our leaders. When they broke, so did we (*Al-mushkila yā walad anna qādatanā kānū aṣghara minnā. Kunnā akbara wa-a'fā wa-aqdara wa-lākinnaḥum al-qāda, inkasarū fa-inkasarnā*).³¹ Without a strong leader, the community edges closer toward the fall.

The elders in the novel, such as Abū Ja'far and Abū Maṣṣūr, belong to an older, dying breed of heroes. They remember Granada at its height, as a magnificent, enchanted city, bustling with energy, culture, knowledge, and learning. They would fight to defend it were they physically able, but their advanced age prevents them from bearing arms and joining the rebels. The death of the elders devastates the community, especially since their children are unable to fill the void. The younger generation is impotent even though it is educated and is physically strong enough to join the rebels' ranks. The generation gap points to the disintegration of the Arabs' moral and heroic *ethos*. Family ties are ruptured, underscoring the breakdown of the Muslim community in general: according to tradition, fathers take on their sons as apprentices and groom them to take over the family business, but Abū Maṣṣūr and Abū Ja'far choose to apprentice two orphaned lads, Na'im and Sa'd, who lost their homes and cities to the advancing Spanish armies, instead of teaching their offspring. Sa'd eventually marries Abū Ja'far's granddaughter Salima and joins the resistance in the mountains of Bisharrāt.

William Granara observes that Ḥasan and Salima, Abū Ja'far's grandchildren, represent binary opposites:³² whereas Ḥasan devotes his energy to protecting his extended family and keeping its members safe, Salima pursues esoteric knowledge and medicinal remedies that prolong life. The two siblings bicker constantly about their opposed priorities and have difficulty communicating with each other. The familial squabbles point to a weakened, besieged Muslim community rather than usher in the birth of a new, brave society. Salima's devotion to the pursuit of knowledge may signify the liberation of women in a futuristic society, but her esoteric quest, which seeks answers to questions such as why people die, appears impractical when her community is in crisis. At the same time, Ḥasan's determination to safeguard his family at all costs curtails his ability to aid his community or his sister: he remains silent when Salima is led to prison and then burnt alive.

Ḥasan's inaction signals a major theme in the novel, namely, the fragmentation of family structure, which mirrors the fragmentation of Arab society. When Sa'd accuses Ḥasan of being indifferent to the rebels, he replies that he

31 Ibid., 373.

32 Granara, *Nostalgia* 70.

is protecting the family's women and children.³³ Not only does Ḥasan ask Sa'd to leave his household and fails to help his sister, but he also refuses to offer refuge to Maryama's brothers,³⁴ his brothers-in-law, when they are released from prison, lest their presence should put the household under the Spaniards' watch. As the oppression increases, Ḥasan offers to marry his daughters off to wealthy suitors from Valencia. Consequently, the next generation of the family grows up scattered, without knowing the whereabouts of their aunts and cousins. The weakening of the family ties illustrates the fragmentation of the Islamic-Arabic society as a whole, divided among interest groups and split along class lines. For instance, 'Umar and 'Abd al-Karīm, the two brothers who marry Ḥasan's daughters, align themselves with the Christian nobility of Valencia. According to the brothers, when the Spanish fanatics attack Arabs, their real aim is to strike at the Spaniard nobility. The brothers also dislike the *mujāhidūn* among the Muslims (such as Sa'd) because their rebellion confirms the Spaniards' perception that Muslim Arabs are disloyal to the kingdom, leaving the Spanish with no choice but to Christianize them or drive them out. Both options complicate the lives of Valencian Muslims.³⁵

Following the sisters' wedding, the conditions in Valencia deteriorate for Muslims there;³⁶ the husbands are accused of conspiring with the French and the Protestants against the Spaniards, and are thrown in jail.³⁷ Ḥasan never sees or hears from his daughters after their marriages. Thus, his efforts to protect his family eventually fail. He loses Sa'd, his best friend, his sister, his daughters, and their families.

'Āshūr is not the first author to dwell on the theme of Arab disunity. Many Arab writers, especially Palestinian poets, regard the fall of al-Andalus as a transhistoric image³⁸ that evokes the loss of Palestine in 1948, and the ensuing wars. 'Āshūr alludes to this structure when she remarks:

To me Granada was the Granada of the Moriscos, defeated men and women whose resistance was doomed to failure. It was a correlative of my experience of the bombing of Baghdad, a bombing which brought with it the 1967 bombing of Sinai, the 1982 bombing of Beirut, and the persistent bombing of southern Lebanon. It was a means to explore my

33 'Āshūr, *Gharnāṭa* 143.

34 Ibid., 211.

35 Ibid., 180–2.

36 Ibid., 196.

37 Ibid., 382.

38 Granara, *Extensio animae* 160.

fears, impotence and also the chances of survival through resistance. Maybe the present was too difficult to handle as present, too scorching. I find myself going to the past which, however painful, was not as painful as the present.³⁹

In the novel, the Spaniards acquire multivalent meanings. Sometimes, they stand for Western colonizers or Israelis, at other times for religious fanaticism. They are sometimes referred to as *al-Ikhwān* (Brethren), a term currently used to refer to the Muslim Brotherhood.⁴⁰ The Spanish inquisition represents the *mukhābarāt*, that is to say, the state intelligence services. The parallel is made clear when, for example, Salima is strip-searched, interrogated, and tortured to confess that she practices witchcraft:

Before they brought her before the three interrogators, they brought a woman who was as huge as a giant (*ka-l-'imlāq*), whose offense was great and whose face was stern. She cut her hair and ordered her to take off her clothes, all her clothes, until she was naked (*'āriya*) like the day when her mother gave birth to her. Then the woman searched with her hands (*tajūsu bi-yadayhā*) under her [Salima's] armpits, between her thighs, her nostrils, mouth, ears, vagina and anus. Searching for what? Is this an absurdity or madness?⁴¹

Salima is also tortured with hot iron and tested:

When Salima clutched (*qabaḍat*) the iron rod (*qaḍīb al-ḥadīd*) heated by fire (*al-maḥmī bi-l-nār*) in her hands, and walked with it along the assigned path, the interrogators did not conclude, as expected after passing a test of this type, that the accused was stating the truth. Instead, they were more certain that she drew strength from a Satan whose immense might enabled her to withstand the pain.⁴²

Salima's torture and her swollen feet⁴³ are reminiscent of the various methods the *mukhābarāt*, i.e., the secret agency, employs to torment innocent people

39 Ashour, Eyewitness 91.

40 'Ashūr, *Gharnāṭa* 181, 190.

41 Ibid., 235.

42 Ibid., 241.

43 Ibid., 243.

and extract confessions to deeds they did not commit. These types of torture were common during the Sadat and Mubarak eras in Egypt.⁴⁴

Salima's quest for knowledge jeopardizes her family's safety, but she is preoccupied with copying and cataloguing the books bequeathed to her by her father and collecting new ones. Despite her education and knowledge, she uses neither to help the rebels. When she was accused of practicing witchcraft and black magic, she could not save herself or convince her accusers of her innocence. Salima's ineffectiveness and failure brings to mind the isolation of modern Arab intellectuals, who are aloof and disconnected from their societies despite their extensive knowledge and learning.

Salima's knowledge stems from copying and memorizing the books she owns, not from innovation. William Granara thinks she is the voice of change and individualism,⁴⁵ but she does not conduct new experiments or make discoveries. When Haşan and Sa'd's friend Na'im shows Salima a magnifying glass that belongs to Priest Miguel, she asks him to leave it with her for one night. Instead of trying to understand how it works so that she can make a similar instrument, she decides to lie to Na'im the next day, telling him she broke it, and keeps it.⁴⁶ Salima does not mingle with her community because she has limited social skills. Her disheveled hair and her unkempt appearance strike fear in onlookers. When 'Umar and 'Abd al-Karim's mother falls ill during the preparation for the wedding of Haşan's daughters, Salima examines her. The old woman is so frightened by her that she refuses to take the medicine Salima prepared.⁴⁷ These shortcomings render Salima as ineffective as her brother.

As the novel progresses, the lines separating good and evil, which were clearly drawn at the beginning, become blurred. A cycle of violence sets in, making it difficult to assign the blame to any one group: every attack on the Castellians leads to an attack on the Bayasın, the Granadan neighborhood where Muslims are holed up, which in turn pushes the Muslims to treason in Valencia and other cities, which provokes the Spaniards to harsher measures forcing Muslims to assimilate and convert to Christianity. Furthermore, when the next generations of Muslims start adopting Spanish names, identifying who is a friend (presumably a co-religionist) and who is a foe becomes rather confusing. To further complicate matters, the religious identity of some of the people who help the rebels and Muslim runaways is sometimes ambiguous. For instance, when 'Alı is on the run, the identity of the woman who offers him

44 Esposito, *Islam and politics* 239–45 and 256.

45 Granara, *Nostalgia* 70.

46 'Ashūr, *Gharnāṭa* 135–6.

47 *Ibid.*, 187–8.

refuge is hinted at but not stated;⁴⁸ by contrast, the man who betrays 'Alī is José, his Muslim friend. Although the novel does not assign blame, it criticizes tribalism and blind loyalty to a community that has become aggressive and intolerant. The murder of Kawthar and her sister are testimony to its decline.

The vanquished Muslims are unable to foresee the long-term consequences of their actions, or make wise decisions regarding their loyalties. For example, when the people of Ja'fariyya celebrate the victory of the English over the Spaniards, 'Alī inquires who the British are. A man replies, "They are not better than our Spanish rulers. They quarrel over sovereignty and rulership, each hoping for the lion's share."⁴⁹ 'Āshūr reminds her readers in this instance that all rulers are the same, regardless of their ethnicity or religion. The pilgrim who returned from his travels explains:

I was as surprised as you were when I found out that Egyptians hate their rulers as we hate our Spanish rulers. And I became more surprised when I saw with my own eyes and heard how a Turk or a Mamlūk points to one of the natives and says, haughtily and disdainfully, 'Egyptian peasant!', as if he was one of the Spaniards calling one of us 'Arab dog'!⁵⁰

The abandonment of Muslims in al-Andalus by their Middle Eastern brethren prompts 'Alī to ask, "Why did the scales weigh in favor of the East [during the crusades], and here they are light? Is there a defect in us, which they [those who fought the crusaders] did not have, or is our misfortune that we are separated by sea, that Egypt is not our neighbor and Iraq and Damascus do not border us?"⁵¹ 'Alī's questions resonate for today's Muslims and Arabs, for their predicament is the same.

'Āshūr is critical of the Andalusians' inaction while awaiting the assistance of Muslims and European rulers or divine intervention (i.e., the hand of fate). When all the Muslims are expelled from Spain, they passively line up at the harbor praying and reciting traditional sayings by the Prophet. When 'Alī proposes that they disobey the order of expulsion, he is told that resistance is futile because the Spaniards are stronger, and it will only lead to a pointless bloodbath. Another voice suggests waiting for outside help. Eventually, the

48 Ibid., 352–3.

49 Ibid., 452–3.

50 Ibid., 469.

51 Ibid., 473.

crowds decide it is their fate to leave their olive trees and their lands. It is, after all, God's decree.⁵² Thus, they passively accept expulsion from paradise.

While 'Āshūr is disillusioned by the resurgence of radical Islam in Egypt, associating it with the destruction of an Andalusian utopia, Salman Rushdie starts with the premise that al-Andalus was not real; it was a myth right from the start, just like Indian nationalism and interfaith coexistence. In his novel *The Moor's Last Sigh*, he sets out to prove this point of view.

Unlike 'Āshūr who eschews historical details, Rushdie's novel is replete with them. History for Rushdie is a technique for questioning and subverting nationalist narratives to uncover the suppressed narratives that were expunged from the official version of the birth of India. 'Āshūr achieves similar ends by different means: by refusing to join the chorus of authors who sing the praises of al-Andalus, she deconstructs the official history and brings buried stories to the light of day.

In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Moraes Zogoiby ("the Moor"), the son of Abraham, a Bombay business mogul, and Aurora, modern India's most illustrious artist, leads a sheltered, carefree life with his family on Malabar Hill in Bombay (as Mumbai was known until 1947), until the day when he is hurled from the "Fabulous garden and plunged towards pandaemonium."⁵³ Moraes' maternal and paternal lineages are both distinguished. His mother Aurora is a descendent of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer who commanded the first ships that reached India, initiating the Western colonization of the subcontinent. Aurora's family built their fortune in the pepper trade by bullying the planters and monopolizing the market. Moraes' father, Abraham, traces his lineage to Boabdil, the last ruler of Granada, and to the Jews of al-Andalus. He is the descendent of the illegitimate child of a Spanish Jew who took refuge under Boabdil's roof. According to the story, the Jewish courtesan betrayed the deposed king and ran away taking with her Boabdil's crown.⁵⁴ Abraham was the Gamas' business manager when Aurora saw him and decided to marry him. Despite their difference in age, religion, and wealth, they build a secular Eden on Malabar Hill: Their marriage and union epitomizes the triumph of secularism in India. Consequently, Moraes, the only son of Abraham and Aurora and the narrator of the story, is of mixed blood and heritage, much like Bombay, the city of his birth: "I, however, was raised neither as Catholic nor as Jew. I was

52 Ibid., 495–7.

53 Rushdie, *Sigh* 5.

54 Ibid., 82.

both, and nothing: a jewholicanonymous, a cathjew nut, a stewpot, a mongrel cur. I was – what's the word these days? – *atomised*. Yessir: a real Bombay mix.”⁵⁵

Moraes' hybrid lineage is not analogous to the mythic *convivencia* of al-Andalus; it is a source of confusion rather than ethnic fusion. Like Bombay with its “uncontrollable increases” and its mushrooming urban sprawls, the Moor ages twice as fast as a normal person “without time for proper planning, and without any pauses.”⁵⁶ His aging body and deformed hand, with its fingers fused together like a clenched fist, are a fitting metaphor for Bombay's asymmetrical “mix.”

On account of his poor health, Moraes does not attend school or have friends.⁵⁷ His paradise is silent, lonely, full of deceivers whom he trusts (his parents, the women he loved, and Vasco Miranda) and people who make him feel ashamed because he is different. Moraes is forced to be deceptive in turn: “All this, too, I conquered. The first lessons of my Paradise were educations in metamorphosis and disguise.”⁵⁸ However, the earthly paradise was neither diverse nor tolerant enough to accept all, including the deformed. To an outsider “it could have looked a great deal more like hell.”⁵⁹

Although the Zogoiby family, like Abū Ja'far's family, appears united, the veneer quickly disintegrates before the surmounting challenges and tensions. The theme of family, a collection of individuals united by blood ties despite their opposed interests and temperaments, functions as an allegory for communal unity in Rushdie's novel as in 'Āshūr's. Aurora, the matriarch, is an artist, a creator, a mother, a goddess, and India itself. Moraes describes her as irresistible, the spark of her children's imaginations, the beloved of their dreams. They love her even as she destroys them: “If she trampled on us, it was because we lay down willingly beneath her spurred-and-booted feet; if she excoriated us at night, it was on account of our delight at the sweet lashings of her tongue.”⁶⁰

55 Rushdie, *Sigh* 104. Moraes' outburst echoes a verse that appears in Sura *Āl 'Imrān* (“The People of 'Imrān”) in the Quran, which translates into English as “Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian, but turned away from all that is false, having surrendered himself to God” (Q 3:67). However, Rushdie reverses those qualities by depicting Abraham, Moraes' father, as a secular businessman, who accumulates his riches by engaging in shady deals and reigns over Bombay's underworld uncontested.

56 *Ibid.*, 161–2.

57 *Ibid.*, 221.

58 *Ibid.*, 153–4.

59 *Ibid.*, 198.

60 *Ibid.*, 172.

The god-like matriarch also represents uncontested secularism: "God was absent" in her paintings.⁶¹

Abraham manages to salvage Aurora's family business despite the World War II blockade against Indian ships, but he is not a typical hero. The patriarch of the Zogoiby family is also the godfather of Bombay's underworld, kingpin of the city's gangs, drug dealers, and exploiters of indentured labor, overlord of all kinds of shady businesses. While Aurora, whose name means light, devotes her attention to art, lofty pursuits, and accumulating a succession of lovers, Abraham rules over the underworld like Hades in Greek mythology. The unity of opposites, light and darkness, adulterous mother and corrupt father, subverts the celebrated motto of Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964), India's first prime minister after its independence from Britain in 1947, "Unity among diversity."⁶² This unity, which never was, is explicitly challenged after the assassination of Indira Gandhi (1917–1984), India's second prime minister, in 1984, and the rise of Hindu fundamentalism. Gandhi's assassination coincides with Aurora's sudden death, signaling the end of the secular state. When the Moor reflects on those events, he reminisces, "After the [Emergency Laws imposed in India by Gandhi] people started seeing through different eyes. Before the Emergency we were Indians. After it we were Christian Jews."⁶³

Although Aurora represents absolute matriarchy and secularism in the novel, her character is too complex to fit within that category. Justyna Deszcz notes that Aurora's art is comprised of "three levels of utopian activity: it is a tale of her own family, of the nation's destiny, as well as of the East in the global context, seen not as traditionally passive and malleable, but as the locus of powerful intermingling stories, imaginations, and fantasies."⁶⁴ The malleability of Aurora's secularist art is contrasted with the work of an antipodal character, the artist Uma Saraswati's colossal and hard edged sculptures.⁶⁵ Contrary to Aurora, Uma embodies rigid Hindu fundamentalism. The undeclared war that ensues between the two women unfolds through their relationship with Moraes. For the Moor, Aurora was at first an irresistible, domineering goddess,⁶⁶ but when Uma appears in his life, he is consumed with passion for her. From that moment on, the mother-son relationship deteriorates. Uma snares Moraes and plots the destruction of the family and her artistic rival Aurora.

61 Ibid., 60.

62 Gabriel, *Homeland* 74.

63 Rushdie, *Sigh* 235.

64 Deszcz, *Kingdom* 43.

65 Almond, *Mullahs* 6.

66 Rushdie, *Sigh* 172.

While making love to Uma, and in the throes of passion, Moraes denounces his mother. Uma records his words and sends the tape to the family. Moraes is expelled from the family home. The betrayal effects Moraes' downfall and the demise of Bombay's hybrid *mix*.

Moraes cast himself as the hero of the story, but his attempts are foiled at every turn. Unaware of Uma's hidden agenda or the danger she represents, he assumes he was expelled from his paradise because his mother disapproved of Uma.⁶⁷ Betrayal is a cyclical theme in the novel: like Boabdil, who was deceived by his Jewish lover, and Abraham, whom Aurora is unfaithful to, the Moor is betrayed by Uma, who plots to kill him by persuading him to join her in a suicide pact. However, it is she who dies when she accidentally drops the two suicide pills on the floor, and swallows the pill meant for Moraes. When Moraes realizes the truth about Uma, he simply declares that she was an "*Insaan*, a human being."⁶⁸

Deserted and alone after his fall, Moraes joins a gang led by Ram Fielding, also known as Mainduck. Fielding's character parodies Bal Thackeray, the Hindu fundamentalist leader in Bombay. Moraes is aware that Fielding is his father's underworld rival. Abraham and Fielding represent two sides of the same coin: one is secular, the other is religious, and both are corrupt. Moraes accepts to work for Fielding. Thus, not only does he betray his mother, but also his father. As a gangster, the Moor thrives. He easily makes the transition from a would-be-hero to a gangster, bludgeoning Fielding's foes with his fused fist. During his service to Fielding, Moraes learns that "Muslim conquerors had deliberately built mosques on the birthplaces of various Hindu deities." Fielding's young followers agree to liberate Hindu sites "hogged by minarets and onion domes"⁶⁹ and, as a result, they agree to join their boss's campaign, while ironically reciting Urdu poetry and admiring Mughal landmarks:

Yes, indeed, a campaign for divine rights! What could be smarter, more *cutting edge*? – But when they began, in their guffawing way, to belittle the culture of Indian Islam, that lay palimpsest-fashion over the face of Mother India, Mainduck rose to his feet and thumbed at them until they shrank back in their seats. Then he would sing ghazals and recite Urdu poetry – Faiz, Josh, Iqbal – from memory and speak of the glories of Fatehpur Sikri and the moonlit splendour of the Taj.⁷⁰

67 Ibid., 278.

68 Ibid., 313.

69 Ibid., 299.

70 Ibid.

Moraes is unperturbed, unaware that Fielding will eventually extend his campaign to target him because he is part of the “mix.” The battle between Fielding and Abraham mirrors to some extent the battle between Uma and Aurora. In retrospect, as Moraes narrates the events that led to his fall, he is able to comprehend that people align themselves with others not on the basis of religion or ideals, but rather self-interest.

Meanwhile, Abraham, the Cochin Jew, manages to unite all the Muslims under his banner against Fielding and his gang:

It occurred to me that my father’s pre-eminence over Scar [the Muslim] and his colleagues was a dark, ironic victory for India’s deep-rooted secularism. The very nature of this inter-community league of cynical self interest gave the lie to Mainduck’s vision of a theocracy in which one particular variant of Hinduism would rule, while all India’s other people bowed their beaten heads.⁷¹

Rushdie is critical of India’s dark secularism, led by figures tainted by corruption, crime, and with links to the underworld; at the same time, he objects to any religion that becomes a theocracy. The rivalry between Abraham (Muslims) and Fielding (Hindus) spirals out of control, leading to the destruction of the Babri Mosque. Suddenly, the Muslims who lived in India for centuries are threatened to be “erased”⁷² just as the Muslims were erased from Spain. Witnessing the mayhem, Moraes resolves to accede to his father’s request to eliminate Fielding. When he smashes Fielding in the face with a green phone, he thinks he has succeeded but later realizes that someone else had beat him to the deed and that Fielding was already dead. The revelation renders Moraes an inept, frustrated hero. His failure is a central theme in the novel: whenever he is called upon to act like a hero, a voice within him stops him from fulfilling his expected role.

Fielding’s death causes the destruction of Bombay, Abraham, Elephanta (the family’s estate), and all the city’s “mix.” As Moraes hops on a plane to Spain, he laments:

Bombay was central; had always been. Just as the fanatical ‘Catholic Kings’ had besieged Granada and awaited Alhmbra’s [sic] fall, so now barbarism was standing at our gates. O Bombay! *Prima in Indis! Gateway to India! Star of the East with her face to the West!* Like Granada – al-Gharnatah of the Arabs – you were the glory of your time. But a darker time came upon

⁷¹ Ibid., 332.

⁷² Ibid., 364.

you, and just as Boabdil, the last Nasrid Sultan, was too weak to defend his great treasure, so we, too, were proved wanting. For the barbarians were not only at our gates but within our skins. We were our own wooden horses, each one of us full of our doom . . . these fanatics of those, our crazies or yours; but the explosions burst out of our very own bodies. We were both the bombers and the bombs. The explosions were our own evil – no need to look for foreign explanations, though there was and is evil beyond our frontiers as well as within. We have chopped away our own legs, we engineered our own fall. And now we can only weep, at the last, for what we were too enfeebled, too corrupt, too little, too contemptible to defend.⁷³

In the above passage, Rushdie faults Indians themselves for the destruction of their paradise. Both authors, Āshūr and Rushdie, blame their respective communities for their fall from grace. The cities they depict may bear different names (Granada, Cairo, Bombay), but the process is the same: the diversity that used to exist in Cairo and Bombay, Egypt and India, is vanishing under the tide of religious fundamentalism. By employing the theme of al-Andalus as a vehicle for their criticism of the present, the authors subvert the romanticized vision of the past. For instance, in the series of paintings entitled *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Aurora superimposes her vision of a thriving, multi-cultural Bombay on al-Andalus and its celebrated *convivencia*, conjoining all those diverse elements together under the strokes of her brush: "The Alhambra quickly became a not-quite-Alhambra; elements of India's own red forts, the Mughal palace-fortresses in Delhi and Agra, blended Mughal splendours with the Spanish building's Moorish grace."⁷⁴ Against the idyllic notions of al-Andalus, Rushdie paints a more turbulent picture. The world of the painting, Aurora explains to her son is a place "where worlds collide, flow in and out of another, and washofy away. [It is one] universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo'ing into another, or being under, or on top of."⁷⁵ The suppressed narrative of this "one country," be it al-Andalus or India, is that it did not come into being *because of* communal co-existence, but *in spite of* ethnic and religious upheaval.

Aurora describes her painting as "a Palimpsestine,"⁷⁶ a reference to the multi-layered history of India, where great kingdoms were built on the ruins of fallen dynasties. The term palimpsest originally refers to a parchment on which writ-

73 Ibid., 372–3.

74 Ibid., 226.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.

ing is barely visible under a more recent text. Parchment was expensive writing material; therefore, texts written on them were often erased so that the parchment could be reused. Since ink was made of strong dyes in the past, the original text was not always entirely effaced; it lingered, visible between the lines of the newer text. Rushdie neatly structures his novel as a palimpsest that mirrors India's complex history. The Moor is Bombay, Bombay is Granada, and the Moor is also Granada. All of them are mixed and have diverse roots. The demise of one entity triggers the fall of the next, and so on. Therefore, the collapse of al-Andalus foreshadows the demise of Bombay and Moraes.

Another important function of palimpsest in the novel is to reveal suppressed narratives of the past, since communities privilege certain histories over others. The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud discusses a device called the Mystic Pad that cleans a surface by erasing words. As on a palimpsest, the words are not erased completely and may be legible under suitable light. Freud draws parallels between those barely visible words and the unconscious, and between the new text and consciousness.⁷⁷ Viewed through this lens, the erased narratives on the palimpsest constitute India's suppressed narratives (the unconscious), and the recent narratives represent the official stories that are imposed by the government and society (the conscience). Jean Jacques Derrida builds on Freud's work by adding that the imposition of the conscience is sometimes disrupted when it experiences "cathectic innervations"⁷⁸ that emanate from within, from the unconscious, to the outside, to the conscious. These disruptions allow the suppressed narratives to surface and come into the open, if only briefly. Rushdie's novel functions similarly: it disturbs the official story, revealing the cracks through which the suppressed story can be discerned.

One aspect of Aurora's wild behavior is that she acquired a series of lovers, whom she later rejected. One of the lovers is Vasco Miranda, whom Moraes remembers fondly because of his joyful and fantastic paintings, which decorated the Moor's nursery room. When Vasco lived in the house of the Zogoibys, he was kind and nice to the ultra-normal Moor. However, Aurora's repulsion unleashes Vasco's dark side. He steals the last four paintings of Aurora's series *The Moor's Last Sigh* and leaves for Spain, where he builds his Little Alhambra and starts dressing like an Eastern Sultan. He builds a world that parallels Aurora's fantastic Mooristan.

Toward the end of the novel, the Moor follows Vasco to retrieve the paintings, thinking his daring plan would lay his mother's ghost to rest. However, Vasco imprisons him and commands him to write his story. Like Scheherazade,

77 Freud, *Works* 230–1.

78 Derrida, *Painting* 225.

the Moor's life will end the minute his story ends. Vasco also imprisons Aoi Uë, an art restorer whom he commands to remove the first layer of paint from Aurora's paintings. Vasco believes that Aurora's paintings are coded: under the palimpsest painting, she painted her murderer. When Aoi Uë is about to finish her task, Vasco aims his gun at her. Moraes tries to save her, but he is hampered by his advanced age and is unable to protect her. Once again, Moraes proves to be an ineffective hero. He saves his skin but not the hapless woman. Through Aoi Uë's efforts, Aurora's original painting is revealed, and the Moor is able to see that the murderer was his father, Abraham. At this moment, the Moor realizes that he, too, was duped by his father, and his ineptness as a hero is brought home to him again.

At the end, the Moor is not quite sure what story to tell. He even questions his lineage. Among the conundrum of hybridity, all interpretations are possible and nothing is certain. According to Rushdie, "India was uncertainty. It was deception and illusion."⁷⁹ Nevertheless, for him, the confusion of hybridity is preferable to fundamental rigidity and intolerance. At the end of the novel, the Moor is the only survivor of the Zogoiby family. His new mission is to spread the histories of his family, and his fall from India's earthly paradise. Predictably, he fails in that mission when he experiences an asthma attack.

Both novels end when the two protagonists ('Alī and Moraes), who are the last descendants of Granada, see a vision of idyllic Granada before they die, as if to stress the message that the celebrated al-Andalus is a mirage. It can only be seen by people who are leaving this world and entering the next.

At the end of *Thulāthiyyat Gharnāṭa*, 'Alī falls asleep. In his dream, he sees himself descending into the heart of the earth (*bāṭin al-arḍ*), as if there were seven levels underground like those in heaven.⁸⁰ He reaches a wide cave in which a river runs. The river leads him to an elaborately decorated palace. He enters and walks through a grand, royal parlor with walls made of beautiful mosaics. On a high bed, he finds Maryama sleeping peacefully, and the birds of paradise perched at her head. When 'Alī wakes up, the Elysian vision makes him wonder why he should leave his homeland; "death might lie in leaving, not in staying (*al-mawt fī l-raḥīl wa-laysa fī l-baqā*)."⁸¹ He turns his back to the sea and runs away from the coast and its crowds. As he makes his way inland, he is reminded that "there is no loneliness in Maryama's grave (*lā waḥsha fī*

79 Rushdie, *Sigh* 95.

80 The seven layers correspond to the seven heavens as mentioned in the Quran; see for example Q 2:29; 23:17; and 17:44, among many others.

81 'Āshūr, *Gharnāṭa* 501.

qabr Maryama).⁸² ‘Alī chooses to listen to his intuition rather than follow the wisdom of his community. However, his return is not triumphant: without a family or descendents, it is the homecoming of a battered hero returning to die peacefully in the family crypt. Thus, ‘Alī’s return closes the final chapter on the myth of al-Andalus.

Likewise, Moraes has a vision. Gasping his last breath, his last sigh, he experiences an epiphany and sees:

The Alhambra, Europe’s red fort, sister to Delhi’s and Agra’s – the palace of interlocking forms and secret wisdom, of pleasure-courts and water gardens, that monument to a lost possibility that nevertheless has gone on standing, long after its conquerors have fallen; like a testament to lost but sweetest love, to the love that endures beyond defeat, beyond annihilation, beyond despair; to the defeated love that is greater than what defeats it, to the most profound of our needs, to our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self.⁸³

To conclude, ‘Āshūr and Rushdie reinterpret the Andalusian topos and the vanishing of its legendary hybridity and cosmopolitanism by tracing the sagas of two families to warn their respective communities against the rise of fundamentalism. ‘Āshūr decries the passivity of common people and their dependence on inept leaders. She also criticizes Egyptians who are engulfed in simplistic binaries and cannot tolerate difference in opinion or religion. Similarly, Rushdie laments the rise of fundamentalism in the land of diversity, the nation of multi-headed gods and goddesses. Both authors depict communities that are caught up in religious and political turmoil, whose fall is guaranteed by the acts of inept heroes.

Whereas earlier authors hoped to resurrect the golden era of al-Andalus in their works, ‘Āshūr and Rushdie subvert that myth by rewriting the history of Granada. By dwelling on the issue of weakened nationalism, and the ensuing political traumas in their respective countries, the authors call on their readers to rethink and reevaluate the myth of earthly paradise, because questioning it may open up the opportunity to build a better world, and maybe a better paradise.

82 Ibid., 502.

83 Rushdie, *Sigh* 433.

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PART 9

*Bringing Paradise Down to Earth –
Aesthetic Representations of the Hereafter*



Madīnat al-Zahrā', Paradise and the Fatimids*¹

Maribel Fierro

1 The Building of Madīnat al-Zahrā'

Madīnat al-Zahrā'² stands on a site located on the side of the foothills of the Sierra Morena near Cordoba, a site which was set out in terraces in order to build the city of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III. At the highest point of this terraced site can be found what is considered to be a residential area. Further down is the 'official' area, with the reception hall known as the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (previously known as the Salón Rico), while at the bottom are found the remaining

* [The original version of this chapter was published in Spanish in the journal *Al-Qanṭara* 25 (2004), 299–327, which has granted permission for its reprint here in English. Additions are indicated by square brackets. The English translation was made by Jeremy Rogers and financed by the Instituto de Lenguas y Culturas del Mediterráneo y de Oriente Próximo.

Regarding the paradise symbolism of Madīnat al-Zahrā', in an interview with Antonio Vallejo Triano in the Spanish journal ABC (28/02/2005), the director of the archeological complex of the town pointed out that epigraphical materials with Quranic verses describing paradise had been found outside the mosque. See http://www.abc.es/hemeroteca/historico-28-02-2005/abc/Cultura/medina-azahara-la-ciudad-mas-grande-jamas-levantada-en-occidente_20900171890.html.]

- 1 This is an expanded and modified version of a lecture given on 23 February 2004 in the Department of Arab Studies of the Institute of Philology of the CSIC. This lecture arose from the research I did for my biography of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, published in the series *Makers of the Muslim World* (Oneworld, [2007]) and, more particularly, from a conversation I had with Julio Escalona. Attendance at the Fourth Madīnat al-Zahrā' Conference (held in Cordoba in November 2003) and the papers presented there (particularly that of María Antonia Martínez Núñez) undoubtedly influenced this article. I would like to thank Carmen Barceló for her comments on the first version of this article. My thanks are due to Salvador Peña for his useful suggestions and, together with Miguel Vega, for the clarification of various points referring to the numismatics of the period of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III.
- 2 This is the name by which the city founded by 'Abd al-Raḥmān III is referred to on the coins minted there. The same name also appears in literary sources, together with the form al-Madīna al-Zahrā'. For more details see Labarta and Barceló, *Las fuentes árabes* 93–106. I shall return to the subject of the name of the city later.

buildings of the city.³ The hall forms part of a collection of buildings including a pavilion just opposite – which appears to be a replica of the hall on a smaller scale⁴ – located in the so-called High or Upper Garden and surrounded by pools. To one side of this garden there extends another, known as the Lower Garden.

The building of Madīnat al-Zahrā' was begun around the year 329/940–1, shortly after the battle of Simancas-Ahandega against the Christians. In this battle the disloyalty of some of the commanders of the *jund* [troops] and some of the lords of the frontier regions led to a Muslim defeat in which the life of the caliph himself was put in danger; as a result 'Abd al-Raḥmān III's copy of the Quran fell into the hands of the Christians. There were other consequences:

Al-Nāṣir was overwhelmed by his defeat in this campaign, unparalleled in all his history and, very displeased by his misfortune, his thoughts were confused and he was not just with himself; for which reason he was advised to assuage his worries by indulging in his greatest pleasure, building. They say that he devoted himself obsessively to it, founding al-Zahrā' below Cordoba, relieving his mind with the comfort and majesty of his buildings, and forgetting all else, for from that time on he ceased going to war in person.⁵

P. Chalmeta, in a study devoted to the repercussions of the Simancas-Ahandega episode, confirms that from then on the caliph

did not trust his troops. The enemy was within, and it is possibly not so far-fetched to consider Madīnat al-Zahrā' not as a city-palace but rather as a stronghold or fortress, at least in part. If 'Abd al-Raḥmān abandoned his palace (*qaṣr*) in Cordoba it was not because he enjoyed building, nor because it was too small. The real reason is very different from the 'official' reason: he no longer felt safe within his capital. This concern and mistrust is reflected in the extraordinary thickness of the double wall of carved stone blocks which defended the new city; and, above all, in the unusually massive thickness of the wall surrounding the Caliph's royal palace.

3 There is a brief and succinct presentation in Vallejo Triano, Madīnat al-Zahrā', capital y sede. See also the same author's Madīnat al-Zahrā': El triunfo 27–40 (English version Madīnat al-Zahrā': The triumph 27–39) and El proyecto urbanístico 69–81.

4 The panels of *ataurique* on the base of the wall which decorate the hall can also be found in the pavilion, although the latter still needs more detailed study.

5 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Crónica*, trans. Viguera and Corriente 327–8.

Indeed, Madīnat al-Zahrā' is a fortified city, protected by walls whose strength was far greater than that of any fortress or castle . . . I repeat, the thickness of the walls of the Caliph's city is not due merely to a desire for monumentalism, but for strategic reasons in the defense of what is considered to be the last bastion and stronghold of the dynasty . . . They had before them the recent example of the Fatimids saving themselves from the rebellion of 'the man of the donkey' thanks to the creation of their palace-refuge of Mahdiya.⁶

But if this was perhaps the initial reason for its construction, it does not mean that the city did not later acquire other functions and meanings. In the case of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, it seems to have been built between the years 342/953–4 and 345/956–7 and it was in those years that the extraordinarily complicated vegetal designs covering its walls were developed. The construction of the hall, as Antonio Vallejo Triano has shown, implied an important reworking of the original plan of the city.

2 The Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III and its Decorative Vegetal Motifs

The building of the hall coincides with the coming to power of the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu'izz (r. 341–65/953–75), who continued the construction of Ṣabra-Manṣūriyya begun in 335/946–7 by his father al-Manṣūr,⁷ who himself had succeeded in putting down the rebellion of the Berber leader Abū Yazīd.⁸ The latter, known as the 'man of the donkey' (I come back to him later), had been on the point of putting an end to a dynasty which had come to power by encouraging eschatological beliefs. Although toward the end of the reign of al-Mu'izz the idea that the arrival of the *mahdī* or Messiah was imminent had begun to wane, there still remained the Shi'ite doctrine that the Fatimid caliph possessed the charismatic powers of the Prophet: he could work miracles, he was infallible, and he was endowed with supernatural knowledge.⁹ For a Sunni

6 Chalmeta, Simancas y Alhandega 397–8.

7 The Fatimid palatine city was circular in shape, following the model of 'Abbasid Baghdad, in contrast with the rectangular shape of Madīnat al-Zahrā', although a later source indicates that the original form of the palatine city of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III was also circular (*mudawwar*), according to witnesses reported by an author from the East, al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348), *Ṣiyar a'lām al-nubalā'* 265–9.

8 On these events, see Halm, *Empire* 298–325, and Brett, *Rise* 165–75.

9 Halm, *Empire* 350.

caliph such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān III it was not easy to try to surpass his rival from the politico-religious point of view.¹⁰ In this chapter I propose a possible way in which he did it: by assimilating his city to paradise.

Christian Ewert's studies on the vegetal motifs¹¹ covering the walls of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III point out, among other things, two aspects: 1) the enormous variety of forms found in this vegetal decoration, for it has been possible to list almost one thousand seven hundred different elements and motifs; and 2) the abundance of asymmetric compositions, in which those responsible for the decoration show a matchless sense of ornamental balance dictated by a central axis. The following description given by Ewert reflects the basic structure of this decoration, and gives us an idea of some of the motifs:

Plaques of very soft limestone, a few centimeters thick, form a veneer replacing the favorite material for architectural decoration in al-Andalus, which is stucco. Wide borders suggest the effect of tapestries. The *ataurique* generally springs from the stalk or central trunk, which acts as an axis for symmetry. The pattern is extremely dense. The elements, well-defined by their sharp outlines, perfectly fill the spaces between the thick stems. They leave practically no background . . . The basic elements are leaves, very often in the form of a half palmette or calyx, fruits and flowers. They give rise to combinations of two half-palmettes, composite palmettes made up of three or more elements and occasionally with an asymmetric upper part . . . and, finally, to asymmetric combinations whose twisted axis distorts and warps what is basically a symmetrical concept . . . Another double decorative element, very heavily condensed, is that formed from two ring-shaped pearls. In this case, too, the occurrence of multiplication appears to have practically no limit. There is perfect harmony in a combination of four pearls arranged geometrically in a square which, for example, supports a totally asymmetric upper part with a wavy acanthus leaf.¹²

M. Ación Almansa has raised the question of the meaning and purpose of these decorative panels in a study¹³ in which he starts by pointing out that the uniqueness of the hall does not lie in its architectural design (the hall of

10 For some of the ways in which 'Abd al-Raḥmān III tried to do so, see Fierro, *Espacio* 168–77.

11 In this work I will not consider the sources of the decorative motifs.

12 Ewert, *Elementos* 41–58.

13 Ación Almansa, *Materiales e hipótesis* 177–95.

the upper terrace of Madīnat al-Zahrā' has the same layout) nor in the richness of the materials from which it was built (marble flooring is found in other parts of the city). Its uniqueness lies in the exuberant wall decoration and, in particular, in the panels of *ataurique* on the lower parts of the building's walls; similar panels are also found in the pavilion opposite the hall – the one which is a smaller-scale copy of the hall itself. The 'heavenly symbolism' of the whole and the unity of the design of the hall and the Upper Garden as a celestial palace and paradise have already been made clear by Antonio Vallejo Triano.¹⁴ But what was the meaning of the wall decoration of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III?

Acien quotes the functional opinion proposed by D.F. Ruggles, for whom the repeated use of vegetation, which has generally been considered a reference to paradise, may also reflect a political meaning related to the garden and the ordering of a cultivated space. Indeed, Ruggles points out, there is no explicit textual reference to any relationship of the gardens of al-Andalus with paradise.¹⁵ Acien, for his part, explains that

even if the allusion to paradise may be considered as implicit in the work of many researchers, with respect to the specific meaning of the panels of the hall of al-Nāṣir I have only found it noted once in the commentary of L. Golvin on a marble slab, which does not come exactly from the hall itself, but from the adjoining bath room.¹⁶

Acien recalls that F. Hernández Giménez showed that these panels indicate "the imposition of an idea and absolute control over its execution," and that the surprising thing is that "the idea imposed and its control were exercised over more than two hundred square meters, distributed over at least sixty-five panels; and insufficient stress has been laid . . . on the fact that they are all different from each other . . ." Furthermore, the theoretical symmetrical center line traced by the decorative elements "is no such thing, *since the two sides do not present a mirror image*" [the italics are mine]; and in addition "what is represented is different vegetal elements on each panel."¹⁷ Acien goes on to say that "underlying existing studies there is the general interpretation of identifying the extensive presence of *ataurique* with paradise," so that

14 Acien Almansa, *El urbanismo musulmán*, refers back to A. Vallejo Triano. See the latter's article *Madīnat al-Zahrā'*, in Cabrera (ed.), *Abdarrahman III* 231–44.

15 See Ruggles, *Gardens* 219.

16 See Golvin, *Note sur un décor* 188.

17 Acien Almansa, *Materiales e hipótesis* 185.

all the decoration of the hall appears to repeat in the interior what exists outside, and the flora of the panels seem to have the same meaning as the real vegetation in the garden, which in its turn is the likeness of that of paradise [the italics are mine]. The huge variety of vegetable forms would thus have a meaning, although it is not altogether clear why it has been split into panels of different sizes, in spite of the obvious subordination of the latter to the architectural whole.¹⁸

Acíén therefore presents other hypotheses, such as possible relationships with courtly ceremonies, so that the different panels might have the function of indicating the respective positions of the people and groups present,¹⁹ and with astrology, specifically with certain passages of the *Picatrix*. Acíén's proposals are worthy of consideration, particularly the latter.²⁰ As was shown in a recent study, dynasties are normally legitimized based on multiple meanings that often intertwine and sometimes converge,²¹ so that it is rarely possible to offer one single interpretation.

3 The Gardens of Paradise in the Light of the Quran 55:46–78

But it seems to me that the heavenly symbolism of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III's hall and the gardens has not been established as it should be, and that this symbolism has not aroused greater interest; for the 'palace/garden' link with paradise is thought of as a general and vague reference, an indissoluble part of palace-building activities in the Muslim world²² and, therefore, not very enlightening. I do not dwell on matters which are already familiar: as, for example, that it

18 Ibid., 186.

19 This is taking the hall to be a reception hall. For more on receptions in the era of the caliphs, see Barceló, *El califa patente* 51–71, repr. 155–75, and Barceló, *El sol que salió por Occidente* 137–62; English translation Barceló, *The manifest caliph* 425–56.

20 In my article *Bāṭinism* 87–112, I refer to this theory as in it I propose a new authorship and dating of the *Picatrix* that establish a precise link between the composition of the work and the reign of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III.

21 See the study on Almohad coins carried out by Vega Martín, Peña Martín and Feria García, *El mensaje*.

22 The form in which the religious image of the celestial garden was often translated into secular paradises created in the palaces of Muslim governors has been the object of several studies: see especially Brookes, *Gardens of paradise*; Lehmann, *Earthly paradise*; MacDougall and Ettinghausen (eds.), *The Islamic garden*; and more recently Blair and Bloom (eds.), *Images*.

was reasonable enough for the idea of the garden as paradise to emerge among the Arabs, inhabitants of a land where water, trees, and shade were exceptions among rocks, arid wastes, and scorched vegetation. Nor is it any wonder that the pleasures of paradise should be seen as those which are to be enjoyed in shady gardens, and related to food, drink, sexual union, and sociability, all of this taking place in paradise on a larger scale and free of imperfections. Gardens are desired and desirable, and so are usually surrounded by walls to control access to them, making them exclusive places dedicated to relaxation and physical and spiritual renewal:

Exploring the topic of images of paradise in Islamic art raises a paradox: the closest parallel to the religious image of the heavenly garden is the secular paradise of the Islamic palace. Two interpretations are possible. The heaven of Islamic belief may represent the idea of a better life held by individuals living in arid and economically precarious societies; for them, a lush and well-watered garden represents all that the natural environment lacks. Alternatively, the builders of Islamic palaces may have had in mind the image of Heaven revealed in the Koran and created their earthly paradises following this concept. Both may be true, for the secular paradise of the Islamic palace can be traced back to pre-Islamic roots and is a reflection of the religious image. Palace courtyards with playing fountains and running streams have a long tradition in the Middle East and Mediterranean regions, while they also invoke the numerous Koranic descriptions of the heavenly garden.²³

The texts to which I now refer help us to define more precisely this 'heavenly' interpretation and to give it specific meanings, showing its advantages over other possible interpretations (although without necessarily eliminating them): it explains not only the variety but also the asymmetry of the wall decorations of the hall; it gives a reason for a series of stories which arose around the subject of Madīnat al-Zahrā'; it allows us to give a new interpretation to the 'green and manganese' decoration of the ceramics produced there; suggests yet another aspect of the name by which the city was known; and may also help us to understand the reason behind one of the doctrines attributed to Mundhir b. Sa'īd al-Ballūṭī, the *qāḍī* of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III from 339/950 to the death of the caliph. The silence of Arab sources on this heavenly symbolism may be related, as we shall see, to the anecdote of how this same Mundhir b. Sa'īd censured 'Abd al-Raḥmān III's building activity.

23 Denny, Paradise attained 106.

It is very well known that in the Muslim conception of paradise there are abundant references to gardens, fruit, water, pavilions, and *hūrīs*,²⁴ all elements present in the Quran. Here is just a brief selection of verses on the subject (in the translation by A.J. Arberry)* not forgetting that garden or gardens are mentioned more than 130 times in the Holy Book of Islam:

Give thou good tidings to those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, that for them await gardens underneath which rivers flow; whensoever they are provided with fruits therefrom they shall say, 'This is that wherewithal we were provided before'; that they shall be given in perfect semblance . . . (Q 2:25)

And Paradise shall be brought forward to the godfearing, not afar (Q 50:31; also in 26:90 and 81:13)

The Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right) mid thornless lote-trees and serried acacias, and spreading shade and outpoured waters, and fruits abounding, unfailing, unforbidden, and upraised couches (Q 56:28–34).

Surely the godfearing shall dwell amid gardens and a river in a sure abode, in the presence of a King Omnipotent (*'inda malik muqtadir*) (Q 54:54–5).

But for the specific 'heavenly' interpretation that I propose for the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III with its gardens the following verses of the Quran are central:

But such as fears the Station of his Lord,
for them shall be two gardens –
O which of your Lord's bounties will you and you deny?²⁵
abounding in branches – . . .
therein two fountains of running water – . . .
therein of every fruit two kinds – . . .

24 On this, see the following studies: El-Saleh, *La vie future*; Smith and Haddad, *Death and resurrection*; Blair and Bloom (eds.), *Images*; al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses*. [See also M. Jarrar's and N. Rustomji's contributions to this publication.]

* [Arberry (trans.), *The Koran*. Unless otherwise indicated, I cite this translation throughout this text.]

25 This phrase is repeated after practically each of the lines which follow. I have omitted it, indicating its presence by ellipses.

reclining upon couches lined with brocade,
 the fruits of the gardens nigh to gather – ...
 therein maidens restraining their glances,
 untouched before them by any man or jinn – ...
 lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral – ...
 Shall the recompense of goodness be other than goodness? ...
 And besides these shall be two gardens – ...
 green, green pastures [in the translation by Abdullah Yusuf Ali: Dark-
 green in colour (from plentiful watering)²⁶] – ...
 therein two fountains of gushing water – ...
 therein fruits,
 and palm-trees, and pomegranates – ...
 therein maidens good and comely – ...
 houris, cloistered in cool pavilions – ...
 untouched before them by man or jinn – ...
 reclining upon green cushions and lovely druggets – ... (Q 55:46–78).

In these verses a distinction is drawn between four gardens of paradise, although the actual number should not be taken too literally, since the important point is that there is a hierarchy among them.

4 The 'Upper' Gardens of Paradise: Variety and Asymmetry

There are two gardens which have a certain superiority relative to the other two. They are characterized as having within them *min kull fākihatin zawjāni*, a phrase which A. Arberry translates as 'therein of every fruit two kinds.' Although some exegetes have understood this simply in the sense that there will be two of each kind of fruit, one of the oldest commentators, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), followed by others, specifies that *min kulli naw'in min al-fākihati ḍarbāni*, means "of each type of fruit there will be two varieties."²⁷ If these fruits of paradise,

²⁶ http://wikilivres.info/wiki/The_Holy_Qur%27an/Al-Rahman.

²⁷ Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* xxvii, 86. For his part, the Andalusian al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272) interprets the phrase in the sense that each fruit will be of two types, and both will be sweet. He goes on to quote the companion of the Prophet, Ibn 'Abbās, saying that there is no tree in this world, be it sweet or sour, which is not to be found in paradise, including the colocynth, although in the next world this will be sweet. He adds that each fruit will be of two varieties, ripe and dried, although the latter will be every bit as sweet and good as the other. He ends by saying that the difference between the two upper and the two

which come in pairs but which are different, together with the plants or trees from which they proceed, were to be represented, perhaps one way of doing this might be a type of vegetation characterized by the asymmetry shown in the wall decorations of the hall? This makes sense of the fact, pointed out by Acién, that the two parts of the panels are not mirror images.

These fruits of paradise will be 'within easy reach': anyone in the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III could touch the panels with his hand, for they were on the wall. Acién points out that "all the decoration of the hall appears to repeat in the interior what exists outside, and the flora of the panels seem to have the same meaning as the real vegetation in the garden, which in its turn is the likeness of that of paradise."^{*} But in the gardens of Madīnat al-Zahrā' each vegetable species could not produce, as it could in paradise, two different varieties of the same fruit at the same time. For this reason, what the asymmetrical decoration of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III really did was to invert the sense proposed by Acién: its vegetal motifs were those which really constituted a 'likeness' of the flora of paradise, while the flora of the Upper Garden of the city could not go outside the bounds imposed by nature and it should therefore be 'seen' according to the heavenly model represented in the hall.

The image or images of paradise that Muslims have and have had throughout history are not based exclusively on the Quran: many other sources have contributed to them, and have been collected in different literary genres such as, among others, the compilations of the traditions of the Prophet and his companions and successors, theological treatises, and works of eschatology. A search in these texts gives a clue to help us outline the ways in which attempts are made to represent or suggest paradise in specific cases. We are fortunate enough to have available a text composed by an Andalusī author who lived in the first half of the third/ninth century; the text contains a minutely detailed description of paradise. I refer to the work of 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. 238/853) entitled *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws* (Book on the description of paradise).²⁸ This is a most important text which has already been used

lower gardens will be that the latter will only have one type of each fruit, while the former will have two: see al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-aḥkām* xvii, 162–3. My thanks to Luis Molina for the information he has provided on the works of Quranic exegesis concerning this verse, based on the materials collected on the CD-ROM *Maktabat al-tafsīr wa-'ulūm al-Qur'ān* [Amman: Markaz al-Turāth lil-Barmajjiyyāt].

* [Acién, *Materiales e hipótesis* 186.]

28 The Arabic text was published in Beirut, 1407/1987, in an edition which I reviewed in *Sharq al-Andalus* 7 (1990), 243–4. The Arabic text has been translated into Spanish: Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, intro., trans. and study Monferrer Sala.

to obtain a better understanding of the iconography of the mosaics of the Umayyad Mosque of Damascus which, as is well known, has been interpreted as a vision of paradise.²⁹ Let us look at some of the descriptions it contains (the number which accompanies them corresponds to those of the paragraphs into which the editor divided the Arabic text, a division which has been followed by Monferrer Sala in his translation [on which the following is based]):

(24) ... 'Abd al-Malik said: 'When the day of resurrection comes and the heavens and the earth are replaced, just as God has said, God will all at once draw up paradise, and then all the gardens that lie therein shall be laid out until they fill the abyss which occupied the space where the heavens were before they were replaced. Between it and the throne shall there be no sky, save only the throne which is [already] there now and which, in due time, shall be the sky of paradise. Thus spoke the Most High: "And paradise shall be brought forward for the godfearing" [Q 26:90] ... The land shall be replaced by a land of silver [Q 3:133] and its highest terraces [shall climb] to the throne, which shall be the whole of its sky.'

(25) ... The Prophet ... has said: 'In paradise there is a palace into which only a prophet, a [true: *ṣiddīq*, my addition] believer, a martyr or a just *imām* will enter.'³⁰

[The latter is identified as 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb. In other words this palace was reserved for prophets, martyrs, and the first two caliphs, Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq and 'Umar, although by extension it is supposed that just and well-guided caliphs will also enter. My addition].

(29) ... The Prophet ... has said: 'In paradise there are rooms from whose interior one can see what is outside, and from outside one can see what is inside, so fine and beautiful are they. ...'

(41) Concerning that which God, the Most High, has said, And surely the world to come is greater in ranks, greater in preferment [Q 17:21] and [also on what] the Most High has said, ... those in truth are the believers; they have degrees with their Lord, and forgiveness, and generous provision [Q 8:4], 'Abd al-Malik said: 'The degrees indicate ranks and merits. The degrees of paradise indicate the merit and the rank through which God considers some superior to others in so far as they have obeyed [His laws] in this world ... The people of each degree, rank and merit are companions. It is not that they are companions when they eat, drink or

29 Flood, *The Great Mosque* 28–9.

30 This is a reference to Q 4:69. See also Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, number 50.

live together, but when they are grouped together [according to] similar merit . . .’

(55) ‘Abd al-Malik said: ‘... As to the garden of paradise, *al-firdaws* is vineyards and grapes. It is on a high hill of paradise from which spring the rivers of paradise. The Prophet . . . said: Ask God for *al-firdaws*, it is the very center of paradise, the highest garden from which flow the rivers of paradise; the people of paradise [there] shall hear the noise [*aṭīṭ*] of the throne.’

(90) . . . There the leaves of paradise are according to the types of fruit and the kinds of birds; in paradise there is no [dwelling place] which is not covered by boughs, even with the varieties of fruit and of birds. If a community were beneath one of their leaves, it would cover [them all] with shade. The flowers [form] gardens, the leaves are always fresh . . .

(92) . . . God has not created a [single] flower (*zahra*) nor a [single] color which is not found there, with the exception of the color black. In paradise there is no dwelling place which is not covered by its branches, which produce adornments and tunics, and from its stem two springs flow . . .*

(103) ‘The branches of the trees of paradise are of gold, the leaves of sapphires and beryls, the palms are like the former. Their leaves are like the most beautiful tunics that were [ever] seen, their fruits are smoother than butter and sweeter than honey, on each of the trees there is [every] kind of fruit. Each species has a different flavor. When anyone desires any [particular one of all the fruits from all these] species, the branches on which the desired fruit grows bow down so that he may take it with his [own] hand, just as he wishes. [Whether] he wishes to be standing, seated or reclining, and [even] if he so wishes he may open his mouth so that [the fruit] may enter. Once he has taken any [fruit], God . . . will create another better and finer than the one before.’

(242) ‘... The fruits of this world have their season, and then they finish, whereas those of paradise are never exhausted; the fruits of this world have guardians, whereas those of paradise do not.’ Concerning the saying of the Most High, “whose fruits shall be within a hand’s reach,” al-Ḥasan commented: ‘They shall reach them, whether they are standing, or seated or reclining, as they wish.’ As to what the Most High said, “their fruits, within reach, may easily be picked,” he [al-Ḥasan] stated: ‘They shall be

* [For the issue of colors and their meanings in Muslim eschatology, see S. Günther’s contribution to this publication.]

within reach, picking them however they wish, whatever may be [the fruit] they may choose [to pick].³¹ Concerning the saying of the Most High, "whensever they are provided with fruits therefrom they shall say, 'This is that wherewithal we were provided before'; that they shall be given in perfect semblance" [Q 2:25], the best, with nothing bad within it, and like the first in taste and quality, with nothing bad within it.³¹

In the examples quoted (and they are only a small sample of the contents of Ibn Ḥabīb's book), there are clear correspondences with the topographical situation of Madīnat al-Zahrā' and with some of its characteristics. We have the layout of paradise as gardens (with earth of silver: the idea of whiteness³² and brilliance) which stretch from the sky, where the Throne of God is located, downwards in steps or terraces. There is a garden which is the exact center of paradise, situated on a hill. The vegetation is lush, varied and dense.³³ There are always fruits within reach of the hands of those who want them. In paradise there is a palace for prophets, martyrs, and just *imāms*. And there are rooms from whose interior one may see what is outside and from outside what is within (a mirror image between the flowers in the garden and the plant decoration of the hall). In paradise believers are not mixed, there is a hierarchy according to rank and merit.³⁴

In the texts referring to Madīnat al-Zahrā' frequent reference is made to *al-saṭḥ al-ʿalī*, which Labarta and Barceló translate as 'upper level,' pointing out that it is not clear whether the phrase alludes to "a topographic or architectural upper level. Here are located the reception halls and an open space."³⁵ The root *s-ṭ-ḥ* appears only once in the Quran, in chapter 88, verse 20. After describing hell and paradise (verses 1–16), the following verses mention the divine omnipotence, asking men to think about how God has raised the heavens "how the mountains were hoisted, how the earth was outstretched (*suṭiḥat*)."³⁵ May the expression *saṭḥ* be seen as a reference to this Quranic verse? Is the term not being used, perhaps, to denote the part of the city where the ground

31 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*.

32 This idea of whiteness is reflected in the legendary story of the slave al-Zahrā' whose wish for a city bearing her name may have motivated the construction of Madīnat al-Zahrā': on this subject, see Marín, *Mujeres en al-Andalus* 79–80, with references.

33 To what extent may the use of the so-called 'florid Kufic' script in the inscriptions of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (see Martínez Núñez, *Sentido de la epigrafía* 408–17) also be related to celestial symbolism?

34 See also Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, numbers 37, 41, 178.

35 Labarta and Barceló, *Las fuentes árabes* 101.

was leveled on the side of the hill? But C. Barceló reminds me that the term *sath* is also used in the description of the Alcázar (royal palace) of Cordoba, so that its use in Madīnat al-Zahrā' would have no particular relevance. Similarly, Juan Pedro Monferrer tells me that this term does not appear in the *Kitāb Wasf al-firdaws*.

5 The 'Flashes of Lightning' and the 'Stewards' of Paradise

We saw earlier how in the wall decorations of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III there appear 'pearls.' In the Quranic description of paradise there are frequent references to jewels and pearls (Q 22:23; 37:49; 52:24; 56:23). The same thing happens in Muslim tradition, where it is said, for example, that the inhabitants of paradise will be given food consisting of ground up gold and pearls, and where there are references to palaces made of pearls or of one gigantic pearl of enormous size.³⁶ There is a famous description of what some authors identify as one of the rooms of Madīnat al-Zahrā'³⁷ where a pearl is in fact mentioned, and which I reproduce here in the version found in the *Dhikr bilād al-Andalus*:

In the Alcázar ['Abd al-Raḥmān III] built a room called *Majlis al-khilāfa* whose walls and ceiling were of gold and thick marble, of the purest colour and of different types. In the centre of this prodigious hall was the pearl given to him by Leo, King of Constantinople, and its tiles were of gold and silver. In the middle of the hall was a great pool full of mercury, and on every side of the room there were four doors with arches of ivory and ebony decorated with gold and different precious stones resting on columns of coloured marble and pure crystal. As the sun came through these doors it bathed the ceiling and the walls of the hall with its light; and they reflected the rays, creating a dazzling brilliance (*nūr ya'khudhu l-abṣār*). The sovereign, when he wanted to frighten his guests, would make a sign to one of his slaves, who would stir the mercury, whereupon the hall would be filled with a flashing light which would overwhelm the hearts of those present (*nūr ka-lama'ān al-barq ya'khudhu bi-jamī' al-qulūb*), for it seemed to them that the room was going round while

36 See Flood, *The Great Mosque* 27–8. Also Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Wasf al-firdaws*, numbers 28, 38, 40.

37 Labarta and Barceló, *Las fuentes árabes* 102, however, think this actually dealt with a hall in the Alcázar in Cordoba. For the location of the hall in Madīnat al-Zahrā', see Molina, *Sobre el estanque*.

the mercury was in movement. Some say that the hall revolved so that it would always face the sun, but others say that it was fixed around the pool. Never before in Islam or before had anybody done anything similar, but to him it was possible because of the large quantities of mercury he had at his disposal.³⁸

The elements seen in this account may be interpreted as a way of imitating central aspects of the description of paradise. One of these is the number of doors: paradise also has eight doors.³⁹ Another is the construction in gold and silver.⁴⁰ Another is the flashing light, which is one of the characteristics that are repeated when describing what each believer will find as he enters paradise:

(128) ... he shall enter, finding rows of cushions, doors [perfectly] aligned and carpets spread [everywhere], and he shall look at the foundations of the building, for behold it has been built on rocks of pearls [with a mixture] of yellow, green, red and white color; then he shall raise his eyes to the ceiling, and were it not for the fact that God has given him the ability [to resist], a light would destroy his sight, for it is like a flash of lightning (*barq*) ...

(47) ... if any of [the dwellers] in paradise raise his eyes, he will be almost blinded by a dazzling light, and he will exclaim: 'What is this? For surely I do not believe that there are flashes of lightning in paradise ...'⁴¹

The description of the hall referring to the tank or pool of mercury has generally been considered by researchers as legendary, pointing out possible literary precedents⁴² and noting how it appears in late sources. But this description also mentions the tiles of gold and silver. There is indeed documentary evidence of the existence of tiles glazed in honey color and white in the excavations

38 Molina (ed. and trans.), *Dhikr bilād al-Andalus*, Arabic text 164, translation 174. In the appendix references are given to other sources (none earlier than the twelfth century) which tell the same story. See also references in Labarta and Barceló, *Las fuentes árabes* 102.

39 'Abd al-Malik Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, numbers 14, 17.

40 Ibid., numbers 7, 32.

41 Ibid.

42 See Rubiera, *La arquitectura* 84–5, for an account of the palace of the Egyptian governor Khumarāwayh b. Ṭulūn (second half of the third/tenth century). But in this account the function and characteristics of the pool of mercury have nothing to do with those of the hall in al-Andalus.

of Madīnat al-Zahrā'.⁴³ Although the description may be invented,⁴⁴ its origin may well be the fact that it was known that the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III referred specifically to paradise, so that those later authors who circulated the story accumulated elements belonging to the same reference.

The same may be the case with the account of the Christian embassy to Madīnat al-Zahrā' told by the mystic Muḥyī l-Dīn b. 'Arabī and analyzed by F. de la Granja, in which the following story is told:

When they [the ambassadors] arrived at the gate of Madīnat al-Zahrā', the ground was carpeted with brocade, from the gate of the city to the throne, all in the same impressive way. In special places they had set chamberlains, who looked like kings, dressed in brocade and silk, seated in ornate chairs.

When they saw a chamberlain, they hastened to prostrate themselves before him, believing that he was the Caliph. But they said: 'Lift up your heads: this is only one of his slaves.'⁴⁵

F. de la Granja has already indicated the literary precedents, both popular and classical, of this story. But it is also a story which is told about paradise: the believer will arrive in paradise and will confuse the angels and other servants of God, surrounded by splendor and light, with God Himself, so that they will go down on bended knee to adore them until they are told of their error.⁴⁶

6 The Dark Green Gardens of Paradise

We have seen that in chapter 55 of the Quran there are two gardens mentioned which are located below the two 'upper' gardens, which seems to indicate that they would be destined for those who are not worthy of a reward so high as that enjoyed in the first two gardens. These 'lower' gardens are dark green (*mudhāmmatāni*), a color which al-Ṭabarī explains by the fact that "they appear black because of the intensity of their greenness" (*muswaddatāni min*

43 Communicated personally by Antonio Vallejo Triano, to whom I am grateful for the information; I also thank Manuel Ación Almansa.

44 See the critical opinion of al-Maqqarī in *Nafḥ al-ṭīb* i, 527–8 (I owe this reference to Carmen Barceló).

45 De la Granja, A propósito 393.

46 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, numbers 129, 245.

shiddati khudratihimā)* – in other words, they, too, will have abundant vegetation, with two fountains, and in them there will be fruit trees, palm trees and pomegranates. For his part 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb explains the Quranic term as "green, which, due to their weight, tend to become black."⁴⁷

It is known that the founding of Madīnat al-Zahrā' was linked to the production of a special type of ceramics which is known as 'green and manganese': against a white background there are different motifs in green edged with black. Vegetal motifs are the most dominant among them.⁴⁸ This type of ceramic, in which open forms are most common (consequently it has been considered as tableware), seems to have been a frequent gift from the caliph. M. Barceló has linked the white background to the color of the Umayyads,⁴⁹ a connection with which Escudero agrees:

the basic tricolor scheme employed in its decoration appears to be a symbol, or emblem, of the Andalusī Umayyads: white as the color of the dynasty, green as the color of the Prophet... and black as the synthesis of power, of Quranic austerity and the dignity of the Caliph's throne. A striking point, in this connection, is the frequent use of the term *al-mulk*, which proclaims 'the Caliphal identity, the legitimate Caliphal line of the Umayyad dynasty,' and floral elements like the palmette, which also carries clear symbolic connotations.⁵⁰

But as well as these possible references, this green color with a black border may also be connected to the dark green gardens mentioned in Q 55. And we must not forget that the color green is the archetypal color of the Islamic paradise (Q 18:31; 55:76; 76:21), as well as of the martyrs.⁵¹

* [Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān* xxvii, 86.]

47 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws* number 99, see also number 229, to the end.

48 See Escudero Aranda, La cerámica decorada 127–64. An update on what is known about these ceramics can be found in Bazzana, A., La ceramique verte 349–58 and Fuertes Santos, *La cerámica califal* 150–2.

49 Barceló, *Al-Mulk* 291–9, repr. in *El sol que salió por Occidente* 187–94.

50 Escudero Aranda, La cerámica califal 402, with references to Roselló Bordoy, La céramique verte 105–8.

51 See Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, numbers 162, 166, 240, 245. There is a well-known tradition that the breath of life (*nasam*) of martyrs is in the belly of green birds, that of believers is in the belly of white birds, and the breath of life of the people in hell is in the belly of black birds: see Lucini, *La escatología musulmana* 537. In the *Kitāb Waṣf al-firdaws*, number 303 we find the following variation: "when your brothers fell victim at Uḥud, their spirits were placed in green birds which drink their fill from the rivers

7 Umayyads and Fatimids in the Time of the Construction of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III

As we have seen, the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III was not built until the years 342/953–4 and 345/956–7, and its construction implied an important remodeling of the original plan of the city.

At about this time, in the year 344/955, the caliph also carried out a reorganization of the administration,⁵² which consisted of the creation of four 'departments,' each under the management of a different vizier: one department was responsible for inter-administration correspondence; the second, for correspondence with the frontier regions; the third, for the transmission of orders and decrees; and the fourth, for supervision of the complaints from and the affairs related to the caliph's subjects. This reform took place in the same year in which the Fatimids attacked the port of Almeria, wreaking great destruction. If this attack was seen as the prelude to a large-scale Fatimid invasion, it may have prompted the caliph to strengthen his control over the territory under his command by means of this administrative reform. But even as early as the overthrow of the 'man of the donkey' in 336/947, the threat presented by the Fatimid caliphate had acquired a new dimension. But first let us look briefly at this 'man of the donkey.'⁵³

The Zanāta Berber (from the branch of the Ifran) Abū Yazīd Makhlad b. Kaydād was a Khārijite, and hence in favor of equality between Berbers and Arabs, of the right to reject and depose unjust rulers, and of the duty to name only the best and most pious of Muslims as the *imām* of the community, even if he were a black slave; thus he denied that the family of the Prophet had any special charisma. Toward the year 332/944, the Zanāta troops of the 'man of the donkey,' as he was called because of his mount (a symbol of humility), began to win military victories against the Fatimids in North Africa, even conquering Kairouan, where coins were minted in the name of Abū Yazīd. The Mālikī faction in the city, while against his doctrines, saw in him a way of freeing themselves from the Shi'ites, who were considered a greater threat. Abū Yazīd, for example, failed to capture either Mahdiyya, the fortress city built by the Fatimids at the beginning of their reign, or Susa.

of paradise, eat their fruits, and dwell in lanterns in the shadow of the throne..." [For al-Ghazālī's statements on the issue of the souls of the martyrs residing in the green birds of paradise, see S. Günther's contribution to this publication.]

52 See Ibn 'Idhārī, *al-Bayān al-mughrib* 220.

53 See the bibliographic references in note 8.

At about the same time, in 333/944–5, according to [the early eighth/fourteenth-century Andalusian historian] Ibn 'Idhārī, there appeared in Lisbon a man who said that he was a member of the family of the Prophet, and that his mother Maryam was a descendant of Fāṭima. He claimed to be a prophet, and declared that the angel Gabriel visited him. He gave his followers a series of rules and laws, among which was to shave their heads (a practice which is generally attributed to the Khārijites). Nothing else is known of this individual. 'Abd al-Raḥmān III had already had to face messianic movements, no doubt exacerbated by the Fatimid example, for in the year 315/927 he had intervened to overthrow another false prophet, a Berber named Ḥamīm b. Mann Allāh al-Muftarī who had appeared on the outskirts of Tetuan.⁵⁴ Both the Fatimid caliph and his Umayyad counterpart, then, had to face heretical rebels.

When the Fatimid caliph Ismā'īl al-Manṣūr (335–41/946–53), who gained his name precisely as a result of his victory over the 'man of the donkey,' acceded to the throne it was still by no means clear that this victory was going to be possible: but in the year 335/946 he managed to overthrow Abū Yazīd and put him to flight. This latter had sent embassies to Cordoba to recognize the Umayyad caliph, with the aim of gaining his military support in his fight against the Fatimids.⁵⁵ But the Andalusī caliph took too long to decide what to do, and when the Umayyad fleet arrived at the coast of Ifrīqiya, Abū Yazīd had been defeated (336/947).

This defeat was converted into a proof of the legitimacy of the Fatimid dynasty and the truth of their doctrine. Abū Yazīd was presented by the Fatimids as the Dajjāl, the Antichrist who would cause great havoc before the appearance of the Messiah or *mahdī*, who would overthrow him. By being identified with the eschatological figure of the Dajjāl, Abū Yazīd was no longer simply a rival who proposed a different version of Islam and was fighting for political power. He was the Great Enemy, whose overthrow would open the way to the consummation of divine destiny. By defeating him, the caliph al-Manṣūr became in his turn a messianic figure, he was the one who had triumphed over evil in order to inaugurate a new era in which the Fatimid dynasty would rule until the end of time.⁵⁶

It was against this background that al-Manṣūr introduced certain innovations. We have already mentioned that he promoted the building of Ṣabra-Manṣūriyya, with its characteristic circular form, in imitation of 'Abbasid Baghdad (and in contrast to the rectangular form of Madīnat al-Zahrā',

54 Fierro, *La heterodoxia* 128–9, 143.

55 Viguera, *Los Fatimíes de Ifrīqiya* 29–37.

56 Brett, *Rise* 170–1.

although see my comments in note 7). But the most visible innovation was the reform of the coinage, with the appearance on the coins of three concentric circles around a central field with a horizontal inscription. Later, his successor al-Mu'izz introduced more radical changes both in the design and in the Shi'ite content of the inscription. The horizontal field disappeared, being replaced by a central point surrounded by three concentric circular bands containing an inscription which read: "There is no god but Allāh, one alone, without partner; and Muḥammad is the Messenger of Allāh; and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is the heir of the Messenger and the most excellent deputy (*wazīr*) and the husband of the Radiant and Pure (*al-Zahrā' al-batūl*).” On the reverse it said, among other things: “the servant of God Ma‘add Abū Tamīm, the *imām* al-Mu‘izz li-dīn Allāh, Prince of the Faithful, Reviver of the *sunna* of Muḥammad, Lord of the messengers [sent by God], and heir to the glory of the well guided *imāms*.” This assertive Shi'ite wording ('Alī as heir to the Prophet and his most excellent deputy, and the mention of his wife Fāṭima as the Radiant and Pure) only lasted two years (from 341–3/952–5); it was replaced by more moderate phraseology from 343/954–5 until the end of the reign of al-Mu'izz in which it only said: “'Alī is the most excellent heir and a deputy of the greatest of those among the messengers [of God].”⁵⁷

If the victory over Abū Yazīd represented the truth and legitimacy of the Fatimids, what repercussions did the same victory have on the Umayyad legitimacy? The false prophet in Lisbon (about whom we know so little) may have served to demonstrate that the Umayyads were also vanquishing evil. But I believe that the remodeling of Madīnat al-Zahrā', and more particularly the heavenly symbolism of the hall and gardens, was the main way in which 'Abd al-Raḥmān III decided to counteract the benefits obtained by the Fatimids with their victory over the 'man of the donkey'.

One aspect of this remodeling was the transfer, in 336/947 (the same year in which Abū Yazīd, the Antichrist of the Fatimids, was overthrown), of the mint from Cordoba to Madīnat al-Zahrā'.⁵⁸ In fact, thanks to this move we can be absolutely certain that at the time this was the name of the city of 'Abd

57 Walker, *Exploring an Islamic empire* 97, where we read: “Without an explanation of them in the other sources, whether these overt proclamations of Shi'i belief had special significance remains unclear. What is most obvious in them is none the less completely in line with Fatimid doctrine both before and after their use on the coinage. Therefore, the main unanswered question is why al-Mu'izz decided to add them and also why he dropped them after such a brief run of only two years.” No relation is established with what was happening in the Umayyad zone.

58 See Canto, Ceca de al-Andalus 111–9 (English translation: *Sikkat al-Andalus* 329–45).

al-Raḥmān III, since on the coins produced there the name of Madīnat al-Zahrā' appears.⁵⁹ Given that the mention of Fāṭima on the Fatimid coins with the text *al-Zahrā' al-batūl* came later (in the time of al-Mu'izz), did al-Mu'izz decide to introduce this text because the Umayyad caliph was calling his city by a name which could be understood as a reference to the daughter of the Prophet? In any case, the decision of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III to call his city by a name which evoked Fāṭima must have been motivated precisely by her role in legitimizing the Fatimids (although the name by which the dynasty is known was not used by them until very late):⁶⁰ for example, in the official sermon accompanying the Friday prayer in Fatimid territory mention was made of the Prophet "Muḥammad and his family, 'Alī, the Prince of the Faithful, his sons al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn, and the radiant one (*zahrā'*)."⁶¹

The transfer of the mint from Cordoba to Madīnat al-Zahrā' also implied the introduction of innovations in the Umayyad coinage, for the legend on the reverse was arranged in three lines (this pattern lasted until 350/961), as against the four of the previous period (321–36/933–47).⁶² Was this an imitation of the reform of the Fatimid coinage on the basis of the three concentric circles introduced by al-Manṣūr?

The series of coins produced by the mint in Madīnat al-Zahrā' are characterized by great variety and rich decoration. The decorative motifs are not only geometric but also based on a great variety of shapes: the issues of the period 336–41/947–52 are particularly notable for the appearance of this varied vegetal and floral ornamentation. During the period 316–29/928–40, the decorative signs were particularly simple, mostly of geometric shapes. In the period 330–5/941–6, a fixed decorative element was introduced on the back of the silver coins, it had the systematic repetition of an eight petaled flower. The extraordinary decorative development which took place in the years 336–41/947–952 (and here I echo A. Canto) coincides with the transfer of the mint from Cordoba to Madīnat al-Zahrā'. The issues of the years 336–7/947–9 are those which show the greatest decorative variety, and from the last year onwards we observe a slight decrease in the variety, which becomes more noticeable in the last years of the caliphate of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III, when coins were decorated

59 The Oriental traveler and Fatimid spy Ibn Ḥawqal, who arrived in al-Andalus in the year 337/948, refers to the Palatine city by the name of al-Zahrā', but it is not clear in his text if the form was 'Madīnat al-Zahrā'' or 'al-Madīna al-Zahrā': *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-arḍ* 77–8; for the Spanish translation see Ibn Ḥawqal, *Configuración de mundo*, trans. Romaní Suay 64–5.

60 On this subject see my study *On al-fāṭimi and al-fāṭimiyyūn* 144–7.

61 Halm, *Empire* 124, 272.

62 The following section is based on the study by Canto mentioned in note 57.

with geometric themes or carry no decoration at all. It is clear that this rich vegetal and floral ornamentation of the coinage corresponds with the decorative program of the Hall of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III: although the construction of the latter can be dated later than the changes effected in the coinage, both phenomena are closely linked.

Al-Mu'izz came to power in 341/953, and a year later (in 342/953) the Midrarid governor of Sijilmasa, who until then had pledged obedience to the Umayyad caliph of al-Andalus, pronounced himself caliph with the title of al-Shākīr li-llāh.⁶³ According to [the well known fifth/eleventh-century scholar] Ibn Ḥazm, in letters sent by 'Abd al-Raḥmān III from Madīnat al-Zahrā' which he himself saw, the Umayyad caliph called himself *al-qā'im li-llāh*,⁶⁴ a title which is not mentioned in the chronicles and which has clear messianic overtones, having been used particularly by the Shi'ites. The fact that a Sunni caliph such as 'Abd al-Raḥmān III decided to adopt it and use it reveals another aspect of this long rivalry between Umayyads and Fatimids, expressed via symbols of legitimacy. The adoption of this name may well have taken place after the defeat of the 'man of the donkey' appeared to confirm and reinforce the messianic role of the Fatimid dynasty.

8 Al-Madīna al-Zahrā', the Shining or Dazzling City

One of the most remarkable characteristics of paradise is its brilliance, of which we have already seen evidence in talk of 'bolts of lightning.' Let us look at some other examples taken from 'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb:

(45) ... The Prophet said ...: "The people in paradise will see the people in the higher ranks in the same way a shining star (*al-kawkab al-durrī*) is seen in the confines of the firmament."

(46) ... "The people in paradise will see each other in paradise as the Eastern Star is seen from the Western Star ..."

(150) ... "He who dwells above contemplates all those who are below him; his light illuminates everything, just as the sun lights the Earth when it rises [in the morning]."

63 Halm, *Empire* 397–8.

64 Ibn Ḥazm, *Naṭṭ al-'arūs* iv, 49 (in the edition of Seybold, trans. Seco de Lucena 151–2/68, this title appears as *al-qā'im bi-llāh*). In iv, 63, Ibn Ḥazm however uses the title *al-qā'im bi-amr Allāh*. For more information see Fierro, *Sobre la adopción* 38–9.

(229)...his appearance shall be that of a brilliant light (*nūr sāṭi'*), whose rays shall be like the rays of the sun when it rises [in the morning] and like the shining star (*al-kawkab al-durrī*) and the brilliant day; the palaces shall be high... and of sapphire, which will radiate its light (*yazharu nūruhā*); if it were not for the fact that [God] has taken it to His service, his eyesight would be blinded by the intensity of its brilliance and the eye of its jewels..."⁶⁵

We have already mentioned that the name of Madīnat al-Zahrā' by which the city of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III is known may have been yet another example of that rivalry with the Fatimid dynasty of which we have just seen several examples. Indeed, in the Fatimid legitimacy, as the very name of the dynasty implies, the figure of the daughter of the Prophet, Fāṭima, occupies a central place; she is known by the name 'al-Zahrā'".⁶⁶ Be that as it may, the root *z-h-r* had been used to name other Umayyad buildings.⁶⁷

But if Madīnat al-Zahrā' was built as an embodiment of paradise on earth, could its name not also be related to this idea of brilliance? The anecdote of the pool of mercury and the roofs of gold and silver would point in this direction. And we might also add what is known about the public illumination of the city.⁶⁸ The verses of Ibn Zaydūn about Madīnat al-Zahrā', in which the city is compared to paradise, draw attention to its brilliance: "those royal palaces whose apartments shone, and where shaded receptions seemed like sunrise" (although this a cliché in describing palaces, remember the line 'What castles are those? They are high and bright...'), but in the same verses he mentions a building known as al-Kawkab (the star).⁶⁹

65 Ibn Ḥabīb, *Kitāb Wasf al-firdaws*, see also numbers 10, 33, 45, 47, 48, 229, 248.

66 See references included in my article Espacio 175.

67 See Rubiera, *La arquitectura* 122–4 and 177–8.

68 See Escudero, *La cerámica califal* 405, referring to Valdés, *Kalifale Lampen* 208–16. But A. Vallejo Triano tells me this is a rather contrived interpretation of the use of the lamps found in Madīnat al-Zahrā'.

* This is a reference to a famous Spanish poem (known as the 'romance' of Abenámár) in which a Christian asks the 'Moor' Abenámár about the palaces of Granada.

69 See Rubiera, *La arquitectura* 129; Pérès, *La poésie andalouse* 124–5 (my thanks to Carmen Barceló for the latter reference).

9 The Censure of Mundhir b. Saʿīd

One of the best-known anecdotes about the caliphate of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III is that which tells of the censure of the *qāḍī* and preacher of Cordoba, Mundhir b. Saʿīd al-Ballūṭī (d. 355/966), toward the caliph for having failed to attend Friday prayer for some time because he was too busily occupied in the construction of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ.⁷⁰ Mundhir had been appointed as *qāḍī* in 339/950 (as preacher some years before) and occupied the position until his death, in the times of the caliph al-Ḥakam II. It was thus during his term as *qāḍī* that the Hall of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III was built. Mundhir's censure consisted of two parts, both of which were expressed using Quranic quotes. In the first instance, he quoted Q 26:128–35: "What, do you build on every prominence a sign, sporting, and do you take to you castles, haply to dwell forever? When you assault, you assault like tyrants! . . . Indeed, I fear for you the chastisement of a dreadful day." This quote appears to be a reproach for building Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ, but in the anecdote it is presented as a warning lest the building keep the caliph away from his religious duties. In the second place, the *qāḍī* quotes Q 43:33–5 when he visits the hall of Madīnat al-Zahrāʾ (according to some sources, when he saw a dome covered in precious metals):

And were it not that mankind would be one nation, We would have appointed for those who disbelieve in the All-merciful roofs of silver to their houses, and stairs whereon to mount, and doors to their houses, and couches whereon to recline, and ornaments; surely all this is but the enjoyment of the present life, and the world to come with thy Lord is for the godfearing.

In this case, it seems clear that the *qāḍī* was trying to send the message that he found the luxury and extravagance in which the caliph had indulged to be unacceptable; and it may also be understood that part of the censure was because the caliph was showing off in this world the luxury reserved for the righteous in the next.

I have indicated elsewhere⁷¹ that an official preacher within the Sunni community is effective if it may be said of him that this official appointment has not tied his hands and feet – in other words, if he is allowed to censure the ruler. This censure is not only *not* a threat to the ruler, however daring it may

70 Sources quoting this censure (with variations) are collected by de Felipe, *Identidad y onomástica* 210–2.

71 See Fierro, *La política religiosa* 119–56.

appear, on the contrary, it strengthens that ruler. The religious authority of the Sunni caliph is based on his guaranteeing and protecting Islamic religious law (*shari'a*), which is interpreted by experts in religious knowledge (scholars, or *'ulamā'*); the application of this law extends to the person of the caliph himself. A Sunni caliph will therefore be strengthened if the scholar he has named as official preacher dedicates part of his sermons to reminding the caliph of the rules to be obeyed, and to reproaching him when he fails to follow these rules. Only a good, just, and pious caliph would allow such exhortations and censures, and the fact that these take place closes the circle: the caliph is good, just, and pious. The censure of the Sunni ruler at the same time lends him legitimacy, in contrast to what happens among the Shi'ites, as there can never be censure of an *imām* who is infallible.

But even so, the censure is not pronounced without consequences. We do not know if Mundhir's censure had any effect on the quality of the materials used in the building of Madīnat al-Zahrā', but it may well have. In the version of the story which mentions a dome of precious metals, the caliph is said to have ordered it to be rebuilt in a more simple way. We know that Mundhir b. Sa'īd criticized the elimination of the name of 'Alī and material relative to him in some works composed in al-Andalus during the fourth/tenth century, and apparently his disapproval put a stop to a practice which arose from the Umayyad hatred of the fourth orthodox caliph (the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet, of whom the Fatimids declared themselves to be descendants and heirs), a practice which could not be acceptable within the Sunni community.⁷² Under al-Ḥakam II it was the mosque of Cordoba (the same one his predecessor 'Abd al-Raḥmān had stopped attending) which was the object of sumptuous decoration. I refer to the famous mosaics of the *miḥrāb*, in which once again we can see celestial symbolism, with its roots in the building traditions of the Umayyads of Damascus,⁷³ but this time it was not associated to a city but to a religious building. Perhaps, as happened with the Fatimids when they had to discard the messianic propaganda of the early days of the dynasty, the second Umayyad caliph also had to dilute his promise of paradise on earth, taking it back to its eschatological dimension.⁷⁴

One of the theological doctrines attributed to [the Andalusian legal expert and theologian] Mundhir b. Sa'īd [d. 355/966] deals with the difference

72 Ibid.

73 See references in Fierro, En torno a la decoración. At that time I was inclined to think that it was 'Abd al-Raḥmān III who conceived the decoration of the *miḥrāb*.

