

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

THE SYMBOLIC FUNCTION OF ANGELS
IN THE QUR'ĀN AND SUFI LITERATURE

by
LOUISE CLAUDE GALLORINI

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وشكراً لِحَبِّي الدنيوي الحقيقي وهو السبب الأول والأخير لِرِحَلَتِي الأكاديمية، أي اللغة العربية.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION OF

Louise Claude Gallorini for Doctor of Philosophy
Major: Arabic Language and Literature.

Title: The Symbolic Function of Angels in the Qur'ān and Sufi Literature.

This dissertation is a literary study tracing the roles and functions of angels as characters in the Quranic text and pre-Mongol Sufi literature (7th-12th century CE). The first chapter explores the mythopoeic process related to angels in the Quranic text, listing their roles and functions, and how they illustrate one of the main cosmological shifts between pre-islamic belief systems and the islamic belief system. The second chapter traces the evolution of these roles and functions in the *tafsīr* genre, more specifically the Sufi commentary subgenre, with the examples of commentaries by al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) al-Sulamī (d.412/1021), al-Qushayrī (d.465/1072), Ibn Barraĵān (d. 536/1141) and Rūzbihān Baqlī (d.606/1209). Out of these arise two additional functions, not found in the Qur'ān, illustrating an evolution in time in the religious world-view. The third and fourth chapters explores these functions in two different examples of Sufi literature of the same period, and which could be considered as “Quranic commentaries” in a general sense. The third chapter thus explores the presence and functions of angels in Sufi *mi'rāj* narratives, or tales of celestial ascensions ascribed to Sufi masters, with the two main examples of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874-5 or 234/848-9) and Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī (d. 645/1248). The fourth chapter focuses on angels as they appear in the “Meccan Openings” (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*) by Ibn 'Arabī. Angels as characters appear thus to embody a specific multi-layered symbolic function in Sufi texts, whereby they become multivalent characters or signs, whether present or absent from the narrative, signifiers for the readers, both inside and outside the text.

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ABBREVIATIONS:

E.I.²: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second (Leiden: Brill), online.

E.I.³: Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third (Leiden: Brill), online.

E.Q.: Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān (Leiden: Brill), online.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

سقطت القسطنطينية ولم ينته الجدل حول الملائكة. لم ينته أيُّ جدلٍ ولا حول شيءٍ. ومَنْ يهَمُّه إن كان الملائكةُ حقيقةً أم خرافةً ما دام الاعتقاد بوجودهم أجملُ من عدم الاعتقاد؟ وهل نحن سابعون في اليقين حتَّى نتوقّف عند شكِّ كهذا؟ وما دام لا خيار لنا إلّا في التمنيِّ ولا حريةِ إلّا في الخيال، فلندعُ هذا المجنَّح الغائن يغمرنا بحمايته. إنّه هو نفسه مَنْ نلمحه عندما نغمض العينين ونسرح وراء ما لا تصل إليه اليد.

أنسي الحاج¹

Angels are part of the six articles of faith of Islam, they are saluted five times a day by practicing muslims at the end of the ritual prayer, and Gabriel is commonly admitted as the transmitter of the Revelation, however angels rarely seem to be the focus of a body of work in islamic literature: in pre-modern Arabic literature, there does not seem to be any before the *ḥadīth* compilation *Al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbar al-Malā'ik* by al-Suyūfī (d. 911/1505). This renders their textual presence in Arabic literature hard to trace: they are everywhere, but only on the side vision, slightly out of focus, usually seen as a inconspicuous surviving elements from other cosmologies.²

Although angels are an obvious locus of influences and interactions with previous monotheisms, as a simple reading of the Quranic text makes evident, we have to keep in mind that the late-antique milieu in which Islam appears and is constituted is more complex than a monotheistic continuation, and is the starting point of further

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

² David Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité des anges* (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 61.

cultural complexity.¹ As noted by Angelika Neuwirth, the Quranic text is on one hand a reflection of the confluence of several traditions, including the interaction of the Biblical and the Arabian canons, and quranic angels are an example of this; on the other hand, the Quranic text is also the reflection of a struggle between two world-views common in Antiquity, the literal and the figurative,² and this study proposes precisely to see how angels are used as narrative figures, between the literal and the figurative.

As Neuwirth calls for more studies of the Qur'ān as a literary text,³ researching its mythopoetic process,⁴ Todd Lawson attempts to analyse it more precisely as an epic, a foundational referential, “a dictionary for the language of self-identity, of ‘mythography’, and the broader cultural code.”⁵ He finds indeed that the Quranic text is closer to what is understood today as the “epic” genre both in function and form. He follows Northrop Frye and his work on the Bible (for whom it was literature, but also more than literature), as he tries to understand by what means the theological content of the Qur'ān has been communicated to many of its readers. Quranic studies face a

¹ Aziz Al-Azmeh writes on the complexity of the new religious tradition's constitution: “*In contrast to the diffusionist model often provided for the explanation for the genesis of the Muslim religion, and its search for constitutive origins in previous monotheistic religions or in more generally Semitic terms, the model here adopted is polygenetic, with an emphasis on local and autochthonous forces and processes which, once their geographical and social remit had widened under imperial auspices, joined a historical flow that had already been firmly in place, and realised, under central control, a number of possibilities available in the structures of polytheism, as had been the case before. This process took time (...) for its elaboration and for acquiring minimal coherence and the capacity for self-reproduction and self-perpetuation, eventually and, in the fullness of time, becoming the Great Muslim Tradition.*” See Azīz Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 40.

² Angelika Neuwirth, “The Qur'ān Enchantment of the World,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. A. Rippin, M. Daneshgar, W. A. Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 125-144.

³ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴ Angelika Neuwirth, “From Sacred Mosque to Remote Temple: Sūrat Al-Isrā' between Text and Commentary,” in *With Reverence for the Word: Medieval Scriptural Exegesis in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, ed. Walfish, Barry D., Joseph W. Goering and Jane Dammen McAuliffe (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 377-407.

⁵ Todd Lawson, “The Qur'an and Epic.” *Journal of Qur'ānic Studies* 16, no. 1 (2014): 58.

similar resistance that is found in Biblical studies to the idea that it may contain elements of previous myths, theologically marked as “pagan” or “false,”¹ however a literary study of the Quranic text and its commentaries might however, indeed, be fruitful by highlighting the mental representations and cosmologies inhabited by writers and readers, worlds constructed with imaginary material drawn out from previous and neighbouring belief systems - in a time where scientific speculation did not separate the physical world from the afterworld(s) as starkly as it does now.

Are angels a relevant perspective to attempt a glimpse into imaginaries and cosmologies of a given society? Many scholars suppose so: “Angels provide privileged grounds for exploring a whole range of issues from epistemology and metaphysics, to philosophy of mind and language;”² Angels are “a driving force for speculation concerning the borders of the universe and the multiplicity of worlds,” they are also “a religious ingredient that turns out to be poly-compatible. Angels can be imported and redefined, amalgamated and mixed; they belong at the same time to folk-religion and to official theology and, as such, are highly flexible entities. This is why this angelology remains an extremely productive pool of motifs for the religious imagination;”³ “In fact, it may be said that in medieval theology and philosophy in particular, human nature is defined in reference *to* angelic nature and vice-versa.”⁴ “‘Islamic angelology’ has the potential to be a fertile new interdisciplinary field of study that explores broad

¹ John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination, an Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 20-24.

² Isabelle Irribarren, Martin Lenz, *Angels in Medieval Philosophical Inquiry: Their Function and Significance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 4.

³ Johann Ev Hafner, “Where Angels Dwell, Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (Beirut: Orient Insitut Beirut, 2019), 230, 234-235.

⁴ Gisela Webb, “Hierarchy, Angels, and the Human Condition in the Sufism of Ibn Arabi,” *The Muslim World* 81, no. 3-4 (1991): 245-253.

conceptions of transcendence and immanence and the relationship between human existence and religious ideas. (...) Studying angels in Islam from a comparative perspective can, thus, help us to identify and understand continuities of tradition beyond Islamic belief, as well as specific developments within;¹ The use of angels blurs the frontier between popular, official, and normative literature,² and they also reveal what themes and aspects of life are more important for a given group of people.³ Stephen R. Burge has studied this in Sunni *hadīth* on al-Suyūṭī's work, and our dissertation hopes to come as a complementary study, looking at Sufi literature. We propose here to explore the Islamic angelic world from a literary point of view: the roles and functions of angels as characters and what their representation and use in the texts might suggest regarding mystical Islamic cosmologies showing through premodern Arabic literature.

We will first review the roles and functions of angels in the Qur'ān, and then throughout a selection of Sufi literature: Sufi commentaries, Sufi *mi'rāj* narratives, and the case study of the Meccan Openings by Ibn 'Arabī. We hope to perceive an evolution through time in this literature, over a period qualified problematically at times by the very large (and non-Arabic) adjective "medieval"⁴ or the ideologically charged "Golden-Age," to which we will prefer "pre-Mongol," referring to an event significant for the civilisation concerned, while somewhat historically more accurate: the period

¹ Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (eds), *The Intermediate World of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019), 38.

² Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam: Jalal Al-Dīn Al-Suyūṭī's Al-Ḥabā'ik fī Akhbār al-Malā'ik* (London: Routledge, 2015), 8.

³ Stephen R. Burge, "'Panangelon:' Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism, A Case Study Exploring Meteorological Angels in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik*," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 165-166.

⁴ Daniel Martin Varisco, "Making 'Medieval' Islam Meaningful," *Medieval Encounters: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Culture in Confluence and Dialogue* 13, no. 3 (2007): 385-412.

from the Quranic revelation in the 1 century AH/7th century AD to the Mongol invasion in 6th AH/13th AD.¹

The Qur'ān may be argued to be at the start of a vast literary process,² and for the study of highly religious figures such as angels, it is a natural point of departure. Aziz al-Azmeh noted that “Like demonology, Qur'ānic angelology is uncertain, in all probability reflecting conceptual and mythological indeterminacy (...) But angels do perform specific functions in the service of the Lord, and are mentioned in the context of a rudimentary mythical apparatus.”³ If Jaroslav Stetkevych's study⁴ and Aaron Hugues' article⁵ might on the contrary suggest that behind this apparently rudimentary mythical apparatus lays a well developed but mostly lost mythology of which the quranic text makes use, we will see in the first chapter exactly what roles and functions are endorsed by the angelic figures, and what shifts happens in this mythological indeterminacy within the Qur'ān.

Moving on from the Qur'ān in its late-antique immediate milieu,⁶ we will study a selection of Sufi commentaries (*tafsīr*), produced in a world already different from

¹ We will also use both datation systems, Anno Hegirae and Anno Domini, throughout the study for date of death of authors.

² “Indeed as the first literary text in the Arabic language to have been written down almost immediately and thus to have triggered the Islamic ‘culture of the Book’ that emerged very soon after” (Angelika Neuwirth, ‘The ‘Discovery of Writing’ in the Qur'ān: Tracing a Cultural Shift in Arab Late Antiquity’, in *The Qur'ān and Adab, the Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam*, ed. Nuha Alshaar, Oxford University Press, 2017, pp. 61-92. This chapter gives a convincing view of the authoritative shift from the oral to the written induced by the quranic text.)

³ Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 341.

⁴ Jaroslav Stetkevych, *Muhammad and the Golden Bough* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1996).

⁵ Aaron Hughes, “The Stranger at the Sea: Mythopoesis in the Qur'ān and Early Tafsīr,” *Studies in Religion*, vol. 32, no. 3 (2003), 261-279.

⁶ For a full explanation of this concept, see the first chapter of Al Azmeh, *Azīz. The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity: Allāh and His People*. Cambridge University Press, New York, 2014. The whole book is worth reading, as a detailed and wide-reaching study of islam as a late

that of the Qur'ān. These commentaries will help us determine what characteristic the characters of angels keep, lose, or gain, as the reading and interpretative acts reshape them.

The third and fourth chapters could be seen as commentaries in the larger sense, as explanations and narratives “pegged” to quranic verses, to use the phrase of Burge, whereby different narratives are pegged to quranic verses in order to explain them and the world around the reader: the classical islamic category of the circumstances of Revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) is a traditional example of such a process.¹ Thus the third chapter will concern the Sufi celestial ascension narratives (*mi' rāj*), the readers and listeners of which might have been a larger group, possibly more popular for some of them, than that of the *tafsīr*. Sufi authors have both commented on the Prophetic *mi' rāj*, and written about personal mystical ascension. The fourth chapter will concern the several volumes of the Meccan Openings (*al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*) by Ibn 'Arabī, a lengthy work which might have been on the contrary relevant initially only to a small intellectual elite, although its impact on the wider islamic group of theologians and thinkers was doubtless significant.

Through these works, we will attempt to trace the evolution of angels, as literary characters and elements a mythopoeic process, textual and extratextual products of human imagination.² They are part of a cosmological renewal, of the building of

antique phenomenon; Patricia Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities," *Arabica*, vol. 57, no. 2/3, (2010), 151-200.

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 6-7.

² On the importance of imagination in human societies, see Alexander Knysh, *Sufism, a New History of Islamic mysticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017), 31-34, with references to Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); and Patricia Crone, *Pre-industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003).

mythology, in the anthropological sense of sacred history, reflecting the building of a new civilisation in different cultural contexts.

Burge notes that there is not one islamic angelology, as they tend to reflect theological debates, or the product of such debates, giving rise contradictory systems, as was the case in Christianity and Judaism: there are as many angelologies as they are authors.¹ As late waves of converts brought different perspectives and viewpoints into islamic writings,² we suppose then that angelologies will reflect in part the great complexity and changes witnessed the period from the late-antique Arabic phenomenon of islam to the Empire phase.

While angels in general have been studied,³ angels in islam are a more recent focus of research. There are a number of good articles and chapters on angels in islam,⁴ which provide generalist overviews of angels in Qur'ān and well-known texts in the Western academic tradition (by authors such as Ibn Sīnā, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', al-Fārābī). There are also more specific articles and chapters on angels in Quranic

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 108. Another scholar offers to use “angelopedia” to designate the study and accumulation of the many discourses existing on angels (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 18).

² Antoine Borrut, “De l'Arabie à l'empire, conquête et construction califale dans l'islam premier,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol 1 (Paris: Verf, 2019), 249-289.

³ Such an example is Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, and Karin Schöpflin, *Angels: The Concept of Celestial Beings; Origins, Development and Reception* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2007); David Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle-Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁴ Louis Gardet, “Les Anges En Islam,” *Studia Missionalia* 21, (1972): 207-227; Pierre Lory, “Les anges dans l'islam,” *Connaissance des religions* (2004): 155-166, <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00323707>; Fehmi Jadaane, “La place des anges dans la théologie cosmique musulmane,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 41 (1975): 23-61; Olga Lizzini, Samuela Pagani, “Islam,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), 1453-2012; Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 339-362; Pierre Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2018), 159-220; Sachiko Murata, “The Angels,” in *Islamic Spirituality, Foundations*, ed. S. H. Nasr (New York: Crossroads, 1987), 324-344.

polemics,¹ in Ibn ‘Arabī² and al-Suhrawardī³ as well as two important books, *Angels in Islam* by Burge and *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels* recently published by the Orient Institute in Beirut.⁴ Angels in Sufism in particular are rarely an object of study, although, as with angels in Islam in general, there is a great number of mentions of angels in various works, in all kinds of literary and theological studies, although these are rarely focused on these beings (or not at length).

A first preliminary remark is that Islamic cosmologies, like antique and medieval Christian cosmologies, follow multiple variations of Ptolemaic-Greek cosmology.⁵ Sufism is likewise infused with neo-Platonic influences,⁶ and within this mental frame, correspondences are also frequent, between planets, heavenly spheres, elements, philosophical concepts, and other such cosmological elements.⁷ We may thus expect that angels in our selected texts fit and be moulded into such models.

Secondly, while some might wonder why Judaism and Christianity would have needed angels as intermediaries with God, since priests already endorse this role⁸ - the need for their presence in Islam and its lack of clergy (at least in Sunni Islam) might be

¹ Crone, Patricia. “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God: The View of the Qur’ānic Pagans”, in *The Qur’ānic Pagans and Related Matters* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 102-124.

² Webb, “Hierarchy.”

³ Stephen R. Burge, “The Provenance of Suhrawardian Angelology,” *Archiv Orientalní*, 76, no. 4 (2008): 435-457.

⁴ Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (eds), *The Intermediate World of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019).

⁵ Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate World of Angels*, 21; Jadaane, “La place des anges,” 28-29.

⁶ Knysh, *Sufism, a New History*, 124-136.

⁷ For a comparative chart of Aristotelian, Islamic theological and Islamic philosophical cosmologies, see Arnol Yasin Mol, “*Laylat al-Qadr* as Sacred Time, Sacred Cosmology in Sunni *Kalām* and *Tafsīr*,” in *Islamic Studies Today*, ed. Majid Daneshgar, Walid Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 81; for a similar chart based on the Epistle of the Brethren of Purity, see de Godefroid de Callatay, “The *Ikwān al-Ṣafā’* on Angels and Spiritual Beings,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 350-351.

⁸ Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 22.

more obvious. Burge describes them in an Islamic context as “God’s presence on earth,” quoting Henry Corbin according to whom without angelology, monotheism would perish in an “illusory triumph.”¹

Thirdly, angels also appear in this context of Late Antiquity where the concept of *deus otiosus* or “high God” removed from the daily affairs of the world is usually opposed to the concept of *deus actuosus*, which corresponds to the idea of a governing god who manages his creation. For Giorgio Agamben, this duality is the gnostic question par excellence, and “angelology is the most antique, articulated and detailed consideration on this particular form of power or divine action that we could define as ‘the governing of the world.’”² Are angels then a way to bring back the High God to his creation, as Governing God, or on the contrary, have they pushed him out of the picture, which is what the Qur’ān, in its maximalist transcendence, tries to reverse? The debate is open.³

A fourth remark is about angels as a mean of divine communication: in Judaism, angels are seen as a way of continuation of Revelation, even after this is officially considered as closed.⁴ In another way, Burge writes that through the *ḥadīth* “God interact with humanity continually, through the angels, to affect changes in the course of

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 75; Henry Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme* (Paris: L’Herne, 1981), 100.

² See Giorgio Agamben, “Introduzione,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), ebook.

³ In the Bible, angels are one of the main devices to build the transcendence of God, and create a progressive distance between man and God after their direct interactions in Genesis (Pierre Gibert, “Fondements bibliques,” in *Histoire de la théologie*, ed. Jean-Yves Lacoste (Paris: Points, 2019), p.23-24); angels may thus be seen as rendering God as “jobless” (Johann Ev Hafner, “Where Angels Dwell, Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 229- 250).

⁴ Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 141-142.

salvation-history on all levels, national and personal.”¹ Throughout this study examples of Sufi literature will show strong echoes of this.

A fifth point regards the influence of other monotheisms on Islamic angels: Burge argues that Judeo-Christian milieus influenced first pre-Quranic and Quranic periods, but not so much the early formative period of Islam, possibly getting stronger only later, “as addition to the available material.”² He further writes that:

“The interaction between Islamic beliefs about angels and their Jewish and Christian counterparts is complex. Many commentators have simply argued that Islamic angelology has its origins in Judaism and Christianity. When looking at the Qur’ān, the influence of Judaism and Christianity is certainly unmistakable, but surely this is not surprising. However, the influence of Judaism and Christianity appears to diminish during the formative period of Islamic theology and Qur’ānic exegesis. Above all, Islamic angelology always remains distinctly Islamic and this distinctiveness cannot be attributed to Jewish and Christian influences. The two other Abrahamic faiths may have provided some basic core beliefs, imagery and conceptualizations, but the Muslim community developed them in their own unique way.”³

We will try to follow a chronological reading of our sources, taking care in particular of decoupling the reading of the Qur’ān from its later Sufi commentaries, and see how these interactions come into play.

A sixth point on the results of Burge on angelic roles and functions: Burge also notes that “the relationship between function and angel is central to most angelologies,” further explaining that angels in *hadīth* are always devoted to one specific role (which he calls “function”), or several angels for one role, but very rarely one angel for

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 76. A similar interaction with the divine, which became highly textual even though not Quranic, is the example of the *ḥadīth qudsī*, see William A. Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam: A Reconsideration of the Sources, with Special Reference to the Divine Saying Or Ḥadīth Qudsī* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1977).

² Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 68.

³ *Ibid.*, 69.

different roles (such as Gabriel and Michael).¹ This is true for the angels in *ḥadīth* literature, and as Burge remarks that angels can be used in a more heterodox fashion in such works as those of Ibn ‘Arabī or al-Suhrawardī,² this study will explore what Sufi texts makes of this mono-functional distribution, whether they are heterodox indeed or more orthodox than he supposes.

This leads us to our seventh point, the object of most of this study: angels in *Sufi* islam. Sufism is notoriously complex to define and trace through history.³ For this study, given the selection of our sources, we could functionally define it as “Sunni mysticism,” part of Islamic esotericism, although non-Sunni texts and phenomenons can be included.⁴ Related, if not often equated to Sufism, the concept of “esotericism” has become subject of study and discussion in islamic studies.⁵ We may note that what Alexander Knysh discussed about defining Sufism⁶ somewhat mirrors what Liana Saif wrote on defining Islamic esotericism.⁷ Both are good overviews on what these two

¹ Ibid., 39.

² Ibid., 8.

³ Alexander Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), and *Sufism, a New History*; For an introduction to Sufism in the period we are concerned with, see Tawfiq b. ‘Āmir, *al-Taṣawwuf al-islāmī ilā al-qarn al-sādis al-hijrī, ru`ya naqdiyya wa-namādhij muntakhaba* (Beirut: Kanz Nāshirūn, 2017).

⁴ As Knysh writes: “Our own position regarding the issue of defining Sufism privileges inclusion over against exclusion. Events, personalities and practices that various groups or observers (both insiders and outsiders) associate with Sufism should be included into its definition unless there are compelling reasons not to do so.” Alexander Knysh, “Definitions of Sufism as a Meeting Place of Eastern and Western ‘Creative Imaginations’,” in *Sufism East and West* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 75.

⁵ Fera Hamza, “Locating the “Esoteric” in Islamic Studies,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. A. Rippin, M. Daneshgar, W. A. Saleh, (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 354-366; Mark Sedgwick, “Islamic and Western Esotericism,” in *Correspondences* 7, no. 1 (2019): 277-299.

⁶ Alexander Knysh, “Definitions of Sufism as a Meeting Place,” 53-75.

⁷ Liana Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?,” *Correspondences* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1-59. She lists four principles of Islamic esotericism: “1) Exegetical principle: Islamic esotericism is pivoted on Qur’anic exegesis, 2) Epistemological principle: Intellectual or revelatory reception, hidden natural and celestial phenomena, the Divine realm, and the nature of Qur’an, 3) Social principle: personal or collective salvific investment through the enlightenment and perfection of the

terms mean in regards to the West / Eastern categories, how they were and are viewed, studied, and understood through Western references and currents of thoughts (such as perennialism).¹ The reader only need to keep in mind that Islamic esotericism and Sufism, two categories usually used as synonyms (although not always overlapping) are part of islamic religious traditions, and may involve ideas ranging from the very orthodox to the very unorthodox. In our case, through our research on the evolution of the roles and functions of angels, we will see how these characters illustrate and participate in the Sufi imaginal textual and extra-textual process, and how it helps defining some aspects of Sufi cosmological views.

Lastly, a few remarks on translations: translations from the primary sources are all mine, except for the Qur'ān, for which I used the Study Qur'ān,² the commentary of Tustarī, and the *mi'rāj* of al-Bisṭāmī, for both of which English translations already exists. All other translations from secondary sources are mine.

For technical terms, I will list here some of the terms used in Sufi texts and the translations proposed in this study, as they are sometimes translated in different ways by different scholars. In his overview of the use of the word “gnosticism,”³ a word used both in Christianity with a particular meaning, and in Western academic works for translating different Islamic concepts such as *taṣawwuf*, *ma'rifa* or *'irfān*, Kevin van

human soul and/or the restitution of a community, 4) Trans-linguistic principle that demands the use symbols and allegory.” (Ibid., 45-46.)

¹ For a longer critique of Western scholarship on esoteric islam and its underlying influences and bias, see Liana Saif, “‘That I Did Love the Moor to Live with Him’: Islam in/and the Study of ‘Western Esotericism,’” in *New Approaches to the Study of Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem, Julian Strube (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 67-87. She concludes that “esotericism stemming from, or reacting to, Islamic traditions cannot be understood fully without referring its various currents to this process of othering and relating”.

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner K. Dagli, Mohammed Rustom (eds.), *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary* (New York: HarperOne Collins Publishers, 2015).

³ van Bladel, “Gnosticism,” E.I.³

Bladel shows how using this word is becoming ever more questionable. Although it might still be practical for common speech, I choose to keep here the common “Sufism” for *taṣawwuf* (or “mysticism”), and to translate *maʿrifa* by “mystical knowledge,” *ʿarif* by “mystical knower,” in contrast to “science” or “knowledge” (*ʿilm*) and “scholar” (*ʿālim*).

Among such other problematic translations, *walī* is translated here as “Friend” or “Friend of God”, and not as the more usual “saint.” Even though many authors prefer using “saint,” the connotation implied by the Christian religious system (more particularly Catholic and Orthodox) is too strong and might induce undue implications about the status of *walī* in the Arab world. Michel Chodkiewicz, although using “saint,” mentions that the latin “amicitia” translates in a much better way this relationship of strong friendship with a patron, and the protection and power involved in the words *wilāya* and *walāya* related to the *walī*¹ (transposed in the Sufi system, the patron is God). However given how little used this latin term is, the common “Friend” is preferred.

Other terms, relevant to angels, are those related to their world: the *ghayb* is translated as “Unseen.” Sedgwick explains that it had been translated many times as “esoteric,”² but I have found that in most contexts of the sources in this study, it is used in the sense of the Unseen world: a plain reality opposed to the other plain reality of the Seen world (*ʿālam al-shahāda*), regardless of the esoteric or exoteric nature of the text. These are two realities that seem to be part of the worldview of premodern authors, regardless of their mystical tendencies. Part of the Unseen is the *Ākhira*, Otherworld or

¹ Michel Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints, prophétie et sainteté dans la doctrine d’Ibn ʿArabī* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986, 2012) 32-35.

² Sedgwick, “Islamic and Western Esotericism.”

Next world, with eschatological connotations, the world reached after death. The Seen and Unseen worlds however can be placed in parallel to *ẓāhir* that opposes *bāṭin*. We will translate these last terms mostly as exoteric (*ẓāhir*) and esoteric (*bāṭin*), as this is the best working translation we have found in the context of our primary sources, although the reader should keep in mind that “esotericism” itself has a particular history which might not overlap exactly the use of *bāṭin* in Arabic.

CHAPTER 2

ANGELS IN ARABIA: IN AND AROUND THE QUR'ĀN

2.1. Angels in Arabia.

2.1.1 - *Tracing the Origins of Angels:*

In islamic cosmology, the first reference on angels coming to mind is first and foremost the quranic text, although it barely mentions their creation (37:150). For a reader trying to collect details regarding the ontology of angels, this might be puzzling. The Qur'ān specifies elsewhere the nature of man and jinn (15:26-27) along the fact that they were created by God, but not so for angels. What are they made of? Common islamic traditions from a later stage provide us with an answer, such as a well known Sunni *ḥadīth*¹ on the matter, telling us that angels are made from *nūr*, one of the words in Arabic to designate “light” and which has positive connotations in the islamic imaginary, as it is associated to God and later on to the Prophet.²

As for the linguistic origins of angels in the Arabic language, different studies give us elements: in a linguistic and exegetical discussion of the sūra 35:1 of the Qur'ān, which is the only verse giving details about the aspect of angels (as having wings), Stephen R. Burge reviews the disputed origins of the Arabic word for “angel” (*malak*, pl. *malā'ika*),³ in both recent scholarship and classical Arabic lexicography.⁴

¹ See *Saḥīḥ muslim*, *ḥadīth* n° 2996.

² We can briefly mention two examples here: in the Qur'ān *nūr 'alā nūr* (24:35) is part of a metaphor describing God; and works from Ibn 'Arabī around the concept of *nūr Muḥammad*.

³ Stephen R. Burge, “The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malā'ika: Exegeses of Q. 35:1.,” *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 10, no. 1 (2008):50-70.

⁴ Classical Arabic lexicography is mainly interested in the root of the word, regarded as being 'l-k, l-'k, and sometimes m-l-k.

According to the latter, this word could be linked to any previous semitic languages surrounding Arabia, such as Canaanite, Aramaic, Syriac, Hebrew or Ethiopic, and although there is a slight preference for Ethiopic, on account that the plural *malā'ika* is close to the Ethiopic plural *malā'ekt*. However more recently Christian Julien Robin has shown that the word could be endogenous to the Arabian peninsula, as examples of the root L-'-K have been found in the Saba'ic and Ma'īnic languages of Arabia (Saba'ic being close to what he calls "Old Arabic"), thus *malak* could be considered an Arabic word in pre-islamic and early islamic times and not a borrowed one.¹

Additionally, it seems that the word *malak* in different forms is found in pre-islamic poetry in both in the sense of "message"² and in the sense of "heavenly being,"³ according to the Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic. The argument based on pre-islamic poetry might be considered questionable by some, as these pre-islamic sources were mainly recorded in written form after the codification of the quranic text (which

¹ Christian Julien Robin, "Les "anges" (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels d'apparence humaine dans l'Arabie antique," in *The Intermediate World of Angels, Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts*, ed. Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019), 121-122. On "Old Arabic" and the linguistic state of Arabia at that time, see Ahmad Al-Jallad, "What Is Ancient North Arabian?," in *Re-Engaging Comparative Semitic and Arabic Studies*, ed. Daniel Birmstiel and Na'āma Pat-El, (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018.)

Contrary to many other scholars who consider that jinn are more endogenic to Arabia than angels, Robin even affirms elsewhere that the category of jinn is not attested before Islam, and that it could be a borrowing from Syria. See Christian Julien Robin, "L'Arabie préislamique," in *Le Coran des historiens, vol I* (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 93.

² Here is a verse attributed to Abū Jandab al-Hudhaliyy al-Mash'ūm, (evaluated date: 86 before Hijra, or 538 CE):

(وقال يتوعد من نهب ماله وقتل امرأته): مَنْ مُبْلَغُ مَلَائِكِي حُبَشِيًّا أَخَا بَنِي زُلَيْفَةَ الصُّبْحِيًّا؟

Source: The Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic, dohadictionary.org

³ Here are two verses attributed to 'Antara, (evaluated date: 22 years before Hijra, or 600 CE):

سَأَلَنِي يَا عُبَيْلَ عَيْبِي خَبِيرًا وَشَجَاعًا قَدْ شَيَّبَتْهُ الْحُرُوبُ
فَسَيِّبِيكَ أَنْ فِي حَدِّ سَيْفِي مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ جَاضِرٌ لَا يَغِيْبُ

And another verse attributed to the same author, with an unusual plural that we will find later in other writings:

وَلَقَدْ حَمَلْتُ عَلَى الْأَعَاجِمِ حَمَلَةً ضَجَّتْ لَهَا الْأَمْلَاكُ فِي الْأَفْلاكِ

Source: Ibid.

suggests a possible editorial process done on this poetry), however it cannot be fully excluded.¹

In all these languages, the root of the word *malak* has the meaning of “to send a message or a messenger,” which fits the common idea, in monotheistic creeds, of angels as being God’s messengers. However in Arabic, Burge shows that the word “*malak*” is used as if it had lost this primary meaning, since elsewhere the Qur’ān speaks of humans and angels sent as messengers, with another word (*rusul*) in (22:75), thus making a distinction between the angel as a being and the role of messenger, and thus implying that angels could have another function than being messengers. Burge notes there that the distinction between angel (*malak*) and messenger (*rasūl*) is the same then that the distinction done in latin between angels (*angelus*) and messenger (*nuntius*), where the original meaning of the root is disregarded, or forgotten, when using the word. This is contrary to the other semitic languages where there is no such clear distinction, such as the word for angel in Hebrew which also means messenger, whether human or non-human. Burge concludes then that *malak*, as early as in the Quranic text,

¹ It is traditionally seen that pre-islamic poetry helped and still helps readers of the Qur’ān in understanding some of its lexicon, its historical and cultural contexts, rendered obscure by the passage of time and evolution of the language. However pre-islamic poetry has been decried by scholars such as David Margoliouth and Tāhā Ḥusayn as forgeries produced post-revelation, thus disqualifying them as legitimate sources for understanding the quranic text. Although this hyper-critical stance has since then been challenged (discussion that will continue with future findings in archeology and palaeography in the Arabian peninsula), some doubts remain. Quranic studies specialists sometimes still tend to dismiss pre-islamic poetry as a useful entry to understanding the quranic text, see for example such a critical overview and argumentation in Gabriel Said Reynolds, *The Qur’ān and its Biblical Subtext* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), 30-33.

