

The Intermediate Worlds of Angels

Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts

Edited by Sara Kuehn
Stefan Leder
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Introduction: Angels and Their Religious and Cosmological Contexts

Sara Kuehn (Vienna) / Stefan Leder (Halle) / Hans-Peter Pökel (Beirut)

The belief in numinous intermediary beings has been, and remains, an important element in many systems of religious thought and imagination. Often referred to as ‘angels’, these figures primarily function as elusive envoys ‘between’ heaven and earth, and are conceived of as crossing the boundaries between the human realm and the divine cosmos. Their intermediating function, as well as the ambiguous nature that follows from their status as spiritual beings continues to raise fundamental questions.

Alongside the ubiquitous and growing modern fascination with the esoteric in recent years, academic interest in angels, particularly in the context of Islamic culture, has also increased. However, much remains to be done to elucidate the various definitions of angels and the contexts from which they emerged. As a central part of religious belief, the discourse on angels touches upon the concept and content of religion itself. Beyond the many attempts to define religion as a means for understanding the world, it is often assumed that believers¹ construe the world in terms of a dichotomy between a sacred and a profane space. Recent research in Religious Studies has suggested that the sacred/profane distinction is a perspective superimposed from the outside and is not necessarily relevant for the believers themselves, who mostly consider the unity of all creation to be an essential part of their world view. Just like the configuration of transcendence and immanence, imagined as separate spatial entities, the distinction of the sacred and the profane is, rather, a strategy of the observer that is used to explain religious belief from an external and, presumably, non-religious perspective.² As

¹ For a definition of the concept of ‘believer’, see Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth. The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2005, 2.

² Hans G. Kippenberg, “Einleitung. Zur Kontroverse über das Verstehen fremden Denkens,” in: *Magie. Die sozialwissenschaftliche Kontroverse über das Verstehen fremden Denkens*, Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi, eds., (Suhrkamp Wissenschaft, 674), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987, 9-51, here: 41. Many attempts are problematic insofar as they exclude the personal experiences and explanations of believers themselves and are merely reflections of the beholders within a theoretical system. It is often not religion itself that is considered or explained but the functional aspect and its relation to religion and religious practice in societies. See also Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und Begriffe*, Munich: Beck 2003, 13; Robert Alan Segal, “Sacred and Profane,” in: *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, vol. 3, Robert Alan Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad, eds., Leiden, Boston: Brill 2015; Wessel Stocker, “Transcendence and Im-

Andrei Pleșu has noted, the construction of dichotomies, or binary *Weltentwürfe*, is also a result of a certain fear of the space in between the worlds.³ According to Pleșu, this in-between space constitutes the *Lebenswelt* of individuals and thus determines how individuals conceive of the world and of their life therein. Transitioning through this space resembles following a path that leads from one point to another and involves traversing distances in spatial, as well as in temporal, terms. Reflecting on this space allows a deeper consideration of the intermediate worlds (*Zwischenwelten*) and the way in which they appear in human imagination, and also allows for a fusion of spatial and temporal indicators through a unique synthesising activity.

It might be helpful to consider religion as a “network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many different sacred figures together,”⁴ mirroring the nature and character of the relations that hold between humans. This approach is not primarily interested in institutionalised religion or in religious practices but, rather, focuses on the human being and its experiences as they relate to the other world. In the context of cosmological worldviews, this human experience, the way that human beings locate themselves within the cosmos and engage with it, mirrors how sacred figures function as agents within the cosmos.⁵ These figures are commonly located in the world beyond, imagined as the world above, an invisible and inaccessible space of imagination that is the counterpart to the earth. This realm is considered as the spatial extension of the sky and as the visible threshold between heaven and earth.⁶ The imagination of heaven as an inaccessible space seems to emerge from the perception of the sky and its phenomena.

Thomas Ruster considers the human experience of the sky as essential for the understanding of heaven as a cypher for transcendence.⁷ In the early modern period, in particular, heaven was often equated with God and not considered to be a part of the accessible world.⁸ In late antique and medieval theological dis-

manence,” in: *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, vol. 3, Robert Alan Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad, eds., Leiden, Boston: Brill 2015, 513-520.

³ Andrei Pleșu, *Das Schweigen der Engel*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2008, 20-21.

⁴ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 2.

⁵ Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 2.

⁶ Thomas Ruster, “Gott und der Himmel. Warum ihre Unterscheidung im Christentum notwendig ist,” in: *Parallelwelten. Christliche Religion und die Vervielfachung von Wirklichkeit*, Johann Evangelist Hafner and Joachim Valentin, eds., (ReligionsKulturen, 6), Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2009, 162-180, here: 164-166.

⁷ For the gaze to heaven (‘Blick zum Himmel’), see also Lumpen and Bietenhard, “Himmel,” 205.

⁸ Ruster, “Gott und der Himmel,” 164-167. For heaven and sky (which are both implied in the German term “Himmel”), see Adolf Lumpen and Hans Bietenhard, “Himmel,” in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*, vol. 15, 1991, 173-212. Lumpen and Bietenhard mention that it was also common in pre-historic times for the divine to not necessarily be understood as connected

course, experience of the higher spiritual world was instead equated with the cognition of angels as imagined intermediary beings. This knowledge was considered to be 'angelic' and therefore required an ontological stage that resembled the ontology of angelic beings. Since the ontological status of angels was, for the Early Church, superior to that of humankind, due to their closer proximity to God, it was also logical that angelic knowledge should exceed the limitations of human understanding.

Erik Peterson argued from another perspective in 1925 that heaven is a part of creation and needs to be distinguished from the creator. Moreover, mystical experience and religious knowledge that leads to proximity to God and participates in heavenly knowledge was, for Peterson, part of the metaphysical order of the world. He argued that the praise of God is an intrinsic part of creation and both an important task of angels and a part of their knowledge.⁹

Due to their ability to pass the thresholds between heaven and earth, the ontological status and the functions of angels is highly ambivalent. With respect to both status and function, Pope Gregory I (540-604) refers in his *Homelia in Evangelium* to a dual nature of angels, namely that they administer (Latin *ministrare*) but also assist (Latin *ad-sistere*), in the original meaning of staying close to a divine authority.¹⁰ This second function includes the task of surrounding and carrying the throne of God, which is located above the heavenly cosmos, thus privileging them through their proximity to God, as discussed by Roberto Tottoli in this volume.¹¹ Within this cosmos, stars, celestial phenomena, and spheres are related to angels in a hierarchy.¹² The importance of these aspects is exemplified in the *Summa theologica* of the scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who relates the double function of assisting and administering to contemplation, liturgical praise, and the sacral governance of the Church, emphasising the importance of angelic beings by their mirroring of ecclesiastical structures.¹³ In addition, Aquinas continues a late antique tradition that connected the celestial with the ecclesiastical hierarchies, a concept that Pseudo-Dionysius Are-

with the heaven. The divine forces were rather located on earth; see Lumpen and Bietenhard, "Himmel," 189.

⁹ See Ruster, *Gott und der Himmel*, 162-164; Erik Peterson, "Der Lobgesang der Engel und der mystische Lobpreis," in: *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 (1925), 141-153.

¹⁰ Giorgio Agamben, *Die Beamten des Himmels. Über Engel gefolgt von der Angelologie des Thomas von Aquin*, Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen 2007, 37.

¹¹ This is the case for accounts in the Old Testament in which angels do not function primarily as envoys or messengers but as celestial beings surrounding the throne of God; see Johann Ev. Hafner, *Angelologie*, (Gegenwärtig Glauben Denken. Systematische Theologie, 9), Paderborn: Schöningh 2010, 19f.

¹² Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen. Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, (Studia Judaica. Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums, 8), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 1975, 23-26.

¹³ Agamben, *Die Beamten des Himmels*, 42f.

opagita had already elaborated in the late fifth century in his *Περὶ τῆς Οὐρανίας Ἱεραρχίας*.¹⁴

The state of the research

Angels have received a great deal of attention across a range of disciplines, including Jewish and Biblical Studies, Theology, and Religious Studies. Beliefs, imageries, and conceptualisations of the monotheistic and pagan traditions of the Near and Middle East—Judaism, Christianity, and to some extent also Zoroastrianism and other religious systems such as Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Mandaeism—are in many ways important for the contextual understanding of the emergence of Islam and its nascent Islamic angelology. Studies of angels in Jewish and Christian contexts have shown that monotheistic representations of ‘angelic beings’ are often related to Biblical traditions and other Near and Middle Eastern traditions. They continue, reject, or reinterpret earlier ideas about celestial beings that seem to have been closely comparable to ‘angels’ with regard to their imagined ontology and functionality. Biblical and Religious Studies have shown that relating textual and iconographic representations of angels to a broader context of shared traditions in the Near and Middle East is a promising approach for providing insights into the nature of these enigmatic beings.¹⁵ The angels of monotheistic traditions should not only be studied by way of comparison with each other, but also, more broadly, against the background of the celestial beings that fulfil similar functions in other religious traditions. This comparative approach to angels has inspired Christian theologians to contextualise issues such as the divinely inspired order of the world and the role played by angels when they serve as a vital link between God and humankind.

When angels belong both to humankind and the divine, and are part of the imagined space between the visible sky and an invisible heaven, how do they then relate to the spatial conceptions of a religious worldview? If they are conceived as created beings distinct from humans—for they do not share the same conditions as humankind—how, then, can they help us to reflect on the Here and the Hereafter?

Even though angels as such are not known in ancient Near and Middle Eastern religions, similar concepts of intermediating figures existed, such as the messenger

¹⁴ Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *Über die himmlische Hierarchie*, Günter Heil, ed. and transl., (Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur, 22), Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1986. For an analysis of the work in its late antique intellectual context, see also Wiebke-Marie Stock, *Theurgisches Denken. Zur Kirchlichen Hierarchie des Dionysius Areopagita*, (Transformationen der Antike, 4), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2008.

¹⁵ See, for example, the volume *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., (Yearbook, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007.

gods that “have always been an integral part of the Syro-Palestinian pantheon and its hierarchy.”¹⁶ Their role as intermediating beings goes beyond providing guidance and protection and is an important feature of the Mesopotamian and Iranian religious contexts, in which celestial creatures as representatives of a divine sphere were often portrayed in an ambivalent shape that combined both human and animal characteristics.¹⁷

The question of whether angels are limited to monotheistic religions or whether they can be compared to the celestial beings that have similar functions in non-monotheistic religious systems has stimulated discussions about the definition of angels, their functional aspects, and the terminology itself. The term ‘angel’ is a derivative of the Latin *angelus*, which goes back to the original Greek term *angelós* or *aggelós*. The Greek term means, broadly, ‘the messenger’ and does not distinguish between human and divine types. It was a fundamental endeavour of religious and philosophical thought in late antiquity, as will be elicited in what follows, to distinguish clearly between human and divine spheres and to elucidate the means and mediums of communication between these spheres.¹⁸

Religious Studies has tended to categorise angels not as messengers but, more abstractly, as in-between-beings (*Zwischenwesen*). For the understanding of angels in the Christian tradition, in particular, this in-between status is helpful since angels are seen as being below God on the ontological scale but above human beings. They belong to the transcendent even if they are not divine. In accordance with the Christian understanding of angels, Johann Hafner systematically distinguishes between lower and higher degrees of transcendence, the highest of which belongs to the divine alone.¹⁹ Transcendence, Hafner argues, can only be understood as a *mysterium* and religion communicates transcendence always as a mystery. Hafner thereby emphasises the problematic contingency in the sense of the efficacy (*Wirksamkeit*) of the holy for the real world.

¹⁶ Matthias Köckert, “Divine Messengers and Mysterious Men in the Patriarchal Narratives of the Book of Genesis,” in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 51-78, here: 73.

¹⁷ For instance, the ‘fravashis’ or departed spirits in the Zoroastrian tradition have often been compared to guardian angels in Abrahamic traditions. Since the nineteenth century they have been adopted as such by the Zoroastrians themselves; see Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism. An Introduction*, London, New York: Tauris 2011, 29.

¹⁸ As a consequence, systematic approaches have reconsidered the terminology and attempted to avoid the word ‘angel’ in favour of terms that emphasise the ‘connecting aspects’ of celestial beings. Since the term ‘angel’ bears an intrinsic dualistic moral evaluation in its assumption of good and evil, Gregor Ahn defines angels as “border crossers” (*Grenzgänger*); Gregor Ahn, “Grenzgängerkonzepte in der Religionsgeschichte. Von Engeln, Dämonen, Götterboten und anderen Mittlerwesen,” in: *Engel und Dämonen. Theologische, anthropologische und religionsgeschichtliche Aspekte des Guten und Bösen*, Gregor Ahn and M. Dietrich, eds., Münster: Ugarit 1997, 1-48, here: 9f. An overview of the different positions is provided by Hafner, *Angelologie*, 13-19.

¹⁹ Hafner, *Angelologie*, 21f.

Transferring this Christian perspective on angels to other religious beliefs is, unsurprisingly, problematic. For instance, although angels are, according to the Qurʾān, an essential part of God's creation, their ontological status is conceived to be lower in relation to humankind, as indicated in the narrative of the fall of Iblis (Q 2:32). Even though the belief in angels is a central tenet of the Islamic faith (Q 2:285; 4:136; 2:98; 2:177), as has been emphasised in a recent *fatwā* (legal opinion) of the al-Azhar University in Cairo,²⁰ scholarly research on angels in Islam is still at a very early stage.

Many early studies of angels in Islamic thought investigated the influence of older traditions on Islamic beliefs, often from a polemical perspective. An early scholar in the field, William Robertson Smith (1846-1894), approached the topic of demons and angels in the framework of Semitic religions from an anthropological perspective, insofar as he considered the appearance of natural spirits in the form of animals to be a fundamental part of Bedouin belief.²¹ Robertson Smith and others have to be understood in the context of the early development of Religious Studies that took place in the nineteenth century. Following in the footsteps of Erasmus of Rotterdam (ca. 1466-1536) and Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842), early scholars of Religious Studies began to apply the methods of classical philology and source-critical reading to the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible.

²⁰ See <http://www.dar-alifta.org/Foreign/ViewFatwa.aspx?ID=7996>.

²¹ Robertson Smith argues that demons (Arabic *jinn*) were banished from Hebrew religion and mainly play a part in "poetical imagery," although they also appear as *she'irim* ('haired ones') or as nocturnal goblins or monsters (Hebrew *lilit*). Wellhausen alludes to the close relation of celestial creatures to the Arabic *jinn*; Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1961, 135. Smith emphasises the vitality of nature, which appeared in the ancient Semitic culture in a close connection with totemism, especially in the imagination of demons as animals with some human characteristics. Smith saw some relation to totemism in ancient Arab paganism insofar as some "direct evidence of kinship or brotherhood between human communities and animal kinds" can be asserted. Smith also relates this idea to holy places or sanctuaries, for these are not inhabited by a single deity but by "a plurality of sacred denizens" and by animals which have "demoniac attributes." Interestingly, Smith notes that the Hebrew plural noun *elōhim* was later understood as a singular; for the linguistic problems concerning the plural noun *elōhim* in relation to the singular *el*, see Wellhausen, *Reste*, 144f. With regard to human attributes, Smith discerns an explanation for the conception of an anthropomorphic god or goddess in this development. The 'indeterminate plurality' of the *elōhim* then appears in the conception of angels, that is as the sons of *elōhim* (*bnē ha-elōhim*), as they appear, for instance, in Gen. 6:2; see especially William Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites. The Fundamental Institutions*, New York: Meridian Books 1959, 118-139 and 441-446. For the relationship of Elohim and Jahwe as manifestations of the holy, see also Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, John W. Harvey, transl., Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971, 74f. On Robertson Smith, see Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion. Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Anthology*, (Religion and Reason, 3), The Hague, Paris: Mouton 1973, 150-159, and Hans G. Kippenberg, "William Robertson Smith (1846-1894)," in: *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft. Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, Axel Michaelis, ed., Munich: Beck 1997, 60-76.

Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) was one of the foremost representatives of this approach and broke new ground by applying philological methods to source reading. The initial stage of this development centered on a philological approach that was based on the assumption that language and religion had undergone parallel developments. At roughly the same time, the theoretical approach of the British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) emerged. Tylor saw animism as a form of “primitive religion,” which he considered to be the “origin” of religious belief and to contain the essential content of the concept of religion as a whole.²² Tylor argued for an evolutionary model of religion and believed in the existence of certain survivals of primitive religions, which he was convinced could be found in more developed forms of religious beliefs as well. In contrast to sociological approaches to the study of religion, Tylor developed the idea that the essential content of religion is the belief in spiritual beings.²³

Wellhausen, in turn, suggested that demons in general are not different from deities; at least in the early history of Semitic religions, this distinction seemed to be meaningless for believers.²⁴ He argued that demons—in contrast to deities—have no individuality since demons are normally not mentioned by name²⁵ but that they resemble humans insofar as they primarily represent their tribe or their genus. In the field of nineteenth-century Religious Studies, the relationship between humans and deities was especially important for scholars trying to conceptualise the essential differences between Semitic and non-Semitic religions. While, in at least some religions of Graeco-Roman antiquity, gods and humans resembled one another in both literary and iconographic depictions, it was thought that only in the Semitic religions could one find the concept of absolute transcendence. Wellhausen assumed that humans and demons complement each other, since they are the only two possible forms of beings in the world, as is also pointed out in the Qurʾān (Q 55:31). Even if demons do not have the same physiological conditions as human beings, they—unlike angels—are considered to be beings related to the earthly sphere who follow the laws and conditions that apply to living beings.²⁶

One of the first monographs to deal with angels in a specifically Islamic context was published in 1908 by Walther Eickmann.²⁷ As a pioneering scholar in

²² Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches*, 209-219; see also Kippenberg, “Einführung,” 12. On the belief in demons and spiritual beings, specifically on the Arabian Peninsula in pre-Islamic times, see A. S. Tritton, “Spirits and Demons in Arabia,” in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 4 (1934), 715-727.

²³ See Karl-Heinz Kohl, “Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917),” in: *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft. Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, Axel Michaels, ed., Munich: Beck 1997, 41-59, here: 50-52.

²⁴ Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches*, 138-149.

²⁵ According to Wellhausen, a major difference between demons and deities is that only the latter have names.

²⁶ Wellhausen, *Reste*, 148f.

²⁷ Walther Eickmann, *Die Angelologie und Dämonologie des Korans im Vergleich zu der Engel- und Geisterlehre der Heiligen Schrift*, Leipzig: Eger 1908.

the field, Eickmann focused on the Qur'ān and compared the available representations of angels and demons with those in the Bible. He emphasised that both the Bible and the Qur'ān provide instruction about angels as well as demons.²⁸ Eickmann's work was soon followed by a study by Paul Eichler, who also paid attention to the category of devils (Arabic *shayāṭīn*) in the Qur'ān. Eichler understood devils as spiritual beings and argued that neither the Bible nor the Qur'ān provide a formally elaborated picture of these beings.²⁹ He was a vehement critic of Eickmann's approach, arguing that the Qur'ān merely describes spiritual beings by referring to earlier traditions, and thus advocates the avoidance of any notion of a specific Qur'ānic angelology or demonology.³⁰

Scholarship on angels in Islam has often been concerned with the question of how far earlier traditions influenced Qur'ānic and later Islamic representations. This approach is closely related to the so-called Babel-Bible-controversy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century which, for the first time, put the authenticity of Biblical traditions into question. This critical view was supported by the increasing awareness of similar Mesopotamian traditions, which were said to have been plagiarised by the Old Testament. The idea of plagiarism and even epigonism provided an influential framework for Islamic and Qur'ānic studies that attempted to undermine the notion that the Qur'ān was a serious seventh-century document embedded in a shared cultural tradition of Near and Middle Eastern cultures. Earlier studies that focus on a 'Qur'ānic angelology' are often problematic because they assume a linear development from animism to monotheism.³¹ Overcoming these polemical attitudes and somewhat overemphasising the influence of earlier traditions, scholars have, more recently, tried to understand the broader context of the intricate relationships between traditions that share a mutual heritage and that exploit representations that might be either similar or different.

²⁸ Eickmann, *Angelologie*, 56.

²⁹ Paul Arno Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, Doctoral Thesis, Leipzig, Lucka: Berger 1928.

³⁰ Eichler, *Die Dschinn*, 1.

³¹ Examples of this problematic approach include, for instance, Joseph Chelhod, *Les structures du sacré chez les Arabes*, (Islam d'hier et aujourd'hui. Collection, 13), Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose 1964, especially 67-92. While not focusing on angels specifically, Toufic Fahd, too, follows a comparable line of thought, even though he considers the religious history of early Islam within a broad cultural context; see Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe. Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'Islam*, Leiden, Boston: Brill 1965. Also, Alford T. Welch, "Allah and Other Supernatural Beings. The Emergence of the Qur'anic Doctrine of *Tawḥīd*," in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979), 733-758; and Jacques Waardenburg, "Changes of Belief in Spiritual Beings, Prophethood and the Rise of Islam," in: *Struggles of Gods. Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions*, Hans G. Kippenberg, ed., Berlin: Mouton 1984, 259-290.

With regard to the concept of idolatry and its relationship to a ‘Qur’ānic angelology’, Gerald Hawting sees the Qur’ān as referring to the worship of angels and interprets the ‘daughters of God’³² as angels as well.³³ He argues that the Qur’ān is directed at other monotheists and not at the Meccan pagans. The pagan background of the concept of angels is discussed by Patricia Crone, who points out that the Meccan detractors of the Prophet Muḥammad clearly conceptualised the messenger (Arabic *rasūl*) as an angel in human shape with wings. This pagan understanding of the messenger was “coterminous with Greek *angelos* or Hebrew *mal’āk*, both of which originally meant an angel and a messenger of the mundane kind.”³⁴ Crone concludes that the humanity of the Prophet presented an obstacle that prevented the Meccans from recognising him as a messenger of a divine authority.

The importance and the impact of late antiquity, understood as an epistemic space, and its implication for the development of religious history is also emphasised by Angelika Neuwirth, who argues that the revelation of the Prophet Muḥammad is related to the shift in the interaction between the supernatural and the natural world. The concept of intermediation and of intermediate beings seems to be a specifically late antique development in which gods and deities were ‘translated’ into the status of angels as intermediators between the worlds. The cohesion of the earliest listeners of the Qur’ān, who heard the words from Muḥammad, was secured through an idea of containment (*Beherrschung*) of the real world.³⁵ For the Qur’ān itself and its Meccan and Medinan revelations, Neuwirth connects the pagan intellectual background of the early community of listeners with the importance of the Bible in its interpreted form: since the early Meccan surahs can be understood as a ‘Biblisation’ of the pagan worldview, one can see the Medinan surahs as an Arabisation of the Biblical worldview. Hence, according to Neuwirth, in order to understand the Qur’ān and its conceptual paradigm, it is necessary to consider the ancient pagan traditions as well as the monotheistic traditions.³⁶ An

³² See the contributions in this volume by Christian Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels d’apparence humaine dans l’Arabie antique,” and Aziz El-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings.”

³³ Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam. From Polemic to History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999. For a critical review of Hawting’s approach, see Stephen Burge, *Angels in Islam, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Habā’ik fi akhbār al-malā’ik*, (Culture and Civilization in the Middle East, 31), London: Routledge 2012, 11-12.

³⁴ Patricia Crone, “Angels Versus Humans a Messengers of God. The View of the Qur’ānic Pagans,” in: Patricia Crone, *The Qur’ānic Pagans and Related Matters. Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, vol. 1, Hanna Siurua, ed., (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, 129), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2016, 102-124, here: 109.

³⁵ Angelika Neuwirth, *Die koranische Verzauberung der Welt und ihre Entzauberung in der Geschichte*, (Veröffentlichungen der Papst-Benedikt XVI.-Gastprofessur an der Fakultät für Katholische Theologie der Universität Regensburg), Freiburg: Herder 2017, 42f, 45f.

³⁶ Neuwirth, *Die koranische Verzauberung*, 231-238, 239-256.

impressive study of the relationship between Judaism and early Islamic religious history has been provided by Steven Wasserstrom,³⁷ and this approach is continued by Stephen Burge, who has delivered the most comprehensive monograph yet on angels in Islam. Burge's study of the work of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) reveals the extreme fluidity of beliefs and images related to angels and offers insight into a wide range of theological and philosophical positions.³⁸ To this survey must be added Pierre Lory's recent exploration of the place of humankind in the cosmos vis-à-vis the angels, the *jinn*, and the animals in the spiritual anthropology of Islam. His main focus is the Sufi Tradition, including the teachings of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). However, he also treats Sunni approaches to these matters and, in this context, explains the view of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), who believed that human reason may deduce the existence of angels.³⁹

*Relations between heaven and earth:
some considerations on cosmology in Islam*

Orders of existence and representations of a structured cosmos are a core feature of religious thought in the attempt to explain the world and its existence in the form of cosmogonies. The etymology of the Greek term *cosmos* is unclear. However, early Greek sources, such as Homer's epics, reflect a universal order that evaluates the actions of the individual.⁴⁰ In contradistinction to the Greek concept, Hebrew, as well as other Semitic languages, does not have a single unifying term but describes the world as a whole as consisting of heaven and earth. In Hellenised Judaism, the conceptualisation of heaven imagined as an ontological plurality of spatially ordered spheres⁴¹ seems to appear for the first time in the *Testamentum Levi*. This idea is also mentioned in the Qurʾān (Q 41:12; 12:71) and deeply informs the Islamic understanding of sacred space.

In his commentary to the *Book of Genesis*, the *Decalogue of the Thora*, Pseudo-Philo of Alexandria (d. 40 CE) understands the cosmos to be a universal order that is reflected in scripture. The Greek *nomos* (Hebrew *torah*) and the cosmos form a unity and only the fulfillment of the Mosaic laws are, according to Pseudo-Philo, an expression of life in harmony with nature and creation itself.⁴²

³⁷ Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew. The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1995, esp. 167-205.

³⁸ Burge, *Angels in Islam*.

³⁹ Pierre Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns*, Paris: Albin Michel 2018.

⁴⁰ Dietmar Wyrwa, "Kosmos," in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Georg Schöllgen et al., eds., vol. 22, Stuttgart: Hiersemann 2005, 614-762, here: 616.

⁴¹ Wyrwa, "Kosmos," 638. For conceptions of the seven heavens in Hellenised Judaism, see also Wyrwa, "Kosmos," 646f.

⁴² Wyrwa, "Kosmos," 652f.

Neither in late antique Christianity nor in Islam was there a single or a continuous tradition of cosmological speculation. Rather, different schools of thought that followed a Hellenistic, or specifically Ptolemaic, worldview became important for speculations about the nature of space.⁴³ Claudius Ptolemy (d. 160) understood the universe primarily as a geocentric entity with nine heavenly spheres that were concentrically arranged around the earth. He followed the speculations about the heavens offered by Aristotle, who had identified fundamental differences between a terrestrial and a celestial realm. Aristotle thought of what we might call ‘the universe’ as a great sphere consisting of two parts: a lower and an upper region demarcated by the sphere of the moon. The sphere of the moon is what humans perceive as the sky and it functions as the threshold between heaven and earth. While matter on earth is mainly made up of the four elements – earth, air, fire, and water –, heavenly matter is thought to consist of a ‘more precious element’, namely aether, the element from which the stars are also made.⁴⁴ In his *Problemata Physica*, Aristotle treats heaven and earth as “connected to one another,” a supposition which he inferred by reference to their analogous natures.⁴⁵

Aristotle’s explanation caused some difficulties for later interpreters because he placed the moving planets within the same sphere as the fixed stars. The assumption of motion arose from his observation that the planets varied in their brightness and that nearer things were brighter than those further away. This resulted in the question of why the distance from the earth of the moving planets increased or decreased. Such a motion must be impossible, later interpreters concluded, since the distance of the sphere of the fixed stars from the central earth must, logically, remain constant.⁴⁶

This worldview, and its modified versions, became accessible to a broader public through the translation of Hellenistic sciences into Arabic and came to be the “most widely accepted view of the universe among educated Muslims.”⁴⁷ Although

⁴³ Wyrwa, “Kosmos,” 702f. On conceptions of space, see also Shlomo Pines, “Philosophy, Mathematics and the Concepts of Space in the Middle Ages,” in: Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Arabic Versions of Greek Texts and in Medieval Science*, (The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, 2), Jerusalem, Leiden: The Mages Press, Brill 1986, 359-374.

⁴⁴ Ingrid Hehmyer, “The Configuration of the Heavens in Islamic Astronomy,” in: *Roads to Paradise. Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, vol. 2, *Continuity and Change. The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamic World*, Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson, eds., (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, 136/2), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2017, 1083-1098, here: 1087.

⁴⁵ *The Problemata Physica Attributed to Aristotle. The Arabic Version of Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq and the Hebrew Version of Moses ibn Tibbon*, L. S. Filius, ed., (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 11), Leiden, Boston: Brill 1999, 653.

⁴⁶ Hehmyer, “The Configuration of the Heavens,” 1088.

⁴⁷ Ahmet T. Karamustafa, “Cosmographical Diagrams,” in: *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, 1, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992, 71-89, here: 71a, 73a. On the translation movement, its history, and the continuity of antique knowledge in Muslim cultures, see Franz Rosenthal, *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam*, Zürich: Artemis

the works of Ptolemy preserved in the *Almagest* appeared in several translations in ninth-century Baghdad⁴⁸ (in addition to translations of Aristotle's work),⁴⁹ it is worth mentioning that Muslim scholars also revised and rethought Hellenistic views of the cosmos.⁵⁰ In developing a celestial geography, Arab scholars often compared the earth and the firmament of the sky with the figure of an egg (Arabic *bayḍa*), understanding the earth as the yolk at its center.⁵¹

The translation and transmission of the knowledge of earlier civilisations was of particular importance during the 'Abbāsīd dynasty as it allowed the caliphs to present themselves as the legitimate successors of the Mesopotamian and Sasanian kings. As Dimitri Gutas points out, this was also significant for the translation of astrological works into Arabic, since ordination by the stars signified God's command and therefore fulfilled both a political and an ideological function.⁵² Ingrid Hehmeyer has demonstrated that this idea and the image of the seven heavens had been prevalent in ancient Iran and in Mesopotamia.⁵³ In this context, it is noteworthy that the Arabic term *falak*, which denotes the celestial sphere(s) and occurs

1965, and Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)*, London, New York: Routledge 1998.

- ⁴⁸ Of these four translations, two are still extant, see Emilie Savage-Smith, "Islamic Celestial Globes and Related Instruments," in: Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools and Magic*, Part 1, *Body and Spirit, Mapping the Universe*, (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, 12, 1), London: The Nour Foundation 1997, 168-185, here: 176f.
- ⁴⁹ See Gerhard Endreß, *Die arabischen Übersetzungen von Aristoteles' Schrift De Caelo*, Doctoral Thesis, Egelsbach, Cologne: Hänsel-Hohenhausen 1965.
- ⁵⁰ Hehmeyer, "The Configuration of the Heavens," 1093f. with examples. An impressive description of the earth as well as the celestial sphere—though not relating to angels—has survived from eleventh-century Egypt as the *Book of Curiosities*, see *An Eleventh-Century Guide to the Universe. The Book of Curiosities*, Yossef Rapoport and Emilie Savage-Smith, eds. and transl., (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 87), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2014, esp. 332-338. See also Roshdi Rashed, "Cinématique celeste et géométrie sphérique," in: Roshdi Rashed, *Les mathématiques infinitésimales du IX^e au XI^e siècle*, vol. 4, *Ibn al-Haytham. Astronomie, géométrie sphérique et trigonométrie*, London: Al-Furqān 2006, 1-45.
- ⁵¹ Eilhard Wiedemann, "Bemerkungen zur Astronomie und Kosmographie der Araber," in: Eilhard Wiedemann, *Aufsätze zur arabischen Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 1, Wolfdieterich Fischer, ed., (Collectanea, 6/1), Hildesheim, New York: Olms 1970, 80-86.
- ⁵² Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 45f. See also Michael Cooperson, "Al-Ma'mūn, the Pyramids, and the Hieroglyphs," in: *'Abbāsīd Studies, 2. Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbāsīd Studies, Leuven, 28 June – 1 July 2004*, John Nawas, ed., Leuven: Peeters 2010, 165-190; Syed Nomanul Haq, "Moments in the Islamic Recasting of the Greek Legacy: Exploring the Question of Science and Theism," in: *God, Life and the Cosmos: Christian and Islamic Perspectives*, Ted Peters, Muzaffar Iqbal, and Syed Nomanul Haq, eds., Aldershot: Ashgate 2002, 153-172.
- ⁵³ Hehmeyer, "The Configuration of the Heavens," 1089f. For Zoroastrian astronomy and the description of celestial phenomena and their association with theological issues, see Antonio Panaino, "On the Dimension of the Astral Bodies in Zoroastrian Literature. Between Tradition and Scientific Astronomy," in: *Studies in the History of the Exact Sciences in Honour of David Pingree*, Charles Burnett, Jan P. Hogendijk, Kim Plofker and Michio Yano, eds., (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 54), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2004, 267-286.

several times in the Qurʾān (for instance, Q 21:34; 36:40), can be traced back to Sumerian and Akkadian origins.⁵⁴

The major intellectual traditions within Islamic culture that produced cosmological models were the fields of philosophy, mysticism,⁵⁵ and the sciences.⁵⁶ These traditions imbued the universe with a meaning and purpose that was related to human beings, especially their souls, and gave significance to the question of why it is important for believers to relate themselves to the divine. By contrast, scholars of religious sciences were often hesitant to construct ‘comprehensive cosmologies’ as a result of intellectual speculation, a fact that may have been due to the meager information provided by the Qurʾān on this topic. A further reason might be found in scriptural exegesis because the hermeneutics of scripture always had to strike a balance between an allegorical and a literal understanding, in particular with regard to ambiguous verses or terms in the Qurʾān that were open to interpretation.⁵⁷

Even though there is no systematic cosmology in the Qurʾān, the text nevertheless mentions the seven heavens (Q 2:29; 17:44; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15; 78:12). However, only the first of these heavens is described, with the passage telling us that it is “adorned with the beauty of the stars” (Q 37:6; 41:12; 67:5).⁵⁸ The universe presented in the Qurʾān is a “hierarchical, multilayered complex that stretches from the throne of God on top through the seven heavens in between down to the seven earths at bottom.”⁵⁹ It is important to remember that the Qurʾān mentions Muḥammad’s night journey (Arabic *isrāʾ*) and his ascension to heaven (Arabic *miʿrāj*), which in later Islamic literature is often described as a transportation through the seven heavens to paradise.⁶⁰ His guide in the miraculous *isrāʾ* was reportedly the angel Gabriel (Arabic Jibril or Jibrāʾīl; Q 17:1; cf. 1 Enoch, chaps. 14ff). In some Islamic traditions, Gabriel accompanies Muḥammad

⁵⁴ Willy Hartner, “Falak,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (EI²). Accessed 26 March 2018.

⁵⁵ William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul. The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*, Oxford: OneWorld 2007, 87, and Ian Richard Netton, *Allāh Transcendent. Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*, Richmond: Curzon 1989, 72f (al-Kindī), 106f, (al-Farābī), 162-172 (Ibn Sinā), 256-320 (mysticism).

⁵⁶ Emilie Savage-Smith, “Celestial Mapping,” in: *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, 1, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1992, 12-70.

⁵⁷ Karamustafa, “Cosmographical Diagrams,” 72a.

⁵⁸ Karamustafa, “Cosmographical Diagrams,” 71bf.

⁵⁹ Karamustafa, “Cosmographical Diagrams,” 72a.

⁶⁰ Frederick S. Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey. Tracing the Development of the Ibn ‘Abbās Ascension Discourse*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 2008, and Frederick S. Colby and Christiane Gruber, eds., *The Prophet’s Ascension. Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Miʿrāj Tales*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010.

on his *mīrāj* into the various levels of heaven and to the divine threshold from where the Prophet goes on to the Throne of God.⁶¹

The present volume

This volume mostly consists of the proceedings of the conference ‘Angels and Mankind. Nature, Role and Function of Celestial Beings in Near Eastern and Islamic Traditions’, which took place at the Orient-Institut Beirut, Lebanon (2nd to 4th of July 2015). Focusing on an interdisciplinary approach to angels and their Near and Middle Eastern religious milieu, with its Jewish, Christian, and Islamic contexts, the contributions revolve around conceptualisations of similarities-*in*-difference. The conference attempted to contextualise conceptions of angelic beings in Islamic traditions from a vertical and a horizontal perspective. The vertical perspective considers representations of angelic beings historically by referring to similar concepts in earlier traditions. The horizontal perspective relates Islamic conceptualisations to coexisting interpretations in monotheistic traditions and to different confessional approaches within the Islamic framework itself.

A particular focus of the conference was the goal of bringing together the textual and visual worlds associated with these beings. In doing so, the aim was to engage in a dialogue between literary scholars and art historians in order to further encourage joint study of the comparative and interpretative possibilities contained within literary texts and their pictured narratives and related visual culture. The aim was to engage with the image and the discursive spaces that it generates in order to reveal aspects of the relationship between text and image, as well as with the information that can be extracted from its representational iconography and visual vocabulary.⁶² The conference was organised by the Orient-Institut Beirut in association with the University of Balamand and was co-funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). It was convened by Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, and Hans-Peter Pökel.

The volume discusses intellectual conceptions of the most varied types of numinous beings that mediate and intercede between the divine sphere and humanity, as well as serving as higher powers. It explains the nature, role, and function of angels (Arabic *malak*, pl. *malāʾika*, literally ‘envoys’, from the root *l-ʿ-k*) in creation accounts, in the revelatory experience, in ascension accounts, in the transmission of knowledge, as witnesses, in reward and punishment, and in eschatology, as well as examining the metaphorical uses of these beings. The concept of

⁶¹ Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Ishāq’s Sirat Rasūl Allāh*, London: Oxford University Press 1967, 181-187.

⁶² Oleg Grabar, “Seeing Things: Why Pictures in Texts?,” in: *Seeing Things: Textuality and Visuality in the Islamic World*, Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson, eds., (Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Princeton Papers), vol. 8, 2001, 1-4; William John Thomas Mitchell, “What Do Pictures “Really” Want?,” *The MIT Press* 77 (1996), 71-82.

celestial creatures that intermediate between a seen and an unseen sphere, and the representation of these creatures as in-between-beings, is studied here as a transcultural and transconfessional phenomenon, even if the depictions might differ in specific cases.

The first part of this volume engages with the exploration of angels in relation to Ancient Near and Middle Eastern, Hellenistic, and late antique concepts of intermediating beings in the centuries before Islam and during the early Islamic period. The contributions shed light on the role played by angels in the development towards the supreme god proclaimed by Muḥammad as Allāh. The second part elaborates on the nature, substance, and significance of angels in Christian and Islamic traditions. The third and final part of the volume focuses on Islamic interpretations of how angels operate as agents between heaven and earth and on their role in Islamic conceptions of celestial space in relation to Neoplatonic conceptions of the world.

Part I:

Angels in relation to Near and Middle Eastern polytheistic traditions

In the late fourth century BCE, Alexander the Great opened the land routes from Greece to India with substantial military and cultural expeditions. These had a lasting effect as they resulted in the creation and consolidation of an empire that stretched from Egypt to India and the cultural traditions of which involved a symbiosis between Greek and Near and Middle Eastern cultures. These cultures had interacted long before the time of Alexander's conquests. However, the conquests initiated a Hellenising process that led to an intense interaction between the Central Asian provinces and Mediterranean cultural and religious traditions. Glen Bowersock is one of several scholars to point out that the common elements of which Hellenism was comprised were "a medium not necessarily antithetical to local or indigenous traditions. On the contrary, [they] provided a new and more eloquent way of giving voice to them."⁶³ The wide distribution of *angelós* veneration is perhaps best understood in the light of Hellenism as a symbiosis of Greek and ancient Near and Middle Eastern cultural heritage that supported a communication between Greek and local traditions within a cosmopolitan context.⁶⁴ The Greek and Aramaic languages, as *linguae francae* of large parts of these regions, provided a common means of expression for regional, linguistically dissimilar, cults of *angeli*, serving to create a synergy of distinct but similar phenomena.⁶⁵

⁶³ Glen W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1990, 7.

⁶⁴ Cf. Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire*, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2011.

⁶⁵ In pre-Christian times, the term was used to identify the functions of certain 'messengers of the Gods' such as Hermes, see, for instance, Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate:*

Etymologically, the Greek word *angelós* denotes a human or divine ‘messenger’, while the term *daimón*, which became its counterpart in Christian theological speculation, meant a specifically supernatural spirit or a being.⁶⁶ The Septuagint Greek translation of parts of the Hebrew Bible, which began in the third century BCE and was completed by 132 BCE in Alexandria, can be seen as a major endeavour of Hellenised Judaism. The text, parts of which later became canonical for the Early Church, uses *angelós* to translate the Hebrew term *mal’akh*, denoting specifically the messenger of God.⁶⁷

In the Old Testament, messengers often appear in an anthropomorphic shape as beautiful men and even as a theophany of YHWH. It is the content of their message that inspires their listeners to understand them as messengers related in some way to a divine authority, an interpretation that, interestingly, mostly takes place once the messenger has vanished.⁶⁸ The terminological distinction of angels on the basis of their mission became a late antique concern that is prominent in the re-narration of Biblical history from Adam to Saul in the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, which was, for a long time, ascribed to Philo of Alexandria (d. 40 CE). By applying the Latin terms *nuntius* and *angelus*, Pseudo-Philo distinguishes human messengers from their divine counterparts. He establishes a ‘super-human otherness’⁶⁹ of angels that is reflected in the difference of their general appearance from the shape of mere humans.⁷⁰

Literary and archaeological evidence suggests that angels (Latin sg. *angelus*, pl. *angeli*) played a significant role in later Roman religion.⁷¹ In *Les origines de la*

Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity, Leiden, Boston: Brill 1999, 164-167. At the same time, Canaanite, Mesopotamian, and Iranian depictions of intermediating beings existed as *mal’akhim*, *kherūbim*, and *seraphim*. On Cherubim and Seraphim in a Biblical context, see Friedhelm Hartenstein, “Cherubim and Seraphim in the Bible and in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Sources,” in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature, Yearbook 2007), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 155-188. On the importance of Aramaic or Arabo-Aramaic, see Ernst Axel Knauf, “Arabo-Aramaic and ‘Arabiyya. From Ancient Arabic to Early Standard Arabic, 200 CE–600 CE,” in: *The Qur’ān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur’ānic Milieu*, Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx, eds., (Texts and Studies on the Qur’ān, 6), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2010, 197-254. On the development of a Greek-Jewish terminology associated with a ‘new angelology’ set against Biblical angelology, see Michael Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabbinischer Zeit*, (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 34), Tübingen: Mohr 1992, esp. 10-113.

⁶⁶ Cf. Johann Michl, “Engel I (heidnisch),” in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 5, 54-60.

⁶⁷ Hafner, *Angelologie*, 13.

⁶⁸ Köckert, “Divine Messengers and Mysterious Men in the Patriarchal Narratives of the Book of Genesis.”

⁶⁹ Christopher Begg, “Angels in Pseudo-Philo,” in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 537-553, here: 548.

⁷⁰ Begg, “Angels in Pseudo-Philo,” 549.

⁷¹ Cf. Cline, *Ancient Angels*.

représentation des anges dans le christianisme ancien, Nada HELOU examines the visual representations of angelic beings in early Christian iconography in the late antique Mediterranean world, which she compares with third- to sixth-century Eastern Roman and Mesopotamian artefacts. These, in turn, benefitted from the rich and established repertoire of ideas and images of *angeli* and other divine beings present in the late antique world, especially the Hellenistic East of the Roman Empire, which functioned as a meeting place for the iconographic traditions of the Near and Middle Eastern cultural traditions.

Hellenism was not only significant for the core regions of the Ancient Near and Middle Eastern civilisations. The Arabian peninsula was also, at least in part, privy to Hellenistic cultural transformation. While the northern parts of the peninsula had close connections to the Byzantine and Sasanian empires until the seventh century, Old South Arabia was a point of contention between the Sasanian empire and the Christian-Ethiopian culture of Aksum, supported by the Byzantine emperors until it finally became a target of early Muslim conquests in 632.⁷²

In the first half of the fifth century, the polytheistic South Arabian tradition was rejected during the reign of the Himyarite king Malkikarib Yuha'min (c. 400–c. 445 CE) of ancient Yemen. It was around this time that pagan formulae in South Arabian inscriptions were replaced by monotheistic expressions using the term *rahmān*, which indicates that, at least for the elite, the belief in one deity (absorbing other deities) had become prevalent.⁷³ As another name of God, al-Rahmān is used frequently in parallel to Allāh in the Qur'ān. The Arabian polytheism (Arabic *shirk*) of Muḥammad's time, sometimes described as henotheism, involved a belief in the existence of many deities alongside a single supreme God. A distinctive feature of Arabian *shirk* was 'angel worship'. The Arabs believed that the angels were

⁷² Klaus Schippmann, *Geschichte der alt-südarabischen Reiche*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1998, 55-74, esp. 72-74. For the conquest of the Yemen, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests. How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live in*, London: Weidenfeld, and Nicholson 2007, 24-27, 43f.

⁷³ Cf. Christian Robin, *L'Arabie antique de Karib'il à Mahomet: nouvelles données sur l'histoire des arabes grâce aux inscriptions*, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud 1992, 144-146. In accordance with Jacques Ryckmans, Hermann von Wissmann considers the formula "rḥmnn b'l smyno" ('Lord of Heaven') to be Jewish of the monotheistic period of South Arabia; see Hermann von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Alt-Südarabien*, (Sammlung Eduard Glaser III. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte, 246), Wien: Böhlau 1964, 358f. Since the question of whether this monotheism was Christian or Jewish has not been decided, Klaus Schippmann has suggested considering a third possibility, namely an autochthonous form of monotheism whose followers he interprets as the *ḥunafā'*; see Schippmann, *Geschichte*, 101. For the religious situation in Old South Arabia, see also Schippmann, *Geschichte*, 97-102, and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam. Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit. Eine Hinführung*, (Eastern Christian Studies, 7), Leuven: Peeters 2007, 111-136. Hainthaler relates the development of monotheistic belief in Old South Arabia to the advent of the Byzantine mission that took place in the late fourth century BCE; see Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 114.

the ‘daughters of God’ (Q 53:19-22; 6:100; 16:57; 37:149) and that they could function as intercessors (Arabic pl. *shufaʿāʾ*, sg. *shafīʾ*) of some sort (Q 10:18). God might be approached through them and they could be called upon to bless the believers.⁷⁴ Christian ROBIN takes up this question in his chapter on *Les anges de l’Arabie antique*, in which he explores the pre-Islamic concept of supernatural beings by focusing on ancient South Arabian epigraphic and iconographic representations in the context of other pre-Islamic (specifically Nabataean) Hellenised Semitic cultures. This broader approach helps to contextualise references to the cult of the ‘daughters of Allāh’ in the Muslim exegetical tradition of Q 53 and the tangled Meccan passages about a ‘cult of angels’ (Arabic *ʿibādat al-malāʾika*).

Prevalent beliefs about intermediating spiritual beings, in particular those beliefs concerning the Qurʾānic *malāʾika*, are discussed in Aziz AL-AZMEH’s *Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings*. Al-Azmeh, who was the keynote speaker at the Beirut conference, builds upon his recent study *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*. In his contribution, he addresses aspects of ‘preternatural’ beings from the period in which the Qurʾānic community emerged and clearly distinguishes between the later Muslim theological speculations about angels and their depiction in the multi-religious late antique environment of the Qurʾān. He thereby focuses on the socio-religious and political phenomena of the history of the early Muslim community, which he aptly terms ‘Paleo-Muslim’. The dynamic process of religious development is elaborated upon by considering pre-Islamic cultic practices of worship and sacrifice as a primary indicator for the belief in the efficacy of the divine. Deities, *jinn*, and angels tended to shade into each other functionally during the early stage of the transformation from henotheism and monolatry to a strict monotheism (Arabic *tawhīd*). The development of the idea of a unique supreme God was, then, a result of the absorption of functions which were otherwise attributed to different deities and other divine beings in line with the evolving taxonomy of the preternatural. With reference to the inner-Qurʾānic evidence, Al-Azmeh shows that the elabo-

⁷⁴ Q 53:19-20 mentions three such local deities by name: al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt. The same chapter clarifies their role by stating, “And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession avails naught, save after Allāh grants leave unto whomsoever He will and unto the one with whom He is content? Truly those who believe not in the Hereafter name the angels with female names” (Q 53:26-27). That the three goddesses, and perhaps others, are in fact angels who can function as intercessors is further clarified in Q 53:19-20: “And they have made the angels, who are servants of al-Raḥmān, females. ... They say: ‘Had al-Raḥmān willed, we would not have worshipped them’.” See Mohammed Shahab Ahmed, *The Satanic Verses Incident in the Memory of the Early Muslim Community: An Analysis of the Early Riwayāhs and Their Isnāds*, Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1999, 182, published as *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2017, 181. See also Christian Robin, “Les Filles de dieu de Saba’ à la Mecque: réflexions sur l’agencement des panthéons dans l’Arabie ancienne,” in: *Semitica* 50 (2001), 113-192; Christian Robin, “À propos des « Filles de dieu » Complément à l’article publié dans *Semitica* 50, 2001, 113-192,” in: *Semitica* 52-53 (2002-2007), 139-148.

rate distinctions between angels, *jinn*, and God, as well as the gap between transcendence and immanence, were virtually meaningless for, and in the context of, the seventh-century environment of the Qur'ān. Rather, they are, Al-Azmeh argues, a result of later Muslim theological reflection.

Islamic angelology, both when seen within the theological framework of monotheism and when treated as a 'throw-back' to an earlier, polytheistic system that underwent a process of revision, is discussed in Stephen BURGE's "*Panangelon*": *Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism. A Case Study Exploring Meteorological Angels in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's Al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik*. Burge argues that, especially in the field of 'popular' beliefs, there remained certain elements of Near and Middle Eastern polytheistic cultures which were subsequently Islamised to lesser or greater degrees. He focuses on 'meteorological' angels and on the question of the extent to which they function as not fully determined personifications of natural powers, rather than as "clear cut personalities." He analyses a selection of Muslim traditions on meteorological angels that include references to storm gods in ancient Near and Middle Eastern religions and shows that, while there are indeed connections to ancient Near and Middle Eastern deities, the depictions of the meteorological angels are also the result of Muslim exegetical elaboration. The continued use of older mythological motifs to describe and explain meteorological phenomena was, thus, hermeneutically harmonised with a Muslim worldview.

Part II:

Nature, substance, and significance of angels in monotheistic traditions

The Qur'ānic creation accounts reflect the distinct natures of humans and angels and their differing types of knowledge. By teaching Adam the names of all things (Arabic *al-asmā'*) (Q 2:30-32), God made the angels aware of the limits of their knowledge, despite their belonging to a higher ontological order than that to which humankind belongs. Muslim commentators read this Qur'ānic account as a demonstration of a unique human capacity that was lacking in the angels. Angels were no longer objects of worship within the Muslim conceptual framework but became a part of God's creation that humbly worships and attends to him as obedient servants (cf. Q 4:170-171).⁷⁵ Islamic mystics as early as Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) deliberated over the Qur'ānic phrase "I am placing a viceroy upon the earth" (Q 2:30) and compared contemplative prayer (Arabic *dhikr*) to the life (Arabic *ḥayāt*) of the angels, who could not survive if they did not worship God.⁷⁶ Al-Tustarī considers angels as models for the contemplative life and

⁷⁵ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung*, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust 2002, 8-10.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sūfi Sabl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896)*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1980, 204.

invisible guides to the mystic's heart. He describes the act of remembrance in prayer (*dhikr*) as the re-actualisation of God's presence in the mystic's innermost being, comparing this state of recollection to the constant celestial celebration of God's commemoration (Arabic *tasbīḥ*) on the part of the angels and holding that this praise is their mode of being, their very sustenance (Arabic *rizq*).⁷⁷

Sara KUEHN's chapter, *The Primordial Cycle Revisited: Adam, Eve, and the Celestial Beings*, with which the second section begins, carries out an extensive examination of the visual and textual sources for the position of humankind vis-à-vis the angels. These sources, she suggests, should be seen as part of an extended nexus of sacred events in the context of a pluricultural mythic repertoire derived from the monotheist scriptures, extra-scriptural literatures, and folk-religious beliefs. By considering the reciprocal relationship between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literary traditions, Kuehn demonstrates the engagement of both Muslim writers and painters in interpreting a narrative that is central for the understanding of the pivotal role played by angels in the Abrahamic traditions.

A particularly important role is played in this context by the angel Gabriel (Hebrew 'Man of God'), who serves as a central figure for all three monotheistic religions. Representing nations and individuals and natural phenomena, Gabriel not only belongs to the order of Archangels, acting as the ruler of paradise, as well as of the serpents and the cherubs (Enoch 20:7), but is often also the revealer (Daniel 8:16; 9:21) and a messenger from God to man (*Beresbit Rabbā* 48; 78; Luke 1:19, 26-28).⁷⁸ In the Qur'ān, the name Jibrā'il appears in the Medinan surahs and is always presented as belonging to an agent of revelation (Q 2:97).⁷⁹ Prominent *ḥadīth* reports and visual traditions, as well as much of the modern scholarship, have almost universally associated Gabriel (Arabic Jibrā'il, Hebrew Gabri'el) with the inspiration and divine revelation of Muḥammad. The spirit (Arabic *rūḥ*) is generally

⁷⁷ Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence*, 201.

⁷⁸ Cf. Hans Klein, "The Angel Gabriel According to Luke 1," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 313-323; see also Christoph Berner, "The Four (or Seven) Archangels in the First Book of Enoch and Early Jewish Writings in the Second Temple Period," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 395-411, esp. 406-408. For the *angelus interpres*, see also Karin Schöpflin, "God's Interpreter. The Interpreting Angel in Post-Exilic Prophetic Visions of the Old Testament," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 189-203. On the *angelus interpres* in Rabbinic tradition, see Schäfer, *Rivalität*, 10-12, 20-22 and 57-59.

⁷⁹ Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, with a Foreword by Gerhard Böwering and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān, 3), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2007, 100f; also, Josef Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, Leipzig: De Gruyter 1926, 107.

taken to be a reference to this Archangel. Cognate with the Hebrew *rūah* (wind, breath, and, by resemblance, spirit; mentioned in the Old Testament as a vehicle of divine intervention in human affairs; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16), this term comes from the same Arabic root as *rīh*, ‘wind’, which is precisely the meaning of the Latin *spiritus*. Both of these terms are related to the late antique concept of the *pneuma* as an equivalent to the *logos*.⁸⁰ The spirit or *rūh* comes down from or rises up through one realm after another. It comes down as the breath of life into Adam, the primordial human being (Q 15:29; 32:9; 38:71-72). Similarly, we read that God blew (Arabic *nafakha*) of His *rūh* into Mary (Arabic Maryam) for the conception of Jesus (Arabic ʿĪsā ibn Maryam) (Q 21:91; 66:12). Here *rūh* equates with *rīh* and means ‘breath of life’, the creation of which belongs to God, in accordance with Genesis 2:7 (cf. Job 27:3 and 33:4; Ezekiel 37:5; John 20:22). Importantly, there is an implicit association between the conception of Jesus and the breath that is bestowed upon Adam.

The Qurʾān associates *spirit* with the unseen realm of the angels, and refers to Gabriel, the angel of revelation, as *al-rūh al-amin*, the Trustworthy Spirit. Gabriel is thus represented as a personification of divine agency and even functions as a “figure on the nature of cognition itself.”⁸¹ Hence, even though the Qurʾānic conception of spirit is multifaceted, elusive, and resists being limited to any single entity, it is associated above all with the angel Gabriel. An identification of the spirit with Gabriel is also found in the New Testament, when the seven angels standing before God (Revelation 8:2, 6) are named the seven spirits (Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The spirit, or *rūh*, is invoked and plays a unifying role in creation, in the sending down of the prophetic revelation, and in the eschatology of the day of reckoning (Arabic *yawm al-din*, the Day of Judgement). As the time before time (creation) is essentially an enigma, so too are the end of time and the time of reckoning. The spirit functions as the agent that brings together the eternal and the temporal (Q 70:1-9). These three liminal or interstitial moments, points of contact between the eternal and the temporal realms, imply, at the same time, an insemination, a conception, and a birth.

The non-Qurʾānic legend of the purification of Muḥammad’s heart by angels, often specified as the archangels Gabriel and Michael (Arabic Mikāʾil, Q 2:97-8), is

⁸⁰ For a discussion of the difficult term *pneuma*, interpreted as an equivalent of ‘spirit Christology’ (‘Geistchristologie’), see Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Anglomorphie Pneumatology. Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae. Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language, 95), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2009, esp. XXV-XXIX. The synonymous use of *pneuma* and *logos* is especially evident in the work of Clement of Alexandria, see Bucur, *Anglomorphie Pneumatology*, 75-79. On its relation to aether, which was considered as the place of the souls in early Christian thought, see J. H. Waszink, “Aether,” in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 1, Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1950, 150-158.

⁸¹ Gisela Webb, “Gabriel,” in: *Encyclopedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., Leiden, Boston: Brill 2002, 278f.

richly textured in later Muslim traditions. It carries, perhaps, an echo of a prophetic initiation reminiscent of the Biblical prophets, as found, for instance, in Ezekiel 1-3 and Isaiah 6, as well as of other anthropologically analogous paradigms, many of which involve an ascension. Indeed, this rite of passage is sometimes associated with Muḥammad's heavenly journey (*mi'rāj*) and with Qur'ān 17:1.

The depiction of angels in Byzantine tradition, and particularly the depiction of the Archangel Michael, is explored in Glenn PEERS' *Angelic Anagogy, Silver and Matter's Mire in Late Antique Christianity*. Peers focuses specifically on the embodiment of icons and iconographical depictions in order to explain how objects navigate the space between the sacred and the profane. The object's underlying matter is not the image itself but, rather, the viewer's imaginative carnality, his/her corporeal presence before the object which puts his/her body into relation with the icon. Peers focuses on objects and primarily Greek texts from approximately 550-650 CE. He emphasises that this span of time can stand as an example for other periods and that the issues discussed are important for understanding Byzantine and Eastern Christian concepts of the relationship between humans and the material world and, consequently, the divine. His discussion of alchemical thought further helps to explain how the qualities of matter determine the experiences of bodies and how they receive guidance on becoming close to the divine. Peers builds upon the late antique scientific system, as represented by Aristotelianism and Platonism, which helps to explain the mechanics of the cosmos in terms of a combination of classical physics and its later Christian metaphysical adaptation.

In *Création et Êtres Angéliques d'après un Manuscrit Arabe inédit. L'Hexaéméron du Pseudo-Épiphanes de Salamane*, Marlène KANAAN provides insights into a pseudo-epigraphic apocryphal commentary on the *Book of Genesis* preserved in a seventeenth-century Greek manuscript. The text provides a paraphrased description of the *Hexaemeron* and, in many instances, follows the Ethiopian *Book of Jubilees*. It describes the heavenly agents and their functions within the hierarchical structures of the divine order. By referring to Rabbinic literature, Kanaan explains that this apocryphal work can be related to a syncretistic fourth-century Palestinian context and that the author of the work was actively engaged in the attempt to harmonise Christian ideas with both Jewish literature and late antique philosophy.

A critical approach to the celestial space as the imagined dwelling place of angelic beings is developed through a juxtaposition of Jewish, Gnostic, and Christian late antique traditions. Focusing on the second and third century CE, Johann Ev. HAFNER's *Where Angels Dwell: Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity* reflects on angelology as a driving force for speculations about the borders of the universe and the potential multiplicity of worlds in a late antique context. In contradistinction to the scholarly assumption that the increasing transcendence of

a distant God requires more angels in order to bridge this distance, Hafner rigorously demonstrates that it was in fact the huge diversification of angels that was understood as elevating God to greater and greater transcendent heights, which were, in turn, associated with a heaven above a visible sky. This thesis shows that the tendency to further differentiate angelic functions across hierarchical spheres, in order to warrant God's transcendence, resulted in a concomitant spatial expansion of the heavens as a reflection of earthly structures.

Frederick COLBY's chapter focuses on the accounts of Muḥammad's *mī'rāj* that describe his encounter with a fantastic angel whose body is composed half of fire and half of snow (or ice). In *Uniting Fire and Snow: Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel 'Habīb' in Medieval Versions of Muḥammad's Ascension*, he compares a variety of Muslim references to this angel found in middle period Muslim ascension narratives, as well as a brief reference to a similar angel in the Rabbinic 'Ascension of Moses', arguing that the Muslim tradition concerning this angelic figure is not related to the Rabbinic narrative. A close reading of the Muslim references, however, reveals the important function that this angel plays in *mī'rāj* texts themselves, namely that of counseling the Muslims to heal rifts within their own communities and within themselves.

Part III:

Approaches to angels in Islamic contexts

The final part of this volume considers the interpretation of angelic beings within the framework of Muslim traditions and follows the horizontal approach. It is dedicated, in particular, to the bi-directional functionality of angels. In their relation to the divine, angels are mostly imagined as servile assistants and as agents who carry out divine commands. In their relation to humankind, by contrast, angels are conceived of as figures of authority who, in following the divine commands, have a supporting, protecting, or punishing function. Even more, angels become visible as intermediary agents due to the functions they fulfil, and this visibility enables them to pass over the threshold between the worlds. The focus on the functionality of angels in this part of the volume is even related to hermeneutical questions, allowing an allegorical understanding that interprets them as cosmic forces that are able to influence the dynamic balance of the world and the actions of human beings.

The Muslim interpretation relies on hierarchical cosmological schemes, the structure of heaven, and the idea of the seven heavens, which were all, as mentioned above, already familiar in their outline to the ancient peoples of the Near and Middle East. According to the Qur'ān, the seven heavens were created (Q 41:12; cf. 23:17; 78:12) as layers, one above the other (Q 67:3; cf. 71:15). From His throne (Arabic *'arsh*) in the seventh heaven, God controls and directs the cosmos (Q 7:54) and the affairs of the world (Q 10:3, 31; 13:2; 32:5). He

sends down commands through angels and the Spirit, and these ascend back to Him with reports (Q 22:5; 70:4; 34:2; 57:4; 97:4). We are told here that one day of the ascension of the angels equals one thousand years of ‘earthly’ time (Q 32:5, cf. 22:47). Similarly, in Qur’ān 70:4, the phrase “a day whose measure is fifty thousand years” is understood to refer to either the Day of Resurrection or the distance between heaven and earth, as well as indicating the disparity between time in the spiritual realm and time in this world. In the seventh heaven, or above it, the angels sing the praise of God (Q 39:75; 40:7; cf. 69:17; 42:3) and seek forgiveness for the believers (Q 40:7). The ‘*arsh*’ is encircled by the angelic carriers (Q 39:75), who move in serried ranks (Q 89:22; cf. 37:1). Angels also hold up God’s stool (Arabic *kursī*), which contains the heavens and the earth (Q 2:255).

Islamic tradition, consisting of early exegetical material and reports – mostly very succinct – concerning the lives of the Prophet and those close to him, sustains and mirrors dogmatic dynamics and different understandings of history. Roberto TOTTOLI’s abundantly documented study, *The Carriers of the Throne of God: Islamic Traditions Between Sunnī Angelology and Shi‘ī Visions*, elucidates this point in its treatment of traditions regarding the carriers of God’s Throne in Sunnī and Shi‘ī traditions. In some traditions, angels appear to be interchangeable with those foundational figures who belonged to the family of the Prophet, particularly in the early Islamic imaginings of the carriers of the Throne. The Qur’ānic and Islamic concepts of the Throne of God, which find striking parallels in Biblical and Rabbinic tradition, in particular those traditions relating to Ezekiel, developed into a vivacious plurality of visions representing the symbolic eminence of the Throne and the hierarchical order of those who carry it or dwell in its direct proximity. An obvious sectarian rivalry runs through early traditions. Sunnī traditions emphasise the role played by angels in carrying the Throne, with these beings giving proof of their adoration and of God’s majesty as they do so. Shi‘ī traditions, by contrast, favour the central figures of Shi‘at ‘Alī, confirming their closeness to God and their entitlement to lead, although this tendency becomes milder over time and the angels can be seen resuming their place around the Throne in later texts. Despite these changes in its attendants, the significance of the Throne itself as the representation of the essence of the true religion, the author suggests, did not wane. There were other, more subtle means that could be used to express a claim to priority, such as the depiction of the names of the Prophet’s family as written on the throne. Tottoli’s discussion is not, however, solely restricted to the powerful carriers of the Throne. It also embraces a wide range of reports that refer to the religious distinction and merits of those beings who are said to be close to it, such as the souls of the martyrs depicted as hanging from the Throne. The story Tottoli tells is inclusive, draws upon a wide range of sources, and is largely uninterested in whether the single tradition is valid and generally accepted among its Muslim audience. He

thus offers a comprehensive depiction of the many shades and expressions related to this significant representation of the world beyond.

Sebastian GÜNTHER's detailed survey of the role of angels in Muslim eschatology, *"As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands" (Qur'ān 6:93): The Work of Heavenly Agents According to Muslim Eschatology*, focuses on classical eschatological texts, the works of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). Günther also draws attention to parallels in Rabbinic, Iranian, and ancient Egyptian traditions, showing that the highly imaginative descriptions of angels and their functions in Islam can be understood as reverberations and transformations of earlier traditions, which undergo a "resourceful adoption" to the Islamic context, as the author puts it. Angels carry out a wide range of quite specific functions and duties during the distinct stages of the complex events that take place at death and in the post-death journey taken by both body and soul. The scenario includes inter alia the way in which angels are engaged with the biological death of humans, the dragging of the soul out of the body, the accompanying of the soul on the initial journey to the heavens and the subsequent return to the body, the interrogation of the dead in the grave, and the many duties fulfilled by angels at the resurrection and final judgement. The visitation and interrogation of the dead in the grave by the angels Munkar and Nakir⁸² is a unique aspect of Muslim angelology.

With the wide range of functions performed by angels in the eschatological context, they appear as assistants, helping to perform or to prepare something that they do not, themselves, bring about. In this role, serving on the one hand as subalterns while on the other they act as agents who exercise a degree of control over human beings, they also have to perform acts of considerable severity, including the threatening and punishing of individuals. Since they are able to move freely between the physical world of the human being and the celestial world of the divine, their role is an intermediary one. A possible interpretation of the eschatological schema which emerges in Günther's chapter is that it accentuates the fundamental dichotomy between earth and heaven, and between good and bad.

Both the tenets of faith and the metaphysical tradition adopted by Arab philosophy from Neoplatonism are seminal for the broad dimensions of the Islamic conception of angels. The intermediary position of man as standing between beast and angel is a topos that provides evidence for the general notion of a hierarchically structured creation. A dualism between evil and good celestial beings also pervades the Islamic discourse on the world beyond the earth. In the intellectual world of the *Iḵḫwān al-Ṣafā'* ('Brethren of Purity', established c. 373/983), whose teachings constitute the starting point for a series of studies in this part of the vol-

⁸² Ian Richard Netton, "The Perils of Allegory: Medieval Islam and the Angels of the Grave," in: *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, Ian Richard Netton, ed., vol. 1, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2000, 417-427.

ume, “angels are thought to be found in the chests of believers, and demons in the chests of infidels.”⁸³ In his *The Ikhwān as-Ṣafā’ on Angels and Spiritual Beings*, Godefroid DE CALLATAÏ discusses the astral determinism and the importance of the world of spirits in the teachings of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’*. This aspect of their thought is related to an undercurrent running through their teachings that is also exemplified by the ubiquity of angels and which ultimately derives from their application of emanation theory. At the same time, these thinkers obviously endeavour to establish a harmonious relationship between Neoplatonic ideas, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Islamic teachings laid out in the Qurʾān and the Prophet’s teachings (Arabic *ḥadīth*). This connection appears most strikingly when *ḥadīth* material is used to explain the link between angels and the spheres of the celestial vault. As the author suggests, both trends seem to merge in a spiritual philosophy that attempts to teach one how to become an angel. The human being exhibits flagrant limitations and deficiencies when compared to angels, whereas angels, with their elaborate hierarchy, correlate with the planets and spheres and their corresponding astrological implications. The author also briefly directs attention towards the intellectual background of the Brethren and, specifically, their tendency to consider astrology and the natural sciences as essential approaches for understanding the relations between angels and the heavenly spheres. One may add that in their epistles (*rasā’il*), the Brethren also refer to the Ṣābiān from Ḥarrān, who practiced an intensive cult of astral worship, but they may only have made use of certain Ṣbian symbols in a purely allegorical manner. This extreme form of astral determinism also informs many passages of the epistles in which the theories are reported as part and parcel of the Brethren’s own teaching. De Callataï suggests that the correlation of heavenly spheres and angels as it is maintained in the epistles must be understood in the light of the astrological implications that spheres and planets have according to the Brethren’s teaching.

The teachings of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’* intersect in interesting ways with aspects of Ibn Khaldūn’s (d. 808/1406) discussion, as Stefan LEDER shows in his *Angels as Part of Human Civilisation. Ibn Khaldūn’s Conciliating Approach*. Man’s intermediary position between beasts and angels reappears here, and the author construes the idea of connectivity between human and angelic spheres – including revelation – by reference to the well-defined and hierarchical ascending order of different spheres. In this vein, the uninterrupted and continuous connection allows motion between the spheres and provides the possibility that human beings, in particular prophets who comply with specific requirements, may exchange their human status for that of the next higher order of beings, the angels. Yet Ibn Khaldūn is not involved in teaching how individual human faculties could be developed so that they may connect to the spiritual world. His focus is

⁸³ For the translation see: Yasmine F. Alsaleh, “‘Licit Magic’: The Touch and Sight of Islamic Talismanic Scrolls,” Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University 2014, 41. Ikhwān, *Rasā’il ikhwān al-ṣafā’*, 4:425.

on civilisation as it is advanced by man as a social being. His analytical approach identifies the principles that make it possible to achieve this level of civilisation, including the faculties and limitations of human cognition. He relates these principles to the particular instances of social organisation and human activity that characterise civilisation. In accordance with his general stance, which emphasises the importance of religion for the organisation of society, he is careful to balance philosophy and religion. Both the explications regarding the nature of the soul, which enables access to the sphere of supreme cognition, the sphere of angels, and the Islamic teaching on revelation and God's interference with certain individuals, the prophets, are acknowledged and related to each other. When Ibn Khaldūn insists on the rational deducibility of the angelic sphere, metaphysics bridge the gap between human civilisation and the world beyond. That angels seem, from this perspective, to be reduced to no more than their epistemic functionality underscores Ibn Khaldūn's rationalist outlook. His focal point, Leder argues, remains man and his God-willed capacities, which include access to the world beyond. The question of the sources to which Ibn Khaldūn's discussion is indebted cannot be settled at this point with certainty. However, we can say, at the very least, that he was deeply immersed in the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic heritage of Islamic philosophy.

The final two contributions in this part of the volume refer to illustrated books and reflect on the intricate relationship between the discursive and visual representation of angels. The famous encyclopaedia of natural history compiled by Zakariyyā' al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), which was also indebted to the astrological and philosophical explanations of the *Ikbwān al-Ṣafā'*, is extant in Persian and Arabic versions produced by the author himself. From her autopsy of the manuscripts, Karin RÜHRDANZ presents new insights into their chronological order in her chapter *Zakariyyā' al-Qazwīnī on the Inhabitants of the Supralunar World: From the First Persian Version (659/1260-61) to the Second Arabic Redaction (678/1279-80)*. Rührdanz demonstrates that the amendments and additions applied to the chapter on angels in the first Arabic version, dedicated to al-Juwaynī, himself a famously erudite individual, might have been motivated by the author's wish to display his erudition and understanding of the spiritual and moral agency of angels, and of their activities within nature. The illustrations belonging to the oldest manuscript of the second Arabic redaction show angels as winged figures, often with a human shape. The artist follows, interprets, and simplifies their verbal description. These pictures later became a model for the depiction of the marvelous creatures. Confronting the reader with the image of angels inevitably made them, as Rührdanz suggests, more real, creating a reality, one is tempted to add, in the image's own figurative terms.

The composite multilayered source of the *Shāb-nāme (Book of Kings)*, completed in the early eleventh century, combines elements of different beliefs wherein an-

cient Iranian Zoroastrian traditions take pride of place.⁸⁴ Our volume closes with Anna CAIOZZO's *L'ange et le roi dans la culture visuelle de l'Orient médiéval: Le cas des miniatures du Šah-nāma de Firdawsi de Tūs*, which focuses on this heritage by discussing the association of the angel with royalty in the visual culture of the *Šāh-nāme* and in the context of other Islamic illustrated manuscripts. A focal point here is the development of the motif of winged figures, more generally referred to in scholarly literature as Nike (Victory), which can be recognised in the *victoriae* set into the spandrels of the monumental rock-cut arch at Tāq-i Bustān, built by the Sasanian king Khusraw II Parwiz (590-628).⁸⁵ This, in turn, inspires the interpretation of angels as guardians and saviours of kings, followed by a brief discussion of the role of angels in esoteric or secret sciences, such as magic. Caiozzo shows that angels serve as guarantors of the divine order by demarcating different types of royalty, an intervention which is associated with the appearance of the inspired sage who, little by little, takes precedence over these manifestations of the world beyond.

We hope that this volume will shed new light on textual and visual representations of the numinous intermediating beings in Islamic traditions that are typically referred to as angels. Our aim has been to situate interpretations of these entities within their broader transcultural contexts so as to throw them into relief and expose new details and nuances of the ways in which they have been understood. 'Islamic angelology' has the potential to be a fertile new interdisciplinary field of study that explores broad conceptions of transcendence and immanence and the relationship between human existence and religious ideas.

During the conference, and even more so during the preparation of this volume, we became increasingly aware of the richness of our topic. It is our conviction that the Islamic belief in angels should not be understood in a vacuum but, rather, in relation to the earlier traditions of divine mediation and the imaginations of the cosmos that were adapted or rejected in the subsequent Islamic traditions. Studying angels in Islam from a comparative perspective can, thus, help us to identify and understand continuities of tradition beyond Islamic belief, as well as specific developments within.

⁸⁴ Cf. Kolsoum Ghazanfari, *Perceptions of Zoroastrian Realities in the Shahnameh: Zoroaster, Beliefs, Rituals*, Berlin: Logos-Verlag 2011.

⁸⁵ Johanna Domela Movassat, *The Large Vault at Tāq-i Bustan: A Study in Late Sasanian Royal Art*, Lewiston: Mellen 2005.

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Part I:
Angels in Relation to Near and Middle Eastern
Polytheistic Traditions

Les origines hellénistiques de la représentation des anges dans le christianisme ancien

Nada Hérou (Beyrouth)

Les formes des créatures angéliques ou ailées étaient connues chez les civilisations les plus anciennes du Bassin méditerranéen, depuis les peuples de la Mésopotamie jusqu'aux Romains en passant par les Egyptiens, Phéniciens, Grecs, qui tous ont eu dans leurs croyances des messagers divins. Dans cette étude je me baserai sur les origines de la représentation des anges dans la religion chrétienne.

Image traditionnelle des anges

L'iconographie des anges, tout autant que celle des figures sacrées de la religion chrétienne, a mis un certain temps à se former et à s'implanter dans l'art chrétien. Il était probablement plus évident de peindre les images du Christ, de la Vierge, des apôtres et de tous les saints que de s'imaginer des représentations concrètes relatives aux anges. Contrairement aux saints qui ont existé et vécu sur terre et qui étaient visibles, les anges sont des créatures plutôt invisibles au commun des gens car elles sont de nature spirituelle. La tâche de trouver donc une image à de telles créatures s'avère difficile voire complexe.

Depuis les premiers siècles du christianisme, les Pères de l'Église ont chacun interprété à sa façon l'origine du monde angélique.¹ Sur l'incompréhensibilité de la nature des anges Jean Damascène (m. 749) l'affirme en disant: «Le Créateur seul connaît la forme et la définition de cette substance ».² L'apôtre Paul dans sa Lettre aux Colossiens (1:16) dit: « Car en lui ont été créées toutes les choses qui sont dans les cieux et sur la terre, les visibles et les invisibles, trônes, dignités, dominations, autorités ». Je rappelle que les trônes, les dignités, les dominations et les autorités sont les noms des ordres angéliques. Saint Luc expliquant la nature des anges (24:39) dit « Un esprit n'a ni chair ni os ». D'après les Pères de l'Église, les images sensibles à travers lesquelles apparaissent les anges (plusieurs apparitions sont décrites dans l'histoire sacrée, dans l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testaments), ne sont pas le reflet de leur nature, mais seulement le reflet de leur état temporaire.³ C'est pour-

¹ Sur la polémique concernant l'origine des anges voir: Joseph Turmel, « Histoire de l'angéologie, des temps apostoliques à la fin du V^e siècle », dans : *Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuse*, vol. 3 (1898), 412-426. Voir aussi: Vincent Klee, *Les plus beaux textes sur les Saints Anges*, Collection Angelogia, vol. 2, Nouvelles éditions latines, Paris 1984.

² Klee, *Les plus beaux textes*, 26.

³ Turmel, « Angéologie », 413-414; Fernand Cabrol et Henri Leclercq, « Ange », dans: *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie (DACL)*, vol. 1, 2^e partie, Paris: Librairie Letouzey et Ané 1924, 2080-2161; Angelo di Bernardino (réd.), *Adaptation française François*

quoi ils appelaient les anges des esprits sans chair car, d'après eux, ces créatures possédaient des corps composés de manière plus subtile que notre chair.⁴

Tous les écrits parlant d'anges les décrivent comme des créatures éthérées qui traversent les obstacles matériels et dont le déplacement est instantané; bref ils transgressent le temps et l'espace et par conséquent ils ne sont pas sujets aux lois physiques.⁵ Dans ce monde immatériel d'esprits ne possédant ni corps ni chair, ni forme, les artistes arrivèrent quand même à trouver une image reflétant ou reproduisant ces créatures.

Cette iconographie dotant les anges d'une image précise les faisant facilement reconnaissable prendra du temps à s'établir, mais une fois formée elle sera stable. Ce n'est que vers le VI^e-VII^e siècle que cette image se fixe définitivement. Ainsi l'ange adopte une allure plutôt androgyne avec son aspect juvénile aux longs cheveux bouclés noués derrière la tête, comme le montre bien la fresque de l'église de Notre-Dame-des-Ruines à Kfar Hilda au Mont Liban (XIII^e siècle) (Fig. 1). Les vêtements classiques d'un ange sont le chiton ou tunique et l'himation ou pallium qui est une sorte de manteau jeté par-dessus le chiton. Ces deux types de vêtements adoptent généralement les couleurs rouge et bleue. Les attributs de l'ange sont ses ailes comme symbole de sa dextérité et de sa réaction instantanée, le ruban sur ses cheveux comme pour indiquer sa nature supérieure, le bâton pour indiquer sa nature de messenger et le globe pour signifier son universalité. Parfois les archanges s'habillent du loros et parfois des vêtements de guerre.

L'évolution de l'image des anges

Avant d'arriver à cette iconographie fixe, la représentation des anges devra encore traverser différentes étapes durant lesquelles différentes formes coexisteront, comme elle puisera ses modèles non pas d'une seule origine mais plusieurs types iconographiques et sémantiques se réuniront pour élaborer l'image finale. Il est donc intéressant de voir comment cette iconographie va progressivement se former.

Les images les plus anciennes d'anges que l'on retrouve dans les catacombes de Rome et sur les sarcophages ne remontent pas au-delà du III^e-IV^e siècle, elles reproduisent des anges qui sont pour nous à peine identifiables. En ces premiers siècles les anges participent aux scènes vétérotestamentaires. La catacombe de la

Vial, « Angéologie », dans: *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du christianisme ancien*, vol. 1, Paris: Cerf 1990, 124-129.

⁴ Turmel, « Angéologie », 413-414.

⁵ Glenn Peers, *Subtle Bodies. Representing Angels in Byzantium*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press 2001, 13-60.



Fig. 1: Ange, Nativité, Kfar Hilda (Liban). Photographie © N. Hélou.

Via Latina⁶ reproduit une des versions les plus anciennes de la scène de l'Hospitalité d'Abraham (III^e-IV^e siècle), provenant de catacombe de la Via Latina à Rome (Fig. 2) qui sera plus tard interprétée comme la scène de la Trinité.⁷ Le vieux prophète est assis, alors que les trois visiteurs à l'allure de trois adolescents, qui

⁶ Les trois clichés provenant des Musées du Vatican me sont parvenus grâce à l'aide de madame Irena Vaišvilaite que je remercie vivement.

⁷ André Grabar, *Le premier art chrétien*, Paris: Gallimard 1966, 231; Mahmoud Zibawi, *L'art paléochrétien*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1998, 131.



Fig. 2: L'Hospitalité d'Abraham, catacombe de la Via Latina. Photographie © Musées du Vatican, Rome.

sont censés être des anges, s'approchent de lui. Une autre image d'anges est figurée dans le songe de Jacob ou l'échelle de Jacob, scène de la catacombe de la Via Latina.⁸ Le prophète voit dans son rêve une échelle qui est enfoncée dans la terre et rejoint le ciel. Les anges, qui ressemblent à des hommes romains ordinaires, y montent et y descendent, montrant ainsi que le ciel et la terre sont reliés. Dans la catacombe de la Via Latina une autre fresque reproduit l'épisode de Balaam avec l'ange brandissant son épée et arrêtant l'ânesse; le messenger de Dieu menace le devin de renoncer à maudire le peuple d'Israël.⁹ Si l'on ignorait cette histoire qui provient du livre des nombres (22-24), il aurait été difficile de l'identifier à cause de l'ange qui ne ressemble pas à lui-même: celui-ci adopte l'aspect d'un homme barbu au regard farouche. Toutes ces figures d'anges qui remontent au III^e et IV^e siècle sont représentées à peu près de la même façon: ils sont tous de beaux jeunes gens, ou d'âge mur, habillés selon la tradition courante de l'époque de la tunique et du pallium, ils ne sont ni ailés, ni nimbés, et ne possèdent aucun attribut qui puisse les identifier.

⁸ Grabar, *Le premier art chrétien*, 230; Zibawi, *L'art paléochrétien*, 131.

⁹ Zibawi, *L'art paléochrétien*, 114-115; Grabar, *Le premier art chrétien*, 260.



Fig. 3: L'Annonciation à la Vierge Marie, catacombe de Priscilla.
Photographie © Musées du Vatican, Rome.

La plus ancienne image néotestamentaire de l'époque provient de la catacombe de Priscilla à Rome avec la scène de l'Annonciation à la Vierge Marie datée de la seconde moitié du III^e siècle¹⁰ (Fig. 3). L'archange Gabriel, à peine reconnaissable, comparait devant la Vierge, la main tendue vers elle, il est vêtu du pallium ou de l'himation. Encore faut-il noter que la chapelle chrétienne la plus ancienne se trouvant à Doura Europos (241), figure la Résurrection du Christ avec les Femmes au tombeau, scène autrement appelée l'Ange au Tombeau car celui-ci comparait assis sur le tombeau vide du Seigneur devant les Myrophores (les femmes qui se rendent au Sépulcre le lendemain de la Crucifixion pour embaumer le corps de

¹⁰ Zibawi, *L'art paléochrétien*, 162.

Jésus) leur annonçant la bonne nouvelle. Or à Doura Europos cet ange qui doit annoncer la Résurrection du Seigneur n'y est pas représenté.¹¹

Rome et Ravenne offrent en cette période protobyzantine différentes images d'anges qui se distinguent toutes par leurs aspects souvent très différents. Ainsi l'église de Santa Pudenziana à Rome datée du pontificat de Sirice (384-399) représente dans la partie supérieure de sa conque absidale les quatre symboles des évangélistes avec l'ange de saint Mattieu. Or celui-ci est représenté sous l'allure d'un beau jeune héros musclé qui est doté d'une paire d'aile.¹² Encore un exemple assez significatif de la conception de l'image des anges se retrouve dans les mosaïques de la basilique Santa Maria Maggiore à Rome (432-440). Ces figures bien que nimbées ne ressemblent guère à leur iconographie traditionnelle établie plus tard: leurs cheveux sont bouclés, leurs vêtements blancs, signe de leur pureté, continuent à être amples, lourds et très larges. Par ailleurs les anges sont représentés ici tantôt ailés comme dans les scènes de l'Annonciation et de la Nativité, tantôt sans ailes comme dans la scène de l'Hospitalité d'Abraham.¹³ Il est remarquable de noter que pour la première fois on voit un ange volant qui est figuré dans la scène de l'Annonciation. Ailés ou non, ces anges se ressemblent avec leurs chitons et himations blancs, leurs nimbes et leurs cheveux foncés et bouclés qui entourent leurs visages. Ces mêmes traits caractérisant les figures d'anges qui persistent dans l'art du VI^e siècle, comme certaines mosaïques de Ravenne le témoignent bien.¹⁴

Tout ceci prouve qu'à cette époque non seulement avant l'édit de Milan, mais plus d'un siècle plus tard, les artistes travaillant pour les chrétiens, soit préféraient éviter de représenter les anges comme à Doura Europos, soit les représentaient comme chacun les concevait à cause de l'absence d'une iconographie précise les identifiant.

Les figures d'anges sur les sarcophages paléochrétiens

Beaucoup de sarcophages chrétiens du IV^e siècle, figurant des événements de l'ancien et du nouveau testaments, ont reproduit à peu près les mêmes scènes.¹⁵ Ainsi l'on voit se répéter le sacrifice d'Abraham et Daniel dans la fosse aux lions; à chaque fois on a de la peine à reconnaître l'ange. Dans la scène du sacrifice

¹¹ William Seston, « L'église et le baptistère de Doura-Europos », dans: *Publication de l'Ecole française de Rome* 43 (1980), 607-627, esp. 614-615; Grabar, *Le premier art chrétien*, 69; Zibawi, *L'art paléochrétien*, 72.

¹² André Grabar, *L'âge d'or de Justinien*, Paris: Gallimard 1966, 146-150.

¹³ Grabar, *L'âge d'or*, 146-150.

¹⁴ Des anges portant le chiton et l'himation blancs se retrouvent dans la conque de l'abside de Saint-Vital, et aussi sur les murs nord et sud de Saint-Apollinaire Nuovo. Mais dans ce dernier exemple leur cheveux sont longs.

¹⁵ Sur l'uniformité de la production de sarcophages voir: Mat Immerzeel et Peter Jongste, « Les ateliers de sarcophages paléochrétiens en Gaule: la Provence et les Pyrénées », dans: *Antiquité tardive* 2 (1994), 233-249.



Fig. 4: Le sacrifice d'Abraham, sarcophage de Junius Bassus, Rome, Saint-Pierre. Photographie © Musées du Vatican, Rome.

d'Abraham du sarcophage de Junius Bassus (359), du Musée du Vatican (grotte de Saint-Pierre)¹⁶, l'ange, sous l'allure d'un adolescent aux cheveux constitués de courtes mèches, est habillé d'une toge et souffle à l'oreille du vieil homme qui brandit son couteau s'appêtant d'égorger son fils (Fig. 4). Sur le sarcophage dit

¹⁶ Friedrich W. Deichmann, Giuseppe Bovini, Hugo Brandenburg, *Repertorium der christlich-antiken Sarkophage. Rom und Ostia*, vol. 1, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag 1967, 279-283.

des Deux Frères l'ange derrière Abraham ne ressemble pas à son homologue figuré sur le sarcophage précédent, car avec sa chevelure épaisse et ronde il paraît un peu plus âgé.¹⁷ Sur un autre sarcophage dit de Bartolomeo du Museo Pio Cristiano¹⁸ reproduisant des scènes bibliques l'ange qui retient la main du patriarche ne ressemble pas aux deux premiers. Sur un quatrième sarcophage des musées du Vatican, autrefois dans le palais du cardinal di Carpegna, puis à Sainte-Marie-du-Trastévère à Rome¹⁹, daté du premier quart du IV^e siècle, le messager apparaît encore plus distinct des autres: avec sa barbe et son crâne chauve, il est aussi vieux qu'Abraham et ses traits sont si réalistes qu'il paraît être le portrait d'un personnage concret. Sur un sarcophage dit dogmatique, conservé à Saint-Paul-hors-les-murs à Rome, reproduisant des scènes de l'ancien et du nouveau testament, un ange, à l'allure d'un petit personnage juvénile, vêtu d'une tunique cintrée, tend un panier de pain à Daniel qui se trouve dans la fosse aux lions.²⁰ D'ailleurs dans la majorité de ces sarcophages la scène avec Daniel dans la fosse aux lions reproduit un ange mais à chaque fois l'aspect de celui-ci change.

Toutes ces scènes reproduisant des figures variées d'anges sur des sarcophages remontent généralement au IV^e siècle. Les représentations de ces créatures célestes continuent de prendre des allures différentes encore au V^e siècle. Sur un ivoire reproduisant sur deux registres une scène de Résurrection (Milan, Castello Sforzesco) avec en haut les soldats endormis et, en bas, les femmes au tombeau, l'ange, qui accueille les Myrophores, est dépourvu d'ailes.²¹ Certes il est nimbé, mais il est vêtu d'une toge romaine ordinaire. Sur un autre ivoire (Munich, Bayerisches Nationalmuseum), daté de la même époque, et figurant dans la partie supérieure une Ascension et dans la partie inférieure une scène de Résurrection²², l'ange au tombeau, à l'inverse de son homologue de l'ivoire de Milan, ne possède ni ailes ni nimbe. Il ressemble à un ordinaire citoyen romain.²³

Avec toutes ces figures très variées d'anges qui ne se ressemblent pas, l'on comprend alors qu'à cette époque, même au V^e siècle, il n'existait pas encore d'iconographie précise pour les images d'anges, tel que nous avons vu dans les peintures des catacombes; ceux-ci étaient loin d'être idéalisés, au contraire, ils adoptaient des formes non seulement typiquement humaines mais se soumettaient aux métamor-

¹⁷ Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, *Repertorium*, no 43.

¹⁸ Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, *Repertorium*, no 42.

¹⁹ Jean-Michel Spieser, *Images du Christ. Des Catacombes aux lendemains de l'icône*, Genève: Librairie Droz S.A., 2015, no 37.

²⁰ Deichmann, Bovini, Brandenburg, *Repertorium*, 39; Marie Pardyová, « Les sarcophages paléochrétiens de dimensions monumentales », dans: *Studia minora facultatis philosophicae universitatis Brunensis* 2 (1997), 137-148, notamment 138-139.

²¹ Peers, *Subtle Bodies*, 33-34.

²² Pour les deux figurations voir: Grabar, *L'âge d'or*, 286-287.

²³ Fernand Cabrol et Henri Leclercq, « Ange » dans: *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie (DACL)*, vol. 1, 2081-2082.

phoses subies par le temps durant la vie sur terre: ces anges sont figurés tantôt jeunes, tantôt âgés.

Les figures de génies ou d'enfants ailés

Toujours à l'époque paléochrétienne les tentatives de façonner une image identifiant ces êtres spirituels continuaient de se développer. Parallèlement aux images d'« anges-hommes » une nouvelle iconographie se faisait jour aux environs de la deuxième moitié ou de la fin du III^e siècle. Celle-ci sera issue d'une influence païenne évidente: l'ange emprunte les traits des figures allégoriques ou des personifications.

L'art antique a beaucoup favorisé les représentations de génies qui sont des figures mythiques de jeunes gens ailés. Les génies (du latin *genius*, gens, figno qui signifie procréer, produire et du grec γεννάω – gennan – qui désigne former, générer) sont en fait des divinités individuelles dont la tâche est d'accompagner les êtres vivants depuis la naissance jusqu'à la mort. Ils peuvent être alors comparés aux anges gardiens. Ils sont souvent représentés nus, leurs fonctions étaient multiples. Les quatre génies du sarcophage dit des quatre Saisons de Dumbarton Oaks incarnent des catégories immatérielles.²⁴ Les Saisons font allusion à la vanité de l'existence mais aussi à l'espérance de renouvellement éternelle de la vie. La symbolique des Saisons, très populaire dans l'antiquité, était associée aux quatre âges de l'homme. L'apparition de ces génies des Saisons sur les sarcophages revêt un sens eschatologique. Comme les Saisons incarnent une notion immatérielle, elles ont été rattachées aux anges.²⁵

Les croyances antiques concevaient la vie comme un combat dans lequel le juste sort vainqueur et par conséquent il obtient l'immortalité. Celle-ci est le résultat de son triomphe sur les forces du mal qui incarnent le péché et la mort.²⁶ C'est cette symbolique qui est représentée sur les sarcophages avec ou sans des scènes de combats et aussi avec le portrait du défunt inscrit dans un médaillon et porté par des Victoires ou des génies.

Les figures de génies, d'amours et de victoires peuvent porter le même sens et sont, parfois même, confondues. Sur les sarcophages romains on voit tantôt les uns, tantôt les autres. Ainsi deux génies ailés, portant une épitaphe ou cartouche, se retrouvent sur un sarcophage daté du IIe-IIIe siècle (Musée d'Arles).²⁷ Souvent

²⁴ George M. A. Hanfmann, *The Season Sarcophagus in Dumbarton Oaks*, (Dumbarton Oaks Studies, 2), Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press 1951.

²⁵ Henri Stern, *Le calendrier de 354. Etude sur son texte et sur ses illustrations* (Institut français d'archéologie de Beyrouth, Bibliothèque archéologique et historique 5), Paris: Geuthner 1953.

²⁶ Franz Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, Paris: Geuthner 1946, 487.

²⁷ Paul-Albert Février, « Sarcophages d'Arles », dans: *Congrès archéologique de France, 134^e Session 1976, Pays d'Arles*, Paris: Société Française d'Archéologie/Musée des Monuments Français 1979, 317-359 notamment 320, fig. 2 (Republié in Paul-Albert Février, *La Méditerranée*

on reproduit sur les sarcophages deux génies emportant le portrait du défunt inscrit dans un médaillon. Bref les images d'amours ou de génies portant soit le portrait du défunt, soit une cartouche ou une *taboula ansata* possèdent une large diffusion dans le monde romain.

Parlant de Victoires glorifiant le défunt l'on ne peut ne pas mentionner la fameuse tombe des Trois Frères de Palmyre où les Victoires peuvent être facilement confondues avec les anges, sauf que celles-ci adoptent des allures féminines.²⁸ D'ailleurs ces mêmes images de génies et de Victoires se retrouvent dans un contexte chrétien. Ainsi un sarcophage de la deuxième moitié du IV^e siècle, conservé à San Ambroggio de Milan, reproduit sur le registre inférieur le Christ et les apôtres²⁹, sur le registre supérieur deux génies ailés et nus encadrent le médaillon central qui renferme la figure du défunt et de son épouse. Ces figures allégoriques des génies, bien qu'encore rattachées à l'imagerie païenne, sont ici chargées d'un sens chrétien qui les rapproche des anges. Beaucoup plus tard à l'époque de la Renaissance les artistes reprendront les images de génies pour exprimer les anges.

Les dessins subsistants de la base de la colonne d'Arcadius érigée vers l'an 400 (Fig. 5) (Constantinople; détruite) reproduisent dans un contexte glorifiant l'empereur, deux Victoires emportant une couronne de laurier à l'intérieur de laquelle s'inscrit, non pas le portrait de l'empereur, mais le monogramme du Christ. Ces figures ont été identifiées à des Victoires alors qu'elles pouvaient bien représenter des anges.³⁰ Le dessin du côté ouest de la base figure de part et d'autre des deux Victoires des génies ailés et nus: il s'agit bien ici de continuité de la tradition romaine païenne. Ces mêmes figures allégoriques on les retrouve sur l'ivoire Barberini du musée du Louvre (première moitié du VI^e siècle, attribué à Justinien) mais cette fois les Victoires emportent dans le médaillon, non pas le monogramme du Christ, mais le Christ lui-même qui porte la croix d'une main et bénit de l'autre.

Ce n'est que vers le VI^e siècle que l'on assiste à l'apparition des figures d'anges telles que les a reproduits plus tard la tradition iconographique. Sur une ampoule de Terre sainte (Monza) datées du VI^e siècle le Christ dans son Ascension n'est plus emporté par des Victoires mais par des anges³¹: ceux-ci sont auréolés et portent des chitons légers que le vent soulève et emporte facilement. Des représentations fort semblables d'anges s'opèrent dans la miniature de l'Ascension du manuscrit de Raboula qui remonte à 586. Hormis l'auréole qui distingue les Victoires des anges tout témoigne d'une même iconographie. Il devient alors évident que l'image des

de Paul-Albert Février, *Publications de l'Ecole française de Rome* 225 (1996), 1099-1141, notamment 1102, fig. 2.

²⁸ Carl H. Krealing, « Color Photographs of the Paintings in the Tomb of the Three Brothers at Palmyra », dans: *Annales Archéologiques Arabes Syriennes* 11/12 (1961/62), 13-18, pl. 1-16.

²⁹ André Grabar, *Les voies de la création en iconographie chrétienne*, Paris: Flammarion 1979, 35, fig. 11.

³⁰ Grabar, *Les voies de création*, fig. 37.

³¹ C'est l'ampoule No 11 de Monza, voir: André Grabar, *Les ampoules de Terre Sainte*, Paris: Klincksieck 1958, 27-28.

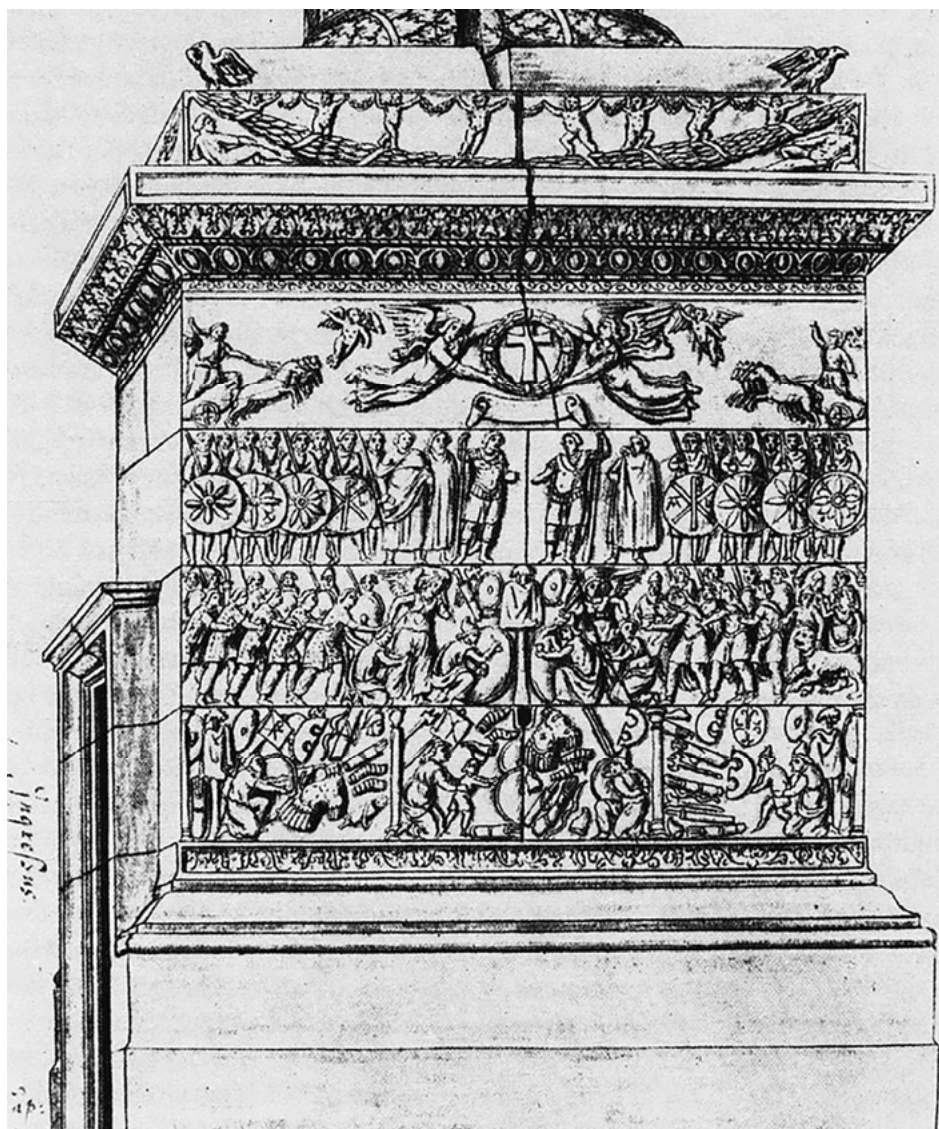


Fig. 5: Base (détruite) de la colonne d'Arcadius, dessin © Cambridge Trinity College.

anges s'est inspirée de celles des Victoires qui sont elles-mêmes des créatures immatérielles. De ce fait l'on peut déduire que la transition figurative des images de Victoires vers des images d'anges s'est produite d'une façon naturelle, délicate presque machinale et difficilement discernable.

Les Vents

Par ailleurs, l'on ne peut parler de l'origine de la figuration des anges tout en se limitant sur les Victoires, et en omettant de signaler le rôle psychopompe des Vents et leur image qui les figurait ailés. Ceux-ci ont certainement contribué à créer les représentations d'anges. Etant ailés et considérés comme un souffle, ils jouent le rôle d'intermédiaires entre le monde supérieur et l'Hadès. En ceci leur fonction ressemble à celle des anges.

Le volet d'un diptyque en ivoire du British Museum du début du V^e siècle (Fig. 6) représente l'apothéose de Symmaque³², qui était le consul d'Afrique en 391, connu pour être un défenseur acharné du paganisme. L'on voit sur le diptyque deux créatures à l'allure lourde qui emportent le consul dans les cieux sous le regard du dieu Soleil et de cinq ancêtres. Ces créatures sont des hommes d'âge assez mûr, ils sont nus, l'un d'eux est barbu, ils ont une chevelure hirsute, et sont munis d'une paire d'ailes derrière le dos et d'une autre paire d'ailettes sur la tête. Ces créatures sont loin d'être celles des Victoires et encore moins celles d'anges.

Des figures d'hommes aux têtes décorées d'ailettes se rencontrent parfois sur les sarcophages. Ce sont les personnifications des quatre Vents qui soufflent des quatre points cardinaux et qui souvent surmontent les angles de la cuve des sarcophages tels des protomes et des monuments funéraires.³³ Les Grecs et les Romains ont vénéré les dieux des Vents connus pour Borée, Euros, Notos et Zéphyr. Ceux-ci, dotés de force purificatrice, sont sensés souffler sur les âmes des défunts dans leur ascension posthume. Ces dieux de l'atmosphère sont de même mis en rapport avec les Saisons qui dépendent de leurs souffles secs ou humides, brûlant ou glacés.³⁴ Les personnifications des Vents reproduisent souvent des visages virils aux joues gonflées, aux têtes pourvues d'ailettes qui sortent des mèches de leurs cheveux.

Dans les croyances des peuples primitifs le souffle occupait une place primordiale dans la vie car il est la vie: le premier souffle commence avec la naissance de l'être humain et ne s'éteint qu'au moment où sa vie s'achève. Pour les peuples sémitiques, l'âme se confond avec le souffle.³⁵ L'un des premiers versets de la Genèse (II, 7) est très significatif en ce sens: « L'Éternel, lit-on, avait formé l'homme de la poudre de la terre, il avait soufflé dans ses narines une respiration de vie et l'homme fut fait âme vivante. »

³² Bianchi-Bandinelli Ranuccio, *Rome, la fin de l'art antique. L'art de l'Empire romain de Septime Sévère à Théodose I^{er}*, Paris: Gallimard 2010, 12; Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire*, 178; Kurt Weitzmann (ed.), *Age of Spirituality, Late Antique and Early Christian Art. 3rd to 7th Century. Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 19, 1977, Through February 12, 1978*, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1978, no 60.

³³ Hélène Walter, *La sculpture funéraire gallo-romaine en Franche-Comté*, Franche-Comté: Presses universitaires 1975, 150-151.

³⁴ Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire*, 163.

³⁵ Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire*, 164.



Fig. 6: L'apothéose de Symmaque. Photographie
© British Museum, London.

Dans la tradition funéraire païenne les Vents, tout comme les Victoires, en soufflant aidaient l'âme du défunt à monter au ciel. Mais avant d'accéder à la sphère la plus haute, l'âme se débarrassait de toutes les souillures de ses péchés par l'intermédiaire des vents.³⁶ Ainsi les Vents se confondent ici avec les anges. Sur le diptyque de Symmaque où les créatures viriles jouent le rôle de Victoires, l'on comprend alors qu'il s'agit bien de personnifications des Vents qui aident le glorifié à accéder au monde céleste.

Il est important de souligner ici que le mot vent et le mot âme possèdent dans les langues sémitiques la même racine et à peu près la même prononciation *ru'ah* (en arabe *riḥ* et *rūḥ*)³⁷, et toutes les deux désignent des catégories immatérielles existant dans l'air. L'Ancien testament parlant des envoyés de Yahvé, évoque les Vents (Ps 103, 4): « Il fait des Vents ses messagers. Des flammes de feu ses serviteurs ». Comme les anges étaient considérés jusqu'au VI^e siècle des créatures de nature aérienne³⁸, les Vents leur ressemblaient ou s'assimilaient à eux dans la mesure où ceux-ci étaient considérés, tout comme les anges, conducteurs des âmes des défunts. D'après Franz Cumont les Vents étaient très vénérés par les Phéniciens, peuple marin³⁹, d'ailleurs les vestiges archéologiques retrouvés au Liban, malgré leur nombre restreint, le prouvent bien. Les représentations des quatre Vents ont été repérées sur le plafond d'une tombe (hypogée) découverte à Jell el-ʿAmad (III^e siècle) près de Tyr.⁴⁰ La fresque est disparue. Les personnifications des quatre Vents occupaient les quatre coins du plafond, la partie centrale est détruite. Ce sont des visages masculins figurés de profil, de leurs bouches sort un faisceau qui fait allusion au souffle. Les Vents ici sont représentés dans un contexte funéraire païen, ce qui leur assigne une fonction psychopompe. De belles figures de Vents se retrouvent aussi dans le calendrier de la mosaïque de l'église de Qabr Hiram (575) découverte à l'est de Tyr et conservée au musée du Louvre.⁴¹ Ici le contexte est différent: il s'agit d'un calendrier chrétien et les Vents sont assimilés ici à la notion du temps mais aussi aux quatre points cardinaux. Si dans le calendrier les Mois et les Saisons illustrent le Temps, les Vents représentent l'Espace et par conséquent le calendrier de Qabr Hiram offre une lecture cosmologique du pavement.

³⁶ Cumont F., *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, Paris 1942, 146-176.

³⁷ Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire*, 106.

³⁸ J. Turmel, « Histoire de l'angéologie, des temps apostoliques à la fin du V^e siècle », dans: *Revue d'histoire et de littérature religieuse* 3 (1898), 412-426.

³⁹ Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire*, 108.

⁴⁰ Denise Le Lasseur, « Mission archéologique à Tyr (avril-mai 1921) », dans: *Syria* 3 (1922), 1-26.

⁴¹ Pour la bibliographie de Qabr Hiram voir: Catherine Metzger, *La mosaïque de Qabr Hiram*, Paris : Editions du Louvre 2012, 20. Voir aussi: Nada Hérou, *Les mosaïques de pavements au Liban à l'époque protobyzantine (IV^e-VII^e siècle)*. Description et analyse, Kaslik: Phoenix 2017, 217-247.

L'on déduit que, la conception du voyage de l'âme après la mort par l'intermédiaire de créatures immatérielles comme les vents, les génies, les victoires, s'est transmise aux chrétiens. Dans l'ancien et le nouveau testament les messagers de Dieu qui accompagnent les morts dans leur voyage dans l'au-delà sont les anges. Ils n'ont pas de corps, tout comme les vents ils sont aériens car le souffle de Dieu signifie la création continue du monde.⁴² Cette notion est confirmée par les écrits des Pères; dans son traité *De spirito sancto* Basile le Grand (m. 379) écrit: « La substance des Vertus célestes est un souffle aérien ou un feu immatériel, selon ce qui est écrit: « *Il fait ses anges avec du vent et ses messagers avec du feu.* C'est pourquoi ils sont localisés, et ils apparaissent avec leur propre corps à ceux qui sont dignes ». ⁴³ Ainsi se confondent vents, victoires, anges en ces premiers siècles de création d'images chrétiennes. De ce fait la représentation des messagers de Dieu peut être conçue comme le résultat d'une longue recherche qui a abouti aux combinaisons les plus complexes ou aux synthèses associant les représentations de Génies-Victoires avec les Saisons-Vents avec tout ce que ceux-ci comportent de significations eschatologiques.

Les séraphins et les chérubins

Evoqués à maintes reprises dans la bible les séraphins et les chérubins se présentent comme une autre catégorie d'anges.⁴⁴ Les visions d'Isaïe et d'Ezéchiel les décrivent comme munis de plusieurs paires d'ailes, et entourant ou trainant le trône de Yahvé. La Genèse leur attribue la tâche de garder les portes du paradis afin d'interdire à Adam d'y entrer. Bref leur fonction consiste à protéger Dieu et la sagesse divine comme ils doivent lui servir de gardes du corps. L'iconographie médiévale les représentera munis de six ailes (parfois quatre), deux dirigées vers le haut, deux vers le bas et deux de côté, on ne voit d'eux que leurs visages et parfois leurs mains tenant le *laborum* qui est une sorte de panneau sur lequel il est écrit trois fois le mot saint ou le *trisagion*.⁴⁵ Les chérubins se distinguent par leurs ailes couvertes d'yeux. Or l'aspect « physique » de ces créatures célestes et spiri-

⁴² Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire*, 110.

⁴³ Basile de Césarée, *Sur le Saint-Esprit*, Paris: Editions du cerf 1968, XVI, 38 – 137 A.

⁴⁴ Les séraphins et les chérubins sont largement mentionnés dans l'ancien testament. Voir entre autre, pour les séraphins: Is. 6, 2-3, 6-7). Pour les chérubins: Ex. 25, 18-20; 2 Chr. 3, 10-13; 3, 14; 1 Sam. 4, 4; 2 Sam. 6.2; Chr. 13, 6; 2 R.19, 15; Ps. 98, 1; Dn. 3, 55; Ps. 17, 11; 2 Sam. 22, 11; Ps. 18, 10; Ex. 25, 22; Nb. 7, 89; 2 R. 19, 15; Ps. 80, 1; 99, 1; Ex. 26, 1-31; 25, 8; 1 R. 6, 23; 29; 2 Chr. 3, 14; Ez. 41, 18-25 etc.; Ez. 1, 6-10 et 10, 12-14; Ez. 1, 8; 10, 7-8, 21.

⁴⁵ Rafca Nasr, dans sa thèse de doctorat traitant la lecture liturgique des peintures médiévales du Liban a soulevé le problème de la fonction liturgique des séraphins et des chérubins dans le cadre de leurs représentations dans les théophanies-déisis des programmes absidaux des églises du Liban. Voir Rafca Nasr, *Les images presbytérales des églises du Liban à la lumière de la liturgie eucharistique: les théophanies aux XIIe-XIIIe siècles*, Thèse de Doctorat en cotutelle Université Libanaise et Université de Poitiers 2016, 117-158.

tuelles a été décrit par Yahvé lui-même quand il dicta à Moïse comment construire l'arche d'alliance et comment décorer son propitiatoire (Ex. 25,10-21). Je ne cite ici que sa description des chérubins:

18 Et tu feras deux chérubins d'or; tu les feras au marteau, aux deux bouts du propitiatoire. 19 Fais donc un chérubin à ce bout, et un chérubin à l'autre bout. 20 Et les chérubins étendront les ailes en haut, couvrant de leurs ailes le propitiatoire, et leurs faces seront vis-à-vis l'une de l'autre.⁴⁶

A quoi ressemblaient donc ces chérubins ? Le témoignage de Yahvé nous laisse comprendre que ceux-ci étaient munis de grandes ailes. Le mot chérubin remonte à une origine babylonienne *keroub* et il est fort probable que ces chérubins ressemblent à ces créatures ailées qui montent la garde devant le palais de Sargon II à Dour Charoukine (VIIIe siècle). Celles-ci flanquaient non seulement l'entrée du palais, mais illustraient le trône du souverain assyrien de telle sorte qu'il était supporté par des chérubins.

Par ailleurs on peut établir une liaison directe avec les Ecritures sacrées. Le livre des Rois décrit comment le roi Salomon décora son palais de beaucoup de représentations de chérubins, de palmiers, de fleurs, de lions, qu'il disposa sur les murs, les manches, les poignées et sur tous les objets qui servaient à l'office.⁴⁷ Voilà ce qu'en dit le texte (1 Roi 6: 23-29):

« Il fit dans le sanctuaire deux chérubins de bois d'olivier sauvage, ayant dix coudées de hauteur. Chacune des deux ailes de l'un des chérubins avait cinq coudées, ce qui faisait dix coudées de l'extrémité d'une de ses ailes à l'extrémité de l'autre. Le second chérubin avait aussi dix coudées. La mesure et la forme étaient les mêmes pour les deux chérubins. La hauteur de chacun des deux chérubins était de dix coudées. Salomon plaça les chérubins au milieu de la maison, dans l'intérieur. Leurs ailes étaient déployées: l'aile du premier touchait à l'un des murs, et l'aile du second touchait à l'autre mur; et leurs autres ailes se rencontraient par l'extrémité au milieu de la maison. Salomon couvrit d'or les chérubins. Il fit sculpter sur tout le pourtour des murs de la maison, à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur, des chérubins, des palmes et des fleurs épanouies. »

D'après cette description assez révélatrice des chérubins l'on peut s'imaginer qu'il s'agissait de figures très proches des lions assyriens ailés à têtes humaines. Malgré la rareté de ces figures dans l'art paléochrétien, l'on a pu quand même trouver quelques modèles nous renseignant sur leur aspect qui n'a guère changé durant le Moyen Âge byzantin. Ainsi nous retrouvons des figures de chérubins-séraphins sur deux chapiteaux du Musée de Constantinople qui ont été datés de

⁴⁶ Cette description relativement détaillée du décor de l'arche contredit le deuxième commandement qui interdit de reproduire des images. Cependant les œuvres juives peintes, telle la synagogue de Doura Europos et les mosaïques de pavements des synagogues du IV^e-VI^e siècle et bien d'autres monuments affirment l'existence d'un art figuratif juif assez développé.

⁴⁷ Sur les sources scripturaires et liturgiques des séraphins et chérubins ainsi que leur iconographie et leur fonction liturgique notamment dans les programmes presbytéraux voir: Nasr, *Images*, 117-158.

la fin du Ve-début du VIe siècle ou du IXe siècle.⁴⁸ Un chérubin est représenté sur un *flabellum* retrouvé à Stūma (Idlib, Syrie) et conservé au musée d'Istanbul, il a été daté du VIe-VIIe siècle.⁴⁹ La topographie de Cosma Indicopleutes achevée en 547 (Bibli. Apost. Vaticane), illustre plus d'une fois des figures de chérubins.⁵⁰ L'une des miniatures les représente flanquant le sommet du propitiatoire tels qu'ils sont décrits dans Moïse. Il convient de rappeler que la *Topographie* est un traité de cosmologie nestorienne. Il est frappant de constater que ces quelques images de chérubins conservées de l'époque protobyzantine proviennent toutes du Proche Orient. Il est convenu de rattacher les chérubins aux *Keroub* assyriens, mais ce lien ne pouvait se réaliser que par l'intermédiaire d'influences plus directes. Celles-ci se sont bien sûr faites par le biais de la tradition juive et plus précisément par les représentations de chérubins sur le tabernacle. Malgré le peu de témoignages qui nous sont parvenus, on est porté à supposer que l'ancêtre iconographique de ces créatures – moitié anthropomorphes, moitié zoomorphes – provient sans conteste de prototypes assyriens.

Déduction

Les origines de la création de l'image angélique étant multiples et complexes, l'on peut comprendre que les premiers chrétiens ont eu recours aux prototypes de figures allégoriques déjà existantes dans l'art païen de leur entourage. Comme il n'est pas non plus exclu que ces images pouvaient être transmises à travers des modèles de la tradition hébraïque et des civilisations du Proche Orient ancien. De cet amalgame d'apports et d'influences est donc née l'iconographie des anges chrétiens.

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Fig. 3: L'Annonciation à la Vierge Marie, catacombe de Priscilla. Photographie © Musées du Vatican, Rome.

⁴⁸ Fernand Cabrol et Henri Leclercq, « Séraphin », dans: *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, vol. XV, 1, 1303-1306.

⁴⁹ Fernand Cabrol et Henri Leclercq, « Flabellum », dans: *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, vol. V, 2, 1622-1624.

⁵⁰ Cette topographie de Cosma Indicopleutes est une copie du IX^e siècle de l'original qui date du VI^e siècle. Voir: Vanda Wolska-Conus, *Topographie chrétienne de Cosma Indicopleustes*, Vol. 2, Paris: Cerf 1970, 249; Fernand Cabrol et Henri Leclercq, « Isai », dans: *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, vol. VII, 2, 1579-1580.

Fig. 4: Le sacrifice d'Abraham, sarcophage de Junius Bassus, Rome, Saint-Pierre. Photographie © Musées du Vatican, Rome.

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Fig. 6: L'apothéose de Symmaque. Photographie © British Museum, London.

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Les « anges » (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels d'apparence humaine dans l'Arabie antique

Christian Julien Robin (Paris)

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 - 2. *Rasūl*
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Plusieurs études récentes qui se sont intéressées aux anges dans la prédication de Muḥammad¹ invitent à rouvrir le dossier peu connu des « anges » dans l'Arabie

¹ Patricia Crone, « Angels Versus Humans as Messengers of God: The View of the Qurʾānic Pagans », dans: P. Townsend and M. Vidas, édd. *Revelation, Literature and Community in Late Antiquity*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011, 315-336; Patricia Crone, *The Qurʾānic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three Volumes (Islamic History and Civilization, Studies and Texts, 129)*, vol. 1, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2016; G. W. Bowersock, « Les anges païens de l'Antiquité tardive », dans: *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 24 (2013), 91-104.

préislamique. Pour ce terme d'« anges », nous retenons une définition assez vague qui ignore les nombreuses subtilités résultant d'une longue histoire et d'une large diffusion, notamment dans les religions « abrahamiques » et dans l'Avesta: une catégorie d'êtres surnaturels, dont le rang et la nature sont intermédiaires entre ceux des divinités (ou du Dieu unique) et ceux des hommes. Ces êtres surnaturels sont d'ordinaire bienfaisants, au contraire des « démons ». On les représente souvent comme des individus masculins ou féminins munis de deux ailes.² Leur fonction se déduit de cette image et du nom qui leur est donné: les ailes suggèrent qu'ils circulent entre le monde inférieur et le monde supérieur et leur nom, *angelos* en grec et *mal'ak* dans les langues sémitiques, indique qu'ils sont d'abord des « messagers ».

