

The Functions of Angels in Sufi Literature



LOUISE GALLORINI

BRILL

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The Functions of Angels in Sufi Literature

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The Functions of Angels in Sufi Literature

By

Louise Gallorini



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Abbreviations

- EI*¹ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 1st ed., Leiden: Brill, 1913–1938
*EI*² *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., Leiden: Brill, 1954–2004
*EI*³ *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., Leiden: Brill, 2007–
EQ *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Leiden: Brill, 2001–2006
ER *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, New York: Macmillan, 1986

Long quotes from sources are left in Arabic (in footnotes); shorter ones and phrases are transliterated.

Transliteration System

ا a/ā (long vowel)

ب b

ت t

ث th

ج j

ح ḥ

خ kh

د d

ذ dh

ر r

ز z

س s

ش sh

ص ṣ

ض ḍ

ط ṭ

ظ ṭ

ع ʿ

غ gh

ف f

ق q

ك k

ل l

م m

ن n

ه h

و w/ū (long vowel)

ي y/ī (long vowel)

ء ʾ

ى ā

ي ī

و ū

َ a

ِ i

ُ u

َی ai

َو aw

ِی īy

ُو ūw

ة a/āt

Introduction

سقطت القسطنطينية ولم ينته الجدل حول الملائكة. لم ينته أيُّ جدلٍ ولا حول شيءٍ. ومن يهّمه إن كان الملائكة حقيقة أم خرافة ما دام الاعتقاد بوجودهم أجمل من عدم الاعتقاد؟ وهل نحن ساجدون في اليقين حتى نتوقف عند شك كهذا؟ وما دام لا خيار لنا إلا في التميّ ولا حرية إلا في الخيال، فلندع هذا المجنّح الفاتن يغمرنا بحمايته. إنه هو نفسه من نلحه عندما نغمض العينين ونسرح وراء ما لا تصل إليه اليد.

أنسي الحاج¹

Angels are ubiquitous in Islam: They are part of the six articles of faith, they are saluted five times a day by practicing Muslims at the end of the ritual prayer, and Gabriel is commonly seen as the transmitter of the Revelation. Angels, however, rarely seem to be the focus of any body of work in Islamic literature. In pre-modern Arabic literature, there do not seem to be any before the *ḥadīth* compilation, *Al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-Malā'ik* by al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). This renders their textual presence in Arabic literature hard to trace, as they are everywhere, but only on the periphery, slightly out of focus, usually seen as inconspicuous surviving elements from other cosmologies.

Are angels a suitable means to attempt a glimpse into the past, to peer at such varied aspects of a given society as intellectual processes, theological debates, imaginaries and worldviews? Many scholars posit this notion,² and

1 Unsī al-Ḥajj, "Malā'ika," *Al-Akhbār*, April 10, 2010. https://al-akhbar.com/Archive_Conclusions/113758.

2 "Angels provide privileged grounds for exploring a whole range of issues from epistemology and metaphysics, to philosophy of mind and language" (Isabelle Irribarren and Martin Lenz, *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry: Their Function and Significance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 4.); Angels are "a driving force for speculation concerning the borders of the universe and the multiplicity of worlds;" they are also "a religious ingredient that turns out to be poly-compatible. Angels 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" (Johann Ev Hafner, "Where Angels Dwell, Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder and Hans-Peter Pökel (Beirut: Orient Insitut Beirut, 2019), 230, 234–235); "In fact, it may be said that in medieval theology and philosophy in particular, human nature is defined in reference to angelic nature and vice-versa" (Gisela Webb, "Hierarchy, Angels, and the Human Condition in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi," *The Muslim World* 81, no. 3–4 (1991): 245–253); "Islamic angelology' has the potential to be

this book will focus on “Sufi angels,” or angels from a Sufi literary point of view. What are the roles and functions of angels as characters in Sufi literature? Do they differ in any way from those of Quranic angels? What might transpire through their appearance in these mystical premodern texts? How are they “used” inside and outside the text, and to what purposes? What parts of the Islamic cosmological imaginary may these theological creatures let us see?

1 Preliminary Remarks

This is an attempt to trace the evolution of angels as literary characters and elements of a mythopoeic process, as textual and extratextual products of human imagination.

Burge notes that there are many Islamic angelologies, as they tend to reflect theological debates, or the product of such debates, giving rise to contradictory systems, as was the case in Christianity and Judaism. Therefore, it would seem that there are at least as many angelologies as there are authors.³ As late waves of converts brought different perspectives and viewpoints into Islamic writings,⁴ I suppose that Islamic angelology reflected in part the great complexity and changes witnessed in the period from the late-antique Arabic phase to the Empire phase, but I also argue that a singularity might also run through different writings. As many Islamic angelologies as there are per author, this study should show that there are some common functions to them all, with a particularity characterizing Sufi writings.

a fertile new interdisciplinary field of study that explores broad conceptions of transcendence and immanence and the relationship between human existence and religious ideas. (...) 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” (Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (eds.), *The Intermediate World of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts* (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019), 38); The use of angels blurs the frontier between popular, official, and normative literature (Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabā’ik fī Akhbār al-Malā’ik* (London: Routledge, 2015), 8); they also reveal what themes and aspects of life are more important for a given group of people (Stephen R. Burge, “‘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*,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 165–166.)

3 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 108. Another scholar offers to use “angelopedia” to designate the study and accumulation of the many discourses existing on angels (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité des anges*, Paris: Cerf, 2018, 18).

4 Antoine Borrut, “De l’Arabie à l’empire, conquête et construction califale dans l’islam premier,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, 3 vols. i (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 249–289.

While angels in general have been studied,⁵ angels in Islam are a more recent focus of research.⁶ Angels in Sufism are rarely an object of study—at least in Arabic sources⁷—although, as with angels in Islam in general, there is a great number of mentions of angels in various works, throughout all kinds of literary and theological studies, but these works are rarely focused on these beings.

A first preliminary remark is that Islamic cosmologies, like antique and medieval Christian cosmologies, follow multiple variations of Ptolemaic-Greek

5 Such an example is Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas and Karin Schöpflin, *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings; Origins, Development and Reception* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2007); David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle-Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); Delphine Lauritzen, *Inventer les anges de l'antiquité à Byzance: conception, représentation, perception* (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'histoire et de civilisation de Byzance, 2021). Also relevant to early Islamic angels and most Sufi cosmologies is Luc Brisson, Seamus O'Neill and Andrei Timotin, *Neoplatonic Demons and Angels* (Boston: Brill, 2018) and Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing in Ancient Judaism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

6 There are a number of good articles and chapters on angels in Islam which provide generalist overviews of angels in Quran and well-known texts in the Western academic tradition (by authors such as Ibn Sinā, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', al-Fārābī): Louis Gardet, "Les Anges En Islam," *Studia Missionalia* 21, (1972): 207–227; Pierre Lory, "Les anges dans l'islam," *Connaissance des religions* (2004): 155–166, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00323707>; Fehmi Jadaane, "La place des anges dans la théologie cosmique musulmane," *Studia Islamica*, no. 41 (1975): 23–61; Olga Lizzini and Samuela Pagani, "Islam," in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), 1453–2012; Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 339–362; Pierre Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2018), 159–220; Sachiko Murata, "The Angels," in *Islamic Spirituality, Foundations*, ed. S.H. Nasr (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 324–344.

There are also more specific articles and chapters on angels in Quranic polemics (Crone, Patricia. "Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God: The View of the Qur'anic Pagans", in *The Qur'anic Pagans and Related Matters* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 102–124); in Ibn 'Arabī (Webb, "Hierarchy."); in al-Suhrawardī (Stephen R. Burge, "The Provenance of Suhrawardian Angelology," *Archiv Orientalní*, 76, no. 4 (2008): 435–457); as well as two important books, *Angels in Islam* by Burge and *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels* recently published by the Orient Institute in Beirut (Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (eds), *The Intermediate World of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019). Lastly, another book came out recently that covers angels and dreams in relation to the traditions around the Prophet's family in both Sunni and Shia traditions: Christopher Paul Clohessy, *Angels Hastening, the Karbalā' Dreams*, (New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2021).

7 In the wider Islamicate corpus, in other languages than Arabic, there are of course the works of Henry Corbin on angels in the Persianate tradition—angels in these works and tradition would deserve their very own study. Corbin also contributed a lot in establishing the notion of "imaginal" (as developed by Ibn 'Arabī in contrast to simple human imagination) known to Western readers.

cosmology.⁸ Likewise, Sufism is often infused with Neo-Platonic influences,⁹ and within this mental frame, correspondences are also frequent between planets, heavenly spheres, elements, philosophical concepts, and other such cosmological elements.¹⁰ Therefore, we may expect angels in our selected texts to be molded to fit such models.

Secondly, considering monotheisms' anthropological need for intermediaries (e.g., priests, angels) despite their theological claims, some might wonder why Judaism and Christianity would have needed angels as intermediaries between believers and God, when priests can be seen as fulfilling this role.¹¹ This might make the need for their presence in Islam, with its lack of clergy (at least in Sunni Islam), less surprising. Burge describes them in an Islamic context as "God's presence on Earth," quoting Henry Corbin, according to whom monotheism would perish in an "illusory triumph"¹² without angelology.

Thirdly, angels also appear in the context of late antiquity, where the concept of *deus otiosus*, or "high God" removed from the daily affairs of the world, is usually opposed to the concept of *deus actuosus*, which corresponds to the idea of a governing god who manages his Creation.¹³ Are angels then a way to bring back the high God to his Creation, as a governing God? Or, on the contrary, have they pushed him out of the picture, which is what the Quran, in its maximalist transcendence, tries to reverse? The matter is open to discussion.¹⁴

8 Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate World of Angels* 21; Jadaane, "La place des anges" 28–29.

9 Knysh, *Sufism, a New History* 124–136.

10 For a comparative chart of Aristotelian, Islamic theological and Islamic philosophical cosmologies, see Arnol Yasin Mol, "*Laylat al-Qadr* as Sacred Time, Sacred Cosmology in Sunni *Kalām* and *Tafsīr*," in *Islamic Studies Today*, ed. Majid Daneshgar, Walid Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 81; for a similar chart based on the Epistle of the Brethren of Purity, see de Godefroid de Callatay, "The *Ikṡān al-Ṣafā'* on Angels and Spiritual Beings," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 350–351.

11 Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 22.

12 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 75; Henry Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris: L'Herne, 1981), 100.

13 For Giorgio Agamben, this duality is the gnostic question par excellence, and "angelology is the most antique, articulated and detailed consideration on this particular form of power or divine action that we could define as 'the governing of the world.'" See Giorgio Agamben, "Introduzione," in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Venezia: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), ebook.

14 In the Bible, angels are one of the main devices to build the transcendence of God, and create a progressive distance between man and God after their direct interactions in Genesis (Pierre Gibert, "Fondements bibliques," in *Histoire de la théologie*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (Paris: Points, 2019), 23–24); angels may thus be seen as rendering God as "jobless" (Johann

A fourth remark relates to angels as a means of divine communication: In Judaism, angels are seen as one form of continuation of the Revelation, even after it is officially considered closed.¹⁵ In another way, Burge writes that through the *ḥadīth* “God interacts with humanity continually, through the angels, to affect changes in the course of salvation-history on all levels, national and personal.”¹⁶ Examples of Sufi literature will show strong echoes of this throughout this book.

A fifth point regards the influence of other monotheisms on Islamic angels: Burge argues that Judeo-Christian milieus influenced the first pre-Quranic and Quranic periods—but not so much the early formative period of Islam—and that their influence possibly became stronger only later on, “as addition to the available material.”¹⁷

A sixth point applies to the results of Burge on angelic roles and functions. He notes that “the relationship between function and angel is central to most angelologies,” further explaining that angels in *ḥadīth* are always devoted to one specific role (which he calls “function”), or several angels for one role, but very rarely one angel for different roles (such as Gabriel and Michael).¹⁸ This is true for the angels in *ḥadīth* literature, and as Burge remarks, angels can be used in a more heterodox fashion in such works as those of Ibn ‘Arabī or al-Suhrawardī.¹⁹ This study will explore what Sufi texts make of this mono-functional distribution, and whether they are heterodox indeed or more orthodox than he supposes.

Ev Hafner, “Where Angels Dwell, Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 229–250).

15 Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 141–142.

16 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 76. A similar interaction with the divine, which became highly textual even though not Quranic, is the example of the *ḥadīth qudsī*, see William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying Or Ḥadīth Qudsī* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1977).

17 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 68. Additionally, he writes that: “The interaction between Islamic beliefs about angels and their Jewish and Christian counterparts is complex. Many commentators have simply argued that Islamic angelology has its origins in Judaism and Christianity. When looking at the Quran, the influence of Judaism and Christianity is certainly unmistakable, but surely this is not surprising. However, the influence of Judaism and Christianity appears to diminish during the formative period of Islamic theology and Quranic exegesis. Above all, Islamic angelology always remains distinctly Islamic, and this distinctiveness cannot be attributed to Jewish and Christian influences. The two other Abrahamic faiths may have provided some basic core beliefs, imagery, and conceptualizations, but the Muslim community developed them in their own unique way.” Ibid. 69.

18 Ibid. 39.

19 Ibid. 8.

This leads us to our seventh point, the object of this book: angels in *Sufi* Islam. The definition of Sufism is notoriously complex, and tracing it through history is a delicate matter.²⁰ Given the selection of our sources, for this study we could define it functionally as “Sunni mysticism,” a part of Islamic esotericism, although non-Sunni texts and concepts may be included. Not all authors would agree on translating Sufism or *taṣawwuf* as “mysticism,” a word that has a different landscape of meanings in English. One of these scholars explains why: “When [using terms like mysticism], it is important to realize that *taṣawwuf*, for many Islamic scholars, more than an overwhelming personal experience, was first and foremost approached as a discipline of religious knowledge of the self and of approaching the divine that was bound to rules and restrictions.”²¹

The concept of “esotericism,” which is related, if not always equated, to Sufism, has recently become a subject of more intense study and discussion in Islamic studies.²² We may note that Alexander Knysh’s reflections about defining Sufism²³ somewhat mirror what Liana Saif wrote on defining Islamic esotericism.²⁴ The reader only needs to keep in mind that Islamic esotericism

20 Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), and *Sufism, a New History*; For an introduction to Sufism in the period we are concerned with, see Tawfiq b. ‘Āmir, *al-Taṣawwuf al-islāmī ilā al-qarn al-sādis al-hijrī, ruḥya naqdīyya wa-namādhij muntakhaba* (Beirut: Kanz Nāshirūn, 2017). He also writes: “Our own position regarding the issue of defining Sufism privileges inclusion over against exclusion. Events, personalities, and practices that various groups or observers (both insiders and outsiders) associate with Sufism should be included into its definition unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.” Alexander Knysh, “Definitions of Sufism as a Meeting Place of Eastern and Western ‘Creative Imaginations,’” in *Sufism East and West* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 69.

21 Pieter Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 10.

22 Feras Hamza, “Locating the ‘Esoteric’ in Islamic Studies,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. A. Rippin, M. Daneshgar, W.A. Saleh, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 354–366; Mark Sedgwick, “Islamic and Western Esotericism,” in *Correspondences* 7, no. 1 (2019): 277–299.

23 Alexander Knysh, “Definitions of Sufism as a Meeting Place” 53–75.

24 Liana Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?,” *Correspondences* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1–59. She lists four principles of Islamic esotericism: “1) Exegetical principle: Islamic esotericism is pivoted on Qur’anic exegesis, 2) Epistemological principle: Intellectual or revelatory reception, hidden natural and celestial phenomena, the Divine realm, and the nature of Qur’an, 3) Social principle: personal or collective salvific investment through the enlightenment and perfection of the human soul and/or the restitution of a community, 4) Trans-linguistic principle that demands the use symbols and allegory” (ibid. 45–46). For a longer critique of Western scholarship on esoteric Islam, see Liana Saif, “‘That I Did Love the Moor to Live with Him’: Islam in/and the Study of ‘Western Esotericism,’” in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem, Julian Strube (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 67–87.

and Sufism, two categories usually used as synonyms (though not always overlapping), and a part of Islamic religious traditions, may involve ideas ranging from the very orthodox to the very heterodox. In this case, through this research on the evolution of the roles and functions of angels, I wish to show how these characters illustrate and participate in the Sufi imaginal textual and extra-textual processes, and how they help define some aspects of Sufi cosmological views.

At this point, however, a brief review of the roles and functions of angels in the Quran will help the reader understand their evolution better in the selection of texts used in this book: different Sufi commentaries and two case studies of what could be seen as commentaries in the “wider” sense, that is, Sufi *mi'rāj* narratives and the Meccan Openings by Ibn 'Arabī. I hope to perceive an evolution over time in this literature, in a period qualified problematically at times by the very large (and non-Arabic) adjective “medieval”²⁵ or the ideologically charged “Golden-Age,” to which I prefer “pre-Mongol.”²⁶

2 Angels in the Quran

In order to better understand the possible evolutions of the figure of angels over time in the later Islamicate imaginary, and what this might tell us of a possible construction and differentiation of a new cosmology related to the historical consolidation of a new religion, it is important to first explore what the Quran initially presents.²⁷

Although angels are an obvious locus of influences and interactions with previous monotheisms, as a simple reading of the Quranic text makes evident, the late-antique milieu in which Islam appears and takes shape is more complex than a monotheistic continuation. As noted by Angelika Neuwirth, the Quranic text is on the one hand a reflection of the confluence of several traditions, including the interaction of the biblical and the Arabian canons of which Quranic angels are an example; on the other hand, the Quranic text is also the

25 Daniel Martin Varisco, “Making ‘Medieval’ Islam Meaningful,” *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 13, no. 3 (2007): 385–412.

26 This refers to an event significant for the civilization concerned, while somewhat historically more accurate: the period from the Quranic revelation in the 1 century AH/7th century AD to the Mongol invasion in 6th AH/13th AD. We will also use both dating systems, Anno Hegirae and Anno Domini, throughout the study for date of death of authors.

27 This part summarizes and offers some conclusions on findings from a study of Quranic angels summarized in Appendice 1. Its main results are given in the beginnings of Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

reflection of a struggle between two worldviews commonly found in antiquity: the literal and the figurative.²⁸ This book follows the continuation of this struggle beyond the Quran, a struggle where angels are presented as narrative figures between the literal and the figurative.

As Neuwirth calls for more studies of the Quran as a literary text,²⁹ researching its mythopoeic process,³⁰ Todd Lawson attempts to analyze it more precisely as an epic, a foundational referential, “a dictionary for the language of self-identity, of ‘mythography’, and the broader cultural code.”³¹ He finds indeed that the Quranic text is closer to what is understood today as the “epic” genre, both in function and form. Such a literary study of the Quranic angels and then Sufi angels might be fruitful in that it highlights mental representations and cosmologies inhabited by writers and readers, worlds constructed with imaginary material in interaction with previous and contemporaneous neighboring belief systems from nearby cultures or groups, at a time when debates and speculation did not separate the physical world from the ‘invisible’ world(s) as starkly as they do now.

In a world where a potentially vast but mostly lost Arabian mythology shows through Quranic echoes,³² the angelic figures operate a mythopoeic shift in the new cosmology offered by the sacred text. In order to delineate this shift, I selected all Quranic verses about angels, with two categories emerging: First,

28 Angelika Neuwirth, “The Qur’ān Enchantment of the World,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. A. Rippin, M. Daneshgar, W.A. Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 125–144. On the polygenetic roots of the new religious tradition, see also Azīz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 40.

29 Angelika Neuwirth, “The Qur’ān Enchantment of the World” 129.

30 Angelika Neuwirth, “From Sacred Mosque to Remote Temple: Sūrat Al-Isrā’ between Text and Commentary,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Walfish, Barry D., Joseph W. Goering and Jane Dammen McAuliffe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 377–407.

31 He follows Northrop Frye and his work on the Bible (for whom it was literature, but also more than literature), as he tries to understand by what means the theological content of the Quran has been communicated to many of its readers. See Todd Lawson, “The Qur’an and Epic.” *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 58.

32 In these paleo-islamic times, to borrow Aziz al-Azmeh’s phrase, the Quranic text and its allusions and references would have been clearer to its contemporary audience, while many are eluding us today, becoming objects of many discussions in Quranic studies. However, on this fascinating subject, the reader may want to start with Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 341; Aaron Hughes, “The Stranger at the Sea: Mythopoesis in the Qur’ān and Early Tafsīr,” *Studies in Religion*, vol. 32, no. 3 (2003), 261–279; Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996).

a group of verses clearly mentioning angels by name or proper name (*malak*, *malakayn*, *malā'ika*, *Jibrīl*, *Mikāl*) that I call the “angel verses,” and second, a group of verses that may be alluding to angels and thus constitute what I call the “alluding verses,” where neither the verse nor its immediate context make the presence of angels certain.

From the first category, the angel verses, I listed several roles³³ from which I derived several literary functions held by angels: a narrative function, a theological function, a praxis function (these are detailed in the beginning of Chapter 1), a cosmological function that includes the particular role of messenger, an overlooked function of challenger, and the special cases of named angels (these are detailed in the beginning of Chapter 2). From the second, the alluding-verse category, I also found a number of roles echoing those of the angel verses (roles seen in the beginning of chapters 1 and 2). As for the relationship of angels with *jinn* and the special case of the Devil, that *jinn*-angel, details are included in the beginning of Chapter 3, along with non-Quranic functions.

We find that angels in the Quran take the messenger role away from the *jinn* completely. Angels actively take part in showing an absolute monotheism, with no partially-willed or fully free-willed delegates, since Quranic angels do not have the agency that many pre-Islamic celestial beings had. They retain distinct functions, and some of them even acquire proper names in the Medinan surah *al-baqara*,³⁴ but all their actions, even if questionable at first glance, or at the origin of earthly problems (*Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, Satan), are shown to be ultimately carried out according to God's will, albeit in a slightly indirect way. Beyond their individual and group functions, angels as a group represent a single creedal function.³⁵ In other words, problematic or powerful angels like Gabriel and Michael, and the indeterminate and nameless as a whole, are all brought back under God's command. This process is not fundamentally new to Arabia, as pre-Islamic belief systems seem to have represented intermediaries

33 See Appendix 1, “Representations, roles, and functions of angels in ‘angel verses.’”

34 Contrary to what O'Meara proposes in his article “From Space to Place,” where he affirms that angels lose their individuality from early to late surahs, the proper names of Gabriel, Michael, *Hārūt*, and *Mārūt* in the Medinan *sura al-baqara* are a first and obvious argument against this. He also claims that angels were “visible” beings in Meccan and early Medinan surahs, although I have seen nowhere in the Quranic text any verse supporting such a view. On the contrary, not being able to see angels was a problem for the disbelievers from the beginning, as the Quranic text reflects.

35 “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 individualized, all the while designating God himself by virtue of His command.” Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings,” 146.

while leaving the higher deities unrepresented (or represented by an empty throne).³⁶ However the systematic unification of these intermediaries in a single and barely defined category, “angels,” is the start of a new imaginary.

One interesting literary device, that of the ‘invisibility’ of angels, is achieved via the hypothetical role of angels, which is one of the most commonly represented in the Quran, whereby a verse mentions angels without them being present in the narratives as characters. It rhetorically doubles the invisibility of angels: invisible creatures to start with, they become invisible as characters in the text as well—that is, they become really and narratively part of the Unseen. In this way God is brought closer to humans than the pervasive high deity frequently found in antiquity, who is removed from the world and delegates its management to lesser deities.³⁷

Therefore, angels lose some of their pre-Islamic counterparts’ importance, becoming strictly faithful messengers sent to prophets, and guardians for humans. They are pictured as faithful assistants following God’s will, as opposed to the unpredictable and sometimes too powerful *jinn* inspirators of pre-Islamic Arabia. The channels between God and humans become safer and more predictable, since everything turns into part of God’s plan—though this plan might not be understood by humans—and thus God transforms slowly into something more akin to the jugular vein of the human creature, to paraphrase Q 50:16, and closer to the *jinn* too, who are brought under tighter control.

The Quranic text operates a transition to a new representation of the Unseen, shifting away from both foreign and autochthonous elements, and signaling the emergence of a new worldview among late antique cultures and imaginaries. The messenger function taken from *jinn* and given exclusively to angels and prophets denotes a first shift—and a well-known one—of this new mythopoeic process that will continue in post-Quranic times. Now that angels

36 Robin, “L’Arabie préislamique,” 136. The high god of the kingdom of Dadān (also known as Liḥyān) in North-East of Arabia, called “the absent one” (*dhū-l-ghayba*), a characteristic which was to remain unrepresented, also sounds like a prefiguration of Islam’s reluctance concerning divine representations (I first learned about this through a personal communication when visiting the archeological site in 2019. This name is also mentioned as “dhī ghayba” in Abdulrahman Alsuhaibani and Mohamed Metwaly, “Integrated Results of Aerial Image, Ground Magnetics and Excavation for Settlement Assessment at Dadan Site, Al-’Ula Area, Saudi Arabia,” *Archaeological Prospection* 27, no. 3 (2020): 263–274. However, an older reference mentions a “Dhu Ghaba” as meaning “Lord of the Grove,” see Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs* 141.)

37 Beck has also analyzed the evolution of Quranic theology in the earliest surahs moving from such a Mesopotamian-like model to a personal/human model, writing on the early Qur’anic surah of the subordination of a ‘angelic apocalypse’ to a ‘human prophetic function’ (Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an* 121.)

are established as archetypal spiritual entities, barely defined or even purposefully kept undefined by the Quran, navigating between the celestial spheres and the human sphere, this book will explore how these beings of the Unseen play into the formation of a new mystical worldview.

Burge has noted that while scriptures have a limited and undefined angelology, other religious sources show an expanded angelic world formed along three different processes: delegation (a transcendent God delegating functions, which the Quranic text limits); polytheism (angels as traces of a polytheistic world); and exegesis (angels are used by exegetes for clarification of verses).³⁸ In particular, this latter exegetical process will be prominent in this book, given the specific corpus selected. These texts were produced once Islam had emerged out of Arabia, and when the process of a new civilization had begun, mirroring the establishment and growing complexity of the new mythic imaginary. How did this impact the representations of angels, and more broadly, the imaginary pertaining to the Unseen? Can we detect any significant new angelic roles or functions, beyond the exegetical increase in the number of angels? Is there an evolution in the formation of the new Islamic cosmology through a reversal of the depersonalization of Quranic angels, or a continuation of the Quranic process that subsumes and recreates older roles under a “new mantle”?

3 Angels in Sufi Commentarial Literature

Evolving from this late-antique situation, angels in Sufi commentarial literature will be the main focus of this book, through a selection of Sufi texts. What I call “commentarial literature” here are texts understood both as Sufi commentaries (*tafsīr*) in the strict sense, and in the broader sense of Sufi works using Quranic verses and *ḥadīth*, and elaborating on them, even if they are not classified as *tafsīr* per se. These texts were produced in pre-modern times, but in a world already different from that of the Quran, and they will help us determine what roles and functions the characters of angels keep, lose, or gain, as the reading and interpretative acts reshape them.

Tafsīr, usually translated as “interpretation” or “exegesis,” is a literary genre designating any commentary written on any text-source. In the specific religious Islamic context it is often understood as “Quranic exegesis.”³⁹ Exegesis

38 Stephen R. Burge, “Panangelon: Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism” 153.

39 For a discussion on the definition and characteristics of this genre, see Andreas Görke,

can be seen as completing scriptures,⁴⁰ or as “a pure vertical, scientific desire to come to terms with and explore the epic ethos at what might be thought a narratological molecular level.”⁴¹ Aaron Hughes explains that one of the general functions of Quranic *tafsīr* is to help to establish the Quran in a different time and place than its initial context, to have this text make sense to a particular public. Furthermore, Karen Bauer writes that “it is a process of meaning creation, because what the scholars read into the text is not always explicitly there.”⁴² This creates new possibilities, and renews a vision of the world,⁴³ which is why the representation of angels in this type of work can be useful, if one is to trace their evolution.

As already noted, angels are also subject to an “exegetical increase” in number.⁴⁴ Angels are developed out of exegesis, whereby words become angels (such as *Riḍwān*), referring to the work of Saul M. Olyan, who studied this exegetical increase of the number of angels in Judaic traditions.⁴⁵ This angelic increase might also be related to the integration of various neighboring traditions into these Islamic texts, uncovering older and contemporary traditions that circulated at the time of their writing.⁴⁶

Johanna Pink, *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3–7; Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 14–22; Norman Calder, “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham,” in *Approaches to the Qurʾān* (London: Routledge, 1993), 101–140.

40 John E. Wansbrough, *Qurʾānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretations—with a Foreword, Translations and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippin* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), 100.

41 Lawson, “The Qurʾān and Epic” 58.

42 Karen Bauer, ed. *Aims, Methods and Contexts of Qurʾānic Exegesis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 8.

43 “Tafsīr is existential. It reconstructs, and subsequently anchors, the material out of which the Quran has been constructed. The main task of the early exegete is to recreate a dialogue with previous discourses that the Quran, through its terse style, has abolished. In the subsequent recreation, however, tafsīr also provides a series of exegetical surprises and unexpected possibilities which also deconstruct the original thrust (if it can be discovered) of the prior discourse. Much like commentary in general, tafsīr is one among many means of locating a human tradition in both cosmic and terrestrial space vis-à-vis other traditions, aspects of the real world, etc.” Hughes, “The Stranger at the Sea” 266.

44 “The interpretation and elucidation of scripture, particularly when the supra-mundane is concerned, has a tendency to expand the text greatly. If one looks at the references to angels in al-Suyūṭī’s *al-Ḥabāʾik fī akhbār al-malāʾik*, a great increase in the number of angels can be seen” (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 5).

45 Ibid. 33.

46 David Hamidović, “Les écrits apocryphes juifs et le Coran,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1 (Paris: cerf, 2019), 234.

The word “*tafsīr*” recalls an almost synonymous word, “*taʿwīl*”, which is usually translated similarly in English, and which has been a synonym of “*tafsīr*” at various times throughout Islamic literary history, especially in the early period. However, their relationship is complex, and *taʿwīl* has evolved to designate the personal opinion of the commentator as well (as opposed to interpretations based on other sources), or the esoteric interpretation of both Shias and Sufis, in their attempt to explain the “inner” (*bāṭinī*) meaning of the verses.⁴⁷ While reading through the different commentary works used here, however, I noticed the differences between the words were not always clear-cut. Authors seem to have used the two words interchangeably at times, their commentaries being somewhat easily included in the fold of traditionally Sunni interpretations, or rather, belonging to a “Traditional Sunni—Mystical Sunni” spectrum. For clarity’s sake, the word “*tafsīr*” is kept throughout this book to designate the genre and individual works, while making a distinction only between “esoteric” and “exoteric” types of individual commentaries, by qualifying them as such. Indeed, while the authors differ on the number and adjectives used for the levels of understandings of the Quranic text that they see as necessary for reading and interpreting it, all commentators seem to agree on a certain esoteric/exoteric distinction.

Regarding this distinction, “esoteric” is used here to qualify the generally non-exoteric quality of commentaries (sometimes “mystical” and “inner” might be used as well). This usually translates the meaning of the adjective *bāṭinī* in Arabic in the appropriate context (the literal translation of this word could be “internal”), while the word “exoteric” is used to qualify the non-mystical type of commentary, and usually translates the word *ẓāhirī* in Arabic (literally “external”).⁴⁸

However, if the distinction within a commentary on a verse between esoteric and exoteric sources or interpretations is somewhat clear, the distinc-

47 Poonawala, “Taʿwīl,” *ET*². Jamal Elias also writes: “In the majority of Sufi writings on the Qurʾān from the classical period onwards, tafsīr is often used to refer to structural explanations of an aya—such as the circumstances of its revelation (*sabab al-nuzul*), while taʿwīl is its allegorical or metaphysical interpretation” (Jamal J. Elias, “Šūfī Tafsīr Reconsidered: Exploring the Development of a Genre,” *Journal of Qurʾānic Studies* 12, no. 1–2 (2010): 42).

48 The reader has to keep in mind that using the words “esoteric” for *bāṭinī*, like using “gnosticism” or “mystical Islam” in the context of Sufism, has a long history full of epistemological complexities involving various concepts and religious traditions, and they reflect the translator’s world(s) as much as they do the translated words. Regarding this discussion on the esoteric/exoteric (*bāṭin/ẓāhir*) distinction and related concepts, such as *ʿirfān* (“mystical knowledge”), and the complexities of the history of these words, see Liana Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?”.

tion between works qualified as “Sufi” and “Sunni” or other such categories is not always straightforward, such as the example of the commentary of al-Thaʿlabī.⁴⁹ Jamal Elias also notes that the esoteric aspect is not necessarily part of any and all Sufi interpretations.⁵⁰ Over time, certain works came to be clearly marked as Sufi or esoteric, such as the commentary of Rūzbihān Baqlī and his poetic-mystical style,⁵¹ while others are less obviously esoteric in appearance, or are so in a different way, such as the works of Ibn Barraġān, who uses mostly traditional exoteric sources and references.⁵² Despite these liminal cases, many works can be easily classified as belonging to the Sufi commentary subgenre,⁵³ either because the author clearly states his affiliation to this trend through his education, preferred masters and other such indications⁵⁴ and/or because most of his interpretations are esoteric in nature and in goal, even though they do not declare themselves as Sufi.⁵⁵

49 Shia commentaries contain an esoteric part by principle (Rippin, “Tafsīr,” *ET*²), while al-Thaʿlabī wrote a commentary which is usually classified as Sunni, although he was the first mainstream exegete to incorporate mystical interpretations in his commentary work (Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition* 152). Another interesting aspect of his commentary that has an incidence on some of the commentaries studied here, is that al-Thaʿlabī was also the first one, as far as is currently known, to have systematically included *ḥadīth* in the Quranic commentary, while this genre was kept mostly separate from the *tafsīr* genre before him (ibid. 191–198).

50 See his very interesting discussion of what constitutes and defines a Sufi *tafsīr*, including the different periodizations offered for these works (Elias, “Šūfī Tafsīr” 41–55).

51 Carl Ernst says of him: “His predilection for the outrageous ecstatic sayings (*shaṭḥiyyāt*) of earlier Šūfis earned him the sobriquet “Doctor Ecstaticus” (*shaykh-i shaṭṭāh*). He recorded his spiritual experiences with directness and power, using a prose style of great rhetorical density.” Ernst, “Rūzbihān” *ET*².

52 For more on Ibn Barraġān, see Yousef Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus: Ibn Barraġān and Islamic thought in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

53 For practical purposes we call all mystical trends, including the Andalusī indigenous mystical tradition identified by Casewit, as such. Kristin Zahra Sands explains that what distinguishes Sufi commentaries from others is that the exoteric knowledge, although necessary, is only a steppingstone for a deeper understanding of the Quranic text, which comes from within, by divine inspiration. See Kristin Zahra Sands, *Šūfī commentaries on the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 28.

54 Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qurʾan Commentaries* 68–70.

55 Such is the example of Ibn Barraġān, who identified Sufis as part of a distinct mystical Eastern trend with which he did not identify. Regarding his relationship with Sufism, and whether one can describe him as Sufi today, see Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus* 67–74. Yousef Casewit argues that “al-Andalus was home to an indigenous mysticophilosophical tradition that was distinct from the Arabic Sufi tradition that developed in the central and eastern lands of Islam”, the followers of which were calling themselves the *Contemplatives* (“*Muʿtabirūn*”), with Neoplatonic influences (including the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā*). Ibn Barraġān was its foremost representative, and as such did not consider himself a Sufi, a

Through the Sufi works of Quranic commentary, we can perceive an example of the progressive building of concrete themes, motifs, and traditions that form what came to be qualified as “Sufi,” in which “creative imagination” was key.⁵⁶ We will see how angelic characters illustrate and participate in this Sufi textual and extra-textual imaginal process, how it helps define some aspects of Sufi cosmological views, and what specificities arise from the nature of commentarial literature.

The following three chapters (1, 2, and 3) will be devoted to Sufi commentaries by five different authors (al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, al-Qushayrī, Ibn Barraġān, and Rūzbihān Baqlī), falling in the category of *tafsīr* or Quran commentary, *stricto sensu*. These chapters tend to be mainly descriptive, as they gather elements from a vast corpus that can be used for future analysis. These elements, however, herald tendencies that are shown more clearly in the last two chapters, based on more well-known sources.

Indeed, the last two chapters (4 and 5) are focused on “case studies” that could be seen as commentaries in the wider sense. I mean by this that they are explanations and narratives “pegged” to Quranic verses, to use Burge’s phrase, whereby different narratives are pegged to Quranic verses in order to explain them and the world around the reader. The classical Islamic category of the circumstances of Revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) is a traditional example of such a process.⁵⁷ Without being classified as *tafsīr* in the strict sense, these texts nonetheless revolve around the Quran and theological matters as their first “reason of being.” Thus the fourth chapter will concern the Sufi celestial ascension narratives (*mi’rāj*), which may have had a larger audience (and been more popular with some in that group) than that of the *tafsīr*. Sufi authors have both commented on the Prophetic *mi’rāj* and written about personal mystical ascen-

term which interestingly did not mean to him a mystically and philosophically-oriented trend, as much as a trend focused on self-purification (ibid. 2–3). This tradition’s different approach made their mystical leanings less easily discernible than the better-known eastern tradition and its vocabulary.

Coppens similarly notes that neither Sulamī nor Qushayrī used the word “*ṭaṣawwuf*” in their *tafsīr* when presenting their works and the “Friends of God,” see Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 57. More particularly on Qushayrī and his relationship to the concept of Sufism, see Chapter 9 in Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar: Abū’l-Qāsim Al-Qushayrī and the Latā’if Al-Ishārāt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

56 “If one were to apply Crone’s and Geertz’ ideas [on human imagination] to the ascetic-mystical version of Islam, one would argue that, having originated in the imaginative faculty of its founding fathers, it gradually acquired concrete practical, doctrinal (discursive), artistic, and institutional dimensions that constitute the abstraction we call ‘Sufism,’” Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History* 32.

57 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 6–7.

sion. In contrast, the last chapter will concern the many volumes of the Meccan Openings (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*) by Ibn ‘Arabī, a lengthy work which might have been relevant initially only to a small intellectual elite, although its impact on the wider Islamic group of theologians and thinkers was doubtless significant.

4 Last Remarks

Translations from the primary sources are all mine, except for the Quran, for which I used the Study Quran,⁵⁸ the commentary of Tustarī, and the *mi’rāj* of al-Biṣṭāmī, for all of which English translations already exist. Any translation from secondary sources is also mine.

For reasons of space and readability, I refer in many cases to Quranic verses by their number only, although I try to paraphrase or quote them as much as possible. The reader can use the “angelic” ones in full in Appendix 2 if need be.

Regarding technical terms, I will make a few remarks here about some terms used in Sufi texts and the translations proposed in this book, as they are sometimes translated in different ways by different scholars. Although the traditional use of “gnosticism”⁵⁹ is widespread in the Islamic context, and might still be practical for common speech, I chose to keep here the common “Sufism” for *taṣawwuf* (or “mysticism”, although this interchangeability is also an open question), and to translate *ma’rifā* as “mystical knowledge,” *‘arīf* as “mystical knower,” in contrast to “science” or “knowledge” (*‘ilm*) and “scholar” (*‘ālim*), except for some rare cases where the context does not imply this difference.

Among such other problematic translations, *walī* is translated here as “friend” or “friend of God”, and not as the more usual “Saint.”⁶⁰

Other terms relevant to angels are those related to their world: The *ghayb* is translated as “Unseen.” Sedgwick explains that it had been translated many

58 Seyyed Hossein Nasr et al. (eds.), *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne Collins Publishers, 2015).

59 In his overview of the use of the word “gnosticism,” a word used both in Christianity with a particular meaning, and in Western academic works for translating different Islamic concepts such as *taṣawwuf*, *ma’rifā* or *‘irfān*, Kevin van Bladel shows how using this word is becoming ever more questionable (van Bladel, “Gnosticism” *ET*³).

60 Even though many authors prefer using “saint,” the connotation implied by the Christian religious system (more particularly Catholic and Orthodox) is too strong and might induce undue implications about the status of *walī* in the Arab world. Michel Chodkiewicz, although using “saint,” mentions that the latin “amicitia” translates in a much better way this relationship of strong friendship with a patron, and the protection and

times as “esoteric,”⁶¹ but I found that in most contexts of the sources in this study, it is used in the sense of the Unseen world: a plain reality opposed to the other plain reality of the Seen world (*‘ālam al-shahāda*), regardless of the esoteric or exoteric nature of the text. These are two realities that seem to be part of the worldview of premodern authors, regardless of their alleged mystical tendencies. Part of the Unseen is the *Ākhira*, Otherworld or Next World, with eschatological connotations, the world reached after death. The Seen and Unseen worlds, however, can be placed in parallel to *ẓāhir*, which opposes *bāṭin*. We will translate these last terms mostly as exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*). Although this translation does not always perfectly overlap the meanings of the Arabic words, this is the best working translation I have found in the context of these primary sources. However, the reader should keep in mind the debate around the word “esotericism”, mentioned previously.

power involved in the words *wilāya* and *walāya* related to the *walī* (transposed in the Sufi system, the patron is God). See Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints, prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn 'Arabī* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986, 2012) 32–35. However, given how rarely this Latin term is used, the more common “Friend” is preferred.

61 Sedgwick, “Islamic and Western Esotericism.”

Angels in Sufi *Tafsīr*: Basic Quranic Functions

This chapter focuses on what I call “basic Quranic functions,” which are shown in the Quran by different angelic roles—narrative, theological, and religious practice. These are distinct from those which fall into another category, seen in the next chapter: “general Quranic functions.” The third chapter of this *tafsīr* series will elaborate on two new (non-Quranic) functions growing out of the commentarial aspect of these works. Each chapter starts with a presentation of the relevant functions of angels in the Quran, before diving into the corresponding functions appearing in the Sufi texts. However, a brief presentation of these Sufi works is needed for some contextualization.

1 Some Introductory Remarks on the Selected *tafsīr*

1.1 *The Works and Their Authors*

The *tafsīr* works used in the three following chapters are: the *tafsīr* of al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) (shortened to Tustarī in the rest of the book),¹ the first *tafsīr* of al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) (shortened to Sulamī),² the *tafsīr* of al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) (shortened to Qushayrī),³ the long *tafsīr* of Ibn Barrajān (d. 536/

1 Sahl al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Annabel Keeler, Ali Keeler (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011). I am using this English edition, based on three different manuscripts, and whenever I quote Tustarī, I do so from this edition, although an Arabic version exists, which I have used to check the translations of some concepts Sahl b. ‘Abdallah al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-tustarī*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsil ‘Uyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007). For more on al-Tustarī see Böwering, “Sahl al-Tustarī,” *ET*² and Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 283/896)* (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1980). The 5 other works are not translated into English, as far as I am aware, so all translations from these are mine.

2 Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥussayn b. Mūsā al-Azdī al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid ‘Umrān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001). See also Böwering, “al-Sulamī” *ET*² and Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 46–53. I will be referring to his complement *Ziyādāt ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr* only rarely, as it contains very few mentions of angels of interest, compared to his main commentary, and most of them are reused by Baqlī. See al-Sulamī, *Ziyādāt ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr*, ed. Gerhard Böwering (Beirut, Dar al-Machreq, 1995).

3 ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm Basiyūnī (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Amma li-l-kitāb, 2000). See also Halm, “al-Qushayrī,” *ET*² and Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar*.

1141) (shortened to Ibn Barraġān 1),⁴ the short *tafsīr* by the same author (shortened to Ibn Barraġān 2),⁵ a work independent from the first, and the *tafsīr* of Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 606/1209) (shortened to Baqlī).⁶ All of them, except for the first one, are part of what Andrew Rippin calls “the mature phase of *tafsīr*.”⁷

I tried to select works somewhat representative of the Sufi or Sunni mystical *tafsīr* genre, within the delimited historical period for this research (up to until the end of the Abbasid caliphate).⁸ However, considering the time limitations of this research (I could not use unpublished manuscripts), I had to choose from published and edited existing works. Though this does not mean they are more representative of this sub-genre than unedited ones, they are generally recognized as historically influential nonetheless.⁹

The different authors of these commentarial works, in a process shared with non-Sufi works, usually include various reports from previous Sufi scholars and authorities within their comments. The selection of these reports is in itself interesting and can give us clues about what a given author is looking for and

4 ‘Abd al-Salām bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin Muḥammad b. Barraġān al-Ikḥmī al-Ishbīlī, *Tafsīr Ibn Barraġān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2013). See also Bellver, “Ibn Barraġān,” *ET*³.

5 ‘Abd al-Salām bin ‘Abd al-Raḥmān bin Muḥammad b. Barraġān al-Ikḥmī al-Ishbīlī, *A Qur’ān Commentary by Ibn Barraġān of Seville: ʾIdāḥ al-ḥikma bi-ahkām al-ʾibra*, ed. Gerhard Böwering, Yousef Casewit (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

6 Abū Muḥammad Ṣadr al-Dīn Rūzbihān bin Abī Naṣr al-Baqlī, *ʾArāʾis al-bayān fī ḥaqāʾiq al-qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008). See also Ernst, “Rūzbihān,” *ET*² and Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 65–68.

7 Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr” *ET*². In Michael A. Sells’ more detailed classification, the first one is part of the early Sufi period, the second and third ones of the formative phase, and the last two authors are representatives of the “Sufi synthesis” phase, of which Ibn ‘Arabī is also an example, see Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Miraj, Poetic and Theological Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 17–26; For a questioning and reviewing of academic classification of Sufi *tafsīr* more specifically, see Elias, “Sūfī Tafsīr Reconsidered.”

8 For an overview of the political, social, and religious context of Nishapur at that time, in which three of these Sufi authors lived (Al-Sulamī, al-Quhayrī, and Baqlī), see Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 40–70.

9 Finding representative works of such a prolific genre is a challenge, and such a choice remains highly subjective. Quranic commentaries are indeed innumerable, in the words of Saleh: “The self-declared inexhaustibility of God’s word found its match in the inexhaustibility commentators saw in its meaning” (Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition* 1–4). He also explains that the currently printed commentaries are not necessarily the most representative, showing in his book how, for example al-Tha’labī’s commentary has been more influential than al-Ṭabarī (ibid. 12). For a glimpse into the commentaries from other sensibilities than Sunni Islam, see Annabel Keeler, and Sajjad H. Rizvi, *The Spirit and the Letter, Approaches to the Esoteric Interpretation of the Qur’an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

arguing for.¹⁰ This is how the reader notices that Sulamī contains elements of Tustarī, and that Qushayrī contains elements of these two, a genealogical process noted by Coppens on later Sufi commentary works.¹¹ With time, reports tend to accumulate and sometimes contradict or complement each other,¹² while the personal commentaries tend to lengthen as well, the consequence of this being that commentary writings quickly reached encyclopaedic proportions.

Another remark on the anthological style of the commentaries is that selected *tafsīr* works can be divided very roughly into two groups. The commentaries of Tustarī, Sulamī, and to some degree, Qushayrī, remain concise, with many reports and references attributed to known or unknown authors, as if to legitimize the personal commentaries they offer following these reports (if there are any, as sometimes a commentary on a given verse consists only of reports attributed to others). These authors were indeed involved in a building process within the religious landscape, being part of what will later be called the “Nishapuri school of exegesis.”¹³

Conversely, the latter commentaries of Ibn Barrajān and Baqlī are much more voluminous, at a time when theological schools were more established, and the personal commentaries by the authors were usually longer than the reports and other references included alongside them. The ordering of references and reports, as well as the length of original commentaries, all contribute to give each author a specific voice. It is interesting to note that in Baqlī’s case, his selected references come only after his own personal commentary on each

10 An example is shown by Baqlī with his selection of *ḥadīth* which support his argument against the description of angels and *jinn*, while another author like Ibn Barrajān will select reports and *ḥadīth* supporting his own tendency to describe as much as he can these same beings.

11 Pieter Coppens, “Sufi Qur’ān Commentaries, Genealogy and Originality,” *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 1–2 (2018): 102–124. For a detailed tracing of the Tustarī tradition through time and its influence on different authors, see Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision* 7–42.

12 Which is a particularity of the *tafsīr* genre: “The preferred mode of disagreement was to add one’s voice to the pool of interpretations inherited.” Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition* 14. It was also noted that a Qushayrī comments verse by verse, while his two predecessors did not, and that Sulamī contains mostly mystical comments while Tustarī and Qushayrī mingle both exoteric and esoteric kinds (Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar* 127).

13 Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar* 88–94; Within this school, there are some nuances to note: for example, Qushayrī found himself in the position to defend Sufism and anchor it as part of the Sunni tradition, whereas Sulamī did not have to in his time (ibid. 256). Baqlī is also considered part of this theological “school” of the Eastern tradition, in Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 39–45.

verse, which denotes a shift in the approach taken by the author. His narrative voice takes precedence, and the need to present older and established voices first no longer seems necessary to build the legitimacy of his own discourse.

Finally, let us point out that the *tafsīr* of al-Sulamī contains references and reports attributed to well-known early mystic scholars and figures, such as Jaʿfar al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) and al-Tustarī.¹⁴ However, we used the commentary of al-Tustarī as a separate work, as it was redacted earlier than Sulamī, in an attempt to trace the evolution of the different commentaries over time and the uses of references and reports between them.¹⁵ The commentary work of al-Sulamī (both the one used here and his second *Ẓiyādāt ḥaqqāʾiq al-tafsīr*) is used by Rūzbihān al-Baqlī.¹⁶ The work of al-Qushayrī is also key in the development of Sufi commentaries, and seems to have long been undervalued as such. However, its influence on later Sufi works is gaining recognition, and an example is its impact on the *tasfīr* of Rūzbihān Baqlī: In the text, the only Sufi scholar referred to by the latter as “the master” (*al-ustādh*) is al-Qushayrī,¹⁷ while most authors of the other reports that he mentions are left unspecified or unqualified. All of these (Tustarī, Sulamī, Qushayrī and Baqlī) are in some measure representative of the eastern mystical tradition, and their approach to the Quranic verses was linked to the concept of “indication” or “allusion” (*ishāra*), while Ibn Barrajān (in both works used here) is an example of the discrete Andalusian mystical tradition based on the concept of “crossing” (*ibāra*).¹⁸ However, the

14 On the main references in Sulamī, see Gerhard Böwering, “The Major Sources of Sulamī’s Minor Qur’ān Commentary,” *Oriens* 35, (1996): 35–56. He explains that the sixth Shiite imam is mentioned by Sulamī as Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq, al-Šādiq, or just Jaʿfar, to distinguish him from another reference, Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad b. Nusayr al-Khuldī (d. 348/959); see *ibid.* 52.

15 Coppens posits Sulamī as the basis on which the Sufi commentary genre developed (see Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 40) while Ali Humayun Akhtar takes Tustarī as the first example of this genre, based on its hermeneutical elements, which are the *ẓāhir/bāṭin* aspects, the importance of *dhikr*, and the concept of *yaqīn*, see Ali Humayun Akhtar, “Identifying Mysticism in Early Esoteric Scriptural Hermeneutics: Sahl Al-Tustarī’s (d. 283/896) Tafsīr Reconsidered,” *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 2 (2017): 38–52; However since Tustarī has been known mainly through Sulamī, both can be seen as the “originators” of the genre.

16 Böwering, “al-Sulamī” *ET*².

17 For more details on the influence of the *tafsīr* of al-Qushayrī see Alan Godlas, “Influences of Qushayrī’s *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* on Sufi Qur’anic Commentaries, Particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī’s *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* and the Kubrawī *al-Taʾwīlāt al-naḥmīyya*,” *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 2.1 (2013), 78–92. For more information on al-Qushayrī in general and his advocacy for a “sober sufism,” see Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar*.

18 Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus* 207. For more details on the religious and political

different cultural and scholarly centers of the Islamic world were in frequent communication, “feeding” each other in some measure over time.¹⁹

2 Reviewing Angels in the *tafsīr*

Drawing a list of the Quranic verses related to angels²⁰ helped me review the numerous mentions of angels in the different commentary works, resulting in a table given in Appendix 3. At first, I noticed that not all angel verses necessarily receive commentaries,²¹ however of those that did, the number of these commentaries roughly equated the commentaries on the alluding verses. A few liminal cases arose as verses were added to the alluding-verse category, such as Q 51:1–4,²² although I did not consider them to be alluding to any angels based on an initial reading of the Quranic text alone, unlike many of the so-called “cryptic” verses in the openings of some Meccan surahs, where the reader might identify angels more easily.²³ This is part of the re-creation of a dialogue with the Quranic text, mentioned by Hughes, and an enrichment built on the alluding verses the initial space-time context of which might have already have been lost to some extent by the time these commentaries were written. As for these alluding verses, the commentaries play their part in the mythopoeic process

context and influences informing the works of Ibn Barrajān, see also José Bellver, “‘Al-Ghazālī of Al-Andalus’: Ibn Barrajān, Mahdism, and the Emergence of Learned Sufism on the Iberian Peninsula,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133, no. 4 (2013): 659–681.

- 19 A very short example that goes beyond the historical period of this research is that of Ibn Barrajān. As an Andalusian scholar, he would influence Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, who in turn influenced the Islamic East, including the Ottoman world, while Baqlī, influenced by the eastern tradition with Qushayrī and Sulamī, would also have an impact in the Ottoman and Persianate worlds.
- 20 See Appendix 2. I am referring here to the two categories of verses: the “angel verses” that mention angels clearly, and the “alluding verses” that suggest angels, mainly identified as such by inference, comparison of narrative roles, or later interpretation.
- 21 In some cases, this might be due to a part missing from the original manuscripts used for the editions used here, such as Qushayrī, which is missing verses Q 23:24–28 and their commentaries.
- 22 These verses are interpreted as representing angels in Ibn Barrajān 1 (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 187), though others, such as Baqlī, give only a mystical interpretation of these verses (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 340–341).
- 23 Another example are verses Q 55:2 and Q 69:40–41, which usually easily read as being about the Prophet, however, Ibn Barrajān 1 sees Gabriel as a first possible subject there, and Muḥammad only as a second option (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 235–237, and 378.)

in that some—but not all—identify and confirm the presence of an angel in a verse that merely suggests the presence of one.²⁴

I will draw the attention of the reader to this nuance whenever relevant; however, both the angel-verse and the alluding-verse categories, which are more useful when reviewing angels in the Quran, are brought under the single umbrella of “angelic verses” in the following chapters.²⁵ This is because in reading these commentaries, another group appeared, which I unpoetically called the “non-angelic verses” group for clarity. While the verses themselves are unrelated to angels per se, the Sufi author deems it important to mention the presence of angels, or of their activity, in relation to these verses in the commentaries.²⁶

Moreover, on a second level of reading, the presence of commentary on an angelic verse does not necessarily mean that the commentary includes anything pertaining to the angel(s) mentioned or suggested in the verse. As often as not, an exoteric commentary mentioning angels might also be found next to an esoteric one bypassing the angel(s) in question. With this first angelic verses group, it is indeed interesting to notice that many of them are not commented on regarding the angelic characters, giving an overall impression of not wanting to “state the obvious”, or more precisely, to “comment on the obvious,” going instead straight into an esoteric commentary on the verse. The most striking example is that of Q 35:1 that Sulamī does comment on but without including any remark on the obvious—and only—subject of the verse, that is, angels and their number of wings. By the end of this study, the reader will understand that this kind of comment is very meaningful and leads to a specific Sufi function given to angels.

Regarding the different types of comments, many are barely more than paraphrases regarding the characters of the angels, underscoring a known role or function found in the Quranic text,²⁷ so most of these have not been included

24 See Chapter 3 with the examples of Riḍwān the keeper of Paradise and the *Zabāniyya*.

25 We have thus “angelic verses” (= angel verses and alluding verses as seen in Appendixes 1 & 2) on one side, and “non-angelic verses” on the other. Of course, it sometimes gets more complicated, for example when an author commenting on a “non-angelic” verse includes a reference to an “angelic verse” within his commentary.

26 These “non-angelic verses” are not considered “Alluding verses” because they do not seem to be alluding to angels at all; not by any stretch of the imagination. Differentiating between these two groups (angelic and non-angelic verses) in the commentaries seemed more relevant than the difference between “clear” and “suggesting” verses. One such example is the commentary of Tustarī (on 2:238) which includes the angel Gabriel, although the verse only enjoins the maintaining of prayer (al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 35).

27 For instance: al-Sulamī on Q 13:23 and Baqlī on Q 21:103 in his typically flowery style.

here. Similarly, many mentions of angels were left out, such as references to *ḥadīth* pertaining to angels that the commentators might have used, except for some particularly relevant cases, as the angels in *ḥadīth* have already been covered at length by Burge in his book.²⁸

In the following three chapters, each function is thus divided between angelic verses and non-angelic verses, however, the reader will not be surprised to learn that many parts of the commentaries could be listed under different functions at the same time. For better readability, I tried to avoid repetition where possible, and highlight only the most relevant function of each commentary.

Because of the book's subject and to show the pervasiveness of angels in these works, I gave preference to the angelic functions and themes in the presentation of these first three chapters over separating each commentator chronologically in each section, in order to avoid the multiplication of sub-sections. The reader who is then interested in one specific commentator will find it easier to use the index first instead of relying on the table of contents, although I tried to keep a chronological order of commentators within each section and theme discussed, for the reader to appreciate the evolution of the commentaries as much as possible.

For a better appreciation of these functions in the *tafsīr* works, let us turn now to the review of angelic roles in the Quran that led me to delimit the three basic Quranic function of angels.

3 Presentation of the Basic Quranic Functions of Angels

3.1 *A Narrative Function: Secondary Characters Helping or Fighting Humanity, Helping God*

Taking this basic narrative function in its strict sense, angels are shown in different roles as unseen helpers, according to the general idea of help typical of the function of a secondary character in relation to a protagonist in any narrative. They help God in different matters, such as guarding Hell Q 66:6, Q 74:31; bearing the Ark Q 2:248 and the Throne Q 69:17; taking souls after humans' deaths in numerous verses; striking them and sending them to Hell or welcoming them to Paradise. They are also seen as helping humans: being guardians to humans Q 6:61; seeking forgiveness for them (though forgiveness is granted by God according to His Will only Q 53:26); supporting believers in battle, with

²⁸ Burge, *Angels in Islam*.

a specific reference to the battle of Badr Q 3:121–125;²⁹ or generally helping the Prophet Q 8:9, Q 66:4.

Being helper secondary characters automatically implies being antagonists to others. Angels are antagonists to humans fighting the Muslim army during the battle of Badr; or more simply throughout the Quranic text, being antagonists to the disbelievers, for example by striking them ‘above the neck’ and ‘their every fingertip’ Q 8:12, with other such examples of violence Q 8:50, Q 47:27.³⁰ Similarly, they are also seen cursing disbelievers Q 2:161, Q 3:87. This invites the reader to consider the corporality of angels: Although we assumed them to be primarily incorporeal and spiritual beings, or at least invisible, the battle of Badr is one of many examples showing that they can sometimes directly affect the physical world.

Believers are thus enjoined to see that they have God’s support in the form of these helping angels, and His enmity should they do otherwise. While this narrative function of protagonist and antagonist worked inside the text, the following functions also reach the metatext.

3.2 *A Theological Function: A Defining Aspect of the Islamic Credo*

In many instances, angels are presented alongside God without them taking part in any specific action, and among these instances we find what we could call “credo-defining” verses, where angels are presented as part of the basic Islamic credo, clearly stating what believers should believe in Q 2:98, Q 2:177, Q 2:285. These verses come in one specific surah (*sūrat al-baqarah*), regarded as being of the Medinan period by Nöldeke and other scholars, a period when the existence of angels is clearly asserted, and the new faith has gained more detailed features in both theology and practice. This is also the surah that contains the only mentions of angels’ personal names.

In the same credo-defining way, other verses tend to define what angels are not: God-denying femaleness of angels Q 37:150 or being named by female names Q 53:27, denying commands to take them as lords Q 3:80 or taking them as spouses Q 17:40.³¹ We also find the angels themselves denying being worshipped when asked about it by God Q 34:40–41.

29 This passage could be an echo of the biblical “Lord of the Hosts.” Although already an interpretative take on them, Al-Azmeh also understands these angels to be a personification of the winds, which pre-Islamic Arabs would have done with *jinn*, in a manner comparable to the way Valkyries of Nordic mythology were a personification of the Aurora Borealis (Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels” 149).

30 A similar function of emphasis and support by God against the enemy is given to the “angel of YHWH” in Genesis. See Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 70–72.

31 This echoes pre-Islamic belief systems, see Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres

These denials and “absences” of angels in the text might reflect adjustments against contemporary and previous belief systems as studied by different scholars,³² here used by the Quranic text to illustrate a strict monotheist idea.³³ This idea steers away from complexities that a gendered description of God’s otherworldly creatures would bring, or by a delegation of power and will to these creatures which could have justified a separate worship or intercession ritual inside the new religion’s practices. The Quranic text then effectively uses the figure of angels and what they might have reflected before it to reinforce a strict monotheist idea of a unique creator in charge of the world’s affairs.

3.3 *A Religious Praxis Function: Illustrating the Believer’s Expected Actions*

In a similar meta-rhetorical manner to the previous function, angels also have the function of illustrating some basic expectations of believers, such as praising God in Q 13:13, Q 39:75, Q 42:5. Being obedient to God and carrying His orders is one of the most represented roles. In at least 11 occurrences, angels’ main action and representation is about obeying, such as the narrative of the bowing down to Adam. However, this specific narrative is telling in its ambivalence. On one hand the angels are shown as obeying God along other acts of obedience, so they could be seen as models to the human believers. They are ordered to bow down to Adam because of his superiority in knowledge Q 2:30–34, which would indicate an ontological superiority of man over angel. On the other hand, they are also seen as questioning God’s decision, although God always has “the

sumaturels.” Similarly, Beck explains this as a reframing of pre-Islamic deities subsumed into the new theology as angels. Where old gods designated by a masculine devotional name such as *al-Rahmān* could be easily assimilated to Allāh, the female deities had to be demonized or pushed back. See Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an* 155 (fn. 15). Other scholars argue that this denotes a change of societal structure, from a matriarchal organization to a patriarchal one, this change being reflected in monotheist scriptures in general (See Najm al-dīn al-Nafātī, “*Ẓāhira tajassud al-malā’ika qirā’a fī lu’bat al-dhukūra*,” *Majallat Ādāb al-Qayrawān*, no. 9–10, (2012–2013): 465–473.) However, this change appears to me as somewhat relative in the Quranic text, which argues against both the femaleness of angels and the taking of any kind of “son” by God. I would argue rather that angels are strictly maintained as neutral in nature (despite the gendered vocabulary of Arabic).

32 Al-Azmeh, Beck, Chabbi, Crone, and Neuwirth have all written on this subject. We might also mention, on the specific subject of angel veneration in late antiquity, a phenomenon which obviously occupied the Quranic text: Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

33 As such, the reinforcement of the monotheistic idea might be constructed more against contemporaneous popular beliefs than other normative and canonical texts, as a similar theological function of anonymized angels underlining the power of God is also noted in biblical literature (Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing* 110).

last word.” The angelic model of obedience could then be seen as dual: Where angels are shown proper acts by “lesser” beings than them, readers might hold this as an unspoken example of humility presented by the text, in terms of religious praxis, yet this encouraged humility does not equate to unquestioning obedience.

Attesting to His Might and superiority is another general attitude of the angels that is perceived through their different roles, such as support of the angels during the battle of Badr, or their sending to take everyone’s souls including the disbelievers. This accompanies the idea of the all-powerful deity, as in the previous function, reinforced in some verses such as Q 53:26, where intercessions are made by the angels on behalf of humans. These are granted only by God’s leave, the angels having no proper power to grant this or to influence divine will.

These actions show the angels’ positive acts in relation to God, and exemplify such concepts as obedience, support for believers, and praising God. The text could be read as an exhortation to believers to mirror these acts as part of the new Islamic ethos.

3.4 *Guardians in Alluding Verses*

The three functions I just presented were gleaned only from the angel verses. However, the reader will find strong echoes of these functions in the alluding verses, and one role strongly represented in these verses is that of guardian. Using intra-Quranic comparisons, the reader might presume these in general to be angels.³⁴ Verse Q 6:61 describes guardians (*ḥafāẓatan*) sent to watch over God’s servants; the beings in verse Q 13:11 called *mu’aqqibāt* guard one from the front and the rear, whether one’s actions are done openly or in secret. This is echoed by the verses Q 82:10–12 where these guardians are said to be writing down everyone’s deeds, and briefly as well in Q 68:1. Similarly, in the verses Q 50:17–18 “two receivers” (*mutalaqqiyān*), or a “watcher” (*raqīb*) are recording words uttered by a person. The single verse Q 86:4 also mentions a guardian over every soul, about which Beck notes that “in Late Antiquity, the idea that each person has a divine twin, or angelic counterpart, was omnipresent.”³⁵

In Q 72:25–28 we also find guards around the (human) messenger chosen by God; in Q 37:1–10 we find “guardians” guarding the heavens against “defi-

34 For a short genealogy of guardian angels in Judaism and Christianity, see Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 81–93.

35 Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an* 125; see also Burge, *Angels in Islam* 70–71; Cunial, “Spiritual Beings” *EQ*.

ant satans" (*wa-ḥifẓan min kulli shayṭān mārid*) who would want to listen to the "Highest Assembly" (*al-mala' al-a'lā*), echoing the verses Q 72:8–9, where similarly, *jinn* find the heavens closed to them, duly guarded. The heavens are similarly guarded in Q 41:12 by guardians (*ḥifẓan*). As for Hell, its guardians are called "its keepers" (*khazanatuhā*), questioning the new coming souls in Q 39:71 and answering their questions Q 40:49–50, while Paradise is also guarded by "its keepers" welcoming in the new souls Q 39:73.

Relating to the guardian category, two last possible references to angels are first (80:15–16), "in the hands of scribes / noble and pious" (*bi-aydī safara / kirām barara*) reminding us of other verses suggesting angels writing down the deeds of humans in Q 43:80, Q 50:17–18;³⁶ and guardians in Q 82:10–12. This guardian role, part of the narrative function, appears of course in the Sufi *tafsīr*, a first function that we will now turn to.

4 The Narrative Function of Angels in the *tafsīr*

4.1 *Secondary Characters Helping or Fighting Humanity in Angelic Verses*

This function is the only one that is mostly intra-textual by definition, and it is expressed through a variety of roles, starting with the expected one of guardian.

4.1.1 Guardians

In this category, Tustarī noticeably does not identify any angel for the alluding verse Q 86:4, "Over every soul there is a guardian," which could be easily interpreted so, mentioning only God's protection (*ʿiṣma*).³⁷ However Qushayrī does identify in this verse a guardian angel,³⁸ and so does Ibn Barrajān 1, though he sees there either angels guarding "recording [man]'s work by writing it for him", or guarding "humanity and all existent things."³⁹ The more detailed verses Q 41:30–31 present angels as guardians, and Sulamī paraphrases the verse, seeing the angels as a "protection" (*ḥimāya*).⁴⁰

36 Although the word translated as "scribes," *safara* does not refer to the guardian aspect of the writing guardians of the previous verses.

37 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 277.

38 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 714.

39

الملك يحفظ عمله يكتبه له (...) الإنسان والموجودات كله

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* v, 478

40 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 218.

On the alluding verse Q 13:11, the “*mu‘aqqibāt*” are identified by Tustarī as angels “of night and day, which come one after the other in succession” (based on the notion of “one after the other” in the verse). They preserve “all the good and evil things that He has determined for His servant.” Furthermore, these angels bear witness for or against this servant.⁴¹ Qushayrī also identifies them as angels, in a long commentary on this type of guardian angels. After repeating the idea of them coming in succession night and day, he writes:

They keep them [humans] by God's command from God's command,⁴² this because God—Exalted He be—has designated to everyone in Creation angels who repel affliction from them when asleep or unaware, or when awake and up and walking ... And in all of their states.⁴³

This verse, Q 13:11, appears within the commentary of Ibn Barrajān 1 on another alluding verse suggesting guardian angels Q 6:61, where the author deduces the presence of angels with a reference to *ḥadīth* literature. He explains that there are different categories of guardian angels: guardians of actions, and guardians of the night or of the day. These angels protect the person against death as long as his time has not come.⁴⁴ Similarly, Baqlī identifies guardian angels in Q 6:61,⁴⁵ while verse Q 13:11 elicits from him a purely mystical commentary with an angelic metaphor: To him, guardians are then “the eyes of His kindnesses” (*‘uyūn al-tāfīhi*), or, according to an unknown report, “Who is guarded

41 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 100.

42 God is commanding the protection of humans from the existence of other things that also sprang out of His will, and this denotes the wider meaning of the word “*amr*” in Arabic. This word, translated as “command” throughout this chapter for clarity purposes, may be translated in several manners (such as “divine arrangement”, “will”, “doomsday”, “decree”), as its meaning is quite wide and might differ slightly according to each theological school. It is generally seen as part of God's creative act, the cause of existence of things, for which the word “command” seems the clearest, keeping in mind that the Arabic word might have a wider semantic field. See Schwarb, “Amr (theology)” *ET*³.

43 يحفظونهم بأمر الله من أمر الله، وذلك أن الله—سبحانه—وكل لكل واحد من الخلق ملائكة يدعون عنهم البلاء إذا ناموا وغفلوا، أو إذا اتبها وقاموا ومشوا ... وفي جامع أحوالهم.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā'if* ii, 218

Interestingly, on commenting on another verse Q 4:38, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions within two short paragraphs the same idea using the same phrases and vocabulary as Qushayrī: the “*mu‘aqqibāt*” coming in succession of night and day, protecting by God's command from God's command.

44 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 222–225.

45 Baqlī, *Arā'is al-bayān* i, 371.

by the causes is guarded by the Maker of causes, and His Command, as the religious scholars saw only the cause, while the mystical knowers saw the Maker of causes.”⁴⁶ One could understand it thus: Non-Sufi religious scholars see angels where mystical knowers see God. Angels are but an “effect” of God, helping humanity, but also a metaphorical sign pointing back to Him. This is one early example of the specific Sufi function given to angels, seen in more detail in Chapter 3, aside from presenting a picture of mystics as a sort of elite among believers.

Qushayrī, on the alluding verses Q 82:10–12, identifies the “guardians” (*ḥāfiẓīn*) of these verses as angels writing down the deeds of humans, for whom the sight of angels is meant as a source of fright⁴⁷ (in this case, the ultimate function will be seen in Chapter 3). Angels as a source of fear is a recurrent motif, usually indicating the function of reminding believers that they are under constant watch, should they want to disobey or act as hypocrites; or their use for inspiring divine awe.

On Q 72:25–28, Qushayrī sees angels guarding the “revelation” (*waḥī*) from the pre-Islamic priests (*al-kahana*) and the “satans” (*al-shayāṭīn*), so that these do not add or impair the messages they bear. This comment completes a story given by Qushayrī on Q 72:1, seen in Chapter 3,⁴⁸ although it is expected here, as this surah refers earlier to *jinn* and their rejection as heavenly messengers. On these same verses Q 72:25–28, Ibn Barrajān 1 interprets the two guards (*raṣad*) around the Messenger as angels,⁴⁹ while Baqlī gives a mystical interpretation only.⁵⁰ Overall, the role of guardian is well established and appears numerous times throughout the commentaries, adding some details to the Quranic presentation of this role.⁵¹

4.1.2 Angelic Prayers and General Help

In the Quran, angels can intercede on behalf of humans, albeit only with God’s permission, and the commentaries usually paraphrase this idea. It is also found in *ḥadīth* literature, which places them in an ambiguous relationship with

46

المحفوظ بالأسباب محفوظ بالمُسَيِّب، وأمره، فالعلماء رأوا السبب، والعارفين رأوا المسبب

BAQLĪ, *Arāʾis al-bayān* ii, 224

47 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 697. Ibn Barrajān 1 identifies angels there as well by quoting a *ḥadīth* (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 457).

48 Al-Qushayrī, iii, 640.

49 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 398.

50 Baqlī, *Arāʾis al-bayān* iii, 450–460.

51 On guardian angels in *ḥadīth*, echoing the angels seen here, see Burge, *Angels in Islam* 71–75.

humans, comparable to that of Saints in Christianity.⁵² Being prayed for by angels might make humans look superior, but the need for intercession also underlines the difficulties of the human condition.

On the verse involving the descent of angels and the Spirit Q 97:4, Tustarī sees angels protecting the mystical knowers' states and those preserving God's ordinances.⁵³ Sulamī adds that angels descend to bring ease (*istirwāḥ*) to the "hearts of the sincere" (*qulūb al-ṣādiqīn*),⁵⁴ where Ibn Barrajān 1 sees angels saluting believers and protecting them from any harm during this particular night of the year where satans are especially active.⁵⁵

On the verses Q 3:124–125, where angels descend to help the believers, Qushayrī reminds the reader that if the *ḥadīth* associated to this victory gives credit to the angel's descent (*inzāl al-malak*), ultimately everything is in the hand of the King (*bi-yad al-malik*), that is, God.⁵⁶ This idea is presented even more strongly in his comment on Q 8:9, "the accomplishment is from the King" (*al-injāz min al-malik*), and quoting Q 3:126 "there is no victory save from God", reinforcing the monotheist credo, as if the reader's attention could be distracted by the angelic characters. Ibn Barrajān 1 does not give any direct commentary on these verses Q 3:124–125, to which he associates Q 8:9, "I shall aid you with a thousand angels rank upon rank," except for a discussion about the exact number of angels sent.⁵⁷

On Q 8:12, where angels strike necks and fingertips, Ibn Barrajān 1 continues this discussion by adjoining a section on the participation of the angels in the battle of Badr, discussing their numbers again⁵⁸ as well as grammatical points, reminding the readers that there was as much fighting done by the angels as there was by human participants. He also reminds the reader than the "ancients" (*al-awā'il*) fought alongside "satans" (*shayāṭīn*) in the same way, but that "they cannot bear the presence of angels, such as the darkness does not hold with the presence of light". He ends this section by mentioning the presence of "*jinn* believers who also gave their fealty to the human believers."⁵⁹

52 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 94–95.

53 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 297.

54 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq* ii, 409.

55 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 525.

56 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* i, 274.

57 He elaborates longer on this last verse later: Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 587.

58 He concludes that there were 9,000 angels both here in Ibn Barrajān 1 and in his second commentary (Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur'ān Commentary* 358). Regarding angels and battles, verse Q 9:26 is also understood in this context, and the "hosts that you saw not" are identified as helping angels in Baqlī (Baqlī, *Arā'is al-bayān* ii, 10).

59 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 445–446.

This *jinn* help echoes the angelic help, and it is an interesting illustration of the cosmological shift seen in Chapter 1: Angels become the companions of choice for the Muslim, and the *jinn* are not superior to humans anymore, but on par with them, if not lower, as the last example shows, mirroring the “helper” role of angels to the believers.

Qushayrī mentions that the angels’ prayers for humanity in Q 33:43 is a supplication (*du‘ā*) to God for the benefit of humanity, coming in two kinds: forgiveness for the disobedient (*bi-l-ghufrān li-l-‘āṣi*) and beneficence for the obedient (*bi-l-iḥsān li-l-muṭī*); it can also be for intercession (*al-shafā’a*).⁶⁰ On this same verse, Q 33:43, Baqlī seconds the Islamic credo that angels ask for forgiveness on behalf of humans by God’s will, and relates from the “master” (*al-ustādh*, meaning al-Qushayrī) that God’s prayer means mercy (*rahma*) and that the angels’ prayers mean intercession (*shafā’a*).⁶¹

On Q 42:5, another verse mentioning the intercession role of angels, Ibn Barrajān 1 summarizes the main aspect of this role:

*God has willed that each thing has angels from among his servants attached to it and interceding for its existence, and for maintaining what He wants to be maintained, and suppressing what He wants to be suppressed, and He—Exalted and Praised He be—has obligated the angels of the heavens to the intercession for those on Earth, asking forgiveness on their behalf. To this He answers, out of His kindness and generosity, and without which the Earth would not hold together, however He willed it to hold so they [the angels] ask forgiveness for the people of the Earth.*⁶²

60 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 165. We find angels asking forgiveness for the disobedient and helping those who prevent themselves from committing evil acts elsewhere, such as in the commentary on Q 40:7–9, al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 297. Almost friendly, on Q 51:4 Qushayrī briefly identifies angels within a longer esoteric commentary, adding that they come and offer help in various manners, and ask different groups of people about “their states” (*aḥwāl*ihim) (al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 459).

61 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 144–145. On Q 33:56 the same idea is explained, with an additional report given by Baqlī attributed to Sulamī according to which praying on the prophet, as God and the angels do in this verse, means bringing mercy upon oneself, see *ibid.* 147–148.

62 لم يشأ الله كون شيء إلا وقّض الملائكة من عباده يشفعون في كونه، وكذلك في إبقاء ما شاء إبقاءه وإعدام ما شاء إعدامه، فقيّض—سبحانه ولع الحمد—ملائكة السماوات إلى الشفاعة لمن في الأرض يستغفرون لهم، لولا ذلك من لطفه ويسره في تشفيعه إياهم ما أمسكت الأرض، لكنه شاء إمساكها فهم يستغفرون لذنوب أهل الأرض.

These commentaries tend to veer towards a generalization of the angelic role of intercession for all beings, at all times. This stresses an overarching benevolence of God allowing the angels to intercede in a near-systematic manner, enlarging this burgeoning idea of the Quran. These details adding onto the Quranic function are related to the “angelic increase” of the enrichment function seen in Chapter 3. The idea of angels attached to all created things, as tiny as a blade of grass, is also a common motif in writings of non-Islamic as well as Islamic traditions.⁶³

4.1.3 Angels against Humanity

Before we see how angels are described when dealing with disbelievers, the afterlife, and the role of angels in taking souls, Tustarī comments on Q 41:30 with a *ḥadīth* according to which God, and so the angels who are responsible for this action, hesitates most in the taking of the believers’ souls. This may not add anything new to this role, yet it shows a particular nuance to this action, some proper will of angels who are unwilling to frighten human’s souls by doing so, by giving them “good tidings” and treating them “with honor.”⁶⁴

Tustarī understands Q 69:30–32 as an order given to apparently powerful angels:

*As soon as He says that, a hundred thousand angels will rush towards him. If just one of these angels took in the grasp of the world and the mountains and seas it contains, he would be strong enough for that. [One of the angels] will take hold of his neck with his hands, and then he will enter Hell-fire.*⁶⁵

Qushayrī similarly understands Q 79:1–5 as angels “tearing the souls of the miscreants from their bodies,” “forcing them out.”⁶⁶ On Q 6:93, which describes angels taking the wrongdoer’s souls, Ibn Barrajān 1 also elaborates that even if

The same idea of angels obligated by God to pray on humanity and to intercede on their behalf is repeated in Ibn Barrajān 2 in the comment on 40:7 (Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 431).

63 Burge, *Angels in islam* 41; Jaadane, “La place des anges” 52–54; Jean Daniélou, *The Angels and their Mission: According to the Fathers of the Church* (Indiana: Christian Classics, 1957, 1993), 3–4, 81–82.

64 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 178.

65 Ibid. 245. Ibn Barrajān 1 similarly understands this verse as God’s direct orders given to angels (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 376.)

66 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 681.

a disbeliever dies of a painless death, angels will come tormenting him: “it is prescribed to the angels to take his despicable soul with unpleasantness, and beat [him] and exert pressure upon him in the process.”⁶⁷ If justice in the visible or Seen world does not show, then the commentator seem to reassure the reader that justice will be done in the Unseen world. On the same theme, later on Q 15:8 Ibn Barrajān 1 adds a nuance by identifying the “truth” or “reality” (*ḥaqq*) brought by the angels as meaning “death” (*al-mawt*) or “torment” (*al-‘adhāb*), which can be a mercy (*raḥma*).⁶⁸

However, on many verses about angels coming to torment or take the disbelievers’ souls, such as Q 8:12 and Q 8:50 and Q 74:31, the commentaries remain short, discussing a linguistic point or paraphrasing the verse.⁶⁹ This frightening aspect of angels after death seems to be more pronounced in non-mystical Sunni readings of the eschatological role of angels.⁷⁰

Later, Ibn Barrajān 2 will add another detail on the angels in Q 6:93 and what Ibn Barrajān 1 commented on before. Angels make a distinction between the external and the inner sides of the people whose souls they come to collect: disbelievers who “appear in a light state of unrest” while their inner self (*bāṭin*) is indeed at fault, and the believers who might “appear in a pronounced state of unrest” while their inner self is “proper” (*muqtaḍā*).⁷¹ This might be a way of reminding the reader that angels, beings of the Unseen, are not fooled by appearances, enjoining the believers in taking care of their inner spiritual side, and that the Seen world and the Unseen world are at play whether before or after death.

There are also unexpected kinds of “non-help”, such as preferable defeat. Ibn Barrajān 1, in his discussion of angelic help on Q 8:12, ends it with a possible case where the defeat of Muslims is preferable, in which case the angels are

67

يَكْلَفُ هُوَ إِخْرَاجَ نَفْسِهِ الْخَبِيثَةِ بِإِزْعَاجٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ، وَضَرْبٍ وَتَشْدِيدٍ عَلَيْهِ فِي ذَلِكَ.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 263

68 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 256–257.69 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 443 and 460; v, 404–405.70 Sebastian Günther, “As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Quran 6:93), The Work of Heavenly Agents According to Muslim Eschatology,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 307–346.

71

ظَاهِرُ أَلْزِهِ خَفِيفٌ، ظَاهِرُ أَلْزِهِ تَبْدُو عَلَيْهِ الشَّدَّةُ

IBN BARRAJĀN 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 309

The root ‘-L-Z seems to be quite uncommon, I found it only in the *Lisān al-‘arab* and Steingass dictionaries.

partly responsible for God's order: "And the angels, in such a battle, grasp their hands preventing them from fighting and winning."⁷² This illustrates a reversal of the common understanding of what is seen as negative, going beyond the acceptance of fate or the idea that God does as He wills. Here, a negative situation is actually caused by angels, and is explained as being potentially positive.

4.1.4 Other Roles

Summarizing the previous roles, and hinting at innumerable others, Qushayrī identifies angels on Q 19:64 as the subject of those who descend "by the command of thy Lord:"

*Indeed, the angels—peace upon them—always descend with the permission of the Real, Exalted He be, and some of them descend to assist the oppressed, others to help the troubled, others to destroy the deniers, others to support the believers, and others for an endless number of matters for all people.*⁷³

Among these diverse roles, we find the unknown "driver" (*sā'iq*) and "witness" (*shahīd*) in Q 50:21 as interpreted by Tustarī as the recording angels (*kataba*) testifying for or against the dead.⁷⁴

A few verses before, on Q 50:18, Tustarī interprets the "watcher" (*raqīb*) as being an angel, adding that angels have access to a person's heart, but not his conscience: "The angels do not know the good and evil that is within a person's conscience (*ḍamīr*) save when that person's heart acquiesces in it [either good or evil]."⁷⁵ This gives an important detail on the limitations of angels'

72

والملائكة في هذا المشهد يقبضون أيديهم عن القتال والنصرة

IBN BARRAJĀN I, *Tafsīr* ii, 446

73

إِنَّ الملائكة—عليهم السلام—أبداً ينزلون بإذنه الحق تعالى، فبعضهم بإنجاد المظلومين، وبعضهم بإغاثة الملهوفين، وبعضهم بتدمير الجاحدين، وبعضهم بنصرة المؤمنين، وبعضهم إلى ما لا يُحصى من أمور الناس أجمعين.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā'if* ii, 436

74

Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 205. This could have been an early development of the two angels 'of the grave' known in Islamic tradition as Nakīr and Munkar according to Wensinck, however Tustarī later names them as such.

75

Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 204.

capabilities, with two implications: It reinforces the idea of man as more knowledgeable (see Chapter 2), and it suggests that the area where angels can operate and have an effect on men is situated at the heart level, or at least on matters related to the heart. This relationship between angels and humans' hearts is further illustrated in different instances, such as Qushayrī's comments on Q 8:12, where God addresses His angels: they are "whispering thoughts to men in their hearts," whether for strengthening believers or frightening the disbelievers.⁷⁶ Another widely used mystical term, "innermost secret" (*sirr*),⁷⁷ close to the mystical concept of "heart" (*qalb*) is also found in relation to the angels, such as in the commentary of Ibn Barrajān 1 on verses Q 50:17–18 as referring to angels who "know the innermost secret of certainty of the servant" (*ya'lamān sirr yaqīn al-abd*).⁷⁸

On Q 50:17 still, Qushayrī identifies the "two receivers" (*al-mutalaqqiyān*) as angels whose presence and witnessing should be frightening, and Qushayrī gives details about their exact position around any given person:

*When the servant is seated, one (angel) is on his right writing down his good deeds, and one (angel) on his left writing down his bad deeds; if one stands up, one (angel) is standing at his head and one at his feet; if one sets walking, then one (angel) walks in front of him and one behind him.*⁷⁹

In the same comment, Qushayrī further offers different options, addressing himself to the reader. There may be two angels during the day, and two different ones at night; or the one who is inscribing bad deeds one day might be the one inscribing good deeds the next day, so that the angel can also witness this. The ones inscribing bad deeds are often changed so that they know only a

76 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* i, 607.

77 This word may cover two different notions in Islamic mysticism: a secret in the sense of a teaching, reality, or doctrinal point, or a second level of reality, or secret in the sense of "subtle organ," one of the layers of the "heart," inner consciousness. See Amir-Moezzi, "Sirr" 112.

78 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 180.

79 إذا العبد قائدًا فواحد عن يمينه يكتب خيرا، وواحد على يساره يكتب معاصيه، وإذا قام فواحد عند رأسه وواحد عند قدمه، وإذا كان ماشيا فواحد قائم بين يديه وآخر خلفه.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā'if* iii, 450–451

The angel writing good deeds on the right and the angel writing bad deeds on the left is a motif also found in Jewish apocrypha (Hamidović, "Les écrits apocryphes juifs et le coran," 519).

few of those bad deeds.⁸⁰ The editor of the *tafsīr* notes in a footnote that it is as if the Sufi commentator keeps a hopeful attitude towards the disobedient (*al-ʿuṣāt*), which might be an attempt, attributed to Qushayrī, to counter the fear that angels induce at other times.

4.2 *The Narrative Function and Its Roles in the Non-angelic Verses*

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, angelic roles turn out to be just as often represented in commentaries of verses that do not concern them. Separating comments on angelic verses from those on the non-angelic verses also help us see how pervasive angelic presences are, and whether these comments on non-angelic verses add any originality. For example, Tustarī mentions angels praying for humans by quoting different *ḥadīth* on Q 2:157,⁸¹ and on Q 4:41 he gives an interesting commentary with surprising details on the general help and assistance given by the angels to humans, mentioning an angel verse:

God, exalted is He, has placed 360 angels in the service of each Muslim servant in accordance with the number of his veins. When he wants to do something good, they assist him in that, but if he wants to do something bad they chide him about it. If he acts upon any of those [intentions] they record that action for him until the Day of Judgement, when they show it to him, and apprehend him for it. Then when he comes before God, Exalted is He, they will bear witness for him about the faithfulness of his obedience, and [against him] for the sins he committed. God said, Exalted is He, and every soul will come accompanied by a driver and a witness Q 50:21.⁸²

Conversely, on Q 87:16, Tustarī presents a type of angel stronger than a guardian, almost a guide, for the world-renouncing type of believer in this life:

Every believing servant who has renounced this world, [will find that] God has placed in charge of him an angel, who will plant in his heart all kinds of wisdom (ḥikam), just as the people of this world plant different kinds of trees in their gardens.⁸³

80

لَا لَا يُعْلَمُ مِنْ مَسَاوِيكَ إِلَّا الْقَلِيلُونَ مِنْهَا

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* vol. 3, 450–451

81 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 23–24.

82 Ibid. 54.

83 Ibid. 279.

Continuing the illustrated examples of angels' actions, on verse Q 22:27, about pilgrimage, Tustarī mentions some servants of God who "ride on conveyances of gold covered with silk and drawn by angels."⁸⁴ On Q 89:14, Tustarī mentions a "patrol (*raṣad*) of angels with hooks (*kalālīb*) and pikes (*ḥasak*) on the Traverse of Hell (*jīsr jahannam*)," who will question people concerning religious obligations (*farā'id*).⁸⁵ However, for the obedient people, Q 95:6, Tustarī mentions assisting angels making up for human frailties by recording the deeds of men "when they become weak and old", so that their good deeds might still be rewarded, "even though they are too weak to perform them".⁸⁶

In the same hopeful attitude shown earlier, on Q 40:64 Qushayrī mentions angels writing down bad deeds (*qabīḥ mā irtakabtum*), with the possibility of God erasing this and replacing them with good ones (*ḥasanāt*).⁸⁷ Similarly, on Q 41:18 Qushayrī sees angels helping those who fall off the "right path" (*al-ṣirāṭ*) to help them back onto it.⁸⁸

Continuing with a generally gentle-minded attitude for humans, on Q 15:47 Qushayrī presents, however, a particular case where angels' help is not needed, namely in the purification of disobedient hearts. This is by God's design, because "had He delegated the purification of their hearts to the angels, their faults would have become known, so He took care of this Himself out of gentleness for them."⁸⁹ This implies an image of chattering angels incapable of keeping secrets, as if set to an automatic messenger function. Giving them information would be equivalent to exposing it for all Creation to know, so that if God wished for any information to be kept secret, out of compassion, He would have to take care of the matter Himself. Qushayrī presents the same line of thinking in his commentary on Q 37:22–24, which are verses about people brought to Hell, where he elaborates on "the people interrogated by the angel, and the people interrogated by the King."⁹⁰ The deeds of the last group are not to be made known, because God has compassion over them (*yarḥamuhum*

84 Ibid. 132.

85 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 283.

86 Ibid. 295.

87 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* iii, 314.

88 Ibid. 324.

89

ولو وكل تأثير قلوبهم إلى الملائكة لا شتبهت عيوبهم، فتولى ذلك بنفسه رفقاً بهم.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā'if* ii, 273

90 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* iii, 230. The "*malik*" mentioned in this paragraph might remind the reader of the keeper of Hell, sometimes identified as an angel when reading the Quran, however the context here clearly suggests that it should be understood in the sense of "king" as a designation for "God."

Allāh fa-lā yaḥḍahūhum) while the deeds of the first group, interrogated by the angels, are appropriate for exposure (*taṣluḥu li-l-kashf*).⁹¹

If he is mostly hopeful, Qushayrī also plays on fear, such as on Q 23:62, where he sees in the second part of the verse, “with Us is a Book that speaks the truth,” the presence of angel scribes who cause fear to those who were unaware that these angels were recording their deeds.⁹²

Regarding the moment of death, angels are often mentioned around the event of death or in an apocalyptic setting. However, mirroring the angels in care of death, a peculiar role is presented in the commentary by Tustarī on Q 90:4, on angels in care of birth. Tustarī mentions the existence of an angel whose helping role is specifically dedicated to “raise up the child’s head” in the womb of his mother, and “if it was not for that it would drown in blood,” from a saying attributed to a Mujāhid bin Jābir (d. 100–104/718–722).⁹³ This is echoed by Ibn Barrajān on the story of the annunciation to Mary in Q 19:17–23, where he mentions a particular category of angels that appeared in *ḥadīth* literature, “the angels of the wombs” (*malā’ikat al-arḥām*),⁹⁴ one of which could have been sent instead of Gabriel.

On Q 20:44, Qushayrī sees the possible suggestion of the “two angels” (*al-malakayn*) interrogating the believers in their grave (*fī al-qubūr*), as a potential hint to Nakīr and Munkar.⁹⁵ On Q 22:31, Qushayrī mentions the existence of “angels of torment” (*malā’ikat al-’adhāb*) in the context of the state of those who associate God with something else,⁹⁶ and these angels of torment are mentioned again in the comment of Qushayrī on Q 75:22–29, along with “the angels of compassion” (*malā’ikat al-raḥma*), who are among the angels driving the souls to God for Him to decide whether to send them to Paradise or to Hell.⁹⁷ Burge noted that the idea of angels of torment and compassion is a common

91 Ibid.

92

نُفُوقِهِمْ بِاطْلَاعِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ، وَكُتَابِهِمْ عَلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَالِهِمْ.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā’if* ii, 580

A similar interpretation is given for (54:53): the knowledge of angels recording everything so that people are afraid to commit faults lest they are held accountable for them (ibid. iii, 500).

93 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 285. The only (Ibn) Mujāhid (d. 324/936) would have been younger than Tustarī; This is also a *ḥadīth* attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687), (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 195).

94 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 479. Several examples of these *ḥadīth* have been listed later by al-Suyūṭī, see Burge, *Angels in Islam* 194–195.

95 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 459.

96 Ibid. 542.

97 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 658. Paradise is described here as “*‘illiyīn*”, in reference to (83:19),

motif in Islamic traditions about the afterlife, although there is no mention of them in the Quran.⁹⁸

More specifically, on the Angel of Death, on Q 6:59 Baqlī presents a report attributed to Abū Saʿīd al-Qurashī, with the following story surrounding death of creatures (*dābba*): a “green leaf” (*waraqa khadrā*) suspended from the Throne is associated with each creature, and when it dries and falls on the lap of the Angel of Death, the name of the person and his father’s name is inscribed onto it, so that the Angel of Death knows that it is time to collect this person’s soul.⁹⁹

On Q 27:8, in the context of the revelation to Moses, Qushayrī mentions the presence of angels within a long comment on this episode. When Moses fell unconscious from the event, “God sent to him angels to revive him with the refreshment of intimacy,” and at another time when “he fell down stricken,” the angels are found asking to him in surprise, “Oh son of the basket, is it such as you who asks for the vision?”¹⁰⁰ On this same verse, Baqlī mentions that one of the causes of Moses falling down stricken is the “angels of the heavens raising their voices”, causing the mountains to tremble.¹⁰¹ Later, commenting on Q 28:29–33, he relates a report attributed to a certain al-Qāsim that identifies two particular angels in this episode, Gabriel and Michael.¹⁰²

On Q 3:13, Ibn Barrajjān 1 mentions the angelic verse Q 8:9, with the angelic help sent by God, as seen above, with which he associates Q 8:41, another verse that mentions unknown armies. According to his interpretation, the angels sent were seen (*ruʾyat al-ʿayn*), as a “sign for them of the will of God for the support of His prophet,” although, he writes, seeing angels was contrary to custom at the time.¹⁰³ Therefore he tries to resolve the apparent contradiction within the Quranic text, of angels being seen at times (though usually in human form as we will see later) and the credo-related verses denying the sending of angels alongside or instead of the Prophet.

and it has different degrees (*la-hā tafāwut darajāt*), and Hell is called “*sijjīn*”, in reference to (83:4), with equally diverse degrees.

98 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 74.

99 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* i, 370.

100 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 65.

101 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* i, 465.

102 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 87. This al-Qāsim could be Qushayrī because some of the phrases of this saying are similar to that of Qushayrī on the same verse, however, Baqlī usually refers to Qushayrī as “al-Ustādh,” so the identity of this reference remains unsure.

103 آية لهم على إرادة الله نبيه، وإن ذلك يومئذٍ كان خارجاً عن معهود العرف.

In his commentary on the 108th surah, with an unusual depiction of angels, Ibn Barraġān 1 relates the story of a repenting man (*rajul tā'ib*) after he committed a hundred murders. When death comes, it has to consider his case because of “the dispute (*takhāṣum*) of the angels about him, between the angels of compassion and the angels of torment,” after which the man is found one measure (*shibr*) closer to righteousness if such is his real intention (*niyya*).¹⁰⁴ Similarly Ibn Barraġān 2 comments on Q 1:7 that “if a person’s speech agrees with the angels’ speech, then all his previous sins are forgiven.”¹⁰⁵ While the dispute of angels over the souls of humans, although unusual, is found elsewhere in other religious traditions,¹⁰⁶ the idea of compassion annulling previous sins via angelic help will find echoes later in Ibn ‘Arabī, on whom Ibn Barraġān had an influence (as we will see in Chapter 5).