However we can mention that Patricia Crone herself recognises that Islamic tradition, although textually built over a long period of time after the Qur’ān, is sometimes needed even in historical quranic studies, “because it preserves early information and because it embodies a millennium and a half of scholarship by men of great learning and high intelligence on whose shoulders it is good to stand. Indeed, we cannot completely get off their shoulders even if we try, since we normally rely on their dictionaries for the lexical meaning of the words in the book.” Patricia Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans: God and the Lesser Deities,” *Arabica* 57, no. 2 (2010): 152.

has come to mean a celestial being first and foremost, that belongs to the spiritual realm, more than the function of messenger originally implied by the name.¹ This is seconded by Robin, who sees in the Quranic *malak* as divine being the real borrowing (if there is one) from surrounding languages linked to monotheisms (Aramaic, Judeo-aramaic), while the word had a profane but endogenous use before it (as “messenger”) alongside “*rasūl*” (also present in Saba’ic).²

If this distinction between the word *malak* and *rasūl* was the position of the quranic text, it might not have been the case for a part of its audience, at least not its polytheists detractors, according to a recent study by Patricia Crone.³ Indeed she explains that polytheists were expecting Muḥammad to be accompanied by an angel, or replaced by an angel, in order for them to believe him as a messenger, because they would have understood the word *rasūl* (messenger) in a religious context to designate an angel (like the latin *angelus*), a word which Muḥammad uses in this way at times as well. However, calling himself a *rasūl* “is what will have sounded absurd to the polytheists: he was calling himself an angel, and when they objected, he would explain that he was just a human angel !”⁴

As cosmological beings, the pre-islamic genealogy of Quranic angels in local and surrounding cultures and religions as cosmological beings is also becoming clearer

¹ Burge, “The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malā’ika”; For an etymological discussion of this similar shift in Judaism and Christianity, visible in the New Testament, see David Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité des anges* (Paris: Cerf, 2018), 42-57.

² Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels,” 124.

³ Patricia Crone, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God: The View of the Qur’ānic Pagans,” in *The Qur’ānic Pagans and Related Matters: Collected Studies in Three Volumes, vol 1*, ed. Hanna Sirurua (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 102-124.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 110. Following this theory, this could give an insight into a shift of the uses of the language, Arabic. If polytheists understood *rasūl* as angel, this means that the Qur’ān will have operated a major shift in the use of the word, by assigning *rasūl* to a function only, and *malak* to the celestial beings, when it was, according to Crone’s analysis, conflated as one concept before the quranic revelation.

thanks to the now thriving quranic and islamology studies fields, as well as from studies in comparative religion and comparative mythology.¹ Angels are entangled in different theories and complex cultural relationships. First and foremost influences from Judaism and Christianity come to mind, as angels are a fundamental part of their cosmologies² - and more studies of the sort have been recently published on angels in islam.³ Whatever their perspective on the Qur'ān,⁴ these studies bring us interesting insights into the cultural, historical and anthropological context of the quranic revelation. Of a particular interest for this study is the question around the arrival of angels in the Arabian imaginary: were they already present before the quranic revelation, or did they come

¹ For a critical recent review of modern scholarship on angels in islam, see Stephen R. Burge, *Angels in Islam, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabā'ik fī akhbār al-malā'ik* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 9-15; and even more recently Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, Hans-Peter Pökel (eds.), *The Intermediate World of Angels*, (Beirut: Orient Institut Beirut, 2019), 11-45.

Regarding the antique and late antique world more generally, an interesting example of such studies is one between the antique mesopotamian *lamassu* and the Biblical cherubim, studying their many common features, that we find later as standard features of angels, such as having wings, acting as guardians to humans, intercessors for them. The *lamassu* are particularly interesting in that they also share the good/evil feature of Arabian *jinn*, as well as being protectors of places. See Samson N. Kagmatche, *Étude comparative entre les lamassu et les chérubins bibliques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2011).

² For an overview of the Judaic and Christian presences in pre-islamic Arabia, which seem to have included a particular trend of Christianity regarding Jesus as an angel, or as part of a triad with Michael and Gabriel, see Jan M. F. Van Reeth, "Les courants "Judéo-chrétiens" et chrétiens orientaux de l'antiquité tardive," in *Le Coran des historiens, vol 1* (Paris: Cerf, 2019).

³ Aside from the studies mentioned so far, see more particularly the contributions of Nada Hérou on the formation of the representation of angels in antique Christianity building on Greco-Latin mythological elements; Christian Robin and Aziz Al-Azmeh on the wide diversity angelic-like beings in the Arabian peninsula on the eve of Islam, with roles similar to that of angels as listed in this chapter; and Burge on the peculiar case of meteorological angels that sometimes echo ancient thunder gods of the Middle-East, these contributions forming the first part of *The Intermediate World of Angels*, 49-153.

⁴ In the field of quranic studies and more generally studies interested in early islamic history, there has been - and still is - a wide array of views around the quranic text and early islamic literature: from a near-full refutation of the historical constitution of the quranic text as presented by the islamic sources (sometimes seeing the quranic text as deriving from late-antique Christian sources), to a near-total acceptance of the narrative(s) presented by these islamic sources (for a critical overview of the use of sources regarding early Islam, see Aziz Al-Azmeh, "Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 135-136; and more particularly how the debates in modern scholarship of Quranic studies showed and evolved through the studies of angels in islam, see Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 9-10).

with the quranic text, as a possible belated influence from Judaic and Christian traditions into the text? This will be important later on in this chapter, when studying their relationship with another type of otherworldly beings, the jinn, of whose “Arabianness” is more clearly admitted.

While Joseph Chelhod argues in his study¹ that angels were known to the people of pre-islamic Arabia, Toufic Fahd refutes this,² saying that angels came to Arabia only with the advent of islam. This stance is also adopted to some extent by scholars such as Jacqueline Chabbi and Esmâ Hind Tengour who consider the quranic text in its native milieu as somehow isolated from too many external cultural influences, and so tend to consider angels as an influence of the Judaic and Christian traditions on the later stages of the quranic revelation.

However Amira El Zein³ supports Chelhod’s view on the pre-islamic presence of angels with four points: firstly, Arabs could have used the word “jinn” to designate angels, as the root “J N N” refers to anything that is hidden, belonging to the world invisible to the human gaze, the Unseen (*ghayb*);⁴ secondly, pre-islamic Arab society

¹ Joseph Chelhod, *Les structures du sacré chez les Arabes* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1965). However this study has an outdated evolutionary model for religion in the Arabian peninsula, and for a better updated study of pre-islamic beliefs see Christopher M. Moreman, “Rehabilitating the Spirituality of Pre-Islamic Arabia: On the Importance of the Kahin, the Jinn, and the Tribal Ancestral Cult,” *Journal of Religious History* 41, no. 2 (2017): 137-157.

² Toufic Fahd, *Anges démons et djinns en islam* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).

³ Amira El-Zein, *Islam, Arabs, and the Intelligent World of the Jinn* (New York, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

⁴ Several translations, depending on the context, are possible for this concept: divine mystery, the invisible world pertaining to magic, the Unknowable, and in Sufism “*al-ghayb* means, according to context, the reality of the world beyond the senses and beyond discursive reason which gnosis (*ma'rifa*) experiences, - the hierarchy of the invisible worlds, - the beings of these worlds, - and even the world of the Divine Essence” (MacDonald, Gardet, “al-Ghayb,” E.I.²). For clarity purposes however, I chose to translate this term as “Unseen” or “the world of the Unseen” which could reflect the common denominator to almost all the uses of this concept (related to what cannot be seen, either by the five senses, or more metaphorically by intellectual means - the “unseen” beyond the limits of human understanding), although “Otherworld” could also be used, in the sense of something “other” that cannot be seen or known. Incidentally, al-

was composed of different creedal groups, pagans, Zoroastrians, local Christians, and Jews, and these three later groups at least would have been familiar with the concept of angels; thirdly, the Qur'ān refers to angels in a way that suggests that it was a known concept in pre-islamic Arabia; and lastly, pre-islamic Arabs seemed to have referred to fallen angels.¹ We will develop here further these four points that she has briefly presented - grouping the second and third point together, as they are similar (the Qur'ān suggest the known presence of angels by interacting with the religious diversity of the time). However we should keep in mind that findings regarding pre-islamic Arabic remain more or less conjectural.²

Angels as jinn: The first point is supported by Moreman in a review of the pre-islamic spiritual Arabian landscape:³ the distinction between angels and jinn was never clear in the beginning, and one could conclude that the abrahamic traditions tended to name spirits from the otherworld “angels” while other local traditions named them “jinn.” Interestingly in both cases these spirits were mainly seen as messengers. The view of angels as jinn is also supported by the position of Chabbi, who sees in the Qur'ān's failure to fully separate both category of beings - and failing to mention the nature of angels by contrast to that of the jinn (fire) - was due to the powerful presence of jinn in the Arabian imaginary, and who had a similar role to that of the angels.⁴ There is also the possible linguistic explanation that the word “jinn” could also be used for

Azmeh has also remarked that this notion had not been studied enough in scholarly literature, Aziz al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 369.

¹ El Zein, *Islam, Arabs*, 35.

² For an updated overview of pre-islamic Arabia based on recent archeological, epigraphical and historical sources, see Christian Julien Robin, “L'Arabie préislamique,” 53-154.

³ Moreman, "Rehabilitating the Spirituality," 137-157; see also Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 210-211.

⁴ Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus* (Paris: CNRS, 2013), 215. This is seen in more detail later in this chapter.

angels (seen also in the third part of this chapter). Other local belief systems included similar celestial intermediary figures, that could be conflated with angels, such as the *shams*, female-like winged figures in messenger and protecting roles in antique Yemen, and the “daughters of Īl,” part of cults in the Arabian South, Negev and Palmyre.¹ This conflating process echoes an earlier one in antique Christianity with the Latin *genii* and angels,² Greek daimons compared to Jewish angels,³ or neo-platonicians gods becoming angels in the angelology of pseudo-Denys the Areopagyte.⁴

Angels as part of the multiplicity of beliefs in pre-islamic Arabia, and as references in the Quranic interaction with its audience: we may find an example of el-Zein’s second and third point first in a quranic verse, which is part of one of the quranic renderings of biblical stories: the story of Moses coming to face Pharaoh. In this excerpt Pharaoh challenges Moses publicly, denying his divine mission because he was not endowed with divine favours such as understood by Egyptians, and Pharaoh ends his challenge by this question: “Why, then, have armlets of gold not been cast upon him, and why do angels not accompany him ?” (43:53). However beliefs and religion of Ancient Egypt did not include any angels or figures coming close to the understanding of an angel as is it understood in the monotheisms, although some beings in antique

¹ This might remind the reader of the “daughters of Allāh” of the latter islamic traditions, developed from surah 17, and the accusations of angelic cults. For recent epigraphic and archeological evidences of these, see Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels.” Al-Azmeh notes that the multiplicity of these intermediaries and unclear naming made for an unclear theology and an entanglement of angels with other similar beings (Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels,” 143-144).

² Nada Hélou, “Les origines hellénistiques de la représentation des anges dans le christianisme ancien,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 49-67. See also Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 125-136.

³ This is how Philo of Alexandria would explain that what philosophers called “demons,” Moses called “angels,” see Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 146-154

⁴ Jean-Yves Lacoste, “Ange,” in *Dictionnaire de Théologie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1998), 43. The influential writings of this uncertain late-antique Christian author will be discussed more in Chapter 4.

belief systems had a role close to that of the guardian angels. This could then only be seen as a quranic adaptation of a story relating to another world and culture than that of 7th century Arabia, presented in a way so as to be understood by its listeners.¹ Indeed if the quranic text saw fit to use the concept of angel, it must have then been because such creatures were known by at least an important part of the public, if only the Christians and Jews among them, more relevant than supernatural beings of the ancient Egyptian pantheon would have been in the same textual role.²

The Qur'ān, by being the oldest extended text written in Arabic, can nonetheless give us clues about the belief systems of pre-islamic Arabians, as al-Azmeh puts it: *“What does nevertheless seem to have filtered through and spread around, and found its way into the Qur'ān eventually, is less a coherent doctrine than a number of doxological and mythological motifs, theologoumena and mythemes, deriving from ambient religions.”*³ From the text itself and its more or less clear references to the world it appeared into, one can perceive some bribes of this gone world, which seem to have included, already, angels.

Indeed, aside from the Moses narrative, the quranic text suggests elsewhere the presence of angels as a known concept in pre-islamic times, as Ḥusayn al-Ḥājj Ḥasan

¹ Angels are part here of the “Arabization of biblical stories” (Neuwirth, “The Qur'ān's Enchantment of the World,” 133-134).

² Some scholars go so far as affirming that the existence of God was more problematic than the existence of angels to listeners of the Quranic message, and that the lack of mention of the creation of angels is explained by the similarly elliptic style of the Qur'ān applied to biblical stories: these were already known by the public, so there was no need to repeat them (Abdel-Hakim Ourghi, “Auch die Engel sprachen mit Gott im Koran Die *parrhesia* der Engel,” *Der Islam* 85, no. 2 (May 2011), 361-397.) See also Jaadane, “La place des anges,” 30-31, who adds that the Qur'ān is not so much interested in the nature of angels as in their functions (ibid., 43).

³ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 270.

quotes and explains the verses regarding what he calls the worshipping of angels.¹ These verses are also studied by Crone² in her article on the quranic pagans, where she shows that among Christians and Jews angels had already a prominent place, to the point that “*angels enjoyed great prominence in post-exilic Judaism and eventually came to be venerated to such a degree that modern scholars debate how far there was an actual cult of angels among Jews on the eve of the rise Christianity,*”³ further showing that some pagans could have passed off their deities as angels in Christianity in the growing monotheist movements of antiquity and late-antiquity. She also analyses how this angel cult concerned non-monotheistic pagans, whose cult in particular, according to the quranic text itself, would be that they made their angels-gods female⁴.

Pagans and fallen angels: Illustrating A. El Zein’s fourth point about pagan Arabs referring to fallen angels, we think of the quranic *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* and how George Dumézil saw in them a trace of a Zoroastrian myth. Similarly Daniel Beck argues in more detail for the presence of angels in Arabia before the quranic revelation in his study of the earliest quranic surahs.⁵ According to him, not only angels were present from the very start of it, but their role in early quranic theology was predominant, with representations heavily marked by, if not directly borrowed from, Mesopotamian and Iranian myths. Their presence was then suppressed - or at least rendered obscure by the elliptic style of the quranic narrative - because these parts of the

¹ Ḥasan Ḥusayn Al-Ḥajj, *Al ustūra ‘inda al ‘arab fī al jāhiliyya* (Beirut: al-Mu’assassa al-jāmi‘iyya li-l-dirāsāt wa-l-nashr wa-l-tawzī‘, 1988), 123-124.

² Crone, "The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans," 151-200.

³ *ibid.*, 192; Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 137-139, 268-295.

⁴ *ibid.*, 198.

⁵ Daniel A. Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’ān: From Anonymous Apocalypse to Charismatic Prophet* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017). This scholar tends towards the “sceptic trend” of quranic studies, and his work could also be classified in the “pan-babylonian” trend noted by al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 276-278.

quranic text would have been seen as too close to a polytheistic representation of the divine world when compared to the later surahs and later quranic theology.¹

Nonetheless, and perhaps more than a conscious suppression by the later surahs, these detected traces of previous myths illustrate perfectly how “*conceptual and cultic structures of polytheistic syncretism were deployed to generate an idea of exclusive divinity and of an exclusive cult,*” as noted by al-Azmeh on the emergence of Islam, a process also visible for the two previous monotheisms². During this process, these indeterminacies around angels can let us see them as subject and reflexion of this “theological diplomacy”³ leading to full monotheism.

2.1.2 - Some considerations:

These philological, historical, and cultural anthropological studies bring us interesting context and insights to the quranic text, helping us to keep in mind the apparition of the Qur’ān in a late antique Arabian milieu,⁴ which will not be the case for most of the texts subject of the later chapters, texts which belong to more medieval and urban contexts. Here the quranic text as a late-antique text of the Middle-East reflect

¹ Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’ān*, 19-30. In this section of his study entitled “Suppression of the Cosmic Angelology of Archaic Surahs”, Beck argues for example that Q74:30 (“Over it are nineteen”), which is usually interpreted as the numbers of angels guarding Hell, in fact is a wide-known reference in the antique world to the sum of the twelve zodiacal constellations and the seven planets, which had a important role in diverse cosmologies, such as in Mazdakite theology. He also gives as an example the case of the *zabāniya* in Q96:18, also traditionally interpreted as the guardians of Hell, as an influence from manicheism, where such figures would be the guardians of the heavens, repelling (which is the sense to the root Z-B-N according to Rudy Paret) disobedient beings into this world, letting only the obedient ones on the path to the heavens.

² Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 48.

³ The most famous trace of which is the ‘diplomatic incident’ of so-called Satanic Verses. See Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 323-326.

⁴ Angelika Neuwirth, “The Qur’ān Enchantment of the World,” in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. A. Rippin, M. Daneshgar, W. A. Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 125-144.

monotheist ideas in interaction with each other and with other beliefs systems (often associated to the most powerful political systems of the time), among which the idea of a “*deus otiosus*” was also widespread, a High God so far removed from humanity and his intercessors (such as lesser gods or angels) that he did not have a specific cult.¹ This gave the possibility of angels to be seen as intercessors, or avatars of the higher deity, as well as possibly his sons and daughters.² This is precisely the intercessor role of these beings that the quranic text reproaches to the “associationists” (*mushrikūn*) of holding towards angels or other beings.³ This historical aspect presupposes interesting continuities and differences in the matter of representing angels in later islamic texts.

This historical consideration aside, this study primarily aims at a literary analysis which regards the Qur’ān as a text in and of itself, with its own narratives and characters,⁴ which will be compared as such with the texts analysed in the following

¹ According to Al-Azmeh, Allāh was seen in pre-islamic times as such, a “vague presence” turned into a clear and sole deity by the quranic text. On this subject, and for a detailed review of the landscape of religious beliefs in late antiquity and pre-islamic Arabia, where frontiers between monotheism, monolatry, henotheism, polytheisms and diverse types of paganism were porous, see chapter 2, 4 and 5 of Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*.

The concept of *deus otiosus* is usually opposed to the concept of *deus actuosus*, which corresponds to the idea of a governing god who manages his creation. For Giorgio Agamben, this duality is the gnostic question par excellence, and “angelology is the most antique, articulated and detailed consideration on this particular form of power or divine action that we could define as ‘the governing of the world.’” See Giorgio Agamben, “Introduzione,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*.

² Johann Ev Hafner challenges the commonly accepted idea that angels exist to compensate a High God that has become too transcendent, by arguing that on the contrary, the multiplication of angels is what has pushed back the High God farther away from humanity, rendering Him “jobless.” See Johann Ev. Hafner, “Where Angels Dwell, Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 229- 250.

The mention of daughters of God can be found in many instances in pre-islamic inscriptions, but they are so far not conflated with angels, according to Crone, angels who were however also appealed to as intercessors. For a more detailed discussion on the relationship between angels and “daughters of God”, see Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans,” 182-185; Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels.”

³ For a detailed discussion of this see Crone, “The Religion of the Qur’ānic Pagans,” 177-188.

⁴ Angelika Neuwirth considers that literary analysis of the Qur’ān “waits to be explored” (Neuwirth, “The Qur’ān Enchantment of the World,” 129). Interestingly, John E. Wansbrough

chapters. This research is more interested in how the quranic text creates a new narrative, starting a mythopoeic process out of previous religious and mythological literatures and concepts, than in tracing exactly each narrative and concept to possible and often disputed pre-islamic source(s).¹ Indeed, this historic and philological research of the origin and words found in the quranic text and how it re-uses them is something that might elicit strong reactions from some of its believers; to us however it shows that, if anything, the Qur'ān was very successful in redefining a worldview through its mythopoeic process, and as such, it is worth studying the different aspects of this process, such as the angelic figures.

In order to better understand the possible evolutions of the figure of angels over time in the later islamicate imaginary, and what it might tell us of a possible construction and differentiation of a new cosmogony that reflects the historical consolidation of a new religion, it is important to first explore what the Qur'ān initially presents. The following part will explore the verses mentioning angels, and the verses suggesting them. In the third part, the relationship between angels, jinn, and *Iblīs/al-Shayṭān* will be explored.

2.2 Angels in the quranic narrative.

2.2.1. Chronology and Classification of Verses:

When reviewing the different apparitions of angels in the quranic text, it is important to first note and make a difference between the verses containing a clear

estimates that literary analysis are better suited to study Islamic sources than any historical approach. See John E. Wansbrough, "Res Ipsa Loquitur: History and Mimesis" in *Method and Theory in the Study of Islamic Origin*, ed. H. Berg (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3-19.

¹ This work has been and continues to be massively undertaken by many researchers in the quranic studies' and theology fields. Regarding angels in particular, see the different works by Burge, and the contributions in the first part of *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*.

mention of angels (such as singular *malak*, plural *malā'ika*) and the verses that do not contain a clear mention of them. This distinction is important, and sometimes ignored by some scholars (committing then some form of eisegesis).¹ Paying thus attention to what the quranic text presents first will help us with evaluating more precisely what and how the later literature will build the figure of angels, as this literature comments upon the quranic text, both on its clear statements and its potential angelic allusions. Indeed these 'unclear' verses leave room for interpretation - and most subsequent commentaries and traditions will later see in them angels, although the word itself is not mentioned. In some cases, these traditional interpretations depend on comparisons with similar stories in other religious traditions, such as the story of the guests of Abraham.² In other cases, angelic presence is less clear. We then classified the relevant Quranic verses as "Angel Verses" that mention angels clearly, and "Alluding Verses" that could be understood as being about angels, at least if one reads the text with them in mind.

There are over 90 verses about angels: 3 mentioning them by name (*jibrīl*, *mīkāl*, *hārūt*, *mārūt*); 89 mentioning them by one of the forms of the word "angel" (singular *malak*, dual *malakayn*, plural *malā'ika/malak*); and a certain number of verses

¹ In a much shorter list of angelic roles in the Qur'ān, al-Azmeh does not distinguish between both type of verses, for example assuming that the invisible host in (9:26) are angels (al-Azmeh, "Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings," 148-150). There are other similar examples: Fehmi Jaadane considers Surah 79 as being about angels, when the word or concept itself is nowhere mentioned, see Jaadane, "La place des anges," 48-51; Ida Zilio-Grandi considers Mālik and the *zabāniya* as angels although the Quranic text does not qualify them as such, see Ida Zilio-Grandi, "Alcune considerazioni sugli angeli nel corano," *Angeli*, ed. M. G. Quraneghi (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2012), 181; Murata also assumes that the words *Mālik* and *Riḍwān* designates angels in the Qur'ān, when this reading is only based on later interpretations, especially in the case of *Riḍwān*, see Murata, "The Angels," 325.

² This story appears twice in the Qur'ān, and from the parallel with Genesis 18:1-15, we know that these "guests" are supposed to be angels, though they are never described as such in the quranic text (Busse, Heribert, "Abraham", E.I.³) and that, as we have seen, that the Hebrew word for "angel" could have meant human messengers as much as celestial envoys.

suggesting angels (for example by the words *mālik*,¹ *zabāniya*, *ḥafāza*) although this is mainly due to later interpretations, and because some of these interpretations differ, there is not a definite number. Our list of these verses is given in Appendice 1.

We will first briefly discuss the chronology of quranic verses, then enter into the subject matter, first with the verses mentioning angels, and then the more problematic verses that only suggest them.

When researching the “arrival” of angels in the Quranic text, whether by clear mentions or allusions, we also have first to discuss the chronological order of their verses. The chronology of the quranic verses is still subject to scholarly debate and research, on top of having also been a traditional focus of interrogation from muslim scholars throughout islam’s history.² In western scholarship, since the pivotal work by Theodor Nöldeke³ based on a critical reading of the classical islamic sources, other scholars have discussed the ordering of the verses, as well as the related matter of the text’s history and time of redaction and arrangement into what we have now as *muṣḥaf*. From the commonly held views around the making of the codification of Qur’ān during some time after the Prophet’s death⁴ to recent scholarship suggesting its codification

¹ It will be explained below why *Mālik*, traditionally seen as the angel guardian of Hell, is not listed with the “named angels”.

² Viviane Comerro, *Les traditions sur la constitution du muṣḥaf de ‘Uthmān* (Beirut: Orient-Institut, 2012).

³ His *Geschichte des Qorāns* was the subject of his doctoral dissertation in 1860, and was the object to several re-editions and re-prints, the latest one being the translation into English edited by Brill in 2013, see Theodor Nöldeke, Friedrich Schwally, Gotthelf Bergsträßer, Otto Pretzl, *The History of the Qur’ān*, trans. Wolfgang Behn (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

⁴ For a somewhat ‘extreme’ view that estimates the codification of the quranic text not before the early Abbasid times, see John E. Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretations - with a Foreword, Translations and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippin* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), first published by Oxford University Press in 1977. This view has been challenged since then, and most estimations revolve around a codification sooner after the Prophet’s death (for a recent and still hypercritical view of the matter, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Les vies de Muhammad,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, 196-206).

within the time of the Prophet's life,¹ views and theories have been differing greatly in the quranic studies field.

Regarding the angels' apparition according to Nöldeke's ordering of the quranic surahs,² we have noticed that angels are mentioned throughout the different periods (first, second, and third Meccan, and Medinian periods), with no particular formal specificity between angels and a particular period, except for one noticeable fact: the four angels given individual names are in verses that are to be found in the Medinian period, and more precisely in one surah, *sūrat al-baqarah*. However this one element does not seem sufficient to validate the often-read claim that angels appear only late in the quranic revelation,³ a theory often linked to the idea of a main influence of Judeo-Christian traditions on the late revelation.⁴

Though it would be interesting to go through each dating theory and see whether there is any difference with Nöldeke's regarding the angels' appearance in the text, it would be beyond the scope of this study. In the end, any datation cannot remove one

¹ For an example of such a study that favors a codification within the Prophet's lifetime, see Raymond K. Farrin, "The Composition and Writing of Qur'ān: Old Explanations and New Evidence," *Journal of College of Sharia & Islamic studies* 38, n°1 (2020), 121-135; Behman Sadeghi, "The Chronology of the Qur'ān: a Stylometric Research Program", *Arabica* 58 (2011), 210-299. On the redaction of the Qur'ān during Muḥammad's life, al-Azmeh also notes that "even hypersceptical scholars suggest this might be possible" (Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 456.) See the whole of Chapter 7 on the constitution and assembling of the quranic text. For one of the most recent updated bibliography on Quranic studies in different languages, see Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, Guillaume Dye (ed.), *Le Coran des historiens vol. 3, Bibliographie des études sur le Coran*, (Paris: Cerf, 2019).

² We have used Nöldeke, *The History of the Qur'ān*. For an overview and discussion of different dating systems, by both classical muslim scholars and modern western scholars, see Peter G. Riddell, "Reading the Qur'ān Chronologically," in *Islamic Studies Today: Essays in Honor of Andrew Rippin*, ed. Majid Daneshgar, Walid A. Saleh (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 297-316.

³ This is for instance the position of Moreman and Chabbi (Moreman, "Rehabilitating the Spirituality;" Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le Coran décrypté* (Paris: Cerf, 2014), 65-105).

⁴ The ordering of Régis Blachère give similar results regarding angels, see Régis Blachère, *Introduction au Coran* (Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1959). Interestingly the same debate exists regarding the Jewish Bible, between the claim that angels appear only in some texts, and research suggesting that angels were always more or less present throughout the text (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 130-132).

inherent difficulty concerning angels beyond the verses naming them: indeed one scholar might analyse in one verse an allusion to an angel, while another understands the same verse in a different manner. As an example, scholars like Beck argue for the presence of angels or at least messengers figures from the very beginning, under obscure guises, caused by the influence of other pre-islamic religious imaginaries. Another example is the verse (9:30),¹ where Crone analyses the figure of Ezra (*'Uzayr*) - otherwise readily identified as a prophet by most readers - as related to an angel veneration, in the context of a known Jewish angel worship at that time.² Thus historical analysis tool would not be able to pinpoint exactly when and how angels came to be inserted into the quranic text, beyond the verses mentioning the words *malak/malā'ika*. It is then safe enough to suppose that they were more or less present from the beginning, in the otherworldly imaginaries that were present in and around Arabia at the time of the nascent religion.

Apart from being unsolvable, this discussion appear only tangentially relevant to this literary study which considers angels as characters of the quranic text as a whole, whatever its suggested date of redaction and arrangement of surahs. What interest most this study are angels as characters in the text that is left to us, how they are inserted into its narratives, and what it tells us of an aspect of the quranic text's view of the otherworld. From this analysis, we will hopefully have a better idea of this aspect, in a transitory period, an aspect of the birth of a new cosmology out of and alongside other cosmologies in this late antique milieu of 7th century Arabia. This will be a point of

¹ "The Jews say that Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say that the Messiah is the son of God...". We have not included this verse in the last part of this chapter, as seeing an angelic figure in Ezra cannot be seen or supposed by a simple reading looking for angelic figures. This is relevant to historical and philological inquiries beyond the scope of this research.

² Patricia Crone, "The Book of Watchers in the Qur'ān", in *The Qur'ānic Pagans and Related Matters*, 182-218.

comparison with subsequent texts and their angels, texts whose redaction dates are ascertained to be later than that of the quranic text, produced in the very different-looking world of islamic empires.

2.2.2. Representations, Roles, and Functions of Angels in ‘Angel Verses:’

The representation of angels in the quranic text rarely includes any description of them, except for one verse elaborating on their appearance (Q35:1), “*angels as messengers, of wings two, three, and four,*”¹ while the other descriptions usually associated with angels are formed indirectly. Indeed we can imagine angels as men by comparison with other traditions (the Spirit sent to Mary in (19:17) as a “perfect man” is not qualified as an angel, while in 3:45 several angels talk to her, although without being described),² or by metaphor (Joseph likened to an angel (12:31) is a metaphor in the mouths of Zulaykha’s guests), or by deduction (the verses denying the femaleness of angels).³ Based on the clear “angel verses” of the Quranic text however, we do not know much more about angelic appearances than a varying numbers of wings.

Quranic angels are however much more represented by their roles, which we can list from their appearance as characters inserted in different narratives throughout the text. These roles and their presence may appear either active or passive within the narrative. There is also the case of their hypothetical presence, when they are mentioned by other characters but not present themselves as characters in the narrative, and this hypothetical category is presented as one role. Then from these different appearances

¹ For a full study of this verse see Stephen R. Burge, "The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malā'ika."

² This fits a monotheistic tradition of angels appearing in human form and announcing the birth of important characters (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 112-113).

³ Burge writes that the Qur'ān gives two descriptions of angels, one with wings and others as men (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 57). However if the wings verse is clear, once again the others are only indirect, and these are the object of the following part of the chapter, in 2.3.)

and roles, we will be able to obtain a better idea of their possible functions in relation to other characters in the text, as well as in relation to the text's audience.¹

These are the different roles that could be gleaned from the verses mentioning angels:²

- Guardians: guarding humans till their death (6:61); guarding Hell (66:6), (74:31);
- Messengers: Gabriel sent to the prophet (2:97); calling to Zachariah bearing 'glad tidings' (3:39); speaking to Mary(3:42), (3:45); sent down accompanying 'the Spirit' (16:2); God choosing messengers among angels and mankind (22:75); sent down during 'the Day' (25:25); angels appointed as messengers, with 2, 3 or 4 wings (35:1);
- Support: supporting the believers in battle (3:124-125), supporting the prophet (8:9); (66:4);
- Taking or welcoming souls after death: taking souls and questioning them (4:97); stretching 'forth their hand' to take the souls of wrongdoers (6:93); angels taking 'those who disbelieve, striking their faces and their back' (8:50), (47:27); coming to greet the righteous (13:23), (21:103); taking souls in state of wrongness or goodness (16:28-32); on seeing the angels 'on the Day' (25:22); the angel of death taking a souls of those who disbelieve in resurrection (32:11);
- Giving blessings: (33:43), (33:56);

¹ The quranic text is notoriously complex with its succession of extradiegetic and intradiegetic narrative levels, and heterodiegetic and homodiegetic characters throughout, as well as stories related in different places in a slightly different manner, such as the story of Iblīs. This makes the relationship between characters inside the text and its audience outside of it - such as the Prophet and the Arabian audience - very intricate and complex.

² Many of these roles reflect those found in biblical and para-biblical literature, see Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 154-171.