74 Symptomatic of this would be the abandonment of florid Kufic script in the period of al-Ḥakam II: see Martínez Núñez, Sentido de la epigrafía 416.

between the earthly paradise in which Adam and Eve lived, and the other eternal paradise (*jannat al-khuld*) since the *qāḍī*

thought that paradise and heaven have indeed already been created, except that paradise is not the same as that in which Adam and his wife were installed by God. He based this opinion on various reasons, one of which was that, if it had been eternal paradise itself, they would not have eaten of the tree in the hopes of living for ever. He also said that in the eternal paradise there is no room for lies and, nonetheless, the devil lied there. Finally he said that whoever enters paradise never leaves it, yet Adam and his wife left paradise.⁷⁵

His contemporary, the scholar Wahb b. Masarra (d. 346/957),⁷⁶ would have shared this opinion. This is a doctrine which had not aroused any particular concern among Muslims⁷⁷ and perhaps it may reflect the debate about the identification of Madīnat al-Zahrā' with paradise that I have set out here. The comparison of a palace with eternal paradise (*jannat al-khuld*) had already been made in al-Andalus by 'Ubaydīs b. Maḥmūd when talking of one of the constructions of Ibn al-Shāliya:

The palace of the Emir Abū Marwān
is copied from eternal paradise,
wrought with great magnificence:
it has halls held up by columns,
all made of marble mounted in purest gold.⁷⁸

This comparison was still being made later with the construction of Almanzor: "Votre palais d'al-'Amiriya est comme le Paradis de Riḍwān."⁷⁹

75 See Fierro, *Heterodoxia* 141, quoting the translation by M. Asín Palacios.

76 Fierro, *Heterodoxia* 139, note 52.

77 See van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft* iv, 550–4 (for reference to the doctrine of Mundhir b. Sa'īd, 553).

78 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis*, ed. Antuña 11. The Spanish translation [on which this is based] is by Terés, 'Ubaydīs ibn Maḥmūd 113.

79 Blachère, *Un pionnier* 30. Riḍwān is the guardian of paradise: see *ET*², s.v.

10 Conclusion

As I have said before, 'Abd al-Raḥmān III found it difficult to try to compete with a rival, the Fatimid caliph, who assumed a type of authority that the Umayyad, as a Sunni caliph, could never hope to have. What he could do was emphasize certain aspects which formed part of the Sunni tradition. One of these is the caliph's assurance of salvation for his subjects.⁸⁰ And if he does so, is it not as if paradise already existed in this world, especially where the caliph had his residence?

The ensemble of the hall and gardens that 'Abd al-Raḥmān III decided to build on the terraced site of Madīnat al-Zahrā' may, therefore, have the following message: with the proclamation of the caliphate in al-Andalus, it is as if God had extended the gardens of paradise down to earth. These gardens had different levels or grades, and the highest grade is that where the caliph dwells; and above him is only God. It is as if the caliph, the just *imām*, were living now in those two upper gardens mentioned in chapter 55 of the Quran. And so the decoration of the hall suggests those fruits which come in pairs, but which are not the same.

The other two gardens are below it. These two lower gardens are characterized by the almost black green of their vegetation. The production of ceramics in 'green and manganese' in Madīnat al-Zahrā' symbolized the fact that the caliph assured those who had not been chosen to reside in the upper level of the possibility of gaining access to the other gardens. The Quranic verse 76:20 says of paradise: "when thou seest them then thou seest bliss and a great kingdom" (*wa-idhā ra'ayta thamma ra'ayta na'īman wa-mulkan kabīran*). The ceramics produced in Madīnat al-Zahrā', with their vegetal decorations and their *al-mulk* text, proclaimed that this "bliss and a great kingdom,"⁸¹ promised to the faithful in the next life, was linked to a city shining like paradise, and to the caliph who built it, 'Abd al-Raḥmān III.

80 See Crone and Hinds, *God's caliph*.

81 The term *mulk* is generally thought to refer to the power of the caliph. The term has a negative sense, according to the *ḥadīth* which says that the true *khilāfa* of the Prophet lasted only 30 years, during the reign of the orthodox caliphs, and that the later caliphate was merely earthly royalty (*mulk*) acquired by usurpation. See this argument in a contemporary text on the reign of 'Abd al-Raḥmān III in Madelung, A treatise on the imamate 76.

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The *Chār Muḥammad* Inscription, *Shafā'a*, and the Mamluk Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya

Tehnyat Majeed

In medieval Cairo, living with the dead was a fact of life. Likewise, it could be said that Cairo was a dedicated necropolis where the living and the dead were in perpetual communion, continually negotiating mercy and salvation. An exchange of this nature was predicated on two sets of belief: first, that certain pious individuals after death had a great power of blessing or *baraka* which the living could obtain through remembrance, prayers, and by visiting their graves; and second, that the prayers of the living influenced the afterlife of the dead, to the extent that when performed with utmost sincerity, prayers could wash away the sins of the dead.¹ Not surprisingly then, a cult of the dead manifested itself around the numerous memorial buildings dotting the urban landscape of medieval Cairo where the practice of visiting graves (*ziyārat al-qubūr*) had emerged over time. In fact, a whole genre of literature on the *ziyārat al-qubūr* had developed, serving as guidebooks for the proper veneration of the dead.² Overall, these funerary devotional trends account for the preservation of Cairo's medieval cemeteries and burial structures.³

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- 1 In a *ḥadīth* cited by al-Bukhārī on the *isnād* of Adam, Shu'ba, and 'Abd al-'Aziz b. Ṣuhayb, Anas b. Mālik notes how the deceased is remembered with his final abode in the afterlife. He relates: "They passed by a *janāza* (bier) and they said good things about [the deceased], whereupon the Prophet said, 'It has become incumbent (*wajabat*)'; and then they passed by another (*janāza*) and said bad things about [the deceased], whereupon the Prophet said, 'It has become incumbent.' 'Umar asked, 'What has become incumbent?' The Prophet answered, 'Of this one, you said good things, so paradise became incumbent for him; and of that one, you said bad things, so hell became incumbent on him; you are the witnesses of God on earth.'" (Zaman, *Death, funeral processions* 46). Taylor observes that while in the Quran intercessory power is conditional upon God's will, there is confidence in the traditions about the intercession of the Prophet and "theologians promise that even great sins may be forgiven" except the sin of unbelief which will not be pardoned (Taylor, *Some aspects of Islamic eschatology* 64).
 - 2 See Taylor, *In the vicinity of the righteous*. This monograph focuses primarily on the Qarāfa cemetery.
 - 3 See Massignon, *Le cité des morts au Caire*.

While funerary architecture in Cairo is not a novelty of the Mamluk period and several significant tombs and shrines survive from the Fatimid and Ayyubid times, the high number of extant tomb chambers commissioned by Mamluk rulers and *amīrs* indicates that death and funerary concerns were a major preoccupation of the Mamluk elite during their lifetime. The Ayyubids⁴ were the forerunners who established the trend of dynastic mausolea in Cairo,⁵ but their architectural preference for institutions of learning was more dominant as they transformed the Fatimid hub of grand palatial monuments that had once signaled power and authority in the heart of Cairo, into a center for religious learning and education. Inspired by Ayyubid monumental patronage, the Mamluk fervently added to the city's principal axis not only charitable educational and religious foundations, but several tomb chambers as well. In a built landscape of grand Fatimid gateways, caliphal and vizieral mosques and commemorative *mashhads* (martyria), and against the backdrop of the sprawling Ayyubid citadel, Mamluk architectural patronage effectively combined dynastic, religious and social functions with the funerary.⁶ The multi-functional complex that invariably included a burial chamber for the patron was highly characteristic of Mamluk monumental architecture. As an integrated component of larger architectural complexes, the tomb was placed, most often, at the forefront along the main street or at street corners. This pivotal positioning of the mausoleum was aimed strategically to gain as much blessing or *baraka* as possible from passers-by. A number of architectural features were designed for this benefit. For example, the windows of the mausoleum on the interior were built as deep niches with large ornamental iron grills opening onto the street. Quran readers would sit in these window niches and recite during the day so that the attention of pedestrians was drawn to the tomb chamber. Moreover, in order to ensure that the tomb chamber was immediately recognizable from a distance, a lofty dome would frequently surmount it. These stone domes raised on high drums served as insignias and showed a wide range of carved

4 The later Ayyubids built *madrasas* dedicated to religious education in what was previously the Fatimid imperial center. Sultan al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb (648/1250) rescued the decaying Bayn al-Qaṣrayn which had been neglected during Šalāḥ al-Dīn's reign, by founding a *madrasa* (648/1250) following the earlier example of his father's Dār al-Ḥadīth al-Kāmiliyya on the western side of the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn (Korn, The façade of aṣ-Šāliḥ Ayyūb's *madrasa* 114).

5 Three dynastic tomb chambers from the Ayyubid period survive in Cairo. These are the tomb structures of *imām* Šāfi'ī (608/1211) and that of the 'Abbasid caliphs (c. 640/1242–3) in the southern cemetery (al-Qarāfa al-Šuḡhrā), and the tomb of al-Šāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb in the Fatimid city center.

6 Al-Harithy observes that Mamluk monuments were built to serve public communal needs (al-Harithy, The concept of space 83).

decorations from simple ribs and zigzags to complicated geometric interlacing stars and intricate arabesque patterns. In this way, *qubba*, which literally means “dome” became synonymous with the mausoleum. Not only do these countless *qubbas* reflect the Mamluk fascination with the afterlife, but their physical dominance of Cairo’s skyline also attested to the increasing architectural attention they received.

In a general sense, while such funerary monuments reflect man’s desire to be remembered, in the case of Mamluk Cairo there is a pervading sense that the dead continue to play a vital role in the affairs of the living. In the very heart of Islamic Cairo stands a funerary edifice whose layout, decoration and function provide some insight into this intersection of the spiritual and material worlds in the Mamluk conception of the afterlife. The monument in question is the acclaimed architectural *tour de force* of its period – the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya commissioned in 683–4/1284–5 by the Bahri Mamluk Sultan al-Malik al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn [Fig. 46.1].⁷ A square domed structure measuring roughly 21 m × 23 m, the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya was part of a larger *waqf* endowment comprising a *madrasa* (college) and a *māristān* (hospital) on a site called the Bayn al-Qaṣrayn (between the two palaces) where the Fatimid royal palaces originally stood. Al-Harithy observes that Qalāwūn’s architectural complex was a watershed in Mamluk architecture as it “consolidated the tradition of its predecessors and initiated new approaches to architectural and urban design.”⁸ The entire complex, built within a record thirteen months, presented an outstanding and innovative spectacle of eclectic architectural traditions. It stood like a trophy, with references not only to the Islamic monumental tradition, but also to buildings in Norman Sicily and those of the Crusaders in Palestine, all by imitating certain architectural features and by incorporating spolia. Hillenbrand astutely observed that “the entire Mediterranean world had been systematically trawled for ideas so as to make this foundation a monument truly representative of its time.”⁹ Situated on the main axis of the city, the magnificent stone façade of Qalāwūn’s architectural ensemble departed from earlier examples of Cairene monuments, especially in its articulation of a series of pointed arched panels with double windows crowned by an oculus

7 By late fourteenth century, the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya included the tombs of al-Malik Ṣayf al-Dīn Qalāwūn (d. 689/1290), of his son al-Malik al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 741/1341), and of his grandson al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ ‘Imād al-Dīn Ismā‘īl b. Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (d. 746/1345) (al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* iv, 516).

8 Al-Harithy, The concept of space 76.

9 Hillenbrand, *Islamic architecture* 330.

in the center.¹⁰ On the ground plan, we see that the central axis along with the inner walls of both the tomb chamber and the *madrasa* were skewed about 10 degrees south for correct orientation toward Mecca, even though on the exterior the structure followed the original street alignment [Fig. 46.2]. A decorated arched portal of modest dimensions provided access into the complex of buildings. It led into a wide corridor that connected the mausoleum on the right side with the *madrasa* on the left. At the further end of the corridor, before approaching the *māristān*, a short passage on the right with another elaborate portal led into the *qā'a*, a small rectangular arcaded courtyard that preceded the tomb chamber. Al-Maqrīzī writes that the royal attendants (*ṭawāshiya*) gathered in this space which also provided accommodation for those attendants who were on regular duty in the *qubba*.¹¹ Here, Mamluk officials would have congregated before they made their ceremonial entry into Qalāwūn's mausoleum. Centered within the squarish interior of the mausoleum, the cenotaph was placed right under the large dome. Later during his reign, Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (d. 741/1341) formed an enclosed private space (*maqṣūra*) by adding a wooden screen (*mashrabiyya*) around his father's cenotaph. This *maqṣūra* was reserved for Mamluk officials. The richly ornamented prayer niche (*miḥrāb*) of rather large dimensions on the *qibla* side is considered a masterpiece of gilding and intricate patterning of mother-of-pearl, glass mosaics, and marble decoration. Complementing the *miḥrāb*, the interior walls are lavishly decorated with floral, arabesque, and geometric patterns and a majestic gilded inscription frieze. Such grandeur set the mausoleum as a stage for dynastic and religious ceremonials. In addition to hosting official events, the *qubba*'s deed stipulated the space for congregational prayers, Sufi gatherings, and for the teaching of the four schools of law (*madhāhib*).¹²

A unique feature of the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya is its interior layout. Unlike any other Cairene mausoleum, the central square domed plan of the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya is articulated by an inner octagonal setting of four piers and four columns¹³ which along with parts of the decorative scheme, such as the

10 The paired arch-windows with the bull's eye is said to have been inspired by examples in Norman Sicily. Hillenbrand, *Islamic architecture* 326; Behrens-Abouseif, *Islamic architecture* 97.

11 Al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* iv, 516.

12 Al-Maqrīzī informs us that the *waqf* deed assigned an *imām* to lead the five daily prayers for the attendants, Quran reciters, and regular staff of the *qubba*. In its heyday, he adds, the best jurists were employed to instruct in the *qubba* (al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* iv, 518).

13 These then form eight arches that carry the drum that in turn supports the dome which is 11.60 m in diameter. All in all, the dome rises 31 m above the pavement. The rose granite

marble paneling, are considered to be direct references to the octagonal-shaped Qubbat al-Ṣakhra or the monument better known as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem built by the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik, in 72/691–2 [Figs. 46.3a, 46.3b].¹⁴ Although we do not know of any Mamluk historical source that compares these two monuments in an architectural or decorative context, we know that the Mamluks were acutely aware of Jerusalem’s holy significance and the reverence attached to it by their immediate predecessors, the Ayyubids.¹⁵ Contemporary architectural historians of the Mamluk period explain that in imitating aspects of Umayyad architecture, the Mamluk ruler was staking his claim as “spiritual heir to the glory of the Umayyads.”¹⁶ Other reasons may, however, also account for this conscious archaism on the part of Sultan Qalāwūn and his successors,¹⁷ if the archetypal Dome of the Rock in any way inspired his mausoleum. We know that Qalāwūn, as well as his son al-Nāṣir Muḥammad,¹⁸ sponsored new commissions and restorations that re-emphasized the sacred character of Jerusalem – sacredness epitomized by the structures of the *ḥaram al-sharīf*, in particular, that of the Dome of the Rock and al-Aqṣā Mosque.¹⁹

columns, according to Creswell, were most probably pillaged from some ancient edifice (Creswell, *Muslim architecture* 192).

- 14 Ibid.; Saladin, *Manual* 117–8; Herz, *Die Baugruppe* 19; Meinecke, *Das Mausoleum des Qalā’ūn*.
- 15 The books on *Faḍā’il al-Quds* (The merits of Jerusalem) were in higher circulation during the Mamluk period than ever previously (Goitein, *Al-Ḳuds*).
- 16 Meinecke, *Mamluk architecture* 169–79. Flood extends this claim to include most of Qalāwūnid architecture because of its conscious appropriation of Umayyad prototypes in the effort to “transpose cultural context” and search for “images of legitimacy” (Flood, *Umayyad survivals* 73). It has been noted that many early Bahri Mamluk funerary monuments in Cairo employed glass mosaic designs, marble paneling, and gilded acanthus scroll friezes that were derived from the Umayyad decorative repertoire. But, as Walker perceptively notes, this Umayyad derivation was also inspired by the fact that much of the original Umayyad decoration in Jerusalem and Damascus was restored by Mamluk patrons who therefore would have hired the same craftsmen to work on their monuments (Walker, *Commemorating the sacred spaces* 34).
- 17 Although the complex was built during Qalāwūn’s lifetime, the minaret and some of the decorative ornaments within the interior were added during his son Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad’s reign.
- 18 A historical inscription dated 718/1318 and rendered in gold on a sky-blue ground around the building of the Dome of the Rock carries a dedication to al-Nāṣir Muḥammad b. Qalāwūn (Tritton, *Three inscriptions from Jerusalem* 538).
- 19 Qalāwūn’s earlier patronage involved a number of commissions and restorations in the holy cities of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem (Meinecke, *Die mamlukische Architektur*).

In addition to the stylistic parallels found in the ornamental repertoire of the two monuments that evoke such historical connections, I would like to draw attention to a set of enigmatic inscriptions in the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya that may actually resonate with some of the more metaphysical and religious meanings that were associated with the Dome of the Rock.²⁰ These are the eight large marble mosaic panels²¹ in square Kufic²² writing carrying the name of the Prophet Muḥammad, installed on the four walls within the interior of the tomb chamber [Figs. 46.2, 46.4]. The unconventional formation of the name of Muḥammad and its repetitive rotations make a compositional design that could easily be mistaken for a non-epigraphic geometric pattern. This particular setting of the Prophet's name composed four times as a rotating symmetry within a single square became a very popular epigraphic motif known as the *chār Muḥammad* (four Muḥammads) that was later found on several monuments in various parts of the Islamic world.²³ The Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya *chār*

In 681/1282–3, a few years before he ordered his mausoleum in Cairo, Qalāwūn had built a *ribāṭ* (convent) in Jerusalem (Northrup, *From slave to sultan* 60). Little confirms that Qalāwūn was amongst the six Bahri sultans noted to have made extensive improvements to the buildings of Jerusalem and Hebron and also to have constructed new edifices (Little, *Relations between Jerusalem and Egypt* 74). The Bahri Mamluks invested in the revivification of the *ḥaram al-sharīf*: Sultan Baybārs (r. 658–76/1260–77) renovated the mosaics on the exterior façades of the Dome of the Rock, added a *miḥrāb* to the Dome of the Chain, Qalāwūn (r. 678–89/1279–90) repaired the roof of al-Aqṣā Mosque, and amongst the numerous refurbishments carried out by his son Sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad (r. 708–741/1309–40) was the re-gilding of the dome of al-Aqṣā and the Dome of the Rock (Drori, *Jerusalem during the Mamluk period* 198). According to Northrup, Qalāwūn's repairs and building works in Jerusalem, Medina, and Hebron were not only to assert his authority over the holy shrines of Islam but also to win popular support (Northrup, *From slave to sultan* 85–6).

- 20 We must note here that amongst Qalāwūn's numerous grand titles embellishing the exterior main façade of his complex in Cairo is the dignified epithet, *ṣāhib al-qiblatayn* (possessor of the two *qiblas*) which publicly declares that he possessed not only Mecca, the present *qibla* but also the first *qibla* – the ancestral spiritual center of Jerusalem. For the complete inscription, see van Berchem, *Matériaux* 126).
- 21 The inscription is rendered in a technique called “opus sectile” which creates the design by an ordered arrangement of finely cut colored marble tesserae on a grid pattern (Meinecke, *Das Mausoleum des Qalā'ūn* 51).
- 22 Square Kufic or *kūfī murabbʿa* as known in nineteenth-century Egypt was a highly stylized form of writing predominantly found on Islamic architecture. It is a style of writing inscriptions that originated on buildings in the eastern Islamic lands sometime during the fifth/eleventh century.
- 23 Persian in origin, the inception of the term *chār Muḥammad* is unknown, but the term has found common currency in Islamic epigraphy. Similar epigraphic designs with the

Muḥammad is the earliest surviving example of this epigraphic type in Cairo. Within the formal vocabulary of square Kufic writing, the text composed of *chār Muḥammad* constitutes positive space, while the area surrounding and defining it that maintains the integrity of the inscription represents negative space [Fig. 46.5]. Each *Muḥammad* makes up a quarter of the whole design, representing a 90 degree symmetrical rotation in each subsequent turn. The four initial *mīms* of each *Muḥammad* are focal to the composition as they emerge from a common centered point of origin. The medial *mīms* are in parallel alignment with the initial ones, serving also as major points of reference for the text. Without these knotted *mīms*, the straight lines of the *ḥā'* and *dāl* are meaningless. From the initial *mīm*, the letters *ḥā'*, *mīm*, and *dāl* follow in twists and turns to create a design that delineates the outer periphery of the larger square. Fixed at the center and rotating clockwise, this composition is called a "pin-wheel." The intrinsic quality of symmetry and harmony created by the play of positive and negative space maintains effectively the visual and formal equilibrium of the inscription.

In the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya, the *chār Muḥammad* inscription occurs in two vertically arranged schemes: as a double sequence (123 cm × 60 cm) in panels on the lateral walls [Fig. 46.6a] and in a triple square sequence (215 cm × 74 cm) on the axial walls flanking the *miḥrāb* and the main entrance door [Fig. 46.6b].²⁴ The geometric concept of the circle within the square that governs the design of the *chār Muḥammad* type is also the ordering principle of the plan of the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya [Figs. 46.7a, 46.7b]. This fundamental correspondence between the design of the *chār Muḥammad* inscription and the plan of the *qubba* represents the fractal²⁵ relationship inherent in much traditional

name of 'Alī called *chār 'Alī* survive in Iran from at least the fourth/tenth century in a funerary structure commissioned by the Buyid 'Aḍud al-Dawla (Ghouchani, *Angular Kufic* 4). According to Herzfeld, *chār 'Alī* was a generally used term for square Kufic epigraphy in Iran and Iraq (Herzfeld and Sarre, *Archäologische Reise* ii, 157). I have, therefore, retained the use of the Persian term *chār Muḥammad* in the context of the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya because this inscriptional type, a widespread leitmotiv in the Islamic world, is best known by this term. We have, as yet, no knowledge about the term used to refer to this specific type of inscription during the Mamluk period.

24 The double type of *chār Muḥammad* became quite popular in funerary and religious buildings in Cairo after its appearance within Qalāwūn's tomb chamber; by contrast, there are no other surviving specimens of the triple sequence in the Islamic world.

25 A "fractal" is a self-similar pattern. Salingaros, who expounds that human interaction with space draws upon the "fractal" properties in architecture, defines a fractal as "a structure in which there is substructure (i.e. complexity) at every level of magnification" (Salingaros, *Architecture, patterns, and mathematics* 80). Thus, a fractal pattern replicates itself at

architecture where the fundamental geometry shaping the basic plan of the structure generates subsequent divisions and elements proportionately, creating harmony between the whole and its parts.²⁶ This geometric concept of the circle within the square, like a *mandala*, symbolically represents the unity of the material (square) with the cosmic (circle) – an appropriate metaphor in the funerary context. But, what about the content of the *chār Muḥammad* – what was its significance and relevance to the meaning and function of the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya?

In popular piety, the name of the Prophet Muḥammad came to offer *baraka*, as the Quran itself affirms Muḥammad to be a source of *raḥma*.²⁷ Thus, inscriptions that pay tribute to Muḥammad solicit his *baraka* which in the burial chamber was specially invoked for the deceased. By the seventh/thirteenth century, the commemoration of the Prophet Muḥammad in religious spaces had taken several forms following a tradition that became established quite early under the Umayyads.²⁸ In the funerary context and particularly in tomb

different scales retaining the integrity of a fundamental design and its proportions. The “fractal relationship” implies that the observer, at some level of consciousness, experiences the geometric similarities between the layout of the interior and that of the sub structural elements, such as the inscriptions and ornamental motifs.

26 Recognizing the predominance of geometry in Mamluk aesthetic culture, Walls explores the intrinsic relationship between architectural plans, structural elements, and geometric concepts in his architectural analysis of the Ashrafiyya Madrasa (886/1482) in Jerusalem. Similarly, Fernández-Puertas in his study of the Nasrid Alhambra palace discovered the presence of a harmonious proportional system in ground plans, elevations, structural elements, and decoration (Walls, *Geometry*; Fernández-Puertas, *The Alhambra*). Kessler points out that the most striking feature on entering a Mamluk tomb chamber is its conscious symmetrical arrangement of elements within the interior (Kessler, *Funerary architecture within the city*; Fernández, *The foundation of Baybars al-Jashankir* 32).

27 “*Wa-mā arsalnāka illā raḥmatan lil-‘ālamīna*.” (We sent thee not, but as a Mercy for all creatures) (Q 21:107). All translations from the Quran in this paper are quoted according to Ali (trans.), *Holy Qur’ān*.

28 Architectural forms as well as certain objects within religious spaces were held to be direct references to the Prophet. For instance, Whelan maintains that the architectural form of the *mihrāb* replaced the ‘*anaza* – the spear of the Prophet – as the device to indicate the direction of the Ka’ba. And by extension, since the Prophet’s role as *imām* was also connected to his ‘*anaza*, with the *mihrāb* taking over this function, the space in front of it then became a reference to the Prophet himself. (Whelan, *The origins of the Mihrāb Mujawwaf* 214–5). Flood contends that a similar signification was attached to a stone disc in the *mihrāb* of the cave below the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem (Flood, *The commemoration of the Prophet* 329). And we know that the pulpit (*minbar*) was another item that held specific associations with the Prophet Muḥammad. Within al-Aqṣā Mosque,

chambers, epigraphic dedications to the Prophet directly refer to his role as *shāfi* or intercessor.²⁹ Though the Quran categorically states that God alone has the power of intercession, it allows for the right to intercede by another, if God so permits.³⁰ By the end of the fifth/eleventh century, the role of the Prophet as *shāfi* for his *umma* (community) on the day of the resurrection was well-developed in classical *ḥadīth* literature and thereafter remained in vogue in popular Muslim culture. The presence of the *chār Muḥammad* in tombs reinforces the likelihood of its symbolic function as an 'icon' for intercession. Eschatological tradition developed formulas such as the *ṣalawāt sharīfa*, i.e., blessings in the Quran on the Prophet that were recited in the hope of securing his intercession:³¹ *"Inna allāha wa-malā'ikatahu yuṣallūna 'alā l-nabīyyi yā ayyuhā alladhīna amānū ṣallū 'alayhi wa-ṣallimū taslīman."* (Allāh and His Angels send blessings on the Prophet: O ye that believe! Send ye blessings on him, and salute him with all respect) (Q 33:56).³²

In mystical texts, such as *al-Futuḥāt al-makkiyya* (*The Meccan Illuminations*) of Ibn 'Arabī (560–638/1165–1240), we find a great emphasis on the practice of *dhikr* blessing the Prophet through concentrated visualization so that a disciple may be graced by the presence of the Prophet and receive his *baraka*. It was believed that when blessings are made with sincerity and full immersion, they

the archaic Kufic inscription commemorating the Prophet that flanked the *miḥrāb* on one side shows an early development of architectural inscriptions with the name of Muḥammad (Flood, *The commemoration of the Prophet* 321; Le Strange, *Palestine* 100).

- 29 Even during his lifetime, the Prophet, as related by his wife 'Ā'isha, would often go at night to the cemetery of Baqī' al-Gharqad to pray and intercede on behalf of the dead (Wensinck, *Shafā'a* 177–9).
- 30 Q 6:51, 70; 32:4; and 39:43–4 declare God's sole right to intercession. While Q 10:3; 19:87 (cited below); 20:19; 21:28; and 53:26 state the privilege of intercession to another, as God permits. *"Lā yamlikūna al-shafā'ata illā man ittakhadha 'inda al-raḥmāni 'ahdan"* (None shall have the power of intercession, but such a one as has received permission [or promise] from [Allāh] Most Gracious).
- 31 Schimmel, *The Prophet in popular Muslim piety* 377. "The *ṣalawāt* has developed in popular piety to the most important formula besides the *shahāda* [the Muslim creed] and the *basmala* [the formula "In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate"] and many people will not begin their work unless they have uttered the *durūd* [invocation of God's blessing on the Prophet], which is often used also as a *dhikr* [remembrance of God] formula. It is believed that the Prophet is present in meetings devoted to the recitation of blessings for him . . ." (Schimmel, *The Prophet in popular Muslim piety* 377).
- 32 Incidentally, this verse occurs in the original text of the Umayyad 'Abd al-Malik's first/seventh-century inscription in the Dome of the Rock. For the complete transcription, see Kessler, 'Abd al-Malik's inscription 4.

had the power to draw the Prophet to appear to the devotee.³³ To Ibn ‘Arabī, however, it was the Prophet’s universal and cosmological status as *al-insān al-kāmil*, the ‘Perfect Man’ that had to be invoked to mediate between the spiritual and the corporeal worlds. It was on the basis of a *ḥadīth* that mentions the conferral on Muḥammad of the *jawāmi‘ al-kalim* (all-comprehensive words) that Ibn Arabī interpreted the divine attributes whose actualization through Muḥammad indicated “why he will be the master of humanity of the Day of Ressurrection.”³⁴ In this framework, the Prophet’s role as *shāfi‘* is submerged within his eschatological position as *al-insān al-kāmil* (the perfect human being). Similarly, another mystic and adherent of Ibn ‘Arabī, ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (766–810/1365–1408) in his *Qāb qawsayn wa-l-multaqā l-nāmūsayn* (A distance of two bow-lengths and the meeting point of the two realms), counseled his disciples (as his spiritual master had) to combine prayers for God’s forgiveness with imagining and visualizing the Prophet whom he considered “the reality of all realities.”³⁵ In the same work, al-Jīlī presents a visual image of the Prophet’s relationship to the cosmos:

All of Reality may be conceived as a single circle divided in two, between the true, necessary, eternal existence and the created, possible, originated existence. Each half of the circle is a bow’s length. The line dividing them is the string of the bow, used by each bow. The division of this line is the “distance of two bow-lengths.”³⁶

Just as al-Jīlī’s single circle of reality draws a nuanced picture of the Prophet’s spiritual status through the use of simple concrete terms, our *chār Muḥammad*

33 Hoffman, *Annihilation in the Messenger of God* 353.

34 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīyya* i, 134–5, 144–5, in Hoffman, *Annihilation in the Messenger of God* 353. Hoffman further recalls that the Sufi *maqām* (rank) of *fanā’ fī l-rasūl* (annihilation in the Prophet) was associated with visualization practices.

35 Hoffman, *Annihilation in the Messenger of God* 352, 358. Concerning the Prophet, al-Jīlī writes: “He hears you and sees you whenever you mention him, for he is described by the attributes of God, and God sits with those who remember Him. If you cannot do this and you have visited his tomb, recall its image in your mind. Whenever you do *dhikr* or bless him, be as if you were standing at his tomb, in all honor and respect, until his spiritual substance (*ruḥānīyyatuhu*) appears to you. If you have not visited his tomb, continue to bless him, and imagine him hearing you, and be entirely respectful, so your blessings will reach him” (Hoffman, *Annihilation in the Messenger of God* 357, note 28; al-Jīlī, *Qāb qawsayn* published in al-Nabhānī, *Jawāhir al-bihār* iv, 236).

36 Hoffman’s exposition on al-Jīlī’s text *Qāb qawsayn* provides a visual image of this cosmological status of the Prophet (Hoffman, *Annihilation in the Messenger of God* 358).

panels in the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya, as simplified abstract devices, may have been installed to visually evoke the posthumous realities and blessings associated with the Prophet. It is evident that such an enigmatic motif as that of the *chār Muḥammad* panels contained many layers of interpretation. Did the four repetitions of the name of the Prophet rotating on a central point within a single unit of the *chār Muḥammad* symbolically represent the universality of his message that extended in the four cardinal directions of the terrestrial sphere, or did it refer to the more mystical and cosmological dimensions of unity and integration inherent in the “reality of all realities?” No single interpretation takes precedence over another.

If the *qubba's chār Muḥammad* panels refer to the Prophet's role as *shāfi'*, these could also have served as a graphic synecdoche of the *mī'rāj al-nabī* (the Prophet's ascension), since the ascension texts inform us that the Prophet Muḥammad received the gift of intercession at the time of the *mī'rāj*.³⁷ And the reference to the *mī'rāj* brings us to the monument that had come to commemorate this miraculous nocturnal event, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem – the monument to which the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya alludes. According to Muslim belief, the archangel Gabriel brought the Prophet from Mecca to the site of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem³⁸ and there, before the actual ascension to the heavens, Muḥammad performed the ritual prayer with a number of other prophets.³⁹ After passing through the sixth heaven and

37 The *mī'rāj al-nabī* has continued to inspire and intrigue generations of Muslims throughout the centuries and the story of the *mī'rāj* is found not only in classical exegetical literature, but it also became a popular theme in Arabic literary, mystical, oral, and pictorial traditions (Schrieke et al., *Mī'rādī* 97–105). Al-Jīlī also mentions the *mī'rāj* vis-à-vis Muḥammad's station as the “reality of realities” (Hoffman, *Annihilation in the Messenger of God* 358). See now also Gruber and Colby (eds.), *The Prophet's ascension*; as well as S. Günther's and M. Jarrar's contributions to the present publication.

38 On his arrival to Jerusalem, Ibn Baṭṭūṭa's first remarks were about the holiness of the city after Mecca and Medina and then he added that the rock in Jerusalem had been the site of the ascension of the Prophet (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Travels* 77–8). Particularly well-developed in eighth/fourteenth-century Mamluk Egypt was also the position of Jerusalem in the category of Islamic sacred topography, after Mecca and Medina. For example, Shoshan recounts that in one section of the text *al-Rawḍ al-fā'iḳ fī l-mawā'iz wa-l-raḳā'iq* (The superior meadows of preaching and sermons) attributed to Shu'ayb al-Hurayfish, he mentions an anachronistic *ḥadīth* that on *laylat al-qadr* “the angels carry four banners (*līwa*”), one of which they place on Muḥammad's grave, one on Tūr Sīnīn, a third one on the Meccan *ḥaram* and the fourth in Jerusalem (Bayt al-Maqdis)” (Shoshan, *Popular Sufi sermons* 109).

39 Also inferred to be the site in Jerusalem from the verse Q 17:1 “Glory be to Him who transported His servant by night from the *maṣjid al-ḥaram* to the *maṣjid al-aqṣā* which We have surrounded with blessing, in order to show him one of our signs.” While the *isrā'* signs

reaching the *sidrat al-muntahā* – the lote-tree of the boundary, at the threshold of the throne of God, the Prophet Muḥammad was given the privilege of *shafā'a* or intercession. The *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim cites a *ḥadīth* that during his audience with God, the Prophet was given three things: “the five ritual prayers, the seals of the *Sūrat al-Baqara*, and the forgiveness of the errors of one who dies a member of his community [while] not ascribing partners to God at all.”⁴⁰ The ascension literature, we are told, circulated widely in the popular imagination amongst *ḥadīth* transmitters, mystics, storytellers, scholars, and theologians.⁴¹ Thus, Muḥammad’s role as *shāfiʿ*, the *miʿrāj*, and the Dome of the Rock are all interconnected in the medieval Islamic eschatological view. All three of these aspects that can be seen through the *chār Muḥammad* motif in Qalāwūn’s *qubba* relate to the apocalyptic scenes of the *qiyāma* (resurrection), as well as to the intervening time between death and resurrection. Firstly, Muḥammad is sought for his *shafā'a* by his community. Secondly, the *miʿrāj* event suggests his closeness to God above all other messengers and provides descriptions of paradise and hellfire.⁴² And thirdly, according to medieval imagery, the Rock in Jerusalem is the gathering place of the first resurrection when the angel Isrāfil blows his trumpet.⁴³ Jerusalem set the stage for the events of the last days and

a journey from one earthly coordinate to another and is symbolic of a soul’s lateral development on the material plane, the *miʿrāj*’s upward movement signifies the soul’s vertical integration with unity. Thus, in the Sufi tradition, the *miʿrāj* episode was an important reference to the stages in the soul’s evolution.

40 Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Īmān*, *Bāb fī dhikr sidrat al-muntahā*, no. 1, in Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s night journey* 84. In fact, Colby observes that al-Tirmidhī’s *ḥadīth* of “this eschatological scene continues with an additional anecdote attributed to Anas b. Mālik in which God explicitly invites Muḥammad to advance intercessory petitions.” As reported by al-Tirmidhī: “Muḥammad states: ‘I fall to the ground in prostration, and God inspires me to eulogize and praise. I am told, Raise your head! Ask and be given! Intercede and receive intercession! Speak and have your speech heard!’” (al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan*, *Kitāb Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, *Bāb Tafsīr Sūrat Banī Isrāʾīl*, no. 20, in Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s night journey* 89).

41 Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s night journey* 166, 171.

42 Based on the resurrection literature, Bencheikh observes that the accounts of the *miʿrāj* and the *qiyāma* are clearly related (Bencheikh, *Miʿradj in Arabic literature* 101). The scenes of the afterlife that the Prophet witnessed during his nocturnal journey were meant to influence the actions of individuals. In the sequence of his heavenly itinerary as related in the ascension texts, hell was shown to the Prophet after his visit to paradise, which psychologically would have left a vivid memory of the horrific images of hellfire.

43 Schimmel, *Deciphering the signs of God* 2–3. Grabar observes that, “Jerusalem was the main locus for events preparing the establishment of divine rule on earth” (Grabar, *The shape of the holy* 48).

the decorative program of paradisaal images of the Dome of the Rock symbolically suggested that it was at the epicenter of the events of the resurrection and divine judgment.⁴⁴ The eschatological landscape of Jerusalem was further marked by the Valley of Jehenna toward the east side of the town, and by the Mosque of Ascension that anticipated the return of Jesus which fit into the Muslim 'Last Days' messianic belief in the second coming of Jesus. The *chār Muḥammad* motif, in essence, bridged this temporal and geographical space between Jerusalem's eschatological monument, the Dome of the Rock, and the funerary chamber – the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya in Cairo.

While the eschatological meanings of Jerusalem were deeply embedded in the medieval psyche, paradisaal associations of Cairo were also fairly well-established by this period. During his sojourn in Cairo Ibn Baṭṭūṭa recounts not only the blessed sanctity of al-Qarāfa cemetery, "for it is part of the mount al-Muqaṭṭam, of which God has promised that it shall be one of the gardens of paradise,"⁴⁵ but also lists the Nile River as one of the two inner streams flowing through paradise.⁴⁶ And it is in the ascension literature that we are informed about the Nile's heavenly connection as it was one of the rivers seen by the Prophet as originating at the foot of the *sidrat al-muntahā*.⁴⁷

Therefore, even though Cairo was not the stage for the apocalypse, its associations with the paradisaal world, as recorded by Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, reflects the prevalent medieval notion of the city's heavenly connections. And the countless mausolea within the city and its surroundings were a constant reminder of eschatological realities, in particular, that of paradise and its attainment through the intercession of the Prophet in the present and in the hereafter.

Apart from the presence of the *chār Muḥammad* panels, it is evident from the *waqf* stipulations of the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya that in appointing an *imām* to conduct the five daily prayers, and *faqīhs* to teach the four *madhāhib*, and

44 Rosen-Ayalon, *The early Islamic monuments*. While the Temple Mount on which the Dome of the Rock stands was held by the Jews to be the site of the Last Days and the Resurrection, a *ḥadīth* cited on the authority of two companions of the Prophet, 'Ubāda b. al-Ṣāmit and Rāfi' b. Khudayj corroborated that the Rock in Jerusalem was the *maqām* for the throne of God on the *yawm al-qiyāma* (Livne-Kafri, *Fadā'il Bayt al-Maqdis* 64, note 16).

45 The famous seventh/thirteenth-century Andalusian *faqīh* and *muḥaddith*, al-Qurṭubī, who traveled to Egypt and settled in Upper Egypt till his death, affirmed the Qarāfa's special virtue (Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Travels* 45–6).

46 Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, *Travels* 48–9.

47 Séguy, *The miraculous journey* 13, plate 31. A ninth/fifteenth-century illustrated *Mi'rāj-nāma* produced in Timurid Herat clearly depicts this particular scene at the *sidrat al-muntahā*. The manuscript seems to have been aimed at a larger audience as it is written in both Arabic and in eastern Turkish, Uighur script (Séguy, *The miraculous journey* 7).

in designating Quran readers to sit in the window niches to recite the scripture day and night in the *qubba*, Qalāwūn was unequivocally concerned with accumulating and negotiating as much *baraka*⁴⁸ as possible.⁴⁹ But maintaining his earthly status after death was of equal concern to him. We infer this from the fact that he chose an old palatial site on the main artery of the city instead of the blessed grounds of the Qarāfa cemetery where he would have been in closer proximity to the numerous graves of saints and pious figures, and especially in the shade of the venerated shrine of *imām* Shāfiʿī.⁵⁰ With the positioning of Qalāwūn's complex in the city center opposite the tomb of Sultan al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb,⁵¹ Qalāwūn not only affirmed loyal ties to his Ayyubid overlord, but he also stated his preference for more royal company in the afterlife.⁵² Moreover, two incidents documented by al-Maqrīzī clearly illustrate that after his death Qalāwūn was not only memorialized as a dynastic patriarch under his immediate successors, but that his image was reinvented as a pious ruler who also served as an intermediary between the two worlds.

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- 48 Meri surmises that *baraka* had come to be understood as a quality of intercession and its manifestation required a spiritual and devotional interaction with a concrete physical object, as well as a performance of ritual acts around this object of veneration. For instance, even though the divine word itself held *baraka*, Meri provides the example of the 'Uthmanic codex as an object used to solicit *baraka* especially in threatening circumstances of apocalyptic proportions (Meri, *Aspects of baraka* 46–69).
- 49 Such pious acts were considered to intercede on behalf of the patron. According to popular belief, even the Quran will “intercede for those who have studied and recited it devoutly, and this hope is often expressed in prayers written at the end of manuscripts of it” (Schimmel, *Shafāʿa*: In popular piety 179).
- 50 We know that Qalāwūn had his wife Fāṭima Khātūn's mausoleum (682–3/1283–4) built in the Qarāfa al-Ṣuġhrā, close to the shrines of the saints Sayyida Ruqayya and Sayyida ʿĀtika.
- 51 In fact, the mausoleum of al-Ṣāliḥ Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb built after his death in 648/1250 by his widow Shajar al-Durr, is the earliest surviving funerary structure in the heart of Fatimid Cairo. Qalāwūn, following this example, attached his own mausoleum to the religious and charitable institution that he had commissioned. This set a precedence for the Mamluk elite who constructed burial chambers and fit them within public institutions (al-Harithy, *The concept of space* 83). The physical connection between the two funerary monuments was highly significant, as we are informed that Qalāwūn questioned his architect al-Shujāʿī about why the *madrasa* and not the *qubba* was placed directly opposite the *qubba* of al-Ṣāliḥ (Northrup, *From slave to sultan* 119).
- 52 In effect, Qalāwūn's *nisba* al-Ṣāliḥī boldly inscribed in *thulth* script on the exterior foundation text of his complex also reflects this spirit of reinforcing loyal ties with, and presenting himself as rightful heir to his dynastic predecessor and Ayyubid master. For the Arabic text of this inscription, see van Berchem, *Matériaux* 126.

It might seem that the presence of the *chār Muḥammad* panels, which can be considered the ‘marks of Muḥammad,’ extended part of the Prophet’s mediatory role between the material and the spiritual to Qalāwūn as well, once the Mamluk ruler was buried in his *qubba*. First, the grand oath-taking ceremony – the *bay’a* of Mamluk officials promoted in Egypt or nominated to Syria – was held at the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya⁵³ during which the Mamluk *amīr* would pledge his allegiance at the grave of Sultan Qalāwūn.⁵⁴ And the second episode relates to Qalāwūn’s son and successor al-Ashraf Khalīl who, in order to fulfill his father’s aborted mission of conquering Acre, visited and prayed at his father’s grave for success before setting off to battle. On his triumphal return, al-Ashraf Khalīl went directly to the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya where, along with a host of Mamluk officials and elites, he held a brief ceremony in gratitude for this victory.⁵⁵ Thus, through the device of the *qubba* and the presence of specific inscriptional motifs, Qalāwūn, too, became a mediator between this world and the other world.⁵⁶

As for integrating his *qubba* into the larger *madrassa* and *māristān* complex, in doing so Qalāwūn not only ensured its preservation and maintenance, but could also hope to secure recompense in the hereafter, for charitable endowments constituted *ṣadaqa jāriya*.⁵⁷ Unlike the *madrassa* and *māristān* which

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- 53 Both Qalāwūn’s mausoleum and his throne hall in the citadel are referred to as Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya. See Rabbat, Mamluk throne halls 203, for descriptions about the activities taking place in Qalāwūn’s official throne hall. Such throne halls were also referred to as *īwān*, for example that built by al-Nāṣir Muḥammad on the citadel. After his demise, Qalāwūn’s eponymous tomb chamber assumed a dynastic ceremonial character, and a link between his funerary monument and the administrative center at the citadel was established by virtue of the official processions that started at the citadel and culminated in ceremonies held within Qalāwūn’s mausoleum (al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* iv, 516–24).
- 54 During Qalāwūn’s reign, this official ceremony was enacted at the grave of Sultan Najm al-Dīn Ayyūb and was shifted to the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya after Qalāwūn’s burial (al-Maqrīzī, *al-Khiṭaṭ* iv, 519–20).
- 55 Afterwards, al-Ashraf Khalīl dedicated three estates in Acre to the endowment of the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya.
- 56 As Wensinck observes, even though the *ḥadīth* literature makes Muḥammad the prime intercessor, “Islam was not content to make Muḥammad the sole conveyor of intercession. At his side, we find angels, prophets, martyrs and even simple believers...” (Wensinck, *Shafā’a* 178).
- 57 According to a *ḥadīth*, the worldly affairs of a man come to an end at death but three things will outlast him: first, *‘ilm* (useful knowledge), second, *walad ṣāliḥ* (a just and pious descendant) who will pray for him, and lastly, *ṣadaqa jāriya ‘ala yadayhi* (everlasting charity which flows from his hands) (Pahlitzsch, The concern for spiritual salvation 337. The author refers to Muslim, *Kitāb al-Waṣīyya* no. 14; Abū Dāwūd, *Kitāb al-Sunan*,

were religious and philanthropic enterprises and legal *waqf* properties, the mausoleum was a personal memorial which in spirit did not really qualify as *waqf*.⁵⁸ On its own, the Qubbat al-Manṣūriyya's life might have been really short, and even if, as an independent edifice it was preserved for a time, Qalāwūn's regal status would have been, eventually, lost to memory. By placing his mausoleum within this larger *waqf* endowment and stipulating liturgical functions within it, and adorning it with religious references, such as Quranic inscriptions and in particular, the eight *chār Muḥammad* panels that evoked connections with the *mī'rāj* and the iconic Dome of the Rock, Qalāwūn believed he would ensure longevity for the tomb, and for his own person,⁵⁹ and hoped that he might attain perpetual remembrance, eternal glory, God's benevolence, and thus, ultimately, salvation.

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Kitāb al-Waṣṣīya no. 14, al-Tirmidhī, *Kitāb al-Aḥkām* no. 26). In this way the *waqf* best embodies *ṣadaqa jāriya* as mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, for which recompense is in the hereafter. Moreover, one could consider that both al-Ashraf Khalīl and al-Nāṣir Muḥammad were Qalāwūn's *walad ṣāliḥ* (pious descendants) as they heeded the Quranic exhortation to secure their father a just reward: "*Khudh min amwālihim ṣadaqatan tuṭahhiruhum wa-tuzakkīhim bihā wa-ṣallī 'alayhim inna ṣalātaka sakanun lahum wa-llāhu samī'un 'alīm.*" (Of their goods, take alms, that so thou mightiest purify and sanctify them; and pray on their behalf. Verily thy prayers are a source of security for them. And Allah is One who heareth and knoweth) (Q 9:103).

- 58 It would have particularly benefited and thus appeased both the religious elite, the *'ulamā'*, and the general public, the *'amma* – the two sections of society that could have raised objections to the building of a royal mausoleum. At its core, the concept of *waqf* endowment in Islam is firmly based on the religious precept of charity.
- 59 Pahlitzsch observes that the founding of a public endowment ensured the memory of the patron at an "institutional level" (Pahlitzsch, *The concern for spiritual salvation* 347).

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FIGURE 46.1 *Complex of Sultan al-Manṣūr Qalāwūn, Cairo, 683–4/1284–5, Exterior façade.*

COURTESY: B. O'KANE, PHOTO TAKEN OCTOBER 2007.

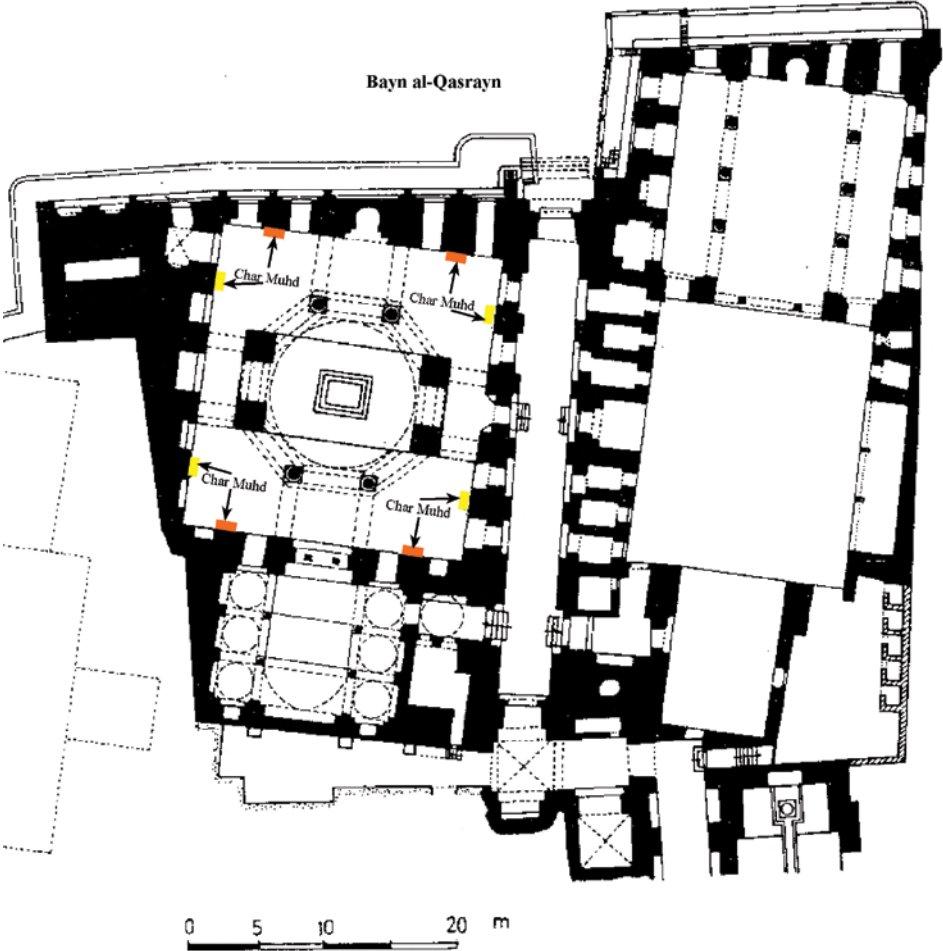


FIGURE 46.2 *Complex of Sultan Qalāwūn, ground plan (Creswell's plan in Behrens-Abouseif, Islamic architecture 97, Fig. 20); Plan has been slightly modified by locating the Chār Muḥammad Panels on it.*

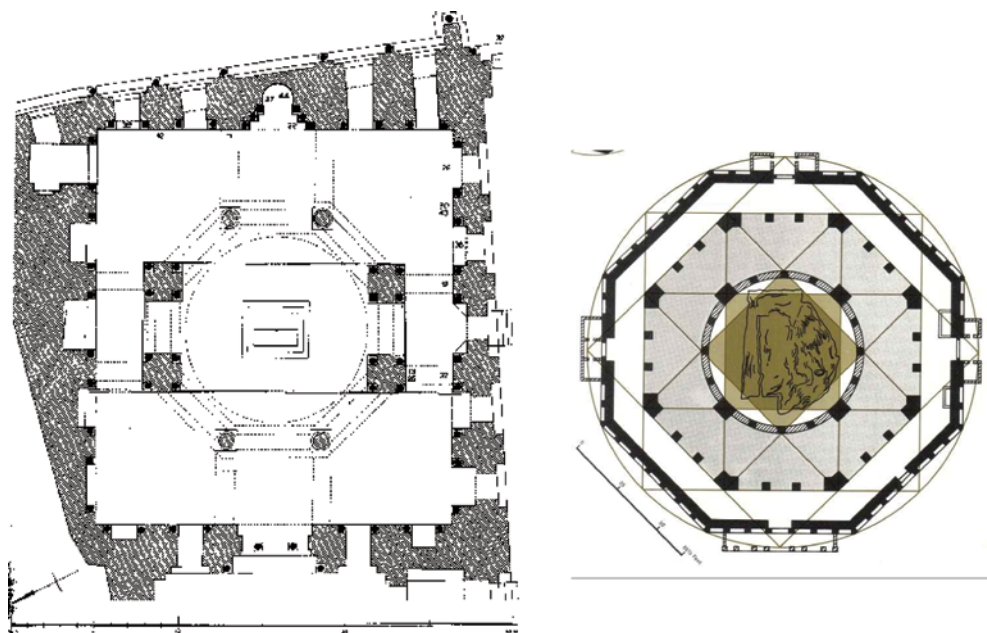


FIGURE 46.3 *Comparison of the 8-sided layouts.*
a. Qubbat al-Manşūriyya, plan (Meinecke, Das Mausoleum des Qalāʾūn 49, Abb. 1).
b. Dome of the Rock, Plan (Landay, Dome of the Rock 70).



FIGURE 46.4 *Qubbat al-Manşūriyya, interior with Chār Muḥammad panel.*
 COURTESY: B. O'KANE, PHOTO TAKEN OCTOBER 2007.

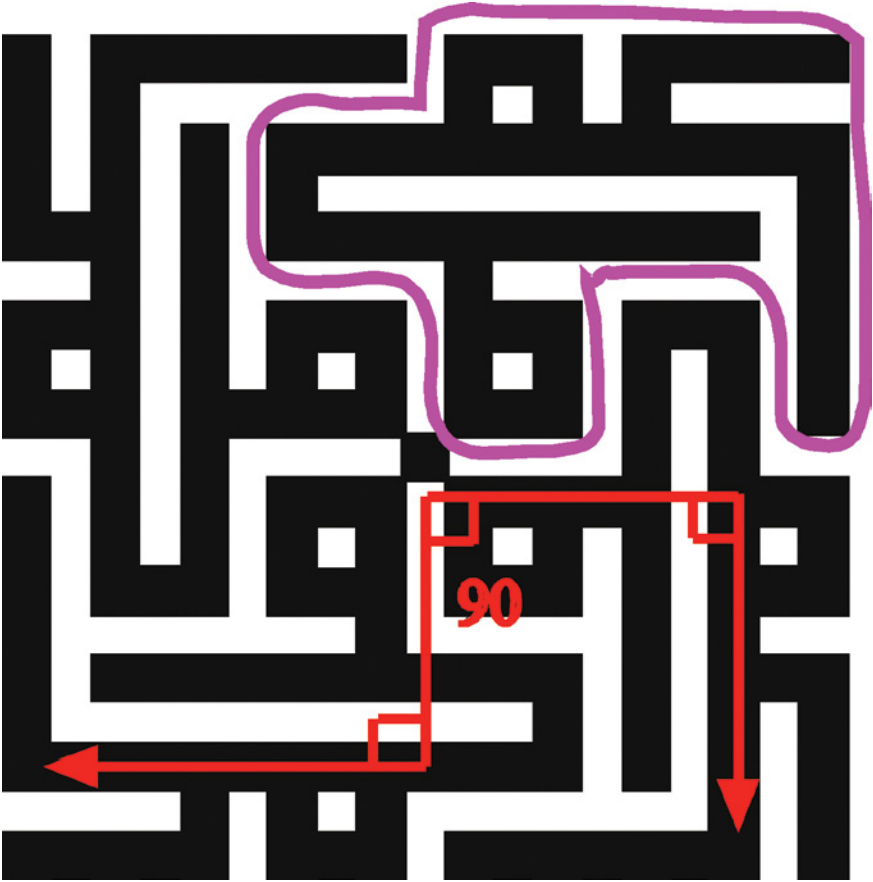


FIGURE 46.5 Chār Muḥammad design.



FIGURE 46.6 *Qubbat al-Manṣûriyya Châr Muḥammad Inscription.*
a. Double Châr Muḥammad panel.
b. Triple Châr Muḥammad panel.
 COURTESY: B. O'KANE, PHOTO TAKEN OCTOBER 2007.

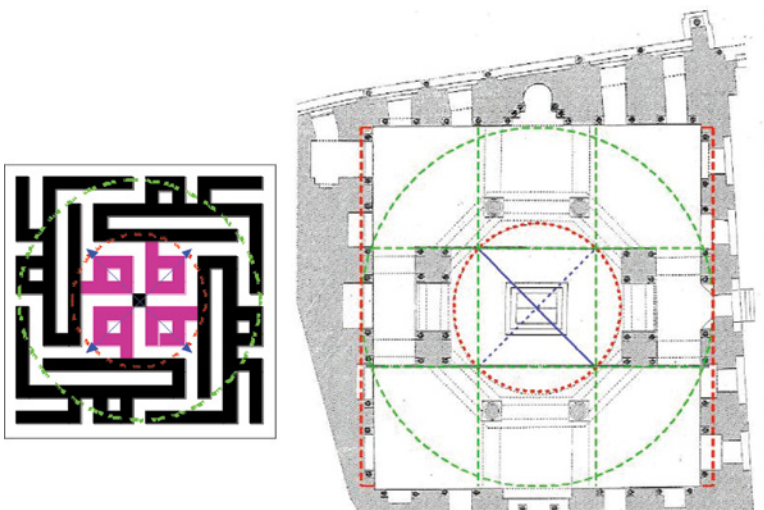


FIGURE 46.7 *Geometric correspondence: Circle within square.*
a. Plan, Qubbat al-Manṣûriyya (Meinecke, Das Mausoleum des Qalā'ûn 49, Abb. 1); plan has been modified with overdrawing.
b. Châr Muḥammad design.

Visualizing Encounters on the Road to Paradise

Karin Rührdanz*

The mystery of the “other world” created as great a challenge to Muslim artists as to artists in other cultures. In medieval and early modern times, imagination focused on this most important concept, and we may take it for granted that people expected it to be visualized, at least to be hinted at in religious spaces as well as in their everyday environment. The banishment of the figure from crucial spaces of worship, however, deprived the Muslim artists, and their patrons, of an important means of expression. For centuries, it left decorative writing as the only way to make well defined religious statements: A calligraphic inscription quoting relevant passages of the Quran, for instance, could evoke paradise directly. On the other hand, secular art extensively used figures throughout most periods. It did not flinch at all from taking figures and depicted elements out of their pre- and non-Islamic contexts, shaking off former religious connotations. Such happened, for instance, in early Islamic times with animal figures connected to Zoroastrian beliefs, and later with the round halo that became an accentuating device encircling the heads of humans and animals alike. While secular art had the complete range of themes and pictorial means at its disposal (including inscriptions), would inscriptions alone do the work for religious art?

Probably they did, and we have to regard the complicated geometrical framework surrounding inscriptions, and the intrinsic vegetal ornament they are embedded in, as pure ornament that enhanced the beauty of the whole. It is in the nature of ornament to lend its support to an idea expressed more explicitly by other means.¹ The concept of paradise (*janna*) as a garden, however, makes it equally probable that vegetal decoration is often meant as a metaphor for paradise.² Much depends upon the context. On the wall of a mosque, lavish vegetal decoration invites such an interpretation. As the main motif on

* The author would like to thank the Oriental Department of the Berlin State Library, the David Collection Copenhagen, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and the Harvard Art Museums for the permission to publish miniatures in their collections and for providing the photographs.

1 For a discussion of the functions of ornament, see Grabar, *Mediation of ornament*.

2 For a concise exploration of the subject, see Blair and Bloom, *Images of paradise*.

a ceramic plate it would be much less convincing. However, even when the function of an object or building, the evidence of inscriptions, or particularities of the vegetal decoration itself justify its interpretation as a depiction of paradise, it could be nothing more than an nonspecific allusion to the promise of paradise and its beauty.

Figurative, especially narrative representation may equally invite multilayered interpretation. Figures, however, evoke a more specific context, often a particular event. Since most pictures of paradise, or from the roads to paradise, have come to us as manuscript illustrations their subjects are easily recognized. Besides, figurative representation allows us to address specific elements of the concept and follow the artist's imagination in much more detail. Furthermore, subject selection and iconography are open to a partisan approach that reflects sectarian beliefs and political contexts. This only became possible with the development of book illustration from the sixth/twelfth century, and with the subsequent widening of the scope of illustrated texts that eventually led to the inclusion of eschatological subjects. It obviously remained a phenomenon restricted to the Persianate world. Thus, the material dealt with here belongs to the late eighth to eleventh/fourteenth to seventeenth centuries and originates in Iran, Central Asia, and the Ottoman Empire.

Supported by normative Sunni theology which defended a literal understanding of relevant Quranic passages,³ storytelling elaborated on the relevant Quranic verses in response to the insatiable hunger of the public for details about the other world and the events that already had happened there or would occur with the approach of the end of this world.⁴ On the one hand, artists could easily rely on this common knowledge for their depictions. On the other hand, the doctrine of the fundamental difference between the two worlds⁵ made the visualization of the other world impossible – or so one should assume. If objects mentioned in Quranic descriptions should not be imagined as being similar to objects known to people in this world – how to depict them? It seems, however, that this never posed a serious problem to artists as long as society (or a part of society) recognized figural representation as a means to visualize imagination.⁶ Transferring the imaginative approach developed for the depiction of this world onto the representation of the hereafter probably implied the simultaneous transfer of the perception that the

3 Gardet, *Djanna* 449.

4 For a detailed account, see Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 1–97.

5 Gardet, *Djanna* 449.

6 In Christian discourse, a similar argumentation was turned to work in favor of pictorial representation, see Louth, 'Truly visible things' 22–3.

picture constitutes transformed reality. In this article we look at the other world from three aspects:

1. As the place humankind started from;⁷
2. As it was observed by privileged visitors during their lifetime;
3. As the ultimate abode of humankind.

Paradise as the dwelling place of Adam caught the attention of Persian painters early in the ninth/fifteenth century. Comprehensive historical works usually started with creation and the pre-Islamic prophets. This placed the focus on Adam, the first human being and first prophet. Paradise is reduced to the role of a setting where both decisive moments in Adam's life happened: his elevation by God's order that the angels should recognize his superiority and adore him, and his fall, his and his wife's expulsion from paradise. As a subject for illustration the adoration by the angels appears first in ninth/fifteenth-century historical texts as well as in the more popular stories of prophets.⁸ From the tenth/sixteenth century it became a standard subject of the illustrative cycle of *Majālis al-'ushshāq* manuscripts, a collection of Sufi biographies compiled about 1500.⁹ The "Assemblies of Lovers" often portray Adam, who lays naked amidst lush vegetation and is surrounded by prostrating angels, as a vulnerable human being who was distinguished above all by God's grace. Such a depiction does not build upon Quranic wording but rather reflects a mystical approach to the relationship between God and human as would be expected in the *Majālis al-'ushshāq*. A different iconography was chosen by painters in Central Asia when illustrating the same text in the eleventh/seventeenth century. They placed Adam – fully dressed and haloed, but without royal attributes – in the

7 Whether the garden of Eden where Adam lived should be identified with the paradise awaiting the true believer at the end of the world, was not completely agreed upon, see Gardet, *Djanna* 449–50. See also A. Lane's contribution in this publication.

8 Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi İstanbul, B. 282, fol. 16a, see Karatay, *Farsça kataloğu* 51–3, no. 138. This compilation of histories by Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū contains illustrations only at the beginning where it deals with the prophets up to Muḥammad. The odd distribution of illustrations points not only to the importance of that part of history, but also to the existence of illustrated "Histories of the Prophets" as models, as, in fact, attested by a fragmentary manuscript, dated 1424, in a private collection. For a color illustration depicting the angels prostrating in front of Adam from the manuscript first mentioned, see Gray, *Arts of the book in Central Asia* 163, plate XLIII.

9 Uluç, *Majālis al-'Ushshāq*, illustrations of the subject: figs. 2, 5; Uluç, *Sixteenth-century Shiraz manuscripts* 183–223, relevant illustrations 200–1, figs. 142–3; Gladiss, *Freunde Gottes*, Taf. 1, 3.

heavens on, or in, a golden cloud (Fig. 47.1).¹⁰ Nearer to the common literary descriptions are pictures showing Adam enthroned, sometimes together with his wife, as the illustrations of the “Adoration” in the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā*’ (*Stories of the Prophets*) always do.¹¹ This iconographic solution follows the generic theme “King enthroned and served by attendants” and conveys Adam’s extraordinary position by using royal imagery.

God’s wrath upon Adam and his wife became a subject for illustration in the tenth/sixteenth century, and more so in manuscripts from the Ottoman Empire than from Iran.¹² When the period of Adam’s prophethood is visually represented by a single illustration it happens to be the expulsion rather than the adoration. What was it that made sin and its punishment more important than the elevation of the human being? In any case, it does not seem to be a phenomenon specific to normative Sunnism because the relevant manuscripts include texts with ‘Alīd overtones produced under Ottoman rule in Baghdad,¹³ and the earliest expulsion miniature (see below) is from Safavid Iran. One may think about an antithesis to the mystic interpretation of Adam’s relationship with God,¹⁴ particularly to Qizilbash ideology. Normative Sunnism as well as Imamism insisted on the importance of the individual’s record in contrast to Qizilbash teaching which denied resurrection and judgment.¹⁵

Some representations of the expulsion from paradise allow us a closer look at paradise itself. While somewhat richer vegetation and the inclusion of palatial structures again show the adaptation of royal iconography to this subject, the presence of a peacock and snake (or dragon) introduces a specific element (Fig. 47.2). Both animals had roles in organizing the fall of Adam and his wife.¹⁶ Consequently, in several pictures they were expelled together with the humans who used them as their mounts. As far as we know, this iconographic idea derives from early Safavid Iran where it constituted part of a royal “Book of

10 For a dispersed leaf (about 1600) in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, no. 73.5.584, see http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=image;hex=M73_5_584.jpg. For a dispersed leaf from a *Majālis al-‘ushshāq* illustrated by the painter Farhad about 1650, see Soudavar, *Art of the Persian courts* 220–1, no. 85.

11 Milstein, Rührdanz, and Schmitz, *Stories of the prophets* 106–8, pls. XIII, 27, 57.

12 For illustrations in the stories of the prophets, see *ibid.*, 108–9, pls. 2, 40, 48.

13 Milstein, *Miniature painting in Ottoman Baghdad*, pls. 10, 17.

14 Pedersen, *Adam* 178.

15 Babayan, *Safavid synthesis* 1–2.

16 On the involvement of the peacock and snake, see, for instance, al-Tha‘labī, *Islamische Erzählungen von Propheten und Gottesmännern* 39–41.

omens," a *Fālnāme*.¹⁷ Thus, the paradise of the beginning is not a place without destructive elements. In dramatizing the fall of man Shi'a concepts of retribution, as expressed in Ṭahmāsp's repentance,¹⁸ may have been responsible for shaping the iconography of this crucial moment.

Expelled from, but promised return to, paradise after the destruction of this world, human beings had no chance to find out what they were to expect. Getting an impression of paradise while living was a rare privilege God granted to very few people. The Prophet Muḥammad was one of them. He got a glimpse of paradise and hell during his journey through the heavens.¹⁹ The different stations on his journey were seldom depicted, however. Muḥammad's whole experience of the *mi'rāj* was condensed into one symbolic representation that shows him mounted on Burāq and surrounded by angels crossing the heavens. *Mi'rāj* pictures frequently illustrate romantic poems, too, where they are inserted near the beginning in connection with praise of the Prophet. Praising Muḥammad, the poets often explicitly dwell on the *mi'rāj*.²⁰ In part, the exclusive selection of this biographical moment for poetical description and subsequent illustration may be because it aligns well with the romantic mood of many *mathnawīs*.

Taking the many explicitly mystical poems and the mystical overtones of several romantic poems into account, it becomes more clear why the stations of the journey are not the picture of choice, but a generic representation of the mounted Prophet surrounded by angels is. The latter symbolizes the mystical journey of the individual to God better than a painting could, particularly one that tries to match the literal understanding of the details of the *mi'rāj*. There is, however, reason to believe that the *mi'rāj* picture also alluded to man's destiny at the end of time. As we see, it definitely developed into a symbol of resurrection, judgment, and paradise in the course of the tenth/sixteenth century.

Isolated depictions of the *mi'rāj* are known from the eighth and ninth/late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.²¹ Starting with small miniatures that

17 This leaf (S86.0251) from a dispersed *Fālnāme* painted about 1550, is now in the Sackler Gallery, Washington, DC, see Lowry, *A jeweler's eye* 128–9, no. 33; Lowry and Beach, *Checklist of the Vever Collection* 138–44; Farhad, *Falnama* 98–9, no. 13. For a similar treatment of the subject in a *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* manuscript, see Farhad, *Falnama* 212–3, no. 65.

18 Newman, *Safavid Iran* 32.

19 Schrieke et al., *Mi'rādī*; Scherberger, *Mi'rāḡnāme* 11–26. See also S. Günther's contribution in this publication.

20 Mayel-Heravi, *Quelques me'rāḡīyye en persan* 199–201; Schimmel, *Und Muhammad ist Sein Prophet* 145–54.

21 The early eighth/fourteenth-century depiction of Muḥammad on Burāq about to start his journey is not included here because it appears in a sequence of historical events

show little more than the haloed figure of the Prophet on Burāq (Fig. 47.3), the representations develop into glittering scenes with flying angels among fiery clouds, and with gold and jewels showered on the Prophet.²² Then, with the rise of the Safavids, 'Alī, represented as a lion, enters the scene and is usually depicted looking at the Prophet Muḥammad from above (Fig. 47.4).²³ The incorporation of the lion not only alludes to 'Alī's proximity to God and to his role in the early days of Islam as a courageous warrior, but also to his role at the end of the world.²⁴ This becomes clear when one of the angels is shown with the seven-armed trumpet that reveals him as Isrāfīl.²⁵ In another case from late eleventh/seventeenth-century Bukhara, an angel shows a tablet to Muḥammad as he arrives at the throne of God – most probably a reminder of the eventual review of the record of each human at judgment day (Fig. 47.5).²⁶ It is difficult to determine whether such iconographic developments reflect a simultaneous growth of eschatological meaning charged upon the *mi'rāj* picture or whether the charge had been the same from the beginning and only became more explicitly visualized later.

Different stages of the journey to heaven were depicted in connection with the complete description of the *mi'rāj*. The few fragments preserved of a late eighth/fourteenth-century *Mi'rāj-nāme* refer only to some moments of the journey,²⁷ whereas a later manuscript produced in Herat during the reign of Shāh Rukh b. Tīmūr allows us to follow the complete *mi'rāj* as told in this

illustrating the world history composed by Rashīd al-Dīn, Edinburgh University Library, Arab 20, see Rice, *The illustrations of the "World History"* 110–1, no. 36.

Early pictures of the *mi'rāj* are found in two early Timurid anthologies, H. 796 (fol. 4b) of the Topkapi Saray Museum Istanbul, dated 1407, see Stchoukine, *La peinture à Yazd*, plate VII; and Add. 27261 (fol. 6a) of the British Library London, dated 1410–1, see Uluç, *Sixteenth-century Shiraz manuscripts* 396, fig. 299. To the earliest examples one may add now the copy of Nizāmī's *Makhzan al-asrār*, dated 1388, in the David Collection Copenhagen, see Sotheby's *Art of the Islamic world* 52–3, lot 30.

- 22 For two elaborate *mi'rāj* pictures in poetical works, Or. 2265 (fol. 195a) of the BL, dated 1539–43, see Welch, *Persian painting* 95–7, plate 33, and 46.12 (fol. 275a) of the Freer Gallery of Art Washington, see Simpson, *Sultan Ibrahim Mirza's Haft Awrang* 210, fig. 126.

- 23 Shani, *The lion image* 305–92.

- 24 Ibid., 347–9.

- 25 Ibid., 349–50, pls. 14–5.

- 26 The illustration belongs to a copy of Jāmī's *Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā*, dated 1683–4, in the David Collection, Copenhagen (43/2000, fol. 10a) and is signed by the Janid court painter Bihzād.

- 27 Interestingly, they show Muḥammad carried on Jibrā'il's back. This may indicate that the story was divided into two parts, in which Burāq is related to the *isrā'* only, the journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. For the album paintings, see Ettinghausen, *Persian ascension miniatures*; Gruber, *Ilkhanid Mi'rāj-nāma*.

Chaghatay translation.²⁸ Dealing with his delicate task the artist employed three different types of iconographic approaches. In a first series describing the journey through the heavens and comprising more than half of the sixty pictures, one element is usually singled out to respond to the text. It may be a prophet (or prophets), an amazing angel or a strange tree. Other elements of the description are neglected and the figures stand out against a deep blue background filled with golden clouds. These fiery golden clouds are the “wild cards” of the painter. When Muḥammad reaches the point nearest the throne of God he is completely enclosed in such clouds, which fill the picture space. In this way the artist conveys an impression of the most exalted moment while sparing himself the trouble of visualizing single elements of this enigmatic environment.

Another approach is used for the fifteen miniatures that illustrate the treatment of sinners in hell. Set against an appropriately black background, action takes place amidst golden flames. Although monstrous figures sometimes take part, the dirty work of the torture is done mostly by human-like figures (*zabāniya*) who are very engaged in their task. The painter took pains to show different moments in the application of punishment and a variety of postures. As is often observed, the pictures of hell are vivid and rich with ideas about how to torture people.

Before Muḥammad reaches hell he is allowed to see paradise. This vision is given only five images. We must concede to the artist, however, that he made the best of the short text that did not have many descriptive elements. For the first miniature that shows *kawthar*, the river in paradise, he fell back on familiar elements: palace architecture with domed buildings, a stream in front, and fine vessels – only the arrangement was made specific.²⁹ When the Prophet entered paradise, however, the report mentions only the walking, playing, and camel-riding *hūrīs*. For the appropriate background of their activities the painter used the image of an ideal garden, with trees and bushes in full blossom. At one point (fol. 47b) he introduced an element that did not exist in the description: three streams of different color crossing the green plain.³⁰ One guesses that, here, he refers to the streams of water, milk, wine, and honey of Sura 47,³¹ most probably omitting the wine. Apart from this element, the garden could also be an earthly abode reserved for privileged people. This supports the idea that the

28 Bibliothèque nationale de France, suppl. turc 190, see Seguy, *Miraculous journey*. For translations of the text, see Scherberger, *Mi'rāḡnāme* 48–115; Thackston, *The Paris Mi'rāḡnāme*.

29 Seguy, *Miraculous journey*, plate 39.

30 Ibid., plate 40.

31 Paret (trans.), *Der Koran* 358.

garden image is always open to multilayered interpretation. It also reflects the artistic problem of how to outdo the royal garden when representing paradise. Clearly, it is easier to allude to paradise while illustrating an earthly garden than to depict paradise itself.

Before we leave the subject of visitors to paradise I would like to mention one other person who enjoyed similar grace. This is Idrīs, a somewhat enigmatic figure, commonly counted among the pre-Islamic prophets.³² His vision of paradise and hell and his stay in the former place offered another opportunity for illustrators of the “Stories of the prophets” to depict these realms.³³ However, the juxtaposition of paradise and hell in one miniature results in extremely simplified iconography: two angels in front of a green hill represent paradise, and a demon clubbing sinners in fire represents hell.³⁴ When Idrīs is depicted spreading wisdom and teaching crafts to his children in paradise, this takes place in a colorful garden beside an ornamented pavilion.³⁵ From its balcony two angels are watching. They feature as the distinctive element in a setting which otherwise could equally well accommodate a princely gathering.

If we look for illustrated manuscripts describing the events at the end of times, one text in Turkish, the *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma* (The circumstances of resurrection), stands out as a vehicle for such pictures. Two manuscripts of the *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma* and, at least seventeen leaves of a dispersed copy are preserved.³⁶ To this we can add large paintings from Persian and Ottoman *Fālnāmes* (Books of omens)³⁷ that come with sparse text that only hints at the subject.

At the end of time, resurrection is preceded by destruction. To my knowledge, the illustrative cycle of the *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma* is the only one containing pictures that refer to the reversal of natural processes. Some supernatural actors

32 Vajda, Idrīs; Alexander, Jewish tradition in early Islam.

33 Milstein, Rührdanz, and Schmitz, *Stories of the prophets* 111–3.

34 Ibid., plate xxv.

35 Ibid., plates 3, 58.

36 For Ms. or. oct. 1596 of the Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, see Stchoukine et al., *Illuminierte islamische Handschriften* 229–37. For M. Hafid Efendi 139 in the Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, see Bağcı et al., *Osmanlı resim sanatı* 198–9; And, *Osmanlı tasvir sanatları* 85, 307–9. Dispersed leaves from another manuscript are in the Keir collection (iv.9–21), see Robinson et al., *Islamic painting* 227–8, and in the Free Library Philadelphia (Lewis Ms. O.-T7), Milstein, *Miniature painting in Ottoman Baghdad* 95–6, pls. 1–2.

37 In general about the early illustrated *Fālnāmes*, see Milstein, Rührdanz, and Schmitz, *Stories of the prophets* 65–69, 83–85; Farhad, *Falnama*. For the *Fālnāme* at Sächsische Landesbibliothek Dresden E. 445, see Rührdanz, *Miniaturen des Dresdener ‚Fālnāmeh‘*; for H. 1703 at the Topkapı Saray Museum, see Sevin, A sixteenth-century Turkish artist; for a late copy see Huizenga, *Een fal-nama*.

of the last days, however, are represented in other contexts, too, for example the Dajjāl (the Antichrist), the Beast of the Earth, and the angel Isrāfil.

A colorful and somewhat enigmatic image of the Dajjāl comes from the *Fālnāme* produced for Shāh Ṭahmāsp (Fig. 47.6).³⁸ The rider on the mule may be seen as mimicking his opposite: 'Alī on Duldul, and while he does not look very strange, his retinue certainly does. Human figures with horns mix with people who resemble jesters – or dervishes? And their making music must probably be understood as additional proof of their wickedness at a time when Ṭahmāsp had denounced it.³⁹ In contrast, the Ottoman illustration of the killing of the Dajjāl by Jesus⁴⁰ renders this event as the rather common “hero killing monster” trope.

The Beast of the Earth became a favorite of *Fālnāme* artists. Three pictures from different *Fālnāme* manuscripts all follow the same model: an upright standing figure with the sparkled body of a demon and a human head and wings directly confronts us. It holds a rod in one hand and a ring in the other. The beast is placed in context in the Dresden *Fālnāme*⁴¹ where believers are shown on one side, the damned people falling down on the other, while smaller demons with animal heads watch near the lower border. It becomes more fanciful in Topkapı Saray Museum *Fālnāme* H. 1702, and the humans have disappeared from the picture.⁴² In H. 1703 the beast stands alone and is transformed with even more ornamentation. It comes with a leafy dress, without crown, but with golden horns and canine teeth.⁴³ In this case, we can easily follow the iconographic development the subject experienced over the rather short period of about 30 years from a Persian model⁴⁴ to an undisputedly Ottoman creation. The reduction of the composition that eventually led to the complete loss of the visualized context reflects the usual transformation Persian models underwent. Nevertheless, the subject remained understandable for the Ottoman patron. Beyond the typical, however, is the ornamental re-drawing of the beast, in which it is changed from a powerful demon into a decorative

38 Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.85.237.72, see http://collectionsonline.lacma.org/mwebcgi/mweb.exe?request=image;hex=M85_237_72.jpg; Farhad, *Falnama* 184–5, no. 53. The *Fālnāme* H. 1702 at the Topkapı Saray Museum also contains a representation of the Dajjāl (fol. 48b), see Farhad, *Falnama* 288.

39 Monshi, *History* 203; Horn, *Denkwürdigkeiten* 48–9.

40 For an illustration, see Stchoukine et al., *Illuminierte islamische Handschriften*, Taf. 12.

41 Fol. 27b = p. 48, see Rührdanz, *Türkische Miniaturmalerei*, plate 11.

42 Fol. 47b, see And, *Minyatürlerle Osmanlı-İslâm mitolojyası* 284; Farhad, *Falnama* 188.

43 Fol. 22b, Farhad, *Falnama* 186–7, no. 54.

44 The miniature in the Dresden *Fālnāme* is most probably of Ottoman origin, too, but closer to an assumed Persian model.

piece resembling the surface decoration on ceramics and wooden panels. One wonders whether this beast should be taken seriously. Or, did the artist merely amuse himself with the elaborate popular stories?

Another important actor during the events leading to the end of the world had been depicted much earlier in a completely different context. This is Isrāfil, the angel who, on God's order, will announce the resurrection. In most cases, when Isrāfil is represented in the chapters on angels in cosmographies from the late seventh/thirteenth century, he is shown holding or blowing the trumpet, thus referring to his extraordinary mission.⁴⁵ In later Persian and Turkish adaptations of the "Wonders of creation" the trumpet becomes a seven-armed one, but the angel is almost always shown as an isolated figure.⁴⁶ Probably because of the impact of this established iconography in the respective *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma* illustrations Isrāfil is still depicted in isolation⁴⁷ although the text would favor more elaborate compositions.

We find Isrāfil incorporated in extended compositions in the large judgment scenes on *Fālnāme* (Book of omens) leaves. On the painting from the *Fālnāme* of Ṭahmāsp,⁴⁸ he is one of three angels present at the moment the records of people are weighed (Fig. 47.7). In the lower half, a group of true believers kneels together with several groups of sinners whose sins are obvious through different iconographic idiosyncrasies. Center stage is taken by the angel Jibrā'il (or Mika'il) with the scales and by 'Alī who seems to deliver the verdict after consultation with the Prophet Muḥammad. Eleven haloed figures on the top together with a lone halo complete the "fourteen immaculate ones." Here we have an example of a distinctively Shi'i interpretation of the events of the last judgment.

The painting in the Dresden *Fālnāme*⁴⁹ closely adheres to this model, with interesting modifications, however. In the center, flanked by Muḥammad on the right and Isrāfil on the left, we see again the angel with the scales and 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib. On the top, the painter knowingly or unknowingly distorted the

45 For an early example, still showing Isrāfil blowing a simple trumpet, compare a leaf from Qazwini's *Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*, Freer Gallery of Art Washington, 54.51, see Ettinghausen, *Arab painting* 178.

46 Compare leaf 14.599 at the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, see Blair and Bloom, *Images of paradise* 10, no. 16a.

47 From the Ms. M. Hafid Efendi 139 (fol. 22a) in the Süleymaniye Library Istanbul, see Bağcı et al., *Osmanlı resim sanatı* 199, fig. 161; among the leaves in the Keir Collection no. 1v.18, see Robinson, *Islamic painting*, color plate 28.

48 Harvard University Art Museums, 1999.302, see Farhad, *Falnama* 190–1, no. 55.

49 Fol. 19b = p. 64, see Rührdanz, *Die Miniaturen des Dresdener 'Fālnāmeh'*, Abb. 4; Farhad, *Falnama* 66.

composition: There he placed seven haloed figures (none of them veiled), one lone halo, and part of a building from which two angels look out. Since haloed unveiled figures usually represent pre-Islamic prophets, we now get a glance of paradise with prophets and angels (although the floating halo is somewhat disturbing). The iconographic modification seems to transform the Shi'i claim into a Sunni pro-'Alid interpretation which was acceptable in Ottoman lands in the later tenth/sixteenth century.

Another change was introduced at the bottom of the painting in the Dresden *Fālnāme* where a horrible oversized demon and other monsters deal with the sinners in a sea of fire. The Turkish *Fālnāme* H. 1703 does not contain a picture of the judgment or paradise, but one of hell (fol. 21b) that shows two demons, and people tortured and perishing. The pictorial material again underlines the familiar observation: Thinking of hell must have occupied people much more than thinking of paradise, and they were encouraged to do so by explicit pictures no less than by drastic rhetoric.⁵⁰ This is even more evident in the illustrations of the *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma*.

Before focusing on hell and paradise in these Ottoman manuscripts, an *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma* picture, which seems to be inspired by the above described judgment scene, should be mentioned. There we have angels including Jibrā'il with the scales, the Prophet Muḥammad, and sinners taken away and tortured by demons.⁵¹ Any 'Alid elements have disappeared, as one would expect in a manuscript from this time: the artist has gone to great lengths to incorporate the first three caliphs, Abū Bakr, 'Umar, and 'Uthmān together with other champions of Sunni Islam into illustrations featuring the Prophet Muḥammad. Those three caliphs accompany him, for instance, when the Prophet appears after resurrection!⁵²

In the sequence of events leading to the judgment in the *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma*, scenes of fearful and hopeful expectations alternate with depictions of sudden attacks by demons and monsters.

When the people have moved to the gathering place (*maḥshar*) where they have to wait for a thousand years they experience a taste of punishment or reward: the believers will not suffer from the heat of the sun while the sinners will.⁵³ Later it rains scrolls on the crowd (Fig. 47.8).⁵⁴ The white scrolls are for

⁵⁰ See for example N. Christie's contribution to the present publication.

⁵¹ Compare the description of IV.13 in the Keir Collection, see Robinson, *Islamic painting* 228.

⁵² For an illustration, see Stchoukine et al., *Illuminierte islamische Handschriften*, Taf. 53.

⁵³ And, *Osmanlı tasvir sanatları* 309.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 308.

the good people, the black ones for the lost ones, including unbelievers and Muslims who sinned.

Depicting these two events the painter of the Istanbul manuscript transferred the mixed crowd into an unspecified but promising land by using a shining golden background. Replacing the gold with two shades of pale blue in the Berlin *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma* the artist may have intended to evoke the character of this no-man's land through the color of the sky.⁵⁵ That the resurrected people appear already neatly divided into "good" and "bad" could also point to a more rigid, narrow-minded approach to peoples' chances of salvation. The picture of paradise that is preserved in three versions⁵⁶ seems to speak to an interpretive shift, too. Of two illustrations showing happy couples walking and playing among large trees and rich pavilions in the more elaborate one in the Istanbul *Aḥwāl-i qiyāma* they are also drinking wine. Four streams – one of them reddish in color – diagonally cross the space. Visualizing the paradisaal environment strictly according to common descriptions, this picture focuses on the reward and enjoyment of the believer. In contrast, the respective miniature in the Berlin manuscript (Fig. 47.9) represents paradise in a sparse composition as a place for men only whose pleasure is to worship, not to enjoy a leisurely life.