On Q 8:41, in commenting on this verse which distributes the gains from a battle in different portions, with one fifth going to the Prophet, Ibn Barraġān 2 explains that among the recipients of this fifth portion are the angels, as the commentator seems to consider they should be rewarded for their participation in the battle mentioned in Q 8:9.¹⁰⁷ This points to a proximity of angels with the material dimension of the world appearing in the texts at times, although this one example reflects the general commenting style of Ibn Barraġān, which tends to give more “realistic” or “pragmatic” explanations than the other commentaries, as seen previously in his discussion of the exact number of angels sent to battle.

5 The Theological Function in the *tafsīr*

5.1 *Defining Aspects of the Islamic Credo in Angelic Verses*

The commentaries generally present numerous examples of the theological function, as briefly seen previously. They illustrate God as the ultimate cause to all things happening on Earth, with angels following His orders and will, without any significant independence of action, even when apparently having some, as in the case of Hārūt and Mārūt. God as the cause of everything was at

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 553.

¹⁰⁵

فن وافق قوله قول الملائكة غفر له ما تقدم من ذنبه.

IBN BARRAJĀN 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 95

¹⁰⁶ One such example is the motif of Michael disputing Satan over the soul of Moses, as mentioned in Jude 1:9 in the Bible. See also Daniélou, *The Angels and their Mission* 100.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Barraġān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 359.

the heart of intense theological and philosophical debates. Whether He caused everything, directly and at all times, or whether He delegated this to secondary causes, He remained at the origin of every event.¹⁰⁸ Angels are also used to reinforce and explicate basic aspects of the Islamic credo over and over, implying a lively theological debate during the commentators' different time periods.

On Q 4:136, which defines the basic credo, Sulamī does not mention the angels per se, however the unknown report he presents does reiterate the functions of mediation accorded to the elements of this verse, among them the angels. Paradoxically, these mediators are required for a direct connection to the divine:

*O you who are called to the baring of faith from any mediation, there is no path for you to reach this baring except through the acceptance of the mediators and following them, believe in God and His messengers.*¹⁰⁹

On this same verse, Ibn Barrajān 1 explains that "all the angels (...) are like one angel in the matter of the belief in them", and so the belief in all the prophets and messengers are "as the belief in one man,"¹¹⁰ thus stressing the unimportance of the personal traits of both angels and prophets in order to concentrate on the ultimate object of belief, God. The author offers this interpretation again in Ibn Barrajān 2.¹¹¹ As an exoteric illustration of the Oneness of God, angels and prophets are even more depersonalized than in the Quran, through a process of moving from a literal reading to a figurative one. The characters are reduced to their function of being a simple vessel of the divine message, orienting the believer's understanding of the monotheistic credo.

Suggesting an ongoing religious debate, the verses Q 21:27–28 suggest a response to the Christian belief in the son of God and serve as a reaffirmation

¹⁰⁸ For an overview of this debate, see Ulrich Rudolph, "Occasionalism," in *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), online.

¹⁰⁹ يا أيها المدعون تجريد الإيمان في من غير واسطة، لا سبيل لكم إلى الوصول إلى غير التجريد إلا بقبول الوسائط واتباعهم آمنوا بالله ورسوله.

SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 164

In the first clause, it seems that either there is a word missing (Allāh?) after the "fi," or the "fi" itself should not be there. We also suppose that the second "ghayr" might be a misspelling of "khayr" or "ghāyat," as calling for the non-freeing of faith in this context does not make sense.

¹¹⁰ Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 133.

¹¹¹ Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur'ān Commentary* 117.

of the oneness of God, where a presence of angels is sometimes used, suggested by the “honored servants” (*‘ibād mukramūn*), not preceding God in thought or action. As often happens with alluding verses, angels are not the only interpretation possible, and Sulamī presents here different reports interpreting these servants as prophets and different creatures. However, he himself identifies them as angels.¹¹² Similarly, Qushayrī paraphrases verse Q 4:172, on the Messiah and the “angels brought nigh” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn*) not disdaining being in the service of God for some theological explanations. He writes that mentioning the angels here does not mean that they are superior to the Messiah, but rather that they are a way to address them according to their beliefs. He reminds readers that this is not the case in the Islamic cosmology.¹¹³ This is a usual stance in commentaries, although on this same verse, Q 4:172, and contrary to the general impression given by the commentaries in the next section, angels are defined by Baqlī as better than Jesus, benefitting from a distinction over him.¹¹⁴

On another credo-defining verse, Q 2:285, Qushayrī briefly elaborates an idea about different modalities of belief between the Prophet and that of the rest of the believers: “It is said that the Creation believed through mediators (*waṣā’iṭ*) while Muḥammad believed without mediators.”¹¹⁵ This idea is repeated in the comment on angelic help verses Q 3:124–125, and echoes what was seen earlier, namely, that whenever angels help, credit ultimately goes to God.¹¹⁶ It also already hints at the Sufi symbolic function in Chapter 3: From the exoteric point of view angels are mediators, while on the esoteric side the direct connection to the divine does not require their presence, at least here, in the case of the Prophet.

Regarding another Quranic angelic role, Qushayrī explains that the witnessing of God’s unity by the angels on Q 3:18 is not useful to God per se, but on the contrary, this act of witnessing is for God to make them happy (*as’ada-hum*)

¹¹² Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 5.

¹¹³ لا يدلّ على أنهم أفضل من المسيح (...) إنما خاطبهم على حسب عقائدهم.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā’if* i, 393

¹¹⁴ لأنهم أفضل من عيسى، تخصيص الملائكة على عيسى.

BAQLĪ, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 291

¹¹⁵ ويُقال آمن الخلق بالوسائط وآمن محمد بغير وسائط

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā’if* i, 215

¹¹⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* i, 274–275.

and guide them to the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of his Oneness.¹¹⁷ This appears as a way to express the unity of God as sufficient in itself, and no acknowledgement of it by any creature, even angelic ones, is really needed for this reality to exist. This idea of God's utter independence from angels pervades throughout the different commentaries, especially in the comments on the creation of Adam. This is as if authors made sure to transmit this theological reading to their readers; they need God, whereas God needs no one.

The forbidding of taking angels and prophets as lords in Q 3:80, another echo of a theological controversy, is contrary to the credo of the hierarchy in Creation for al-Qushayrī. For him, this verse explains the "limitations of humanity" (*ḥadd al-bashariyya*) in regard to the "truth of the lordship" (*ḥaqq al-rubūbiyya*), and he further questions the precedence of forms over their cause: "Would he command you to study the forms, and attribute the events to the representations, after the lights of the Oneness appeared in your inner self, and the suns of Uniqueness emerged in your hearts?"¹¹⁸ Similarly, Baqlī's comments on this verse, stating that angels do not ask about unbelief but, on the contrary, inform believers of different elements such as the "lights of the divine law," or the unity of God and the "sacrality of his degrees."¹¹⁹ This insistence on reaffirming the basic credo in different ways suggests that the cosmological re-ordering was a permanent process in the different commentators' times, from the Quranic times to Balqī's, well into the flourishing of the Islamic empire. Did people still tend to give an independent will to angels, seeking from them what pre-Islamic people might have been seeking from the *jinn*? Did angels' intercessor role, present in other contemporaneous religions, turn into some form of worship? This type of commentary and its repetition could indicate such a possibility.

A further trace of this religious debate, although left undefined, is found in comments on verses about Hell, in Q 40:49–50: Qushayrī identifies the keepers of Hell (*khazanat jahannam*) as angels, seeing in these verses a trace of "foreign indications" (*amārāt al-ajnabiyya*) from non-Islamic belief systems that include intercession, so "God has taken away compassion from the heart of the

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 226.

¹¹⁸ أيا مكرم بمطالعة الأشكال، ونسبة الحدثان إلى الأمثال، بعد أن لاحت في أسراركم أنوار التوحيد، وطالعت في قلوبكم شمس التنريد.

Ibid. 253–254

¹¹⁹ Baqlī, *Arā'is al-bayān* i, 161.

angels [of Hell] so that they do not intercede on their behalf.”¹²⁰ Qushayrī seems to be more orthodox here than other Sufi masters, and less lenient than Baqlī on the matter of Hell, the latter hinting at a possibility of salvation for all.¹²¹

Following this need for clarification and the matter of humans worshipping angels, commentators turn to the matter of angels worshipping God. Qushayrī adds nuance in that the bowing of all creatures in Q 16:49, including angels, is one of witness (*shahāda*), and not one of worship (*ʿibāda*),¹²² pointing toward the idea that angels, like the other creatures mentioned in the verse, do not have the free will that induces the need for worship. On a similar theme that offers more ambiguity, the bowing of the angels to Adam in Q 7:11, seen in more detail in the next chapter, Ibn Barraġān 1 also tries to avoid reading this scene as associationism. He explains that the bowing of angels to Adam is like the bowing of believers behind the imam, by quoting a *ḥadīth* on the difference between praying for someone else and praying for oneself, and drawing a parallel with the creation of Adam:

*As for Adam, His Lord shaped him and breathed into him some of His Spirit, and inspired him His devotion and his bowing to Him, and when he bowed down to Him out of devotion, the angels in their entirety bowed down out of his bowing to God Lord of the Worlds, as He commanded them to.*¹²³

On the visibility of angels, Qushayrī offers very short commentaries on the verses about God’s choice not to send an angel along with the Prophet in Q 6:8–9. He compares the sending of a visible angel accompanying the prophet to giving a lamp to the blind: External proof does not precede an internal conviction,¹²⁴ although revealing angels remains in God’s power.¹²⁵ Qushayrī, on the similar verses Q 15:7–8, presents a related idea, according to which if God

120

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَنْزِعُ الرَّحْمَةَ مِنْ قُلُوبِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ لئَلَّا يَسْتَشْفَعُونَ لَهُمْ.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 309

121 See the analysis on this subject in Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qurʾan Commentaries* 109–123.

122 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 300.

123 وَأَدَمُ إِذَا سَآهَ رَبَّهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ. وَأَلْهَمَهُ عِبَادَتَهُ وَبُحُودَهُ إِلَيْهِ، وَلَمَّا سَجَدَ لِرَبِّهِ تَعَبَّدَ لَهُ سَجْدَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ كُلِّهِمْ أَجْمَعُونَ لِسُجُودِهِ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ كَمَا أَمَرَهُمْ.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 302

124 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* i, 462.

125 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 632.

“shows angels to the sight of men, when they seek to see [them], because knowledge becomes then necessary.”¹²⁶ He then specifically equates the seeing of angels to accessing mystical knowledge, which cannot be external or exoteric. We find in this comment the same idea of angels becoming visible to men only when their mission is to destroy the latter: “It was known that the time had not come for their destruction; for he [Muḥammad] knew that there was someone in their loins who would believe in God, Exalted He be, again.”¹²⁷ This idea of frightful angels is repeated in the narratives by Abraham’s guests, however, on Q 16:33 and the question of people awaiting for angelic descent, Qushayrī offers an alternative explanation, assuming that disbelievers then did not know anything about angels: “The people were waiting for the coming of the angel because they did not know about it and they did not believe in its existence.”¹²⁸ This could be one example of a commentator linking the presence of angels with the apparition of (Islamic) monotheism, classically considering that angels were not known, or not properly so, in other traditions in the “age of ignorance” according to the usual Islamic historical worldview.

On this matter, Ibn Barrajān 1 comments on Q 17:95—where God explains that He would send angels only if the Earth was filled with them—that the need for a human messenger has to do with the clarity of the message. This clarity is brought only by human specificities, implying that the “unseen” character of angels induces incomprehension:

*If the Messenger to humanity had been an angel or something else that is not human, the clarity of the message would not have been what it was, because it is clarified by his words and his actions, and most of the states of humanity are not found in angels, such as eating and drinking, defecating, sexual relationship and its consequences, and other such states and necessities.*¹²⁹

126

إذا أظهر الملائكة لأبصار بني آدم فيكون ذلك عند استبصارهم، لأنه تصير المعرفة ضرورية.

Ibid. 264

An anonymous reader of the manuscript kindly suggested that the original word here might have been *istīṣāl* instead of *istibṣār*, as it is found in the commentaries of Ismāʿīl Haqqī (d. 1137/1725) and Ibn ʿAjība (d. 1224/1809) on the same verse.

127 Ibid. However, angels may still become visible, as Qushayrī reminds us in the commentary on (25:22), ii, 632.

128 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 296.

129 لو كان الرسول إلى البشر ملكاً أو غيره مما ليس ببشر ما بلغ من [التبيين ما بلغه البشري] فإنه يبين

On Q 11:31, Qushayrī sees in this verse a way for Muḥammad to say that he is accomplishing only what he was told to do and nothing more (*lā azīd ‘ammā umirtu*) and claiming to be an angel would be considered “more.”¹³⁰ This is an important part of the Islamic credo, of Muḥammad bringing the Quran while having “no more” than human status. These comments also stress that the importance of the message does not erase the importance of the vehicle of the message. The vehicle is essential for the understanding of the message’s content.

On Q 17:95 again, Baqlī comments on the verse that illustrates best this one detail of the Islamic credo: The messengers sent correspond in kind to their communities (men sent to humanity, not angels), providing one of his rare attempts at describing the angels. He explains that sending angels in their “angelic form” (*al-hay’a al-malakiyya*) to Earth would not have been possible, since they are “pure souls” (*kawnuhum nufūsan mujarrada*), hence their apparition in human form when need be. He mentions the verse, Q 6:9, and how disbelievers would not recognize an angel if they saw one.¹³¹ As for the timing of the sending of messengers, Ibn Barraḡān 2, on angelic verses Q 16:1–2, explains that revelation arrives in due time, and that messengers should not be pressed.¹³²

While God may select either angels or humans as messengers in Q 22:75, Qushayrī explains in his comment that being an angel should not be an argument in his favor, as “the virtue goes to the One who sends, and not to a particularity of the constitution of the one who is sent.”¹³³ Reminding readers of the correct priorities (God comes first, and only God), he also repeats later that God is also unrepresentable, as in Q 89:22, where God descending with angels “row upon row” is interpreted as a metaphor. Here, angels appear as ‘metaphorical proxies’, as if God could not appear literally: “‘Your Lord came’, that is, the

بقوله وبفعله وأكثر أحوال البشر ليست للملك، [من] أكل الطعام وشرب الشراب وإخراجه والنكاح ولواحقه، إلى غير ذلك من أحواله وضرورته.

IBN BARRAḠĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 421

Al-Qushayrī on Q 17:95 presents a concise paraphrase of this concept: “Kind (*jins*) is better suited to kind, and the form (*shakl*) surest to form” (Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 370).

130 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 133.

131 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 384. In Chapter 3 he presents more mystical commentaries on this aspect of the credo.

132 Ibn Barraḡān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 446.

133

فالقضية بحق المرسل، لا لخصوصية في الخلقة في المرسل.

angels on His command". In the same way Qushayrī, on this verse, also explains that "He does an action and calls it 'coming,'" ¹³⁴ He insists therefore on an allegorical approach to the Quranic words, where angels are used as a vehicle for a shift from a literal to a figurative reading of the Quran.

5.2 *The Theological Function in the Non-angelic Verses*

An unexpected angelic limitation is shown in Tustarī's commentary on Q 39:69, through an interpretation to this verse, which is qualified as esoteric or "inner" (*bāṭinī*). Angels are given life by God through His remembrance, "just as He gave the children of Adam life through their breathing," however, "when He withholds remembrance from them they perish."¹³⁵ Angels are then mortal, which underlies their finite nature relative to God, though they might appear as near-immortals to humans.¹³⁶ This is a notable difference with regard to the representation of angels in more philosophical texts, where they are "immortal intellects," something which also underlines the absolute divine against the relative existence of Creation.

On verse Q 16:8, which states that "He [God] creates that which you know not," Tustarī gives a more imaged example. According to a *ḥadīth* related by Ibn 'Abbās, God created a planet from white pearl, on which there is a mountain of red ruby, and on this mountain is an angel filling all the space, with "660,000 heads, each head having 660,000 mouths and each mouth having 660,000 tongues, and each of these tongues praising God, Exalted is He, 660,000 times a day." And despite these incredible numbers, the angel will say, at the Day of Resurrection, that his worship was not enough. This comment seems to illustrate the angelic function of good religious praxis (as seen in the next function), but Tustarī also sees this verse as reinforcing the unfathomable power of God, explaining the "inner meaning of these words" which is that the human intellect is limited.¹³⁷

Tustarī later illustrates verse Q 29:2, in which people say that they believe they will not be put to the test, with a conversation between God and the

¹³⁴

جاء ربك، أي الملائكة بأمره، ويُقال: يفعل فعلا ويُسميه مجيئاً

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā'if* iii, 727

¹³⁵ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 173.

¹³⁶ Olga Lizzini, "L'angelologia filosofica di Avicenna," in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ebook.

¹³⁷ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 107. Burge has written on this aspect, where angels are described with superlative qualities, the goal of which seems to be to present a picture that is incomprehensible, hard to imagine, possibly with the function of highlighting the greatness of God (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 60–64).

angels. Angels complain that disbelievers receive good things from the world, while believers are afflicted, and in response God lets the angels see the reward of both disbelievers (the goods of the world are not a blessing), and believers (afflictions do not harm them).¹³⁸ For the reader, unfairness in this world finds a resolution here via an ultimate justice rendered by God, a justice that not even angels are aware of. Another such conversation is related in Q 33:23, a verse describing different types of believers. Sulamī presents a report attributed to ‘Umar al-Makkī (?), which is a conversation between God and the angels, who are following orders to add more and more afflictions onto the believers, until the angels say that there are no more left. God then asks them to write (*uktubūhu*) the names of those who have not changed their ways and faith despite the afflictions cast onto them.¹³⁹

On (36:11), Tustarī illustrates the act of remembrance (*dhikr*), in a conversation between John the Baptist and Jesus, in which John the Baptist says: “[My heart] is attached to the Throne, and if my heart were to find rest with the angel Gabriel for just a blinking of the eye, I would consider myself as not having known God, Mighty and Majestic is He.”¹⁴⁰ This illustrates again the transcendental and direct relationship between believers and God preferred by the Islamic credo, as not even a great intermediary as Gabriel would be deemed acceptable. In another conversation, it is God’s mercy that is illustrated in Q 39:53, for which Tustarī relates a conversation between Gabriel and Abraham, the former informing the latter that God’s pardon of a misdeed means turning it into a good deed.¹⁴¹

On a more restricted creedal level, we find a report given by Sulamī on Q 24:35 that draws a parallel between four archangels and the four first “well-guided” Caliphs, which shows a use of angels for legitimizing purposes to Sunni Islam.¹⁴² This reference also serves the cosmological function via an increase in the number of angels named, as seen in the next two chapters. This is a clear trace of theological stances that authors defend in the midst of political turmoil by using their interpretation of cosmological elements and “plastic” characters like the angels.¹⁴³

On Q 17:57, Qushayrī interprets this verse as hinting at the cult of Jesus, ‘Uzayr and the angels. Qushayrī stresses that asking them to be mediators for

¹³⁸ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 149.

¹³⁹ Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 144.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 163.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 173.

¹⁴² Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 46–52.

¹⁴³ For instance, Nguyen writes about the difficult political environment Qushayrī, student of Sulamī, lived through (Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar* 23–54).

their prayers to God does not lead to anything, because “How can they relieve you from the affliction, while they themselves plead with God and fear him in the states of their selves?”¹⁴⁴ On the matter of Jesus and ‘Uzayr, Qushayrī comments further on Q 39:4, replying to those claiming that these are the sons of God, and that had God willed to take a son, he would have taken an angel, as they are not in need of food, water, and other such needs of Creation.¹⁴⁵ We find similar elaborations on the adoration of angels, Jesus, ‘Uzayr and other deities or defied characters in Ibn Barrajān 1 within the commentary of the 30th surah.¹⁴⁶ These suggest a recurring and lasting theological debate over the first centuries, both in Islamic Spain (in the case of Ibn Barrajān) and the Islamic East (in the case of Qushayrī), long after the Quranic text in 7th century Arabia hinted at such debates. This reflects a cultural and theological situation that never evolved into a fully stable and unified landscape, where different authors always had to defend their position and that of their groups within it.

Commenting on Q 20:134, Qushayrī pursues the theme of the disbelievers who ask for proof in order to believe, such as summoning an angel, and the futility of such an attempt when faced with dissatisfied or skeptical persons. They do not accept the messengers and so ask for angels, however, had they indeed been sent angels, they would have asked for the contrary, their arguments never-ending.¹⁴⁷

Beyond the identity of messengers, in a section within the commentary of the 11th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 explains that there are two types of revelation for human messengers: “A revelation revealed to the messenger and brought by the angel with the command (*amr*),” and one sent “to the innermost secret (*sirr*) of the heart (*qalb*) of the messenger.”¹⁴⁸ One type of communication is external, via an angel, while the other bypasses the angel to go directly to the “heart” and the “innermost secret.” This dichotomy, which has roots in the Quran, is found elsewhere in Baqlī (see Chapter 2 and the messenger function in non-angelic verses) and later in Ibn ‘Arabī, for example.

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فكيف يرفعون عنكم البلاء وهم يرجون الله ويخافونه في أحوال أنفسهم؟

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā’if* ii, 354145 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 268.146 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 340.147 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 490. Further below, Qushayrī mentions verse (21:27) as an answer to these demands: God sent humans with the revelation (*waḥī*) (Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 493).148 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 8.

On Q 22:65, Ibn Barrajān 1 comments on the spoken devotions and the five articles of faith (prayer, charity, pilgrimage, fast and testimony) as being part of the worship (*‘ibāda*) of God by beings and things, stemming out of their innate nature (*fiṭra*) and law (*shar‘*). However, one category of being is set apart from the rest of Creation:

*Except the angels—peace upon them—because they do not have a will or nature that can differ from God’s and not be in agreement with him, but on the contrary, they are shaped on what He loves from them and what agrees with Him, and this is the difference between the devotion of those in charge [humanity] and the devotion of angels.*¹⁴⁹

This highly instrumental description of angels is also mentioned in Ibn Barrajān 2, within the commentary of the 34th surah, where he alludes to pre-Islamic beliefs to reassert the fact that nothing existed before God, and that “He does not use any of his Creation the way he uses the angels.”¹⁵⁰ This stance is slightly different from that of Qushayrī in the previous section, on the matter of angels bowing to God, where angels were classified alongside the rest of Creation, while humans were set apart (they need to worship God, but angels and the Creation bow as “witnessing”).

Regarding the debate with pre-Islamic systems, Ibn Barrajān 1, in commenting on (34:12) mentions angels, alongside prophets and the (pre-Islamic people’s) virtuous (*ṣāliḥihim*) as objects of depiction and representations. To him, these representations, for which he uses the word usually translated nowadays as “statue” (*timthāl*), used in this verse, seem to mean something closer to a general representation, in an almost existentialist-like definition: “This is a name for everything that is fashioned as something it is not.”¹⁵¹ Ibn Barrajān 1 affirms that this is forbidden (*maḥzūr*) both in Islam and in these previous religions, suggesting here another ongoing theological debate.

¹⁴⁹ إلا ما كان من الملائكة—عليهم السلام—فهم الذين ليست لهم إرادة تخالف إرادة الله ورضاه بهم وفيهم ولا طبع، بل هم مجبولون على ما يحبهم منهم ويرضاه، وهذا هو الفرق بين عبادة المكلفين وعبادة الملائكة.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 74–75

¹⁵⁰ ولا معه من يستعمله كما يستعمل الملائكة من خلقته.

IBN BARRAJĀN 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 573

¹⁵¹ وهو اسم لكل شيء مصور على صورة غيره.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 418

Within the comment of the 39th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions Q 43:59–60, offering one of many instances of angels illustrating God's power over all things by being involved in everything. Therefore angels are responsible for death, angels breathe the Spirit in the wombs and spring life from it by God's permission, and no action, growth, death, or life happens without God, who has angels dedicated to this.¹⁵²

Later, and contrary to the difference stressed by Ibn Barrajān on their physicality, Baqlī, on Q 6:38, explains only in mystical terms that both angels and humans are similarly made, which explains the preference bestowed upon them over the rest of Creation: "their bodies were created from the world of the Acts, and their spirits from the light of the Kingdom."¹⁵³ Additionally, regarding their description, Baqlī comments on Q 59:6 by relating an event with the prophetic *mī'rāj* story: the Prophet saw the angels, but refrained from describing them.¹⁵⁴ This restraint from physical description is a remarkable stance by Baqlī, since it contrasts with his propensity for using dense mystical and illustrative phrases in almost all his comments (and in his celestial ascension narratives); it also contrasts with the physical descriptions that Ibn Barrajān had seemed willing to give before him.

6 The Religious Praxis Function in the *tafsīr*

6.1 *Illustrating the Believer's Expected Actions, or Desired Actions in Angelic Verses*

Angels can also be used to define and encourage good religious practices, a function under which many *ḥadīth* fall into, as they help the believer organize his or her daily life in its smallest details.¹⁵⁵ Böwering has already noted that, for mystics such as al-Tustarī, angels are a model of contemplative life, living on the remembrance of God (*dhikr*).¹⁵⁶ The verses about Adam Q 2:30–34 are usually commented on; in these, angels are seen as obeying God's orders, bowing

¹⁵² Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 538. Of course, this could also be included in the first (narrative) function, where we find similar comments.

¹⁵³ خَلَقْتَ أَجْسَامَهُمَا مِنْ عَالَمِ الْأَفْعَالِ وَأَرْوَاهُمَا مِنْ نُورِ الْمَلَكُوتِ

BAQLĪ, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* i, 354

¹⁵⁴ "fa-amsaka lisānahu min al-waṣf," Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 310.

¹⁵⁵ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 80–86; Stephen R. Burge, "Impurity/Danger!," *Islamic Law and Society* 17, no. 3–4 (2010): 320–349.

¹⁵⁶ Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision*, 201–204.

to Adam. If this scene and its commentaries can be listed under this function, where the total obedience of angels to God can be seen as a model for man, these commentaries tend to be more interesting in their other main function, the cosmological function of angels in relationship to man, seen in the next chapter. However, we can briefly mention here how the attitude of angels elicits from Baqlī an unattributed saying about these verses, as a lesson for his readers: “Who takes pride in his science, and takes pride in his obedience, ignorance is his homeland.”¹⁵⁷

On Q 51:24, Tustarī identifies Abraham’s guests with angels, and he uses this story to show the exemplary attitude of Abraham, who waited for his guests without eating, which he considers “the mark of true friendship (*khilla*)”, as is the act of curing “another’s illness when one is sick.”¹⁵⁸ Qushayrī later offers the reader a similar perspective,¹⁵⁹ with angels as witnesses to such good acts, in an educational spirit.

On Q 3:39, Sulamī does not comment on the angels bringing glad tidings to Zacharia directly, but presents a series of reports, attributed to previous mystics, about the spiritual benefits of being pious and patient, implying thus the interaction with angels as among these benefits (in the case of Zacharia in the verse), or at least a metaphorical validation of this piety.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, in his comment on Q 39:75, Sulamī presents the angels, in a report attributed to [Abū ‘Alī] al-Jūzjānī (d. 4th AH/10th AD), comparing the acts of angelic worship (*‘ibāda*) in the verse, and the affirmation of incomparability (*tanzīh*), to acts the believer should be doing if he is to approach God.¹⁶¹ Back on Q 3:39, Qushayrī gives the same interpretation, by likening Zakharia in this verse to a person in need who has to wait “by a king’s door, until the king calls to him”, which implies that this call comes only when the person is dutiful and constant in his service.¹⁶² On this verse, Baqlī later submits a long string of phrases as metaphors for the *mihrāb*, such as “the garden of the lovers” (*riyāḍ al-‘āshiqīn*), detailing the benefits of an attitude like that described in the verse, such as nearness (*al-qurba*) and gentleness (*al-uns*), followed by different mystical commentaries attributed to pre-

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من استكبر بعلمه، واستكبر بطاعته مكان الجهل وطنه.

BAQLĪ, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 41

158 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 208. The editors point out the reference to Abraham known as “friend of God” (*khalīl Allāh*), and that al-Tustarī carried this nickname himself.

159 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 145–146.

160 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* i, 99–100.

161 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 205.

162 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* i, 240.

vicious mystics, both unknown (introduced by “*qīla*”) and named.¹⁶³ Elsewhere, the presence of angels is introduced as corollary to good religious practice. For example, on Q 1:7, Ibn Barrajān 2 mentions a *ḥadīth* according to which angels answer “*āmīn*” after the imam ends reciting the *fātiḥa*,¹⁶⁴ and people are similarly surrounded by angels while reading the Quran.¹⁶⁵

On the most angelic of all verses describing angels’ wings, Q 35:1, Qushayrī starts his commentary by discussing the meaning given to the number of wings of the angels. It presents an illustration of how a believer should approach His acts and think about them, and what God tells him of the world and the Unseen:

[God] made His acts known to his servants, and entrusted them with considering them, and among them [His acts] there is what we know by seeing such as the heavens and the Earth and other things, and among them there is what pertains to the path of faith in them, such as information and transmission—and not by indication from reason—and angels are of this sort; for we do not investigate their form or their wings, and how they can fly with three or four wings, however we know overall the perfection of His power, and the sincerity of His word.¹⁶⁶

This serves as an illustration of God’s power and its reach beyond human reasoning capabilities, drawing parallels between elements of the Seen world and the Unseen. The advice given by the commentator here is that one should accept some things, such as the angels’ mode of transportation, based on an act of faith rather than based on reasoning, more “*bilā kayf*” than *mu’tazila*. This is in line with Qushayrī’s belonging to the Asha’rī, as Nguyen already noted: “Negation of *tashbīḥ* was a guiding principle in Qushayrī’s hermeneutics,”¹⁶⁷

163 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 147–148. Among the known ones are Ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 309/921–922 or 311/923–924), one of the main references of Sulamī (full name: Abū al-Abbās Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Sahl al-Adamī, see Böwering, “The Major Sources of Sulamī”) and al-Wāsiṭī (d. 320/932, full name: Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Wāsiṭī).

164 Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 88.

165 Ibid. 93.

166 تعرّف إلى العباد بأفعاله، وتدبهم إلى الاعتبار بها، فمنها ما نعلم منه ذلك معاينة كالسموات والأرض وغيرها، ومنها ما سبيل الإيمان به الخبر والنقل، لا بدليل العقل، والملائكة من ذلك، فلا تتحقق كيفيات صورهم وأجنتهم، وكيف يطبرون بأجنتهم الثلاثة أو الأربعة، ولكن على الجملة نعلم كمال قدرته، وصدق كلمته.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā’if* iii, 190

167 Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur’an Scholar* 234.

and *tashbīh* of God was what hid just behind the discussion of angels, creatures that could be understood as “divine extensions” of the actions of God in the world.

6.2 *The Praxis Function in the Non-angelic Verses*

There are other examples of angels clearly involved in the text for the reader to understand the importance of certain religious acts in non-angelic verses. For example, on the theme of friendship, Tustarī comments on Q 25:28 that the person whose prayers are good will make friends with everyone, and “the angels may even befriend him.”¹⁶⁸ On Q 2:238 Tustarī compares the singling out and importance of the “middle prayer” mentioned in the verse to “the same way that Gabriel and others were singled out for mention among the host of the angels, due to a certain particularity.”¹⁶⁹ On this verse, Ibn Barrajān 1 later defines the “middle prayer” as the morning prayer (*ṣalāt al-ṣubḥ*) and the mid-afternoon prayer (*ṣalāt al-ʿaṣr*), during which both angels of the day and angels of the night are witnesses, quoting a *ḥadīth* about this.¹⁷⁰

Tustarī gives another example involving Gabriel on Q 6:77, where Gabriel asks Abraham whether he needs anything, and Abraham answers “From you, no,” illustrating the ideal attitude of the believer depending solely on God for his needs,¹⁷¹ so not even an archangel could be enough.

We also find the motif of circumambulation around the Kaaba with angelic illustration. On (22:27), Sulamī presents a long report attributed to Dhū al-Nūn (d. 245/859 or 248/862), with a comparison between the Kaaba and the Throne, where angels mirror humans in their religious practice: “and the House is like the Throne of God, and the circumambulation around it is like the circumambulation of the angels around the Throne.”¹⁷² In the commentary on the 34th surah, Ibn Barrajān 2 takes up this human-angelic mirroring to explain how the Command circulates from God to Creation and back again in circles, and in this circular way “the Command is composed of Creation and Creation of the Command.”¹⁷³ This comparison is also used by Baqli in his comment on Q 3:86, with more poetic license, where the Throne is the *qibla* (direction of

168 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 140.

169 Ibid. 35.

170 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 425.

171 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 66.

172 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 21.

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وعلى ذلك يتركب الأمر بالخلق والخلق بالأمر.

prayer) of the angels, the Seat is that of the “drunk on the Presence” (*sukārā al-ḥaḍra*), the House Inhabited (*al-bayt al-ma‘mūr*) that of the “envoys” (*saḡara*), the Kaaba being the *qibla* of all people, elite and masses. He then mentions the angels’ bowing to Adam again, saying that he was then their *qibla*.¹⁷⁴ This last part marks a difference from the more pragmatic Ibn Barraḡān, which we saw in the previous section (the theological function in angelic verses), trying to avoid associationism by explaining that angels bow down to Adam as if he was their imam only, not their *qibla*.

We also find other examples of mirrored comparisons between angel and man, where angels are not examples for men, but used to exalt one particular figure and encourage worship (of God). Such an example is seen on Q 17:1, a verse traditionally associated with the night journey (*isrā’*) of Muḡammad, where Qushayrī introduces an interesting parallel of the relationship between Muḡammad and both angels and humans:

*It is said that the Real—Exalted He be—sent him [Muḡammad] so that the people of the Earth learn from him the act of worship, and then He ascended him to the Heavens so that the angels learn from him the etiquette of worship.*¹⁷⁵

While reaffirming one theological point, Ibn Barraḡān 1 on Q 34:22–23 reiterates the idea that no intercession is done or granted except by God’s will, indicating the benefits of such intercessions and the believer’s acts of worship:

*It is evident that the opening of knowledge and mystical knowledge is: bowing down and praying with humility and submission, and that the opening of existence is: the intercession from the Throne bearers—peace upon them—that He entrusted with interceding for Whomsoever He wills to have with Him.*¹⁷⁶

On the 36th surah (“Yā-sīn”), Ibn Barraḡān 2 lists all the benefits of reciting this surah during different situations, including over the deathbed of a Mus-

¹⁷⁴ Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 174.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 334.

¹⁷⁶ والظاهر أنّ أوّل مفتّح العلم والمعرفة: السجود والصلاة بما فيها من خضوع وخشوع، وأوّل مفتّح الوجود: الشفاعة لما أوجدها حملة العرش—عليهم السلام—يسرّهم ليشفعوا لما يريد إيجاده عنده.

lim, which results in the coming of 10,000 angels to pray over him, intercede for him, witness him and accompany him during his funeral; or at the moment of death, so that the angel of death does not come to take his soul before “Riḍwān the keeper of Paradise” (*riḍwān khāzin al-janna*) comes and gives him a drink. Reading this surah during the Friday prayer also makes God proud of the reader [in front of] the angels (*bāhā Allāh bihi al-malā’ika*).¹⁷⁷ Such examples enjoining the believers to worship in different forms during their lives are present in Sufi *tafsīr*, albeit to a lesser degree than in the *ḥadīth* literature on angels, as studied by Burge. Sufi authors seem less keen on elaborating on classical “reward-punishment” approaches, insisting more on how one can improve by imitating angels (or even by bettering them).

7 Concluding Thoughts

These examples of angels’ three basic functions, first appearing in the Quran, show a certain stability and continuity through these Sufi works, despite small variations. Their roles and functions are reinforced, illustrated with different examples. Sufi authors depict angels as helpful, selfless, and encouraging of believers to partake in good religious practices. This creates a picture of angels as unrelated to any sort of debate, at least not at first sight. They are omnipresent and quiet figures accompanying the believer, even if they are frightening at times or enmeshed in theological debates at other times, on a second level of reading. Angels are treated slightly differently from one author to the next. Sometimes they are set apart from the rest of Creation (Ibn Barrajān), or men are set apart and angels are included in the non-human portion of Creation (Qushayrī). The East-West divide between mystical authors also becomes apparent in their care to avoid any associationism (Ibn Barrajān), compared to the poetic license that does not refrain from making Adam the Qibla of angels (Baqli).

As discrete characters in the “cosmological economy,” angels may also have an impact on the physical world, such as when they help believers in battle (a Quranic narrative) or when they receive part of the war bounties (a commentarial addition to the Quranic narrative), on which authors provide some details. On a more subtle level, the influence of these unseen creatures on the “Seen world” transpires through their help for believers in their religious life in various manners, such as embodying models to follow or attitudes to adopt,

¹⁷⁷ Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 586.

interceding for them, as well as helping them to outline theological aspects of their religion. However, we have caught a glimpse here of how these commentaries do not focus on the daily praxis as much as on a religious praxis leading to experiential states for the believer. Similarly, they avoid describing Hell and Paradise, which are not as much the focus of their discussion as is the journey to God, as noted by Coppens in his analysis of Sufi *taf̣ṣīr*.¹⁷⁸ This will be made more evident in the following chapters.

Thus, Sufi commentaries do not seem to describe angels more than the Quran does, confirming a picture of angels as genderless—because they are bodiless—and different in nature and function from humans in the overall cosmology. However, even as authors emphasize the conformity of angelic activity as seen in the Quran in these functions, signs of a shift in the manner of treating angels appear between the literal and the figurative readings (which display tension at some level by then in the Quran, as mentioned in the introduction). Angels are used as metaphors in some instances, leading to a symbolic reading of verses.

In the next chapter we turn to another continuation of Quranic functions, the more general Quranic angelic functions. We will discuss whether the different sensitivities between authors also outline this shift from the literal to the figurative or symbolic.

¹⁷⁸ Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries* 120.

Angels in Sufi *tafsīr*: General Quranic Functions

These “general Quranic functions” are understood as the global cosmological function of angels shown in their different aspects: there are those who establish a new worldview; messengers; and “challenging” angels. Let us see how these aspects appear in the Quran first, before looking at how they are illustrated in the commentaries. This umbrella of a general cosmological function could of course include the more specific functions seen in the previous chapter, but here I expand the perspective by looking at angels with a wider scope within the broader Islamic worldview. They “appear” mostly in both the Seen and Unseen worlds in various ways, setting the bigger picture of the Islamic imaginary.

1 Presentation of the General Quranic Functions of Angels

1.1 *A Cosmological Function: Angels as Part of Establishing a New Worldview*

In a manner closely related to their theological function, angels are used as characters within arguments against disbelievers, which serve to establish clearer aspects of the new Islamic cosmology. For example, the figure of angels is used to relate the story of Moses and the Pharaoh's standoff. This may suggest that angels were known to the Quran's audience, since this particular story, set in Pharaonic Egypt, would not have needed angels, if we remain in the original story's setting. For Moses to prove his claim, the Pharaoh would have indeed asked to see some sign of the Egyptian gods' supporting him—but not angels. The mention of angels is clearly an adaptation for the listeners in Arabia, to whom angels were known. In this way, Angels are involved in the Quranic rhetoric used to refute the disbelievers' challenges, while slowly establishing a re-reading of the pre-Quranic world.¹

A prophet's demand to see an angel, as proof, might be seen as a Quranic trope.² Similarly, a mirror argumentation is used by God, who makes the sug-

1 We find a similar remark made by disbelievers from 'Ād and Thamūd in the verses 41:13–14.

2 There are indeed several other instances of such a demand made to the Prophet Muḥammad himself, in the setting of his immediate Ḥijāzī context: These are demands to see angels accompanying or replacing the Prophet in the verses 11:12, 15:7–8, 17:92, 23:24, 25:7, and 25:21.

gestion of sending an angel instead of a human messenger, or of turning the human messenger into an angel, only to argue that this would not convince the disbelievers, in Q 6:8–9. None of these demands and arguments with disbelievers contradict the basic credo of an angel sent to the Prophet (as stated in the Medinan period with the “credo verses”), as some have suggested.³ On the contrary, it only means that angels cannot be seen by other (non-prophet) humans, because if they could, this would not be proof enough for the disbelievers. In this worldview, humans have no choice but to trust the human messenger and his personal modalities to receive the revelation.⁴

In this function, we can include the obedience of angels, mentioned previously, which also helps define the general cosmology. Indeed, God’s order to the angels to bow to Adam can be seen as a preference or superiority granted to man over angels, which contradicts the way most Christian cosmologies evolved (early Christianity usually placed angels above men, as possessors of mysterious knowledge that men could only partially obtain).⁵ Angels questioning of God about the creation of humanity is also a narrative tool to push God into “explaining Himself” and thus the new cosmological order, and His eternal superiority in terms of knowledge; the cosmos sometimes does not make sense to humans, and even angels wonder about it. We will see in this book however, that this reversed hierarchy becomes somehow unstable, the question of the superiority of angels over humans being an object of debate over

3 Francis E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 143.

4 This matter of the angels’ role in regard to the arguments against polytheists and disbelievers in the prophecy of Muḥammad is studied in great detail by Crone (Crone, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God”), although she seems to have missed something about the precise situation presented by the Quran regarding the relationship between angels and humans in the matter of angel messengers, as we will see in the next section.

5 “Since the ontological status of angels was, for the Early Church, superior to that of mankind, due to their closer proximity to God, it was also logical that angelic knowledge should exceed the limitations of human understanding.” Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 13. Similarly in Judaism, angels were more knowledgeable of God than humans; however, they are described as jealous and irritated when God chooses to give the Torah to Israel (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 264) which reminds us of the attitude of the questioning angels when God chooses to entrust the Earth to humans. In Christianity, angels are seen to bow to only one man in particular, Jesus (Hebrews 1:1–6). This reminds one of the bowing to Adam in the Quran, a narrative which is not completely new in late antiquity, as this scene can be found in a non-canonical Christian narrative based on a Jewish source. See Guillaume Dye, “Le corpus coranique: context et composition,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 765, 811–812. In this text, the reason given is that angels bowed to Adam because he was made in God’s image. See also Sara Kuehn, “The Primordial Cycle Revisited,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, especially fn. 15, 176–177.

time, at least as much as the proverbial debates about their sex. This function can also include the changing relationship between angels and *jinn* in the Arabian *ghayb*, as mentioned in the introduction and seen in the next chapter.

1.2 *A Classic Cosmological Function: Angels as Messengers*

As already shown by Burge⁶ and Crone,⁷ being an angel (*malak*) does not automatically make one a messenger, as per the etymology of the word (Burge), or the possible uses of the language by the polytheists (Crone). They are consistently presented as angels, alongside others presented as “messengers” (e.g. Q 2:285), or alongside ‘the Spirit’ (e.g. Q 16:2). This messenger role was mentioned previously, when angels are shown in the text bearing messages to other characters, such as Zachariah or Mary, and this is true for both Meccan and Medinan periods. However, in the case of Gabriel, this role is listed here as a function both at the text and metatext levels. The Quranic text is regarded by all related traditions as having been transmitted by the archangel Gabriel to the prophet Muḥammad (or partly so), as a message itself, while the text points to him internally as a messenger character. Gabriel’s messenger function thus works both internally, as the text for the Prophet, and externally, for us reading or hearing this text, which exists for the believer thanks to the angelic transmission. This basic belief is supported by the following verse, which can be easily understood as the basis for the narrative of this transmission: “Whosoever is an enemy of Gabriel: he it is who sent it down upon thy heart by God’s Leave, confirming that which was there before, and as a guidance and glad tidings for the believers” Q 2:97.

Although this messenger role is paramount both inside the Quranic narratives and in the Islamic creed about the Quranic text, angels do not seem to be sent as messengers haphazardly. From the different verses mentioning angels, the Quran is adamant about not needing to send an angel as a messenger to the new Muslim community and the disbelievers, or an angel to accompany (or replace) a human messenger. However, this does not mean that the Quran denies their existence or denies sending angels to Muḥammad or other prophets, as we have seen previously, nor does it mean, as Crone concluded, only that “God’s messengers were always humans, or they were angels or humans as He saw fit.”⁸ On the contrary, from all the verses concerned with these polemics, and verses regarding angels sent to humans in different situ-

6 Burge, “The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malā’ika.”

7 Crone, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God.”

8 Crone, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God” 109.

ations listed for the previous function (see Appendix 1), we notice that in the new worldview angels are sent as messengers to main religious figures only—if not prophets exclusively⁹—and that human prophets and messengers, like Muḥammad, are sent to the rest of humanity. This is clearly supported by a verse in particular, Q 17:95: “Say, were there angels walking about upon the Earth in peace, we would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as messenger.” With the exception of prophets, who are characters with a special liminal status encompassing both worlds, God sends messengers to creatures according to their nature (angels to angels, humans to humans). This messenger function of angels is then paramount to the new religion’s cosmology, although the act of sending a message to a human through an angel is restricted to a select type of humans, namely, pivotal religious figures such as prophets, or at least people involved in a key manner to a prophecy.¹⁰

1.3 *An Overlooked Cosmological Function: Angels as Testers*

If angels as protectors and helpers in the first chapter paint a common view of God’s subservient creatures, unquestioning of His acts most of the time, there is the obvious case of *Iblīs*, who does not fit in, and to a lesser degree, the angels questioning God’s wisdom on sending Man as viceregent on Earth. However, a particularly long Quranic verse introduces a nuance to the archetype of impeccable angels, one that is often overlooked or misunderstood. The story of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* portrays angels that are usually more related to the “fallen angels” category,¹¹ without going as far as the standard representation of evil, like *Iblīs*/Satan:

9 In this case we would consider Zakariya and Mary as prophets, an argument which can be and has been defended. Zakariya is regarded as such in Islamic traditions, although he is presented as a priest in the Christian ones (Heller, Bernhard, “Zakārīyā,” *ET*). As for Mary mother of Jesus as a prophet, this view seems to have existed in early Christianity: see N. Clayton Croy, Alice E. Connor, “Mantic Mary? the Virgin Mother as Prophet in Luke 1.26–56 and the Early Church,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 34, no. 3 (2012), 254–276. This view will also be found in post-Quranic times as a theological concept, discussed by classical and modern theologians, where both Muḥammad and Mary are seen as the bearers of God’s word. See the chapter dedicated to this in Ḥusn ‘Abbūd, *Mary in the Qur’an: A Literary Reading* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 130–147; see also Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *The Praised and the Virgin* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

10 Burge notes that in all three monotheistic religions, angels are sent to: prophets, mothers of prophets, and key protagonists in narratives (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 104). On this note and following our remark in the previous chapter, angels being seen by a select group of people denotes another specific aspect of their partial corporality and relationship to the physical and human world.

11 On this important biblical theme (see Genesis 6: 1–4) and related myths in previous

And they followed what the satans recited against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt. But they would not teach anyone until they had said, "We are only a trial, so do not disbelieve." Then they would learn from them that by which they could cause separation between a man and his wife. But they did not harm anyone with it, save by God's Leave. And they would learn that which harmed them and brought them no benefit, knowing that whosoever purchases it has no share in the Hereafter. Evil is that for which they sold their souls, had they but known. Q 2:102

Among the different stories developed by exegetes and commentators around this verse in later Islamic literature,¹² a common one presents these two angels as being put to the test by God, when they claimed to be infallible, perfectly obedient to God, pure, and unable to fall into sin as humans do. God then sent them to Earth as a challenge, which these two angels failed to pass by committing different sins (among them adultery and killing). Georges Dumézil and others, and more recently Roberto Tottoli, argue that the origin of these two figures can be traced back to an Iranian myth (the Zoroastrian archangels Haurvatāt and ‘Ameireitāt), although this story, like the others given as explanations to this verse, could suggest diverse origins.¹³ Indeed, Crone convincingly argues that the content of this story attached to the verse comes from a text belonging to early Christian literature, the *Book of Watchers*, part of the Ethiopian book of Enoch, while the names of Hārūt and Mārūt, in form, are indeed derived from the Iranian legend mentioned above.¹⁴

monotheistic traditions, see Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

- 12 For a review of the different later stories extrapolated around this verse, see Tottoli, "Hārūt and Mārūt" *ET*³. For a detailed review of these stories in Sunni exegesis, and its links with and impact on Jewish traditions, see John C. Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the 'Tale of Hārūt Wa-Mārūt.'" *Journal of American Oriental Society* 135, no. 4 (2015): 817–842. More recently Jean Charles Coulon devoted a long and very good article about this story's developments in the early islamic tradition and the origins of islamic magic: Jean-Charles Coulon, "Le développement de la légende de Hārūt et Mārūt et des origines de la magie dans les premiers siècles de l'islam," in Lauritzen, *Inventer les anges*, 871–941. I will focus only on the reception of these angels in the selected Sufi corpus.
- 13 Georges Dumézil, *Naissance d'archanges* (Gallimard, Paris, 1945). For a list of scholars arguing for this origin, see Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," 818 (f. 4); Tottoli, Hārūt and Mārūt *ET*³.
- 14 Patricia Crone, "The Book of Watchers in the Qur'ān" 182–218; Jean-Charles Coulon sees

While these narratives echo previous religious and mythical literature, we can see here that the Quranic text does not mention or suggest them much. These stories will be attached to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* only later. The Quran only describes them as being sent down into the human world during the time of Babylon, as teachers who took care to present themselves as a trial from God, asking people to keep their faith before teaching them anything. God also explicitly says that if the results of their teaching did harm anyone, it was only part of His divine plans.¹⁵ The verse then gives an image of these two angels as a divine testing tool for humans, in contradiction to their being themselves the subject of a test by God, as understood from the stories later attached to this verse.

This is one example of the use of earlier or contemporary beliefs and myths by the Quranic text. Most of these are now lost, but the audience of the time would have been familiar with them without requiring detailed explanations. Like other narratives echoing pre-Islamic traditions, the Quranic text modifies or reframes this narrative in order to fit the worldview it proposes. Later, very quickly, commentaries will be needed, and other narratives will be grafted onto it from this pre-Islamic material.

Another scene with Quranic angels questioning God—when they ask about the creation of Adam in Q 2:30–38—is similar to the *Book of Watchers*,¹⁶ as if they were questioning God's judgment in sending humans to wreak havoc on Earth. These different scenes discreetly fashion a picture of angels as characters who interact, question, and push other figures of the Quranic narrative to explain themselves (including God) or to find explanations for the origins of strife (wrongly used angelic magic). At first sight, this is quite far from the usual picture of impeccable angels who would not question God. Furthermore, this function of challenge and test has also been noted in Judaic apocryphal literature, as a way for explaining questionable acts in contradiction with the idea of a magnanimous God.¹⁷

there a Judeo-Christian adaptation of an Indo-Iranian legend, Jean-Charles Coulon, *La magie en terre d'islam au Moyen-âge* (Paris: CTHS, 2018), 30–34.

15 Burge also notes that in Old Testament Pseudepigraphia in general, angels are thus contradictorily responsible for teaching the dark arts, while being examples of righteousness and symbolizing the might of God (Burge, *Angel in Islam*, 52–53).

16 Tommaso Tesei, "The Fall of Iblis and Its Enochic Background," in *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception*, ed. Alberdina Houtman, Tamar Kadari, Marcel Poorthuis, Vered Tohar (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 70.

17 For example, in an alternative narrative of Abraham's sacrifice, it is said that an angel (Mastema) is responsible for challenging Abraham to sacrifice his son, while God already knows of Abraham's fidelity. David Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 14–15.

Lastly, in this category of fallen angels, who are somehow disobedient but ultimately are only permitted to be so by virtue of God's plan, the most well-known "tester" of all is the figure of Iblis. He cannot be seen as being fully disobedient, since he obtains from God the role of tempter of humanity, in Q 15:32–43, and God is shown as remaining in full control of developments on Earth (see for example Q 6:112–113, Q 34:20–21). The unclear relationship between Iblis and the categories of angels and *jinn* will be seen in the next chapter.

1.4 *Messengers in the Alluding Verses*

The role of messenger is quite well represented in the alluding verses. We find the verses Q 15:51–65 about messengers sent to Abraham in the form of a dialogue between these characters. Here, the birth of a son is announced to Abraham, and then these messengers state that they had been sent to Lot's family and people. The same story is repeated in a slightly shorter version in verses Q 29:31–33 and Q 51:24–34. In this last retelling, we learn that a particularity of these messengers is that they do not eat human food,¹⁸ and we find this detail in the retelling of this same story in Q 11:69–73.

Incidentally, in Q 29:31–34, these messengers come to punish the people of Lot, a punishment that is echoed in Q 11:77–81 and Q 54:33–39.¹⁹ These intermediaries are inferred by the reader to be an angelic presence, through thematic comparisons between parts of the Quranic text containing the same narrative and previously known biblical stories.

Another messenger role appears in the verses Q 19:17–26, where "*Our Spirit*" (*rūḥanā*)—which could be likened to the Holy Spirit of Christians—is sent in the form of a "*perfect man*" to Mary, self-describes as a "*messenger*" (*anā rasūl*) and announces the birth of Mary's son. Although the Spirit (*rūḥ*) is seen elsewhere as being separate from the angels in Q 70:4,²⁰ "*Our Spirit*" here has been

18 Which differs from the Bible narratives of Abraham's and Lot's visitors, where the angels/messengers are described as eating, in Genesis 18:8 and 19:3 respectively. This could be an additional hint at the Quranic specification of "angels" as a category of beings, and not just a function: These beings have the particularity of not eating human food.

19 No messengers are mentioned in this last group of verses however; only God is seen declaring the coming of His punishment.

20 In this case, as seen before, one could also argue that Gabriel, in the verses naming him directly which present him in the same way with "and" ("the angels and Gabriel"), is to be seen as separated from the angels. In the cultural context of the Quran, it would be hard to regard Gabriel as something else than an angel, as much as a "Our Spirit" reminds us of the Christian Holy Spirit first and foremost, but given the slippery frontiers between angels, *jinn* and other invisible creatures, a doubt remains.

understood later to be Gabriel.²¹ This also illustrates the previously mentioned thesis that angels are sent only to Prophets, here Abraham and Mary.

The Quran contains other messenger roles and figures in a more cryptic manner, as in Q 26:192–195, where a “Trustworthy Spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) also identified later as the Holy Spirit and/or Gabriel, brings the revelation. Similarly, the *miʿrāj* verses Q 53:4–18 are about an “awesome power” (*shadīd al-quwā*); and Q 81:19–21 about a “noble messenger” (*rasūl karīm*).²² Comparing this with Q 2:97 where Gabriel is said to bring a revelation completing the previous ones, it is relatively easy to interpret these three examples as being about Gabriel. Similarly, verses Q 19:64–65 could be seen as a direct quote from Gabriel addressing the Prophet.²³ This indeterminate character in the Quranic text—without a clear textual identification linking it to Gabriel—would later be interpreted in Islamic literature as being Gabriel, in a process seen as peculiar to Islam.²⁴

There are many other roles attributed to undefined beings in the alluding Quranic verses seen in the next chapter, which clearly echo roles from the angel verses. This will develop into angelic protagonists in commentarial literature in this chapter, slowly introducing the cosmological increase of the next chapter. One such role is that of the “driver” and “witness” of Q 50:21–26.

With these elements in mind, let us turn to the commentaries and what they make of these mythopoeic processes presented in the Quran.

21 For an overview of the different identifications given to the Spirit in the Quran and the later Islamic tradition, see Burge, *Angels in Islam* 43–44; Griffith, “Holy Spirit,” *EQ*; Sells, “Spirit,” *EQ*.

22 For a detailed study of sura 53 (*al-najm*) see Patricia Crone, “Problems in Sura 53,” in *The Qurʾānic Pagans and Related Matters* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 140–150, although she considers at times that the word “messenger” (*rasūl*) and “angel” (*malak* or *malāʾika*) mean the same thing, such as in the case of sura 81.

23 For Beck, these are remnants from the early Quranic cosmology where the angelic/cosmic messenger had a prominent role over its anonymous human herald, echoing the pre-Islamic Mesopotamian cosmologies that gave power to the celestial being over its human servant, before a Quranic gradual shift towards the importance of the human messenger (Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qurʾān* 126–138). On his part Al-Azmeh sees in this uncertain “Spirit” an allusion to *malʾak Yahweh* and Metatron in the Jewish literature of the time, a being acting at times like God’s herald or “lesser Yahweh” (Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 343–346), a Spirit continuous with God, a “translocation of divine presence,” where angels could potentially be separate from the deity (Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels” 148).

24 Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 351; Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels” 145–146. We have such an example with Ibn ʿArabī much later, who understands Gabriel (the Holy Spirit) as the father of Jesus, where Christians would consider this Holy Spirit as part of the triune God.

2 The Cosmological Function in the *tafsīr*

2.1 *A New Worldview, Hierarchies, and Groups in Angelic Verses*

2.1.1 The General Relationship between Angels and Humans

Taking a step back from the specific interactions between angels and humans seen in the first chapter, here are examples of more general roles, hierarchies and relationships between angels and humanity within the Islamic cosmology, a subject that has always been an important focus of theological discussion.²⁵ In these Sufi *tafsīr*, this discussion often appears in commentaries on the fall of Adam, a theme which has been analyzed elsewhere.²⁶

We saw that the bowing of the angels to Adam, aside from being a possible model of obedience to God for humans (praxis function in Chapter 1) can also help define a new worldview. Man is central while the angels' status is ambiguous: "inferior" when bowing to Adam, and "superior" as messengers between the heavens and Earth. This ambiguity is also nourished by a shared spiritual identity. In one of these scenes of the bowing to Adam in Q 38:72, an unknown report qualifies the Spirit breathed into man as "the spirit of an angel" (*rūḥ malak*) which seems to be the reason why angels bowed once they were informed.²⁷ This ambiguity and the positions of different authors have been subject matter in the literature.²⁸ These Sufi commentaries also reflect their authors' own ambivalence towards the cosmological place of angels, leading them to question angelic infallibility. The act of (dis)obedience of the verses in Q 2:30–34 elicit from them additional details on the capacities and place of angels.

About these verses, Tustarī writes that what God inspires the angels to do (sanctification and glorification of God) is an action that purifies them,²⁹

25 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 98; Roberto Tottoli, "The Carriers of the Throne of God: Islamic Traditions Between Sunni Angelology and Shī'ī Vision," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 297–299.

26 Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries* 135–173.

27 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq* ii, 190.

28 Lory, *La dignité de l'homme* 177–201. It would seem that "hellenistic *falāsifa*" and "different Shia gnosés" regard angels as superior to humans (Louis Gardet, "*Les Anges En Islam*"). An interesting though brief overview of the relationship between men angels in Sunni mysticism can be found in Pierre Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges* 202–220; See also Murata, "The Angels" 338–342; a longer one in different Sunni sources is found in Samuela Pagani, "La controversia sui meriti relativi degli uomini e degli angeli nella letteratura religiosa musulmana," in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ebook. For a comparison between two particular Sunni authors see Lutpi Ibrahim, "The Questions of the Superiority of Angels and Prophets between Az-Zamakhsharī and Al-Baydāwī," *Arabica* 28, no. 1 (1981): 65–75.

29 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 18.

curiously implying that angels might be impure to start with. Sulamī later relates different reports attributed to different mystics, an unknown one saying that the angels do not understand Scriptures (*dark al-maktūbāt*),³⁰ and other reports stressing other limitations.³¹ The subsequent commentators also highlight angelic limitations at times, a recurring one being that angels do not see the placing of the soul in Adam's body.³² Contrary to his predecessors, Qushayrī tends to present a vision of angels as infallible, given this act of pure obedience, which denotes devotion to God and not the adoration of Adam.³³ This implies the fallibility of humankind, though humans are given a special place, given that God mentions their creation in the Quran, and not that of angels, Paradise and the Throne.

Still on the verses on Adam, Ibn Barrajān 1 gives many details about the existence of different classes of angels, using the word for "tribe" (*qabīla*). Some angels are made of light (*nūr*), and others of fire (*nār*), and the latter are called "*jinn*,"³⁴ as he mentions elsewhere. Then there is a group called "the angels of torment" who question God in Q 2:30, out of pride.³⁵ There is another group of verses that describes the same event, Q 15:28–32, and here Ibn Barrajān 1 explains that the bowing of angels follows the guidance of Adam who is also

30 Angels can be scribes, as seen elsewhere, but here are unable to "attain the realities of the Real," al-Sulamī, i, 54–56.

31 Elsewhere, Sulamī finds further limitations to angelic capabilities, as well as lending them egos they should get rid of in Q 15:28–31. In a report attributed to Ja'far, angels ask questions regarding Adam for God to teach them so that their egos fade away (*tatalāshā 'indahum nufūsahum*), Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 353. A similar comment is made, through a report of unknown origin, on Q 38:71 (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq* ii, 190). Additionally Sulamī recounts three anonymous reports explaining that at the moment of the creation of Adam, angels had not witnessed God adding the soul to Adam's body (*idāfat al-rūḥ ilayhi*), along with "his exceptional place in creation, the uprightness of his repentance, the teaching of the names, and the supervision of the Unseen," however once they were informed of this, they praised God (Sulamī, i, 353–354).

32 We can also mention here Tustarī commenting on Q 50:18 as seen in the narrative function of Chapter 1 (the ignorance of angels of a person's thoughts as long as they do not reach the heart). Similarly, Qushayrī writes, on Q 18:50, that Satan refuses to bow because he only sees the physical aspect of Adam (Qushayrī, ii, 401). Baqlī describes the same idea, in the form of a report of unknown origin as well. However, regarding the "ensoulement" scene of Adam, it needs to be noted that a different report from Abū al-Ḥussayn comes shortly after wherein angels can see the "Spirit" (*al-rūḥ*) in Adam, thus illustrating one of the many examples of contradicting reports mentioned in the introduction (Baqlī, *ʿArā'is al-bayān* ii, 288). All this suggests that these different limitations of angels' capacities was a shared representation, without any seemingly traceable origin.

33 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* i, 79.

34 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 264.

35 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 177.

bowing to God.³⁶ In Ibn Barrajān 2, the text maintains the same classification of angels, into those of light or fire, found in Ibn Barrajān 1. However, these angels question God in order to acquire knowledge, not out of denial.³⁷ Ibn Barrajān 2 also provides another detail, whereby the tribe of the angels of fire cause corruption on Earth (*al-mufsidīn fī-l-aṣḥ*). These are the angels alluded to when God is asked about sending creatures that cause corruption and the shedding of blood on Earth, questioning the divine wisdom in this choice.³⁸ By removing the blame from humankind (who usually had not done anything yet), this seems to echo the narratives of the biblical fallen angels. These angelic tribes are also a new addition to the Quranic cosmology, heralding one of the shifts seen in detail in the next chapter. This invisible hierarchy of Ibn Barrajān somewhat foreshadows that of Ibn ‘Arabī, as one of the many subtle influences of the former author on the latter.

In contrast to Qushayrī and more in line with Ibn Barrajān 2 and Qushayrī’s predecessors, Baqlī presents a picture of angels as being faulty, ignorant and prideful. He explains that God has already “burned thousands of angels one by one” because of their questioning, according to a report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 309/921–922 or 311/923–924); or has “stricken them with ignorance” for the same reason, according to a report attributed to Ja‘far.³⁹ With regard to verses Q 2:30–34 he also writes that “Adam was created for love (*maḥabba*), and angels were created for worship,”⁴⁰ further explaining that, because angels could not see God, God created Adam in his image (*ṣawwara-hu bi-ṣūratihī*), in which he put the mirror of his soul (*mar’āt rūḥi-hī*), so that God could appear to angels (*tajallā lahum*), their bowing becoming thus an act of initiation. In another comment, Baqlī also explains that God might have punished angels for their questioning by denying them access to knowledge, or that they took pride in their service to Him, so God made them look at Adam and bow to him, to teach them that their service meant nothing to Him.⁴¹ Baqlī’s explanations about the

36 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 263. The same interpretation is found in Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 313. This was also seen in the praxis function in the previous chapter.

37 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 124–125.

38 Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 125.

39

فأحرق منهم ساعة واحدة ألوفا (...) ضربهم كلهم بالجهل.

BAQLĪ, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 42

These same reports, with minor differences in their wording, can be traced back in Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* i, 54–55. On these two major references in Sulamī, see Böwering, “The Major Sources of Sulamī.”

40 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 41.

41 Ibid. God not needing angels and their worship is an idea also found in both commen-

creation of angels and Adam generally tend to differ in tone from the others, as seen both through reports attributed to other mystics and in his own opinions on the matter, as his writings accentuate both the blame and laudatory appreciation.

Tustarī presents an interpretation of verse Q 70:4, which mentions an angelic accent, as having an esoteric “inner meaning:” Angels ascend with the deeds of men, testifying for these deeds and men’s sincerity, while the Spirit (*rūh*), mentioned alongside angels, is understood as being the “intuition of the self” (*dhihn al-naḥs*). These angels “cover the distance to the Throne, which measures fifty thousand years, in the blinking of an eye,” which is a faster pace than what is presented in the verse (“on a day”).⁴² Sulamī offers one report on this same verse, precisely attributed to his predecessor, al-Tustarī. Interestingly, it conveys the same idea in a shorter but different manner: “This means the deeds of the children of Adam to God, Exalted is He, and the Spirit watching these deeds in this situation.”⁴³ Compared to the first interpretation in Tustarī, where angels are discrete beings and the Spirit is a metaphor, the second version has the metaphor displaced: angels become metaphors for the deeds of men, while the Spirit returns to being an entity in its own right. The initial tension between the literal and the figurative reading in the Quran continues to fluctuate from one Sufi master to his successors.

Apart from this metaphorical fluctuation, angels are also used to discuss variations of beauty. On Q 12:31 and the story of Joseph, Ibn Barraġān 1 comments on the notion of beauty between humans and angels and its different consequences. He points out that if Joseph is compared to an angel for his beauty, the reason is that angelic beauty is not a type which would stir neither dissension (*fitna*), nor carnal desire (*shahwa*), as human beauty would.

taries of Sulamī (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* i, 221; al-Sulamī, *Ziyādāt ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* 10) which Baqlī presumably borrowed. This seemingly poor opinion of Baqlī on angels is sometimes seen elsewhere, such as in his commentary of 17:14, a verse which he interprets as a station protecting God’s beloveds against the “jealous angels, *jinn*, and humans” (*al-aḡhyār min al-malāʾika wa-l-jinn wa-l-ins*), (Baqlī, *Arāʾis al-bayān* ii, 353), and it has been noted by Coppens as well (Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qurʾan Commentaries* 152–154). It is also shared by other authors, such as al-Farghānī (d. ca. 700/1300) who finds eighteen blameworthy qualities of angels that are corrected by mankind’s deputyship (Murata, “The Angels” 342).

42 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 247. This motif of angels carrying deeds or prayers is also found in early Christian writings (Daniélou, *Angels and their Mission*, 79), with a variation of transporting remorse to the 5th Heaven and humans’ praise to the 4th Heaven (Johann E. Hafner, “Where Angels Dwell” 239–240).

43

أي أعمال بني آدم إلى الله عز وجل والروح إليها ناظر في ذلك المشهد.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 350

This extraordinary non-human beauty is what explains the exceptional infatuation with him that Zulaykha and her guests show, with the guests reacting by cutting themselves with their knives.⁴⁴ Baqlī offers the same interpretation of this verse, explaining that Joseph could not provoke lust in anyone. He then proceeds to compare the reaction of the women seeing Joseph with that of the angels seeing Adam, suggesting that Zulaykha and the women's reactions had not always been so negative and blameworthy.⁴⁵ Accordingly, the women's reaction is not interpreted as being lustful, or as of carnal desire, but more akin to a sense of marvel.⁴⁶

On relations between mystics and angels, various comments throughout the tafsīr works set this particular human group apart. Sulamī specifies on Q 13:23 that “the people of the devotions and of the degrees” (*ahl al-ṭāʿāt wa-l-darajāt*) are the ones receiving salutations from angels.⁴⁷ In this same verse, Q 13:23, Baqlī sees angels welcoming souls into Paradise as their “brothers” (*ikhwānuhum*), at this stage where human spirits become as family in the “station of knowledge and affection” (*maqām al-maʿrifa wa-l-maḥabba*).⁴⁸ Through these examples we perceive an equality between angels and men's souls, for those who succeed in gaining entry to Paradise, though it apparently contradicts the difference of status usually expounded in the scenes of the bowing to Adam.

This closeness between mystics and angels is also found in the commentary of another verse: on Q 13:13, Qushayrī elaborates on the effects of God's strikes on whomever he wills. If these target the heart of the seekers (*murīdīn*) while angels have a glimpse of their hearts, “they cry tears of blood for them” (*yabkūn daman li-ajlihīm*).⁴⁹ This illustrates an interesting aspect of a special relationship between Sufi-minded practitioners and angels, and of the angels' capacity

44 Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 92.

45 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* ii, 168–169.

46 Related to this, in the theological function, Qushayrī explains on Q 8:12 that angels appear in human form when they appear to Muslims, so that these do not know that they are angels (al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* i, 607). On this subject, see the messenger and symbolic functions as well. They may only see them as beautiful humans, such as the Joseph narrative suggests.

47 Al-Sulamī, i, 343. Sulamī also identifies the keepers of Paradise in Q 39:73 according to a report attributed to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ (d. 309/922) (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 205).

48 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* ii, 238. The same idea is found later in the comment on Q 41:30: Angels relaying the welcoming into Paradise comes only after God says it, letting their call be about honoring them (*tashrīf li-l-malāʾika*), and not out of necessity (Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 248).

49 Al-Qushayrī, ii, 221.

to be corporeally closer to humanity at times, if only inducing this closeness by means of metaphor.

Baqlī presents the last angel/mystic comparison on the credo verse, Q 3:18, in which he enumerates the differences of testimony (*shahāda*) of angels and of the people of science (*ūlū al-‘ilm*). That of the angels is uttered out of conviction (*yaqīn*), out of the vision of the Acts (*ru‘yat al-af‘āl*), and out of the vision of the Might (*ru‘yat al-‘azama*), which lead them to have fear (*khawf*), whereas the testimony of the people of knowledge is uttered out of witnessing (*mushāhada*), out of the vision of the Attributes (*ru‘yat al-ṣifāt*), and out of the vision of Beauty (*ru‘yat al-jamāl*) which lead them to have hope (*raja‘*).⁵⁰

2.1.2 Relationship to God and the Angels’ Place in the Overall Islamic Cosmology

By “place” I mean both location—physical or imaginary—and their roles, an ambiguity induced by terms like “station” (*maqām*), widely used in Sufi writings as part of the arsenal of vocabulary used to describe the spiritual path and experiences.

Such a place is the role of Throne-bearers in Q 69:17, on which Tustarī writes that these unnamed and unnumbered angels are made up of “eight regiments of cherubim of unknown number,”⁵¹ a comment accompanied by a *ḥadīth* on an immense angel among them. In Qushayrī, the Throne-bearers in Q 40:7 are described as being the “elite of the angels” (*khawāṣṣ al-malā’ika*), ordered to praise God and asking for forgiveness for the disobedient. Following this is a commentary on Q 40:8–9, mentioning the “angels drawn near” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabīn*) as part of the virtuous within creation, who intervene by helping those who refrain from doing evil, that is, from dealing with the satans of creation.⁵² On these same alluding verses, Q 40:7–9, Ibn Barrajan 2 uses a similar phrase to Qushayrī’s, but for all angels: They are described as the “elite of God” (*khāṣṣat Allāh*).⁵³ Then, Baqlī also naturally identifies angels, providing a long description of them in mystical terms, and, like Qushayrī, he presents them as interceding on behalf of the Friends of God (*awliyā’*).⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 132.

⁵¹ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 244. Roberto Tottoli reviews the studies done on these Throne-bearers in Islamic traditions and how they are related to the biblical vision of Ezechiel (Roberto Tottoli, “The Carriers of the Throne of God” 274–276.)

⁵² Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 297.

⁵³ Ibn Barrajan 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 703.

⁵⁴ Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 229.

On the general angelic and mystical cosmology, Sulamī provides a report on the alluding verse Q 37:164, attributed to Ja'far, whereby all angels and creatures have a station (*maqām*) within creation, a station that cannot be trespassed for fear of destruction (*halak*): “to the Prophets the station of witnessing (*mushāhada*),” “to the messengers the station of seeing (*‘yān*),” “to the angels the station of awe (*hayba*),” “to the believers the station of nearness (*dunuw*) and service (*khidma*),” “to the disobedient the station of repentance (*tawba*),” “and to the disbelievers the station of expulsion (*ṭard*) and curse (*la’na*).”⁵⁵

In this same verse, Q 37:164, Qushayrī identifies angels as his master did, stressing the idea of their having “known stations” (*maqām ma'lūm*) which they do not trespass (*lā yatakhṭṭūna maqāmahum*). He adds that Prophets and Friends of God (*awlīyā*) also have their own stations, the difference being in their guidance. The Prophets’ station in regard to God is made known, while the Friends of God’s are made secret.⁵⁶ Regarding Q 39:75, Qushayrī reiterates that angels are distributed among different stations according to “what the Real wanted from them in their devotion.”⁵⁷ Commenting on Q 20:116, Qushayrī first situates angels “in all of the heavens,”⁵⁸ then, in Q 37:1–10, in a surah opening that could allude to angels, Qushayrī identifies angels for the first four verses, reiterating the idea of angels in different places, “arranged in the Heavens and the air,” and others “reciting the Book of God.”⁵⁹ However, in this Quranic passage Qushayrī does not identify the act of keeping the heavens from satans in Q 37:7 with angels, but gives esoteric interpretations only.

Finally, although he situates the stations of angels and the Spirit in the “world of the Kingdom” (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) in Q 70:4,⁶⁰ Baqlī clearly steers away from any physical geography regarding Q 37:1–10. There, he only gives a mostly mystical interpretation, seeing only in Q 37:3 angels collecting all around the hearts of “those in the Presence of God’s revelation.”⁶¹ Similarly, he offers a fully mysti-

55 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 182. The word “station” (*maqām*) (used in this Quranic verse) is known to have both an exoteric meaning and an esoteric meaning in religious writings (a spiritual level), something frequent in Sufi commentaries.

56 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 243. Ibn Barrajān 2 also identifies angels here (Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 305.)

57

على ما أراد الحق في عبادتهم

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā’if* iii, 293

58 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 481.

59 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 227–228. Ibn Barrajān 1 also identifies angels in the first verses of the 37th surah (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 487–488.)

60 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 452.

61 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 173.

cal interpretation of Q 37:164, whereby only beginners and intermediates on the mystical path know different stations, while those who are in full communion (*al-muwahḥidīn*) know no station, because they are immersed in the Existence and the Attributes (*al-dhāt wa-l-ṣifāt*). Only afterwards, in a report attributed to Jaʿfar, does Baqlī mention angels in the station of awe (*hayba*),⁶² as seen with Sulamī.

Writing on Q 42:5, the peculiar verse wherein the Heavens are nearly split open, Qushayrī gives us an interesting glimpse into a cosmology with different interpretations and references. On a metaphorical level the Heavens are nearly split open by the greatness (*aẓama*) of God; the Heavens are nearly split open by the sheer number of angels because of their weight (*min thiḡal al-malāʾika*), seconded by a *khavar* showing a picture of angels crowding the Heavens in different positions of prayer,⁶³ which is one of the rare allusions to a possible corporeality of these beings. Then Qushayrī gives us a linguistic interpretation, whereby the phrase “the heavens nearly break for him” (*kādat al-samāwāt tan-shaqqu lahu*) was supposedly used by Arabs to denote someone’s greatness, and in this case the verse would have been a rhetorical tool in response to disbelievers, using their style of speech.⁶⁴

On celestial topology, the group of verses in Q 53:4–18 is a base for the later *miʾrāj* narratives (seen in Chapter 4) and they do not clearly mention angels. However Qushayrī identifies Gabriel in Q 53:9, and as the subject of “he saw him” (*raʾahu*) in Q 53:13, Gabriel seeing God while the Prophet Muḥammad was at the Lote Tree (*sidrat al-muntahā*). The commentary then elaborates on the meaning of this tree. Situated in Paradise, this is “the utmost point where angels, the spirits of those who witness (*al-shuhadāʾ*) and all the Creation’s souls are able to reach, while behind it lays what nobody but God knows.”⁶⁵ In the same comment, Qushayrī describes “the garden of refuge” (*jannat al-maʾwā*) as one of the paradises. In approaching God, angels thus become no more advantaged than any human or non-human spirit.

Regarding the Lote Tree Tustarī explains, with reference to the alluding verses in Q 83:18–19, that the “record” of the *ʿIlīyūn* is only the exoteric explanation, and that the verses’ esoteric meaning refers to the spirits of the believers “gathered at the Lote Tree beyond which none may pass, in the form of

62 Ibid., iii, 182–183. He mentions the stations (*maqāmāt*) of the angels elsewhere, such as in his comment on the 55th surah (Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 378).

63 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 342.

64 Ibid.

65 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 482–483. “Those who witness” may also be translated as “martyrs” depending on the context. In Chapter 3 we will again see the importance of the Lote Tree.

green birds which fly freely in Paradise until the day of Resurrection,” while the spirit of the disbelievers are “gathered at *Sijjīn* beneath the lowest Earth.”⁶⁶ Here, Qushayrī echoes his other commentary on these same verses, Q 83:18–21, about this geographical area, identifying the “*‘illīyyūn*” with a place beyond the seventh sky, “the highest of all places” (*a’lā al-amkina*), or with a “book inscribed” (*kitāb marqūm*) witnessed by “those drawn near from the angels” (*al-muqarrabūn min al-malā’ika*), or with the Lote Tree mentioned previously.⁶⁷ More broadly, in Q 83:21 Ibn Barrajān 1 sees prophets, messengers, and angels,⁶⁸ in “those drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*), whereas Baqlī refrains from defining these.⁶⁹ As for Q 89:22, Ibn Barrajān 1 also briefly explains that angelic rows mean different groups of angels according to each realm; i.e., the angels of the Earth and then a group of angels for each Heaven, which doubles in number every time, from Earth to the highest Heaven.⁷⁰

2.1.3 Specific Cosmological Roles

An expected and unsurprising role is that of angel scribes. In the alluding verses already mentioned in Chapter 1, and in the alluding verse Q 68:1, Sulamī, Ibn Barrajān 1 and Ibn Barrajān 2 all identify “honored scribe angels” (*al-malā’ika al-kirām al-kātibūn*) as the subject of the verse.⁷¹ Similarly, in Q 80:15 Qushayrī and Ibn Barrajān 1 identify the scribes (*sqfara*) as angels.⁷²

A particular category of angels that I have encountered numerous times is that of angels related to meteorological events, a particular case studied in detail by Burge in the *ḥadīth*. In some instances, this is due to an exegetical development of angels, which makes them closer to personifications of natural phenomena than full characters. In other instances he analyses them as the remnants of previous myths and beliefs, which make these angels sound more independent.⁷³ We find them in other literary genres, such as an angel causing

66 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 273.

67 Al-Qushayrī, iii, 701–702.

68 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 464. On a non-angelic verse, Ibn Barrajān 2 shows a different geography and meaning around the Lote Tree. It is where prophecy is transmitted, while angels and Heavens are to be found beyond it, instead of before it as suggested in these passages (see “The messenger function in non-angelic verses”).

69 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 492.

70 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 492. Earlier he elaborated on the more physical aspect of cosmology (spheres and associated planets), mentioning the existence of the seven Heavens and, more interestingly, seven Earths (*al-arḍīn al-sab’*), (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 382–384).

71 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 343; Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 365; Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary*, 783.

72 Al-Qushayrī, iii, 689; Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 448.

73 For example, the description of the angel of clouds and thunder (sometimes called Rūfil)

thunder when reciting glorifications of God (*tasbīḥ*), in some narratives of the Prophetic Ascension.⁷⁴ An initial example is Qushayrī on Q 37:2, where he identifies the “drivers” (*zājirāt*) with angels driving clouds, before giving an esoteric interpretation of angels driving people away from disbelief.⁷⁵

The “thunder verse”, Q 13:13, is used to illustrate this meteorological role in particular, as it associates thunder with angels in the praise of God. Tustarī comments on this verse with a saying attributed to ‘Ikrima (d. 104/723): “Thunder is an angel who has been put in charge of the clouds; he drives them along just as a camel herder would do his camels,” accompanied by two *ḥadīth* on thunder being God’s pleasure, or being the clouds’ laugh, giving an overall very positive view of these meteorological events.⁷⁶ In Ibn Barrajān 1, the comment on Q 13:13 is a paraphrase, however. The editor of the volume added a lengthy footnote with several different sources defining “thunder” (*raʿd*) as the voice of an angel, or an angel dedicated to the clouds or driving them,⁷⁷ suggesting a pervasive association of meteorological events with angels. This footnote also illustrates how the meteorological theme turns out to have a dominant role among the different angelic roles within the commentaries of Ibn Barrajān. Indeed, we find angels in charge of the winds in the alluding verses Q 51:1–3, Q 77:1, and Q 79:4, as well as in various other places of the commentaries of Ibn Barrajān.⁷⁸ Additionally, in contrast to Tustarī, it is in Ibn Barrajān 2 that we find thunder associated with provoking fear (*takhwīf*). Furthermore, with regard to Q 13:12–13 Ibn Barrajān 2 describes the prophet as having an “angelic meaning” in the sense of an angelic dimension (*bi-mā kāna fī rasūl Allāh min al-maʿnā al-malakī*) which made him sensitive to meteorological events: “Whenever winds rose or a vision appeared in the sky, his color yellowed and his disquiet grew.”⁷⁹

in some *ḥadīth* could be traced back to ancient thunder gods, whereby clouds were both a destructive force and bringers of necessary rain; there is also a curious *ḥadīth* involving prayers to an “angel of the sun” that could have links with ancient Egyptian mythology. See Burge, “‘Panangelon’: Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism.”

74 Frederick S. Colby, “Uniting Fire and Snow: Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel ‘Ḥabīb’ in Medieval Versions of Muḥammad’s Ascension,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 261.

75 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 227.

76 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 100.

77 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 179–181.

78 Respectively: Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 187; *ibid.* 428–429; *ibid.* 443; I did not list all occurrences here, as it does not add to the function, however such examples can be found in Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 179, 485, 545 among many others in that single volume.

79

متى هبّ الريح أو تخيّلت في السماء مخيلة اسفرّ لونه واشتدّ قلقه.

Baqlī provides a mainly mystical commentary on this same verse, Q 13:13 (see the next chapter); however, he mentions the report attributed to Ibn al-Zanjānī (?), as follows: “The rumbling is the angels’ thunderbolts, lightning the sighs of their hearts, and rain their crying.”⁸⁰

In the alluding verses Q 79:1–4, Ibn Barraġān 1 sees different categories of angels, other than meteorological ones, determined by the actions they conduct in these verses. Those that “wrest violently” and “draw out quickly” in Q 79:1–2 would be angels of death; as well as angels of plants, production, and growth, taking care of these processes by encouraging what needs to be encouraged, and removing what needs to be removed. In Q 79:3, those that “glide serenely” would be angels in charge of making planets and stars maintain their course, and in Q 79:4 those that “race to the fore” would be angels preceding God’s winds wherever these are sent, although the author offers an alternative interpretation where horses are meant in this verse.⁸¹ In Ibn Barraġān 2 these suggested angels have a meteorological role yet again, but the accent is on their “core” function of vivifying creation, of “activating the object for which it was created,” or “preserving creation,”⁸² a wider guardian role that is seen numerous times throughout his commentary.

2.2 The Cosmological Function in the Non-angelic Verses

2.2.1 Relationship between Angels and Humans

Commentaries on this echo the commentaries on angelic verses in a rather expected way. Here are some examples from Tustarī to Baqlī. First, an idea that we find in Tustarī on Q 59:7⁸³ and in other commentaries, is that one mark of distinction for humans is to have a more specific relationship with angels. For instance, in Q 7:46, Tustarī identifies the “people of the Heights” with “the people of gnosis [mystical knowledge] (*maʿrifa*)”, honored by this standing, “and the two angels know them.”⁸⁴ Considering Q 20:118, Sulamī presents a report attributed to Ibn ʿAṭā, in which he mentions three elements marking the special place of man in the Creation: his external appearance, the breathing of the

80

الوعد صعقات الملائكة، والبرق زفرات أفئدتهم، والمطر بكائهم.

BAQLĪ, *Arāʾis al-bayān* ii, 226

81 Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 443.

82

تنشط المعقول لما وجد له، حفظ المخلوق.

IBN BARRAJĀN 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 819

83 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 226.

84 Ibid. 73.

Spirit into him, and the bowing of angels.⁸⁵ Tustarī's commentary on Q 114:4 relates an encounter with a man who decided to stay in Mecca after many travels because it was filled with wonders; a place where "the angels unceasingly circumambulate the House [Kaaba] morning and night in diverse forms."⁸⁶ This indicates a possible interaction, if only by sight, between people (who are not prophets) and angels. This story also echoes the centrality of the Kaaba, seen in the praxis and credo functions, reinforcing here the importance of Mecca and its physical and spiritual centrality.

A possibly greater interaction between non-prophets and angels is found in the Sulamī commentary on Q 16:128, in a report attributed to Mimshā' al-Dīnwarī (d. 299/912) that provides a personal cause of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) to this verse: "I saw one of the angels, and he told me: 'All of those who are with God are annihilated except one man.' I asked him: 'Who?,' he told me: 'The one with whom God was when He said "Truly God is with those who are reverent, and those who are virtuous."'"⁸⁷

With regard to the human/angel comparison, Sulamī also presents an anonymous report concerning Q 18:18, in which someone is asked about the difference between the lights of God's guidance (*anwār hidāyatihi*) and the lights of the angels (*anwār al-malā'ika*). The answer is that the lights of the angels are the lights of His generosity (*karāmātihi*) and the lights of the children of Adam are the lights of His guidance and "this is both an inner (*ẓāhir*) and outer (*bāṭin*) light," a human duality that Chapter 5 echoes and shows in more detail. This answer also causes a greater awe, hence this part of the verse: "thou wouldst have turned away in flight." The report ends with an allusion to a particular *ḥadīth*, containing yet another comparison of a case of intra-Islamic legitimization: "there was no flight from the angels' lights at the occultation as there was a flight like that of Satan from 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb."⁸⁸

85 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 451.

86 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 321.

87 رأيت ملكاً من الملائكة يقول لي: كل من كان مع الله تعالى فهو هالك إلا رجلاً واحداً، قلت: ومن هو؟ قال: من كان الله معه وهو قوله: إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مُحْسِنُونَ.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 380

88 ولم يكن من أنوار الملائكة عند الحجب فراراً كفرار الشيطان من عمر الخطاب.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 407

Several *ḥadīth* seem to be about Satan fleeing 'Umar, see for instance *ḥadīth* 2396 in *Saḥīḥ muslim*.

On the “verse of Light” Q 24:35, for which Sulamī offers numerous reports, one is attributed to al-Junayd (d. 298/911), whereby God enlightens (*mun-awwar*) the heart of the angels so that they glorify and sanctify Him (*sabbahū-hu wa-qaddasūhu*), and the hearts of the Messengers so that they know the true mystical knowledge (*ḥata ‘arafū ḥaqīqat al-ma‘rifa*) and worship Him with true worship (*ḥaqīqat al-‘ubūdiyya*). Two anonymous reports further draw a parallel between mystics and angels: “the light of heavens is the angels, and the light of the earth is the Friends of God” (on the verse of light); “He made the Earth a dwelling-place for His Friends, and the sky a canopy for His angels” (on verse Q 40:54).⁸⁹ Above all, however, a special place is already made for the Prophet. Within a long report on Q 48:29, attributed to al-Qāsim in Sulamī, we find a brief mention of Muḥammad, who appears as distinguished above both angels and other prophets.⁹⁰

Here we also find angels involved in reflections on emotions. Sulamī presents a report on Q 32:16, attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 108/728), about the notion of fear: “The fear of the Prophets, the Friends of God, and the masters of mystical knowledge is the fear of impudence, and the fear of the angels is the fear of God’s cunning, and the fear of the general people is the fear of the destruction of the self, and expectation and hope are the matter in cause”.⁹¹ This is another example of emotions attributed to angels, although they are often presented as pure spirits. This specific fear underlines one of their basic roles, obeying God to the letter of His word—as misunderstanding him because of His cunning would mean failing at their role. Another unexpected reaction of angels, that of dispute, also emerges in the commentaries. Sulamī identifies the “Highest Assembly” (*al-mala’ al-a‘lā*) as angels in his commentary on Q 55:1–2 by allud-

89

نور السماوات والملائكة ونور الأرض الأولياء.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā’iq*, ii, 46–52

جعل الأرض قراراً لأولياءه والسمااء بناء لملائكته.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 212The same report is given by Baqlī (Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 239), who repeats it in more mystical terms on Q 42:13 (ibid. 262).90 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 259.

91 خوف الأنبياء والأولياء وأرباب المعارف خوف التسليط وخوف الملائكة خوف مكر الله وخوف العامة خوف تلف النفس والرجاء والطمع عين التهمة.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 138

ing to Q 38:69,⁹² and so does Qushayrī, who elaborates on the same verse with a quote attributed to Muḥammad: “I would not have had knowledge of this Highest Assembly and their dispute if God had not informed me of it,” mentioning further that these angels were in dispute concerning Adam and his being sent to Earth.⁹³

Although angels are seen as disputing about men, they also witness human actions. Commenting on Q 7:168, Qushayrī mentions angels and the rest of the creatures as witnesses “to the core of men, in their differences and agreement, devotion and hypocrisy.”⁹⁴ Later, writing about Q 25:44, Qushayrī puts together an interesting summary of the variable hierarchical relationship between humans, angels, and animals, thus somehow settling the ambivalence running through all the passages discussing this relationship:

*Indeed God—Exalted He be—created the angels and molded them on reason, [He created] the cattle and gave them the instinct of passion, and [He created] humans and built in them both matters; so he who has his passion in control of his reason is worse than cattle, and he who has his reason in control of his passion, then he is better than the angels ... So the shaykhs said.*⁹⁵

92 Al-Sulamī, ii, 292. In the “angelic verse” part of this section, we have seen that the Highest Assembly is more generally identified with the first Heaven by Ibn Barrajān.

93 وما كان لي من علم بالملائة الأعلى واختصاصهم فيه لولا أن الله عرفني

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 262

Following this is another comment, presented as a *khabar* on the Prophet and Gabriel, and the comment ends in a way that could suppose that all of it is reported from the Prophet: “And thus it was revealed to me and I am but a clear warner” (*wa-hakadhā innamā yūḥā ilayya wa-anā mundhir mubīn*).

94 جواهرهم في الخلاف والوفاق، والإخلاص والنفاق.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* i, 582

95 وإن الله—سبحانه—خلق الملائكة على العقل جبلهم، والبهائم على الهوى فطرهم، وبني آدم وركب فيهم الأمرين، فمن غلب هواه عقله فهو شر من البهائم، ومن غلب عقله هواه فهو خير من الملائكة ... كذلك قال المشايخ.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 638

On Q 98:7, Qushayrī makes a similar but much shorter comment: The believers here who are in this verse “the best of creation” are described by Qushayrī as better than the angels (al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 754).

This potential of humans has been previously noted and belongs to the never-ending debate of “Who is better, man or angel?”. Similarly, within the commentary of the 19th surah, Ibn Barraġān 1 mentions “human satans” (*shayāṭīn al-ins*) and “human angels” (*malā’ikat al-ins*),⁹⁶ according to one’s created nature, which could give him the same solution as offered by Qushayrī to resolve the ambiguity in the angel/human hierarchy. However, his comment is followed by a comparison of the order between the growth of man and cosmological growth by God’s command (*nushū’ al-amr*), “In the world, from mineral to plant, to animal, to man and *jinn*, to believer, to Friend, to Prophet, to angel, and he who studies the existence thoroughly will find it as we mentioned.”⁹⁷ This gives an interesting albeit classically hierarchical vision of the world which turns the previous relationship between angels and humans, as seen in the story of Adam, on its head. In the commentary on the 30th surah, Ibn Barraġān 2 echoes this cosmological hierarchy, but with the word “degree” (*daraja*) which has a more mystical connotation. All creatures have different degrees, until the Spirit is breathed into them and out of which is created the degree of humanity. Within this degree, subcategories are classified as follows: human, believer, Friend (*waliyy*), Prophet, Messenger, and then angel.⁹⁸

Lastly, turning to Baqlī, he mentions the creation of Adam again when commenting on the 3rd surah, giving the reason that God gave “the robe of honor of His stewardship” (*khil’a khilāfatihī*) to Adam for explaining the bowing of

96 This theme of angelic and devilish humans is found in different places of Ibn Barraġān 1, for example, a brief sentence within the commentary of the 23rd surah, on an end-of-the-world scene with the Dajjāl and his party, sending satans in the form of men, and the righteous party (*al-ḥizb al-ṣāliḥ*) sending angels in the form of men (Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 118).

97 في العالم من جماد إلى نبات إلى حيوان إلى إنس وجن إلى مؤمن إلى صادق إلى نبي إلى ملك ومن استقرأ الوجود ألفاه على ما ذكرنا.

IBN BARRAĠĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 483

He presents the same hierarchy, with slightly more details and the concept of a “link” (*waṣl*) between each class of beings, commenting on (43:60) (Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 95), and again the same hierarchy writing on (55:19) where he talks about a “*barzakh*” being between each class of beings (Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 245). This chain of creature is a feature of a Neoplatonic representation of the universe (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 90).

98 Ibn Barraġān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 561. On (2:269) Baqlī similarly designates the position of the angels as “the highest position of the positions of the Friends of God and the highest rank of the stations of the pure”

منزلة الأعلى من منازل الأولياء ومرتبة العليا من مقامات الأصفياء.

BAQLĪ, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 112

angels.⁹⁹ On the subject of Jesus in Q 4:171, Baqlī then offers an alternative vision to the reason for angels bowing to Adam, as he compares how people were drawn to Jesus, “as the angels of God loved (*‘ashaqat*) the face of Adam, and because of this they bowed to Adam.”¹⁰⁰ Baqlī later presents an alternative explanation to the ambivalent angel/human relationship and hierarchy. Regarding Q 17:70, he explains that the preference (*al-afḍaliyya*) given to some men, such as prophets, over “angels drawn near” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn*) is not due to their constitution, which does not go beyond the “station of reason” (*maqām al-‘aql*), but because of the “innermost secret deposited in them” (*al-sirr al-mūda’a fī-him*).¹⁰¹ In relation to this, he uses a threefold comparison to highlight these special men when commenting on Q 40:12, playing on both exoteric and esoteric cosmology. He identifies “cherubim” (*karūbiyyin*) adorning the heavens, as “He adorned the Earth with the Prophets and the Friends of God,” and as the hearts of the mystical knowers (*al-‘arīfīn*) are adorned with “the suns of the Essence’s disclosure, the moons of the Attributes’ droop, and the fires of the masteries of the secrets of the Kingdom and the Sovereignty.”¹⁰² This threefold comparison between a special class of angels in heaven, a special class of humans on Earth, and their hearts within which the divine connection resides, outlines an esoteric cosmology.

2.2.2 General Cosmology

This theme also appears in different examples from Tustarī to Baqlī in non-angelic verses. Writing on Q 16:53, Tustarī points out that bearers of the Throne are higher in rank than other angels.¹⁰³ As for the recording angels in Q 3:61, Tustarī follows up with the idea of their limited capabilities, as seen previously in the theological function, by saying that those humans who glorify God are those who remember, and “this is not written down by the recording angels, for it is a witnessing of the One remembered in a remembrance that is through the

99 Ibid. 143.

100 Ibid. 290.

101 Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 370.

102 كما زينّا الأرض بالأنبياء والأولياء (...) شمس تجلي الذات وأقمار تدّي الصفات ونيرات سيادات أسرار الملكوت والجبروت.

BAQLĪ, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 245

Later, regarding Q 41:38, these same cherubim and Friends of God are “those who are with thy Lord that glorify Him night and day” (Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 251). We will come back to the cherubim and *muqarrabūn* in the next chapter.