Cette définition assez vague est d'ailleurs celle du Coran, dans l'adresse de la sourate 35:

« Louange à Dieu créateur des cieux et de la terre, qui prend comme émissaires des anges munis d'ailes par deux, trois et quatre »,³

al-ḥamdu li-llāhi fāṭiri al-samāwāti wa-l-'arḍi jā'ili al-malā'ikati rusul^{um} ūli ajniḥat^{um} matnā wa-thulātha wa-rubā'

(Q 35, *Fāṭir* ou *al-Malā'ika*, verset 1).

Le mot *malā'ika* « anges », qui est le pluriel du substantif *malāk*, étymologiquement *mal'ak* (racine L'K), signifiait lui-même à l'origine « émissaire, envoyé ».⁴

Les caractères de l'ange que nous venons de dégager – le rang intermédiaire entre les hommes et les divinités, la représentation sous forme humaine avec des ailes et le rôle de messager –, auxquels il faut ajouter la fonction de protecteur, se retrouvent en Arabie chez les êtres surnaturels.

À l'époque de Muḥammad, il est manifeste que la plupart des Arabiques⁵ croyaient aux « anges ».⁶ Mais l'opinion commune est que le mot et le concept

² L'origine de cette représentation est assurément méditerranéenne: voir la contribution de Nada Hérou, « Les origines hellénistiques de la représentation des anges dans le christianisme ancien », dans ce volume.

³ Selon Régis Blachère [*Le Coran* (al-Qor'ân), traduit de l'arabe par Régis Blachère, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose 1966], dont la traduction tente de conserver l'ambiguïté de l'original, il faut plutôt comprendre des anges envoyés par groupes de deux, trois ou quatre. Mais Blachère n'exclut que ces nombres se rapportent aux ailes, avec renvoi à Isaïe 6, verset 2 (« Ces séraphins] avaient six ailes: deux dont ils se couvraient la face, deux dont ils se couvraient les pieds et deux avec quoi ils volaient ») ou Ezéchiel 1, verset 6 (« Chacun [de ces animaux] avait quatre ailes »). En faveur de la première proposition, on retiendra également que ces nombres ne peuvent pas s'appliquer aux ailes, mais seulement aux paires d'ailes.

⁴ Voir ci-dessous, pp. 121-124.

⁵ Par « Arabiques », nous entendons les habitants de la péninsule Arabique.

⁶ Pour la communauté de Muḥammad, voir notamment Crone, « Angels Versus Humans as Messengers of God »; Gisela Webb, « Angel », dans: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ân*, vol. 1, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2001, 84-92. Pour les juifs et les chrétiens, qui avaient une position dominante dans la plupart des régions de l'Arabie préislamique [Christian J. Robin, « The

ont été empruntés aux populations voisines du Levant ou de l'Éthiopie. Pourtant, aux premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne, des êtres surnaturels féminins munis d'ailes, appelés *shams* (mot féminin signifiant « soleil ») étaient vénérés en Arabie du Sud.

Avant l'ère chrétienne, ce sont d'autres êtres surnaturels, également féminins, appelés « Filles de Īl » (*bnt ʾl*), qui étaient sollicités. Les « Filles d'Allāh » du Coran sont très probablement l'ultime avatar de ces « Filles de Īl ».

Dans cette étude, nous nous proposons d'examiner successivement ces trois catégories d'êtres surnaturels, les *shams*, les « Filles de Īl » et les « Filles d'Allāh » en nous intéressant tout particulièrement à ce qui les apparente aux « anges » et à ce qui les en distingue.

A. Des personnages féminins avec des ailes nommés shams

Une dizaine d'images provenant d'Arabie, représentent un être humain avec deux grandes ailes s'attachant en haut du dos. Toutes ont été trouvées au Yémen.⁷ C'est pourquoi, avant d'analyser ces images, il n'est pas inutile de rappeler comment les Sudarabiques percevaient le monde des divinités.

a. Le monde supérieur en Arabie du Sud

Les divinités se répartissaient en deux grandes classes, les majeures, qui sont les divinités à proprement parler, et les mineures qui sont de simples êtres surnaturels. Cette classification se fonde sur l'ordre dans lequel les puissances célestes et terrestres sont invoquées à la fin des inscriptions, à savoir:

- les divinités majeures;
- le ou les souverain(s);
- les êtres surnaturels (ou divinités mineures);

Peoples Beyond the Arabian Frontier in Late Antiquity: Recent Epigraphic Discoveries and Latest Advances », dans: Jitse H. F. Dijkstra et Greg Fisher, *Inside and Out. Interactions between Rome and the Peoples on the Arabian and Egyptian Frontiers in Late Antiquity* (Late Antique History and Religion 8), Leuven: Peeters 2014, 33-79], on peut supposer que les anges étaient reconnus et vénérés même si les données directes font défaut.

⁷ Voir Sabina Antonini de Maigret, « A Winged Deity in Southern Arabia », dans: *Arabian and Islamic Studies: A Collection of Papers in Honour of Mikhaïl Borishovitch* (sic) *Potrovskij on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday*, éd. Alexander V. Sedov – *Issledovanija po Aravii i islamu. Sbornik statej b' čest' 70-letija Muhajla Borisoviča Piotrovskogo*, Sostavitel' i otvetstvennyj redaktor A. V. Sedov. Moskva: Gosudarstvennyj Muzej Vostoka 2014, 234-243, et, publié antérieurement, Christian J. Robin, « Matériaux pour une typologie des divinités arabiques et de leurs représentations », dans: *Dieux et déesses d'Arabie, images et représentations: Actes de la table ronde tenue au Collège de France (Paris) les 1 et 2 octobre 2007*, éd. par Isabelle Satchet avec la collaboration de Christian J. Robin (Orient et Méditerranée, n° 7), Paris: De Boccard 2012, 7-118, notamment 72-76.

– éventuellement la commune⁸ des auteurs du texte ou un ensemble de communes dans le cas du souverain.⁹

Il peut arriver que les êtres surnaturels soient mentionnés à la suite des divinités majeures, avant le souverain.¹⁰

Le fait que le souverain soit souvent invoqué entre les divinités majeures et les êtres surnaturels souligne que sa fonction présente un caractère sacré.

Parmi les divinités majeures, celles qui font l'objet d'un culte collectif au niveau de la commune ou du royaume présentent un caractère institutionnel: ce sont elles qui constituent ce que nous appelons le « panthéon », local ou national. Dans les invocations qui concluent les inscriptions, toutes les divinités du panthéon sont d'ordinaire énumérées dans un ordre immuable. Cette règle se vérifie surtout dans les royaumes de Saba' (où le panthéon se compose de trois dieux et de deux déesses, 'Athtar, Hawbas, Almaqah, dhāt-Himyam et dhāt Ba'dān^{um11}) et de Ma'in.

Dans ce panthéon de Saba', la divinité principale est un dieu, Almaqah. Ce n'est pas le dieu qui est mentionné en premier. Il faut donc distinguer le grand dieu (Almaqah) du dieu de premier rang ou dieu suprême ('Athtar). Il en va de même dans la plupart des panthéons. On peut observer en outre que, en Arabie, toutes les divinités principales et de premier rang sont des dieux (que nous appelons les « grands » dieux et les dieux « suprêmes »), et non des déesses.¹²

Les divinités mineures comptent assurément plusieurs classes. Il est vrai que, à époque ancienne, avant l'ère chrétienne, les textes n'en mentionnent qu'une: les « Filles de Īl ». Mais, plus tard, du 1^{er} siècle av. EC à la fin du 4^e environ, ils en

⁸ Le terme « commune » traduit le sudarabique *sha'b* (*sʿb*). Il désigne les tribus les plus développées, qui se caractérisent par une organisation politique et sociale complexe, l'existence de finances publiques, la pratique de l'écriture, l'intégration dans des réseaux commerciaux etc.

⁹ Un bel exemple est fourni par l'inscription *RES* 3958, analysée en détail dans Christian J. Robin, « Les “Filles de Dieu” de Saba' à La Mecque: réflexions sur l'agencement des panthéons dans l'Arabie ancienne », dans: *Semitica* 50 (2000), 113-192, 129-130.

¹⁰ Voir, par exemple, dans *Ir* 49 [40] (Bayt Dab'an, vers 240 EC), la place de « leurs deux *mandāb*, Raymān et Shams^{um} »: *b-rdʿ ʿl-tr-Sʿrqrʿ^u (7) w-Wgl w-Sʿmydʿ w-ly-lmw ʿl-tr-(ʿ)zz^m d-Gʿwl^m bʿl mḥrm^u ʿrr w-dʿ⁽⁸⁾ l Bʿdr^m w-mudhy-lmw Rym^u w-Sʿms^{um} w-b-rdʿ mrʿ-lmw Sʿmr Ybhmd⁽⁹⁾ mlk Sʿbʿ w-d-Ryd^u w-b-rdʿ w-ʿhyl sʿb-lmw Dmr ʿrbʿw Qsʿm^m*, « avec l'aide de 'Athtar Shāriqān⁽⁷⁾, de Wgl, de Sumūyada', de leurs deux dieux, 'Athtar 'Aziz^{um} dhu-Gʿbw^m maître du sanctuaire ʿrr et dhāt-Ba'dan^{um}, et de leurs deux *mandāb*, Raymān et Shams^{um}, avec l'aide de leur seigneur Shammar Yuhāmid⁽⁹⁾ roi de Saba' et de dhu-Raydān et avec l'aide et les forces de leur commune Dhamari, les fractions Qasham^{um} ». Pour la localisation des toponymes, on se reportera aux cartes, Fig. 23 et 24 (ou, à défaut, à la carte Christian Robin and Ueli Brunner, *Map of Ancient Yemen – Carte du Yémen antique*, 1:1 000 000, Munich: Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde, 1997).

¹¹ Voir par exemple Ja 629 (ci-dessous, p. 90).

¹² Cette prééminence des dieux sur les déesses n'est apparue que récemment, avec la découverte de textes prouvant que Hawbas à Saba', et Ḥawkam et Basham^{um} à Qatabān, étaient des dieux et non des déesses.

distinguent trois: les *shams* qui protègent les individus et les lignages; les *mandāḥ* qui veillent sur les temples, les palais et les maisons; les « protecteurs » (*rabiʿ*), enfin, qui veillent également sur les individus et les lignages. Les termes *mandāḥ* et *rabiʿ* sont les appellatifs de catégories comptant des divinités masculines et féminines très diverses.¹³ En revanche, les *shams* sont des manifestations particulières de la déesse Shams^{umm} (ou Soleil).

En règle générale, les divinités majeures ne sont pas représentées sous forme humaine ou animale.¹⁴ La seule exception remonte aux origines de la civilisation sudarabique. Elle se trouve sur les piliers de Nashshān, qui représentent tous les grands dieux du Jawf.¹⁵ Elle peut être interprétée comme une expérience qui n'a pas eu de suite.

En revanche, les êtres surnaturels, conçus comme plus proches des hommes, ont pu être représentés sous forme humaine à toutes les époques. L'inventaire des images aujourd'hui disponibles permet de distinguer quatre catégories principales qu'il est souvent malaisé de rattacher aux classes que les textes invoquent: les jeunes femmes en cortège; celles qui sont debout sur un podium; les êtres masculins ou féminins munis d'ailes; enfin les êtres fantastiques ailés, combinant des caractères empruntés à divers animaux, avec une tête soit animale soit humaine. Les trois premières catégories qui, comme les anges, se rattachent à l'humanité sont analysées dans la suite de cette étude. Seule la quatrième, qui est caractérisée par l'animalité, n'est pas retenue dans notre corpus; mais il n'est pas inutile d'en esquisser un inventaire.

¹³ Parmi les *mandāḥ*, on compte les dieux ʿAthtar dhu-Alim^{umm} (Av Aqmar 1 / 4, Av Aqmar 2 / 3, BynM 200 / 3, CIH 47 / 2), ʿAthtar dhu-Dhibān (BynM 101+92+93 / 4), ʿAthtar dhu-M[...] (CLAS 95.11/w5 n° 1 / 7), ʿAttar Nawbān (RES 4194 / 5), Rāfidān (Mlbb 10 / 4-5), Raymān (Ir 49 [= 40] / 8), Ṣanʿān (BynM 22 / 3), Warfū Amar-ʿAmm (CLAS 47.11/b5 / 5), Yasrān (Ja 664 / 20), « Baʿal de leur demeure » (*Bʿl byt-bmw*, CIH 194 / 3), « Baʿal de Shabʿān » (*Bʿl Sʿbʿān*, CIH 41 / 3) et « Baʿal de Wakil^{umm} » (*Bʿl Wklm*, CLAS 32.81/b9 / 2, CIH 159 / 1, CIH 172 + 241 / 4); le couple divin ʿAthtar dhu-Haram et dhāt-Baṣar^{umm} (Makyāsh et al-Zubaydi 2008 / 12-13); les déesses ʿAzizallāt (MAFRAY-Hajar Warrās 1 / 3) et Shams^{umm} (Ir 49 [= 40] / 8); enfin les paires de déesses dhāt-Baʿdān et dhāt-Zahrān (RES 3958 / 9-10, YMN 13 / 9-10), et Nāshibat et ʿUzzayān (CLAS 47.82/o2 / 17-18; CLAS 95.11/o2 / 18-19; H2c / 5).

Comme *rabiʿ*, on peut mentionner les dieux ʿAthtar (Av Naʿd 9 / 5), Shaʿbān (al-Jawf 04.16 / 21-22, où c'est apparemment une divinisation du temple Shaʿbān de Nashq^{umm}, dédié à Almaqah), Kharif ʿAtiq (Garb Ḍulaʿ 1 / 2), Yuhaʿim (CIH 132 / 3; CLAS 39.11/o3 n° 1 = Fa 119 / 2, 8, 13-14 et 14-15) et Yuhanʿim (Ja 2851 / 8); et les déesses dhāt-Zahrān (Thāʿ 1 / 1-2), dhāt-Ḥimyam ʿAthtar Yagūr (Ja 618 / 35-36) et Shams^{umm} (Av Naʿd 9 / 5).

Il faut rappeler ici que les inscriptions sudarabiques ne notent que les consonnes. Les vocalisations sont donc toujours hypothétiques; si certaines sont raisonnablement assurées grâce à des parallèles relevés avant tout en arabe, d'autres, qui n'ont pour finalité que de faciliter la lecture, sont plus ou moins arbitraires.

¹⁴ Robin, « Matériaux » (n. 7).

¹⁵ Voir ci-dessous, pp. 95-101.

Les êtres fantastiques ailés sont représentés sous la forme de statuettes ou dessinés sur des dalles de pierre ou de bronze, seuls ou comme éléments de compositions plus complexes. Les caractères qu'ils réunissent sont variés, mais beaucoup moins que dans leurs modèles mésopotamiens.¹⁶ Les principaux types sont:

- un lion ailé sculpté sur un chapiteau du palais royal de Shabwa (Shabwa V/81/3);
- un lion à tête humaine (mais avec des oreilles d'animal), dont les deux ailes sont déployées, sur une dalle de pierre originaire de Dāf, conservée aujourd'hui à Istamboul¹⁷;
- une lionne ailée à tête de femme, représentée par une statuette de bronze (LNS 1700 M) (Fig. 1)¹⁸;
- deux lionnes ailées à tête de femme, incisées sur des plaquettes d'os ou d'ivoire provenant de Tamna' (MIFT 00.40 et T.00.B.O/17);
- un lion ailé à tête masculine moustachue, avec une couronne, et une lionne ailée (ou un lion) avec une tête apparemment féminine sur une stèle commémorant une offrande à un roi divinisé de Awsān, conservée au Louvre (CSAI III, 9 = CLAS 96.51/01/R71);
- un ibex ailé à tête humaine, représenté en statuette de bronze (‘Aqil et Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi*, I.B.e.1)¹⁹;
- deux taureaux ailés dans une vaste composition sur une plaque de bronze (YM 13981 = ‘Aqil et Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi*, IV.A.6, Ma'rib);
- une grande variété de griffons et autres êtres fantastiques dans les décors postérieurs au début de l'ère chrétienne, provenant notamment de Zafār, dont les modèles sont méditerranéens.²⁰

¹⁶ Voir la typologie esquissée dans: Jeremy Black and Anthony Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia: An Illustrated Dictionary*, London: British Museum Press 1992, 64-65, fig. 53 (« Demons, Monsters and Minor Protective Deities »).

¹⁷ Helmuth Th. Bossert, *Altsyrien. Kunst und Handwerk in Cyprien, Syrien, Palästina, Transjordanien und Arabien von den Anfängen bis zum völligen Aufgeben in der griechisch-römischen Kultur*, unter Mitarbeit von Rudolf Naumann, Tübingen: Wasmuth 1951, n° 1286, 99 (texte) et 375 (photographie).

¹⁸ Inédit, Collection du Shaykh Nāṣir Āl Ṣabāḥ (al-Kuwayt).

¹⁹ Voir aussi Sabina Antonini de Maigret, « Sculptures of Southern Arabia: Autochthony and Autonomy of an Artistic Expression », dans: *Arabia* 1 (2003), 21-26 et pl. 1-5 (pp. 206-210), 25 et pl. 5 e (p. 210); selon le catalogue de vente (Sotheby's, 17 novembre 1977), la pièce proviendrait d'al-Jūba.

²⁰ Alessandra Lombardi, *South Arabian Funerary Stelae from the British Museum Collection*, with contributions by Fabio Eugenio Betti (Arabia Antica 11, Archaeological Studies), Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider 2016, fig. 3 (p. 149); fig. 4 (p. 150); fig. 9 et 10 (p. 154); n° 122 = BM 1996.0713.1 (p. 185). Parmi ces êtres fantastiques, on trouve à nouveau une lionne ailée qui a perdu sa tête [Wolfgang Radt, *Katalog der Staatlichen Antikensammlung von Saṭi'ā und anderer Antiken im Jemen*. Aufgenommen von der Deutschen Jemenexpedition 1970, Berlin: Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, in Kommission bei Buchhandlung Wasmuth K. G. 1973, n° 45 (p. 12 et Taf. 17)], un fragment d'animal (probablement un lion ailé, Shabwa V/84/2) ou des centaures [Radt, *Katalog*, n° 50 et 51 (p. 13 et Taf. 19)]. Les statuet-



Fig. 1: Statuette de bronze représentant une lionne ailée à tête de femme (LNS 1700 M). Photographie © Christian J. Robin.

Il semblerait qu'on puisse distinguer deux périodes. Avant l'ère chrétienne, les êtres fantastiques sont d'inspiration mésopotamienne. Ils ont probablement un rôle de protecteur. C'est logiquement le lion qui domine parce qu'il est un ani-

tes représentant un « Dionysos Sabazios » ailé (Tamna⁶; voir 'Azza 'Ali 'Aqil et Sabina Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi: Bronzi sudarabici di period pre-islamico*, Rome, Paris: De Boccard, 2007, I.A.b.7) ou un angelot ailé (NAM 494) ou les angelots ailés chevauchant un lion qui décorent un bassin de bronze (Costa Brazier = 'Aqil et Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi*, II.C.a.5) sont moins significatifs car ils sont probablement importés.

mal effrayant, mais aussi noble et loyal, qui attaque frontalement. Le taureau est emblématique de la puissance physique et l'ibex de la vie sauvage. La combinaison de caractères empruntés à divers animaux, tout particulièrement les ailes, et à l'homme souligne que ces protecteurs sont particulièrement efficaces grâce à la multiplicité de leurs aptitudes. L'ajout des ailes est aussi un moyen facile de distinguer ces protecteurs des animaux appartenant au monde naturel (ibex, lion, taureau, dromadaire, autruche etc.), fort communs dans le répertoire iconographique. Après l'ère chrétienne, les êtres fantastiques, désormais empruntés au monde méditerranéen, ne sont plus guère que de simples éléments de décor sans signification particulière.

Un dernier caractère peut être souligné. Seules les divinités positives, susceptibles d'accorder des bienfaits, sont mentionnées par leur nom dans les textes. Pourtant, il n'est guère douteux que les Sudarabiques croyaient également à l'existence de divinités maléfiques et prédatrices. Une fresque de Qaryat al-Fa'w, par exemple, représente un mauvais œil entouré d'animaux terrifiants.²¹ Le fait que ces divinités maléfiques ne soient jamais nommées suggère que leur seul nom avait une puissance négative.

Les commanditaires des textes distinguent les menaces qui pèsent sur les biens de celles qui visent les personnes. Pour les biens, ils demandent la protection divine contre divers types de prédateurs qui sont désignés par des termes aussi vagues que possible, tels que *ms¹nkr^m w-ms¹fy^m*²²:

« Ces hommes ont confié leurs deux offrandes (pour les protéger) contre quiconque (les) détruirait et (les) enlèverait de leurs emplacements »

w-rt¹dw ⁽¹¹⁾ *dn²s¹dⁿ s¹qnyty-s¹m bn ms¹nkr^{(12)m} w-ms¹fy^m bn²brt¹s¹my*

(FB-Hawkam 3, al-^cĀdi, l'antique Maryamat^{um})

C'est seulement pour certains monuments funéraires qu'ils supplient en outre la divinité de frapper le prédateur, parce qu'il s'agit manifestement d'une transgression plus grave, mettant en péril la survie du défunt dans l'au-delà. Mais, même dans ce cas, les formules de malédiction sont allusives et laconiques:

« et puisse ^cAthtar l'Oriental frapper quiconque le mutilerait »

w-l¹yq⁽²⁾m^cn^c ttr S²rqⁿ d¹ys²trm-bw

(CIH 442, provenance inconnue).

²¹ Ali Ibrahim Al-Ghabban, Béatrice André-Salvini, Françoise Demange, Carine Juvin et Marianne Cotty, *Routes d'Arabie: Archéologie et histoire du royaume d'Arabie séoudite*, Paris: Louvre éditions et Somogy éditions d'art 2010 (traduction anglaise: *Roads of Arabia. Archaeology and History of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia*, 2010), n° 163, 340.

²² Pour désigner les prédateurs, on rencontre également d'autres termes comme *hs¹s¹m*, *mhd^m* etc.

Concernant les menaces contre les personnes, les Sudarabiques souhaitent que la divinité détruise l'« ennemi » et diverses catégories d'individus ou de fléaux désignés par des termes plus ou moins synonymes :

« et puisse (le dieu) détruire, humilier, écraser et anéantir tout ennemi et adversaire d'Ilisharah Yaḥḍub et de son frère Ya'zil Bayān, rois de Saba' et de dhu-Raydān, fils de Fāri^{um} Yanhub roi de Saba' »

*w-l-ṭbr w-wḏf w-ḏr'n w-hms¹ w-hkms¹ⁿ kl ḏr w-s²ⁿ 'ls^{2rh} Yḥḏb w-ḥy-brw Y'zl Byn mlky S^{1b} w-ḏ-
Rydⁿ bny Fr^m Ynbb mlk S^{1b},*

(Ja 577 / 19, Ma'rib).

Jamais il n'est précisé si ces prédateurs et ces ennemis appartiennent au monde des hommes ou à celui des dieux.

b. Les personnages ailés dans les images sudarabiques

Il n'est guère douteux que les personnages ailés apparaissant dans l'iconographie sudarabique sont des êtres surnaturels appartenant à l'une des classes que mentionnent les inscriptions. De fait, les trois images qui comportent un petit texte (que la graphie permet de dater entre le 1^{er} et le 4^e s. EC)²³ qualifient ce personnage ailé de *shams*, « soleil », un être surnaturel de genre féminin, chargé de protéger les individus et les lignages.

1. Musée national YM 16658 (Fig. 2)

Le plus bel exemple est une dalle incomplète, conservée au Musée national de Ṣan'ā', encore inédite, mais déjà signalée.²⁴ Les dimensions ne sont pas connues. Le fragment qui subsiste doit correspondre approximativement à la moitié ou aux 2/3 de la pièce complète.

Le personnage se dégage en léger relief sur un rectangle creux. Il se présente avec le corps de face et la tête de profil. La longueur de la chevelure, avec deux mèches qui tombent sur l'épaule gauche, suggère qu'il est féminin. Il tient un arc de la main gauche et tend vers l'avant de la main droite une corde qui se termine par une boucle circulaire. La main et la boucle débordent sur le montant gauche du cadre périmétrique. Sous le bras gauche, on devine la partie inférieure d'un ustensile qui pourrait être un carquois attaché dans le dos. Une seule aile est représentée, celle de gauche. Sabina Antonini de Maigret rapproche cette image de la victoire (*niké*) du monde romain, tout en soulignant tout ce qui pourrait évoquer la chasse.

²³ Les datations données dans le cours de cette contribution sont établies d'après la graphie des textes. Elles sont donc des approximations, avec une incertitude de l'ordre d'un siècle.

²⁴ Robin « Matériaux » (n. 7), 75 et Fig. 9.



Fig. 2: Dalle d'albâtre avec l'image de la *shams* très-Haute (*s²ms¹ ʿlyt*). Cette épithète de la *shams* suggère que la provenance est Radmān. Musée national, Ṣanʿāʾ, YM 16658. Photographie © Institut du Monde arabe, Paris.

Le personnage ailé est identifié par l'inscription:

« Shams^{um} ʿĀliyat²⁵ (= très-Haute) »

S²ms^{um} ʿlyt,

La provenance de cette plaque est probablement la commune ḥimyarite de Radmān ou l'une des communes voisines, si on se fonde sur le qualificatif ʿĀliyat, apposé à Shams^{um}.²⁶

Bibliographie: Robin « Matériaux » (n. 7), p. 75 et Fig. 9; Antonini de Maigret, « Winged Deity » (n. 7), 237 et fig. 3 a.

²⁵ Pour faciliter la lecture, nous vocalisons tous les noms propres qui entrent dans notre propos, même ceux pour lesquels un modèle arabe fait défaut. Mais pour beaucoup, la vocalisation est hypothétique voire arbitraire.

²⁶ Voir ci-dessous, pp. 91-92.



Fig. 3: Dalle d'albâtre avec une image de *shams* portant l'inscription « Protection de *shams* sur toi » (*s²rh s²ms¹-b¹-l-k*). Musée militaire, Ṣan'ā', MŞM 213 (provenance: Ma'rib). Photographie © Sabina Antonini de Maigret.

2. Musée militaire MŞM 213 (Fig. 3)

Comme la plaque précédente, il s'agit d'une pièce inédite, mais déjà signalée.²⁷ Elle est incomplète en bas.

Le personnage féminin est très semblable à celui du n° 1 (YM 16658). Il se tient de la même manière et présente les mêmes attributs. Bien que la pièce soit

²⁷ Sabina Antonini de Maigret, *South Arabian Art: Art History in Pre-Islamic Yemen* (Orient & Méditerranée, 10), Paris: De Boccard 2012, 105.

incomplète, il en subsiste suffisamment pour ajouter un détail: le vêtement, qui s'arrête nettement au-dessus du genou, est très court. Les dimensions sont inconnues. Le texte se lit:

« protection de Shams sur (toi) »

s²rh S²ms^l-b^l-l(k),

Il semble complet, aussi bien à droite qu'à gauche. La gravure est maladroite: on notera le grand espace entre le *rā'* et le *ḥā'* ou encore la disposition qui n'est pas parfaitement symétrique. Ici, Shams n'est pas qualifiée de « Très-Haute » comme dans le texte précédent.

Bibliographie: Antonini de Maigret, *South Arabian Art* (n. 27), p. 105; Antonini de Maigret, « A Winged Deity » (n. 7), 237 et fig. 3 b.

3. Musée national YM 16667 (Fig. 4)

Cette pièce inédite a été vue dans le bureau du directeur des Antiquités (à l'époque le Pr Yūsuf ʿAbd Allāh) dans les années 2000. La plaque, qui est beaucoup plus haute que large, est incomplète en bas.

Le personnage est de face dans une attitude hiératique. On ne saurait dire s'il est debout ou assis sur un trône (qui se devine peut-être en dessous du bras gauche). Le bras droit semble présenter un objet qui pourrait être un arc. Une abondante chevelure enserre la tête. Une aile dépasse apparemment derrière l'épaule gauche, mais il n'est pas complètement exclu que ce soit un carquois. De part et d'autre de la tête, deux personnages beaucoup plus petits, apparemment ailés eux aussi, tendent une couronne, celui de droite avec la main droite et celui de gauche avec la main gauche.

Sabina Antonini de Maigret interprète cette image contre une « apothéose » de la « déesse », couronnée par des angelots.

Provenance: ʿAns (région qui appartenait autrefois au royaume de Ḥimyar).

Dimensions: 27,5 cm (hauteur) sur 16,5 (largeur) et 5 (épaisseur).

L'inscription n'est plus lisible, sauf au début de la première ligne:

- | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1 | <i>S²ms^{um} b^llt M.yr</i> | Shams ^{um} maîtresse de ... |
| 2 | <i>(m^{fl}l y)m(n).y b^c=</i> | sur |
| 3 | <i>l-brw</i> | lui ... |

La seule certitude est que le personnage représenté est appelé *Shams*, et qu'il est pourvu d'une titulature divine: « maîtresse » suivi très probablement par un nom de sanctuaire.

Bibliographie: Antonini de Maigret, «Winged Deity » (n. 7), 240-241 et fig. 5.



Fig. 4: Dalle de pierre avec l'image d'un personnage ailé, couronné par des angelots, appelé *shams* dans l'inscription. Musée national, Şan'ā', YM 16667 (provenance: 'Ans). Photographie © Mission Qatabān.

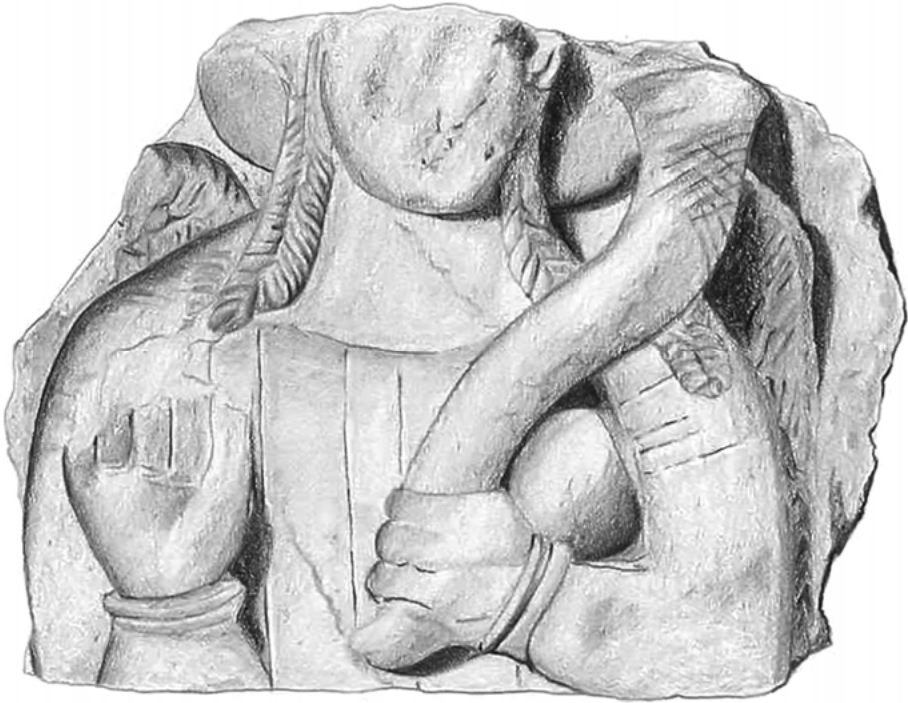


Fig. 5: La dalle Ingrams (P48//98.Is). Dessin © Dan Ky.

4. Dalle Ingrams = P48//98.Is (Fig. 5)

Aux trois dalles de pierre avec un texte identifiant le personnage ailé comme une *shams*, que nous venons de voir, il faut en ajouter deux dont l'interprétation est moins sûre. La première représente un personnage ailé vu de face, en léger relief, qui porte une corne d'abondance de la main gauche. La main droite est levée, la paume tournée vers le spectateur, dans un geste de soumission ou de bénédiction. Le bracelet indique que le personnage est féminin, ce que confirme la poitrine discrètement esquissée et, de façon moins déterminante, la longue chevelure avec quatre mèches qui s'étalent sur les épaules. Un large nimbe entoure la tête.

Dimensions: 18,3 cm (hauteur) sur 25,5 (largeur).

Cette représentation d'un personnage avec un nimbe – un emprunt au monde méditerranéen – est unique en Arabie du Sud.

Dans son article, Jacques Ryckmans qualifie le personnage ailé de « déesse », sans justifier cette appellation; pour Jacqueline Pirenne, ce serait « une représentation de la déesse en Fortune ». En se fondant sur le style, Pirenne propose une date relativement tardive, « non antérieure au 3^e siècle » EC.



Fig. 6: La dalle Dostal (provenance: Tarim au Ḥaḍramawt). D'après Dostal, *Beduinen* (référence ci-dessous) Abb. 11.

Bibliographie: Jacques Ryckmans, « A Bust of a South Arabian Winged Goddess with Nimbus in the possession of Miss Leila Ingrams », dans: *Arabian Studies* 3 (1976), 67-78; P48//98.Is (commentaire par Jacqueline Pirenne); Antonini, « A Winged Deity » (n. 7), 241-242 et fig. 8 a.

5. Dalle Dostal (Fig. 6)

La seconde dalle d'interprétation plus difficile a été photographiée par l'anthropologue autrichien Walter Dostal au Ḥaḍramawt. Elle représente un personnage jeune, inexpressif, probablement masculin, en relief, de face, dans une position hiératique, avec deux petites ailes dans le dos. Il est nu et, semble-t-il, les bras ballants.

Cet « ange » se distingue des précédents par le style et par le sexe. Sa date paraît tardive, mais c'est insuffisant pour en conclure qu'il est juif ou chrétien. Comme il est unique au Yémen, il n'est pas sûr qu'il soit l'œuvre d'un artiste local. Il est donc retenu dans notre inventaire avec hésitation.

Bibliographie: Walter Dostal, *Die Beduinen in Südarabien. Eine ethnologische Studie zur Entwicklung der Kamelhirtenkultur in Arabien* (Institut für Völkerkunde der Universität Wien, Wiener Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte und Linguistik, XVI),

Horn et Vienne: Ferdinand Berger, 1967, Abb. 11; Robin « Matériaux » (n. 7), 75 et fig. 12 (p. 76); Antonini de Maigret, « A Winged Deity » (n. 7), 241 et fig. 7.

6. *Petits fragments du musée de Zafār*

Sabina Antonini de Maigret ajoute à ces cinq pièces trois petits fragments de décor sculpté qui montrent que le thème du personnage ailé était familier dans le répertoire iconographique de Zafār, la capitale de Ḥimyar.²⁸ Deux de ces personnages qui tiennent à la main une sorte de couronne sont qualifiés « d'angelots avec guirlande »; quant au troisième, il représenterait une *nikē*.

Bibliographie: Antonini de Maigret, « A Winged Deity » (n. 7), 238 et fig. 4 c, et 240, fig. 6 b-c [d'après Paul Yule, éd., *Late Antique Arabia. Zafār, Capital of Ḥimyar*, (Abhandlungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft, 29), Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2013].

7. *Autres images d'anges, sur de l'orfèvrerie importée ou des imitations*

Pour que le dossier soit complet, il faut encore mentionner que les fouilleurs étatsuniens de Tamna^c ont trouvé dans une habitation des appliques de bronze représentant des angelots chevauchant des lions.²⁹ Enfin, dans la collection du Shaykh Nāṣir à al-Kuwayt, le décor de quatre pièces d'orfèvrerie – le pied d'un miroir³⁰ (Fig. 7 et 8) et trois coffrets cylindriques avec couvercle en argent – présente un ou plusieurs personnages ailés. Deux de ces coffrets reproduisent des scènes rituelles dans lesquelles on voit un personnage ailé apportant ce qui paraît être un vêtement cérémoniel (Fig. 9 et 10).³¹ Sur le troisième, de réalisation plus grossière, ce sont trois personnages ailés qui flanquent deux chasseurs attaquant chacun un lion (Fig. 11 et 12).³²

Ces personnages ailés (comme le « Dionysos Sabazios » et les angelots ailés déjà évoqués n. 20) n'ont pas été retenus dans notre inventaire parce qu'ils se trouvent assurément sur des objets de provenance étrangère ou exécutés au Yémen par des artistes itinérants: ils ne sont donc pas représentatifs des croyances et des pratiques sudarabiques.

²⁸ Antonini de Maigret, « A Winged Deity » (n. 7), fig. 4 c (p. 238) et fig. 6 b-c (p. 240).

²⁹ Voir Berta Segall, « The Lion-Riders from Timna^c », dans: Richard LeBaron Bowen and Frank P. Albright (édd.), *Archaeological Discoveries in South Arabia*, with contributions by Berta Segall, Joseph Termbach, A. Jamme, Howard Comfort and Gus W. Van Beek, foreword by Wendell Phillips (Publications of the American Foundation for the Study of Man, II). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press 1958, 155-178.

³⁰ LNS 1686 M.

³¹ LNS 1640 M et 1692 M (qui proviennent peut-être de Ḥinū ʿl-Zurayr).

³² LNS 1693 M.



Figs. 7 et 8: Miroir sudarabique de la collection du shaykh Nāṣir Al Ṣabāh, al-Kuwayt (LNS 1686 M). L'inscription qui est incisée sous la scène figurée (voir Fig. 7), suggère une origine qatabânite. Photographies © de la Collection.



Figs. 9 et 10: Coffrets cylindriques avec couvercle de la collection du shaykh Nāṣir Āl Ṣabāh, al-Kuwayt, LNS 1640 M et 1692 M. L'inscription suggère une origine qatabānite. Photographies © de la Collection (LNS 1640 M) et de Christian J. Robin (LNS 1692 M).



Figs. 11 et 12: Coffret cylindrique avec couvercle de la collection du shaykh Nāṣir Āl Ṣabāh, al-Kuwayt (LNS 1693 M). On peut supposer qu'il s'agit d'une copie réalisée au Yémen si on se fonde sur la médiocrité de la facture. Photographies © de la Collection.

c. La nature et les fonctions des personnages féminins ailés appelés shams

Pour mieux cerner la nature et les fonctions des personnages ailés appelés *shams*, nous allons examiner maintenant ce que les inscriptions nous apprennent sur les *shams* avant de revenir à la manière de les représenter.

1. Les shams d'après les inscriptions

Les personnages ailés que nous venons d'examiner sont explicitement appelés *shams* sur les trois dalles où une inscription est associée au relief (n° 1-3). L'appellatif *shams* dérive de *shams*, le « soleil », qui est féminin (de manière assurée ou probable) dans les langues d'Arabie, au contraire des termes désignant la « lune », qui sont masculins.³³

Les attestations de *shams*, avec le sens concret de « soleil, astre solaire », sont très peu nombreuses. Une inscription en langue ma'înique demande qu'une offrande soit protégée

« contre tout prédateur tant que dureront le soleil et le terre »,

bn d-ys^t nkr-s^t ywmy s²ms^t w^{-(A)} r^qm

(GOAM 315, Barāqish).

Un texte ḥimyarite en langue saba'ique rapporte que le roi et son armée

« se battirent avec eux depuis l'apparition de l'aube jusqu'au coucher du soleil »

thrgw b^{-c} m-bmw bn s²f s²r^qm^c dy m^q(³³)tt s²ms^m

(Ja 649, Ma'rib).

En fait, c'est surtout comme nom de divinité que *Shams* est attestée.

En Arabie, les plus anciennes mentions d'une divinité nommée *Shams* se trouvent dans les inscriptions du royaume de Ma'în.³⁴ Un peu avant et un peu après de 500 av. EC, deux inscriptions commémorent des offrandes à Il *Qdlbm* et Shams Ḥaḍar (*l Qdlbm w-S²ms^t-Ḥḍr*), deux divinités dont on ne sait rien (Ma'în 99 et Ma'în 100).

Le culte d'une divinité nommée *Shams* est bientôt attesté dans tous les royaumes d'Arabie méridionale, à Qatabān, à Saba', au Ḥaḍramawt et à Ḥimyar. Mais c'est seulement dans le royaume de Saba' qu'on est sûr que *Shams* est une déesse,

³³ Dans les langues épigraphiques (saba'ique, ma'înique, qatabānique et ḥaḍramawtique), le soleil se dit *shams* (féminin) et la lune *warakb* (masculin); en arabe classique, c'est *shams* (féminin) et *qamar* (masculin). On peut ajouter que *bilāl*, le « croissant (de lune) », est logiquement masculin en saba'ique comme en arabe.

³⁴ Ma'în est un royaume antique dont la capitale s'appelait Qarnā. Le site de cette capitale s'appelle aujourd'hui Ma'în. Il faut donc noter que le même nom désigne le royaume antique et le site de sa capitale.

grâce à des textes plus longs et plus précis, qui comportent des accords grammaticaux. En saba'ïque, le nom de la déesse peut être *Shams*, mais c'est le plus souvent *Shams^{um}*, avec la désinence *-um* qui correspond au *tanwin* de l'arabe et marque notamment l'indétermination.

Dans le royaume de Hagar, sur la rive arabe du golfe Arabo-persique³⁵, à partir de la fin du 4^e s. av. EC, les inscriptions et les monnaies révèlent que la grande divinité s'appelle *Shams*. On ignore si cette divinité est masculine ou féminine. Quelques indices, cependant, invitent à donner la préférence au genre masculin: en Arabie, toutes les grandes divinités sont masculines; sur les monnaies, le nom de *Shams* est mentionné dans le champ à côté d'un personnage masculin assis sur un trône qui pourrait en être une image³⁶; enfin, *Shams* a pu être emprunté à la Mésopotamie où c'est un dieu. Si *Shams* de Hagar est bien un dieu, c'est apparemment une exception en Arabie.

Dans l'Arabie méridionale, un seul texte qualifie expressément *Shams* de « déesse » (*ʔlt* et peut-être *ʔlt*).³⁷ Mais beaucoup d'autres impliquent que *Shams* en est bien une: on lui fait des offrandes, on lui consacre des sanctuaires, et elle est la « maîtresse » (*bʔlt*) de nombreux lieux où elle est vénérée etc.

Un peu avant le début de l'ère chrétienne, le nom *Shams^{um}* présente une évolution remarquable. Comme Ishtar et ʔl en Mésopotamie et au Levant (et peut-être *ʔtr* en Arabie du Sud), il devient l'appellatif d'une classe de divinités mineures, tout en conservant son caractère de nom propre. Cet emploi de *shams*, qui apparaît vers le 1^{er} s. av. EC, dure jusqu'au 4^e s. EC.³⁸

Pour les Sudarabiques, les *shams* sont tout particulièrement chargées de la protection des individus et des lignages. Comme illustration, on peut mentionner les invocations d'une inscription de Ma'rib (l'antique Marib, capitale du royaume de Saba') qui établit explicitement le lien entre une *shams* et les seigneurs des commanditaires du texte:

³⁵ Christian J. Robin et Alessia Priolella: « Nouveaux arguments en faveur d'une identification de la cité de Gerrha avec le royaume de Hagar (Arabie orientale) », dans: *Semítica et Classica* 6 (2013), 131-185, notamment 160-161; Christian J. Robin, « Gerrha d'Arabie, cité séleucide », dans: *Henri Seyrig (1895-1973), Actes du colloque Henri Seyrig (1895-1973) tenu les 10 et 11 octobre 2013 à la Bibliothèque nationale de France et à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Paris*, organisé par Frédérique Duyrat, Françoise Briquel-Chatonnet, Jean-Marie Dentzer et Olivier Picard (SYRLA, Supplément III), Beyrouth: Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient 2016, 223-250, 229.

³⁶ Robin, « Gerrha d'Arabie » (n. 36), 230-233. Sur les monnaies grecques qui ont servi de modèle, c'est Zeus qui est assis sur le trône.

³⁷ CLAS 35.91/06/P53 (provenance inconnue), [n]kl Lḥyʔt Sʔbʔyⁿ (2) [ʔ]-Sʔmsʔ ʔlt (3) ʔbbḥ ʔt (4) Tḥ^m ʔw-sʔmʔw ʔltⁿ ʔgn⁽⁵⁾m ..., « Ouvrage de Laḥayʔathat le Sabéen,⁽²⁾ [pour] Shams, la déesse de (3) Abibahath femme (4) de Tābi^{cum}, et ... ». La fin du texte n'est pas traduite parce qu'elle présente de sérieuses difficultés de compréhension. Il est possible que le mot *ʔltⁿ* y signifie « la déesse ».

³⁸ Ce nouvel emploi est attesté dans les royaumes de Qatabān (voir par exemple RES 3856 = CSAII, 15, wādi Ḍura'), Saba' et Ḥimyar.

« avec le protecteur Yuha^cin et la *shams* de leurs seigneurs, maîtresse de Qanyā[n] »,

b-rb^c[ⁿ] (15) *Yh^cn w-s²ms¹ ʔmr²-bmw b^clt Qny[ⁿ]*

(CLAS 39.11/o 3 n° 1 = Fa 119, Maʔrib, 3^e s. EC).

Une autre illustration est offerte par la *shams* personnelle du souverain sabéen qui s'appelle Tanūf (*Tuf*). Dans l'inscription Ja 629 (Maʔrib), cette *shams* royale est invoquée avec celle des auteurs du texte:

« avec ʿAthtar et Hawbas, avec A⁽⁴⁶⁾lmaqah maître d'Awām-et-Hirwan^{um} et Almaqah maître de Matba^{um}-et-Rawzān, avec dhāt⁽⁴⁷⁾ Ḥimyām, avec dhāt Baʿdan^{um}, avec la *shams* du roi Tanūf et avec leur *shams* maîtresse de Ṣayḥayn »,

*b-ʿttr w-Hwbs¹ w-b-⁽⁴⁶⁾lmqh b^cl()ʔwm w-Hrw^m w-²lmqh b^cl Mib^{cm} w-Rwzⁿ w-b-ḏt⁽⁴⁷⁾ Ḥmy^m
(w)-b-ḏt B^cdn^m w-b-s²ms¹ mlkⁿ Tuf w-s²ms¹-bmw b^clt Ṣyḥyn*

(Ja 629, Maʔrib, milieu du 2^e s. EC).

Un texte d'al-Miʿsāl (Radmān) commémorant l'aménagement du sanctuaire consacré à la *shams* des princes de la commune de Radmān est également explicite:

« (le prince) a édifié,⁽²⁾ creusé et achevé le haut-lieu de Shams^{um} ʿĀliyāt (Très-Haute) sur son mont Shihṛār^{um}, sanctuaire dédié à *shams* qui appartient aux banū Maʿāhir, maîtres du palais⁽³⁾ Hirrān »,

br² w-⁽²⁾bqr w-bqh mḡf S²ms^{1m} ʿbyt b-ʿ-ḥrw S²hr^m ms²ms^{1m} l-bny M^cbr ʔb^cl bytⁿ(3) Hrⁿ

(al-Miʿsāl 1 / 1-3, commune de Radmān, fin du 2^e s. EC).

Le substantif *ms²ms¹*, probablement un nom de lieu à vocaliser *mishmās*³⁹, désigne apparemment une catégorie particulière de sanctuaires consacrés à la déesse *shams*. C'est ici son unique attestation.

Le fait que les *shams* sont chargées de la protection des personnes s'accorde avec l'observation que c'est une autre catégorie d'êtres surnaturels, les *mudḥ*, qui a pour fonction de veiller sur les temples, les palais et les habitations:

« avec le financement de ʿAttar Shāriqān, avec le soutien de leurs *sham*⁽⁵⁾s, des *mudḥ* de leurs habitations, de ʿAttar dhy-Yfy, de Saḥr dhu-Kawkabān et de⁽⁶⁾ ʿAmm dhu-Bṭm^m et avec l'aide de leurs seigneurs Marthadān Yashʿar et Saʿd^{um} Yah⁽⁷⁾mad, princes de Maḏḥā^m, et avec la contribution de leurs clients, les clients des banū Shabʿān »,

b-mṔ ʿtr S²rqrⁿ w-b-rḏ² ʔs²ms¹-l⁽⁵⁾maw w-mudḥt ʔbyt-bmw w-ʿtr ḏ-Yfy w-S¹hr ḏ-Kwkbⁿ w-⁽⁶⁾cm ḏ-Bṭm^m w-b-rḏ² mr²y-lmw Mrṭḏⁿ Ys²r w-S¹c^dm Yh⁽⁷⁾md qyly Mḏḥy^m w-b-s²t² ḏm-bmw ḏm bny S²l^{cm}

(Bahāʔ 1, commune de Maḏḥā^m, région de Bayḏāʔ-Ḥaṣi, 1^{er} s. EC).

³⁹ Dans les dialectes arabes médiévaux et contemporains du Yémen, le schème *mifāl* donne des noms de lieux (alors qu'en arabe classique, ce sont des noms d'instrument): voir *mihṛāb*, *mikhlāf* etc.

Au premier abord, les usages du terme *shams* sont quelque peu déconcertants. Dans un même texte, la même *shams* peut être traitée comme un nom propre (*Shamssm*) ou comme un nom commun (sa *shams*, leur *shams*). On a d'autres exemples d'une même ambiguïté en Arabie du Sud. Les théonymes ʾĪl (?l) et ʿAthtar (ʿ*ttr*) peuvent aussi être employés soit comme un nom propre soit comme l'appellatif d'une catégorie de divinités.⁴⁰ Le nom du barrage de Maʿrib, ʿArim (ʿ*rm*), peut lui aussi être employé comme nom propre et comme nom commun pour dire « barrage ». ⁴¹ En réalité, c'est un phénomène qui n'est pas aussi insolite qu'il y paraît tout d'abord : il n'est pas rare que la frontière entre les catégories « nom propre » et « non commun » soit poreuse. Par exemple, si on examine les usages du français, on y relève de multiples exemples, à commencer par le mot « Dieu », nom propre, qui devient un nom commun dans « mon dieu ».

Le terme *shams* n'est jamais utilisé comme appellatif d'une autre divinité, ce qui indique que tous les *shams* sont des émanations de la déesse *Shamssm*. Il se distingue ainsi du terme *mudḥ* qui peut désigner des divinités de toutes sortes, comme nous l'avons vu.⁴²

Divers procédés sont utilisés pour différencier les *shams*. Le premier est l'ajout d'un qualificatif comme *Tanūf* (pour la *shams* du roi de Saba) ou ʿĀliyat, « haute, élevée » (sur lequel nous allons revenir). Le second procédé consiste à accoler au théonyme la référence à un sanctuaire, comme « maîtresse de Qanyā[n] » ou « maîtresse de Ṣayḥayn », déjà vus ci-dessus.

La seule *shams* sur laquelle nous ayons des données relativement abondantes est *shams-ʿĀliyat* (ou *Shamssm ʿĀliyat*), protectrice du lignage des banū Maʿāhir, princes de Radmān. Bien que ce soit une divinité mineure, un vaste sanctuaire rupestre lui est consacré au sommet de la barrière rocheuse qui encerclle le site d'al-Miʿsāl; l'ampleur de ce sanctuaire est manifestement en rapport avec le rang quasi royal auquel les princes issus des Banū Maʿāhir prétendent aux 1^{er}-3^e s. EC, comme le montrent l'introduction d'une ère propre à Radmān pour compter les années et le fait que ces princes se succèdent de père en fils à la tête de la commune. Tout aussi remarquable, le nom de *shams-ʿĀliyat* apparaît non seulement

⁴⁰ Christian J. Robin, « ʿAthtar au féminin en Arabie méridionale », dans : *New Research in Archaeology and Epigraphy of South Arabia and its Neighbors, Proceedings of the "Rencontres sabéennes 15" held in Moscow May 25th-27th, 2011*, Alexander Sedov, éd., Moscow: The State Museum of Oriental Art and Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences 2012, 333-366, notamment 351.

⁴¹ Christian Darles, Christian J. Robin et Jérémie Schiettecatte, avec une contribution de Ghassan el Mastri, « Contribution à une meilleure compréhension de l'histoire de la Digue de Maʿrib au Yémen », dans : François Baratte, Christian Julien Robin et Elsa Rocca (édd.), *Regards croisés d'Orient et d'Occident: Les barrages dans l'Antiquité tardive, Actes du colloque tenu à Paris, Fondation Simone et Cino del Duca, 7-8 janvier 2011, organisé dans le cadre du programme ANR EauMagreb* (Orient & Méditerranée 14), Paris: De Boccard 2014, 9-70, notamment 9.

⁴² Voir n. 13. La déesse *Shamssm* elle-même peut être qualifiée de *mandah*: voir l'inscription Ir 49 [= 40] (cité n. 10) où elle est l'un des deux *mandah* des (palais des) auteurs du texte.

dans les invocations des inscriptions monumentales sur divers sites de Radmān⁴³, mais aussi dans les graffites récemment découverts dans les communes voisines, entre Sanabān et Hakir.⁴⁴ Les auteurs de ces graffites se déclarent fréquemment « consacrés » (mot-à-mot « lié par contrat », *m^cbd*) à *Shams^{um} ʿĀliyat*⁴⁵; deux d’entre eux précisent qu’ils ne sont pas des sujets des princes de Radmān, mais qu’ils résident dans les villes de Hakir^{um46} (aujourd’hui Hakir) et de *S²mm* (non identifié).⁴⁷ Dans un cas, l’auteur est consacré à deux divinités, *Shams^{um} ʿĀliyat* et ʿAttar dhu-Šanḥ.⁴⁸

Il est manifeste que *shams-ʿĀliyat* (ou *Shams^{um} ʿĀliyat*) est devenue une divinité régionale jouissant d’un certain rayonnement. On peut aisément établir une corrélation entre l’ascension politique des Banū Maʿāhir et celle de *shams-ʿĀliyat* dans les hiérarchies divines.

Comme illustration du fait que *Shams^{um} ʿĀliyat* alterne librement avec *shams-ʿĀliyat*, on se reportera aux inscriptions provenant d’un même sanctuaire, celui d’al-Miʿsāl. Voir par exemple:

- « dans le temple de sa *shams ʿĀliyat* (Très-Haute), maîtresse du mont Shiḥrār^{um} », *b-mḥrm s²ms^l-l-w ʿyt b^clt ʿrⁿ S²ḥrr^m* (al-Miʿsāl 2 / 2, milieu du 3^e s. EC);
- « le mémorial de *Shams^{um} ʿĀliyat* (Très-Haute) sur son mont Shiḥrār^{um} », *mḡf S²ms^lm ʿyt b-ʿr-l-w S²ḥrr^m* (al-Miʿsāl 1 / 2, milieu 2^e s. EC).

Sur la plaque YM 16658 (n° 1 ci-dessus), la *shams* représentée est appelée ʿĀliyat. Comme le qualificatif ʿĀliyat n’est attesté présentement que pour la *shams* de ces Banū Maʿāhir princes de Radmān, il est plausible (mais non assuré) que la plaque YM 16658 provient de Radmān ou d’une commune voisine.

Si nous introduisons maintenant la chronologie, il semblerait que les plus anciennes invocations à une *shams* apparaissent vers le 1^{er} s. av. EC, un peu partout, puisque l’on a en des attestations à Saba⁴⁹, à Qatabān⁵⁰ et dans les communes

⁴³ En plus d’al-Miʿsāl, ce sont Qāniya (YMN 11), dhū Ḥadid (MAFRAY-dhū Ḥadid 1 et 2) et Bayḥān (RES 3958).

⁴⁴ Voir les textes relevés par Khaldūn Nuʿmān à Hakir (Jarf an-Nuʿaymiyya 8, p. 82), al-Kawla (n° 3, p. 101), et al-Sinabān (Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c 2, 4, 7, 9, 10 et 14, pp. 89-96). Noter que *Shams ʿĀliyat* est inconnue dans la Khawlān du Sud, pourtant dirigée elle aussi par les Banū Maʿāhir.

⁴⁵ Voir Jarf al-Nuʿaymiyya 8; Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c 2, 4, 7, 10 et 14.

⁴⁶ Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c 14.

⁴⁷ Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c 10. La localisation de *S²mm* est incertaine. al-Ḥasan al-Ḥamdāni mentionne un toponyme Shumm du côté de Ḥarāz et du jabal al-nabī Shuʿayb [David Heinrich Müller, *al-Ḥamdānī’s Geographie der arabischen Halbinsel*, 2 vols., Leiden: Brill 1884-1891 (reprise par le même éditeur, 1968), 68 / 20, 72 / 8, 106 / 12 et 135 / 8] et un Shamām en Arabie centrale où il y avait une mine d’argent et une mine de cuivre exploitées par des milliers de zoroastriens (*majūs*) [125 / 16; 147 / 22 et 23; 149 / 17; 154 / 3; 165 / 3].

⁴⁸ *m^c(2)hd S²ms^m ʿyt⁽³⁾ w-m^cbd ʿr d-S³(4)nh b^cl Ks²nf*, Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c 9.

⁴⁹ RES 4198 (1^{er} s. av. EC) (*w-(b) (s²)ms^l(4)bmw b^clt Hrⁿ*).

⁵⁰ CLAS II, 15 = MAFYS-Ḍura³ 8 (1^{er} s. EC) (*w-b-rd^c S²ms^l-s^l*).

qui viennent de se séparer de Qatabān (Sufār^{um} 51, Maḍhā^m 52 et Radmān⁵³). La dynastie sabéenne se donne une *shams* particulière appelée Tanūf, vénérée dans le temple Ghadrān qui lui est propre, probablement à Maʿrib, vers la fin du 1^{er} s. EC. Les premières attestations se trouvent dans les inscriptions des fils du roi Dhamar^cali Dhariḥ: Nashaʿkarib Yuhaʿmin⁵⁴ et Yuhaqīm⁵⁵. Dès lors, la pratique d’invoker sa *shams* se généralise, quel que soit l’auteur du texte.

L’idée qu’une divinité particulière veille sur le souverain semble apparaître au 2^e s. av. EC à Qatabān où quatre textes mentionnent « le *rabiʿ* du (roi) Shahr » (*Rbʿ S²hr*)⁵⁶.

2. Les shams d’après leurs images

Sur trois plaques, comme nous l’avons vu, une *shams* est représentée sous l’apparence d’une jeune femme ailée. Il est très exceptionnel que des êtres surnaturels soient illustrés sous forme humaine ou animale. Ceux qui le sont, avec une inscription qui les identifie explicitement, ne sont pas nombreux: en plus des *shams*, ce sont les grands dieux du Jawf et les « Filles de ʿĪl » sur deux piliers de Nashshān qui remontent à 700 av. EC environ, aux origines de la civilisation sudarabique, et peuvent être interprétés comme une expérimentation sans suite.⁵⁷

Il n’est pas impossible que d’autres figures humaines représentent des divinités, sans que cela soit explicité, parce que la chose était si bien connue qu’il était inutile d’en faire mention. C’est très vraisemblable pour les séries de jeunes femmes jugées sur une sellette, communément appelées « Filles de ʿĀd », comme nous allons le voir. C’est beaucoup plus incertain pour la femme faisant un geste de bénédiction, dont la nature précise est d’autant plus problématique qu’aucune n’a été trouvée dans une fouille régulière.⁵⁸

⁵¹ Robin-Bron Masjid al-Nūr = *CIAS* II, 3 / 3 (vers le début de l’ère chrétienne) (*ʿbrt S²ms¹-lmw*).

⁵² MQ-Nakhlān 1 (vers le début de l’ère chrétienne) (*w-s²ms¹-lmy*).

⁵³ YMN 11 (*w-b* ⁽⁵⁾*s²ms¹-hrw ʿlyt*); YMN 15 / 4 (1^{er} s. EC ?) (*w-b-rd^c S²ms¹-b*).

⁵⁴ Ce sont des offrandes faites par le roi à « leur *shams* Tanūf, maîtresse de Ghadrān » (*s²ms¹-lmw Tnf bʿlt Gḍr^m*) ou des opérations de remise en état (*CIH* 573 [Maʿrib]; Ja 853 A-F [Maʿrib]; Ja 854 [Maʿrib]). Ce sont aussi des invocations à la *shams* royale par des sujets du souverain (Ir 2; Ja 559; Ja 560; Ja 561).

⁵⁵ Nous n’avons qu’une invocation à la *shams* royale par un sujet du souverain, Ja 644.

⁵⁶ Voir *CSAII*, 197 = *RES* 3688 de Labakh, entre Bayhān et Hinū al-Zurayr (*ʿm ḍ-Dwn^m w-ʿnby S²ym¹ w-S²ms¹ w-rb^c ⁽¹⁰⁾ S²hr*; roi *S²hr Ḡyl^m bn ʿbs²bm*); *CSAII*, 198 = *RES* 3689 de Labakh (*bn Hḥl^m mh⁽²⁾rm ʿm ḍ-Dwn^m w-bn Rṣf^m mh^{rm} ʿnby S²ym¹ w-bn tht S²ms¹ ⁽³⁾ w-rb^c S²hr*; roi *S²hr Ygl bn Yd^cb*); *CSAII*, 199 = *RES* 3691 de Hajar Kuḥlān (*bn Hḥl^m mh^{rm} ʿm ḍ-Dwn^m w-bn Rṣf^m mh^{rm} ⁽²⁾ ʿnby S²ym¹ w-bn tht S²ms¹ w-rb^c S²hr*; roi *S²hr Hill Yhn^cm bn Yd^cb*); *CSAII*, 200 = *RES* 3692 de Hajar Kuḥlān (*bn Hḥl^m mh^{rm} ʿm ḍ-Dwn^m w-bn Rṣf^m mh^{rm} ʿnby S²ym¹ ⁽²⁾ [w-bn] tht S²ms¹ w-rb^c S²hr*; roi [*S²hr Ygl bn*] *Yd^cb*).

⁵⁷ Voir ci-dessous, pp. 95-101.

⁵⁸ Sur cette question, voir Robin, « Matériaux » (n. 7), notamment 84-95.

Cette réticence manifeste à représenter les divinités sous forme humaine conduit à supposer que nos trois images de *shams* ne sont pas le produit d'une tradition régionale, mais plutôt le résultat d'un emprunt aux représentations du monde méditerranéen. C'est d'ailleurs ce que suppose Sabina Antonini de Maigret quand elle parle de « victoire » (*nikê*) ou d'« apothéose de la déesse ».

Il reste à se demander si les deux dernières figures ailées (n° 4 et 5) représentent également des *shams* ou si ce sont des êtres surnaturels appartenant à d'autres catégories. Il est difficile de répondre de manière assurée. Il est probable que la plaque n° 5 (Dostal) représente un être surnaturel différent. Le seul point commun avec le groupe de *shams* réside dans les ailes; en revanche, les différences sont nombreuses et significatives, notamment le genre. Quant à la plaque n° 4 (Ingrams), elle pourrait représenter une *shams*, si on suppose que le personnage féminin ailé qui tient une corne d'abondance est une simple variante de celui qui tend une couronne. L'abondance des biens et la réussite sociale ne sont-ils les principaux bienfaits que les fidèles attendent de leurs protecteurs?

Sabina Antonini de Maigret a analysé le personnage ailé féminin de la dalle n° 2 (auquel on peut joindre désormais les dalles n° 1 et 3). Elle l'identifie comme une victoire ailée, une *nikê*; selon elle, la « corde » formant une boucle, tendue avec la main droite, est une « couronne » (dans le texte) ou une « guirlande » (dans la légende). Dans l'arc qui remplace la palme du modèle proche-oriental, elle pense reconnaître un motif évoquant la chasse. Ce type de dalle serait une image de culte en contexte domestique.⁵⁹

Jacques Ryckmans et Jacqueline Pirenne qui ont étudié minutieusement la dalle n° 4 (Ingrams) reconnaissent dans le personnage féminin portant une corne d'abondance une « déesse » de la fécondité faisant un geste de bénédiction; ce motif s'inspirerait des représentations syriennes de Déméter, Atargatis et de la Fortune.

En résumé, nous supposons que les quatre images de jeunes femmes munies d'ailes représentent des *shams*. Pour deux d'entre elles, la provenance serait Ḥimyar et pour la troisième Ma'rib. On peut aisément reconstituer comment l'idée de représenter les *shams* sous l'apparence de jeunes femmes munies d'ailes s'est répandue au Yémen: c'est à l'imitation des personnages surnaturels présents dans le décor des objets importés du monde romain (ou réalisés sur place par des artistes romains) comme le suggèrent les pièces d'orfèvrerie de la Collection du shaykh Nāṣir (al-Kuwayt). On peut supposer que les peintres, les sculpteurs et les orfèvres étrangers qui venaient offrir leurs services aux souverains et aux princes du Yémen avec des cartons illustrant leurs propositions de décor ont été le principal vecteur de diffusion. Comme les *shams* présentaient des caractères comparables à ceux des victoires (*nikê*), il est logique qu'on ait pensé à les figurer à leur ressemblance.

⁵⁹ Antonini de Maigret, « Sculptures of Southern Arabia » (n. 19), 105-106.

De ce fait, les images ne peuvent être utilisées qu'avec prudence pour déterminer la nature et les fonctions des *shams*: les attributs comme les ailes, la couronne, la corne d'abondance ou l'auréole viennent des figures qui ont servi de modèle. Mais il n'en demeure pas moins que les *shams* ont été identifiées avec divers types d'êtres surnaturels du monde romain, ce qui implique au moins une certaine proximité.

Si nous comparons les *shams* avec notre définition des « anges », il apparaît que les points communs sont nombreux: les *shams* constituent une classe homogène d'êtres surnaturels occupant un rang intermédiaire entre les hommes et les divinités; d'après les inscriptions, elles ont pour fonction de veiller sur les humains; sur les plaques sculptées, elles sont munies d'ailes leur permettant de circuler entre la terre et les cieux, certainement pour servir d'intermédiaires entre les hommes et les divinités; enfin, les motifs de la couronne et de la corne d'abondance soulignent qu'elles apportent la bonne fortune à ceux qu'elles protègent. On peut donc considérer que les *shams* sont les « anges » de l'Arabie du sud antique.

B. Un cortège de jeunes femmes appelées « Filles de Īl »

Les *shams* ne sont pas les seuls êtres surnaturels dont on possède une image. Il y a aussi les « Filles de Īl » qu'un bandeau décoratif représente sous la forme d'un cortège de quatre jeunes femmes tenant un objet recourbé.

a. Le bandeau de Nashshān avec l'inscription « Filles de Īl » (Fig. 13)

Deux des piliers de l'entrée monumentale du temple d'Aranyada^c à Nashshān aujourd'hui al-Sawdā[?]), dans le Jawf du Yémen, porte un décor sculpté en léger relief qui représente le monde supérieur.⁶⁰ En allant de haut en bas, on découvre successivement:

- Deux panneaux représentant deux dieux debout, se faisant face; chaque dieu est individualisé par un nom qui semble avoir été ajouté après la réalisation de la scène; ce sont dans le panneau supérieur 'Athtar ('*ttr*) et un dieu dont le

⁶⁰ Rémy Audouin, Mounir Arbach et Christian J. Robin, « La découverte du temple d'Aranyada^c à Nashshān et la chronologie des Labu'ides », dans: *Arabia* 2 (2004), 23-41 et fig. 20-41 et 70 (pp. 205-216 et 234); Christian J. Robin, « À propos des 'Filles d'Īl' (complément à l'article publié dans *Semitica* 50, 2001, pp. 113-192) », dans: *Semitica* 52-53 (2007), 139-148; Benjamin Sass, « From Maraş and Zincirli to es-Sawdā[?]: The Syro-Hittite Roots of the South Arabian Table Scene », dans: *Bilder als Quellen – Images as Sources: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Artefacts and the Bible Inspired by the Work of Othmar Keel*, édd. Susanne Bickel, Silvia Schroer, René Schurte and Christoph Uehlinger (Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis, Sonderband / Special Volume), Fribourg: Academic Press et Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 2007, 293-319.



Fig. 13: L'un des deux piliers du temple d'Aranyada' à Nashshān (dans le Jawf du Yémen) illustrant le monde supérieur (date: peu avant 700 av. EC). Dessin © Rémy Audouin.



Fig. 14: Panneau représentant les dieux Nab'al (*Nb'l*, Kaminahū) et Yada'ismu (*Yd's'm*, Haram) sur l'un des deux piliers du temple d'Aranyada' à Nashshān. Dessin © Rémy Audouin.

nom n'est plus lisible, dans le panneau inférieur Wadd (*Wd*) et Aranyada'. Ces quatre dieux pourraient composer le panthéon du royaume de Nashshān.⁶¹

- Trois panneaux représentant deux dieux assis sur un trône, se faisant face; chaque dieu est identifié par un nom qui semble également avoir été ajouté après coup. Ce sont Aranyada' et Almaqah (*lmqh*) en haut, Yada'ismū (*Yd's'm*) et Nab'al (*Nb'l*) au centre (Fig. 14), Nakrah (*Nkrh*) et Hiwār (*Hwr*) en bas. Chacun de ces dieux représente l'un des royaumes du Jawf: Nashshān (Aranyada'), Saba' (Almaqah), Haram (Yada'ismū), Kaminahū (Nab'al), Ma'in (Nakrah) et Inabba' (Hiwār).
- Deux bandeaux avec trois personnages (probablement féminins) de profil, tournés vers la gauche, brandissant apparemment un objet recourbé et une sorte de clochette, à la longue chevelure et à la poitrine couverte d'objets qui ressemblent à des tablettes de bois et à des petits vases. Les deux objets brandis constituent les pointes d'une figure énigmatique en forme de croissant.

⁶¹ Voir les invocations des inscriptions al-Sawdā' 3 ('Athtar Shāriqān, Wadd, Aranyada', 'Athtar dhū-Garb, 'Athtar Nashq) et al-Sawdā' 16 ('Athtar dhū-Garb et dhū-Riṣāf, Aranyada' et Wadd).

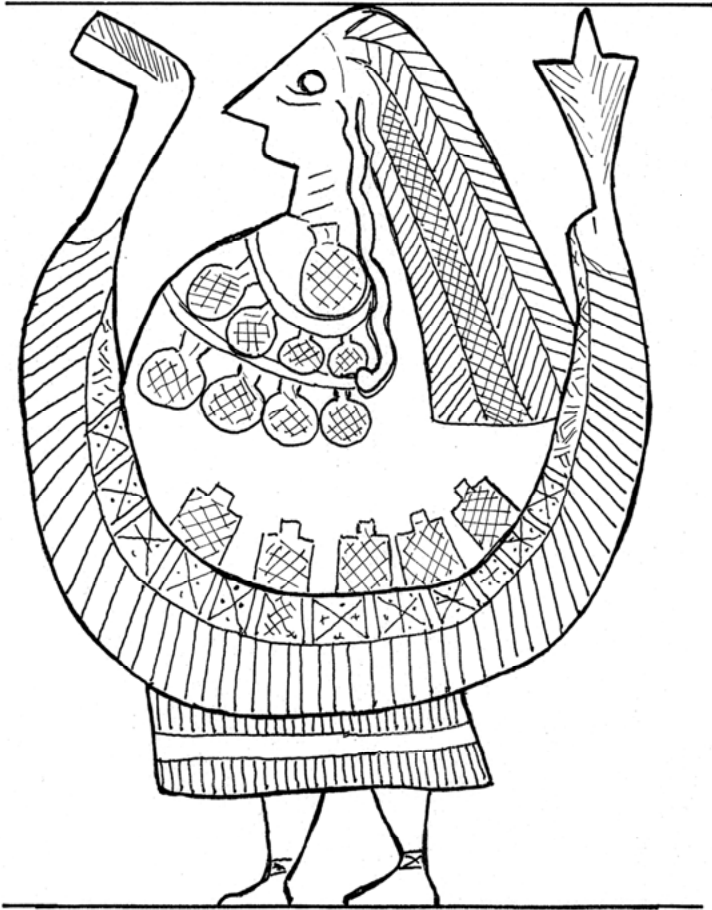


Fig. 15: L'une des trois « Filles au croissant » sur l'un des deux piliers du temple d'Aranyada^c à Nashshān. Dessin © Rémy Audouin.

Nous proposons d'appeler ces personnages les « Filles au croissant » puisque cette figure fait leur singularité (Fig. 15).

- Une zone de transition avec un bandeau d'autruches et d'ibex alternés, puis une tête d'ibex (?) en haut-relief, aujourd'hui brisée. De chaque côté de cette tête, divers motifs sont superposés. Parmi ces derniers, on reconnaît un arbre avec des oiseaux picorant, deux bouquetins affrontés, enfin deux mains aux doigts écartés et pointés vers le bas du côté extérieur, une main semblable et le symbole du dieu Aranyada^c, en forme de *bā'*, du côté intérieur.
- Un bandeau épigraphique commémorant la fondation du temple par le souverain Alamnabaṭ Amar fils de Labū'an, qui ne mentionne pas son titre de « roi de Nashshān »:

« Alamnabaṭ Amar fils de Labūʿān a fondé »,

*ʿlmmḅṭ ʿmr bn Lbʿn sʿḥḍṭ*⁶²

- Un cortège de quatre personnes brandissant un objet recourbé, qui se dirigent vers la droite. Elles sont identifiées par l’inscription:

« Filles de Īl », *[B]bmt ʿ(ʿ)*

L’image de ces quatre femmes, malheureusement, n’est guère lisible sur les photographies. Le fac-similé de Rémy Audouin, qui ne donne guère que leur contour, ne permet pas de reconnaître l’ensemble de leurs attributs (Fig. 16-17). Les clichés dont on dispose permettent cependant de conclure que ces jeunes femmes sont traitées d’une manière qui n’a pas de parallèle en Arabie du Sud ou au Proche-Orient.⁶³

La lecture de l’inscription est raisonnablement assurée grâce aux nombreuses autres occurrences de l’expression « Filles de Īl ». La graphie *bbmt* est régulière en ma^cinique pour le pluriel de *bnt*, « fille »: voir M 360 / 4 (*w-bbn-sʿm w-bbnt-sʿm*, « leurs fils et leurs filles »), al-Sawdāʿ 37 / 3 et 5; MŞM 116 / 2 (*k-sʿm w-bbnt-sʿm*, « pour eux et leurs filles »).⁶⁴ On retrouve l’ajout du même *b* dans le pluriel de *bn*, « fils », qui est d’ordinaire *bbny* (*bbn-* en annexion). On ignore si ce *b* qui distinguait les graphies du singulier et du pluriel, était purement orthographique ou s’il était articulé.⁶⁵

Les piliers de Nashshān, qui offrent cette étonnante représentation du monde supérieur, avec notamment celle de tous grands dieux des royaumes du Jawf, semblent légèrement antérieurs à 700 av. EC: ils raient donc aux origines de la civilisation sudarabique. Une telle datation est confirmée par le fait que les panneaux représentant les grands dieux s’inspirent de stèles funéraires néo-hittites de la Syrie du Nord.⁶⁶ On peut donc considérer le décor des piliers de Nashshān comme une innovation locale à partir d’un modèle étranger, peut-être réalisée par des artistes étrangers. Une telle représentation de divinités majeures sous ap-

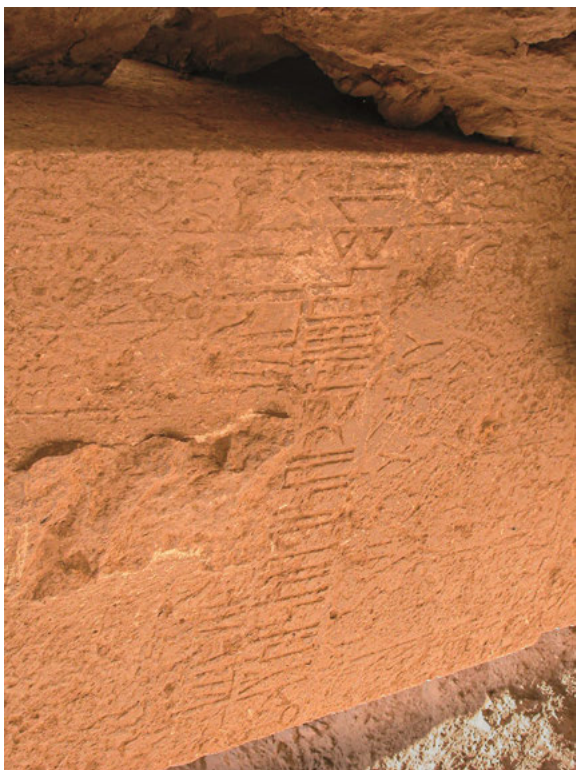
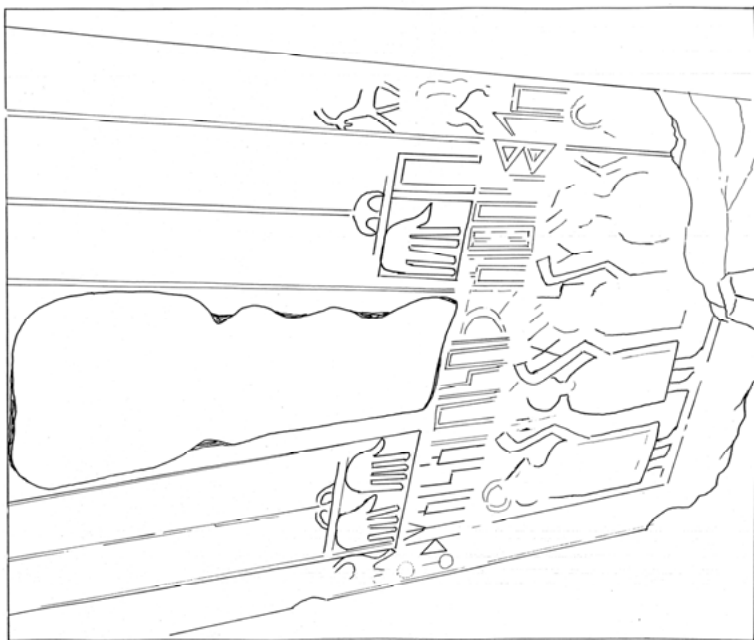
⁶² Mounir Arbach et Irene Rossi situent ce souverain de Nashshān vers 775 av. EC « Réflexions sur l’histoire de la cité-État de Nashshān (fin IX^e-fin VII^e s. av. J.-C.) », dans: *Egitto. Vicino Oriente* 34 (2011), 149-176, notamment 156]. Une date vers la fin du 8^e s. me paraît plus vraisemblable. Les arguments en faveur d’une date très haute sont la graphie, le classement des rois de Nashshān et les synchronismes entre les rois de Nashshān et les souverains sabéens.

⁶³ Rémy Audouin et Mounir Arbach qui ont fait le relevé du temple d’Aranyada^c ne sont pas responsables de ces lacunes de la documentation. Ils ont travaillé dans des conditions extrêmement difficiles et il est déjà remarquable qu’ils remonteraient pu enregistrer tant de données.

⁶⁴ Pour *bnt*, « fille », au singulier, on dispose d’une dizaine d’occurrences: voir notamment al-Sawdāʿ 93 / ou al-Jawf 04.32 / 1.

⁶⁵ Il pouvait noter le timbre de la voyelle du pluriel (hypothétiquement /a/), différente de celle du singulier; ou la consonne /b/ dont l’ajout alignait le mot sur le modèle de la racine trilitère.

⁶⁶ Sass, « From Maraş and Zincirli to es-Sawdāʿ » (n. 61).



Figs. 16 et 17: Les « Filles de Il », [b]mt²(l), sur l'un des deux piliers du temple d'Aranyada^c à Nashshān. Photographie et dessin © Rémy Audouin.

parenté humaine n'a pas eu de suite. Après 700 av. EC, en Arabie, les images de divinités sont très rares.

Les piliers de Nashshān représentent aussi, tout en bas du monde supérieur, quatre jeunes femmes tenant un objet recourbé et appelées « Filles de Īl ». Pour cerner l'identité et la fonction de ces dernières, nous disposons de quelques indices que nous allons maintenant analyser.⁶⁷

b. Le dieu « Īl » en Arabie du Sud

Un premier indice est fourni par le nom du « père », le dieu « Īl ». On ne connaît aujourd'hui que trois mentions directes de ce dieu, toutes dans des inscriptions remontant aux origines de la civilisation sudarabique, plus précisément aux 7^e et 6^e s. av. EC.

Un notable de la cité de Haram dans le Jawf du Yémen se déclare « prêtre de Īl et de 'Athtar » et ministre de deux rois:

« Aws fils de Aws^{ʿi(2)}l, du clan Raymān,⁽³⁾ prêtre de Īl et de 'Ath⁽⁴⁾tar, ministre de Yadhmu⁽⁵⁾malik et de Watar'il »,

ʿwsʿ bn ʿwsʿi(2)l d-ʿhl Rymⁿ (3) rs²ʿw ʿl w-ʿt(4)tr qyn Ydmr⁽⁵⁾mlk w-Wtrʿl

(Haram 5 = CIH 512).

Un second notable, issu du même clan, se déclare quant à lui « ministre » des mêmes dieux et des mêmes rois:

« Ili'aws fils de Yafa^{ʿi(2)}l, du clan Raymān, minis⁽³⁾tre de Yadhmmurmalik et Wata⁽⁴⁾r'il, et de Īl et de 'Attar⁶⁸ »,

ʿpwsʿ bn Yfʿi(2)l d-ʿhl Rymⁿ qy(3)n Ydmr<m>lk w-Wt(4)rʿl w-ʿl w-ʿt,

(Haram 11 = RES 2742).

On s'accorde à considérer que le « ministre » (*qyn*) est en charge des affaires temporelles (notamment financières) tandis que le « prêtre » (*rs²ʿw*) s'occuperait du service divin.⁶⁹ La date est déduite de la mention du roi Yadhmmurmalik, un contemporain de Karib'il le Grand, soit le début du 7^e s. av. EC.

Un texte sabéen de Ma'rib, qui pourrait dater du 6^e s. av. EC⁷⁰ évoque la construction d'un temple en l'honneur de Īl:

⁶⁷ Ces données ont déjà été rassemblées et analysées dans Robin, « Filles de Dieu » (n. 9).

⁶⁸ 'tr est une variante graphique de 'ttr, avec assimilation du t.

⁶⁹ Christian J. Robin, *Inabbā', Haram, al-Kāfir, Kamma et al-Harāshif* (Inventaire des Inscriptions sudarabiques, tome 1), Fascicule A: *les Documents*; Fascicule B: *les planches*, Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres & Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente 1992, 45-46.

⁷⁰ Pirenne, *Paléographie des inscriptions sud-arabes: Contribution à la chronologie et à l'histoire de l'Arabie du Sud antique*, Tome 1: *Des origines jusqu'à l'époque himyarite* (Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten van België, Klasse der Letteren, Verhandeling Nr 26), Brussel Palais der Academien 1956, le classe en B4.

« et quand (le souverain) construisit comme lieu de culte le temple de *Ns^lwr*, le temple de **Īl** et le temple de Celui qui est à Raydān et qu'il organisa le culte de Celui qui est à Raydān »,

w-ywem bny mrs²w^m byt Ns^lwr w-byt ʔl w-byt d-b-Ryd^m w-hrs²w d-b-Ryd^m

(RES 3943 / 4).

Le fait que l'inscription ne précise pas la localisation de ce temple amène à supposer qu'il se trouvait là où l'inscription était exposée, à savoir dans la région de Ma^ʔrib.

Ces trois mentions d'un culte du dieu **Īl**, toutes très anciennes et situées dans le berceau de la civilisation sudarabique, sont manifestement une survivance de temps archaïques pendant lesquels **Īl** aurait été le dieu suprême.

Incidemment, il faut mentionner que, du nom propre **Īl** (ʔl), a dérivé un nom commun « *īl* » (ʔl)⁷¹ qui sert d'ordinaire d'appellatif pour la divinité propre à une personne ou à un groupe dans les royaumes de Qatabān et de Ḥimyar :

« avec l'aide de leur **dieu** et de leur seigneur ʿAmm dhu-Raymat^{um}, maître du rocher Nawʿān et de l'abri ⁽³⁾ caché Hīrān, et de ʿAmm dhu-Shaqar maître de la *s²rt* Hidū, avec l'aide de leurs *shams* et des *mandāh* ⁽⁴⁾ de leurs habitations, et avec l'aide et la supervision de leurs seigneurs Laḥayʿat Bariyān prince de Radmān et Khawlān »,

b-rd^ʔ ʔl-hm^w w-mr²-hm^w ʿm d-Rym^m bʿl zr Nw^m w-mk⁽³⁾mm^t Hr^m w-ʿm d-S²qr bʿl S²rt Hd^w w-b-rd^ʔ ʔs²ms^l-hm^w w-mudḥt ⁽⁴⁾ ʔby^t-hm^w w-b-rd^ʔ w-ṯrg ʔmr²-hm^w Lḥy^t Br^y^m qyl Rdmi^m w-Ḥw^m

(Bā[faqih]-Bā[ṯayi^ʿ]-al-Hadd 4).

Noter que, contrairement à la norme, les divinités majeures et mineures sont regroupées ici avant l'invocation au prince.

L'appellatif « *īl* » n'est attesté à Saba^ʔ que dans une formule figée héritée des temps anciens⁷²:

« quand il constitua une alliance de communes avec un **dieu** et un patron et avec un pacte et une alliance »,

ywem hrwst kl gzw^m d-ʔ^m w-s²ym^m w-d hbl^m w-hmr^m

(RES 3945 / 1).

C'est encore cet appellatif, selon toute probabilité, qu'on trouve dans le nom de quelques divinités, comme ʔl *Qdlbm* (Maʿin 99 / 4 et 100 / 4), ʔl-S³hr^m (MQ-HK 11 / 3) ou ʔl-*Fḥr* (RES 3856 / 4 et 6).

Dans l'anthroponymie, les théophores composés avec **Īl** sont innombrables, non seulement aux origines, mais aussi pendant toute l'histoire sudarabique jusqu'à l'Islam. Dans ces théophores, **Īl** peut être le second élément (comme dans Karib^ʔil, Yasma^ʿil ou Shuriḥbi^ʔil) ou le premier (comme dans Ilisharah ou Ili^ʿazz). Il

⁷¹ Ce phénomène a déjà signalé à propos de *shams* (ci-dessus, pp. 88-91).

⁷² À Saba^ʔ, l'appellatif « dieu » est ʔlb, avec l'ajout d'un /h/ pour aligner le mot sur le modèle trilitère. Noter que le pluriel, ʔlht, est formé par redoublement du terme primitif.

semblerait que $\bar{I}l$ second élément soit d'ordinaire le nom propre et il premier élément plutôt l'appellatif. Il est remarquable que les théophores avec $\bar{I}l / il$ soient demeurés si populaires, alors même que le culte du dieu $\bar{I}l$ était tombé en désuétude: c'est une belle illustration du conservatisme de l'anthroponymie. C'est aussi une illustration de l'écart souvent très grand entre la liste des divinités mentionnées dans les inscriptions et celles des divinités dont le nom apparaît dans les théophores.

Si nous revenons à l'appellation « Filles de $\bar{I}l$ » ($Bhnt \bar{I}l$), il n'est guère douteux que, dans ce syntagme, $\bar{I}l$ soit le dieu $\bar{I}l$, ancien dieu suprême de divers peuples sémitiques du Proche-Orient. De fait, l'appellation « Filles de $\bar{I}l$ » se trouve en Arabie du Sud, mais aussi dans le Négev et à Palmyre comme nous allons le voir. Elle a un parallèle intéressant à Makka où $\bar{I}l$ est remplacé (comme dans toute l'Arabie désertique) par une autre divinité suprême, Allāh.⁷³

Une appellation très semblable remplace « Filles » par « Fils ». L'expression « Fils de $\bar{I}l$ » se trouve à Ougarit et dans la Bible. C'est apparemment une métaphore pour nommer soit les dieux de manière indistincte (surtout ceux de peu d'importance) soit tous les êtres surnaturels dont la nature se situe entre la divinité et l'humanité.

En bref, il apparaît que l'on a pu nommer diverses catégories d'êtres surnaturels les « Fils » ou les « Filles » de la divinité suprême.

c. Les divinités identifiées par un lien de parenté ou un rapport de dépendance avec une autre divinité

L'identification d'une divinité ou d'une classe de divinités par une simple filiation ou par un rapport de parenté n'a rien d'exceptionnel. Les inscriptions himyarites mentionnent une « Mère de déesses »⁷⁴. À Saba', on connaît une « Mère de 'Athtar »⁷⁵, un « fils de Hawbas »⁷⁶ et peut-être un frère de Almaqah⁷⁷. Le lien de parenté peut être remplacé par un rapport de dépendance: un texte sabéen mentionne ainsi « les deux serviteurs d'Almaqah »⁷⁸.

⁷³ Jean Starcky avait cru reconnaître une « Fille de Bêl » ($l-brt Bl$) dans une inscription de Palmyre [Starcky, Jean, « Inscriptions archaïques de Palmyre », dans: *Studi orientalistici in onore die Giorgio Levi della Vida*, vol. II (Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto per l'Oriente, 52), Rome: Istituto per l'Oriente 1956, 509-528, notamment 512-513]. Il semblerait qu'il faille plutôt lire ... $l brt Bl\bar{t}w$ [Maria Gorea, que je remercie, renvoie à $qm' brt Bl\bar{t}y$ dans Jean Cantineau, *Inventaire des inscriptions de Palmyre*, Fascicule 5, *La colonnade transversale* (Publications du Musée national syrien de Damas, n° 1). Beyrouth: Imprimerie catholique 1931, n° 13, 21-24].

⁷⁴ $^m \bar{I}l^m$: MAFRAY-al-Maktūba 1 / 4-5; JRy Plaquette Beeston; ZM 999. Pour autant qu'on le sache, $\bar{I}l$ est le féminin, au singulier ou au pluriel, de \bar{I} , « dieu ».

⁷⁵ $^m \bar{I}l^m$: CIH 544 = Louvre 98; Nāmi NNSQ 19 / 5.

⁷⁶ $bn Hwbs^l$: MAFRAY-al-Balaq al-janūbi 9 / 3.

⁷⁷ $\bar{h}-brw$, avec un pronom suffixe qui renverrait à $\bar{I}mqb$: CLAS 39.11/r1 / 4.

⁷⁸ RES 4967 = CLAS 95.11/r4 n° 1 / 2-3: $hquy \bar{b}dy \bar{I}mq^{(3)}b$, « a dédié aux deux serviteurs d'Almaqah ». Le panthéon sabéen compte cinq divinités, trois dieux et deux déesses dans

On ignore si les Sudarabiques donnaient à ces termes de parenté – « fils », « fille » ou « mère » – un sens concret impliquant une génération physique ou bien celui métaphorique d'une relation hiérarchique.⁷⁹

d. La nature et les fonctions des Filles de Īl à Nashshān

Pour déterminer le statut et la fonction des « Filles de Īl », nous pouvons nous fonder sur leur nom, mais aussi sur deux indices donnés par les piliers de Nashshān. Le premier est la répétition de quatre images identiques, sans aucun caractère qui individualise l'une de ces « Filles de Īl ». Il s'agit donc d'images représentant des êtres anonymes et interchangeables.

Le second indice est la place de ces images sur les deux piliers. On rencontre d'abord les dieux et les « Filles au croissant », puis le roi, enfin les « Filles de Īl ». Comme ces dernières ont la même place que les êtres surnaturels dans les invocations qui concluent les inscriptions⁸⁰, on peut en déduire qu'elles appartiennent à la catégorie des êtres surnaturels et constituent peut-être une classe particulière au sein de celle-ci.

La place des « Filles de Īl » dans la hiérarchie du monde supérieur, tout en bas de l'échelle, suggère que leur fonction est de servir d'intermédiaire entre les hommes et les divinités. Mais on ne possède aucune preuve explicite d'un rôle de messager.

e. Les « Filles de Īl » et les « Filles de ʿĀd »

Nous avons examiné les deux piliers de l'entrée monumentale du temple d'Aranyadaʿ à Nashshān, qui donnent une représentation imagée du monde supérieur. Un autre pilier du même temple comporte une série de jeunes femmes qui pourrait être une autre illustration des mêmes « Filles de Īl ». En-dessous du bandeau épigraphique mentionnant le même souverain, « [Alamnabaṭ] Amar fils de Labūʿān », on trouve une rangée de trois mains (identiques à celles qui étaient au-dessus du bandeau épigraphique dans le pilier précédent), puis une rangée de

cet ordre: ʿAthtar, Hawbas, Almaqah, dhāt-Ḥimiyam et dhāt-Baʿdān. Il est remarquable que ce soit les trois dieux, ʿAthtar, Hawbas et Almaqah, et eux seulement, dont les noms apparaissent dans les filiations divines.

⁷⁹ Cette relation hiérarchique est commune dans les généalogies: le fait que B soit le « fils » de A signifie que B est un groupe qui appartient à A ou en dépend. Seuls deux textes établissent un rapport de parenté entre deux divinités nommées. Une dédicace nous apprend que, à Sabaʿ, la déesse Athirat était la mère de ʿAthtar [al-Jarū, Asmahān Saʿid et Muḥammad ʿAlī al-Ḥājj: « al-Maʿbūda Athirat (Athira) umm al-maʿbūd ʿAthtar fi ḍawʿ naqsh sabaʿi jadid », dans: *Majallat al-Khalij li-l-taʿrikh wa-l-āthār*, 10 (1436 h / 2015 m), 71-96]. Une autre nous révèle que, au Ḥaḍramawt, ʿAthtar était le père de Sayin, le grand dieu communal (« Sayin dhu-ʿAlim et ʿAthtar son père », *Sʿyn d-ʿlm w-ʿitr ʿb-sʿ*, *RES* 2693 / 5).

⁸⁰ Voir ci-dessus, pp. 71-72.

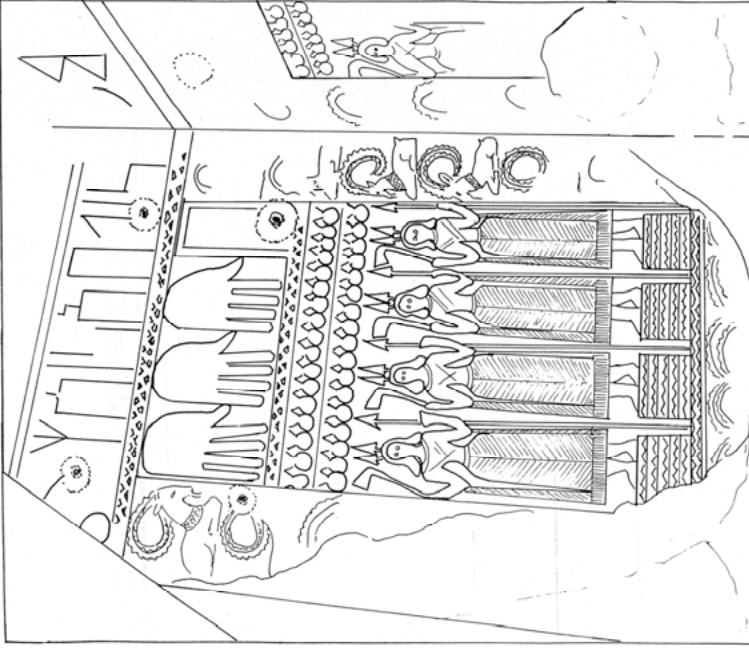
quatre jeunes femmes brandissant le même objet recourbé de la main droite, mais debout sur une sellette, tenant une lance de la main gauche, et avec deux pointes de lance qui dépassent au-dessus de leur tête (Fig. 18 et 19).

Le motif des jeunes femmes juchées sur une sellette qui a été signalé à Haram et à Maʿīn dans les années 1940 et 1950 par les Égyptiens Muḥammad Tawfiq et Aḥmad Fakhri et par le Belge Fernand Geukens, était alors appelé par les habitants du Jawf « Filles de ʿĀd » (*Banāt ʿĀd*). Cette appellation dérivait de la croyance populaire selon laquelle les populations anciennes de l'Arabie méridionale appartenaient à la tribu de ʿĀd; cette croyance venait elle-même du Coran qui cite à de nombreuses reprises ʿĀd parmi les peuples du passé que Dieu aurait châtiés et annihilés pour leur impiété. Cette appellation « Filles de ʿĀd » a été adoptée dans les publications scientifiques depuis lors.⁸¹ Je l'emploie ici pour le seul motif des jeunes femmes juchées sur une sellette. Ce motif qui se répète dans toute une série de temples du Jawf, comporte deux variations notables: l'absence ou la présence des deux pointes de lance au-dessus de leur tête d'une part, la nature des objets tenus d'autre part (objet recourbé et lance; ou objet recourbé et « fléau » (Fig. 20), sans qu'on sache ce que cela implique.

Les jeunes femmes des piliers de Nashshān – les « Filles de ʿĪl » et les « Filles de ʿĀd » – on en commun d'avoir été réalisées sous le même règne, d'occuper la même position hiérarchique sur le pilier, de tenir un même objet recourbé et d'être reproduites à l'identique. On peut donc supposer que les unes et les autres sont deux représentations des « Filles de ʿĪl », mêmes si seule la première série est identifiée comme telle.

Le motif de la jeune femme debout sur une sellette et tenant un objet recourbé n'est pas propre au temple d'Aranyadaʿ à Nashshān comme nous l'avons déjà indiqué. On le trouve dans le décor de plusieurs temples du Jawf, voués à des divinités apparemment différentes, comme Matabnaṭiyān à Haram, ʿAthtar à Maʿīn et à Nashshān (Fig. 19), et peut-être Madahwā à Kamna (Fig. 21). Souvent, il se répète horizontalement sur toute la surface disponible, formant une longue suite de personnages identiques. Les jeunes femmes juchées sur une sellette sont vêtues d'une longue jupe et d'une sorte de cape couvrant le dos ; elles sont vues de face, avec les pieds de profil; leur main droite tient un objet recourbé qui rappelle un boome-

⁸¹ Rémy Audouin, « Étude du décor des temples des Banāt ʿĀd », dans: Christian Robin et Iwona Gajda, édd., *Arabia Antiqua: Early Origins of South Arabian States. Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Archaeological Heritage of the Arabian Peninsula held by ISMEO, Roma, 28th-30th May 1991*, Rome: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente 1996, 121-141; Sabina Antonini de Maigret, *I motivi figurative delle Banāt ʿĀd nei templi sudarabici*, (Repertorio Iconografico Sudarabico, 2), Paris, Rome: De Boccard 2004.



Figs. 18 et 19: Les personnages appelés conventionnellement « Filles de 'Ad » sur un autre pilier du temple d'Aranyada' à Nashshân. Photographie et dessin © Rémy Audouin.

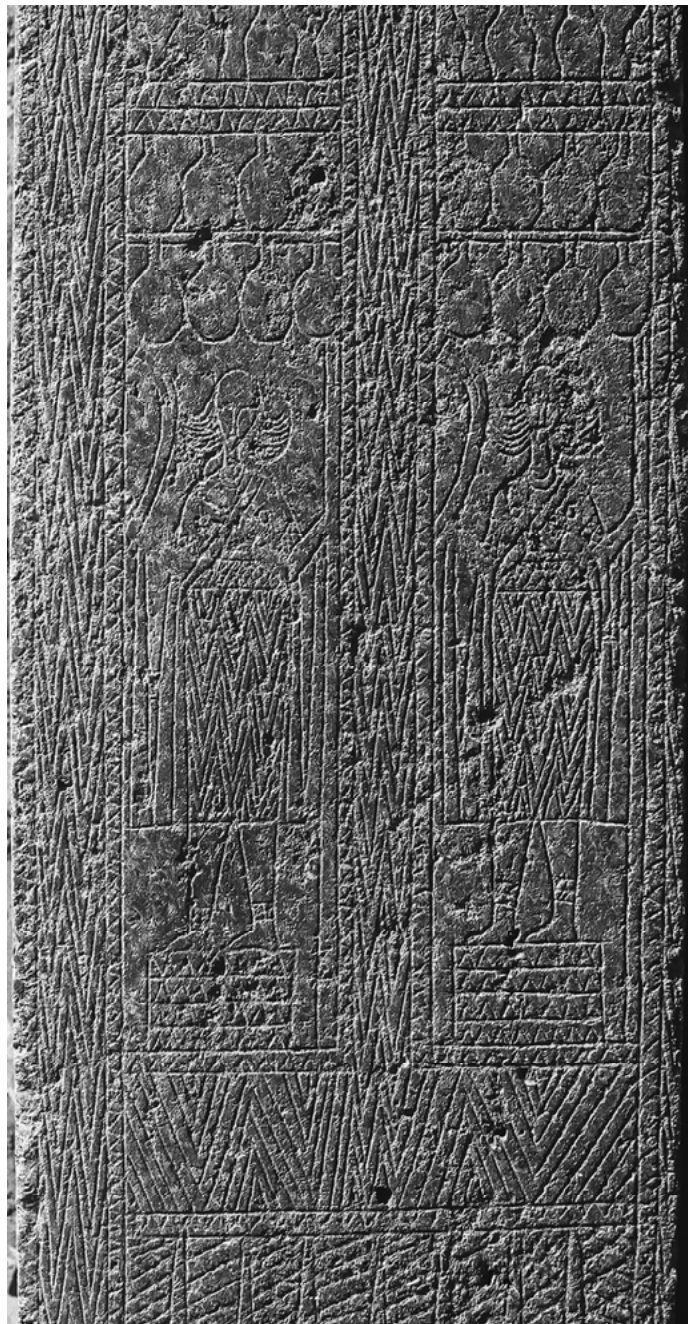


Fig. 20: Les personnages appelés conventionnellement « Filles de 'Ād » sur un pilier du temple de 'Athtar à al-Sawdā' (l'antique Nashshān). Photographie © Mission archéologique française en République arabe du Yémen.



Fig. 21: Les personnages appelés conventionnellement « Filles de 'Ād » sur un pilier provenant de Kamna (l'antique Kaminahū). Photographie © Rémy Audouin.

rang, et leur gauche une lance ou une longue tige dont l'extrémité supérieure se retourne et retombe parallèlement; leurs cheveux sont déployés.⁸²

Parfois, la symétrie par rapport à un axe vertical conduit à inverser les mains qui tiennent les objets: c'est ainsi que, Fig. 21, l'objet recourbé peut être tenu par la main droite ou la main gauche et la lance par la main gauche ou la main droite.

⁸² Ce motif a été étudié de façon minutieuse par Sabina Antonini de Maigret (*Motivi delle Banāt 'Ād*, n. 81). Un tableau illustrant les principales variations de ce motif se trouve dans Rémy Audouin et Mounir Arbach: *Un panthéon de l'Arabie du Sud en images. Le temple I d'as-Sawdā'. A South Arabian pantheon expressed in images. Temple I of as-Sawdā' Yemen: Découvertes Archéologiques dans le Jazef (République du Yémen). Opération de sauvetage franco-yéménite du site d'as-Sawdā' (l'antique Nasbshân)*. Sanaa: Centre Français d'Archéologie et de Sciences Sociales et Fonds Social de Développement 2004, 58, fig. XXVII; Rémy Audouin et Mounir Arbach, *Un panthéon de l'Arabie du Sud en images. Le temple I d'as-Sawdā'*. Sanaa: Centre français d'archéologie et de sciences sociales 2004 (en français et en anglais), fig. 27.

Si l'identification des « Filles de Īl » avec les « Filles de ʿĀd » paraît plausible, celle avec les « Filles au croissant » (Fig. 14) qui se trouvent sur le même pilier, au-dessus de l'inscription royale, paraît douteuse. Si la main droite tient effectivement un même objet recourbé, la position hiérarchique n'est pas la même: au-dessus du roi (et donc avant lui) pour les « Filles au croissant » et au-dessous du roi (après lui) pour les « Filles de Īl ».

C. Les « Filles de Īl » dans les inscriptions de dédicace

Les « Filles de Īl », représentées et identifiées sur le pilier du temple d'Aranyada^c à Nashshān, sont également nommées dans une douzaine d'inscriptions sudarabiques commémorant des offrandes.

Ces inscriptions comportent plusieurs caractères remarquables. Elles proviennent de diverses régions de l'Arabie méridionale, plus précisément de Saba[?], de Qatabān et du Ḥaḍramawt. Si on leur ajoute Nashshān, ce sont toutes les régions de l'Arabie du Sud à l'exception de Ḥimyar. Du point de vue chronologique, ces inscriptions se répartissent entre le 6^e s. av. EC et les premières décennies EC.

Le nom des « Filles de Īl » présente naturellement des variations orthographiques puisque la langue de l'inscription peut être le ma'īnique (*Bmt ʿl*), le ḥaḍramawtique (*Bnbt ʿl*), le qatabānique (*Bnty ʿl*) ou le saba'ique (*Bnt ʿl*).

Il est remarquable que les auteurs de ces offrandes soient des femmes, sauf dans le texte Phillips-Filles de Īl publié ci-dessous, et que ces offrandes soient en général d'une valeur relativement modeste. La seule offrande d'un prix élevé est la tablette de bronze Phillips-Filles de Īl. Les autres sont des statuettes grossières, de petits brûle-parfums ou une simple dalle de pierre inscrite.

On notera enfin que les Filles de Īl sont toujours mentionnées collectivement. Aucun texte ne s'adresse à l'une d'entre elles en particulier.

a. Inventaire des 12 textes commémorant des offrandes aux « Filles de Īl »

Dans l'ordre chronologique, ce sont:

1. Sūna/L/1; ḥaḍramawtique; vers le 6^e s. av. EC ; auteur féminin; offrande d'un brûle-parfums aux *Bnbt-ʿl*.
2. T.00.A.12; sabéen; date probable vers le 5^e s. av. EC; fragment de dalle inscrite portant un texte de contenu incertain en boustrophédon, dont l'auteur est perdu, mentionnant les .../(B)nty ʿl/...
3. Ja 871 (TT1 747); qatabānite; 3^e-2^e s. av. EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'une statuette de femme aux *Bnt-ʿl*⁸³ ʿd *Rsfm*.

⁸³ En sudarabique, la voyelle longue n'est pas écrite, sauf à la fin d'un groupe graphique. L'orthographe régulière est donc *Bnty ʿl* ou *Bnt-ʿl* si ʿl est attaché au mot précédent. On trouve cependant *Bnty-ʿl* dans Ja 869.

4. Ja 872 (TT1 863); qatabānite; 3^e-2^e s. av. EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'une statuette de femme aux *Bnty ʾl ʿd ʾmr*.
5. Graf 6; qatabānite; hypothétiquement 3^e-2^e s. av. EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'une statuette de femme assise sur un trône à dossier aux *Bnty ʾl ʿd* ⁽³⁾ *[R](s)^{fm}*.
6. MIFT 99/72; qatabānite; 3^e-2^e s. av. EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'une statuette tronquée de femme aux *Bnty* ⁽⁴⁾ *ʾl ʿd Rš^{fm}*.
7. Ja 869 (TT1 138); qatabānite; 1^{er} s. av. EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'un cône renversé aux *Bnty-ʾl ʿd ʾmr*.
8. CLAS 95.41/p8/C66 n° 1 = YM 470; sabéen; vers le 1^{er} s. av. EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'un brûle-parfums aux *Bnt ʾl*.
9. CLAS 95.41/p8/C66 n° 2 = YM 473; sabéen; date probable quelque peu antérieure à l'EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'un brûle-parfums aux *Bnt-ʾl*.
10. Phillips-Filles de ʾĪl; qatabānite; 1^{er} s. av. EC ou ap. EC; auteur masculin; offrande d'une tablette de bronze aux *b* ⁽³⁾ *nty ʾl bʿlty Bʿlw* ⁽⁴⁾ *Hgr^m*.
11. CLAS 95.41/p8/C66 n° 3 = YM 468; sabéen; date probable vers le début de l'EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'un brûle-parfums aux *Bnt [ʾl]*.
12. Ja 868 (TT1 35); qatabānite; date vers le début de l'EC; auteur féminin; offrande d'une statuette de femme aux *Bnty-ʾl* ⁽³⁾ *ʿd ʾmr*.

Voir aussi Ja 870 (TT1 363) qui ne mentionne pas les « Filles de ʾĪl », mais seulement leur lieu de dévotion Amar (*s^lqnyt ʿd ʾmr*).

Ces inscriptions complètent quelque peu ce qu'on peut dire de la nature et de la fonction des Filles de ʾĪl. Ces dernières sont incontestablement des êtres surnaturels, supérieurs aux hommes, vénérés dans des lieux de culte divers. Parmi ces derniers, seul *Riṣāḫ^{fm}* est identifié: c'est le temple de la nécropole de Tamna^c, qui était consacré au dieu Anbī. On peut supposer que, dans *Riṣāḫ^{fm}*, il y avait un espace dédié aux Filles de ʾĪl, dans lequel les fidèles pouvaient déposer leurs offrandes. Des autres lieux de culte des Filles de ʾĪl (*ʾmr* et *Bʿlw Hgr^m*), on ne sait rien.

Le seul rite connu est la remise d'une offrande, souvent une statuette de femme en pierre ou un brûle-parfums. La statuette était sans doute une image de la femme qui sollicitait les Filles de ʾĪl; placée dans le temple, elle rappelait que la généreuse donatrice attendait une réponse favorable à sa demande. Le brûle-parfums produisait des fumées agréables aux divinités et insupportables aux êtres maléfiques.

Il est remarquable que presque toutes les offrandes aux Filles de ʾĪl soient faites par des femmes. Cela signifie sans doute que les Filles de ʾĪl étaient sollicitées pour des préoccupations spécifiquement féminines, comme la crainte de ne pas avoir d'enfant. L'offrande d'un brûle-parfums, elle aussi, peut s'expliquer par une demande d'enfant: de nos jours, au Yémen, on brûle des parfums lors des rites de purification qui suivent la naissance d'un bébé.

Concernant la chronologie, il semblerait que la vénération des Filles de Īl connaisse son apogée peu avant le début de l'ère chrétienne et qu'elle cesse d'être attestée peu après.

b. Une inscription inédite, Phillips–Filles de Īl (Fig. 22)

1	<i>Twb'l bn Hmym Hy=</i>	Thawb'il fils de Himyam Hayw
2	<i>w s¹qny mr²t-s¹wrw B=</i>	a offert (cette inscription) à ses maîtresses, les
3	<i>nty 'l b¹ly B¹lw</i>	Filles de Īl, maîtresses des deux Maîtres
4	<i>Hgr^m hg tkrb-s¹n</i>	de Hagr ^{um} , comme il Leur avait promis
5	<i>w-m¹t l-y²r^hnm l¹b=</i>	et avec l'espoir qu'Elles agissent favorablement envers Leur serviteur Thawb'il, selon ce qu'il
6	<i>d-s¹n Twb'l hg b-y=</i>	Leur demandera. Thawb'il a confié aux
7	<i>krb-s¹n rd Twb²=</i>	Filles de Īl sa personne physique et
8	<i>l bnty 'l d²n-s¹w-</i>	sa volonté, ses gens, sa demeure et
9	<i>mqm-s¹w-bkl-s¹w-byt-s¹w-</i>	son ... contre quiconque pèche et
10	<i>dq(-s¹) bn h¹t^m w-ms¹b²s¹m</i>	fait le mal

1. 2, *mr²t-s¹wrw*: le pronom suffixe lourd *-s¹wrw* signale une voyelle longue après le *t*, non écrite parce qu'elle n'est pas à la fin du groupe graphique. Sans le suffixe *-s¹wrw*, l'orthographe du mot précédant serait *mr²ty* (comparer avec *bnty* et *b¹ly* dans le même texte). Le pronom suffixe léger (annexé à un mot qui ne se termine pas par une voyelle longue) est *-s¹*.

ll. 3-4, *b¹ly B¹lw* ⁽⁴⁾ *Hgr^m*: première attestation de cette titulature divine. Il est possible, mais non assuré, que *B¹lw* soit le substantif *b¹l*, « maître » au duel.

1. 4, *tkrb-s¹n*: verbe à l'accompli, à la forme avec *t* préfixé, dont le sujet est Thawb'il. Noter, aux lignes 6-7, le verbe formé sur la même racine *b-y²*⁽⁷⁾*krb-s¹n*, avec un *t* infixé. Anne Multhoff suppose que les deux formes *tkrb* et *ktrb* ont fusionné, la première se maintenant pour le seul accompli et la seconde pour le seul inaccompli [« TF^cL/FT^cL – Die verbalen T-Stämme im Altsüdarabischen », dans: *Folia Orientalia*, 47 (2010), 19-69]. L'hypothèse est séduisante, mais paraît trop systématique, puisqu'on connaît des exceptions.⁸⁴

1. 5, *m¹t*: substantif employé comme adverbe. Il est construit avec la conjonction *l-* et un verbe conjugué avec préfixes. Voir déjà dans FB-Hawkam 4 / 3; FB-Hawkam 5 / 2; Maraqtan-Qatabanic 1 / 4; *CSAII*, 14 = *RES* 4336 / 4.

l-y²r^hnm: première attestation de cette forme lourde de la conjugaison avec préfixes. Elle peut être interprétée comme une 3^e personne féminin pluriel. En arabe,

⁸⁴ Voir par exemple Demirjian 1 / 17 (*w-yawm hrwt-brw w-(¹⁷)l¹k-brw Yd^cl Bym*), à comparer avec 1. 21 (*w-brwy kl d⁽²¹⁾t l¹k-brw w-brwt-brw Yd^cl*).

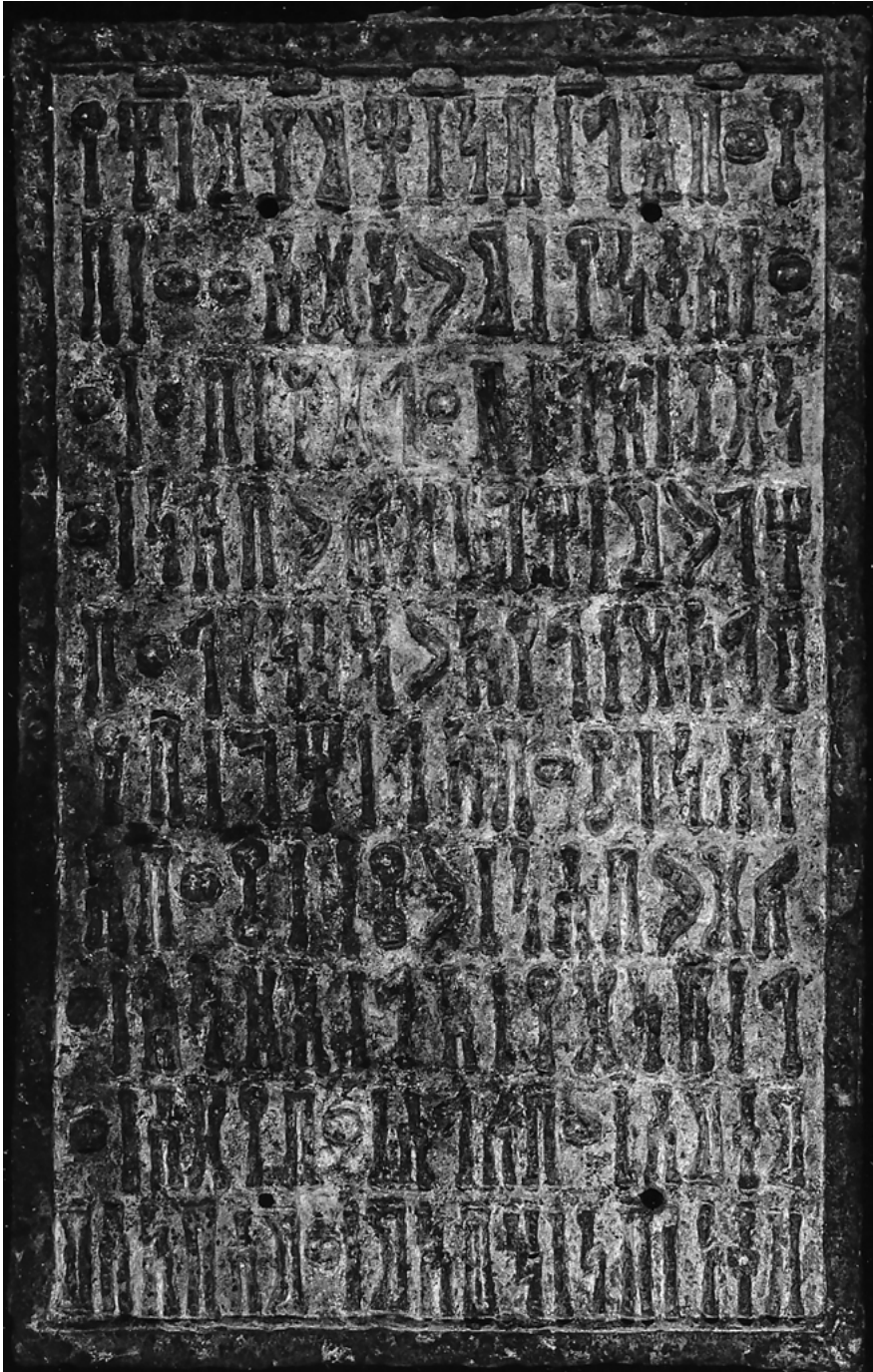


Fig. 22: L'inscription Phillips–Filles de Il en langue qatabânique (un peu avant ou après le début de l'ère chrétienne). Photographie © Carl Phillips.

la 3^e personne féminin pluriel de l'inaccompli est *yaf'alna*, avec le préfixe *ya-* et la désinence *-na*.