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55 This choice also provided him with a less expensive alternative to the gold.

56 For the Istanbul manuscript, see And, *Osmanlı tasvir sanatları* 85; Bağcı et al., *Osmanlı resim sanatı* 198, fig. 160; for a dispersed leaf in the Free Library, see Milstein, *Miniature painting in Ottoman Baghdad*, plate 2.

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FIGURE 47.1 *Angels adoring Adam, page from a dispersed manuscript of the Majālis al-'ushshāq, Bukhara, ca. 1600. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.73.5.584.*



FIGURE 47.3 Mi'rāj, Niẓāmī, Makhzan al-asrār, Baghdad?, 1388. David Collection Copenhagen, Ms. 20/2008, fol. 4b.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PERNILLE KLEMP.



FIGURE 47.4 Mi'raj, Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā', Istanbul?, 1577. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Diez A Fol. 3, fol. 226b.



FIGURE 47.5 Mi'rāj, Jāmī, Yūsuf-u Zulaykhā, Bukhara, 1683. David Collection Copenhagen, Ms. 43/2000, fol. 10a.
PHOTOGRAPH BY PERNILLE KLEMP.



FIGURE 47.6 *Entry of the Dajjāl (Antichrist) into Jerusalem, page from a dispersed Fālnāme manuscript, Qazwin?, ca. 1560. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.85.237-72.*



FIGURE 47.7 *Last Judgment, page from a dispersed Fālnāme manuscript, Qazwin?, ca. 1560. Arthur M. Sackler Museum, 1999.302.*



FIGURE 47.8 *Records raining from the sky, Aḥwāl-i qiyāma, Istanbul, early seventeenth century. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. or. Oct. 1596, 34b.*



FIGURE 47.9 *In paradise, Ahwāl-i qiyāma, Istanbul, early seventeenth century. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. or. Oct. 1596, 41a.*

Images of Paradise in Popular Shi'ite Iconography

Ulrich Marzolph

In the visual expression of the Muslim world, paradise is the pivotal notion of bounty and happiness untroubled by the concerns and worries of human existence. As such, it is the ultimate reward for the true believer.¹ Meanwhile, Shi'ite Muslim imagery in general is dominated by the event of martyrdom, in particular the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson Ḥusayn and his followers at Karbala.² Undoubtedly, Shi'ite imagery has undergone a certain development over the centuries. Today, few images could represent the modern Iranian interpretation of Shi'ite identity more specifically than, say, the depiction of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya's troops parading Ḥusayn's severed head at Karbala, such as shown in a drawing illustrating the scene in a nineteenth-century lithographed edition of Sarbāz Burūjirdī's martyrological book *Asrār al-shahāda* (The spiritual realities of martyrdom)³ or Iranian artist Maḥmūd Farshchiyān's famous modern painting of Ḥusayn's wounded horse returning to the wailing women at the camp without its master, a large version of which was temporarily installed in 2008 at the street crossing north of Tehran's Lālah Park.⁴ Considering the impact of Ḥusayn's fate as the quintessential expression of martyrdom for Shi'ite Islam, there is little surprise that the Shi'ite imagery of paradise, in both learned and popular contexts, is no exception to the above mentioned rule: martyrdom is a direct way to paradise, and paradise is the ultimate reward for the martyr.⁵

The two areas of popular Shi'ite Islamic imagery I wish to consider briefly in the following both illustrate this belief in different, though ultimately connected ways. First, I discuss the depiction of paradise as part of the cumulative representation of the battle of Karbala (in 61/680) produced in the Qajar

1 Blair and Bloom, *Images of paradise*.

2 Aghaei, *Martyrs*; Newid, *Der schiitische Islam*; Varzi, *Warring souls*; Flakerud, *Visualizing belief and piety*; see also Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a revolution* 44–65.

3 Marzolph, *Narrative illustration* 101, fig. 37; see also Marzolph, *Pictorial representation*.

4 See Puin, *Islamische Plakate* ii, 458–60, and iii, 860, no. G-16.

5 On historical and contemporary notions of martyrdom in Islam see, e.g., Khosrokhavar, *L'Islamisme*; Khosrokhavar, *Les nouveaux martyrs*; Mayeur-Jaouen, *Saints et héros*; Neuwirth, *Blut und Mythos*.

period. My examples include the tilework installed on commemorative buildings such as the Ḥusayniyyah-yi Mushīr, erected in 1876 by the wealthy philanthropist Mīrzā 'Abd al-Ḥasan Mushīr al-Mulk (Fig. 48.1), or the Imāmzādah-yi Ibrāhīm in Shiraz⁶ and the large canvasses that used to serve as prompts for professional storytellers performing in the streets and marketplaces well into the twentieth century.⁷ Second, I discuss images of paradise incorporated into modern murals, many of which have been installed in recent years on the windowless walls of large buildings in the Tehran cityscape.⁸ The extent to which any of these areas may or may not be adequately termed “popular” is open for discussion. The depictions of the battle of Karbala, on the one side, may be regarded as “popular” since they satisfy the demand of large gatherings of people from various strata of society commemorating the tragedy of Karbala by listening to, watching or actively partaking in live performances, whether recited or acted on stage. The murals, on the other side, might be regarded as a kind of “intentional folklore” (often termed “propaganda”) insofar as they have been installed by state-subsidized institutions such as the powerful Bunyād-i shahīd (The Martyr's Foundation). Their aim is to keep alive and firmly root the memory of recent martyrs within present and future society, predominantly the memory of those men that lost their lives during the so-called “imposed” war of defense against the neighboring country of Iraq, as model characters of true Shi'ite behavior.

In the images of the battle of Karbala prepared in the Qajar period, both the scenes on tilework and on canvas depict a number of the battle's well-known scenes, such as Ḥusayn lamenting the death of his son 'Alī Akbar, Ḥusayn bidding the women farewell while holding his son 'Alī Aṣghar, and Ḥusayn attacking the enemy. In addition, the depictions regularly feature a vision of the hereafter. While in the tilework images considered here, this vision is placed in an arching area above the battle scenes, in the images on canvas it is regularly put on the image's upper side. The images on canvas concentrate on the battle scenes that are usually displayed around a central image of Ḥusayn attacking the enemy, and depict the image of the hereafter, sometimes in a truncated version, showing hell below and paradise above, separated by the *pul-i širāt*, the narrow bridge that the dead must cross in order to be directed to either

6 Humāyūnī, *Ḥusayniyyah-yi Mushīr*; Ansari, *Malerei* 254, no. 54; Fontana, *Ahl al-Bayt*, fig. 58; And, *Ritielden drama* 310; Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a revolution* 62–3; Chelkowski, *Patronage and piety* 95; Newid, *Der schiitische Islam* 250; see also Mīrzā'ī Mihr, *Naqqāshihā*.

7 Sayf, *Naqqāshī*; Ardalān, *Murshidān*; see also Floor, *Theater*, particularly 119–23.

8 Marzolph, *The martyr's way to paradise*; Chehabi and Christia, *The art of state persuasion*; Gruber, *Mural arts*; Karimi, *Tehran's post Iran-Iraq war murals*.

hell or paradise according to their respective merits. Full versions of this scene, such as those depicted on tilework or single images on canvas, include an array of dead people clad in white shrouds and waiting for their deeds to be evaluated. Paradise is here placed at the upper left or the upper right side of the image, relying on a small but fairly regular set of components (Fig. 48.2).⁹

In the lower center of the image representing paradise there is a small water basin, sometimes with a gushing fountain. This basin represents *kawthar*, the paradisaal spring or well of water. Behind the water basin there is a tree in whose top branches we see a large bird with a female head wearing a crown. A legend sometimes identifies the bird as *murgh-i silm*, "the bird of peace." The surrounding landscape depicts a green lawn framed by groups of trees. In the distance there are, at times, also outlines of man-made structures such as a pathway, a bridge or a pavilion. While paradise is thus portrayed as the ideal garden, the image is dominated by two human characters placed in the foreground. The person seated on one side of the basin can reliably be identified as the Prophet Muḥammad by the halo around his head and, sometimes, the green turban he wears. By presenting a small vessel with water from the basin, Muḥammad welcomes a second person to paradise. This person stands on the opposite side of the basin and is clad in full armor, at times still wearing his sword. In his analysis of the tilework images of the Ḥusayniyya-yi Mushīr in Shiraz, Ṣādiq Humāyūnī identifies this person as 'Alī, the Prophet's son-in-law and the first Shi'ite *imām*.¹⁰ Even though this assumption is tempting, in Shi'ite iconography 'Alī is usually depicted with his sword, known as *dhū l-fiqār*. Historically, this sword is known to have two cutting edges (*shafratān*) on both the upper and the lower side.¹¹ In popular Shi'ite iconography it is represented as a sword whose blade branches into two separate points. No other warrior is ever depicted bearing this sword, and thus it has become an unambiguous iconographic marker for 'Alī. Meanwhile, the sword of the warrior to whom the Prophet Muḥammad hands the water does not have such an iconographic marker. In fact, the figure does not betray any particular characteristics at all. On the contrary, his dress is the same as that worn by the caliph's troops. A legend sometimes supplied on the images clearly identifies this person as Ḥurr, Ḥurr-i shahīd (The martyr Ḥurr) or Janāb-i Ḥurr (Our master Ḥurr). Surprising as the presence in paradise of a warrior from the enemy's party might be at first sight, the historical events perfectly justify this identification.¹²

9 For the following analysis see, particularly, Sayf, *Naqqāshī*, nos. 25, 30, 51, 63, and 65.

10 Humāyūnī, *Ḥusayniyyah-yi Mushīr* 43.

11 Halm, *Schia* 16, n. 20.

12 Kister, al-Ḥurr. Al-Ḥurr's (like al-Ḥusayn's) name is given in Arabic with and in Persian without the definite article.

Ḥurr, whose full name in Arabic is al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Riyāhī, played a special role in the battle of Karbala. He was an army commander originally sent by order of Yazīd b. Mu'āwiya (d. 64/683), the second Umayyad caliph, to prevent Ḥusayn and his followers from reaching their eventual destination, the city of Kufa. According to Shi'ite legend, Ḥurr soon recognized Ḥusayn's rightful position and pitied him for the outrageous treatment he received from the caliph's troops. Consequently, Ḥurr switched sides, joined Ḥusayn's companions in their fight against the caliph's troops and died as a martyr at Karbala. Considering his story, Ḥurr thus is not just a randomly selected exemplary character but the quintessential martyr. Even though at first he was loyal to the caliph, he acknowledged Ḥusayn's justified claim to lead the Islamic community. Consequently, he became one of Ḥusayn's followers and died a martyr's death serving the just cause. His presence in paradise is the model of a true Shi'ite believer's destiny, since Ḥurr represents a *shahīd* in the double sense of the word: He is both a witness to Ḥusayn's martyrdom and a martyr himself, whose self-sacrifice for the Shi'ite and, in fact, for the Islamic community is endorsed by the Prophet Muḥammad. Furthermore, Ḥurr's martyrdom is particularly noteworthy because it is linked to his meritorious conversion to the Shi'i branch of Islam shortly before his death.

The images from the Qajar period form part of the visual memory of Shi'ite culture, and their impact extends well into the present. In this manner, they also lie at the basis of the visual interpretation of paradise on murals in contemporary Iran, where after the revolution of 1979 a specific Shi'ite identity was cultivated. Murals have been a regular phenomenon in Tehran since the 1980s, and even though the agenda guiding their installation continues to develop with changing political trends, new murals appear occasionally. Direct depictions of paradise are not frequent on the Tehran murals, even though paradise was promised to Iranian soldiers slain on the front as their immediate reward, and many fighters wore the plastic key to paradise on a string around their neck.

It is probably not by coincidence that the most prominent depiction of paradise in a modern mural has been installed on the wall of the courtyard bordering the headquarters of the Foundation of Martyrs in central Tehran (Fig. 48.3). In its older version, the mural depicted an anonymous martyr who, after taking off his boots and putting aside his machine-gun, stood at the entrance to paradise, wrapped in a white shroud. The depersonalized image was supplied with a caption reading *shahīd avval kasī-st ki bi-bihsht vārid mīshavad*, "The martyr is the first one to enter paradise." This dictum is attributed to Ruhollah Khomeini (d. 1989), the charismatic leader of the revolution, and is quoted fairly often on Tehran murals. The mural's previous version was originally executed in a style reminiscent of traditional miniature painting. Since its colors were fading away, it was eventually replaced by a new image in bright colors.

The new image essentially depicts the same scene. Meanwhile, it emphasizes even further the lack of individuality of the person depicted and reduces the martyr's presence in the scene to a pair of worn boots placed in front of a field of red tulips. Yet, the martyr's body is still there. His bare feet are dangling below his swaying white shroud that is enveloped by a huge pair of white wings. His head is barely discernible in the center of the image where a hand holds his head while a second one loosens the red ribbon qualifying him as a martyr ready to sacrifice his life. The general applicability of the mural's message is further validated by a quotation from the *maqām-i mu'azzam-i rahbarī*, the Supreme Leadership of the Islamic Republic, stressing the fact that society will never forget the martyrs.

An emotionally moving martyr mural from the 1990s, replaced in 2002 by a mural relating to the fate of the Palestinian people, used to be on a building adjacent to the Mudarris freeway leading from the crowded business districts of southern Tehran to the quiet middle and upper-class residential areas in the north.¹³ It showed a little girl wearing a black *chādūr* and holding a red rose in her hand. The girl was mourning her dead father lying in front of her with the words: *Bābā-yi shahīdam – hīch gulī khushbūtār az yād-i to nīst*, "My martyr father – no rose smells sweeter than your memory!" While the mural's Tehran version did not specify the martyr's name, another version in the city of Sirjan gave his name as Jamshīd-e Zardusht. The lack of individuality in the mural in Tehran elevated the martyr's fate to a normative level whose appeal would arise from its general applicability. In addition, the image was supplied with a number of stars containing invocations addressed to the group of five persons (*panj tan*)¹⁴ representing the holy family revered by Shi'ite Islam: Muḥammad, his daughter Fāṭima (here called by her cognomen al-Zahrā', "the Luminous"), 'Alī, and their sons Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. To this was added the hidden twelfth *imām*, al-Mahdī, who in the Shi'ite worldview is the only rightful ruler of the world. The upper right corner contained what looked like a crack in the sky that allowed a glimpse of paradise, the future home of all martyrs. Though the exact components of this image of paradise were difficult to identify, one could make out a cypress tree to the left, another tree with large white blossoms on the right, and a bird amidst a landscape that appeared to be an abode of peace. In its particular composition, this mural raised the anonymous martyr's individual fate to a Shi'ite believer's obligation, and the little girl's personal grief became a general appeal to applaud the martyr's dedication.

In a similar manner, other Tehran murals join in the call for martyrdom by emphasizing that it leads to paradise. Many of the murals have been refur-

13 Marzolph, The martyr's way to paradise 95; Bombardier, La peinture murale iranienne.

14 See Fontana, *Ahl al-Bayt*; Newid, *Der schiitische Islam* 189–204.

bished over the past few years, as authorities obviously took into account the fact that straightforward didactic or homiletic messages did not appeal to the general audience, much less the younger generation. Even so, images of paradise continue to appear in a number of new murals. One such mural has been installed on the wall bordering the courtyard of the Najmiyya Hospital on Tehran's Jumhūrī Avenue (Fig. 48.4).¹⁵ At first sight this mural is a fairly surrealistic image dominated by a large wall that suggests the separation of two worlds. The world to this side of the wall appears to be the world we live in, since a spiral staircase starts in the courtyard right at the bottom of the image. The staircase leads up and over the wall, where its single steps gradually disintegrate and then fade altogether. The world on the wall's other side is only visible on the mural's left side, where spectators are permitted a glimpse into a scene of fertile fields and green trees. This world, however, is unreal and probably beyond human comprehension, since the trees are floating in the air, and the whole scene is mirrored upside down. Regarding the composition of this part of the image there is no doubt that the scene depicted on the wall's other side is paradise. This interpretation is further corroborated by the two popular symbols of the martyr's soul that have been integrated into the image. On the right, we see a group of white doves flying toward the other side of the wall, while on the left, a swaying fold of the wall has generated a line of balls floating in the air. These balls, once fully matured, open up to reveal white butterflies that also head for the Promised Land. In this manner, the mural revalidates the Shi'ite concept of martyrdom by reducing it to a set of symbols that have been propagated on and through the Tehran murals for many years, such as the white dove or the butterfly as a symbol of the martyr's soul. The essential message is thus retained, even though in terms of artistic representation it has been adapted to modern requirements.

In spring 2009, another new mural was installed on a building next to the Tehran Mudarris freeway. This mural, replacing the previously installed image of the Palestinian suicide bomber Rīm Ṣāliḥ al-Riyāshī,¹⁶ is exceptional because it was executed in a style reminiscent of traditional Persian manuscript illustration (Fig. 48.5).¹⁷ It is installed on a windowless wall facing the freeway, the wall being separated into two equally large halves by an emergency staircase. The dominant, and in fact only, background color is a blue so pure and untainted that it risks outdoing the impression of a blue cloudless sky against the backdrop of the natural color of Tehran's sky that is often veiled by heavy pollution. The same is true for the lower side of the image,

15 See Marzolph, *The martyr's fading body*.

16 Gruber, *Mural arts* 34.

17 For a detailed discussion of this mural, see Gruber, *Images of Muhammad*.

which ends in a darkish green of lawn and bushes merging with the heavily watered vegetation that covers the concrete structure framing the freeway. If one follows the artist's presumed original intention, both the sky and ground sections of the image intend to continue their natural surrounding, suggesting that the scene takes place in a manner known as *trompe l'œil*. Numerous other murals in a similar, though often more realistic manner have been installed in Tehran in recent years; these include, to give but one example, a mural on the eastern side of the Maydān-i Vanak on Valī-yi 'Aṣr street to the north of the city center.¹⁸ Though this image does not intend to illustrate paradise, it incorporates a somewhat paradisaical vision in that it depicts two fathers with their sons on their shoulders wandering off into a landscape of lush green hills that form a visual break in the concrete jungle of urban Tehran.

In contrast to realistic images such as the one on Maydān-i Vanak, the mural to the side of the Mudarris freeway depicts a scene that even without specialist knowledge can easily be identified as depicting the Prophet Muḥammad's *mi'rāj*, or voyage to the heavens. The Prophet is riding his fabulous steed Burāq on the mural's upper right side. He is clad in a green cloak and his head is surrounded by a halo of flames. The mural's left side suggests fragments of tilework on the upper side of an imaginary building together with the heads (and, in one case, the upper side of the body) of heavenly beings. The inscription on the tilework spells the phrases of the Islamic profession of faith, namely *lā ilāha illā llāh*, "There is no god but God," and *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, "Muḥammad is God's messenger." A third inscription placed above the prophet's head on the mural's upper right side reads in large letters *ʿAlī valī Allāh*, "ʿAlī is God's close friend," thus adding the specific Shi'ite component of the *shahāda*.¹⁹ Except for the dominant sky, the landscape is almost devoid of other physical phenomena but for the lower right foreground that depicts a heavenly being plucking a branch from a small tree heavily loaded with large white blossoms. Moreover, there is a link between the mural's overall fictional atmosphere and contemporary reality. Stretching out his arms to take the branch is a man dressed in ordinary clothes who might well be taken for a living person, such as someone passing by on the adjacent street. What makes this image of paradise so exceptional is the fact that its components are exact, although isolated and rearranged copies from illustrations in a ninth/fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Mi'rājnāma* (The book of the ascension) that is today preserved in the Paris National Library.²⁰

18 Karimi, Tehran's post Iran-Iraq war murals 57, fig. 5.

19 See Eliash, On the genesis and development.

20 Séguéy, *Miraculous journey* 41, plate 40; Gruber, *El Libro de la Ascensión* 160, fol. 49r; Sims, Marshak, and Grube, *Peerless images* 169, fig. 83 (image mirrored sideways).

Whatever the artist's intention in executing this mural might have been, it is a new attraction that fits into the recent strategy of the Tehran murals, a strategy in which the formerly prominent life-like and somewhat gruesome realistic depiction of actual martyrs has been abandoned in favor of a mythical and transcendent vision of the hereafter as the martyr's ultimate goal.

Whether we consider the depictions on tilework or canvas from the Qajar period or those on contemporary murals in Tehran, it is clear that the dominant image of paradise in popular Shi'ite iconography is inseparably linked with martyrdom. While the characteristics of paradise as a true believer's ultimate destination are outlined in rather vague terms – allusions to general images of bounty and peace such as a lush vegetation – the message of the images is unambiguously clear: self-sacrifice in the service of a just cause remains the pivotal concept of the current interpretation of Shi'ite Islam in Iran and the gate through which the true believers have to pass in order to attain the Promised Land.

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FIGURE 48.1 *Tilework on the Husayniyyah-yi Mushir in Shiraz; from Humāyūnī, Husayniyyah-yi Mushir, folding page between 18 and 19.*



FIGURE 48.2 *Painting on canvas, from Sayf, Naqqāshī 127, no 30.*



FIGURE 48.3 Mural on the courtyard adjacent to the headquarters of the Bunyād-i shahīd, Tehran.

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FIGURE 48.4 *Mural on the courtyard of the Najmiyyah Hospital, Tehran.*
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FIGURE 48.5 *Mural on a building next to Mudarris Freeway, Tehran.*
© U. MARZOLPH, 2010.

Where is Paradise on Earth? Visual Arts in the Arab World and the Construction of a Mythic Past

Silvia Naef

Among the numerous definitions that the dictionary indicates for “paradise,” there is “any place or condition that fulfils all one’s desires or aspirations.”¹ This is the meaning of the word that we apply in this article. The starting point of our reflection will be Pierre Nora’s notion of *lieu de mémoire* as well as Jean Baudrillard’s concepts of simulacrum and hyperreality; in this article, we examine the validity of these concepts for a specific type of pictorial representations produced in the Arab world that idealize times and traditions long gone by, conferring upon them timeless, quasi “Edenic” meanings.

For Nora, *lieux de mémoire* are places consecrated to remembering things past that, as he puts it, are at risk of being forgotten.² Nora considers that there is, in the present time, an acceleration of history, and that as a consequence of it, modern societies have lost the living memory that characterized traditional societies, a memory transmitted by the elders to the younger generations, a collective memory that has disappeared along with peasant societies.

The acceleration of time has given rise to a separation of what Nora names “real memory” (living memory) and “history,” by which he designates the way modern societies organize a past that would otherwise fall into oblivion. Acceleration leads to quick forgetting, compensated by the compulsive and insistent attempt to keep memory alive through constant and repeated acts of remembrance – the *lieux de mémoire* – and the creation of archives – where every minor trace is preserved, supposedly for future generations, regardless of the fact that nobody will ever be able to consult them. To exemplify this, Nora quotes the French social security archives with their miles of files that no human being will be able to explore in their entirety, or oral history, which requires 36 hours of recording to document each hour, and therefore no one will be able to watch the material in detail.³ This desperate (and useless) attempt at preserving the smallest traces of a fading past reminds us of the 1:1 map of

1 Barber (ed.), *Canadian English*, s. v.

2 Nora, *Between memory and history*.

3 *Ibid.*, 9–10.

the Empire imagined by Jorge Luis Borges. In Borges' short story, a civil servant of an imaginary Empire tries to design a "perfect" map which would reproduce every single inch of the country in its real size: it is, obviously, an impossible endeavor that shows the absurdity of this intention of total preservation.⁴

1 Modernization, Acceleration of History and the Visual Arts in the Arab World

What Pierre Nora describes for France, which quickly, over the last few decades, changed from a rural to a modern, post-industrial society, is also true, although in a different way, of Arab societies. Modernization and change, which started in the main urban centers in the nineteenth century, have affected the Arab world, especially during the decades after World War II. This was when most countries became independent and tried to catch up with industrialization, even if the process is still far from being accomplished and excludes large parts of the population, especially in rural areas.

The replacement of inherited modes of art production by Western conceptions is strongly tied to this process. To understand the importance of this movement, we have to go back briefly to a moment that is essential in the history of modern art in the Arab world and beyond. In the wake of modernization, Western art – which already had had some impact on the production of what would commonly be called "Islamic art"⁵ at the Ottoman court or in Iran – was introduced through the creation of art schools in the Western tradition by the authorities or by influential members of those societies that were close to the ruling families: 1883 in Istanbul, 1908 in Cairo, and 1911 in Tehran. The model or ideal for these schools, a typical top-down process, was the Parisian Fine Arts Academy, *École des Beaux-Arts*. The introduction of an institutionalized art education was part of an all-encompassing modernization process in which local art traditions (we might say "Islamic art") started

4 "In that Empire, the Art of Cartography attained such Perfection that the map of a single Province occupied the entirety of a City, and the map of the Empire, the entirety of a Province. In time, those Unconscionable Maps no longer satisfied, and the Cartographers Guilds struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it. Suarez Miranda, *Viajes de varones prudentes*, Libro IV, Cap. XLV, Lérida, 1658." Borges, *Collected fictions* 325.

5 Since the 1970s, when Oleg Grabar posed the question of how problematic the definition "Islamic art" was, the discussion has been ongoing. However, scholars still use it, since there is no other viable and satisfying option to define art production in the "central Islamic lands" from the seventh to the eighteenth century CE.

to be considered as inferior to the nineteenth-century Western academic tradition.⁶ Therefore, just as this was the case for the army or the school system, art also had to be introduced according to the Western norm in order to catch up with “civilization”; the idea of a progress of humanity toward a better future was integrated into their own narrative by the local elites. This notion was expressed vividly, a few decades later, in January 1923, by one of the main modernizers in the region, the Turkish leader Mustafa Kemal (d. 1938): “A nation that ignores painting, a nation that ignores statues, and a nation that does not know the laws of positive science does not deserve to take its place on the road to progress.”⁷

We can define the first period of an art practice along schemes imported from the West as a period of *adoption*, where the focus was on acquiring themes and techniques mostly unknown before.

This radical change affected only the profane field. Religious art, a term by which we might designate in the Islamic context any object, representation or building used for ritual practices, was spared this change and continued to be conceived along customary patterns, with the exception of architecture in some rare and recent cases.⁸ Until the present day, mosque decoration mostly refers to ancient examples: in new buildings, calligraphic panels and decorations are mere reproductions of old patterns and styles. In modern art, religious themes were generally avoided, although a few artists using calligraphic symbols sometimes refer to a religious – mainly Sufi – experience or sense. In his 1989 series of lithographs, *Mesnevi*, the Turkish artist Ergin İnan (b. 1943) uses religious symbols and Arabic script. However, it reflects more a “breaking of taboos” – as Kiymet Giray suggests – than a desire to represent spiritual experience.⁹ Religious paintings can rather be found in the work of some artists with a Christian background, like Saliba Douaihy (Ṣalībā al-Duwayhī) (1915?–1994) in Lebanon or Marguerite Nakhla (1908–1977) in Egypt, who both produced modern religious art, mostly for churches.¹⁰ Typically, paradise or related subjects, represented symbolically in Islamic art,¹¹ have not been a theme for modern art.

6 On this topic, cf. Naef, *Peindre pour être moderne*.

7 Quoted in Kreiser, *Public monuments in Turkey and Egypt* 114.

8 For modern mosque architecture, see Holod and Khan, *The mosque and the modern world*.

9 Giray, *Ergin İnan* 188.

10 On Douaihy, cf. al-Duwayhī, *al-Madā wa-l-rūh*. On Nakhla, see Marcos, Moussa, and Ramzy, *Marguerite Nakhla*.

11 Blair and Bloom (eds.), *Images of paradise in Islamic art*.

Starting from the 1950s, a period of optimistic and often socialistic modernization and industrialization seized countries like Egypt, Iraq, and, in the 1960s, Algeria and, although the goal of mass consumption was not achieved, the disappearance or transformation of traditional ways of life did take place. The freshly independent countries were striving to build new societies, with local, non-alienated identities, modern but rooted in what was deemed to be the national past. In the visual arts, this period coincided with a “back to our roots” movement, which aimed at introducing elements taken from local traditions – referred to later on as heritage (*turāth*) – in an art form whose reference was exclusively modern Western art: no one contemplated the return to previously existing practices.

The somehow old-fashioned visual arts of the earlier adoption period, which could be defined to a certain extent – according to Gayatri Spivak – as a case of “mimicry of the colonized,” were to be replaced by what was considered to be “authentic,” meaning that it belonged to the cultural capital of the country before it was submitted to colonial rule and its influences. A new period of *adaptation* to what were deemed “local traditions” started.

Art production in the Arab world was, in the middle of the twentieth century, almost entirely figurative; abstraction started to be accepted only in the 1960s, although it had been known to many artists earlier on. One reason for this were the then prevailing socialist ideas that considered abstraction a form of “bourgeois decadence” since it could not express “revolutionary” values and educate the populace. In this worldview, not only could abstract art not reflect the “reality” of the popular classes, but it was often identified with the United States, not entirely wrongly. As Frances Stonor Saunders shows in her book *The cultural cold war*, the United States sponsored this type of art as being “the very antithesis to socialist realism” and “an explicitly *American* intervention in the modernist canon” and made of it the symbol of freedom of expression and modernity.¹² In the Arab world, art, in the view of many artists of the time, had to be made “by the people and for the people” and help to build a new and better society; it had to convey a message; abstract art was therefore not suitable. “Art for art’s sake” was a slogan mostly rejected by artists in a period of social and economic upheaval. Nevertheless, most painters preferred to represent “the people” in a form of idealized settings, mostly rural. Modern life, urban landscapes, and industrial work were nearly absent. If we add that most of the time, these artists belonged to the modernizing elites, their reference to a folkloric image of land and people in order to represent the “authentic” appears to be even more of a conscious choice.

12 Saunders, *The cultural cold war* 254. Emphasis in the original.



FIGURE 49.1 Sayyid 'Abd al-Rasul, *Composition*, 1961.

Sayyid 'Abd al-Rasul's (1917–1995) *Composition* (1961) (Fig. 49.1) exemplifies this. It shows a group of women and young girls on their way to the well, in what is supposed to be a typical scene of the Egyptian countryside. The women, whose faces and position remind us partly of Pharaonic representations, are expressionless, in spite of the fact that their features are individually delineated. Their colorful dresses have a high aesthetic value, as do the patterns on them. There is no hint of the painfulness of their job, even with the bending woman in the front. Water carrying appears as a picturesque activity, demanding no effort. At the same time, this composition is an example of what “authenticity” is meant to be: village women, in traditional dress, performing a centuries-old daily life ritual, seemingly untouched by modernization and Westernization. Their garments are a timeless variation on the theme of the Egyptian peasant's clothing: the different motifs and colors show the ability of local craftsmen. The reference to old Egyptian representational modes situates the work in a continuous “Egyptianness” and allows the identification with it.

In her article “The Painter's Landscape,” Françoise Cachin shows how landscapes became a *lieu de mémoire* in nineteenth-century France at a time when industrialization changed not only daily life but also people's attitude toward



FIGURE 49.2

Mamdūh Qashlān, Local Features 70, 1979.

the countryside.¹³ Following Cachin, landscapes in their Impressionist interpretation have become the quintessential expression of France as such, as the still ongoing success of exhibitions of this school shows. For French audiences, France as shown in these paintings has turned into France itself, especially after World War I, when the genre of landscape painting disappeared from artistic practice.¹⁴

In the Arab world, landscape painting played only a secondary role in this post World War II period.¹⁵ However, a phenomenon similar to that observed in France by Cachin can be retraced there, where the place held by French landscape painting is taken by idealized genre scenes and architectural depictions. In this sense, the break that occurred with academic art by the introduction of modern styles after World War II was merely a stylistic one, the subjects varied only slightly compared to the previous period. Modernity and its materializations are largely absent, regardless of the fact that these representations pretend to contemporaneity. Temporality, symbolized by items of our time, is not evoked: and as Cachin notes for Millet's peasants, whose "silhouettes . . . are those of the *eternal* French peasant,"¹⁶ the pictorial rendering of the popular classes is timeless: timelessness, happiness, harmony of places, faces, and practices long forgotten but sublimated by their distance in time. Any reference to conflict, poverty, and illness is also nonexistent.

In Mamdūh Qashlān's (b. 1929) *Local features 70* (Fig. 49.2) a village scene shows men sitting, discussing, and drinking coffee and a group of women chatting and standing. In the background, we can make out houses and a tree. In

13 Cachin, *The painter's landscape* 296.

14 Cachin, *The painter's landscape* 337–8.

15 As Kirsten Scheid has shown, landscape painting had become the embodiment of the nation in Lebanon in the first half of the century. Scheid, *Painters, picture-makers, and Lebanon* 223–95, and especially 288–92.

16 Cachin, *The painter's landscape* 318. Our emphasis.

contrast to the liveliness and movement that characterize a village square, the whole composition is static and gives a sense of irreality. It would be difficult to situate this painting in a precise period: no element gives us a hint in this direction.

2 Visual Arts in a Hyperreal World

An important shift in ways of producing visual works occurred in the 1990s. With the rupture constituted by the first Gulf War in 1991, which marks the end of pan-Arab nationalism as a strong cross-border ideology, art production and discourses on art came to be less dominated by the idea of Arabness. *Globalization* had an impact on the regional scene: The co-optation of some artists of Middle Eastern and Arab origins into the world art market and the adoption by many of them of new concepts and techniques like installations and video art, initiated a partial shift in art production in the region, but this production is rather oriented toward international audiences. On the regional scene, which, for different reasons, has expanded since the 1990s, themes and techniques remained more conservative, painting and sculpture constituted the prevailing techniques.¹⁷ A part of this production is still dedicated to idealized urban and rural representations, although many other subjects can be found as well.

This might be surprising, considering the changes that happened in the last decade. On the one side, it can be explained by a pictorial tradition that, in spite of the stylistic break that happened after World War II, has thematically kept its ties with genre painting, derived from the academic and Orientalist tradition, where only popular themes are considered “picturesque” enough to deserve representation. Another reading might be more fruitful, starting from the idea expressed by Jean Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation*. For Baudrillard, simulacra play an essential role in our society. By simulacra he means representations of things that do not necessarily exist, in contrast to the past, when images were produced and used in order to represent the “real.” Nowadays, the image, the simulated thing, the *simulacrum*, can exist without the real, it has become completely independent of it and exists as such: “Simulation is no longer . . . a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal. . . . The era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials.”¹⁸ The signs of the

¹⁷ See Naef, *Entre mondialisation* 81–92.

¹⁸ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and simulation* 1–2.

real, i.e., a fake representation of what the real is supposed to be, have replaced the real, the image has replaced what it is supposed to represent. What counts is not the represented object, but the representation itself. With the disappearing of a concrete reality, replaced by what he calls “hyperreality,” a virtual or better reality, our societies develop nostalgia, a will to preserve everything past, but in a “better” and “cleaner” form.

For Baudrillard, Disneyland is the quintessential expression of this, Disneyland which he considers to be “the real America” hiding the fact that the “real” does not exist anymore.¹⁹ This development can be observed in the Arab world as well. For Deeba Haider for instance, the whole city of Dubai is an illustration of this. For her, Dubai has become an attraction park, where fake prevails over reality: shopping malls are simulating cities in other parts of the world,²⁰ functional elements of traditional architecture are used as purely decorative features,²¹ buildings have to follow precise rules in order to make the environment look more “traditional.”²² We could add that the Dubai Museum, with its puppets representing and performing the activities the inhabitants of Dubai used to perform daily only a few decades ago, or the reconstituted traditional home presented in the courtyard, also reconstructs history and daily life in a largely sublimated and expurgated form, giving an *aesthetical* view of it (Fig. 49.3).

The construction of a simulated reality as an improved form of the existing urban structures is not limited to newly created entities: Historical cities of the region also show such examples. In her book about changing consumer cultures in Egypt, Mona Abaza describes Cairo’s new shopping mall culture, which aims to replace the old and dirty city by a cleaner, more modern and comfortable way to shop. Located near Madinat Nasr, the new chic area outside Cairo, and only twenty minutes from the international airport, City Stars Mall opened in 2005 and offers a replica of the Khān al-Khalīlī Sūq, “displaying the identical jewelers, handicrafts and items that are sold in the old popular bazaar.”²³ The illusion is perfect: the old is reproduced in its forms and functions (traditional shops) but this gated character transforms it into a clean and safe heaven for local shoppers and tourists; it is air-conditioned, free of poor people, pickpockets, and other “dangers” that exist in “real” life. Saree Makdisi

19 Ibid., 12.

20 Haider, *Transformation of Dubai* 655.

21 Ibid., 657.

22 Ibid., 656.

23 Abaza, *Changing consumer cultures* 30–1.



FIGURE 49.3 *Dubai Museum: Reconstruction of a traditional home in the courtyard.*
 PHOTO: S. NAEF, 2008.

observes the same phenomenon in the rebuilt city center of Beirut, reconstructed not as it was, but as

it ought to have looked and felt: ... [the] discourse of authenticity functions in a strictly visual register, so that what it means by *authenticity* is actually the look – the spectacle – of authenticity, rather than authenticity as such. ... the authentic is what *looks like* it is authentic, ...²⁴

Aesthetization of past traditions and objects, stressing their “authenticity” can also be found in movies produced in the last two decades, as Nacer Khemir’s (b. 1948) movies (*Les baliseurs du désert*, 1984; *Le collier perdu de la colombe*, 1991; *Bab Aziz*, *Le prince qui contemplait son âme*, 2006) or Moufida Tlatli’s (b. 1947) *La saison des hommes* (2000). Shot on the Djerba island, *The Season of Men*, intended as a drama of separation and social injustice, pictures a traditional

24 Makdisi, Beirut, A city without history? 212. Emphasis in the original.

society where men-women relations are problematic and critically inspected, whereas architecture, handicraft production (weaving), and rituals performed among women are presented throughout as beautiful and harmonious. Even in a movie with a feminist agenda, nostalgia might prevail.

In painting, this timeless aesthetization, oblivious of history and other contingencies is even more striking. As in the movies mentioned, traditional architecture is often the main theme, as in this composition by the Syrian artist Hammoud Chantout (Ḥammūd Shantūt) (b. 1956), exhibited in 2001, showing a traditional house with its balcony and green plants (Fig. 49.4). Chantout has done many paintings on the theme of traditional architecture, illustrating houses in Syrian towns or villages, but also in invented locations, where the building becomes the subject of the composition.²⁵ The mere concentration on architectural details, the absence of human beings and of action, reinforces the effect of stillness and timelessness. It appeals to the new taste of the urban bourgeoisie for vernacular architecture (even when relatively recent) and visual traditions, which expresses itself in the Syrian case in the recent transformation of the old city of Damascus from a dwelling area for lower income classes to a trendy spot for its wealthier inhabitants, as the important number of restored houses, turned into elegant shops and cafés, demonstrates.

The replacement of reality by an improved fake version, which characterizes modern societies, including the Middle East, leads to a nostalgia for what becomes, very often, a form of idealized past. The heritage of the past is no longer seen as such, but used in order to create a present with no disturbing elements, where life seems to be spent in happiness and peace, in a generalized “Buddha Bar” atmosphere of relaxation and harmony.

In this view, the past can only be considered in an “improved” shape and appears as a time when families were still together, work was done mostly by hand, and the rhythm of life was much slower and less stressful. There is a romanticization of the representation not only of past life in the village, as some kind of ideal community, but as a form of life that modernization, and the subsequent introduction of machines, with their noise and accelerated rhythm (along with the appearance of new concepts and ideologies) has destroyed.

These representations of a past which never existed in such a form, of a tradition purified of everything that could trouble it, appears when it has become no more than a pale remembering. Paintings and films have parallels with the history museum in Dubai: they remind people of what they have lost, and what is gone forever. In consequence, the specific type of figurative painting which has been described here is indebted not only to traditions of representation,

25 See <http://chantout.com/galo5.htm>.



FIGURE 49.4 *Hammoud Chantout, Traditional House, undated, exhibited at al-Sayed Gallery, Damascus, November 2001.*
PHOTO: S. NAEF, 2001.

but is a way of recalling a vanished memory, of preserving what the acceleration of history has condemned to oblivion. Painting as a *lieu de mémoire*, as the embodiment of times gone, is a refuge, a protection from the uprooting induced by modernity, and is appreciated by a new bourgeoisie that has abandoned traditional ways of life, but wants to keep them as remembrance, a credential of authenticity. A past from which contradictory and conflicting images have been removed, now becomes an ideal reference, a time of a supposed perfection erased by modernization, a secular “paradise on earth.”

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PART 10

*Heavens and the Hereafter in Scholarship
and Natural Sciences*



The Configuration of the Heavens in Islamic Astronomy

Ingrid Hehmeyer

1 Preamble

The account of the Prophet Muḥammad's night journey (*isrā'*) and his subsequent ascension to heaven (*mi'rāj*) includes a description of how Muḥammad was transported through seven heavens, from the first or lowest that is closest to Earth, to the seventh or highest. According to some prophetic traditions and *ḥadīth*-derived literature, on this occasion Muḥammad visited paradise. However, there is no consensus with regard to its location, which is given variously as in the first heaven or in the seventh, or even beyond the seven heavens.¹ The sevenfold layering of the celestial sphere can also be found in several verses of the Quran.² The concept itself originates in pre-Islamic times and is often traced back to the Greeks' understanding of the configuration of the heavens. But astronomy predates the era of the Greeks. From early times onwards humans have been engaged with the skies, the traces of which can be found in the mythologies of many cultures. In order to appreciate, therefore, the significance of the seven heavens it is necessary to look at the evidence from the first written records of astronomy, which takes us back to ancient Mesopotamia.

2 The Mesopotamians' Understanding of the Heavens

In the minds of the Mesopotamians, Heaven and Earth were created by the gods with an underlying order and regularity. This concept is expressed in various creation myths.³ Besides prominent stars and constellations, the Mesopotamians recognized seven planets. The latter included the Sun and the Moon, in addition to what we refer to today as the five planets visible to the

¹ For details see Roberto Tottoli's contribution to the present publication.

² Q 2:29; 17:44; 23:17; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 78:12.

³ See Horowitz, *Cosmic geography* 107–50.

naked-eye observer, viz.: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Together the seven planets were called *bibbu* in Akkadian, meaning “wild sheep,” which relates to their seemingly erratic motion across the background of the fixed stars. These appear to maintain fixed positions relative to one another and to move always according to the same set pattern, as though mounted on a sphere rotating uniformly within a period of approximately one day. The fixed stars were therefore compared with domesticated animals.⁴ What is reflected in this view of the sky is how fundamental a role agriculture in general and animal husbandry in particular played for Mesopotamian civilization.

A second significant aspect of the Mesopotamians' conception of the heavens relates to their perception of certain stars and constellations and, in particular, the planets as celestial manifestations of gods and goddesses. The changing astronomical patterns such as planetary alignments, the appearance of a planet within a prominent constellation and, most dramatically, a lunar or solar eclipse, were perceived as communications from the deities, who placed such signs in the heavens for humans to see. It is important to note that people did not necessarily believe there was any causative relationship between these signs and future events on Earth. They were merely indicators of what the gods had in store for humans. Reading and interpreting the signs offered the possibility of taking appropriate action, thereby modifying the potential outcome. The concept of determinism was not inherent. But we get a clear sense of correlation between divine, celestial, and terrestrial realms.⁵

The need to interpret the signs led to the systematic observation of the skies and record-keeping.⁶ In due course, the experts – scholar-scribes – started to apply mathematics to their study of the heavens and to quantify celestial phenomena, such as future planetary movements and positions. The use of mathematical models for reliable numerical prediction in astronomy implies the comprehension of underlying patterns of regularities. This was a breakthrough for the development of scientific inquiry in the ancient world. Building on

4 Ibid., 153.

5 The details are best summarized in Rochberg-Halton, *Scientific inquiry* 26–30, and Steele, *Brief introduction* 30–7. There is an extensive corpus of specialized literature on the subject, in particular Rochberg, *Heavenly writing*, and – with a slightly different interpretation – Koch-Westenholz, *Mesopotamian astrology*. Both works include comprehensive bibliographies.

6 There is thus a close connection in ancient Mesopotamia between what according to modern terminology would be called astronomy, which involves the study of the movements and positions of the heavenly bodies, and astrology, which interprets these movements and positions as predictions for mundane events. Unlike today, they were not regarded as separate in ancient Mesopotamia; see Rochberg, *Heavenly writing* 102.

achievements from the third and second millennia BCE, astronomy flourished in Mesopotamia during the first millennium BCE.⁷

To give just one example, we may consider the Mesopotamian lunisolar calendar. The first evening sighting of the crescent Moon marked the beginning of a month. The length of the lunar month is approximately 29½ days (on average, half of the lunar months comprise 29, the other half 30 days). A lunar year of twelve months has 354 days (six times 29 days plus six times 30 days) and is therefore eleven days shorter than the solar year of 365 days. This means that the lunar year starts eleven days earlier each year and thus moves through the seasons. One of the purposes of the calendar was the provision of a framework for tax collection, which depended on the time of harvest during the solar year. In order to keep the lunar calendar and the solar year synchronized, an intercalary month was inserted every few years, at irregular intervals. Originally, it was the king's decision when such a month should be added. This was certainly not the best solution and could result in great irregularities. For instance, the king might have been reluctant to insert a month because it delayed tax collection. At the same time, the New Year celebrations in spring were the most significant social event of the year. The method adopted by the civil authorities from about 500 BCE onwards, but possibly originating in the eighth century BCE, involved seven intercalations in 19 years – a fixed cycle that predicted the beginning of a new month and a new year, and that regulated the calendar in general through mathematics. The intercalation no longer depended on observation or whim. This method also had a high degree of accuracy, because it corresponded to the underlying pattern of the regular lunar motion.⁸

We find varying traditions in ancient Mesopotamia that deal with the concept of the universe. However, they all agree that Heaven and Earth consist of a series of superimposed layers. For instance, two texts dating to the first millennium BCE, but likely with origins in the second millennium, describe the heavens as divided into three layers. The lowest one, closest to Earth, is specified as the visible sky that carries the stars. The domain of the gods of Heaven lies above it, with the lesser deities residing in the middle layer and the Heaven-god Anu, one of the major deities, in the third or highest layer. The three heavens are matched in one of the texts by three layers of Earth: the

7 See Britton and Walker, *Astronomy* 51–66, and Steele, *Brief introduction* 48–65, for examples of significant developments. Neugebauer, *Mathematical astronomy* i, 347–555, presents a comprehensive study of mathematical astronomy in ancient Mesopotamia.

8 Hunger and Pingree, *Astral sciences* 199–200; Britton and Walker, *Astronomy* 45–6, 52–5; Steele, *Brief introduction* 21–4. For details of the New Year festival, see Dalley, *Influence* 76–7.

visible Earth where humans live, below it the middle layer consisting of the subterranean waters, and finally the underworld of the dead.⁹

But there is also evidence of an earlier tradition of seven heavens and seven earths, preserved in several Sumerian texts.¹⁰ Interestingly, all of them are incantations. It has been suggested that the number seven does not necessarily have to be understood in the literal sense of its numerical equivalent, but could rather be interpreted in a metaphorical way. One possible reading of “seven heavens” is “all of heaven” or “all heavens” which refers to Heaven in its entirety, without making reference to a specified number of layers.¹¹ The same applies to “seven earths.”¹²

3 The Geocentric Model of the Greek Cosmos

The earliest attestation to the influence of the Mesopotamian astronomical tradition on the Greeks has been traced to around the eighth century BCE and Homer’s *Iliad*. The account of how Hephaestus made Achilles’ shield (Book 18) includes a description of its astronomical decorations,¹³ and it has been pointed out that they bear a close resemblance to astronomical concepts found in earlier texts from Mesopotamia.¹⁴ Alexander’s conquest of Mesopotamia in the second half of the fourth century BCE brought the Greeks in direct contact with Mesopotamian astral sciences. They became the foundation for astronomical thought and practice by the Greek intellectuals who themselves eventually made great contributions, advances, and refinements to astronomy. Until the fourth century BCE, however, their main interest was to develop a philosophical approach to explaining the universe, relying on evidence of the senses and reason, rather than a mathematical approach. Unfortunately, hardly any of

9 The two tablets are KAR 307 and AO 8196, see Horowitz, *Cosmic geography* 3–19. Throughout the book, the author provides a wealth of detail from other texts. Of particular interest is chapter 11 that deals with the geography of the heavens. Of course, there are abundant variations on the theme of the heavens and the earths.

10 Horowitz, *Cosmic geography* 208–20.

11 Ibid., 218–9.

12 The symbolic meaning of “seven” is clearly expressed in some texts from Assyrian times from which we learn that an Assyrian king could claim the supreme title “king of the universe” after completing seven victorious campaigns. In these text examples, “seven” has the meaning of “universe,” see Dalley, *Influence* 76. Conrad, *Seven* 43, note 1, provides further references to the symbolic usage of the number seven in the ancient world.

13 Homer, *Iliad* 349–53.

14 Pingree, *Legacies* 129.

the original writings of the Greek philosophers from before the fourth century are extant, and the first author whose comprehensive theories of the universe have survived is Aristotle (d. 322 BCE). One needs to bear in mind, though, that Aristotle's ideas are based on the works of his predecessors.

3.1 *Aristotle*

Aristotle addressed the topic of the universe in particular in his *Metaphysics* Λ and *On the heavens*, amongst other writings.¹⁵ He saw a fundamental difference between the terrestrial and the celestial realm. Aristotle explained the universe as a great sphere that consisted of two parts, an upper and a lower region, divided by a sphere on which our closest celestial neighbor, the Moon, was located. The sublunary or terrestrial region included everything beneath the Moon. Terrestrial matter was made up of four elements: earth, water, air, and fire. The Earth, consisting (mainly) of elementary earth, had its natural place at the center of the sublunary region. It was surrounded by a shell of water – the seas. This, in turn, was encompassed by a shell of air – the atmosphere – and, finally, a shell of fire. Like the preceding ones, it was spherical and concentric with the Earth. Aristotle emphasized that in the sublunary region things were subject to impermanence and change, which included generation, growth, diminution, and decay.

From the Moon outwards, in the heavenly region, everything was perfect and unchanging. Here, matter was made up of a fifth, more precious element, the ether. The universe was finite, with its boundary marked by the sphere of the fixed stars. By contrast, the seven planets were each embedded on a separate sphere. These spheres were arranged concentrically and the planets orbited the Earth in the most perfect geometric figure, the circle.¹⁶ From the Moon to the fixed stars, this resulted in seven planetary layers of the heavenly region (Fig. 50.1), a perfect example of seven being a number of totality, consummation, and wholeness.

15 For detailed references to Aristotle's works in which the following ideas can be found, see Dicks, *Early Greek astronomy* 194–219.

16 Aristotle's model was, in fact, slightly more complex. Refining a model first devised by his predecessor Eudoxus, Aristotle explained the intricacy of each planet's motion by a set of nested concentric spheres, with the planet itself being situated on the innermost one and each of these nested spheres carrying out one component of planetary motion, which was thus a combination of uniform circular motions. In addition, Aristotle inserted sets of spheres in between the innermost sphere carrying a planet and the outermost sphere belonging to the next planet placed below it, so as to counteract transmission of their respective movements.

Aristotle's geocentric model of the cosmos was widely accepted by philosophers and educated people in ancient Greece and beyond. It was straightforward and seemed to confirm the evidence of the senses. Night after night we can observe how the stars rise in the east, move through the skies and eventually set in the west, with the same groupings of stars or constellations reappearing in the same relative position, while we feel the Earth firmly at rest beneath our feet.¹⁷ It is therefore not surprising that Aristotle's cosmology, reflecting perfection and symmetry, constituted the most influential model for nearly 2000 years.

Unfortunately, it did not work in detail. It was the planets, moving individually among the fixed stars, which caused problems. The Greek noun *planes*, meaning a "wanderer," "roamer," "vagabond," conveys a sense of random motion and reflects the Greek intellectuals' puzzlement with regard to the planets. One obvious problem was related to the observation that they vary in brightness. It strongly suggested that their distance from Earth increased and decreased considerably. Yet on a circular planetary orbit this would be impossible, because by definition the distance from the center is constant.

3.2 *Ptolemy*

It was the second-century CE Greek astronomer Ptolemy who – while preserving the underlying concept of the seven planetary spheres – readdressed the issue of planetary motion. Ptolemy took a mathematical approach and provided geometric models to explain and predict the movements of the planets. Ptolemy's main work dealing with astronomy, the *Almagest*, equipped mathematical astronomers with diagrams, formulas, and tables to calculate future planetary positions in longitude and latitude.¹⁸ The predictions were much more accurate than those based on models presented by Ptolemy's predecessors. But as long as circular orbits and a geocentric (Earth-centered) model of the cosmos were used, mathematically derived forecasts and astronomical phenomena would never match exactly. Notwithstanding, Ptolemy's *Almagest*

17 By contrast, post-Copernican astronomy presents the notion that Earth is spinning on its axis, while at the same time racing through space at high speed.

18 Ptolemy's great contribution is a presentation of models for planetary movement that allowed the description of anomalistic motion while retaining the principle of uniform circular motion. The authoritative English translation of the *Almagest* was prepared by Toomer (trans. and annot.), *Ptolemy's Almagest*. See Pederson, *Survey*, and Neugebauer, *Mathematical astronomy* i, 21–261, for detailed commentaries on the work.

became enormously influential for the mathematical astronomers in the Islamic world.¹⁹

4 The Concept of the Seven Planetary Spheres in the Mithras Cult of the Ancient Roman World

We encounter the seven heavenly layers again in an entirely different context, in the Roman Mithras cult. Originally, the god Mithra (*sic*) was a deity in the early Zoroastrian pantheon of the Iranian-speaking peoples of the mid-first millennium BCE. Roman contact with the East brought knowledge of the deity's attributes to Italy, where there was a fundamental transformation of the beliefs. For the Iranians, Mithra "personifies the sanctity of contracts and thereby becomes the just judge who . . . judges the souls of men according to their deeds," while for the Romans, "Mithras is a saviour god who releases the human soul from the trammels of a purely mundane existence which is under the severe and hostile control of the Zodiac and the planets, the agents of an unseeing Fate."²⁰

As in other cultures, planets were perceived of as errant and vagabond, and therefore potentially dangerous. Sacrifice was one way to propitiate these forces, and at the same time Mithras' slaying of the ceremonial bull was understood as an act that would ultimately offer immortality of the soul. Ritual sacrifice became a dominant element of Roman Mithraic ceremonies.²¹

Romanized Mithraism grew into an attractive alternative to the worship of the official Roman deities. In the almost complete absence of written sources, reconstruction of the practices of the cult relies on examination and interpretation of the archaeological record.²² In the context of this paper, three well-preserved Mithras sanctuaries (Mithraea, sing. Mithraeum) dating to the mid-second to the mid-third centuries CE in Ostia, the port of ancient Rome, are of particular significance. Half-circles in the floor mosaics of the

19 For the seven celestial spheres in Islamic philosophy, see Michael Marmura's contribution to the present publication, especially the sections on al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

20 Zaehner, *Dawn and twilight of Zoroastrianism* 99.

21 It should be acknowledged here that explanations of origin and development of Mithraism vary widely. For a comprehensive survey of the different theories, see Jacobs, *Mithrasmysterien* 9–55.

22 Needless to say, there is no general consensus among the authors and a range of opinions can be found not only regarding detailed connotations, but also general concepts of the cult.

Mithraeum of the Seven Spheres divide the aisle into seven sections, a concept that is also found in the Mithraeum of the Seven Doors, while the mosaics in the Mithraeum of Felicissimus depict the seven planets.²³

The interpretation of these artistic features takes us to the liturgical activity which seems to have included a ceremonial procession of (initiated) cult participants, and it has been suggested that as part of it

the participants made a symbolic passage through the seven planetary spheres of salvation. . . . In the Mithraeum of Felicissimus the signs of the seven grades of initiation, which correspond to the seven planetary spheres, could represent the seven steps of salvation as one proceeded from the rear of the sanctuary to the front.²⁴

5 Astronomy in the Islamic World

The foundations of astronomy and the study of the configuration of the heavens had thus been laid long before Islam. These included the concept of the seven planetary spheres. While one might assume that Muslim astronomers would have rejected pre-Islamic astronomy because it represented the pagan past, this was not the case. Most of the Muslim scholars treated the scientific works of their predecessors with great respect and studied them thoroughly, either the original texts in the languages in which they had been composed or after they had been translated into Arabic.²⁵ An extraordinary intellectual open-mindedness is expressed by the ninth-century scientist and philosopher Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī: “We must not be ashamed of deeming truth good and of acquiring truth from wherever it comes, even if it comes from races remote from us and nations different from us.”²⁶ Al-Kindī’s commitment

23 Groh, Ostian Mithraeum 11; Stewardson and Saunders, Mithraic liturgy 73; Laeuchli, *Mithraism* pls. 1, 21–8.

24 Stewardson and Saunders, Mithraic liturgy 73.

25 The religious debate over the appropriateness of studying the “ancient sciences” has been examined by Goldziher, *Attitude* 185–215. He draws the conclusion that “the theoretical protests and desiderata of one-sided theologians in Islam were scarcely able to interfere with developments in the real world.” (Goldziher, *Attitude* 209) More recently, Ragep, *Freeing astronomy*, re-addresses the issue and provides a fresh approach to the complex relationship between the religion of Islam and science in general, and the study of astronomy in particular.

26 Al-Kindī, *Fi l-falsafa al-ūlā* (On first philosophy), chapter 1, translated in Marmura, *Islamic philosophy* 394.

to learning, whatever its source, included specifically the heritage from ancient, pre-Islamic civilizations. In astronomy this means, first and foremost, the works of the Greeks. It would be wrong, though, to state that science in the Islamic world is Greek science translated into Arabic.²⁷ From the beginning there was much more involved than mere translation. Based on a thorough study of the ancient texts, scholars in the Islamic world made their own original contributions to furthering scientific knowledge (Fig. 50.2).

5.1 *Astronomy and the Religion of Islam*²⁸

The reason that astronomy became a prominent scientific discipline in the Islamic world is directly related to the religion of Islam and some of its core requirements. In Islam, more than in any other religion in human history, the appropriate performance of various religious rituals is determined with the help of astronomy. This includes – first – the use of crescent visibility and the lunar calendar for the regulation of the religious year. The first sighting of the crescent Moon that marks the beginning of a month is fairly simple, as long as one knows to look west shortly after sunset. Professional astronomers took up the cause to try and find a mathematical method to determine the beginning of a new month for calendar predictions. But they failed in their efforts. Even today, with the use of computers, the beginning and the end of a month based on the actual first sighting of the crescent Moon cannot be predicted with certainty, which becomes particularly apparent every year at the beginning and the end of Ramadan, the month of daylight fasting. This is to a large extent due to non-quantifiable atmospheric conditions. For instance, pollution may increase the glow in the sky from the setting Sun such that the first sliver of the crescent Moon is not visible.

The second religious requirement that posed a challenge for the astronomers involved the orientation of the *qibla*, the local direction of the Ka'ba in Mecca that Muslim believers face for prayer, wherever they are. It became an important issue with the rapid spread of Islam. The prayer wall of a mosque must

27 This is the fallacious assessment of Islamic medicine in particular and Islamic science in general which is expressed by Ullmann, *Islamic medicine* xi.

28 See King, Religion 245–62, and King, Islamic society 128–84, for the astronomical details. The notion of “science in the service of religion,” a phrase originally coined by King, has been challenged by Ragep, *Freeing astronomy* 50–1, who argues that “Muslim ritual could have survived perfectly well without the astronomers” and “that this ‘service to religion’ was really religion’s service to the astronomers, both Muslim and non-Muslim, providing on the one hand a degree of social legitimation and on the other a set of interesting mathematical problems to solve.”

be oriented toward Mecca, and this has major repercussions for the layout of the entire building. The *qibla* is a function of longitude and latitude of a given locality and Mecca. The long distances across the Islamic world, together with the curvature of the Earth, present a complex problem that can only be solved with the help of spherical trigonometry. Scientists were also successful in reducing the three-dimensional problem to two dimensions, which allowed them to resolve the issue through plane trigonometry. The calculations involved in solving the *qibla* problem gave rise to a level of sophistication in trigonometry that was unknown in the Greek and Indian methods previously used. The resulting advances indicate that the discipline of trigonometry, both plane and spherical, should be considered “essentially a creation of Arabic-writing scientists.”²⁹

The third issue was the determination of the specific times of the daily prayers. Since the eighth century CE, the daytime prayers were defined on the basis of shadow length – or, more specifically, shadow increase – that is, by using the sundial principle.

- At astronomical midday the Sun has arrived at its highest position in the sky, and the shadow cast by any vertical object, which serves as the gnomon (the rod of a sundial), has reached its minimum. The absolute length of this minimum varies over the course of the year, following the Sun's changing altitude in the sky.
- The time of the *zuhr*, or noon prayer, begins when the shadow of the object has increased over its shortest length by an observable amount, that is, after the sun has noticeably started its downward path. This definition was even more specific in some medieval Muslim circles (al-Andalus and the Maghrib) where the noon prayer began as soon as the shadow increase equaled one quarter of the height of the vertical object.
- The *ʿaṣr*, or afternoon prayer, begins when the shadow increase over its midday minimum has reached the length of the object's height.

In the same way as the astronomers tackled crescent visibility and the *qibla* problem, they developed complex mathematical approaches in spherical astronomy to pre-determine the exact time when a prayer should begin. One of the results was the successful computation of prayer tables. Based on the astronomers' firm understanding of the changing solar altitude throughout the year – and the principle of the apparent daily rotation of the celestial sphere in general – the tables were calculated for a specific geographical latitude, for

29 Kennedy, *The Arabic heritage* 40.

instance the latitude of Baghdad or Cairo, and listed the shadow lengths of a gnomon for the individual daytime prayers.³⁰

5.2 Planetary Theories

The questions addressed by the astronomers and the solutions found reflect scientific sophistication, and the fact that the requirements of the religion of Islam stimulated this work underscores the fact that the scholars were exploring new directions of astronomical inquiry and had to find answers to a set of problems not considered by the Greeks. In the same innovative spirit, astronomers soon started to tackle topics outside the religious sphere. Once again, it was the motion of the planets, the seven wanderers, which caused them to ponder.

A radical critique of Ptolemy's theory of planetary motion was written by the eleventh-century Iraqi scientist Ibn al-Haytham (d. ca. 1040) under the title *al-Shukūk 'alā Baṭlamyūs* (Doubts on Ptolemy). In this work, the author identified sixteen problems in Ptolemy's controversial elaborations,³¹ and because of the serious shortcomings of Ptolemaic theory, Ibn al-Haytham called for a new approach in astronomy, the aim of which was to rectify the mistakes made and to develop alternative theoretical underpinnings.

One of the astronomers who recognized the necessity to reform astronomy and establish non-Ptolemaic planetary models was the thirteenth-century Iranian astronomer Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274). It was Ptolemy's fundamentally flawed theory of planetary latitudes that evoked al-Ṭūsī's criticism. He developed a new mathematical model, known today as the "Ṭūsī couple," and then applied this device in his work *al-Tadhkira fī 'ilm al-hay'a* (Memorandum on the science of astronomy, written around 1260) to provide a fresh explanation of the latitudinal motion of the planets.³² Three hundred years after Naṣīr

30 Similarly, the time of night could be obtained from the altitudes of certain fixed stars.

31 Even though Ptolemy accepted the rule of uniform circular motion of the planets, he introduced an off-center point of a circle – the equant – around which he "uniformized" planetary motion, see Cohen, *New physics* 28–33. The equant was the most controversial issue in Ptolemy's theory of planetary motion. It seemed to violate the principle of uniform circular motion and while it may have made sense as part of a mathematical model, it contradicted the physical reality, as Ibn al-Haytham points out very clearly (*al-Shukūk* 26–7). See Pines, *Critique* 548–9, for a discussion of Ibn al-Haytham's criticism of the equant. Dallal, *Islam* 68–71, has recently re-examined Ibn al-Haytham's objections to Ptolemy's models.

32 Ragep (ed., trans. and comm.), *Memoir* i, 194–9. The Ṭūsī couple managed to reduce latitudinal planetary motion to a combination of uniform circular motions. It was physically admissible; Ptolemy's awkward equant was no longer required.

al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, the Polish astronomer Copernicus (1473–1543), who was equally dissatisfied with Ptolemy’s model of planetary motion, used the Ṭūsī couple in his heliocentric cosmology. In his *De revolutionibus* (1543) Copernicus in fact reproduced al-Ṭūsī’s diagram, nearly identical with al-Ṭūsī’s own version in the *Tadhkira*, regrettably without citing his source.³³

6 Conclusion

Even though religious requirements stimulated astronomical research, the rich and sophisticated contributions to astronomy in the Islamic world were not made within the sphere of religion, but as part of the discourse of *‘ilm al-hay’a*, the science of the configuration (of the heavens), a term that designated astronomy proper from the tenth century onwards.³⁴ This is despite the fact that many of the astronomers were also renowned religious scholars, with al-Ṭūsī being a prominent example.³⁵ The increasingly mathematical approach to the heavens as an object of astronomical inquiry was best expressed by al-Ṭūsī’s student and later associate, the Persian astronomer (and polymath, who also wrote several works on religious topics) Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1311). He extrapolated from Ptolemy’s *Almagest*³⁶ and stated in a succinct summary: “Astronomy is the noblest of the sciences. . . . [I]ts proofs are secure – being of number and geometry – about which there can be no doubt, unlike the proofs in physics and theology.”³⁷ His point of view was shared by the Central Asian astronomer ‘Alā’ al-Dīn ‘Alī al-Qūshjī (d. 1474):

The upshot is that that which is stated in the science of astronomy (*‘ilm al-hay’a*) does not depend upon physical (*ṭabī‘īyya*) and theological (*ilāhīyya*) premises (*muqaddamāt*). The common practice by authors of introducing their books with them is by way of following the philosophers; this, however, is not something necessary, and it is indeed possible

33 Copernicus, *Manuscript* fol. 75. The issue was discussed in detail by Swerdlow and Neugebauer, *Mathematical astronomy* i, 41–8.

34 See Saliba, *Medieval Arabic thought* 137–49 and 163, for the conceptual and linguistic designation of astronomy proper with the distinct term *‘ilm al-hay’a*.

35 Saliba, *Islamic science* 188–90.

36 Book I.1, see Toomer (trans. and annot.), *Ptolemy’s Almagest* 35–6.

37 Al-Shīrāzī, preface to *Nihāyat al-idrāk fī dirāyat al-aflāk* (The highest intelligence in the knowledge of the celestial spheres), translated in Ragep, *Freeing astronomy* 58. This book is one of two comprehensive works on astronomy by al-Shīrāzī.

to establish [this science] without basing it upon them. For of what is stated in [this science]: (1) some things are geometrical premises, which are not open to doubt.³⁸

Such an attitude was fundamental to enable great astronomical advances in understanding and explaining the heavens, and meant that the astronomers of the Islamic world could go far beyond the level of knowledge of their ancient predecessors and standard Aristotelian ideas of the seven heavenly spheres. Their concern was with the natural configuration of the heavens of this world, not with the spiritual heaven.

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38 Al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid* (Commentary on the epitome of belief), translated in Ragep, *Freeing astronomy* 68. The book is a commentary on al-Ṭūsī's theological work *Tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid*.

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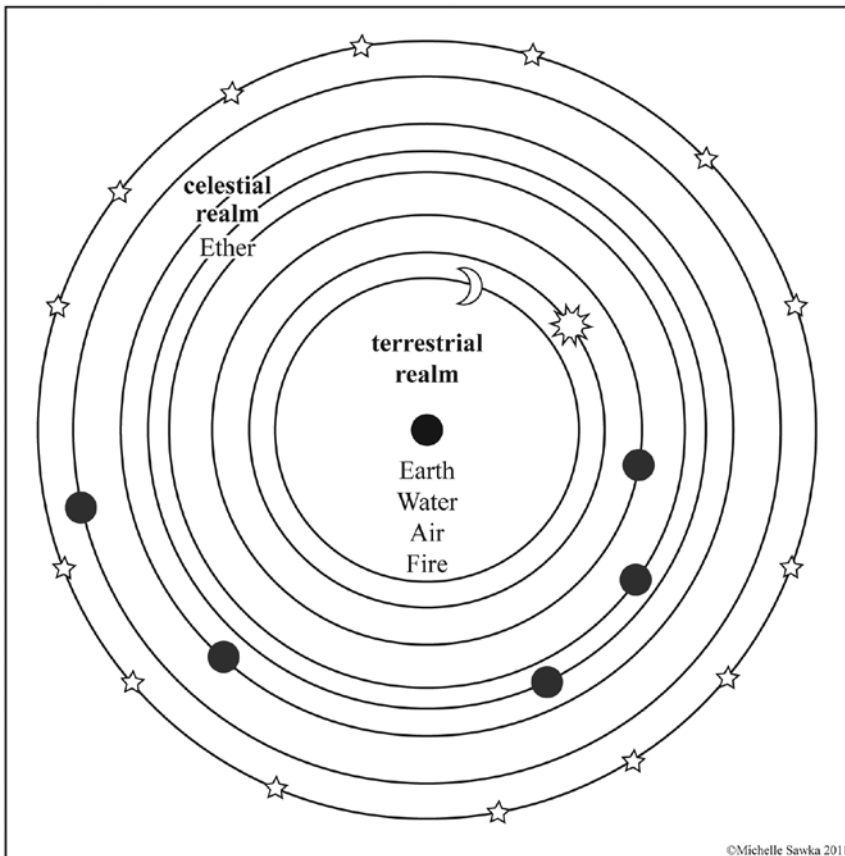


FIGURE 50.1 Aristotle's Earth-centered cosmos (not drawn to scale, and with the set of nested spheres omitted) (based on Gregory, *Eureka* Figs. 9 and 12).



FIGURE 50.2 *The constellation of Sagittarius the Archer as seen in the night sky. Ink and color on paper, from Kitāb Šuwar al-kawākib al-thābita (Book of the figures of the fixed stars) by ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Šūfī (d. 986), Iran, seventeenth century. WITH PERMISSION OF THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM © ROM (971.292.13).*

The Quadrants of *Shariʿa*: The Here and Hereafter as Constitutive of Islamic Law

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The relationship between law and morality is a topic of considerable debate in Anglo-American legal philosophy. That debate is often identified with the exchange between H.L.A. Hart and Lord Patrick Devlin in the latter half of the twentieth century. The debate started when a 1957 committee recommended that consensual sexual activity between men in private should be decriminalized. This recommendation met with sharp criticism from Lord Devlin. As Peter Cane states,

Although Devlin did not express it as straightforwardly as he might have, his basic point was that the criminal law was not (just) for the protection of individuals but also for the protection of society – ‘the institutions and the community of ideas, political and moral, without which people cannot live together.’¹

* The Islamic legal research herein was inspired by my work with Professor Denise Spellberg, of the University of Texas at Austin, a mentor, colleague, and friend, to whom I owe many thanks. The author also wishes to thank Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson for their generous support and encouragement of this article, as well as Meghan Clark and Aleatha Cox for their assistance in editing the article. This article benefited greatly from all of the above; all errors and limitations that remain are the author's responsibility. The quadrants model offered herein was first presented at a graduate seminar at the Faculty of Law on Law, Religion, and the Public Sphere, which I co-taught with Jennifer Nedelsky. The debate around the quadrants model, from both the students in that seminar and from Professor Nedelsky helped make this a better article. The initial inspiration for this article came from a grant awarded to myself and my colleague Robert Gibbs from Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council, and which supported our research on the nature of legal reasoning in Islamic and Jewish law. The author gratefully acknowledges the support of the SSHRC.

1 Cane, *Taking law seriously* 22, quoting Patrick Devlin, *The enforcement of morals* (Oxford 1965), 22.

Hart rejected Devlin's assertion, and instead argued that the scope of the criminal law was defined by the harm principle, which seeks to prevent harm to others.² He outright repudiated the view that legal enforcement of widely held moral norms is justified. This is a deeply contested debate, and one that remains a topic of considerable scholarship.³ This is not the place to address the nuances of that debate. But that issue in contemporary legal philosophy certainly forms a backdrop to this essay.

The distinction between law and morality seems to be in the minds of many who write about Islamic law and explain its scope of regulation to an audience unfamiliar with the tradition.⁴ In doing so, though, they rely on that distinction to illustrate the limits and inefficiency of the Islamic legal tradition. For instance, Wael Hallaq argues that the meaning of 'law' is so substantially founded upon assumptions about the state and its institutional powers that any characterization of *sharī'a* as "law" will render it a failed system. As evidence, he refers to the "routine and widespread pronouncement, usually used to introduce Islamic law to the uninitiated, namely, that the Sharī'a does not distinguish between law and morality."⁵ For Hallaq, the view that *sharī'a* suffers no distinction between law and morality is relied upon as one of the factors that "rendered [the *sharī'a*] inefficient and paralyzed."⁶ In Islamist circles, the unity between law and morality in the *sharī'a*, however, is applauded as yet further evidence of the moral superiority of Islam over other legal systems; these systems, they say, have stripped law of moral content.⁷ Between these two views of Islamic law lies a third, which emphasizes that all rules in Islamic law are categorized pursuant to the *al-aḥkām al-khamsa*, or the five categories of legal value: obligatory (*wājib*), recommended (*mustaḥabb*), permitted (*ḥalāl*), reprehensible (*makrūh*), and prohibited (*ḥarām/maḥzūr*). This typology of rules is used to show that Islamic law has its own approach to distinguishing between 'law' and 'morality': the obligatory and prohibited are "law" in the modern sense, while the recommended and reprehensible categories are extra-legal, falling into the realm of morality.⁸

2 Cane, *Taking law seriously* 22.

3 For other views on the debate, see Dworkin, *Enforcement of morals* 986–1005.

4 Kamali, *Sharī'ah law* 43–4; Coulson, *Conflicts and tensions* 77–95, who begins his discussion by reference to Hart's discussion of law and morality, where he responds to Devlin.

5 Hallaq, *Sharī'a* 2.

6 Ibid.

7 Abu-Saud, *Concept of Islam* 118–20; Moaddel and Talattof, *Contemporary debates in Islam* 197–206 (presenting Sayyid Qutb's Islam and culture, excerpted from his *Milestones*).

8 Kamali, *Principles* 44–6; Kamali, *Sharī'ah law* 44; Hallaq, *Sharī'a* 84–5. Hallaq disagrees with this latter argument, and suggests that Muslim jurists did not distinguish between law and

Hallaq's apprehension and critique of characterizing Islamic law in terms of the law/morality distinction both challenges the assumptions underlying the meaning of "law," and runs the risk of isolating Islamic law from compelling philosophical debates about law, its limits, and its coercive power. The Hart/Devlin debate concerned whether and to what extent particular substantive moral norms could be relied upon in the UK legal system, which has its own history and institutional design. Elsewhere, I have written about how pre-modern Muslim jurists were cognizant about the public good (*ḥuqūq Allāh*) and individual interests (*ḥuqūq al-'ibād*) as they used reason to reach legal outcomes about substantive doctrine.⁹ In both cases, conceptual dichotomies operate to categorize different types of interests and aspirations that animate the development of law.

Conceptual dichotomies, whether law/morality or *ḥuqūq Allāh/ḥuqūq al-'ibād*, provide analytic modes of understanding and appreciating the dynamics of the law. And however useful they may be, when employing them, we must remain mindful about how such conceptual dichotomies carry more intellectual baggage than may be duly disclosed. For instance, in Hart and Devlin's debate, at issue was not so much what is law and what is morality, but rather whether the state can legislate general rules of criminal law based on a particular moral outlook. The intelligibility of their debate depends, therefore, on a variety of unstated preconditions, not all of which were historically present in the formative period of Islamic law. Such preconditions might include:

- The existence of a state with centralized legislative and enforcement power;
- A morally pluralistic polity in which all are given equal status;
- A democratically formed state in which the will of the people is accounted for in a legislative process.

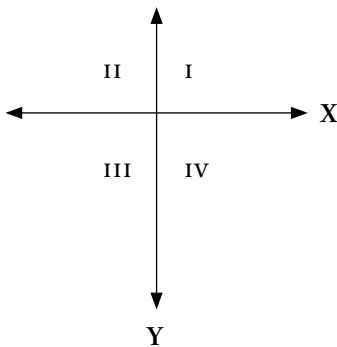
Not all of these preconditions map onto the Islamic historical tradition, legal or otherwise. Consequently the stakes for Hart and Devlin may not be easily translatable for the purpose of analyzing pre-modern Islamic law and legal theory. That does not mean that the underlying interests captured by "law" and "morality" cannot be defined or articulated in different ways that take into account the differences posed by competing legal systems. Nor are we constrained by conceptual dichotomies that are borrowed from other traditions. As noted above, the pre-modern Islamic conceptual dichotomy of *ḥuqūq*

morality. Instead, he queries the modern division between law and morality, which he suggests is neither normative nor natural in the course of human history.

9 Emon, *Ḥuqūq Allāh* and *ḥuqūq al-'ibād*.

Allāh and *ḥuqūq al-'ibād* offers one site of examination. Another site, which is the topic of this essay, concerns the role of the here and hereafter in legal reasoning.

Imagine for a moment each Islamic doctrinal rule occupying a position on an x-y graph. The horizontal x axis reflects the impact and significance of a given doctrinal rule on individuals living in society together. The vertical y axis reflects the relationship of the doctrinal rule to the will of God. Any doctrinal rule, therefore, is plotted on the x-y graph in light of considerations about the social significance of a given rule of law (the here = *al-dunya* in Quranic parlance), and its eschatological implications for the believer (the hereafter = *al-ākhirah*). The more the doctrinal rules reflect social considerations, the higher the x value and the lower the y value (although greater than zero). The more the doctrinal rules reflect a concern about God's will and eschatological concerns, the higher the y value and the lower the x value. Ideally, every rule should be plotted in quadrant I, where the x and y values are both positive.



Problems in justification and legitimacy may arise when a doctrinal rule is plotted in quadrants II, III, or IV. For instance, a rule that aspires to fulfill God's will but comes at a certain social cost might have a negative X-value and a positive Y-value, and thus be plotted in quadrant II. A rule that has a positive social value but seems to violate God's desires will have a positive X-value but negative Y-value, and thus fall in quadrant IV. A rule that adversely impacts the social well-being and violates God's will falls into quadrant III. Being mindful of these quadrants, we can imagine a Muslim jurist taking into account both the 'here' and 'hereafter' when considering how to evaluate a particular doctrinal rule, with the goal of ensuring that every doctrinal rule is plotted in quadrant I. In other words, to the extent this collection of essays concerns paradise as a destination, Islamic law in general and the quadrants model in particular emphasize the signs along the way. Rather than being about paradise as

eschatological destination, this chapter focuses on law in order to reflect on the challenges of the journey itself.

To illustrate and justify the explanatory power of this proposed quadrant model of analysis, this essay addresses different doctrinal issues in the history of Islamic law. In particular, the legal issues discussed revolve around the dog in Islamic law. The dog was a subject of legal debate that moved between concerns about the here and the hereafter. Those concerns were framed in terms of, for example, ritual requirements for prayer, the regulation of the domestic household, and the management of agricultural professions. Although this study focuses on traditions concerning dogs, it is not meant to offer a scholarly treatment of the dog in the Islamic tradition.¹⁰ Rather this study introduces a conceptual model of analysis, using debates about the dog, to grasp and appreciate how the here and hereafter contribute to Muslim jurists' reasoning about the law.

1 Why the Dog?

The vast number of doctrinal rules about the dog, arguably, are built upon a particular tradition concerning a dog that licked water from a bowl. A *ḥadīth*, narrated by the companion of the Prophet Muḥammad, Abū Hurayra (d. ca. 58 or 59/678),¹¹ reads: "The messenger of God . . . said 'If a dog licks your container, wash it seven times.'"¹² A second version of this *ḥadīth* stipulates different numbers for the required washings;¹³ and a third version requires one

10 For studies on the dog in the Islamic tradition, see Abou El Fadl, Lord of the essence 316–30; Abou El Fadl, Dogs in the Islamic tradition 498–500.

11 The fact that Abū Hurayra narrated this *ḥadīth* is a point of initial interest. It is relatively well known that Abū Hurayra was fond of cats. His name suggests his favoritism toward that animal (i.e., father of a female kitten). It is reported that he received his *kunya*, Abū Hurayra, because he found a kitten and carried it in his sleeve. On the other hand, other sources suggest that he may have also owned a farm dog. Al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a'lām* ii, 579; al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* ix–x, 478, 483.

12 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 174.

13 The Ḥanafis rely on a version of the Abū Hurayra *ḥadīth* on dogs and water in which the Prophet is reported to have required either three, five, or seven washings. Al-Sarakhsī, *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ* i–ii, 48; al-Kāsānī, *Badā'ī al-ṣanā'ī* i, 374; al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-awṭār* i–ii, 34; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī* i, 332; al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfat al-aḥwadhī* 253–4.

to dump the contents of the container prior to washing it seven times.¹⁴ A fourth version reads as follows: “The messenger of God . . . said: ‘Concerning the purity of your container (*ṭuhūrīnā’ aḥadikum*), if a dog licks from it, wash it seven times.’”¹⁵ Furthermore, some versions of this *ḥadīth* pose the additional requirement of sprinkling sand or earth in one of the washings.¹⁶ The use of sand or earth as a cleansing agent both recognizes the purity of the earth for purification purposes,¹⁷ and renders the dog’s impurity something that goes beyond a concern about conventional dirt per se.

At the core of the tradition is a concern about the implication of the dog for the purity of the water in the bowl. The implication of this concern can extend far and wide, based on the multitude of ways impurity can both transfer to other objects and affect human behavior. For instance:

- Can a Muslim use the water a dog licks to perform ritual ablutions?
- How large must the container of water be before concerns about wasting water used for purification arise?
- If the dog is impure, can it be bought and sold in the market?

The potential impact this single tradition could have on a multitude of issues prompted the jurist Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī (d. 853/1449) to write: “The discussions on this *ḥadīth*, and the issues that arise from it, are so widespread that one could write an entire book [about them].”¹⁸ The wide array of legal issues the dog raises permits us to examine whether and how the proposed quadrants model of the *sharīʿa* offers a better approach to understanding the nature of Islamic legal analysis, in contrast to the more dominant model of jurisprudence that posits an analytic dichotomy between law and morality.

14 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 174. Those who oppose the implications of this addition (i.e., *iraqqa*) argue that one of the members of the *isnād*, ʿAlī b. Mushīr (d. 189/804), was not a reliable transmitter. However, al-Dhahabī considers him trustworthy. Al-Dhahabī, *Sīyar aʿlām* viii, 484. See also al-Ziriklī, *al-Aʿlām* v, 22.

15 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 175. As will be indicated below, seven is not the only number mentioned on this matter. The Ḥanafis adopt traditions which require three, five, or seven washings. The significance of the number is reflected in how jurists contend with its apparent arbitrariness, which will be discussed below. On the relationship between arbitrariness and rules, see Atiyah and Summers, *Form and substance* 13.

16 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 175–6. There is a debate as to whether one dusts prior to the seven washings, in the first wash, in the last wash, or somewhere in between. See also Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī* i, 331.

17 Wensinck, *Tayammum*.

18 Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī* i, 333.

2 The Dilemma of the Dog: Limiting the Dangers of the Logical Extreme

For Muslim jurists, a source text, such as a *ḥadīth*, can be applied to diverse situations, not all of which are expressly provided for in the *ḥadīth* text. Jurists can analogize (cf. *qiyās*) between express circumstances in the *ḥadīth* and the circumstances of a new situation. In doing so, they engage in an act of legal reasoning that seeks to extend the application of a rule to a similar case that warrants the legal extension.

However, the ability to extend a ruling by analogy depends on whether the *ḥadīth* espousing the initial rule, with its relevant factual circumstances, has a discernible rationale that explains and justifies the legal outcome. Without such a ratio, the *ḥadīth* may not be extended so easily to new and different situations, given that an analogy with a rational nexus between the given rule and the new circumstance cannot be rendered. But if a *ratio* is read into the law, such as “those dogs are impure,” the *ratio* could have considerable consequences on social well being.

If jurists render all dogs impure, the consequence of applying the dog-water *ḥadīth* generally and absolutely might lead to considerable waste, whether of water or any other item a dog might touch or lick. This concern led Mālik b. Anas (d. 179/796) to consider it a grave sin for someone to discard something, which was the sustenance of God and was meant to be of benefit, because a dog licked it.¹⁹ To require such waste arguably creates perverse incentives against animals, and could even incite violence against them. Traditions from the Prophet about killing dogs, discussed below, play into and further inflame this incentive.²⁰

Jurists, well aware of the social costs that might arise if the dog-water *ḥadīth* were read and applied too broadly, developed different strategies to limit its application. Some jurists believed the tradition was a matter of “worshipful obedience” (*taʿabbud*), because it relates to the believer’s commitment to obey God and seek the fulfillment of His will. Jurists such as al-Shāfiʿī held that the dog is impure in its essence. But if the dog is impure in its essence, it could contaminate anything it has contact with. For al-Shāfiʿī, though, this possibility

19 Ṣaḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana* i, 5. See also Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* i, 121.

20 There are various animal rights groups in the Muslim world protesting against governments that engage in seasonal killings of stray dogs. See for example, <http://www.esmaegypt.org/>. The Fatimid caliph al-Ḥākim bi-Amr Allāh is well known for having decreed the execution of dogs on two separate occasions, presumably because their barking annoyed him. Canard, Ḥākim Bi-Amr Allāh.

is limited because of the absence of any *ratio* explaining the number of washings. For jurists like al-Shāfiʿī, the *ḥadīth* on the dog and water proved perplexing because of the apparent arbitrariness of the number of requisite washings. There seems to be no rationale justifying the number of washings, nor is there a necessary rational connection between the number of washings required and the kind of impurity presumed to be in the water or on the bowl. Indeed, if anything, the required number of washings was simply a directive to be obeyed dutifully. Consequently, while al-Shāfiʿī considered the dog impure, he read the *ḥadīth* as requiring strict, worshipful obedience (*taʿabbud*). In other words, the *ḥadīth* must be adhered to, but can be extended in very limited circumstances, given the lack of an underlying rationale. For this reason, al-Shāfiʿī remarked that it is inappropriate to use the dog-water *ḥadīth* to govern other cases when different impurities fall into water.²¹ Hence, although al-Shāfiʿī considered the dog impure, the legal effect of its impurity is limited to instances involving only a dog. If a dog is part of the legal question, the dog-water tradition will govern, even in situations beyond the impurity of water. But other instances of impurity, in which a dog is not involved, cannot be governed by reference to the dog-water *ḥadīth*.