103 Al-Tustarī *Tafsīr* 108.

One remembered.”¹⁰⁴ This goes even further than the cosmological shift in the Quran, whereby the only intermediaries between God and humans were angels instead of the free-willed *jinn*. Here, the connection to the divine is direct and cannot even be comprehended by the angels.

A more usual limitation in knowledge is seen in Sulamī writing on Q 7:172, with a report attributed to al-Ḥusayn (d. 60/680), according to which none of the “angels drawn near” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabīn*) “knows what made the Creation appear, and how the End and the Beginning come about.”¹⁰⁵ Similarly, in verse Q 7:1, consisting of some letters (*alif, lām, mīm, šād*), Sulamī presents a report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ on the significance of letters. God has given them a secret (*ja’ala lahā sirran*), and “when he created Adam He breathed into him this secret (*dhālika al-sirr*), while he did not transmit it to the angels.”¹⁰⁶ However, on (20:6), Sulamī elaborates on the “secret” (*sirr*) mentioned in this verse, which is possibly different or greater from the one just mentioned, as it is presented as something that is not known by humans, or angels, or Satan, or reason.¹⁰⁷

In Q 69:38–39, Sulamī interprets what is seen and what is not in a parallel manner, with a report attributed to al-Ḥusayn: “what has been shown” means what has been shown to the angels, to the Pen and the Tablet (*li-l-malā’ika wa-l-qalam wa-l-lawḥ*), and “what has not been shown” means what God has not brought into existence and which the Pen has not written and was not felt by the angels.¹⁰⁸

Regarding Q 30:22, which mentions the diversity of tongues as signs of God, as well as Earth and Heavens, Qushayrī presents a parallel between the diversity of human languages mentioned in this verse and angels: “Of His signs is the diversity of tongues of the people on Earth, and the diversity of glorification of the angels who are the inhabitants of the Heaven.”¹⁰⁹ This is one example

104 Ibid. 45.

105 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* i, 249. The attribution to the Prophet’s grandson is only a supposition, as we have not found this saying elsewhere.

106 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* i, 219. This preference for humans is mentioned again in Sulamī on (50:1–2) through another report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 292).

107 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* i, 435. Similarly, Qushayrī mentions briefly on (20:82) that the angels do not have access to God’s innermost secret (*al-sirrīyya*), (al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 469).

108 We find these remarks in a report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ on the same verses in Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 450. Sulamī further explains that “what has been shown” also means what has been shown to the creation of His Attributes (*ṣifātihi*), His work (*ṣun’ihi*) and His knowledge (*‘ilmihī*) and “what has not been shown” has been kept as a grain (*dharra*) in this world and the next, lest it consume—had it been shown—all creation (al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 348.)

109 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 113. On Q 41:38, he calls angels “the inhabitants of the next world”

of the classic subsuming of the exoteric dimensions of the sky and the air, in imagination, to the theological heaven, related to the “Kingdom” (*malakūt*) and the eschatological concept of the afterlife (*al-ākhirah*), which are all part of the Unseen, and all of which are places where the angels are among the main inhabitants or actors. Qushayrī provides further details on what exactly “descends” from these Heavens in verse Q 34:2: rain, angels, blessings (*baraka*), livelihood (*rizq*), and justice (*ḥukm*).¹¹⁰ Qushayrī, referring to Q 51:22, repeats to readers that “part of your livelihood” (*qismat arzāqikum*) is in the Heavens, and angels dedicated to this are in charge of bringing it down from there.¹¹¹ With reference to Q 57:4, Qushayrī adds an ascending movement: Whereas rain, livelihood, and angels with justice and revelation descend, other angels, devotions of the servants, supplications of the Creation, the folios of those in charge (presumably of the angels-scribes), and the souls of the believers ascend to the Heavens.¹¹² This dual movement of descent and ascent echoes the well-known biblical theme of the stairs leading to Heaven.

Ascending angels and biblical influences are also seen in Ibn Barrajān 1, reflecting on Q 32:4–5, who dives into a long comment on the seven Heavens, the seventh having the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*) and the Seat (*al-kursī*), though there is a Throne for each heaven, and whereby angels ascend (*taʿruj*) with the Command and descend between the Earth and the first Heaven. He then mentions what is recorded in “the previous books and the primordial science” (*al-kutub al-mutaqaddima wa-l-ʿilm al-awwal*) of the four angels bearing the Throne: “one is like a man, one is like a bull, one is like a lion, and one is like an eagle.”¹¹³ Though he later mentions Seraphiel (Isrāfil), Michael, Gabriel and Azrael as bearers of the Throne among eight (a number the commentator draws from a quoted *ḥadīth*),¹¹⁴ the description of these first four angels are an interesting example of the survival and re-use of pre-Islamic beliefs and cosmological imaginaries; it echoes more specifically the *ḥayyōt* in the vision of Ezechiel in the Bible.¹¹⁵

(*sukkān al-ākhirah*), (al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 333).

110 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 176.

111 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 464.

112 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 533.

113 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 369–370.

114 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 372–373. He repeats this later in the commentary on the 69th surah, both the four animal-like angels, and the four archangels, of which he names only two, Michael and Seraphiel (Isrāfil), while he remarks that for the other two their “names dropped from my memory” (*kharaja dhikr asmāʾa-humā ʿan dhikrī*), Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 373.

115 Burge explains that while the influence is clear, and this tradition widespread in Islamic

Regarding natural elements and the Islamic retelling of older cosmological imaginaries, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions Q 38:67–69 and Q 38:71 on a separate section of his commentary of the 6th surah, writing about angels who are not allowed to err (*lam yajuz alayhim khaṭṭā*), among them angels created of water, an element that also proceeds from light (*min qabīl al-nūr*). These angels are “spread out for remembrance and devotion in what they were given care of plants, minerals, and Earth.” The commentator explains then that these angels and their actions were called “the Forces” (*al-qiwā*) by the “ancients” (*al-awā'il*) who had not received any light of revelation (*nūr nubuwwa*), and although this appellation was not wrong per se, it included mostly pagan ways that the commentator deplores.¹¹⁶ This shows, however, an attempt to streamline elements from different belief systems into a logical arc of Islamic cosmology.

Regarding the different planes of existence, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions the alluding verses 72:26–27 within the commentary of the 27th surah, and comments on the relativity of the “Unseen” (*ghayb*), of which he gives a concise definition:

The Unseen is such relatively to some and not others, such as the angels and their knowledge are unseen to us, but they are not so to themselves, and so is the case for the jinn, and everything that is hidden from our witnessing and our knowledge is unseen to us, even if it is seen and known by others than us, and the absolute Unseen is what is not known by anyone but itself, such as His words “And with him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He”.¹¹⁷

Ibn Barrajān 1 further details cosmological planes in his commentary on Q 67:1: the “Dominion” (*mulk*) mentioned in the verse is the “external world, what is seen” (*zāhir al-‘ālam, al-mushāhid minhu*), and the “Kingdom” (*malakūt*) is “the

texts, this image “is adapted, used and developed in Islamic traditions independently” (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 60).

¹¹⁶ Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 247.

¹¹⁷ ومن الغيب ما يكون غيبا بالإضافة إلى بعض دون بعض، كاللائكة وعلومهم هم غيب في حقنا، وليسوا بغيب عند أنفسهم، وكذلك الجن، وكلما غاب عن مشاهدتنا وعلينا فهو غيب في حقنا، وإن كان مشاهدا ومعلوما لسوانا، وإنما الغيب المقطوع أنه لا يعمل سواه، كالمنعنى بقوله {وعنده مفاتيح الغيب لا يعلمه إلا هو}.

inner one, the affair of the angels" (*huwa bāṭinuhu, wa-huwa fi'l al-malā'ika*). God is "the Maker" (*al-ṣāni'*), the Dominion is what is Made (*maṣnū'*), and the Making is the affair of the angels (*wa-l-ṣan'a fi'l al-malā'ika*) who organize God's command and wish—"and because He hid the Making in the Made, He called the hidden: Kingdom."¹¹⁸ This implies that the angelic plane is situated within the physical one, a notion that we will find with Ibn 'Arabī in Chapter 5. From this Unseen, commenting on Q 2:164, Ibn Barraḡān 2 describes the clouds driven by the angels to make the "dead land" (*al-balad al-mayyit*) alive with "a life extracted from the Unseen of Paradise."¹¹⁹ Later he writes that angels keep this "position" of being hidden in creation, and do so until Judgment Day, when they will stand "behind the creatures" (*min warā' al-khalā'iq*).¹²⁰ Furthermore, at the end of the world, angels' existence seems to depend on the world's physical existence. In the comment on Q 2:153, he writes that if God decides to end an Earth and its celestial system to create a better one, "this order comprises the death of its angels,"¹²¹ which echoes angelic mortality seen in Tustarī commenting on Q 39:69 in Chapter 1.

The relation between mystics and angels appears again when Baqlī gives a mystical definition of the Unseen on Q 11:123, comparing angels and the special group of the mystics:

118

ولإخفاء الصنعة في المصنوع، سمي المخفي: ملكوتا.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* v, 358–359

In Ibn Barraḡān 2, he calls the Kingdom (*malakūt*) the "object" or "deed" of the angels (*maṣ'ūl al-malā'ika*) (Ibn Barraḡān 2, *A Qur'ān Commentary* 303; *ibid.* 601), and furthermore "what the angels do" (*fa-huwa ma yafalahu al-malā'ika*) (Ibn Barraḡān 2, *A Qur'ān Commentary* 736), and a "secret within the existence of the dominion" (*sirr fī wujūd al-mulk*) (*ibid.* 779).

119

الحياة المستخرج من غيب الجنة.

IBN BARRAJĀN 2, *A Qur'ān Commentary* 160

Angels dedicated to life on Earth in all of its forms is also a recurrent theme in both Ibn Barraḡān 1, and Ibn Barraḡān 2. Another example is the commentary of the 87th surah, with the mention of angels of the sun, water and "what God made under the Earth" (*mā ja'ala Allāh fī al-turāb*) (*ibid.* 840).

120 *Ibid.* 850.

121 *Ibid.* 153. To Ibn Barraḡān, angels are indeed seen as an essential part of the world's infrastructure, both spiritual and physical, as we have seen earlier when Ibn Barraḡān 1 commented on Q 42:5, in which the angels' intercession accorded by God held the world together, while Ibn Barraḡān 2 reiterates this same thought on the beginning of 37th surah (*ibid.* 602).

*The Unseen of the heavens is what is found of the sciences of the destinies in the hearts of the angels, that flows in qualities of fate and divine decree on the servants' actions; and the Unseen of the Earth is the sciences of the mystical knowledge of His Essence and His Attributes in the hearts of the Prophets, the Messengers, the mystical knowers and the sincere.*¹²²

Regarding access to this Unseen, in his commentary on Q 3:84 Baqlī explains that he who is overcome by the love-affection (*maḥabba*) of God sees with his “innermost vision” (*abṣār sirrihi*) the world of the Kingdom and the “Unseen of the Real” (*ghayb al-ḥaqq*) of which the angels are part.¹²³ Mystical characteristics help the seeker cross planes of existence, having a wider reach within Islamic cosmos than most believers.

2.2.3 Specific Cosmological Roles

As previously seen in the angelic verses section, the “meteorological angels” appear numerous times throughout the works of Ibn Barrajān. This is true of his commentaries on the non-angelic verses as well, as if this aspect of the natural world had a particular importance to him. Among these examples we can mention his commentary on Q 13:17, underlying the utmost importance of rain. He likens the descent of the Quran with Gabriel to the descent of rain with angels, and more generally the descent of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and revelation (*waḥī*) on God’s command.¹²⁴ In Ibn Barrajān 2 we also find interpretations of the “We” of majesty as a plural pronoun to designate angels and the wind and God’s action through them in bringing water and life, described in Q 50:9.¹²⁵ This could be a way to explain this metaphorical “We” as a literal plural for God’s angelic servants, as seen in the first chapter, with Qushayrī’s examination of Q 89:22.

¹²² غيب السماوات ما في قلوب الملائكة من علوم المقادر التي تجري بنعوت القضاء والقدر على أفعال العباد، وغيب الأرض علوم معرفة ذاته وصفته في قلوب الأنبياء والمرسلين والعارفين والصادقين.

BAQLĪ, *Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 144

¹²³ Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* i, 164.

¹²⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 191–194. Another example is in the comment on Q 15:22–23, where air and water are sent with angels in charge of the winds, with the reiteration of angels taking care of nature and its elements, responsible for its movements and changes (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 260–261).

¹²⁵ Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 572. Another example of trying to avoid a literal presence of God and replacing his direct presence is seeing angels intervene where one would usually understand God, or at least an unknown narrator. Ibn Barrajān 2 explains, regarding Q 75:11, that the angels are answering humans at Judgment Day, telling them “Nay! But there shall be no refuge” (Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 807).

These commentaries move away from a strict “*bilā kayf*” Sunni approach of the Quran regarding anthropomorphic mentions of God, and instead of avoiding any explanation, they seem to attempt a more “pragmatic” understanding by involving angels where need be. This illustrates another way of dealing with the literal/figurative reading of the Quran: using the literal characters of angels to analyze a verse that is read figuratively.

The main angelic relationship to the Quran is the transmission by Gabriel, but we find other examples, as when Qushayrī writes that “the angels of night and day” are the subject of the witnessing done in verse Q 17:78 on the “Quran of dawn” (*qur’ān al-fajr*).¹²⁶ Similarly, Baqlī sees in this verse the Quran “attended to by the presence of the angels of night and day.”¹²⁷

Among the specific angelic roles is that of teacher in a reversal of the known Quranic topoi of Adam teaching the angels. In the commentary of the 29th surah, Ibn Barrajan 2 elaborates a mystical vision of devotions, within which the “high knowledge” (*al-‘ilm al-‘alīyy*) is “reserved to the elite of [God’s] servants” (*al-makhzūn li-khawāṣṣ ‘ibādihi*) who gain it, partly thanks to the angels:

[... *The high knowledge*] which is the knowledge of the Oneness in its overarching truth over all knowledge, that the Prophets conducted and that the angels—peace upon them—taught until its knowers saw with the visions of their hearts the truth propagate in the Heavens and the Earth.¹²⁸

Other specific cosmological roles briefly appear within commentaries on non-angelic verses. On the 38th surah, Ibn Barrajan 1 mentions angels in charge of the celestial spheres (*aflāk*), a role that Ibn ‘Arabī will write about too (seen in Chapter 5).¹²⁹ Commenting on Q 52:41, Ibn Barrajan 1 explains that angels write whatever the world of the Unseen delivers to them.¹³⁰ On the 112th surah, Ibn Barrajan 2 identifies “the angels drawn near” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn*) as the Throne-Bearers, sent everywhere in creation when the order is given reciting this surah.¹³¹ Analyzing (76:16), Ibn Barrajan 1 comments on a very specific

¹²⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 364.

¹²⁷ Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 379.

¹²⁸ وهو علم التوحيد بحقيقته المشتمل على كل علم آداه الأنبياء وعلمه الملائكة عليهم السلام حتى يرى مدركو ذلك بأبصار قلوبهم الحق المبثوث في السماوات والأرض.

IBN BARRAJĀN 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 550

¹²⁹ Ibn Barrajan 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 519.

¹³⁰ Ibn Barrajan 1, *Tafsīr* v, 205.

¹³¹ Ibn Barrajan 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 894.

role; i.e., angels making vials of silver (*qawārīr min al-fidḍa*) mentioned in the verse,¹³² adding illustrative details to the otherwise very elliptic verse for the sake of the reader. Sulamī was already presenting a report on Q 52:23 attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’, which takes this verse with majlis-like scenes as a metaphor where the attendant’s role (*al-sāqī*) is given to angels and the drink is the remembrance of God, with drunkenness being related to witnessing (*sukruhum ‘alā al-mushāhada*), and people being the companions of God (*julasā’ Allāh*).¹³³ This outlines an image of Paradise close to the fabled Caliphal courts. These diverse secondary angelic roles also participate in the function of cosmological enrichment—presented in the next chapter—which might help readers recreate and appropriate the Islamic cosmology into their life, and which might especially help mystically-oriented readers switch their attention to more spiritual and inner matters—of which the angels are the foremost representatives.

3 The Role of Messenger: The Classic Cosmological Function in *tafsīr*

3.1 *Angels as Messengers in Angelic Verses*

Mentions of Gabriel, the messenger *par excellence*, naturally and mostly belong to this category. This obvious fact needs no deep analysis, although the reader should keep it in mind. In the next chapter, a separate section concerns angels with personal names, and it is under the new light that we will review the main mentions of Gabriel. We will review here other cases of angel messengers, starting with the story of Abraham’s guests. In Q 51:24, they are identified as angels by Tustarī and Qushayrī,¹³⁴ and with numbers. They could either be 12 different angels, or Gabriel accompanied by seven other angels, or three angels. However, Sulamī reports only around the concept of “honored ones” (*mukramīn*) in these verses,¹³⁵ even though he does identify angels in another Quranic version of the story of Abraham’s guests in Q 11:69–73, through a report attributed to al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 320/938) and another anonymous one.¹³⁶

On these same verses, Q 11:69–73, Qushayrī explains that Abraham did not recognize them as angels at first, because they appeared as men. The commen-

132 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 421.

133 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 281. The same report is given by Baqlī (Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 352).

134 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 208; Qushayrī, iii, 465–566.

135 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 275–276.

136 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* i, 321.

tary elaborates on the etiquette of preparing food for guests (as mentioned in the previous chapter), and it is when Abraham's guests did not touch the food that he recognized them for what they were,¹³⁷ adding an interesting detail at the end of the commentary:

*It was said in that time that angels did not descend openly except for punishment; so when they restrained themselves from taking food and he understood they were angels, he became afraid that they had been sent for the punishment of his people.*¹³⁸

A few verses later, in Q 11:81, Qushayrī also identifies the messengers sent to Lot as angels, with the recurring theme of terrifying angels. With the example of the prophetic *sīra* and the first encounter with Gabriel, the modern reader will recall that angels always tend to be associated with fright, therefore seeing one is not a good sign. They need then to state their good intentions to Lot, in words in this case, as the commentary shows: “Do not worry, for they did not come to you with evil intentions, and indeed we are the messengers of your Lord come to destroy them.”¹³⁹

In his commentary on the version of the story of Abraham in Q 15:51–60 and the story of Lot in Q 15:61–65, Ibn Barrajān 1 identifies the messengers unsurprisingly as angels, however, showing an awareness of the biblical Hebrew ambiguity (seen in Chapter 1), he mentions that although the Torah mentions “men” (*rijāl*), they are in reality angels.¹⁴⁰

On the topic of sending down angels and the Spirit in verse Q 16:2, Sulamī explains that people receiving inspiration from angels or the Spirit are those

137 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 145–146. This echoes an earlier commentary by Qushayrī on Q 8:9 as appearing as men.

138 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 146. See also a similar commentary and confirmation of Abraham's guests as angels, as well as Lot's guests, in Q 15:51–65 in al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 275–276. Similarly, in Q 11:69–74, Baqlī identifies angels who frighten Abraham (Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* ii, 127–130).

139 لا عليك فإنهم لا يصلون إليك بسوء، وأنا رسل ربك جئنا لإهلاكم.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 149

He adds the reason why Lot's wife is among the punished: She suggested to Lot's people that they should fornicate with the angel. A similar commentary on the angels as source of fright, in the same Lot story, is found in al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 96. Baqlī similarly identifies angels in Lot's story.

140 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 268 and 270. Ibn Barrajān 2 and Baqlī identify angels here as well (Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 444; Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* ii, 296–297).

who have attained the “station” (*maqām*) of prophecy, their situation coming about with affliction (*balāʾ*) or mercy (*raḥma*). A more mystical report attributed to Ibn ʿAṭāʾ follows: Whoever converses with the angel in his “secret self” (*fī sirrihi*) will receive “details on the Unseen” (*khaṣāʾiṣ al-ghayb*), and the angel will “open his soul to a way for gazing upon of the Nearness.”¹⁴¹ Furthermore, in his commentary on Q 53:4 Sulamī introduces a report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī (d. ca. 320/923), additionally specifying that common people (*al-ʿamma*) can receive “revelation” (*waḥy*) from the “Friends of God” (*awliyāʾ*), while the human messengers (*rusul*) receive it from angels.¹⁴² However, commenting back on Q 16:2, Qushayrī explains that angels descend with Revelation (*waḥy*) and a message (*risāla*) to the prophets, but they also descend with “determination” (*taʾrīf*) and inspiration (*ilhām*) to the “mystics spoken to” (*muḥaddathūn*). In this case, as Qushayrī then concludes, different people can interact with angels, but in contrast to prophets, “they are not commanded to speak about it, and not burdened with bearing a message to Creation.”¹⁴³ We note here a variation on what is understood as “revelation”: Qushayrī makes a linguistic distinction between revelation (for prophets) and inspiration (for others), angels being at the origin of both, while his master Sulamī does not distinguish prophetic revelation from non-prophetic revelation, the distinction being marked by the angels who are behind the prophetic revelation, and the Friends of God behind the non-prophetic one.

Still discussing Q 16:2, Baqlī relays different reports, including those of the “master” (al-Qushayrī) with the same idea of angels sent to different people but not with the same mission. He then distinguishes some degrees of revelation. On the heart tier, angels transmit secrets (*asrār*) to the masters of the hearts (*arbāb al-qulūb*); then on the spiritual tier, revelation can also be about the Attributes (*al-ṣifāt*), in which case it is done according to the different spirits’ trajectories in the world (*ʿalā qadr sīrihi fī ʿālamihā*); and finally, on the innermost secrets’ tier, revelation of the Essence is direct, without mediators (*al-wasāʾit*).¹⁴⁴ Writing on Q 22:75, Baqlī adds an interesting detail regarding mystics: In their messenger function, angels are the intermediaries sent to

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يفتح لروحه طريقاً إلى الإشراف على القرب

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqāʾiq* i, 362142 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 284.143 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 285. This characteristic, of interactions with angels without a mission of transmission of message, defines this category of mystics “*muḥaddathūn*,” because angels speak to them (see also Lory, *La dignité de l’homme* 206).144 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* ii, 308–309.

prophets, while prophets are the intermediaries sent to the masses, and the Friends of God are intermediaries for the Friends of God only,¹⁴⁵ which sets them apart from the dynamic between prophets and common people. This is yet another example that conveys an understanding of these Friends as being somewhat of an elite set, a notion which often runs through mystical writings and uses the Arabic terms “*khāṣṣa*” or “*khawāṣṣ*”.

There is one specific case arising again in the matter of angels sent to a special human group. Discussing Q 3:42, Qushayrī and Baqlī consider the capacity of Mary to see and interact with angels as part of her distinction above all other women, although Qushayrī notes that she might have been able to hear the angels only, and not to see them.¹⁴⁶ Along with Sulamī’s commentary on Q 53:4, mentioned earlier, this easily supports the theory that classifies the Virgin Mary as being in the ranks of the prophets (as seen at the beginning of this chapter), although these Ash‘arite authors would not have considered her to be so.

An interesting case of the messenger role in the alluding verse Q 77:1 is the part about “those sent forth” (*mursalāt*), which could be interpreted as messenger angels, and how Sufi commentaries might draw different interpretations from it. For example, Tustarī confirms that these feminine “envoys” (*mursalāt*) are angels, while simultaneously also being understood as the believers’ spirits.¹⁴⁷ Thus we have a clear case of two juxtaposed exoteric and esoteric interpretations, complementing each other beyond an apparent contradiction. In this surah opening, Qushayrī also identifies angels sent with “good command” (*al-ma’rūf min al-amr*), angels separating the permitted (*al-ḥalāl*) from the forbidden (*al-ḥarām*), and angels sending the revelation to prophets.¹⁴⁸ The commentary of Ibn Barrajān 1 reflects his preferred themes. The two first verses are about angels in charge of meteorological events (associated with compassion), the third is about angels taking care of existing things such as plants and animals, and the fourth verse is about angels delivering the revelation.¹⁴⁹

Within the general notion of messengers, we might also mention Qushayrī commenting on Q 41:31–32 where he identifies the subject, “we” (*naḥnu*) as

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الملائكة وسائط الأنبياء، الأنبياء وسائط العموم والأولياء للأولياء خالصة

BAQLĪ, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 546

146 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* i, 242; Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* i, 150.

147 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 261. His esoteric interpretation continues in the subsequent verses Q 77:3–6.

148 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 670–671.

149 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 428.

possibly meaning angels who descend upon the believers in Q 41:30, though another possibility could be the direct speech of God with the “We” of majesty.¹⁵⁰ This open interpretation is another example of how angels are either used as the literal explanation for the metaphorical “We” of majesty (as seen in the previous section), or they are subsumed within the idea of God on a cosmological level, with very little to no independency in action, especially in their important function of messengers. Lastly, remarking on Q 53:43, Ibn Barraġān 1 does not consider the Pharaoh’s asking Moses to see angels as a demand for proof of God’s power (as suggested in Appendix 1), but rather as a demand for angels to bear the news brought by Moses,¹⁵¹ thus underscoring this primary function of the messenger function that is associated with people seeing angels.

3.2 *The Messenger Function in Non-angelic Verses*

In the non-angelic verses, we find examples of angels being sent to various prophets. Writing on Q 75:29, Tustarī briefly mentions Jacob and an angel bearing good tidings to him, making the pangs of death easy for him to bear.¹⁵² Sulamī’s comments on Q 20:51 mention an anonymous report interpreting this verse as an angel sent by God to Abraham telling him: “Oh Abraham, God is indeed commanding you to know Him with your heart.”¹⁵³ Qushayrī brings up the stories of Abraham and Lot in his commentary on Q 24:11, highlighting that Lot could not know that his guests were angels until they informed him.¹⁵⁴ Conversely, a different light is cast on the relationship between prophets and angels in Ibn Barraġān 2, with an eschatological *ḥadīth* mentioned, whereby the Dajjāl would be accompanied by two angels looking like prophets.¹⁵⁵

In these non-angelic verses, we also find explanations for the Quranic shift from *jinn* messengers to angel ones. Ibn Barraġān 1 touches briefly on the possibility of God sending *jinn* messengers to the *jinn* people, and not only human ones, in his comments on Q 6:130. In his opinion, this verse is open to such an interpretation, but he refutes the possibility of *jinn* messengers being sent to humans for two reasons: They would not convey a message that is important to humans, and they would not be seen by humans, which is a condition for messengers and envoys (*wa-dhalik shart fī al-mursil wa-l-mubligh*), and because the guides (*a’imma*) are humans, not *jinn*, after their father has been tried and

150 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 329–330.

151 Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 93.

152 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 258.

153 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq* ii, 8.

154 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 597.

155 Ibn Barraġān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 259.

refused by God.¹⁵⁶ This raises the same question about angels: They are not seen by most people, and if they are, it is in a human form, but their selective visibility is not enough to disqualify them as messengers. They are still preferred over *jinn*, who are disqualified for this position in Islamic cosmology because of their kinship to Satan, not just because of their invisibility.

The progression of the message is also described in these comments. In Ibn Barraĵān 2, a brief mention of the divine command is given to angels, who then convey it from one Heaven to another until it reaches the “Boundary” (*muntahā*, a word usually associated with the Lote Tree, *sidrat al-muntahā*), which is the place of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and message (*risāla*).¹⁵⁷ This boundary is presented as the interface between the angelic realm and the human one, the point of contact for the transmission of messages.

Although Gabriel being sent to Muḥammad is central in Islamic cosmology, the idea that an angel messenger to Muḥammad is not necessary is very present as well. The manner of resolving this ambiguity differs only slightly from one author to the next. In Chapter 1 we have seen, in the theological function in non-angelic verses, that Ibn Barraĵān simply admits two parallel canals of communication, one involving angels and another that is direct. The Prophet is thus distinguished among prophets, as Qushayrī also comments on Q 4:162: During the *miʿrāj*, God gave commands to Muḥammad regarding the prayers, without the mediation of Gabriel (*wāsiṭat Jibrīl*).¹⁵⁸ Similarly, and adding to his discussion on the degrees of revelation in the previous section, Baqlī explains while discussing Q 5:111 that the “revelation” (*waḥī*) sent to the human messengers is both “specific” (*khāṣṣ*) and “general” (*ʿāmm*). The specific one is sent without mediation, and the general one is sent through the mediation of Gabriel. The specific one has different levels (*marātib*); to wit, the revelation of the Acts (*waḥī bi-l-ʿfʿl*), the revelation of the Attributes (*waḥī bi-l-ṣifa*), and the revelation of the Essence (*waḥī bi-l-dhāt*).¹⁵⁹ The presence and role of Gabriel is then to transmit to those who cannot receive a specific revelation, as a way to help them understand a divine message or reality which, if made specific, would

156 This is an obvious reference to Iblīs, considered the father of the *jinn* in Islamic cosmology:

اختبر الله أباهم المبلّس الملعون فأبى

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 278

157 Ibn Barraĵān 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 241.

158 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* i, 389–390. We will see in Chapter 4 that angelic functions other than the messenger role are highlighted in the *miʿrāj* accounts.

159 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* i, 337.

not require the existence of Gabriel anymore. In Chapter 5, we will see that Ibn ‘Arabī has a more symbolic understanding of this duality.

4 An Overlooked Cosmological Function in *tafsīr*: Angels as Testers

At the beginning of this chapter we saw that the “challenging” function was held primarily by Satan (seen in Chapter 3), but also by Hārūt and Mārūt in the Quran. Satan, whether considered an angel or *jinn*, has the primary role of challenger or tempter to humanity; however, the following verses show that other angels share this function at times, without belonging to the fallen angel narrative arc.

On the Hārūt and Mārūt verse Q 2:102, Tustarī states that they did not act without God’s prior knowledge of their actions, “which precedes the occurrence of the act of the one doing it.” Once again, God’s knowledge and will encompasses all angels, including the seemingly independently willed angels.¹⁶⁰ Tustarī thus focuses back on the meaning of the verse, without the stories attached to it later—this might indicate that the later explanations were not yet as widely shared in Tustarī’s time.

Commenting on this verse, Qushayrī sees Hārūt and Mārūt as a lesson to creation, with similar consequences as listening to Satan: “To creation, they became sedition (*fitna*), even a lesson, for to whoever listens to their sayings, without considering their ignorance, their affliction befalls [the listener] as well as their distress in the next world.”¹⁶¹ This is already moving towards blame falling on both angels and the people listening to them. However, for Ibn Barrajān 1, Solomon and the two angels Hārūt and Mārūt are absolved by God (*barra’a Allāh*) from what satans were doing. Ibn Barrajān also seems to follow the verse closely and independently from stories attached to it in non-Sufi *tafsīr*, as seen at the beginning of this chapter. The doing of satans could include wrongly following the guidance angels offered, attributing to them and to Solomon sorcery that God had not allowed.¹⁶² He elaborates on this

¹⁶⁰ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 22.

¹⁶¹ صاروا للخلق فتنة بل عبرة، فمن أصغى إلى قيلهما، ولم يعتبر بجهلها تعلق به بلائهما، وأصابه في الآخرة عنائهما.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, i, 110

¹⁶² Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 248–249. In a subsequent but separate section, Ibn Barrajān 1 further refutes that Solomon used “sorcery” (*sihr*), since this is not from God, and rejects the widespread story of Solomon’s power contained in his ring, attributing this to falsified

theme later: These angels were sent with knowledge of the Names and what this required (*'ilm al-asmā' wa-mā taqtaḍihi*), as well as with cures against sorcery (*dawā' min al-siḥr*). As for their declaration "We are only a trial so do not disbelieve", Ibn Barrajān 1 says it was directed to knowledgeable people, meaning "Do not deviate and do not turn away from the path so that it does not turn away from you". He writes that this was in a context where deviation and *fitna* was said to be widespread, at a time when knowledgeable people were learning from these angels arts that they then twisted, such as learning "what separates the husband from the wife instead of what is required of affection, generosity and friendship in God," and such other negative things to which they added sorcery (*wa-yuḍfūn ilā dhālik siḥr*). What the angels taught was very close to their opposite, as a twisted version of this opposite: "Indeed the reverse way was close to this, that expressed the opposite."¹⁶³ In the same comment, the author mentions satans learning from angels what they turned into error (*ḍalāl*) such as star-spiritualism (*rūḥāniyyat kawākib*), which is among the things the verse refers to in "They would learn that which harmed them and brought them no benefit".

The testing function also appears elsewhere, for example, in commentaries on verses discussing the sending of visible angels, part of the credo function (seen in Chapter 1). Ibn Barrajān 1 elaborates on Q 6:8–9, on the meaning of God's decision to send human messengers to humanity, and that had the messenger been an angel, He would still have made him appear in human form (something which is echoed in the story of Abraham's guests). Although the primary function is to define the Islamic credo, here the commentator stresses the challenge and how one should not rely on appearances: Human messengers have the appearance of humans (*ṣawāhiruhum bashariyya*), but are angels within (*bawāṭinuhum malakiyya*),¹⁶⁴ thus drawing a parallel with the exoteric/esoteric dichotomy of knowledge typical to Sufi discourse. By using the literal sense of both words (*bāṭin/ẓāhir*), it also blurs the frontier between human and angelic messengers, and this will find an echo in Ibn 'Arabī, in Chap-

stories (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 250). Though he keeps calling them angels throughout his long commentary on the verse, he also raises the possibility that instead of "two angels" (*malakayn*), it might have been "two kings" (*malikayn*), with the reading of a different vowel on the *lām* (*kasra* instead of *fatha*), according to the reading of Ibn 'Abbās and one 'Abd al-Raḥmān.

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فإنه يقرب مما هذه سبيله بالمقابلة التي تعبر بها عن التضاد.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* i, 255–256

164 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 203.

ter 5. Following this idea, the commentator explains that external appearance does not indicate the messengers' sincerity (*ṣidqihim*), and if one relies on their outward aspect, then one lacks faith in them and in what they brought.

The idea of listeners put to the test by a messenger is illustrated again with a second exoteric/esoteric comparison involving the Quranic text itself, which poses a similar test to its reader or listener. The commentator writes that there are clear verses (*āyāt bayyināt li-l-ʿilm*) and other, ambiguous ones, the "appearance" or exoteric aspect of which does not correspond to their "inside" or esoteric aspect (*mutashābihāt ṣawāhiruhā bi-khilāf bawāṭinuhā*). If one then does not reflect and research this internal side of the verse, then one cannot reach the higher knowledge (*rafiʿ al-ʿilm*) and the degree of certainty (*darajat al-yaqīn*), and one is left to be "at best a teacher or a reciter."¹⁶⁵ Angelic characters and their possible appearance to men's eyes in human form help the author elaborate the function of a test of faith posed to humanity as a whole, concerning prophets and their claims, on a first level. On a second level, it presents another test, illustrating what separates a normal believer from a mystic in their approach to the Quranic text and its message.¹⁶⁶ It also incidentally alludes to the commentator's ideas about occupations and social hierarchies of his time.

5 Concluding Thoughts

The length of this chapter shows that these more general Quranic functions are highly represented in the Sufi *tafsīr*, with some nuances from one author to the next. They support and expand on the Quranic text, anchoring it in readers and listeners' imaginaries. We notice that angelic hierarchies are not very elaborated. The Quran's egalitarian aim is maintained in commentaries. The cosmos is complex, but angels are distinguished in it by their roles and functions, not by their ranks and identities, although they are paradoxically sometimes used to underline the specificity of some people in the human plane (caliphs, mystics).

We encounter interactions with biblical culture and figures, and shared references by authors across geography and space, in writings suffused with

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وأعلى رتبة أن يكون دارسا وقارئا

IBN BARRAJĀN I, *Tafsīr* ii, 203

¹⁶⁶ The Qurʾān as a "litmus test" in Ibn Barrajān's works is researched in detail by Yousef Casewit, where he also explains that his approach to the "ambiguous" verses (or "con-similar/differentiated", to use Casewit's translation) is different from those of most Sufi scholars from the Islamic East. See Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus* 206–244.

Neoplatonic hierarchies of beings within creation—a background shared with non-Sufi sources of this time. In these hierarchies however, we often find angels placed above men, which creates a tension with angels bowing to Adam in the Quran, and that leaves the question of the superiority of man or angels open, with different resolutions according to each author. This will appear again in Ibn ‘Arabī in Chapter 5.

When reading these works, the Eastern filiation from Tustarī and Sulamī to Baqlī is quite evident, although they each approach the same themes differently, if only through their personal selection of reports and references to their shared predecessors.

The tension between the figurative and literal readings of the Quran shows in Sufi commentaries, fluctuating within each work but also between authors. From the pragmatic Ibn Barraġān to the flowery poetical metaphors of Baqlī, angels appear or disappear in different ways. Since authors accumulate different interpretations over time—theirs and their predecessor’s—the figurative or symbolic readings increase, adding to more literal comments, and this even in Ibn Barraġān’s writings.

For example, on the only verse that describes angels, Q 35:1, Ibn Barraġān 1 briefly comments that the number of wings is meant as follows: one wing on each side of an angel, or two wings on each side, or three wings on each side, or four wings on each side, “the increasing of angels’ wings [being] for perfecting their creation and completing that which they exist for,” adjoining a *ḥadīth* where the Prophet describes Gabriel as having 600 wings.¹⁶⁷ By means of this quite exoteric commentary, he chooses to understand this verse as being about pairs of wings, rather than having angels trying to fly with three wings, out of logicity if not logistics. It also seems to contradict another one of his earlier interpretations, according to which angels do not need wings,¹⁶⁸ an interpretation that can be seen as more esoteric in nature. This apparent contradiction coexisting in the same work can be seen as an example of a forgotten aspect of classical Islam,¹⁶⁹ but it also prefigures the symbolic function that I attempt to define in the next chapter.

However, this rare “pragmatic” commentary also indirectly highlights an overall tendency of Sufi commentaries on angels. They outline the general cos-

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زيادات الأجنحة في الملائكة من تمام خلقهم وكال ما أوجدتهم له.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 436–437

168 Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 233.

169 Thomas Bauer, *A Culture of Ambiguity: An Alternative History of Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

mology by detailing angelic roles and functions, illustrating and expanding on those found in the Quran, as commentaries do by definition, but this cosmology is very much a spiritual one, or an invisible one, as most descriptions hover above, around, and inside the physicality of this cosmology and its creatures. It leaves readers to define and imagine most of its “down-to-earth” aspects and effects for themselves.

A last remark is that where one could have expected more description of the Unseen world, such as Paradise and Hell, with which angels are associated, these commentaries are surprisingly sparse, almost impressionistic, as noted by other scholars,¹⁷⁰ and they focus more on the experiential dimensions of believers’ practices and their imaginary.

170 On Hell and Paradise in Sufi commentaries, see Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries* 83–134.

Angels in Sufi *tafsīr*: Two Sufi Functions

This chapter focuses on two additional functions that emerged from the reading of Sufi commentaries. They are not present in the Quran, as they stem from the interpreting act of the commentators. The first one is the cosmological enrichment, mostly related to the alluding verses on angels, and already noted as an “angelic increase” by scholars, as seen in the introduction, an increase common to all commentarial work. The second one is what I would argue is a specific Sufi function, the symbolic function of angels, whereby angels acquire a different type of textual and extra-textual reality, away from literal readings and closer to figurative ones, though not replacing the former either.

I will first present a review of the relationship between angels, *jinn*, and Satan in the Quran, as this aspect is mobilized in the cosmological increase of commentarial works. Then we have the particular case of Gabriel, Michael, and other named angels in the Quran, as they become a particular locus of the development of traditions and, as such, a testament to the proliferation of exegesis. I will also review the few remaining angelic presences in alluding verses not reviewed in the previous chapters. This will help the reader better appreciate the commentarial development on these aspects in the cosmological enrichment function—although this pervades all roles and functions in general and we have seen many cases of it in the previous chapters.

The last function in this chapter—the symbolic function—is not related to any specific part of the Quran and essentially proceeds from the commentary genre. Nonetheless, the reader will recognize somewhat, as it also appeared in some examples in the previous chapters.

1 Of angels, the *jinn* and the Devil in the Quran

1.1 *The Relationship between Angels and the jinn*

Jinn are almost as elusive as angels when one wants to define them.¹ However, the Quranic text does mention their creation, which happened earlier than

1 For an overview of what *jinn* can be in the Islamic world, see MacDonald, Massé, Boratav, Nizami, and Voorhoeve, “Djinn,” *ET²* and El Zein, *Islam, Arabs*. For *jinn* more specifically in pre-Islamic times and early Islamic times, see Tengour, *L’Arabie des djinns*, and Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 205–212.

that of men, and in which they were made from “scorching fire” (*nār samūm*) Q 15:26–27, and “smokeless fire” (*mārij min nār*) Q 55:14.²

From Tengour’s detailed study of the *jinn* in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia, it would seem that *jinn* were an integral part of the Arabian imaginary in pre-Islamic times, with the role of mediators between humanity and the world called *ghayb*,³ although more recent findings may nuance this picture (see Appendix 1).

It is also from this *ghayb* that *jinn*, summoned by different categories of humans (such as the priest, *kāhin*, or the magician, *sāhīr*), would transmit messages regarding the future or, more famously, they would inspire poets. In this respect, the idea of *jinn* as intercessors and inspirers is much comparable to the role of *daimōn* in the Greek antique world.⁴ It would seem that the pre-Islamic Arabian belief in a *qarīn* was common. Every person had a *jinn* companion, while an angelic companion was a common belief in late antiquity in general, both in monotheistic traditions and non-monotheistic ones, multiplying the possible interactions with the divine.⁵ This belief was so widespread that even the prophet Muḥammad was said to have such a familiar spirit, and this was maintained somewhat non-controversially in later traditions,⁶ underlining

2 Tengour writes that the words used for fire and their adjectives here are particular to the Arabian context. If *nār* is the regular Arabic word for the concept of “fire” in English, it is qualified in two different ways in this verse. In the first verse “scorching fire” refers to the hot winds of the deserts, seen as a negative element (Tengour, *L’Arabie des djinns* 178–179) whereas in the second verse, “smokeless fire” would refer to the optical effect seen outside when the summer sun provokes some sort of mirage-like effect (Tengour, *L’Arabie des djinns* 184), alluding also to the nature of *jinn* as a mix of fire and hot air (Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus* 189–191).

3 As spirits from the Unseen, at times powerful ones, they could be regarded as Lords and Ladies (*rābb, rābba*) of certain localities, from whom tribes and individuals had to ask permission before settling in a particular place, or lesser gods (Joseph Henninger, “Beliefs in Spirits Among the Pre-Islamic Arabs,” in *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, ed. Emilie Savage-Smith, Ashgate, Aldershots, 2004, 36–43; Tengour, *L’Arabie des djinns*).

4 Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’anic Pagans,” 187. We have seen in the first part of the chapter that the Greek *daimōn*, for the same reasons, were compared and assimilated to Jewish angels.

5 This concept of *qarīn* is also found in the Quran (MacDonald, “*Qarīn*,” *ET*²). See also: Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), 145; Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’ān* 125; Burge, *Angels in Islam* 70–71. For a short but up-to-date overview of pre-Islamic beliefs, see Moreman, “Rehabilitating the Spirituality of Pre-Islamic Arabia” 137–157.

6 However, Islamic literature would take care to differentiate the prophet from a mere inspired *kāhin*, in a move from pagan-like inspiration (*waḥy*) to a biblical-like revelation (*tanzīl*), although both concepts would coexist (and that the word *waḥy* would become “revelation” in the monotheistic sense). See Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 347.

the ambiguity of the relationship between the Quran and poetry.⁷ The Quran appears in a world full of ambiguity towards the differentiation of angels and *jinn*, characters of the *ghayb*, both in nature and function.

Additionally, two other elements contribute to the confusion about angels and *jinn*, a biblical one and a linguistic one. *Jinn* could be the locus of the fallen angels theme, transferred into the Quranic text (aside from Satan, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, seen previously), more particularly when they are referred to as demons (*shayāṭīn*),⁸ while the closeness of angels and *jinn* could be seen as a (Christian) Gnostic influence.⁹ Then, on a linguistic level, the word *jinn* comes from the root J-N-N, with the meaning of something “hidden,”¹⁰ which easily corresponds to the spirits of fire from the *ghayb*, unseen by men, as much as it can correspond to angels for the same reason of invisibility.¹¹

Thus, both *jinn* and angels in pre-Islamic times were appealed to as intercessors to the higher divine planes by different groups of people, while the Quranic text will be keen on specifying that when angels are asked by God about people worshipping them, they answer that people were really worshipping *jinn*, not them Q 34:40–41. This is another hint of the cosmological shift in which angels are involved in the Quran.

We have seen that one of the main Quranic functions of angels in the Quranic text is that of messenger. Angels and some selected humans in Q 22:75 are designated as messengers at the expense of the *jinn* who, from common mediators of the *ghayb* between the higher planes and humans, become relegated to the same hierarchical level as humans in the creation.¹² Like humans, they can be righteous or not, as in Q 72:11–15, and they are similarly challenged to bring “the like of the Quran” as in Q 17:88. This “neutral” outlook of the Qur’an

7 For an interesting literary discussion on this, see the chapter “The Prophet among the Poets” in Kermani, *God Is Beautiful* 252–292.

8 Mehdi Azaiez et al., *The Qur’an Seminar Commentary: A Collaborative Study of 50 Qur’ānic Passages / Commentaire Collaboratif De 50 Passages Coraniques* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 385–398.

9 Neuwirth, “Cosmology,” *EQ*.

10 For a detailed linguistic analysis see Tengour, *L’Arabie des djinns* 58–73.

11 As such, the word *jinn* could have also designated angels in pre-Islamic times. This indetermination between angels and *jinn* as categories has been noted by Al-Azmeh, Tengour and El-Zein, as did Moreman: “A more accurate definition of *jinn*, then includes any spiritual entity, be it considered demon, angel, ancestor, or deity.” See Moreman, “Rehabilitating the Spirituality of Pre-Islamic Arabia,” 155. Similarly, the ancient Greek “*daimōn*” seems to have meant any supernatural beings, while “*angelos*” meant specifically “messengers” (Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels* 26).

12 Aside from Tengour’s study, the same idea is explored by Chabbi (Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus* 185–196).

on *jinn* is important to keep in mind.¹³ Moreover, the Quran shows that *jinn* are now forbidden to listen to the higher planes in Q 37:8–10 and Q 72:8–9, which are now guarded Heavens, the Quran confirming thus their pre-Islamic status as mediators. According to the same verses, if the *jinn* do try to listen, they are thrown off by shooting stars. These shooting stars are believed to be thrown by angels in later interpretations, though these verses do not mention them *per se*. *Jinn* are then “downgraded” to lower planes of the *ghayb*, in a parallel and limited world reflecting the likewise limited physical world of humans, while angels can freely move between all planes (Hell, the human world, the Heavens, and the *ghayb* in its entirety) in order to perform their many roles. Among angels possibly lie ex-pagan otherworldly beings, such as the Yemeni *shams* and the “daughters of ʿĪl” whose filiation to God is refuted by the Quran, beings who would thus gain the status of angels while losing their personal and pagan characteristics.¹⁴

The messenger function is reassigned exclusively to angels, alongside prophets, while the more ambiguous testing function, inherited from the biblical fallen angels and Near-Eastern mythologies, is redistributed between *jinn* (at least those becoming demons), two angels (Hārūt and Mārūt), and the “*jinn*-angel” Iblīs, all ultimately acting by God’s will. This has to be considered in parallel to the treatment of angels and demons in the biblical text.¹⁵ This is

13 *Jinn* do not necessarily become associated with Hell, contrary to the argument made in Simon O’Meara, “From Space to Place, the Quranic Infernalization of the Jinn” in *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. Christian Lange (Leiden: Brill, 2016). The spread of Islam in central Arabia does reconfigure the hierarchy of spiritual entities, as he correctly noticed, as they lose some of their power over parts of the *ghayb*. However, *jinn* do not necessarily equate demons in the modern sense and were not necessarily associated with Hell, as he further argues. *Jinn* has indeed become associated with the underground in popular culture over time, but they also remain associated with air, at least in the Quranic text, as explained by Chabbi and Tengour. Moreover, the Quranic text addresses itself to both humans and *jinn*, as creatures of free will, free to submit or to disbelieve Q 72:11–15, inhabitants of their own respective worlds, the human world and the *ghayb*. The Quranic text does not have this attitude towards demons. If the term *shayṭān* is a word that used to designate a type of *jinn*, good or bad, in pre-Islamic times, and has semantically shifted in the Quran to designate only bad spirits, this does not mean that all *jinn* equate with *shayṭān* or *shayṭān* in Quranic cosmology. On that note, Pierre Lory remarks that indeed later Muslim authors will paint a darker picture of *jinn* than that of the Quran, see Lory, *La dignité de l’homme* 222.

14 See Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels* 19, with references to Angelika Neuwirth’s works.

15 The biblical text does not seem to qualify them as ontologically evil, but as neutral creatures carrying out acts (by God’s command) that could be seen externally as evil (Anne Marie Kitz, “Demons in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of Biblical*

the main cosmological shift of the *ghayb*, as presented by the Quranic text. The higher planes (or Heavens) and most of the beings previously populating them in earlier cosmologies are still there, but they are re-organized, some of its beings being “promoted” and others demoted and re-named, while the human world seems to remain the same.¹⁶

1.2 *Iblīs/Satan: jinn, Angel or Both?*

In the Quran, the Devil is called by two different names, Iblīs and Satan (*al-Shayṭān*). Peter Awn notes that the Devil is called Iblīs in the narratives of man’s creation and his own fall, while Satan is employed for all the other narratives, most of all the temptation of Adam and Eve.¹⁷ In the case of the Iblīs narratives, previous non-canonical Jewish and Christian literature reflects a similar story as that of the Quranic Iblīs refusing to bow to Adam, on God’s command, thus causing his downfall.¹⁸ Tesei seconds the notion that this type of literature was very popular in Eastern Christian circles, and shows how the Quranic Satan then concentrates upon himself the whole fallen angel narrative arc.¹⁹

Was Iblīs an angel or a *jinn*? From the Quranic text only, this question remains unresolved. Verses strongly suggest that he is an angel by immediate

Literature 135, no. 3 (2016): 447–464); The same has been written about biblical angels, neutral creatures neither good or evil per se (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 94–104). This could be a way to ascribe what is perceived as evil or violent to God in an indirect way, thus keeping a benevolent image of God while retaining His absolute power (ibid. 170–171; Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing* 112.)

16 Al-Azmeh notes a similar demotion of *jinn*, replaced by angels, in early Islamic Medinan poetry (Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 326).

17 Peter J. Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 19. Similarly Tommaso Tesei mentions Syriac exegetes reporting that the semantic shift takes place when the Devil disobeys God’s command (Tesei, “The Fall of Iblīs” 67). On the variant name of the “stoned Satan” (*al-Shayṭān al-raḥīm*), it could be probably a word from the Akkadian meaning “the accuser,” more in line with biblical traditions, however it would have lost its meaning by the time of the Quranic revelation, and it will have been understood as “Satan the accursed, the stoned” which also have resonances in pre-Islamic traditions. See Adam Silverstein, “On the Original meaning of the Qur’ānic Term *al-shayṭān al-raḥīm*,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133, no. 1 (2013): 21–33.

18 For a review and commentary on these, see Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption* 20–24. He argues that the mystical view of Satan will influence the later Sufi understanding of him.

19 His article shows the figure of *Iblīs* and its complex relationship to Enochian literature (such as the *Book of Watchers* seen previously) and shows how the *Iblīs* narrative gains in importance by conflating different biblical and para-biblical scenes involving fallen angels (of which Hārūt and Mārūt is a trace in the Quran). See Tesei, “The Fall of Iblīs” 66.

textual context in Q 2:34 and Q 38:73–74,²⁰ but elsewhere the text also affirms that he is “of the *jinn*” Q 18:50.²¹

Later, commentators will elaborate different arguments to choose one position or another, mainly based on the character’s actions (are angels exempt from sin? If so, Iblīs cannot be one of them) or the character’s nature (Iblīs is made from fire, *nār*, while angels are made from light, *nūr*, which are related but not exactly the same). It also depends on what is included in “*jinn*” and “angel” since one can be considered a subcategory of the other, and this varies from one author to the next.²² Modern scholars also suppose that Iblīs could be seen as both, due to the fact that he is regarded as belonging to angels as long as he obeys God, but his refusal to bow to man makes him become a *jinn*, through a process of “*jinnization*” of the biblical figure of Satan.²³

1.3 The Case of Gabriel and Michael

These two angels, who happen to be well-known archangels in Jewish and Christian traditions, are two of the rare angels given personal names in the Quran, like Hārūt and Mārūt.²⁴ Gabriel (*jibrīl*) is mentioned three times, in verses Q 2:97–98 and Q 66:4, and Michael (*mikāl*)²⁵ is mentioned only once in

20 For instance, contrary to others, al-Jāhiz considers that Iblīs, as the grammatical “exception” (*mustathnā*), had to be of the same category as the group he is excepted from (*mustathnā minhu*), that is, the angels (Jaadane, “La place des anges” 27). For a summary on the discussion of this grammatical debate, see also Samuela Pagani, “Esegesi coranica,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), ebook.

21 See Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption* 18–44; Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus* 198; Wensinck, Gardet “Iblīs,” *ET*².

22 For a summary of these arguments by different well-known commentators on the matter, such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Bayḍawī, see Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption* 24–37; Wensinck, Gardet, “Iblīs,” *ET*². For example, al-Zamakhsharī resolves this in going to the exact opposite of the theory that the term “*jinn*” as a concept covered both *jinn* proper and angels; for him, the term “angel” encompasses angels and *jinn*. If anything, this shows the gradual importance of angels over *jinn* in the later Islamicate *ghayb*.

23 Tengour, *L’Arabie Des Djinn* 205–210.

24 Another angel is called by name, according to the usual interpretations of the Quran, and this is *Mālik*, guardian of Hell (Q 43:74–80). However, we have classified him under “alluding verses” for reasons explained in the next chapter.

25 The form of this name in Arabic, *mikāl*, has been analyzed as a *mif’āl* pattern, from the root w-k-l. However, exact origins of this name remain rather obscure. Arthur Jeffery supposes it comes from the Hebraic and Syriac version of the name; the latter used in Persian Manicheism. See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Wensinck, “Mikāl,” *ET*². It could also be related to a Canaanite deity called Mikāl (Mach, “Michael מִיכָאֵל,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible Online* (Brill)).

conjunction with Gabriel: “Whosoever is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael: God is indeed the enemy of the disbelievers” Q 2:98.

The attentive reader will note that in these verses, Gabriel and Michael are never described as being angels, in contrast to Hārūt and Mārūt for whom the Quranic text specifies their identity as angels. For Gabriel and Michael, their “angelness” can be implied by the immediate context of the verse with an inclusive “and” (*wa*), as well as the cultural environment of the Quranic text, where these two names would already have been associated with archangels, at least for Christians and Jews familiar with their own traditions.

Theophoric names such as theirs were known, and more widespread in the Judeo-Christian traditions. They appeared within a movement of multiplication of angels as a locus of renewed revelation, and “personalized” divine communication. These names might have been functional at the beginning, underlying both their commander (God, with the suffix “-el” in Hebrew, “-īl” in Arabic) and their particular characteristics, but they became increasingly used as personal names.²⁶ However Burge writes that these theophoric names remain rare in Islam, and if they are kept, they usually lose their original etymological meaning, while Arabic ‘function names’ are preferred (on the model of “the angel of Death”).²⁷

In the Quranic text alone then, Gabriel and Michael are only clearly mentioned in “credo verses”, of the Medinan period (surahs 2 and 66) according to Nöldeke’s order, as part of what the believers should believe in. They do not have, then, any other obvious function than to illustrate the basic Islamic credo, and have none of the roles that will be attributed to them, especially to Gabriel, in the later Islamic traditions.²⁸ They also do not seem to have the

For a brief overview of the status of these two angels in Islam, see Gisela Webb, “Gabriel,” *EQ*, and *ibid.* “Michael,” *EQ*.

It is also worth noting that if these are considered as “archangels” in other traditions, the Quran does not use any specific word to designate a particular rank of angels as that of “archangel”.

26 Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 176–192, and 192–201 on Gabriel and Michael.

27 Burge notes that “it is possible, and quite common, for a name to be transferred from one religion to another, but for the conceptualization associated with the angels not to be assimilated. Likewise, it is possible for a conceptualization of an angel to be adopted by the Muslim community, without the actual name being appropriated at the same time.” See Burge, *Angels in Islam* 32–33. Seconding Jaadane, he adds that angels in Islam are defined more by their function than by their nature (*ibid.* 39). We will see later that indeed some authors will give alternative names to Gabriel and Michael.

28 For an overview of post-Quranic traditions linked to Gabriel and Michael, see Pedersen, “*Djabrā’ī*,” *ET*²; Wensinck, “*Mikāl*,” *ET*²; Reynolds, “Gabriel,” *ET*³; Burge, “Michael,” *ET*³. In

roles attributed to them in previous traditions, although this could be seen as a consequence of the elliptic style of the Quran, pointing to what its audience already knew. However, as part of this basic Islamic credo, Gabriel does appear as the transmitter of the Revelation (as seen above with verse Q 2:97). In conjunction with the other verses mentioning him and the cultural context, this explains why he was later interpreted as being the intermediary of revelation, despite the different ways the Quranic text presents the revelation (God speaking directly and indirectly).²⁹

1.4 *Other Angelic Roles in Alluding Verses*

Aside from the messenger role that is highly represented in alluding verses, as seen in the Quranic functions of Chapter 2, other roles also show in alluding verses, and are attributed to undefined beings. Some of them will be understood to be angels, from an intra-Quranic reading comparison. Some of these undefined beings will become key angelic figures of the Islamic traditions. Among these roles, we find the supporting role of angels previously seen in Q 3:124–125, which is repeated in verses Q 33:9–10 where “hosts” (*junūd*) are sent against enemies, as well as in verse Q 9:26, where similar “hosts whom you saw not” (*junūdan lam tarawhā*) appear. This is in contrast with Q 36:28, where similar “hosts” (*jund*) were not sent down against an unbelieving people. Similarly, we also find “hosts” in Heavens and Earth in Q 48:7, a verse for which the context cannot ascertain whether these hosts are human or angelic or both.

We also find a rather clear allusion to angels in Q 21:26–29, in the role of obedient servants who do not speak except by God’s leave, echoing Q 78:38, as well as the role of intercessors only by God’s leave in Q 53:26. This group of verses appears in a context of refutation of God having children, an example of a defining argument in the Islamic credo, of the same kind as where God denies taking angels as spouses, in Q 17:40, and in the later tradition, in the case of the so-called Satanic verses.³⁰

In Q 6:61, we also find beings called “messengers” (*rusulunā*). However, this verse does not insist on this particular role, as these messengers are tasked

the Judeo-Christian traditions, Michael has a longer history and more importance than Gabriel, however Gabriel already has the roles that Islamic traditions will attribute to him later: messenger of course, and less known, destructor of cities and people (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 176–201; Burge, *Angels in Islam* 106). As an agent of revelation and bringer of benefits, the Islamic Persian tradition also identify him with the Zoroastrian angel/divinity Sarōsh/Sroša (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 49).

29 See Welch, Paret, Pearson, “Kur’ān,” *ET*².

30 For an overview of this subject in the Islamic tradition, see Ahmed, “Satanic Verses,” *EQ*.

with taking every human soul after death. Similarly, we find souls accompanied by a “driver” (*sā’iq*) and a “witness” (*shahīd*) in Q 50:21–26, something which might announce the later traditions of the interrogator angels, Nakīr and Munkar, coming to the newly departed souls,³¹ a glimpse of which we have seen in the previous chapter. We also find Throne-bearers, others praising their Lord, and yet others seeking forgiveness for the believers in Q 40:7–9. These last three verses describe such specifically angelic roles (as seen in Appendix 1) that even without subsequent interpretation, these characters can easily be read as angels.

In a murkier category, three verses are usually seen as being uttered by angelic characters in the first-person plural: Verses Q 37:164–166 state that all have a “known station” (*maqām ma’lūm*), that they are those who are “ranged in ranks” (*ṣāffūn*) and who “glorify” (*musabbihūn*). This “maqām” gains a particular importance in Sufi texts (as seen in the previous chapter). We also find these unnamed beings glorifying their Lord in Q 41:38. The immediate context of these verses does not suggest much, but when taken in the general context of the Quranic text, the beings could easily be interpreted as angels.³²

Furthermore, in this category of a more or less muted reference to angels, some other cryptic verses remain, such as Q 77:1–7, Q 79:1–5, Q 80:11–16. Beck analyses these types of surah openings as referring to celestial entities quickly identified as angels, and specifically in surahs 77 and 79, as well as the explicitly angelic intervention in Q 97:4, as a remnant of what he calls an “angelic apocalypse.”³³ An interesting point is that these cryptic early Meccan verses refer to these celestial beings by the female plural, as in Q 79:5 “*al-mudabbirāt*”, or Q 37:1

31 Wensinck, “Munkar wa-Nakīr,” *EI*²

32 Angels have been seen glorifying God before, and the word “*ṣāffūn*” echoes the name of the particular surah to which these verses belong, *sūrat al-ṣāffāt*, referring to its first verse, “By those ranged in ranks” (*wa al-ṣāffāt ṣaffan*), followed by two other similarly cryptic verses (37:1–3), usually interpreted as being about angels as well.

33 Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an* 182. For a convincing analysis of surah 97 as a remnant of an angelic apocalypse, rather than a cryptic reference to Christmas night (according to Christoph Luxenberg and Guillaume Dye), see the whole chapter in Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an* 171–214. Like the surah 68 mentioned in 2.3.2, the surahs 37, 77, 79 are early Meccan surahs according to Nöldeke’s order, known to be more cryptic than Medinan surahs. The openings of 37, 77 and 79 are built on the model of “By the ...”, an incantatory manner that Beck has analyzed as oaths involving cosmic beings. While very difficult to interpret for the post-Quranic Islamic tradition, they can be analyzed through the lens of comparative mythology, and they might have been clearer references to 7th century listeners acquainted with Mesopotamian cosmology (Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an* 19–30).

“al-ṣāffāt,” which fits the theory of the subsuming of older deities into the new cosmology by the Quranic text.³⁴ This could be related to the “credo-defining” verses insisting that these entities, clearly named angels in Q 3:80, Q 17:40, and Q 37:150, are not female, not taken as spouses by God, and not to be taken as Lords. Additionally, contrary to the old celestial beings who were somewhat independently willed, the monotheistic angels now only descend “by leave of their Lord” Q 97:4.

Regarding key aspects of the Islamic cosmology, some alluding verses are at the origin of several of them. For instance, verses Q 83:18–21 on the undefined *“‘Ilīyyūn”*³⁵ could mean either beings or places, and “those brought nigh” (*al-muqarrabūn*) could be either humans or angels. Of the guardian category in the alluding verses (also seen in Chapter 1), two special cases about Hell’s guardians need to be mentioned here: *Mālik* and the *zabāniya*. In verses Q 43:74–80, *Mālik* is widely understood to be the Keeper-of-Hell angel by later commentators (or chief of the keepers of Hell), whom unfortunate souls call upon to put an end to their misery. I have not classified these verses as angel verses because the text does not specify or suggest in its immediate context that *Mālik* is indeed an angel, although this character is given a proper name,³⁶ which could be reminiscent of previous deities, and especially deities of the underworld.³⁷ Where Gabriel and Michael are mentioned right after the word “angels”, the word *Mālik* stands alone in describing this character in this passage, and the immediate context of these verses do not contain anyone else than the disbelievers’ souls he is in charge of.

As for the verse *“sanad’u al-zabāniya”* Q 96:18, translated in the Study Quran by “We shall call the guards of Hell,” it is usually interpreted as per the translation of the word *zabāniyya*, meaning guardian angles of Hell, although it is a very cryptic word and neither the word nor the verse suggests a guardian role.

34 Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’ān* 155 (fn. 15); Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans” 151–200. Al-Azmeh affirms that Q 37:1–2 are oaths made to angels (Al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam* 326), though it does not appear as obvious to a reader of the Quranic text who does not rely on Quranic commentaries.

35 This word could be derived from the Hebrew *‘ēlyōn*, meaning “the highest one” (Leemhuis, “‘Ilīyyūn” *EQ*).

36 Grammatically however, *mālik* could also be understood as a descriptor—“possessor of something” (so here possibly “possessor/guardian of Hell”)—rather than a proper name. We are only sure that this *Mālik* is not God because the unbelievers’ souls are specifically asking from him to have his Lord put an end to their misery.

37 Jeffery sees in this specific word the biblical Moloch, see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*; it also seems that deities bearing the name “Malik,” or a related form in Semitic languages, would often be associated with the underworld, see Müller, “Malik,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

Lange, in his detailed study on Hell's angels in the Quran³⁸ reviews the possible linguistic origins of this word, and concludes convincingly that it could have originally meant a special class of *jinn* before post-Quranic exegeses "angelized" them. Seconding other scholars, Lange also shows in the same article that the word *zabāniya* probably had linguistic origins in the Arabic language and could have designated autochthonous Arab spirits. Beck sees the origins of the *zabāniya* in morally ambiguous cosmic beings subjected to a higher power in Mesopotamian cosmology, with a role reminiscent of those in the Quran: cosmic beings in charge of keeping the souls trapped in the material universe, or of letting them pass to a higher plane, depending on which cosmology one was referring to (Manichean or Zoroastrian).³⁹ Both of these analyses makes the reader think of the ambivalent *jinn*, as much as of angelic guardians. This is part of the sometimes-confusing relationship between angels and *jinn* in the early stages of Islamic cosmology, and in the cosmological shift in which the Quran operates.

Lastly, we should mention a particular angel that exists in many Islamic writings but does not have a clear Quranic basis: *Riḍwān* the keeper of Paradise. Verse Q 3:15 mentions the word *riḍwān* but does not suggest this as a particular name, as it translates as "contentment," an emotional state felt by the people of Paradise.

Keeping in mind the potentiality for multiple levels of reading provided by the alluding verses in conjunction with the redefined place of *jinn* in Islamic cosmology, let us turn now to the first additional angelic function of the *tafsīr*.

2 The Function of Cosmological Enrichment in the *tafsīr*

2.1 *Angels and the jinn, Iblīs, and Other Beings in Angelic Verses*

The cosmological enrichment function grows out of the reorganization of the Unseen world brought by the Quran. This function helps the readership or audience of the commentaries recreate an Islamic cosmology for themselves, integrating para-Islamic and pre-Islamic notions into the new cosmology in a cohesive way. Examples of this function can be found in previous examples, such as the angels of torment and compassion in Chapter 1, and the bearers of the Throne in Chapter 2. The Quranic text does not describe the bearers, how-

38 Christian Lange, "Revisiting Hell's Angels in the Quran", in Lange, Christian, ed. *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. Christian Lange (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 74–99.

39 Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur'an* 22–24.

ever, Islamic tradition gives them animal-like shapes that resonate with biblical texts. When this enrichment relates to the Unseen, this function might provide readers and listeners with mystical explanations of events, or reflections about inner and more spiritual matters, of which the angels are foremost representatives.

2.1.1 Iblīs/Satan

We have seen that the Quranic text is ambiguous on Iblīs: Is Iblīs angel or *jinn*? One grammatical theory was that the word "*jinn*" might have designated any creature of the Unseen, including angels. Here, Ibn Barraġān reverses this definition, and like Zamakhsharī, considers angels to be composed of two tribes, one of fire and one of light. On the identity of Iblīs or Satan, Ibn Barraġān 1 classifies Iblīs as an angel in the commentary of the scene of the bowing to Adam and the refusal of Iblīs Q 2:30–34,⁴⁰ but Ibn Barraġān 2 clearly states, on a similar scene in Q 15:30–31, that Iblīs is "of the *jinn*, that is to say of the angels created from scorching fire,"⁴¹ having previously said that all angels of light had bowed, as did all angels of fire except Iblīs.⁴²

On an inner level, earlier, Tustarī explains Q 2:30 to say that Satan is "a partner with the natural self (*nafs al-jibilla*), regarding the desires that it has, which have nothing to do with God."⁴³ Similarly, a commentary by Sulamī on another iteration of the refusal scene, Q 18:50, mentions a report attributed to Yahyā b. Mu'adh (d. 257/871) on the danger of following a path "apart from God," that leads to being unable to discern "who is your enemy from who is your protector, and the state of approach from the state of turning away."⁴⁴

Satan and angels share the same channel of communication, the heart, as describes Qushayrī, seen in Chapter 1: In the same way that God allows to "convey the whisperings of Satan to the hearts, He conveys the thoughts of the angel."⁴⁵ This is a known motif, as within a wider discussion on the heart in mystical Islam, Sachiko Murata already noted how the heart, locus

40 Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 188.

41

كان من الجن أي من الملائكة المخلوقين من نار السموم.

IBN BARRAĠĀN 2, *A Qur'ān Commentary* 314

42 Ibid. 133.

43 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 17.

44

من يعاديه ويواليه، وحال إقباله من حال إداره.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 412

45 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* i, 607.

of evil and good, center of the human being, is also the place of incoming thoughts or *khawāṭir* from different sources, which are usually four according to Sufis.⁴⁶

On God allowing Satan's action, Qushayrī goes further on the refusal of Iblīs in Q 7:11, implying that Iblīs' acts were planned by God, and even taught by Him. The author writes as if God was addressing humans, ending his commentary on how Iblīs' opposition followed "because of what was left of his disposition in you, and from what We taught him of jealousy of you, and his adversity to you."⁴⁷ Qushayrī presents this idea in another way on the alluding verse, Q 50:27: The "companion" (*qarīn*) mentioned is either a guardian angel claiming that he did not push him [his human companion] to commit a fault (*mā a'jaltu-hu 'alā al-zilla*), or Satan claiming that he [the human being] chose to act on his whispering of his own free will (*fa'ala—bi-ikhtiyārihi*).⁴⁸

On the refusal of Iblīs in Q 15:28–31, Baqlī presents a more metaphorical discussion comparing physical elements with concepts, whereby he associates Iblīs with the quality of "force" or "compulsion" of God (*al-qahr*) and his being made out of fire (*nār*) as opposed to the quality of "compassion" (*al-raḥma*) associated with the clay (*ṭīn*) and water of which men are made. He then addresses the interpretation of Iblīs's being made of this "compulsion" that rendered him blind (*maḥjūb*) to what the rest of the angels saw in Adam, or of his being so staunch a monotheist that he simply refused to bow to any other than God, by writing that "if his sight had been correct, he would not have paid attention to the means," the "means" being Adam as a created being.⁴⁹ Similarly, explaining Q 2:30–34, Baqlī writes that Iblīs refused to bow because he did not see the "secret of God" (*sirru-llāh*) in Adam, as the angels did.⁵⁰ Before Regarding Q 15:30–31, and before Baqlī, Sulamī presents a report attributed to

46 See Sachiko Murata, *The Tao of Islam, A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought* (Albany: SUNY, 1992), 289–326. These four types of incoming thought come from God, angels, the soul, and satans. According to Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) in his *Qut al-qulub*, there are six of them: from the soul, the enemy, the spirit, the angel, the intellect, and the certainty. Ibid. 292–293.

47 ثم لاحق خلافه بما بقي عرق منه فيكم، ثم ما آلتنا به من مكان يحسدكم ويعاديكم.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā'if* i, 521

48 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* iii, 452–453.

49 ولو كان نظره صحيحا لم يلتفت إلى الوسائط.

BAQLĪ, *Arā'is al-bayān* ii, 288–290

50 Baqlī, *Arā'is al-bayān* i, 43.

Abū 'Uthmān (d. 298/910) according to which God opened the angels' eyes to the particularities of Adam (*khaṣā'ish Ādam*) while he blinded Iblis, which led him to rebel.⁵¹

Qushayrī gives a specific interpretation of the story of Adam and Eve's temptation by Satan in Q 7:20, showing a desire for angelic status for particular reasons. They wished to become angels not because the angelic rank was superior to humankind's, but because angels do not suffer from passions or the fate of death.⁵² This temptation by Satan is quite an interesting reversal of expectations. Adam and Eve are not tempted to experience more passion, but by a state where passion is absent, which resonates with particular mystical paths, like the ones of world-renouncing hermits. This dynamic is opposite of that found in stories associated later with the verse of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, angels tempted away from their angelic state to the human one, full of passions. Here man aspires to experience no passion while being in a state involving passion and mortality, divinely prescribed and desired for man, while angels are destined to a state devoid of passion and featuring immortality, although some of them are tempted by the human state. Interestingly, in verses Q 25:7–8 and in Qushayrī's commentary, we find this same idea, where the Prophet is disqualified in the eyes of the disbelievers for being a man subject to desires (*shahawāt*).⁵³ We will see that this seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy between the angelic and the human finds a solution in some esoteric comments in the next function, but we could suppose here that this angelic explanation of temptation underlines the importance of embracing one's human condition and the troubles that come with it. Aspiring to no passion, although it might culturally be valued in some specific places and times (possibly in Christian or Gnostic circles), is considered a Satanic suggestion in this instance.

Going back to Q 15:28–31, Qushayrī first offers a mystical comparison to Satan's pride, to explain the possible errors into which one might fall along the mystical path: "And thus it is for one whose states are veiled (*ḥujiba 'an aḥwālī-hi*), one claims to being good, while remaining in the darkness of perplexity (*ḥayra*)."⁵⁴ Qushayrī also mentions that Iblis refused only one bow, arguing that he would not bow to any other than God.⁵⁴ This 'extreme monotheist' stance by Iblis and its paradoxical implications have been studied by Mohammed Rus-tom on the defense of Iblis by 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), who called

51 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 354.

52 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* i, 524.

53 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* ii, 628.

54 Ibid. 270.

the Devil “the teacher of angels.”⁵⁵ On another refusal verse, Q 17:61, Qushayrī also writes that the refusal to bow to anyone but God is an act of ignorance on Satan’s part (*kāna dhalik jahlan minhu*), because if he really knew God, he would have obeyed,⁵⁶ while on Q 18:50, Qushayrī reiterates the reason given by Sulamī earlier for Satan’s refusal; i.e., he could not see past the physical aspect of Adam, and so thought himself better than him.⁵⁷ Lory sees in Qushayrī’s comments that angels may refuse spiritual advancement.⁵⁸ All these examples are echoed in the study by Sara Kuehn on the relationship between Satan and Adam, and the bowing of angels through different pictorial illustrations of Islamic texts.⁵⁹ To conclude, Iblis/Satan classically fits the archetypal role of the challenger, the most well-known example of the angelic testing function, but with some surprising explanations in the commentaries.

2.1.2 *Jinn*

Tustarī, Sulamī and Qushayrī do not add much new information about *jinn*. On Q 34:40, a verse where God asks angels about who were worshipping them, Ibn Barraĵān 1 reiterates that the *jinn* were a category of angels (*wa-min al-malā’ika ayḍan: al-jinn*), and that the Sabeans (*ṣābi’a*) were worshipping angels.⁶⁰ This could be an Islamic way of confirming that pre-Islamic peoples were already worshipping *jinn* or *jinn*-like creatures, aside from angel cults. In Ibn Barraĵān 2, on the refusal of Iblīs in Q 15:30, the angels of the “fiery tribe” (*al-qabīl al-nārī*) were designated by God as the “*jānn*,” a word mentioned in Q 15:27⁶¹ and a known alternative form of the word “*jinn*”.

On the Hārūt and Mārūt verse, Q 2:102, Ibn Barraĵān 1 elaborates on the relationship between *jinn* and Solomon, who had full power over them, according to Islamic traditions, a power not given to anyone else after him. He had the power to subjugate them and jail them, to take from them oaths that they would not overpower humans, to kill some of them, to banish them and to make them work for the benefit of God’s servants. The commentary adds that the goal of this Quranic story is for “God to declare that *jinn* cannot access information from the Unseen,” illustrating once again the shift brought into the Unseen in the Islamic cosmology. Furthermore, Ibn Barraĵān 1 mentions that

55 Mohammed Rustom, “Devil’s Advocate: ‘Ayn Al-Quḍāt’s Defence of Iblis in Context.” *Studia Islamica* 115, no. 1 (2020): 65–100. See also Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*.

56 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* ii, 356.

57 Ibid. 401.

58 Lory, *La dignité de l’homme* 214.

59 Kuehn, “The Primordial Cycle Revisited.”

60 Ibn Barraĵān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 430.

61 Ibn Barraĵān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 442.

those *jinn* who might have had such access were killed by Solomon, and that they remained unaware of Solomon's death for a while after it happened, as a consequence of not being able to access information from the Unseen.⁶² This somehow contradicts the fact that, until the late pre-Islamic period, *jinn* were seen to have kept this role of mediator, well after Solomon's time. However, it might also be seen as an additional argument to depict *jinn* intermediaries after Solomon's time as being faulty and needing to be replaced by angels. It might also serve the purpose of anchoring and validating the Islamic cosmological organization, as if it were prefigured in the Jewish tradition and religion, before it became a feature of a monotheist cosmology, something possibly posited in parallel to the *jinn*'s expanded powers in non-monotheistic traditions. This is within the historical-religious setting, but for the contemporary setting of the commentator, it might anchor the idea that *jinn* are not reliable and cannot be mastered in any way ever since Solomon. This should be considered in the context of wider magical practices than the modern reader might be aware of, at a time where texts like *Shams-al-ma'ārif* by Al-Būnī (d. 622/1225) were popular.

Regarding the role of mediator, Ibn Barrajān explains, on Q 37:7 and the "guard against every defiant satan," the process of transmission of messages in pre-Islamic times, apparently using "*jinn*" and "satans" interchangeably:

*The jinnī listens to the word, and the shooting star throws him away, and the satan transmits the word to his follower, and this one transmits it to his follower, and so on until it reaches the jinn that transmits it to the priest (...) with little understanding and confusing of the report.*⁶³

On Q 72:8–9 and the flaming stars, Ibn Barrajān 1 continues, and elaborates on the Heavens guarded by angels against the *jinn*, with a story about *jinn* finding the Prophet in the market of 'Ukāẓ and commenting to each other that he is the reason why they are no longer able to listen to the heavens.⁶⁴

Lastly, on Q 15:28–31, Baqlī mentions that God created "the *jinn* and the *jānn*" from fire (*nār*), as well as Iblīs, creating a difference between men and *jānn* such as there is between water, clay and fire. Then comes the long commen-

⁶² Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 249.

⁶³ فيستمع الجني الكلمة ويقذفه الشهاب، ويلقي الشيطان الكلمة إلى وليه ثم يلقيها ذلك إلى دونه كذلك حتى تبلغ إلى الجني الذي يلقيها إلى الكاهن (...) بقلة الإفهام وتشوش التبليغ.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 490

⁶⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 395–396.

tary mentioned above associating Satan, fire, and “compulsion,” opposed to the association of water and clay with God’s mercy (*rahīma*) on his human servants, while fire is linked to God’s torment (*‘adhāb*) on his *jinn* servants. He adds that the difference between their constitutive elements and associated qualities are at the origin of the “dispute” (*mukhālafā*) between both species.⁶⁵

2.1.3 New Beings

The keepers of Hell in verse Q 96:18 are not interpreted by Tustarī as being angels per se, and he first offers only a lexical explanation to the name *zabāniya*, followed by a *ḥadīth* illustrating their unknown identity and the potential importance of this aspect by its effects on some people:

*This means the keepers of Hell whose feet are on Earth and heads in the Heaven of this world. They are called the Zabāniya from the word zabn, meaning the act of pushing away, for they push the people of Hell back on their tracks, using their arms and feet. When Abū Jahl heard the mention of the Zabāniya he fled to his people, upon which they asked him, ‘Have you become afraid of him’ [the Prophet]? He replied, ‘No, but I fear the Zabāniya for I do not know who they are’.*⁶⁶

Qushayrī on his part does not offer any further commentary on what kind of beings this word indicates,⁶⁷ nor does Ibn Barrajan 1.⁶⁸ However, Ibn Barrajan 2 might imply that they are angels, of the guardian kind, following a verse taken as a metaphor, Q 20:46: Moses and Aaron are “under Our eyes, that is our guardians and our angels, such as His saying calling his circle ‘So let him call his cohorts. We shall call the guards of Hell’.”⁶⁹

Another ill-defined angelic group that appears in post-Quranic traditions is the cherubim (*karrūbiyyim*; sometimes *kārūbiyyim*). This word is not found in the Quran, but seems to be often used in later religious writings, such as

65 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 286–287.

66 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 296.

67 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 749.

68 Ibn Barrajan 1, *Tafsīr* v, 522–523.

69

بأعيننا أي حفظتنا وملائكتنا، كقوله عز وجل فيدعون ناديه سندعوا الزبانية.

IBN BARRAJAN 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 690

This implication works only if we take the “and” (*wa*) in “*ḥafazatīnā wa-malā’ikatinā*” as being inclusive, especially given the predominant role of guardianship given to angels, but could also be read as a separate group, and the *zabbāniya* then would remain these unknown creatures, as in Tustarī.

these commentaries and the texts studied in the next chapters. It presents varying spellings (which also happens for names, such as Gabriel), an example of an increase by integration of previous and contemporary religious traditions. These commentaries do not use this word as a synonym for another group, the angels “drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*), which is a word that we do find in the Quranic text. Islamic tradition most often interprets these “drawn-near” as a group of angels, an example of exegetical expansion. As seen in the previous chapter, these “drawn-near” are not qualified as angels, so we sometimes find other interpretations of this term, such as a group of mystics or believers, as seen in the previous chapter. The confusion between these “drawn-near” and the cherubim is sometimes found in some studies;⁷⁰ however, they have a different etymological origin. The word “cherubim” seems to be of Babylonian origin, the word from the Akkadian “*kāribu*” or “*kurību*,” and the cherubim as beings seem to have been the biblical equivalent to the Sphinx or, more generally, the winged protectors of Near-Eastern mythologies.⁷¹ In contrast, the “drawn near” is an Arabic term found in the Quran, with a clear meaning of the Arabic Q-R-B root, and which could allude to any type of creature.

Lastly, two specific categories of new beings are mentioned in the commentaries of Ibn Barrajān, first in non-angelic verses in his first work, and then again in angelic verses in his second work. However, these mentions are brief, so I group them together here. These beings are not found in the Quran, at least not with these names: the *ḥinn* and the *binn*. Ibn Barrajān 1 first mentions the existence of these beings in a section discussing angels and *jinn* within the commentary of the sixth surah, unrelated to angels. They seem to be created from both elements of Hell (*jahannam*) and water, and they can be of mineral, plant or animal origin (*al-jamād wa-l-nabāt wa-l-ḥayawān*), attracted (*ḥanna*) or averse (*bāna*) to humans, hence their names.⁷² Ibn Barrajān 2 later comments on the angelic verse Q 2:30–34, and mentions *ḥinn* and *binn* again. According to one interpretation, these are the creatures or “animals” (*dawābb*) sent by God to Earth before man, the *ḥinn* yearning for Adam, and the *binn* wreaking havoc. Furthermore, the questioning of angels regarding those cor-

70 For example, Godefroid de Callataÿ translates “*al-muqarrabūn*” as cherubim, even though most Islamic texts use the two different words in different manners (Godefroid de Callataÿ, “The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ on Angels and Spiritual Beings,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 347–364.)

71 For example, related to the winged protectors such as found in the palace of Sargon (Nada Hélou, “Les origines hellénistiques de la représentation des anges,” 64). For the etymology and a detailed review of the biblical cherubim, see Mettinger, “Cherubim,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

72 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 248.

rupting the Earth and shedding blood targeted this category of creatures and not humankind, contrary to most Quranic commentaries.⁷³

2.2 *The Cosmological Enrichment Function in Non-angelic Verses*

Non-angelic verses elicit some additional commentaries. We will turn first to the *jinn*, then to the Spirit, and lastly to a different take on the *zabāniyya*.

On the “special” *jinn Iblīs*/Satan, little can be added from the non-angelic verses. On Q 2:257, Tustarī reiterates the power of Satan over the human self, “for Satan cannot overpower man except through desire (*hawā*) of his lower self.” According to Tustarī as well, on Q 58:10, a secret conversation (*najwā*) is what Satan does to the natural self (*nafs al-ṭabʿ*), accompanying this by a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says that there is a touch of madness (*lamma*) that comes from both angels and Satan.⁷⁴ On Q 41:37, Qushayrī implies that Iblīs is an angel, within a brief recounting of his refusal to bow to Adam,⁷⁵ which seems to confirm this as the generally accepted view, possibly as the common understanding of the Christian tradition of the “fallen angel.” This would explain the inclusion of *jinn* as a sub-group of angels by some authors (Ibn Barrajān or Zamakhsharī), rather than what could have been the case in pre-Islamic Arabia, angels as a sub-group of *jinn*, or a fully separate group of beings in the Unseen.

Interestingly, on Q 25:28 Tustarī shows that *jinn* can help and have a protector role for humans “whose prayer is good:”

*Such a person will be stirred during sleep at the prayer times so that he awakes. This is done by his brothers among the jinn who have befriended him. They may also accompany him when he travels and give him priority over themselves.*⁷⁶

This seems to be a continuation of the Quranic ambivalence on *jinn* before the “demonizing process” took over in later literature.

A negative take is already more marked on the communication with the Unseen in (26:221–223), as Qushayrī draws the reader’s attention to the subject of these verses, satans descending on disbelievers (*kuffār*) and pre-Islamic priests (*kuhḥān*).⁷⁷ The exact identity of these “satans” (*al-shayāṭīn*) is not

73 Ibn Barrajān 2 124–125.

74 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 224.

75 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 333.

76 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 140.

77 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 22.

given, whether they are *jinn* or otherwise, but the cultural context and other comments imply as much.

An example of important comments on *jinn* outside of the angelic verses is the commentary on Q 72:1 by Qushayrī, recounting a story that the reader could have expected later in the commentary on Q 72:8–9:

It is said that the jinn were traveling to the sky listening to the speech of the angels, then memorized it, and then transmitted it to the pre-Islamic priests (kahana). They would then add or remove [information from] it ... And so it was during the period between our Prophet, peace and prayers be upon him, and Jesus, Peace be upon him. Thus, when our Prophet was sent, Peace and prayers be upon him, and they were stoned with shooting stars, Iblīs understood that something had happened, and his armies fled. Then nine of them came into the heart of a palm tree and they listened to the recitation of the Prophet, and they believed. They went to their people and said: "Indeed we heard a great recitation, that guides to good sense, so we believed in it."⁷⁸

This story still ascribes a degree of agency to *jinn* with possibility of redemption, but they are seen as problematic for the role of messenger, thus underlining the importance of angels being less independently-willed for this role. Within the commentary on the 26th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions Q 58:32 to mark another difference between the two groups: "the ladder is for the satans" (*al-ṣullam li-l-shayāṭīn*) and "the stairs for the angels" (*al-ma'ārij li-l-malā'ika*), using the plural word for "stairs" that is used in the singular for the *mi'rāj*, or the heavenly ascent of the prophet.⁷⁹

Later Ibn Barrajān 1 goes further than Qushayrī, by writing that the *jinn* are "the satans" (*al-shayāṭīn*) with characteristics that are closer to humans than angels, although he still understands *jinn* as a category of angels. In his comment on Q 21:8, where God denies sending Prophets who do not eat or drink

⁷⁸ قيل: إنّ الجن كانوا يأتون السماء فيستمعون إلى قول الملائكة، فيحفظونه، ثم يلقونه إلى الكاهنة، فيزیدون فيه وينقصون ... وكذلك كانوا في الفترة التي بين نبينا صلى الله عليه وسلم وبين عيسى عليه السلام. فلما بُعث نبينا صلى الله عليه وسلم ورجعوا بالشهب علم إبليس أنه وقع شيء ففر جنوده، فأُتي تسعة منهم إلى بطن نخلة واستمعوا قراءته صلى الله عليه وسلم فأمنوا، ثم أتوا قومهم وقالوا: إنّنا سمعنا قرآنا عجبا يهدي إلى الرشد فأمنّا به

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭā'if* iii, 637

⁷⁹ Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 219.

(implying angel-like qualities), he writes: “And the *jinn*, who are the satans, eat food, and drink and breed, and they have spouses and children, they are not eternal until Judgment Day, except Iblis, may God curse him.”⁸⁰ This may be seen as an example of a conflating of satans and *jinn*, a darkening stance brought by a commentator going beyond the Quranic message, as noted in the beginning of this chapter.

The relationship between angels and *jinn* becomes more complex on a separate section within Ibn Barrajān 1’s commentary of the sixth surah. Quoting the different verses regarding the *jinn*, he explains that all those who are named “*jānn*” are made from “scorching fire” (*nār al-samūm*) and these are angels prepared for “the retribution of the people of torture” (*mujāzāt ahl al-‘adhāb*), while Iblis is made from “smokeless fire” (*mārij min al-nār*)—that is fire (*nār*) and “bitter cold” (*zamharīr*)—as are the “infallible angels” (*al-malā’ika al-ma’šūmīn*). He states then that He created “angels of compassion” (*malā’ikat al-raḥma*) from “pure light” (*khālīṣ al-nūr*) dedicated to rewarding the obedient, and further down the text the *jānn* mentioned in Q 55:15 are said to be the children of Iblis, and among them are believers and disbelievers.⁸¹

On the ambiguous concept of “companion” (*qarīn*) of late-antique imaginaries, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions Q 43:36 and Q 41:25 and the angelic verses Q 41:30–31, within his commentary on Q 4:38 and its mention of Satan as companion, to discuss this notion, which he understands diversely. It is first associated with a “satan” as mentioned in verse Q 43:36, a companion that can be either good (*ṣāliḥ*) or corrupted (*fāsid*), and who remains with the person after death, “in the domain of the *barzakh* and after the resurrection (*ba‘th*).” This companion is of the same creed as the person, with the same moral traits, and it can be a satan, an angel, or a *jinn*, adding that “the companion of the Prophet [was] an angel and a believer *jinn*.”⁸² The *jinn*, even if a believer, will usually entice to quick temper, eagerness, and bursts of anger, while the angel will lead to forbearance, equanimity, gentleness, good behavior and compassion. After death, the commentator says that these companions will oppose each other.⁸³ We might see here the symbolization of two pre-Islamic concepts that are hard

80 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* i, 251.

81 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 244–245.

82

قرين النبي ملك وجن مؤمن.

IBN BARRAJĀN 2, 49

Grammatically, it is not clear whether the subject is one companion who is both angel and *jinn*, or if they are two different beings.

83 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 49.

to translate, but which seem to have been thus conveyed into the new Islamic cosmology and its values. The angel symbolizes here human *ḥilm* (“magnanimity” or “chivalry”), while the *jinn* symbolizes human *jahl* (usually translated as “ignorance”, but combined with their propensity to temper, it becomes close to the Norse-originated concept of “berserk”, a quality that could be positive in battle, for example).⁸⁴

Later, on Q 41:25, Ibn Barrajān 1 discusses the presence of companions once again, presenting similar ideas: to each person a *jinn*, in a relationship configuration where the human is the “guide” (*imām*) while the companion his follower (*tābiʿ*). As a consequence, when the person converts to Islam, his *jinn* companion does too, and if the person becomes corrupt again, then his companion is excused and replaced by a corrupt one.⁸⁵ In the next page of his commentary on the angel verse Q 41:30, he describes then the companions (*quranāʾ*) of the righteous people (*ahl al-ṣalāḥ*) as angels. Once again *jinn* are presented as being a sub-group of angels.⁸⁶ This would mean that the righteous people are paired with infallibly good angels, while common people, who are at risk of falling into bad habits, are paired with *jinn* (or angels of fire), who can be equally good or bad. This gives a spiritual illustration to the reader of his or her own actions and religious practices, which might have both origins and consequences in the Unseen, as much as the inhabitants of that Unseen might influence the reader’s actions and decisions.

Lastly, on *jinn* and angels, within the commentary of the 27th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 later refers to Q 6:38 to explain that the wings mentioned in this verse are for animals only (*bahāʾim*), as they need them to fly, while “angels and *jinn* do not need any wing to ascend or descend,”⁸⁷ though this goes against what he affirms on the angel verse Q 35:1. Writing on Q 37:11, Ibn Barrajān 1 qualifies both angels and *jinn* as beings “who reason” (*man yaʿqil*),⁸⁸ although angels are not usually given independence of thought or action from God. This questions the

84 Bernd Roling, “Northern Anger: Early Modern Debates on Berserkers,” in *Discourses of Anger in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Karl A.E. Enenkel, Anita Traninger (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 217–237.

85
 فَعْنِي مِنْهُ وَقِيضْ لَهُ قَرِينَ فَاسِدٌ مُفْسِدٌ.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* v, 47

86 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 48.

87
 إِذِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالْجِنُّ لَا يَنْتَقِرُونَ فِي الصُّعُودِ وَالنُّزُولِ إِلَى الْجَنَاحِ.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 233

88 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 491.

capacity of reasoning in relation to other intellectual dispositions: reason/intellect (*ʿaql*), which is different from reflection/thought (*fikr*), and which could be decoupled from free-will. Since oftentimes the grammatical plural used for angels is also the one used for “non-reasoning” beings such as most animals (the plural in feminine singular), this is yet another example of the confusion and ambivalence surrounding angels, whether it is intended or not by the authors.

Concerning the “Spirit” (*rūḥ*), it is understood to be Gabriel in many cases (as seen in the next section), but not systematically. This is one of the different beings or concepts from the world of the Unseen for which the relationship to angels is not always clear cut.

In commenting on some verses of the third surah, Ibn Barraġān 1 discusses the notion of “Spirit” by bringing up different angel verses, such as Q 78:38, Q 16:2, Q 19:17, Q 21:91, Q 38:72 and Q 17:85, as well as the “angel of the wombs” (seen in Chapter 1) breathing the Spirit into where it needs to be sent. These verses are given different interpretations in different contexts, and the Spirit may mean Gabriel in some cases such as Q 19:17, or something less defined, which Ibn Barraġān 1 talks about in a more esoteric manner, with the breathing of the Spirit done into someone who could either mean Adam, Jesus or Muḥammad, based on the context:

God named it his “Spirit”, and we previously said that its adding to him was a distinction in creation and command and sovereignty, and satisfaction of him and all that is alive, so the angel of the wombs breathed into him the Spirit, or what is meant by this, and the Attributes of God that the existence of things expressed, and witnessing Him through these [Attributes] are the witnesses such as Power, Knowledge, Will, Life, Hearing, Vision and others, and the Spirit spoke through these [Attributes] the Noble Qurʾān by bringing it into existence as an indication of the Highest Spirit [God].⁸⁹

89

سمّاه الله جلّ جلاله بأنه روح منه، قد تقدّم أن معنى إضافته إليه اختصاصه إياه خلقاً وأمراً وولاية، ورضى به وكلّ ما هو حيّ، فلك الأرحام عليه السلام ينفخ فيه الروح، أو ما هو معناه وصفة الله جلّ ذكره أعرب عنها وجود الموجودات، وشهدت له بها الشواهد كالقدرة والعلم والإرادة والحياة والسمع والبصر وغير ذلك، والروح فقد نطق بها القرآن العزيز بإيجاد إياه دلالة على الروح العليّ جلّ ذكره وتعالى علاؤه وشأنه.

However, later, on Q 17:85, Ibn Barrajān 1 takes up again the definition of the “Spirit” descending with the Lord’s “command” (*amr*). While each and all creatures are made to exist by Command (*fa-qad awjada li-kulli khalq amran*), the commentator also relates a report attributed to ‘Alī according to which the Spirit is an angel with seven thousand heads, each head with seven thousand tongues speaking seventy languages, praising God; another report attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās according to which the Spirit is an angel, with no other qualifications; and an anonymous report according to which “the universe is made of ten parts, nine parts of it are the Spirit, and one part is the rest.”⁹⁰ This preponderance given to the spiritual over the physical, and naming it “Spirit,” will be echoed later in both the “Breath of the All-Merciful” and the embracing of the imaginal dimension of the physical one with Ibn ‘Arabī.

