

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE FORMATION OF PARADISIACAL NOTIONS IN THE
EARLY MUSLIM COMMUNITY:
INFLUENCES AND INNOVATIONS

by
RAWAN AFIF AL KAYAT

A thesis
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For the degree of Master of Arts
To the Center of Arab and Middle Eastern Studies
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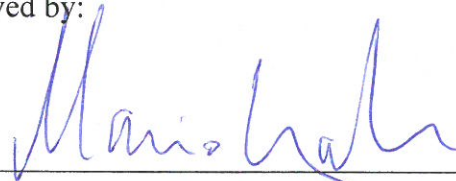
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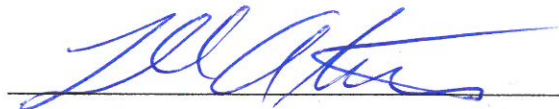
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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Rawan Afif al-Kayat for Master of Arts
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Title: The Formation of Paradisiacal Notions in the Early Islamic Community: Influences and Innovations

Paradise, the dwelling of the souls of the righteous after their death, is mentioned in all the monotheistic scriptures, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament and the Qur'ān with the Islamic scripture encompassing the most developed and lucid description of Paradise of all three. Nevertheless, devotional books were not the only place where Paradise was portrayed. In fact, many poets, writers, theologians, scholars, and painters elaborated on the scripture's views of Paradise, in defining its location, content and purpose.

For the early Islamic community, the formation of paradisiacal notions was the product of both influences and innovations. Many scholars believe that the Qur'ānic Paradise is very similar to that of Ephrem the Syrian (d.c. 373), a Syriac Christian deacon, poet, and theologian of the 4th century. Ephrem wrote *madrashe*, lyrical doctrinal hymns. He composed fifteen of these hymns under the title *The Hymns on Paradise*, in which he depicts a Paradise that develops upon the narrative of Adam and Eve from chapters two and three of Genesis.

While these two texts do share some similarities in the description of Paradise, the paradisiacal notions that resonated among the early Muslim community share very little with that of Ephrem. This can be seen in the textual and visual products of early Muslims such as in the *tafāsīr* of the time, and the mosaics portraying Paradise in early Muslim religious monuments. Moreover, not only do the scholars who note the similarities between Ephrem's Paradise and the Qur'ānic Paradise not adequately address the nature and depth of the similarities, they do not study the development of paradisiacal notions within the early Islamic community that are depicted in textual and visual sources of the time.

By considering a textual and visual reading of Paradise in Ephrem's hymns, the Qur'ān, early *tafāsīr*, of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.c. 767) and Furāt al-Kūfī and the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus, this thesis aims to understand what notions of the afterlife resonated amongst early Muslims, how these concepts were manifested in different cultural forms, and the significance of these ideas for early Muslim community.

This thesis will show that even though the Qur'ān's description of Paradise is similar to that of Ephrem in some ways, it still portrayed a somewhat different conception that is distinctive. It was based on these notions that the early Islamic community developed further individual paradisiacal themes and notions that eventually led to a unique Islamic conception of Paradise.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Paradise has been depicted in different religious texts throughout many centuries. The term “Paradise” is used to refer to the Garden of Eden before the expulsion of Adam and Eve and as the dwelling of the souls of the righteous after their death.¹ Many religions describe Paradise as a more fulfilling life after death in a land void of sorrow where all human desires are fulfilled. This image is particularly stated in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Nevertheless, the scriptures were not the only place where Paradise was portrayed. Many poets, writers, theologians, scholars, and painters elaborated on the scripture’s description of Paradise in defining its location, content and purpose. In some instances, these portrayals of Paradise within a certain community started to shape a new conceptual identity of the hereafter that is much more developed than the scriptures. The Islamic Paradise is an example of such progression in paradisiacal notions. There is a trajectory of formation of concepts of Paradise that stems from the Qur’ān and continues with the early Islamic community, as can be seen in religious texts such as the *tafāsīr* and in artistic visual representations such as mosaics found in early Islamic monuments.

In the Qur’ān, there is mention of the new faith being “a confirmation of what is before it” (Q35:31); and in both the Qur’ān and Gospels, Paradise is associated with the heavens and is a garden with fields that bear a variety of fruit and vineyards that produce wine (*khamr*). However, Paradise was not represented or discussed in the same

¹ Leah Kinberg, “Paradise,” *Encyclopedia of the Qur’ān*.

manner in these monotheistic scriptures.² In fact, in the Qur'ān, Paradise is a much more pervasive and lucid concept than in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Scriptures.³ There are many scholars, notably Hubert Grimme and Tor Andrae, who attribute the extensive descriptions found in the Qur'ānic Paradise to a Paradise depicted in lyrical doctrinal hymns written in the 4th century by a Syriac writer and theologian.⁴

Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), a deacon, poet, and theologian, wrote *madrashē*, fifteen lyrical doctrinal hymns, entitled *The Hymns on Paradise*, in which he depicts a Paradise that develops the narrative of Adam and Eve from chapters two and three of Genesis.⁵ His *Hymns on Paradise* convey a more detailed portrayal of Paradise than what it is found in the Canonical Scriptures, and, as noted by many scholars, share many parallels with the Qur'ān's description of Paradise; for example, in the lush vegetation, the abundance of fruits and the eternal state of happiness.⁶ While a number of studies, such as those by Tor Andrae, Walid Saleh, Barbara Roggema, and Edmund Beck mention the existence of such similarities, they do not elaborate on them or

² Emran Iqbal el Badawi, *The Qur'ān and the Aramaic Gospel Traditions*, (New York, 2014), p. 202-203; for *khamr* see Q47:15; Matthew 26:29.

³³³ For the Hebrew Bible see "Paradise," Jewish Encyclopedia, Volume 9, p. 515. The word Paradise is mentioned in Cantic of Canticles 4: 13, Ecclesiastes 2: 5, and Nehemiah 2:8. In the first of these passages it means "garden"; in the second and third, "park." In the New Testament there are many different terms that designate Paradise such as kingdom of heaven, resurrection, among others. For a discussion of Paradise, see Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (New Haven, 1988).

⁴ See Hubert Grimme, *Mohammed* (1904), vol. 2, p. 160; Tor Andrae, *Les origines de l'Islam et le Christianisme*, trans. Jules Roche (Paris, 1955), p. 151.

⁵ Translation done by Sebastian Brock, see Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*. Sebastian P. Brock (Crestwood, 1990).

⁶ Scholars that noted the similarities are Hubert Grimme, Tor Andrae, Edmund Beck, and Joseph Benzium; see Literature Review p.5.

In the chapter, "The Notion and Definition of Canon", Eugene Ulrich defines "canon" as "...the definitive list of inspired, authoritative books which constitute the recognized and accepted body of sacred scripture of a major religious group, that definitive list being the result of inclusive and exclusive decisions after a serious deliberation." It is further defined as follows: "...the definitive, closed list of the books that constitute the authentic contents of scripture." See *The Canon Debate* (Massachusetts, 2002), p. 29-34.

adequately address the nature of these passages.⁷ Additionally, studies on the subject do not consider the significance of these passages on the conception of the Islamic Paradise or its evolution within the early Muslim community.

While these similarities could be read as influences of one text over another, an alternate reading can attribute these commonalities to a shared cultural space where analogous notions of an ideal afterlife were being circulated within the different communities residing in the Middle East. Nonetheless, even if one is to consider the similarities found between Ephrem's Paradise and that of the Qur'ān, studying the textual and visual outcome of the early Islamic community shows that there was a new and unique identity of Paradise forming at the time.⁸ The changing needs of the new Islamic community are reflected in new elements that are found in the expression of Paradise in the Qur'ān, the subsequent *tafāsīr* (sing. *tafsīr*, exegesis), and in the mosaics of early Muslim religious monuments.

A. Aims and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to trace the formation and development of the notions of Paradise for the early Islamic community. Since many scholars believe that the Qur'ān's description of Paradise is peculiarly similar to that of Ephrem, the descriptions of Paradise found in both texts will be analyzed in order to clarify the extent of the similarities. Furthermore, the *Tafsīr* of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.767), an 8th-century Sunni exegete, and the *Tafsīr* of Furāt al-Kūfī, a 9th century Shī'ī commentator, as well

⁷ See Literature Review section, p. 5.

⁸ This study is therefore not concerned with questions of textual origin or attribution, for these influences have been dealt with extensively elsewhere and go beyond the scope of this thesis. For a history of scholarship on the relationship between Syriac Christianity and the Qu'ran, see Joseph Benzion Witztum, "The Syriac Milieu of the Qur'ān: The Recasting of Biblical Narratives" (Ph.D, Princeton University, 2011), p. 10–65.

as the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus will be studied as textual and visual depictions of Paradise in the early Islamic community. These two *tafāsīr* were chosen because they are two of the earliest within their respective traditions and have an explanation of the verses in the Qur’ān. Similarly, the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus represent the earliest examples of how Islamic concepts such as Paradise were being visualized among early Muslim communities. These sources shed light on Paradise as a concept and physical place and whether such literary and art works drew inspiration from Ephrem or the Qur’ān or if they represented Paradise in a different way altogether.

This thesis, thus, aims to investigate what notions of the afterlife resonated amongst early Muslims, how these concepts were manifested in different cultural forms, and the significance of these ideas the Islamic communities of Late Antiquity.

B. Background

The Hebrew Bible describes Paradise as the Garden of Eden saying, “[a]nd out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (**Genesis 2:9**). This garden was a place of abundance and harmony, where humanity resided in peace with nature and “walked with God.”⁹ The first chapters of Genesis describe an enclosed park, full of fruit-bearing trees with a river running through it; the *Septuagint*, the classical Greek translation of the Old Testament, called this park *paradeisos*.¹⁰ In the early Persian Empire two closely associated words existed for "Paradise": Median *paridaeza* and Old Persian *paridaida*; the former was

⁹ Alister McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Malden, 2003), p. 43.

¹⁰ Jan N. Brimmer, “Paradise: From Persia, Via Greece, Into the *Septuagint*” (Netherlands, 1999), p. 1.

adopted by Babylonians, Greeks and Jews.¹¹ The word Paradise in early Persian writings was applied to a number of locales such as storage-places, vineyards, orchards, stables, or forests. The one common factor was that they were all enclosed areas.¹² On the other hand, *paradeisoi* for the early Greeks did not indicate orchards or vineyards, but spaces that were of a humble size, located in close vicinity to each other, and contained animals, water (such as a river or lake), prominent trees and lush vegetation.¹³ Specifically, “Paradise of delight” (Genesis 2:15), interpreted the term “Eden” in terms of the related word *adanim* (“pleasure” or “delight”).¹⁴ Still, with time, the Graeco-Roman *paradeisos* became more cultivated and more artificial.¹⁵ In Roman times, *paradeiso* included meadows and flowers such as roses, daffodils and hyacinths, which were planted in beds along with springs and trees. The space became a sanctuary for swans, parrots, and peacocks instead of wild creatures.¹⁶

C. Literature Review

The Qur’ān’s description of Paradise is much more developed and particularized than that of earlier monotheistic scriptures. It is described as an eternal abode with rich vegetation, abundance of fruits, and corporal pleasures; Stefan Wild explained it as “the life that man on the Arabian Peninsula did *not* have in the seventh century.”¹⁷

As noted earlier, many scholars have noted that Ephrem the Syrian’s writings on Paradise seem to fill the space between the underdeveloped afterlife of the Bible and the

¹¹ Ibid., p. 2.

¹² Ibid., p.10.

¹³ Ibid., p.10.

¹⁴ McGrath, p. 44.

¹⁵ Brimmer, p. 17.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁷ Stefan Wild, "Lost in Philology? The Virgins of Paradise and the Luxenberg Hypothesis," *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Boston, 2010), p. 626.

lavish one in the Qur'ān. A number of authors have debated the similarities that exist between the two texts, with Tor Andrae finding more similarities than others.

In his *Mohammed, the Man and His Faith* (1936), Tor Andrae discussed the similarities that exist between the Qur'ān and Syriac Christian literature in content as well as “in [the] expression, form and style of preaching.”¹⁸ Andrae mentioned various points of convergence in the Ephrem's sermons about judgment and those of the Qur'ān. He noted that the *Hymns on Paradise* are of “special interest,” going as far as to state, “the Koran's descriptions of Paradise were inspired by the ideas of this Christian Syrian Preacher.”¹⁹ The similarities he notes are the location of Paradise on a mountain, the division of its inhabitants into three levels, the [four] rivers, the endless supply of fruit, the peacefulness, and the wine.²⁰

Although Andrae's analysis is compelling in drawing the connection between these two texts, any direct influence is difficult to prove. There are simply not enough sources (not yet at least) to support such a hypothesis.

Andrae, along with others such as Barbara Roggema noted the irony that the Qur'ān's description of the joys in Paradise are (almost) identical to those of the Syriac deacon, since Christians considered the Qur'ānic promise of the afterlife to be “offensive and faulty” for the Bible showed that heaven only consists of morality and peace, not food and drink.²¹ In fact, Roggema writes in *The Legend of Sergius Bahira*, “that the physical conception of heaven in Islam was a weapon in the hands of Christians, whose critical questions regarding the pleasurable reward in the hereafter

¹⁸ Tor Andrae, *Mohammed, the Man and His Faith* (London, 1936), p. 87.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Tor Andrae, *Les Origines de L'islam et le Christianisme* (Paris: 1955), p. 53-54.

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 155; Barbara Roggema, *The Legend of Sergius Bahira: Eastern Christian Apologetics and Apocalyptic in Response to Islam* (Boston, 2009), p. 122.

have plagued Muslims continuously.”²² In the discussion of these two depictions, one controversial issue has been the existence of a reference to the virgin maidens in Ephrem’s *Hymns on Paradise*. Andrae believed that both descriptions of Paradise share the same physical joys, including sexual pleasure; indeed he noted that in the Hymns 7:8 there is an allusion or a “veiled reference” as he says it, to the *ḥūrīyyāt* found in the Qur’ānic Paradise. The hymn itself says

‘Whoever has abstained from wine on earth, for him do the vines of Paradise yearn. Each one of them holds out to him a bunch of grapes. And if a man has lived in chastity, the (feminine) receive him in a pure bosom, because he as a monk did not fall into the bosom and bed of earthly love.’²³

Andrae describes this passage, saying:

To be sure, Afrem occasionally points out that this is only an attempt to give some idea of a joy which no earthly mind is able to grasp. But most of his listeners and readers no doubt remained quite oblivious to his feeble attempts to spiritualize his sensual images. Popular piety certainly interpreted this daring imagery in a crass and literal sense, and under such circumstances one cannot blame a citizen of pagan Mecca for doing the same thing.²⁴

Edmund Beck refuted this calling on scholars (“once and for all”) to stop using this passage to draw a “Christian parallel to the houris of the Qur’ān.”²⁵ Beck explained that Andrae’s attribution is simply caused by a fault in the Roman edition “*edition romaine*” that he used for his translation.²⁶ The fault led Andrae to believe that a new subject was introduced to the stanza, the women who were receiving the righteous in a pure bosom, when in reality the vines remain the subject of that verse.²⁷ He further explicates by saying that the “bosom” is not referring to any feminine paradisiacal beings, but it is only an imagery indicating the “interior” of the vines where one can rest.²⁸

²² Roggema, p. 122; Stefan Wild also states that “the human sexuality in the Islamic afterlife became favorite topics of Christian anti-Islamic discourse,” in “Lost in Philology?” p. 631.

²³ The hymn here is as translated in Tor Andrae, *Les Origines*, p. 88.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Edmund Beck, “Les Houris du Coran et Ephrem le Syrien”, p. 408.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 407.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 407- 408.

Christoph Luxenberg, his last name itself a pseudonym, provided a different reading on the matter and stated that Islamic exegesis, under the influence of Persian conceptions, misinterpreted the Qur’ānic “paraphrase of Christian Syriac hymns” and identified the existence of virgins in Paradise.²⁹ He claims that the language of the Qur’ān being that of the Quraysh is an “Aramaic-Arabic hybrid language” that was spoken in Mecca at the time of the revelation. Thus, reading the Qur’ān as a pure Arabic text has distorted its meaning.³⁰ In his book, he reads many passages of the Qur’ān using Syriac in order to decode the message. One of those passages concerns the *ḥūrīyyāt* where he argues that they are in fact “crystal clear grapes” and not women at all.³¹ Stephan Wild challenges this claim stating that “no amount of good or bad philology” can eliminate the fact that the Qur’ān’s eschatological imagery is intensely sensual and materialistic most likely because the Qur’ān was trying to “outbid” and “outstrip” its predecessors.³² Beck and Wild have shown convincingly that Ephrem’s Paradise is void of references to maidens and any sexual activity. Indeed this image is contrary to everything Ephrem stood for as a Syriac deacon and theologian. Moreover, Wild’s statement that the Qur’ān’s Paradise is intensely sensual and materialistic not only is undoubtedly true; but it becomes even more so with subsequent generations.

Joseph Witztum reconsiders Andrae’s list of similarities between Ephrem’s hymns and the Qur’ān adding one more: weather that is neither too cold nor too hot.³³ However, even with that addition to the similarities found by scholars, the list of parallels remains far from exhaustive as will be shown in this thesis.

²⁹ Christoph Luxenberg, *The Syro-Aramaic Reading of the Koran* (Berlin, 2007) p. 249-250

³⁰ Ibid. p. 326-333. For a list of reviews on his Syriac reading of the Qur’ān see Witztum, “The Syriac Milieu of the Qur’ān,” note 193 p. 53.

³¹ Luxenberg, p. 251.

³² Wild, p. 642, 644.

³³ Witztum, p. 38, n. 133.

Walid Saleh disagreed with previous scholarship and noted that, even without the maidens, Ephrem's Paradise and the Qur'ān's Paradise are radically different and the similarities are not noteworthy. He argues that many aspects of Paradise that are mentioned in the Qur'ān do not exist in the *Hymns on Paradise*. For example, the inhabitants of the Qur'ānic Paradise eat the flesh of birds.³⁴ Saleh argues instead that there is a "strong parallel" between Greek mythology and the Qur'ānic Paradise. Most notably, he mentions the striking similarities that the Qur'ānic youths share with Ganymede, the cup-bearer of Zeus who was granted immortality, and that the *ḥūrīyyāt* share with Hera, the *boōpis* or the "oxen-eyed" goddess.³⁵

The similarities and differences that exist between the Qur'ān's depiction of Paradise and Ephrem's hymns make up a crucial part of this thesis; however, other issues that are tackled are the depiction of Paradise in the early Islamic community such as the artistic images.

Visual representations of Paradise are seen in examples of art and architecture, many of which include manifestations of the beauty and magnificence of the Islamic afterlife in places of worship, representational art, and tombs. An example of such depictions is found in the mosaics of two Umayyad religious monuments the Dome of the Rock completed in 691, located on the Temple Mount in the Old City of Jerusalem, and the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus, renovated between the years 705 and 715 by the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd I. Although there are many conflicting interpretations of the significance and meaning of these mosaics, this thesis will show that the images portrayed in these visual representations have parallels in textual

³⁴ Walid Saleh, "The Etymological Fallacy and Qur'ānic Studies: Muhammad, Paradise, and Late Antiquity," *The Qur'an in Context: Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qur'anic Milieu* (Leiden, 2010), p. 684.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 689-691.

descriptions of Paradise in the Qur'ān and early *tafāsīr*; an approach that is not considered in depth in the secondary sources available.

Many scholars have interpreted the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus in different ways. On one hand, some attribute these mosaics as being a mere copy of similar works found in Byzantine churches while others believed they were purely ornamental or were a sign of Umayyad conquests.³⁶ On the other hand, many other scholars do link the mosaics to a representation of Paradise. Andre Grabar, for example, has argued that these vegetal motifs should be read as Islamic parallels to Christian iconographies of Paradise.³⁷ Robert Hillenbrand also stated that both the jeweled vases and otherworldly plants found in the Dome of the Rock are symbols of power and Paradise used to “glorify” the rock and create an unearthly like ambience.³⁸ Finbarr Flood has suggested that the flowing rivers, houses, and abundantly green trees represented in the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus are related to inscriptions on the structure’s walls that quote Qur’ānic passages related to Paradise (Q80:24-31).³⁹ Additionally, Klaus Brisch stated that the architectural structures in these mosaics represent the “lofty chambers” and “castles” mentioned in the Qur’ān in Q34:37 and Q25:10).⁴⁰

Scholars have tried to interpret the mosaics as depictions of Paradise mainly based on elements found in other mosaics or in their overall unearthly like ambience; however, other than Brisch, no other scholar has attempted to find direct textual

³⁶ For a discussion of these interpretations see Richard Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting* (1973), p. 26. Also refer to Ch.IV, p. 59-64 of this thesis.

³⁷ Andre Grabar, *L'Iconoclisme Byzantin: Dossier Archéologique.*, p. 62; also see Oleg Grabar, “The Umayyad Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem,” *Ars Orientalis* (1959), p. 47, n. 78.

³⁸ Robert Hillenbrand, *Islamic Art and Architecture* (New York, 1999), p. 22.

³⁹ Finbarr Barry Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus: Studies on the Makings of an Umayyad Visual Culture* (Leiden, 2001), p.250.

⁴⁰ Klaus Brisch, "Observations on the Iconography of the Mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus," *Content and Context of Visual Arts in the Islamic World* (Pennsylvania, 1988), p. 16-17.

paradisiacal references in the Qur'ān to the visual representations found in the mosaics. Moreover, there are no sources that consider the representation of Paradise in these mosaics vis-à-vis the *tafāsīr* of the early Muslim community and *The Hymns on Paradise* of Ephrem. And none examine the meaning of these artistic representations in conjunction with the *tafāsīr* as evidence of a new concept of Paradise that was forming within the early Muslim community.