La conjugaison lourde, avec l'ajout d'un suffixe *-n* comme dans l'énergique de l'arabe, n'était attestée précédemment qu'en saba'ique et en ma'inique; son apparition dans un texte en qatabānique s'explique peut-être par un emprunt au saba'ique, semblable à ceux qui s'observent fréquemment dans les zones de contact. En pur qatabānique, on aurait attendu *l-y'rḥwn*.

ll. 9-10, *w⁽¹⁰⁾dq(s¹)*: la lecture de la lettre qui suit le *q* est incertaine. On peut hésiter entre *wdq(s¹)* et *wdq(n)*. L'hypothèse que ce soit le nom de l'habitation paraît improbable. Si on lit *w⁽¹⁰⁾dq(s¹)*, c'est la première attestation du substantif *dq*. Parmi les racines qui peuvent être postulées, *DQQ*, *DNQ*, *WDQ*, *DWQ/DYQ* ou *DQW/DQY*, la seule qui soit productive est *DWQ*, qui exprime l'idée de « goût ». Si on se fondait sur la phraséologie des inscriptions, on s'attendrait à trouver ici *w-qny-s¹*; il semble difficile cependant de supposer que *dqs¹* en soit une version corrompue.

D. Les « Filles de Īl » et les shams

Dans notre investigation sur les « anges » en Arabie méridionale, nous avons rencontré les *shams* qui sont attestées principalement après le début de l'ère chrétienne et les Filles de Īl qui sont vénérées avant. Même si le nombre des attestations est encore assez faible et même si la datation de la plupart des documents est approximative du fait de la brièveté des textes et de la médiocre qualité de leur exécution, on peut en conclure que les *shams* prennent la place des Filles de Īl. Deux hypothèses sont envisageables:

- a. Les *shams* sont identiques aux Filles de Īl dont elles seraient une appellation nouvelle.
- b. Les *shams* et les Filles de Īl sont deux classes d'êtres surnaturels, aux fonctions différentes. Les unes seraient attestées d'abord et les autres ensuite, soit du fait des hasards de la documentation soit à la suite de changements dans les pratiques rituelles.

Entre ces deux hypothèses, il est difficile de trancher.

On retiendra pour le moment que notre documentation mentionne successivement deux ensembles d'êtres surnaturels, qui se situent entre le monde des hommes et celui des dieux. Les plus anciens sont les Filles de Īl qui sont représentées avec des attributs de signification incertaine appartenant au répertoire régional; elles sont surtout sollicitées, semble-t-il, quand une femme ne parvient pas à avoir d'enfants. Les plus récents sont les *shams* qui veillent sur les personnes; quand ces *shams* sont représentées, comme sur les dalles ḥimyarites, ce sont des jeunes femmes munies d'ailes qui suggèrent un rôle de messagères. La relation entre ces deux catégories d'êtres surnaturels n'est pas encore éclaircie.

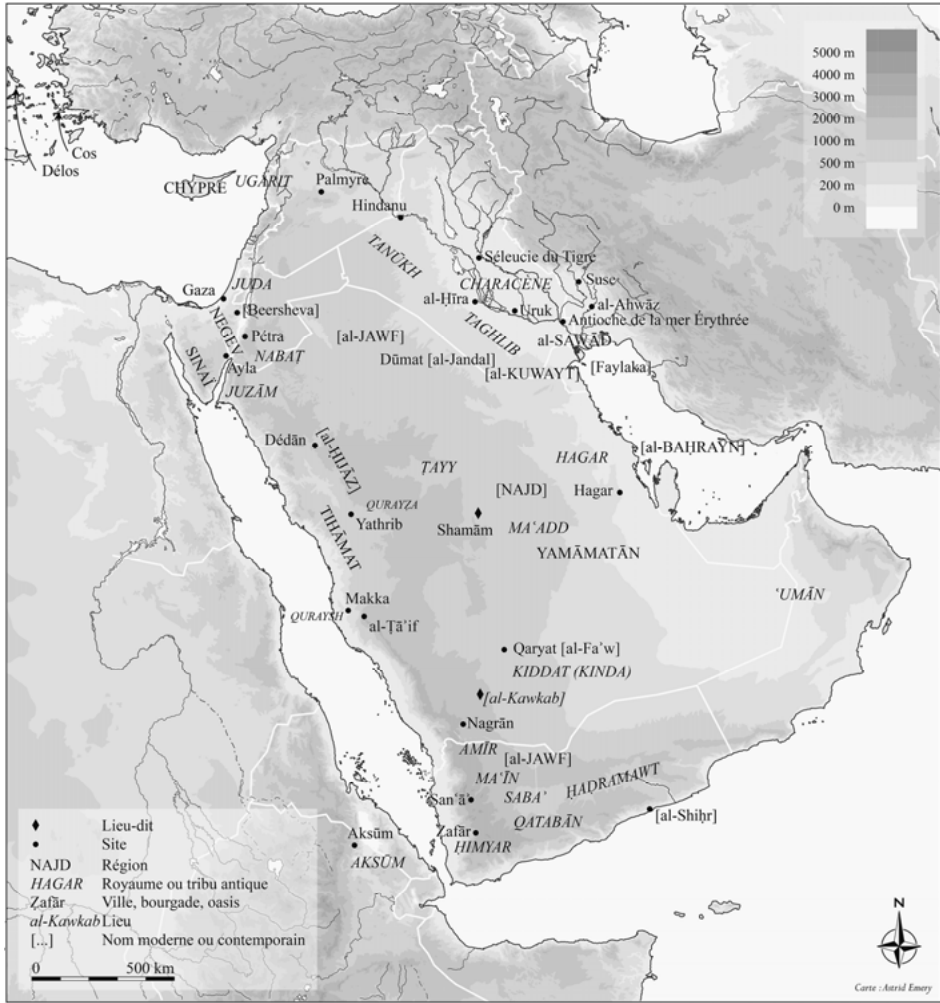


Fig. 23: Carte 1 – L'Arabie préislamique.

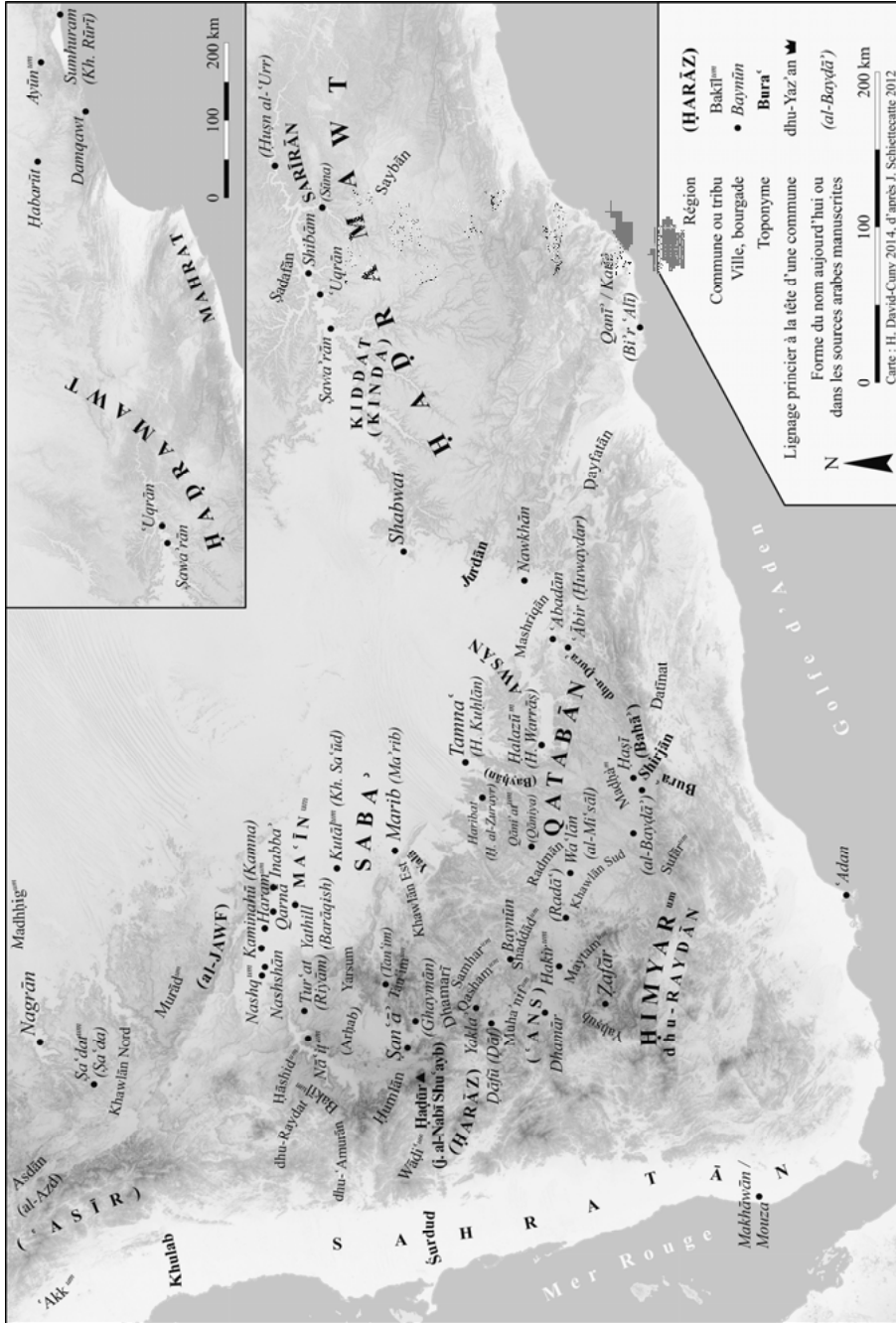


Fig. 24: Carte 2 – Le Yémen préislamique.

E. Des « Filles de Īl » aux « Filles d'Allāh »

Concernant les « Filles de Īl », une dernière donnée n'est pas sans importance: elles étaient vénérées en Arabie du Sud, mais aussi à Palmyre et dans le Negev.

À Palmyre, une inscription en langue araméenne datée de 63 EC⁸⁵ commémore l'offrande d'un autel aux Filles de Īl et à deux autres divinités: dans l'ordre « Arṣu, Qismayā et les Filles de Īl » (*Bnt-ʿl*). Ce texte provient d'un vaste sanctuaire situé au sud de la ville, qui était consacré à Arṣu (*ʿrṣw*).

Les Filles de Īl de Palmyre sont apparemment identiques à celles de l'Arabie du Sud. C'est l'hypothèse de l'éditeur du texte, Javier Teixidor. Les arguments sont la similitude des appellations et la proximité des dates.

Dans le Negev, on a trouvé un texte d'incantation en « cursive nabatéenne » qui invoque divers êtres surnaturels ayant pour fonction de rompre un enchantement. Parmi eux, trois sont qualifiés de « Fille de Īl » (*Brt-ʿl* ou *Brt-l*)⁸⁶:

« ⁽⁵⁾ And these are the disenchantresses: Tinshar **daughter of El**, ⁽⁶⁾ Tipshar daughter of Tinshar, Aṣaṣ son (or daughter) of Shamash ⁽⁷⁾ Ḥargol **daughter of El**, Shebaṭbaṭa **daughter of El** — the female statuettes »,

(⁽⁵⁾ *ʿwʿlb ʿ(l)h pṣrtʿ Tnšr Brt-ʿl* ⁽⁶⁾ *Tpšr brt Tnšr ʿṣṣ br Šmš* ⁽⁷⁾ *Ḥrgl brt-l Šbṭbṭʿ brt-ʿl šlmmytʿ*)

(traduction Joseph Naveh, « A Nabatean Incantation Text », dans: *Israel Exploration Journal* 29 (1979), 111-119 et pl. 14).

Le texte est écrit à l'encre sur un gros galet, qui a été découvert à Ḥorvat Raqiq (Kharibat Abū Ruqayyiq), à une dizaine de kilomètres au nord-ouest de Beersheba. On le date de la fin du 2^e s. ou vers 100 av. EC. Il confirme que les « Filles de Īl » – trois « désenchanteresses » ou « désenvoûteuses » (*pṣrtʿ*) nommément désignées (Tinshar, Ḥargol et Shebaṭbaṭa), plus une possible quatrième qui est la fille de la première (Tipshar fille de Tinshar) – n'étaient pas inconnues dans le monde araméen, en tout cas parmi les populations en contact avec le désert.

Parmi les « désenvoûteuses », le même texte mentionne aussi un enfant de Shamash. Les rejetons de Īl et ceux de Shamash appartiennent donc à une même classe d'êtres surnaturels. On retrouve les mêmes divinités qu'en Arabie méridionale, mais agencées de manière un peu différente puisque, au Yémen, les « Filles de Īl » sont remplacées par les *sbams* (terme arabe correspondant à l'araméen *shamash*).

On peut se demander si les « Filles d'Īl » nommément mentionnées de Ḥorvat Raqiq sont identiques à celles de l'Arabie méridionale et de Palmyre. À première vue, les différences sont importantes. À Ḥorvat Raqiq, ces êtres surnaturels sont individualisés par un nom propre et leur fonction est clairement indiquée par le

⁸⁵ La date originale est « au mois d'elūl, l'an 375 » (de l'ère séleucide). Le mois elūl correspond à août-septembre.

⁸⁶ L'araméen remplace le /n/ du substantif *bnt*, « fille », commun à plusieurs langues sémitiques, par un /r/.

terme *pšrt*, « désenvoûteuses ». Cependant, le contraste ne doit pas être surestimé: dans ses commentaires, J. Naveh relevait déjà de nombreux caractères, surtout linguistiques, qui rattachent le texte de Ḥorvat Raqiq au monde arabe ou nabatéen.

Les « Filles de Īl » étaient donc sollicitées par les humains non seulement en Arabie méridionale, mais aussi dans deux régions du monde araméen en contact avec l'Arabie. Il n'est pas sûr qu'elles aient eu partout la même fonction, mais il est plausible que toutes émanaient d'une antique catégorie d'êtres surnaturels au service du dieu Īl, faisant le lien entre le monde des hommes et celui des divinités. Elles avaient en effet un point commun qui mérite d'être souligné: c'étaient de simples êtres surnaturels, comme nos anges et nos démons, et non des divinités.

Les « Filles de Īl » de l'Arabie préislamique ont naturellement été mises en relation avec les « Filles d'Allāh » de la Tradition musulmane. Pour les spécialistes des religions préislamiques, de manière unanime, l'appellation « Filles d'Allāh » est un simple calque de « Filles de Īl », avec remplacement d'un dieu suprême par un autre.

Il faut noter cependant que l'appellation « Filles d'Allāh » ne se trouve pas dans le Coran, mais seulement dans la littérature qui en dérive. On la relève notamment sous le calame de Hishām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī, dit Ibn al-Kalbī (mort en 819 ou 821), l'un des plus anciens transmetteurs dont l'œuvre nous soit parvenue en partie et qui fut la source principale de bien des savants postérieurs, comme Ibn Ḥabīb, Ibn Durayd, al-Ṭabarī, Abū l-Faraj al-Īṣfahānī etc. Après avoir cité le Coran (Q 53 /19-21, voir ci-dessous), Ibn al-Kalbī observe:

« On disait qu'elles étaient les “Filles d'Allāh” (*banāt Allāh*) – Qu'il est au-dessus de cela ! - et qu'elles intercédèrent auprès de lui ». ⁸⁷

L'appellation « Filles d'Allāh » ne se trouve pas davantage dans les vers qu'un saint personnage contemporain du jeune Muḥammad, le *ḥanīf*, Zayd b. ʿAmr b. Nufayl, aurait composé pour exprimer son aversion pour le culte des déesses et autres divinités avant même le triomphe de l'islam. ⁸⁸

Mais l'idée que, selon les adversaires de Muḥammad (ou certains d'entre eux), Allāh ait eu des filles « parmi les anges » se trouve bien dans le Coran:

« Quoi! votre Seigneur vous a-t-Il octroyé des fils et a-t-Il pris, pour Soi, des filles parmi les Anges? En vérité, vous dites certes une parole monstrueuse »,

⁸⁷ Ibn al-Kalbī, Hisham [*Les idoles de Hicham ibn al-Kalbi*, texte établi et traduit par Wahib Atallah, Paris: Klincksieck 1969], § 15e, p. 14: *kānū yaqūlūna: banāt Allāh, ʿazza wa-jalla ʿan dbālika, wa-hunna yashfāʿna ilay-hi*. La traduction s'inspire de celle de Wahib Atallah.

⁸⁸ Uri Rubin, « *Ḥanīfiyya* and Kaʿba. An inquiry into the Arabian pre-Islamic background of *din Ibrāhīm* », dans: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13 (1990), 85-112, notamment 99-100; voir notamment Ibn Hishām, *al-Sira al-nabawiyya*, ʿUmar ʿAbd al-Salām Tadmuri, éd., 4 vol., Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿarabi 1990 (1410) (3^e impression), 255.

Sourate 17 (« Le voyage nocturne » ou « Les Fils d'Israël », *al-Isrā'* ou *Banū Isrā'īl*) / 42 (40).⁸⁹

Voir aussi Q 16 (*an-Nahl*) / 59-60 (57-58); Q 37 (*al-Şaffāt*), 149-153, 158; Q 43 (*al-Zukhruf*) / 15-18 (16-19); 52 (*al-Ṭūr*) / 39.

On y trouve même une sourate, la fameuse 53, qui indique explicitement l'identité de ces « Filles d'Allāh » :

- 19 Avez-vous considéré al-Lāt et al-^cUzzà
 20 et Manāt, cette troisième autre?
 20 bis [Ce sont les Sublimes Déeses
 20 ter et leur intercession est certes souhaitée],
 21 Avez-vous le Mâle et Lui la Femelle!
 Sourate 53 (« L'Étoile », *al-Najm*) / 19-21.⁹⁰

Plus loin, le verset 28 (27) condamne à nouveau la doctrine qui attribue des filles à Dieu :

« En vérité, ceux qui ne croient pas en la [Vie] Dernière donnent certes aux Anges l'appellation de femmes ».⁹¹

Ce passage de la sourate 53 a une notoriété universelle grâce aux fameux « versets sataniques »⁹², reproduits ici entre crochets, qui ont inspiré le romancier britannique Salman Rushdie. Ces deux versets auraient été déclamés, puis abrogés parce qu'ils ne s'accordaient pas avec le monothéisme radical de la prédication muḥammadienne. La Vulgate ne les reproduit pas, au contraire d'autres versets également abrogés, ce qui souligne la gêne qu'ils ont provoquée.

L'expression « les Sublimes Déeses » de la traduction empruntée à Régis Blachère rend une expression arabe obscure, *al-Gharāniq al-^culā*, dont le sens précis est discuté⁹³, mais qui reconnaît assurément aux trois déesses (al-Lāt, al-^cUzzà et Manāt) une essence surnaturelle.

⁸⁹ *A-ḡa-ʾaṣḡā(y)-kum rabbu-kum bi-ʾl-banīna wa-ʾttakbadha mina ʾl-malāʾika ināʾl^{an} inna-kum la-taqūlūna qaw^{an} ʾazim^{an}*. La traduction des citations coranique est empruntée à Régis Blachère.

⁹⁰ (19) *A-ḡa-raʾaytum al-Lāta wa-ʾl-^cUzzā* (20) *wa-Manā(w)ta al-thāliḡhata ʾl-ukbrā* (20 bis) *ḡa-ʾinna-hunna ʾl-Gharāniq^u ʾl-^culā* (20 ter) *wa-ʾinna ṡafāʾata-hunna la-turtajā* (21) *A-la-kumu ʾl-dbakaru wa-la-bu ʾl-utbnā*. Selon Ibn al-Kalbi, *al-Aṣḡām = Les Idoles*, éd. et trad. Wahib Atallah, Paris: Klincksieck 1969, § 15e, p. 14, la tribu de Quraysh, quand elle pratiquait la circumambulation autour de la Ka'ba, criait *wa-ʾl-Lāt wa-ʾl-^cUzzā wa-Manāʾ al-thāliḡhata al-ukbrā ḡa-ʾinna-hunna al-Gharāniq al-^culā wa-ʾinna ṡafāʾata-hunna la-turtajā*, suggérant que le Coran reproduit une *talbiya* tribale.

⁹¹ *Inna ʾl-ladḡbina lā yuʾminūna bi-ʾl-akḡbirati la-yusammūna ʾl-malāʾikata tasmiyata ʾl-^cuḡthā*.

⁹² Ahmed Shahab (« Satanic verses », dans: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 4, 2004, 531-536) rappelle que l'expression appartient à la coranologie occidentale.

⁹³ Voir R. W. J. Austin, « *Al-Gharāniq al-^cUlā* – The twilight of the Arabian goddess », dans: *A Miscellany of Middle Eastern Articles*, In Memoriam Thomas Muir Johnstone 1924-83, A. K. Irvine, R. B. Serjeant and G. Rex Smith, eds., Harlow, Essex: Longman 1988, 15-21. Le substantif *ghirniq* désigne l'oiseau nommé « grue ».

La Tradition interprète les « versets sataniques » comme une malencontreuse tentative de compromis, proposée par Muḥammad à ses adversaires mecquois : trois déesses de la vieille religion auraient été intégrées dans la théologie de la nouvelle, sous l'appellation de « Filles d'Allāh », expression soulignant leur subordination. Mais Muḥammad se serait immédiatement ravisé.⁹⁴ Pour l'islam orthodoxe, un tel compromis ne pouvait avoir été dicté que par Satan, d'où l'appellation « versets sataniques »⁹⁵.

La recherche coranique, aussi bien musulmane qu'orientaliste, suppose donc que les opposants mecquois au Prophète vénéraient trois déesses, al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā et Manāt, sous l'appellation de « Filles d'Allāh », comme le résume en quelques mots G. R. Hawting :

« À une place centrale dans l'image traditionnelle de l'idolâtrie de la *Jābiliyya* se trouvent les trois déesses ou idoles al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā et Manāt, que les opposants mecquois au Prophète, dit-on, considéraient comme les filles d'Allāh ».

En bref, le texte coranique nous apprendrait que les Mecquois qui s'opposaient à Muḥammad croyaient que Allāh avait des filles « parmi les anges » (*malā'ika*). On peut donc en déduire que ces opposants reconnaissaient l'existence d'être surnaturels semblables aux « anges », mais que ces anges étaient du genre féminin et étaient appelés « Filles d'Allāh ». Par ailleurs, parmi ces « Filles d'Allāh », on aurait compté al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā et Manāt.

L'épigraphie arabe et les sources externes établissent que al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā et Manāt étaient des déesses, appartenant aux divinités majeures de l'Arabie préislamique. Aux nombreuses preuves déjà rassemblées ailleurs⁹⁶, on peut ajouter que al-Lāt appartenait au panthéon de Najrān vers 300 av. EC.⁹⁷ Mais il faut ajouter que, nulle part, l'une de ces trois déesses n'est la divinité majeure ou la divinité de premier rang.

⁹⁴ Sur cet épisode, la source la plus développée est la chronique d'al-Ṭabarī, dont la chaîne de garants semble solide puisqu'elle remonte à Muḥammad b. Ka'b al-Qurazī, un musulman de la deuxième génération (mort entre 735 et 738), fils d'un jeune captif juif rescapé de la tribu Qurayza de Yathrib [*Ta'rikh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, I. *Annales quos scripsit Abu Djafar Mohammed Ibn Djarir at-Ṭabarī*, cum aliis edidit M. J. De Goeje, Prima series, 3, Leiden: Brill 1964 (reproduction photomécanique), 1192-1196; *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, vol. 6, *Muḥammad at Mecca*, translated and annotated by W. Montgomery Watt and M. V. McDonald, (Bibliotheca Persica), New York: State University of New York Press 1988, 107-112] Voir aussi Gerald Hawting [*The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam. From Polemic to History*, (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999, 131-132], qui donne une traduction de la majeure partie de ce passage (pp. 1192-1195).

⁹⁵ La tentation de reconnaître d'autres divinités apparaît ailleurs dans le Coran : voir Q 22 (*al-Ḥajj*) / 51 (52), mais aussi Q 17 (*al-Isrāʾ*) / 75 (73)-77 (75) et Q 39 (*al-Zumar*) / 64-66.

⁹⁶ Voir notamment Robin, « Filles de Dieu » (n. 9).

⁹⁷ Christian Julien Robin, 'Ali I. al-Ghabbān et Sa'īd F. al-Sa'īd, « Inscriptions antiques récemment découvertes à Najrān (Arabie séoudite méridionale) : nouveaux jalons pour l'histoire de l'oasis et celle de l'écriture et de la langue arabes », dans : *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, Comptes rendus* 2014, 1033-1127, notamment 1070-1073 (Inscription de Li'adhar'il / 3-4 et 9), où le nom de la déesse est *hl-lh*.

S'il n'est pas complètement impossible qu'il y ait eu quelques exceptions, aucune n'est assurée pour le moment. Le seul temple connu dans les villes de Kutāl^{um} (aujourd'hui Kharibat Sa'ūd) et d'al-Ṭā'if était sans doute consacré à des déesses, dhāt-Ḥimyam et al-Lāt respectivement. Mais il faut noter qu'aucune fouille n'a été pratiquée à Kutāl^{um} et que al-Lāt à al-Ṭā'if n'est attestée que par la Tradition arabo-musulmane dont on connaît les lacunes. Concernant l'oasis de Dūmat, la déesse Atasamayn y joue assurément un rôle important, mais la divinité majeure y est le dieu Ṣalm.

Si nous revenons à l'épisode des versets sataniques, une contradiction manifeste apparaît aussitôt: les trois déesses al-Lāt, al-'Uzzā et Manāt sont des divinités majeures alors que les Filles de ʾĪl (et donc, hypothétiquement, les Filles d'Allāh) sont de simples êtres surnaturels. On pourrait en tirer argument pour dénier toute valeur historique à l'incident. Mais la contradiction pourrait être plus apparente que réelle.

Une première explication serait que, pour gagner les Mecquois à sa cause, Muḥammad aurait accepté d'intégrer trois divinités païennes secondaires (noter que ce sont des déesses et non des dieux) dans sa vision du monde divin, mais en réduisant ces divinités au rang de « Filles d'Allāh », c'est-à-dire d'être surnaturels.

Une seconde explication serait que la réduction des déesses au rang de « Filles d'Allāh » avait déjà été opérée par les Mecquois eux-mêmes, du fait de l'émergence d'une divinité dominante (Allāh en l'occurrence) dans le polythéisme mecquois. Dans les deux cas, l'épisode des versets sataniques rappellerait que les Mecquois avaient exigé – et failli obtenir – de Muḥammad qu'il accepte leur vision du monde divin.

Le lexique utilisé est lui-même significatif. Les « Filles d'Allāh » du polythéisme arabe sont en concurrence avec les « anges » (*malā'ika*, singulier *malāk*) des monothéistes. Les opposants à Muḥammad (ou certains d'entre eux) se servent du langage du paganisme; ils sont les héritiers et les continuateurs de la vieille religion ancestrale. En revanche, Muḥammad a choisi la rupture en adoptant la terminologie des principales religions monothéistes, avec des termes comme Satan (*Shayṭān*), ange (*malāk*) etc.

Pour compliquer encore un peu plus le tableau, certains des opposants à Muḥammad se servent apparemment, eux aussi, du lexique des religions monothéistes. Ils utilisent en tout cas le substantif *malāk* pour désigner un ange, et non « Fille d'Allāh ». On le découvre quand ces opposants contestent l'origine divine du message de Muḥammad parce que Muḥammad est un homme et non un ange.⁹⁸ Ils veulent dire par là que seul un ange peut avoir un accès direct à Dieu. Un homme serait anéanti comme le prouvent les exemples de Moïse sur le mont Sinaï et de Paul sur le chemin de Damas. D'ailleurs, Muḥammad a accepté la validité de l'objection puisque l'intermédiaire de l'ange Gabriel a été progressivement

⁹⁸ Crone, « Angels Versus Humans as Messengers of God » (n. 1).

introduit. On peut donc en déduire que les opposants à Muḥammad se divisaient en deux catégories: ceux qui restaient attachés à la vieille religion et en conservaient le lexique ancestral (notamment les « Filles d'Allāh ») et ceux qui étaient ouverts aux innovations, mais sans aller jusqu'au rejet complet du passé. De fait, diverses études récentes s'accordent à reconnaître dans les opposants à Muḥammad de quasi-monothéistes.⁹⁹

*F. Excursus : les termes signifiant « messenger » (terrestre ou divin)
dans les inscriptions préislamiques d'Arabie et d'Éthiopie*

a. Les termes sudarabiques désignant les « messagers »

En grec, le mot « ange » dérive d'une racine qui signifie « envoyer ». Il en va de même dans les langues sémitiques où les termes désignant l'« ange » sont formés sur la racine L'K qui exprime également l'idée d'« envoyer ». Les ouvrages spécialisés signalent que cette racine L'K est attestée en ougaritique, en hébreu, en syriaque, en arabe et en guèze. Il faut leur ajouter désormais le saba'ique et le ma^cinique.

1. *Maḷak*

Les premières attestations de la racine L'K sont récentes. Ce furent tout d'abord une occurrence du verbe *l'k* (avec *t* infixé) et une autre du verbe *t'k* (avec *t* préfixé) dans une inscription du 6^e s. av. EC:

« après que l'a investi et ⁽¹⁷⁾ l'a chargé d'une mission Yada^cil Bayān fils de Yatha⁽¹⁸⁾amar, roi de Saba', dans les Pays de Dhakar^{um}, Li⁽¹⁹⁾hyān, Abi^os et Ḥanak, ceux de ses qua⁽²⁰⁾torze expéditions (?), et il a exécuté tout ce ⁽²¹⁾ dont l'avait chargé et investi Yada^cil »,

*w-ywem brwst-brw w-(17)l'k-brw Yd^cl Byn bn Yl⁽¹⁸⁾mr mlk S'lb^c d' rḏ Dkr^m w-L⁽¹⁹⁾hyⁿ w-⁽²⁰⁾b's'1 w-
Ḥnk 'llnⁿ r'rb^c (20)^cs'2r-brw r'rgl^m w-brwfy kl d⁽²¹⁾t t'k-brw w-brwst-brw Yd^cl*

(Demirjian 1).

Peu après la publication de ce texte, le verbe *l'k*, « envoyer », était relevé dans trois ou quatre documents d'archive en écriture cursive sur des bâtonnets de bois: X.BSB 90 / 2, 3; 97 / 9; 109 / 3; et peut-être 133 / 9.

⁹⁹ Hawting, *Idolatry* (n. 95); Mehdi Azaiez, *Le contre discours coranique*, (Studies in the History and Culture of the Middle East, 30). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter 2015; Crone, *Qur'anic Pagans*. La manière dont Muḥammad et ses opposants nomment Dieu est une piste qu'il conviendrait également d'explorer. Allāh est une divinité issue du paganisme arabe tandis qu'al-Rahmān est le dieu des monothéistes (juifs, chrétiens ou adeptes de Musaylima notamment) qui ont rompu avec la vieille religion.

Quant au substantif *mPk*, on vient de le découvrir dans un texte d'archive sur bâtonnet de bois, dans l'expression *mPk mlkⁿ*, « l'envoyé du roi »:

« Quant à lui, qu'il vous remercie parce que vous avez donné une compensation avec le messager royal ʿAbd (ou: “le serviteur de”) ibn Gurat »

... *w-lʿ l-yḥmdn-kmy b-dt tʿdrn b-m⁽⁰⁴⁾Pk mlkⁿ ʿbd bn Grt ...*

(L052 – Lettre, sabéen).

Enfin le substantif *mPkt* avec le sens d'ambassade se trouve dans un texte minéen publié après la rédaction de cette étude:

« ... ⁽³⁾ mission qu'il a effectuée dans le nord et ambassade dont l'avait char[gé ... »,

...] ⁽³⁾ *mṭwt ns² b-s¹ ʿd s²mt w-mPkt lʿ[k ...*

(Ma^{cin} 116 ¹⁰⁰).

Dans les inscriptions sudarabiques préislamiques, sont donc attesté le substantif *mPk* (à vocaliser sans doute *malʿak*), le substantif *mPkt* (à vocaliser peut-être *malʿakat* ¹⁰¹) et les verbes *tPk* (*talaʿaka*) et *lPk* (*iltaʿaka*).

Il faut leur ajouter *MPk^m*, un anthroponyme sabéen attesté à Yalā aux alentours de 700 av. EC (*ʿmkrb fqḏⁿ ḏ-ʿbn [w]-ʿmʿns¹ fqḏⁿ bn MPk^m*, « ʿAmmikarib le *fqḏ* dhu-ʿbn et ʿAmmiʿanas le *fqḏ* fils de Malʿak^{um} », Y.85.AQ/10 = Iryāni-Yalā 62).

Il est désormais manifeste que la racine LʿK était vivante et productive dans plusieurs langues de l'Arabie du Sud, notamment dans le sabaʿique qui était très proche du vieil-arabe. De ce fait, il est probable que la racine LʿK était également familière aux locuteurs de l'arabe à la veille de l'Islam, en tout cas plus que ne le donnent à penser les maigres références des dictionnaires.¹⁰²

Il était admis que l'arabe coranique *malāk*, « ange », était un emprunt au guèze.¹⁰³ Désormais, avec la multiplication des attestations épigraphiques de la racine LʿK en Arabie, cela paraît fort douteux. Le mot *malāk* (ou mieux *malʿak*) est arabique.

¹⁰⁰ Voir Mounir Arbach et Mohammed Maraqtan: « Notes on the Root LʿK “to Send” and the Term *mPk* “Messenger” in the Ancient South Arabian Inscriptions », dans: *Semitica et Classica* 11 (2018), 251-256.

¹⁰¹ La vocalisation *malāʿikat* (voir l'arabe *malāʿika*, pluriel arabe de *malāk*, « ange »), paraît peu plausible.

¹⁰² C'est surtout le verbe *alʿaka*, « envoyer quelqu'un comme messager à quelqu'un » (Kazimirski, Albert de Biberstein: *Dictionnaire arabe-français contenant toutes les racines de la langue arabe*, Paris: Maisonneuve 1860, s.v.).

¹⁰³ Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʿān* (Gaekwad's Oriental Series, 79), Baroda: Oriental Institute 1938 (reprise, Brill: Leiden, Boston 2007, Texts and Studies on the Qurʿān, 3), « *malak* », 269-270 (curieusement classé à la racine MLK). Arthur Jeffery observe cependant que « the word would seem to have been borrowed into Arabic long before the time of Muhammad, for the Qurʿān assumes that Arabian audiences are well acquainted with angels and their powers, and the form, indeed, occurs in the N. Arabian inscriptions ».

2. *Rasūl*

Pour désigner le « messenger », il existe un second mot en sabaïque: *rs^l*, arabe *rasūl*, « envoyé », qui se trouve trois fois dans la grande inscription d'Abraha, datée de mars 548:

« Est alors arrivé auprès de lui ⁽⁸⁸⁾ le ministre plénipotentiaire {*mḥs²kt*} du négus et sont arrivés auprès de lui ⁽⁸⁹⁾ le ministre plénipotentiaire du roi des Romains, l'ambassadeur {*tblt*} ⁽⁹⁰⁾ du roi de Perse, l'envoyé {*rs^l*} de Mudhdirān, l'envo⁽⁹¹⁾yé de Ḥarīth^{um} fils de Gabalat et l'envoyé d'Abikarib ⁽⁹²⁾ fils de Gabalat »,

w-k-wšḥ-[ḥ]m⁽⁸⁸⁾w mḥs²kt ngs²y^m w-wšḥ-ḥmw⁽⁸⁹⁾ mḥs²kt mlk Rm^m w-tblt⁽⁹⁰⁾ mlk Frs¹ w-rs^l Mḏr^m w-rs^l(⁹¹)I Ḥr^m bn Gblt w-rs^l ḥkrb⁽⁹²⁾ bn Gblt

(CIH 541).

Le terme *rs^l*, qui désigne les délégués envoyés à une rencontre diplomatique par les princes arabes, souligne que ces délégués n'ont pas le rang d'ambassadeur (qui est exprimé par les termes *mḥs²kt* et *tblt*). Il est probablement un emprunt à l'arabe comme très souvent le lexique des inscriptions ḥimyarites des 5^e et 6^e siècles.

b. La racine L'K en guèze préislamique

Incidentement, il n'est pas inutile de mentionner que la racine L'K est également attestée dans les inscriptions aksūmites en langue guèze. On trouve deux fois le verbe *la'aka* avec le sens d'« envoyer un messenger ». Une fois il est à l'accompli:

w²nb-s Pk w-ḥdrk ...sn m(sl) [...],

« et moi, j'ai envoyé un messenger et je me suis établi à ... avec ... ».

(RIÉth 191 / 26, Aksūm, 500-520 EC)

Dans la seconde occurrence, il est au gérondif:

sōbē lə'ikəyanī ?i-sam^ca-nī,

« et quand j'envoyai encore un messenger, ils ne m'obéirent pas »,

(RIÉth 189 / 13, Aksūm, vers 360 EC)

Le substantif *ma^lak* / *m^lk*, quant à lui, est attesté à trois reprises avec le sens de « représentant du roi » ou « chef » dans un même texte:

w-š^ckwem bzm yubrm w-wbbkwem m^lkm,

« je lui ordonnai de rester ici et je lui donnai un chef »

(RIÉth 190 A / 3, Aksūm, vers 360 EC)

Voir aussi RIÉth 190 A / 14-15 et 48-49 dans des passages de signification moins assurée.

Enfin, on relève une attestation de *maʿak* / *mʿk* avec le sens d'« ange » dans une citation de Ps 35 (34) / 4-5:

w-mʿk ʿgzbhr l-yśdd-m,

« que l'ange de Dieu les chasse »

(RIÉth 192 A / 31, Aksūm, vers 550 EC)

Le substantif *maʿak* était donc commun en Arabie et en Éthiopie pour désigner un messager ou un délégué du souverain. On peut en déduire que le mot n'est un emprunt ni en Éthiopie ni en Arabie. En revanche, la signification de « messager divin, ange » est une innovation tardive, sans aucun doute introduite par la diffusion des religions monothéistes. Le substantif *maʿak* avec le sens d'« ange » est attesté une fois en Éthiopie avant l'Islam dans une inscription chrétienne. En Arabie, il n'est pas attesté, mais il n'est guère douteux qu'il était connu. Le premier argument est que la notion d'ange était nécessairement familière aux juifs et aux chrétiens qui ont une position dominante en Arabie à partir du 4^e s. EC. Le second argument est que le mot *maʿak* était disponible pour nommer l'ange puisque le « messager » était nommé *rasūl*.

Dans les deux cas, la nouvelle signification a sans doute son origine en hébreu, avec une transmission qui passe par l'araméen (judéo-araméen et syriaque). L'opinion d'Arthur Jeffery selon laquelle, dans l'arabe coranique, « there can be little doubt ... that the source of the word is the Eth. *maʿak* with its characteristic plu. *malāʿakt*, which is the common Eth. word for *angelos*, whether in the sense of *angelus* or *nuntius*, and thus corresponds exactly with Hebr. *maʿak*; Phon. *mʿk*; syr. *maʿakō* »¹⁰⁴ doit être infléchie en conséquence.

Les anciens Arabiques croyaient dans diverses classes d'êtres surnaturels occupant une place intermédiaire entre le monde des hommes et celui des dieux. L'une de ces classes, chargée de la protection des personnes et représentée sous l'apparence de jeunes femmes munies d'ailes, celle des « soleils » (les *shams*), était semble-t-il très semblable aux anges du monde méditerranéen; elle est attestée pendant les quatre premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne, jusqu'à la conversion de Himyar au judaïsme à la fin du 4^e s.

Le nom de *shams* que portent ces anges en Arabie ne se réfère pas à la fonction de « messager », au contraire des anges en hébreu (*maʿak*) et en grec (*angelos*). Pourtant le substantif *maʿak*, tout comme la racine LʿK, existaient avec les sens de « messager » et de « envoyer », mais uniquement en contexte profane. On peut en déduire que, dans l'arabe coranique, le mot *maʿak* n'est pas un emprunt, mais un vocable certainement arabe; en revanche, la spécialisation avec le sens de « messager (divin) », alors que le sens original était « messager, envoyé », est une innovation sans doute empruntée au judéo-araméen ou à l'araméen chrétien (syriaque).

¹⁰⁴ Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary* (n. 104), 269.

Liste des sigles

Les sigles utilisés dans cette contribution sont ceux de la base de données DASI (Digital Archive for the Study of Pre-Islamic Arabian Inscriptions), accessible sur la Toile à l'adresse:

<http://dasi.humnet.unipi.it>

Pour la bibliographie, on se reportera à cette base de données.

C'est seulement pour les pièces qui n'y sont pas traitées (ou pas encore introduites) que la référence ou l'origine de l'information est donnée.

ʿAqil et Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi: ʿAzza ʿAli ʿAqil et Sabina Antonini de Maigret, Bronzi sudarabici di periodo pre-islamico* (Repertorio iconografico sudarabico, Tomo 3). Paris (Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres) et Rome (Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente), 2007, au numéro: I.A.e.28 = NAM 494; I.A.b.7; II.C.a.5 = Costa Brazier; IV.A.6 = YM 13981; IV.A.7 = Shabwa V/84/2.

Av Naʿd 9

Bā[faqih]-Bā[tāyiʿ]-al-Ḥadd 4

Bahā 1

BynM 22; – 101 + 92 + 93; – 200

CIAS 32.81/b9; – 35.91/o6/P53; – 39.11/o3 n° 1 = Fa 119; – 39.11/r1; – 47.11/b5; – 47.82/o2; – 95.11/o2; – 95.11/r4 n° 1 = RES 4967; – 95.11/w5 n° 1; – 95.41/p8/C66 n° 1 = YM 470; – 95.41/p8/C66 n° 2 = YM 473; – 95.41/p8/C66 n° 3 = YM 468; – 96.51/o1/R71 = CSAI III, 9; – P48//98.Is
CIH 41; – 47; – 132; – 159; – 172 + 241; – 194; – 442; – 512 = Haram 5; – 541; – 544 = Louvre 98; CIH 573

Costa Brazier (= ʿAqil et Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi*, II.C.a.5): Paolo Costa, « A bronze brazier with Bacchic scenes from Ṣanʿāʿ », dans: *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel*, Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg, 24-27 juin 1987, éd. T. Fahd (Université des sciences humaines de Strasbourg, Travaux du Centre de recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce antiques, 10). 1989 (distribué par Brill), 479-484 et 6 planches (1-12).

CSAII, 153 = RES 4704; –, 197 = RES 3688; –, 198 = RES 3689; –, 199 = RES 3691; –, 200 = RES 3692

CSAIII, 14 = RES 4336; –, 15 = MAFYS-Ḍuraʿ 8

CSAIII, 9 = CIAS 96.51/o1/R71

Demirjian 1

DJE 17

Fa 119 = CIAS 39.11/o3 n° 1

FB-al-Bayḏāʿ 1

FB-Ḥawkam 3; – 4; – 5

Garb Ḍula^c 1

GOAM 315

Graf 6

H2c

Haram 5 = *CIH* 512

Haram 11 = *RES* 2742

Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c 2; – 4; – 7; – 9; – 10; – 14: Khaldon Noman, *A Study of South Arabian Inscriptions from the Region of Dhāmār (Yemen)*, Dottorato in Orientalistica, Università di Pisa (manuscrit) [2012], 89-96.

Ir 2; – 49 [= 40]

Ja 559; – 560; – 561; – 577; – 618; – 629; – 644; – 649; – 664; – 853 A-F; – 854; – 868 (TT1 35); – 869 (TT1 138); – 870 (TT1 363); – 871 (TT1 747); – 872 (TT1 863); – 2851

Jarf an-Nu^caymiyya 8: Noman, *Study* (ci-dessus, Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c), 82

al-Jawf 04.16; – 04.32

JRy Plaquette Beeston

al-Kawla 3: Noman, *Study* (ci-dessus, Ḥammāt al-Ḍab^c), 101

L052: Abraham J. Drewes et Jacques Ryckmans, *Les inscriptions sudarabes sur bois dans la collection de l'Oosters Instituut conservée dans la bibliothèque universitaire de Leiden*, Texte révisé et adapté par Peter Stein, édd. par Peter Stein et Harry Stroomer, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2016, au numéro.

LNS 1640 M; LNS 1686 M; LNS 1692 M; LNS 1693 M; LNS 1700 M: collection du Shaykh Nāṣir Āl Ṣabāḥ (al-Kuwayt), inédits

Louvre 98 = *CIH* 544

M 360

Ma^cin 99; – 100; – 116 (Mounir Arbach et Mohammed Maraqtan, « Notes on the root L^cK “to send” and the term *mlk* “messenger” in the Ancient South Arabian inscriptions », dans: *Semitica et Classica* 11 (2018), 251-256, 251-253.

MAFRAY-al-Balaq al-janūbī 9

MAFRAY-al-Maktūba 1

MAFRAY-dhū Ḥadid 1 et 2

MAFRAY-Hajar Warrāṣ 1

Makyāsh et al-Zubaydī 2008

Maraqtan-Qatabanic 1

al-Mi^csāl 1; – 2

MIbb 10

MIFT 99/72

MIFT 00.40: Sabina Antonini de Maigret, « New South Arabian Amulets », dans: A. V. Sedov (éd.), *Scripta Yemenica. Issledovanija po Juzhnoj Aravii. Sbornik nauchnyh statej v chest' 60-letija M. B. Piotrovskogo*. Moscou : “Vostochnaja literatura”, Académie des Sciences de Russie 2004, 96-101.

- MQ-HK 11
 MQ-Nakhlān 1
 MŞM 116; – 154; – 213
 NAM 494 = ‘Aqil et Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi* (ci-dessus ‘Aqil & Antonini), I.A.e.28
 Nāmī *NNSQ* 19
 P48//98.Is
 Phillips-Filles de Īl: texte publié dans cette contribution, pp. 111-113.
 RES 2693; – 2742 = Haram 11; – 3856; – 3943; – 3945; – 3958; – 4194; – 4198; – 4336 = *CSAII*, 14; – 4967 = *CLAS* 95.11/r4 n° 1
RIÉth 189; – 190; – 191; – 192
 Robin-Bron Masjid al-Nūr = *CLAS* II, 3 / 3
 al-Sawdā’ 3; – 16; – 37; – 93
 Shabwa V/81/3: Rémy Audouin, « Sculptures et peintures du château royal de Shabwa », dans: *Fouilles de Shabwa. II. Rapports préliminaires*, Jean-François Breton éd., (Institut français d’Archéologie du Proche-Orient. Publication hors série, N° 19 = *Syria*, tome LXVIII, 1991). Paris: Geuthner 1992, 165-181, notamment 165-171; voir en dernier lieu Lombardi, *South Arabian Funerary Stelae*, fig. 8 (p. 153)
 Shabwa V/84/2: Audouin, « Sculptures » (ci-dessus Shabwa V/81/3), 175 et fig. 13 B (= ‘Aqil et Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi*, IV.A.7)
 Sūna/L/1
 T.00.A.12
 T.00.B.O/17: Antonini de Maigret, « Amulets » (ci-dessus MIFT 00.40)
 Thā’ 1
 X.BSB 90 / 2, 3; 97 / 9; 109 / 3; 133 / 9: Peter Stein: *Die altsüdarabischen Minuskelinschriften auf Holzstäbchen aus der Bayerischen Staatsbibliothek in München. Die Inschriften der mittel- und spätsabäischen Periode*, (Epigraphische Forschungen auf der Arabischen Halbinsel, 5), 2 vols., Tübingen: Wasmuth, 2010, au numéro.
 Y.85.AQ/10 = Iryāni-Yalā 62
 YM 468 = *CLAS* 95.41/p8/C66 n° 3; – 470 = *CLAS* 95.41/p8/C66 n° 1; – 473 = *CLAS* 95.41/p8/C66 n° 2; – 13981 = ‘Aqil & Antonini de Maigret, *Bronzi*, IV.A.6; – 16658; – 16667
 YMN 11; – 13; – 15
 ZM 999

Abbreviations

- av. avant
 EC ère chrétienne
 s. siècle

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Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings

Aziz Al-Azmeh (Vienna/Budapest)

In addressing the topic of Paleo-Muslim preternatural beings, it will be useful to consider a number of prefatory points relating to sources and to Paleo-Islam before turning to the highly complex related questions of Paleo-Muslim divinity and angelology. Paleo-Islam is a historiographical category, elaborated further below, that is concerned with the configuration and dynamics of those events, social and political trends, and doctrinal and ritual developments and options that relate to the history of Muhammadan and immediately post-Muhammadan Arabia. This category is intended to describe, in relation to rough chronological termini, a dynamic that was later to crystallise into forms that we now recognise as Islamic. Framing the subject in terms of this category will allay the impression that beginnings can be described in light of outcomes, or that outcomes were an inevitable flowering of these Paleo-Muslim seeds, conceived in a linear manner.¹ My preliminary observations also relate to Paleo-Muslim preternatural beings prior to the crystallisation of what ultimately became the monotheistic Muslim divinity and His related regime of the preternatural. I use the term ‘preternatural’ rather than ‘supernatural’ because, since the nineteenth century, the latter term has come to imply a sharp-edged division between two completely distinct realms that would have been inconceivable in Paleo-Muslim times. During this period, the natural world and the preternatural realm constituted a continuum and were distinguished only in the sense that the one was visible and the other largely invisible, although even the latter could become visible in rare flashes of appearance.

Sources

Sources for the Paleo-Muslim period, covering Muḥammad’s lifetime, the decades preceding it during the Ḥijāz period, and the years immediately following his death, are often portrayed as impossible to use, entirely misleading, or as being so forbiddingly impenetrable that they have little evidentiary value. However, if we pay closer attention to this material we can see that these prevailing views are a matter of attitude rather than of fact. Indeed, such views can only be sustained by appealing to a methodological postulate that is no longer credible

¹ See Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2014, 41-42, 358-368 and at Index; in shorter compass, Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Islam: Transfigurations of Late Antique Religion,” in: *A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity*, Josef Lössl and Nicholas J. Baker, eds., Oxford: Wiley Blackwell 2018, 348-354.

and which stipulates criteria of documentation and verification that are generally unattainable. These criteria have their origins in an unworkable, idealistic historiographic model of the perfect and neutral document that is able to speak for itself. This model arose out of the epistemological innocence of the more simplistic versions of nineteenth-century positivism and has been deployed polemically, and often naively, in relation to studies of the Paleo-Muslim period, rather than in a constructive manner. One research trend that has its roots in this despairing attitude is the cognitive nihilism associated with hyper-sceptical historiography, which has become commonplace and fairly orthodox in certain academic milieux. Another trend, captive to an even older misconception concerning historical methodology perpetuates, protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, *faute de mieux* the basic conceptual and technical apparatus of a medieval practice of historical verification, indulging in seemingly endless parsing of *isnāds* despite an awareness that a mirage might be chased thereby, and also despite the paucity of results expected and announced so far.

Rather than celebrating, regretting, or seeking to measure and calibrate *a priori* this alleged inaccessibility to history, and the near-impossibility of convincing historical reconstruction, this essay will proceed in an affirmative mode and on the assumption that much of the history of our period is, in fact, accessible. The underlying contention is that historians are by vocation trained to handle and interpret different types of sources, including those that are difficult. There is much that we can learn from our surviving fragments about the ancient Hijāzī Arabs and their religion. Much can be reconstructed of the way in which, in the first third of the seventh century, the taxonomy of the preternatural, including angels, was reconfigured. This period can be accessed by forensically reconstructing it from Arabic literary sources such as the Qurʾān, from sources in other languages, and from material evidence available in the epigraphic and archaeological records, and in ancient Qurʾānic manuscripts.

The use of an alert eye, primed by both curiosity and methodological and conceptual reflexivity, and attuned to comparativism, seems the appropriate way to read through the narrative motifs of epic, legend, patterning, myth, partiality, and other encrustations upon the individual *akhbār* that serve as the ‘elementary particles’ of historical transmission. Such an approach gives rise to a highly complex picture of the emergence of a new religion and of the social arrangements and dynamics associated with it. Making it possible to rethink this historical period with an accent on its complexity will serve to reset the ground-rules of the discussion by suggesting new areas for research, by reinterpreting well-known facts in the light of new perspectives, and, crucially, by the forensic reconstruction of a history from its traces.²

² For the foregoing paragraphs, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Islam and the Arabs in Late Antiquity. A Critique of Approaches to Arabic Sources*, Berlin: Gerlach Press 2014; Robert Hoyland, “The

Perspectives

Since the goal of this chapter is to ask fresh questions, explore new thematic areas, and reset the research agenda, a second preliminary point is especially pertinent. This is that the standard and habitual narrative which takes Paleo-Islam and its Qurʾān as almost natural outgrowths of previous monotheisms, a view that has been made to appear self-evident to the monotheistic self-representation of the history of monotheism, is far too simplistic. This narrative allows for little more than token gestures towards the crucial immediate context of Arab polytheism and its perspective on the divine and the preternatural. It tends to place undue emphasis on breaks with this perspective, despite the recognition of a series of ritual continuities and the identification of certain modes of expression with the earliest Qurʾānic verses. Further, this monotheistic genealogy is generally expressed in terms of the Qurʾānic text, a way of conceiving the history of religions which sees them primarily as texts that beget other texts.

I maintain, by contrast, that although these textual genealogies did come to be constructed exegetically as the new religion was elaborated under the Umayyads and the Abbasids, it would be anachronistic to ascribe to them a foundational and causative effect in the earlier, Paleo-Muslim and Muḥammadan period. At this time, they were yet to become co-constitutive of the new religion, although they were fragmentarily evident in its articulation. Nevertheless, it is true that a monotheistic construction of a typological pre-history of Muḥammad's religion can be found in the Qurʾān fragmentarily. The crucial point being made here is the emphasising of the distinction between the symbolic and genealogical, on the one hand, and the efficiently causal, on the other.³

The perspectival resetting I advocate views the emergence of the new religion as taking place not so much through doxography as through religious practice. This practice includes mythical elaboration and cultic practice at concrete points

Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions," in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997), 77-102; Robert Hoyland, "New Documentary Texts and the Early Islamic State," in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 69 (2006), 395-416. With the emphasis on the pertinence of non-Arab sources and witnesses, it is interesting to note that the one work that has used these systematically alongside epigraphic and other material remains Robert Hoyland, *In God's Path. The Arab Conquests and the Creation of an Islamic Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2015, passim. He offers a narrative that introduces interesting and pertinent detailed material which tends to be in agreement with the general outline (as well as crucial detail) of what occurs in the much derided Arabic narrative sources. For elaborations on forensic analysis in history and law and medical diagnostics, see Carlo Ginzburg, *Clues, Myths and Historical Method*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1992, 96-104.

³ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 76-77, 89-90, 279-280, 306-307, and passim for monotheism, and 271-272, 316-317, 489-497 for the Qurʾān. The present essay is primarily derived from points developed in this book, sustained by the references there cited and discussed. Some additional reference will be made to additional material or material that broadens the span of analysis in a meaningful way.

of application, with an emphasis on primary, devotional, forms of practice over secondary, theological or mythographic, elaborations, and with a view to noting dynamics of change and variability. The Qurʾān, the major ‘fossil’ of Paleo-Islam, does encompass theologemes and mythologemes, but it does so in a form and with an intension that was still evolving when the texts were set down. These theologemes and mythologemes would have been received in different ways by different audiences and constituencies, a point that is often missed in the assumption of unitary meanings of and audiences for the various Qurʾānic enunciations. The ascription to the Qurʾān of the kind of *Leittheologie* that Protestant and Protestant-influenced scholarship finds in scripture is anachronistic and unjustifiable.

This model of interpretation, stressing process over fixity in the Paleo-Muslim period, can be taken as a leitmotif for the approach to Paleo-Muslim material proposed here. The assumption that Allāh’s rapid emergence to a position of primacy and exclusivity in the Paleo-Muslim context was an almost natural and self-explanatory occurrence, and that so too was the corresponding incidence of the standard monotheistic conception of angels, has been very resilient and arises from ancient monotheistic traditions about the naturalness and primeval character of monotheism.⁴ The invocation, *tout court*, of Judaism or Christianity or, in the absence of sufficiently convincing support for either, of the exotic and alluring, but equally evasive, Judaeo-Christianity, is a not uncommon complement to this assumption.⁵

The assumption of self-evidence needs to be relaxed if we are to unfetter the historical gaze and enable it to seek out a verisimilar account of the emergence of Allāh and the host of preternatural beings that arrived alongside Him, including beings called angels. What is discernible in the Paleo-Muslim period, as we shall see, is a great degree of fluidity in the classification of preternatural beings, with Paleo-Islam developing in a direction that ultimately differentiated angels generically. This development gave angels greater definition and subordinated them to the new deity just as He was being reconfigured as transcendent and began to absorb the class of divinity entirely into Himself. By relaxing the traditional assumptions of self-evidence, we are able to explore what might follow from the proposal that the Arab transition to monotheism was neither natural, self-explanatory, nor inevitable, but, rather, a non-linear process with a specific dynamic that can be reconstituted and described.

⁴ See, for instance, Jeremy Schott’s illuminating discussion in “Heresiology as Universal History in Epiphanius’ *Panarion*,” in: *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 10 (2007), 546-563; Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 53, 279-280.

⁵ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 248-275, 279-315.

Paleo-Islam

The condition of dynamic mutability that lies behind the Ḥijāzī Arab transition to monotheism finds expression in the historiographic category of Paleo-Islam, which designates both a period and a perspective, and which provides the chronological and thematic parameters of this essay. This term is used in preference to 'Islam' without qualification, to 'early Islam', and to 'primitive Islam'. The use of the term expresses a preference for precision and discrimination over categorical reductionism, for names as category nominatives are neither neutral nor insignificant but tend rather to function in an associative manner. Names, when used with little discrimination, can convey broad conceptual networks by association, implying specific semantic fields and shades that generally have the commonplace purchase of clichés and carry a high ideological load.

The historiographical category of 'Paleo-Islam' is able to assist us in a number of ways as we attempt to reset the terms in which the 'unfurling' of the Ḥijāz occurred during the first half of the seventh century, alongside the emergence of a new religion, the eventual triumph of the Umayyads, and their stepping into the shoes of their imperial predecessors. The category guards against the automatic ascription of causality to priority in time, such as the proposal that the Qurʾān gave rise, ineluctably and in a linear manner, to what we call classical Islamic beliefs, practices, politics. On the contrary, our new approach contends that Muḥammad's horizons were limited by the circumstances of his time and place, and that the elementary religion of Muḥammad would most likely either have waned or become an obscure western Arabian sect had it not been for the fact of empire. The notion of Paleo-Islam serves to facilitate a perspective which regards conceptions of the divine, and of the preternatural more generally, as well as associated cultic practices, as undergoing a process of change the end of which was not inherent in its beginning. It is intended to avert ascriptions of inevitability or of the inherence of consequences in precedents, thus restoring to history its proper dynamics.

Paleo-Islam is a socio-religious and political phenomenon, the name of a historical period, and a perspective from which to approach historical interpretation. In scriptural and doctrinal terms, it refers to an emergent condition, prior to theological and exegetical elaboration in cumulative durable forms and including the pre-exegetical Qurʾān, and prior to durable imperial crystallisation. This condition necessitates reading the Qurʾān and ritual practices against the immediate background of their inception and in terms of how they would have been performed at the concrete points of occurrence. Paleo-Islam was an evolving constellation of elements and a scattering of credal, mythical, and devotional elements motivated by social and political processes, with each element being received differently by different constituencies of address, influence, enmity, alliance, and so forth.

Gods, cults, and religions

In order to understand Arab polytheism and the way in which it was reconstituted into the new monotheistic religion of Muḥammad, it is important to recognise that religion as an historical fact is sustained by social constituencies and by forms of authority and control. It is especially important to study religious practice at the concrete points of its application. With regard to Arab polytheism, it is crucial to understand the way in which worship was organised by **cultic associations** which also typically doubled as socio-political alliances and provided the framework for arrangements concerning territorial access and control over trade and natural resources.⁶ Thus, each of the Ḥums (Quraysh, Thaḳīf, Kalb, Māzin, sections of Hawāzin, and in general sections thereof dwelling along the routes between Mecca and Yemen, routes north-east of Mecca to al-Ḥira, and on the road to Syria), the Ṭuls (Yemenites and sections from Iyād, ʿAkk), and the Ḥilla (comprising distant groups: Tamim [except for the Yurbūʿ section, who were Ḥums], sections of Māzin, Rabīʿa, Asad, Ṭayy, and Qays ʿAylān except for Thaḳīf) performed pilgrimages at the federated sanctuary of Mecca. Each group and subgroup indicated the specific constituency of a treaty-based alliance that formed cultic associations with discernible social geographies. Such associations might be compared in some respects to what the Swiss were later to call *Eidgenossenschaften*.

This association of cult and alliance was to be the tried and tested model for the erection of the Paleo-Muslim movement. Federal sanctuaries with which Arabs were associated abounded in Hellenistic and late antique times, as, for instance, at Manbij (Hierapolis) in northern Syria, Rāmat al-Khalil (Mamre) near Hebron in Palestine, and Jabal Ithlib at al-ʿUlā to the north of Ḥijāz. Recent excavations have yielded further interesting results.⁷ It is not sufficiently appreciated that the religions carried by social constituencies were distinguished from one another not so much by differences in doctrine as by the significance placed on distinct cultic times, such as the schedule of pilgrimages and associated markets of the *ḥajj* (of the Ḥilla and the Ṭuls), which took place in autumn (either Dhū l-Ḥijja, Muḥarram or Ṣafar al-awwal: the timing was uncertain, and the names of months were not always constant, intercalation having an effect on both), and the *ʿumra* (of the Ḥums), which took place in the spring month of Rajab. Pilgrimage itineraries within the larger Meccan area overlapped in part but were distinct in other ways, with Muḥammad eventually carrying out an amalgamation that initially lacked universal assent, and removing the mandatory sacrifices that had previously been essential offerings to the various deities wor-

⁶ For the following: Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 183-203. For local west Arabian calendars and intercalation: Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 138-139, 191-196, 332-333.

⁷ François Villeneuve and Zeidoun Al-Muhaisen, "Dharrah and Tannur, Sanctuaries of Central Nabatea," in: *Petra Rediscovered: The Lost City of the Nabatean Kingdom*, Glenn Markow, ed., New York: Abrams 2003, 82-100.

shipped by the Arabs. The associated calendars that codified the rhythms of worship, trade, and transhumance were political institutions of social time. Intercalations were more than just technical adjustments for coordinating solar and lunar temporal reckonings. Rather, they represented the outcomes of negotiation and alliance, or were dictated by a party that had gained the upper hand in a conflict.⁸ When intercalation was abrogated by Muḥammad once and for all, the move bore all the marks of a stroke of political genius. In one move, he successfully severed the connection between the cultic calendar and the rhythms of social and economic life that depended upon the seasons. The mastery of time now belonged to Muḥammad's new political and cultic association, the *umma* that acted under his own command.⁹

Within this system of religion, it mattered little what god was the object of worship, since many deities were worshipped by multiple constituencies and none had a stable or constant personality that was distinct from a specific ritual occasion. The deities that were worshipped were connected to particular places and ritual occasions but were, for all intents and purposes, interchangeable. Rudolf Otto's statement, presumably building on Wellhausen, that these Arabian gods were no more than local noumena and variable demonstrative pronouns is certainly overstated, and is far more applicable to the nameless *jinn* than to named gods.¹⁰ However, the overstatement is simply representative of one end of the spectrum of possibilities that describes practical conceptions of preternatural beings at the points of their concrete application. For the gods of the polytheistic Arabs in late antiquity were defined by the coincidence of cult – that is, worship and sacrifice or other votive offering, given at a particular place and at specific or otherwise extraordinary times – and name, epithet, or epiclesis.¹¹ The situation here is not unlike that which obtained for other polytheistic religions that have been studied in greater detail. And, like these other religions, Arab polytheism contained no imperative divine unicity rather than multiplicity, and tended towards devotional atomisation without recourse to mythical or theological repertoires at the points of

⁸ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 193-196. See also François De Blois, "Qur'an 9:37 and CIH547," in: *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies* 34 (2004), 101-104. Needless to say, such arrangements were not unique to Arabia: see now also Antonio C. Panaino, "Pre-Islamic Iranian Calendrical Systems in the Context of Iranian Religious and Scientific History," in: *The Oxford Handbook of Ancient Iran*, D. T. Potts, ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press 2013, 957-958. The recent review of the material by Hideyuki Ioh, "The Calendar of pre-Islamic Mecca," in: *Arabica* 61 (2014), 471-513, remains largely uncritical and assumes a homogeneity and regularity which are not justifiable. See now the broad sweep of detail in Christian Robin, "Die Kalender der Araber vor dem Islam," in: *Denkraum Spätantike. Reflexionen von Antiken im Umfeld des Koran*, Nora Schmidt, Nora Katharina Schmid and Angelika Neuwirth, eds., Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2016, 299-386.

⁹ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 332-333.

¹⁰ Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige. Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*, Munich: Beck 1997, 149.

¹¹ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 164-183, 204-223.

practical cultic application.¹² It was *savoir-faire* rather than *savoir-penser*,¹³ and its divinities might just as well be namelessly identified with the locations of their worship as given any other nominative identity,¹⁴ as we can see in the example of Dhū l-Khalāṣa south-east of al-Ṭāʾif, worshipped by Khathʿam, Daws, Bajila, and Azd al-Sarāt. Theologies and mythologies including pantheons of twelve or nine or seven divinities are secondary elaborations arising from social and cultural processes distinct from those of worship.¹⁵ Ultimately, a religion was a specific form of sacrifice performed at specific places and times by a specific constituency; such was, indeed, the meaning of the word *dīn*.¹⁶ If Hubal and the god at Dhū l-Khalāṣa (who received no blood sacrifices) were distinguished by their specific function of cleromancy, this did not mean that they were not all-purpose gods as well. Polytheism is aggregative and syncretising, and we have indications for a turnover in the roster of the divine. These changes often involved the importation of new divinities or their representations, according to the vagaries of political control and opportunities of communication,¹⁷ with the importation of Hubal and of his idol standing out as a famous example in Arab tradition. The turnover of the divine was correlated with the emergence, or attempted emergence, of centres of territorial control, such as the failed attempt by B. Baghiḍ to set up a competitor to the Meccan *ḥaram*.¹⁸

The only shared item of **belief** among Arab polytheists was in the efficacy of deities, an item held not as a confession but, rather, rendered in ritual action. It is this that explains the centrality of rites rather than any considerations of faith in this tradition. Rites are a combination of bodily gestures and words pronounced in set sequences of two verbal packages: invocation, thanksgiving, and praise, on the one hand; supplication, promise, and propitiation, on the other. The performance of rites was usually followed by sacrifice, and all these elements

¹² See Pierre Brulé, “Le langage des épiclèses dans le polythéisme hellénique (l’exemple de quelques divinités féminines). Quelques pistes de recherche,” in: *Kernos* 11 (1998), 15, 18-19; Robert Parker, “The Problem of the Greek Cult Epithets,” in: *Opuscula Atheniensia* 28 (2003), 173, 182; Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 49-64.

¹³ M. Linder and John Scheid, “Quand croire c’est faire. Le problème de la croyance dans la Rome antique,” in: *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions* 38/81 (1993), 48-50.

¹⁴ François Villeneuve, “La résistance des cultes bétélyques d’Arabie face au monothéisme: de Paul à Barsauma à Muhammad,” in: *Le problème de la christianisation du monde antique*, Hervé Inglebert, Sylvain Destephen and Bruno Dumézil, eds., Paris: Picard 2011, 223-224.

¹⁵ Cf. Ian Rutherford, “Canonizing the Pantheon: the Dodekathion in Greek Religion and Its Origins,” in: *The Gods of Ancient Greece. Identities and Transformations*, Jan N. Bremmer and Andrew Erskine, eds., (Edinburgh Leventis Studies 5), Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2010, 47-48.

¹⁶ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 204-205 and 205 fn. 247. See now also Reinhard Schulze, *Der Koran und die Genealogie des Islam*, Basel: Schwabe 2015, 302, with reference to the same poetic evidence, ‘Amr b. Qamī’a’s line: *innī arā dīnī yurwāfiqū dīnabumu / idbā ansakū afrāʾabū wa dhabihabū*.

¹⁷ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 180-181, 215-220.

¹⁸ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 130.

were generally performed at set ritual times, in locations that were specially consecrated, and by specific constituencies: cultic associations or what Wellhausen called *Schlachtgemeinschaft*.¹⁹ Priestly functions, including sacrifice and the leadership of pilgrimage processions, were social and political functions carried out by designated individuals at set times and places.

Gods and other preternatural beings

It has been suggested that Paleo-Muslim divinity emerged within a polytheistic setting, a development which also involved a recasting of the taxonomy of the preternatural. This development saw the angels particularised and constituted as a specific category of the preternatural that was disentangled from the *jinn* and from polytheistic deities. In the fullness of time, this development led to the creation of an elaborate angelology cast along familiar monotheistic lines, although this later construction was only fragmentarily present in Paleo-Muslim times.²⁰

But this disentanglement was not complete or constant. As in the period prior to Paleo-Islam, and still to some extent continuing during the Paleo-Muslim period as expressed in the Qurʾān, the boundaries between various named types of preternatural actors were unstable. Deities, *jinn*, and angels tended to shade into each other in terms of their functions. When the Qurʾān asserts that unbelievers conceived the *jinn* as partners to Allāh (Q 6:100), the implication is that *jinn* may have been worshipped, a polemical overstatement of the fact that they had been propitiated in ways that were not dissimilar to the way in which deities were propitiated.²¹ A further implication of this is that the taxonomic classes under which deities and the *jinn* were classified were not entirely distinct from one another. Further, when the Qurʾān states that unbelievers did not really worship angels but worshipped the *jinn* instead (Q 34:41), this amounts to a Qurʾānic *jinnification* of deities that might have been designated as angels, or that the Paleo-Muslims came to designate as angels rather than as gods. Similarly, when the Qurʾān castigates those who elevated angels to the status of deities (Q 3:80, 34:40), this appears to be a taxonomic manipulation of a classificatory indeterminacy that was operative in Arab polytheism. This indeterminacy was also related to the disparagement of belief in female angels (Q 17:40, 43:19, 53:27) and to the removal of the angelic – in fact, the generally preternatural – nature of the three famous female deities, Allāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt. The context for this last

¹⁹ Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums. Gesammelt und erläutert*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1961, 117.

²⁰ For the ultimate picture culled from prophetic traditions and other Muslim elaborations, see Stephen Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabāʾik fi akbbār al-malāʾik*, London: Routledge 2012.

²¹ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 210-211.

move might well reflect Muḥammad's divine diplomacy at the point in time when these figures were designated as Allāh's daughters.²²

Clearly, whether a preternatural being was *ilāh*, *jinnī*, or *malak/mal'ak* was a matter of unstable naming conventions or, perhaps, of sociolects, and not the result of the kind of theology with its related ontology that was to come in the course of time,²³ reflected in the cumulative moves of Paleo-Islam from henotheism and monolatry to monotheism, a move reflected in the chronological flow of the Qur'ān.²⁴ This is unsurprising, given the polyvalent and polyonymous nature of polytheistic deities, and the rapid turnover of the divine in the Ḥijāz. In many ways, this development of Paleo-Islam paralleled the disengagement in the early history of Christianity of *daimones* from the realm of indeterminate divinity that they had long shared with *theoi*, and their consequent relegation to a status of preternatural malignancy that was substantively distinct from the status of God.

This phenomenon is also unsurprising when we consider the continuum between visible and invisible nature, or nature and the preternatural, and the porosity of the boundaries between them. Polytheistic divinities inhabited and animated special locations and objects, including cult objects.²⁵ Famously, the *jinn* were capable of materialisation and could take on a variety of visible forms, including acting as doubles to humans. Transmogrification was not infrequently noted by Paleo-Muslims and polytheistic Arabs, be it that of the *jinn* or of Gabriel. Similarly, both polytheists and Paleo-Muslims mention the appearance of mysterious persons in confusing guises, including the possible confusion over the appearances of Muḥammad and Dihya al-Kalbi and Abū Fukayha. This can be compared to the ways in which Aphthartodocetism and the Qur'ān conceived of the likeness, the formal double or *eidolon*, of Christ on the cross as a transfer of forms – the person crucified was not Christ, but something like him. Again, we can also note, this time with reference to a transfer of substances, the aetiological and euhemeristic interpretations of certain deities, such as Isāf and Nā'ila, ancestral deities of Quraysh from regions near the Red Sea who were said to have been petrified for having profaned the sacred Meccan enclave.²⁶ Anthropologically, epiphany, like transfiguration, is itself an instance of transmogrification, and the receipt of divine inspiration also involves an act of transmogrification, regardless of the precise route through which this inspiration was transmitted.

²² Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 325-326.

²³ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 293-295, 326-327.

²⁴ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 283, 306-326.

²⁵ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 164-183, 204-248. Compare the discussion of animation by Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 17 (1963), 56, 59-61.

²⁶ For some of this Arabian lore: al-Jāhiz, *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. 'Abd al-Salām Muḥammad Hārūn, Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābi al-Ḥalabi 1965-68, vol. 1, 297-299, 308-309; vol. 6, 196.

The being that presented itself to Muḥammad *‘alā qābi qawṣayni aw adnā* in order to deliver inspiration, described in a famous vision of Sūrat al-najm (Q 53:5-10), is likely to have been Muḥammad’s deity – the deity who ‘descends’, according to the Qurʾān, but who dwells above the seven heavens, and who is yet present in the black stone at Mecca, is of this type.²⁷

The relationship between Allāh and His preternatural subordinates needs to be seen in the light of the metastasis, partibility, and polymorphy of the divine, and the continuum between the visible and the invisible. This applies all the more once He has eliminated other competing deities and has assumed the exclusive right to the generic title of divinity, predicating divinity of Himself alone and absorbing all the functions that had previously been attributed to a range of divine figures. Allāh allocates to Himself both common and uncommon divine epithets and, crucially, the epiclesis of invocation *Allābumma*, used previously for the invocation of all deities. He declares Himself the sole recipient of the attribute and epithet of unicity. These epithets had previously been generic and were applicable to a variety of divinities in cultic moments, as was the case with polytheistic invocations that used the epithet ‘one’.²⁸ The Qurʾān, intriguingly, sometimes associates, and thus perhaps conflates, both sympathetically and by synecdoche, the Lord, Rabb, and the angels. This is done almost indiscriminately during the Meccan period, with the Qurʾān speaking of God and the angel (in the singular) coming forth in formation, *ṣaffan ṣaffan* (Q 89:22) – perhaps, but not necessarily, implying multiplicity in a manner that Arabic grammar would recognise as *mufrad bi-ṣiḡhat al-jamʿ*. Indeed, one needs to bear in mind the possibilities of thinking of the linguistic usage in Arabic of the singular to designate a plurality, and the plural to designate a singularity.

The precise way in which this conjunction of multiplicity occurred is not entirely clear. What matters is the connection between the divinity and His various instantiations and the strong implication of convertibility that is reminiscent of transmogrification. The Qurʾān speaks of the arrival of ‘the angels ... or your Lord, or Signs from your Lord’ (Q 6:158). It speaks of a visitation during sleep (*tāfa ‘alayhum tāʾifun*) from or of your Lord (*min rabbika* – Q 68:19), although in what form is left unclear.

It is important to note the frequent conjunction in the Qurʾān between angels and the Spirit. However, there is no suggestion anywhere in the Qurʾān that they were not distinct, or that the Spirit denoted Gabriel, as was later to become the prevalent exegetical gloss upon the very late Qurʾān’s gloss (at Q 2:97-8) on its

²⁷ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 346-357.

²⁸ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 228-230, 305-306, 326-327. See also the textual study of Darina Staudt, *Der eine und einzige Gott. Monotheistische Formeln im Urchristentum und ihre Vorgeschichte bei Griechen und Juden*, (Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus, 80), Göttingen: Vandenoek & Ruprecht 2012, 58-70, 312-321.

own earlier statements, which has remained with us down to the present day.²⁹ What we have here is a situation in which it is often difficult to disengage God from His messenger in a categorical manner, in a way that is reminiscent of, but not necessarily directly inspired by, the Biblical *mal'ak Yahweh* that is, at times, indistinguishable from Yahweh Himself.³⁰ All are active in situations in which God emits tangible energy by epiphanic display. This phenomenon belongs to a world in which the categories of the natural and preternatural are not ontologically distinct – God and Spirit, single and multiple, share this, that they are instances of God's kratophanic energy, by which the Qurʾān swears *al-ṣāffāt* and *al-zājirāt* (Q 37:1-2), as it swears by the stars and by a variety of other beings, both natural and preternatural.³¹

God instantiates His being as Spirit and as angel by a *glissando* of energy in different manifestations, a *glissando*, it needs to be noted, played across *our* categories of ontological classification, not those of seventh-century Arabia. The instantiations discussed here are corporeal, incorporeal, and subtle. The latter, commonly characteristic of the *jinn*, is both corporeal and incorporeal, straddling the visible and the invisible and inhabiting both, the distinction between the two being virtually meaningless to Arabians of the seventh century. This setting was well noted by St Augustine (354-430), who asserted in his exposition of Psalm 103 that the word 'angel' is the name of an office rather than a nature.³² Angelicalness designates a function and betokens a presence beyond the specific instance of any particular angel. It manifests those operations of God that can be, and have been, personified and individualised, all the while designating God himself by virtue of His command. This manifestation can appear, as it does in the Old Testament, as a pillar of cloud or a pillar of fire.³³

A systematic tally of the ways in which the notion of Spirit is used in the Qurʾān reveals a variety of senses, each of which is associated with a different stage of Muḥammad's ministry.³⁴ God blows His Spirit into the clay from which Adam

²⁹ Much later, by a reinvention or by the silent persistence of a motif and of a distinction, the Spirit, *al-Rūh*, is depicted in al-Qazwīnī's thirteenth-century cosmography as a separate angel, and indeed one of very exalted and particular status, some of his powers related by etymological association with his name, every breath of his becoming a soul; see: al-Qazwīnī: *ʿAjāʾib al-Makhlūqāt wa gharāʾib al-marʾijūdāt*, ed. Fārūq Saʿd, Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadida 1977, 90.

³⁰ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 323.

³¹ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 186, 326, 418, 439-440.

³² This view is a standard component of Catholic dogma: *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, London: Burns and Oates 1994, § 329.

³³ See the especially fine analysis of Thomas Hobbes, whose extraordinary exegetical gifts are not noted often enough: *Leviathan*, ed. Richard Tuck, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996, 274-276. For an analogous situation, cf. R. L. Gordon, "The Real and the Imaginary: Production and Religion in the Graeco-Roman World", in: *Art History* 2 (1979), 8-9, 12, 20.

³⁴ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 343-346.

was created. He blows His Spirit into Mary's parthenogenetic body. The Spirit is a mysterious matter of (*min amr*) God (Q 16:2, 17:87, 40:15) and is 'of' Him, *minhu* (Q 58:22). It creates by animation and the magical precipitation of effect, by contiguity or at a distance; it brings succour to His worshippers, and, crucially, brings forth inspiration and revelation. Other senses of the Spirit in the Qur'ān notwithstanding, we clearly have here a concept which conveys the transmission of divine substance by means of sublime energy, indeed the transmogrification of the former into the latter. This spirit straddles materiality and spirituality, the one serving as the double of the other, a conductive capacity which incorporates and transcends the less ample preternatural energies of the *jinn* and of the betylic Lords.

The Spirit, *rūḥ*, is a term the connotations of which evolved along with the history of the Qur'ān. It may also be regarded from the perspective of categorical uncertainty and ontological mutability discussed above. The Spirit's identification with Gabriel was only a late Qur'ānic personification of divine agency, simplifying categorisation and clearing out indeterminacy as it emphasises the divine transcendence that was connected with the older mythemetic repertoire of monotheistic religions. There are many passages from various periods that mention angels and the Spirit together (Q 70:4, 78:38, 97:4). The angels 'bring down' the Spirit (Q 16:1). Both might, like *mal'ak Yabruḥ*, be transient manifestations of God's energy, with a character that is fundamentally *jinnic*. The spirit may indeed become an angel in jinnic, transmogrifying aspect, as was the case with the Spirit sent to Mary, which appeared to her in human form (Q 19:7). The Holy Spirit brings forth Signs (Q 16:102), helps Jesus (Q 2:87, 253, 5:110), and God sends forth a Spirit from or of His Command (Q 16:2). The differentiation between Spirit and Command is not always clear, their categorical separation being introduced furtively, as the latter acquired the sense of a more literal, direct command by a distinct and intransitive deity in chronologically later parts of the Qur'ān.

Categorical distinctions in later passages are clearer; when the angels and the Spirit appear as a serried host, they speak only with the permission of al-Raḥmān (Q 78:38). But the two beings are distinct. The Spirit is clearly *of* God, sometimes figured angelically, and is often His metonymical personification. The Spirit, as both term and being, could productively be interpreted in the context of a magical conceptual infrastructure upon which the philosophical notion of hypostasis was based, a conceptual infrastructure that might underlie it mytho-poetically; it might be sublimated philosophically as hypostasis if conceived as a functional differentiation within divine activity. This tallies with the notion of 'procession' in the Nicene Creed, which has the Holy Spirit proceed from both Father and Son. The relationship is epiphanic. The Spirit is often a substantive projection of God, a numinous energy, and, as often in cases of epiphany, is subtended by an assumption of the indeterminate consistency of substance, allowing for associations with transmogrification and transfiguration. Like the Word in John 1:1, for instance, which 'was with God' and 'was God', the prepositions relating God and Spirit in

the Qurʾān betoken a metonymical and allegorical slippage of the referent in a play of identity and separation, in all cases indicating unity and continuity of action, readily prone to personification.

The continuity between God and “the Spirit of Him”, God and His Word, is conceived almost materially, just as transfiguration is understood materially, in terms of a plasticity of both substance and form, as a change of form and a diminution of plenitude. Between *al-rūḥ al-amīn* and *al-rasūl al-amīn*, the latter applying equally to God’s angel and to Muḥammad as well, is an agreement of attributes. Without implying that there might have been an identification between Muḥammad and Gabriel, it can be noted again that we are dealing here with an *imaginaire* in which boundaries between nature and the preternatural were not firm, and in which transfiguration was familiar to Paleo-Muslims.

Like the spirit blown into the clay out of which Adam was fashioned, and the spirit blown into Mary’s body whence Jesus came, the Spirit – and, by displacement, angels and other transfigurations of the divine as well – represents a translocation of divine presence, a dramatisation of contiguous magic acting across the scale of being.

Paleo-Muslim angels

Already in Paleo-Muslim circles there was a germ of the later categorical differentiation between angels and the Spirit, with the suggestion that individuation and personification might be possible. Angels are potentially at a distance from God, while the Spirit is continuous with Him, despite the possibility of the one shading into the other. This shading was later neutralised, with the reinterpretation of the Spirit as angelic and of angels as messengers, guards, servitors, worshippers, and, broadly, as agents of divine action. Angels came to be seen as intermediaries who carried out the commands of a divine being that both transcended them and created them. This relationship between higher and lower beings was part of the package of changes that transposed Allāh into the register of monotheism and the sort of cosmocratic and cosmogenic transcendence which had, by then, become the standard model in monotheistic territories ambient with Arabia. The ontological demotion and reconfiguration of angelicalness was, at the same time, correlated with the demotion of polytheistic deities to the status of phantasms.³⁵

It is difficult to interpret the status and the substance of angels in a definitive way, given the categorical indeterminacy sketched above, and doubtless Muḥammad’s various constituencies understood them differently. A full investigation of this very interesting issue would need to form part of a wider project to provide a historical-anthropological description of the complex, and at times obscure, Paleo-Muslim mythical landscape. We cannot assume that this landscape was uni-

³⁵ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 315-327.

form or see it as predetermined by its eventual evolution into the fully developed scheme of Muslim angelology. Nevertheless, it is possible to sketch briefly the image of angels as depicted in the Qurʾān, which was to become an important component in the later islamising elaboration of monotheistic angels.³⁶

Much of the time, angels appear as generic creatures, lacking individuality and indistinct from each other, although functional and individualising elements are sometimes added to this generic appearance. Thunder, after whom Q 13 is named, praises God (Q 13:13), who commands natural forces. Gabriel is mentioned three times in very late Qurʾānic texts. On one of these occasions, he is depicted as bringing inspiration to Muḥammad's heart (Q 2:97), taking over the communicative functions of the spirit in an emergent regime of categorical separation between God and God's manifestations, now ontologically separated from him and acting as His messengers or satraps. Gabriel appears again together with Michael without qualification, along with messengers (*rusul*) and unnamed angels (Q 2:98). On another occasion, Gabriel appears in connection with Muḥammad's domestic affairs (Q 66:4). Mālik – if the reading is correct – is called upon in vain by people in Hell who ask for his help (Q 43:77). Hārūt and Mārūt (Q 2:102), both obscure beings who were involved in magic, are sent with disorder and discord (*fitna*). That these two preternatural creatures were called angels rather than daemons or *jinn* probably came about by default as a result of the lack of elaborate categorical boundaries and likely reflects the looser Arab usage of 'angel' discussed above.

Angels take people away when the hour of their death arrives (Q 4:97) and are also appointed as the guardians of hell (Q 74:31). In addition to such commissions, angels minister to Him in two primary capacities. First, they act as scribes who register the deeds of men. Second, they serve as His host, carrying and surrounding His Throne in serried ranks (Q 39:75, 40:7), and guarding the gates of the heavens (Q 37:1-10, 54:11). They dwell in celestial heights, called *al-malāʾ al-ʿalā* by some or *ʿIlīyūn* by others, where they minister to God's wishes, on a royalist model of command. Angels, presciently predicting the lot of humankind, are also depicted as counselling God against designating Adam as His vicar on earth (Q 2:30).

Groups of angels are sent to assist Muḥammad and his companions in battle (Q 3:123f., 8:9, 9:26), in hosts of 300,000 and 500,000 (Q 3:123-125), sometimes visible to the humans involved and sometimes invisible (Q 9:26). At Q 33:9 God chastises unbelievers by dispatching furious winds – a ubiquitous motif in the Qurʾān – along with invisible soldiers. These soldiers serve to personify the force of the winds, often associated by the Arabs of the time with *jinn* – it is interesting to note here the comparable view that the Valkyries personified the Aurora Borealis. It is possible that the winds and the soldiers might stand metonymically

³⁶ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 338-339, 342-345.

for each other and that both might, with some mythological plausibility, be interpreted as angelic extensions of the divine. God also obliterated the people of Lot by bombarding them with deadly pellets that rained down from the sky. This account is given without further explication but one possible interpretation is to see this as an example of angelic action (Q 15:72). The Battle of the Elephant was also won by the raining down of deadly pellets from the sky. These were dropped by avian creatures (Q 15:74, 105:4) and angels have often been associated with birds.³⁷

One would expect that, as the categorical differentiation of angels from gods and other preternatural beings found its complement in their creaturely status, this differentiation would have been consolidated by mythematic elements acting to confirm the generic specificity of their nature. While angels are described as winged creatures (Q 35:1) and, on occasion, are defined in functional terms and individuated from one another, we have little further indication of their nature and substance.

The natures of the other categories of preternatural beings, by contrast, were much more clearly defined as they were differentiated in line with the evolving taxonomy of the preternatural. The *jinn* were beings of fire (Q 55:15), and indeed of a very Arabian fire, the scourging wind of *samūm* (Q 15:27). Satan declares himself to have been created of fire, superior to the clay that was Adam's substance (Q 7:13, 38:76). His appearance in the Qur'ān is far more individuated than that of the angels and his character is better rounded and drawn more clearly, although he does sometimes occur generically as well, in the plural or sub-categorised as *'ifrit* and *mārid* (Q 27:39, 37:7).³⁸ Both types of Satanic manifestation, the individual and the generic, were to be elaborated later into a profuse Muslim demonology that paralleled angelology and grew in tandem with the older *jinnology*.

Yet Satan's nature is itself an indication of the uncertain boundaries and categories of the Paleo-Muslim preternatural. Devils may well be the functionally opposed mirrors of angels. But as an obnoxious, fallen, and accursed angel, Satan must surely once have been forged from the same conceptual substance.

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³⁷ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 248, 325.

³⁸ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 340-341.

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“Panangelon”:

Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism

A Case Study Exploring Meteorological Angels in
Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik*

S. R. Burge (London)

Whilst the scriptural traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam have a fairly limited angelology, with only a few angels being named, this is not the case within the extra-scriptural literatures of these three religious traditions.¹ Jewish, Christian and Muslim sources all show a vastly expanded angelic world, in which angels are associated with a vast array of different phenomena and concepts.² There are three main ways of explaining the growth in angels. First *delegation*: the idea that an utterly transcendent God needs to delegate tasks to messengers from the divine realm, not only to provide communication, but to perform certain actions, and to observe the human realm.³ Second *exegesis*: some scholars, most notably Saul Olyan, argue that many (if not all) angels can be regarded as developing out of a process of exegesis;⁴ while this is an important element contributing to the development of the angelic world, its prevalence and its applicability in all or most cases can be questioned. Third *polytheism*: some scholars have related the

¹ See George H. Tavad, with A. Caquot and J. Michl, *Die Engel*, (Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, vol. 2, 2b), Freiburg: Herder 1968.

² For Jewish/Christian material see George A. Barton, “The Origin of the Names of Angels and Demons in the Extra-Canonical Apocalyptic Literature,” in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 31 (1912), 156-167. Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1-36, 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran*, Sheffield: JSOT Press 1992. For Muslim material see Miguel Asín Palacios, *Le Escatología musulmana en la Divina Commedia*, Madrid: Escuelas de Estudios Árabes de Madrid y Granada 1943; and S. R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik*, London: Routledge 2012.

³ This is related to the process of the hypostatization of divine qualities, cf. Helmut Ringgren, *Word and Wisdom: Studies in the Hypostatization of Divine Qualities and Functions in the Ancient Near East*, Lund: H. Ohlsson 1947. See also Avigdor Shinan, “The Angelology of the Palestinian Targums on the Pentateuch,” in: *Sefarad* 43 (1983), 181-198; G. G. Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God: Some Notes on Metatron and Christ,” in: *Harvard Theological Review* 76 (1983), 269-288. R. M. M. Tuschling, *Angels and Orthodoxy: A Study of their Development in Syria and Palestine from the Qumran Texts to Ephrem the Syrian*, Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 2007. James C. Vanderkam, “The Angel of the Presence in the Book of Jubilees,” in: *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7 (2000), 378-393. George Foot Moore, “Intermediaries in Jewish Theology: Memra, Shekina, Metatron,” in: *Harvard Theological Review* 15 (1922), 41-85.

⁴ Saul M. Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism*, Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1993. See also Moshe J. Bernstein, “Angels at the Aqedah: A Study in the Development of a Midrashic Motif,” in: *Dead Sea Discoveries* 7/3 (2000), 263-291.

angelic world within a monotheist context to earlier, less strictly monotheist religious beliefs; not necessarily polytheist *per se*, but certainly not a strict monotheist system; in the context of Islamic studies Jacques Chelhod is the most prominent exponent of this idea.⁵

These different approaches highlight a tension between the scriptural tradition and the reality of a highly populated and functioning angelic realm: on the one hand a 'developed' angelology appears to contradict the scriptural tradition in the sense that new angels are introduced; yet, on the other hand, a developed angelology often appears to be the product of the exegetical expansion of scripture, or at least theological belief rooted in scriptural statements. At the same time, however, some aspects of angelology appear to have much more in common with polytheistic pantheons and cosmologies. For example, in both the Jewish and Muslim traditions there are angels who are associated with meteorological phenomena, like Baraqiel (1 Enoch 6:7). Some of these meteorological angels have a function and are represented in a similar way to 'thunder gods' or 'storm gods', such as the Canaanite god Ba'al Hadad. The appropriation of polytheist iconography into angelology is not unknown, with the *ḥayyōt* seen in Ezekiel 1:5 and Revelation 4:7 (and beyond) being derived from Babylonian zoomorphic deities.⁶

The crux of the issue centres around the way in which the angelic world is conceived: is the angelic world developed from the 'top down' or from the 'bottom up': is a developed angelology a product of an utterly transcendent God, in which roles and actions are delegated to angelic bodies; or is a developed angelology a 'throw-back' to an earlier, polytheistic system which has undergone a process of monotheist revision? Or is it a product of both – in which case, how do we gain an understanding of what one form of angelology is? The basic hypothesis of this chapter is that, within an Islamic context, its developed angelology is a process of both: the theological monotheizing project of Islam clearly exerted an influence on Islamic angelology, but also in the development of angels as intermediaries. In a similar monotheizing process, angelology did also develop through exegesis. Yet, at the same time, an element of 'popular' Muslim beliefs about angels are

⁵ Jacques Chelhod, *Les structures du sacré chez les Arabes*, Paris: G.F. Maisonneuve et Larosse 1965; see also J. D. Jacques Waardenburg, "Changes of Belief in Spiritual Beings, Prophethood and the Rise of Islam," in: *Struggles of Gods: Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions*, Hans G. Kippenburg, ed., Berlin: Mouton 1984, 340-386. The case of early Christian angel-veneration is related to this; see Darrell D. Hannah, *Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angelic Christology in Early Christianity*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1999; and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John*, Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1995.

⁶ Martin Metzger, *Königsbron und Gottestron: Thronformen und Thronarstellungen in Ägypten und im Vorderen Orient im dritten und zweiten Jahrtausend vor Christus und deren Bedeutung für das Verständnis von Aussagen über den Thron im Alten Testament*, Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1985; David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, Tübingen: Mohr (Paul Siebeck) 1988, 41.

likely to have retained elements of pre-Islamic polytheist culture, which are subsequently Islamized to lesser or greater degrees.

In his *al-Ḥabāʾik fī akbbār al-malāʾik*,⁷ the late Mamlūk scholar and encyclopaedist Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505)⁸ refers to a number of different types of angels related to meteorological phenomena. The control of aspects of weather by angels is found in the Abrahamic traditions more broadly, for example, in *The Book of the Watchers* (1 Enoch 17-36), the angelic world is fully integrated with cosmological structures and phenomena. Maxwell Davidson comments:

Despite the formal difficulties with the list of angels in 1 Enoch 20, this chapter gives the same impression of a world under divine control. Each angel is responsible for some important matter... Cosmological phenomena such as thunder and the luminaries are cared for by Uriel and Raguel, while eschatological issues are superintended by others.⁹

Other examples can be seen in the *Testament of Adam* which describes the *archons* as controllers of the weather,¹⁰ the *Book of Jubilees* which associates angels with natural phenomena,¹¹ and in the Talmud, where Ridya is named as the angel responsible for rain.¹² Other traditions, such as Zoroastrianism, also establish a clear link between the control of natural phenomena and intermediary spiritual beings, so the concept of a meteorological angel or spiritual being is not rare or unknown.¹³ As will be seen later, the question of the nature of the superintendence is central to understanding what the role and function of the angel is, as well as its relationship to a latent polytheism. Concerning angelic control of such phenomena, Harold Kuhn comments:

These references indicate that the writers in question thought of angels as controlling intermediaries between God and the inanimate world; and further that they considered

⁷ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik fī akbbār al-malāʾik*, Muḥammad al-Saʿīd b. Basyūnī Zaghlūl, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 1408/1988; for a partial translation and analysis, see Burge, *Angels*, 114-174, 184-221.

⁸ For details about his life, see E. M. Sartain, *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī: Biography and Background*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1975; and Burge, *Angels*, 16-28.

⁹ Davidson, *Angels at Qumran*, 77. See also 3 Enoch which refers to the ‘princes who guide the world’, who are individual angels that control specific meteorological phenomena, such as fire (Gabriel), hail (Baradiʾēl), wind (Ruḥiʾēl), whirlwind (Zaʿamiʾēl). See 3 Enoch 14:4; P. Alexander (transl.), “3 (Hebrew) Enoch,” in: *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, James R. Charlesworth, ed., London: Darton, Longman and Todd 1983-1985, vol. 1, 223-215, 266-267.

¹⁰ *Testamentum Adam* 4:3; *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 995.

¹¹ *Jubilees* 2:2; *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, 55.

¹² B. Taʿanith 9b; see also Brigitte Kern-Ulmer, “Consistency and Change in Rabbinic Literature as Reflected in the Terms ‘Rain’ and ‘Dew,’” in: *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 26 (1995), 55-75; and Reuven Kiperwasser and Dan D.Y. Shapira, “Irano-Talmudica I: The Three-Legged Ass and *Ridyā* in B. Taʿanith: Some Observations about Mythic Hydrology in the Babylonian Talmud and in Ancient Iran,” in: *AJS Review* 32:1 (2008), 101-116.

¹³ The Aməša Spənta, Aməretāt, is associated with the bringing of rain; see Mary Boyce, *Zoroastrians: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*, new ed., London: Routledge 2001, 25.

them to be rather indistinct personifications of powers, rather than as clear cut personalities.¹⁴

This chapter aims to explore the extent to which meteorological angels do, or do not, remain as ‘indistinct personifications of powers, rather than as clear cut personalities’. The position of angels as possessing devolved power, as opposed to individual control, is in contrast to the power wielded by the meteorological gods of other Semitic religions.¹⁵ So this chapter will analyse a selection of Muslim traditions about meteorological angels in light of storm gods in Near Eastern religion to evaluate the relationship between the angels and God, exploring the extent to which these (meteorological) angels represent a latent polytheism, created by the cosmological void left by the removal of the Arabian pantheon of gods,¹⁶ and the emergence of a single, transcendent God. Can the development of a pantheon of angels – perhaps a *panangelon* – really be considered as the result of the theological and exegetical expansion of scripture, and is a developed angelology a necessary consequence of a strict monotheism?

The Guardian of the Wind

The Guardian or Guardians of the Winds (*khazanat al-riḥ*)¹⁷ are the angels that unleash the storms of punishment on the people of Hūd at ‘Ād and the people of Ṣāliḥ at Thāmuḍ. The stories of these two Arabian prophets and their peoples appear in the Qurʾān,¹⁸ and were developed greatly in the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* literature. Al-Suyūṭī includes the following *ḥadīth* in his collection:

The wind is imprisoned in the second earth. When God willed that ‘Ād should be destroyed, He commanded the Guardian of the Wind that a wind should be sent upon them, which would destroy the city of ‘Ād. The Guardian of the Wind said: ‘Lord,

¹⁴ Harold B. Kuhn, “The Angelology of the Non-Canonical Jewish Apocalypses,” in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948), 217-232, here: 226.

¹⁵ Alberto R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East*, Winona Lake: Eisenbaums, 2007; Daniel Schwemer, “The Storm-gods of the Ancient Near East: Summary, Synthesis, Recent Studies,” in: *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions* 7/2 (2007), 121-68 and 8/1 (2008), 1-44.

¹⁶ Jacques Ryckmans, “Le panthéon de l’Arabie du Sud pré-Islamique: Etat des problèmes et brève synthèse,” in: *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 206 (1989), 151-169; Aziz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013, 164-278.

¹⁷ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Habāʾik*, 114-116, §423-439; a summary of the *ḥadīth* can be found at Burge, *Angels*, 193-194.

¹⁸ For accounts of Hūd, see Q 7:64-71; 11:53-84; 26:124-140; for accounts of Ṣāliḥ, see Q 7:72-78; 11:63-72; and 26:142-158. For a discussion of the punishment stories in the Qurʾān, see Alford T. Welch, “Formulaic Features of the Punishment-Stories,” in: *Literary Structures of Religious Meaning in the Qurʾān*, Issa J. Boullata, ed., Richmond: Curzon 2000, 77-116; and Brannon Wheeler, “Arab Prophets of the Qurʾān and Bible,” in: *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 8/2 (2006), 24-57.

should I send a wind as strong as a bull blowing through its nostril?' He, the Omnipotent and Almighty, said to Him, 'No. Do it so the earth will be turned over and whoever is on it, because I will send it upon them, as strong as a signet ring.'¹⁹

The idea that God has control of the winds is extremely common in the Near East, and it is not simply a characteristic of a 'storm God'. Schwemer cites the example of the Sumerian god Enki, who also destroys with wind and storm without being a specific storm god;²⁰ and numerous examples can also be found in the Bible of God utilising wind as a destructive force.²¹ In this case, the Guardian of the Wind does not appear to be a 'remnant' of any older specific storm god that was part of an earlier polytheist system, but rather, the Guardian of the Wind can be regarded as an angel with delegated authority: the Guardian is simply responsible for opening and closing the gates that hold the wind within the Second Earth.²² The Guardian, or in some accounts Guardians, have no individual personality or characteristics and he or they actually play a very minor role in the narrative itself, both in this example and in accounts of the same story in other works, such as al-Tha'labī's *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*.²³

The reference to the wind being as 'strong as bull's nostril' is, however, reminiscent of the association between many storm-gods with bulls, such as Haddu and Ba'al. Alberto Green indicates a number of zoomorphic images for storm gods, including: a bull, a dragon, a roaring lion, and a giant lion-headed eagle, but the bull is the most common motif.²⁴ In the ancient Near East the bull was also associated with the harvest, so a link with a bull and its attendant fertiliser,²⁵ along with the rains that the storm god brought, is important.²⁶ It is possible, then, that the reference to the bull in this *ḥadīth* is a remembrance of, or allusion to, earlier mythic associations between the storm and the bull.²⁷ The bull is sometimes used in Islamic poetry to describe rage and anger,²⁸ but more generally bulls feature relatively little in Muslim imagination, and are not mentioned in the Qur'an

¹⁹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā'ik*, 114-115, §423 [my own translation].

²⁰ Schwemer, "Storm-gods" (2007), 126-127.

²¹ There are many studies on wind in the Bible; see Alex Luc, "Storm and the Message of Job," in: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25 (2000), 111-123; Steve A. Wiggins, "Tempestuous Wind Doing YHWH's Will: Perceptions of wind in the Psalms," in: *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology* 13/1 (1999), 3-23; and Jill Middlemas, "The Violent Storm in Lamentations," in: *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 29 (2004), 81-97.

²² The idea of 'flood-gates' can also be seen in *Jubilees* 5:24.

²³ al-Tha'labī (transl. William M. Brinner), *Arā'is al-majālis fi qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā' or "Lives of the Prophets,"* Leiden: Brill 2002, 109.

²⁴ Green, *Storm-God*, 13.

²⁵ Green, *Storm-God*, 79.

²⁶ Green, *Storm-God*, 18.

²⁷ Schwemer, "Storm-gods," (2007), 159-60.

²⁸ E.g. al-Nābigha al-Dhubayāni, *Madḥ al-Malik al-Nu'mān Abi Qābūs*; see: *Qasida Poetry in Islamic Africa and Asia*, vol. 2, *Eulogy's Bounty, Meaning's Abundance. An Anthology*, Stefan Sperl and Christopher Shackle, eds., Leiden: Brill 1996, 72-75.

(cows and cattle do, however), or in the *ḥadīth* literature very often.²⁹ However, caution should be taken in attempting to establish a direct link between the Guardian(s) of the Wind and other Ancient Near Eastern storm-gods, as there are notable differences, such as the inclusion of *Guardians* in the plural, which contrasts with the single storm deities seen in Ancient Near Eastern religions.³⁰

The most important comment to make about the Guardian of the Wind is that the angel is highly functional and only appears in instances of destruction, and only when God has decreed that that should happen. The angels have very little personality and independence and are entirely *functional*. This suggests that these angels are developed out of exegesis and/or a sense of divine delegation. There may be some elements (such as the bull motif) that hark back to an earlier mythology and symbolism but the Guardian of the Wind does not appear to be any kind of angelized Ancient Near Eastern storm-god.

The Angels of Rainfall

The functionality of the Guardians of the Wind is also seen in the unnamed angels that keep a record of where rain falls. For example, al-Suyūṭī includes a number of *ḥadīth* similar to this:

I heard that He sends down with the rain such and such from the angels, more numerous than the sons of the Adam and the sons of Iblis. The angels record every raindrop, where it falls and who is sustained by that plant.³¹

These angels, although clearly related to clouds and rainfall have no personality and, like the Guardian of the Wind, are purely functional. Their behaviour and their role is related to the Qurʾānic notion of *rizq* ('sustenance'): the angels are not bringing the rain down itself, but are keeping a record of which plants are nourished by it, but also which people are then nourished by the plant. These traditions about the recording of raindrops help us to see the fullness of the depiction of some of the other angels, and suggests that they have very different 'histories' as ways of looking at angels and their place in the cosmos. These angels are highly exegetical and are an embellishment on the theological idea of divine sustenance which permeates the Qurʾān and Islamic perceptions of God's creative power and beneficence.³²

²⁹ Sarah Tlili, *Animals in the Qurʾan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, 260; see also Richard C. Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures*, Oxford: Oneworld 2006.

³⁰ Cf. the methodological concerns raised concerning the comparison of the Bible with Ancient Near Eastern sources in Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81/1 (1962), 1-13.

³¹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik*, 14, §19; Burge, *Angels*, 116 (with some modifications).

³² D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam: Exégèse lexicographique et théologique*, Paris: Éditions du Cerf 1988, 397-400.

The Angel of the Clouds

The lack of definite attributes, description and independent activity seen in the traditions about the Guardian of the Wind and the Angels of the Rain is not witnessed in the traditions about the Angel of the Clouds (*malak al-sahāb*). This angel is given a physical description, and is also given different names. In one *ḥadīth* the angel is given the name Rūfil;³³ this theophoric name appears to be derived from the angel Raphael, although there is no conceptual link between the Jewish-Christian Raphael and the angel Rūfil.³⁴ Another *ḥadīth* states that ‘thunder is an angel’ (*al-raʿd^u malak^u*); this does not appear to be a name *per se* but the identification of an angel with an abstract concept has much in common with many Near Eastern storm gods, such as the Akkadian god Hadad.³⁵ However some of the *ḥadīth* take the words *al-Raʿd* (‘thunder’) and *al-Barq* (‘lightning’) as specific names:

Ibn ʿAbbās said: Some Jews approached the Messenger of God, and said: ‘Tell us about this Thunder.’ He said: ‘It [or *he*] is one of God’s angels, responsible for the clouds. In his hand is a whip of fire, with which he drives the clouds. He drives on the clouds when God commands him.’ What is this sound which we can hear?’ He said: ‘His voice.’ They said, ‘You are right.’³⁶

Another states directly that it is a name:

Thunder is one of the angels. His name is al-Raʿd (Thunder), and it is his voice which you hear, and lightning is a whip of fire which the Angel uses to drive back the clouds.³⁷

The use of abstract titles for the names of deities were known in Arabia: Allāt (‘the Goddess’), al-ʿUzza (‘The Mighty One’) and Manāt (‘Fate’) are the obvious examples.³⁸ In contrast, it is a relatively rare way of naming angels in the Judeo-Christian tradition; although abstract names are not unknown, there is a stronger preference for theophoric nomenclature or names derived from functions.³⁹

Regardless of whether the Angel of the Clouds (*malak al-sahāb*) is called Rūfil or the abstract al-Raʿd, the angel often has a greater sense of personality than the Guardian(s) of the Winds, with more personal characteristics, attributes, and accoutrements. A number of *ḥadīth* describe the angel in a way similar to this: ‘Thunder is an angel who drives the clouds by saying the *tasbīḥ*, just like the camel-driver with his calling.’⁴⁰ This image of the Angel of the Clouds acting as some

³³ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik*, 76, §266; Burge, *Angels*, 187.

³⁴ See Burge, *Angels*, 34-38.

³⁵ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik*, 75, §258; Burge, *Angels*, 186.

³⁶ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik*, 75, §257; Burge, *Angels*, 186.

³⁷ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik*, 76, §261; Burge, *Angels*, 186.

³⁸ al-Azmeh, *Emergence*, 173-182.

³⁹ See Burge, *Angels*, 43-48.

⁴⁰ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik*, 75, §259; Burge, *Angels*, 186.

kind of ‘cloud herdsmen’ is also seen in images of cloud or rain gods found in Near Eastern religion, such as the Sumerian god Ishkur (Akkadian: Adad).⁴¹ However, these motifs associated with the Angel of the Clouds are closely identified with specific phenomena, and to a certain extent the actions of the angel explain how clouds move, what thunder is, and what lightning is. In this context the appearance and motifs are highly aetiological of meteorological phenomena.

In the Ancient Near East, the most common association with clouds is that of destruction: clouds mark the coming of a violent storm and the storm-god is the one who drives and directs that storm to a specific place. Clouds, however, are not simply maleficent vehicles of destruction, but provide the rain necessary for life. In Greek religion, one of Zeus’ titles is ‘cloud-gatherer’.⁴² This view of clouds and rain is found in the Bible and Near Eastern sources, and it is this role that the Angel of the Clouds takes.

Although some of the *ḥadīth* distance the angel from God, the angel still remains functional; but this functionality is also accompanied by information that gives the angel character and enables the angel to be imagined. This distinction between a functional and imagined angel is extremely important, since it creates a very different understanding of what angels are, what their purpose is, and how independent they are of God. It is interesting to note that in the *ḥadīth* about the Angel of the Clouds, God is not always present.⁴³ In the case of the Guardian of the Wind, God was central to the conception of the angel: it was God who commanded the winds to blow, the Guardian simply made it happen in the physical sense. The *ḥadīth* about the Angel of the Clouds appear to be mixed, with some of the *ḥadīth* describing an angel that is more autonomous, almost acting on his own, and others establishing a link between the angel’s movements and the divine decree.

The characterisation of the Angel of the Clouds is quite different to the presentation of Baraqiel in 3 Enoch 14:4, a work which dates to just before the advent of Islam. In the Enochic literature, Baraqiel is one of the watchers, or fallen angels, and Baraqiel is said to have introduced the art of astrology – an association that is also attributed to the Babylonian storm-god Adad.⁴⁴ Although they are linked to the same meteorological phenomenon (lightning) the Angel of the Clouds and Baraqiel are completely different in personality and function: the Angel of the Clouds has no association at all with astrology, nor is the Angel of the Clouds a

⁴¹ Green, *Storm-God*, 79.

⁴² ‘*nephelēgeretēs*’; see Moshe Weinfeld, “Rider of the Clouds’ and ‘Gatherer of the Clouds,’” in: *Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1973), 421-426.

⁴³ §§258-261, 263-265, 267; only §§265, 262 and 266 mention or allude to God; see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā’ik*, 75-77; Burge, *Angels*, 186-187.

⁴⁴ Schwemer, “Storm-gods” (2007), 150. In the Qur’ān, the introduction of astrology is attributed to the fallen angels Hārūt and Mārūt (Q. 2:102); cf. Richard Bauckham, “The Fall of the Angels as a Source of Philosophy in Hermias and Clement of Alexandria,” in: *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985), 313-330.

fallen, rebellious angel. The Muslim Angel of the Clouds, particularly the way in which he is described has more in common with the storm-god of the Ancient Near Eastern religion. The storm-god Hadad is also described, as moving the clouds around using his whip as a scourge.⁴⁵ Joseph Blenkinsop describes Hadad in this way:

Hadad bestows the fertilizing rain, but is feared as the bringer of destructive storms. He is also known as ‘the Thunderer’ (*rammānu*, Rimmon), and is represented wearing a horned headdress and bearing a stylised lightning bolt and either a mace or whip.⁴⁶

Given the reference to thunder and lightning, it may be that the Angel of the Clouds could be considered as the Angel of the Storm-Clouds.

The nature of lightning makes an association with a whip relatively straightforward, so it does not follow that the Angel of the Clouds necessarily developed out of any ancient Near Eastern figure, such as Hadad. However, the characterisation of the angel does have, at the very least, a number of elements in common with Near Eastern mythology. Whereas the Guardian of the Wind is purely functional and acts on the command of God, the Angel of the Cloud appears to be more independent as a figure, which suggests that it is continuing an older mythic motif to describe thunder and lightning, albeit one that is harmonised with the Muslim worldview. This Islamisation of the angel can be seen in the references to God commanding the angel to move the clouds, and in the statements, seen above, that the angel used the *tasbīh* to drive the clouds through the sky.

The Angel of the Rain

The chapter in al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Ḥabā’ik* devoted to the Angel of the Rain (*malak al-qaṭr*)⁴⁷ illustrates a further difficulty with Islamic angelology. Since *ḥadīth* can comprise a wide number of different genres: exegetical, apocalyptic, linguistic, and so on, the *ḥadīth* corpus can contain *matns* from different genre traditions. The two opening *ḥadīth* in this chapter relate an account of the *Angel of the Rain* coming to the Prophet Muḥammad and showing him a vision of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom.⁴⁸

The Angel of the Lord sought permission from his Lord to visit the Prophet, and permission was given to him when Umm Salama was there. The Prophet said to Umm Salama, ‘Hold the door! Do not let anyone come into us.’ While she was at the door, al-Ḥusayn entered, rushing and jumping up to the Messenger of God, and the Prophet kissed him

⁴⁵ Cf. Joanna Töyräänvuori, “Weapons of the Storm God in Ancient Near Eastern and Biblical Traditions,” in: *Studia Orientalia* 112 (2012), 147-180.

⁴⁶ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Judah’s Covenant with Death (Isaiah XXVIII 14-22),” in: *Vetus Testamentum* 50:4 (2000), 472-486, here: 478.

⁴⁷ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā’ik*, 53-55, §172-177; Burge, *Angels*, 184-185.

⁴⁸ See also, Mahmoud M. Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering in Islam*, The Hague: Mouton 1976, 76-77.

and embraced him. The Angel of the Rain said to him, 'Do you love him?' He said, 'Yes.' The Angel said, 'Your community will kill him. If you want, I can show you the place where he will be killed.' So he showed him, and he brought some sand and red earth, and Umm Salama took it, and she put it into her dress.⁴⁹

The story seems to have very little to do with rain. The next *ḥadīth* retells the story of Abraham in the Fire and the angel brings down rain to protect him.⁵⁰ The following two *ḥadīth* are related to the Angel of the Clouds. The first is a prophetic *ḥadīth*:

A cloud covered [us], when we wanted it to; and the Messenger of God said: 'The angel, which drives the clouds, has come to me previously and he greeted me, and mentioned that he drove them to a valley in Yemen.' It is said he has a rope.⁵¹

The next is an extended, folktale-like narrative *ḥadīth* given on the authority of the Prophet about a man following a cloud as it waters someone's land:

There was once a man who was in the countryside, who heard thunder in the clouds, and he [also] heard a voice coming from within them [say], "Water the gardens of so-and-so!" Then those clouds came to some dry land, and it emptied the water that was in it. Then it came to the head of a spring on the dry land and came to a stop at the spring, and took up the water. The man walked with the clouds until he came to a man standing in the garden, watering it. The man said, 'Servant of God, what is your name?' He said, 'Why do you ask?' He said, 'I heard [a voice] in the clouds which brought this water, [say] "Water the gardens of so-and-so!", using your name. What would you do if you were cut off from it?' He said, 'As for what you have said concerning that, I divide it into three thirds: a third is for me and my family, a third I give back, and a third I give to the poor, those in need, and the traveller.'⁵²

This folkloric tale is focused on the actions of the man who gives a third of what he produces to the poor, but it is interesting for the fact that there is no reference to God at all within the story. The voice in the clouds appears to direct where the rain should fall, rather than acting as some kind of intermediary. However, it is necessary to accept that the lack of divine influence may simply be a result of the focus on the man's actions, rather than a statement about the angel itself.

The last *ḥadīth* in the chapter returns to the story of Abraham in the Fire. There is some unity in the chapter on the Angel of the Rain in the fact that the angel brings and is associated with rain (except in the vision of Ḥusayn's death at Karbalā'). This chapter is intriguing because it appears to include *ḥadīth* about angels that emerge from different traditions. Like the Guardian of the Winds, the angel's role in the story of Abraham in the Fire of Nimrod suggests an exegetical influence. The two *ḥadīth* that present an angel that is similar in description and func-

⁴⁹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā'ik*, 53, §172; Burge, *Angels*, 184 (with some modifications).

⁵⁰ Q 21: 51-75, especially 66-70.

⁵¹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā'ik*, 54, §175; Burge, *Angels*, 185.

⁵² A similar story appears in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, K. *al-Zuhd wa'l-raqā'iq*, Istanbul: al-Maṭba'at al-'Amira fi Dār al-Khilāfa al-'Aliyya, 1330-1334/1912-1916, vol. 8, 222-223 *Bāb al-ṣadaqa fi al-masākin*, §55:4:1.

tion to the *Angel of the Clouds* appear to be associated with an older mythological or folkloric tradition; there is a disassociation from God and a degree of independence for the angel, not seen in many other examples.

The first two *ḥadīth* predicting the death of Ḥusayn are harder to relate to the *malak al-qatr* (the Angel of the Rain). This is a relatively common *ḥadīth*, and sometimes the angel is given as Gabriel.⁵³ The fact that the Angel of the Rain, an angel that brings water, appears in the context of the thirst of Ḥusayn and those who were with him, adds even more poignancy to the account.⁵⁴ The association of this story with the Angel of the Rain may also be an allusion to the community’s tears shed for Ḥusayn, or the dropping of his blood.⁵⁵ This slightly strange chapter brings together a number of different *ḥadīth* under the auspices of the ‘Angel of the Rain’, but these appear to develop out of a number of different, and seemingly independent, traditions.

The Angel of the Sun

The Sun, with its obvious importance within human life has been associated with a number of deities, and also with angels in monotheist contexts. Al-Suyūṭī includes a description of the Angel of the Sun (*malak al-shams*) alongside a group of angels who are responsible for keeping the sun cool. One of the *ḥadīth* states that “the sun does not rise until three hundred and sixty angels urge it on, who detest those who worship things other than God.”⁵⁶ This has something in common with the description of the Sun in 3 Baruch, which describes the Sun being pulled through the sky by a team of angels like a chariot, after which 365 doors are opened revealing the light of day.⁵⁷

The parallel with 3 Baruch is continued in the *ḥadīth* that follows which states that “seven angels are responsible for the sun. They throw snow at it every day. If they were not to do that, nothing would exist without it being set on fire.”⁵⁸ 3 Baruch describes the role of a celestial being known as the ‘Guardian of the World’ (3 Bar 6: 3-4) who shields the earth from the heat of the sun, and “if he

⁵³ Ayoub, *Redemptive Suffering*, 76-77.

⁵⁴ The juxtaposition of tears and thirst is common themes in Shi‘ī commemorations of Ḥusayn’s martyrdom; see Khalid Sindawi, “The Image of Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī in ‘Muqātil’ Literature,” in: *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 20/21 (2002-2003), 79-104.

⁵⁵ *qatr* is refers to ‘drops of liquid’ rather than rain specifically; see E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society 1984, vol. 2, 2542 [Reprint London 1863-1893].