Further down, quoting other verses mentioning the Spirit, the commentator talks about the “Holy Spirit” (*rūḥ al-quds*), the “Trustworthy Spirit Gabriel” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn Jibrīl*), “the believers sharing mutual love in the Spirit of God” (*al-mu’minūn yataḥābbūn bi-rūḥ Allāh*), and other instances of the various appearances of the Spirit.⁹¹ Overall, these discussions on the Spirit somehow leave the reader with the impression that it can take on different forms, and that it can serve, in a more abstract manner, the same functions as those of the angels, i.e., a channel or mediator between God and His prophets or elected people, or the spiritual element common to both angels and distinguished humans, as if the messenger function of Gabriel was de-personalized to the point of an abstract concept. The Spirit comes in these instances as a metaphor losing its signifier, a literal reading discarded for the sake of a symbolic discussion that also removes any limiting image or word.

As another late example of this, Baqlī avoids defining the Spirit, tellingly, within a long commentary on Q 17:85, the same way he avoided describing the angels, as “None have access to its identity except its creator,” and it is “made evident” by God (*bayyanaḥā*) only to Prophets and Friends.⁹²

Finally, in his commentary of the 52nd surah, Ibn Barrajān 2 interestingly suggests something different from many interpretations on the *zabāniya*: They are guardian angels sent to guard people such as Moses and Aaron, so “do not

⁹⁰

إِنَّا الْخَلِيقَةَ كُلَّهُمْ عَشْرَ أَقْسَامٍ؛ فَتِسْعَةُ أَقْسَامٍ مِنْهَا الرُّوحُ، وَقِسْمٌ وَاحِدٌ سَائِرُ ذَلِكَ

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 414–415

⁹¹ Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 317.

⁹²

وَلَا يَطَّلِعُ عَلَى مَا هِيَ إِلَّا صَانِعُهَا

BAQLĪ, *Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 383

be afraid, for you are under Our eyes, that is to say our guardians and angels.”⁹³ Instead of the usual frightening keepers of Hell, here they become angelic guardians to the two prophets.

3 The Case of Gabriel, Michael, and Other Named Angels in the *tafsīr*

3.1 *The Named Angels in Angelic Verses*

Unsurprisingly, commentators identify Gabriel early on when an undefined singular entity is involved in transmitting a message, as this section will show. However, they also mention other names at times which are not Quranic. In the Quran few angels were given names, such as Gabriel, Michael,⁹⁴ *Hārūt*, *Mārūt*, and possibly *Mālik*. The commentaries mention the first two numerous times in different reports and *ḥadīth* (we cannot list them here for reasons of space and relevance), with the highest number of references allocated to Gabriel. Many of them reiterate roles that are seen earlier and/or in different *ḥadīth*, as analyzed by Burge. Most of these mentions are reiterations of their roles in the Quranic text and have been studied by Burge (for the *ḥadīth*). However the commentaries, drawing from other religious sources, confirm or provide additional names, an “exegetical increase” of angels noted by Burge, who wrote a detailed chapter on the ways angels can be named in Islamic tradition.⁹⁵ He writes that there are four ways angels are named in Islam: “1) use of the suffix *-īl*; 2) function names using the formula ‘the angel of X’; 3) function names formed without *malak*; and 4) other miscellaneous names of varied or disputed origins,”⁹⁶ noting later that function names tend to be preferred in Islamic texts.⁹⁷ Sachiko Murata remarks that the mention of angels’ personal names are usually followed by the formula used for prophets (other than Muḥammad), “Peace be upon him” (*‘alayhi al-salām*), which might also occur after a mention of the common name “angel(s).”⁹⁸ This is most often the case across these commentaries.

93 Ibn Barraḡān 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 690.

94 Gabriel is usually spelled “*jibrīl*” in these commentaries, except for a brief mention in Baqlī where it is spelled “*jibrāʾīl*” (Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* ii, 12). We also note that most commentaries we have seen use the common *rasm* for Michael (*mikāʾīl*) and not the Quranic one (*mikāl*).

95 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 31–51.

96 Ibid. 33.

97 Ibid. 49.

98 Murata, “The Angels” 326.

On “those that govern affairs” in Q 79:5, Qushayrī presents an unknown report that identifies specific angels: Gabriel descending with the Revelation, Michael descending with rain and plants, Seraphiel (Isrāfil)⁹⁹ descending with the surahs (*ṣuwar*), and the Angel of Death coming to take souls (he is not given a name).¹⁰⁰

In commentaries of both Ibn Barraġān 1 and Ibn Barraġān 2 on Q 2:33–34, we find the idea that angels are being named according to “their essences and the essences of their being brought to existence,” such as *Riḍwān* and *Mālik*, who are thus identified as angels.¹⁰¹ Later on we learn that Gabriel and Michael have alternative names, respectively *ʿAbd-Allāh* and *ʿAbd-al-Raḥmān*.¹⁰² Similarly, in Ibn Barraġān 2 we find angels named according to “that for which they exist,” and Gabriel, like Iblīs, is said to be an angel of fire, referring to the angelic tribe mentioned earlier.¹⁰³ This might be a way to symbolically oppose the main Satan, who has a proper name (Iblīs), to the main angel among angels (Gabriel).

In the case of Gabriel, the following examples show that his primary role of messenger is identified in many verses that are classically interpreted as being about it, although this is not systematic. The “Trustworthy Spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) in the alluding verses Q 26:193–194 is identified as Gabriel in Sulamī, where Gabriel is said to make the Prophet a “warner” (*mundhir*) and not a “realizer” (*muḥaqqiq*), because “what is caught from the Real” (*mā talqufuhu min al-ḥaqq*) is not known by any creature, be it *jinn*, human or angel, and “had Gabriel

99 I follow here the suggestion of Burge, who identifies *Isrāfil* with the Seraphiel of the Jewish traditions, ‘chief of the seraphim,’ while Wensinck proposed that *Isrāfil* derived from the word “seraphim” itself (ibid. 35, ft. 37), and Günther translates this name as “Raphael,” although both etymologies and biblical roles do not seem to match (Günther, “‘As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Quran 6:93)”). It would also seem that the Islamic Seraphiel shares some characteristics with the angel Sandalphon in the Talmud (Pagani, “La controversia sui meriti relativi degli uomini,” ebook).

100 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 682.

101

على حقائقهم وحقائق ما أوجدوا له.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* i, 185

On (35:1), Ibn Barraġān 1 also mentions the existence of Seraphiel (Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 436).

102 Ibn Barraġān 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 186. This is found later in Suyūṭī with a small variation: Michael is named *ʿUbayd-Allāh* while Seraphiel is the one named *ʿAbd al-Raḥmān* (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 34).

103 Ibn Barraġān 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 130–133; Gabriel as an angel of fire is also found in some Jewish texts (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 251).

made him witness it, [Gabriel] peace-upon-him would have burned.”¹⁰⁴ Sulamī also briefly identifies Gabriel through a report attributed to Ja‘far in the alluding verse Q 53:8, which is part of the verses associated with the *mi‘rāj* story.¹⁰⁵ In Sulamī’s steps, Qushayrī also identifies Gabriel in both of these cases, Q 26:193 and Q 53:8,¹⁰⁶ with added details on Q 26:192–193, about Gabriel’s movements: First he ascends “to heaven and listens to his Lord, memorizing [the message], then he descends, and transmits the message to the messenger.” In the process, he appears (*yatamaththalu*) to Muḥammad at times so that he listens to him, or he brings the verses directly upon his heart at other times (*yūridu Jibrīl dhalik ‘alā qalbihi*). Ibn Barraġān 1 identifies Gabriel in Q 53:5 only, while identifying the Prophet in Q 53:8.¹⁰⁷ On Q 26:192–195, Baqlī also identifies Gabriel, as “mediation” (*wāṣiṭa*) of the sacred,¹⁰⁸ though he does not do so throughout Q 53:4–18, where his interpretation is mystical, and the rare mentions of angels or Gabriel are given by reports attributed to previous mystics only.¹⁰⁹ In this theme, as in others, this angelic “silence” is a notable feature of these commentaries, and this concurs with Coppens’s analysis on these *mi‘rāj* verses, on which he finds Sufi commentators particularly not talkative.¹¹⁰

Regarding the debate with previous monotheisms, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the commentary of Qushayrī on the credo verses Q 2:97–98 relates that Jews considered Gabriel an antagonist to them, for had it been Michael bringing the revelation, they would have believed.¹¹¹ We also find this motif in Ibn Barraġān 1, the same verse eliciting a similar commentary from him:

104

لو شاهد فيه جبريل لا حترق عليه السلام.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaḡā’iq* ii, 81

The mention of angels, especially the ones with specific names, is often accompanied by the phrase “*alayhi al-salām*”, and since the only other possible subject of the sentence here was the Prophet, whose mention is always followed by the longer “*ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-l-sallām*”, then Gabriel was the obvious subject here. Gabriel burning when witnessing the Real/God is a recurring motif, seen also in Chapter 4.

105 Al-Sulamī, ii, 284.

106 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 18 and 481–483; see 2.2.4 on Gabriel in the “*mi‘rāj*” verses Q 53:4–18.107 Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 208.108 Baqlī, *Arā’is al-bayān* iii, 53.

109 Ibid. 356–360.

110 Coppens has provided useful tables giving an overview of different Sufi commentators, including Sulamī, Qushayrī, and Baqlī, and who they “saw” in these verses, and Gabriel is one option alongside the Prophet or God, and of course the option of a “silent” commentary (Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 231–234).

111 Qushayrī, i, 108. This is a common motif, probably related to his role of destructor of

*It is reported that they said to God's Messenger: 'Had he not been bringing you the divine inspiration, we would have followed you'; and they said: 'Because he brings pain, and he is our enemy among the angels.'*¹¹²

It shows that although these authors are separated by geography and time, they use the same references, and although "they" are not explicitly identified as "the Jews", the narrative is so similar to the clearer ones that it is easy to infer so. Ibn Barrajān probably did not need to state what was obvious.

On Q 81:19, Sulamī identifies the noble messenger (*rasūl karīm*) as Gabriel in an implicit manner, as he does not mention his name but through an unknown report says, "He made him an envoy (*safīran*) between Him and His Prophets."¹¹³

In a similarly classical manner, Qushayrī identifies Gabriel in Q 19:17–26 with "Our Spirit" (*rūḥunā*) and the "messenger of your Lord" (*rasūl rabbiki*) sent to Mary,¹¹⁴ as he does in the "Spirit" in Q 70:4,¹¹⁵ as well as in Q 97:4, where Qushayrī indicates that it could also be an unnamed "great angel" (*malak 'azīm*).¹¹⁶ This is a rare instance of a phrase that could be translated as "archangel," as in the great majority of cases in the primary sources of this study, "angel" is used as a common category name. This is also one of the very rare allusions to Gabriel in these Sufi commentaries on this group of verses, Q 97:1–5, about the "Night of Power," during which many other Islamic writings explain that Gabriel brought the complete Revelation.¹¹⁷ Ibn Barrajān 1 also sees in Q 19:17 Gabriel, "or an angel from the angels of the wombs."¹¹⁸ Interestingly, Baqlī, on Q 19:17–26, does

Sodoma in Jewish traditions (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 106). For Muslims, it could also be seen as the championing of Gabriel in face of the Christians who adopted Michael as their main archangel (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 345; Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* 4).

¹¹² جاء أنهم قالوا لرسول الله: لولا أن الذي يأتيك بالوحي هو جبريل لا تبعناك، قالوا: لأنه يأتي بالعذاب وهو هدونا من الملائكة.

IBN BARRAJĀN 1, *Tafsīr* i, 240

¹¹³ Sulamī, ii, 375. Qushayrī and Ibn Barrajān 1 also identify Gabriel here (Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* iii, 694. Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 456).

¹¹⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* ii, 423.

¹¹⁵ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* iii, 628.

¹¹⁶ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* iii, 751. This is a rare instance of a phrase that could be translated as "archangel," as in the great majority of cases in the primary sources of this study, only "angel" is used as a common category name.

¹¹⁷ For an overview of the exegesis around these verses, with a focus on Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944/1537), see Arnold Yasin Mol, "Laylat al-Qadr as Sacred Time."

¹¹⁸ Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 479.

not see in “Our Spirit” the archangel Gabriel, but the light of God connecting with the light of Mary’s spirit (*nūr rūḥihā*) “after it appeared as an image of Jesus.”¹¹⁹ Here the Spirit would either be an apparition as a human prophet, symbol of her future son in the narrative, or it could be seen as a metaphor for her elevated spiritual state and distinction.

3.2 *The Named Angels in the Non-angelic Verses*

Named angels also appear in seemingly completely unrelated verses, with Gabriel coming first. On Q 2:1, Tustarī identifies the letter *lām* with Gabriel, *Alif* with God and *mūm* with Muḥammad. We find this reported in Sulamī as well,¹²⁰ and in Qushayrī as an anonymous report among the different interpretations offered.¹²¹ Commenting on Q 11:40, Tustarī mentions a story involving Gabriel and Muḥammad, where Gabriel acts, classically, as a messenger between God and the Prophet,¹²² where God offers to the Prophet the choice between granting Paradise to a portion of his nation and the right of intercession. After several exchanges through Gabriel, the prophet obtains intercession for two-thirds of his nation.¹²³ While in the Quran only angels are able to intercede on behalf of humans (and always with God’s permission), this narrative extends this favor to the Prophet, an idea repeated by Tustarī later, regarding Q 14:34.¹²⁴

If some commentaries relay the usual exoteric dogma surrounding the revelation,¹²⁵ other comments give curious details, such as Qushayrī’s commentary on Q 32:8–9, alluding to verse Q 35:1, by describing Gabriel as the “peacock of the angels” (*ṭāwūs al-malā’ika*).¹²⁶ Baqlī relates the same phrase, with the same allusion to Q 35:1, in a report attributed to “the Master”, which confirms that he means al-Qushayrī by this title. Reminiscent of the Yezidi belief sys-

119

بعد أن تمثل لها بصورة عيسى.

BAQLĪ, *Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 456120 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 13; Sulamī, i, 47.121 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* i, 53.122 On Q 12:42 Tustarī mentions Gabriel again as messenger between God and Joseph while the latter is in prison (al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 96). This seems to be the main role in which we find Gabriel, such as in the commentaries on Q 89:1–4 (al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 282) and Q 113:2 (ibid. 318).123 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 92.

124 Ibid. 103.

125 For example, Sulamī, i, 42.

126 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* iii, 140.

tem,¹²⁷ which some claims has partial roots in Sufi traditions,¹²⁸ the peacock figure is one among many representations of angels with animal figures (some prophetic *mi'rāj* narratives include a rooster angel). Burge already noted that, while angels are described as having human form only in the Quran, with or without wings, Islamic traditions give them many different forms,¹²⁹ such as bearers of the Throne, as seen previously.

There are other well-known examples of the involvement of Gabriel in the Prophet's life. In his comments on Q 74:1–2, Qushayrī relates the first apparition of Gabriel, floating in the air (*fa-badā lahu fī al-hawā*), and how this caused the Prophet to flee and envelop himself in a garment (mentioned in these verses).¹³⁰ Then Qushayrī understands (81:23) as Muḥammad seeing Gabriel on the “clear horizon”, mentioned in the verse, during the night of the *mi'rāj*.¹³¹ On Q 15:47, Qushayrī mentions that God ordered Gabriel to clean and purify Muḥammad's heart,¹³² a well-known episode in Islamic religious literature, though not mentioned in the Quran. With regard to Q 94:1, the verse usually associated with this heart purification narrative, Ibn Barraḡān 1 adds the story of two angels attending to this work, one of them being Gabriel, situating this event during the night of the *isrā'* and *mi'rāj*.¹³³

Beyond these classical episodes, mostly known from the *Ḥadīth*, some new roles are attributed to Gabriel. Interestingly, Sulamī, on Q 7:199, presents Gabriel as an interpreter (*mufasssīr*) to the Prophet, the latter asking him the meaning of the verse he just transmitted.¹³⁴ Similarly, on Q 34:23, Baqlī presents Gabriel in the role of interpreter to the rest of the angels. They receive the

127 Victoria Arakelova, Garnik S. Asatryan, *The Religion of the Peacock Angel, the Yezidis and Their Spirit World* (London: Routledge, 2014).

128 On the Yezidi tradition and its angels, the reader will be interested in the excellent article by Artur Rodziewicz: Artur Rodziewicz, “Heft Sur—the Seven Angels of the Yezidi Tradition and Harran,” in Lauritzen, *Inventer les anges*, 943–1029. He explains that the peacock angel is sometimes identified as Gabriel, or as Iblīs—in the latter case not as a negative satanic character, but as a secretly positive character with a specific relation to God.

129 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 56.

130 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* iii, 647.

131 Ibid. 694.

132 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* ii, 273.

133 Ibn Barraḡān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 511. In Ibn Barraḡān 2, only two angels are mentioned, not Gabriel, and the purification consists in “extracting the portion of Satan from his heart” (Ibn Barraḡān 2, *A Qur'ān Commentary* 860). There are many variations of the chronology of these different events: The heart purification is sometimes situated in Muḥammad's childhood, sometimes during his adulthood with the *mi'rāj* (see Chapter 3 and the works of Vuckovic and Colby).

134 Sulamī, i, 261.

“speech of Real” (*kalām al-ḥaqq*) and enter such a state of awe (*ḥayba*) that they do not comprehend this speech, and ask Gabriel what it means. The last part of the verse would be an allusion to Gabriel’s answer, and he is then described as being “of the people of wakefulness and mastery of mystical knowledge.”¹³⁵

More classically, Gabriel is involved in narratives with more theological reflections, used to explain a literal reading of the Quran. Qushayrī mentions Gabriel and Michael in his reading of Q 7:148, as a rebuke to the people of Moses who took up the worshipping of the golden calf, as no-one would have agreed to this if they were to “behold Gabriel and Michael and the Throne, or the Earth, or the *jinn*, or humanity.”¹³⁶ Earlier, we saw a few exoteric explanations of the Quranic “We” of majesty, and there is at least one other in non-angelic verses, involving Gabriel: Mentioning a grammatical point in Q 21:91, Qushayrī argues that the descent of Gabriel is conjoint to God. For example, in this verse where “We breathed into her Our spirit,” to Qushayrī this means that Gabriel oversaw this, on God’s command.¹³⁷

In these non-angelic verses however, we also encounter a few other familiar personal names, added by Islamic traditions to the Quran, and mentioned in the commentaries. These are mainly Azrael (*ʿAzrāʾīl*),¹³⁸ Seraphiel, *Munkar* and *Nakīr*, and *Riḍwān*.

Azrael, angel of death,¹³⁹ is mentioned by Tustarī in his commentary on Q 39:68.¹⁴⁰ He does not play any particular role in it. However, and paradoxically enough, this commentary concerns the mortality of angels. In Ibn Barra-jān 2, Seraphiel is given a particular role, presented as according “to the book called Torah:” after the downfall of Adam, Seraphiel is placed with a “spear of fire” (*rumḥan nārīyyan*) in front of the “tree of life” (*shajarat al-ḥayāt*) so that no-one picks its fruit. To the author, the spear means “piercing” (*ṭaʿn*), and the interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of the tree of life means what is “permitted” (*mubāḥa*)

135

من أهل الصحو والتمكين في المعرفة.

BAQLĪ, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 153–154

136

ولا من لاحظ جبريل وميكائيل والعرش أو الثرى، أو الجن أو الورى.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* i, 570137 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* ii, 521.138 On this name, see Stephen R. Burge, “ZRʾL, The Angel of Death and the Ethiopic *Apocalypse of Peter*,” in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigraphia* 19 (2010): 217–224.

139 For an overview of the Angel of Death in other Sunni sources, see Günther, “As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Quran 6:93)” 314–322.

140 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 173.

in Paradise, and its restriction in this world means “faith” (*īmān*) and acting in obedience (*al-ʿamal bi-tāʿatihi*).¹⁴¹

On Q 47:1, Tustarī mentions Munkar and Nakīr by name, questioning souls,¹⁴² which seems to be an early example of the last stage of the naming process of these angels in Islamic traditions, according to Arent J. Wensinck.¹⁴³ The etymological origins of these names is unclear, and variations exist in other texts.¹⁴⁴

We also find comparisons between prophets, caliphs, and angels, as if the angels who are distinguished by personal names served to highlight their putative human equivalents on Earth. We mentioned this building process of Sunni political legitimacy earlier in Chapter 1 and in the cosmological function. On Q 24:35, the “verse of Light”, Sulamī presents an anonymous report describing such a parallel: “In this verse the light of the Heavens is four: Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Azrael, peace upon them. The light of the Earth is Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman, and Ali, may God be pleased with them.”¹⁴⁵ Tottoli wrote more extensively on the Throne-bearers and how they are used for legitimacy purposes between Sunni and Shia trends. Sunni texts present a similar picture as that of these commentaries, while Shia texts mention the equivalence of these angels to the Prophet’s family, or mention that their names are inscribed on the Throne.¹⁴⁶

Regarding such comparisons with prophets, Ibn Barrajān 1 elaborates on Jesus and other exceptional men, mentioning Q 43:59 when commenting on the 19th surah. He discusses their number before saying that some of them are “in the footsteps of” different figures. This phrasing translates literally as “on the hearts of,” such as in “on the heart of the Prophets” (*ʿalā qulūb al-anbiyāʾ*), while others are “on the heart of” Gabriel, Michael and Seraphiel. Others yet are simply described as having hearts that resemble the hearts of angels (*ashbahat qulūbu-hum qulūb al-malāʾika*). To Ibn Barrajān the angelic verse that follows,

141 Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 322.

142 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 193.

143 The first stage consists in the absence of any angel mentioned, then the mention of an angel, then two angels, and lastly these two angels are given the names Munkar and Nakīr (Wensinck, “Munkar wa-Nakīr,” *ET*²).

144 An example would be “Nākūr,” and sometimes a third one, Rūmān, is associated with them. See Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 46. For more on these two angels in other Sunni sources, see Günther, “As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands” (Quran 6:93) 325–331.

145 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 52.

146 Tottoli, “The Carriers of the Throne of God” 276–282. For angels “used” to highlight the importance of the Prophet’s family in general, see Clohessy, *Angels Hastening*.

Q 43:60, indicates these men.¹⁴⁷ This phrasing, “on the heart of,” is quite important as it will be widely used by Ibn ‘Arabī (seen in Chapter 5), and this is one indication among many of Ibn Barrajān’s influence on him.

Although *Riḍwān* is the angel who came to be associated with Paradise in Islamic traditions, he is not presented as an angel in the Quran.¹⁴⁸ He is mentioned in Qushayrī’s commentary on Q 7:43, which describes a cosmological organization briefly: *Riḍwān* is put in charge of organizing Paradise, while the Throne is kept by a certain “group” (*jumla*); the keys of the Kaaba are given to Banī Shayba, and the purification of hearts, subject of this verse, is taken care of by God himself.¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, *Riḍwān* and the “group” are not described as being angels, and this is only implied by the Quranic context and the general Islamic cosmology. In Ibn Barrajān 2, *Riḍwān*, the keeper of Paradise (*khāzin al-janna*) is also mentioned in his commentary of the 36th surah. However, he does not qualify him clearly as an angel either, and only the context of the death of a believer and the angel of death coming at the same time imply that he might also be one, in addition to the more general context of understanding the guardians of Paradise and Hell as angels.¹⁵⁰

4 The Symbolic Function of Angels in the *tafsīr*

4.1 *An Esoteric (bāṭinī) Meta-function in Angelic Verses*

The last function is not Quranic either, but it was hinted at in different places throughout the previous chapters, and it appears more clearly through a second level of reading, when noticing that many of the angel verses are given a *bāṭinī* or esoteric interpretation either as the only type of interpretation, or as a second interpretation following an exoteric one. The figurative reading has fully taken over, although it does not mean it erases the literal one. In these cases, angels stand for spiritual experiential metaphors, and do not necessarily appear as discrete characters. They are metaphorical tools directly used for a function outside the text, a symbolic or esoteric meta-function: They are used to explain a Quranic verse in relation to the author’s and/or readers’ spiritual experience, or to explain concepts for which angels become allegories or symbols. The angels temporarily cease to represent characters inside the text.

147 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iii, 484.

148 A development of Islamic tradition also noted by Burge (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 74).

149 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* i, 535.

150 Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 586.

4.1.1 Metaphorical Angels

This first part shows different examples of angels used as allegorical metaphors. In the commentaries on Q 70:4 in Chapter 2, angels are presented as allegories for the deeds of humanity ascending to God, and the Spirit as an allegorical metaphor for the “intuition of the self.” Another example of alternative exoteric and esoteric commentaries appears in Qushayrī on alluding verses Q 79:1–5,¹⁵¹ and we have seen in the messenger function that Tustarī does the same to the equally alluding verse Q 77:1 where angels can be understood as such, beings sent by God with His Command, or as metaphors for the spirit of the believers receiving an inspiration. Tustarī then offers exclusively esoteric explanations on the following verses, Q 77:2–6.¹⁵² Another type of angel or spirit “retreat” from the text is their subsuming into their element (according to Islamic traditions): Sulamī on the visitation of Mary Q 19:17 reports a saying attributed to Ibn ‘Atā, saying that the “Spirit” (*rūḥ*) should be understood as “light” (*nūr*) from which Jesus was created.¹⁵³

The most ‘angelic’ of all verses, Q 35:1, also gives way to different metaphors. Following our first mention of Q 35:1, in Qushayrī, and how this verse illustrates the dual attitude a believer should have towards the acts of God (in Chapter 1), in a second part of his commentary Qushayrī provides a list of esoteric interpretations on God’s increasing creation as He wills.¹⁵⁴ Baqlī also makes mystical allegories of this verse, playing on the number of wings:

*He gave the angels wings of knowledge according to the stations’ degrees, giving preference to some over others as in His verse “two, three, and four”, and the saintly spirits have wings, of which there is the wing of Knowledge (maʿrifa), the wing of Oneness (tawḥīd), the wing of Love-Affection (maḥabba), the wing of Desire (shawq); and with the wing of Knowledge you fly to the world of Attributes (ṣifāt), with the wing of Oneness you fly to the world of Being (dhāt), with the wing of Love-Affection you fly to the Witnessing (mushāhada), and with the wing of Desire you fly to the Communion (wiṣāl).*¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 681–682.

¹⁵² Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 261.

¹⁵³ Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* i, 423.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 190–191.

¹⁵⁵ جعل للملائكة أجنحة المعرفة على مراتب المقامات، فضّل بعضهم على بعض في ذلك في قوله {مثنى وثلاث ورباع}، وللأرواح القدسية أجنحة، منها جناح المعرفة، ومنها جناح التوحيد، ومنها جناح المحبة،

He then relates reports from other mystics with variations on this metaphorical approach, and a report attributed to al-Junayd elaborating on this increase of “creation as He wills” in the hearts of the mystical knowers (*al-ʿārifīn*).¹⁵⁶

On the credo verse Q 3:80, angels are similarly ignored by Sulamī, while the verse is given different esoteric interpretations, such as a report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī, in which angels symbolize an unnecessary veil (object of worship demanded by unbelievers in the verse): “Would He command you to veil yourself from the Real after you gazed upon the Real, or to cut yourself from the Real by following something else?”¹⁵⁷ Angels seem to stand for metaphorical “crutches” for those who cannot yet look directly at the Real, echoing the dual canal of communication between the Prophet and God, with or without Gabriel.

Similarly, regarding Q 50:21, where many understand guardian angels, Baqlī presents only a mystical metaphor: the “driver” as the “desire of the soul of the mystical knower” (*shawq nafs al-ʿārif*) for “the beauty of the Real” (*jamāl al-ḥaqq*) and the “witness” as the witnessing of this desire (*mushāhadat shawqihi*). He furthermore witnesses that he is a “Friend drawn near” (*walīyy muqarrab*) by using this description, which is mostly given to angels in exoteric commentaries.¹⁵⁸

On Sulamī’s commentary on the *mirʿāj* verses, Q 53:4–18, apart from a brief discussion on receiving inspiration (seen in the previous chapter) and a mention of Gabriel, these verses are given a mystical interpretation. For instance, in the report attributed to [Jaʿfar] al-Ṣādiq given by Sulamī, verse Q 53:10 becomes a metaphor for a mystical relationship between two lovers and how they keep what is between them secret.¹⁵⁹

Similarly, Qushayrī seems to allow an apparent existence (or at least a metaphorical one) to the Angel of Death only for those whose hearts are unaware, when commenting on Q 32:11:

ومنها جناح الشوق، فبجناح المعرفة تطير إلى عالم الصفات، بجناح التوحيد تطير إلى عالم الذات، وبجناح المحبة تطير إلى المشاهدة، وبجناح الشوق تطير إلى الوصال.

BAQLĪ, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 156

156 Ibid.

157 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* i, 105–106.

158 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 334.

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لَمْ يُطْلَعَا عَلَى سِرِّهِمَا أَحَدًا سِوَاهُمَا

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 285

*Had their hearts not been unaware, the souls would not have been taken by the Angel of death; indeed, the Angel of Death does not have any effect on anyone, and does not move freely by himself, and what is obtained from the dead is specific to the power of the Real. However, they were unaware of the witnessing of the realities of the Lord so He spoke to them on the level of their understanding (...), and all are spoken to with what they may bear according to their strength and weakness.*¹⁶⁰

This clearly implies that the Angel of Death is not independent from God, and his name or representation only serves to communicate God's speech to the level of those who need this metaphor at the moment of their passing.

On Q 37:1–10, Sulamī sees in Q 37:6 stars adorning the sky as “the hearts of his friends [adorned by] the stars of mystical knowledge.”¹⁶¹ We have seen in Chapter 2 that Qushayrī first identifies angels for the four first verses of this same group, however, he builds on the exoteric interpretations with esoteric or symbolic ones, which become the predominant type of commentary given for Q 37:5–7, whereby “[God] adorned the hearts with the lights of monotheism, and if Satan draws close to them, they will stone him with the stars of their knowledge.”¹⁶² On these verses Baqlī gives a mystical interpretation only.¹⁶³

For the alluding verses Q 79:1–5, Tustarī interprets “the racing ones” (*al-sābiqāt*) not as angels, but as the spirits of the believers racing “to be the first to respond to the Angel of Death out of longing (*shawq*) for their Lord.”¹⁶⁴ On these same verses, much later, Baqlī also gives his personal interpretation, identifying the spirits (*arwāḥ*), breaths (*anfās*) or intellects (*ʿuqūl*), but no angel.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, Baqlī sees in angels symbols for human spirits in Q 13:13,

¹⁶⁰ لولا غفلة قلوبهم وإلا لما أحال قبضة أرواحهم على ملك الموت، فإن ملك الموت لا أثر منه في أحد، ولا له تصرفات في نفسه، وما يحصل من التوفي فن خصائص قدرة الحق. ولكنهم غفلوا عن شهود حقائق الرب فخاطبهم على مقدار فهمهم (...) وكل يخاطب بما يحتمل على قدر قوته وضعفه.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 140–141

¹⁶¹ وقلوب أوليائه بكواكب المعرفة.

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 176

¹⁶² زينا القلوب بأنوار التوحيد، فإذا قرب منها الشيطان رجمها بنجوم معارفهم.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 227–228

¹⁶³ Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 476–477.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 265.

¹⁶⁵ Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 381.

and angels praise God: “The angels are the spirits of the mystical knowers when they are annihilated by the splendor of His greatness.”¹⁶⁶ One last example of a metaphorical angel is provided by Ibn Barrajān 1 on Q 25:21, as he writes only one short comment on seeing angels in the verse, which symbolize death to him.¹⁶⁷

4.1.2 Invisible Angels

This second part focuses on the meta-function as shown through a slightly different approach to angels, whereby the commentary is purely mystical, bypassing the angels altogether, reflecting, on a meta-level, on the dispensability of angels as mediators or explanatory metaphors. We had seen this for the Prophet when in direct connection with the divine, where Gabriel is understood as the exoteric symbolization of this communication for some commentators, or during the episodes when Gabriel was not needed, for other commentators. Thus on Q 35:1, Sulamī elaborates in a similarly mystical way on the meaning of “increasing creation as He wills,” such as the “mystical knowledge of God” (*maʿrifat Allāh*) in a report by Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ, or “the Love-Affection in the hearts of the believers” (*maḥabbafī qulūb al-muʾminīn*) in an anonymous report, without referring once to angels as such.¹⁶⁸

On verse Q 3:18, which defines the basic Islamic credo, Sulamī presents different mystical interpretations on the *shahāda*, with numerous reports from previous mystics, including one from Tustarī,¹⁶⁹ according to which God’s witness of His self, followed by the witnessing of His creatures, means that he had full knowledge of everything before the existence of everything. Over the three pages, angels are mentioned only once, briefly, in the report attributed to Jaʿfar, as a paraphrase to the credo: “angels and the possessors of knowledge” attest to God’s own *shahāda*.¹⁷⁰

On different verses that are usually considered to be alluding to angels, we have an example of an exclusively mystical interpretation, with Sulamī providing reports such as the ones attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭāʾ, Jaʿfar, al-Junayd on Q 41:12,¹⁷¹

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والملائكة أرواح العارفين وهي فانية من إجلال عظمته.

BAQLĪ, *Arāʾis al-bayān* ii, 226

He later gives another interpretation, closer to the one given by Qushayrī in the previous chapter (angels crying tears of blood for the mystics), Baqlī, *Arāʾis al-bayān* ii, 226–227.

167 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* iv, 183.

168 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 157.

169 This can be found in al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 43.

170 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* i, 90–93.

171 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 216.

al-Wāsiṭī on the “watcher” in Q 50:18, and Sulamī himself with al-Wāsiṭī on the “driver” and the “witness” in Q 50:21.¹⁷²

On commenting on Q 78:38 and its angels “none speaking,” Sulamī once again bypasses the obvious subject of angels to go to an “educational” interpretation of the verse on the etiquette of speaking, by himself and a report attributed to Abū ‘Uthmān.¹⁷³ On this same verse, Qushayrī immediately gives an esoteric commentary discussing the “awe” (*hayba*) that people will feel on the Last day, pointing out the difference with the “elite” (*khawāṣṣ*), who are permanently witnessing this awe.¹⁷⁴

Commenting on Q 8:9 and this verse’s angelic help by the thousands, Sulamī does not mention it. Reports and discussions are about asking help from God, including one attributed to al-Naṣrābādhī (d. 367/978) that is particularly mystical: The self (*naḥs*) calls for help for eternity and health, while the heart (*qalb*) calls for help in the face of its fear of change (*taqlīb*).¹⁷⁵

Discussing Q 89:22, “your Lord comes with angels row upon row,” Sulamī presents a report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī commenting on the divine Might, where angels are not needed to explain this (or turning angels thus into metaphors for this concept). He also presents reports of unknown origins discussing the notion of time and place to underline the incommensurability of the divine.¹⁷⁶

On the blessing of angels in Q 33:43, Sulamī mentions a report attributed to Abū Bakr b. Ṭāhir, which ignores the angels, bypassing these mediators or helpers, and goes on to elaborate on the meaning of God’s prayers on his servants.¹⁷⁷ On this same verse, Qushayrī offers several esoteric meanings for God’s prayers and the angels, as the verse’s theme of darkness and light lends itself easily to such a type of interpretation.¹⁷⁸

On the angels coming with God in the rhetorical question in Q 2:210, Qushayrī explains that this demonstration of God’s power (*naḥdḥ qudratuhu fīmā yurīd*) is not necessary to the hearts of monotheists, who do not require the interpretation (*taʿwīl*) of this verse and similar verses, since “the Real Exalted He be, is above any move or impermanence, of specific location in place and time.”¹⁷⁹ Angels are then an unnecessary part of the demonstration of

¹⁷² Ibid. 267.

¹⁷³ Ibid. 369.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 679.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* i, 257–258.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqāʾiq* ii, 394.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 149.

¹⁷⁸ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 165.

¹⁷⁹ Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* i, 172.

God's power, as their representation is still linked to notions of temporality and space. Similarly, on Q 33:9–10, Qushayrī sees in these allusions of unseen armies either divine help in averting afflictions, Q 33:9, or afflictions being inflicted upon some, Q 33:10, discussing God's acts directly, without mentioning the angels possibly involved here.¹⁸⁰

On the credo verse Q 4:136, Qushayrī furnishes different reports, all paraphrasing in different ways what a believer should believe in. The last report employs a mystical vocabulary, according to which believers are said to be “witnessing the Real, not the Reality of the Essence” (*shāhid al-ḥaqq lā ḥaqīqat al-dhāt*),¹⁸¹ reiterating the incommensurability of God.

There is another such example from Qushayrī that echoes the theme of angels having access to the heart of men, encountered in Tustarī's comments on Q 50:18. This is found in Qushayrī's commentary on Q 2:248, elaborating on the fact that if the “tranquility” (*sakīna*), borne by the angels in the Ark in the verse, was situated in a particular place and in the time of the people of Israel (*banū Isrāʾīl*), in the tabernacle (*tābūt*) and the staff of Moses (*ʿaṣā Mūsā*), then God “has deposited the *sakīna* of this [Muslim] nation in their hearts.”¹⁸² This could be seen as a particular variation of this meta-function: Something regarded as a literal event with existing entities is turned by an Islamic mystic into a metaphor for a spiritual reality, transposing an exoteric cosmological detail (which needs angels to bear it) into a spiritual one (which is placed directly into hearts, angels becoming unnecessary). By choosing to read this verse fully figuratively instead of literally, the author claims a certain mystical superiority of the Islamic concept of “*sakīna*” over what he considers to be the Jewish one, to which he relegates the literal reading.

Another distinction between two groups of humans and the use and need of angels for the “literal reading” group is made by Qushayrī, in his commentary on Q 82:10–11. The sight of the writing angels is meant as a source of fright to humans, if the latter seek to rationalize and question the divine (*iṭṭilāʿ al-ḥaqq*). Had they known better, that is, were they not questioning the existence of God this way, it would have been better for them than seeing angels.¹⁸³

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كم بلاء صرفه عن العبد وهو لم يشعر.

AL-QUSHAYRĪ, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 153–154

181 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* i, 374. This reminder of a final access to one “interface” of the divinity, and not its whole, could be understood both as a warning against what al-Qushayrī saw as wild claims from some Sufis, and an idea that is to be found in Ibn ʿArabī's works, among others.

182 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* i, 192.

183 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 297–298.

In the continuation of Qushayrī and this approach, the Angel of Death mentioned in verse Q 16:32 elicits from Baqlī a long list of mystical metaphors about death, without mentioning angels or physical death—metaphors which he attributes to “the master” (*al-ustādh*).¹⁸⁴ In the next chapter we will see similar examples of angels, where their literal existence is considered to be a “help” for believers who are not mystically inclined.

4.1.3 Metaphorical Angels

In this third part, we look at the example of angels used as metaphorical tools. Both Ibn Barraġān 1 and Ibn Barraġān 2 contain such reflections. The metaphorical discussion on the “names” taught by God to Adam is found first in Ibn Barraġān 1, for instance, in a section within the commentary of the seventh surah, where he says that “all creatures have dedicated angels, specifically and generally,” and that Adam taught the angels “their own names, so he called them all with the name corresponding to what he [the angel] was in charge of among the existent things.”¹⁸⁵ On Q 2:30–34, Ibn Barraġān 2 launches into a similar and longer commentary around the naming of things that God teaches Adam about, and the question of the angels serving the purpose of prompting the discussion around these names.¹⁸⁶ Here, Adam gives angels their names not with the goal of “separating them from each other, but with the goal of giving them names corresponding to that for which they exist,” or names corresponding to the purpose of their existence, as Iblis is also named for his desperation (*iblāsihi*).¹⁸⁷ This idea is extended to all the names taught to Adam, names corresponding to abstract concepts, things and creatures, all receiving names corresponding to their existence. The whole discussion is rather philosophical in nature, evoking a process of “bringing into consciousness”, begun by God through the teaching of names. Through this process, angels discover God’s infinite knowledge and the portion thereof that has been imparted to Adam, which, however partial, remains superior to their own. This knowledge also corresponds to a kind of realization of their own existence by crea-

¹⁸⁴ Baqlī, *Arāʾis al-bayān* ii, 317.

¹⁸⁵ لكل مخلوقاته ملائكة موكلون به بخاص وعام (...) بأسماء أنفسهم فأبأ كلًا باسمه المطابق لما وُكل إليه من الموجودات.

IBN BARRAĠĀN 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* ii, 306

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 124–133.

¹⁸⁷ ليست أسمائهم عنده للتفرقة بعضهم من بعض فيما هنالك، إنما أسمائهم مطابقة لما وجدوا له.

Ibid. 128

tures and things, thanks to the process of receiving the names that correspond to their realities. In this way, angels are closer to symbolizing philosophical concepts, relationships, or dynamics, and this foreshadows the understanding of Ibn ‘Arabī of the divine Attributes and Names in Chapter 5.

On these same verses, Q 2:30–34, Baqlī, as we have seen in the cosmological function, considers that angels are prideful and faulty, whereby the creation of Adam teaches them to be modest, something which is drawn as a general example to readers (as seen in the praxis function). Furthermore, by ordering them to bow to Adam, angels are made to see the “Secret of God” (*ṣirru-llāh*) in Adam, while Iblis does not see it, and refuses to bow.¹⁸⁸ Baqlī further states, with a highly mystical terminology, that God also taught Adam “the names of the stations that are the stairs of the states (*madārij al-ḥālāt*).”¹⁸⁹ Similarly, on the topics of “secrets” and Adam in Q 7:11, Baqlī describes angels bowing to Adam because “his image is the locus of the standing (*istwā*) of the light of the Attributes (*ṣifāt*),” “his form is the locus of the standing of the lights of the Acts (*af‘āl*),” “his spirit the locus of the standing of the lights of the love-affection (*maḥabbā*),” and “his secret the locus of the fixation of the lights of science (*‘ilm*) and the knowledge (*ma‘rifā*).” Adam becomes thus a means of servanthood to the angels (*wāsiṭa fī al-‘ubūdiyya*),¹⁹⁰ and in a way angels become signposts to mystical realities and experiences of mankind.

The creation of Adam allows angels to access God and His capacities through Adam’s manifestation in a way, an idea which is repeated elsewhere in the commentary on Q 15:28–31.¹⁹¹ Parallel to this, angels participate in, if not stand for, the self-realization of the divine through man.

4.1.4 Obscuring Angels

Lastly, this fourth part explores another symbolic way of seeing angels, found in the comment on verses Q 6:8–9, in which God says that angels were not sent down to the Prophet or, if they were, angels would have been obscured with human-like appearance. We have seen that this blurs boundaries, in the commentaries, between who is human and who is angelic, this despite the Quranic distinction, choosing angels as a category of being over angels as a messenger function (whether human or otherwise). The very short commentaries of Qushayrī seen in the theological function show that external proof is nothing to those who are unconvinced at first: Conviction must come from within. On

188 Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* i, 43.

189 Ibid. 42.

190 Ibid. 418.

191 Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān* ii, 286–290.

Q 6:9, which mentions angels with the appearance of men being sent by God, “thus obscuring to them that which they themselves obscure”, Qushayrī writes: “Who does not consider his innermost self as sacred, [God] obscures his affair (*labbasā amrahu*).”¹⁹² Angels, like the innermost self, are thus to be perceived internally and without needing an external appearance.

We have seen in the previous chapter how Ibn Barrajān 1 uses these angels obscured by God in Q 6:8–9 as a test for humanity, and then draws a comparison with the mystical approach to the Quranic text and how the higher knowledge and certainty can be reached only by going beyond the appearance/exoteric, to reach the inside/esoteric.¹⁹³ On the same verses, Ibn Barrajān 2 reiterates that, had angels been sent to humanity as messengers, they would have looked human (echoing Abraham’s story seen in the messenger function), elaborating on the nature of the universe: Messengers sent to humanity are angelic on the inside (*bawāṭīnuhum malakīyya*) and human on the outside (*ẓawāhiruhum basharīyya*), as the universe is composed of different elements on its outside (*al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ ẓāhiruḥu*), of which the inside is the “Evident Real” (*bāṭin dhālika mā huwa al-ḥaqq al-mubīn*).¹⁹⁴

On these same verses, Q 6:8–9, Baqlī uses a mystical vocabulary, with his habitual flowery style, to comment on those able to see or feel angels, where “the people of the Truth” (*ahl al-ḥaqīqa*) would see in the face of the messenger what was not in the “face of people of the Kingdom” (*wujūh ahl al-malakūt*) of “the illumination’s brilliance of the attributes of the light of eternity” (*sanā ishrāq šifāt nūr al-azal*). He adds specificity on Q 6:9, saying that the “mystical seekers” (*murīdīn*) cannot see “the people of the Kingdom” (*ahl al-malakūt*), that is the angels, except by “feeling” (*al-mithāl al-ḥissī*). Additionally, if they were able to see them, they would only see them in human form, which is “the locus of obscuration” (*mawqī‘ al-iltibās*). He also adds, in a manner reminiscent of Qushayrī, that those who cannot see angels because God obscures “for them that which they themselves obscure” suffer only from their “ruse sent back on their neck” (*wa-yurja‘u kayduhum ‘alā a’nāqihim*). For him, the verse may also have a further meaning for the “people of the Truth” when the “station

192 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if* i, 462.

193 Ibn Barrajān 1, ii, 203.

194 Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qur’ān Commentary* 282. In this sentence, the universe is designated by “*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*”, on which Böwering remarks that “another important feature of Ibn Barrajān’s writings as a whole, as well as the *Īdāh* in particular, is his doctrine of *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*, that is, ‘The Reality By Virtue of Which the Heavens and Earth are Created.’ This idea has its roots in the writings of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā and finds an echo in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers” (ibid. 42).

of treachery and cunning in desire and Love-Affection" (*maqām al-khidāʿ wa-al-makr fi-l-ʾishq wa-l-maḥabba*) means that they commit idolatry in their love (*min shirkihim fi al-ʾishq*).¹⁹⁵ Symbolically, one can understand in these types of commentaries how all angels may share an Iblīs-like characteristic and his function of challenger, which is also shown semantically by repeated use of words such as "*labassa*" or "*iltibās*," which have the same root as "Iblīs".

In the next chapter, we will also see such an example of a challenge function, generalized to all angels in the *miʾrāj* of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874–875 or 234/848–849),¹⁹⁶ who is, interestingly, a notable source for Baqlī. I would suggest that the latter author may have been influenced by the former in his view of angels in more ways than one, if we recall that Baqlī also has an occasional negative view of angels in the previous chapters—a view shared by al Bisṭāmī, as we will see later.

4.2 *The Symbolic Function in Non-angelic Verses*

This part will be short, as mystical commentaries bypassing angels can only be identified in angel verses. However, on a related level, we do find some uses of angels to point out a spiritual or mystical concept or reality in "non-angel verses." Tustarī, on Q 6:125, writes a long commentary mentioning the stations (*maqāmāt*) and degrees (*darajāt*) a believer might reach. For this, he quotes the angelic verse, Q 37:164, where the unknown speakers are usually identified as angels in "known stations," with another verse, Q 6:132, that mentions "degrees," used to justify the use of these words.

While not exactly a metaphor, the angels are used here to illustrate the specificity of mystics as a group, likened thus to angels, as in Tustarī who gives an esoteric interpretation of "livelihood" (*maʿāsh*) in verse Q 78:11, which seems to set apart a certain elite from the masses (*ʿawāmm*):

*That is, the lights of the heart and its illumination (tanwīr) through Our remembrance (dhikr), are the livelihood (ʿaysh) of the spiritual self (nafs al-rūḥ) and the intellect (ʿaql), as they are the livelihood of the angels. However, the other kind of livelihood is the way of the generality of people (ʿawāmm).*¹⁹⁷

195 Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* i, 347–348. These ideas are repeated in the comment on Q 25:7, where Baqlī adds that human qualities are not contrary to prophethood, as the body is the vessel (*markab*) leading ultimately to mystical knowledge (*maʿrifā*) (Baqlī, *ʿArāʾis al-bayān* iii, 26–27).

196 Also known as Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī, or al-Basṭāmī.

197 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 263.

Echoing the angels circumambulating the Kaaba which illustrate verse Q 114:4, Tustarī identifies, in his commentary on Q 52:4, the Quranic Inhabited House (*bayt ma'mūr*) with a House in the 4th or 7th Heaven, to which angels make a pilgrimage.¹⁹⁸ On the esoteric side however, he adds that this "*bayt*" is in reality the heart of the mystics:

*In its inner meaning, it refers to the heart; the hearts of mystics are frequented (ma'mūra) by His gnosis (ma'rifa), His love (maḥabba) and intimacy (uns) with Him. It is to this [the mystic's heart] that the angels make pilgrimage, for it is the House of the Realisation of God's Oneness (bayt al-tawḥīd).*¹⁹⁹

On another parallel between angels and hearts, we find the interpretation of Q 48:4 in Sulamī through a report attributed to al-Tustarī: On the exoteric side God's armies in heaven are the angels (*junūduhu fī al-samā' al-malā'ika*), and His armies on Earth are the raiders (*junūduhu fī al-arḍ al-ghuzāt*), while on the esoteric side "the armies of the Heavens are the hearts and the armies of the Earth are the selves".²⁰⁰ Interestingly, earlier in Tustarī we find the same commentary, with the difference that the armies of the Heavens are prophets, not angels, with a greater elaboration on the esoteric interpretation, and how it is preferable for the heart to overpower the self.²⁰¹

On this simultaneity of exoteric and esoteric interpretations, and the place of angels in this nexus, Sulamī gives a clear example of what I argue is eminently a Sufi approach to the understanding of angels. He comments on Q 27:6, with a report attributed to Abū Bakr bin Ṭāhir, for whom "One who is Wise, Knowing" (*ḥakīm 'alīm*) is Gabriel. To him, Gabriel transmitting the Quran is only the exoteric aspect of an inner event: "Indeed you receive the Qur'ān from the Real, in reality, even when you are taking it on the outside by the mediation of Gabriel, God—Exalted he be—said 'The Compassionate taught the Qur'ān.'" ²⁰² This echoes the dichotomy already seen between the direct divine

198 Ibn Barraġān 1 relates the same interpretation on this verse, mentioning only the 7th Heaven, Ibn Barraġān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 199.

199 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 210.

200

جنود السماوات القلوب وجنود الأرض النفوس.

SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā'iq* ii, 255

201 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 196.

202

إنك لا تتلقف القرآن من الحق حقيقة وإن كنت تأخذه في الظاهر عن واسطة جبريل قال الله تعالى {الرحمن علم القرآن}.

message and the message given by a mediator. Here, Sulamī juxtaposes the esoteric understanding to the usual exoteric understanding of this event. The figurative or symbolic is added as an indispensable completion of the literal reading of the verse. This will also appear more clearly in the following chapters.

Another parallel is drawn between angels and human souls in the commentaries on Q 85:1–3, in both Tustarī and Sulamī, which contain the same report attributed to Tustarī with one variation: The “witness” is understood to be an angel (in Tustarī the one mentioned in 50:21) or several angels (in Sulamī), and the “witnessed” is understood to be the Day of Resurrection (in Tustarī), or humanity (*al-insān*) (in Sulamī).²⁰³ Although diverging on this exoteric interpretation, both versions converge on the esoteric one: The “witness” is the spiritual self (*nafs al-rūḥ*) and the “witnessed” is the “natural self” or “lower self” (*nafs al-ṭabʿ*).²⁰⁴

Additionally, among the many mentions of meteorological angels, Ibn Barrajān 1’s commentary on Q 77:1–2²⁰⁵ can be mentioned here, where the angels in charge of the winds and the clouds are simultaneously in charge of spreading God’s compassion.²⁰⁶ This denotes a recurrent literary theme where clouds, rain, and wind carry a positive connotation, contrary to heat and the sun,²⁰⁷ reflecting geographical realities. Similarly, commenting on Q 57:16, Ibn Barrajān 2 compares the revivification of Earth by God after its death with the revivification of the hearts by remembrance (*dhikr*) and the seeking of knowledge (*ṭalb al-ʿilm*) from God, His messengers, His angels, and His signs (*āyāt*).²⁰⁸

On Q 39:17, Baqlī speaks about the callings from the inner part of the servant (*bāṭinihi*) where the “apprehensions of the self” (*hawājis al-nafs*), the “whisperings of Satan” (*waswās al-shayṭān*), and the “thoughts of the angel” (*khawāṭir al-malak*) compete. The first one calls for his interests, the second to disobedience, and the last one to devotion.²⁰⁹

On the specific metaphor of Satan as the “ego” or “lower self,” we find the commentary of Qushayrī on Q 7:12, a verse about Iblīs claiming “I am bet-

203 Among the many unknown reports that he provides on verse Q 85:3, Qushayrī gives a variation on this one: The witness is an angel, but it can also be humanity, witnessing itself (Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif* iii, 710).

204 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr* 276, and Sulamī, ii, 385.

205 Also seen in the cosmological and messenger functions.

206 Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 428–429.

207 A few pages earlier, the sun is described as part of the torment inflicted upon those going to Hell (Ibn Barrajān 1, *Tafsīr* v, 405).

208 Ibn Barrajān 2, *A Qurʾān Commentary* 742.

209 Baqlī, *Arāʾis al-bayān* iii, 208.

ter than him" (*anā khayran minhu*) when speaking about Adam.²¹⁰ Sulamī presents different reports, all providing mostly esoteric interpretations. An anonymous one lays the fault on Iblīs, by claiming he was better than man because he was created of fire, in that "he did not know, uncertain that the preference (*al-faḍl*) came from the One giving the preference (*al-mufḍil*) and not from the matter (*al-jawhariyya*)."²¹¹ Other reports focus even more interestingly on the word "I" (*anā*): Another anonymous one says that Iblīs was cursed when he uttered this very word; the report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī links this to the ascetic's life, "He who wears the shirt of asceticism is clasped by the 'I'"; the report attributed to Ibn 'Aṭā takes this verse to explain that "if the Real takes over the innermost of something, it defeats it and there is no preference left for any but [the Real]."²¹² On Q 7:29, Sulamī describes Iblīs' inborn nature (*khilqa*) as beginning by disbelief (*kufṛ*) and dispute (*khilāf*), before he was brought by God among the angels and the "drawn near" (*muqarrabīn*), and then sent back again to what he started from.²¹³

Finally, we also encounter angels as metaphorical concepts, in a separate section in the commentary of the sixth surah, where Ibn Barrajān 1 comments on the alluding verse Q 34:23, that could be understood as involving angels in an eschatological setting. He elaborates on the general cosmology of angels, as seen in the section on cosmological function in Chapter 2. However, he presents a brief paragraph that is more esoteric and philosophical in nature, about the "Meanings of the universe" (*ma'ānī al-khalīqa*) being more numerous than its "Essences" (*dhawāt*).²¹⁴ This "meaning" (*ma'nā*) cannot always be translated this way. This multiform and multi-use word in a philosophical context might translate different concepts inherited from the Greek, such as "entity" or "idea."²¹⁵ Ibn Barrajān gives examples of actions that can target an

210 Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if* i, 522.

211

من لبس قيص النسك خاصره أنا
لأن الحق إذا استولى على سر شيء قهره فلم يترك فيه فضلاً لغيره

AL-SULAMĪ, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 221–222

212 Al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā'iq* i, 227.

213 Baqlī, *Arā'is al-bayān* ii, 242–243.

214 Kermani, *God is Beautiful* 203–204; Leaman, "Ma'nā," *ET*²; In Chapter 5, its derived adjective "ma'nawī" with Ibn Arabī might be best translated as "ideational."

On "meaning" and its different meanings, we might mention here the mystical take by James S. Cutsinger on modern myths as those produced by the Inklings to illustrate his comprehension of angels: To him, angels make man realize that the world is full of meaning, so it crushes his ego (James S. Cutsinger, "Angels in Inklings," *Mythlore* 19, no. 2 (1993): 59–60.)

entity, or a concept, such as “attracting” (*jādhīb*), “pushing” (*dāfiʿ*), “dividing” (*muqsim*), and the commentator then compares these to “angels in charge” (*al-malāʾika al-muwakkalīn*) who are themselves more numerous than the Meanings, “since to every Meaning there is a Pusher, a Taker, and a Maintainer” (*idh li-kulli maʿnā dāfiʿ wa-qābiḍ wa-māsik*). Therefore each Meaning has several angels taking care of it. Angels are thus symbols for movements putting the universe in motion. He later takes the examples of the alluding verses Q 77:1–5 and Q 79:1–5 as examples of these notions.²¹⁵ For instance, in Q 79:1–2 he elaborates on the angels of death taking souls and others in charge of growing plants or tearing off “matters” and “meanings” that have grown to be too many in certain situations.²¹⁶

5 Concluding Thoughts on Angels in the Sufi *tafsīr*

These chapters showed that angels in the Sufi *tafsīr* were among the main actors of the cosmological Unseen (*ghayb*), which includes the theological Kingdom (*malakūt*) and the eschatological afterlife (*ākhirā*). These commentaries represented them in the same roles as those found in the Quranic text, leading to the same functions, albeit with more details and nuances sometimes, and adding some new specific roles at other times. While a filiation showed through these commentaries, using a set of shared references, the originality of each author was also noticeable in many cases, if only in the way they chose their references from the common set.²¹⁷

Additional details and roles, as well as the way the commentators sometimes used the presence of angels to draw parallels about mystical or philosophical reflections, led me to add two new functions. First is the function of cosmological enrichment through an elaboration of relationships between angels and other beings such as the *jinn*, *ḥinn*, *binn*, and other relatively undefined concepts such as the Spirit (*rūḥ*). This function is related to the “exegetical infla-

215 Ibn Barraḡān 1, *Tafsīr* ii, 242–243; v, 428–429, 442. Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) writes similarly, though in a more literal manner, that everything needs several angels, and that the natural faculties (attracting, pulling, etc), are done by angels (Murata, “The Angels” 335).

216 تكثر المواد والمعاني غير المرادة لذلك المراد، فتزعه النازعات من الملائكة.

IBN BARRAJĀN, v, 428–429

217 This corroborates the findings of Coppens (Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qurʾan Commentaries* 248).

tion” noted by Burge.²¹⁸ This is also related to the use of *isrāʾīliyyāt*, which are elements of the midrashim (Jewish commentaries) used by Muslim scholars to explain specific or unclear aspects of the Quranic text and sacred history,²¹⁹ although Burge considers the presence of *isrāʾīliyyāt* rather limited in Islamic angelologies, appearing mostly in some specific names.²²⁰

The second additional function seems to be specific to Sufi or mystical types of commentaries: the meta-function of angels as symbols of spiritual states and concepts. The reader might have noticed it throughout the previous functions in individual examples, but it is shown more systematically in the last part, the symbolic function, in four different variations: 1) We have seen angels used as allegorical metaphors standing for the representation of esoteric or “inner” concepts (e.g. human deed, spirit), events (e.g. death) or meaning (e.g. attitude of the believer); 2) angels were noticed for their absence in the commentary on some verses, as a way of pointing out the non-necessity of their presence (as metaphors in the text) or existence (as characters for revelation or inspiration) for the mediation with the divine, this “negation” function outlining the direct divine communication of the Sufi experience and echoing an “invisibilization” process started in the Quran; 3) the particular metaphorical and mystical representation of angels in the works of Ibn Barrajān, where angels stand as particular symbols when writing about divine Names, Acts of creation, and Meanings, as tools of God in His creative act and its maintenance, which announces in part a similar use of angels in Ibn ʿArabī’s works; and 4) a specific esoteric sign where the physical/exoteric relationship between the appearance of angels and that of humans serves to explain the test of faith posed to people in general, as well as the mystical state of being, both exoterically and esoterically, of a specific group of people (such as the prophets, the righteous, and the mystical knowers).

This symbolic function of angels could be analyzed as an example of the fourth principle of Islamic esotericism listed by Saif, the “trans-linguistic prin-

218 Which echoes Olyan’s work on Jewish writings.

219 Goldziher list three different types of *isrāʾīliyyāt*: one that completes a biblical theme in the Quran, one that includes as stories classified as “the time of the Banū Isrāʾīl” even if they do not involve Jewish characters, and one that covers miraculous folk stories partly of Jewish origins. See Vajda, “Isrāʾīliyyāt,” *ET*² See also Roberto Tottoli, “Origin and use of the Term Isrāʾīliyyāt in Muslim Literature,” *Arabica* 46, no. 2 (1999): 193–210.

For more on the relationship between Judaism and the Quranic text, see Meir M. Bar-Asher, “Premiers contacts entre Juifs et Arabes en Arabie avant l’avènement de l’islam,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, 3 vols., i, (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 295–329.

220 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 47–49.

ciple that demands the use of symbols and allegory,”²²¹ a symbolic aspect of exegetical methodology also noted by Pierre Lory on a Sufi commentary by an author of the Akbarian school.²²² The discussion on the “symbolic” in this context of religious commentaries also recalls the four levels of interpretation that are applied to monotheist scripture. In Islamic traditions, a saying attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) posits that each Quranic verse has four meanings (the last two being difficult to translate): an exoteric (*ẓāhīr*), an esoteric (*bāṭin*), a limit (*ḥadd*), and an ascent (*maṭlaʿ*).

This echoes another saying, attributed to Jaʿfar al-Šādiq, who “claimed the Qurʾān is composed of four things: expressed matters (*ʿibārāt*), allusions (*ishārāt*), subtle references to the transcendent realm (*laṭīf*) and absolute truths or references to an absolute reality (*ḥaqāʾiq*). Most notably, this last saying is mentioned in the introduction of Sulamī’s *tafsīr*, its name *Ḥaqāʾiq al-tafsīr* recalling this last word. The first of these is the literal meaning of the text intended for ordinary people (*ʿawām*), the second is the allegoric meaning for the elite (*khawāṣṣ*), the third is the secret meaning intended for the spiritual elite or ‘Friends of God’ (*awliyāʾ*), and the fourth comprises the highest doctrines understood only by prophets (*anbiyāʾ*).”²²³

Even though literary and conceptual comparisons between languages and religions can only lead so far without raising discussions of relevancy due to the particularities of each tradition and the complexity of translation, both linguistic and cultural, these sayings call to mind in turn the parallel tradition of interpretation in Judaism and Christianity. Indeed, Wansbrough noted this parallel with the Christian tradition started by the fathers of the Church, such as Origen (d. 253 AD) and Cassian (d. 435 AD): literal exegesis (*ẓāhīr* and *historia*), symbolic (*bāṭin* and *allegoria*), prescriptive (*ḥadd* and *tropologia*), and spiritual (*maṭlaʿ* and *anagoge*).²²⁴ To this we can add the Jewish interpretative tools of plain meaning (*pshat*), hint/allegory (*remez*), homiletic exposition (*drash*), and mystical/symbolic (*sod*).²²⁵

The question would then be: Assuming that the equivalences thus established are working, is the symbolic function of angels in this chapter an illustration of the symbolic “*bāṭin/ishārāt/allegoria/remez*” level, or of the spiritual

221 Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?” 46.

222 Pierre Lory, *Les commentaires ésotériques du Coran d’après ‘Abd ar-Razzâq al-Qâshânî*, Les deux océans, Paris, 1980, 28–43.

223 Elias, “Sufi tafsīr reconsidered” 41–42.

224 John E. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies* 243.

225 Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 430.

“*maṭlaʿ/ḥaqāʾiq/anagoge/sod*” level of reading? This is further complicated by the fact that the first (symbolic) might equate a concept of the second (*anagoge*) for some authors such as pseudo-Denys the Areopagite (6th century). Indeed, to him anagoge is a symbol using a representation that is completely unlike what it represents, taking the example of the animal-looking bearers of the Throne,²²⁶ a tool to help the mind on its way to “un-represent” the highest spheres and the divine. My best answer so far would be then that the commentators here use both the symbolic “*bāṭin/allegoria/remez*” tool and the spiritual “*maṭlaʿ/anagoge/sod*” tool, depending on each example. There is also the possibility that one example might be classified as both, depending on one author’s understanding of a given interpretation and naming of a level of reading. For the sake of simplicity, I choose to conflate then both levels of readings under the simpler denomination of “symbolic function,” used for the authors studied in this chapter, when they provide commentaries on Quranic verses that could be qualified as esoteric (*bāṭin*).

This symbolic function can also be related to one of the angelic types listed by Burge in his typology of Islamic angels, which are: 1) angels of abstract concepts; 2) cosmological angels; 3) angels of specific things and places; 4) other angels.²²⁷ I would argue that the three last types could be found in the Quran in some measure throughout the listed functions here, whether on the level of roles or on the level of functions arising from these roles. However, the first one, “angels of abstract concepts,” cannot correspond to an angelic role in the text, as it can only correspond to a function which arises primarily out of the interpreting act of the text, or at least out of a particular reading of the text. Indeed, the Quranic text itself does not state that the Angel of Death stands for the abstract notion of death: Only the interpretative act of the reader or listener can reach such a conclusion, adding a symbolic or figurative understanding to the literal one presented by the text.²²⁸ As such, this “abstract” type overlaps with the symbolic function that sees signs in angels, both in the sense of Quranic “*āyāt*” and in a larger symbolic sense.

Through these functions, we have also seen what different styles of Quranic commentary might be encountered, and how an individual author makes sense

226 Denys L’Aréopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste*, ed. Günter Heil, trans. Maurice de Gandillac (Paris: Cerf, 1958, 2020), LXXX–XCI, 77–85.

227 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 39.

228 Burge affirms that abstract angels such as the Angel of Death was common in many religious traditions of the Middle East, however he does not seem to make the distinction between what a text says in and of itself (such as the Quran), and what texts say of other texts (such as commentaries), inducing a necessary distance and interpretative possibility (see *ibid.* 39–40).

of the developing Islamic cosmology and enriches it. We were able to detect the Eastern spiritual filiation of Tustarī to Baqlī through Sulamī and Qushayrī, while Ibn Barrajān represented a somewhat different Western tradition. His pragmatic and philosophical view of angels differed from the more mystical and experiential approach of the other authors—although within the Eastern authors great differences were visible, from Qushayrī, closest to the mainstream Sunni view, to Baqlī, presenting highly poetical reflections on angels.

In their own ways, these comments lead to the renewal of the cosmology first presented by the Quran. It further islamizes the religious imaginary through the reuse of pre-Islamic and contemporary concepts, re-ordered in a new way. An example of this is the reversal of what “*jinn*” could have meant in pre-Islamic times (any being of the Unseen including angels). In Ibn Barrajān’s time of the Islamic al-Andalus, “angel” now means all beings of the Unseen, including the *jinn*.²²⁹ These commentaries anchor and enrich the Quranic text in a specific time and place, exposing it to particular transversal interests and debates, such as the ongoing inter- and intra-religious conversation, the physical world and its necessities, the definition of what being Sufi or mystic means and what a Sufi’s aspirations should or can be. These aspirations also add a particular coloring to these *tafsīr*, where angels become models to imitate or surpass, characters suffusing the texts in an approach more impressionistic than highly detailed, the focus being on one’s spiritual journey and experience.

Further research on other commentaries regarding the different types of *tafsīr* sub-genres would be interesting for comparative purposes. Would the cosmological enrichment function be greater? Would they contain any function specific to them?

Such comparative research could also help us evaluate the extent to which the symbolic function, as seen here, is particular to Sufi commentaries. From our readings, allegorical angels do exist elsewhere, such as in philosophical writings: Philosophers seem to identify angels with Intellects,²³⁰ al-Farabī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) identifying ten of them. The latter further identifies the Holy Spirit with Gabriel and the Tenth Intellect, an angel being more generally the symbol of an immortal intellect and an intermediary entity (*jawhar wasīt*) between God and terrestrial bodies on the three different planes of reason (*‘aqlī*), soul (*nafsī*), and body (*jismānī*).²³¹ These identifications seem

229 This echoes the thesis of another Quranic commentator, al-Zamakhsharī.

230 Jadaane, Fehmi, “La place des anges” 30–32.

231 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods used for its Study by the Ikhwan Al-Safa’, Al-Biruni, and Ibn Sina* (Cam-

to become more complex in other mystical trends, such as that exemplified by the writings of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*),²³² or in texts from various Shia and Ismaili schools of thought.²³³ However, from our cursory understanding of these readings, angels then only appear as one type of metaphor, allegories acting more as a translation of concepts from a philosophical language into an Islamic one, more than being the construction of a specific concept of angels.²³⁴

In such non-Sufi writings, angels also seem to be set into clear and systematic angelic systems, unlike angels in these commentaries, which do not seem to be part of any well-delimited group or hierarchies, but rather are left to be angels about whom we know few things, exoterically. The notable absence of any word that could be translated as “archangel,” except the one occurrence noted in the “Gabriel and Michael” section in this third chapter, is one sign indicating the ‘refusal’ of our authors to define angelic hierarchies, gleaned from a negative reading of their comments. Angels are almost only ever called this, “angels,” and the few cherubim or the one “great angel” occurrences are not enough to reverse the general impression left in thousands of pages. I argue that this indicates a specific tendency of Sufi writings to deflect the attention away from the form and back to the content, from what the angel is to what the angel means to the authors, aside from showing a specific theological illustration of the equalitarian Quranic vision of the creation, especially in relation to God.

I would not go as far as to argue that Sufi authors pay more attention to the meaning than to the form in opposition to other religious “schools”. Many of their comments on angels have suggested otherwise and, like Qushayrī, many have been keen to build their approach as part of the greater Sunni tradition, and not outside of it.²³⁵ They seem, however, to bring a particular focus to the symbolic reading, which they add to the figurative one that is well covered by

bridge: Belknap Press, 1964), 268; Murata, “The Angels,” 328–329; Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia filosofica di Avicenna.”

232 de Callatay, “The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* on Angels and Spiritual Beings,” Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia nelle epistole dei Fratelli della Purezza: l’esempio della natura,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ebook.

233 For example, Gabriel as a multivalent demiurge character; see Erdal Gezik, “How Angel Gabriel Became our Brother of the Hereafter (on the Question of Ismaili Influence on Alevism),” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2016): 56–70; Angels related to “creative light” in Shiism in Gardet, “Les anges en islam.”

234 Burge goes so far as to write that angelic hierarchies in Islamic philosophy are an “afterthought—an attempt to graft Quranic and *ḥadīth*-based beliefs into an otherwise alien philosophical system” (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 97–98).

235 Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur’an Commentaries* 261–262.

non-Sufi authors and consider them to be complementary to one another. We saw such an example earlier, with Sulamī on the mediation of Gabriel, where both symbolic and literal interpretations are considered simultaneously, as if by necessity.

As such, if further research showed more frequent mentioning of “literal” angels in more typically Sunni *tafsīr*, this would also confirm the particularity of this last function of angels, seen here in Sufi *tafsīr*.²³⁶ Indeed, these do not contain as many angels as expected, since at times it becomes unnecessary to even mention them, symbols in negation for spiritual states and concepts, while the exoteric-minded reader of another type of *tafsīr* would require a greater number of mediators—more angels, as discrete beings that exist to be involved in the process of building an Islamic cosmology and to manage its elements.

On the possible elaboration of a specific mystical concept of angels, the case studies in the next two chapters will further illustrate a tendency of Sufi texts to consider angels as a multifold reality.

236 More literal readings of the role of angels after death, as studied by Günther, seem to point in this direction (Günther, “‘As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Qur’ān 6:93)” 307–346.)

Angelic Roles and Functions in the Sufi *mi'rāj*

This first case study looks at a specific part of Islamic religious literature, the *mi'rāj* or celestial ascension, which tends to involve many angelic characters. I will first present the prophetic model of ascension narratives and its angelic characters before turning to its Sufi retelling and mimesis, followed by the two personal narratives from two quite different Sufi masters, al-Bisṭāmī and Ibn 'Arabī.

1 The “Heavenly Ascension” or *mi'rāj* in Islam

1.1 *The Prophetic Model*

Mi'rāj literature is an aspect of Islamic apocalyptic literature built upon a few verses of the Quran. These became the basis of what came to be known as the night journey of the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Jerusalem—the *isrā'*—and his heavenly ascension, which is the *mi'rāj* proper. *Isrā'* in Arabic is rather clear in its meaning of night travel, as the Quranic verse associated with this narrative in *sūrat al-isrā'* seems to be clear as well:¹

Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer. (17:1)

¹ Nathaniel Miller has convincingly argued that interpreting this verse as a “night journey” is more out of fidelity to the Prophetic *sīra* than anything else. Exegesis and classical lexicography kept alternative meanings of this word, and his own philological analysis shows that it is probably of Sabaic origin, with the meaning of “To travel through the uplands” or “To send a royal expedition.” See Nathaniel Miller, “Yemeni Inscriptions, Iraqi Chronicles, Hijazi Poetry: A Reconstruction of the Meaning of *Isrā'* in Qur'an 17:1,” *Journal of the royal Asiatic Society*, online (2020). Interestingly, such an alternative sense is kept in one of the sayings listed by Sulamī in his collection of sayings on the Prophetic *mi'rāj*, see Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension: Early Mystical Sayings on Muhammad's Heavenly Journey*, ed. Frederick S. Colby (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2006), 35.

For a recent literary study of this verse, which aims to show the mythopoeic process built on it, see Neuwirth, “From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple.”

However, the *mi'rāj*, a word whose literal meaning is stairs or ladder, has come to designate the heavenly ascension through the Heavens to God, and is linked most notably to Quranic verses that are more elusive in their meaning, in *sūrat al-najm* (Q 53):

By the star, when it sets / your companion has neither strayed nor erred / nor does he speak out of caprice. / It is naught but a revelation revealed, taught him by one of awesome power. / Possessed of vigor, he stood upright / when he was upon the highest horizon. / Then he drew nigh and came close, / till he was within two bow's length or nearer. / Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed. / The heart lied not in what it saw. / Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw? / And indeed he saw him another time, / at the lote tree of the boundary, / by which lies the Garden of the refuge, / when there covered the lote tree that which covered. / The gaze swerved not; nor did it transgress. / Indeed, he saw the greatest of the signs of his Lord (Q 53:1–18).²

Thus, if the Quran seems to allude to the night journey, the reference to the *mi'rāj* story is less clear, even if we take into consideration other verses, such as Q 70:3–4, which describes God as the “Lord of the heavenly stairs” on which angels descend and ascend. The *mi'rāj* narrative will be mainly found later, in the *ḥadīth* and the *sīra* in greater detail, and in non-Sufi *tafsīr*. As for the Sufi *tafsīr*, the previous chapters showed that these verses did not elicit long comments, and Coppens has analyzed them in more detail, finding a notable absence of long discussions on this subject³—although, as we will see, Sufis did not disregard the theme of *mi'rāj* altogether, as some of them were even interested in experiencing it.

Some of the non-Sufi classical accounts speak of stairs, and others of Burāq, the legendary mount of the Prophet that replaces the stairs in some cases.⁴ This

2 To these two main Quranic sources, sometimes another verse is added, Q 81:15–24, where most commentators understand the vision of Gabriel in the early stages of the revelation to Muḥammad, others understood this as a vision of God, see Frederick S. Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey: Tracing the Development of the Ibn 'Abbas ascension Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 16–17. These verses, Q 53:1–18, have been interpreted in various ways by early muslim exegetes who debated whether Muḥammad saw Gabriel or God, see Joseph Van Ess, “Le Mi'rāj et la vision de Dieu dans les premières spéculations théologiques en islam,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam*, ed. M. Amir Moezzi (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1996), 27–56.

3 Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries* 227–255.

4 Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns: The Legacy of the Mi'rāj in the Formation of Islam* (New York, Routledge, 2005), 44–50.

is how the *mīrāj* stories were progressively elaborated and extended in Islamic religious literature until it could be argued that it became a literary genre in itself,⁵ with an elaboration on religious figures such as prophets and angels.

Regarding Jewish apocalyptic literature, John J. Collins writes in his referential study that “the constant element is the presence of an angel who interprets the vision or serves as guide on the otherworldly journey.”⁶ Ithamar Gruenwald also notes that angels are important in attesting to the veracity of a vision in such literature.⁷ As such, this literary genre in the Islamic context unsurprisingly and clearly echoes previous apocalyptic literature and ascension narratives in the region, in both Jewish and early Christian literature,⁸ showing roots into a late-antique milieu, similarly to what Neuwirth argues for the Quranic text itself. It also has motifs rooted in Arabian folklore,⁹ which, added to the Judaic and Christian references, would have created a narrative that is both familiar to its audience, as a legitimate monotheistic narrative, and differentiated from the other two monotheistic creeds, by its Ara-

5 Roberto Tottoli, “Muslim Eschatology and the Ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad: Describing Paradise in Mīrāj Traditions and Literature,” in *Roads to paradise: Eschatology and concepts of the hereafter in Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson (Leiden, Brill, 2017), 875.

6 John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* 6.

7 Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkevah Mysticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkevah Mysticism, and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 58.

8 Aside from the study by Collins, see also Mary Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys, A Study of the motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfort/Berne/New York, 1984); Muriel Debié, “Les apocalypses syriaques,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, i, 543–586.

This resonance shows in the *mīrāj* narratives themselves, where the Prophet meets Idrīs among other prophets, and Idrīs is often identified with Enoch, one of the main sources of biblical ascension narratives (Vajda, G., “Idrīs” *ET*²). And while this “Judeo-Christian echo” could have served for legitimacy purposes by inscribing the Prophet’s ascension within an older prophetic tradition, in the same way that the *isrāʾīlīyyāt* would have served to explain obscure contextual points to Quranic narratives or Prophetic narratives, this aspect has become today, conversely, an argument against the legitimacy of *mīrāj* for some modern Muslim thinkers (for instance see Ronald P. Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension in Islam: The Reception of Religious Narrative in Sunni, Shiʿi and Western Culture* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 34–36).

9 Peter Webb, “The Familiar and the Fantastic in Narratives of Muḥammad’s Ascension to the Heavenly Spheres,” *Middle Eastern Literatures* 15, no. 3 (2012): 249–250. Webb analyses this as bringing more familiarity to the audience as a point of departure for the story, for an easier identification with its hero. However, given the evolution of Islamic societies within the first centuries of Islam and the shift from the Arabian peninsula to the great cities outside of it, this Arabian outlook would not necessarily have felt very familiar to a Muslim audience of the 4th century, and instead could be analyzed more as a narrative technique to legitimize the narrative as “Arabian,” and as such, differentiated from the Jewish and Christian ones.

bian aspect.¹⁰ The *mī'rāj* narratives could be analyzed like other apocalyptic narratives, on a historical level, as the mythical (and mystical) translation of real political expectations in times of uncertainty that had remained unanswered.¹¹

The prophetic *mī'rāj* can be included within the wider utopian literature genre, as argued by Peter Webb in an interesting comparison with western travel narratives containing fantastical elements,¹² in which he analyses the Prophetic ascension narrative as “plausible fiction.” By this he means that its factual reality is not as important as the message that authors try to convey through these stories to their audience: The main character of the story comes back to his country, trying to bring and implement an utopia, in the “here and now,”¹³ the way the Prophet brings back the number of prayers for believers, in order to organize their physical and spiritual lives, helping them with the descriptions of what is to come as reward for a faithful life.

1.2 Two Archetypes of *mī'rāj*

The Prophetic *mī'rāj* presents many variations, as elaborated by different authors in Quranic commentaries or works dedicated to this theme,¹⁴ although two great trends of sources for constructing the narrative could be roughly differentiated: the “official” or “canonical” version based on the Sunni *ḥadīth*, and a “para-official” alternative version, widely circulated, based on what Colby calls the “Ibn ‘Abbās narrative,” and used mainly in Shia accounts.¹⁵ Regarding the ascension narratives presented in this chapter, we will see that Ibn ‘Arabī’s account follows the “canonical” framework, while al-Biṣṭāmī follows the “Ibn ‘Abbās” framework, characterized by the clear presence of many angels.

The first, or “canonical,” version, based mostly on the Sunni canonical *ḥadīth* compilations, usually features the following main narrative structure: Depart-

10 For more detailed discussion on the function of building religious legitimacy through the *mī'rāj*, see Colby, *Narrating's Muḥammad Night's Journey* 87, and Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*.

11 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Le Shi'isme et le Coran,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, iii, 921–967 (see especially “Entre l'apocalypse et l'empire,” 939–957).

12 He calls this “utopian travel rubric,” constructed narratively as such: a familiar beginning, remarkable journey, and fantastic arrival (before the hero returns home). See Webb, “The Familiar and the Fantastic” 242.

13 Ibid. 255.

14 Schrieke et al., “Mī'rādī,” 112.

15 Reality is of course more complex, authors using both sources and agreeing on many aspects while differing on others, such as al-Qushayrī, who tends to favor the canonical Sunni *ḥadīth* but nonetheless includes narratives that other Sunni authors would discard and that Shia authors would use (see below).

ing from Mecca and stopping at Jerusalem (during the *isrā'*) on the mythical mount al-Burāq, Muḥammad is then taken by the archangel Gabriel through the seven Heavens, meeting the different previous prophets (Adam, Jesus and John the Baptist, Joseph, Idrīs, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham), before arriving at the Lote Tree, where he continues alone to meet God at the Throne.¹⁶ Sometimes various other episodes of Muḥammad's life are collated with this story, such as the episode of the cleansing of his heart by two or more angels as preparation for the journey, which we find in the *sīra*, and which has been analyzed has an initiation and purification process, necessary for a successful ascension.¹⁷ Another initiation scene is often included, where Gabriel appears in the function of the "testing angel," with the trope of the offering scene, where he has to choose between a cup of wine and a cup of *laban*. The Prophet chooses the *laban*, on which Gabriel compliments him, telling him that he chose the "natural disposition" (*fiṭra*) for his community.¹⁸

Other details may vary; for example, Muḥammad uses stairs instead of Al-Burāq; Muḥammad meets some of the prophets in Jerusalem, or he meets them in different orders of presentation, albeit all serving the same legitimizing process by both validating Islam within the monotheist history, and placing Muḥammad as the favored one above all other prophets.¹⁹ Additionally, in most cases, the *mi'rāj* includes a specific scene with Moses encouraging Muḥammad to discuss with God the reduction of the number of prayers from fifty a day to five a day, which underlines the great importance of this narrative for one of the major Islamic practices. What interests us here is that Gabriel appears in these narratives clearly in a role of guide and teacher, showing Muḥammad the different Heavens, Paradise and Hell,²⁰ arranging for him to meet prophets and other

16 For more details and the different sources used in this version of the narrative, see Schrieke et al., "Mi'rādī," *ET*2; Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, and the first chapter of Buckley, *The Night Journey*. The order of the prophets here is the one seen in Ibn Ishāq's account (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* 55–56); Neuwirth notes that the presence of prophets in different spheres is not so much a Quranic concept as a reminiscence of the planetary deities familiar in antiquity (Neuwirth, "From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple" 388).

17 Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys* 17–25; Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate World of Angels* 32.

18 This scene, with variations, exists in many accounts, at the beginning of the journey as an initiation episode, while other accounts situate this scene near the end of the narrative as a confirmation episode (ibid. 26–29.)

19 Ibid. 41–73.

20 The touring of Hell is an example of an Ibn 'Abbās trope integrated in Sunni narratives, see Christiane J. Gruber and Frederick Stephen Colby, *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010),

angels, and answering his questions. Vuckovic analyses Gabriel here as an elite teacher, and part of the legitimizing process involves him being a link between previous monotheisms and the Quran, since he is one of the two angels named in both the Bible and the Quran.²¹ Therefore this teaching role mainly fulfills the function of expanding the Islamic cosmological representation, the praxis function (other angels shown as submissive and praising God), as well as generally reinforcing the credo function (the (in)accessibility and ineffability of God, who only Muḥammad may approach).

The second, or “para-official,” Ibn ‘Abbās version, seen as unorthodox by some classical and modern scholars, is not considered as often as the first group of sources in studies on the prophetic *mi‘rāj*. However, Colby traces its history and use in parallel with the more well-known Sunni canonical sources in his book, and shows its importance and influence on the general *mi‘rāj* literature,²² an influence where the many angelic apparitions have a role in illustrating the wonders of the Unseen.²³ Indeed, this particular narrative is especially rich within angelic characters, illustrating a complexification of Islamic angelology.²⁴ According to this narrative structure, Muḥammad first meets four angels (the guardian of Hell Mālik, Azrael, a “half-fire half-snow” angel, and the Rooster angel),²⁵ and he then ascends through the Heavens, meeting ever more

11–26. The touring of Hell or the “underworld” is a trope found in many traditions, even outside the Middle East and monotheistic traditions (Ana Iriarte Diez, “al-Nuzūl ilā al-jahīm fi al-asāṭir wa-l-qīṣaṣ al-sha‘biyya: dirāsa muqārana bayna al-ḥaḍāra al-islāmiyya wa-ḥaḍārat al-māyā,” *Al-Mashriq* 90, no. 2 (2016), 597–627.)

21 Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys* 32–39.

22 Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey*. The use of the name Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687) refers to the Prophet’s cousin, who became such a famed scholar that his status made him the subject of many attributions of prophetic traditions and Quranic commentaries, whether deemed authentic or not by later scholars. Among these attributions are many of what will be called “*isrā’iḥyāt*,” and the primitive version of this *mi‘rāj* narrative (ibid., 31). Traces of this narrative will thus be found, for example, in the Quranic commentary of al-Tha‘labī (427/1035) (ibid. 108–111).

23 See, for example, the influence of the expanded Ibn ‘Abbās narrative attributed to the near-legendary figure of Abū al-Ḥasan Bakrī, its influence in the Islamicate east, and on different authors such as Avicenna and Ibn ‘Arabī (Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey* 126–164).

24 He supposes that this focus on angels might either indicate “a complement” to the canonical versions, or that the communities in which this narrative circulated placed a great importance on angels as part of a “successful ascension,” putting it in parallel to Jewish narratives (the mention of cherubim, *karūbiyyūn*, being of course an indication) and to other ascension narratives built on this framework such as al-Biṣṭāmī’s (Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey* 36–37).

25 In another later version, attributed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, Muḥammad is met by Gabriel, Michael and Seraphiel, who bring to him Al-Burāq (ibid. 107).

angels, before meeting God. It is only when descending again towards Earth that he meets other prophets.²⁶ Colby has written a longer piece on the particular case of the “Half-fire half-snow angel,” sometimes called Ḥabīb, who appears as one angel or several angels, depending on the version. Present in a Jewish ascension story with Moses and the angel Metatron, this curious angel is also mentioned in Sunni writings, by authors such as al-Qushayrī. He might represent many things, which we can list under the theological and praxis functions (such as God’s ability to reconcile contraries and a disunited people; or being a pious model); he is also an archetype of the liminal, a symbol of boundary-crossing, which is one of the main concepts of the *mi'rāj* narratives.²⁷

This Ibn ‘Abbās narrative usually also includes a dialogue, or intimate colloquy, between God and Muḥammad about the “good rewards” (*ḥasanāt*) and “scales” (*darajāt*) or expiations (*kaffārāt*), a dialogue which is generally presented as an explanation for the debate of the Highest Council (understood as “of angels”). While it is primarily concerned with the status of Adam and the reaction of angels in many Quranic commentaries, this debate becomes a didactic dialogue illustrating pious behavior when included in this ascension narrative.²⁸ This dialogue was analyzed by Colby as a battleground in the heart of proto-Shia and proto-Sunni debates and appropriation for legitimacy purposes, a trope which was erased later by canonical Sunni accounts, but not completely so, since it reappears in the works of Sunni authors, such as Al-Qushayrī.²⁹

26 Ibid. 31–35.

27 Colby, “Uniting Fire and Snow: Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel ‘Ḥabīb.’”

28 Ibid. 22–23. He also detects in this scene a possible echo in Jewish literature (ibid. 91).

29 Frederick S. Colby, “The Early Imami Shi‘i Narratives an Constestation over Intimate Colloquy Scenes in Muḥammad’s *Mi'rāj*,” in *The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales*, ed. C.J. Gruber and F.S. Colby (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 141–156. This scene has been considered as “nowhere to be found in the earliest *mi'rāj* literature” by Daniel Gimaret, who considered only the canonical *ḥadīth*. He writes in his article on the medieval Latin translation of the *mi'rāj* (the *Liber Scali Machometi*) that it contains this dialogue, considering it a trace of a disappeared Arabic text that would appear only with al-Qushayrī in the 4th/11th century—the Ibn ‘Abbās version actually already existed, although orally, as Colby argues, and it would have circulated independently in the 3rd/10th century, used by storytellers, although its extant textual traces are indeed preserved in later works (Daniel Gimaret, “Au coeur du *mi'rāj*, un *ḥadīth* interpolé,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’Islam: ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1996), 67–82; Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night’s Journey* 49.).

Therefore, in this narrative we find the same angelic functions as in the canonical version: There are angels in the cosmological function, albeit with more details than in the canonical version (as tools for describing the Heavens, Paradise and Hell). We also see angels in the praxis and credo functions, derived from their teaching and didactic roles (answering the Prophet's many questions about angels and the realities of the Unseen, the prompt for his dialogue with God on good actions and expiations, and the (in)accessibility of God, symbolized by the Lote Tree and its praising angels).³⁰

Regarding a particular point that will appear in the next chapter as well, the passage through the Lote Tree seems to be common to almost all narratives, based on verse 53:16, seen previously, and the Prophet is usually seen as the only being who may go beyond it, unlike all other creatures, including Gabriel and the other angels. It is usually located near the "garden of the refuge" (*jannat al-ma'wā*) mentioned in Q 53:15, and two other Quranic references, the "House Inhabited" (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*), and another paradisiac tree (*Tūbā*).³¹ There are also descriptions of it with angels perching on it like birds. The Lote Tree, on a historical level, could be related to the *zizuphus* genus, probably the one used for Jesus' crown of thorns, and more interestingly here, a plant traditionally used for marking the boundaries of a property—the same role which it seems to have in the ascension narratives, albeit on a mystical level. The Lote Tree is also often associated with the four rivers of Paradise, which can also be viewed as the separation between the physical or exoteric (the two earthly rivers) and the spiritual or esoteric (the two unseen rivers), or a metaphor for God's manifest and unmanifest nature,³² the "landmarked end of the Universe,"³³ which exegetes have variously situated in "*the sixth heaven, in the seventh heaven, above the seventh heaven, or next to or beneath the throne of God.*"³⁴ This is the

30 See a full translation of the Ibn 'Abbās primitive version in Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* 175–193.

31 Lange, "Lote Tree," *EI*³; Hannah Bigelow Merriman, "The Paradox of Proximity to the Infinite: An Exploration of *sidrat al-muntaha*, 'The Lote Tree Beyond Which None May Pass,'" *Religion and the Arts* 12, no. 1 (2008), 336–337; Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* 19–22.

32 Merriman, "The Paradox of Proximity" 333–334. The four rivers of paradise also seem to be a late-antique motif, as they are also mentioned in one of the apocalyptic Syriac narratives on Alexander the Great, possibly the narrative that constitutes the main source of the Quranic narrative on Dhū-l-Qarnayn (Debié, "Les apocalypses syriaques" 566–567).

33 Webb, "The Familiar and the Fantastic" 254.

34 Lange, Christian, "Lote Tree," *EI*³. There is an echo of this motif in Enochian literature as well.

limit between all creatures (including angels), and what cannot be represented: Gabriel can only show the way to Muḥammad, in his role of companion and guide, and point, due to his own personal inability to access what is beyond, and that which only Muḥammad can access.³⁵ In this, the character of Gabriel fulfills different functions seen in the Quran, illustrating one aspect of the credo (God beyond description, in his unmanifest nature), helping Muḥammad, and showing him and the reader more details of Islamic cosmology that are not provided by the Quranic text.

Similarly, in the Twelver Shia sources of the *mi'rāj*, studied by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, angels are also seen in the credo function, legitimizing an aspect of the Shia dogma by stressing the importance of 'Alī: The *tafsīr* of Furāt al-Kūfi (d. 300/912), a narrative attributed to Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 31 or 32/652–653), presents angels talking to Muḥammad in the seventh heaven, explaining to him that they had asked God to see 'Alī, to which God responded by creating an angel identical in form to 'Alī so that they could look at him whenever they wished to see the terrestrial 'Alī.³⁶ In the praxis function, the scene related to the number of prayers given to Muḥammad (common in Sunni sources) is followed by Gabriel or another unnamed angel teaching him the exact call to prayer.³⁷

2 The Sufi *mi'rāj*

2.1 *The Sufi Retelling of the Prophetic Ascension*

Mi'rāj literature took on a particular importance in Sufi literature, as shown by the transmission of traditions surrounding the prophetic *mi'rāj* by different Sufi authors, such as al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), who collected sayings of Sufi masters

35 This is related to *ḥadīth* that Colby says is not part of the Sunni canon, although used by Sufis, linked to the *mi'rāj*: Gabriel would burn up if he looked at God, but the Prophet can look at Him. This motif is also found in Jewish lore on the Merkabah and the burning light of the Throne (Sulamī, *Subtleties of Ascension* 53).

36 Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, "L'Imām dans le ciel. Ascension et initiation (aspects de l'imāmologie duodécimaine III)", in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam*, 105–107. The role of angels in proto-Shii sources and the legitimizing process they are used for is also studied by Colby (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* 65–68). An example of the angels' wider use reflecting religious legitimacy debates was seen in Chapter 2 with the Throne Bearers (see also Tottoli, "The Carriers of the Throne of God"). Colby also wrote on the ways Sunni works reuse these sources by making angels look like Abū Bakr instead of 'Alī (Colby, "The Early Imami Shi'i Narratives" 149.) For an overview of the *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* in Twelver Shia sources, see Buckley, *The Night Journey* 139–176.

37 Buckley, *The Night Journey* 167–170.

on this theme, in his *Laṭā'if al-mi'rāj*,³⁸ or the retelling of the complete *mi'rāj* by his student, al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) in his *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*.³⁹ The importance of this genre shows also in the specific sub-genre explored in this chapter: accounts of personal *mi'rāj*, such as the testimonies of Ibn 'Arabī and the obvious use of the *mi'rāj* pattern to illustrate the acquisition of knowledge that a spiritual seeker should be pursuing.

The prophetic *mi'rāj* serves as a model for Sufi *mi'rāj* narratives, and as such. the re-telling of the prophetic one by Sufi authors shows different sources and tendencies. For example, Sulamī uses some Ibn 'Abbās sources;⁴⁰ and al-Qushayrī uses mainly the classical Sunni *ḥadīth* and parts of the Ibn 'Abbās narrative (such as the dialogue between God and Muḥammad, seen previously), possibly within the context of competing versions presented by Sunni and Shia authors, and the re-appropriation of some sources by the Sunni al-Qushayrī in the face of their use by Shia authors.⁴¹

Regarding the prophetic ascension, its modalities were the object of an ongoing debate in the early centuries of Islam, which is reflected in al-Qushayrī's book. He was one of the earliest authors to bring arguments from non-religious science to defend the belief in the prophetic *mi'rāj* as a physical journey.⁴² He discusses, in his book *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*, the degrees of belief in the heavenly ascension,⁴³ from those who refute the bodily ascension to those who believe that the Prophet ascended both in body and spirit, which is al-Qushayrī's position.⁴⁴ He then explains that the Sufi *mi'rāj*, such as al-Bisṭāmī's,

38 Colby considers this collection as authentic and probably written before al-Qushayrī's book, although there is no definite proof (Sulamī, *The Subtelties of the Ascension* 20–23).

39 'Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*, ed. Luīs Ṣalībā (Jbeil: Dār wa-maktaba Bibliūn, 2011). See also the analysis of Qushayrī's interpretation of the *mi'rāj* verses in Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar* 173–183.

40 There are, for example, three characteristics of the Ibn 'Abbās narratives in Sulamī: Muḥammad seeing God, Muḥammad having a conversation with God, and the touring of both Hell and Heaven (Sulamī, *The Subtelties of the Ascension* 9.)

41 Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* 116–123; Gimaret, "Au coeur du mi'rāj" 81.

42 Buckley, *The Night Journey* 75–76.

43 al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 123–124.