A second interpretive strategy was to read the *ḥadīth* as being less about the dog per se and more about the removal of impurities (*najāsa*). On this basis, these jurists extended the rule to apply to other types of impurity, thereby expanding the precedential effect of the dog-water *ḥadīth*. But in doing so, they had to contend with countervailing issues as well, such as waste. For instance, suppose a dog touches one's clothes or eats solid food from a bowl. Technically these circumstances are not addressed in Abū Hurayra's tradition as noted above. But if we believe the *ḥadīth* relies on the *ratio* of impurity, we may want to extend its application to these new situations. Yet if we extend its application, how far must we go before countervailing considerations, such as waste and limited resources, factor into the analysis?

For example, the Ḥanafī jurist al-Kāsānī (d. 587/1191) suggested that focusing on the dog itself actually blurs the larger issues at stake. Suppose a dog, after being immersed in water, emerges and shakes the water off its body near a group of people. If the water lands on someone's clothes, does that mean the clothing is impure? If we assume the dog is impure in its essence, then anything it touches becomes impure. But if we separate the impurity from the

21 Al-Shāfiʿī, *Umm* i, 20. Al-Shāfiʿī held that the dog-water tradition can be extended to other situations, depending on how one understands what it means to wash. Yet he explicitly considers the dog-water tradition a matter of worshipful obedience. See also al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥawī l-kabīr* i, 308.

essence of the dog, we can put a break on the slippery slope of imputing pollution to all the dog touches. In other words, we can shift our focus to the impact of the purported impurity on the object of concern. In the example above, al-Kāsānī argues that the issue of impurity has less to do with the dog and more to do with the amount of water that splashes on the clothes. If the amount of water that hits the clothes exceeds the volume and size of a coin (i.e., dirham), the clothes are considered ritually impure and the wearer cannot perform ritual prayers. Anything less entails no impurity.²²

Similarly, the Mālikī jurist Ibn Rushd al-Jadd (d. 520/1126) held that the tradition applies to the impurities that must be removed. For Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, the reference to the requisite seven washings evokes concerns over the health consequences associated with dogs lapping water, specifically dogs with rabies.²³ He noted that the Prophet said during an illness, “pour over me seven waterskins (*qirab*) whose tying ribbons are untied, so that I can attend to the people.”²⁴ Here, the number seven is associated with medical care, and not any particular impurity. He wrote:

It is necessary to be cautious of the dog's drinking or eating, and of using the vessel prior to washing it, out of fear that the dog has rabies. It is in the case of rabies, which appears in [the dog's] saliva looking like poison harmful to the body, that the Prophet's command, namely to wash the vessel from which the dog laps seven times to guard against illness, becomes applicable . . .²⁵

22 Al-Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ* i, 414–5.

23 Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Muqaddimāt* i, 90. Not all Mālikīs would have agreed. Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī (d. 543/1148) said: “[In this case] the number [of washings] is mentioned, and a dusting is included with it. This [process] establishes that it is pure out of worship (*ʿibādatan*), [since] there is no requisite number or use of dust for washing out an impurity.” Ibn al-ʿArabī, *ʿAṣṣat al-aḥwadhī* ii, 134.

24 Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Muqaddimāt* i, 90–1.

25 Ibid. This same sort of rationale exists in rules regulating dog ownership in cities across the United States. For instance, Austin, Texas City Ordinance contains a provision prohibiting the ownership of dogs that have not been vaccinated for rabies. Austin City Ordinance 33–3–25(A) provides: “No person shall own, keep or harbor within the city any dog or cat over the age of four months unless such dog or cat has a current rabies vaccination. The dog or cat shall be revaccinated before the expiration of the first and each subsequent current vaccination as provided by state law.” Further, the City has gone so far as to authorize the city's Health Authority to sponsor rabies-vaccination clinics. Austin City, 3–3–26.

For Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, the number offers an insight into the rationale of the rule. He was unconvinced that the rule is simply about worshipful obedience; if it were, then the rule could not be extended or analogized to other situations since it lacks a *ratio legis* (*illa*) that provides an objective basis for reasoned analysis. While it may be tempting to consider the *ḥadīth* as a rule of worshipful obedience that cannot be extended to other situations, the social reality of impurity, whether associated with the dog or not, would seem to require sufficient flexibility in the norm to extend to new situations.²⁶ This is not to suggest, though, that Ibn Rushd al-Jadd disregarded any limits to extending the rule. He was mindful of concerns about waste. So while he generally held that all carnivorous animals (including dogs) contaminate what they lick, whether water or food,²⁷ he devised two important exceptions. First, if the water lapped is large in quantity, then it is not rendered impure. The larger the quantity, the more likely it is that the impurity dissipates throughout the water, thus rendering the whole amount suitable for ritual purification. Second, one can only discard food licked by an animal if one is absolutely certain the food is polluted. But in this case, certitude is contingent upon an ancillary inquiry into whether the animal is domesticated or not. If the animal is wild or undomesticated, we can be certain the food is polluted. Otherwise, certainty cannot be established. For Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, the domesticity of the dog operates as a limiting factor on the extension of the *ḥadīth* to situations that might raise the specter of waste.²⁸ By shifting the focus of inquiry to issues such as the nature

26 Ibn Rushd al-Jadd was not compelled by those who argued that the dog-water tradition is purely about worshipful obedience or purely about impurity. He was critical of those who reduced the issue purely to a matter of removing impurity because they could not explain the specific number of washings stipulated in the tradition. But those who view the dog-water tradition as a rule of worshipful obedience seem to preclude concerns about impurity that seem present on the face of the tradition. Taking a middle road between these two positions, Ibn Rushd al-Jadd argued that whatever number of washings purifies the object, those are justified on the basis of removing the impurity. Any additional washing that occurs because of the *ḥadīth* is purely worshipful obedience, and nothing else. Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Muqaddimāt* i, 90.

27 Ibid., i, 87–8.

28 Ibn Rushd al-Jadd addressed the issue of domesticity of dogs by reference to a different *ḥadīth* concerning cats. In this tradition, a man named Abū Qatāda came upon his wife Kabasha while she was filling a container with water so that her husband could ritually purify himself before making prayers. A cat approached her, wanting to drink the water. Kabasha tilted the container so that the cat could lap water from it. Her husband later remarked: “The messenger of God . . . said ‘The cat is not impure. Rather it is among those

of impurity, quantity, and domesticity, jurists such as al-Kāsānī and Ibn Rushd al-Jadd utilized complex legal reasoning to alleviate the potential burdens of assuming that the dog is impure.

Importantly, the two different readings of the tradition offer two significant reflections on the axes of analysis that operate within Islamic legal analysis. First, the view that the *ḥadīth* is *taʿabbud*, or worship-centric, emphasizes the eschatological significance implicit in any instance of Islamic legal reasoning. One cannot ignore the importance of obedience to God (and hence of eschatology) as part of the Islamic legal calculus. Consequently, the quadrants model of analysis accounts for the eschatology of legal analysis along the vertical y axis, which is meant to capture those modes of behavior that are directed solely for the pleasure of God. Second, the view that the dog-water *ḥadīth* is concerned with impurity but not to the point of waste, reflects the way in which the law cannot ignore, and indeed must account for, the social well-being of individuals living in an organized society. As such, we can account for the social ramifications of the dog-water *ḥadīth* on a different axis, the horizontal x axis. The x axis allows us to measure how a particular legal outcome will influence and impact human experience in its variety.

Using the quadrants model of Islamic reasoning, we begin at an initial starting point where both the x and y values are zero (0, 0), namely at the intersection of the x and y axes on the graph illustrated at the beginning of this essay. We then calculate whether a given act, in light of relevant sources, constitutes a matter along the x axis, the y axis, or both. In most cases, we will find that both axes matter, to varying degrees. Indeed, the debate among jurists may very well be captured by reference to how they emphasize the content of one

who mix with you (*min al-ṭawāfīn ʿalaykum aw al-ṭawāfāt*),” or in other words, it is a domestic animal. Mālik b. Anas, *Muwatṭʾaʾ* i, 22. By reference to this *ḥadīth*, Ibn Rushd al-Jadd argued that “those carnivorous animals that do not mix with us in our homes carry impurities.” Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Muqaddimāt* i, 87. By implication, carnivorous animals such as dogs that mix with us in our homes do not necessarily pollute all that they touch or lick. Ibn Rushd al-Ḥafīd, *Bidāyat al-mujtahid* i, 30. Interestingly, Ibn Rushd al-Jadd noted that not all Mālikīs agree with this position. One group, following Ibn Wahb (d. 197/813) ignored the argument concerning the domesticity of dogs. Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Muqaddimāt* i, 88–9. But others such as Ibn al-Mājjishūn (d. 211/827) held that rural dogs (*badawī*) pose no danger of pollution if domesticated, but urban dogs (*ḥadārī*) do. Ibn Rushd al-Jadd, *al-Muqaddimāt* i, 89. Of course, there is some inconsistency in holding that a domestic predatory animal does not necessarily pollute food, but does pollute a small amount of water. The answer to this may rest on other *ḥadīths* that involve animals drinking from large ponds.

axis over another. To illustrate how these axes operate in juristic reasoning to help plot doctrinal rules in one or another quadrant, we explore various rulings concerning the dog and its impurity. Throughout, we examine the extent and degree to which the jurist's reasoning reflects concerns along the x and y axes, and how those concerns are balanced to influence how each doctrinal rule is plotted in one or another quadrant.

3 The Axes of Analysis: From the Heavenly to the Earthly

If dogs are impure and polluting, one might wonder why jurists would tolerate the existence of dogs at all. If canines carry impurities and endanger the well-being (spiritual and otherwise) of Muslims, why not simply order the execution of all dogs? This option is not entirely far-fetched, in large part because of a tradition in which the Prophet expressly commanded killing all dogs. After issuing the command, he then exempted from its application hunting dogs, herding dogs, and farming dogs.²⁹ Some versions of the tradition include other exemptions. Other versions contain no exceptions whatsoever. In yet different versions, after the Prophet commanded the killing of dogs, he subsequently dispatched people to kill the dogs in the area around Medina.³⁰ A review of these traditions and later doctrinal rules suggests that jurists read different normative sources (e.g., *ḥadīth*) together to create a general rule to kill canines, with exceptions for limited classes of dogs.

The Prophet's motive in killing all dogs relates to a story that states that angels do not enter homes when dogs are present. We learn from the Prophet's wife 'Ā'isha that the angel Gabriel promised to visit the Prophet Muḥammad at a given hour. That hour came but Gabriel did not. The Prophet, disturbed by Gabriel's absence, paced the room of 'Ā'isha's house, holding a stick in one hand while slapping it into the other. At one point, the Prophet noticed to his surprise a puppy under the bed. He called out: "'Ā'isha when did this dog enter here?" 'Ā'isha did not know, but immediately removed the dog from the premises upon the Prophet's request. Upon doing so, Gabriel arrived. The Prophet said to him: "You promised [to meet with] me so I waited. But you did not show

29 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 176. The last category of dogs, agricultural dogs, is not found in all versions of the tradition. There are other traditions, attributed to Abū Hurayra in which this particular dog is included among those that could be owned. Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* ix–x, 479.

30 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* ix–x, 478; Abū Bakr b. al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'ān* ii, 545–6.

up.” Gabriel responded: “The dog that was in your house prevented me from entering. We [angels] do not enter a house which has a dog or picture in it.”³¹ Upon learning this, the Prophet commanded all dogs to be killed.³²

The theological significance associated with angels is certainly great. In the Islamic tradition the angel Gabriel is considered to be the conduit of God’s revelation to the Prophet. Further, for angels to visit people in their homes might reasonably be considered a blessing. For a dog to block angels from entering one’s home defines the dog as antithetical to these sacred and pure representatives of the divine. For many Muslim jurists, this episode explains why the Prophet commanded the execution of all dogs.³³ Therefore, if we consider how to plot this rule, we can reasonably assert that the rule concerns one’s closeness to God, something which is facilitated by one’s closeness to God’s representative. Consequently, given the above context, when the Prophet ordered all dogs killed, he may have infused his directive with a high *y* value and possibly an *x* value of zero.

With the command issued, various people went into the Medina countryside to fulfill the Prophet’s order. The problem was that when the rule was put into effect the Prophet learned of its negative social implications. Two men came to the Prophet with a question. Their conversation is related by the Quranic exegete al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272):

Oh Messenger of God, our people hunt with dogs and falcons. The dogs obtain [for us] cows, donkeys, and gazelles. From the dogs, we are able to sacrifice them [(i.e., the prey) for consumption]. But you [ordered] the killing of dogs; hence we cannot consume such food. Further, God has

31 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* xiii–xiv, 307–9. See also Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* vi, 163; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī* x, 380–1; al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfat al-aḥwadhī* viii, 72–3. Incidentally, al-Mubārakfūrī wrote that the puppy in question belonged to the Prophet’s grandsons, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. In another version, after the dog is removed from the house, the Prophet sprinkles water over the area where the dog was found, which some considered as positive evidence of the dog’s inherent impurity. But the Mālikīs thought the sprinkling was precautionary at most. As Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī wrote, “Regarding those who do not consider the dog’s essence to be impure, its place is sprinkled with water out of caution, since sprinkling is the lawful method of purification where there is doubt.” Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī* x, 381. See also al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* xiii–xiv, 308–10.

32 Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* ii, 546; al-Shawkānī, *Nayl al-awṭār* i–ii, 38.

33 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* xiii–xiv, 310; Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Fath al-bārī* x, 380; al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfat al-aḥwadhī* viii, 72.

made impermissible improperly slaughtered animals. So what is permitted for us?³⁴

In response to this question, wrote al-Qurṭubī,³⁵ the Prophet received the following Quranic revelation:

They ask thee what is lawful to them (as food). Say: lawful unto you are (all) things good and pure: and what you have taught your trained animals [*al-jawāriḥ al-mukallibīn*] (to catch) in the manner directed by God: eat what they catch for you, but pronounce the name of God over it: and fear God; for God is swift in taking account (Q 5:4).³⁶

With this verse, the Prophet permitted one to own dogs of prey, herding dogs, and farm dogs.³⁷ Although the Prophet may have considered the original directive to have a high y value and likely a zero x value, he could not ignore the negative x value, once he learned this new evidence. When the consequences showed themselves, the rule had to be reconsidered in light of the negative implications for society. Taking the consequences into account, we find that while the original rule had a high y value, it had a negative x value, given its implications, thus plotting it in quadrant I. To shift it from quadrant II to quadrant I, where the rule can have a positive x and y value, the Prophet offered exceptions to the general directive to kill all dogs, based on the Quranic verse. In doing so, he preserved the directive to kill dogs, with some exceptions, thereby controlling for the x value while upholding his commitment to the positive y value in the original rule.

To shift the value from a negative to a positive x value, the Prophet construed an exception from the Quranic verse that reversed the social impact of the initial, general directive. We can glean the significance of the Quranic verse that redeems some animals (but not others) with reference to the term *al-jawāriḥ al-mukallibīn*, which literally means trained predatory animal. The Ḥanafī jurist al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) concluded that ‘trained predatory animal’ refers to those animals that hunt on behalf of their owners. Such animals include, according to him, dogs, carnivorous animals, and birds of prey.³⁸

34 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ* iii, 44.

35 Ibid.. See also Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* ii, 546; al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* ii, 393; al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī* iii, 21.

36 Ali (trans.), *The glorious Qurʾān*.

37 Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ* iii, 44.

38 Al-Jaṣṣāṣ, *Aḥkām al-Qurʾān* ii, 393. See also al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ* v–vi, 45.

Al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) understood this term to refer to animals that hunt or gather (*kawāsib*), including dogs, tigers, and falcons.³⁹

Consequently, while the dog constitutes a spiritual danger, it is also an important companion that ensures the well-being of people. While the spiritual danger of dogs may have led the Prophet to order the killing of all dogs, the fact that dogs can positively contribute to other aspects of human existence could not be denied, neither in fact nor in law. Instead, the example above illustrates that Islamic legal reasoning does not exist in a historical or social vacuum. Rather it is an ongoing process that reflects a multitude of calculations along different axes of analysis.

4 Purity and Resource Management: Waste and Well-being

An especially relevant issue that arises from the dog-water debate concerns the water left over in the container after the dog laps it up or drinks from it. Some jurists questioned whether the water lapped up by dogs can nonetheless be used for ritual purification purposes. A strict reading of Abū Hurayra's *ḥadīth* suggests that any water in a container must be discarded. But does that mean water in a container of any size, regardless of how large? And if so, then what about water in a puddle, pond, or lake, from which animals often drink? Ritual purity may be important to commune with God in prayer, but at what cost to the well-being of peoples' everyday lives? Or, to put it in terms of the axes of analysis, to emphasize the imperative of ritual purity (the y value) with disregard to the social consequences of waste (the x value) would plot the legal outcome in quadrant II, with potentially devastating effects on social well-being. A dog may be considered impure; but that does not end the inquiry, given the consequences that may arise from this ruling. The dog may cause ritual impurity, but the spiritual importance of ritual (its positive y value) does not preclude delimiting the scope of the dog's impurity in other areas of human existence (along the x axis). Since the possibility exists that a rule requiring that one waste water in order to become ritually pure might be plotted in quadrant II (i.e., a positive y value, negative x value), we see that jurists contended with how to find a better balance so that both x and y values can remain positive, thus keeping the rule plotted in quadrant I.

39 Al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf* i, 594. For Ibn Kathīr, it refers to trained dogs and falcons and any bird taught to hunt. It includes predatory dogs, cheetahs or panthers, falcons, and other animals like them. Ibn Kathīr, *Mukhtaṣar taḥṣīr Ibn Kathīr* i, 484.

To address this situation of potential waste, Muslim jurists considered traditions from both the Prophet and his companion ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, traditions concerning large bodies of water from which animals drink. In a *ḥadīth*, the Prophet was asked about using water from a pond between Mecca and Medina, from which predatory animals would drink. The Prophet responded: “For them [i.e., the animals] is what they drink. What remains is for us to drink, and it is pure.”⁴⁰ In the second tradition, ‘Umar was with a riding party when they arrived at a pond. A member of the party asked the caretakers of the pond whether predatory animals drink from it. ‘Umar interrupted: “Oh caretakers of the pond do not tell us. We are welcomed by the animals and the animals are welcomed by us.”⁴¹ Sunni jurists relied on these traditions to shift the analysis from the impurity of animals to concerns about waste. They were no doubt aware that the issue of impurity arises in these cases, but the rules on impurity are not alone dispositive of the issue. Despite any impurity associated with the dog, jurists seemed to incorporate resource management, waste, and social well-being into their analytic concerns.

To shift the frame of analysis to waste, jurists inquired about the amount of water in a container or the size of the container itself. For many Sunni jurists, if the amount of water lapped up by a dog is large, the water is not impure, despite his lapping it up.⁴² Mālik b. Anas said: “Ritual purification with the excess water of a dog does not please me, where the water is of a small amount . . . But it is not a problem if the water is of a large quantity.”⁴³ Even jurists who generally considered the dog impure in its essence relied on quantity to limit the application of the dog-water tradition. For instance, al-Nawawī stated: “If a dog laps [up water] from a large quantity of water such that his

40 Al-Sarakhsī, *Kitāb al-Mabsūṭ* i-ii, 48–9; Saḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana* i, 6; al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥawī l-kabīr* i, 304.

41 Mālik b. Anas, *Muwatṭaʿ* i, 23; al-Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ* i, 375.

42 Al-Kāsānī, *Badāʾiʿ al-ṣanāʾiʿ* i, 375. Notably, the Zāhirī jurist Ibn Ḥazm argues that any reliance upon the quantity of water at issue is an inappropriate extension of the rule. Responding to the Shāfiʿī, he wrote: “Al-Shāfiʿī said ‘If the water in the container is 500 *raṭls*, do not dump it if a dog licked from it.’” Ibn Ḥazm, however, would dump out the contents out of worshipful obedience, regardless of the quantity of water at issue. Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* i, 123, 155.

43 Saḥnūn, *al-Mudawwana* i, 6. Likewise, the Ḥanbalī jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), relied on quantity as a central feature of his analysis. Relying on customary practices (*ʿādāt*), Ibn Taymiyya held that the container from which a dog licks is usually small. Consequently, the dog’s saliva sticks to the water and the container. Hence one must dump the water and wash the container. But if the container is large, no impurity arises. Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿ* xx, 521.

lapping [it up] does not reduce it to [less than] two *qullas*, then its [lapping it up] does not render [the water] impure.”⁴⁴ “*Qulla*” is meant to convey a particular quantity of measure. The exact quantity it denotes is not clear; however, some suggest that it refers to a large jar (*al-jarraḥ al-kabīra*) or small jug (*al-kuz al-ṣaghīr*).⁴⁵ If the water is greater than two *qullas*, it remains pure;⁴⁶ but if it is less, the water is impure.⁴⁷ In such cases, the jurists balanced their concerns of impurity and waste, and were keen to plot any resulting ruling in quadrant I, where both *x* and *y* values are positive.⁴⁸

5 From Demon Dogs to Dangerous Women: Piety, Prayer, and the Polity

One of the more colorful dog-related traditions involves the situation in which a dog, often a black dog, passes in front of a man praying. A tradition on this point reads as follows:

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- 44 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 177. See also Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī, *al-Fatāwā* i, 61, who addressed the situation in which a dog drinks from a well containing a large amount of water. Although he did not rely on the two *qulla* threshold, he still invoked the quantity of water as a mediating factor in the overall purity of water licked by a dog.
- 45 Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* xi, 288.
- 46 Notably, even if the amount of waters is two *qullas* or more, it can still become impure if one of its qualities is changed by the introduction of any external impurity. According to al-Qaffāl, although the amount of water may be greater than two *qullas*, if there is a change in one of the characteristics of the water (i.e., color, taste, smell), then it is impure. If there is no such change, then the water remains pure, even if an impure entity, such as a dog, makes contact with it. Al-Qaffāl, *Ḥilyat al-ʿulamāʾ* i, 80. See also the Ḥanbalī Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn* i, 483.
- 47 Al-Qaffāl, *Ḥilyat al-ʿulamāʾ* i, 80. There are two prevailing views among the Shāfiʿīs on what one must do with the water in this case. Some require the contents of the container to be dumped, and prohibit their use. Others hold that dumping the contents of the container is not obligatory (*wājib*) but rather preferred (*mustahabb*). Furthermore, the use of the water, in certain circumstances, may be permitted. Al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī l-kabīr* i, 305; al-Qaffāl, *Ḥilyat al-ʿulamāʾ* i, 314. Nevertheless, al-Māwardī and al-Qaffāl preferred dumping the vessel's content. Al-Māwardī, *al-Ḥāwī l-kabīr* i, 304; al-Qaffāl, *Ḥilyat al-ʿulamāʾ* i, 314.
- 48 The Ismaʿīlī jurist al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān discussed the case in which an animal falls into a well and dies. “If something emanating from the animal changes one of the water's characteristics [i.e., color, taste, or smell], [the water] should be avoided until the change is removed, [so that] the water becomes wholesome and obviates [the impurities]... At that moment, it is pure.” Al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām* i, 112–3.

According to Abū Dharr [al-Ghifārī (d. ca. 32/652–3)], the Prophet said: “If one of you prays, he [should] lay before him a [barrier],⁴⁹ such as the back half of a saddle. If there is nothing, like the back half of a saddle, in front of him, then a donkey, woman, or black dog [that passes in front of him] voids [qatʿ] his prayer.”⁵⁰

The implications of this tradition vis-à-vis the dog, let alone women, are enormous.⁵¹ The fact that a dog can invalidate one's prayer emphasizes the eschatological danger of dogs, or in other words, the need to avoid dogs in order to maintain a connection to God (a positive y value).⁵² Prayer is the moment when one is communicating with God; it is an intimate moment for the soul of the believer. Jurists were certainly concerned about a dog's ability to interfere with that relationship and the eschatological implications of dogs, or in other words, the dog's affect on the vertical y axis.

Yet jurists could not read this tradition solely in terms of its implication on y values. They had to devise a ruling from this tradition that did not, at the same time, adversely affect the x value associated with any rules governing prayer. So for instance, if we take the tradition at face value as applying to black dogs,

49 A *sutra* is generally an item that someone praying sets before him, “sticking it in the ground or laying it down if the ground be hard, in order that no living being or image may be the object next before him.” Lane, *Arabic-English lexicon* i, 1304; See also Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* vi, 169.

50 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 450. In another version narrated by Abū Hurayra, the color of the dog is not specified. Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 451; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* v, 194, 197, 202, 208; Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā* ii, 320–6; Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Iʿlām al-muwaqqiʿīn* ii, 79–80; Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAridat al-aḥwadhī* i, 133. Ibn al-ʿArabī remarks that al-Tirmidhī considered this tradition to be *ḥasan ṣaḥīḥ*, a designation that is perhaps unique to al-Tirmidhī. Abou El Fadl, *The authoritative and the authoritarian* 47–8.

51 Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* ii, 322. See also Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAridat al-aḥwadhī* ii, 134. As one can imagine, the fact that women can negate a man's prayer in the same fashion as a dog or a donkey, raises serious concerns at the possible chauvinism implicit in this tradition. Interestingly, this possibility was not necessarily lost on the jurists themselves. This tradition raises gender concerns over the association between animals and women. Whether Islamic theology supports such an assertion, or whether this tradition is the result of chauvinist tendencies among the narrators requires a separate study. See Abou El Fadl, *The authoritative and the authoritarian* 71, note 60, who suggests that discourses on women prostrating to their husbands are “largely chauvinistic, and possibly immoral.” For an important recent study on gender, ethics and Islam, see Ali, *Sexual ethics*.

52 Notably, there are some versions that do not specify black dogs, and rather consider all dogs equally capable of voiding one's prayer. See for example, Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā* ii, 321; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* vi, 99.

we might ask whether this tradition adversely impacts rules that allow the limited ownership of dogs. Drawing upon the Prophet's exemption of certain dogs from the general command to execute all dogs, the Shāfiʿī jurist al-Nawawī recognized that, in some cases, people should be permitted to own dogs. Those cases are characterized in terms of an individuals' needs and necessities, those which ensure his well-being. Al-Nawawī wrote:

Our companions [i.e., Shāfiʿī jurists] and others agree that it is prohibited to own dogs for reasons other than need (*hāja*), such as owning a dog for the pleasure of its appearance, or out of pride. This is prohibited, without debate. As for the need (*hāja*) for which it is permissible to own a dog, the prophetic tradition includes an exception for any one of three dogs: farming, herding, and hunting. This is permitted without debate.⁵³

The reference to *hāja* is a crucial indication that what is at stake in the prophetic exception to canine execution is an acknowledgment that dogs play an important role in certain activities. Need does not include the joy of a dog's companionship; rather need captures the functional role of a dog in ensuring the success of certain industries in society – industries upon which all of society potentially depends.⁵⁴

But when read alongside the black dog tradition, jurists addressed whether the dogs that can be owned for agricultural purposes must be any color other than black. On the one hand, the black dog is deemed to be an eschatological threat. For example, in most accounts of the black dog tradition, an additional section is added which explains the specification of the color. Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī is asked: "Oh Abū Dharr, what is the [difference] between black dogs, red dogs, and yellow dogs?" Abū Dharr responded: "I asked [that of] the messenger of God, just as you are asking me. He said: 'The black dog is a devil (*shayṭān*).'"⁵⁵ The black dog that voids prayer is no simple dog. It is an evil spirit, a demon dog of hell.⁵⁶

53 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 177.

54 Ibid., iii–iv, 176–7; ix–x, 479–80.

55 Ibid., iii–iv, 450; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* v, 194, 197. See also Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAridat al-aḥwadhī* ii, 133 for reference to the black dog.

56 Incidentally, the association of the dog (particularly the black dog) with the devil is not unique to the medieval Islamic world. European folklore abounds with numerous references to demons and devils in dog form. Quite often, such demon dogs take the form of a black dog. For example, in Cambridge, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk the black dog ghost is: "frequently one-eyed, haunts coasts, fens, roads, and churchyards, and is always ominous . . . In the Isle of Man, there is a vague ghost, sometimes in the form of a black dog,

The Islamic legal tradition's association of the black dog with the devil only reemphasizes the dog's negative value. More than simply being a source of filth and impurity, it is arguably a locus of evil. On the other hand, this is not to deny the useful social purposes that dogs can serve. How must the jurist plot the ruling? To plot the rule in quadrant I, what sort of factors might the jurist take into account? There was, as one might expect, considerable disagreement, especially because limiting ownership of dogs to those that are not black may or may not put a severe burden on the interests of farmers and agricultural laborers. Al-Nawawī tells us, for instance, that some jurists prohibited owning black hunting dogs. Rather such dogs must be killed since they are devils.⁵⁷ But he also related that al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/820), Mālik b. Anas, and the majority of scholars permit one to own black hunting dogs. Al-Nawawī then noted: "The intent of the tradition [about dogs as devils] is not to displace [black dogs] from the dog species entirely."⁵⁸ While the tradition on black dogs might appear inflexible and unforgiving, the juristic debate on canine exceptions suggests that the black dog tradition had more bark than bite. Despite the negative attitude toward black dogs, jurists could not ignore the fact that dogs, black or otherwise, cannot be classified in absolute terms, whether as a pure eschatological threat or as a pure social benefit. Yet in plotting rules of law in

that haunts roads; and in Guernsey, black dogs attack wayfarers during the Twelve Days of Christmas." Brown, *The black dog* 176. Ethel Rudkin, writing in 1938, begins her article on the black dog by noting that the "Black Dog walks in Lincolnshire still; and there are a number of living people who have seen him, heard him, and even felt him." Rudkin, *The black dog* 111. When the black dog appears, it may have two heads or none at all. Its eyes may be as big as saucers. Brown, *The black dog* 180–1. Rudkin's research also indicates that in the British town of Northrope, "there is a Black Dog that haunts the churchyard, known as Barguest." Rudkin, *The black dog* 117. Sometimes the black dog is not necessarily evil. Nevertheless, its common association with evil is undeniable, especially in the regions of Scandinavia and Germany. Brown, *The black dog* 188. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that the black dog would be considered a devil given certain natural circumstances. In her study of the devil in dog form in European folklore, Barbara Allen Woods provides a possible explanation for why black dogs in particular might be associated with evil. She writes: "There is nothing extraordinary or mythical about such an incident. On the contrary it is entirely natural that a dog should be out trotting the deserted streets and paths. It is not even beyond credulity that such an animal would appear black in the darkness, or that its eyes, if they were caught in a faint ray of light, would appear large and fiery . . . Yet, any or all of these normal characteristics can seem positively uncanny, especially when observed under eerie circumstances or in an anxious state of mind." Woods, *The Devil in dog form* 33.

57 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* ix–x, 480; xiii, 76.

58 Ibid.

light of these types of concerns, we can observe the reliance on competing axes of analysis.

Indeed, those axes pose significant challenges when considering the indirect implications of the dog-prayer tradition on the status of women. By juxtaposing women with the black dog, this tradition suggests that the dangers of the black dog's impurity and evil apply to women as well. In fact, some Muslim jurists, relying on this tradition, deemed a man's prayer void if a donkey, black dog, or woman passes in front of him while he prays.⁵⁹ Others, however, omit the donkey and women from the tradition, and instead held that only the dog negates one's prayer. They argued that if a woman or donkey passes in front of a man praying, his prayer is not void, although his concentration in prayer may be interrupted.⁶⁰ This reading dissociates women from dogs, but maintains the link between women and donkeys. Although the animal comparators shift, women remain equated with beasts of burden.

The implications of this tradition were certainly not lost on the jurists. For instance, Ibn Ḥazm reported that ʿĀ'isha complained about the implications of this *ḥadīth*. She said: "You [men] put us [women] in the position of dogs and donkeys. Only the following negate prayer: dogs, donkeys, and cats."⁶¹ As mentioned above, some jurists even omit "women" from the tradition entirely. This exclusion is based on traditions from the Prophet's wife, ʿĀ'isha. It was reported that she was lying down in front of the Prophet while he was praying. If the tradition equating dogs and women were historically accurate, then the Prophet's prayer would have been invalidated by his wife's position in front of him as he prayed. But the Prophet continued to pray undisturbed. Only later when she decided to sit upright did the Prophet move, thus suggesting that his prayer was disturbed. This particular set of events prompted the Andalusian jurist, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), to suggest that as long as ʿĀ'isha was lying down in front of the Prophet, no damage was done. But once she sat upright, she obstructed his prayer prompting him to move, and presumably restart his

59 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 450; Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAṣḥab al-aḥwadhī* ii, 133–4, noted that the Companions Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī, Ibn ʿUmar, Anas, and al-Ḥasan were of this opinion; Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā* ii, 320, adopted the general reading of the tradition, however he made an exception for women who are lying down as if asleep, on the basis of narrations from the Prophet's wife, ʿĀ'isha. These traditions will be discussed below.

60 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 450; Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAṣḥab al-aḥwadhī* ii, 133.

61 Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā* ii, 324. Another view of this tradition narrows its meaning to apply only to menstruating women. Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī challenged this position as being based on weak evidence. Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAṣḥab al-aḥwadhī* ii, 134; Ibn Ḥazm, *Muḥallā* ii, 324.

prayer.⁶² The rationale for Ibn Ḥazm's distinction is less important here than the fact that it has nothing to do with 'Ā'isha as a woman.

Another reading goes so far as to redeem the dog in order to undermine the social implications of the dog-prayer tradition entirely. That reading holds that nothing negates one's prayer. Instead, the black dog tradition relates to the loss of one's concentration. This argument hinges on the way in which the particular Arabic term *qaṭ'* is interpreted. The word *qaṭ'* means to cut or sever, and could connote the voidance of the prayer in this tradition. But many jurists argued that what is "cut" is not the prayer itself, but rather the concentration of the person praying.⁶³ At most, the tradition emphasizes the need to concentrate on prayer and take pains to avoid distractions in prayer when possible. Instead of rendering the animal or woman a roving eschatological danger that can invalidate one's prayer, the majority of jurists put the onus on the person praying to pray in an environment where he can concentrate. In doing so, they remained committed to understanding the tradition in terms of its eschatological significance (its y value), without creating negative social implications (its x value). Thus, they saw the *ḥadīth* as a warning that those who pray should concentrate when convening with their Lord. In this sense, they plotted the resulting rule using a positive y axis while delimiting its social impact almost entirely (i.e., a zero x value).

The multiple interpretations about the black dog tradition illustrate that, despite source-texts providing an apparently clear statement of a rule, the effect of any such rule must be mediated in light of everyday life. By invalidating prayers, dogs are in bad standing with those who are concerned with their eschatological well-being, presumably any Muslim who seeks to commune with God. For such otherworldly-minded people, the danger the dog poses may constitute sufficient justification for a hostile stand against the dog in worldly and mundane affairs. The relationship between the eschatological and the sociological seems evident from the debate among jurists about whether

62 Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Muḥallā* ii, 322.

63 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 450; Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAṣḥat al-aḥwadhī* ii, 134. According to al-Nawawī, some held the tradition to be abrogated by another that states: "Nothing negates one's prayer. Block whatever you can [from crossing]." Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* iii–iv, 450. Ibn al-ʿArabī held that prayers are not voided, given another tradition in which Ibn ʿAbbās narrated as follows: "I was sitting behind [someone] on a donkey when we came upon the Prophet as he and his companions were praying at Mina. We descended from the donkey and entered the prayer line. The donkey passed in front of them, but their prayer was not negated." According to Ibn al-ʿArabī this tradition has two possible explanations: first, nothing negates prayer; second, the prayer leader's *sutra* is a *sutra* for the entire congregation. Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿAṣḥat al-aḥwadhī* ii, 132–3.

black dogs can be owned, or whether they should constitute a special category of dogs, one that is vulnerable to the prophetic command to kill all dogs. The social implications of the eschatological concern are also evident in the way jurists considered the juxtaposition of dogs and women. Not only might black dogs be vulnerable, women might also be ostracized out of concern for their eschatological threat. To avoid such adverse social implications for both dogs and women, the majority position returns to the context of eschatology by reading the black dog tradition as a comment on the responsibility of those who pray. In doing so, the locus of danger shifts from the dog and woman to the individual in prayer who is not fully focused on what he or she is doing. Between the minority and majority positions we find a focus on eschatology, a topic that may fit uneasily with modern conceptions of legal ordering. But as suggested in this study, the eschatological component in these traditions animates broad-ranging concerns about what the polluting dog might mean to Muslims working in the fields, drinking from ponds, or praying in crowded areas.

6 Conclusion

The dog-water tradition is one among many dog-related traditions that contribute to a process of legal reasoning that cannot rely on a neat divide between the “legal” and the “moral,” without at the same time controlling for the institutional assumptions that give the law/morality dichotomy salience and significance. This essay relies on a quadrant model that posits two axes of analysis, the here and the hereafter, as elemental to Muslim jurists’ reasoning about the law. These two axes invoke ideas that may echo sentiments associated with the law/morality distinction; but the two axes also control for the unstated assumptions that may give the law/morality conceptual dichotomy its significance and poignancy. Muslim jurists recognized that the pollution of dogs in matters of ritual not only implicates eschatological concerns; the pollution of dogs for ritual purposes could also have serious implications on mundane matters that have little or nothing to do with ritual practice, and thereby have limited eschatological significance. The dog may have been viewed as a source of impurity that might prevent one from communing with God in prayer; but that view did not end the inquiry. For many jurists, that view constituted the beginning of an analytic process that contended with the complexity of human needs and lived experience. That process could not ignore the interests associated with what might be considered in contemporary parlance ‘moral,’ – if not ‘religious’ and thereby private – nor could it ignore those interests that

might be considered 'legal.' However, to rely upon the dichotomy between the 'legal' and the 'moral' imposes a modern bifurcation that does not adequately explain what Muslim jurists were doing when working with competing source-texts, whether Quranic verses or *ḥadīth* texts. Adopting the quadrants model of analysis allows us to appreciate that the legitimacy and authority of any doctrinal rule depends on how it is plotted in light of two axes of analysis, one which is concerned with the individual's relationship with God and the other that is concerned with individual experience and social well-being. In other words, the jurists plotted doctrinal rules in terms of interests that pertain to both the here and the hereafter. By plotting a doctrinal rule in terms of both the here and the hereafter, I do not mean to distinguish the Islamic model of analysis from other modes of legal interpretation. Indeed, the rationales for the various rules noted above are highly rational and reasonable; their rationality is clear when we appreciate and understand the frame of reference or background factor that makes juristic reasoning intelligible. The dichotomy between law and morality is certainly an important dichotomy as it pertains to contemporary legal theory in the modern state. But it does not fully capture the framework that animated Muslim jurists in the past, whose presumptions about political society, and its relationship to the law, were different from ours today. The quadrants model shows how Muslim jurists reasoned and reached doctrinal outcomes in light of concerns that are not easily captured by contemporary philosophies of law, although that does not mean such concerns are unintelligible or irrational. Each doctrinal rule arises from a complex process of legal reasoning amidst axes of analysis that reflect fundamental concerns that lie at the heart of the Islamic legal worldview.

But why offer the quadrants model at all? In a world coming to terms with the growing significance of religion in the public sphere,⁶⁴ we cannot ignore

64 The increased relevance of religion (and in particular Islam) to debates about liberal governance and the public sphere in North America and Europe is evident in increasing scholarly attention to the issue of religion and the public sphere. For important scholarship on the issue, see Casanova, *Public religions in the modern world*; Casanova, *Public religions revisited*. Increasingly universities in North America and Europe are initiating centers devoted to the study of religion in the public sphere. See for instance, the University of Toronto's *Religion in the public sphere* (<http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/rps/>); The Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, at the State University of New York Buffalo sponsors working groups on Law and Religion and Law, Religion and Culture (<http://www.law.buffalo.edu/BALDYCENTER/research.htm>); The University of Exeter in the United Kingdom is the home of the European Muslim Research Centre (<http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/emrc/>). In terms of policy development, Quebec's Reasonable Accommodation Commission, led by Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard, illustrates that even

the imperative to grapple with the difficult challenge of living together amidst our differences. All too often, that challenge is met with political rhetoric and polemics, leading to public policies that not only perpetuate stereotypes, but also marginalize, if not demonize, those who are deemed different. This tendency was certainly evident in the 2005 debate in Ontario, Canada that concerned *sharīʿa*-based family law arbitration,⁶⁵ and it took center stage again in 2010 when the Swiss constitution was amended by a popular referendum to ban the erection of minarets for mosques in the country.⁶⁶

Yet, this polemic is confirmed by stories of Muslims who adhere to an uncompromising, inflexible, and at times an oppressive version of *sharīʿa*. Such stories include, for instance, Muslim taxi drivers who refuse to drive blind passengers accompanied by seeing-eye dogs, on the basis that dogs are impure according to Islamic law.⁶⁷ Such cases are often described in liberal constitutional terms as examples of rights in conflict: the rights of the disabled versus the rights of the religious adherent.

Resolving such conflicts is no easy matter. But that difficulty is not unique to a liberal constitutional system of law and order; nor will it always find an amenable resolution in liberal, constitutional terms of analysis and reference. For instance, such stories may situate the conflict in terms of a distinction and division between the public and the private, the secular and religious, the church and the state, and the law and morality.

The quadrants model developed above offers additional analytic terms to characterize such conflicts. These terms, described above as axes of analysis, take into account the dynamics of Islamic legal reasoning, without precluding the possibility of dialogue between the animating principles of different legal systems. Furthermore, the quadrants model has an important consequence: it counters the tendency to place Islamic doctrinal rules in contemporary categories such as the 'religious' or even the 'cultural.' Too often such terms are code for the 'irrational,' and thereby place debates about Islamic law and its significance for Muslims outside the realm of conscientious reasoned deliberation about law, order, and good governance.⁶⁸ The quadrants model, therefore, offers a way of unpacking the significance of a given legal rule by emphasizing

governments are not immune from contending with the place of religion in the public sphere (for official website, see <http://www.accommodements.qc.ca/index-en.html>).

65 For a commentary on the tenor and tone of the debate, and its marginalizing implications, see Bakht, *Muslim barbarians* 67–82.

66 Caldwell, *No minarets, please* 9; Nurrohman, *A lesson to draw* 7.

67 Brothers, *Cabbie refused ride to guide dog* B2; Saleh, *Dirty dogs* i, 27.

68 Brown, *Regulating aversion* 152–4.

the competing interests at stake. It shifts the focus from debating about the authoritative hold of a given rule, to appreciating and accounting for the rational inputs that made the rule intelligible in a given period or era.

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Perceptions of Paradise in the Writings of Julius Wellhausen, Mark Lidzbarski, and Hans Heinrich Schaeder

*Ludmila Hanisch**

In his book on Europe's interest in the Quran during the Protestant Reformation, Hartmut Bobzin observes, "The full range of reasons for the study of Islam, and of the Quran in particular, can only be understood in the context of the theological disputes related to the Reformation."¹ Here, in addition to proselytization efforts, familiarity with the enemy (who was standing at the gates of Vienna), commercial interests, and a policy of foreign alliances, Bobzin was referring to the significance the confrontation with the alien religion would have for the development of Christian doctrine.

In the seventeenth century, theologians held the Quran to be a grossly inferior imitation of the Bible, and even in the early eighteenth century, the phrase "Mohammedan doctrine" was used pejoratively to denote a non-canonical tenet. Following the Enlightenment and the ensuing Romanticism movement, a strictly theological motivation for study ceased, and independence from the quest for theological knowledge was generally emphasized. Attempts to criticize religion through references to non-Christian belief also fell into relative oblivion.²

Though the religious elements of Oriental studies did not completely disappear from the consciousness of academic specialists (who gradually focused more on linguistic problems and literary texts during the nineteenth century), they were increasingly relegated to the background in scholarly endeavors. Nonetheless, in the nineteenth century, Heinrich Ewald maintained the link, "... and it is indeed true that the Bible – apart from its theological essence – appertains to the Orient."³ Even H.L. Fleischer, the staunch proponent of a

* Sadly, as this book was in preparation, we learned of the untimely passing of Dr. Ludmila Hanisch of Berlin.

1 Bobzin, *Zeitalter der Reformation* 8.

2 One result of Marchand's extensive study *German Orientalism* is that in the era under scrutiny, the findings of Orientalist research also influenced Christian theological discourse.

3 Ewald, Plan 10.

philological approach towards the Middle East reminded his audience, "We old Orientalists are, in fact, all theologians manqué."⁴

In his history of Arabic studies, Johann Fück emphasized that an unprejudiced study of Islam came into existence only after German Orientalists ceased to be swayed by theological modes of thought.⁵ However, the emphasis with which the dissociation from religious considerations was stressed reflected a self-conception that, at that point, had been only partially implemented at the institutional level.

A survey of Semitic studies at German universities reveals that at the beginning of the twentieth century one-third of the faculty members still taught in the faculty of theology. This revelation, coupled with the finding that Indic studies, too, were not outside the influence of theological developments at some universities, suggests the need to take another, deeper look at the link between theology and Orientalist research.⁶ A review of the main fields of research and teaching at several Near and Middle Eastern Studies departments in Germany over the past decades indicates that it would be advisable to include local Christian theological traditions in the consideration of the history of German Orientalism.

Even the academic interaction with France – the "blessed oriental paradise" (Fleischer) where many individuals who later held professorships in Germany in the area of Orientalism attended university – did not always do away with the influence of different local theological traditions. It must be noted, though, that German academia never emulated its Continental neighbor's strict secularist standards. Furthermore, Germany – unlike France – never possessed colonial territories, the majority of whose inhabitants were Muslims.⁷ A diachronic examination of the relationships between Orientalist studies and theology at specific universities would make it possible to clarify the special way in which they were interwoven until well into the twentieth century. For individual universities, investigations of the subject already exist.⁸

4 Schaefer quoted this sentence in his inaugural lecture in Leipzig entitled "Die Idee der orientalischen Religionsgeschichte" 13.

5 Fück, *Die arabischen Studien* 97, 124, 158, 181.

6 This has recently emerged in regard to Indology, see Sengupta, *From salon to discipline* and Rabault-Ferrière, *L'archive des origines* 92–9.

7 In France, there were no departments of theology except at the University of Strasbourg. For a recent study of the influence of colonial history on the study of Arabic in France, see Messaoudi, *Savants, conseillers, médiateurs*.

8 Preissler, *Orientalische Studien*; Schnurrer, *Lehrer der Hebräischen Literatur*.

1 Scope and Focus of Analysis

At the time of its founding in 1737, Göttingen's Georg August University did not grant its theology department pre-eminence over other faculties, as was the tradition elsewhere. This fact suggests that a deeper study of this institution is in order.

In 1745, the appointment of Johann David Michaelis to an Old Testament studies professorship in the Faculty of Philosophy of Georg August University created an academic position unique in the German university landscape. Göttingen's differentiation between science and revelation (or conviction) actually took on concrete form at the institutional level, even before the Humboldtian university model – with its privileging of the Faculty of Philosophy – was put into practice in Berlin. It is said that thanks to his appointment to the Faculty of Philosophy, Michaelis – who left the pietistic atmosphere of the University of Halle for Göttingen – enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy in comparison with colleagues who worked in an atmosphere of the ecclesiastical dogma that prevailed in the Faculty of Theology.⁹ Götz von Selle's rendition of the history of the Georg August University's foundation reveals the repeated emphasis placed on the efforts of the institution's founders to distinguish its course offerings from those at Halle.¹⁰

The focus here is the degree to which scholars' early experience with a particular religious socialization impacted their interest in Orientalist research. Exposure to religious training at a formative stage of life certainly may increase sensitivity with regard to the strength and extent of one's religious commitment. It must be noted that while experience of this type of scholar certainly does not preclude an inclination toward agnosticism or atheism, growing up in the household of a pastor or rabbi certainly has a justifiable reputation for decisively directing a child's intellectual development, frequently away from explicitly religious studies and pursuits.¹¹

My analysis focuses on the presentation of Near Eastern religions by three scholars who taught Semitic and Oriental philology from the last third of the nineteenth to the middle of the twentieth century: Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), Mark Lidzbarski (1868–1928), and Hans Heinrich Schaeder (1896–1957). They were selected because their teaching activities took place in an era when Orientalist studies in Germany were primarily engaged in philology and occasionally history; these studies also held that the Near East was scientifically

9 Loewenbrueck, *Judenfeindschaft im Zeitalter der Aufklärung* 88.

10 Selle, *Universität zu Göttingen 1737–1937*.

11 Snouck Hurgronje, *de Goeje* 7.

uninteresting,¹² despite increasingly intense interactions through voyages, commerce, and colonization.¹³ The growing interest in the Near East caused an expansion in the number of Orientalist teaching institutions and supported what at first was less of a paradigm change than a diversification of the discipline into various special subjects. This era saw both the division of the courses offered into Semitic and Indo-European languages, and the creation of Assyriology as an independent subject in its own right.¹⁴

The three scholars selected here, who externally manifested detachment from their religious convictions, are representatives of a gradual phase of revolution. Their earlier religious or theological training inspired their work, helped shape their investigations, and doubtlessly influenced their research, which had apparently non-theological objectives. Their research did not necessarily require travel to the Near East or South Asia, and they appeared disinclined to do so. Only Mark Lidzbarski is known to have made such a trip – to Istanbul to study manuscripts.

2 Julius Wellhausen

With regard to Julius Wellhausen, the works of Rudolf Smend – probably the person most familiar with Wellhausen's life and output – serve as a reference. He called Wellhausen a “pioneer in three disciplines”: The Old Testament scholar who dealt intensively with the history of Israel and came – via a detour through Arabic studies – to the New Testament.¹⁵

The son of an orthodox Protestant pastor, Julius Wellhausen studied theology in Göttingen. Among his teachers was the theologian Heinrich Ewald, who, in addition to Oriental languages, instructed him in the analysis of academic issues – which included Ewald's emphasis on the significance of the Bible for Near Eastern research. After several years as a professor of theology in Greifswald, Wellhausen no longer wanted to take part in the training of

12 Becker, Hartmann 231.

13 For a full presentation of the evolution of Orientalist research in Göttingen, it would be necessary to include Johann David Michaelis, Heinrich Ewald, and others. They, however, were part of an era in which there was not yet an assertion of independence from theology.

14 Renger, *Altorientalistik*. In this context, it should be pointed out that the Assyriologist Friedrich Delitzsch was searching for the geographic location of paradise, see Delitzsch, *Paradies*.

15 Smend, *Julius Wellhausen*.

pastors. He applied to the Ministry of Education and first received a position as an associate professor in the Faculty of Philosophy at Halle.¹⁶ After a period in Marburg, he went to Göttingen where he was the last theologian to teach Old Testament studies in the Faculty of Philosophy. After his death, his work had a better reception among theologians than Orientalists; for the former, his output on the history of Israel was of greater interest than that pertaining to the Arabs.

Carl Heinrich Becker and Enno Littmann were among those Orientalists who especially appreciated Wellhausen. Becker had studied Wellhausen's Arabist work for his dissertation, and Enno Littmann, who briefly succeeded Wellhausen as professor at Göttingen, intended to write a biography of Wellhausen, but this never materialized. Thus, the most comprehensive study of Wellhausen the Arabist appeared about twenty-five years ago, authored by Kurt Rudolph, an expert in religious studies.¹⁷ Wellhausen explained his interest in early Islamic history with the pregnant quote: "... to become acquainted with the wild stem onto which priests and prophets have grafted the rice of Jahve's Thora."¹⁸ Through this wish to gain familiarity with the pristine form of ancient Israel, he went beyond the requirements of Biblical exegesis. For Wellhausen, the history of the ancient Arabs – and not their holy book – contained information about the ancient Hebrews. He considered Muḥammad first and foremost a statesman and called the Quran the prophet's most meagre accomplishment.¹⁹

Wellhausen, coming from a Protestant milieu, considered Islam's "catholicism" (universality/*jamā'īyya*) as an attribute that was both conservative and compliant with the powers that be. In contrast, he favored the idea of a theocracy recognized and accepted by individual believers.²⁰ For him, the subjective feeling of affiliation with a religion was more important than the institutions stipulated by the orthodoxy. His ideal was a religiosity without priests and prophets.

Since he concentrated on early Islamic history, Wellhausen's comments on Islam's vision of the afterlife are sparse. In his famous historical work *Das arabische Reich und sein Sturz*, it is the opposition parties who strove for entrance to paradise. After Muḥammad's death, the Kharijites (*khawārij*) fought on the

16 Jepsen, Wellhausen in Greifswald 51–2.

17 Rudolph, Wellhausen als Arabist.

18 Wellhausen, *Muhammed in Medina* 5.

19 Smend, *Julius Wellhausen* 31; Wellhausen, *Mohammedanism* 561.

20 Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien* 12; Rudolph, Wellhausen als Arabist 38; Wellhausen, *Das arabische Reich* 310.

battlefield in order to gain access to heaven.²¹ Around the middle of the eighth century, they redirected their endeavors toward a terrestrial kingdom, no longer sacrificing themselves in an effort to reach paradise.²²

3 Mark Lidzbarski

Mark Lidzbarski is less well-known than Wellhausen. In 1917, when he was a professor at Greifswald, he was appointed to take over the chair of Semitic philology in Göttingen. In the correspondence of his peers, his name is always mentioned with great respect and his works are invariably characterized in a positive light. The Royal Society of Sciences in Göttingen supported his publications, even in economically difficult times. Lidzbarski's autobiography, *Auf rauhem Wege*, appeared anonymously and ends with the beginning of his years as a university student in Berlin. This book is reminiscent of the image of his preschool instruction that Ignaz Goldziher portrayed in his diary.²³

Abraham Mordechai Lidzbarski was born the son of a Hasidic businessman in Płock – in the Russian part of Poland at the time, on the right bank of the Vistula River. In those days, the city had about 20,000 inhabitants, 25–36 percent of whom were Jewish. The majority were either *chassidim* (pious) or *mitnaggedim* (opponents) and were initially rivals in Poland, but from the middle of the nineteenth century, any tension between these rivals lost its significance when both groups united against the “enlightened” Jews of the *Haskalah*.²⁴ Lidzbarski attended a Chassidic school at the age of three and began studying the Talmud at age six. His descriptions evoke the image of an obscurantist environment that one might expect to find in the easternmost corner of Halychyna better known as Galicia, rather than in a small town on the bank of the Vistula between Posen and Warsaw.²⁵ Lidzbarski's teachers were all

21 Muḥammad's first supporters were organized like an army, Wellhausen, *Arab kingdom* 65.

22 Wellhausen, *Arab kingdom* 388. In Wellhausen, *Oppositionsparteien* 57 is the saying handed down by Mughira (between 668 and 671), that he was not willing to spill Muslim blood and in this way forfeit his way into heaven.

23 Goldziher, *Tagebuch*; Lidzbarski, *Auf rauhem Wege*. In a review, Hans Heinrich Schaeder called the book a “documentation of the history of education of considerable significance,” Schaeder, Review of M. Lidzbarski, *Auf rauhem Wege*, 817.

24 Guesnet, *Polnische Juden*; Wodziński, *Haskalah and Hasidim*.

25 His observation that few demands were made on the daughters of Jewish families in regard to religious training is noteworthy. They were permitted to attend Polish schools where they acquired some knowledge of modern foreign languages, *Auf rauhem Wege* 91–2.

Chassidim and he described the origin of this trend as the consolidation of Judaism in an unadorned form, the “deeper-minded nature” in all religions in which a revival is sought. The way out in this case was to turn to mysticism.²⁶ He later became acquainted with representatives of the Jewish *Haskalah*, the “free spirits” whose knowledge impressed him. Instead of pursuing a rabbinical career as his family wished, Lidzbarski strove to become an “astronomer.”²⁷

At the age of fifteen, he secretly took a ferryboat across the Vistula in order to learn something “worth knowing.”²⁸ After attending a German grammar school in Posen, where he was fortuitously introduced to the Arabic language by Hartwig Hirschfeld, Lidzbarski studied Near Eastern languages at the Berlin University.²⁹ He pursued his goals despite a precarious financial situation. When still a student, he converted to Protestantism and from that point on used the name Mark Lidzbarski. He never revealed whether he had abandoned Judaism out of conviction or whether the atmosphere in the German Empire made a conversion most opportune. In any case, despite his conversion, he never described his original community with any disdain whatsoever. After receiving his PhD in Berlin, for which he was examined by Eduard Sachau and Eberhard Schrader, Lidzbarski completed his postdoctoral thesis in 1896 in Kiel.³⁰ In 1907, he was appointed the successor to Wilhelm Ahlwardt in Greifswald.

In the scholarly world, Lidzbarski was best known for his works on North Semitic epigraphy. He was intensely interested in the Mandaean, an interest that colleagues emphasized in their recommendation that he be selected for the Greifswald professorship. They described “the elucidation of the dark Mandaean literature, which is particularly important for the history of religion” as being his “actual aim in life.”³¹

26 Ibid., 82.

27 Ibid., 31, 146. The autobiography was discussed by Klanska, *Aus dem Schtetl in die Welt* 254 and 278–83.

28 Some decades before him, Julius Fürst had chosen a similar path. In 1820, at the age of fifteen, Fürst also left his hometown in Prussian territory and later worked in Leipzig. Vogel, *Der Orientalist Julius Fürst* 41.

29 Hartwig Hirschfeld (1854 Thorn/Province of Posen – 1934 Ramsgate/England). In 1889, Lidzbarski is listed as a student on the attendance list of the former Friedrich-Wilhelms University.

30 Promotionsakte Lidzbarski, Faculty of Philosophy, no. 315, sheet 437, archive of the Humboldt University of Berlin.

31 The document from the Greifswald Faculty of Philosophy’s appointment commission is in I HA, Rep. 76 Va, Sect. 7, Tit. 4, Nr. 22, Vol. 17, sheet 163. GSTA – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem.

Until today, specialists in the field view Lidzbarski's editions of Mandaean texts, which he worked on continually during his entire scholarly life, as being second in importance only to Nöldeke's *Mandäische Grammatik*.³² This respect is due to his having organized these texts – which also contained liturgies – on a sound philological basis; the introductions in the editions are brief and contain mainly technical explanations. Lidzbarski stated that the reason for his occupation with this religious community was that Mandaeism is the only Gnostic sect from which literature has been preserved. He described its significance by saying: "I don't know whether many who delve into the Mandaean religion can visualize what an enormous revolution it represented in regard to everything that preceded it."³³

Lidzbarski's research dealt with Jewish influences on Near Eastern Gnosticism, for which he primarily relied on philological evidence.³⁴ His investigations led him to postulate that the Mandaeans were of western origin, from the Palestinian-Syrian region, even though they later settled in Mesopotamia. His work *Alter und Heimat der mandäischen Religion*, which he wrote shortly before his death, displays the fervor he felt for this topic; it contained harsh criticism of the theologian Erik Peterson's lecture "Urchristentum und Mandäismus."³⁵

According to Lidzbarski, the Mandaeans focused exclusively on the life beyond, resulting in their failure to keep a written history. They regarded paradise as dwellings (*Shkinas*) flooded with light that received the soul after a journey through the world of light.³⁶ Lidzbarski's research goals and methods must be sought in his liturgy editions since he made only a few comments about them in his other works. His compilations of Mandaean texts documented the

32 Nöldeke, *Mandäische Grammatik*.

33 Lidzbarski, *Alter und Heimat* 384. In 1870, the Arabist and dialectologist Albert Socin traveled to Kurna on the lower Euphrates, the region of the last remnants of those who are seen to be Mandaeans. He was not able, however, to implement his plan to make voice recordings.

34 Later research has confirmed this. See also Rudolph, *Die Mandäer* 253: "The obvious Jewish colouring of this religion permits postulation of its western (Palestinian-Syrian) roots. These ultimately date back to a Judaism that had become heretical and was moved into the maelstrom of this late-antique religion by the Gnostic movement, . . ."

35 Peterson, *Urchristentum und Mandäismus*.

36 For example, Lidzbarski, *Mandäische Liturgien* 86, 181–2, 204, etc. A central aspect of their ritual was baptism in flowing water that they believed came from the north. Lidzbarski dedicated *Mandäische Liturgien* to Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920), who represented the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule (History of Religions School), which was not well regarded by the Göttingen theologians.

significance of Judaism for the Gnostic religious communities. He felt that the Mandaean religion and beliefs continued to have an impact on the cultures of the Near Eastern peoples and were not obliterated by later influences.

4 Hans Heinrich Schaefer

Hans Heinrich Schaefer focused his scholarly attention on another branch of pre-Christian Gnosticism: Manicheism. When Hans Heinrich was born, his father, Erich Schaefer, was an associate professor of Protestant theology in Göttingen. Hans Heinrich Schaefer completed his studies in Theology and Orientalism in Breslau, where Franz Praetorius served as his PhD supervisor.³⁷ Even as a young scholar, Schaefer had already made a name for himself with works on the history of religion in pre-Islamic Iran, for which he had been prepared by Josef Markwart, one of his teachers. In 1924, he took part in the discussion of the various influences on, and strata of, the syncretistic religious communities in the Near East with a long treatise entitled “Urform und Fortbildungen des manichäischen Systems.”³⁸

After earning his post-doctoral teaching degree in 1926, Schaefer undertook work in Königsberg and, following a brief period in Leipzig, he held a position in Berlin from 1931 to 1944. These academic posts indicate his stature as a scholar. He did not return to the city of his birth until after the Second World War in 1948, when he was appointed to the chair of Oriental Philology and Religious Studies, which, after 1945, was the title of the position that had been held by both Wellhausen and Lidzbarski. It was during this period that he converted to Catholicism. Schaefer held Wellhausen's work in high regard and took pleasure in the fact that he now sat in his esteemed predecessor's chair.³⁹

37 On 16 May 1919, Arthur Schaade introduced Hans Heinrich Schaefer to the Orientalist Carl Heinrich Becker, who worked in the Ministry of Education at the time. Of Schaefer, he wrote: “He is a very unusually talented individual . . . I believe his future plans go in the direction of comparative religious history. I already have a tendency to see him as a ‘coming man.’” Estate of Becker, C.H., Rep. 92, no. 3693, GSTA – Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin-Dahlem.

38 Schaefer, *Urform* 15–107. Lidzbarski criticized Schaefer's assumption that Mani introduced a writing reform in a brief article entitled “Warum schrieb Mānī aramäisch?”

39 Letter by Schaefer to H.S. Nyberg from 5 July 1946, 58. In his 1936 article “Orientforschung und abendländisches Geschichtsbild,” Schaefer conferred a position of honor on Wellhausen as a representative of “profound Occidental solidarity in the perception of things Oriental” 388.

The history of religion in pre-Islamic Iran was a focal point of activity throughout his academic career. He held its tenets more highly than Islamic doctrine, which he viewed as “an Arab layer of the Near Eastern religions of redemption.”⁴⁰ In regard to Manicheism, he sought to analyze the mutual influence of Greek thinking and oriental religion.⁴¹ He clung firmly to his plan to write a *Handbook of Old Persian*, even though the issue was put on hold due to his manifold interests and tasks; in the end, this work never appeared.

According to Schaeder, Mani, the founder of the religion, grew up in the presence of the Mandeans and included Iranian elements in his doctrine. This included the characteristic radical dualism between light and darkness, as well as the conflict between the empire of good and the empire of evil. The goal of the struggle is the liberation of light, which forms the main component of the eschatology. Through asceticism and abstinence, the human being can reach gnosis, or true, salvific knowledge; evil darkness flees and returns to the light. Mani, whom Schaeder considered to have finalized the Hellenistic-Oriental gnosis, promoted a unidirectional tendency toward such a mode of salvation.⁴²

In his conception of Manicheism, the Jewish components of the history of Near Eastern religion are relegated to the background. This becomes clear when his works are compared with those of Lidzbarski. In 1929, Schaeder wrote about his preoccupation with the history of religion to the Swedish theologian and Iranist Nyberg, “It is strange to me: I increasingly recoil from the type of history of religion whose tone has been set in the last forty years and come ever closer to ‘conservative’ theological consideration, although I personally have absolutely no theological interests.”⁴³ Schaeder understood the term “conservative theological consideration” to mean interest in the “spiritual content of the sources,” whereas he felt the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* only dealt with the “external trappings.”

A year later, he assumed the Fleischer professorship in Leipzig and, despite his statement denying that he had any interest in theology, in his inaugural lecture entitled “Die Idee der orientalischen Religionsgeschichte,” he promoted the Old Testament to the rank of a classical corpus for the analysis of Oriental religions. Furthermore, he postulated that a theological orientation would protect the Orientalists from “arcane research into antiquity,” as well as animate

40 Schaeder, Arabien I. Vorislamisch 460.

41 Schaeder, *Urform* 16.

42 Ibid., 106.

43 Letter by Schaeder to H.S. Nyberg dated 5 April 1929, 5. Schaeder's works on the history of religion were compiled after his death by his student Carsten Colpe and were published in one volume with a lengthy epilogue: *Studien zur Orientalischen Religionsgeschichte*.

the dialogue between Christians and humanists.⁴⁴ He viewed the latter as a fertile evolution of the Greek heritage in the Occident, whereas the Orient was only a passive recipient of this heritage. To him, the history of Oriental religion meant a history of decline. The prophets had been able to maintain the balance between escape from the world and openness to it, but after Jesus, a process of disintegration set in, of which Mani and Muḥammad were emblematic.

5 Conclusion

This study of the aforementioned three Orientalists' perspectives on various Near Eastern religions has necessarily been offered in broad strokes. Nonetheless, it is evident that their own religious training and personal relationships to religion influenced their selection of the fields and topics with which they dealt so intensively. Eschatology and the end of days played a subordinate role in this process, and descriptions of the details of rituals and myths were equally negligible.

Even though all of these scholars clearly recognized the powerful effect religious ideas had on the development of Near Eastern history, their approaches differed in regard to the issue of the persistence and changeability of religious traditions. In this area, their respective interests in history was of greater influence.

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PART 11

*Paradise Meets Modernity – The Dynamics of
Paradise Discourse in the Nineteenth,
Twentieth, and Twenty-First Centuries*



Islam and Paradise are Sheltered under the Shade of Swords: Phallocentric Fantasies of Paradise in Nineteenth-Century Acehnese War Propaganda and their Lasting Legacy

Edwin P. Wieringa*

1 No Sex Please, We're Muslims

The blurb on the dust jacket of John Esposito's *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* self-assuredly asserts that this Q&A book on Islam is "the first place to look for information," written by "one of America's leading authorities on Islam." This unabashed claim to expertise and learning aroused my curiosity, and prompted me to start my inquiry into concepts of paradise in Islam by consulting Esposito's guidebook. Though I did not expect a quick and easy answer, I was disconcerted to find that Esposito's opaque language makes it rather difficult to grasp what kind of supreme happiness Islam promises its adherents in the afterlife: "Quranic descriptions of heavenly bliss are life-affirming, emphasizing the beauty of creation and enjoyment of its pleasures within the limits set by God."¹ Joy within limits sounds rather dull and stern, and the exact nature of these joys remains anyone's guess. Esposito speaks nebulously about "the pleasures of heavenly gardens of bliss," and contrasts the "comprehensive and integrated" Islamic images of heaven with the "more sedate, celibate" paradise of Christianity.² "The Quran," Esposito tells us, "does not draw a distinction between enjoying the joys of beatific vision and those of the fruits of creation."³

It is not clear what exactly this means; it does not tell us much about the kind of enjoyment the Muslim celestial elect may experience. Does it involve

* Prof. Willem van der Molen and Nico van Rooijen, MA at the KITLV in Leiden kindly helped me with the illustrations of Abdullah Arif's *Nasib Atjeh*. I also would like to thank Dr. S. Suryadi for providing me with photos of manuscript Cod. Or. 8747c of Leiden University Library.

1 Esposito, *What everyone needs* 28.

2 Ibid., 29.

3 Ibid.

having sex with *ḥūrīs*? Apparently not, because Esposito translates the term *ḥūrīs* as “beautiful companions,” stating that

[t]he Quran makes no reference to a sexual role for the houris, but *some* Western critics have rendered houris as meaning ‘virgins’ and seized upon one popular belief that has been used to motivate *some* Muslim suicide bombers. However, *many* Quranic commentators and *most* Muslims understand houris as virgins only in the sense of pure or purified souls.⁴

What does this overwrought rhetoric mean? Something like “No sex please, we’re Muslims”?

In order to comprehend Esposito’s stilted dense prose, we should bear in mind that the issue of *ḥūrīs* is a very sensitive one, given its use as a stock argument in polemics against Islam as essentially a primitive, sensual religion, engrossed in worldly pleasure. Apparently wishing to avoid the pitfall of stereotyping Islam as depraved, Esposito goes to the other extreme, turning the notion of the *ḥūrīs* into spiritualized creatures that have no sexual potential at all. As David Cook makes clear, however, such denial of the existence of sexual themes as intrinsic parts of Islamic visions of paradise is a gross distortion of the prevailing evidence: “It is impossible to find any classical Muslim exegete who understood the verses concerning the houris as anything other than references to women whose purpose was to provide sexual pleasure for the blessed in heaven.”⁵ Aziz al-Azmeh, too, writes that before Muslims came “under the influence of nineteenth century European Puritanism,” Islamic discourse on paradise was essentially on “carnal pleasures and the sumptuousness of victuals and provisions.”⁶

It is hardly surprising that over the last years, stories about the sexual motives of ‘testosterone terrorists’ have tantalized Western media. On account of the public debate caused by the sanguinary actions of so-called jihadists (or *mujāhidīn*, defenders of the faith, or literally, “strugglers”), even non-Muslims now seem to know that the Islamic heaven offers the champions of the faith unlimited pleasures of the flesh. The main reaction in the Euro-Atlantic world has been a mixture of disbelief, ridicule, and even scorn, reinforcing age-long clichés of Islamic backwardness and the ‘sex-craved Arab.’ Reputedly, Muslim

4 Ibid., emphasis added.

5 Cook, *Martyrdom* 33. Elsewhere, too, Cook takes issue with “the works of John Esposito, whose writings on the subject of jihad border between the scholarly and the apologetic,” see Cook, *Understanding* 41.

6 Al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 216, 218.

suicide bombers choose death in the firm belief that they will be welcomed in paradise by seventy-two curvaceous celestial playmates.⁷ It is a telling fact that one of the best-known controversial Danish Muḥammad cartoons (a satirical drawing depicting a Mullah, supposedly representing the Prophet Muḥammad greeting disheveled suicide bombers lined up on a cloud as if in heaven and imploring them to stop killing themselves because paradise has run out of virgins), which first appeared in the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005, was immediately understood by the general observer.

Unbelievable though it may seem, in the so-called spiritual manual of the attackers of 9/11 the young Muslim warriors, in the last night before the assault, are instructed to be optimistic as ‘marriage’ is ahead.⁸ A wedding with the heavenly brides will be their guaranteed ultimate reward: “Know that the Heavens have raised their most beautiful decoration for you, and that your heavenly brides are calling you: ‘Come oh follower of God,’ while wearing their most beautiful jewelry.”⁹ Obviously, this is not the kind of language that many postcolonial scholars in the West are comfortable with. For example, Hans Kippenberg, a noted scholar of comparative religious studies, comments that “[t]he topic of the wedding of the martyr with the heavenly brides intensifies the feeling of inconceivability that befalls Western observers regarding Muslim concepts of martyrdom.”¹⁰ Ill at ease with this outré rhetoric, he refers to the historian Malise Ruthven, who in Kippenberg’s view “has tried to open a path to understanding” here, by arguing that according to al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), the sexual imagery of paradise should be seen as an inducement to righteousness. So, just like Esposito, Kippenberg rejects, offhand, a literal interpretation of the wedding trope, and instead opts for a more refined, deeper meaning of the text: “The state of spiritual fulfilment can only be described in terms of familiar experiences.”¹¹

The uneasiness with ‘vulgar’ matters (i.e., affairs related to sex or bodily functions, the word ‘vulgar’ tellingly can be traced back to the Latin *vulgaris*,

7 Whereas Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 165 describe the *ḥūrīs* as “buxom,” al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 226 argues that the heavenly consorts in pre-modern texts answered to a “bookish medieval Arab-Islamic canon of feminine beauty.” The shape of their breasts should be “the small breasts of pubescent girls in early adolescence,” conjoined to a “very narrow waist and unnaturally huge buttocks,” see al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 226.

8 Kippenberg, *The spiritual manual* 41.

9 Cited in *ibid.*, 45.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Ibid.* Kippenberg refers to Ruthven, *A fury* 102. On the meaning of *ḥūrīs* and heavenly marriage, see also S. Griffith’s contribution to the present publication.

derived from *vulgus* 'common people') may perhaps be typical for the elite group of intellectuals everywhere, *sui generis*.¹² In his essay on pre-modern Muslim views concerning love and sex in paradise, Franz Rosenthal observes that only "[r]are thinkers came to the wise conclusion that the situation in Paradise cannot be understood and conveyed in human terms."¹³ Conversely, he notes that "[o]rdinary people, like true believers, saw the delights of Paradise in human terms," and that nearly all traditional Islamic fantasies about paradise are male-designed.¹⁴ Male fantasizing about "effortless eating, drinking and cohabiting" for all eternity reflects an era that predates political correctness.¹⁵ In their reference book *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Jane Idleman Smith and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad notice a heavy emphasis in traditional literature on "the specifically physical pleasures encountered with the females of the Garden and the clear indication that if desired the believer can in fact have children," but remarkably few discussions on this can be found in modern works.¹⁶

Contemporary Muslim exegetes commonly avoid discussing the enthralling particulars in the abode of the blessed, instead they merely comment that the pleasures of the next world are "really beyond human comprehension,"¹⁷ and I am in no position to say whether nowadays raging hormones and sexual frustration could really play a role in motivating some angry young men to blow themselves up in anticipation of an afterlife of eternal sexual gratification and other sensual pleasures. I lack the expertise to theorize about terrorism, and hence it is not my intention to join the chorus of commentators who now try to explain what makes Islamic suicide bombers tick.

12 As the sociologist of religion Martin Riesebrodt points out, there is "a plurality of understandings of religion that are specific to different groups and categories of people and in their interaction with each other." He provides the example of intellectuals who tend to prioritize theoretical discourse regarding worldviews, metaphysics, and doctrine, whereas bureaucrats and rulers will emphasize the aspects of authority, order, and morality. See Martin Riesebrodt, *Religion* 17. Common people, then, would seem to be primarily interested in more 'common' issues. Cf. the view held by the Arabic-writing Persian philosopher and historian Miskawayh (said to have died in 421/1030, aged then a hundred, see Arkoun, *Miskawayh* 143) that "the sensual view of Paradise is one held by ignorant degenerates and uncouth commoners," see al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 219.

13 Rosenthal, *Reflections* 7.

14 *Ibid.*, 23 (citation); *ibid.*, 22 (male fantasies).

15 I owe the pithy formulation of the three pleasures in paradise to Rosenthal, *Reflections* 8.

16 Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 167.

17 *Ibid.*

My scholarly interest in the current topical issue of the ubiquitous suicide *mujāhidin* lies in the new perspective it may provide on popular nineteenth-century Acehese poems dealing with the ‘holy war’ against Dutch imperial encroachment. The ‘Aceh War’ which the Acehese called the “Dutch War” (*Prang Beulanda*) or “Infidel War” (*Prang Kaphé*),¹⁸ was a brutal colonial conflict in North Sumatra (Indonesia) that was instigated in 1873 by the Dutch and dragged on for several decades. According to the history books, this bloodshed ended in 1903, but even after the last Dutchman had left the area, violence continued well into the twenty-first century, and the lyrics of the old wartime poems are still recited today. The Acehese war poems issuing from the colonial period served the purpose of propaganda. It was the idea of ‘testosterone terrorists’ – imaginary or not – which has led me to rethink the intention behind this kind of literature. In what follows, I argue that bellicose poems from the Aceh War are not only hyper-violent but also highly sexualized narratives, aimed to incite young men eager to enjoy marital bliss.¹⁹ Far from being *curiosa* from a long-forgotten war, in post-independence discourse the songs of the holy war against the Dutch have become emblematic of a constructed primordial Acehese identity, epitomized by proud defenders of Aceh, “the abode of Islam.” These incendiary texts have thus outlived their original creators, long after the combat with the Dutch was written definitively in the history books.

2 Acehese War Literature

The literature that arose during the Aceh War comprises two kinds of writing: first, descriptive accounts of events taking place in this war, and second, blatantly propagandistic texts urging the Acehese to take up the religious duty of fighting the Dutch infidels (*kaphé*, from Arabic *kāfir*).²⁰ An example of the first category is the *Hikayat Prang di Sigli* (Song of the war in Sigli) by Teungku Nyak Ahmat (alias Uri b. Mahmut b. Jalalōdin b. Abdōsalam), which describes an attack on Sigli and the retributive bombardment by the Dutch.²¹ Arguably better known in secondary literature (though still unpublished and little-examined) is the *Hikayat Prang Gōmpeuni* (Song of the war with the Dutch), a truly great epic composed by the illiterate oral performer

18 Alfian, Aceh 111.

19 For a recent approach to Acehese war literature from a historical perspective, see Hadi, Exploring.

20 Drewes, *Two Acehese poems* 50.

21 Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 65–6.

Dōkarim (also known as Abdulkarim), which the Dutch Orientalist Christiaan Snouck Hurgronje (1857–1936) discovered *in statu nascendi* in 1891–2, during his stay in Aceh where he was engaged in secret service activities on behalf of the Dutch government. It was due to Snouck Hurgronje's initiative that the *Hikayat Prang Gōmpeuni*, which until then was only mnemonically stored, was recorded in writing.²² Dōkarim was not an especially devout person, and he did not recite his poem before a public of belligerent seminarians and guerilla fighters, but before common villagers like himself, who enjoyed a lyrical celebration of heroic deeds against the hated colonial *gōmpeuni*, i.e., “company,” referring to the Dutch East Indies Company, the time-honored term by which the Dutch were known. Though the message of the poem was unmistakably directed against the foreign *kāfirs* (infidels), Snouck Hurgronje deemed that the entrenched theme of hatred of the infidel was just “a matter of custom,” and did not represent “deep-seated and unyielding fanaticism.”²³ He was even convinced that “under certain circumstances” Dōkarim might be persuaded to recast his account into a “glorification of the *gōmpeuni*.”²⁴ In a postscript Snouck Hurgronje added that this indeed might have become a reality, were it not for the fact that Dōkarim was put to death in September 1897 by Acehese troops for acting as guide to the Dutch forces.²⁵

Professional storytellers are crowd pleasers by default, but the writers of the texts of the second category, collectively known as *Hikayat Prang Sabi* or Song of the holy war, were moralists and theologians, who possessed rather different entertaining qualities. Flowing from the pen of clerics (*‘ulamā*), who were well-versed in Islamic learning, *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts were basically popular sermons on hell and heaven. The Acehese scholar Imran Teuku Abdullah groups the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* category into the genre of *tambéh* (from Arabic *tanbīh*, “warning, reminding”) literature, i.e., theological literature comparable to Malay *kitab* (“religious book”; from Arabic *kitāb*) literature.²⁶ Drawing on the Quran and prophetic traditions, *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts severely criticized their audience for neglecting the duty to fight the *jihād*. The portrayal of the terrible consequences of inaction gave preachers the opportunity to stress the future pains of hell. However, these frightening hell diatribes were juxtaposed with luring promises of the delights of heaven that awaited those who heeded

22 Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* ii, 100–17; Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 59–62.

23 Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* ii, 102. On its anti-Dutch character, see Wieringa, *The dream*.

24 Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* ii, 102.

25 Ibid.

26 Abdullah, *Hikayat* 22.

the call to fight for Aceh's freedom. Martyrs would eternally enjoy "effortless eating, drinking, and cohabiting" in paradise.

The historian Anthony Reid duly called the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* the most famous of the Acehnese exhortations to *jihād*, and correctly pointed out that the Aceh War inspired quite a few local poets at the time to try their hand at this genre. To quote Reid: "These poems, read aloud by one of their number, became the *most popular entertainment* for the *young men* gathered in the *meunasah* (communal hall)."²⁷ He does not comment further upon this statement, but I think that the youth of the men who took part in the poetry recitation groups may be key to our understanding of the popularity of this kind of literature.

3 A Classic Rags-to-Riches Story

In fact, the title 'Song of the holy war' is a blanket term that lumps together an impressive number of Acehnese narrative poems that strongly induce its listeners to wage *jihād* against the infidel Dutch intruders.²⁸ These texts elicited such an overwhelming response that the Dutch authorities felt compelled to confiscate as many manuscripts of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* as possible. Many were burnt, but a rather large proportion of this type of war propaganda was taken as booty and is still preserved in (Dutch-created) public libraries.²⁹

A rather simple sort of 'Song of the holy war' that was discovered in 1911 in the manuscript collection of a captured 'rebel' contains a most earthy fantasy of heaven that emphasizes three bodily pleasures, viz. indulgences in eating, drinking, and, yes, sex. It is a relatively short, undated anonymous poem of 115 lines, part of a larger Islamic story collection in a composite manuscript.³⁰ So it begins (lines 1–2):

²⁷ Reid, *The contest* 252, emphasis added.

²⁸ A certain Teungku Chik Pante Kulu (alias Teungku Syekh Muhammad Pante Kulu) has been credited with the authorship of "the" *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, which he is supposed to have written while aboard a ship between Jidda and Penang (see e.g., Hasjmy, *Apa sebab* and Hasjmy, *Alam Aceh* viii), but this claim would appear to be just legendary (see Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 73). Indonesian authors, however, generally tend to consider this claim as an established fact. Sofyan, Teungku 1–30 provides a recent legendary life story.

²⁹ The Jakarta, Leiden, and Amsterdam collections are described in Voorhoeve, *Catalogue*. See Durie, *Poetry and worship* 80–6 for a discussion of collections and collectors.

³⁰ Damsté, *Atjèhsche oorlogspapieren* 789 provides a short description of this composite manuscript, which is kept in Leiden University Library, shelf-marked Cod. Or. 8693

*La ilaha ilalah, balék kisah lagèe la'én
Muhamadun Rasulōlah, bit that éndah haba saidina*

There is no god but God. We will change the narrative, and sing another song. Muḥammad is the Prophet of God. The story of our Master [i.e., Muḥammad] is really very beautiful.

The reference to “our Master” in this paratextual comment embeds the narrative with fictional characters in a made-up story during the single most important period of Islamic history; it is situated in the formative and normative time period of the Prophet himself. This lends it greater authority, and makes a formidable truth-claim.

This narrative poem is about three poor men discussing their destitute condition; one of them informs his friends that he once heard an explication of a prophetic saying advanced by a cleric (*teungku*) to the effect that participating in the holy war would bring many rewards.³¹ As he tells them (lines 9–10):

*Barangsoe ureueng jipoh kaphé, teukeudi mate raya pahla
Takeudi cahit lam prang sabi, Tuhanku Rabi peu ampōn deèsa*

Whosoever attacks an infidel, and kills him, receives rich rewards.
Should one become a martyr in the holy war, then our Lord will forgive his sins.

Martyrs will receive a most pleasurable life in the hereafter (lines 11–13):

*Makanan mangat Tuhan yue bri, budiadari idang gata
Taduek mangat tilam³² mangat, le that nèkmat kheun ulama
Pue bu nabsu tameuhajat, hasé si'asat hana lama*

God will order [angels] to give you delicious food, and nymphs will serve it. You will be seated most comfortably on cushions. According to the ‘*ulamā*’, the pleasures are manifold.

All your wishes will come true, within a second, without delay.

(Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 76). Leiden Cod. Or. 8747c contains a transliteration with a draft Dutch translation by Henri Damsté (Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 79).

31 As Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* i, 70 once put it, *teungku* is the title given to all “who either hold an office in connection with religion or distinguish themselves from the common herd by superior knowledge or more strict observance of religious law.”

32 The text has *talam*, which must be a mistake.

In fact, this promise goes back to a canonical prophetic tradition on wish-fulfillment in paradise, but it is perhaps the anticipation of the doubt of the implied reader/listener that motivates an exclamation of astonishment here: “Is it really like that, brother?” (*nyo bit meunan, hé cèedara*, line 14).³³ However, the reassuring answer is: “I’m not kidding you, older brother!” (*bukon polèm lôn meuseunda*, line 15); “I’m not making things up! By God, I’m not just telling you something!” (*Bukon polèm lôn beurakah, walabilah, bukun pura*, line 16).³⁴

The three men decide not to go home, but to go instead to the main road in order to kill Dutch infidels. Although one of them has two children, he sees no point in returning to his family as there does not seem to be a way out of his problems. He later prays for the ones he left behind, and argues that his children should be taken care of by their mother. The spirit of the three would-be *mujāhidīn* could be called desperate rather than devout (line 22):

Nibak hudéb bahlé maté, miseue bacé han sapeue na

It is better to die than to continue living [like this].³⁵ We are as poor as a *bacé* fish, having nothing at all.

The *bacé* is a kind of murrel, and because this fish is “bald” (i.e., “slippery”), it has become a byword in Acehnese language for utter poverty.³⁶

Two of our *mujāhidīn* are cut down in a furious fight with the Dutch infidels, but the third one flees. He falls asleep under a tree, and in his dream he beholds the glories of paradise, where he meets a beautiful, fair-skinned maiden called Cut Putroe Ti or “Lady Princess,” who is already waiting for him in her luxurious boudoir.³⁷ One could say that it is merely a ‘peep show’: Lady Princess points out that the killing of two infidels merely grants a quick look in heaven.

33 For this prophetic tradition, see al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 221.

34 For my interpretation of *beurakah* as “to make things up,” see Kreemer, *Atjèhsch hand-woordenboek* 32 and Djajadiningrat, *Atjèhsch-Nederlandsch woordenboek* i, 257 (under *brakah*).

35 This expression is cited in Djajadiningrat, *Atjèhsch-Nederlandsch woordenboek* i, 105 under *ba’ II*, but without reference.