In conclusion, no modern studies examine in depth the similarities and differences that exist between the paradisiacal notions of Ephrem and the ones found in the Qur'ān. Furthermore, the conception of Paradise and how it changed with the early Islamic community was not addressed to really understand how significant were the elements of Paradise that were similar to Ephrem's depiction. What did the early community retain and what did it develop? Were any of the similarities retained or did a new, unique conception of heaven originate? To answer these questions, the *tafāsīr* need to be explored to understand the religious aspect of the community while the mosaics will be visual proof of what the overall community retained from these descriptions.

D. Methodology

This study will take an inter-disciplinary approach by undertaking a literary analysis of textual sources and an art historical analysis of visual representations. This will be carried out in stages. First, a close examination of the verses in the Qur'ān regarding Paradise and Ephrem's fifteen *Hymns on Paradise* as translated by Sebastian P. Brock, will be conducted with the similarities and differences noted and analyzed focusing on the imagery and visuals that both texts portray. Secondly, the *tafāsīr* of Muqātil ibn

Sulaymān (d.767) and Furāt al-Kūfī will be studied to track the way the portrayal of Paradise expanded beyond the original depiction in the Qur’ān

Additionally, artistic depictions of the mosaics will be “read” as a text to add a necessary visual dimension to my consideration of the forms that early representations of Paradise took within this community. The method used here is informed by Finbarr Flood’s approach in his book *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter*, in which art and material culture are used as both historical and visual sources in his quest to find “routes not roots”.⁴¹ In order to use these mosaics as primary visual sources, the main research will be identifying images in the mosaics and linking them to matching imagery found in the other sources in question in the same way Klaus Brisch does in his "Observations on the Iconography of the Mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus."⁴² The purpose of my analysis will be to consider how these examples may further inform our understanding of early Islamic depictions of Paradise.

⁴¹ Finbarr Flood, *Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval "Hindu-Muslim" Encounter* (Princeton, 2009), p. 1-14.

⁴² Brisch, p. 17.

CHAPTER II

EPHREM AND HIS DEPICTION OF PARADISE

A. Ephrem: life and works

Saint Ephrem the Syrian, deacon, poet and theologian is traditionally acknowledged as one of the greatest writers of Syriac literature, but his standing as “a religious poet of quite outstanding stature” has frequently been overlooked, mainly due to the limited accessibility of his works, written in Syriac, and to their poor translation into modern languages.⁴³ There are many biographies written in both Greek and Syriac about Ephrem’s life, in addition to many texts that claim to be autobiographical; yet, what we know about his life is relatively brief since most of the available information is considered unreliable and unhistorical.⁴⁴

Ephrem, an astute thinker, opted to express his theological insight through poetry instead of prose, which is why he “deserves to rank alongside the greatest of theologian poets in the Christian tradition.”⁴⁵ It is only in somewhat recent years that his theological thought truly began to be valued and not until 1920 that his importance for

⁴³ J.P. Amar, “Ephrem, Life of,” *The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, p. 147. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 8. For a detailed and chronological study of primary sources that depict Ephrem’s life see Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 8-25. For a historical context of Ephrem’s life see Edward G. Mathews, Jr., “General Introduction,” in St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Selected Prose Works*. Translated by Edward G. Mathews, Jr. and Joseph P. Amar. Edited by Kathleen McVey (Washington D.C, 1994), p. 12–45.

⁴⁵ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 8.

the Christian tradition was acknowledged when Pope Benedict XV decreed Ephrem to be a Doctor of the Universal Church.⁴⁶

In his own writings, Ephrem says that he was born of Christian parents around the year 306.⁴⁷ He grew up under the tutelage of several bishops beginning with Jacob, Bishop of Nisibis, who was appointed in 308. He lived in Nisibis for all but the last ten years of his life where he served as deacon and catechetical teacher in the local church under St. Jacob of Nisibis (d.c. 338), Babu (d.c. 350), Vologeses (d.c. 361), and Abraham (c.361-?).⁴⁸ After the Roman-Persian wars of the 4th century in which Nisibis was taken by the Persians, all Nisibenes were expelled from their homes, and Ephrem eventually settled in Edessa where he spent the remaining ten years of his life, until the year 373.⁴⁹

The earliest biographical mentions of Ephrem were not from the Syriac tradition but rather from the works of Greek religious historians such as Palladius, Sozomen, and Theodoret.⁵⁰ While these works contain a number of legends, they uniformly describe him as a monk; this was also the case in an eleventh-century collection of Syriac homilies.⁵¹ However, monasticism had not entered Syria in Ephrem's lifetime.⁵² In fact, Ephrem belonged to an ancient Syrian tradition of asceticism; most likely, he was an *ihidaya* meaning "single," "celibate," "single-minded," or "simple," a follower of Christ

⁴⁶ S.P Brock "Ephrem," *The Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, p. 146.

⁴⁷ The exact year of his birth is not known. Also, some later hagiographers wrote that his father was a pagan priest, however that claim was refuted by Brock who writes that according to "Ephrem's own declaration [...] he was brought up 'in the way of truth'." See S.P Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of Saint Ephrem the Syrian* (Frederiksværk, 1992), p.16 and Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 21.

⁴⁸ Brock "Ephrem," p. 146.

⁴⁹ Brock, *Hymns*, p.17; the most likely date to be correct is June 9th as provided by the Chronicle of Edessa written in the 6th century. Other dates provided by other sources are the 15th, 18th and 19th of June, see Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Amar, "Ephrem," p. 147.

⁵¹ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 25.

⁵² Amar, "Ephrem," p. 147, Brock, *Hymns*, p. 21,25.

the *Ihidaya*.⁵³ It was only in the late fourth century that *ihidaya* took on the meaning of *monachos*, or monk; in fact, in Ephrem's time, *ihidaya* referred to a celibate person consecrated to Christ; either an unmarried celibate, or a married person who renounced marital intercourse.⁵⁴ However, a portrayal of Ephrem found in a *memra* by Jacob of Serugh dedicated to the poet is considered both historically and culturally accurate.⁵⁵ Unlike other notices of Ephrem, this *memra* commends his moderation and simplicity and recognizes his work among the choirs of virgins known as *Bnat Qyāmâ* "Daughters of the Covenant."⁵⁶

Ephrem was an active theologian and prolific writer, and his chief legacy lies in the literary works he left behind; indeed, over four hundred of his hymns survive to this day, while many more were lost.⁵⁷ His importance as a theologian was recognized by his contemporaries. He was dubbed as the "sage among the Syrians" and St. Jerome in his book on famous authors *De Viris Illustribus (On Illustrious Men)* written in 392, stated:

Ephraim, a deacon of the Church of Edessa, wrote a great deal in the Syriac language. He attained such distinction that his writings are read in some churches after the Scriptural lections. I have read a work of his on the Holy Spirit, which someone had translated, from Syriac into Greek, and even in translations, I could recognize the acumen of a lofty intellect.⁵⁸

⁵³ Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p. 136.

⁵⁴ For a full explanation of the term and of Ephrem's ascetic tradition, see Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 25-33.

⁵⁵ Amar, "Ephrem," p. 147.

⁵⁶ Ibid. Concerning the term *Bnat Qyāmâ*, Susan Harvey writes: "The constant use of the root qwm for designating basic Christian life keeps us mindful of the place of asceticism in early Syriac Christianity. The term used here for the "stance" of the Christian life is *qyāmâ*, also carrying the sense of "covenant," as used for the *Bnay* and *Bnat Qyāmâ*. In the early fourth century, the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant were still an ambiguously defined part of the church, but the Acts of Shmona and Guria refer to the *Bnay* and *Bnat Qyāmâ* as suffering particular abuse in these persecutions. The language of these Acts plays intentionally on *qyāmâ*, "covenant," as another derivative from *qwm*: the "covenant" of the consecrated life is not different from the "stance" or covenant the lay Christian has taken by the commitment of faith." See S. Ashbrook Harvey, "The Edessan Martyrs and the Ascetic Tradition," *V Symposium Syriacum* (Rome, 1988), p. 195-206.

⁵⁷ Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 33.

⁵⁸ Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 12.

He was a very prolific writer, and as a result, various works, notably Greek and Latin ones, were wrongly attributed to him.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the ones that are unquestionably from him fall under four categories, prose (such as biblical commentaries, e.g., *Commentary on Genesis*, or *Commentary on the Diatessaron*), rhythmic prose "On Our Lord," and a letter addressed to a certain Publius on the Last Judgment), metrical homilies *memre* (six on faith and one on the *Destruction of Nicomedia* by an earthquake), and hymns. In fact, the vast majority of Ephrem's surviving works are *madrashé*, or lyrical doctrinal hymns, such as the *Hymns on Paradise* (15 hymns believed to have been composed before 363), as well as *Hymns On Faith* (87), *On Nisibis* (77), and *On the Church* (52), to name a few.⁶⁰

B. Hymns on Paradise

The *Hymns on Paradise* are a liturgical cycle of fifteen hymns, depicting the elemental Paradise of Adam to be the future dwelling of the righteous.⁶¹ It appears that these hymns were written while he was still in Nisibis.⁶² Ephrem's poetry is of two kinds: the *memre* written in verses of seven syllables, and the *madrashé*, composed in mostly unrhymed stanza form following a single syllabic pattern.⁶³ Ephrem employed in his diverse poetry about fifty different patterns; the *Hymns on Paradise* follow a pattern of 5 + 5 / 5 + 5 / 5 + 5 / 7 / 5 + 5 / 5 + 5 syllables, and as hymns they were sung by the "Daughters of the Covenant," which were choirs of virgins.⁶⁴ The manuscripts containing the hymns normally include the *qala*, which is the title of the melody; it

⁵⁹ Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p. 17.

⁶⁰ Christopher Buck, "A New Reading of Ephrem the Syrian's Hymns on Paradise," *The Journal of the Assyrian Academic Society*, p. 81. Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 33.

⁶¹ Buck, "A New Reading," p. 81.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 85; Brock, *Hymns*, p.36. Brock argues that Syriac poetry was one of the earliest forms of poetry based on syllabic principles. To read more about the contested history of syllabic patterns see Brock, *Hymns*, p.36-37.

⁶⁴ Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (2006), p.30, n. 1

comprises the first words of that hymn using the stanza pattern. Many hymns have cycles that employ various stanza patterns, but the *Hymns on Paradise* employ the same pattern for each stanza and its *qala* was frequently dubbed *Pardaisa* after the hymns.⁶⁵

Ephrem portrays Paradise starting from the narrative of Adam and Eve found in Genesis chapters 2 through 3. While reading the Bible, the deacon had a vision where he was transported to Paradise and started relaying and describing what his mind was seeing.⁶⁶ The *Hymns on Paradise* show Ephrem's "highly imaginative use of imagery and great sensitivity and artistry in the use of language," not to mention that they reveal the depth and intensity of the poet's thought.⁶⁷ Indeed many modern scholars highlight the beauty and finesse of these hymns; George Mathews considered them "perhaps Ephrem's most beautiful hymns."⁶⁸ Following Ephrem's theological vision, the hymns are filled with significance and symbolism; however for the purpose of this study these will not be deliberated or studied in depth. The concern of this study is to examine the descriptive characteristics of Paradise as portrayed in his hymns in order to compare them to the Qur'ān's.⁶⁹ Some clarification on metaphors and symbols will be made whenever an explanation is necessary so as to avoid mistaken interpretations or deductions.

The *Hymns on Paradise* are preserved in three sixth-century manuscripts written in the years 519, 522 and 551 AD. There is also another manuscript dated from the eight or ninth century that only contains a few stanzas.⁷⁰ This thesis relies on the translation

⁶⁵ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 38.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 78

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 34.

⁶⁸ Edward G. Mathews, Jr., "St. Ephrem, Madrashe on Faith, 81–85: Hymns on the Pearl, I–V," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 38 (1994), p. 47.

⁶⁹ For an in-depth study and study of Ephrem's symbolism see Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p. 39-74.

⁷⁰ Sebastian Brock, *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems* (2006), p. 3.

made by Sebastian Brock available in the book *The Hymns on Paradise* published in 1990.

1. Conception of Ephrem's Paradise

Ephrem starts his hymns on Paradise, the “tale of the Garden,” by affirming that it was as revealed by Moses in scripture (H1:1) and it was indeed scripture that named it Eden (H5:5).⁷¹ He also upholds that scripture forms the basis of his figurative transport to Paradise and thus his description of it, “Scripture brought me □ to the gate of Paradise,” (H6:2) “and when I reached that verse wherein is written the story of Paradise, □ it lifted me up and transported me from the bosom of the book □ to the very bosom of Paradise,” (H5:3).⁷² It is only Ephrem’s mind that made the journey and not his body, “while my intellect took wing and soared upward in awe as it perceived the splendor of Paradise” (H1:3), “[w]ith the eye of my mind I gazed upon Paradise;” (H1:4)⁷³

Ephrem also begins and ends his hymns with references to scripture, as though he starts and closes with the affirmation to set or confirm the religious nature of his hymns.⁷⁴ In Ephrem’s Letter to Publius, the poet states that Paradise “is visible” in the scripture, and says that the Gospel is “a figure” for the splendor of the Kingdom of Heaven.⁷⁵ In his *Hymns on Faith* Ephrem adds that “the Scriptures are placed there like a mirror, and he whose eye is luminous beholds there the image of reality.”⁷⁶ Yet, Ephrem also alludes in his hymns to the fact that Paradise is not fully portrayed in scripture, he states that Paradise is “spoken of in few words,” (H 1:1)⁷⁷ that he “began to

⁷¹ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 78, p.104.

⁷² Ibid., p. 109, 103, see also H5:4-6, p. 103- 104

⁷³ Ibid., p. 78,79, see also H5:4-5 p. 103- 104.

⁷⁴ See H1:1, p. 77 and H15:17 p. 188.

⁷⁵ Ephrem, “Letter to Publius 2,” in Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, p. 58.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 57.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 78.

wander amid things not described,” (H5:5)⁷⁸ and that Paradise is a “tale that is short to read but rich to explore,” (H1:3).⁷⁹ This lack of specificity in the Bible allowed Ephrem the opportunity to explore Paradise granting him the leeway between the scriptural depiction of Paradise and his own imagination.

He was transported to heaven so that Paradise may be transported to the reader, and even though, as he stated, tried to describe Paradise in human terms, in reality there are inadequate words that describe things as they are in the Garden of Eden.⁸⁰ The words are not adequate for two reasons, first because the beauties and splendors of Paradise are unearthly, and second, because the spiritual and “hidden” nature of heaven should not be confused with terrestrial terms and descriptions. This concept is affirmed and reaffirmed throughout the hymns, “even though it may appear terrestrial because of the terms used, □ it is in its reality spiritual and pure” (H11:4), “[d]o not let your intellect □ be disturbed by mere names, for Paradise has simply clothed itself in terms that are akin to you, not because it is impoverished that it has put on your imagery; rather, your nature is far too weak to be able to attain to its greatness” (H11:7).⁸¹ Ephrem employs the same concept in his *Hymns On Faith* to explain the reference of scripture to God’s ears, eyes etc; Brock explains Ephrem’s logic with the following:

Since the human mind is part of creation, it is unable of its own accord to leap across this gap between created and Creator and to provide any description at all of the hidden Godhead. No theology, talking about God, would in fact be possible at all but for God’s own initiative and condescension: stirred by love for humanity, the culmination of His creative activity, He Himself has crossed this gap and allowed Himself to be described in human language and in human terms in the Scriptures as part of the process of His self-revelation. God thus “put on names”-the metaphors used of him in the Bible-and in this way the human intellect is provided with a whole variety of pointers upward, hinting at various aspects of the hiddenness of God, whose

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 104.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 78 see also H5:4, p. 103.

⁸⁰ Buck, “A New Reading,” p. 83. See H1:1, Brock, *Hymns*, p.77.

⁸¹ Ibid., p.155, 156; see also H1:1, p.77; H4:7, p.99; H11:4-5, p.155; H11:8, p.157.

true nature, however, cannot possibly be described by, or contained in, human language.⁸²

Ephrem does the same with Paradise, which is unearthly and unworldly. Ephrem tells his reader that his own words are inadequate since everything found in Paradise, even the lowliest treasure, surpasses all, even the greatest treasures and glories on earth.⁸³ Paradise is described in Ephrem's hymns as glorious, wondrous, splendid, magnificent, and resplendent.⁸⁴ It is the "summit of all blessings,"⁸⁵ a "harbor of joys, a haven of pleasures,"⁸⁶ it is the abode of the exalted, of beauty, of peace, of light and of happiness.⁸⁷ However, the Hymns are highly metaphorical, and Ephrem is clear about the symbolic aspect of his portrayal and in the purity and spirituality of heaven.⁸⁸ He compares it to the wind that can be felt but not seen, that is both concealed and apparent:

My brethren, consider the wind: though its blast is tumultuous, it lacks any color by which it can be seen, for it is hidden in its manifestation; having no outer array or substance at all, it is both hidden and yet manifest when it is blowing. So too the abode of Paradise is both hidden and manifest: while it can be perceived to exist, what it really is cannot be perceived.⁸⁹

Moreover, no 'material' riches are found in Heaven. The treasures adorn the outside of Paradise and only chalcedony and gems are explicitly named (H7:4).⁹⁰ Ephrem states, in fact, that all the gems and jewels found around Paradise are cast out to "to prevent their defiling the glorious earth of Paradise."⁹¹ The perimeter of Heaven is a "dazzling land," even the best earthly precious stones would look dull and ugly compared to the

⁸² Ibid., p. 45.

⁸³ See H4:8, p. 100; H 6:2, p. 109; H14:9, p. 179.

⁸⁴ See H1:1, p.77; H1:5, p.78; H1:9, p. 79.

⁸⁵ H 5:5, p. 104.

⁸⁶ H5:12, p.106.

⁸⁷ See H 5:12, p. 106; H11:2, p.154; H14:8, p. 178.

⁸⁸ See H11:4 p. 155; H11:6 p. 156.

⁸⁹ H 15:1, p. 182.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 120.

⁹¹ Ibid.

gems found there. However, in spite of their beauty, their connection to earthly wealth is considered a corrupting influence. This view is most likely reflective of Ephrem's asceticism and an assertion that his view of Paradise is more of a spiritual space than a material one. This aspect of Ephrem's Paradise is one of the major notions that changed with the Qur'ānic Paradise. The existence of precious metals and jewels inside Paradise is not only mentioned in the Qur'ān, but is also very prevalent in the *tafāsīr* and mosaics.⁹²

2. *Time and Space in Paradise*

Ephrem's Paradise had a distinctive location in space, with physical dimensions and characteristics that are clearly defined. Ephrem's mind was transported to Paradise and so he makes sure that the reader follows the same path. He does not start to describe the interior of Paradise without first demarcating its location, entrance and main divisions. Ephrem adopts the Jewish concept of Paradise as being on a mountain.⁹³ That mountain is circular (H1:8)⁹⁴ and higher than any other mountain, "the summit of every mountain is lower than its summit, the crest of the Flood reached only its foothills" (H1:4).⁹⁵ It encircles both land and sea (H1:8-9) and encompasses the Great Sea (which itself was thought to surround the Earth) and has a wreath that delineates all of creation (H1:9).

Heaven also has its own moon.⁹⁶ Our earthly sky therefore is the internal part the

⁹² See for example Q76:16, Q55:58, Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, p. 214, IMG 2-4, Appendix p.95-96

⁹³ The concept of Paradise as being on a mountain is not mentioned in the Genesis narrative; it is described as being "the holy mountain of God" in Ezeckiel 28:13-14. See Brock, *Hymns* p.51. Nicholas Sed states that Ephrem's vision of Paradise is informed to a great extent by Jewish Concepts. See Nicholas Sed, "Les Hymnes sur le Paradis de Saint Éphrem et les Traditions Juives," *Le Muséon* 81 (1968), p. 455–501. □

⁹⁴ Brock, *Hymns*, p.80.

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 78,79.

⁹⁶ See H10:8, p. 150 where Ephrem remarks on "the phases of the moon" and how they affect Paradise.

funnel-shaped mountain of Paradise, both transcending and enveloping the world.⁹⁷ By locating Paradise outside the familiar concepts of time and space, Ephrem was purposely **going against a more literalist view prevalent in the early Christian period.**⁹⁸

When he is first transported to heaven, he relays that his mind crossed over the bridge and entered Paradise through the door (H5:5).⁹⁹ The key to Paradise is “forged” on Earth.¹⁰⁰ In his hymns, Ephrem uses the metaphor of the key not only in relation to Paradise but also to concepts and principles such as the “key of justice” (H3:5), “keys of doctrine” (H6:1), “key to the eyes of the shepherd” (H15:3) and the “keys to learning” (H15:6).¹⁰¹ He also mentions that God “came and gave us His keys, since it is for us that His treasures lie waiting” (H7:1);¹⁰² in which the treasures are either a reference to Paradise itself or the treasures found in it. The key or keys of Paradise in the hymns of Ephrem are a metaphor of the person’s deeds and beliefs on earth since he clearly states that they are forged on earth and also given by God. The door and the fence are animated; the door smiles upon the believer and is discerning, it also changes sizes according to the stature and rank achieved by each person that enters showing “whether they are perfect, or lacking in something” (H2:2).¹⁰³ The fence that encircles Paradise’s boundary is adorned (H 4:7) and provides security.¹⁰⁴ Both the inner and outer walls are the harmony that settles and reunites all things (H11:3).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the fence is guarded by a radiant double-faced angel who is peaceful to everyone that resides inside

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 85; “keys of Paradise” H8:2, p. 132.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 92, p. 108, p. 183, p. 184.

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 119.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 100

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 155; see also H2:7, p.87; H4:1, p.97.

its walls and is a danger to those who were cast out (H11:3).¹⁰⁶ Some of these elements, such as the gate and fence, are also found in the Islamic Paradise.¹⁰⁷

Inside Paradise, not all the inhabitants are equal and Ephrem makes that assertion in the second hymn before getting into the description of the Garden of Eden. He envisioned his Paradise divided into three different levels, each with increasing degrees of beauty and glory relating to different categories of blessedness (H2:10).¹⁰⁸ The inhabitants of the levels are also different. The repentant occupy the lowest parts, which are the foothills, the middle, comprised of the slopes, are for the righteous. Lastly, the heights are reserved for the exalted and victorious. One final position is the summit which is the domain of God himself (H2:10,11).¹⁰⁹ The levels are allocated “with justice” so that after the resurrection, each person rises to the level indicative of his earthly deeds (H2:11). The model for Ephrem’s division came from Noah’s ark and Moses on Mount Sinai. The animals on Noah’s ark were on the lowest part, the birds in the middle and he was like “the Deity”, on the higher level; similarly, on Mount Sinai, the people lived below, the priests and Aaron in the middle regions and Moses on its heights while God was on the summit.¹¹⁰ Similarly, as will be discussed in Chapter III, in the Qur’ān, we find a division of the inhabitants of Paradise into groups that occupy different levels (Q56:10).