- Cursing disbelievers: (2:161), (3:87);
- Bearers of the ark: (2:248);
- Bearers of the Throne: (69:17);
- Teachers to humans: the example of Hārūt and Mārūt teaching dangerous knowledge by God's leave (2:102);
- Obedient actors, carrying out God's orders: obeying God and prostrating to Adam (except Iblīs)(2:30-34), (7:11), (15:28-31), (17:61), (18:50), (20:116), (38:71-74); presented as servants of God (4:172); God asking angels to strike humans 'above the neck' and 'their every fingertip' (8:12); guarding Hell and obeying God's commands (66:6); angels not speaking save by God's command (78:38); angels descending with the Spirit by God's leave and with His commands (97:4);
- Questioning God: questioning God about His placement of Man as vicegerent on the earth (2:30);
- Praising God: (13:13), (39:75), (42:5);
- Seeking forgiveness: for 'those on earth' (42:5), (53:26);
- Bowing down to God: (16:49), this is separated from the category of obedient actors because the verse present the angels as active subject of the bowing down, it is not an order from God in this instance.
- Witnesses, allies of God: presented alongside God, accompanying Him (2:98), (2:177), (2:210), (2:285), (4:136), (89:22); bearing witness (3:18), (4:166); angels asked from God about humans worshipping them, angels denying this (34:40-1); angels at the sides of Throne (69:17); angels ascending to God (70:4); angels standing in rows on 'that Day' (78:38);

- Hypothetical presence: denying commanding believers to take angels as lords (3:80); God speaking hypothetically about sending an angel, or making the prophet into an angel (6:8-9); the prophet denying presenting himself as an angel (6:50), (11:31); Satan suggesting to Adam and Eve they could become angels (7:20); Zulaykhā's guests comparing Joseph to an angel (12:31); disbelievers asking the prophet to bring angels as proof of his truthfulness (11:12) (15:7-8), (17:92), (23:24), (25:7), (25:21); about a possibility of sending angels down or coming upon humans (6:111), (6:158), (16:33), (43:60); about the hypothesis of God taking angels as spouses (17:40); about sending an messenger angel to an earth inhabited by angels (17:95); about the hypothesis of angels being created female (37:150) or being given female names (53:27); about disbelieving humans messengers because angels were not sent down in their stead (41:14); about angels not accompanying Moses (43:53).

A first remark is that the hypothetical role of angels is one of the most represented: the Qur'ān rhetorically doubles the invisibility of angels. Invisible creatures, they become invisible as characters in the text - they are ontologically and narratively of the Unseen.

Keeping in mind that these different roles can be listed under more than one function, we can then classify these different appearances in the following functions of angels and particular cases, functions that are to be found on both inside and outside levels of the narrative.

2.2.2.1 - A narrative function : secondary characters helping or fighting humanity, and helping God.

Taking this basic narrative function in its strict sense, angels are shown in different roles as unseen helpers, according to the general idea of help typical of the function of secondary character to a protagonist in any narrative: they help God in different matters as we have seen above, such as guarding Hell (66:6), (74:31), bearing the Ark (2:248) and the Throne (69:17), taking souls after humans' deaths in numerous verses, striking them and sending them to Hell or welcoming them to Paradise. They are also seen as helping humans: being guardians to humans (6:61),¹ seeking forgiveness for them although this forgiveness is granted by God according to His will only (53:26), supporting believers in battle, with a specific reference to the battle of Badr (3:121-125),² or generally helping the Prophet (8:9), (66:4).

Their being antagonist secondary characters automatically follows: angels are antagonists to humans fighting the muslim army during the battle of Badr, or more simply throughout the quranic text, antagonists to the disbelievers, for example by striking them 'above the neck' and 'their every fingertip' (8:12), with other such examples of violence (8:50), (47:27).³ Similarly, they are also seen cursing disbelievers (2:161), (3:87). This pushes the reader to consider the corporality of angels: although we suppose them as primarily incorporeal and spiritual beings or at least invisible, the

¹ For a short genealogy of guardian angels in Judaism and Christianity, see Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 81-93.

² This passage could be an echo of the Biblical "Lord of the Hosts." Although already an interpretative act, Al-Azmeh also understands these angels as the personification of the winds, which pre-Islamic Arabs would have done with jinn, and comparable to the Valkyries of Nordic mythology as personification of the Aurora Borealis (Al-Azmeh, "Paleo-Muslim Angels," 149).

³ A similar function of emphasis and support by God against the enemy is given to the "angel of YHWH" in Genesis. See Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 70-72.

battle of Badr is one of many examples showing that they can sometimes directly affect the physical world.¹

Believers are thus enjoined to see that they have God's support in the form of these helping angels - and His enmity should they do otherwise. We will see now other functions than this narrative function of protagonist and antagonist on a first level, functions which concerns the metatext.

2.2.2.2 - A theological function: defining aspect of the islamic credo.

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

In the same credo-defining way, other verses tend to define what angels are not: God denying femaleness of angels (37:150) or being named by female names (53:27),² denying commanding to take them as lords (3:80), or taking them as spouses (17:40).¹

¹ A recent presentation by Pierre Lorry approached this topic of the peculiar corporality of angels, its particular relationship to the human world, and what it means on a theological level. See Jean-Charles Coulon, "Des hommes et des esprits : anges, djinns, démons et autres êtres intermédiaires (atelier du congrès du GIS « Moyen Orient et Mondes Musulmans » 2019)," *Le monde des djinns* [Carnet de recherche], <https://djinns.hypotheses.org/1284>

² Some scholars argue that this denote a change of societal structure, from a matriarchal organisation to a patriarchal one, this change being reflected in monotheist scriptures in general

We also find the angels themselves denying being worshipped when asked about it by God (34:40-41). These denegations and “absent” presences of angels in the text might reflect adjustments against contemporary and previous belief systems as studied by different scholars,² here used by the quranic text to illustrate a strict monotheist idea.³ This idea steers away from complexities brought by a gendered description of God’s otherworldly creatures, or by a delegation of power and will to these creatures which could have justified a separate worship or intercession ritual inside the new religion’s praxis. The quranic text then effectively uses the figure of angels and what they might have reflected before it to reinforce a strict monotheist idea of a unique creator in charge of the world’s affairs.

2.2.2.3 - A religious praxis function: illustrating the believer’s expected actions.

In a similar meta-rhetorical manner to the function of reinforcing the monotheistic idea by showing obedience to God, His Might and general superiority, angels also have the function of illustrating some basic expectations of believers, such as praising God (13:13), (39:75), (42:5). Being obedient to God and carrying His orders

(See Najm al-dīn al-Nafātī, “Zāhira tajassud al-malā’ika qirā’a fī lu‘bat al-dhukūra,” *Majallat Ādāb al-Qayrawān*, no. 9-10, (2012-2013): 465-473.) However this change is somewhat relative in the quranic text, where angels are more often genderless than masculine, and the text addresses itself in the later surahs to both masculine and feminine genders.

¹ This echoes the discussions seen before, and references to pre-islamic belief systems, see Robin, “Les “anges” (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels.” Similarly, Beck explains this as a reframing of pre-islamic deities subsumed into the new theology as angels: where old gods designated by a masculine devotional name such as *al-Rahmān* could be easily assimilated to Allāh, the female deities had to be demonised or pushed back. See Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an*, 155 (f.15).

² Al-Azmeh, Beck, Chabbi, Crone, and Neuwirth have all written on this subject. We might also mention, on the specific subject of angel veneration in Late Antiquity, a phenomenon which obviously occupied the Quranic text: Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

³ Burge notes that angels in Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are thus “moulded to help accentuate a pertinent theological point” (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 53).

is one of the most represented roles, in at least 11 occurrences where the angels' main action and representation is about obeying, such as the narrative of the bowing down to Adam. However this narrative in particular is interesting in its ambivalence. On one hand the angels are shown as obeying God, and along other acts of obedience, they are shown as models to the human believers; on the other hand however, they are ordered to bow down to Adam because of his superiority in knowledge (2:30-34), which would indicate an ontological superiority of man over angel. The angelic model of obedience could be seen then as doubled: by being shown proper acts by "lesser" beings than them, the reader might hold this as an unspoken example of humility given by the text in terms of religious praxis.

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

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

2.2.2.4 - A cosmological function: angels as part of establishing a new world-view.

We also find angels used as characters during arguments against disbelievers, and which serve in establishing clearer aspect of the new islamic cosmology. We have

seen in the first part of this chapter how the figure of angels are used to relate the story of Moses and Pharaoh's stand off: it could suggest that angels were known to the Qur'ān's audience since this particular story, set in Pharaonic Egypt, would not have needed angels - one could think that Pharaoh would have asked to see one of the Egyptian God's support to Moses to prove his claim. This is a first example of how angels are used by quranic rhetoric to refute the disbelievers' challenges while slowly establishing a re-reading of the pre-quranic world. We find a similar remark made by disbelievers from 'Ād and Thamūd in the verses (41:13-14).

The demand to see an angel from a Prophet, as proof, could actually be seen as a quranic trope. Indeed we have several other instances of such a demand made to the Prophet Muḥammad himself, in the setting of his immediate Ḥijāzī context: these are demands to see angels accompanying or replacing the Prophet in the verses (11:12), (15:7-8), (17:92), (23:24), (25:7), (25:21). Similarly, a mirror argumentation is used by God, who emits the hypothesis of sending an angel instead of a human messenger, or turning the humans messenger into an angel, to argue that it would not have convinced the disbelievers (6:8-9). None of these demands and arguments with disbelievers contradict the basic credo of an angel sent to the Prophet (as it would be clearly stated in the Medinian period with the "credo verses"), as some have suggested,¹ but on the contrary, it only means that angels cannot be seen by other humans - or, if they could, it means that it would not be a sufficient proof anyway for the disbelievers to turn them to belief. Humans have no choice but to trust the human messenger and his personal modalities for receiving the revelation.

¹ Francis E. Peters, *Muhammad and the Origins of Islam* (Albany: State University of New York, 1994), 143.

This matter of the angels' role in regard to the arguments against polytheists and disbelievers in the prophecy of Muḥammad is studied in great detail by Crone,¹ although she seems to have missed something about the precise situation presented by the Qur'ān regarding the relationship between angels and humans in the matter of angel messengers, as we will see in the next section.

In this section we can also include the obedience of angels mentioned in the previous function, which also help defining the general cosmology: indeed God's order to the angels to bow to Adam can be seen as a preference or superiority given to man over angel, which is contrary to how most Christian cosmologies evolved (early Christianity usually placed angels as superior to men, possessors of mysterious knowledge that men could only partially obtain).² The questioning of God by the angels about creating humanity is also a narrative tool to push God into "explaining himself" and thus the new cosmological order, and His eternal superiority in terms of knowledge: the cosmos sometimes does not make sense, and even the angels wonder about it. We will see in the next chapters however that this reversed hierarchy remains unstable, the question of the superiority of angels being an object of debate, more so perhaps than the

¹ Crone, "Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God."

² "Since the ontological status of angels was, for the Early Church, superior to that of mankind, due to their closer proximity to God, it was also logical that angelic knowledge should exceed the limitations of human understanding." Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 13. Similarly in Judaism, angels were more knowledgeable of God than humans, however they are described as jealous and irritated when God chooses to give the Torah to Israel (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 264), which remind us of the attitude of the questioning angels when God chooses to entrust the earth to humans. In Christianity, angels are seen to bow to only one man in particular, Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-6). This reminds one of the bowing to Adam in the Qur'ān, a narrative which is not completely new in Late Antiquity, as this scene can be found in a non-canonical Christian narrative based on a Jewish source (see Guillaume Dye, "Le corpus coranique: context et composition," in *Le Coran des historiens, vol 1* (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 765, 811-812. In this text, the reason given is that angels bowed to Adam because he was made in God's image. See also Sara Kuehn, "The primordial Cycle Revisited," in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, especially ft. 15, 176-177.

proverbial debates about the sex of angels. Additionally another most significant cosmological shift brought by the quranic angels in the Arabian *ghayb* (involving jinn) is seen in the third part of this chapter.

2.2.2.5 - A classic cosmological function: angels as messengers.

As already shown by Burge¹ and Crone,² being an angel (*malak*) does not make them automatically messengers, as per the etymology of the word (Burge), or the possible uses of the language by the polytheists (Crone). They are consistently presented as angels, alongside others presented as “messengers” (i.e. 2:285), or alongside ‘the Spirit’ (i.e. 16:2). This role of messenger was mentioned previously, when angels are shown in the text bearing messages to other characters, such as Zachariah or Mary, and this is true for both Meccan and Medinian periods, contrary to Chabbi’s position on that the Qur’ān do not present angels as messengers in the Meccan period.³ However in the case of Gabriel, this role is listed here as a function both in the text and in the metatext, since the quranic text is regarded by all traditions as transmitted by the archangel Gabriel to the prophet Muḥammad: he is presented as messenger inside the text, but also the text, that we are reading, is believed to be transmitted by him. This basic belief is supported by the following verse: “*Whosoever is an enemy of Gabriel: he it is who sent it down upon thy heart by God’s Leave, confirming that which was there before, and as a guidance and glad tiding for the believers.*” (2:97)

¹ Burge, “The Angels in Sūrat Al-Malā’ika.”

² Crone, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God.”

³ Jacqueline Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus*, 229.

Regarding this verse understood as the basis for the narrative of the transmission of the Qur'ān to the Prophet by the Archangel Gabriel, Tengour seconds Chabbi¹ by making an interesting remark in saying that Gabriel was mentioned in the quranic text only very late in the Medinian period, and never explicitly as the messenger sent to the Prophet. He would have been then later been identified in subsequent religious literature as the Prophet's messenger, when the islamic empire needed to produce exegesis to form a coherent theology for a religion seen as the successor of the previous monotheisms.² However this verse strongly suggest otherwise: Gabriel is there mentioned by name (*Jibrīl*) and although the word "Qur'ān" is not, the "it" of "who sent it down" suggests the quranic revelation, as hardly anything else comes to mind which is "confirming that which was there before, and as a guidance and glad tiding for the believers". Indeed the Qur'ān presents itself here as a continuation of the previous divine messages of Jewish and Christian sacred texts, thus stating the role of Gabriel as messenger sent to the Prophet.

Although this messenger role is paramount both inside the quranic narratives and in the islamic creed about the quranic text, angels do not seem to be sent as messengers haphazardly. From the different verses mentioning angels, the Qur'ān is adamant about not needing to send an angel as messenger to the new muslim community and the disbelievers, or an angel accompanying - or replacing - a human messenger. However this does not mean that the Qur'ān denies their existence or denies

¹ Ibid., 214-215.

² "During this primitive period of the revelation, the word *rasūl* clearly denotes a supernatural messenger. This messenger is never named. Medieval Islamic tradition will identify it as the angel Gabriel, *Gibrīl*, while he is himself still unknown to the quranic speech and will make only three apparitions in all, at a later stage, in the Sura II, *al-Baqara*, verses 97-98 and Sura LXVI, *al-Tahrīm*, verse 4. (...) nowhere does the (quranic text) affirms that the inspirator (or the transmitter of messages) of Muhammad is an angel called *Gibrīl*." See Esma Hind Tengour, *L'arabie des djinns* (Louvain-la-neuve: EME éditions, 2013), 28. For more see Ibid., 78-85.

sending angels to Muḥammad or other prophets as we have previously seen, nor does it mean only, as Crone concluded, that “God’s messengers were always humans, or they were angels or humans as He saw fit.”¹ On the contrary, from all the verses concerned regarding these polemics, and verses regarding angels sent to human in different situations listed in the previous function, we notice that in the worldview presented by the Qur’ān angels are sent as messengers to main religious figures only - if not prophets only² - and that to the rest of humanity are sent human prophets and messengers, such as Muḥammad. This is moreover clearly supported by a verse in particular (17:95) : “Say, “Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as messenger.” To the exceptions of prophets, who are characters with a special status, God sends messengers to creatures according to their ontological category (angels to angels, humans to humans). So this messenger function of angels is paramount to the new religion’s cosmology, although the act of sending a message from an angel to a human is reduced to a select type of humans - that is, pivotal religious figures such as prophets, or at least people involved in a key manner to a prophecy.³

¹ Crone, “Angels versus Humans as Messengers of God,” 109.

² In this case we would consider Zakariya and Mary as prophets, an argument which can be and has been defended. Zakariya is regarded as such in islamic traditions, although he is presented as a priest in the Christian ones (Heller, Bernhard, “Zakārīyā’,” E.I.1) As for Mary mother of Jesus as a prophet, this view seems to have existed in early Christianity: see N. Clayton Croy, Alice E. Connor, "Mantic Mary? the Virgin Mother as Prophet in Luke 1.26-56 and the Early Church," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 34, no. 3 (2012), 254-276. This view will also be found in post-quranic times as a theological concept, discussed by classical and modern theologians, where both Muḥammad and Mary are seen as the bearers of God’s word: see the chapter dedicated to this in Ḥusn ‘Abbūd, *Mary in the Qur’an: A Literary Reading* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 130-147; see also Rusmir Mahmutćehajić, *The Praised and the Virgin* (Leiden: Brill, 2014).

³ Burge notes that in all three monotheistic religions, angels are sent to: prophets, mothers of prophets, and key protagonists in narratives (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 104). On this note and following our remark in 2.2.1, angels being seen by a select group of people denotes another particular aspect of their partial corporality and relationship to the physical and human world.

2.2.2.6 - A overlooked cosmological function: angels as testers.

If angels as protectors and helpers fit the common view of God's subservient creatures, unquestioning of His acts (except for *Iblīs* obviously), a particularly long quranic verse adds a more complex nuance to this common representation of impeccable angels. Indeed the story of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* shows angels that are usually more related to the "fallen angels" category,¹ while not being the standard representation of evil like *Iblīs*/Satan:

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

Among the different stories developed by exegetes and commentators around this verse in later islamic literature,² a common one presents these two angels being put

¹ On this important Biblical theme (see Genesis 6: 1-4) and related myths in previous monotheistic traditions, see Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

² For a review of the different later stories extrapolated around this verse, see Tottoli, "Hārūt and Mārūt", E.I.³ For a detailed review of these stories in Sunni exegesis, and its links with and

to the test by God, when they claimed to be unable to fall into sin as humans do, since angels are not as fallible, perfectly obedient to God, and pure. God then sent them on Earth as a test, which these two angels fail by committing different sins (among them adultery and killing). Georges Dumézil and others,¹ seconded more recently by Roberto Tottoli, argues that the origin of these two figures can be traced back to an Iranian myth (the Zoroastrian archangels Haurvatāt and ‘Ameireitāt) - although this story, like the others given as explanations to this verse, could suggest diverse origins.² Indeed, Crone convincingly argues that the content of this story attached to the verse comes from a text belonging to early christian literature, the *Book of Watchers*, part of the Ethiopian book of Enoch, while the names of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, in form, are indeed derived from the Iranian legend mentioned above.³

While these narratives are an echo to previous religious and mythical literature, we can see here that the quranic text does not mention or suggest them much. These stories will be later attached to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*: the Qur’ān only describes them as being sent down in the human world during the time of Babylon, as teachers who take care to present themselves as a trial from God, and asking people to keep their faith before teaching them anything. God also explicitly says that if the results of their teaching did harm anyone, it was only part of His divine plans.⁴ So the verse gives an

impact on Jewish traditions, see John C. Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions of the "Tale of Hārūt Wa-Mārūt"." *Journal of American Oriental Society* 135, n°4 (2015): 817-842.

¹ Georges Dumézil, *Naissance d'archanges* (Gallimard, Paris, 1945). For a list of scholars arguing for this origin, see Reeves, "Some Parascriptural Dimensions," 818 (f.4).

² Tottoli, "Hārūt and Mārūt," E.I.³

³ Patricia Crone, "The Book of Watchers in the Qur’ān," 182-218; Jean-Charles Coulon sees there a Judeo-Christian adaptation of an Indo-Iranian legend, Jean-Charles Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam au Moyen-âge* (Paris: CTHS, 2018), 30-34.

⁴ Burge also notes that in Old Testament Pseudepigraphia in general, angels are thus contradictorily responsible for teaching the dark arts, while being examples of righteousness and symbolising the might of God (Burge, *Angel in Islam*, 52-53).

image of these two angels as a divine test for humans, in contradiction to being themselves the subject of a test by God as we understand from the stories attached to this verse.

This is thus one example of the use of the quranic text of earlier or contemporary beliefs and myths, most of which is lost, but which would have been known to its audience not in need too much detailed explanations. For this narrative, like others narratives echoing pre-islamic traditions, the quranic text brings modifications or reframes it and its function in order to fit the worldview it proposes. However very quickly commentaries will be needed, with other narratives being grafted on this pre-islamic material.

Another scene with quranic angels questioning God has been shown to be similar to the *Book of Watchers*, the episode when they ask about the creation of Adam in (2:30-38),¹ as if they were questioning God's judgment about sending humans wrecking havoc on earth. These different scenes discreetly fashion a picture of angels as characters interacting, questioning, pushing other figures of the Quranic narrative to explain themselves (including God) or to find explanations for the origins of strife (wrongly used angelic magic). This is at first sight quite far from the usual picture of impeccable angels obeying God without questions, and this function of challenge and test has also been noted in Judaic apocryphal literature, as a way to explain questionable acts in contradiction with the idea of a magnanimous God.²

¹ Tommaso Tesei, "The Fall of Iblīs and Its Enochic Background," in *Religious Stories in Transformation: Conflict, Revision and Reception*, ed. Alberdina Houtman, Tamar Kadari, Marcel Poorthuis, Vered Tohar (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 70.

² For example, in an alternative narrative of Abraham's sacrifice, it is said that an angel (Mastema) is responsible for challenging Abraham to sacrifice his son, while God already know of Abraham's fidelity. David Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 14-15.

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

2.2.2.7 - The case of Gabriel and Michael:

These two angels, who happen to be well-known names of archangels in Jewish and Christian traditions, are two of the rare angels given personal names in the Qur'ān, like *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*.¹ Gabriel (*jibrīl*) is mentioned three times, in verses (2:97-98) and (66:4), and Michael (*mīkāl*)² is mentioned only once in conjunction with Gabriel: "Whosoever is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael: God is indeed the enemy of the disbelievers" (2:98)

It is interesting to note that in these verses, Gabriel and Michael are, on a very close reading, never described as being angels, contrary to *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* for which the quranic specifies their identity as angels. For Gabriel and Michael however, their

¹ Another angel is called by name, according to the usual interpretations of the Qur'ān, and this is *Mālik*, guardian of Hell (43:74-80). However we have classified him in the section "Allusions to angels" for reasons explained below.

² The particular form of this name in Arabic, *mīkāl*, has been analysed as a *mif'āl* pattern, from the root W-K-L. However the exact origins of this name remains rather obscure. Arthur Jeffery supposes it comes from the Hebraic and Syriac version of the name, the latter used in Persian manicheism. See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Wensinck, "Mīkāl," E.I.². It could also be related to a Canaanite deity called Mīkāl (Mach, "Michael מִיכָאֵל", in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible Online* (Brill)). For a brief overview of the status of these two angels in islam, see Gisela Webb, "Gabriel," E.Q., and *ibid.*, "Michael," E.Q.

‘angelness’ can be implied by the immediate context of the verse with an inclusive “and” (*wa*), as well as the cultural environment of the quranic text, where these two names would already have been associated with archangels, at least for Christians and Jews familiar with their own traditions.

Theophoric names such as theirs were known, and more widespread in the Judeo-Christian traditions, appearing within a movement of multiplication of angels as locus of renewed revelation, and “personalised” divine communication. These might have been function names at the beginning, underlying both their commander (God, with the suffix “-el” in Hebrew, “-īl” in Arabic) and their particular characteristic, however they were used more and more as personal names.¹ However Burge writes that these theophoric names remain rare in Islam, and if they are kept, they usually lose their original etymological meaning, while Arabic ‘function names’ are preferred (on the model of “the angel of Death”).²

In the quranic text alone then, these two archangels are only clearly mentioned in “credo verses”, of the Medinian period (surahs 2 and 66) according to Nöldeke’s order, as part of what the believers should believe in. They do not have then any other obvious function than illustrating the basic islamic credo - and none of the roles that will be later attributed to them - especially to Gabriel - in the later islamic traditions.³

¹ Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 176-192, and 192-201 on Gabriel and Michael.

² Burge notes that “it is possible, and quite common, for a name to be transferred from one religion to another, but for the conceptualization associated with the angels not to be assimilated. Likewise, it is possible for a conceptualisation of an angel to be adopted by the Muslim community, without the actual name being appropriated at the same time.” See Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 32-33. Seconding Jaadane, he adds that angels in Islam are more defined by their function than by their nature” (ibid., 39). We will see in the following chapters that indeed some authors will give alternative names to Gabriel and Michael.

³ For an overview of post-quranic traditions linked to Gabriel and Michael, see Pedersen, “*Djabrā’īl*,” E.I.²; Wensinck, “*Mīkāl*,” E.I.²; Reynolds, “Gabriel,” E.I.³; Burge, “Michael,” E.I.³ In the Judeo-Christian traditions, Michael has a longer history and more importance than

They also do not seem to have the roles attributed to them in previous traditions, although this could be seen as a consequence of the elliptic style of the Qur'ān, pointing to what its audience already knew. However, as part of this basic islamic credo, Gabriel does appear as the transmitter of the revelation (as seen above in 2.2.5 with the verse 2:97) which, in conjunction with the other verses mentioning him and the cultural context, explains why he has been interpreted later as the intermediary of revelation, despite the different ways the Quranic text presents the revelation (God speaking directly and indirectly).¹

2.2.3. Allusions to Angels in the 'Alluding Verses:'

This is a delicate review of other narratives, found in the verses that do not clearly mention angels by name (*malak, malakayn, malā'ika*; or *Hārūt, Mārūt, Jibrīl, Mīkāl*). However these narratives involve characters that are widely understood by later commentators to be about angels. Being interpreted as such by subsequent literature, they should technically not belong to this chapter on the quranic angels, since the approach is here to review what can be ascertained as angels from the quranic text alone - especially removed from the later literature built upon it, such as *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* literature.² With this problem in mind, we chose to briefly review these narratives here, so as to understand better the later elaborations and interpretations made on them, and so what role these narratives had in the evolution of the angelic figures as characters.

Gabriel, however Gabriel already has the roles that islamic tradition will attribute to him later: messenger of course, and less known, destructor of cities and people (Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 176-201; Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 106). As agent of revelation and bringer of benefits, the Islamic Persian tradition also identify him with the Zoroastrian angel Sarōsh/Sroša (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 49).

¹ See Welch, Paret, Pearson, "Kur'ān," E.I.²

² As seen in the introduction, *ḥadīth* literature on angels has been studied, mainly covered by Stephen Burge, however *tafsīr* literature has been covered much less extensively.

This also means that this section will not include verses that are used in post-quranic traditions as related to events involving angels, if these are not somehow suggested in the quranic text itself. For example surah 94 is usually seen as related to a scene in the prophetic *sīra*, where Muḥammad’s chest is opened and his heart is washed by an angel.¹ In the quranic text alone, there is no reference to any being that could be identified as an angel - there is only the majestic “We” usually referring to God - so these verses cannot be listed in this chapter on the quranic angels.

Among the verses that we will review here, there are some that historical or philological approaches of the text may indicate as angels, if only by comparison with the same narratives in the other religious texts, as well as verses describing roles that were previously seen in this chapter as held by angels, and so, by comparison, could concern angels here as well.

2.2.3.1 - Messengers.

Reflecting the roles of messenger, we find the verses (15:51-65) about messengers sent to Abraham, in the form of a dialogue between these characters, where the birth of a son is announced to Abraham, and then these messengers stating they had been sent to Lot’s family and people. The same story is repeated in a slightly shorter manner in verses (29:31-34) and in (51:24-34). In this last retelling, we learn that a particularity of these messengers is that they do not eat human food,² and we find this detail in the retelling of this same story in (11:69-73).

¹ See *Saḥīḥ muslim*, *ḥadīth* n°310-315.

² Which differs from the Bible narratives of Abraham’s and Lot’s visitors, where the angels/messengers are described as eating, respectively in Genesis 18:8 and 19:3. This could be an additional hint at the Quranic specification of “angels” as a category of beings, and not just a function: these beings have the particularity of not eating human food.

Incidentally in (29:31-34) these messengers come to punish the people of Lot, a punishment that is echoed in (11:77-81), as well as (54:33-39) although no messengers are mentioned in this last group of verses, where only God is seen declaring the coming of His punishment. These intermediaries are then only suggested: this would be an instance of an angelic presence inferred by the reader through thematic comparisons between parts of the quranic text containing the same narrative and previously known Biblical stories - an example of the typically elliptic style of the Qur'ān¹ with verses and their immediate context that do not contain any clear mentions of angelic beings or otherwise.

Another role of messenger appears in the verses (19:17-26), where “*Our Spirit*” (*rūḥanā*) - seemingly like the Holy Spirit of Christians - is sent in the form of a “*perfect man*” to Mary, self described as “*messenger*” (*anā rasūl*) and announcing the birth of her son. Although the Spirit (*rūḥ*) is seen elsewhere as separated from the angels (70:4),² this “*Our Spirit*” here has been understood later as Gabriel.³ This would also second what was previously explained about angels being sent only to Prophets, here Abraham and Mary.

Other messengers roles and figures are also found, in a more cryptic manner in (26:192-195) where a “*Trustworthy Spirit*” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) brings the revelation (later

¹ Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Quran* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2018), 94-95

² In this case, as seen before, one could also argue that Gabriel, in the verses naming him directly which present him in the same way with “and” (“the angels and Gabriel”), is to be seen as separated from the angels. In the cultural context of the Qur'ān, it would be hard to regard Gabriel as something else than an angel, as much as a “*Our Spirit*” reminds us of the Christian Holy Spirit first and foremost, but given the slippery frontiers between angels, jinn and other invisible creatures, a doubt remains.

³ For an overview of the different identifications given to the Spirit in the Qur'ān and the later islamic tradition, see Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 43-44; Griffith, “*Holy Spirit*,” E.Q.; Sells, “*Spirit*,” E.Q.

identified with the Holy Spirit and/or Gabriel); the verses (53:4-18) is similarly about an “awesome power” (*shadīd al-quwā*); and (81:19-21) about a “noble messenger” (*rasūl karīm*)¹. By comparing with (2:97) where Gabriel is said to bring a revelation completing the previous ones, with these three examples, it is relatively easy to interpret these verses as suggesting Gabriel. Similarly the verses (19:64-65) could be seen as a direct quote from Gabriel addressing the Prophet. For Beck, these are remnants from the early quranic cosmology where the angelic/cosmic messenger had a prominent role over its anonymous human herald, echoing the pre-islamic Mesopotamian cosmologies that gave power to the celestial being over its human servant, before a quranic gradual shift towards the importance of the human messenger.² On his part Al-Azmeh sees in this uncertain “Spirit” an allusion to *mal’ak Yahweh* and Metatron in the Jewish literature of the time, a being acting at times like God’s herald or “lesser Yahweh,”³ a Spirit continuous with God, a “translocation of divine presence,” where angels could be potentially separate from the deity.⁴ This indeterminate character in the quranic text - which does not suggest an identification with Gabriel - would be interpreted later in islamic literature as Gabriel, a process seen as peculiar to Islam.⁵

¹ For a detailed study of sura 53 (*al-najm*) see Patricia Crone, “Problems in Sura 53,” in *The Qur’ānic Pagans and Related Matters* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 140-150, although she considers at times that the word “messenger” (*rasūl*) and “angel” (*malak* or *malā’ika*) as meaning the same thing, such as in the case of sura 81.

² Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an*, 126-138.

³ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 343-346.

⁴ Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels,” 148.

⁵ Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 351; Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels,” 145-146. We have such an example with Ibn ‘Arabī much later, who understands Gabriel (the Holy Spirit) as the father of Jesus, where Christians would consider this Holy Spirit as part of the triune God.

2.2.3.2 - Guardians.

Another noted angelic role, the guardian role, is found in these verses as well: verse (6:61) describes guardians (*ḥafazatan*) sent over God's servants; in verse (13:11) beings called *mu'aqqibāt* are guarding anyone from the front and the rear, whether one's action are done openly or in secret. This is echoed by the verses (82:10-12) where these guardians are said to be writing down everyone's deeds, as well as briefly in (68:1). Similarly in the verses (50:17-18) "two receivers" (*mutalaqqiyān*), or "watcher" (*raqīb*) are recording words uttered by a person. The single verse (86:4) also mention a guardian over every soul, about which Beck notes that "in Late antiquity, the idea that each person has a divine twin, or angelic counterpart, was omnipresent."¹

In (72:25-28) we also find guards around the (human) messenger chosen by God; in (37:1-10) we find "guardians" guarding the heavens against the "defiant satans" (*wa-ḥifẓan min kulli shayṭān mārid*) who would want to listen to the "Highest Assembly" (*al-mala' al-'alā*), echoing the verses (72:8-9) where similarly jinn find the heavens closed to them, duly guarded. The heavens are similarly guarded in (41:12) by guardians (*ḥifẓan*). As for Hell, its guardians are called "its keepers" (*khazanatuhā*), questioning the new coming souls in (39:71) and answering to their questions (40:49-50), while Paradise is also guarded by "its keepers" welcoming the new souls in (39:73).

Among the guardian category, we have to mention two special cases about Hell's guardians here: *Mālik* and the *zabāniya*. In the verses (43:74-80), *Mālik* is a character who is widely understood as being the angel Keeper of Hell (or chief of the

¹ Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur'an*, 125; see also Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 70-71; Cunial, "Spiritual Beings," E.Q.

keepers of Hell) to which the unfortunate souls call for putting an end to their misery. We have not classified these verses in the previous section, because the text does not specify or suggests in its immediate context that *Mālik* is indeed an angel, although this character is given a proper name,¹ which could be reminiscent of previous deities.² Where Gabriel and Michael are mentioned right after the word “angels”, the word *Mālik* stands alone in describing this character in this passage, and the immediate context of these verses do not contain anyone else than the disbelievers’ souls he is in charge of.