⁵⁶ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā’ik*, 116, §431; Burge, *Angels*, 194.

⁵⁷ 3 Baruch 6:1-2; *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 668 (Slavonic Text) and 669 (Greek Text).

⁵⁸ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā’ik*, 116, §432; Burge, *Angels*, 194.

did not hide the rays of the sun, the human race and every creature on earth would not survive because of the flames of the sun.”⁵⁹ This passage is often interpreted as a metaphor of the divine presence, in which case the angel fulfils a similar role to the angel Metatron (Ar. Miṭāṭrūsh).⁶⁰ The Phoenix, and its association with sun, was a common motif in both Christian and pagan religion, with the Phoenix originating in Egyptian religion;⁶¹ this could imply that the angels related to the sun are maintaining this older mythic imagery.

Al-Suyūṭī does include one *ḥadīth* with slightly heterodox theology, which may indicate a link to a polytheist history for the *ḥadīth*. It reads:

A man prayed to the Angel of Sun, and he continued for a period of time until the Angel of the Sun came to him, and said, ‘What do you want from your prayers?’ He said, ‘I have been told that you are the noblest of the angels and the closest of the angels to the Angel of Death, so I sought your intercession for me from him.’⁶²

The idea of seeking intercession (*shafāʿa*) from angels is not common or widely accepted. The brevity of the *ḥadīth* and the lack of a wider context can only lead to conjecture, but such a belief in the intercession of the Angel of the Sun to escape death is reminiscent of the relationship between the Egyptian sun god Osiris and death and rebirth.⁶³ This, alongside the imagery of the Phoenix, seems to suggest that the Angel of the Sun is related to older mythic ideas concerning the sun, rather than functioning as a vehicle for the development of a theological idea or an exegetical development of the Qurʾān.

‘Panangelon’: the ‘pantheon’ of angels

Although the material from al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Habāʾik fi akhbār al-malāʾik* only represents a very small part of the wide body of traditions relating to angels, it does, nevertheless, illustrate that traditions about angels take wildly different forms and appear to have quite different ‘histories’. Whilst Olyan’s argument that exegesis is an extremely important element of Jewish angelology, and by extension in other scriptural traditions too, there still remains an element of older mythic material that appears to be linked to Near Eastern religious traditions. Just looking at *ḥadīth* which describe the association of angels with meteorological phenomena, there are traditions which appear to describe a theologico-exegetical use of angels. In this case, the angels are highly functional and have little personality

⁵⁹ 3 Baruch 6:6; *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 668 (Slavonic Text) and 669 (Greek Text); named as the Phoenix in 3 Baruch 6:10, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, 670 (Slavonic Text) and 671 (Greek Text).

⁶⁰ Burge, *Angels*, 103.

⁶¹ John Spencer Hill, “The Phoenix,” in: *Religion and Literature* 16 (1984), 61-66.

⁶² al-Suyūṭī, *al-Habāʾik*, 116, §430; Burge, *Angels*, 194.

⁶³ Jon Davies, *Death, Burial and Rebirth in the Religions of Late Antiquity: Religion in the First Christian Centuries*, London: Routledge 1999, 30-31.

and characterization, giving support to Olyan’s thesis in the context of Islam and the Qurʾān. However, there are also plenty of cases in which the angels appear to carry links to a more ancient mythological tradition. These angels are highly characterised and appear to act on their own impulse, almost independent of the divine decree – something which is usually emphasised (if not over emphasised) in *ḥadīth* about angels fulfilling a functional role.

Considering angelology more widely, as the angelic world grows there is a development of something akin to a pantheon of angels (in the Christian context this is linked more with saints rather than angels),⁶⁴ in which angels become ‘responsible’ for specific phenomena within the cosmos. Can this expansion really be attributed solely to the exegetical development of scripture? This seems unlikely. As God becomes viewed as being increasingly transcendent there is an element of *delegation* which can be seen as a ‘top down’ development; but other angels seem to be the product of a ‘bottom up’ development – a throwback to an earlier period. Quite why this should happen is difficult to establish with certainty, but it may represent two simultaneous movements: a theological monotheizing agenda advocated and developed by academic elites, alongside the maintenance of more popular religious beliefs. In an Islamic context, the *ḥadīth* literature easily encompasses both of these angelological and theological aspects. Above all, it is necessary to regard traditions about angels in Islam as being incredibly fluid, and the product of a ‘mixed economy’: angels are both the product of exegesis, but also a process of monotheizing older, latent mythic traditions. These two trends are clearly evident in the *ḥadīth* about meteorological angels found in al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Ḥabāʾik*.

Is making a distinction between these types of angelological material helpful? Appreciating the ‘history’ of a tradition about an angel, whether one is dealing with the Muslim, Christian or Jewish sources, particularly gaining an understanding of whether it represents an older mythic idea or whether a text is dealing with an angel that has been given responsibility or oversight over something, enables a deeper insight into the theology behind the tradition. It can reveal nuances that might not otherwise have been seen. For example, the emphasis on the angels that watch the rain fall is not on the angels, but on the sustenance (*rizq*) that God provides through that rainfall – the impersonality of the angel is important because the role of God is central, not the angels. Similarly, the personality of the Angel of the Rain that predicts the death of Ḥusayn at Karbalāʾ allows the emotional impact of the story to come to the fore. The more mythic elements within the *ḥadīth* about angels also allow us to gain an insight into the world of popular religious beliefs: certain imagery and forms appear to have maintained traction in the move from the late-ancient to the Muslim world.

⁶⁴ Cf. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1981, 1-22.

As many scholars have noted, beliefs and images of angels are fluid and adapt to their theological context;⁶⁵ whereas beliefs and imagery of God are more rigid, angels, as creatures of the unknown world, are extremely malleable and also prone to the fantastical.⁶⁶ Traditions and images of angels appear to envelop a wide range of different sources: within the ‘pantheon of angels’ exegesis is certainly a significant generator of angels, but there is also a number of angels that represent a link, development, or continuation of much older beliefs, some of which appear to have their ultimate origins in Ancient Near Eastern religions. This is not to suggest, in any way, that Muslim beliefs in angels are rooted in polytheism – the picture is much more complex – but rather, the angelic world has a fluid history that bears witness to competing elements from those held in popular religion to those advocated by scholarly elites. It also bears witness to the process and fluidity of the cross-cultural exchange in beliefs and imagery in Near East.⁶⁷ This makes for a complex world, but one which is all the more interesting to study.

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⁶⁵ Burge, *Angels*, 177-183; Toufic Fahd, “Anges, démons et djinns en Islam,” in: *Génies, Anges et Démon: Égypte, Babylone, Israël, Islam, Peuples Altaïques, Inde, Birmanie, Asie du Sud-Est, Tibet, Chine*, D. Meeks, ed., Paris: Mouton 1971, 155-213,155; and Tavard et. al., *Engel*, 1.

⁶⁶ See also Peter Webb, “The Familiar and the Fantastic in Narratives of Muḥammad’s Ascension to the Heavenly Spheres,” in: *Middle Eastern Literatures* 15 (2012), 240-256.

⁶⁷ See also S. R. Burge, “Z’R’L, The Angel of Death and the Ethiopic *Apocalypse of Peter*,” in: *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 19 (2010), 217-224; and S. R. Burge, “Islamic,” in: *The Bible in Folklore Worldwide*, vol. 1, *A Handbook of the Bible and Its Reception in Jewish, European Christian, and Islamic Folklores*, Eric Ziolkowski, ed., Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017, 307-330.

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Part II:
Nature, Substance and Significance of Angels
in Monotheistic Traditions

The Primordial Cycle Revisited: Adam, Eve, and the Celestial Beings

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According to the cosmogonic narrative in the Qurʾān, human life began with the creation of Adam and his mate, an event which is central for understanding the pivotal role of angels (*malāʾika*)¹ in Islam. This chapter will revisit the primordial cycle of stories that relate the position of humankind to that of the celestial beings, including Iblis and the serpent in Paradise, in the attendant typologies of the Qurʾānic narratives. These stories are part of an extended nexus of sacred events which appear in the context of the mythic repertoire of the monotheist scriptures, their extra-scriptural literatures, and folk-religious belief. Of special interest here are the visual depictions of these accounts, which incorporate and adapt a number of motifs and themes from the greater Islamic world. Miniatures from Islamic manuscripts dating from the late fourteenth to the early 17th century provide us with illustrations for some of the stories and reflect the interpretive lore surrounding these Qurʾānic narratives as it is elaborated in the genres of *taʾrikh* (*History*), the oral legendary traditions of the storytellers and itinerant preachers recorded in the *Qisṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (*Tales of the Prophets*), and Sufi poetry. Attention is paid to the reciprocal relation between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literary cultures within the Islamic realm. These visual sources also reflect, and afford an insight into, a liberal borrowing of legends from earlier Jewish and Christian traditions and, thus, enrich the dynamics of the core events of the narratives.

God's dramatic final creative act takes centre stage in the Sūrat al-Hijr. Here God makes the body of man (*basbar*)² from earth-like clay and gives it life by breathing into it some of His own spirit (*ruh*) (Q 15:26-29; cf. 38:71-72). The jealousy of the angels had been roused prior to Adam's creation. As in the Talmudic exegesis of Genesis 1:2, God had declared to them his plan but they counselled against this potentially disobedient and sinful creation and offered reasons why God should not fashion humankind (Q 2:28-31; 15:28-38). The angels, spirits created of fire (*nār*) and "cold light" (*nūr*), thus reflecting the immateriality of God and expressing His divine glory, cried out in protest.³ They said, "How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed when we celebrate Your

¹ Terms in parentheses are Arabic unless otherwise specified.

² Adam is not named in the two earliest and longest Qurʾānic accounts found in *surās* 38 and 15; he is first identified by his Arabic name Ādam in Q 20:115-6. The latter was, of course, transferred from the Hebrew and other Semitic languages. See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* [1938], second edition, Leiden: Brill 2007, 50-51.

³ This notion can also be found in the Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Sanhedrin* 38a-b and *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshit Rabbā*) 8:1.

praise and proclaim Your holiness?’ But He said, ‘I know things you do not’” (Q 2:30).⁴ God then announced His intention to appoint the man as His *khalīfa*, that is His ‘successor’ (Q 2:30) or ‘trustee’ (Q 6:165; 7:129) on earth.⁵ Ibn ‘Abbās’ (d. 68/687-688), the Prophet Muḥammad’s paternal cousin, is said to have explained that God named him Adam because He created him from the skin (i.e. surface) (*adīm*) of the earth.⁶

Adam’s presentation to the angels in Paradise is portrayed in an illustration from a manuscript of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mantiq al-ṭayr* (*The Conference of the Birds or Speech of the Birds*) produced in 899/1494 in Shiraz, Iran (Fig. 1). The father of humanity and first prophet of Islam is depicted here in his glory. Ibn ‘Abbās’ interpretation is that God, “after having created Adam, took out of his loins all the spirits that He was about to create till the day of resurrection; He then made them bear witness that He was their Lord.”⁷ Hence, the spirits recognised God’s lordship prior to the creation of their bodies. Some of these primordial entities are said to have been invested with primordial light, which God created before all other things, including heaven and earth. The gift of prophecy was bestowed upon Adam immediately after his creation. According to the mystical tradition, this manifested itself in him as the pre-existent ‘light’, *nūr Muḥammadi*, a sign of special transcendence associated with Muḥammad’s prophethood.⁸

This prophetic light was believed to be God’s first emanation and the instrument of all the subsequent creation that began on the Day of the Covenant. As Muḥammad’s primogenitor, Adam was the first to have light on his forehead “like the moon on the night of a full moon.”⁹ This conception was elaborated upon by the 9th-century Islamic mystic Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), who spoke of the essence of Muḥammad as “a column of light,” a single and transcendent illumina-

⁴ All quotations from the Qur’ān in this chapter are drawn from the translation of M. A. S. Abdel-Haleem, *The Qur’an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004.

⁵ See Q 33:72. For discussions regarding the possible meanings of the designation *khalīfa*, see Meir J. Kister, “Ādam: A Study of Some Legends in *tafsir* and *ḥadīth* Literature,” in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 113-174, esp. 115-132.

⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh al-rusul wa l-mulūk*, ed. and transl. Franz Rosenthal, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, vol. 1, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1989, 259-260.

⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsir*, vol. 9, 75, cited after Uri Rubin, “Pre-Existence and Light – Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad,” in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), 67-68.

⁸ The mention of shining and light is of particular significance for the Shī‘ī tradition and for the concept of the light of Muḥammad (*nūr muḥammadi*), which was in Adam and transmitted from him to his progeny, and then through the generations to ‘Alī. See Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muḥammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*, Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press 1995, 37, and Rubin, “Pre-Existence,” 96-97, 62-119. See Johannes Pedersen, “Ādam,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EP*). Accessed 26 March 2018; and Roberto Tottoli, “Ādam,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition (*EP*³). Accessed 26 March 2018.

⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rīkh*, vol. 1, 47; al-Tha‘labī, *Arā’is al-majālis fi qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, ed. and transl., William M. Brinner, *Lives of the Prophets*, Leiden: Brill 2002, 47.



Fig. 1: The angels face Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Mantiq al-tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*) of Farid al-Din 'Atta'r. Iran, Shiraz, 899/1494. Krakow, National Museum in Krakow/The Princes Czartoryski Museum, BCz 3885 II Rkps Saf 93. Photograph © National Museum in Krakow.

tion which had emanated from God Himself and which had bowed down before him a million years before the pre-eternal covenant between humans and God. This light, al-Tustarī states, has been disseminated in “particles of uncreated certitude” in the hearts of the “intimate elect.” Tustarī’s notions continued to influence Sufi thinkers, as well as painters, for centuries to come.

Early Muslim sources¹⁰ were familiar with the Rabbinic traditions that Adam was clad in “clothes” of light in Paradise¹¹ and that he was exquisitely beautiful.¹² This concept of primordial and creative light, used to symbolise God and His message through prophecy, eventually gave rise to the flame-shaped halo as an attribute of those who spoke with prophetic authority. A miniature included in the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* shows Adam, before the first woman was created, literally engulfed in flaming light (Fig. 1). It portrays a scene that begins with the presentation to the angels of the first man fashioned by God and which leads to an angelic rebellion.

The painting features four angels discussing the prototypical human being. Their body language reveals a tension, or even a form of rivalry, between the angels and the prototype of the newly created human race. The angels all seem to share, albeit to a lesser degree, the defiant reaction of Iblis, who stands at the back haughtily turning his head away. According to tradition, God made Iblis beautiful¹³ and he is depicted as such here. He is portrayed with his characteristic darker skin to denote his impending fall, but he has wings and wears the contemporary ‘angelic hairstyle,’ a loop of hair tied on top of the head.¹⁴

The Qurʾān reports that God taught Adam, but not the angels, the names of all things (*al-asmāʾa kullabā*, Q 2:31), at which point they recognised the exalted status of the first man and obeyed God’s command to venerate him (Q 2:34): “When We told the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam,’ they all bowed. But not Iblis, who refused and was arrogant: he was one of the disobedient.”¹⁵ When God questioned

¹⁰ Such as Yaʿqūbī 1, 5, cited after Rubin, “Pre-Existence,” 96.

¹¹ This is related to the notion of “God putting on the garment of light” in *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshit Rabbā*) 3:21 (cf. 20:12 on Genesis 3:4), which owes much to Philo’s *De Fuga et Inventione* 110, and which, according to Alexander Altmann (“A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation,” in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7/3-4 (1956), 195-206, esp. 201-202), “is another way of saying that God revealed His Logos [or Wisdom] by the light which radiated from it.” For a discussion of the motif of garments of light in the Syriac *Meʿārath gazzē*, see Alexander Toepel, *Die Adam- und Seth-Legenden im syrischen “Buch der Schatzhöhle”*: eine quellenkritische Untersuchung, Louvain: Peeters 2006, 159.

¹² al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 47; al-Maqdisī, *al-Baḍʿ*, cited after Kister, “Ādam,” 139. Cf. *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kahāna*, Braude and Kapstein, ed. and transl., 101.

¹³ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 249.

¹⁴ Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of “Qisās al-Anbiyāʾ”*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers 1999, 28.

¹⁵ References to the prostration of the angels before Adam appear in seven different *sūras* (chapters) in the Qurʾān (Q 2:34; 7:11-12; 15:28-33; 17:61-2; 18:50; 20:115-6; 38:71-8). Angelika Neuwirth, “Qurʾān, Crisis and Memory. The Qurʾānic Path towards Canonization as Reflected in the Anthropogonic Accounts,” in: *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies*, Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch, eds., Würzburg: Ergon 2001, 118-119, 125-126.

Iblis about his defiance, Iblis' response, given in two parts, focused on the inferior material nature of Adam. First, he stated that he would not bow down to a mortal made of clay (Q 15:33; cf. 7:12; 17:61; 38:76). He then went on to underline the superiority of his own essence, proclaiming (Q 7:12; cf. 38:72), "I am better than him: You created me from fire and him from clay." Parallels with this episode can be found in extra-Biblical literature such as the pseudoepigraphical *Life of Adam and Eve*¹⁶ and the Syriac *Me'ārath gazzē* (*Book of the Cave of Treasures*).¹⁷

The earliest known depiction of the adoration of the angels dwells on Iblis' rebellion. Al-Kisāʿī, one of the early authors of the *Tales of the Prophets*, recorded just before 1200, relates that since "Iblis' worship was greater than that of any of them, God raised him to the heaven of the earth, where he worshipped God for a thousand years and was called The Worshipper who was known to hold an exalted station among the angels," for "God has given his servant an ability to obey God such as He has given to no [other] angel."¹⁸ In a late 14th-century Persian depiction of the scene from a manuscript of the 12th-century Persian cosmographer al-Ṭūsī al-Salmānī's *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt* (*Wonders of Creation*), copied by Aḥmad Harawi in 790/1388, Adam is not shown at all (Fig. 2). The actual protagonist in the image is the defiant angel, depicted as standing upright behind two others who kneel on their prayer rugs,¹⁹ their heads turned to look at him with astonishment. The text above the miniature reads, "When the angels saw Iblis, they were afraid, and performed another prostration before Adam."

In this composition the celestial rebel is presented as a winged angel, his hands hidden under his long sleeves, following a common pictorial convention

According to Gabriel Said Reynolds (*The Qurʾān and Its Biblical Subtext*, London: Routledge 2010, 51), reading the Qurʾānic story of the angelic prostration in the light of related Biblical and post-Biblical traditions suggests that the angels are prostrating themselves to the glory of God within Adam. For other explanations, see, for instance, Roberto Tottoli, "Muslim Attitudes towards Prostration (*sujūd*): I. Arabs and Prostration at the Beginning of Islam and in the Qurʾān," in: *Studia Islamica* 88 (1998), 5-34; Cornelia Schöck, "Adam and Eve," in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1, Jane D. McAuliffe, ed., Leiden: Brill 2001, 22-26, and Cornelia Schöck, *Adam im Islam: ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna*, Berlin: Schwarz 1993, 23-24.

¹⁶ The origins and dating of *The Life of Adam and Eve* are uncertain. It was probably written during the period between 100 and 300 CE. According to some scholars, it was originally a Jewish text and later went through various Christian redactions. Today it is preserved in six fragmentary versions in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, and Coptic. See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, New York, NY: Doubleday 1985, 249-295, esp. *Life* 12:1-16:3.

¹⁷ The Syriac version probably dates between the 5th and 6th centuries CE, the Arabic version to the 8th century CE. Cf. Clemens Leonhard, "Observations on the Date of the Syriac Cave of Treasures," in: *The World of the Aramaeans, III: Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers and Michael Weigl, eds., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2001, 255-292, esp. 288.

¹⁸ al-Kisāʿī, *Qisās al-anbiyāʾ*, ed. and transl. Wheeler M. Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets*, Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications 1997, 22.

¹⁹ On the question of whether the act of prostration implies worship, see Tottoli, "Prostration," 5-34.



Fig. 2: Two angels turn back and see with alarm that Iblis will not bow down before Adam. Painting from a manuscript of *‘Ajā’ib al-makblūqāt* (*Wonders of Creation*) of al-Ṭūsī Salmānī. Iran, *Rabi’ al-awwal* 1 790/10 March 1388. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 332, fol. 209r. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

for expressing religious respect. Shortly after the events depicted here, Iblis was accused of rebellion, cast out of heaven, and called “accursed” (*rajim*) (Q 7:13; 7:18; 15:34-35; 38:77) because he had refused to obey God’s command to bow down to Adam. Nevertheless, God grants him his request to play an active role in humankind’s destiny as the tempter or seducer (Q 7:16-7; cf. 15:39-45; 17:62-65; 38:82-5) who performs the task of testing as many humans as he can until the day of judgement and the resurrection.

Adam’s preeminent position in the cosmic order was supported not only by the scriptural text but also by the canonical *ḥadīth*, or prophetic tradition, which states that God created Adam “according to His form” (*‘alā ṣuratihī*),²⁰ a formulation that echoes the Biblical tenet in Genesis 1:6 that God created man in God’s own image.²¹ As Josef van Ess makes clear in his studies of early Islamic theology, conceptions of God in this period could take a distinctly human form and scale. In general, emphasis was placed on God’s beauty being that of a beardless man at the apex of his youth.²² Theologians even argued that, when he came to create the first human, God looked into a mirror.²³

Adam is represented as a beautiful beardless youth²⁴ in a 15th-century illustration in the *Majma‘ al-tāwārikh* (*Gathering of Histories*) of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū (d. 833/1430),²⁵ painted in Herat in Iran, which shows a group of crowned angels humbly prostrating themselves before the first man.²⁶ The regally dressed figure, crowned

²⁰ Gauthier H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Ḥadīth*, Leiden: Brill 2007, 33.

²¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, no. 17952, and cf. no. 17950: “He created Adam’s face in His image.” Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *Kitāb al-Iṣṭiḍhān*, *bāb* 1: God created Adam in the form of the Merciful (*‘alā ṣurat al-raḥmān*). Also Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ta’wīl*, 278; cited after Kister, “Adam,” 138. Cf. Josef van Ess, *The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam*, Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University Department of Religious Studies 1989, 10.

²² Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1997, 377-383; van Ess, *The Youthful God*, 10. Cf. Garth Fowden, *Qūṣayr ‘Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2004, 200-201.

²³ Van Ess, *The Youthful God*, 10; W. Montgomery Watt, “Created in His Image: A Study in Islamic Theology,” in: *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 18 (1959-1960), 38-49.

²⁴ Cf. Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, 69, 86.

²⁵ Painting from a manuscript of *Majma‘ al-tāwārikh* of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū (comprising Ṭabarī’s *Tā’rikh al-rusul wa l-mulūk* by Abu ‘Alī Bal‘ami), painted ca. 828-36/1425-33 in Herat, Iran, and preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, B.282, fol. 16r. The translation of the Arabic inscription at the lower part of the page reads, “...and He said to get out of the form of the angels and to get into the form of the disappointed Iblis, God Almighty wanted the angels to understand the virtue of Adam, he is knowledgeable while the angels are not, this virtue is due to his action and not his origin or essence and in the Qur’ān God Almighty said...” See Eleanor Sims, Boris Il’ič Maršak, Ernst Grube, *Peerless Images: Persian Painting and Its Sources*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press 2002, 263-264, fig. 180.

²⁶ Yet in a 15th-century Central Asian painting from a folio in Farid al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mantiq al-tayr*, now in the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart, Adam, as a mature bearded man, receives the prostrations of the angels, with the exception of Iblis who here again preserves his angelic at-

but not haloed, is shown standing on a royal throne (Persian *takht*) to the right, talking to four prostrated angels who are labelled “the powerful angels” in red ink by the later accompanying Ottoman Turkish inscription. The angels are shown bent over with their foreheads on the ground and their hands extended towards Adam with their palms up, adopting a posture usually performed by the practicing Muslim during the obligatory ritual prayer to God. “Adam, the vehement,” as he is described in the same hand, is portrayed as arguing with Iblis, identified by the accompanying inscription as “the accursed devil (*shayṭān*).”²⁷ In stark contrast to the angels, who have long wings and are clad in colourful robes, Iblis is shown to have lost his heavenly status due to his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam. Half-hidden behind a large tree he is portrayed as a horned black demon with flaming eyes, naked but for a short red skirt, with a pair of short wings, tail, and clawed feet. He, in turn, is pointing with the index finger of his left hand at the open mouth of a red-cloured wriggling serpent, while with his right hand he grasps his long white beard in a gesture that communicates that he is swearing an oath.²⁸ Iblis’ black colour symbolises the diabolisation of the *angelus rebellans* and marks him as one of the unbelievers and denizens of Hell. His depiction is in stark contrast to that of Adam and the angels, who appear as radiant white-skinned beings, a colour usually used to denote the higher principle. The painting is thus marked by a clear distinction between good and evil. This figure of Shayṭān arises from the shadows of the combat myths of the ancient Near East, in which good and evil are symbolised, even incarnated, in figures which are in perpetual binary opposition to each other.²⁹ Elements of these interpretative traditions are amalgamated within

tributes. Johannes Kalter and Margareta Pavaloi, *Erben der Seidenstrasse – Usbekistan*, (Linden-Museum Stuttgart, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin), Stuttgart: Mayer 1995, 106, fig. 168.

²⁷ In the Qur’ān, the terms Iblis and al-Shayṭān are synonymous. However, the latter occurs only in connection with the temptation and fall of the first couple. See Andrew Rippin, “Shayṭān,” in: *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EP*²). Accessed 26 March 2018. Reynolds (*The Qur’ān*, 40) argues that, as shown in Sūrat al-Baqarah (2:34 vs. 2:36; cf. 7:11 vs. 7:20; 20:116 vs. 20:120), the devil in heaven is called Iblis but after his banishment he is named Shayṭān, the tempter. For a discussion of the transmission of the word Iblis into the Arab and Islamic milieu, see Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, “One More Time on the Arabized Nominal Form Iblis,” in: *Studia Orientalia* 112 (2012), 55-70, esp. 60-61. For an important discussion of “the *shayṭāni* aspect of Iblis” fusing both *dramatis personae* in *surā* 38, see Neuwirth, “Qur’ān, Crisis and Memory,” 134. *Hadith* traced back to Ibn ‘Abbās, moreover, connect the name ‘Azāzil with that of Iblis before his expulsion (George Vajda, “‘Azāzil,” in: *EP*²), whereas al-Tha‘labī (*‘Arā’is al-majālis*, 56) states that God changed his name from ‘Azāzil to Iblis. For an elaboration of the motif of the fallen angel ‘Azāzil in Shi‘a Islam, see Bärbel Beinhaus-Köhler, “Die Engelsturz motive des *Umm al-Kitāb*. Untersuchungen zur Trägerschaft eines synkretistischen Werkes der häretischen Schia,” in: *The Fall of the Angels*, Christoph Auffarth and Loren Stuckenbruck, eds., (Studies in Biblical Narrative 6), Leiden: Brill 2004, 161-175.

²⁸ Susan Aykut, *Hairy Politics: Hair Rituals in Ottoman and Turkish Society*, Adelaide: Charles Strong Memorial Trust 2000, 17.

²⁹ This is reflected, in particular, in a system that has two warring camps of spiritual beings, headed by the Zoroastrian God and Devil, fighting for the loyalty of human beings. Both

the Qurʾān. As Angelika Neuwirth has pointed out, this figure's multiple affiliations as *jinn*, as Iblis-Shayṭān, and as one of the angels suggests that – in keeping with pre-Qurʾānic mystical thought – angels and demons share important features in the Qurʾān and are closely related to one another.³⁰

Roughly a century later, in a late 16th-century miniature from a manuscript of *Majālis al-ʿUshshāq* (*The Assemblies of Lovers*) by the Timurid mystical poet Amīr Sayyid Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Gazurgāhi, perhaps painted in Shiraz, Iran, Adam, still lifeless and naked, is depicted as lying on the earth in the centre of a circle of prostrated angels while Iblis kneels on a prayer rug, zealously worshipping God (Fig. 3).³¹ Here Iblis maintains his absolute devotion to God alone. Despite his status as rebellious figure, Iblis is something of an ambiguous figure and has sometimes been praised for his exceptional fidelity, especially in the Sufi tradition of Islamic mysticism, for his willingness to accept banishment from heaven rather than bow to anyone but God. Iblis' complex character is reflected in the *Kitāb al-Ṭāwāsīm* of the mystic Maṅṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), in which he is portrayed as the ultimate monotheist who will bend the knee to none other than God, even in defiance of God's own divine command. For this absolute devotion, or in spite of it, he is severely punished.³²

A painting from a manuscript of the eminent 12th-century Iranian poet Ilyās ibn Yūsuf Nizāmī's *Khamsa* (*Five Poems*), illustrated in late 16th-century Shiraz,

are primal spirits who came together in the beginning to create life and death (Yasna 30:3-5). The "Evil One" declares to God: "I shall destroy you and your creatures forever and ever. And I shall persuade all your creatures to hate you and to love me" (Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, Leiden: Brill 1975, 46). Ideas of this complex dualism and the related eschatology were developed in differing ways in post-Exilic Jewish texts and intertestamental literature. In conformity with his gnostic role, *al-shayṭān* is the permanent opponent of humankind. He is the personification of evil, wholly dark, and wholly cursed. Cf. also Alexander Altmann, "The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends," in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, N.S., 34/4 (1945), 371-391, esp. 376-378.

³⁰ Angelika Neuwirth, "Cosmology," in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1, Jane D. McAuliffe, ed., Leiden: Brill 2001, 440-458.

³¹ The upper part of the page bears couplets in Persian, the translation reading, "Such beauty no one has and at once they pressed their faces against the ground and with faint tongue they said, 'The arch of your eyebrows is forever the *qibla* of the souls. You are facing towards a heart and my heart is oriented toward you.' The Angel because of the attribute (did not?) fall prostrate to Adam. That the flower is moulded from your soil." The lower part of the page features Qurʾānic citations and Persian verses stating, "...so the angels fell prostrate, all of them together (Sūrat al-Hijr 15:30); Save Iblis (Sūrat al-Hijr 15:31, partial), he of grandeur, pride (in Persian). He was arrogant and did not fall down to the ground to bow and soon the birds of the cosmos were reaping the seeds."

³² On the mystic dimension of Iblis, see Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*, Leiden: Brill 1983, esp. 122-134, as well as Benedikt Reinert, *Die Lehre vom tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1968, esp. 78-79, 166.



Fig. 3: The angels bow before Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Majālis al-‘Ushshāq* (*The Assemblies of Lovers*) of Gazurgāhī. Iran, perhaps Shiraz, ca. 982/1575. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 1559, fol. 10v. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Iran,³³ portrays Adam lying lifeless on the ground, encircled by the prostrated angels. His entire body radiates or emanates flames of light, his prophetic essence, indicating that God has already breathed His spirit into him.³⁴ The renowned 10th-century Arab geographer and traveller Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusain al-Mas'ūdi reports that when God created Adam, He informed the angels of Adam's superior knowledge "and thus God made Adam into a *mibrāb*, a Ka'ba, a gateway and a *qibla* towards which the pure spirits and the angels bowed down."³⁵ Iblis, however, rather than being shown on a prayer rug, is shown at a distance. Grey-skinned and half-naked with a white beard, he is portrayed standing with his arms folded across his breast, his hands pointing towards the shoulders, a posture which in a Sufi context signifies abject humility and respect.

In the *Testament of Abraham* (ch. 8, rec. B), a pseudepigraphic text of the Old Testament composed in the 1st or 2nd century CE, Adam is identified as "sitting upon a throne of great glory" encircled by a multitude of angels. According to the 12th-century Persian writer Abū Ishāq al-Nishāpūrī, seven days after Adam's creation God sent from Paradise a throne of red gold studded with pearls, as well as silk clothes and a crown. Seven hundred angels are said to have encircled Adam in orderly ranks, according him the obeisance he was due. His throne was erected where the Holy Mosque of Mecca now stands and the seat of the throne was placed where the Ka'ba is now.

In a Persian illustration dated ca. 978/1570, perhaps from a manuscript of al-Nishāpūrī's *Qisaṣ al-anbiyā'* (*Tales of the Prophets*),³⁶ a crowned, royally dressed and youthful Adam with a flaming halo is shown seated on a tall throne surrounded by a host of bedazzled angels. Some of the angels are depicted as descending from heaven offering trays filled with light in commemoration of his receipt of the Prophet's gift, which is literally poured over him (Fig. 4).³⁷ Meanwhile, others offer

³³ Made in ca. 987-993/1580-85 in Shiraz, this painting from a *Khamsa* of Nizāmi is now in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, B.146, fol. 14r. See Lâle Uluç, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts*, Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası 2006, fig. 143.

³⁴ A closely related scene, but without radiating light, is portrayed in the *Majālis al-'ushshāq* of Gāzurgāhi, painted in Shiraz, Iran. A copy, dated ca. 982/1575, is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 776, fol. 11v. Another, dated ca. 987/1580, can be found in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 829, fol. 6v. Rather than being shown on a prayer rug, Iblis is here represented, half hidden in the back, with his finger in his mouth, the traditional pose of astonishment. See Uluç, *Turkman Governors*, fig. 142.

³⁵ Mas'ūdi, § 45, cited after Leigh N. B. Chipman, "Adam and the Angels: An Examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources," in: *Arabica* 49/4 (2002), 449.

³⁶ Writings belonging to the genre of the *Tales of the Prophets* adapt Old Testament scripture and recast it in a Muslim context.

³⁷ The miniature is framed above and below with inscriptions, the translation of the upper section (in Persian with parts of Sūrat Al-Baqarah, verse 34) reads, "All stepped forward with the foot of submission and then laid the forehead of indignation on the ground, save Iblis. He refused and waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers. Indeed he was for-

praise or bow their heads and prostrate themselves in worship. Raising his right index finger, Adam addresses a turbaned and richly dressed Iblis who likewise lifts his right index finger, the mutual gestures signifying intense discussion. The painting mirrors the motif of a contest setting Adam/Humankind against an angelic being in order to establish which of them is the superior created entity.

In another instance, in a late 16th-century miniature which also illustrates a manuscript of al-Nishāpūri's *Qisas al-anbiyā'*, Adam's mate (*zawj*) (who just as in the story of the fall in Genesis 3 is also not named in the Qur'ān)³⁸ is depicted as sharing both the throne and the prophetic status with Adam. The first couple is framed by adoring angels, some prostrating themselves, some looking on, while a grey-skinned Iblis stands half-hidden in the background.³⁹ In a composition from a mid-16th-century dispersed manuscript of the *Fāl-nāma* (*Book of Omens*), painted either in Tabriz or Qazvin in Iran, the enthroned and regally dressed primordial pair appears to be enjoying Paradise by taking part in a royal banquet, served by sixteen lavishly adorned angels.⁴⁰ Flaming nimbi radiate from the primordial couples' crowned heads.⁴¹ The medieval author al-Kisā'i writes that "grapes and fruits of Paradise were offered to them, and they ate."⁴² The winged creature closest to the throne carries a golden tray supporting a silver wine bowl. Further down, an angel offers a golden ewer while a second angel holds a tray laden with pomegranates.

The theme of feasting (though food and beverage differ) is similarly described in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 29:4), which states that Adam "sat in the Garden of Eden, and the angels roasted flesh for him, and prepared cooling wine." The emphasis is on the "celestial banquet," an image used to describe the primordial covenant, mentioned earlier, understood from the Qur'ānic words in which God addresses the pre-created souls of the progeny of Adam with a critical question – "Am I not your Lord?" – to which they reply that they bear witness (*shahidnā*) (Q 7:172). They thereby assume the contractual obligation to profess monotheism once born into earthly existence. This is acknowledged by the angels

bidden from entering Paradise and cursed eternally and expelled..." And continues in the lower part of the page, the translation of the Persian inscription reading, "...from the court of the Eternal Refuge. So was the gentleness of the *mihṛāb* that the medicine consisted of looking at your face. If the angel does not bend his head, he will be cursed. The storytellers said that Adam in Paradise was not keen on anything and that he became the *mābram* of completeness..."

³⁸ Traditions, however, confirm her name as Eve or Ḥawwā'. The names of the first human pair are thus the same as in Judaism and Christianity.

³⁹ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 54, fol. 23; unpublished.

⁴⁰ The text of the *Fāl-nāma* is attributed to the sixth Shī'a *imām* Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 147/765). Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., S1986.254; Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı, *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, London: Thames & Hudson 2009, 96-97, cat.no. 12.

⁴¹ Cf. al-Kisā'i, *Qisas*, 35.

⁴² al-Kisā'i, *Qisas*, 35-36.



Fig. 4: Adam enthroned in Paradise with Iblis in the upper left corner. Perhaps from a manuscript of the *Qisas al-anbiyā* (*Tales of the Prophets*) of al-Nishāpūrī. Iran, perhaps Qazvin, ca. 978/1570. Paris, Louvre Department of Islamic Art, MAO 375. Photograph © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN – Grand Palais / Raphaël Chipault.

as they bow to the first father and the mother of humankind. One of the angels kisses Adam's right foot.⁴³ A grey-faced, bearded Iblis looks on dismayed from the upper right.

Combining what is said in the Qurʾān with the extra-Qurʾānic traditions, we can construct a composite picture of the events surrounding Adam's expulsion from Paradise. God had instructed Adam and his partner, known in the extra-Qurʾānic literature as Eve, to inhabit Paradise and had given them only a single restriction (Q 2:35): "do not go near this tree, or you will both become wrongdoers!" The first pair of humans were then tested. Tradition informs us that Iblis-Shayṭān constructed a stratagem to enter the serpent (which does not appear in the Qurʾān itself) in order to tempt the humans to violate the divine command and approach the forbidden tree.⁴⁴ Iblis-Shayṭān induced the pair to eat from this "tree of eternity (*kbuld*)" (Q 20:120), whispering (*waswasa*) to them that the restriction had only been made to deny them eternal life and the status of angels (Q 7:20-21).⁴⁵ After receiving this promise of immortality from the serpent, Adam and his mate broke the divine covenant and "both tasted of the tree." Shayṭān thus succeeded in depriving them of their heavenly glory (Q 7:27). Immediately after this transgression, the primal couple were transformed: they apprehended their nakedness⁴⁶ and, thus, their sexuality and immediately covered themselves with leaves (Q 7:22).⁴⁷ The 9th-century compiler of *qisās* literature and authoritative Qurʾān exegete Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) explains that, by tempting them in this way, Iblis wished to reveal to them their "secret parts," which had been hidden from them. This he knew "from his reading of the books of the angels."⁴⁸ Interestingly, tradition tells us that the only food the angels can

⁴³ One of the routine ritual gestures, the veneration of the feet of prophets, saints, and rulers, was commonplace in the medieval Iranian world and beyond.

⁴⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, vol. 1, 275-276; al-Kisāʾī, *Qisās*, 38.

⁴⁵ In another account, he tempts by offering to take them to the Shajarat al-Khuld and "a kingdom that will not decay" (Q 20:120). In the *Kitāb al-Majāll* (*Book of the Rolls*) it is said that Allāh plants the Tree of Life in the midst of Paradise and, later, that Eve and then Adam eat fruit from "the forbidden tree." Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Apocrypha Arabica*, (Studia Sinaitica 8), London: C. J. Clay and Sons 1901, 8-9 (Arabic and English).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of cultic nudity in the ancient world, often associated with the symbolism of the new life or rebirth of an initiate, see Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," in: *History of Religions* 5/2 (1966), 217-238, esp. 218-222. It is also of interest that in the Hebrew *Pirqē de-Rabbi Eliʿezer* a certain tonal association can be observed between Adam seeing himself naked (Hebrew *arom*) after he had eaten from the tree, on the one hand, and the serpent, of whom it is said in Genesis 3:1 that it was "*arum*," smarter, than all the animals of the field, on the other. See *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser: nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852*, ed. and transl. Dagmar Börner-Klein, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2004, XXXIV.

⁴⁷ The notion that Adam and his partner dressed in fig leaves after their transgression is of Biblical origin. *Genesis* 3:7; cf. *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshit Rabbā*) 19:6; al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 52.

⁴⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾriḫ*, vol. 1, 276.

eat is fruit, because they are immortal.⁴⁹ Iblis' actions can thus be seen as an inversion of the traditional behaviour of an angel.

According to the Scriptural account, as soon as the primordial Adam and his partner ate of the forbidden fruit they were deprived of the celestial shining dress (cf. Q 7:20, 22, 27),⁵⁰ said to have been fashioned from "human fingernail,"⁵¹ which enrobed them "in glory and majesty" (Psalm 104:1).⁵² These mythic garments belonged to the hidden divine realm,⁵³ for after the removal of the pair from the realm of divinity their "garments of glory" were replaced by "garments of skin." It is interesting in this context that the Aramaic *Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan* (on Genesis 3:21) suggests that the leather garments God created for the first couple were made of the skin shed by the serpent, a notion also found in the Hebrew *Pirqē de-Rabbī Eli'ezer*, an 8th- or 9th-century Haggadic-Midrashic work which integrates elements from Islamic folklore.⁵⁴

In the mythical drama of the primordial fall, the heavenly prototype was cast down from heaven into the earthly world and thus became an earthly being, the mortal Adam. In an illustration from a dispersed manuscript of the great 15th-century Persian poet 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi's *Nafahāt al-uns* (*Breaths of Fellowship*), probably painted in mid-17th century Bukhara, Adam is shown literally engulfed in flames of light and glory (Fig. 5). The depiction of the heavenly Adam accords

⁴⁹ 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsir*, vol. 2, 226; al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, 277. Cf. Schöck, "Adam and Eve," 25; Rippin, "Shaytān," 525.

⁵⁰ They actually lost the angelic bodies they had once possessed. It is worth noting that 2 *Enoch* attributes also to Adam an *angelic* status before his fall and allows him to reign on earth like a king.

⁵¹ *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshit Rabbā*) 196 (on *Genesis* 3:21), which is dated to ca. 450 CE, refers to the first couple's clothing as "smooth as fingernail, beautiful as pearl." *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (on *Genesis* 3:7 and 21) describes them as created with clothing of fingernail (*tuṣṣrā*). See also Hanneke Reuling, *After Eden: Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16-21*, Leiden: Brill 2005, esp. 253-61; Gary A. Anderson, "The Garments of Skin in Apocryphal Narrative and Biblical Commentary," in: *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, James L. Kugel, ed., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001, 101-143. Al-Tha'labī (*'Arā'is al-majālis*, 47) likewise relates that Adam's original skin was like fingernails; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'rikh*, vol. 1, 276.

⁵² Cf. *Book of Job* 40:10.

⁵³ See note 11 *supra*.

⁵⁴ It states that "from the skin [of Leviathan] the Holy One, blessed be He, made garments of glory for Adam and his helpmate," Chapter 20, ed. and transl. Börner-Klein, 212. Cf. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5, Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America 1925, 103; Nissan Rubin and Admiel Kosman, "The Clothing of the Primordial Adam as a Symbol of Apocalyptic Time in the Midrashic Sources," in: *The Harvard Theological Review* 90/2 (1997), 170. It is interesting to note Abraham ibn Ezra's comment on *Genesis* 3:21 in this connection, who says: "... others say there was an animal who was of anthropoid form, and God issued a command and it [the animal] shed its skin." John C. Reeves, "Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān," in: *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, John C. Reeves, ed., Leiden: Brill 2004, 57, note 50.



Fig. 5: The descent of Adam to earth. Painting from a dispersed manuscript of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi’s *Nafahāt al-uns* (*Fragrances of Intimacies*). Attributed to Farhād. Probably Bukhara, ca. 1060/1650. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: The Art and History Collection, LTS1995.2.61. Photograph © Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

with the description in a *ḥadīth* which states that, “the Prophet Muḥammad said: I saw my Lord as a beardless youth with curly hair in a green robe.”⁵⁵ This depiction echoes another tradition, mentioned earlier, according to which God created Adam “in his image.” After his descent from Paradise to earth, the mortal Adam in his human body is shown in a humble posture with eyes cast down, wearing a headdress given to him by the angel Gabriel in memory of his lost dignity. The painting is framed by an inscription reading, above, “As Adam’s honourable figure was adorned with this robe, half a day,” and below, “there he resided in Paradise for the equivalent of five hundred years whence he was sent to this world.”

Ottoman miniatures of the second half of the 16th century and the early 17th century portray both Adam and Eve after their act of disobedience as naked apart from leafy loincloths but surrounded by flaming nimbi.⁵⁶ The angelic host watch the departure of the first couple through the gate of Paradise, depicted as a tall tower. Outside the gate, Iblis is shown cowering next to the peacock and the serpent, who have also been expelled from Paradise.⁵⁷ The scene foreshadows the impending enmity between the first couple, on the one hand, and the serpent and Iblis, on the other (Q 20:123).⁵⁸ The same scene is featured in the *Fāl-nāma* manuscript of Ahmed I, attributed to Ḥasan Pāshā, who painted it in early 17th-century Istanbul.⁵⁹ Interestingly, it portrays Eve as holding an ear of grain in her right hand, for like Jewish and Christian interpreters before them, Muslim commentators also speculated about the species of the ‘forbidden fruit’ in Paradise. Aside from grain, the forbidden fruit appears in other traditions as a stalk of wheat, a vine, or some other sort of plant.⁶⁰ Following the primordial pair are, once again, the serpent and the peacock – a motif we will return to below.

⁵⁵ Van Ess, *The Youthful God*, 10.

⁵⁶ Cf. al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis*, 52. This scene is depicted in a painting from a manuscript of Kāshifī’s *Rawḍat al-shuhadā’* (*Garden of the Martyrs*), translated by Fuḍūli al-Baghdādī and dated to the second half of the 16th century, now in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément turc 1088, fol. 9v; or in an illustration from a manuscript of Fuḍūli al-Baghdādī’s *Ḥadiqāt al-Su‘adā’* (*Garden of the Blessed*), painted by ‘Aziz Allāh al-Ḥusaynī al-Kāshānī in 1010/1602-3 in Baghdad, New York, Brooklyn Museum, 70.143, fol. 14.

⁵⁷ al-Kisā‘ī, *Qisas*, 20. For an insightful discussion of the Islamic-period peacock in Paradise and in its broader context, see Christiane Tortel, “Le paon, de l’Inde ancienne à l’époque islamique. Histoire illustrée d’une chute,” in: *Semitica et Classica* 3 (2010), 195-210, esp. 198-201. On the serpent in Paradise which was singled out to become the pawn of Iblis, see Sara Kuehn, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art*, Leiden: Brill 2011, 9, 127.

⁵⁸ al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis*, 52, 54.

⁵⁹ Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H.1703, fol. 7v. Farhad and Bağcı, *Fahama*, 297.

⁶⁰ In Jewish tradition it is mainly mentioned as grape or fig or wheat (*Berakot* 40a; *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshit Rabbā*) 15:7). Christian and Muslim traditions add further possibilities (al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 183-185; al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis*, 51). See Ishāq ibn Bishr, *Mubtada’*, 44a, cited after Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, 109-110; cf. Schöck “Adam and Eve,” 25; Rippin, “Shayṭān,” 525.

A late 16th-century Persian miniature depicts the couple rather differently, showing them as barefooted and bareheaded but clothed in white garments.⁶¹ It is possible that these clothes might represent the garb of sinners and penitents, who wore a shroud as an act of penance when they were begging for forgiveness. Concomitantly, white is also, of course, the colour of mourning and purification in Islamic tradition, as seen most prominently during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. It thus seems most likely that the primal couple is shown wearing the *ihram*, the pilgrims' dress that enables entrance to the sacred space around the Ka'ba, thereby signifying the ritual purity of the first humans. In addition, both are shown with diaphanous face coverings. In his collection of tales of the pre-Islamic prophets, al-Kisā'i records that Adam was the first to be taught the pilgrimage rites by the angel Gabriel, including the seven-fold circumambulation (*ṭawwāf*), after building the earthly Ka'ba in Mecca.⁶² Adam was instructed that he should follow the example of the angels, who had worshipped the Ka'ba for two thousand years before his creation, and "offer prayer as he had seen the angels do." Once Adam had finished his worship, "Gabriel said: This is sufficient for you, Adam! You are absolved, your repentance has been accepted, and your wife has also been absolved."⁶³ Yet, in spite of this invocation of the first couple's spirit of repentance and their consequent receiving of divine forgiveness, the painting shows the serpent and the peacock lurking just behind them, thus symbolising that, in the eyes of the painters, the pair did not in fact receive full forgiveness for their sins after all.

In another version of the first couple's flight from Paradise featured in a folio from a dispersed mid-16th-century manuscript of the *Fāl-nāma*,⁶⁴ Adam rides a huge four-legged dragon (reflecting the close relation between the serpent and its larger relative) while his mate is mounted on a peacock (Fig. 6).⁶⁵ They are pursued by a gatekeeper in courtly dress and turban who wields a long stick with which he prods them to hurry them along. The scene is framed by rows of angels above and below who watch the spectacle.

⁶¹ Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Per 231, fol. 13b.

⁶² al-Kisā'i, *Qisas*, 61-62, 66. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 295; al-Tha'labī, *Arā'is al-majālis*, 60. In a Midrashic context, wrapping oneself in white clothing conveys an air of holiness and of resemblance to the angels; Rubin and Kosman, "The Clothing," 155-174. See also Kister, "Ādam," 169-170.

⁶³ al-Kisā'i, *Qisas*, 61-62, 66.

⁶⁴ The same scene is also featured in a copy of Abū Ishāq al-Nishāpūri's *Qisas al-anbiyā'*, painted either in Safavid-period Iran or in Ottoman-period Turkey (in the late 980s/1570s to early 990s/1580s), now in Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H.1228, fol. 3r. It is worth noting that Iblis preserves his angelic attributes in this miniature: he is lavishly dressed and has beautiful long wings which he uses to fly, his hands directed towards heaven in an expression of pronounced bewilderment. Farhad and Bağcı, *Fahnama*, 213, cat.no. 65.

⁶⁵ al-Tha'labī, *Arā'is al-majālis*, 50-51.



Fig. 6: Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise. Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Fāl-nāma* (*Book of Omens*) of Ja'far al-Šādiq. Iran, Tabriz or Qazvin, mid-960s/1550s. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.251. Photograph © Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Why would Adam and his partner be shown riding these beasts? Their being mounted on these creatures points to a symbolic meaning that is not mentioned in the texts. Although the serpent is not mentioned in the Qurʾān, later traditions give it a prominent role in the mythical drama of the temptation and fall of humankind. For example, in the *Life of Adam and Eve*⁶⁶ God prevents Iblis from entering Paradise to seduce Adam, so Iblis beguiles both the serpent and the peacock, persuading them to assist him in his goal. In exchange for the promise of eternal life, Iblis is able to enter the pre-historical Garden⁶⁷ hidden in the serpent (either in its mouth or in its belly) and to speak through the creature's mouth in order to tempt the first couple to eat the forbidden fruit. According to other accounts, the serpent speaks at Iblis' command.⁶⁸ The serpent is usually described as having once been the most beautiful of all the animals, only losing its legs and assuming its eventual shape after the fall as the result of God's punishment. Al-Kisāʿī also records that the serpent's "speech was exaltation of God, the Lord of the Universe" and that "God had created her two thousand years before he created Adam."⁶⁹

It is noteworthy that this imagery was also known in the Jewish tradition. The *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* – which was written in the 8th- or 9th-century but preserves earlier apocryphal material⁷⁰ – states that Samael (who is identified with Satan in Wisdom 2.24 and the Palestinian Targum on Genesis 3:6) came to Eden riding on a serpent.⁷¹ The Talmud describes the wicked king Nebuchadnezzar as riding a lion and holding in his hands a serpent as a bridle.⁷² We thus have a clear association between the fallen angel Iblis-Shayṭān, the serpent, and the peacock, as well as an indirect connection to the serpent's great mythological relative, the dragon. The 11th-century *Shāh-nāma* (*Book of Kings*), which records the ancient history of Iran, relates that the mythical king Ṭahmūrath (the third Pishadian king and certainly one of the greatest kings of Iran) used Iblis as a mount.

⁶⁶ Emil Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, Tübingen: Mohr 1900, 521.

⁶⁷ al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 50-51; al-Kisāʿī, *Qisās*, 36-39. See the Syriac *Meʿārath gazzē* 22; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 14:11; Bar Hebraeus, *Tārīkh mukhtaṣar al-dīwān*, 7. According to another tradition in *3 Baruch* [in Greek] 9:7, Samael "took the serpent as a garment" in order to deceive Adam.

⁶⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, 107.

⁶⁹ al-Kisāʿī, *Qisās*, 38.

⁷⁰ See Anna Urowitz-Freudenstein, "Pseudepigraphic Support of Pseudepigraphical Sources: The Case of 'Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer,'" in: *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, John C. Reeves, ed., Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1994, 35-53.

⁷¹ Chapter 21, ed. and transl. Börner-Klein, 222. See Arnold M. Goldberg, "Kain: Sohn des Menschen oder Sohn der Schlange?" in: *Judaica* 25 (1969), 203-221; Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1975, 167-169; Whitney S. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblis: Narrative Theology in the Qurʾān*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2011, 86.

⁷² *Sabbath* 150a.

Clearly, the association which led to this religious iconography was very much part of the repertoire of visual expressions in the medieval Iranian world.

In Sufi iconography, the riding by a mystic of a dangerous animal, using a serpent as a bridle and sometimes also holding another serpent as a whip, is commonly used as metaphor for the need of the senses for an intelligent rider (generally, Reason or Intellect) who can guide them to master their base soul (*nafs*),⁷³ often symbolised as a serpent or dragon. Mounting, in this context, symbolises mastering and taming. Sufis understand the tempter, Iblis, as operating from within the human body, even if he sometimes takes on forms that seem to be external to it. The Qurʾān speaks of forces of temptation as “the slinking whisperer – who whispers into the hearts of people” (Q 114:4-5). The 13th-century Iranian mystic Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221) tells a parable of Iblis and his little son al-Khannās, “One Who Slinks Away.”⁷⁴ The name is derived from verse 4 of Sūrat al-Nās, in which the whispering of the evil one (*al-waswās al-khannās*) is used as a designation for Iblis (Q 114:4).⁷⁵ In this mythic narrative, Iblis uses a stratagem to gain access to the human spirit:⁷⁶

[One day Adam went off to work and Iblis came to visit Eve, bringing along his little son, al-Khannās.] Iblis said, ‘Something important has come up. Please watch my son until I come back’. Eve agreed and Iblis went on his way. When Adam came back, he asked, ‘Who is this?’ She said, ‘It is the child of Iblis; he has been left in my care’. Adam reproached her, ‘Why did you agree?’ He flew into a rage, killed the child, chopped him into pieces, and hung each piece from the branch of a tree. Iblis came back and asked, ‘Where is my child?’ Eve told the whole story: ‘He has been cut into pieces and each piece has been hung from the branch of a tree’. Iblis called out to his child and he was joined back together. Alive once again, he stood before Iblis.

The same scenario is repeated twice, with Adam growing more and more desperate and devising more elaborate ways of killing Iblis’ little son. In the end:⁷⁷

[he] fried him; he ate half himself and gave Eve the other half to eat. ... When Iblis returned and asked for his child, Eve recounted the whole tale: ‘He killed him and fried him; I ate half and Adam half’. Iblis said, ‘This was exactly my intention, in order that I might have access to man’s interior! Since his breast is now my abode, my goal is achieved.’

⁷³ See Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 64-69, 185.

⁷⁴ This narrative had featured in Sufi mystical writings over the centuries. ʿAṭṭār locates its origins in an account of the 9th-century mystic Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlī al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932) who, in turn, relates the story on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110-116/726-734). For the story titled “The dispelling of the Devil’s insinuations” in al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Navādir al-Uṣūl fī Maʿrifat Aḥādith al-Rasūl*, see Zohar Hadromi-Allouche, “The Death and Life of the Devil’s Son: A Literary Analysis of a Neglected Tradition,” in: *Studia Islamica* 107/2 (2012), 157-158. For an examination of related *ḥadīth* reports, see Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 60-63; and Hadromi-Allouche, “Devil’s Son.”

⁷⁵ The text from al-Tirmidhī’s *Navādir al-Uṣūl* is referred to by al-Qurṭubī in his exegesis to *sūra* 114, *Tafsīr*, vol. 20, 261-262, cited after Hadromi-Allouche, “Devil’s Son,” 159.

⁷⁶ *Tadkhirāt al-awliyāʾ*, 529-31, quoted in Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 63; Bodman, *The Poetics*, 12-13.

⁷⁷ *Tadkhirāt al-awliyāʾ*, 529-31, quoted in Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 63; Bodman, *The Poetics*, 13.

‘Aṭṭār’s didactic story of the primeval cannibalism of the first parents of human-kind offers a clear parallel to Iblis’ initial subterfuge through which he enticed Adam and his partner to eat from the forbidden tree. The ingestion of human flesh echoes the eating of the fruit in Paradise. Through the absorption of the food, the tempter dwells forever in the human body, seductively whispering his temptations. An association with the serpent is alluded to here, as Zohar Hadromi-Allouche has pointed out, in the name of al-Khannās, which has a certain tonal semblance to the Arabic *ḥanash* or the Hebrew *nahash*, both of which mean “snake.”⁷⁸

It should come as no surprise, then, that the ingesting of ambivalent creatures that reflect the ambiguity of good and evil is also recorded in Jewish texts, such as the *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kabāna*, a 5th- or 6th-century collection of Haggadic Midrash.⁷⁹ Here we read that God Himself captured the Biblical monster, Leviathan, who is sometimes featured in tandem with another monster named Behemoth, which had first been pursued unsuccessfully by the angels. In the *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kabāna*, God is depicted as the host of a banquet during which, after a final confrontation with the beast, he exposes the defeated creature. He then slaughters the monster and sloughs off Leviathan’s impervious skin in order to make *sukkāb* [that is, awareness of God’s presence], which will serve to protect the righteous from the fire of the Day of Judgment.⁸⁰ This ‘skin of Leviathan’ which, like the ‘garments of light’ discussed above, emanates heavenly glory and celestial splendour, was also used to clothe Adam and his partner in *Genesis* 3:21.⁸¹ On the Day of Judgement, a canopy will be erected over the righteous and they will then feast upon the flesh of the vanquished beast’s head, the greatest of delicacies, at the eschatological banquet.⁸²

⁷⁸ Hadromi-Allouche, “The Death,” 177.

⁷⁹ Cf. early Jewish tradition as found in, for example, the 1st-century-CE pseudepigraphical apocalyptic texts *4 Ezra* (6:49-52), *2 Baruch* (*Syriac Apocalypse*) (29:4), *1 Enoch* (60:7-10,24), as well as in later apocalyptic writings (ca. 200-500 CE) such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (10:10, 21:4) and the *Ladder of Jacob*; see Michael Mulder, “Leviathan on the Menu of the Messianic Meal: The Use of Various Images of Leviathan in Early Jewish Tradition,” in: *Playing with Leviathan: Interpretation and Reception of the Monsters from the Biblical World*, Koert van Bekkum, Jaap Dekker, Henk van de Kamp and Eric Peels, eds., Leiden: Brill 2017, 117-129.

⁸⁰ *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kabāna*, supplement 2.4, ed. and transl. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, *R. Kabana’s Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days*, Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society 2002, 623-628.

⁸¹ K. William Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2006, 137, note 114. See Ginzberg, *The Legends*, vol. 5, 42, note 123. See also note 53 *supra*.

⁸² Just like the manna which Israel ate in the wilderness, Leviathan’s head will prepare them to receive instruction in the Torah from God. See *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kabāna*, ed. and transl. Braude and Kapstein, 627, note 27.

This blessed messianic meal is described in the 9th-century Midrash *Alpha Beta dē-Rabbi Aqiba*.⁸³

The motif of a feast with the consumption of the monster(s), which can be associated with the fallen angel (or his little son), became a symbol of future blessings to be bestowed upon the chosen of God. Rather than mythically representing Iblis-Shayṭān's permanent interior presence within humankind through the ingestion of the demonic at the emergence of creation, the latter imagery symbolises, conversely, the ultimate victory over these forces on the day of resurrection.

With this we have come full circle. The divergent interpretative traditions of the primordial cycle that are found in the visual and textual sources show that the first couple and their progeny always have a choice. In the Qur'ānic context, *fitnah* ('test' or 'trial'), often initiated by the fiery spirit Iblis-Shayṭān, encourages human beings to make the right decision, thus sparing them the terrors of eschatological judgment.⁸⁴ The role of the serpent in the Biblical Paradise, at least as it is reflected in extra-Qur'ānic lore, thus parallels the role of Iblis-Shayṭān in serving as a personification and projection of desire and seduction. The serpent/Iblis-Shayṭān thus stand as symbols for the temptation of humankind.⁸⁵ Hence, on a microcosmic level, humankind is prompted to mount or digest their base instincts and thereby master and tame them. By doing this they can honour the divine "burden of trust (*al-amana*)" (Q 3:72-73), the binding primordial covenant between God and humankind that was placed upon them in anticipation of the final consummation when God will speak to the saved.

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Fig. 1: The angels face Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*) of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. Iran, Shiraz, 899/1494. Krakow, National Museum in Krakow/The Princes Czartoryski Museum, BCz 3885 II Rkps Saf 93. Photograph © National Museum in Krakow.

Fig. 2: Two angels turn back and see with alarm that Iblis will not bow down before Adam. Iran, *Rabī' al-awwal* 1 790/10 March 1388. Painting from a manuscript of *'Ajā'ib al-makblūqāt* (*Wonders of Creation*) of al-Tūsī Salmānī. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits,

⁸³ The traditions that this Midrash contains are, of course, much more ancient than the date of its final redaction. *Alpha Beta dē-Rabbi Aqiba*, *BHM* 3, 33-34, cited after Whitney, *Leviathan and Behemoth*, 179-180.

⁸⁴ The prediction of a chosen community, the righteous believers, as opposed to those that dishonour the divine-human covenant, the wicked unbelievers, is referred to in at least seven *surās* (15:26-48; 38:67-85; 20:115-123; 17:61-65; 18:50-51; 7:10-25; 2:28-39; sequence of the *surās* as suggested by Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory," 126). See Richard Gramlich, "Der Urvertrag in der Koranlegung (zu Sure 7, 172-173)," in: *Der Islam* 60/2 (1983), 205-230; Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory," 118-119, 125-126.

⁸⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1967, 257-259.

Supplément Persan 332, fol. 209. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

- Fig. 3: The angels bow before Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Majālis al-ʿUshshbāq* (*The Assemblies of Lovers*) of Gazurgāhi. Iran, perhaps Shiraz, ca. 982/1575. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 1559, fol. 26. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.
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Angelic Anagogy, Silver and Matter's Mire in Late Antique Christianity*

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Looking at Byzantine icons is a difficult experience to articulate entirely. Our immediate impressions are very often pre-conditioned and so not really accessible. We are at the very least struck by their / the icons' weathered antiquity, distinctive formal qualities, and probably above all by their confident charisma, their ability to confront without apology or qualification anyone entering their presence. One of our protective positions before that self-possession is to fall back on readings of contemporary (that is, primary) documents that indicate native ways of looking at such objects. These leading documents are often persuaded to agree with our commonly-held explanations for these objects that did not really exist. This essay explores some of our useful fictions about images of angels, their recursive play, and matter's implications in this play.

Anagogy is the process habitually summoned to explain how objects, icons mostly, portage the space between the sacred and the profane. That is to say, the object transports the mind to a spiritual place and erases its own presence in this process of spiritual desire (see Fig. 1). A classic example is an epigram on an image of the Archangel Michael by the poet Agathias, sometimes called Scholasticus, who lived ca. 532 to ca. 580 CE. I use here a recent translation by Aglae Pizzone, who has also written a thoughtful and very useful analysis of this poem:¹

The wax—how daring!—molded the invisible, the incorporeal archangel in the semblance of his form. Yet it was no thankless task, since the mortal man who beholds the image directs his spirited impulse by way of a superior imagination. His veneration is no longer distracted: engraving within himself the model, he trembles as if he were in the latter's presence. The eyes stir up a deep intellection, and art is able by means of colours to ferry over the heart's prayer.

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¹ Aglae Pizzone, "Toward a Self-Determined and Emotional Gaze: Agathias and the Icon of the Archangel Michael," in: *Aesthetics and Theurgy in Byzantium*, Sergei Mariev and Wiebke-Marie Stock, eds., Berlin: De Gruyter 2013, 75-103. On the relevance of this epigram into fifteenth-century Rome, see Meredith J. Gill, *Angels and the Order of Heaven in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2014, 78-83.



Fig. 1: Icon of the Virgin, Saints and Angels, Monastery of St. Catherine, Mount Sinai, ca. 600, © Princeton University.

Like other scholars (myself included), she treats the icon as window, a transparent entity that exists to erase its existence.² Moreover, in her model, the viewer (and really, the writer, since the icon does not survive) is an autonomous agent, and the matter at hand is not the image; but rather the viewer's imaginative carnality, his/her corporeal presence before the object, is the determining materiality.³

Pizzone's analysis rests on an understanding of spiritual knowledge and fulfillment working through vision and resulting in communion with the divine. This explanation, to be sure, parallels many descriptions in devotional literature and theological florilegia. But those sources are not neutral and need analysis like any sophisticated, self-involved literature would. Pizzone's work does certainly advance the question of the viewer's body in relation to the icon, and I am really using her for rhetorical contrast. My argument takes a strongly divergent tack, because I want to make a case for eliminating discussion of transparency, carnality as it belongs to humans only, and not least, I favour object over text. So I do not elide that sixth-century writer's explanations with a reclaimable material reality. Text is always self-interested, and it is always in an agonistic relationship with its subject, especially when it is ekphrastic. It is only one interpre-

² Pizzone, "Toward a Self-Determined and Emotional Gaze," 80, "Agathias stresses the emotional impact of the image, eventually eliciting intellectual ascension. The painted portrait of Michael both stimulates embodied faculties and triggers a superior cognitive ability."

³ Pizzone, "Toward a Self-Determined and Emotional Gaze," 83-84, "By 'matter,' I mean not only the substantial, material object, i.e. the painted image, eliciting the beholder's progress, but also the carnality of the beholder him/herself, the physicality of his/her sight."

tative position among many possible, and it is prescriptive in the face of objects' own ceaselessly asserted materialistic independence.

My position tries to take account of the variety of experience and ontologies of the Late Antique/Early Medieval worlds. No single, discrete category exists, for them or even for us, and my argument champions mixture over line, multiplicity over binaries, progress through many possible states of contact with the divine. That mixture is a natural state for us all. As Michel Serres (1930-2019) has written, "No-one has ever witnessed the great battle of simple entities. We only ever experience mixtures, we encounter only meetings."⁴ At stake, just the same, in any historical analysis is the particularity of mixture in that context. I want to confine myself here to relatively narrow limits, objects and texts from approximately 550-650 CE and primarily in Greek. I will stray a little, but this period stands for larger issues meaningful for understanding Byzantine and Eastern Christian relationships to their material world and consequently (always as a consequence, one has to stress) to the divine.

Moreover, I want to spend time on silver, because of this precious metal's role in defining craft, science and interpreting the world for this period (and beyond). This medium also illuminates others used for this period's art. Proto-chemistry (or alchemy) and geology are necessary knowledge for viewing this period, as it would be for anyone attempting to understand us.⁵ The science of Late Antiquity was a distinctive system of thought, organic to their relations to the world, however well or poorly any one person knew it.⁶ Alchemy also combined those fields in its search for essences, for ways to perfect matter, and in its careful attention to process (however misguided many early scientific fields were, by our standards).⁷ Our deep time, to put it another way, is based on assuming that minerals and ores are inert, and they possess a lifespan nearly incomprehensible to us. It is easy, then, for us to ignore it (and to over-exploit it, too).⁸ Late Antique explanations were based on an organic geology, and their temporal assumptions of minerals and ores necessarily were not deep. That time was flowing

⁴ Michel Serres, *The Five Senses: A Philosophy of Mingled Bodies (I)*, Margaret Sankey and Peter Cowley, transl., London, New York: Continuum 2008, 28.

⁵ See my "Transfiguring Materialities: Relational Abstraction in Byzantium and its Exhibition," in: *Convivium* 2/2 (2015), 116-137.

⁶ For a bibliography on Byzantine science, see Maria Mavroudi, "Translations from Greek into Latin and Arabic during the Middle Ages: Searching for the Classical Tradition," in: *Speculum* 90/1 (2015), 28-59. For a wider net, see also Hidemi Takahashi, "The Mathematical Sciences in Syriac: From Sergius of Resh-'Aina and Severus Sebokht to Barhebraeus and Patriarch Ni'matallah," in: *Annals of Science* 68/4 (2011), 477-491, and also his "L'astronomie syriaque," in: *Les sciences en syriaque*, Études syriaques, vol. 11, Paris: Guethner 2014, 319-338.

⁷ Alchemy's scientific roots are often borne out with sympathetic examination, if not realized as such. See, for example, Cristina Viano, *La matière des choses. Le livre IV des Météorologiques d'Aristote et son interprétation par Olympiodore*, Paris: Vrin 2006, 199-206.

⁸ Jussi Parikka, *The Anthrobscene*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2014, 22.

and emergent, because stones were constantly making and moving. For us, too, if we stop to recognize it.⁹ It was mixed in the sense that human time was also mingled with stony time. Moreover, that geology was not then simply under their feet, but living its mingling life among other living creatures.¹⁰ So that geology, and its chemistry and physics, were divinely compelled and soaked in God's presence, and it provides the fullest understanding of crossing to the divine.¹¹ Rather than Agathias's anagogy (or at least our explanation of it as such), I would argue for straddling or bestriding over traversing, that is to say, mixture, relation, mingling, movement, a perfect meeting of physics and metaphysics.¹²

Drawing on the example of Michael Baxandall (1933-2008) in *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, these Late Antique objects can likewise be "addressed as lenses bearing on their own circumstances."¹³ In the first regard, art historians use their eyes, but vision dislikes mixtures, and most conditions of display in museums undermine the heterogeneous in favour of clarity and legibility.¹⁴ This silver plate from the Menil Collection in Houston, TX, dates ca. 600 (Fig. 2), and it shows a scene of communion given by Christ to Sts. Peter and Paul. In documentary photographs, the plate is evenly lighted and consistently easy to read for narrative and identities. But in controlled exhibition (here I am speaking of an exhibition I curated at the Menil in 2013, *Byzantine Things in the World*), the silver plate partook of a dynamic process of figural passages yielding to abstraction under light's intensities (even if installation photographs resist that dynamic; Fig. 3).¹⁵ Strangely, the embossed plate became illegible at just the points where figures and representational elements were present. In that sense, the apprehension of the scene takes self-conscious searching for the right position vis-à-vis the plate for seeing figuration, while its 'natural material state' is lambent, mysterious presence. An

⁹ See, for example, R. D. Norris, J. M. Norris, R. D. Lorenz J. Ray, and B. Jackson, "Sliding Rocks on Racetrack Playa, Death Valley National Park: First Observation of Rocks in Motion," in: *PLoS ONE* 9/8 (2014) [<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0105948> (last accessed 23 February 2016)].

¹⁰ Paul Feigelfeld, "Media Archaeology out of Nature: An Interview with Jussi Parikka," in: *e-flux journal* 62 (February, 2015).

¹¹ I cite here as support, Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman*, Cambridge-Malden, MA: Polity 2013, 60, "Life, far from being codified as the exclusive property or the unalienable right of one species, the human, over all others or of being sacralized as pre-established given, is posited as process, interactive and open-ended."

¹² See the excellent article by Gregory Smith, "Physics and Metaphysics," in: *The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity*, Scott Fitzgerald Johnson, ed., Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press 2012, 513-561.

¹³ Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany*, New Haven, London: Yale University Press 1980, vii.

¹⁴ Serres, *The Five Senses*, 81, "A medium is abstract, dense, homogeneous, almost stable, concentrated; a mixture fluctuates. The medium belongs to solid geometry, as one used to say; a mixture favors fusion and tends towards the fluid."

¹⁵ See *Byzantine Things in the World*, Glenn Peers, ed., Houston, New Haven: The Menil Collection, Yale University Press 2013.



Fig. 2: Paten with the Communion of Peter and Paul, silver repoussé in high relief, 10 1/8 diameter (90-12DJ), ca. 600, The Menil Collection, Houston, photograph © Paul Hester, with permission of The Menil Collection.

irony, perhaps, is that the ‘natural state’ took place in such a constructed setting. And photography scarcely touches the effects. Moreover, the color values of the sheens of the plate revealed identity-instability that echoed alchemists’ notion of shared essential-qualities of silver and gold. From certain angles, the silver came to look golden and appeared to traverse both metals almost simultaneously. Exhibition is really the only way most of us can experience this changeable nature.¹⁶ Sil-

¹⁶ I am also thinking of the David Plates in *Byzantium and Islam* at the Metropolitan Museum, where the plates shone brilliantly in silver and gold flashes. I am immensely grateful for the collegial sharing of installation photographs by the curator, Helen Evans, who also edited the catalogue, *Byzantium and Islam: Age of Transition, 7th-9th Century*, with Brandie Ratliff, New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art 2012. See, also, Bente Küllerich, “Monochromy, Dichromy and Polychromy in Byzantine Art,” in: *Doron rodopoikilon: Stud-*



Fig. 3: Installation view of *Byzantine Things in the World* (2013), The Menil Collection, Houston, photograph © Paul Hester, with permission of The Menil Collection.

ver reveals its own instability, its movement from state to state, its ability to cross worlds. Matter, in other words, is not an intruder on the making of meaning; rather, it contributes directly and fully to passages among states.¹⁷

And yet our explanatory framework asserts no real connection between an image and its model, except insofar as conventionalized resemblance gives it. To return to Agathias, wax is in some sense ‘greatly daring’ in its material capture of the archangel. Such metaphors from technology have led scholars to develop theories of non-essential relations between images (the impressed wax) and the model (the seal) – one impresses the other and leaves a trace, but no essence is shared between the two. Theologians did employ this metaphor, and it allowed them to pursue an inoculating relation between icon and subject. Friedrich Kittler (1943-2011) tells us, however, that an historical discursive practice is predetermined by media technology, and media – like seals and wax, to take it to Late Antiquity – established and maintained a certain understanding of the operations that materials bore out.¹⁸

ies in Honour of Jan Olof Rosenqvist, Denis Searby, Ewa Balicka Witakowska and Johan Heldt, eds., Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet 2012, 169-183.

¹⁷ See the stimulating book by Spike Bucklow, *The Riddle of the Image: The Secret Science of Medieval Art*, London: Reaktion 2014.

¹⁸ See *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*, Erik Butler, transl., Stanford: Stanford University Press 2013, and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Geoffrey Winthrop, transl., Stanford: Stanford University Press 1999, to take two of his books translated

Materiality made passages between the terrestrial and divine, and technologies (and their descriptions) attempted to catch up with matter, its *stoffē* and its effects.¹⁹ Alchemy was in the first place a strongly observant system. It examined the shining, self-perfecting lambency beyond the eye's reach, and then attempted to articulate it and harness it. Here, silver and wax provided – and provides for us retrospectively – lenses with which to understand its own circumstances in its world. As Jussi Parikka has recently argued:

The engineer does not breathe life into inert material. With their specific qualities and intensities, the material demands a specific type of specialist or a specific method to be born, so that they might be catalyzed into the machines we call machines. The material invents the engineer.²⁰

If Kittler tried to position media at the outset of cultural discourses, Parikka takes us one step back in the chain, to an originary moment of materials, or just matter, which includes stones, ores, wax, and so on, as formative or generative of its own outcomes in human hands. And to take this recursiveness one step further, or deeper, that lack of individuality or independence of the human agent, or even its self-evident existence, is difficult to catch hold in these contexts where media-technology shines its light.²¹

Substance as a basic stratum of the world is a necessary component in any historical discourse concerned with things. Naturally, contemporaries to this silver plate had notions about substances, and they sought explanations, as far as their media allowed, for how substance or matter worked and unfolded. For example, Stephanus of Alexandria (ca. 550/5-ca. 622 CE) is one of the most important sources for natural philosophy in this period, in which alchemy should be included.²² He has been credited with being an important intellectual bridge between Alexandria and Constantinople in the crucial seventh century, when the loss of Egypt meant a new gravitational center for intellectuals was needed at the capital. That reputation, however, may be undeserved, as recent work has argued,²³ but

into English as examples. And see my "Senses' Other Sides," in: *Proceedings of the 23rd International Congress of Byzantine Studies, Belgrade, 22-27 August 2016. Plenary Papers*, Belgrade, 2016, 175-87.

¹⁹ Parikka in Feigelfeld, "Media Archaeology out of Nature," "...in locating materiality of cultural techniques in technological arrangements. But I want to insist that the materiality of media starts even before we talk about media: with the minerals, the energy, the affordances or affects that specific metallic arrangements enable for communication, transmission, conduction, projection, and so on. It is a geopolitical as well as a material question, but one where the geos is irreducible to an object of human political intention."

²⁰ Parikka in Feigelfeld, "Media Archaeology out of Nature."

²¹ See Ute Holl, "Media Theory (or, and, despite) a Theory of Cultural Techniques," transl. Daniel Spaulding, in: *Texte zur Kunst* 98 (June 2015), 80-87, here: 86.

²² See Maria K. Papanastasiou, "Stephanus of Alexandria," in: *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Detroit: Scribner 2008, vol. 24, 516-519.

²³ Mossman Rouché, "Stephanus the Alexandrian Philosopher, the Kanon and a Seventh-Century Millennium," in: *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 74 (2011), 1-30.

in any case, Stephanus wrote important treatises for this issue of substance, for matter and its dynamic independence.

Alchemy suffered discredit, but it was an aspect of scientific inquiry that was motivated not only by avarice, but also by genuine curiosity and discipline. In this last aspect, it was, in the hands of a thinker like Stephanus, a program of self-improvement, indeed spiritual perfecting that matched the self-refining progress of base metals to gold. Only the pure in spirit, in other words, could help realize pure matter. And discerning that essential aspect of matter was based on a belief that all bodies, down to the lowest level of matter, have power and ability to regenerate. Those qualities all derive from an understanding of and connection with a vital spirit in matter,

And being burnt to ashes they make many and divine works and various colours...and leading the nature back outside to the visible. On the one hand, [those sulphurous things] are active bodies; on the other hand, a power, according to another discourse, displaying activity...For such things as come to rebirth, relate to an easily apprehended art, especially they who cook together the ash of common plants with the like, and melt together the ashes of bodies and glasses with the like... For [these bodies] come again to a certain power and virtue and re-birth, having a nature imitative of the whole universe and of the elements themselves, whence also they have re-birth, a communion with a certain spirit, as of things coming into existence by a material spirit. So copper, like a man, has both soul and spirit.²⁴

In this elaborate way, Stephanus's position permits a further view into how substance or basic matter was conceived and explained in this period ca. 600 CE. It conforms to some fundamental definitions for substance used by scholars today: the possibility of division and separation, while retaining identity as substance; characteristic structures maintaining in the substance despite separation; and certain tendencies predictable in themselves and in relations.²⁵ An important distinction is the vital spirit, the animating current that runs through matter. Modern physics and chemistry have their explanations for this spark of life, while scientists of all kinds had their own explanations in Late Antiquity. For Lucretius, famously, the movement of atoms was due to *clinamen*, an unpredictable and arbitrary swerve.²⁶ For this period, the swerve may be unpredictable and seemingly arbitrary,

²⁴ And further, "For these melted and metallic bodies, when they are reduced to ashes, being joined to the fire, are again made spirits, the fire giving freely to them its spirit. For as they manifestly take it from the air that makes all things, just as it also makes men and all things, thence is given them a vital spirit and a soul. So also the fusible bodies, being reduced to ashes with the metallic bodies, by a certain method recover their soul, as if becoming akin to the fire. And likewise all the elements have creations, destructions, changes and restorations from one to another." Text and transl. in: F. Sherwood Taylor, "The Alchemical Works of Stephanos of Alexandria," in: *Ambix* 2/1 (1938), 40-41.

²⁵ See Hans Peter Hahn and Jens Soentgen, "Acknowledging Substances: Looking at the Hidden Side of the Material World," in: *Philosophy and Technology* 24 (2011), 19-33.

²⁶ On Serres's use of this theory, see Daniela Hahn, "Teilchen-Bewegungen: Zur experimentellen Beobachtung von Gemengen in 19. Jahrhundert," in: *Stoffe: Zur Geschichte der Mate-*

but that opacity is only due to a lack of discernment: for alchemists, investigation and experimentation was a way into deeper and fuller understanding than was possible for those not able to reach that level. Alchemy was self-perfecting in claiming that vital spirit and to further world knowing.

Part of that knowing involved risky work, and here I would like to bring us back to silver specifically. In the first place, silver was a metal near purity. In a system without classifications for metals and ores as we have them, the only real way to rank and organize metals and ores was through their relative purity. Ruled by the moon (as gold was ruled by the sun), silver had lofty celestial credentials, and it moved to perfection's rank naturally, as all things in the world moved to their proper places eventually. No one knew how long silver's route to perfection would in the normal course of time take to reach its goal, but the assumption was always that it would. Alchemy was the search for the accelerant for that purity, a way to harness that vital matter to its own perfecting end. And so the plate is not inert according to this system; in its substance, it is moving that way through its vital spirit. Its vital spirit is most often temporally quite deep and slow, and it is also most often innocuous. But another quality of substance is unpredictable and dangerous qualities of change, regeneration and combination.²⁷

Again, in the absence of definitions of distinguishing characteristics that we would recognize from our geological framework, silver had such traits, too. Silver possessed qualities that were not fully explicable, especially when the problematic aspect of its relationship to quicksilver is examined. In Greek, *hydrargyros*, and in Latin, *argentum vivum*, the difficulty is evident in the very designation of mercury in that world.²⁸ Its vitality, both in its neutral form as silver and in its active form as quicksilver, is a common assumption in that world. Indeed, Stephanus inferred its basic sympathy with life-giving fluid, as warm, human blood is most like quicksilver.²⁹ In those terms, quicksilver and its slow brother, silver, are kinds of life-blood of earth that have cognate human attributes, but also dangerous and miraculous qualities. Mercury and sulphur were the basic catalysts of life in these

rialität in Künsten und Wissenschaften, Barbara Naumann, Thomas Strässle and Caroline Torra-Mattenklott, eds., Zurich: Vdf 2006, 57-63.

²⁷ Hahn/Soentgen, "Acknowledging Substances."

²⁸ See John Maxson Stillman, *The Story of Alchemy and Early Chemistry*, New York: Dover 1960, 7-11 [repr. of the edition New York 1924].

²⁹ Maria Papathanassiou, "Stephanos of Alexandria: A Famous Byzantine Scholar, Alchemist and Astrologer," in: *The Occult Sciences in Byzantium*, Paul Magdalino and Maria Mavroudi, eds., Geneva: Pommes d'or 2006, 176, translating an unpublished text by Stephanus, "...blood composed of air is warm and human and is like quicksilver. Yellow bile composed of fire is warm and dry and is like copper. Black bile composed of earth is dry and cold and is the dross of both [quicksilver and copper]. Phlegm composed of water is cold and humid and is like the vapours of a watery solution of gold, which are the souls of copper."

theories, and their basic interaction produced vermilion, the material artists and others knew to be closest to blood.³⁰

In these ways, science in the period ca. 600 CE was able to draw connections and, in fact, to find substantial unity in the world, from cosmos to humanity to the matter underfoot. Not everyone would know or articulate the material world in this way, of course, but the general position was certainly deep seated in nearly every aspect of life.³¹

Those properties are similar to descriptions found in intellectuals' texts, alchemists' included, of the cosmic sympathies that guide and govern. And all these qualities establish experience for bodies to know, experience and be guided to proximity to the divine and even contact with God. Geology's organic qualities, its patterns of growth, its abilities of motion and action, were common assumptions that linked the Pilgrim – never given a great deal of credit for his critical faculties – and great thinkers like Proclus (412-85), who also wrote of the living qualities of stone and metals. Two principal camps, to generalize, claimed the field. On the one hand, Platonists for whom the cosmos was caused by the One saw soul in all things, making alive even those things that could not live otherwise:

Indeed, [soul] accounts for or is closely involved in a wide variety of functions that few people nowadays are inclined to ascribe to a single thing: reason, sensation, passions, appetite, and so on, but also life and growth, the 'vegetative' function people share with plants and the living, growing earth.³²

On the other hand, from the ancient world through the Byzantine, Late Antiquity was part of a long continuum wherein geology was life and provided passage from stones' and ores' matter to the highest insights into the unified workings of the cosmos.

Explanations for those workings varied among intellectuals writing in the fields of philosophy and science in this period. Aristotelians offered explanations from the other direction, from Platonists, not top down and form on matter from above, but a solid stratum from which form could emerge and pass. Their philosophy in this period established a continuum from heaven to earth that broke the old dichotomy between the two realms. But they kept the notion of a dynamic universe filled with *pneuma*, or spirit, which pervaded the universe and established

³⁰ See Pamela H. Smith, "Knowledge in Motion: Following Itineraries of Matter in the Early Modern World," in: *Cultures in Motion*, Daniel T. Rodgers, Bhavani Raman, and Helmut Reimitz, eds., Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2014, 110-112, and also "Making as Knowledge: Craft as Natural Philosophy," in: *Ways of Making and Knowing: The Material Culture of Empirical Knowledge*, Pamela H. Smith, Amy R.W. Meyers, and Harold J. Cook, eds., Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press 2014, 36, as well as Carolyn L. Connor, *The Color of Ivory: Polychromy on Byzantine Ivories*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998, 28-29.

³¹ Smith, "Physics and Metaphysics," 516, Plotinus and others are a "potential index of certain deep-seated assumptions that rarely made it to the surface of explicit discussion."

³² Smith, "Physics and Metaphysics," 526-527.

basic balances whereby all things strove to reach their own perfection, according to their nature. In this period – the sixth and seventh centuries – major arguments were mobilized that altered age-old Aristotelian dogma. The *pneuma* became the divine spirit, heaven and earth were governed by the same principles, and the eternity of the universe was cut, replaced by creation and finitude – at the hands of the single God, who was adapted by philosophers like John Philoponus (ca. 490-ca. 570) to the Christian deity.³³ A Christian understanding of the mechanics of the universe became increasingly exclusive in this period.

Two examples could show how these models implicate the stuff of silver. The first comes from the life of St. Theodore of Sykeon, an Anatolian monk and bishop who lived during the reign of Heraclius (610-41); his hagiography dates shortly after that reign ended.³⁴ In one episode, the saint sends a deacon to Constantinople to purchase a silver service set for liturgical celebration. The deacon returns with a shiny new set, but Theodore discerns a problem with the silver. Not visible to a normal eye, the silver atoms had been debased by a previous form imposed on them, namely a chamber pot for a prostitute. Judging the silver to be forever spoiled, Theodore had them both perform a prayer of blessing over the liturgical vessels, which tarnished before their eyes. Miraculous connoisseurship is revealed here. At a level only distinguishable by the saint, matter had sufficient form to be intelligible still as rotten and debased, but that level was below the current form, apparently blameless, that the silver had taken. Almost radioactively tainted by sin, matter was in this episode the aspect that carried the body (in the end, the liturgical set), but the unformed substance of silver is the basic subject and discerned only by symptoms observable by an informed examiner. While the language I am applying here is largely derived from Philoponus's argument (though inadequate to the sophistication and difficulty of it), the real protagonist, Theodore, is working through rather more reduced concerns, of right and wrong substance, pure and contagious mixture.

The other example I would like to introduce gives the positive side of mixture and contagion. Written a century or two after the fact, the *Narratio de Sancta Sophia*

³³ On Philoponus, see Samuel Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity*, New York: Basic 1962, Christian Wildberg, "John Philoponus," in: *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2008 Edition), Edward N. Zalta, ed., <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/philoponus/>>, *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, Richard Sorabji, ed., 2nd ed., London: Duckworth 2010, Thomas F. Torrance, "John Philoponos of Alexandria—Theologian and Physicist," in: *Kanon* 15 (1999), 315-330, and among other noteworthy studies by Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "Philoponus and the Coptic Eucharist," in: *Journal of Late Antiquity* 3/1 (2010), 158-175.

³⁴ *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, André-Jean Festugière, ed., 2 vols., Brussels: Société des Bollandistes 1970, I: 36-38 (42); *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies Translated from the Greek*, transl. Elizabeth Dawes and Norman H. Baynes, Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press 1996, 117-118 [repr. of the edition Oxford 1948]. Festugière, *Vie de Théodore de Sykéon*, vol. 2, 196-198, also mentions a very similar, contemporary story from Theophylactus Simocattes (active first half of the seventh century).

described the silver altar produced for Hagia Sophia in the sixth century in terms of a bravado mingling of stuff: in order to produce a work costlier than gold alone, Justinian collected a team of specialists in different materials, who advised him to combine all the most precious substances (“gold, silver, various precious stones, pearls and mother of pearl, copper, electrum, lead, iron, tin, glass and every other metallic substance”).³⁵ The craftsmen ground the substances in mortars, smelted them all at once, and kneaded them together, and finally poured them in a mold. The text gives other extravagant descriptions of the liturgical furnishings, but the effect is also noteworthy: the resultant material brought out wonder in viewers (naturally), and it more compellingly altered color and brilliance, so that sometimes it was golden and sometimes silvery in sheen and glow, but also alternating with sapphire; it was able simultaneously to include all colours and hues.

This narrative has a number of points of contact with my argument: in the first place, it shows the nature of mixture according to understandings of the period, that is to say as a blend without loss of individual characteristics. Each material retained in some way an aspect of its own appearance and substance that played out in the altar cladding. Such questions of identity and mixture had been debated throughout this period. The examples of torches and woven cloth often played into these philosophical discussions: torches when bundled together can seem united, but are perfectly distinct when they are separated, and likewise, cloth of many coloured threads can appear one colour, but examination of the weave reveals individual threads and colours. For Platonists, “mixture is one of the delusions so characteristic of the world of seeming and becoming.”³⁶ For an erstwhile Aristotelian like Philoponus, mixture is ultimately reducible to the four elements, but above that level, substances, like water and wine, retain their particularity,

³⁵ *Narratio de S. Sophia*, “Wishing to make the altar table much costlier (polytelesteran) than gold, he called in many specialists and told them so. They said to him. ‘Let us place in a smelting furnace gold, silver, various precious stones, pearls and mother of pearl, copper, electrum, lead, iron, tin, glass and every other metallic substances (hylene).’ Having ground all of these in mortars and bound them up they poured them into the smelting furnace. After the fire had kneaded together (anamaxamenon) these (substances), the craftsmen removed them from the fire and poured them into a mould, and so the altar-table was case, priceless mixture. In this was, he set it up, and underneath it, he placed columns of pure gold with precious stones and enamels; and the stairs all round upon which the priests stand to kiss the altar-table he made of pure silver. As for the basin of the altar-table, he made it of priceless stones and gilded it. Who can behold the appearance of the altar-table without being amazed? Who indeed can comprehend it as it changes color and brilliance, sometimes appearing to be gold, at other places silver, another gleaming with sapphire—in a word, reflecting seventy-two hues according to the nature of the stones, pearls and all the metals?” See *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanarum*, Theodorus Preger, ed., 2 pts. in 1 vol., New York: Arno 1975, I: 74-108, here 94.17-96.6 (17) [repr. of the edition Leipzig 1901-1907]; transl. Cyril Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1986, 99.

³⁶ Frans A. J. de Haas, “Late Ancient Philosophy,” in: *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy*, David Sedley, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2003, 262-263.

while losing or reducing their actuality.³⁷ Without that position, every combination above the four elements would have been very hard to comprehend and to describe according to how we know the world.

In the second place, the process described has a great deal in common with methods of alchemy preserved in Late Antique sources. The kneading of metal to produce certain effects occurs as a cognate to breadmaking, as alchemy has many cognate forms in other fields such as cookery and agriculture. The kneading takes place there because the smiths are working with a yeast, namely gold. Gold is a seed, like semen, or yeast, that enlivens and engenders all that which it comes into direct contact in such processes.

In the third place, this description takes us back to the Menil silver plate. That object is an antidote, as so many things are when considered in themselves very carefully, to mental or spiritual anagogy as the prescribed means for Late Antique people to overcome the limitations of this world and to traverse to the next. The conditions of display and points of contact with such a plate allow us to imagine what that anonymous narrator could be describing, that is, the play, growth and change of substance so richly seen in gold and silver (but evident in all materials in descending show). In this way, the plate does indeed comment on its own circumstances. It can reveal, if looked at in light and space, its silvery watery quality, when forms submerge in that glowing field; it can stabilize and coalesce into that legible moment of communion with Christ; it can also show its golden substance that ferments and grows the plate to the perfection that gold only can give. Such an object can recapitulate in its matter and form the very nature of the world and its relation to God. Nothing is eternal, but God, according to thinkers like Philoponus, and that belief – strongly against tradition – became increasingly common in this period.³⁸ God created and provided motivation to all matter, and nothing reduces entirely to non-being, except in its form.³⁹ For Philoponus, this argument about the non-perishability of substance can also apply – strikingly – to the eucharistic materials, too. So the bread can become flesh, as he wrote in his refutation of Pro-

³⁷ Christophe Erismann, "John Philoponus on Individuality and Particularity," in: *Individuality in Late Antiquity*, Alexis Torrance and Johannes Zachhuber, eds., Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate 2014, 143-159; Richard Sorabji, "New Findings on Philoponus. Part 2: Recent Studies," in: *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science*, 11-40, here 24-26; Frans A. J. de Haas, "Mixture in Philoponus: An Encounter with a Third Kind of Potentiality," in: *The Commentary Tradition on Aristotle's De generatione et corruptione: Ancient, Medieval and Early Modern*, J. M. M. H. Thijssen and H. A. G. Braakhuis, eds., Turnhout: Brepols 1999, 21-46, Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity*, 99-121, and for Philoponus, *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200-600 AD. A Sourcebook*, vol. 2, *Physics*, Richard Sorabji, ed., London: Duckworth 2004, 291-294 (20a.4-7); and *The Philosophy of the Commentators 200-600 AD. A Sourcebook*, vol. 1, *Psychology (with Ethics and Religion)*, Richard Sorabji, ed., London: Duckworth 2004, 178-180 (5c.2).

³⁸ Virginia Burrus's treatment in "Nothing Is Not One: Revisiting the Ex Nihilo," in: *Modern Theology* 29/2 (2013), 33-48, reveals some of the beautiful complexity of this position.

³⁹ See, for example, Torrance, "John Philoponos of Alexandria," 323-326.

clus in his *Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World* (529), but when the form of the flesh has perished, the form of the flesh can be ‘not-being’ and yet the body or substance remains itself.⁴⁰ And so for the wine as well:

For when the wine is changed into blood, straight away the form of the wine is destroyed; and likewise, if the bread changes into flesh, the very form itself of the bread has not become flesh, but rather it itself has on the one hand gone into non-being, yet on the other in its substrate the form of the flesh is generated...⁴¹

God-motivated, but not activated by ritual or prayers in this model, Philoponus is describing in some fashion the tainted substance of Theodore of Sykeon’s silver. Form is passing, however miraculously produced, and substance retains its nature however it is shaped. In other words, the plate and icon, like so many objects or things in that world, can reveal their own self-directed anagogy through their substances.

As in Baxandall’s aphorism again, the object is its own lens on its own circumstances – its recursions are always rich. The forms on the plate show that very anagogy in matter: Christ is giving his own blood, but the wine remains even having received that form, while the bread is sitting there, separated flesh (though unrecognizable as such from its appearance) of the man behind it. The Lord is giving his very (undiminishing) body for eating and drinking by the two princes of the apostles.⁴² The bread is still bread, clearly – this is Philoponus’s point, that “...there is no need to imagine some kind of incorporeal matter mysteriously at work in our world. On the contrary: the three-dimensional performs as matter perfectly well.”⁴³ Here is a remarkably realist philosophy that also finds resonance in hagiography and other literary genres, like ekphrasis. Oddly, alchemy can also emerge as a cognate system of thought, in which the substratum of matter can be directed and purified to its best essence. Likewise, the liturgical action of the eucharist demanded purity on the part of the participant in this period, so in a remarkable conjunction of thinking and being, transitive matter refined Christians to their best, most divine form.⁴⁴ Gold is that divine substance that pulls along every other substance in its wake toward accomplishing its ultimate self-realization, its best essence. Science

⁴⁰ On this issue, see the excellent Leslie S. B. MacCoull, “*Eidos, Idea, and Hyle on the Altar: Philoponus on the Matter of the Eucharist*,” in: *Ostkirchliche Studien* 59/2 (2010), 317-327.

⁴¹ *Ioannes Philoponus, De Aeternitate Mundi Contra Proclum*, Hugo Rabe, ed., Leipzig: Teubner 1899, 358,14-20, transl. MacCoull, “*Eidos, Idea, and Hyle on the Altar*,” 320. For an alternative translation, see *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World* 9-11, transl. Michael Share, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press 2010, 41.

⁴² On a comparable plate, see Derek Krueger’s analysis in his *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2014, 113-114.

⁴³ MacCoull, “*Eidos, Idea, and Hyle on the Altar*,” 322.

⁴⁴ On the move from communal to penitence and purity in understanding and performance of the Eucharist, see Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects*, 127-129.

told them about such matters, and the things around them told them what their science could say, to return to Jussi Parikka's and Friederich Kittler's positions.

That mix and mingling that we all do was active for stuff's side, too. The wax was greatly daring in the image of the Archangel, and the silver of the plate was deeply involved in its search for perfection. Movingly, matter was able to bestride these passages between material and spiritual realms. The angelic wax might have been about anagogy for Agathias, but that anagogy was, ironically, downward, to the matter that made present and real to him the fearful archangel. At this level, substance trumps form. Agathias's semblance of the archangel's form is only ever stated at the level of wax and colour, the basis of the encaustic technique of icon painting. Tellingly, the archangel is never described as such; he has none of the attributes other texts might give him, like wings, beardless face, youthful beauty, staff or orb. He is revealed on the level of matter, the wax and colours. And the viewer is likewise made into a semblance: the molding of the archangel is also performed on that imaginary viewer, who is engraved within him or herself in that same spiritual semblance. Substance, shared among God's creation, is the stratum truer to the divine than form, and the mingling of this matter, our mire in our world's stuff, shows forth the archangel's anagogy descending to 'deep intellection' of strangely invisible matter.

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Création et êtres angéliques d'après un manuscrit arabe inédit: l'*Hexaéméron* du Pseudo-Épiphane de Salamine

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Introduction et brève présentation codicologique du manuscrit

Cette communication vise à présenter une conception de la création et des êtres angéliques d'après un texte arabe inédit, l'*Aksimāros* ou l'*Hexaéméron* du Pseudo-Épiphane, évêque de Salamine. Il s'agit d'un apocryphe pseudépigraphique contenu dans un manuscrit du 17^e siècle, Balamand 123 (*olim* 659), appartenant à la collection du Monastère Patriarcal Notre-Dame de Balamand au Liban.¹

Intitulé *Mağmūʿ* ou Florilège, ce manuscrit, à usage privé, regroupe, à côté de l'*Aksimāros*, un ensemble d'écrits relatifs à des thèmes différents, correspondant à l'intérêt de son propriétaire ou lecteur. Je cite à titre d'exemples:

1. une *Vision de Grégoire sur la chute de Satan*;
2. une *Vision apocryphe de l'apôtre Paul*;
3. une *Anthologie du moine Théophile et le récit de son voyage en compagnie d'autres moines à Jérusalem, en Perse et aux Indes*;
4. un *Mîmar sur la vénération des Livres Saints*, attribué à Jean Chrysostome;
5. une *Vie du moine Zosime du Monastère saint Jean-Baptiste près du Jourdain*;
6. une *Vie de la sage Sybille fille d'Hercule*; etc.²

Certes, ce manuscrit n'est pas unique en son genre. Le fonds ancien de la Bibliothèque du Monastère de Balamand compte, à lui seul, 13 Florilèges, dont le plus ancien remonte au 15^e siècle.

Composé de 19 quinions, sauf pour les cinq derniers feuillets, Balamand 123 est un manuscrit de 196 feuillets. Chaque feuillet se termine par une réclame rédigée au coin gauche inférieur de la page. Toutefois, une irrégularité de réclame apparaît sur certaines pages et un changement d'écriture sur d'autres.

Datant de 1661, le manuscrit est copié par un clerc prénommé *Farah* sur un papier occidental filigrané en écriture *naskhī*, à l'encre rouge pour les titres et

¹ Voir le catalogue arabe des manuscrits:

Al-Makhṭūʿāt al-ʿarabiyyah fi-l-adyirah al-urṭūduksiyyah al-antakiyyah fi Lūbmān, vol. 2, *Dayr Saʿyīdat al-Balamand, Qism al-tawṭīq wa al-dirāsāt al-urṭūduksiyyah al-antakiyyah*, Bayrūt: Jāmiʿat al-Balamand 1994, 107-108.

² Voici quelques autres textes: *Une vie de Jean Baptiste et son séjour dans le désert*; un *Calendrier ecclésiastique sur le calcul de l'année liturgique et des dates de fêtes*; un *Commentaire sur la symbolique de l'architecture ecclésiastique et des objets liturgiques*; etc.

noire pour le corps du texte. La première œuvre qui le compose est l'*Aksimāros*, qui semble être, à cause des grécismes, une traduction arabe anonyme d'un original grec. Il occupe les feuillets 1^r à 47^r. Son prologue est comme suit:

Au nom du Père, du Fils et du Saint-Esprit un seul Dieu. Nous commençons avec l'aide et la grâce de Dieu, par transcrire l'*Aksimāros* d'Épiphane, évêque de Chypre parlant des six jours de la création, de l'arrangement du Créateur, ainsi que des miracles de sa création, gloire à lui.³

Il se termine par la formule suivante:

Prie pour le pauvre copiste, ta prière t'aidera auprès de Dieu.⁴

Connu par les spécialistes et recensé dans plusieurs catalogues de manuscrits, je pense à Graf par exemple,⁵ l'*Aksimāros* paraphrase certains livres de l'*Ancien Testament*, tout en élaborant une herméneutique du livre de la *Genèse*, notamment l'ouvrage des six jours. Il nous transmet aussi une version de *La Caverne des trésors*, *Maghārat al-kunūz*, relatant le sort d'Adam et Ève après leur sortie du paradis, ainsi que *Le Combat d'Adam* et son *Testament*.

Mais avant de procéder à l'étude de ce texte, notamment dans sa partie consacrée à la création et à l'angélogogie, rappelons que l'auteur à qui il est attribué est né en Palestine en 315. Il appartient donc à la première génération qui vécut dans un empire en voie de christianisation. Formé chez des cénobites d'Égypte, Épiphane quitte ce pays pour fonder un monastère dans sa terre natale. Pour des raisons mal connues, l'higoumène immigre à Chypre où il fut élu évêque de Salamine jusqu'à sa mort en 403. Célèbre pour son souci de trouver des antidotes aux erreurs hérétiques, son *Panarion* ou *Boîte à remèdes* a connu, au dire de Jérôme, un certain succès auprès des érudits, si bien qu'on a commencé à faire appel à son autorité et à lui attribuer quelques autres textes, dont notre récit.⁶ Rappelons aussi que ce texte est avant tout une œuvre exégétique, trouvant son origine dans des sources bibliques, patristiques, mystériques et philosophiques, notamment néoplatoniciennes.

Création et hiérarchie céleste d'après l'Aksimāros

Le liminaire de l'*Aksimāros* commence par une confession de foi inspirée des formules bibliques, proclamant Dieu comme Père tout-puissant, unique créateur et conservateur de toutes choses.

³ Traduction de l'auteur.

⁴ Traduction de l'auteur.

⁵ Georg Graf, *Geschichte der Christlichen Arabischen Literatur*, (Studi e Testi, 118), Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 1944, vol. 1-2, 353; 493.

⁶ Voir Ioannes Quasten, *Initiation aux Pères de l'Église*, « Épiphane de Salamine, Écrits apocryphes », vol. 3, trad. J. Laporte, Paris: Édition du Cerf 1963, 553-558.

Cette profession de foi en Dieu trinitaire, prend l'allure d'une louange s'efforçant de mettre en évidence et à l'aide des catégories philosophiques, la nature divine. Partant d'une perspective cosmico-sotériologique, qui réfute l'existence d'une matière éternelle, le liminaire évoque l'unicité, la simplicité, l'éternité et la toute-puissance de Dieu, étendues au Fils et à l'Esprit-Saint. Ainsi, l'être, l'immutabilité, l'unicité et la transcendance des trois hypostases sont, selon l'auteur, les attributs de ce Dieu unique et éternel, auteur *ex-nihilo*, par le Fils et l'Esprit-Saint, de toutes choses. Rien ne fut avant lui et par lui tout advint à être. Il a tout créé par volonté.

Cette doctrine de la création *ex-nihilo*, partant de l'action libre et volontariste de Dieu, considère la création comme un miroir reflétant l'éternité, la puissance et la bonté de son auteur qui échappe à toute figuration.

Le liminaire est suivi d'un premier texte intitulé *Ṣifat ibtidā' al-khalīqah* ou *Description du début de la création*, qui n'est pas sans nous rappeler *Le Livre des Jubilés*⁷ et *Le Livre de l'abeille*.⁸ Il occupe les deux premiers cahiers et se veut une description minutieuse et parfois exégétique de l'œuvre divine accomplie les six premiers jours de la création.

Ordonné selon une conception chronologique, ce texte est divisé en plusieurs rubriques décrivant chacune un épisode de la création, conformément à la foi et à la cosmologie judéo-chrétiennes.

La première rubrique de cette description s'ouvre sur un *incipit* rédigé à l'encre rouge reprenant la formule « Dieu dit » pour signaler le début de la création. Ainsi les quatre éléments, feu, air, eau et terre sont, selon ce texte, la première expression de la *hylée* créée par la parole divine.

Emmenés à l'existence tous ensemble par le *Fiat* divin, ils sont, comme dans les cosmogonies traditionnelles, la *materia prima* à partir de laquelle, Dieu fit toutes choses. Le texte s'emploie à décrire dans le menu détail et dans un langage fort symbolique, ce que Dieu a créé à partir de chaque élément. C'est ainsi que la création à partir de l'élément « feu » inaugure la quatrième rubrique du manuscrit. Elle nous raconte comment Dieu bénit le souffle du feu *nasmat al-nār* et lui dit d'être fécond et prolifique et comment le feu s'est décliné en lumière *nūr*, en

⁷ André Caquot, « Jubilés », dans: *La Bible. Écrits intertestamentaires*, A. Dupont-Sommer, M. Philonenko, édés., Paris: Gallimard 1987, 629-810.

Le livre des Jubilés est un écrit biblique inclus dans le canon éthiopien tout en étant absent de la Septante. Il reproduit des parties de textes traditionnels midrashiques qui allongent le récit de la *Genèse* et de l'*Exode* en ajoutant ou retranchant certains détails. Ce livre présente l'histoire du monde à compter des six jours de la création jusqu'à Moïse 10; Ernest Alfred Thomson Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Bee* (Anecdota Oxoniensia, Semitic series 1/2), Oxford: Clarendon 1886.

⁸ *Le Livre de l'abeille* est une compilation syriaque (avec une version arabe ancienne) organisée en 60 chapitres, reproduisant des textes historico-légendaires retraçant le devenir du monde de la création jusqu'au jugement dernier. Il est dû à un évêque nestorien du début du XIII^e siècle, Salomon de Khalat, métropolitain de Bessora en 1222.

luminescence brûlante, *nirāniyyab muḥriqab*, et en chaleur *ḥarārab*. Toutefois, c'est à partir de la seule lumière que Dieu fit son trône, l'éleva et le fixa au plus haut, délimitant ainsi la frontière entre lui et le reste de son œuvre.

La création des trois cieux, étendus en forme de coupole et séparés, dans leur gradation, par des voiles de lumière, suit ce passage. On y lit comment le Seigneur stratifia les trois cieux et comment il les sépara les uns des autres :

Après cela, Dieu prit de la seule lumière et créa le premier ciel. Il l'étendit et le modela comme une coupole. Il lui fit de la lumière un voile par-dessous et de tous les côtés. Puis Dieu prit aussi de la seule lumière et créa le deuxième ciel. Il l'étendit et le modela comme une coupole. Il lui en fit un voile par-dessous. Il le ferma de tous les côtés et le colla au deuxième ciel, le compléta, et créa les trois cieux.⁹

Cette stratification céleste prend sa source dans la tradition juive. Son écho se fait entendre jusqu'aux versets de saint Paul, notamment dans sa deuxième *Épître aux Corinthiens*.¹⁰

Mais la description de la création à partir du feu ne s'arrête pas là. Elle se poursuit dans une nouvelle rubrique consacrée cette fois à la création des anges.

Intitulée *Description de la création des anges* ou *Ṣifat khalqat al-malā'ika*, ce passage nous explique la nature de ces êtres célestes, leurs noms, leurs fonctions, ainsi que leur hiérarchie. Créés à partir du feu entier, ils sont des esprits étincelants *arwāḥ mutawāqqidab*. Dès qu'ils furent créés, Dieu les fit entrer dans les cieux pour les répartir en rangs hiérarchiques *li-yutaqisabum*. Ainsi le premier rang de la hiérarchie est, selon ce passage, celui de l'ange de beauté *ritbat Malāk al-Ḥusn*. Il est composé de dix chœurs. Le deuxième est celui des Chérubins *al-Kārūbim*. Le texte précise que quelques-uns parmi eux ont été chargés de porter le Trône divin. Ils siègent donc dans la proximité immédiate de Dieu et sont aussi composés de dix chœurs. Leur nature, ainsi que leur fonction s'expliquent par leur place hiérarchique et par l'étymologie hébraïque de leur nom, effusion de sagesse ou abondance de science, qui n'est pas sans nous rappeler les *Kāribūs* assyro-babyloniens destinés à veiller aux temples et aux palais. S'ensuit le troisième rang, celui des dix chœurs de Séraphins *al-Sirāfim*, ceux qui brûlent ou chauffent, et dont certains ont été gratifiés aussi de porter le Trône divin. Tandis que le quatrième rang dans la hiérarchie est celui des Chefs des Puissances ou des Chefs des Armées, dont les dix chœurs sont présidés par l'archange au nom théophore, Michel ou *Mikḥā'īl*, devenu après la chute de l'ange de beauté et prémices de toute la création, Satan, le chef par excellence de la tétrade du premier ciel ou des premiers quatre degrés de la hiérarchie.

La description de la hiérarchie du deuxième ciel s'ouvre sur celle des Dominations *al-Arbāb*, traduction arabe du grec Κυριότητες présidé après la chute de Satan par l'ange Gabriel. Elle occupe donc le premier rang *al-ritbat al-ūlā* dans la

⁹ Traduction de l'auteur.

¹⁰ 2 Cor. 12-2.

deuxième triade, alors que le second revient aux dix chœurs des Trônes *ritbat al-kursi* présidé par l'ange Raphaël, dont parle le livre de Tobit.¹¹ Le texte nous rapporte que vingt-quatre anges appartenant au rang des Trônes, ont été élus par Dieu pour le servir et l'entourer de façon permanente.¹² Il leur fit tenir des encensoirs¹³ et des coupes¹⁴, et orna leurs têtes de couronnes. Le troisième rang de la hiérarchie dans le deuxième ciel est celui des Principautés *al-Salāṭin*, présidé par Suriel l'ange de l'éclair, chargés lui et ses dix chœurs, de faire sonner les trompettes, selon l'*Apocalypse* de saint Jean.¹⁵

La description de la hiérarchie du troisième ciel est inaugurée par le rang de l'ange Sadaquiel et de ses dix chœurs, préposés aux âmes des hommes à l'heure de leur mort. Le manuscrit ajoute que ces anges reçoivent l'appellation d'anges de Justice *Malā'ikat al-Ṣalah*; appellation entendue comme une vertu ou une valeur de vigueur et d'équité imitant la Vertu suessentielle, source de toute vertu. Alors que le deuxième rang dans cette hiérarchie revient à l'ange Salatiel et à ses dix chœurs choisis par Dieu pour assister les âmes et les corps des justes le jour du Jugement dernier et de la résurrection. Quant au troisième rang de la triade du troisième ciel, il revient à l'ange Ananiel ou Hananiel et à ses dix chœurs, régissant sur les arbres et les plantes de la terre, sur la chaleur et le vent et sur tous les changements climatiques et dans le nom figure aussi, mais pour désigner une personne, dans le livre de Tobit.¹⁶

Ainsi se complète, selon ce texte, les dix degrés de la hiérarchie céleste et de leurs cent chœurs. Toutefois, l'auteur précise, qu'après la chute de Satan et de tout le rang des Archontes *al-Sādāt* auquel il appartient – rang qui n'a pas été mentionné dans les précédents feuillets – Dieu ferma le ciel sur ces êtres et clôtura toutes les issues situées aux quatre points cardinaux, afin de les empêcher d'accéder à sa connaissance, ainsi qu'à celle de toute la création.

Pourtant, dans cet univers fortement hiérarchisé et accompli dans l'ordre selon l'arrangement divin, Dieu fraya un chemin entre le ciel et la terre. Il fit en sorte que la puissance de sa sainte Trinité, soufflât sur les essences angéliques, si bien que leurs intelligences pures s'ouvrirent sur une certaine connaissance du divin. Fidèles à l'étymologie hébraïque, de leurs noms, מַלְאָךְ *Malāk*, ils commencèrent alors à servir comme messagers entre les deux mondes, non sans nous rappeler le *démon* du *Banquet* platonicien.

Mais par arrangement, Dieu fraya, pour les anges, un chemin entre eux, à l'intérieur de leur hiérarchie au milieu des cieux. Ils le dévalaient lors du service

¹¹ Tb 1; 3, 16; 12.

¹² Dans l'*Apocalypse*, il est question de 24 anciens siégeant autour du trône divin. Voir Ap 4, 4.

¹³ Ap 8, 5.

¹⁴ Ap 16, 1.

¹⁵ Ap 8, 2, 6; 11, 15; 21, 8.

¹⁶ Ap 1,1: « Livre des actes de Tobit, fils de Tobiel, fils d'Ananiel, fils d'Adouël, fils de Gadaël, fils de Raphaël [...] »

auquel Dieu les envoie. Et Dieu fit en sorte que la force Trinitaire soufflât au-dessus du Trône sur les têtes des anges. Lorsque les anges entendirent souffler la force Trinitaire, ils étendirent leurs esprits vers le haut, afin d'écouter le souffle de la force Trinitaire. Et aussitôt ils reconnurent Dieu qui les créa.¹⁷

Saisis de frayeur, des myriades de myriades et milliers de milliers d'anges *ūlūf ūlūf rabāwāt rabāwāt*, dit le texte, se mirent alors à glorifier et à louer le Seigneur à la manière du récit apocalyptique.¹⁸ Et l'*Aksimāros* d'énumérer les dix degrés de la hiérarchie céleste, mais cette fois selon un ordre nouveau: il s'agit des Archontes, des Chérubins, des Séraphins, des Puissances ou des Armées, des Dominations, des Trônes, des Principautés, des Prééminences *al-Muqaddamūn*, des Archanges, et des Anges. Il nous rapporte aussi que cette hiérarchie céleste, constamment tendue vers Dieu, proclamait des chants de gloire et de louange, que Satan, l'ange de beauté, de par le privilège de son rang, transposait pendant quatre jours, de la Jérusalem céleste à la Sainte Trinité. Mais, lorsqu'il vit que toutes ces louanges lui parvenaient, il en tira grand orgueil et prit conscience de sa force et de sa puissance, si bien qu'il chuta au soir du quatrième jour de la création.

L'*Aksimāros* poursuit sa narration, heure par heure, des différentes étapes de l'œuvre divine. Nous y lisons par exemple, ce que Dieu fit à partir du feu, de l'air, de la terre et de l'eau et comment il jugea très bon, tout ce qu'il avait fait.

Cependant, il est une description assez curieuse au folio 7^r du manuscrit, celle de la création des vêtements des anges, de leurs ceintures, bâtons et éventails reflétant le nom divin.

Intitulée *Ṣifat khalqat ḥilal al-malā'ika*, cette rubrique décrit comment Dieu communiquait et faisait parvenir ses ordres à tous êtres angéliques par le truchement de sa voix, mais aussi par le truchement des vêtements de lumière, *ḥilal nūrāniyyab*, symbole de connaissance et d'illumination de l'Essence divine inconnaissable, mais perçue par les différents chœurs angéliques. On y lit ce qui suit:

Devant son trône, Dieu l'Éternel créa des ornements lumineux et les mit entre leurs mains. Car s'Il voulait les envoyer en mission, il allumerait ces ornements miroirs qu'ils tenaient dans leurs mains. Comme Dieu, béni soit-il, ne leur adressait pas tout le temps la parole, il leur fit ce signe entre les mains.¹⁹

Il est évident que la symbolique des vêtements de lumière incandescente renvoie à une forme visible et extérieure de l'intériorité spirituelle et hiératique des anges.

Revêtus donc de tous leurs habits de lumière et serrant leurs ceintures, emblèmes de la force et des pouvoirs dont ils sont investis, les anges tenaient dans leurs mains des éventails miroirs sur lesquels figurait, sur trois lignes, le nom de la Sainte Trinité.²⁰ Alors l'Esprit-Saint, comme une colombe, les bénit et fit en sorte qu'ils

¹⁷ Traduction de l'auteur.

¹⁸ Ap 5-11.

¹⁹ Traduction de l'auteur.

²⁰ Ap 15, 6.

observèrent leurs distinctions hiérarchiques. Parés de tous leurs ornements, les chœurs et les légions angéliques entonnèrent leur chant de gloire et acclamèrent le Seigneur à la troisième heure du dimanche :

Saint est le Dieu unique, saint est le Fils unique, saint est l'Esprit-Saint unique.²¹

Et le texte d'énumérer quelques traits distinctifs de certains rangs d'anges, tels les Chérubins couverts d'yeux, symboles d'omniprésence et d'omniscience et les Séraphins, ayant chacun six ailes, deux pour voler, deux pour se couvrir la tête, et deux pour se couvrir les pieds, symboles de spiritualité, de puissance, mais aussi de connaissance et d'élévation vers le divin sublime.

Ainsi s'achève, selon ce texte, la partie consacrée à la hiérarchie céleste et à l'immense coupole du ciel où séjourne cette armée, voire cette cour divine.