44 It seems that al-Qushayrī was reacting to Avicenna's position, among others (such as mu'tazilites and Shias), who considered the *mi'rāj* to be spiritual only (Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, "Avicenne, al-Qoṣeyri et le récit de l'échelle de Mahomet," in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam*, 173–198). The bodily ascension is also Al-Rāzī's position (Guy Monnot, "Le commentaires de Rāzī sur le voyage nocturne," in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam*, 57–65.) The "in spirit" interpretation seems to have been gradually abandoned by exegetes, while the *mi'rāj* narrative became more systematized, and the "in body" interpretation became the standard position. For a review of the different positions and their main proponents, see Buckley, *The Night Journey* 59–138.

differs from the Prophet's in that it is performed only in spirit and not in body. This is supported by the vocabulary in the text, where the narrator uses the words "nawm" (sleep) and "ru'ya" (vision) or "ra'aytu" (I saw) to describe his visions, which would happen during his sleep, in spirit and not in body. This is also the position taken by Ibn 'Arabī, a position that might reflect the will to imitate the Prophet while not claiming equality with him in his prophetic qualities of physical ascension, and which reflects the settlement of the debate by Ibn 'Arabī's time.

This "true vision" of Sufis is closely related to dreams, and underlines its importance as a means of providing knowledge to the Islamic world, since "ru'ya" and "manām" can be synonyms, of divine origin and "extension of prophecy."⁴⁵ On Sufi dreams, Erik Ohlander tells us that:

First dreams and dreaming were seen to serve an epistemic function, namely communicating knowledge not readily available otherwise. (...) Second, dreams and dreaming were seen to serve a practicable purpose, namely as an experiential element of wayfaring on the mystical path. Finally, dreams were made to serve as a marker of claims to status and authority, in particular in relation to the assertion that among all the self-identified ṭawā'if comprising the Muslim body politic it is the Sufis who fulfill the function of post-prophetic heirship for the umma itself.⁴⁶

As we will see, this prophetic heirship clearly appears in the works of Ibn 'Arabī, and also implicitly in other Sufi writings related to the *mi'rāj*.

Ibn 'Arabī's retelling of the prophetic ascension in the *Futūḥāt* follows the Sunni canonical framework, from which Ibn 'Arabī, as a *ḥadīth* scholar, does not seem to try to depart too much.⁴⁷ Gabriel, as in many other non-Sufi prophetic ascension accounts, is seen accompanying and teaching Muḥammad, guiding him through the heavens. He also appears in the function of the "testing angel", with the already mentioned trope of the scene where he offers him a cup of wine and a cup of *laban*.⁴⁸

45 Kinberg, "Dreams," *ET* 3.

46 Erik Ohlander, *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800*, (London, Routledge, 2012), 206–207.

47 This "classical Sunni stance" of Ibn 'Arabī must be nuanced, as he also uses elsewhere *ḥadīth* that are not often used by non-Sufi exegetes, such as the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* "I was a treasure ..." *Ḥadīth qudsī* in general was primarily used by mystics; see Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam* 39.

48 Muḥyi al-dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'lā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2013), vol. 9, 98.

However Gabriel and angels are presented in the first paragraph with clear functions, colored with Ibn ‘Arabī’s particular vocabulary. Intra-textually Gabriel is sent to Muḥammad to show him God’s signs, then he is identified to the Trustworthy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*), and then he brings with him al-Burāq, which he describes as a “mount of the isthmus” (*dābba barzakhiyya*).⁴⁹ In this way he clearly sets this key figure of the *mi’rāj* story in the “imaginal dimension”, which includes physical reality and also all of the Unseen world, including the world of dreams.⁵⁰ This could mean that things are done physically without appearing so in the strict physical world. This is a slightly different approach to the debate of “ascension in body or in spirit:” Ibn ‘Arabī settles this by implying that it was both, reminding the reader that “spiritual” in its wider sense (or imaginal sense), includes the body: the Prophet traveled in body with the help of imaginal beings taking shape in the imaginal world, all this taking place beyond our strict physical perception of events.⁵¹

Extra-textually, Ibn ‘Arabī also states that Gabriel being sent to the Prophet is like the giving of wings to angels in general, which is “to teach us the fixation of the causes that He set in the world.”⁵² Angels are used here, from the first paragraph on the prophetic ascension, in their creedal function, by teaching; and as an allegory to present a philosophical concept, echoing the debate about God as the ultimate cause for everything in the cosmos.⁵³

2.2 The Personal Mystical Ascension of Sufis

The importance of *mi’rāj* as a model in Sufi writings is summarized by Böwering: “For the Ṣūfīs, the night journey and ascension of the Prophet became the prototype of the soul’s itinerary to God as it rises from the bonds of sensuality

49 Ibid. ix, 97.

50 See Chapter 5 for a presentation of this concept.

51 He writes later that the Prophet took thirty-four different night journeys (*arba’a wa thalāthūn marra alladhī usriya bihi*), one of them “in body, and the rest in spirit” (*bi-jismihi wa-l-bāqī bi-rūḥihi*), which seems like another way of answering “both” to the debate of “body or spirit” (Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt* ix, 102.)

This *barzakh* position is held today by both Sunni and Imāmi scholars (Buckley, *The Night Journey* 119–127.).

52

لُعَلَّنَا بَثْبُوتَ الْأَسْبَابِ الَّتِي وَضَعَهَا فِي الْعَالَمِ

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *Futūḥāt* ix, 97

53 The modalities of which were an object of debate in the early centuries of Islam. The debate started in *mu’tazilī* circles, and the questions revolved around whether creatures could be at the origin of secondary causes, whether God left them a full freedom of choice or whether everything was caused by God at every instant, the latter being the Ash’arī position. See Ulrich Rudolph, “Occasionalism,” online.

to the height of mystical knowledge.”⁵⁴ Alternatively, as Su'ād al-Ḥakīm would add to Sufi understanding, aside from the physical journey of the Prophet, Sufis would have appropriated this word for themselves with multiple meanings: “The word “*mi'rāj*” represents a movement of elevation (*taraqqī*); not only a sensible elevation or an elevation in the heavens. This word carries intellectual meanings, such as the progression (*tadarruj*) of the soul's cleansing, on the one hand, and the progression in the verification of knowledge on the other.”⁵⁵ These narratives seem to be good examples of an apocalyptic literature that “provides a rather clear example of language that is expressive rather than referential, symbolic rather than factual.”⁵⁶

Böwering further suggests that the prophetic *mi'rāj* also interested Sufis in that it provided images complementing the traditionally aural and oral religious practices, enriching their spiritual experience,⁵⁷ while Paul Ballanfat considers the *mi'rāj* a Sufi trope, the “metaphor of the mystical experience, the atopy of words referring to another topology,” lending an aspect of initiation and sanctification to the Sufi's experience and narrative.⁵⁸ This sanctification aspect is important in that the Friend of God becomes “truthful” (*ṣiddīq*), like the nickname given to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq for having been the first to believe the Prophet after his own *mi'rāj*, and like Abū Bakr was presented as a legitimate successor at the head of the Muslim community, so the Friend is at the head of the Sufi community. Ballanfat pushes the comparison further by explaining that this sanctification makes the Friend among his followers “as the prophet in his community,” becoming thus, in Ballanfat's words, an “*angelos*.”⁵⁹

54 Gehrard Böwering, “Mi'rāj,” *ER*.

55 وجد الصوفية أن لفظ “معراج” يصور حركة الترقى، وهو ليس حصراً على الحركة الحسية أي الترقى في السماوات، بل يحمل هذا اللفظ معاني عقلية، كالتدرج في التطهير النفسي من ناحية، أو التدرج في التحقق بالعلوم من ناحية ثانية.

MUḤYĪ-L-DĪN IBN 'ARABĪ. *Kitāb al-isrā ilā maqām al-asrā*. Su'ād al-Ḥakīm (ed.), Beirut, Dandara li-l-ṭibā'a wa-l-nashr, 1988, 28

56 Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination* 21.

57 Thus the representation of supreme Name of God in visions, as well as God's vision by Muḥammad after the Lote Tree, took on a special importance for the early Sufi authors, such as al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, and al-Wāsiṭī. See Gerhard Böwering, “From the Word of God to the Vision of God: Muḥammad's Heavenly Journey in Classical Ṣūfī Qur'ān Commentary,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam*, 205–222.

58 Paul Ballanfat, “L'Échelle des mots dans les ascensions de Rūzbihān Baqlī de Šīrāz,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam*, 268–269.

59 Ibid. 275–278. For the role of Abū Bakr's testimony in the validation of the *mi'rāj* in Islamic history, see Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys* 89–90.

This spiritual journey may also mean the “decomposition” of one’s self in order to achieve full unity with God (usually known as *fanā’ wa-baqā’* or “annihilation and abiding [in God]”),⁶⁰ and a ‘re-composition’ on the way back to the world. The spiritual seeker returning to the world is internally different, rearranged, because of the knowledge gained.⁶¹ This travel as a quest for mystical knowledge—reflecting a well-known *ḥadīth* on travel for the quest for knowledge—will be illustrated here by both al-Bisṭāmī’s and Ibn ‘Arabī’s accounts.⁶²

Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874–875 or 234/848–849), also known as Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī (or al-Basṭāmī), is an important early Sufi figure from what is now North-Central Iran. He is known only through the works and sayings attributed to him, first transmitted orally, as he became an important reference for later Sufis, becoming over time an example of the “ecstatic” Sufi, as compared to the “sober” type, such as al-Junayd.⁶³ However there is no existing work directly authored by him.⁶⁴ He is mentioned numerous times in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, and notably in Ibn ‘Arabī’s own *mi’rāj* account, where al-Bisṭāmī is the only name given of those he meets when he arrives at the stage of the divine presence.⁶⁵ Rūzbihān Baqlī, who has authored a compilation of the ecstatic expressions (*shaṭaḥāt*) attributed to different Sufi masters (including al-Bisṭāmī), interprets his mystical ascension narratives as a purely mystical experience, a renewed *fanā’* process.⁶⁶

Ibn ‘Arabī, a major mystic figure presented in more detail in the next chapter, lived a few centuries later (12th–13th century), and came from the other side of

60 Mojaddedi, “Annihilation and Abiding in God,” E.I.3. However, Knysh explains that there are two definitions usually attached to *fanā’*: annihilation of the self or “falling away,” or expanded selfhood (Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism* 309–310).

61 James Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn ‘Arabī and the Mi’rāj Part 1,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 4 (1987), 641. This return is seen as the ‘perfection’ of the spiritual travel in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, according to Chodkiewicz, who calls this double travel “the double stairs,” title of his detailed chapter on the initiatory travel according to Ibn ‘Arabī (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* 151–184).

62 Michel Chodkiewicz, in an article about the centrality of travel and its spiritual dimension in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, explains in a short semantic analysis how Islamic common religious words remind the believer of his condition of traveller (such as *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*, *sharī’a*, *sālik*, *ṭarīqa*) (Michel Chodkiewicz, “Le voyage sans fin,” in *Le voyage initiatique*, 239–250).

63 Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 52.

64 Mojaddedi “al-Bisṭāmī, Abū Yazīd (Bāyazīd),” *Er*³; Roger Deladrière “Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī et son enseignement spirituel,” *Arabica* XIV, no. 1 (1967): 76–89.

65 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 9 137–138.

66 Pierre Lory, “Le mi’rāj d’Abū Yazīd Basṭāmī,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’islam*, 234.

the Islamic world (the west). He is well-known for his numerous writings, some of which—written by his hand—are preserved.

Between both of their lives, the Islamic world had evolved, the field of theology had become systematized, and prophetic traditions had taken on more fixated forms, as the diversity of prophetic ascension accounts show. However, in Ibn 'Arabī's time, al-Bisṭāmī had become a near-legendary reference for mystics, and as such, is mentioned by name in the *Futūḥāt* more than any other mystic:⁶⁷ Ibn 'Arabī seems to have held him in high regard despite Ibn 'Arabī's dislike of ecstatic expressions (*shaṭāḥāt*), many of which were attributed to al-Bisṭāmī. He considered him an example of a man having achieved the state of “no attributes,” or union with the divine through the complete discarding of any feature of the self that could be an obstacle in the path toward God,⁶⁸ and used al-Bisṭāmī to corroborate his own teachings.⁶⁹

Al-Bisṭāmī is a reference to another famous Sufi figure seen in the previous chapters, Rūzbihān Baqlī, who has commented twice his *mirāj*, in Arabic and in Persian.⁷⁰ Baqlī is also the author of a particular work that deserves a mention here, “The Disclosure of Secrets and the Discovery of the Lights” (*Kashf al-asrār wa-mukāshafat al-anwār*),⁷¹ which reads like a journal of his own visions of ascension throughout his life, from his adolescence to his fifties, visions steeped in references to the prophetic *mi'rāj*. This does not just present a single ascension narrative, but a multiplicity of ascensions, scattered scenes corresponding to different moments of the basic *mi'rāj* narrative, without a single order.

Ballanfat analyses this work as an ascension of words, where its textual overflow in itself indicates the mystic's own experience, his state of being subsumed in the divine, while their ambiguity and paradox are also an indication for the seeker to understand the divine signs.⁷² He also sees the influence of

67 Binyamin Abrahamov, “Ibn al-'Arabī and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī,” *Al-Qantara* 32, no. 2 (2011), 370.

68 Ibid. 377–378.

69 Ibid. 385.

70 In Arabic in *Mantiq al-asrār* and in Persian in *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥiyyāt*. Paul Ballanfat argues that he is one of the Sufi masters who gave a great importance to the prophetic *mi'rāj* (Ballanfat, “L'échelle des mots” 265).

71 Translated into English: Ruzbihan ibn Abi al-Nasr Baqli, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufi Master*, trans. Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Parvardigar Press, 1997).

72 Ballanfat, “L'échelle des mots” 267–268. He explains that this over-exposition or description of mystical bursts, as well as its presentation in a journal form, is unlike most of mystical accounts that avoid describing divine realities too closely. Thus, contrary to the

al-Biṣṭāmī's *mi'rāj* in the aspects of angels and prophets met on his way;⁷³ however, this could also be the influence of the Ibn 'Abbās narrative circulating at the time, and not necessarily only al-Biṣṭāmī's account. There are also signs of influence from Shia sources, where angels encourage Baqlī to cross an ocean that only 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib had crossed.⁷⁴

Angels are indeed very much present in Baqlī's ascension scenes, mostly in the Quranic classical roles, and sometimes as short metaphors, such as the "angelic realm" that means death.⁷⁵ He sees various prophets and Sufi masters in the higher heavens, including al-Biṣṭāmī,⁷⁶ and various angels, including Gabriel, described as the most beautiful.⁷⁷ His unrestrained style gives more detailed descriptions than other ascension narratives, lending different strong shows of emotion to angels (such as laughing, longing, weeping).⁷⁸ It might also give us clues on what features were regarded as beautiful in Baqlī's time: Angels are "dressed like brides,"⁷⁹ "like beautiful women with tresses,"⁸⁰ while they are also described in several places as looking "like Turks."⁸¹ Ballanfat notes that the Khiḍr is the initiator of Rūzbihān, the way Gabriel was for the Prophet,⁸² and the way Jesus was for Ibn 'Arabī,⁸³ and the green bird for al-Biṣṭāmī: once again in this initiatory step, Gabriel seems to be sent to prophets only, regardless of the fact that Baqlī sees him in the heavens alongside Muḥammad.

This chapter will now go into the details of the accounts of Al-Biṣṭāmī and then Ibn 'Arabī, who both share a complete ascension journey, following the prophetic narrative.

ascetic and understated style of al-Biṣṭāmī that we will see later, where the negation of attributes reflects the *tawḥīd*, here Ballanfat explains that the exuberance of Rūzbihān reflects the "eye of the multiple" (*'ayn al-jam'*) which accomplishes the *tawḥīd* of "no motif" paradoxically maintaining all the motifs (ibid. 286).

73 Ballanfat, "L'échelle des mots" 269.

74 Baqlī, *The Unveiling of Secrets* 17.

75 Ibid. 82.

76 Ibid. 81, 106.

77 Ibid. 17.

78 Ibid. 17, 47, 69, 115.

79 Ibid. 47.

80 Ibid. 23.

81 Ibid. 17–18, 31. These numerous descriptions may be seen to act like the grammatical variations noted in Chapter 2 for describing angels beyond a masculine/feminine dichotomy.

82 Ballanfat, "L'échelle des mots" 272.

83 Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints* 85.

3 The *mi'rāj* of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī

3.1 *Presentation*

The text used here is one of various accounts of al-Bisṭāmī's *mi'rāj*, and seemingly the oldest,⁸⁴ their variety being a first sign among several pointing to oral transmission of the text (as seen in the next section). This version is the longest and the only one following the classic structure of the *mi'rāj* form, from one heaven to another up towards God, while the others are more akin to scattered episodes, similar to Rūzbihān Balqī's account.⁸⁵ This particular retelling of a *mi'rāj* accomplished by a Sufi personality, like the other accounts around al-Bisṭāmī, is possibly one of the earliest Sufi works on the *mi'rāj* theme,⁸⁶ although there are doubts as to whether the historical al-Bisṭāmī actually claimed having lived a personal ascension, or if he is even at the origin of this narrative at all.⁸⁷ Al-Bisṭāmī gained importance as a near-legendary figure in later writings, a status reinforced by the very act of attributing writings and experiences to him, and therefore, Pierre Lory argues, a genuine mystical experience of spiritual elevation might have been turned into a "proper" *mi'rāj* through retellings of it.⁸⁸ Although Lory finds the style of this particular retelling very different from the style usually attributed to writings by al-Bisṭāmī, which might suggest that it is indeed far from being authentic, it also represents a popular hagiography that was circulating at the time as a secondary "ascension profile" in addition to a first one destined for "more advanced Sufis."⁸⁹ This underscores the importance of a particular and popular example feeding the religious imaginary of the early centuries, and shows what kind of representations circulated at the time.

It is part of the legacy of the *mi'rāj* stories developed around the Prophet, in the sense of "legacy" developed by Denise Spellberg,⁹⁰ and used by Vuck-

84 Reynold A. Nicholson, "An early Arabic version of the *Mi'rāj* of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī," *Islamica* 2, (1926), 403; Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 249–257 (which includes the text of the *mi'rāj* based on Reynold Nicholson's edition).

85 For these different accounts, see Lory, "Le *mi'rāj* d'Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī" 223–237.

86 Nazeer el-Azma, "Some Notes on the Impact of the Story of the *Mi'rāj* on Sufi Literature," *Muslim World*, vol. 63 (1973): 93.

87 Böwering, "From the Word of God to the Vision of God" 208; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*.

88 Lory, "Le *mi'rāj* d'Abū Yazīd Bisṭāmī" 224.

89 Ibid. 231, 236. An example of this first profile are the three short narratives compiled by Sar-rāj (378/988) which Pierre Lory deems "serious in the choice of his information" (ibid. 224).

90 Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994).

ovic in her study on the Prophet's *mi'rāj*,⁹¹ concluding that "'Legacy' engages the history of interpretation and focuses on how particular historical actors in particular historical moments construct meaning and use the *mi'rāj* as but one way to create, confirm, and redefine community and ideology."⁹²

As such, the "invested account" of al-Bisṭāmī's *mi'rāj* can also be seen more particularly as the first known example of the legacy of a number of Sufi *mi'rāj* stories that were to come. Reinforcing the legitimization process of this account in the Sufi community is the fact that this narrative is attributed to a well-known religious figure who lived in what Vuckovic calls the classical period of Islamic historiography, set between the first and third Hegirian centuries (125 A.H.–300 A.H.), a period during which different prophetic *mi'rāj* narratives and *ḥadīth* were put in written form, before their "canonification" in the fourth century.⁹³ Reading Bisṭāmī's *mi'rāj* through this lens can tell us more about major Sufi figures' representations, the communities revolving around them in their wake, and how they defined themselves—all of which could be more interesting to the reader than the factual occurrence of this story and whether the historical al-Bisṭāmī is at its origin.

Its singularity lies in that it paves the way for several subsequent works dealing with *mi'rāj* stories, whether authored by, or attributed to, different Sufi personalities, of which Ibn 'Arabī's is the best-known example,⁹⁴ or the more numerous writings by other Sufi authors who take the prophetic *mi'rāj* as a starting point of their reflection. This and other aspects of al-Bisṭāmī's stature, built overtime, make him a model or a herald, as per the saying that al-Hujwiri

91 "Legacy (...), is what is created after an individual's life is lived; it is the record of creative expression and reflections in the hands of many others reflecting on the life of a given individual. A focus on legacy recognizes that scholarship and hermeneutics have their own histories; the scholarly enterprise is not protected from the vicissitudes that surround other methods of text production. Thus, legal texts, Qur'anic interpretation, *ḥadīth* collection, and biographies (...) are evaluated as human, authored, and *invested* accounts." Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys* 12.

92 Ibid. 124.

93 Ibid. 3; Webb, "The Familiar and the Fantastic" 240–241; Pavlovitch, "Ḥadīth," *Et*³.

94 Su'ād al-Ḥakīm, in her presentation of *Kitāb al-isrā* by Ibn 'Arabī, mentions a writing by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya detailing the characteristics of a Sufi *mi'rāj* or "true vision" (*ru'ya ṣaḥīḥa*), which suggests that several accounts of personal mystical ascension existed, however, so far only that of al-Bisṭāmī and Ibn 'Arabī are known to us. See Ibn 'Arabī, *Kitāb al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 32; Lory, "Le *mi'rāj* d'Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī," 223–237. Some of Sulamī's sayings also suggest that mystics did personal ascensions, although very few written traces remain, to our knowledge (Sulamī, *The Subtleties of Ascension*, 18). As previously seen, there is, however, at least one other author of personal ascension narratives—although not strictly following the prophetic *mi'rāj* framework—Rūzbihān Baqlī.

(d. 464/1072) attributes to Al-Junayd: "*Abū Yazīd is among us as Gabriel's position is among the angels.*"⁹⁵

The Sufi *mi'rāj* as a journey done in spirit while the body is sleeping is supported by the vocabulary in this account, as previously mentioned (the words "*nawm*," "*ru'ya*" or "*ra'aytu*" are used), so this "true vision"⁹⁶ would be seen during his sleep, in spirit and not in body.

The story is presented as narrated by a certain Abū al-Qāsim al-ʿĀrif, whose identity remains otherwise unknown, relating what al-Biṣṭāmī told him. Al-Biṣṭāmī travels through the seven heavens⁹⁷ up to the Seat (*kursī*) after the seventh heaven, then to the Throne (*ʿarsh*) where he finally meets God. At every heaven, he meets angels, of different kinds and groups, some of whom are given names. Each time they invite al-Biṣṭāmī to share in their activities, such as praying, or offer him unspecified but seemingly endless possessions—thus the angels sound like they are complimenting him each time on arriving at such a level (one of the seven heavens), while at the same time tempting him into staying there and not going further on his journey. However, each time al-Biṣṭāmī understands that he is being subject to a test, and states that he wants to go further. First, he is taken to the first heaven by a green bird, then to the second and third by a vision (*ru'ya*), while between the third and seventh heavens, it is an angel who takes him by the hand to accompany him further. At the seventh heaven, al-Biṣṭāmī is asked to stop because he arrived at the "Boundary" (*al-muntahā*),⁹⁸ however, he goes on. After the seventh Heaven, al-Biṣṭāmī is turned into a bird and given wings, so that he does not require any angelic help in order to travel to the Seat (*kursī*),⁹⁹ where the angel dedicated to it will also be testing him. Al-Biṣṭāmī, however, keeps on flying to the Throne (*ʿarsh*),

95

أبو يزيد منا بمنزلة جبريل من الملائكة.

ABŪ AL-ḤASAN ʿALĪ B. ʿUTHMĀN AL-HUJWIRĪ, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, al-juz' al-awwal, ed. Badī Jum'a (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'lā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2007), 317

96 Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Dreams & Visions in the World of Islam: A History of Muslim Dreaming and Foreknowing* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 1.

97 There are usually seven Heavens in this type of literature, based on the Quran Q 67:3, which can be seen as an Islamic adaptation of the hellenistic cosmological structures (made of nine Heavens) used by Muslim authors (Jaadane, "La place des anges" 28–29; Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, "Introduction," *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 20).

98 Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 254. This seems to be an elliptic allusion to the Lote Tree of the boundary, that is usually situated in this heaven, as seen previously.

99 In other accounts, he is also said to be turned into a bird, he also describes his ascension using the verb from the same root than "*mi'rāj*" (*urrija bi-rūhihi*) while going through the *malakūt*. See Lory, "Le mi'rāj d'Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī" 226–227.

where other angels are present, the *karūbiyyīn* and the bearers of the Throne. These test him yet again. However, al-Biṣṭāmī stays focused and finally God calls to him and draws him near, “nearer than the soul is to the body” (*aqrab min-hu min al-rūḥ ilā al-jasad*).¹⁰⁰ He then meets prophets, and the text ends with a section on the veracity of the event, which essentially argues that it is useless to try to convince people who do not believe in it in the first place, an argument supported by prophetic sayings and Quranic verses on the matter.

3.2 Analysis

The first remark is that the structure follows that of the Ibn ‘Abbās account of the Prophetic *mi‘rāj*, with the noticeable presence of angels during the ascension, and the meeting of prophets *after* the meeting with God. This reflects Lory’s remark on the two strands of Bistamian ascension narratives above: This *mi‘rāj* of popular strand is built in the same way as the more popular Ibn ‘Abbās version of the prophetic ascension narrative (“more popular” as opposed to the more “learned” canonical version, which does not exclude the latter’s wide circulation as well).

Regarding the form, in the first analysis, the narrative is rather effortless and direct in its language, compared to the other accounts, and mentions attributions to al-Biṣṭāmī, which could suggest an oral transmission.¹⁰¹ As such, this could indicate a wider circulation—with readers or listeners of a more popular milieu—than the readers of the *tafsīr* seen in the previous chapters. Its cosmology and its angels in their variations might represent interesting continuities and differences, a glimpse into another subgroup of readers’ imaginations.¹⁰² The formula at the beginning, “*qāla Abū al-Qāsim al-Ārif*,” in the fashion of an *isnād* in the *ḥadīth*, a literary genre based on oral transmission before it was consigned in written collections, supports this suggestion.

In a second analysis, the oral-formulaic analysis comes to mind when reading this text. From the Oral Literary theory, first developed by Milman Parry

100 Ṣalībā, *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj*, 256. The translations from the text are taken from Nicholson’s article (Nicholson, *An early Arabic Version* 402–415). This phrase echoes the Quranic verse (50:16): “We did indeed create man, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”

101 Similarly, the Ibn ‘Abbās ascension narrative was also the object of dismissal because of a style too simple or “monotonous” to be authentic, according to some scholars, as well as containing signs of orality, as analyzed by Colby (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey* 29, 43.)

102 Burge notes, similarly, that “traditional material, both the various collections of *ḥadīth* in Islam and the Jewish midrashim, often reflect a popular expression of beliefs about angels, which is corroborated by similar beliefs found in magical incantation texts and studies of Jewish and Muslim folklore” (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 68).

and Albert Lord¹⁰³ on the Iliad and Odyssey epics, and more recently applied by Andrew Bannister to the Quranic text,¹⁰⁴ this analytical tool can be used to evaluate how, and to what extent, a text is rooted in oral performance before being written down. According to this theory, reciters used a set of formulas and themes to help them memorize long narratives. These formulas, whether single and repeated word for word, or in a systematic arrangement of very similar ones, are repeated throughout the narration and may be rearranged according to the reciter's situation and narrative decisions during the performance. This supposes that the wording of such narratives was not as fixed in their wording then as the resulting written texts later became.

With this in mind, some elements mark the text as orally based when first reading this *mi'rāj* story. Indeed, we find a repetition of several sentences and phrases, in similar places at each stage of the narrative. An example of this is the following formula: "What I desire is other than what Thou offerest me" (*murādī fī ghayr mā ta'riḍu 'alayya*),¹⁰⁵ which is repeated nine times, and this at the end of each heavenly visit. We also find the sentence "all the while I knew that He was testing me therewith" (*fa-fī kulli dhālika 'alimtu annahu bihā yujarribunī*) repeated at each heavenly stop, or the offer of endless possessions, which is repeated in slightly different forms in each Heaven,¹⁰⁶ for example, "Then He continued to offer me a Kingdom such as no tongue can describe" (*thumma lam yazal ya'riḍu 'alayya min al-mulk mā kallat al-alsun 'an na'tihi*) in the seventh Heaven, and "of the grandeur of His kingdom such gifts as no tongue can describe" (*uzma mamlakatuhu mā kallat al-alsun 'an na'tihi wa-wasfatihī*)¹⁰⁷ when he arrives at the Throne.

In terms of content, the text shares the common themes and characters of prophetic *mi'rāj* stories, especially within the Ibn 'Abbās framework. For

103 Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960), vol. 24. For a brief overview of this theory and its influences on later scholarship, see Carl Lindahl, "Singers and Tales in the 21st Century: The Legacies of Milman Parry and Albert Lord," *Fabula* 52 (2012), 302–307.

104 Andrew G. Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur'an* (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014).

105 This phrase echoes the discussion of Ibn 'Arabī in the *Futūḥāt* on al-Bisṭāmī, where he interprets his will (*irāda*) as an absence of will, as per the saying attributed to al-Bisṭāmī, "I will not to will" (*uridu an lā urida*). See Abrahamov, "Ibn al-'Arabī and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī" 384.

106 The trope of the refusal of worldly goods is also found in other accounts attributed to al-Bisṭāmī, as an illustration of his intransigent an ascetic character. See Lory, "Le *mi'rāj* d'Abū Yazīd Basṭāmī" 231.

107 Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 255.

instance, al-Biṣṭāmī meets with the prophets after meeting God, and not before, with a special emphasis on Prophet Muḥammad, the only one mentioned by name. Vuckovic showed, in her study of prophetic *mi'rāj* narratives, that his meeting with different previous prophets, such as Moses or Jesus, served the purpose of legitimizing and defining the identity of the Muslim community as a distinct group.¹⁰⁸ Here, al-Biṣṭāmī could likewise be seen as deriving religious legitimacy from his encounter with the Prophet Muḥammad, but in this case the legitimacy of Sufis within the wider Muslim community is what is at stake, as it is in Sufi circles that this narrative might have benefitted from a wider transmission than in any other circle. This also confers a special aspect to the identity of the Sufi community among Muslims, an initiation process peculiar to mystics, which might have been construed as a sort of elite identity. The beginning of the text alludes to this, stating that such an ascension experience cannot be had by laypeople (*ʿāmmat al-nās*), even though presumably they are also Muslims.

The characters and roles of the angels constitute a particularly interesting aspect of this heavenly journey, which, apart from a green bird,¹⁰⁹ are the only protagonists met by al-Biṣṭāmī during his ascension, until his encounter with God. Although on his way to God he meets many angels, if not all of them, there is no mention of the Archangel Gabriel, although others are identified by names. Some angels bear strange-sounding names of the theophoric kind, such as *Lāwīdh*, *Niyāʿīl*, *Bariyāʿīl*.¹¹⁰ It might be possible to infer from Gabriel's absence that al-Biṣṭāmī considers him to be specific to prophets, and not mystics or Sufi masters.

In the text, angels are frequently associated with the word *nūr*, from the first Heaven, where the angels comment that their visitor is “of humanity, not of light” (*ādami lā nūrī*), which accords with a well-known *ḥadīth*¹¹¹ about the creation of angels as made from *nūr*. The angels in turn are associated with various words of the semantic field of light: lantern (*qandīl*), daylight (*ḍawʿ*),

108 Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys* 59–73.

109 The color green has a particular importance in Islam. It is associated at times with Gabriel in the *ḥadīth*, it is also the color of the Prophet, of Paradise, of life, probably related to its importance in Zoroastrianism. However, its importance and use is quite distinct from the Judeo-Christian tradition, green becoming then a particular Islamic symbol (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 64–65). Interestingly, it seems that *jinn* also were unwilling to inhabit white or green birds (Henninger, “Beliefs in Spirits” 11).

110 These names are not found among the theophoric names listed by Burge from al-Suyūṭī's collection of *ḥadīth*, although they sound similar, as if adapted from Hebrew names (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 34–38).

111 See *Ṣaḥīḥ muslim*, *ḥadīth* no. 2996.

(their faces as) the light of the sun (*ḍiyā' al-shams*), Heavens shining from their light (*nūr tabruqu minhu al-samawāt*), and each angel having a "standard of light" (*liwā' min nūr*). Other classical aspects of angelic representation in the text show when al-Biṣṭāmī finds all of them praying, praising God, guarding the Heavens, and bearing the Throne.

Regarding details and variety, the description of angels remains somewhat cursory, in line with the rest of the objects and landscapes he traverses. This elliptic style fits with what Lory notices of al-Biṣṭāmī's different accounts, noting his ascetic character in refusing to describe or talk about celestial topography.¹¹² However, here are the main descriptions we can glean from the text: In the first Heaven, angels are described as standing upright, their feet in the stars;¹¹³ they fly back and forth between the Earth and the second Heaven a hundred thousand times each day, looking at the Friends of God, others bowing down in nests of trees of light.¹¹⁴ An angel of the third Heaven is described as having four faces, one facing the Earth, warning about the Last Day, another crying while looking up to the Heavens, another on his right towards other angels in praise, and the last face on his left sending "his hosts" (*junūdahu*) to all corners of the Heavens to praise God. He shows al-Biṣṭāmī one of his wings, of which each feather bears a lantern brighter than the sun.¹¹⁵ The angels in the fourth Heaven are covered by a generalizing sentence, "all the angels, of all attributes, forms, and descriptions, came to me and saluted me."¹¹⁶ In the fifth Heaven, angels' heads are in the sixth one and they salute the traveler in different languages, and they are surprised when al-Biṣṭāmī responds to them in the same languages.¹¹⁷ The angels of the sixth Heaven are only described as the "desiring angels" (*al-malā'ika al-mushtāqīn*);¹¹⁸ and the description of angels in the seventh Heaven insists on their great numbers and their size.¹¹⁹

Thus, throughout the text, the descriptions of angels' appearances and acts are positive and correspond in general to their description in the previous chapters, in coherence with their Quranic representation. However, when al-

112 Lory, "Le mi'rāj d'Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī" 233.

113 Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 250.

114 Ibid. 251. This motif of angels in nests recalls the similar scene of the Prophet and Gabriel in nests of the Lote Tree.

115 Ibid. 251–252.

116

جميع الملائكة بصفاتهم وهيأتهم ونعوتهم قد جاؤوني ويسلمون عليّ.

Ibid. 252

117 Ibid. 253.

118 Ibid. 254.

119 Ibid. 254.

Bisṭāmī refuses their offers of gifts and riches, they are sometimes described negatively by him, appearing to him “like mosquitoes” (*ka-l-ba‘ūda*). This gives an alternative impression of angels, one slightly different from the classically pure beings repeatedly presented as obedient, with no will of their own, assisting believers in their worship by God’s permission. Had they kept these roles, one would suppose that they would only encourage al-Bisṭāmī in his mystical travel. However, apparently one of their primary roles in this text, aside from the traditional ones, is to challenge the travelers on their path to God. The narrative starts by al-Bisṭāmī clearly stating that “he was tested” (*umtuḥintu*).¹²⁰ Angels thus actively try to entice al-Bisṭāmī to riches, or even to what is considered and appears to be perfectly good actions, such as praying alongside them, even if this implies that he would not be able to go farther, remaining at the level of whatever Heaven he finds himself in when offered the option.

Only when al-Bisṭāmī, understanding that God is acting through them by understanding the nature of the test (remaining attached to one specific station of the journey), insists on traveling on, does an angel appear to accompany him to the next Heaven.¹²¹ As such, angels are still obeying God through their actions, albeit in an heterodox manner, by testing the traveler on the spiritual path. They become His instruments of testing, over any other function, both in the text, and extra-textually as an illustration to the spiritually-oriented reader. This function gives more depth to the interactions between angels and humans, which goes beyond their best-known functions, those of discreet helpers and models of religious praxis. Instead, in this case the spiritual traveler has to disobey such a model, or at least not be influenced by what would otherwise be seen as desirable orthodox devotions, such as prayer. In this, these angels also differ from the angels’ roles in the prophetic *mi‘rāj* itself, where angels are not seen testing Muḥammad in any way, and are usually described as “submissive,” classical guides accompanying the Prophet in his journey,¹²² possibly except for the initiation scene involving Gabriel offering the Prophet different drinks to choose from.

These angelic actions echo a similar but often overlooked angelic “testing” function found in the Quranic text, with Hārūt and Mārūt and Iblīs challenging humanity with ambivalent if not dangerous teachings, although this is done

120 Ibid. 249.

121 This idea of “straight on the aim, not wanting anything else” echoes different sayings in Sulamī’s collection (Al-Sulamī, *the Subtleties of the Ascension* 41–43, 101).

122 Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension* 1–18; as seen in the introduction, angels as guides is a typical motif of apocalyptic literature.

with God's permission. The example of these testing angels in a *mi'rāj* narrative seems rather singular, and are not particularly noticed in secondary literature.

During his ascension through the Heavens we also notice an aspect of the symbolic function. After each test is presented by angels and the test is successfully passed, another angel appears to accompany him. Angels then come to reflect the narrator's spiritual progress, and how one must both gain and surpass their attributes. We have here an example with their two main attributes, both in the text and in general, as previously seen: light and wings. For instance, al-Bisṭāmī's own "light of [his] desire" (*diyā' shawqī*)¹²³ surpasses that of angels and of the world, after having been described as having wings himself when he arrives at the Seat (as seen in the summary). He no longer needs the help of an angel, almost becoming one himself (as a bird), or at least, gaining their main Quranic attribute (the wings). He crosses "veils after veils" (*hujuban ba'd hujub*)¹²⁴ towards God, while other angels are described once again as annoying mosquitoes.

This testing function of angels in this heavenly journey could reflect the need to confront even essentially good creatures such as angels if one is to meet God. They test the spiritual incentive to travel on and not settle down, even though "settling down" might sound more comfortable and even praiseworthy (praying alongside angels) in a traditional Islamic setting. This might illustrate some core aspects of the Sufi ethos, suggesting a never-ending quest for God, never satisfied by what could appear to most people as "good enough" or desirable, remembering that one is "on this Earth as a stranger or a wayfarer."¹²⁵

To conclude this section and the topic of the "pioneer" status of the account attributed to al-Bisṭāmī, El-Azma reminds us that for the Sufi community:

*Explicitly or implicitly, the impact of the story of the mi'rāj on Sufi literature was powerful, in terms of expression, structure and form, and in symbolism and allegory. The story symbolized the Sufi path with its complex order of stages and states and provided the mystics with a frame of reference for their experiences and contemplations. (...) They used its allegorical power to express the themes of communion with God and regeneration of the soul, and so popularized their beliefs in order to convert the masses to their faith.*¹²⁶

123 Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 255.

124 Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj* 255.

125 From the well-known *ḥadīth* "Be on this Earth as a stranger or a wayfarer" (*kun fī-l-dunyā ka'annaka gharīb aw 'ābir sabīl*) (see *Ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhārī, no. 6079).

126 El-Azma, "Some Notes on the Impact of the Story of the Mi'rāj."

This last part could appear to be in contradiction to what a superficial reading of al-Bisṭāmī's *mi'rāj* indicates regarding "*āmmat al-nās*". However, with regard to the Ibn 'Abbās model narrative that al-Bisṭāmī's account seems to follow, one could consider that its audience may have also been "popular," and that therefore this representation of an elite spiritual experience becomes a call enjoining everyone and anyone to follow the narrator's path. In this way its audience may have felt that they too could be part of this special journey, through an imagery readily understood, built mostly around "tester angels." Then, this type of Sufi literature would seem to be a particular example of the function Vuckovic saw in the prophetic *mi'rāj*, i.e., that of a reinforcement of the Quranic moral code, while "*giving an alternative route for constructing a communal moral code within a fantastic tale*,"¹²⁷ and an exemplary model of utopian literature, as seen in the first section of this chapter.

4 The *mi'rāj* of Ibn 'Arabī

4.1 Presentation

The account of Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual ascension is found mainly in two different places in his writings, a short work dedicated to this event only, *Al-isrā' ilā-l-maqām al-asrā'* (seemingly an early work),¹²⁸ and Chapter 367 of the *Futūḥāt*.¹²⁹ James Morris mentions two other sources, the *Kitāb al-anwār*, and Chapter 167 of the *Futūḥāt*. However, these are less relevant here; the *Kitāb al-anwār* focuses more on the practicalities of the spiritual journey, that is, the preparation to and return from the journey,¹³⁰ and Chapter 167 of the *Futūḥāt*, covered here in Chapter 4, uses the framework of the ascension through the Heavens for Ibn 'Arabī to expose his general cosmology, more than for narrating a personal journey.¹³¹

While the first account contains a first part dedicated to the preparation of the spiritual seeker for this specific experience, the second source starts with a brief retelling of the Prophet's Ascension, seen in the first part of the chapter. The author reiterates that his own ascension is only a spiritual one, not a

¹²⁷ Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 97.

¹²⁸ Muḥyi-l-dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā' ilā al-maqām*. He wrote this account at the age of 34 in 594/1198, while still in the Maghreb region, before travelling to the east (ibid. 34).

¹²⁹ Chapter 367 (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, ix, 96–139).

¹³⁰ As Vuckovic points out, Sufis need to train for this journey, where prophets do not, as they are elected for it and prepared for it by celestial beings without having to take an active part in it (Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 129).

¹³¹ Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension, I" 632–633.

journey done in body like that of the Prophet. He explains that this type of spiritual journey is the particularity of the Friends of God (*awliyā'*), receiving knowledge through the embodiment of "meanings"¹³² in the imaginal world: "To the Friends of God spiritual isthmus-like night journeys; where they look upon embodied meanings in images perceived by the imagination; they are given knowledge about what these images contain of meanings."¹³³ This is part of their inheritance (*irth*),¹³⁴ related to their spiritual inspiration, which is not to be assimilated into a new prophecy, as he explains elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* (see Chapter 4).

Both accounts are quite similar regarding the visits of the different Heavens and their respective prophets. He meets Adam in the first Heaven, the Messiah/Jesus in the second one, Joseph in the third one, Idrīs in the fourth one, Hārūn in the fifth one, Moses in the sixth one, and Abraham in the seventh one, before arriving to the "House Inhabited" (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*) and the "Lote Tree of the boundary" (*sidrat-al-muntahā*). Each stop along the way allows for a discussion and revealing of knowledge. In his second account, the order of Heavens and prophets is the same, with the difference that he also meets John (*Yahyā*) in the second Heaven, and later in the fifth.

4.2 Analysis

The general analysis of Ibn 'Arabī's ascension journey and its connection to his overall cosmological theory has been studied by James Morris, who sees in this account a highly symbolic presentation of the framework of the *Futūḥāt*,¹³⁵ while Vuckovic analyses his use of the *mi'rāj* as a way of exposing his perceived place in the world and ideas without being charged with heresy (by making his own journey purely spiritual and not physical).¹³⁶ As we have seen, contrary to the al-Bisṭāmī narrative, this one follows the first or "canonical profile" of prophetic narrative ascension: Ibn 'Arabī evolves throughout the Heavens,

¹³² This word, *ma'ānī* (sing. *ma'nā*), seen in Chapter 3 with Ibn Barrajān, is also to be related here to the adjective *ma'nawī* seen in Chapter 4 in the *Futūḥāt*, where Ibn 'Arabī uses it in the sense of "abstract meaning, ideational," or even "supra-sensory." Morris translates it as "spiritual realities" (Morris, "Spiritual Ascension" 638).

¹³³ أما الأولياء فلهم إسرائات روحانية برزخية، يشاهدون فيها معاني متجسدة في صور محسوسة للخيال، يعطون العلم بما تتضمنه تلك الصور من المعاني.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* ix, 102

¹³⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām* 33.

¹³⁵ Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension, I" 630–632.

¹³⁶ Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 125–128.

meeting a different prophet each time, according to the order shown in the Sunni *ḥadīth*, based prophetic accounts. He converses with them, thus illustrating a different aspect of knowledge that one has to gain on the way. He is ‘colored’ by the Names of God: As seen in Chapter 5, God acts through his Names on His creation, which are the “colorings” (*talwīnāt*) in the soul of the seeker.¹³⁷

Thus, the seeker has to travel incessantly: “So the Real makes the Friend travel at night through His Beautiful Names, and to others of His Names, all these being divine Names; he knows the changing of his states, and the states of the whole world; and [he knows that] this change is what the source of these Names provoke in us.”¹³⁸ This is done in order to become conscious of His signs within him.¹³⁹ The idea of change and travel is clear in this paragraph,¹⁴⁰ suggesting that one should not remain in a particular state, and that one has to journey on, a narrative dynamic that echoes Al Bistāmī’s narrative. The goal of the journey is understood as accomplishing the status of “Perfect Man” that fully mirrors the divine Reality, achieving that for which the world was created.¹⁴¹

The first impression on reading Ibn ‘Arabī’s *mī’rāj* account in the *Futūḥāt* is that, contrary to the rest of this work, angels are not very present, as if illustrating that seeing angels is the privilege of prophets, as seen in the previous chapters. In an even narrower sense, seeing angels seems to be the privilege of major prophets only. One of these rare explicit mentions happens in the second Heaven, where John the Baptist tells Ibn ‘Arabī that probity or righteousness (*ṣalāḥ*) came to him through good news (*bushrā*), while it came to his cousin

137

فهو في الحق أسماء، وفيها تلوينات، وهي عين الشئون التي هو فيها الحق

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* ix, 105

138

فإذا أسرى الحق بالولي في أسمائه الحسنى، إلى غير ذلك من الاسماء، وكلّ الأسماء إلهية، علمَ تقلبات أحواله، وأحوال العالم كله، وأنّ ذلك التقلب هو الذي أحدث فينا عين تلك الأسماء

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* ix, 106

139 Ibn ‘Arabī explains a few paragraphs later that nothing distinguishes a spiritual traveler from other beings, except in that his visions of the Signs, which are everywhere at all times, become unveiled. Thus he becomes conscious of the Signs of God (Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt* ix, 107).

140 Ibn ‘Arabī repeatedly uses the verb “asrā”, to travel by night, as used in the Quranic verse (17:1) related to the *isrā’*, thus reminding the reader every time of this journey in spirit, and dream.

141 Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, I” 640. Morris explains that the concept of “Perfect Man” is particularly developed in the first chapter, on Adam, of the *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam* (ibid. 645).

Jesus through angels.¹⁴² Another prominent function held by angels here is the praxis function, somewhat later: the classical obedient feature, an angelic feature to acquire if the servant wants to have his prayers answered, as angels obey God at all times and anything they ask for is answered.¹⁴³

Upon closer inspection, however, we realize that he describes different beings or objects that could be defined elsewhere as angels or angelic in nature (including in his earlier account of the *Kitāb al-isrā* as we will see). Chodkiewicz highlights an important aspect of Ibn 'Arabī's *mi'rāj*, which explains the apparent absence of angels: A parallel is drawn, whereby the traveler who follows the steps of the prophets will meet prophets in his ascension through the celestial spheres, while the follower of the philosophers will meet the angel of each sphere. The first one receives the spiritual knowledge, the second one cosmological knowledge only.¹⁴⁴ Thus, in time, angels for the spiritual traveler become implicit, if not both invisible and unnecessary, throughout some of the commentaries in Chapter 3, while at the same time they are very much visible and present in others. Moreover, we will see in the next chapter that philosophers acquire only a partial knowledge, so angels here become associated with partial knowledge and vision, in line with the representation of angels in the Quran, where they admit their ignorance.

There are several examples of such implicit angelic elements, aside from the rare explicit ones. An example is given when Ibn 'Arabī arrives at the seventh Heaven, meeting Abraham and the celestial Kaaba, which Morris describes as the particular "cosmological transition between the material world and the "paradisiac" realm of the highest spheres, as the Heart of the voyager." This is the moment where Ibn 'Arabī sees the "Inhabited House" (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*), which seems to be identified with the celestial Kaaba. He clearly refers to the *ḥadīth* of the 70,000 angels entering it, never returning, which he then implicitly compares to many veils of light and darkness that God places between Him and His servant, so that His servant is not "burned up by the splendors of His Face" (*aḥraqat subuḥāt wujhi-hi*) in a direct vision of Himself.¹⁴⁵ Angels then act

142 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ix, 114.

143 Ibid. 133.

144 Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* 162.

145 James Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabī and the Mi'rāj Part II," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no. 1 (1988), 69; and Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt* ix, 127. See also Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyi-l-dīn, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 99, where in the same scene Su'ād al-Ḥakīm refers to this *ḥadīth* and al-Tustarī's explanation of the internal (*bāṭin*) dimension of the "Inhabited House" is the heart of the mystical knower, towards which the angels come in pilgrimage.

The reference to and Ibn 'Arabī's use of the *ḥadīth* of the 70,000 angels is seen in Chapter 4.

here as intermediaries between man and God, more in the role of protectors of man for the sake of man's personal integrity than classical messengers. They could be described as messengers here only in that they signal to the seeker that he has come close to God, veils pointing to His presence.¹⁴⁶

This step of the journey comes before the "Lote Tree of the Boundary," an important spiritual landmark. Christian Lange reminds us that "In the *falsafa* tradition and in Šūfism, accordingly, the *Sidrat al-muntahā* [Lote Tree of the Boundary] symbolizes the furthest limit of ordinary human comprehension of the divine and also the point at which the elect enters into special proximity to God."¹⁴⁷

Ibn 'Arabī writes then: "When I left him [Abraham], I arrived at the Lote Tree of the Boundary. I stood then in the midst of its terrestrial branches and its farthest branches, which were enveloped by the lights of the deeds, and in which sang the birds of the souls of those doing the deeds, as [the Lote Tree] is in the form of Man." He then mentions the four rivers of knowledge, referring to another part of the *Futūḥāt*, and writes that he was appointed the "supports of the cushions of the mystical knowers" (*muttaka'āt rafārīf al-ārīfīn*) before being transformed into light (*nūran*) and vested in a vestment (*khul'a*) the likes of which he had never seen.¹⁴⁸ This last scene echoes a motif of the Prophetic *mi'rāj* in Sulamī,¹⁴⁹ as well as a motif in antique Jewish and Christian literature,¹⁵⁰ while the whole episode contains several implicit angelic references: lights, deeds, and less intuitively so in translation, "cushions".

146 By way of religious comparison, we can also mention the interesting relationship between veils and angels, whereby angels are assimilated to veils here, as the pseudo-Denys the Areopagyte, known for his Christian angelology, writes that an "allegorical veil" does not add anything to the truth, but is required by human frailty, keeping the gaze from the divine glare. See Denys L'Aréopagyte, *La hiérarchie céleste* 75, fn. 1.

147 Lange, "Lote Tree," *ET*³.

148 فلما فارقه جئت سدرة المنتهى. فوقفت بين فروعها الدنيا والقصوى، وقد غشيتها أنوار الأعمال، وصدحت في ذرى أفنانها طيور أرواح العاملين، وهي على نشأة الإنسان.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* ix, 127, and for another and complete translation, see Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension, II" 70–71

149 Muḥammad being clothed in light is a non-Sunni trope, another example where Sufi authors seem to find sources of inspiration in Shia-connoted sources (Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension*, 17); In another saying, attributed to al-Junayd, Muḥammad is clothed in "lights," stripped of his own "attributes" (*ṣifāt*), and clothed in God's Attributes, a situation in which Gabriel would have burned (*ibid.* 71).

150 "Vestments of light" are considered to be the symbol of knowledge, see Marlène Kanaan, "Création et êtres angéliques d'après un ms arabe inédit: l'Hexaéméron du pseudo-

Deeds represented as lights (*anwār*) and birds representing the souls of those originating these deeds reminds the reader of what is seen in the previous chapters and what will be seen in Chapter 5, where angels are either described as transporting the good deeds of believers to the higher spheres, or these deeds being described themselves as angels, created by men through their deeds and words.¹⁵¹ Similarly, Ibn 'Arabī considered elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* the human soul as angelic, part of the "Governing angels" (*malā'ikat al-tadbīr*) in one of his typologies.¹⁵² Thus, this excerpt is then implicitly filled with angels or angel-like beings, illustrating the destination of good deeds and their good souls. Another interesting aspect of this passage is the Lote Tree described as being in human form, with branches reaching out everywhere throughout the cosmos (on Earth and in the celestial spheres, not restricted to one or the other heavenly sphere), which is not unlike other archetypal "trees of life" in other cultural contexts.¹⁵³ It also relates to another book of Ibn 'Arabī, "The Universal Tree" (*shajarat al-kawn*), which the author uses as a running metaphor to expose his cosmology both external and internal to the human being, mentioning parts of the prophetic *mi'rāj*, as well as angels whose roles (similar to those seen in other chapters) help us understand that the tree symbolizes Adam, and illustrate the supremacy of Muḥammad in the hierarchy of beings.¹⁵⁴

The phrase "supports of the cushions of the mystical knowers" also refers, as do many phrases in Ibn 'Arabī's writings, to a particular Quranic verse Q 55:76 describing believers in Paradise.¹⁵⁵ He compares the word translated here with "cushions" (*rafārīf*, sing. *rafṛāf*) with the celestial equivalent of a litter (*miḥaffa*) in his description of the prophetic ascension.¹⁵⁶ Additionally, Morris qualifies

Epiphane de Salamine," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 224; The angel Michael clothes Henoah in "vestments of glory" in order to make him like an angel, in the second book of Henoah (Hamdović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 262–263).

151 See the "Cosmological function" in Chapter 2; In the Ibn 'Abbās narrative of the prophetic *mi'rāj*, the Lote Tree is described as being full of angels praising God in different ways and tongues (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* 190).

152 See "Creation of angels, typology and meaning" in Chapter 5.

153 The most obvious examples that comes to mind is the tree of life in Judaism, and the world-tree in Nordic mythology.

154 Muḥyi al-dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Shajarat al-kawn*, ed. Riyāḍ al-'Abdallāh (Beirut: al-Markaz al-'arabī li-l-kitāb, 1984), 42, 88–89, 90–91.

155 "They recline upon green cushions and beautiful wonders."

156 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* ix 100, where this cushion is brought to the Prophet by an angel, in a scene where Gabriel explains that he cannot go farther (an idea present in many accounts), illustrating the Quranic verse 37:164.

it as an “angelic vehicle,”¹⁵⁷ which is justified in that it replaces Gabriel in the prophetic *mi‘rāj*, the angel guide who cannot go farther than the Lote Tree.

However, the word “*rafārif*” turns out to be related to “flapping its wings”, when used as a verb (*rafraf*) for a bird, or the idea of “shimmering” or “glimmering.”¹⁵⁸ This suddenly reminds the reader of the lexical field attached to angels and their two main attributes, light and wings. The use of this word, at this stage of the journey, right before being transformed into light, would be seen as the ultimate metonymy, keeping only the two most well-known attributes of angels to describe the spiritual process of being transported into the divine Presence. Therefore, this textual metonymy describes both a symbolic process, and extra-textually an actual removal of all elements that could be seen as intermediaries between the seeker and God. We find a similar textual process in the other account, where Ibn ‘Arabī writes that the self of “the spiritual young man”¹⁵⁹ became veiled to him (*iḥtajaba ‘annī dhātuhu*), leaving with him his attributes (*ṣifātuhu*).¹⁶⁰

Regarding this other and earlier account, the *Kitāb al-isrā’*, the reader will find mostly the same references, and at times clearer angelic mentions supporting the later and more symbolic *mi‘rāj* account.

In the category of implicit angelic references, Ibn ‘Arabī uses an angelic attribute to describe his own actions, such as his description of “being given the wings of determination” (*ansha’a lī jināḥ al-‘azm*) with which he flies (*ṭirtu*) towards the Seat (*al-kursī*).¹⁶¹ At a later stage he uses clearer implicit references: “So I smoothed down the wings of the subtleties (*al-laṭā’if*), mounting the back of the cushions (*al-rafārif*), and I flew in the atmosphere of knowledge (*al-ma‘ārif*), these being three hundred cushions, called ‘the Most Noble Highest

157 Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, II” 71. He later draws a link between this “couch” (*sarīr*) and “Those drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*), which are by definition those who are drawn the closest to God, without defining them as angels (ibid. 76, f. 212).

158 See the translations given by many bilingual dictionaries, such as the Hans Wehr Dictionary (online). The Doha historical dictionary also gives the meaning of “to flap its wings,” aside from another well-known one, used in many translations of the Quran, where *rafraf* means a type of carpet, colored in green. It also gives the meaning of “the extremities of a thing, hanging.” The color green is also that of the bird in al-Bisṭāmī’s narrative. On a side note, the name of Lote Tree itself in Arabic (*sidrat al-muntahā*) is related to the lexical field of light, as the root “S-D-R” in the verbal form means “to dazzle.”

159 This spiritual young man, related to or assimilated here to the “universal soul” (*al-rūḥ al-kullī*) or “the eye of certainty” (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*) by Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm, is also described as an angel-like guide that Ibn ‘Arabī mentions in different places of his writings.

160 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā’ ilā al-maqām al-asrā* 68.

161 Ibid. 111.

Council' (*al-mala' al-a'lā al-ashraf*).¹⁶² Given the near systematic interpretation of the Highest Council as being that of angels in the other chapters, and elsewhere in Islamic literature, these "cushions" are clearly linked to angelic beings, if not in fact assimilated in them. Another example uses one alternative name to what he calls "angel" elsewhere, such as Nūn and The Pen,¹⁶³ in the more allegorical part of the "secret conversations" of his account.

In the category of explicit references, having arrived at the "Inhabited House" he quotes and comments on the Quranic verses linked to the *mi'rāj*, before clearly exposing a key difference between humans and angels that we find in the *Futūḥāt*: "The angels took hold of the single leg [of the Seat], while the mystical knowers took hold of both legs of the Unseen (*al-ghā'iba*) and the Seen (*al-shāhida*)."¹⁶⁴ As seen in Chapter 5, this is a way of explaining that angels inhabit the unseen, or *bāṭin* dimension, while human beings potentially have access to both—the goal of the mystic is in any case to "see with two eyes," to use another phrase of Ibn 'Arabī,¹⁶⁵ the capacity to accomplish oneself in both physical and spiritual dimensions, or alternatively, intellectually and spiritually.

Pursuing further, a new stage of the journey unfolds, parts of which are called "secret conversations" (*munājāt*) or intimate colloquies, which appear as a summary of the *mi'rāj* and its teachings in its different aspects. This echoes the intimate colloquy seen earlier between Muḥammad and God in the Ibn 'Abbās narrative, and as such this reflects the influence in Sufi writings of the "para-official" sources imbedded in the official sources of even a Sunni *ḥadīth* scholar such as Ibn 'Arabī.

In the first one, "the secret conversation of the two arcs" (*munājāt qāb qawsayn*), he is met by an angel bringing him a stair (*sullam*) which he uses to ascend, before the angel leads him to the "two arcs," and then departs

¹⁶² فسويتُ جناحَ اللطائف، وامتطيتُ متون الرفارف، وطرْتُ في جَوِّ المعارف، وإذا هي ثلاثمائة رُفرف،
وتُدعى بالملأ الأعلى الأشرف.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 128

The cushions and wings are once more associated within a long list of different associated concepts in *ibid.*, 165.

¹⁶³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 153. We see in Chapter 4 that these are called angels, but also in the prophetic ascension, when he sees the angels recording every act of God's servants, and that "every pen is an angel" (*Futūḥāt*, ix, 100.)

¹⁶⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 101.

¹⁶⁵ A similar phrase and general idea are found a bit later (*ibid.*, 130.)

enshrouded in his wings.¹⁶⁶ This very rare example of an explicit angel starting a renewed *mi'rāj* is interesting, mirroring the appearance of Gabriel to the Prophet. Al-Ḥakīm points to this as the representation of the Real always limited by one's representations based on one's religion and belief, however advanced the seeker is.¹⁶⁷ Here, the angel would be the only possible imaginal representation at the start of the initiation, within the Islamic representation of such a process. Even presented as entities in their own right, angels are ultimately a metaphor—here, for initiation.

In another such “secret conversation,” which stands as the seeker's self-realization as theophany, Ibn 'Arabī speaks similarly with “the doctrinal Real” (*al-ḥaqq al-ʿitiqādī*), not unlike the “Special face” (*al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*) seen in his other writings, with which a given believer interacts with his Lord, this face differing from one believer to the next according to his limitations. During this conversation, the teaching function of angels appears in a reversed manner, through the Real calling his seeker “Teacher of angels,” with the implicit Quranic reference to Adam teaching them the Names.¹⁶⁸

The last notable angelic apparition is in the very short part called “The Joseph Signs” (*al-ishārāt al-yūsufiyya*). To a question about why he was sold at such a cheap price, an answer is given: for man to know his state of need. Then, if the price is raised, this will be because of an additional attribute (*ṣifa*) of his self (*ʿalā dhātihī*) given to him by the “Highest Angel” (*al-malak al-a'lā*).¹⁶⁹ The context does not identify this angel,¹⁷⁰ but given the story of Joseph in the Quran, where he is likened to an angel by the women who see him, this rare explicit angelic reference gains more weight. Thus, even though Joseph physically resembled an angel, he was still sold at a cheap price. However, a real angelic attribute given to a person, even a prophet, makes this person dearer. Gaining attributes is thus implicitly shown to be desirable, and they mean more than “looking like,” when gained through the mediation of an angel.

Reiterating the metaphorical idea of the Sufi ascension, recurrent in Ibn 'Arabī's writings, Morris refers to the “Heart” (*qalb*) as the goal and seat of the journey: “The heavens of this journey, the prophets and angels who populate them, the Temple or the Throne where the final ‘unveiling’ takes place—all of

166 Ibid., 133.

167 Ibid. 133, fn. 4.

168 Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā* 166. This reference and the related scenes and concepts, such as the refusal of Iblis to bow because man's clay veiled his interior, is elaborated later, in the part called “Adamic Signs” (*al-ishārāt al-ādamiyya*) 189.

169 Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā* 204.

170 If this is a transcription error, and a *kasra* should have been used instead of the *fatha*, we would have an equally unidentified “Highest King” (Pharaoh? God?).

these, he insists, are so many places of the Heart.”¹⁷¹ In the beginning of his account, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that it is the “ordering of the journey from the world of the cosmos to the world the ‘illī’ station” (*tartīb al-riḥla min al-‘ālam al-kawnī ilā al-mawqif al-illī*), which al-Ḥakīm explains is related to the suffix “-īl” in angels’ theophoric names (such as Mikā’il), and that as such this *illī* station means “the station of angelic spiritualities” (*mawqif rūḥāniyyāt al-malā’ika*).¹⁷²

The goal would be for man to become angel-like, or at least reach an angelic station, after going through all other stages, stations and Names, and then to go through the angelic ones as well, until, in the end, only the angelic attributes of wings and light are retained, as the utmost limit of the human capacity to describe the last stretch of the journey towards God.¹⁷³

5 Concluding Thoughts

Where angels in *ḥadīth* are used to underline their role in the believer’s daily life, angels in *mi’rāj* stories inform the reader of their roles in their personal and communal eschatological future,¹⁷⁴ although they may fill other Quranic functions (such as the praxis one). As noted with Jewish apocalyptic texts, this type of literature also encourages the “literary expansion” of angels, as a way of searching for new ways to access divine revelation.¹⁷⁵ These *mi’rāj* narratives participate in the reappropriation of Quranic terms, which Neuwirth calls a “mythologizing exegesis,” whereby these terms are taken out of their original context and re-wrapped in new images and new meanings,¹⁷⁶ or a meaning is given to words that have lost their original meaning.¹⁷⁷ In the case of angels, we can also find this process in examples around words from another language, such as *karūbiyyūm* (cherubim), seen in the Ibn ‘Abbās *mi’rāj* narrative by an Arabic root, K-R-B, which can explain these angels as being “those who worry,” thus giving rise to a new description of a category of angels—an enrichment of Islamic cosmology.¹⁷⁸

171 Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, I” 630.

172 Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā* 53.

173 This idea of angels accompanying human souls on their way to God’s presence before disappearing is also a theme in early Christian writers, such as Clement of Alexandria (d. 215AD) and Origen (d. 253AD), (Daniélou, *Angels and Their Mission* 91–92).

174 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 87.

175 Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 137.

176 Angelika Neuwirth, “From Sacred Mosque to Remote Temple” 398.

177 Such as *sijjīn* and *zabāniyya* (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey* 202–204).

178 Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey* 178.

We have seen that while al-Biṣṭāmī's account reflected the popular strand of the "para-official" Ibn 'Abbās prophetic *mi'rāj*, Ibn 'Arabī's narrative was built mainly on the model of the Sunni official strand, albeit with elements from the Ibn 'Abbās narrative. Both strands of prophetic *mi'rāj* serve legitimacy purposes as well as didactic purposes, through angels and prophets, whether this legitimizing process was based on the Sunni canonical sources¹⁷⁹ or the legitimacy was lent to (relatively) marginalized elites with the Ibn 'Abbās narrative.¹⁸⁰ This is reflected in the Sufi *mi'rāj* narrative, using one or the other source models, or both.

The Ibn 'Abbās framework, both prophetic and Bistamian, includes a developed angelology, and the narrator meets only angels on his way to God, so they come to clearly symbolize functions seen previously (the praxis and credo functions, or more generally a didactic function), as well as a particular testing function. However, the canonical framework highlights the presence of prophets along the path of the narrator towards God, and angels are much less present: Gabriel takes on all these functions in the prophetic narrative, while they are present mainly implicitly in Ibn 'Arabī's narrative. These Akbarian subtle allusions are detected by means of a careful reading of his works, and this only underlines the fact that he presents to the reader the symbolic function of angelic presences, possibly assuming that his reader is already aware of their Quranic basic functions and textual presence.

These implicit references are found in both narratives, when the narrators approach the highest heavenly places, where wings and light become their attributes. Al-Biṣṭāmī shows that one cannot remain in any one of the Heavens in the company of angels, as Ibn 'Arabī shows that one cannot stay at the station of any one specific Name: one must journey on, until all that remains describable is light and wings. In the Sufi narratives, these replace both Gabriel and Burāq respectively as the celestial guide and vehicle of the Prophetic ascension. Indeed they are also both winged, and both related to the concept of light (Gabriel as angel, Burāq as meaning "lightning").¹⁸¹ This stripping down to two implicit attributes, wings and light, acts as a textual metonymy, symbolizing the spiritual process towards *fanā'* and the process of making the divine un-representated, as well as the extra-textual reality the author might have wanted to convey, the letting go of personal existence to achieve unity with his Creator.

179 Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys* 9–13.

180 Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey* 170–173; see also examples of sayings in al-Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension* 41–43.

181 Burāq can be compared to the bird into which al-Biṣṭāmī transforms himself, symbolizing the spirit (*rūḥ*); see Ṣafā Ismā'īl Ibrāhīm, "Ṣuwar al-unthā fī al-mi'rāj al-nabawī wa-l-ṣūfī" (Master's thesis, American University of Beirut, 2017), 19–24, 43–44.

Angels have become symbols of “signs” on the way—educational, challenging or alluding—signaling in these different ways to the spiritual traveler that he is on his way towards God, on his ennobling travel.¹⁸² This indication of having to travel beyond the angelic presences is a renewed motif already found in some sayings on the Prophetic *mi'rāj*.¹⁸³ However, the angelic signs of the Sufi narratives are more clearly textual symbols, or at least to the same degree as they are presented as entities in their own right.

Thus, Sufis add their variation on the “plausible fiction” of the prophetic narrative, as analyzed by Webb, whereby the hero of the narrative comes back from his fantastical journey with a utopia to implement, and as an example for others to follow. However, Sufi ascension narratives are even closer to the definition of Webb’s utopian travel rubric, because “once the remarkable elements are amplified, the possibility of the journey’s physical repetition is replaced with only a metaphorical possibility. Readers (...) can now only complete the mission by learning from the text’s utopian message and recreating the ideal community on the real ground of the familiar world.”¹⁸⁴ Indeed if most of the time the believer is enjoined to believe in the factual travel of Muḥammad (which Peter Webb does not seem to take into account), Sufi narratives offer a metaphorical, “dream” version of this narrative for believers to reproduce, directed more particularly to the mystical-oriented believer. However, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s case, the “metaphorical” would be replaced by the “imaginal,” the nuance being that this is a reality that includes and is greater than the physical/spiritual divide.

As a last remark, when clearly mentioned in these Sufi ascension narratives, angels appear as both entities sent by God to this world and the different Heavens, and as symbols for the spiritual realities of the greater Unseen world beyond the physical one. These realities are both inner and outer: either in the human soul (e.g. the good deeds on the Lote Tree) or outside of it (e.g. testing situations on the way to the higher planes). In these narratives, they correspond fully to what Lizzini writes on angels, “beings of the frontier” indicating both the distinction and the conjunction between the two worlds, the *Dunyā* and the *Ghayb*.¹⁸⁵ This seems to be a reading additional to the prophetic *mi'rāj*, where

182 This journey via the celestial ascension, as the biblical Enoch or Idrīs, can be seen as the reverse dynamic of the fall of Adam (Chodkiewicz, “Le voyage sans fin” 244).

183 For example, the saying attributed to al-Junayd regarding Gabriel, who would burn if he was clothed in “lights” and in God’s attributes like the Prophet, implying that only humans, or at least the Prophet, may go beyond the angelic realm (Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension* 53; *ibid.* 71).

184 Webb, “The Familiar and the Fantastic” 245.

185 Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia islamica: il Corano e la tradizione,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cris-*

angels fulfil their Quranic roles and functions, represented as full “real” beings. As such, this creative and interpretative reading of the prophetic *miʿrāj* could be considered to be a particular parallel example of the larger *tafsīr* works on the Quranic texts seen in the previous chapters.

These Sufi narratives also differ from the allegorical function angels seem to have in other ascension narratives or their interpretations by non-Sufi authors, like those Ismailis who identify angels with the elected souls,¹⁸⁶ or angels as being the goal of human evolution.¹⁸⁷ More generally, as seen in the previous chapter, there is also the example of Avicenna equating Gabriel with the “agent intellect,” the “initial Command” as well as the Holy Spirit, while the other angels are equated with the “power of mental spirits,” the spirits of different spheres, and souls when detached from their bodies.¹⁸⁸ Angels may be all this,¹⁸⁹ but they are also the symbols of stations to be reached and surpassed, “signposts” on the way to God.

In other words, angels in Sufi *miʿrāj* narratives seem to be used for legitimacy and group formation purposes, as prophetic *miʿrāj* did for the wider Islamic community at large,¹⁹⁰ and in the same way that philosophers such as Avicenna have done for imported foreign concepts via a straightforward allegorical process.¹⁹¹ However, Sufi authors do this by departing slightly from a one-dimensional use of angels as entities (prophetic *miʿrāj*) or a one-dimensional metaphorical use of angels (philosophical *miʿrāj*). In their examples of the angelic symbolic function, Sufi authors keep both positions while maintaining an ambiguity with a multidimensional or simultaneous “multi-reality” use

tianesimo, Islam, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), ebook.

186 This seems to be the position of the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā*, who also identify the state of sainthood as “angelic,” and another Ismaili author, ʿĀmir bin ʿĀmir al-Baṣrī (7th/13th), who, describing the prophetic ascension, writes that he did so thanks to “his angelic capacity,” see Yves Marquet, “L’ascension spirituelle chez quelques auteurs ismailiens,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’Islam*, 117–132; on the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā*, see also the references in the conclusion of the previous chapter.

187 “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” (de Callataÿ, “The *Ikhwān al-ṣafā*’ on Angels” 347).

188 De Fouchécour, “Avicenne, al-Qoṣeyri et le récit de l’échelle de Mahomet” 173–198.

189 Lizzini, “L’angelologia islamica.”

190 Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys* 75–121.

191 Aaron W. Hughes, “Miʿrāj and the language of Legitimation in the Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophical Traditions: A Case Study of Avicenna and Abraham ibn Ezra,” in *The Prophet’s Ascension* 174–180.

of angels. They become textual metaphors and extra-textual symbols as well as well-identified entities in their own right as per basic Islamic doctrine. None of these understandings cancels the others out, nor do they contradict each other as much as they complete each other.

Angels in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* by Ibn ‘Arabī

1 Presentation of the Work

Focusing on angels in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 645/1248)¹ is a case study of a particular work, the impact of which is not negligible on subsequent Islamicate mystical and religious writings.²

My choice of his opus magnum *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* is due mainly to the following reasons. First, if many works by Ibn ‘Arabī have long been studied, the *Futūḥāt* is not always systematically used “in depth” due to its size; secondly, and most importantly, the angelic system was more developed in this work than in any other work of Ibn ‘Arabī’s numerous writings, to the best of my knowledge.³ Moreover, angels in Ibn ‘Arabī’s works have not been the main subject of any research since the insightful article by Gisela Webb.⁴

This gives us the chance to approach a particularly detailed cosmology after the process of solidification of Islamic cosmology(ies) during the first centuries of Islam. It increases our chances of finding an original use of angels in its narrative in the context of a society that is about to change greatly. Indeed, Ibn ‘Arabī was born in and lived the first part of his life in al-Andalus, with the implications of his interactions there and the differences in comparison with the Eastern part of the Islamicate world, where he traveled and settled until the end

1 There are two scholars known as Ibn ‘Arabī, contemporaries and both of Andalusian of origin: Abū Bakr Ibn ‘Arabī is known as a *faqīh* (d. 543/1148) and the other one, known as Muhyī al-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, our author here, is known as a mystic (b. 560/1165), however he called himself “Ibn al-‘Arabī.”

2 Although some authors might stress the importance of Ibn ‘Arabī’s works in Islamic thought and beyond mainly through a positive lens, others point out that its reception was mixed at best, or at least very highly debated—and indeed this kind of impact is significative per se. See Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1999). “From the 7th AH/13th CE centuries onward practically every Muslim thinker of note took it upon himself to define his position vis-à-vis the controversial Sufi master” (ibid. 1). Such harsh critics as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) can even be seen as useful to make sense of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching and genealogy of thought (ibid. 107–108).

3 For an updated overview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s manuscripts and works, expanding on Osman Yahia’s recension, see Jane Clark, Stephen Hirtenstein, “Establishing Ibn ‘Arabī’s Heritage, first findings from the MIAS Archiving Project”, *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 52, (2012):1–32.

4 Gisela Webb, “Hierarchy, Angels, and the Human Condition.”

of his life. Ibn 'Arabī passed away just before the end of the Abbasid Caliphate (officially in 892/1258), after having left his home of al-Andalus, equally in turmoil with the Reconquista. A new multiform era was emerging in the Islamic territories, and Ibn 'Arabī's writings may be presented as an example of a testimonial compilation of knowledge rooted in a sophisticated cultural and political era that is about to be transformed.⁵

Ibn 'Arabī's works are mostly philosophical, metaphysical and mystical in nature,⁶ and they do reflect the characteristically Neoplatonic view of the universe found in many Islamic Sufi writings.⁷ However, reading the *Futūḥāt* also resembles reading through a more classically Sunni religious encyclopaedia,⁸ which also shows Ibn 'Arabī's formation as a *ḥadīth* scholar, educated by well-established savants,⁹ *ḥadīth* being the second major source of his references,

5 For a condensed biography of Ibn 'Arabī, see Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī in the later Islamic Tradition*, 6–16. For a longer biography see Claude Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī ou la quête du soufre rouge*, (France, Gallimard, 1989). Ibn 'Arabī's mysticism was marked in general by al-Andalus, where mysticism was not so institutionalized in *ṭarīqas* as in the East (ibid. 91). An Andalusī influence noted by Addas is Ibn Barrajān's thought. For example, there is the concept of "divine reality from which all things are created" (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*) seen in Chapter 2 (ibid., 77). Further influence of Ibn Barrajān on Ibn 'Arabī has been more recently studied by others, see Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*; Gracia López-Angueta, "Ibn 'Arabī's Metaphysics in the Context of Andalusian Mysticism: Some Akbarian Concepts in the Light of Ibn Masarra and Ibn Barrajān," *Religion* 12, no. 1 (2021), online.

6 He is presented as a philosopher in many Western works, although Ibn 'Arabī himself distanced himself somewhat from this category (Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī* 135, 138). In the very beginning of the *Futūḥāt* a section called "One should not say that a Sufi is a Philosopher" also sets the tone (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Introduction, 1, 151). Saif presents him furthermore as an example of "revelatory esotericism" as opposed to more philosophically infused "intellectual esotericism," exemplified by the Brethren of Purity (Saif, "What is Islamic esotericism?" 37–44).

7 For instance, a paragraph explains how the Creator gave existence to the "lightest" of beings (the Intellect or Pen, which is divine creative light) and to the densest of creation (the elements), adding in the process many mediators or veils on the way, between Creator and created (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 209, 7, 221).

8 For example, the first four books are dedicated to the five pillars of religious practice, discussing its details in a rather classical exoteric way, its esoteric interpretations presented last.

9 Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 124–128. This is rarely highlighted in Western studies although noted by many classical muslim scholars (Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī* 46). Regarding *ḥadīth*, Graham writes that al-Naysabūrī (d. 533/1138) and Ibn 'Arabī seem to be the first ones to single out the *ḥadīth qudsī* by a special name (the "divine *ḥadīth*" or *ḥadīth ilāhī*, pl. *aḥādīth il āhiyya*), see Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic word*, 57. These *ḥadīth* constitute an interesting continuity between Quran proper and *ḥadīth*, and Graham explains that mystically-minded scholars were the most interested in them, and less so 'mainstream' theologians (ibid. 39). He goes on to argue that these *ḥadīth* reflect an early stage of islamic literature, and as such ground the roots of Sufi piety "in early Muslim spirituality and the prophetic-revelatory event itself"

after the Quran, throughout the *Futūḥāt*. Different passages of his writing reflect his life as a well-established scholar living close to centers of power, both far from the sulfurous reputation he gained later, and from the figure of the hermit/ascetic Sufi master.¹⁰ Regarding his use of Sufi vocabulary, Addas writes that difficulties and misunderstandings arise from the fact that Ibn ‘Arabī can use it in a non-technical way, and not from the difficulty of the words themselves or from their unknown origins,¹¹ a difficulty which is reflected in this chapter, in his sometimes ambiguous way of defining angels.

Interestingly, the act of writing the *Futūḥāt* is presented by Ibn ‘Arabī as the result of his inspiration following an encounter near the Kaaba with a “young man” (*fatā*), sometimes qualified as an angel.¹² Writing this work took him thirty years, and he revised it once afterward.¹³ The edition used here is the Yemeni edition of the *Futūḥāt*,¹⁴ in thirteen volumes. It seems to be the best critical edition so far, although it is not yet as widely used as the older editions. For this reason, references first state the chapter given by Ibn ‘Arabī in his text

(ibid. 109–110). This of course recalls a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* associated with Ibn ‘Arabī in many publications about him, according to which God says, “I was a treasure and I wished to be known.”

- 10 For instance, his city sophistication and preferences can be detected in such sentences as “the desert people are external/exoteric (*ẓāhir*), and the city people are internal/esoteric (*bāṭin*)” (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 462. 10,363.). Angels provide a good example of his preference for the respect of the religious law: After mentioning the tradition of angels being incommoded by bad odors, Ibn ‘Arabī reports that this was not actually true according to a personal conversation with the divine during his sleep, however, when waking up, he decides that following the law on this matter is still preferable (Addas, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, 265). His attitude, which could be both very traditional and anti-literal, may be seen as an echo of that of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism, a Short History*, 105–113.
- 11 Ibid., 248–249. He reuses vocabulary preestablished by known scholars such as al-Tustarī and Junayd. Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm wrote a dictionary of Sufi terms as used by Ibn ‘Arabī: Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mu‘jam al-ṣūfī, al-ḥikma fī ḥudūd al-kalima* (Beirut: Dandara li-l-Ṭibā’a wa-l-Nashr, 1981).
- 12 This dangerously close comparison to the tradition of Quranic Revelation by Gabriel is discussed by Addas (Addas, Ibn ‘Arabī, 241–243), the corresponding chapter in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1. 1,197.
- 13 He started writing it in Mecca in 599/1202, and finished it in Damascus in 629/1231, and decided to revise it in 632/1234 by correcting some parts of it, during reading sessions with friends and students. For more details see the presentation by the editor ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān Maṇṣūb in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1. 49–50.
- 14 Muḥyi al-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (Cairo: al-Majlis al-Aḥlā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2013). For a review of the Yemeni edition, see Eric Winkel, “Review of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (ed): *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 24, no. 1 (January 2013), 80–82. Winkel has also started working on the first complete translation of this edition into English.

(called *bāb*, the total number of which is 560) because these are the same in all editions, followed by the volume and the page number of the Yemeni edition.

Before reviewing the most relevant of the numerous occurrences of angels, a very brief attempt at presenting some of the main concepts of Ibn 'Arabī's cosmology is needed in order to better apprehend the situation of angels within it. These concepts will also be discussed throughout the chapter as the need arises.

An apophatic dimension of theology has always been an element shared by Semitic monotheisms in diverse ways, and in Ibn 'Arabī's case, this apophatic or negative theology remains classically Islamic in that it subordinates the total immanence of creation, immanence that is only relatively existent or relatively real compared to the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*).¹⁵ However, Ibn 'Arabī's numerous writings, stressing and detailing this immanence and its infinite theophanies (*tajalliyāt*) might have led to misunderstandings by later commentators,¹⁶ possibly equating the textual preponderance of this immanence over transcendence with a cosmological and existential preponderance of immanence over God's transcendence. This immanence and its imaginal powers, however, have primal importance to Ibn 'Arabī only insofar as they are a means of journeying towards the unknowable God, the way his Names point to the Essence without being themselves the Essence.¹⁷

In Ibn 'Arabī's overall worldview, God is One in Himself, called the Essence, independent from His creation, while He is called the Divine (or the Lord or any one of His Names) when considered in relation to his creation and each creature. These creatures are all so many loci of His self-manifestation, or theophanies (*tajalliyāt*), or His Acts, realized or in potential.¹⁸ We have thus

15 This relativity and God's absoluteness is illustrated in different instances, such as on human actions: Ibn 'Arabī gives the phrase "the good deeds of the pure are the bad deeds of those drawn near" (*ḥasanāt al-abrār sayyī'āt al-muqarrabīn*) as an example of the relativity of all deeds in regard to God and to each rank of creatures. The quality of a deed depends thus on a given perspective as well as who does it, Ibn 'Arabī adding an absolute reference in that anything coming from God is good, "however displeasing or pleasing [this deed is]" (*sā'ū dhālika am sarra*), (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 472. 10, 440.)

16 Related to this is his later reputation as proponent of the concept of oneness of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), (Knysh, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 13–14). See also Mohammed Rustom, "Is Ibn 'Arabī's Ontology Pantheistic?," in *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2 (2006), 53–67.

17 Ibid., 67. See also Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 75. 4, 271 on there being two types of relationship of contemplating God by His creatures, the transcendental (*tanzīh*) and the descent into Imagination as example of similarity (*tanazzal ilā al-khayāl bi-darb min al-tashbīh*).

18 William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, (SUNY, Albany, 1989), 5. Elsewhere, Chittick also links this distinction to transcendence and immanence: "When we consider God, we

“the Essence, the Divinity, and the Cosmos; or Being, the Barzakh, and existence.”¹⁹ Within a Neoplatonic-like spectrum, or the “Unlimited Imagination” (*al-khayāl al-muṭlaq*), we see God as Being above all and originator of all things, as “He.” Then follows everything that is “He/not He:” the world of spirits, then the world of imagination, then the corporeal world, and then nothingness (or non-existence).²⁰ All existent things that are not God have the quality of “possibility” (*imkān*).²¹

Compared to the more classical three worlds mentioned previously, the world of spirits is the “Spiritual world” or *Malakūt*, also “High world;” the world of imagination is the “world of Power” or *Jabarūt*, also “Middle world;” and the corporeal world is the “Dominion” or *Mulk*, also “Lower world.”²²

This brings us to different key concepts. The first one is that of “Imagination” (*khayāl*), which is especially relevant, as this is the main point of contact between humans and angels, as beings between the divine and the terrestrial and conduits between worlds. “Imagination” can have several meanings for Ibn ‘Arabī, especially in the phrase “world of Imagination” (*‘ālam al-khayāl*), which englobes the cosmos and corporeal world.²³ There are three types of imaginal dimensions: “Unlimited Imagination” seen above as a maximalist concept which contains all degrees of existence; “Discontinuous Imagination” (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*) which is separated from the human viewer and outside of him, and “Continuous Imagination” (*al-khayāl al-muttaṣil*) which comprises

look at the Essence Itself or at the Divinity. In the first case we declare that He is absolutely incomparable and unknowable, and in the second we say that He is somehow similar to the cosmos. (...) God in Himself and God in His self-disclosure” (ibid. 357). This book and the following one, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (SUNY, Albany, 1998) are very detailed overviews to the main concepts found in the *Futūḥāt*.

- 19 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 357. Using the concepts seen in Chapter 1 (part 1.2), we could further compare with the late antique ‘Remote High God’ *Deus Otiosus* (the Essence/ the Being), ‘Governing God’ *Deus Actuusus* (the Divinity/ the Barzakh), and creation (Cosmos/ Existence); We could also relate the difference between Essence and Divinity with the idea of a Creator-God and a Salvation-God common in other traditions (Agamben, “Introduzione;” Brisson, “Introduction,” in *Neoplatonic angels*) although for Ibn ‘Arabī the second is an aspect of the first (and only) one.
- 20 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 16. Chittick explains elsewhere that “nothingness” does not exist as such except by “supposing the impossible” in imagination.
- 21 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 381. 9,547.
- 22 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,225. Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* 73. 5,52. With the nuance that the *Jabarūt* may include the other two within the “Unlimited Imagination.”
- 23 Corbin calls this word of Imagination the “imaginal” or *mundus imaginalis*, in order to distinguish it from the mainstream understanding of the word “imagination” in modern western languages, see Henri Corbin, *L’imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d’Ibn ‘Arabī* (Paris: Entrelacs, 1958, 2021).

the commonly known human faculty of imagination and the soul.²⁴ This also illustrates the concept of isthmus (*barzakh*) seen below, as Chittick writes: "Imagination is fundamentally an intermediate reality; as such, it is defined by saying that it is neither this nor that, or both this and that. Hence it is a *barzakh*, or the *barzakh* par excellence."²⁵

The whole cosmos is generally seen by Ibn 'Arabī as synonymous with "Unlimited Imagination", whereby every created thing is somewhat imaginal in relation to God. Philosophically speaking, every created thing is a "possible thing," and religiously speaking "in state of poverty towards God", that is, every created thing is only relatively existent, more or less close to the "Real." Imagination seems to be a concept used in a singular manner by Ibn 'Arabī, within the wider Islamic theological and philosophical thought,²⁶ and is closely linked to the world and actions of angels, as we will see in this chapter.

These levels of Imagination are related to the levels or modes of existence and other key concepts: first, the concept of theophany (*tajallī*) governed by the Names of God, theophanies and Names that happen or are present within one or more level of the Unlimited Imagination. In these levels of imagination appear forms, shapes, images, or even symbols (all meanings that can be inferred in English from the Arabic word *ṣūra*). In its wider sense, everything

24 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 116–117. This is also how dreams and prophetic visions are distinct: Most dreams pertain to Continuous Imagination, while prophetic visions pertain to Discontinuous Imagination (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* 332). The Continuous Imagination, which corresponds most to the common understanding of the word "imagination," is also probably how many other authors employ it, such as al-Fārābī (d. 338/950) who explains that it is situated between the sensitive world and reason (Olga Lizzini, "L'angelologia di al-Fārābī: il cosmo, l'anima, l'uomo," in *Angeli*).

25 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 117.

26 Chittick writes, on the importance of imagination for Ibn 'Arabī in human cognition: "As far as Ibn 'Arabī is concerned, although the Muslim philosophers theorized about imagination and understood that it has a tremendous power to control the world of forms, they never quite grasped its significance for acquiring knowledge. For them, as for the Kalām authorities, true knowledge had to come by way of reason. However, as the Shaykh demonstrates repeatedly, reason is unsuited to gaining positive knowledge of the divine, because its reality is to declare God incomparable and to deny His similarity. Hence it can know for certain only what He is not, not what He is" (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* 345). Put another way, where an author such as al-Ghazālī restrains himself in writing within the premises of negative theology and leaving the details of "tasting" to the reader's own experience and imagination, Ibn 'Arabī writes overflowingly on what Imagination meant to himself, and what it made him see and understand of God's creation, stepping into the potentially dangerous waters of positive theology and thus exposing himself to criticism.

has a form, humans (fixed) and angels (variable) alike, as an external signifier of their signified that Ibn 'Arabī calls “meaning” (*ma'nā*).²⁷

The second key concept of isthmus (*barzakh*) also varies depending on the context where it is used. Ibn 'Arabī writes: “A barzakh is something that separates (*fāṣil*) two other things while never going to one side (*mutaṭarrif*), as, for example, the line that separates shadow from sunlight.”²⁸ As such, the soul can be seen as an isthmus between body and spirit;²⁹ the world of Imagination seen as an isthmus between the world of spirits and the corporeal world; and in a maximalist version, the Supreme Isthmus (*al-barzakh al-a'lā*) is equal to the Unlimited Imagination,³⁰ everything other than God, dependent on Him.

A third key concept is that of theophany (*tajallī*),³¹ which is characterized by its uniqueness (a given theophany is never repeated), and by its appearance on different levels of existence and *loci* of manifestation, from the more abstract and non-physical to the most physical: “It comprises the images that are ideational, spiritual, angelical, natural, and elemental.”³² Such an image (*ṣūra*) is the manifestation of an entity (*'ayn*), and while this image (or form) dies, the entity does not.³³ These images are also classified into three different types of bodies: the corporeal or elemental body (*jism 'unṣurī*), which contains also the corporeous or imaginal body (*jasad khayālī*), and the body of

27 In this chapter, I translate *ṣūra* mainly as “image”, “shape”, or “form,” and the adjective *ma'nawī* as “ideational” instead of “meaningful,” the use of which in English is too wide to translate adequately this adjective in this context. I also chose to translate *tajallī* as “theophany” and not “self-disclosure” as Chittick did, not because I disagree in any way with him, but because I found the reading process easier this way (I also liked the discreet reminder of the divine included in this word *via* its etymology with “theo”). For a summary on the idea that “everything is a sign of God,” see William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, (SUNY, Albany, 1998), 3–6, and on the forms and meanings, *Ibid.*, 27–29.

28 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 177. See also Salman Bashier, *Ibn al-'Arabī's Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*. State University of New York Press, 2004.

29 Or as Ibn 'Arabī writes, the particular soul (*al-naḥs al-juz'īyya*) is born of nature (*al-ṭabī'a*) that is its mother, and of the Divine Spirit (*al-ruh al-ilahī*) that is its father (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 108. 5, 238).

30 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 125.

31 Ibn 'Arabī is also widely known for his use of this term. Chittick translates it as “Self-disclosure of God”, however the shorter “theophany” seems to me adequate, regardless of its uses in the history of the Christian religious tradition (see Weßler, Werner, Jörg, Scriba, “Theophany,” *Religion Past and Present*, online).

32 قدّمنا أن تجلياته تختلف لأنه تعمّ الصور المعنوية، والروحانية، والطبيعية، والعنصرية.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9, 257

33 Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 96.

light (*jism nūrī*) (these echo the three worlds above).³⁴ The complexity lies in that these images can be combined into one single theophany—man being the most complete one, encompassing all of these levels of manifestation, when becoming “the Perfect Man” once the spiritual journey is accomplished. Theophanies are unequal between themselves (depending on the clarity of its relationship to God, or to use a well-known phrase, depending on how the cup colors the water), although these theophanies all proceed from the same source and—to a certain extent only—are similar to it (since only God is “really Real”).³⁵

We also find in Ibn 'Arabī's writings a complex hierarchy of relationships and correspondences between human beings, angels, prophets and their names, the divine Names and Attributes. We will see that any of these may cover different realities, or that each of these realities might be apprehended in different ways—a multiplicity that might have led Webb to wonder whether Ibn 'Arabī was not trying “to destabilize the concept of hierarchy through the use of hierarchy.”³⁶

Central to this complexity is his hierarchy of Prophets and Friends of God (*awlīyā'*), which both organizes the universe and symbolizes different stages and states that one may reach, all the way to the level of Perfect Man.³⁷ The main new element introduced by Ibn 'Arabī might be his use of the concept of “the seal of the saints,” although it was mentioned by al-Tirmidhī (d. 892/278) before him.³⁸ At the top of this hierarchy is the Muhammadan Reality, of which all other prophets are particular reflections.³⁹ Each prophet has partial or total

34 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 14. 1,463. “Corporeal” and “corporeous” are adjectives used by Chittick to distinguish physical bodies from imaginal bodies.

35 Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 331. See also Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 52–57.

36 Webb, *Hierarchy*, 245.

37 This system is summarized and explained in Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*. This author regards this “doctrine of sainthood” as the key to one of the two main aspects of Ibn 'Arabī's works, the initiatory aspect (the other one being metaphysical), (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 58). Elements of this hierarchy are not new by the time of Ibn 'Arabī, however, they are systemized in a sort of “global doctrine” that surpasses previous descriptions (*ibid.*, 96–99).

38 *Ibid.*, 121–122. Ibn 'Arabī's answers to the questions of al-Tirmidhī occupy a good part of the 4th volume as well as the beginning of the 5th of the *Futūḥāt*, part of the legitimization process of Ibn 'Arabī's own status.

39 *Ibid.*, 70. Reflected into the microcosm, Muhammad stands for the rationally speaking soul while other prophets stand for the soul's spiritual faculties (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 288). On the macrocosm, this Muhammadan Reality is related to the “Muhammadan Light,” which is the “Cosmic Imam” in Shia cosmology, and stands for the “plenary manifestation of divine Names and Attributes, the sum of all that can be known in God, the

inheritors, and this is also true for angels (one can be an inheritor of a particular angel),⁴⁰ and although the inheritance of Muhammad's sainthood ends with Ibn 'Arabī, the inheritance of other prophets is open until the end of times.⁴¹

2 Building on the Angelic General Quranic Functions

The *Futūḥāt* is a good example of enrichment of Islamic cosmology by the sheer length of the work, while its systematization, rendered clearer by comparing different works of Ibn 'Arabī, is less obvious and sometimes appears confusing.⁴² Distinguishing the symbolic function of angels in the text from the other classical Quranic functions is even more difficult than the situation of the Quranic commentaries previously seen. This separation between the Quranic functions on one hand, and the symbolic function on the other hand, has been done in order to make this particular cosmological enrichment clearer, more than out of a real difference of functions in nature. Indeed, Ibn 'Arabī himself states that all mentions of cosmological realities in his works aim at pointing the reader or the listener to the equivalent in his or her internal realities: the cosmological macrocosm pointing to the human microcosm.⁴³ This common thread of "as above so below" colors all the works of Ibn 'Arabī as mystical in function and nature, beyond perceived description of discrete realities. Therefore any mention of angels by Ibn 'Arabī should be seen as mystical in function to some degree, however pragmatic or mundane some of them may be.

Moving around the order of functions seen in the first three chapters for matters of relevance, I will first present here the general Quranic functions as seen in Chapter 2, and then the basic Quranic function as seen in Chapter 1, before moving on to the symbolic function. I include the non-Quranic "cosmological

real *Deus Revelatus*" (Amir-Moezzi, "L'imam dans le ciel," in *Le voyage initiatique*, 116). It seems that the Muhammadan Light is a concept first developed by al-Tustarī, a concept of preexistence found in early Christian writers as well, see Geneviève Gobillot, "Quelques stéréotypes cosmologiques d'origine pythagoricienne chez les penseurs musulmans au Moyen-Âge (11)," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 219 (2002), 161–192.

40 Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 83. In his *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn 'Arabī presents 27 such prophetic models, however there are many more, 124,000 of them according to a *ḥadīth* (ibid., 92).

41 Ibid., 119.

42 Such an example is the sainthood system in Ibn 'Arabī, as explained by Chodkiewicz in *Le sceau des saints*, where the author draws on the *Futūḥāt*, and the *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam* among other works, in order to make sense of a system the parts of which are sometimes understood to be contradictory or upsetting of some basic Islamic beliefs.