36 See Djajadiningrat, *Atjèhsch-Nederlandsch woordenboek* i, 150 under *batjé*. Damsté, *Atjèhsche oorlogspapieren* 789 and Damsté, *Meer Atjèhsche oorlogspapieren*, paraphrases the text as “We have no means of subsistence, not even a small fish to eat,” which is not quite correct.

37 Her skin color is described as “white” (*kulét putéh*, line 75) and “fine” (*kulit haloih*, line 77). This is in accordance with traditional Arab-Islamic descriptions of the *hūrīs*’ complexions as white and soft, see al-Azmeh, *Rhetoric for the senses* 227. The preoccupation with fair skin will be discussed in more detail further below.

Unlike his two friends, who were killed and thus became martyrs with an eternal entrance permit to paradise, the fleeing fighter had not yet completely fulfilled his side of the bargain with God. As he has not been killed himself, he is not allowed to stay with her. The Dame tells him (lines 101–102):

*Bak malam nyoe troih meuriwang, bayeue utang ubak Rabi
Deungon ulôn han jeuet rakan . . .*

Go back tonight; pay your debt to God.
You're not allowed to keep company with me . . .

The choice is up to him (lines 103–104):

*Meuna meuhet meuduek sajan, kuriwang dilèe bak prang sabi
Meuna hajat teu keu kamèe, sinoe takeubah janji*

If you want to stay with me forever, then first return to the holy war.
If you desire me, then fulfill your promise.

The *mujāhid* immediately returns to earth, exclaiming in the final line of this poem:

Adat lôn thee dumnoe balaih, beu dami Alah, han lôn lari

If I had known all this before, by God, I would never have run away!

Henri Damsté (1874–1955), a Dutch colonial official long stationed in Aceh and an expert of all things Acehnese, discussed this text in 1912, and opined that “to a certain extent” it would explain the disregard for death among the rebellious Acehnese.³⁸ The key question is, however, whether this rather lowbrow type of propaganda really served well to mobilize young Acehnese men under the banner of Islam. There would seem to be good reason for being skeptical about its inflammatory potential. To begin with, there is a thinly concealed disdain on the part of the anonymous poet for his *dramatis personae* from wretched life. For example, at the beginning of the narrative the hapless trio is not only portrayed as penniless but also as pretty brainless. After having established the sad fact that they are utterly poor, and that “it is better to die than

38 Damsté, Atjèhsche oorlogspapieren 791.

to continue living [like this]" (line 22, see above), the following conversation ensues (lines 23–26):

*Bahkeu keunan lhèe geutanyoe, nibak meunoe meureuraba
Bak gata adoe bak muwaham, pakri tapham hé cèedara
Nibak ulôn hana lé pham, maléngkan curam nibak gata
Nibak ulôn tan lé piké, bahlé maté Lèm Mat Lila*

Let's go there [i.e., to the main road where the Dutch infidels are], the three of us, instead of roaming around like this.

And what about you, brother, what do you think about it?

As far as I'm concerned, I've got no idea at all, but you know so much more.

And I don't have to think anymore, let me³⁹ just die!

The gang leader's enthusiastic approach to holy war and the acquiescence of his two friends, who reply with frank admissions of ignorance, places the would-be *mujāhidīn* in the role of dumb yokels – not exactly complimentary, or for that matter, helpful if this story was meant to urge its listeners to identify with the fictional warriors and take up arms themselves. Looking down on the luckless ones, the poet does not appear to possess the gift of imaginative sympathy. Furthermore, the fabulist has cast his poem in the cultivated, classical style of Acehnese *hikayat* literature, and does not deign to reproduce the daily speech of the hoi polloi: for example, one of the simpletons uses the difficult word *maléngkan* in the admission of stupidity (line 25, cited above), which is not even included in Djajadiningrat's standard dictionary, generally acknowledged to be the most authoritative and comprehensive dictionary of the Acehnese language (interestingly enough, mainly based upon material from *hikayat* literature). Assuming, for the sake of argument, that the poem was intended for poor, uneducated peasants, how many listeners would have known that *maléngkan* is a calque of Malay *melainkan* ("but; however")?⁴⁰

This story belongs to the genre of *kisah* (from Arabic *qisṣa*, "narrative, tale, story"), and is hardly concerned with the divine will.⁴¹ Nowhere do we read

39 This (third) man, called Lèm Mat Lila, speaks about himself in the third person here.

40 An anonymous referee suggested that Malay *melainkan* was perhaps taken over from Arabic *wa-lākin* ("but; however"), but appearances are deceiving and the words are not related. In fact, the Malay word *melainkan* is formed on the basis of *lain* ("other; different") with the affixes *me-* and *-kan*.

41 On the genre of *kisah*, see Abdullah, *Hikayat* 20–1.

that the main reason for Muslims to go out to fight the holy war is because God commands them to do so. Attention is focused mono-thematically upon the three pleasures, viz. food, drink, and sex, while the religious dimension of the afterlife is completely overlooked. The three “nice things” are a common theme in Arabic belles-lettres, so much so that the Arabist Geert Jan van Gelder speaks of the sequence of eating–drinking–love as a narrative formula.⁴² In Acehnese literature, however, this formula remained foreign, and was only employed in texts belonging to the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* corpus. This short poem, then, promises a simple way to end all misery: kill and be killed, and paradise will be yours, the abode of pure bodily pleasures.

The original owner of the manuscript, who was a rebel in Dutch eyes, possessed several versions of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts, but this same man also liked to read the fairytale *Hikayat Putroe Gumbak Meuih* (Song of Princess Goldilocks).⁴³ In fact, the role of the number ‘three’ in the story of the three *mujāhidīn* already seems to indicate that we are dealing here with a folktale familiar from childhood.⁴⁴ The story has a classic rags-to-riches theme with a predictable three-phase storyline: at first, a ‘nobody’ is living in lowly, miserable circumstances, but one day, this unlikely hero suddenly embarks on a strange series of adventures that brings about a miraculous transformation of his fortunes. Eventually, he wins the hand of a beautiful princess, and lives happily ever after.⁴⁵ It would seem quite unlikely that talking down to the ‘simple folk’ in this crude way really would have worked to recruit enthusiastic fighters in the way of God.

And yet, *mirabile dictu*, sometimes this bizarre tale of the destitute *mujāhid* was reenacted in real life. After the war was officially over, the Dutch were still confronted with what they called “Aceh murder” (*Atjeh moord*), whereas the Acehnese spoke of “killing an infidel” (*poh kaphé*),⁴⁶ i.e., “the slaying of Europeans by Atjehnese, which became a private form of the *prang sabi*” (i.e., holy war).⁴⁷ As James Siegel succinctly phrases it: “Through the murder of a

42 Van Gelder, *God's banquet* 110.

43 Damsté, *Atjèhsche oorlogspapieren* 789. The Song of Princess Goldilocks was published in a scholarly edition by Amshoff, *Goudkruintje*.

44 There is abundant scholarship on the role of “three” in folktales, here I only mention Butzer and Jacob, *Metzler Lexikon* 69–70 with further references. Booker, *The seven basic plots* 229–33 devotes a special section to “the rule of three.”

45 Booker, who categorizes all human storytelling into seven basic plots, discusses the rags-to-riches variety as his second plot, see Booker, *The seven basic plots* 51–68.

46 Alfian, *Aceh* 114.

47 Siegel, *The rope* 82.

kaffir (an unbeliever), an Atjehnese man hoped to gain paradise.”⁴⁸ This phenomenon took place at least some 120 times between 1910 and 1937.⁴⁹ The 1939 report by former Resident Jongejans reads like a sober retelling of our simplistic *jihād* poem – needless to say, stripped of its seductive elements: “The murders are simply carried out. The perpetrator goes to a place where he knows he will find a European – a military encampment, a bivouac, a station. He waits. When a European passes he runs at him and does him in. He himself is usually captured or killed.”⁵⁰ One captured man, who had unsuccessfully attempted to commit ‘Aceh murder,’ declared that he had wished to kill a Dutchman in order to get into heaven. His statement that he “preferred to die rather than to live like this”⁵¹ is a remarkable echo of the fable of the penniless holy warriors (see line 22, cited above).

4 The Neglected Duty

However, there are other, more sophisticated Acehnese poems dealing with the holy war against the Dutch. Broadly speaking, two major categories of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts can be distinguished, viz. first, works with a strongly sermonizing character that draw upon citations from the Quran and *ḥadīth* literature. This version, which is rooted in scholastic discourse, mainly stresses the ‘push factor’ for going to war, and presents *jihād* as a religious duty that the Acehnese have hitherto neglected. This is the first and older version (henceforward *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I), out of which a more narrative version (called *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II) emerged; the latter pays greater attention to the ‘pull factor’ of *jihād* by elaborating upon its wonderful rewards.

Let us first look at the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I. Here the emphasis is upon dire warnings against the harsh rule of the Dutch tyrant. This version harps on the common people’s fear of the horrifying events said to happen during the Last Days, whereas the theme of heavenly rewards for martyrs in the holy war is dealt with only briefly. According to the Aceh-born but Leiden-trained philologist Teuku Iskandar, the language of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I is “stylistically

48 Ibid. Cf. the commentary of the Dutch pioneer of “psycho-anthropology,” Van Wulfften Palthe, *Geestesstoornis* 18, who stated that the killing of an infidel by an Acehnese was a kind of suicide motivated by a desire to enter “Muhammadan heaven.”

49 Siegel, *The rope* 84. See also Reid, *An Indonesian frontier* 339–40.

50 Cited in translation in Siegel, *The rope* 82.

51 Ibid., 83.

attractive,” but “the composition as a whole is rather dull.”⁵² This insipidity, I think, may be traced back to its genesis, being heavily indebted to the Arabic tract *Naṣīḥat al-muslimīn* (*Advice to Muslims*) by the eighteenth-century Palembang theologian ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī (born 1116/1704?).⁵³

The latter scholar, who wrote all his books in Mecca or in nearby cooler Ṭā’if, already enjoyed considerable fame as a learned divine during his lifetime, but after his death, allegedly at the incredible age of 124, he came to be ranked among the “friends of God” (see below).⁵⁴ It is said that ‘Abd al-Ṣamad died in 1244/1828 as a swashbuckling *mujāhid* in a war waged in northern Kedah (Malaysia), somewhere in a Malay Muslim district, which had been occupied by infidel troops from Siam (Thailand). There was no way to bury the remains of the martyrs because the Kedah forces were forced to retreat, so the location of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad’s grave remains unknown.⁵⁵

52 Iskandar, *Hikayat* 96. In 1928, Damsté published an edition of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* 1, based upon a manuscript of the Snouck Hurgronje collection, see Damsté, *Hikajat*. This manuscript is kept in Leiden University Library, shelf-marked Cod. Or. 8145, see Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 74.

53 Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* ii, 119; Drewes, *Directions* 223; Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 70–1. Hasan, *The Tuhfat* 73 mentions the year 1772 as its date of composition.

54 Reliable historical data for his biography are scarce. Reconstructions of his bio- and bibliography can be found in Drewes, *Directions* 222–24; Quzwain, *Mengenal Allah* 7–31; Azra, *The origins* 112–7; and Kaptein, ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī, 25–6. If we accept that he was born in 1704, this would mean that he began composing his works at an already advanced age, viz. in 1181/1764, when he allegedly wrote his first work (see Drewes, *Directions* 222; Hasan, *The Tuhfat* 73). His final work was completed on 20 Ramadan 1203/14 June 1789 (see ‘Abd al-Ṣamad al-Palimbānī, *Sair al-sālikīn* ii, part 4, 267), when he would have been 85 years old.

55 Quzwain, *Mengenal Allah* 11; Azra, *The origins* 114. The portrayal of ‘Abd al-Ṣamad in the role of an active *mujāhid* greatly enhanced his status as an exemplary theologian who wielded both pen and sword. In this essay I am only concerned with the traditional perception of him as saintly figure, and debunking his biography does not serve my purpose here. Perhaps I should mention that modern-day researchers (see preceding note) are highly skeptical about his life data. They are more inclined to believe that he spent his entire studious life in Arabia, and probably also died there. The modernist Muslim scholar Azyumardi Azra makes the common sense remark that 124 years is “too old to go to the battlefield” (Azra, *The origins* 114). However, traditional conventions and modern expectations often clash in Islamic historiography (cf. Robinson, *Islamic historiography* 149–55). Traditional biographies of ‘ulamā’ border on hagiography, and two (closely related) stock elements are the production of abundant scholarly works and astounding longevity (cf. note 12 on the centenarian Miskawayh).

His fierce reputation as an old warhorse notwithstanding, 'Abd al-Šamad's writing on the doctrine of *jihād* is basically a dry legal work (*fiqh*) lacking any motivational aspects. Although this rather pedestrian theological treatise forms the original kernel of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I, authors and copyists of variants of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I saw to it that their adaptations were studded with vituperative outbursts against the Dutch aggressors by inserting prayers for the downfall of the *gōmpeuni* and other 'hate speech.' As the writing of versified exhortations to sacrifice one's life in the holy war against the Dutch was quite popular, there are numerous variants of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I.⁵⁶

There is a long list of studies on 'influence' in the field of literary studies. The literary theorist Harold Bloom famously sees poets in perpetual conflict with their predecessors, an idea he first propounded in *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), and which he further elaborated in a sequence of books in the 1970s and 1980s. In Bloom's view, influence became an obstacle to creativity. However, the Bloomian literary anxiety principle, which suggests that poets are hindered in their creative process because of the influence of their precursors, deals exclusively with the 'Great Works' of Western literature, and is totally inapplicable to pre-modern Acehese literature. Manuscripts belonging to the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* corpus are marked by what a philologist would call extensive cross-contamination. For example, with regard to a certain author of local fame, viz. Teungku Nyak Ahmat, whom we already encountered (above) as the poet of a short account of a local skirmish, we know that he also composed, in 1894, a version of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I category, entitled *Nasihāt ureueng muprang* (Advice to warriors); this has, not coincidentally, almost the same title as the *Naṣīḥat al-muslimin*.⁵⁷

*Lôn meung peugèt nyoe hikayat, nasihat keu ureueung muprang
 Ulōnteu cōk dalam kitab, basa Arab lheuēh gob karang
 Teuma di lôn lôn peu-Acèh, mangat sarèh soe nyang pandang
 Hana bacut kureueng leubèh, hana alèh dōm geutimang
 Nasihatōy Museulimin nama kitab, Abeudō Samat ureueng karang
 Elia Allah karamat that, nanggroē teupat di Palimbang*

I wish to compose a *hikayat*, an admonition to warriors.
 I draw on a theological book, originally written in Arabic.

56 Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* ii, 119–20.

57 Abdullah, *Hikayat* 70.

Now, I adapt it into Acehnese, so it may be pleasant for those who want to take a look at it.

I will not omit or add anything, everything is evenly balanced.

Naṣīḥat al-muslimīn [Advice to Muslims] is the title of the book, and ‘Abd al-Ṣamad its writer.

He is a friend of God, most holy, originating from Palembang.

However, Nyak Ahmat also borrowed heavily from another *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I version, viz. Teungku Tiro’s Lessons on the holy war, of which he embellished the rhyme and meter.⁵⁸ Furthermore, whole sections of Nyak Ahmat’s treatise agree line for line with yet another redaction of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I which was published by Damsté, in particular it matches the final part of the published version.⁵⁹

Foregrounding the threat of future Dutch mastery over Aceh, *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I texts mainly stress a ‘push factor’ for going to war. For example, in the widely-read pamphlets of Teungku Tiro, which Snouck Hurgronje dubbed Lessons on the holy war, we find the following call to arms:⁶⁰

*Watée jitueng nanggroé lé kaphé, dumteu saré wajéb tamuprang
H’an jeuet ta’iem peuseungab droe, duek lam nanggroé mita seunang
Bak watée nyan jeuet peurelèe ‘in, beu tayakin lagèe seumayang
Wajéb tapubuet jeueb kutika, meung h’an dèechateu hay abang
H’an sampureuna seumayang puasa, meung h’an tabungka tajak muprang
Paki meuseukin dum cut raya, tuha muda agam inōng
Nyang na dapat lawan kaphé, beu that bahlé hamba urang
Peureulèe ‘in cit u atueuh, beu that bèk lheueh bak jih utang*

When the country is seized by the infidel, we all have the duty to wage war. Inaction is not permitted, taking it easy in one’s country.

At such times *jihād* is a religious obligation incumbent on all Muslims individually (*farḍ al-‘ayn*), as sure as prayer.

It is invariably obligatory, and if you’re careless, you’re sinful, o brother.

Your prayers and fasting are less than perfect, if you don’t immediately go to the battlefield.

58 Snouck Hurgronje, *The Achehnese* ii, 119; Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 71.

59 Damsté, *Hikajat*; Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 70–1.

60 Abdullah, *Hikayat* 46.

The poor and needy (*faqīr miskīn*), the large and the small, the old and the young, men and women:

Those who are able should fight the infidel, even the bondsmen.

For them, too, it is a personal obligation (*farḍ al-ʿayn*), even though they have not yet settled their debts.

In another variant of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* 1 (published by Damsté) *jihād* is said to be obligatory in order to prevent the infidel rule of the *majusi* (Arabic *majūsī*, “Magian”) or “fire-worshipers,” which is a play on the Dutch word *maréchaussée*, the brutal anti-guerrilla unit of the colonial army.⁶¹ This same text cites the well-known prophetic saying that “paradise is under the shade of the swords” as well as other passages from *ḥadīth* literature and the Quran in support of *jihād*, but the heavenly bonus for martyrs is left to the imagination of the audience.⁶² We are merely informed that all sins will be forgiven, and that⁶³

neubri ceruga janat adan, teumpat raman suka'an até
teuka keunan peue nyang mehuet, peue meukeusut cit hasé lé

[God] gives the Garden of Eden, a place of feasts and enjoyments.
 All that one craves will be brought to that place: all wishes will immediately come true.

The poem mentions as a special reward seventy (*sic*) *ḥūrīs* in addition to an unmentioned number of servants (*kadam*, from Arabic *khadam*), but does not specify any external features of the heavenly personnel, rather it blandly states that the handmaidens of paradise are “very wonderful.”⁶⁴ Nor is there an explicit answer to the question of the usefulness of so many beautiful virgins for a male resident of paradise.

61 Cf. Damsté, Hikajat 550. The pun is also explained in Kreemer, *Atjèhsch handwoordenboek* 170 (under *madjoesi*).

62 Damsté, Hikajat 560.

63 Damsté, Hikajat 562.

64 Seventy *ḥūrīs*, etc. in Damsté, Hikajat 562. In these texts the number of *ḥūrīs* allotted to the blessed is generally seventy, whereas conventionally *ḥadīths* speak of seventy-two *ḥūrīs*, see Rosenthal, *Reflections* 16–7.

5 Heavenly Rewards

There is a strong correlation between the dramatic situation of actual warfare and the length of enthusiastic descriptions of paradise. For example, the earliest known Acehnese expositions of the *jihād*, a text from 1710 that pre-dates the Aceh War, contains only minimal references to paradise.⁶⁵ This rather short poem merely emphasizes *jihād* as a personal obligation (*farḍ al-ʿayn*).⁶⁶ By contrast, the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II tells rather long and enticing stories of paradisaal delight with relish. This second category of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts consists of a string of exemplary narratives. Starting with admonitions to wage the holy war, its composer has borrowed freely material from the earlier *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I version. After a rather theological introduction advocating the immediate necessity of holy war, the text strings together accounts of four battles of (legendary) Islamic history, viz.

- (1) A story that is also known as *Hikayat Abeudō Wahét* was named after the fictional narrator, Abeudō Wahét (or Abdul Wahid in Malay spelling). This person is depicted as an Arab scholar, who tells his learned colleagues the story of a good-looking young noble, just fifteen years old, who takes part in the holy war against Byzantium. The story is mainly concerned with the latter's dream of Ainul Mardiah, the most beautiful of all virgins in paradise; it is also commonly known as *Kisah Ainul Mardiah* (Story of Ainul Mardiah). The boy dies a heroic death, and has an everlasting life of joy with Ainul Mardiah.
- (2) A story of the *jihād* between Mecca against the Abyssinians, in which the Meccans are rescued by the miraculous intervention of birds dropping stones on the enemy. This story is associated with Q 105 (The Elephant), which is well-known in Arabic Islamic historical and exegetical tradition.⁶⁷
- (3) A story of a man who left his pregnant wife behind and joined the holy war on the advice of the Prophet; he prayed to God to protect their unborn child. After his return home, he finds his wife buried in the grave and their child alive and well, sitting besides its dead mother. Only then does the warrior realize that he had forgotten to include his wife in his prayers

65 See Siegel, *Shadow* 236 note 20 and Alfian, Aceh 113. The manuscript is kept in Leiden University Library, shelf-marked Cod.Or. 8163b; it is described briefly in Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 79.

66 See Alfian, Aceh 113.

67 See Shahīd, *People*.

for safety, but it is too late. This rather macabre story is widely known; and though it originated in early Buddhist lore, the Islamicized version was incorporated in an Arabic anthology entitled *Rawḍat al-‘ulamā’* (The garden of scholars), a collection of moralistic anecdotes about pious people. It is through this that it entered Acehnese literature.⁶⁸

- (4) A story of an ugly black man who is rejected in disgust by earthly women, but who is killed in a holy war and immediately thronged with voluptuous virgins in paradise.

Both the first and last stories are adaptations of the rags-to-riches plot, which in my opinion offered the greatest appeal to a young male public. The archetypal hero of folk tales of this variety is invariably young, and “stories specially written for children have always relied on the Rags to Riches theme.”⁶⁹ Acehnese listeners, like people around the world, loved to hear stories with happy fairy tale endings. The fable of the three *mujāhidīn* (discussed above), which deals with wish-fulfillment in a most simple and sentimental form, is based upon the “boy meets girl, boy gets girl, and he lives happily ever after” formula. The major theme in the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* 11 is that *hūrīs* waiting in heaven are infinitely preferable to earthly women. In the introductory words of the poem:

*Hé adék cut muda seudang, beudoh rijang jak prang sabi
Bah lé tinggay dum sibarang, jak cok bintang ateueh keurusi
Keu inong jroh bèk lé ta syén, ta cok la'èn nyang juhari
Bah lé kedéh ta meukawén, nyang that candén budiadari*⁷⁰

Hey, younger brother, immediately go to holy war!
Leave everything behind, take the stars on the Throne.
It is useless to desire pretty women, go for the other beauties.
Let's marry there, with the beautiful *hūrīs*.

This version of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* is much more explicit about the role of the otherworldly belles: the verb *meukawén* in the last line above, which I have neatly translated as “marry,” is a common euphemism for “sexual intercourse.”⁷¹

The theme of the *hūrīs* permeates the next story, viz. the *Story of Ainul Mardiah*, which deals with a fifteen-year-old boy who dreams of the gorgeous

68 See Van Ronkel, *Maleische litteratuur* 175–84.

69 Booker, *The seven basic plots* 53.

70 Alfian, *Sastra perang* 50–2.

71 Djajadiningrat, *Atjèhsch-Nederlandsch woordenboek* i, 681.

paradisal virgin Ainul Mardiah, and who is promised 'marital bliss' after he is slain in holy war. In my opinion it is not coincidental that the young hero is only fifteen years old. According to Islamic law, minors are exempt from the *jihād* obligation, because they are not of legal age (*mukallaf*, or responsible), and also based on the following tradition about Ibn 'Umar: "The Messenger of Allah inspected him on the Day of Uḥud, when he was a fourteen-year-old boy and did not allow him to fight. Then, on the Day of the Trench, when he was a fifteen-year-old boy, he inspected him and allowed him to fight."⁷²

In this connection I would like to draw attention to the exclamation "Hey, younger brother," which appears in the quotation above from the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II, with which the poet directly addresses his audience. This ecphronesis and such variants as "Oh younger brother" (*wahé adék*) or "Hey, dear" (*hay boh até*) are used so often in the text that their function as 'attention getter' seems to have become worn from overuse. Commenting upon his Dutch translation of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* I, the Aceh specialist Henri Damsté stated that the phrase "Oh my brother" or the like is merely a stop-gap.⁷³ In order not to 'overburden' his translation, he therefore decided to decrease the number of references to those brothers. However, it is germane to note that the 'young brothers' in this poem are adolescent boys; this is indicated by the terms used in the last-quoted fragment above (*cut*, "young; little"; *muda*, "young; unripe"; *seudang*, "young, not yet an adult").

In other words, the intended public of this text was teenagers, young pubescent boys with active hormones. At this age, testosterone surges drastically transform the male brain and lead to higher than normal levels of aggression and risk-taking. It is a telling fact that most crimes in any given country are committed by young males, but idealism is also remarkably common during this stage of the maturation process: religious conversions are far more likely to occur in adolescence than in any other period of life.⁷⁴ Furthermore, as biologists have noted, "[s]usceptibility to peer influence is highly variable, but generally peaks at about fourteen, when most, if not all, adolescents are likely to behave like lemmings."⁷⁵ A *jihād* agitator could easily exploit the 'herd instinct' of his young audience by holding meetings in communal halls.⁷⁶

⁷² Peters, *Islam and colonialism* 15–6.

⁷³ See also Abdullah, *Hikayat* 73, 795–6, who regards the habitual mentioning of the addressees in traditional Acehnese literature as mere filler words.

⁷⁴ Pridmore-Brown, *Surges* 4.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Cf. Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda* 281.

Another ubiquitous phrase in the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II is the imperative *tueng ibarat* or “take the example.”⁷⁷ The battle stories that are told in the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II are not meant simply for entertainment, but are *exempla*, fictitious moral anecdotes illustrating the point of *jihād*. It is reported that the poem was chanted before men went off to attack the Dutch. The listeners are said to have been dressed in the white shrouds of warriors about to martyr themselves.⁷⁸ Hate can be a great motivator, but bearing in mind that the prospective martyrs were generally young men, the poet of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II cleverly employed the lure of sexual fantasy, knowing full well that the promise of unlimited eternal sexual pleasure would certainly excite a pubescent audience.

The third story about the married man who found his dead wife and living child in the grave may perhaps show that the composer of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II tried to cast his nets widely, but I still think that the group of young men over the age of fifteen must have been his main target. His shrewd psychological insight into the innermost feelings of this age group is in my opinion nowhere better demonstrated than in the final tale about an ugly black man called Said Saleumi.⁷⁹ In this story the poet skillfully exploits the anxieties – feelings of inferiority and inadequacy – that typically beset teenagers. After having repeated, once again, the assurance that seventy *hūrīs* will be God's gift to holy warriors in the hereafter, the narrator begins by telling his readers that the ill-favored Said Saleumi was so repulsive to women that he was unable to find a wife:

*Soe na hajat syureuga tinggi, bèk lé lanti jak beu leugat
Tujoh ploh droe budiadari, keu eseutiri wahé sahbat
Rupa indah hana sakri, peunulang Rabbi di akhirat
Saboh haba 'ajib sikali, wahé akhi tueng ibarat
Haba jameun tréb ka lawi, yoh prang Nabi Sayidil Ummat
Sidroe ureueng hé syèedara, jeuheut rupa cit hitam that
Pakri parot bak-bak muka, lom ngon sukla meukeu kilat
Keu peurumoh galak raya, neu jak mita jeueb-jeueb teumpat
Han ji tém tueng inong nyangna, sabab rupa eit jeuheut that
Ho nyang neu jak han ji tém tueng, sigala ureueng bandum luwat
Tahe gante teujak teu dong, han ji tém tueng jeueb-jeueb teumpat
Uroe malam jak mencari, keu eseutiri galak neu that⁸⁰*

77 Cf. Siegel, *Shadow* 262–3.

78 Ibid., 262.

79 An alternative transliteration of his name would be Sa'id Salmi, as in Alfian, Aceh 116.

80 Alfian, *Sastra perang* 142.

Whosoever wishes the highest heaven should hurry up.
 Oh my friends, seventy *hūrīs* will be your wives.
 They will be incomparably beautiful, being a gift of the Lord in the hereafter.
 Oh my brothers, take the example of this most wonderful story, a story of yore from the time of the war of our Prophet, Commander of the Community.
 Oh brothers, once there was a man who was ugly and very black. There were scratches on his face, and his black skin was shiny. What he craved was a wife, and he searched everywhere. Women did not like him, because of his most ugly appearance. There wasn't anyone, anywhere that wanted him, everyone felt disgusted. He became nervous and confused as he was unwanted everywhere he went. Day and night he searched for a wife, because that was what he wished for.

The contrast between the dark this-worldly situation of the ugly, pitch-black Said Saleumi and the otherworldly brilliance of paradise could hardly be greater. As Siegel comments on the signification of paradise in the preceding *Story of Ainul Mardiah*: "Practically everything mentioned, in fact – women, rivers, palaces – is described in terms of radiance."⁸¹ The light versus dark opposition in the story of Said Saleumi is associated with life and death: the hero will eventually emerge from temporary darkness into the eternal world of light. I omit the details of this story; suffice it to say that Said Saleumi's fortunes completely turned around when he died as martyr in the holy war with the infidel Jews. The *hūrīs* immediately picked him up from the battlefield, and lovingly embraced their dearest 'husband.'

Rejection, humiliation, confusion, and even skin problems – probably most teenage boys would have had no difficulties identifying with the unfortunate Said Saleumi and his repulsive appearance. Girls rarely yearn for the touch of an unsightly boy. Henri Damsté ironically comments upon the story about the unlovely Said Saleumi that the struggle against the Dutch was "also" very suitable for unfortunate lovers.⁸² However, rather than considering this as a mere side effect, I would argue more strongly that 'unfortunate lovers' must have constituted the text's implied audience, and that the recruitment of future 'testosterone terrorists' was its very *raison d'être*.

81 Siegel, *Shadow* 253.

82 Damsté, *Atjèhsche Oorlogspapieren* 782.

I hasten to add that my interpretation does not touch on the issue of the sacrificial desires of listeners. It is quite conceivable that socio-political causes may have been of primary importance for them; although the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II does not fail to mention that the world was in disarray as a result of economic hardship and political chaos, the text concentrates far more intently on the promise of instant sexual gratification in paradise. The *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II aims at the 'weak spot' of the intended young male public.

6 The Project of Persuasion

Almost no documentary evidence is available on the communal practice of reading a tale of war. Scholars often refer to a well-known anecdote in traditional Malay literature; this anecdote states that on the eve of the Portuguese attack on Malacca in 1511, the Malay nobles gathered together in the royal audience hall in order to stage a public recitation of the *Hikayat Muhammad Hanafiyya* (Story of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya) in order "to derive profit" from it (*berfaédah*, a verb based upon the Arabic loanword *fāʾida*, "profit, benefit; useful lesson, moral").⁸³ The latter text, which is a legendary tale about the life of a son of 'Alī and a concubine from the tribe of the Banū Ḥanīfa, is strongly imbued with the Shi'i spirit of martyrdom.⁸⁴ Its protagonist, who was 'Alī's last surviving son after the tragedy at Karbala, is presented as a single-minded hero bent on taking vengeance for his two murdered half-brothers, al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. A Western Malayist once admitted that he had read this *hikayat* "with more interest than pleasure," as in his opinion the story is "a test of any reader's stamina with its disheartening theme of defeat after defeat, and its endless accounts of cruelty, deceit, killing and mutilation."⁸⁵ In 1511, however, Malay officers apparently considered this particularly gory story an ideal way to prepare for battle with the infidel Portuguese, so they modeled themselves on the example of the vindictive Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya and his brave troops. Although there is substantial scholarship on the public recitation of stories in many ritual contexts throughout insular Southeast Asia, we do not know whether the communal reading of a tale of war was a common practice

83 For an English translation of this episode, see Brown, *Sējjarah Mēlayu* 161–6.

84 For a text edition and commentary, see Brakel, *The Hikayat* and the companion volume Brakel, *The story*. On the choice of this particular text, see Wieringa, Amir Hamza; for Shi'i influences upon early Islamic Malay literature, see Wieringa, Does traditional Islamic Malay literature.

85 Jones, Review article 122.

in pre-modern warfare. Nevertheless, the oft-quoted anecdote concerning the 1511 Malay vigil has been paradigmatic for interpreting the *Hikayat Prang Sabi*.⁸⁶

The feverish production of war propaganda in the 1880s cannot be separated from the historical reality that the definitive end of the Acehese Sultanate was sealed during this period.⁸⁷ But although the *'ulamā'* frantically circulated *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts, which emphasized "the helplessness of the *kāfir* and the successes in store for the Atjehnese when once they accepted the true disciplines of Islam," these desires remained wishful thinking.⁸⁸ Anthony Reid writes about this last ditch effort to turn the tables on the opponent: "As the war with the Dutch proceeded, . . . leadership of the resistance passed increasingly to the most intransigent ulama, for whom the idiom of Islamic martyrdom was the ingredient needed to inspire courage in the face of overwhelming odds."⁸⁹ This hypothesis would fit well with what is told about the 1511 episode in Malacca, when an Islamic *corps d'élite* listened to blood-and-thunder tales drawn from extremist Shi'i martyrology while awaiting the imminent fall of the sultanate.⁹⁰

I cannot deny this possibility, but I propose to look at the authorial intention of *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts from another angle. As I see it, these stories are primarily religious propaganda, i.e., "efforts to move people to a religious change or direction."⁹¹ In disseminating this kind of propaganda, the *'ulamā'* were doing what they as preachers had always done best, viz. teaching about heaven and hell. Their call for an altered way of life was not only addressed to coreligionists, but also to nonmembers, to persuade them to convert. Reid provides the example of Teungku Chik di Tiro (d. 1308/1891), a stern theologian, who in response to Dutch attempts to enter into an agreement, wrote a letter to the Resident in September 1885 urging the Dutch to embrace Islam first: "As soon as you accept Islam by pronouncing the two articles of faith, then we can conclude a treaty."⁹² In his letter we can detect the same rhetorical technique as in *Hikayat Prang Sabi* literature – he contrasts the two ultimate possibilities of punishment (hell) and reward (heaven). The theologian assured his foreign

86 See e.g., Alfian, Aceh 113.

87 Cf. Reid, *The contest* 252.

88 Ibid.

89 Reid, *War, peace* 4.

90 Incidentally, Reid does not draw a comparison to sixteenth-century Malacca.

91 Riesebrodt, *The promise* 149.

92 Letter to Resident K.F.H. van Langen, September 1885, cited in translation by Reid, *War, peace* 4. Muhammad A.R., Teungku Chik Ditiro 45–60 provides a modern-day hagiographic account of this 'national hero.'

opponent that if they converted to Islam the Dutch would be spared humiliation on the battlefield and eternal punishment in hell, and instead would be granted access to paradise with “whatever the heart desires in the way of food, drink, fruit or women.”⁹³

However, as noted by experts on propaganda and persuasion, messages have “greater impact when they are in line with existing opinions, beliefs, and dispositions” of the target audience.⁹⁴ In this case, the impact was zero. Teungku Chik di Tiro’s non-believing addressee was Karel van Langen (1848–1915) who, as an expert on Acehese language and culture, was of course well acquainted with the ardent theological phraseology of his day and age, but this experienced colonial civil servant did not convert to Islam.⁹⁵ The belief that God will not abandon his religion is something which Teungku Chik di Tiro shared with other preachers, but Acehese talk of God was not backed by any concrete, tangible proof of its correctness. As Reid dryly comments, “[o]f course God did not deliver the kind of victory Teungku di Tiro expected, and a later generation had sullenly to accept the reality of Dutch rule.”⁹⁶

The propaganda texts from the Aceh War are classified in overviews of Acehese literature as “original treatises,” by which is meant that they are not based upon Malay or Arabic examples.⁹⁷ However, the conventional wisdom that these texts have a “genuine Acehese character” must be discarded.⁹⁸ Even a cursory look at classical Arabic literature shows that Acehese war propaganda was modeled on an Arabic (sub)genre known as “the merits of holy war” (*faḍā’il al-jihād*).⁹⁹ This genre first emerged in the eighth century, and was quickly popularized in public recitations by storytellers from Islamic Spain to Persia, as it was intended to arouse the enthusiasm of the crowds and to recruit volunteers. During the sixth and seventh/twelfth and thirteenth centuries, i.e., during the Crusades, the genre reached its heyday, and the exhortatory stories

93 Reid, War, peace 4.

94 Jowett and O'Donnell, *Propaganda* 279.

95 A short biography of Karel van Langen can be found in Anonymous, Langen 530.

96 Reid, War, peace 4.

97 See Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese* ii, 117–8, whose categorization is adopted in Voorhoeve, *Catalogue*.

98 Pace Snouck Hurgronje, *The Acehese* ii, 118, who first made this assertion.

99 Arabic literature has a special genre of works on “the merits” (*faḍā’il*) of all kinds of topics, see Sellheim, Faḍīla 728–9 and Walther, *Kleine Geschichte* 164, 239. For the subgenre on “the merits of the holy war,” see Jarrar, The martyrdom; Christie, Motivating; and Dajani-Shakeel, Jihād.

on holy war acquired their definitive form, becoming close to popular folk literature.¹⁰⁰

Comparison with medieval Arabic literature on the *jihād* makes clear that Acehnese '*ulamā*' must have been among its most avid readers. The historian Niall Christie disentangles three "major motivational threads" running through the narrative of the *Kitāb al-Jihād* (Book of the holy war) of 'Alī b. Tāhir al-Sulamī (d. 500/1106), which we also know from Acehnese examples, viz. provoking "listeners into action through playing on feelings of guilt or shame, frightening them with the probable consequences of inaction, and tempting them with earthly rewards."¹⁰¹ Furthermore, in his case study on the genre of "the merits of holy war" the Arabist Maher Jarrar draws attention to the central theme of "the holy war as a sacred wedding," and discusses several *topoi*, which we can also detect in Acehnese war poems (e.g., the revelatory dream of the hero who has a vision of paradise; the hero's immediate passage to the *hūrīs* directly upon his heroic death; the comparison between the paradisaical virgins and earthly women; and the ridiculing of flesh-and-blood females).¹⁰²

The appearance of militant motivational literature inciting the Acehnese to wage *jihād* against the infidel, has been hailed in postcolonial Indonesian discourse as an expression of an age-old Acehnese 'fighting tradition' on behalf of Islam. However, this attempt at mythmaking conveniently overlooks the remarkable fact that the '*ulamā*' had to do their utmost to constantly remind their flock of this so-called 'fighting tradition.' The theologians who wrote the Acehnese war propaganda were steeped in the world of Arabic letters, and they did not wear their learning lightly. James Siegel writes that the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II is difficult for people with little knowledge of Malay and Arabic to understand.¹⁰³ I am inclined to view the quest of the young hero for Ainul Mardiah in paradise, ascending from one level to the next, as something of a learned inside joke. This golden fiancée, who outshines all nymphs in paradise, has an exotic appellation, which means nothing to uneducated Acehnese, but could easily be recognized by Arabists as '*ʿayn al-marḍiyya*, which loosely translates to "source of satisfaction."¹⁰⁴

100 Jarrar, The martyrdom.

101 Christie, Motivating 2. See also N. Christie's discussion of al-Sulamī's *Kitāb al-Jihād* and M. Jarrar's contribution in the present publication.

102 Jarrar, The martyrdom.

103 Siegel, *Shadow* 259–61.

104 Ibid., 253–9; he discusses Ainul Mardiah at length, but does not refer to the Arabic origin of this term.

Hikayat Prang Sabi texts stand in a long tradition of Islamic rhetoric on *jihād*. Evocation of the pleasures of the wedding night is a central theme, but another common feature of these stories of “the merits of holy war” is the assurance that the pain of death for one fighting in the way of God is no more than “the pain of a pinch.”¹⁰⁵ This notion, which could already be found in medieval Arabic *jihād* propaganda, is transposed in Acehnese *Hikayat Prang Sabi* texts into the comparison that if a *mujāhid* is hit by a Dutch bullet, it will feel like the quenching of a terrible thirst or like a mother tickling the legs of her infant.¹⁰⁶ Apparently, present-day recruiters of radicals still use the same rhetorical devices. For example, a few years ago, an Islamic preacher told British teenage boys to train with Kalashnikov rifles as soldiers for Islam. If they died as religious martyrs, their rewards in paradise would include seventy-two virgins, and they would eat from the fruits of paradise. Furthermore, this *jihād* enthusiast asserted that “[e]ven if you are hit by a cruise missile, the pain will feel like that of a mosquito bite.”¹⁰⁷

7 A War That Will Not Go Away

The theme of an oppressed people's fight against foreign colonialists can be found in much of the so-called decolonized world, as a recurrent element in the master plots of ethnicity/race and nationhood. In post-independence Indonesia the ‘heroes’ Teuku Umar (1854–99) and Teungku Chik di Tiro (1836–91), as well as the ‘heroines’ Cut Nyak Dien (1850–1908), and Cut Nyak Meutia (1870–1910), who all participated in the Aceh War, were given a place in the Indonesian nationalist pantheon of heroes, and are categorized in Indonesian schoolbooks as “heroes of the struggle for Indonesian independence.”¹⁰⁸ The Acehnese *jihād* could easily be represented as simply one chapter among many in the state-sanctioned myth of the 350-year struggle of ‘the Indonesian people’ against their Dutch oppressors.

In the postcolonial period the Acehnese War was not only described as the manifestation of the so-called ‘fighting tradition’ of the Acehnese people against Dutch colonialism, but also, and much more importantly, as an

105 Jarrar, *The martyrdom* 100.

106 Damsté, *Atjèhsche oorlogspapieren* 782.

107 News item “British martyrs ‘promised 72 virgins,” dated 23 January 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/england/2687797.stm.

108 See e.g. Ajisaka, *Mengenal*, from which I also took the years of birth and death of the heroes.

expression of a primordial Acehese identity. In contradistinction to other Indonesian ethnicities, Acehese were not only defined as Muslims, but as singularly pious, militant defenders of the faith. I will not go into the complexities of Aceh's bitter internecine power struggle with Jakarta in the era of independence, but will only briefly discuss, in a short coda, the postcolonial legacy of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi*.

Few Acehese-language books were published before World War II, and while Dutch sponsorship favored European-style texts, under Dutch rule the publication of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* was not permitted. By contrast, in the postcolonial period a veritable book industry was established; it produced a steady stream of publications on local culture and regional history, including reprints of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi*.¹⁰⁹ The official nationalist celebration of Acehese identity emphasized Aceh's "specialness," highlighted the heroism of the Acehese people, and in the process of the glorification of Aceh, made wildly exaggerated claims that the Acehese were Muslim from earliest times, and had been staunch defenders of the faith ever since.¹¹⁰

The role of Ali Hasjmy (1914–98), the first post-independence governor of Aceh, and a prolific author of romanticized accounts of the Aceh War, can hardly be underestimated; he disseminated the popular view that the bravery of the Acehese people who opposed the Dutch infidel was due to their inherent religious zeal. The *Hikayat Prang Sabi* is interpreted in Ali Hasjmy's work as a blueprint for the 'victory' of the Acehese in their holy war against the Dutch; the Acehese willingly sacrificed their lives, undeterred by death, knowing that they would be given entrance into heaven.¹¹¹ Ali Hasjmy's mythologized rewriting of the Aceh War as a heroic epic along the lines of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* has meanwhile become "an authoritative foundational text."¹¹² This oversimplified and fanciful history is nowadays considered by leading Acehese academics as emblematic of Acehese identity. For example, Hasan Basri, currently professor of Quranic exegesis and Islamic thought at the State Islamic Institute Ar-Raniriy Nanggroe Aceh Darussalam, states that Acehese identity and Islam are synonymous: "The Acehese are known today for the great care they take over religion, for the fact that they can read the Qur'an fluently, for the way they obediently perform their religious duties, for having nobility

109 Aspinall, *Islam and nation* 36–7.

110 See *ibid.*, 37.

111 Ali Hasjmy's best-known book is entitled *Why the Acehese People were able to fight Dutch Aggression for Decades*, see Hasjmy, *Apa sebab*.

112 Clavé-Celik, *The Acehese women warriors*.

of character, and for the way they shun immoral behaviour and crime.”¹¹³ He claims that even the few exceptional Acehnese who are only nominal Muslims “will still defend Islam to the death and will oppose those who do identify with the infidels.”¹¹⁴ The spirit of *jihād*, then, would seem to be inherently Acehnese.

This constructed image of Acehnese as proud *mujāhidīn* was likewise eagerly exploited by the Acehnese separatist movement. Whereas the official, Jakarta-approved discourse lauded Acehnese anti-colonialism as an exemplary contribution to the Indonesian independence struggle, the anti-Jakarta insurgents liked to cast the national Indonesian government in the role of the hated colonialist. Propaganda materials from the Free Aceh Movement (known by its Indonesian acronym GAM, Gerakan Aceh Merdeka) routinely spoke of the “Javanese colonial government” or the “neo-colonial Indonesian government.” The *Hikayat Prang Sabi* became “a kind of anthem by Aceh Merdeka fighters, who would sing it at secret meetings and in exile. Sometimes they would replace phrases in the original, such as *Dutch infidels*, with modern equivalents such as *Javanese spies*.”¹¹⁵ Edward Aspinall, who has looked into the contents of GAM literature, concludes that “it is easy to find evidence of a cult of martyrdom that extends the old ideology.”¹¹⁶

In the history of publishing the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* in an effort to popularize it, I would like to single out the influential role of Abdullah Arif (1922–70), who was a leading literary figure in post-independence Aceh. Siegel calls him the most prominent person to present the past to the Acehnese public, and rightly remarks that “Abdullah Arif wrote to instruct.”¹¹⁷ In the 1950s and 1960s he was able to play the role of broker in local politics, because of his good relations with rebel leaders as well as with the national government.¹¹⁸ Already at an early age, he drew attention to himself as an advocate of the militants in a local conflict, known as the Cumbok War, which was fought between December 1945 and January 1946.¹¹⁹ A radical group that sided with the Republic had declared holy war against the nobles, and Abdullah Arif, in support of the *mujāhidīn* in

113 Basri, *Islam in Aceh* 187. Hasan Basri is also the same person who wrote a most laudatory biography of Ali Hasjmy, see Basri, Teungku A. Hasjmy.

114 Basri, *Islam in Aceh* 187.

115 Aspinall, *Islam and nation* 98.

116 *Ibid.*, 97.

117 Siegel, *Shadow* 270.

118 See Sjamsuddin, *The republican revolt* 146. For more biographical details, see Siegel, *Shadow* 267–70.

119 Sjamsuddin, *The republican revolt* 146.

this fratricidal war, published a version of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* in his newly established series *Seumangat Atjeh* (*Spirit of Aceh*).¹²⁰

The Acehnese historian Mohammad Isa Sulaiman, who has studied the four booklets from the series *Spirit of Aceh*, which were first published between October 1945 and January 1946, observes that Abdullah Arif drew heavily on *Hikayat Prang Sabi* rhetoric for his anti-Dutch propaganda.¹²¹ Sulaiman cites *inter alia* the trope that a martyr in the holy war will not fall, but will be caught by Ainul Mardiah:¹²²

Hadis pangoelèe Rasoeloellah
Gata han reubah oh keunong beudé
Meungkon lam leumoeng Ainoel Mardiah
Han lom reubah he boh haté

According to a Prophetic tradition,
 you will not fall down when you're shot.
 Only into the arms of Ainul Mardiah
 you'll fall, my dears.

Abdullah Arif possessed his own printing press in Aceh's capital Kutaraja from 1945, but we do not have an overview of his publications. The research library of the KITLV in Leiden, arguably one of the world's best research libraries on Indonesia, has collected a total of eighteen works from his press, the last ones from around 1963, including a 1960s copy of a four-volume edition, in Arabic script, of a version of the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* II.¹²³ The first volume of the latter edition contains the story of Ainul Mardiah, which he had published immediately after World War II, in Roman script, in the series *Spirit of Aceh* (volume iv).¹²⁴

120 Sulaiman, *From autonomy* 127. A copy of this book, kept in the library of the research institute KITLV in Leiden, has been made available in a digitalized version on the Aceh Books website, see http://www.acehbooks.org/pdf/ACEH_03452.pdf. The title page informs the reader that a part of the revenue would be donated to victims from the Cumbok War.

121 See Sulaiman, *Islam et propagande* 207–17.

122 *Ibid.*, 214, unaltered orthography.

123 The KITLV even has three copies of this edition, with shelf numbers mm-22-N, hh-3244-N, and hh-5462-N. The latter copy was digitalized, and is available at http://www.acehbooks.org/pdf/ACEH_00304.pdf. Since 1 July 2014, the KITLV library and collections have been managed by Leiden University Library.

124 Voorhoeve, *Catalogue* 73.

The front covers of Abdullah Arif's publications have a forceful iconographic denotation of Acehnese identity. For example, in the case of the *Spirit of Aceh* the two defining aspects of what is believed to be the Acehnese spirit are graphically illustrated, viz. militancy and piety (Fig. 53.1).¹²⁵ Two crossed daggers are prominently placed at the forefront, thereby functioning as a gate for the royal mosque in Kutaraja. Here Islam is most dramatically pictured sheltered in the shade of the swords. The two weapons, which can be identified as *réncongs*, are highly symbolic: the word *réncong* has entered the dictionaries as "an Acehnese dagger with a curved handle (often used as a symbol of Aceh)."¹²⁶ The shape of this dagger is said to symbolize the Arabic lettering of the *bas-mala*, reinforcing once more the close connection constructed between Aceh, Islam, and warfare.¹²⁷ The symbolism of the Acehnese daggers is also employed in the printer's vignette (Fig. 53.2), in which a radiant book is situated above the royal mosque. The sickle-and-star framework rising above the two crossed swords is likewise a powerful Islamic symbol, while the name Abdullah Arif is written in Arabic script upon the crescent moon.¹²⁸ The year 1945 between the crossed daggers heralds the year Abdullah Arif established his printing press, and also the year of Indonesia's declaration of independence.

Abdullah Arif also published collections of traditional and modern *pantōn*, which is a genre of oral poetry. Whereas this kind of poetry is generally not politically motivated in cognate literatures in Indonesia, even in this sector we encounter expressions of constructed Acehnese identity. From her fieldwork experiences in the 1990s, Jacqueline Aquino Siapno relates that Acehnese lullabies in the form of *pantōn* are sung from one generation to the next, rhapsodizing the spirit of *jihād*. Among those that are still often sung, she quotes the following example:¹²⁹

Doo-doo-da-i-dang
Seulayang blang kaputoh talou
Bebagah rayek banta seudang
Tajak muprang bela nanggrou

125 Abdullah Arif's *Nasib Atjeh* iii is available in digital form at http://www.acehbooks.org/pdf/ACEH_03222.pdf.

126 See e.g., Stevens and Schmidgall-Tellings, *Dictionary* 823.

127 See Barbara Leigh, The *rencong*. Illustrations and a detailed description can be found in Van Zonneveld, *Traditional weapons* 113–4. Extending the *sīn-mīm* ligature of the phrase *bi-smi (llāh)*, forming a long line, is the most common way of calligraphic embellishment in manuscripts from Indonesia, see Gallop, *Beautifying* 196–9.

128 On comparable graphic symbolism in Malay religious books, cf. Wieringa, *Some light* 188–9.

129 Siapno, *Gender* 145, unaltered orthography.

Doo-doo-da-i-dang,
 the string broke, the kite flew off.
 Grow up quickly, little child,
 help us to go to war, defend this country.

Another favorite evergreen is:¹³⁰

La Ilaaha Illallah
Muhammad Rasul nabi geutanyou
Beuteugoh Iman aneuk meutuwah
Di jalan Allah meuprang bek lalou

There is no God but Allāh
 and Muḥammad is his Prophet.
 Make your faith strong, little child,
 striving in the path of Allāh.

Through these songs, Acehnese children are taught to be good Muslims, to fight to defend their religion and country.

Abdullah Arif's 1958 compilation *Pantōn aneuk miet* or Poems for small children, which formed part of the series *Pantōn Aceh* (Acehnese poems), was brought out again in 2006, this time accompanied by translations into Indonesian and playful illustrations. The new publication was made possible by commercial sponsors, but also by such official organizations as the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Indonesian Ministry of Culture and Tourism. An example of what they sponsored was the poem *Muda seudang* (Teenage boy):¹³¹

Sidroe aneuk muda seudang
Jijak lam prang lawan kaphé
Ji-ék guda ka jipasang
Cok geuliwang deungon beudé

A young boy in his teens
 joins the war against the infidels,
 keen to ride on a horse,
 armed with sword and rifle.

¹³⁰ Ibid., unaltered orthography.

¹³¹ Arif, *Pantōn aneuk miet* 21–2.

*Cok ngon reuncōng dum alat prang
That guransang dalam haté
'Oh trōih keudéh lam mideuen prang
Ka jimeucang sallō'alé*

He takes the *réncong* and all military equipment.
He is endowed with combativeness.
Upon arrival on the battlefield,
he wages the holy war.

*Le that maté kaphé suang
Keunong cékyang ngon boh beudé
Aneuk muda that guransang
Kaphé jicang dum sagai bé*

Many miserable infidels are killed,
shot by his rifle.
The young boy is combative,
slaughtering all infidels.

*Padum lawét lam mideuen prang
Meutang-ilang lawan kaphé
Teuma syahid muda seudang
Di teungoh blang ka meugulé*

After a long time on the battlefield,
fighting the infidels,
the young boy is made a martyr,
fallen on the field of battle.

*Samlakoe jroh hanaimbang
Dum sibarang han ingat lé
Tinggai rumoh gampōng ngon blang
Tinggai ladang di binèh glé*

The warrior is never worried,
nothing can obstruct him.
Leave your house, village and rice field!
Leave the village at the edge of the mountain!

*Cut samlakoe woe bak Tuham
 Syeuruga lapan citka hasé
 Meunan janji lam Kuru'an
 Ne'mat Tuhan hanjeuet kheun lé*

The warrior returns home, back to God.
 The eighth heaven is already waiting,
 as promised in the Quran;
 God's pleasures are indescribable.

*Budiadari iréng sajan
 Rupa jih ban cahya kandé
 Tujōh plōh droe saban-saban
 Nyan balasan bak prang kaphé*

The *ḥūrīs* are coming out in throngs to
 welcome him,
 with lit up countenances, shining brightly.¹³²
 Seventy in number, all looking similar,
 being the reward for waging the war against the infidels.

Another poem in this twenty-first-century collection is called *Di babah pintō syeuruga lapan* (At the threshold of the eighth heaven), which also deserves to be quoted in full:¹³³

*Di babah pintō syeuruga lapan
 Saboh krueng sinan indah han sakri
 Batè di panté pudoe ngon intan
 Lam krueng meukawan budiadari*

At the threshold of the eighth heaven
 flows a beautiful river,
 and the stones at the beach are diamonds.
 The *ḥūrīs* amuse themselves in this river.

¹³² The word *kandé* (Malay *kandil*, Arabic *qindil*, English *candle*) denotes a big lamp.

¹³³ Arif, *Pantōn aneuk miet* 23. The term “eighth heaven” should be understood as the highest abode in paradise.

*Budiadari dum muda seudang
 Jiteubiet u blang jidong meuriti
 Jicok ngon kipah jimat bak jaroe
 Jiprèh woe lakoe dalam prang sabi*

The *hūrīs* are all pretty.
 Going to the grassland, they form neat rows,
 gracefully waving their fans,
 while waiting for their husband in the holy war.

*'Ohban saré troih teungku meutuah
 Jipeuduek pantaih ateueh keurusi
 Jimueng ulèe jisampōh darah
 Alhamdulillah trōih ban janji*

When the fortunate gentleman arrives,
 they lovingly welcome him on his throne,
 caressing his head, cleaning his wounds.
 Praise be to God, for the promise is kept.

*Janji Tuhanku dilèe mula
 Masōk syeuruga soe tém prang sabi
 Soe nyang tém poh sitrèe ceulaka
 Biek beulaga kaphé hareubi¹³⁴*

At first, Our Lord made a promise:
 the reward for entering the holy war is heaven.
 Let's wipe out the wretched enemies,
 those pitch-black infidel enemies!

*Meutuah that muda bahlia
 Jipōt lingka lé putroe ti
 Nyankeu balaih lam syeuruga
 Le that pahla bak prang sabi*

134 The word *hareubi* originates from Arabic *ḥarbī*, denoting an infidel against whom any kind of warfare is permissible.

The young man is most fortunate:
 the fair ladies cool his body with their fans.
 Such are the rewards in heaven,
 as the holy war merits many awards.

If there is such a thing as Islamophobia, these ditties would seem to provide a good reason for it. However, a sloganeering, Manichean debate along the lines of either “Islam is evil” or “Islam means peace” leads nowhere. In this context I would like to draw attention to the fact that church-goers who earnestly claim and preach that “Christianity is love,” may enthusiastically sing the hymn *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, without noticing the inherent paradox in the least. As the argument commonly goes, this song’s obvious martial associations should be interpreted figuratively. Originally written as a processional hymn in 1865 in England by the Anglican cleric Sabine Baring-Gould, *Onward, Christian Soldiers* was not inspired by any actual war, but by “a special day for children when peace and brotherhood were the theme for all the activities.”¹³⁵ As it happens, the Salvation Army eagerly added Father Baring-Gould’s children’s anthem to its militant hymnody, but *Onward, Christian Soldiers* has also been one of the Ku Klux Klan’s favorite marching tunes.¹³⁶ The song has great emotional power: it will bring “chill bumps to any dedicated Klansman,” as it will to many traditional Christians.¹³⁷ Stirring up strong emotions, it reinforces among its singers “a sense of solidarity with the group, a ‘we-ness.’”¹³⁸ The lyric has also lent scriptural authority to the African American civil rights movement in the United States. The well-known Baptist minister (and preacher of nonviolence and passive resistance) Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–68) once wrote about the feelings of joy, pride, and fulfillment when singing it vigorously together:

The opening hymn was the old familiar ‘Onward Christian Soldiers,’ and when that mammoth audience stood to sing, the voices outside (the church building could not accommodate the large gatherings) swelling the chorus in the church, there was a mighty ring like the glad echo of heaven itself. . . . The enthusiasm of these thousands of people swept everything along like an onrushing tidal wave.¹³⁹

135 Collins, *Stories* 147.

136 See Murdoch, *Origins* 101; and McVeigh, *The rise* 143.

137 Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan* 64.

138 Jasper, *The emotions of protest* 183.

139 Cited in Jasper, *The emotions of protest* 183.

The point that I wish to make is that lyrics related to the *Hikayat Prang Sabi*, too, are linked to “the pleasures of protest,” fostering solidarity within one’s own group.¹⁴⁰ Of course, the *Hikayat Prang Sabi* will always be associated with *jihād*, but in contemporary Aceh this does not necessarily imply that this loaded term must always be interpreted only in a historical and literal sense, i.e., in its traditional meaning of fighting a war against the infidel. In the terminology of some Islamic theologians the “*jihād* of the sword” or “physical *jihād*” is only “the smaller *jihād*,” in contrast to the peaceful forms of “the greater *jihād*,” viz., the struggle against one’s own evil or exerting oneself for the sake of Islam and the community of believers, e.g., by the *jihād* of the tongue or the *jihād* of the pen.¹⁴¹ Jacqueline Siapno informs us that in Aceh, in recent years, *jihād* has also come to be understood in more irenic ways, viz. “fighting against injustice and poverty, state violence, struggling to overcome ignorance, in addition to normative piety (striving to practice Islam properly).”¹⁴²

The massive tsunami that struck on 26 December 2004 killed around 180,000 people in Aceh, and destroyed substantial parts of its coastal areas. However, this disaster was also the catalyst for peace talks between the Indonesian government and the Free Aceh Movement, resulting in the signing of a peace agreement on 15 August 2005. A long and sad history of much violence has seen to it that the ‘Song of the holy war’ has become deeply ingrained into the collective thought of the Acehnese people, but, hopefully, with the passing of time, a figurative rather than a literal interpretation of the term *jihād* may finally develop into the dominant mode of understanding. Whereas literalist advocates of the “*jihād* of the sword” may claim that direct entrance into heavenly paradise is for those who strive for martyrdom in the path of God, “the greater *jihād*” at least ensures that hell on earth will not materialize.

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140 Jasper, The emotions of protest 182.

141 Peters, *Jihād* 369–70; Alfian, Aceh 109–10.

142 Siapno, *Gender* 143.

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Beli banyak
dapat korting.

Pesan kepada :
ABDULLAH ARIF
Kutaradja.

FIGURE 53.1 Advertisement for volume xii of the series Spirit of Aceh. Its title page features two crossed traditional Acehnese daggers, which symbolically function as a gate for the royal mosque in Kutaraja. From Abdullah Arif, Nasib Atjeh [*The fate of Aceh*] iii, Kutaradja 1958. KITLV Leiden, shelf mark mm-199-N.

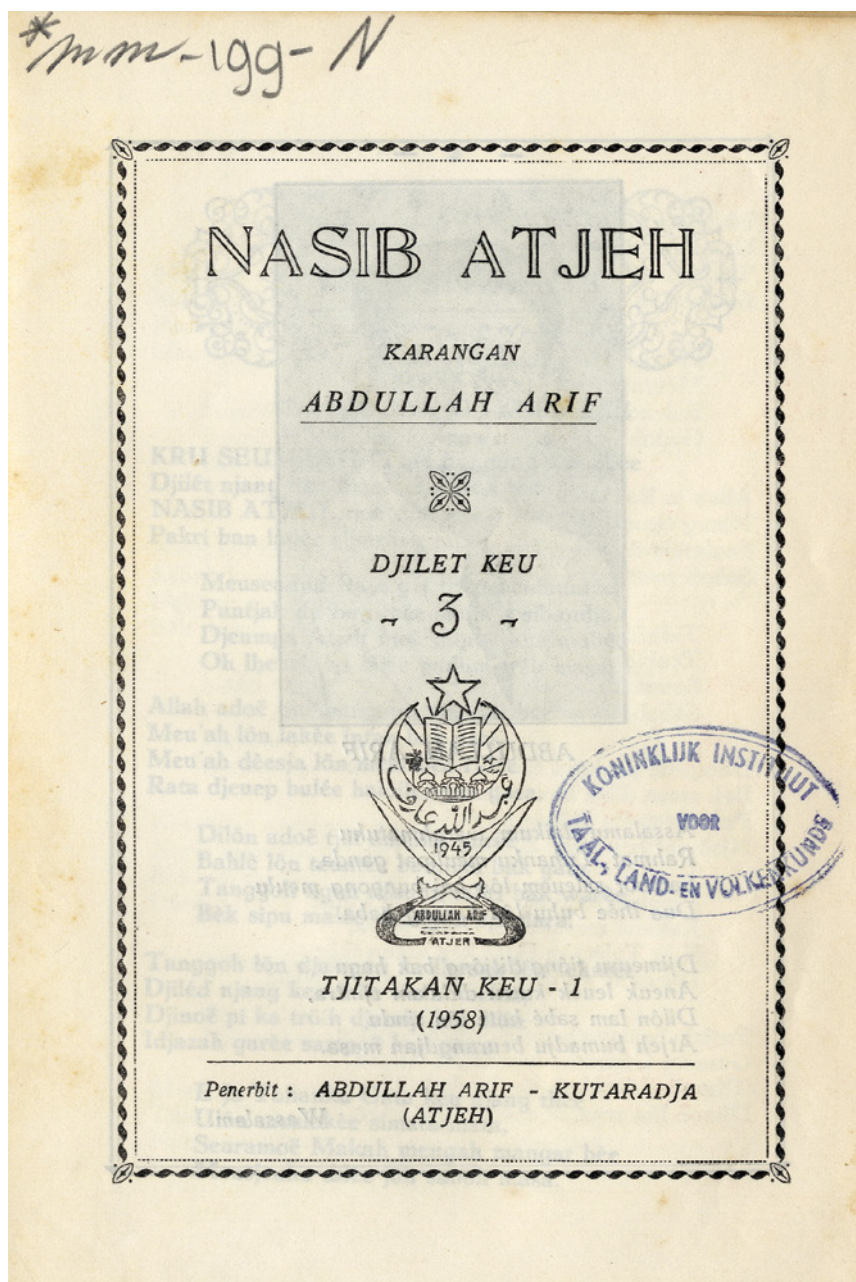


FIGURE 53.2 Cover of Abdullah Arif's *Nasib Atjeh* [*The fate of Aceh*] iii, Kutaradja 1958. The vignette has a strongly Islamic design. KITLV Leiden, shelf mark mm-199-N.

Eschatology between Reason and Revelation: Death and Resurrection in Modern Islamic Theology

Umar Ryad

By the end of the nineteenth century, a great number of Muslim scholars tried to revitalize a new *kalām* (or Islamic theology) to address modern philosophical and scientific issues. Facing a multitude of religious and intellectual challenges under the Western colonial dominion, these new theologians were forced to reevaluate classical theological and philosophical ideas related to the existence of God, creation, good and evil, prophecy, and the afterlife. Most of them became convinced that classical *kalām* concepts had lost the logical basis of argumentation in the face of newer experimental and empirical methods of science.¹ As eschatology is the main domain of metaphysical postulations, modern Muslim theologians analyzed various classical eschatological subjects in response to these intellectual challenges.

In their 1981 work, *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*, Jane I. Smith and Y.Y. Haddad succinctly studied and presented examples of ideas by modern Islamic thinkers and theologians on such subjects.² The authors correctly observe that unlike classical theologians, who were generally interested in using particular references in the religious sources to the *barzakh* state after death to illustrate specific points about the nature of God and His justice,³ modern Muslim writers rather tend to address the heavy Western emphasis on rationalism. In fact, the great majority of contemporary Muslim writers have chosen not to discuss the afterlife at all, since they are satisfied with simply affirming the reality of the day of judgment and human accountability and see no need to provide details or interpretive discussion. According to Smith and Haddad, this is, in large part, because Muslim thinkers face a kind of “embarrassment with the elaborate traditional detail concerning life in the grave and in the abodes of recompense, called into question by modern

¹ Ozervarli, Attempts to revitalize.

² Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding*.

³ Ibid., 33.

rationalists.”⁴ In their view, modern Muslim thinkers conceive their main task as emphasizing in particular the work ethic that will help achieve material and technological parity with the West.⁵ Unfortunately Smith and Haddad did not select their case studies from the above-mentioned revitalization trend of the new Islamic theology. They therefore ignore an important aspect of modern theological thought as reflected by those thinkers and their attempts to reinterpret the traditional viewpoints concerning eschatological subjects.

Smith and Haddad analyze modern Muslim thinkers under three categories, namely traditionalists, modernists, and spiritualists; this is plausible but not comprehensive or representative. It is true that contemporary traditionalist Muslim writers produce new material in modern Arabic about the traditional view of Islam on the afterlife with no additional interpretation. Modernists, by contrast, are much more concerned with interpretive analyses of life, the conciliation between science and the immediate life after death, the possibility of continuing human development, and the Quran’s affirmation of ethical responsibility.⁶ Representatives of the trend of Islamic spirituality, who flourished during the colonial period, were interested in popular European and American spiritual writings; they looked to these writings especially in their responses to Orientalist and missionary accusations that Islam’s conception of the afterlife is sensual and material.⁷

Despite the fact that the two authors agree that the three categories are fluid and certainly not always mutually exclusive, they sometimes tend to quote obscure writers to reach specific general conclusions on what they categorize as “modernist thinkers and theologians.” In the present chapter, I argue that any attempt to renew the discipline of *kalām* in modern times (including in discussions of eschatological issues) should not be regarded as entirely liberal, modernist or reformist. This is not an organized movement, but rather sporadic attempts – representatives of this trend inevitably tried to harmonize traditional Islamic tenets with the positivistic modern attitude toward nature and science. Thus theirs was an attempt to combine religious values with scientific discoveries and interpret revelation (sometimes) according to the scientific theories of the age.⁸

The present chapter investigates the interpretations of significant modern Muslim theologians and scholars on eschatological issues. I have not

4 Ibid., 99–100.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 100.

7 Ibid., 101.

8 Ozervarli, *Attempts to revitalize* 104.

undertaken an exhaustive study, nor do I provide a comprehensive overview of their thoughts on the subject. Rather, this exploration seeks to clarify their multifaceted views about eschatological issues within this new trend of modern theology by examining a few key texts. The present paper explores their methods of including, analyzing, criticizing or circumventing the classical theological treatment of death and the life hereafter. What are the contributions of these modern theologians to the concept of resurrection and divine judgment, the portents prior to or accompanying these events, and the nature of the hereafter? To what extent did they agree or differ with traditional Islamic views on death and the afterlife? How did they relate their understanding of modern scientific findings to the religious truth about eschatological subjects? To what extent did they make use of natural phenomena and rational clarifications in this modern theological discourse?

1 A Bridge between Medieval and Modern Theology: Shāh Walī Allāh's Eschatology

Smith and Haddad note that Indo-Pakistani Muslim scholars emphasize a kind of Darwinian evolutionism as a vindication of Islamic ideas.⁹ Their study however was limited to a scant analysis of the ideas of people like Abū l-A'la al-Mawdūdī (d. 1399/1979) and the Aḥmadiyya modernist Mawlānā Muḥammad 'Alī (d. 1371/1951). They did not dwell upon the ideas of other significant Indo-Pakistani theologians who seriously reinvestigated classical eschatological themes in the modern context.

Take, for example, the role of the great theologian Shāh Walī Allāh (d. 1176/1762) in renewing religious concepts. His ideas serve as a bridge between medieval and modern developments.¹⁰ As part of his philosophy of religion in general, Walī Allāh deemed eschatological issues in the Quran and *ḥadīth* as belonging to the realm of a metaphysical-psychological system, but he was not inclined to explain relevant statements allegorically.¹¹ Rather he argued that all topics related to the afterlife (such as the questioning in the grave, the weighing of one's deeds, the crossing of the Bridge, and the vision of God) can be understood by the human intellect.¹² His explanations were

9 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 101.

10 Rafiabadi, *Saints and saviours* 134; for more about him, see Hermansen, Shāh Walī Allāh's theory; Baljon, *A mystical interpretation*; Baljon, *Religion and thought*.

11 Halepota, *Philosophy* 258.

12 Jalbani, *Teachings* 193.

mostly based on his psychological views of psychic states and their representations in mental images.¹³

Walī Allāh interpreted the day of judgment as a matter related to the non-material life, which should be shaped according to the nature of the *‘ālam al-mithāl* (World of Similitudes).¹⁴ Walī Allāh developed this doctrine, also known as the Realm of Images, which was in fact a product of medieval Muslim mysticism, as an attempt to rationalize certain dogmatic beliefs, particularly those of an eschatological nature. As an example of such rationalization, and to demonstrate that it did not begin in the eighteenth century, he cited al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). For example, al-Ghazālī explained the tradition about the “punishment in the grave” of a disbeliever being stung by ninety-nine serpents, each with seven heads, by stating that this number refers to the chief vices and their numerous subdivisions that destroy human happiness.¹⁵ Through later Muslim theologians and mystics, such as Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī (d. 710/1311), and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), this doctrine became an integral part of Sufi spiritual culture.¹⁶

Walī Allāh was of the view that there existed a “subtle vapor” in the human body, known as *nasma*. By employing the humoral theory (which was used by Greek, Roman, and Islamic physicians in treating the human body, and which was still used by European physicians until the nineteenth century), he argued that this subtle vapor was the cause of the essence of the four humors of the human body, i.e., blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. It was like a white fog that prevailed over the whole body and was responsible for its functioning.¹⁷ In Walī Allāh’s view, physicians agreed that as soon as this vapor was in the body, man was alive; but as soon as it was separated from it, he was dead. According to him this subtle vapor was the spirit. One of its qualities was that it could taste without a tongue and hear without the use of ears. When a man died, his *nasma* became very weak because the four humors did not exist anymore, but it did not completely disappear. Providence helped the vapor to gain strength until it was able to see, hear, and speak. The *nasma* would therefore serve as a steed for the real soul in the world to come.¹⁸

Walī Allāh maintained that the separation of the *nasma* from the body was the cause of death, but its connection with the soul remained intact. As the

13 Halepota, *Philosophy* 259.

14 Cf. Lawson, Ahmad Ahsa’i.

15 Rahman, *Dream* 168–9.

16 Ibid., 168–80.

17 Jalbani, *Teachings* 194.

18 Ibid., 194–5.

body was a vehicle for the *nasma* in this world, similarly the *nasma* would be the vehicle for the soul in the hereafter. Walī Allāh compared the condition of the *nasma* in this world to that of an expert writer with his fingers cut off, who could retain the faculty of writing. The *nasma* after man's death retained, with its airy essence, almost all the faculties of the head and heart.¹⁹

In Walī Allāh's view, in that world of symbols and images individual qualities would vanish and only the specific form would remain, as reflected by man's intellectual and imaginative faculties surviving through and in the *nasma*. The World of Similitude was a world full of knowledge, and a clear exposition of *‘ālam al-arwāḥ* (the World of Spirits). Also, sciences of the World of Similitude would be revealed to man and he himself would become a representative of the World of Similitudes. In this world, the re-gathering of bodies and the infusion of souls in them was not the creation of a new life, but rather the completion of worldly life; and the relation between them was like that of cause and effect. However, due to its great transformation, the body that would be given to the human being on the day of judgment would not be exactly the same as it was before. The state of the human being would appear as something between the material and the non-material.²⁰

The stage following man's death was the *‘ālam al-barzakh* (World of the Grave). It resembled, in Walī Allāh's view, dreams during sleep, which were the reflection of man's thoughts and knowledge during the day. In sleep, man's sense faculties cease functioning and freely make their appearance. His feeling of pain in his dreams emanate from his thoughts, which appear to him in a particular form. The only difference between the world of dreams and that of the grave was that from the former one wakes up, while from the latter one will not rise until the day of judgment. Walī Allāh concluded, "a man overcome by fierceness and cruelty in this world will see in his grave a wild beast like a lion or a wolf scratching him with its claws. The miser will see a serpent or a scorpion biting or stinging him."²¹ However, if his actions were good, he would see angels with beautiful faces, carrying silken clothes and musk in their hands.²² Walī Allāh did not accept any metaphorical interpretations of these facts and stated that man would have twofold pain or pleasure in his grave. One part of this was his apprehension of his good or bad actions, and the other was that angels would be inspired to appear to him in some beautiful or ugly and awful form. All man's actions that were undertaken with full presence of mind were

19 Ibid., 196–7.

20 Ibid., 201–3.

21 Ibid., 197–8.

22 Ibid., 198.

preserved in his *nasma* and when his body decays after death, they will appear to him in their true colors.²³

This explanation reminds us of the views of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) who affirmed the existence of a new realm between the spiritual and the physical after death, which he called *al-muthul al-muʿallaqa* (the Realm of “Suspended Images”) or of *al-ashbāḥ al-mujarrada* (“Pure Figures”). In his view, the fully developed spiritual souls become pure lights, but those that have not fully developed through “illumination” and those pious souls who have faithfully followed the credal and practical prescriptions of religions will not rise to the status of pure spirits, but will ascend to the Realm of Suspended Images wherein they enjoy the quasi-physical delights of paradise. The vicious people, who are damned, will be assigned to the Realm of Pure Figures, but the figures they shall live with will be obnoxious and torturous.²⁴

As for the divine *mīzān* (lit., the Balance) and the *ṣirāṭ* (the Bridge to paradise), Walī Allāh pointed out that all actions of man will be weighed in the Balance, and he will be made to pass over the Bridge. He described the Bridge as the straight path of the *sharīʿa* that will appear there in its material form. It was the sample of the rule or way of life placed in the nature of men; their differences in crossing this path will reflect their differences in following the rules of the *sharīʿa* in their lives. Those who followed the path of *sharīʿa* will pass the Bridge as fast as lightning. The Balance will appear in a form, which is not purely material, nor is it immaterial, but is a shape in between.²⁵

Walī Allāh explained metaphorically some essential material concepts related to the hereafter. For instance, according to him the issue of *ḥisāb* (reckoning) refers to one of the manifestations of God’s attribute of discernment, while the river of Kawthar (a fountain) given to the Prophet Muḥammad points to a manifestation of his guidance. Every prophet has his fountain, but that of the Prophet Muḥammad is the source of all of them. The reward of paradise is a manifestation of God’s *jamālī* (amiable) attributes, while punishment in hell is a manifestation of His *jalālī* (majestic) attributes.²⁶

Another important aspect was Walī Allāh’s clarification of the mountain of *al-aʿrāf* (the heights), which he portrays as the in-between destination of persons who did not do any good, nor did they commit any evil acts. In Walī Allāh’s thinking, the “inmates of al-Aʿrāf” will include those who did not receive

23 Ibid., 199–200.

24 Rahman, *Dream* 169–70. For more about Suhrawardī, see for example, Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes* 175–7; Cf. Walbridge, *The leaven*; Ohlander, *Sufism*.

25 Jalbani, *Teachings* 203–5.

26 Ibid., 205–6.

the message of God, and those living on the mountain-tops, who, because of their ignorance could not derive any benefit from the message of Islam, nor could they understand the Quran and its arguments. It also includes people who were deficient in reason, such as children, lunatics, imbeciles, fools, and "rustics." Walī Allāh gave the example of a black slave-woman, who when asked by the Prophet about God, had pointed to up to heaven; the Prophet had said explicitly that she was a believer. Those to whom the message of Islam had not been conveyed or explained properly, those whose doubts had not been removed, would be lodged in al-A'rāf as well.²⁷

According to Walī Allāh's eschatological interpretations, man's progress did not end with his life in paradise; there was still a higher and nobler stage. After his long stay there, his *nasma* would become weak, and would continue to shape itself in various forms according to the requirements of the soul, until it attained its ultimate aim by eventually changing into the divine or the angelic soul.²⁸ Walī Allāh stressed that belief in the hereafter provided human beings with a clear-cut purpose in life and enabled them to endeavor to improve their present life and look forward to a pleasant state in the life hereafter.²⁹

2 Indo-Pakistani Modernist Theology

2.1 Sayyid Aḥmad Khān's Naturalism

Walī Allāh paved the way for many subsequent Indo-Pakistani Muslim theologians. One of the most significant contributions to modern theological thinking was made by Sayyid Aḥmad Khān (d. 1306/1898), whose new interpretation of Islamic tenets was based on his understanding of the laws of nature. In his naturalist approach, Khān considered the soul immortal, stressing that it would not perish with the death of the body. In support of his theory, he used the materialistic doctrine that nothing perishes in the world. The quantity of matter remains unchanged, it is only its form that is subject to change.³⁰

Khān did not present a systematic analysis of eschatological concepts. However, he stressed that man's happiness was dependent on his ability to ensure that his human faculty of "godliness" gained the upper hand over his faculty of "iniquity." In his view, in the hereafter the punishment for sins consists of the misery of the soul on the day of judgment. Due to his sins, the

²⁷ Ibid., 206–8.

²⁸ Ibid., 208–11.

²⁹ Halepota, *Philosophy* 261.

³⁰ Dar, *Religious thought* 221.

sinner will inflict wretchedness upon his soul, especially at the moment of death. Only the sin of *shirk* ("associationism," viz. the worship of other gods besides God) leads to everlasting misery that the soul can never be freed from.³¹ Khān maintained that the human soul will live on after death as immaterial and separate from its original body. According to him, scientific observations had proven that the soul exists, even though we cannot grasp its inner reality. The human soul, unlike that of animals, was privileged to be "put under obligation." It was "unlimited" and "undetermined" in its actions; man could cause his soul to develop and be happy or decline and be miserable.³²

Khān explained the Quranic references to *qiyāma* (resurrection) as a sign of the radical change of the individual human soul at the time of death, when it will be separated from its body and enter a new form. In this regard, Khān reinterpreted Quranic teachings on evolution against the background of the absence of belief in the existence of an immortal soul among the Arabs during the time of the revelation.³³ In other words, the Quran did not teach that the earthly body will rise again in the literal sense. But in order to impress the reality of reward and punishment upon the minds of "those Arabs," it had to appeal to their imagination by stressing the idea of such a bodily resurrection.³⁴

In Khān's view, all eschatological events were beyond man's comprehension. The major objective of the relevant Quranic texts was only to urge men to good deeds and discourage them from evil acts by showing them the long-term consequences of their deeds. The verses on paradise and hell were formulated in figurative language so that human beings would imagine the highest form of eternal bliss and repose. Such language was designed to awaken man's desire to obey commands and respect divine prohibition. Khān understood all the physical descriptions of the hereafter as metaphor. For example, the "blowing of the trumpet" referred to the radical change of everything at the end of time, and the "book of deeds" or the "weighing of the deeds on the scales" was a metonym for God's justice.³⁵

Khān argued that as the body was only the instrument of the soul, the subject of reward and punishment was the soul, not the body. At the time of death, the soul would acquire a certain kind of physical medium, which would be distinct from the present body, and at resurrection there would be no new life but a continuation of one's old life. The real purpose of the Quran's reference to

31 Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* 209–10.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid 211.

35 Ibid.

the reality of resurrection was merely to refute the beliefs of those who denied the existence of the soul and identified life with life on this earth only. The relevant verses of the Quran specifically address those who disbelieve in a life after death; the Quran does not describe the resurrection as a fact, but rather as the kind of life that will come to be.³⁶

Khān considered anyone who believes in the one God, even if he does not believe in Muḥammad, as not actually a *kāfir* (unbeliever), but a *muwaḥḥid* (unitarian believer). As for the status of non-Muslims in the hereafter, Khān quoted al-Ghazālī's view, that there would be three categories of unbelieving people: 1) those who never heard about Muḥammad and his message; 2) those who met Muslims and have a perfect knowledge of Islam; and 3) those who heard about Muḥammad and his message but insufficiently. People belonging to the first and third categories will find salvation in the hereafter.³⁷

Regarding the nature of paradise, Khān refused to believe that the words "garden," "streams," "houses made of gold," "silver and pearl bricks," "rivulets of milk," "honey," "wine," "delicious fruit," "beautiful damsels," and so on, were to be taken literally; for in this case they would contradict the Quran and *ḥadīth*. Man can only understand the nature of things that he experiences through his senses; even the things he can conceive in his imagination must be based, ultimately, on what he has already seen. Khān maintained that it was impossible to express the reality of super-sensuous things in language, even in divine language. The words used in the Quran are all metaphorical, referring to the physiological states of happiness and unhappiness that man will experience in the life after death. Khān quoted one *ḥadīth* in which a man asked the Prophet Muḥammad whether there would be horses in paradise. He replied, "You will have a red turquoise horse and you will be free to ride anywhere you like." Another asked, "Will there be camels also?" He replied, "Yes, and everything else which you will desire to have." This *ḥadīth* does not mean that there will be horses and camels; the Prophet wanted to point out that it would be a place of perfect happiness, however a man might interpret the shape of that happiness.³⁸ *Ru'yat Allāh* (vision of God) in the hereafter has to be seen as the fundamental and highest blessing of paradise. Paradise should be understood metaphorically as referring to the ability to see the Holy Essence openly, without a veil; and such a "spiritual disclosure" transcends mere rational affirmation.³⁹

36 Dar, *Religious thought* 222–3.

37 Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* 212–3.

38 Dar, *Religious thought* 222–6.

39 Troll, *Sayyid Ahmad Khan* 211.

2.2 *Afterlife between Science and Religion: Shibli l-Nu'mānī's Rationalist Theology*

The Indian revivalist historian Shibli l-Nu'mānī (d. 1332/1914) contributed to the discussions about the need for a modern theology as well. In his view, there is no conflict between science and religion, since they have nothing to do with each other as their subject matter and scope are different. All matters related to the creation, whether dealing with the components of water or the speed of light, belong to science and are of no concern to religion. Questions concerning the existence of God, life after death, or punishment and reward, however, should only be discussed in the domain of religion and are not to be touched by science. In his new theology, al-Nu'mānī championed rational interpretations by the Mu'tazilis and Muslim philosophers, and was later influenced by the mystical rationalism of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Rūmī.⁴⁰ He had been a close friend of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān, but later set aside his ideas. He even harshly criticized Khān and his group as "third-rate" and "short-sighted" materialists.⁴¹

Al-Nu'mānī was of the view that modern materialistic and naturalistic theories must be countered by mystical and philosophical contemplation of theological matters. For this reason, he argued that the issues of *kalām* had not really changed, and that any "part of the old *kalām* which is useless today was insufficient before also and will so remain always."⁴² All theological issues concerning the affirmation of God, His unity, prophecy, and the Quran as the word of God, and the hereafter, were legitimate concerns; the rest was irrelevant.⁴³

Al-Nu'mānī was a severe critic of Ash'arī theology which he described as "childish argumentations and unbounded speculations which have people believe in magic."⁴⁴ However, he excluded al-Ghazālī's theological thought by arguing that al-Ghazālī believed that "Ash'arism is good for the common people."⁴⁵ Al-Nu'mānī further argued that Islam is unique in its confirmation of the usual concept of reward and punishment in the hereafter as good for the common people. He strongly supported al-Ghazālī's view that reward and punishment are inalienable effects of good and bad deeds by saying that "hell is right inside you." Al-Nu'mānī concluded "if you did not understand the meanings in this manner, then you did not get from the Quran anything except the

40 Murad, *Intellectual modernism* 5.

41 Ibid., 6.

42 Ibid., 14.

43 Ibid., 15.

44 Ibid., 21.

45 Ibid., 27.

crust, as the cattle get only the husk from the wheat.”⁴⁶ In his mind, reward and punishment after death are in fact material expressions of spiritual things.⁴⁷

Al-Nu‘mānī found in Rūmī’s views a better and more convincing way of interpretation, and a clearer and more appealing presentation of faith. He preferred Rūmī’s positive arguments on the question of resurrection and the imperishability of the soul. He was attracted by Rūmī’s mystical interpretation of the plausibility of resurrection on the basis of the process of evolution in life, which al-Nu‘mānī saw as a Darwinian as well as a Quranic concept. According to this view, there is likely to come yet another, and better stage of life, in accordance with modern science that holds that matter and energy are indestructible. Body and soul will therefore only assume other forms.⁴⁸

2.3 *Muḥammad Iqbāl’s Reconstruction of Faith*

In his *Reconstruction of the Religious Thought in Islam*, the well-known poet and thinker Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1357/1938) analyzed these ideas further. In his comment on the verse “and everyone of them will come to Him singly on the Day of Judgment” (Q 19:95),⁴⁹ Iqbāl argued that the passage must be understood as a clear insight into the Islamic theory of salvation. Whatever the final fate of man, it does not mean the loss of individuality. He maintained that man’s “unceasing reward” is his gradual growth in self-possession, in uniqueness, and intensity of activity as an ego. Iqbāl interprets the *barzakh* stage in the Quranic terminology as some kind of suspense between death and resurrection. Resurrection is not based, as in Christianity, on the evidence of the actual resurrection of a historic person. Islam, in Iqbāl’s mind, seems to take resurrection as a universal phenomenon of life.⁵⁰

In Iqbāl’s philosophy, even the scene of “universal destruction” preceding the day of judgment cannot affect the perfect calmness of a full-grown human ego.⁵¹ Life offers a scope for ego-activity, while death is the first test of the synthetic activity of the ego. There are no pleasurable and painful acts after death; there are only acts that sustain and dissolve the ego.⁵²

46 Ibid., 45–6.

47 Ibid., 48–9.

48 Ibid., 52–3.

49 Quranic verses quoted from the translation of Yusuf Ali are available at <http://www.islam101.com/quran/yusufAli/index.htm>.