Sources et signification de la hiérarchie pseudo-épiphanienne

Si l'on examine de près cette version arabe de l'*Aksimāros* et sa conception hiérarchique de la création, ainsi que sa stratification systématique des êtres angéliques, on remarque que tous ses éléments figurent dans des traditions antérieures.

En effet, il est facile de relever dans la *Bible* et dans des anciens textes patristiques ou apocryphes juifs et chrétiens, je pense au *Livre d'Hénoch*²² et à son chapitre intitulé *Des Veilleurs*, à *l'Ascension d'Isaïe*²³, etc., des dénominations et des listes d'ordres angéliques à peu près équivalents ou identiques à ceux que nous transmet ce texte pseudo-Épiphaniien.

La Bible mentionne par exemple les anges en général. Dans certains de ses livres, Genèse²⁴, Ésaïe²⁵, Ezéchiël²⁶, Daniel²⁷, Tobit²⁸, Psaumes, etc., les auteurs inspirés parlent des Séraphins et des Chérubins. D'aucuns ont même été jusqu'à signaler leurs noms propres : Michel, Gabriel et Raphaël. D'autres les décrivent à la manière de l'auteur du *Premier Livre des Rois*²⁹, évoquant les ailes des Chérubins, qui figuraient sur l'arche de l'alliance. De même pour les Évangélistes Matthieu³⁰,

²¹ Traduction de l'auteur.

²² *Le Livre d'Hénoch*, traduit sur le texte éthiopien par François Martin, Paris : Letouzey et Ané 1906, 1-8. Le livre n'a été traduit en entier que dans le *Dictionnaire des Apocryphes* de Migne en 1856.

²³ *l'Ascension d'Isaïe*, Traduction Enrico Norelli, Apocryphes. Coll. de Poche de l'AELAC 1993.

²⁴ Gn 3, 24.

²⁵ Es 6.

²⁶ Ez 10, 4-7.

²⁷ Dn 10-13.

²⁸ Tb 1, 3, 6 et passim.

²⁹ I R 6, 23-26

³⁰ Mt 4, 11; 26, 53 etc.

Marc³¹, Luc³², Jean³³, et pour l'apôtre Paul qui évoquent tous les anges³⁴, les Trônes, les Principautés, les Puissances, les Vertus et les Archanges³⁵. De son côté, l'*Apocalypse* de Jean accorde une large place à ces êtres célestes dans ses visions des derniers temps, etc. Quant aux textes des Pères de l'Église, ceux de Cyrille de Jérusalem³⁶, d'Éphrem le Syriaque, de Grégoire de Nazianze³⁷, de Jean Chrysostome³⁸, et du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite³⁹, qui a élaboré la plus parfaite et la plus mystique des théories dans sa *Hiérarchie céleste*, sans toutefois oublier les *Constitutions Apostoliques*⁴⁰, ils présentent tous des descriptions de la hiérarchie céleste et proposent une esquisse d'un ordonnancement de ses êtres. Mais si, pour la plupart, ces textes s'accordent sur les dénominations et l'ordre des anges, leur nombre, ainsi que leurs places varient.

Dans l'*Aksimāros*, comme on l'a déjà dit, la hiérarchie est composée, à l'instar de l'ancienne tradition kabbalistique juive attestée par Maïmonide, de dix degrés.⁴¹ Plusieurs anges y sont désignés par leurs noms propres, contrairement au texte biblique. Alors que dans la majorité des écrits patristiques, les listes énumèrent neuf dénominations et ne mentionnent guère leurs prénoms, sauf pour les trois Archanges Michel, Gabriel et Raphaël. Ces appellations angéliques sont, sans doute, connues. Le *Livre d'Hénoch*, qui fait partie du canon de l'Ancien Testament de l'Église éthiopienne, mais qui fut écarté de celui de l'Église universelle lors du concile de Laodicée, cite à plusieurs reprises, dans une section datée du II^e siècle av. J. C., les noms et les fonctions de certains anges, selon un procédé qui consiste à joindre le suffixe « *El* » à une racine désignant une qualité ou une fonction angélique. Quelques noms propres des anges du *Livre d'Hénoch*, Suriel et Ananiel par exemple, figurent dans l'*Aksimāros*. Aussi la Kabbale juive mentionne-t-elle deux noms utilisés par l'*Aksimāros*, à savoir Sadaquiel et Ananiel, qu'elle associe respectivement à la quatrième et à la sixième sephiroth. Il est même question du rang de Sadaquiel comme étant celui des Dominations, alors que celui d'Ananiel ou Hananiel renvoie aux Principautés.⁴² D'après le Talmud ces noms

³¹ Mc 16, 7.

³² Lc 1, 26-38; 2, 12.

³³ Jn 20, 12.

³⁴ 2 Cor 12, 7; Ép 1, 20.

³⁵ Ép 1, 20; Col 1, 16; I Th 4, 16.

³⁶ Cyrille de Jérusalem, *Catéchèse* 23, *Patrologia Graeca* (désormais PG) 33, 1113 B.

³⁷ Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours* 28, PG 36, 72 A-B.

³⁸ Jean Chrysostome, *Homélie sur la Genèse* 4- 5, PG 55-54, 44.

³⁹ Denys l'Aréopagite, *La Hiérarchie céleste*, introduction, étude et texte critique, traduction et notes par R. Roques, G. Heil et M. De Gandillac, Paris: Éd. du Cerf, coll. Sources Chrétiennes 1958.

⁴⁰ Les Constitutions Apostoliques, édition critique du texte grec, introduction, traduction, notes et tables par Marcel Metzger, Paris: Édition du Cerf 1987, vol. 8, 12, 27.

⁴¹ Maïmonide a soutenu que l'ancienne tradition juive comptait 10 degrés d'anges.

⁴² Gershom Sholem, *La Kabbale: une introduction. Origines, thèmes et bibliographies*, Paris: Édition du Cerf 1998.

sont d'origine mésopotamienne. Ils vinrent avec les Israélites de Babylone et relèvent donc d'un emprunt.

À partir du 4^e et du 5^e siècles, on tombe facilement sur des listes d'ordres angéliques semblables à peu près au texte pseudo-épiphaniens. Il suffit de jeter un coup d'œil sur une vision de Jean l'Eunuque, rapportée dans *La Vie anonyme de Pierre l'Ibérien*.⁴³ Quant à la vision hiérarchique de l'univers et de ses êtres, malgré son côté arbitraire, elle semble exister, non seulement chez certains Pères de l'Église, mais aussi, bien avant, dans la pensée grecque, et plus particulièrement dans plusieurs systèmes philosophiques. De Platon à Proclus en passant par Plotin et Jamblique la vision hiérarchique d'un univers ordonné a presque dominé le discours philosophique des premiers siècles avant et après Jésus-Christ.

Manifestement, l'auteur de notre texte a voulu intégrer et réconcilier le christianisme avec la littérature juive antérieure et la sagesse de son temps. Conditionnée par une situation culturelle dans laquelle persistaient les traditions juives et l'héritage hellénistique, sa présentation hiérarchique du monde et des anges constitue la meilleure illustration de la survivance de ces traditions et de la transposition des réflexions cosmologiques, gnostiques et des schèmes philosophiques dans l'exposé de la révélation chrétienne.

Si toute cette littérature pose la question d'une hiérarchie céleste, contrairement aux écrits bibliques, on comprend dès lors qu'aux yeux de l'auteur, les silences et les imprécisions scripturaires aient fait pâle figure. Face donc aux *Midrashim* juifs et à la belle ordonnance de l'univers philosophique, notamment néoplatonicien, il a voulu intégrer dans le christianisme ces belles descriptions d'un univers hiérarchisé.

Puisant ses informations dans plusieurs sources d'origine différente, évoquant la nature des anges, leurs noms et leurs fonctions, cette section de l'*Aksimāros* est plutôt une compilation, voire une interpolation de plusieurs textes enchâssés les uns dans les autres, mais remaniés par un auteur familier avec la littérature angéologique, philosophique, les commentaires extra-bibliques et les milieux gnostiques judéo-chrétiens, notamment alexandrins et éthiopiens. Il offre à cet égard, un contraste complet avec les écrits des Pères commentant les premiers chapitres de la *Genèse*. Le but de son auteur est nécessairement de christianiser et de récupérer toutes les informations de son temps concernant la création et les êtres angéliques. Il suffit de scruter le liminaire et les attributs du Dieu créateur pour se rappeler la doctrine plotinienne de l'Un, principe premier, suprême, simple, antérieur, mais au-dessus de toutes choses.

Cherchant donc à assouvir le sentiment d'ignorance concernant certaines lacunes du texte biblique et à réconcilier les traditions juives et philosophiques avec le

⁴³ Cité par Ernest Honigmann, *Pierre l'Ibérien et les écrits du Pseudo-Denys l'Aréopagite*, (Mémoires de l'Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres et des Sciences morales et politiques, vol. XLVII, fasc. 3), Bruxelles: Palais des Académies 1952, 18-19.

christianisme, l'*Aksimāros*, nous offre une synthèse séduisante interprétant trop partialement les données scripturaires. Certes, cette synthèse est riche en symboles et relève plutôt du mythe. Mais les mythes temporalisent et humanisent, par la nécessité même de l'expression, ce qui échappe au temps et à l'existence humaine.

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Where Angels Dwell

Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity¹

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Introduction: space and angels

It is common when a discussion addresses angelological topics for at least one person in the audience to feel compelled to ridicule the topic by referring to the medieval question of how many angels can stand on the point of a pin.² By bringing up this almost paradigmatically pointless scholasticism, the speaker seeks to demonstrate just how irrelevant the discourse regarding angels was and still is. However, if the same person took a moment to listen to a lecture on quantum physics, he or she might accept the legitimacy of speculations concerning the superposition of states (in the same place, ‘on the tip of a needle’) or on the entanglement of distant entities (“geisterhafte Fernwirkung”, as Einstein criticised it) as rational. This chapter will demonstrate that angelology has, since ancient times, been an important field for the discussion and consideration of questions concerning space, place, and distance.

My title begins with ‘Where’, a word that implies a fundamental distinction between an *entity* that is within a space and the *space* that contains it. We apply this distinction all the time into the world of our experience: things are found among other things somewhere in an encompassing space. Regardless of whether space is treated as existing in three dimensions outside the observer³ or as an interior category by reference to which an observer structures his perception,⁴ we almost always think of space as a container that is ultimately indifferent to its content. It was only with the development of the theory of relativity in the 1920s that space began to be understood by physics as sensitive to its content, with mass serving to curve spacetime. At roughly the same time, existential philosophy sought to distinguish the human being as an exceptional entity that is not in the world in the

¹ This article is a heavily revised version of Johann Hafner, “Die Himmel. Wege zur Vervielfältigung von Welt im antiken Christentum,” in: *Der Himmel als transkultureller und ethischer Raum*, Bernd Oberdorfer and Stefanie Waldow, eds., Munich: Fink 2016, 77-104.

² For the scholastic treatise, see Thomas Marschler, “Der Ort der Engel. Eine scholastische Standardfrage zwischen Theologie, Naturphilosophie und Metaphysik,” in: *Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie* 53 (2006), 39-72.

³ Descartes distinguished between *res cogitans* (the observer) and *res extensae* (the things observed), clearly separating being-in-space from being-in-thought.

⁴ Kant defined space (“Form der Anschauung äußerer Dinge”) and time (“Form der Anschauung innerer Vorgänge”) as subjective categories which determine our empirical knowledge (without being empirical themselves).

same way as items such as trees and tables but that ex-sists (in the sense of protruding into the world) by ‘referring’ to the world as a whole (“Sein im Ganzen”). Heidegger’s being-in (“In-sein”) means dwelling in or inhabiting a place.⁵ After Heidegger, philosophical anthropology began to take a more naturalistic perspective on the notion of space, seeing space as the domain within which biological entities, and humans as the exemplars of this type, are situated and within which they carry out their ‘vital’ interests (*Vitalismus*) and activities.⁶ In postmodern philosophy, for example, spatiality is a central category for understanding the structure of any culture. Peter Sloterdijk explains the biography of the self from the ‘closedness’ of the womb to individual motility, and the development of the intimate village into a globalised society, in terms of spheres, bubbles, and foams.⁷

However, it would be misleading to claim that humankind had to wait until the modern age in order to discover that space is not just an empty container but, rather, the result of vital relations. This chapter argues that angelology contained early precursors to this insight. I show how the differentiation of angels is deeply connected to the differentiation of space into realms and spheres, and how angelology also acted as a driving force for speculation concerning the borders of the universe and the multiplicity of worlds. I focus here on the centuries between the end of the Second Temple and the establishment of fixed canons in Judaism and Christianity. During this period, biblical angelology, apocalyptic expectations, and platonic emanationism mixed together in experimental ways. I examine representative texts from Jewish, Gnostic, and Christian traditions in order to describe the connections between angelic functions and cosmological models, and seek to systematise these against the background of a basic dialectic between transcendence and immanence.

Semantic observations: the interchangeability of ‘heavens’ and ‘heaven’

Before turning our attention to early apocalyptic texts, it will be useful to consider the usage of the word ‘heaven’. In some modern languages, as well as in liturgy and in translations of the Bible, ‘heaven’ is used in the singular form. However, this usage does not reflect the wording in the original languages of the Bible, where we find the plural form is used in all cases in Hebrew and in most cases in *koine* Greek.

⁵ Cf. Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, 15th ed., Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag 1984, 53f.

⁶ In his later philosophy, Heidegger turned this model upside down. Each entity is a ‘thing’ (the Germanic word for ‘convention’), where the foundational dimensions (earth, world, mortals, immortals) meet. Cf. Martin Heidegger, “Das Ding” (1950), in: *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann 2000, 165-187.

⁷ Cf. Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären*, 3 vols., Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1998-2004.

The first sentence of the Bible affords us a prominent example: “*Ber’eshit bara’ elohim ’et ha-shamayim⁸ w’-’et ha-’arets*” is translated into German as “Im Anfang schuf Gott Himmel und Erde.” Jewish translations, such as those of Tur-Sinai and Buber/Rosenzweig, which claim to be as close to the original as possible, even use a determined singular form, “den Himmel” (*the* heaven). Other translations, such as the King James Bible, shift between plural and singular forms: the first sentence reads “God created the heavens” (Gen 1, 1)⁹ while the Lord’s Prayer translates “*en tois ouranois*” (Mt 6, 9a) as “Our Father which art in heaven.” This meandering between plural and singular forms can be observed throughout the history of the European use of the Greek and Latin languages. For example, one of the most important dogmatic texts in Christianity, The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, employs singular forms in the first article about the creator: “We believe in one God, the father, the almighty, the maker of heaven and earth,” which is a correct translation of the Greek singular (*poiētēn ouranou kai gēs*). However, in the second article, concerning the Son, the Greek text chooses plurals instead: *katelthonta ek tōn ouranōn* (he descended from the heavens) and *kai anelthonta eis tous ouranous* (he ascended into the heavens).¹⁰

There is no apparent logic behind these choices. However, it is easy to sympathise with the struggles faced by the translators, who are caught between the Masoretic Hebrew text on the one hand, with its “*shamayim*,” and the Greek Septuagint text on the other, which reads “*epoiēsen tōn ouranōn kai tēn gēn*.”¹¹ One might suppose that these are mere grammatical variations that can be explained by linguistics. The argument would run that the Hebrew *shamayim* is a plural of extension, used to indicate an entity or an element so vast that its borders cannot be described and circumscribed,¹² and this is why it occurs as a *plurale tantum*. However, significant doubts can be raised regarding such a solution. First, we have to consider the famous example of a ‘real’ plural of ‘heaven’: “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens (*ha-shamayim ushme ha-shamayim*),¹³ is the Lord’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is” (Dtn 10, 1). The parallelism here sug-

⁸ According to Gesenius’ *Handwörterbuch*, *shamayim* is derived from Assyrian *shamū*, pl. *shamē*: sky, roof. It is represented as a habitat (cf. Ps 2, 4) on pillars (Job 26, 11) with windows (Gen 7, 11) and doors (Ps 78, 23). Cf. Frederik Torm, “Der Pluralis *ouranoi*,” in: *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 33 (1934), 48-50.

⁹ The New KJV reads “God created the heavens and the earth,” as do most other modern English Bibles.

¹⁰ The French version renders the plural “*cieux*”; English and German versions go back to “heaven” and “Himmel.”

¹¹ So does the Vulgata “*creavit Deus caelum et terram*.” There are a few verses in which the LXX follows the masoretic plural: “Praise God all you heavens/Lobt Gott vom Himmel her (*min ha-shamayim*, LXX: *ex tōn ouranōn*), praise God in the highest (*ba-m’rowmim*, LXX: *en tois hypsistois*).” Ps 148, 1.

¹² Cf. Gerhard von Rad’s translation “Wasserfläche,” *Das erste Buch Mose*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1949, 24.

¹³ Again, the Septuaginta translates this into “*ho ouranos kai ho ouranos tou ouranou*.”

gests that the heavenly world is inhabited in a way that is similar to the way in which the earth is inhabited and that there is a realm even beyond the heavens, as the heavenly world is beyond the earth. One might explain this text from a grammatical perspective as a pleonastic trope, but historically it led to Christian and Rabbinic speculation that there must be many heavens.¹⁴ Secondly, the cosmology behind Gen 1 clearly distinguishes the plurality of heavens in verse 1 from the single sky (firmament/*raḳiaʿ*) in verse 8a. The name *shamayim* serves as an obvious allusion to *mayim*,¹⁵ the plural of upper and lower waters. It means that there are at least as many heavens as there are waters.

To summarise, in most cases the Hebrew Bible uses ‘heaven’ in its plural form, meaning an entirety. However, this form has also been interpreted as a cosmological plural. The plural meaning thus denotes that heaven is a complex being, whereas the singular meaning indicates that heaven is a distinct being, the second part of creation. Unlike ‘earth’, the ‘heavens’ were open to further exaggerations and differentiations. I will return to this point later.

Systematic distinctions: three kinds of transcendence

The mixing of ‘heaven’ and ‘heavens’ in most languages is not an inconsistent *façon de parler* but, rather, represents the ambivalence of transcendence as such. Heaven can be looked at from below, as earthlings do when they see the sky. It can also be imagined as looked down upon from above, as in the case of the perspective afforded to angelic beings.

From the earliest times, humans looked up at the sky and speculated about what might lie beyond.¹⁶ The visible sky seems to be the border of the world, the limit that defines the world of finite things. But this observable heaven cannot yet be infinite. The movement of the stars and the planets, and the change of light into darkness and back again, make the sky appear to be a living being or a realm of living beings. However, infinity would require a perfect being with perfect movements, while the sky as seen from the earth appears to be replete with irregular motions. These irregular phenomena are what drove Plato, Aristotle, and

¹⁴ Cf. *Chagiga* 12b. Similar speculations were triggered by 1Kings 8, 27 (consecration of the temple). Cf. Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 1951, 8.

¹⁵ Later Midrashim reflect the derivation of *shamayim* from *mayim* and propose that *shamayim* is a compositum of *esh* (fire) and *mayim* (water). Cf. Wilfred Shuchat, *The Creation According to the Midrash Rabbah*, Jerusalem, New York: Devora Publishing 2002, 142ff.

¹⁶ Astronomic observations were much more than just calendric calculations. They also served as indications of the contact between this world and another. Anthropologists use the fact that an early culture buries its deads in the direction of sunrise (resp. sunset) as an indicator of religiosity. Cf. Hans Jonas, “Werkzeug, Bild und Grab. Vom Transanimalischen im Menschen,” in: Hans Jonas: *Philosophische Untersuchungen und metaphysische Vermutungen*, Frankfurt and Leipzig: Insel 1992, 34-49.

many other ancient astronomers,¹⁷ to seek a model that would explain how the irregular visible movements can be derived from an underlying regular and more perfect motion. From this perspective, the visible sky is, thus, only the lower surface of a higher transcendence.¹⁸

Let us consider this position in abstract terms. Heaven contains two different kinds of transcendence. The sky stands for the empirical, or what I call *low transcendence*, because it is still part – albeit a distant part – of the visible world. The heavens *above* the sky, by contrast, may be visible in some models but they are definitively beyond reach. Despite this, these heavens may still be similar to the earth below, perhaps inhabited and, in some models, loosely connected with the earthly realm in that they consist of stratified layers containing elements such as rain, hail, and snow. Let us call this second level *relative transcendence*. Epistemologically, there must also be an external perspective on everything, capable of distinguishing and relating the different parts into a single cosmos. This perspective, which embraces the model as a whole, is neither immanent nor transcendent, as this distinction is itself transcended from the perspective of the external observer,¹⁹ a position that actually results more from a philosophical necessity than from depictions that occur in religious texts. I call this perspective *high transcendence*. Let us keep this in mind as we move on in the argument.

Angelic and spatial diversifications in antiquity

Having clarified the semantic and philosophical patterns at issues, let us now turn to the source material.

1. Angelic groups in a single heaven (Apocalypse of John, ca. 100 CE)

We start with the most influential angelic text in Christianity, the Revelation of John. This text – commonly dated to the late first century – unfolds its main scene in chapters 4 and 5, concerning the appearance together of God on his throne and

¹⁷ For the diversification of angelic spheres and worlds in Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero, see Johann Hafner, “Die Himmel. Wege zur Vervielfältigung von Welt im antiken Christentum,” in: *Der Himmel als transkultureller und ethischer Raum*, Bernd Oberdorfer and Stefanie Waldow, eds., Munich: Fink 2016, 77-104, where I also recall philosophical traditions.

¹⁸ The closing sentence of the biblical creation-account can be interpreted as an expression of this ambivalence: “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.” *w'kol z'ba'am* (and all the host of him) stands for a complex totality. *Zaba* is used for the multiplicity of celestial beings or the angelic legions, the *zeba'oth*. This is a clear indication of the above mentioned double-perspective: looking from below/inside we see the difference between heaven and earth, looking from above/outside the narrator describes the totality of heavens and earth as a “vast array” (LXX: *kai pas ho kosmos autōn*).

¹⁹ In religious terms, it is the perspective of God looking at his creations, the heaven(s) and the earth.

the lamb. The two central figures are framed by a complex heavenly liturgy, which consists of very different kinds of angelic beings: the 24 “elders”/*presbyteroi*, the seven “spirits”/*pneumata tou theou* surrounding God, the four winged “beasts”/*zôa* guarding God, a “mighty angel”/*aggelos ischuros* announcing the lamb, and finally 10,000 × 10,000 angels/*aggeloi* giving praise. The ordinary reader is familiar with most of these creatures from the prophetic visions in Isaiah 6 and Hesekiel 1 while the learned reader might recall some of these creatures from non-canonical texts such as 1Hen and 4Esr.

Nowadays, this vision is commonly recognised because it is a widely used motif in Christian art. It has become so familiar to us that we tend to overlook its subtleties: the different beings complement each other as part of a multi-layered ritual;²⁰ guarding, praising, announcing, all these processes are interwoven with each other in this one and only space:

And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, [...] the four and twenty elders fall down before him [...]. And worship him that liveth for ever and ever and cast their crowns before the throne saying: Thou art worthy ... (Apc 4,9f.).

The seven spirits are transformed into the eyes of the divine lamb. Everyone listens to the command of the herald-angel; angels and the redeemed join together in the eschatological song ‘Halleluja’. All of this takes place in one single heaven, inhabited by different angelic and human beings situated around a central throne. We do not yet see a plurality of spaces and it is only at the end of Apc that the new heaven is created to replace the old one.²¹ As a consequence, the whole scene appears to be rather chaotic and this chaos presented Christian iconographers with a difficult task in depicting this heavenly apparition as a structured scene. The painting of this scene was more easily accomplished in the baroque style, in which angelic groups could be freely mixed, than in the more orderly Gothic style, in which one would expect them to be presented in neat rows.²²

The angelic pandemonium in John’s apocalypse is a useful place to start because it serves as a good background-layer for comparison with other texts of the same and subsequent centuries. When considering this period, we should refrain from identifying ‘Christianity’ and ‘Judaism’ as defined traditions, because they are still in a state of crisscrossing and interlacing with one another. Angelology, moreover, is a religious ingredient that turns out to be poly-compatible. Angels

²⁰ In his attempt to overcome a narrow scholastic view, Erik Peterson derived his interpretation of angels from their liturgical functions, mainly based on Apc 4f. Cf. Erik Peterson, *Das Buch von den Engeln. Stellung und Bedeutung der heiligen Engel im Kultus*, Leipzig: Kösel 1934.

²¹ The “new heaven” in Apc 22 provides a more structured and highly cultivated landscape: it hosts God’s throne, the liturgical staff, and the redeemed in an ideal city with walls, gates, and gardens.

²² Gothic style paintings arrange angels in concentric circles or hierarchical lines, whereas baroque art randomises them throughout the picture. See, for example, the ceiling fresco “Engelhimmel” in the basilica of Ottobeuren, Bavaria.

can be imported and redefined, amalgamated and mixed; they belong at the same time to folk-religion and to official theology and, as such, are highly flexible entities. This is why this angelology remains an extremely productive pool of motifs for the religious imagination. These factors led to an explosive diversification of angels during our period and, together with it, a parallel diversification of heavens. As time passed, they less and less frequently formed a synergetic ensemble in which each helped the others out in pursuit of a single goal. Rather, they are separated in both location and role, with each species having its own distinct heaven and its own distinct function. This development was to culminate in the fully-fledged division of labour of the three hierarchies and nine choirs of Pseudo-Dionysios in the early 6th century CE, which Giorgio Agamben has argued served as the blueprint for the imperial Byzantine bureaucracy.²³

There is a master-narrative in religious studies, found in most handbooks and monographs, that is often drawn upon to explain the multiplication of angels and heavens. According to this narrative, whenever God becomes too transcendent, angels have to fill the gap! The angelic inventory is thus seen as a reaction to a more and more abstract monotheism. I want to challenge this explanation on the grounds that it is too easy and that it lies beyond empirical proof. My thesis is this: it is not the transcendence of a distant God that calls for more angels to bridge this distance but, rather, it is the diversification of angels that pushes God more and more towards transcendent heights.

2. Paul's audition in the third heaven (2Corinthians 12, ca. 55 CE)

Paul needs to be discussed next because it was his account of a heavenly vision that acted as a trigger for the diversification of angels and heavens. In this account, we find the first explicit mention in Jewish-Christian history of a "third heaven,"²⁴ when Paul tells the story of "a man" who was "caught up to the third heaven" (*harpargenta beôs tritou ouranou* 2Cor 12, 2). The context of this verse, in which Paul tries to defend his authority as an apostle by reference to the authenticity of his encounter with the divine,²⁵ makes it clear that the man in the story is, in fact,

²³ Cf. Giorgio Agamben, *Die Beamten des Himmels: Über Engel*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 2007. This is the German version of Agamben's *Homo Sacer* II, 2, chapter 6: Angelology and bureaucracy.

²⁴ Yet the pluralisation of heavens was already on the rise in early Jewish thought. Cf. Paula Gooder, *Only the Third Heaven? 2 Corinthians 12,1-10 and Heavenly Ascent*, London: Bloomsbury 2006. Gooder argues that Paul wanted to stress that he only went half-way and that the third is not the highest heaven. Most probably, Paul saw the paradise as a realm above the third heaven.

²⁵ The discussion concerning the redaction of 2Kor is extremely complicated. Most scholars consider the polemical part at ch. 10-13 as a separate letter, probably written after an unsuccessful visit to Corinth. Cf. Willi Marxsen, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 4th. ed., Gütersloh: Mohn 1978, 99f. It is still a matter of considerable contention whether the vision

himself. Members of his parish in Corinth seemingly expected their leaders to have ecstatic or mystic experiences. In order to satisfy his readers, Paul – after a long list of his efforts and sacrifices – concludes by reluctantly boasting:²⁶

2 “I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago,
whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;
such a one caught up to the third heaven.

5 Of such a one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.” (KJV)

3 And I knew such a man,
whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;

4 How that he was caught up into paradise,
and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

6 For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

The text obviously refrains from excessive enthusiasm. Paul calls the third heaven “paradise,” where he heard “unspeakable words/*arrêta brémata*” (2Cor 12, 4). He announces a vision, but what he in fact presents is an audition. He heard something, but he will not tell what exactly. The ‘words’ are surely not the word of God, but angelic languages which he cannot and must not translate.²⁷ Instead of heavenly bliss, he receives a “thorn in the flesh.” He did not see angels in heaven but is tortured by a “Satan-angel”/*aggelos satan* (2Cor 12, 7) here on earth. Obviously, Paul wants to downplay his spiritual journey and to avoid excessive attention to celestial angelic matters.

However, since nothing enflames curiosity more than a mystery, his enigmatic presentation achieved quite the opposite, with his brief mention of a third heaven opening wide the gates of speculation. Later writers provide us with a cascade of apocalypses of Paul, in which he explores the heavens and encounters angels. Paul’s

is identical with his vocation (Gal 1,21, cf. Apg 9,30) or another experience. According to Paul’s own specification, the vision took place around 40 CE, after his vocation in the year 33 CE. Cf. William Baird, “Visions, Revelation, and Ministry. Reflections on 2Cor 12:1-5 and Gal 1:11-17,” in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104 (1985), 651–662, 652.

²⁶ I render this passage in a table in order to show its intricate composition. Verse 2 talks about rapture into the third heaven and into Paradise while verses 3-4 are clearly parallel in their repetition. The two movements must, thus, be treated as a single experience. Cf. Josef Zmijewski, *Der Stil der paulinischen Narrenrede*, Cologne, Bonn: Peter Hanstein 1978, 324f.; Bernhard Heininger, *Paulus als Visionär. Eine religionsgeschichtliche Studie*, Freiburg: Herder 1996.

²⁷ Cf. Thomas Schmeller, *Der Zweite Brief an die Korinther (2Kor 7,5-13,13)*, Neukirchen-Vlyun/Ostfildern: Neukirchener Verlag 2015, 290f.

angelology is usually quite unspecific. He knows “angels, principalities, powers” (Rom 8, 38), but in most cases the powers/princes are not exclusively defined as heavenly beings. They are either identical with (cf. 1Cor 2, 8) or a side effect of (cf. Rom 13,1-3) forms of coercion by human social systems.²⁸ The powers do not only rule the world in history but also enforce the limits of the created world:

For I am persuaded, that
neither death, nor life,
nor angels, nor principalities/*archai*,
nor things present, nor things to come,
nor powers/*dynameis*,
nor height/*hypsōma*, nor depth/*bathos*,
nor any other creature,
shall be able to separate us from the love of God (Rom 8, 38f.).

Here Paul enlists all the overwhelming forces he can think of. Angelic beings and cosmic dimensions are closely connected here. Height and depth are presented as distracting or even hostile actors, and Paul probably takes them to be astral subjects. Since the terms used here are taken from an apocalyptic text in which these beings are not just members of this world but also of another (cf. 1Hen 18, 11), a further connotation is that heaven is expanded beyond human comprehension.²⁹ Angels appear not simply as inhabitants of a space, but also as sheer spaces or realms. They are like human rulers, yet in a higher sense as the abstraction of rule itself rather than being bound to certain persons and spots. Angels and the cosmos both share similar potentials to multiply in kind or to grow, and both share a tendency towards an uncontrollable multiplication of spheres.

Paul’s overlapping of the cosmic and the angelic led to further speculations, a development that he did not intend and that his pseudepigraphical successors tried to contain. One such attempt can be found in the deuteropauline³⁰ text *Letter to the Colossians*, in which the author has to fight rampant speculations (“philosophy” 2, 8) concerning diverse angelic beings. He criticises the community in Colossae for venerating angels, but he already accepts the concept that the heavens (plural!) and the earth (*en tois ouranois kai epi tēs gēs* 1, 16) are inhabited by ambivalent beings such as thrones, dominions, principalities, powers (cf. 1, 16), and cosmic elements (*stoicheia* 2, 8).³¹ Obviously, this author connects angels to the astral

²⁸ For an exhaustive and modern interpretation, see Walter Wink, *The Powers*, 4 vols., Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1984-1998; and its popular summary Walter Wink, *The Powers that Be*, New York: Harmony 1998.

²⁹ “I saw how the winds stretch out the vaults of heaven.” 1Hen 18, 3.

³⁰ Vgl. Philipp Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur*, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 1975, 196. Because of the highly institutionalised situation and the established everyday Christian way of life, most date this text to the early second century.

³¹ The cosmological hymn (1, 12-20), which presents Christ as a high potency (head), is so different from Pauline vocabulary that it could be regarded as a Christianised version of pre-Christian mythology.

phenomena of day and night. The direction of man's longing is towards heaven, "where Christ sits at the right of God" (3, 1) and reigns over the angelic powers. Col stresses the Lordship of Christ through his subjugation ("stripping/disarming") of the powers and dominions (*apekdysamenous tas archas kai tas exousias*, 2, 15; cf. 2, 10) precisely because the Colossians seem to admire mystics who enter and fathom³² the heavens, where they see different kinds of angels. The Colossians replace a Christ-centered attitude with a complex angelic spirituality. Unlike Paul, the author of Col does not reject cosmological and angelological ideas on the grounds that they are something worldly. Rather, he surpasses them with an even more spectacular idea: that of Christ as the super-angel.³³

So, despite Paul's reluctance, his followers began to accept a more complex cosmological and angelological view. It seems there is an inherent driving force connected to such views that pushes in the direction of further differentiation. Once the gates to the plural heavens had been reluctantly opened by Paul, the floor was opened up to questions concerning the numbers, orders, and inhabitants of these higher worlds.

3. *From the three-layer to the seven-layer heavens (Testamentum Levi, ca. 200 CE)*

The Testamentum Levi – a part of the "Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," compiled sometime around 200 CE – diligently distributes different angels across different heavens. This Jewish text, the origins of which can be traced back to the second century BCE, was Christianised during the second century CE.³⁴ The twelve sons of Israel are praised here as ideals of faith and justice. One part of the text, the TestLevi 2-3, narrates two dreams that the patriarch Levi had about his journey

³² *Embateuein* is a *terminus technicus* for visions in mystery cults.

³³ The analogies between Christ and high angels (messenger, residing in heaven, guarding men, son of man, sons of God, origin before time, human appearance) are so many that it took a whole letter (Hebrew) and many christological dogmas to draw a distinction. From a bird's eye view, christology is contracted angelology. Cf. Johann Hafner, *Angelologie*, Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh 2010, 184-192; Daniel Boyarin, *Die jüdischen Evangelien. Die Geschichte des jüdischen Christus*, Würzburg: Ergon 2015. Jehova's Witnesses and, to some extent, Seven-Day-Adventists, who still identify Michael and Christ, are heirs of this early angel-Christology.

³⁴ I cannot resume the debate here. A strong hypothesis suggests that the TestLevi draws on an Aramaic source that is similar to the Qumran-fragments. The writers in Qumran must have copied an Aramaic Testament of Levi. H. Dixon Slingerland, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. A Critical History of Research*, Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature 1977. Jarl H. Ulrichsen, *Die Grundschrift der Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen: Eine Untersuchung zu Umfang, Inhalt und Eigenart der ursprünglichen Schrift*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell 1991. Jonas C. Greenfield, Michael E. Stone and Ester Eshel, *The Aramaic Levi Document. Edition, Translation, Commentary*, Leiden: Brill 2004. James Kugel, *The Ladder of Jacob*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 2006, 155-168. Jürgen Becker, "Die Testamente der zwölf Patriarchen," in: *Jüdische Schriften in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, Vol. 3: Unterweisung in lehrhafter Form, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2001, 16-163.

through the seven heavens and his installation as a priest. In this account, Levi is guided by an angel into the self-opening heavens:

Then sleep fell upon me, and I saw a high mountain, and I was on it. And behold, the skies were opened and an angel of the LORD said unto me: Levi, enter. And I entered the first heaven.³⁵ I saw there a great [body of] water, suspended. And I saw a second heaven, more luminous and brighter, and the height of it was boundless. And I said to the angel: Why is this so? And the angel said to me: Do not marvel over this, for you will see another heaven, brighter still and beyond compare, when you get there. (TestLevi 3, 5b-9)

In this vision, Levi is allowed to proceed to the second heaven and to notice that there is much more to explore above it. Unlike those who experience other prophetic visions – as in the guiding text Is 6 – Levi does not tremble with fear. Rather than displaying human humility before the Most High, Levi is instead fascinated by the manifold spheres. The angelic *fascinatum* thus mitigates the divine *tremendum*. Instead of taking him further, the *angelus interpretis* explains to him the entire fabric of the seven heavens.

The text is a brilliant example of the multiplication of heavens by introducing different species of angels. The first stage in the evolution of the text, the original Aramaic source, probably presented only one heaven³⁶ but furnished it with several angels. In a second stage, the passage in TestLevi 2 suggests that three heavens provide the basic architectural framework for the ‘world above’. A third stage then involved an author reworking this framework to give into a more detailed and differentiated version. Three additional heavens were inserted between the highest heaven (near God’s throne) and the middle heaven, giving the following result:

- Heaven 1: The lowest sphere reflects the deeds of the unrighteous.
- Heaven 2: Contains the elements (fire, snow and ice) for the judgment of the unrighteous.
- Heaven 3: The armies of angels dwell in a third heaven,³⁷ destined for the Day of Judgment when they will “punish the Spirits of deceit and of Beliar” (cf. 3, 3).³⁸
- Heaven 7: In the highest heaven, Levi will stand in the holy of holies before the Most High, who sits in his temple on a throne (cf. 2, 10 and 5, 1).

³⁵ Some text variants skip the first heaven and read instead: “And from the first heaven I entered the second.” There Levi sees the hanging sea. Most modern translations follow this variant but it seems to be an attempt to synchronise this passage with that which follows.

³⁶ Cf. Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1993, 32. The Aramaic source’s inspirational background, the book of Henoch, assumes one single heaven. Only later parts of this text, 1Hen 18 and 47, mention differentiations into “chambers” and into height and depth. Cf. Siegbert Uhlig, “Das äthiopische Henochbuch,” in: *Jüdische Schriften in hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, Vol. 5: Apokalypsen, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1984, 461-780.

³⁷ Some variants place the armies in the second heaven.

³⁸ This refers to 1Hen, which starts with the sin of angels and then unfolds the punishment of angels.

- Heaven 6: The archangels or “angels of presence” are located close-by below God, serving Him and expiating sins by their bloodless and rational³⁹ sacrifices (cf. 3, 5).
- Heaven 5: Below the archangels, angels transport the “answers” (the good deeds and remorse of humankind as a kind of orthoprax sacrifice)⁴⁰ to the higher angels.
- Heaven 4: Below the fifth heaven, “thrones and dominions” praise God (or transport the praise of humankind as a kind of spiritual sacrifice).⁴¹

By a process of differentiation, the heavens have now reached seven in number. The former *lower heaven* is split into the *heaven of sins* and the *heaven of elements*. The former *middle heaven* is split into the *heaven of punishing armies*, the *heaven of praising thrones*, and the *heaven of transporting angels*. And the former *upper heaven* is split into the *heaven of serving angels* and the *heaven of the Great Glory*.

It is quite clear that a number of different concepts have been amalgamated into a single pattern here. In this case, it is angelology that expands cosmology: the more angels you have, the more heavens you need. The expansion of heavens is not just a result of the lust for spatial exaggeration. Rather, it is driven by the trend towards differentiating between higher functions. Each heaven is the place for another process: storing deeds, preparing judgment, singing praise, advocating on behalf of the humans, or offering sacrifice. It is this differentiation of processes that motivates a further differentiation of heavenly realms with which to associate them.

There are numerous examples from the first and second century CE in which a redactor multiplies heaven into seven distinct realms. Some scholars have assumed that this particular number of heavens dates back to Babylonian astronomical sources,⁴² and that the redactors thus felt compelled to furnish the empty spaces with angelic contents. But this conjecture is unable to explain why we find models with two or three or five or, later, even nine and ten heavens in the same century. Clearly, it is angelology, not astronomy, that expands the cosmos. Let us focus on one detail: in contrast to earthly temples in which material sacrifices are given, the heavenly liturgy is expected to be more subtle. What is crammed together in the rituals on earth will be unfolded in heavenly cult: praise, intercession, and sacrificing are distributed among the upper three heavens (4-6), whereas the profane issues

³⁹ A typical Christian description of liturgy. Cf. Justin, 1Apol.

⁴⁰ Cf. Harm W. Hollander and Marius de Jonge, *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. A Commentary*, Leiden: Brill 1985, 138f.

⁴¹ For a differing view, see Peter Schäfer, “From Cosmology to Theology. The Rabbinic Appropriation of Apocalyptic Cosmology,” in: *Creation and Re-Creation in Jewish Thought: Festschrift in Honor of Josef Dan On the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday*, Rachel Elior, Peter Schäfer, eds., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005, 39-58, who places thrones and dominions besides the archangels.

⁴² A. Y. Collins, cit. in Himmelfarb, 32f.

(recording, punishment, and judgment (1-3)) are distributed among the lower three heavens.

The lowest heaven is still a problem: it seems still to be a part of the earthly world and it hosts no angelic inventory whatsoever. Cosmologically, it contains the waters of rain,⁴³ while, theologically, it is a mirror of the wicked deeds committed on earth. Actually, this heaven symbolises not a transcendent world but the part of this world – ‘lower transcendence’, as we called it – that lies beyond our reach: literally, it is the inaccessible sky paired with the irreversible past (time). The lowest heaven has to provide a solution to the theoretical problem of finiteness. We know this from everyday experience: our world is encompassed by borders that we see but never experience, such as the horizon that defines the visible world, or in the way that death defines life. The first sky serves as a membrane whose lower surface belongs to the immanent sphere and whose upper surface belongs to the transcendent. This cosmological ambivalence represents a philosophical problem: how can finiteness be detected in a world where everything is finite? Like a border that is noticed only by crossing it, the finite emphasises the idea of a beyond, of infinity, without which the finite would lack meaning. Classical metaphysics from Augustine through Descartes to Lévinas offers endless variations on this simple form: finiteness presupposes the knowledge of infinity. Or as we can put it in our specific case: a lower heaven leads to higher heavens.

4. *Angelic exaggerations (Ascension of Isaiah, ca. 150 CE)*

Once this multiplication begins, there are no apparent limits to transcendent inflation. We can consider as an example the “Ascension of Isaiah” (AscIs). This text was widely known in both late antique Christianity (it is mentioned by Origen, Epiphanius, Jerome) and Judaism (jSanh X, 2; bSanh 103b),⁴⁴ because it is a hybrid of a Jewish legend and a Christian apocalypse. In its first chapters, it contains a narrative describing the martyrdom of Jesaja under king Manasse, who acts under the influence of Satan.⁴⁵ A redactor has added (ch. 1-2 and 5) – without taking any great efforts to hide the rift⁴⁶ – an account of Isaiah (ch. 3-4; 6-11) concerning his journey to heaven, back to earth, and then up to heaven once

⁴³ Some variants of TestLevi place fire, ice, and snow in the first heaven. So, later, does 2Hen in order to reserve the second heaven for the fallen angels plus sun, moon, and stars.

⁴⁴ Cf. Erling Hammershaimb, “Das Martyrium Jesajas,” in: *Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, vol. 2, *Unterweisungen in erzählender Form*, Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 1973, 17 and 19.

⁴⁵ Probably mentioned in Hebr 11, 37.

⁴⁶ In 1, 5-6a the redactor makes an introductory remark that somehow announces that a vision will follow later in the text.

again. Due to the closeness of this account to early enthronement motifs, we can date the last redaction of the text to the second century.⁴⁷

The sole link between the two very different sources – physical martyrdom and spiritual rapture – is an angelic strand. In the first part, it is the evil “angel of injustice” (2, 4), Beliar or Sammael (2, 2) aka “Satan and his angels and dominions” (2, 2), who seduces the King of Israel to commit magic, oracles, and adultery. In the second part, Satan plays also an important role in trying to stop Isaiah from reaching higher realms.⁴⁸ In both parts of the text, we observe a hierarchical differentiation of angelic beings. In the Jewish legend, this distinguishes Balkira (human servant of the evil), Beliar (spirit inhabiting Manasse), Sammael (spirit serving Manasse), and, above them all, Satan (the lord of evil angels). The extended Christian version unfolds the first fully-fledged angelic uranography.

A short summary will suffice to give an idea of its structure. The text begins with a high angel descending to reveal a vision to Isaiah (cf. AscIs 6, 13). The prophet is guided step by step on his journey upwards by this “glorious angel.” The pair first pass the firmament, where Sammael and the angels of Satan envy and fight against each other. The sky seems to contain the same evil as the world down below and is presented not as the negation but as the escalation of earthly conditions. From there, Isaiah and the angel pass through the six successive heavens, each one brighter than the one preceding, while the distances between the heavens increase each time. Each heaven is preceded by its own atmosphere, which must be passed through before the heaven itself can be entered. The first five heavens are each internally divided into a left and a right side, a lesser and more noble side, inhabited by angels who praise the one on the throne.⁴⁹ In the third heaven, there is no more reminder of the earth; it is fully disconnected by this point. Nothing remains hidden in this heaven, but everything from the lower realms is forgotten.⁵⁰ Isaiah gradually assumes an angelic face (cf. 7, 25) and is then transformed into an angelic shape (cf. 9, 30).

⁴⁷ Cf. Robert G. Hall, “The Ascension of Isaiah. Community, Situation, and Place in Early Christianity,” in: *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 (1990), 300-306. The martyrdom and the ascent were probably originally separate texts.

⁴⁸ “And we ascended to the firmament, me and him, and there I saw Sammael and his hosts and a big fight took place against him, and the angels of Satan were jealous against each other” AscIs 7, 9, cf. 10, 12. “And I saw him, and he was in the firmament, but he did not transform into their likeness, and all the angels of the firmament and Satan saw him and adored him.” AscIs 11, 23.

⁴⁹ AscIs thus dramatises what is depicted in a more compact scene at Apc 4f. The text leaves open whether the “one on the throne” is the highest angel of this heaven or whether it is the anticipation of the throne of God, reaching down through all the heavens. Grunewald’s argument that this contradicts Jewish tradition, since “angels cannot fold their legs and, thus, cannot sit,” refers to later Midrashim like Bereschit Rabba, which reacts to earlier angelologies.

⁵⁰ Each heaven seems to unfold through the same logic of exaggeration: it is more glorious than the previous; in each, the throne is more glorious than the angels and the angels to

The sixth heaven is undivided and filled with an abundance of light, which leads to a dialogue between Isaiah and the guiding angel about the experience of light. In chapter 9, Isaiah is finally taken to the highest, the seventh, heaven. Here, not only do angels dwell but also Adam, Abel, Henoch, and all the just. They do not wear their crowns and nor do they sit upon their thrones. Why? This is the moment for the guiding angel to explain the plan of salvation. The Lord, who will be called Christ, has to descend to earth and overcome the angel of death (“And he will rise after three days, when he has plundered the angel of death,” 9, 16).⁵¹ This is all written down in heavenly books, the reader learns. After being informed of the plan by the guiding angel, Isaiah, the patriarchs, and the angels give praise to the “Lord of glories” (9, 31) and to “another glorious one, who was like him” (9, 33, here: Christ, the Son). The guiding angel then becomes a “second angel,” the angel of the Holy Spirit, which is also the angel of prophecy. He has to be adored as the Christ by the heavenly hosts. Finally, the Lord⁵² and the angel of the spirit adore God (9, 40), forming a kind of ‘proto-Trinity’.⁵³

At the command of God, Christ now descends through the seven heavens. The whole enterprise is enacted as a secret mission. He still appears as the Lord as he passes through the sixth heaven but from there on he travels in disguise, taking on the look of the angels so that nobody recognises him. In the lower heavens, he has to speak a password to pass through the gates of the heavens. The Lord even assimilates the form of the chaotic angels of the first heaven and that of the angels of the air. He sneaks, camouflaged, into the earthly world and becomes a man through the virgin. The text skips over the corporeal birth: the child somehow leaves the womb and even Mary is surprised to see her child (11, 8). He – the name Jesus is not mentioned – grows up, performs miracles, is betrayed, is crucified, descends to the netherworld and rises again after three days. The final return to heaven is a triumphal ascent, this time in his real appearance as Lord. Now the angels of the different heavens immediately acknowledge Christ, bow down, and repent for not having recognised him earlier. In the highest heaven, he is enthroned at the right side of the “great glory.” Finally, the righteous can take their crowns, garments, and thrones.⁵⁴

the right side are more glorious than those to the left. Isaiah is tempted to adore the angels but – like in *Apc 22, 8* – the guiding angels forbids it.

⁵¹ Transl. Michael A. Knibb, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, J. H. Charlesworth, ed., New York, Garden City: Doubleday&Company 1985, 164-176.

⁵² There are two possible ways of reading 9, 39. “My Lord” is either the *angelus interpres* or Christ himself. Even in the first case, it would be Christ – disguised as the guiding angel – who bows before God.

⁵³ In this early form of the trinity, the Beloved and the Spirit, enthroned to the left and to the right of the highest God, are clearly subordinated.

⁵⁴ According to Gruenwald, who counts *AscJes* among the Jewish texts, “the Christian editor or interpolator of the book ... transforms at least one traditional Jewish theme, the wearing of crowns, into a Christian apocalyptic theologoumenon.” Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkavah Mysticism*, Leiden: Brill 1980, 61.

This apocalypse is not very subtle. There are no hidden hints or symbolic allusions. It is plainly interested in examining the fabric of angelic worlds. Instead of the simple idea of incarnation, AscI unfolds a complex structure of differentiation across the seven heavens: each heaven has two layers and most also have two sides; the lower three heavens are differentiated from the upper four; various groups of the righteous and angels are distinguished from each other; ordinary angels are differentiated from divine angels (the spirit, the guiding angel); and there is a difference between the heavens before and after Christ's triumph. Becoming a human by taking on flesh is just another disguise. In fact, the word (the "Lord") is not made flesh, as orthodox Christology would define later, but rather takes on flesh as another form of camouflage, so that humans are not able to recognise the descended Lord. It seems that salvation can only be brought by surprise and incognito.⁵⁵

The dialectic between divine and human is transformed into a glissando of downward angelic transformations. This logic produces results that are likely counter to the intentions of the author: by bridging the gap between God and man through infinitesimal transitions and by suggesting that the immanent is connected to the transcendent through progressive upgrades, these models make contact with the divine considerably more complicated. God is pushed up and up into a highest heaven. The upper heavens are organised in a cascade of adoration by angels, righteous, the Spirit, and the Beloved. God himself, the "Lord of all glory," can only be praised but cannot be viewed (cf. 11, 32). The highest remains somehow hidden, even within the angelic liturgy. This is not something new: the Jerusalem temple and many other religious buildings were constructed using a logic that surrounded the sanctissimum with forecourts. In this case, however, it is angels that provide the architectural structure.

5. *From seven to ten layers (The Coptic Apocalypse of Paul, ca. 200 CE)*

Among the texts found at Nag Hammadi, there is a short apocalypse which, while clearly Christian in content, goes far beyond the Biblical texts. The Coptic Apocalypse of Paul (NH V, 2) – not to be confused with the Coptic version of the much later Greek Apocalypse of Paul⁵⁶ – locates the vision mentioned in 2Cor12 as oc-

⁵⁵ The gnostic myths in the texts of Nag Hammadi express this trickster-soteriology in their own way. Cf. Apocryphon of John (NH II, 1), 30-31. See also the Gospel of Mary 9, 2; Dialogue of the Saviour 8, 7.

⁵⁶ There are interesting parallels that we cannot discuss here. Cf. Hans-Josef Klauck, "With Paul through Heaven and Hell. Two Apocryphal Apocalypses," in: *Biblical Research* 52 (2007), 57-72. The Greek ApcPl unfolds the otherworld not vertically into layers but horizontally into regions. Paul is taken *only* into the third heaven. There he explores a transcendent landscape: paradise, the gates of heaven, city of Christ, the Acherusic sea (a precursor of purgatory), and then back to paradise again. Like the Ethiopian Apocalypse of Peter (ca. 150 CE), this text intends to shock its readers with drastic depictions of punish-

curing on Paul's journey to Jerusalem where he plans to join his "co-apostles." On a mountain in Jericho, he meets a child and this meeting prompts him to look upwards and to awaken his mind.⁵⁷ Paul is immediately taken by the Spirit to the third heaven and then proceeds to the fourth, from where he looks down on the earth. The co-apostles join him here. At the gate of the fourth heaven, he watches angels conducting a lawsuit against a soul. The soul is sentenced to return to its body. In the fifth heaven, Paul witnesses four angels (probably the archangels) whipping souls towards judgment. As he passes the sixth heaven, about which we are told nothing of the contents, the gates open automatically for him. In the seventh heaven, the apostles meet an old man on a throne, the creator and Lord of the higher angels, the "principalities and authorities" (ApcPI NH 5, 2, 23). In a short dialogue, Paul explains that he journeys to the place from which he originally came – a clearly gnostic motif.⁵⁸ The seemingly earthbound⁵⁹ creator wants to keep Paul in his heaven but through the use of a secret sign he is able to escape into the eighth. Here, Paul meets the Ogdoad – the eightfold divinity of Gnosticism, before going on to the ninth and then the tenth heaven, where he meets "his fellow spirits" (ApcPI NH 5, 2, 24).

In this narrative, angels are reduced to the status of a lower executive force: they punish, interrogate, and transport souls. In the seventh heaven, they block the way into higher realms. Even the function of interpreter is not taken by an angel but by a spirit, probably the Holy Spirit disguised as a child, who leads the visionary. ApcPI contains angels in each of the first seven heavens. In the end, however, the author seems to run out of imagination and the three highest heavens are listed in the shortest way possible.⁶⁰ These upper heavens show the inversion of angelic rituals into the mystic gnostic act of silent understanding. The end of salvation-history will not be a judgment about earthly deeds but the con-spiration, the fusion of intellectual spirituality.

ments in the hereafter. Angels are employed mainly as agents of torture. We observe the same logic here: as the praise is differentiated into many liturgical tasks and levels, so the punishment is transformed into various methods and places.

⁵⁷ Text according to The Nag Hammadi Library, transl. George W. MacRae and William R. Murdock.

⁵⁸ Cf. Michael Kaler, *Flora Tells a Story. The Apocalypse of Paul and Its Contexts*, Waterloo: WLU Press 2008.

⁵⁹ "He turned his face downwards to his creation" ApcPI NH 5, 2, 23. The God of the Bible resides in the seventh heaven but is depicted as a helpless divinity. He is surpassed by another species of transcendent beings, the aeons (Ogdoad) and the spirits/*pneumata*. This text is not only a critique of apostolic church-authorities in Jerusalem but also a critique of biblical theism.

⁶⁰ See, for instance, this tautological description: "We entered the ninth heaven. I greeted those, who are in the ninth heaven." ApcPI NH 5, 2, 24.

The logic of angelic inflation

Let us return to the thesis with which I began this chapter. It is not God's distance that produces angels and heavens, but angels who increase God's distance. In the texts discussed above, God is not defined or described at all.⁶¹ He/It stays behind the curtains of heavenly liturgy. Angelic services are employed in order to maintain God's transcendent position. Thus, angels do not grow in a top-down but a bottom-up way. They interpret, they transport human prayers and deeds, they command silence and proclaim, punish, protect, praise, and sacrifice.⁶² God becomes more and more sublime but, as executive functions are shifted elsewhere, he also becomes jobless.

The production of space by angels follows a hidden logic that system-theory calls 're-entry'. It arises from the paradox that occurs when one applies a distinction to itself. The question of whether the distinction between 'good' and 'bad' is good or bad cannot be decided easily without running into tautology or paradox. The same is true in the case of the epistemological doubt concerning whether the distinction between 'true' and 'false' is true or false. Every social system faces this problem of self-references which cannot be solved; they can only be procrastinated over or concealed. In religious systems, the paradox can be rephrased: is the distinction between 'transcendent' and 'immanent' transcendent or immanent? And in the semantics of our texts: is the distinction between earth and the angelic realms drawn from an earthly or from a heavenly perspective? Is it an observation from below or from above? Angelic uranography is a mythological attempt to conceal the paradox by reduplication:⁶³ each side of the basic 'transcendence/immanence' distinction is split into two halves, one more transcendent and the other more immanent.⁶⁴

⁶¹ None of the early angelological texts presupposes the concept of a highest being, from which lower beings emanate. This will be the case in gnostic texts, but not here.

⁶² Historically, the expansion of a spectacular heavenly cult could be seen as a substitution for the end of the Jerusalem temple in Judaism and the establishment of a very sober and inconspicuous liturgy in Christianity. If we earthlings have no direct contact to our deity, at least our angels do.

⁶³ For a concise deduction of these laws of form, see Johann Hafner, "Die Codierung des Christentums," in: *Interdisziplinäre Traditionstheorie*, Blahoslav Fajmon and Jaroslav Vokoun, eds., Zürich: Lit-Verlag 2016, 133-193.

⁶⁴ This rigid categorisation can serve only as a heuristic orientation. As with all theoretical models, we never find actual particular cases in which it occurs in a completely pure form. Rather, the model allows for overlapping at its borders: the stars of the sky might be part of the higher heavens, some righteous might reach the highest heavens, or some fallen angels might inhabit the telluric spheres.

	transcendent	immanent
transcendent	I transcendent transcendence “divine” “heaven of heavens”	II immanent transcendence “angels” “heavens”
immanent	III transcendent immanence “sky”	IV immanent immanence “earth”

Quadrant IV represents the familiar part of the earth, the empirical surroundings found in space and time.⁶⁵ This is encompassed by the inaccessible parts of the visible world (quadrant III), represented by mountaintops, the vast ocean, and the sky.⁶⁶ These are endless but not infinite. Quadrant II and I stand for the idea that there is another world beyond the immanent – distant or close – realms.⁶⁷ This otherworld is separated from our world by space (heaven) or by time (afterlife) or by perfection (for the righteous only). Quadrant II symbolises the part of the otherworld that is still similar to us. This is the place where angels and souls dwell. Quadrant I represents a transcendence that is completely dissimilar to us,⁶⁸ a status that can only be expressed by apophatic symbols or exaggerations such as ‘holy of holies’ or ‘most high’. If a religious tradition decides to differentiate the world below into more or less accessible regions, it is likely to differentiate the world above into more or less accessible parts as well. This is the birth of angelic intermediaries and of the plurality of heavens. Once this duplication first takes place, it can be perpetuated without end. Quadrants I and II are even more prone to differentiation, since their characteristic is infinity. There is always a higher heaven, there is always a stronger angel. Angelic inflation can only be contained by capping the expansion with an absolute being who sits at the top. Again, the same problem arises: is the highest being part of the ladder of angels or is it beyond? If it is a part, it is not the summum but adds to the inflation; if it is beyond, it cannot communicate via intermediaries. If a religion wants to retain God’s transcendence and communicability at the same time, it has to choose ways of direct revelation. Perhaps the idea of direct incarnation into a human person (Christianity), the idea of direct emanation into human spirit (Gnosis), and the idea of direct dictation of an absolute text (Islam) are reactions to the unsolvable problem of angelic inflation.

⁶⁵ Cf. the Satan-angel in 2Cor 12, who buffets Paul here on earth.

⁶⁶ Cf. the lowest heaven in AscJes and TestLevi.

⁶⁷ Cf. the God-oriented vs the man-oriented angels in TestLevi and coptApcPl.

⁶⁸ Cf. the throne-visions in Apc 4, TestLevi, and AscJes.

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Uniting Fire and Snow: Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel ‘Habīb’ in Medieval Versions of Muḥammad’s Ascension¹

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In popular versions of the story of Muḥammad’s ascension through the heavens, especially those circulating outside the Sunni canonical collections of sound *ḥadīth* codified by the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, over the course of his night journey, Muḥammad encounters a wondrous angel created in fantastic fashion: half of its anthropomorphic body consists of fire, and the other half of its body consists of snow. Typically Muḥammad finds the angel in the midst of a petitionary prayer, calling on God to unite the hearts of his faithful believers, just as God unites the elements of fire and snow in its form. In the popular Islamic ascension narratives, scenes featuring a “Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel” are invariably brief, and they may seem hardly worth significant attention. Previous studies have often come quickly to the conclusion that the origins of this angel should be sought in a Hebrew text, postulating that Muslim storytellers simply must have borrowed the scene in which it appears from an earlier Jewish narrative. What I hope to illustrate, however, is that in asking the question about how this angel relates to humankind, and in discussing how this trope develops over time and relates to similar tropes in other contexts, what first appears to be a minor and simple matter of influence or appropriation actually turns out to involve greater complexities than previously acknowledged. Focusing on the historical development of the representations of the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel in the Muslim ascension narratives suggests that what begins as a symbol of God’s divine omnipotence and communal reconciliation transforms over time into a more pietistic model for divine forgiveness and the petitioning of God for more individual inner reconciliation. Throughout, we will see that the physical depictions of Half-Fire Half-Snow Angels remain fairly constant, despite the changing ways in which the different Muslim accounts portray these wondrous heavenly beings in varying degrees as exemplars of a balanced and pious nature for humankind, and as intercessors on behalf of humanity.

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The image of a fantastic angel that God created in a form half of fire and half of snow may have circulated in some of the earliest scholarly works written by Muslims, apparently even in the famous early Qurʾān commentary ascribed to the eighth-century exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān.² Although the passage in which Muqātil discusses this composite angel remains elusive – seemingly not in direct relation to the Night Journey verse (Q 17:1) or the opening verses of *Sūrat al-Najm* (Q 53:1-18) that often serve as proof-texts for a Qurʾānic elaboration of Muḥammad’s ascension – Muqātil’s reference, if authenticated, suggests that far from being a “late addition” to Muslim angelology, the angel makes its appearance in the first centuries of Islamic history.

Version A

While Muqātil’s reference to this angel in his Qurʾān commentary remains elusive for the present, the “Primitive Version” of the Ibn ʿAbbās ascension narrative, which elsewhere I have argued began to circulate in the ninth century CE, offers one of the earliest full written descriptions of this Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel. For the sake of reference in this study, I will be calling variations of this appearance of the narreme Version A. What follows is the full account from this early depiction, in which Muḥammad relates first-person his encounter with this angel amidst the wonders that he witnesses on his ascension through the heavens:

[After passing the Angelic Rooster], next I passed by other strange creatures, among which was an angel half of whose body below its head was of snow, and the other [half] of fire. Between them was a seam, the fire not melting the snow, nor the snow extinguishing the fire. He stood calling out in a very loud voice, “Glorified be my Lord, who holds back the cold from this snow so that it does not extinguish the heat of this fire! Glorified be my Lord, who holds back the heat of this fire so that it does not melt this snow! O God, uniter of snow and fire, unite the hearts of your believing servants!” I asked Gabriel, “Who is that?” and he replied, “An angel that God has assigned³ to the outer limits of the heavens and the extremities of the earths. He is one of the best angelic advisors to the believers of earth, petitioning on their behalf with this glorification since the day of his creation.”⁴

² According to Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique*, Beirut: Dar el-Machreq 1970, 70, this Half-Fire Half-Snow angel appears in the *tafsir* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d.150/767), although he does not in his brief reference specify where in this particular Qurʾān commentary. A perusal of the likely locations in the written text as well as search through the “Maktabat al-Shamilah” digital database did not turn up the citation, so this attribution awaits further confirmation.

³ Or “connected to,” for the printed version of al-Suyūṭī’s text contains the Arabic verb *waṣṣalahu*, which I contend represents a corruption of the verb *wakkalahu* attested in numerous other Ibn ʿAbbās ascension reports, as well as the other early attestation of Version A from *Tafsir Qummi* (see below).

⁴ Appendix A of Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2008, 176. The full “Primitive Version” is translated here on 175-193. The

This is the second of four major angels appearing at the opening of this early Ibn ‘Abbās ascension narrative, the four including the Rooster Angel, this Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel, the Angel of Death, and the angelic Guardian of Hellfire. These same four angels, while not identical with the four “archangels” from al-Suyūṭī’s later compilation of angel reports, still serve in prominent roles in the relationship between the angelic and human realms. These four together appear as part of the “preface” to this early text, and they become standard figures that nearly always can be found – although not always clustered in proximity – in the non-canonical Islamic ascension texts transmitted in the name of Ibn ‘Abbās. This particular early text begins its preface with a reference to the wonders of the ascension (*‘ajā’ib al-mi‘rāj*), and thus the first context in which this angel needs to be considered in our analysis is as representative of a “wonder,” something fabulous and incredible, a clear sign to the audience of the narrative that, as the character Dorothy says in the classic American film *The Wizard of Oz*, “Toto, I think we’re not in Kansas anymore.” In other words, this Half-Fire-Half-Snow Angel, together with other wondrous angels, signal to the audience that Muḥammad’s heavenly journey has taken us to a sacred space outside the realm of the world known to all but the most privileged of human beings.

Another notable feature of the representation of this wondrous angel in Version A cited above appears in the way the narreme details the angel’s location at “the outer limits” or borders of the heavens and the “extremities” or ends of the worlds. Its location thus can be understood as a liminal site on the edges of created realms, perhaps a border zone between heaven and earth itself – and God assigned the angel to that boundary region as its representative. The idea that the Half-Half Angel holds a type of dominion over the borders between heaven and earth is one that we will see again in other accounts, and one that may explain why the angel so often appears in the First Heaven (*al-samā’ al-dunyā*) in many such stories. The narrator’s placement of this Half-Half Angel in this liminal position on the extremes of the heavens and earth could be interpreted as communicating something about border crossing and boundary linking, perhaps symbolizing this angel’s mediating role between God and humankind, as it petitions the divinity on behalf of humanity.

While the above early Ibn ‘Abbās ascension narrative was only preserved by the scholar Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) in order to discredit it as a forged *ḥadīth* report, and much later was included in a compilation of forged *ḥadīth* by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), the same narreme from the Primitive Version that I am here calling Version A also appears in the 3rd/9th-century Qur’ān commentary by the

narreme, ascribed by the traditionist Ibn Ḥibbān (d. 354/965) transmitted with an *isnād* through Maysara b. ‘Abd Rabbih via ‘Umar b. Sulaymān al-Dimashqī, is now preserved in Suyūṭī’s *al-Lāli al-maṣnū‘a fi ahādīth al-mawḍū‘a*, ed. Abu ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ṣalāḥ b. al-Muḥammad b. ‘Uwayḍa, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya 1996, vol. 1, 62-63, near the very beginning of this report.

early Imami Shi'i exegete 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm al-Qummi (d. 307/919), who includes it as part of a report attributed to Ja'far al-Šādiq as recorded in a now lost early work on the *mi'rāj*.⁵ The only difference between the Primitive Version's and al-Qummi's representation of this same narreme comes at the end of the brief scene, where the compiler appends the following information to the way Gabriel explains the identity of the angel to Muḥammad:

He has been calling to them [i.e. human believers] as you hear from the time he was created. There are two [other] angels who call in the heavens. One says, "O God, grant a successor to everyone who is charitable," while the other says, "O God, bring ruin upon every niggardly person."⁶

This report as transmitted in al-Qummi's Qur'ān commentary thus reproduces Version A of our narreme, simply adding a few details about how this remarkable angel stands amidst a select few angels who petition God on behalf of humanity (the other two on the matter of charitable giving), and how it not only directs its petitions toward God but also directs its counsels about uniting the hearts of believers toward human beings themselves. The latter role has occupied this wondrous angel since creation, according to this second early attestation of Version A.

In another reference from the formative period of Islamic thought in the eastern lands of what is modern-day Iran, the Nishapūri traditionist al-Tha'labi (d. 427/1035) records a report, transmitted via Muqātil and al-Ḍaḥḥāk from Ibn 'Abbās, that describes our Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel appearing in the second heaven, just after a series of angels who stand shoulder to shoulder and raise their voices in glorifying God:

God created an angel named Ḥabīb, half of him is fire and half of him is snow, and between them is a seam. The fire does not melt the snow, nor does the snow extinguish the fire. He says, "O you who unites fire and snow, unite the hearts of your servants."⁷

This brief anecdote, which I consider an abbreviated variant of Version A, preserves the earliest dateable reference I have found to the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel being called by the proper name "Ḥabīb" (Lover or Beloved). This proper name is somewhat unusual, for it does not fit any of the patterns of Muslim angel nomenclature that Stephen Burge details based on his valuable study of an-

⁵ The angel appears in the midst of the first heaven, between scenes of otherworldly punishment, in this remarkable report; see al-Qummi, *Tafsīr Qummi*, vol. 2, ed. Ṭayyib Mūsā Jazā'iri, Najaf: Maktabat al-Hudā 1967-68, 6-7. The full text of this report has recently been translated into English by R. P. Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension in Islam: The Reception of Religious Narrative in Sunni, Shi'i and Western Culture*, London: I. B. Tauris 2013, 6-18, where the translator discusses its original context on 6. The Half-Fire-Half-Snow angel appears in Buckley's translation on 10-11.

⁶ Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension in Islam*, 11.

⁷ al-Tha'labi, *Qiṣaṣ al-Anbiyā'*, Beirut: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa [n.d.], 11, translated in my "Constructing an Islamic Ascension Narrative: The Interplay of Official and Popular Culture in Pseudo-Ibn 'Abbās", PhD diss., Duke University 2002, 224.

gels in Islam,⁸ nor does it fit into the exegetical principle of Jewish angel nomenclature that Saul Olyan describes.⁹ Still, unlike many angelic names introduced in passing in *mi'raj* narratives that rarely repeat in other texts, the name “Ḥabīb” has significant staying-power, as witnessed by numerous later references. Take, for example, the 11th/17th-century Cairo MS *Tarikh Taymur* 738/10, where the description includes this same proper name:

Then I passed an angel, half of him was of fire and half of him of snow, and he was calling out in a beautiful voice, “O one who unites between snow and fire, unite servants, the believers. I said, “O Gabriel, who is this?” He answered, “This is an angel whose name is Ḥabīb. He does not [ever stop] this petition for the believers. And he cries for the sinners.”¹⁰

While it is true that many versions of the Half-Half scene do not give any name for this wondrous angel, when a proper name appears, more often than not that name is “Ḥabīb.”

One final instance of this angel as attested in Version A that I wish to mention appears in the far western lands of Islamdom in the 13th century *Liber Scale Machometi*, the Latin and Old French composite text that presents this angel, along with the Rooster Angel that immediately precedes it, not just once but twice over the course of its account of Muḥammad’s ascension, first in the account of the First Heaven and again in the account beyond the Seventh Heaven.¹¹ The first instance from the First Heaven is brief and nearly identical to the short account just quoted from Cairo MS *Tarikh Taymūr* 738/10 except that it does not include the name of the angel as Ḥabīb. The second reference that comes later in *Liber Scale Machometi* is more extensive, and more closely resembles Version A quoted above (the “Primitive Version” of the Ibn ‘Abbās ascension narrative) and its echo in al-Qummi.

Thus in both eastern and western sources, from the 3rd/9th through the 11th/17th centuries, we find attestations of this Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel whose opposing elemental essences are moderated and held in check from affecting one another through God’s supreme power. Most of the preceding examples, which I here categorise together as minor variations on a single trope that I am choosing to label Version A, all seem to emphasise the wondrous nature of the physical

⁸ S. R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabābīk fī akhbār al-malā’ik*, London: Routledge 2012.

⁹ Saul Olyan, *A Thousand Thousands Served Him: Exegesis and the Naming of Angels in Ancient Judaism*, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr 1993.

¹⁰ Cairo MS *Tarikh Taymūr* 738/10, “Hādha al-mi’raj ‘alā al-tamām wa-l-kamāl,” 328v line 14, just after Muhammad’s encounter with the Rooster Angel.

¹¹ See Gisele Besson and Michele Brossard-Dandré, *Le Livre de l’échelle de Mahomet*, Paris: Librairie Générale Français 1991, Chapter 9, 119; Chapter 29, 179; compare the English translation in Reginald Hyatte, *The Prophet of Islam in Old French: The Romance of Muhammad* (1258) and *The Book of Muhammad’s Ladder* (1264), Leiden: Brill 1997, 113 and 135.

form of this heavenly being. The way its form perfectly balances heat and cold could be thought to symbolise the interaction of two opposing bodily humors, conjoining in harmony and health, writ large on the body of this angel. Yet the fact that these opposing elemental forces are confined to opposing hemispheres of the body, while not destroying or even harming one another, seems to be the central miracle that the angel's physical form represents. The seeming impossibility of this angel's very body communicates explicitly to the audience of this tale that God has power over all things, and earthly rules of the natural order of things do not apply in this heavenly realm. It thus functions both to confirm that on his journey Muḥammad did indeed transcend the earthly realm, and also to emphasise the divine ability to create and maintain the universe however God wishes.

Beyond exploring the wonders of the physical symbol that this angel represents, the reports of this Half-Fire-Half-Snow Angel from Version A convey a moral interpretation as well: God, who has the power to unite fire and snow, also has the power to unite other opposing things beyond the physical dimension, such as feuding groups of people, or warring tendencies within human hearts. The angel's petition proclaims that God has the power, which the angel calls upon, to bring about reconciliation and unification in the disunited people of faith (*mu'minūn*).

The angel's petitionary prayer to "unite the hearts" of the community of believers alludes directly to two different Medinan passages in the Qur'ān that use a closely related Arabic phrase to show how God has previously united or reconciled hearts of his believing servants, and in the second instance, how he alone has the power to do so. The first reference comes from the chapter known as the "Family of Imran" (Q 3) where it discusses the relations between those who are believers and those who earlier were outside the camp of the believers:

*Hold firmly to the rope of God and be not divided among yourselves, and remember the favors that God bestowed on you when you were one another's foe and **be united your hearts** and turned you into brethren through his grace.¹²*

In another chapter known as the "Spoils of War" (Q 8), the Qur'ān acknowledges the need to fight one's enemies, but also acknowledges that the ultimate power rests with God alone to bring about reconciliation:

*Prepare against them whatever arms and cavalry you can muster... Whatever you spend in the way of God will be paid back to you in full, and no wrong will be done to you. But if they are inclined to peace, make peace with them, and have trust in God, for he hears all and knows everything. If they try to cheat you, God is surely sufficient for you. It is he who has strengthened you with his help and with the believers **whose hearts he cemented with love**. You could never have*

¹² Q 3:103, translated by Ahmed Ali, *The Qur'an: A Contemporary Translation*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1984, emphasis added. All quotations from the Qur'ān in this chapter are drawn from Ahmed Ali's translation unless stated otherwise.

*united their hearts even if you had spent whatever wealth there is in the earth; but God united them with love, for he is all-mighty and all-wise.*¹³

In both cases, the Qurʾānic passages refer to struggles between the community of God's faithful believers and those who resist and/or fight against them. Internal reconciliation within the Muslim community (Q 3:103) and external reconciliation between the Muslims and their non-Muslim adversaries (Q 8:62-63) both becomes possible through God's power, the Qurʾān insists, not through humanity's own efforts. God alone is able to unite the opposing forces. As Olyan argues regarding the development of a series of angels in the ancient Jewish context whose origins can be traced to Biblical exegesis, the exegesis of these Qurʾānic verses may well have contributed to the emergence of the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel in Muslim ascension narratives, who God alone is able to create and sustain, despite its contrasting halves. Turning back to contemplating the function of this angel, then, clearly it performs the literal and symbolic task of reminding humanity of the overwhelming power of God to reconcile opposites, and it also models for the pious believer a type of petitionary prayer. The angel's petitionary prayer in this brief account offers a call for God to bring about some sort of joining and reconciliation of opposites within the community, or within the hearts of the individuals that make up the community in more general terms.

Version B

Up until this point we have surveyed several narremes that describe the supplication and appearance of this Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel as an individual wonder, standing on his own, but at the beginning of the middle period of Islamic history we find a new variation of this angelic scene, one that portrays not one but a whole brigade of Half-Half Angels, and I will be calling this new variation Version B. A brief reference in *Kitāb al-miʿrāj* by the Sufi traditionist from Nishāpūr al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) offers an early example of this variant, portraying not one but a group of composite angels created out of Fire and Snow:

I passed by angels, half of whom were of fire and half of whom were of snow. They said, "God, you who unite fire and snow, unite the hearts of your servants, the believers."¹⁴

This extremely brief reference is very similar to that given by al-Qushayrī's Nishāpūrī compatriot al-Thaʿlabī (d. 427/1035), but in this report it mentions not

¹³ Q 8:60-63, emphasis added.

¹⁴ al-Qushayrī, "Kitāb al-miʿrāj," Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, MS 1891, Bankipore India, fol. 26v; compare Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-miʿrāj*, Ali Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Qādir, ed., Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥaditha 1964, 57-58.

one but a group of angels, in the plural, who all individually appear to take this wondrous form, composed half of snow and half of fire.¹⁵

The next more detailed instance from Version B that portrays a group of Half-Half Angels is transmitted not in Arabic but in Persian, from the anonymous Istanbul manuscript Ayasofya 3441, dated 685/1286, presenting a text that Christiane Gruber has argued originally accompanied the paintings from the illustrated Ilkhanid *Mi'rajnāma*.¹⁶ Here the troop of Half-Half Angels, led by a single huge leader of the same wondrous nature, collectively appear in the second heaven instead of the first:

I saw an angel in the second sky, whose name is *Qābil* [Able]. He was more marvelous and larger than all the other angels that I had seen. I saw next to him innumerable angels, which all resembled him. [48] (fol. 23r) Half of them were of fire and half of snow. Neither did the snow extinguish the fire, nor did the fire melt the snow. They were all reciting a prayer, which was this: "O He who joined snow and fire, *place affection between the hearts* of Muhammad's community." Gabriel said to me, "Rise and greet him because he is the kindest to you of all angels of this heaven." I stood up and greeted him. He answered: "O Muhammad, this is good tidings for you and your community. Know that God ordered us fifteen thousand years before he created Adam to send prayers upon you and to yearn for your community. Our request to you tonight is that you ask God most High to [forgive us] our shortcomings." I answered: "I agree [to do so]."¹⁷

In this middle period Persian *Mi'rajnāma*, the troop of Half-Half Angels is led by their leader "*Qābil*," who initially appears to embody the singular composite angel we have been examining from Version A but then is said to be accompanied by other angels of a similar nature but smaller stature. They were created long ago¹⁸ with a "yearning" to reach out to and assist Muḥammad and his community, which could partially explain the name given to the Half-Half Angel in other contexts, "Lover" or "Beloved."¹⁹ This being as it may, they all call out with the typical petitionary "prayer" formula that we had seen in Version A, but then they address Muḥammad directly and ask him to intercede with God on their behalf. This theme of intercession, which the angels' own petition also represents a plea on behalf of the Muslim community as a whole, emerges as a prominent aspect of the

¹⁵ Note that the text is so brief and vague that it could be read to suggest that half of the angels were made out of Fire, and the other half of the group were made out of Snow. It remains possible that the earliest versions of the trope began with such a depiction of a group of angels not divided individually but collectively. Such an exegetical ambiguity does not appear in the later texts that I here group as variants of Version B.

¹⁶ Christiane Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension: A Persian-Sunni Devotional Tale*, London: I. B. Tauris 2010.

¹⁷ Anonymous, "Mi'raj Nameh," Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Ayasofya 3441, Istanbul Turkey (dated 685/1286), fols. 22v-23r, a passage translated by Gruber, *Ilkhanid*, 47-48.

¹⁸ This detail resembles that from the end of the narreme in Qummi's *Tafsir*, discussed above, where the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel is described as petitioning on behalf of humanity since the time of its creation, presumably before the creation of human beings.

¹⁹ It is worth considering that, without the diacritical points above and below two key letters, the name *Qābil* might possibly represent a corruption of the name "Ḥābib."

Ibn ‘Abbās ascension genre from about the 6th/12th-7th/13th century forward, and the above anecdote from this 7th/13th-century Persian narrative is no exception to this historical pattern.

Before examining other variations of this composite Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel in Islamic narratives of heavenly ascent, it is worth pausing briefly to note that, similar to the narremes I have given here as Version B, we find a fairly obscure and difficult to date apocryphal Jewish ascension text known as *Gedulath Mosbe* (“The Greatness of Moses”), in which the ascending prophet Moses, following the angel Metatron as his interpreter and guide, encounters a similar brigade of angels during his heavenly journey:

Moses went to the fifth heaven, which is like the fifth day of the week. He saw there angels made half of fire and half of snow – snow from above and fire from below. The Holy One, Blessed be He, makes peace between them [i.e. the snow and fire] and one cannot extinguish its counterpart, as it is said, *He makes peace in his high heaven* (Job 25:2). All of them give praise before the Holy One, Blessed be He. Moses said to Metatron: “What are these ones doing?” He said to him: “From the day that the Holy One, Blessed be He, created them, so are they.” He said to him: “What is their name?” He replied: “Their name is *Erelim* [Valiant Ones],²⁰ the ones who are called *Ishim* [Men].” As it is said, *To you, O men, I call* (Prov. 8:4).²¹

I will return to this singular Hebrew reference in the analysis to follow, but suffice it to say at this point that even as it portrays specifically Jewish elements (for example, a reference to God as “the Holy One Blessed be He,” and citation of scriptural references from the Hebrew Bible) it shares a number of the very same details that we have encountered in the Islamic narratives. Its cryptic allusion to *Proverbs* at the end of the anecdote could preserve an echo of the petitionary element prominent in nearly all the Muslim accounts of Half-Half Angels. This being as it may, the Hebrew version most closely resembles the narremes I have called Version B, especially since it ascribes the Half-Fire Half-Snow composite nature to a whole brigade of angels, not just a single wondrous being. As with the Muslim variations, this Hebrew narreme emphasises God’s power to bring about the reconciliation of opposing forces in the heavens.

²⁰ See a discussion of this group of angels in Olyan, *A Thousand Thousand Served Him*, 52-53. Note that in the aforementioned discussion, Olyan states that the name *‘erellim* represents a *hapex legomenon* resulting in a difficulty interpreting *Isaiah* 33:7, “Behold *Erellam* (?) cried out outside / The angels of peace cried bitterly.” He continues, saying that “The *Erellim* are mentioned as a brigade of angels in numerous rabbinic texts, in the Hekhalot, and in the works of the medieval commentators,” giving examples of each in notes 79-81.

²¹ From “The Greatness of Moses” [*Gedulath Mosbeh*], English transl. by Helen Spurling in “Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise: A New Translation and Introduction,” 699-753, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, Richard Bauckham et al., ed., Cambridge: Eerdmans 2013, 717. The Hebrew text was first translated into English by Moses Gaster, who entitled it “The Revelation of Moses,” initially published in 1854 in “Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise,” in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (July 1893): 571-611.

Version C

If Version A of the narreme presents a single angel whose balanced and balanced and modermoderated composite form keeps the opposing constituent elements in harmony, and Version B presents a whole brigade of angels with the same nature (except that their heat and cold are not mentioned, rather the balancing takes place either within their bodies or among the members of the group), we now turn to a group of texts that I shall label Version C, representing accounts which incorporate a meteorological dimension to the anecdote. These variants are similar to Version A except that they emphasise this angel's booming voice, and they relate the sound made by the angel to the sound of thunder heard on earth. For example, the Anatolian scholar Izniki (d. 833/1429) transmits the narreme as follows:

Then I passed by an angel whose appearance was human in build except that half of him was of snow and half of fire. Thus says Ibn 'Abbās, and he did not add to it. Wahb [ibn Munabbih] said, "The upper part was of snow, and the lower part was of fire, the fire not melting the snow nor the snow extinguishing the fire. I heard its glorification as it was saying, "Praise to the one who joins snow and fire, praise to the one who joins his servants, the believers." I said, "Gabriel, who is this angel?" He replied, "This is an angel whom God created through his perfect power, as you see him. And he assigned him to the clouds which he drives from place to place for the benefit of his servants. His name is Thunder (*al-Ra'ad*), and from him comes lightning. From his stepping on the clouds, thunder appears; from his violence upon [the clouds] comes lightning."²²

As far as the extant ascension texts available to me, Izniki's account is the first to forge a link between this Half-Half Angel, here again appearing as a single figure as in Version A, and this wondrous angel's meteorological role as the origin of earthly thunder and lightning. From the thunderous noise that his moving about produces, thunder on earth results, hence the name of the angel is given as *al-Ra'ad*, "Thunder."²³ One cannot help but think that Izniki's anecdote here in Version C conflates two different angels, whose original roles were categorically different.²⁴

The famous 9th/15th-century illustrated Timurid *Mi'rājnāma* offers in its Uighur main text a slight variant on the same basic idea we have seen in Izniki's

²² Izniki, "Kitāb al-Mi'rāj," Mamara University MS İlahiyat Öğüt 1229, Istanbul Turkey (dated 1095/1684), fol. 8r, line 10. In this text the narreme appears in the narrative's account of the first heaven, after Muḥammad's encounter with the Rooster Angel.

²³ Perhaps because the name "Thunder" is applied to our Half-Half Angel in Version C, that might explain why uniquely in this text the Rooster Angel is given the name *Habīb* at the very end of its narreme (which could possibly represent the author's solution to two different names being applied to the Half-Half Angel).

²⁴ Note that the meteorological angels in al-Suyūṭī's collection, studied by Burge, do contain some that represent the origins of Thunder, and the angel named "Thunder" who shepherds the clouds is attested in two places in Muqāṭil's *Tafsīr* (commentary on Q 13:13 and 37:2), but none of these attestations link the angel "Thunder" to the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel at the heart of this study.

anecdote, while adding an extra intriguing detail, namely that the angel holds prayer beads or rosaries (*subḥa*):

I saw an angel, half of which was made of fire and the other half of snow. I asked Gabriel: "What is this angel?" Gabriel answered: "This is the angel whose voice is so booming that, when it recites a *tasbīḥ* [glorification], men say that it thunders." It held two rosaries in its hands.²⁵

Here the sound of the thunder emanating from this angel does not result from its stepping on clouds but as a result of its powerful voice as it booms forth its glorification of God. The theme of worshipful glorification in this narreme is amplified even further by the attention the narrator pays to its pair of prayer bead strings (Ar: *subḥatān*). The accompanying painting, depicting the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel sitting cross-legged, Gruber connects to central Asian religious and artistic traditions,²⁶ a detail we will have more to say about below as we consider the possible cultural and textual traditions that helped to shape this unique figure.

Version D

First, however, let us conclude this survey of the Half-Half Angel in popular Islamic ascension narratives by noting that a number of the later accounts similarly draw attention to the glorification and petitionary aspect of this angel, drawing on a trope that multiplies the features of this angel (in a way elsewhere ascribed independently to other angels, both singular and entire brigades) that focus on its countless and ceaseless petitionary prayers on behalf of the righteous believers on earth. For instance, the earliest extant dated Bakrī version of the Ibn ʿAbbās ascension narrative (from the last quarter of the 7th/13th-century) that serves as a model for many subsequent accounts in this same genre presents the angel in the following fashion:

Gabriel and I passed on until suddenly we were with another angel, half of whose body was white snow and the other half of whose body was blazing fire. Its head was in the

²⁵ Bibliotheque Nationale Franc. MS Sup Turc 190, Paris France, fol. 11v., translated by Christiane Gruber in *El Libro de la Ascensión: Mīrājnāma Timúrida*, Granada: Patrimonio Ediciones 2008, 367 and 385. The accompanying painting appears in *ibid.*, 202, fig. 4.1. While the manuscript includes Arabic, Ottoman Turkish, and Uighur Turkish texts describing the angel, the passage above represents Gruber's translation of the Uighur Turkish from the main body of the text (Gruber, *Libro de la Ascensión*, 367) accompanying the painting depicted on Folio 11 v (see Gruber, *Libro de la Ascensión*, 202). The Arabic caption and Ottoman translation of that caption that appear above the main body of the text both repeat the detail that two rosaries are held in the angel's hands. Only the brief Ottoman inscription – and the accompanying painting – specify that the two rosaries are composed of different substances, related to the two components united in the angel itself: one rosary is made of snow and the other of fire.

²⁶ Gruber, *Libro de la Ascensión*, 322-324.

snow [portion]. The fire did not melt the snow, nor did the snow extinguish the fire, and one thing did not blend with the other. I asked, “Gabriel, what is the name of this one?” He answered, “Muhammad, its name is Ḥabīb, and it is the best advisor to those of the earth. This angel makes the following supplication: ‘My dear God, unite the hearts of the male believers and the female believers. Rectify their essential nature, and improve the actions of the righteous so that they do not cease to perform them. Indeed you have power over all things.’ He never ceases, from the day he was created until the day of resurrection, in uttering this invocation.” “May God bless this angel for it.” The angel looked to Gabriel and asked, “Who is that [man]?” He replied to Ḥabīb, “This is Muhammad.” Then he greeted me, received me warmly, congratulated me, extolled my name, and promised me good things.²⁷

We saw some of these same details in the Persian Mi‘rājnāma cited previously,²⁸ in which the Half-Half Angels were said to have been created by God to pronounce their petition on behalf of humanity in general and Muḥammad in particular fifteen thousand years before he created Adam. In this above account, the specific date of the angel’s creation is not mentioned, but the never-ending nature of the angel’s petitionary prayer is: “He never ceases, from the day he was created until the day of resurrection, in uttering this invocation.” Thus, Ḥabīb’s continuous petition on behalf of humanity, seeking reconciliation among the believers, seems to be the emphasis of these later accounts of the angel, giving more attention to the angel’s unending prayers than to the wondrous nature of the angel itself. In addition, if the earlier versions appear to stay closer to the Qur’anic contexts in which the Qur’anic phrase “*unite their hearts*” is used to talk about reconciling disparate earthly communities, here in these later narratives the reconciliation seems to be more internal to the very beings of the believers: “Rectify their essential nature, and improve the actions of the righteous so that they do not cease to perform them.” The petition, then, calls on God to restore the internal balance within believers, not to bring together competing factions among the believers. Once this internal balance is restored, the anecdote asserts, then the performance of righteous actions will surely follow.

This emphasis on petitionary prayer, multiplied thousands-fold and echoed by the rest of the angels with an “Amen,” appears in the final variants I will discuss before the concluding analysis, represented by a few instances of narremes which I will here refer to collectively as Version D. The following instance derives from another Bakrī recension of the Ibn ‘Abbās ascension narrative, this one from about two centuries later in a copy dated 886/1481. One significant feature of this and the following text from Version D appears in the way that Gabriel encourages Muḥammad to interact with the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel at the end of this narreme:

²⁷ Bakrī, “Kitāb fihi mi‘rāj al-nabī,” Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Amcazade 95/2, Istanbul Turkey, fol. 38r, translated by Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, Appendix B, 205-206.

²⁸ See Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, discussed above.

I saw among them an immense angel sitting on a throne of light. Half of him was of fire, and half of snow. The snow did not extinguish the fire, nor did the fire melt the snow. Around him were angels [the number of whom] no one knows except God.²⁹ He called out, “Glorified be the one who separates between the fire and snow! Separate between your servants faith in obedience to you.” The angels responded, “Amen.” I said, “My beloved Gabriel, who is that?” He replied, “That is one whom God created as a wonder and appointed him to the outer limits of the heavens and earths. He is one of the best angelic advisors to your community, Muhammad, petitioning on their behalf as you heard until the day of judgment.” He said, “Advance and greet him.” [When I did,] he said, “Welcome, beloved of the lord of the worlds!”³⁰

In this scene, the name “Ḥabīb” (beloved) gets applied to Muḥammad, rather than to the angel he encounters.³¹ Gabriel explains that our Half-Half Angel represents a “wonder” (*ʿajab*), hearkening back to Version A (the “Primitive Version”) with which we began this survey that groups the Half-Half Angel together with the Rooster Angel, Guardian of Hellfire, and Angel of Death as four major angels that represent some of the principle wonders that Muḥammad encountered during his journey. The time when the Half-Half Angel began its petitions on behalf of humanity is not specified in this narreme, but its endurance in continuing such pleas until Judgement Day is mentioned. Moreover, each time the angel voices its petitionary prayer, the rest of the angels respond with a resounding “Amen.”

This detail appears again in another example that illustrates Version D, from an anonymous 10th/16th-century manuscript entitled *al-Najm al-wahbāj fi-l-masrā wa-l-miʿrāj*:

I proceeded forward, and suddenly I was with the largest angel I had ever seen, half of its body was of snow and half of it of fire. It had a thousand thousand thousand tongues, each tongue glorifying God in a language that did not resemble any other. It had a pair of wings of snow and another pair of fire. It called out, “O you who unite snow and fire, unite the hearts of your righteous servants. The angels said, “Amen.” I became confused and overwhelmed, and I said, “Gabriel, who is this angel?” He replied,

²⁹ The text never specifies whether the other angels surrounding the Half-Half angel share its wondrous nature. From Gabriel’s explanation to Muḥammad, however, we can deduce that the angels surrounding this enormous angel are not similarly created of fire and snow because the single enormous angel at their head is said to constitute a “wonder” on its own.

³⁰ Bakrī, “Hadith al-miʿrāj,” Süleymaniye Kütüphanesi, MS Ayasofya 867, Istanbul Turkey (dated 886/1481), fol. 173v, translated as an appendix to my PhD dissertation, “Constructing an Islamic Ascension Narrative,” Appendix 2, “The Translation of the Reshaped Version”, 450. Interestingly in this text, the Half-Half angel appears not in the first or second heavens but in the sixth.

³¹ The epithet “Beloved of God” gets applied to Muḥammad in a number of diverse contexts, not the least of which is a passage common to many of the later Ibn ʿAbbās ascension texts in the divine colloquy scene, where God assures Muḥammad in the “favor of the prophets” narreme that even if other prophets might receive special titles (such as Abraham as “friend of God” or Moses as “speaker with God,”), Muḥammad would himself be known as “beloved of God.” See, for example, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 98-99 and 228-229.

“This is the angel assigned to the edges of the heavens, and he is the best advisor among the angels. Draw near to him, and greet him.” So I drew near to him and greeted him. He returned the greeting, welcomed me, and congratulated me with a blessing from God.³²

The descriptions of this Half-Half Angel in Version D begins to merge with those of other polycephalous (i.e. multi-headed) angels described elsewhere in the ascension narratives, the number of its tongues being multiplied dramatically to stress the virtually uncountable ways in which this angel’s petition on behalf of humanity has been and continues to be articulated.

For instance, one final late example can be seen in a 13th/19th-century manuscript that goes even further in equating the Half-Half Angel with a brigade of polycephalous angels that may or may not have shared its composite form (the text remains ambiguous on this point):

[The Angel Half of Snow and Half of Fire] had a thousand thousand heads, in each head a thousand thousand faces, in each face a thousand thousand mouths, in each mouth a thousand thousand tongues glorifying God in a thousand thousand languages, no one resembling any other. In each of their glorifications, they said, “The one who unites snow and fire, unite the hearts of your servants, the righteous,” and the [other] angels responded, “Amen.”³³

The “thousand thousand” trope is common to many descriptions of ineffable heavenly wonders, of course, and such a description of this polycephalous composite angel appears elsewhere as a description of other brigades of multi-headed angels that do not take the same Half-Half composite form. Just as with the meteorological elements that collated with the Half-Half Angel in Version C, here the multiplication of features of the Half-Half Angel appears to have been drawn from the description of other wondrous angels ubiquitous in later Muslim ascension narratives as well as beyond the Muslim accounts.³⁴ We might theorise that this characteristic has been elided into the description of the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel at this late date precisely because the narrator wished to call attention to and accentuate the nearly infinite glorifications and petitions that this composite angel gives voice to on behalf of God’s believing servants.

³² Anonymous, *al-Najm al-wahbāj fī-l-masrā wa-l-miʿrāj*, Dār al-Kutub, MS 829/1 Majāmiʿ, Cairo Egypt, copied by Zayn al-Dīn b. Ḥasan b. Zayn al-Dīn in the year 1003/1594, fol. 6r, l.8, after meeting the angelic guardian of the first heaven called Ismāʿīl.

³³ Anonymous, Dār al-Kutub, MS Tarikh Talat 1993, Cairo, Egypt, 49r-49v.

³⁴ In her study of the Timurid *Miʿrājnāma*, Gruber points out that the figure of the polycephalous angels can also be found in the eastern Asian artistic tradition. See Gruber, *El Libro de la Ascension*, 325 and 204 figure 4.4.

Analysis and conclusion

From the examples we have seen from Arabic, Persian, and Turkish narratives of Muḥammad's ascension, clearly this angel Ḥabīb plays an important role, both as a living symbol of God's extraordinary power to unite polar extremes, and also as an exemplary figure modeling for believers a form of petitionary prayer known in Arabic as *du'ā*. This last idea coincides with Gruber's hypothesis that at least in the case of select ascension narratives, part of the purpose of the work was to serve as a "prayer manual," to instruct Muslims, especially recent converts, in the proper ways to address petitions to God.³⁵ In this sense, the fact that nearly every instance of the Half-Fire Half-Snow narreme includes a report of the *du'ā* that the angel proclaims supports the idea that this and similar ascension narremes serve as a type of "teaching text," modeling a meritorious form of *du'ā* for Muslims, and offering them "good advice" on the type of petitionary prayers that the believers themselves should say in their devotions. Even if it represents such a "teaching text," however, the multiplication of the petitionary theme in later versions of this trope suggests to me that Ḥabīb also represents something more to the audience of these ascension stories, not only an embodiment of God's wondrous power, but also an example of God's abundant mercy toward believing Muslims as God saw fit to create this angel whose sole purpose seems to be to provide them with the potential for divine succor and to offer them good advice.

Let me move toward my conclusion by offering a few remarks on the debates about the origins of this remarkable Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel in the Islamic tradition. We have seen that references to it, while not a part of the official *mi'rāj* narratives circulated in *ḥadīth* reports that most mainstream transmitters consider as the most trustworthy, still are found in some of the very earliest texts from the formative period of Islamic history, and the references multiply in subsequent centuries, especially in the popular Islamic ascension narratives circulated in the name of Ibn 'Abbās. Does this widespread narreme originate from non-Muslim sources that directly "influenced" the Muslim narrators, and if so, which non-Muslim sources should we look to for its origins? As I mentioned at the outset, modern scholars who have discussed this question have generally claimed that the angel probably was borrowed from Jewish sources on the basis of the single brief reference to a brigade of similarly composed angels from the Hebrew "*Gedulat Mosheh*" text.³⁶ The problem with this hypothesis is that this unusual Jewish text appears late on the scene, only extant in early modern manuscripts, and it is extremely difficult to date with much certainty. Modern translator Helen Spurling asserts, "Those who have discussed the dating of '*The Greatness of Moses*' have rightly not hazarded a

³⁵ See Gruber, *Ilkhanid*, 20-23 and 31.

³⁶ Such a thesis appears, for instance, in Gruber, *El Libro de la Ascension*, 322.

proposed date beyond saying the text is ‘late’ or medieval.”³⁷ Indeed, recent scholars have been divided on the issue of *Gedulat Moshe*’s provenance, and while it may preserve some early material, most contemporary scholars generally assert it to be from the medieval period or later. One scholar, S. Lieberman, even offers the theory that *Gedulat Moshe* itself was influenced by Islamic narratives,³⁸ a hypothesis that is worth consideration given the evidence presented here. However, keep in mind that even Lieberman’s conjecture continues to perpetuate an unnecessarily simple model of influence, merely reversing the direction of supposed borrowing. In light of the valuable points that Philip Alexander made decades ago in his study comparing Merkavah mysticism and Gnosticism,³⁹ it is imperative for us to consider more complex models to explain textual similarities in other contexts as well, moving beyond reductionist models of unidirectional “influence” and “borrowing.” In doing so, we might discover that the Half-Half Angels appearing in the “Greatness of Moses” and in the Islamic ascension narratives may have both come from a third, common source that preceded both, or even more likely, they may have resulted from a more complex series of interactions and socio-historical conditions that do not fit such simple models.

Consider, for instance, the fact that these angels are commonly described as balancing opposing natural elements to bring about a harmony within themselves, a detail that might cause someone looking for beginnings or origins to look for a South Asian or even East Asian source. Indeed, the angel could be seen as representing a type of embodied *yin-yang* symbol, or to embody, Bodhisattva-like, a harmonic balance between this-that extremes. Gruber makes a persuasive case that the single extant Muslim painting of the Half-Half Angel, appearing in the Timurid *Mīrājnāma* produced in 9th/15th-century Herat, which depicts the angel as sitting in what might be interpreted as the lotus position, draws on iconic symbolic elements from South and East Asian artistic and religious traditions.⁴⁰ Even should Gruber’s case for this particular painting be seen as definitive, nevertheless that would still not tell us anything definitive about the textual origins of the figure as portrayed in Islamic ascension narratives. Simply on the basis of this painting, or on perceived similarities with ideas from Asian thought, should that lead researchers to conclude that the angel itself was borrowed from narratives of earlier Buddhist, Zoroastrian, or other origins from eastern lands? Again, just as with the Jewish reference in the “Greatness of Moses” text, the parallels are indeed intriguing, but given how late these parallel texts appear in dateable sources (recall that the single extant painting of this angel only appears in a 9th/15th-century manuscript),

³⁷ Helen Spurling, “Hebrew Visions of Hell and Paradise,” 706.

³⁸ Spurling, “Hebrew Visions,” 706.

³⁹ Philip Alexander, “Comparing Merkavah Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method,” in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35/1 (Spring 1984), 1-18.

⁴⁰ Gruber, *El Libro de la Ascensión*, 322-23 and Figure 4.1 on 202.

making a strong case for evidence of “borrowing” would at this point rest more on conjecture and speculation than on solid textual grounding.

Setting aside the question of origin and influence, then, what this study has endeavored to show is that the figure of the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel “Ḥabīb” in the Islamic tradition is itself complex and multi-dimensional. By categorizing the references to this angel into distinct textual groups or “versions”, I have demonstrated that while there is a certain consistency to the brief Islamic narremes in which this angel is introduced, the variations demonstrate that the Half-Half Angel takes on different nuances and distinct functions in different contexts. In what appears to be the earliest strand of the tradition (Version A), the angel reflects a balance of heat and cold, harmonising the temperature extremes in itself, and calling for disparate groups of individuals to similarly moderate their extremes in order to find unity as a group. In the latest strand of the tradition (Version D), there is less emphasis on the reconciliation of factions among people, and more emphasis on internal harmony within the believers themselves, which will presumably result in righteous behavior and the promise of next-worldly salvation. The numbers multiply exponentially in later texts, both in terms of the numbers of Half-Half Angels (the brigades of Version B), and their features or attributes (e.g. the multiple tongues, or multiple millennia of service). While nearly every reference to this angel in the Muslim texts reports the particular *du‘ā* that this angel or angels proclaim on behalf of humanity, the later texts dwell on this detail even more than the earlier texts do, and the intense power of the petition gets amplified both in volume (recall the “thunder” of Version C) and in polyphonic manner of expression (recall the thousand-thousand tongues of Version D).

The importance of this petitionary feature of the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel figure, then, and its connection to petitionary prayers for next-worldly salvation, rise to prominence as themes in the later narremes, replacing how the earlier texts, perhaps staying closer to the Qur’anic contexts from which a key phrase from the *du‘ā* was taken, stress the wonder of this angel in representing God’s power to unite disparate elements within the community. Exploring the internal development of the Half-Fire Half-Snow Angel narreme in the Islamic tradition, how its depictions and representations change over time and in different Muslim contexts, puts us on a much more solid textual ground than debates over extra-Islamic influences or origins, and can be shown to be supported by parallel historical developments in the construction of Islamic ascension narratives more broadly.

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Part III:
Approaches to Angels
in Islamic Contexts

The Carriers of the Throne of God: Islamic Traditions Between Sunnī Angelology and Shī'ī Vision*

Roberto Tottoli (Napoli)

Religious narratives and traditions are usually created and circulated in order to express and affirm concepts and ideas and, through them, to illustrate points of faith. In early Islam, as in many other areas of social and religious expression throughout history and across cultures, differing and sometimes even contrasting opinions concerning specific points of belief were among the main factors that gave rise to a great multiplicity of traditions. These competing views and beliefs generated and inspired corresponding narratives and traditions. Where we find discourse that was rich in material or that displays a peculiar insistence on one or more points, this serves as a clear sign that those specific narratives or traditions were used to clarify or expound a point of some controversy. However, while it may be easy to generalise, the task of reconstructing the dynamics involved in the creation and use of such narratives is far more difficult when we turn our attention to specific questions. Muslim religious literature is a treasure-trove of literary texts and reports but, due to the well-known problems surrounding the chronology of reports and traditions, it is not always easy to examine this material for the purpose of ascertaining when, why, and how a given controversial discussion originated or to what extent signs of it are discernible in narratives and traditions that are primarily collected in later sources.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the richly developed and widely diffused Muslim traditions preserve clear indications of relevant points, and the Islamicist can detect traces, at least, of the debate and discussion that textured early Muslim thought. An example of a case in which we have a large number of reports conveying a variety of distinct traditions is the use of competing or alternative narratives concerning the Throne of God and those who carry it, surround it, or stand in proximity to it in either literal or figurative senses. The emergence of such competing narratives in early Muslim thought has occasionally been mentioned or discussed in previous studies but the question of the direct relationship between the accounts that emerged from the Sunnī and Shī'ī (mainly Imāmi) literature has largely been neglected.¹

* I would like to thank Roy Vilozny, who read a first draft of this paper, for his suggestions.

¹ On these questions, see, for example, U. Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light. Aspects of the Concept of *Nūr Muḥammad*," in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), 62-119; R. Tottoli, "The Story of Jesus and the Skull in Arabic Literature: the Emergence and Growth of a Religious Tradition," in: *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 28 (2003), 225-259; C. Gilliot, "Le trois

Islamic literature includes many traditions regarding angels, devotees, other beings and personages in proximity to the Throne of God. Some of the elements included in such traditions bear clear signs of earlier competing versions which reflect debates and differences concerning political and theological matters. While Muslim depictions of the Throne of God contain some clear parallels with a number of other Near Eastern traditions, the argument of this paper is that competing interpretations and usage of the imagery of the Throne by Sunnī and Shiʿī believers gave rise to varying conceptions of the nature and form of the Throne, and this polemical environment left enduring marks on the Islamic imagery in question that can still be detected today.

In pursuing this line of thought, we shall see how Qurʾānic references to the Throne influenced the initial spread of traditions about the angels who carried it. We shall also see how, along with the Qurʾānic material, the concept of ‘closeness to the Throne’ found its way into later Islamic traditions. We shall then discuss how, at an early stage, Shiʿī narratives developed their own version of the concept of closeness to God through the use of the imagery of the Throne and how this alternative interpretation interacted with Sunnī traditions. A study of the sources suggests that whilst the Sunnī narratives developed the theme with specific reference to the imagery of angelology, the Shiʿī narratives responded by re-elaborating this theme in such a way as to enhance and emphasise the status of the family of the Prophet Muḥammad and the imams.

Near Eastern traditions regarding the Throne of God and its carriers

The concept of God’s Throne predates the Qurʾān and other Islamic literature. The origin of the image that appears in the Qurʾān, as well as of the associated idea of those who bear the Throne, can be found in the religious and cultural environment of the pre-Islamic Near East. This close connection has been analysed by, for example, Thomas O’Shaughnessy,² who argues for a close relationship between the Qurʾānic and Islamic conception of the Throne, on the one hand, and Biblical and Rabbinic traditions and conceptions, on the other. In particular, he draws attention to the vision of Ezekiel, which emerges as the main point of reference for the original Islamic version of the Throne.³ The Jewish connection has also been

mensonges d’Abraham dans la tradition interprétante musulmane. Repères sur la naissance et le développement de l’exégèse en Islam,” in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 17 (1997), 37-87.

² T. J. O’Shaughnessy, “The Throne and the Biblical Symbolism of the Qurʾān,” in: *Numen* 20 (1973), 202-221, and subsequently reprinted in *Eschatological Themes in the Qurʾān*, Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, Loyola School of Theology 1986, 12-34. O’Shaughnessy also discusses in particular the two Qurʾānic passages in which there is mention of the carriers of the Throne, which we shall discuss later on.

³ O’Shaughnessy, “The Throne and the Biblical Symbolism of the Qurʾān,” in particular 206-207 on the Throne carriers. O’Shaughnessy discusses the imagery on the Throne as a whole, with reference to the conceptions conveyed by the Qurʾān and their use in relation

examined by Cornelia Schöck, in a study specifically devoted to the carriers of the Throne.⁴ She adds the *Revelation* of John as another important source for both the Qurʾānic conception of the carriers of the Throne and for certain later developments, pointing out the parallels that emerge in post-Qurʾānic narratives.⁵

There is little room for doubt that the vision of Ezekiel was the main and immediate point of reference for the Islamic conception of the carriers of the Throne. The central related tradition in the Jewish literature is the vision of the *Merkabah* that is described at the beginning of the book of Ezekiel and then repeated in chapters 10 and 43:1-4. These passages describe, albeit somewhat mysteriously and with details occasionally left unclear, the vision of four fantastic unspecified beings (*hayyōt*), each with four different faces, who support a platform above their hands on which the manifestation of God sits, seated on a lapis lazuli Throne. This complex image has been the source of much theological speculation and elaboration, and many literary interpretations. Schöck mentions the vision of the *Merkabah* by quoting the work of David Halperin, who collected together a great deal of material on this topic from Jewish literature and also included an appendix on the corresponding Islamic depictions.⁶ In this appendix, Halperin discusses the Islamic traditions concerned with the carriers of the Throne.⁷

Some scholars have approached the same theme from other perspectives, adding significant further information on the Islamic conceptions of the carriers of the Throne and on the Throne of God in general. Anna Caiozzo, for instance, has drawn attention to the pictorial representations of the carriers of the Throne in manuscripts and their relation to other Near Eastern religious traditions.⁸ Works dealing with Islamic angelology have also, in some cases, discussed the angels who bear the Throne. The most recent work on the topic, *Angels in Islam* by Stephen Burge, mentions the carriers of the Throne in many passages, primarily in order to underline the way in which Islamic traditions endow these angels with a particular significance and to examine how the traditions deal with them in comparison to

to the Omnipotence of God. Thus, when he discusses the two verses on the carriers and another that describes the angels surrounding the Throne (Q 39:75), he mentions Jewish apocryphal references as parallel passages.

⁴ C. Schöck, "Die Träger des Gottesthrones in Koranauslegung und islamischer Überlieferung," in: *Die Welt des Orients* 22 (1996), 104-132.

⁵ Schöck, "Die Träger des Gottesthrones," 110-111, 116, 119. Schöck deals mainly with the Islamic traditions, mentioning that these carriers are like or have the faces of mountain goats or, in other versions, of a human, a lion, a bull, and an eagle, correctly underlining how the Islamic versions tried to harmonise these conceptions with the contents of the Qurʾān.

⁶ Schöck, "Die Träger des Gottesthrones," 114; David J. Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot. Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision*, Tübingen: Mohr 1988.

⁷ Halperin, *The Faces of the Chariot*, 469-476. Halperin discusses the problems connected to the mention of the number eight by the Qurʾān and the traces of possible Christian influence.

⁸ A. Caiozzo, "Quatre signs d'un zodiaque caché. Les porteurs du Trône divin dans les cosmographies en arabe et en persan d'époque médiévale," in: *Annales islamologiques* 33 (1999), 1-28.

other types of angels.⁹ However, the questions of the origin of this belief and, above all, the dynamics of the traditions relating to the Throne are not the major concern of Burge's comprehensive work on angels. Nor are they the concern of other studies that happen to touch on angels in Islam more tangentially, which rarely cite and describe the traditions concerning the carriers of the Throne beyond the core Qur'ānic texts.¹⁰

In any case, a review of the previous studies on the topic leaves little doubt that Islamic narratives and conceptions concerning the Throne and its carriers are well grounded in Near Eastern religious lore. The vision of Ezekiel, in particular, constitutes a clear point of reference for the Islamic version. What we tend to find in these studies is, first of all, an emphasis on the description of those Islamic traditions that are most closely related to this Near Eastern imagery as well as some brief references, in broader studies on angelology, to the significance of the angels who bear the Throne of God. However, the inner dynamics of the Islamic traditions and the development of the exegetical reading of the Qur'ānic verses in question have never been studied.

Qur'ān and Islamic exegesis: Sunnī and Shī'ī

Many verses in the Qur'ān mention the Throne of God. Indeed, the Throne of God is one of the most favoured Qur'ānic images for emphasising the majesty and omnipotence of God. The most common name given to the Throne is 'arsh. *Kursī*, meaning "chair," is also mentioned once in connection to God, in a verse which had, and continues to have, a particular importance in Islamic lore. This is usually cited as 'the Throne Verse': "His Seat/Throne comprises the heavens and earth" (Q 2:255).¹¹ Across all the verses in which the Throne of God appears, the Qur'ān mentions the concept of something or someone bearing it in just two instances. These explicit references are highly significant since they bring the concept of the bearing of the Throne into Islamic religious discourse in a way that is distinct from the images and concepts derived from other Near Eastern religious cultures. The Qur'ān can thus be understood as providing the root source that lies behind the different interpretations given by Sunnī and Shī'ī traditions as to who are most deserving of proximity to the Throne.

⁹ S. R. Burge, *Angels in Islam. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabā'ik fi akhbār al-malā'ik*, London, New York: Routledge 2012, 58-60, 92, 145-149.

¹⁰ See, for example, H. Kassim, "Nothing Can Be Known or Done without the Involvement of Angels: Angels and Angelology in Islam and Islamic Literature," in: *Angels: the Concept of Celestial Beings – Origins, Development, and Reception*, F. V. Reiterer, T. Nicklas, K. Schöpflin, eds., Berlin: De Gruyter 2007, 647-648.

¹¹ On the Throne in Islam in general, see G. Vitestam, "'Arsh and kursī. An Essay on the Throne Traditions in Islam," in: *Living Waters: Scandinavian Orientalistic Studies Presented to Professor Dr. Frede Lokkegaard on His Seventy-Fifth Birthday, January 27th 1990*, E. Keck, S. Sondergaard and E. Wulff, eds., Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press 1990, 369-378.

The two verses that mention carriers of the Throne or the bearing of the Throne are Q 40:7 and 69:17. In the first, it is said that: “those who bear the Throne and those round about it proclaim the praise of their Lord, and believe in Him, and they ask forgiveness for those who believe” (Q 40:7). In Q 69:17 it is further added: “... and the angels shall stand upon its borders, and upon that day eight shall bear above them the Throne of thy Lord.” Each of the two verses includes different information about the carriers of the Throne and both can be combined to help provide a basic delineation of the fundamental elements of this concept. Although it is not explicitly stated, these two passages suggest that those who bear the Throne are angels: the bearers are described as proclaiming the praise of the Lord and, in the second verse, angels are spoken of just before the bearing of the Throne is mentioned. The second verse adds further eschatological colour to the image, specifying that those who bear the Throne are eight in number.

The first context in which this basic data is elaborated upon and in which we find a variety of interpretations is that of Qurʾānic exegesis. Here we can see Sunnī and Shiʿī efforts to give coherence and, consequently, meaning to the contents of the holy text through the construction of a logical discourse on what exactly it is that the Qurʾān communicates. As in other cases, Qurʾānic exegesis on the verses that mention the carriers of the Throne represents a first step towards understanding how religious ‘experts’ read these passages and how the Qurʾānic passages interacted with Islamic religious traditions as a whole, crossing literary genres and being used to articulate the perspectives of the religious authorities who wrote about them.

The Sunnī commentaries state that those who bear the Throne are angels. This is not made entirely explicit in the two Qurʾānic verses, although it is easy to argue for such a reading, especially in the case of the second text. Making this point plain appears to be the major concern of the commentaries, which start from the logical implications of the verses and then provide explicit affirmations of the role played by the angels that are intended to put an end to any possible interpretative doubt. For instance, according to the commentary of Muqātil (d. 150/767), one of the earliest *tafsirs*, the carriers of the Throne (*ḥamalat al-ʿarsh*) were the first angels created by God, and, thus, were angels of particular importance. What is significant here is not only the unequivocal affirmation that the carriers are angels, indeed angels with a particular status, but also the use of the expression *ḥamalat al-ʿarsh*. This is not Qurʾānic language but it later became the standard formula used to refer to these angels.¹²

In addition to affirming the angelic nature of the bearers of the Throne, Sunnī interpretative tradition agrees on the meaning of many of the other details regard-

¹² Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsir*, vol. 3, Beirut 2003, 706 (on Q 40:7). In collecting a large part of the following materials, I also relied upon the main electronic databases, such as *al-Maktabat al-shāmila* and *Maktabat AhlulBayt 1.0*, then checking the references in the printed editions.

ing the bearing of the Throne that are mentioned in the Qurʾān but also preserves alternative interpretations on some points. The point about the status of the angels appears to be one of the indisputable elements in the tradition. As in later traditions, the exegetical works all use a variety of different words and images to express the prominence and high standing of the angels who carry the Throne, who stand in a superior position in relation to all other creatures. Indeed, the carriers of the Throne have the highest status even among the angels: their dimensions are prodigious, as is their appearance, and the other angels are made to recognise this superiority.¹³ The extraordinary dimensions of the bearers is explained not only by reference to their high status but also by their function, with the exegetes emphasising that the fantastic and prodigiously heavy Throne of God implicitly requires gigantic angels of suitable size to hold it aloft.¹⁴ It was possibly in response to this notion that a vivid tradition developed according to which the carriers of the Throne of God are (like) mountain goats (*awʿāl*) on whose backs the Throne is carried.¹⁵ The enormity of the angels is further maintained by a *ḥadīth* related to Muḥammad's ascension into heaven, in which the Prophet states that he was permitted to talk to one of the angelic carriers before going on to describe the fantastic dimensions of this angel.¹⁶

¹³ They are the *sayyids* of the angels in heaven: al-Samʿāni, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 7, Riyadh 1997, 7 from al-Naqqāsh; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, Beirut 1420/1999, 106. See also al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān ʿan tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 8, Beirut 2002, 266: God ordered all the other angels to greet the carriers of the Throne as a sign of their superior status; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, vol. 27, Beirut 1999, 487-488: they are indeed the best amongst the angels. They are from the Cherubim: Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fi ʿilm al-tafsīr*, vol. 4, Beirut 2001, 31; al-Samʿāni, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, 7.