Adam was originally placed in an intermediate state, midway up the mountain of Paradise where the Tree of Wisdom functioned as a gate of testing for this devotion (H3:3); it was only by obeying the command of God that Adam and Eve could progress up the mountain and ascend past the Tree of Wisdom to the Tree of Life (H3:2 ,3,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁰⁷ See Q13:23, al-Kūfī, p. 208.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 88,89.

¹¹⁰ See H2:12-13, p. 89.

13,14).¹¹¹ However, they broke God's commandment by submitting to the serpent's temptations and were cast out of Paradise, losing both the summit and the midpoint.

Although Paradise is an eternal abode, heaven has its own indications of time. Paradisiacal time is divided into four "groups" or seasons. Each group is made up of three months and brings with it something new: "the first fruits" come out in the first three months, the "luscious soft fruits" during the fourth through the sixth month, the "late fruits" ripen during the following three months and at the final quarter of the heavenly year "the pregnant buds are bursting forth with joy" (H10:7).¹¹² He names these months the standard Syriac name but notes that months of extreme weather cannot exist in Paradise for they would disturb its tranquility (10:3).¹¹³ As a result, the months that pass there are pleasant and moderate "for Eden makes [the months] like itself":¹¹⁴

The months also bring with them flowers and beautify Paradise. Grass grows in December, wheat in January, and all the months blossom with flowers that decorate the hills of Paradise and bear its fruits.¹¹⁵ The grass in Paradise is also otherworldly, for both the grass and its roots have rejuvenating powers when eaten and when their scent is breathed in. They make the inhabitants more beautiful (H7:21).¹¹⁶

Ephrem's description of time emphasizes change. Each season brings with it something new, and therefore, different in color, taste, and scenery. Consequently, even though the righteous will stay in the Garden of Eden indefinitely, this eternity does not mean that time stands still in Paradise and all remains

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 85; p. 91, 95.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 150.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 149.

¹¹⁴ H10:4, p.149

¹¹⁵ See H10:4, p.149; H10:6, p. 149-150.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

unchanged. On the contrary, Paradise is a place that always brings changes and new beginnings.

3. The Concept of Paradise as a Garden

Ephrem's Paradise is divided as we have seen above, however Paradise as a whole is a perpetual garden made up of fruit bearing trees, flowers, and rivers and springs each possessing their own characteristics and purpose.

The trees in Ephrem's envisioned heaven are one of the most animated floras. If an individual should wish to climb one, the tree itself will lower its branches in forms of steps because they are very "eager" to have you climb and reach their "bosom" where you can recline on the couch that is formed by its branches (H9:3).¹¹⁷ These couches made from branches and flowers are cupped, creating a sort of shielding womb for whoever decides to repose there. As one tree leaves the inhabitant the other summons one to come and partake of its produce as they "rejoice" that one have chosen to eat from their fruits, or drink their juices, smell their fragrances or even wash with their dew (H9:6).¹¹⁸ The trees therefore offer abundance of fruits that present themselves to the inhabitants of Paradise while they rest reclining on the couches made of branches and flowers. Such vivid animation of trees is mainly found in Ephrem's hymns and is not shared with the Islamic tradition which will be explored in the next chapter.

The fruits of these trees satisfy the hunger and quench the thirst of the inhabitants of Paradise. All fruits are holy and glorious and the production of fruits is never ending with each month bringing with it its own harvest.¹¹⁹ They nourish and

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 137.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 138.

¹¹⁹ See H 4:7, p. 99; H 14:8, p. 178; H 7:3, p. 119; H10:6, p. 156.

purify those who consume them and make wise those who drink their juices (H7:3).¹²⁰ The fruits dangle in such a way that they are within hand's reach to pluck, no extra effort is needed to reach them. This is a characteristic of fruits that is also found in the Qur'ān, *tafāsīr* and mosaic depictions.¹²¹ The "bosom" of the tree holds a banquet and, like everything else in Heaven, the fruits are also animated: they move toward you and each fruit waits its turn, "[e]ach type of fruit in due sequence approaches, each awaiting its turn: fruit to eat, and fruit to quench the thirst;" (H9:4).¹²² There are also clouds made of fruits that cast a shade over the heads of the saints (H9:5).¹²³ When fruits touch or overlap, they create their own "offspring" that have new flora and vegetation unlike any other harvests before them (H9:4). The only fruit mentioned by name is the fig, although it is a slightly negative sense since it recalls that Adam covered his nakedness when he sinned with the leaves of figs that grow on the boundary of Paradise (H2:7).¹²⁴

The two most important trees of Paradise are the Tree of Wisdom/Knowledge and the Tree of Life that are planted in Paradise on two different levels: the Tree of Knowledge is in the middle and the Tree of Life on a higher circle.¹²⁵ The Tree of Knowledge is like a veil that shadowed Adam and Eve from seeing the Tree of Life which was to be kept as a reward if they followed the commandment (H3:9)¹²⁶ and to block their ability to see its beauty which could exacerbate the temptation of eating its forbidden fruit; they should be able to keep God's commandment without the promise

¹²⁰ Ibid., p. 120.

¹²¹ See Q55:54; Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol.4, p.527

¹²² Ibid., p. 137.

¹²³ Ibid., p. 138.

¹²⁴ Ibid., p.88. In H12:13, p. 165, there is a reference to a dried fig tree, Brock clarifies that in Ephrem's *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, he explains that when Adam was returned to his former glory and no longer needed leaves or "garments of skin", God dried up the fig tree. See p. 194, n. XII.13

¹²⁵ See H3:3, p. 91 and H12:15, p.166

¹²⁶ Ibid., p. 93.

of a reward.¹²⁷ These two trees can make a human achieve “the likeness of God”, awarded with immortal life, and wisdom and knowledge that do not fail (H12:15).¹²⁸

Ephrem’s Paradise also has flowers as beautiful and sweet smelling adornments. They bloom like fruits, monthly and in new varieties (H10:6).¹²⁹ The flowers are mainly affected by the phases of the moon: the different stages of the moon create change in the flowers, and with each full moon and blossom, the flowers go through a continuous cycle of birth, maturity, progression into old age, and then rejuvenation.¹³⁰ The blossoming of flowers is described as pregnant flowers going into labor and giving birth, “[w]ho has ever beheld flowers with pregnant wombs which each month brings to pangs of labor, then, suddenly, to give birth?” (H10:9). The flowers are so numerous that they outnumber the stars. Their fragrance is adorned with divine grace which heals illnesses and lifts the curses that plague the lands set by the serpent in the original garden (H11:9).¹³¹ Other than adding to the beauty of Paradise, the description of flowers in Ephrem’s hymns, like pregnant mothers giving birth signals the constant joy that comes with new life. In contrast, the mention of flowers is non-existent in the Islamic conception of Paradise, the imagery thus is exclusive to Ephrem’s Paradise.

Paradise is also home to ever-flowing springs of “delight” that gush wine, honey, milk and cream (H10:6).¹³² The four rivers, or in this case springs, in Heaven are mentioned in the Bible, but Ephrem adds a new spring as well. Flowing from Eden into

¹²⁷ This second reason is explained in Ephrem’s *Commentary on Genesis* (II.17):

God had created the Tree of Life and hidden it from Adam and Eve, first, so that it should not, with its beauty, stir up conflict with them and so double their struggle, and also because it was inappropriate that they should be observant of the commandment of Him who cannot be seen for the sake of a reward that was there before their eyes.

See Brock, *Hymns*, p. 60.

¹²⁸ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 166.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹³⁰ See H10:8 and H10:9 p. 150-151.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹³² Brock, *Hymns*, p. 149.

the sky is a spring of perfumes and according to Ephrem, it delivers benediction to the soul and heals those who breathe it (H11:12).¹³³ In Exodus 3:17 there is a mention of a “land that is flowing with milk and honey” and it is important to mention as well that in early Christianity and up until the 6th century, both milk and honey were given to the newly baptized.¹³⁴ Milk and honey not only symbolized the status of being newly born but also as entering the promised land, which explains the significance of having such rivers in Paradise for Ephrem.¹³⁵ In the Qur’ān, the number of rivers is identical to that of Ephrem, but the nature of some change (Q47:15).

Thus, Ephrem’s conception of heaven is a garden that boasts all the characteristics of a beautiful, ultimate, and otherworldly nature with its lush vegetation, endless fruit bearing trees, changing flowers and springs unlike anything found on earth.

4. The Concept of an Inhabited Paradise

Ephrem’s garden is equipped to comfortably accommodate and sustain its human inhabitants. They have garments, houses and were also attended to and served; these are all characteristics of Paradise that continued to exist in the Qur’ān and early Islamic community but with different imagery.¹³⁶

Humans are the only earthly creations that dwell in Ephrem’s Paradise, it is also inhabited by angels (H14:9) but no animal was even allowed to come near its outer area

¹³³ Ibid. p. 158. The idea of four rivers began with the Sumerians in the third millennium B.C.E who believed that four cosmic rivers structured the world and in Genesis, there is no clear indication of whether the river that “went out of Eden” and parted into four heads originated from the garden.¹³³ The existence of the four rivers in Paradise, however, appeared in exilic times. In Hellenistic times, it was believed that the rivers were flavored with milk, honey, wine and oil which were all considered symbol for the promised land as they were sacred liquids in the ancient near east. See Matthias Radsheit, “Springs and Fountains,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*.

¹³⁴ Robin Jensen, *Baptismal Imagery in Early Christianity: Ritual, Visual, and Theological Dimensions* (Grand Rapids, 2012), p.126

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 125

¹³⁶ See Ch. III, p. 47-55

(H3:4).¹³⁷ Heaven is reserved for the righteous, the persecuted, the afflicted, the prophets, and apostles. A place where all those who have been wronged, slain, stoned, aggrieved or stricken look at those who have inflicted these wrongs on them and laugh (H1:14).¹³⁸ Paradise is for those who are worthy of it and for those good men whose goodness makes them beautiful.¹³⁹ These righteous dwellers live without illnesses, suffering, burdens and anguish (H2:7), and know no evil, rage, contempt, harm, hatred nor envy (H7:11); lust for example, does not exist “the fountains of lust are stopped up” (H7:5) and “virginity dances” in Paradise.¹⁴⁰ They are now tranquil, peaceful and are pure from within (H7:12).¹⁴¹ The nature of the inhabitants of Paradise, as well as heaven being an abode of eternal bliss free of sorrow and hate are other examples of shared conceptions of heaven that are mentioned in the Qur’ān and that resonated with the early Muslims.¹⁴²

People with disabilities lose all their physical challenges when they reach heaven, the cripples can walk and jump, the deformed could not even crawl can fly, the blind see the beauty of Paradise and the deaf hear the sounds of the harps of heaven (H7:13).¹⁴³ In another verse Ephrem explains that the bodies of the righteous change in size, indeed he describes them as resembling the mind which is capable of stretching out, expanding, shrinking and/or contracting (H5:8).¹⁴⁴ His concern with the size of the bodies stemmed from his apprehension about the size of Paradise and whether it will fit

¹³⁷ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 92.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹³⁹ See H1:5, p. 79; and H2:1, p. 84.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 85, p. 123. See also H7:22-23, p. 127.

¹⁴² See Q7:42, 7:43, 52:18.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

all the righteous. He also states that Paradise actually makes everyone younger and more beautiful and “[n]one grow old there, for none die there” (H7:22).¹⁴⁵

The men and women in Paradise wear radiant clothes made of light, for nakedness is a shame according to Ephrem and needs to be covered.¹⁴⁶ He does not mention any fabrics or types of clothes, just apparel made of light. The “Robe of Glory” or the “Robe of Light” of Adam and Eve is a well-known metaphor of Ephrem, and of Syriac writers in general, that was developed out of the Old and New Testaments.¹⁴⁷ Ephrem conceives that at the Fall, Adam and Eve were stripped of their original clothing in Paradise: the “Robe of Glory” which Christ then laid in the river Jordan for all humanity to put on at baptism.¹⁴⁸ Thus, at baptism, the individual Christian when “putting on Christ” he/she is putting on the “Robe of Glory” and at the Resurrection, the just Christian will reenter Paradise in his/her Robe of Glory. The term originates from an interpretation of Genesis 3:21 in Hebrew that reads “And the Lord God made Adam and his wife garments of skin,” with the Hebrew terms for “skin” and “light” being very similar such that some manuscripts of Genesis read “garments of light.”¹⁴⁹

Other than clothes, the inhabitants of Paradise will also have spaces to live in. The just are all given sanctuaries but they vary in accordance with their deeds. Their abodes are dripping with ointments perfumed with pleasant odors, they are decorated with wreaths of fruits and topped with flowers (H5:6).¹⁵⁰ And so, the bigger the deeds, the more ornaments, beauty, and glory the sanctuary has in comparison to others that

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 127

¹⁴⁶ See H7:5, *ibid.*; H14:8, p. 178.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 68. See also Sebastian Brock, “Clothing metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syriac Tradition,” in *Typus, Symbol, Allegorie bei den östlichen Vätern und ihren Parallelen im Mittelalter* (Eichstätter Beiträge, 1981), p. 11-40, reprinted in *Studies in Syriac Christianity. History, Literature and Theology n.12*, ch. IX; and Brock, *The Luminous Eye*, chap. 5.

¹⁵⁰ Brock, *Hymns*, p. 104.

are dimmer in coloring with few embellishments. Houses also have “lamps with thousands of rays” (H5:9).¹⁵¹ Ephrem does not mention what the houses are made from or how big they are, unlike the Qur’ān, *tafāsīr* and mosaic depictions that assert that the inhabitants of Paradise will have castles.¹⁵²

Paradise needs no human-like attendants because service is performed by the wind. It is noteworthy to keep in mind while talking about the winds in Ephrem’s hymns that the Syriac word *ruho* or *ruha* means both wind and spirit.¹⁵³ Brock uses the term wind in his translation but I believe in line with Ephrem’s spiritual thinking and religious belief, that the breezes in these hymns are more spirit than wind.

The breezes or winds of Paradise are far from normal winds; in fact, they have many roles. They act as servers with “some offering foods, others diverse drinks, one breathing dew, another fragrant scents” (H9:8).¹⁵⁴ The breeze need only to blow to nourish, feed or appease the thirst of the dwellers; some breezes are also loaded with goodness, joy, delights and even riches.¹⁵⁵ These “discerning” breezes are both “baker and cupbearer” and thus feasting in Heaven is done without the use of hands, teeth, nor mouths and without the stomach growing heavy.¹⁵⁶ Here Ephrem is invoking earthly pleasures yet also highlighting the difference found in Heaven. He states: “[w]ho has ever experienced delight in this way, eating, without employing his hands, drinking, without using his mouth?” (H9:11), and “[w]ho has ever reclined and enjoyed himself without anyone slaving away? Who has eaten to satisfaction without any food, or drunk

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.105.

¹⁵² See Q 52:10; Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p.527; IMG 6,9 in Appendix p.95, 97

¹⁵³ See entry for ‘wind’ or ‘spirit’ in Robert Payn Smith, *A compendious Syriac dictionary: founded upon the Thesaurus Syriacus* (Winona Lake, 1988).

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁵⁵ See H9:8 and H9:10, p. 139.

¹⁵⁶ See H9:9 and H9:11, p.139, 140.

and become merry without any drink?” (H9:9).¹⁵⁷ In these verses, Ephrem highlights delight, satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness, human feelings reached with an otherwise improbable scenario that can only take place in Heaven.

5. The Sensory Experience in Paradise

In Ephrem’s Paradise, one can eat delicious food, live amid a beautiful botanical garden, and also can smell beautiful perfumes and hear sweet melodies.

Paradise is filled with pleasant scents and perfumes. As seen above, the bowers are dipped in ointment and there is a spring of scented perfume, and blossoms all around. Ephrem described the aromas of heaven as most wonderful (H4:7) with even a single blossom having ten thousand scents (H5:9).¹⁵⁸ There are also scented breezes that blow with wide-ranging force bringing various pleasures, as elaborated above, and some scents and fragrances have healing powers as well.

Paradise is not without its own music to complete the sensory experience. The sounds heard in heaven have different origins, but all form sweet melodies and lovely music, and are labeled as having no equal on earth (H14:9).¹⁵⁹ On the one hand, harps and lyres are gathered, accompanied by shouts of “Hosanna□and the Church crying Alleluia” (H11:2).¹⁶⁰ On the other, the chants of the angels are heard (H14:9). Harps and lyres are mentioned in the Old Testament and they are instruments that were used only on festive and cheerful occasions and never used on any occasions of grief,¹⁶¹ which further attests to Ephrem’s image of a heaven free of sorrow, sadness and heartache.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 140, 139.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 100, p. 105.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 178.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 154.

¹⁶¹ “Harp and Lyre,” *Jewish Encyclopedia*, V6, p. 236.

This pleasant-sounding music does not come from the instruments of heaven alone, as the mere voices of the heavenly beings and the “melody of the spiritual” are beautiful, unworldly harmonies (H14:9).

In his description of Paradise, Ephrem tries to engage all of the senses in order to best engross the reader’s mind so that he/she can lucidly imagine the different wonders and pleasures of Paradise. The beautiful landscape, alongside the pleasant perfumes and wonderful melodies all paint an image of happiness and serenity.

C. Conclusion

Ephrem’s conception of Paradise is one of greenery, fruits, blossoms, trees, and springs. It is a highly animated Paradise where most of the elements have functions other than just for beauty or splendor. The gates change in size, the trees scoop you up; it is also a spiritual garden where winds heal and fruits purify your soul. People are only dressed in garments of light and no animals can approach the Garden of Eden. For fear of desecration of the earth of Paradise, the gems are cast out to form a dazzling land outside that of Paradise. Beautiful melodies and fragrant breezes paint an atmosphere of peace and serenity. It is a model where everything has a purpose, nothing is “useless” (H7:21), and where everything is pure and has curing or healing powers. Moreover, Ephrem’s spiritual substance is depicted in the various spiritual functions that the landscape possesses.

In this Paradise of purity, virginity plays an important role just as it does in Syriac Christianity as a whole. The life of a celibate was representative of the élite of the Church and Virgins were considered the jewel of the Church.¹⁶² In his *Hymns on Paradise* (and in his other writings) he evokes the imagery of a marriage feast (H14:9)

¹⁶² Christopher Buck, *Paradise and Paradigm: Key Symbols in Persian Christianity and the Baha'i Faith* (New York, 1999), p. 98, 99.

and of bridal chambers (H 1:6); this wedding feast is an assurance for the chaste Christians of their celebrated destiny at the end of time.¹⁶³ In the Bible and in Syriac Christian writings, the church is described as the Bride of Christ and the betrothal is actually a vow of celibacy and commitment of Christians to **Christ as the Bridegroom**.¹⁶⁴ Yet, regardless of the many metaphors and symbols that Ephrem evokes in his hymns, he does paint Paradise in “vivid earthly terms” in which Beck draws similarity to the way Paradise is described in the Qur’ān.¹⁶⁵

Some of the elements of Ephrem’s Paradise have similarities in the Qur’ān, the *tafāsīr* and the mosaics while others have radically changed. The main parallels are found in the landscape of Paradise and its conception as a garden where there is eternal bliss. The principal changes that start to form with the Qur’ān, and are adopted and developed by the early Muslim community, are mainly associated with the inhabitants and their physical pleasures. These aspects will be elaborated in detail in the next chapter.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁶⁴ Revelation 19:7-9, 21:9-10, Ephesians 5:22-33; Brock, *Hymns on Paradise*, p.27.

¹⁶⁵ Beck, “Les Houris du Coran et Ephrem le Syrien”, p.408.

CHAPTER III

PARADISE IN THE QUR'ĀN AND EARLY *TAFĀSĪR*

This chapter will study the description of Paradise as depicted in the Qur'ān and *tafāsīr* of the early Islamic community. I have selected two works one from both the Sunni and Shī'ī traditions to analyze: the exegesis of Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d.150/767), an 8th century Sunni exegete, and Furāt al-Kūfī, a 9th century Shī'ī exegete. After a detailed study of the Paradise as depicted in Ephrem's hymns was made, a study of the Qur'ān and early *tafāsīr* is needed in order to map out the similarities and differences that exists between the two traditions' conception of Paradise. Moreover, a look at the early *tafāsīr* will also inform our study of the way the early Muslim community shaped its understanding of Paradisiacal notions originating from the Qur'ān.

A. Muqātil ibn Sulaymān

Abū-l Ḥassan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān Al-Balkhī was born in Balkh and lived in Marw, Baghdād and Baṣra, where he died in 150 A.H/767 A.D; some biographers believe that he died of old age.¹⁶⁶ He is a traditionist and commentator on the Qur'ān who was reproved for not being accurate with his *isnad*. Ibn Sulaymān was also considered a *qāṣṣ* and his *tafsīr* is thought to have preserved some early *qāṣaṣ* material.¹⁶⁷ In later centuries he was discredited and later exegetes such as al-Tabarī refrained from making

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Rippin, "Qur'ānic Interpretations" in *Classical Islam: a sourcebook of religious literature*, p.154.

¹⁶⁷ Lyall Armstrong, *The Quṣṣās of Early Islam* (Boston, 2017), p.97.

use of his work; this was mainly due to his excessive elaborations on biblical elements in the Qur'ān and his continuous tracing back of references to Jews and Christians.¹⁶⁸ More recent scholars, such as Armstrong, argue that the main reason for this criticism and disregard was more based on the poor transmission of reports: Muqātil supposedly copied from written works instead of following the standards of oral transmission of *ḥadīth*.¹⁶⁹ His exegesis is important for this particular research project due to its early date and extensive narration of heavenly notions and imagery. It is important to understand the conception of Paradise in the early Islamic community regardless if the work of Ibn Sulaymān was later dismissed.