50 Iqbāl, *The reconstruction* 92.

51 Ibid., 93.

52 Ibid., 95.

Iqbāl defined the state of *barzakh* as not merely a passive state of expectation, but as one in which the ego catches a glimpse of fresh aspects of reality, and prepares to adjust itself to these aspects. The ego must continue to struggle until it is able to gather itself, and win resurrection. The resurrection is not an external event, but a continuation of a life process within the ego and nothing but a kind of stock-taking of the ego's past achievements and its future possibilities.⁵³ Iqbāl was aware of the difference of opinions among Muslim philosophers and theologians on the re-emergence of man's former physical state in the afterlife. He was impressed by the views of Shāh Walī Allāh, whom he considered the last great theologian of Islam. Iqbāl liked about Walī Allāh's interpretations the sense that resurrection involves at least some kind of physical medium suitable to the ego's new environment (discussed above).⁵⁴

Iqbāl claimed that Quranic teachings confirm that the ego's re-emergence will bring him "sharp sight" (Q 50:22) whereby it will clearly see the self it built as "fate fastened around his neck." He clearly stated that paradise and hell were states, not localities. According to him, the descriptions of the hereafter in the Quran were visual representations of an inner fact, i.e., of a human character. Hell, in the words of the Quran, is "God's kindled fire which mounts above the hearts" "(It is) the Fire of (the Wrath of) Allah kindled (to a blaze). The which doth mount (Right) to the Hearts:" (Q 104:6–7) – the painful realization of one's failure as a man. Heaven is the joy of triumph over the forces of disintegration. There is no such thing as eternal damnation in Islam. Iqbāl's view about the "eternity" of hell resembles the view of Ibn al-Qayyim (see below). In his view, the word *khulūd* (eternity), is explained by the Quran itself as only referring to a period of time (Q 78:23). Time cannot be wholly irrelevant to the development of personality. Hell as conceived in the Quran is not a pit of everlasting torture inflicted by a vengeful God; it is a corrective experience, which makes a hardened ego once more sensitive to the living breeze of Divine Grace. In Iqbāl's definition heaven is no holiday, as life is one and continuous:

[M]an marches always onward to receive ever fresh illuminations from an Infinite Reality, which every moment appears in a new glory. And the recipient of Divine illumination is not merely a passive recipient. Every act of a free ego creates a new situation, and thus offers further opportunities of creative unfolding.⁵⁵

53 Ibid., 96.

54 Ibid., 97.

55 Ibid., 98.

3 Death and Resurrection in Islamic Reformist Theology

3.1 *Al-Afghānī's Critique of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān*

Sayyid Jamāl al-Dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1314/1897) was still living in India when the ideas of Sayyid Aḥmad Khān became widespread among highly-educated Muslims in that country. As a sharp reaction to Khān and his followers, he wrote a treatise in Persian under the title: *The Truth about the Neicheri (or Naturalists) Sect and an Explanation of the Neicheris*, which was later translated by his Egyptian student Muḥammad 'Abduh under the name *An Answer to the Dahriyyīn (or Materialists)*. Whatever the political concerns behind al-Afghānī's treatise, in the present study we are mainly interested in his religious evaluation of Khān's eschatological interpretations.⁵⁶

Al-Afghānī did not present a systematic theological or philosophical interpretation of eschatological concepts in Islam, but deemed that Khān's ideas demolished the "pillars of the castle of man's happiness." Al-Afghānī considered belief in the day of judgment as one of the motivating forces driving human beings to become trustworthy and truthful in life. In al-Afghānī's view, Khān and his Neicheri group propagated the belief that there is no life after death and that

man is like a plant that grows in the spring and dries up in the summer, returning to the soil. The happy man is [one] who attains in this world animal appetites and pleasures. Because of this false opinion they gave currency to misfortunes of perfidy, treachery, deception, and embezzlement; they exhorted men to mean and vicious acts.⁵⁷

In al-Afghānī's mind, because of their denial of these facts the Neicheris had believed communism, and held that all desirable things should be shared among people.⁵⁸

Al-Afghānī maintained that the appearance of materialists and naturalists had undermined the great nations of the past. Former Greek and Persian civilizations vanished when those doctrines spread among their people, and their greatness and glory completely disappeared.⁵⁹ Al-Afghānī claimed that the superiority and greatness of the Muslim community remained until the fourth

56 About al-Afghānī's philosophy, see Keddīe, *An Islamic response*. Cf. Ali, Sayyid Jamaluddin Afghani.

57 Keddīe, *An Islamic response* 148.

58 Ibid., 149.

59 Ibid., 154–7.

century when the Neicheris, or materialists, appeared among them. According to al-Afghānī, in Egypt, for instance, they appeared under the name of Bāṭiniyya or those who know the hidden. He refers here to the Muslim groups throughout Islamic history that advocated the esoteric meaning in the scriptures and the law. The term *bāṭinī* served as a pejorative name for the Ismaʿīlis, especially by their opponents.⁶⁰ For al-Afghānī, they first created doubt in the Muslims about their beliefs. For a period of time, they strove, secretly, to corrupt the manners of Muslims till one of the followers of the well-known Bāṭiniyya sect publicly declared that

at the time of the Resurrection there will be no duties incumbent upon mankind, neither external nor internal ones. The Resurrection consists of the rising of the True Redeemer, and I am the True Redeemer. After this let everyone do whatever he wants since obligations have been removed.⁶¹

Throughout his response, al-Afghānī did not mention Khān and his group directly by name. He despised them for “collaborating” with the British who were teaching their people slavery instead of freedom and putting obstacles before their progress. When living in Paris, in 1884, he started to mention them directly by name. He believed that the British had planted them in the country in order to destroy religious belief among Muslims. Aḥmad Khān hovered around the English in order to obtain some advantage for himself and his group. He called himself a Neicheri and naturalist and began to seduce the “frivolous young men” in India. By crying “Nature, Nature,” he attempted to convince people that Europe had progressed in civilization, power, and strength by rejecting religion and explaining things in terms of nature. Oriental materialists, such as Khān, were not like materialists of Europe; for whoever abandons religion in Western countries retains the zeal to guard his people from the attacks of foreigners. Khān and his followers invited their people not only to reject religion, but also to disparage their fatherland and made their people consider foreign domination insignificant.⁶² They drew their swords to cut the throats of Muslims, while weeping for them and crying: “we kill you only out of compassion and pity for you, and seeking to improve you and make your lives comfortable.”⁶³

60 See, for example, Walker, Bāṭiniyya; Halm, *Kosmologie*.

61 Keddīe, *An Islamic response* 157. On this event see the discussion by Velji, Apocalyptic rhetoric, in the present publication.

62 Keddīe, *An Islamic response* 175–8.

63 Ibid., 179.

3.2 *Muḥammad Abduh's Renewed Theology*

The Egyptian Mufti Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1323/1905) discussed eschatological issues in different places. In his formative years, he referred to four main Islamic interpretations of the state of the soul after death in his *Risālat al-wāridāt* (Treatise on thoughts that come to one's mind):⁶⁴ 1) the first group argued that the soul does not exist outside of the body, and will cease to exist after the body's death. 2) Another group believed that it will continue to exist and will remain in full possession of its faculties after its separation from the body. 3) The third group, the *ḥukamā'*, or philosophers, agreed with the previous group about the independent existence of the soul from the body, but they argued that the separation between the two is permanent. The soul remains dependent on God and finds its existence in *'ālam al-ta'alluq wa-l-takhalluq*,⁶⁵ an Islamic theological term that refers to two aspects of the divine names: active and passive attributes of God. *Takhalluq* shows the multiplicity of the divine attributes as manifested in the phenomenal world, whereas the relationship between the active side and the passive one is called *ta'alluq*.⁶⁶ The relationship between God and the soul is "like the son of a king who desires to reach the rank (*martaba*) of his father but because of his inability he withdraws to some aspects in which his power becomes manifest."⁶⁷ Therefore, the more the soul progresses intellectually and morally, the more it will be rewarded. Its failure to fulfill its role leads to punishment and pain.⁶⁸ 4) The Sufis, as the fourth group, understand the fate of the soul after death in a way similar to that of the philosophers, but they couched their understanding in Sufi terminology. The philosophers believed that the status of the soul is determined by its rational and moral abilities, but in the Sufi terms, the status of the soul depends on its progress on the mystical path that leads toward mystical union with its creator.⁶⁹

According to Scharbrodt, although 'Abduh does not explicitly identify himself with any of these groups and their respective beliefs, he certainly follows a metaphorical understanding of individual eschatology as developed by philosophers and mystics. He understood Quranic descriptions of the afterlife

64 There are various discussions about the ascription of the treatise to Muḥammad 'Abduh. Some authors argue that it was not his work because it covered very complex theological issues that 'Abduh would not have been familiar with at the time (he was very young and had not yet received his diploma from al-Azhar). See Scharbrodt, *The Salafiyya and Sufism* 95–7.

65 Ibid., 108.

66 Sawai, *The divine names* 15–6.

67 Scharbrodt, *The Salafiyya and Sufism* 108.

68 Ibid.

69 Ibid.

symbolically – whether in rational terms like those used by the philosophers or in spiritual terms used by the mystics. In his view, the fate of the soul in the afterlife depends on its spiritual and intellectual progress. Reward and punishment are characterized as the consequence of the degree of perfection the soul achieves.⁷⁰

In fact, ‘Abduh was cautious about raising these earlier discussions in his Quranic exegesis entitled *al-Manār* or in his theological writings. In his *Risālat al-tawhīd* (Treatise of unity), ‘Abduh repeated the same typology, but did not give preference to any of them. Instead, he developed other views on the belief in the afterlife as part of man’s need of a prophetic mission. In addition, he stressed that among the nations, both ancient and modern, there are many competing ideas about the return of the soul. These schools of thought differ with regard to the nature of future bliss and torment, the delight of the life beyond, and how to achieve happiness or avert eternal punishment. For him, the human soul is immortal and lives on after its separation from the body; and the final death is a kind of womb of hiddenness.⁷¹ ‘Abduh went beyond the old theological “disputatious” territory “where many thoughts and ideas jostle together.”⁷² According to him, human minds are not always able to know God or the life to come by themselves. Though they share a common sense of submission to a power higher than their own and most people feel that there is another realm beyond this one, heathenism has disordered their thoughts and diverted them from the path of blessedness. A few people, those to whom God has given perfect reason and the light of perception despite their not having the boon of prophetic guidance and example, will reach a proper understanding of the nature of the life to come.⁷³

Moreover, ‘Abduh claimed that the human universal sense of the other world was not a mental aberration. In his view, intelligence and intuition ensure that this life-span is not the sum total of man’s existence, since “man takes off this body of flesh, as he does his clothes, and is alive still in another guise, though its nature be beyond our ken.”⁷⁴

‘Abduh maintained that there are

intuitive feelings [that] stimulate the spirits of men to search into this eternal world and to anticipate how it will be when it is reached, and

⁷⁰ Ibid., 110.

⁷¹ ‘Abduh, *Theology of unity* 81–2. Cf. Vatikiotis, Muḥammad ‘Abduh 65.

⁷² ‘Abduh, *Theology of unity* 81.

⁷³ Ibid., 74.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 82.

how too they are to come to it. The answer, both as to what and wither, is obscure and illusive. We are conscious of inadequacy in the development of our minds in face of the issues of this brief existence here. They do not suffice to give us the right directions or make good of our need for teaching and guidance. We must appeal to the gathered judgment of ages in assessing our thoughts and correcting our views. . . . We are still in unresolved certainty about this earthly life, yearning for a quiet assurance still far to seek.⁷⁵

Human beings have no power whereby they are able to understand the hidden store of fate. Rational study or intuition could hardly determine the link between the two worlds, in ‘Abduh’s view. The two worlds mingle within us alone. More investigation of “temporal sciences cannot attain to assurance about the realities of the future realm.”⁷⁶

In ‘Abduh’s thinking, prophets were sent by God to tell people about their fate and what they should do in order to reach a good fate. Some people might ask why God did not place this knowledge or “supernatural mercy” in men as an instinctive capacity to guide them to action and to the path leading to the goal in the life beyond. In answer, ‘Abduh stated that such questions come from “intellectual pretension” and the “ignorance” of human nature. He argued that,

not everybody is ready and able to cope naturally with every condition, but needs study and evidence as a basis on which he can deal with existence. Were man to operate in this instinctive way in respect of his needs, he would be like animals not like himself. Indeed, he would become a sort of animal, or even like the ant and the bee, or one of the angels who are not of this world of ours.⁷⁷

3.3 *Rashīd Riḍā’s Puritan Interpretation of Eschatology*

In various places in his reformist journal *al-Manār*, the Syrio-Egyptian reformist Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā (d. 1354/1935) touched upon different issues related to the afterlife. Many readers of his journal raised questions in this regard, which he published in his *fatwā* section. One of the early examples was a question from Cairo concerning al-Ghazālī’s section on the afterlife in his *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revitalization of the Religious Sciences*). Were issues like the questioning and punishment by two angels in the grave, the bridge (*al-ṣirāṭ*)

75 Ibid., 83.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid., 85.

spanning hell, and intercession (*shafā'a*) in the hereafter, considered proven by authentic traditions? If a Muslim does not believe in these things, would he be considered an unbeliever? In his answer, Riḍā noted that al-Ghazālī mentioned these concepts from an Ash'arī point of view, but he did not declare that those who disagreed with this doctrine were unbelievers. In other works, al-Ghazālī was of the opinion that the faith of a believer would not be affected, even if he lived and died without knowing about such controversial issues in theology. Riḍā urged Muslims not to investigate the contents of these hidden matters deeply, but to believe only in what had been proven by definitive or decisive (*qaṭ'i*) texts.⁷⁸ Riḍā also discouraged his readers from seeking theological clarifications about far-fetched questions, such as the abode of souls after death. The same held true for the location of paradise and hell, which Riḍā evaluated as real things, whose locations were not known.⁷⁹

Despite his faith in the issue of *'adhāb al-qabr* (the torments of the grave), Riḍā did not give it any priority from a theological point of view. Man should leave these issues to God's knowledge.⁸⁰ One should believe in the authentic traditions reported in this regard, but the reality of the questioning by the angels was not known. Those who interpret these traditions metaphorically or even deny them, were not to be regarded as unbelievers.⁸¹ Riḍā maintained that one should follow the *salafī* path by believing in the conditions of the hereafter without delving into philosophical issues: "there is nothing more despicable than disputations about the conditions of the hereafter which cannot be supported by reason or sense."⁸² It sufficed Riḍā to cite al-Ghazālī's comparison of those experiencing the punishments of the grave with the state of a sleeper who feels pain or a snake's bite in his dream, while other people around him do not see any effect of pain on him.⁸³

Another interesting point arose with regard to the process of the human body decaying. When its constituent parts become mixed with other elements, and plants and trees absorb its substances, then other people come and eat such trees and plants, how will all of these elements be resurrected? In Riḍā's view, religion proves that there shall be life after death. People, composed of body and soul, will also be people in their second life, which is an advanced form of life for good people but a worse form of life for bad people. The bodily

78 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 5 (1903), 911–2. See also 13 (1910), 104; 28 (1927), 504–7; 32 (1932), 268–89.

79 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 10 (1907), 442–3. See also 19 (1916), 282; 30 (1929), 185–92.

80 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 5 (1903), 945–6.

81 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 6 (1903), 671.

82 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 8/7 (1905), 256–7.

83 See 'Abduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* xi, 191–3.

and biological substances of man change regularly during his lifetime, while he remains the same in his morals and behavior. In that sense, the substance of a body during its second life in the hereafter will be the same as it was in its first life. To say that all substances that enter the human body will be resurrected as they were during the first life was, according to Riḍā, a form of futile and impossible philosophical reasoning or speculation. If it were true, the shape of each resurrected human body would appear on the day of resurrection in gigantic measures. In his view, the next life would not be on earth, because it was indicated in the Quran that "One day the earth will be changed to a different earth, and so will be the heavens" (Q 14:48). The world will be destroyed when the earth hits another cosmic body and all planets are dispersed and return to nebula form (Q 56:4–6; 82:1–2). The last resurrection will take place on another, larger planet or world; and from there the eternal souls will take their new substances.⁸⁴

In his journal, Riḍā adopted Ibn al-Qayyim's view regarding the duration of the hellfire. Ibn al-Qayyim was of the view that the fire does not function as retribution, according to the classical doctrine; rather it serves a therapeutic function, to cleanse people of their sins, even the sins of unbelief (*kufr*) and associationism (*shirk*). According to him, hell would be of no profit to God because He would not gain anything from punishing human beings. Therefore, the eternal punishment of the wretched would not increase the blessedness of God's beloved, and certainly would be of no benefit to those who suffered it.⁸⁵

When a group of Riḍā's readers blamed him for his defense of Ibn al-Qayyim's views, he strongly argued that there was no consensus among Muslim theologians regarding the perpetuity of hellfire. Riḍā stated that Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned all theological opinions without holding any of them as definite, rather he ascribed all knowledge of this issue to God Himself. Riḍā maintained that he did not discuss anything secret and all books presenting the different views on this issue were available to everyone. As for the verse "Allah forgiveth not that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgiveth anything else" (Q 4:48, 116), Riḍā stated that this confirms that the punishment of unbelievers is self-evident and inevitable, but it does not indicate its endlessness.

84 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 7 (1904), 54–6. For more about *al-Manār*'s analysis of this issue, see *al-Manār* 11 (1908), 448–51.

85 Ibn al-Qayyim depended on reports that cast doubt on the eternity of punishment in the hellfire. One example was a report from the Prophet's Companion Abū Hurayra conveying a message similar to that of 'Umar: "There will come to Hell a day when no one will remain in it," Hoover, *Islamic universalism* 183. See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī l-arwāḥ*. Cf. Abrahamov, *The creation and duration* 87–102; Perlmann, *Ibn Qayyim* 330–7.

He argued that profound research or investigation into these issues was not a threat to the belief of Muslims. Riḍā criticized Muslim preachers and traditional scholars who disseminated weak and inauthentic traditions related to the hereafter among common Muslims, such as one indicating that God would save six thousand persons from hellfire every night during the month of Ramadan. Those preachers usually presented such issues as fundamentals of the faith. Some would even go further by claiming that the number of saved people during Ramadan was larger than the number of Muslim inhabitants on earth, especially during the time of the Prophet. By means of such discussions, Riḍā did not intend to address “atheists,” but his aim was to clarify such issues in the minds “Muslim doubters” who still believed that the world had an almighty, forgiving and compassionate God.⁸⁶

An Englishman once asked Riḍā: “Will it be suitable for God, the Greatest, to punish the weak human being for committing sins which are actually the essence of his fragility?” In his answer, Riḍā made it clear that unbelief and the rejection of God’s bounty on humans by committing sins was contrary to His laws and would damage one’s inherent consciousness and contaminate his soul. Punishment in the afterlife would therefore be a natural effect of man’s corruption on earth, just as any disease is a natural result of man’s disobedience of the doctor’s advice and health instructions. In that sense, the reason for punishment is an interior matter emanating from man’s own acts.⁸⁷

Riḍā did not reject entirely the signs preceding the day of judgment that were reported in authentic prophetic traditions. However, he interpreted some of these events according to the spirit of his age. He explained the appearance of *dajjālūn* (or imposters) by claiming prophecy as one of these signs that had already happened, as in the cases of the Bahā’iyya and Aḥmadiyya. The Prophet’s foretelling about the shrinking of time (*taqārūb al-zamān*) was another sign that was observed in his time in the form of modern means of transport, such as trains, cars, and planes. Likewise, the prophetic report about the increase in killing might refer to the Turkish aggression on the Arabs and the military machinery that killed more than ten million people during World War I. Regarding the sign of some people boasting about their ability to construct tall buildings, Riḍā asserted that this had already occurred in the shape of modern skyscrapers during the early twentieth century.⁸⁸ The same held true for the conversation between the dwellers of paradise and hellfire

86 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 22 (1921), 315–20. See also 22 (1921), 379–89 and 553–60. Riḍā re-evaluated the same issue in his Quran exegesis, see ‘Abduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* viii, 58–86.

87 ‘Abduh and Riḍā, *Tafsīr al-manār* xi, 262–3.

88 Ibid., ix, 401–3.

(Q 7:44), which was supported by modern knowledge in Riḍā's view. He argued that the meaning of the verse might have been strange for early Muslims, but in the early twentieth century telecommunications prove that people from remote distances can communicate by telephone and telegraph. At the time of writing his Quranic exegesis Riḍā had also been told that people in the West were about to invent audio-visual instruments for the same purpose.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, Riḍā maintained that the majority of traditions pointing to the signs of the hereafter were reports of meaning only; there was no agreement among the narrators on their literal wording. In his evaluation, throughout Islamic history many people, such as the *zanādiqa* (atheists or heretics) and the Umayyad and 'Abbasid supporters of racial and social solidarity (*ahl al-ʿaṣabiyya*), had fabricated many of these traditions.⁹⁰ However, Riḍā did not doubt the core of authenticity of such traditions regarding the coming of the Dajjāl (or Antichrist), but he was skeptical about the details mentioned in these traditions. He believed that these details were nothing but interpolations of Israelite origin.⁹¹

In 1904 and in 1924 Riḍā received questions from two readers in Egypt concerning an anonymous nineteenth-century eschatological document (which is still circulating among some Muslims on the Internet nowadays) reported to have been the dream of a certain *shaykh* Aḥmad, a caretaker of the Prophet Muḥammad's tomb in Medina.⁹² This *shaykh* Aḥmad claimed to have been told by the Prophet that "the Day of Judgment was at hand; it was his interlocutor's duty to spread the word. Various blessings would accrue to those who copied the message; damnation would befall all who chose to ignore it."⁹³ Riḍā saw the document for the first time among his father's papers, in Syria, when he was a child learning to read and write. Initially he was interested in it and believed in its authenticity. Later, Riḍā described this "will" of *shaykh* Aḥmad as a foolish lie, which naive common people would easily believe. The inventor of

89 Ibid., viii, 374–5.

90 Ibid., viii, 418–20.

91 Ibid., viii, 403–13. About the *isrāʾīliyyāt*, see for example, Schützinger, *Ursprung*; Albayrak, *Qurʾanic narrative*; Albayrak, *Isrāʾīliyyāt* 39–65; Nettler, *Early Islam* 1–14.

92 See, for example, <http://www.bdr130.net/vb/t792318.html>; <http://www.muslimh.com/vb/t148485.html>; <http://www.jarash-uni.com/vb/forum4/thread1281.html>; cf. http://www.qaradawi.net/site/topics/printArticle.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=6158&version=1&template_id=232&parent_id=17; <http://www.binbaz.org.sa/mat/17886>.

93 Katz, *Shaykh Aḥmad's dream* 157–80. In his advice to the Dutch government, C.S. Hurgronje mentioned this will, which Indonesian pilgrims carried back home to the archipelago. He published his Dutch translation in *De Indische Gids* (July 1884). C. Snouck Hurgronje, *Adviezen* 3, 1902.

this document was from the common people, as the language was archaic and silly. Those who fabricated this continue to use the name of *shaykh* Aḥmad, as if he were the “eternal” caretaker of the Prophet’s tomb without regard to the change of time and governments. Some visitors to Medina ask about this *shaykh*, but do not find anyone by this name.⁹⁴

3.4 *Al-Qaraḍāwī’s Popularization of Eschatology for Common Muslims*

In his well-known television program *al-Sharī’a wa-l-ḥayāt* (Sharī’a and life) on Al-Jazeera, the Egyptian Muslim reformist Yūsuf al-Qaraḍāwī (b. 1345/1926) has popularized the events related to the day of judgment. He agrees that the destruction of the world at the end of life will challenge all technological discoveries in modern time. He accepts minor and major signs of the Hour, and compares the resurrection of the body with the medical achievements of cloning. Medical and biological scientists are now able to clone new bodies from a tiny cell. The *‘ajab al-dhanab* (incorruptible coccyges or a small bone at the end of the spine), mentioned in some traditions, might refer to a cell, like those used in the process of cloning, which is the origin of this new life. In his opinion, the way of resurrection is beyond the perception of human beings; it is like electricity, which nobody sees, though its results are perceptible everywhere. The location of resurrection will be in a new world and under a new sky. Al-Qaraḍāwī does not reject the phenomenon mentioned in the traditions regarding the day of resurrection. For example, he asserts that everyone will read the roll of his deeds recorded by the “divine registration pen” or, also in his words, that taken by the “divine candid camera” that records all acts and sayings in audiovisual form.⁹⁵ This is exactly what classical theologians and philosophers meant by their views that man would not find his deeds, which perish, in the afterlife, but he will find their “pictures.” The Quranic phrase “Read thine (own) record” (Q 17:14) would mean, in al-Qaraḍāwī’s interpretation: Look at the recorded “tape” or the “pictures” of your acts. Therefore, early Muslim theologians claimed that the book would be read by everyone, including illiterate people; all people would thus watch their acts and rehearse their own sayings. Al-Qaraḍāwī described the *mīzān* (Scale) as a thermometer that will measure one’s deeds like the temperature of water and air is measured, or as a counter measures electricity or air pressure.⁹⁶

Like Riḍā, al-Qaraḍāwī accepted Ibn al-Qayyim’s view on the eternity of hell. In al-Qaraḍāwī’s understanding, Ibn al-Qayyim’s view could be the most

94 Riḍā, *al-Manār* 7 (1904), 614–5; 25 (1924), 416–20.

95 Al-Qaraḍāwī, *Yawm al-ḥisāb*.

96 Ibid.

excellent answer to the philosophical “allegations” made by atheists and materialists against God’s mercy. In the end, the perishing of hell is something related to God’s will.⁹⁷

In al-Qaraḍāwī’s mind, people in the modern age might see the minor signs preceding the hereafter in the changing social and economic situation of the world. For example, it was reported in some prophetic traditions that the Hour will approach when markets will draw closer toward each other (*taqārub al-aswāq*). Al-Qaraḍāwī argues that Muslims in the past might not have been aware of such things, but they did not witness what we do nowadays. In the present age, people can see the interrelatedness of markets clearly; London, Hong Kong and New York are not physically close, but are tied through the virtual world of the Internet.⁹⁸

As for the major signs of the Hour, al-Qaraḍāwī accepts the theory of the Indian Muslim scholar Mawlānā Abū l-Kalām Āzād (d. 1377/1958) who suggested that the figure of Dhū l-Qarnayn mentioned in the Quran was Cyrus the Great (d. 530 BCE) and that Gog and Magog were the Mongols who attacked the Persian and Indian civilizations, and then attempted to destroy the Muslim rule of Baghdad and Central Asia.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, al-Qaraḍāwī maintains a common Muslim belief that the Dajjāl (Antichrist) will appear in person and be killed by Jesus. Moreover, he rejects the metaphorical interpretation of the Muslim convert Muhammad Asad (Leopold Weiss) that the Antichrist was actually a reference to Western civilization.¹⁰⁰ Al-Qaraḍāwī was of the view that everyone will be addressed in his grave and on the day of judgment in the language they could understand, and not only in Arabic as some argued.¹⁰¹ As for those living in remote areas who did not receive the message of Islam or who received it only in a distorted way, they would all be saved in the afterlife.¹⁰²

3.5 *Rational Mysticism: The Case of Said Nursi*

In the tenth word of *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of light), the outstanding Turkish scholar Said Nursi (d. 1379/1960) elucidated what he considered the “sacred supreme evidences” of the resurrection of the dead as related to the existence and unity of God, the function of prophethood, the importance of man, and

97 Al-Qaraḍāwī, ‘Alāmāt al-sā’a.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid., Cf. Nadwi, *Faith*.

100 Al-Qaraḍāwī, ‘Alāmāt al-sā’a, see Asad’s chapter on the Dajjāl in *Road* 282–311.

101 Al-Qaraḍāwī, al-Imān.

102 Ibid.

the necessity of the Eternal Creator of this transitory world.¹⁰³ A full analysis of Nursi's ideas in this regard falls outside the scope of the present study, but a few examples of his views will suffice to place him in the context of the new *kalām* movement.

In his lengthy analysis, Nursi used metaphors, comparisons, and stories in simple and common language and a straightforward style in order to facilitate comprehension and to show what he saw as rationality, and the coherence of the truths of Islam: "the meaning of the stories is contained in the truths that conclude them; each story is like an allusion pointing to its concluding truth. Therefore, they are not mere fictitious tales, but veritable truths."¹⁰⁴

Nursi based his arguments of such proofs on the meaning of certain of the divine beautiful names. In addition, he confirmed that belief in the hereafter is essential for human social life and brings numerous comprehensive spiritual benefits. For example, children, who comprise one fourth of the human race, in his view could endure an awesome and tragic death by ensuring them that their lost beloveds exist in paradise after death. With this idea, they gain spiritual strength in their weak and delicate bodies, and find hope that permits them to live joyfully, despite their vulnerable spiritual disposition. By thinking of paradise, the child might say, for example, "My little brother or friend has died and become a bird in paradise. He is playing there, and leading a life finer than ours." Otherwise, the death of children and adults all around them would negatively affect their inner faculties – spirit, heart, and intellect – and they would either be destroyed or become like wretched animals.¹⁰⁵ The belief in the resurrection also benefits old people, who might find some consolation, tranquility, and comfort while experiencing the painful and awesome despair that arises from the anticipation of death and separation. The same holds true for young men, who can restrain their turbulent feelings and tempestuous souls and passions from committing transgression, oppression, and destruction; otherwise they would bring humanity down to a lowly and bestial state.¹⁰⁶

Nursi deduced his ultimate faith in the resurrection from the "light" of the prophethood of Muḥammad and the Quran. If they were to depart from the cosmos and vanish, the cosmos would "die" and "lose its sanity, and the globe would lose its sense and its head. Its dizzy, uncomprehending head would collide with a planet, and the end of the world would result."¹⁰⁷

103 Nursi, *From the Risale-i Nur* i, 59–132.

104 Ibid., i, 59.

105 Ibid., i, 109–10.

106 Ibid., i, 110–1.

107 Ibid., i, 123.

Moreover, Nursi argued that the reality of resurrection emanated from the divine beautiful names. For instance, the hereafter, as a manifestation of the names *al-Hakīm* (Wise) and *al-Ādil* (Just) was the gate to God's "wisdom and justice." According to this view, man cannot experience the true essence of His

justice in this transient world; it is for this reason that matters are postponed for a supreme tribunal. For true justice requires that man, this apparently petty creature, should be rewarded and punished, not in accordance with his pettiness, but in accordance with the magnitude of his crime, the importance of his nature and the greatness of his function. Since this passing and transient world is far from manifesting such wisdom and justice for man, who is created for eternity, of necessity there will be an eternal hell and everlasting Paradise.¹⁰⁸

In one of his comparisons, Nursi maintains that life resembles a flower, which for a short time smiles and looks at us, and then hides behind the veil of annihilation. It departs like a word leaving your mouth. By entrusting thousands of its fellows to men's ears, the word leaves behind meanings in men's minds. The flower, too, expresses its meaning and thus fulfills its function, and departs. But it departs and leaves its apparent form in the memory of everything that sees it, its inner essence in every seed. It is as if each memory and seed were a camera to record the adornment of the flower, or a means for its perpetuation. If such be the case with an object at the simplest level of life, it can be readily understood that man, the highest form of life and the possessor of an eternal soul, is closely tied to eternity.¹⁰⁹ In Nursi's understanding, there is no truer report, no firmer claim, no more apparent truth in the whole world than the reality of the afterlife: "the world is without doubt a field, and the resurrection a threshing-floor, a harvest. Paradise and hell are each storehouses for the grain."¹¹⁰

Nursi made another interesting comparison between the state of affairs in the hereafter and circumstances that have been formed and arranged by way of imitation and representation. Brief gatherings and dispersions are arranged in this life at great expense merely for the sake of taking pictures that can be shown in the cinema in the hereafter. So too, one of the reasons for our passage through individual and social life in this world, for a brief time, is to enable pictures to be taken and images formed, to enable the result of our deeds to be

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., i, 87.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., i, 95.

registered and recorded, to be displayed on a day of accounting, and be shown at a vast gathering, to yield the fruit of supreme happiness. Nursi deduced this image and meaning from the Prophet's saying: "This world is the tillage for the hereafter."¹¹¹

Finally, Nursi concluded that "the hundred and twenty-four thousand prophets" have unanimously reported, partly on the basis of direct vision and partly on the basis of absolute certainty, that the hereafter exists and that all beings will be taken to the hereafter as the Creator has firmly promised. Similarly, "the one hundred and twenty-four million saints" who confirm the reports of the prophets through unveiling and witnessing give testimony to the existence of the hereafter in the form of certain knowledge, and also bear testimony to the existence of the hereafter.¹¹²

4 Eschatology in Neo-Modernist Thinking

4.1 *Fazlur Rahman and Quranic Ethics*

Fazlur Rahman (d. 1408/1988) adopted a philosophy similar to his Indo-Pakistani predecessors. In his view, the Quran's underlying picture of the joy of paradise and the distress of hell reveals that there will come an hour (*sā'a*) when every human being will be shaken into a unique self-awareness of his own deeds by starkly facing "his doings, not-doings and misdoings and accept the judgment upon them."¹¹³ Fazlur Rahman noted that the Quranic concept of the end of life provides the vision necessary to drive one to *taqwā* (piety).¹¹⁴

Fazlur Rahman argued that the Quran refers to *al-ākhirā* (the end) as the moment of truth (Q 79:34–5), when everybody will find his deepest self, fully excavated from the debris of extrinsic and immediate concerns.¹¹⁵ The Quran's use of the term "weighing" was to be understood as sarcastic, as it addressed Meccan merchants that all deeds in the hereafter shall be "weighed," not in gold, silver or any other trade commodity. Fazlur Rahman blamed the Mu'tazilis for their literal interpretation of this "weighing" and their development of a strict *quid pro quo* theory of retribution. Instead of accepting God's infinite mercy as

¹¹¹ Ibid., i, 99.

¹¹² Ibid., i, 131.

¹¹³ Rahman, *Major themes* 106.

¹¹⁴ Berry, *Islam and modernity* 64.

¹¹⁵ Rahman, *Major themes* 106.

real, they did grave violence to religion by trying to get around this and explain it away.¹¹⁶

Fazlur Rahman pointed out that the Quranic statement about the record of deeds, which will speak [and] will never be denied by their actors (Q 23:62), is an indication that what is in people's minds will be public such that people will not be able to hide their thoughts. The speaking of one's organs (Q 41:19–24) confirms that in a situation where one's mind becomes transparently public one's physical organs even begin to bear witness against oneself. Fazlur Rahman understood that the Quran required man to reach this state of mind and transparency of his heart in the course of this life, if he were to achieve success and not burn in hell.¹¹⁷

He pointed to the significance of the fact that the earth shall be given as an inheritance to those dwelling in the garden. The earth will not be destroyed, but transformed with a view to creating new forms of life and new levels of being.¹¹⁸ Fazlur Rahman believed that the Quran makes it clear that the effect of punishment in hell is dependent upon the sensitivity of the guilty and therefore involves conscience. He argued that punishment is basically moral or spiritual, but the Quran, unlike Muslim philosophers, does not recognize a hereafter that will be peopled by disembodied souls. In philosophy and Sufism the term *nafs* came to mean soul as a substance separate from the body, but in the Quran it mostly means "himself," "herself," "themselves" or "inner person." Although the Quran does not affirm any purely spiritual heaven or hell, and the subject of reward and punishment is a person, its vivid portrayals of a blazing hell and garden are meant to convey these effects as real spiritual-physical feelings.¹¹⁹ Fazlur Rahman claimed, however, that one has to consider the spiritual aspect of punishment and reward in the hereafter as primary. God's pleasure (*riḍwān*) will be the greatest success, while disbelievers and evildoers will earn His displeasure and alienation (*sakht*) as their greatest punishment.¹²⁰ "The central endeavor of the Quran," Rahman wrote, "is for man to develop this keen insight here and now, when there is opportunity for action and progress for at the Hour of Judgment it will be too late to remedy the state of affairs; there one will be reaping, not sowing or nurturing."¹²¹

116 Ibid., 109.

117 Ibid., 109–10.

118 Berry, *Islam and modernity* 65.

119 Ibid., 112.

120 Ibid., 113.

121 Ibid., 120.

In their definition of reward and punishment in the hereafter as a continuation of the status of the human ego, Iqbāl and Fazlur Rahman indirectly reiterated the views of the famous Sufi Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240), who maintained that the hereafter will be created eternally on the pattern of this world. The hereafter requires the creation of a world from this world but it will be sensible (not merely mental). In Ibn ‘Arabī’s words, by the mere existence of an idea, or imaginative impulse (*hamm*), of a violation, desire or appetite, all this shall become sensible.¹²²

4.2 *Ḥasan Ḥanafī’s Anthropological Understanding of Theology*

In his voluminous work *Min al-‘aqīda ilā l-thawra* (From dogma to revolution), the Egyptian philosopher Ḥasan Ḥanafī (b. 1353/1935) described prophecy as the past and the evolution of humanity as part of history, whereas the hereafter represented its future.¹²³ Ḥanafī’s point of departure for his philosophical analysis was that in the past such eschatological issues were dependent on imagination. He was, first of all, skeptical that the concept of *al-mubashsharūn bi-l-janna* (those who were given the glad tiding of entering paradise) might contradict this law.¹²⁴ Likewise, Ḥanafī criticized the concept of the *shafā’a* (intercession). All reports relating that some believers will enter paradise without any judgment were in his view part of the “folklore fantasy” about heroism and were a response to the need of simple folk for a savior. The Prophet appeared in such reports as “a nation leader, a sheikh of a clan or the head of a community.”¹²⁵ Intercession in that sense would make believers lax, believing they could “gain without effort,” and this would therefore eliminate repentance (*tawba*) and man’s motivation to save himself by means of own deeds in this life and by learning from trial and error.¹²⁶ Ḥanafī compared intercession in the hereafter with the idea of the Jews as the chosen people, and the doctrine of Jesus bearing the sins of believers.¹²⁷

Ḥanafī defined the belief in death on three levels: 1) on the divine level as part of human belief in God’s destiny, and an indication of the end of one’s age on earth, 2) on the natural level by subjecting death to science, and 3) on the human level it defines death as the opposite of life and is part of the soul

¹²² Rahman, *Dream* 171.

¹²³ Ḥanafī, *Min al-‘aqīda* iv, 321.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, iv, 404–7.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, iv, 313–4.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, iv, 419.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, iv, 420.

abandoning the human body and taking another destination.¹²⁸ Ḥanafī criticized the classical theological representations of the angel of death, ‘Azrā’īl, and his assistants taking the souls of those destined to die. In Ḥanafī’s view, its personification is a suitable poetic image expressing man’s anxiety about death; this was seen as more effective than merely putting it in a scientific description or a rational theorization of the event of death.¹²⁹ He also stated that theological discussions related to the interval of life in one’s grave after death before resurrection, such as the return of souls to bodies afterward and the questioning of (dis)believers by the two angels, were beyond the arena of theological sciences and he criticized them as “folklore fantasy.” Ḥanafī argued that those elements were probably remnants of ancient beliefs regarding life in the grave, as in the case of the pyramids, which were dwellings for dead bodies waiting for the return of their souls. They may also have resulted from a strong desire to defeat the idea of death and reduce the pain in the grave, while keeping the memory of the dead in the mind of his beloved.¹³⁰

In Ḥanafī’s understanding such beliefs were based on “weak traditions” which were not included in the earliest theological works. They were inserted in later theological books under a separate subject during times of social and cultural decay. The afterlife emerged as compensation for this life; and the focus came to be on the victory of soul after the defeat of the body and on a happy future instead of an agonizing present. Ḥanafī claimed that these reports were not *mutawātir* and did not offer any rational or theoretical certainty.¹³¹ He understood that the logic behind such doctrines was the strength of self-censorship and fear of God, but “folklore fantasy” reduced the angels to a kind of police interrogation and torture like that of an intelligence service. Ḥanafī noted that the two angels, who will appear in the grave after death, are references to particular meanings and these were later personified in the figures of Munkar and Nakīr.¹³² Pain in the grave after death was part of the “folklore imagination of darkness, silent and stagnant air, rotten smell, loneliness, isolation and cheerlessness. It expresses a real human experience in the present life which he overthrows upon the unseen world.”¹³³

Ḥanafī’s tone is at times sarcastic about the narratives reported about the state of the dead in the grave. For example, in his discussion of the tradition

128 Ibid., iv, 428.

129 Ibid., iv, 437–40.

130 Ibid., iv, 440–61.

131 Ibid., iv, 461–2.

132 Ibid., iv, 463–5.

133 Ibid., iv, 477.

that the ground sympathized with Fāṭima, the mother of 'Alī, because the Prophet was reported to have put his shirt on her body after her burial in order that the hellfire not touch her, Ḥanafī ironically inquired:

Would this shirt remain till the Day of Resurrection? What is the intercession of such a shirt? [This is] like a policeman who put his badge on the wall and went away, while his soldiers were standing in front of it with no movement. It [the badge] would appear as an alternative and symbol of him in order to keep the order in his absence. Why Fāṭima, the mother of 'Alī, and not Fāṭima his wife, or 'Alī himself or his children?!¹³⁴

Ḥanafī described the metaphysical supposition of physical resurrection as based on the identity of the human being and his relation to the world. The human being is the microcosm, while the world appears as the macrocosm. The destruction and revival of this "tiny world," represented in the death of man, is related to the destruction of the larger world. Once the reconstruction of the larger world happens, the second individual state of human resurrection follows.¹³⁵ Ḥanafī claimed that the scenes of resurrection in theological works appear to be dynamic in order to reflect a sense of the continuation of life and the accidental nature of death. Therefore, resurrection is an emotional event that represents the moment of awakening as the opposite of the moment of death and silence.¹³⁶ He believed that later Muslim theologians depended on "Sufi imaginations" in their divisions and descriptions of the events on the day of resurrection.¹³⁷

As for the idea of a merely spiritual resurrection, Ḥanafī argued that this was based on a dualistic imagination of the world in which the state of the body is devalued while the position of the soul is emphasized. The emphasis on the goodness of the soul over the evil nature of the body reflects a puritan image of the world. This dualism was, in Ḥanafī's mind, a "childish" conception of the world, since it was dependent solely on the concept of good and evil and reward and punishment. A mature and reasonable human being does good and avoids evil for its own sake, without expecting any reward or punishment. This view is also based on hatred and not love because the "other" will never be able to reach the same spiritual resurrection as the "self." Sufis deny the punishment of others because they love all human beings, while others desire to save

¹³⁴ Ibid., iv, 472.

¹³⁵ Ibid., iv, 487.

¹³⁶ Ibid., iv, 508.

¹³⁷ Ibid., iv, 504.

people by means of their own suffering. In that sense man appears as a hero who would save the world; he is the center of the world and the pivot of history. Bodily suffering then becomes pleasurable, as a means of reaching a greater rejoicing by refining the soul.¹³⁸ Ḥanafī maintained that the dualism between body and soul is a pessimistic, capitalist, and racial conception of the hereafter, one that stresses that there is no hope in this world, but man should seek his happiness in the outside world. It expresses the dialectics between victory and defeat and becomes more apparent when society is weak. Competition moves from earth to heaven and from this world to the hereafter.¹³⁹

Ḥanafī analyzed the *'alāmāt* (signs) of the hereafter and the events on and after the day of judgment as part of what he continuously categorized as "folklore fantasy." In his view, these signs were inserted into Islamic theology in order to complete the doctrinal array so that Islamic dogma would be as significant as Jewish and Christian theology. Ḥanafī argued that the signs mentioned in the Quran do not tell exactly when the day of judgment will happen; they are merely scenes that combine human facts and cosmological events. He believed that the hour would certainly come, but its precise knowledge is only known to God. The purpose of the Quranic descriptions was not to tell the actual time of the judgment, but rather to urge people to prepare for it and to perceive well that their time will end.¹⁴⁰

Ḥanafī concluded that the classical theological treatment of the concept of resurrection was nothing but a reflection of the burden of the unknown future of human beings in that time time by stressing a sense of confidence or fear for that future. For that reason classical texts preserve artistic images of it in order to give value judgments. The meanings of these portrayals expose the essence of human experience in the future. According to him these texts do not convey material realities, but reveal emotional realities that express the structure of human existence. It would be wrong to interpret them as quantitative realities. They should be understood as a means of cultivating human behavior and influencing it from the very beginning. In Ḥanafī's own words, eternity is pure human desire expressing man's ambition in bypassing his perishing. In believing in his eternity the human will continue to strive for his perfection.¹⁴¹

138 Ibid., iv, 526.

139 Ibid., iv, 527.

140 Ibid., iv, 551.

141 Ibid., iv, 605–7.

5 Conclusion

Modern Muslim scholars of the new renewal movement of theology considered classical Islamic notions about death and eschatology as an arena vulnerable to scientific, materialistic, and positivistic challenges. They therefore attempted to analyze classical eschatological subjects in modern philosophical and scientific terms.

Influenced by mystical and philosophical ideas, Indo-Pakistani modernist theologians agreed that “the physical body plays no role in the immediate life of an individual after death.”¹⁴² Shāh Walī Allāh used the idea of the *‘ālam al-mithāl* as developed by medieval Muslim mystics in order to rationalize traditional eschatological images. By employing what Fazlur Rahman called a “philosophy of mediationism,” Walī Allāh’s eschatological thought is pervaded by the idea of synthesis, wherein contradictions in reality are resolved by establishing proper and binding relationships.¹⁴³ Khān followed the same path by harmonizing this doctrine with the idea of naturalism. In addition, the pioneers of this approach were sometimes critical of classical views on eschatology. Shiblī l-Nu‘mānī’s critique of Ash‘arī theology came as a result of his argument that mystical ideas should be taken as “useful” parts of authentic theology. In rationalizing these theological parts with modern science, these scholars were not concerned with the consequences of events in the afterlife, but were attempting to reconcile the traditional dogma on eschatology with the findings of modern science and nature.

The reformist approach stressed the ethical values of eschatological tenets for Muslim life. However, there were certainly common points between their writings and those of classical and medieval traditionalists in their understanding of the life after death. Although ‘Abduh, Riḍā, and al-Qaraḍāwī were cautious in interpreting Islamic eschatological narratives, their views were still compatible with the affirmations of traditional Islamic theology. Riḍā and al-Qaraḍāwī in particular made use of their “worldviews” to explain the signs of the hereafter: Riḍā applied *taqārub al-zamān* (closeness of time) to modern means of transport, such as trains, cars, and planes, while Qaraḍāwī saw *taqārub al-aswāq* (closeness of markets) in the interrelatedness of the international markets in London, Hong Kong and New York and on the Internet. Moreover, their defense of Ibn al-Qayyim’s views on hellfire represented their strenuous appeal for a response to modern challenges by returning to “authentic” and “pure” Islam. Nursi’s rational mysticism (or what one can call “mystical

142 Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 104.

143 Rahman, *Dream* 179.

reformism”) went beyond the description of classical narratives or theological-philosophical analysis by stressing the “reality” of the other world on the basis of his understanding of cosmic symbolism – what he believed to be the “power” of God’s beautiful names in the universe.

Neo-modernist Islamic theology is bold, but is only known or influential among elite intellectual groups. In their critiques, neo-modernists were not concerned with the reconciliation between the validity of Islamic traditional eschatological dogmas and the findings of modernity. In his anthropological understanding of theology, for example, Ḥasan Ḥanafī explained eschatology as a projection from “outside” Muslim societies and not as something that emerged from the “inside” real Islamic objectives. He was clearly influenced by Western scientists of religion and philosophers, such as Ludwig Feuerbach, who claimed that the conceptions of “god” are nothing but projections of humans’ own values, and the idea of “heaven” or “eternal life” is simply a projection of human longing for immortality.¹⁴⁴

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144 See, for example, Feuerbach, *The essence* 222f.

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Between Science Fiction and Sermon: Eschatological Writings Inspired by Said Nursi

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Because studies on modern Islam tend to focus on political and legal aspects, eschatology has been neglected for quite some time. The fact that authors like Ghulām Aḥmad Parwēz (Pakistan, 1903–86),¹ Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭāhā (Sudan, 1909 or 1911–85),² or Ḥasan Ḥanafī (Egypt, b. 1935), the advocate of the “Islamic Left” in Egypt,³ reformulate salvation as an inner-worldly concept seems to correspond to this politically focused approach to modern Islam. However, this should not distract from the persistence of more conservative interpretations in which the individual afterlife and traditional eschatological concepts play a dominant role. Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad have taken a first step toward filling the gap in research on such concepts by collecting references to the Intermediate World and the hereafter in nineteenth and twentieth-century Arab publications.⁴ More recently, interest in modern Islamic eschatology has been boosted by the discovery of the importance

* *General notes:* In the summary of the sources, “Allah” is used when the authors use the word “Allāh,” whereas *tanrı* is translated as “God.” The English equivalents of religious terms that are generally capitalized in Turkish religious writings are capitalized. Content and URLs of all websites referred to were last checked on 26 April 2010.

Acknowledgments: Most of the material for this article was collected during my work for the research project “Nurculuk – fundamentalistische Theologie in der Türkei” (Nurculuk – fundamentalist theology in Turkey) under the supervision of Jens Peter Laut and funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Council, DFG).

- 1 Parwēz, *Islam* 194–202.
- 2 The author interprets concepts like the *barzakh* as stages in a progressive development of mankind in which Muḥammad’s prophethood does not figure as the climax: Ṭāhā, *Risāla* 211.
- 3 Riexinger, *Nasserism* 72, 79. In this case, the inner-worldly reinterpretation of eschatology reflects the influence of Latin American liberation theology on the author.
- 4 Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 99–146. Unfortunately, this work is more a collection of material than an analysis of concepts; Smith and Haddad do not discuss the ideas of the authors with regard to their general theological outlook nor do they endeavor to assess the impact and relevance of these concepts.

of apocalyptic motives in jihadist ideology,⁵ and radical currents in *imāmī* Shi'ism.⁶ However, it would be a mistake to associate the interest in the hereafter exclusively with militancy, as life after death and the "last things" have been dealt with by a number of Turkish authors inspired by the ideas of Said Nursi, a figure with a rather irenic outlook.⁷

1 Said Nursi and the Nurcu Movement⁸

Nurcus (*Nurcular*, "disciples of [the divine] light"), is a term coined to describe the followers of Said Nursi, who was a Kurdish scholar born in the mid or late 1870s in the village of Nurs in eastern Anatolia.⁹ After finishing his studies by traveling from scholar to scholar and from *medrese* to *medrese* as was the norm at the time in the region "East of Sivas," and while still at an early age he gained fame in his home region as someone skilled in religious disputations, and thereby attracted the interest of the state authorities. This earned him an invitation to the library of Tahir Paşa, the governor of Van. There, for several months he studied privately and dedicated himself to the study of the natural and social sciences. This experience convinced him that Islamic scholars should interpret the Quran in accordance with modern scientific findings, and that traditional religious studies should be combined with the teaching of secular subjects.

In 1908, Said Nursi traveled to Istanbul hoping to gain imperial support for his plans for a university designed to fit this purpose. While his efforts were of no avail, the trip thrust him into the life of the capital when sultan Abdülhamit II was deposed by the Committee for Union and Progress (İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti, commonly known in the West as the Young Turks). Although he initially lent his support to the Committee for Union and Progress, he was arrested for allegedly participating in the "counter-revolution" of 31 March 1909. After his acquittal, he withdrew to Van and gathered a group of disciples around

5 Cook, *Contemporary*; Damir-Geilsdorf, Ende; Reichmuth, Second Intifada.

6 Ourghi, *Schittischer Messianismus*; Ourghi, Licht.

7 On the other hand, not all radicals are inclined to eschatological speculation. Mawdūdī, *Sirat* i, 456, for example, urges the utmost caution with regard to traditions referring to the *maḥdī*.

8 This biographical account is based on the somewhat hagiographic publications of Nurcu authors: Badıllı, *Bediüzzaman*; Şahiner, *Son şahitler*; Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen taraflarıyla*. An English-language biography based on these books was written by the British convert Şükran Vahide, who is married to the high ranking Nurcu Mehmed Fırıncı: Vahide, *Islam*.

9 The movement is often referred to as Nurculuk. However, unlike Nurcu, the term is considered derogatory by many followers of Said Nursi.

him. In the pre-war years he published his first books, which were mostly dedicated to what he considered the reconciliation of Islam with modern science and the defense of religion against the threat of materialism. During World War I, Said Nursi led a volunteer regiment formed by his disciples and in 1916 he was captured by the Russian army. After his release – or his escape – from captivity in northern Russia following the Bolshevik Revolution, he returned to Istanbul, where he began teaching and publishing again.

Said Nursi stayed in the capital when the National Liberation War began. In 1923, he went to Ankara at the invitation of the new Republican government. Apparently, Mustafa Kemal had expected him to legitimize the new republican government, but, on realizing the government's secularist tendencies, Said Nursi did not comply with his wishes. In 1924, Said Nursi withdrew to Van for a second time. After the suppression of the 1925 Kurdish revolt led by Sheikh Said, Said Nursi was rounded up with many religious scholars and tribal leaders although he had remained aloof from the insurrection.

He spent the next twenty-six years either banished or in prison in several places in western Anatolia and, in one case, in the Black Sea region. In Barla, a small mountain village in the province of Isparta to which he was confined from 1926 to 1935, the surveillance was loose enough to allow him to teach. His lectures were written down and copied by his disciples, and were dispersed countrywide through a network of followers. Together with his earlier publications, the collection of these oral discourses became known as the *Risâle-i Nûr*. These discourses consist mainly of interpretations of Quranic verses or discussions of theological or ethical problems. In spite of persecution by the Kemalist regime, Said Nursi restricted himself to the moral condemnation of the rulers and the “godless” lifestyle they propagated, as he objected to indulging in politics. During this period, he won the support of several religious young men who, in the following decades, formed the leadership of the Nurcu movement.

In 1951 Said Nursi was finally released from banishment by Prime Minister Adnan Menderes, who had won the first free multi-party elections the year before. Said Nursi could now propagate his ideas without major restrictions; he received permission to publish the *Risâle-i Nûr* in the Latin alphabet. In return for the relaxation of restrictions imposed on him and his disciples, Said Nursi lent support to Menderes' politics, in particular to his alignment with the United States against the Soviet Union. Said Nursi died on 23 March 1960, two months before the first military coup that led to the execution of Menderes and the first round of new persecutions of the Nurcus.

Because Said Nursi had not designated a successor, throughout the 1960s his followers were only loosely organized. Matters of common concern were handled by a council of his early associates. Some of the leaders were responsible

for the dissemination of Said Nursi's teachings through recitation and elucidations in lecture circles that had sprung up throughout the country.¹⁰ Others were responsible for the publication of the *Risâle-i Nûr*. Politically, most Nurchus lent their support to Süleyman Demirel's Justice Party (Adalet Partisi), the successor of Menderes' Demokrat Parti. Only a tiny minority turned to Turkey's first Islamist party, the National Order Party (Millî Nizâm Partisi) founded in 1969. To this day, the majority of the Nurchus criticize both Turkish and foreign Islamists for their anti-democratic ideology, their hierarchical forms of organization, their authoritarianism, and their tolerance of violence.

The publishing activities of the Nurchus were originally restricted to the dissemination of the *Risâle-i Nûr*. In the late 1960s, however, they began to enlarge their program. In Istanbul, they started the political daily *Yeni Asya* (New Asia, 1973) and the monthly review *Köprü* (The bridge, 1976). In the latter, and in many tracts published by the *Yeni Asya* publishing house, Nurchu authors addressed religious, ethical, and political issues on the basis of their interpretation of Said Nursi's teachings. One author even went so far as to write a novel for this purpose (see below). However, the expansion of publishing activities was resented by a number of leaders, who insisted that the movement should concentrate on disseminating the *Risâle-i Nûr* in reading circles and teaching sessions (*sohbet, ders*). The expansion of publishing activities was not the only issue to cause friction among the Nurchus. Some of the younger members were unwilling to subordinate themselves to the authority of Said Nursi's inner circle and they set up publishing enterprises of their own.

The 1980 military coup furthered the fragmentation of the Nurchu movement. Whereas the direct military intervention of 1960 and the threat of intervention (*muhtıra*) of 1971 were intended to reinstall undiluted Kemalism, the junta of Kenan Evren sought support from religious circles in its struggle against the Left. Although some Nurchus eagerly grasped this extended hand, the *Yeni Asya* group kept aloof. However, these politically motivated conflicts, and the animosity between certain leading figures, should not distract from the fact that, in other non-political matters there are no substantial differences between the various Nurchu factions.

The most important development among the Nurchus since the 1980s has been the increase in media use for the propagation of their ideas. In the course of this process, authors and lecturers who did not necessarily have a high status according to the old, albeit informal, system of initiation gained importance.

10 On Nurchu community life: Spuler-Stegemann, Organisationsstruktur; Yavuz, *Nur* study circles. These circles can be considered similar to Sufi models, adapted to new purposes under the restrictive conditions of the Kemalist regime: Zarcone, Transformation.

To a certain extent, this unintentionally weakened the old Nurcu structure based on the controlled reading circles.¹¹

2 Said Nursi's Teachings

2.1 General

Said Nursi's works are characterized by their opaque style. Whereas his followers admire his language for its force, rhythm, and imagery, his detractors denounce it as "bad Turkish" because of the many indisputable grammatical errors or even as a symptom of his alleged mental derangement.¹² For the most part, Said Nursi did not follow the conventions of scholarly religious writings. Instead of theoretical concepts in abstract terms, he used parables and metaphors suitable for convincing laypeople.

Although the reconciliation of Islam with modern science was the most important stimulus of Said Nursi's activities, his overall theological outlook was conservative. He accepted modern astronomy and reinterpreted Quranic verses and *ḥadīths* that reflect geocentric concepts or even support the mythological *sunna* cosmology, like the idea that the Earth rests on the horn of a bull standing on a whale.¹³ In this respect, he followed the same line as modernist thinkers. With regard to other issues to which modernists attach particular importance, Said Nursi consciously opposed their solutions. For example, he objected to the concept of independent causality, and defended the idea that God sustains, at every moment, a generally regular succession of events. On the basis of this assumption, he defended the possibility of miracles. Nevertheless, he offered numerous rational explanations for many of the miracles reported in the Quran. Another outcome of his rejection of the idea of independent causality was his strong objection to the concept of self-organizing matter resulting in life. Although he never explicitly referred to the theory of evolution, his target was unmistakable. In the 1970s, the Nurbus took up his objections again, and bolstered their attempts to refute Darwinism with translations of American Protestant creationist literature. The Islamic brand of creationism that resulted from this synthesis is now popular throughout the Islamic world, perhaps even more so in the diaspora. Indeed, it may be considered the

11 On these aspects: Yavuz, *Nur* study circles 305–12; with particular emphasis on groups active in Europe: Şahinöz, *Nurculuk* 97–146, 156–60; Riexinger, *Schöpfungsordnung*.

12 Dursun, *Müslümanlık*.

13 Nursi, *Lem'alar* 93; Heinen, *Islamic cosmology*.

Nurcus' most important contribution to current ideological discussions in the Islamic world.¹⁴

Another major, but more traditional, aspect of Said Nursi's teachings consists of elements from later intellectual Sufism, in particular speculations based on the concept of macrocosm and microcosm,¹⁵ and the notion of plural worlds.¹⁶ According to him, everything that exists is animate to a certain degree.¹⁷ One central aspect is the idea that the cosmos has two ontologically different manifestations:

[The] cosmos has two sides, like the two sides of a mirror: *mülk* and *melekûtiyet*. The side of *mülk* is the realm where contradictions struggle (*ezdadın cevalangâhudır*). It is the place where aspects like beautiful-ugly, good-bad, small-large clash. For its sake means and causes have been set up, so that the hand of power (*dest-i kudret*) does not manifest itself visibly in particulars as required by (His) Greatness and Aloofness (*azamet, izzet*). However they have not been given real power to effect (*hakikî tesir verilmemiş*) as required by (His) Oneness (*vahdet*).

By contrast, the side of *melekûtiyet* is absolutely transparent (*mutlaka şeffafedir*); and it is not disturbed by specification (*teşahhusat*). This side is directly oriented toward the Creator. There is no order, sequence (of events). Causality cannot intrude (*illiyet, mâlûliyet giremez*). There are no deviations. No impediments interfere. (On this side) the atom becomes the brother of the sun.¹⁸

Another theme in Said Nursi's writings is the search for modern scientific discoveries and technical inventions that were anticipated in the Quran. This apologetic exegetical approach called *tafsîr 'ilmî*; it emerged in late nineteenth-century Egypt and gained popularity throughout the Islamic world.¹⁹ In Turkey, some of Said Nursi's followers became its most ardent advocates.

14 Riexinger, Islamic opposition 488–498; Riexinger, Turkey.

15 Nursi, *Ishârat* 27; Nursi, *Sözler* 871; Nursi, *Mektûbât* 428.

16 Nursi, *Sözler* 839; Radtke, Sufism 349–53.

17 Nursi: *Khutba* 105; Nursi, *Mathnawî* 254; Nursi, *Sünuhât* 35. Remarkably, the same idea can be found in the writings of the German materialist authors who were popular among secular Ottoman intellectuals: Büchner, *Kraft und Stoff*; Haeckel, *Welträthsel* 258f. Whether Said Nursi was aware of this and considered it proof of the scientific character of his ideas is impossible to say.

18 Nursi, *Sünuhât* 33.

19 Baljon, *Modern Muslim* 88–94, 125f.; Jansen, *Interpretation* 40–54; Riexinger, *Sanâ'ullâh* 406f.

Said Nursi's teachings on science and religion are closely related to his ethical and political views. A major part of his later works is devoted to coming to terms with the fact that Islamic norms are no longer generally binding. But instead of calling for the implementation of the *sharī'a* with state support, he urged his followers to act according to Islamic norms out of conviction. For this purpose, he stressed, man has to know where he comes from and where he will go when he dies. Hence both eschatology and the affirmation of creation play a central role in his thought. The idea that it is impossible to lead an ethical life without the acceptance of the Creator is the reason for his revulsion toward both Kemalism and communism. And the notion that Christians and Muslims should oppose the forces of unbelief reinforced his favorable attitude to Christians, an attitude that he had already revealed before World War I.

2.2 *Eschatology*

Said Nursi's teachings defy the notion that Islamic discourses in the twentieth century are marked by a shift from religion to ideology. The *memento mori*²⁰ and the affirmation of the resurrection are central elements in Said Nursi's writings and sayings because he thought that the awareness of what will come is a prerequisite for an ethical life. Hence it comes as no surprise that eschatological themes figure prominently in the *Risāle-i Nûr*. However, in most instances he simply affirms traditional doctrines, as for example the *berzah* (Arabic: *bar-zakh*, cf. Q 23:100; 25:53; 55:20)²¹ or the record of deeds.²² Nevertheless, it is remarkable that he tries to underscore the veracity of the traditional concepts by claiming that he himself has seen them in visions and dreams.²³ In other cases, he endeavors to explain elements of eschatology in the light of modern science (as he understood it) or current events.

In some cases, Said Nursi mixes the affirmation of eschatology with *tafsīr 'ilmī* (scientific exegesis). For example, he says that the Small Hell (*Cehennem-i Suğrâ*) already exists, as this has been proven by the findings of modern geology. Based on the observation that the temperature of the earth increases by

20 Among the most frequently quoted passages from his works is a statement that appears in two sermons, in which he refers to a school playground with pretty teenage girls, whom he saw from his cell in the Eskişehir jail. He declares that their physical beauty is futile because in fifty years time they would either already lie in a grave or have become ugly and disrespected. Here the *memento mori* is combined with the criticism of the visibility of the female body encouraged by the Kemalists: Nursi, *Sözler* 178, 186, 191.

21 Nursi, *Sözler* 416, 692f., 878, 894f.; Nursi, *Mektûbât* 12–4: for martyrs, the Intermediate World will be free of hardship; Nursi, *Lem'alar* 282–6.

22 Nursi, *Mektûbât* 221.

23 Nursi, *Sözler* 407–9: On the bridge the resurrected will have to cross before the judgment.

one degree centigrade every 33 meters one drills down, Said Nursi concluded that the center of the planet is 200,000° C. Thus he attempted to prove the veracity of the *ḥadīth* according to which hell's fire is one thousand times hotter than fire on Earth. However, in the end (*ahiret*), the inhabitants of the Earth, and those already smoldering in the Small Hell, will be delivered to the place of judgment. Those who are damned will end up in the Great Hell located inside the Earth's orbit. However, it is still invisible because its fire is hidden and lightless. With regard to the Great Hell, Said Nursi does not embellish his vision with reference to scientific theories or findings.²⁴ In light of new technical inventions, he proposed one new explanation for the Intermediate World (*berzah*), which was taken up again decades later. According to him, it can be compared to a cinema in which all past events are displayed.²⁵

Other reflections on eschatology are connected with his ideas about society and politics. His irenic approach to the non-Muslims in this world motivated him to find an agreeable solution for their destiny in the hereafter. He did not dare to overrule the Quranic warning that they will end up in hell, but he argued that the morally excellent non-Muslims will be accommodated in a deluxe section of hell that resembles paradise in all major aspects. Until now, some Nurcus subscribe to this position.²⁶

One of his treatises serves to endow the struggle against communism with an apocalyptic dimension. He identified the Dajjāl with a threat from the north, and he justified this association by referring to a *ḥadīth* according to which "the first day of the Dajjāl" will last a year, the second one a month, the third one a year, and the fourth one a day. During his captivity in Russia, he observed that near the North Pole days and nights last longer. If a railway train or a car traveled ahead of the sunset in such northern regions it would be possible to see the sun for a week. For Said Nursi, this served as decisive proof that the Dajjāl will come from the north. He added that this assumption is corroborated by two further universally accepted prophecies in the *ḥadīth*: first, Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj (Gog and Magog) will invade the civilized world from the north, and second, the Jews will be among the followers of the Dajjāl, which fits in with the fact that "Trotsky's committee" brought Lenin to power.²⁷ The identification of Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj with a threat – usually of nomadic people – from the northern steppes can be traced back to classical commentaries. In recent decades Arab authors, too, have reinterpreted these figures in a way that

24 Nursi, *Mektûbât* 14f.

25 Nursi, *Lem'alar* 524.

26 Nursi, *Ishārat* 81f.; Pakso, *Meseleler* i, 124–6: Hence Edison is admitted, Darwin not.

27 Nursi, *Şualar* 506–9, 513; on Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj also Nursi, *Sikke* 189.

reflects current political conflicts: They identify Ya'jūj and Ma'jūj as Israel with reference to the assertion that the eastern European Jews are descendants of the Khazars; this was brought forward by Koestler in his *The Thirteenth Tribe*.²⁸ Furthermore, Said Nursi claimed that the *ḥadīth* according to which one eye of the Dajjāl is blind should be reinterpreted to mean that one eye possesses special powers of a spiritualist nature, like a magnetism that enables its holder to control and steer (*teshir edici manyetizma*), as he himself claims to have seen "in a spiritual world" (*bir mânevi âlemde*).²⁹ In a similar way, Said Nursi connected the *ḥadīth* according to which there will be a time when nobody says "Allah, Allah" anymore, with the forced turkification of the call to prayer in 1932.³⁰ With regard to the beast of the Earth (*dābbat al-arḍ*; Q 27:82; 34:14) and the rising of the sun in the West, Said Nursi conceded that he was unable to find an explanation that is totally convincing. However, he speculated that the beast of the Earth might not be a single animal but a certain kind or herd (*tâife*) that afflicts mankind by devouring men's bones like bark beetle larvae chew trees.³¹

3 Fethullah Gülen: Affirmation without Explanation

At present, Fethullah Gülen (b. 1938 or 1941) is by far the most prominent figure to emerge from the ranks of the Nurcu movement. In fact, whether or not Gülen describes himself as a follower of Said Nursi depends on whether he considers it politically opportune to do so under prevailing circumstances. Gülen hails from the province of Erzurum in the east of Turkey, where he received a traditional religious education in underground *medreses*. After military service he worked for the Directorate of Religious Affairs as a preacher (*vaiz*). In this capacity, he was sent to two of Turkey's most westernized cities, Izmir and Edirne. In Izmir, where he served in the 1970s, he attracted conservative students with his sermons against materialism, and it was here that he began to form an independent movement. His disciples published the magazine *Sızıntı* (The leak [through which truth trickles]) and recordings of his sermons. Their ranks were filled with the help of summer camps that they organized for pupils. Because he supported the 1980 coup, and especially the government of Turgut Özal, he was treated favorably by the state authorities

28 Van Donzel and Ott, *Yādjūdj wa-Mādjūdj*; Cook, *Contemporary* 205–8.

29 Nursi, *Sözler* 513f.

30 Ibid., 499.

31 Ibid., 510f.

in the 1980s and early 1990s. Thus his followers were able to set up educational institutions, media outlets (especially the daily newspaper *Zaman*), and commercial enterprises in Turkey and abroad. Hence Gülen may be considered one of the most influential figures in Turkey even though he left the country for the United States after falling afoul of the army in 1999.³²

Whereas these various activities of the Gülen movement reveal their willingness to make use of the most modern devices and strategies available, Gülen's religious writings are fairly conventional with regard to form and content. Like Said Nursi, he uses many examples and parables. Although he occasionally introduces modern scientific vocabulary of Turkish or Western origin, his language is characterized by a large number of Arabic and Persian words and hence appears quite Ottoman.³³ Major subjects of his writings are moral issues, in particular the defense of the traditional gender order, the glorification of the Ottoman past, and the struggle against materialism. However, he shuns direct reference to current Turkish politics.

One of his tracts is devoted to *Ölüm Ötesi Hayat* (Life beyond death).³⁴ However, the title is somewhat misleading because Gülen pays little attention to the description of the afterlife. Instead he focuses on demonstrating the possibility and necessity of the physical resurrection and punishment "on the basis of the Quran and reason." As expected, he is motivated by the observation that for "several centuries" the belief in the hereafter was subjected to the doubt and abuse of atheists, materialists and "denialists" (*inkârcı*).³⁵

According to Gülen, it is unthinkable that someone's life could be "straight" (*müstakîm*) if he is not aware that his acts will be judged. Hence Allah warns humans that all their deeds will be recorded by angels. Those who believe in resurrection will therefore possess a remedy against the craziness of youth and

32 The bulk of the literature on the Gülen movement can be divided into uncritical apologetics and hysterical conspiracy theories by left-wing nationalists; a critical biography remains a desideratum. Two generally positive presentations do, however, take objections against Gülen into account: Hermann, Fethullah Gülen; Yavuz, *Islamic political identity* 179–205; a denunciation of Gülen as opportunist by an "old school" Nurcu: Şahinöz, *Nurculuk* 97–120; on Gülen's educational activities and the media associated with him: Agai, *Netzwerk*. Gülen's date of birth is controversial. Whereas 1941 is given in official documents, he himself claims to have been born on 10 November 1938, i.e., the day of Atatürk's death.

33 For example, he occasionally uses the word *Hüdâ* (from Pers. *khodâ*) for God, which is nowadays quite uncommon in Turkey: Gülen, *Ölüm* 4.

34 The translation was chosen consciously because Gülen did not opt for the temporal *sonra* but for *öte*, which is used to express a local relation or an alternative.

35 Gülen, *Ölüm* i.

the desperation of old age and infirmity.³⁶ The belief in resurrection thus guarantees peace of mind (*huzur*) for the individual, which is a precondition for social stability.³⁷

According to Gülen, the Lord (*Cenab-ı Hak*) has explained the possibility of resurrection to mankind in several ways. First, the Quran summons humans to observe the world so that they will recognize His infinite powers that keep the heavens in their place without pillars and resurrect vegetation every spring. Hence men have to ask themselves whether it is easier (for God) to create heaven, or to create them (Q 79:27). In fact, there is no difference between the first creation and the second one.³⁸ Another argument that he puts forward to bolster his claim is the universal wisdom that he says characterizes the universe (*kâinât*). This assumption is based on an expansion of the macrocosm-microcosm concept. According to Gülen, the universe is a “big person” (*büyük bir insan*, i.e., *insân akbar*). Hence no detail in the “macroworld, normoworld and microworld” is meaningless. This includes man’s existence and also his sense of and longing for eternal life.³⁹ Because man is a manifestation of the mystery of the perfect order (*ahsen-i takvîm sırrının mazharı*, Q 95:4), resurrection and the Great Judgment are absolutely necessary in order to evaluate his deeds in this world.⁴⁰ Furthermore, he argues, one must consider that natural laws can explain only the events themselves but not why and for what purpose they occur. But everything has an objective and a purpose such as the creation of the human who longs for eternity (*ebed*).⁴¹ Moreover, the necessity of resurrection can be concluded from the grace, pity, and generosity of the Lord.⁴² In

36 Ibid., 1f., 10.

37 Ibid., 3, 6f., 13f.; on *huzur*, a central term in Turkish Islamic discourse: Glaßen, ‘Huzur’.

38 Gülen, *Ölüm* 23–31; spring was used by Said Nursi as metaphor for resurrection. In this context Gülen clings to the concept of a compact heaven, which contradicts modern theories of physics to which he refers elsewhere. Such inconsistencies are typical of this type of literature, see p. 1256. Furthermore, the passage includes an affirmation of the creation of man from clay and argil (29). This reflects Gülen’s strong opposition to the theory of evolution.

39 Gülen, *Ölüm* 33–5. The three worlds to which Gülen refers are terms used in popular presentations of modern physics. The “normoworld” as opposed to the macroworld (astronomical phenomena) and the microworld (particles), is the one to which the human senses are adapted. According to Gülen, they show remarkable signs of correspondence: 59f.; similar, but without the terms: İsmail, *Ölüm* 18f.

40 Gülen, *Ölüm* 38.

41 Ibid., 34f., 66f.

42 Ibid., 41–9.

addition, the beauty of this world demands to be continued⁴³ and the graces (*nimetler*) of the True Lord (*Cenab-i Hakk*) in this world are hints of those to be received in the hereafter.⁴⁴ Finally, Gülen adds a list of Greek, Islamic, and Western philosophers who affirmed the belief in resurrection, at least in a collective form (Spinoza),⁴⁵ and he stresses that the basic teachings of the Old and New Testament correspond to those of the Quran.⁴⁶

In the concluding chapter he states: "We believe in the truth of resurrection as reported in the Quran and *ḥadīths* and leave the aspect of the question that is not our concern to the knowledge of the Lord." He considers the images of hell and paradise in the Quran to be entirely sufficient to motivate the pious and to warn those who might be led astray.⁴⁷

Only in a few instances does Gülen offer explanations for eschatological events. For example, from the *ḥādīth* according to which men will be resurrected naked and uncircumcised, he concludes that men will be resurrected with their souls and as "reproductions" (*eşbah*) of their bodies that consist of their original atoms/particles (*zerrat-ı asliye*).⁴⁸ The return of the moon, which is now commonly accepted to have been born of the Earth, to its mother might result in an atomic explosion that brings about the resurrection. However, comets or tests of nuclear bombs could lead to the same result.⁴⁹ The existence of DNA in human sperm (sic! the ovum does not seem to matter) and in all living beings is proof that all information in the universe is preserved. On the day of the resurrection this information will be used to reproduce all living beings.⁵⁰ In a second elaboration on spring as an anticipation of resurrection, Gülen tries to underscore this example by referring to photosynthesis.⁵¹ His reluctance to indulge in more far-reaching speculations on the hereafter is remarkable because it contrasts with his approach to other exegetic issues discussed below.⁵²

43 Ibid., 50f.

44 Ibid., 52–4.

45 Ibid., 75–80.

46 Ibid., 81–3.

47 Ibid., 85.

48 Ibid., 16–9; this traditional theory is upheld by other modern authors, too: Mawdūdī, *Sīrat* ii, 374.

49 Gülen, *Ölüm* 20f.

50 Ibid., 55–7.

51 Ibid., 63f.

52 However this is not uncommon in modern eschatological writings. For Arab examples see Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 131.

4 Hekimoğlu İsmail: On End of Time and the Human Transition

Hekimoğlu İsmail is the pen name of Ömer Okçu (b. 1932) who, unlike Gülen, did not receive a thorough religious education. After high school he went to the United States to study electrical engineering. But instead of seeking employment in that profession after his return, he began working as a freelance writer. In 1967, he published *Minyeli Abdullah* ('Abdallāh from al-Minya), arguably the first Turkish-Islamic thesis novel. He has been a prolific writer ever since. In addition to further novels, stories, and poems, İsmail has written a popular explanation of the main biographical facts and doctrines of Said Nursi (in response to 100 questions), and several collections of essays on religious and ethical questions. At present, he is closely associated with Gülen, and contributes columns on religious issues to the daily newspaper *Zaman* on a regular basis.⁵³

Hekimoğlu İsmail deals with eschatological issues in his introduction to Said Nursi's life and doctrines.⁵⁴ According to İsmail, the signs of the coming of the day of resurrection described in the Quran will be caused by the suspension of those forces holding the universe together. But how are people supposed to be resurrected when ultimately the Earth breaks apart, magma surges out, gravitational forces cease to exist, and everything is dismantled into single atoms? Hekimoğlu İsmail explains this thus: At the beginning of the universe, God filled the void with atoms and ether. From these two components He created molecules, stars, and planets. When everything is dismantled in the end, God can easily create everything, including humans, anew in a second creation. Hence humans will not vanish in a void but will undergo a transition to another state as they did before when they died in the world of souls and were resurrected in a womb at the same time.⁵⁵

When Hekimoğlu İsmail explains why hellfire can inflict unimaginable pain on humans without burning them, he argues that, according to God's order, this happens in human bodies at 37°C. Nevertheless, the Creator can decree that this process should take place at much higher temperatures. Moreover, He

53 <http://www.hekimogluismail.com>.

54 In 2004 he published the booklet *Ölüm yokluk mu?* (Does death mean void?) in which he writes about the general structure and harmony of the universe but says remarkably little about the afterlife. The only aspect to which he refers continually is God's infinite power, which can be observed in every detail of creation. This is supposed to prove that God can resurrect men *and* create an infinite hereafter. The necessity of the latter is justified with moral arguments. However, Hekimoğlu İsmail does not describe any details.

55 İsmail, *100 Soruda* 169f.; cf. Q 29:16–23.

could arrange for this not to burn the body and for the fire never to cease, just as the sun has been burning non-stop since time immemorial. Referring to firemen who wear protective suits made from asbestos, he asks why Allah should not create a protective device as He did when Abraham opposed Nimrod. At this point, however, İsmail turns from technicalities to morals, stressing that everyone should forge their own armor to protect themselves from hellfire by obeying the divine commandments.⁵⁶

5 Muhammet Bozdağ: An Apocalyptic and Success Counselor

The most extensive book on eschatology was written by Muhammed Bozdağ (b. 1967), who has no formal religious education in the state education system nor does he play an important role in the leadership of a Nurcu organization. Bozdağ studied public administration. After completing his PhD he joined the Department of Laws and Ordinances of the Turkish National Assembly, where he has since risen to the rank of vice director. In the mid-1990s, he started to promote the popular concept of *kişisel gelişim* ("personal growth/development") in writings, public lectures, and on the Internet.⁵⁷ This concept is an Islamic adaptation of popular Western counseling literature that promises a combination of worldly success and spiritual satisfaction.⁵⁸ At first glance, this overly optimistic literature contrasts with Bozdağ's grim visions of doom. However, the Western models that he copied for this purpose did, in fact, leave their trace in his eschatological writings, too. Remarkably, his audience does not seem to be restricted to Nurcus, or to religious conservatives in general. Photographs of his lecture audiences show that not all of his female admirers cover their hair. This would be disapproved of in more religiously observant circles.⁵⁹

Bozdağ reveals his eschatological ideas in his book *Sonsuzluk Yolculuğu* (The voyage toward infinity), in which he attempts to answer the question: "Where do we come from and where will we go?"⁶⁰ Hence the last things are treated as part of an all-encompassing cosmological model. The language of the book is marked by a dichotomy: on the one hand, he uses the common Arabic terms for traditional religious concepts, while in all other instances he clearly prefers

⁵⁶ İsmail, *100 Soruda* 180–2.

⁵⁷ Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 4; <http://www.yetenek.com/articles.asp?tid=1&cid=50>.

⁵⁸ Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 12: "Ruhsal gelişimle omuz omuza giden kişisel gelişimi anlamlı buluyorum."

⁵⁹ http://yetenek.com/articles_detail.asp?id=54.

⁶⁰ Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 13.

Turkish neologisms for Arabic or Persian terms. For example, he uses *evren* (universe) and *sonsuzluk* (infinity) where Gülen would prefer *kâinât* or *ebed*. By employing a “purified” Turkish instead of the “Ottoman” preferred by elder religious authors, he stresses his scientific credentials. His choice is typical of younger religious authors who place Islamic concepts on an equal footing with secular theories or ideologies by complying with the linguistic norms of Turkish secularism.⁶¹ The book was published by Nesil Yayınları, the most important publishing house of Nurettin Fethullah Gülen. The first edition sold 110,000 copies, a second, revised edition was published in 2010 by Yakamoz Yayınları, a commercial publishing house.

The book begins with a description of the Big Bang as proof of the *creatio ex nihilo* and the illusory character of matter. However, the author claims that the void (*yokluk*) from which space/time (*uzay/zaman*) was created, was already made of light. Matter, as we experience it, is nothing more than a specific state of waves, and hence light. He claims that this insight fits Q 24:35: “God is the light of the heavens and the earth.”⁶² Furthermore, he maintains that Allah created parallel universes in which the speed of waves is not necessarily restricted to the speed of light in our universe. According to Bozdağ, parallel universes correspond to the concept of plural worlds as formulated by the Sufi masters.⁶³ In their dreams humans can access the other worlds/parallel universes because virtual (*sanal*) versions of the universes exist in fictional worlds (*hayal âlemleri*) already described by the Sufi masters.⁶⁴ This is because the souls of angels, humans, and *jinn* are free from the restrictions imposed on their bodies by the four dimensions.⁶⁵ Bozdağ, too, considers man to be a microcosm but he does not elaborate much on this subject. Like Said Nursi, he ascribes consciousness to particles.⁶⁶

According to Bozdağ, Adam and Eve were created in the *Elest Yurdu*, the “Realm of a lastu (*bi-rabbikum*),” which alludes to Q 7:172 where Adam’s offspring acknowledge God as their lord. This realm must be conceived of as “one of the imaginary dimensions in the heavens” (*Elest yurdunu, göklerdeki hayalî boyutlardan biri olarak değerlendireceğiz*).⁶⁷ Only after they were taken in by

61 Seufert, *Politischer Islam* 382.

62 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 17–22; the translation follows Arberry (trans.), *Koran interpreted*.

63 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 24–8.

64 Ibid., 28–31.

65 Ibid., 38–40.

66 Ibid., 48f. Similar ideas can be found in New Age literature, the reception of which will be dealt with below: Hanegraaff, *New Age* 157.

67 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 55.

Iblis did they descend to our universe. Because their forefathers originated in another universe, where they were endowed with a soul, humans possess spiritual and intellectual capabilities that are unknown to animals. Above all they possess individuality. However: "Our brain cells have not heard, felt or seen concrete (*somut*) sound, rain, mountain or wind. Because (in the *elest yurdu*) there are no physical concretions (*cisimsel somutluklar*), the concepts were abstract (*soyut*) and had the value of a potential basis (*potansiyel temelleri itibarileydi*)."⁶⁸ Moreover, the memory of the experiences of their forefathers is retained in the human genes.⁶⁹ Bozdağ claims that an awareness of the origins and purpose of creation will pave the way for real success because gratitude toward God helps one to lead an ethical life,⁷⁰ which will yield rewards in this world: The orderly joys of marriage help to contain the potentially destructive force of sexuality,⁷¹ and fulfilling the prescribed rites bestows peace of mind (*huzur*).⁷²

Bozdağ's elaborations on eschatology begin with the assertion that death cannot be conceived of as a void because it means the separation of the body from the soul. The latter will continue to exist, and although dying is a process that affects only the body, the soul must taste the pain of death (Q 3:185; 21:35; 29:57).⁷³ He claims that this can be proven by accounts of near-death experiences, and he points out that even atheist scientists have been transformed into believers by what they have seen under such circumstances. Muslims who have undergone such a condition, however, are able to identify that what they experienced was none other than the transition to the Intermediate World (*berzah*). The fact that many accounts of near-death experiences resemble visions of space travel is considered by Bozdağ to be proof of his assertion that the soul will migrate to another dimension after death.⁷⁴

Bozdağ's vision of this transition is not free of contradiction. Some pages later he ascribes to the "cause- and matterless" soul a longing to free itself from its physical garment. In accordance with the traditional concept of the "small death," Bozdağ asserts that the soul will remain close to the body until

68 Ibid., 55, 61–76, 79–87, quote: 86.

69 Ibid., 94f.

70 Ibid., 106–15.

71 Ibid., 115–20.

72 Ibid., 124–8; on this typically Turkish concept: Glaßen, „Huzur“.

73 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 132, 134f.