¹⁴ Their prodigious dimensions are implicit in those traditions cited in commentaries which mention the dimensions of their ankles, see Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, Cairo 1989, 498; Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, Riyadh 1999, 1586, vol. 6, 1898. Their heads, or their horns, because of their dimensions, even perforate the Throne: al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, 106; Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl*, vol. 4, Beirut 1407/1987, 151; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 15, Cairo 1964, 294. Notwithstanding their dimensions they have difficulty in bearing the Throne given its size and weight: Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl*, vol. 4, 162; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 15, 294. On their dimensions, see also Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, 3264 nos. 18422-18423; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, 106; Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 672.

¹⁵ al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 10, 29; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, vol. 30, 626; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, Beirut 1999, 131 from Abū Dāwūd; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 18, 266; Ibn ʿAṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajiz fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaziz*, vol. 5, Beirut 1422/2001, 359: *al-waʿūl*; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manībūr fi al-tafsīr bi-l-maʿthūr*, vol. 8, Beirut 1990, 269. See also some Shīʿi reports stating that the four (angels) have four faces and have horns like those of a goat: al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, Beirut 1986, 47.

¹⁶ Ibn Abi Zamanīn, *Uṣūl al-sunna*, Medina 1995, 93 no. 34; al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb al-ʿarsb*, vol. 1, Medina 2003, 338. See also the versions in Yaḥyā b. Sallām, *Tafsīr*, Beirut 2004, vol. 1, 252, vol. 2, 541; Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, 3370; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 8, 266; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, vol. 4, 331. On the ascension of Muḥammad to heaven, see also the contribution of Frederick Colby in this volume.

Another aspect of the scene that fascinated exegetes was the question of how many angels were assigned the duty of supporting the Throne. The Qurʾān raises a problem here, since the natural assumption that a throne has four legs or pillars is complicated by the Qurʾānic statement that “on that day” they will number eight (Q 69:17). Sunni exegetical works do not ignore this number but, rather, debate the question of whether eight is an exact number or whether, as many interpreters suggest, there may, in fact, have been eight *rows* or *groups* of angels. Some Sunni exegetes give an alternative reading, stating that there are four carriers of the Throne but that there will be eight on the Day of Resurrection. Most of the exegetical works either mention all of these possible interpretations or support one of them.¹⁷

The exegetical reports also attest to Islamic traditions that reflect the influence of the *Merkabah* and Near Eastern images and lore. These traditions state that the angels that bear the Throne have four different faces or four different appearances or shapes: one human, one like that of a lion, one like an eagle, and, finally, the fourth appearing like a bull.¹⁸ Some of the traditions include a range of other information about the angels, defining details such as their dimensions, prerogatives, and ranks in a variety of ways. Some of these details reported by these traditions are rather curious, in particular those concerning the names of the angels and, most intriguingly, the suggestion that the bearers of the Throne speak Persian.

¹⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*, vol. 23, Beirut 2001, 227-229; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, 274-275. On the eight rows or groups, see al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 10, 28; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, 106; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 18, 266; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 8, 269; ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad, *al-Sunna*, vol. 2, Cairo 1986, 505 no. 1171; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 10, 28; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr fi ʿilm al-tafsīr*, vol. 4, 31; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, vol. 27, 487 and vol. 30, 626; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, 130. On all these interpretations, see Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-Arsh wa-mā ruwiya fīhi*, Riyadh 1998, 368-369. See also al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb al-ʿarsh*, vol. 1, 339-345; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Habāʾik fi akhbār al-malāʾik*, vol. 1, Beirut 1985, 56-61: they will be eight after being four. The question of four or eight and the subsequent differentiation between them is sometimes solved by stating that four utter one invocation and the other four utter another: al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 17, 438. Ibn Abī Hātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, 3370 no. 18968; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, 274-275 and cf. Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, vol. 3, Beirut 1992, 490: they are eighth parts (*ajzāʾ*) of intimate angels (*al-muqarrabūn*). This is also maintained in Shīʿī reports, see al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍuruhū al-faqīh*, Qom [n. d.], 483; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 55, Beirut 1983, 28: four in different shape, and they will become eight on the Day of Resurrection.

¹⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 1, 365; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, vol. 30, 626; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, 274: they have four different intercessory functions, vol. 8, 270; Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, vol. 3, 490: each angel has four faces in those shapes; al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmiʿ li-ahkām al-Qurʾān*, vol. 18, 266. Versions of this tradition are also attested in early literature outside the exegetical works, see for example Abū Saʿīd al-Dārimī, *Naqḍ al-Imām Abī al-Saʿīd*, vol. 1, Cairo 1998, 478; see also al-Suyūṭī, *al-Habāʾik*, vol. 1, 56; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*, Jidda 1993, vol. 2, 287 no. 848; ʿAffān b. Muslim, *Aḥādīth*, Cairo 2004, 87 no. 128. Also in Shīʿī literature: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, Qom 1403/1982, 407. On these reports, see also Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 58-60.

There seems to be no specific reason for this belief, other than the idea that this language has some sort of special status.¹⁹

This Sunni line of interpretation was not the only approach to interpreting the Qurʾānic passages that mention the Throne. While the Sunni interpretations insist on the angelic nature of the carriers of the Throne, a few Shiʿī exegetes take a different approach. The very fact that such alternative interpretations exist is enough to show that the ways in which Muslims conceptualised the Throne was not clear-cut. One important line of approach sought to give other meanings to the Throne of God and, in doing so, to propose theological interpretations which gave rise to concepts that were very different to those stemming from the literalist readings. This is the case when, for instance, an interpreter maintains that the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*) actually stands for and signifies knowledge (i.e. *al-ʿilm*). It is in this context that a commentary as early as that of Furāt al-Kufī (fl. 3rd-4th/9th-10th cent.)²⁰ explains that those who bear the Throne, eight in number as stated by the Qurʾān, are four early figures (*al-awwālīn*) – Abraham, Noah, Moses, and Jesus – and four later figures (*al-ākhirīn*) belonging to the family of Muḥammad: Muḥammad himself, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. Other exegetes who give the same or similar interpretations, as well as some later traditions, use the expression *ḥamalāt al-ʿarsh* to describe the bearers. This language is not Qurʾānic but had, as noted above, become the common technical definition in the Sunni literature for the angels who carry

¹⁹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, 276, from Ibn Abi Shayba, in fact mentions a report stating that they speak *al-fārisiyya al-durriyya*, see Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf fi al-ahādīth wa-l-āthār*, vol. 6, Riyadh 1409/1989, 122 no. 29981; and see al-Daylamī, *al-Firdaws bi-maʿthūr al-khiṭāb*, vol. 3, Beirut 1986, 300 no. 4901: *al-dhurriyya*; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-mawḍūʿāt*, vol. 1, Medina 1966-68, 110, with another orthographic version. On this strange detail, and in relation to other reports on the language spoken by angels, see Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 276 no. 327. Names are sometimes given to the carriers of the Throne. Isrāfīl is usually identified as one of the carriers but other names are also given, see al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 8, 270; and Abū al-Shaykh, *Kitāb al-ʿazama*, vol. 3, Riyadh 1408, 949: Isrāfīl is on one of the corners of the Throne (*zāwiya min zawāyā al-ʿarsh*); cf. also Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, 3370 no. 18969; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabāʾik*, vol. 1, 59 and cf. al-Suyūṭī, *al-Itqān fi ʿulūm al-Qurʾān*, vol. 4, Cairo 1974, 118: three names of the carriers of the Throne are known: Isrāfīl, Lubnān, and Rūfil. This Rūfil should be read Rūqīl as in al-Suyūṭī, *Muṣḥamāt al-aqrān fi muḥamāt al-Qurʾān*, vol. 1, Damascus, Beirut 1982, 112. Shiʿī sources add further information, see Ibn Shādhān, *al-ʿĪdāb*, Tehran 1984, 529; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 56, 308-309: the Throne is on the shoulders of Isrāfīl. The name of another angel among the carriers of the Throne (literally: of the angels charged with the *qawāʾim* of the Throne) is given by Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abi Ṭālib*, vol. 3, Najaf 1956, 123; see also Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Durūʿ al-wāqīya*, Qom 1414/1993, 84: one angel encharged (*muwakkal*) under the Throne is named Rūz Bahman; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 55, 21: one report cites Isrāfīl and another report cites the name Lubnān (see in fact the same name in Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 10, 3371 no. 18970), vol. 56, 103: another name is given, Dib Mahr.

²⁰ See on Furāt, who flourished in the second half of the 3rd/9th century and probably lived into the 4th/10th, M. M. Bar-Asher, *Scripture and Exegesis in Early Imāmi Shiism*, Leiden, Jerusalem: Brill 1999, 29.

the Throne.²¹ Another exegetical reading of Q 40:7 goes even further and states that those who bear the Throne, meaning by this the knowledge (*‘ilm*) of God, are Muḥammad and his trustees (*awṣiyā*), while those *around* it are angels.²² This interpretation, by al-Qummi (fl. 3rd-4th/9th-10th cen.), makes it clear that the author sees “those who carry the Throne” and “those around it” as belonging to two distinct categories. The significance of these reports cannot be overstated. They provide evidence for a major break with the previous tradition and, at the same time, offer a different interpretation of the identity of the bearers and of the meaning of the Qur’anic imagery.²³ However, the Shī‘ī interpretations were not univocal on this point, as is attested by other traditions, not included in Qur’anic commentaries but attested in other literary genres, which give different accounts of the fundamental details of the figures who bear the Throne, such as stating that on the Day of Resurrection the eight will be *on* (*‘alā*) the Throne.²⁴

Angels do not disappear completely from Shī‘ī depictions of the Throne. The later literature does, in fact, include traditions in which the eight who bear the Throne are angels, and in this they fall broadly into line with the Sunnī interpretations.²⁵ It is notable that such traditions are found in later moderate exegetical works, such as that written by al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1154). Al-Ṭabrisī includes in his commentary some of the most typical Sunnī elements, such as the representation of the carriers of the Throne as cherubim and the *sayyid* of the angels, who will number eight on the Day of Resurrection.²⁶ This exegetical evolution does not diminish the historical significance of the early Shī‘ī reading and the general view of the carriers that emerges from Shī‘ī sources taken as a whole. In any case,

²¹ Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, Qom [n. d.], 375 no. 504: they ask forgiveness for the *shī‘at ‘Alī*, al-Qummi, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, Qom 1984, 384; see also Ibn Abī Ḥamza al-Thumālī, *Tafsīr*, Qom 2000, 340: the eight bearing it on that day will be four of ours and four that God wills; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Tafsīr al-ṣāfi*, vol. 5, Tehran 1995, 219: various reports; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Ftiqādāt fi dīn al-imāmiyya*, Beirut 1993, 46; and cf. al-Mazandarānī, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, vol. 4, Beirut 2000, 101; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-arwār*, vol. 24, 90-91 and vol. 55, 7.

²² al-Qummi, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 255: ... who bear the knowledge of God; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-arwār*, vol. 24, 89.

²³ al-Qummi’s exegetical interpretation provides evidence that some Shī‘ī scholars examined the problem of the *ḥamalat al-‘arsh* from two perspectives, one stating that ‘Throne’ means Knowledge, in which case the carriers are the prophets and the imams (including the division to 4 and 4), and another one describing the Throne in its cosmological sense, in which case its carriers are eight angels. See also al-Qummi, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, Qom 1984, and n. 69.

²⁴ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 4, Tehran: 1984 (= ed. Beirut 1981), 585; Ibn Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, Beirut 1996, 512; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, Beirut 1984, 290; Ibn al-Mashhadī, *al-Mizār*, Qom 1996, 547; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-arwār*, vol. 7, 292; al-‘Allāma al-Hillī, *Muntabā al-maṭlab*, vol. 2, [n. p., n. d.], 894.

²⁵ See, for example, the interpretations collected by al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-arwār*, vol. 55, 2-3. According to other Shī‘ī interpretations, if the Throne is science (*‘ilm*), its *ḥamalat al-‘arsh* are the *‘ulamā’*: al-Mazandarānī, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, vol. 4, 93, 100; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-arwār*, vol. 55, 10.

²⁶ al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ al-bayān fi tafsīr al-Qur’ān*, vol. 7, Beirut 1959-60, 427 and vol. 10, 108.

the family of Muḥammad, imams, and angels appear to compete for the status of bearers in the Shiʿī traditions. This competition attests to the fact that early Shiʿī interpretations offered different solutions to the questions surrounding the Throne and that these varying attitudes came to be differentiated from the Sunni views. These alternative attitudes can be seen as a first indication that the question of the identity of the carriers of the Throne was an issue that was actively debated or that was at least deemed useful as a way of expressing sectarian theological distinctions and originality.

Being close to or under the Throne: Islamic religious imagery

The question over the nature of the carriers of the Throne is not to be considered solely in connection with the contents of the Qurʾān and the explanations of the exegetes. The many references to the Throne of God in the Qurʾān as a whole prompted the circulation of a rich body of imagery in Islamic traditions and literature. In fact, *ḥadīth*, *āthār*, and other religious literature of various kinds and genres from both Sunni and Shiʿī sources further elaborated this imagery and diffused a great many traditions dealing with the Throne and its bearers. That proximity to the throne serves as evidence of piety is a tenet in both Sunni and Shiʿī thought, as many sources attest. It is, for instance, impossible to count all the times the expression *Rabb al-ʿarsh al-ʿazīm* is used in the literature to name God. It is not even possible to list all of the times that the Throne is evoked in order to convey religious beliefs and, especially, the Majesty of God and His creation. For instance, a common way of enhancing an account and giving it added impact is to note that some particular human action “makes the Throne of God tremble.” A famous report that is quoted in almost all of our sources states that when the Companion Saʿd b. Muʿādh (d. 5/627) died, the Throne in fact shook.²⁷ One specific concept is particularly significant to our discussion here: the idea that proximity to the Throne is evidence of rank and religious prominence. In some respects, this notion fits well with the meaning and role of the carriers of the Throne, who are by definition the closest to the Throne and thus to God.

The significance of proximity to the Throne is mentioned in a great many traditions and depicted in various images. Angels play a prominent role in the expression of this belief in Sunni literature. Sunni beliefs in this regard directly accord

²⁷ We are, thus, not surprised by the clear-cut statement that to reject belief in the Throne is to reject belief in God, see e.g. *Mount of Knowledge, Sword of Eloquence. Collected Poems of an Ismaili Muslim Scholar in Fatimid Egypt. A Translation from the Original Arabic of al-Muʿayyad al-Shirāzī's Diwān*, Mohamad Adra, transl., London, New York: I. B. Tauris in Association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies 2011, 54: on the Throne and the *kursī*, 63, 65-68. But cf. also the opposite: unbelievers will be paraded on the Day of Resurrection in front of the Throne to receive their judgment: C. Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, New York: Cambridge University Press 2016, 154.

with theological conceptions that grant the privilege of proximity to, in order of closeness, angels, prophets, and devotees. The vicinity and role of the major angels are thus expressed through the image of closeness to the Throne: the closest creatures to God are Gabriel, Michael, and Isrāfil who are situated under three of the four corners (*zawāyā*) of the Throne.²⁸ The imagery of the Throne was so pervasive as to be used to qualify the status of those who will go to heaven that some are destined to be close to the Throne. There are many other examples of this belief in our sources. One saying that is quoted in the major *ḥadīth* collection mentions Moses hanging or standing on one pillar (*qā'ima*) of the Throne.²⁹ Moses is not the only prophet to be granted this privilege. It is also stated that David, for instance, is in the vicinity of the Throne or will be when the eschatological times begin.³⁰ It is worth noting in this regard that the cosmological white cockerel mentioned in some of the traditions that describe the cosmogonic phase in which the world is constructed reaches up so that its neck is directly under the Throne.³¹

Sunnī reports also frequently enhance the significance of certain statements by saying that they are written on the Throne, at the same time using this tactic to counteract similar Shī'ī claims that maintained different beliefs about what was written on the Throne. Sunnī reports thus state that certain texts are written on the Throne of God, such as suras or verses of the Qur'ān (for example, the closing verses of the sura *al-Baqara* (Q 2), the *Fātiḥa* (Q 1), and various others).³² Other

²⁸ al-Malaṭī, *al-Tanbih wa-l-radd 'alā ahl al-abwā' wa-l-bida'*, Cairo [n. d.], 112. Before disobeying God, Iblis was the most devoted of the angels and used to bear the Throne for God alone: al-Dhahabī, *al-Muntaqā fi minhāj al-ītidāl*, Cairo [n. d.], 278.

²⁹ Yahyā b. Sallām, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 570, 571, on the Day of Resurrection; 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, Beirut 1992, 484; Muḥammad adds that he does not know if he will be raised before him; see also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 20, 258, 259: various versions; Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 6, 310 no. 31686, 332 no. 31837; al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, Beirut 2001, 121 no. 2412; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, Beirut 1990, 1843-1844; al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 8, 256; al-Baghawī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 519; al-Qurtubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'ān*, vol. 7, 279; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 3, 548.

³⁰ David will be standing by the leg (*sāq*) of the Throne on the Day of Resurrection: al-Wāḥidī, *al-Tafsīr al-wasīṭ*, vol. 3, Beirut 1994, 549; cf. also Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, 62; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 7, 168; Ismā'il b. Ja'far, *Ḥadīth 'Alī b. Ḥajar al-Sa'dī*, Riyadh 1998, 227 no. 134; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 13, Cairo 2001, 29 no. 7586, *passim*. This tradition regarding David recalls the use of entertainments for the blessed every Friday before the Throne of God and while awaiting the final Judgement; on these beliefs and in relation to the mention of David standing next to the Throne, see Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 152.

³¹ These reports about the cosmological cockerel are shared by Sunnis and Shī'īs: al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 6, 60; al-Sam'ānī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, 38; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, vol. 8, Cairo 1994, 68 no. 7391; al-Suyūṭī, *al-Ḥabā'ik*, 81-83; Ibn Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, Tehran 1951, 118; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 7, 437 and vol. 8, 272; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-a'māl*, Qom 1989, 227; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, 77. Cf. also al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-islām*, vol. 1, Cairo 1963, 209-210; al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wā'izīn*, 468; al-Ṭabrisī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, Beirut 1998, 454.

³² See, for instance, 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 379; Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 6, 304 no. 31649; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 35, 273-275 nos. 21343-21345; al-

writings that are given this elevated status in Sunnī traditions emphasise moral intentions or display clear Sunnī tendencies. For instance, after completing his creation, God wrote on His Throne the well-known sentence “my mercy comes before my anger,” and the words remain there still.³³ Of particular significance in this regard is the tradition which holds that Adam, or Muḥammad during his ascension according to some versions, found written on one leg (*sāq*) of the Throne the *shahāda* and then the names Abū Bakr *al-Ṣiddīq* and ‘Umar *al-Fārūq*.³⁴ These traditions can be contrasted with Shī‘ī views, which instead mention the names of Muḥammad, his family, and the imams (see below, p. 291). The tradition mentioning the two first caliphs in place of the Prophet’s family constitutes evidence for the internal Islamic rivalries over the legitimacy of the succession after Muḥammad’s death and for Sunnī attempts to engage with and counteract Shī‘ī traditions.

Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu‘jam al-awṣat*, vol. 4, Cairo 1995, 262 no. 4145; al-Qāsim b. Sallām, *Fadā’il al-Qur’ān*, vol. 1, Damascus, Beirut 1995, 232-233: including three different reports on the verses of *al-Baqara* (these reports are cited in all the works on *faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, see, for example, al-Firyābī, *Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān*, Riyadh 1989, 161-166, 179). Another widely quoted report states that these final verses of the sura *al-Baqara* are from one of the treasures or one treasure of the Throne: see, for example, Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Bahr al-‘ulūm*, vol. 1, 191; al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, vol. 1, Cairo 1999, 334: from a treasure from a *bayt* from below the Throne. The same is said in relation to the *Fātiḥa*, defined as a treasure from under the Throne: al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 1, 89, but cf. vol. 1, 129; see also in Ibn ‘Aṭīyya, *al-Muḥarrar al-wajiz*, vol. 1, 181: the *Fātiḥa* and the two last verses of the *Baqara* are from below the Throne, vol. 1, 395; and cf. al-Suyūṭī, *Mu’tarak al-aqrān fi ‘jāz al-Qur’ān*, vol. 3, Beirut 1988, 196: four passages or verses are from the treasure of the Throne, adding the verse of the Throne (*kursi*) and the Kawthar (i.e. Q 108:1). Also, the sentence *lā ḥawla* etc. is defined as one treasure of paradise under the Throne: al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, vol. 4, 234 no. 2616; Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 13, 345 no. 7966, see also vol. 14, 363 no. 8753: *lā quwwa illā bi-Allāh*.

³³ ‘Abd Allāh b. Aḥmad, *al-Sunna*, vol. 2, Cairo 1986, 397 no. 862. But see other versions that specify that this was written in a book/script (*kitāb*) on (*faṣṣa*) the Throne: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 44; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Musannaf*, vol. 11, Beirut 1983, 411 no. 20858; al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-bayān*, vol. 9, 170; al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 4, 137; or that God took this script with this sentence from below the Throne: ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 365; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, 262: plus other words; and cf. the less explicit versions in Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 14, 323 no. 8700; and al-Bukhārī, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 106 no. 3104: in a writing on (*faṣṣa*) the Throne.

³⁴ al-Tha‘labī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 1, 184; see also the versions in al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manthūr*, vol. 5, 219; al-Daylamī, *al-Firdaws*, vol. 4, 123 no. 6382; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Kitāb al-mawḍū‘āt*, vol. 1, 337; see also the references given by Kister, “Ādam: a Study of Some Legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* Literature,” in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 113-174, here: 130-131. Mention of the inscription of the *shahāda* with the name of Muḥammad on the Throne also appears in the *Apology* of al-Kindī (fl. 9th cen.) and also in other Christian polemical literature, see on this F. González Muñoz, “El conocimiento del Corán entre los mozárabes del siglo IX,” in: *Sub luce florentis calami: Homenaje a Manuel C. Díaz y Díaz*, Santiago Compostela: Universidade de Santiago de Compostela 2002, 390-409: 399-400. The issue of the name of Muḥammad on the Throne and various Islamic theological beliefs on this topic were mentioned and briefly discussed by L. Massingnon in his entry on al-Kindī in the first edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, First Edition, vol. 2, Leiden 1927, 1080.

However, not all beliefs are specific to one or the other side of the sectarian divide and some are found in both Sunnī and Shiʿī sources. The concept of closeness to the Throne was not only a field of competition, but also an area of broad agreement concerning more general religious meanings. A useful example of this agreement can be seen in views about the souls of the martyrs, which are said to be like or within green birds. These birds reside under the Throne, or in lamps (*qanādil*) under the Throne, or hang from the Throne,³⁵ this proximity being a marker of moral prominence that is also evident in many other reports.³⁶

How close someone is to the Throne is also frequently mentioned in relation to the shade the Throne offers on the Day of Resurrection. Those awaiting Judgement will be exposed to the terrible heat of the sun, with the only available shade being that cast by the Throne of God. Having access to this shade affords recovery and pre-emptively signals the ultimate destiny of those who are granted the privilege of its relief. The shade offered by the Throne appears in several different reports. In one text, for instance, a prayer is cited that asks God to grant the shade of the Throne on the Day of Resurrection when there will be no other shade.³⁷ Other texts state that all those who believe in God and lead a pious life will have this

³⁵ ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 423; ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 5, 263 nos. 9553: white birds, 9554, 9556: green birds; al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, vol. 1, 233 no. 289; Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 4, 210 no. 19385, *passim*; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 3, 1502; al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, vol. 6, 229, 232, 233, 237; Ibn Abi Ḥātim, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 263, Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, vol. 1, 254 and vol. 3, 208; Ibn Abi Zamanin, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, Cairo 2002, 334; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, vol. 9, 183 no. 8905; al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kaṣḥf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 3, 206. And they will hang their swords around the Throne: Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-awwāl*, vol. 1, Cairo 1992, 50 no. 61; Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, 117; cf. also Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 4, 206 no. 19343. Martyrs are in the closest position to the Throne (although there is no mention of shade here): Zayd b. ʿAli, *Musnad*, 353.

³⁶ Three things hang from the Throne (*muʿallaqāt bi-l-ʿars*), and one of these is *al-rahīm* (relationship, kinship), which also appears in Shiʿī versions in connection to the family of Muḥammad. See al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmāʾ wa-l-ṣifāt*, vol. 2, 223 no. 788; al-Sarakhsī, *al-Mabsūṭ*, vol. 7, Beirut 1986, 70 and vol. 30, 257; Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, *Baḥr al-ʿulūm*, vol. 1, 279. The Sunnī reports include a tradition stating that *al-rahīm* will come on the Day of Resurrection under the Throne: ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 11, 172 no. 20240; Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, vol. 5, 217 no. 25388, 25392, 218 no. 25396; Muslim, *al-Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, 1981; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsat*, vol. 6, 363 no. 6623: the *rahīm* invokes God Almighty. See also Wakiʿ b. al-Jarrāḥ, *al-Zuhd*, Medina 1984, 702-703; Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *al-Taʿwba*, Cairo [n. d.], 49 no. 23; al-Bayhaqī, *al-Shuʿab wa-l-imān*, vol. 9, Bombay 2003, 378-379 no. 6818-6819. The Shiʿī versions are very similar but usually specify that the relationship of the family of Muḥammad is meant here, see al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 2, 151, 156; al-Kāshānī, *Bādāʾīʿ al-ṣanāʾīʿ fi tartīb al-sharāʾīʿ*, vol. 4, Beirut 1982, 48; Ibn Saʿīd al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, Qom 1979, 36; al-ʿAyyāshī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, Tehran [n. d.], 202; al-Qummi, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 363; al-Majlisī, *Bīḥār al-anwār*, vol. 23, 265 and vol. 71, 129; plus one version on the *rahīm* of the imams. Or it is the relationship of the imams and the believers, see al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Maʿāni al-akbbār*, 302. Muḥammad saw it during his ascension: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, 540; al-Tanūkhī, *al-Faraj baʿd al-shidda*, vol. 1, Qom 1985, 70.

³⁷ Ibn ʿĀbidin, *Hāshiyat radd al-muḥṭār*, vol. 1, Beirut 1995, 137; Ibn Ḥajar, *Talkhiṣ al-ḥabīr*, Beirut: [n. d.], 449; cf. al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amāli*, Beirut 1993, 276.

shade on the day when there will be no shade, a synonym for the Day of Resurrection.³⁸ Other reports give more restricted lists of those who deserve the shade of the Throne, using a formulaic expression intended to prompt moral behaviour by emphasising the destination of some categories of persons known to have lived in an exemplary manner.³⁹ The Prophets are also connected with the shade in some texts. One report states that Moses saw a man in the shade of the Throne and asked God who it was, in response to which God explained what the man had done to deserve his honoured position.⁴⁰ There are obvious similarities here with other traditions that use different images to designate individuals as destined for either heaven or hell.

The Shi'ī traditions and literature do not differ markedly in their efforts to convey the idea that proximity to the Throne is a sign of the high status of a believer. Among the invocations uttered when visiting the Ka'ba, as well as on other occasions, is an invocation that beseeches God to "Give me shade from Your Throne."⁴¹ A tradition concerning the visiting of the tomb of Muḥammad in Medina during the annual pilgrimage even states that he who visits the Prophet there is like one who visits God on His Throne, and it is explained that the reward is like that of one who is lifted and placed close to the Throne.⁴² The possibility of reach-

³⁸ al-Dhahabi, *Kitāb al-ʿarsh*, vol. 1, 303. Many other traditions use the same image and refer to the Day (of Resurrection) with no shade, see al-Thaʿlabī, *al-Kashf wa-l-bayān*, vol. 2, 287 and vol. 7, 98; al-Thaʿalibi, *al-Jawābir al-ḥisān fi tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, vol. 5, Beirut 1997, 189, 190: they will be those who love each other in the name of God (*al-mutahābbūna fi Allāh*); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-manṭūr*, vol. 1, 442: those fasting (correctly) are in the shade of the Throne, cf. also vol. 3, 361 and vol. 4, 373; *al-mutahābbūna*, vol. 7, 173. On this, see also Ibn al-Mubārak, *al-Zuhd wa-l-raḡāʾiq*, vol. 1, Beirut [n. d.], 249 no. 715; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabir*, vol. 20, 87 no. 167, *passim*. Less frequent is mention of this privilege accorded to people from some specific region: Nuʿaym b. Ḥammad, *al-Fitan*, vol. 1, Cairo 1991, 248 no. 709, 249 no. 710: people from Jordan; cf. Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, vol. 4, 465-466 no. 22169, 22174. Ibn Abi Shayba includes various reports using the image of the shade of the Throne, see e.g. *al-Muṣannaḡ*, vol. 4, 546-547; see also Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 14, 329 no. 871 and vol. 37, 308 no. 22623; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awṣaṡ*, vol. 1, 270; Abū Nuʿaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, vol. 3, Beirut 1974, 221.

³⁹ See, for example, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, vol. 11, 201 no. 20322: seven plus the trustworthy merchant will enjoy the shade of the Throne. They will number seven and the acts granting this are listed: al-Bazzār, *al-Baḡr al-zakḡbār*, vol. 15, 12 no. 8182; al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awṣaṡ*, vol. 9, 63 no. 9131. See also a Shi'ī version: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḡḡurubn al-ḡaḡib*, vol. 2, 536.

⁴⁰ ʿAbd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 464; Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaḡ*, vol. 5, 330 no. 26587, 26593; al-Thaʿalibi, *al-Jawābir al-ḥisān*, vol. 2, 249f. See also Shi'ī sources on this: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, 247; Ibn Saʿīd al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-zuhd*, 38; al-Ṭabrisī, *Mishkāt al-awwār*, 534.

⁴¹ Ibn Bābawayh, *Fiḡḡ al-Riḡā*, Mashhad 1986, 219; al-Ṭūsī, *Miṡbāḡ al-mutabājjid*, Beirut 1991, 41, 94, 684; and al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq (= Ibn Bābawayh), *al-Muḡniʿ*, Najaf 1994, 1; Ibn al-Barrāj, *al-Muhaddithab*, vol. 1, Qom 1986, 240; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāḡi*, vol. 3, 432.

⁴² al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥīllī, *Muntabā al-maṡṡlab*, vol. 2, 887; al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Mizār*, Beirut 1993, 169; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-awwār*, vol. 97, 144, vol. 98, 70-71, 105 and vol. 99, 35. Cf. Ibn Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, 278, 282-283: visiting the tomb of Ḥusayn is like visiting God on His Throne; see also al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, 182: the two sons of ʿAlī; al-

ing the Throne is mentioned in some cases as a reward: whosoever fasts three days in the month of Sha‘bān will visit God on His Throne every day in paradise.⁴³ This privilege cannot but also be granted to the family of Muḥammad and his offspring, thus underlining Shi‘ī religious tenets and emphasising their discourse on legitimacy.⁴⁴ Muḥammad is mentioned in a number of reports that underline his privileged status in relation to the Throne, and is also mentioned in some reports alongside Abraham, who holds a prominent place in relation to the imagery of the Throne in Shi‘ī beliefs.⁴⁵ A similar conception, also pointing towards Muḥammad’s prominence, appears in other traditions that deal with the pre-existence of Muḥammad’s soul. For instance, it is said that God created the souls of humans two thousand years before their bodies and in the intervening time the souls were hung on the Throne. In this period of pre-existence, this tradition has it, the first to answer to and obey Muḥammad’s soul was the soul of ‘Alī. Other reports add that this is the reason that only ‘Alī and his party are charged with responsibility for the pillars of the Throne.⁴⁶ The main idea here is that it is the family of

Ṭūsi, *Tahdhīb al-ahkām*, vol. 6, Tehran 1986, 46, 51 (on the day of ‘Āshūrā’), cf. also 85: who visits the tomb of Abū ‘Abd Allāh is like one who visits God on (*ṣawqa*) His Throne.

- ⁴³ al-Ṭūsi, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutabajjid*, 825; al-‘Allāma al-Ḥilli, *Tadhkirat al-fuqahā’*, vol. 6, Qom 1994, 197; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍurubu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, 92. Cf. also al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-‘māl*, 59: two days; al-Kulayni, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, 172: Muḥammad states that at the right of the Throne there are creatures with faces more radiant than the sun and whiter than snow and that they are those who love each other.
- ⁴⁴ “Our souls (i.e. those of ‘Alī and the Imams) and the souls of the dead prophets show up at the Throne every Friday night”: al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, Tehran 1993, 152; al-Kulayni, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, 253 (two different versions): mentioning the souls of the *awṣiyā’* and the current *waṣī*. On the Day of Resurrection *minbars* will be put around or on the right of the Throne for Muḥammad’s party and the party of the people of his house: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, 65; al-Ṭabrisi, *Miṣbkāt al-anwār*, 175-176; al-Qāḍi al-Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, Qom 1993, 572, 579: in the shade of the Throne. God had married ‘Alī to Fāṭima already in heaven in the shade of the Throne: al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, Beirut 1991, 378; al-Ṭabarī, *Dalā’il al-imāma*, Qom 1992, 92; al-Ṭabarī, *Nawādir al-mu’jizāt*, Qom 1990, 91.
- ⁴⁵ The place of Muḥammad is to the right of the Throne and the place of Abraham to the left of the Throne, see al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍurubu al-faqīh*, vol. 2, 192; al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 7, 340, cf. also versions in vol. 8, 1-2. See also Ibn al-Bitriq, *al-‘Umda*, Qom 1987, 38: in paradise, *fi buṭnān al-‘arsb* there are two pearls, each with 70,000 rooms etc. – one for Muḥammad and the people of his house, and one for Abraham and the people of his house. See also another report mentioning Muḥammad and Abraham around the Throne, also including ‘Alī: Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Faḍā’il*, Najaf 1962, 148. Muḥammad was created as a light under the Throne twelve thousand years before the other created things: Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, 505. See also al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, 34, and cf. 40; and al-Majlisi, *Biḥār al-anwār*, vol. 15, 7, and see vol. 15, 22: Muḥammad was created from the substance (*tina*) of a hyacinth under the Throne.
- ⁴⁶ al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Amālī*, Qom 1983, 114. On ‘Alī and his party being charged with responsibility for the Throne: al-Qāḍi al-Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 1, 270; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib āl Abī Ṭālib*, vol. 3, 345. There are twelve of them around the Throne: al-Nu‘mānī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, Qom 2001, 88. On this topic, see R. Vilozny, “A Concise Numerical Guide for the Perplexed Shiite: Al-Barqī’s (d. 274/888 or 280/894) *Kitāb al-Askāl wa-l-qarā’in*,” in: *Arabica* 63 (2016), 64-88.

Muḥammad that deserves, more than anyone else, to be close to the Throne of God, a view that is further borne out by reports that mention ʿAli, Faṭīma, Ḥusayn, and Ḥasan in the surroundings of the divine seat.⁴⁷

Some Shiʿi texts also make use of the shade imagery discussed above. Shiʿi literature includes numerous versions of traditions which list the acts that grant access to the shade of the Throne to those who perform them. Seven or three specific qualities (*khiṣāl*) are mentioned in this context, possession of which will grant access on the Day of Resurrection, thus implicitly emphasising the final reward and salvation that will come to people who perform the required actions or who have these qualities.⁴⁸ More details are added in other traditions, slightly shifting the overall image conveyed despite the central lines of the depiction remaining the same (for example, some traditions have it that God will build a castle in the shade of the Throne for those who act in a certain way).⁴⁹ ʿAli and his progeny are included in the imagery of most versions of these depictions. ʿAli and Muḥammad's family are given pride of place in the shade of the Throne, where they are joined by all the other figures who are assigned a high status, such as martyrs and proph-

⁴⁷ On the Day of Resurrection Ḥasan will be on the right of the Throne and Ḥusayn on the left: Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsir*, 148. Muḥammad states that paradise was created from the light of the Throne as he himself, Faṭīma, and ʿAli were created from the same light; al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 148. On the Day of Resurrection the two sons of Faṭīma will meet, and she will have a dress tinted with blood hanging from one of the pillars (*qāʿima*) of the Throne: Zayd b. ʿAli, *Musnad*, Beirut [n. d.], 460; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, 12, 29.

⁴⁸ There are versions mentioning three qualities or acts: ʿAli b. Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, *Masāʾil*, Qom 1989, 343; Ibn Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Mahāsīn*, 5; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, 147; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, 80, 81, 141; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Musādaqat al-ikhrwān*, al-Kāzimiyya [n. d.], 76. And versions mentioning seven: Zayd b. ʿAli, *Musnad*, 410-414; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, 343. Cf. other versions with two or one in al-Qāḍi al-Nuʿmān, *Daʿāʾim al-Islām*, vol. 1, 154 and vol. 2, 15. See also other reports on this motif in al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amāli*, 357, 402; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-ʿmāl*, 114: whosoever recites the sura *al-Dukhān* (Q 44); al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-ʿmāl*, 145; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 3, 227: whosoever consoles the mother bereaved of her son will be granted the shade of the Throne; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍāʾil al-ashhur al-thalātha*, Beirut 1992, 26: whosoever fasts thirteen days in Rajab will have a table of green hyacinth in the shade of the Throne, and cf. 29, with a similar statement in the same long tradition, 88. On the image of the shade of the Throne in other contexts, see al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-niʿma*, Qom 1985, 252; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍurūhu al-ḥaqīq*, vol. 2, 64 and vol. 4, 17; al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 344, *passim*; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 98, 11; Ibn Abi Ḥamza al-Thumālī, *Tafsir*, 302.

⁴⁹ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amāli*, 631. On the Day of Resurrection, Ḥusayn will sit at the shade of the Throne. In relation to Husayn and the fate of the Shiʿis there is mention of another text written on the right of the Throne, see e.g. al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍāʾil al-shiʿa*, Tehran [n. d.], 265. Abraham will be to the right of the Throne and dressed in a garment of paradise: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, 383; al-Kūfi, *Manāqib al-Imām Anīr al-muʿminīn*, Qom 1991, 302; cf. also al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 128: each one is in a *qubba*. And without mention of the garment: Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib al-Abi Ṭālib*, vol. 3, 26. Sunni reports state that Muḥammad will be dressed: Ibn Abi Shayba, *al-Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, 265 no. 35936, but there are other Sunni versions also mentioning Abraham.

ets.⁵⁰ A great many other Shi'ī reports also use the image of the Throne in ways that are broadly directed at encouraging good behavior and affirming certain religious concepts and beliefs.⁵¹

Sunni and Shi'ī reports both record the extensive and composite imagery that grew up around the notion of closeness to the Throne of God. Although specific and distinct concerns emerge in this imagery, most of the traditions share motifs in a way that shows a general concern with the importance of the Throne as a religious symbol that represents God's favour. This rich and varied imagery incorporates a broad range of details regarding both the types of people and the individuals who were close to the Throne or who would merit close proximity when Judgement came – either around it, under it, or on it – due to their beliefs or actions. The traditions regarding the carriers of the Throne comprise an important part of this imagery, reflecting the fact that all the various traditions agree on this basic tenet: to carry the Throne of God is an honour in itself but it is all the greater an honour because it implies an extremely close proximity to God.

Shi'ī visions of the names written on the Throne of God

Whilst there are significant overlaps in the Sunni and Shi'ī conceptions of proximity to the Throne of God, Shi'ī literature also adds something new. The significance of closeness to the Throne probably prompted Shi'ī traditions to introduce a new concept with the aim of enhancing the status of Muḥammad and his family by asserting that the names of Muḥammad, Fāṭima, 'Alī, and other members of his family or imamic progeny are written on the Throne. We can begin by noting that the appearance of these names on the Throne serves, in a way, to counteract the Sunni interpretations that privilege the position of angels and, in particular, of the angels that carry the Throne. At the same time, these traditions also give further strength to the fundamental Shi'ī belief that the rights of the family of Muḥammad and 'Alī are also given in written form, i.e. through a *naṣṣ*. Having their names written on the Throne is a good way of highlighting their primordial high status and the role they play in the cosmological order and, consequently, in Islamic society. Last but not least, the use of this religious symbolism clearly re-

⁵⁰ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amāli*, 315; cf. also al-Qāḍi al-Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 2, 397. Ibn Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, 168, 243: during the Day of Resurrection Ḥusayn will be under or at the shade of the Throne without fear of the Judgement. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāwandī, *al-Kharā'ij wa-l-jarā'ih*, Qom 1998, vol. 2, 551 and vol. 3, 1166: Ḥasan alone is also mentioned in relation to a formula written on the Throne. Ibn al-Biṭriq, *al-'Umda*, 230: Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are mentioned together and they will stay together between Muḥammad and Abraham in the shade of the Throne.

⁵¹ See, for instance, al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-'amal*, 57: God built a hundred prodigious castles destined to those fasting during days of the month of Rajab; and cf. 70: thousand cupolae; cf. al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍā'il al-ashhur al-thalātha*, 4: who fasts thirty days of the month of Sha'bān, Gabriel calls him from before the Throne.

minds us of the significance of the archetypal primordially of the Imamate of ʿAlī and his successors in early Shiʿī thought.⁵²

Some Shiʿī texts consequently re-interpreted the notion of closeness to the Throne in accordance with these beliefs by depicting Shiʿī characters and tenets of faith as written on the Throne or on its legs, thus bypassing the questions surrounding its possible carriers. There are many traditions in which such imagery plays a role, with the majority being connected to the three traditional narrative settings in which it is or was possible for someone to reach and see the Throne of God: the sight of the Throne by Adam after his creation in heaven, who either saw or was shown the names on the Throne at that time; the sight of the Throne by Muḥammad during his ascension to heaven; or the depiction of the Throne in eschatological visions describing the end times.

The traditions concerning the written names are closely related to others that simply affirm the primordial character of the family of Muḥammad, as well as to those cited above (p. 282) concerning the concept of being close to the Throne of God. Some of these reports make reference to the idea that these figures, their light, their appearance, or their forms in some other sense are in proximity to the Throne, although the texts leave it unclear as to what form this proximity takes (around, under, on) and how they are “attached to” it if indeed they are. The similarities between these depictions and those concerning the written names are clear. In one tradition, for instance, Muḥammad himself states that he was created along with ʿAlī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn seven thousand years before Adam and that they used to stand together before (*quddām*) the Throne.⁵³ The main features of these traditions are already apparent in explicit attestations in early Shiʿī works, where, for instance, in the words attributed to Muḥammad by Abū Jaʿfar (Muḥam-

⁵² See in this regard, and specifically on these traditions, M. A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le shīʿisme original. Aux sources de l'esotericisme en Islam*, Lagrasse: Verdier 1992 [Engl. ed.: *The Divine Guide in Early Shiism: the Sources of Esotericism in Islam*, Albany: State University of New York Press 2010], 78-79 where he emphasises that these reports usually identify the Throne with knowledge (*ʿilm*) and, in particular, with esoteric science, knowledge of which is connected with the imams; 79: on the Throne bearing in itself the essence of the prophecy and the imamate, 134, 180. The question is also briefly touched on by A. S. Arjomand, “The Consolation of Theology: Absence of the Imam and Transition from Chiliasm to Law in Shiʿism,” in: *The Journal of Religion* 76/4 (1996), 548-571, here: 569-570, where he mentions traditions citing the imams as carriers of the Throne (see below n. 77) and incidentally also those on the names of the imams written on the Throne, stating that after the occultation there was no obstacle to the circulation of this belief which implied the transfer of the power of the imam to the other world. See also the mention of the most significant traditions connected to Adam in this regard by M. J. Kister, “Ādam,” 130, 161. Some of these reports, as quoted by Ibn Bābawayh, were also translated by A. S. Tritton at the beginning of his “Popular Shiʿism,” in: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 13 (1951), 829-839. A comprehensive collections of these Shiʿī traditions is given by al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 27, 1-13.

⁵³ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿIlal al-sharāʿiʿ*, vol. 1, Najaf 1966, 208; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, 639; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 15, 7; a shorter version is in al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Ikhtisāṣ*, Beirut 1993, 91.

mad al-Bāqir, the 5th Imam), it is said that on the right of the Throne there are people on minarets of light with their faces radiant with light who are neither prophets nor martyrs. Asked by his companions to say who they are, Muḥammad answers that they are the *shīʿat ʿAlī* and that ʿAlī is their imam.⁵⁴ A similar line of thought appears in the traditions that mention a vision of forms or phantoms in the vicinity of the Throne that have the appearance of Muḥammad's family. Adam sees silhouettes (*ashbbāḥan*) radiating light on the Throne (*ʿalā al-ʿarsh*) and these are silhouettes of Muḥammad, Fāṭima, ʿAlī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn. Once Adam has seen the figures, God tells him that it was for the sake of these five that Adam has been created.⁵⁵ Some traditions have Muḥammad emphasise the privileged role and primordial superiority of his family in the presence of those who later became opponents of its rights. In one report, Muḥammad is described as sitting by ʿAlī and telling him that on the right and left of the Throne are men on *minbars* of light. On hearing this, Abū Bakr and others among the companions ask insistently who these men are. Muḥammad finally replies that ʿAlī and his party will be the winners (on the Day of Resurrection).⁵⁶ It is in fact the *shīʿat ʿAlī* who are closer to the

⁵⁴ Ibn Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, 181; see also al-Ḥumayrī al-Qummi, *Qurb al-asnād*, Qom 1992, 61. Muḥammad and ʿAlī were on the right of the Throne praising God two thousand years before God created Adam: al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 15, 11. On the question of light, see also Rubin, "Pre-existence and Light."

⁵⁵ al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Masāʾil al-sarawīyya*, Beirut 1993, 39f.; al-Rāwandī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, Beirut 1989, 47-48; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 11, 175: they are before the Throne. Mention of a silhouette (*shabbh*) under the Throne connected to the family of the Prophet, as described to him during the ascension to heaven, is in Ibn Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, 549. Cf. al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ*, 22: it is Ḥusayn who states that there used to be silhouettes (*ashbbāḥ*) around (*ḥawla*) the Throne before the creation of Adam. This was seven thousand years before the creation of Adam: Muḥammad and the people of his house were *ashbbāḥ* under the Throne, see al-Khazzāz al-Qummi, *Kifāyat al-atḥār*, Qom 1981, 71; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, 552; and al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 15, 7 and vol. 25, 2: *ashbbāḥ* of light fifteen thousand years before the creation; cf. also al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Masāʾil al-ʿukbariyya*, Beirut 1993, 28 in the same tradition various words convey this concept: *ashbbāḥ*, *ṣuwar* and *amthāl* of Muḥammad's progeny. See also al-ʿAskarī, *Tafsīr*, Qom 1989, 220. The concept of the *ashbbāḥ* is strongly related to pre-existence and there are numerous traditions in its regard. On this concept, in relation to the terms *ashbbāḥ* and *azilla* (shadows) in early Shiʿi beliefs and in connection to the notion of the pre-existence of imams, see M. Asatryan, "Early Shiʿi Cosmology. *Kitāb al-ashbbāḥ wa-l-azilla* and Its Mileu," *Studia Islamica* 110 (2015), 1-80: here 6-7; D. De Smet, "Les racines docétistes de l'imamologie shiʿite," in: M. A. Amir-Moezzi with M. De Cillis, D. De Smet and O. Mir-Kasimov, eds., *L'ésoterisme shiʿite. Ses racines et ses prolongements / Shiʿi Esotericism. Its Roots and Developments*, Turnhout: Brepols, 87-112: here 92-95; L. Capezzone, "Pre-Existence and Shadows: a Gnostic Motif or a Literary One?," in: *La littérature aux marges du adab*, I. Hassan (ed.), Lyon-Beyrut: Diacritiques Editions-Presses de l'IFPO (Institut Français du Proche Orient) 2017, 336-361; P. Crone, *The Nativist Prophets of Early Islamic Iran. Rural Revolt and Local Zoroastrianism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012, 209-215. *Ashbbāḥ* may sometimes refer to the state of the souls in the pre-existent era.

⁵⁶ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Fadāʾil al-shīʿa*, 11-12; another version stating that they will be in the shade of the Throne in the positions of the prophets, martyrs, etc., is given by al-Fattāl al-

Throne than all created things on the Day of Resurrection.⁵⁷ This story goes a step further in the direction of closeness to the Throne than the narratives discussed above by explicitly placing ʿAli and his family “on the Throne.” In a longer *ḥadīth*, ʿAli states that God embellished the Throne with Ḥasan and Ḥusayn on two of its supports (*rukn*).⁵⁸ These reports evoke a very similar image to those that place the written names of ʿAli’s family directly on the Throne.

The privileged status and archetypical primordial role of ʿAli and his party is further enhanced by reports which state that all the details of the family’s privileged status and their archetypical primordial role are explicitly written on the Throne. Many different versions of this claim appear with a variety of details and in various forms. One of the most widely attested traditions simply states that, during his ascension, Muḥammad saw that the *shabāda* was written on the Throne and that God supported Muḥammad and helped him through ʿAli.⁵⁹ This belief seems to

Nisābūri, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 296; al-Qāḍi al-Nuʿmān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 3, 462: around the Throne.

⁵⁷ Ibn Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Maḥāsīn*, 182; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 8, 214, 365; al-Ṭabrisī, *Mishkāt al-anwār*, 170-171; al-Hillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar*, Qom 2003, 273; these traditions, according to the words of Abū ʿAbd Allāh (Imam Jaʿfar al-Šādiq), add “after us,” meaning the family of Muḥammad and the imams.

⁵⁸ al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, Qom 1993, 406; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abī Tālib*, vol. 3, 5; or, according to Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Faḍāʿil*, 11, God will have one *minbar* to the right and one to the left of the Throne and Ḥasan and Ḥusayn will stand there on the Day of Resurrection as an embellishment of the Throne. This is to be associated with another *ḥadīth* according to which Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, among other things, are defined as two earrings of the Throne (*shanfā al-ʿarsb*): al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Irshād*, vol. 2, Beirut 1993, 127; al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutabajjid*, 326; but cf. the version in al-Fattāl al-Nisābūri, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 166: they are the two *shufāʿāʿ*; other textual variations are given by other sources, for example, al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, *Kanz al-ʿummāl*, vol. 12, Beirut 1981, 115 no. 34262: *sayfā* (two swords). Cf. also Ibn Qawlawayh, *Kāmil al-ziyārāt*, 550: God states that by both of them he will embellish (*uzayyinu*) the Throne; see the same concept in al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *al-Amālī*, 174; al-Fattāl al-Nisābūri, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 157; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 26, 292: ʿAli stated this talking to Salmān, vol. 94, 184. This tradition also appears in Sunnī literature: al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʿid wa-manbaʿ al-fawāʿid*, vol. 9, 184 no. 15095; and al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-awsaṭ*, vol. 1, 108 no. 337, although adding that they are not hanging. See also al-Fattāl al-Nisābūri, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 81: there are four lights around/on the Throne: ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, Abū Tālib, ʿAbd Allāh and Tālib. Cf. also al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *Maʿāni al-akhbār*, Qom 1959, 396: before the creation, Adam is shown Fāṭima, who is in a case (*buqqa*) under the leg of the Throne.

⁵⁹ See, for example, al-Kūfī, *Manāqib al-Imām āmir al-muʾminīn*, vol. 1, 210, 240, 244; al-Fattāl al-Nisābūri, *Rawḍat al-wāʿizīn*, 42. Cf. al-Ṭabrisī, *Makārim al-akhlāq*, Beirut 1972, 335: with no explicit mention of the name of ʿAli; al-Hillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar*, 261; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 30, 275; al-Qāḍi al-Nuʿmān, *Sharḥ al-Akhhār*, vol. 2, 380. Some other reports state that this same, or a similar, writing appears on the *Sidrat al-muntabā*, see al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, 643; al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *al-Amālī*, 284: two versions; Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqib fi l-manāqib*, Qom 1991, 118; see also in Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Faḍāʿil*, 168. And cf. al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *al-Khiṣāl*, 207: not only on the Throne but on the *Sidrat al-Muntabā* and in other created places their names are written. A version of this report is also found in Sunnī sources: al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Muʿjam al-kabīr*, vol. 22, 200 no. 526; al-Haythamī, *Majmaʿ al-zawāʿid*, vol. 9, 121 no. 14702. Another version simply states that

be of quite ancient provenance and appears in early Imāmi sources. The author al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī (d. 346/957) mentions a long report in which Jesus explains that ‘Alī is made of light and that God created the Throne and wrote on it “our” names before he created angels, the heavens, and the earth. Muḥammad himself states elsewhere that he and ‘Alī were created from one light before Adam and that both praised God on the right side of the Throne.⁶⁰ The same source clarifies that “our names” refer to the names of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn, which are written on the pavilion (*sarādiq*) of the Throne.⁶¹ This idea is repeated in many traditions attested in various authoritative sources, all of which emphasise that the names of ‘Alī, or of the five (i.e. Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn), and/or of the twelve imams are written on the Throne.⁶²

during his ascension Muḥammad saw his own name written on the Throne and that of ‘Alī, see al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, vol. 1, Najaf 1966, 230, along with another version mentioning Abū Bakr al-Siddiq after the name of Muḥammad; on the mention of Abū Bakr in these reports, see above, p. 286 and 293. Cf. also Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Rawḍa fi faḍā’il amir al-mu’minin*, Qom 2002, 173, who mentions the names of Muḥammad and of the *Amir al-mu’minin* written on the Throne; see also al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 56; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-awwār*, vol. 18, 304: this is written on each pillar. On the meaning of this tradition in the economy of the evolution of Shi‘i eschatological beliefs, see Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 199-200.

⁶⁰ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ṭal al-sharā’i’*, 134; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ma‘āni al-akbbār*, 56; al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wā‘izin*, 129: two thousand years before the creation of Adam. See also Rubin “Pre-existence and Light” and Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 29-30.

⁶¹ al-Ḥusayn b. Ḥamdān al-Khaṣībī, *al-Hidāya al-kubrā*, 100-101, 432; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍā’il al-shi‘a*, 7-8; Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Rawḍa fi faḍā’il amir al-mu’minin*, 111; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-awwār*, vol. 11, 142: the five names on the pavilion of the Throne two thousand years before Adam. An allusion to unspecified names (but well-known: *al-asmā’ al-mashbūrāt*) written on the pavilion of the Throne is in an invocation mentioned by al-Ṭūsī, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutabajjid*, 651; and Ibn al-Mashhadī, *al-Mizār*, 632-633. The name of Muḥammad is written on the pavilion (*sarādiq*) of the Throne: al-Khazzāz al-Qummi, *Kifāyat al-atbar*, 170. These generic names written on the Throne are given as an explanation of Q 2:37 on the *kalimāt* taught to Adam by God, see Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abi Ṭālib*, vol. 1, 260. A version in which “we were in the pavilion of the Throne praising God” is in al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-awwār*, vol. 15, 21-22, vol. 26, 273, and cf. vol. 26, 257: Muḥammad, ‘Alī and Fāṭima(’s names) are written on the Throne (*nahnu maktūbūna ‘alā ‘arsh Rabbīnā*).

⁶² ‘Alī and the Imams: Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abi Ṭālib*, vol. 1, 254; cf. also ‘Alī b. Yūnus al-‘Āmili, *al-Sirāt al-mustaḥqim*, vol. 2, [n. p.] 1964, 150. It is Adam who sees the names of Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn written on the Throne: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Uyūn akbbār al-Ridā*, vol. 2, 274; al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 48; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ma‘āni al-akbbār*, 124; Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Faḍā’il*, 128; al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Taḥṣir al-ṣāfi*, vol. 1, 117; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-awwār*, vol. 11, 157; vol. 15, 14-15 and vol. 26, 327; cf. also al-Sharif al-Murtaḍā, *Rasā’il*, vol. 3, Qom 1985, 116. The river Kawthar springs from the leg (*sāq*) of the Throne of God: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ma‘āni al-akbbār*, 182; al-Ḥillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar*, 269. Cf. also Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Faḍā’il*, 152: Muḥammad and ‘Alī are the names written on the Throne; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-awwār*, vol. 11, 165, 173; vol. 16, 362, *passim*. It was Muḥammad who stated that he and ‘Alī, Fāṭima, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn are in a domed shrine under the Throne: al-Qāḍi al-Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akbbār*, vol. 2, 4. Some other reports mention images of the family rather than proper written names, see al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Masā’il al-sarwiyya*, 39-40.

Many Shī'ī traditions are quite specific about where on the Throne these writings appeared, explaining that they were present on the pillars or the legs of the Throne. The mention of the legs or pillars directly recalls the notion that the Throne was borne or carried. Whilst it is not spelled out explicitly, it is implied that no matter who bears the Throne, the names of 'Alī and the family of Muḥammad stand over them and are, through their superior position, the real "carriers." Some of the sources cited above specifically mention Muḥammad as the Messenger of God and note that the name of 'Alī, who was given to help Him, was written on one of the pillars (*qā'ima*) of the Throne. Other versions make the same broad claim but place the writing on the leg (*sāq*) of the Throne.⁶³ Other narratives, sometimes directly connected to Muḥammad's night journey and ascension to heaven, include mentions of the names on the leg (*sāq*) of the Throne and state that these include the names of Muḥammad and 'Alī, as well as the twelve names/lights (i.e. the imams), or the names of Fāṭima and her offspring.⁶⁴ Another text reports that it is written, once again on a pillar (*qā'ima*) of the Throne, that Ḥamza, the uncle of Muḥammad killed at Uḥud, is the Lion of God, the Lion of the Messenger of God, and the Lion of the martyrs (etc. – these were some of his by-names). On the corners (*zarwāyā*) or on the upper side (*dhū'āba*) of the Throne,

⁶³ al-Qāḍī al-Nu'mān, *Sharḥ al-akḥbār*, vol. 1, 210; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 18, 314; Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqib fi al-manāqib*, 118; al-Shaykh al-Mufid, *al-Ikbtisās*, 109, and al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 8, 316: two thousand years before God created the world, vol. 11, 173; Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsī, *al-Thāqib fi al-manāqib*, 118; al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsī, *al-Amālī*, 643; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, 284; Vv.Aa., *Alqāb al-Rasūl wa-ʿitratibi*, Qom 1986, 13; al-Khazzāz al-Qummi, *Kifāyat al-atḥar*, 74; Ibn al-Biṭriq, *al-Umda*, 171; Shādhān al-Qummi, *al-Rawḍa fi faḍā'il amir al-mu'minin*, 28. The significance of the legs of the Throne is elevated in some traditions, also on the Sunni side, which ascribe specific names to them. This is already attested in early commentaries and also in relation to verses mentioning the carriers of the Throne by al-Qummi, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 336; Ibn Abi Ḥamza al-Thumālī, *Tafsīr*, 186; Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr*, 374. It is to be remarked that, also on the Sunni side, some reports attribute Qur'ānic terms as names of the legs or parts of the Throne, for example al-Ṭabarī, *al-Jāmi' al-bayān*, vol. 24, 208: 'Illiyūn is the name of the right *sāq* (or the right *qā'ima*) of the Throne; cf. a tradition ascribed to Ja'far, where the 'Illiyūn is replaced by the Throne, see Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 99-100.

⁶⁴ al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿIlal al-sharā'i'*, 6, al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *ʿUyūn akḥbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, 238: twelve lights, i.e. the names of the twelve *arwāṣiyā'*, from 'Alī to the Mahdi, see also al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 18, 346, and cf. vol. 26, 337: the *arwāṣiyā'* written on the leg (*sāq*) of the Throne; al-Khazzāz al-Qummi, *Kifāyat al-atḥar*, 105, 118, 138, 156, 185, and 217: the imams, 245, 247; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Faḍā'il al-sb'ā*, 256. Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abi Tālib*, vol. 1, 254; al-Fattāl al-Nisābūrī, *Rawḍat al-wā'izīn*, 84, plus Fāṭima and their descendents. Cf. also al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'āni al-akḥbār*, 109f.: the five names plus those of the imams; al-Khazzāz al-Qummi, *Kifāyat al-atḥar*, 74-75, 105-106, 118, 156, *passim*: Muḥammad and 'Alī plus twelve names written with light, i.e. the imams. See al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 24, 88: it was 'Alī who stated "we were twelve lights around the Throne ..."; see also al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Ma'āni al-akḥbār*, 109-110; al-Hillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar*, 280, cf. also 281 with another report. Cf. al-Kulayni, *al-Kāfī*, vol. 8, 230: on it (*the sāq*) there are the *manāzil* of the *arwāṣiyā'* and their party.

the name of ‘Ali the Commander of the Faithful is written.⁶⁵ However, while the legs or pillars of the Throne are by far the most frequently mentioned, various other Arabic terms are also used. For instance, in the sequence of the creation, God is said to have created the Throne and written the *shabāda* on its supports (*arkān*), along with the fact that ‘Ali is his trustee (*wasīy*).⁶⁶

Other traditions add more details. Although not strictly connected to the writings on the Throne, one report mentions that there is an angel with the appearance of ‘Ali and that this angel was created by God and is located directly under or in the middle of the Throne (*fi buṭnān al-‘arsh*).⁶⁷ Less elaborate and complex narratives simply repeat that the names of Muḥammad and ‘Ali are written on the Throne without adding anything further. These reports clearly respond to those others that mention only the name of Muḥammad. Such reports appear on both the Shi‘i and Sunnī sides of the sectarian divide but they serve different functions in each context. The Shi‘i versions serve to confirm the presence of the written names of the family and thus work as abridged versions of the longer reports. The Sunnī versions, by contrast, seek to use the same imagery in a counteracting manner, absorbing the potency of the notion of names written on the Throne of God while at the same time restricting this potency to the Prophet Muḥammad alone.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, 224; cf. al-Mazandarānī, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, vol. 5, 304; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 22, 280. See also the version in al-Ṣaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, 141: this is the proof against those denying our rights etc.; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 38, 7. In front (*waǧib*) of the Throne is written the *basmala* and that Muḥammad and the family of Muḥammad are the best of the creatures of God: al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 56; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 26, 283.

⁶⁶ al-Khazzār al-Qummī, *Kifāyat al-atḥar*, 171; cf. also al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 16, 265: on the pillar (*qā’ima*) of the Throne a sentence is written including mention of Muḥammad and ‘Ali.

⁶⁷ Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abi Ṭālib*, vol. 2, 73; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *‘Uyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, vol. 1, 139; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 18, 353-354. Cf. also a report in which men hear a voice and say that it might be from an angel close to God, a prophet who has been sent, or a bearer of the Throne, but it is ‘Ali’s: Zayd b. ‘Ali, *Musnad*, 458; ‘Ali b. Yūnus al-‘Āmilī, *al-Ṣirāt al-mustaǧim*, vol. 1, 244.

⁶⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *al-Mustarshid*, Qom 1994, 542. Muḥammad and ‘Ali are on the Throne and also on the Chair (*kursi*), see Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Yaqīn*, [n. p.] 1992, 101-102, and cf. 235: after the creation, Adam lifts his head and sees the writing “Muḥammad the Messenger of God and ‘Ali the Commander of the Believers”; see also in al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 26, 324. Cf. also al-Ḥillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar*, 250: written on each one of the pillars. A longer script on the Throne is mentioned in Ibn al-Ḥasan al-Qummī, *al-‘Iqd al-naḍīd wa-l-durr al-farīd*, Qom 2002, 82. It was God who told Muḥammad that He had written his and ‘Ali’s name on the Throne out of His love for both of them: al-Ḥillī, *al-Mukhtaṣar*, 252. But there are also traditions mentioning only the name of Muḥammad: al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Man lā yaḥḍurhu al-faqīh*, vol. 4, 178; al-Qaḍī al-Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, vol. 2, 421; al-Majlisī, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 11, 181, and vol. 15, 5: a long report describing the fact that his name and light were inscribed on the leg (*sāq*) of the Throne, vol. 15, 33; al-Rāwandī, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, 55: Adam sees it; see also al-Shirbīnī, *Mughni al-muḥtāj*, vol. 1, Beirut 1958, 512. This is, in fact, also attested in Sunnī literature: Abū Ḥayyān, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ fi l-tafsīr*,

As we have seen, Shiʿi visions of the Throne tend to elaborate on the concept of closeness to it by giving prominence to the family of Muḥammad. They heighten the family's position by mentioning the primordial character of the family members and, in many reports, by stating that their names were written on the Throne. While the primordial origin of the family and the written attestation of their rights were no doubt the fundamental beliefs that stood at the origin of these traditions, the need to counter competing visions about who stood closest to the Throne of God was most likely also an important motivating factor. While Sunni beliefs granted this position to the angels bearing the Throne, Shiʿi literature goes beyond this by asserting that ʿAli, his family, and the imams had the privilege of having their names inscribed on the Throne, along with making implicit reference to the fact that it is the legs that actually bear the Throne. Despite the fact that the traditions discussed here never actually define these as carriers of the Throne or directly broach the question of the angelic nature of the carriers, the concepts clearly overlap.

Shiʿi visions and traditions regarding the carriers of the Throne

A number of issues require further consideration. First, it will be useful to reflect on the dynamics of the Shiʿi traditions and the literature that preserves them. I will also ask whether there is further evidence that can help answer the question of whether the competing views of the written names and the carriers of the Throne are explicitly connected. Finally, it will be useful to examine the traditions that connect ʿAli and the family of Muḥammad to the carriers of the Throne. The general sense one gains when reading the Shiʿi sources is that after the early identification of the carriers of the Throne with non-angelic figures and the initial depiction of the overlapping vision of the written names, the two concepts went on to develop independently of one another. The later Shiʿi literature seems to reflect these two distinct tracks. While al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq Ibn Bābawayh (d. 380/991) attributes a great deal of importance to the names written on the Throne, as is clear in the many traditions cited from his works mentioned in the footnotes to this chapter, al-Kulaynī (d. 329/941), by contrast, seems to be inspired by a rather different attitude. In his chapter on the Throne, al-Kulaynī does not mention these traditions but states that the carriers of the Throne are the *ʿulamāʾ* and/or the angels.⁶⁹ It is

vol. 1, Beirut 1999, 268: the name of Muḥammad is written on the leg of the Throne; in Sunni literature, this statement, along with the versions adding the names of Abū Bakr and ʿUmar quoted by other sources, clearly aims to counteract Shiʿi visions.

⁶⁹ al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, 129-133. See also al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Iṭiqādāt fī dīn al-imāmiyya*, 45-46, collecting the various concepts and traditions: as regards the Throne, which is the totality (*jumla*) of created things, its carriers are eight angels, while the Throne, which is knowledge, is borne by prophets (including Noah) and by Muḥammad, ʿAli, Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. On this, see also above p. 282 and n. 23.

significant in this regard that Ibn Bābawayh includes a tradition concerning the trustees (*awṣiyā*) recorded on the Throne and the twelve lights around it when discussing the superiority of prophets over angels.

Some traditions, which are particularly relevant to our argument, mention together and combine conceptions regarding the written names and the carriers of the Throne. This conflation attests to the fact that, according to these traditions, while the two sets of imagery and ideas may have been *different*, they were not incompatible and did not stand in contrast to, or competition with, one another. Some of these traditions appear in reports discussing the superiority of prophets, imams, or angels. This is a major topic in Shi'ī theology and it is unsurprising that it finds expression in traditions about the Throne. Discussion of the superiority of Adam, the Cherubim, or of the carriers of the Throne is provided in a tradition which also has it that the Throne has a line (*saṭr*) on its surface where, after the *basmala*, it is written that Muḥammad and his family are the best that God created.⁷⁰ This is one of the few occasions on which the carriers of the Throne appear together with the written names and a statement about superiority, although it is not clearly stated here that these carriers are angels.⁷¹ Furthermore, in an exegetical report that seeks to explain Q 38:75, the Prophet Muḥammad is asked who are of higher status (*alā*) than the angels. The answer he gives is that those who rank higher are the five names written on the pavilion of the Throne.⁷²

Certain other traditions do not mention the written names but cite the carriers and 'Alī and the family of Muḥammad all together. The superiority of Muḥammad's family over the carriers of the Throne is mentioned in a report which states that the carriers of the Throne have their heads bent down and that Gabriel explained to Muḥammad that all the angels look at 'Alī except for the carriers of the Throne. The carriers ask God for permission to bend their heads

⁷⁰ al-Rāwandi, *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā*, 56; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 11, 114-115.

⁷¹ As a matter of fact, some doubts are raised by those traditions, also found on the Sunni side, that mention angels and carriers of the Throne together. The most common and logical way of reading this is to understand the carriers as a specific category of angels, although this is not the only possible reading, see e.g. a *ḥadīth* according to which angels and carriers of the Throne ask forgiveness for whomsoever lights a lamp (*sirāj*) in a mosque. On this, see al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Muqni*, 89; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *Thawāb al-ʿmāl*, 29; Ibn Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Mahāsīn*, 57; this tradition is often cited in later sources. Angels and carriers of the Throne are also mentioned by al-Ṭūsi, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutabajjid*, 639, 748 (with prophets, too), 808; Ibn Khālid al-Barqī, *al-Mahāsīn*, 44; Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsīr*, 267. See also the listing of all the categories of angels, also including the carriers of the Throne: Ibn al-Barrāj, *al-Muḥadḍab*, vol. 1, 96; al-Kulayni, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 2, 522: angels *muqarrabūn* and carriers of the Throne; see, in fact, also al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Amālī*, 657. Cf. also al-Ṭūsi, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutabajjid*, 140, 786. It is also explicitly stated in other invocations that angels bear the Throne: al-Ṭūsi, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutabajjid*, 481.

⁷² al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 11, 142.

and God permits them to do so.⁷³ The Prophets and the descendants of Muḥammad are superior to angels and the angels are at “our” service, Muḥammad tells ‘Alī. The first example of this service or this superiority is given by adding that those who bear the Throne praise God and ask forgiveness for those who believe in “our *wilāya*.”⁷⁴ The carriers of the Throne are thus portrayed as clearly testifying to the superiority of the family of Muḥammad, in line with the position insisted upon in some other Shi‘i texts.⁷⁵ Other reports also mention the *ḥamalāt al-‘arsh* and ‘Alī. For instance, before the creation Muḥammad is accompanied by the cheers and greetings of the angels, who are happy when they see the face of ‘Alī. The exceptions to this general behavior are the *ḥamalāt al-‘arsh*, who ask God for permission before beholding ‘Alī’s face.⁷⁶

Useful as this evidence is, the best lens through which to consider the combination of the two concepts is that offered by the traditions concerning the eight carriers of the Throne, the four prophets and four members of Muḥammad’s family mentioned above in the discussion of the exegetical readings (p. 282). These reports attest to the fact that Shi‘i traditions also elaborated alternative visions of those who bear the Throne that find a different way of emphasising the importance of the Prophet’s family. They absorb the underlying notions that inform the reports concerning the written names and recast the Prophet’s family members as carriers of the Throne instead. These traditions are usually conveyed in long dramatic reports. For instance, in one of these reports Ja‘far al-Šādiq answers a question about the imams and describes the succession of Muḥammad and the fate of the supporters of the rights of the family of the Prophet, ending with the statement that “from among us” are those who serve as God’s treasurers (*khuzzān*) on earth and in the sky, being not the treasurers of gold and silver, and “from among them are the carriers of the Throne on the Day of Resurrection, Muḥammad, ‘Alī, Ḥasan, and Ḥusayn and four others according to the will of God.”⁷⁷ Other texts show that the question of the angelic nature of the carriers

⁷³ Ibn Ḥamza al-Ṭūsi, *al-Thāqib fi al-manāqib*, 143; Shādhān al-Qummī, *al-Rawḍa fi fudā’il amir al-mu’minin*, 210; Shādhān al-Qummī, *al-Faḍā’il*, 5-6, 168; al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 18, 371.

⁷⁴ al-Majlisi, *Bihār al-anwār*, vol. 18, 345; al-Qummī, *Tafsir*, vol. 1, 18.

⁷⁵ See also Sulaym b. Qays, *Kitāb*, Najaf 1962, 381: there are 90,000 angels around the Throne who obey ‘Alī. In his long invocation, ‘Alī asks to invoke God with His (secret) name which nobody knows, not even a bearer of the Throne or one of the Cherubim: al-Ṭūsi, *Miṣbāḥ al-mutabajjid*, 296.

⁷⁶ al-Shaykh al-Ṭūsi, *al-Amālī*, 105. On the question of who is superior, angels or prophets, but also mentioning the names of the imams written on a leg of the Throne when Muḥammad talks with God during the ascension to heaven, see al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *Kamāl al-dīn wa-tamām al-ni’ma*, 255-256; al-Shaykh al-Šadūq, *Ilal al-sharā’i’*, vol. 1, 5-7; see also ‘Alī b. Yūnus al-‘Āmili, *al-Širāt al-mustaḡim*, vol. 2, 125: on the leg (*sāq*) of the Throne. About Muḥammad’s, ‘Alī’s, and the imams’ superiority over angels, see Amir-Moezzi, *The Divine Guide*, 35-36.

⁷⁷ Muḥammad b. al-Muthannā al-Ḥaḍramī, *Kitāb*, in Vv.Aa., *al-Uṣūl al-sitta ‘asbar*, Qom 1984, 91. Cf. also al-Šaffār, *Baṣā’ir al-darajāt*, 124, 126: a short version without the names

of the Throne could be called into question by reference to the superior role of the family of Muḥammad. In a dialogue between Muḥammad and Fāṭima, pre-figuring the fate of Ḥusayn, the Prophet asks her if she does not desire that her son (having been killed and thus now being one of the martyrs) should be one of the carriers of the Throne.⁷⁸ Another tradition shows no doubt in this regard and simply states that the pillars (*arkān*) of the Throne are connected only with ‘Ali and those of his faction who succeed him (*shī‘atibi*).⁷⁹

The traditions regarding the names written on the Throne were rarely invoked to discuss directly the question of who bears the Throne of God, but there are at least a few traditions that attest to this connection. A number of other reports discuss further the superiority of ‘Ali, his family, and the imams over the angels and the carriers of the Throne, thus suggesting that the concepts overlapped and interacted to some extent. The circulation and spread of such traditions determined that early Shi‘i views that set aside the identification of the carriers as angels still left room for a growing, implicit or explicit, recognition of the angelic nature of the carriers, which was completely bypassed by the traditions that emphasised the written names on the Throne.

Conclusion

The rich literature on the subject of the Throne of God, and in particular on the carriers of the Throne or on those positioned around it or close to it, demonstrates that this topic was a point of some sensitivity in early Islamic traditions and literature. The Sunni identification of the carriers of the Throne as angels of high status was not the only possible interpretation and Shi‘i reports reveal alternative views. One such view is attested in those early reports which, following the Qur’ān, state that the carriers of the Throne are four prophets and four members of the family of Muḥammad. Another version, just as early as the first, places emphasis on the names of ‘Ali and his descendants being written on the legs of the Throne. These provide clear evidence that Shi‘i attempts to maintain

at the end. Less clear is the version given by al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfi*, vol. 1, 132 and quoted in his *tafsir* by al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī, *al-Tafsir al-aṣafi*, vol. 2, [n. p.] 1982, 1344: the Throne signifies knowledge (*al-‘ilm*) and its carriers number eight, four of us (*minnā*) and four that God wants. See also al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *al-Itiqādāt fī dīn al-imāmiyya*, 45-46; al-Shaykh al-Ṣadūq, *‘Ilal al-sharā‘i*, vol. 1, 5-7; al-Māzandarānī, *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfi*, vol. 4, 113-114, also including other versions. According to Arjomand, “The Consolation of Theology,” 569-570, the belief in knowledge (*‘ilm*) and the miraculous power of the imams typical of the Imāmi sectarian group of the Mufawwida is reflected in the reports which state that “the imams, the proofs of God, are the carriers of the Throne and of His science and religion,” and their names are written on the divine Throne. See also the sources quoted above, at p. 292

⁷⁸ Furāt al-Kūfi, *Tafsir*, 172.

⁷⁹ al-Qāḍi al-Nu‘mān, *Sharḥ al-Akbbār*, vol. 2, 270; Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib Āl Abi Ṭālib*, vol. 3, 5.

the legitimacy and rights of Muḥammad's family also used the Throne imagery and the prominence accorded to those who are close to it or who bear it. This is further supported by a testimony cited by Jonathan Brown in two of his books. This testimony mentions that, according to some Shī'ī traditions, *ḥadīths* stating that the name of 'Alī was written on the Throne of God were even included in the *Sabīḥ* by al-Bukhārī, thus directly attacking the core of the Sunnī *ḥadīth* canon.⁸⁰ Most probably, as is attested in some of the early traditions, the significance of the Throne as bearing in itself the essence of the true religion, and the fact that the names of the imams and the family of the Prophet were written upon it, came to imply that the carriers of the Throne might be precisely these figures, indirectly conflicting with other traditions that depicted the angels as the carriers of the Throne.⁸¹

However, developments in Shī'ī thought had their own internal dynamics and were not solely derived from the tensions inherent in Sunni-Shī'ī debates. The traditions concerning the written names completely changed the terms of the confrontation. In fact, while Sunnī angelology established the nature of the carriers of the Throne by also evoking Near Eastern lore, the Shī'ī interpretations shifted interest in the real nature of the carriers to the prominence accorded to the written names of 'Alī, his family, and the imams as a more suitable way of extolling their status. Having these names written on the legs of the Throne diminished the figures who bore it and this assertion of the superiority of the Prophet's family consequently meant that there was no problem accepting that the carriers themselves were angels, as stated in the Sunnī traditions. The tradition regarding the four prophets and four members of Muḥammad's family was accordingly given secondary importance and came to be less frequently cited, or at least not given as great a prominence as it had in the early Shī'ī Qur'ānic commentaries. Consequently, when the Imāmī traditions came to be collected and established in the literature, reflecting the gradual change from a traditionalist to a more rationalist approach from the 4th/10th century onwards, there appears to have been less doubt about the identity of the *ḥamalāt al-ʿarsh*: they are eight angels or eight groups of angels, and their depiction in these texts includes details that derive from related Sunnī traditions.⁸² The Shi'īs thus seem to have solved, to a great extent, their dispute with the Sunnī interpretations and beliefs by assuming that the carriers of the Throne

⁸⁰ J. Brown, *The Canonization of al-Bukhārī and Muslim. The Formation and Function of the Sunnī Ḥadīth Canon*, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2007, 228; J. A. C. Brown, *Hadīth. Muḥammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*, Oxford: Oneworld 2009, 143.

⁸¹ See, for example, Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin*, 80.

⁸² In fact, as suggested above (n. 23), the interpretations implying two perspectives on the Throne, the first as knowledge and the second seeing it from the perspective of its cosmological meaning, solved, to a great extent, the dispute with the Sunna, or at least put it in a wider context – not all Sunnī interpretations are wrong but very often they fail, according to the Shi'ī vision, to grasp the esoteric layers.

were angels while, at the same time, emphasising the traditions about the written names as reflecting the real inner meaning of the Throne.

On the other hand, the existence of a counter-interpretation along sectarian lines probably also prompted the diffusion of the Sunni angelology regarding the carriers of the Throne.⁸³ Descriptions which highlight prodigious details and elements are typical in all early Sunni traditions and do not only appear in relation to angels. But in relation to the Throne of God as a whole, and not only its carriers, it appears that the alternative Shi‘i views might have played a role in which they acted as an implicit polemical ‘other.’ This means that, here as elsewhere, it was not only literary taste and popular remakings but also theological concerns and religious polemical discussions around legitimacy that were at work. Given this, the many traditions in Islamic literature regarding the carriers of the Throne and events and behaviours in proximity to the Throne of God appear to be more the result of these internal disputes than of the impact of Near Eastern religious influences or imagery.

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⁸³ Also the Ḥanbalī belief that Muḥammad will be seated on the Throne on the Day of Resurrection can be read in the same vein and possibly with the same function; see on this C. Gilliot, *Exégèse, Langue et Théologie en Islam. L’exégèse coranique de Tabari*, Paris: Vrin 1990, 251-253.

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“As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands” (Qurʾān 6:93)

The Work of Heavenly Agents According to Muslim Eschatology

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In the Qurʾān it is stated that “the truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets” (Q 2:177), and an enemy of God is he who disbelieves in “God, His Angels, and His messengers, Gabriel and Michael” (Q 2:98). Based on this kind of Qurʾānic decree, the beliefs in both angels and the Last Day have come to constitute integral components of the six articles of Muslim faith.¹ Moreover, numerous statements in works by classical Muslim scholars highlight the vital role played by heavenly agents and divine messengers – Arabic: *malāʾika*, sing.: *malak*, usually translated as “angels” – in Islamic religious thought and practice.² These transcendental beings are important not only when a person passes away but also during the events prophesied for the apocalyptic cessation of this world and the creation of the eternal kingdom of the heavens and the earth in a world to come (Q 2:107; 48:14). Thus, their activities are primarily concerned with two main aspects of

¹ For Qurʾānic evidence concerning these articles of faith, see also Q 2:285, “They all believe in God, His angels, His scriptures, and His messengers”; and Q 6:59, “He has the keys to the unseen: no one knows them but Him. He knows all that is in the land and sea. No leaf falls without His knowledge, nor is there a single grain in the darkness of the earth, or anything, fresh or withered, that is not written in a clear Record.” Thus, the six articles of Muslim faith constitute the belief in (1) God, (2) His angels, (3) His scriptures, (4) His messengers, (5) the Last Day, and (6) His supremacy, i.e., the belief that predestination, both good and evil, comes from God, who alone foreknows and foreordains all that comes to pass in the world and in the lives of individuals. On the establishment of the Muslim creed in the early sources, see Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, vol. 1, Berlin et al.: de Gruyter 1991, 207-221.

Passages quoted from the Qurʾān in this article are given in M. A. S. Abdel Haleem’s translation; in some cases, individual Qurʾānic terms are my own renderings. All other translations from the Arabic are my own, unless indicated otherwise, although I often consulted existing relevant English and German translations. On this note, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Maher Jarrar, American University of Beirut, for his invaluable advice and help concerning a number of thematic and translation aspects of this study.

² The Hebrew *malʾāk* (*malāki*) and the Greek *aggelos* (*angelos*) also mean “[divine] messenger,” “angel”; cf. also Gisela Webb, “Angel,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1, Leiden: Brill 2001, 84-92, 84; and Glen Carpenter, *Connections: A Guide to Types and Symbols in the Bible*, Maitland: Xulon Press 2004, 295. For an exhaustive recent study on angels in Islam, see Stephen Burge’s correspondingly titled 2012 monograph, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabāʾik fi akhbār al-malāʾik*, London et al.: Routledge 2012.

eschatology: the end of an individual person's life and the end of the world as we know it, including the resurrection of the dead, the divine judgement, life in the hereafter, paradise, and hell.

In addition to the Qur'ān, the earliest Muslim views about the roles of angels in Islamic eschatology are included in the extensive body of Islamic prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth*). However, these notions were also popular themes in accounts related by early Muslim storytellers (*quṣṣās*) and in sermons delivered by preachers (*wu'āz*, *khutabā*). Yet it appears that the *ḥadīth* scholars, storytellers, and preachers were inspired in this regard not only by the Qur'ān but also by the fertile pool of eschatological concepts nurtured by ancient Near Eastern cultures and religions.

The first efforts to collect, classify, and trace the authenticity of Muslim beliefs about the tasks of angels at the end of an individual's life and on doomsday were undertaken by Muslim compilers of prophetic traditions during the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries. Indeed, by the time of the Yemeni Qur'ān exegete and *ḥadīth* scholar 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 211/827), the Iraqi traditionist and historian Ibn Abi Shayba (d. 235/849), and the Transoxanian *ḥadīth* scholar Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), numerous traditions containing such information had become integral components of the authoritative Sunni *ḥadīth* collections. The respective traditions were included in these compilations, often in chapters entitled *Kitāb al-janā'iz* ("The Book of Funerals") or with a very similar name.

Another early scholar, the littérateur and ascetic Ibn Abi l-Dunyā (d. 281/894), reportedly devoted no fewer than fifteen treatises to the subjects of death, life in the grave, and life in the hereafter. In his *Kitāb al-marwt* ("The Book of Death") and *Kitāb al-qubūr* ("The Book of the Grave") in particular, Ibn Abi l-Dunyā's description of the eschatological events is, in its methodological approach, close to that presented by *ḥadīth* scholars.³ Thus, his traditionalist, piecemeal exposition of the 'last things' is in stark contrast to al-Ḥārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī's (d. 243/857) powerful and imaginative vision of humankind's path to a world to come.

Several early Muslim scholars with a variety of theological and juridical backgrounds devoted chapters or entire works to eschatological issues. However, it was not until the renowned jurist and theologian Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066)

³ Ibn Abū l-Dunyā's *Kitāb al-marwt* is an instructive examination of death, the various modes of dying, and the role of the Angel of Death in this process, but also of interactions between the dead and the living. The *Kitāb al-qubūr*, in turn, provides anecdotes relating to the hereafter, especially the "sepulchral period between dying and the Day of Resurrection," with two aspects in the foreground: "the interaction between the dead and the living" and "the correlation between one's record in life and the circumstances he will later experience in his grave," as Leah Kinberg notes in her introduction to the Arabic edition of these two texts. Cf. Ibn Abi l-Dunyā, *Kitāb al-marwt wa-l-qubūr* (Al-Karmil Publications Series 2), Leah Kinberg, ed., Haifa: Jāmi'at Ḥaifā, Qism al-Lughā al-'Arabiyya wa-Ādābihā 1983, I-V. See also the review of this publication by Khaled Nashef, in *Die Welt des Orients* 16 (1985), 191-198.

addressed the topic in his *al-Ba‘th wa-l-nushūr* (“*Resurrection and Resurgence*”)⁴ that the eschatological genre appears to have become fully established in Arabic-Islamic writing. In the aftermath of al-Bayhaqī’s work, eschatological writing began to be recognised as a distinct textual category, known as *‘ulūm al-ākhirah* (“branches of knowledge concerning the hereafter”).⁵ While it is not the primary purpose of the present study to provide a survey of the genre of medieval Muslim writing on eschatology, two further works must also be mentioned here at least briefly: *al-Tadbkirah fi ahwāl al-marwāt wa-umūr al-ākhirah* (“*The Reminder about Death and the Matters of the Hereafter*”), perhaps the most inclusive and celebrated compilation on Islamic eschatology, written by the Andalusian Qur’ān-commentator, scholar of prophetic tradition, and jurist Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273); and the *al-Nihāyah fi l-fitan wa-l-malāḥim* (“*The Conclusive Word Concerning the Civil Wars [of the End-Times] and Apocalyptic Battles*”) by the renowned religious scholar and jurist Abū l-Fidā’ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373).⁶

With these preliminaries in hand, the following pages will go on to explore certain key activities and functions of heavenly agents as they are described in the eschatological manuals written by three celebrated Muslim scholars from the classical period of Islam.⁷

⁴ Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Ba‘th wa-l-nushūr*, Amīr Aḥmad Haydar, ed., Beirut: Markaz al-Khadamāt wa-l-Abḥāth al-Thaqāfiyya 1986.

⁵ This genre consists of four sub-categories: (1) the *al-fitan wa-l-malāḥim* (“the civil wars [of the end-times] and apocalyptic battles,” or “dissensions and fierce battles”) literature, a kind of Islamic apocrypha combining historical commentaries with eschatological stories; (2) writings that focus on *al-qiyāmah* (“the resurrection” of the dead), the revivification of the body, the gathering for divine judgement, and divine judgement on the Day of Judgement; (3) works that deal exclusively with *al-jannah wa-l-nār* (“the garden and the fire”), offering specific descriptions of the various domains of paradise and hell; and (4) *al-adab al-ukhrāwī*, the belletristic “literature on the hereafter,” with fiction-like, often quite entertaining, presentations of the last things and life in the hereafter. Cf. Sebastian Günther, “«God Disdains Not to Strike a Simile» (Q 2:26). The Poetics of Islamic Eschatology: Narrative, Personification, and Colors in Muslim Discourse,” in: *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, vol 1, *Foundations and the Formation of a Tradition. Reflections on the Hereafter in the Quran and Islamic Religious Thought*, Sebastian Günther, Todd Lawson, eds., Leiden: Brill 2016, 181-217, here 194-195. Furthermore, see also Waleed Ahmed, “The Characteristics of Paradise (*Ṣifat al-Janna*): A Genre of Eschatological Literature in Medieval Islam,” in: *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, vol. 2, *Continuity and Change. The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamicate World Thought*, Sebastian Günther, Todd Lawson, eds., Leiden: Brill 2016, 817-848.

⁶ Abū l-Fidā’ ‘Imād al-Dīn Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar Ibn Kathīr al-Qurashī, *Kitāb al-nihāyah fi l-fitan wa-l-malāḥim*, M. ‘Abd al-Qādir ‘Aṭā, ed., Cairo: Dār al-Taqwā 2002.

⁷ For the use of “classical” as a term in the cultural and intellectual history of Islam, in reference to both the time between the 9th and 15th centuries CE and the special, high quality of the respective texts (or other cultural testimonies), see Tarif Khalidī, *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1994, xi; Thomas Bauer, *Die Kultur der Ambiguität: Eine andere Geschichte des Islams*, Berlin: Insel Verlag 2011, 4; and Sebastian Günther, “Introduction,” in: *Ideas, Images, and Methods of Portrayal: Insights into Classical Arabic Literature and Islam*, Sebastian Günther, ed., Leiden: Brill 2005, xxviii-xx.

- *al-Tawābhum* (“Imagining,” “Envisioning,” also translated as “*The Visualisation [of the Last Things]*”) by Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Muḥāsibī, an immensely influential theologian, mystic, and prolific writer of the 3rd/9th century;
- *al-Durrab al-fākhirab fi kashf ‘ulūm al-ākhirab* (“*The Precious Pearl Revealing the Knowledge of the Hereafter*”), commonly ascribed to the authoritative philosophical theologian and mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī from the 5th/11th to 6th/12th century;
- *Kitāb al-rūḥ* (“*The Book of the Soul [and its Journey after Death]*”), by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, a prolific theologian of the Ḥanabali school of jurisprudence from the 8th/14th century.⁸

We will concentrate on these writings because, first, they thematically focus on – and follow in their textual structure – three core issues relating to ‘the final things’, which Muslim tradition concisely refers to as *al-marwt wa-l-qubūr wa-l-qiyāmah* (“death, graves, and resurrection”). According to this basic tripartite structure, and in terms of the tasks attributed to angels, these treatises deal with:

- i. The biological death of a human individual, including the dragging of the soul out of the body by angels, the Angels of Death, the accompanying of the soul by angels on its initial journey to the heavens, and the angels’ returning of the soul to its body for the funeral (these topics are studied in sections 2 and 3 of the present chapter).
- ii. “Life” in the grave, covering the timespan between burial and resurrection, including the interrogation by the angels in the grave as well as initial perspectives on the reward and punishment of body and soul (examined here in section 4).
- iii. The duties of angels at the resurrection and judgement (discussed in section 5).

The second reason for giving preference in this study to the aforementioned classical Arabic books is their particularly creative approach and imaginative presentation of eschatological ideas, the intensity and vividness of their depiction of angels, and the authoritative character and broad popularity they still retain among Muslims today. In these respects, the books considered here stand out,

⁸ For a survey of the eschatological literature in Islam, see Sebastian Günther, Todd Lawson, eds., *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, vol. 1. *Foundations and the Formation of a Tradition: Reflections on the Hereafter in the Quran and Islamic Religious Thought*, vol. 2. *Continuity and Change: The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamicate World*, Brill: Leiden 2016, and here in particular the editors’ Introduction, 1-28; an instructive classification of the Muslim apocalyptic is given by Fred Donner, “A Typology of Eschatological Concepts,” in: *Roads to Paradise: Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, vol. 2. *Continuity and Change. The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamicate World Thought*, Sebastian Günther, Todd Lawson, eds., Leiden: Brill 2016, 757-772.

even when considered in the context of the rich pool of Arabic works on Islamic eschatology.⁹

Given the common thematic focus (and overlap) of these books, our exploration will follow the sequence of ‘the final things’ – death, grave, resurrection, and judgement – rather than a chronological order based on the dates of our authors. We will, therefore, hear the voices of the respective writers concurrently when drawing, it is hoped, a representative picture of the roles played by heavenly agents in Muslim eschatology. This inclusive approach is not diminished by the fact that a certain emphasis is placed on al-Ghazālī’s work, since this emphasis mirrors the relative popularity of this particular text.

1 Our sources on the tasks of angels: three classical Muslim thinkers

1.1 Al-Muḥāsibī

Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Hārith ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī (170-243/781-857) is said to have been an early advocate of the doctrine of later Muslim orthodoxy.¹⁰ Al-Muḥāsibī was born in Basra but grew up and lived most of his life in Baghdad, where he ultimately died. Along with asceticism and the commitment to the inner and the outer duties toward God, al-Muḥāsibī proposed the combination of reason (*‘aql*) and knowledge (*‘ilm*) as the most suitable tool for considering matters of faith. In so doing, he went beyond what mystics at that time considered to be important for a religious life: an ascetic lifestyle, mystical inspiration (*ilbām*), mystical instruction (*ta‘lim*), and ecstatic exaltation (*wajd*, also *jadbb*).¹¹ It is interesting to note in this context that al-Muḥāsibī viewed didactic conversation as the most efficient method of communication and instruction, a perspective that is clearly reflected in several of his writings.

Despite this interest in conversation with others, a vital element in al-Muḥāsibī’s world of thought was, as Josef van Ess has noted, constant self-examination – *muḥāsaba* – in anticipation of the Final Judgement. Unsurprisingly, issues concerning ‘the last things’ and the Final Judgement were thus major themes in his writing, as can be seen in his main work, *al-Ri‘āyah li-ḥuqūq Allāh* (“*The Ob-*

⁹ In the light of these thematic foci (death, grave, resurrection, and judgement), we shall leave aside in this study any consideration of activities in which angels engage at the beginning of doomsday when the earth and the universe collapse, as well as the duties that angels fulfill in the eternal abodes of paradise and hell.

¹⁰ Josef van Ess, “al-Muḥāsibī,” in: *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed., Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992, 400-401. See also the more recent elaboration, Josef van Ess, *Kleine Schriften*, Hinrich Biesterfeldt, ed., vol. 1, Leiden: Brill 2018, 153-159.

¹¹ Josef van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Hārith al-Muḥāsibī, anhand von Übersetzungen aus seinen Schriften dargestellt und erläutert*, Bonn: Selbstverlag des Orientalisches Seminars 1961, 78. See also Göran Oğén, “Religious Ecstasy in Classical Sufism,” in: *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 11 (1982), 226-240.

servance of that which is Owed to God”),¹² and his similarly important *al-Taṭawabhum* (“The Visualisation [of the Last Things]”). Al-Muḥāsibī argues in these books that human death and the final judgement are inseparably connected. Moreover, the fear of the final judgement can be excited, and thus mobilised in pursuit of one’s own spiritual development, only through three things: one’s own imagination, the words of the Qurʾān, and the prophetic tradition. Envisioning the last things – from the moment of death to the joys of paradise and the vision of the Divine (*visio beatifica*) – thus plays a crucial role in al-Muḥāsibī’s works.¹³

*Al-Taṭawabhum*¹⁴ in particular is a uniquely imaginative portrayal of different eschatological events, with specific references to the roles played by the angels in each of these scenarios. In this book, al-Muḥāsibī begins most paragraphs with the words “imagine yourself” (*taṭawabham nafsaka*). He thus not only addresses his reader directly, but vividly evokes in the reader’s mind, in the here and now, the dramatic scenes believed to happen when a person passes away and the experience that he or she may encounter after death.¹⁵ Stylistically, al-Muḥāsibī harks back in

¹² Margaret Smith, ed., London: Luzac 1940.

¹³ Van Ess, *Gedankenwelt*, 14. Remarkably, al-Muḥāsibī deals with death, its unpredictability, and its consequences in a way that van Ess (following Helmut Ritter) called a ‘maieutic conversation’; cf. van Ess, *Gedankenwelt*, 130, 136-8.

¹⁴ Van Ess aptly uses for the verbal noun *taṭawabhum* the German expression “Vergegenwärtigung” (“Re-presentation”); cf. his *Gedankenwelt*, 137, where he also draws attention to the complexity of this Arabic term. The *nafs* (“soul”), as well as the entities that manifest the soul or operate as its layers (such as *ʿaql*, “intellect,” *qalb*, “heart,” and *rūḥ*, “spirit”), cover a wide array of meanings and psychological dimensions. These range from a primary emanation from the divine essence (Q 16:2, the spirit as a creation like the angels but above them in rank), a life-giving agency of God or “breath of life” (Q 15:29, 21:91), to the “carnal soul” (Q 12:73, 75:2, 89:27) and “the self” in the Qurʾān, the prophetic tradition, and works of Muslim scholars, especially those on mysticism. Cf. Régis Blachère, “Note sur le substantif *ʿnafs* dans le Coran,” in: *Semitica* 1 (1948), 69-77, here 70-71; van Ess, *Gedankenwelt*, 31-36 (on *nafs* and *qalb*); and Imranali Panjwani, “Soul,” in: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Science, and Technology in Islam*, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014, 267-273.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the *Taṭawabhum* appears to have been written specifically for male Muslims. This observation is due not only to the use of the male form of the second person singular (which, according to the rules of Arabic grammar, would not *per se* exclude female addressees). Rather, it is based on the many specific male issues mentioned in the text. For example, the reader is called upon to imagine how, in Paradise, the wives, children, servants, and stewards of the blessed man, who is granted entrance into paradise, will be informed of his arrival, and how the entire family will rejoice about his coming. Moreover, the wives of the blessed are portrayed as very eager to meet their husband, and as feeling very happy and pleased at the prospect. The wives, this text continues, will even lose control of themselves due to their great happiness in anticipation of seeing their husband, as they want to see him immediately and look at him who is the delight of their eyes. Still, the wives will have to wait for this moment and remain under guard in their pavilions, since God prescribed it so in the Qurʾān (Q 55-72). The text later mentions in great detail the tender bodies, sweet smells, gentle touches, and similar extraordinary pleasures that the blessed men will experience when meeting the *huris*, or virgins of paradise, promised to Muslim believers. Cf. Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥārīṭ ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, “Kitāb al-taṭawabhum,” in: Abd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā, ed., in: Abū ʿAbdallāh al-Ḥārīṭ ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *Adab al-nufūs*, ʿAbd al-Qādir Aḥmad ʿAṭā, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1411/1991,

this treatise to the technique of the early Muslim *quṣṣās* when admonishing his audience that “salvation can only be attained through pious fear, the observation of canonical obligations and *wara’*: abstaining from that which God forbids, acting in all things only for God and taking the Prophet as a model.”¹⁶ *The Visualisation* thus exquisitely illustrates how, as early as the 3rd/9th century, the combination of powerful literary images with a style that engaged the reader served to instruct Muslim believers in ‘the last things’, in which angels play, according to al-Muḥāsibī, a central role.

1.2 *Al-Ghazālī*

Next we shall look at *al-Durrab al-fākīrab fī kashf ‘ulūm al-ākīrab* (*The Precious Pearl Revealing the Knowledge of the Hereafter*), another exceptionally rich source of eschatological ideas. This text has commonly been ascribed to the authoritative philosophical theologian and mystic Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (450-505/1058-1111). Al-Ghazālī was born in Ṭūs near the city of Mashhad in Iran, but pursued much of his education and higher studies in Nishapur and Baghdad. He served for several years as the head professor at the newly-founded Nizāmiyya College, the most famous institution of higher learning not just in Baghdad but in the entire Muslim world in the eleventh century CE. However, several of his major works were written far from the bustle of the great city, while travelling on a 3-year-long journey that was begun under the pretext of making a pilgrimage and during the course of which he led a rather secluded life.

In terms of the history of ideas, al-Ghazālī is generally noted for accepting Greek logic as a neutral instrument of learning, and for recommending it to theologians. In his mystical writings in particular, he successfully recast basic Aristotelian ethical values in an Islamic mode, representing them as Sufi values. At the same time, he insisted that the path to mystical gnosis must begin with traditional Islamic belief.

Al-Ghazālī’s *The Precious Pearl* is exclusively devoted to the topics of death and the hereafter.¹⁷ He apparently drafted this remarkable work after finishing his multi-volume *Iḥyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* (“*The Revitalisation of the Studies of Religion*”). In fact, *The Precious Pearl* appears to be an extract from the fortieth and last book of the latter work, which he seems to have modified to better provide for the spiri-

148-206, here 182-184; Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Hārīt ibn Asad al-Muḥāsibī, *At-Tawābūm* (sic). (*Visualization*), *Mankind’s Journey to the Hereafter*, Muhammad Dāgher, transl., Cairo: Dar al-Salām 1430/2009, 127-133.

¹⁶ Roger Arnaldez, “al-Muḥāsibī,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (EP), new ed., vol. 7, Leiden: Brill 1993, 466b.

¹⁷ For the main topics of *The Precious Pearl*, see my “«God Disdains Not to Strike a Simile» (Q 2:26).” This article also addresses the question of whether *The Precious Pearl* was originally written by al-Ghazālī or not. On this issue, see also Christian Lange, *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016, 108.

tual and dogmatic edification of a wider Muslim readership. Within the general eschatological framework of the book, the specific eschatological activities of angels play a remarkable, manifest role.

1.3 *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah*

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (691-751/1292-1350) was born in Damascus as the son of a scholar and teacher. Following in his father's footsteps, he soon became renowned in his own right. Several of his students later distinguished themselves as leading scholars of the Mamlūk era. Today, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah's legacy has become a matter of some controversy, since aspects of it have been claimed by fundamentalist reformers of the Salafi and Wahhabi movements.¹⁸

Ibn Qayyim's *Book of the Soul* is a later, but no less popular, medieval magisterial treatise about death and what the body and the soul will experience in the next world. The book is of a composite nature, perhaps based on several earlier essays by the same author. Nonetheless, the *Kitāb al-rūḥ* is probably his most widely circulated and, thus, "successful" book.¹⁹ In it, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah offers a first critical synopsis of views that had become 'mainstream' among orthodox Muslims concerning Islamic eschatology. However, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah goes beyond simply compiling various pieces of information and scholarly opinions on topics related to eschatology. Rather, using the proof of reason (*dalil al-ʿaql*) and unprejudiced intuition (*fiṭrah*), he scrutinises each piece of material individually in the light of the doctrines specified in the Qurʾān, in the prophetic tradition (*ḥadīth* and *sunnah*, religious practice), and by the consensus of Sunni scholarship.²⁰ *The Book of the Soul* thus appears to constitute a fully-fledged treatment of Muslim eschatology as it stood in the 7th/13th century, summing up and systematising much of what had been said on the topic by previous Muslim scholars.

2 *Angels at the point of human death*

The Qurʾān says little about the actual circumstances of a human being's death. Nevertheless, it is indicated in Islam's Holy Scripture that death is a distressing

¹⁸ Asʿad AbuKhalil (sic), "The Incoherence of Islamic Fundamentalism: Arab Islamic Thought at the End of the 20th Century," in: *The Middle East Journal* 48/4 (1994), 677-694.

¹⁹ Y. Tzvi Langerman, "Ibn Qayyim's *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*: Some Literary Aspects," in: *Islamic Theology, Philosophy and Law: Debating Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya*, Birgit Krawietz, Georges Tamer, eds., Berlin: de Gruyter 2013, 125-145, here 125, 133. This article also addresses the authenticity of the book, which has been debated among certain Muslim scholars recently on dogmatic grounds; see Langerman, "Ibn Qayyim's *Kitāb al-Rūḥ*," 135-137.

²⁰ Ulrich Rebstock, "Grabesleben: Eine islamische Konstruktion zwischen Himmel und Hölle," in: *Islamstudien ohne Ende: Festschrift für Werner Ende zum 65. Geburtstag*, Rainer Brunner et al., eds., Würzburg: Ergon 2013, 371-382, here 373.

process that every person will experience alone and helpless. At the point of death, “the angels stretch out their hands” to the souls of the dying (Q 6:93-94) while the soul of the dying person “comes up to his throat” (Q 56:83). Interestingly, the idea of an angel wresting the soul from the dying individual’s body is also evident in the name of sura 79, “The Forceful Charges,” the main theme of which is the inevitability of resurrection, its aftermath, and its timing. Similarly, the Qur’ān states that “the Angel of Death (*malak al-marwī*) put in charge of you will reclaim you, and then you will be brought back to your Lord” (Q 32:11).

2.1 *Cosmological dimensions of death*

Al-Ghazālī begins his discussion of death and the afterlife by setting these issues within a wider cosmological context. In reference to individual human death, he notes first the Qur’ānic concept of *kullu nafsin dhā’iqatu l-marwt* (“every soul is certain to taste death,” Q 21:35). This idea of the soul “tasting death” is, he says, “attested” in the Qur’ān “in three places,”²¹ and he concludes from this that “God desired three deaths for the world.” Drawing again on the same premise, al-Ghazālī states that the Qur’ānic attestations signify three categories of death and, thus, the corresponding tripartite structure of the universe:

- (a) The death of those in the perceptible “earthly world” (*al-‘ālam al-dunyāwī*), populated by humans, animals, and plants.
- (b) The death of those in an unseen celestial world, the “dominion of divine power” (*al-‘ālam al-malakūti*), inhabited by the angels, spirits, and *jinn*.
- (c) The death of those in a “world of might and magnificence,” of pure, angelic intelligences (*al-‘ālam al-jabarūti*), inhabited by the highest otherworldly beings who are nearest to God, including the mysterious cherubim,²² “the bearers of the Throne and companions of the pavilion of God the Majestic,” as well as other spiritual beings who maintain the divine order in this celestial sphere.²³

²¹ These three places are Q 3:185, 21:35, 29:57; but see also 44:56.

²² In the Bible, God placed the *living* cherubim “at the garden Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24). In another Biblical passage, they are described as golden statues placed on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant, “stretching out their wings above, covering the mercy seat with their wings, and they shall face one another; the faces of the cherubim shall be toward the mercy seat” (Exodus 25:18-22; see also Exodus 25:1, 1 Kings 6:32). Cf. also Carpenter, *Connections*, 304. Translation according to the New King James Version (NKJV, 1982, online).

²³ al-Ghazālī’s tripartite cosmological division is based on the sophisticated cosmological endeavours of certain of his predecessors, including in particular Ibn Sinā (427/1037). These ideas reached their zenith in classical Muslim thought with Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 637/1240). See, for example, Kojiro Nakamura, “Imām Ghazālī’s Cosmology Reconsidered with Special Reference to the Concept of ‘Jabarūt,’” in: *Studia Islamica* 80 (1994), 29-46; and Samer Akkach, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam*, New York: Suny Press 2005, 1-3, 114. A cosmological vision of this kind seems to recall certain of Plato’s ideas (c. 427-347 BCE). Plato proposed that there are two realms of reality: the (ever changing) physical or material

Al-Ghāzali writes that all three realms will be destroyed on doomsday (*yawm al-dīn*) and will vanish without exception. With them will go all their inhabitants, including the angels, who will die and be annihilated before God revives them and establishes his eternal “kingdom of the heavens and the earth.”²⁴

2.2 Angels drag the soul out of the body

Elaborating on the idea of death in the three realms, al-Ghazālī reviews the notion that life is a combination of soul and body and that death occurs when the soul is separated from the body. Prior to this discussion, he states (with implicit reference to Q 6:93-94) that four angels descend to the dying person in the attempt to extract his soul from his body. These angels, for whom a name is not given, pull the soul simultaneously from the hands and the feet of the dying. The four human extremities may explain why these angels are four, although the number four also generally symbolises universality in religious contexts.²⁵

In the moments immediately preceding biological death, some aspects of the “dominion of the angels,” the *malakūti* world, may be unveiled to the dying person, and he may actually see the angels.²⁶ In al-Ghazālī’s description, the arrival of the four angels precedes the Angel [of Death], who stabs the dying person with a spear rubbed in a fiery poison (*summan min nār*), thus causing biological death. The activities of these four angels are described in *The Precious Pearl* as follows:

فإذا دنت منيته وهي الموتة الدنيوية فحينئذ ينزل عليه أربعة من الملائكة، ملكٌ يجذب النفس من قدمه اليمنى، وملكٌ يجذبها من قدمه اليسرى، وملكٌ يجذبها من يده اليمنى، وملكٌ يجذبها من يده

world of becoming and the (constant, unchanging) world of being, the world of forms or ideas. He also proposed a division of the soul into three parts: the appetitive, the spirited, and the rational (Robin Barrow, *Plato and Education*, London: Routledge 1976, 46). As the history of mystical thought in Islam suggests, views of this kind played an important role for Muslim illuminationist philosophers such as Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 586/1191) and Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640), to name only two.

²⁴ Q 7:185 (*malakūt al-samawāt wa-l-ard*), Q 3:189; 5:17, 9:116, 24:42, 57:5 (*mulk al-samawāt wa-l-ard*). For the various names of doomsday in the Qur’ān, see Sebastian Günther, “Day, times of,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 1, Leiden: Brill 2001, 499-504, here 500.

²⁵ Carpenter, *Connections*, 272-274, 304.

²⁶ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah al-fākhrah fi kashf ‘ulūm al-ākhirah,” in: *Ad-Dourra al-fākhira: La perle précieuse de Ghazālī: Traité d’eschatologie musulmane, avec une tradition française par Lucien Gautier*, Lucien Gautier, ed., Geneva: Georg 1878, repr. Leipzig: Harrassowitz 1925, 2; see also Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *The Precious Pearl: al-Durra al-fākhira: A translation from the Arabic with notes of the al-Durra al-fākhira fi kashf ‘ulūm al-ākhirah of Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī*, J.I. Smith, transl., Missoula, MT: Scholars Press 1979 [new ed.: *Knowledge of the hereafter: Durrah al-Fākhrah*, Selangor: Islamic Book Trust n. d.], 21.

اليسرى، وربّما كُشِفَ للميت عن الأمر الملكوتي، قبل أن يُغرغر، فعاين أولئك الأملاك على حقيقة علمه، لا على قدر ما يتخيّرون إليه من عالمهم.²⁷

When [the human’s] destiny approaches, that is, his earthly death, four angels descend upon him. One pulls out the soul from his right foot, another from the left foot, the third from his right hand, and the fourth from his left hand. Perhaps, the matter of the lower spiritual (*malakūti*) world [inhabited by angels, spirits, and *jinn*] may be unveiled for him even before he exhales his last breath. Then, he sees those angels according to [the degree of] his cognitive power, not the way in which they actually appear in their own world.

Still, the conditions of the dying and the duties of the angels placed in charge of them by God vary, as al-Ghazālī explicates:

تختلف أحوال الموتى، فمنهم من يطعنه الملك حينئذ بجرية مسمومة قد سُقِيَتْ سُمًّا من نار، فتفتّر النفس، وتفيض خارجةً، فيأخذها في يده، وهي ترعد أشبه شيء بالزئبق على قدر النحلة شخصاً إنسانياً، ثم يناولها الزبانية.
ومن الموتى من تجذب نفسه زويداً زويداً حتى تنحصر في الحنجرة، وليس يبقى في الحنجرة إلا شُعبة يسيرة متصلة بالقلب، فحينئذ يطعنها بتلك الحربة الموصوفة.²⁸

[At this point,] the conditions of the dead differ. Some of them will be stabbed by the Angel [of Death] with a poisoned spear that was rubbed in a fiery poison, so that the soul flees and overflows toward the outside [of the body]. Then the Angel takes it in his hand while it shudders, very much resembling quicksilver. The soul is only the size of a bee, but with human characteristics. At that point, the guardians of hell (*zabāniyāl*) seize it.

There are [others] from among the dead whose soul will be dragged out slowly and gradually until it is confined in the windpipe. There remains but a small portion in the windpipe, connected to the heart. At this point, the Angel [of Death] stabs it with the aforementioned spear.

One could argue that al-Ghazālī evokes here the traditional (“orthodox”) belief in the corporeal nature of resurrection and the hereafter.²⁹ On such a reading, he would re-emphasise his refutation (*ibtāl*) of the errors he found in the metaphysical sciences (*al-ilābiyyāt*) of the philosophers, whom he charged with disbelief (*ya-jību takfirubum*) regarding three points. Two of these points relate to concepts concerning the hereafter:³⁰

²⁷ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 4; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 21.

²⁸ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 7; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 23. Cf. a similar passage in al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 154-155.

²⁹ Cf. Frank Griffel’s review of T. J. Gianotti’s “Al-Ghazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the *Iḥyā’*,” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124/1 (2004), 110.

³⁰ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, Ḥamid Ṣaliba/Kāmil ‘Ayyād, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Andalus 1967/[1397], 83; see also al-Ghazālī, *Deliverance from Error. Five Key Texts In-*

- a) The philosophers' "denial of bodily resurrection and the return of spirits to bodies" on the Day of Judgement (the philosophers reason that it is the spirit, not the body, that will be rewarded or punished (see the chapter *Fi ibtāl inkārihim li-ba'ṭh al-ajzād wa-radd al-arwāḥ*).³¹
- b) The philosophers' "denial of the world's eternity (see the chapter *Fi ibtāl qawlihim bi-qidam al-ālam*) as well as their statement on "the post-eternity of the world, time, and motion" (see the chapter *Fi ibtāl qawlihim fi abadiyyat al-ālam wa-l-zamān wa-l-ḥarakah*).³² In contrast, the orthodox belief is that the world was created and that it will cease on the Day of Judgement.

Moments prior to death, when the soul has risen to the upper part of the body before leaving it completely, temptations are presented to it, and the devil, Iblis, may send his servants to tempt some people. He may place his servants over the respective person and put the person in their charge. The servants of hell might then show the dead person an image of beloved relatives who had predeceased them to attempt to persuade the dead person to give up his Islamic belief and die instead as a Jew or Christian. It is noteworthy in this context that Iblis is thought of as an angel in some Muslim traditions, while others consider him to be one of the *jinn*.

However, if God wants to "acknowledge and guide his servant," God instead sends the Angel of Mercy (*malak al-raḥmah*), Gabriel, to drive away his enemies from amongst the devils (*shayāṭūn*) so that this person dies as a Muslim. The dying person is relieved and smiles before passing away.³³ Up to the point of biological death, a small part of the soul remains connected to the heart. The heart, as the seat of life, will be pierced with the aforementioned poisoned spear so that the soul completely separates from it. The soul will then leave the body, marking the point at which the person has definitively passed away.

The believer's soul

In the case of the good soul (lit.: fortunate or felicitous soul, *nafs sa'idah*),³⁴ the Angel (of Death) will seize it. However, two angels "with beautiful faces, wearing lovely clothes and sweet-smelling fragrances," will be in charge of the soul. The good soul is the size of a bee and has human characteristics. One of the two angels pulls the soul out slowly and gradually, so that it slips out of the body easily

cluding His Spiritual Autobiography al-Munqidh min al-Dalal, R[ichard] J. McCarthy, transl. and annot., Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae 1980, 66-67.

³¹ Michael Marmura, *Al-Ghazālī's: The Incoherence of the Philosophers [= Tahfut al-falāsifa]: A Parallel English-Arabic Text, Translated, Introduced and Annotated by Michael E. Marmura*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press 2000, 208-209 (20th Discussion).

³² Marmura, *Incoherence*, 12-13, 47-48 (First and Second Discussion).

³³ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 9; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 24.

³⁴ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 11.

and smoothly “like the jetting of water from a water-skin” – a description from al-Ghazālī, which our third author, Ibn Qayyim, repeats in a similar fashion with reference to a prophetic tradition.³⁵ Al-Ghazālī’s text runs:

فإذا قبض الملك النفس السعيدة تناولها ملكان حسنا الوجوه عليهما أثواب حسنة، ولهما رائحة طيبة فيلقانها في حرير من حرير الجنة، وهي على قدر النحلة شخص إنساني، ما فقد من عقله ولا من علمه المكتسب له في دار الدنيا شيئاً.³⁶

When the Angel [of Death] seizes the good soul, two angels with beautiful faces, wearing lovely clothes and with sweet-smelling fragrance, will [take it and] wrap it in silk taken from the silk of the Paradise. The soul will be the size of a bee, with human characteristics, and will have lost nothing of its intelligence and the knowledge that it acquired in the realm of this world.

The disbeliever’s soul

The soul of the profligate (*fājir*)³⁷ also bears human characteristics, but is the size of a locust. Ugly, black-garbed guardians of hell, called the *zabāniyah*, squeeze it out of the body. The Angel of Death stabs the wicked with the poisoned sword. The profligate soul tries to flee but the Angel of Death, ‘Izrā’īl, seizes it.

وأما الفاجر فتؤخذ نفسه عنفاً، فإذا وجهه كاكل الحنظل والملك يقول: "اخرجي أيتها النفس الخبيثة من الجسد الخبيث"، فإذا له صراخ أعظم ما يكون كصراخ الحمير، فإذا قبضها عزرائيل تناولها زبانية قباح الوجوه سود الثياب مُنتني الرائحة، بأيديهم مُسوح من شعر، فليقونها فيه، فتستحيل شخصاً إنسانياً على قدر الجرادة، فإنّ الكافر أعظم جرماً من المؤمن، أعني: الجسم في الآخرة.³⁸

As for the profligate, his soul is taken forcefully. Suddenly, his face is like the face of someone who has eaten colocynths. The angel says: “Come out, O you wicked soul, from this spiteful body!” Then he shrieks louder than the braying of donkeys. ‘Izrā’īl [the Angel of Death] then seizes it and delivers it to the guardians of hell, who have repulsive faces, black clothes and a rotten smell, who carry in their hands haircloth. They will wrap it therewith; then he will turn into a person as big as a locust. Indeed, the disbeliever (*kāfir*) will have a bigger body than the believer. I mean [by this] the body in the hereafter.

³⁵ Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Abi Bakr Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *Kitāb ar-Rūḥ*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at Muḥammad ‘Alī Ṣabīḥ 1966, 47; idem., *The Soul’s Journey After Death, An Abridgement of Ibn Al-Qayyim’s Kitāb ar-Rub*, Layla Mabrouk, transl., London: Dar al-Taḳwa 1990, 16.

³⁶ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 11; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 25.

³⁷ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 17. See also Q 38:28: *fujjār*, “those who spread corruption” (Abdel Haleem’s translation).

³⁸ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 17.