As for the verse “*sanad’u al-zabāniya*” (96:18), translated in the Study Quran by “We shall call the guards of Hell,” it is usually interpreted as per this translation: the word *zabāniyya* meaning angels guardians of Hell, although the word and the verse do not suggest a guardian role. Lange in his detailed study on Hell’s angels in the Qur’ān³ reviews the possible linguistic origins of this word, and convincingly concludes that it could have originally meant a special class of jinn, before post-quranic exegeses “angelised” them. Seconding other scholars, Lange also shows in the same article that the word *zabāniya* had probably linguistic origins in the Arabic language and could have designated autochthonous Arab spirits. Beck on his part sees the origins of the *zabāniya* in morally ambiguous cosmic beings subjected to a higher power in Mesopotamian cosmology, cosmic beings with a role reminiscent of those in the Qur’ān: in charge of keeping the souls trapped in the material universe, or letting them

¹ However grammatically, *mālik* could also be understood as an adjective, “possessor of something” (so here possibly “possessor/guardian of Hell”), and not a proper name. We are only sure that this Mālik is not God because the unbelievers’ souls are specifically asking from him that his Lord finish their misery.

² Jeffery sees in this specific word the Biblical Moloc, see Jeffery, *Foreign Vocabulary*; it also seems that deities bearing the name “Malik” or related form in Semitic languages would often be associated with the underworld, see Müller, “Malik,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

³ Christian Lange, “Revisiting Hell’s Angels in the Quran”, in Lange, Christian, ed. *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. Christian Lange (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 74-99.

pass to a higher plane, according to which cosmology one was referring to (Manichean or Zoroastrian).¹ Both of these analyses makes the reader think of the ambivalent jinn, as much as angelic guardians. This is part of the sometimes confusing relationship between angels and jinn in the early islamic cosmology and the cosmological shift it opens to, as we will see in the last section of this chapter.

Lastly, we should mention a particular angel that exist in many islamic writings, but who does not have a clear Quranic basis: *Riḍwān* the keeper of Paradise. The verse (3:15) mentioning the word *riḍwān* does not suggest this as a particular name, as it translates by “contentment,” an emotional state felt by the people of Paradise.

2.2.3.3 - Other roles:

Among some other roles, we find the support role of the angels previously seen in (3:124-125) that could be echoed in the verses (33:9-10) where “hosts” (*junūd*) are sent against enemies, as well as in the verse (9:26) where similar “hosts whom you saw not” (*junūdan lam tarawhā*) or negatively echoed in (36:28) where similar “hosts” (*jund*) were not sent down against an unbelieving people. We also similarly find “hosts” in heavens and earth in (48:7), a verse which context cannot ascertain whether these hosts are human or angelic or both.

We also find a rather clear allusion to angels in (21:26-29), in a role of obedient servants not speaking except by God’s leave, echoing (78:38), as well as the role of intercessors only by God’s leave in (53:26). These group of verses appear in a context of refutation of God having children, an example of a defining argument of the islamic

¹ Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an*, 22-24.

credo, of the same kind as as God denying taking angels as spouses (17:40), and in the later tradition the case of the so-called Satanic verses.¹

In (6:61), we also find beings called “messengers” (*rusulunā*). However this verse does not insist on this particular role, but here these messengers have the role of taking every human soul after death. We similarly find souls accompanied by a “driver” (*sā'iq*) and a “witness” (*shahīd*) in (50:21-26) - which could announce the later traditions of the interrogator angels of Nakīr and Munkar coming to the newly departed soul². Among the different roles listed in 2.2, we also find Throne-bearers, others praising their Lord, and yet others seeking forgiveness for the believers in (40:7-9). These last three verses describe such specifically angelic roles, as previously listed, that even without subsequent interpretation, these characters can easily be read as angels.

In a less clear category, we also have three verses that are usually seen as uttered by angelic characters in the first person plural in the verses (37:164-166), stating that all have a “known station” (*maqām ma'lūm*), that they are those “ranged in ranks” (*ṣāffūn*) and “glorify” (*musabbiḥūn*). We also find these unnamed beings glorifying their Lord in (41:38). The immediate context of these verses do not give much to veritably ascertain that these are angels speaking. However taken in the general context of the quranic text it could easily be interpreted as such: angels have been seen glorifying God before, and the word “*ṣāffūn*” echoes the name of the particular surah to which belong these verses, *sūrat al-ṣāffāt*, referring to its first verse, “By those ranged in ranks” (*wa al-ṣāffāt ṣaffan*), followed by two other similarly cryptic verses, usually interpreted as being about angels as well (37:1-3).

¹ For an overview of this subject in the islamic tradition, see Ahmed, “Satanic Verses,” E.Q.

² Wensinck, “Munkar wa-Nakīr,” E.I.²

Furthermore, in this category of more or less muted reference to angels, some other cryptic verses remains, such as (77:1-7), (79:1-5), (80:11-16). Like the surah 68 mentioned in 2.3.2, the surahs 37, 77, 79 are early Meccan surahs according to Nöldeke's order, and as many of them, they are known to be more cryptic than Medinian surahs. The openings of 37, 77 and 79 are built on the model of "By the...", an incantatory manner that Beck has analysed as oaths involving cosmic beings. While very difficult to interpret for the post-quranic islamic tradition, it becomes obvious references through the lens of comparative mythology, and possibly so for 7th century listeners acquainted with Mesopotamian cosmology.¹ As such he analyses these types of surah openings as referring to celestial entities quickly identified as angels, and specifically surahs 77 and 79, as well as the explicitly angelic intervention in (97:4), as remnant of what he calls an "angelic apocalypse."²

An interesting point is that these cryptic early Meccan verses refer to these celestial beings by the female plural, as in (79:5) "*al-mudabbirāt*", or (37:1) "*al-ṣāffāt*," which fits with the theory of the subsuming of older deities into the new cosmology by the quranic text.³ These verses would be echoes of these old beliefs, females deities turned into angels, describing an angelic apocalypse, while the reframing by the new islamic credo of these entities in the quranic text is made clearer. Indeed this could be related with what we have called the "credo-defining" verses we are told that these entities, clearly named angels in (3:80), (17:40), and (37:150), are not female, are not

¹ Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur'an*, 19-30.

² Ibid., p. 182. For a convincing analysis of surah 97 as a remnant of an angelic apocalypse, rather than a cryptic reference to Christmas night (according to Christoph Luxenberg and Guillaume Dye), see the whole chapter in Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur'an*, 171-214.

³ Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur'an*, 155 (f.15); Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'anic Pagans," 151-200. Al-Azmeh affirms that (37:1-2) are oaths done to angels (Al-Azmeh, *Emergence of Islam*, 326), though it does not appear as obvious to a reader of the quranic text who does not rely on quranic commentaries.

taken as spouses by God, and are not to be taken as Lords. Additionally, contrary to the old celestial beings who were somewhat independently willed, the monotheistic angels descend now only “by leave of their Lord” (97:4). This is another example of the formation of the new islamic “otherworldly” view by the use pre-islamic theological and mythological references.

Two last possible references to angels are first (80:15-16), “in the hands of scribes / noble and pious” (*bi-aydī safara / kirām barara*) reminding us of other verses suggesting angels writing down the deeds of humans in (43:80), (50:17-18), and (82:10-12), although the word translated as “scribes”, *safara*, does not refer to the guardian aspect of the writing guardians of the previous verses. Secondly, we also have (83:18-21) on the undefined “‘*Illiyūn*”¹ which could mean either beings or places, and “those brought nigh” (*al-muqarrabūn*) which could be either humans or angels.

In conclusion to this section about these “alluding verses,” we mainly find some of the roles previously mentioned in 1.2.2: protagonists or antagonists to the humans, messengers, guardians, bearers of the throne, praising God ... And in every case more or less implicitly obeying God’s commands. Some differences are to be noted, in that we find a proper name for Hell’s (main) guardian, *Mālik*, as well as a name for a category of Hell’s guardians, the *zabāniya*. There is also, among these verses, a detail given about guardian angels: they are described in four different places as writing down a person’s deeds, in (43:80), (50:17-18), (80:15-16), and (82:10-12).

As such, in the case where we accept that these verses do designate angelic characters, they do not bring fundamental modifications to the roles of angels. However

¹ This word could be derived from the Hebrew *‘elyōn*, meaning “the highest one” (Leemhuis, “‘*Illiyūn*,” E.Q.).

they do give more details for some categories of them (names, the act of writing). It also confirms the messenger function of angels sent to prophets (the story of Abraham's guests, or angels sent to Abraham and Lot; the story of the messenger sent to Mary). Likewise, an interesting category appears among the guardian role, that is the guardians of the heavens against the jinn, in (37:1-10), (41:12), (72:8-9), and this is part of the important relationship of angels with jinn that we will next review in the third section of this chapter.

We can deduce the same functions as listed in 1.2.2 for these roles, on the narrative, cosmological and theological levels. Angels as characters, while echoing pre-islamic belief systems, reflect a shift operated by the quranic text towards a monotheistic cosmology where angels are the direct and faithful link between God and humanity, although this link is not always straightforward, as illustrated by the "tester" angels.

2.3 Angels in the Qur'ān: their Relationship with Jinn and the Devil.

2.3.1 Angels and the Jinn.

Jinn are almost as elusive as angels when one wants to define them,¹ however the quranic text does mention their creation, which happened earlier than men, made from "scorching fire" (*nār samūm*) (Q15:26-27), and "smokeless fire" (*mārij min nār*) (Q55:14). The words used for fire and their adjectives here are particular to the Arabian context: if *nār* is the regular Arabic word for the concept of "fire" in English, it is qualified in two different ways in this verse: in the first verse "scorching fire" refers to

¹ For an overview of what jinn can be in the islamic world, see MacDonald, Massé, Boratav, Nizami, and Voorhoeve, "Djinn", E.I.² and El Zein, *Islam, Arabs*. For jinn more specifically in pre-islamic times and early islamic times, see Tengour, *L'Arabie des djinns*, and Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 205-212.

the hot winds of the deserts, seen as a negative element;¹ whereas in the second verse, “smokeless fire” would refer to the optical effect seen outside when the summer sun provokes some sort of mirage-like effect,² alluding to the nature of jinn as a mix of fire and hot air.³

In her detailed study of the jinn in pre-islamic and early islamic Arabia, Tengour shows that *jinn* were an integral part of the Arabian imaginary in pre-islamic times, with the role of mediators between humanity and the world called *ghayb*, that is the unseen world, in the imaginary topography situated between the human world and the distant astral or higher spiritual world. As spirits from the otherworld - at times powerful ones - they could be regarded as Lords and Ladies (*rābb*, *rābba*) of certain localities, from whom tribes and individuals had to ask permission before settling in a particular place.⁴

It is also from this *ghayb* that jinn, called by different categories of humans (such as the priest, *kāhin*, or the magician, *sāḥir*), would transmit messages regarding the future or more famously inspiring poets. *Jinn* as intercessors and inspirers, specifically, is much comparable in this to the role of daimons in the greek antique world.⁵ More generally, Robert Hoyland also notes that it was a common pre-islamic Arabian belief that every person had a jinn companion, usually called a *qarīn*,⁶ while an angelic companion was a common belief in Late Antiquity in general, both in

¹ Tengour, *L'Arabie des djinns*, 178-179.

² Tengour, *L'Arabie des djinns*, 184.

³ Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus*, 189-191.

⁴ Tengour, *L'Arabie des djinns*. This study follows a careful literary and historical-anthropological analysis, that makes it a very convincing studies on *jinn* in late-antique Arabia, although she does not cover epigraphical findings.

⁵ Crone, "The Religion of the Qur'ānic Pagans," 187. We have seen in the first part of the chapter that the greek daimon, for the same reasons, were compared and assimilated to Jewish angels.

⁶ Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs : From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001), 145. For a short but up-to-date overview of pre-islamic beliefs, see Moreman, "Rehabilitating the Spirituality of Pre-Islamic Arabia," 137-157.

monotheistic traditions and non-monotheistic ones, multiplying the possible interactions with the divine.¹ This concept of *qarīn* is also found in the quranic text.² This *qarīn*, as a familiar spirit, would be assimilated to a jinn most often, or an angel. This belief was so widespread that even the prophet Muḥammad was said to have such a familiar spirit, and this was maintained somewhat uncontroversially in later traditions,³ underlining the ambiguity of the relationship between the Qur'ān and poetry.⁴ This adds to the ambiguity around the differentiation of angels and jinn both in nature and function, as characters from the *ghayb*.

Additionally, two other elements contribute to the confusion between angels and jinn, one biblical, and one linguistic. Some scholars indeed defend the idea that jinn were the locus of the fallen angels theme, transferred into the Quranic text (aside from Satan, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* seen previously), more particularly when they are talked about as demons (*shayāṭīn*),⁵ while the closeness of angels and jinn could be seen as a (Christian) Gnostic influence.⁶ Then on the linguistic level, the word jinn comes from the root J-N-N, as we have previously mentioned, with the meaning of something “hidden,”⁷ which easily corresponds to these spirits of fire from the *ghayb*, unseen by

¹ Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur'ān*, 125; Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 70-71.

² MacDonald, “Qarīn”, E.I.²

³ Islamic literature would however take care of differentiating the prophet from a mere inspired *kāhin*, in a move from pagan-like inspiration (*waḥy*) to a Biblical-like revelation (*tanzīl*), although both concepts would coexist (and that the word *waḥy* would become “revelation” in the monotheistic sense). See Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 347.

⁴ For an interesting literary discussion on this, see the chapter “The Prophet among the Poets” in Kermani, *God Is Beautiful*, 252-292.

⁵ Mehdi Azaiez, Gabriel Said Reynolds, Tommaso Tesei, Hamza M. Zafer, *The Qur'an Seminar Commentary: A Collaborative Study of 50 Qur'ānic Passages / Commentaire Collaboratif De 50 Passages Coraniques* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2016), 385-398.

⁶ Neuwirth, “Cosmology,” E.Q.

⁷ For a detailed linguistic analysis see Tengour, *L'Arabie des djinns*, 58-73.

men, as much as to angels for the same reason. As such, the word jinn could have also designated angels in pre-islamic times.¹

Thus, both jinn and angels in pre-islamic times were appealed to as intercessors to the higher divine planes by different groups of people, while the Quranic text will be keen on specifying that when angels are asked by God about people worshipping them, they answer that people were really worshipping jinn, and not themselves (34:40-41). This is a first hint to the cosmological shift of which angels are the locus in the Qur'ān.

Indeed we have seen in the second section that one of the main functions of the angels in the quranic text was being messengers, sent to prophets or at least important religious figures. This role is given by the Qur'ān to the angels and some selected humans (22:75). This is done at the expense of the jinn who, from common mediators of the *ghayb* between the higher planes and humans, become relegated to the same hierarchical level as humans in the creation.² Like humans, they can be righteous or not (72:11-15), they are similarly challenged to bring “the like of the Quran” (17:88), and this “neutral” outlook of jinn given by the Qur'an is important to keep in mind.³

¹ This indetermination between angels and jinn as categories has been noted by Al-Azmeh, Tengour and El-Zein, as did Moreman: “A more accurate definition of *jinn*, then includes any spiritual entity, be it considered demon, angel, ancestor, or deity.” See Moreman, “Rehabilitating the Spirituality of Pre-Islamic Arabia,” 155.

Similarly, the ancient Greek “daimon” seem to have meant any supernatural beings, while “angelos” meant specifically “messengers” (Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 26).

² Aside from Tengour's study, the same idea is explored by Chabbi (Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus*, 185-196).

³ Jinn do not necessarily become associated with Hell, contrary to the argument made in Simon O'Meara, “From Space to Place, the Quranic Infernalization of the Jinn” in *Locating Hell in Islamic Traditions*, ed. Christian Lange (Leiden: Brill, 2016). The islamisation of central Arabia does reconfigure the hierarchy of spiritual entities, as he correctly noticed, as they loose some of their power over parts of the *ghayb*; however jinn do not necessarily equate demons and were not necessarily associated with Hell, as he further argues. Jinn has indeed become associated with the underground in popular culture over time, but they also remain associated with air, at least in the quranic text, as explained by Chabbi and Tengour. Moreover the quranic text addresses itself to both humans and jinn, as creatures of free will, free to submit or to disbelieve

Moreover, in two different places (37:8-10; 72:8-9) the Qur'ān shows that jinn are now forbidden to listen to the higher planes, or the heavens, which are now guarded, the Qur'ān confirming thus their pre-islamic status as mediators thus confirmed. According to the same verses, if the jinn do try to listen, they are thrown away by shooting stars. These shooting stars are believed to be thrown by angels in later interpretations, though these verses do not mention them per se.¹ Jinn are then “downgraded” to lower planes of the *ghayb*, in a parallel limited world reflecting the likewise limited physical world of humans, while angels can freely move between all planes, Hell, the human world, the heavens, and the *ghayb* in its entirety, in order to perform their many roles. Among angels possibly lie ex-pagan otherworldly beings, such as the Yemeni *shams* and the “daughters of Īl” whose filiation to God is refuted by the Qur'ān beings who would thus gain the status of angels while loosing their personal and pagan characteristics.²

We see here then the main cosmological shifts of the *ghayb*, as presented by the quranic text and the world view it proposes of this Unseen. The higher planes (or heavens) and most of the beings populating them previously in earlier cosmologies are still there, but they are re-organised, some of its beings are “promoted” and other demoted, re-named, while the human world remains the same.³

(72:11-15), inhabitants of their own respective worlds, the human world and the *ghayb*. The quranic text does not have this attitude towards demons. If the term *shayṭān* is a word that used to designate a type of *jinn*, good or bad, in pre-islamic times, and has semantically shifted in the Qur'ān to designate only bad spirits, this does not mean that all jinn equate *shayṭān* or *shayāṭīn* in Quranic cosmology. On that note, Pierre Lory remarks that indeed later muslim authors will dress up a darker picture of jinn than that of the Qur'ān, see Lory, *La dignité de l'homme*, 222.

¹ Beck also analyses this as remnants from pre-islamic cosmologies.

² See Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 19, with references to Angelika Neuwirth's works.

³ Al-Azmeh notes a similar demotion of jinn, replaced by angels, in early islamic Medinian poetry (Al Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 326).

The messenger function of the Unseen beings is reassigned to the exclusivity of angels, alongside prophets, while the more ambiguous testing function, inheritance of the Biblical fallen angels and Near-Eastern mythologies, is redistributed between jinn (at least the part of them becoming demons), two angels (Hārūt and Mārūt), and the “jinn-angel” Iblīs, all acting ultimately by God’s will. This has to be considered in parallel to the treatment of demons in the Biblical text, which does not seem to qualify them as ontologically evil, but as neutral creatures carrying acts (by God's command) that could be seen externally as evil,¹ while the same has been written about Biblical angels, neutral creatures neither good or evil per se.² The ambiguous identity and roles of these entities of the Unseen, jinn, angels and others, with their probable overlap in different pre-islamic belief systems, is progressively cleared and re-arranged by the Qur’ān through redefined statuses and functions in the emergent islamic worldview.

2.3.2. *Iblīs/Satan: Jinn or Angel?*

In the Qur’ān, the Devil is called by two different names, *Iblīs*³ and Satan (*al-Shayṭān*). Peter Awn notes that the Devil is called *Iblīs* in the narratives of man’s creation and his own fall, while Satan is employed for all the other narratives, most of all the temptation of Adam and Eve.⁴ It is interesting to note, in the case of the *Iblīs*

¹ Anne Marie Kitz, "Demons in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 135, no. 3 (2016): 447-464.

² Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 94-104. He explains that this could be a way to ascribe what is perceived as evil or violent to God in an indirect way, thus keeping a benevolent image to God while retaining His all-powerfulness. See also *Ibid.*, 170-171.

³ Jeffery gives the origin of this word to the greek “diabolos,” though the exact filiation of this word is not very clear (Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur’ān*, 47-48).

⁴ Peter J. Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 19. Similarly Tommaso Tesei mentions Syriac exegetes reporting that the semantic shift takes place when the Devil disobeys God’s command (Tesei, “The Fall of Iblīs,” 67). On the variant name of the “stoned Satan” (*al-Shayṭān al-raḥīm*), it could be probably a word from the

narratives, that previous non-canonical Jewish and Christian literature reflects a similar story as that of the quranic *Iblīs* refusing to bow to Adam, as per God's command, thus causing his downfall,¹ and Tesei seconds that this type of literature was very popular in Eastern Christian circles, in his article studying the figure of *Iblīs* and its complex relationship to Enochian literature (such as the *Book of Watchers* seen previously).² He shows how the *Iblīs* narrative gains in importance by conflating different Biblical and para-Biblical scenes involving fallen angels that are presented in several narratives (of which Hārūt and Mārūt is a trace in the Qur'ān) - and so the Quranic Satan concentrates upon himself the whole fallen angel narrative arc.³

Was *Iblīs* an angel or a jinn? From the quranic text only, this question remains unresolved.⁴ In the Qur'ān, verses strongly suggest he is an angel by the immediate textual context of the narratives he is included in (2:34; 38:73-74),⁵ but the quranic text elsewhere also affirms that he is “of the *jinn*” (18:50).

Later, commentators will elaborate different arguments to choose one or the other position, mainly based on the character's actions (are angels exempt from sin? If

Akkadian meaning “the accuser,” more in line with Biblical traditions, however it would have lost its meaning by the time of the Quranic revelation, and it will have been understood as “Satan the accursed, the stoned” which also have resonances in pre-islamic traditions. See Adam Silverstein, “On the Original meaning of the Qur'ānic Term al-shayṭān al-rajīm,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133, n°1 (2013): 21-33.

¹ For a review and commentary on these, see Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 20-24. He argues that the mystical view of Satan will influence the later Sufi understanding of him.

² Tesei, “The Fall of *Iblīs*,” 66.

³ Ibid. Hārūt and Mārūt are part of this narrative arc, if we keep the Quranic text along without its commentaries.

⁴ See Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 18-44; Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus*, 198; Wensinck, Gardet, “*Iblīs*”, in E.I.²

⁵ For instance, contrary to others al-Jāḥiẓ considers that *Iblīs*, as the grammatically “exception” (*mustathnā*), had to be of the same category than the group is he excepted from (*mustathnā minhu*), that is, the angels (Jaadane, “La place des anges,” 27); for a summary on the discussion of this grammatical debate, see also Samuela Pagani, “Esegesi coranica,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), ebook.

so, Iblīs cannot be one of them) or the character's nature (*Iblīs* is made from fire, *nār*, while angels are made from light, *nūr* - both related to one another but not exactly similar).¹ Modern scholars also suppose that *Iblīs* could be seen as both, by the fact that he is regarded as belonging to angels as long as he obeys to God, but his refusal to bow to man makes him become a *jinn*, through a process of “jinnisation” of the biblical figure of Satan.²

This exemplifies the troubled relationship between angels and jinn, making very attractive the theory of the word jinn as meaning any creature of the Unseen including angels, at least up until the quranic text and its re-attribution of roles and places of the angels and the jinn is its cosmology. As for Satan, the common name for the Devil (*al-Shayṭān*, plural *shayāṭīn*, devils), we have seen that this would only illustrate a semantic shift, from a category of jinn, good or bad, inspiring poets and others in pre-islamic times,³ to a fully evil category in the islamic worldview. This demonising process had happened precisely to the Greek *daimon*, turned into our modern evil “demon” in the Christian cosmology.⁴

2.4 Concluding Thoughts:

The Qur’an presents itself “in clear Arabic tongue,” relating known facts and stories of its epoch that were then written or transmitted in other languages (Hebrew,

¹ For a summary of these arguments by different well-known commentators on the matter, such as al-Ṭabarī, al-Zamakhsharī, and al-Bayḍāwī, see Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy and Redemption*, 24-37; Wensinck, Gardet, “Iblīs,” E.I.². For example al-Zamakhsharī resolves this in going to the exact opposite of the theory that the term “*jinn*” as a concept covered both jinn proper and angels: for him, the term “angel” encompasses angels and *jinn*. If anything, this shows the gradual importance of angels over jinn in the later islamicate *ghayb*.

² Tengour, *L’Arabie Des Djinns*, 205-210.

³ Chabbi, *Le seigneur des tribus*, 220.

⁴ Riley, “Demon,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), online.

Aramaic, Old/Middle Persian, Greek, etc). As the historical Jesus would have transmitted his message in Aramaic, Muhammad used Arabic, and these were, during their respective lives, messages with references steeped in the cultural and religious milieu of their upbringing. These messages were however at the start of a restructuration, and not only renovation, of older cosmologies. The Qur'ān was re-using these myths for its own purposes, initiating an islamic mythopoeic process, in a specific language of Arabia.¹

Among the shifts in this Arabian cosmology brought by the quranic text, we have found that: angels take the messenger role away from the jinn completely; angels take actively part in showing and illustrating absolute monotheism with no partially or fully free-willed delegate, such as what Jesus or archangels might have represented in late antiquity, since quranic angels do not have the agency that many pre-islamic celestial beings had. They retain distinct functions, and some of them even gain proper names in the Medinian surah *al-baqara*,² but all of their actions, even when

¹ Robin explains that the common Arabic tongue, used for pre-islamic poetry, was probably based on the Najdi dialect, confirmed by archeological findings (Robin, “L’Arabic préislamique,” 77; *ibid.*, “Inscriptions antiques de la région de Najrān (Arabie Séoudite méridionale) : nouveaux jalons pour l’histoire de l’écriture, de la langue et du calendrier arabes,” in *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, 158e année, n° 3 (2014), 1051.) Ahmad al-Jallad has also interesting works on this subject, based on inscriptions in different alphabets. He explains that the “clear Arabic tongue” of the Qur’ān means the vernacular, as compared to ritualistic languages used at that time for religious purposes (Ahmad al-Jallad, Ronny Vollandt, *The Damascus Psalm Fragment: Middle Arabic and the Legacy of Old Ḥigāzī, w. a Contribution by R. Vollandt* (Oriental Institute, 2020), 73-77). He explains in this book how the Arabian peninsula was home to a great variety of dialects, and Chapter 4 deals with the transition from this state to the state of diglossia with Classical Arabic; See also Ahmad al-Jallad, “The Linguistic Landscape of Pre-Islamic Arabia: Context for the Qur’an” in *The Oxford Handbook of Qur’anic Studies*, ed. Haleem, Muhammad Abdel and Mustafa Shah (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), online.

² Contrary to what O’Meara proposes in his article “From Space to Place,” where he affirms that angels lose their individuality from early to late surahs, the proper names of Gabriel, Michael, Hārūt, and Mārūt in the Medinian *sura al-baqara* are a first and obvious argument against this; he also claims that angels were “visible” beings in Meccan and early Medinian surahs, although I have seen nowhere in the quranic text any verse supporting such a view - on the contrary, not

questionable at the first glance, or at the origin of earthly problems (*Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, Satan) are shown to be ultimately conducted according to God's will, albeit in a slightly indirect way. Beyond their individual and group functions, angels come to represent as a whole a single creedal function: "*Angelicalness designates a function and betokens a presence beyond the specific instance of any particular angel. It manifests those operations of God that can be, and have been, personified and individualised, all the while designating God himself by virtue of His command.*"¹ In other words, problematic angels and powerful angels such as Gabriel and Michael, along with the undetermined and unnamed mass of them, are all brought back under God's command. This process is not fundamentally new to Arabia, as pre-islamic belief systems seem to have represented intermediaries while leaving the higher deities unrepresented (or represented by an empty throne),² however the systematic unification of these intermediaries in a single and barely defined category of "angels" is the start of a new imaginary.

God is thus brought closer to humans, closer than the pervasive high deity removed from the world, as found in antiquity. Beck has also analysed the evolution of quranic theology moving from such a Mesopotamian-like model to a personal/human

being able to see angels was a problem for the disbelievers from the beginning as the quranic text reflects.

¹ Al-Azmeh, "Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings," 146.

² Robin, "L'Arabie préislamique," 136. The high god of the kingdom of Dadān (also known as Liḥyān) in North-East of Arabia, called "the absent one" (*dhū-l-ghayba*), which characteristic was not to be represented, sound also like a prefiguration of Islam's reluctance concerning divine representations (I first learned about this by a personal communication when visiting the archeological site in 2019 ; this name is also mentioned as "dhī ghayba" in Abdulrahman Alsuhaibani, Mohamed Metwaly, "Integrated Results of Aerial Image, Ground Magnetics and Excavation for Settlement Assessment at Dadan Site, Al-'Ula Area, Saudi Arabia." *Archaeological Prospection* 27, no. 3 (2020): 263-274. However an older reference mentions "Dhu Ghaba" as meaning "Lord of the Grove," see Robert G. Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs*, 141.)

model, writing on the early quranic surahs: “As its revelation theology evolved, the anonymous angelic apocalypse was restructured into support for nascent claims of authoritative prophecy. A literary form of prophetic commission was repetitively elaborated, in forms that initially shadowed the basal structure of angelic apocalypse, but which increasingly subordinated and assimilated the older angelic roles to a human prophetic function.”¹

Thus angels lose some of their pre-islamic counterparts’ importance, they become strictly faithful messengers sent to prophets, and guardians to humans. They are pictured more as faithful assistants following God’s will, differentiated from the unpredictable and sometimes too powerful jinn inspirators of pre-islamic Arabia. The canals between God and humans are safer, more predictable inasmuch as everything has become part of God’s plan - though this plan might not be understood by humans - and thus God is slowly made closer to the jugular vein of the human creature, to paraphrase (50:16), and closer to the jinn, who are brought under a tighter control. God is also brought closer by the narrative invisibility of islamic angels, as they are also more “invisible” and depersonalised than the Christian pantheon of angels and saints.

The quranic text constitutes a transition² and indeed the start of a new representation of the Unseen, shifting away from foreign and autochthonous elements, and old representations. The messenger function given from jinn to the exclusivity of angels and prophets denotes a first shift of this new mythopoeic process, a shift also

¹ Beck, *Evolution of the Early Qur’an*, 121. If Beck’s analysis concerns only the earliest surahs and can be seen as falling within a certain theoretical tendency (pan-babylonism), the general idea of a reconfiguration of supernatural beings and elements of myth from both pagan and monotheistic milieus by the Qur’ān is valid and analysed as such by other scholars such as Al Azmeh (Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*, chapter 5, more particularly 326-338 for angels and jinn.)

² The transition to monotheism was not natural or linear, and can be traced, according to Al-Azmeh, “Paleo-Muslim Angels,” 138.

illustrated by other related stories in the quranic text such as that of Hārūt and Mārūt. The Qur'ān and its uses of these creatures and stories constitutes a signal of a new worldview being born, while fully immersed in late antique cultures and imaginaries and not completely separated from them. In these paleo-islamic times,¹ the quranic text and its allusions and references would have been clearer to its contemporary audience, while many are eluding us today, becoming objects of many discussions in quranic studies.

Now that angels are established as the archetypal spiritual entities, barely defined or even purposefully maintained undefined by the Qur'ān, navigating between the celestial spheres and the human sphere, we will see how these beings of the Unseen play into the formation of the new worldview. Burge has noted that while scriptures have a limited and undefined angelology, other religious sources show an expanded angelic world formed along three different processes: delegation (a transcendent God delegating functions, which the Quranic text limits as we have seen in this chapter); polytheism (angels as traces of a polytheistic world, which we also have just seen in this chapter); and exegesis (angels are used by exegetes for clarification of verses).² In the next chapter, this latter exegetical process will be explored, as we will take a look at a specific corpus of post-quranic texts, Sufi *tafsīr* works. These texts were produced once islam had come out of Arabia, and when the process of a new civilisation had begun, in parallel to the establishing and growing complexity of the new mythic imaginary. How does this impact on the representations of angels, and more broadly the imaginary

¹ “In religious terms, Paleo-Islam designates an evolving repertoire of ritual, doctrinal and mythical possibilities; it was a regime of exploration, innovation, adaptation, adjustment and assimilation, specific to a time and place.” Al-Azmeh, *The Emergence of Islam*, 358.

² Stephen R. Burge, “Panangelon:” Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism, A Case Study Exploring Meteorological Angels in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūfī’s *al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik*,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 153.

pertaining to Unseen? Could we detect some significant new angelic roles or functions?
A reverse of the depersonalisation of angels or a continuation of the Quranic process of older roles in a 'new mantle', continuing the formation of the new islamic cosmology?

CHAPTER 3

ANGELS IN SUFI *TAFSĪR*

3.1. Introduction.

3.1.1. Sufi *Tafsīr*.

Tafsīr, usually translated as “interpretation” or “exegesis,” as a literary genre designates any commentary written on any text-source. In the specific religious islamic context it is often understood as “quranic exegesis.”¹ Exegesis can be seen as completing Scriptures,² or as “a pure vertical, scientific desire to come to terms with and explore the epic ethos at what might be thought a narratological molecular level.”³ Aaron Hughes explains that one of the general functions of quranic *tafsīr* is helping to establish the Qur’ān in a different time and place than its initial context, in making sense of this text to a particular public this creates new possibilities, and renewing a vision of the world⁴ - which is why the representation of angels in this type of work can be useful to trace their evolution.

¹ Norman Calder has tried to define the exact characteristics of this genre, such as format, in the content, and references used (linguistic, theological). See Norman Calder, “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the description of a genre, illustrated with reference to the story of Abraham,” in *Approaches to the Qur’ān* (London: Routledge, 1993), 101-140. An updated and short discussion on this genre can be found in Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 14-22, and a more recent overview of the discussion in Andreas Görke, Johanna Pink, *Tafsīr and Islamic Intellectual History: Exploring the Boundaries of a Genre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-7.