This research uses *Tafsīr Muqātil b. Sulaymān* edited by 'Abd Allāh Maḥmūd Shahātah (5 vols., Cairo 1979-88), that provides an interpretation of the entire text of the Qur'ān; the work puts little emphasis on issues of grammar or text; instead it tries to elaborate on the elements of scriptural narrative as much as possible.¹⁷⁰

B. Furāt al-Kūfī

Abū-l-Qāsim Furāt b. Ibrāhīm b. Furāt al-Kūfī is the author of the *Tafsīr Furāt* ("Qur'ānic commentary of Furāt"), which is one of the oldest Shī'ī Qur'ānic commentaries.¹⁷¹ Little is known about him, but the date 310 A.H/922 A.D is at times given as his date of death.¹⁷² His commentary on the Qur'ān is his only surviving work and is a collection of more than 770 *ḥadīths* mainly attributed to the *imams* Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d.c.114 AH/732 AD) and Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d.148 AH/765 AD) as well as few

¹⁶⁸ Rippin, "Qur'ānic Interpretations," p. 154.

¹⁶⁹ Armstrong, *The Quṣṣās*, p. 97.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Amir-Moezzi, Mohammad Ali, "Furāt b. Furāt al-Kūfī," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*.

¹⁷² Andrew Rippin, "Qur'ānic Interpretations," p. 160.

companions of ‘Alī ibn Abī Talib.¹⁷³ The commentary is selective and is not complete, and he only comments on certain verses that mainly have a special doctrinal meaning within the Shī‘ī tradition. For the purpose of this research, these references were disregarded unless they enhance the physical description of Paradise.¹⁷⁴

C. Islamic Paradise

1. Conception of the Islamic Paradise

The Islamic afterlife was not only a doctrine of faith, but also a motivation for reform.¹⁷⁵ It is a place where believers could live eternally satisfied. The English term Paradise is portrayed but different Arabic terms designate Paradise such as the term *janna*, which refers to “garden” in general; but with the definite article *al-*, it refers particularly to Paradise. As a single word *al-janna* is the most frequently used term in the Qur’ān to designate Paradise (over 80 times)¹⁷⁶, which is recurrently described as “gardens underneath which rivers flow”¹⁷⁷ meaning underneath their groves.¹⁷⁸ Paradise is unequivocally described as a reward for the godfearing (Q18:31); an “inheritance” (Q7:43, 43:72), “requital” (Q13:35), “recompense” (Q20:76), and “homecoming” (Q25:15) for them. It is also a divine promise (Q50:32), a gift (Q78:36), a resting place (Q18:31), “a fair resort” (Q13:29), it is a “mighty triumph” (Q9:89), and a “secure place” (Q44:51). Since it is a reward and recompense for the righteous, the Qur’ānic verses are, more often than not, preceded or followed by verses depicting Hell for the

¹⁷³ Moezzi, “Furāt b. Furāt al-Kūfī.”

¹⁷⁴ Several manuscripts of the *Tafsīr* of Furāt exist (‘Āghā Buzurg Ṭihirānī, 4:298–9) as well as two critical editions one by Muḥammad ‘Alī al-Gharawī al-Urdūbādī, Najaf 1354 A.H/1935 A.D, and the other by Muḥammad al-Kāzīm, Tehran 1410 A.H/1990 A.D¹⁷⁴ that was used in this research. Moezzi, “Furāt b. Furāt al-Kūfī.”

¹⁷⁵ Nerina Rustonji, “Early Views of Paradise in Islam,” *Religion Compass* (2010), p. 166.

¹⁷⁶ Leah Kinberg, “Paradise;” see also Asma Afsaruddin, “Garden;” and Q2:214; 7:43; 19:63. The idea of Paradise is mentioned over one hundred and thirty seven times using more than fifteen different words that convey the ideas of *jannah*, *dār al-‘ākhīrah*, *al-firdaws*, etc.

¹⁷⁷ See Q2: 25, Q 3: 15, Q 4:57, Q9:72, 89, Q 47: 12, Q 7:43, Q18:31, Q 20:76.

¹⁷⁸ Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil ibn Sulaymān*, Vol.2, p.584.

unbelievers in order to contrast the two fates of the afterlife, “[a]s for the unbelievers, they take their enjoyment and eat as cattle eat; and the Fire shall be their lodging” (Q47:12), “[a]re they as he who dwells forever in the Fire, such as are given to drink boiling water, that tears their bowels asunder?” (Q47:15). The righteous will live within gardens of bliss, fountains, and vineyards. Similar to the Paradise of Ephrem, the Qur’ānic Paradise is a space void of lies, sin and fatigue, where only peace is found.¹⁷⁹ The righteous will have all that they want or wish for, and they will even have what they did not even think of asking for.¹⁸⁰ The Islamic Paradise is thus a pure and eternal fruitful garden that provides shelter for its inhabitants; it is filled with ease, joy, food, and drinks;¹⁸¹ God describes it with terms that are familiar to the people of earth so that their hearts may be guided to him.¹⁸²

Paradise also provides an eternity of lavish living and richness in material possessions. Unlike the Paradise of Ephrem, it is filled with fine fabrics, jewels, gems, and precious metals. The fabrics that are explicitly named are silk and brocade (*sundus*, *istabraq*) and are repeated numerous times in the Qur’ān and *tafāsīr*.¹⁸³ Silk is mentioned five times in the Qur’ān, and only in passages that describe Paradise. Therefore, silk and its luxurious connotations is one of the main elements of Islamic heavenly ontology.¹⁸⁴ The precious metals are gold and silver (white silver, red gold); the jewels are gems, precious stones and crystals (crystals of silver) (Q76:16), coral and rubies (Q55:58), pearls (Q35:33), topaz, rubies (red, white, yellow, green), and green emeralds. Wearables and furniture that are made of precious metals and encrusted with

¹⁷⁹ See Q 35:35, 56:25, 78:35. See also, Q 10:6,15:45, 44:52, 50:34, 52:17, 56:26, 78:32;

¹⁸⁰ See Q 50:35. Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 114-115.

¹⁸¹ Nārhi, “Beautiful Reflections: The Cognitive and Evolutionary Foundations of Paradise Representations.” *Method & Theory In The Study Of Religion* 20, p. 342.

¹⁸² Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 114-115.

¹⁸³ See Q76:21, 18:31, 44:53, 76:12.

¹⁸⁴ Gonzalez, V., “Silk,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*.

precious stones, rubies, emeralds and the like are all symbols of excessive wealth on earth which accompanies also power. The average person living on earth could never afford all this luxury and even those who can, can never have camels made of rubies because such are otherworldly creatures. This is again to emphasize that no feat is great for God, and one can never really grasp the riches and bounties that God will offer the righteous in Paradise for they are unlike anything found on earth.

2. Time and Space in Paradise

Just as Ephrem located his Paradise in space and described its shape and boundaries, the Islamic Paradise was also given characteristics of its own in the Qur'ān and *tafāsīr*. Paradise in the Qur'ān is portrayed as having a range “as the heavens and earth” (Q3:133). It is located above the earth and is built and decorated and has “no cracks” (Q50:6). It is comprised of four gardens that are adjacent to each other: “for them shall be two gardens” (Q55:46), “[a]nd besides these shall be two gardens” (Q55:62) all made of green pastures. These four gardens are identified as the Garden of Eden (*jannat 'adn*), the Garden of Perpetual Bliss (*jannat al-na'īm*), the Garden of Paradise (*jannat al-firdaws*), and the Garden of Refuge (*jannat al-ma'wa*).¹⁸⁵ Ibn Sulaymān explains that the width of Paradise is equal to the width of seven heavens and seven earths put together.¹⁸⁶ Thus, if one falls from heaven, it will take him seventy years to reach the surface of earth.¹⁸⁷ Moreover, the gardens that make up Paradise are groves so large that a person must walk for five hundred years in order to cross each one.¹⁸⁸ Furāt al-Kūfī described the Garden of Eden is a castle made of one colossal pearl that has neither fault nor juncture and is large enough to accommodate all Muslims gathered in that castle. It

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., Vol.4, p. 202-204.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., Vol.1, p. 301.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., Vol.2, p. 227.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., Vol.4, p. 202-204.

has a million doors made of rubies and topaz and each is twelve miles¹⁸⁹ wide and can only be entered by a prophet, one of the righteous person, or a martyr.¹⁹⁰

In the Qur’ān, the final resting place does not have only one gate like the Paradise of Ephrem, it has many: “angels shall enter unto them from every gate” (Q13:23), “Gardens of Eden, whereof the gates are open to them,” and the virtuous enter Paradise through these gates in peace and security (Q 38:50, 39:73). Similarly to Ephrem, these gates take on a more lively form with Ibn Sulaymān who describes them as being transparent and as discerning: they can be spoken to and they themselves speak.¹⁹¹ A fence is mentioned only by al-Kūfī when he is discussing the Ṭūbā tree and narrates from Ibn ‘Abbās that its branches can be seen from outside the fence of heaven.¹⁹²

In the afterlife, people will be divided into three groups: “the Companions of the Right, the Companions of the Left” and “those Foremost (in faith)” (Q56:10).¹⁹³ Unlike the divisions of Ephrem, only two groups will enter Paradise: the Companions of the Right and the Foremost, while the final resting place of the third group, the Companions of the Left, will be a fiery hell.¹⁹⁴ Within Paradise, the Companions of the Right will live amidst lote trees, and gushing waters with abundant fruits and couches to recline on, and they will also have enamored virgins who are the same age as theirs (Q56:27-38); while the Foremost in faith will be the nearest to God (Q56:11). However, in chapter 83 of the Qur’ān verses 20 and 28 the “foremost in the race” (*al-sābiqūn*) and those

¹⁸⁹ The Arabic mile or *mīl* is historical unit of length with a precise length that is disputed but lies between 1.8 and 2.0 km. For more on this see Paul Lunde. “Al-Faraghani and the Short Degree.” *The Middle East and the Age of Discovery Aramco World Magazine Exhibition Issue*, 43:3. p. 15–17.

¹⁹⁰ Furāt al-Kūfī, *Tafsīr Furāt al-Kūfī*, p. 211.

¹⁹¹ Ibn Sulaymān Vol.3, p. 650.

¹⁹² Al-Kūfī, p. 208.

¹⁹³ The translation of Yusuf Ali is used for Q56:10,11.

¹⁹⁴ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p.216.

brought near (*al-muqarrabūn*) are sometimes identified as two separate groups.¹⁹⁵ This then implies that three different groups who will be the future inhabitants of Paradise. However, it is important to mention here that in Arberry's translation, in both instances (Q56 and Q83), the two terms are interchangeable and refer to the same group who are "those brought nigh" or "brought near." Ibn Sulaymān also refers to the *sābiqūn* as being themselves the *muqarrabūn*, meaning the ones brought near to God.¹⁹⁶

We have discussed in the previous chapter Ephrem's conception of paradisiacal time with months and seasons and days. In the Qur'ān, Paradise is an eternal abode void of any references to seasons or months, "therein dwelling forever" (Q4: 57)¹⁹⁷ "neither shall they ever be driven forth from there" (Q15:48). Moreover, Paradise has "neither sun nor bitter cold," (Q76:13) and thus, has no winter nor summer.¹⁹⁸ Not only that, days cannot be counted since in heaven there is no night, the righteous are in eternal light.¹⁹⁹ Eternity as a concept was used by Muslim thinkers, from an early date, as a means to differentiate between Creator and creation: God is eternal, yet everything else has an origin in time.²⁰⁰ In the Qur'ān, God is the only eternal being. There are however references to humans dwelling in either eternal bliss or damnation depending on their deeds. Perhaps the avoidance of associating time in Paradise with earthly notions such as seasons, weather, months, and days is only to make a clear distinction between "being in infinite time" and "the ever-changing quality of earthly existence."²⁰¹ Change is a characteristic of earth and of life there, and change brings with it both the good and the bad. For example, good weather is followed by bad weather, happiness can be

¹⁹⁵ See also Kinberg, "Paradise."

¹⁹⁶ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 216.

¹⁹⁷ See Q2:25; Q3:15., Q9:72, Q9,89, Q 20:76, Q 23:11, Q39:73.

¹⁹⁸ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 527-532.

¹⁹⁹ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.3, p. 650.

²⁰⁰ Taneli Kukkonen, "Eternity," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*.

²⁰¹ Shahzad Bachir, "Eternity," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

replaced with sorrow, and a good disposition can turn into a troubled one. Change highlights duality, and since Paradise is an eternal abode of bliss, harmony, and happiness, change, with its dichotomy, cannot exist there.

3. The Concept of Paradise as a Garden

The Qur'ānic Paradise also builds on the concept of otherworldly gardens where nature is unparalleled. It is a garden with a beautiful landscape, fruit trees that provide in a continuous manner for eternity, and through which rivers and springs flow, an imagery very much like that of Ephrem and one that continues to be developed in the *tafāsīr* and is also represented in the mosaics.

The Garden of Eden is filled with various kinds of trees, such as common shade trees (Q13:55), or fruit bearing trees. In Paradise, there is every fruit one might think of and in two kinds (Q2: 25; 55: 52) and they exist in profusion and the supply is everlasting (Q13:35).²⁰² The Qur'ān identifies dates and pomegranates (Q55: 68), and grapes (Q78:32).²⁰³ According to some *aḥādīth*, the fruits are softer than butter and their taste is sweeter than honey.²⁰⁴ The fruits are always near the inhabitants of Paradise and are easy to gather even if they were reclining on couches (Q55:54). This imagery present in Ephrem's hymns, seems to constitute an important concept for the Muslim community as well, for it is in Qur'ān, is represented in the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus (IMG7-8) and is also developed in the *tafāsīr*. The inhabitants can eat the fruits of the trees while sleeping, sitting, or standing if they wish for they are

²⁰² See also Q 38:51, 43:74; 44:55; 47:15.

²⁰³ Vineyards are mentioned in Q78:32. Also, "serried acacias" are mentioned in Q56:29, there are many species of acacia trees and some of them produce berries, however the species of the trees mentioned here is unclear.

²⁰⁴ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 218.

accessible in any location.²⁰⁵ If one desired, the trees would approach him/her and then return to their original place.²⁰⁶ The animated trees are a shared imagery between Ephrem and Ibn Sulaymān but which is not found in the Qur’ān.

In the Medicine of the Prophet (*al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*), which includes medical prescriptions that were recommended by the Prophet to his companions, pomegranates and dates are mentioned as having medical properties.²⁰⁷ Moreover, the fruits that are mentioned in Paradise all contain seeds. This is particularly important because seeds in the Islamic tradition are a significant symbol of creation and resurrection, and a sign of God’s mercy, kindness, and justice.²⁰⁸

Furthermore, similar to the tree of Zaqqūm in the Fire, there is also a significant tree for the Garden, the Lote Tree that is located near the throne of God (Q53:12).²⁰⁹

In Q13:29, Ṭūbā is translated as “blessedness and a fair resort” for those “who believe and do righteous deeds.” In Ibn Sulaymān’s *tafsīr* it is also explained as blessedness; however, in Furāt al-Kūfī’s *tafsīr*, Ṭūbā is identified as a tree in heaven.²¹⁰ Al-Kūfī transmits several *aḥādīth* narrated from Ibn ‘Abbās, Abī Ja‘far and notably ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib that state that the Prophet said that upon entering Paradise in the *Mi‘rāj*, he saw a tree so big that every one of its leaves could cover the world and all that is in it.²¹¹ The tree grows jewels, garments, and fruits and all are dangling within the reach of the people of heaven.²¹² The branches of that tree are sweeter than honey, and softer than butter. They pass through every castle, house, and residence in Paradise and they

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ See Omar Said, and Bashir Saad. *Greco-Arab and Islamic Herbal Medicine*, p. 104

²⁰⁸ See Rafik Berjak, “Habb/Habba,” in *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia*

²⁰⁹ Rustomji, p. 170.

²¹⁰ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.2, p.375, al-Kūfī, p. 208. Ṭūbā in the Ethiopian/Indian language means *janna*; see Kinberg, “Paradise.”

²¹¹ Al-Kūfī, p. 208.

²¹² Ibid.

can be seen from outside the fence of heaven.²¹³ They are like fruit canes and each holds a hundred different kinds of fruit some that are earthly and familiar, while others are ethereal. Every time someone picks a fruit from it, another one grows back. The size of the tree is again highlighted, “if a rider on horseback should ride [beneath it], he would ride underneath its shade for one hundred years before traversing it.”²¹⁴ Ṭūbā’s blossoms are yellow gardens (*riyāḍ*)²¹⁵, its branches are made of silk and brocade, its fruits are green garments, and its taste is ginger and honey.²¹⁶ It stands on a flatland made of red rubies and green emeralds, has a soil made of musk and grey amber and is surrounded by saffron grass.²¹⁷ Additionally, the waters of *al-salsabīl*, *al-raḥīq*, and *al-ma‘īn*, fountains found in heaven, gush forth from its core.²¹⁸

The description of abundant trees and lush vegetation in Paradise could be linked to the landscape of the *Hijāz* at the time of the revelations and the early Islamic community. Medina was a rich oasis, however, the majority of the area was a desert that had plentiful, but short-lived vegetation that only came out in the rainy season or spring.²¹⁹ Agriculture was practiced in a number of oases in western Arabia with date palms being the main crop.²²⁰ Thus, some paradisiacal trees were rooted in the reality of the early Islamic community but are offered with more richness in heaven. These elements combined with the fact that high, large, and abundant trees were part of paradisiacal notions circulating at the time can explain the attraction of the early Islamic community to a hereafter that provided such lush and green vegetation that were non

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid., p. 212.

²¹⁵ According to al-Aṣbahānī’s book, *Ṣifāt al-Janna*, the word in question is actually *riyāṭ* (diaphanous garments).

²¹⁶ Al-Kūfī, p. 212.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Montgomery Watt and Richard Bell, *Introduction to the Qur’ān* (Edinburgh, 2001), p. 5

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 8

existent on earth. Additionally, in the Qur'ān, vegetation is mainly mentioned within three themes: as evidence to the bounty of God, to highlight the diversity of vegetation in nature and finally the portrayal of plants in constant threat of decay due to climatic changes and the scarcity of water supplies.²²¹ The vegetation in Paradise can also be evidence of the bounty of God but in contrast to earthly plants, the trees in Paradise are eternally abundant and produce a ceaseless flow of fruits for there is no threat of decay or water shortage. This important aspect is highlighted to describe to the righteous the difference between life on earth and the hereafter.

In Paradise, there is no scarcity of water supplies as well, for there are rivers that flow underneath and through the groves of Paradise and fountains that gush from them. The phrase “rivers of Paradise” is mentioned forty six times in the Qur'ān while spring(s) occurs nine times.²²² There are fountains in the gardens of Paradise, one is named *as-salsabīl* (Q76:18).

The Qur'ān, following previous monotheistic traditions, also mentions the four rivers of Paradise. The rivers are of “unstaling” water, of milk “unchanging in flavor,” of “purified” honey, and of wine (Q 47: 15) that does not intoxicate.²²³ The four rivers are believed by some to originate from the river *al-Kawthar* and extend to all the occupants of heaven.²²⁴

The four natures of these rivers are all mentioned in the Qur'ān and have significance outside the realm of Paradise. Water is used for ablution, to wash, clean,

²²¹ Neuwirth, Angelika, “Geography,” in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

²²² Amira El-Zein. “Water of Paradise,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*.

²²³ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 202,203.

²²⁴ Ibid. The word *al-Kawthar* is mentioned only once in the Qur'ān and is also a name of Sūra 108. The verse Q108:1 reads: **إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ كَوْثَرًا**, “we have given you *al-Kawthar*. The word comes from the root *k-th-r* which means “to be abundant,” some translators such as Arberry translates this verse as “Surely We have given thee abundance;” while some leave it as *al-Kawthar* since the Prophet himself stated that it was a name of a river in Paradise. see J.Horovitz and L.Gardet, “Kawthar” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

and purify oneself before performing the act of prayer. The existence of water in Paradise can also be seen as an endless stream of purification of both the body and the soul.²²⁵ Honey is in the Qur’ān as a name of a *sūra* (Q16) and as a drink “wherein is healing for men” (Q16:69), and milk is also mentioned in the same chapter as tasting “sweet to drinkers” (Q16:66). Moreover, both honey and milk were favored by the prophet and considered to have healing powers and medicinal value.²²⁶ The river of wine in Paradise has special connotations since wine was gradually prohibited in the Qur’ān (Q4:43), but remained a prominent aspect of the hereafter. It is forbidden for the righteous to drink wine on earth since it can sidetrack them from God, yet it remains as a reward in Paradise. Wine in heaven is free of all negative effects such as dizziness, drunkenness, and other bad behaviors associated to the drinking of wine such as telling lies, fighting and such. Subsequently, it seems that the different rivers in Paradise had a level of significance to Islamic traditions even if some are similar to rivers found in other descriptions of Paradises.

In addition to the rivers, there is a fountain in heaven that is sweeter than honey, whiter than milk, colder than ice and softer than butter, according to al-Kūfī.²²⁷ Ibn Sulaymān also describes a fountain of wine that is mixed with water as cold as camphor.²²⁸ It tastes like ginger and smells like musk although the camphor, ginger, and musk that are mentioned here are said to be unlike any found on earth.

In Islamic religious contexts, springs are considered vital and pure and have life-giving waters; these notions are probably influenced by the mythical fountain of life

²²⁵ El-Zein, “Waters of Paradise.”

²²⁶ Said, p. 104

²²⁷ Al-Kūfī, p. 466.