2.3 The Angel of Death

Al-Muḥāsibī, writing in the first half of the 3rd/9th century, does not refer to the angels mentioned in the Qurʾān as those who stretch out their hands to the soul of the dying. Nor does he indicate their duties in any other way. In this regard, his description contrasts with the elaborate portrayal that al-Ghazālī provides. Al-Muḥāsibī does, however, refer to the Qurʾānic Angel of Death when directly addressing his audience with a powerful depiction of the task this specific angel will carry out. He asks his readers to imagine themselves at the very moment when the Angel of Death visits “you”:

فتوهم نفسك وقد صرعت للموت صرعة لا تقوم منها إلا إلى الحشر إلى ربك، فتوهم نفسك في نزع الموت وكربه وعصصه وسكراته ونمته وقلقه، وقد بدأ الملك يجذب روحك من قدمك، فوجدت ألم جذبته من أسفل قدميك، ثم تدارك الجذب واستحثت النزع، وجذبت الروح من جميع بدنك، فنشطت من أسفلك متصاعدة إلى أعلاك، حتى إذا بلغ منك الكرب منتهاه، وعمت آلام الموت جميع جسمك، وقلبك وجل محزون مرتقب منتظر للبشرى من الله عز وجل بالغضب أو الرضا، وقد علمت أنه لا محيص لك دون أن تسمع إحدى البشريين من الملك الموكل بقبض روحك. فبينما أنت في كربك وغمومك وألم الموت بسكراته وشدة حزنك لارتقابك إحدى البشريين من ربك، إذ نظرت إلى صفحة وجه ملك الموت بأحسن الصورة أو بأقبحها، ونظرت إليه ماداً يده إلى فيك ليخرج روحك من بدنك، فذلّت نفسك لَمَّا عاينت ذلك وعاينت وجه ملك الموت، وتعلقت قلبك بماذا يفجأك من البشرى منه، إذ سمعت صوته بنغمته: “أبشر، يا ولي الله، برضا الله وثوابه”، أو “أبشر، يا عدو الله، بغضبه وعقابه”، فتستيقن حينئذ بنجاتك وفوزك، ويستقر الأمر في قلبك، فتطمئن إلى الله نفسك، أو تستيقن بعطبك وهلاكك.³⁹

Imagine yourself (*tawabham nafsaka*) when death throws you down with a blow, from which you wake up only for resurrection [in front of] your Lord. Then, imagine yourself in the throes of death, its struggles, sorrows, agonies, and anxieties when the Angel [of Death] starts dragging your soul out [of your body] from your feet, while you feel the pangs of his (the Angel of Death’s) twitch. Thereupon, the convulsions become continuous and the extraction hastier and more rapid. Forthwith, the soul is removed from your entire body. It briskly ascends to your highest point. When agony reaches its [upper] limit and the sufferings of death have overcome all your body, your heart is fearful and distressed in anticipation and in uncertainty of the tidings from God – blessed and exalted be He – [which will express] either anger or contentment [with you]. You will have realised that you have no choice but to hear one of the two tidings from the angel commissioned to seize your soul.

While you are in this state of trepidation and sorrow, when the pangs of death with its agonies [will overcome you] and [while you are in] austere grief due to your anticipation

³⁹ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawabham,” ed. Beirut 1411/1991, 153-154; ed. Paris 1978, § 6-9. See also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 13-15.

for one of the two tidings from your Lord, [good or bad,] you will gaze at the face of the Angel of Death, which will either [appear] in the most beautiful form or in the most horrible. You will see him stretching his hand out to your mouth in order to pull out your soul from your body. Then, your soul will submit because of what you recognised, and because you saw the face of the Angel of Death. Your heart will become attached to the tiding, with which he overwhelms you. It is then that you hear his voice with the announcement either saying: “Rejoice, o beloved of God, in God’s contentment and His requital,” or “O enemy of God, prepare to receive the dreadful tidings of God’s anger and punishment.” It is then that you will be sure about your redemption and great achievement. The matter will firmly settle in your heart. You will find repose in God; or else, you will be sure of your perdition and doom.

The Angel of Death is not given a name in the Qur’ān (Q 32:11) and al-Muḥāsibi refers to him also only by his duty. Islamic tradition, however, gives the Angel of Death the name ‘Izrā’il and usually describes him as a creature moving around the earth with the speed of light, seizing the souls of those whose appointed time has come.⁴⁰

Based on a prophetic tradition, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah adds to this a word of comfort, assuring the believers that:

إِنَّ الْعَبْدَ إِذَا كَانَ فِي إِقْبَالٍ مِنَ الْأَخْرَجَةِ وَأَنْقَطَعَ مِنَ الدُّنْيَا نَزَلَتْ إِلَيْهِ مَلَائِكَةٌ كَانَتْ وُجُوهُهُمُ الشَّمْسُ
فَيَجْلِسُونَ مِنْهُ مَدَّ الْبَصَرِ. ثُمَّ يَجِيءُ مَلِكُ الْمَوْتِ حَتَّى يَجْلِسَ عِنْدَ رَأْسِهِ فَيَقُولُ: أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ، الطَّيِّبَةُ
أَخْرِجِي إِلَى مَغْفَرَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٍ.

⁴⁰ A later source, the popular *Daqā’iq al-akbbār fi dhikr al-jannah wa-l-nār* (“*The Meticulous Accounts about Paradise and Hell-fire*,” often attributed to ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī (5th/11th or 6th/12th century), is rather detailed in its description of the Angel of Death. Here it is stated that, “The Angel of Death has seventy thousand feet, four thousand wings, and his whole body is full of eyes and tongues. In fact, there is not one of God’s creatures from whom there is not a tongue, a face, an eye, or a hand that is part of his body. Only when a creature dies, does its eye, its hand, leave the body of this Angel. It is said also that the Angel of Death has four faces, watching in all four cardinal directions (with a Biblical parallel in the four Biblical living creatures, who resemble a man, although ‘each one had four faces, and each one had four wings’ (Ezekiel 1:4-7). In Islam, the Angel of Death is also said to be so gargantuan that he stands with one foot on the Bridge that spans Hell, and the other on the Throne of Paradise. The Angel of Death has knowledge of each person’s death. But this knowledge of his is a secret. It is given to him by God only when the time of a person’s death is near.” Cf. ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī, *Daqā’iq al-akbbār fi dhikr al-jannah wa-l-nār*, Cairo: Maṭba‘at Muṣṭafā Muḥammad 1352 [1933], 6-8 (chapter 5). See ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī, *The Islamic Book of the Dead: A Collection of Hadiths on the Fire and the Garden*, ‘Ā’isha ‘Abd al-Raḥmān, transl., San Francisco: Diwan Press 1977 [English transl. of al-Qāḍī’s *Daqā’iq al-akbbār*], 32-35. Christian Lange, however, has convincingly shown that the *Daqā’iq al-akbbār* does not constitute a fixed text. Rather, it appears to be part of a “corpus that splits up into three major clusters, a Western, Eastern, and Middle Eastern one [...] Finally, in the Middle East and the Ottoman Empire, where the title regularly appears as *Subtle Traditions [Daqā’iq al-akbbār]*, the work came to be connected with the name of an otherwise unknown ‘Abd al-Raḥīm b. Aḥmad”; see his *Paradise and Hell in Islamic Traditions*, 108-112. Based on Lange’s arguments, the ascription of this work to ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī can now be laid to rest.

قال: فتخرج تسيل كما تسيل القطرة من في السماء، فيأخذها، فإذا أخذها لم يدعوها في يده طرفة عين حتى يأخذوها فيجعلوها في ذلك الكفن وذلك الحنوط ويخرج منها كأطيب نضحة مسك وجدت على وجه الأرض.⁴¹

When he is about to be accepted into the hereafter as he is departing from this world, angels will descend to the believer (*ʿabd*), [from the heavens] with faces as bright as the sun. They will sit around him [in throngs stretching] as far as the eye can see. Then the Angel of Death will come and sit at his head. He will say, “Good soul, come out to forgiveness and pleasure from God!”

It is said: So, his soul will emerge flowing like a drop of water flows from a water-skin. Then the Angel [of Death] will take hold of it. When he will grasp it, the other angels will not leave it in his hand even for the twinkling of an eye. They will take it and place it in a shroud, while the most pleasant scent of musk found on earth’s face will exude from that corpse.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah also tells his readers that the angels will come to the soul (*rūḥ*) of the dying believer and will speak with it, while the people present at the deathbed will not notice this. They will not smell the sweet fragrance nor hear the words of the conversation.⁴²

3 Angels guard the soul on its first ascent to heaven

The believer’s soul

After the person has passed away but before burial takes place, the souls of both the believer and the disbeliever will experience – in different ways – a first heavenly journey. The good soul, it is said, will be wrapped in sublime silk by angels. The soul will then be lifted up to heaven by two beautiful angels (according to al-Ghazālī) or by the Angel of Death (according to al-Muḥāsibī and Ibn Qayyim).

At the first heaven, as at every other of the seven, the voice of a heavenly agent, whose name is not given, will ask al-Amin, “The Trustworthy,” and the good soul for their names.⁴³ Muslim tradition normally identifies *al-Rūḥ al-amin* (Q 26:193) with the archangel Gabriel. Gabriel is also the spirit who, together “with the angels,” descends and ascends to God (Q 16:2, 70:4, 97:4).⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī, however,

⁴¹ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 41.

⁴² Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 65.

⁴³ Smith in her translation of al-Ghazālī’s *al-Durrab* gives the name “Gabriel” in parenthesis after al-Amin. This information, however, is not supported by al-Ghazālī’s text, as our further discussion will demonstrate.

⁴⁴ Gisela Webb, “Gabriel,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2, Leiden et al.: Brill 2002, 278. In Q 16:102, the term *rūḥ al-quḍus* (“the holy spirit,” see also Q 2:87, 2:253, and 5:110) is understood by some Muslim commentators to refer to Gabriel, the traditional angelic bearer of God’s message. Cf. Sidney Griffith, “Holy Spirit,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 2, Leiden et al.: Brill 2002, 442-444.

has it that al-Amin, as he knocks at the heavenly gate and is asked by the voice for his name, replies: “I am Ṣaṣṣā’il.”⁴⁵ According to Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, upon the good soul’s arrival in the lower heaven, it is **Gabriel** who welcomes the soul in the presence of seventy thousand angels. Each of these angels will delight the soul with glad tidings that it had not heard before.⁴⁶

Once the soul has entered the first heaven, it is al-Amin, or Gabriel, who then accompanies the good soul as it journeys onwards, “from one heaven to the next until it comes into the presence of God.”⁴⁷ Every angel in every heaven that the soul passes through smells the good soul’s exceptional sweet fragrance

⁴⁵ Al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 11-12. Ṣaṣṣā’il is usually believed in Muslim tradition to be the angel in charge of the fourth heaven. Information ascribed to the early Qur’ān-commentator Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/688) and the Christian convert to Islam and transmitter of Biblical material, Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. ca. 55/728) reads as follows:

عن ابن عباس رضي الله عنه أنه قال: ملائكة السماء الدنيا على صورة البقر وكل الله تعالى بهم ملكاً اسمه اسماعيل، وملائكة السماء الثانية على صورة العقاب والملك الموكل بهم اسمه ميخائيل، وملائكة السماء الثالثة على صورة النسر والملك الموكل بهم اسمه صاعديائيل، وملائكة السماء الرابعة على صورة الخيل والملك المؤل بهم اسمه صلصائيل، وملائكة السماء الخامسة على صورة الحور العين والملك الموكل بهم اسمه كلكائيل، وملائكة السماء السادسة على صورة الولدان والملك الموكل بهم اسمه سمحائيل وملائكة السماء السابعة على صورة بني آدم والملك الموكل بهم اسمه روبائيل. قال وهب [بن منبه]: وفوق الساعات السبع حجب فيها ملائكة لا يعرف بعضهم بعضاً لكثرة عددهم يستبحون الله تعالى بلغات مختلفة كالرعد الصاعق، والله الموفق.

On the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, may God be pleased with him, it is said: “The angels of the lower heaven are in the shape of a cow (*baqar*) while God entrusted them to an angel whose name is Ismā’il. The angels of the second heaven are in the shape of an eagle (*‘uqāb*), while the name of the angel entrusted with them is Mikhā’il. The angels of the third heaven are in the shape of a vulture (*nīsr*), while the name of the angel entrusted with them is Ṣā’diyā’il. The angels of the fourth heaven are in the shape of horses (*kbayl*), while the name of the angel entrusted with them is Ṣaṣṣā’il. The angels of the fifth heaven are in the shape of a Ḥūrī [virgin of paradise, with big black eyes], while the name of the angel entrusted with them is Kalkā’il. The angels of the sixth heaven are in the shape of children, while the name of the angel entrusted with them is Samkhā’il. The angels of the seventh heaven are in the shape of the decedents of Adam, while the name of the angel entrusted with them is Rūfā’il.” Wahb [ibn Munabbih] said: Above the seventh heaven, there are veils, in which there are angels who do not know each other due to their large number. They praise God in different tongues, which sound like numbing thunders; God is the Bestower of Success.” Cf. Qazwini, *‘Ajā’ib al-makblūqāt* = [Zakariyā ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwini], *El-Cazwini’s Kosmograhie*. vol. 1. *Die Wunder der Schöpfung*, Ferdinand Wüstenfeld, ed., Wiesbaden: M. Sändig 1967 [Repr. Göttingen: Dieterichsche Buchhandlung 1848-49], 59-60. See furthermore Qazwini, *Die Wunder* = Al-Qazwini, *Die Wunder des Himmels und der Erde*, Alma Giese, transl., Lenningen: Erdmann 2004, 71-72, and Sachiko Murata, “Angels,” in: *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, Seyyid Hossein Nasr, ed., London: Routledge 1987, 324-344, here 326-328, with an annotated list of these angels’ names, based on al-Qazwini’s *‘Ajā’ib*.

⁴⁶ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 100.

⁴⁷ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 11-12; al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 26. See similarly Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 46.

(*yastanshiqūna riḥabā*) and prays for blessings on the soul.⁴⁸ On this heavenly voyage, the soul's trustee, al-Amin, guides the good soul through oceans of fire, light, darkness, ice, and hail, until it reaches the Throne of Mercy. Some souls, despite having come so far, will be ordered back without an encounter with God, as only "those who know him" may actually reach Him at this point.⁴⁹

The souls of the most pious and of the martyrs will remain at this supreme location until Judgement Day. All other souls will be taken back to earth by angels in order to be reunited with their bodies in their graves.⁵⁰ When the soul returns to earth, it can even see its body being washed. During this time, the angels carry on a conversation with the soul, although the living are unable to hear it. Angels also pray for the soul of the believer in the heavens just as people pray over his body on the earth.⁵¹ This is the fate of all righteous and pious souls, whether they have lived as Muslims, Jews, or Christians on earth, provided, it is affirmed, that they "followed their faith" (*man kāna minhum 'alā sharī'atibi*) in both its beliefs and its ritual practices. The polytheists, however, will not experience this.⁵²

The disbeliever's soul

The profligate soul will also be taken to heaven. Like the good soul, it is accompanied by an angel whom al-Ghazālī calls al-Amin. When al-Amin is asked by the voice at the entrance to the first heaven for his name, he responds: "I am **Daqyā'il**." Daqyā'il is said to be the angel "responsible for myrmidons of punishment."⁵³ Yet, the heavenly journey of the wicked soul ends abruptly. When an unnamed agent behind the first heavenly gate is informed that the soul of a disbeliever wishes to enter, entry is denied. Al-Ghazālī writes:

⁴⁸ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 50.

⁴⁹ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 17; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 29.

⁵⁰ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 11-12, 18-20; al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 26-27, 30-31; Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 92.

⁵¹ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 50, 65; see also Ibn Qayyim, *The Soul's Journey*, 17.

⁵² al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 18 and 43, see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 30 and 47.

⁵³ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 17-18; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 17-18. Daqyā'il is probably the Arabic equivalent of Dalkiel, one of seven angels of Hell, and ruler of Sheol, the place of darkness in the Hebrew Bible. Dalkiel operates in the seventh compartment of the Jewish underworld, "punishing ten nations." Cf. Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels, Including the Fallen Angels*, New York: The Free Press 1967, 94. Apparently quoting al-Ghazālī's *al-Durrah*, Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī mentions Daqyā'il in his *al-Taḍkīrah fi aḥwāl al-marwāt wa-umūr al-ākhirah*, al-Sādiq ibn Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm, ed., vol. 1, Riyadh: Dār al-Mihāj 1425/[2004], 244:

وفي الصحيح: "أن ضرس الكافر في النار مثل أحد"، فيعرج به حتى ينتهي إلى سماء الدنيا، فيقرع الأمين الباب، فيقال: من أنت؟ فيقول: أنا دقيائيل لأت اسم الملك الموكل على زبانية العذاب دقيائيل، فيقال: من معك؟ فيقول: فلان ابن فلان بأفح أسائه وأبغضها إليه في دار الدنيا، فيقال لا أهلاً ولا سهلاً....

قال: فَيُعْرَجُ بِهِ حَتَّى يَنْتَهِيَ إِلَى سَاءِ الدُّنْيَا، فَيَقْرَعُ الْأَمِينُ الْبَابَ، فَيُقَالُ: "مَنْ أَنْتَ؟" فَيَقُولُ: "أَنَا دَقْيَائِيلُ" لِأَنَّ اسْمَ الْمَلِكِ الْمَوْكَلِ عَلَى زَبَانِيَةِ الْعَذَابِ دَقْيَائِيلُ، فَيُقَالُ: "مَنْ مَعَكَ؟"، فَيَقُولُ: "فُلَانُ ابْنُ فُلَانٍ" بِأَقْبَحِ أَسْمَائِهِ وَأَبْغَضِهَا إِلَيْهِ فِي دَارِ الدُّنْيَا، فَيُقَالُ: لَا أَهْلًا وَلَا سَهْلًا، وَلَا يُفْتَحُ لَهُ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ، وَلَا يَدْخُلُ الْجَنَّةَ.⁵⁴

It will be said: The soul [of the disbeliever, *kāfir*] will be taken up until it reaches the lower heaven. The Trustee [of the soul], al-Amin, will knock at the door.

Then he will be asked: “Who are you?” So, he replies: “I am Daqyā’il,” as the name of the angel responsible for the myrmidons (*zabāniyah*)⁵⁵ of punishment is Daqyā’il. Then he will be asked: “Who is with you?,” to which he replies: “So-and-so, the son of so-and-so,” using the ugliest and most loathsome of the names that he used to detest in the earthly realm.

Then it responds [to the soul of the wicked]: “You are not welcome!” ‘... and the gates of heaven are not open to him, and he will not enter the garden’ (in reference to Q 7:40).

When al-Amin hears this response, he will “fling the soul from his hand.” It will fall from heaven and be “flung to a distant place by the wind” (Q 22:31). Once the wicked soul reaches earth, the guardians of hell take charge of it and take it to *Sijjīn* (Q 83:7,8), explained here (just as in most recent Islamic scholarship) as “a huge stone to which souls of the profligate (*arwāḥ al-fujjār*) are brought.”⁵⁶ Eventually, however, all souls will be reunited with their bodies in their graves and will stay there until the Day of Resurrection.

4 Angels interrogate in the grave

While little is said in the Qur’ān about the situation in which the soul finds itself between death and resurrection, eschatological works are rich in details in this respect. In this literature, it is suggested that the soul attaches itself to “the breast [of the deceased] from the outside” (*bi-ṣadr min khārij al-ṣadr*) and that body and soul

⁵⁴ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 17-18; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 17-18.

⁵⁵ Cf. the Qur’ānic passages about the nineteen angels in charge of the scorching Fire, punishing the disbelievers under the supervision of their leader, the angel Mālik (Q 74:30-1). Some Muslim exegetes identify these guardian angels with the Qur’ānic *zabāniyah*, the “guards of hell” (Q 96:18) and “Over it (the Fire) stand angels, stern and strong; angels who never disobey God’s commands to them, but do as they are ordered” (Q 66:6). See furthermore Rosalind W. Gwynne, “Hell and Hellfire,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 2, Leiden et al.: Brill 2002, 414-420, here 417. See also Christian Lange, “Revisiting Hell’s Angels in the Quran,” in: *Locating Hell in Islamic Tradition*, idem, ed., Leiden and Boston: Brill 2015, 74-99, esp. 75-84 and 88-91.

⁵⁶ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 18; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 30. For the different meanings and the complex etymology of the expression *sijjīn*, see Michael Carter, “Foreign Vocabulary,” in: *Wiley Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an*, Andrew Rippin, Jawid Mojaddedi, eds., Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009, 120-139, here 137-138 (“a place of eternal imprisonment,” rather than a “register”).



The Angels Munkar and Nakir in the famous cosmography *‘Ajā’ib al-makblūqāt wa-gharā’ib al-marājūdāt* (“The Wonders of Creation and the Unique Phenomena of Existence”) by Zakariyā’ ibn Muḥammad al-Qazwini (d. 682 AH/1283 CE). Ms. Walters 659, fol. 51B. Date: 1121 AH/ 1717 CE (Ottoman Empire). Reproduced from Wikipedia with the permission of the Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, Maryland, USA.

will await the day of resurrection together in the grave.⁵⁷ However, this time in the grave is not a lifeless, uneventful period. Rather, it is a state and time in which body and soul experience a number of events, including visits from angels, interrogations about the deceased’s life on earth, as well as previews of life in the hereafter, whether in paradise or hell. Interestingly, this concept of a “life in the grave” recalls an ancient Egyptian idea according to which the soul *ka* (that is, the more intellectual and spiritual aspects of a person, in contrast to the soul *ba*, representing the personality) takes up its abode in the tomb, contemplating and viewing pictures and other representations of the deceased’s life on earth.⁵⁸

In Islam, two angels, **Munkar and Nakir**, well known in the tradition as *fattānā al-qabr* (“the two Interrogators in the Grave,”⁵⁹ visit the dead. “Reprehensible” and “Reproachful” (or “The Denied” and “The Denier”), as their names can be translated, enter the grave and interrogate the deceased “with severity and reproach him

⁵⁷ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 21; see al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 32.

⁵⁸ E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Book of the Dead: The Papyrus of Ani in the British Museum. The Egyptian Text with Interlinear Transliteration and Translation, A Running Translation, Introduction, Etc.*, New York: Dover 1967 (abridged republication of the work originally published in 1895), lxiv; Geddes MacGregor, *Images of Afterlife: Beliefs from Antiquity to Modern Times*, New York: Paragon House 1992, 59.

⁵⁹ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 23.

with roughness.”⁶⁰ They make the dead sit up in the grave, which will widen for this purpose, and ask the deceased person questions concerning their faith, such as: “Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your Prophet? And what is your prayer direction?”⁶¹

Al-Muhāsibī mentions the two angels of the grave, but follows the Qur’ānic usage (“the angels take them in death and beat their faces and their backs, because they practiced things that incurred God’s wrath,” Q 47:27-28; see also 8:50) in not providing names for them. He also states, however, that the two angels will strike the grave with their legs on both sides and that they will cause the deceased, while in the grave, to look at what they can expect in the hereafter, whether paradise or hell.⁶²

Al-Ghazālī elaborates on this idea by stating that God determines for the deceased the right responses to the questions put forward by the two angels. In fact, to the believer (*mu’min*) who has worked for the good in his life but has no share in knowledge (*laysa ma’abu ḥazz min al-’ilm*), God will send his good deeds in personified form. These deeds will appear to him in the best image, wearing pleasant perfume and clothing, and will instruct him how to respond to the questions that Munkar and Nakir will ask, so that the deceased need not worry. Munkar and Nakir will expand the top of the pious person’s tomb and make it a great dome. They will open for him on his right side a gate through which to view paradise and smell its fresh breezes. The disbeliever’s soul, in contrast, will be tormented by gazing upon hell and its punishments through a gate on the left side of the grave.⁶³

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah specifies that the angels will visit the dead shortly after those attending the funeral have left and the earth has been leveled over the corpse. They will not be prevented from entering the grave by the soil, as angels can move around in dense substances as easily as birds do in the air. He writes:

فإذا وُضِعَ في لَحْدِهِ وَسُؤِّيَ عَلَيْهِ التُّرَابُ لَمْ يَحْبِجِ التُّرَابُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ عَنِ الْوَصُولِ إِلَيْهِ، بَلْ لَوْ نُقِّرَ لَهُ حَجْرٌ فَأُودِعَ فِيهِ وَخْتَمَ عَلَيْهِ بِالرِّصَاصِ لَمْ يَمْنَعِ وَصُولَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِلَيْهِ، فَإِنَّ هَذِهِ الْأَجْسَامَ الْكَثِيفَةَ لَا تَمْنَعُ خَرَقَ الْأَرْوَاحِ لَهَا، بَلِ الْحِجَّتْ لَا يَمْنَعُهَا ذَلِكَ بَلْ قَدْ جَعَلَ اللَّهُ سَبْحَانَهُ الْحِجَارَةَ وَالتُّرَابَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْهَوَاءِ لِلطَّيْرِ.⁶⁴

When the corpse has been placed in the grave, and the soil is levelled over him, the soil does not prevent the angels from reaching him. Even if a stone had been hollowed out for him so that he was placed/put into it and the opening sealed over with lead, it

⁶⁰ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 23. See also Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 47.

⁶¹ al-Muhāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 154, 155; see also al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 23-24; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 34; and Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 47 (almost verbatim).

⁶² al-Muhāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 155; see also al-Muhāsibī, *The Visualization*, 19.

⁶³ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 25; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 35.

⁶⁴ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 65 ; see also Ibn Qayyim, *The Soul’s Journey*, 6.

would not stop the angels from reaching him. Indeed, these dense substances cannot hinder the passage of souls. Nor are the *jinn* hindered by them. God – glory be to Him – made stone and soil for angels equal to what air is for birds.

The image and function of Munkar and Nakir carries certain echoes of the Zoroastrian concept of the angels *Srōsh* (“Obedience”) and *Ātar* (“Fire”). These angels are believed to appear on the first night after a person has passed away. They welcome the pious soul and guide it over the Bridge of Judgement, which separates the world of the living from that of the dead.⁶⁵

Another angel, named **Rūmān**, a figure not found in the Qurʾān and perhaps introduced to the Islamic tradition at a rather later time, is mentioned only by al-Ghazālī. Rūmān visits the grave even before Munkar and Nakir do. He roams the graves in the graveyard and demands from the deceased that he write down his deeds, using his shroud as paper, his saliva as ink, and his finger as pen. The deceased must then seal his record and hang it around his neck, in line with the words of Qurʾān 17:13, which states: “We have fastened the fate of every man on his neck.” Al-Ghazālī says in this regard:

فإذا أُدخل الميت قبره ... ثم يناديه ملك اسمه رومان، وقد رُوي عن ابن مسعود رضي الله عنه أنه قال: قلت يا رسول الله، ما أول ما يلقي الميت إذا أُدخل قبره؟ قال: يا ابن مسعود، لقد سألتني عن شيء ما سألتني عنه أحد إلا أنت. فأول ما يناديه ملك اسمه رومان يجوس خلال المقابر، فيقول: يا عبد الله، أكتب عملك!، فيقول: ليس معي دواة ولا قرطاس، فيقول: هيات كفنك قرطاسك، ومدادك ريقك، وقلمك إصبعك. فيقطع له من كفنه قطعة. ثم يجعل العبد يكتب، وإن كان غير كاتب في الدنيا. فيذكر حينئذ حسناته وسنناته كيوم واحد، ثم يطوى الملك تلك الرقعة ويعلقها في عنقه. ثم قرأ رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم: ﴿وكل إنسان أزمانه طائرته في عنقه﴾، أي عمله.⁶⁶

Once the deceased is laid in his grave and the earth is poured over him, Thereupon an angel named Rūmān calls to him. It is related from Ibn Masʿūd – may God be pleased with him – that he said: I asked: “O Messenger of God, what is the first thing that the deceased encounters when he is laid in his grave?” He replied, “O Ibn Masʿūd, you ask me about something that no one has ever asked about, except for you.”

⁶⁵ Jal Dastur Cursetji Pavry, *The Zoroastrian Doctrine of a Future Life: From Death to the Individual Judgement*, New York: Columbia University Press 1929, 14-16, 23, 85; William W. Malandra (transl. and ed.), *An Introduction to Ancient Iranian Religion: Readings from the Avesta and the Achaemenid Inscriptions*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1983, 135-140. The idea that ancient Iran is the region of initial importance for the concept of angels in the ancient Near East is supported by Annemarie Schimmel, who stated, “Iran kann als Heimat der Engelvorstellung im engeren Sinn angesehen werden”; cf. her article “Geister, Dämonen, Engel,” in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (= RGG3), 3rd ed., vol. 2, Leiden: Brill 1958, 1298-1301, here 1300.

⁶⁶ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 22; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 32-33.

[*The Prophet said:*] “The first one to call him is an angel called Rūmān, who roams about the graves, saying: ‘O servant of God, write down your deeds’. So, he answers: ‘I do not have ink or parchment with me’. ‘But oh!’, [Rūmān responds], ‘your shroud is your parchment, your saliva your ink and your finger your pen’. So, he cuts for him a piece of his shroud and makes the servant write, even if he was unable to write during his lifetime. Then he mentions his good and bad deeds as if [they all happened] in one day. Then the angel folds up that shroud and hangs it around his neck.”

At that point, the Messenger of God – peace and blessings be upon him – recited, ‘We have bound each human’s destiny to his neck (Q 17:13)’, referring to his deeds.

The portrayal continues as follows:

فإذا فرغَ من ذلك، دخل عليه فتانا القبر وهما ملكان أسودان يخْرِقان الأرض بأنيابهما، لهما شعور مسدولة، يجزانها على الأرض، كلاهما كالرعد القاصف وأعينهما كالبرق الخاطف ونفسهما كالريح العاصف بيد كل واحد منهما مقمع من حديد لو اجتمع عليه الثقلان ما رفعاه، لو ضُربَ به أعظم جبل ضربةً لصار دكاً.

فإذا رأتهما النفس ارتعدت وولّت هاربةً، فتدخل في منخر الميت فيحيا الميت من الصدر ويكون كهيئته عند الغرغرة ولا يقدر على جراك غير آتة يسمع وينظر.

قال: فيسألانه بعنفٍ وبهراة بجفاء، وقد صار التراب له كالماء حينما تحرك انفسح فيه، ووجد فرجة فيقولان له: من ربك؟ وما دينك؟ ومن نبيك؟ وما قبلتك؟

فمن وفقه الله تعالى وثبته بالقول الثابت فيقول: ومن وكلكما عليّ؟ ومن أرسلكما إليّ؟ وهذا لا يقوله إلا العلماء الأختار

فيقول أحدهما للآخر: صدق فقد كُفي شرنا، ثم يضربان عليه القبر مثل القبة العظيمة ويفتحان له باباً إلى الجنة من تلقاء يمينه، ثم يفرشان له من حريرها ورِيحانها ويدخل عليه من نسيها ورؤحها ويأتيه عمله في صورة أحب الأشخاص إليه يُؤنسه ويُحْدِثه ويملاً قبره نوراً ولا يزال في فرح وسرور ما بقيت الدنيا حتى تقوم الساعة، ويسأل: متى تقوم الساعة؟ فليس شيء أحب إليه من قيامها.⁶⁷

[*The Prophet said:*] When he (Rūmān) finishes this matter, the two denunciators will enter his grave. They are two black angels whose canine teeth penetrate the earth, with long hair hanging down and dragging over the ground, with voices like cracking thunder, with eyes like flashing lightning, and with breath like forceful wind. Each one of them carries a pair of iron tongs (*miqma'*) so heavy that the inhabitants of heaven and earth together would not be able to lift them; if the greatest mountain was hit with them, it would be crushed.

Once the soul sees these two angels, it shudders, runs away, and enters the nostrils of the deceased. Then the deceased will come back to life, from his chest [upwards], and be

⁶⁷ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 23-24; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 33-24. A similar passage is found in al-Qazwini, ‘*Ajā’ib*, 60-61; al-Qazwini, *Die Wunder*, 74.

back in the same condition that he was in when exhaling his last breath. He will only hear and see, but be unable to move.

The Prophet said: “They will ask him with severity and shout at him boorishly. By then, the soil will become like water, so that, in whatever direction the deceased moves, it will widen for him. Should he then find relief, they will ask him: ‘Who is your God?’, ‘What is your religion?’, ‘Who is your prophet?’, and ‘What is your prayer direction?’

Whoever is granted success by God, Exalted be He, and this consolidated through an affirmative saying [in the Qur’ān], he will say: ‘Who has put you in charge over me?’ and ‘Who sent you to me?’ [However, this kind of statement] will be uttered only by select knowers.

One of the angels will tell the other: ‘He said the truth; and he is protected from our evil’. Then they will cover the grave over him in the form of a mighty dome and open a gate for him toward paradise from his right side. The two angels will furnish the grave for him with the silk and the sweet basil of paradise. He will smell its fragrance and freshness. His deeds will come to him in the image of the person most liked by him on earth. This person will be friendly to him, speak with him, and fill his grave with light. He will continue in happiness and delight as long as this earthly world lasts, until the Hour of Judgement. He will then ask: ‘When will the Hour take place?’, and nothing will be dearer to him than that.

Further research will be needed to explore how this idea of the grave-visiting angel Rūmān, otherwise unattested in the early Muslim sources, was introduced to Islamic eschatological thought. One wonders, for example, whether the Islamic perception of this figure might have been inspired by a Rabbinic idea, according to which the Angel of Death,

Places himself upon the grave of a person after burial and strikes him upon the hand, asking him his name.... For three successive days the Angel of Death, with a chain made half of iron and half of fire, smites off all the members from the body, while his host of messengers replace them in order that the dead may receive more strokes. All parts of the body, especially the eyes, ears, lips, and tongue, receive thus their punishment for the sins they have committed.⁶⁸

Another possible parallel can be found in the Iranian concept of Vizarsh, a demon who struggles with the soul of the person during the first three nights after he has passed away.⁶⁹

Al-Ghazālī’s account of death (as the cessation of all the biological functions of life) and of 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 resurrection

⁶⁸ Cf. Kaufmann Kohler, “Hibbut ha-Keber,” in: *Jewish Encyclopaedia: A Descriptive Record of the History, Religion, Literature, and Customs of the Jewish People from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, vol. 6, New York et al.: Funk & Wagnall 1906, 385.

⁶⁹ Vizarsh (or *vizarsha*, “drag-off”), with his devilish crew, tries to ensnare the soul of the righteous, casting a noose around its neck to drag it off to hell; but he fails in his attempt and the snare falls off. Cf. Pavry, *The Zoroastrian Doctrine*, 12. This information is found in *Bundabishn* (Pahlavi: “Original Creation”), a Zoroastrian scripture dating from the 9th century CE. However, it is based on ancient material from a lost part of the original *Avesta* and even preserves some pre-Zoroastrian elements.

and divine judgement. Ibn Qayyim, by contrast, contemplates the question of whether a human may save himself from punishment, with explicit reference to the *barzakh* or isthmus (that is, the state or space between this world and the next). He answers this question in the affirmative by mentioning a dream of the Prophet, maintaining in this context that, when the Angel of Death is about to take a person’s soul, the dying person’s good and pious deeds arrive at the scene in personified form and intercede to ease the time in the grave for the deceased. These deeds and ethical behaviours may even suffice to drive away the Angel of Death, the devils, and the angels of punishment.⁷⁰ Also, if a believer “supplicates for his dead brother, an angel takes this supplication to him in his grave.”⁷¹

5 *The tasks of the angels at the resurrection of the dead*

Resurrection and divine judgement will be signaled by the blast (*naḥkba*) of the divine Trumpet. With the awakening of the dead, a “Caller” – the angel Isrāfil (Raphael; or Gabriel according to some Muslim exegetes in accordance with the Christian tradition) – “will call from a nearby place,” exhorting the dead to come out from their graves so that Divine Judgement may begin (Q 50:41). According to Muslim tradition, this place of the Caller is the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.⁷²

Resurrection follows immediately from the single blast of Isrāfil’s Trumpet, according to most Qur’ānic passages. Only Q 39:68 specifies that the Trumpet “will be sounded once again” and that it is then that the dead “will be on their feet, looking on.” According to al-Ghazālī, a “second death” will occur between the two blasts of the trumpet, this time not of the body and the outer senses (like on earth) but of the “inner senses” instead. Reinforcing the idea that all the human senses are put to death during the state of the “second death,” so that nothing is left in the lifeless bodies, al-Ghazālī surmises that an angel would not stay in such an alien corpse even if he was forced into it.⁷³ This idea of a second death once again seems to resonate with an ancient Egyptian conception, in this case the famous belief that the heart of the deceased person will be weighed in judgement against an ostrich feather on the divine balance. The good heart will be so light that its owner will be admitted to the realm of bliss, while the heavy hearts of those who fall

⁷⁰ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 82 (and 33); see also Ibn Qayyim, *The Soul’s Journey*, 26-27.

⁷¹ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 90; see also Ibn Qayyim, *The Soul’s Journey*, 33.

⁷² al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 33.

⁷³ Based on respective Qur’ānic references, the various majoritarian (Sunni) theological approaches share a belief in the resurrection of the body. The spirit that proceeds from God (*nafs* or *rūḥ*, depending on the term’s definition) rejoins the resurrected body and both become immortal. According to these views, the soul would not be immortal without a resurrected body. Cf. furthermore Michael Sells, “Spirit,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*, vol. 5, Leiden: Brill 2006, 114-117, here 116; Arent J. Wensinck, *Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, Cambridge: Frank Cass 1932 (repr. Abingdon: Routledge 2008), 129-30, 195, 268.

short in goodness will fail the test. In fact, the soul represented by this heavy heart will either be eaten by a ravenous monster lying in wait for this occasion (thus, the soul experiences something equivalent to a second death of the human it represents), or it will be punished in a fiery furnace.⁷⁴

The critical role played by angels in the setting and conduct of resurrection is highlighted by our author. He points out that:

فإذا ساقبتهم الملائكة زمراً أفواجاً يُحشَر كلُّ واحد على حاله تحت كلِّ واحد منهم ما قَدَّر له، وجمَعوا في صعيد واحد، الأولون والآخرون، أمر الجليل جلَّ جلاله ملائكة السماء الدنيا أن يتولَّوهم، فيأخذ كلَّ واحد منهم إنساناً وشخصاً من المبعوثين، إنساً وجمناً ووحشاً وطيراً. ويحوِّلونهم إلى الأرض الثانية، وهي أرض بيضاء من فضة نورية، وصارت الملائكة من وراء العالمين حلقةً واحدةً، فإذا هم أكثر من أهل الأرض بعشر مرّات، ثم إنَّ الله سبحانه وتعالى يأمر ملائكة السماء الثانية فيُحدِّقون بالكلِّ حلقة واحدة، فإذا هم مثلهم عشرين مرّة.⁷⁵

When the angels hand over the dead in groups and bands, while each individual is raised in his own state, mounted on that which has been ordained for him, they are gathered on a single highland, the first [to die mixed in] with the last. The Glorious One orders the angels of the near heaven to take care of them. Everyone takes one from amongst the resurrected humans, *jinn*, animals, and birds.

They transport them to the second earth, which is an earth white with silvery light (see Q 14:48).⁷⁶ The angels stand in ranks behind the creatures in one great circle; and they number more than ten times the people of the earth. Then, God, praised and exalted be He, will command the angels of the second heaven to form a single circle around them all. Then, they would number twenty times more than the others.

The angels of the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh heavens will then descend, each time outnumbering the previous group of angels by thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy times respectively. Each group of angels will form their own great circle around the circle of angels that had arrived before them. At this point, all of creation blends and mixes together, one part on top of another, “until one foot is raised above a thousand other feet by the density of the throng.”⁷⁷ However, angels will comfort the believers in that terrible moment by repeating to them the Qurʾānic promise that on that day the God-fearing will not have to fear or be sad,

⁷⁴ Budge, *The Book*, cxviii, cxxx; 16; MacGregor, *Images*, 58-60, 101.

⁷⁵ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 54.

⁷⁶ Q 14:48: “One Day – 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. [All will be judged] so that God may reward each soul as it deserves: God is swift in His reckoning.”

⁷⁷ al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 54-55.

in indirect reference to the verses, ‘On that day, ... my servants there is no fear for you today, nor shall you grieve’ (Q 43:67-68).⁷⁸

On the Day of Reckoning, eight angels “will bear the throne of your Lord above them” (Q 69:17). Also on that Day, as during all existence, the *malā’ikah muqarrabūn*, “the angels who are close to Him” (Q 4:172), “glorify Him tirelessly” (as do all “those that are with Him” in the heavens and the earth [Q 21:19-20]).

An angel, called in the Qur’ānic text “the summoner from whom there is no escape” (Q 20:10), will summon the resurrected to the place of Judgement. Guardian angels, called in the Qur’ān “watchers, noble recorders who know what you do” (Q 82:11-12), register deeds and actions executed in this world so that the people will be judged accordingly in the next. One of the “receptors set to record” sits at a person’s right shoulder (recording the good deeds), another one on his left (recording the bad deeds) (Q 50:17). Based on this Qur’ānic evidence, some modern scholars seem to understand the Qur’ānic adjectives of the *kirām kātībūn* (“honourable scribes”) – *raqīb* (“watcher”) of good deeds and *‘atīd* (“ever-present” recorder) of bad actions – as personal names, although no support for this view has so far been found among the classical Qur’ān-commentators, nor elsewhere in the classical Arabic sources.⁷⁹ During judgement, these angels are charged with bringing along the pages of a person’s heavenly record, in which all their good and evil deeds are recorded. The angels will place the respective pages on the pan of the divine balance so that the fate of the person will be decided and it will be learned whether they will be sent to paradise or to hell.⁸⁰

Based on Qur’ānic evidence, it is generally believed that the **angels and the prophets** will bear witness on behalf of individuals and entire communities, respectively (Q 2:143; 16:89). More specifically, al-Ghazālī indicates that God permits the scholars (*‘ulamā*) at some point during judgement to intercede for their virtuous neighbors and brethren. This is the time at which the scholars will “order an angel to call out among the people” to individually announce a scholar’s intercession for those who had helped him on earth to ease his harsh living conditions.⁸¹ However, on the Day of Resurrection, as al-Muḥāsibī specifies, the angels will cover themselves with their wings despite their huge bodies. They will humble themselves and submit to their Lord.⁸² Gabriel, as al-Muḥāsibī also notes, will be called by God on Judgement Day to “fetch hellfire”:

⁷⁸ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 64; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 53-54.

⁷⁹ ‘Umar Sulaymān al-Ashqar, *‘Ālam al-malā’ika al-abrār*, Kuwait: Maktabat al-Falāḥ 1403/1983, 18, which refers to “some scholars” (*ba’d al-‘ulamā*), without providing a reference for this statement. A search on the Internet, however, reveals that there are (non-academic) websites claiming that the expressions *raqīb* and *‘atīd* are names of angels.

⁸⁰ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 96-97; al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 80.

⁸¹ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 88; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 75.

⁸² al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 158; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 31.

ثم نادى [الله]: يا جبريل، ائتني بالنار، فتوهما وقد أتى جبريل فقال لها: يا حتم، أجيبي ... فتوهما حين اضطربت وفارت ونارت. ونظرت إلى الخلائق من بُعد مكانها وجذبت خزائنها متوثبة على الخلائق غضباً لغضب ربه على من خالف أمره وعصاه.⁸³

Then, God demands: “Gabriel, bring me Hell-fire!” Imagine it, when Gabriel will come and say to it: “Oh Hell, comply!” ... So, imagine both of them when Hell will start to quiver, to gush copiously, and to flame up; and it will look at the creatures from afar; ... it will drag its keepers, jumping up onto the creatures, in fury against those who disobeyed His orders and sinned.

After God passes judgement on all the disobedient and wrongdoers, they are pushed by unnamed divine agents into the vaults of hell. Only the believers, the Muslims, the doers of the good work, the knowers of the Truth, the affirmers of Revelation, the martyrs, the righteous, and the messengers remain at the place of resurrection, al-Ghazālī writes.⁸⁴ This is also the time at which a giant unnamed angel is revealed to them to the left of the Throne. He pretends to be the Lord, but the people will remain steadfast and not give up their belief in God. Then, another, even more gigantic, angel appears on the right side of the Throne, pretending to be the Lord. But, again, the people will adhere to their belief in God until the Lord himself appears to them and allows them to pass over the Bridge (or pathway) that spans hell (*ṣirāt al-jahīm*), set up for the faithful to reach paradise.⁸⁵

The idea is evoked that, on that Day of Reckoning (*yawm al-ḥisāb*, Q 38:16, 26, 53; 40:27), God will command that heavenly agents adorn paradise and bring it near to the resurrected who await judgement. God will likewise order “a group of divine guardians” to bring hell near, a hell “which walks on four legs and is bound by seventy thousand reins,” as al-Ghazālī tells his readers.⁸⁶

It must be stressed that several heavenly agents and actions mentioned in the Qurʾān are entirely absent from the manuals of al-Muḥāsibī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Qayyim. These include, for example, **Riḍwān** (“Good-pleasure,” Q 13:23-24), the angelic Keeper of the Gates to Paradise who welcomes the pious at the gardens of perpetual bliss. Likewise, **Mālik** (Q 43:77), the “Possessor” or Keeper of Hell, who is traditionally believed to be an angel,⁸⁷ is not mentioned by any of the three au-

⁸³ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 161; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 43-44.

⁸⁴ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 81; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 70.

⁸⁵ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 81; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 71.

⁸⁶ al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 67; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 61. In spite of its reins, hell will break free and storm, “clattering and thundering and moaning,” towards the crowd of people at the place of judgement. 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.

al-Ghazālī, “al-Durrah,” 67-68; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 61-62.

⁸⁷ Mālik is the one telling the wicked who appeal to him that they must remain in Hell because “they abhorred the truth when the truth was brought to them,” and who thus be-

thors. While al-Muḥāsibī briefly mentions the “keepers” (*kbuzzān*) of Hell-fire,⁸⁸ the three authors otherwise appear to make no explicit reference to the “harsh, terrible angels” (Q 66:6), nineteen in number, who guard Hell-fire, God having made their number “a test for the disbelievers” (Q 74:30-31). Nor do they refer to the Qur’ānic idea that the angels shall enter Paradise “from every gate” (Q 13:23-24).⁸⁹ However, since the manuals under review here expressly deal with eschatological issues relating to death in this world, the grave, and resurrection in the hereafter, we should not be surprised to find that topics that are related to the abodes of final confinement in the hereafter fall outside the thematic scope of these accounts.

6 *Additional characteristics of angels*

Al-Muḥāsibī also provides a few physical descriptions of (nameless) angels. Angels are said, for example, to move fast and to have “large bodies and loud voices” (*bi-kabīr ajsāmihim wa-baḥwīl aṣwātihim*).⁹⁰ Furthermore, they have hands with palms that feel harsh when they put them on the person’s upper arms while taking him or her to the place of divine judgement.⁹¹ Angels move quickly, setting off “at a fast pace” with the person on the way to judgement.⁹²

In terms of their duties, angels cause horror and terror in the people waiting for Judgement.⁹³ They drag people to the place of judgement and loudly announce God’s ruling before all creation. In the case of a believer, they will declare: “This is so-and-so, the son of so-and-so, he will be blessed today and will never be wretched again.” In the case of a disbeliever (*kāfir*) or hypocrite (*munāfiq*), they will proclaim: “This is so-and-so, the son of so-and-so, today he will be wretched and will never feel happy again.”⁹⁴ What is more, angels will humiliate the disbeliever and sinner because he pretended in this world to be a good person, when he was not.⁹⁵ To the houses of the believer and blessed in paradise, they will bring gifts

came known in Islamic tradition as the “Keepers of Hellfire,” assisted by 19 mysterious Guards of Hell, the *zabāniyah*. Cf. Q 43:77 and 96:18.

⁸⁸ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 161. See also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 44.

⁸⁹ With the salutation: “Peace be with you, because you have remained steadfast. What an excellent reward is this [final] home of yours!” (Q 13:24).

⁹⁰ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 157; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 29.

⁹¹ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 166; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 63.

⁹² For upper arms, the Arabic text has *ḍabīʿuka*, which looks like a misspelling of *ḍabʿaika*, “your two upper arms.” Cf. al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 166; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 63.

⁹³ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 165; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 60-61.

⁹⁴ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 165, 170, 172; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 60, 77, 86-87.

⁹⁵ al-Muḥāsibī, “al-Tawahhum,” 172; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 89.

and presents.⁹⁶ The angels also humble themselves and submit to their Lord in front of Him.⁹⁷

Al-Ghazali states that the angels may appear to humans in ways that are different from their appearance in their own angelic world; they will appear to them in ways that accord with the extent of the respective human's degree of understanding.⁹⁸ The appearance of angels seems to resemble that of humans, as they are described on several occasions as having hands.⁹⁹ Specific mention is made of two of the angels being black,¹⁰⁰ namely Munkar and Nakir, which prompts the question of whether this implies that all other angels are white. Angels are also said to have prostrated themselves before Adam when he still lived in Paradise, before he disobeyed his Lord and was expelled from the Garden.¹⁰¹

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah adds to this the notion that there are angels who live in the heavens "in throngs" (coll.: *mala'*).¹⁰² They are "creatures like the *jinn*," who may live with humans on the earth; and they fought with the believers [at Badr] and "struck down the disbelievers with whips" (*taḍribu al-kuffār bi-l-siyāt*) and shouted at them (*taṣīḥu bihim*). However, the Muslims did not see or hear them.¹⁰³ Furthermore, when a servant of God supplicates for his dead brother, an angel will take the supplication to the dead in the grave, and the angel will say, "You, owner of this strange grave! Here is a gift from a brother who feels compassion for you!"¹⁰⁴ Angels were created prior to the *jinn* and humans.¹⁰⁵ They need no physical bodies to carry out their duties,¹⁰⁶ and they roam all the physical and celestial worlds as they bring glad tidings not only to the dying and the dead in the grave, but also to those in the hereafter.¹⁰⁷

7 Concluding remarks

Authoritative Muslim writers on eschatology such as al-Muḥāsibī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah make it quite clear that angels are integral parts of, and active participants in, Islam's end-time scenarios. In fact, their vivid and highly imaginative descriptions of the angels' activities are central topics in their writings. While the three authors examined in the present study make it unequivocally clear

⁹⁶ al-Muḥāsibī, "al-Tawahhum," 189; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 151.

⁹⁷ al-Muḥāsibī, "al-Tawahhum," 158; see also al-Muḥāsibī, *Visualization*, 31.

⁹⁸ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 4; al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 21.

⁹⁹ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 7; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 23.

¹⁰⁰ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 23; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 33.

¹⁰¹ al-Ghazālī, "al-Durrah," 37; see also al-Ghazālī, *The Pearl*, 43.

¹⁰² Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 41; Ibn Qayyim, *The Soul's Journey*, 7.

¹⁰³ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 71; see also Ibn Qayyim, *The Soul's Journey*, 18.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 90; Ibn Qayyim, *The Soul's Journey*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 148.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 148.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Qayyim, *Kitāb al-rūḥ*, 93.

that they draw for their respective views primarily upon the corresponding Qur’ānic passages, they (like others working in the Muslim eschatological tradition) also creatively use related ideas drawn from the rich pool of Near Eastern eschatological traditions.¹⁰⁸ Through resourceful adoption of relevant extra-Qur’ānic perspectives, a number of ancient Near and Middle Eastern eschatological visions have come to be incorporated into an Islamic framework and have, thus, been Islamicised. This general insight is also true more specifically when looking at the images of heavenly agents carrying out the work of their eschatological functions.

Second, the Arabic eschatological texts surveyed here clearly reemphasise the Islamic idea that the primary function of angels is to serve God as messengers and agents and, thus, to carry out His will. As in Judaism and in Christianity, angels in Islam are mediators between the known physical world of humankind and the unknown, celestial world of the divine. Moreover, the angels are privileged to move freely between these two realms.

Angels have a wide range of purposes and duties within this framework, as al-Muḥāsibī, al-Ghazālī, and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah emphasise in their works by providing detailed and intensely vivid descriptions of these tasks. This can be seen, for example, in the case of al-Amin, an angel who accompanies the soul on its initial trip to heaven before it is returned to its body for burial. Al-Amin is identified as the angel Ṣaṣa’il, who is said to escort the soul of the believer, and the angel Daqyā’il, who is designated as the escort of the soul of the disbeliever.

Depicting the acceptance of the soul into heaven, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah names Gabriel, “the Angel of Mercy,” as the angel entrusted with the soul’s journey through the seven heavens up to the Throne of God, before the soul is taken back to its body in the grave. Gabriel, well-known in the Muslim tradition as the messenger sent by God to communicate the Qur’ānic revelation to Muḥammad, is portrayed in these eschatological writings as the soul’s constant companion, guide, and cognitive intermediary on its journey through heaven. Indeed, the eschatological functions and images associated with Gabriel also bring to mind the vital role he is assigned in the story of Muḥammad’s *mi’rāj*, or ascension to heaven, as depicted in Islamic historical and biographical literature.¹⁰⁹ Yet one may also, in this context, think of a more general religious concept, according to which Gabriel often acts together with Michael, the angel who is said to provide nourishment for body and soul in this world, and who is also given the role of transcendental Rewarder of good deeds. Thus, in the Muslim religious and eschatological traditions, Gabriel and Michael play a prominent role as they offer dogmatic instruction to

¹⁰⁸ See for the more general picture my articles “«Gepriesen sei der, der seinen Diener bei Nacht reisen ließ» (Koran 17:1): Paradiesvorstellungen und Himmelsreisen im Islam – Grundfesten des Glaubens und literarische Topoi“, in: *Jenseitsreisen: ERANOS 2009 und 2010*, Erik Hornung, Andreas Schweizer, eds., Basel: Schwabe 2011, 15-56 and “«God Disdains Not to Strike a Simile» (Q 2:26).”

¹⁰⁹ See also Webb, “Angel,” 91.

believers about the configuration and significance of the world beyond death and beyond human sensory perception.

Furthermore, as in the Bible, angels in the Qurʾān and the Muslim eschatological literature act almost exclusively within the framework established by God's omnipotence. They have no free will, something that is as true when they serve as God's agents of interrogation and punishment as it is when they act benevolently. ʿIzrāʾīl, the Angel of Death, mentioned in the Bible on more than one occasion,¹¹⁰ is portrayed in the Muslim literature as a frightening being of immense power. Through his divinely mandated duty of seizing souls at the point of death, he symbolises in Islam the universal religious idea that no one can escape his or her mortal fate.¹¹¹ This idea finds its expression in, for example, the Muslim notion of the Angel of Death's visitation at the deathbed, accompanied by other angelic beings and visionary guides, or by ugly demons. Likewise, Munkar and Nakir, the Angels of Punishment, interrogate the deceased in the tomb with questions about the state and seriousness of his faith and punish them for their failings. However, this 'trial in the grave' does not replace Divine Judgement or render it superfluous. Instead, it presents a preliminary solution to a human mind that might wonder at the perplexing ideas of death, resurrection, judgement, and eternal life, and at the temporal gap between the individual human death and collective divine judgement.¹¹² It is not, therefore, surprising that Muslim ideas of this kind reverberate and further develop eschatological thoughts known from other monotheistic religions, including those concerning the function and image of the Angel of Death in Rabbinic and Kabbalistic texts. Indeed, the Muslim idea of the examination and punishment of the dead in their tombs has striking parallels in certain Christian and Jewish sources (Hebr.: *hibbūt ha-keber*, lit. "the beating of the grave").¹¹³ Nevertheless, it is worth noting that, as the Dutch Orientalist Arent Jan Wensinck (1882-1993) observed, certain of these Jewish ideas seem to belong to the "post-Islamic period," as he calls it, thus indicating an Islamic influence on Judaism, rather than vice-versa.¹¹⁴ Still, the narrative complexity and richness of detail evident in the respective Muslim descriptions of the eschatological roles of angels, coupled with

¹¹⁰ For example, Exodus 12:23; 2 Samuel 24:16; Isaiah 37:36.

¹¹¹ Christopher M. Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold: Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions*, Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield 1992, 2010², 86.

¹¹² For two angels of death in the Hebrew Bible, see also van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, vol. 4, 533.

¹¹³ One of seven modes of judgement or of punishment that humans undergo after death, as described already by Rabbi Eliezer (c. 40-120 CE), a leading Rabbinic figure of his day. Cf. Kaufmann Kohler, "Hibbūt ha-Keber," 385.

¹¹⁴ For Christian parallels, see Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold*, 44. For similar issues in Judaism, see Johann Ch. G. Bodenschatz, *Kirchliche Verfassung der heutigen Juden*, vol. 2, Erlangen: Selbstverlag 1748, 95-96; Arent J. Wensinck, Arthur S. Tritton, "Adhāb al-Ḳabr," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*El²*), vol. 1, Leiden: Brill 1979, 186-187.

the emotional intensity that these portrayals yield, must be seen as strikingly distinctive features of Muslim eschatological writing.

Third, the eschatological texts we have examined here provide their readers with impressively detailed instruction about the activities and functions of angels and other transcendental beings in space and time. Indeed, these various angelic engagements, when taken together, help to depict an intriguing eschatological scenario, which may be summarised as follows:

At the point of death:

- Four angels descend to the dying person to extract his soul from the body. They “stretch out their hands” to the soul of the dying (Q 6:93-94), dragging out the believer’s soul slowly and gradually but removing the disbeliever’s soul with pressure and force.
- The Angel of Death reclaims all the souls, stabbing the heart of the dying with a spear rubbed in fiery poison so that the soul must leave the body.
- Two beautiful, sweet-smelling angels will be in command of the good soul. The Angel of Death will take the bad soul in his hand and ugly, rotten-smelling guardians of hell will grab it.
- Gabriel, the Angel of Mercy, appears to the dying person who is a believer, driving away the devils who tempt him at the point of death to give up his Muslim faith.

The soul’s initial journey to heaven:

- Angels will lift all the souls to the first heaven. They wrap the good soul in sublime silk, but pack the profligate soul in haircloth.
- An angel called al-Amin, “The Trustee” of the soul, will accompany the souls, both the good and the profligate, to the first heaven. The angel entrusted with the soul on this trip is *Ṣaṣaʿil* (in the case of the good soul) and *Daqyāʿil* (in the case of the profligate soul).
- Gabriel will guide the good soul through all the heavens. Entry into heaven will be denied to the profligate soul and it will be sent back to earth where the guardians of hell will take charge of it. They will take it to *Sijm* (Q 83:7,8), a place dreadful like hell. Both the good and the bad souls will be taken back to their bodies.

In the grave:

- An angel named *Rūmān* visits the grave, roaming the graves in the graveyard, forcing the deceased to write down his deeds, and hanging this record around his neck.
- *Munkar* and *Nakir*, the two Angels of Punishment will arrive, hitting the grave with their legs on both sides. They will make the dead sit up, interrogate him in the grave with questions about his faith, and cause him to see what to expect in the hereafter, whether paradise or hell.

At resurrection and judgement:

- The angels (except for the bearers of the Throne) will be annihilated like all other creatures before God revives them and establishes his eternal “Kingdom of the heavens and the earth.”
- A Caller – the angel Isrāfil (Raphael) or Gabriel – will exhort the dead to come out from their graves.
- The angels of the lower heaven will take care of the resurrected humans, *jinn*, and animals.
- Every angel will take responsibility for one resurrected creature and transport him or it to a new, silvery-shining earth.
- The angel will hand over the dead in groups to the place of judgement.
- The angels will form vast circles, massing in ranks behind the creatures in anticipation of judgement.
- An angel, “the summoner from whom there is no escape” (Q 20:10), will call the resurrected to the place of judgement.
- Angels will bring along to the place of judgement the heavenly record of the person’s good and evil deeds, prepared by angelic “watchers, noble recorders who know what you do” (Q 82:11-12) who have recorded the person’s lifetime, one recorder sitting at his right shoulder (recording the good deeds), and another at his left (recording the bad deeds).
- Angels will place the respective pages on the pan of the divine balance so that God can decide the fate of the person: paradise or hell.
- The angels will bear witness, along with the prophets, on behalf of individuals and entire communities; eight angels “will bear the throne of your Lord above them” (Q 69:17) and all the angels will eternally glorify God.

Fourth, as may have become clear from this list, these Muslim eschatological views emphasise the rationally defined tasks and functions of the angels, as opposed to questions regarding their appearance, nature, or substance. In this regard, the respective eschatological ideas in Islam seem to differ somewhat from those known to us from Judaism and Christianity. However, there are also a number of clear parallels among the Islamic, Jewish, and Christian eschatological views, as well as those of Ancient Egypt and the Zoroastrian faith. These parallels arise, in part at least, from the fact that several of the Arabic names of angels appear to be borrowed from Aramaic and Hebrew.¹¹⁵ It is, therefore, not surprising that in adopting the Biblical names of certain angels into the Islamic milieu, Muslim tradition also

¹¹⁵ This is to be noted also for the name of the Angel of Death, ‘Izrā’īl, deriving from Hebrew ‘Asrī’īl; cf. Arent J. Wensinck, “‘Izrā’īl,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (E²), vol. 4, Leiden: Brill 1993, 292; and Burge, *Angels*, 36-37.

embraced some of their “Biblical” characteristics.¹¹⁶ However, while the Hebrew names of angels in the Bible have a theophoric element, such as the suffix “ēl,” that serves to underscore God’s power and authority – Gavri’ēl (meaning “God is my Strength”) or Mikhā’ēl (“Who is like God?”) – such elements are rendered meaningless to an Arabic-speaking audience. As a result, in the Islamic context these angels seem to achieve some degree of independence from God “as a named being,” as has been noted by Stephen Burge,¹¹⁷ even though their primary purpose is to pass on His orders and act on His instructions.

Another important point remains to be made. In Islam, the angels’ significance and purpose resides much less in an evocation of God’s might and power through their theophoric names. Nevertheless, the frequently used function-formula of an angel’s name (‘the angel of so-and-so’ or the Angel of Death, for example) shifts the focus of the believer away from the angel itself and directs it toward God. The angels surround God, continuously serve, praise, and worship Him, and thus offer “a symbolic depiction that progressively gives him more royal traits”¹¹⁸ and that emphasises His sovereign majesty in a way that is perceptible to the Muslim believer. Seen from this perspective, the images and symbols that the angels convey and represent in this cosmic framework appear like otherworldly reflections of human existence.

Last, but by no means least, in classical Muslim eschatology, angels have not only a revealing and ushering function but also a catalysing role. It is, above all, this animating and driving force of the angels in these medieval Arabic texts that brings to light a number of ethical teachings that serve as injunctions of faith for the ‘living of this life’, rather than providing mere descriptions of the ‘resurrected in a future life in the hereafter’. Among these messages, there is one that is always central to these edifying dogmatic narratives: believers are urged to re-think their ways in this life in anticipation of the serious consequences that their conduct will have for them in the next.

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¹¹⁶ For more references concerning the respective development in the history of ideas, see Hasan El-Shamy, *Folk Traditions of the Arab world: A Guide to Motive Classification*, vol. 2, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press 1959, 36.

¹¹⁷ Burge, *Angels*, 34-38, esp. 35.

¹¹⁸ Pierre Grelot, *The Language of Symbolism: Biblical Theology, Semantics, and Exegesis*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 2006, 72, 74; and Burge, *Angels*, 34-38.

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The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* on Angels and Spiritual Beings¹

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References to angels and, more generally, to spiritual beings are found throughout the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. This is hardly surprising considering the resolute determination of the Brethren of Purity to reconcile the message of the Qurʾānic revelation with the philosophical explanation of the world inherited from Neoplatonic philosophy. The emanation theory as elaborated by the Ikhwān implies that angels occupy every part of God’s creation.² Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that the search for means by which to acquire the status of angels is the most fundamental objective of what the Brethren called the ‘spiritual philosophy’ (*al-falsafa al-rūḥāniyya*) and, therefore, is the principal *raison d’être* of the corpus itself.³

In spite of being ‘God’s vice-regent on the earth’, in the Brethren’s account man occupies an intermediary position in the hierarchy of beings. In Epistle 28, for in-

¹ Research for this article benefited from the support of both the ARC project ‘Speculum Arabicum: Objectifying the contribution of the Arab-Muslim world to the history of sciences and ideas: the sources and resources of medieval encyclopaedism’ (‘Communauté française de Belgique–Actions de Recherche Concertées 2012–2017’) and the ERC project ‘The origin and early development of philosophy in tenth-century al-Andalus: the impact of ill-defined materials and channels of transmission’ (ERC-2016-ADG, n. 740618, 2017-2022) currently underway at the University of Louvain (UCLouvain). I wish to thank Anna Caiozzo for various suggestions made on an earlier draft of the present paper.

² See for instance, among countless other pieces of evidence: *On the Natural Sciences: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 15-21*, ed. and transl. Carmela Baffioni, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies 2013, 424-425.

³ On ‘spiritual philosophy’ within the *Rasāʾil*, see for instance: *On ‘Astronomia’: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistle 3*, F. Jamil Ragep and Taro Mimura, eds. and transl., Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2015, 114, and: *On Magic I: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 52a*, G. de Callatāy and Bruno Halflants, eds. and transl., Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies 2011, 12. The omnipresence of the spiritual in the *Rasāʾil* needs no demonstration. One needs only recall that ‘the science of spiritual beings’ (*‘ilm al-rūḥāniyyāt*) is one of the five sciences that the Ikhwān call ‘divine’ in the classification of knowledge in Epistle 7 (‘On the Scientific Arts’), and also that no formula is used more frequently in the *Rasāʾil* than the shibboleth-like (and partly Qurʾānic) expression ‘You must know, my brother – may God assist both you and us with a spirit coming from Him – that ...’. On these two issues, see: G. de Callatāy, ‘The Classification of Knowledge in the *Rasāʾil*,’ in: *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity. The Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and their Rasāʾil. An Introduction*, N. El-Bizri, ed., Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies 2008, 58-82; and Id., ‘From Ibn Masarra to Ibn ‘Arabi: References, Shibboleths and other Subtle Allusions to the *Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* in the Literature of al-Andalus,’ in: A. Straface – C. De Angelo and A. Manzo, eds., *Labor Limae. Studi in onore di Carmela Baffioni*, a monographic issue of *Studi Magrebini*, 12-13 (2014-2015), vol. 12, 217-267.

stance, devoted to the limits of human knowledge, we are reminded that ‘among the existing beings some are nobler than man, such as angels cherubim (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn*), whereas others are inferior to him, such as wild beasts (*al-babā’im*).⁴ The Ikhwān insist in the same passage that man ‘is not well-versed in the sciences, like angels, nor ignorant and negligent, like beasts’. Angels also come to the fore in a passage in which the Ikhwān consider man’s inability to know about events that are too far distant in the past:

As for the story of the tribes of Israel, and what was after the flood or before it when going back to the time of Adam, and the stories of angels and tales of demons which spread corruption over the earth before the creation of Adam, there is no science of these things for man and there is no other way for him to know them than by revelation and by the acceptance of [what derives] from the angels, as a concession (*illā min tariq al-wahī wa-l-akhdh ‘an al-malā’ika tasliman*).⁵

To stress the feebleness of human science in comparison to that of the angels, the Ikhwān next provide several examples in the form of analogies that are designed to illustrate the vast gaps, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, between the different levels of God’s creation. What man is able to know of angels, they write, is in the same proportion as what sea-animals are able to know of animals living on dry land, and this is something negligible, just as what the animals living on dry land are able to grasp about humans is negligible. As for the angelic level, the text suggests that this domain is, itself, divided into many ranks and that these ranks vary widely in proportion to each other.⁶ As usual, the Ikhwān bring to bear here a long series of Qur’anic quotations, which they interpret more or less freely in support of their own theories. For the most part, the references to angels in Epistle 28 remain quite general. The only Qur’anic spiritual being mentioned by name in this epistle is ‘Iblis the Cursed’ (*Iblis al-la‘in*) at the very beginning of the treatise. There, as at various other places in the *Rasā’il*, the Ikhwān follow Q 2:30-34 in reporting the famous story of the angels summoned by God to prostrate themselves before Adam, and of Iblis’ brazen refusal to obey the divine command.⁷

⁴ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 20.

⁵ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 22. In the subsequent lines, the Ikhwān provide various examples of things in this world that are beyond the reach of the human intellect and which man will forever be unable to grasp ‘unless he takes the understanding of them by imitation (*taqlīdan*) of the prophets – Peace be upon them – in the same way as they themselves took it from the angels, as a concession (*tasliman*)’.

⁶ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 24.

⁷ Epistle 28, ed. Beirut, vol. 3, 18-19. A thorough exploration of this narrative in Islamic exegetical literature can be found in L. N. B. Chipman, “Adam and the Angels: an Examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources,” in: *Arabica* 49/4 (2002), 429-455. Putting the Brethren’s use of the narrative in perspective with early Ismā’īli interpretations of the Qur’ān, Heinz Halm observes: “Die ismailitischen Autoren haben sich diese Verse nicht entgehen lassen. (...) Auch in den *Rasā’il Iḥwān al-Ṣafā’* wird mehrfach darauf angespielt: Iblis ist „der Pharao Adams“, in seiner Anmaßung (*kibr*) das Urbid aller Widersacher“ (H.

In order to find passages in which the Ikhwān link figures from Islamic angelology with specific parts of the universe, we need to turn to other epistles. The most comprehensive and systematic attempt in this direction is that provided in Epistle 20 ('On Nature'), complemented by certain indications found in Epistle 49 ('On the Spiritual Beings'). Let us begin, then, with Epistle 20, whose importance for the Ikhwānian angelology has already been pointed out by a number of scholars.⁸ The Ikhwān start by recalling that the world is made of eleven spheres in all. These are, in order of their increasing distances from the Earth (which is located at the centre of the universe): 1) the 'sphere of Earth and Water'; 2) the 'sphere of Fire and Air'; 3) the sphere of the Moon; 4) the sphere of Mercury; 5) the sphere of Venus; 6) the sphere of the Sun; 7) the sphere of Mars; 8) the sphere of Jupiter; 9) the sphere of Saturn; 10) the starry sphere; 11) the all-encompassing sphere.⁹ What the Brethren also wish to recall in this epistle is the scheme of emanation that is meant to account for the transmission of the spiritual faculties from the highest to the lowest of these heavenly spheres and from the lowest sphere to the world of coming-to-be and passing-away.

After some discussion of the analogies between this sublunary world and the heavenly world – including an astrologically-orientated comparison between the revolving universe, with the Earth at its centre, and the sacred pilgrimage of the Muslims around the Ka'ba – the Ikhwān al-Šafā' finally set out to describe in detail the influences arising from the spiritual faculties that were particularly attached to

Halm, *Kosmologie und Heilslehre der frühen Ismā'īliya. Eine Studie zur islamischen Gnosis*, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner GmbH 1978, 104).

⁸ The passage, now critically edited and translated into English by Baffioni as part of the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity series (pp. 395-404 of the Arabic edition), had previously been discussed by the same scholar in: "The Angelology System in the Iḥwān al-Šafā'," in: *Arabistika i isfjamoznanie. Studii po slučaj 60-godišnjinata na doc. d.f.n. Penka Samsareva*, S. Evstatiev, H. Čobanova and I. Djuļgerov, eds., Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo 'S. Kliment Ohridski' 2003, vol. 2, 434-442. The Brethren's angelology is also briefly touched upon in F. Jadaane, "La place des anges dans la théologie musulmane," in: *Studia Islamica*, 41 (1975), 23-61. An Italian annotated translation of the passage, based on the Beirut edition of the *Rasā'il*, has recently been provided by Olga Lizzini in: "L'angelologia nelle Epistole dei Fratelli della Purezza: l'esempio della natura," in: *Angeli. Ebraismo Cristiano-ismo Islam*, G. Agamben and E. Coccia, eds., Vicenza: Neri Pozza 2009, 1966-2012. The passage was also the subject of a dissertation by Cyril Villarosa Uy II, *Angels and Emanation in the Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Šafā'* (MA Dissertation, Cambridge UK, 2013, unpublished but available on academia.edu). Curiously enough, that study does not discuss at all, or else only very succinctly, the passages of the *Rasā'il* that are central to the present contribution. The edition of Epistle 49 by the same scholar has now just been published as part of the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity series (On God and the World. An Arabic Critical Edition of Epistles 49-51)*, ed. W. Madelung, C. Uy, C. Baffioni, and N. Alshaar, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies 2019), unfortunately too late to be of use for the present contribution.

⁹ Epistle 20, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 362-363. In Epistle 16, the first two spheres of the system are called 'the circle of the Earth' (*kurat al-arḍ*) and 'the sphere of the Air' (*kurat al-hawā'*) respectively; see Epistle 16, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 86.

each celestial sphere. Their objective in doing so was to harmonise the sayings of the Qurʾān with the implications of the Neoplatonic emanation scheme; the Brethren specify the manner in which each ‘spiritual faculty’ (*quwwa ruḥāniyya*) is commonly referred to by ‘the philosophers’ (*al-falāsifa*) and by ‘the law’ (*al-nāmūs*) respectively. For us, what is interesting about this passage is that the network of correspondences between the philosophical and religious interpretations of the spiritual faculties is given in considerable detail and in a very explicit manner. In addition, the passage also mentions the name of the faculty that corresponds to each planet, as well as the place in the human organism from where the faculty is meant to operate. These latter indications are in full agreement with those found at the end of Epistle 26 (‘On the Claim of the Sages that Man is a Microcosm’), in which a more elaborated account of the analogies between the universe and the human organism is provided.¹⁰ For the sake of clarity, these elements have been collected together in the following table:¹¹

“Philosophers”		“Law”
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of the fixed stars’		Various unspecified categories of angels, including ‘the Bearers of the Throne’
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of Saturn’ ¹²	Black Bile	‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; amongst them: ‘the Angel of Death’; ‘Munkar and Nakīr’
	Spleen	

¹⁰ See Epistle 26, ed. Beirut, vol. 2, 476-479, where the associations are given in the following order: 1) Heart – Sun; 2) Spleen – Saturn; 3) Liver – Jupiter; 4) Gall Bladder – Mars; 5) Stomach – Venus; 6) Brain – Mercury; 7) Lung – Moon. It should be observed, however, that this final part of Epistle 26 in the Beirut edition could be an interpolation. On this, see: C. Toubeau, *L’homme microcosme. Présentation et traduction annotée de l’épître XXVI de l’Encyclopédie des Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, 17 (MA Thesis, University of Louvain 1989, unpublished). On the Microcosm-Macrocosm issue in the thought of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, see now: I. Nokso-Koivisto, *Microcosm-Macrocosm Analogy in Rasāʾil Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ and Certain Related Texts* (PhD Thesis, University of Helsinki, 2014, unpublished but available on academia.edu).

¹¹ In the passage from Epistle 20, the celestial spheres are listed in the following order: 1) Sun; 2) Saturn; 3) Mars; 4) Jupiter; 5) Venus; 6) Mercury; 7) Moon; 8) Starry sphere. The Sun comes first, no doubt to emphasise the particular importance of its role. The permutation of Jupiter and Mars is perhaps less expected here, although it may be observed that the Ikhwān also revert the order of these two planets when listing the revolutions of the planets in Epistle 36.

¹² Carmela Baffioni (*On the Natural Sciences*, 309 of the English translation) notes that this is the only place in the passage in which the singular form *rūḥāniyya* is generally used in the manuscripts. Given that at least four copies do have the plural form here as well (see the critical apparatus of Baffioni’s edition, 397, n. 11), I have retained the plural, which is also much more consistent with the rest of the passage.

“Philosophers”		“Law”
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of Jupiter’	Blood	‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; amongst them: ‘Riḍwān, the Guardian of the Gardens’
	Liver	
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of Mars’	Yellow bile	‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; amongst them: ‘Jibrā’īl’; ‘Mālik the Furious’ and ‘all the Guardians of Hell’
	Gall Bladder	
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of the Sun’	Heat	‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; amongst them: ‘Isrāfil’
	Heart	
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of Venus’	Concupiscent Faculty	‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; amongst them: ‘the Houris’ and ‘the Servant-Maids of the Gardens’ ¹³
	Stomach	
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of Mercury’	Imaginative Faculty	‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; amongst them: ‘the Youths, who are the servants of the inhabitants of the Gardens’, ‘the Honourable Secretaries’ and ‘the Honourable Pious’
	Brain	
‘ <i>Ruḥāniyyāt</i> of the Moon’	Faculty of Respiration	‘An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers’; amongst them: ‘Those in Succession’
	Lung	

Let us consider the elements of the ‘Law’ column. If we except the line corresponding to the *ruḥāniyyāt* of the sphere of the fixed stars, we observe that the formula ‘An angel endowed with cohorts (*junūd*) and helpers (*āwān*)’ has been used without distinction for all other celestial spheres, namely the seven planetary spheres that stretch from Saturn to the Moon. Nowhere in the Qur’ān does this formula appear as it does here, although the word *junūd* is mentioned on

¹³ Most manuscripts have ‘*kbuzzān al-jinān*’ (‘the Guardians of the Gardens’), which is strange here given that the same expression, in the singular form, is already used as an epithet for Riḍwān. On the basis of a relatively late manuscript, Baffioni (*On the Natural Sciences*, 401, n. 1) emendates with ‘*jawāri al-jinān*’ (‘the Maids of the Gardens’), which I also retain.

various occasions, on each of which it unambiguously refers to the innumerable armies of angels that populate the heavens of God.¹⁴ The formula suggests that each planetary sphere is linked to one major angel in particular and that this angel is, himself, at the head of a numerous army of subaltern angels.

Interestingly, this is also the idea behind the passage from Epistle 49 in which the Ikhwān portray the cavalcades of angels that are meant to represent the spiritual entities escorting each of the seven planets.¹⁵ The passage is remarkable for its extensive supply of symbolic imagery and its heavy recourse to all kinds of astrological correlations. For each planet of the system, from Saturn to the Moon, the procession of a multitude of angels is said to be preceded by the figure of one specific angel, usually described as being of gigantic proportions. In each case, this angel is said to be riding a horse of a particular colour (or combination of colours) and holding a banner, also described as being of a special colour. Most banners are reported to feature inscriptions, which correspond to certain verses (or parts of verses) from the Qurʾān but whose actual link with the present description may seem at times to be quite far-fetched, as is often the case in writings of the Ikhwān. When names of individual angels are mentioned – which is unfortunately only the case for the two most remote planets –, they fully agree with the indications of Epistle 20. An attempt at interpreting the network of astrological implications in this passage has been provided by Yves Marquet in his *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ*.¹⁶ However, for the purpose of the present contribution we shall limit ourselves to listing the main points indicated by our text in the following table:

¹⁴ For *junūd*, see: Q 33:9; 48:4; 48:7; 74:31. It may be noted, however, that ‘*aʿwān*’ (helpers, bodyguards) does not appear in the Qurʾān.

¹⁵ Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 216-224.

¹⁶ Y. Marquet, *La philosophie des Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, Algiers: Études et documents 1975, 114-129. There would certainly be much to gain from an extensive comparison of this passage with other networks of symbolic relationships as found in Islamic literature and visual arts, but such an investigation obviously lies beyond the limits of the present inquiry. For various Islamic astrological representations that incorporate angels, see for instance: A. Caiozzo, “Rituels théophaniques images et pratiques magiques: les anges planétaires dans le manuscrit persan 174 de Paris,” in: *Studia Iranica* 29 (2000), 109-140; Eadem, *Images du ciel d’Orient au Moyen Age: une histoire du zodiaque et de ses représentations dans les manuscrits du Proche-Orient musulman* (Collection Islam), Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne 2003; Eadem, “Anges gardiens et démons familiers dans les manuscrits enlumines de l’Orient médiéval,” in: *De Socrate à Tintin. Anges gardiens et démons de l’Antiquité à nos jours*, J.-P. Boudet, Ph. Faure, C. Renoux, eds., Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2011, 105-118.

Circle of the Fixed Stars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 'Those following the Footstool' - 'Those surrounding the Throne' - 'Those bearing the Throne'
Circle of Saturn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A multitude of angels seizing the spirits of the dead bodies - Horses of deep black (<i>dubm</i>) colour - An angel in front of the procession - A black banner, with inscription (Q 23:91) - 'An angel endowed with cohorts and helpers'; angels in charge of the seizing of the spirits; amongst them: the 'Angel of Death'
Circle of Jupiter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A multitude of angels - Horses of white (<i>bayḍ</i>), gray (<i>shubh</i>), and piebald (<i>balq</i>) colours, with white and green clothes - A noble angel, of gigantic size, in front of the procession - A banner (no colour mentioned), with inscription (Q 31:1; 35:24) - Amongst them: 'Riḍwān, the Guardian of the Gardens'
Circle of Mars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A multitude of angels, rude and violent - An angel in front of the procession, riding a reddish (<i>aḥmar</i>) horse - A red banner, with inscription (Q 55:33; 57:25)
Circle of the Sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Angels visiting kings and sultans with clothes made of golden silk - Horses of chestnut (<i>shaqar</i>) and golden (<i>ṣayfī</i>) colours - A noble angel, of gigantic size, in front of the procession - A golden banner, with inscription written with light (Q 2:255; 3:26)
Circle of Venus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A multitude of angels - Beasts of various colours (<i>mulaḥwawana</i>) and beautifully ornamented (<i>muwashshaba</i>) - An angel in front of the procession - A banner (no colour mentioned), with inscription (Q 7:32)
Circle of Mercury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Angels as noble secretaries, with beautiful forms, light spirits, and subtle personalities - An angel in front of the procession - A banner (no colour mentioned), with inscription (Q 80:11-16)
Circle of the Moon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A multitude of angels in charge of this world of coming-to-be and passing-away - An angel in front of the procession - A white banner, with inscription in black colour (Q 36:39-40)

Angels referred to by name in this passage and in that from Epistle 20 all correspond to major figures in Islamic angelology, most of them already mentioned in

the Qurʾān.¹⁷ The ‘Bearers of the Throne’ (*ḥamalat al-ʿarsh*) evidently recall ‘Those who bear the Throne’ (*alladhīn yaḥmilūn al-ʿarsh*) and ‘Those [as a collective] who bear the Throne of your Lord’ (*yaḥmilu ʿarsh rabbi-ka*) in Q 40:7 and 69:17 respectively. In Q 39:75 and 40:7, reference is also made to ‘Those around the Throne’ (*man ḥawal al-ʿarsh*). The ‘Angel of Death’ (*malik al-mawt*) is mentioned by name in one place, Q 32:11. In contrast, neither the name Munkar nor that of Nakir is found in the Qurʾān.¹⁸ As a proper name, Ridwān does not appear either, anymore than does ‘the Guardian of the Gardens’ (*khāzin al-jinnān*), but it seems that it later came to be regarded as a personification of the common word ‘*riḍwān*’ (‘approval’), which does appear in various places, such as Q 3:15.¹⁹ Contrary to what one might perhaps have expected, the name Jibrāʾil is mentioned only three times in the entire text of the revelation, at Q 2:97, 2:98 and 66:4. Mālik is mentioned in Q 43:77, although not as ‘the Furious’ (*al-ghaḍbān*), and ‘the Guardians of Hell’ (*khazanatu jahannam*) appear as such in Q 40:49. Remarkably, the name Isrāfil does not appear at all in the Qurʾān. As for the Houris (*al-ḥūr al-ʿayn*), we find them under this appellation in Q 44:54, 52:20 and 56:22 (*ḥūr ʿayn*), while ‘*ḥūr*’ is used in Q 55:72. The formula ‘Servant-Maids of the Gardens’ (*jawāri al-jinnān*), by contrast, is not found as such in the Qurʾān. The expressions ‘the Youths’ (*al-wildān*), ‘the Honourable Secretaries’ (*al-kirām al-kātibūn*), and ‘the Honourable Pious’ (*al-kirām al-barara*) are all Qurʾānic: the former is found in Q 56:17 and 76:19, and the latter two are mentioned in Q 82:11 and 80:16 respectively. Finally, we note that ‘Those in Succession’ (*al-muʿaqqibāt*) in all likelihood echoes Q 13:11, where the same expression indeed refers to the ‘successive angels’ protecting each human ‘before and behind him’, as has been mentioned above.

When attempting to understand the rationale lying behind the relations the Ikhwān set between angels and heavenly spheres, the references or allusions to the Qurʾān remain vague, even meaningless, if we do not consider them in the context of the astrological implications they have for the authors of the *Rasāʾil*. Several of the correspondences between angels and planets can be justified only by reference to the network of relations that astrologers had established between given planets and the categories of people and professions on which they were meant to exercise their particular influence. In Epistle 26, the Ikhwān report that the Sun is the leader of the planets in the sphere, in the same way as there are kings and leaders among humans. They complete this analogy by defining which specific relation each of the other six planets has with the Sun:

¹⁷ For a very recent and updated overview of Islamic angelology, see G. S. Reynolds, “Angels,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition (E³), K. Fleet, G. Krämer, D. Matringe, J. Nawas, E. Rowson, eds., Brill Online, 2015. Accessed on 21 November 2018.

¹⁸ See A.J. Wensinck, “Munkar wa-Nakir,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (E²), vol. 7, 577.

¹⁹ See W. Raven, “Ridwān,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (E²), vol. 8, 519.

The relation of Mars to the Sun is like that of the chief of army (*ṣāhib al-jaysb*) to the king. The relation of Mercury to the Sun is like that of the secretaries and ministers (*al-kuttāb wa l-wuzarā'*) to the kings. The relation of Jupiter to the Sun is like that of the judges and the scholars (*al-quḍāt wa l-'ulamā'*) to the kings. The relation of Saturn to the Sun is like that of the guardians and deputies (*al-kbuzẓān wa l-wukalā'*) to the kings. The relation of Venus to the Sun is like that of the servant-maids and female singers (*al-jawāri wa l-mughanniyyāt*) to the kings. The relation of the Moon to the Sun is like that of the rebels (*al-khawārij*) to the kings.²⁰

For two sections of our table above, we need offer no further explanation. The present passage makes it perfectly intelligible that the Brethren associate Mercury with the 'Pious Secretaries' and Venus with the 'Servant-Maids'. In the case of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, we must turn to other types of astrological affinities, largely inherited from the Greeks, who were, themselves, walking in the footsteps of their Chaldean predecessors. Thus, in addition to the figure of the chief of army, the baneful Mars represents the flamboyant, impetuous, and brutal temperament, and the deep red colour of the planet reinforces its link to both blood and fire. In contrast to Mars, the brilliant Jupiter is meant to be a benevolent planet, whose strength is considerable and whose temperament incarnates equilibrium and justice. As for Saturn, considered to be another malevolent planet from the astrological perspective, the slowness of its revolution makes it a symbol of old age.²¹ Embroidering the ancient dichotomy between the two clearly benevolent planets (Jupiter and Venus) and the two clearly nefarious ones (Saturn and Mars), the Ikhwān offer in Epistle 3 some additional comments, which are worth considering here. The passage reads:

Among these [existing things] is the situation of the two benefics (*sa'adayni*), Jupiter and Venus. One of them, Venus, is an indicator of good fortune for people in this world. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to the delight of eating, drinking, sex, and pleasures in this world; a person whose condition is thus in this world is one of the fortunate people in this world. As for Jupiter, it is an indicator of good fortune for people in the Hereafter. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to goodness of character, rightness of creed, sincerity of pioussness, and purity of piety; a person whose condition is this in this world is one of the fortunate people in the Hereafter. Also among these are the two malefics (*naḥṣāni*), Saturn and Mars. One of them, Saturn, is an indicator of bad fortune for people in this world. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to misfortune, distress, poverty, illness, and adversity in [one's] affairs; a person whose condition is thus in this world is one of the unfortunate people in it and whoever experiences this state in this world is amongst the miserable ones in it. As for Mars, it is an indicator of bad fortune for people in the Hereafter. That is, if it dominates the nativities, it guides them to evils of illegality, debauchery, murder,

²⁰ Epistle 26, ed. Beirut, vol. 2, 467.

²¹ For a comprehensive overview of the planetary characteristics in Antiquity, see the still valuable *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1898) by Auguste Bouché-Leclercq, 89-104.

theft, and corruption on Earth; a person whose condition is thus in this world is one of the unfortunate people in the Hereafter.²²

All of this fits remarkably well with the associations between angels and planets noted above. That Saturn is considered a planet ‘ill-fated in this world’ tallies well with the presence of the Angel of Death, as well as that of Munkar and Nakir, in its sphere. Likewise, the fact that Mars is regarded as ‘ill-fated in the other world’ enables us to understand why ‘Mālik the Furious’ and the other guardians of Hell are closely linked with it. In the opposite direction, the auspicious influence that Jupiter is meant to exert upon the other world certainly justifies the presence of Ridwān, the guardian of Paradise, in that sphere. It must be acknowledged, however, that the passage above does not provide any grounds by which we can substantiate our final association – that of Venus with the Houris and the Servant-Maids of the Gardens – with the same clarity, since the Houris and the Maids hardly ever appear to have an effect on the happiness of this world. In this last case, it is tempting to assume that the above-mentioned network of relations between the Sun and the other planets, on the one hand, and the king and the other social categories, on the other, proved to be the decisive element.

Leaving the seven planetary spheres to one side for the time being, let us now consider the starry sphere above them. It is important to bear in mind that, according to the Ikhwān, this eighth sphere, ‘the sphere of the fixed stars’ (*falak al-kawākib al-thābita*), is not the outermost sphere of the system. As did several other scientists of their time, and following in the footsteps of Greek astronomers from Late Antiquity, the Brethren postulated the existence of a supplementary sphere, without stars, which they usually call ‘the all-encompassing sphere’ (*al-falak al-muḥīṭ bi-l-kull*). This ninth and ultimate sphere was meant to account for the movement of equinoctial precession allegedly discovered by Hipparchus in the 2nd century BC. At times, the Brethren also refer to this all-encompassing sphere as ‘the sphere of the zodiac’ (*falak al-burūj*). This title comes from the fact that, in their eyes, an abstract zodiac was, as it were, attached to the inner side of the all-encompassing sphere and thus also moved with respect to the visible constellations at the speed of one degree every 100 years, a rate which corresponds to the canonical estimation of the precessional cycle given by Ptolemy in the 2nd century AD.²³

The Brethren associate this eighth sphere, the sphere of the fixed stars, with ‘the Bearers of the Throne’ (*ḥamalāt al-ʿarsh*). As noted above, the Qurʾān makes mention of ‘Those bearing the Throne’ in two places, and also twice alludes to

²² Epistle 3, ed. Ragep, Mimura, *On Astronomia*, 101-103 (68-69 of English translation).

²³ On all this, see my footnotes to Epistle 36 in: *Sciences of the Soul and Intellect. Part I: An Arabic Critical Edition and English Translation of Epistles 32-36*, ed. and transl. Paul E. Walker – Ismail K. Poonawala, David Simonowitz, and Godefroid de Callataÿ, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies 2015, 199 of English translation.

'Those around the Throne'. One Qur'ānic line turns out to have been especially important in inspiring Islamic angelology, namely 69:17, concerning the Day of Resurrection: 'And the angels are at its edges [= of the Heaven]. And they will bear the Throne of your Lord above them, that Day, eight [of them]' (*wa-l-malak 'alā arjā'ihā wa-yahmilu 'arsha rabbi-ka fa'wqa-hum ya'wma'idhin thamāniyya*). Thinkers as imbued as were the Ikhwān with arithmetical symbolism in the style of the Pythagoreans could hardly have resisted the temptation to connect the eight angels of this verse with the first eight spheres of their cosmology. This is, indeed, what we infer from what they write in Epistle 16 ('On the Heavens and the World') about the last two spheres of their system, having first described the seven planetary spheres:

As to the eighth sphere, i.e. the sphere of the fixed stars that extends over and embraces these seven spheres, it is the *Footstool that extends over the heavens and the earth* (*al-kursī al-ladhi wasī'a al-samāwāt wa-l-arḍ*). As to the ninth sphere, embracing these eight spheres, it is the lofty *Throne that eight [angels] shall carry above them upon that [day]* (*fa-huwa al-'arsh al-'azīm alladhi yahmalu-hu fa'wqa-hum ya'wma'idhin thamāniyya*), as God, be He exalted, mentioned.²⁴

In addition to the explicit reference to the Qur'ānic Throne of 69:17, the Ikhwān also quote here from the famous 'āyat al-kursī' at Q 2:255, which ends with the words, 'His Footstool extends over the heavens and the earth'. It is unfortunate that the *āyat al-kursī* (literally, the 'verse of the Footstool') is frequently rendered in English and in other European languages as 'the verse of the Throne', leading to a multitude of grave confusions in the modern scholarship.²⁵ As the passage above makes plain, the Brethren clearly distinguished between the two notions, to the extent that they made them correspond in reality with two distinct spheres, as Yves Marquet pointed out nearly fifty years ago.²⁶

Another factor that has likely also contributed to the misunderstanding of the Brethren's views, including in the medieval transmission of the *Rasā'il*, is that a superficial look at the Brethren's words in this and similar passages can easily lead to erroneous conclusions. One such incorrect interpretation is that the 'Bearers of the Throne' should be linked to the ninth sphere, since this is the sphere that corresponds to the Throne. Another serious error consists in identifying the Throne with the eighth sphere itself, as did the copyist of Atif Effendi 1681, the oldest ex-

²⁴ Epistle 16, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 138-139 (Baffioni's translation, according to the alternative reading she proposes on p. 138, n. 15). See also the critical apparatus on p. 75 of the Arabic.

²⁵ See Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 138, n. 15: "The other versions [of the Qur'ān] consulted (Arberry, Bausani, Bonelli, Chebel, Kasimirski, Kračkovskij, Masson) translate both *kursī* and *'arsh* with 'Throne,' but the context suggests 'footstool' to be a more suitable translation for *kursī*."

²⁶ Y. Marquet, *La philosophie des Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, 110-112.

tant manuscript of the *Rasā'il*.²⁷ A closer examination of the passages relating to the two most distant spheres and the Qur'ānic references therein can only lead to the conclusion that the Brethren identify the 'the Bearers of the Throne' with the eighth sphere, and the Throne itself with the ninth.²⁸ In conformity with their habit of reading the Qur'ān through Neoplatonic lenses, the Ikhwān turn the image of the eight angels bearing God's Throne into their view that the eighth sphere of the cosmos supports the final sphere.²⁹

Interpreting the Qur'ān in line with the astronomical and astrological views of the Ikhwān has enabled us to grasp the great majority of the associations between angels and celestial spheres established in Epistles 20 and 49. However, some components of our table still remain unexplained. In order to address these points, we need to turn our attention to what Islamic traditions, which are considerably richer on the topic of angelology than is the Qur'ān, have to tell us about this issue. *Ḥadīth* literature on angels is vast, but we may benefit greatly in this regard from Stephen Burge's recent study of the *Ḥabā'ik fi akhbār al-malā'ik* by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505).³⁰ Al-Suyūṭī's treatise compiles some 750 prophetic traditions dealing with angels from a great variety of earlier classical *ḥadīth* scholars, with a notable predilection for authors who, like Abū al-Shaykh (d. 369/979) or al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), lived far closer in time to the Ikhwān than to the Mamlūk compiler.

Leaving aside the figures of Mikhā'il, retained by the tradition as one of the four archangels but curiously not mentioned by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', and, conversely, of the Houris, who do appear in Epistle 20 but are nowhere to be found in al-Suyūṭī's collection, the comparison of the *Rasā'il* with the *Ḥabā'ik* provides a number of interesting clues that can help us better appreciate the Brethren's moti-

²⁷ The translation of the passage in Atif Efendi 1681 reads: "As to the eighth sphere, i.e. the sphere of the fixed stars, the intermediate [sphere between Saturn and the sphere] that embraces these eight spheres, it is the lofty Throne that eight [angels]..."

²⁸ See, for instance, Epistle 20, ed. Baffioni, *On the Natural Sciences*, 303: "And know, O my brother, that the angels that surround the Throne are those who carry the Throne, and they are the fixed stars that surround the ninth sphere from inside (*wa-biya al-kawākib al-thābita al-ḥaffā bi-l-falak al-tāsi' min dākbi-l-bi*), as pilgrims surround the Ka'ba from outside in their *ṭawāf*." The expression 'from inside' is used to stress that the 'Bearers of the Throne' and the Throne are not at the same level.

²⁹ Now, it is also true that the Ikhwān in fact make use of various different Qur'ānic formulas to evoke angels beyond the sphere of Saturn, and it is not easy to determine in each case whether these expressions are meant to designate the angels of one of the last two spheres specifically or if they may refer to both indistinctly. An example of these intricacies is found in a passage from Epistle 49 dealing with 'the Sublime Angels' (*al-malā'ika al-'ālūn*), which reads as follows: "Among them there are the souls of those who follow the Footstool (*al-lāḥiqūn bi-l-kursi*) that embraces the heavens and the world, and of those who surround the Throne (*al-ḥāffūn min ḥawla al-'arsb*), and of those who bear the Throne (*ḥamalāt al-'arsb*), and each of them is in a noble station and an eminent place, singing the praise of their lord" (Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 216-217).

³⁰ S. Burge, *Angels in Islam. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's Al-Ḥabā'ik fi akhbār al-malā'ik*, London, New York: Routledge 2012.

vations for linking certain angels with specific spheres of the celestial vault. For instance, Ḥadīth 27, the first of those concerned with the four archangels, reports that, of the four, 'Jibrā'il is the one responsible for the winds and the army' (*fa-amma Jibrā'il fa-muwakkil bi-l-riyāḥ wa-l-junūd*). This attribution, which finds parallels in the Talmud, enables us to explain why Jibrā'il is ranged with the *ruḥāniyyāt* of Mars, together with Mālik the Furious and the Guardians of Hell. Ḥadīth 28 goes in much the same direction, stating that, in addition to being responsible for the Book, 'Jibrā'il is also responsible for the acts of destruction when God has willed [Gabriel] to annihilate peoples, and he is responsible for victory in battle'.

With regard to Isrāfīl, whom the Ikhwān connect with the sphere of the Sun, al-Suyūṭī's *Habā'ik* also includes several *ḥadīth* that concur in making this archangel the creature who is closest to God. This may usefully be compared with passages in which the Brethren stress the prominent role of the Sun in the diffusion of the *ruḥāniyyāt* through the cosmos, in spite of its sphere being separated from the all-encompassing sphere by several levels. Thus, in dealing with the particular status of the angels attached to the sphere of the Sun, they write:

This status is the most majestic status for the supreme spiritual beings (*fa-bādhibi al-manzila ajall manāzil al-ruḥāniyyin*), and they are the angels cherubim (*fa-hum al-malā'ika al-muqarrabūn*).³¹

The lines that immediately follow in Epistle 49 give the impression that 'cherubim' (*al-muqarrabūn*)³² is, for the Ikhwān, a kind of loose appellation under which they include at the same time those angels attached to the sphere of the Sun and those attached to the last two spheres of the system, for whom they appear to reserve the more specific denomination of 'supreme cherubim' (*al-muqarrabūn min al-ʿālin*). This seems to confirm the idea that a very special affinity exists for the Ikhwān between the sphere of the Sun, that is the king according to the above-mentioned analogy, and the most elevated part of the cosmos. The following passage, also taken from Epistle 49, illustrates the same viewpoint:

From the body of each one of the fixed stars is projected a spiritual power which spreads to the whole body of the world, from the highest point of the eighth sphere, which is the vast Footstool, to the point most extreme from the centre of the Earth. Thanks to this power and with these angels exists the light which illuminates the heavens, makes the spheres brilliant, and comes into contact with the Sun, converting the latter into the luminous candle, the brilliant star, the manifest light, and the brightest lighted lamp.³³

³¹ Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 216.

³² On the identification of *al-muqarrabūn* (literally, 'Those close to [God]') with the Biblical Cherubim (*al-karūbiyyūn* or *al-karrūbīm*), see for instance, W. Madelung, "Malā'ika," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EI²*), vol. 6, 217 and, more recently: Lizzini, in: "L'angelologia," 1469-1471. On Cherubim, see also G. Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels including Fallen Angels*, New York, London: The Free Press/Collier-MacMillan Limited 1967, 86-87. For a discussion of the words *karūbiyya* and *ruḥāniyya* inside and outside Ismā'īli literature, see S. Stern, *Studies in Early Ismā'īlism*, Leiden: Brill 1983, 26-29.

³³ Epistle 49, ed. Beirut, vol. 4, 224.

The same conception also tallies fairly well with Ḥadīth literature about Isrāfil. A great number of traditions insist that Isrāfil is the creature closest to God, and most of these traditions connect him in particular with ‘the Preserved Tablet’ (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), the Qurʾān, and the Throne of God.³⁴ All these issues are, needless to say, central to the Ikhwānian system. Reading al-Suyūṭī’s collection of *ḥadīth*, we also observe with Burge that, “Isrāfil has a privileged position as the angel *nearest* [Burge’s emphasis]. As such, Isrāfil acts as a mediator between God and the angels, mainly Michael and Gabriel, just as Gabriel acts as the mediator between the human and divine worlds.”³⁵ It seems that this was also the idea that the Brethren had in mind when they made Isrāfil one of the angels specifically associated with the Sun.

In addition to Epistles 20 and 49, there is one more epistle that has much to offer with regard to angelology. I refer here to Epistle 52a, the short version of the epistle on magic. As well as being possibly the last genuine part of the corpus of *Rasāʾil*, this is also the only *risāla* to bear mention of ‘the demons of the earth, the jinn, the devils and the angels’ in its very title.³⁶ The reason for this uniqueness is clear. This last epistle includes the famous passage in which the Brethren report the views on spiritual beings that were held by the mysterious Ṣābiʾans. If we are to believe the Brethren’s account, which finds some interesting parallels in other medieval authors, such as Masʿūdi (d. 345/956), Ibn al-Nadīm (d. c. 388/998), and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), those Ṣābiʾans built 87 temples, each presumably devoted to one particular angel or star, and performed in them ceremonies of astral magic. We are also told of pagan initiation rituals in which young men and maidens were symbolically sacrificed to spiritual entities in the heavens. One such ritual, we learn, included the recitation of “the names of the angels, male and female – and there are eighty-seven of them (*asmāʾ al-malāʾika al-mudhakkara wa-l-muʾannatha wa-biya sabʿa wa-thamānūn*).” A multitude of proper names are men-

³⁴ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 66.

³⁵ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 92.

³⁶ See Epistle 52a, ed. de Callataÿ and Halflants, *On Magic I*, 5. The full title of this epistle is: “On the quiddity of magic, incantations, the evil eye, incitements [given to animals], intuition, and spells; on the modalities of the actions of talismans; on what the daemons of the earth, the jinn, the devils, and the angels are; and on the means of their deeds and mutual influences. The objective is to expound clearly the fact that in the world there are autonomous and imperceptible agents that are called spiritual beings.” For the issue of the authenticity of Epistle 52a, see pp. 5-10 of the introduction to the edition of this text. For discussions about angels, jinns, and devils in Islamic literature and/or practice, see for instance: F. Toufic, “Angeles, démons et djinns en Islam,” in: *Génies, anges et démons* (Sources orientales, 8), Paris: Le Seuil 1971, 153-214; P. Lory, “Angeles, djinns et démons dans les pratiques magiques musulmanes,” in: *Religion et pratiques de puissance*, A. de Surgy, ed., Paris: L’Harmattan 1997, 81-94. D. De Smet, “Angeles, diables et démons en gnose islamique: vers l’islamisation d’une démonologie néoplatonicienne,” in: *Démons et merveilles d’Orient* (Res Orientales, 13), R. Gyselen and P. Gallieri, eds., Bures-sur-Yvettes: GEMCO 2001, 61-70.

tioned throughout the narrative, without it always being possible to discriminate between what is considered 'a star', 'an angel', 'a spirit', or 'a god'. Thus, in addition to the temples for the planets, we are told that the Şābi'ans also devoted temples to the constellations of the starry sphere:

They also made temples to all the fixed stars, and they managed them in the same way as with the planets. And they allege that experience has led them to this and to the knowledge of the powers of their influences. Amongst them is the Dog of the Giant, that is Sirius Crossing; amongst them, al-Ūrūn, that is Capricorn; amongst them, Harūs, and that is Sagittarius; amongst them, Suḥā, which is the little star which is part of the Great Bear.³⁷

And if this is not enough, the Ikhwān next report that the Şābi'ans also made temples to souls not attached to any celestial bodies:

And [deriving] from the fixed stars, as if these were the souls denuded (*al-mufūs al-mujarrada*), they also made other temples, and they managed them in the same way as with the stars, along the years and the needs. Amongst them is Pluto, who is the king in charge of hell and the abyss; amongst others, Poseidon, who is the king in charge of the sea; amongst others, Fūḥās, who is the king in charge of the winds; amongst others, Kimas, who is the king in charge of the marvels arising from the jinn; amongst others, Aphrodite, who is the king [sic] in charge of the waves; and so forth for what they could conceive of. And in this way, they completed for them eighty-seven temples.³⁸

Now the question naturally arises as to whether, and to what extent, the Ikhwān themselves believed in these doctrines. As I have tried to demonstrate in my comments on this epistle, it is not always possible to fix in the text the limits between the parts that report the tenets of the Şābi'ans and those in which the authors express their own views. There are certainly elements in this hotchpotch of rituals and symbols that the Ikhwān could not endorse or subscribe to other than in a purely allegorical way. What is beyond doubt, however, is that this extreme form of astral determinism also lies behind innumerable passages of the *Rasā'il* in which the theories conveyed are meant to be part and parcel of the Brethren's own teaching. We may conclude the present contribution by giving one last example, concerning the two nodes of the Moon which astrologers traditionally refer to as "the Head of the Dragon" (*ra's al-jawzabr*) and "the Tail of the Dragon" (*dhanab al-jawzabr*). At the beginning of Epistle 52a, but not in the Şābi'an section itself, we find the assertion that these two nodes are "neither stars nor apparent bodies, but hidden things" and that, as such, "the concealment of their essence and the apparentness of their actions, is an indication that in the world there are souls that are concealed to sensation. Their actions are apparent, whereas their essences are concealed: they are called the spiritual beings (...). They are the genera of angels, and

³⁷ Epistle 52a, ed. de Callatay and Halflants, *On Magic I*, 64-65 (English translation, 130-132).

³⁸ Epistle 52a, ed. de Callatay and Halflants, *On Magic I*, 65-66 (English translation, 132-133).

the tribes of jinn, and the groups of devils”.³⁹ The world of the Ikhwān is, without question, a world of spirits.

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³⁹ Epistle 52a, ed. de Callataï and Halflants, *On Magic* I, 11 (English translation, 91-92). For a passage that is almost identical, see also Epistle 3, ed. Ragep and Mimura, *On Astronomia*, 101-103 (69-70 of English translation).

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Angels as Part of Human Civilisation

Ibn Khaldūn's Conciliating Approach

Stefan Leder (Halle)

Angels are the subject of a wide-ranging Islamic discourse, both as a tenet of faith and as the objects of theological, metaphysical, and cosmological discussion. This discourse unfolds across a number of literary genres and can be difficult to disentangle; even though the topics under discussion may intersect, contextual frameworks and objectives frequently differ. Qurʾānic angelology can be read as a reverberation of the theological landscape of the Near East and as a reflection of the prophet's dialogue with his – partly skeptical – local addressees.¹ Eschatological images and ideas current at the time of the Qurʾān are reflected in the Qurʾānic angelology.² Its extension in exegeses of the text mainly aims at expounding the statements and allusions found in the scripture and at harmonising passages that were thought to be perplexing and problematic.³ Islamic Tradition further elaborates various theological tendencies, ranging from a literalist understanding of the text to *kalām* theology,⁴ and also including the Sufi notion of communion with angels.⁵ The cosmographical approach to the description of the world situates it within, and exposes it to the influence of, the cosmic order, which includes the cosmic spheres, heaven and hell, and the angels with whom the prophets are conjoined.⁶ Heaven and hell, and the intermediary sojourn in the *barzakh*, are of par-

¹ Patricia Crone, "Angels Versus Humans," in: *Revelation, Literature, and Community in Late Antiquity*, Philippa Townsend, ed., Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011, 315-336.

² Christian Lange, "Revising Hell's Angels in the Quran," in: *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, Christian Lange, ed., Brill 2016, 74-99.

³ See Qurʾānic verses mentioning the expression "angels and *rūḥ*," problematic in the eyes of exegetes; Art.: "Malāʾika," (D. J. MacDonald, W. Madelung), in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam* 2nd edition, vol. 6, Leiden 1991, 216b-219b. For *rūḥ*, see also Pierre Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns*, Paris: Albin Michel [2018], 163.

⁴ Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabāʾik fi akhbār al-malāʾik*, (Culture and Civilization in the Middle East, 31), London: Routledge 2012.

⁵ Pierre Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns*, Paris: Albin Michel, [2018].

⁶ Al-Maqdisi, Muṭahhir ibn Ṭāhir (wrote ca. 355/966), *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa-l-taʾrikh*, vols. 1-6. Reprint of the edition Paris, 1899-1919, vol. 1, 169-181, especially 172ff. Bernd Radtke, *Weltgeschichte und Weltbeschreibung im mittelalterlichen Islam*, (Beiruter Texte und Studien 51), Beirut, in Kommission Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart 1992, Teil IV, Die Kosmographie Sibṭ Ibn al-Gauzis in der Rezension Ibn ad-Dawādāris [d. after 736/1335], Engel und Geistwesen 332-339; Al-Qazwīnī, *Die Wunder des Himmels und der Erde*, Aus dem Arabischen übertragen und bearbeitet von Alma Giese, Stuttgart: Erdman 1986, 62-79. More particularly on angels in al-Qazwīnī's (d. 686/1283) encyclopedia *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt*, see Syrinx von Hees, *Enzyklopädie als Spiegel des Weltbildes. Qazwīnīs Wunder der Schöpfung – eine Naturkunde*

ticular interest for those concerned with eschatological matters.⁷ Metaphysics too may make reference to the angels when explaining the soul and its potential for supernatural perception. The discourse on the nature and function of angels may, thus, help explain the ability of humans and, especially, the ability of the Prophets to experience transcendence.

Giorgio Agamben's short and pointed analysis of the concept of angels in scholastic theology can be transferred, in part at least, to the Islamic context. The significance of angels, he suggests, consists in the distinction between the function they serve in governing the heavenly spheres and the role they play in assisting humans, and in the – temporary – hierarchical order in which any limited force is generally conceived of as being led and administered by a superior force.⁸ In the Islamic context, the heavenly hierarchy was not replicated in the hierarchical structure of a church, of course. However, the Aristotelian-Neoplatonic heritage, with its series of graded distinctions of causes and essences, became an established model for Islamic thinkers that was elaborated into the specific metaphysics of the spirit ("Geistmetaphysik") as early as al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/866).⁹ These gradations have a dynamic aspect insofar as they allow for the ascending or descending motion of parts of the system and this concept raises questions concerning the relative positions of humans and angels.¹⁰ This issue has important implications for the notions of prophecy and revelation, and thereby reveals a latent tension between the metaphysical concept of cognition and the Islamic vision of revelation. This tension is present in Ibn Khaldūn's discourse on angels, in which he expends significant efforts in avoiding what appear to him to be incorrect assessments of the

des 13. Jahrhunderts, (Diskurse der Arabistik, 4), Wiesbaden 2002, 268-350 and the contribution of Karin Rührdanz in this volume.

⁷ Tommaso Tesi, "The *barzakh* and the Intermediate State of the Dead in the Quran," in: *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, Christian Lange, ed., Leiden: Brill 2016, 31-55.

⁸ Giorgio Agamben, *Die Beamten des Himmels: Über Engel*. Aus dem Ital. übersetzt und hrsg. von Andreas Hiepmo, Frankfurt: Verlag der Weltreligionen 2007.

⁹ Gerhard Endress, "al-Kindī: Arabismus, Hellenismus und die Legitimation der Philosophie im Islam," in: *Islamische Grenzen und Grenzübergänge*, Benedikt Reinert, Johannes Thomann, eds., Bern: Peter Lang 2007, 35-60.

¹⁰ Lutpi Ibrahim, "The Question of the Superiority of Angels and Prophets Between Zamakhshari and Baiḍāwī," in: *Arabica* 28 (1981) 65-75; Lory, *La dignité de l'homme*, 189, 234; Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 95. On the functioning of the human soul and its higher faculty of perceiving spiritual phenomena, see also *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' wa-khullān al-wafā'*, ed. 'Ārif Tāmīr, vols. 1-5, Paris, Beirut, Manshūrāt 'Uwaydāt 1995, vol. 3/191-204 (*risāla* 35), 203. *Die Abhandlungen der Ikhwān es-Safā' in Auswahl*. Zum ersten Mal aus arabischen Handschriften Friedrich Dieterici, ed., Leipzig: Hinrichs 1886, 454-475. For the change towards an anthropocentric worldview in Rabbinic tradition, in contrast to the former cosmological orientation, and the repercussions of this change for the concept of angels, see Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen, Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelsvorstellung*, Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 1973, 219-233. Samuela Pagani, "La controversia sui meriti relativi degli uomini e degli angeli nella letteratura religiosa musulmana," in: *Angeli: Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia, eds., Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore 2009, 1501-1558, here: 1527.

incompatibility of rationalist and revelatory approaches to knowledge. In other words, he believes that the rationalistic account of angels as a necessary and indispensable part of creation must be reconcilable with Islamic teachings. Nevertheless, he is unable to completely resolve this tension, as can be seen in the discrepancy that remains between his skepticism about the benefits of philosophy and his use of metaphysics in his epistemological framework, in which angels, and human interactions with such entities, play an indispensable role.

Civilisation and religion

Ibn Khaldūn's taking up of this discussion in the framework of his *Muqaddima* does not come simply as a matter of course. Ibn Khaldūn considered his famous History to be an entirely novel, systematic, and theoretically sound project. Even the title is indicative of his ambitions, since "Book of Lessons and Record of Beginnings and Events in the history of the Arabs etc.," is a play on words that also translates as "subject and predicate (*al-mubtada' wa-l-khabar*) in the history of the Arabs." In grammatical terminology, it is the combination of both elements that constitutes a phrase, and the two together thus establish signification, just as does Ibn Khaldūn's science. In the *Prolegomena, Muqaddima*, the author explicates the theoretical premises and presents the many aspects involved in his endeavour, which is the explaining of *ʿumrān*, civilisation. He claims to set out an "independent science [that] has its own subject matter: human civilisation (*ʿumrān basharī*) and social organisation (*al-ijtimāʿ al-insānī*), and its own issues (*masāʾil*): explaining systematically the manifestations that attach themselves to its essence."¹¹ In the Khaldunian understanding, civilisational activity, including the science of civilisation, does not result from a set of rules, but gives shape to them.¹² All manifestations of civilisation, such as language, arts, sciences, and crafts, as well as economy and political order, contribute to its organisation.¹³ The various forms of rule and political order, their emergence, conditions, and manifestations, as well as their decline, stand at the core of Ibn Khaldūn's endeavour.¹⁴ I shall argue that his concili-

¹¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima, Kitāb al-ʿIbar wa-dīwān al-mubtada' wa-l-khabar fī ayyām al-ʿArab wa-l-ʿajam wa-l-barbar wa-man āṣarabhum min dhawī al-sultān al-akbar*, vol. I, Ibrāhīm Shabūh and Ihsān ʿAbbās, eds., (Tunis: 2006); vol. II, Ibrāhīm Shabūh, ed., (Tunis: 2007), (further referred to as MSH) 1/60f.; Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*, vol. I - III, transl. Franz Rosenthal, New York: Bollingen Foundation 1958 (further referred to as MR) 1/77f.

¹² Abu Yaareb al-Marzuqi, *Ibn Khaldun's Epistemological and Axiological Paradoxes*, Tunis: Maison Arabe du Livre 2006, 39: "He seeks to ground *Ilm al-Imran* construed as civilisational activity and not as a result of activity, in a scientific knowledge of laws, whose nature is of the same kind as physical laws."

¹³ *Fī anna al-ʿumrān al-basharī lā budda labu min al-siyāsa yantazimu bibā amrubu*. MSH 1/519, chap. 3, sec. 51.

¹⁴ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History. A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*, London: George Allen and Unwin 1957, 204.

ating stance is not a tactical maneuver aimed at harmonising divergent points of view but, rather, emerges from his approach to civilisation, which is what history is all about, and to the pivotal position of humankind therein.

The complicated social formations inherent to civilisation exhibit certain regularities that result from the way in which social cohesion (*‘asabiyya*) functions. The mundane aspects of religion, that is religion in its role as a supreme repressive force (*wāzī‘*), may contribute towards the shaping of social cohesion, especially in the Arabic case. The Muḍar Arabs distinguished themselves by the plainness of their Bedouin lifestyle,¹⁵ to the point that only religion in its prophetic or charismatic form¹⁶ could overcome tribal divisions and bring about unity by offering a supreme normative authority and political leadership. Arabs were, therefore, particularly capable of accepting the truth of the prophet’s mission.¹⁷ Arabs were the most distant of all peoples from the lavishness and the mundane concerns of settled life, thus fusing their religion, which called them to abstain from comfort, with their inherited habits.¹⁸ However, social cohesion, *‘asabiyya*, deploys its effects even in the absence of religious authority. The end of the caliphate as a historical reality after the first decades of Islamic history and its replacement with institutional authority illustrates this correlation.¹⁹

Ibn Khaldūn conceives of civilisation in terms of two main sets of conditions: the geographical and climatic conditions of social life and the psychological and intellectual conditions of the human being expressed in metaphysical terms.²⁰ Concerning this latter set, one may discern two approaches to explaining how humankind is connected to transcendence through the prophets. Both approaches interfere with and overlap one another. One approach takes God as the starting point. God chooses (*iṣṭafā*) individuals as the connecting links (*wasā’il*) between Himself and His servants by creating them to be cognisant of Himself, by addressing them, and by using them to give evidence to mankind of the wonders (*kha-wāriq*) manifest in the things of which they speak that are beyond the reach of man, which can only be learned from God through their mediation.²¹ As the authentication of prophets is the crucial criterion for establishing the truth of what they say and do, the author gives details about the signs (*‘alāmāt*) that are under-

¹⁵ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta’rīkh Ibn Khaldūn al-musammā bi-Kitāb al-‘Ibar wa-l-mubtada’ wa-l-khabar*, vols. I-VII, Beirut 1971, here: vol. VI, 6.

¹⁶ *Al-dīn bi-l-nubuwwati au al-wilāyati* (reference in note 17 below). *Wilāya* refers to being *wali* or *wali Allāh*, close to God.

¹⁷ MSH 1/263 chap. 2, sec. 26 (“Arabs attain royal authority, or establish central power, only by way of a religious movement led by a prophet or a saint, or in reaction to a great event of this type”); MR 1/305.

¹⁸ MR 1/ 357.

¹⁹ MR 1/428 chap. 3 sec. 26.