² John E. Wansbrough, *Qur’ānic Studies: Sources and Methods of Scriptural Interpretations - with a Foreword, Translations and Expanded Notes by Andrew Rippin* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2004), 100.

³ Lawson, “The Qur’an and Epic,” 58.

⁴ “*Tafsīr is existential. It reconstructs, and subsequently anchors, the material out of which the Qur’ān has been constructed. The main task of the early exegete is to recreate a dialogue with previous discourses that the Qur’ān, through its terse style, has abolished. In the subsequent recreation, however, tafsīr also provides a series of exegetical surprises and unexpected*

Burge already noted that “*The interpretation and elucidation of scripture, particularly when the supra-mundane is concerned, has a tendency to expand the text greatly. If one looks at the references to angels in al-Suyūṭī’s al-Ḥabā’ik fī akhbār al-malā’ik, a great increase in the number of angels can be seen.*”¹ He further explains that angels are developed out of exegesis, whereby words become angels (such as Ridwān), referring to the work of Saul M. Olyan who studied this “exegetical increase” of angels in Judaic traditions.² This increase in angels might also be related to the integration of various neighbouring traditions into these Islamic texts, uncovering older and contemporary traditions that circulated at the time of redaction.³

The word “*tafsīr*” brings to mind an almost synonymous word, “*ta’wīl*”, which is usually translated the same way in English, and throughout Islamic literary history it has been at times a synonym to “*tafsīr*”, especially in the early period. However their relationship is complex, and it has evolved to designate also the personal opinion of the commentator (as opposed to interpretations based on other sources), or the esoteric interpretation of both Shias and Sufis, in their attempt at explaining the “inner” (*bāṭinī*) meaning of the verses.⁴ However while reading the different commentary works used here, we noticed that the authors seemed to have used both words indiscriminately at

possibilities which also deconstruct the original thrust (if it can be discovered) of the prior discourse. Much like commentary in general, tafsīr is one among many means of locating a human tradition in both cosmic and terrestrial space vis-à-vis other traditions, aspects of the real word, etc.” Hughes, “The Stranger at the Sea,” 266.

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 5.

² *Ibid.*, 33.

³ David Hamidović, “Les écrits apocryphes juifs et le Coran,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol 1 (Paris: cerf, 2019), 234.

⁴ Poonawala, “Ta’wīl”, E.I.² Jamal Elias also writes: “*In the majority of Sufi writings on the Qur’an from the classical period onwards, tafsīr is often used to refer to structural explanations of an aya - such as the circumstances of its revelation (sabab al-nuzul), while ta’wīl is its allegorical or metaphysical interpretation*” (Jamal J. Elias, “Sūfī Tafsīr Reconsidered: Exploring the Development of a Genre,” *Journal of Qur’ānic Studies* 12, no. 1-2 (2010): 42).

times, possibly reflecting the fact that their works contains both more traditional Sunni interpretations along mystical ones. For clarity purposes the word “*tafsīr*” has been kept throughout this chapter to designate the genre, while making only a distinction between “esoteric” and “exoteric” types of commentaries by qualifying them as such. Indeed, while the different authors differ in the number and adjectives used for the levels of understandings of the quranic text they see as necessary for reading and interpreting it, all commentators seem to agree on a certain exoteric/esoteric distinction.

Regarding this distinction, “esoteric” is used here to qualify the non-exoteric quality of commentaries (sometimes “mystical” and “inner” might be used as well). This usually translates the meaning of the adjective *bāṭinī* in Arabic in the appropriate context (the literal translation of this word could be “internal”), while the word “exoteric” is used to qualify the non-mystical type of commentary, and usually translates the word *ẓāhirī* in Arabic (which means literally “external”). The reader has to keep in mind that using the words “esoteric” for *bāṭinī*, like using “gnosticism” or “mystical islam” in the context of Sufism, has a long history full of epistemological complexities involving different concepts and religious traditions, and they reflect as much the translator’s world(s) as they do the translated words.¹

However if the distinction within a commentary on a verse between exoteric and esoteric sources or interpretations is somewhat clear, the distinction between works qualified as “Sufi” and “Sunni” or other such categories is not always straightforward, such as the example of the commentary of al-Tha‘labī.² Jamal Elias also notes that the

¹ For an important discussion on the esoteric/exoteric (*bāṭin/ẓāhir*) distinction and related concepts such as *irfān* (“mystical knowledge”) and the complexities of the history of these words, see Liana Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?”

² Shia commentaries contain an esoteric part by principle (Rippin, “Tafsīr”, E.I.²), while al-Tha‘labī wrote a commentary which is usually classified as Sunni, although he was the first

esoteric aspect is not necessarily part of any and all Sufi interpretations.¹ Overtime certain works came to be clearly marked as Sufi or esoteric, such as the commentary of Rūzbihān Baqlī and his poetic-mystical style,² while others are less obviously esoteric in appearance, or at least in a different way, such as the works of Ibn Barraġān who uses mostly traditional exoteric sources and references.³ Despite this liminal cases, many works can be easily classified as belonging to the Sufi commentary subgenre,⁴ either because the author clearly states his affiliation to this trend through his education, preferred masters and other such indications and/or because most his interpretations are esoteric in nature and in goal, even though should they not declare themselves as Sufi.⁵

mainstream exegete to incorporate mystical interpretations in his commentary work (Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafṣīr Tradition*, 152). Another interesting aspect of his commentary that has an incidence on some of the commentaries studied here, is that al-Tha‘labī was also the first one, as far as is currently known, to have systematically included *ḥadīth* in the quranic commentary, while this genre was kept mostly separate from the *tafṣīr* genre before him (*ibid.*, 191-198).

¹ See his very interesting discussion of what constitutes and defines a Sufi *tafṣīr*, including the different periodizations offered for these works (Elias, “Ṣūfī Tafṣīr,” 41-55).

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

³ For more on Ibn Barraġān, see Yousef Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus: Ibn Barraġān and Islamic thought in the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁴ For practical purposes we call all mystical trends, including the Andalusī indigenous mystical tradition identified by Casewit, as such. Kristin Zahra Sands, in her books which constitutes a very good introduction to the genre of sufi tafsir, explains that what distinguishes Sufi commentaries from others is that the exoteric knowledge, although necessary, is only a stepping stone for a deeper understanding of the quranic text, which come from within, by divine inspiration. See Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī commentaries on the Qur‘ān in Classical Islam* (London: Routledge, 2006), 28.

⁵ Such is the example of Ibn Barraġān who identified Sufis as part of a distinct mystical Eastern trend which he did not identify with. Regarding his relationship with Sufism and whether one can describe him as Sufi today, see Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, 67-74. Yousef Casewit argues that “al-Andalus was home to an indigenous mysticophilosophical tradition that was distinct from the Arabic Sufi tradition that developed in the central and eastern lands of Islam”, the followers of which were calling themselves the Contemplatives (“*Mu‘tabirūn*”), with neoplatonical influences (including the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā*). Ibn Barraġān was its foremost representative, and as such did not consider himself a Sufi, at a term which interestingly did not mean to him a mystically and philosophically-oriented trend, as much as a trend focused on

Through the Sufi works of quranic commentary, we can perceive an example of the progressive building of concrete themes, motifs, and traditions that form what came to be qualified as “Sufi,” where “creative imagination” was an important key, as explained by Knysh: “If one were to apply Crone’s and Geertz’ ideas [on human imagination]¹ to the ascetic-mystical version of Islam, one would argue that, having originated in the imaginative faculty of its founding fathers, it gradually acquired concrete practical, doctrinal (discursive), artistic, and institutional dimensions that constitute the abstraction we call ‘Sufism’.”² In our case, through our research on the evolution of the representation of angels, we will see how these characters illustrate and participate in this sufi imaginal textual and extra-textual process, and how it helps defining some aspects of Sufi cosmological views.

Among the specificities arising from the nature of the commentary genre is the giving of new details or perspectives on a quranic verse, and this is what we are interested in here: in the Sufi *tafsīr*, what do the comments about angels point to? Is there any new role or function arising from these commentaries that might give interesting additions to the representations of angels in the quranic text?

self-purification (ibid., 2-3). This tradition and its different approach made their mystical leanings less easily discernible than the better known eastern tradition and its vocabulary. Coppens similarly notes that neither Sulamī nor Qushayrī used the word “*taṣawwuf*” in their *tafsīr* when presenting their works and the “Friends of God,” see Pieter Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 57. More particularly on Qushayrī and his relationship to the concept of Sufism, Chapter 9 in Martin Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar: Abū'l-Qāsim Al-Qushayrī and the Laṭā'if Al-Ishārāt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹ For these two authors, human imagination is not as much an accessory than an essential and necessary tool for human development and the emerging of societies. As already seen in the introduction, Alexander Knysh refers here to Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5, 44-46, 89, and Patricia Crone, *Pre-industrial Societies: Anatomy of the Pre-Modern World* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 124-125.

² Alexander Knysh, *Sufism: A New History*, 32.

3.1.2. The Selected *Tafsīr*:

Following here is a list of the *tafsīr* works used for this research, with the abbreviations used in this chapter for both the authors and their works between parentheses: the *tafsīr* of al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) (shortened to Tustarī in the rest of the chapter),¹ the first *tafsīr* of al-Sulamī (d.412/1021) (shortened to Sulamī),² the *tafsīr* of al-Qushayrī (d.465/1072) (shortened to Qushayrī),³ the long *tafsīr* of Ibn Barraġān (d. 536/1141) (shortened to Ibn Barraġān 1)⁴ and the short *tafsīr* by the same author (shortened to Ibn Barraġān 2),⁵ which is an independent work from the first one, and the *tafsīr* of Rūzbihān Baqlī (d.606/1209) (shortened to Baqlī).⁶ All of them, except for the first one, are part of what Andrew Rippin calls “the mature phase of *tafsīr*.”⁷

¹ Sahl al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, trans. Annabel Keeler, Ali Keeler (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2011). I am using this English edition, based on three different manuscripts, and whenever I am quoting Tustarī, I am quoting from this edition, although an Arabic version exists, which I have used to check the translations of some concepts (Sahl b. ‘Abdallah al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-tustarī*, ed. Muḥammad Bāsīl ‘Uyūn al-Sūd (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2007). For more on al-Tustarī see Böwering, “Sahl al-Tustarī”, E.I.² and Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qur’ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 283/896)* (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

The 5 other works are not translated into English, as far as I am aware, so all translations from these are mine.

² Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Muḥammad b. al-Ḥussayn b. Mūsā al-Azdī al-Sulamī, *Ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr*, ed. Sayyid ‘Umrān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001). And see Böwering, “al-Sulamī”, E.I.²

³ ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā’if al-ishārāt*, ed. Ibrāhīm Basiyūnī (Cairo: al-Hay’a al-Miṣriyya al-‘Amma li-l-kitāb, 2000). See also Halm, “al-Qushayrī”, E.I.²

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

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

⁶ Abū Muḥammad Ṣadr al-Dīn Rūzbihān bin Abī Naṣr al-Baqlī, *‘Arā’is al-bayān fī ḥaqā’iq al-qur’ān*, ed. Aḥmad Farīd al-Mazīdī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2008). And see Ernst, “Rūzbihān”, E.I.²

⁷ Andrew Rippin, “Tafsīr”, E.I.² In Michael Sells’ more detailed classification, the first one is part of the early Sufi period, the second and third ones of the formative phase, and the last two authors are representatives of the “Sufi synthesis” phase, of which Ibn ‘Arabī is also an example, see Michael A. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism: Sufi, Qur’an, Miraj, Poetic and*

We tried to select works somehow representative of the Sufi or mystical *tafsīr* genre,¹ within the period concerned by this research (pre-modern times up to the end of the Abbasid caliphate).² However, taking into account the time limitations of this research, we could not use non-published manuscripts, and had to choose from the published and edited existing works, though this might not mean they are more representative of this sub-genre than unedited ones.³ In other words, this reflects Sunni mystical writings, as including other mystical schools of thought would have been beyond the scope of this study.⁴

The authors of these commentary works, in a process shared with non-Sufi works, usually include in their comments different reports from previous Sufi scholars and authorities. The selection of these reports is in itself interesting and can give us clues about what a given author is looking for and arguing for.⁵ This is how the reader notices that Sulamī contains elements of Tustarī, that Qushayrī contains elements of

Theological Writings (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 17-26; For a questioning and reviewing of academic classification of Sufi *tafsīr* more specifically, see Elias, "Sūfī Tafsīr Reconsidered."

¹ Finding representative works of such a prolific genre is a challenge, and such a choice remains highly subjective. Quranic commentaries are indeed innumerable, in the words of Saleh: "The self-declared inexhaustibility of God's word found its match in the inexhaustibility commentators saw in its meaning" (Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 1-4), explaining further that the currently printed commentaries are not necessarily the most representative, showing in his book how for example al-Tha'labī's commentary has been more influential than al-Ṭabarī (Ibid., 12).

² For an overview of the political, social, and religious context of Nishapur at that time, of which three of these Sufi authors lived (Sulamī, Qushayrī, and Baqlī), see Coppens, *Seeing God*, 40-70.

³ Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 3.

⁴ For a glimpse into the commentaries of some of these other schools, see Annabel Keeler, and Sajjad H. Rizvi, *The Spirit and the Letter, Approaches to the Esoteric Interpretation of the Qur'an* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

⁵ An example is shown by Baqlī with his selection of *ḥadīth* which support his argument against the description of angels and jinn, while another author like Ibn Barrajān. will select reports and *ḥadīth* supporting his own tendency to describe as much as he can these same beings.

these two,¹ a genealogical process noted by Coppens on later Sufi commentary works.² With time reports tend to accumulate, sometimes contradict or complement each other,³ and the personal commentaries tend to lengthen as well, the consequence of this being that commentaries quickly reached encyclopaedic sizes.

Another remark regarding the anthological style of the commentaries is that selected *tafsīr* works can be divided very roughly in two groups. The commentaries of Tustarī, Sulamī, and Qushayrī within a certain measure, remain concise, with many reports and references attributed to known or unknown authors, as if to legitimise the personal commentaries they offer following these reports (if there are any, as sometimes a commentary on a given verse consists only of reports attributed to others).

Conversely, the latter commentaries of Ibn Barrajān and Baqlī are much more voluminous, and the personal commentaries by the authors are usually longer than the reports and other references presented in them. The ordering of references and reports, as well as the length of original commentaries, all contribute to give each author a specific voice. It is interesting to note that in Baqlī's case, his selected references come only after his own personal commentary on each verse, which denotes a shift in the voice taken by the author. Indeed his narrative voice takes precedence, and the need to present older and established voices first does not seem to be felt anymore to build his own legitimacy, or at least previous reports placed after his own view, as way of confirming it, illustrates a new acceptable way of legitimizing one's own discourse.

¹ For a detailed tracing of the Tustarī tradition through time and its influence on different authors, see Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision*, 7-42.

² Pieter Coppens, "Sufi Qur'ān Commentaries, Genealogy and Originality," *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 1-2 (2018): 102-124.

³ Which is a particularity of the *tafsīr* genre: "The preferred mode of disagreement was to add one's voice to the pool of interpretations inherited." Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition*, 14.

A last remark on this subject, the *tafsīr* of al-Sulamī contains references and reports attributed to well-known early mystic scholars and figures, such as Ja‘far al-Šādiq (d. 148/765) and al-Tustarī.¹ However we used the commentary of al-Tustarī as a separate work, as it has been redacted earlier than Sulamī, in an attempt to trace the evolution over time of the different commentaries and the uses of references and reports between them.² The commentary work of al-Sulamī (both the one used here and his second *Ziyādāt ḥaqā’iq al-tafsīr*) is used by Rūzbihān al-Baqlī.³ The work of al-Qushayrī is also key in the development of sufi commentaries, and seems to have long been undervalued as such. However its influence on later sufi works is getting recognised, and an example is its impact also on the *tasfīr* of Rūzbihān Baqlī, where in the text the only sufi scholar referred by the latter as “the master” (*al-ustādh*) is al-Qushayrī,⁴ while most of the authors of other reports he mentions are left unspecified. All of these (Tustarī, Sulamī, Qushayrī and Baqlī) are in some measure representative of the eastern mystical tradition and their approach of the quranic verses linked to the concept “indication” or “allusion” (*ishāra*), while Ibn Barraĵān (in both works used

¹ On the main references in Sulamī, see Gerhard Böwering, "The Major Sources of Sulamī's Minor Qur'ān Commentary," *Oriens* 35, (1996): 35-56. He explains that the sixth Shiite imam is mentioned by Sulamī as Ja‘far b. Muḥammad al-Šādiq, al-Šādiq, or just Ja‘far, to distinguish him from another reference, Ja‘far b. Muḥammad b. Nusayr al-Khuldī (d. 348/959), see *Ibid.*, 52.

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

³ Böwering, "al-Sulamī", E.I.²

⁴ For more details on the influence of the *tafsīr* of al-Qushayrī see Alan Godlas, "Influences of Qushayrī's *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt* on Sufi Qur'anic Commentaries, Particularly Rūzbihān al-Baqlī's *Arā'is al-bayān* and the Kubrawi *al-Ta'wīlāt al-najmiyya*", *Journal of Sufi Studies*, 2.1 (2013), 78-92. For more information on al-Qushayrī in general and his advocacy for a “sober sufism”, see Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar*.

here) is an example of the different Andalusian mystical tradition based on the concept of “crossing” (*‘ibāra*).¹ However the reader needs to keep in mind that the different cultural and scholarly centres of the islamic world were in frequent communication, and so always influenced each other in some measure over time.²

3.1.3. Chapter plan and preliminary comments.

The classification of the quranic verses as done in Chapter 1³ made clearer the reviewing the numerous mentions of angels in the different commentary works, which resulted in the table Annex 2. At first, we notice that all verses from the first category (mentioning angels directly) did not necessarily receive commentaries,⁴ however of those that did, the number of these commentaries roughly equates the commentaries given on verses of the second category (alluding to the presence of angels).⁵ Indeed these verses, such as (51:1-4),⁶ were not considered to be alluding to any angels by reading the quranic text alone while researching Chapter 1, although we commented on this possibility for many of the so-called “cryptic” verses in the openings of some Meccan surahs (see 1.2.3.3). Another example are the verses (55:2) and (69:40-41)

¹ Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, 207. For more details on the religious and political context and influences informing the works of Ibn Barrajān, see also José Bellver, ““Al-Ghazālī of Al-Andalus”: Ibn Barrajān, Mahdism, and the Emergence of Learned Sufism on the Iberian Peninsula,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 133, no. 4 (2013): 659-681.

² A very short example that goes beyond the time period of this research is that Ibn Barrajān. As an Andalusian scholar he will influence Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought, which in turns has influenced the islamic east including the Ottoman world, while Baqlī, influenced by the eastern tradition with Qushayrī and Sulamī, will also have an impact in the Ottoman and Persianate worlds.

³ I am referring here to the two categories of verses: the “angel verses” mentioning angels clearly, and the “alluding verses” which might suggest angels, but mainly are identified as such by later interpretations.

⁴ In some cases this might be due to a missing part in the original manuscripts used for the editions used here, such as Qushayrī where verses (23:24-28) and their commentaries are missing.

⁵ This even led to the addition of some verses in Annex 1.

⁶ These verses are interpreted as representing angels in Ibn Barrajān 1 (vol 5, p.187), though others, such as Baqlī, gives a mystical interpretation of these verses only (vol 3, 340-341).

which usually easily read as being about the Prophet, however Ibn Barrajān 1 sees there Gabriel as a first possible subject, and Muḥammad second only¹. This is part of the re-creation of a dialogue with the quranic text mentioned by Hughes, and an enrichment built on the “alluding verses” whose initial spacio-temporal context might already have been somewhat lost in time, at the different historical moments these commentaries were written. As for these “alluding verses,” the commentaries are especially interesting in that some identify and confirm - while some others do not - the presence of an angel in a verse that is only suggesting the presence of one.²

Both categories just mentioned, the angel verse and the alluding verses of chapter 1, are classified as “angelic verses” in the sections below. However, the reading of these commentaries made clear that another group had to be created, called the “non-angel verses group” for clarity purposes: the commentaries on these verses mention angels while the verses being commented on are not related to angels per se. This group, given the nature of the verses, could be considered very similar to the “alluding verses” of the first group in some cases. In most other cases however, the verses commented do not seem to be “alluding” to angels at all, while the author deems important to mention the presence or some action of angels in relation to this verse,³ hence our choice of a new separate category, called the “non-angel verses” in the sections below.

Moreover, on a second level of reading, the presence of a commentary on an “angel verse” of the first group does not necessarily means that the commentary includes anything pertaining to the angel(s) mentioned or suggested in the verse. Or, as

¹ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 235-237, and 378.

² See the eighth function (2.2.14 and 2.2.15) with the examples of Riḍwān the keeper of Paradise and the *Zabāniyya*.

³ Such an example is the commentary of Tustarī on (2:238) which includes the angel Gabriel, on a verse that only enjoins the maintaining of prayer (Tustarī, 35).

often as not, an exoteric commentary mentioning angels is found next to an esoteric one bypassing the angel(s) in question. With this first “angelic verses” group, it is indeed interesting to notice that many verses are not commented on regarding the angelic characters, giving an overall impression of not wanting to “state the obvious” or more precisely “commenting on the obvious”, for instance going straight to an esoteric commentary on the verse. The most striking example is that of (35:1) where Sulamī does comment but does not include any remark of the obvious and only subject of this verse, that is, angels and their number of wings. As we will see, this kind of comment has led to the creation of a new function.

Regarding the different types of comments, many are barely more than paraphrases in regard to the characters of the angels, thus underlining a known role or function found in the quranic text,¹ and most of these have not been included here. Similarly, many mentions of angels were left out, such as references to *ḥadīth* pertaining to angels that the commentators might have used, except for some particularly relevant cases, as the angels in *ḥadīth* have already been mainly covered by Burge in his book.²

A thematic presentation will give us a clearer picture of the angels’ representations in these Sufi commentaries, first from the group of “angelic verses” as listed in Chapter 1 (both ‘angel’ and ‘alluding’ verses), and then secondly from

¹ This is the case of the following comments, for instance: Sulamī on (13:23), and Baqlī on (21:103) in his typically flowery style.

² Burge, *Angels in Islam*.

commentaries on “non-angel verses”¹. This thematic presentation is based on the functions also listed in Chapter 1, and the roles underlying these functions.

Outlining and announcing an answer to the initial question about possible new functions, the nature of the commentaries have led to an addition of two new functions not listed in Chapter 1: first, illustrating the “exegetical increase” of angels, a function of cosmological enrichment (function 8), mostly linked to the “alluding verses” of chapter 1, which concerns the addition of new beings or more details on the relationship between angels and these beings, such as the jinn; then out of the specifically esoteric nature of these commentaries, seemingly a “meta-function” (function 9), whereby angels cease to be characters inside the quranic text, and become a tool for the commentator for illustrating an esoteric meaning, seeing in a word or phrase a metaphor for a spiritual reality happening to man, instead of an actual being as an ontologically independent reality from man.

We tried keeping as much as possible the chronology of the works, in order to keep track of possible evolutions of these representations overtime, for each function. The chronology and possible links and influences between the works might have been clearer by reviewing and presenting the comments verse by verse, however given the great number of verses, this would have been too long a detour to reach the goal of this chapter, which primarily concerns the functions of the angelic roles in these works.

The distribution of relevant comments under each function was done by keeping in mind that many parts of the commentaries could be listed under different functions at the same time. However for better readability, we tried to avoid repetitions, and the

¹ Information drawn from commentaries on “non-angelic verses” might include references to “angel verses”, which happens in the longer commentaries where other verse(s) than the one(s) being commented upon are included within the commentary.

most relevant function of each commentary was kept as much as possible among the different angelic roles and functions found in the commentaries.

3.2. The Nine Functions of Angels.

3.2.1. A Narrative Function: Secondary Characters Helping or Fighting Humanity in ‘*Angelic Verses.*’

This role is very recurrent, along with that of messenger, and is presented in different forms in numerous places in the commentaries.

Guardians:

In this “guardian” category, Tustarī noticeably does not identify any angel for the verse (86:4) which could be obviously interpreted so, mentioning only God’s protection (*iṣma*).¹ However Qushayrī does identify in this verse a guardian angel,² so does Ibn Barrajān 1, though he sees there either angels guarding “the work for which they write”, or guarding “humanity and all existent things.”³ In commenting on (41:30-31) Sulamī paraphrases the verse, and adds a guardian role, as he sees the angels as a “protection” (*ḥimāya*).⁴

On (13:11), the “*mu‘aqqibāt*” are identified by Tustarī as angels “of night and day, which come one after the other in succession” (hence their name), preserving “all the good and evil things that He has determined for His servant.” These angels further

¹ Tustarī, 277.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 714.

³

“الإنسان والموجودات كلها.” “الملك يحفظ عمله يكتبه له،”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 478.

⁴ Sulamī, vol 2, 218.

bear witness for or against this servant.¹ Qushayrī also identifies them as angels, in a long commentary on this type of guardian angels. After repeating the idea of them coming in succession night and day, he writes:

*“They keep them [humans] by God’s command from God’s command,² this because God - Exalted He be - has designated to every one in the creation angels who repel affliction from them when asleep or unaware, or when awake and up and walking... And in all of their states”.*³

This verse (13:11) come within the commentary of Ibn Barraĵān 1 on another verse suggesting angels (6:61), the author deducing the presence of angels with a reference to *ḥadīth* literature. He explains that there are different categories of guardian angels, guardians of actions, and guardians of the night or of the day. These angels protect the person against death as long as his time has not come.⁴ Similarly Baqlī identifies guardian angels in (6:61),⁵ while in the verse (13:11) elicit from him a purely mystical commentary without the mention of any angels: to him guardians are then “the eyes of His kindnesses” (*‘uyūn al-tāfihi*), or according to an unknown report, “Who is guarded by the causes is guarded by the Maker of causes, and His Command, as the

¹ Tustarī, 100.

² God is commanding the protection of humans from the existence of other things that also sprang out of His will, and this denotes the wider meaning of the word “*amr*” in Arabic. This word, translated as “command” throughout this chapter for clarity purposes, may be translated in several manners (such as “divine arrangement”, “will”, “doomsday”, “decree”), as its meaning is quite wide and might differ slightly according to each theological school. It is generally seen as part of God’s creative act, the cause of existence of things, for which the word “command” seems the clearest, keeping in mind that the Arabic word might have a wider semantic field. See Schwarb, “Amr (theology)”, E.I.³

³

“يُحفظونهم بأمر الله من أمر الله، وذلك أن الله - سبحانه - وكل لكل واحد من الخلق ملائكة يدفعون عنهم البلاء إذا ناموا وغفلوا، أو إذا انتبهوا وقاموا ومشوا... وفي جامع أحوالهم.”

Qushayrī, vol 2, 218.

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

⁴ Ibn Barraĵān 1, vol 2, 222-225.

⁵ Baqlī, vol 1, 371.

religious scholars saw only the cause, while the mystical knowers saw the Maker of causes.”¹

Qushayrī on (82:10-12) identifies the “guardians” (*ḥāfiẓīn*) of these verses as angels writing the deeds of humans, for whom the sight of angels is meant as a source of fright² (in this case, the ultimate function will be seen in 2.2.9). We will see that the angels as a source of fear is a recurrent motif, usually indicating the function of reminding believers that they are under constant watch, should they want to disobey or act as hypocrites (see 2.2.3), or inspiring divine awe.

On (72:25-28), Qushayrī sees angels guarding the “revelation” (*wahī*) from the pre-islamic priests (*al-kahana*) and the “satans” (*al-shayāṭīn*), so that these do not add or impair the messages they bear (this comment comes completing a story given by Qushayrī on (72:1), see 2.2.8)³. In these verses, Ibn Barraĵān 1 interprets the two guards (*raṣad*) around the Messenger as angels,⁴ while Baqlī gives a mystical interpretation only.⁵ Overall, the role of guardian is well established and appear numerous times throughout the commentaries, adding some details to the quranic presentation of this role.⁶

Angelic prayers and general help:

In chapter 1, we have seen that angels can intercede on behalf of humans, albeit only with God’s permission, and the commentaries usually paraphrase this idea. We

¹ “*al-mahfūz bi-l-asbāb mahfūz bi-l-musabbib, wa-amruhu, fa-l-‘ulamā’ ra’ū al-sabab, wa-l-‘arīfūn ra’ū al-musabbib,*” Baqlī, vol 2, 224.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 697. Ibn Barraĵān 1 identifies angels there as well by quoting a *ḥadīth* (Ibn Barraĵān 1, vol 5, 457).

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 640.

⁴ Ibn Barraĵān 1, vol 5, 398.

⁵ Baqlī, vol 3, 450-460.

⁶ On guardians angels in *ḥadīth*, echoing the angels seen here, see Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 71-75.

also found it in *ḥadīth* literature, which places them in an ambiguous relationship with humans comparable to that of Saints in Christianity:¹ being prayed for might make humans look superior, but the needing of prayer also underlines the difficulties of the human condition.

On (97:4), Tustarī sees these angels protecting the mystical knowers' states and those preserving God's ordinances.² Sulamī adds that angels descend to bring ease (*istirwāḥ*) to the "hearts of the sincere" (*qulūb al-ṣādiqīn*),³ where Ibn Barrajān 1 sees angels saluting believers and protecting them from any harm during this particular night of the year where satans are especially active.⁴

On (3:124-125), verses about the angels descending to help the believers, Qushayrī reminds the reader that if the *ḥadīth* associated to this victory gives the credit to the angel's descent (*inzāl al-malak*), ultimately everything is in the hand of the King (*bi-yad al-malik*), that is, God.⁵ This idea is presented even more strongly in his comment on (8:9), "the accomplishment is from the King" (*al-injāz min al-malik*), and quoting (3:126) "there is no victory save from God", reinforcing the monotheist credo, as if the reader's attention could be distracted by the angelic characters. Ibn Barrajān 1 does not give any direct commentary on these verses (3:124-125) to which he associates (8:9), except for a discussion about the exact number of angels sent, although he elaborates longer on this verse later.⁶ On (8:12), Ibn Barrajān 1 continues this discussion by adjoining a section on the participation of the angels in the battle of Badr, discussing

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 94-95.

² Tustarī, 297.

³ Sulamī, vol 2, 409.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 525.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 1, 274.

⁶ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 1, 587.

their numbers once again¹ and grammatical points, reminding the readers that they were as much fighting done on the part of the angels as there was on the parts of humans participants. He also reminds the reader than the “ancients” (*al-awā`il*) fought alongside “satans” (*shayāṭīn*) in the same way, but that “they cannot bear the the presence of angels, such as the darkness does not hold with the presence of light”. He ends this section with mentioning the presence of “jinn believers who also gave their fealty to the human believers.”² This help echoes the angelic help,³ and it is an interesting illustration of the cosmological shift seen in Chapter 1: angels become the companions of choice for the muslim, and the jinn are not superior to humans anymore, but on par with them (if not lower, as the last example shows).

On (33:43), Qushayrī mentions that the angels’ prayers for humanity is a supplication (*du`ā`*) to God for the benefit of humanity, of two kinds: forgiveness for the disobedient (*bi-l-ghufrān li-l-`āṣī*) and beneficence for the obedient (*bi-l-iḥsān li-l-muṭī`*); it can also be for intercession (*al-shafā`a*).⁴ On this same verse (33:43), Baqlī seconds the islamic credo that angels ask for forgiveness on behalf of humans by God’s will, and relates from the “master” (*al-ustādh*, meaning al-Qushayrī) that God’s prayer means mercy (*rahma*) and the angels’ prayers mean intercession (*shafā`a*).⁵

¹ He concludes that there were 9000 angels both here in Ibn Barraḡān 1 and in his second commentary (Ibn Barraḡān 2, 358).

² Ibn Barraḡān 1, vol 2, 445-446.

³ For example on (9:26), a verse understood in the context of battle, the “hosts that you saw not” are identified as helping angels in Baqlī (Baqlī, vol 2, 10).

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, p.165. We find angels asking forgiveness for the disobedient and helping those who prevent themselves from committing evil acts elsewhere, such as in the commentary on (40:7-9), Qushayrī, vol 3, 297, discussed in 2.2.4.

⁵ Baqlī, vol 3, 144-145. On (33:56) the same idea is explained, with an additional report given by Baqlī attributed to al-Sulamī according to which praying on the prophet, as God and the angels do in this verse, means bringing mercy upon oneself, see Baqlī, vol 3, 147-148.

On (51:4), Qushayrī briefly identifies angels within a longer esoteric commentary, adding that they come and offer help in various manners, and ask different groups of people about “their states” (*aḥwālihim*).¹

On (42:5), Ibn Barrajān 1 summarises the main role of the angels’ intercession:

*“God has willed that each thing have angels from among his servants attached to it and interceding for its existence, and for maintaining what He wants to be maintained, and suppressing what He wants to be suppressed, and He - Exalted and Praised He be - has obligated the angels of the heavens to the intercession for those on earth, asking forgiveness on their behalf. To this He answers, out of His kindness and generosity, and without which the earth would not hold together, however He willed it to hold so they [the angels] ask forgiveness for the people of the earth.”*²

These commentaries seem to veer towards a generalisation of the role of intercession to all beings at all times, stressing an overarching benevolence of God allowing the angels to intercede in a near-systematic manner, which goes beyond what the quranic text might suggest at first sight of a selective permission. The idea of angels attached to all created things, as tiny as a blade of grass, is a common motif in writings of non-islamic traditions as well as islamic.³

Angels against humanity:

On (69:30-32), Tustarī understands an order given to apparently powerful angels:

“As soon as He says that, a hundred thousand angels will rush towards him. If just one of these angels took in the grasp of the world and the

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 459.