²²⁸ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 524.

that provides everlasting youth and health for its drinkers.²²⁹ Radscheit argues that there is an allusion to that in Q 18:60-64 with Moses in search of the fountain of life.²³⁰ In the Qur'ān, springs are always connected to God's mercy and His omnipotence and later on in the Islamic community fountains became a symbol for Paradise.²³¹

4. The Concept of an Inhabited Paradise

The Islamic Paradise is inhabited by the righteous who, do not only live comfortably like the Paradise of Ephrem, but they live in luxury and indulge themselves in corporeal pleasures. Humans are God's best creation (Q95:4) and He granted them preference over all creations (Q 17:70). This translates into special privileges and treatment that the righteous of mankind receive in the hereafter.²³²

The occupants of Paradise are the just men and women who obey God and His Messenger; they are the ones God has blessed and they include the prophets, martyrs, and the righteous (Q4:69). They are those who do deeds of righteousness, who are believers (Q7:42, Q10:6). The residents of heaven will know neither rancor (Q7:43) nor sorrow (Q35:34); on the contrary their hearts will be pure, and they will rejoice in what God has given them (Q52:18). The believers will be joined by their descendants "[a]nd those who believed, and their seed followed them in belief, We shall join their seed with them," (Q52:21) and their wives "[e]nter Paradise, you and your wives, walking with joy!" (Q43:70).

Contrary to Ephrem's Paradise that is void of lust, the Islamic Paradise is one where sexual activity is prevalent. The men in heaven will have purified spouses,

²²⁹ Radscheit, "Springs and Fountains."

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Muhammad Ibrahim Surty, "Reflections on the Qur'ānic Concept of Paradise," *Islamic Quarterly* (1986), p. 183.

meaning purified from menstruation, human excrement, urine and all other filth according to Muqātil.²³³ “We shall espouse them to wide-eyed houris” (Q44:54), the houris are maidens with white faces whose beauty is so radiant that if they were on earth, their splendor could put out the earthly sun.²³⁴ The maidens are mentioned in several verses and are portrayed as “maidens restraining their glances” (Q38:52; Q 55: 56), “untouched before them by any man or jinn” (Q55:56,74), “lovely as rubies, beautiful as coral” (Q55:70), “good and comely” (Q55:70), “with swelling breasts, like of age” (Q78:33). These maidens restrain their glances because they do not gaze at any men other than their “husbands” for they adore them.²³⁵ They are virgins untouched by neither man nor jinn for they are created in heaven with the trees of heaven.²³⁶ Everyone in Paradise is of the same age: thirty-three years old, and thus the houris are of the same age.²³⁷ There is a certain peculiarity in the fact that the age of the dwellers in the Islamic Paradise is the same as Jesus’s age.²³⁸ Although the Qur’ān only mentions the houris and their beauty, Ibn Sulaymān describes the sexual act that takes place between the man and his wives. He explains that while one is reclining on the couch with his wife face to face in his castle, he looks at her white and pure face and shies away from asking her to copulate.²³⁹ However, knowing what he wants from her, she draws near and says: “lift your head and look at me for today you are mine and I am yours.” Then he sleeps with her (*yūjāmi ‘uhā*) with the force of a hundred men and the lust of forty men; and every

²³³ See Q2: 25, Q 3: 15, Q4:57. Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.1 p. 381.

²³⁴ Ibid., Vol.3.p. 825; Vol.4. P.531.

²³⁵ Ibid., Vol.3, p. 650. At times, Ibn Sulaymān refers to them as wives in his exegesis.

²³⁶ Ibid., Vol.4 p. 203, p. 564.

²³⁷ Ibid. See Vol.4. p. 530, Vol.3, p. 650.

²³⁸ L.Gardet, “Djanna,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

²³⁹ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol. 4 p. 530.

time he comes to her, he finds her a virgin. Every man has four thousands eight hundred wives just like her and every wife has seventy servants and slaves at her disposal.²⁴⁰

The inhabitants of Paradise are exceptionally well clothed with fine fabric and garlanded with gold and jewels. The Qur'ān states that they are “robed in silk and brocade” (Q44:53), “their apparel there shall be of silk” (Q35:33), and in another verse the color of these garments is identified as green, “they shall be robed in green garments of silk and brocade” (Q18:31). The Qur'ān also specifies that they will be adorned with “bracelets of gold” (Q18:31), “bracelets of gold and with pearls” (Q35:33), and “bracelets of silver” (Q76:21). The number of garments each person possesses is different in the two *tafāsīr*; al-Kūfī specifies that each person will have a hundred thousand different attires all made from green silk and brocade, and Ibn Sulaymān states that each person has seven of white silk.²⁴¹ The latter also builds on the Qur'ānic image, as according to him, each person will have on his forehead a wreath crested with topaz, rubies and precious stones of different colors topped with a crown of gold on his head. In addition, each person will have on his arms three bracelets: one of gold, one of silver and one of pearl and his fingers and toes will also be bejeweled with rings made of gold and silver inlaid with precious stones.²⁴²

Not only are their garments luxurious but their abodes are also lavish. According to the Qur'ān, the abodes of the righteous are “a shelter of plenteous shade” (Q4:57), “goodly dwelling-places” (Q9:72), and “lofty chambers, above which are built lofty chambers, underneath which rivers flow” (Q39:20), and even “palaces” (Q25:10).

Unlike the sanctuaries that are decorated with fruits and flowers in Ephrem's Paradise, the houses in the Islamic Paradise are made of precious jewels according to

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Al-Kūfī, p. 211, Ibn Sulaymān, p. 529.

²⁴² Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.2, p. 529.

both Ibn Sulaymān and al-Kūfi. According to Ibn Sulaymān, the righteous live in castles of pearls and rubies in between which a fragrant wind blows from under the Throne of God smelling like piles of white musk.²⁴³ In another instance he mentions that each person has a house whose length and width is one *farsakh* by one *farsakh*, that has rooms with close-wrought beds whose covers are softer than silk and are weaved with rods of rubies and emeralds.²⁴⁴ Each bed's legs are made of pearls and its edges made of gold and silver; the bed has mattresses that fill seventy rooms of this world.²⁴⁵ He also states that every man in heaven has a castle that contains seventy other castles and inside each of these castles, there are seventy houses.²⁴⁶ Every house is created of a hollow pearl whose length and width is of a *farsakh*, and has forty thousand shutters made of gold.²⁴⁷ In that house, there is a bed woven with rods of pearls and rubies; on both its right and left sides are forty thousand gold chairs with legs finished with red rubies.²⁴⁸ The numbers forty and seventy are repeated throughout the exegesis in relation to several aspects in heaven. It is believed that the Prophet Muhammad recited the Qur'ān seventy times during his divine ascension to heaven, which could be an explanation of how this number came to be associated with heaven.²⁴⁹ Forty on the other hand is also a number that is associated with both the Qur'ān and the Prophet and mainly with periods of purification in the Islamic culture.²⁵⁰

²⁴³ Ibid., Vol.1, p. 381, Vol.2, p. 227; Vol.2, p. 181, 182.

²⁴⁴ A *farsakh* is a Persian measure of distance that equals three miles, approx. six kilometers. See Marina Tolmacheva, "Geography." *Medieval Islamic civilization: an encyclopedia* (New York, 2006), p. 285.

²⁴⁵ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.2, p. 227.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., Vol. 4 p. 528.

²⁴⁷ According to Annemarie Schimmel, every number above a 100 basically means "infinite, numberless," see her *The Mystery of Numbers* (New York, 1993), p.278.

²⁴⁸ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.2, p. 529.

²⁴⁹ Schimmel, p. 264.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 248.

Al-Kūfī posits that there are domes and castles in the highest levels of *‘Illiyūn* that are made of red, green, yellow, and white rubies.²⁵¹ Accordingly, the castles are furnished with matching color fabric, “the castles that are made of red rubies are furnished with red silk, those of green rubies are furnished with green silk, those of white rubies are furnished with white silk, and those of yellow rubies are furnished with yellow diaphanous fabric (*al-riyāṭ al-aṣfar*).”²⁵² All the castles are covered with green emeralds, white silver, and red gold and its foundation and pillars are built of jewels. At the door of each castle are “green, green pastures [...] therein two fountains of gushing water,” and “of every fruit two kinds.”²⁵³ These lavish castles and pavilions are an obvious sign of luxury and richness that is an important element of the Islamic Paradise. These opulent castles and lofty chambers seem to be a consistent imagery within the early Muslim community for they are also found depicted in the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus.

The colors used for the descriptions of castles in the *tafāsīr* are four of the six primary colors mentioned in the Qur’ān: white, green, red, yellow, blue, and black.²⁵⁴ Green expresses a sense of freshness and luxuriousness,²⁵⁵ red (Q35:27,28) is used for its prominence or “strikingness” when describing God’s creations,²⁵⁶ white is a color of creation that also conveys purity while yellow alludes to brightness and beauty.²⁵⁷ The mentions of colors in the Qur’ān usually denote an entire spectrum of shades and are

²⁵¹ Al-Kūfī, p. 214. When discussing *‘Illiyūn*, most commentaries go back to the basic root of the word, which means height and glory. It is mostly identified as the seventh heaven, the lotus tree in the seventh heaven, as the most elevated place or as the residence of angels. Kinberg, “Paradise,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ see Afnan Fatani, “Colors” in *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia* ed. Oliver Leaman, p. 145

²⁵⁵ Green is mentioned 7 times in the Qur’ān, Q 12:43, 46; 22:63; 18:31; 36:80; 55:76; 76:2.

²⁵⁶ Andrew Rippin, “Colors,” *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* White is mentioned 8 times and yellow 5 times. See also Fatani “Colors,” p. 149.

mainly evidences of God's work and his involvement in the whole life cycle.²⁵⁸

Moreover, come colors such as black, white and blue have a metaphorical meaning mostly linked to a psychological or emotional state of being.²⁵⁹ In fact, while white represents happiness and bliss (Q 3:107), black and blue have negative connotations. Black denotes gloom (Q 39:60) and anger (Q 16:58), and blue is linked to emotional terror and fear, and physical feelings of cold and suffocation (Q 20:102).²⁶⁰ The interesting part about this is that black and blue are colors that are not only absent from Paradise in the Qur'ān, but also in the *tafāsīr*. Therefore, the colors used in the *tafāsīr* could be explained as evoking beauty, radiance, prominence, luxury and also happiness and bliss.

The theme of lavishness and opulence, consistent in various aspects in the Islamic Paradise, is also present in the banquets set for the inhabitants. They will eat and drink to their hearts' content. "And We shall succor them with fruits and flesh such as they desire" (Q52:22) and the people in heaven will "[e]at and drink, with wholesome appetite," (Q52:19). They shall have "whatever the souls desire, and the eyes delight in" (Q43:71), and "a cup overflowing" (Q78:34). They can have flesh of fowl (Q56:21) cured or barbequed and they can eat without doubt since all food in heaven is *ḥalāl*.²⁶¹ Food will be passed around them on platters of gold (Q43:71) while they drink from a cup "wherein is no idle talk, no cause of sin" (Q52:23) and "whose mixture is ginger" (Q76:17). It is a cup filled with wine that does not intoxicate and cause people "to engage in fabrication, lies and sins."²⁶² The godfearing in heaven need only say "Praise be to you oh God" for banquets of food to be brought to them that are a

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ Fatani, "Colors," p. 145

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p.145, p. 218.

²⁶² Ibid., Vol.4 p. 146.

mile long and a mile wide.²⁶³ The tables, made of red rubies, hold seventy thousand bowls made of gold and silver that contain seventy different kinds of food each.

Young servants wait on the believers passing with gold glasses and silver bowls containing wine and water. The righteous takes a piece with his hand but the morsel transforms into whatever he is craving, and one eats with the appetite of forty men.²⁶⁴ Once the believer has filled himself, he can drink a drink that digests what he ate during the previous forty years and God throws upon him a thousand “doors” of cravings.²⁶⁵ Then, birds as large as camels come in and describe the pastures where they have grazed in the Gardens of Paradises. If the believer craves it, then God knows of his craving, and so the fowl falls on the table with some of its meat cured, the other barbequed, whiter than snow and sweeter than honey.²⁶⁶ He eats until he is full and then the fowl flies away from the same door through which it entered. Half of the food is made of seventy thousand types of cured meat from the same bird, and the other half is barbequed/grilled (“*šawā*”).²⁶⁷ The Qur’ān mentions *ka’s*, *akwāb*, *abārīq*, and *qawārīr* as various types of drinking vessels from which the inhabitants of Paradise drink.²⁶⁸ The interesting aspect is that these words are only used to refer to paradisiacal cups; in fact, when referring to cups outside of Paradise the words *ṣuwā’* and *siqāya* are used in chapter 12 instead.²⁶⁹ This seems to further attest that what the righteous will find in Paradise is not similar to what they have or what they use on earth.

²⁶³ Ibid., Vol.2.p 227.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., Vol.4 p. 530.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., Vol.2, p. 227. In an explanation of another verse the same situation is described: he is brought a drink of his craving, after he drinks a sip, he eructs and consequently, a thousand new doors of appetite are reopened. See Vol.4, p.529.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., Vol.4 p. 530.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., Vol.2, p. 228.

²⁶⁸ Doris Behrens-Abouseif, “Cups and Vessels”, *Encyclopaedia of the Qur’ān*

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

As mentioned before, the inhabitants of heaven are served by *wildān* and *ghilmān* (servant boys). They are like scattered pearls (Q76:19, 52:24) meaning abundant in number according to Ibn Sulaymān.²⁷⁰ They are as beautiful and as white as pearls hidden away in shells untouched by hands, unseen by eyes, and unimagined by hearts of people.²⁷¹ Each person has one hundred thousand immortal youths under his service that do not grow old or grow up.²⁷²

Ephrem banned animals from his Paradise, while in the Qur'ān, the existence or lack thereof of animals in Paradise is not very clear; they are not mentioned but also not excluded. The only reference to animals in the Qur'ān is pertaining to the flesh of fowl as food, “[a]nd We shall succor them with fruits and flesh such as they desire” (Q52:22). However, in the two *tafāsīr*, animals such as birds, camels and horses are very much described as being in heaven. On the one hand, Ibn Sulaymān depicts the fowl that the righteous eat from in heaven as birds as large as camels that have beaks, wings, backs, abdomens, and legs each of a different color and all are glowing.²⁷³ On the other hand, al-Kūfī narrates *aḥādīth* that mention two other heavenly animals: horses of light and camels made of rubies.²⁷⁴ The inhabitants of heaven use the horses of light whenever they want to leave their houses. The horses are led by the immortal youths who hold the snaffles of the horses. Their bridles and reigns are made of white silver and their cruppers are made of jewels.²⁷⁵ The camels were made of rubies and then “the spirit was breathed into them.”²⁷⁶ They have such fair and beautiful faces that they are compared to lanterns. Their bridles are made of chains of gold and their fur is made of red silk and

²⁷⁰ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 527-532.

²⁷¹ Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 145-146.

²⁷² Ibid., V.4 p. 530.

²⁷³ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.2, p. 227.

²⁷⁴ Al-Kūfī, p. 212, 214.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 214.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 212.

white fluff, “unlike anything that anyone has seen in their beauty and grandeur.”²⁷⁷ They carry saddlebags upon boards made of jewels and rubies studded with pearls and red corals and their sheetings are of red gold covered with silk and red fabric. Although they have never been trained, they are the best of camels and they do not long for a drink.²⁷⁸

Camels and horses are among the species that occupy a notable place in pre-Islamic Arabic poetry.²⁷⁹ Additionally, camels and horses were believed in the Islamic traditions to carry blessing (*baraka*),²⁸⁰ birds and camels were also mentioned in the Qur’ān among God’s miraculous signs (Q7:73; 16:79),²⁸¹ and the camel as a gift from God.²⁸² Thus, all of the animals that inhabit Paradise, as mentioned in the *tafāsīr*, invoke positive connotations such as God’s miracles and gifts to humanity and blessings, which are all central themes of Paradise in general. Paradise is after all a miraculous and supernatural abode that is a gift and a promise to the righteous where they will dwell in eternal bliss.

5. The Sensory Experience in Paradise

The righteous in Paradise will have a rich sensory experience in Paradise. He shall taste many flavors, see many colors, and feel the texture of various elements. The scents of Paradise are an element that was developed more in the exegesis than in the Qur’ān.

The Qur’ān mentions camphor (*Kāfūr*) mixed with wine, “[a]s to the Righteous, they shall drink of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with *Kāfūr*,” (Q76:5); and musk “as they are given to drink of a wine sealed, whose seal is musk” (Q83:25, 26); camphor and musk

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ch. Pellat, J. Sourdel-Thomine, L.P. Elwell-Sutton, and P.N. Boratav, “Ḥayawān”, *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

²⁸⁰ Richard Folts, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford, 2006), p. 13

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 15.

²⁸² Oliver Leaman, “Camels,” in *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia*, p. 135

both have strong aromas but according to Ibn Sulaymān camphor here is referenced for its coldness, and musk for its flavor.²⁸³ *Muqātil* mentions smells and scents in two instances: he states that in heaven there are fragrant winds that blow from under the Throne of God smelling like piles of white musk, and describes the fountain that gushes the drink of wine mixed with water as “smelling like musk, unlike any musk found on earth.”²⁸⁴ Al-Kūfī briefly mentions musk and grey amber, saffron and agarwood, and states that the latter “is set ablaze without a flame.”²⁸⁵

Musk or *misk* was not a known perfume in antiquity and only made its way to Byzantium in the 6th century.²⁸⁶ It was used as both medicine and perfume and is considered the best and strongest of perfumes according to Islamic Traditions.²⁸⁷ Musk and camphor were also imported via the trade routes and were therefore seen as exotic. They also belonged to the Medicine of the Prophet (*al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*), mentioned above.²⁸⁸ Perfume was also considered an expensive commodity that wasn't easily acquired but was also regarded by the Prophet as an important addition to purification. A saying attributed to the Prophet tells believers to wear perfume if they can afford it for the purification for the Friday prayer.²⁸⁹ Hence, Paradise again includes only the best, the most exotic, and most refined of things and scents also fall into this category. In the hereafter, one will be able to smell the best of the scents even if he/she could not afford it in their earthly lives. Musk and camphor will not only be smelled but also drunk as a sign of eternal health as well.

²⁸³ See Mann JC, *Natural products: their chemistry and biological significance*, p. 309–11.

Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 524.

²⁸⁴ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.2, p. 181-182; Vol 4. p. 524.

²⁸⁵ Al-Kūfī, p. 212, 214.

²⁸⁶ A.Dietrich, “Misk,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*.

²⁸⁷ Ibid. See also Helena M. Paavilainen, *Medieval Pharmacotherapy, Continuity and Change* (Leiden, 2009), p. 347.

²⁸⁸ Said, p. 115

²⁸⁹ See Rafik Berjak, “Purify,” *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia*, p. 513

D. Conclusion

Belief in the afterlife constitutes one of the six articles of faith in Islam,²⁹⁰ which could explain why the description of heaven is so extensively present in the Qur’ān and the *tafāsīr*. Paradise needed to be very well described in order for the human mind to grasp it and for it to also constitute enough of a lure and reward for righteous behavior. There are many words that are used in the Qur’ān to indicate Paradise such as *janna*, *firdaws*, *‘adn*. The term *janna* literally means garden; Muslim philologists and some commentators also believe it to be an Arabic word derived from the root *j-n-n* that signifies “to cover, to conceal, to protect.”²⁹¹ The word *firdaws* has a foreign origin which means garden in Greek or Syriac and *‘adn* which is a biblical name (Eden) is conceived by Islamic sources to mean, “firmly establish and have a long duration.”²⁹² Together these three designations of Paradise also summarize the essence of the Islamic Paradise: a garden where the righteous dwell forever protected from all anger, sorrow, hurt and other negative sentiments that they once experienced on earth.

Paradise in the Islamic scripture is comprised of gardens that offer their inhabitants fruits, fowl’s meat, drinks, and beautiful youths that serve them, and they all have their own beautiful virgin maidens. They have abodes, are well dressed in silk and brocade, and adorned with bracelets. There are also four rivers of milk, honey, water and wine and fountains as well. Dwellers will live in bliss and they will have all that they may wish or desire. In the subsequent *tafāsīr* works some of these images are much more developed: the lofty chambers become castles inside castles made of rubies that also have houses made of hollow pearls. These pavilions are also furnished with silk and the

²⁹⁰ See Zeki Saritoprak “Eschatology,” *The Qur’ān: an Encyclopedia*, p. 191

²⁹¹ Kinberg, “Paradise.”

²⁹² Ibid.

furniture is made of gold and incusted with precious jewels. The descriptions of banquets are also excessive: tables that are a mile long and a mile wide and morsels of food that transform according to one's wishes. Furthermore, mythical creatures are added such as camels of rubies, horses of light and fowls as big as camels. The flavors, scents and colors of Paradise also get more developed in the *tafāsīr*, while the Qur'ān only mentions the color green for Paradise in the *tafāsīr* we find more colors such as white, yellow and red. The dwellers will also have houris who themselves are guarded in pavilions. They are reserved for the pious who have abstained from the pleasures of life.²⁹³

All in all the Islamic heavenly ontology is mainly one of luxury, lavishness and profusion of material things and corporal pleasures. Nevertheless, in the overall description of Paradise, one can already identify many similarities between the Paradise in the Qur'ān and in the hymns of Ephrem such as the abundance of fruits and trees, the absence of sorrows, the eternal bliss, the occupants, and so forth. But, it is evident that even though there are similarities, the elements retained had significance for the early Islamic community. It is also unmistakable that the early Islamic community was forming new notions and conceptions of heaven. These notions were without a doubt based on verses found in the Qur'ān, however, the outcomes of the *tafāsīr* are more developed, and the images original to their authors.