43 Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 127; Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 78. 5, 116.

enrichment function” of Chapter 3 in the first group, as angelic appearances here fit mostly both the Quranic cosmology function and its corollary of the non-Quranic enrichment one.

2.1 *The Cosmological Function and Its Enrichment*

2.1.1 Creation of Angels, and Angelic Typology

Defining angels as “spirits into lights, possessors of wings,”⁴⁴ Ibn ʿArabī also uses the well-known *ḥadīth*, usually presented to supply the noted absence of the angels’ creation in the Quran. Angels are made of light (*nūr*) while *jinn* are made of fire (*nār*), and angels are later described as “spirits breathed into lights” (*arwāḥ manfūkha fī anwār*).⁴⁵ Thus, before *jinn* and humans, God created angels, giving them each “knowledge of what He wanted to carry out in the world” and giving them the governance of the cosmos, or “universal body” (*al-jism al-kull*).⁴⁶ Following this passage, Ibn ʿArabī explains that God created a first sphere (*al-falak al-awwal*), and then started creating angels, first of all creatures or “entities” (*aʿyān*), mentioning specific numbers: 35 angels to start with, to which He added 16 others, and from among them Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel and Azrael. Afterward He created 974 angels and gave them orders, and then:

*He created more angels to be the inhabitants of the Heavens and the Earth for His service; for there is no place in Heaven or Earth that does not have an angel in it, and the Real keeps creating angels from the breaths of the world as long as they keep breathing.*⁴⁷

This description of a world completely overflowing with angels brings us to Ibn ʿArabī’s three main angelic typologies. Table 2 from Appendix 4 is additionally provided at the end of this section for greater clarity. This comparative chart includes the angelologies from Ṣadr al-dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and Saʿīd

44 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 518. 11,82.

45 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 12. 1,425. Thus, angels’ bodies are natural, although not elemental (*unṣurī*) because they are not made from the four elements (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* 280).

46 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 7. 1, 399–400. These would correspond to the angels of the second category seen later, dedicated to the service of creatures and the cosmos.

47 *وخلق الله ملائكة هم عمّار السماوات والأرض لعبادته؛ فما في السماء والأرض موضعٌ إلا وفيه ملكٌ، ولا يزال الحقُّ يخلق ملائكة من أنفاس العالم ما داموا متنفّسين.*

al-dīn al-Farghānī (d. ca. 700/1300),⁴⁸ both followers of Ibn ‘Arabī—and their angelologies clearly bear his mark.

Indeed, the creation of angels from the “breaths of the world” recalls first another passage by Ibn ‘Arabī, where he presents one of his angelic classifications: the first two types correspond to two categories seen below, that is, the “enraptured angels” (*al-malā’ika al-muḥayyama*) and the angels in service of the world, which he also calls here the Elemental angels (*al-malā’ika al-‘anāṣir*); while the third type that is brought to mind here is “the angels created from the actions of the servants and their breaths” (*al-malā’ika al-makhlūqa min a‘māl al-‘ubbād wa-anfāsihim*), and these correspond to what is in the heart of the one who breathes.⁴⁹ Elsewhere he writes that these angels born of the breaths of man are the latest creation of God, and that very few of man’s (spiritual) companions know of it,⁵⁰ yet elsewhere Ibn ‘Arabī writes that the strongest of these angels are the angels created from the breaths of women.⁵¹

Then Ibn ‘Arabī gives two other typologies that are worded slightly differently. Although ultimately coherent, they provide an interesting ambiguity on this category of “angels of breaths” in particular. He explains in his second typology that God created three categories of spirits (*arwāḥ*) according to their overall roles: a first category fully dedicated to Him, unaware of the other two (clearly equivalent to the enraptured angels), a second category that is given the governance of a natural body (*mudabbira ajsāman ṭabī’iyya*) which concerns creations such as humans and animals, and a third category “dedicated to our service [humans]” (*musakhkhara la-nā*), which could mean the “usual” angels such as guardian angels (and the elemental angels above).

48 I use the classifications drawn by Murata in her article, where she writes that al-Farghānī’s angelology is “fresh enough to warrant a summary,” although it is hardly different from that of Ibn ‘Arabī’s, whom she mentions briefly without describing his angelology (Murata, “The Angels” 334). Indeed al-Farghānī’s typology corresponds to Ibn ‘Arabī’s second typology.

49 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 13, 1,463; *ibid.*, 558, 11,262. Elemental angels seem to be a concept found in antiquity and early Christianity as well (Agamben, “Introduzione”).

50 (...) وملك مخلوق من نفس إنسان. وهذا الملك آخر موجود طبيعي، ولا يعرف ذلك من أصحابنا إلا القليل، فكيف من ليس من أهل الإيمان والكشف.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 73, 4,568

Elsewhere he presents a slightly different version: Illustrating the interaction between the physical world and the Unseen, breaths become the mother of angels, the father being “normal” angels needing the physical dimension for reproduction (*ibid.*, 292, 7,245).

51 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198, 6,354.

Indeed, even though he does not write the word “angel”, the paragraph describing this third category corresponds to the usual roles given to angels in Islamic traditions.⁵²

In another chapter, devoted to the “angelic *walāya*,”⁵³ Ibn ʿArabī presents his third typology: three “kinds” (*ṣanf*) of angels. If the enraptured angels remain the same, as a first group fully turned to God, the second and third categories are switched here. The third category of spirits seen previously now corresponds to the second kind of angels, “the dedicated angels” (*al-malāʾika al-musakhkhara*), whose head is The Pen (or First Intellect, see next section), and although they originally come from the same plane as the enraptured angels, they are directed by God to help the believers. As for the third kind here, “the governing angels” (*malāʾikat al-tadbīr*) which he describes at the end of the chapter as being “the speaking souls” (*al-nufūs al-nāṭiqā*), they correspond to the second category of spirits in the previous paragraph, and to the third type (the “angels of breaths”) mentioned earlier.⁵⁴

An interesting parallel arises then out of these three typologies. These “governing ones” can mean particular angels of breaths that are the latest creation of God (in the first typology), they can also mean humans in the second case (second category of spirits), while they are presented as more “classical” angels in the third case (third kind of angels). This superposition of meanings crystallizes well the ambiguous relationship between humans and angels explored later, and their shared spiritual constitution. These governing angels are also a category that does not fit in Webb’s classification of angels from Ibn ʿArabī’s writings,⁵⁵ although this category is the most unusual of his angelic representations.

⁵² وأرواح أخر مسخرات لنا، وهم على طبقات كثيرة. فمنهم الموكل بالوحي والإلقاء، ومنهم الموكل بالأرزاق، ومنهم الموكل بقبض الأرواح، ومنهم الموكل بإحياء الموتى، ومنهم الموكل بالاستغفار للمؤمنين والدعاء لهم، ومنهم الموكلون بالغراسات في الجنة جزاء لأعمال العباد.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 310. 7,445

⁵³ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 154. 5,409–415. This third typology seems to be the typology that Lory uses in his chapter on angels and mystics (Lory, *La dignité de l'homme* 205).

⁵⁴ This tripartite classification is also reflected in one of his classifications of knowledge or sciences (*ʿulūm*) with a similar hierarchy: the science of the divine (*al-ilāhiyyāt*), the science of the Higher Spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-ʿulwīyya*), and the science of the created natural things (*al-muwalladāt al-ṭabīʿīyya*), (Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4,382).

⁵⁵ She writes that Ibn ʿArabī’s writings fall into three categories: angels as effusion of God, comparators to humans, and apparition of angels or angels-like creatures to Ibn ʿArabī (Webb, *Hierarchy* 246).

Table 2 from Appendix 4

| Typology no. 1 | Typology no. 2 | Typology no. 3 | Typology of al-Qūnawī | Typology of al-Farghānī |
|--|---|-------------------------|---|--|
| Enraptured angels | Spirits fully dedicated to God | Enraptured angels | Cherubim (enraptured ones; inhabitants of the Invicibility such as Gabriel and the Holy Spirit) | Angels with no locus of manifestation (enraptured angels). |
| Elemental angels | Spirits given the governance of a natural body (↓)^a | Dedicated angels | Governing angels (those of heavenly spheres and those of earthly things). | Angels attached to one locus of manifestation (governing angels, and human spirits) |
| Angels created of actions and breaths of the servants | Spirits dedicated to the service of humanity (↑) ^b | Governing angels | <i>No third category.</i> | Angels with or without locus of manifestation (such as messengers, winged angels) |

a This type is presented as the second type of spirit in the text, however, its description matches that of the third category of angels in the other typologies.

b This type is presented as the third kind in the text, however, its description matches that of the second category of angels in the other typologies.

However, some of these angelic typologies are not eternal, allowing for a fluctuation between categories. Angels dedicated to the intercession on behalf of humans, for instance, will go from being of the third category of spirits to be of the first category when God's compassion encompasses everything, and intercession will not be needed anymore. They will then even cease to be designated by the name "angels", joining the group of unnamed pure spirits in eternal adoration, like those of the first category.⁵⁶

2.1.2 Other Remarks on the Creation of Angels and Meanings of the Word

Throughout his work, Ibn 'Arabī insists on the inbuilt obedience of angels to God, quoting verses such as Q 66:6 numerous times, and once using it to counter what he considers to be misguided interpretations of the verse involving Hārūt and Mārūt.⁵⁷ This obedient image, however, is challenged by their questioning attitude towards God and His wisdom when creating Adam. Ibn

56 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 349, 8,328, although they are still called angels elsewhere. Elsewhere he calls these lights "material light" (*nūr mādī*). Their nature of light makes them the closest of the creatures to the divine lights (*ibid.* 90, 5,182).

57 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 49, 2,89. Obedience is such a fundamental trait of the angels that

ʿArabī explains that this is because of another inbuilt feature of angels (*min jibillatiha*) that makes them wish good for themselves (*lam turid al-khayr illā li-nafsihā*), and thinking themselves better than Adam,⁵⁸ the mysterious freedom of choice given to man escaping their understanding. This mystery seems to destabilize their obedient nature. Elsewhere, Ibn ʿArabī comments on Q 13:15 by explaining that this full obedience of angels is also shared by minerals (*al-jamādāt*), while all other creatures retain the existential possibility of obeying God voluntarily or “under compulsion” (*karhan*).⁵⁹

Yet another important remark on the creation of angels is that they are part of the natural world, “under the rule of Nature” (*taḥt ḥukm al-ṭabīʿa*), and as such are prone to dispute (*ikhtisām*), in reference to Q 38:69.⁶⁰ Angels are made of “material light frames” (*al-hayākil al-nūriyya al-māddiyya*) perceived by the senses, and were they to be stripped of these frames, there would not be any dispute or fight (*lā khiṣām wa-lā nizāʿ*) because they would not be made of any compound (*tarkīb*) which is proper to the natural world.⁶¹ Indeed these compounds are made of natural elements (*ṭabāʿīʿ*) containing oppositions (*li-mā fihā min al-taḍādd*).⁶² This touches upon a particular understanding of the relationships between the divine Names that we will see in the next part of this chapter.

As for the meaning of the word “angel” (*malak*) in the chapter on the station of “angelic prophecy” (*al-nubuwwa al-malakiyya*),⁶³ Ibn ʿArabī presents another layer of meaning to it. For him it means exactly “messenger,” using the etymology of the root “م-ر-ك,” adding that this role of messenger (*al-risāla*) is given to many different types of creatures: the noble spirits (those generally called “angels,” including by Ibn ʿArabī in his works), but also *jinn* and men. This definition is reiterated or suggested in numerous places, angels that are not sent

Ibn ʿArabī writes that “among his servants he chose the angels” the way he chose “God” out of His Names, *ibid.* 90. 5,168.

58 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 70. 3, 361. This “praying for themselves” seems to contradict the many other instances where angels are seen praying for mankind and other creatures—however, this can be seen as another mark of their inbuilt capacity to obey God: They will pray for whomever and whatever God tells them to, and maybe pray for themselves and others at the same time?

59 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,559. This is a reference to the verse 13:15.

60 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 70, 3,361, and *ibid.* 290. 7,230.

61 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,524.

62 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 306. 7,314. See also *ibid.* 336. 8,124. If angels are considered natural, they are not “elemental” (made of any of the four elements): elemental bodies (*ʿunṣurī*) are natural bodies (*ṭabīʿī*), however not all natural bodies are elemental (such as angels and spheres). *Ibid.* 178. 5,628.

63 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 157. 5,424.

anywhere retain the name of “spirit.”⁶⁴ Conversely, if some men can be qualified as angels due to their messenger function, angels can also be qualified as prophets. This is the case for all angels around the Throne, and some individual angels of the Seat, the Heavens, and the Stairs (*‘urū*), the last of whom is Ismael the angel of the terrestrial Heaven.⁶⁵ This definition of angels might explain the infrequent allusions to angels being made of something other than light;⁶⁶ and it also justifies the ambiguity regarding Satan in the Quranic text. Indeed, he was not an angel in the sense of “noble spirit” made of light (though he was still considered of the “highest spirits”, *al-arwāḥ al-‘ulwīyya*), but he was an angel in the sense that he was also given the function of messenger, as part of the “angel/messenger” group. He was then cut off from this function—from being an angel—when he refused to bow down to Adam.⁶⁷ The mark of this angelic function is the wings: These are given only to the messenger spirits, “the envoys from the Presence of the Command to its Creation.”⁶⁸

Confusingly, the word “angel” is also used for realities perceived otherwise. The “spirituality of a planet” (*rūḥāniyyat kawkab*) is an angel of its corresponding Heaven which puts the planet in movement.⁶⁹ Elsewhere, Ibn ‘Arabī also calls the worlds of the created spheres (*falak*) “angels”, according to each sphere’s nature, in which are created yet other angels in the service of all begotten things (*al-muwalladāt*) in the elemental plane (*‘ālam al-‘anāsir*). These things all possess their own souls (*nufūs*) proceeding from the “Universal Soul” (*al-nafs al-kulliyya*),⁷⁰ which parallels the idea of multiple spirits breathed into creatures, proceeding from the greater “Spirit.”⁷¹

64 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 206. 6, 415. For example, the phrase “this is what the angel descends with, or what the human messenger brings” reflects such an understanding of “angel” (ibid. 366. 9, 74).

65 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 157. 5, 425.

66 For example, Ibn ‘Arabī questions whether the angel of death is made of “blends” (*akhlāṭ*) as are made the bodies of animals (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 348. 8, 315).

67 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 157. 5, 420, 424–425, and Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9, 176.

68 ما جعل للأرواح أجنحة إلا للملائكة منهم: لأنهم السفراء من حضرة الأمر إلى خلقه.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9, 229

69 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 167. 5, 476.

70 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 295. 7, 301. This idea of angels in the service of each living thing, however tiny, was seen in Chapter 1, itself an echo of a notion found in Jewish and Christian traditions.

We can note here that the “Universal Soul” seem to be also used by the Brethren of Purity, who identify it to angels dedicated to creatures and the maintenance of creation (so they would identify here angels with creatures that Akbarian angels are in charge of), (Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia nelle epistole dei Fratelli della Purezza”). However, the comparison with the Brethren’s angelology and cosmology in detail would merit another study.

71 We find here again the second and third categories of spirits presented in the beginning of

Indeed, "Spirit" is another confusing word. Closely related to angels, "the Spirit" (*al-rūḥ*) includes them all, while at the same time being chosen *from* among the angels,⁷² as well as being what is breathed *into* them, as it is breathed into all creatures—a Spirit which is ascribed to God (*muḍāf ilayhi*), and which is often synonymous with the "Breath of the All-Merciful" (*naḥs al-raḥmān*).⁷³ Ibn 'Arabī takes up again the functional meaning of "angel" in another example: Individual spirits born out of the "Holy Spirit" (*rūḥ al-quḍs*) are called proper angels once they are sent, and if they are not sent, they remain referred to under the term "Spirit."⁷⁴

Finally, in Ibn 'Arabī's writings we sometimes find the ambivalence of the word "*jinn*" noted in Chapter 3. Although he usually makes a clear difference between angels and *jinn*, the fact that they are both invisible to man, "hidden by the veil" (*masturūn bi-l-ḥijāb*) justifies calling the angels "*jinn*,"⁷⁵ or using the variant form "*jānn*,"⁷⁶ while the interior of man is also described as being in reality "*jānn*."⁷⁷ In this regard, anything that has an internal/invisible quality (*bāṭin*) can be qualified as "*jinn*-like." At other times, his writings remind the reader that there are indeed spiritual creatures other than the ones called "angels," although they are mostly left nameless.⁷⁸

2.1.3 Cosmological Hierarchies: Celestial and Spiritual Hierarchies

Using a court-like description of roles, Ibn 'Arabī describes the "enraptured angels" (*al-malā'ika al-muhayyama*) as closest to God, then the cherubim (*al-*

this section: humans and other creatures (second category) and angels dedicated to them (third category).

72 As "The Spirit" is also identified as an angel, in Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 5. 1,379.

73 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 90. 5,176.

74 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 206. 6,415.

75 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9,175–176.

76 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 345. 8,261.

77

فإن باطن الإنسان جانّ في الحقيقة

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,304

Ibn 'Arabī echoes the etymological debate surrounding the root "J-N-N" seen in Chapter 1 by explaining that angels (as spirits of light) are also called by the name "*jinna*," as are the *jinn* (*wa-ka-dhālika tasmiyat al-malā'ika jinna, wa-ka-dhālika al-jinn*), because this goes back to being "hidden from view" (*al-istitār*), though the modes of hiding are not one and the same, see *ibid.*, 388. 10,48. This also appears in another paragraph which describes the angels born of the spheres as hidden, like the foetuses in their mothers' wombs (the word for *jinn* having the same root as that for foetuses, *ajinna*, in Arabic) before coming to the physical world (*ibid.* 559. 12,111).

78 See, for instance, Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,557: "What descend from the angels and the spiritual forces in the clouds" (بما ينزل من الملائكة والقوى الروحانية في الضباب).

karūbiyyīn) are described as gatekeepers (*ḥājib*), among which we find the angel Nūn, vizier or “head of the divine divan” (*ra’s al-dīwān al-ilāhī*) who is given the “knowledge of His creation” (*‘ilm fī khalqihī*) or complete knowledge.⁷⁹

On a position (*manzila*) below Nūn is another angel, the archetypal scribe angel, called “the Pen” (*al-Qalam*), who receives parts of Nūn’s knowledge, which make up 360 “sciences of completion” (*‘ulūm al-ijmāl*), subdivided in as many discrete sciences (*‘ulūm al-taṣṣīl*). The Pen is also in charge of writing on the Tablet (*lawḥ*) everything that happens in the cosmos until the Last Day, which corresponds to these 360 sciences.⁸⁰ Webb sees in this particular description, and the elevated position of the angel Nūn, a symbol of the “Breath of the Compassionate,” as distinct to Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology: This angel comes as the first emanation of Being, instead of the Intellect, usually symbolized by the Pen, as in other authors’ cosmologies.⁸¹

The enraptured angels exist on another plane of existence, as they are not part of this physical creation (*al-khalq*), which is the “breath of the All-Merciful” (*naḥas al-raḥmān*), receiving the forms of all that is not God (*al-qābil li-ṣuwar kulli mā siwā Allāh*).⁸²

In a chapter devoted to the bearers of the Throne, Ibn ‘Arabī quotes a saying attributed to Ibn Masarra al-Jabalī (d. 319/931):⁸³ “The borne Throne is the Dominion, and it is delimited by body, spirit, nourishment, and rank.” He then elaborates on this, paralleling “body” with “forms” (or images), and “rank” with “promise and threat”: “Adam and Seraphiel for the forms, Gabriel and Muhammad for the spirits, Michael and Abraham for the nourishments, and Mālik

79 Further summaries are provided in Annex 4.2 for greater clarity.

80 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 60. 2, 159–200. Enraptured angels are a good example of categories of unclear limits in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī, as they are described elsewhere as not being angels, but “purified spirits” (*arwāḥ muṭaḥḥara*) in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 177. 5, 571, so close to God that they are not aware of the existence of the rest of the cosmos and its creatures, “they do not know other than God” (*lā ‘ilma lahum bi-ghayr Allāh*), *ibid.* 295. 7, 293. Yet elsewhere, the enraptured angels are described as being the cherubim, see *ibid.* 75. 4, 313.

81 Webb, *Hierarchy* 247–248.

82 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 558. 11, 241. The Pen and the Tablet are also part of this other plane of existence, at least initially (as we have seen previously that they might also be part of the dedicated angels). However, the enraptured angels, also called “the Higher ones” (*al-‘ālīn*) are invariably described as being the closest to God, away from the Cosmos, not angels by function, and not aware of the Cosmos. They were not concerned by the order given by God to the angels to bow down to Adam, hence God asks the Devil whether he considered himself part of the “Higher ones” (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 361. 8, 567–568).

83 The first Muslim mystic from al-Andalus known to us by his writings, see Ebstein, “Ibn Masarra,” E.I.³.

and Riḍwān for the promise and the threat.”⁸⁴ However, in the same chapter, Ibn ʿArabī explains that for now only four bearers of the Throne are present, and that they will become eight on the Last Day, mentioning once again Ibn Masarra to describe the forms of these other four, a description already seen in Chapter 2: one in human form, one as a lion, one as an eagle, and the fourth as a bull.⁸⁵ We will see in the next section the parallels with human bearers, and later the mystical aspect drawn from these four and eight bearers.

Another celestial category, often quoted with the cherubim and which sounds similar in Arabic, is that of “Those Drawn Near” (*al-muqarrabīn*). These concern the general category of the “Friends of God” (*awliyāʾ Allāh*), which are composed of angels, messengers, prophets, Friends, and believers. They all may reach the stations of Those Drawn Near by the act of prayer.⁸⁶ Besides the cherubim and Those Drawn Near, other groups are the “Zealots” (*al-muʿtakafūn*), the “Isolated” (*al-mufarradūn*), and “those who are taken away from themselves for what the Real showed them of His Majesty” (*al-maʾkhūdhūn ʿan anfusihim bi-mā ashhadahum al-Ḥaqq min jalālihi*). These categories are included with the enraptured Angels, whose main characteristic is that they are unaware of the rest of the Creation. They also represent a station (*maqām*), where members of a particular human category, the “Solitaries” (*afrād*) are to be found, because they do not see anything else than the Real.⁸⁷

This category of “Solitaries” is very important in the cosmological hierarchy of Ibn ʿArabī. Also called “People of Numbers” (*ahl al-aʿdād*), these Solitaries are of unchanging number at any given time, succeeding each other to keep their number constant. There are seven “Replacements” (*abdāl*), made up of four “Pegs” (*awtād*), two imams, and one “Pole” (*quṭb*). Then we have twelve “Cap-

84 رويناً عن ابن مسرة الجبلي من أكبر أهل الطريق علماً وحالاً وكشفاً: “العرش المحمول هو الملك، وهو محصور في جسم وروح وغذاء ومربية” فأدم وإسرافيل للصُّور، وجبريل ومحمد للأرواح، وميكائيل وإبراهيم للأرزاق، ومالك ورضوان للوعد والوعيد.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 13. 1,462–463

The bearers of the Throne are presented in more detail in the next part.

85 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 13. 1,464. Ibn ʿArabī discusses the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*) and the Seat (*al-Kursī*) and their attendant angels in a manner similar to that seen previously in the other chapters (ibid. 198. 5,272–277.)

86 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 47. 2,58–59.

87 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 295. 7,293.

tains" (*nuqabā'*), 80 "Nobles" (*nujabā'*), one "Disciple" (*ḥawārī*), and 40 "Of the month of Rajab" (*rajabīyyūn*). There are also two "Seals" (*khatm*) for all of time: one sealing the *wilāya* of Muhammad (identified with Ibn 'Arabī himself), and one sealing the general *wilāya* (identified with Jesus).⁸⁸

Continuing with these "People of numbers", there are 300 souls "on the heart of Adam" (*alā qalb Ādam*), 40 persons "on the heart of Noah," seven "on the heart of the Friend Abraham," five "on the heart of Gabriel," three "on the heart of Michael," and one "on the heart of Seraphiel."⁸⁹ The phrase "on the heart of" is similar to the other phrase used widely by Ibn 'Arabī, "on the feet of" (*alā qadam*), and describes an inheritance, as seen in the introduction of this chapter—first used by Ibn Barrajān, as explained in Chapter 2. One might think about it as a "station" (*maqām*) or a "way" (*ṭariqa*), which corresponds to either prophets or angels. We could formulate this as a "mode of being." Here, the people who are on a "Gabriel mode" are described as having "as many sciences as Gabriel has forces represented by his wings," while the 'Michael mode' means simplicity, smiling, softness of character, and compassion.⁹⁰ The "Seraphiel mode" corresponds to a person that "reunites the two sides" (*jāmi' li-l-ṭarafayn*), and Ibn 'Arabī tells us that Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and Jesus both corresponded to this mode.⁹¹

This whole hierarchy can be complexified further: One person can hold several of these modes of being, progress from one to another, and cumulate them.⁹² There is also an overlap to keep in mind, as one person can be the archetype of a role for others as well: Jesus was "on the heart of Seraphiel", while some of Ibn 'Arabī's shaykhs were themselves "on the heart of Jesus". Elsewhere, Ibn 'Arabī touches on this subject again in the chapter on the "*position of the Gabrielan mystical knower*,"⁹³ giving more names of the angels concerned, which he calls "the advanced angels" (*al-malā'ika al-muqaddamīn*) or heralds.

88 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 22. 1,550, *ibid.*, 75. 4,278–282. The Pole is seen as the highest position of all, to whom angel, *jinn*, and humans give allegiance (*mubāy'a'a*). See the section where Ibn 'Arabī also mentions a book he has written on this matter (*ibid.* 270. 7,10), and the chapters on "the four Pegs" and "the supreme degree of walāya" by M. Chodkiewicz (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* 95–120).

89 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 75. 4,282–291.

90 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 75. 4,290.

91 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 75. 4,291.

92 This echoes a similar journey of the soul after death in Christian patristic literature: A soul learns from an angel, before moving on and learning from another one higher up, and so on (Daniélou, *The Angels* 91).

93 *fī ma'rīfat manzīl al-ʿarīf al-jibraʿīlī*, Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 303. 7,375.

He explains that men and women who are on any of these modes leave traces (*athar*) corresponding to these angels' ranks, as they are under their watch and command.⁹⁴

There are many more categories, beyond the scope of this chapter. We will only note here that these other Solitaries seem to be part of the greater group called "The people of the world of breaths" (*rijāl ʿālam al-anfās*), which reminds us of the angels of breaths, although the link between these two remains unclear. We will mention only the ten "men of the Unseen" (*rijāl al-ghayb*), who Ibn ʿArabī describes elsewhere as having the power to act and move in the Unseen world (*al-ghayb*) and in the spiritual world (*al-malakūt*). They also have the power to call on the spirits of the spheres (*arwāḥ al-kawākib*) though not the spirits of angels (*arwāḥ al-malāʾika*)—as this remains God's prerogative.⁹⁵ They are also called this way because when they pray, their state (*ḥāl*) brings them where angels do not go (this is discussed later). Ibn ʿArabī also mentions two types of men of the Unseen in their way of "appearance" (*ẓuhūr*): men who are invisible to the higher spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-ʿulā*) but visible to God, and men who are invisible to (our) visible world (*ʿālam al-shahāda*), but visible in the "higher world" (*al-ālam al-ʿulā*).⁹⁶

All these Solitaries are followed by "The men of unlimited number" (*rijāl alladhīn lā yaḥṣuruhum ʿadad*), and this category seems to cover all kinds of mystically-oriented persons (of which "the Sufis" are, interestingly, only one category), and their visible and invisible roles in maintaining the greater order of the world.⁹⁷ The fact that Sufis are considered to be one category recalls one of the authors that influenced Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Barraġān, who also considered them to be one of many categories of mystics.

2.1.4 On the *jinn*

Keeping in mind that at times "*jinn*" or "*jānn*" can be used for any creature of the Unseen, including angels, and that "angel" can also be used for a function and not a type of being, as seen above, Ibn ʿArabī devotes a chapter to the "smokeless fiery spirits" (*al-arwāḥ al-mārījīyya al-nārīyya*) that we usually define as *jinn*.⁹⁸ He explains that *jinn* are an isthmus (*barzakh*) between "an

94 Ibid.

95 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 25, 1,569. This is an example of the ambiguity around the definition of angel, as we have seen that Ibn ʿArabī calls the spheres "angels" at times, and at other times angels are only in charge of them.

96 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75, 4,293.

97 Many pages are dedicated to detailing these denominations (Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69, 4,268–367.)

98 While this book was under review, a book came out that treats the topic of *jinn* quite

embodied spirit” (*rūḥ mujaṣṣam*) and a “spirit without locus” (*rūḥ bilā ayn*). They are made of fire and air (*hawāʾ*), fire being considered the highest of the four elements (*arkān*), though water (*māʾ*) is more powerful—which is given as a reason for the refusal to bow to Adam. The predominance of the fire element allows the *jinn* to change shapes, a faculty which they share with angels, while they share with humans the choice to obey or disobey (*fa-minhum al-ṭāʾiʿ wa-l-ʿāṣī mithlanā, wa la-hum al-tashakkul fī al-ṣuwar ka-l-malāʾika*). Ibn ʿArabī often designates humans and *jinn* alike with the Quranic “the two heavy ones” (*al-thaqalān*). We cannot see them except by disclosure from God to some of his servants, this change of shape taking place in the imaginal world. If we were able to perceive what the “shaping force” (*al-quwwa al-muṣawwira*) in the “imagined imagination” (*al-khayāl al-mutakhayyil*) made of us, we would see that we also have different shapes.⁹⁹ However one can recognize a *jinn*, whatever its shape, by the “tune” (*nighma*) it has, which does not change.¹⁰⁰

He then goes to describe the process of *jinn* reproduction, from their first unique ancestor, a “male-female” (*khunthā*) reproducing itself, its descendants multiplying with each other, by interpenetration (*tadākhul*). The resulting ambiguous nature of *jinn* is described as an isthmus between male and female, as they are between men and angel, which is also due to a lack of female force (*quwwat al-unūtha*) as much as a lack of male force (*quwwat al-dhukūriyya*), preventing them from being fixed as one or the other. Ibn ʿArabī then describes their feeding habits (from bone) and their wars, before returning to the process of their creation, when angels from the seven Heavens were ordered to prepare the elements for this event. The *jinn*, once created, are temporarily the only ones present in the “world of natures” (*ʿālam al-ṭabāʾiʿ*). They discover in themselves a sense of pride and importance (*ʿizza wa-ʿuẓma*) which remains unexplained until they have a point of comparison when man is created, and

extensively, a great part of it devoted to Akbarian *jinn*. The reader interested in *jinn* may want to consult this fascinating work: Dunja Rasic, *Bedeviled, Jinn Doppelgangers in Islam and Akbarian Sufism* (Albany: SUNY, 2024). From a cursory reading, it seems that both our writings are in accordance with what pertains to Akbarian *jinn*, albeit mine is much shorter due to my subject matter being elsewhere, while Rasic works on a partially different corpus, including non-Sufi authors and secondary sources that are not relevant here.

99 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 9. 1, 423–424. It was brought to my attention that a good portion of this chapter exists translated into English, so the reader may want to consult it: Gracia López Anguita, “On the Inner Knowledge of Spirits Made of an Igneous Mixture, Chapter 9 of the *-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*,” In *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society*, vol. 44 (2008), online.

100 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 283. 7, 145–146.

one of them, al-Ḥārith (another name for Iblīs), despises him immediately.¹⁰¹ Ibn ʿArabī makes clear, as he does throughout his work, that individual *jinn* are called “satans” only when they choose disobedience, as al-Ḥārith becomes Iblīs only when God “confused him” (*ablasahu*)—otherwise they retain the denomination “*jinn*,”¹⁰² which suggests that this term is neutral.

However, Ibn ʿArabī does warn the reader that sharing company with spirituals from the *jānn* (*al-ruḥāniyyūn min al-jān*) rarely ends well, because their fiery nature makes them prone to instability and to a curiosity that overwhelms them too rapidly. While keeping company with angels will help acquire more knowledge about God, this knowledge itself is the assurance of having really been in the company of angels. He also qualifies *jinn* as the most ignorant of God’s natural creatures, and because of that one should be cautious regarding the information they provide, referring to their listening to the Heavens. He also mentions that a man interested in *jinn* will wish to learn the sciences of plants, stones, names and letters from them, sciences which he calls “natural magic” (*al-sīmyāʾ*), a science frowned upon by the different divine laws (*al-sharāʾiʿ*).¹⁰³ In general, the ambiguous similarity between this type of sciences and what Ibn ʿArabī writes about of the sciences of Names and letters mirrors the parallel between the partial information that *jinn* transmit from the Heavens and the “trustworthy” information that angels transmit. They may look and sound similar, with the same vocabulary, but one is incomplete while the other is complete.¹⁰⁴ This also hints at the variety of what is called today “occult sciences,”

101 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 9, 1,426–427.

102 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 9, 1,428, Ibid., 198, 6,354. For instance, Ibn ʿArabī explains elsewhere that an angelic impulse (*ilqāʾ malakī*) is always pleasing to God and good in the long term, though it might be temporarily “bitter” (*murr*), while an satanic impulse is always pleasing to the self, but bitter in retribution—noting that a satanic impulse is not a “fiery” one (*nāri*) because among *jinn* are good ones “giving good impulse” (*man yulqī al-khayr*), (ibid. 113, 5,255.)

103 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 51, 2,102–104.

104 “Natural magic” or *al-sīmyāʾ* is mentioned in an influential work in Arabic of pseudo-Plato, “The Book of the Tables of the Jewels” (*Kitāb Abwāḥ al-jawāhīr*), which involves the letters of the alphabet and angels (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 103), thus conflating what Ibn ʿArabī tries to separate somewhat. In another influential occult work, “The Goal of the Sage” (*Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*), attributed to Maslama al-Qurṭubī (d. 397/1007), he is also opposed to alchemy (*al-kīmīyāʾ*), science of the bodies, *al-sīmyāʾ* being the science of the celestial bodies (ibid. 144–151). I translate *al-sīmyāʾ* as “natural magic” in the context of Ibn ʿArabī, as it seems more appropriate this way. However with time this word came to signify more often “science of letters and magical squares” (ibid. 304). Coulon also notes that many of the concepts used by al-Qurṭubī have been used by others later, including Ibn ʿArabī (ibid., 147). The difference thus presented by Ibn ʿArabī between full knowledge and partial knowledge (natural magic) must have seemed like it was walking a very fine line, to some of his readers.

which were not quite disregarded by religious scholars.¹⁰⁵ At least for Ibn 'Arabī, the main issue with it was that he considered it to be incomplete.

2.1.5 On Iblīs

In the section that examines the creation of angels we saw that Satan was considered an angel per his function (messenger), but not per his nature (*jinn*). For Ibn 'Arabī this explains his ambiguous status in the Quran, as seen in Chapter 1. Adding to what was previously said about him, Ibn 'Arabī writes that he is not only of the natural world, but also “elemental” (*‘unṣurī*) which explains his pride preventing him to be like angels, a pride found with the *jinn*.¹⁰⁶ As such, Iblīs gains a particular angelic function: being the “messenger of discord,” part of God's unknowable plan.

Ibn 'Arabī refutes the view that Satan/Iblīs was the first *jinn*, explaining that he was only one of them, and more exactly “the first wretched of the *jinn*” (*awwal al-ashqiyā' min al-jinn*).¹⁰⁷ He was sent to be part of the “lower world” (*‘ālam al-sufī*), and from there he may come to men via the “lower positions” (*al-manāzil al-sufliyya*) which are the four horizontal directions (right, left, behind, front).¹⁰⁸ Although angels can act, as expected, as protectors against Satan,¹⁰⁹ he is capable of playing “make-believe” at the highest states, including when one reaches the Lote Tree, by glamouring (*talbīs*) everything.¹¹⁰

Discussing the importance of maintaining ranks in prayer, Ibn 'Arabī reminds the reader that both satans and angels “are at the doors of the hearts” (*‘alā abwāb al-qulūb*),¹¹¹ and that satans are sent by God on His order, inflicted

¹⁰⁵ On the contrary, most of them included these in their writings, even though this has long been disregarded in western studies. See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Introduction: De-Orienting the Study of Islamicate Occultism,” *Arabica* 64, no. 3–4 (2017): 287–295; Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Farouk Yahya, *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2020). Comparing the lives of the Andalusians Ibn Masarra (d. 931/319) and Maslama al-Qurṭubī, Coulon writes that mystics could be more politically problematic than theologians versed in the occult sciences (Coulon, *La magie en terre d'islam* 158).

¹⁰⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,354.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 9. 1,429. Rasic confirms this, highlighting the specific Akbarian stance on this, in contrast to other authors she studies (Rasic, *Bedeveled*).

¹⁰⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 16. 1,486. Even though one would expect *al-‘ālam al-sufī*, it is written *‘ālam al-sufī*.

¹⁰⁹ For instance, angels stand between the prophet and Iblīs in a scene where the prophet talks with Iblīs, confirming both of their roles that are ultimately in God's hands: the Prophet guides toward the right path and the devil induces into error (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 68. 2,268; see also *ibid.* 73. 4,513.)

¹¹⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 283. 7,149.

¹¹¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 2,595.

upon man (*musallaṭūn ʿalā al-insān*).¹¹² In the chapter on pilgrimage, Ibn ʿArabī gives us an interesting portrait of the devil, who has a place called “*urna*” on Arafat: “Iblīs goes on pilgrimage every year, his place (being) crying on what he missed of obeying his Lord, while being forced to seduce even though this is out of his choice, justified by his oath to his Lord.”¹¹³ In this same passage, Ibn ʿArabī explains that a pilgrim has to be above the devil’s place (*mawqif Iblīs*) as a symbol of his distance (*buʿd*) from God.

On the Last Day, when Hell ceases to be what it is, quietened and brought within the precincts of the Gardens (*ḥaḏāʾir al-jinān*), the secret of Iblīs and his followers is made clear (*ittadaḥa sirr Iblīs*); i.e., that their behavior was prescribed by a pre-established decree (*qaḏāʾ sābiq*).¹¹⁴

Ibn ʿArabī also writes often about “satans” (*shayāṭīn*) in the plural form, and in the chapter devoted to satanic thoughts he explains that they are of two sorts: physical satans (*ḥissī*), and ideational satans (*maʿnawī*). Of the physical ones, we also have two further sorts, human and *jinn*.¹¹⁵ This also hints at the simultaneity of literal and figurative or symbolic reading of Quranic concepts.

2.1.6 Cosmological Topography

Topographically, Ibn ʿArabī has drawn up several diagrams concerning his view of the cosmos, its planes, places, and creatures, a cosmos of the Neoplatonic kind.¹¹⁶ Overall, it is comprised of the “Highest Council” (*al-malaʾ al-aʿlā*), made of creatures of light, and the “Lowest Council” (*al-malaʾ al-asfal*) made of elemental creatures, and between them is the isthmus which also comprises them both, making them a “more complete world” (*akmal al-ʿālam man jamaʿa bay-nahumā*).¹¹⁷

¹¹² Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9, 176.

¹¹³ فَإِنَّ إبْلِسَ يَحْجُّ فِي كُلِّ سَنَةٍ، وَذَلِكَ مَوْقِفُهُ يَبْكِي عَلَى مَا فَاتَهُ مِنْ طَاعَةِ رَبِّهِ. وَهُوَ مُجْبُورٌ فِي الْإِغْوَاءِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ مِنْ اخْتِيَارِهِ، إِبْرَارًا لِقَسَمِهِ بِهِ.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4, 146

¹¹⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 5. 1, 380.

¹¹⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 55. 2, 125.

¹¹⁶ For a good overview of this Akbarian general cosmology, see Ali Karjoo-Ravary, “From the Remainder of Adam’s Clay: Chapter Eight of Ibn Al-ʿArabī’s *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkiyya*,” *Journals of Sufi Studies* 10, no. 1–2 (2021), 6–15.

¹¹⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 387. 10, 46. One could draw a parallel with the *Malakūt* and *Mulk* seen in the introduction, with the *Jabarūt* between them, that might also include them both. He also uses a grammatical comparison: This more complete world containing the Highest and Lowest Council, spirit and nature, is a world containing an “active name” (*ism fāʾil*) and a “name acted upon” (*ism mafʾūl*). Ibn ʿArabī adds elsewhere a “Middle Council”

We can also mention the overlap of what he calls the nine spheres (*aflāk*) which seem to correspond ultimately to the seven Heavens. The physical Seen world (*‘ālam al-shahāda*) accounts for three spheres because it has three dimensions: It is an isthmus (*barzakh*), with an external (*ẓāhir*) dimension and an internal (*bāṭin*) one. Then the world of Power (*Jabarūt*) is another sphere by being itself an isthmus, while its external dimension is the internal dimension of the Seen world. However, it also has its own internal dimension, which constitutes another sphere. This other sphere is the Spiritual world (*Malakūt*), which, as an isthmus, accounts for the sixth sphere. Its external dimension is the internal one of the world of Power, while its own internal dimension is the seventh sphere.¹¹⁸ This is why he mentions nine spheres: The three worlds each present three aspects, and the overlap of their two intersections (Seen world with *Jabarūt*, *Jabarūt* with *Malakūt*) turn their nine aspects into seven separate planes.¹¹⁹

Angels circle this physical world in ranks, described as the “upholders of the earthly Heaven” at times (*‘ummār al-samā’ al-dunyā*),¹²⁰ and elsewhere as the upholders of all seven Heavens.¹²¹ Angels are either regarded as in charge of, or as the spirits of, the constellations (*burūj*) which bear the names of these angels. They are also said to inhabit the “diaphanous bodies” (*al-ajrām al-shaffāfa*) swimming in the Heavens.¹²² The fact that they never move from these constellations make them the “twelve imams” of the world.¹²³

(*al-malā’ al-awsaṭ*), which seems to represent the spiritual world below the constellations (sublunar world), while the Higher Council is the one beyond that (ibid. 558. 11,203). Lory writes that exegetes are usually embarrassed by the idea of this Highest Council and its dispute, with what it might imply of decision-sharing with God and disagreement (Lory, *La dignité de l’homme* 180–181), but Ibn ‘Arabī does not seem to mind using this term, and we will see that angelic disputes have an important role in his theodicy.

118 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,215.

119 This tripartite cosmos, build on nine spheres, was seen in Chapter 2, with the *Mulk/Shahāda/Dunyā* as the first world, and the *Malakūt* and the *Jabarūt* as the two others. This was used by other authors, and Günther writes that this idea reached its zenith with Ibn ‘Arabī (Günther, “As the Angels Stretch Out their Hand” 315 fn. 23).

120 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 64. 2,194. As widely understood in Islamic traditions, they guard this heaven against the “disbelievers of the *jinn*” (*kuffār min al-jinn*) who come and listen to what is said (ibid. 198. 6,310).

121 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 348. 8,310.

122 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,270, and ibid., 348. 8,309 (this is a common late-antique motif).

123 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 371. 9,337. This comes in a long discussion of astrological themes and explains the number twelve as due to the four pillars of the Throne times the three “mansions” (*manāzil*) of the world: physical world (*dunyā*), intermediary or isthmus (*barzakh*), and the next world (*al-ākhirā*).

Similarly, to other authors, Ibn ʿArabī writes that angels have a fixed station, and that their power is given according to the number of their wings. He later discusses at length the descent and ascent of angels using stairs (*maʿārij*). These are different from the stairs used by the human messengers, which echoes a biblical motif, as seen in the chapter on the *miʿrāj*.¹²⁴

In these Heavens, the oft-mentioned “House Inhabited” (*al-bayt al-maʿmūr*) is described as upheld by 70,000 angels born of “water drops from the river of life because of the shaking of the Trustworthy Spirit,”¹²⁵ and we will see in the next part how this becomes a mystical metaphor. Created in the same manner, the Trustworthy Spirit is identified with Gabriel. In this same chapter, the Lote Tree (*sadrat al-muntahā*) is also described, parts of it similar to that in Chapter 2, “this is where end all the actions of the children of Adam” (*tantahī aʿmāl banī Ādam*).¹²⁶ The Lote Tree is referred to in numerous parts of the *Futūḥāt*, once as the point from where the four rivers of Paradise flow, out of which God made the Nile and the Furat flow.¹²⁷

Regarding Hell, Ibn ʿArabī devotes a chapter to it and presents a complex eschatological vision of what parts of the world and who will be sent to Hell, as well as its types of torments, such as the “felt fire” (*nār ḥissīyya*) touching the senses, and the “emotional fire” (*nār maʿnawīyya*) touching the heart, showing a simultaneity of readings or realities once again.¹²⁸ On the matter of angels, we find the Quranic *ṣabāniyya* classically identified with angels,¹²⁹ although the hierarchy and topography is not always clear. Ibn ʿArabī describes his own visit to Hell, through his “visions of the Unseen” (*ruʾyā ghaybīyya*): It has seven

¹²⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 314. 7,486–487. Elsewhere, he writes, however, that “the highest of them is the one who has the least wings, and the least winged of them is who has two wings” (*ibid.* 357. 8.479).

¹²⁵ أما اختياره البيت المعمور فلأنه مخصوص بعمارة ملائكة يُخلَقون كل يوم من قطرات ماء نهر الحياة الواقعة من انتفاض الروح الأمين.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 90. 5, 173

Later we will see the same number of angels passing through its door, never returning. These angels born of a river is a motif in the Talmud as well: Angels created each day for praise, returning to the river of fire whence they come (Agamben, “Introduzione”).

¹²⁶ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,291–292.

¹²⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 348. 8,310–311. The other two are called Siḥūn and Jihūn. In one of his *miʿrāj* accounts however, these last two are given different names: He writes that the Nile and the Furat are the two “external/exoteric” rivers (*ṣāḥirān*), called the Nile of the Book and the Furat of the Sunna, while the two “internal/esoteric” rivers (*bāṭinān*) are “Unity” (*al-Tawḥīd*) and “Graciousness” (*al-Minna*) (Ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-isrā* 137).

¹²⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 61. 2,173.

¹²⁹ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 61. 2,166.

doors guarded by seven angels, of whom he forgot the names, except for the one called Ismael (*Ismā'īl*), and an eighth door kept closed, which is the veil from the vision of God (*al-ḥijāb 'an ru'yat Allāh*).¹³⁰ We also find “one hundred police” (*mī'a darak*), and “Followers” (*wulāt*), among them angels, in charge of Hell under the supervision of Mālik, the guardian (*khāzin*).¹³¹ Ibn 'Arabī explains that these angels are part of the angels of Paradise and its guardian Ridwān, both kinds of angels “helping” (*imdād*) those of Paradise and Hell in the same way,¹³² which suggests a difference of intentions and results and not a difference of nature, or even ultimately not a difference of topography. This also reminds the reader of Ibn 'Arabī's originality in seeing Hell as a temporary place of torture for its inhabitants, where the angels of torment will also end up encompassed by God's infinite compassion.¹³³ This consideration of the finitude of Hell is usually seen as heterodox, although it is shared by other authors, such as al-Baqlī,¹³⁴ and it has been discussed in depth by Chittick.¹³⁵

Lastly, in our physical world, Ibn 'Arabī writes that some places leave a mark (*ta'thīr*) on those of “subtle hearts” (*al-qulūb al-laṭīfa*) for being or having been occupied by “honored angels” (*al-malā'ika al-mukarramīn*) and “sincere *jinn*” (*al-jinn al-ṣādiqīn*), as well as individual mystical figures like Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī.¹³⁶

2.1.7 As above so below

Correspondences between different creatures, functions and concepts are very common in philosophical and theological writings with Neoplatonic aspects.

130 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 61. 2,170. Ibn 'Arabī mentioning that he forgot the angels' names is rare and might appear as innocuous, but it might be less so when Najm al-dīn Kubrā (d. end of 12th century) in *Fawā'id al-jamāl* considers that knowing the names of the *jinn* and the angels is one of the marks of sainthood (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* 49).

131 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 61. 2,174. These angels are given names: al-Qā'im, al-Ḥāmid, al-Nā'ib, al-Sādin, al-Jābir, and the rest of the Followers as well: al-Ḥā'ir, al-Sābiq, al-Mātiḥ, al-Ādil, al-Dā'im, and al-Ḥāfiẓ. Two paragraphs later, however, Ibn 'Arabī explains that all those in charge of Hell are of an unknown number.

132 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 61. 2,174.

133 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 343. 8,224, *ibid.*, 344. 8,234.

134 Coppens, “Sufi Qur'ān Commentaries” 109.

135 Chittick, William. *Imaginal Worlds, Ibn al-'Arabī and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, (Albany: SUNY, 1994), 110–119. He explains the importance of the veil or the eighth door of Hell no longer being hellish: “Although the sinners will reach felicity in the Fire, one factor continues to differentiate their felicity from that of the inhabitants of the Garden: They will always remain veiled (*maḥjūb*) from God, while the felicitous in the Garden will be given a vision (*ru'ya*) of Him” (*ibid.* 116).

136 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 4. 1,340.

Such an example is given in the chapter on the “science of the domain of the positions” (*ʿilm manzil al-manāzil*) on the number nineteen. There are nineteen positions (*manāzil*) and each of them represents a kind of being (*ṣanf*), one of them being the angels. This number also stands for the fourteen single letters found in the opening of some suras, added to the five groups in which they are distributed; the nineteen angels of Hell; the twelve constellations and the seven brightest stars (*al-darārī*); the nineteen letters of the bismillah; the twelve Captains (*nuqabāʾ*) and the seven Replacements (*abdāl*).¹³⁷ Illustrating a leitmotiv of Ibn ʿArabī’s writing, which is that “the compassion of God encompasses everything,” the nineteen angels of torment guarding Hell are faced by “Nineteen Compassions” (*al-tisʿa ʿashara raḥma*) that encompass them, as a hope for those sent to Hell.¹³⁸

Other examples of such correspondences, which could be understood as literal or metaphorical, are statements such as “the spirits of the Replacements (*abdāl*) are the notables of the angels,”¹³⁹ “The etiquette of the Friends of God is the etiquette of the angelic spirits;”¹⁴⁰ or seeing the human position (*manzila*) of the Solitaries as the equivalent of the angelic station of the enraptured angels.¹⁴¹

Mentioned above, the four angelic bearers of the Throne (*al-ʿarsh*), associated to prophets, are also paralleled by four human bearers “on the level of the Compassionate” (*ʿalā mustawā al-raḥmān*), of whom Ibn ʿArabī is part. Each bearer is put in charge of one of the four pillars (*qawāʾim*), and Ibn ʿArabī is given the most favored one.¹⁴² Furthermore, these four pillars are associated with the four angles of the Kaaba.¹⁴³

¹³⁷ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 22. 1,549–550. See also the long description of the “captains” (*nuqabāʾ*) of the different spheres and heavens, and “Friends” (*wilāt*) distributed in twelve constellations “like the towers of the wall of Medina” (*mithla abrāj suwar al-madīna*), (*ibid.*, 60. 2,160–161).

¹³⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 343. 8,251. Indeed, Ibn ʿArabī constantly refers to Q 7:156 (“My Mercy encompasses all things”), and Q 40:7 (angels saying “Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge”), see for instance *ibid.* 188. 6,111.

¹³⁹ أرواح الأبدال أعيان الأملاك.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 559. 12,20

¹⁴⁰ فآداب الأولياء آداب الأرواح الملكية.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 445. 10,309

¹⁴¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,417. The comparison is sometimes on the level of chapters, such as the two chapters on human *walāya* and angelic *walāya* following each other (*ibid.* 153,154.)

¹⁴² Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 371. 9,333–334.

¹⁴³ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 16. 1,493. The Syrian angle is associated with Adam, the Iraqi angle

Regarding religious practices, angels are also seen as paralleling human practices. Angels, *jinn*, and humans are described as undergoing the pilgrimage every year,¹⁴⁴ and in one of his poems, Ibn ‘Arabī describes angels as having done the pilgrimage to Earth before Adam did,¹⁴⁵ angels form ranks for prayer as believers do,¹⁴⁶ and quoting a *ḥadīth* which does not seem to be referenced elsewhere, he writes that God is in the Heavens as He is on Earth, and the Highest Council beseech Him as humans do.¹⁴⁷

Such correspondences between angels, planets, prophets, and other creatures and concepts run throughout the *Futūḥāt*, and cannot be fully laid out here. However, it is important to keep in mind the pervasiveness of this correspondence system pattern in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, a principle shared by many other authors.¹⁴⁸

2.1.8 A Shared Teaching Role

A last notable role endorsed by humans and angels alike, linked to one of the central ideas of transmitting knowledge, is that of teaching. Ibn ‘Arabī mentions that angels were the students of man, referring to the scene of the creation of Adam, marking man as “of more complete constitution,” or of vaster knowledge, but not marking him as superior to angels.¹⁴⁹ Elsewhere, Adam is shown teaching angels a new glorification, when circumambulating the Kaaba, the “hawqala” (*lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwata illā bi-llāh*), given by God to him from “a treasure under the Throne” (*min kanz min taḥt al-arsh*).¹⁵⁰

This teaching role is sometimes reversed, as when Ibn ‘Arabī mentions the different *ḥadīth* of Gabriel teaching men their religion,¹⁵¹ where he is described as the teacher (*mu‘allim*) and master (*ustādh*) of the Prophet and the messen-

is associated with Abraham, the Yemeni angle with Jesus, and the angle of the Black stone with Muhammad. In another mystical description of the Kaaba contains an “angelic angle” (*al-rukn al-malakī*) which is the Yemeni angle (ibid. 72. 4,11–12).

144 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4,16, see also Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4,98.

145 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4, 263.

146 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 2,587, and 2,596.

147 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,133.

148 See the example of ‘Azīz Nasafī (d. before 700/1300) who links heavens, planets, organs, angels, and the angels’ charges in the universe (Murata, “The Angels” 336.) Rasic also presents such correspondences between planets, angels, *jinn*, and prophets (Rasic, *Bedeviled*).

149 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,557. Echoing a comparison seen in Chapter 2, Adam is made a *qibla* for angels, as well as a teacher (ibid. 369. 9,265.)

150 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 178. 6,48, ibid. 379. 9,577, ibid. 476. 10,456.

151 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 36. 1,662, ibid. 363. 9,10.

gers.¹⁵² Angels are also seen as providing knowledge to the clarified souls,¹⁵³ with Ibn 'Arabī also writing: “Angels are the masters of the sons, and they are the students of the first of the fathers.”¹⁵⁴ Contrary to other authors in previous chapters, Ibn 'Arabī does not seem to lend angels a challenging function as much as an occasional teaching one.

2.2 Other General Functions: The Messenger Role and the Named Angels

2.2.1 Messengers

As we saw in the section on the creation of angels, the function of messenger was identical to the word “angel” in many instances, while sometimes Ibn 'Arabī writes “angelic messenger” and “human messenger” to make the distinction between the creatures “angel” and “human.”¹⁵⁵ He also writes that human messengers are of a limited number, while angelic messengers are unlimited (*ghayr maḥṣūrīn*).¹⁵⁶ Moreover, these angelic messengers are responsible for both the “legislative prophecy” (*nubuwwat al-tashrī'*) as given to the prophets and messengers only, and the “general prophecy” (*al-nubuwwa al-āmma*) as given to Friends and others.¹⁵⁷ He seems close to Qushayrī's position, seen earlier in the

¹⁵² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 224. 6,513, *ibid.* 369. 9,266.

¹⁵³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 344. 8,237.

¹⁵⁴ الأملأك أستاذو الأبناء، وهم تلامذة أول الآباء.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 559. 12, 117

However, a few pages later, he nuances this vocabulary by writing that angels do not descend as teachers, but “as speakers” (*mukalliman*), (*ibid.* 559. 12,123).

¹⁵⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,236. In another work, he draws a parallel between Gabriel, the “messenger of the internal/esoteric” (*rasūl al-bāṭin*) and Muḥammad the “messenger of the external/exoteric” (*rasūl al-ẓāhir*), see Ibn 'Arabī, *Shajarat al-kawn* 71.

¹⁵⁶ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,413. Ibn 'Arabī reminds the reader of the difference between a Message, which brings the divine law, and Revelation, which is brought to everything and everyone (*ibid.* 73. 4,429–430).

¹⁵⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 132. 5,320, and similarly in *ibid.* 559. 12,241. In this, Ibn 'Arabī also refutes Al-Ghazālī's view, according to whom the difference between prophets and Friends is the descent of the angels (for prophets only) while Friends receive only inspiration and not angels (*ibid.* 364. 9,30).

Ibn 'Arabī adds elsewhere that, while the general prophecy lasts even into the next world, in Paradise and Hell, legislative prophecy is specific to the physical world, and ends in the next world (*ibid.* 158. 5,328). Similarly, contrary to legislative prophecy, which ended with Muhammad, general prophecy does not end (*ibid.* 73. 4,416). He also nuances elsewhere the importance and meaning of the word “Revelation” received by the Friends, by calling it “subtleties” (*raqā'iq*) of Revelation and not a full Revelation, which remains a prophetic prerogative (*ibid.* 310. 7,446) and insisting that what he calls general prophecy

messenger function of Chapter 2, on the role of angels in transmitting the Revelation, as opposed to Sulamī (Qushayrī considered that angels transmitted it to both prophets and non-prophets in different modalities, while Sulamī considered that angels were only involved with prophets, and Friends of God were the intermediaries for the others).

Angels descending with the Revelation to different prophets is, of course, mentioned often, with the two modes of descent of the angel seen in Chapter 2: directly on the heart, or physically by being perceived by one or more of the five senses.¹⁵⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī mentions elsewhere that if the angel does not take a specific shape, his message becomes his shape.¹⁵⁹ The revelation is like a voice (*ṣawt*) from the interior to the exterior, likened by the Prophet to “a chain on rocks” (*silsila ‘alā al-ṣafwān*),¹⁶⁰ a phrase that Ibn ‘Arabī uses frequently, which may be either God’s speech striking down the angels, or the Revelation at its strongest, as when associated with Moses, or with Gabriel and the effect it has on the Prophet.¹⁶¹

Commenting on Q 18:68, Ibn ‘Arabī reiterates that revealed divine laws are transmitted by the angel called “Trustworthy Spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*), the Holy Spirit,¹⁶² or simply the Spirit,¹⁶³ which is usually identified with Gabriel.¹⁶⁴ Elsewhere, echoing the multilayered meaning of the Spirit seen earlier, he describes it at some point as the “foremost of the angels” (*qā’im muqaddam al-jamā’a [al-malā’ika]*),¹⁶⁵ and elsewhere as the “messenger of the messengers” (*rasūl al-rusul*). The definition of Spirit shifts when it is involved in the Quranic verses where God speaks in the first person singular: Then the source of Revelation (*‘ayn al-wahī*) is the source of the Spirit, and its deliverer is God Himself. Thus, this Spirit is not the source of the angel as much as it is the message, unknown to the angels, because this Spirit, by not being incarnated in light like them, cannot be perceived even by them.¹⁶⁶

only confirms the details of the legislative one, and if any revealed details go against it, then it has been inspired by something else than an angel (ibid. 310. 7,448).

158 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 14. 1,467. Elsewhere he describes the descent on the heart as the angels marking the heart, and the self—or the soul (*nafs*)—reading what is marked (*mar-qūm*), (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 340. 8,179).

159 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 559. 12,230.

160 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,146.

161 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 350. 8,342. See a similar description in ibid., 518. 11,82.

162 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,464.

163 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 31. 1,611.

164 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 42. 2,21 is one example.

165 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 371. 9,352.

166 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 287. 7,189–190. Though not known to angels, this Spirit is still consid-

In a small chapter on the “knowledge of the angelic message” (*maʿrifat al-risāla al-malakiyya*), Ibn ʿArabī details the course of the message, from the moment of God’s given decision, to its implementation on Earth.¹⁶⁷ He reveals it to the closest angel near the Seat, and the message is passed down from angel to angel through the Heavens. Interestingly, he likens this angelic transmission to the “breaking down of the Word” (*inqisām al-kalima*). The Word goes from a unity (*aḥadiyya*) through seven stages (mirroring the seven Heavens), before being broken down at the Lote Tree, and is then transmitted through the Heavens and down. This relationship between angels and the concept of words (and Names) will be made more evident in the symbolic function. The message thus transmitted to Earth by the “angel of water” (*malak al-māʾ*) is then distributed to the “angels of the touches” (*malāʾika al-lammāt*) who have access to hearts. Then begins the battle with satans, who have the same access and can present deceptively similar messages. On the angels of water, Ibn ʿArabī elaborates that this is the medium through which they communicate revelation (in its general sense), and so all animals know it in their innermost secret (*al-sirr*), while the “two heavy ones” (men and *jinn*) do not—implying that this is why they also need revealed Laws. This transmission by water, however imperfect, explains also why people like or dislike other people instinctively.

Ibn ʿArabī writes that the general transmission by angels of the touches explains that “the wise politics for the good of the world” (*al-siyāsa al-ḥikamiyya li-maṣāliḥ al-ʿālam*) happen in societies who have lost their prophets or did not receive a divine Law. Angels come with inspiration (*ilhām*) and touches, guiding people by their thoughts (*aḥkārihim*), although not by their innermost secrets (*asrārihim*).¹⁶⁸

2.2.2 Gabriel and Other Named Angels

Gabriel is the angelic name that appears most often, a common case in Islamic writings. Classically referred to as “specialized in prophecy” (*al-makhṣūṣ bi-l-*

ered as a mediator (*wāsiṭa*) between God and the receiver (ibid. 559. 12,121), even though this Spirit sounds similar to the angels in the shape of their message, seen above.

167 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 160. 5,435–437. Its general outline is shared in many Islamic cosmologies, such as that of the Brethren of Purity (Gardet, “Les anges en islam” 223).

168 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 160. 5,436–437, and ibid. 73. 5,18 where he calls this wisdom “objective moral law” (*al-nāmūs al-waḍʿī*). A similar passage is presented in ibid. 369. 9,267, where this inspiration in absence of revealed Law is breathed by “the holy divine Spirit in (the) soul” (*wa-yanfuthu al-rūḥ al-ilāhī al-qudsī fī rūḥihī*).

This “moral law,” *nāmūs*, is a word inherited from the Greek and platonic writings, which gained a rich history in Arabic; interestingly, it is also used sometimes as a personal name for Gabriel (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 101; “N-M-S” in *Lisān al-ʿArab*).

inbā') from the very beginning of the *Futūḥāt*,¹⁶⁹ he is the master of the “role of human messenger” (*maqām al-risāla al-bashariyya*).¹⁷⁰ Ibn ‘Arabī also classically identifies him as the angel sent to Mary and insists he is the father of Jesus—and Jesus is thus seen as half-human half-angel,¹⁷¹ allowing Ibn ‘Arabī to reject the Trinity dogma. Gabriel is also mentioned many times around the notion of “good behavior” (*iḥsān*).¹⁷² Another recurrence concerning Gabriel is his appearance as Dihya (d. ca. 50/670), who was said to be the most beautiful man of his time (*ajmal ahl zamānihi*).¹⁷³ A possible explanation for this systematic appearance of Gabriel is given elsewhere by Ibn ‘Arabī, regarding humans’ difficulty to perceive the spiritual world. In a particular paragraph in the chapter on the *jinn*, he explains that a perceived shape is “bound by the gaze” (*yuqayyiduhu al-baṣar*) in a way that does not allow it to change from this given shape, as it acts like a veil (*sitr*) allowing the eye to follow it. If the shape changes, it becomes “unseen” to the viewer (*ghāba ‘anhu*), the same way a flame disappears if the candle is taken away.¹⁷⁴ If the human eye is to see the flame, the candle cannot change as it burns, and so Dihya would then be the only way for humans to see and apprehend Gabriel, once he has appeared as such.

Another angel mentioned by name is Seraphiel (*Isrāfīl*), whose role in the resurrection is to blow the trumpet twice: once to annihilate the *barzakhi* life forms that just ended, and a second time to make the new forms come to life.¹⁷⁵ Then we also find Ridwān, the keeper of Paradise, and Mālik the keeper of Hell, the latter being annihilated on the Last Day when Hell is transformed;¹⁷⁶ the four main angels Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Ismael, mentioned together as being models for mystical knowers to be “on the heart of” one of them;¹⁷⁷ Hārūt and Mārūt in the context of the “dwelling” (*manzil*) of their science, the science of magic (*siḥr*).¹⁷⁸ Although unnamed in most of his

169 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, Presentation, 1,88. It appears in different forms, *jibril* here, or more rarely *jibra’īl* as in *ibid.* 1,95.

170 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 159. 5,433.

171 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,179, *ibid.* 557. 11,187.

172 For example, Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,152, *ibid.* 70. 3,260, *ibid.* 73. 5,37.

173 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 560. 12,439. He means here Dihya b. Khalifa al-Kalbī, companion of the Prophet, see Lammens, Pellat, “Dihya,” *Et*².

174 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 9. 1,426.

175 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 64. 2,206. This exact role is given to Michael in Christian patristic literature (Daniélou, *The Angels* 108).

176 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 148. 5,380. See the discussion about the Akbarian hell in the “cosmological topography” earlier.

177 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,320.

178 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 271. 7,19.

textual appearances and described as a “strange angel” (*malak gharib*) of the seventh Heaven,¹⁷⁹ we find Azrael taking up souls,¹⁸⁰ and not being able to go back without a soul once he has appeared to humans.¹⁸¹ Then there are Azazel (*'azāzīl*), the Light, and the Spirit among the list of angels governing modes of being mentioned earlier;¹⁸² and finally, angels of the grave described as frightening (*fazīr*), though they are not given names in the *Futūḥāt*.¹⁸³

Ibn 'Arabī mentions the suffix “el” (*al-ill*) as a divine name added to angels and spirits, giving the example of Gabriel, Michael and “Abdael” (*'abda'il*). We have also seen in the previous chapter that he makes of this suffix a spiritual station, a first example of the symbolic function given to angels.

3 Building on the Basic Quranic Functions: Angels in Relationship to Humans, Spirits and Other Beings

After reviewing general Quranic functions, I review below the first three functions seen in Chapter 1, the functions of common or daily angelic interactions with the human world. Ibn 'Arabī tends to represent angels quite classically here.

3.1 *Angels Compared to Humans*

We will first review the discussion around the relationship between Adam and angels, which overlaps many functions, as in the previous chapters. In a mystical take on the story of Adam's creation, and answering the 45th question attributed to al-Tirmidhī on how to obtain precedence on angels, men are seen as superior to angels in that God gave Adam the “Names demanded by these Disclosures in which I chose to reveal Myself to My servants.”¹⁸⁴ Angels are one-

179 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 348. 8, 315.

180 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 348. 8, 315.

181 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4, 35. This illustrates the common theological understanding that death is unchangeable, with a nuance in *ḥadīth*, that Azrael showed deference for only one human being, Muḥammad (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 78, 97), which can be seen as a case of credo function, for legitimacy purposes.

182 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 303. 7, 375. Interestingly, Azazel in Islamic tradition is usually seen as a fallen angel or a *jinn* (Vajda, “Azāzīl,” *ET*²), however, here he is part of a list with archangel names such as Gabriel and Michael, of the Highest Council.

183 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3, 170.

184 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4, 465.

The idea that angels possess partial knowledge of God has been seen before in Chapter 2 and is also found in other traditions (see for example Kanaan, “Création et être angéliques” 222–224).

dimensional compared to humans, esoteric to us but exoteric only in their own milieu, which fits the general picture made clearer later.¹⁸⁵

However, this particular superiority does not mean that men are better than angels, as the angelic rank is still superior to the human rank. This means that man is of a “more complete constitution” (*akmala nash'atan*) than that of angels.¹⁸⁶ In a particular passage, Ibn 'Arabī even relates a scene in which he asks the Prophet himself to put an end to this particular dispute around the preference or merit (*faḍl*) between angels and humans. The Prophet answers him that “angels are better” (*inna al-malā'ika aḥḍal*).¹⁸⁷ So we have a double relationship, and the resolution of the debate seems to lie for Ibn 'Arabī in the perspective given by the qualities of each being: while man is “more complete” (*akmal*), angel is “better” (*aḥḍal*).¹⁸⁸

Interestingly, Ibn 'Arabī makes a difference between a human being born in a community that received a messenger, and a human born into a community that did not. In the first case, the child is born with “two companions” (*qarī-nayn*), an angel and a demon, as per a known late antique tradition already seen in Chapter 3; while in the second case, the child does not have any companions, and behaves according to his own nature, and directly guided by God.

185 Echoing some explanations in Chapter 2 to this event, Ibn 'Arabī writes that the misunderstanding of the angels when facing Adam is due to their lack of an “esoteric” or “internal” dimension (*bāṭin*), so being made only of an external dimension, they cannot guess Adam's internal one, see *ibid.* 73. 4,454. They also see in Adam the composition of elements which announces strife, which angels would like to avoid, see *ibid.* 560. 12,422.

186 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4. 557. Or as he puts it elsewhere: “Man is of a more complete constitution, angel is of a more complete position” (*al-insān akmala nash'atan, wal-malak akmala manzila*) (*ibid.* 71. 3,511). See also *ibid.* 358. 8,499. Being the last type of creature created, and the most complete one, this is why God gave humans the deputyship (*khilāfa*) of the Earth, *ibid.* 10. 1,435. For a discussion on the comprehensiveness typical to man as opposed to the limited natures of angels, see Webb, *Hierarchy* 250–251.

187 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,438. The argument endorsing this statement by the Prophet is the *ḥadīth*, according to which any human invoking (*dhikr*) God, God invokes him “in a better assembly” (*mala' khayra minhum*). See the section on the praxis function below.

188 Murata mentions Ibn 'Arabī's position in her article as well, although she explains it in another way: Angels are superior to mankind “as the microcosm,” while they are inferior to man when he is the “Perfect Man” (Murata, “The Angels,” 341–342). The quality of being “more complete” may indicate this potentiality of humanity of reaching the stage of “Perfect Man.” As for Michael A. Sells, he also discusses this completeness (*kamaliyya*) of man as being a way of Ibn 'Arabī going against the image of the ascetic mystic to mean man is complete, “not ‘perfect’ as having shed human imperfections, but rather ‘complete’ in the sense of embracing all realities,” including their very human ones, away from being “only” like the angels. See Sells, Michael A. *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 79.

He further explains that anything good or bad coming from the child is caused by his angel or his demon, and does not concern the child, but is aimed at the person(s) taking care of the child: Thus, a human becomes responsible for his own behavior, in relation to the divine or to the self, only at the age of reason.¹⁸⁹

While they are also “of the intellect” (*ʿaqlī*), angels do think contrary to humans. This is because thought/reflection (*fikr*) is of the “natural elemental rule” (*ḥukm al-ṭabʿ al-ʿunṣurī*),¹⁹⁰ and from this thinking force (*al-quwwa al-mufakkira*) derives the “imaginative force” (*al-quwwa al-mūṣawwira*) that is specific to the human genre¹⁹¹ (this is also related to what we saw in the previous section: Angels have natural bodies, but not elemental ones). As he writes elsewhere: “As much as the imagination of man is not in want of images, so is the essence of angels not in want of shapes.”¹⁹² The richness of this particularity of humanity, thought or mental reflection, is mirrored in the selves of angels, their essence, that can take as many shapes as men are able to imagine shapes. Angels could thus appear as receptors modelled by men’s active imagination.

On the other hand, angels share with humans and *jinn*, by virtue of being spirits governing bodies, that the theophany (*tajallī*) is hidden from them by the “veil of the Unseen” (*ḥijāb al-ghayb*), contrary to the rest of creatures. However, angels receive knowledge from God by divine notification (*al-taʿrīf al-ilahī*) while *jinn* and humans obtain it through insight (*naẓar*) and inquiry (*istidlāl*).¹⁹³ Another difference previously mentioned and that will be explored later is that angels are created and placed in a fixed station, while human can gain (*kash*) one or more.¹⁹⁴

3.2 *The Narrative Function: Helping Angels, Fighting Angels*

Ibn ʿArabī covers the classical helping roles of this narrative function in his chapter on “angelic *wilāya*,” echoing what has been previously seen in the other

189 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 298. 7,325. In the case of prophets and Friends, these demonic companions cannot access them or influence them, and the *qarīn* of the Prophet even became Muslim (ibid. 69. 3,160). For more on these companions and *quranāʾ*, see Rasic, *Bedeviled*.

190 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4, 342. However, this is not necessarily linked to knowledge (*ʿilm*), since angels are repeatedly described as being more knowledgeable of God than men (as seen in the next part). On these different modes of acquiring knowledge, see also Chittick, *The Sufi Path* 159.

191 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9,241.

192 وكما لا يخلو خيال الإنسان عن صورة، كذلك ذات الملك لا تخلو عن صورة.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 305. 7,397

193 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 317. 7, 522.

194 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 314. 7,486.

chapters. He also uses Quranic vocabulary provided by the “alluding verses,” interpreting them fully as concerning angelic realities.¹⁹⁵

God has angels interceding for everyone on Earth “in general” (*‘umūman*) and for the believers “specifically” (*khuṣūṣan*),¹⁹⁶ while the Prophet intercedes for everyone including angels.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, while prophets intercede for the believers “by sight” (*‘an naẓar*), that is, believers convinced by proof, these believers themselves will intercede for those who are believers by tradition (because of education and family), while angels intercede “for all who have noble traits of character in this world, even if they are not believers.”¹⁹⁸ Within the mystical vocabulary of Ibn ‘Arabī, the Moses Presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-mūsawīyya*) is described as an opening door to intercession for angels,¹⁹⁹ and as an example of his stress on compassion, he mentions the *ḥadīth* on intercession, illustrating the compassion that remains after all intercessions are done.²⁰⁰

Regarding the fighting angels, we can mention here angels sent to Badr to fight alongside the Prophet, described as being from the third Heaven, the creatures of which are characterized by warrior-like qualities.²⁰¹ Facing Satan and his armies, God has armies of angels;²⁰² and angels are dedicated by God to watch over those who fight between themselves (*al-mutashāḥinīn*) until they settle, and intercede and pray for them.²⁰³

195 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 154. 5,409–415. For example, “*al-ṣāffāt*” and “*al-mursalāt*.” These angelic roles are also talked about in relationship to the element of water in *ibid.* 198. 6,316–317. We find also other classical roles, such as different instances of helping angels ordered to urge someone about not doing a reprehensible act (*ibid.* 398. 10, 117. There is a similar scene, for example, in *ibid.* 558. 11,254).

196 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 560. 12,575. They are usually described as asking forgiveness for those on Earth, as in *ibid.* 342. 8,210.

197 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 13. 1,454. In answering the 73rd question of al-Tirmidhī, Ibn ‘Arabī states that the Prophet intercedes for all creatures in a particular order: first angels, then the other prophets, the Friends, the believers, animals, plants, and minerals or inanimate objects (*jamād*) last (*ibid.* 73. 4,506). This order is echoed in *ibid.* 64. 2,208.

198 وأما الملائكة فتشفع فيمن كان على مكارم الأخلاق في الدنيا، وإن لم يكن مؤمناً

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 374. 9,417

199 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 337. 8,133.

200 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 392 10,82, *ḥadīth* no. 11463 from *Masnad Aḥmad*:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَقُولُ: شَفَعَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَشَفَعَ النَّبِيُّونَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَبَقِيَ أَرْحَمُ الرَّاحِمِينَ

201 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 12. 1,455.

202 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 383. 9,581–582.

203 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 117. 5,268. This could be seen as a heightened awareness of strife within the Islamic empire.

We also find angels in the role of scribes in a similar way as found in the Sufi *tafsīr*. In a saying attributed to the Prophet, angels are witnesses of the good deeds of the servant, while God is the watcher (*raqīb*) of what is inside his heart.²⁰⁴ Angels do not write down what a human does or thinks until he says it (*lā yaktub hattā talaffaḥa bihi*).²⁰⁵ Echoing a similar concept in previous chapters, these deeds are then taken with the angels up to the Heavens. Another detail is added to the role of the angel-scribes: When the speaker speaks with God in his mind, at that moment the spoken word is seen by the angel as a light thrown by the speaker, a light which the angel picks up and keeps until the Last Day.²⁰⁶

Regarding a new role seen in the Sufi commentaries, Ibn ʿArabī also writes about the angels of the wombs: angels in charge of “bringing about the forms in the wombs” (*inshāʾ al-ṣuwar fī al-arḥām*),²⁰⁷ who “turn around the drops [in the wombs] from one state to another” (*fa-yuqallibūn al-nuṭaf min ḥāl ilā ḥāl*) as per the divine order.²⁰⁸ However, he takes care to remind the reader elsewhere, commenting on verse (3:6), that God is the ultimate form-maker (*al-muṣawwir*) and not the angel.²⁰⁹

Among other classical roles, we find angels guiding humans souls in Paradise to “their palaces” (*quṣūrihim*) because these are drunk on the vision of God (*sukr al-ruʿya*) and lost by “the plentifulness of good on their way” (*limā zādahum min al-khayr fī ṭariqi-him*);²¹⁰ angels guarding Medina against the Dajjāl in apocalyptic times;²¹¹ and Jesus coming back to Eastern Damascus supported by two angels.²¹²

A last note regarding this function is on a curiously sadistic *ḥadīth* involving a lack of help from angels. God orders the angel not to answer the request of someone for a while, because He loves hearing his voice.²¹³ This *ḥadīth* appears

204 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 560. 12,677. This *ḥadīth*, partially paraphrased here, is referenced in the index, however it does not appear to have been recorded by one of the other classical *ḥadīth* scholars.

205 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 417. 10,204. More details on this idea, with similarities to the Sufi commentaries, see: *ibid.* 544. 11,159, *ibid.* 560. 12,429.

206 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 544. 11,159.

207 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 7. 1,407.

208 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 371. 9,309.

209 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,184.

210 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 65. 2,235. This seems to refer to a *ḥadīth* not referenced elsewhere.

211 Mentioning a *ḥadīth* (Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 4,259.)

212 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 366. 9,62; *ibid.* 9,69. This is a motif also found in Christian patristic literature: Daniélou, *The Angels and Their Mission* 35.

213 وقد روي أن الله يقول للملك: “لا تقض حاجة فلان في هذا الوقت، فإنّي أحب أن أسمع صوته.”

in another work of al-Qushayrī, and this general motif of unanswered prayers is repeated in different works by different authors, discussed by Atif Khalil, who presents different reasons behind this apparent “sadism.”²¹⁴

3.3 *The Theological Function: Angels Illustrating the Credo*

As characters supporting or illustrating the Islamic credo, angels are seen throughout the *Futūḥāt*, in similar roles as those found in Chapter 1, for instance, in the context of the shahāda,²¹⁵ or in reference to the coming of angels on Judgment Day.²¹⁶ In the chapter on the shahāda, in a comment on verse Q 3:18, angels are seen as the second ones attesting to God’s oneness after Himself, along with “Those who know” (*ūlī al-‘ilm*) as “partners” of God adjoined to Him by the letter “waw”, however, this partnership is in testimony and testimony only (*wa-lā ishtirāk hunā illā fī al-shahāda qaṭ‘an*).²¹⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī wants here to avoid any literal reading of his metaphor and strictly delimits the function of angels in illustrating the credo.

Within the answer to the ninety-sixth question from the list attributed to al-Tirmidhī, on the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that “the standing of the prophets, in which they take from the Unseen by way of faith from the angels, is the standing of the believers in which they take from the prophets,”²¹⁸ showing the classical role of angels in the monotheistic credo and the faith relationship and positions between angels, prophets, and believers. Similarly, in arguing for the monotheistic idea, Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates on the error of worshipping all kinds of things and creatures, from angels to stones, plants or *jinn*,²¹⁹

²¹⁴ Atif Khalil, “Is God Obligated to Answer Prayers of Petition (Du’a)?” *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures*, 37, no. 2 (2011): 93–109. For example, prayer itself is better than any answer to it, prayer creates a unique bond with God, placing the supplicant in the ideal state of one who is fully dependent on God. “The gift lies in the very act of deprivation” (ibid. 105).

²¹⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* index chapter. 1,161, and ibid. 68. 2,330.

²¹⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 64. 2,194. They are also seen in charge of the “warning” (*indhār*) on the last day in the verse 16:2, a verse described as the “Unity of warning” (*tawḥīd al-indhār*), ibid. 198. 6,198.

²¹⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 67. 2,246. He calls this verse a treasure for the hearts of the mystical knowers (ibid. 72. 4,13.) In a similar passage, God testifies that the angels and “those who know” testify to Him of His Oneness (ibid. 198. 6,186.).

²¹⁸ ومنزلة الأنبياء في ما يأخذون من الغيب بطريق الإيمان من الملائكة (هي) منزلة المؤمنين مع ما يأخذون من الأنبياء.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4-541

²¹⁹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 325. 7,594.

even though these did not claim divine status for themselves.²²⁰ God's ultimate power and unknowability is also illustrated in a comment on the 44th sura, Ibn 'Arabī writing that not even angels are safe from "God's cunning" (*makr Allāh*).²²¹ Implicitly, humankind should not think itself capable of perceiving all of God's intention. Related to this matter, in the answer to the 11th question attributed to al-Tirmidhī, "What is the act of bowing down?," Ibn 'Arabī clears the ambiguity around the bowing to Adam: Angels bow down to the "rank of knowledge" (*martaba al-'ilm*) and not to his "constitution" (*nash'a*), which they share with men,²²² and which would be contrary to the monotheistic credo.

3.4 *The Religious Praxis Function*

Angels are also used in the classical manner of the *tafsīr* as models and encouragement for religious practices,²²³ and for illustrating discussions on the minutiae of these practices.²²⁴ Angels are deemed superior to men in their devotion (*'ibāda*) because their constitution (*nash'a*) does not allow them to do otherwise,²²⁵ which also implies that they do not have any specific merit.

On the practice of prayer and invocation, Ibn 'Arabī mentions a *khabar*, whereby whoever invokes Him in an assembly is invoked by God in return in a better one, which Ibn 'Arabī describes as being possibly the angels, of "those drawn near" (*al-muqarrabūn*), "the Cherubim especially, that He has dedicated to His Presence" (*al-karūbiyyīn khāṣṣatan, alladhīn ikhtaṣṣahum li-ḥaḍratihī*). He then explains that of all devotional acts, prayer (*ṣalāt*) is the one that adjoins the believer to the "stations of those drawn near" (*maqāmāt al-muqarrabīn*). In the same passage Ibn 'Arabī writes as if God is talking to angels of "those drawn near," showcasing the valor of the human believer who managed to attain the same station as they have, through his devotions and despite all the hardships that God has put in his way, and which the angels themselves never experi-

220 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 331. 8,68.

221 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 340. 8,173.

222 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,548.

223 For instance, see a typical commentary on Quranic verses, with prayers of angels made for believers of good behavior in Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 2,412. Another example is a *ḥadīth* explaining that if a believer prays for his brother without him knowing, the angels will do likewise back to him in *ibid.* 69. 2,540 (this is the *ḥadīth* no. 4912 in *ṣaḥīḥ muslim*), and in *ibid.* 73. 4, 537.

224 For instance, a *ḥadīth* involving Gabriel praying with the Prophet to discuss the times of prayer in Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 2,427.

225 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,567. Their adoration is a common role to all angels, including between the angels of torment (*malā'ikat al-'adhāb*) and the angel of felicity (*malā'ikat al-na'īm*), *ibid.* 320, 7, 542.

enced, once again underlying their lack of merit in their practice. The angels then ask God that they be given over to him.²²⁶

Furthermore, on prayer, commenting on verse Q 96:7, Ibn 'Arabī reiterates that bowing down (*al-sujūd*) is the devotion that was ordered to “angels and all creation” (*al-malā'ika wa-l-khalq ajma'ūn*), bringing them “the Nearness” (*al-qurba*),²²⁷ and that Satan cannot approach someone in the state of bowing down (*sujūd*).²²⁸ He also states that angels cannot pray for evil (*fa-inna al-malak la yad'ū bi-l-sharr*), and that their prayers are always answered, both because of their purity, and because the object of their prayers is other than themselves.²²⁹ Discussing a *ḥadīth*, Ibn 'Arabī explains that angels attached to humans accomplish their turnover by descending and ascending during the morning and afternoon prayers;²³⁰ during prayer, each man is an imam to the angels who come and pray behind him, “as they bowed down to their father Adam” (*kamā sajadū li-abihim Ādam*).²³¹ Lastly, among the benefits of bowing down during prayer, someone doing it correctly gains a similar “fragrance” (*naḥḥa*) to that of angels, because of one’s “specific angelness” (*min ḥaythu malakiyyatihi al-khāṣṣa*). If not, then this devotional act is not considered done.²³² The angelic fragrance thus becomes the validating criteria of one’s prayer. In this passage, the reciprocity between men and angels is underlined once again: Where angels are shown to pray behind men in some cases, here men pray on the angels’ guidance (*iqtidā'an bi-sujūd al-mala' al-a'lā wa-bi-hadihim*).

In the chapter dealing with ritual purification (*wuḍū'*), Ibn 'Arabī reminds the reader of a prophetic saying according to which the heart is the seat of the “touch” (*lamma*) of both Satan and the angels, the last one being of course purifying.²³³ In the same chapter regarding purification and washing,

226 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 47. 2,58–59. Angels are also said to attend sessions of invocations or “remembrance” (*jalsāt dhikr*) though its members often cannot see them (ibid. 388. 10,57.)

227 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 48. 2,78.

228 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,78.

229 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 70. 3,325. Ibn 'Arabī reminds us often that the object of their prayers is usually humanity, such as in his comment on 33:43 around the prayers of God and angels on the believers (ibid. 69. 3,231–232.)

230 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 2,576. The *ḥadīth* mentioned is n°1001 in *ṣaḥīḥ muslim*.

231 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 347. 8,288.

232 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,142. This example seems to concern specifically the bowing down done after reciting the end of the seventh sura, mentioning the angelic bowing down.

233 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 57. 2,136, and ibid. 68. 2,327. The purification of the heart by the angel's touch is repeated in ibid. 68. 2,344. Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabī says that God created an

the olfactive field is summoned again, as Ibn ʿArabī writes about etiquette (*adab*), mentioning a *khavar* whereby angels are pushed away by anyone who lies, pointing that lies are “putrescence” (*natan*) which equally hurts angels and humans because the human spirit is of the same constitution as that of angels.²³⁴

As an example of the attention given to detail in all aspects related to the devotions asked of a believer, a paragraph discusses the repeating of the first part of the *shahāda* three times in a row, in the call to prayer (*adhān*) of the “Baṣra school” (*madhhab al-baṣriyyīn*): The first is meant for “the visible world” (*ʿālam al-shahāda*), the second for “the world of Power” (*ʿālam al-jabarūt*), and the third for “the spiritual world” (*ʿālam al-malakūt*).²³⁵ Concerning the call to prayer, Ibn ʿArabī mentions elsewhere that if the heart is present to God, the angel’s touch is not needed to remind the believer of the call to prayer.²³⁶

In discussing alms (*zakāt*), Ibn ʿArabī explains that such good deeds (*ʿamal*) done by someone take on the shapes of angels that ask for forgiveness on behalf of this person until the Last Day.²³⁷ In the part on “the night of Destiny” during Ramadan, the 97th sura and its descent of angels (done together and not individually) are used to explain that communal devotions are preferable.²³⁸

angel dedicated to the heart (*khalaqa al-malak al-muwakkal bi-l-qalb*), facing at this level a satan, in *ibid.* 264. 6,640.

²³⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 68. 2,361. This *khavar* is found in Tabarānī’s *al-muʿjam al-kabīr*, 57. This is mentioned again in *ibid.* 71. 3, 477, and the lack of purification (*ightisāl*) also drives angels away (*ibid.* 560. 12,501–502.) A more prosaic case is shown in this same last chapter, in the “prophetic counsels” (*al-waṣāyā al-nabawīyya*) presented as given to his son-in-law ʿAlī, whereby angels abhor seeing food stuck in the teeth (*ibid.* 560. 12, 595–596.) Another example of angels associated with acts of purification is found in this chapter (*ibid.* 560. 12,585.) For a reevaluation of the importance of ritual purity in Islam via a study of such *ḥadīth* on angels, see Burge, “Impurity / Danger!”

²³⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 2,445.

²³⁶ فحضور القلب مع الله يغني عن إعلام الملك بلمته التي هي بمنزلة الأذان والإقامة للإسماع.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,165

²³⁷ وهو قول النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فيما يُخْلَقُ من الأعمال من صور الأملِك إنه “يستغفر له ذلك الملك إلى يوم القيامة.”

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 70. 3,405

This *ḥadīth* does not seem to be referenced by other scholars.

²³⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 71. 3,563.

In a story attributed to al-Shiblī, in a series of questions between him and an unknown person, there is a mention of the “glorification of the angels” (*takbīr al-malā’ika*) which seems to be the required glorification used during the pilgrimage.²³⁹

Regarding more particular aspects of Islamic practices, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that the “amen” (*amīn*) is hidden after the last verse of the first sura, because “it is an unseen element from the Spiritual world” (*li-annahū ghayb min ‘ālam al-malakūt*). Whoever says amen in agreement with this “protection of the angels” (*ta’mīn al-malā’ika*) will be satisfied,²⁴⁰ with a protection which becomes in another passage the “protection of the Spirit” (*ta’mīn al-rūḥ*).²⁴¹ Similarly, in the last part of *Futūḥāt*, one of the counsels (*waṣāyā*) is a *ḥadīth* presented with its *sanad* that goes back through the Prophet to Gabriel, then interestingly, Michael, followed by Seraphiel, to whom God says that whoever can recite the bismillah and the first sura in one breath is forgiven, avoids Hell, and meets Him.²⁴²

Commenting on the etiquette of funerals, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that it is not recommended to accompany the procession while riding or crying out loud, out of respect for the angels present.²⁴³ When prayers are done over the deceased, angels respond likewise over to those praying.²⁴⁴

As narrative figures urging the reader to adopt a correct behavior and searching for knowledge, angels are also shown to be following such persons, placing themselves in their service, and asking for forgiveness on their behalf.²⁴⁵ Among the counsels attributed to the Prophet and given to Abū Hurayra, is the recommendation not to frighten anyone, lest the angels frighten you on the Last Day, and the salutation of a Muslim to another implying that angels pray on him

239 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4,42.

240 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,234. A similar reflection is found in *ibid.* 73. 4,547, and *ibid.* 356. 8, 459.

241 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 5. 1, 382. Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates also on the importance of “amen” echoed by the angels in *ibid.* 69. 2,526. Commenting further on the first Quranic sura, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that angels bow down after the end of the verse 1:5 (“from Thee we seek help”), while the prideful ones refuse (*ibid.* 5. 1,381.)

242 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 560. 12, 546. It is uncharacteristically presented with its *sanad* and according to the text, it seems to have been personally collected by Ibn ‘Arabī in 601 (Herigian) from one Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī bin Abī al-Faḥ, whose father was known as al-Kanārī.

243 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,201. In the same passage, a *ḥadīth* is mentioned showing the Prophet, like angels, accompanying the procession of a Jewish funeral.

244 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,208.

245 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 560. 12, 550. An example of a classical appearance of angels on this theme is the *ḥadīth* involving Gabriel on the importance of taking care of one’s neighbor (*ibid.* 72. 4,95).

seventy times.²⁴⁶ Then the Prophet himself is given counsel by Gabriel, when God asks him whether he wants to be a prophet-king or a prophet-servant. The Prophet then turns to Gabriel for advice, and Gabriel suggests choosing to be a prophet-servant.²⁴⁷

Regarding more mystical practitioners, Ibn 'Arabī writes that angels and the “scholars of Unveiling and Testimony” (*'ulamā' al-kashf wa-l-shuhūd*) share two modes of devotions: the devotion “of the self” (*'ibāda dhātīyya*), and the devotion “of command” (*'ibādat amr*), the first one being that of the people and Paradise.²⁴⁸ Similarly, Ibn 'Arabī counsels a spiritual seeker to practice silence (*ṣamt*) whether while journeying or in a retreat, as well as to not pay attention or talk with animals, *jinn* or any one of the Highest Council.²⁴⁹ The three worlds are also put in relation with the three dimensions of faith in the practice of asceticism (*zuhd*): Asceticism as “*muslim*” pertains to restraining oneself from the physical in the Dominion, asceticism as “*mu'min*” pertains to restraining oneself from the self in the world of Power, and asceticism as “*muḥsin*” pertains to restraining oneself from anything other than God in the Spiritual world, and this is the removing of the veil for the “sect” (implying “the people on the spiritual path”).²⁵⁰

4 The Symbolic Function: The Mystical Meta-function of Angels

If Ibn 'Arabī sometimes writes about humans, *jinn*, and angels through the lens of common themes or experiences (we will see such examples of theophanies being veiled to them) or writes about all three of them as possessing the potential of becoming mystical knowers (*al-'ārifin*) leaving their bodies,²⁵¹ he also underlines their differences. In this work, angels appear more often as a counterpoint to highlight differences between these categories of being, as seen in the previous part.²⁵² Angels are then used to diversify the cosmological landscape and situate different planes of existence, while they are used as

246 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 560. 12, 620. The number seventy and its declinations (seventy thousand, etc.) are strongly associated with angels throughout the *Futūḥāt*.

247 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 560. 12, 656. This *ḥadīth* does not seem to be referenced elsewhere.

248 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 370. 9, 270.

249 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 53. 2, 114.

250 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 93. 5, 193–194.

251 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 8. 1, 412–413.

252 See also Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9, 177. Men share with *jinn* the potential of being happy (*sa'īd*) and so believers (*mu'min*), or unhappy (*shaqīyy*) and so disbelievers (*kāfir*), while angels are happy/believers only. Elsewhere, Ibn 'Arabī reminds us of the classical distinc-

metaphors at other times. It would seem, however, that both functions may appear at the same time.

Indeed, Ibn ‘Arabī often describes humans with angelic adjectives, and we have seen that he seems to entertain a particular superposition of potential meanings around humans in the creation, with the matter of the “governing spirits.” They may be spirits, angels, or capable of creating angels out of their breaths. This ambivalence could also involve the *jinn*, whereby the interior of man could be understood as “*jānn*.” While this ambivalence might be found in different degrees and various forms in many Islamicate works, it is found quite clearly in a work attributed to Maslama al-Qurṭubī, “The Goal of the Sage” (*Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*),²⁵³ an author that was probably influential for Ibn ‘Arabī.²⁵⁴

Ibn ‘Arabī seems to maintain this ambivalence deliberately: On one hand, in a paragraph commenting on a *ḥadīth* about the pilgrimage, human-angels seem to be a reality, where he first compares human hands to the wings of birds, then reminding the reader that the interior of man (*bāṭin al-insān*) is his spirit, and “is in reality a governing angel, which is the third type of angels.” And because God created all angels with wings, he further states: “Let us know definitively that our spirits—by their being angels whose station is the governing of elemental bodies—possess wings, and that these natural bodies were made as veils between us and them, so that we cannot see them.”²⁵⁵

On the other hand however, a few other paragraphs clearly suggest that this is meant as a metaphor only, except for the cases of humans receiving the function of messengers. In a paragraph discussing the meaning of “angel” as the function of messenger as well as mentioning the “angels of the breaths,” he states that:

tion: angels have only divine will (*irāda ilāhiyya*) and no desire, while humans and *jinn* have natural will and desire (ibid. 378. 9,490).

253 He writes that *jinn* can be part of human nature when anger is too great, and that angels can be created by a “look,” existing both inside humans and outside in the Highest Council (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam* 153–154).

254 (ibid. 147).