²

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

Ibn Barrajān., vol 5, 60.

The same idea of angels obligated by God to the prayers on humanity and to intercession on their behalf is repeated in Ibn Barrajān 2 in the comment of (40:7) (Ibn Barrajān 2, 431).

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

mountains and seas it contains, he would be strong enough for that. [One of the angels] will take hold of his neck with his hands, and then he will enter Hellfire.”¹

On (79:1-5), Qushayrī understands angels “tearing the souls of the miscreants from their bodies”, “forcing them out.”² Similarly on (6:93) Ibn Barrajān 1 comments that even if a disbeliever dies of a painless death, angels will come tormenting him: “it is prescribed to the angels to take his despicable soul with unpleasantness, and beat [him] and exert pressure upon him in the process.”³ Later on (15:8) Ibn Barrajān 1 adds an interesting nuance by identifying the “truth” (*ḥaqq*) brought by the angels as meaning “death” (*al-mawt*) or “torment” (*al-‘adhāb*), which can be a mercy (*raḥma*).⁴

However on many verses about angels coming to torment or take the disbelievers’ souls, such as (8:12) and (8:50) and (74:31), the commentaries remain short, discussing a linguistic point or paraphrasing the verse.⁵ This frightening aspect of angels after death seems to be more pronounced in non-mystical Sunni reading of the eschatological role of angels.⁶

Moreover, on Ibn Barrajān 2, the angels in (6:93) make a distinction between the external and the inner side of the people they come to collect their souls from: disbelievers who “appear in a light state of unrest” while their inner self (*bāṭin*) is indeed at fault, and the believers who might “appear in a pronounced state of unrest”

¹ Tustarī, 245. Ibn Barrajān 1 similarly understands this verse as God’s direct orders given to angels (Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 376.)

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 681.

³

“يكلّف هو إخراج نفسه الخبيثة بإزعاج من الملائكة، وضرب وتشديد عليه في ذلك.”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 2, 263.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 256-257.

⁵ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 2, 443 and 460; vol 5, 404-405.

⁶ Sebastian Günther, “‘As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Qur’ān 6:93), The Work of Heavenly Agents According to Muslim Eschatology,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 307-346.

while their inner self is “proper” (*muqtaḍā*).¹ This might be a way of reminding the reader that angels, beings of the Unseen, are not fooled by appearances, enjoining the believers in taking care of their inner spiritual side.

On another kind of “non-help”, Ibn Barraḡān 1 in his discussion of angelic help on (8:12) seen previously, ends it with a possible case where defeat of the muslims is preferable, in which case the angels are partly responsible on God’s order: “And the angels, in such a battle, grasp their hands preventing them from fighting and winning.”² This illustrates a reversal of common understanding of what is seen as negative, going beyond the acceptance of fate or the idea that God does as He wills: here a negative situation is explained as being potentially positive.

Other roles:

Summarising the previous roles, and hinting at innumerable others, Qushayrī identifies angels on (19:64) as the subject of those who descend on the command of God:

“Indeed the angels - peace upon them - always descend with the permission of the Truth, Exalted He be, and some of them descend to assist the oppressed, others to help the troubled, others to destroy the deniers, others to support the believers, and others for an endless number of matters for all people.”³

¹ “*zāhir ‘alazihi khafīf*,” “*zāhir ‘alazihi tabdū ‘alayhi al-shidda*,” Ibn Barraḡān 2, 309. The root ‘-L-Z seems to be quite uncommon, I found it only in the *Lisān al-‘arab* and Steingass dictionaries.

² Ibn Barraḡān 1, vol 2, 446.

³

“إن الملائكة - عليهم السلام - أبدا ينزلون بإذنه الحق تعالى، فبعضهم بإنجاد المظلومين، وبعضهم بإغاثة المهوفين، وبعضهم بتدمير الجاحدين، وبعضهم بنصرة المؤمنين، وبعضهم إلى ما لا يحصى من أمور الناس أجمعين.”
Qushayrī, vol 2, 436.

Among these diverse role we find the “driver” (*sā’iq*) and “witness” (*shahīd*) in (50:21) as interpreted by Tustarī as the recording angels (*kataba*) testifying for or against the dead.¹

This was one of many examples where angels are often mentioned around the event of death or in an apocalyptic setting, however a peculiar role is presented in the commentary of Tustarī on (90:4), mirroring the angels in care of death, angels in care of birth: Tustarī mentions the existence of an angel whose helping role is specifically dedicated to “raise up the child’s head” in the womb of his mother, and “if it was not for that it would drown in blood,” from a saying attributed to a certain Mujāhid.² This is echoed in the mention by Ibn Barrajān on the story of the annunciation to Mary in (19:17-23) of a particular category of angels that appeared in *ḥadīth* literature, “the angels of the wombs” (*malā’ikat al-arḥām*),³ one of which could have been sent instead of Gabriel.

In commenting (50:18), Tustarī interprets the “watcher” (*raqīb*) as being an angel, adding that angels have access to a person’s heart, but not his conscience: “The angels do not know the good and evil that is within a person’s conscience (*ḍamīr*) save when that person’s heart acquiesces in it [either good or evil]”.⁴ This gives an important detail on the limitations of angels’ capabilities, with two implications: it reinforces the idea of man as more knowledgeable (see 2.2.4.), and it suggests that the area where angels can operate and have an effect on men is situated at the heart level, or at least on matters

¹ Tustarī, 205. This could have been an early development of the two angels ‘of the grave’ known in islamic tradition as Nakīr and Munkar according to Wensinck, however Tustarī later names them as such (see 2.2.7).

² Tustarī, 285. The only (Ibn) Mujāhid (d. 324/936) would have been yougner then Tustarī; This is also a *ḥadīth* attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687), (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 195).

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 479. Several examples of these *ḥadīth* have been listed later by al-Suyūfī, see Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 194-195.

⁴ Tustarī, 204.

related to the heart. This relationship between angels and humans' hearts is further illustrated in different instances, such as by Qushayrī on (8:12) present the angels as “whispering thoughts to men in their hearts,” whether for strengthening believers or frightening the disbelievers.¹ Another widely used mystical term, “innermost secret” (*sirr*),² close to the mystical concept of “heart” (*qalb*) is also found in relationship to the angels, such as in the commentary of Ibn Barrajān 1 on the verses (50:17-18) as being angels who “know the innermost secret of certainty of the servant” (*ya lamān sirr yaqīn al-abd*).³

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

*“When the servant is seated, one (angel) is on his right writing down his good deeds, and one (angel) on his left writing down his bad deeds; if one stands up, one (angel) is standing at his head and one at his feet; if one sets walking, then one (angel) walks in front of him and one behind him”.*⁴

In the same comment, Qushayrī further offers different options, addressing himself to the reader: it might be two angels during the night, and two different ones at night; or one who is inscribing bad deeds one day might be the one inscribing good deeds the next day so that the angel can also witness this; or the ones inscribing bad

¹ Qushayrī, vol 1, 607.

² This word may cover two different notions in Islamic mysticism: a secret in the sense of a teaching, reality, or doctrinal point, or a second level of reality, or secret in the sense of “subtle organ,” one of the layers of the “heart,” inner consciousness. See Amir-Moezzi, “Sirr,” E.I.²

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 180.

⁴

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

Qushayrī, vol 3, 450-451. The angel writing good deeds on the right and the angel writing bad deeds on the left is a motif also found in Jewish apocrypha (Hamidović, “Les écrits apocryphes juifs et le coran,” 519).

deeds are often changed so that they do not know too many of those bad deeds (*li- 'alā yu 'lam min masāwīka illā al-qalīlun minhā*) - the editor of the *tafsīr* notes in a footnote that it is as if the Sufi commentator keeps an hopeful attitude towards the disobedient (*al- 'uṣāṭ*), which might be an attempt, attributed thus to Qushayrī, to counter the fear that angels induce at other times.

3.2.2. *The Narrative Function and its Roles in the 'Non-Angel Verses.'*

Tustarī mentions angels praying over humans by quoting different *ḥadīth* on (2:157),¹ and on (4:41) he gives an interesting commentary with surprising details on the general help and assistance given by the angels to humans, mentioning an angel verse:

“God, exalted is He, has placed 360 angels in the service of each Muslim servant in accordance with the number of his veins. When he wants to do something good they assist him in that, but if he wants to do something bad they chide him about it. If he acts upon any of those [intentions] they record that action for him until the Day of Judgement, when they show it to him, and apprehend him for it. Then when he comes before God, Exalted is He, they will bear witness for him about the faithfulness of his obedience, and [against him] for the sins he committed. God said, Exalted is He, And every soul will come accompanied by a driver and a witness (50:21).”²

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

“Every believing servant who has renounced this world, [will find that] God has placed in charge of him an angel, who will plant in his heart all kinds of wisdom (ḥikam), just as the people of this world plant different kinds of trees in their gardens.”³

¹ Tustarī, 23-24.

² Tustarī, 54.

³ Tustarī, 279.

Continuing in illustrated examples of angels' actions, on the verse (22:27) on pilgrimage, Tustarī mentions some servants of God who “ride on conveyances of gold covered with silk and drawn by angels.”¹ On (89:14), Tustarī mentions a “patrol (*raṣad*) of angels with hooks (*kalālīb*) and pikes (*ḥasak*) on the Traverse of Hell (*jisr jahannam*),” who will question people concerning the religious obligations (*farā'id*).² However for the obedient kind of people, (95:6), Tustarī mention assisting angels making up for human frailties by recording the deeds of men “when they become weak and old”, so that their good deeds might still be rewarded, “even though they are too weak to perform them”.³

In the hopeful attitude shown earlier, Qushayrī on (40:64) mentions angels writing down bad deeds (*qabīḥ mā irtakabtum*), with the possibility that God erases this and replaces it with good ones (*ḥasanāt*),⁴ and similarly on (41:18) Qushayrī sees angels helping those who fall on the “right path” (*al-ṣirāt*) to help them back on it.⁵

However on (15:47), Qushayrī presents a particular case where angels' help is not needed, that is for the purification of the disobedient hearts. This is by God's design, because “*had He delegated the purification of their hearts to the angels, their faults would have become known, so He took care of this Himself out of gentleness for them.*”⁶ This implies an image of chattering angels incapable of keeping secrets, as if set to an automatic messenger function: an information given to them equals its bringing into light for all creation to see, so that if God wishes any information to be kept secret, out

¹ Tustarī, 132.

² Tustarī, 283.

³ Tustarī, 295.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, 314.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 3, 324.

⁶

“ولو وكل تأثير قلوبهم إلى الملائكة لاشتهرت عيوبهم، فتولّى ذلك بنفسه رفقاً بهم.”

Qushayrī, vol 2, 273.

of compassion, He has to take care of it Himself. Qushayrī presents the same line of thinking in his commentary of (37:22-24) which are verses about people brought to Hell, where he elaborates on “the people interrogated by the angel, and the people interrogated by the King.”¹ The deeds of the last group are not to be made known, because God has compassion over them (*yarḥamuhum Allāh fa-lā yafḍaḥuhum*) while the deeds of the first group, interrogated by the angels, are appropriate for exposure (*taṣluḥu li-l-kashf*).²

Regarding the moment of death, on (20:44), Qushayrī sees in this verse the possible suggestion of the “two angels” (*al-malakayn*) interrogating the believers in their grave (*fī al-qubūr*), which are possibly another possible hint to Nakīr and Munkar.³ On (22:31), Qushayrī mentions the existence of “angels of torment” (*malā’ikat al-’adhāb*) in the context of the state of those who associate God with something else,⁴ and these angels of torment are mentioned again in the comment of Qushayrī on (75:22-29), along with “the angels of compassion” (*malā’ikat al-raḥma*), who are among the angels driving the souls to God for Him to decide whether to send them to Paradise or to Hell.⁵ Burge noted that these angels of torment and compassion is a common motif in Islamic traditions about the afterlife, although there is no mention of them in the Qur’ān.⁶ More specifically on the angel of death, Baqlī on (6:59) presents a report attributed to Abū

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 230. The “*malik*” mentioned in this paragraph might remind the reader of the keeper of Hell, sometimes identified as an angel when reading the Qur’ān, however the context here clearly suggests that it should be understood in the sense of “king” as a designation for “God”.

² Ibid.

³ Qushayrī, vol 2, 459.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 2, 542.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 3, 658. Paradise is described here as “*’illiyyīn*”, in reference to (83:19), and it has with different degrees (*la-hā tafāwut darajāt*), and Hell is called “*sijjīn*”, in reference to (83:4), with equally diverse degrees.

⁶ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 74.

Sa'īd al-Qurashī with the following story surrounding death of creatures (*dābba*): to all creatures are associated a “green leaf” (*waraqā khaḍrā*) suspended to the Throne, and when it dries and falls in the lap of the angel of death, the name of the person and his father’s name is inscribed onto it, so that the angel of death knows that it is time to collect this person’s soul.¹

On (23:62), Qushayrī sees in the second part of the verse, “with Us is a Book that speaks the truth” the presence of angels scribes who causes fear to those who were unaware that these angels were recording their deeds.² A similar interpretation is given for (54:53): the knowledge of angels recording everything so that people are afraid to commit faults in case they are held accountable on them.³

On (27:8), in the context of the revelation to Moses, Qushayrī mentions the presence of angels within a long comment on this episode. When Moses fell unconscious from the event, “God sent to him angels to revive him with the refreshment of intimacy,” and at another time when “he fell down stricken,” the angels are found asking to him in surprise, “Oh son of the basket, is it such as you who ask for the vision?”⁴ On this same verse, Baqlī mentions that one of the causes of Moses falling down stricken is the “angels of the heavens raising their voices” and causing the mountains to tremble;⁵ later in commenting (28:29-33), he relates a report attributed to a

¹ Baqlī, vol 1, 370.

²

Qushayrī, vol 2, 580.

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 500.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, 65.

⁵ Baqlī, vol 1, 465.

“فخَوَّقَهُم بِاطْلَاعِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ، وَكُتَابِهِمْ عَلَيْهِمْ أَعْمَالِهِمْ.”

certain al-Qāsim that identifies two particular angels in this episode, Gabriel and Michael.¹

On (3:13), Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions the verse (8:9) with the angelic help sent by God, as seen above, to which he associates (8:41), another verse that mentions unknown armies. According to his interpretation, the angels thus sent were seen (*ru'yat al-'ayn*), as a “sign for them of the will of God for support of His prophet,” although, he writes, seeing angels was contrary to custom at the time.² He tries thus to resolve the apparent contradiction within the quranic text of angels being seen at times (though usually in human form as we will see later) and the credo-related verses denying the sending of angels alongside or instead of the Prophet.

In his commentary of the 108th surah, with an unusual depiction of angels, Ibn Barrajān 1 relates the story of a repenting man (*rajul tā'ib*) after he committed a hundred murders: when death comes, it has to consider his case because of “the dispute (*takhāṣum*) of the angels about him, between the angels of compassion and the angels of torment,” after which the man is found one measure (*shibr*) closer to righteousness if such is his real intention (*niyya*).³ Similarly Ibn Barrajān 2 comments on (1:7) that “if a person’s speech agrees with the angels’ speech, then all his previous sins are forgiven.”⁴

¹ Baqlī, vol 3, 87. This al-Qāsim could be al-Qushayrī because some of the phrases of this saying are similar to that of al-Qushayrī on the same verse, however Baqlī usually refer to al-Qushayrī as “al-Ustādh,” so the identity of this reference remains unsure.

²

“آية لهم على إرادة نصره الله نبيه،” “وإن ذلك يومئذ كان خارجا عن معهود العرف.”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 1, 503.

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 553.

⁴

“فمن وافق قوله قول الملائكة غفر له ما تقدم من ذنبه.”

Ibn Barrajān 2, 95.

The dispute of angels over the souls of humans, although unusual, is found elsewhere in other religious traditions.¹

On (8:41), in commenting this verse which distributes the gains from a battle in different portions, with one fifth to the Prophet, Ibn Barraĵān 2 explains that among the recipients of this fifth portion are the angels, as the commentator seems to consider they should be rewarded for their participation in the battle mentioned in (8:9).² This points to a proximity of angels with the material dimension of the world, and although we find other such instances (see 2.2.5), this reflects the general commenting style of Ibn Barraĵān which tends to give more ‘realistically’ or ‘pragmatically’ based explanations than the other commentaries, as seen previously in his discussion of the exact number of angels sent to battle.

3.2.3. A Theological Function: Defining Aspects of the Islamic Credo in ‘Angelic Verses.’

As briefly seen in the previous section, the commentaries generally present numerous examples of the theological function. They illustrate God as ultimate cause to all things happening on earth, with angels following His orders and will, without any significant independence of action, even if they might apparently have some (as in the case of Hārūt and Mārūt).³ In this section, we will see that angels are used to reinforce

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

² Ibn Barraĵān 2, 359.

³ God as cause of everything was at the heart of intense theological and philosophical debates: whether He caused everything directly at all times or whether He delegated this to secondary causes, He remained at the origin of every event, directly or indirectly. For an overview of this debate, see Ulrich Rudolph, “Occasionalism,” in *Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), online.

and explicate basic aspects of the islamic credo over and over, implying an ongoing lively theological debate during the commentators' different time periods.

On (4:136), which defines the basic credo, Sulamī does not mention the angels *per se*, however the unknown report he presents reiterates the functions of mediation accorded to the elements of this verse, among them the angels, and how these mediators are paradoxically required for a direct connection to the divine: “O you who are called to the freeing of faith from any mediation, there is no path for you to reach this freeing except through the acceptance of the mediators and following them, believe in God and His messengers.”¹ On this same verse, Ibn Barrajan 1 explains that “all the angels (...) are like one angel in the matter of the belief in them”, and so the belief in all the prophets and messengers are “as the belief in one man,”² stressing thus the unimportance of personal traits of both angels and prophets to concentrate on the ultimate object of belief, God. The author offers this interpretation again in Ibn Barrajan 2.³ As an exoteric illustration of the Oneness of God, angels and prophets are even more depersonalised than in the Qur’ān, reduced to their function of simple vessel of the divine message, orienting the believer’s understanding of the monotheistic credo.

Suggesting an ongoing religious debate, the verses (21:27-28) suggest a response to christian belief of the son of God and serving as a reaffirmation of the oneness of God, where a presence of angels is sometimes used, suggested by the “honoured

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

Sulamī, vol 1, 164. In the first clause, it seems there is either a word missing (Allāh?) after the “*ft*,” or that the “*ft*” itself should not be there. We also suppose that the second “*ghayr*” might be a typo, where “*khayr*” or “*ghāyat*” should have been, as calling for the non-freeing of faith in this context does not fit.

² Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 2, 133.

³ Ibn Barrajan 2, 117.

servants” (*ibād mukramūn*), not preceding God in thought or action. Sulamī presents there different reports interpreting these servants as Prophets and different creatures, however he himself identifies them as angels.¹ Similarly, Qushayrī paraphrases the verse (4:172) on the Messiah and the “angels brought nigh” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn*) not disdaining being in the service of God, by explaining that mentioning the angels here does not mean that they are superior to the Messiah, but rather a way to address them according to their beliefs, thus reminding readers that this is not the case in the islamic cosmology.² This is usually presented as such, although on this same verse (4:172) and contrary to the general impression given by the commentaries in the next section, angels are defined by Baqlī as better than Jesus, benefitting from a distinction over him.³

On (2:285), Qushayrī elaborates briefly on this credo verse with an idea of a difference in modalities of belief between the Prophet and that of the rest of the believers: “It is said that the Creation believed through mediators (*waṣā’it*) while Muḥammad believed without mediators.”⁴ This idea is repeated in the comment on (3:124-125), and echoes a parallel with what was previously seen: whenever angels help, the credit ultimately goes to God.⁵ It also hints at the last function listed in this chapter: from the exoteric point of view angels are mediators, while on the esoteric side the direct connection to the divine does not require their presence.

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 5.

²

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

Qushayrī, vol 1, 393.

³

“لأنهم أفضل من عيسى،” “تخصيص الملائكة على عيسى.”

Baqlī, vol 1, 291.

⁴ “wa-yuqāl āmana al-khalq bi-l-wasā’it wa-āmana Muḥammad bi-ghayri wasā’it,” Qushayrī, vol 1, 215.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 1, 274-275.

In the comment on (3:18), Qushayrī explains that the witnessing of God’s unity by the angels is not useful to God per se, but on the contrary, this act of witnessing is for God to make them happy (*as ‘ada-hum*) and guide them to the knowledge (*ma ‘rifa*) of his Oneness.¹ This appears as a way to express the unity of God as sufficient in itself, and no acknowledgement of it by any creature, even angelic ones, is really needed for this reality to exist. This idea of God’s independence from angels, not needing them for anything is throughout the different commentaries, especially in the comments of the creation of Adam (see 2.2.4).

On (3:80), Qushayrī interprets the forbidding of taking angels and prophets as lords as being contrary to the credo of the hierarchy in creation, a verse explaining the “limitations of humanity” (*ḥadd al-bashariyya*) in regard to the “truth of the lordship” (*ḥaqq al-rubūbiyya*), further questioning the precedence of forms over their cause: “*Would he command you to study the forms, and attribute the events to the representations, after the lights of the Oneness appeared in your inner self, and the suns of Uniqueness emerged in your hearts?*”² Similarly Baqlī comments on this verse that not everything should be equated to God, not to stand the unity of God and the sacrality of his degrees.³ This insistence on reaffirming the basic credo in different ways suggests that the cosmological re-ordering was a permanent process in the different commentators’ times: did people tend to give an independent will to the angels, seeking from them what pre-islamic people might have been seeking from the jinn? Did the angels’ intercessor role turned into some form of worship?

¹ Qushayrī, vol 1, 226.

²

أيأمركم بمطالعة الأشكال، ونسبة الحدثان إلى الأمثال، بعد أن لاحت في أسراركم أنوار التوحيد، وطالعت في قلوبكم شمس التفريد.”

Qushayrī, vol 1, 253-254.

³ “*waḥdāniyyat Allāh wa-quḍs ṭabaqātihi,*” Baqlī, vol 1, 161.

Following this need for clarification in this aspect of the credo, Qushayrī gives on (16:49) a nuance in that the bowing of all creatures including angels is one of witnessing (*shahāda*), and not one of worshipping (*ibāda*),¹ possibly as another way to avoid giving an example of angels associating God to something else. On (7:11) and (7:20), Ibn Barrajān 1 also tries to avoid reading this scene as associationism: he explains that the bowing of angels to Adam is like the bowing of believers behind the imam, by quoting a *ḥadīth* on the difference between praying for someone else and praying for oneself, and drawing a parallel with the creation of Adam:

*“As for Adam, His Lord shaped him and breathed into him of His Spirit, and inspired him His devotion and his bowing to Him, and when he bowed down to Him out of devotion, the angels in their entirety bowed down out of his bowing to God Lord of the Worlds, as He commanded them to”.*²

A further trace of this religious debate is found in (40:49-50): Qushayrī identifies the keepers of Hell (*khazanat jahannam*) as angels, seeing in these verses a trace of “foreign indications” (*amārāt al-ajnabiyya*) from non-islamic belief systems that include intercession, so “God has taken away compassion from the heart of the angels [of Hell] so that they do not intercede on their behalf.”³

On the visibility of angels, the very short commentaries of Qushayrī on (6:8-9) compares the sending of a visible angel accompanying the prophet to giving a lamp to the blind: an external proof does not precede an internal conviction,⁴ although revealing

¹ Qushayrī, vol 2, 300.

²

“وَأَدَمَ إِنَّمَا سَوَّاهُ رَبُّهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ. وَأَلْهَمَهُ عِبَادَتَهُ وَسُجُودَهُ إِلَيْهِ، وَلَمَّا سَجَدَ لِرَبِّهِ تَعَبَّدًا لَهُ سَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ لِسُجُودِهِ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ كَمَا أَمَرَهُمْ.”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 2, 302.

³

“إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَنْزِعُ الرَّحْمَةَ مِنْ قُلُوبِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ لِنَلَّا يَسْتَشْفَعُونَ لَهُمْ.”

Qushayrī, vol 3, 309.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 1, 462.

angels remains in God’s power.¹ Qushayrī on (15:7-8) presents a related idea, according to which if God “shows angels to the sight of men, this is as insight, because mystical knowledge becomes then necessary.” He then specifically equates the seeing of angels to the access to mystical knowledge, which cannot be external or exoteric.² We find in the same comment a trace of the idea of angels becoming visible to men only when their mission is to destroy them: “It was known that the time had not come for their destruction; for he [Muḥammad] knew that deep in themselves some would believe in God, Exalted He be, again.”³ We will find this idea of frightening angels repeated in 2.2.5 with the story of Abraham’s guests, however on (16:33) Qushayrī offers an alternative explanation, assuming that disbelievers then did not know anything about angels: “The people were waiting for the coming of the angel because they did not know about it and they did not believe in its existence.”⁴ On this matter, Ibn Barraḡān 1 comments on (17:95) that the need for a human messenger has to do with the clarity of the message, a clarity brought only by human specificities, implying that the ‘unseen’ character of angels induces incomprehension :

*“If the Messenger to humanity had been an angel or something else that is not human, the clarity of the message would not have been what it was, because it is clarified by his words and his actions, and most of the states of humanity are not found in angels: such as eating and drinking, defecating, sexual relationship and its consequences, and other such states and necessities”.*⁵

¹ Qushayrī, vol 2, 632.

² Incidentally, both words can be translated as “zāhirī” in Arabic.

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

Qushayrī, vol 2, 264.

³ Ibid. However angels may still become visible, as Qushayrī reminds us in the commentary of (25:22), vol 2, 632.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 2, 296. This is one example of a commentator linking the presence of angels with the apparition of (islamic) monotheism, disregarding the fact that they could have been known in other traditions.

⁵

On (11:31), Qushayrī sees in this verse a way for Muḥammad to say that he is accomplishing only what he was told to do and nothing more (*lā azīd ‘ammā umirtu*), and claiming to be an angel would be considered “more.”¹ This is an important part of the islamic credo, where Muḥammad on his strict human status, bringing the Qur’ān. In his comment on (22:75), a verse on God selecting angels and humans as messengers, Qushayrī also explains that being an angel should not be an argument in his favour, as “the virtue goes to the One who sends, and not to a particularity of the constitution of the one who is sent.”²

Qushayrī interprets the verse (89:22) as a metaphor, in which angels appear as ‘metaphorical proxies’, as if God could not appear literally: “‘Your Lord came’, that is, the angels on His command”, and in the same way Qushayrī further explains on this verse that “He does an action and calls it “coming.”³ He insists thus on an allegorical approach of the quranic words.

On (17:95), Baqlī comments on the verse that illustrate best one detail of the islamic credo: messengers sent correspond in kind to their communities (men sent to humanity, not angels), giving one of his rare attempts at describing the angels. He explains that sending angels in their “angelic form” (*al-hay’a al-malakiyya*) on Earth

“لو كان الرسول إلى البشر ملكا أو غيره مما ليس ببشر ما بلغ من [التبيين ما بلغه البشرى] فإنه يبين بقوله وبفعله وأكثر أحوال البشر ليست للملك، [من] أكل الطعام وشرب الشراب وإخراجه والنكاح ولواحقه، إلى غير ذلك من أحواله وضرورته.”

Ibn Barraḡān 1, vol 3, 421.

Qushayrī on (17:95) presents a concise paraphrase of this concept : “Kind (*jins*) is better suited to kind, and the form (*shakl*) surest to form.” (Qushayrī, vol 2, 370).

¹ Qushayrī, vol 2, 133.

²

“الفضية بحق المرسل، لا لخصوصية في الحلقة في المرسل.”

Qushayrī, vol 2, 563.

³ “*jā’ a rabbuka, ay al-malā’ika bi-amrihi*,” “*wa-yuqāl: yaf’alu fī ‘lan wa-yusammīhu mujī’an*,” Qushayrī, vol 3, 727.

would not have been possible, since they are “pure souls” (*kawnuhum nufūsan mujarrada*), hence their apparition in human form when need be, mentioning the verse (6:9) and how disbelievers would not recognise an angel if they saw one.¹ As for the timing of the sending of messengers, Ibn Barrajān 2 on (16:1-2) explains that revelation arrives in due time, and that messengers should not be pressed.²

3.2.4. The Theological Function in the ‘Non-Angel Verses:’

On (16:8), Tustarī gives an example to illustrate this verse which states that “He [God] creates that which you know not:” according to a *ḥadīth* related by Ibn ‘Abbās, God created an earth made from white pearl, on which there is a mountain of red ruby, and on this mountain an angel filling all the space, with “660,000 heads, each head having 660,000 mouths and each mouth having 660,000 tongues, and each of these tongues praising God, Exalted is He, 660,000 times a day.” And despite these incredible numbers, the angel will say, at the Day of Resurrection, that his worship was not enough. This comment seems to illustrate the angelic function of good religious praxis (as in 2.2.3), but this verse is also then taken by Tustarī to reinforce the unfathomable power of God, stated by the verse, explaining the “inner meaning of these words” which is that the human intellect is limited.³

Tustarī later illustrates the verse (29:1-2), in which people say that they believe while not being put to the test, by a conversation between God and the angels: angels complain that disbelievers receive good things of the world while believers are afflicted,

¹ Baqlī, vol 2, 384. See 2.2.9 for his more mystical commentaries on this aspect of the credo.

² Ibn Barrajān 2, 446.

³ Tustarī, 107. Burge has written on this aspect where angels are described with superlative qualities which goal seems to give a picture that is incomprehensible, hard to imagine, possibly with a function of highlighting the greatness of God (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 60-64).

and in response God let the angels see the reward of both disbelievers (the goods of the world is not a blessing), and believers (afflictions do not harm them).¹ This serves as an illustration to the reader of the idea behind what might appear as unfair in this world has a meaning and an ultimate justice given by God, a justice that not even angels are aware of. Another conversation is related in (33:23), a verse describing different types of believers: Sulamī gives a report attributed to ‘Umar al-Makkī, which is a conversation between God and the angels who are following orders to add more and more afflictions on the believers, until the angels say that there is no more left, after which God asks them to write (*uktubūhu*) the names of those who have not changed their ways and faith despite the afflictions sent to them.²

On (36:11), Tustarī illustrates the act of remembrance (*dhikr*) by a conversation between John the Baptist and Jesus, John the Baptist saying: “[My heart] is attached to the Throne, and if my heart were to find rest with the angel Gabriel for just a blinking of the eye, I would consider myself as not having known God, Mighty and Majestic is He.”³ This again illustrates the transcendental and direct relationship preferred by the islamic credo between believers and God, were not even such as great intermediary as Gabriel should be deemed acceptable. In another conversation, it is God’s mercy that is illustrated on (39:53), for which Tustarī relates a conversation between Gabriel and Abraham, the former informing the latter that God’s pardon of a misdeed means turning it into a good deed.⁴

On a more restricted creedal level, we find a report given by Sulamī on (24:35) that draws a parallel between four archangels and the four first “the well-guided”

¹ Tustarī, 149.

² Sulamī, vol 2, 144.

³ Tustarī, 163.

⁴ Tustarī, 173.

Caliphs (see also 2.2.7) which shows a use of angels for legitimising purposes to Sunni Islam.¹

On (17:57), Qushayrī interprets this verse as hinting at the cult of Jesus, ‘Uzayr and the angels, although this does not benefit nor harm, Qushayrī further stressing that asking these to be mediators for their prayers to God does not lead to anything, because “how can they relieve you from the affliction, while they themselves plead with God and fear him in the states of their selves?”.² On the matter of Jesus and ‘Uzayr, Qushayrī further comments on (39:4), replying to those claiming that these are the sons of God, that had God willed to take a son, he would have taken an angel, as they are not in need of food, water, and other such needs of creation.³ We find similar elaborations on the adoration of angels, Jesus, ‘Uzayr and other deities or defied characters in Ibn Barrajān 1 within the commentary of the 30th surah,⁴ suggesting a recurring and lasting theological debate over the first centuries, both in Islamic Spain (in the case of Ibn Barrajān) and the Islamic east (in the case of Qushayrī).

Commenting (20:134), Qushayrī pursues the theme of the disbelievers asking proofs to believe, such as the sending of an angel, underlying the futility of trying to find them a proof: they did not accept the messengers and so asked for angels, however, had they been indeed sent angels, they would have asked for the contrary, their arguments never-ending.⁵

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 46-52. This reference also serves the Cosmological function, and the increase of named angels.

²

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

Qushayrī, vol 2, 354.

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 268.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 340.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 2, 490. Further down, Qushayrī mentions the verse (21:27) as an answer to these demands: God sent humans with the revelation (*waḥī*) (Qushayrī, vol 2, 493).