²⁹³ A number of studies try to locate the origins of the idea of the houris, some link it to Zoroastrian tradition about the *Daenā* and the good deeds while others propose a Pahlavi or Aramaic origin. For a discussion of this and more on the subject of the Houris in Islamic tradition, see Maher Jarra, "Houris," in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*; A.J.Wensinck, Ch.Pallat, "Hūr," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Oliver Leamen suggests that the verses mentioning houris "are placed in the text in a very specific order, to reveal a transition from a more material form of description to something more spiritual." He argues that the discussion of the houris changes from the first, second, third Meccan Period, to the Medinan Period. He explains that the descriptions at first resonated with a public "wedded to material things and appetites," but once the people became more in touch with their religious beliefs, the notions of the houris took a more sedate form of "purified spouses" (Q2:25; 3:15; 4:47). See Oliver Leamen, "Houris," p. 269 in *The Qur'ān: an Encyclopaedia*.

CHAPTER IV

PARADISE IN EARLY ISLAMIC ART

The visual culture of any community is as important as its literary culture, for it is an additional source that further informs the conceptions and impressions that were present within a society at a certain period in time. The Great Mosque of Damascus and the Dome of the Rock are both important monuments, not only because of their own political, architectural and decorative characteristics, but also because they show the distinct visual identity of the early Islamic community. The mosaics in both mosques seem to represent early artistic manifestations of Islamic notions of Paradise and thus, are worthy of closer examination for their visual and symbolic dimensions as an assertion of specific paradisiacal concepts that were present within the community. The mosaics of these monuments were a visual space of conceptualization of Paradise just as the *tafāsīr* were a literary one.

The Dome of the Rock is the oldest extant Muslim monument that saw little alterations to its original plan and interior.²⁹⁴ It is an architectural monument raised by the Umayyads and built between 688 and 692 during the caliphate of ‘Abd al-Malik. The building is located on a platform built in Herodian times, which undergirds what is called *al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf* (the “Noble Sacred Enclosure”).²⁹⁵ In its main features, the

²⁹⁴ Richard Ettinghausen and Oleg Grabar, *Islamic Art and Architecture 650-1250*, p. 16.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Dome of the Rock follows the Late Antique Christian architectural practices (fig. 1105, 1107).²⁹⁶

The interior architecture has been largely maintained in its original state. In much the same way as its ground plan and structure, the decorations, notably the mosaics, are quintessentially Byzantine.²⁹⁷ However, the scale of the mosaics used to decorate both the interior and exterior of the Dome of the Rock is so large that it is unparalleled in any surviving early Byzantine church.²⁹⁸ The lower part walls and piers are covered with patterned stone slabs, but beyond that point, the walls are covered with mosaics that represent a whimsical garden. Mosaics decorate the upper parts of the arches, the soffits and spandrels of the circular arcade, and the drums, which show traces of repairs and restorations that did not considerably modify the designs.²⁹⁹

The Dome boasts mosaic Qur'ānic inscription in Kufic script found above the arcades: "Say: He is God, the One, God the Eternal; He has not begotten nor was he begotten; and there is none comparable to Him" (Q12). The sanctuary as a whole, including the Byzantine architectural plan, the mosaic, and the Qur'ānic inscriptions, are all believed to represent the new Muslim power and dominance over the other faiths, namely the Christians and Jews. According to Grabar, the "Dome of the Rock

²⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 18. It fits the category of what is known as a *martyria*, a centrally planned building often built around the tomb of a saint or a martyr. The Dome of the Rock appears to duplicate, within a few centimeters, the dimensions of numerous Byzantine octagonal sanctuaries such as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre the Church of the Ascension built in 378, and the fifth century Tomb of the Virgin. Another church that is also built on a octagonal ground plan is the Church of Ascension on the Mount of Olives; the length of its exterior walls are identical to those of the inner octagon of the Dome of the Rock. The proportions and many of the methods used in its construction such as "the arches on piers and columns, the wooden domes, the grilled windows, the masonry of stone and brick" also originate from Byzantine architecture. See Alexander Papadopoulos, *Islam and Muslim Art* (London, 1976), p. 482; Volkmar Enderlein, "Enderlein, Volkmar. "Syria and Palestine: the Umayyad caliphate: History; Architecture; Building decoration," *Isla : Art and Architecture* (Postdam, 2013), p. 65.

²⁹⁷ Hillebrand, p.25.

²⁹⁸ Ibid. It should be noted that the mosaics were renovated numerous times in the Ottoman period,

²⁹⁹ Ettinghausen and Grabar, p.16.

[was] in the thick of competition, almost a confrontation, between Christianity and Muslims.”³⁰⁰

The Great mosque of Damascus was founded in 705-06 by Umayyad caliph al-Walid and completed in 714 or 715. The site was that of an ancient temple first hallowed to the god Hadad then rebuilt by the Romans and dedicated to Jupiter.³⁰¹ With the coming of the Byzantine Empire, the pagan site became a church dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, and was established in the vast court.³⁰² The mosque actually still has fragments of both its predecessors: the outer wall of the mosque is formed by the original exterior wall of the temple of Jupiter and it shared a part of the site of the church; Greek inscriptions from the church survive above the central west and east doors of the mosque.³⁰³ The Great Mosque had admirably carved window grilles like those of the Dome of the Rock. The interior decoration made of mosaics also resembled that of the Dome of the Rock but on a larger scale. The predominant green and gold tonality is another similarity between the mosaics of the two monuments. The Great Mosque is believed to have had the biggest surface area of gold mosaic to be found in any other building at that time, covering about four thousand square meters.³⁰⁴ Much of the original mosaic had to be replaced or was poorly restored after most of it was destroyed during the fire of 1893. The walls in the porticoes, the court façade, the sanctuary, and even the northern minaret were all originally covered with mosaics. The exterior walls of the building are comparatively plain, the most prominent features and decorations are found only in the inner side of the courtyard.³⁰⁵

³⁰⁰ Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p.56

³⁰¹ Enderlein, p. 64.

³⁰² Papadopoulo, p. 231.

³⁰³ See Enderlein, p. 69; Papadopoulo, p. 231.

³⁰⁴ Enderlein, p. 71.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

There are many reports by early Arab authors that the caliph reached out to the Byzantine Emperor who is said to have sent artists, workers, and materials for the building of the mosaics.³⁰⁶ Many scholars believe that this did not really happen and these accounts were relayed only to show that the highly intricate work of the mosaics. However, other scholars argue that the caliph did ask for help from his Byzantine contemporary.³⁰⁷

There was a constant ambiguity in the Byzantine-Umayyad relations of the time for they were not only relations between two faiths but also two empires, a form of “cold war” was developing.³⁰⁸ Moreover, there were administrative and cultural changes that were taking place such as ‘Abd al-Malik establishing a Muslim coinage and changing the administrative language from Greek to Arabic.³⁰⁹ The changes of the coinage help clarify the relations between the empires and capture artistic inclinations, which were also noticeable in architecture.³¹⁰

After signing a treaty with Byzantium, caliph ‘Abd al-Malik decided to change the coinage as a form of opposition to the Byzantines but the changes came slowly.³¹¹ When the Arabs first conquered Syria, they used Byzantine coins without any changes for they were already familiar with these coins in commerce.³¹² At first, the Arabs removed the overtly Christian symbols but retained the Byzantine look, for example on the reverse,

³⁰⁶ See Papadopoulo, p. 231; Hillenbrand, p. 28; Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 25.

³⁰⁷ For a discussion of this, see Papadopoulo, p. 231; Hillenbrand, p. 28; Ettinghausen, *Arab Painting*, p. 25.

³⁰⁸ Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 57-58, n. 126.

³⁰⁹ Ettinghausen and Grabar, p. 26.

³¹⁰ Hillenbrand, p. 19.

³¹¹ Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p.5 9. The Byzantine historian Theophanes states that in the years 686-687 Caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (685-705) and Emperor Justinian II (685-695, 705-711) concluded a peace treaty, according to which the Byzantine Emperor agreed to withdraw Mardaites (inhabitants of the Arabo-Byzantine border country); see Nani Gelovani, “Arab-Byzantine Relations under the Umayyad Caliphate and South Caucasus,” *International Journal of Social Science and Humanity* 3, no. 1. For a more in depth look at the relations between the empires see H. A. R. Gibb, “Arab-Byzantine relations under the Umayyad Caliphate,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol 12 (1958), p.231-233.

³¹² Hillenbrand, p.19.

the cross no longer had its horizontal bar, and the initial letter of the monogram symbolizing Christ was removed.³¹³ The Byzantine ruler on the coins was replaced by new images that had more significant Islamic references, such as a *mih̄rāb* encircling the Prophet's lance.³¹⁴ Finally, ‘Abd al-Malik removed all figural images and replaced them with Qur’ānic epigraphy.³¹⁵ The new coinage included all the themes of the inscription of the Dome of the Rock: the Unitarian affirmation and the emphasis on Muhammad as the apostle of God.³¹⁶ The coinage, coupled with the erection of the monuments, meant that the new Muslim state was claiming its exclusive sovereignty. Consequently, there is a trend in coins and in architecture: a dependence on classical models inherited from the preceding cultures, then a period of experimentation that was a basic reworking of old ideas in new contexts, and finally the creation of a distinctively Islamic identity.³¹⁷

The process of acculturation and innovation occurred at a much more accelerated pace in the coins than in art and architecture. The delineation of the evolution of coinage is important to show that even though Byzantine coins were used, there was an evolving emphasis on Islamic forms until a completely new design was produced.

The same method should be applied when considering the mosaics not only for their importance as artistic pieces, but also for their connotation for the early Islamic community. For the mosaics in the two monuments, it was clearly a period of transition of techniques and some motifs, yet what is of significance for our study is not the Byzantine or Sassanid methods or themes but the Islamic outcome. Grabar asks, “[w]hat can the significance of such a theme be in the decoration of an early Muslim holy

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ Ibid. For further studies on coinage, see Clive Foss, *Arab-Byzantine coins* (Washington DC, 2016).

³¹⁶ Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 60.

³¹⁷ Hillenbrand, p. 19.

place?”³¹⁸ I will attempt to formulate my own answer while analyzing the representations in the mosaics.

A. Mosaics

The Dome of the Rock sanctuary’s mosaics have remained almost entirely in their original state, covering a large area of about two hundred eighty square meters; the walls have a glimmering gold background on which is depicted a whimsical garden with a few palm and olive trees scattered around.³¹⁹ The vegetal motifs are mainly comprised of spiral bands of acanthus, lavish foliage heavily used at the time, which emerge from an emblem of trees or bejewelled vases (**IMG 2**). There are also fruits in the mosaics such as dates growing on palms, and grapes and pomegranates that are placed among flourishing vines (**IMG 1**).³²⁰ Jewelled wearables are integrated into the tendrils of the trees on the inner face of the octagonal colonnade (**IMG 4**).³²¹ These include crowns, bracelets, breastplates, necklaces, pins, and earrings that have either precious stones dangling from them or are encrusted with them.³²²

In the Great Mosque, the vegetal motifs are mostly analogous to those of the Dome of the Rock but are more easily identifiable. On the walls of the ambulatories, they portray a landscape; in its lower area, there is a river with huge fruit bearing trees growing on the banks. The best conserved of these masterpieces is the large bordered panel on the wall of the western portico; it measures 34.50 by 7.155 meters.³²³ The mosaics are rendered in fine detail and the variation in color gives them a sense of three-dimensionality; this is mostly shown in the rich design of the trunks, branches and

³¹⁸ Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 60.

³¹⁹ Ettinghausen and Grabar, p. 19.

³²⁰ Enderlein, p. 80.

³²¹ Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 47.

³²² Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 47.

³²³ Ettinghausen and Grabar, p. 19.

leaves of the trees that makes them seem as if the light were playing on them.³²⁴ In addition, the architecture of the buildings is unusual and lush with thematic variety; there are “cubic houses” that are stacked above each other like a mountain range (IMG 9,10), there are also colonnaded halls that open out in a semicircle (IMG 8,12), and also towers that are placed in scenic clusters.

There are numerous theories that have been put forward throughout the years about the interpretations and significance of the mosaics. However, none have explained the ambiguity of their significance beyond all doubt, which, in all fairness is an impossible feat. Many elements of these mosaics are related to the mosaics found in Christian monuments in Syria and Palestine such as the different vegetal motifs, the realism of some of the trees, the garlands and scrolls portrayed and the decoration found on the tie beams, which has prompted many to argue that they are a mere copy of mosaics found elsewhere.³²⁵ The types of ornaments found in the Dome of the Rock were well known and used worn by Byzantine and Persian princes.³²⁶ According to some studies these depictions of jewels and crowns on the mosaics all portray in some way power, holiness and dominion in both Byzantine and Persian art.³²⁷ The style of the mosaics in the Dome of the Rock is also reminiscent of the mosaic ornamentation of Christian churches like the trees made of acanthus tendrils that are found in the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.³²⁸ Moreover, the palmettes, wings, and some of the flowers are of Iranian origin; therefore, it seems that the artisans of the early Umayyad Empire turned to the local artistic conventions of the conquered lands as visual and material sources while

³²⁴ Enderlein, p. 80.

³²⁵ Ettinghausem, p. 19.

³²⁶ The jewels shown in the Dome of the Rock also share some parallels with images dealing with religious matters such as the ones of Ravenna and Rome that have the best repertory of jewels and crowns. See Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 148, n.82 for a full discussion.

³²⁷ Oleg Grabar enumerates the studies done by A. Grabar, J.Deer and P.E.Schramm.

³²⁸ Enderlein, p. 80.

also amalgamating them to create an aesthetic vocabulary of its own as will be argued below.³²⁹

The mosaics of the Dome of the Rock introduced the principles of “the non-realistic use of realistic shapes and the anti-naturalistic combination of naturalistic forms,” such as having a bejewelled box in the place of the trunk of a tree (**IMG 3**), principles that would continue to be used and developed in later Islamic art.³³⁰ Grabar argues that topographical representations were known in pre-Islamic art, and the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock could be explained as symbols of the Umayyad conquest: Byzantine and Sassanid royal symbols were used to validate that the unbelievers had been defeated and brought into the new faith.³³¹ He also argued that Islam had not yet gained an “artistic personality of its own.”³³² Thus, the crowns and jewels reproduce an artistic theme of Byzantine origin that employed royal symbols in a religious sanctuary to accentuate the holiness of the sanctuary.³³³

The panels in the Great Mosque of Damascus have also been interpreted in different ways. Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn al-Muqaddasī (d.381 AH/991 AD), provides us with the earliest interpretation of the mosaics to date. He argued that they are images of the towns of the world. Modern scholars believe that the city of Damascus is represented on the last surviving mosaic panel.³³⁴ Other interpretations include an ideal city of God that is derived from classical and postclassical representations of Paradise, or perhaps the depiction of a “Golden Age” under the new Muslim rule in which peace

³²⁹ Ettinghausen and Grabar, p. 19.

³³⁰ Enderlein, p. 80.

³³¹ Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 52.

³³² Grabar, *The Shape of The Holy: Early Islamic Jerusalem*, (Princeton, 1996), p. 72.

³³³ Ibid.

³³⁴ Ettinghausen and Grabar, p. 26.

has prevailed.³³⁵ Last but not least, the vegetal motifs are seen, like those of the Dome of the Rock, as symbols of the Umayyad conquest, informed by prevalent Byzantine motifs and techniques.

In addition, many scholars argue that these mosaics are indeed a representation of heaven. Enderlein identified the trees adorned with precious stones as a reference to Paradise,³³⁶ while others such as Andre Grabar believed that the vegetal motifs in the Dome of the Rock are Islamic parallels to Christian iconographies of Paradise.³³⁷ Robert Hillenbrand stated that both the jeweled vases and otherworldly plants symbolize Paradise and create an unearthly like setting.³³⁸ Finbarr Flood asserted that the vine ornament in the Dome of the Rock alludes to the Divine Presence and also suggested that the flowing rivers, houses, and abundantly green trees represented in the Great Mosque of Damascus are related to inscriptions on the structure's walls that refer to Qur'ānic passages on Paradise (Q 80:24-31).³³⁹ K. Brisch, E.Borsch-Supan, and B. Finster all believe that these mosaics portray Paradise. According to Brisch, Finster was "the first to collect Arabic texts describing the Damascus mosque in which the authors refer to the Koranic passages once inscribed in the mosques' mosaics" that all deal with the Day of Judgment.³⁴⁰ Brisch in his study links the mosaics in the Great Mosque to two Qur'ānic verses (Q25:10; 39:20) that mention the castles and lofty chambers of the inhabitants of Paradise.³⁴¹ These theories about paradisiacal elements in the mosaics can

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Enderlein, p. 80.

³³⁷ Andre Grabar, *L'Iconoclisme byzantine*, p. 62; also see Grabar, "The Umayyad," p. 47, n.78

³³⁸ Hillenbrand, p. 22.

³³⁹ Flood, *The Great Mosque of Damascus*, p. 33 and 89.

³⁴⁰ See Klaus Brisch, p.16. The theories put forth by Borsch-Supan, and B. Finster are mentioned by Brisch; however since the sources are in German and I could not find an English translation, the citations found in Brisch's article will be used: E. Borsch-Supan, *Garten-, Landschafts- und Paradiesmotive im Innenraum*, Berlin, 1967, 18-20; B. Finster, "Die Mosaiken der Umayyadenmoschee von Damascus," *Kunst des Orients*, vii, fasc. 2, 1972, p.118-21.

³⁴¹ Ibid., p.17.

be further attested by linking the visual depictions and their interpretations in scholarship to the *Hymns on Paradise*, more verses from the Qur'ān and to the *tafāsīr*.

While these mosaics may very well have had varied functions, the similarities they share with the depiction of heaven as found in these texts (the castles, landscape, jewels, etc.) build a strong case filled with clear documented references that they are in fact representations of Paradise.

B. The Visual Depiction of Paradise

1. Conception of the Islamic Paradise in the Mosaics

Looking through the images of the mosaics, one can see many aspects of the Qur'ānic Paradise present. The mosaics depict a landscape with rich vegetation as can be seen in the trees and prevalent vegetal motifs in the Dome of the Rock (IMG 1,3,4), and in the nature depicted in the Great Mosque of Damascus (IMG 6,9-11). The trees also seem to be bearing fruits. The overall scenery is reminiscent of a “fair resort” (Q13:29) as Paradise is described in the Qur'ān.

Similarly, the Paradise depicted in the mosaics is one where material riches are prevalent. Jewels and gems are mostly found in the mosaics in the Dome of the Rock. There are jeweled vases and vessels of which stem out vegetal motifs (IMG 2), as well as crowns or tiaras, bracelets, breastplates, necklaces, pins and earrings that are either incusted with precious stones or have them hanging (IMG 4). In the exegesis, it is described that the inhabitants of heaven will be served with gold and silver bowls, plates, and cups that are encrusted with gems, rubies, and other precious stones. The vases or vessels depicted here follow the same description.

2. *Time and Space in Paradise*

The position of the mosaics is an allusion to the location of heaven above us. In fact, in both the sanctuary and the mosque, the mosaics adorn the upper parts of the walls while from the ground up to that point the walls are covered in marble (IMG 5-7). Additionally, there are no mosaics on the floors at all. The mosaics found in the Umayyad castles and buildings of the same period cover the floor and the walls from the ground up. Moreover, in Byzantine churches such as the Church of Nativity to which the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock were compared, there are mosaics that pave the floors as well. It seems then, that in other monuments that were built around the same time-period, and in monuments that the mosaics were compared to, there was no conscious effort made in the positioning of these mosaics such as the one made in the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus.³⁴² Consequently, the position of the mosaics is important and significant for the depictions are located above people's heads, suggesting that what is depicted in these mosaics is actually located above us.

The concept of Paradise as an eternal abode is hard to depict in the mosaics. Nonetheless, Klaus Brisch argues that the mosaics seem to insinuate "a world of arrested motion."³⁴³ This "arrested motion" is caused by the gold that engulfs the ground and spreads to the rest of the landscape features.³⁴⁴ He continues to say that the spectator

³⁴² Another attestation that the placement of the mosaics is not haphazard but was studied is found in p.19, n2 in Brisch's article. He writes:

"It might be useful here to add an unpublished observation of Professor H. Lushey, former director of the German Archaeological Institute, Tehran, that he communicated to me many years ago. In spite of the fact that the arcades of the courtyard of the Damascus mosque are two-storied, no floor has been built between the lower and the upper story of the galleries. This is a break with the tradition of Late Antiquity and can be explained only by presuming the architect's wish to offer the viewer an unobstructed contemplation of the mosaics on the walls behind the arcades. This in itself is an indication that the mosaics were planned before the design of the *riwaqs* was undertaken."

³⁴³ Klaus Brisch, "Observations," p. 15.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

looking at the mosaics feels as though he is staring at a “vacuum” or an “airless world” meaning as though time and space are somewhat suspended.³⁴⁵ Brisch explained that “[t]hese artists apparently wished to portray a world that exists, but one that can only be inhabited by believers after the Resurrection”.³⁴⁶ The spectator looking at these mosaics feel as if the world depicted in them is at the same time reachable and inaccessible. While the actual mosaics seem within hand’s reach, Paradise is without a doubt in a place that is very far away.

3. *The concept of Paradise as a Garden*

The garden in these mosaics portrays the same major characteristics that are found in Ephrem, the Qur’ān and *tafāsīr*.

The mosaics boast a large number of trees from which palm trees and vine scrolls are the most easily recognizable (IMG 1,8), both of which are mentioned in the Qur’ān as being in Heaven (Q55:68–9; Q23:19). In the Dome of the Rock, there are olive trees, and in the Great Mosque there are many different shapes and sizes of trees that are shown either clustered together or standing alone (the very large ones are usually not part of a cluster) (IMG 6,9-11).³⁴⁷ The clusters of trees could be a representation of the shade trees (Q13:55) and serried trees (Q56:29) mentioned in the Qur’ān that are also explained in the *tafāsīr* as trees so close that one can reach them sitting, reclining, or standing.³⁴⁸ Additionally, the mosaics in the Dome of the Rock portray wearable ornaments such as crowns and bracelets that seem to grow within the

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Brisch, p. 17.

³⁴⁷ Ettinghausem, p. 19.