²⁰ Abu Yaareb al-Marzuqī, *Ibn Khaldūn’s Epistemological and Axiological Paradoxes*, 19 ft. 30. See MSH, chap. 1 sec. 6: *Fi aṣnāf al-mudrikīn li-l-ghayb min al-bashar bi-l-ḥiṭra au bi-l-riyāda*.

²¹ *Bi-wasāṭatibīm* MSH 1/165; MR 1/184.

stood to be proofs of the prophetic status, including the famous story in which the Byzantine emperor Heraclius recognises Muḥammad as the prophet.²² The second approach deploys an explication of the metaphysical aspects of prophecy that refers to the concepts of angelic spheres and angels.²³ A short discussion of how philosophers perceive wonders precedes this passage.²⁴ Later in his book, he reconfirms the theory of the prophets' temporary merging with the angelic spheres.²⁵ In the last chapter of the *Muqaddima*, parts of which were added to the book at a very late stage of its redaction, Ibn Khaldūn finally returns to this issue and adds a modified version of his metaphysical explication, this time adapted to the more investigative context which characterises that chapter.²⁶ In order to understand what the author intends when he offers two different approaches to the prophet's connection with transcendence, one needs to consider his epistemological theory²⁷ and his notorious refutation of philosophy.²⁸

Ibn Khaldūn's stance – apparent in his treatment of the soul (*nafs*), prophecy, and angels – cannot be understood by drawing on the clumsy notion of a dichotomy between rational and Islamic (revealed) knowledge that supposedly pervaded Islamic culture. This notion was discarded as an 'orientalist myth' several decades ago.²⁹ Arguing against the idea that Ibn Khaldūn was enmeshed in such an irreconcilable dilemma, al-Azmeh has suggested that "his critique of abstraction and its adoption elsewhere" does not result in contradiction but, rather, in articulate points of view that emerge in distinct paradigmatic and polemical contexts.³⁰ Drawing on a perspective that transcended the distinction between philosophy and religion, Ibn Khaldūn brought his axiological concept of man into play.³¹ He believed that the human soul continuously strives towards active intellection and attempts to assimilate itself to the highest spiritual group, a position held, in his

²² Stefan Esders, "The Prophesied Rule of a 'Circumcised People'. A Travelling Tradition from the Seventh-Century Mediterranean," [*unpublished manuscript*]. For this story and its literary and theological contexts, see also Stefan Leder, "Heraklios erkennt den Propheten. Ein Beispiel für Form und Entstehung narrativer Geschichtskonstruktionen," in: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 151 (2001), 1-42.

²³ MSH 1/172-179, chap. I, 6th prefatory discussion (On the real meaning of prophecy); MR 1/194-202.

²⁴ MSH 1/170f.; MR 1/192f.

²⁵ MSH 2/172-174, chap. VI, sec. 5 (On the knowledge of prophets); MR 2/422-424.

²⁶ MSH 2/169-172, chap. VI, sec. 4 (On the knowledge of human beings and the knowledge of angels); MR 2/419-422.

²⁷ MSH 2/165-167, chap. VI, sec. 2 (The world of the things that come into being as the result of action materialises through thinking); MR 2/415f; MSH 2/167-169, chap. VI, sec. 3 (Section on the experimental intellect and how it comes into being); MR 2/417-419.

²⁸ MSH 2/409-418, chap. VI, sec. 31 (30), MR 3/246-258.

²⁹ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*, London, New York: Routledge 1982, 116.

³⁰ Aziz Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*, 116f.

³¹ As suggested by Abu Yaareb al-Marzuqi, *Ibn Khaldun's Epistemological and Axiological Paradoxes*, 7, fn. 7, based on what he identifies as Ibn Khaldūn's vision of how civilisation may be refined and how human limitations can be transcended.

view, by the angels. This stance echoes various Neoplatonic positions that were well-known in the Islamic traditions. In pursuing this approach, he is careful to adapt his views in a manner that allows him to confirm the tenets of the Islamic creed. Neither a philosopher nor a theologian, his perspective is orientated by his historical understanding of civilisation, in the development of which he applies a descriptive and analytical approach. In general, his stance towards philosophy is friendly and he gives proof of this attitude in his discussion of angels. At the same time, he repudiates the priority given by the Neoplatonists to the First Intellect,³² and offers a skeptical assessment of the limitations that inhibit the discursive tradition, in particular, with respect to metaphysics.³³

It is important to take into account the systematic approach that unfolds in the *Muqaddima*. The analysis here both supports and inspires, if not requires, a rational approach to the human being's ability to access what lies beyond the earthly sphere. Ibn Khaldūn's remarks on supernatural perception appear in the first part, or chapter, of the work, in which he explicates the foundations of human civilisation and treats the natural conditions underlying *ʿumrān* in several prefatory discussions. The last of these is dedicated to the recognition of the supernatural world, including its accessibility, through the acquired faculty of thought. However, the ability to access this sphere is not a general human capacity. It is reserved, rather, to those who are equipped with an extraordinary natural disposition. We may assume that it is the author's intent to present communication with the world of the unseen as an essential part of human civilisation. The most important aspect of this communication is prophecy. Religion based on prophecy is essential for the author's approach to the history of civilisation, as we have seen, and, in particular, for his discussion of the history of the Arabs, and it may well be the case that this perspective motivated his views about communication with the higher realms. Ibn Khaldūn's vision of the place and function of angels in the world centres on the idea that there is a type of cognition shared by angels and prophets. The particular capabilities that allow prophets to communicate with angels, however exceptional, are still a human faculty.

Angels and the human soul

The complexity of Ibn Khaldūn's text here exceeds the usual syntactic and semantic ambiguities.³⁴ The author presents an abbreviated and convoluted synthesis of parts of the metaphysical tradition that was adopted and processed by Islamic phi-

³² Al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn*, 117f.

³³ Zaid Ahmad, *The Epistemology of Ibn Khaldūn*, London, Routledge Curzon 2003, 97. For a more sober reading of Ibn Khaldūn's refutation, see Muḥammad Mazūghī, "Ibn Khaldūn wa-l-falsafa," in: *Studies on Ibn Khaldūn*, Massimo Campanini, ed., Milano: Polimetrica 2005, 145-180.

³⁴ Stefan Leder, "The Arabs of Ibn Khaldūn," in: *Al-Abhath* 57 (2009), 47-64, here: 47f.

losophy. The intricate character of the Neoplatonic tradition is well known. Part of the problem involved in understanding that tradition is that it does not draw clear distinctions between its Platonic and Aristotelian roots.³⁵ The mélange of Aristotelian theories concerning the movement of celestial spheres and the Neoplatonic concept of emanation are both characteristic of Arabic philosophy from an early date.³⁶ Ibn Khaldūn's remarks in this context cannot be traced back as far as the specific sources on which he may have drawn but his explications clearly echo ideas that appear elsewhere. In the *Rasā'il Ikbwān al-Ṣafā'*, for example, the transformation of purified human souls into angels is an important aspect of the understanding of angels.³⁷ Ibn Khaldūn's references to the highest assembly (*al-mala' al-ʿlā'*) in the heavenly spheres, the contact with angels through highly developed human perception, and the idea that the human being constitutes a nexus between animals and angels all echo concepts referred to in the *Rasā'il*.³⁸ However, in spite of the parallels between the two texts, which occur in other parts of the *Muqaddima* as well and have encouraged sweeping speculation about the origins of Ibn Khaldūn's work,³⁹ there is no sound evidence of any direct dependency.⁴⁰ There are also parallels to Ibn Sinā's teachings, as we shall see below, but it is the differences that predominate in that case as well.

The starting point for Ibn Khaldūn's deductions concerning the soul, angels, and the communion of the two is an explanation of the fundamental characteristics of the created world.⁴¹ These consist of the interrelatedness of the parts of creation (*ittiṣāl*), their arrangement in an ascending order, their potential transition from one stage to the other, and the disposition (*isti'dād*) to make this transition, as well as the existence of essences, which exercise influence. Elements of this explanation appear again in al-Fārābī's (d. 339/950) metaphysics,⁴² but, for obvious reasons, Ibn Khaldūn does not adopt the idea of the active intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*)

³⁵ Henry J. Blumenthal, "Neoplatonic Elements in De Anima Commentaries," in: *Aristotle Transformed: The Ancient Commentators and Their Influence*, Richard Sorabji, ed., London: Duckworth 1990, 305-324, here: 307.

³⁶ Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *L'Épître sur l'intellect, al-Risāla fī l-ʿaql*. Traduit de l'arabe, annoté et présenté par Dyala Hamzah. Paris: L'Harmattan 2001, 24f.

³⁷ Godefroy de Callataÿ, *Ikbwān al-Ṣafā'. A Brotherhood of Idealists on the Fringe of Orthodox Islam*, Oxford: Oneworld 2005, 85.

³⁸ Susanne Diwald, *Arabische Philosophie und Wissenschaft in der Enzyklopädie*, Part 3, *Die Lehre von Seele und Intellekt*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1975, 434, 335 and 292, 153.

³⁹ Maḥmūd Ismāʿīl, *Nihāyat Uṣṭūra. Naẓariyyāt Ibn Khaldūn muqtabasa min Rasā'il Ikbwān al-Ṣafā'*. Maṣūra: ʿĀmir li-ṭ-ṭibāʿa wa-l-nashr 1996.

⁴⁰ See also Fuʿād Baʿli, *Ikbwān al-Ṣafā' wa-Ibn Khaldūn. Dirāsa muqārana fī l-fikr al-ijtimāʿi*, Bagdad 2011.

⁴¹ In chap. I, 6th prefatory discussion, Explication of the real meaning of prophecy, MSH 1/172-179, MR 1/194-202.

⁴² Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect. Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect and Theories of Human Intellect*, New York, NY et al.: Oxford University Press 1992, 3, 54, 58ff., 84.

and the appurtenant theory of prophecy. Instead, he critically discusses this concept in his refutation of philosophy on rational grounds.⁴³

Ibn Khaldūn's intent here is to demonstrate that the soul's disposition to merge with angels corresponds with the general principles that are at work in creation:

We observe that this world with all the created things is structured in a certain order and solid manner, has causes and things caused tied together, the parts of the existing world interconnected (*ittiṣāl*), and lets one existing thing be transformed (*istiḥāla*) into another,⁴⁴ and this does not cease to evoke marvel and never ends.⁴⁵

According to his further explications, observation of the visible world reveals that the elements are arranged in just such an ascending order, from earth through water then air and on to fire. The elements are connected with one another and are always ready to be transformed, rising upwards or declining downwards. Each higher stage is more refined (*altāf*) and the ascending order thus leads toward the world of the spheres with its interconnected layers. The senses may perceive their motion, and this perception conveys knowledge not only about their measurements and position, but also about the existence of essences (*dhawāt*) beyond these spheres, which exercise their influence upon them. Examples show that all of these principles appear in the world of creation (*‘ālam al-takwīn*). In the gradual process of creation (*tadarruj al-takwīn*), which implies growth and the richness of species, man appears at the highest level because he is equipped for thinking and reflection (*al-fikr wa-l-rū‘ya*), in contrast to the ape, the next lower being, who otherwise resembles man in many respects.

The existence of the soul and the angels, we are told, can be deduced through a chain of reasoning from what is directly apparent to us. We can infer from our sensory perception the influence of the motion of the spheres and the elements, and we find in the world of creation the influence of the motions of growth and perception. There must be something that exercises this influence, the argument runs, and it must be different from the bodily substance, something spiritual, which is, according to the principle of interconnection (*ittiṣāl*), connected with the components of the created world (*mukawwanāt*). This is the soul (*nafs*), which has perception and causes motion. With the existence of the soul established, the next step is to understand that above the soul there must exist another entity (*maʿjūd*) that is connected with the soul and provides it with these capacities. Its essence (*dhawāt*)

⁴³ Aziz al-Azmeh, *Ibn Khaldūn in Modern Scholarship. A Study in Orientalism*, London: Third World Centre for Research and Publishing 1981, 99-102.

⁴⁴ Cf. Amélie-Marie Goichon, *Lexique de la Philosophie d'Ibn Sinā (Avicenne). Vocabulaire comparés d'Aristote et Ibn Sinā*, Frankfurt: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University 1999 [Paris: Desclée de Brouwer 1938.], 99f. *istiḥāla*, "le mouvement qui va d'une qualité à une autre," with reference to Ibn Sinā's *‘Uyūn al-ḥikma*.

⁴⁵ MSH 1/172, MR 1/194.

should be pure perception and absolute intellection (*ta'qqul mahḍ*). This is the world of the angels.⁴⁶

Due to the connection between the two worlds, the soul has the disposition to exchange its human existence for an angelic existence (*istī'dād li-l-insilāk*⁴⁷ *min al-bashariyya ilā l-malā'ikiyya*). This occurs at a certain time and in a certain moment, when the spiritual self (*dhāt rūḥāniyya*) has become perfect in actuality (*bi-l-fi'l*), and the effect is that the soul can now, in the case of the prophets, become part of the angelic species (*jins*). The soul is connected with the horizons (*ufuq*) above and below in the same manner as are all existent and ordered entities (*mawjūdāt*), and is thus connected with the body through which it acquires sensory perception (*madārik ḥisiyya*). This perception in turn makes possible the acquisition of actual intellection (*ta'qqul bi-l-fi'l*). The soul is also connected with the horizon of the angels, through which it acquires scientific and supranatural perception (*madārik 'ilmiyya wa-l-ghaybiyya*). This perception is particularly concerned with the knowledge of things that come into being (*ḥawādith*), a knowledge that exists timelessly in the intellection of the angel. Concluding the argument of this part of his chapter on the meaning of prophecy, Ibn Khaldūn refers back to his starting point: "This is in consequence (*'alā mā*) of what we mentioned before about the solid order (*tartīb muḥkam*) extending over all parts of existence through the interconnection of essences and forces (*dhawāt, quwwā*)." ⁴⁸

Moving from the general to the specific, Ibn Khaldūn now turns to explain why the faculty of the soul that enables it to approach and attain angelicity cannot realise its potential in every human being. The next passage⁴⁸ in his discussion is concerned with the invisible soul, the influence it has over the human body, and, of particular interest here, the influence it has over intellection, which connects the soul to the angelic sphere. He explains how the rational power (*nāṭiqa*), the highest level of the faculty of perception, is constituted. The graded powers of external sense perception ascend towards an inward (*bāṭin*) perception. The first level is the common sense (*ḥiss mushtarak*) that perceives all objects of sensory perception simultaneously. Ibn Khaldūn here seems to simplify a concept that is laid out by Ibn Sinā in more detail. The latter maintains that the common sense is the faculty (*quwwa*) to which all sensible perceptions are led and then expounds an argument that is similar to that of Ibn Khaldūn.⁴⁹ However, this does not mean that Ibn

⁴⁶ Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy of History. A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, Phoenix edition 1964, 88. Fn. 3 refers to this expression as an evidence of "Ibn Khaldūn's philosophic interpretation of the phenomena of prophecy."

⁴⁷ The rather peculiar term *insalakba* means literally "to skin" (snake).

⁴⁸ MSH 1/174f.; MR 1/196f.

⁴⁹ *Psychologie d'Ibn Sinā (Avicenne) d'après son œuvre aš-šifā*, éd. et trad. en français par Ján Bakoš, Prague: Éd. de l'Académie Tchécoslovaque des Sciences 1956, 2 vols., here: 2/115. Cf. Ibn Sinā, *al-Nafs min Kitāb l-Shifā*, Ḥasan Ḥasanzādeh al-Āmili, ed., Qum: Mu'assasa-i Būstān-i Kitāb 2006, 227.

Khaldūn necessarily borrows directly from Ibn Sinā. Al-Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111) also makes use of this epistemological concept in his *Revival of religious sciences*,⁵⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 605/1209) refers to the theory in his work on the soul,⁵¹ and there are several further testimonies for the spread of this concept in Islamic thought. Setting the question of ultimate origins to one side, Ibn Khaldūn's further remarks in this passage present a striking parallel to Ibn Sinā's discussion of the matter.

The common sense is linked to imagination (*khiyāl*), the power of picturing sensory perception in the soul in an abstract manner, and, further, to estimative power (*wahmiyya*), which serves the perception of concepts (*ma'ānī*) related to individual events (*shakhsīyyāt*), and to memory (*ḥāfiẓa*), which functions as a general repository (*kbazāna*). These powers then culminate in the power of thinking (*fīkr*), which is the force that enables reflection (*raʿwiyya*) and orientation towards intellection (*taʿaqqul*). The soul is constantly moved by thinking due to a tendency (*nuzūʿ*) implanted in it. This motion aims at overcoming the lowness (*darak*) of instinctual power and the readiness to respond to it that is inherent in humankind. The soul thus aims at leaving behind these instinctual tendencies, moving towards the activity of the perfected form of intellection, which is similar to the highest gathering (*al-malaʿ*) of the spiritual beings (i.e. the angels), and ascending to the first order of the spiritualia (*rūḥāniyyāt*) by perceiving without the use of bodily organs. The soul constantly moves in this direction and, in doing so, is able to change its nature (*tansalikk*) completely from humanity and spirituality to angelicity (*malakiyya*) without the help of any acquired faculty, achieving this solely by virtue of the primary natural disposition (*fiṭra, jibilla*) that God has bestowed upon it.

This particular capacity is restricted to only one facet of the soul. The distinction between the three kinds of soul to which Ibn Khaldūn refers⁵² was a common topic in philosophy and in Islamic thought. Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925 or 323/935), for example, refers to the Platonic origins of this distinction and, in doing so, provides proof of his amalgamation of Platonic and Aristotelian ideas.⁵³ What matters for Ibn Khaldūn, though, are the intellectual capacities and the spiritual potential of the soul. Epistemological issues related to human cognition are

⁵⁰ Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, Siḍqi Muḥammad Jamil al-ʿAṭṭār, Taqdim wa-murājaʿa, Beirut: Dār al-Fīkr 1415/1995, 1-5, vol. 5, 146-162 (*Fī niʿam Allāh fī khayr asbāb al-idrāk*).

⁵¹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-naḥs wa-l-rūḥ wa-sharḥ quwāhumā fī ʿilm al-akblāq*. Dirāsa wa-taḥqīq ʿAbdallāh Muḥammad ʿAbdallāh Ismāʿīl, Kairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariya li-l-Turāth 1980, 177.

⁵² MSH 1/175f., MR 1/197-199.

⁵³ Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, "Al-Ṭibb al-ruḥāni," in: *Rasāʾil Falsafiyya*, Paulus Kraus, ed., Frankfurt: Institute for the History of the Arabic Islamic Sciences 1999, [Cairo 1939], part one. Cf. Stefan Leder, *Ibn al-Gauzi und seine Kompilation wider die Leidenschaft. Der Traditionalist in gelehrter Überlieferung und originärer Lehre*, (Beiruter Texte und Studien, 32), Wiesbaden: Steiner 1984, 188f.

combined with a classification of human capacities and their social significance: the first kind (*ṣanaḥ*) of the soul – or, rather, quality of the soul, since the soul is a single united entity, composed of interconnected parts in ascending order – is devoid of spiritual perception. It contents itself with moving downwards towards sensory and imaginative perception and with the formation of ideas from memory and estimation. In this limited manner, perceptive or conceptual (*taṣawwuriyya*) knowledge and apperceptive or assessing (*taṣḍiqiyya*) knowledge are produced.⁵⁴ These constitute the limited intellectual capacities of scholars. The second kind of the soul is orientated towards spiritual intellection through the motion of thinking. This perception does not require bodily instruments and moves freely in the realm of inner observations, which are empathetic (*wijḍānī*) in character. This is the perception of saints and people of mystical learning.

A (third) kind (of the soul) is naturally equipped (*maḥṭūr*) to change (*insilākh*) from humankind, bodily and spiritually, to angelicity, belonging to the highest stage, so that it actually becomes an angel in a short moment like the blink of the eye. It thus occurs to the soul that it may see the highest group (*malaʾ*) (of the angels) in their stage and listen to the essential talk (*al-kalām al-naḥṣānī*) and the divine address.⁵⁵ Those (to whom this occurs) are the prophets, God bless them.⁵⁶

In correspondence with the solidly structured order of the created world, as mentioned at the outset of Ibn Khaldūn's explication, the angelic dimension of prophecy resides in the nature of the human soul. Since achieving this angelic state is something that occurs only to prophets, Ibn Khaldūn then discusses the particular qualities that God granted to prophets, before turning to the Islamic concept of revelation (*wahy*) that is interwoven with, or grafted onto, his metaphysical approach. God induced and formed the natural ability to exchange humanity for angelicity at the moment of revelation, and he freed prophets from the hindrances and effects of the bodies that they wore as human beings. He installed in them immunity from sin and error (*ʿiṣma*), righteousness, and a desire for worship, so that they tend toward this (angelic) stage by virtue of the natural disposition that was implanted in them.

When Ibn Khaldūn points out that prophecy is God-willed and depends on specific qualities that He grants to *His* prophets, the focus of his discourse shifts from the potential of the human soul to God's provision, and this may confirm the conventional idea of a dichotomy that divides philosophy and religion. In

⁵⁴ Amélie-Marie Goichon, *Lexique de la Philosophie d'Ibn Sinā (Avicenne)*, s.v.; Tiana Koutzarova, *Das Transzendente bei Ibn Sinā. Zur Metaphysik als Wissenschaft erster Begriffs- und Urteilsprinzipien*, Leiden: Brill 2009, 60-65.

⁵⁵ Ibn Sinā's angelology offers a more differentiated systematic, at least according to what he has to say in his *Shifā'*: Angels seen by the Prophet have transformed into form, Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing, al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyāt*, A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by Michael W. Marmura, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press 2005, 359.

⁵⁶ MSH 1/176, MR 1/199.

any case, he attempts to reconcile the historical Islamic aspects of revelation with conceptual thinking that conceives of a transition to angelicity as something that falls within the potential of humankind. His position is coherent insofar as it corresponds with the guiding perspective of this section of his book, in which he explains *ʿumrān* as being embedded in the comprehensive order of the created world, in its natural and metaphysical aspects, on the one hand, and in what he takes to be the history of mankind and the role of religion therein, on the other. The transition of the soul into the angelic spheres constitutes revelation. It requires the God-given potential of the soul in a general sense and is also bound to certain individual requirements that occur under the condition of God's interference. Revelation happens outside of time (*laysa fī zamānin*) and terrestrial space, but prophecy is an office that brings about religious teaching within these boundaries. It thus takes place in history and results in religion, which is explained by Ibn Khaldūn in both general and Islamic terms in this passage. With respect to general traits, he is primarily interested in two phenomena, one of which is transmission. Prophets preserve and adapt (*ʿajū bihi*) what they have encountered and learned in the angelic sphere to make it appropriate for the lower level of human perception, because they have the insight that is needed to properly communicate the message. The other is the form of communication with angels. This communication may occur through the perception of an indistinct sound (*dawī*), the meaning of which is understood, or through the appearance of an angelic figure ("man") talking in understandable words. Relating this distinction to the Islamic creed, Ibn Khaldūn declares that the second form of communication distinguishes those prophets who are sent as messengers. This remark provides him with a starting point for his summary presentation of revelation and prophecy as recorded in Islamic tradition, and, subsequently, for his delimitation of prophecy from phenomena such as soothsaying and dreams.⁵⁷

Ibn Khaldūn construes the idea of the connectivity between human and angelic spheres – and the resulting event of revelation – by referring to a framing metaphysical concept. An Aristotelian imprint is recognisable in his work generally, but this does not allow us to derive any specific conclusions concerning the inspiration for his discussion of these matters in particular.⁵⁸ Despite parallels with Ibn Sinā's metaphysics, Ibn Khaldūn's explication of the role of the angels in the revelatory act does not reproduce the concept of emanation.⁵⁹ Rather, Ibn Khaldūn's understanding includes a graded and ascending order of different worlds that contain and organise all the parts of creation, the uninterrupted and continuous conjunc-

⁵⁷ MSH 1/177-186; MR 1/200-208.

⁵⁸ Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldūn's Philosophy*, 80, fn. 6, reads Ibn Khaldūn's complaint, that the works of the Ancient have fallen into oblivion, as a reference to Aristotle, and thus traces the Aristotelian legacy in his work (78ff.).

⁵⁹ Olga Lizzini, "L'angelologia filosofica di Avicenna," in: *Angeli: Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia, Vicenza, eds., Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore 2009, 1845-1963, here: 1868f., 1904.

tion of these worlds, and the readiness of parts at the fringes of the different worlds to exchange one status for the other.⁶⁰ However, it is the distinction between different kinds of intellection that is the kernel of the theory. This is so not only because it adopts and explicates the cosmological gradation by reference to a corresponding order of cognition, but also, and even more importantly, because it provides an explanation of the nature of angels that makes them an indispensable component of existence. Ibn Khaldūn's approach, in the first instance, implies a subdivision of the soul into different parts, so that the ability to ascend to the angelic spheres can be imagined as a general, or very nearly general, human potential. His subsequent discussion, however, emphasises the limits that constrain human faculties when they are compared with those of an angelic nature.

Angels and prophets

Ibn Khaldūn dedicates the sixth part of the *Muqaddima*, the single longest chapter of the book, to the discussion of sciences and education. Starting from the general features of the human capacity for thinking, he considers a wide range of different types of human knowledge, and its theoretical premises and applications. In this context, he acknowledges the ability of humans to become aware of a world beyond that in which they live and argues that it is man's cognitive faculties alone that are able to grasp this higher world. As we have seen, he argues that reason corroborates the existence of a higher spiritual world but that the limitations of human cognition in general, and particularly with respect to metaphysics, engender the inalienability of religious faith that is built upon the message transmitted by prophets to their people (*umma*). Revelation is what prophets transmit of the knowledge they receive when they share in the direct and complete cognition of angels. The prophets secure humanity's access not only to the "higher world" but also, more specifically, to a form of cognition that transcends doubt and the incomplete, approximating knowledge associated with the lower world. Fundamental for this approach is the structure of the created world. Passages that repeat arguments employed earlier on in the discussion of related issues occasionally occur in the *Muqaddima*, and his treatment of metaphysics includes several such instances.⁶¹ The modular character of the argument used to explain the communication between human beings and the transcendent world secures an approximate congruence with the concepts exposed earlier, while also introducing a more skeptical assessment of metaphysics. The limitations of common human cognition serve to corroborate the necessity of prophetic mediation.

⁶⁰ Reference to these concepts appears again later: MSH 2/172; MR 2/423.

⁶¹ MSH 2/246-260, chap. VI, sec. 16 (The exposition of ambiguity in the Qur'ān and the Sunna), MR 3/69-75 (here sec. 15) is parallel to MSH 1/172-192, chap. I, 6th prefatory discussion (The real meaning of prophecy), MR 1/194-202.

The superior position of man and its foundation in man's intellect, is the starting point for a line of thought that provides evidence for the interrelatedness of human civilisation and the world beyond. For instance, the ability to understand a causal chain by thinking backwards to the first cause enables the human being to arrange his actions according to this order. Starting a chain of actions with the action that will be the foundation for the subsequent steps means beginning one's action from the conclusion to which one's thinking has led. This accords with the Aristotelian dictum, adopted by Arabic tradition, that thinking starts out from the end of a causal chain, but action starts from the end of thinking.⁶² The capacity to think thus distinguishes man from the animals, with man's political (*madani*) nature making him dependent on mutual assistance (*mu'āwana*). A parallel to this idea is offered by Ibn Sinā in his *Metaphysics*, in which partnership (*mushāraka*) and reciprocal transaction (*mu'āmala*) appear as prerequisites for survival. This in turn demands the existence of law and justice, brought about by a lawgiver who is sustained by divine providence.⁶³ Ibn Khaldūn's line of thought takes the same direction and may have been inspired by Ibn Sinā. Man acquires the norms and concepts that are needed in order to realise what is necessary and recommendable (*yajib wa-yanbaghi*) in dealing with his fellow men mainly by making use of the empirical (*tajribi*) intellect. This is based either on factual experience or on transmitted experience that has been accumulated in tradition. Within a system of ascending order, this intellect stands between the lower grade of discerning (*tamyizi*) and the higher grade of speculative (*naẓari*) intellect, sharing sensuality with the former and abstraction with the latter.⁶⁴ This gradation finds a parallel in the distinction between three worlds that reveals the wide gap between the human and the angelic spheres with respect to cognition.⁶⁵

The fact that man possesses scientific perception (*madārik 'ilmīyya*), which exists above the level of the sensory, indicates the existence of the higher world of the soul. Likewise, one may infer from the existence of impulses in man's heart, such as volition and the inclination towards active motions (*ḥarakāt fi'līyya*), that these are the result of the influence (*āthār*) of an agent from the world above us, the world of spirits and angels.⁶⁶ However, besides what one may deduce from visions or dreams that conform to reality, and that are, therefore, true and pertain to a

⁶² MSH 2/166; MR 2/415; for references to Arabic versions of this dictum and the Aristotelian original (*Eudemian Ethics*), see MR note 10.

⁶³ Ibn Sinā, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 364f.

⁶⁴ MSH 2/167-169, chap. VI, sec. 3 (On the experimental intellect); MR 3/414ff.

⁶⁵ MSH 2/169-171, chap. VI, section 4 (On human and angelic cognition); MR 2/419-421.

⁶⁶ For the Aristotelian expression, in the Arabic tradition (al-Fārābi), of *al-āthār allati fi l-nafs*, see: Heidrun Eichner, "Das Avicennische Corpus Aristotelicum: Zur Virtualisierung des Aristoteles-textes in der Postavicennischen Tradition," in: *Entre Orient et Occident: La Philosophie et la Science Gréco-Romaines dans le Monde Arabe*, Richard Goulet, Ulrich Rudolph, eds., Genève: Vandoeuvre (Fondation Hardt), 2011, 197-235, here: 209; for al-Fārābi's and Ibn Sinā's use of the term, see Koutzarova, *Das Transzendente bei Ibn Sinā*, 73, 75.

world of truth,⁶⁷ there are no proofs for the existence of this highest, spiritual world. According to Ibn Khaldūn, the truth of what is maintained by the specialists in metaphysics (*ḥukamāʾ ilābiyyūn*) about the essences (*dhawāt*) of the spiritual world, called “intellects,” and the order in which they stand, is not certain, since the features required for logical argumentation are absent in this case. For anything more precise in this respect, one can only refer to the normative Islamic rulings (*sharʿiyyāt*), which are built upon revelation and clarified and justified by faith.⁶⁸

The world of man (*basbar*) is immediately accessible to him (*wijdāni mashbūd*) in its physical and spiritual aspects. The sensory world is shared with animals while the world of the intellect and spirits (*al-ʿaql wa-l-arwāḥ*) is shared with angels, whose essence, free from corporality and matter, is identical with the essence of that higher world. In contrast to man, angels are pure intellect, from which it follows that intellect, the subject that makes use of it, and the object of intellection are all one. Their knowledge (*ʿulūm*) always agrees, by nature, with the things about which they have this knowledge. In contrast, the type of knowledge to which humans have access is acquired through a complicated process that never attains full certainty.

The process by which knowledge is acquired takes place in the soul and results in the limitations of human cognition. These limitations are crucial for Ibn Khaldūn’s argument. In (Pseudo)-Aristotelian tradition, the soul, which is intelligent and equipped with the faculty of thinking, produces perception.⁶⁹ This tradition, with which it is reasonable to assume that Ibn Khaldūn was familiar, also insists on the ‘substantiality’ (*jawhariyya*) of the soul rather than its corporality. Ibn Khaldūn speaks of the soul as a sort of material substance (*mādda hayūlāniyya*)⁷⁰ and further adduces that the soul gradually takes over (*labisa*) the forms of existence (*ṣurwar al-wajūd*) by means of the forms perceived (*ṣurwar al-maʿlūmāt*) that are conveyed to it. Knowledge is acquired through a gradual process and it remains approximate. The objects, or targets (*maṭlūbāt*), of this process in the soul – the items of knowledge – constantly vacillate between confirmation and negation, a consequence of the difference between the perception of something

⁶⁷ *Fa-tuṭābiqu l-wāqiʿa fi l-ṣaḥīḥati minbā fa-naʿlima annabā ḥaqqum wa-min ʿālam al-ḥaqq.*

⁶⁸ MSH 2/170.

⁶⁹ Helmut Gätje, *Studien zur Überlieferung der aristotelischen Psychologie im Islam*, Heidelberg: Winter 1971, 110: *bi-fabminā alladbi huwa fikrat al-nafs fa-idbā kāna dbālika, fa-l-nafs idhan muḥakkiratun ʿāqilatun.*

⁷⁰ The term *hayūlā* refers to primary matter that is generally kept apart from *mādda*, secondary matter. In the context of the *Rasāʾil Iḥwān al-Ṣafāʾ* (op. cit. 3/198, 200), the soul appears to be something like the primary matter (*ka-l-hayūlā*) exposed to impulse (*ṣurwar*) from reason, which is rather similar to what Ibn Khaldūn maintains. The common term *ʿaql hayūlāni* is the Aristotelian material intellect, see Arthur Hyman, “Averroes’ Theory of the Intellect and the Ancient Commentators,” in: *Averroes and the Aristotelian Tradition*, Gerhard Endress, Jan A. Aertsen, eds., Leiden: Brill 1999, 188-198, here: 191f. Accordingly, in Ibn Sinā’s philosophy, *hayūlā* is employed to qualify the intellect, cf. Amélie-Marie Goichon, *Lexique de la Philosophie d’Ibn Sinā (Avicenne)*, sub *hayūlā, mādda, ʿaql hayūlāni*.

and its actual existence. Preference given to one side over the other, the positive or the negative, always remains relative, and related to the other side. Even if knowledge is supposedly gained, one still has to examine critically whether there is any agreement between the knowledge of a thing and the thing that is known. Notwithstanding the fact that this is, in the best case, confirmed through technical (logical) proof, this knowledge remains as if it were behind a veil (*ḥijāb*) – the veil of the supernatural. This contrasts with the direct vision of angels, which is able to grasp the truth of things in an immediate and unobstructed way. Man's perception is, therefore, deficient, as he has to acquire the knowledge he seeks through thought and intellectual techniques (*shurūṭ ṣinā'iyya*). The removal of the veil that obstructs his unmediated access to the truth of things may only be attained through pious discipline.⁷¹

Prophets, who constitute a specific class of humans, bridge the gap between these two worlds. They possess a natural disposition (*maftūr*) for this task, as is shown by the fact that they do not undergo any changes (*lā yatabaddalu fibim*) while they are invested with a divine state (*ḥāla ilāhiyya*).⁷² The trend towards the divine (*rabbāniyya*) prevails in them as far as the powers of perception and the powers of desire are concerned. It is in the prophets alone that the human soul becomes, for a single instant, part of the angelic species (*jins al-malā'ika*) before resuming its humanity (*basariyya*) again. This moment of transition and revelation takes place when the human soul meets in the angelic world (*‘ālam al-malakiyya*) that which it was charged to transmit (*kullīfat bi-tabliḡihī*) to humankind. The knowledge of the prophets in this state (*ḥāla*) is the knowledge that is normally reserved for angels, the knowledge that comes from direct observation and vision (*‘ilm shabāda wa-‘yān*) of the objects of knowledge. Error and fault cannot affect them, for the agreement (*muṭābaqa*) between perception and the things perceived is pure (*dhātīyya*) because the veil of the supernatural (*ḥijāb al-ghayb*) has been removed, allowing clear and direct observation (*shabāda waḍiḥa*).

When Henri Corbin, in his study of Ibn Sinā, depicts the Neoplatonic angel as the hermeneutic interpreter of the impenetrable divine transcendence,⁷³ the picture he draws is, in some senses, the reverse of Ibn Khaldūn's conceptualisation of angels. In Ibn Khaldūn's view, the rational deducibility of the angelic spheres is confirmed, completed, and becomes true by revelation. Angels are an inextricable part of civilisation in both its historical and systematic dimensions. But at the center of civilisation stands the human being, defined by both its amazing capabilities and its inherent limitations.

⁷¹ MSH 2/171.

⁷² Chapt. VI, section 5 (on the knowledge (*‘ulūm*) of prophets), MSH 2/172f. MR 2/422-424.

⁷³ "L'herméneute du silence divin, c'est-à-dire comme annonce et épiphanie de la transcendance divine impénétrable et incommunicable," in: Henri Corbin, *Avicenne et le récit visionnaire*, vol. II, *Étude sur le cycle des récits Avicenniens*, Teheran: Société des Monuments Nationaux 1954, 63.

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Zakariyyā' al-Qazwīnī on the Inhabitants of the Supralunar World: From the First Persian Version (659/1260-61) to the Second Arabic Redaction (678/1279-80)

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Zakariyyā' al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283) wrote and re-wrote his *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt* in the third quarter of the 13th century during the years that followed the Mongol conquest of Baghdad and the crushing of the Abbasid caliphate.¹ His compilation of what would eventually become the most popular medieval encyclopaedia of natural history in the Islamic world took place in the context of, and contributed to, the cultural recovery of southern Iraq under Ilkhanid administration² and the intensified efforts of the Muslim elite to preserve knowledge by making it accessible through compendia and summaries.³

Al-Qazwīnī's description of the "Wonders of Creation" is divided into two *maqālāt*, the first of which is dedicated to the objects and phenomena of the supralunar, or better, since the moon is part of it, the supramundane world. It starts with the nine heavenly spheres and the planets, moves on to the constellations and then speaks about the inhabitants of the heavens. A discourse on time in general, as well as on remarkable events connected to particular months and days according to the various calendars, completes the first *maqāla*. The second *maqāla* deals with the sublunary world, including the spheres of fire, air, water, and earth as well as the "three kingdoms" of nature (minerals, plants, and living beings). Al-Qazwīnī's aim is to describe creation as it is and as it functions and he pursues this goal with the declared intention to elicit wonder at the marvellous perfection of the Creator's work, which extends even to the tiniest part of it. He accords to nature a certain degree of autonomy once created and thus attributes the movement of the cosmic bodies, as well as processes such as the gestation, growth, and decay observed in inanimate and animate sublunary nature, to

¹ For information on the author and his work, see Syrinx von Hees, *Enzyklopädie als Spiegel des Weltbildes: Qazwīnīs Wunder der Schöpfung – eine Naturkunde des 13. Jahrhunderts*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2002, 24-114.

² Hend Gilli-Elewy, *Bagdad nach dem Sturz des Kalifats: Die Geschichte einer Provinz unter ilhānīdischer Herrschaft*, Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag 2000; George Lane, *Early Mongol Rule in Thirteenth-Century Iran: A Persian Renaissance*, London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon 2003.

³ Hamid Dabashi, "Khawājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī: The Philosopher/Vizier and the Intellectual Climate of His Time," in: *History of Islamic Philosophy*, vol. I, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Oliver Leaman, eds., London and New York: Routledge 1996, 540.

its inherent workings. It is within this framework that he has to fit in his treatment of angels.

Al-Qazwini's chapter on the inhabitants of the heavens has thus far attracted scholarly attention from two perspectives. Von Bothmer's dissertation on the illustrations of the *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt* manuscript at Munich (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, cod.arab. 464) has studied the depictions of the angels therein.⁴ More recently, von Hees has analysed the introduction to the chapter on angels and the first six entries pertaining to the Carriers of the Throne and the angels al-Rūḥ, Isrāfil, Jibraʾil, Mikāʾil, and ʿAzrāʾil, as they are found in the same manuscript.⁵ Examining the literary sources of al-Qazwini's descriptions of the main functions of the angels, the various encounters between angels and human beings, and the visual appearance of angels in the manuscript, von Hees demonstrates the major impact that the *Rasāʾil Ikrwān al-Ṣafāʾ* had on al-Qazwini's interpretation of the role of these beings.⁶ In the particularly striking case of al-Rūḥ, she concludes that the abstract philosophical idea of *al-nafs al-kulliyya*, the emanating universal soul, has been transferred into an angel which then acts as an all-moving cosmic force.⁷ Besides al-Rūḥ's involvement in crucial events such as the revelation and the end of times, al-Qazwini also accords responsibility for processes observed in nature to each of the other great angels and their multiple helpers. Isrāfil provides the power to everything newly created to begin its life;⁸ Jibraʾil incites in them the will to fight evil and detrimental forces;⁹ Mikāʾil activates in them a striving to attain perfection.¹⁰

The preceding description is based upon the latest redaction of the text (in Arabic), completed by al-Qazwini in 678/1279-80. However, these statements can also be found in the first redaction (in Persian) dating from the year 659/1260-61.¹¹ As one might expect, the two Persian and two Arabic redactions all share the same understanding of the complexity of nature and the same way of describing it. Nevertheless, each redaction exhibits particularities which testify to the adaptation of the text to divergent purposes and audiences, as the chapter on angels will show.

⁴ Hans-Caspar Graf von Bothmer, *Die Illustrationen des "Münchener Qazwini" von 1280. (cod. Monac. arab. 464) Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis ihres Stils*, München 1971, 96-121.

⁵ Von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 254-350.

⁶ See, for instance, von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 273-274, 294-296, 303-304, 343-344, 348; on extensive use of the same source by al-Qazwini, see also Susanne Diwald, *Arabische Philosophie und Wissenschaft in der Enzyklopädie Kitāb Ikrwān aṣ-Ṣafāʾ (III). Die Lehre von Seele und Intellekt*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 1975, 7.

⁷ Von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 274.

⁸ Von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 298 (transcription of fol. 32b), 299 (translation into German).

⁹ Von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 306 (transcription of fol. 33a), 308 (translation into German).

¹⁰ Von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 318 (transcription of fol. 33b and translation into German).

¹¹ Concerning the various redactions, see the "Excursion" below.

The attempt to specify the appearance and the functions of each great angel, and of the groups of minor angels, corresponds with the general methodical approach taken by al-Qazwīnī in describing creation. In the individual entries, he lays stress on the defining qualities of the object or species. In a comparable way, the introduction to a chapter, or sub-chapter, summarises the characteristic qualities of the group that distinguish it from others. While such an approach is typical of the genre of encyclopaedias of natural history, al-Qazwīnī's work stands out due to its lucid structure and systematic arrangement of the information it contains.¹² In what follows, I compare the chapter on angels as it appears in the two earliest dated manuscripts we know of so far, which represent the first Persian redaction of 659/1260-61 and the second Arabic redaction of 678/1279-80.¹³ I then go on to discuss how the illustrations in the second Arabic redaction relate to the evolution of the chapter into its final shape.

Excursion

Before looking in detail at the chapter on angels and tracing its transformation, it is necessary first to explain the sequence of the different redactions of the *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt* composed by al-Qazwīnī. The acceptance of the Persian redaction of 659/1260-61 as al-Qazwīnī's first version of his work goes against previously held views which I, too, maintained for many years while studying the illustrated manuscripts. Since the early 20th century there has been a general understanding that al-Qazwīnī, who remained in his position as a judge in Wasit (in southern Iraq) after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad in 1258 and died in 1283, had been responsible for two Arabic redactions (among an assumed four) of the *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt*.¹⁴ All Persian and Turkish versions were regarded as later translations. Here I suggest that al-Qazwīnī is not only the author of two Persian versions of the *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt* as well but that one of those Persian versions was composed earlier than the first Arabic redaction.¹⁵ Since an elaborate substantiation of this claim would lead away from the subject of this article, I will do no more

¹² Among other formal qualities, this was one of those that secured the popularity of al-Qazwīnī's text throughout the centuries, see Karin Rührdanz, "Populäre Naturkunde illustriert: Text und Bild in persischen *ʿAjāʾib*-Handschriften spätmongolischer und früh Timuridischer Zeit," in: *Studia Iranica* 34/2 (2005), 231-256.

¹³ A comparison between the two earliest preserved manuscripts seems the appropriate approach because none of the existing editions is sufficiently reliable. For the same reason, recourse is taken to other early manuscripts where necessary. The editions are, however, referenced for easier access.

¹⁴ Summarised in Tadeusz Lewicki, "Al-Qazwīnī," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EP*), vol. 4, Leiden: Brill 1990, 865-866, based upon Julius Ruska, "Qazwinistudien," in: *Der Islam* 4 (1913), 14-66, 236-262.

¹⁵ On the position of Persian in the 13th century and particularly since the Ilkhanid period, see Bert G. Fragner, *Die "Persophonie": Regionalität, Identität und Sprachkontakt in der Geschichte Asiens*, Berlin: Das arabische Buch 1999, 67, 78-79.

than acquaint the reader with the strongest argument for revising the traditional picture.¹⁶

This internal evidence consists of a sentence about the apogee of the sun which appears in the chapter on the sun and its heavenly sphere. There one reads in the Munich manuscript: “*Wa-fi waqtinā hadbā, wa-hurwā thamān wa-sabʿūn wa-sittamiʿa al-awj fi l-jawzāʾ.*”¹⁷ This statement permits the conclusion that al-Qazwīnī was busy composing this Arabic redaction in 678/1279-80. A different Arabic redaction, also preserved in many manuscripts, contains an earlier date (661/1262-63) at this place and thus obviously represents an earlier, and most probably the first, Arabic redaction.¹⁸ A similar phrase found in the majority of manuscripts containing a Persian version which mentions the year 658/1259-60 was never taken seriously, partially because of the lack of manuscripts earlier than the 9th/15th century combined with a frequent change in the formula which created doubts about its value as evidence.¹⁹ Besides, it seemed odd to many scholars to accept the priority of a Persian version over the first Arabic one (661/1262-63), which had been dedicated to the famous governor of Baghdad and southern Iraq ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn ʿAṭā-Malik al-Juwaynī (d. 1283).²⁰

¹⁶ I am preparing an article dedicated solely to this subject. It will necessarily include a new assessment of other facts which have already been established but have been persistently interpreted under the assumption that the Persian versions were later translations.

¹⁷ “And in our time, i.e. the year 678, the apogee is in Gemini.” For the phrase, see fol. 16a; the manuscript is dated by the colophon on fol. 212b to the same year. It is accessible at http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/bsb00045957/image_1. There is no edition of this redaction but von Hees bases her transcriptions and translations on this manuscript.

¹⁸ The wording of the sentence differs insignificantly from the second Arabic redaction but expresses clearly that it talks about the year in which the text was written. This has been established by checking a number of early manuscripts of the first Arabic redaction, such as S DC 2 (dated 790/1388), University Library Leipzig (fol. 17b); for this manuscript, see Karl Vollers, *Katalog der islamischen, christlich-orientalischen, jüdischen und samaritanischen Handschriften der Universitätsbibliothek zu Leipzig*, (Leipzig: Harrassowitz 1906), repr. Osnabrück: Biblio-Verlag 1975, no. 736, p. 237. For a printed text of the first Arabic redaction, see the margin text accompanying Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Damirī, *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā*, al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat al-Maymaniyya 1305/1887, vol. I, 43, or Zakariyyāʾ al-Qazwīnī, *ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt*, Fūʾad Saʿd, ed., Beirut: Dār al-Afāq al-Jadidah 1401/1981⁴, 57.

¹⁹ It does not explicitly say that it speaks about a current year: “*wa dar sanat-i thamān wa khamsin wa sittamiʿa dar burj-i jawzāʾ-st.*” Thus, for instance, on fol. 15a, suppl. pers. 2051, Bibliothèque nationale de France, see <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8432229p.r=supplement%20persan%202051>. For a printed text of this version, see *Kitāb ʿAjāʾib al-makhlūqāt wa-gharāʾib al-mawjūdāt*, Naṣr-Allāh Subbūhī, ed., Tihārān: Markaz-i Naṣir Khusraw 1340/1962; the phrase on p. 26.

²⁰ For the dedicatee, see George Lane, “Jovayni, ʿAlāʾ-al-Dīn,” in: *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. XV, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns 2011, 63-68; idem, *Early Mongol Rule*, 177-212. – Qazwīnī’s reference to the governor and his *majlis* is part of the preface in the (so far) oldest known (fragmentary) manuscript of the first Arabic redaction, Or. 14140 of the British Library (fol. 2a). While the fragment is of no help with the sentence on the sun’s apogee (it has lost most folios in the chapters on the heavenly spheres and the angels) the preserved preface clearly states that this is indeed the redaction addressed to ʿAṭā-Malik al-Juwaynī.

However, a very early manuscript of a Persian version has now come to light, Fatih 4174 at the Süleymaniye Library, and with this new piece of evidence the situation has changed decisively. This copy was finished at the end of *Ramaḍān* 699/May-June 1300.²¹ It explicitly mentions the year 658 as the current year when talking about the apogee of the sun. Furthermore, on fol. 1a, following the title and the name of the author, the year 659/December 1260 – November 1261 is stated by the scribe as the year in which the composition of the text had been completed. This allows us to conclude with confidence that this Persian redaction was the earliest *‘Ajā’ib al-makblūqāt* text and was composed by al-Qazwīnī three years prior to the first Arabic redaction. This conclusion may appear less surprising when we take into account that al-Qazwīnī was following a well-established line of encyclopaedias in the Persian language, as described and analysed by Vesel.²² Unfortunately, the dedicatee of al-Qazwīnī’s first Persian redaction of the *‘Ajā’ib al-makblūqāt*, a certain Khudāwand Šāhib al-‘Ālam ‘Izz al-Dīn Fakhr al-Islām Malik al-Šudūr Sayyid al-Akābir Shāhpūr b. ‘Uthmān,²³ has not been identified so far. Nevertheless, his name and the epithets suggest that he was a powerful “man of the sword” with a cultural background in Persian rather than Arabic.

Having explained the revised sequence²⁴ of the redactions produced by al-Qazwīnī himself, I shall now compare the chapter on angels as it appears in the first Persian redaction, represented by the Süleymaniye manuscript Fatih 4174,

In his latest and most comprehensive publication on the manuscript, Carboni argues for an attribution to Mosul about 1300, and not later than 1303-03, see Stefano Carboni, *The Wonders of Creation and the Singularities of Painting: A Study of the Ilkhanid London Qazwini*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015, 6-7. The manuscript can also be accessed at http://www.qdl.qa/en/archive/81055/vdc_100023630151.0x000002. The pictorial programme of this manuscript differs significantly from that in the Munich manuscript. Because only two folios from the chapter on angels are preserved, I will only take cursory account of it here.

²¹ The copyist signed as Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Abi Maṣṣūr al-Kāzarūnī.

²² Živa Vesel, *Les encyclopédies persanes: Essai de typologie et de classification des sciences*, Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations 1986, 27-34. The close relationship to the Persian encyclopaedias of natural history is also stressed and thoroughly analysed for several entries on animals and birds by von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 115-254.

²³ Fatih 4174, fol. 2a; ed. Subbūhī, 3 (without the patronym).

²⁴ A second Persian redaction, copies of which are known dating back to the 1420s, includes the respective sentence with the year 664/1265-66. So far, I have only come across manuscripts containing a severely corrupted chapter on the angels. The second Persian redaction will therefore not be taken into account here. The existence of this version was already noticed by Storey, see Charles A. Storey, *Persian Literature* II/1, London: Luzac 1972, 126, with respect to the British Library manuscript Add. 23564, dated 845/1441. Several earlier manuscripts are preserved mainly in Istanbul collections, see Karin Rührdanz, “Qazwini’s *‘Ajā’ib al-makblūqāt* in Illustrated Timurid Manuscripts,” in : *Iran: Questions et connaissances, Actes du IV^e Congrès Européen des Études Iraniennes, Paris 1999, Vol. II: Périodes médiévale et modern* (= *Studia Iranica, Cahiers* 26), Maria Szuppe, ed., Paris, Leuven: Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes/Peeters 2002, 473-484.

with the final version of the same chapter encountered in the second Arabic redaction, represented by the Munich manuscript cod.arab. 464. It must be noted, however, that the most significant transformation from the earliest version had already been implemented in the first Arabic redaction of 661/1262-63, which was dedicated to 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Aṭā-Malik al-Juwaynī. In the second Arabic redaction of 678/1279-80, al-Qazwīnī became still more elaborate and more detailed in his explanations, but without introducing further substantial changes in the text. The important addition in the second Arabic redaction are the illustrations.

In Fatih 4174, at the beginning of his introduction, al-Qazwīnī defines the angels as being of simple substance (*jawhar-i basīṭ*). According to him, angels are provided with life, speech, and intellect. They are absolutely obedient to God and constantly engaged in praising Him. God created the angels to keep His wider creation in order, and nobody besides Him knows all the different kinds of angels and their various shapes. Quoting the prophet Muḥammad on the abundance of angels in the heavens, al-Qazwīnī argues that the supramundane world cannot be void because God populated every other part of his creation. The remaining part of his short introduction serves to stress the involvement of angels everywhere and in everything, be it in the supralunar or the sublunar world. There does not, the reader is told, exist any particle of creation which is not under the care of an angel. However, it is only by the way of the prophets that knowledge can be obtained about them.²⁵

These introductory statements are followed by nine entries on particular angels or groups of angels. The first is concerned with the Carriers of the Throne and this is then followed by individual entries for the angels al-Rūḥ, Isrāfīl, Jibrāʾīl, Mikāʾīl, and 'Azrāʾīl. The last three entries cover the angels of the seven (planetary) spheres, the two angels who record the deeds of human beings, and, finally, the two fallen angels Hārūt and Mārūt. As in other chapters, al-Qazwīnī reserves to himself the right to select what is included. Corresponding to an already established hierarchy of angels, the subjects of the first six entries all the way up to 'Azrāʾīl appear to be obvious choices but the last three groups are less so. One might suggest that al-Qazwīnī's emphasis on differentiation and specification prompted him to present those angels he could name and those he considered to be most popular with his readers and, consequently, those his readers would expect to figure in his description.

With respect to the activities of the angels, several entries (on the Carriers of the Throne, the Angel of Death, and the Recording Angels) describe clear-cut functions specific to that particular angel, pair, or group of angels. In other cases, the pieces of information put together present a less defined picture, with some overlaps. Since the angel Rūḥ is declared to be responsible for the movement of the spheres, planets, and stars as well as for the sublunar world (the four ele-

²⁵ Fatih 4174, fol. 17a-b; ed. Subbūhī, 54.

ments [*ʿanāšir*] and the generated things [*muwalladāt*], meaning the minerals, plants, and living beings),²⁶ some overlap with tasks assigned to the other angels is inevitable. Compared to such sweeping responsibilities, the entries on Isrāfil and Jibraʿil emphasise their messenger function – in the announcement of the Last Judgement and in the transmission of the revelation respectively – and speak about individual encounters, whether past or future. However, other functions might be added to this central role, as the example of Isrāfil demonstrates, including, in particular, functions that have a bearing on natural history.

If God wants to bring something into being which did not exist before (*iḥdāth*), the order arrives first with Isrāfil who notifies Jibraʿil but then himself gets involved – together with his ubiquitous helpers – in the coming into existence of living beings, plants, and minerals.²⁷ They provide the *muwalladāt* with the power on which generation and corruption depends. Here the text says *ṣalāḥ wa-fasād* but I suggest that this expression should be seen in connection with the passage on *kaʾn wa-fasād* that is found at the beginning of the second *maqāla* on the sublunar world.²⁸ Explaining this world as being made up of basic elements (*ʿanāšir*) and generated beings (*muwalladāt*), al-Qazwīnī defines generation, transformation, and decay as their way of existence, in contrast to the world above the moon. Al-Qazwīnī sees being subject to change as the way in which the independence of sublunar nature (granted by God) gradually materialises. It seems that the role of Isrāfil and his angel-helpers consists in assisting with the initial coming-into-being upon God's command of "new" generated beings. The angels are thus declared to be indispensable to the comprehensive transformation process inherent in nature. The entries on Jibraʿil and Mikāʿil conclude in a comparable way: together with his helpers, Jibraʿil induces into the *kāʾināt* the power to withstand affliction, while Mikāʿil and his helper-angels are responsible for the growth of the *arkān* and *muwalladāt*, and for their reaching perfection.²⁹

The entries on the great angels are followed by one on the angels of the seven heavenly spheres. After stressing again their permanent praise of God, this entry only lists the specific appearance of the angels belonging to each sphere and the names of their leaders.³⁰ The next entry deals with the recording angels (*al-ḥafaza*) and emphasises the continuous surveillance of every individual as well as the inclination of the watching angels to accept good deeds as reparation for bad

²⁶ Fatih 4174, fol. 17b; ed. Subbūḥi, 55 (the part concerning the elements and generated beings omitted, however).

²⁷ The involvement of Jibraʿil (not Mikāʿil), the belonging of the helping angels to Isrāfil, and the enumeration of the *muwalladāt* in descending order, as in ed. Subbūḥi, 57, is confirmed by Fatih 4174, fol. 17b.

²⁸ Fatih 4174, fol. 24b-25a; ed. Subbūḥi, 85 (under the wrong headline and corrupt at the beginning without any mention of the termini).

²⁹ Fatih 4174, fol. 18a; ed. Subbūḥi, 57 and 58.

³⁰ Fatih 4174, fol. 18b; ed. Subbūḥi, 60-63.

ones.³¹ The chapter on angels closes with a story about Hārūt and Mārūt. It explains the fate of the two fallen angels as the result of the sins they committed when placed under the same conditions in which human beings live on earth. God exposed them to this experience to prove to the angels that they have no reason to belittle humans.³²

By the time the first Arabic redaction was completed just three years later, the chapter on angels had been significantly reworked by al-Qazwīnī. The most important changes can be summarised as follows:

1. The introduction and several of the nine entries already present in the first Persian redaction were extended. Al-Qazwīnī relates more traditions concerning the appearance of the great angels and the encounters of humans with these beings. There are, however, no substantial differences in the way in which the angels are presented and their functions explained.
2. In the introduction to the later version, the relationship between the angels, the *jinn*, and the *shaytāns* is put forward as a difference between species (thereby creating a contradiction to the placement of the chapter on the *jinn* among the *kā'ināt*).³³
3. The chapter has five additional entries: one about the angels Munkar and Nakir, the others about certain categories of angels, including the *karūbiyyūn*; all but one of the new entries pertain exclusively to the moral and spiritual relationship between human beings and God.³⁴
4. The exception is the final entry. This is concerned with the angels entrusted with the keeping in order (*iṣlāḥ*) of the *kā'ināt* and their protection against corruption (*fasād*). Al-Qazwīnī does not explain in what ways the functions of these angels differ from those he had already entrusted to the helpers of the great angels. It seems likely that he saw the need for a detailed explication of how the angels supervise the processes in nature. The example chosen by al-Qazwīnī is the human being, its metabolism and growth. Al-Qazwīnī writes, for instance, about a large number of angels who take care that food is correctly processed by the human being and that it has the desired effect on their growth and strength.

The additions, in particular the references to traditions, allowed for a display of erudition that al-Qazwīnī may have deemed appropriate for a version of the text written in Arabic and dedicated to a patron like 'Alā' al-Dīn 'Ata-Malik al-Juwaynī, who was not only the powerful governor of Baghdad but also an es-

³¹ Fatih 4174, fol. 18b; ed. Subbūhī, 63-64.

³² Fatih 4174, fol. 18b-19a; ed. Subbūhī, 64-65.

³³ For a comment on this contradiction, see von Hees, *Enzyklopädie*, 269-70.

³⁴ The entry on the *karūbiyyūn* was inserted after the long entry on Azrā'īl. Three more entries followed that on the recording angels (*ḥafāẓa*) while the last addition was placed behind the entry on Hārūt and Mārūt.

teemed scholar and author himself. At the same time, the new entries changed the balance of the chapter to a certain degree by placing more emphasis on the spiritual model of the angels, their relationship to God, and their care for the moral welfare of human beings, thus strengthening the edifying element in his account. As the final new entry demonstrates, it was equally important to the author to elaborate on the details of the angels' involvement in the workings of nature while at the same time arguing that this integration does not diminish the perfection of creation, but, rather, ennobles nature. However, this kind of reconciliation eventually infringes on the power bestowed on generated beings according to al-Qazwīnī's explanation in other passages. I assume that it is not, therefore, by chance that the passage on *kawn wa fasād* no longer exists in the first Arabic redaction.³⁵

Compared with the evolution to the first Arabic redaction, the chapter on angels in the second Arabic redaction, dating from 1280, does not exhibit substantial changes. The majority of the entries are slightly more elaborate, resulting from the inclusion of additional *ḥadīth* and longer explanations. The way in which al-Qazwīnī expresses himself and his addition of another example to stress his point makes the second Arabic redaction more easily accessible for the reader. The most important additions, however, are the many illustrations preserved in the oldest manuscript of this redaction, cod.arab. 464 at Munich. The chapter on angels includes representations of the Carriers of the Throne, the angels al-Rūḥ (Fig. 1), Isrāfīl (Fig. 2), Jibra'īl, Mikā'īl,³⁶ and 'Azrā'īl,³⁷ the angels of the seven (planetary) spheres (Fig. 3),³⁸ the two angels recording the deeds of the human beings,³⁹ and, finally, Hārūt and Mārūt (Fig. 4).⁴⁰ One may assume that the information contained in those entries provided the painter with the necessary incentives to select just these angels for visual representation.

³⁵ The relevant folio is not preserved in the oldest extant manuscript of the first Arabic redaction (BL Or. 14140). The statement is based upon such early manuscripts as S DC 2 in Leipzig (Vollers no. 736, fol. 54b, see note 18) in which this passage is replaced by one on the transformation of one element into another; ed. Sa'd, 134-135.

³⁶ For a colour reproduction, see Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2011, 36.

³⁷ *Die Wunder der Schöpfung/The Wonders of Creation* (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek. Ausstellungskataloge. Nr. 83), Helga Rebhan, red., Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2010, 63.

³⁸ For reproduction of the angels of the fifth and sixth heaven, see *Die Wunder der Schöpfung/The Wonders of Creation*, 65.

³⁹ *Wunder der Schöpfung/Wonders of Creation*, 64; Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, New York: Rizzoli 1977, 138.

⁴⁰ This list sounds strikingly similar to the pictorial programme we can imagine for the first Persian redaction because it comprises illustrations only to those entries that had already been contained in that version. It cannot be excluded therefore that the image selection followed an illustrated manuscript of the first Persian redaction. This is not very likely, however. Fatih 4174 had not been planned to include figurative illustrations at all. It contains a number of diagrams that are also found in the Munich manuscript and empty spaces in the chapter on arts and crafts that does not exist in either of the early Arabic redactions.

32

ولما فتح رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم قول امية بن ابي الصلت فخرج منه من حيث ابراهيم في بيت وكان
 جاهليا وبينه هذا رجل وثور تحت يني رجله والنز الميركي وليث ملكه وعن ابن عباس رضي
 الله عنه خلق تعالى على حلا العرش وهم اليوم اربعه فاذا كان يوم القيامة يؤيدهم باربعه اخرى فذلك
 قوله تعالى ويجعل عرش ربك فوقهم يومئذ ثمانية وهم في عظم لا يوصفونهم على صورة بني ادم يشفع اليه
 ادم في اوراقهم ومنهم على صورة الكبرياء يشفع للمهاجرين اوراقها ومنهم على صورة النمر يشفع للطيور في
 اوراقها ومنهم من هو على صورة الاسد يشفع للشباع في اوراقها

ومنهم الملك الذي يقوم صفقا للمليكة صفقا ويسمى الروح

وذلك لان الله عند الله تعالى
 قالوا انما نرى روحا
 لان كل نفس من
 انفاسه يصير روحا
 كحيوان وذكر
 ان هذا الملك خلقه الله
 تعالى وكل ما طار في
 الافلاك وحركات
 الكواكب وابتاحت
 ملك النجوم العاصم
 والمولدات من
 المعادن والنبات
 والحيوان وهذا
 الملك اعظم من
 الافلاك واقوى
 منها واشرف
 واعلى من الجلائق
 الجثمانية وهو الذي
 يقدرون على ان يخلقوا
 كما يقدرون على ان يخلقوا



Fig. 1: The Angel al-Rūh, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 32a.



Fig. 2: The Angel Isrāfil, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 32b.

والشهادة فينبهم بما كانوا يعملون وعن الاعشى عن خيشمة قال دخل ملك الموت على سليمان داود
عليهم السلام فجعل ينظر الى اجد من خلشاه وبدن النظر اليه فلما خرج ملك الموت قال الرجل من هذا يا بنى الله
فقال له ملك الموت فقال رايته ينظر اليك اكان يريدني قال سليمان عليه السلام فاذا تريد فقال اريد ان
تخلصني منه فتامر الريح ان تحملني الى ارضي بلاد الهند فامر سليمان الريح بذلك ففعلت ثم قال سليمان لملك الموت
اذا اتاه بعد ذلك فترى النظر الى اجد من خلشاهي قال كذا تعجب منه لا امرت ان اقبض وجهي باضمي
الهند في شاع قريبه ورايتك عندك وقال سليمان بن ميمون قبض ملك الموت روح جابر الجعفي
ثم صرح الى النساء فقال له الملك له من كنت اشكره من امرت بقبض روحه ووجهي فقال امرت بقبض روح امرأته
فلاذ من الارض فانيها وقد ولدت مولودا فرجستها لغيرها وزحمت ولدها لصغيره وكونته فلاة لا يشعشع
فقال الملك اجدوا الذي قبضت روحه الان ذلك المولود فقال لملك الموت سبحان اللطيف الخبير

وفهم الكروبيول

وسموا الكروبيول في حطيم القديس اليفات لهم الى ما تسمى الله تعالى لاستعراقهم بحال الجحيم الربوبية
وجلالها في حطيم الليل والنهار لا يعرفون جاء في الخبر ان الله تعالى ارسل نوحا وسمي في السموات
ثلثون يوما محثوه حلقا من خلق الله لا يعلمون ان الله تعالى بعصم طرفه من ان لو ايا رسول الله من
ولد ادم هم قال لا يعلمون ان الله تعالى حيا ادم قبل ان يول الله ابراهيم عليهم السلام قال لا يعلمون ان الله
تعالى خلق ابراهيم ثم تلا قوله تعالى وخلق ما لا تعلمون وسبحانه ما اعظم شأنه

وفهم ملكه السموات السبع

قال كعب الاچباري سم ملكه يدومون على التسبيح والتهليل في اليايام والقعود والركوع والتهجد
كما قال تعالى يسبحون الليل والنهار لا يفترون حتى تقوم الساعة فاذا قامت الساعة يقرءون
سبحانك ما عندنا حق بعد ذلك وعن ابن عباس رضي الله عنه انه قال

ملكه السماء الدنيا على صورة البقر

وقد وكل الله بهم ملكا اسمه اشعيبيل وهو مطاع فيهم



وملكه

Fig. 3: Angels of the first planetary sphere, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 34b.



Fig. 4: The Angels Hārūt and Mārūt punished, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 37a.

Confronting the reader with the image inevitably made “the thing” more real, notwithstanding the differences that might occur between written and visual descriptions. The illustrations strengthened the effect that the mere inclusion of the angels in an encyclopaedia of natural history must have already produced. It is not surprising, therefore, that the representation of the angels followed the same rules that were employed in the depiction of the other objects. Despite all the stories told about them, they are not imbedded in the narrative compositions.⁴¹ Their presentation in isolation against the plain paper ground fits the pictorial programme of the manuscript, which clearly prefers the uninhibited view of the stand-alone object.⁴²

The majority of the depicted angels are shown as having the figures of human beings, although this is explicitly stated in the text in only a few cases. Others are described as having the shape of animals (horses, cows/bulls, lions) and birds of prey. In each case the artist has painted them like the respective mundane beings but with the addition of wings. Moreover, since the pictorial programme includes a number of marvellous winged creatures,⁴³ it is only the impressive shape of the large and colourful wings that makes the angels stand out.⁴⁴ The extent to which the earthly served as a visual model for the heavenly is also exemplified by the depiction of Hārūt and Mārūt as hanging upside down. Besides being half-naked, as prisoners are usually shown, they also have the long untidy hair that characterises the wild inhabitants of distant islands.⁴⁵

Whilst the application of the general compositional principle to the representation of angels worked well for the painter, it must have been difficult to implement another equally important principle: the individualised depiction of the object. Conforming to his emphasis on differentiation, al-Qazwīnī quotes descriptive traditions in the entries on several angels or categories of angels. This approach provided clear indications as to how to depict, for instance, the angels of the seven planetary spheres. However, in the cases of the great angels, the traditions were rather confusing and difficult to visualise. Consequently, the painter ignored specific details such as the number of wings and did not attempt to individualise the great angels. The painter may have found some justification for this in the fact that, according to the text, the real appearance of angels is anyhow beyond human knowledge. The sayings could, thus, only evoke an acciden-

⁴¹ In two cases one may speak of a narrative element in the composition because the pair of recording angels are depicted as sitting opposite to one another while writing (fol. 36a), and Hārūt and Mārūt are shown hanging upside down.

⁴² For the philosophical context of such images, see Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image and Cosmos*, 40-54.

⁴³ For instance, a wild creature from one of the distant islands (fol. 59a) and a demon (fol. 71b).

⁴⁴ This does not apply to the angels in the shape of birds. Their depictions have no elements that set them apart visually.

⁴⁵ Examples on fols. 59a-b, 62b, 207b; see also von Bothmer, *Illustrationen*, 152.

tal state which might be revoked at any moment. Nevertheless, it is clear that the painter believed the images should convey the extraordinary character of these marvellous creations.

One of the important general attributes of the great angels is their size. They are described as being large beyond any human imagination. Visually, this information is conveyed by the size of the miniature when compared to the depictions of other items in the manuscript and by the relationship between the figure and the picture area.⁴⁶ These illustrations are among the largest contained in the manuscript but they never fully replace the text on the page on which they are located. The effect depends more on the way in which the angels fill the picture area, just fitting in the frame and touching or even transgressing it with the tip of a wing or one leg.⁴⁷ This contact with the frame seems to happen while the angels are moving forward in a highly energetic manner. Their dynamic position adds to the impression of grandeur, although it may have been meant to express, in the first place, their omnipresence, as well as their ability to move around with extraordinary speed and to act with superhuman strength. Powerful movement is an instrument that is used for other purposes in other places, as, for instance, when it is used to create a livelier picture of an animal. However, when applied to the large angel figures that fill and transgress the picture area, and when combined with the depiction of their large wings, it produces the desired effect.

Whether the light colouring contributes to the expression of the angels' exalted status and purity, as argued by von Bothmer,⁴⁸ is disputable, since this kind of thin colouring is also applied in other miniatures, particularly those that depict sea animals. When compared to the depiction of other human figures (representing planets and constellations, for instance), it seems more to the point to note that the garment of the angels is always lavishly cut. Bulging around their bodies, it suggests their elevation as well as their dynamic movement.

Copies of the second Arabic redaction of the *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt* made in the following centuries relied heavily on the illustrations in the Munich manuscript,⁴⁹ to the extent that the pictures of the angels here became a model for the visualisation of these marvellous creatures. This does not imply that the pictures themselves conformed to some formalised standard. Rather, they are products of the illustrator's experimentation, his attempts to go beyond generic depictions in order to show the individual angels in their differentiated glory and magnificence. The

⁴⁶ For a more detailed analysis, see von Bothmer, *Illustrationen*, 112-116, 119-120.

⁴⁷ The early London fragment of the first Arabic redaction exploited the figure versus frame relation in a less pleasing but equally effective way by squeezing in the angel figures (fol. 12a). A narrative illustration, on the other hand, permitted the painter to work with the contrast between angel and all other beings (fol. 13a); for descriptions and reproductions, see Carboni, *Wonders of Creation*, 52-56 and 220-221.

⁴⁸ Von Bothmer, *Illustrationen*, 120.

⁴⁹ In contrast, no manuscript containing a pictorial programme that follows the model of the London manuscript Or. 14140 is known so far.

clearest indication is the treatment of the halo. In the 12th - 14th centuries, a simple golden disk often surrounded the head of humans and other living beings in order to emphasise the head. Consequently, providing angels with golden disk halos would not necessarily elevate them above other creatures. This may have been the reason for the addition of a fancy petalled border around some halos, as in the case of al-Rūḥ, Isrāfil, and Mikāʾil.⁵⁰ Such a border is a characteristic element of late 13th – mid-14th century illumination in Eastern Islamic lands. It is frequently found in contemporary Qurʾān illumination framing title page medallions (*shamsa*) as well as margin elements.⁵¹ It is tempting to see a deliberate connection between the most important angels and the similarly adorned revelation in Qurʾān manuscripts of the period. However, this element of illumination is by no means confined to Qurʾān copies.⁵² Apart from framing *shamsas* and cartouches, the petalled border was even used to encircle entire frontispiece areas.⁵³ It seems, therefore, that the petalled border did not carry a particular meaning. It did contribute, however, to the impression that the extraordinary angel figure would leave on the viewer.

The attentive reader of the chapter on angels in the second Arabic redaction of the *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt* would understand the symbolic value of the angels' representations that sets these depictions apart from the majority of other illustrations in the manuscript. At the same time, he or she would appreciate their entertaining value. The paintings both enhanced the appeal of al-Qazwini's work and contributed to its accessibility.

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⁵⁰ That this device is not applied to all of the great angels seems odd but may just be the result of experimentation.

⁵¹ Compare, for instance, David James, *The Master Scribes: Qurʾāns of the 10th to 14th centuries AD*, London: Azimuth Editions 1992, pls. 22, 43, 49.

⁵² For a large number of examples from Ilkhanid copies of scholarly and literary texts, see Elaine Wright, *The Look of the Book: Manuscript Production in Shiraz, 1303-1452*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution 2012, figs. 1, 2, 4, 15, 24, 26.

⁵³ See, for instance, Nourane Ben Azzouna, *Aux origines du classicisme: Calligraphes et bibliophiles au temps des dynasties mongoles (les Ilkhanides et les Djalayirides 656-814/1258-1411)*, Leiden: Brill 2018, pl. 21; for more examples featuring a petalled border, see pls. 19, 24, 26.

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Illustrations

- Fig. 1: The Angel al-Rūḥ. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 32a. Photograph © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich.
- Fig. 2: The Angel Isrāfil. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 32b. Photograph © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich.
- Fig. 3: Angels of the first planetary sphere. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 34b. Photograph © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich.
- Fig. 4: The Angels Hārūt and Mārūt punished. Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod.arab. 464, fol. 37a. Photograph © Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Munich.

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L'ange et le roi dans la culture visuelle de l'Orient médiéval

Le cas des miniatures du *Shāh-nāma* de Firdawsī de Tūs

Anna Caiozzo (Bordeaux Montaigne)

Pour Philippe Faure, l'ami des anges

Les anges sont un thème important dans la représentation de l'imaginaire céleste. Ils appartiennent à la cosmologie du monde musulman que reproduisent entre autres les cosmographies¹ ou les copies des ascensions célestes.² Ils sont associés à la révélation, à la protection des êtres remarquables (prophètes, saints, poètes), et à la glorification des lieux saints (Jérusalem³, La Mecque⁴). En outre, les anges interviennent comme porteurs d'influx dans les rituels magiques⁵, et comme substituts des vents et porteurs de présents aux écoinçons des représentations cosmologiques circulaires⁶ ou dans les frontispices de certains manuscrits, parrainant le commanditaire. Les anges ont leur pendant dans les djinns et *shayāṭīn* (démons) qui, eux, habitent surtout la terre ou les grottes⁷, et qui, pour ces derniers (démons), sont leur contrepartie maléfique. Dans le registre de l'imaginaire cosmologique, magique ou politique, les anges sont donc omniprésents dans les manuscrits enluminés entre le XIII^e et le XV^e siècle, témoins des multiples rôles qu'on leur attribue.

En outre, les anges sont un des thèmes iconographiques parmi les plus fascinants dans les arts visuels pour les multiples héritages qu'ils portent, à la fois dans l'univers des croyances mais aussi des formes et des styles. Les anges sont à la

¹ Voir dans la cosmographie de Qazwīnī, *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt wa gharāʾib al-marejūdāt*, l'étalement des anges zoomorphes, Munich, Staatsbibliothek, codex arab 464, Irak, 1280, fol. 34v-35v et Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (BnF), Smith-Lesouéf (oriental) 221, Iran, début XVII^e siècle, fol. 35r à fol. 36r, et chez Kisāʾī: al-Kisāʾī, *Tales of the Prophets, Qisas al-anbiyāʾ*, W. M. Thackston Jr., ed., Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1997. Toufic Fahd, "La naissance du monde selon l'islam," dans: *Sources orientales*, Paris: Le Seuil 1959, 237-252.

² Christiane Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension: A Persian-Sunni Devotional Tale*, London, New York: Tauris Academic Studies 2010.

³ Tūsī Salmānī, *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt*, Paris, BnF, *Supplément persan* 332, Bagdad, 1388, fol. 140r.

⁴ Voir, par exemple, Nizāmī, *Khamsa*, Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, Istanbul (TSM), H 781, fol. 111v^o, 849H./1445-6, dans Barbara Brend, *Mubammad Juki's Shah-namah of Firdausi*, London: Wilson 2010, 145.

⁵ Anna Caiozzo, "Rituels théophaniques imagés et pratiques magiques: les anges planétaires dans le manuscrit persan 174 de Paris," dans: *Studia Iranica* 29/1 (2000), 111-140.

⁶ Anna Caiozzo, "Astrologie, cosmologie et mystique, remarques sur les représentations astrologiques circulaires de l'Orient médiéval," dans: *Annales islamologiques* 38 (2004), 311-356.

⁷ Voir Rustam tuant le *div* blanc, <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/card/cescene:425716088>.

convergence des croyances, et l'un des manuscrits parmi les plus beaux, le Supplément turc 190 conservé à la BnF à Paris, le *Mīrāj-nāma* du Prophète Muḥammad, réalisé à Hérat en 840/1436, rappelle la survivance du passé préislamique, qu'il soit bouddhiste, chrétien, manichéen ou zoroastrien.⁸

Les anges sont également présents dans les corpus de poésie iranienne, entre autres, la *Khamsa* de Nizāmī, surtout dans l'illustration préliminaire du *Trésor des secrets*⁹, en scène de l'*isrā'*, et dans les corpus du *Shāb-nāma* de Firdawsi, de façon plus spécifique cette fois.

Le *Shāb-nāma*, grande épopée des rois de Perse, récemment mise sous les feux de la rampe par les travaux du groupe de Cambridge autour du *Shahnama Project*¹⁰, est une œuvre mémorable, une part de l'identité iranienne par ses mythes et légendes mais aussi par la poésie de l'œuvre et sa diffusion par les bardes durant des siècles.¹¹

Le *Shāb-nāma* évoque l'histoire de l'Iran depuis la Création du monde, les dynasties mythiques jusqu'aux Sassanides, et les tribulations de l'Iran confronté à son ennemi millénaire, le Touran. Aux humains se joignent bon nombre d'êtres étranges, animaux fabuleux (dragon et simurgh) mais aussi des êtres intermédiaires, les *div*-s, sortes de démons issus des croyances des religions de l'Iran ancien, devenus ogres des montagnes, mais aussi des anges, protecteurs des hommes et messagers des cieux.¹² La croyance en certaines entités héritées du monde iranien préislamique survit en effet à l'époque islamique, celle des *yazata*-s¹³ en particulier, intégrés par Firdawsi¹⁴ à l'épopée sous la forme d'anges.¹⁵

L'ange (*firishta*) est d'abord un être bénéfique qui se manifeste aux humains pour les guider ou les protéger.¹⁶ Les bénéficiaires de ces apparitions sont généralement

⁸ Voir Marie-Rose Séguy, *Mīrāj nāmeb, Le voyage miraculeux du Prophète: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, manuscrit supplément turc 190*, Paris: Draeger 1977.

⁹ Par exemple, Nizāmī, *Khamsa*, BnF, Supplément persan 578, Shiraz, 1504, fol. 6, Mīrāj du Prophète Muḥammad.

¹⁰ Voir le site <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/card/cescene:425716088>.

¹¹ Kumiko Yamamoto, *The Oral Background of Persian Epics: Storytelling and Epics*, Leiden: Brill 2003.

¹² Sur les *div*-s voir Francesca Leoni, "Picturing Evil: Images of Divs and the Reception of the Shahnama," dans: *Shahnama Studies II, The Reception of Firdausi's Shahnama*, Charles Melville, Gabrielle van den Berg, eds., Leiden, Boston: Brill 2012, 101-120.

¹³ Sur les *Amesha Spentas, Yazatas, Fravashis*, voir <http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Religions/iranian/Zarathushtrian/angel.htm>.

¹⁴ Firdousi, *Le livre des rois*, Jules Mohl, ed. & trad., 7 vols., Paris: Maisonneuve, 1976-1978 [Repr. Paris 1838-1878]; Fritz Wolff, *Glossar zu Firdosis Schabname*, Hildesheim: Olms 1965, 777b, deux occurrences au mot arabe *malak* et 6 occurrences au mot persan *firishta*.

¹⁵ Cette mutation avait été signalée par Georges Dumézil, *Naissance d'Archanges, essai sur la formation de la théologie zoroastrienne*, (Jupiter, Mars, Quirinus, III). Paris: Gallimard, 1945. William W. Malandra, "Sraoša," dans: *Encyclopædia Iranica*, Online Edition, 2014, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/sraosa>.

¹⁶ Anna Caiozzo, *Le Roi glorieux. Les imaginaires de la royauté d'après les enluminures du Shāb Nāma de Firdawsi aux époques timourides et turkmènes*, Paris: Geuthner 2018, 186-191.

des rois en quête de devenir (ou dont la position n'est pas encore assurée), ou des aristocrates exerçant le rôle de tuteur des princes ou de soutien de la royauté. L'intervention de l'ange et sa confrontation avec l'humain ne participe donc pas d'un rite de passage (à l'instar des *dīv*-s ou des monstres), mais révèle l'intérêt que les dieux accordent à la royauté et à la personne du souverain, ou du futur souverain, en déléguant un protecteur ou un instructeur, permettant à un destin royal de s'accomplir. En dehors du récit lui-même, signalons d'autres anges présents dans les frontispices.

L'ange apportant la divine gloire (farr)

Les plus anciennes occurrences des anges sont celles des frontispices de copies du XIV^e siècle exécutés à Shiraz, le manuscrit Dorn 329 de Saint-Pétersbourg¹⁷ datant de 1333, ou encore celui du vizir Ḥasan Qiwām al-dawla wa'l-din en 1341¹⁸. Les miniatures exposent des scènes de majesté où le souverain, assis sur un trône, entouré de serviteurs et de courtisans, est surmonté par deux anges tenant des couronnes. Les deux frontispices possèdent une forte parenté thématique qui n'est pas sans rappeler quelques miniatures des XII^e-XIII^e siècles ou encore des scènes de majesté sur des artefacts saljoukides, ayyoubides ou mamelouks, tous reproduisant l'investiture de souverain par des anges tel qu'on peut l'observer dans l'art sassanide d'inspiration parthe.

Il est en effet fréquent d'observer sur l'argenterie sassanide des créatures ailées portant des rubans au-dessus du roi, et ce sont bien des victoires apportant chacune un cercle enrubanné qui encadrent la scène d'investiture dite de Khusraw Parviz dans l'arc de Ṭaq-i Bustān.¹⁹ Les victoires participent ici à l'investiture du roi par les deux divinités présentes, Anāhita et Ahura Mazda.²⁰ Le thème réapparaît au XII^e siècle, à l'époque seldjoukide dans les arts mineurs. On voit réapparaître les victoires ailées, en particulier dans la numismatique artoukide: deux anges dont les ailes forment un dais au-dessus du trône de l'artoukide de Ḥiṣn Kayfā, Nūr al-din Muḥammad (1175-1185)²¹. Toutefois, la diffusion de ce thème a également pu s'effectuer par le biais des sources chrétiennes, où il est en effet transposé. On peut

¹⁷ Adel T. Adamova, "The St. Petersburg Illustrated Shahnama of 733 Hijra (1133 AD) and the Injuid School of Painting," dans: *Shahnama, The Visual Language of the Persian Book of Kings*, R. Hillenbrand, ed., Burlington: Ashgate 2004, 51-64.

¹⁸ Marianna Shreve Simpson, "A Reconstruction and Preliminary Account of the 1341 Shahnama. With Some Further Thoughts on Early Shahnama Illustration," dans: *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars: Studies in Honour of Basil W. Robinson*, R. Hillenbrand, ed., London, New York: I. B. Tauris in Association with the Centre of Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cambridge 2000, 217-245.

¹⁹ Johanna Domela Movassat *The Large Vault at Taq-i Bustan: A Study in Late Sasanian Royal Art*, Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press 2005.

²⁰ http://www.cais-soas.com/CAIS/Images2/Sasanian/Taq_e_Bostan/Taq_Bostan_Mian_Arch.jpg.

²¹ *The Wind Blowing from Asia to Anatolia*, Istanbul: Yapi Kredi Kültür Merkezi 1984, n°21, 29.

observer dans la célèbre gourde de pèlerin de Mossoul, datant du milieu du XIII^e siècle, des anges volant au dessus du dôme de la chapelle où se tient le baptême du Christ²², comme le montrent encore certains manuscrits chrétiens peints en Orient aux XII^e et XIII^e siècles.²³

Mais c'est le frontispice du manuscrit du *Kitāb al-diryāq* du Pseudo-Galien de Paris, daté de 1199, et vraisemblablement réalisé à Mossoul, qui introduit le thème dans les arts du livre du monde musulman: dans cette double scène de majesté, quatre anges aux écoinçons de la miniature encadrent un personnage hiératique et couronné tenant un cercle devant lui et enveloppé par un double dragon formant un ouroboros.²⁴ Les quatre anges semblent participer d'un mouvement de rotation de la sphère formée par le corps du dragon alors que deux petits personnages se tiennent de part et d'autre du souverain, chacun tenant d'une main le cercle paré des deux pans d'une écharpe dans laquelle on peut reconnaître le *dastār*, substitut du cercle et symbole de gloire royale.²⁵ La gloire est en effet un don céleste dont les souverains bien guidés sont dépositaires et ce depuis les temps mythiques, afin de gouverner victorieusement, mais qui les abandonnent lorsqu'ils dérogent à leur mission.²⁶

Le frontispice du *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, également exécuté à Mossoul vers 1219, montre lui aussi des anges porteurs d'une sorte de voile formant un dais au-dessus dudit Badr al-dīn Lu'lu'²⁷, émir et régent de Mossoul (1210-1232-1259) et que l'on retrouve dans chacune des scènes où figure l'émir. Le frontispice des *Maqāmāt*

²² Eva Baer, *Ayyubid Metalwork with Christian Images*, (*Muqarnas Supplement*), Leiden: Brill, 2014 [1988], Eva Hoffman, "Christian-Islamic Encounters on Thirteenth-Century Ayyubid Metalwork: Local Culture, Authenticity and Memory," dans: *Gesta* 43 (2004), 129-142.

²³ Voir sur Mandagore, Paris, BnF, Copte 13, Damiette, 1178-80; Syrieque 355, Malatya, XII^e -XIII^e siècles, entre autres.

²⁴ Anna Caiozzo, "Les trois états de la Lune, éléments d'analyse pour la lecture du frontispice du Livre de la Thériaque," dans: *Commentaires du facsimile de la Thériaque de Paris*, Paris: Aboca Museum 2009, 36-47.

²⁵ Abalola Soudavar, *The Aura of the Kings: Legitimacy and Divine Sanction in Iranian Kingship*, Costa Mesa: Mazda Publisher 2003.

²⁶ Sur le *kl^harnah*, *farr* ou *farn*: la gloire, ses origines, voir Pierre Lecoq, *Les Livres de l'Avesta, Textes sacrés des Zoroastriens*, Paris: Cerf 2016, 585-608 et Harold W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth Century Books*, Oxford: Clarendon Press 1943, I, 1-51; 585; Albert De Jong, "Khvarenah," dans: *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, Pieter W. van der Horst, eds., Leiden-New York-Cologne: Brill 1995, 903-908 et surtout A. Lubotsky, "Avestan x^varənah-: the etymology and concept," dans: *Sprache und Kultur der Indogermanen, Akten der X. Fachtagung der Indogermanischen Gesellschaft, Innsbruck, 22.-28. September 1996*, Innsbruck: Institut für Sprachwissenschaften der Universität Innsbruck 1998.

²⁷ David S. Rice, "The Aghānī Miniatures and Religious Paintings in Islam," dans: *Burlington Magazine* 95 (1953), 128-234. Sur les illustrations, voir les manuscrits d'Abū l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, Irak, Mossoul; 610H/1218-19AD: Istanbul, Millet Library, Feyzullah Efendi 1565, vol. 19, et Feyzullah Efendi 1566, vol. 17, fol. 1r, 1219. Copenhagen, David Collection, D 1/1990, vol. 20; Le Caire, Egyptian National Library, Farsi 579, vol. 4 et vol. 11, frontispices.

Schefer de 1236-7, conservés à Paris, garde la trace de ces traditions puisque deux petits anges surmontent les prétendus commanditaires du frontispice.²⁸

Dans les scènes de majesté des objets saljoukides, les anges sont souvent remplacés par d'autres créatures, des oiseaux²⁹ ou des harpies, ou encore des sphinx.³⁰ Ces oiseaux animaux ailés semblent figurer des êtres célestes³¹ rappelant la divine gloire ou encore des *apotropaia* protégeant le souverain dans le sillage des rubans portés par les créatures volantes et autres animaux enrubannés³² dans les bas-reliefs et peintures sassanides.³³

Les peintres mamelouks reproduisent au XIV^e siècle dans une miniature célèbre, une scène classique de majesté avec des anges³⁴, un type que l'on observe également dans les métaux, objets qui furent des modèles facilement transportables³⁵ à une époque où les relations diplomatiques avec les Mongols commençaient à se normaliser.³⁶ La fameuse miniature ilkhanide représentant Salomon, son vizir et le démon Şakhr³⁷ se situe dans cette tradition où les anges forment un dais d'une écharpe pour signaler l'investiture céleste du souverain représenté comme dans les deux frontispices des deux *Shāb-nāma* de Shiraz. Dans ce cas, le voile en forme de dais est un lointain témoignage de la gloire ou du *farr*.

Par la suite, à l'époque timouride, les frontispices des *Shāb-nāma* sont davantage dévolus à des thèmes fixant le programme politique du commanditaire, comme l'a bien montré E. Sims³⁸, et le XVI^e siècle assure, quant à lui, la promo-

²⁸ Robert Hillenbrand, "The Schefer Hariri: A Study in Islamic Frontispice," dans: *Arab Painting, Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, A. Contadini, ed., Leiden: Brill 2010, 117-135.

²⁹ Jarre, fin XII^e - début XIII^e siècle, (29.2 × 34.3 cm), Brooklyn Museum, Gift of The Roebling Society, 73.30.6.

³⁰ Sur le rôle de ces animaux, voir Eva Baer, *Sphinxes and Harpies in Medieval Islamic Art: An Iconographical Study*, Jerusalem: Israel Oriental Society 1965.

³¹ New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1975.1.1642, Robert Lehman Collection 1975, début XIII^e siècle.

³² Carol Altman Bromberg, "Sasanian Royal Emblems. in the Northern Caucasus," dans: *Proceedings of the First European Conference of Iranian Studies Held in Turin, September 7th-11th, 1987 by the Societas Iranologica Europaea, Part 1, Old and Middle Iranian Studies*, G. Gnoli, A. Panaino, eds., Rome: Istituto italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente 1990, 4.

³³ Katsumi Tanabe, "A Study of the Sasanian Disk-Nimbus: Farewell to Its Xvarnah-Theory," dans: *Orient* 6 (1984), 29-50.

³⁴ *Maqāmāt*, Vienne, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek (ÖNB), Égypte, 1334, AF 9, fol. 1v, dans: Richard Ettinghausen, *La peinture arabe*, Genève: Skira 1977, 148.

³⁵ Chandelier, Sa'd ibn 'Abd Allāh, Iran (Fars province), 1343-53, cuivre gravé avec or et argent, Doha, Museum of Islamic Art, cat. 162.

³⁶ Sur les relations entre Mongols et Mamelouks, voir Reuven Amitai, *Holy War and Rapprochement: Studies in the Relations between the Mamluk Sultanate and the Mongol Ilkhanate (1260-1335)*, Turhout: Brepols 2013.

³⁷ Salomon, Istanbul, TSM, Hazine 2152, folio 97r, dans: Michael Barry, *L'art figuratif en Islam médiéval et l'énigme de Behzād de Hérat (1465-1535)*, Paris: Flammarion 2004.

³⁸ Eleanor Sims, "The Illustrated Manuscripts of Firdausi's Shahnama Commissioned by Princes of the House of Timur," dans: *Ars Orientalis* 22 (1993), 45-48.

tion de la figure de Salomon et de sa cour.³⁹ Les anges, avatars des victoires et porteurs de gloire, ne disparaissent pas pour autant, mais ils sont désormais relégués à des scènes de la vie privée dans d'autres corpus comme *Kalila wa Dimna*⁴⁰ ou la *Khamsa* de Topkapi, où ils apparaissent aux écoinçons de l'arc surmontant l'alcôve où siègent Bahrām Gūr et la princesse.⁴¹

L'ange, protecteur et sauveur du roi

Si la fonction de l'ange reste celle d'un messenger, elle est aussi protectrice vis-à-vis des êtres menacés. Dans le monde musulman, c'est l'ange Gabriel qui assume cette tâche, comme le montrent les miniatures de l'épisode où le fils d'Abraham promis au sacrifice est épargné par l'intervention de l'ange⁴², ou encore lorsqu'Abraham est protégé du brasier dans lequel l'a fait catapulté Nemrod.

Dans le monde iranien, l'ange, salvateur par excellence, est une entité dénommée Sraosha/Srosh/Surūsh, bien connue depuis les travaux de Kreyenbroeck.⁴³ L'ange Srosh, ou Sraosha, est le seul des *yazata*-s, ou anges du zoroastrisme, à être représenté dans les corpus du *Shāb-nāma*.⁴⁴

Srosh est célébré par les textes avestiques comme étant la « récitation » ou, mieux encore, « celui qui a le mot sacré du corps », protégeant les hommes contre le mal.⁴⁵ Dans le *Shāb-nāma*, il est le messenger des cieux aux hommes de grande vertu, doublé d'une fonction protectrice marquée.

Cet ange guide les rois et les hommes qui s'adonnent à la prière et à la contemplation, les informe de certains faits à venir et, surtout, oriente leur action et leur fournit le sens de leur mission sur terre. Il apparaît à Gayūmarth, le géant primordial, père des hommes, vêtu d'une peau de léopard, et lui révèle les noirs desseins d'Ahriman et de ses fils contre son fils Siyāmak.⁴⁶ L'ange est beau de traits, « semblable à une péri » et vêtu comme le roi.⁴⁷ Par ailleurs, il le conseille et oriente ses choix et lui demande d'être le bras armé des cieux dans son combat contre le mal.

³⁹ Serpil Bağcı, "A New Theme of the Shirazi Frontispiece Miniatures: The Divān of Solomon", dans: *Muqarnas* 12 (1995), 101-111.

⁴⁰ Naşr 'Allāh Munshī, Istanbul, TSM, Revan 1022, Hérat, 1429, fol. 31v, dans: Eleanor Sims, *Peerless Images. Persian Painting and Its Sources*, New Haven: Yale University Press 2002, 192.

⁴¹ Sims, *Images*, 204; *Khamsa*, 1429, New York, MET, 13.228.13, fol. 23v, Herat, 1435.

⁴² Joseph Gutmann, "The Sacrifice of Abraham in Timurid Art," dans: *The Journal of the Walters Art Museums* 59 (2001), 131-135.

⁴³ Philip G. Kreyenbroek, *Sraoša in the Zoroastrian Tradition*, Leiden: Brill 1985.

⁴⁴ Parmi les autres anges évoque le nom, on trouve Afrin, le feu, Asfandārmad, la protection des âmes et des êtres, Khurdād, l'eau aux plantes, fertilité, Amermdād, le bétail.

⁴⁵ Mary Boyce and Frantz Grenet, *History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1, *The Early Period*, Leiden: Brill 1975, 60.

⁴⁶ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 1, 30-31.

⁴⁷ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 1, 30, l. 28-30.

Il apparaît, par exemple, à l'ermite Hūm⁴⁸ pour lui signaler la présence d'Afrāsiyāb, poursuivi par Khusraw et caché à proximité.⁴⁹ Plusieurs miniatures montrent la capture du tyran grâce à l'ermite mais sans révéler la présence de l'ange.⁵⁰

L'un des moyens que l'ange choisit pour se manifester aux rois et aux grands est le rêve, qui est aussi le procédé mantique de prédilection du monde musulman.⁵¹ Durant le règne calamiteux de Kay Kāwūs, Gūdarz voit Srosh en rêve, assis sur un nuage, lui annoncer la rédemption de la royauté grâce au petit-fils du roi, Kay Khusraw⁵², que son fils Giv découvrira au bord d'une fontaine.⁵³ Plus tard, Srosh se manifeste également au roi Kay Khusraw en rêve, mais cette fois pour lui conseiller de renoncer au trône⁵⁴, et de se préparer à mourir: il va le guider dans son voyage dans l'au-delà.⁵⁵

Malgré de fréquentes interventions pour assurer le salut de la royauté, les seules occurrences où Srosh apparaît sont celles réservées au sauvetage de Khusraw Parviz poursuivi par son rival Bahrām Chubina sur un flanc de montagne: là, il prie Dieu de le sauver, et Srosh, vêtu de vert, sa couleur de prédilection⁵⁶, et monté sur un cheval blanc⁵⁷, couleur des montures divines, l'enlève et l'emporte plus loin dans un endroit sûr, en lui annonçant qu'il sera roi et devra rester vertueux.⁵⁸ Dans ce cas, en défenseur de la dynastie sassanide, l'ange protège directement l'héritier légitime du trône, et s'oppose à la revendication illégitime du Parthe Bahrām Chubina.

L'ange et les sciences du secret

Si les anges témoignent de l'origine divine du pouvoir et de la légitimité des héritiers, ils veillent également à la formation des héros et des princes, et dans certains cas, dispensent un savoir que peu d'hommes, à l'exception des élus et prophètes, peuvent posséder.

⁴⁸ En réalité le *Haoma*.

⁴⁹ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 4, 203.

⁵⁰ <http://shahnama.caret.cam.ac.uk/new/jnama/card/cescene:496468829>.

⁵¹ Voir Pierre Lory, *Le rêve et ses interprétations en islam*, Paris: Albin Michel 2003 et John C. Lamoreaux, *The Early Muslim Tradition of Dream Interpretation*, New York: New York University Press 2002. Voir Toufiq Fahd, *La divination arabe: études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif d'Islam*, Leiden: Brill 1966.

⁵² Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 2, 476-477.

⁵³ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 2, 486-487.

⁵⁴ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 2, 226-227.

⁵⁵ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 2, 232-233 et 260-261.

⁵⁶ Kolsoum Ghazanfari, *Perceptions of Zoroastrianism Realities in the Shahnameh: Zoroaster, Beliefs, Rituals*, Berlin: Logos 2011, 82-92 et 83.

⁵⁷ Philippe Swennen, *D'Indra à Tištrya. Portrait et évolution du cheval sacré dans les mythes indo-ariennes anciens*, Paris: De Boccard 2004, 43-44 et blanc en particulier comme celui de Tištrya ou des Asvins. Voir Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 7, 167.

⁵⁸ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 7, 166-167.

Un ange apparaît ainsi à Farīdūn une nuit⁵⁹, après qu'il ait vaincu le tyran Ḍaḥḥāk, pour lui enseigner les secrets de la magie. La magie est donc un savoir divin, mais délivré à certains individus particuliers. L'histoire des anges déchus Hārūt et Mārūt, accusés d'avoir livré la magie aux hommes, est, à cet égard, révélatrice d'un imaginaire de la mauvaise magie, celle de Babylone, sur laquelle régnait précisément le tyran et sorcier Ḍaḥḥāk.⁶⁰ On peut noter que l'épisode est peu illustré: une seule occurrence met Farīdūn en présence de l'ange dans un manuscrit du *Shāb-nāma* du XV^e siècle⁶¹, mais toutefois ici pour signaler un danger.⁶² L'initiation du roi de Perse n'est plus mentionnée après cet épisode, comme si le savoir était ensuite transmis par le détenteur à ses héritiers.⁶³ Farīdūn devient le modèle du roi magicien et du souverain bien guidé, mais aussi soumis à l'autorité divine car Srosh lui demande, par exemple, d'épargner Ḍaḥḥāk en l'enfermant dans une caverne.⁶⁴ Un autre héros est guidé par un ange, Isrāfīl, messenger de la fin des temps dans le monde musulman.⁶⁵ C'est en effet, l'ange Isrāfīl qui accueille Iskandar/Alexandre-Le-Grand sur la montagne Qāf alors que le roi avait perdu son guide, al-Khāḍir (Fig. 1). Isrāfīl tient un instrument dans ses mains, la trompette du jugement dernier⁶⁶, et sa fonction annoncée est eschatologique; il communique aussi les ordres de Dieu aux hommes.⁶⁷ Il demande à Iskandar de se préparer à quitter ce monde et à renoncer à ses ambitions⁶⁸, une scène que l'on retrouve dans une cosmographie en persan du XIV^e siècle.⁶⁹ Alexandre vient en

⁵⁹ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 2, 94-95, vol. 1. 304.

⁶⁰ Jean de Menasce, "Une légende indo-iranienne dans l'angéologie judéo-musulmane: à propos de Hārūt-Mārūt," dans: *Études asiatiques* 1 (1947), 10-18, et Henri-Charles Puech, "De la mythologie indo-iranienne à la légende juive et musulmane des anges Azaël et Šemhazai ou Hārūt et Mārūt," dans: *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 133 (1948), 221-225.

⁶¹ Firdawsi, *Shāb-nāma*, Patna, Khuda Bakhsh Oriental Public Library, ACC 1243-1244, 1462-5, Gilan ?, fol. 15r.

⁶² Voir Toufiq Fahd, *La divination arabe: études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif d'Islam*, Leiden: Brill 1966.

⁶³ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 1, 134-135, 213-215.

⁶⁴ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 1, 108-111.

⁶⁵ D. B. Macdonald, W. Madelung, art. "Malā'ika," dans: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EP*), vol. 6, 1991, 216-218 et Arent Jan Wensinck, art. "Isrāfīl," dans: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EP*), vol. 4, 1978, 211.

⁶⁶ Cette trompette présente dans la Bible comme le *shōfār* est aussi celle d'un ange connu des chrétiens d'Orient, Suriel, qui sonne de la trompette dans le *Livre d'Hénoch* et dans l'apocryphe *Salasha* de la Mort de Moïse. Voir le commentaire d'André Caquot dans Duchesne-Guillemin, "Cor de Yima et trompette d'Isrāfīl: de la cosmologie mazdéenne à l'eschatologie musulmane," dans: *Comptes-rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* 3 (1979), 539-549.

⁶⁷ Fehmi Jadaane, "La place des anges dans la théologie cosmique musulmane," dans: *Studia Islamica* 41 (1975), 23-61, 49.

⁶⁸ Firdousi, *Livre*, vol. 5, 220-221.

⁶⁹ Ṭūsi Salmāni, *Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt wa gharā'ib al-mawjūdāt*, Paris, BnF, Supplément persan 332, Bagdad, 1388, fol. 60r.



Fig. 1: Isrāfil et Iskandar sur le mont Qāf, Firdawsi, *Shāb-nāma*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 490, Qazwin, vers 1580, fol. 352r. Photographie © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

effet d'atteindre une des extrémités du monde et c'est en allant vers l'extrémité opposée et en construisant la barrière séparant les hommes des peuples de Gog et Magog, qu'il passera du statut de conquérant à celui de prophète, protecteur de l'humanité, le fameux *Dhū-l-Qarnayn* de la Sourate XVIII.⁷⁰

En revanche, le cas de Kay Kāwūs est plus problématique. Le roi commet au cours de son règne un certain nombre d'erreurs: mal conseillé par un *div* musicien⁷¹, il entre de façon inconsidérée en guerre; époux d'une jeune femme qui séduit son fils Siyāvūsh, il est indirectement responsable de son exil et de sa fin tragique. Mais Kāwūs est aussi un roi magicien qui ne met cependant pas son savoir au service des faibles, comme en témoigne la mort du fils de Rustam, Suhrāb, auquel il refuse l'onguent salvateur.⁷² Qui plus est, il ose défier le ciel dans son char emporté par les aigles.⁷³ Les anges ne sont généralement pas convoqués, mais on les aperçoit parfois derrière les nuages, observant consternés la scène⁷⁴ (Fig. 2). Cette scène qui trouve un écho très fort dans l'histoire du roi Nemrod, persécuteur d'Abraham⁷⁵, qui ne put lui non plus accéder aux cieux est souvent représenté de façon semblable dans les manuscrits de la fin du XV^e siècle⁷⁶, voire d'époque safavide, où le roi tire une flèche sur l'ange.⁷⁷ On pourra noter que Kay Kāwūs comme Ḍaḥḥāk ne rencontrent pas d'anges mais des *div*-s voir le diable lui-même qui les corrompent et les mènent vers leur perte comme les anges conduisent les souverains de valeur vers le salut.

En revanche, l'une des occurrences de figure angélique parmi les plus intéressantes est celle de la simurgh. En effet, le Zābulistān, en réalité le Séistan, est gouvernée par une dynastie, les Sām, dont les rois et princes héritiers jouent le rôle de conseillers et de bras armés des rois d'Iran. Les plus célèbres sont Zāl, le prince albinos, et son fils Rustam. Tous deux interviennent durant des siècles comme des protecteurs des rois. Zāl réputé pour sa sagesse, fut admis à la cour des premiers Kayānides, sous Manūtcīhr mais aussi sous Kay Khusraw puis à celle de leurs successeurs où ses conseils étaient écoutés.⁷⁸ Son fils, Rustam, l'homme au corps

⁷⁰ Norman O. Brown, "The Apocalypse of Islam," dans: *Social Text*, Duke University Press 8 (1983-1984), 155-171.

⁷¹ Firdawsi, *Shāh-nāma*, Téhéran, Gulistan Palace, 716, Hérat, fol. 92r.

⁷² Firdousi, vol. 2, 176-77.

⁷³ Sur l'envol suprême transgression voir Anna Caiozzo, "L'ascension du héros du mystique et du saint," dans: *Images, symboles, mythes et poétiques de l'ascension*, B. Sósien, ed., Cracovie, Presses de l'Université Jagellonne 2007, 17-24.

⁷⁴ Paris, BnF, Supplément persan 494, Shiraz, 1444, fol. 88r.

⁷⁵ Rachel Milstein, "Nimrod, Joseph and Jonah: Miniatures from Ottoman Baghdad," dans: *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, N.S., 1 (1987), 123-138.

⁷⁶ Philadelphia, Free Library of Philadelphia, Lewis O. 50, fol. 12v; New Delhi, National Museum, 57.27/17(a)-(n), fol. 4r.

⁷⁷ Voir London, British Library (BL), Additional 27302, Qazwin, 1586, fol. 94r.

⁷⁸ L'épopée des Sakas évoque l'histoire du Séistan, Charles E. Bosworth, "Sistān," dans: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EP*), vol. 9, Leiden: Brill 1997, 681-685

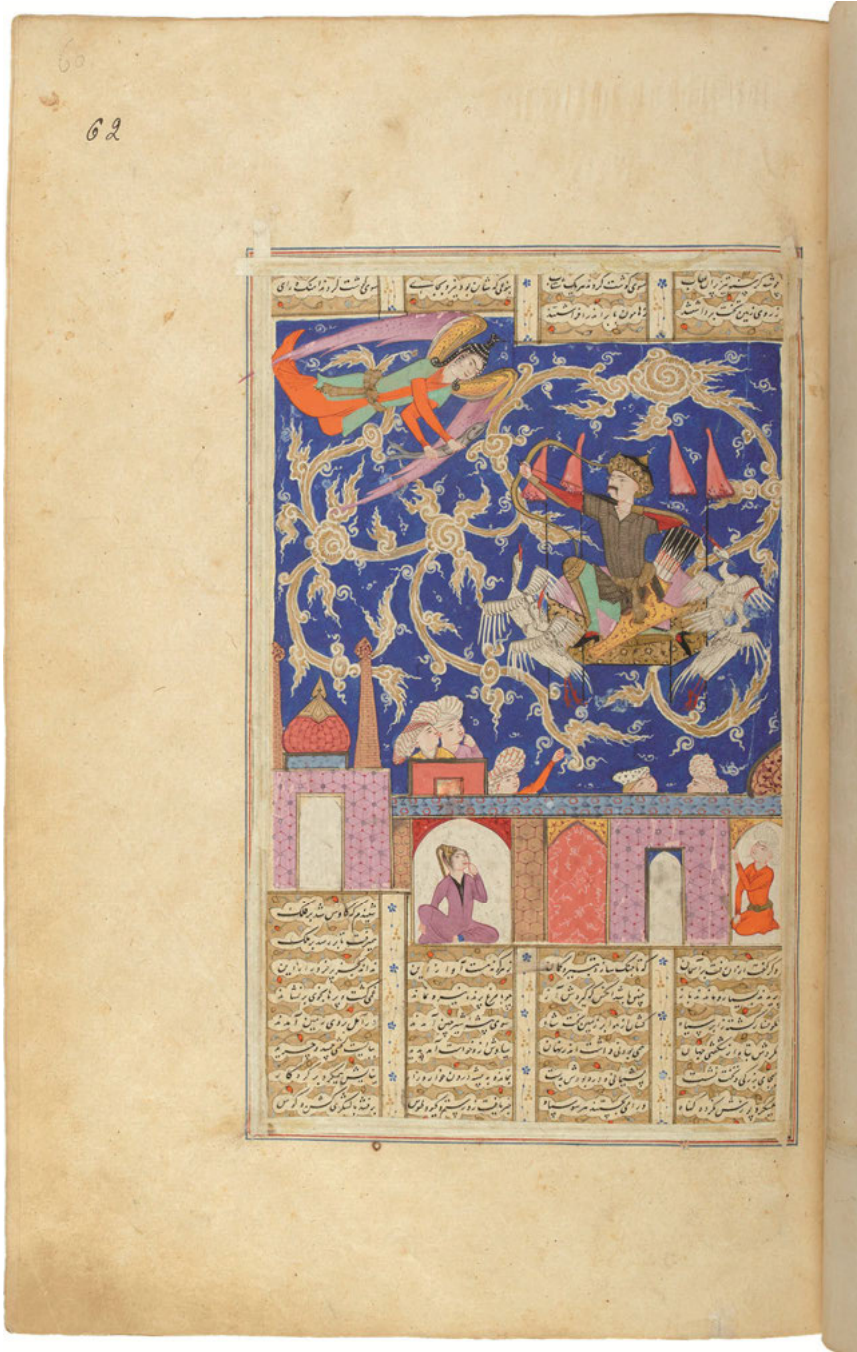


Fig. 2: Kāvūs s'envole pour conquérir le ciel, Firdawsī, *Shāh-nāma*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 489, Shiraz ou Ispahan, XVII^e siècle, fol. 62r. Photographie © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

d'éléphant, fut un chef d'armée redouté, et ses aventures suffirent à illustrer les versions abrégées du *Shāh-nāma* durant des siècles jusqu'aux conteurs contemporains.⁷⁹ La singularité de cette dynastie repose sur le pouvoir protecteur d'un oiseau, un grand rapace, la simurgh. En effet, exposé à la naissance en raison de son apparence singulière, celle d'un vieillard, Zāl fut enlevé par le rapace comme proie facile, mais ensuite, l'oiseau l'adopta en raison de sa beauté et lui enseigna leur langage. En cas de danger, Zāl appelait la simurgh en brûlant sa plume, ce qui ainsi, sauva Rudāba d'un accouchement difficile, guérit les plaies de Rustam et de Rakhsh son cheval.

Zāl apparaît ainsi sous les traits d'un puissant magicien invoquant la simurgh comme on invoque les anges par le biais d'un *nīrang*. Mais à la cour du nouveau roi Gushtāsp on le traite de sorcier « jādū ». La rivalité entre le roi et son fils Isfandiyār fut le prétexte pour mettre au banc les princes du Zābulistān et provoquer la rivalité entre les deux guerriers, Rustam et Isfandiyār. La simurgh confia à contrecœur à Zāl le moyen de tuer Isfandiyār dont le corps était réputé invulnérable. Les pouvoirs de l'oiseau devaient demeurer exclusivement bienveillants et la mort d'Isfandiyār tué par Rustam scella la fin de la dynastie des Sām.⁸⁰

Le mystère de la simurgh a été évoqué par de nombreux mystiques mais surtout par le poème d' 'Aṭṭār (1145-1221)⁸¹, *Le Dialogue des oiseaux*. La simurgh apparaît alors comme le roi des oiseaux, mais aussi comme un avatar de l'esprit saint, et c'est bien ce rôle qu'elle joue vis-à-vis des rois du Zābulistān, celui d'une entité savante, leur confiant des secrets de magie, veillant sur leur santé et celle de leurs héritiers comme les anges le faisaient pour les dynasties d'Iran investies par la gloire. À n'en pas douter, rappelant le faucon porteur de gloire, avatar animal du *xvarnah/farr*. La simurgh serait donc un ange, ou une entité intermédiaire protectrice, bienveillante, vivant sur le toit du monde, l'Alburz où elle peut entendre les secrets des mondes célestes et les transmettre à ceux qu'elle a choisis comme initiés.

Les anges et autres entités angéliques à l'image de la simurgh, sont donc omniprésents présents, quoique parcimonieusement représentés, dans l'épopée des rois de Perse; jusqu'à l'époque safavide, leur présence dans les miniatures demeure relativement discrète. Hormis les frontispices du XIV^e siècle, ou plus tard, au XVI^e siècle, la cour de Salomon et Belqis où les anges sont omniprésents, elle est à l'époque médiévale, visuellement limitée à trois registres: la révélation de la

⁷⁹ Sur Rustam, voir Olga M. Davidson, "The Crown-Bestower in the Persian Book of Kings," dans: *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, vol. 1, 1985, 61-148.

⁸⁰ Sur Zāl magicien, voir la cérémonie d'invocation de l'oiseau, Londres, BL, or. 1403, fol. 296r.

⁸¹ 'Aṭṭār, *Le langage des oiseaux*, (trad.) Garcin de Tassy, Paris: Albin Michel 1996, 296, Mohamed Djafar Moïnfar, "Simorgh (Simorğ ou Angha ('Ankā')," dans: *Images et représentations en Terre d'Islam, Actes du colloque international de Strasbourg*, Hossein Beik Baghban, ed., Tehran: Presses universitaires d'Iran 1997, 204-216. Carlo Saccone, "L'angelo terrestre' tra il sé e l'altro. Il viaggio dell'intello nel mistico persiano Fardodin 'Attār'," dans: *Viaggi e visioni di re, sufi, profeti*, Milan, Trente: Luni editrice 1999, 86-129.

magie, la protection des princes légitimes (Faridūn, Parviz, les rois du Zābulistān), enfin, la condamnation de l'hybris (Alexandre, Kay Kāwūs).

Certes, l'ange est le garant de l'ordre divin, celui qui rappelle, comme dans les frontispices, que l'origine du pouvoir réside dans les cieux. L'ange se manifeste dans la première partie de l'épopée dévolue à la royauté primitive, pour révéler l'avenir et révéler des savoirs cachés aux rois qui font office de médiateurs entre les mondes terrestre et céleste. Puis l'ange devient un signe, un des *monstra*, qui se manifeste pour signifier que le souverain s'égare de la voie droite, en somme, un avertissement, ne sauvant que les princes dont le pouvoir est légitime (Parviz).

L'intervention de l'ange marque ainsi les différents types de royauté: le temps des rois magiciens, une royauté primitive où les souverains usaient de la magie pour contrôler les forces maléfiques; le temps des tyrans (Kay Kāwūs et Iskandar), que les anges condamnent, et le temps d'une royauté qui se fragile et s'affaiblit (le roi bien que soutenu par les cieux doit venir à bout d'un puissant rival). Dans le cas de la simurgh, compte tenu de la longévité des princes du Zābulistān, l'ange oiseau joue tous ces rôles à la fois, synthétisant les qualités des autres anges de l'épopée: mère-nourricière, éducatrice, protectrice d'une lignée attachée aux valeurs d'un autre âge, sans doute déclassée par l'arrivée du zoroastrisme.⁸²

Puis le temps des anges s'efface progressivement à l'époque sassanide, celui où les pouvoirs de magie du roi disparaissent et où la compétence et la formation prend le pas sur le savoir intuitif et les guides célestes. Désormais, ce sont les médecins, les conseillers, les astrologues, - les gens de savoir - qui guident le roi, interprètent leurs rêves et les signes divins. Le sage inspiré dont le prototype est Buzurgmihr, le conseiller de Khusraw Anūshirwān, remplace auprès du roi les manifestations de l'au-delà qui appartiennent à une époque révolue.⁸³

Les arts visuels continueront de représenter des visites d'anges aux hommes, mais de façon emblématique, pour traduire l'avènement d'une nouvelle ère, celle de l'islam où dans la culture visuelle, ils apparaissent désormais pour informer, guider le prophète Muḥammad, ses troupes, ses familiers dans les corpus d'inspiration religieuse comme dans les chroniques historiques.⁸⁴

⁸² Marcia E. Maguire, "The Haft Khvān of Rostam and Isfandiyār", dans: *Studies in art and Literature of the Near East, in Honor of Richard Ettinghausen*, Peter J. Chelchowsli, ed., New York 1974, 137-147.

⁸³ Anna Caiozzo, "Le rêve entre divination et dévoilement du sacré dans le Shāh Nāma de Firdawsi," dans: *Alors je rêverai des horizons bleuâtres... Études dédiées à Barbara Sosien*, B. Marczuk, J. Gorecka-Kalita, A. Kocik, eds., Cracovie: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellonskiego 2013, 83-93.

⁸⁴ Le manuscrit le plus évocateur est au XIV^e siècle, *l'Histoire universelle* de Rashid al-din, conservée à la Bibliothèque universitaire d'Edimbourg (ms 161, Tabriz, 1306-7). Voir David Talbot-Rice, *The Illustrations to the « World History of Rashīd al-dīn*, Édimbourg: The Edinburgh University Press 1976; Sheila Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles, Rashid al-Din's Illustrated History of the World*, vol. XXVII, Collection of Islamic Art, J. Raby ed., The Nasser Khalili, The Nour Foundation, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995.

Illustrations

Fig. 1: Isrāfil et Iskandar sur le mont Qāf, Firdawsi, *Shāb-nāma*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Supplément persan 490, Qazwin, vers 1580, fol. 352r. Photographie © Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

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