In a section within the commentary of the 11th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 explains that there are two types of revelation: “a revelation revealed to the messenger brought by the angel with the command (*amr*),” and one sent “to the innermost secret (*sirr*) of the heart (*qalb*) of the messenger.”¹ One type of communication is external, while the other associates angels with the ‘heart’ and the ‘innermost secret’ as seen in the first section.

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

*“Except the angels - peace upon them - because they do not have a will or nature that can differ from God’s and not be in agreement with him, but on the contrary they are shaped on what He loves from them and what agrees with Him, and this is the difference between the devotion of those in charge [humanity] and the devotion of angels”.*²

This highly instrumental description of angels is also mentioned in Ibn Barrajān 2, within the commentary of the 34th surah, where he alludes to pre-islamic beliefs in order to reasserts the fact that nothing existed before God, and that “He does not use any of his creation the way he uses the angels”.³

Regarding the debate with pre-islamic systems, Ibn Barrajān 1 in commenting (34:12) mentions angels, alongside prophets and the [pre-islamic people]’s virtuous (*ṣāliḥīn*) as objects of depiction and representations. These representations, for which he uses the word usually translated nowadays as “statue” (*timthāl*) - word used in this

¹ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 8.

²

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

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 74-75.

³

“ولا معه من يستعمله كما يستعمل الملائكة من خليقته.”

Ibn Barrajān 2, 573.

verse - seems to mean for him something closer to a general representation, in an almost existentialist-like definition: “This is a name for everything that is fashioned as something it is not.”¹ Ibn Barrajān 1 affirms that this is forbidden (*maḥẓūr*) both in islam and in these previous religions, suggesting here another ongoing theological debate.

Within the comment of the 39th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions (43:59-60), offering one of many instances of angels illustrating God’s power over all things: angels responsible for death, angels breathing the Spirit in the wombs and springing life from it by God’s permission, and no action, growth, death, or life happening without God, having angels dedicated to this.”²

Regarding the credo surrounding angels, after the quranic denial of them being female, a curious mention of angels is done by Ibn Barrajān 2 in commenting (24:36-37), a mention that apparently insists on a gender to angels, which is unusual in commentaries: “and the men-angels and all things glorify Him, praise Him, and sanctify Him” (*wa-l-rijāl al-malā’ika wa-kullu shay’ yusabbiḥuhu wa-yaḥmuduhu wa-yuqaddisuhu*). However a more likely explanation would be that “and” (*wa-*) is missing between both words, as it would sound more grammatically correct and more in line with the rest of the text that “men, angels, and all things glorify Him”, unless it is a way to refer to the “angelic-like men” (seen in later in this chapter) which would also correspond to the type of pious men mentioned in the verse.³ One of these seems to be correct in light of an even more interesting grammatical construct he later makes, in

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Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 418.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 538.

³ Ibn Barrajān 2, 523.

“وهو اسم لكل شيء مصور على صورة غيره.”

commenting on the 112th surah: angels are ordered by God to spread all over creation reciting this surah, and their action is described in two particular words in Arabic, a verb and an indirect object which translates as “they take in their bosom” or “they take under their wing” (*wa-ya`khdhūn bi-aknāfihinna*).¹ Here the verb is conjugated in the plural masculine, and the possessive of the object is in plural feminine as used for females - and not the singular feminine used for inanimate objects that is otherwise mostly used for angels in these texts, in parallel to the plural masculine (this dual use of singular feminine and plural masculine is also found in the quranic text). This is one particularly interesting example of the widespread ambivalence surrounding the gender of angels, as if the gendered Arabic language was used in a way so as to render their gender neutral, by designating them alternatively in the feminine and the masculine, at the risk of reaching a point that strains the grammatically correct, such as in this example.

Furthermore, and contrary to the difference stressed by Ibn Barrajān on their physicality, Baqlī on (6:38) explains only in mystical terms that both angels and humans are similarly made, which explains their preference over the rest of the creation: “their bodies were created from the world of the Acts, and their spirits from the light of the Kingdom” (*khuliqat ajsāmuhumā min `ālam al-af`āl, wa-arwāḥuhā min nūr al-malakūt*).² Additionally, on their description, Baqlī comments on (59:6) by relating an event with the prophetic *mi`rāj* story: the Prophet saw the angels, but refrained from

¹ Ibn Barrajān 2, 895. Here is the immediate context of these two words, though there seem to miss an object after “their wing” which I infer from the context in the paragraph: “[God] spoke so the angels - peace upon them - went in all parts of the earths and the heavens, taking under their wing [the order?] and saying “God is one (...)” (*qāla fa-taṣīru al-malā`ika `alayhim al-salām fī aqṭār al-arḍīn wa-l-samāwāt wa-ya`khdhūn bi-aknāfihinna wa-yaqūlūn Allāh al-aḥad...*).

² Baqlī, vol 1, 354.

describing them.¹ This restraint in physical description is a tendency shown by Baqlī which contrasts with his propensity in using dense mystical and illustrative phrases as much as it contrasts with the physical descriptions that Ibn Barrajān seems intent on giving.

3.2.5. A Religious Praxis Function: Illustrating the Believer's Expected Actions, or Desired Actions in 'Angelic Verses:'

Angels can also be used to define and encourage good religious practices, a function under which many *ḥadīth* fall into.² Böwering has already noted that for mystics such as al-Tustarī, angels are a model of contemplative life, living on remembrance of God (*dhikr*).³ The verses (2:30-34) are usually commented on, where angels are seen as obeying God's orders, bowing to Adam. If this particular scene and its commentaries can be listed under this function, where the total obedience of angels to God can be seen as a model to man, the commentaries are more interesting in their other main function, the cosmological function of angels in relationship to man (see 3.2.7 and 3.2.8). However we can briefly mention here how the attitude of angels make Baqlī add an unattributed saying on these verses, as a lesson for his readers: "Who takes pride in his science, and takes pride in his obedience, ignorance is his homeland."⁴

On (51:24) Tustarī identifies Abraham's guests with angels, and he uses this story to show the exemplary attitude of Abraham who waited for his guests without eating,

¹ "fa-amsaka lisānahu min al-waṣf," Baqlī, vol 3, 310.

² Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 80-86; Stephen R. Burge, "Impurity/Danger!," *Islamic Law and Society* 17, no. 3-4 (2010): 320-349.

³ Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision*, 201-204.

⁴

“من استكبر بعلمه، واستكبر بطاعته مكان الجهل وطنه.”

Baqlī, vol 1, 41.

which he considers “the mark of true friendship (*khilla*)”, as is as the act of curing “another’s illness when one is sick.”¹ Verses also commented in this perspective by Qushayrī,² the angels are witnesses to such good acts, both to the other character in the narrative (Abraham), and in an educative way to the reader.

Sulamī on (3:39) does not comment on the angels directly, but gives a series of reports attributed to previous mystics around the spiritual benefits of being pious and patient, implying thus the interaction with angels as among these benefits (in the case of Zacharia in the verse), or at least a metaphorical validation of this piety.³ Similarly in the comment on (39:75), the angels are presented by Sulamī in a report attributed to [Abū ‘Alī] al-Jūzjānī (d. 4th AH/ 10th AD), comparing the acts of angelic worshipping (*ibāda*) and affirmation of incomparability (*tanzīh*) to acts the believer should be doing if he is to approach God.⁴ On (3:39) Qushayrī gives the same interpretation, by likening Zakharia in this verse to a person in need who has to wait “by a king’s door, until the king calls to him” - implying that this call comes only when the person is dutiful and constant in his service.⁵ On this verse, Baqlī gives a long string of phrases as metaphors for the *mihrāb*, such as “the garden of the lovers” (*riyāḍ al-‘āshiqīn*), detailing the benefits of such an attitude described in the verse, such as nearness (*al-qurba*) and gentleness (*al-uns*), followed by different mystical commentaries attributed to previous mystics, both unknown (introduced by “*qīla*”) and named.⁶ Elsewhere, on the theme of

¹ Tustarī, 208. The editors point out the reference to Abraham known as “friend of God” (*khalīl Allāh*), and that al-Tustarī carried this nickname himself.

² Qushayrī, vol 2, 145-146.

³ Sulamī, vol 1, 99-100.

⁴ Sulamī, vol 2, 205.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 1, 240.

⁶ Baqlī, vol 1, 147-148. Among the known ones are Ibn ‘Aḩā’ (d. 309/921-2 or 311/923-4), one of the main references of Sulamī (full name: Abū al-‘Abbās Aḩmad b. Muḩammad b. Sahl al-

good religious practice, angels are presented as part of its corollary: on (1:7), Ibn Barrajan 2 mentions a *ḥadīth* according to which angels answer “*āmīn*” after the imam ends reciting the *fātiḥa*,¹ and similarly, while reading the Qur’ān, people are surrounded by angels.²

On (35:1), Qushayrī starts his commentary with an interesting perspective on the meaning given to the number of wings of the angels. It presents an illustration of how a believer should approach His acts and think about them and what God tells him of the world and the Unseen:

“[God] made to his servants His acts known, and entrusted them with considering them, and among them [His acts] there is what we know by seeing such as the heavens and the earth and other things, and among them there is what pertains to the path of faith in them, such as the information and the transmission - and not by indication from reason - and the angels are of this sort; for we do not investigate their form or their wings, and how they can fly with three or four wings, however we know overall the perfection of His power, and the sincerity of His word.”³

This both serves as an illustration of God’s power and its reach beyond human reasoning capabilities, and the advice given by the commentator is that one should accept some things, such as the angels’ mode of locomotion, based on an act of faith and not on reasoning.

3.2.6. The Praxis Function in the ‘Non-Angel Verses:’

Adamī, see Böwering, “The Major Sources of Sulamī”) and al-Wāsiṭī (d. 320/932, full name: Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Mūsā al-Wāsiṭī).

¹ Ibn Barrajan 2, 88.

² Ibn Barrajan 2, 93.

³

“تعرف إلى العباد بأفعاله، وندبهم إلى الإعتبار بها، فمنها ما نعلم منه ذلك معاينة كالسموات والأرض وغيرها، ومنها ما سبيل الإيمان به الخير والنقل، لا بدليل العقل، والملائكة من ذلك، فلا نتحقق كيفيات صورهم وأجنحتهم، وكيف يطرون بأجنحتهم الثلاثة أو الأربعة، ولكن على الجملة نعلم كمال قدرته، وصدق كلمته.”

Qushayrī, vol 3, 190.

There are other examples of angels clearly used for making the reader understand the importance of certain religious acts: on (2:238) Tustarī compares the singling out and importance of the “middle prayer” mentioned in the verse to “the same way that Gabriel and others were singled out for mention among the host of the angels, due to a certain particularity”.¹ On this verse, Ibn Barrajān 1 defines the “middle prayer” as the morning prayer (*ṣalāt al-ṣubḥ*) and the mid-afternoon prayer (*ṣalāt al-‘aṣr*), during which both angels of the day and angels of the night are witnesses, quoting a *ḥadīth* about this.² Then through the theme of friendship, Tustarī comments on (25:28) explaining that the person whose prayers are good will get friends from everyone, and “the angels may even befriend him.”³

Tustarī gives another example involving Gabriel on (6:77), where Gabriel asks Abraham whether he needs anything, and Abraham answers “From you, no,” illustrating the ideal attitude of the believer depending solely on God for his needs,⁴ where not even an archangel could be enough.

We also find the motif of circumambulation around the Kaaba: on (22:27), Sulamī presents a long report attributed to Dhū al-Nūn (d. 245/859 or 248/862), in which we find a comparison between the Kaaba and the Throne, where angels mirror humans in their religious practice: “and the House is like the Throne of God, and the circumambulation around it is like the circumambulation of the angels around the Throne.”⁵ In the commentary on the 34th surah, Ibn Barrajān 2 takes up the mirroring of the circumambulation on believers around the Kaaba and that of the angels around the

¹ Tustarī, 35.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 1, 425.

³ Tustarī, 140.

⁴ Tustarī, 66.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 2, 21.

throne to explain how the Command circulates from God to the creation and back again in circles, and in this circular way “the Command is composed of the creation and the creation of the Command.”¹ This comparison is also used by Baqlī in his comment of (3:86), with a more poetic licence, where the Throne is the *qibla* (direction of prayer) of the angels, the Seat is that of the “drunk on the Presence” (*sukārā al-ḥaḍra*), the House Inhabited (*al-bayt al-ma‘mūr*) that of the “envoys” (*safara*), the Kaaba being the *qibla* of all people, elite and masses. He mentions then again the bowing of the angels to Adam, saying that he was then their *qibla*.²

On (17:1), the verse traditionally associated with the night journey and celestial ascension of Muḥammad, Qushayrī gives an interesting parallel of the relationship between Muḥammad and both humans and angels: “It is said that the Truth - Exalted He be - sent him [Muḥammad] so that the people of the earth learn from him the act of worship, and then He ascended him to the heaven so that the angels learn from him the etiquette of worship.”³

On (34:22-23), Ibn Barraḡān 1 reiterates the idea that no intercession is done or granted except by God’s will, with the benefits of such intercessions and the believer’s acts of worship:

*“It is evident that the opening of knowledge and gnosis are: bowing down and prayer with humility and submission, and that the opening of existence is: the intercession from the Throne bearers - peace upon them - that He entrusted with interceding for Whomsoever He wills to have with Him”*⁴

1

“وعلى ذلك يتركب الأمر بالخلق والخلق بالأمر.”

Ibn Barraḡān 2, 575.

² Baqlī, vol 1, 174.

³ Qushayrī, vol 2, 334.

⁴

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

On the 36th surah (“Yā-sīn”), Ibn Barrajān 2 lists all the benefits of reciting this surah during different situations, including at the deathbed of a muslim, which results in the coming of 10,000 angels to pray over him, intercede for him, witness him and accompany him during his funeral; or at the moment of death, so that the angel of death does not come to take his souls before “Riḍwān the keeper of paradise” (*riḍwān khāzin al-janna*) come and give him a drink. Reading this surah during the Friday prayer also makes God proud of the reader [in front of] the angels (*bāhā Allāh bihi al-malā’ika*).¹ Another example of theological discussions using angels will be seen in the next part and in 2.2.8, with the description of the Bearers of the Throne.

3.2.7. A Cosmological Function: Angels as Part of Establishing a New World-View, with New Hierarchies and Groups, in ‘Angelic Verses.’

General relationship between angels and humans:

This category can obviously include the interaction between angels and humans that we have previously seen as helpers or antagonists to humanity (in 2.2.1), however here follows examples of more general roles, hierarchies and relationships between angels and humanity within islamic cosmology, a subject that has always been an important focus of theological discussion.²

In Chapter 1, we saw that the bowing of the angels to Adam, as much as being possibly a model of obedience to God for humans (praxis function), it also helps defining a new world-view. In this new islamic cosmology man is central while the

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 427.

¹ Ibn Barrajān 2, 586.

² Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 98; Roberto Tottoli, “The Carriers of the Throne of God: Islamic Traditions Between sunni Angelology and Shi’ī Vision,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 297-299.

angels' status is ambiguous: at first glance they can be seen as inferior (bowing to Adam), while being a link between the heavens and earth (as messengers), while their fallibility is also a subject of discussion. This ambiguity and the position of different authors have been written about.¹ These Sufi commentaries also reflect their authors' own ambivalence towards the cosmological place of angels. The act of obedience of the verses (2:30-34) elicit from them additional details on the capacities and place of angels.

On these verses, Tustarī writes that what God inspires the angels to do (sanctification and glorification of God) is an action that purifies them,² curiously implying that angels might be impure. On his part, Sulamī relates different reports attributed to different mystics, among them an unknown one saying that the angels do not know how to read (*dark al-maktūbāt*),³ the others stressing other limitations. Qushayrī gives a vision of angels as infallible, given this act of pure obedience, which denotes devotion to God and not the adoration of Adam (as seen in 2.2.2).⁴ This implies the fallibility of humankind, although humans are given a special place, as God mentions their creation in the Qur'ān, on the contrary to angels, Paradise and the

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

² Tustarī, 18.

³ Sulamī, vol 1, 54-56, a characteristic which does not fit exactly with another well-known angelic role, that of scribes.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 1, 79.

Throne.¹ Ibn Barrajān 1 gives many details, such as different classes of angels, for which he uses the word “tribe” (*qabīla*): angels made of light (*nūr*), and others made of fire (*nār*), which he mentions elsewhere that they are called “jinn,”² a group called “the angels of torment” who are the ones questioning God in (2:30) out of pride.³ On another group of verses relating the same event (15:28-32), Ibn Barrajān 1 explains that: the bowing of the angels is but following the guidance of Adam who is also bowing down to God.⁴ In Ibn Barrajān 2, while keeping the same classification of angels of light and fire as in Ibn Barrajān 1, these same angels however question God in order to acquire knowledge, and not out of refusal.⁵ Ibn Barrajān 2 gives also another detail whereby the tribe of the angels of fire cause corruption on earth (*al-mufsidīn fī-l-ard*) and these are the ones asking God about the sending of who will cause corruption and the shedding of blood on Earth, questioning the divine wisdom in this choice.⁶

And finally, contrary to Qushayrī and more in line with Ibn Barrajān 2, Baqlī gives a picture of angels as being faulty, ignorant and prideful, and God having already “burned thousands of angels one by one” because of their questioning, according to a report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ (d. 309/921-2 or 311/923-4); or having “stricken them with ignorance” for the same reason, according to a report attributed to Ja‘far.⁷ Overall, Baqlī’s explanations about the creation of angels and Adam generally differ in tone

¹ Qushayrī, 74-76.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 264.

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 1, 177.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 263. The same interpretation is found in Ibn Barrajān 2, 313. This was also seen in the praxis function.

⁵ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 1, 124-125.

⁶ Ibn Barrajān 2, 125. This seems to echo the narratives on the Biblical fallen angels.

⁷

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

Baqlī, vol 1, 42. These same reports, with minor differences in their wording, can be traced back in Sulamī, vol 1, 54-55. On these two major references in Sulamī, see Böwering, “The Major Sources of Sulamī.”

from the others, by both using reports attributed to other mystics and his own opinions on the matter. On the verses (2:30-34) he also states that “Adam was created for love (*maḥabba*), and angels were created for worship,”¹ further explaining that because angels could not see God, God created Adam in his image (*ṣawwara-hu bi-ṣūratihī*) in which he put the mirror of his soul (*mar’āt rūḥi-hi*), so that God could appear to them (*tajallā lahum*), their bowing becoming thus an act of initiation. In another comment, Baqlī further relates that angels might have been punished by God for their questioning by denying them access to knowledge, or that they took pride in their service to Him, so God made them look at Adam and bow to him, to teach them that their service meant nothing to Him.²

On another verse (70:4), Tustarī presents an interpretation as its esoteric “inner meaning:” angels ascend with the deeds of men, testifying for these deeds and man’s sincerity in them; while the Spirit (*rūḥ*) is understood as being the “intuition of the self” (*dhihn al-naḥs*). These angels “cover the distance to the Throne, which measures fifty thousand years, in the blinking of an eye,” which is a faster pace than what is presented in the verse (“on a day”).³ Interestingly, Sulamī offers on this same verse one report, precisely attributed to al-Tustarī. It conveys the same idea in a shorter and albeit different manner: “This means the deeds of the children of Adam to God, Exalted is He,

¹ Baqlī, vol 1, 41.

² Ibid. God not needing angels and their worship is an idea also found in Sulamī (Sulamī, vol 1, 221). This seemingly poor opinion of Baqlī on angels is sometimes seen elsewhere, such as in his commentary of (17:14), a verse which he interprets as a station protecting God’s beloveds against the “jealous angels, jinn, and humans” (*al-aghyār min al-malā’ika wa-l-jinn wa-l-ins*), (Baqlī, vol 2, 353); It is also shared by other authors such as al-Farghānī (d. ca 700/1300) who finds eighteen blameworthy qualities of angels that are corrected by mankind’s deputyship (Murata, “The Angels,” 342).

³ Tustarī, 247. This motif of angels carrying deeds or prayers is also found in early Christian writings (Daniélou, *Angels and their Mission*, 79), with a variation of transporting remorse to the 5th heaven and humans’ praise to the 4th heaven (Johann E. Hafner, “Where Angels Dwell,” 239-240).

and the Spirit watching these deeds in this situation.”¹ Compared to the first interpretation in Tustarī, the metaphor in the second version is displaced, whereby angels become metaphors for the deeds of men, while the Spirit gains back an ontological independence.

On (12:31), Ibn Barrajān 1 comments on the notion of beauty between humans and angels and its difference in its consequences, by pointing out that if Joseph is compared to an angel for his beauty, the reason is that the beauty of the angels are not a type which would stir dissension (*fitna*), nor carnal desire (*shahwa*), such as the beauty of humans would. This extraordinary non-human beauty is what explains to the women the out-of-the-ordinary infatuation of Zulaykha of him to her guests, and their own reaction by cutting themselves with their knives.² The same interpretation is given by Baqlī on this verse, by explaining that Joseph could not provoke lust in anyone. He then makes an interesting reverse angel/human comparison between the reaction of the women when seeing Joseph with the reaction of the angels when seeing Adam, giving an overall impression that Zulaykha and the women’s reaction were not entirely seen as negative and blameworthy.³ The reaction of the women is then not interpreted as being lustful, of carnal desire, but more akin to a sense of marvel.

Lastly we can mention here on this theme something that was seen in 2.2.2, on (8:12) Qushayrī explains that angels appear in human form when they appear to muslims, so that these do not know that they are angels.⁴

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

Sulamī, vol 2, 350.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 2, 92.

³ Baqlī, vol 2, 168-169.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 1, 607. On this subject, see 2.2.5 and 2.2.9 as well. They may only see them as beautiful humans, such as the Joseph narrative suggests.

On the subject of the afterlife and the role of angels in taking souls, Tustarī comments on (41:30) with a *ḥadīth* that God - and so the angels who are responsible of this action - hesitate most in the taking of the believers' souls. If this does not add anything new to this role, it adds however a particular nuance to this action, as if the angels were not willing to frighten human's souls by doing so, by giving them "good tidings" and treating them "with honour."¹ Sulamī specifies on (13:23) that "the people of the devotions and of the degrees" (*ahl al-ṭā'āt wa-l-darajāt*) are the ones receiving the salutations from the angels.² On this same verse (13:23), Baqlī sees in angels welcoming souls into Paradise as their "brothers" (*ikhwānuhum*), at this stage where human spirits become as family with them in the "station of knowledge and affection" (*maqām al-ma'rifa wa-l-maḥabba*).³ We perceive here an equality between men's souls and angels, for those who succeeded in gaining entry to Paradise, though it apparently contradict the difference of status usually expounded upon in the scenes of the bowing to Adam.

This closeness between mystics and angels is also found in the commentary of another verse: on (13:13), Qushayrī elaborates on the effects of God's strikes on whoever he wills: if these targets the heart of the seekers (*murīdīn*) and the angels have a glimpse of their hearts, "they cry tears of blood for them" (*yabkūn daman li-ajlihim*).⁴ This gives an interesting aspect of both a special relationship between sufi-minded practitioners and angels, and a capacity of angels to be corporeally closer to humanity at times, if only inducing this closeness by metaphor.

¹ Tustarī, 178.

² Sulamī, vol 1, 343. Sulamī also identifies the keepers of Paradise in (39:73) according to a report attributed to Ibn 'Aṭā' (d. 309/922), (Sulamī, vol 2, 205).

³ Baqlī, vol 2, 238. The same idea is found later in the comment on (41:30), (Baqlī, vol 3, 248).

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 2, 221.

A last angel/mystic comparison is presented by Baqlī on (3:18), in which he enumerates the difference of testimony (*shahāda*) of angels and the people of science (*ūlū al-‘ilm*): that of the angels is out of conviction (*yaqīn*), out of vision of the Acts (*ru‘yat al-af‘āl*), and out of the vision of the Might (*ru‘yat al-‘azama*) which lead them to have fear (*khawf*), while the testimony of the people of knowledge is out of witnessing (*mushāhada*), from the vision of the Attributes (*ru‘yat al-ṣifāt*), and the vision of the Beauty (*ru‘yat al-jamāl*) which lead them to have hope (*raḡā’*).¹

Relationship to God and the angels’ place in the overall islamic cosmology:

In the role of Throne-bearers in (69:17), Tustarī writes that these unnamed and unnumbered angels consist in “8 regiments of cherubim, of unknown number”², comment accompanied by a *ḥadīth* on an immense angel among them. In Qushayrī, the Throne-bearers in (40:7) are described as being the “elite of the angels” (*khawāṣṣ al-malā’ika*), ordered to praise God and asking forgiveness for the disobedient. Following is a commentary on (40:8-9) where the “angels drawn near” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabīn*), part of the virtuous within creation, intervene by helping those who refrain from doing evil, that is, from dealing with the satans of creation.³ On these same verses (40:7-9), Baqlī identifies angels, giving a long description of them in mystical terms, and like Qushayrī he presents them as interceding on behalf of the Friends of God (*awliyā’*).⁴

¹ Baqlī, vol 1, 132.

² Tustarī, 244. Roberto Tottoli reviews the studies done on these Throne-bearers in Islamic traditions and how they are related to the Biblical vision of Ezechiel (Roberto Tottoli, “The Carriers of the Throne of God,” 274-276.)

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 297. In Ibn Barraḡān 1, only (40:7) is commented, with a short identification of angels, see vol 5, 3. In Ibn Barraḡān 2, all the angels are described as the “elite of God” (*khawāṣṣat Allāh*), Ibn Barraḡān 2, 703.

⁴ Baqlī, vol 3, 229.

For Baqlī, on (41:30), angels relaying the welcoming into Paradise come only after God saying it, letting them call being about honouring them (*tashrīf li-l-malā'ika*), and not out of necessity.¹

Sulamī on (15:28-31) seems to lend egos to angels: in a report attributed to Ja'far, angels ask questions regarding Adam for God to teach them so that their egos fade away.² Additionally Sulamī relate there previous commentaries attributed to different authors, and among these anonymous reports explaining that at the moment of the creation of Adam, angels had not witnessed God adding the soul to Adam's body (*iḍāfat al-rūḥ ilayhi*), along with "his exceptional place in creation, the uprightness of his repentance, the teaching of the names, and the supervision of the Unseen," however once they were informed of this, they praised God.³ Baqlī relates the same idea, in the form of a report of unknown origin as well,⁴ which suggests that these different limitations of angels' capacities, also seen in the previous part of this section, was a shared representation, although no traceable origin could be attributed to it.

¹ Baqlī, vol 3, 248.

²

”تتلاشى عندهم نفوسهم.”

Sulamī, vol 1, 353. A similar comment is made, through a report of unknown origin, on (38:71) (Ibid., vol 2, 190).

³

”اختصاص الخلق له، واستقامة التوبى وتعليم الأسماء والإشراف على الغيب.”

Sulamī, vol 1, 353-354. This echoes Sulamī on (2:30-34) on the ignorance of angels in the matter of writing and Tustarī on (50:18), of a person's thoughts as long as they do not reach the heart. This is another clear stress on the limits of angels' capacities in relation to both God and God's creation (man). In another scene of the bowing of Adam (38:72), an unknown report qualifies the Spirit breathed into man as "the spirit of an angel" (*rūḥ malak*) which seem to be the reason why the angels bowed once they were informed (Sulamī, vol 2, 190). Similarly, we find an echo of these angelic limitations in a commentary of Qushayrī on (18:50) where Satan refuses to bow because he only sees the physical aspect of Adam (see Qushayrī, vol 2, 401).

⁴ Baqlī, vol 2, p.288. It needs to be noted that a different report, from Abū al-Ḥussayn comes shortly after whereby angels can see the "Spirit" (*al-rūḥ*) in Adam, thus illustrating the many examples of contradicting reports mentioned in the introduction of this chapter.

On the general angelic and mystical cosmology, Sulamī presents on (37:164) a report attributed to Ja‘far whereby angels and different creatures all have a station (*maqām*) within creation, that cannot be trespassed for fear of destruction (*halak*): “to the Prophets the station of witnessing (*mushāhada*),” “to the messengers the station of seeing (‘*iyān*),” “to the angels the station of awe (*hayba*),” “to the believers the station of nearness (*dunuw*) and service (*khidma*),” “to the disobedient the station of repentance (*tawba*),” “and to the disbelievers the station of expulsion (*tard*) and curse (*la‘na*).”¹ The word “station” (*maqām*) (here used in the quranic verse) is known to have both an exoteric meaning (a given geographical place), and an esoteric meaning in religious writings (a spiritual level), the latter being frequent in Sufi commentaries. On (20:116), Qushayrī places angels “in all of the heavens,”² then on (37:1-10), an opening of a surah that could allude to angels, Qushayrī identifies angels for the first four verses, reiterating the idea of angels to be found in different places, “arranged in the heaven and the air,” and others “reciting the Book of God.”³ However in this Quranic passage Qushayrī does not identify the act of keeping the heavens from the satans in (37:7) with angels, but gives esoteric interpretations only.

On (37:164) Qushayrī identifies once again angels as Sulamī did, with a stress on the idea of their having “known stations” (*maqām ma‘lūm*) which they do not trespass (*lā yatakhṭūna maqāmahum*). He adds that Prophets and Friends of God (*awliyā’*) also have their own stations, with the difference being in their guidance: the Prophets’ station in regard to God is made known, while the Friends of God’s are made secret.⁴ On (39:75) Qushayrī reiterates that angels are distributed on different stations according

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 182.

² Qushayrī, vol 2, 481.

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 227-228.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, 243.

to “what the Truth wanted from them in their devotion.”¹ Ibn Barrajān 1 also identifies angels in the first verses of the 37th surah,² as well as Ibn Barrajān 2 on (37:164-165).³ Finally, although he situates the stations of angels and the Spirit in the “world of the Kingdom” (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) in (70:4),⁴ Baqlī clearly steers away from any physical geography on (37:1-10), where a mostly mystical interpretation is given, seeing only in (37:3) angels collecting around the hearts of “those in the Presence of God’s revelation.”⁵ He similarly gives a fully mystical interpretation on (37:164), whereby only beginners and intermediates on the mystical path know different stations, while those who are in full communion (*al-muwahhīdīn*) know no station as they are immersed in the Existence and the Attributes (*al-dhāt wa-l-ṣifāt*), and only afterwards in a report attributed to Ja‘far does Baqlī mention angels in the station of awe (*hayba*),⁶ as seen with Sulamī.

On the peculiar verse (42:5) whereby the heavens are nearly split open, Qushayrī gives us an interesting glimpse of cosmology with different interpretations and references: on a metaphorical level the heavens are nearly split open by the greatness (*‘azama*) of God; the heavens are nearly split open by the sheer number of angels because of their weight (*min thiqal al-malā’ika*), seconded by a *khobar* giving a picture of angels crowding the heavens in different positions of prayer,⁷ which is a rare allusion to a possible corporeality of these beings; and then Qushayrī gives a linguistic interpretation, whereby the phrase “the heavens nearly break for him” (*kādat al-*

¹ “*‘alā mā arāda al-ḥaqq fī ‘ibādatihim*,” Qushayrī, vol 3, 293.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 487-488.

³ Ibn Barrajān 2, 305.

⁴ Baqlī, vol 3, 452.

⁵ Baqlī, vol 3, 173.

⁶ *ibid.*, vol 3, 182-183. He mentions the stations (*maqāmāt*) of the angels elsewhere, such as in his comment of the 55th surah, (Baqlī, vol 3, 378).

⁷ Qushayrī, vol 3, 342.

samāwāt tanshaqu lahu) was supposedly used by Arabs to denote someone's greatness, and in this case the verse would have been a rhetorical tool in the reponse to the disbelievers by using their style of speech.¹

Furthermore, on celestial cosmology, the group of verses (53:4-18) upon which has been built the tales of the *mi'rāj* later on, and even though there is no mention of any angels, Qushayrī identifies Gabriel in (53:9), and as the subject of "he saw him" (*ra'āhu*) in (53:13): Gabriel seeing God while the Prophet Muḥammad was at the Lote-tree (*sidrat al-muntahā*). The commentary then elaborates on the meaning of this tree: situated in Paradise, this is "the utmost point where angels, the spirits of those who witness (*al-shuhadā'*) and all the Creation's souls are able to reach, while behind it lays what nobody but God knows."² In the same comment, Qushayrī describes "the garden of refuge" (*jannat al-ma'wā*) as one of the paradises. In approaching God, angels thus become no more advantaged than any human or non-human spirit.

Regarding the Lote-tree, Tustarī explains on (83:18-19) that the "record" of the *'Illiyūn* is only the exoteric explanation, and that the verse's esoteric meaning refers to the spirits of the believers "gathered at the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass, in the form of green birds which fly freely in Paradise until the day of Resurrection", while the spirit of the disbelievers are "gathered at *Sijjīn* beneath the lowest earth."³ Here Qushayrī echoes his other commentary on (83:18-21) about this geographical area, identifying the "*'illiyūn*" with a place beyond the seventh sky, "the highest of all places" (*a'lā al-amkina*), or with a "book inscribed" (*kitāb marqūm*) witnessed by "those drawn near from the angels" (*al-muqarrabūn min al-malā'ika*), or with the Lote

¹ Ibid.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 482-483. "Those who witness" may also be translated as "martyrs" depending on the context. We will also see in chapter 3 the importance of the Lote-tree.