³⁴⁸ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 202,203.

vegetal motifs. We have also seen that there are references to trees that grow jewels as well as fruits in the *tafāsīr*.³⁴⁹

Paradise here also is a garden that bears fruits. The fruits are depicted in many panels of mosaics in both sanctuaries whether scattered between the acanthus and other vegetative motifs or on the trees. The many scholars who have studied the mosaics extensively identify the fruits depicted in them, mentioning the presence of grapes, dates, and pomegranates (IMG 1,4,8,9).³⁵⁰ Again, these are the fruits of heaven as mentioned in the Qur’ān (Q 55:68; Q78:32).³⁵¹ In the mosaics of the Great Mosque, there are large trees that shown to hold fruits. Trees with different sizes and length are scattered in Paradise and some are placed around certain castles (IMG 9). In Ephrem, the Qur’ān and its exegesis there is a recurrence of the idea that fruits in Paradise are near the inhabitants at all times and are easy to pluck and eat while sleeping, sitting, or standing. The scattered fruits among the vegetation, as well as, the way the trees are depicted as surrounding the pavilions from all sides (IMG 12) could very well be a representation of that notion. One can easily reach a fruit in all directions, whether in one’s house or outside of it.

A river or stream is illustrated in the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus with the castles and trees on its banks (IMG 8-11). Not much can be deduced from the depiction except that it seems to be a river of water which is one of the four rivers of Heaven; not to mention the periodic repetitions in the Qur’ān of the Garden of Eden as “gardens underneath which rivers flow.”³⁵² Matthias Radscheit has shown the predominant symbol for the fountain of life in early Byzantine art is a goblet with vine

³⁴⁹ Refer to Ch. III, p. 25-28; see also al-Kūfī, p. 208.

³⁵⁰ Refer back to Mosaics section p. 64

³⁵¹ Refer to Ch. III, p. 25,26

³⁵² Refer to Ch. III, p. 45

tendrils growing out of it and claimed that this imagery, found also in the mosaics in the Dome of the Rock, can be read as a “metaphor for Paradise.”³⁵³

4. *The Concept of an Inhabited Paradise*

The mosaics in both Umayyad monuments are devoid of humans and animals. While this could very well be due to the prohibition of figural representations, it could also be that heaven is empty since the Judgment Day has not yet come. Either way, Paradise as depicted in the mosaics is clearly a Paradise that is waiting to be inhabited. The existence of fruits and big castles are understandably made for the future dwellers. Moreover, the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock show many ornaments and both the Qur’ān and *tafāsīr* mention the righteous being adorned with bracelets and precious stones. The *tafāsīr* also indicate crowns, wreaths, and rings all incrustated with jewels, rubies, pearls, and other gems that are very similar to the ones depicted. These are all signs that the Paradise portrayed is one that is meant to be inhabited.

The future inhabitants of this Paradise will also have huge palaces waiting for them. In fact, the castles and towers depicted in the mosaics are the most interesting aspect, and provide the most convincing proof that these mosaics do represent Paradise. The architecture shown in the mosaic is undoubtedly unworldly for nothing similar existed at the time. And also, nothing similar is found in other mosaics or works of art that were done at the time; the designs are exclusive to the Muslim sanctuaries.

The towers consist of mainly two types: small houses on top of each other creating a mountain-like tower (IMG 8-12), and another where it seems there are buildings inside buildings (IMG 6,7,10-12). These two types of structure are referenced in the Qur’ān and the exegesis: the small cubic houses piling up appear as if they are a

³⁵³ Ibid.

direct interpretation of the following verse, “lofty chambers, above which are built lofty chambers, underneath which rivers flow” (Q39:20). The other structures also appear to be a similar visual representation of the notion of the castles within castles and houses within castles that the righteous will have in Paradise that is found in Ibn Sulaymān’s *tafāsīr*.³⁵⁴ The castles are of a very large size and seem as though they are decorated with gems and precious stones, which is also similar to the description found in both Ibn Sulaymān and al-Kūfī.³⁵⁵

Additionally, al-Kūfī posits that at the door of each castle are “green, green pastures [...] therein two fountains of gushing water”, “therein of every fruit two kinds;”³⁵⁶ the green pastures, water, and fruits are all elements that are found around the castles and structures in the mosaics.

This is not to say that the artists or builders of the mosaics were basing their mosaics on these particular *tafāsīr*. In fact, the mosaics were made more than a century before al-Kūfī and more than fifty years before Ibn Sulaymān’s death. However, there were certainly *aḥādīth* circulating at the time that could explain the similarities found in these depictions of heaven.

C. Conclusion

There are two major points that need to be retained from this chapter. Oleg Grabar stated very eloquently,

Thus, one can present at the same time an explanation that is religious and self-sufficient in Islamic terms alone, even though it may reflect practices found in other civilizations, and an explanation, which brings up the relationship of the non-Muslims to the new faith.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁴ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol. 4, p.528.

³⁵⁵ Refer back to Ch. III, p. 49-51 for more details on this.

³⁵⁶ Al-Kūfī, p. 214.

³⁵⁷ Oleg Grabar, “The Umayyad,” p. 52.

The mosaics may very well be a practice that was taken from another culture, as well as the themes depicted such as the jewels, the vegetal motifs and the landscapes in general. However, it is also clear that they were used not as a simple imitation found elsewhere but as a conscious tool to depict and assert more than one proclamation. Just as the architecture of Byzantine churches and sanctuaries were used but modified to build grand monuments that rivaled that of the Christians in order to emphasize the strength of new Islamic rulers is; the same can be said of the mosaics and the Byzantine evocations in them, notable in the jewels.

The fact that these jewels represent holiness and power for the other faiths is just another assertion of the power and authority of the new faith.

The second point is that the mosaics clearly represent the conceptions and notions that the Islamic community had of Paradise at the time. Almost every element in the mosaics has a similar or analogous element in the Qur'ān and/or *tafāsīr*. Moreover, it seems as though the mosaics show the progression of the notions of Paradise within the community. The mosaics of the Dome of the Rock seem to have mainly concentrated on depicting vegetation and ornaments while the castles were introduced with the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus.

The mosaics also highlight the importance of studying the visual arts of the Islamic community vis-à-vis the religious and political ideologies and beliefs of the same period. One cannot fully grasp the full picture without looking at all the sides that comprise it. Religious beliefs and ideas can be depicted in visual art just as power can be asserted with architecture as we have seen with the building of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus. The mosaics depict some notions that were mentioned in Ephrem's hymns and the Qur'ān but are more prevalent in the *tafāsīr*,

which further informs us of the way that the early Islamic community was formulating its new conceptions of heaven. Conceptions such as the lavishness of the castles, the prevalence of jewels and the ornaments found in Paradise are ultimately exclusive to the Islamic community. The *tafāsīr* and the mosaics seem to put more weight on the material riches of Paradise. In the mosaics this is mainly deduced from the panels in the Great Mosque of Damascus that are more focused on portraying huge castles and towers amid the trees. Even though some trees are very largely portrayed, the castles and palaces are the most eye-catching feature.

CHAPTER V

COMPARISONS AND RESULTS

The previous chapters have examined the depiction of Paradise in Ephrem's *Hymns on Paradise*, the Qur'ān, early *tafāsīr* and the representations found in the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus. Already, one can denote recurring imagery and themes between all of these sources. This chapter will compare the similarities and differences between the three in order to better consider the development of the depiction of Paradise between the Qur'ān and early Islamic community.

A. Comparisons and Results

The general conception of Heaven in all sources used in this study is somewhat similar. Paradise is first and foremost based on scripture, even with Ephrem and the mosaics as we have seen above. The absence of sorrow, grief and fatigue is also a motif present in the *Hymns on Paradise* and the Qur'ān, “[a]nd they shall say, ‘Praise belongs to God who has put away all sorrow from us. Surely our Lord is All-forgiving, All-thankful,’” (Q35:34), “[t]hey know no worry, for they have no suffering; they have no fear, for no snare awaits them; they have no adversary, for they have passed through the contest,” (H7:23), and consequently it is a peaceful place.³⁵⁸ Additionally, both depictions portray heaven as a reward for good deeds; it is an encouragement for one to be virtuous and moral in order to be worthy of Paradise, the place that is closest to God, “[w]eary not,

³⁵⁸ See Q 56:25,26 also 52:23; 78:35.

my brethren, nor suppose that your struggle will last long, or that your resurrection is far off,” (H7:2,3), “Paradise which the godfearing have been promised,” (Q47:15). Moreover, both Ephrem and Muqātil assert that Paradise is only depicted in human terms and terrestrial characteristics in order for the human mind to apprehend it and so the hearts may be guided to Him.³⁵⁹ Last but not least, both traditions believe that everything described in Paradise surpasses anything found on earth. This is hardly surprising since all these textual sources are religious texts that are preaching. The Qur’ān is, after all, a scripture and Ephrem’s hymns and *tafāsīr* are both works that are expanding or commentating on scripture.

The *Hymns on Paradise* and the Qur’ān both mention that Paradise is of great size, “as the Heavens and Earth” (Q3:133), “the wreath of Paradise that encircles the whole of creation” (H1:9). Ibn Sulaymān adds that the width of Paradise is equal to the width of seven heavens and seven earths put together.³⁶⁰ The height of Paradise is a similarity found between Ephrem and Ibn Sulaymān only, even though the two express it differently. Ephrem speaks of heaven as higher than any summit, while the latter explains that if one falls from Paradise, it will take him seventy years to reach the surface of Earth.³⁶¹ Both Ephrem and Ibn Sulaymān describe Paradise as having animated gates, an element that is absent in the Qur’ān and al-Kūfī’s exegesis. The door in the hymns smiles and changes in size and the gate according to the exegetes are transparent but can speak and be spoken to.³⁶² The differences here are mainly in the imagery presented rather than in concept. Situating heaven in time and space while also giving it some sort of physical dimension and characteristics is an important aspect for

³⁵⁹ There is nothing in the exegesis of al-Kūfī about this matter.

³⁶⁰ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.1, p. 301.

³⁶¹ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.2, p. 227.

³⁶² Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.3, p. 650.

both traditions. It was important to depict a Paradise that is otherworldly but also somewhat understandable and imaginable by human minds.

Both Paradises are divided into different levels that accommodate different levels of dwellers according to their deeds and belief. Ephrem mentions three classes of people in Paradise that occupy different spaces: the repentant are in the lowest parts, which are the foothills, the middle, comprised of the slopes, are for the righteous, and lastly the heights are reserved for the exalted and victorious (H2:10). In the Qur'ān the divisions are of a different nature: two of the groups will reside in heaven while the third will be sent to Hell (Q56:7-10). These divisions of Paradise are also a way of preaching as they can be seen as a further encouragement for the righteous to strive to be better, more faithful and more just, for the better one performs on earth, the closer he is to God in Paradise. Paradise is not without hierarchy even though it is the eternal abode of all the just.

Moreover, both Paradises share the same moderate weather, neither too hot nor too cold, “no harmful frost, no scorching heat is to be found in that blessed place of delight,” (H11:2), “see neither sun nor bitter cold,” (Q76:13). Yet, Ephrem’s Paradise presents change in an unchanging situation; he describes in details the different seasons and months that are in Paradise: new months bring with them new produce that is itself always crossing with other fruits and creating new harvests. No such insinuation is found in the Islamic tradition. Moreover, in the Islamic Paradise there is no night, only eternal light;³⁶³ though Ephrem mentions stars and the moon with its different phases, which most likely means that in his conception of heaven, nightfall occurs. It seems that Ephrem is trying to create a series of beginnings in an endless space. He is presenting

³⁶³ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.3, p. 650.

change in Paradise, a presumably unchanging state. Therefore, Paradise will always renew itself for its inhabitants. The existence of a moon and stars in Ephrem's hymns is peculiar since Revelation 21:23 states, "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light." Ephrem was foremost a theologian, and it is more likely than not that he was aware of this verse. Ephrem makes no mention of the sun at all, and it seems that he mentions the moon and the stars to indicate time cycles and abundance. It appears then, that in his hymns, the moon in Paradise is not present for its light since the glory of God is enough, but just only as a reference to change or time that is passing.

The landscape and vegetation of the depictions of heaven are mostly similar in all the sources. This is due to the fact that the ideal garden and final repose shares similar aspects for all communities in this Late Antique milieu. Lush gardens with water and serenity are ideals found in many cultures and civilizations.³⁶⁴

All of the sources relay or depict an abundance of fruits and produce. According to Ephrem, the fruits dangle in such a way that they are within hand's reach to pluck, no extra effort is needed to reach them. Similarly, in the Qur'ān the supply is everlasting (Q13:35), and the fruits are always near the inhabitants of Paradise and are easy to grab even if they were reclining on couches (Q55:54); an image that is further developed in the *tafāsīr*.³⁶⁵ The mosaics also depict the abundance of fruits as well as the notion of easily reached fruits in all places in heaven. Profusion and a never-ending stream of giving is strictly a paradisiacal notion, one that is again contrasted with earthly life. Nothing on earth comes in a ceaseless stream, especially not fruits. Once again, we find a promise in the hereafter of an aspect of life that can never be found on earth.

³⁶⁴ Surty, p. 179-180.

³⁶⁵ See also Q 38:51, 43:74; 44:55; 47:15.

Ephrem's fruits have an additional religious purpose: they purify those who eat them and make wise those who drink from them (H7:3). He also described the fruits as waiting in turn and as approaching the believers. The taste of fruits is not something that is mentioned in Ephrem's hymns, yet in the *tafāsīr*, they are described as softer than butter and their taste is sweeter than honey.³⁶⁶ This is also reflective of the contrast of the way physical pleasures are portrayed in the hymns. Ephrem's fruits are more spiritual while the Islamic Paradise is abundant in fruit because their taste is exquisite.

The trees in Ephrem and Ibn Sulaymān's imagery of Paradise share a common notion of animation that is absent in the Qur'ān. The trees of the former rejoice and are eager to have the inhabitants eat from their fruits or climb them to sit and relax on couches made from branches and flowers. If one wishes it, the tree itself will lower its branches in form of steps (H9:3). Muqātil does not evoke the exact same imagery but nonetheless, according to him if one wishes, the trees would move and approach so one is able to reach and then they return back to their original place.³⁶⁷

The trees of Paradise according to Ephrem are the Tree of Wisdom/Knowledge and the Tree of Life that are planted in Paradise on two different levels (H12:15), in addition to the fig trees that are on the fence (H2:7). While the Qur'ānic Garden of Eden is filled with common shade trees (Q13:55), serried acacia trees (Q56:29), grapevines (Q23:19) palm trees and pomegranate trees (Q55:68–9) are also for the most part depicted and recognized in the mosaics. On the other hand, al-Kūfī and the mosaics share a common picture of jewels growing on trees that is not found or mentioned anywhere else.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 218.

³⁶⁷ Ibid. Vol.4, p. 527-532.

³⁶⁸ Al-Kūfī, p. 208.

All representations of heaven also have rivers, springs, and fountains. Three out of the four rivers found in Paradise according to Ephrem's hymns and the Qur'ān are similar: the rivers of wine, honey and milk (H10: 6, Q47: 15). The fourth river in the Hymns gushes cream while the one in the Qur'ān is made of "unstaling" water. The mosaics on the Great Mosque of Damascus also depict a river of what is most likely water. Water, as previously discussed, is associated with God's power and mercy and with life and health. Ephrem's springs and fountains have a healing function and later on in the Islamic tradition, we find that the waters of Paradise are used to purify the dwellers.³⁶⁹

The main differences between the *Hymns on Paradise*, the Qur'ān and the *tafāsīr* can be found in the way the inhabitants live in Paradise: the way they are dressed, where they live and the physical pleasures they experience.

In both traditions, heaven is for the righteous, the persecuted, the afflicted, the prophets, and apostles. No one in heaven will know rancor, illness or suffering, they will all live in bliss. Ephrem explains that in Heaven the righteous can change their bodies' sizes, as they can stretch out, expand or shrink (H5:8), while in the Islamic sources used here, it seems that bodies stay the same since nothing is said about the subject. The physical description of the bodies of the inhabitants is also indicative of the importance that each Paradise gives to the corporal pleasures. For Ephrem, the body is a different conception than our current reality, it is more like the mind while in the Islamic Paradise it seems as though the bodies of the future inhabitants of Paradise need to be similar to earthly bodies in order for people to identify to all the sexual and non sexual pleasures that are evoked. One of the **major differences between the two Paradises is that while the**

³⁶⁹ El-Zein, "Water of Paradise."

Qur'ān promises virgin maidens as companions to the men, Ephrem does not admit nor even allude to sex in Paradise, on the contrary, it is a place devoid of lust. The virgin maidens of the Qur'ān are depicted as the most beautiful creatures and one's power to copulate with them increases multiple times.

An additional difference is that for the Islamic exegetes, everyone in Paradise is of the same age of thirty-three years, while for Ephrem, in Paradise there are children, youth, people in the "married state" and people with old age (H 7).

Ephrem described both men and women in Paradise as "clothed in raiment of light;"(H7:5). These heavenly and simple clothing of Ephrem's Paradise are replaced with green silk and brocade in the Islamic Paradise. The inhabitants are also adorned with jewelry made of precious metals (Q18:31). The *tafāsīr* specify the number of garments each person will have while also adding more ornaments that the righteous get to wear such as wreath crested with topaz, rubies and precious stones of different colors topped with a crown of gold on their heads and rings on one's fingers and toes.³⁷⁰

The dwelling places or abodes also vary greatly in both traditions. Even though the occupants of both Paradises will have dwelling places in the afterlife, the kind of abodes and their descriptions are nothing alike. The sanctuaries given to the righteous in Ephrem's Hymns vary according to their deeds but they are all drenched in ointments and are perfumed. Their embellishments are made of fruits and flowers and their grandeur and splendor increase the greater one's deeds are (H5:6). However, in the Qur'ān, the houses are "lofty chambers, above which are built lofty chambers," (Q39:20) and "palaces," (Q25:10). In the *tafāsīr* and the mosaics, the imagery of these lofty chambers and palaces was extensively developed. The castles are miles and miles

³⁷⁰ The numbers differ in both *tafāsīr*. See al-Kūfī, p. 211, Ibn Sulaymān, Vol. 4, p. 529

long and wide and are adorned with pearls and rubies; they also have castles and houses built inside them.³⁷¹ The houses are created of gigantic hollow pearls with golden shutters and have beds whose covers are softer than silk and are weaved with rods of rubies and emeralds. Al-Kūfī states that there are castles made of red, green, yellow, and white rubies and furnished with matching color fabric. They are covered with green emeralds, white silver, and red gold and have a foundation and pillars that are built of jewels.³⁷² In the mosaics as well, there are depictions of small houses on top of each other creating a mountain-like tower and others where it seems that there are houses built inside bigger castles. They are also huge in size and it seems as though they are adorned with pearls and other precious gems. The emphasis in the difference of abodes and garments of the inhabitants is due to the different way that material riches were perceived. Ephrem viewed them as corruptible while the Qur'ān mentions them to embellish items found in Paradise.

Just like the architecture in heaven, eating is also described very differently in both traditions. The presence of easily plucked fruits in abundance for all to eat is the only similarity between the Paradises described. In addition to fruits, the Qur'ān mentions twice the flesh of fowl (Q52:22; 56:21). Yet again, the imagery is developed in Ibn Sulaymān's exegesis: the fowls that fly in for the righteous are the size of camels, they have different parts made of different colors, and they offer different kinds of meat, such as grilled or cured. Although Ephrem mentions the fruits and the trees that scoop one up to pluck fruits, according to him it is the wind that blows satiety. Moreover, one eats without the use of hands, teeth or mouths and without the stomach growing heavy (H9:9).

³⁷¹ Ibid., Vol.1, p. 381, Vol.2, p. 227.

³⁷² Ibid.

On the other hand, in the *tafāsīr* the imagery of banquets and food is extensive. The tables are a mile long, full of bowls and various kinds of food: when one is full, he/she can have a sip of drink in order for him/her to digest everything and start eating again.³⁷³ Eating is considered a pleasure for many, yet the exaggeration of the quantity of food that one can find and eat in Heaven is peculiar.

Even though both traditions have human dwellers in their Paradises, animals have no place in Ephrem's Paradise and the mosaics are also void of any human or animal depiction. However, in the *aḥādīth* transmitted in the *tafāsīr* we see the creation of fantastic beasts: fowls as big as glowing camels, horses of light, and camels made of rubies.³⁷⁴ Ibn Sulaymān describes the gigantic birds in reference to the appropriate verses of the Qur'ān that discuss the eating of fowl meat. Al-Kūfī discusses horses and camels that are not mentioned as being in Paradise at all in the Scripture.

Last but not least, both heavens seem to be rich in aroma and sweet smelling fragrances; yet, for the Islamic community this was something that was developed after the Qu'rān. The *Hymns on Paradise* describe scented breezes that blow and they either serve or bring joy as elaborated above, while other scents and fragrances have healing powers. The *tafāsīr* mention the existence of musk and camphor in Paradise. Both elements were known in the community for being used as medicine; however, their medicinal value is not explicitly stated as a reason for their being in Paradise.

What is most remarkable is that the few differences between Ephrem's Hymns and the Qur'ān, actually form the basis on which the conception of Paradise in Islam starts to shape its own unique identity that is far from the one depicted in Syriac Christianity three centuries earlier. What started with the Qur'ān kept

³⁷³ See Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.4, p. 529-530; refer to Ch.III, p. 52

³⁷⁴ Refer to Ch.III, p. 54-55

developing more with the subsequent Islamic community. These differences that start to take form are rooted in two main categories: material wealth and physical pleasure.

While it is true that Muqātil's description of some elements in Paradise is similar to the imagery employed by Ephrem such as the animated gates, trees and scented breezes, these are only mentioned in one or two lines in his *tafsīr*.³⁷⁵ The importance of material wealth and physical pleasure for the exegete is clearly shown in the length and details of his description of these notions. They are repeated in several instances throughout his work and they continue for pages at a time while the descriptions of the vegetation in Paradise are mentioned in a few sentences only.³⁷⁶

It is most apparent that Ephrem's Paradise is spiritual: the people wear raiment of light, the winds blow satiety, fruits purify you and make you wise, the breezes hold healing powers etc. It is so much so that Ephrem opted to cast out all gems and jewels to the land that surrounds Paradise because gems will spoil and corrupt the otherwise peaceful and serene land.