255 وَلَمَّا كَانَ بَاطِنُ الْإِنْسَانِ—وَهُوَ رُوحُهُ—مَلَكًا فِي الْحَقِيقَةِ مِنْ مَلَائِكَةِ التَّدْبِيرِ، وَهُمْ النَّوْعُ الثَّالِثُ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ. وَقَدْ أَخْبَرَ اللَّهُ—تَعَالَى—عَنِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنَّهُمْ ذَوُوا أَجْنَحَةٍ، وَمَا خَصَّ مَلَكًا مِنْ مَلَكٍ. فَنَعْلَمُ قَطْعًا أَنَّ نَفُوسَنَا، مِنْ حَيْثُ هِيَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ الَّذِينَ مَقَامُهُمْ تَدْبِيرُ هَذِهِ الْأَجْسَامِ الْعَنْصَرِيَّةِ، أَنَّهُمْ ذَوُوا أَجْنَحَةٍ، وَجُعِلَتْ هَذِهِ الْأَجْسَامُ الطَّبِيعِيَّةُ حِجَابًا دُونَنَا، عَنْ إِدْرَاكَهَا بِأَيَّاهَا.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4,237

This is followed by the example of Gabriel, who appeared as a man, wings invisible to all.

*Any spirit who is not given a message is a spirit, and we do not say of him “angel,” except as a metaphor. Such are the spirits created from the breaths of the believers and those invoking God: God creates from their breaths spirits who ask forgiveness on the behalf of the one invoking Him until the Last Day, and so does He out of all their praiseworthy deeds in which are their breaths.*²⁵⁶

He is even more explicit elsewhere, when talking about the impossibility of changing one’s genus or kind (*ṣanf*) within the Creation, using angel then as a kind and not as a function. He states that “two entities never share one and the same character, or one and the same position: man can never be angel, nor angel be man, or messenger be anything else.”²⁵⁷

Thus we have a being presented simultaneously as a governing spirit to a physical body, and as a governing angel to a physical body, while metaphorical angels are born out of the breaths of this being. How is the reader to solve these apparent contradictions?

4.1 *Angels as Men, Men as Angels, and Access to the Unseen*

There is a particular mirroring between men and angels, mentioned earlier: Angels are only “external” (*ẓāhir*) creatures in the Unseen, without an internal aspect, so they cannot perceive the “internal” (*bāṭin*) dimension of man beyond his external aspect of clay (one of the reasons why angels questioned the creation of Adam).²⁵⁸ Conversely man usually cannot perceive angels, creatures of the Unseen that are “*bāṭin*” from the human point of view. Only after death, in

²⁵⁶ وكلّ روح لا يعطي رسالة، فهو روح، لا يقال فيه: مَلَكٌ، إلّا مجازاً. كالأرواح المخلوقة من أنفاس المؤمنين، الذاكرين الله: يخلق الله من أنفاسهم أرواحاً يستغفرون لصاحب ذلك الذِّكر إلى يوم القيامة، وكذلك من أعمالهم كلّها المحمودة، التي فيها أنفاسهم.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 155. 5,420

He ends the paragraph with an example of such a metaphor for “angel,” with the mention of a personal vision of the Prophet explaining that angels are created from the prayers of the faithful around the Kaaba. As for the more general creations proceeding from men’s deeds (and not only the praiseworthy ones) Ibn ʿArabī writes elsewhere that they can be turned into angels, spirits, bodies, or isthmuses (*ibid.* 188. 6,106).

²⁵⁷ فلا يجتمع اثنان في مزاج واحد أبداً، ولا يجتمع اثنان في منزلة واحدة أبداً: فلا يكون الإنسان مَلَكٌ أبداً، ولا الملك إنساناً، ولا الرسول غيره أبداً.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 314. 7,484

²⁵⁸ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 340. 8,177. This idea is also found in Chapter 2.

the Unseen, does the internal aspect of humans appear externally, thus reaching the same level of “externality” as angels in the non-physical world.²⁵⁹

This is why, after reminding the reader of the obscuring (*istitār*) of *jinn*, angels, and Paradise to men, as well as the existential and etymological link between these three creations as belonging to the Unseen, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that usually angels and demons see humans “visibly with their eyes” (*shuhūdan ‘ayniyyan*), while we humans see them “by faith and not by sight” (*īmānan lā ‘aynan*).²⁶⁰ Elsewhere, angels, *jinn*, and humans are said to be unable to access the Unseen except in the case of physical miracles, which Ibn ‘Arabī calls “the breaking of habits” (*kharq al-‘awā’id*).²⁶¹ Of course the extent of this access, or lack thereof, is different to each of these beings: Angels access more of the Unseen than *jinn* do, while *jinn* themselves have more access to the Unseen than humans do. This access to the Unseen is related to Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory on theophanies: These happen permanently and they are seen externally by all creatures, except for those gifted of speech, that is, men, *jinn*, and angels—“because theophanies to them are from behind the veil of the Unseen.”²⁶² An exception is that of the mystical knowers, for whom theophanies are visible and permanent as well, they know the “who” and “why” of the subject of a given theophany, however, the “how” remains God’s knowledge alone.²⁶³

Another exception to the rule of invisibility of angels to the “average” human being—apart from miracles—is the 5,000 angels sent to the battle of Badr, which were visible to the army of believers.²⁶⁴ Yet another exception, due to “piercing vision” (*nufūdh al-baṣar*) is the case of Ibn ‘Abbās and Aicha who both saw Gabriel without him meaning to be seen by any other than the Prophet, with whom he was conversing.²⁶⁵ This might reflect the ever-growing specific regard for the first generation of Muslims who were in contact with the Prophet, as if this gave them particular access to spiritual dimensions. This access is translated here into their being able to see angels when they usually would not.

More generally in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, only prophets and Friends of God have the capacity to access the Unseen in a systematic manner, as if reflecting their capacity of knowing themselves, their “interior” (*bāṭin*). Being able to perceive the Unseen indicates a higher spiritual position, as the men of Unveiling

259 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 518. 11,84.

260 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 388. 10,56.

261 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 297. 7,311–312.

262 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 317. 7,522: *fā-inna al-tajallī lahum min khalf ḥijāb al-ghayb*.

263 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 276. 7,79.

264 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 154. 5,412.

265 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 366. 9,73.

(*ahl al-kashf*) do not even need to practice seclusion in order to gain the capacity of seeing “the higher spirits and the spirits of fire” (*al-arwāḥ al-ʿulwīyya wa-l-arwāḥ al-nārīyya*).²⁶⁶ However, Ibn ʿArabī also writes that seclusion allows its practitioner to be only near the Spiritual world (*al-malakūt*), with access only to the Dominion (*al-mulk*) and the imaginal world (*al-jabarūt*),²⁶⁷ where angels manifest themselves out of the Spiritual world. We might also mention here the specific category of humans, the ten men called “the men of the Unseen” (*rijāl al-ghayb*) from the cosmological hierarchies presented in the previous section. These are noted for their discretion, talking in whispers, possibly named thus for their capacity to veil themselves from human sight, or from being of the good *jinn*, or even from nourishing themselves from the Unseen world and not from the physical world.²⁶⁸

Elsewhere, Ibn ʿArabī mentions that some mystical knowers (*ʿarifīn*) say that the “constitution of the next world” (*nashʾa al-ākhirā*) reverses the rules: The spirit becomes more powerful than the body, hence they can change shape however they like, “the same way angels do today with us” (*kamā al-yawm ʿindānā al-malāʾika*).²⁶⁹ Some people recognize a “spiritual” (*ruḥānī*) by its shape, which may or may not resemble a human being, and which might appear externally from the viewer (*min al-khārij*), or internally (*min al-dākhil*). Conversely, “all angels know man if he becomes spiritual, and he appears to them as one of them, or by a foreign shape unknown to them.”²⁷⁰

Answering the 58th question of the list of questions attributed to al-Tirmidhī, Ibn ʿArabī uses verses Q 6:9 and Q 17:95 to explain that “*man learns of his self and his rank only by the form*,” that is, the human form as vision or shape, as opposed to the formless spiritual, and so angels are not sent in another form or shape than the human one.²⁷¹ Thus the general rule remains that, in the

266 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 78. 5, 118. This capacity of understanding God's Self-disclosures seem indeed to be the prerogative of the “people of Unveiling” (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God* 52–57).

267 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 78. 5, 120.

268 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4, 291–292.

269 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 293. 7, 278.

270 والملائكة كلهم يعرفون الإنسان إذا تروحن، وظهر فيهم بصورة أحدهم، أو بصورة غريبة لم يروا مثلها

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 311. 7, 460

We have translated the neologism “*tarawḥana*” as “becoming spiritual.”

271

فعرفة الإنسان بنفسه ومربته لا تُعلم إلا من الصورة.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4, 489

He also writes, as an example of these verses: “one does not reap other than the fruit of his deeds.”

physical world, angels will appear as humans, and humans will appear in the Unseen as angels. Both kinds may take another shape than their own in the world that is not their own, however, in their own world, both appear as they are: Gabriel in the Unseen will appear as Gabriel and not as another angel, and a given man in the physical world will only appear there as himself.²⁷²

Of the external angelic apparitions, the most well-known is Gabriel, appearing as Dihya al-Kalbī, as seen previously, with the possible explanation that his continual appearance in this same shape was due to the limitations of the physical world and vision. However, this limitation of human vision seems to be the reflection of a limitation of belief as well, touching on the testing function of angels, as Ibn ‘Arabī writes that the Prophet’s companions did not give their true gaze (*naẓar ṣaḥīḥ*) its due (*ḥaqqahu*), or the divine matter its due. Thus, by seeing only Dihya and not understanding that it was Gabriel, they were “*believers who did not believe*,”²⁷³ and did not see that Gabriel’s body was not a physical body but an imaginal body (*jasad mutakhayyal*).²⁷⁴ Taking elsewhere as examples two *ḥadīth* about the appearance (*tamaththul*) of Paradise and Gabriel to the Prophet, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that “the appearance of something is not the thing itself, but its semblance.”²⁷⁵

Where do these perceptions of the Unseen take place, whether internally or externally to the observer’s gaze? In the imaginal world, of which the Unseen is often synonymous, but also only a part of it, since the physical world is included in this world. In this great isthmus, angels are able to take shape in this space of Discontinuous Imagination (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*) where *jinn* also change shape at their will. In this dimension, they appear to men as an “imagined thing” (*al-mutakhayyal*), part of the human faculty of Continuous Imagination (*al-khayāl al-muttaṣil*), which is itself included in the bigger Unlimited Imagi-

272 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 311. 7,458–459. He writes elsewhere more extensively about these apparitions, as prophets or as angels (ibid. 198. 6,248–250).

273 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 381. 9,543: *al-ṣādiqūn alladhīn mā ṣadaqū*.

274 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 178. 5,624.

275

وتمثل الشيء ما هو عين الشيء، بل هو شبهه.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 126. 5,300

Though a visual apparition might not be equal to its full meaning, Ibn ‘Arabī uses comparisons with physical phenomena to make the reader understand the transformative process: “*water is transformed into vapor, as angels turn into human form, and so are the theophanies*” (ibid. 370. 9,371).

nation.²⁷⁶ This is the space where imaginal bodies contained within elemental bodies can encounter other imaginal bodies, as well as the bodies of light.

This capacity of imagination is typical to man, as seen in the previous section; it derives from his “thinking force” (*al-quwwa al-fikriyya*). This is underlined in a passage stating that spirits cannot take on a shape (*ṣūra*) except one that is already present in the natural world, and this taking of a shape happens according to their essence (*taṣawwur dhātiyyan*) and not out of an imaginative force that remains the prerogative of humanity.²⁷⁷ This human particularity of having visions is possible only for the “elemental animal constitution,”²⁷⁸ thus excluding angels.

He also explains where such visions take place: from the “presence of the felt senses” (*ḥaḍra al-maḥsūsāt*) to the “presence of Continuous Imagination,” which is situated in the front of the brain (*muqaddam al-dimāgh*)—from which emanates the Spirit in charge of the images of the Limited Imagination. This angel delivers the images God wishes to show, which can appear within man’s imagination (in the narrow sense), and these images can be allegorical, such as a bird representing an angel.²⁷⁹ This physical dimension of angelic interaction is also mentioned elsewhere, characterized by the body becoming cold afterward.²⁸⁰ This confirms an interesting feature seen before in the angel/human relationship: While angels can be responsible for visions, or be a vision themselves in the imaginal world, only humans are able to receive visions, as if their constitution itself gave them a kind of depth for this possibility of reflection.

This imaginal dimension is also that of sleep (*nawm*), in which angels, *jinn*, and the “interior of man” (*bāṭin al-insān*) appear, all three in forms (*ṣuwar*) that become external in this imaginal dimension. In this same paragraph, Ibn ʿArabī explains that these forms are nourished by both the nourishment of the senses (*rizq ḥissī*) and by “ideational” nourishment (*maʿnawī*), which is the nourishment of sciences, theophanies, and states (*al-ʿulūm, al-tajallīyyāt, al-aḥwāl*).²⁸¹

276 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 177. 5, 572–573.

277 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9, 241. See also *ibid.* 311. 7, 455. If the shape changes, it is sign that it is of *jinn* origin, from an elemental origin, and so not to be trusted (*ibid.* 198. 6, 357).

278 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 188. 6, 112: *al-nashʾa al-ʿunṣuriyya al-ḥayawāniyya*.

279 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 188. 6, 104. This appears in the long chapter dedicated to visions, too long to be summarized here. He classifies visions, their rank, their context of apparition. He also says that visions reflect the personal states of the one having them, and that we are all part of God’s own vision.

280 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 310. 7, 448.

281 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 13. 1, 465. Elsewhere Ibn ʿArabī makes a difference between visions while awake (*ruʾya*) and while asleep (*ruʾyā*), the latter being the beginning of Revelation (*ibid.* 188. 6, 99). The state of sleep is of a great importance, as he also writes “All

The imaginal may be relevant to the physical senses, although not always, as seen in a discussion around the *ḥadīth*, where Gabriel enjoins people to worship God as if they saw Him. Ibn 'Arabī sees this as another example of the intermediary of imagination to help the believer: Worshipping God as if imagining Him is acceptable. Immanence via imagination is not forbidden, while the physical embodiment of God is (as felt by the five senses, *maḥsūsan*). Ibn 'Arabī notes that the nature of imagination is to give a shape to what is shapeless, by "an internal sense between the intellect and the sensible."²⁸² In a similar passage, the shapes appearing in this intermediary dimension, allowing the apparition of creatures that are not possible in the physical plane, are qualified as "corporeous" (*jismānī*).²⁸³

4.2 *Different Degrees of Communication with the Divine*

Referring to God's two hands creating Adam and to the fundamental concept of image/shape (*ṣūra*) between men and angels seen above, Ibn 'Arabī also writes: "Spirits and images are between angels and humanity. Humanity for the directness of the two hands, angels are the coming and going between the eye and the eye, from non-place to place, from place to non-place, from place to place, and from non-place to non-place."²⁸⁴ This curious-sounding sentence covers the whole messenger function of angels in the universe, between all kinds of existent things (those that are situated, and those that are not, in the imaginal world), and the coming and going between places which might possibly include "between men." It also refers to a key concept of the two eyes, symbol of the two types of knowledge necessary to reach God according to Ibn 'Arabī: the eye of reason (that may grasp the concept of divine transcendence), and the eye of imagination (that may perceive images, symbols of partial divine immanence).²⁸⁵ These two types of knowledge are also presented elsewhere

existence is sleep, and its wakefulness is sleep" (*fa-l-wujūd kulluhu nawm, wa-yaqzatuḥu nawm*) (ibid. 188. 6,111).

282 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9,201: *ḥiss bāṭin bayna al-ma'qūl wa-l-maḥsūs*.

Imaginal images are opposed to what Ibn 'Arabī understood Christians as doing (seeing God in physical images), which they did rightfully so, he writes, until Muhammad came with a new Law (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* 84; *Futūḥāt* 36. 1,660–669).

283 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 463. 10,390.

284 فالأرواح والصور، بين ملائكة وبشر. البشر لمباشرة اليدين، والملائكة للتردد بين العين والعين؛ من لا أين إلى أين ومن أين إلى لا أين، ومن أين إلى أين، ومن لا أين إلى لا أين.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 559. 12,18

285 Chittick, *The Sufi Path* 246, 362.

as knowledge of realization helped by signs/verses and suras, and knowledge given in the externalized shapes of human spirits.²⁸⁶

Echoing the section above, Ibn 'Arabī also explains the relationship to God between men and angels with the interior/exterior dimensions. The relation of man to the Real (*nisbat al-insān ilā al-ḥaqq*) is through his internal direction (*jihat bāṭinihi*), while the angels' is through the external direction (*jihat zahirihi*), although humans will have access to God through both directions after death,²⁸⁷ thus sharing with angels the same mean of communication with God.

Regarding the fundamental mediating role of angels, Ibn 'Arabī uses some Names of God, "the First" and "the Last," to describe that God (as First) is in relationship with man, (the Last) creature to come into existence, the mediation between the two having been given to angels. Because angels are mediators and as such can only be enclosed into something larger, they were not given the Deputyship (*khilāfa*), given to man for his completeness.²⁸⁸ The all-pervasive presence of the divine is also illustrated by the description of four angels coming from four different directions (East, West, above and below) asking each other "Where do you come from?" and all responding: "From God."²⁸⁹

However, on the narrower subject of human prophecy, Ibn 'Arabī writes that it can be transmitted "without an angelic spirit between God and his servant,"²⁹⁰ which seems to be different from one of the two ways of angelic message transmission, from the interior and exterior, as seen previously. We have also seen that sometimes the message may be itself the angel's shape. Elsewhere, direct communication is reached once the veil of angels and prophet is removed.²⁹¹ He also writes: "Since the knowledge vivifies the hearts, as the spirits vivify the bodies in their entirety; the knowledge was named Spirit, which the angels brought down on the hearts of the servants of God, delivering to them, and revealing without mediation in the case of [some of the] servants."²⁹² This establishes a direct communication, helped by angels, who are presented as helpers.

286 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 277. 7.84.

287 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,454.

288 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 405. 10,150.

289 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4, 57.

290

من غير روح ملكي بين الله وبين عبده.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 156. 5,421

291 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 559. 12,302–303.

292 ولما كان العلم تحيا به القلوب كما تحيا بالأرواح أعيان الأجسام كلها: سُمِّي العلم روحا، تنزل به الملائكة على قلوب عباد الله وتلقيه، وتوحي به من غير واسطة في حق عباد أيضا.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 368. 9,143

Beyond the mediation of angels, he underlines the difference between three forms of communication from the divine, the angelic mediation being only one of them. First is the “revelation” (*waḥī*) in a narrow sense, which is communicated to the heart without mediation; second, a speech given via an image or form (*ṣūra*), such as the burning bush for Moses; and third, the speech given via an angelic messenger. However, these are not necessarily exclusive, as he then explains that Revelation may begin with a vision (*ruʿyā*) during sleep, and then move on by imagination to the external apparition of an angel.²⁹³ This divine communication or connection, from the Unseen, can also be done in a specific mode, so that the message is inaccessible to other men and angels, Ibn ʿArabī calling this modality “of the special face” (*min al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*).²⁹⁴

Commenting on the grammatical aspect of verse Q 33:56, Ibn ʿArabī writes about another type of connection with the divine, which singles out the Prophet through prayer. He explains that the prayer of God on the Prophet is done via the station of the prayer of angels on him, so that the prayer of God and angels is as one regarding the Prophet, while the prayer on the believers is done by God and the angels separately (although it also includes the Prophet).²⁹⁵

Lastly, angels also appear as mere metaphors for direct communication. Elsewhere Ibn ʿArabī refers to the divine delivery (*ilqāʾ*) and reception (*talaqqī*) by man via nine spheres, referring to the nine spheres and seven planes seen in the previous section: nine spheres for the three dimensions of each of the three worlds (*mulk/shahāda, Jabarūt, and Malakūt*) that can be conflated into seven planes, corresponding to the seven Heavens, to which are added the Throne and the Seat (we end thus with nine planes). From the “truthful nine” (*al-tisʿa al-ḥaqqīyya*) to the “created nine” (*a-tisʿa al-khalqīyya*) is all Real extended, and when these subtleties meet, we call this meeting “angel” (*kān al-malak dhāk al-ijtimāʿ*).²⁹⁶

As seen in previous chapters, this aspect of the mystical symbolic function could be seen as the esoteric aspect of the credo and messenger functions. Angels as a symbol accentuate the divine transcendence (*tanzīh*), invisible beings pointing to the All-powerful and unknowable divine, as opposed to men,

293 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 188. 6,100–101. He also writes that an angel called “Spirit” is in charge of these visions. Elsewhere, he marks the difference again between prophets and Friends, where prophets see angels, while Friends see spiritual subtleties in the shape of men or animals (*ibid.* 310. 7,448).

294 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 492. 10,505. This is related to the concept of “preparedness” (*istīʿdād*) for perceiving theophanies: God discloses Himself to an individual according to his personal capacity or state of preparation (Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 91).

295 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,232–233.

296 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,214–215.

shaped in God's image, pointing to the most complete theophany (*tajallī*) in this world, a symbol of His immanence (*tashbīh*). However, this mediating role can be removed entirely at times, as if angels were metaphors too cumbersome for comprehension to be left in the text, for instance when described as veils to be removed, or as allegories for the ninefold contact between men and the divine.

4.3 *Angels, Mystical States, Practices, and the Mystical View of Man*

4.3.1 Angels as Metaphors for Mystical States, Situations, and Evolution for Humanity

Mirroring the hierarchy of obedience seen in the previous section, angels and minerals (or inanimate things) are also first on the scale of knowledge of God (*al-ʿilm billāh*), because of their lack of reasoning faculties and desire (*lā ʿuqūla lahum wa-lā shahwa*). They are then followed by plants, then animals, humans being the last.²⁹⁷ This relationship is also seen in two other references to angels' bowing down to Adam. The first one was seen in the previous section, where this act is explained as a bowing down to the rank of knowledge (*martabat al-ʿilm*) and nothing else.²⁹⁸ The second one shows a circularity of devotion, Ibn ʿArabī writing in a chapter on the "Presence of humility" as if God was saying to humanity: "If you take pride on the bowing down of the angels to your father, then I did order you to bow down to the Kaaba, for the Kaaba is dearer than you if your pride is in the bowing down, because you are in your selves more noble than the angels that have bowed down to you, that is, to your father."²⁹⁹ The Kaaba is precisely described afterward as an inanimate object (*al-kaʿba al-jamādiyya*): Men are better than angels and inanimate objects only when they also humble themselves when facing them.

297 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 326. 8,15, and *Ibid.*, 326. 8,15. Ibn ʿArabī reminds the reader in numerous places that angels are more knowledgeable of God, for example in *ibid.* 69. 3, 155.

Another interesting scene illustrates the superiority of knowledge of angels, from the Prophet's approach of Heaven with Gabriel: the angel passes out while the Prophet remains awake, and the passing out of Gabriel illustrates his knowledge of the situation, while the Prophet remained awake because he was more ignorant of it (*ibid.* 73. 4, 553, and *ibid.* 300. 7,344.). This reminds also of the *ḥadīth* seen in previous chapters, where Gabriel would burn up if he looked at God while the Prophet would not.

298 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,548.

299 إن كنتم اعتزّزتم بسجود الملائكة لأبيكم، فقد أمرتكم بالسجود للكبّة، فالكبّة أعزّ منكم إن كان عزّكم للسجود، فإنكم في أنفسكم أشرف من الملائكة التي سجدت لكم، أي لأبيكم.

This lack of knowledge, linked to the situation of humanity when considered as individual humans, was hinted at previously in the cosmological hierarchy: The main difference between angels and men is that the first have fixed stations while man is capable of moving through stations and states, upwards and downwards. Having arrived at an elevated spiritual stage, men and angels stand together as “those drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*) as seen in the previous section. Ibn ‘Arabī often quotes the credo verse 3:18 in this context to show the particular criteria of knowledge,³⁰⁰ while angels’ stations serve as a measure of the progress of man.³⁰¹ For if a person may lack knowledge at a point in time, he may gain all of it at another—and this potentiality is the fundamental difference with the rest of the cosmos, including angels. For instance, in the chapter where Ibn ‘Arabī comments on the power of angels represented by their wings, and how these symbolize their stations, he explains that these wings are used to descend while they use their nature (*ṭabʿ*) to ascend, contrary to birds, which use their wings to ascend and their nature to descend. He uses this analogy for the impossibility of going beyond one’s station:

*The wings of angels for descending below their station, and the wings of the bird to ascend beyond its own station; this for each existent thing to know their incapacity, and that it is not possible for one to act beyond one’s God-given capacity.*³⁰²

Nuancing the previously seen position of angels as being “better” than men, confirmed by the Prophet to Ibn ‘Arabī, his cosmological hierarchy includes the concept of the “Perfect Man” (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as the highest position (*makānan*), above that of the First Intellect³⁰³—therefore above that of the first angel. It is then a matter of achieving that state, and facing the difficulties induced by the human condition, as illustrated in different commentaries on

300 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 75. 4,328. Here he considers that knowledge (*maʿrifa*) is seen as a higher degree than faith (*īmān*). Commenting elsewhere the same verse, the knowledgeable ones can include men, *jinn*, archetypes (*ummuhāt*) and created things (*al-muwalladāt*), (ibid. 73. 4,415).

301 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1. 1,205.

302 وَأجنحة الملائكة للنزول إلى ما دون مقامها، والطائر جناحه للعلو إلى ما فوق مقامه، وذلك ليعرف كل موجود عجزه، وأنه لا يتمكن له أن يتصرف بأكثر من طاقته التي أعطاه الله إياها.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 314. 7,486

303 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 371. 9,362. He can then even be the arbiter in the dispute of the Highest Council (ibid. 558. 11,514).

religious practices, where Ibn ʿArabī presents this as a dialogue between God and His angels, seen previously: The angels did not do anything to be in their elevated state, however, the achievement of this spiritual state by humans is somehow superior, in that they owe it to their own merit while entrenched in all sorts of constitution-induced contradictions.³⁰⁴ Humans also have a wider range of spiritual experiences than angels. If men are of a more complete constitution, while angels are of a more complete position, “humans are more complete in taste than angels” (*al-insān ajmaʿa bi-l-dhawq min al-malak*).³⁰⁵ Echoing this is another comparison, where Ibn ʿArabī states that what is in the next world (*al-ākhirā*) is in the physical world, and that the physical world is more complete than the next world.³⁰⁶

4.3.2 Angels and Spiritual Practices

A man performing his prayers is said to be on Earth in body, and in Heavens intellectually (*bi-ʿaqlihi*), “so he is an angel-human and a human-angel.”³⁰⁷ This representation of body on Earth, and mind (*ʿaql*) with the angels, with the addition of the spirit as a veil, is also the description of the lovers of God from an unknown Yemeni master in a *khabar* attributed to Dhū al-Nūn. Ibn ʿArabī then comments that this is because minds have the attributes of bondage (*taqyīd*) the way angels are bound to their stations.³⁰⁸ Similarly, Ibn ʿArabī comments once on the differentiation by knowledge between humans and angels: Humankind will attain the knowledge of God that angels have only when they get rid of their humanity on the natural level, and return to a state of breathed spirit;³⁰⁹ being familiar with angels is a sign of success (*falāḥ*) for the renunciant.³¹⁰ This seems to run counter to the concepts of Perfect Man and humanity being more complete than angels, seen above, as if aspiring to be on par with angels were the end-goal. However, the “real end goal” is to reach beyond angelic planes.

Elsewhere, this comparison and end goal are indeed surpassed: Among the men of the Unseen, Ibn ʿArabī discusses a saying attributed to Sahl bin ʿAbdal-lāh (al-Tustarī) according to which, when praying, these men travel with angels. Ibn ʿArabī replies that angels cannot follow them and do not know where these

304 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 48. 2,58, Ibid., 72. 4,203–204. This recalls the representation of angels as devoid of desires seen in Chapter 2.

305 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 71. 3,511.

306 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 126. 5,300.

307 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 69. 3,143: *fa-huwwa al-malak al-basharī wa-l-bashar al-malakī*.

308 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 178. 6,31–32.

309 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 375. 9,447.

310 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 274. 7,53.

men go.³¹¹ This is reiterated elsewhere: Angels can descend upon any heart, except upon those of the mystical knowers, who are nowhere for them to find, illustrating verse Q 42:11.³¹²

Ibn 'Arabī then seems to illustrate the dynamic of the spiritual journey, where good practices bring one to the level of angelic stations first (men-angel, non-physical spirit), before moving on in the journey, which can take you beyond angelic knowledge. This reflects the spiritual journey seen in the *mi'rāj*, and this “beyond” is illustrated elsewhere by the lengthy title of a chapter: “Whoever made of his heart My house, and emptied it of anything else than Me, nobody knows what I give him; so do not liken it to the Inhabited House, because this is the house of My angels, not My house, and this is why I did not make my friend [Ibrahim] live in it.”³¹³

4.3.3 Angels and the Spiritual Environment of Mystical Men

Among the mystically-minded men, Ibn 'Arabī writes a chapter about the mystical knowers, whom he describes as “the arrived ones” (*al-wāṣilīn*), and their two categories: those who come back (by choice or by force), and those that do not, and remain among the enraptured angels and the cherubim, in a state of total consummation (*istihlāk*). He explains that the complete inheritor of the Friends (*al-wārith al-kāmil min al-awliyā'*) is the one who received an internal theophany making him understand what came to the Prophet, and thus making him stand in the “station of the angel” (*maqām al-malak*) sent to Muhammad, one of the “inspired ones” (*muḥaddathīn*) of the *umma*. After this point, he is sent back by God to the creation (*raddahu Allāh ilā al-khalq*) as a guidance on the revealed Law,³¹⁴ becoming then one of the “ones who came back” (*al-rāji'ūn*).³¹⁵

³¹¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,293.

³¹² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9,230.

³¹³ من جعل قلبه بيتي، وأخلاه من غيري، ما يدري أحدٌ ما أعطيه، فلا تشبهوه بالبيت المعمور، فإنه بيت ملائكتي، لا بيتي، ولهذا لم أَسكن فيه خليلي إبراهيم.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 405. 10,145

Elsewhere, this heart of the servant is likened to the Thrones, which only the angel in the shape of a human can help encompass by saying the *hawqala* and teaching it to the other angels-bearers (ibid. 476. 10,456). Humans being able to journey above the angelic domain is also a motif found in Christian patristic literature (Daniélou, *The Angels* 83–84).

³¹⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 45. 2,43–48. The term *muḥaddath* is found in *ḥadīth* literature, sometimes called *mulham*, and this is a person to whom angels talk without them being a messenger or a prophet (see Chapter 2 p. 97 fn. 1).

³¹⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* 118.

Recalling the hierarchies of the “men of unlimited numbers”, we have seen Ibn ʿArabī explaining that these men follow a mode of being (“on the heart of”) corresponding to particular angels and prophets, thus having a “known station” (*maqām maʿlūm*); although, contrary to angels, they are not restricted to one only and may cumulate several of these modes of being. These particular men and women may thus be in relationships both with angels, as modes of being, and names, such as the Pole who is linked to the name “Muḥammad,” “Aḥmad,” and “ʿAbdallāh.”³¹⁶ Among the angels, “the great and the greatest” (*al-kabīr wa-l-akbar*) of these are, in ascending order of importance: Ismael, Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel,³¹⁷ and there are five followers to Gabriel, three to Michael, and one to Seraphiel.³¹⁸ Some of the men above also have distinctive knowledge about the angels created out of the breaths of men, as mentioned in the previous section.³¹⁹

These Friends share with the prophets a special relationship with angels: “(...) and from here descend the angels on the hearts of the messengers among humans with the legislative Revelation, and on the hearts of the Friends with the *ḥadīth* and inspiration.”³²⁰ However, differences remain between prophets and Friends: only people from the rank of prophet and messenger can see angels descending on them, while Friends and people of God may see angels but not their “delivery” (*ilqāʾ*) if it is directed towards them, or they may see the delivery but not the angel bringing it.³²¹ Elsewhere Ibn ʿArabī maintains that only prophets and messengers are able to see angels, while others only feel his trace (*yuhissu bi-atharihi*)³²²—or, formulated another way, only those who are both Solitaries and prophets may see the “*theophany in the lights of the spir-its*.”³²³

316 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 270. 7,9. As a reminder, in the previous section, the Replacements (*abdāl*) are compared to “the notables of the angels” (ibid. 559. 12,20.)

317 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 75. 4,320.

318 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,269, 4,290–291.

319 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,568.

320 ومن هنا تنزل الملائكة على قلوب الأرسال من البشر بالوحي المشروع، وعلى قلوب الأولياء بالحدیث والإلهام.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9,263

“Ḥadīth” here could be translated using a more generic meaning of “speech”, but I chose the restricted meaning of “prophetic saying” given the special place held by Ibn ʿArabī in the science of *ḥadīth*.

321 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 268. 6,655.

322 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 353. 8,414.

323 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 206. 6,415: *al-tajallī fī anwār al-afrād*.

Ibn 'Arabī also speaks about the “gifts” (*karāmāt*) of select people, and as for other such concepts, he makes a difference between the common gifts, which induce visible miracles, and the “ideational gifts” (*al-karāmāt al-ma'nawīyya*) which are the only ones that cannot be corrupted by cunning (*māk*). These are much more physically discreet, if not invisible, such as maintaining good religious practices and being pure of heart. As a symbol of this purity, Ibn 'Arabī writes that these gifts are shared with the angels “drawn-near” and the select people of good (*al-muṣṭafūn al-akhyār*).³²⁴

Lastly, human thoughts are classified using adjectives: divine, angelic, egoist (*naḥsī*), and satanic, and Satan appears to prophets externally because he does not have access to them internally. All prophets have then only three kinds of thoughts: divine, angelic and from the self, and no satanic thought. This particularity can be shared by some Friends.³²⁵

4.3.4 Angels between the Physical and the Symbolic

The spiritual symbol is also translated into physical and geographical terms regarding Iblīs and his place on mount Arafat: He symbolizes remoteness from God (*bu'd*) because of his disobedience, though he is not expelled from this highly meaningful place of Arafat because he possesses some knowledge (*ma'rifa*).³²⁶

Conversely, moving from the physical to the symbolic, the oft mentioned “House Inhabited” (*bayt ma'mūr*) was mentioned with its 70,000 angels. It was first described as if it were a physical place somewhere in the cosmos (whether in the physical or imaginal worlds). However, Ibn 'Arabī seems to draw a parallel with a mystical representation of man. There are 70,000 angels passing through the doors of this House, angels created by the emanations of Gabriel: “And in the same number of these angels are the thoughts of the sons of Adam. There is no believing person, or otherwise, who does not have 70,000 thoughts per day, and which are not felt by anyone except the People of God.”³²⁷ These

324 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 184. 6,88. This recalls the distinction made between what the angels Hārūt and Mārūt brought and how it was turned into sorcery (*siḥr*), mixing darkness and light (ibid. 271. 7,21).

325 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 55. 2,125–128; Ibid., 72. 4,11–12. These thoughts are elsewhere described as realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) (ibid. 2. 1,305).

326 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4, 146.

327 وبعدد هؤلاء الملائكة، في كل يوم تكون خواطر بني آدم. فما من شخص مؤمن، ولا غيره، إلا ويخطر له سبعون ألف خاطر في كل يوم، ولا يشعر بها إلا أهل الله.

angels then meet with the angels created from the “thoughts of the heart” and ask forgiveness till the Last Day. Ibn 'Arabī then writes that the angels created from someone whose heart is upheld (*ma'mūr*) with the invocation of God are different from the angels created from other persons, adding that angels created of thoughts take the shape or image (*ṣūra*) of these thoughts.³²⁸

This recalls the ambiguous category of angels in Ibn 'Arabī's typologies, “the governing ones,” that could be understood as angels, humans, or angels born of breaths. We find other descriptions of such angels: Similar to angels created from thoughts, breaths, and acts, are the angels created from the words of men. They constitute an angelic representation which lends itself to a very good metaphor where Ibn 'Arabī presents the mechanics of repentance. Ibn 'Arabī first writes: “Know that there is no word uttered by the servant from which God does not create an angel. If this [word] is good then it is an angel of compassion, and if the [word] is bad then it is an angel of vengeance.”³²⁹ He then explains that if the person repents, these angels of vengeance are turned into angels of compassion. There are modalities: If the repentance is about one word only, then it concerns only the corresponding angel, if the repentance is general, then all angels of vengeance ever uttered are changed into angels of compassion.

Among these human-born angels, another possible type of allegory to be mentioned here are the angels or spirits born out of a spiritual intercourse between two persons, while other such breaths (*anfās*) born out of intercourse between humans and houris create shapes. Ibn 'Arabī explains that this is similar to the creation of angels born from the breaths of those invoking God.³³⁰ This clearly comes within a type of Islamic discourse of the exalted human creature, as an elaboration of a “Muslim spiritual anthropology vis-à-vis perceived tendencies in Christian, Zoroastrian, and even certain Muslim doctrines to devalue the body, matter, and world.”³³¹

³²⁸ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,293. In this same chapter, this House Inhabited is said to correspond to the celestial Kaaba. This Kaaba was also seen in his *mi'rāj* accounts as standing as a cosmological transition between the material worlds and the highest spheres (Morris, *Spiritual Ascension* ii, 68).

³²⁹ واعلم أنه ما من كلمة يتكلم بها العبد، إلا ويخلق الله تلك الكلمة ملكاً. فإن كانت خيراً كان ملك رحمة، وإن كانت شراً كان ملك نقمة.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 287. 7,194

³³⁰ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 369. 9,158–159. This comes within descriptions of different types of intercourse involving spiritual elements and concepts, and their results.

³³¹ Webb, *Hierarchy* 249.

Considering all these angels and recalling what Ibn ‘Arabī says about those angels born of human breaths as being the last creation of God,³³² this category of angels illustrates well the ambiguity of the third angelic category seen in the previous section. They are often presented in a way that sounds both literal and metaphorical, and as such they could be seen both as the cosmological fruit of the most complete of creatures (man), as well as the metaphor or symbol of the human dynamic, the movement of man on his journey towards perfection. Thus, angels are not used in the usual way to mark their distinction from men, highlighting by contrast the special place of man in creation on the cosmological level, but they become here allegories for the gift of change and potential realization which are typically human.

4.4 *Angels as Philosophical and Religious Symbols*

4.4.1 Symbols for Concepts and Objects

The vocable “angel,” as seen in the previous section, can be used when writing about different objects and realities, such as a sphere, a planet, a creature that was given a messenger function, or a being (spirit of light), most of them sharing an idea of movement and spirituality. Another concept which is designated by the word “angel,” whether an angel from the enraptured angels or from the cherubim in that plane beyond our cosmos, is the “First Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-awwal*).³³³

In a philosophical view of the angels Pen and Tablet, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that from this First Intellect proceeds the Tablet containing the 360 “theophanies” (*tajalliyāt*), which correspond to the “360 sciences” seen in the previous section.³³⁴ This first example shows the permanent superposition of meanings given to a concept or an object throughout Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings. To each concept correspond different meanings or perceived realities, the appearance of the concept changing according to whether it is considered philosophically (a First intellect), metaphorically (a science), or spiritually (an angel, a theophany).

We also find this superposition of meanings, or “simultaneous layer of intended associations” as Webb puts it,³³⁵ concerning the Bearers of the Throne, seen in the previous section. There are four of them until the Last Day, when they become eight, or more precisely, there are four known bearers, and four

332 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 4,568.

333 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 13. 1,463–464. He also writes that what he calls “Muhammadan reality” is what the First Intellect is for others (ibid. 3. 1,327.)

334 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 13. 1,464.

335 Webb, “Hierarchy” 247.

invisible ones who become known on the Last Day (four prophets, or three prophets and one angel). These eight bearers of the Throne are also described as realities (*ḥaqāʾiq*): Gabriel and Muhammad, Adam and Seraphiel, Michael and Abraham, and Riqdān and Mālik.³³⁶ These four couples of bearers are also paralleled by four human representatives, succeeding each other on Earth, so that there are always four of them at any one time. These bearers, whether angels or prophets, stand for certain concepts: The Throne stands for Dominion (this world), its bearers stand for body/form, spirit, nourishment, and rank/promise-threat.³³⁷ Ibn ʿArabī explains that these four principles are the four visible ones in this world, or “external” ones (*ẓāhir*). They stand for the eight Ascriptions (*nisab*) describing the Real, when they become visible on the Last Day: Life, Knowledge, Power, Will, Speech, Hearing, Seeing, and Comprehension (this last one through the previous three senses).³³⁸

On a higher metaphorical level, the Throne can be borne only by the human-looking angel and his saying the *hawqala*, a formula taught by Adam to the angels. Then while remaining God’s Throne, set apart from the Creation, the Throne also becomes simultaneously God’s house and part of the believer’s heart. Angels are then compared to Names circling it as they would the Throne:

When God gave existence to the Perfect Man, He gave him a heart like the Throne, and made it His house. No-one in the world is capable to bear the heart of the believer; because they are incapable of bearing the Throne. [The Throne] is in one of the corners of the believer’s heart, which he does not feel

336 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 167. 5,501.

337 Adam and Seraphiel (body/form), Gabriel and Muhammad (spirit), Michael and Abraham (nourishment), Riqdān and Mālik (rank/promise-threat), (Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 167. 5,501).

338 وهذه الثمانية للنسب الثمانية التي يوصف بها الحق. وهي: الحياة والعلم والقدرة والإرادة والكلام والسمع والبصر—وإدراك المطموع والمشوم والملبوس بالصفة الثلاثة به، فإنّ لهذا الإدراك بها تعلّقاً، كإدراك السمع بالمسموعات والبصر بالمبصرات، ولهذا انحصر الملك في ثمانية، فالظاهر منها في الدنيا أربعة: الصورة والغذاء والمرتبّتان، ويوم القيامة تظهر ثمانية بجميعها للعيان، وهو قوله—تعالى—{وَيَحْمِلُ عَرْشَ رَبِّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ ثَمَانِيَةٌ}، فقال صلى الله عليه وسلم “وهم اليوم أربعة”، هذا تفسير العرش بالملك.

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 13. 1.466

The four first Attributes, “Life, Knowledge, Will, Power,” are also linked to four archangels in al-Farghānī’s angelology, and calls them the Four Pillars of Divinity (Murata, “The Angels” 333).

*nor does he know of the presence of a Throne, because of its lightness on him, and He made His Beautiful Names circle this heart, as the angels circle the Throne, and made its bearers: Divine Knowledge, Life, Will, and Speech, four [of them].*³³⁹

Webb noted the special simultaneity of meanings for the Throne, whereby “Ibn ‘Arabī is suggesting that the human heart is the symbol and paradoxical container of the ‘uncreatedness’ and infinite possibility within the human possibility.”³⁴⁰ Angels are used here for understanding the transition of the greater infinite divine reality into an apparently limited internal site.

4.4.2 Angels and the Names

Regarding the concept of names, aside from the notable angels given proper names, we have to keep in mind the other angels seen in the previous section, who seem to embody, as an allegory, some other names and concepts, such as the Pen, the Tablet, and Nūn, as well as angels created from words that become their names.³⁴¹ Echoing Ibn Barrajān and the *ḥadīth* tradition, seen in Chapter 2, we also find a mention of a meteorological angel: Thunder is the voice of the angel called by this name (*raʿd*), praising God, and made of air as we are made of water.³⁴²

However, here the focus will be on what Islamic tradition calls “the divine Names” (traditionally numbered at ninety-nine), which are what makes Adam favored over the angels, the Names standing then for all-encompassing knowledge.³⁴³ These Names are understood differently in Islamic traditions but we can draw a parallel with the understanding of theophoric names of angels in early mystical Jewish writings, whereby they make angels so close to the divine

³³⁹ فلَمَّا أَوْجَدَ اللهُ الْإِنْسَانَ الْكَامِلَ جَعَلَ لَهُ قَلْبًا كَالْعَرْشِ، جَعَلَ يَتَنَا لَهُ. فَمَا فِي الْعَالَمِ مِنْ يَطِيقُ حَمْلَ قَلْبِ الْمُؤْمِنِ، لِأَنَّهُمْ عَجَزُوا عَنْ حَمْلِ الْعَرْشِ. وَهُوَ فِي زَاوِيَةٍ مِنْ زَوَايَا قَلْبِ الْمُؤْمِنِ، لَا يَحْسَسُ بِهِ وَلَا يَعْلَمُ أَنَّ ثَمَّ عَرْشًا، نَخَفَتْهُ عَلَيْهِ، وَجَعَلَ أَسْمَاءَهُ الْحَسَنَى تَحَفُّ بِهَذَا الْقَلْبِ، كَمَا تَحَفُّ الْمَلَائِكَةُ بِالْعَرْشِ، وَجَعَلَ حَمَلَتَهُ: الْعِلْمَ الْإِلَهِيَّ، وَالْحَيَاةَ، وَالْإِرَادَةَ، وَالْقَوْلَ، أَرْبَعَةً.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 476. 10,456

³⁴⁰ Webb, “Hierarchy” 249.

³⁴¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 287. 7,194–195.

³⁴² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,315.

³⁴³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 206. 6,417. See also the chapter “The Names of God” in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* 33–46.

that they become divine Names, losing their proper existence, to become an aspect of God.³⁴⁴

The world of isthmuses (*'ālim al-barāzikh*), which is also the “world of Power” (*jabrawūt*), is the “station of the divine Names” (*maqām al-asmā' al-ilāhiyya*),³⁴⁵ the dynamic of this world being both vector and symbol of the relationship of the Names with the cosmos. Divine Names have a great importance for Ibn 'Arabī, and he describes these as being messengers, alongside angels and humans.³⁴⁶ He writes elsewhere that the gaze can only perceive the Names in the traces (*athar*) that they leave, these traces being their image (*ṣūra*).³⁴⁷ Each Name acts as a kind of archetype,³⁴⁸ each having the governance (*ḥukm*) of some creatures, for example, the Name “The Solitary” (*al-fard*) governs the people called the Solitaries (*al-afrād*), seen previously, people who are the terrestrial reflection of the enraptured angels.³⁴⁹

Thus God creates all things according to His Names,³⁵⁰ and here is one way of understanding the relationship between angels and the Names, as keepers of their innermost secret and of their attached realities: “He created as many realities as there are Names of His Reality, and he brought out as many dedicated angels as the number of his creations. He thus gave a Name to each reality from among His Names, that worship Him and know Him, and he made an angel to each innermost secret of these realities, who serves Him and attend to Him.”³⁵¹ This parallels what was seen above: The mystical knower arriving towards God in a state of consummation, like the cherubim and the enraptured angels, is also said to be a Name of Essence (*ism dhātī*) that does not indicate anything else than God, as an indicator of the Essence.³⁵²

Echoing the representation of angels born out of breaths, acts, and words, Ibn 'Arabī often comes back to the explanation of verse (38:69) and its dispute

344 Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 261.

345 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 120. 5, 278.

346 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 348. 8, 313.

347 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 211. 6, 451.

348 William Chittick, “Ibn 'Arabī's Myth of the Names,” in *Philosophies of Being and Mind: Ancient and Medieval*, ed. James T.H. Martin (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1992), 207–219.

349 Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints* 112.

350 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 206. 6, 412.

351 ^{ثم أنشأ—سبحانه—الحقائق على عدد أسماء حقّه، وأظهر ملائكة التسخير على عدد خلقه. فجعل لكل حقيقة اسماً من أسمائه، تعبده وتعلّمه، وجعل لكل سرّ حقيقة ملكاً، يخدمه ويلزمه.}

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* Introduction. 1, 90

352 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 45. 2, 46.

of the angels, so important for his theodicy, a way of solving the problem of evil when affirming that God is all powerful and beneficent. The reason for the dispute can be explained through the Names, through another understanding of the relationship between Names and angels. Angels are seen here as worldly, albeit subtle, emanations of the Names, some of which are sometimes contrary in meaning to others, thus creating dissonance: "The origin are the opposed divine Names, henceforth this opposition is found in the world."³⁵³ Elsewhere, Ibn 'Arabī breaks down this dispute in a slightly different manner: Some angels are created for particular domains or "divisions" (*muqassamāt*) and so cannot perceive unity (*aḥadiyya*) by virtue of their constitution, while other angels are created for Unity (*tawḥīd*) and unities (*waḥdāt*). Therefore, whenever these two groups meet, they fight because they cannot understand each other's roles, although they are all part of the "Universal Soul" (*al-naḥs al-kulliyya*).³⁵⁴ This dispute is also reflected in their questioning of God regarding Adam: One of the reasons given previously was that angels cannot see the interior of man, but another is that they see in him conflicting realities,³⁵⁵ or we could say, the potential presence of all the Names. Another example of disputing angels is one related by Ibn 'Arabī which echoes a similar story in Sufi commentaries: A man from a bad village wanted to repent and move to a good village, and died on the way, so the angels "soldiers of the Name the Compassionate" fought with the angels "soldiers of the Name the Vengeful" over his fate.³⁵⁶

Ibn 'Arabī also writes that God created angels on the Name "The Powerful" (*al-qawīyy*), and *jinn* on the Name "The Subtle" (*al-laṭīf*), and uses this to illustrate that in some cases, one Name contains traits from another, as for example "The Powerful" contains "the Subtle" in that angels are also made of subtle matter, like the *jinn*.³⁵⁷ Angels and other higher spirits are also said to proceed from the Name "The Alive" (*al-ḥayy*).³⁵⁸ Men, on the other hand, are created on

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والأصل الأسماء الإلهية المتقابلة، ومن هنالك سرى التقابل في العالم.

IBN 'ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 154. 5,414. See also *ibid.* 374. 9,427354 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 371. 9,335–336.355 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 177. 5,564.356 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 310. 7,351.357 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,357. On the angels created from "The Powerful," see from the beginning of the sub-chapter p. 353.358 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 132. 5,323–324. This discussion brings to mind the notion of archangels as being "the greatest words" in Shihāb al-dīn al-Suhrawardī's angelology, although his system sounds more comparable to philosophical categories (the latest great word being Gabriel, as he is the Tenth Intellect for Ibn Sīnā), see Murata, "The Angels" 329; Mohammed Rustom, "Storytelling as Philosophical Pedagogy: The Case of Suhrawardī,"

the Name “The Assembler” (*al-jāmiʿ*), which contains both the “divine image” (*al-ṣūra al-ilāhiyya*), and the “cosmic image” (*al-ṣūra al-kawniyya*), in both the external and internal aspects.³⁵⁹ However, these Names might vary or be added to others: Elsewhere he explains that humans are created as visible out of the Name “The Visible” (*al-Ẓāhir*), while *jinn* are created out of the Name “The Invisible” (*al-Bāṭin*).³⁶⁰ As for Iblīs, he was created under the rule of the Name “The Far-away” (*al-baʿīd*),³⁶¹ as he is characterized by drawing away from God—and as a demonic inspiration pulling a human away while an angelic one draws him near.

This difference, between angels presented as creatures attached or dedicated to Names and their realities, keeping their innermost secret, and their being proceeding from them directly, echoes the difference between angels as discrete characters or simple narrative comparators to humans (highlighting man’s characteristics and journey), and their being born out of human breaths, words, and acts, as direct metaphors for human experiences.

4.4.3 Angels and the Letters of the Alphabet

Ibn ʿArabī elaborates on the archetypal divine command “Be!” (*kun*). This word is made of two visible letters, although it is constructed using three letters—the middle letter, *waw*, being dropped. This letter, “like an isthmus” (*barzakhiyya*) and “spiritual” (*ruḥāniyya*) is given a status akin to that of the angel: leaving a mark even though the source of this mark is gone.³⁶² This is one of the examples of Ibn ʿArabī’s writings on letters and their esoteric meaning, which might have been influenced by Maslama al-Qurṭūbī, probable author of “the Goal of the Sage.”³⁶³ The “science of letters” has a long history in Islamic literature, and we outline here only its relationship with angels in the *Futūḥāt*.³⁶⁴

in *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam, Religious Learning between Continuity and Change* i (Leiden: Brill, 2020) 404–416. A more detailed comparison with Ibn ʿArabī on the roles of Names and the concept of angels would probably highlight both their common terminology but quite different cosmo-theological implications.

359 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,359. Elsewhere he writes that man contains all realities, including angels (*ibid.* 3. 1,308.)

360 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 356. 7,457.

361 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 72. 4,146.

362 (...) ولماذا حُذِفَت الكلمة الثالثة المتوسطة البرزخية التي بين حرف الكاف وحرف النون، وهي حرف الواو الروحانية، التي تُعْطِي ما لِلْمَلَكِ في نشأة المكوّن من الأثر، مع ذهاب عينيها؟

IBN ʿARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 176. 5,483

363 Known in the West as the “Picatrix.” See Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam* 143–169.

364 On the “science of letters” in Ibn ʿArabī, Denis Gril, “La science des lettres,” in *Les illumi-*

Early in the *Futūḥāt* he discusses the distribution of letters between creatures and cosmological ranks and concepts. Letters are distributed between the three worlds and their respective *barzakh* between them,³⁶⁵ while in parallel letters are also distributed between creatures. For instance, to the *jinn* are allocated the *sīn* and the *shīn*, while angels receive eighteen letters: *bāʾ, jīm, dāl, hāʾ, wāw, ḥāʾ, ṭāʾ, yāʾ, kāf, mīm, fāʾ, qāf, rāʾ, tāʾ, thāʾ, khāʾ, dhāl*, and *zāʾ*.³⁶⁶ This chapter contains the discussion mentioned earlier, about the nine spheres of divine delivery, and human reception, thus associating the human/divine encounter with letters. This idea is encountered later in other terms: The Seraphiel reality, an ascription to the Real (*muḍāfa ilā al-ḥaqq*), blows into images, and “the secret of the Real between the two is the meaning between the blower and the receiver, like the link from the letters between the two words.”³⁶⁷

Elsewhere, he writes that the world of spirits proceeds from the spoken letters, the world of the senses from the numerical letters, and the world of the intellect in the imaginal from the letters of reflection (or “thought-letters”), all of these entering in the constitution of the Names of the Names.³⁶⁸ Later, in a discussion around some of the divine Names, he explains that some angels are called by the name of the letters of which they are the spirits, giving the letters their power of action: “For do not imagine that the letters function by their shape, but by their spirits (...).”³⁶⁹ Thus Ibn ‘Arabī also presents the lone

nations de la Mecque, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997, 2021), 165–282. There is also one secondary source which I was not able to access: Carmela Crescenti, “ilm al-ḥurūf ou la science des lettres: métaphysique de la langue et des lettres selon la doctrine d’Ibn ‘Arabī,” PhD dissertation, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2009; Dunja Rasic, *The Written World of God: The Cosmic Script and the Art of Ibn Arabi*, Anqa Publishing, Oxford, 2021. On lettrism in Islamic literature in general see Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 156–157; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Afterword: Conjuncting Astrology and Lettrism, Islam and Judaism,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 12, no. 1 (2017): 89–97.

365 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,225.

366 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,214.

367 سَرَّ الْحَقُّ بَيْنَهُمَا هُوَ الْمَعْنَى بَيْنَ النَّافِخِ وَالْقَابِلِ، كَالرَّابِطِ مِنَ الْحُرُوفِ بَيْنَ الْكَلِمَتَيْنِ.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,305

368 فَعَنِ الْحُرُوفِ اللَّفْظِيَّةِ يَوْجَدُ عَالَمُ الْأَرْوَاحِ، وَعَنِ الْحُرُوفِ الرَّقِيقَةِ يَوْجَدُ عَالَمُ الْحَسِّ، وَعَنِ الْحُرُوفِ الْفِكْرِيَّةِ يَوْجَدُ عَالَمُ الْعَقْلِ فِي الْخَيَالِ، وَمِنْ كُلِّ صَنْفٍ مِنْ هَذِهِ الْحُرُوفِ تَتَرَكَّبُ أَسْمَاءُ الْأَسْمَاءِ.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 73. 5,34

369 فَلَا تَتَخَيَّلْ أَنَّ الْحُرُوفَ تَعْمَلُ بِصُورِهَا وَإِنَّمَا تَعْمَلُ بِأَرْوَاحِهَا.

IBN ‘ARABĪ, *al-Futūḥāt* 198. 6,304–305

letters in the beginning of some Quranic suras: They are the shapes of angels whose names are those letters, and if they are spoken aloud, it is equivalent to calling upon these angels who come and attend to the speaker.³⁷⁰ Similarly, the position of the First Intellect in the Breath of the Compassionate is said to be that of the letter *hamza* in the human alphabet.³⁷¹

5 Concluding Thoughts

Not all functions of angels are discussed here, or not fully so, as I chose to highlight the most relevant examples. Indeed, the function of angels as testers or challengers is not particularly well represented in this work, other than in the way seen in the previous chapters (regarding the invisibility of angels and the character of Satan). This function can be seen perhaps also as a secondary effect of other functions: The mystical function is somehow a challenging one, as it challenges the believer to have faith in the Unseen and its angels, and challenges the mystical knower not to fall in its different traps.

At any rate, this mystical meta-function of angels as metaphors and/or as imaginal realities, used to convey different mystical concepts and states, is the greatest function given to them by Ibn ʿArabī, towering above all others. The question then remains as to whether this religious vocabulary, “angels,” is a literary metaphor, like the allegory of “The Pen” and “The Tablet” used in texts that are philosophical in nature. Alternatively, perhaps it is to be understood to have a more mythical meaning, but neither as a discrete reality only partially comprehensible to our mere five senses and intellect, nor as something so concrete as a plant or stone, but nonetheless something more real than a metaphor for intellectual concepts. Simultaneity seemed to be the key to this question throughout the *Futūḥāt*.

On this question, Burge notes an irreconcilability between the nature of angels as understood by philosophers and the people of *ḥadīth*, while estimating a failure in some attempts to reconcile both: “However, when the question of whether angels have bodies or are incorporeal is raised, there is open hostility between the *ḥadīth*-based and philosophical perspectives. The two positions are mutually incompatible. Some attempts were made to try to reconcile the two positions, such as al-Suhrawardī’s philosophy of illumination, but these were ultimately unsuccessful. This was an area where the *ḥadīth*-based the-

370 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198, 6,306.

371 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 198, 6,240.

ologians had to maintain the corporeality of angels, in direct conflict with the philosophical tradition.”³⁷² This is where Ibn ‘Arabī also seems to attempt at a reconciliation of both, in his own way:³⁷³ Angels are both a discrete reality as well as multiple symbols or metaphors for philosophical concepts, abstract realities, and the spiritual states of the mystical seeker.

Indeed, in the same way as they appear as both creatures and metaphors, angels appear as representing singular names or divine Names, simplicity, directness with the divine, fixity, obedience, mediation, partial perfection, contrasting with concepts associated to humanity: complexity, change, accumulation, multifaceted beings, completion, and potentiality of complete perfection.³⁷⁴ Angels are seen as pure, direct emanations from God, while humans possess a distinctive self-reflection, or capacities of thought.³⁷⁵ Humans are capable of seeing angels when the former have advanced far along their spiritual journey toward God, who communicates at times with them through angels: a circular double dynamic, both external and internal to the human being. Angels could ultimately symbolize the dynamic between the human self and God, both real and symbolic, a “mythic dialectic” to borrow the words of Sells³⁷⁶—the dynamic made possible for this treasure that wanted to be known, if we are to use the famous *ḥadīth*.

The use of angels in relation to the divine Names also points to the specific theodicy of Ibn ‘Arabī. On one hand we have the example of Jaadane, who notes that al-Ghazālī does not answer the question of the existence of diseases and other problems if angels are really in charge of everything;³⁷⁷ the example of pre-Islamic traditions that might have used them with an seemingly independent will to deflect the direct involvement of God in events and acts perceived as bad; and the example of Shihāb al-dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), who will

372 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 102. As mentioned in the conclusion of Chapter 3 and 4, angels are often considered to be one-dimensional allegorical symbols for philosophical and abstract concepts.

373 His style of writing has been seen as “mythic-visional,” “using symbolic images that evoke emergent associations rather than fixed realities,” see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism* 166–167 (here he refers to Marshall Hodgson and Osman Yahia, respectively). As for the success or failure of this attempt, this is a theological judgment that is best left to the believer to decide.

374 I refer the reader to Sell’s discussion of this man-angel dynamic as well (Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsayings* 78–81).

375 On this distinction, Lory writes that humans are more defined by their status (which may change) while angels are defined by their nature (Pierre Lory, “Les anges dans l’islam.”)

376 Michael A. Sells, “Ibn ‘Arabī’s Garden among the Flames: A Reevaluation,” *History of Religions*, 23, no. 4 (1984), 295.

377 Jaadane, “La place des anges” 54–55.

elaborate a progressive darkening of divine emanation through the wings of Gabriel to explain evil.³⁷⁸ On the other hand, Ibn 'Arabī defines the origin of evil as both of divine origin (as all things are), and induced by angels' nature and pure obedience to what they were created for, that is, their nature corresponding to the Names or missions that might be contrarian between themselves, leading to their "dispute."

Thus, we have seen that most Quranic functions are represented in the angelic narratives, and it would seem at first that rather than presenting a very original cosmology, Ibn 'Arabī presents a quite traditional Islamic cosmology in great detail, which regroups different trends and concepts found in other works, while expanding on them to display their more complex image, with mythical and symbolic dimensions. This is certainly the case for the "angels of breaths." Indeed, this peculiar phrase was briefly mentioned (as angels created by acts and breaths) in a *tafsīr* that did not offer a lengthy explanation of it, and as such this phrase is comparable to the fate of the phrase "seal of the saints." It existed before Ibn 'Arabī, but it acquired a textual and theological substance and greater complexity with him.

In her article on angels in the writings of Ibn 'Arabī, Webb wondered if he was not trying to upset and destabilize the concept of hierarchy through the use of hierarchy, differentiating it from more usual and traditional hierarchies in Islamic theological writings.³⁷⁹ What I saw then was, on the contrary, a quite coherent presentation of a complex cosmological hierarchy, highly detailed within a cosmology similar to other Islamic mystical cosmologies of a Neoplatonic favor.

Ibn 'Arabī is singular in giving us a detailed celestial hierarchy, and its tripartite aspect compares with the writings of pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagite, an early Christian theologian and philosopher, author of the treaty called *On the Celestial Hierarchy*,³⁸⁰ which was later widely used in Christian writings and

378 His use of Gabriel as an archetypal character seems to cover most angels and their function in Ibn 'Arabī, the Enraptured ones for the right wing of Gabriel, and the others for the left: "The right wing is made of pure light and is totally disengaged (*mujarrad*) from creation and connected to God, who is Absolute Being. But the left wing displays a trace of darkness, like the spots on the face of the full moon. It represents Gabriel own's personal existence, which has one side turned away from God and toward nonexistence. When a shadow falls from Gabriel's mottled left wing, this lower world of falsehood and deception comes into existence" (Murata, "The Angels" 329).

379 Webb, "Hierarchy" 245.

380 The identity of this author is still subject to debate. He supposedly hailed from the Syrian area, during the late 5th century to early 6th century, see Denys L'Aréopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste* v–xix. This constitutes one of the best studies and translation of this treaty.

traditions. Although partial angelologies were written before him, he was the first to describe a full-fledged angelic hierarchy, and like many other antique and late antique texts, it is influenced by Neoplatonism.³⁸¹ Among such writings on celestial beings, this one appears to me to be the closest to that on Islamic angels, beings with minimal independent will.³⁸² For these reasons, its comparison with Ibn 'Arabī's hierarchy sounded relevant to me, although Ibn 'Arabī has more often been compared to other Christian mystics, like Meister Eckhart.³⁸³ He presents a tripartite hierarchy (see Appendix 4.2) which seems to echo that of Ibn 'Arabī, although only the first categories of both authors seem to match both in names and roles (Ibn 'Arabī's enraptured angels and cherubim are matched by pseudo-Dionysus' seraphim and cherubim). Both authors have also addressed particular human hierarchies, as an echo of the celestial ones: Their details are not comparable, but they seem to hold the same spiritual functions within humanity. While pseudo-Dionysus presents another triad (Deacons, Priests, Bishops), Ibn 'Arabī presents a highly complex one with many categories (Replacements, Imams, Pegs, Nobles, etc.) which shows a less strict hierarchical relationships between each of its members and the general society. Ibn 'Arabī's hierarchy does not seem to claim a particularly defined social or religious ascendance, like that of the Christian clergy in society, although their spiritual function seems to be of the same value within it. In this, we have two examples of spiritual hierarchies reflecting two different and particular aspects of the two religious traditions: celestial and spiritual hierarchies matching the social-religious Christian defined order, on one hand, and the celestial and spiritual hierarchies reflecting potential and realized stations or positions within the social-religious Islamic group on the other hand.

Another comparison to a better known Neoplatonic angelic hierarchy comes to mind, that of the founder of the "illumination" school, al-Suhrawardī, men-

Olga Lizzini notes that this treatise was translated into Arabic, but it does not appear to have influenced any particular Muslim writer—the Neo-Platonic influence on Islamic cosmological representations was widespread through varied textual genealogies (Olga Lizzini, "L'angelologia islamica").

381 Gunther Heil, in *L'Aréopagyte, La hiérarchie céleste*, lvii, lxiv. His was especially popular in the Middle-Ages, used by many authors, such as John Scotus Eriugena (d. ca. 877) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 323).

382 Marilena Vlad, "Dionysius the Aeropagite on Angels: Self-Constitution Versus Constituting Gifts," in *Neoplatonic Demons and Angels*, 271–272.

383 Robert J. Dobie. *Logos and Revelation, Ibn 'Arabī, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010); Ian Richard Netton, *Allah Transcendent, Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London: Routledge, 2006), 294–300.

tioned earlier.³⁸⁴ It is also a tripartite angelic hierarchy, but with a different distribution of roles and functions in the cosmos. There is the “longitudinal order of angelic lights” followed by the “latitudinal order of angelic lights” that emanates from the first one, and which corresponds to Platonic archetypes and is likened to the Zoroastrian archangels. The third group is the “regent lights” that partly corresponds to guardian angels and angels moving the spheres, taking care of all elements of Creation. Gabriel has a great importance, involved in a very different theodicy than that of Ibn 'Arabī, while also being the Active Intellect, Holy Spirit, and the human soul emanating from him, among other crucial roles. The illumination theory presents an overall distinct picture of angelic hierarchies, interacting with different pre-Islamic systems, so that no immediate comparison can be drawn to that of Ibn 'Arabī, although many references are shared. This shows a richness present within a same culture and religious tradition, where two apparently similar thinkers can produce two original cosmologies and angelologies.³⁸⁵

Webb rightly noted that hierarchical motifs “seek to simultaneously articulate ontological, cosmological, and cosmogonic truths about the Divine Essence and Its self-disclosure in/of the world, while speaking of personal-existential realities and potentialities.”³⁸⁶ Indeed, Ibn 'Arabī shows particular uses of angelic functions: angels as characters who both exist as comparators to the situation of human beings and their unique potentiality of transformation and movements through spiritual stations in the cosmos, and angels as symbols for their spiritual practices and the result of these practices. Chief examples of this second role, angels as symbols, are the angels that Webb did not identify as a category, the “governing ones” and its angels born of breaths, acts, and words.

384 See Netton, *Allah Transcendent* 256–268, and Stephen R. Burge, “The Provenance of Suhrawardian Angelology,” *Archiv Orientalní*, 76, no. 4 (2008): 435–457.

385 Further detailed comparison with other Islamic angelologies could yield interesting outcomes, illustrating different cosmological representations in the Islamic world. Among such other authors are the Brethren of Purity (ca. 4th/10th century), al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), Shihān al-dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406). For the outline of some of these angelologies, see Murata, “The Angels;” Jaadane, “La place des anges;” Stefan Leder, “Angels as Part of Human Civilisation, Ibn Khaldūn’s Conciliating Approach,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 365–384. Another interesting comparison could be made with angelologies in works more occult in nature, such as the longer version of the *Shams al-Ma‘ārif* by al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), a contemporary of Ibn 'Arabī, and an author also influenced by Ibn Barrajān (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’Islam* 212, 226).

386 Webb, “Hierarchy” 246.

Moreover, beyond an apophatic theology already identified in the writings of Ibn 'Arabī,³⁸⁷ the “Mystical Theology” of pseudo-Dionysus the Aeropagite helps us here as well, in analyzing Akbarian angels as pointing to a silent theology, which is beyond cataphasis (positive theology, immanence) and apophasis (negative theology, transcendence).³⁸⁸ Indeed, in the writings of Dionysus the Aeropagite, cataphatic theology is represented by the dynamic flowing from God to humans, going through Names and concepts, while apophatic theology is represented by the movement going from humanity to God, through subtler states and beings such as angels.³⁸⁹ Thus on one hand, angels in Ibn 'Arabī stand for Names and concepts, as well as existing as perfected and subtler aspects of humanity, combining both theologies or dynamics, while on the other hand they also seem to be symbolizing these curious human-born realities (breaths, words, acts), the latest of all God's creation. As such, they seem to be pointing to something beyond the first dichotomy, erasing the distance between humans and God, whether cataphatic or apophatic, and thus one could see in these angels a symbol of a silent theology, accompanying the reader on the journey towards and beyond the “He/not He” God, when there remains but light and wings of them, before disappearing into the unsaid.

The simultaneity of meanings for a word such as “angel” or “Throne” finds a general example in the chapter on seclusion, with the word “man:” Ibn 'Arabī writes that “Man is a small world, and the world is a great man” (*fa-l-insān 'ālam ṣaghīr wa-l-'ālam insān, kabīr*).³⁹⁰ He puts it another way at the beginning of the *Futūḥāt*, “The human Presence is like the divine Presence, or rather it is the very same thing, composed of three levels: the Dominion, the Spiritual world,

387 Ibid. 251.

388 “(...) Negative theology remains a discursive process of the intellect, while mystical theology is situated beyond discourse. (...) Negative theology cannot but refer to a positive theology which it limits and corrects in its formulations. Mystical theology, on the contrary, does not refer to either of these processes, which it nonetheless supposes. It is pure immaterial experience where senses and intellect are radically excluded” (Gunther Heil, in L'Aréopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste*, xxx–xxxi).

389 Jean-Yves Leloup, *Un obscur et lumineux silence, La Théologie mystique de Denys l'Aréopagite*, (Albin Michel, Paris, 2013), 76–85. The writings of Dionysus the Areopagite first corresponded to a Neoplatonic type, however, with his *Mystical Theology*, Leloup writes, he breaks away from duality, towards a “He/not He” representation of the divine, and beyond (towards *henosis*, a Greek word that is very similar to the idea of *wiṣāl* in Arabic and Ibn 'Arabī's writings). See also L'Aréopagite, *La hiérarchie céleste* xxv–xxxi.

390 Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 78. 5,116.

and the world of Power,”³⁹¹ locus of the manifestation of Names, assembler of all realities (including the angelic one), born of Heaven and Earth.³⁹²

More than being a simple metaphor, however, these quotes could point to an objective reality, an Islamic “multiverse,” considering the overlap and situation of these three worlds and their creatures, as seen in the section on cosmological function in Chapter 2: The *Malakūt* is contained within the *Jabarūt*, which is itself contained within the *Mulk*, or physical world. We have seen that it unfolds into nine spheres, equating the nine points of contact between the human and the divine, a contact which Ibn ʿArabī calls “the angel.” Here one might also consider the particular place of Imagination in Ibn ʿArabī’s cosmology, where it potentially makes metaphors and images (*ṣuwar*)—and so, angels—into phenomena more real than mere literary metaphors: They are both true and not true, the way the universe is both “He and not He,” depending on the context and perspective.

391 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 2. 1,214, and this is echoed by another statement about the physical world being the more complete mirror of the Otherworld (Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 126. 5,300).

392 Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 3. 1,408, Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 208. 6,412. Chodkiewicz mentions another work, *ʿAnqāʾ al-mughrib*, where Ibn ʿArabī explains that “everything of the external world” he is speaking about is for the reader to search its correspondence inside of himself (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 127). Showing his affiliation with Ibn ʿArabī, Murata writes on Qūnawī that “angels correspond to the spiritual faculties of the Perfect Man, who is the prototype of both mankind and universe” (Murata, “Angels,” 333).

Conclusion

The facts of our fallen life demand instead that the message be written in the very substance, in the body, of the messenger—indeed, that the message be the messenger, and he the message. It is essential moreover that the messenger's body be such as to resist our efforts to define or explain it. For the purpose of this instruction is precisely to teach us the inadequacy of all our usual categories—so as to compel renewed attention to the arousing of our drowsed souls. We need, in a word, an angel.¹

Angels and angel-like beings were common to many religious traditions, however, they are now mostly conflated with monotheism. Angels hover between being messengers in the “antique way,” as independent beings from other gods, and divine manifestations or emanations from God in monotheisms. The Quran itself does not give us a clear intra-angelic hierarchy, however, it describes clear functions for angels as characters within the cosmology it presents, exclusive intermediaries of the Unseen between the Heavens and the human world. From then on, Islamic spirituality could “only be envisaged in connection with the angels, who are intertwined with all dimensions of human life as seen by Islam.”²

Through the literary analysis of angels as characters, I listed different Quranic functions, general and specific ones, based on their many roles, both in verses mentioning them clearly and in verses that might allude to them.

Applying Angelika Neuwirth's typology of the “Arabization of biblical concepts” to the case of Quranic angels,³ if we are to momentarily forget that angels might well be equally native to Arabia,⁴ we could say that Sufi angels, by their

1 James S. Cutsinger, “Angels and Inklings” 59.

2 Sachiko Murata, “The Angels” 343.

3 “The Qur’ān’s charging the empirical world with text-referentiality can hardly be overestimated. It induces a biblicization of Arabian episteme. The reverse movement is equally distinctive: It is the Arabization of biblical concepts. What is striking is that both processes operate with a hermeneutical tool that was current in the Late Antique reckonings with heritage texts but which was obviously new in the Arabian context: the hermeneutics of a complex typology. (...) For the sake of simplicity, it will be classified in our context as (1) the simple figure of re-enactment, the repetition of a biblical incident or a biblical experience in the life of the community; (2) the more intriguing figure of promise and fulfilment in which a biblical promise becomes real in the history of the community; and (3) the psychologically-charged figure of mythopoiesis, the discovery of biblical precedents as underlying established communal practice” (Neuwirth, “The Qur’ān’s Enchantment of the World” 133–134).

4 See Appendix 1.

functions, also participate in all three typologies: First, angels are an example of a link, a figure of re-enactment of biblical and non-biblical figures in previous cosmologies, both local and foreign. Second, as a figure of fulfillment, angels help the readers, as much as the seekers on the spiritual path, in reaching an eschatological promise via the spiritual path, which may or may not include the physical dimension. Third, angels participate in a mythopoeic process, part of the construction of Islamic cosmology(ies), with different angels, in different shapes and forms,⁵ coming to enrich the imaginaries of authors, readers, and believers.

Furthermore, this mythopoeic process is reached through the non-Quranic cosmological enrichment function. This additional function, arising from the Quranic cosmological function, appears naturally out of the expanding principle of commentarial works. Taking the case of verse Q 17:1, in Chapter 4, Neuwirth adds that this mythopoeic process arises from a decoupling of the Quranic text from its immediate context, which precedes a “mythologizing exegesis,” the reappropriation of Quranic terms, often undefined terms whose original contextual meaning have been lost over time, and re-wrapped by these commentarial narratives in new images and new meanings.⁶ From this double process, angels are used to illustrate expanding divine signs, characters taken from the Quranic text, further adapted, mixed, and detailed, to be present at all times and all places in the believer’s daily life and imagination.

As for the spiritual and eschatological re-enactment (the second figure listed by Neuwirth), this is illustrated by a particular function of angels in Sufi texts, which I called the symbolic function. This implies different literary devices (metaphors, ellipses) and interpretations (allegorical, symbolic) showing through the different texts seen in this book, albeit in diversely developed forms. As Aaron Hughes writes, the commentary genre tries to make the Quran relevant to a particular space and time,⁷ and Sufi commentaries, in their strictest sense (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) and wider sense (Chapters 4 and 5) use angels to symbolize a spiritual journey based on Quranic messages relevant to the mystically inclined reader and practitioner. This symbolic function can be considered the continuation of the figurative reading in the duality it forms with the literal reading, reflecting the struggle between literal and figurative world views in late antiquity as noted by Neuwirth, as mentioned in the introduction.

5 For an example of pictorial representations of angels, see Anna Caiozzo, “L’ange et le roi dans la culture visuelle de l’Orient médiéval,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels* 403–420.

6 Neuwirth, “From Sacred Mosque to Remote Temple” 398.

7 Hughes, “The Stranger at the Sea.”

The symbolic function could be seen as its literary development, sometimes replacing the literal reading, or, more interestingly, adding to it as its necessary complement.

This symbolic function remains discreet and scattered throughout the Sufi *tafsīr*, showing through some of the sayings attributed to diverse Sufi masters, through the lack of commentary on angelic verses—or the apparition of angels in commentaries on verses that do not concern them—and through the literary devices that might be used by authors when writing about them. Where one could have expected a lengthy description of angels, as part of the Unseen world and associated commonly to all things esoteric, instead the reader finds himself facing elusive presences. These Sufi commentaries often corroborate and validate the invisibility of angels, both in the text and outside of it, encouraging the depersonalization of the means of divine revelation. Angels often become symbols “in negative”, doubly invisible first in the Quran and then in its commentaries, a double invisibility as a link between man and God. This gives us an overall impression of a pervasive angelic presence, visible or less visible, on various metaphorical degrees, an instrument that may be used in a myriad of ways inside and outside the text, by both commentator and reader.

However, the symbolic function appears in a more systematic and sustained manner through the different roles held by angels in the *mi‘rāj* narratives. As guides and challengers along the celestial ascension of the different narrators, they come to symbolize stations and liminal signs on the road towards God. Whether as a discrete presence, or as a metonymy of light and wings, the angel is the last tangible and (in)visible sign before one arrives to the spiritual journey’s end, to the ineffable God.

In the last chapter, the symbolic function seems to be fully deployed through what seems to be one of the few near-systematic angelologies that can be found in Sufi texts of this period. Ibn ‘Arabī’s angelology in the *Futūḥāt* thus lends itself to comparison with other angelologies, both inside and outside the Islamic world, which could be an object for further research. As with many other cosmologies, his is infused with Neo-Platonism, and angels come to fill all the Quranic functions, along with the two additional non-Quranic functions. The symbolic function remains, however, the one that appears to be somewhat original, because of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of *mundus imaginalis*. Where some Neoplatonic, Gnostic, or more generally dualistic worldviews might imply a separation between the physical (imperfect) world and the spiritual-ideal (perfect) world (which can be seen in Suhrawardī), Ibn ‘Arabī includes the physical world, considering it as potentially perfect, as a locus of theophanies, and as included within the wider imaginal world, which itself gives access to the spiritual dimension. Additionally, both imaginal and spiritual worlds could be

understood at the same time as being external and internal to man, by his characteristic of being a microcosm and being “more complete” than angels. Angels thus gain multiple realities: They are the discrete beings presented in the Quran as part of the global salvation history and put the universe in motion on the macro and micro levels; but they are also internal realities and symbols of spiritual advancement, of philosophical concepts, of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*), of divine Names, and of the letters of the alphabet and their factual power. They are both exoterically and esoterically present, outside and inside the text, to humankind. The ultimate conflation of this multiple presence is when Ibn ‘Arabī maintains the ambiguity around the identity of the governing angels, by means of metaphor: The human spirit is and is not an angel, producing angels by its breath, words, and deeds.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s work also illustrates the continuation of divine communication with humankind, even after the closing of Revelation by scripture⁸—general revelation, he writes, does not end, and angels are here to maintain it. Angels as symbols also come to illustrate other key concepts of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology, such as his theodicy and God’s infinite compassion. By incarnating contrarian Names, angels enter disputes impacting physical reality, but in the end, even the terrible guardians of Hell will be turned into angels of compassion.

Like angels in the *mi’rāj* narratives, Ibn ‘Arabī’s angels in the *Futūḥāt* also stand for virtues to be acquired, as signposts pointing the way. The human spirit starts low and elevates itself, realizing its potentiality upward until it is above that of angels and their “known ranks,” reaching the state of Perfect Man. The answer to the relationship between man and angel is the goal, and not the rank, as seen with the *mi’rāj* narratives: Man symbolizes mobility and angels fixity, although this fixity is itself subject to ambiguity. Angels are indeed prone to changing shapes and forms, human and non-human, visible or not to the eye and to the text, where they can be talked about as a plural or singular, feminine or masculine.

Further research on a more systematic comparison of all these different Sufi texts with non-Sufi Sunni works and with other works (whether qualified as philosophical, Shia, or other—keeping in mind that these categories may intersect on many levels) would be helpful in determining whether this multi-layered symbolic function is specifically Sufi or, if common to others, whether they use this function. Further research on later periods could yield interesting results as well, from sources from after the so-called closing of the *ijtihād* doors.

8 This idea seems to be shared with Jewish mysticism (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité* 141–142.)

For now, although Burge estimates that Sufi angelologies are not so different from non-Sufi ones,⁹ my argument is that the symbolic function of angels seems quite characteristic of Sufi works and has the feature of multiplicity, of a layering of realities: at all times, as these works hold angels at different levels of realities, textual, real, metaphorical (metonymy, allegory, or other), and imaginal.

While some see a coherence in Sufi angelology that is not present in general Islamic exegesis,¹⁰ these texts also presented a diversity of angelologies, as Burge posited in the introduction. However, I argue that this diversity finds a relative coherence held through the symbolic function. Through the co-existence of several layers of reality (from the real to the symbolic, by metaphor or the textually non-existent) that each of these authors maintained in their own way, the coexistence of contrarian perspectives becomes possible.

Angels in these Sufi texts seem not to be as defined and systematized as they are in comparable Christian mystical literature, and this serves a theological purpose: Angels can be regarded as symbols of the power and unknowability of God, escaping attempts at fixed hierarchies and categories. As we have seen in this study, mentions of archangels or other specific categories of angels that could highlight a set hierarchy is almost non-existent, a “silence” that seems to serve the theological purpose of equality before God.¹¹ Even the one text that is closest to a systematic hierarchy (Ibn ‘Arabī’s works) remains purposefully paradoxical, and has to be reconstructed from scattered pieces of information. His (non)metaphorical angels with overlapping definitions (angels equal to human spirits or not), in parallel to the conception of the universe as “He/not He,” comes across as purposefully maintaining ambiguity and tension.

Many traditions contain tension between two different goals represented by angels. Where some texts present “becoming an angel” as an end-goal,¹² other

9 Burge, *Angels in Islam* 8. Although he writes later that Ibn ‘Arabī’s angelology is heterodox when compared to *ḥadīth*-based angelologies, I have found that the symbolic function is what distinguishes it most, however, his general and wide use of *ḥadīth* makes it hard to pinpoint heterodoxy in the details.

10 Lory, *La dignité de l’homme* 201.

11 For instance, even though Burge uses ‘archangel’ in his works (*raʾīs al-malāʾika*) for Gabriel and Michael, and it would seem to be the translation into Arabic of the Greek word in Christian texts (Burge, *Angels in Islam* 39, f. 65), we have not found this category in the primary sources of this study, even in the developed angelology of Ibn ‘Arabī. As general categories, only cherubim, Muḥayyāmūn and Muqarrabūn seem to denote particular angelic categories, and variably so. As previously noted, we could see here a sign of an equalitarian will which also translates, at least in Sunni Islam, as the lack of established clergy.

12 In the Islamic tradition, the Brethren of Purity are an example (de Callatāy, “The Ikhwān

texts present reaching an angelic state as a temporary goal, a step towards God, to then overtake this step—reaching angelhood or an angelic level in order to become something more afterwards.¹³ Sufi literature represented here, by the use of the symbolic function, seems to illustrate this second option more often.

As a conclusion to this literary study, I wish to refer again to Lawson's analysis of the Quran as an epic. He ventures to translate "*walī*" as "hero" instead of the usual "saint,"¹⁴ or "Friend of God" as I have used here. This provides an interesting perspective on the Sufi texts studied: the *walī* (and aspiring *walī* reader) as a hero on his mystical quest for God, following the steps of the original Quranic epic—a quest where angels are among the main supporting cast to all protagonists, helpers or challengers to believers and non-believers alike, filling numerous roles and functions in the text. Outside the text, for the aspiring hero-*walī*, they continue to fulfill their main function given to them by Sufi authors, the symbolic function of pointing the way to God on multiple levels of both readings and realities outside the text.

al-Ṣafā' on Angels"), and this is also the general conclusion of Louis Gardet on the place of angels in Islam (Louis Gardet, "Les anges en islam" 226–227). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Henoah becoming an angel is another such example (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 262–263).

13 Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 265.

14 Lawson, "The Qur'an and Epic" 81–82.

Angels in Arabia: In and around the Quran

1 Tracing the Origins of Angels

In Islamic cosmology, the first reference to angels that comes to mind is, of course, the Quranic text, although it barely mentions their creation in Q 37:150. For a reader trying to collect details on the origins of angels, this might be puzzling. The Quran specifies elsewhere the nature of man and *jinn*, in Q 15:26–27, along with the idea that they were created by God, but does not do so for angels. What are they made of? Common Islamic traditions from a later stage provide us with answers, such as a well-known Sunni *ḥadīth*¹ on the matter that tells us that angels are made from *nūr*, one of the words in Arabic designating “light,” which has positive connotations in the Islamic imaginary as it is associated with God, and later with the Prophet.²

The Qur’an presents itself “in clear Arabic tongue,” relating known facts and stories of its epoch circulating in other languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Old/Middle Persian, Greek, etc). However, these messages are from the start of a restructuration, and not only renovation, of older cosmologies. The Quran was reusing these myths for its own purposes, initiating an Islamic mythopoeic process, in a specific language of Arabia.³

1 See *Saḥīḥ muslim*, *ḥadīth* no. 2996.

2 We can briefly mention two examples here: In the Quran, *nūr ‘alā nūr* (24:35) is part of a metaphor describing God, and works from Ibn ‘Arabi center around the concept of *nūr Muḥammad*.

3 Robin explains that the common Arabic tongue, used for pre-Islamic poetry, was probably based on the Najdi dialect, confirmed by archeological findings (Robin, “L’Arabie préislamique” 77; *ibid.*, “Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (Arabie Séoudite méridionale): nouveaux jalons pour l’histoire de l’écriture, de la langue et du calendrier arabes,” in *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 158e année, no. 3 (2014), 1051.) Ahmad al-Jallad also has interesting works on this subject, based on inscriptions in different alphabets. He explains that the “clear Arabic tongue” of the Quran means the vernacular, as compared to ritualistic languages used at that time for religious purposes (Ahmad al-Jallad, Ronny Vollandt, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment: Middle Arabic and the Legacy of Old Ḥigāzī*, w. a Contribution by R. Vollandt (Oriental Institute, 2020), 73–77). He explains in this book how the Arabian Peninsula was home to a great variety of dialects, and Chapter 4 deals with the transition from this state to the state of diglossia with Classical Arabic; See also Ahmad al-Jallad, “The Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia: Context for the Qur’an” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Haleem, Muhammad Abdel and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), online.

As for the linguistic origins of angels in the Arabic language, various studies give us some elements.⁴ Christian Julien Robin recently showed that the word *malak* could be endogenous to the Arabian Peninsula, as examples of the root L-ʾ-K have been found in the Sabaʿic and Maʿīnic languages of Arabia (Sabaʿic being close to what he calls “Old Arabic”); thus *malak* could be considered to have been an Arabic word in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times, and not a borrowed one.⁵

Additionally, it seems that the word *malak* is found in different forms in pre-Islamic poetry both in the sense of “message”⁶ and in the sense of “heavenly being,”⁷ according to the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic. As it is

4 In a linguistic and exegetical discussion of the surah 35:1 of the Quran, which is the only verse providing details about the aspects of angels (as having wings), Stephen R. Burge reviews the disputed origins of the Arabic word for “angel” (*malak*, pl. *malāʾika*) in both recent scholarship and classical Arabic lexicography (Stephen R. Burge, “The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malāʾika: Exegeses of Q. 35:1,” *Journal of Qurʾanic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2008):50–70). Classical Arabic lexicography is interested mainly in the root of the word, regarded as being ʾ-L-k, L-ʾ-k, and sometimes m-l-k. This word could be linked to any previous Semitic languages surrounding Arabia, such as Canaanite, Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew or Ethiopic, though there is a slight preference for Ethiopic, on account that the plural *malāʾika* is close to the Ethiopic plural *malāʾekt*.

5 Christian Julien Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels d'apparence humaine dans l'Arabie antique,” in *The Intermediate World of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019), 121–122. On “Old Arabic” and the linguistic state of Arabia at that time, see Ahmad Al-Jallad, “What Is Ancient North Arabian?,” in *Re-Engaging Comparative Semitic and Arabic Studies*, ed. Daniel Birnstiel and Naʾama Pat-El, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018.)

Contrary to other scholars who consider that *jinn* are more endogenic to Arabia than angels, Robin even affirms elsewhere that the category of *jinn* is not attested before Islam, and that it could be borrowed from Syria. See Christian Julien Robin, “L'Arabie préislamique,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 93.

6 Here is a verse attributed to Abū Jandab al-Hudhaliyy al-Mashʿūm, (estimated date: 86 before Hijra, or 538 CE):

(وَقَالَ يَتَوَعَّدُ مِنْ نَهَبٍ مَالَهُ وَقَتْلَ امْرَأَتِهِ): مَنْ مَبْلَغُ مَلَائِكِي حُبْشِيًّا أَخَا بَنِي زُلَيْفَةَ الصُّبْحِيًّا؟

THE DOHA HISTORICAL DICTIONARY OF ARABIC, dohadictionary.org

7 Here are two verses attributed to ʿAntara, (estimated date: 22 years before Hijra, or 600 CE):

سَاطِلِي يَا عُيْلَ عَنِّي خَيْرًا وَتُجَاعًا قَدْ شَبَّيْتَهُ الْحُرُوبُ
فَسَيُنْبِيكَ أَنَّ فِي حَدِّ سَيْفِي مَلَكَ الْمَوْتِ حَاضِرٌ لَا يَغِيبُ

and another verse attributed to the same author, with an unusual plural that we will find later in other writings:

وَلَقَدْ حَمَلْتُ عَلَى الْأَعَاجِمِ حَمَلَةً صَجَّتْ لَهَا الْأَمْلَاحُ فِي الْأَفْلاكِ

Ibid.

based on pre-Islamic poetry, this argument might be considered questionable by some, yet it cannot be completely disregarded.⁸

In all these languages, the root of the word *malak* has the meaning “to send a message or a messenger,” which fits the common idea, in monotheistic creeds, of angels as being God’s messengers. However, in Arabic, Burge shows that the word “*malak*” is used as if it had lost this primary meaning, since elsewhere the Quran speaks of humans and angels sent as messengers, with another word (*rusul*) in Q 22:75, and he concludes then that *malak*, as early as in the Quranic text, has come to mean, first and foremost, a celestial being that belongs to the spiritual realm, more than the function of messenger originally implied by the name.⁹ This is seconded by Robin, who sees in the Quranic *malak* (as a divine being) the real borrowed term—if there is one—from surrounding languages associated with monotheisms (Aramaic, Judeo-Aramaic), where the word had a profane but endogenous use before it (as “messenger”) alongside “*rasūl*” (also present in Saba’ic).¹⁰

8 These pre-Islamic sources were recorded mainly in written form, after the codification of the Quranic text (which suggests a possible editorial process done on this poetry), but it is traditionally held that pre-Islamic poetry helped and still helps readers of the Quran to understand some of its lexicon and its historical and cultural contexts, rendered obscure by the passage of time and evolution of the language. Although pre-Islamic poetry has been decryd by scholars of the hyper-critical school first, before these critics were in turn challenged (a discussion that will continue with future findings in archeology and palaeography in the Arabian peninsula), some doubts remain. Quranic studies specialists sometimes still tend to dismiss pre-islamic poetry as a useful entry to understanding the Quranic text, see for example such a critical overview and argumentation in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qurʾān and its Biblical Subtext* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 30–33.

However we can mention that Patricia Crone herself recognizes that Islamic tradition, although textually built over a long period of time after the Quran, is sometimes needed even in historical Quranic studies, “because it preserves early information and because it embodies a millennium and a half of scholarship by men of great learning and high intelligence on whose shoulders it is good to stand. Indeed, we cannot completely get off their shoulders even if we try, since we normally rely on their dictionaries for the lexical meaning of the words in the book.” Patricia Crone, “The Religion of the Qurʾānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities,” *Arabica* 57, no. 2 (2010): 152.

9 He shows that the Quran makes a distinction between the angel as a being and the role of messenger, and thus implies that angels could have another function than being messengers. Burge notes there that the distinction between angel (*malak*) and messenger (*rasūl*) is the same then that the distinction done in latin between angels (*angelus*) and messenger (*nuntius*), where the original meaning of the root is disregarded, or forgotten, when using the word. This is contrary to the other semitic languages where there is no such clear distinction, such as the word for angel in Hebrew which also means messenger, whether human or non-human. Burge, “The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malāʾika.” For an etymological discussion of this similar shift in Judaism and Christianity, visible in the New Testament, see David Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité des anges* (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 42–57.

10 Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels,” 124.

If this distinction between the word *malak* and *rasūl* was the position of the Quranic text, it might not have been the case for a part of its audience, at least not its polytheists detractors, according to a study by Patricia Crone.¹¹ Indeed she explains that polytheists were expecting Muḥammad to be accompanied by an angel, or to be replaced by an angel, in order for them to believe him as a messenger, because they would have understood the word *rasūl* (messenger) in a religious context as designating an angel (like the Latin *angelus*), a word which Muḥammad uses in this way at times as well. However, calling himself a *rasūl* “is what will have sounded absurd to the polytheists: he was calling himself an angel, and when they objected, he would explain that he was just a human angel!”¹²

The pre-Islamic genealogy of Quranic angels as cosmological beings in local and surrounding cultures and religions is also becoming clearer, thanks to the now thriving Quranic and Islamology fields of study, as well as from studies in comparative religion and comparative mythology.¹³ Angels are entangled in different theories and complex cultural relationships. Most importantly, influences from Judaism and Christianity come to mind, as angels are a fundamental part of their cosmologies.¹⁴ Furthermore, such studies have been recently published on angels in Islam.¹⁵ Whatever their perspective on the

11 Patricia Crone, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God: The View of the Qur’ānic Pagans,” in *The Qur’ānic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, vol. 1, ed. Hanna Sirurua (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 102–124.

12 Ibid. 110. This theory could provide an insight into a shift of the uses of the Arabic language. If polytheists understood *rasūl* as angel, this means that the Quran had caused a major shift in the use of the word, by assigning *rasūl* to a function only, and *malak* to the celestial beings, whereas they had been, according to Crone’s analysis, conflated as one concept before the Quranic revelation.

13 For a critical recent review of modern scholarship on angels in Islam, see Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 9–15; and even more recently Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (eds.), *The Intermediate World of Angels*, (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019), 11–45.

14 For an overview of the Judaic and Christian presences in pre-Islamic Arabia, which seem to have included a particular trend of Christianity regarding Jesus as an angel, or as part of a triad with Michael and Gabriel, see Jan M.F. Van Reeth, “Les courants ‘Judéo-chrétiens’ et chrétiens orientaux de l’antiquité tardive,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 1 (Paris: Cerf, 2019).

15 Aside from the studies mentioned so far, see, more particularly, the contributions of Nada Hélou on the formation of the representation of angels in antique Christianity, building on Greco-Latin mythological elements; Christian Robin and Aziz Al-Azmeh on the wide diversity of angel-like beings in the Arabian peninsula on the eve of Islam, with roles similar to that of angels as listed in this chapter; and Burge on the peculiar case of meteorological angels that sometimes echo ancient thunder gods of the Middle-East, these contributions forming the first part of *The Intermediate World of Angels* 49–153.

Quran,¹⁶ these studies bring us interesting insights into the cultural, historical and anthropological context of the Quranic revelation. Of particular interest here is the question around the arrival of angels in the Arabian imaginary. Were they already present before the Quranic revelation, or did they come with the Quranic text, as a possible belated influence from Judaic and Christian traditions into the text? This is important when studying their relation to another type of otherworldly beings, the *jinn*, whose “Arabianness” is usually more clearly admitted.