74 Ibid., 135–9; on the development and variety of the concept of *barzakh*: Rebstock, *Grabesleben*. The Egyptian ‘Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal, an author of apologetic tracts, had referred to such reports in the 1960s: Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 121; another example is provided by Mawdūdī, *Sīrat* ii, 379.

the funeral, where most of the dead will see their loved ones for the last time. However, some very pious people will be granted the privilege of remaining in contact with their families. For example it was reported that an old woman known for her honesty had died before she could return a needle she had borrowed from her neighbors. With the permission of Allah she was able to talk to her son in a dream so that he could return the needle. Martyrs and friends of God (*velis*) may even be allowed to visit this world for a long time. Due to the connection the dead may keep with this world, Bozdağ sees no harm in visiting graves and praying for the dead, all the more so as those who oppose this practice erect mausoleums for Marx (*sic*), Lenin, and Mao, thereby encouraging the religious veneration of humans. Here, eschatology provides him with an opportunity for a covert attack on the Kemalist veneration of Atatürk. However, Bozdağ warns against excessive practices: Those who light candles at graves or put stones on them disregard the Creator and embarrass the friends of Allah. And those who ask the dead (or “a living secretary”, i.e., contemporary religious authorities) for favors associate someone with God.⁷⁵ Although Bozdağ affirms the traditional concept of the afterlife in the grave, he passes over two prominent aspects of these teachings: the examination and the punishment in the grave, from which only exceptional figures like prophets, *velis*, and martyrs are exempt.⁷⁶

The next stage that Bozdağ refers to is *berzah*. According to him, every place in the material world is a space bridge (*uzay köprüsü*) permitting access to the Intermediate World and other worlds of conception (*hayâl âlemleri*) because information related to the material universe is elevated to the status of waves and creates images in the world of conception. Hence a person who liberates the vision of his soul may see the troops of Mehmet Fatih storming the walls of Istanbul. One could say that the history of matter has been recorded in the world of conception and that it preserves the old positions of matter whenever they change. Hence the spiritual dimension of objects that have passed from their material surrounding can be contemplated, and the eternal world

75 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 145–8; on traditional views on the “small death”: Eklund, *Life* 9f., 23f., 53; Rebstock, *Grabesleben* 374, 378; on classical concepts regarding the communication of the dead with the living: Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 50f. The criticism of the veneration of Atatürk via the criticism of communist personality cults can also be found in the writings of Harun Yahya, *Yahudilik* 485–509, who is dealt with below. That Marx lies in a normal grave with a bust on Highgate Cemetery is apparently unknown to Bozdağ.

76 Eklund, *Life* 6f., 30–8, 45–53; Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 40–7; Rebstock, *Grabesleben* 374.

is visible to those residing in the Intermediate World. Thus, one should imagine this realm as a movie depicting one's own complete life. Moreover, it is possible that a personal universe will be created for everyone. In this realm, humans will not be recognized on the basis of their outward forms but by the feelings that are spread by their souls. Everyone will be endowed with luminous armor, the strength of which will depend on their deeds in this life. Hence the Intermediate World will either provide a foretaste of the joys of paradise or the torments of hell. In order to get an idea of the Intermediate World, one should imagine a movie that transcends the restrictions imposed by the four dimensions and addresses all the human senses.⁷⁷ But whereas communication of the inhabitants of the Intermediate World with the material world is a special favor, the awareness of the acts of those left behind is the norm because the verbal expression of every human takes two forms. On the one hand, the human produces physical waves that are perceived as sound in this world. On the other hand, a "form" (*form*) emanates from his soul, which can also be perceived via telepathy. This form is first sensed by the angels accompanying each human being. "Every soul is a virtual radio transmitter; it transmits its feelings, thoughts and wishes in the form of waves to a spiritual dimension (*dalgalar halinde ruhsal boyuta aktarır*)." This continuing connection with the material universe is a benefit to those who are held in pleasant memory by their fellow men. For example, someone who has dedicated a *waqf* to the poor will perceive it when someone utters "may Allah be pleased." If people pray at the graves of their deceased relatives they may also be able to perceive this "form." The author claims that this is confirmed by some people who report that in such an instance they heard voices supplicating the living to pray for them. Hence Bozdağ once again exhorts his readers to pray at the gravesites lest they be forgotten by their relatives. For his concept of *berzah* Bozdağ does not refer to modern concepts and Western authorities. Instead he relates visions ascribed to the early Muslim ascetics Mālik b. Dīnār (d. ca. 131/748–9) and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) without, however, mentioning the sources.⁷⁸ In this context it is

77 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 148–51; *‘ālam al-khayāl* or *‘ālam al-mithāl* are often used as more specific synonyms for the *barzakh* or as types of different *barāzikh*: Eklund, *Life* 169–74; Gardet, *‘Ālam*.

78 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 151–4; on the conceptualization of the *barzakh* as an ontologically different realm and the classical formulation of this idea: Eklund, *Life* 93–146; on classical ideas of the continuing perception of the dead: Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 51; further reports on visions of the *barzakh*: Rebstock, *Grabesleben* 372 no. 2; on Mālik b. Dīnār, an important role model for early Sufis: Gramlich, *Alte Vorbilder* 59–121, on the dead exhorting the living: 75f.

interesting that the cover of the book shows seagulls heading toward the sky. This could be seen as an allusion to a *ḥadīth* according to which the souls of the dead before resurrection are compared to birds, although Bozdağ does not refer to this tradition in the text.⁷⁹

In the chapter on the fourth stage, resurrection, Bozdağ offers several explanations for eschatological signs common to the Sunni tradition. This stage is preceded by a phase of decay, which will not come as a surprise to those who know that, like humans, the universe undergoes various phases of life. He maintains that in society, decay is already apparent. People are becoming more and more isolated from each other, and an orderly family life has become rare: in Turkey, which has been affected by globalization, 744,000 couples have divorced in the last five years. Millions died during the communist revolutions and the wars in Chechnya and Bosnia. Worldwide, 850 million people suffer from hunger, and although the advance of technology makes ever more sophisticated gadgets available, people have lost a sense of gratitude to the Creator who makes these developments possible. The number of earthquakes is on the rise, the same applies to storms, the latter being a result of global warming.

For the signs of moral decay Bozdağ refers to the canonical *ḥadīth* collections and later compilations; with regard to natural disasters, he quotes various reports from the Turkish daily newspaper *Milliyet*.⁸⁰ He also refers to a common Islamic eschatological sign. He explains the rising of the sun in the West, believed to be alluded to in the Quran, as a planetary catastrophe similar to events that have recently occurred or which have been detected by current research. The rising of the sun in the West alludes to a change in the direction of the Earth's rotation. If the rotation of our planet slowed to the velocity of an airplane, all the objects on its surface would be whirled around and the usual order of rainfall would cease. As proof, he refers to El Niño and the tsunami on 26 December 2004; he claims that these have disrupted the Earth's rotation. As an alternative explanation he suggests that the poles might shift, as this has happened at least 400 times during the last 330 million years. We can conclude that he has confused the magnetic poles with the poles of the rotation axis from his claim that the weakening of the magnetic field, which has recently been observed, proves his assertion.⁸¹

Another sign that the end of the world is imminent is the struggle between good and evil or between the builders and destroyers (*iyilik-kötülük kavgası/yapıcılar ve yıkıcılar*). The leaders of the destroyers are intellectual leaders

79 Eklund, *Life* 101f.; Nursi, *Sözler* 677.

80 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 155–64.

81 Ibid., 164–6.

like Comte, Darwin, and Marx, who claimed that the universe is uncreated, that the soul does not exist, and that there is no reality beyond matter. In various Christian and Muslim countries, their followers, such as Hitler, Lenin, and Saddam Hussein, seized power and suppressed the people. Here again, we may assume that Bozdağ's readers will interpret his words as an attack on Kemalism; that is, he has singled out Comte as a thinker whose ideas were a major source of inspiration for Atatürk, and Darwin was another thinker whose theory inspired the founder of the Turkish Republic. However, according to Bozdağ the awareness of the Creator is threatened not only in the political field. He declares science fiction and fantasy films such as *Star Trek* (see below) to be unacceptable because they cast doubt on the wisdom of the Creator. Furthermore, he warns that if the seeds of hatred between Muslims and Christians are sown, they might result in armed conflicts.⁸² On the other hand, he also considers positive developments in the religious sphere as signs of imminent doom: Although most Christians still cling to the belief in the Trinity, some have recently come close to accepting the true nature of Jesus. Hence they might be willing to accept that Jesus will reappear among the Muslims.⁸³

Bozdağ himself even suggests a date for doomsday. In a dream, he experienced an earthquake and tumbling rocks. Suddenly he saw his soul leaving his body and floating above charred ruins toward an unknown place. The next day he read in *Hürriyet* that the British astronomer Duncan Shell had calculated that parts of the comet Tuttle will hit the Earth on 14 August 2126. This would fit with the *ḥadīth* according to which mankind will continue to exist until roughly 1,500 years after the Prophet's death. When he began to write the book, Bozdağ asked asteroid expert Brian G. Marsden for confirmation. In his e-mail, the astronomer replied that such a collision was highly unlikely and, if the Earth were to be hit, then it would be by a hitherto unknown celestial body. Obviously unacquainted with the irony of British academics, Bozdağ mistook Marsden's reply to mean that the likelihood that the Earth will be hit by an asteroid is high. As an alternative cause of the end of life on Earth, Bozdağ cites the radiation of an exploding neutron star. However, doomsday does not necessarily have to come from space: As predicted by Professor King, if current developments like global warming continue for another sixty years, the end of mankind will be unavoidable.⁸⁴ Frightening as these conjectures may

82 Ibid., 169–71.

83 Ibid., 171–6.

84 Ibid., 177–80. His knowledge is based on reports in *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* that rely on the German tabloid *Bild*. With regard to the *ḥadīth*, he refers to a Turkish translation of

be, Bozdağ has to address the fact that he can only explain the end of life on Earth, not the end of the cosmos as a whole. In order to explain this aspect in accordance with traditional cosmological and eschatological motives, he juggles with scientific terminology of which he has only a limited understanding. As can be seen in Q 39:68, the end of the world will come when God orders the angel Isrāfil to blow the trumpet. According to Bozdağ, this means that the energy balance of the universe will break down due to the withdrawal of dark energy that is responsible for the expansion of the universe. In order to understand what will happen then, one has to imagine what will happen when all energy is withdrawn from the electrons. All particles will suddenly leave their places. According to Bozdağ this fits the Quranic prediction that the moon will come to a standstill and merge with the sun, that the stars will be extinguished, and the mountains leveled (Q 56:4–6; 73:14, 18; 75:7–10; 77:8–11; 88:1–3; 99:1–2). This vision of a total dissolution of matter is quite abstract; thus in the depiction of the judgment he returns to more earthly dangers like earthquakes and the moon burning.⁸⁵

In his description of the resurrection and doomsday, Bozdağ adheres to more conventional elements that are much less challenging to notions derived from everyday experience like the march to the place of judgment. In accordance with the majority of classical sources, he asserts that animals will accompany men on the march and that they will be present at the judgment. But in light of more recent biological knowledge, Bozdağ stresses that all living beings that have ever existed will participate, so that people will be able to see dinosaurs. Like Gülen and Hekimoğlu İsmail, Bozdağ claims that this is possible because the genetic code of all creatures has been recorded in divine memory. Hence, their atoms (*zerreler*, i.e., the theological, not the physical ones) will be pieced together anew on the occasion of the resurrection. As proof of the possibility of transporting atoms to a designated position, he refers to the experiment of Austrian physicists who allegedly managed to transfer particles in 2004. The experiment in question, regarding quantum entanglement, was indeed presented in the media as the first step toward transporting things by “beaming” (familiar to *Star Trek* fans) them, although scientists stressed that they were

⁸⁵ *‘Alāmāt al-qiyāma* by al-Barzanjī who quotes Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Kashf fī mujāzawat hazīn al-umma al-alfa alladhī dallat ‘alayhi al-āthār*.

85 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 181–4; the concept that the world could come to an end (*Ol ve öl*) when the forces keeping the cosmos together collapse can be found earlier in articles for Nurcu magazines: Anonymous, Kainatin sonu.

only transferring quantum states of photons and not matter.⁸⁶ For evildoers, the millennial march to the place of judgment will lead through a waterless plain; the period of waiting for the judgment is depicted as a material torment again, following traditional imagery.⁸⁷ But when his narrative addresses the record of deeds, Bozdağ adapts the traditional imagery to technological progress. Sins and virtuous acts are no longer put down in a book, but in a recording device unparalleled by anything we know. Everyone will be shown everything they ever did and said in word and image.⁸⁸ The Bridge, “thin as a hair and sharp as a sword,” is again depicted according to the tradition. The speed with which it will be crossed, and whether one will succeed in crossing the passage at all, is determined by the amount of good and bad deeds of the person in question. The fact that Bozdağ emphasizes that people will be punished for the mistreatment of animals reflects an empathy for animals which is a trait typical in Nurcu thought with a well-known Quran and *ḥadīth* basis.⁸⁹

For Bozdağ, punishment in hell is a logical consequence of the purpose of creation: “The universe has been created for the sake of praise and remembrance. Hence everybody will glorify Allah in his or her own particular language.” Referring to Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī (d. 672/1273), Bozdağ calls hell the place of worship of the deniers. He asserts that according to Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), four categories of men will end up there: (a) the deniers of the Creator, (b) leaders who elevate themselves to a god-like status, (c) those who associate causes, natural laws, humans or idols with the Creator, and (d) those who outwardly pretend to believe although they deny the existence of God. Bozdağ singles out group (c) because “those founders of destructive ideologies . . . [are the reason] thousands of young people were entrapped by their ideas and spilt blood. They passed away without preparing themselves for infinity.” Every day they had millions of opportunities to repent and to begin to pray.⁹⁰ Those doomed

86 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 190–4; on the presence of animals in classical sources: Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 76f.; also see Nursi, *Sözler* 408. He stresses that wild beasts and snakes become tame. The idea that cloning proves the possibility of resurrection seems to be popular in the Islamic world: Nadwī, *Istīnsākh*.

87 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 194–201; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* iv, 513–6; Gardet, *Ḳiyāma*; Gardet, *Grands problèmes* 274.

88 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 201–3.

89 Ibid., 203–5; cf.: al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* iv, 524–6; Gardet, *Grand problèmes* 320f.; Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 78f.; on Said Nursi’s empathy for animals: Şahiner, *Son şahitler* i, 418.

90 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 209–13; his references to the two great Sufi teachers are, however, questionable. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī states that the inhabitants of hell (*ahl-i dūzak*) are happier in hell than they were in this world, in spite of their torments, because they are now aware of

to hell will be punished with a new kind of pain. While only the brain senses pain in this world, in hell every single cell will be tormented. In addition to physical pain, sinners will suffer from utter loneliness. The worst punishment, however, will be seeing those who have entered paradise. According to Bozdağ, Allah will distinguish between different types of sinners. The author expects a mild punishment for those who have not heard of Islam, but he does not take up Said Nursi's idea of a deluxe section for righteous non-believers.⁹¹

Whereas Hekimoğlu İsmail's vision of the hereafter does not differ fundamentally from this world, Bozdağ's does. According to his concept, the world will be created anew in totally different forms of matter and light.⁹² Bozdağ claims that Allah will create eight paradises (*cennet*) with different "light levels." *Firdevs* will be the one closest to the throne, but, as it is possible to make the transition from one space/time system to the other, people will also be able to wander from one paradise to the other. Although Bozdağ gives quite concrete details of *what* will happen, he concedes that he is unable to explain *how* it will come about. He goes on to assert that, in addition to the common paradise, where all of the rewarded will interact, every individual will be endowed with a personal paradise. These personal paradises will differ in size and richness depending on the good deeds the person in question has done during his worldly life. And they will also make up for the hardship that the person had to endure.⁹³ The inhabitants of paradise will find themselves in a world that differs in one fundamental aspect from this world – a reference to Said Nursi's concept of the ontological difference between the two sides of creation: "The greatest difference between this world and Paradise is the separation between wisdom and power (*hikmet-kudret ayrımı*). The Creator creates this-worldly phenomena, and in order to prevent us from bewilderment, He

God (*az haqq bā khabar*): Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, *Fīhī mā fīhi* 229/*Fīhi mā-fīh* 199. The four categories Ibn 'Arabī mentions are (a) the arrogant (*al-mutakabbirūn*), (b) the associationists/idol worshipers (*al-mushrikūn*), (c) the deniers of God's attributes (*al-mu'atṭilūn*), and (d) the hypocrites (*al-munāfiqūn*). This short explanation of categories does not contain a reference to "destructive ideologies": Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 393–4.

91 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 214f.; the idea of a hierarchy of "hells" is a traditional element: Thomassen, Islamic hell 408.

92 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 187.

93 Ibid., 222–6. The idea that paradise consists of levels that reflect different levels of piety and religious achievement as such could already be found in pre-modern eschatological literature: Rustomji, *Garden* 115–7. The idea of a hierarchy of paradises can also be found in the writings of the mid-twentieth-century Egyptian author 'Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal: Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 136–7; on the *barāzikh* in the writings of al-Sha'rānī: Eklund, *Life* 169.

hides His power behind the curtain of causes.”⁹⁴ Whereas in this world God voluntarily abstains from certain actions, He will fulfill every wish of those who enter paradise. In addition, they will become spiritual beings, devoid of matter (*canlılığın genelleşmesi*). Furthermore, the inhabitants will experience objects, which are regarded as inanimate in this world, as living because an angel will be assigned to each one of them. According to Bozdağ, this was recently demonstrated by “Professor” Masaru Emoto, a Japanese esotericist, who claims to have proven the effect of human emotions on the formation of ice crystals.⁹⁵ Moreover, Bozdağ asserts that the senses will lose their restrictions so that it will be possible to see those colors whose light spectrum cannot be perceived in this world.⁹⁶ In addition to being freed from the restriction of causality, the inhabitants of paradise will be free from restrictions of place. Like the angels or Khidr, they will be capable of multi-locality (*çok mekanlılık*) and hence able to enjoy the company of their loved ones whenever they like while promenading above the clouds at the same time. Moreover, they will be able to assume any size they want. According to Bozdağ, certain experiences in this world already allow one to get an idea of these phenomena. For example, if something happens to her child in Japan, a mother will know about it via telepathy. The possibility of such an interconnection results from the fact that when the universe began it was compressed to 10^{-33} cm: “Although the universe expands, we are one whole and hence we are at every place in the universe,” whereas, according to the crude materialism of Newtonian physics, “I am here and you are there.” From this statement Bozdağ proceeds to an at least questionable application of Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle to bodies definitely larger than subatomic particles. According to Bozdağ, everybody is simply in one place with a higher probability and in others with a lower probability. This also serves to explain reports about *velis* who were seen at different places at the same time or who suddenly disappeared.⁹⁷ Moreover, everything in paradise will be living, but not in a wild way. Instead, all beings will be conscious, virtuous, dignified,

94 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 226f.

95 Ibid., 227–9.

96 Ibid., 230–3.

97 Ibid., 233–6; on the topos of bi- or multi-locality in *karāmāt* legends: Gramlich, *Wunder* 212–8, 280–7; on the sudden appearance of Khidr: Franke, *Begegnung* 18f. Bozdağ’s polemics against Newtonian determinism are based on Davies and Gribbin, *Matter myth* 24–56. Moreover, the defamation of Newton and problematic speculations allegedly based on quantum physics are a common theme in New Age literature: Bochinger, „New Age“ 427–9; Hanegraaff, *New Age* 145, 322–4; so, too, is the idea of cosmic interrelation: Hanegraaff, *New Age* 296.

honest, friendly, and of splendid purity as well as unique value.⁹⁸ For the sensual pleasures awaiting the inhabitants of paradise, Bozdağ finds a new explanation, too. First, it will be a compensation for emotional and sexual pleasure, which one should reasonably forgo in this world: How many beautiful women have fallen in love then become crazy and end up as drug addicts, because their marriages falter! “Who nurtures his soul from paradise for him love (*aşk*) will flourish there.” Men will find pleasure in their union with the *hūrīs*. However, they will experience something completely different from sexual intercourse in this world, that is, from genital penetration. In the other world, all the cells of the two bodies will permeate each other. Women will either become *hūrīs* or their overseers (*hurilerin sultanları konumunda*).⁹⁹

Those who enter paradise will pass their time with endless visits to friends. They will flow in the rhythm of the unknown music of the heavens, the winds, and nature in paradise. Everything will be filled with pleasant smells. Yet, even in paradise, people will not cease to ask questions. They will be curious and ask who grants them all these unbelievable favors and they will long to see Him. Finally the heavens will open up, the souls will stand still and freeze (*durup dondunuz*) and so will the time of paradise. Even the years in paradise cannot be compared to the moment when each servant in paradise (*cennetlik kulu*) will experience the presence of divine beauty (*İlahî Cemal*) according to their consciousness, rank, and judgment. This vision (*görüŝ*) will transform those who have undergone it into the most sought-after beauties in paradise. And this transformation is a reciprocal process: Because paradise and its inhabitants love each other, paradise, too, will increase in beauty.

Infinity awaits us; it did not matter that we had to endure hardship, that we were freezing, that we could not enjoy ourselves for twenty years or so on this bitter road toward indescribable expanses; may those who did good deeds and gave priority to their ritual duties as believers enjoy infinity!¹⁰⁰

In the final chapter, Bozdağ switches back from the climax of his vision of the hereafter to everyday life. It is here that he admonishes his readers to collect the treasure and to plant a seedling for the hereafter with every single action.¹⁰¹

98 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 237–9.

99 Ibid., 240f.

100 Ibid., 243f.

101 Ibid., 247–50.

Remarkably, Bozdağ does not include the major features of traditional eschatology in his reformulation of eschatological concepts, namely the advent of the apocalyptic figures of the *mahdī*, Dajjāl, and the beast of the Earth, and the second coming of Jesus. These aspects are the focus of the attention of another author, Harun Yahya.

6 Harun Yahya (Adnan Oktar): The Eschatological Visions of a Fellow Traveler of the Nurcu

Eschatological motives form an important part of the writings of Adnan Oktar, a former student of architecture and philosophy (without a religious education), who is known under the pen name Harun Yahya (b. 1956). In the 1980s, he began to address students and pupils from Istanbul's upper class in sermons on the collapse of the theory of evolution, Judeo-Masonic conspiracies, and the imminent end of the world. These sermons were supplemented by books and tracts that consisted to a large extent of photocopied press clippings. Until the 1990s, Yahya was a figure on the fringe of the Islamic religious camp in Turkey and, as late as 1996, even the most knowledgeable observer of Islamic groups did not give his group much chance of survival.¹⁰² However, at the end of the 1990s his fame increased considerably because he was one of the first Islamic activists to realize the opportunities the Internet provides for propagating one's agenda. Thus he has gained prominence in Turkey and abroad for his polemics against the theory of evolution on his various websites. He now commands considerable financial means and a staff of collaborators who write the dozens of books published under his name. Furthermore, he organizes conferences with non-Muslim opponents of the theory of evolution and with religious dignitaries. His emissaries are sent to Islamic conventions worldwide in order to propagate his ideas.¹⁰³ Although he has never been affiliated to any of the different currents of the Nurcu movement, he often refers to Said Nursi in his writings.

The first publication with which Harun Yahya attracted attention was the booklet *Is AIDS the Beast of Earth discussed in the Quran?* published in 1987.¹⁰⁴ After some pages containing a selection of press clippings related to AIDS, he comes forward with his first piece of evidence: a correlation between

¹⁰² Çakır, *Ayet* 246.

¹⁰³ Riexinger, Propagating 104–8; Solberg, *Mahdi* 1–13, 194–200.

¹⁰⁴ Chapters were published in advance in the Nurcu magazine *Zafer*, the *Millî Gazete*, the organ of the Islamist Refah Partisi, and the center right daily *Tercüman*; Dayıoğlu, AIDS.

the numbers of Quranic verses related to punishment for a sinful life and the decades of the twentieth century in which AIDS appeared. Verses 70–1 of Sura 22 warn those who deny God, and the first case of AIDS can be traced back to 1971! Q 7:80–4 reports the punishment inflicted on the *qawm Lūṭ*, and it was in the 1980s that homosexuals were punished with AIDS. The cross sum of Q 27:82 is 19, and 1982 is the year in which the number of AIDS infections began to explode.¹⁰⁵ With regard to the more detailed descriptions of the beast in the *ḥadīth*, Yahya argues that it is impossible to interpret them literally. Based on the dimensions indicated in some traditions, the beast's head would reach far beyond the Earth's atmosphere.¹⁰⁶ However, other traditions ascribe a human face to this creature and say that it walks on four feet. Furthermore, it is predicted that it will appear "beyond Mecca" but that it will be seen for the first time in the West. According to Yahya, these are unmistakable predictions of AIDS, which according to scientists in Europe and America was transmitted to humans from guenon monkeys in Africa, hence from beyond Mecca. The enormous speed ascribed to the beast refers to the quick rise in the number of those afflicted with AIDS.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, Yahya declares that the leopard-like skin mentioned in some reports on the beast is a reference to Kaposi's sarcoma concomitant with AIDS.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, he stresses that, according to some *ḥadīths*, the beast will first afflict the *qawm Lūṭ* (people of Lot, taken here to be a synonym for homosexuals), a prediction that has turned out to be true, because AIDS spread among homosexuals, and, as predicted, it does indeed brand the unbelievers.¹⁰⁹ As the chief evidence for his interpretations of the traditions on the beast, he refers to Said Nursi's comparison of the beast to a herd of animals devouring men from within,¹¹⁰ to his equating the Dajjāl with dangerous ideological tendencies,¹¹¹ and to his demand that those verses and traditions, the literal sense of which contradicts established findings of science, be interpreted allegorically.¹¹²

Yahya's thesis did not meet with the approval of the Nurcus. Gülen declared that the beast would not appear unless the number of those believing in God

105 Yahya, *AIDS* 24–6, 31; Schönig, *AIDS* 216.

106 Yahya, *AIDS* 45–51.

107 Yahya, *AIDS* 54–64.

108 Ibid., 72f.; Schönig, *AIDS* 215.

109 Yahya, *AIDS* 76–82, 87–90. The association of AIDS with homosexuals is underscored by clippings from the secular press: 12–21.

110 Ibid., 29f., 40f., 91–6.

111 Ibid., 44.

112 Ibid., 49f.

declined dramatically. Moreover, he asserts that, when this time comes, philosophy and technology will have made so much progress that man will consider himself the true Creator. Hence, he concludes that if there was a development that could be associated with the advent of the beast then it should be sought in the field of reproductive medicine instead. A further objection Gülen raises is based on a *ḥadīth* transmitted by Abū Dāwūd. According to this tradition, there is no illness against which God has not sent a remedy. Hence, in earlier times the plague virus (sic) should have been considered the beast. Gülen concludes that AIDS may be considered one of the phenomena that constitute the beast, but the disease should not be identified with this eschatological sign – all the more so as there will be no more belief in God and everything will move backward after it appears.¹¹³

In 1989, Harun Yahya devoted the book *Mehdi ve Altınçağ* (The Mahdī and the golden age) to the imminent advent of the *mahdī*.¹¹⁴ Like his treatise on AIDS,¹¹⁵ this book is characterized by the ample use of pre-modern eschatological literature. For example, Yahya declares that the existence of such a figure cannot be doubted because of the *tawātur* traditions, as proven by Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624) in his *Maktūbāt*, al-Barzanjī (d. 1103/1691) in his *ʿĀlāmāt al-qiyāma*,¹¹⁶ and the Indian scholar Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān (1834–90) in his *Kitāb al-Burhān fī ʿālamāt al-mahdī ākhir al-zamān*.¹¹⁷ In an updated version that can be found on the Internet he refers to medieval Muslim authorities such as Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Ḥajar, and Jāsim al-Muhalhil as authorities who prove that the signs of the imminent advent of the *mahdī* are oppression and injustice on Earth. Furthermore Harun Yahya cites those authors in order to demonstrate that the *mahdī* will fight the Dajjāl and be a contemporary of Jesus who will return to Earth.¹¹⁸

Harun Yahya asserts that the period after the advent of the *mahdī* will be a golden age of abundance. Genetic modification and the use of new techniques of cultivation in desert areas will provide food in unforeseen quantities.¹¹⁹ The *mahdī*'s generosity will end inflation and economic hardship. Moreover,

113 Gülen, *Asr* ii, 48ff.; Gülen, *İnanç* ii, 133ff. Gülen does not refer to Harun Yahya by name.

114 A short version is already contained in his voluminous book dedicated to anti-Semitic and anti-Masonic conspiracy theories: Yahya, *Yahudilik* 514–56.

115 Sources are listed in Schönig, AIDS 214.

116 Cook, Messianism.

117 Yahya, *Mehdi* 4–8, 36–9; the scholarship of Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān is not tainted by any modernist influences: Preckel, *Islamische Bildungsnetzwerke*, Riexinger, *Ṣanāʿullāh* 128–35.

118 <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altin.html>.

119 Yahya, *Mehdi* 16–25; <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altin5.html>.

astounding advancements in technology will transform people's lives.¹²⁰ He contrasts this vision with a bleak picture of the present. With headlines from newspapers he creates the impression that gambling, the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs, crime, divorce, suicide, and prostitution are increasing relentlessly.¹²¹

Referring to a saying of *imām* 'Alī (d. 40/661) reported by Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān, he asserts that death, hunger, strife, and catastrophes/discord (*fitneler*, Arabic: sing. *fitna*), the loss of traditions (*sünnetler*), the widespread appearance of innovations (*bid'atlerin ortaya çıkması*), and the neglect of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa-l-naḥy 'an al-munkar* are signs of the imminent coming of the *maḥdī*. He considers this prophecy to be fulfilled by the various wars taking place at the time.¹²² Furthermore, he quotes a prediction found in al-Barzanjī's treatise according to which an upheaval (*ayaklanma*) will take place in Shawwāl, and he talks about a war in Dhū l-Qa'da, and a war in Dhū l-Ḥijja. He draws attention to the fact that the first demonstration against the Shah took place in September 1976/Shawwāl 1396, whereas the Iran-Iraq war started in September 1980/Dhū l-Qa'da 1400.¹²³ He refers to another tradition reported by Ṣiddīq Ḥasan Khān according to which Ṭāliqān is in a pitiful state but that there are rich deposits of gold and silver, and that people with a proper knowledge of Allah will help the *maḥdī*. He identifies Ṭāliqān as Afghanistan, which possesses natural resources in abundance and was in a pitiful state under Soviet occupation.¹²⁴ The prediction that the flow of the Euphrates will be interrupted is identified with the Keban Dam, a part of Turkey's irrigation system,¹²⁵ and the occupation of the *ḥaram* in Mecca by Saudi militants in 1979 is equated to prophecies regarding a violation of the sanctity of the Ka'ba.¹²⁶ Before the second Gulf War he identified the prophecies regarding a fire to be seen in the East, which burns people and goods, with the burning of a Romanian tanker in the Bosphorus in 1979,¹²⁷ whereas in a revised version he identifies the fire

120 Yahya, *Mehdi* 25–9.

121 Ibid., 44–6.

122 Ibid., 48.

123 Ibid., 50f.; in the more recent online version photos of famines in Africa and Kurdish victims of the Ḥalabja gas attack are used to underline this assertion: <http://www.harunya-hya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altini.html>.

124 Yahya, *Mehdi* 52f.

125 Ibid., 54f.; *Yahudilik*, 531f.; the interruption of the Euphrates by the Turkish South Anatolia Project (GAP) is an important element in recent Arab apocalyptic writings: Cook, *Contemporary* 51.

126 Yahya, *Mehdi* 60f.; Yahya, *Yahudilik* 535.

127 Yahya, *Mehdi* 62–9; Yahya, *Yahudilik* 524–30.

with the oil pits set on fire by the Iraqi army during its flight from Kuwait in 1991.¹²⁸ As an example of the afflictions to which the Muslims are exposed he draws attention to Turkish atheists speaking out publicly,¹²⁹ and in a revised version he cites the alleged teaching of Darwinism from primary school to university in Turkey. Hence he equates contemporary Muslims, who have to cope with the propaganda of materialist ideologies, to the *ahl al-kahf*, who had to struggle in a hostile environment.¹³⁰ Furthermore, he refers to one *ḥadīth* listed by Şiddīq Ḥasan Khān according to which a “great event” will take place before the advent of the *mahdī*. However, he asserts that, contrary to common assumption, this will not happen in Medina. Instead, he argues, *madīna* may refer to any city, and all details (black stones, the killing of a woman, the extension over two kilometers) demonstrate that it must be equated with the violent May Day demonstration in Istanbul in 1977.¹³¹ Last but not least, the *mahdī* will appear in a period without a caliph.¹³²

But signs are not to be discovered through the analysis of political events alone. A list of apocalyptic signs also contains natural and major man-made disasters like the Chernobyl nuclear meltdown and the Bhopal gas leak.¹³³ As predicted, both a solar and lunar eclipse occurred during the months of Ramaḍān in 1981 and 1982, and Halley’s Comet, which reappeared in 1986, is to be identified with the predicted star born in the East.¹³⁴ He identifies a “sign emerging from the sun” with a giant eruption on the solar surface, and the splitting of heaven referred to in the Quran (Q 77:9; 82:1; 84:1) with the shrinking ozone layer.¹³⁵

According to a *ḥadīth* reported by Mālik the world will last seven days, but the days of God are like a thousand years for humans. Seven thousand years does not refer to human history as a whole, but to the time that will have passed after a landmark event in human history, such as the Great Flood. Harun Yahya objects to the claim that the *umma* will exist for 1,400 years. He prefers the time

128 <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altini.html>.

129 Yahya, *Mehdi* 47; Yahya, *Yahudilik* 545, here he also includes the increase in drug abuse (552–4).

130 Yahya, *Mehdi* 68f.

131 *Ibid.*, 70–4.

132 *Ibid.*, 84.

133 *Ibid.*, 75; in the online version jihadist attacks figure prominently: <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altini.html>.

134 Yahya, *Mehdi* 56–9; Yahya, *Yahudilik* 536–9; <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altini.html>; Halley’s Comet also appears as an eschatological sign in Arab eschatological tracts of the same period: Cook, *Contemporary* 55, 75.

135 Yahya, *Mehdi* 78f.

frame of 1,500 to 1,600 years suggested by Aḥmad Sirhindī, but he considers the year 1,400 as the beginning of the end of time marked by the appearance of the *mahdī*.¹³⁶

Whereas Harun Yahya identifies many eschatological signs with current events, he is much less explicit with regard to the person of the *mahdī*. He mainly restricts himself to listing his characteristics, and events that will help to identify him.¹³⁷ The conquest of Istanbul ascribed to the *mahdī* is described not as a military event but as a spiritual event without bloodshed.¹³⁸ Among the opponents of the *mahdī*, the Sufyānī, who will kill indiscriminately in al-Shām, is singled out and identified. Harun Yahya equates him to Ḥāfiẓ al-Asad because he delivered his country into the clutches of communism and killed 30,000 Muslims in Hama in 1982.¹³⁹ The Dajjāl and most of his followers are Jews, who lead people astray with the help of materialism, the consumption of pork and alcohol, homosexuality, and sexual perversion (*cinsi sapkınlık*) in general.¹⁴⁰ Another group of opponents referred to are the “reactionaries” (*gericiler*). With this term, which is usually used by Kemalists to denounce religious groups, Harun Yahya refers to those who impose excessive religious demands, and hence overemphasize formalities, forbid the arts and music, humiliate women, and oppose technology. Even with the end of the world in sight, Harun Yahya seems to consider it necessary to demonstrate his loyalty to the state.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, he equates contemporary Muslims, who will witness the advent of the *mahdī*, to the *ahl al-kahf*, who also had to defend themselves against the onslaught of the anti-religious ideas of their time and their proponents.¹⁴² Finally, he refers to Said Nursi, who remarked that the Naqshbandī Khalid Baghdādī is the renewer (*müceddid*) of the thirteenth century and the *Risāle-i Nūr* – not himself as a person – will play this role in the fourteenth century. According to Harun Yahya, this bolsters his own claim that the *mahdī* will appear at the beginning of the fifteenth century.¹⁴³ In addition, he presents Said Nursi’s prediction of the imminent renewal of the Muslim

136 Ibid., 36–9.

137 Ibid., 85–184.

138 Ibid., 104–11.

139 Ibid., 120–2; on this figure which is derived from pro-Umayyad eschatological predictions transformed into a black legend: Madelung, Sufyānī; Madelung, al-Sufyānī; Cook, *Studies* 122–36.

140 Yahya, *Mehdi* 195.

141 Ibid., 124–7.

142 Ibid., 150–6.

143 Ibid., 170f.; on Khālīd al-Baghdādī and his importance for Naqshbandīs in the Ottoman Empire: Abu Manneh, Naqshbandiyya-Mujaddidiyya.

world in his “Damascus Sermon” (1913) as another allusion to the advent of the *mahdī*, although this figure is not mentioned in that tract.¹⁴⁴

As in the case of the *mahdī*, Harun Yahya’s treatment of Jesus is limited mainly to listing his characteristics.¹⁴⁵ His book on AIDS as the beast of Earth has been integrated (as a chapter) into the treatise on the *mahdī*. The last issue he deals with is the smoke from which Sura 44 takes its name. According to Harun Yahya, it has to be identified with the radioactive fallout after the core meltdown in Chernobyl in 1986.¹⁴⁶

In a more recent version of the tract, Yahya also quotes *imāmī* Shi‘i sources like *Bihār al-anwār* (Seas of light) by Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī (d. 1110/1698) and al-Tabrisī’s (d. 548/1153) Quranic commentary *Majma‘ al-bayān li-‘ulūm al-Qur‘ān* (Collection of the explanation of the sciences of the Quran), (Abū l-Naḍr) al-‘Ayyāshī (d. ca. 320/932), (Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan) al-Ṭūsī (d. 460/1067), and a certain al-Qummī (most likely ‘Alī b. Ibrāhīm, d. fourth/tenth century). Given that page references are lacking, one may conclude that he has used material compiled by another author.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, he has included poems in praise of the *mahdī* by the well known Islamist poet Sezai Karakoç (b. 1933) and other less well-known authors.¹⁴⁸

The end of the world, the resurrection, and the judgment are apparently much less interesting for Harun Yahya than are the *mahdī* and the Dajjāl. Although he devoted the tract *Ölüm – Kıyamet – Cehennem* (Death, resurrection, and hell) to these issues, unlike the writings discussed above, it consists merely of affirmations of traditional beliefs and admonitions.¹⁴⁹

7 Concluding Remarks

7.1 *Eschatology in the Context of Debates on Science and Religion*

References to concepts and terms of modern physics are a remarkable trait of Bozdağ’s eschatology. Although this ingredient is absent from the eschatological writings of the other authors discussed here, it is a central element of Nurcu thought and Turkish Islamic discourse in general. Examples from other

144 Yahya, *Mehdi* 174f.

145 Ibid., 187–208.

146 Ibid., 290–6.

147 <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altin12.html>.

148 <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/mehdiyet/altin6.html>.

149 <http://www.harunyahya.org/imani/OKiyametC.html>; the first two and the last chapter are dedicated to the refutation of Darwinism and the affirmation of creation.

regions can easily be found, and a systematic analysis of the phenomenon promises to be rewarding.

In the particular Turkish case, this development can be traced back to the debate brought about by the Young Turks' enthusiastic reception of Ludwig Büchner's "Vulgärmaterialismus" and Ernst Haeckel's monism during the first years of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰ As early as 1906, Ahmet Hilmî countered their materialist positions by remarking that it is impossible to differentiate strictly between matter and energy.¹⁵¹ A more extensive elaboration of the argument was brought forward in 1928. İsmail Fenni (since 1935 Ertuğrul), a retired civil servant with a broad but autodidactic knowledge of Islamic and Western thought, published a polemic against Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*, which – although already totally forgotten in Germany – still informed the mindset of most Turkish secular intellectuals. In order to undermine the foundations of materialism, he referred to French philosophers and scientists, stressing that the discovery of radioactivity had shown that matter was not eternal.¹⁵² One and a half decades later, this theme was adopted by Mustafa Şekip Tunç (1886–1958), a psychiatrist and follower of Bergsonian philosophy, in Necip Fazıl Kısakürek's (1905–83) monthly *Büyük Doğu* (The great east), the first magazine with an Islamic agenda that was allowed to be published in the Turkish Republic. He went a decisive step further than Hilmî and Ertuğrul, both of whom had merely correctly demonstrated that materialism is based on an outdated concept of matter. By contrast, Tunç began to use the theory of relativity for far-reaching speculations that included eschatology. In his view, black holes prove that matter will finally disappear.¹⁵³ Around the same time, the reformulation of the macrocosm-microcosm concept mentioned above also made its first appearance in *Büyük Doğu*.¹⁵⁴

The Nurus, however, do not seem to have been interested in such speculations, at least initially. Said Nursi had no knowledge of modern physics

150 Hanioglu, Blueprints.

151 Hilmî, *Meslek-i zalâleti* 64f. He was probably not aware of Einstein's special theory of relativity that had been published just one year before, but did know of George Poincaré's reflections on the equality of energy and matter published in 1900.

152 Fenni, *Mâddiyûn* 305–9.

153 Tunç, Madde ve ruh 2; Tunç, Madde ve ruh 4; Tunç, Madde ve ruh 5; Tunç, Madde ve ruh 6; Elbi, Kâinat ve aynştayn 1; Elbi, Kâinat ve aynştayn 2; in the 1920s, Tunç contributed to the review *Dergâh*, which opposed the positivist ideology underlying Kemalism and propagated the vitalism of Bergson instead: Ülken, *Türkiye'de çağdaş düşünce* 368–75; Çınar, *Dergâh*; İrem, Değişim siyaseti 107–10; on the *Büyük Doğu*: Cantek, *Büyük Doğu*; Koçak, *Büyük Doğu*.

154 Uzdilek, Atom ve yıldızlar 7.

and stuck to the nineteenth-century concepts with which he had become acquainted during his self-directed studies. Hence, he claimed that velocity can be increased infinitely, and for his explanation of the *mī'rāj* he relied on the concept of space filled with ether.¹⁵⁵ Things changed in the early 1970s when Gülen introduced the Big Bang theory as an argument in his campaign against the theory of evolution, which was, as he maintained, based on the conception of the eternity of matter.¹⁵⁶ Other authors go one step further. When they attack the alleged epistemological foundations of modernism, they claim that the theory of relativity and quantum physics have undermined "Newtonian" epistemology, which ascribes an exact position to each body, whereas neither simultaneity independent of an observer nor definite causes exist, and all phenomena are interconnected.¹⁵⁷

Gülen also adopted far-reaching speculations that had been propagated by Haluk Nurbaki (1924–97), a physician, right-wing politician, and contributor to *Büyük Doğu*. In order to prove the existence of angels and *jinn*, Nurbaki formulated some arguments in favor of plural worlds that Bozdağ recycles for his eschatological concepts. Nurbaki asserts that the theory of relativity provides proof of the concept of plural worlds, because time is a dimension that does not differ from the other three that we perceive as space. Hence we must assume that further worlds exist, and we cannot perceive them because they consist of other dimensions. In these other worlds, time, movement, and velocity differ from those we experience here on Earth. The author cites the worlds of angels and souls, and hell as examples.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, Nurbaki claims that he was able to calculate the speed of the angels' movements on the basis of Q 70:4. According to this verse, angels and spirits return to their Lord in one day, which equals 50,000 human years, which comprise 18,250,000 days. On the basis of this speculation, Nurbaki concludes that they move at 18,250,000 times the speed of light. Hence it is normally impossible to perceive them with human senses. But according to the experiments of Professor Feinberg, tachyons can intrude punctually into the physical world although they are subject to a different current of time. Therefore, it is possible that angels bring about effects

155 Nursi, *Sözler* 515, 775, 779.

156 Gülen, *Yaratılış* 94.

157 Bouguenaya-Mermer, Fizik; Bouguenaya-Mermer, *Bilimin* 46f. The author is a physicist from a secular Algerian family who married a Nurcu she met during her studies in Durham, England. Her argument is taken up by Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 41.

158 Nurbaki, *Verses* 69; for a biography cf.: http://www.davetci.com/d_biyografi/biyografi_hnurbaki.htm.

in our world.¹⁵⁹ Gülen follows Nurbaki with regard to most points, but he adds further elements from modern physics or earlier concepts. For example, he claims that angels consist of either ether or anti-matter. Although he maintains that they move faster than light, he calls them quanta.¹⁶⁰

The idea of plural worlds has also been associated with black holes, as we can see in this anonymous contribution to a Nurcu magazine:

Hence entering a black hole can be explained as entering the eternal world (*beka âlemi*). If we could enter a black hole unharmed and leave it again, we would experience the end of this voyage as a homecoming after millions of years. Because of these particular characteristics, astrophysicists of the California Technology Institute describe black holes as “time tunnels” or gates to another world. The doctrine “matter does not disappear” has been torn down by (the discovery of) the black hole. . . . Today such subjects are not discussed in religious gatherings (*sohbetler*) but at the most modern centers for astronomical research.¹⁶¹

Another author even identifies black holes with hell: No light escapes from them, yet their temperature is enormous, hence they are the black flame that never dies which is mentioned in the *ḥadīth*.¹⁶²

Clearly these references to modern physics are not motivated by the desire to furnish explanations for natural phenomena, but rather by the intention of the authors to defend key elements of their worldview. An unmistakable indicator of the paramount importance of this ideological motif is the abundance of decontextualized terms and contradictory arguments. On the one hand, the authors refer to the uncertainty principle, but, on the other hand, they assert that God appears as the one who arranges the atoms (*zerre*) in perfect order in definite places.¹⁶³ Furthermore, they invoke the theory of relativity to undermine materialism, but do not take into account that, according to the space-time concept, time cannot be “sliced” into moments. Hence the theory of relativity is totally at odds with the atomistic concept of time to which both the Nurcus and Harun Yahya cling, and which is a central part of Bozdağ’s vision of the afterlife. Apparently, they select arguments with an exclusive criterion to bolster a specific position. A surprising aspect of this apologetic approach is

159 Nurbaki, *Verses* 155; Nurbaki, *Kâinatlar*.

160 Gülen, *İnançın gölgesinde* i, 144–6.

161 Anonymous, *Yıldızların ölümü*; similarly: Keha, *Var yok*; Karabaşoğlu, *Bilim* 150.

162 Yıldırım, *Cehennem*; cf. Davies and Gribbin, *Matter myth* 266–73.

163 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 47.

the striking heterogeneity of the sources. They include such diverse material as scientific literature, science fiction novels, TV serials, and spurious reports in tabloids.

In addition to these contradictions, the appropriation of catchwords from modern science is marked by blatant double standards. Most authors discussed in this contribution strongly object to the theory of evolution; they assert that the evidence put forward is insufficient.¹⁶⁴ Yet when a physicist declares that theoretically tachyons might be conceived of, this is regarded as convincing proof of the existence of angels and *jinn*.

7.2 “New Age” and Parapsychology as a Source of Inspiration for a “Modernized” Eschatology

With his references to New Age concepts, Bozdağ introduced a new element that relates to the issues discussed earlier. He refers extensively to the contentious attacks of the physicists Fred Hoyle and Peter Davies on a “materialist” and determinist vision of the universe.¹⁶⁵ Hence, for anyone who is unaware of the controversial status of these ideas in the scientific community, the reference to Hoyle and Davies’ concepts fits in well with the criticism of materialism supported by modern physics. Furthermore, Bozdağ’s references to New Age literature are a link to his writings on personal development, which rely on the writings of Dana Zohar and Ian Marshall, who derived their management concepts from “quantum metaphysics.”¹⁶⁶ With his interest in New Age ideas, Bozdağ is not an exception among Turkish-Islamic authors. The positive reception of New Age authors (in the broad sense) such as Fritjof Capra and Jeremy Rifkin as “crown witnesses” against materialism has been noted on a number of occasions.¹⁶⁷ And among the Nurcus it is also apparent in other contexts. Some authors, including Bozdağ, express their discontent with modern medicine and propose holistic alternatives.¹⁶⁸ However, to date the reception of New Age

164 On Harun Yahya: Riexinger, *Propagating*; Riexinger, Turkey; Gülen, *Yaratılış*; Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 45f., 90–2. He goes one step further than other Islamic creationists by buttressing the argument from design in accordance with his metaphysical premise: beings are either beyond the limits of space/time (*ezeli*) or they have been created in space time by someone’s will and power.

165 Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 20, 41, 52.

166 Bozdağ, *Ruhsal zeka* 19; on Zohar and Marshall: Hammer, *Claiming knowledge* 292, 297–302. On “quantum metaphysics” in general: Hammer, *Claiming knowledge* 208, 274–303, 310–9; Boehinger, „New Age“ 429–35; Hanegraaff, *New Age* 129–31.

167 Seufert, *Politischer Islam* 346; on “parascientificity” as a characteristic of religious movements in modernity see also Lambert, *Religion in modernity* 311–3, 323.

168 Mirzaoglu, *Gözle görülmeyen* 158; Bozdağ, *İsteme* 65.

concepts has not been studied in detail. Because the same is true for the reception of these ideological elements in other parts of the Islamic world, it would be premature to conclude that their integration into an Islamic worldview is a specifically Turkish phenomenon. However, there are particular factors in Turkey that facilitate the accessibility of such concepts:

1. The lack of religious censorship and the orientation of considerable sections of the metropolitan population toward Western fashions, including parareligious ideas and fads.¹⁶⁹
2. Turkey lacks a strong Salafi movement, thus concepts of post-Ibn 'Arabī Sufism have continued to influence Islamic thought there. Since both traditions have a common root in hermeticism,¹⁷⁰ this may have facilitated the adaptation of modern reformulations of concepts like the macrocosm and microcosm. In addition, the eclectic nature of New Age literature makes it possible to assimilate single elements (e.g., reincarnation, pantheism, and the idea of an albeit teleological cosmic evolution) into one's own concepts, and to discard others.

Bozdağ's description of the Intermediate World reveals the influence of themes derived from parapsychology. In fact, this is not a new phenomenon because spiritualism has met with a favorable response from Muslim authors in various regions since the late nineteenth century.¹⁷¹ As mentioned earlier, the reference to spiritualism was primarily used by İsmail Fenni to prove the existence of an eternal, sublime soul. Later, when Gülen and other authors were confronting the "denialists" they claimed that paranormal events scientifically proved the existence of angels, *jinn*, Satan, and the soul.¹⁷² However, spiritualism does not appear to have been used to provide a detailed "scientific" explanation of life after death. Two of Bozdağ's proofs of eschatological concepts that are based on parapsychological notions have parallels in works by Arab authors written decades earlier: the existence of the *barzakh* and the communication of

169 On New Age belief and whether it can be considered a religion, this depends on whether one considers common rituals and persisting communities part of the definition: Zinser, *New Age*.

170 Hanegraaff, *New Age* 386–401, 419f.

171 *Ibid.*, 435–41.

172 Gülen, *Prizma* ii, 102–5, 209; Gülen, *İnançın gölgesinde* i, 154ff., Mirzaoğlu, *Gözle görülme-yen* 13, 167; Arslan, *Şeytan* 18.

the dead with the living.¹⁷³ But because Bozdağ does not usually refer to Arab sources in the original, these parallels must be considered the same way we consider other independent speculations.

It is a truism that eschatological ideas reveal the aspects of present-day society that their proponents consider deficient. Hence, the writings of Bozdağ and Harun Yahya relate explanations of eschatological verses and traditions to current events and the denunciation of moral decay like crime, AIDS, sexual perversion, reproductive technologies, drug abuse, the loss of faith, and the fact that “true” Islam does not enjoy the status it deserves, in the same way many modern Arab eschatological writings explain them.¹⁷⁴ In the tracts in question, natural disasters are described as eschatological signs.¹⁷⁵ Cook argues that the choice of these “lesser signs” is motivated by the assumption that they might appear immediately convincing.¹⁷⁶ However, Harun Yahya is aware that this choice poses a problem, because the signs are quite unspecific. Therefore he asserts that only the concentration of such events within a short period corroborates their significance.¹⁷⁷

Further parallels between the Turkish examples presented here and Arab apocalyptic writing stand out. Like Harun Yahya, some Arab authors describe the reign of the *mahdī* as an age of brotherhood and harmony that will result from the encompassing dominance of Islam. Cook rightly draws attention to the parallels with secular utopias, in particular with communism.¹⁷⁸ Like Bozdağ, Arab authors adapt (albeit totally different) elements from science fiction to their scenarios.¹⁷⁹ Another element that can be observed is the depersonalization of the eschatological personnel.¹⁸⁰ However, in Shi'i tracts the connection to the sources is stronger and the speculation far less wide-ranging,

173 Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 113–26; Although not specifically eschatological, Bozdağ's belief in telekinesis is also derived from parapsychology: Bozdağ, *Sonsuzluk* 50.

174 Smith and Haddad, *Islamic understanding* 106, 128–30; Cook, *Contemporary* 51–3.

175 Cook, *Contemporary* 51.

176 Ibid., 49f.

177 Yahya, *Mehdi* 41.

178 Cook, *Contemporary* 145–9. This similarity is also acknowledged by Shi'i authors who cite Western utopian thought as proof of the coming reign of the *mahdī*: Ourghi, *Schiitischer Messianismus* 161f.

179 Cook, *Contemporary* esp. 77–83. The interest of Islamic authors in science fiction is dealt with by Szyska, *Utopian writing*.

180 Damir-Geilsdorf, *Ende* 263.

most probably because the strength of the clerical hierarchy has been able to prevent such excesses.¹⁸¹

Yet significant differences cannot be ignored. In terms of the central elements of recent apocalyptic writing in the Arab world, Cook singles out anti-Semitic conspiracy theories¹⁸² and the adaptation of apocalyptic interpretations of the Bible, either those of Christian fundamentalists or those arrived at independently.¹⁸³ Neither element figures prominently in the writings of Harun Yahya and Bozdağ on eschatology, although Harun Yahya is a conspiracy theorist par excellence. Though he integrated a short version of his ideas on the *mahdī* into his anti-Semitic and anti-Masonic tract, with the exception of the assertion that the Dajjāl will be a Jew, his treatment of eschatology is almost totally devoid of conspiracy theories. Bozdağ is not interested in Jews at all; his examples of the oppression of Muslims come not from Palestine but from the Balkans and the Caucasus.

The most striking difference between the writings of the Turkish authors discussed here and modern radical Islamist apocalyptics in the Arab world relates to the absence of conspiracy themes. Although violence plays an eminent role in all eschatological concepts, it is evaluated very differently.¹⁸⁴ Whereas, for Bozdağ, war as such is an evil that marks the end of time, Arab apocalyptic tracts invoke a nuclear war as deliverance that rids Palestine of Jews yet leaves Muslims miraculously unharmed.¹⁸⁵ In the most extreme cases, the victory over the Jews and their annihilation has become so dominant that the end of the world no longer matters.¹⁸⁶ Whereas Arab apocalyptic writers associate the *mahdī* with warfare, and, for example, identify the victory over Rome as the subjugation of the West,¹⁸⁷ Harun Yahya tries to reinterpret the *mahdī*'s conquests as spiritual victories. Although the technological superiority of the West is a cause of envy for Turkish and Arab authors, this envy causes hatred in the Arab case, whereas for Bozdağ it is a stimulus for selective emulation.¹⁸⁸ Technology as such forms the basis of the golden age according to Harun Yahya, whereas for Maḥmūd Dāwūd the golden age will be brought

181 Ourghi, *Schittischer Messianismus* 237.

182 Cook, *Contemporary* 15, 35–49, 61–71.

183 Cook, *Contemporary* 15, 18–35, 165; in the Shi'i case, references to Nostradamus deserve a mention: Ourghi, *Schittischer Messianismus* 159f.

184 Cook, *Contemporary* 208–13.

185 Ibid., 75–7.

186 Damir-Geilsdorf, Ende 268f., 276.

187 Cook, *Contemporary* 129–45; Damir-Geilsdorf, Ende 271f.

188 Bozdağ, *Ruhsal*.

about by the forced transfer of technology from the West to the Islamic world after military victory.¹⁸⁹

It would be tempting to interpret these findings as corroboration of the thesis popular in Turkey that there is a distinctive “Turkish Muslimness” (*Türk Müslümanlığı*) marked by moderation and a clear inclination toward aesthetics.¹⁹⁰ However, such an evaluation is rendered impossible when we take into account elements like the conspiracy theories of Harun Yahya or Fethullah Gülen’s strong affinity with Turkish militarism in other contexts.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, the recent Turkish eschatological literature provides enough material to modify Cook’s damning analysis of apocalyptic authors as odd figures.¹⁹² Bozdağ, at least, does not fit this description. His language is not sloppy at all. On the contrary, many readers have complained that it is too elaborate and scientific.¹⁹³ His writings on “personal growth” contrast with his apocalyptic visions because they are intended to guarantee the optimal functioning of the individual in this world. Hence, the idea that the end of the world is near does not necessarily compel those who believe in it to engage in incalculable and violent acts of desperation. The easiness with which Bozdağ writes about both worldly success and the afterlife shows that preoccupation with the things to come may cause other believers to become effective accountants busy preparing impeccable balance sheets for both their employer and their Lord.

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189 Cook, *Contemporary* 145–9.

190 For a elaborate version of this argument: Yavuz, Turkish Islam; a critical evaluation: Özdalga, Hidden Arab; and Riexinger, *Schöpfungsordnung*.

191 Riexinger, *Schöpfungsordnung*.

192 Cook, *Contemporary* 2–4.

193 Private e-mail communication.

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Notions of Paradise and Martyrdom in Contemporary Palestinian Thought

Liza M. Franke

*And say not of those slain in God's way, "they are dead";
rather they are living, but you are not aware.*

Q 2:154¹



This Quranic verse communicated by Muḥammad in the seventh century CE has not lost its importance in contemporary Palestinian thought as regards the notion of the garden/paradise.² It is frequently quoted or referred to in print media just as it is frequently cited in fragments or in full in day to day oral discourse. In the context of modern-day martyrdom operations and those who seek martyrdom through them, the *istishhādīyyūn*, special importance is ascribed to the concepts of afterlife and salvation.³ Martyrdom operations (*ʿamalīyyāt istishhādīyya*) are justified by these themes, which often clearly

¹ All translations from the Quran in this paper are based on Arberry (trans.), *The Koran interpreted*.

² According to Smith and Haddad, Women in the afterlife 40, in Arabic the Quranic term for this concept is *al-janna*, which can be translated literally as “the garden” (in contrast to *al-nār* with its literal translation “the fire,” i.e., hell, the netherworld, Hades). However, throughout this paper I use the literal translation or the original Arabic term or the term paradise, being aware that this and other translations such as heaven or the hereafter may be comprehended according to cultural presuppositions and thus may differ from the meaning inherent in the Quranic term.

³ I use the term “martyr” and related expressions to refer to those Palestinians who have been killed by the Israeli military. In doing so, I do not intend to present any moral or religious evaluation of the people or their actions, rather I try to adhere as closely as possible to the emic turn of phrase as prevalent among the majority of the inhabitants of the Palestinian territories. For the Arabic equivalents of this and related terms, cf. the subchapter “The road to paradise: Martyrdom as means to an end?” below.

depict visions of the eschatological garden. Here, corporeal death is likely to be perceived as a *rite de passage* in the sense that inexistence leads one to become real not only in the afterlife but also in the here and now, thus it reflects a symbol of non-death.

Although the notion of the garden more often than not appears in the context of martyrdom operations it is also mentioned more generally in everyday life. Phrases such as: “How shall we live under these circumstances?⁴ *In shā’ Allāh*, life will be more pleasant in the garden” can be heard frequently and may lead to the assumption that the eschatological garden symbolizes more than a realm of refuge from ordinary difficulties.

Because of the fact that scholarly work dealing with the above-mentioned topics in general is quite scarce and similar material for modern and contemporary times is even more meager, I base my analysis primarily on interview material that I have gathered during field trips to the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Thus, I examine notions of *al-janna* and martyrdom and where and how they prevail in contemporary Palestinian thought and discourse in relation to martyrdom operations.

1 Description of Interview Situation and Interview Partners

The subject of the garden/*al-janna* is ever present in contemporary Palestinian thought and discourse. In the context of death and its relation to an afterlife, ideas and images of the garden dominate. The imagination of what the dead can expect and what s/he will receive upon entering the mysterious space is rich in religious beliefs and convictions, some of which can be found in the Quran while others are conveyed through the *ḥadīth*. In what follows I refer to extracts from interviews I conducted with those Palestinians who identified themselves as believing in God and the garden. I argue that lived martyrdom and text traditions are tightly knotted together. Examples from my interviews and written testaments or eulogies and glorifying texts about Palestinian martyrs corroborate my findings.

The analysis presented in this paper is part of my PhD thesis, *At the door of paradise: Discourses of female self-sacrifice, martyrdom and resistance in Palestine* and thus presents preliminary observations. The interviews are part of my PhD project and deal with the overall topic of intentional acts of martyrdom (*istishhādīyyāt*) by women: how these women are perceived, talked about (or not, if it is considered taboo to discuss them), how they are glorified and

4 I.e., the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank and its control of the Gaza Strip.

mourned, and/or exploited and used for propaganda. Martyrdom and notions of the garden also play a role here. These are indicative of how Palestinians deal with death – especially the death of women (or female self-sacrificing martyrs), the afterlife, how they arrange their current life, and what practices of bereavement are specific for women and how these are included in their discourses.⁵ In addition, the subject of the *ḥūr* (virgins in paradise, singular *ḥawrā'*) is part of the discourse, especially in terms of motivating factors and paradisaal expectations for women.⁶

I begin by offering an insight into the fieldwork I conducted in 2006 and 2007. The meetings with my interview partners took place in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. For the majority, Arabic was the language in which the interviews took place. Interview partners were not chosen randomly, but according to their involvement with or knowledge of the *istishhādīyyāt* and their corresponding *'amaliyyāt istishhādīyya* (martyrdom operations). In other words, my aim was to collect the interpretations, perceptions, and attitudes of the interviewees regarding the research topic. Almost every Palestinian has an opinion on this issue and the people I met and interacted with were thus valuable “data sources.” The interview partners can be subdivided into the following groups: family members of the *istishhādīyyāt*; members of militant (resistance) organizations; academics; journalists; women; and students. Their age ranges from approximately 15 to 60 and their educational background likewise ranges from primary school to university.⁷ Had another geographical region been the focus, it might have been striking that *none* of my interview partners were illiterate. However, in the Palestinian context where most people receive at least a basic education, it is not surprising that even people from rural areas are literate.⁸ Not all of the people I spoke with came from precarious financial backgrounds but the majority were from the lower middle class. Among my interview partners were refugees living in one of the refugee camps either in the West Bank (where there are nineteen official refugee camps, i.e., registered with UNRWA,⁹ which provide aid to these registered refugees) or Gaza (where there are eight

5 Abu-Lughod, *Islam and the gendered discourses* 189.

6 On the subject of the *ḥūr* in *ḥadīth* and Quran see the enlightening article by Smith and Haddad, *Women in the afterlife* 39–55. Cf. also Smith, *Reflections on aspects of immortality* 85–99.

7 I do not know the exact age of every interview partner, the above age range is a rough estimation.

8 Cf. on the educational system in Palestine, Jebril, *Reflections on higher education in Palestine*; Abu Lughod, *Palestinian higher education* 75–95.

9 UNRWA is the abbreviation for the United Nations Relief and Work Agency for Palestine Refugees (website: <http://www.unrwa.org>).

official refugee camps). The others, who are not refugees, live in Palestinian cities spread across the West Bank and Gaza. This meant that I had to calculate the travel distance and the time I would need to arrive at the meeting point where the interviews were planned. Most interviews took place in the homes of the interviewees. Thus these interviews occasionally had to be postponed if checkpoints were closed or “flying checkpoints”¹⁰ blocked the road or the car broke down or there were long queues at the checkpoints so that by the time we would have passed the checkpoint, it would have been too dark to continue as the roads can be dangerous at night – either because of road damage or Israeli military patrols and/or shooting (either between Palestinians and Israelis, or among Israelis or Palestinians) in the respective area.

2 The Road to Paradise: Martyrdom as Means to an End?

While the notions of *gender* and *martyrdom* have so far been looked at separately in scholarship on the Middle East, they can also be used as one term consisting of both words: *gendered martyrdom*. This concept, which I have applied in my research so far, links a certain form of death or dying – namely martyrdom – with the social category gender. In focusing on the specificity of male or female martyrdom it is possible to attribute the implicit meaning to the notion that male martyrdom is different (or similar) to female martyrdom. In either case this conflict in meaning (i.e., male vs. female) is noteworthy as it issues in the conceptual tool *gendered martyrdom*. Martyrdom (including martyrdom “operations”) in the Palestinian context takes place either as sacrifice within the scope of the notion *fi sabīl Allāh* (i.e., in the way of God) or in the context of the homeland. It is linked to the nation, resistance, trauma, narratives of suffering and objects of commemoration, collective mourning, and the celebration of funerals.

A good amount of the discussion in contemporary Palestinian thought relates to the idea that death can also mean a release (i.e., from current situations which are perceived to be unbearable) and with the reinterpretation of the tragic death (i.e., death that results from being killed by the Israeli army or self-inflicted death as in acts of martyrdom) of the *shahīd* into the positively connoted heroic death of the freedom fighter. Hence the current political and social realities have to be taken into consideration. These result from previous

10 “Deliberate checkpoints and roadblocks are permanent or semi-permanent, while hasty checkpoints and roadblocks are temporary, and established with less planning and preparation,” Edwards, Suicide attacks 126.

circumstances and chains of events. Chief among them are commemorative events, which also have a trans-national character (i.e., they concern and unite all Palestinians) such as the *nakba* (catastrophe, i.e., the Palestinian exodus in 1948), the expulsion of the Palestinians, the war of 1967, and the first and the second Intifada.

In the Palestinian context it is necessary to differentiate between the notions of *shahīd* – martyr and *istishhādī* – male self-sacrificing martyr. Although both terms are used to denote someone who sacrificed his/her life as a martyr there exist historical and cultural differences that have to be taken into consideration. In contemporary Palestinian thought the concept of martyrdom draws on the earliest accounts of martyrdom in Islam in general and on more modern notions of martyrdom as part of its history and rationale in particular. Thus, it is culturally embedded and enriched – beginning in Mandatory Palestine until today. Both types of martyrs (the *shahīd*, or martyr and the *istishhādī*, or male self-sacrificing martyr) can be found in Palestine today. However, they are connoted differently and thus the way one or the other is glorified varies. Still, overlapping similarities can be identified. In the material from the Quran and *ḥadīth* the classical concept of martyrdom in Islam is conveyed. The following examples illustrate how this knowledge from the past is still important and alive in the contemporary Palestinian context.

Martyrdom in modern-day Palestine is first granted to the *shuhadā'* (martyrs/witnesses). This refers to any Palestinians who die by the weapons of an Israeli soldier. It also comprises fatal injuries suffered not only by militant Palestinians but also by civilians and bystanders. Here, martyrdom is characterized more by passivity although active militants with guns in their hands ready to shoot back are also called *shuhadā'*.

Second, martyrdom is nowadays usually also granted to those who die by actively attacking those perceived to be the enemy. In the Palestinian context these are Israeli military personnel and often Israeli civilians (especially since, for the most part, the latter are not considered civilians but soldiers, because in Israel military service is a gender-comprehensive duty – all citizens of Israel must serve in the military). The one actively (consciously with the religious *niyya*) seeking martyrdom is called *istishhādī* or *istishhādīyya*. In Arabic this term generally describes one who commits a martyrdom operation. In the Palestinian context, this term is mostly used in a positive sense. Yet, in English several terms exist and most of them have negative connotations; this is the reason I use – according to the self-designated Palestinian/Arabic word “*istishhādī*” or “*istishhādīyya*” – the term “self-sacrificing martyr” or “active martyr,” since my aim in this paper is to analyze Palestinian voices and opinions. In this context I consider this term to be the most suitable to analyze

notions of martyrdom and paradise in contemporary Palestinian thought, as it is a close translation of the Arabic word and includes the semantic aspect of self-inflicted death resulting in martyrdom. It combines both aspects of the operation and its actor – the active, to be precise the intentional/deliberate aspect and the passive, namely the sacrifice of life and body for the freedom of the land of Palestine, which is perceived to be indispensable. The term leaves the judgment to the listener, whereas the expressions *suicide bomber* or *suicide attacker* (*intihāriyyūn/āt*) carry a decidedly negative connotation with them. The contrasting terms *martyr* or *hero* (*shahīd/istishhādiyyūn/āt*) do the opposite by evoking a positive association that sometimes results in sentiments of understanding, sympathy, and compassion. Thus, the expression *self-sacrificing martyr* is an especially useful translation of the Arabic term *istishhādiyyūn/āt*, which already comprises the active character of the martyrdom due to the form of its root system (for the corresponding verb it would be form X: *istafʿala*).¹¹

By carrying out a martyrdom operation, the self-sacrificing martyr consciously and deliberately chooses martyrdom and thus the promised afterlife¹² over life in this world. S/he achieves the status of martyrdom, which guarantees immediate admission to the garden. This latter type simultaneously evokes a more secular meaning in the sense of “heroism” (cf. *ḥamāsa*) that relates to the active character of this form of martyrdom.

According to my interviewees in Palestine, both the *shahīd* and the *istishhādī* are conceived of as true martyrs. The bodies of both types of martyr are not washed after death or covered with a shroud but buried in the clothes they were wearing when they died. It is said that a sweet scent of musk exudes from their bodies which are somehow preserved and do not putrefy. Their deaths should not be mourned but celebrated. As is written in Q 2:154, those killed in the way of God are not dead but alive, even though “you do not understand it.” With martyrdom comes the often criticized and deplored enthusiastic behavior of

11 Hans Wehr translates *istishhād* also as “death of a martyr; death of a hero, heroic death; martyrdom.” The passive verb form *ustushhida* then means: “to be martyred, die as a martyr, to die in battle, be killed in action.” Cf. Wehr, *Arabic-English dictionary* 571–2.

12 In Muslim thought death is clearly understood as the continuation of life after the death of the body: “belief in the life after death is concomitant with belief in the Existence of God . . . Failing belief in the life after death there is no faith at all.” Islam is then considered to be the religion of the middle position, i.e., tying together this world and the next (*dīn* and *dunyā*). However, the afterlife concerns merely the soul and not the body, as “Islam in no sense espouses any idea of the possibility of transmigration from one physical body to another.” Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 106; 112.

the bereaved, who seem to celebrate the death of their martyred family member. I use the word “seem” here deliberately because this “joy” is often only the first reaction and grief comes later, after the guests, neighbors, and sometimes even foreigners have left. Consequently, martyrdom – especially self-sacrificing martyrdom – opens up a new space as it can be understood as a “shortcut” to paradise and a lethal action that results in a state of non-death – both in the hereafter, since the martyr immediately enters the garden, and in the here and now, because the self-sacrificing martyr is glorified and kept alive through posters, songs, and other acts of commemoration.

3 Discourse and Dissent Regarding the Garden

In terms of the “life” the *shuhadāʾ* can expect, the issue of the *ḥūr* almost always arises. These are said to be vestals or maidens – some 72 black-eyed females – awaiting the male *shahīd* upon his entry in the garden. This in itself is already complicated and raises questions as to whether the *ḥūr* trigger the *shahīd* to be reckless, intending to be killed by the Israeli army or whether they motivate him to conduct a martyrdom operation. Things become even more complicated in relation to female martyrs (*shahīdāt* and *istishhādiyyāt*). Are they also received by *ḥūr*? If so, what would either of them gain? In the interviews and in other conversations during my field research in Palestine the rewards that the *shuhadāʾ* are promised by God were not much of an issue. It seemed to me that this is something very clear and not something that requires further debate. The treatment of the *shuhadāʾ*, the funeral ceremonies and the expression of personal sentiments, however, provided material for various discussions. It is, for instance, highly contested whether the *istishhādiyyūn/āt* will enter the garden as martyrs or not. Some religious figures and political leaders and others are not convinced that the *istishhādiyyūn/āt* can be regarded as martyrs at all. For them and from a religious point of view, these actions may still constitute suicide, which then cannot be rewarded. However, these dissenting voices are comparatively weak and do not reflect the prevailing Palestinian opinion.

Due to the fact that female Palestinian self-sacrificing, intentional martyrs are quite a recent phenomenon, the opinions regarding their status in the garden vary greatly. Though it is mostly assumed that they enter the garden as martyrs, it is not clear what will await them in the afterlife: will they enter the garden as brides ready to be married off to someone they know, or will they turn themselves into one of the *ḥūr*. The issue of this modern phenomenon of female martyrs has not been treated in the classical written sources and is thus subject to vigorous debate.

During the second of my journeys to Gaza, I had the chance to meet a female politician who is a member of parliament representing Hamas. As a Palestinian woman living in Gaza, in the spotlight as a result of her political career and her membership in Hamas, Huda Naeem¹³ is a unique figure. I was, therefore, more than delighted to have the chance to meet her; we met in Gaza's parliament building, which was destroyed in the military action "Operation Cast Lead" (which began 27 December 2008) by Israel in the Gaza Strip. She stated that the *ḥūr* have received more attention in popular discourse since martyrdom operations have become almost a habit in the Palestinian struggle for independence: "In any case, with or without the promise of the *ḥūr* upon entering the garden, the resistance is most important to us and martyrdom will continue to be a daily part of our life until the liberation of our land." She further opined that female martyrs also receive a glorious status in the garden: they will marry and the *ḥūr* will welcome them likewise: "but in a more friendship-like manner and not in the sexually connoted way as they are said to receive male martyrs."

Another interview partner, a military leader of the Islamic Jihad, a teacher and the mentor of Mirfat Āmīn Mas'ūd, the ninth active female or intentional martyr in the Palestinian context, said about the subject of the *ḥūr* in relation to martyrdom operations:

This is an important religious aspect and written in the Quran. The *ḥūr* are promised to the martyr be it male or female. The female martyr will join the *ḥūr* and become part of them. Martyrdom is very important to us as Muslims and to us as Palestinians it means more than just to die and to enter the garden. It means to us that our struggle is not in vain and that others should follow the martyrs to free Palestine.

4 Martyrdom and the Afterlife in Written Eulogies

Many issues that are not broached in everyday oral discourse are present in written glorifications, gray literature, posters, popular music, and songs. The subject of one example here indicates that the blood of the self-sacrificing martyrs will nourish the land of Palestine, which will be viable for new life. This is a theme going back to pre-Islamic concepts of nature and fertility. These and other subjects are brought up in the encomiums of the Palestinian

13 Huda Naeem and Professor Jameela Shanti are among the six women who were elected to parliament as members of Hamas after its victory in the parliamentary elections in January 2006.

istishhādīyyāt by their anonymous authors, as I demonstrate by referring to glorifying material.¹⁴

4.1 *Āyāt al-Akhras*¹⁵

The text glorifying the third female self-sacrificing martyr since the outbreak of the second Intifada clearly states the joyous sentiments that were the first reactions among family members and others in the refugee camp. Instead of referring to the death as an event of sadness, it is mentioned as a wedding ceremony. *Āyāt* is portrayed as a bride united with the land/husband Palestine by freeing it from the occupation – or at least taking a step in this direction. The motif of the “Palestinian wedding” is regularly repeated and not only remains in the text-based sphere but enters the social realm and characterizes death processions and burial rites.

In the first passage, the author reports what happened among the inhabitants of the refugee camp after *Āyāt*’s martyrdom operation became publicly known. It was written that after receiving the message they went out on the streets to share the joyful celebrations of the “successful” completion of her act. Subsequently, in the second paragraph, which has her name, *Āyāt al-Akhras*, in captions, the symbol of the wedding occurs for the first time. It deals with the marriage topos in a prose-like style, and is therefore of particular significance:

The joyful ululations were mixed with crying. For today is her wedding, even though she does not wear the white dress and even though there was no bridal procession to her groom, who has waited for this procession for the past one and a half years. Instead she was wearing a military uniform and a Palestinian *kūfīyya*. And she was adorned with her red and proud blood which transformed her ceremony into a Palestinian wedding. Such a wedding fills the hearts of each mother of the martyred or injured with calmness and joy. Actually her wedding ceremony should

14 This material consists mainly of written eulogies and encomiums, which glorify the *istishhādīyyāt*. These are usually written by members of the militant resistance organizations and distributed online (the websites are unstable since the operators frequently change the domain) or as leaflets passed out during demonstrations, commemorations or funerals. Other sources are audiovisual, such as video-testaments or glorifying songs. In some cases I was able to obtain the written testaments of the *istishhādīyyāt*.

15 *Āyāt al-Akhras* carried out a martyrdom operation on 29 March 2002. Born in Jerusalem, she was the third *istishhādīyya* and the youngest who, at the age of sixteen, joined the active militant resistance. The operation took place under the auspices of the al-Aqsā Brigades at the Kiryat HaYovel supermarket in Jerusalem and killed two people, a seventeen-year-old Israeli girl and a fifty-five-year-old Israeli security guard.

have taken place last July, completely normal like any other girl in this world. But she wanted to be wedded to her [“]bridegroom[”] [the earth/land of Palestine] exclusively in the “blood-suit,” by which only someone like her could consummate the marriage, [she did this] to create pride among her people by successfully killing and injuring dozens of Zionist occupiers in a successful and heroic operation. An operation, which has been conducted by a girl in the heart of Zionism.

Āyāt al-Akhras was planning to be married in the summer of 2002, yet she refused to be like just any girl, for she was wedded in her blood-soaked uniform. Instead of a wedding dress, she wore a military uniform and the Palestinian *kūfiyya* – a nationalistic symbol in the Palestinian context that is usually associated with Yasser Arafat, who has entered the social discourse as a legend. Yasser Arafat, too, always wore a military uniform and the *kūfiyya* in public. During his lifetime he became the embodiment of the Palestinian National Movement. He united the Palestinians to stand as a collective for the “Palestinian cause.” Hence Āyāt al-Akhras’s deliberately chosen clothing could be regarded as a symbol in the struggle for national existence and accordingly as an imitation and performance of the powerful role of a strong political personality. Instead of flowers and gold, she adorned herself with her red and proud blood, which transformed the act into a Palestinian “wedding,” and transformed her into a Palestinian bride.

In this context, it is useful to mention the work of Angelika Neuwirth, who referred to the relationship between the symbol of the land of “Palestine” and the wedding of the martyr (who should be distinguished from the suicide bombers as martyrs) with this land in the poetry of Maḥmūd Darwīsh (1941–2008), a well-known Palestinian poet.¹⁶ This reference can also be found in the encomium to Āyāt al-Akhras – given that she is characterized as the bride of Palestine, who remains an example and role model for every Palestinian girl and every Palestinian boy – an illustration of the strong presence of symbolic language in the discourse of martyrs. In doing so, the *istishhādiyya* is awarded the same function and honor as male martyrs: Āyāt al-Akhras unites with the land of Palestine, which is imagined to be female although or precisely because she is a woman. Her blood will nourish the land, which thereby is able to produce more children, and thus contribute to the persistence of the resistance until the final liberation of Palestine.

As soon as the message of the martyrdom operation traversed the narrow alleys of the refugee camp, Āyāt’s mother realized what had happened and

16 Neuwirth, Embaló, and Pannewick, *Kulturelle Selbstbehauptung der Palästinenser*; Neuwirth, From sacrifice to sacrifice 271–4.

sobbed: "I think Āyāt has left us and she will never return. She turned into a Palestinian bride. She insisted on revenging 'Īsā Faraḥ and Sā'id 'Īd. They were both neighbors of ours and died in their houses which were hit by rockets."

Āyāt is literally absorbed into the narrative of "fighting for the Palestinian cause." Her unconditional commitment gives her action a fanatical aspect. This is in line with the depersonification effect resulting from the phrase "Palestinian bride," which is a symbol and a myth at the same time. An explanation of the fanaticism is given in the next section, which is headed "The industry of death." Figurative verbalization is used in order to substantiate the claim. An exalted style and pretended objectivity (by means of factual description and witness statements) are some of the methods applied here. "It is said that Āyāt dreamt of becoming like the other martyrs whose names she can recite, but her female nature is the biggest obstacle." The fact that she was a woman and not a man could, in her eyes, only be overcome when the operation carried out by Wafā' Idrīs, the first Palestinian *istishhādīyya*, became well-known. Wafā' and her heroic attack became a symbol and an example for the following *istishhādīyyāt*.

"The pieces of chocolate" is the title of the penultimate passage in which Āyāt's sister Samāḥ is given the floor. She recounts the last moments of Āyāt's life, moments that she shared with her sister. On this last day Āyāt seemed to be very happy and gave her sister some pieces of chocolate and asked her: "Pray for me and ask God for success for me." Although Samāḥ feared her sister might want to carry out a martyrdom operation she was at the same time convinced that Āyāt would never be able to do so. Yet, "she congratulated her on her decision and said that she deserved it [i.e., the status of a martyr] for her courage: I promise to follow you and walk on the path of martyrdom. We are all a martyrdom project." Āyāt's sister encouraged her although she was not sure what to think of her behavior and how to deal with it. However, Samāḥ seemed to believe in the concept of martyrdom and thought that it could be a sustainable method and means for ending the current situation of living under alien military occupation.

In the last paragraph, "My bride is not for me," her fiancé Shādī has his say and recalls how he met and fell in love with Āyāt. He looks at the situation in a sober way, but not unemotionally. Just prior to the martyrdom operation he imagined their married life and how they would raise their firstborn son to become a fighter and free the Aqṣā from the chains of the occupation. "He saw that the girl would not marry him, but become a Palestinian bride after she blew herself up in the heart of Zionism." Again, the myth and symbol of the Palestinian bride is evoked. He also mentions paradise in the next sentence: "Our plan was to get married after the completion of her general secondary examinations this year, but God Almighty had other plans for us. Maybe we

will meet again in paradise, as she wrote to me in her last letter.” He continues talking about a recurring situation when he and Āyāt dreamt of their future life together:

She dreamt of security for her children. This is why she was so concerned about the Zionist aggressors. Her dreams about martyrdom have disrupted her dreams about the future. And she stole from me my dream of marriage to seek refuge in martyrdom and the pictures of those killed by the enemy and our spilled blood, which will carry us to paradise. And we promised to do it together.

He concludes his elaboration: “I wish we had sacrificed ourselves together. And I congratulate her on her martyrdom. I ask God to let me follow her soon.” In the very last sentence of this encomium, the metaphor of the wedding is referred to again and Āyāt is praised in an exalted way, namely that:

The Palestinian bride, Āyāt al-Akhras, remains an example and a role model for every Palestinian girl and every Palestinian boy searching for security among the ruins of the massacres of Sharon while the offender pays with his blood and his future as a price for this security.

The aggressors and defenders are identified very clearly. As has been mentioned above, this final message reminds everyone of the responsibility Āyāt and every other Palestinian – male or female – has, to live a peaceful and secure life. Hence, the encomium is a rational appeal not to imitate passive Arab armies and inactive Arab leaders but to follow the shining, chatoyant, and glorious example of the heroic martyrs.

4.2 *Wafā’ Idrīs*¹⁷

In comparing the encomium of Āyāt al-Akhras with that of Wafā’ Idrīs,¹⁸ we can see striking differences in the linguistic levels of the texts. In the case of

17 The first “modern” martyrdom operation by a woman in Palestine was carried out by Wafā’ Idrīs, a twenty-eight-year-old paramedic working for the Red Crescent. She lived in the al-Am’arī refugee camp in Ramallah. The explosion took place on 27 January 2002, in the center of Jerusalem on Jaffa Road in front of a shoe shop. One eighty-one-year-old Israeli man was killed and more than 100 people were injured. The al-Aqṣā Martyrs Brigades claimed responsibility for this attack immediately after it was conducted. Cf. also the insightful article on Wafā’ Idrīs by Pannewick, *Wafa Idris* 110–3.

18 Cf. *Katā’ib shuhadā’ al-Aqṣā, Idrīs, Wafā’*.

Wafā' Idrīs the author not only uses sacred elements of language, which are also present in the everyday speech of Palestinians, but also employs short sentences, rhythm, poetic-rhyming, and a figurative style.¹⁹ Simple syntax mixed with uncomplex vocabulary and an exalted style are added. This encomium is suited for recitation, as the text – with its particular linguistic style (ornamental, poetic) and a way of reasoning which on closer examination is neither coherent nor unchallengeable – tries to convince its audience of the necessity of martyrdom operations. For instance, it argues, “that death is the embodiment of love for the land and humans,” or “that the Arab rulers prefer to be [cowardly] sheep, instead of fighting and dying.”

Both Wafā' Idrīs and Āyāt al-Akhras are described in the texts as brave heroes who lift the resistance to another level. They are the ones who defy the incompetent Arab rulers and show the Palestinian people that the land of Palestine is worthy of martyrdom operations. In contrast to their male counterparts who in the encomiums are not accredited with explicitly male attributes – rather their death is considered a duty for the deliverance of the Palestinian homeland – women often acquire male attributes. Wafā' Idrīs is even praised as a

woman, who is worth a thousand men and who evokes memories of her [female] predecessors, the pious companions [of the Prophet] who accompanied the advance of the armies to new worlds, who embraced a new religion due to their fair-mindedness and their mercy and their heroism.

Furthermore, it is said that Wafā' Idrīs

preferred to be a symbol of the fact that honor as well as death are a part of life. She is an Arab legend, an eternal legend, a legend which will be storied with its characters made of light in order to exemplify [the fact] that the Arab woman has not only been created for make-up, *rīmīl* [i.e.,

19 Nicholson, *History* 74, notes on the issue of unmetred prose in historical perspective: “... the oldest form of poetical speech in Arabia was rhyme without metre (Saj’), or, as we should say, ‘rhymed prose’, although the fact of Muhammad’s adversaries calling him a poet because he used it in the Koran shows the light in which it was regarded even after the invention and elaboration of metre. Later on, as we shall see, Saj’ became a merely rhetorical ornament, the distinguishing mark of all eloquence whether spoken or written, but originally it had a deeper, almost religious, significance as the special form adopted by poets, soothsayers, and the like in their supernatural revelations and for conveying to the vulgar every kind of mysterious and esoteric lore.”

lipstick from Rimmel, a London-based cosmetics company], and rouge. Rather, she has been created to tell the daughters of her sex as well as the other sex that love is also death.

Thus, here death is elevated and equated with love, which is not manifest in life but rather precisely in death. In the poetry of Maḥmūd Darwīsh death is given a special position: "This praise of death, which violates the central social convention that violent death is to be perceived as a loss and a paralysing blow to every relevant social interaction of the relatives, signalises an inversion of values."²⁰ This understanding is justified in the glorifying texts, especially in reference to myths. Indeed, the analysis by Neuwirth can be seamlessly woven into the encomiums of the *istishhādīyyāt*, yet it has to be acknowledged that Maḥmūd Darwīsh has unambiguously distanced himself, especially since the second Intifada, from the modern understanding of martyrdom which is propagated, for example, by the al-Aqṣā Brigades.²¹

According to the author of the encomium, Wafā' Idrīs said that

spring only blossoms if one waters it with blood. For Palestine is the only country of the world in which the olives, the oranges and roses grow without water [but with blood]... Further on she said that the seeds of the earth would sprout spikes if they are watered with blood. In an unwritten statement she called upon all peoples of her homeland to be like the sand of the path, the clay of the earth and the scent of the linden trees after the rain.