Yet the Islamic sources, literal and visual, show dependence, even an exaggeration in the use of jewels and gems, and references to physical pleasures and satisfactions. The dwelling places that were adorned with fruits and flowers in the Ephrem's Paradise became castles of rubies and pearls of colossal size in the *tafāsīr* and mosaics that are furnished with equally profuse furniture made of precious metals and precious jewels. The inhabitants themselves are decked with silk and brocade and ornaments of all kinds: wreaths, crowns, bracelets, rings and are served with platters and bowls made of gold and silver and encrusted with jewels. In the mosaics as well, we find jeweled vases and vessels of which stem out vegetal motifs, as well as crowns or

³⁷⁵ See Ibn Sulaymān, Vol.3, p.650; Vol.4, p.218; Vol.2, p.181.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., Vol.2, p. 228- 234; Vol.4, p. 527-532.

tiaras, bracelets, breastplates, necklaces, pins and earrings that are either incusted with precious stones or have them hanging. It appears that it was also common at the time for the early Islamic community to evoke “non-realistic use of realistic shapes and the anti-naturalistic combination of naturalistic forms.”³⁷⁷ This was not only true in art, as we have seen in the mosaics, but also in the *tafāsīr*. The mosaics might depict trees with bejeweled boxes as trunks and ornaments growing within trees or vegetal motifs. These anti-naturalistic combinations are used copiously in the *tafāsīr* as well as with the description of the fantastic beasts and the trees that grow ornaments and garments and the like.

Additionally, in the Islamic Paradise the inhabitants possess ownership of not only material things but of other humans as well. In the *tafāsīr*, the numbers of immortal youths and houris that an inhabitant owns is proof of that. Each inhabitant has ten thousands servers and four thousands houris that have servants of their own. The idea of human servants is thus very much prevalent while in Ephrem’s hymn nature itself attends to the inhabitants: the trees themselves can scoop inhabitants, the fruits themselves can approach you and for everything else there are the winds.

For Muslims, it seems as if everything needed to be made of gold and jewels and incusted with precious stones for it to be worthy of being in Paradise. If we are to consider this as stemming from the notion that in Heaven one shall have all his desires met; then it appears as if the desires of the early Muslim community was abundance of pleasures that were earthly in nature. It may be that the continuous assertion of material and physical pleasures beyond those of the Qur’ān is a product of the political situation at the time. Ibn Sulaymān wrote at a time where the Muslim conquests were still taking

³⁷⁷ Ettinghausen and Grabar, p. 19.

place, and one would assume that at a time of war and turmoil food and riches were scarce for the majority of the population. Evoking a heaven where all that was unavailable for them on Earth at the time is offered there in abundance and excess would undoubtedly be an enticement. Interestingly enough, Ibn Sulaymān's *tafsīr* is much more extensive in descriptions of sexual and physical pleasure than al-Kūfī's.

Nonetheless, the servants, the riches, the houris, the jewels, the houses, the clothes in the Islamic Paradise are all there to accentuate the luxury, extravagance and lavishness of a world that awaits those who do right in this world.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The formation of paradisiacal notions for the early Muslim community is a result of two main elements: a shared imagery of Paradise between cultures and a need of inclusion of new elements in what constitutes their heavenly abode.

The comparison of the sources demonstrates that the Qur'ān's depiction of Paradise shares similarities with that of Ephrem; however, the major conception of heaven that the early Muslim community retained and developed is different from that of Ephrem.

The *tafāsīr* explain and relay *ahādīth* that depict or describe Paradise and the mosaics are a fundamental source that present the visual evidence of what notions of Paradise were significant for the Muslim community at the time. Together, these two sources clearly show that the Muslim community created a unique visual descriptive identity of Paradise that is not found in the anterior culture that shared the same epistemological space in Late Antiquity. While the concept of Paradise as a garden remains, for the most part, analogous throughout the sources, the concept of the inhabited Paradise is where the major changes and differences emerge. The early Muslim community seemed to have yearned for a final resting abode that is somewhat reflective of how they fantasized their ideal life on earth would be, a life of riches and pleasures. I say here early Muslim community and not the Qur'ān because even though the Qur'ān introduces notions of luxury and emphasizes physical beauty and pleasures,

these concepts were expanded in the *tafāsīr* of Ibn Sulaymān and al-Kūfī's and also in the mosaics of the Dome of the Rock and the Great Mosque of Damascus.

The sources also show that the early Muslim community had specific notions of Paradise that were already formulated and propagated within its circles. While it is possible that the *tafāsīr* of Ibn Sulaymān was known at the time of the construction of the mosaics, a more plausible explanation would be that these notions of Paradise were circulating perhaps by the *quṣṣāṣ* of early times. The *tafāsīr* of both Ibn Sulaymān and al-Kūfī heavily draw on *aḥādīth* and the *quṣṣāṣ* were, for the most part, reputable scholars who were well informed in a number of subjects, including *aḥādīth*.³⁷⁸ Moreover, since the early Umayyad times, the *quṣṣāṣ* were well established as active participants of the religious and political discourse of the community and some even had close relationships with political leaders and the Umayyad administration.³⁷⁹ It seems then that it makes sense to find so many similarities between the concepts, images, or characteristics of Paradise in both the textual and visual sources.

There is a human desire to return to Paradisiacal gardens that comes from yearning for a specific spiritual state.³⁸⁰ They are places of recompense, harmony and peacefulness where earthly time eventually ends in everlasting existence.³⁸¹ Moreover, the imagery of garden combines the natural and the cultural, the fresh beauty of nature together with the human desire to allow the beauty to be presented.³⁸² This explains the differences that are found between the different conceptions of Paradise. While the beauty of nature is something that is more universal, the way beauty is presented

³⁷⁸ Armstrong, p. 9.

³⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 33. For a detailed study of the *quṣṣāṣ* during the Umayyad period see p. 233-276.

³⁸⁰ Aileen Barclay, Lost in Eden: Dementia From Paradise, *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging*. Vol. 28, (2016), p. 70

³⁸¹ Ibid. p. 70.

³⁸² Ibid. p. 72.

depends mostly on culture and way of life. For Ephrem, that beauty was spirituality while for the Islamic community beauty had more physical and material attestations.

Change and continuity are main aspects of life and hardly any thing, matter, or concept comes out of a vacuum. Ideas grow and develop with time and different cultures and generations and are always adjusted in the process to fit the changing needs of that particular society. As we have seen throughout this study, paradisiacal notions follow the same path. The early Islamic community was filtering the already existing notions of Paradise that were significant to them while also adding their own new ideas and desires.

Scholars such as Andrea attributed the similarities found between the Qur'ān and Ephrem's hymns to direct influence and "inspiration".³⁸³ However, paradisiacal notions of gardens as eternal abodes of happiness in the hereafter are common throughout a range of civilizations. In fact, pagans in the Malayan peninsula believed that Paradise was an "island of fruits," the Papuans of New Guinea believed in a future state of eternal happiness where friends reunite, and the Paradise of the Masai people in Africa is full of groves, seas, rivers and trees that bear the rarest of fruits.³⁸⁴ Moreover, Shintoism in Japan depicted heaven as having mountains, valleys and streams, north American Indians also saw Paradise as an eternal abode filled with beautiful nature and no sorrow, while for south American Indians Paradise was filled with rich fruits.³⁸⁵ These notions that seem to repeat themselves must have originated somewhere, I hope to try and locate in future endeavors and projects the source of conception knowing very

³⁸³ Andrae, *Mohammed*, p. 87

³⁸⁴ See Walter William Skeat and Charles Otto Blagden, *Pagan Races of the Malaya Peninsula* (1906), p. 13; James Hastings, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Edinburgh, 1971), Vol. 2, p. 683, 684

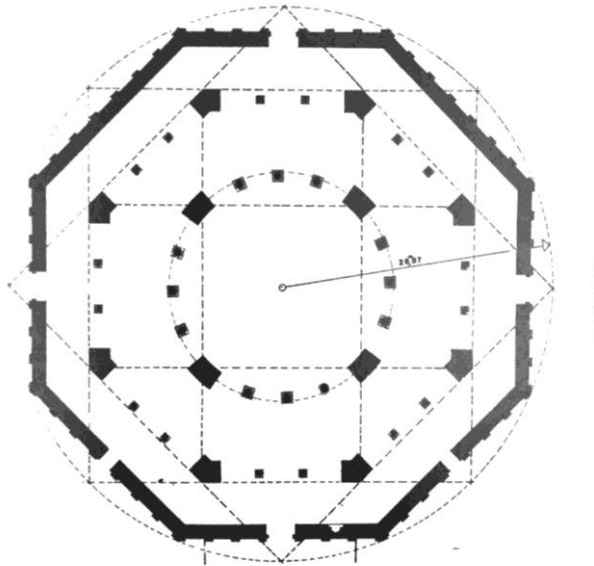
³⁸⁵ Hastings, Vol 2, p. 684, 686, 700.

well that it might turn out to be futile due, perhaps, to the scarcity or lack of evidences that remain extant.

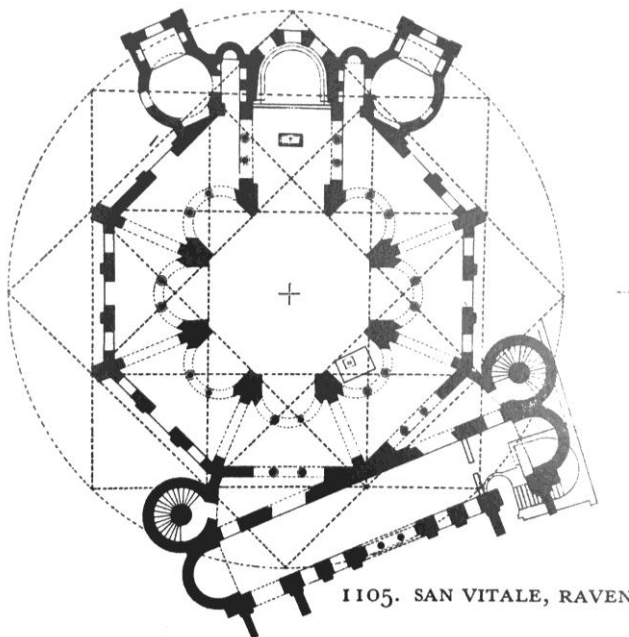
Furthermore, this thesis only considered the parallels between the Islamic Paradise and Ephrem because many scholars deliberated the existence of these similarities but not addressed them in depth. There are, potentially, other notions of Paradise, Byzantine or Syriac, that share similar imagery with that of the Qur'ān and *tafāsīr*. For example, in John 14:2 there is a reference to castles, “[i]n my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.” In addition, in Revelation 21, the description of new New Jerusalem mentions both precious metals and precious stones; the city is made “of gold, like clear glass,” (Rev 21:18) with its foundations “garnished with all matter of precious stones,” (Rev 21:19). Therefore, while Ephrem’s paradise had no mentions of castles, gold and precious stones in Paradise, the castles and precious stones found in the Islamic Paradise might find resemblances in other Christian sources. Thus, the similarities found between the description of the Islamic Paradise and the depictions of Paradise found in additional Christian sources could also be further studied and explored in future projects.

APPENDIX

I. THE STRUCTURAL PLANS OF THE DOME OF THE ROCK AND SAN VITALE IN RAVENNA³⁸⁶

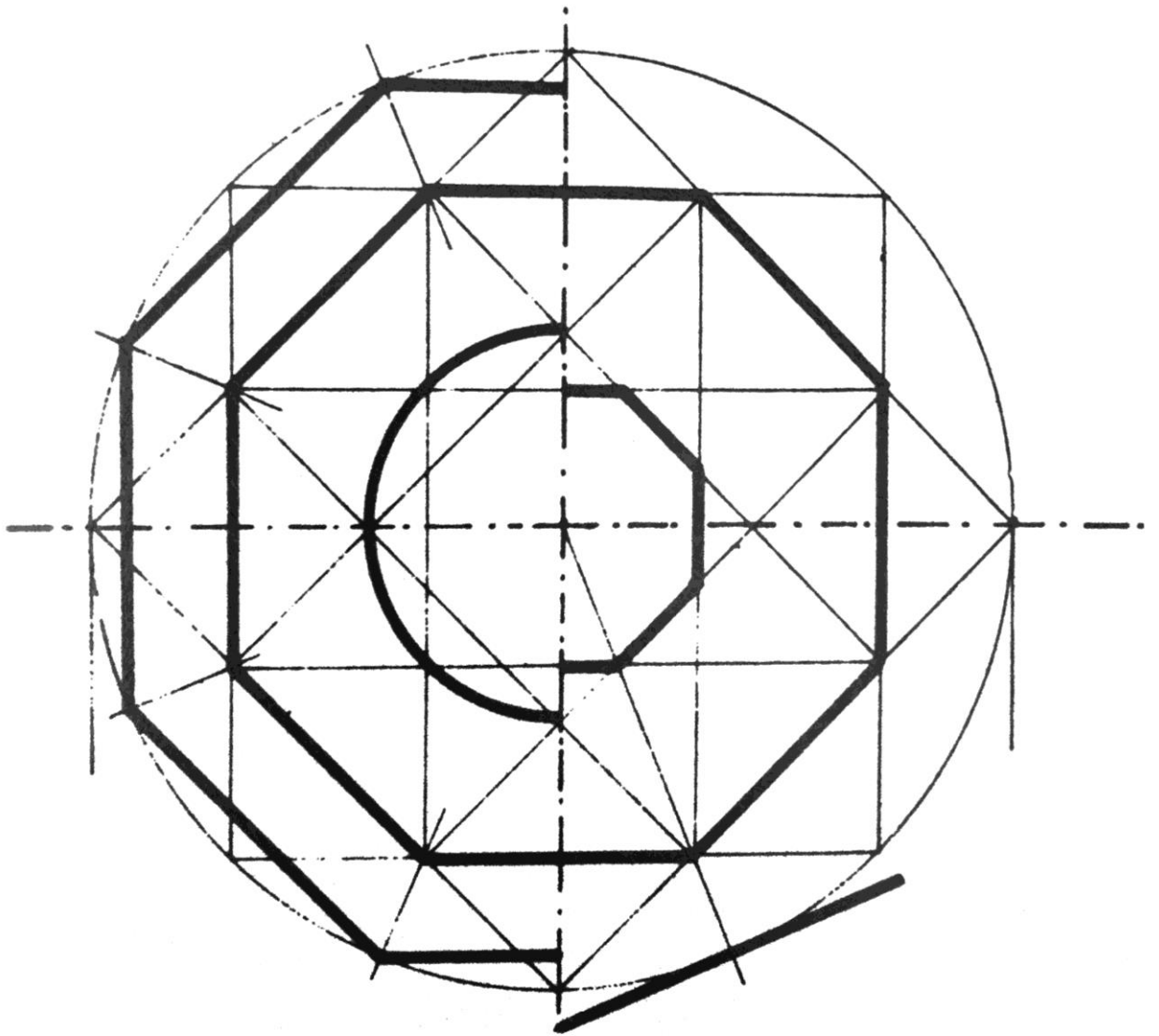


1104. DOME OF THE ROCK, JERUSALEM



1105. SAN VITALE, RAVENNA

³⁸⁶ Figures taken from Alexander Papadopoulos, *Islam and Muslim Art*. (London, 1976)



1107. QUBBAT AL-SAKKRA/SAN VITALE

II. MOSAICS

A. Dome of the Rock



IMG 1. Mosaics in the Dome of the Rock showing date palms, vine scrolls with grapes, and several vegetal motifs with fruits scattered between them.



IMG 2. Various vegetal motifs stemming out of a bejeweled vase in the Dome of the Rock. The vegetal motifs also have ornaments growing out of them or dangling from them.

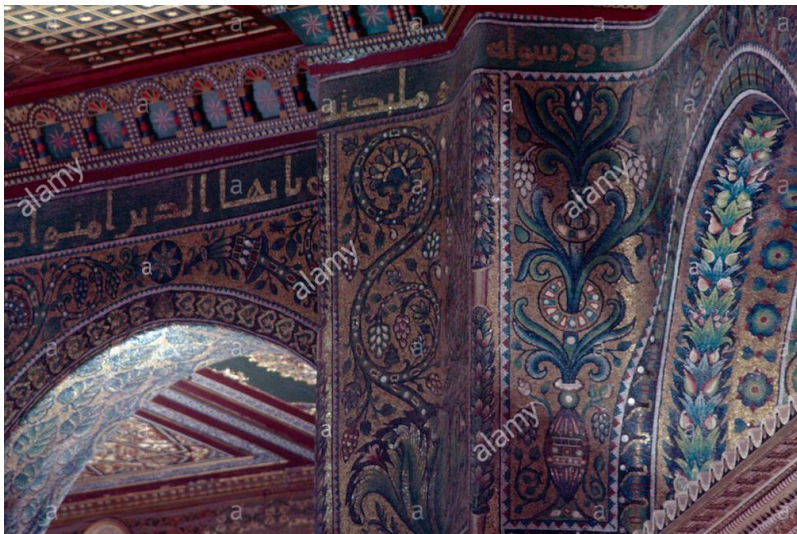
³⁸⁷ B.O'Kane. *The Dome of the Rock, Jeruslame, Interior Decoration*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-the-dome-of-the-rock-jerusalem-interior-mosaic-decoration-22521718.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).

³⁸⁸ B.O'Kane. *The Dome of the Rock, Jeruslame, Interior Decoration*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-detail-of-mosaics-interior-of-drum-the-dome-of-the-rock-jerusalem-122372244.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).



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IMG 3. Details of the mosaics in the Dome of the Rome showing a tree with a jeweled box instead of a trunk.



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IMG 4. In the center and on the right, panels of mosaics in the Dome of the Rock showing vine scrolls that are encrusted with jewels. On the left, there are wearable jewels seeming as if they are growing within the vegetal motifs.

³⁸⁹ B.O’Kane. *Detail of mosaic decoration of a jewel-studded tree on octagonal arcade, The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-detail-of-mosaic-decoration-of-a-jewel-studded-tree-on-octagonal-arcade-122372211.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).

³⁹⁰ B.O’Kane. *The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Interior Decoration*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-the-dome-of-the-rock-jerusalem-interior-mosaic-decoration-7365370.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).



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IMG 5. The interior of the Dome of the Rock showing that the mosaics only adorn the upper parts of the walls.

³⁹¹ B.O’Kane. *The Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, Interior*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-the-dome-of-the-rock-jerusalem-interior-22303564.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).

B. Great Mosque of Damascus



IMG 6. Mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus that portray huge castles with trees all around them.



IMG 7. Mosaic panel in the Great Mosque showing castles within castles with trees and vegetation coming out of all sides.

³⁹² Jim Grover. *Mosaics on Great Umayyad Mosque, Damascus, Syria*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-mosaics-on-great-umayyad-mosque-damascus-syria-33876492.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).

³⁹³ JD.Dallet. Syria, Damascus, Mosaic detail at the Umayyad Mosque. Age Fotostock. <http://www.agefotostock.com/age/en/Stock-Images/Rights-Managed/B21-1335126> (accessed December 15th, 2016).



IMG 8. Mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus depicting palm trees and a structure that appears like houses over houses.

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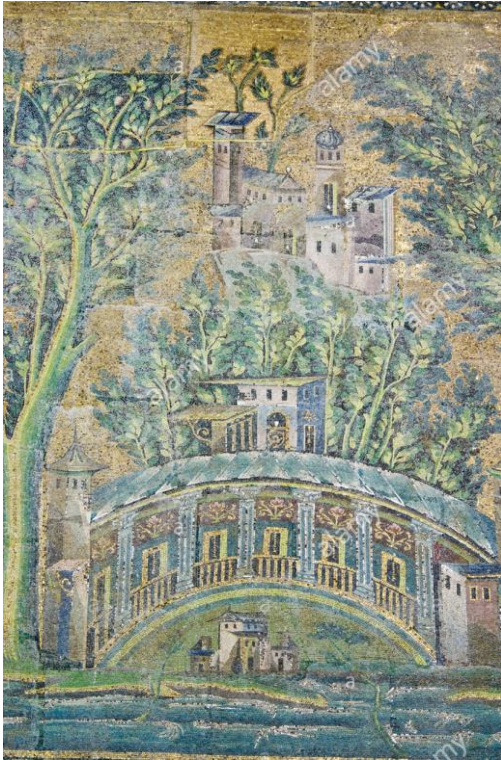


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IMG 9. Details of the mosaics in the Great Mosque of Damascus showing structures that seem like castles within castles with a river in front of them and huge trees scattered between them.

³⁹⁴ Jo Whitworth. *Damascus, Syria. Gold and green mosaics on the Treasury building in the courtyard of the Great Umayyad Mosque.* Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-damascus-syria-gold-and-green-mosaics-on-the-treasury-building-in-56500677.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).

³⁹⁵ B.O'Kane. *Detail of west portico, Great Mosque of Damasus.* Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-detail-of-west-portico-great-mosque-of-damascus-15574193.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).



IMG 10. A structure depicted in the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus showing what seems like castles within castles with a river in front of them and huge trees scattered between them.

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IMG 11. Details of the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus showing structures that seem like castles within castles with a river in front of them and huge trees scattered between them.

³⁹⁶ B.OKane. *Detail of mosaics, west portico, Great Mosque of Damascus, Syria*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-detail-of-mosaics-west-portico-great-mosque-of-damascus-syria-15417251.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).

³⁹⁷ B.OKane. *Detail of mosaics, west portico, Great Mosque of Damascus, Syria*. Alamy Stock Photo. <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-detail-of-mosaics-west-portico-great-mosque-of-damascus-syria-15574935.html> (accessed December 15th, 2016).



IMG 12. Details of a castle in the mosaics of the Great Mosque of Damascus.

³⁹⁸ DBimages. *Mosaic at Umayyad Mosque Damascus, Syria*. Alamy Stock Photo.
<http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-mosaic-at-umayyad-mosque-in-damascus-syria-18864361.html>
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