Although some scholars tend to consider angels to be an influence of the Judaic and Christian traditions on the later stages of the Quranic revelation,¹⁷ Amira El Zein¹⁸ supports Chelhod’s view¹⁹ on a more generalized pre-Islamic presence of angels in Arabia with four points: First, Arabs could have used the word “*jinn*” to designate angels, as the root “J-N-N” refers to anything that is hidden, belonging to the world invisible to the human gaze, the Unseen (*ghayb*).²⁰ Second, pre-Islamic Arab society was composed of different creedal

16 In the field of Quranic studies, and more generally, studies interested in early Islamic history, there has been—and still is—a wide array of views around the Quranic text and early Islamic literature: from a near-full refutation of the historical constitution of the Quranic text, as presented by the Islamic sources (sometimes considering the Quranic text to be derived from late-antique Christian sources), to a near-total acceptance of the narrative(s) presented by these Islamic sources (for a critical overview of the use of sources regarding early Islam, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels* 135–136; and more particularly, how the debates in modern scholarship of Quranic studies showed and evolved through the studies of angels in Islam, see Burge, *Angels in Islam* 9–10).

17 Such as Toufic Fahd, Jacqueline Chabbi, and Esma Hind Tengour.

18 Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (New York, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

19 Joseph Chelhod, *Les structures du sacré chez les Arabes* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1965). However, this study has an outdated evolutionary model for religion in the Arabian Peninsula. For a better, updated study of pre-Islamic beliefs see Christopher M. Moreman, “Rehabilitating the Spirituality of Pre-Islamic Arabia: On the Importance of the Kahin, the Jinn, and the Tribal Ancestral Cult,” *Journal of Religious History* 41, no. 2 (2017): 137–157.

20 Several translations, depending on the context, are possible for this concept: divine mystery, the invisible world pertaining to magic, the Unknowable, and in Sufism, “*al-ghayb*” means, according to context, the reality of the world beyond the senses and beyond discursive reason which gnosis (*ma’rifat*) experiences, the hierarchy of the invisible worlds, the beings of these worlds, and even the world of the Divine Essence” (MacDonald, Gardet, “*al-Ghayb*,” *ET*²). For clarity, however, I chose to translate this term as “Unseen” or “the world of the Unseen,” which could reflect the common denominator of almost all the uses of this concept (related to what cannot be seen, either by the five senses, or more metaphorically, by intellectual means—the “unseen” beyond the limits of human understanding),

groups, pagans, Zoroastrians, local Christians, and Jews, and these three later groups at least would have been familiar with the concept of angels. Third, the Quran refers to angels in a way that suggests that the concept was known in pre-Islamic Arabia. Fourth, pre-Islamic Arabs seemed to have referred specifically to fallen angels.²¹ We will develop these four points that she has briefly presented—combining the second and third points, as they are related (the second point explaining the third one).²²

1.1 *Angels as jinn*

The first point is supported by Moreman in a review of the pre-Islamic spiritual Arabian landscape:²³ The distinction between angels and *jinn* was never clear in the beginning, and one could conclude that the Abrahamic traditions tended to name spirits from the otherworld “angels” while other local traditions named them “*jinn*.” Interestingly, in both cases these spirits were seen mainly as messengers. The view of angels as *jinn* is also supported by the position of Chabbi, who sees that the Quran’s failure to fully separate the two categories of beings, and failing to contrast the nature of angels with that of the *jinn* (fire), was due to the powerful presence of *jinn* in the Arabian imaginary, who had a similar role to that of angels.²⁴ There is also the possible linguistic explanation in that the word “*jinn*” could also be used for angels (as seen in Chapter 3). Other local belief systems included similar celestial intermediary figures that could be conflated with angels, such as the *shams*, female-like winged figures in messenger and protecting roles in antique Yemen, and the “daughters of ʾĪl,” part of cults in the Arabian South, Negev and Palmyre.²⁵ This conflating process echoes an

although “Otherworld” could also be used, in the sense of something “other” that cannot be seen or known. Incidentally, al-Azmeh has also remarked that this notion had not been studied enough in scholarly literature, Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 369.

21 El Zein, *Islam, Arabs* 35.

22 This is keeping in mind that findings regarding pre-Islamic Arabic remain more or less conjectural. For an updated overview of pre-Islamic Arabia based on recent archeological, epigraphical and historical sources, see Christian Julien Robin, “L’Arabie préislamique” 53–154.

23 Moreman, “Rehabilitating the Spirituality,” 137–157; see also Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 210–211.

24 Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus* (Paris: CNRS, 2013), 215.

25 This might remind the reader of the “daughters of Allāh” of the latter Islamic traditions, developed from surah 17, and the accusations of angelic cults. For recent epigraphic and archeological evidence of these, see Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels.” Al-Azmeh notes that the multiplicity of these intermediaries and unclear naming made for an unclear theology and an entanglement of angels with other similar beings (Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels” 143–144).

earlier one in antique Christianity, with the Latin *genii* and angels,²⁶ Greek *daimōn* compared to Jewish angels,²⁷ or Neoplatonic gods becoming angels in the angelology of pseudo-Denys the Areopagite.²⁸

1.2 *Angels as Part of the Multiplicity of Beliefs in Pre-Islamic Arabia, and as References in the Quranic Interaction with Its Audience*

We may find an example of el-Zein's second and third points in a Quranic verse that is part of one of the Quranic renderings of biblical stories: the story of Moses coming to face the Pharaoh. In this excerpt, the Pharaoh challenges Moses publicly, denying his divine mission because he was not endowed with divine favors as those were understood by Egyptians. The Pharaoh ends his challenge with this question: "Why, then, have armlets of gold not been cast upon him, and why do angels not accompany him?" (Q 43:53). However, the beliefs and religion of Ancient Egypt did not include any angels or figures that would come close to the understanding of an angel as seen in monotheisms, although some beings in other antique belief systems had a role close to that of the guardian angels. This could then only be seen as a Quranic adaptation of a story relating to another world and culture than that of seventh century Arabia, presented in such a way as to be understood by its listeners.²⁹ Indeed, if the Quranic text saw fit to use the concept of angel, it must have been because such creatures were known to a significant portion of the public, if only the Christians and Jews among them. Angels were considered to be characters more relevant than the supernatural beings of the ancient Egyptian pantheon in the same textual role.³⁰

26 Nada Hélou, "Les origines hellénistiques de la représentation des anges dans le christianisme ancien," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 49–67. See also Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 125–136.

27 This is how Philo of Alexandria would explain that what philosophers called "demons," Moses called "angels," see Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 146–154.

28 Jean-Yves Lacoste, "Anges," in *Dictionnaire de Théologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1998), 43.

29 Angels here are part of the "Arabization of biblical stories" (Neuwirth, "The Qur'an's Enchantment of the World" 133–134).

30 Some scholars go so far as to affirm that the existence of God was more problematic than the existence of angels to listeners of the Quranic message, and that the lack of mention of the creation of angels is explained by the similarly elliptic style of the Quran applied to biblical stories. These were already known by the public, so there was no need to repeat them (Abdel-Hakim Ourghi, "Auch die Engel sprachen mit Gott im Koran Die *parrhesia* der Engel," *Der Islam* 85, no. 2 (May 2011), 361–397.) See also Jaadane, "La place des anges" 30–31, who adds that the Quran is not so much interested in the nature of angels as in their functions (ibid. 43).

The Quran, by being the oldest extended text written in Arabic, can nonetheless give us clues about the belief systems of pre-Islamic Arabians.³¹ From the text itself, and its references—some more clearer than others—to the world it appeared in, one can perceive some features of this bygone world, which seem to have already included angels.

Aside from the Moses narrative, the Quranic text indeed suggests elsewhere the presence of angels as a known concept in pre-Islamic times, as demonstrated by Ḥusayn al-Ḥājj Ḥasan's quotes and explanation of the verses regarding what he calls the worshipping of angels.³² These verses are also studied by Crone, in her article on the Quranic pagans, where she shows that among Christians and Jews angels already had a prominent place, and were possibly the objects of a cult, which would show that some pagans could have passed off their deities as angels in Christianity, in the growing monotheist movements of antiquity and late antiquity. She also analyses how this angel cult concerned non-monotheistic pagans, whose cult in particular, according to the Quranic text itself, would be that they made their angels-gods female.³³

1.3 *Pagans and Fallen Angels*

Illustrating A. El Zein's fourth point about pagan Arabs referring to fallen angels, we think of the Quranic *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* and how George Dumézil saw in them a trace of a Zoroastrian myth. Similarly, Daniel Beck argues in more detail for the presence of angels in Arabia before the Quranic revelation, in his study of the earliest Quranic surahs.³⁴ According to him, not only were angels present from the very start of it, but their role in early Quranic theology was predominant, with representations heavily marked by, if not directly borrowed from, Mesopotamian and Iranian myths. Their presence was then suppressed—or at least rendered obscure by the elliptic style of the Quranic narrative—because these parts of the Quranic text would have been seen as being too close to a polytheistic representation of the divine world when com-

31 "What does nevertheless seem to have filtered through and spread around, and found its way into the Quran eventually, is less a coherent doctrine than a number of doxological and mythological motifs, theologoumena and mythemes, deriving from ambient religions." Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 270.

32 Ḥasan Ḥusayn Al-Ḥājj, *Al uṣṭūra 'inda al 'arab fī al jāhiliyya* (Beirut: al-Mu'assassa al-jāmi'iyya li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī', 1988), 123–124.

33 Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'anic Pagans" 151–200. See also Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 137–139 268–295.

34 Daniel A. Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur'an: From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017). His work could also be classified in the "pan-babylonian" trend noted by Aziz al-Azmeh (al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 276–278).

pared to the later surahs and later Quranic theology.³⁵ Nonetheless, and perhaps more than indicating a conscious suppression by the later surahs, these traces of previous myths illustrate perfectly how “conceptual and cultic structures of polytheistic syncretism were deployed to generate an idea of exclusive divinity and of an exclusive cult,” as noted by Al-Azmeh on the emergence of Islam.³⁶ During this process, these indeterminacies around angels can let us see them as subject and reflection of this “theological diplomacy”³⁷ leading to full monotheism.

2 Some Considerations

These philological, historical, and cultural anthropological studies bring us interesting context and insights to the Quranic text, helping us to keep in mind the apparition of the Quran in a late antique Arabian milieu,³⁸ which is not the case for the texts analyzed in this book, texts which belong to more medieval and urban contexts. The Quranic text as a late-antique text of the Middle East reflects monotheist ideas in interaction with each other and with other belief systems (often associated with the most powerful political systems of the time), among which the idea of a “*deus otiosus*” was also widespread, a High God so far removed from humanity and his intercessors (such as lesser gods or angels) that he did not have a specific cult.³⁹ This allowed angels to be seen as interces-

35 Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qurʾān* 19–30. In this section of his study, entitled “Suppression of the Cosmic Angelology of Archaic Surahs”, Beck argues for example, that Q 74:30 (“Over it are nineteen”), which is usually interpreted as the numbers of angels guarding Hell, is in fact a widely-known reference in the antique world to the sum of the twelve zodiacal constellations and the seven planets, which had a important role in diverse cosmologies, such as in Mazdakite theology. He also gives as an example the case of the *zabānīya* in Q 96:18, also traditionally interpreted as the guardians of Hell, as an influence from Manicheism, where such figures would be the guardians of the heavens, repelling (which is the sense to the root Z-B-N according to Rudy Paret) disobedient beings into this world, letting only the obedient ones remain on the path to the heavens.

36 This process is also visible for the two previous monotheisms, Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 48.

37 The most famous trace of which is the ‘diplomatic incident’ of so-called Satanic Verses. See Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 323–326.

38 Angelika Neuwirth, “The Qurʾān Enchantment of the World,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. A. Rippin, M. Daneshgar, W.A. Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 125–144.

39 According to Al-Azmeh, Allāh was seen in pre-Islamic times as such, a “vague presence” turned into a clear and sole deity by the Quranic text. On this subject, and for a detailed review of the landscape of religious beliefs in late antiquity and pre-Islamic Arabia,

sors, or avatars of the higher deity, as well as possibly his sons and daughters.⁴⁰ It is precisely this attribution of an intercessor role to angels or other beings for which the Quranic text reproaches the “associationists” (*mushrikūn*).⁴¹ This historical aspect presupposes interesting continuities and differences in the matter of representing angels in later Islamic texts.

This historical consideration aside, we apply here a literary analysis which regards the Quran as a text in and of itself, with its own narratives and characters,⁴² which are compared as such with the texts analyzed in the books. We are more interested in how the Quranic text creates a new narrative, starting a mythopoeic process out of previous religious and mythological literatures and concepts, than in tracing exactly each narrative and concept to possible and often disputed pre-Islamic source(s).⁴³ Indeed, this historic and philological research of the origin and words found in the Quranic text and how it re-uses

where frontiers between monotheism, monolatry, henotheism, polytheisms and diverse types of paganism were porous, see chapters 2, 4 and 5 of Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*.

The concept of *deus otiosus* is usually opposed to the concept of *deus actuosus*, which corresponds to the idea of a governing god who manages his creation. For Giorgio Agamben, this duality is the gnostic question par excellence, and “angelology is the most antique, articulated and detailed consideration on this particular form of power or divine action that we could define as ‘the governing of the world.’” See Giorgio Agamben, “Introduzione,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*.

- 40 Johann Ev Hafner challenges the commonly accepted idea that angels exist to compensate a High God that has become too transcendent, by arguing that, on the contrary, the multiplication of angels is what has pushed back the High God farther away from humanity, rendering Him “jobless.” See Johann Ev. Hafner, “Where Angels Dwell, Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 229–250.

The mention of daughters of God can be found in many instances in pre-Islamic inscriptions, but they are so far not conflated with angels, according to Crone; angels who were however also appealed to as intercessors. For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between angels and “daughters of God”, see Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’anic Pagans,” 182–185; Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels.”

- 41 For a detailed discussion of this see Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’anic Pagans,” 177–188.
- 42 Angelika Neuwirth considers that literary analysis of the Quran “waits to be explored” (Neuwirth, “The Qur’ān Enchantment of the World” 129). Interestingly, John E. Wansbrough estimates that literary analysis is better suited to study Islamic sources than any historical approach. See John E. Wansbrough, “Res Ipsa Loquitur: History and Mimesis” in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origin*, ed. H. Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3–19.
- 43 This work has been and continues to be massively undertaken by many researchers in the Quranic studies’ and theology fields. Regarding angels in particular, see the different works by Burge, and the contributions in the first part of *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*.

them is something that might elicit strong reactions from some of its believers. To us, however, it shows that, if anything, the Quran was very successful in redefining a worldview—through its mythopoeic process—of which angelic figures are an underrated part.

3 Angels in the Quranic Narrative

3.1 *Chronology and Classification of Verses*

When reviewing the different apparitions of angels in the Quranic text, it is important to first note and make a difference between the verses containing a clear mention of angels (such as singular *malak*, plural *malā'ika*) and the verses that do not contain a clear mention of them. This distinction is important, and is sometimes ignored by some scholars (committing then some form of eisegesis).⁴⁴ Paying attention to what the Quranic text presents first will help us evaluate more precisely what and how the later literature will build the figure of angels, as this literature comments upon the Quranic text, both on its clear statements and its potential angelic allusions. Indeed these 'unclear' verses leave room for interpretation, and most subsequent commentaries and traditions will later see in them angels, although the word itself is not mentioned. In some cases, these traditional interpretations depend on comparisons with similar stories in other religious traditions, such as the story of the guests of Abraham.⁴⁵ In other cases, angelic presence is less clear. We then classified the relevant Quranic verses as "angel verses" that mention angels clearly, and "alluding verses" that could be understood as being about angels, at least if one reads the text with them in mind.

44 In a much shorter list of angelic roles in the Quran, al-Azmeh does not distinguish between both type of verses, for example, assuming that the invisible host in (9:26) are angels (al-Azmeh, "Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings," 148–150). There are other similar examples: Fehmi Jaadane considers Surah 79 as being about angels, when the word or concept itself is nowhere mentioned, see Jaadane, "La place des anges" 48–51; Ida Zilio-Grandi considers *Mālik* and the *zabāniya* as being angels although the Quranic text does not qualify them as such, see Ida Zilio-Grandi, "Alcune considerazioni sugli angeli nel corano," *Angeli*, ed. M.G. Quraneghi (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2012), 181; Murata also assumes that the words *Mālik* and *Riḍwān* designates angels in the Quran, when this reading is only based on later interpretations, especially in the case of *Riḍwān*, see Murata, "The Angels" 325.

45 This story appears twice in the Quran, and from the parallel with Genesis 18:1–15, we know that these "guests" are supposed to be angels, though they are never described as such in the Quranic text (Busse, Heribert, "Abraham," *ET*³) and, as we have seen, that the Hebrew word for "angel" could have meant human messengers as much as celestial envoys.

There are over 90 verses about angels: Three mention them by name (*jibrīl*, *mīkāḷ*, *hārūt*, *mārūt*); 89 mention them by one of the forms of the word “angel” (singular *malak*, dual *malakayn*, plural *malā’ika/malak*). A certain number of verses suggest angels (for example by using the words *mālik*,⁴⁶ *zabāniya*, *ḥafaẓa*), although this is due mainly to later interpretations, and because some of these interpretations differ, there is no definite number. Our list of these verses is given in Appendix 2.

I will first briefly discuss the chronology of Quranic verses, then enter into the subject matter; first the verses that mention angels, and then the more problematic verses that only suggest them.

When researching the “arrival” of angels in the Quranic text, whether by clear mentions or allusions, first we also have to discuss the chronological order of their verses. The chronology of the Quranic verses is still subject to scholarly debate and research, in addition to having also been a traditional focus of interrogation from Muslim scholars throughout Islam’s history.⁴⁷ In western scholarship, since the pivotal work by Theodor Nöldeke,⁴⁸ other scholars have discussed the ordering of the verses, as well as the related matter of the text’s history and time of redaction and arrangement into what we have now as *muṣḥaf*.⁴⁹

46 Why *Mālik*, traditionally seen as the angel guardian of Hell, is not listed with the “named angels” is explained below.

47 Viviane Comerro, *Les traditions sur la constitution du muṣḥaf de ‘Uthmān* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2012).

48 Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträsser, Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur’ān*, trans. Wolfgang Behn (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

49 From the commonly held views around the codification of the Quran during the time after the Prophet’s death to recent scholarship suggesting its codification within the time of the Prophet’s life, views and theories have differed greatly in the Quranic studies field. On one hand, a somewhat “extreme” view that estimates the codification of the Quranic text not to have happened before the early Abbasid times, see John E. Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretations—with a Foreword, Translations and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippin* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), first published by Oxford University Press in 1977. This view has been challenged since then, and most estimations revolve around a codification sooner after the Prophet’s death (for a recent and still hypercritical view of the matter, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Les vies de Muhammad,” in *Le Coran des historiens* 1, 196–206). On the other hand, there are studies that favor a codification within the Prophet’s lifetime, see for example Raymond K. Farrin, “The Composition and Writing of Qur’ān: Old Explanations and New Evidence,” *Journal of College of Sharia & Islamic studies* 38, no. 1 (2020), 121–135; Behman Sadeghi, “The Chronology of the Qur’ān: A Stylometric Research Program,” *Arabica* 58 (2011), 210–299. On the redaction of the Quran during Muḥammad’s life, al-Azmeh also notes that “even hypersceptical scholars suggest this might be possible” (Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam* 456.) See the whole

If we keep Nöldeke's ordering of the Quranic surahs,⁵⁰ we have noticed that angels are mentioned throughout the different periods (first, second, and third Meccan, and Medinan periods), with no particular formal specificity between angels and a particular period, except for one noticeable fact: The four angels given individual names are in verses from the Medinan period, and more precisely in one surah, *sūrat al-baqarah*. However, this one element does not seem sufficient to validate the often-read claim that angels appear only late in the Quranic revelation,⁵¹ a theory often linked to the idea of a main influence of Judeo-Christian traditions on the late revelation.⁵²

Although this could be researched further, the dating work cannot remove one inherent difficulty concerning angels beyond the verses naming them: One scholar might analyze an allusion to an angel in one verse, while another understands the same verse in a different manner, not unlike Muslim commentators did in their works, as we see in this book. As an example, scholars like Beck argue for the presence of angels or at least messenger figures from the very beginning, under obscure guises, caused by the influence of other pre-Islamic religious imaginaries. Another example is verse Q 9:30,⁵³ where Crone analyses the figure of Ezra (*ʿUzayr*)—otherwise readily identified as a prophet by most readers—as related to an angel veneration, in the context of a known

of Chapter 7 on the constitution and assembling of the Quranic text. For one of the most recent updated bibliographies on Quranic studies in different languages, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Guillaume Dye (ed.), *Le Coran des historiens*, vol. 3, *Bibliographie des études sur le Coran* (Paris: Cerf, 2019).

50 We have used Nöldeke, *The History of the Qurʾān*. For an overview and discussion of different dating systems, by both classical Muslim scholars and modern western scholars, see Peter G. Riddell, "Reading the Qurʾān Chronologically," in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. Majid Daneshgar, Walid A. Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 297–316.

51 This is, for instance, the position of Moreman and Chabbi (Moreman, "Rehabilitating the Spirituality;" Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le Coran décrypté* (Paris: Cerf, 2014), 65–105).

52 The ordering of Régis Blachère give similar results regarding angels, see Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1959). Interestingly, the same debate exists regarding the Jewish Bible, between the claim that angels appear only in some texts, and research suggesting that angels were always more or less present throughout the text (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 130–132). Remarkably, in the Bible angels with personal names also appear only in the later texts (Reed, *Demons, Angels, and Writing* 28).

53 "The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God ...". We have not included this verse in the last part of this chapter, as seeing an angelic figure in Ezra cannot be seen or supposed by a simple reading looking for angelic figures. This is relevant to historical and philological inquiries beyond the scope of this research.

Jewish angel worship at that time.⁵⁴ Thus historical analysis tools can hardly pinpoint exactly when and how angels came to be inserted into the Quranic text, beyond the verses mentioning the words *malak/malā'ika*. It is then safe enough to suppose that they were present from the beginning, in the otherworldly imaginaries that were present in and around Arabia at the time of the nascent religion.

Apart from being near unsolvable, this discussion appears only tangentially relevant to this literary study, which considers angels as characters of the Quranic text as a whole, whatever its suggested date of redaction and arrangement of surahs. What interested me most in this study were angels as characters in the text that is left to us and before us, to the Sufi commentators, how angels are inserted into its narratives, and what this tells us of an aspect of the Quranic text's view of the otherworld. Angels are here in a transitory period, a feature of the birth of a new cosmology out of and alongside other cosmologies in this late antique milieu of seventh century Arabia. This diachrony is important to keep in mind when reading subsequent texts and their angels in this book, texts whose redaction dates are ascertained to be later than that of the Quranic text, produced in the very different-looking world of Islamic empires.

3.2 *Representations, Roles, and Functions of Angels in Angel Verses*

The representation of angels in the Quranic text rarely includes any description of them, except for one verse elaborating on their appearance (Q 35:1), "*angels as messengers, of wings two, three, and four*,"⁵⁵ while other descriptions usually associated with angels are formed indirectly. Indeed, we can imagine angels as men in comparison with other traditions (the Spirit sent to Mary in (19:17) as a "perfect man" is not qualified as an angel, while in (3:45) several angels talk to her, although without being described),⁵⁶ or by metaphor (Joseph likened to an angel in (12:31) is a metaphor in the mouths of Zulaykha's guests), or by deduction (the verses denying the femaleness of angels).⁵⁷ Based on the clear angel verses of the Quranic text however, we do not know much more about angelic appearances beyond their varying numbers of wings.

54 Patricia Crone, "The Book of Watchers in the Qur'ān," in *The Qur'ānic Pagans and Related Matters*, 182–218.

55 For a full study of this verse see Stephen R. Burge, "The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malā'ika."

56 This fits a monotheistic tradition of angels appearing in human form and announcing the birth of important characters (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 112–113).

57 Burge writes that the Quran offers two descriptions of angels, one with wings and others as men (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 57). However, if the wings verse is clear in calling them angels, the other descriptions are related to characters that are only indirectly defined as angels, inferred intra and extra-textually.

Quranic angels are indeed much more frequently represented by their roles, which we can list from their appearance as characters inserted into different narratives throughout the text. These roles and their presence may be either active or passive within the narrative. There are also cases of their hypothetical presence, when they are mentioned by other characters but not present themselves as characters in the narrative, and this hypothetical category is also presented as a role. From these different appearances and roles, we then obtain a better idea of their possible functions in relation to other characters in the text, as well as in relation to the text's audience.⁵⁸

These are the different roles that could be gleaned from verses mentioning angels:⁵⁹

- **Guardians:** guarding humans till their death Q 6:61; guarding Hell Q 66:6, Q 74:31;
- **Messengers:** Gabriel sent to the prophet Q 2:97; calling to Zachariah bearing 'glad tidings' Q 3:39; speaking to Mary Q 3:42, Q 3:45; sent down accompanying "the Spirit" Q 16:2; God choosing messengers among angels and mankind Q 22:75; sent down during 'the Day' Q 25:25; angels appointed as messengers, with two, three or four wings Q 35:1;
- **Support:** supporting the believers in battle Q 3:124–125, supporting the prophet Q 8:9; Q 66:4;
- **Taking or welcoming souls after death:** taking souls and questioning them Q 4:97; stretching "forth their hand" to take the souls of wrongdoers Q 6:93; angels taking "those who disbelieve, striking their faces and their back" Q 8:50, Q 47:27; coming to greet the righteous Q 13:23, Q 21:103; taking souls in state of wrongness or goodness Q 16:28–32; on seeing the angels 'on the Day' Q 25:22; the angel of death taking the souls of those who disbelieve in resurrection Q 32:11;
- **Giving blessings:** Q 33:43, Q 33:56;
- **Cursing disbelievers:** Q 2:161, Q 3:87;
- **Bearers of the ark:** Q 2:248;
- **Bearers of the Throne:** Q 69:17;

58 The Quranic text is notoriously complex with its succession of extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative levels, and heterodiegetic and homodiegetic characters throughout, as well as stories related in different places in a slightly different manner, such as the story of Iblis. This makes the relationship between characters inside the text and its audience outside of it—such as the Prophet and the Arabian audience—very intricate and complex.

59 Many of these roles reflect those found in biblical and para-biblical literature, see Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité* 154–171.

- **Teachers to humans:** the example of Hārūt and Mārūt teaching dangerous knowledge by God's leave Q 2:102;
- **Obedient actors, carrying out God's orders:** obeying God and prostrating to Adam (except Iblīs) Q 2:30–34, Q 7:11, Q 15:28–31, Q 17:61, Q 18:50, Q 20:116, Q 38:71–74; presented as servants of God Q 4:172; God asking angels to strike humans “above the neck” and “their every fingertip” Q 8:12; guarding Hell and obeying God's commands Q 66:6; angels not speaking save by God's command Q 78:38; angels descending with the Spirit by God's leave and with His commands Q 97:4;
- **Questioning God:** questioning God about His placement of Man as vicegerent on the Earth Q 2:30;
- **Praising God:** Q 13:13, Q 39:75, Q 42:5;
- **Seeking forgiveness:** for “those on Earth” Q 42:5, Q 53:26;
- **Bowing down to God:** Q 16:49, this is separated from the category of obedient actors because the verse presents the angels as active subjects of the bowing down, it is not an order from God in this instance.
- **Witnesses, allies of God:** presented alongside God, accompanying Him Q 2:98, Q 2:177, Q 2:210, Q 2:285, Q 4:136, Q 89:22; bearing witness Q 3:18, Q 4:166; angels asked by God about humans worshipping them, angels denying this Q 34:40–41; angels at the sides of Throne Q 69:17; angels ascending to God Q 70:4; angels standing in rows on ‘that Day’ Q 78:38;
- **Hypothetical presence:** denying commanding believers to take angels as lords Q 3:80; God speaking hypothetically about sending an angel, or making the Prophet into an angel Q 6:8–9; the prophet denying presenting himself as an angel Q 6:50, Q 11:31; Satan suggesting to Adam and Eve that they could become angels Q 7:20; Zulaykhā's guests comparing Joseph to an angel Q 12:31; disbelievers asking the prophet to bring angels as proof of his truthfulness Q 11:12, Q 15:7–8, Q 17:92, Q 23:24, Q 25:7, Q 25:21; about the hypothesis of God taking angels as spouses Q 17:40; about sending a messenger angel to an Earth inhabited by angels Q 17:95; about the hypothesis of angels being created female Q 37:150 or being given female names Q 53:27; about disbelieving humans messengers because angels were not sent down in their stead Q 41:14; about angels not accompanying Moses Q 43:53.

One notable aspect here is that the hypothetical role of angels is one of the most represented: The Quran rhetorically doubles the invisibility of angels. Invisible creatures, they become invisible as characters in the text—they are really and narratively of the Unseen.

Keeping in mind that these different roles can be listed under more than one function, we can then classify these different appearances in the different func-

tions of angels and particular cases, functions that are to be found on both the inside and outside levels of the narrative.

We first have three “basic Quranic functions” (detailed in the beginning of Chapter 1):

- A narrative function: secondary characters helping or fighting humanity, and helping God. This function is intra-textual, where angels are involved in the different narratives of the text.
- A theological function: defining aspects of the Islamic credo. Angels help the reader as much as the internal characters of the text to understand some aspects of the new credo.
- A religious praxis function: illustrating the believer’s expected actions. Here, angels similarly help the reader and characters inside the text to adopt what are considered good practices.

We then have three other subcategories; the “general Quranic functions” detailed at the beginning of Chapter 2:

- A cosmological function: angels as part of establishing a new worldview. Most angelic roles can be included in this general function, where they serve to define a new cosmology.
- A classic cosmological function: angels as messengers. This can be considered as both a cosmological role and a function, but its importance deserves a separate section.
- An overlooked cosmological function: angels as testers. This is also a cosmological function but, contrary to the previous one, it usually goes unnoticed, although it appears in thought-provoking narratives.

As for the case of Gabriel and Michael, this is not a function per se, but angels are very rarely named, and it is interesting to compare the sparing use of names in the Quranic verses to the increased use in later Islamic texts, a process that goes together with the ascription of different roles to them.

3.3 *Angels in Alluding Verses*

This is a delicate review of other narratives, found in the verses that do not clearly mention angels by name (*malak*, *malakayn*, *malā’ika*; or *Hārūt*, *Mārūt*, *Jibrīl*, *Mikāl*). However, these narratives involve characters that are widely understood by later commentators to be about angels. Being interpreted as such by subsequent literature, they should technically not belong to this review of the Quranic angels, since the approach is here to review what can be ascertained as angels from the Quranic text alone—especially removed from the

later literature built upon it, such as *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature.⁶⁰ With this problem in mind, we chose to briefly review these narratives here, so as to better understand the later elaborations and interpretations made on them, and the role these narratives had in the evolution of the angelic figures as characters.

This also means that we did not include verses that are considered in post-Quranic traditions as related to events involving angels, if these are not somehow suggested in the Quranic text itself. For example, surah 94 is usually seen as being related to a scene in the prophetic *sīra*, where Muḥammad's chest is opened and his heart is washed by an angel.⁶¹ In the Quranic text alone, there is no reference to any being that could be identified as an angel—there is only the majestic “We” usually referring to God—so these verses cannot be listed as alluding verses.

Among the verses reviewed as “alluding,” we included some that historical or philological approaches may indicate as including angels, if only by comparison with the same narratives in other religious texts, as well as verses describing roles that were previously seen to be held by angels, and so, by comparison, could concern angels here as well.

Thus we find three categories: guardians (detailed in the beginning of Chapter 1), messengers (detailed in the beginning of Chapter 2), and other various roles (detailed in the beginning of Chapter 3).

In these alluding verses, we mainly find some angelic roles: protagonists or antagonists to humans, messengers, guardians, bearers of the throne, praising God, and so forth—and in every case, they implicitly obey God's commands. If we read these verses as involving angelic characters, they seem to suggest a proper name for Hell's (main) guardian, *Mālik*, as well as a name for a category of Hell's guardians, the *zabāniya*. There is also, among these verses, a detail given about guardian angels: They are described in four different places as writing down a person's deeds, namely in Q 43:80, Q 50:17–18, Q 80:15–16, and Q 82:10–12, and as guarding Heavens against *jinn* in Q 37:1–10, Q 41:12, and Q 72:8–9.

3.4 *The Relationship between Angels, jinn, and the Devil*

This is another key aspect of angelic cosmology, and a number of studies have been written on both subjects. There is a troubled relationship between angels and *jinn*, with one theory postulating that the word *jinn* means any creature

60 As seen in the introduction, *ḥadīth* literature on angels has been studied, covered mainly by Stephen Burge, however *tafsīr* literature has been covered much less extensively.

61 See *Ṣaḥīḥ muslim*, *ḥadīth* no. 310–315.

of the Unseen including angels, at least up until the Quranic text and its reassignment of roles and places of the angels and the *jinn* is its cosmology. As for Satan, the common name for the Devil (*al-Shayṭān*, plural *shayāṭīn*, devils), it illustrates a semantic shift from a category of *jinn*, good or bad, inspiring poets and others in pre-Islamic times,⁶² to a fully evil category in the Islamic worldview. This demonizing process had happened precisely to the Greek *daimōn*, turned into our modern evil “demon” in the Christian cosmology⁶³ (more details are given in the beginning of Chapter 3).

62 Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus*, 220.

63 Riley, “Demon,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), online.

Verses in *mushaf* Order

Each verse or group of verses is presented in English translation (from the Study Quran), followed by the text in Arabic. In **black bold font** are the verses mentioning angels by word; in black non-bold font are either verses accompanying the previous ones for clarity, or verses usually interpreted as being about angels (which I called “alluding verses” in the introduction) though angels are not named or described as such.

- 2:30 **And when thy Lord said to the angels, “I am placing a vicegerent upon the Earth”, they said, “Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy?” He said, “Truly I know what you know not.”**
- 2:31 **And He taught Adam the names, all of them. Then He laid them before the angels and said, “Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful.”**
- 2:32 **They said, “Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge save what Thou hast taught us. Truly Thou art the Knower, the Wise.”**
- 2:33 **He said, “Adam, tell them their names.” And when he had told them their names He said, “Did I not say to you that I know the unseen of the Heavens and the Earth, and that I know what you disclose and what you used to conceal?”**
- 2:34 **And when We said to the angels, “Prostrate unto Adam,” they prostrated, save Iblis. He refused and waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers.**

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۖ قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا 2:30

وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۚ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ 2:31
وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ 2:32

قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ ۖ فَلَمَّا أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ 2:33
السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ 2:34

2:97 Whosoever is an enemy of Gabriel: he it is who sent it down upon thy heart by God's Leave, confirming that which was there before, and as a guidance and glad tiding for the believers.

2:98 Whosoever is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael: God is indeed the enemy of the disbelievers.

2:97 قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَىٰ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

2:98 مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

2:102 And they followed what the satans recited against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt. But they would not teach anyone until they had said, "We are only a trial, so do not disbelieve." Then they would learn from them that by which they could cause separation between a man and his wife. But they did not harm anyone with it, save by God's Leave. And they would learn that which harmed them and brought them no benefit, knowing that whosoever purchases it has no share in the Hereafter. Evil is that for which they sold their souls, had they but known.

2:102 وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُو الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ ۖ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الْمَلَكَيْنِ بِبَابِلَ هَارُوتَ وَمَارُوتَ ۚ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّى يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ ۖ فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَزَوْجِهِ ۚ وَمَا هُمْ بِضَارِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ ۚ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلَاقٍ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا شَرَوْا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

2:161 Indeed, those who disbelieve, and die disbelievers, upon them shall be the curse of God, the angels, and mankind all together.

2:161 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارٌ أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

- 2:177 It is not piety to turn your faces toward the east and west. Rather, piety is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets; and who gives wealth, despite loving it, to kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, the traveler, beggars, and for [the ransom of] slaves; performs the prayer and gives the alms; and those who fulfill the oaths when they pledge them, and those who are patient in misfortune, hardship, and moments of peril. It is they who are the sincere, and it is they who are the reverent.

2:177 لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ
وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ وَآتَى الْمَالَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ
السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا
وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ

- 2:210 Do they wait for naught less than that God should come in the shadows of clouds, with the angels, and that the matter should have been decreed? And unto God are all matters returned.

2:210 هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلَلٍ مِّنَ الْغَمَامِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ
تَرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

- 2:248 And their prophet said to them, "Truly the sign of his sovereignty shall be that the ark come to you bearing tranquility from your Lord and a remnant left by the House of Moses and the House of Aaron, borne by the angels. Truly that is a sign for you, if you are believers."

2:248 وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِّنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ آلُ
مُوسَىٰ وَآلُ هَارُونَ تَحْمِلُهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لَّكُمْ إِن كُنتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ

- 2:285 The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, as do the believers. Each believes in God, His angels, His Books, and His messengers. "We make no distinction between any of His messengers."

And they say, "We hear and obey. Thy forgiveness, our Lord! And unto Thee is the journey's end."

2:285 آمَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا
نُفِرُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

3:18 God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the possessors of knowledge, upholding justice. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.

3:18 شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

3:39 Then the angels called to him while he was praying in the sanctuary, "God gives thee glad tidings of John, confirming a word from God, noble and chaste, a prophet, form among the righteous."

3:39 فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ يُصَلِّي فِي الْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيحْيَى مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ
وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

3:42 And [remember] when then angels said, "O Mary, truly God has chosen thee and purified thee, and has chosen thee above the women of the worlds.

3:43 O Mary! Be devoutly obedient to thy Lord, prostrate, and bow with those who bow."

3:42 وَاذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ
3:43 يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ

3:45 When the angels said, "O Mary, truly God gives thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, high honored in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought nigh.

3:46 He will speak to people in the cradle and in maturity, and will be among the righteous."

3:45 إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا
فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ
3:46 وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

3:80 And he would no command you to take the angels and the prophets as lords. Would he command you to disbelief after your having been submitters?

3:80 وَلَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَتَّخِذُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ أَرْبَابًا أَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْكُفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

3:87 They are those whose recompense is that upon them shall be the curse of God, the angels, and mankind all together,
3:88 abiding therein; the punishment shall not be lightened for them, nor shall they be granted respite,
3:89 except those who repent after that, and make amends, for truly God is Forgiving, Merciful.

3:87 أُولَئِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ أَنَّ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةَ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ
3:88 خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ
3:89 إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

3:124 Remember when thou saidst unto the believers, "Is it not enough for you that your Lord should support you with three thousand angels sent down?"

3:125 Yea, if you are patient and reverent, and they come at you immediately, your Lord will support you with five thousand angels bearing marks.

3:124 إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَنْ يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَنْ يُدْعَ كُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِثَلَاثَةِ آلَافٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُنَزَّلِينَ
3:125 بَلَىٰ إِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَيَأْتُوكُمْ مِنْ فُورِهِمْ هَذَا يُمْدِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِخَمْسَةِ آلَافٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُسَوِّمِينَ

- 4:97 When the angels take the souls of those who were wronging themselves, [the angels] say, "In what state were you?" They say, "We were weak and oppressed in the land." [The angels] will say, "Was not God's Earth vast enough that you might have migrated therein?" These shall have their refuge in Hell—what an evil journey's end!

4:97 إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ ظَالِمِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا فِيمَ كُنْتُمْ قَالُوا كُنَّا مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ
قَالُوا أَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَرْضُ اللَّهِ وَاسِعَةً فَتُهَاجِرُوا فِيهَا فَأُولَئِكَ مَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَسَاءَتْ
مَصِيرًا

- 4:136 O you who believe! Believe in God and His Messenger, and the Book He sent down upon His Messenger, and the Book He sent down before. Whosoever does not believe in God and His angels and His Books and His messengers and the Last Day has wandered far astray.

4:136 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي
أَنْزَلَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا
بَعِيدًا

- 4:166 But God Himself bears witness to that which He has sent down unto thee—He sent it down with His knowledge—and the angels bear witness. And God suffices as a Witness.

4:166 لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَشْهَدُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكَ أَنْزَلَهُ بِعِلْمِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَشْهَدُونَ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

- 4:172 The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God; nor would the angels brought nigh. Whosoever disdains His service, and is arrogant, He will gather them unto Himself all together.

4:172 لَنْ يَسْتَنْكِفَ الْمَسِيحُ أَنْ يَكُونَ عَبْدًا لِلَّهِ وَلَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ وَمَنْ يَسْتَنْكِفْ عَنْ
عِبَادَتِهِ وَيَسْتَكْبِرْ فَسَيَحْشُرُهُمْ إِلَيْهِ جَمِيعًا

- 6:8 And they would say, "Why has not an angel been sent down unto him?" Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they would be granted no respite.
- 6:9 Had We made him an angel, We would have sent him as a man, thus obscuring for them that which they themselves obscure.

وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ ۖ وَلَوْ أَنْزَلْنَا مَلَكَ لَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ ثُمَّ لَا يَنْظُرُونَ 6:8
وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُ مَلَكَ لَجَعَلْنَاهُ رَجُلًا وَلَلَبَسْنَا عَلَيْهِم مَّا يَلْبَسُونَ 6:9

- 6:50 Say, "I do not say unto you that with me are the treasures of God; nor do I know the unseen; nor do I say unto you that I am an angel. I follow only that which is revealed unto me." Say, "Are the blind and the see equal? Will you not, then, reflect?"

قُلْ لَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ ۚ إِنِ اتَّبَعُ 6:50
إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ ۚ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

- 6:61 And He is Dominant over His servants. He sends guardians over you, till, when death comes unto one of you, Our messengers take him, and they neglect not their duty.

وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ ۖ وَيُرْسِلُ عَلَيْكُمْ حَفَظَةً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ تَوَفَّتْهُ رُسُلُنَا 6:61
وَهُمْ لَا يُفْرِطُونَ

- 6:93 Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, or says, "It has been revealed unto me," though naught had been revealed unto him, and one who says, "I will send down the like of what God has sent down"? If thou couldst see when the wrongdoers are the throes of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands, "Yield up your souls! This day shall you be recompensed with the punishment of humiliation for having spoken untruth against God, and for waxing arrogant against His signs."

6:93 وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ وَمَنْ قَالَ سَأُنْزِلُ مِثْلَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَاسِطُو أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرَجُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ الْيَوْمَ تُجْزَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَقُولُونَ عَلَى اللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَكُنْتُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهِ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

6:111 Even if We were to send down angels unto them, and the dead were to speak to them, they would still not believe, unless God wills. But most of them are ignorant.

6:111 وَلَوْ أَنَّا نَزَّلْنَاهُ إِلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَكَلَّمَهُمُ الْمَوْتَى وَحَشَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ قَبْلًا مَا كَانُوا لِيُؤْمِنُوا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَجْهَلُونَ

6:158 Do they wait aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that thy Lord should come, or one of the signs of thy Lord should come? On the day that one of the signs of thy Lord does come, believing will be of no avail to any soul that did not believe beforehand and did not earn some goodness in its belief. Say, "Wait! We, too, are waiting."

6:158 هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ رَبُّكَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ بَعْضُ آيَاتِ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي بَعْضُ آيَاتِ رَبِّكَ لَا يَنْفَعُ نَفْسًا إِيْمَانُهَا لَمْ تَكُنْ آمَنَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ أَوْ كَسَبَتْ فِي إِيمَانِهَا خَيْرًا قُلِ انتظروا إِنَّا منتظرون

7:11 Indeed, We created you, then We formed you, then We said unto the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam." And they all prostrated, save Iblīs; he was not among those who prostrated.

7:11 وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُن مِّنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

- 7:20 Then Satan whispered to them, that he might expose to them that which was hidden from them of their nakedness. And he said, "Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree, lest you should become angels, or among those who abide [forever]."

فَوَسَّسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوَاتِمِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنْ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا مَلَكَينِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ 7:20

- 8:9 When you sought succor from your Lord, He responded to you, "I shall aid you with a thousand angels rank upon rank."

إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي مُدُّكُمْ بِأَلْفٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُرَدِّفِينَ 8:9

- 8:12 Behold, thy Lord revealed unto the angels, "Truly I am with you; so make firm those who believe. I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. So strike above the neck, and strike their every fingertip."

إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنِّي مَعَكُمْ فَثَبِّتُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا سَأُلْقِي فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ فَاضْرِبُوا فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ وَاضْرِبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ 8:12

- 8:50 And if only thou couldst see when the angels take those who disbelieve, striking their faces and their backs, and [saying], "Taste the punishment of the burning!

- 8:51 This is for what your hands sent forth, and because God wrongs not His servants."

وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذْ يَتَوَقَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ يَضْرِبُونَ وَجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ 8:50
ذَلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ 8:51

- 9:26 Then God sent down His Tranquility upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts who you saw not, and punished those who disbelieved. And that is the recompense of the disbelievers.

9:26 ثُمَّ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ جُنُودًا لَمْ تَرَوْهَا وَعَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ

- 11:12 Perchance thou mightest omit some of that which We have revealed unto thee, and thy breast might be constrained because they say, "Why has no treasure been sent down upon him, or an angel not come with him?" Thou art only a warner, and God is Guardian over all things.

11:12 فَلَعَلَّكَ تَارِكٌ بَعْضَ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَضَائِقٌ بِهِ صَدْرُكَ أَنْ يَقُولُوا لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْهِ كَنْزٌ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ مَلَكٌ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ نَذِيرٌ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ

- 11:31 I say not unto you that with me are the treasures of God; nor do I know the Unseen. And I say not that I am an angel; nor do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes, 'God will not give them any good'—God knows best what is in their souls—for when I would indeed be among the wrongdoers.

11:31 وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ وَلَا أَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ تَزْدَرِي أَعْيُنُكُمْ لَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ خَيْرًا اللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ إِنِّي إِذَا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

- 11:69 And indeed Our messengers came to Abraham with glad tidings. They said, "Peace." "Peace," he said, and he hastened to bring them a roasted calf.

- 11:70 Then when he saw that their hands reached not toward it, he conceived a fear of them. They said, "Fear not. Verily we have been sent unto the people of Lot."

- 11:71 And his wife was standing there and she laughed. Then we gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob.

- 11:72 She said, "Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing."

- 11:73 They said, "Do you marvel at the Command of God? The Mercy of God and His Blessings be upon you, O People of the House! Truly He is Praised, Glorious."

11:69 وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبَشْرِىَ قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيدٍ

11:70 فَلَمَّا رَأَى أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَىٰ قَوْمٍ لُّوطٍ

11:71 وَأَمْرَاتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحِكَتْ فَبَشَّرْنَاهَا بِإِسْحَاقَ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ

11:72 قَالَتْ يَا وَيْلَتَىٰ أَأَلِدُ وَأَنَا عَجُوزٌ وَهَذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ

11:73 قَالُوا اتَّعَجِبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ رَحِمْتُ اللَّهُ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ إِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

11:77 When Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed on their account and felt himself powerless concerning them. and he said, "This is a terrible day!"

11:77 وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَصِيبٌ

11:81 They said, "O Lot! We are envoys of thy Lord. They shall not reach thee. So set out with thy family during the night, and let none of you turn around, save thy wife; surely that which befalls them shall befall her. Indeed, the morning shall be their tryst. Is not the morning nigh?"

11:81 قَالُوا يَا لُوطُ إِنَّا رُسُلُ رَبِّكَ لَنْ يَصِلُوا إِلَيْكَ فَأَسْرِ بِأَهْلِكَ بِقِطْعٍ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ وَلَا يَلْتَفِتْ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا أَمْرَاتَكَ إِنَّهُ مُصِيبُهَا مَا أَصَابَهُمْ إِنَّ مَوْعِدَهُمُ الصُّبْحُ أَلَيْسَ الصُّبْحُ بِقَرِيبٍ

12:31 So when she heard of their plotting, she sent for them, and prepared a repast for them, and gave each of them a knife. And she said [to Joseph], "Come out before them!" Then when they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands and said, "God be praised! This is no human being. This is naught but a noble angel!"

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَكًا وَآتَتْ كُلَّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا 12:31
وَقَالَتْ أَخْرِجْ عَلَيْنَ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ أَكْبَرْنَهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ

- 13:11 For him there are attendant angels¹ to his front and to his rear, guarding him by God's Command. Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves. And when God desires evil for a people, there is no repelling it; and apart from Him they have no protector.

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُغَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ 13:11
حَتَّىٰ يَغْيُرُوا مَا بَانْفُسِهِمْ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ َوَالٍ

- 13:13 The thunder hymns His praise, as do the angels, in awe of Him. He sends forth the thunderbolts and strikes therewith whomsoever He will. Yet they dispute concerning God, and He is severe in wrath.

وَيُسَبِّحُ الرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِ وَيُرْسِلُ الصَّوَاعِقَ فَيُصِيبُ بِهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُمْ 13:13
يُجَادِلُونَ فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ شَدِيدُ الْحَالِ

- 13:23 Gardens of Eden that they shall enter along with those who were righteous from among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny; and angels shall enter upon them from every gate.

جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ 13:23
عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ

1 This is a choice from the translators of the Study Quran: In the Arabic text the word is *mu'aqqibat*, not *malā'ika*.

- 15:6 And they say, "O you unto whom the Reminder has been sent down, truly you are possessed.
 15:7 Why do you not bring us the angels, if you are among the truthful?"
 15:8 We do not send down the angels, save in truth, and were We to do so, they would be granted no respite.

وَقَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ إِنَّكَ لَمَجْنُونٌ 15:6
 لَوْ مَا تَأْتِينَا بِالْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ 15:7
 مَا نُنْزِلُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَا كَانُوا إِذَا مُنْظَرِينَ 15:8

- 15:28 And [remember] when they Lord said unto the angels, "Behold! I am creating a human being from dried clay, made of molded mud;
 15:29 so when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating."
 15:30 Thereupon the angels prostrated, all of them together,
 15:31 save Iblis. He refused to be with those who prostrated.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّنْ صَلْصَالٍ مِّنْ حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ 15:28
 فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتَهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ 15:29
 فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ 15:30
 إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى أَنْ يَكُونَ مَعَ السَّاجِدِينَ 15:31

- 15:51 And tell them of the guests of Abraham,
 15:52 when they entered upon him and said, "Peace!"; He said, "Verily of you we are afraid."
 15:53 They said, "Be not afraid. Truly we bring thee glad tidings of a knowing son."
 15:54 He said, "Do you bring me glad tidings when old age has befallen me? So of what do you bring me glad tidings?"
 15:55 They said, "We bring thee glad tidings in truth; so be not among those who despair."
 15:56 He said, "Who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord, save those who are astray?"
 15:57 He said, "What is your errand, O messengers?"
 15:58 They said, "We have been sent unto a guilty people,

- 15:59 save for the family of Lot. We shall surely save them, all together,
 15:60 except for his wife; We have determined that she is indeed among those
 who lagged behind.”
 15:61 So when the messengers came to the family of Lot,
 15:62 he said, “Verily you are an unfamiliar folk.”
 15:63 They said, “Nay, but we bring thee that which they used to doubt.
 15:64 And we bring thee the truth, and surely we are truthful.
 15:65 So set out with thy family during the night, and follow behind them,
 and let not any of you turn around, but go forth wheresoever you are
 commanded.”

وَبَيْنَهُمْ عَنْ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ 15:51
 إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ إِنَّا مِنْكُمْ وَجِلُونَ 15:52
 قَالُوا لَا تَوْجَلْ إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِغُلَامٍ عَلِيمٍ 15:53
 قَالَ أَبَشِّرْهُنِّي عَلَىٰ أَن مَّسَنِي الْكِبَرُ فِيمَ تَبَشِّرُونَ 15:54
 قَالُوا بَشِّرْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ الْقَانِطِينَ 15:55
 قَالَ وَمَن يَقْنَطُ مِن رَّحْمَةِ رَبِّهِ إِلَّا الضَّالُّونَ 15:56
 قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكُمْ أَيُّهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ 15:57
 قَالُوا إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَىٰ قَوْمٍ مُّجْرِمِينَ 15:58
 إِلَّا آلَ لُوطٍ إِنَّا لَمُنَجِّهِمْ أَجْمَعِينَ 15:59
 إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ قَدَرْنَا إِنَّمَا لِمَنِ الْغَائِرِينَ 15:60
 فَلَمَّا جَاءَ آلَ لُوطِ الْمُرْسَلُونَ 15:61
 قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ مَّتَكُورُونَ 15:62
 قَالُوا بَلْ جِئْنَاكَ بِمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ 15:63
 وَأَتَيْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ 15:64
 فَأَسْرِ بِأَهْلِكَ بِقِطْعٍ مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ وَاتَّبِعْ أَدْبَارَهُمْ وَلَا يَلْتَفِتْ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ وَامْضُوا حَيْثُ
 تُؤْمَرُونَ 15:65

- 16:12 He sends down angels with the Spirit from His Command to whomso-
 ever He will among His servants, “Give warning that there is no god but
 I, so reverence Me!”

يُنْزِلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ بِالرُّوحِ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَى مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرُوا أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاتَّقُونِ 16:2

16:27 Then on the Day of Resurrection He will disgrace them and say, "Where are my partners on whose account you were defiant?" Those who were given knowledge will say, "Surely, this day, disgrace and evil are upon the disbelievers"—

16:28 those whom the angels took while they were wronging themselves. Then they will offer submission, "We were not doing any evil." Nay, but God knows best that which you were doing.

ثُمَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُخْزِيهِمْ وَيَقُولُ أَيْنَ شُرَكَائِيَ الَّذِينَ كُنْتُمْ تُشَاقُّونَ فِيهِمْ قَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ إِنَّ الْخِزْيَ الْيَوْمَ وَالسُّوءَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ 16:27

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ ظَالِمِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ فَأَلْقَوْا السَّلَامَ مَا كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ مِنْ سُوءٍ بَلَى إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ 16:28

16:31 They shall enter the Gardens of Eden with rivers running below. Therein shall they have whatsoever they will. This does God recompense the reverent,

16:32 those whom the angels take while they are in a state of goodness. They will say, "Peace be upon you! Enter the Garden for that which you used to do."

16:33 Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, of that the Command of thy Lord should come? Those before them did likewise. And God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves.

جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا يُجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ لَهُمْ فِيهَا مَا يَشَاءُونَ كَذَلِكَ يَجْزِي اللَّهُ الْمُتَّقِينَ 16:31

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ يَقُولُونَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ 16:32

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ كَذَلِكَ فَعَلَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ 16:33

- 16:49 **And unto God prostrates whatever crawling creatures or angels are in the Heavens or on the Earth, and they do not wax arrogant.**

وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ 16:49

- 17:40 **Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females from among the angels [for Himself]? Surely you speak a monstrous word!**

أَفَأَصْفَاكُمْ رَبُّكُم بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنَاثًا إِنَّكُمْ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوْلًا عَظِيمًا 17:40

- 17:61 **And when We said unto the angels, “Prostrate before Adam”, they all prostrated, save Iblis. He said, “Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?”**

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ قَالَ أَأَسْجُدُ لِمَنْ خَلَقْتَ طِينًا 17:61

- 17:90 **And they say, “We shall not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth for us from the Earth,**
 17:91 **or till you have a garden of date palms and grapevines, and you make streams gush forth in the midst of it,**
 17:92 **or till you make the sky fall upon us in pieces, as you have claimed, or you bring God and the angels before us,**
 17:93 **or till you have a house of gold ornament, or you ascend to Heaven. And we shall not believe in your ascension till you bring down unto us a book we can read.” Say, “Glory be to my Lord! An I aught but a human being, a messenger?”**
 17:94 **And nothing hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save what they said, “Has God sent a human being as messenger?”**
 17:95 **Say, “Were there angels walking about upon the Earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as messenger.”**

وَقَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّى تَفْجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ يَنْبُوعًا 17:90

أَوْ تَكُونَ لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّجِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجَّرَ الْأَنْهَارُ خَلَالَهَا فَتُفَجِّرًا 17:91

أَوْ تُسْقِطَ السَّمَاءَ كَمَا زَعَمْتَ عَلَيْنَا كِسَفًا أَوْ تَأْتِيَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ قَبِيلًا 17:92

17:93 أَوْ يَكُونُ لَكَ بَيْتٌ مِّنْ زُخْرِفٍ أَوْ تَرَقَّى فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لِرُقِيِّكَ حَتَّىٰ تَنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا كِتَابًا

نَقْرُؤُهُ قُلْ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ هَلْ كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا

17:94 وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا

17:95 قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَمشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ لَنَزَلْنَا عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا

18:50 When We said unto the angels, "Prostrate before Adam", they prostrated, save Iblis. He was of the *jinn* and he deviated from the command of his Lord. Will you then take him and his progeny as protectors apart from Me, though they are an enemy unto you? How evil an exchange for the wrongdoers!

18:50 وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ
أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِنْ دُونِي وَهُمْ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ بِئْسَ لِلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا

19:17 And she veiled herself from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man.

19:18 She said, "I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if you are reverent!"

19:19 He said, "I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow upon thee a pure boy."

19:20 She said, "How shall I have a boy when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?"

19:21 He said, "Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for Me'" And [it is thus] that We might make him a sign unto mankind, and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter decreed.

19:22 So she conceived him and withdrew with him to a place far off.

19:23 And the pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, "Would that I had died before this and were a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!"

19:24 So he called out to her from below her, "Grieve not! Thy Lord has placed a rivulet beneath thee.

19:25 And shake toward thyself the trunk of the date palm; fresh, ripe dates shall fall upon thee.

19:26 So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if you seest any human being, say, 'Verily I have vowed a fast unto the Compassionate, so I shall not speak this day to any man.'

- 19:17 فَاتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا
- 19:18 قَالَتْ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِالرَّحْمَنِ مِنْكَ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَقِيًّا
- 19:19 قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَنَا رَسُولُ رَبِّكِ لِأَهَبَ لَكِ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا
- 19:20 قَالَتْ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَلَمْ يَمْسَسْنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكْ بِغِيًّا
- 19:21 قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّئْ وَلِنَجْعَلَ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَرَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مَقْضِيًّا
- 19:22 حَمَلَتْهُ فَانْتَبَذَتْ بِهِ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا
- 19:23 فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَى جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَا لَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَنْسِيًّا
- 19:24 فَنَادَاهَا مِنْ تَحْتِهَا أَلَّا تَحْزَنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحْتَكِ سَرِيًّا
- 19:25 وَهَزِي إِلَيْكَ بِجِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسَاقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رَطْبًا جَنِيًّا
- 19:26 فَكُلِي وَاشْرَبِي وَقَرِّي عَيْنًا فَإِمَّا تَرَيَنَّ مِنَ الْبَشَرِ أَحَدًا فَقُولِي إِنَّي نَذَرْتُ لِلرَّحْمَنِ صَوْمًا فَلَنْ أُكَلِّمَ الْيَوْمَ إِنْسِيًّا

- 19:64 “We descend not, save by the Command of thy Lord. Unto Him belongs that which is before us and that which is behind us, and whatsoever lies between that, and thy Lord is not forgetful
- 19:65 the Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and whatsoever is between them. So worship Him and be steadfast in His worship. Dost thou know any who can be named alongside Him?”

- 19:64 وَمَا نَنْتَزِلُ إِلَّا بِأَمْرِ رَبِّكَ لَهُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِينَا وَمَا خَلْفَنَا وَمَا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا
- 19:65 رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فَاعْبُدْهُ وَاصْطَبِرْ لِعِبَادَتِهِ هَلْ تَعْلَمُ لَهُ سَمِيًّا

- 20:116 And when we said unto the angels, “Prostrate yourselves before Adam,” they prostrated, save Iblis; he refused.

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى

- 21:26 And they say, “The compassionate has taken a child.” Glory be to him! Nay, but they are honored servants.
- 21:27 They precede Him not in speech, and they act according to His Command.

21:28 He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they intercede not, save for one with whom He is content. they are wary, for fear of Him.

21:29 And whosoever among them would say, "Truly I am a god apart from Him," such will We requite with Hell. Thus do we requite the wrongdoers.

21:26 وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا سُبْحَانَهُ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُّكْرَمُونَ

21:27 لَا يَسْبِقُونَهُ بِالْقَوْلِ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ

21:28 يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يَشْفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ ارْتَضَىٰ وَهُمْ مِّنْ خَشْيَتِهِ مُشْفِقُونَ

21:29 وَمَنْ يَقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِّنْ دُونِهِ فَلَنِكَ نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ

21:103 The greatest terror will not grieve them, and the angels will receive them. "This is your Day, which you were promised."

21:103 لَا يَحْزَنُهُمُ الْفَزَعُ الْأَكْبَرُ وَتَتَلَقَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ هَذَا يَوْمُكُمْ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

22:75 God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among mankind. Truly God is Hearing, seeing.

22:75 اللَّهُ يُصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

23:24 But the notables who disbelieved among his people said, "This is only a human being like ourselves, desiring to set himself above you. And had God willed, He would have sent down angels. We heard not of this from our fathers of old.

23:25 He is but a man possessed. So wait concerning him, for a time."

23:24 فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا هَذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتَفَضَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَوْ شَاءَ

اللَّهُ لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَذَا فِي آبَائِنَا الْأَوَّلِينَ

23:25 إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ فْتَرَبُّوا بِهِ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ

25:7 And they say, "What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him,

25:8 or no treasure cast unto him, or no garden for him from which to eat?" And the wrongdoers say, "You follow naught but a man bewitched."

وَقَالُوا مَالٌ هَذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعَامَ وَيَمْشِي فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ فَيَكُونُ
مَعَهُ نَذِيرًا 25:7

أَوْ يُنْفِقَ إِلَيْهِ كَنْزٌ أَوْ تَكُونُ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ يَأْكُلُ مِنْهَا وَقَالَ الظَّالِمُونَ إِن تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا
مَسْحُورًا 25:8

25:21 And those who hope not to meet Us say, "Why have not the angels been sent down unto us, or why have we not seen our Lord?" Indeed, they have waxed arrogant in their souls and were greatly insolent.

25:22 On the Day they see the angels, there shall be no glad tidings for the guilty that Day. An they will say, "A barrier, forbidden!"

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا لَوْلَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَيْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ نَرَى رَبَّنَا لَقَدْ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي
أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَتَوَوَّعُوا عَتَوًا كَبِيرًا 25:21

يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَا بُشْرَى يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْجَحِيمِ وَيَقُولُونَ خِزًّا مَحْجُورًا 25:22

25:25 And the Day when the Heavens are split open with clouds and the angels are sent down in a descent,

25:26 that Day the true sovereignty will belong to the Compassionate, and that will be a difficult Day for the disbelievers.

وَيَوْمَ تَشَقُّ السَّمَاءُ بِالْغَمَامِ وَنُزِّلَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ تَنْزِيلًا 25:25

الْمَلِكُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَكَانَ يَوْمًا عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ عَسِيرًا 25:26

26:192 And truly it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds,

26:193 brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit,

26:194 upon thine heart—that thou mayest be among the warners—

26:195 in a clear, Arabic tongue.

وَأَنَّهُ لَنَزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ 26:192

نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ 26:193

عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ 26:194

بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ 26:195

29:31 And when Our envoys came unto Abraham with glad tidings, they said, "We shall surely destroy the people of this town; truly it people are wrong-doers."

29:32 He said, "Verily, Lot is in it." They said, "We know better who is in it. Assuredly We shall save him and his family, save for his wife; she is among those who lagged behind."

29:33 And when Our envoys came unto Lot, he was distressed on their account; yet he was constrained from helping them. And they said, "Be not afraid, nor grieve. We shall surely save thee and thy family, save for thy wife; she is among those who lagged behind."

29:34 Truly we shall bring upon the people of this town a torment from Heaven for having been iniquitous."

وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا إِنَّا مُهْلِكُوا أَهْلَ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ إِنَّا أَهْلُهَا كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ 29:31

قَالَ إِنَّ فِيهَا لُوطًا قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَن فِيهَا لَنُنَجِّيَنَّهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ 29:32

وَلَمَّا أَن جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّا مُنْجُونَكَ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَكَ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ 29:33

إِنَّا مُنْزِلُونَ عَلَى أَهْلِ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ رِجْزًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ 29:34

32:11 Say, "The Angel of death, who has been entrusted with you, will take you; then unto your Lord shall you be returned."

قُلْ يَتُوفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ 32:11

33:9 O you who believe! Remember the Blessing of God upon you when the hosts came upon you and We sent against them a wind and hosts that you saw not—and God sees whatsoever you do—

- 33:10 when they came upon you from above you and below you, and when eyes swerved and hearts reached into throats, and you thought many things regarding God.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَاءَتْكُمْ جُنُودٌ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا وَجُنُودًا
لَمْ تَرَوْهَا وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا
إِذْ جَاءُوكُم مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنكُمْ وَإِذْ زَاغَتِ الْأَبْصَارُ وَبَلَغَتِ الْقُلُوبُ الْحَنَاجِرَ
وَتَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ الظُّنُونًا 33:9 33:10

- 33:43 He it is Who blesses you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out of darkness into light. And He is Merciful unto the believers.

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّيْ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ
رَحِيمًا 33:43

- 33:56 Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace!

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا 33:56

- 34:23 And intercession will benefit none with Him, save whomsoever He gives leave, such that when terror is banished from their hearts, they will ask, "What did your Lord say?" They will reply, "The truth, and He is the Exalted, the Great."

وَلَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ عِندَهُ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُمْ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا فُزِعَ عَنْ قُلُوبِهِمْ قَالُوا مَاذَا قَالَ رَبُّكُمْ
قَالُوا الْحَقُّ وَهُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ 34:23

- 34:40 Upon the Day when He will gather them all together, then He shall say unto the angels, "Were these the ones worshipping you?"

- 34:41 They will reply, "Glory be to Thee! Thou art our Protector, apart from them!" Nay, they worshipped *jinn*, most of them believing in them.

وَيَوْمَ يُحْشَرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِيَّاكُمْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ 34:40
 قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ 34:41

35:1 Praise be to God, Originator of the Heavens and the Earth, Who appoints the angels as messengers, of wings two, three, and four, increasing creation as He will. Truly God is Powerful over all things.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ 35:1
 وَرُبَاعَ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

36:28 And after him We did not send down a host from Heaven against his people; nor would We send down.

وَمَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ جُنْدٍ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا كُنَّا مُنْزِلِينَ 36:28

37:1 By those ranged in ranks,
 37:2 and the drivers driving,
 37:3 and the reciters of a reminder,
 37:4 truly your God is One,
 37:5 Lord of the Heavens and the Earth and whatsoever is between them, and Lord of the easts.
 37:6 Truly we adorned the lowest Heaven with an ornament, the stars,
 37:7 and a guard against every defiant satan.
 37:8 They listen not to the Highest Assembly, for they are repelled from every side—
 37:9 cast out, and theirs shall be a punishment everlasting—
 37:10 save one who snatches a fragment as a piercing flame pursues him.

وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا 37:1
 فَالزَّاجِرَاتِ زَجْرًا 37:2
 فَالتَّالِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا 37:3
 إِنَّ إِلَهُكُمْ لَوَاحِدٌ 37:4
 رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَرَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ 37:5

- 37:6 إِنَّا زَيْنَا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ
 37:7 وَحَفِظًا مِّنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مُّارِدٍ
 37:8 لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى وَيُقَذِفُونَ مِّنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ
 37:9 دُحُورًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَاصِبٌ
 37:10 إِلَّا مَن خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ

37:150 Or did We create the angels female, while they were witnesses?

37:150 أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ

- 37:164 “There is none among us, but that he has a known station.
 37:165 And truly we are those who are ranged [in ranks].
 37:166 Truly we are those who glorify.”

37:164 وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ
 37:165 وَأَنَا لَنَحْنُ الصّٰفُّونَ
 37:166 وَأَنَا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ

38:69 I have no knowledge of the Highest Assembly, when they dispute.

38:69 مَا كَانَ لِي مِنْ عِلْمٍ بِالْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى إِذْ يَخْتَصِمُونَ

- 38:71 [Remember] when thy Lord said unto the angels, “Behold! I am creating a human being from clay.
 38:72 When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating.”
 38:73 Then the angels prostrated, all of them together.
 38:74 Not so Iblīs. He waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers.

38:71 إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّنْ طِينٍ
 38:72 فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

38:73 فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ

38:74 إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ اسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

- 39:71 And those who disbelieve will be driven unto Hell in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, "Did not messengers from among you come to you, reciting unto you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the meeting with this your Day?" They will say, "Yea, indeed!" But the Word of punishment has come due for the disbelievers.

39:71 وَسَيَقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فَتَحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا

أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتِ رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَكِنْ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

- 39:73 And those who reverence their Lord will be driven to the Garden in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein]."

39:73 وَسَيَقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ

- 39:75 And thou shalt see the angels encircling all around the Throne, hymning the praise of their Lord. Judgment shall be made between them in truth, and it will be said, "Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds."

39:75 وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

- 40:7 Those who bear the Throne and those who dwell nigh unto it hymn the praise of their Lord and believe in Him and seek forgiveness for those who believe: "Our Lord, Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy

and Knowledge. Forgive those who repent and follow Thy way, and shield them from the punishment of Hellfire.

40:8 Our Lord, make them enter the Gardens of Eden that Thou hast promised them and those among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny who were righteous. Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise.

40:9 And protect them from evils deeds. Whomsoever Thou shieldedst from evil deeds on that Day, upon him hast Thou had mercy. And that indeed is the great triumph.”

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ
آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ رَّحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ

الْجَحِيمِ

رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ
إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

وَقِهِمُ السَّيِّئَاتِ وَمَنْ تَقِ السَّيِّئَاتِ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ رَحِمْتَهُ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

40:49 And those who are in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, “Call upon your Lord to relieve us from the punishment for a day.”

40:50 They will reply, “Did not your messengers bring you clear proofs?” They will say, “Yea, indeed.” They will say, “Then make supplications!” but the supplication of the disbelievers is naught but astray.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ فِي النَّارِ لِخَزَنَةِ جَهَنَّمَ ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ يُخَفِّفْ عَنَّا يَوْمًا مِّنَ الْعَذَابِ

قَالُوا أَوَلَمْ تَكُ تَأْتِيكُمْ رُسُلُكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ قَالُوا فَادْعُوا وَمَا دُعَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي

ضَلَالٍ

41:12 Then He decreed that they be seven Heavens in two days and revealed to each Heaven its command. And We adorned the lowest Heaven with lamps and a guard. That is the Decree of the Mighty, the Knowing.

41:13 So if they turn away, then say, “I warned you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ‘Ād and Thamūd:

41:14 when messengers came unto them from before them and behind them, [saying], ‘Worship none but God,’ they said, ‘Had our Lord willed, He

would have sent down angels; so truly we disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent.’”

فَقَضَاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا وَزَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ 41:12

وَحَفِظْنَا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ
فَإِنْ أَعْرَضُوا فَقُلْ أَنْذَرْتُكُمْ صَاعِقَةً مِثْلَ صَاعِقَةِ عَادٍ وَثَمُودَ 41:13

إِذْ جَاءَتْهُمْ الرُّسُلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ قَالُوا لَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّنَا لَأَنْزَلَ 41:14
مَلَائِكَةً فَإِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ

41:30 Truly those who say, “Our Lord is God”, then stand firm, the angels will descend upon them, [saying], “Fear not, nor grieve, and rejoice in the Garden that you have been promised.

41:31 We are your protectors in the life of this world and in the Hereafter; therein you shall have whatsoever your souls desire, and therein you shall have whatsoever you call for:

41:32 a welcome from One Forgiving, Merciful.”

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشُرُوا 41:30
بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

نَحْنُ أَوْلِيَاؤُكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِي أَنْفُسُكُمْ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا 41:31
تَدْعُونَ

تَزَلَّ مِنْ غُفُورٍ رَحِيمٍ 41:32

41:38 And if they wax arrogant, then those who are with thy Lord glorify Him night and day, and they never weary.

فَإِنْ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فَالَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْأَمُونَ 41:38

42:5 The Heavens are well-nigh rent asunder from above, while the angels hymn the praise of their Lord and seek forgiveness for those on Earth. Yea! Truly God is the Forgiving, the Merciful.

تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْ فَوْقِهِنَّ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِمَنْ فِي
42:5
الْأَرْضِ ۚ أَلَا إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

43:19 And they have made angels, who are servants of the Compassionate, females. Did they witness their creation? Their witnessing shall be recorded, and they will be questioned.

وَجَعَلُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ إِنَّا أَشْهَدُوا خَلْقَهُمْ سَتُكْتَبُ شَهَادَتُهُمْ وَيَسْأَلُونَ
43:19

43:51 And Pharaoh called out among his people, saying, "O my people! Is not the sovereignty of Egypt mine, and do these streams not flow beneath me? Do you not, then, see?

43:52 And I not better than this one who is vile and can scarcely speak plain?

43:53 Why, then, have armlets of gold not been cast upon him, and why do angels not accompany him?"

وَنَادَىٰ فِرْعَوْنُ فِي قَوْمِهِ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِي
43:51
أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ

أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْ هَٰذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مِثْلِي وَلَا يُكَادِّبُنِي ۚ
43:52

فَلَوْلَا أُلْقِيَ عَلَيْهِ أَسْوِرَةٌ مِّنْ ذَهَبٍ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مُقْتَرِنِينَ
43:53

43:60 Had We willed, We would have appointed angels among you, succeeding one another upon the Earth.

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ مَلَائِكَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ يَخْلُفُونَ
43:60

43:74 Truly the guilty shall abide in the punishment of Hell.

43:75 It will not be lightened for them, and therein will they despair.

43:76 We did not wrong them; rather, it is they who were the wrongdoers.

43:77 And they will call, "O Mâlik, let thy Lord put an end to us." He will reply, "You will surely remain.

43:78 We did indeed bring you the truth, but most of you were averse to the truth."

43:79 Or have they devised anything? Truly it is We Who devise.

43:80 Or do they suppose that We hear not their secret and their secret converse? Yea, and Our envoys are present with them, recording.

43:74 إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي عَذَابٍ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ

43:75 لَا يَفْتَرُ عَنْهُمْ وَهُمْ فِيهِ مُبْلِسُونَ

43:76 وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا هُمُ الظَّالِمِينَ

43:77 وَنَادَوْا يَا مَالِكُ لِيَقْضِ عَلَيْنَا رَبُّكَ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ مَا كُنْتُمْ

43:78 لَقَدْ جِئْتُم بِالْحَقِّ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَكُمُ لِلْحَقِّ كَارِهُونَ

43:79 أَمْ أَمْرًا مَرْمُوسًا فَإِنَّا فِتْنًا مُبْرَمُونَ

43:80 أَمْ يَحْسُبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلْنَا لَدَيْهِمْ يَكْتُبُونَ

47:27 Then how will it be when the angels seize them, striking their faces and their backs?

47:27 فَكَيْفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّتْهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ

48:7 And to God belong the hosts of the Heavens and the Earth, and God is Mighty, Wise.

48:7 وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَنِيًّا حَكِيمًا

50:17 When the two receivers receive, seated on the right and on the left,

50:18 no word does he utter without a ready watcher beside him.

50:17 إِذْ يَتَلَقَّى الْمُتَلَقِّيَانِ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشَّمَالِ قَعِيدٌ

50:18 مَا يَلْفِظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ

50:21 Then every soul comes, with it a driver and a witness:

50:22 "You were indeed heedless of this. Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing."

- 50:23 And his companion says, "This is what I have ready."
 50:24 "Cast you both into Hell every stubborn disbeliever,
 50:25 every hinderer of good, every transgressor, every doubter
 50:26 who has set up another god along with God. Cast him into the severe punishment."
 50:27 His companion will say, "Our Lord, I did not make him rebel; rather, he was far astray."

وَجَاءَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَعَهَا سَائِقٌ وَشَهِيدٌ 50:21
 لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هَذَا فَكَشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ 50:22
 وَقَالَ قَرِينُهُ هَذَا مَا لَدَيَّ عَتِيدٌ 50:23
 أَلْقِيَا فِي جَهَنَّمَ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ 50:24
 مَنَّاعٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ مَّرِيبٍ 50:25
 الَّذِي جَعَلَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ فَأَلْقِيَاهُ فِي الْعَذَابِ الشَّدِيدِ 50:26
 قَالَ قَرِينُهُ رَبَّنَا مَا أَطَعْتَهُ وَلَكِن كَانِ فِي ضَلَالٍ بَعِيدٍ 50:27

- 51:1 By the scatterers as they scatter,
 51:2 and by those that bear a burden,
 51:3 by those that course with ease,
 51:4 and by those that apportion the Command,

وَالذَّارِيَاتِ ذُرُوءًا 51:1
 فَالْحَامِلَاتِ وِقْرًا 51:2
 فَالْجَارِيَاتِ يُسْرًا 51:3
 فَالْمُقَسِّمَاتِ أَمْرًا 51:4

- 51:24 Hast thou heard tell of Abraham's honored guests,
 51:25 when they entered upon him and said, "Peace!" he said, "Peace—an unfamiliar folk."
 51:26 Then he went quietly to his family and came with a fattened calf.
 51:27 He placed it close to them, saying, "Will you not eat?"
 51:28 Then he conceived a fear of them. They said, "Fear not!" and gave him glad tidings of a knowing son.

- 51:29 Then his wife came forward with a loud cry; she struck her face and said,
"A barren old woman!"
- 51:30 They said, "Thus has thy Lord decreed. Truly He is the Wise, the Knowing."
- 51:31 He said, "What is your errand, O messengers?"
- 51:32 They said, "We have been sent unto a guilty people,
51:33 to send upon them stones of clay
51:34 marked by thy Lord for the prodigal."

51:24 هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ

51:25 إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ قَوْمٌ مُنْكَرُونَ

51:26 فَرَاغَ إِلَى أَهْلِهِ فَجَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ سَمِينٍ

51:27 فَقَرَّبَهُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ

51:28 فَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً قَالُوا لَا تَحْزَنْ وَبَشِّرْهُ بِغُلَامٍ عَالِمٍ

51:29 فَأَقْبَلَتْ امْرَأَتُهُ فِي صَرَةٍ فَفَصَّكَتْ وَجْهَهَا وَقَالَتْ عَجُوزٌ عَقِيمٌ

51:30 قَالُوا كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْعَلِيمُ

51:31 قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكُمْ أَيُّهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ

51:32 قَالُوا إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَى قَوْمٍ مُجْرِمِينَ

51:33 لَنُرْسِلَ عَلَيْهِمْ حِجَارَةً مِّنْ طِينٍ

51:34 مَسُومَةً عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لِلْمُسْرِفِينَ

- 53:4 It is naught but a revelation revealed,
53:5 taught him by one of awesome power.
53:6 Possessed of vigor, he stood upright
53:7 when he was upon the highest horizon.
53:8 Then he drew nigh and came close,
53:9 till he was within two bows' length or nearer.
53:10 Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed.
53:11 The heart lied not in what it saw.
53:12 Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw?
53:13 And indeed he saw him another time,
53:14 at the Lote Tree of the boundary,

- 53:15 by which lies the Garden of the refuge,
 53:16 when there covered the Lote Tree that which covered.
 53:17 The gaze swerve not; nor did it transgress.
 53:18 Indeed, he saw the greatest of the signs of his Lord.

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيُ يُوحَىٰ 53:4

عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ 53:5

ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ 53:6

وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ 53:7

ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ 53:8

فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ 53:9

فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ 53:10

مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ 53:11

أَفْتَمَارُوهَ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ 53:12

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ 53:13

عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ 53:14

عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ 53:15

إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَىٰ 53:16

مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ 53:17

لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ 53:18

- 53:26 And how many an angel is there in the Heavens whose intercession
 avails naught, save after God grants leave unto whomsoever He will and
 unto the one with whom He is content?
 53:27 Truly those who believe not in the Hereafter name the angels with
 female names.

وَكَمْ مِنْ مَلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ 53:26

وَيَرْضَىٰ

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ لَيُسَمُّونَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ تَسْمِيَةً الْأُنثَىٰ 53:27

- 66:4 If you both repent unto God ... For your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, He is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal.

66:4 إِنْ تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِنْ تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ

- 66:6 O you who believe! Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands of them and who do what they are commanded.

66:6 يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ

- 68:1 *Nūn*. By the pen and that which they inscribe,
68:2 though are not, by the blessing of thy Lord, possessed.

68:1 ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ
68:2 مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ

- 69:17 And the angels shall be at its sides; that Day eight shall carry the Throne of thy Lord above them.

69:17 وَالْمَلَكُ عَلَى أَرْجَائِهَا وَيَحْمِلُ عَرْشَ رَبِّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ ثَمَانِيَةٌ

- 69:30 Take him and shackle him.
69:31 Then cast him in Hellfire.
69:32 Then put him in a chain whose length is seventy cubits.

خَذُوهُ فَعْلُوهُ 69:30

ثُمَّ الْجَمِّعِ صَلَواتُهُ 69:31

ثُمَّ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ ذَرْعُهَا سَبْعُونَ ذِرَاعًا فَاسْلُكُوهُ 69:32

69:40 truly this is the speech of a noble messenger,

69:41 and not the speech of a poet. Little do you believe!

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ 69:40

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَاعِرٍ قَلِيلًا مَّا تُؤْمِنُونَ 69:41

70:4 Unto Him ascend the angels and the Spirit on a day whose measure is fifty thousand years.

تَعْرَجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ 70:4

72:8 'We reached out to Heaven and found it filled with mighty sentries and flaming stars.

72:9 We used to sit in places thereof to listen, but whosoever listens now finds a flaming star lying in wait for him.

وَأَنَّا لَمَسْنَا السَّمَاءَ فَوَجَدْنَاهَا مُلْتَأَتْ حَرًّا شَدِيدًا وَشُهَبًا 72:8

وَأَنَّا كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْهَا مَقَاعِدَ لِلسَّمْعِ فَمَنْ يَسْتَمِعِ الْآنَ يَجِدْ لَهُ شُهَابًا رَصَدًا 72:9

72:25 Say, "I know not whether that which you are promised is nigh or whether my Lord has appointed a term for it;

72:26 Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone,

72:27 save to the one whom He approves as a messenger. Then He dispatches before him and behind him a guard,

72:28 that He may know that they have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord. And He encompasses whatsoever is with them and keeps a numbered count of all things."

72:25 قُلْ إِنْ أَدْرِي أَقْرَبُ مَا تَعْدُونَ أَمْ يَجْعَلُ لَهُ رَبِّي أَمَدًا

72:26 عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَى غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا

72:27 إِلَّا مَنْ ارْتَضَى مِنْ رَسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْلُكُ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَدًا

72:28 لِيَعْلَمَ أَنْ قَدْ أَبْلَغُوا رَسُولَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَحَاطَ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ وَأَحْصَى كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا

74:31 And We have appointed none but angels as wardens of the Fire; and We have not appointed their number save as a trial for those who disbelieve, to grant certainty to those who have been given the Book and increase in faith those who believe; and those who were given the Book and the believers will not doubt; and that those in whose hearts is a disease and the disbelievers will say, "What does God desire by this as a parable?" Thus does God lead astray whomsoever He will and guide whomsoever He will. And none knows the hosts of thy Lord but He. It is but a reminder unto mankind.

74:31 وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عَدَتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ

الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَزِدَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ
وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ
مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْبَشَرِ

77:1 By those sent forth in succession!
77:2 By the storming tempests!
77:3 By the spreaders spreading!
77:4 By the discerners discerning!
77:5 And by those who bring forth the Reminder,
77:6 to excuse or to warn,
77:7 surely what you are promised will befall.

77:1 وَالْمُرْسَلَاتِ عُرْفًا

77:2 فَالْعَاصِفَاتِ عَصْفًا

77:3 وَالنَّاشِرَاتِ نَشْرًا

77:4 فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرْقًا

فَالْمُلقِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا 77:5

عُذْرًا أَوْ نُذْرًا 77:6

إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ 77:7

78:38 That Day the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, none speaking, save one whom the Compassionate permits and who speak aright.

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا 78:38

79:1 By those that wrest violently,
79:2 by those that draw out quickly,
79:3 by those that glide serenely,
79:4 by those that race to the fore, outstripping,
79:5 and by those that govern affairs!

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا 79:1

وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا 79:2

وَالسَّابِحَاتِ سَبْحًا 79:3

فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا 79:4

فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا 79:5

80:11 Nay! Truly this is a reminder—
80:12 so let whosoever will, remember it—
80:13 on pages honored,
80:14 exalted and purified,
80:15 in the hands of scribes,
80:16 noble and pious.

كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ 80:11

فَنَنْشَأْ ذِكْرَهُ 80:12

فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ 80:13

مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ 80:14

بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ 80:15

كَرَامٍ بَرَّةٍ 80:16

81:19 Truly it is the speech of a noble messenger,
81:20 possessed of strength, before the Possessor of the Throne, of high rank,
81:21 obeyed, trustworthy withal.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ 81:19
ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ 81:20
مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ 81:21

82:10 And yet truly over you there are guardians,
82:11 noble, writing,
82:12 knowing what you do.

وَأَنَّا عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ 82:10
كَرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ 82:11
يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ 82:12

83:18 Nay, truly the book of the pious is in 'Illyiyyūn.
83:19 And what will apprise thee of 'Illyiyyūn?
83:20 A book inscribed,
83:21 witnessed by those brought nigh.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيِّينَ 83:18
وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عِلِّيُّونَ 83:19
كِتَابٌ مُرْقُومٌ 83:20
يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ 83:21

86:4 Over every soul there is a guardian.

إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ 86:4

- 89:21 Nay, but when the Earth is ground up, grinding upon grinding,
 89:22 **and your Lord comes with the angels, row upon row;**
 89:23 and Hell is brought forth that Day—that Day man will remember; yet
 whence will that remembrance avail him?

كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا 89:21

وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا 89:22

وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى 89:23

- 96:18 We shall call the guards of Hell.

سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ 96:18

- 97:4 **The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by leave of their Lord, with every command.**

تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِّن كُلِّ أَمْرٍ 97:4

List of Verses Mentioned in Each *tafsīr*

First column: Following the code in the list of verses of Chapter 1, first are listed the verses making clear mentions of angels (in **bold black**; and non-bold black for the accompanying verses completing their meaning), then the verses that usually suggest the presence of angels.

Other columns: The cases in grey with the symbol ✓ designate the commentaries that engage with angels as characters or at least mention them, as opposed to commentaries discussing subjects other than the angels, for the cases left in white with the symbol ✓. The cases left in blank are verses which received no commentaries (or for which the commentary has been lost to us). The interrogation mark indicates unclear commentaries.

TABLE 1

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|--|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| First group (clear mentions of angels) | | | | | | |
| 2:30 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2:31 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 2:32 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 2:33 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 2:34 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 2:97 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 2:98 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 2:102 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 2:161 | ✓ | | ✓ | | | |
| 2:177 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| 2:210 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 2:248 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 2:285 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 3:18 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 3:39 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 3:42 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 3:45 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 3:80 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 3:87 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 3:124 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 3:125 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 4:97 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 4:136 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 4:166 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 4:172 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 6:8 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 6:9 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 6:50 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 6:93 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6:111 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 6:158 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 7:11 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 7:20 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 8:9 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 8:12 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 8:50 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 11:12 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 11:31 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 12:31 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 13:13 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 13:23 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 15:6 | | | ? | ✓ | | ? |
| 15:7 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 15:8 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 15:28 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 15:29 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:30 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 15:31 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 16:2 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 16:28 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 16:32 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 16:33 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 16:49 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 17:40 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 17:61 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 17:92 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 17:93? | | | ? | ? | | ✓ |
| 17:94? | | | ? | ? | | ✓ |
| 17:95 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 18:50 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 20:116 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 21:103 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 22:75 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 23:24 | | | | | | |
| 25:7 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 25:8 | | | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 25:21 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 25:22 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 25:25 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 32:11 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 33:43 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 33:56 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 34:40 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 34:41 | | | | ✓ | | |
| 35:1 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:150 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 38:71 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 38:72 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 38:73 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 38:74 | | | ✓ | ? | | ✓ |
| 39:75 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 41:14 | | | | | | ✓ |
| 41:30 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 41:31 | | ✓ | ✓ | ? | ✓ | ✓ |
| 41:32 | | ✓ | ✓ | ? | | ✓ |
| 42:5 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 43:19 | | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 43:53 | | | | ✓ | | |
| 43:60 | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 47:27 | | | | | ✓ | |
| 53:26 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 53:27 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 66:4 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 66:6 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 69:17 | ✓ | | | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 70:4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 74:31 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 78:38 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 89:22 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | |
| 97:4 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|--|---------------|--------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|------------|
| Second group (suggesting the presence of angels) | | | | | | |
| 6:61 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 9:26 | | | ? | ? | | ✓ |
| 11:69 | | ✓ | ✓ | ? | | ✓ |
| 11:70 | | ✓ | ✓ | ? | | ✓ |
| 11:71 | | | ? | ? | | ? |
| 11:72 | | | ? | ? | | ? |
| 11:73 | | ✓ | ? | ? | | ? |
| 11:77 | | | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 11:81 | | ✓ | ✓ | ? | | ✓ |
| 13:11 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ? | | ✓ |
| 15:51 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 15:52 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 15:53 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 15:54 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:55 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:56 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:57 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:58 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:59 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:60 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:61 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:62 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:63 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:64 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 15:65 | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 19:17 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 19:18 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 19:19 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 19:20 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 19:21 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 19:22 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 19:23 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 19:24 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 19:25 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 19:26 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 19:64 | | | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 19:65 | | ✓ | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 21:26? | | | ? | ? | | ? |
| 21:27? | | ✓ | ? | ? | ✓ | ? |
| 21:28? | | ✓ | ? | ? | ✓ | ? |
| 21:29? | | | ? | ? | | ? |
| 26:192 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 26:193 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 26:194 | | | ? | | | ✓ |
| 26:195 | | | ? | | | ✓ |
| 29:31 | | | ? | ? | | |
| 29:32 | | | ? | ? | | |
| 29:33 | | | ? | ? | | |
| 29:34 | | | ? | ? | | |
| 33:9 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 33:10 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 36:28 | | | ✓ | | | |
| 37:1 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:2 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:3 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:4 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 37:5 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:6 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:7 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:8 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:9 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:10 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:164 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 37:165 | | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 37:166 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 39:71 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 39:73 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 40:7 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| 40:8 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 40:9 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 40:49 | | | ✓ | ? | | |
| 40:50 | | | ✓ | ? | | |
| 41:12 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 41:38 | | | ? | ? | | ✓ |
| 43:74 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 43:75 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 43:76 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 43:77 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 43:78 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 43:79 | | | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 43:80 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 48:7 | | | ? | ? | | ✓ |
| 50:17 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 50:18 | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ | | |
| 50:21 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 50:22 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 50:23 | | | ✓ | ? | | |
| 50:24 | | | ✓ | ? | | |
| 50:25 | | | ✓ | ? | | |
| 50:26 | | | ✓ | ? | | |
| 50:27 | | | ? | ? | ? | |
| 51:1 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 51:2 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 51:3 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 51:4 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 51:24 | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 51:25 | | | | | | |
| 51:26 | | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| 51:27 | | | | | | |
| 51:28 | | | | | | |
| 51:29 | | ✓ | | | | |
| 51:30 | | | | | | |
| 51:31 | | | | | | |
| 51:32 | | | | | | |
| 51:33 | | | | | | |
| 51:34 | | | | | | |
| 53:4 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:5 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:6 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:7 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:8 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:9 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:10 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:11 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 53:12 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:13 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:14 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:15 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:16 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:17 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 53:18 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 68:1 | | ✓ | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 68:2 | | | ? | ? | | ? |
| 69:30 | ✓ | | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 69:31 | | | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 69:32 | ✓ | | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 69:40 | | | ✓ | ? | | ? |
| 72:8 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 72:9 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 72:25 | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 72:26 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 72:27 | | | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 72:28 | | ✓ | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 77:1 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 77:2 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 77:3 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 77:4 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 77:5 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 77:6 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 77:7 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 79:1 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 79:2 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 79:3 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |

TABLE 1 (cont.)

| Quranic verses | T. al-Tustarī | T. al-Sulamī | T. al-Qushayrī | T. Ibn Barrajān 1 | T. Ibn Barrajān 2 | T.R. Baqlī |
|----------------|---------------|--------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|------------|
| 79:4 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 79:5 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 80:11 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 80:12 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 80:13 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 80:14 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 80:15 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 80:16 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 81:19 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 81:20 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 81:21 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 82:10 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 82:11 | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 82:12 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 83:18 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | ? |
| 83:19 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 83:20 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 83:21 | | | ✓ | ✓ | | ✓ |
| 86:4 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| 96:18 | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ | | |

Angelic Hierarchies

1 **The Three Angelic and Spiritual Typologies of Ibn ‘Arabī, with a Comparison to That of al-Qūnawī, al-Farghānī, and a Reference to Pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagyte**

Boldfaced are the categories of angels that I call “ambivalent,” which can be considered as including human spirits, or involving the human essence in one way or another.

TABLE 2

| Typology no. 1 | Typology no. 2 | Typology no. 3 | Typology of al-Qūnawī | Typology of al-Farghānī |
|--|---|-------------------------|---|--|
| Enraptured angels | Spirits fully dedicated to God | Enraptured angels | Cherubim (enraptured ones; inhabitants of the Invicibility such as Gabriel and the Holy Spirit) | Angels with no locus of manifestation (enraptured angels). |
| Elemental angels | Spirits given the governance of a natural body (↓)^a | Dedicated angels | Governing angels (those of heavenly spheres and those of earthly things). | Angels attached to one locus of manifestation (governing angels, and human spirits) |
| Angels created of actions and breaths of the servants | Spirits dedicated to the service of humanity (↑) ^b | Governing angels | <i>No third category.</i> | Angels with or without locus of manifestation (such as messengers, winged angels) |

a This type is presented as the second type of spirit in the text, however, its description matches that of the third category of angels in the other typologies.

b This type is presented as the third kind in the text, however, its description matches that of the second category of angels in the other typologies.

Pseudo-Dionysus’ Angelic Hierarchies:

- 1. Seraphim; Cherubim; Thrones (closest to God)
- 2. Dominations; Virtues; Powers
- 3. Principalities; Archangels; Angels (closest to humanity)

2 Further Angelic and Human Spiritual Hierarchies of Ibn 'Arabī

(In order of closeness to God):

1. **Enraptured Angels** → Cherubim, including the Angel Nūn (has complete knowledge of creation); Those Drawn Near; Zealots; Isolated; the "Taken Away."
2. **Angel "The Pen"** (has partial knowledge from Nūn, and it equals 360 sciences and subdivisions; he is in charge of the Tablet, writing everything happening in the cosmos). Originally from the Enraptured, but singled out on a plane below that of the enraptured angels.

The Solitaries, or the People of Numbers:

a human hierarchy on the station of the different enraptured angel groups. Same number at any one time, by succession (except for the 2 Seals).

- 7 Replacements: 4 Pegs, 2 Imams, 1 Pole
- 12 Captains
- 80 Nobles
- 1 Disciple
- 40 Rajabiyyūn
- 2 Seals: 1 Seal of Muḥammad (= Ibn 'Arabī), 1 Seal of the general *wilāya* (= Jesus).
- 300 souls "on the heart of Adam"
- 40 persons "on the heart of Noah"
- 7 persons "on the heart of Abraham"
- 5 persons "on the heart of Gabriel"
- 3 persons "on the heart of Michael"
- 1 person "on the heart of Seraphiel"

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This book is a literary study tracing the roles and functions of angels as characters in Sufi literature, based on their functions outlined in the Qur'ān. If you pick up any book discussing Islam or islamic theology, you will probably find angels in it – one never thinks much about them, and they often seem marginal. However, whether real or a simple literary device, what are the angels' real functions in a text? This study proposes to outline their functions, and more specifically what classical Sufi literature (7th–12th century CE) makes of them.

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