The reference to blood also occurs in the encomium to Āyāt al-Akhras and thus proves that the myth of blood plays a decisive role in the encomiums. Blood has already been given particular attention in early history: it symbolized not only life but also death and to date connotes something either positively or negatively. In numerous myths blood is contextualized figuratively, ritually, in writing, or verbally. According to Neuwirth the myth of blood in Islamic culture, particularly in the context of figurations of martyrs, is subject to strong transformations.²² In the Quran, this topic is elaborated on in the context of the role of blood as sacrifice. From an Islamic perspective, the significance of blood differs in Sunni and Shi'i Islam. For the latter, blood is important for its "expiatory value" or impact. In Sunni tradition, the opinion that the martyr symbolizes a self-sacrifice developed only gradually: "Only the modern martyr

²⁰ Neuwirth, *From sacrilege to sacrifice* 270.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 274–8.

²² Neuwirth, *Blut und Mythos* 62–90.

spills his blood as sacrifice. He reconstructs the order through a substitutional *rite de passage* as 'groom of the homeland' by straightening up the dignity of society."²³ The martyr as the groom of the homeland makes the land Palestine female in the sense that through his blood Palestine nurtures the Palestinians and thus cares like a mother for its offspring and offers them security. The land of Palestine/homeland is frequently portrayed as female, when the nation is signified as a mother, lover or bride of the struggle. In other words the male/female agency of the martyr effectuates the future whereas the (female) land of Palestine seems to be a more passive recipient of the martyr's blood and action.

The anthropological concept of a *rite de passage* is here understood according to the anthropologist Arnold van Gennep.²⁴ Instead of remaining in a liminal status – in a state between growing up and the socially accepted position as a husband/father and wife/mother respectively – the martyrs' adolescent death is understood and interpreted as a wedding. The myth of blood serves in this context as an integral part of the wedding (and its consummation). This construct(ion) or *rite de passage* appears repeatedly throughout the encomiums. Thus, blood has a meaningful function here, not as a symbol of injury or of death but rather as a life-giving element.

The *istishhādiyyāt* are credited with a similarly powerful function, which is nonetheless ostensibly limited to external glorification, i.e., propaganda machinery, which is produced by the dispatching organizations: *istishhādiyyāt* are not necessarily glorified in everyday life. Hence these women are twice singled out or separated from society and seldom included in prevailing social structures anymore: as martyrs they receive a higher status in the discourse and by accentuating their femininity they are even elevated beyond the male martyr.

4.3 *Mīrfat Amīn Mas'ūd*²⁵

In her last will, which Mīrfat reads in front of a video camera – she reads it very fast without pausing noticeably to breathe – she calls upon her parents (especially her beloved mother) "to be patient and strong and to consider her a martyr with God." Many comforting references to God are made as well as to paradise – here, a special level in paradise is mentioned, namely *al-firdaws*, the

23 Ibid., 83–4. In this context the martyr who is glorified most notably in poetry is a contrast to the "suicide bombers," too.

24 Van Gennep, *Les rites de passage*.

25 Mīrfat Amīn Mas'ūd was an eighteen-year-old woman from the Jabāliyya refugee camp in northern Gaza who carried out her martyrdom operation in Bayt Hānūn on 6 November 2006. The al-Quds Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack in which six people were killed.

highest level and one which martyrs enter immediately – the place where she and her parents “will meet again if it is God’s will.” She furthermore addresses her family asking them to forgive her mistakes: “pray to God for He will forgive my sins and you, please forgive me.” Although she expresses her strong love for each family member she simultaneously states that “my desire to meet God and the Prophet and to spill my blood for my land is much greater than my love for you.” With this statement her ambitious behavior and religious belief and understanding become apparent. Her strong emotional involvement, her political comprehension and awareness of the national issue are made explicit.

Her speech continues in a very personal tone. The tone is as beseeching as it is self-confident and intriguing. Martyrdom, resistance, and faithful support from society are some of the subjects she addresses in her testament. Other issues are revenge, the occupation, the land, the Prophet, and the sacrifice of the body. Mīrfat is positive about her choice to carry out a martyrdom operation, which she considers an act of revenge – an act of revenge “through the will of God.”

References to God occur continuously in everyday life in Palestine and complete any kind of sentence, be it joking or serious. In the will and testament they fulfill yet another function: to give hope to her family members and fellow Palestinians. The last paragraph, in which she explicitly appeals to her family and even more explicitly to her parents, consists of three exhortations: the first concerns her grave. “It should be built according to the Sunna.” The second is the “request *not* to distribute coffee or candies to the congratulatory and cheering crowd” (neighbors and others) after the martyrdom operation has been successfully completed and thus announced. Mīrfat concludes her appeal by focusing on Islam: her family should “stick to the holy Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet and ask God for forgiveness for me.”

In her very last sentence Mīrfat Amīn Mas‘ūd bids farewell by saying: “And see you soon in paradise! [I am] your martyr daughter, through the will of God, who is alive with God.” She seems certain that she will enter paradise by means of her action and that a family reunion will take place in this space beyond the earthly dimension.

4.4 *Hanādī Taysīr Jarādāt*²⁶

“The heroic *istishhādīyya* Hanādī Taysīr ‘Abd al-Malik Jarādāt” is the title of another example: the encomium of Hanādī Jarādāt and her *waṣīyya* which

26 She was a lawyer from Jenin, the most northern city in the West Bank, who carried out a martyrdom operation on 4 October 2003. Her operation is counted as the sixth which was conducted by women. It took place in the Maxim Restaurant in Haifa, killed nineteen

is attached to the end of the publication. Her case received great attention from the local and international media because, as a highly educated working woman, she seemed to stand out from the masses of the otherwise poor and desperate self-sacrificers.²⁷

Hanādī is dubbed as *al-istishhādīyya 'arūs Ḥayfā*. Her action is linked to the motif of the “Palestinian wedding,” as her martyrdom operation which took place in Haifa²⁸ transformed her into a bride, the “bride of Haifa.” Here the writer of the encomium claims the authority for wedding Hanādī to the land. This is not an automatic process that takes place after a martyrdom operation has been carried out by a woman (in other encomiums this is not necessarily the case, as neither a bridal status is attributed to the woman nor is a particular space – land, city, etc. – always further specified) and thus this example is all the more striking and thought-provoking. Due to the fact that Hanādī sacrificed herself in Haifa – an Israeli city approximately 60 km from Jenin, the city where Hanādī came from – and because of her professional background and the high death toll of her action, her case became well-known in and outside Palestine. The composer of the encomium crowns her as a bride, which implies that by sacrificing her body she is united with the city of Haifa, which is here considered to be still Palestinian. His explicit statement reapplies the much older icon of the Palestinian wedding (formerly attributed to male fighters) to a female combatant who exercised a rather modern form of resistance in the Palestinian context. This symbol not only stands for joyful celebrations of armed actions but also for nationalist consciousness of revolutionary agency: Palestine, the land which the combatant embraces, to which s/he is wedded,

people and injured fifty. The al-Quds Brigades claimed responsibility for this action. This was the second time a martyrdom operation was carried out by a woman under the aegis of the al-Quds Brigades (Hiba Darāghma was the first on 19 May 2003; Mīrfat Amīn Mas'ūd was the third and until now the last *istishhādīyya* who was trained and supervised by them).

27 Although it is true that her career and professional/educational background might suggest a rather prosperous future, it is not true that most martyrdom operations were carried out by poor, desperate people in otherwise futile situations. Cf. the studies on the financial and educational background of “suicide bombers”: Moghadam, *Palestinian suicide terrorism* 65–92; Gambetta, *Making sense of suicide missions*.

28 The present-day city of Haifa is located in northern Israel and is the third largest city after Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Haifa is a submontane seaport of Carmel and has industrial importance. It is also the only Israeli city with public transport running on the Sabbath. Many Arabs live and work in this city and form a huge Palestinian community. Though religiously unimportant (compared to the holy city of Jerusalem) many Palestinians living outside Israel have relatives living in Haifa.

is the main focus of the glorification – it is the reason for and reward of the martyrdom operation.

The salient features in Hanādī's case continue as her *waṣīyya* is also rather noteworthy. It consists of two parts – something I have not come across in the other testaments. The first one is short and general and the second describes in detail and on a very personal level her stance toward the operation. The former is a short paragraph with several key words such as *al-ṣahāyina* (the Zionists), *mustawṭin* (settler), *shahāda* (the creed/blood testimony/martyrdom). Her language is stereotypical and consists of declamatory elements. She concluded, or to be more precise, signed this testament with the words: "your daughter Hanādī Taysīr Jarādāt, daughter of the al-Quds Brigades." The latter is her long and elaborate last will. Here, Hanādī expresses her feelings and viewpoints in an extremely personal and emotional manner. The poignant style is mixed with a factual, almost business-like mode of writing – this is probably the result of her training in the law, which she received at university. This part of the testament is peppered with flowery religious phrases and quotations from the Quran. The combination of emotional and factual writing in the *waṣīyya* mirrors the facts on the ground of the conflict and the results or influence these have in the emotional realm. Literally, the reality is being imprinted (or imprints itself) on the emotional/psychological perception. It is precisely this loaded and highly fraught mixture that is reflected in Hanādī's testament – as of course is the case in the others – which gives these compositions a unique position among the various discursive possibilities: her very personal voice is heard and available to a larger public audience.

First she explicitly addresses her beloved father and next her mother. In both paragraphs she is convinced that she will be with God in *janna*. And if it is God's will she will meet her brother Fādī, her cousin Ṣāliḥ and her fiancé 'Abd al-Raḥīm there. The subject of paradise and the afterlife plays an important role in the entire *waṣīyya*; this is also apparent in the Quranic quotations, such as Q 3:169 and Q 4:74.

She makes clear, as do the other testaments, her strong concern for justice and fairness, and her consciousness of what "the process of leaving this world willingly" means to her and to those she left behind. Hanādī concludes her testament with the following request, that "her parents should always bless and be benevolent toward her. And [the certainty] that they will meet each other again in paradise."

In the *waṣīyya* of Mīrfat Amīn Ma'sūd a similar phrase served as a concluding remark. The hopeful tone in this last sentence is evidence of her knowledge that a *shahīd* (or *istishhādīyya*), according to the Islamic religious tradition – the Sunna, collected in various volumes of *ḥadīth* – is allowed and able to

grant access to paradise for a certain number of his/her relatives. The tone could also be interpreted as a beseeching remark that expresses the fear of the *istishhādiyya*; however, I read it as a rather hopeful statement that helps her remain convinced and steadfast.

In the encomiums of the *istishhādiyyāt* myths emerge as sources of norms, which serve to bestow meaning (*Sinnstiftung*) in the interpretation of daily life and events. Thus, the authors weave together elements endowed with meaning from different fields. Old religious motives are reorganized and coordinated with ideological elements of modernity in the environment of existing Palestinian myths and images. In relation to the encomiums the image of the Palestinian wedding is recurrent. To date, this figure has not lost its deeply symbolic impact – even though reinterpretations and thus meaningful shifts have taken place. Since the beginning of the twentieth century the victims of the struggles for independence – anti-colonialist and anti-Zionist – have been conceived as bridegrooms. Especially in the field of narrative and heroic discourses, the fighter is glorified; the would-be martyr is a bridegroom. These discourses become manifest in poetry, ritual practice, and songs.²⁹ The wedding symbolizes the shifting social status of the fighter as a *rite de passage*. The young combatant unites with the land of Palestine, which is connoted or construed as feminine, and spills his blood for this earth, which then becomes viable for new life. Indeed this motive transforms itself, it is subjected to changes in time and space and adapts to political and social realities; nevertheless this symbolism remains meaningful – especially in reference to the self-sacrificing martyrs whose obsequies are celebrated as wedding receptions. The same is true for *istishhādiyyāt*; both male and female martyrs unite with the land of Palestine by means of their blood. Moreover, Palestine is often imagined as the earthly paradise, the land where milk and honey flows and the place to live and die for. Many of the statements that I collected during my field research referred to and employed exactly this metaphor, namely that Palestine can be associated or substituted for paradise. This is true for diaspora Palestinians, returnees, and those living in Palestine: Palestine symbolizes the home and the destination/destiny for its inhabitants who will continuously revere its soil and its meaning beyond mere dust.

In some cases the defining motif of the “Palestinian wedding” prevails while in others the subject of the *hūr* preponderates. Yet again, in other cases the erotically charged themes are not the focus. Instead nationalist motifs occur:

29 Neuwirth, Embaló, and Pannewick, *Kulturelle Selbstbehauptung der Palästinenser* 14–22.

Mīrfat Mas'ūd³⁰ states in her testament that she prefers to give her blood for her land and to become a martyr by the will of God, who will reunite her with her family in paradise, instead of living under the intolerable and ugly occupation. She also calls upon the *mujāhidūn* around the world to take the way of resistance blessed by God. And sometimes, as is stated in the encomium of Wafā' Idrīs, secular references to life and death dominate the tone: "she preferred to be a symbol, that honor as well as death are part of life . . . that life is also death and that death is the embodiment of love for homeland/earth and mankind. Death is the new life which recreates the Palestinian people."

Martyrdom in present-day Palestine is reminiscent of an act in a social drama. This idea is based on Victor Turner's concept that culture is a performative process and a social drama is the means for solving conflicts in society.³¹ Christian Szyska also applies this approach to his analysis of Islamic written narratives concerned with martyrdom.³² Turner's theoretical method can also be helpful to understand what happens in Palestinian society. The disastrous death of the martyr or self-sacrificing martyr with his mournful victims is transformed by social dynamics into a heroic death that is the result of a glorious act. The commemoration and re-enactment of the respective death in the form of posters, video-clips, and songs keep the dead alive and memorable for society. The martyrdom operation as a *rite de passage* then represents an initiated act of non-death with a continued living potential in the here and now as

30 She carried out her martyrdom operation in Bayt Hānūn on 6 November 2006. The al-Quds Brigades claimed responsibility for the attack in which six people were killed.

31 Cf. Turner, *From ritual to theatre*; Turner, *Drama, fields and metaphors* and Turner, *The anthropology of performance*. The social drama consists of four phases: (1) *Breach* of regular norm-governed social relations; (2) *Crisis*, during which there is a tendency for the breach to widen. Each public crisis has what I now call lamina characteristics, since it is a threshold (*limen*) between more or less stable phases of the social process, but it is not usually a sacred limen, surrounded by taboos and thrust away from the centers of public life. On the contrary it takes its menacing stance in the forum itself, and, as it were, dares the representatives of order to grapple with it; (3) *Redressive* action ranging from personal advice and informal mediation or arbitration to formal juridical and legal machinery, and, to resolve certain kinds of crisis or legitimate other modes of resolution, to the performance of public ritual. Redress, too, has its liminal features for it is "be-twixt and between," and, as such, furnishes a distanced replication and critique of the events leading up to and composing the "crisis." This replication may be in the rational idiom of the judicial process, or in the metaphorical and symbolic idiom of a ritual process; (4) The final phase consists either of the *reintegration* of the disturbed social group, or of the social recognition and legitimation of irreparable schism between the contesting parties. Cf. Turner, *Drama, fields, and metaphors* 37–42.

32 Szyska, *Martyrdom* 29–45.

well as in the afterlife: “[i]n Islam, human beings are created to survive, not to vanish. Death is a return to God.”³³

5 Conclusion

As has been demonstrated, contemporary martyrdom and the text tradition cannot be analyzed independently from each other. In the justification for martyrdom operations and the promised rewards in the garden several elements are involved. These range from religious concepts of martyrdom dating back to the early years of Islam, via modern societal notions of honor, pride, and shame, to nationalist elements of active political participation/resistance as well as sacrifices for freedom and liberation. The very present and important state of hope prevailing in Palestinian society is tied to notions of the garden, be it in terms of what the martyr can expect or in terms of the reasons it is important to continue living: in the garden the *ṣumūd* (steadfastness) will be rewarded.

Thus, concerning the sex-martyrdom debate, as As’ad Abu Khalil clarifies:

It is not the 72 black-eyed virgins dancing in the heads in the would-be Islamic martyrs that should concern the West. Even if one succeeds in bringing about a radical change in the sexual life of Middle East men, the violent conflict will continue because the root cause of suicidal bombings is not sexual frustration, it is despair and deprivation. If prosperity and hope prevail in the Middle East, even the most charismatic warrior-preachers will not be able to find willing recruits.³⁴

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Crisis and the Secular Rhetoric of Islamic Paradise

Ruth Mas

Man is created with a restless anxiety.

Q 70:19

• • •

*Hyperboles are for young men to use; they show vehemence of character;
and this is why angry people use them more than other people.*

ARISTOTLE¹

• •
•

Islam is in crisis: The shrillest of political clichés. Such is the rhetoric of many a scholar well versed in the tradition of Islam and insistent on its reform. Yet, Islam's crisis is not Islam's crisis but a crisis of the credibility and authority of religion now propelled down the anticipatory path of History by the drive of secularist politics. This generalized crisis forms the litany of modernity: holy wars, holy terrors, myths shattered, revolutions, hostile utopias, godly defenders, ungodly offenders, *jihād*, peace, martyrs, violence, assassins, new inquisitions, suicide terrorism, suicide bombers, veils, beards, minarets...: tired, overused, circular, sequential refrains growing weary of their urgency to overtake unsullied futures. However, despite (or perhaps due to) the upheavals of the twentieth century, the rhetoric of the crisis of Islam has tired and is running out of patience with its own repetitions; the secular search for new turning points is in its last breath and demanding renewal.² And so now, the turn to *janna*, i.e., *janna is the instrument of terror*. With this turn, Islamic

¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 96.

² See Ferris, *Silent urns* 206, note 19, where he states, "Yet, in an age when crisis of one thing or another abounds, we are merely perpetuating the crisis that modernity uses to announce its arrival. In this case, it would be more accurate to speak not of the crisis of modernity but of its crises."

paradise has been aligned with the faltering time of the secular in order to revive the rhetoric of crisis which claims that there is a “rejection of modernity [by Islam] in favor of a return to a sacred past.”³ Such rhetoric invokes sacred time in terms of how it is advanced by Islamic terrorists who usher in the divine time of Islam. Accordingly, the time of modernity is set against a traditional Islamic past resistant to the temporal extremes of Islam’s anticipated future. Underpinning the long narrative of this rhetoric is now a highly bankrupted notion of history as progress that strategically reorients and distorts other understandings of time. *Janna* has thus entered a new era in its earthly narrative, but as “the instrument of terror” it is not yet a cliché. It is only an overstatement and hence still capable of projecting an eschatology of Islamic violence that must be overcome by a resurgent and timely sense of support for the modern.

It is with this in mind that we conduct the present examination of Nadia Tazi’s (b. 1953) discourse about *janna* in order to address the way in which she renders Islamic paradise into a rhetoric of crisis. Like many Franco-Maghribi scholars seeking the reform of the Islamic tradition, Tazi’s singular faith in modern secularity is premised on an ongoing preoccupation with “the great crisis of the Muslim world.”⁴ Tazi has worked extensively on the topics of gender and embodiment and as the editor of *La virilité en Islam*, has taken on the male “Islamist,” a principal actor in this crisis whose agency has made of *janna* a prevailing mechanism of horror. She characterizes him (and by extension Islamism) as securing political disarray by conflating his paradisaal aspirations with sexual desire. The social and political assault that concerns Tazi is founded on the androcentric order of Islamist power whose sexual and gendered politics enacts violence upon women. Tazi bases her argument on how Islamists contravene Islam’s classical intellectual and religious tradition and she interprets their hermeneutics as a regression that brings the Islamic tradition into crisis.

For Tazi, this renders the desire for *janna* indefensible because it dangerously establishes the sovereignty of the male Muslim subject. The desire for *janna* does nothing but undo the limits of modernity that secure the boundaries between the political and the religious, paradise and the world, Islam and Islamism. She writes, “*Jannah* apparently becomes less inherently unfathomable when seen as expediting an otherwise untenable clash of two different realities, by becoming an instrument of terror.”⁵ Tazi does not simply assimilate

3 Lewis, *Crisis of Islam* 120.

4 Tazi and Benslama, *Présentation* 6.

5 Tazi, *Jannah* 29.

the instrumentalization of *janna* to violence. She ascribes to *janna* a dialectical mechanism that accelerates the binaries that modernity has set as a condition for its existence. The dyad set up by Tazi in the preceding statement is indicative of a difficulty within her thinking that I treat in this essay, namely a rhetoric of crisis that demands amplification and hyperbole as the operating features of Muslim agency.

Tazi first approached this topic in the late 1990s when the colonially sedimented violence that ravaged and rampantly shed blood in Algeria was also threatening the suburbs of Paris. The perverse paradox this violence has produced has made European modernity the antidote to Islam frequently touted by Muslim reformers from the Maghrib and France. In addition, these reformers have mostly remained silent on the question of *janna*. This raises several questions: Why has it been so difficult for some Muslim intellectuals to address one of the greatest resources of Islamic sensibility and imaginary – *janna* – and a theological staple of the religious and cultural heritage of Islam? What is significant about Tazi's breaching of this silence? And, if, as Michel Foucault tells us in *The Order of Things*, discourse proceeds out of silence, the silence of undifferentiated existence,⁶ then what is it that is being differentiated in this discourse of Islamic paradise?

In *The Archeology of Knowledge*, Foucault treats the question of differentiation in terms of a crisis at the core of modernist thinking about transcendence and the unity (*undifferentiation*) that is usually assumed as its essential characteristic. He states,

But the major benefit, of course, is that it conceals the crisis in which we have been involved for so long, and which is constantly growing more serious: a crisis that concerns that transcendental reflection with which philosophy since Kant has identified itself; which concerns that theme of the origin, that promise of the return, by which we avoid the difference of our present; which concerns an anthropological thought that orders all these questions around the question of man's being, and allows us to avoid an analysis of practice; which concerns all humanist ideologies; which, above all, concerns *the status of the subject*. *It is this discussion that you would like to suppress*, and from which you would like to divert attention...⁷

6 Foucault, *Order of things* xx.

7 Foucault, *Archeology of knowledge* 225, emphasis added.

The question of differentiation for Foucault is located in the crisis that issued from the secularizing enlightenment as a result of the limits it recognized in our thinking about transcendence, i.e., the return to the origin or the very transcendence of *janna*. And, those limits permit us to differentiate ourselves (in distinction to the unification of transcendence) as subjects in history – the difference of our present to which Foucault refers. The issue for Foucault is how such differentiation demands a debate about the name and nature of crisis, a debate that raises the issue of the secular in relationship to transcendental – i.e., undifferentiated – reflection.

Literary critic Paul de Man takes up this issue in terms of how the rhetoric of crisis functions as a strategy of differentiation, a strategy which is particularly relevant to how Tazi positions Muslims in modernity. While not addressing the foundational questions raised by Foucault and Kant, he nevertheless is interested in the form that such rhetoric takes and by which it operates. In a well-known essay entitled “Criticism and crisis,” de Man states, “We must ask ourselves if there is not a recurrent epistemological structure that characterizes all statements made in the mood and the rhetoric of crisis.”⁸ De Man alerts us to the ordering that occurs in the rhetoric of crisis and how it masquerades as knowledge when in fact it is a rhetoric passed off as knowledge without historical actuality. The rhetoric of crisis is thus productive of an epistemology that can only dissimulate knowledge. If we consider de Man’s analysis, Tazi’s coupling of “crisis” with “Islam” prompts us to pose the following questions: what is the structure that recurs in the reformulation of crisis as *janna* and “terror”? And, how does it sustain the historicist and present forms in which the catastrophic rhetoric about Islam and Muslims is framed? In what follows, the architecture of this most recent coupling in the rhetoric of crisis (from the Greek *krisis* and its cognate *krinein*, i.e., to separate) is examined as disclosing a method of discrimination, *differentiation*, and disjoining by which certain historical schemes are put into place and certain subjects are replaced.

Crucial then to the differentiation produced by the logic of crisis, is the question of the status of the subject to which Foucault alerts us. In other words, the place allotted to the Muslim subject and its assumed historical development within modernity depends on how Muslims are separated from the unity of transcendence to which they ascribe themselves, and from the tradition through which they have been shaped. We are interested here in the notion of subjectivity produced by the rhetorical coupling of *janna* with “terror” within modern structures of secularist differentiation. As we have seen in the quotation from Foucault above, what originates from post-Kantian idealist

8 De Man, Criticism and crisis 14.

projects is the desire to reinstate or recuperate a unifying subject after the modernist separations produced by Kant's examination of the limits of human understanding. For Kant, human understanding of transcendental reason is recognition of its own epistemological limitation viz. transcendence. A consequence of Kant's claim is that the subject is no longer understood as "being" but instead as "becoming" in its movement toward greater understanding. This consequence has been normatively accepted as the marker of progressive secular enlightenment, so that it produces a demand that Muslim subjects ultimately disassociate their knowledge and experience of Allah from any transcendental reference. Many of those seeking the reform of Islam take this demand for granted and pay little attention to the fact that this type of modern subject has been derived from a post-Christian context.

In pursuing the reform of Islam, Tazi resorts to the notion of "hyperbology," coined and developed by French philosopher Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, to locate the agency of Muslims in modernity. Tazi works with a certain reading of Lacoue-Labarthe's concept of hyperbology of the subject that we differ with here because it entrenches this notion within a rhetoric of crisis, something which Lacoue-Labarthe does not do. The collection of his essays translated into English under the title *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy and Politics*, tells us that, since Kant, efforts to absolutize the subject, "ha[ve] fallen prey to a certain *precipitation* . . . a certain panic."⁹ Tazi turns to hyperbology as a means of explaining how this panic is present in the excessive representation of Islamic subjectivity that allows *janna* to be instrumentalized as terror. But, in doing so, Tazi emphasizes only one aspect of Lacoue-Labarthe's argument. In what follows, I take up the full consequences of Lacoue-Labarthe's argument in order to raise the question of how these consequences afford another reading of the crisis Tazi invokes. Before doing so however, I follow the path that brings Tazi to Lacoue-Labarthe, specifically, the path that runs through psychoanalysis and its language of desire and excess, as well as her dialectical account of subjectivity.

Tazi's attempt to put the experience of Muslim subjects into the political discourse of our modern epoch occurs in a recently published volume entitled *Islam and Psychoanalysis of the S-Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique*. In the introduction to the volume, editors Sigi Jöttkandt and Joan Copjec evoke terms that call for the urgent questioning of Islam "in this incisive moment in its history" and its relationship to modern modalities of rational inquiry. Urgency, the urgency of interrogation, is the rhetorical device

9 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* 142.

in which the quickening of time instantiates the crisis of Islam. Of interest here is how it retreats behind the insipidness and predictability of a secularist rationality that leaves its political projects unchallenged. In the introduction, we read:

... the questions we have wanted to ask about the precise relation of secular male authority to religious authority in the Islamic world. But how can we pose these questions in the language of psychoanalysis in which some of us think? ... You will find it has a lot to say on these matters of the separateness and incommensurability of individual subjects and cultures and the problem of judgment ... The special issue of *S* – together with that of our sister journal *Umbr(a)* – on the topic of Islam could therefore not be more urgent ...¹⁰

Tazi's laconically titled "Jannah" within this volume interrogates Islam (both its tradition of classical interpretation and its present context) by assigning "gender" as the standard that determines our modern categories of emancipatory progress. The emergence of a gendered Islamic subject will inevitably be the object of the psychoanalytic demystification of Islam that Tazi takes up. She does so in accordance with the "hopes" of the volume to "seize Islam as an unseen, averted knowledge through which the stubborn and enigmatic imperative, 'Be psychoanalytic!' might be taken up."¹¹ The rhetoric of the crisis of Islam is here precipitated by a symptomatic imperative directed at Islam through its subjects – its gendered subjects.

For Tazi, what *janna* brings to our thinking about modernity and Islam lies in establishing the proper boundaries between Islam and Islamism. She asks, "Where does Paradise begin? Where does the world end? Where is the boundary between the political and the religious? And, in the modern context, where does Islam end and Islamism begin?"¹² The ability to separate the two is insisted upon in order to purge the gendered pathology that Tazi claims is specific to Islamism, and introduces the differentiations so crucial to the secular reform of Islam. Tazi establishes these separations within the rhetoric of modern dialectics that interpolates (what Tazi refers to as) the speculative tradition of Islam into a linear progressive history. She states,

10 Jöttkandt and Copjec, *Islam and psychoanalysis* 3.

11 Ibid., 4.

12 Tazi, *Jannah* 35, note 5.

Tell me what *Jannah* is to you, and I will tell you who you are and what you desire. I will know if you are a libertine, a scholar, a philosopher or a mystic. Without seeking to appraise your spiritual understanding or moral fortitude, I will know the extent of your understanding, the nature of your intellectual and religious affinities and the historical tradition upon which you draw. Last but not least, if you are a man I will know how you view women and the sexual order in general. And from all that I will be able to divine where you stand in relation to modernity.¹³

This excerpt precipitates what throughout the rest of the article becomes a virtuosic display of Tazi's command of the primary sources that make up the tradition of Islam. Her reading renders *janna* the pivot to thinking of temporality and politics as constitutive of the dialectics of theology and philosophy out of which the gendered subject is produced. Moreover, it does so by placing the consummate modern subject, here "I," in the position to *limit janna* epistemologically: "I will tell you . . . I will know . . . I will know the extent . . . I will know how you view . . . I will be able to *divine*." This "I" establishes itself as the repetition of the modern predication of limits of transcendent epistemology – the foundational move of the rhetoric of the crisis of Islam. This founding repetition of modernist limits secures Tazi's faith in the singularity of modern secularity, as well as her platform ("I") from which she evaluates the proper confines of Islamic notions of transcendence. What proceeds from the reiterative rhetoric of her discriminating interrogation are questions that all presume the sense of limit to *janna* on which crisis feeds.

Tazi's iteration of the thinking and discriminating "I" serves to normalize it by rhetorically reproducing it as the inheritor of the enlightenment's doctrine of critical reason. To do so she cultivates the subject of the teleological narrative of modernity into a subject that is full of its own consciousness as the agent of that narrative. Tazi's rhetoric of Islam in crisis sets itself against this self-recognition by posing the danger of the "lethargy" of contemporary paradisaal visions for the vitalism of the Islamic subject's rational inquiry. That lethargy, Tazi contends, brings the tradition of Islam to its point of conflict with a progressive epistemology:

Islamism sweepingly disavows the intelligibility, rooted in both philosophy and mysticism, which identifies the real, the true and the invisible. Its great leap backwards begins with the repudiation of the *zâhir* (the apparent) and the *bâtin* (the esoteric) two fundamental states without

13 Ibid., 28.

which the eschatology – and hence the road to the Hereafter – lose their sense. It would be no exaggeration to say that this literalist and jurist reduction eliminates Islam's most brilliant speculative legacy... The lazier the thinking, the more ostentatious the channels through which it is presented.¹⁴

So described, Islamism is an attack on knowledge and a betrayal of the classical tradition of Islamic thought, which reverses its trajectory and veers it off its modernist path through retrograde hermeneutics and the political degeneration caused by religious law. This postulating of a specific form of the Islamic tradition – Islamism, a form among forms, and one that she has not nuanced – is necessary to Tazi's separation of Islam from Islamism. Islamism is *the freezing point of thought* as Tazi so provocatively describes it, an obscurantist sacrality which paralyzes reflection, eschews the acculturated propriety and reasonable judgment of classical Islamic thought, and prevents its advance into modernity.¹⁵ In this way, Tazi produces two possibilities for Islamic subjectivity. First, there is the Islamist male subject that is responsible for impeding Islamic thought through the misplacement of agency and the anesthetization of rationality. Or, there is the idealized subject of a rational Islam and/or a subjective, highly personalized, and highly privatized mystical state. (Despite an unfaltering obligation to the enlightenment however, this humanistic subject does not primarily concern himself with – i.e., does not think through – communal adherence to Islam nor the political and social possibilities made possible by such an adherence.)

Instead of reason, what activates the masculine subject of Islam put forward by Tazi is the Islamist desire for and guarantee of infinite satiation. She writes, "the Islamist doxa – true to the dogma – promises to the righteous, sex, sex and more sex, *ad infinitum*."¹⁶ To this end, in Tazi's reading, the tradition's promised *ḥūrī* of *janna* surfaces from the allegorical and imaginal dimensions of

14 Ibid., 32.

15 Other scholars specialized in the psychology of Islamic masculinity, such as Durre S. Ahmed, may not find Tazi's definition of Islamism sufficiently nuanced. Ahmed's conceptualization of the psychology of Islamic fundamentalism, in *Masculinity, rationality and religion*, with regards to the "psycho-philosophical aspects of modernity" is elaborated as variegated. Furthermore, her analysis contradicts the lack of rationality that is imputed here to Islamism.

16 Tazi, Jannah 29. Readers may take note of the contribution of Baum to masculinity studies (*Chasing horses*), in which he critiques the Orientalist exploitation of the image of Arab Islamic masculinity as encased in cultural and physical impotence in the sexualization and exoticization of images of Palestinian masculinity and femininity.

the fountains, gardens, valleys, and rivers, resplendent with the most sensual of Arabian finery, into the figure of desire distorted by the modern caprices of Islamists. Tazi writes:

There are none of the descriptions, the details, the admiration which once revealed her; she has become a mere shadow, a pure promise of flesh. . . . Her evanescent contours shaped entirely for male sexual pleasure, like the body glorious she exists for no other reason than to serve as a vehicle (for the desires of the righteous) or a rattle to be brandished during ideological disputes.¹⁷

The *ḥūrī* performs two intimately related roles: For Tazi, she is the misplaced masculinist teleology of virginity and object of suicide bombers' desire, and, the dissymmetric reflection of Islamist male power within which Muslim women are caught and reduced to mechanical and disembodied dimensions.¹⁸ Hence, Tazi has the *ḥūrī* intercede between the inertia of male agency and its mechanics for female subjugation.

The *ḥūrī* is the model for which limits will surely need to be established! And they are – modernist, feminist ones in which the spectral *ḥūrī* points Tazi to the violent and ideological dimensions of Islam that must be dissected from modernity's project of freedom and emancipation, a project to which Tazi is clearly committed. Speaking of the androcentric order of Islamists whose sexual identity subjects women, Tazi states: "We must substitute the identity-based terminologies with the ideas and experiences of liberty . . . Remember that the political question involves the emancipation of both sexes, who are inextricably bound together in the domestic arena."¹⁹ This figuring of the *ḥūrī* allows Tazi to displace the violence of politics on to the perversion of sexual politics and to critically differentiate between a liberated subject and the now revived extreme, puritanical, patriarchal, fantastical, combative, austere masculine subject of Islam who is guilty of conflating the sacred with the

17 Tazi, Jannah 30–1.

18 Ibid. Tazi seems unsure as to where to ascribe the catatonics of mechanicity. In an earlier essay, she defines the subject of virility as a macho: "Il n'y a rien d'étonnant à ce qu'il soit peint comme un automate qui émet et reçoit des signaux pouvant anticiper ou annuler la pensée. Un être machinique qui est lui-même machine par la famille, le milieu, l'État, la loi communautaire, la nation; qui gendarme la vie, comme d'autres la mettent en musique ou l'extasient." Later on in the same article she refers to them as "des automates" that "s'adonnent à l'art de la mort." Tazi, *Le désert perpétuel* 33, 43.

19 Tazi, Jannah 42.

profanity of politics. In this way, Tazi correlates her critique of Muslim virility to the unsecularized limits of *janna*, which she defines as “articulat[ing] the eschatological anticipation enshrined in totalitarian slogans, a sectarian messianism and a pathological view of the masculine and the feminine which is quite specific to Islamism.”²⁰ Tazi’s commitment to the secular promise of redemption is repeated throughout her work, for example, when she states that the masculine subjectivity of Islamists and fundamentalism are the “virile foundation of Islam,” or that “virility has . . . not been secularized.”²¹ The epistemological value that *janna* bears for Tazi is dependent on a secular corrective to gender inequality that directs the path of the modern subject away from the wayward masculinity that makes *janna* the crisis point of Islam.

20 Ibid., 29.

21 Tazi and Benslama, *Présentation*, 6. Tazi, *Le désert perpétuel* 30. Over the last two decades, scholarly concern with questions of gender and power has increasingly investigated the relationship of men to patriarchal privilege. What has emerged is an understanding of the definition, performance, and constitutedness of masculinity as varying over culture and time, across social, political, ethnic, biological, sexual, and economic lines, and as susceptible to hegemonic and subordinate constructions. While the Middle East and North Africa have attracted much consideration with regards to questions of women, gender, and the regulation of femininity, scant attention has been paid to masculinity in Islamic cultures. A more recent and welcome exception is Lahoucine Ouzgane’s edited volume, *Islamic masculinities*, which grapples with enabling a thorough and clear examination of the issue of Islamic masculinity “without fuelling Eurocentric, anti-Arab, and anti-Islamic bigotry.” (2) The volume explores the transformation of traditional and spiritual Islamic ideals of femininity and masculinity, and of the social and familial ties by the nation building aspirations of modern states deemed Islamic. Ouzgane’s aims are pointed in his insistence that any examination of Islamic masculinity is necessarily and specifically a product of and constructed within different locales and particular political settings, something that seems to escape Tazi’s analysis. Her identification of Islamic masculinity with suicide bombers should invite the reader to examine the specific and volatile nationalist setting of Israel and Palestine as discussed by scholars such as Massad in *Conceiving the masculine*, Peteet in *Male gender*, and Rothenberg in *Spirits of Palestine*. Their analysis of the ways in which Muslim masculinity is bundled with notions of state, territory, the politics of diaspora and return, and with notions of martyrdom, family honor, and the male as family provider, to name just a few of its imbrications, sheds serious doubt on Tazi’s singular focus on virility as the favored modality of Islamic masculinity in modernity. Additionally, in *Chasing horses*, Baum makes clear how there really can be no discussion of masculinity without femininity, a point which I take up further on in this essay, at the same time as he demonstrates the further legal, administrative, and military imbrications of Palestinian Muslim masculinity and femininity with Israeli masculinity and femininity. Their analysis points to the epistemological danger of short-circuiting Islamic masculinity with the category of suicide-bomber.

Tazi is thus able to mandate a reading of the history of the social and political organization of Islamic community in terms of the accumulation and surplus of the determinative virility of its male subjects: Islamic history begins with the word made virile, which is sedimented throughout successive caliphates, and which then abandons the “sovereignty of the desert” and “the chivalry of the great age” only to be laced with the arcaneness of the discourse of the *seraglio*.²² To illustrate this process, Tazi provides us with an escalating list of what she terms modern “codes of virility”: “veils, beards, minarets, mass movements, spectacular atrocities.”²³ Inscribed within this inflated teleology (note how she unfortunately anchors virility in an absent feminine) is the “bestial destiny” of its contemporary embodiment. Such a culmination is presented by Tazi as an excess of worldly virility that is channeled into transcendence and then resubstantiated immanently as “holy predation,” her description of the operation of male Islamist agency. She qualifies: “*virility* – [is] a quality I should distinguish from masculinity right at the outset, in that it always (and not only in the hereafter) masks hubris, hyperbole and excess.”²⁴ Tazi has us understand

22 Tazi, *Jannah* 33–4. Here, Tazi abandons her previous discussions in “Le désert perpétuel,” of the configurations of power of the modern nation state in Islamic countries and the structural subjectification of males within their despotic regimes, whose virility serves to “sully the Islamic tradition,” and “betray the Muhammadan gesture.” Tazi understands the relationships between men and women as caught within a microphysics of power and not simply in terms of the facile stratification of state-male-female. This much more nuanced discussion does not locate virility within a determined pattern of Islamic history and tradition, as she does in “*Jannah*.” However, by locating its points of origin in the desert culture of Arab society through a reading of Ibn Khaldūn, Tazi produces a model of progress that is set up to fail in Islamic societies and states. This type of reading is fraught with the usual mythical trope – with all its ethno-fraught presuppositions – of “desert culture” as part of the founding myth of Islam.

23 Tazi, *Jannah* 33.

24 *Ibid.*, 29. Tazi has previously attributed this to the failure of modernity, which she describes as “the antidote to virility” (Tazi, *Le desert perpétuel* 41) and which does not produce the values that it expounds in a uniform manner: “Il reste que la modernité pour fétichisée qu’elle soit dans les idées de liberté et dans la technique – s’avère segmentaire, elle n’agit pas au coeur du théologiqo-politique et de ses puissances symboliques.” Indeed for Tazi, on page 43 of this same essay, modernity is even responsible for the nationalization of virility: “Les ideologies modernes ont surtout reterritorialisés la virilité sur la nation.” It is not clear what Tazi would define as its opposite, though she does seem to be proposing that a rationalist Islamic male subjectivity is one that is stripped of (Arab) virility. For a less “apocalyptic” examination of Arab virility see Goldziher, Murruwa and din. In this article, Goldziher examines the classical notions of masculinity that developed in Islam and in the Greco-Latin world in terms of, for example, the virtue of *hilm*,

that the “supermasculine” vision implanted by the “divine optics” of Islamism is the militant constitution of unifying sovereignty and domination that establishes itself beyond limits and worldly law. Islamist virility is here equated with the kind of machismo celebrated by fascists – that of an unsatiated narcissism that feeds upon itself. This enables Tazi to generate a crisis of rhetoric that *inflates and compounds a reasoning of the unreasonable* that is out of step with and defiant of its modern constitution and confinement.

The vocabulary of desire and excess that Tazi introduces, is, however, polished by a Lacanian etiquette that would give many feminist scholars serious pause, and structures the crisis that lies in Tazi’s representation of Muslim subjectivity. In an article directed at scholars of religion, Sîan Hawthorne, for example, eloquently and succinctly articulates the critique by many feminist scholars of the priority that Lacan attributes to masculinity. She states,

[T]he masculine privilege that Lacan grants to the Symbolic register of language . . . [is] a problematic gendered prioritization that renders all that is symbolically designated ‘feminine’ mute and absent and thus disenfranchised with respect to the sovereignty of language . . . Language requires that the individual take up a masculine speaking position which necessarily implies that language itself is aligned with masculinity, indeed *is* masculinity par excellence: visible, concrete, definitive and divided corporeal entanglements and loyalties.²⁵

i.e., forbearance, patience, and gentleness, which he actually indicates is something of a synonym for “*islām*” as an opposite of *jahl*. More recent discussions stemming from the field of masculinity studies, from scholars such as Roded in *Women in Islam* and which are concerned with the image of the prophet Muḥammad, also identify the pre-Islamic tradition of narrating military exploits (*ayyām al-‘arab*) that shaped Islamic literature and produced other models of masculinity. Roded’s discussion, in *Women in Islamic biographical collections*, of honorable lineage (*nasab*), as a virtue valued by men also complicates the idea of masculinity presented to us by Tazi.

- 25 Hawthorne, (M)Other in the text 167–8. Hawthorne provides an astute reading of the implications of Lacanian theories of ontology, language, and identity to the study of gender and religion. Elizabeth Grosz’s *Jacques Lacan: A feminist introduction* is indicative of how extensive the body of feminist scholarship treating Lacanian psychoanalytic theory by scholars such as Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva. Irigaray’s discussion of mimesis in *Speculum of the other women* can be read as a civilizing performance intending to correct Lacan’s “erasure of the feminine” and could even be read constructively with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe’s treatment of Lacan and mimesis, which we address in the rest of this essay. Julia Kristeva, however, has positioned a more radical critique of Lacan in essays such as “Within the Microcosm of ‘the talking cure,’” which Hawthorne makes productive. On page 175 she advocates for Kristeva’s model for a more “dynamic interrelation

In the readings of Lacan elucidated by Hawthorne and other feminist scholars, male desire is the desire for a totality that is constituted discursively and that culminates in *jouissance*. And female subjectivity comes into existence only negatively through language such that women are discursively subjected and undefined in their own right. This relates to Lacan's controversial proposal, "The woman does not exist," before he became the "the later Lacan" who attempted to formulate another type of *jouissance* that does not retreat into a phallic function. *Jouissance*, a term developed by Lacan (which in its sexual form is phallic and unrelated to the Other) is described by Dylan Evans as the pleasure followed by pain that is beyond language and experienced by the (male) subject when it has exceeded the limits put on its capacity to experience pleasure. In Lacanian language, *jouissance* is "the path towards death" – or, the structure that puts into place the parameters of death.²⁶

Tazi's debt to Lacan is illustrated by her description of *janna* as the promise of never ending sex. This promise is made by Islamic doxa and dogma to its virtuous adherents who "pass straight from *jouissance* to the beatific vision just as they pass through death, with its overtones of martyrdom, this world to the next in a kind of permanent ecstasy."²⁷ In this way, *janna* shapes what Tazi considers the exaggerated desire, the desire in excess of Muslim men and its accumulation, which surpasses even *jouissance*. It is unclear where Tazi positions herself on this Lacanian scale or whether she is providing a corrective to its lack in her account of Islamic masculinity gone wrong. However, her adoption of Lacan's masculinist myopia and its exaggerated emphasis on the masculine subject ultimately results in the loss of the Muslim subject within her discussion. Where exactly is the speaking position of Muslim women in Tazi's discourse? Have Muslim subjects, male and female, here determined anything other than the rhetoric of Islam in crisis? Her discussion of Islamic male subjectivity effectively reinscribes the unrepresentability of women, Muslim women, even further by sustaining the analytic irresponsibility of Lacan on the backs of Muslim men. The latter are thus held accountable for what is already the discursive violence against women, which is in turn conflated with political violence and never empirically considered, verified or discussed.

To this point we can turn to the way in which Tazi's psychoanalytic project of demystifying Islam abjures the very tools of psychoanalysis to which Tazi

between the semiotic and symbolic elements of language" in Kristeva's *Revolution in poetic language* 22ff. Cf. Sian Hawthorne, *Rethinking subjectivity in the gender oriented study of religions*.

26 Evans, *Dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis* 91–2.

27 Tazi, *Jannah* 29.

gives such privileged status. This essay is, after all, where she takes up Jöttkandt and Copjec's imperative "Be psychoanalytic!" as a means of "seizing" Islam. Tazi could argue that other research has not developed notions surrounding the social phenomena of Muslim male subjectivity, i.e., virility. And yet, can one not question her recourse to the generalizing language of psychoanalysis here, framed by a rhetoric of escalating excess within which Islamic history and subjectivity has risen? In other words, should one not be suspicious of the unaccountability of a psychoanalytic approach in which it is theory that renders *social* phenomena comprehensible instead of the attentive subjective practice to which it lays claim – the very same caution Freud expresses in his *Civilization and its Discontents*?²⁸ What if we forgo such concerns and take Tazi on her own terms – would it be unfair to ask her, as a scholar publishing in a journal dedicated to Lacanian critique, what notion of Lacanian subjectivity she is drawing upon or developing? After all, how are we to understand Jöttkandt and Copjec's acquiescence – "Fine; put psychoanalysis on the spot. But then allow it to answer." – ? Or does psychoanalysis have a rhetorical function in which it puts itself into crisis ("on the spot") for the purposes of being able to speak?

The role of psychoanalysis and more specifically, how the question of excess in relation to the subject structures Lacan's treatment of *jouissance*, is importantly developed by Lacoue-Labarthe in both an early text on Lacan, *The Title of the Letter*, and his later development of what he calls hyperbology. While *The Title of the Letter* offers a critique of Lacan's unacknowledged indebtedness to Hegel's dialectical presentation of the subject, Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of hyperbology goes beyond this critique by arguing for an issue that remains undeveloped in both Lacan and Hegel, namely, the question of the difference that excess conceals. Lacoue-Labarthe's account of this difference is pertinent because it recasts Tazi's dependence on *jouissance* and hyperbology as the basis of her critique of Islamist virile subjectivity, as well as her congruent use of these two terms. This questioning establishes the important focus on dialectics in Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of hyperbology, specifically, the fact that the latter counters how, in response to the limitations of Kant's critical philosophy at the beginning of the nineteenth century, German idealism developed a dialectical account of the subject, that is, a subject understood as the effect of what it is mediated through rather than a subject whose unity is based on a

28 Cf. "Paradise and its Discontents: Eschatological Thought in Isma'ili, Hekmati, Shaykhi, Babi and Bahai Thought." This panel, organized and chaired by Todd Lawson at *ISIS-International Society for Iranian Studies*, 2008 Toronto is an example of "subaltern" readings and workings of a paradise discourse in Islam.

transcendental claim. Lacoue-Labarthe focuses on how Hegel uses dialectics to rescue the possibility of a unified subject after Kant. According to Lacoue-Labarthe, Hegel's unified subject belongs to a project whose goal is to establish the identity of the subject in the relation of the particular to the universal – an identity that results from the subject's infinite rediscovery of itself through its self-consciousness in the world. Here, Hegel responds to the fact that in Kant the subject can have no transcendent ground, a condition that, for Hegel, produces a deficiency for the subject. For Lacoue-Labarthe, the question of the excess of subjectivity first takes into account how Hegel seizes upon this deficiency as the opening for a dialectical development of the subject within history.

Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of hyperbology thus intervenes in an understanding of how, for Hegel, the subject is implicated in the dialectical move of recognizing itself in what it is not, a move that is also referred to as a speculative moment because it involves the subject recognizing itself as mirrored in something other than itself. In this way, the transcendent or unifying moment for the subject can be restored and integrated through its dialectical journey in time. Hegel's position is in opposition to Kant for whom the difference between transcendental reason and the understanding of the subject must be maintained. Hegel will thus attempt to recuperate this difference through the time of history. In other words, the impasse in which Kant preserves the transcendent as separate, has now, in Hegel, been displaced into a historical process as differentiation, which becomes the dynamic that sustains the subject through history and time. Lacoue-Labarthe asks, however, whether difference is really accounted for in the dialectical movement that Hegel proposes. Hegel only understands difference as playing a mediating role and thus never exists as pure difference. For Lacoue-Labarthe such a pure difference occurs as an excess that Hegelian dialectic cannot account for. This is the problem that Lacoue-Labarthe finds unresolved in Lacan's account of *jouissance* and from which he disassociates himself. It also marks an important difference which Tazi does not take up in her use of hyperbology.

The distance Lacoue-Labarthe takes from Lacan is evident in his earlier study, *The Title of the Letter*, which he co-authored with Jean-Luc Nancy. This volume provides an introduction to the modern problem of the subject in terms that allow us to grasp the relationship between Tazi's use of the language of *jouissance* and excess, and her subsequent turn to hyperbology to explain the significance of *janna* to terror. Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation in *The Title of the Letter* specifically addresses a seminal essay by Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" in order to argue that Lacan reinscribes a foundational subject into a metaphysics of truth, the very

foundationalism that Kant and Hegel sought to avoid. Despite Lacan's claims to the contrary, and despite his attempts to prevent the relationship between subject and alterity from being wholly assimilated into a dialectical movement, Lacoue-Labarthe insists that Lacan is still founding the subject through dialectics i.e., the dialectical mediation that Lacan sought to suspend is still at work. His reading of Lacan brings into focus this reinscription through the latter's understanding of the subject as desire, more specifically, as *jouissance*: "[w]hen it is a question of desire, it is Hegel who intervenes in the text, albeit anonymously."²⁹ What then, does he mean when he states that Hegel intervenes in Lacan's text, or better still, how does Hegel intervene? Lacan, he argues, reads the subject according to a Hegelian dialectic in which the self is sustained in relationship to the other by desire, i.e., desire locates *jouissance* in dialectics. This signifies that the subject is maintained dialectically in its relationship to the Other, and that this relationship is the basis of desire. (Here, the Other in Lacan produces the dialectic of desire in the same way the absolute produces mediation in Hegel.) There is not enough space to take up in detail Lacoue-Labarthe's investigation of this aspect of Lacan's thinking. What interests us instead are the important consequences of Lacoue-Labarthe's critique of Lacan's account of *jouissance* for Tazi's treatment of the subject.

The focus of Lacoue-Labarthe's critique lies on Lacan's claim that the structure of *jouissance* suspends dialectics by refusing a synthesis or moment of completion. Because Lacan argues that desire is meaningful for the subject as long as it is not fulfilled, the dialectics of desire can never be completed. Lacan writes, "*jouissance* must be refused, so that it can be reached on the inverted ladder of the Law of desire."³⁰ In this dense remark, Lacan's conception of the Other is formulated in opposition to Hegel for whom alterity is always mediated and endlessly assimilated. However, Lacoue-Labarthe points out that since the failure of desire to complete itself in *jouissance* is an effect of alterity, then the Other nevertheless maintains a dialectical relationship to the subject, albeit negatively. In this way, the Other always keeps desire alive for Lacan by preventing any transcendent or absolute *jouissance*. He states, "And this alterity . . . commands the structure, if you will, of *jouissance*: ' . . . *jouissance* fulfilled has indeed the positive significance that self-consciousness has become objective to *itself*; but equally, it has the negative one of having sublated *itself*.'"³¹

29 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Title of the letter* 121.

30 Cited by Lacoue-Labarthe, *Title of the letter* 122.

31 Ibid., 123–4. The passage that Lacoue-Labarthe cites is from Hegel's *Phenomenology of spirit*. The fact that this contains a modified translation of Hegel is evident in his use of "*jouissance*" (and "sublated") where Hegel actually states *Befriedigung* which in the

That Other is always understood as something which does not accomplish jouissance but which is dialectical because it mediates jouissance and at the same time distances it. Lacoue-Labarthe refers to this as a diversion from, but not a suspension of, Hegel's dialectical account of the subject:

Lacan's diversion of Hegel first consists in turning the dialectic of desire into a negative discourse. Lacanian dialectic thus governs a constant disappropriation of the subject against the background of absence and division by the Other, whereas Hegelian dialectic governs its process of appropriation against the background of presence and the reduction of alterity.³²

Lacoue-Labarthe contends that the Hegelian dialectic of consciousness has been appropriated by Lacan for the psychoanalytic subject, if only in order to negate and disappropriate it. Thus, the same principle of negativity is at work in Hegel and Lacan. The only difference is that in Hegel it is turned toward the absolute, whereas in Lacan it is turned toward the Other. "Or, more precisely, it is the same process of alienation or negativity which can no longer 'simply' be understood in reference to the Absolute, but rather to the Other."³³ Despite Lacan's attempt to suspend the dialectic, this dialectic nevertheless remains an end "of reintegration and agreement."³⁴ As such, jouissance-as-excess does not bring an end to dialectics but rather refolds the subject within the dialectics whose purpose is thus maintained.

In two essays from a volume entitled *Typography*, Lacoue-Labarthe develops the question of this excess by examining how hyperbology is at work within it. Linking the development of the question of dialectics to the problem of mimesis in speculative thinking, Lacoue-Labarthe asks,

But as regards "Plato," what happens here? Is the infinitization of the *mise-en-abyme*, its "hyperbolic" character, enough to compensate for the

English translation by A.V. Miller appears as "satisfaction." The quotation is drawn from this sentence, which in the German original reads as follows: "Um der Selbständigkeit des Gegenstandes willen kann es daher zur Befriedigung nur gelangen, indem dieser selbst die Negation an ihm vollzieht; und er muß diese Negation seiner selbst an sich vollziehen, denn er ist *an sich* das Negative, und muß für das Andere sein, was er ist." Hegel, *Phänomenologie* 144.

32 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Title of the letter* 124.

33 Ibid., 122.

34 Ibid., 124. Here, Lacoue-Labarthe is quoting Lacan's own terminology.

appropriation of mimesis, for its onto-ideo-logical reduction? Is the use of *a* mimetic means enough to conjure mimesis? Can this means be the means of all means? Is it essentially a question, in mimesis, of *reflection*?³⁵

Here, Lacoue-Labarthe addresses a central problem in philosophy since Plato: the idea that there is only one thing that is the same in itself. With Plato, identity, mimesis, and analogy thus become the means by which sameness is reintegrated as a relation between two things in history.³⁶ The subject emerges within this history through what Lacoue-Labarthe calls a “*speculative apparatus*,” a notion that produces a *mise-en-abyme* – the mirror image, in which the subject contemplates, reflects, interiorizes itself, and sees itself as infinitely mirrored in its own absence. Implicit to this apparatus is the setting up of a dialectic between absence and presence, whereby the present subject (or the presence of the subject) is constantly mediated through its absence, which in turn becomes the sign of its presence. In “The Caesura of the Speculative,” (the essay from which Tazi has drawn in her use of hyperbology), Lacoue-Labarthe explains that when the image takes the place of something absent, this establishes a dialectical logic, a speculative dialectics, which sets in motion the “absolutization or that paradoxical infinitization of the Subject within which philosophy will find its completion.”³⁷ Contained within this process is the possibility of the “limit” which will demarcate the moment in which “the speculative (de)constitutes itself,” and, in Lacoue-Labarthe’s terms, “dismantles itself, deconstructs itself in the same movement by which it erects itself . . .”³⁸ It is the possibility of this limit that will enable Lacoue-Labarthe to disrupt the repetitive reinscription of dialectics and provide a resolution to the accumulating excess within its function.

To do so, Lacoue-Labarthe recasts the dialectical logic of mimesis as “hyperbology” and describes it in terms of the excess of both presence and loss produced in its mirror-imaging.³⁹ This reflection of the subject within the speculative moment allows the subject to exceed itself through its own reflection. And yet, for Lacoue-Labarthe, the condition of the subject’s excess is also its loss in so far as it will always be less than what it could be without its reflection. Hence, the subject’s excess is always the condition of its own finitude,

35 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* 95.

36 For a discussion of the nature and function of historical understanding with respect to mimesis and its origin, see Ferris, *Theory and the evasion* 1–36.

37 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* 217.

38 *Ibid.*, 212.

39 *Ibid.*, 221.

which Lacoue-Labarthe understands as a moment of (dis)appropriation that brings the subject face to face with its own finitude. He states,

I should emphasize, however, that only the “hyperbologic” is undoubtedly capable of accounting for the scheme of the “double turning about” . . . according to which the very excess of the speculative switches into the very excess of submission to finitude (a scheme in which the “categorical” turning about of the divine corresponds to the *volte-face*, as Beaufret says, of man toward the earth, his pious infidelity, and his extended wandering “under the unthinkable,” which fundamentally define the Kantian age to which we belong).⁴⁰

For Lacoue-Labarthe dialectics is inevitable and it is false to assume that he believes dialectics can be overcome with something external to itself – there is no outside to dialectics. While this is fundamentally the critique he levels at Lacan, for whom the “other” functions as external to a dialectics maintained by the subject’s desire, Lacoue-Labarthe is still left with the problem of what to do with the latter’s excess. To resolve this, he turns to what “dislocates [the speculative] *from within*.” Lacoue-Labarthe conceives of this as an “immobilization,” and “suspension” produced by a moment that cannot be mediated by anything else and which arrests and distorts the ability of dialectics to exhaust and fully integrate itself.⁴¹ This is described by Lacoue-Labarthe in the following way:

[T]his dialectical starting device, constantly reengaged, always lacks a principle of resolution. Everything happens, therefore, as though we were dealing with (and with nothing more than) a kind of immobilized attenuation of a dialectical process that marks time in an interminable oscillation between the two poles of an opposition, always infinitely distant from each Other. The act of suspension is this: quite simply, the incessant repetition of the engaging of the dialectical process in the – never changing – form of *the closer it is, the more distant it is; the more dissimilar it is, the more adequate it is; the more interior it is, the more exterior it is*. In short, the maximum of appropriation (for the perpetual comparison here originates in a movement of passing to the limit, the proceeds necessarily from a logic of excess – of the superlative) is the maximum of disappropriation, and conversely.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., 232.

⁴¹ Ibid., 227.

⁴² Ibid., 230.

Lacoue-Labarthe does not place suspension outside of dialectics, nor does this suspension bring dialectics to an end. Suspension occurs with and is internal to dialectics; dialectics carries suspension along with itself as a condition of its movement. It is therefore not a stasis but an incessant repetition of an unmediatizable moment that suspends dialectics as a movement that cannot overcome the difference it produces. This suspension creates *endless separation*, or an excess of separation within the dialectical movement. He describes this as the *mise-en-abyme* in which the speculative reflection incessantly divides reflection from reflection to the point of its distortion. For Lacoue-Labarthe the subject's apprehension of itself has to be translated into the moment of its articulation; this moment is what he will call the "caesura." Here, he follows the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, who in his discussion of tragedy, defines the "caesura" as "the pure word, the counter-rhythmic intrusion." On the basis of this remark, Lacoue-Labarthe describes Hölderlin as having "*caesuraed the speculative*." With the "caesura" Lacoue-Labarthe introduces an element within the dialectical practice besides what it mediates: the moment of speculative distortion, which is the non-articulation/interruption that always accompanies articulation.

The consequences of Lacoue-Labarthe's reading for Tazi begin with the fact that she limits herself to the mediating function of hyperbology without taking into account the *internalized* interruption out of which excess is produced. In this respect, she adheres to the diversion Lacoue-Labarthe criticizes in Lacan's account of *jouissance* – an adherence that she carries over into her understanding of Lacoue-Labarthe's concept of hyperbology and which then makes *janna* into the accomplishment of desire/*jouissance*. This is evident in the following description that she provides for *janna*: "Surpassing any form of representation or comparison, it can be thought of only as 'the end,' in every sense of the word: the end of thought itself, if not a transcendental idea of the conditions under which the end is possible, as a release expedited by faith."⁴³

Here, Tazi has formulated *janna* as a liberation or escape from dialectics by means of desire. These are the grounds on which Tazi will place hyperbology as the impulse of male Islamist violence and then make *janna* resolve the dialectical problem of endless or excessive reinscription.

To do so, Tazi first establishes the death drive through *jouissance* that is produced out of hyperbology, "A violence, in other words, which scandalously promises a hyperbolic continuity between this world and the next, between the most mortal of deaths and eternal life."⁴⁴ For Tazi, hyperbole, or the

43 Tazi, *Jannah* 28.

44 *Ibid.*, 29.

hyperbolic, is *janna* and unites life and death within the expansion of force that she attributes to the irrational subject of virility through its desire and excess: "The hyperbole of *Jannah* is already etched into the shattered face of our century, underpinned by death, as if the afterlife were utterly suffused with extreme violence."⁴⁵ In stating that "the expression of virility [is] the pursuit of sovereignty, hyperbolism . . .," Tazi posits the Islamist subject as the conduit for "hyperbology," a concept that elaborates her Lacanian gloss of jouissance.⁴⁶ This subject is trapped within the hyperbological dialectics of excessive desire,⁴⁷ to which, she argues, he is compelled to put an end:

In all the countless dramas affecting the Islamic world . . . we can interpret the Islamist position based upon the devastating aporiae of virilist hyperbology and its counter-effects. There comes a time when, caught in the asymptote of the virile, *dialectics cease to function* and, in response to political tragedies, we allow relationships to be invested by fascist impulses. Fed by a vicious circle of impotencies and humiliations, the game of double bind becomes the consuming male passion; the means whereby he, wounded, is able to wound life in return.⁴⁸

To interrupt the amalgamating properties of a modern dialectics is to put it into crisis and Tazi leaves no rhetorical way out except for the Islamist position to fold back into fascism with the suspension of dialectics. Tazi's assertion of dialectics over male violence here makes her investment in dialectics clear: Once violence is eliminated, all that is left is functioning dialectics. Virilist hyperbology, which leads to the cessation of dialectics, is a threat to the dialectically based position Tazi wishes to affirm. The disparity in her use of Lacoue-Labarthe is produced by the fact that she does not take into account the limit that exists within dialectics and which prevents it from ever ceasing. Instead, she protects dialectics the same way Lacan protects dialectics by always locating the Other on the outside: For Tazi, *janna* operates like the unattainable Other in Lacan. The excess that commands and leads to *janna* or Lacan's jouissance, thus breaks through dialectics. Tazi is here surpassing even Lacan for whom the subject does not accomplish the desire. Let us recall that Lacoue-Labarthe sees the limit within dialectics in terms of the empty articulation (the caesura) that resides inside it; this empty articulation is the excess dialectics

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 37.

47 Ibid., 39.

48 Ibid., 41, emphasis added.

can never eliminate. For Tazi, despite the appeal to Lacan and hyperbology, that limit is relocated in *janna* by desire. Tazi is thus strongly suggesting that hyperbology, as, for example, the explosion of the desire of the suicide bomber into *janna*, destroys the dialectic, i.e., dialectics are thus suspended from the "outside." By pushing the question of hyperbology beyond excess and into its destruction, Tazi also overreads Lacoue-Labarthe for whom the suspension of dialectics does not ever cease its functioning.

To best approach how Tazi overstates Lacoue-Labarthe's notion of hyperbology, one must turn to her description of an "endless hyperbological circle," and ask, what does she expose by qualifying dialectics with circularity? Firstly, we now know from Tazi's argument that "The Muslim man's relationship with the carnal . . . puts him in a *double bind*."⁴⁹ In relationship to this, Tazi is also referring to the Islamist subject's lack of escape from the irrelevance of the transcendental to the material world of politics. In another moment in the text Tazi discusses the implications of his insistence on bringing the otherworldly dimensions to politics, that is to say, in the name of sacred law, "Affixing itself to the Law is the element of history, a political provision bringing with it a second *double bind*. In deferring to despotic power, this fundamentally separates Islamic society from the classical Greek tradition with which it appears to be allied."⁵⁰ Islamic society's lack of conformity to modernity lies in its refusal to fall in line with classical Greek thinking. To deviate from this legacy is to guarantee the political tyranny that is supposedly absent from a Greek inspired West. The rhetoric of Islam in crisis here preserves the singularity of linear progress from a prescribed point of origin and then throughout a defined history. The crisis of modernity is thus the crisis of an Islam caught in a vicious circle spun out of the dialectics of the modern only to chase and be chased by consuming violence.

The circular causality that for Tazi is contained in hyperbology takes place within political contradictions, oppositions, and conditions that build up into irrational excess and feed and fortify the Islamist male ego.⁵¹ Tazi contends,

The hyperbological complications hem him in on all sides, affecting his points of references, his formal roles and his abilities, without his machismo ever letting up on its demands for satiation . . . For all this, and unremitting in their submission to hyperbolic and disjunctive logics,

49 Ibid., 36.

50 Ibid., 39.

51 Ibid., 40. "[T]he antinomies and crazy excesses of hyperbology. In all of this there is a circular causality linking the sovereign and his subjects . . ."

macho values are all the more resilient now that they are focused upon the domestic arena. The newspapers are full of stories relating how these constraints and dyschronic developments torment society. *What a wretched picture all of this reveals, of a masculinity and gender politics pushing the world into reverse.*⁵²

Tazi has displaced the question of the excess that resides within virilist hyperbology, where the virile is set into a hyperbological state of an unceasing cycle of alternation. Therefore, what Tazi has omitted from Lacoue-Labarthe's dialectics of hyperbology is the problem of the excess of separation, which does not equal never-ending cycling. Positing an endless cycle to hyperbology is a move that remains consonant with Lacan, where endless desire is the interminable oscillation between subject and object. In leaving out the excess of separation, what she takes from Lacoue-Labarthe instead is a movement of alternation that she refers to as establishing endless cycling. In other words, in confusing endless separation with the excess of separation Tazi has stopped short of Lacoue-Labarthe's hyperbology. To repeat: for Lacoue-Labarthe the excess remains within the dialectics and is present in the caesura that is inherent to its operation and which interrupts the rhythm of its endless repetition in the form of "the closer it is the more distant it is" etc. This difference is crucial and because of it Lacoue-Labarthe could rephrase Tazi's argument as follows: *The excess of the speculative, jouissance, switches into the very excess of submission to finitude and not submission to Allah or janna.* This means that instead of an endless hyperbological circle that undoes the dialectics of belief in *janna*, Lacoue-Labarthe speaks of the caesura of the speculative as bringing to a halt, or disarticulating, the process of alternations: "It prevents the racing oscillation, *crazed panic* and an orientation towards this or that pole."⁵³ In other words, Lacoue-Labarthe posits hyperbology as containing the excess of oscillation between finitude and infinite *within it*, which is disarticulated not by *janna* and not by the finite on the other hand, but by an empty moment which is the caesura.

Lacoue-Labarthe's reading of the caesura comes out of his treatment of tragedy in Hölderlin and, accordingly, is suggestive of how Tazi engages with the discussion of religion and sacrifice. Caught by his "speculative desire for the infinite and the divine," the tragic figure in Hölderlin turns toward the infinite. And yet, that movement increases his distance with and estrangement from the divine so that instead of *janna* or a finite moment, he is met with the excess

52 Ibid., 41, emphasis added.

53 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* 235.

of his own finitude.⁵⁴ For Lacoue-Labarthe, hyperbology is the effect of this impossibility in so far as it is about the intolerability of a limitless separation from the divine as a condition of the subject's desired unification with it.⁵⁵ The moment of tragedy lies in the subject's attempt to unite with the divine and escape from its speculative desire through death. This escape is what Lacoue-Labarthe refers to as the moment of sacrifice, "Tragedy, then, is the catharsis of the speculative. Which means also the catharsis of the religious itself and of the sacrifice."⁵⁶ His description of religious sacrifice is one that Tazi would support in her discussion of the desire of suicide bombers. Speaking of the death of the tragic figure, he says,

He is destroyed not by directly provoking the punishment, but by calling up the old ritual of the scapegoat victim. He is destroyed, in short, by his belief in . . . religious "mechanisms," which are in fact, though with regard to a different concept of religion, "sacrilegious" mechanisms, because they presuppose the transgression of the human limit, the appropriation of a divine position . . .⁵⁷

The moment of death, the moment of tragedy, is what Lacoue-Labarthe calls the "catharsis of the speculative." This is the moment of "*jouissance*" in Tazi's discussion of terror, but it is also where she stops and thereby avoids how Lacoue-Labarthe introduces the hyperbologic precisely to arrest its culmination in death.

The issues raised by Tazi's reading of Lacoue-Labarthe (and Lacan) have more at stake than whether she is working accurately with his concepts or not. They have to do with the type of subject positions that are produced for Muslims and what room they are assigned within modernity. In this regard, scholars dedicated to examining and mapping the existence of Islamist movements in the Middle East and Europe, the very context from which Tazi is writing, as well as the historical and political contexts which have given rise to them will take issue with how Tazi paints Islamism, Islamists, and Islamic "brothers" with violent literalism and juridistic hermeneutics. The important empirical, political, sociological, and anthropological differentiations within and between them, and their striated intersections and divergences are instead brought into crisis within a dialectics of the modern. By extension, one

54 Ibid., 232.

55 Martis, *Representation* 103.

56 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* 232.

57 Ibid., 233.

wonders how she would nuance her argument for the experience of “liberty” and the “emancipation” of women to take into account the scholarship dedicated, for example, to examining the increased production of public piety by Muslim women responding to the now globalized label of oppressed⁵⁸ – or the growing research attesting to the functioning of Islamist movements within democratic political models and the mobilization and promotion of the role of women within these movements.⁵⁹ Even more acute is her silencing of the ways in which women’s participation in Islamist movements have upset normative and liberal notions of freedom, agency, and resistance. Do we not have here a withdrawal from the rationalist tools of modernity at the very moment in which one asserts their primacy? Is this assertion of a rational-less “I” not overriding the very subjects that it claims are oppressed? All that is yielded by this rhetoric of the crisis of Islam is the fact that what remains in crisis is the means of modern rationalist referentiality by which crisis is incessantly identified and not the referent itself.

What puts modernity into crisis for Tazi is the subjectivity of Islamists, which is disproportionate or excessive to the forward succession of time. This view is solidly anchored in modernist secular understandings of temporality in which the unruliness of Islamist agency threatens to reverse the secular advance of modernity into the *arrhythmia* of Islam.⁶⁰ This account is also reinforced by a faith in the synthesizing movement of dialectical modernity borrowed from Hegel, developed by Marx and others. There have been many critiques of the way in which this tradition of thinking about history as dialectical ensures political progress, one of which is the kind that is here generalizing the rhetoric of crisis of Islam.⁶¹ Lacoue-Labarthe is one of these critics who nevertheless formulates his response in terms of a non-dialectical moment within dialectics. It is on this point that we should return to Lacoue-Labarthe for whom the caesura *disarticulates the temporal succession of dialectics*. The caesura, Lacoue-Labarthe contends, impedes,

the racing oscillation, *crazed panic*, and an orientation toward this or that pole. The disarticulation represents the active neutrality of the interval

58 Deeb, *Enchanted modern*.

59 Peter, *Islamic movements*; Burgat, *Face to face*; and Burgat, *The Islamic movement*.

60 Mas, *Islam in secular time*.

61 The most notable among them is probably the one leveled by Michel Foucault in *Archeology of knowledge* in which he began to develop his account of history in relation to Nietzsche’s notion of genealogy, which eschewed linear causes and effects in favor of disruptions and change in order to determine the conditions and possibilities of discourse.

between [entre-deux]. This is undoubtedly why it is not by chance that the caesura is, on each occasion, the empty moment – the absence of “moment” – of Tiresia’s intervention: of the intrusion of the prophetic word . . .⁶²

Lacoue-Labarthe’s response to Tazi would be that the caesura is the absence of the intrusion of *janna*, i.e., it is where *janna* does not intrude. And by intrusion he refers to the problem that is established when the prophetic word is already true. Because the prophetic word for Lacoue-Labarthe is the absent moment out of which time unfolds, there is no time in its moment. It, “*janna*,” is spoken from immanence and therefore awaits its referent, or that which makes it true and actualized in the world. Tazi would surely agree that the establishment of its truth is made retroactively, by the backwards glance of death, and hence its truth belongs to its promise. In other words, in order to be a prophecy, *janna* can only make the promise of fully actualized truth, which is the promise of its reference. As such, it articulates the place for that referent but, as it does so, it makes that referent dependent upon a finite moment – a finite moment that is empty. This is where Tazi departs from Lacoue-Labarthe’s hyperbology. If the prophetic word is the promise that the word is empty, it still has to rely on the word to make that promise; that is its paradox, which means that the achievement of temporal significance lies in its promise of the transcendent. The prophetic word here is Lacoue-Labarthe’s disarticulation of progressive temporality; its caesura suspends the forward rhythm of dialectical articulation. As opposed to Tazi, whose commitment to dialectics makes her stop at the acceleration of the reinscription of dialectics, Lacoue-Labarthe sees acceleration as simply the repetition of reinscription rather than the articulation of meaning. In contrast, through the caesura (the excess of articulation) and its interruptive function, Lacoue-Labarthe allows for the introduction of another temporal cycle of reinscription that is dislodged from and dislocates the successive movement of dialectics. The caesura on which this other temporal cycle is based protects *janna* from instrumentalization. In this way, Lacoue-Labarthe has formulated the caesura so that it cannot be appropriated by crisis toward a purpose, which in this case means toward the type of political project that would systematize the tradition of Islam and its subjects into the predetermined demands of a secular modernity.

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62 Lacoue-Labarthe, *Typography* 235.

Such secularizing readings proceed by making the strands of rationalism and spirituality that it picks and chooses to be representative of an “authentic” Islamic tradition conform to the historical moment of the Enlightenment, the complexity of which it also reduces. This means that the political aspirations of this kind of reading of the Islamic tradition also produce a particular reading of the modernist limits on transcendence, and more specifically on transcendent epistemology. The political urge advancing these readings takes the Islamic traditions of eschatology and turns them into a figure of Islamic apocalypse, one that is easily glossed with images of violence emerging from the Middle East. This figure justifies at the same time as it replicates secularizing governmentality and power, and it does so explicitly by putting itself forward as the stop-gap to the advent of an ever present Islamic apocalypse, where *janna* is its favored agent. Thus, the vast, dynamic eschatological fabric of the Islamic tradition, replete as it is with complex and subtle imagery of the afterlife that shapes the experience, culture, practices, daily life, beliefs, and theories of its practitioners and scholars, is dealt a remarkably reductive blow. This blow is leveled both on the level of culture and politics. If the richness of the eschatological aspect of the Islamic imaginary has heretofore been largely unexplored and understudied, the prospects of it productively shaping a society that supports reciprocal multilateral politics and interdependence are increasingly grim. This is especially true if the tradition of Islamic paradise and the hereafter is forcibly strained through the political sieve of the secularizing modern nation state and, above all, because of the way in which the latter is also beholden to and enforces very facile notions of the secular.

By now, it is a banal fact that a progressive view of time authorizes and couples both a temporal model of history and the advance of time with the material evidence of civilizational and political progress. And so is the fact that in doing so, this progressive view of time is meant to disinvolve other traditions of temporality and the transcendental notions to which they adhere while duplicitously hanging on to “their own.” After all, the modern politicization of the secular is only enabled by the *constancy* of a specific notion of the religious as transcendence. The question for the secular governmentality of civic and social organization is which notion that can be. In other words, which notion is going to fuel the political administration of the secular and for whom? In the context of the secular nation state that already begrudges its dependency on notions of religion, especially transcendental ones, Islamic notions of transcendence (*janna* etc.) are ripe for exclusion. The reasons seem almost self-evident in so far as it is necessarily conjoined to the material world, such a notion of Islamic transcendence does not provide or replicate the model of civilizational and political progress already established by the modern nation state. To identify

Islamic notions of transcendence as apocalyptic, or, simply put, to couple notions of *janna* with the apocalypse (where the desire for the former invokes the latter) appears to be yet another example of the ploys of political exclusion. And it is; but this rejection is not simply authorized by the foreignness of the notion of *janna*. It operates by denying it any functional link of its own to the material and even secular world. This means that *janna* is only understood transcendentally, which only allows it to perform according to the predetermined duality of immanence and transcendence that has evolved out of the Christian world and the secularizing political apparatus that it subsequently instituted.⁶³ As such, *janna*, confined as it is to the transcendental realm is only in dialectical relationship to the secular material world so as to enable the necessary continuity of its own exclusion, one which puts into play the secular politics of socio-political organization. The problem in a modern context is also that by keeping the notion of *janna* safely ensconced in transcendence, it has narrowed its possibilities to such an extent that any account of *janna* can only be brought about by apocalyptic ambitions. It seems that the Islamic notion of *janna* (let alone heaven on earth) can only be terrifying.

The threat of Islamic apocalypse encased in a dialectic between the religious and the secular, is thus meant to synthesize the transcendent aims of religion out of the realm of secularizing governance. Not only does this beg the questions of why religious ideals are or should only be understood transcendentally, it also raises the question of what actually constitutes Islamic apocalypse. As Todd Lawson has noted, the Greek origins of the meaning of apocalypse do not yield the connotations of mass destruction, catastrophe or annihilation brought on by the end of the world (or misplaced notions of *janna*) traditionally evoked by contemporary notions of apocalypse. Apocalypse simply means revelation. Lawson's rich and sophisticated reading demonstrates how apocalypse, or the event of revelation, establishes a narrative framework in the Quran that discloses new ethical knowledge. A central feature of this disclosure appears in the form of conceptual dualities, oppositions and their parallel symmetries that narratively set up the unity of God (*tawhīd*) as the origin and standard of virtue and social responsibility.⁶⁴ This is not a rehearsal of secular and modernistic dialectics between the two poles of religious and secular where the asymmetrical synthesis of the two is meant to eliminate through assimilation the disfavored pole in order to shore up the worldly force

63 For a reading that emphasizes the physical reality of Islamic paradise see Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam*. In the present publication, see also Marmura's reading of the descriptions of physical paradise in Islamic philosophy.

64 Lawson, *Le Coran*.

of the other. Instead, the inviolable notion of *tawhīd* is constantly highlighted in terms of its semantic opposites that give it a “symmetrical counterweight,” which in turn posit the origin of that symmetry in God’s very unity.⁶⁵ In other words, this duality exists for the sole purpose of establishing the oneness (*tawhīd*) of God, what Lawson has termed the ‘apocalyptic reversal’ of dualities and oppositions.⁶⁶ Lawson describes this process within the narrative structure of the Quran: “Thus the Qur’an demonstrates through the orchestration of an equally vast number of interlocking and mutually reinforcing symmetries a heretofore undetected sacred and luminous order of enlightenment and plan.”⁶⁷ Contained within this statement is evidence of Lawson’s meticulous study of the ways in which the apocalypse of the Quran confounds its overall linear narrative, one that resists its cavalier absorption by the modernist dualities that produce progressive notions of time. Instead, the Quran is punctuated by the temporal markers of the Day (*al-yawm*), and the Hour (*al-sā’a*), which “is simultaneously a time of self-awareness and of social responsibility,”⁶⁸ i.e., a reminder of the chaos (one of the principle semantic oppositions of *tawhīd*) that is the ethical duty of all humans to ward off. Within the foundational text of the Islamic tradition, apocalypse can thus be understood as keeping apocalypse at bay.

Crucial to Lawson’s analysis of apocalyptic temporality is the way it generates a new epistemology. The apocalypse as the revelation of new knowledge inaugurates the historical period of the Islamic age that supercedes the *jāhili* age of ignorance by semantically positing Islam “as the polar opposite of *jahl* [so that] it comes to be understood precisely as ‘enlightenment’ rather than mere submission.”⁶⁹ It is precisely this “modernity,” as Lawson puts it, that not only “challenged the entrenched social and cultural mores of [Muḥammad’s] time and place,”⁷⁰ it also continues to challenge the mores of contemporary modernity. Contrary to the claims of secular critics of the Islamic tradition and

65 Lawson, *Coherent chaos* 185. See also Lawson, *Duality* 26. His analysis of symmetry is here supplemented with a discussion of typological figuration, a very important element to the discussion of apocalyptic temporality. Unfortunately space does not allow me to pursue it at this time.

66 Lawson, *Duality* 32.

67 Lawson, *Coherent chaos*, 189–90; Lawson, *Duality* 27, 33.

68 Lawson, *Le Coran* 53. Quotations are from the English original, Lawson, *The Qur’an and the apocalyptic imagination*, available at http://toddlawson.ca/pdf/lawson_quran_apocalyptic_imagination.pdf.

69 Lawson, *Duality* 32.

70 Lawson, *Le Coran* 52.

its people, it does so by apocalyptically positing Islam as that which “stand[s] for the opposite of barbarity, savagery, brutality and vainglory as well as standing for the opposite of ignorance and polytheism.”⁷¹

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In considering the stakes of apocalyptic orientation of the Quran toward the transformation of human behavior away from *jahl*, the last word should be given to Michael Marmura, an eminent scholar of classical Islamic thought beloved by all. His insistence that the integrity of the classical Islamic philosophical tradition lay in the ability of Muslim philosophers to develop their rationalism on Islamic grounds has marked his life's work, his colleagues, and all of us who studied under him. Marmura's discussion in this volume of al-Fārābī's (d. 339/950) ideal of the “virtuous” city (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*) fundamentally compels us to be attentive to the ways in which political justice cannot be restrained by the motivations that produce pre-modern/modern dichotomies and the rationalism that upholds them. His words withstand the vagaries of the politics of time:

Alfarabi discusses those “cities” or political entities that are not virtuous and which he terms “ignorant.” These are ignorant because they follow erroneous concepts of what constitutes true happiness. They consist of “the indispensable,” “the vile,” “the timocratic,” “the despotic,” and “the democratic.” They mistakenly identify sheer survival, wealth, pleasure, honor, power or freedom, with true happiness. Those belonging to such political entities and who follow their erroneous concepts of happiness do not survive death. With death they disintegrate and become part of the process of generation and corruption. Then there are immoral political states where both the leaders and the citizens know what true happiness is, but deliberately forsake it for pleasure, power and so on. In the hereafter their souls live in eternal torment, ever seeking celestial happiness, but never attaining it. There are also “erring cities” where the leadership alone has knowledge of true happiness but deliberately forsakes it. The leaders alone are eternally punished, whereas the rest of the citizens, like those of the ignorant cities, have no afterlife.⁷²

71 Lawson, *Coherent chaos* 189.

72 Marmura in the present publication.

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Bibliographical Appendix

Eschatology and the Hereafter in Islam

This bibliography of primary and secondary sources is of principal importance for research on Islamic eschatology and concepts of the hereafter. It incorporates data provided in individual contributions to the present two volumes, but significantly expands on this by adding titles of primary and secondary sources in major European languages as well as in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish.

Obviously, an appendix cannot hope to achieve comprehensiveness, given the steadily growing bulk of relevant publications, Eastern and Western, and the problems of their accessibility, especially when these publications are not part of Western library systems. For these reasons, and in accordance with the thematic foci of studies included in the two volumes at hand, efforts have been made to achieve a near-complete coverage of the most pertinent publications in major European languages, while the bibliographical material in non-European languages – and here especially those in Persian and Turkish – had to remain selective in character. Thus, the latter two sections should be seen as helpful bibliographical starting points for scholars who wish to work on eschatological themes in those languages. With regard to completeness, this bibliographic appendix should be seen as a work in progress. A bibliography of Islamic eschatology, the editors have come to learn, is a topic that deserves a separate, discrete, and no doubt substantial volume.

For valuable bibliographic assistance, the Editors gratefully acknowledge the research of Mehmet Bilekli (Göttingen), Yoones Dehghani Farsani (Göttingen), Serdar Güneş (Frankfurt am Main), Dr. Mahmoud Haggag (Cairo), Christian Mauder (Göttingen), Ali Rida Khalil Rizak (Göttingen) and Dr. Omid Ghaemmaghami (Binghamton).

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Indices



Notes on the Indices

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The Index of Proper Names is organized according to the name by which a figure is most commonly known, with cross references as necessary. It includes all mortal figures, including prophets. Groups of people (e.g., Sabians, Mu‘tazilis), angels, and other “beings” (e.g., God, Khidr) appear in the Index of Topics and Keywords. When texts are mentioned in relation to a figure, these are cited in the index by the original titles only.

The Index of Geographical Names and Toponyms includes earthly places. Otherworldly locations (e.g., rivers in paradise, Qāf mountain) appear in the Index of Topics and Keywords.

The Index of Book Titles and Other Texts includes all books and texts, with their translations, followed by the author (wherever possible).

The Index of Scriptural References includes all references to specific Quranic verses (with Sura number followed by a colon and the verse number) and Biblical verses. When a discussion concerns a whole chapter rather than a specific chapter and verse, this is cited under the appropriate chapter number followed by an en-dash. More general discussions of topics in the Quran and Bible appear in the Index of Topics and Keywords.

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