³ Tustarī, 273.

tree mentioned in the previous paragraph.¹ On (83:21) Ibn Barrajān 1 sees more broadly in “those drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*) prophets, messengers, and angels,² while Baqlī does not attempt at defining these.³ On (89:22), Ibn Barrajān 1 also briefly explains that angelic rows means different groups of angels according to each realm: the angels of the earth and then a group of angels for each heaven, which doubles in number every time, from earth to the highest heaven.⁴

Baqlī uses angels on (40:12) for a comparison on both exoteric and esoteric cosmology: he identifies “Cherubim” (*karūbiyyin*) adorning the heavens, as “He adorned the earth with the Prophets and the Friends of God,” and as the hearts of the mystical knowers (*al-‘arīfīn*) are adorned with “the suns of the Essence’s disclosure, the moons of the Attributes’ droop, and the fires of the masteries of the secrets of the Kingdom and the Sovereignty.”⁵ This threefold comparison between a special class of angels in heaven, a special class of humans on earth, and their hearts within which the divine connection resides, outlines an esoteric cosmology. Later on (41:38) these same cherubim and Friends of God are “those who are with thy Lord that glorify Him night and day.”⁶

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 701-702.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 464. In a non-angel verse, Ibn Barrajān 2 gives a different geography and meaning around the lote tree: it is where prophecy is transmitted, while angels and heavens are to be found beyond it (see 2.2.5).

³ Baqlī, vol 3, 492.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, p.492. Earlier he elaborated on the more physical aspect of cosmology (spheres and associated planets), mentioning the existence of the seven heavens and more interestingly seven earths (*al-arḍīn al-sab‘*), (Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 382-384).

⁵

“كما زينا الأرض بالأنبياء والأولياء (...) شمس تجلي الذات وأقمار تدلّي الصفات ونيرات سيادات أسرار الملكوت والجبروت.”

Baqlī, vol 3, 245.

⁶ Baqlī, vol 3, 251. We will come back to the Cherubim and *muqarrabūn* in 2.2.8.

Lastly, on the only verse that describes angels, (35:1), Ibn Barrajan 1 briefly comments that the number of wings is meant as follows: one wing one each side of an angel, or two wings on each side, or three wings on each side, or four wings on each side, “the increasing of angels’ wings [being] for perfecting their creation and completing that which they exist for,” adjoining a *ḥadīth* where the Prophet describes Gabriel as having 600 wings.¹ Before adding an esoteric dimension to it, his remains a quite exoteric commentary, reflecting Ibn Barrajan’s will to detail logical representations: he chooses to understand this verse as being about pair of wings, rather than having to imagine angels flying with three wings. It also seems to contradict another one of his interpretations according to which angels do not need wings, however this second interpretation can be seen as more esoteric in nature (see 3.2.16 and 3.2.17).

Other specific cosmological roles:

A particular category of angels that we have encountered is the angels linked to meteorological events, a particular case studied in detail by Burge in the *ḥadīth*: he sees in some instances an exegetical development of angels, which makes them closer to personifications of natural phenomenons than full characters; and in other instances he sees the remnants of previous myths and beliefs, making these angels sound more independent.² We find them in other literary genres, such as an angel causing thunder when reciting glorifications of God (*tasbīḥ*) in some narratives of the Prophetic

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“زيادات الأجنحة في الملائكة من تمام خلقهم وكمال ما أوجدتهم له.”

Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 4, 437-438.

² For example the description of the angel of clouds and thunder (sometimes called Rūfīl) in some *ḥadīth* could be traced back to ancient thunder gods, whereby clouds were both a destructive force and bringers of necessary rain; there is also a curious *ḥadīth* involving prayers to an “angel of the sun” that could have links with ancient Egyptian mythology. See Burge, “Panangelon:” Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism.”

Ascension.¹ A first example is Qushayrī on (37:2) identifying the “drivers” (*zājirāt*) with angels driving clouds, before giving an esoteric interpretation of angels driving people away from disbelief.²

The verse (13:13) is particularly used for illustrating this meteorological role (listed in Chapter 1 as “praising God”): on this verse Tustarī comments with a saying attributed to ‘Ikrima (d. 104/723) on angels and thunder: “Thunder is an angel who has been put in charge of the clouds; he drives them along just as a camel herder would do his camels”, accompanied by two *ḥadīth* on thunder being God’s pleasure, or being the clouds’ laugh, giving an overall very positive viewing of these meteorological events.³ In Ibn Barrajān 1, the comment on (13:13) is a paraphrase, however the editor of the volume added a lengthy footnote with several different sources defining “thunder” (*ra‘d*) as the voice of an angel, or an angel dedicated to the clouds or driving them,⁴ suggesting a pervasive association of meteorological events with angels. This footnote also illustrates how the meteorological theme turns out to be a dominant role among the different angelic roles within the commentaries of Ibn Barrajān. Indeed we find angels in charge of the winds in (51:1-3),⁵ in (77:1),⁶ in (79:4),⁷ as well as in various other places of the commentaries of Ibn Barrajān.⁸ And contrary to Tustarī, it is in Ibn Barrajān 2 that we find thunder associated with fear (*takhwīf*). Additionally, Ibn

¹ Frederick S. Colby, “Uniting Fire and Snow: Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel ‘Habīb’ in Medieval Versions of Muḥammad’s Ascension,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 261.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 227.

³ Tustarī, 100.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 179-181.

⁵ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 187.

⁶ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 428-429. See also in 2.2.5.

⁷ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 443.

⁸ We have not listed all occurrences, as it does not add to the function here, however such examples can be found in Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 179, 485, 545 among many others in that single volume.

Barrajān 2 on (13:12-13) describes the prophet as having an “angelic meaning” in the sense of angelic dimension (*bi-mā kāna fī rasūl Allāh min al-ma'nā al-malakī*) which made him sensitive to meteorological events: “whenever winds rose or a vision appeared in the sky, his colour yellowed and his disquiet grew.”¹ On this same verse (13:13), Baqlī gives mainly a mystical commentary (see 2.2.9), however he mentions the report attributed to a certain Ibn al-Zanjānī, as follows: “The rumbling is the angels’ thunderbolts, lightning the sighs of their hearts, and rain their crying.”²

Regarding another role, that of scribe seen in chapter 1, in (68:1), Sulamī, Ibn Barrajān 1 and Ibn Barrajān 2 identify “honoured scribes angels” (*al-malā'ika al-kirām al-kātibūn*) as the subject of the verse.³ Similarly Qushayrī and Ibn Barrajān & on (80:15) identify the scribes (*safara*) as angels.⁴

On the “alluding verses” (79:1-4), Ibn Barrajān 1 sees different categories of angels, determined by the actions they conduct in these verses: (79:1-2) would be angels of death, as well as angels of plants, production, and growth, and taking care of these processes by encouraging what needs to be encouraged, and removing what needs to be removed. On (79:3), the angels are the ones in charge of making planets and stars maintain their course, and on (79:4) angels preceding God’s winds wherever these are sent, although the author offers an alternative interpretation where horses are meant in this verse.⁵ In Ibn Barrajān 2 these suggested angels also have a meteorological role, but

1

“متى هبت الريح أو تخيلت في السماء مخيلة اسفر لونه واشتد قلقه.”

Ibn Barrajān 2, 422.

2

“الوعد صعقات الملائكة، والبرق زفرات أفئدتهم، والمطر بكائهم.”

Baqlī, vol 2, 226.

³ Sulamī, vol 2, 343; Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 365; Ibn Barrajān 2, 783.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, 689; Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 448.

⁵ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 443.

the accent is given on their “core” function of vivifying creation, of “activating the object for which it was created,” or “preserving creation,”¹ another role that is seen numerous times throughout his commentary.

On (41:12), Ibn Barrajān 1 defines the Highest Assembly as the “heaven of this world” (*samā’ al-dunyā*), and this is where the satans come to listen to the angels, and later by mentioning (70:4), he gives a long commentary on the “circles” (*dawā’ir*) composing the universe. This universe is made of movements (*ḥarakāt*), meaning the creation, and of stillness (*sukūn*), meaning the Command (*amr*).²

3.2.8 The Cosmological Function in the ‘Non-Angel Verses:’

Relationship between angels and humans:

On (7:46), Tustarī identifies the “people of the Heights” with “the people of gnosis (*ma’rifā*)”, honored by this standing, “and the two angels know them.”³ We see here, that one mark of distinction for humans is to have a more specific relationship with angels, an idea that we also find in Tustarī on (59:7)⁴ and in other commentaries (see the first part of this section).

On (20:118), Sulamī gives a report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’, he mentions three elements marking the special place of man in the creation: his external appearance, the breathing of the spirit into him, and the bowing of the angels.⁵ However among humans, a special distinction is made: on (48:29), within a long report attributed to al-Qāsim in

1

“تنشط المعقول لما وجد له،” “حفظ المخلوق.”

Ibn Barrajān 2, 819.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 39-41.

³ Tustarī, 73.

⁴ Tustarī, 226.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 1, 451.

Sulamī, we find a brief mention of Muḥammad who appears as distinguished above the angels and the other prophets.¹ On (7:168), Qushayrī mentions angels and the rest of the creatures as witnesses “to the core of men, in their differences and agreement, devotion and hypocrisy.”² Within the commentary of the 3rd surah, Baqlī mentions the creation of Adam again, giving the reason that God gave “the robe of honor of His stewardship” (*khil‘a khilāfatihī*) to Adam for explaining the bowing of the angels.³ On (4:171) and the subject of Jesus, Baqlī offers an alternative vision to the reason of the bowing of angels to Adam, as he compares how people were drawn to Jesus, “as the angels of God loved (‘*ashaqat*) the face of Adam, and because of this they bowed to Adam.”⁴

We find more comparisons between angels and humans on the commentary of Tustarī on (114:4), which relates an encounter with a man who decided to stay in Mecca after many travels, because it was filled with wonders, where “the angels unceasingly circumambulate the House [Kaaba] morning and night in diverse forms.”⁵ This indicates a possible interaction, if only by sight, between people (who are not prophets) and angels; this story secondly echoes the centrality of the Kaaba seen in the praxis and credo functions, reinforcing here the importance of Mecca and its physical and spiritual centrality.

A possible greater interaction between a non-prophet human and an angel is found in the Sulamī commentary on (16:128), in a report attributed to Mimshā’ al-Dīnwarī (d.

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 259.

²

Qushayrī, vol 1, 582.

³ Baqlī, vol 1, 143.

⁴ Baqlī, vol 1, 290.

⁵ Tustarī, 321.

“جواهرهم في الخلف والوفاق، والإخلاص والنفاق.”

299/912) giving a personal cause of revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) to this verse: “*I saw one of the angels, and he told me: All of those who are with God are annihilated except one man. I asked him: Who?, he told me: The one God was with when He said “Truly God is with those who are reverent, and those who are virtuous.”*”¹

On the human/angel comparison, on (18:18) Sulamī further presents an anonymous report in which someone is asked the difference between the lights of God’s guidance (*anwār hidāyatihi*) and the lights of the angels (*anwār al-malā’ika*). The answer is that the lights of the angels are the lights of His generosity (*karāmātihi*) and the lights of the children of Adam are the lights of His guidance and “this is both an inner and outer light” (*wa-huwa nūr zāhir wa-bāṭin*). This causes a greater awe, hence this part of the verse “thou wouldst have turned away in flight.” The report ends by an allusion to a particular *ḥadīth*, containing yet another comparison another case of intra-islamic legitimisation: “there was no flight from the angels’ lights at the occultation as there was a flight like that of Satan from ‘Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb.”²

On the “verse of Light” (24:35), for which Sulamī offers numerous reports, one is attributed to al-Junayd (d. 298/911), whereby God enlightens (*munawwar*) the heart of the angels so that they glorify and sanctify Him (*sabbaḥū-hu wa-qaddasūhu*), and the hearts of the Messengers so that they know the true gnosis (*ḥata ‘arafū ḥaqīqat al-ma’rifa*) and worship Him of true worship (*ḥaqīqat al-‘ubūdiyya*). An anonymous further draws a parallel between mystics and angels: “the light of heavens is the angels,

1

“رأيت ملكا من الملائكة يقول لي: كل من كان مع الله تعالى فهو هالك إلا رجلا واحدا، قلت: ومن هو؟ قال: من كان الله معه وهو قوله: إن الله مع الذين اتقوا والذين هم محسنون.”

Sulamī, vol 1, 380.

2

“ولم يكن من أنوار الملائكة عند الحجب فرارا كفرار الشيطان من عمر الخطاب.”
Sulamī, vol 1, 407. Several *ḥadīth* seem to be about Satan fleeing ‘Umar, see for instance *ḥadīth* 2396 in *Saḥīḥ muslim*).

and the light of the earth is the Friends of God.”¹ Another such parallel is given by an anonymous report in Sulamī on (40:64): “He made the earth a dwelling-place for His Friends, and the sky a canopy for His angels.”²

On (32:16), Sulamī gives a report attributed to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 108/728) about the notion of fear: “*The fear of the Prophets, the Friends of God, and the masters of mystical knowledge is the fear of impudence, and the fear of the angels is the fear of God’s cunning, and the fear of the general people is the fear of the destruction of the self, and expectation and hope are the matter in cause*”.³ This is another example of emotions attributed to angels, although they are often presented as pure spirits, and this fear of them underlines one of their basic role, of obeying God to the letter of His word - misunderstanding him because of His cunning would mean failing at their role.

On (25:44), Qushayrī gives an interesting summary of the variable hierarchical relationship between humans, angels and animals, thus somehow settling the ambivalence running through all the passages discussing this relationship:

*“Indeed God - Exalted He be - created the angels and brought them on reason, [He created] the cattle and gave them the instinct of passion, and [He created] humans and built in them both matters; so who has his passion in control of his reason is worse than cattle, and who has his reason in control of his passion then he is better than the angels... So the shaykhs said.”*⁴

1

“نور السماوات الملائكة ونور الأرض الأولياء.”

Sulamī, 46-52.

2

“جعل الأرض قراراً لأولياته والسماء بناءً لملائكته.”

Sulamī, vol 2, 212. The same report is given by Baqlī (Baqlī, vol 3, 239), who repeats it in more mystical terms on (42:13), (Baqlī, vol 3, 262).

3

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

Sulamī, vol 2, 138.

4

On (98:7), Qushayrī gives a similar but much shorter comment: the believers here who are in this verse “the best of creation” are described by Qushayrī as better than the angels.¹

Similarly, within the commentary of the 19th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions “human satans” (*shayāṭīn al-ins*) and “human angels” (*malā’ikat al-ins*),² according to one’s created nature, which could give him the same solution as offered by Qushayrī to resolve the ambiguity in the angel/human hierarchy. However his comment is followed by a comparison between the growth of man and a cosmological order of the growth of God’s command (*nushū’ al-amr*) “in the world, from mineral to plant, to animal, to man and jinn, to believer, to Friend, to Prophet, to angel, and who studies the existence thoroughly will find it as we mentioned,” which gives an interesting hierarchical vision of the world,³ but which turns the previous relationship between angels and humans (seen in the story of Adam) on its head. In the commentary of the 30th surah, Ibn Barrajān 2 echoes this cosmological hierarchy, however with the word “degree” (*daraja*) which has a more mystical connotation: all creatures have different degrees, until the Spirit is breathed into it, out of which is created the degree of humanity, and

“وإنَّ الله - سبحانه - خلق الملائكة وعلى العقل جبلهم، والبهائم وعلى الهوى فطرهم، وبني آدم وركب فيهم الأمرين، فمن غلب هواه عقله فهو شرٌّ من البهائم، ومن غلب عقله هواه فهو خير من الملائكة... كذلك قال المشايخ.”
Qushayrī, vol 2, 638.

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 754.

² This theme of angelic and devilish humans is found in different places of Ibn Barrajān 1, for example a brief sentence within the commentary of the 23rd surah, on a end-of-the-world scene with the Dajjāl and his party sending satans in the form of men, and the righteous party (*al-ḥizb al-ṣāliḥ*) sending angels in the form of men (Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 118).

³ “في العالم من جماد إلى نبات إلى حيوان إلى إنس ورجن إلى مؤمن إلى صادق إلى نبي إلى ملك ومن استقرأ الوجود ألفاه على ما ذكرنا.”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 483. He gives the same hierarchy, with slightly more details and the concept of “link” (*waṣl*) between each class of beings, on (43:60) (Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 95), and then again the same hierarchy on (55:19) where he talks about a “*barzakh*” being between each class of beings (Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 245). This chain of creature is a feature of neo-platonic representation of the universe (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 90).

then each degree upwards as follows: human, believer, Friend (*waliyy*), Prophet, Messenger, and then angel.¹ On (2:269) Baqlī similarly designates the position of the angels as “the highest position of the degrees of the Friends of God and the highest rank of the stations of the pure.”²

However Baqlī presents later an alternative explanation to this ambivalent angel/human relationship and hierarchy: on (17:70), Baqlī explains that the preference (*al-afdaliyya*) given to some men such as the prophets over the “angels drawn near” (*al-malā'ika al-muqarrabūn*) is not because of their constitution which does not go beyond the “station of reason” (*maqām al-'aql*), but because of the “innermost secret deposited in them” (*al-sirr al-mūda'a fī-him*).³

General cosmology:

On (16:53), Tustarī writes that bearers of the Throne are higher in rank than other angels.⁴ As for the recording angels, on (3:61), Tustarī follows up with the idea of the limited capabilities of angels as seen previously, by saying that those humans who glorify God are those who remember, and “this is not written down by the recording angels, for it is a witnessing of the One remembered in a remembrance that is through the One remembered.”⁵ This goes even further than the cosmological shift in chapter 1 whereby the only intermediaries between God and humans were angels instead of the free-willed jinn: here the connection to the divine is direct and cannot even be comprehended by the angels.

¹ Ibn Barrajan 2, 561.

²

Baqlī, vol 1, 112.

³ Baqlī, vol 2, 370.

⁴ Tustarī, 108.

⁵ Tustarī, 45.

“منزلة الأعلى من منازل الأولياء ومرتبة العليا من مقامات الأصفياء.”

Another unexpected angelic limitation is shown in Tustarī's commentary on (39:69), through an interesting interpretation to this verse, qualified as esoteric or "inner" (*bāṭinī*), whereby angels are given life by God through His remembrance, "just as He gave the children of Adam life through their breathing", however "when He withholds remembrance from them they perish."¹ Angels are then mortal, which underlies their finite nature relatively to God, though they might appear as near-immortals to humans.²

A more usual limitation in knowledge is seen in Sulamī on (7:172), with a report attributed to al-Ḥusayn (d. 60/680), according to which none of the "angels drawn near" (*al-malā'ika al-muqarrabīn*) "knows what made the Creation appear, and how the End and the Beginning come about."³ Similarly on the verse (7:1) constituted from some letters (*alif, lām, mīm, ṣād*), Sulamī presents a report attributed to Ibn 'Aṭā' on the significance of letters: God has given them a secret (*ja'ala lahā sirran*), and "when he created Adam He breathed into him this secret (*dhālika al-sirr*), while he did not transmit it to the angels."⁴ This preference to humans is mentioned again in Sulamī on (50:1-2) through another report attributed to Ibn 'Aṭā'.⁵ However on (20:6), Sulamī elaborates on the "secret" (*sirr*) mentioned in this verse, which is possibly different from the one just mentioned, as it is presented as something that is not known by the humans, or the angels, or Satan, or reason.⁶

¹ Tustarī, 173

² This is a notable difference with the representation of angels in more philosophical texts where they are "immortal intellects" (Olga Lizzini, "L'angelologia filosofica di Avicenna," in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam* ebook).

³ Sulamī, vol 1, 249. The attribution to the Prophet's grandson is only a supposition, as we have not found this saying elsewhere.

⁴ Sulamī, vol 1, 219.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 2, 292.

⁶ Sulamī, vol 1, 435.

On (69:38-39), Sulamī interprets what is seen and what is not in a parallel manner, in a report attributed to al-Ḥusayn: what has been shown means what has been shown to the angels and to the Pen and the Tablet (*li-l-malā'ika wa-l-qalam wa-l-lawḥ*), and what has not been shown means what God has not brought into existence and which the Pen has not written and was not felt by the angels;¹ while what has been shown also means what has been shown to the creation of His Attributes (*ṣifātihi*), His work (*ṣun'ihī*) and His knowledge (*'ilmihī*) and what has not been shown has been kept as a grain (*dharra*) in this world and the next, lest - had it been shown - it would have consumed all creation.² Similarly, Qushayrī mentions briefly on (20:82) that the angels do not have access to God's innermost secret (*al-sirriyya*).³

In general cosmology, we can also list here the report given by Sulamī on (24:35), seen in previously, drawing parallel between four archangels and the four first caliphs using angels for legitimising purposes.⁴ On (30:22), Qushayrī also presents parallel between the diversity of human languages mentioned in this verse and angels: “Of His signs is the diversity of tongues of the people on earth, and the diversity of glorification of the angels who are the inhabitants of the heave,”⁵ and on (41:38), angels are called “the inhabitants of the next world” (*sukkān al-ākhirā*) by the same commentator.⁶ This also points to the subsuming of the exoteric dimensions of the sky and the air, in imagination, to the theological “Kingdom” (*malakūt*) and the eschatological concept of

¹ We find these remarks in a report attributed to Ibn 'Aṭā' on the same verses in Baqlī, vol 3, 450.

² Sulamī, vol 2, 348.

³ Qushayrī, vol 2, 469.

⁴ Sulamī, vol 2, 46-52.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 3, 113.

⁶ Qushayrī, vol 3, 333.

the afterlife (*al-ākhirā*) into the cosmological category of the Unseen - all of which the angels are the main inhabitants or actors.

On (34:2), Qushayrī details what exactly “descends from heaven” in this verse: rain, angels, blessings (*baraka*), livelihood (*rizq*), and justice (*ḥukm*).¹ On (51:22), Qushayrī repeats to the readers that “part of your livelihood” (*qismat arzāqikum*) is in the heavens, and angels dedicated to this are in charge of bringing it down from there.² On (57:4), Qushayrī adds an ascending movement: while rain, livelihood, and angels with justice and revelation descend, other angels, devotions of the servants, supplications of the Creation, the folios of those in charge (presumably of the angels-scribes), and the souls of the believers ascend to the heavens.³ This double movement of descent and ascent echoes the theme of the stairs leading to heaven, a well-known biblical theme.

Angels ascending and Biblical influences are also seen in Ibn Barrajān 1 on (32:4-5), who launches into a long comment on the seven heavens, the seventh having the Throne (*al-‘arsh*) and the Seat (*al-kursī*), while at the same time there is a Throne for each heaven, angels ascend (*ta‘ruj*) with the Command and descend between the earth and the first heaven. He then mentions what is recorded in “the previous books and the primordial science” (*al-kutub al-mutaqaddima wa-l-‘ilm al-awwal*) of the four angels bearers of the Throne: “one is like a man, one is like a bull, one is like a lion, and one is like an eagle.”⁴ And although he later mentions Seraphiel (*Isrāfīl*), Michael, Gabriel and Azrael as bearers of the Throne among eight (a number the commentator draws from a

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 176.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 464.

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 533.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 369-370.

quoted *ḥadīth*),¹ the description of these first four angels are an interesting example of the survival and re-use of pre-islamic beliefs and cosmological imaginaries: it echoes more specifically the *ḥayyōt* in the vision of Ezechiel in the Bible.²

Regarding natural elements, on a separate section of the commentary of the sixth surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions (38:67-69) and (38:71), writing about angels who are not allowed to err (*lam yajuz alayhim khaṭī'a*), and among them angels created of water, an element that also proceeds from light (*min qabīl al-nūr*). These angels are “spread out for remembrance and devotion in what they were given care of plants, minerals, and earth.” The commentator explains then that these angels and their actions were called “the Forces” (*al-qiwā*) by the “ancients” (*al-awā'il*) who had not received any light of revelation (*nūr nubuwwa*), and although this appellation was not wrong in itself, it mostly included pagan ways that the commentator deplors.³

Within the commentary of the 27th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions (72:26-27) and comments on the relativity of the “Unseen” (*ghayb*) of which he gives a concise definition:

*“The Unseen is such relatively to some and not others, such as the angels and their knowledge are unseen to us, but they are not so to themselves, and so is the case for the jinn, and everything that is hidden from our witnessing and our knowledge is unseen to us, even if it is seen and known by others than us, and the absolute Unseen is what is not known by anyone but itself, such as His words “And with him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He”.*⁴

¹ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 372-373. He repeats this later on the commentary of the 69th surah, both the four animal-like angels, and the four archangels, of which he names only two, Michael and Seraphiel (*Isrāfīl*), while he remarks that for the other two their “names dropped from my memory” (*kharaja dhikr asmā'a-humā'an dhikrī*), Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 373.

² Burge explains that while the influence is clear, and this tradition widespread in islamic texts, this image “is adapted, used and developed in Islamic traditions independently” (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 60).

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 2, 247.

⁴

Ibn Barrajan 1 further details cosmological planes on (67:1): the “Dominion” (*mulk*) mentioned in the verse is the “external world, what is seen” (*ẓāhir al-‘ālam, al-mushāhid minhu*), and the “Kingdom” (*malakūt*) is “the inner one, the affair of the angels” (*huwa bāṭinuhu, wa-huwa fi ‘l al-malā’ika*). God is “the Maker” (*al-ṣāni’*), the Dominion is what is Made (*maṣnū’*), and the Making is the affair of the angels (*wa-l-ṣan’a fi ‘l al-malā’ika*) who organise God’s command and wish - “and because He hid the Making in the Made, He called the hidden: Kingdom.”¹ This implies that the angelic plane is situated within the physical one, a notion that we will find with Ibn ‘Arabī in chapter 4. From this Unseen, on (2:164), Ibn Barrajan 2 describes the clouds driven by the angels to make the “dead land” (*al-balad al-mayyit*) alive with “a life extracted from the Unseen of paradise.”² Later Ibn Barrajan 2 writes that angels keep this “position” of being hidden in creation, and until Judgment Day when they will stand “behind the creatures” (*min warā’ al-khalā’iq*).³ Furthermore, at the end of the world, the existence angels seem to depend on the world’s physical existence, in the comment on (2:153), if God decides to end an earth and its celestial system to create a better one, “this order

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

Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 4, 253.

1

“ولإخفاء الصنعة في المصنوع، سمي المخفي: ملكوتا.”

Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 5, 358-359. In Ibn Barrajan 2, he calls the Kingdom (*malakūt*) the “object” or “deed” of the angels (*maf’ūl al-malā’ika*) (Ibn Barrajan 2, 303 and 601), and farther “what the angels do” (*fa-huwa ma yafalahu al-malā’ika*) (Ibn Barrajan 2, 736), and a “secret within the existence of the dominion” (*sirr fi wujūd al-mulk*) (*ibid.*, 779).

2

“الحياة المستخرج من غيب الجنة.”

Ibn Barrajan 2, 160. Angels dedicated to life on earth in all of its forms is also a recurrent theme in both Ibn Barrajan 1, and Ibn Barrajan 2. Another example is the commentary of the 87th surah, with the mention of angels of the sun, water and “what God made under the earth” (*mā ja’ala Allāh fi al-turāb*) (Ibn Barrajan 2, 840).

³ Ibn Barrajan 2, 850.

comprises it with the death of its angels,”¹ which echoes the mortality of angels in Tustarī on (39:69). To Ibn Barraġān, angels are indeed seen as an essential part of the world’s infrastructure, both spiritual and physical, as we have seen in 2.2.1 when Ibn Barraġān 1 commented on (42:5) in which the angels’ intercession accorded by God held the world together, while Ibn Barraġān 2 reiterates this same thought on the beginning of 37th surah.²

On (11:123), Baqlī gives a mystical definition of the Unseen, comparing angels and the special group of the mystics:

*“The Unseen of the heavens is what is found of the sciences of the destinies in the hearts of the angels, that flows in qualities of fate and divine decree on the servants’ actions; and the Unseen of the earth is the sciences of the gnosis of His Essence and His Attributes in the hearts of the Prophets, the Messengers, the mystical knowers and the sincere.”*³

Regarding the access to this Unseen, on (3:84) Baqlī explains that who is overcome by the love-affection (*maḥabba*) of God sees with his “innermost vision” (*abṣār sirrihi*) the world of the Kingdom and the “Unseen of the Truth” (*ghayb al-ḥaqq*) of which the angels are part.⁴

Lastly on anonymous report offered by Sulamī identifies the “Highest Assembly” (*al-mala’ al-a’lā*) of (55:1-2), mentioned in (38:69) as the angels,⁵ as does Qushayrī, who elaborates on the same verse with a quote attributed to Muḥammad: “I would not have had knowledge of this Highest Assembly and their dispute if God had not

¹ Ibn Barraġān 2, 153.

² Ibn Barraġān 2, 602.

³

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

Baqlī, vol 2, 144.

⁴ Baqlī, vol 1, 164.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 2, 292. On the “angel verse” part of this section, we have seen that the Highest Assembly is more generally identified with the first heaven by Ibn Barraġān.

informed me of it,” mentioning further that these angels were in dispute concerning Adam and his sending to earth.¹

Other specific cosmological roles:

As previously seen in the “Angel verses” section, the “meteorological angels” appear numerous times throughout the commentaries of Ibn Barrajān, as if this aspect of life had a particular importance to him, more so than in the other commentaries. Among these examples we can mention his commentary on (13:17) underlying the utmost importance of rain: he likens the descent of the Qur’ān with Gabriel with the descent of the rain with the angels, and more generally the descent of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and revelation (*wahī*) on God's command.² Another example is in the comment of (15:22-23), where air and water are sent with angels in charge of the winds, with the reiteration of angels taking care of nature and its elements, responsible for its movements and changes.³ In Ibn Barrajān 2 we also find an instance of interpreting the “We” of majesty as a plural pronoun to designate angels and the wind and God’s action through them in bringing water and life described in (50:9),⁴ possibly as a way to explain this metaphorical “we” as a literal plural for God’s angelic servants, as seen in 2.2 with Qushayrī on (89:22). Another example of trying to avoid a literal presence of God and replacing his direct presence is seeing angels intervene where one would usually understand God, or at least an unknown narrator: in Ibn Barrajān 2 on (75:11) explains

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”عرفني الله أن لولا فيه واختصامهم الأعلى بالمأ علم من لي كان وما“

Qushayrī, vol 3, 262. Following this is another comment, presented as a *khbar* on the Prophet and Gabriel, and the comment ends in a way that could suppose that all of it is reported from the Prophet: “And thus it was revealed to me and I am but a clear warner” (*wa-hakadhā innamā yūhā ilayya wa-anā mundhir mubīn*).

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 191-194.

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 260-261.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 2, 572.

that the angels are answering humans at Judgment Day, telling them “Nay! But there shall be no refuge.”¹

On the role of angels in relationship to the Qur’ān other than the transmission by Gabriel, Qushayrī writes on (17:78) that “the angels of night and day” are the subject of the witnessing done in this verse on the “Qur’ān of dawn” (*Qur’ān al-fajr*).² Similarly, Baqlī sees in this verse the Qur’ān “attended to by the presence of the angels of night and day.”³

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

*“[...The high knowledge] which is the knowledge of the Oneness in its overarching truth over all knowledge, that the Prophets conducted and that the angels - peace upon them - taught until its knowers saw with the visions of their hearts the truth propagate in the heavens and the earth”.*⁴

Among different specific roles, within the commentary of the 38th surah, Ibn Barraġān 1 mentions angels in charge of the celestial spheres (*aflāk*);⁵ on (52:41), Ibn Barraġān 1 explains that angels write whatever the world of the Unseen delivers to them;⁶ on the 112th surah, Ibn Barraġān 2 identifies the “angels drawn near” (*al-malā’ika al-muqarrabūn*) as the Thrones-Bearers, sent everywhere in creation when the

¹ Ibn Barraġān 2, 807.

² Qushayrī, vol 2, 364.

³ Baqlī, vol 2, 379.

⁴

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

Ibn Barraġān 2, 550.

⁵ Ibn Barraġān 1, vol 4, 519.

⁶ Ibn Barraġān 1, vol 5, 205.

order is given reciting this surah;¹ on (76:16), Ibn Barrajān 1 comments on a very specific role: angels making the vials of silver (*qawārīr min al-fidda*) mentioned in the verse,² adding illustrative details for the reader to the otherwise very elliptic quranic text. Similarly on (52:23), Sulamī was already presenting a report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ which takes this verse with majlis-like scene as a metaphor where the attendant’s role (*al-sāqī*) is given to the angels and the drink the remembrance of God, drunkenness is on witnessing (*sukruhum ‘alā al-mushāhada*), and the people is the companions of God (*julasā’ Allāh*).³ These different seemingly secondary angelic roles also participates in the function presented in 2.2.8, that of cosmological enrichment, which might help the reader in recreating and appropriating the islamic cosmology into his or her life, and which might especially help the mystically oriented reader in switching his or her attention to more spiritual and inner matters - of which the angels are foremost representatives.

3.2.9. A Classic Cosmological Function: Angels as Messengers in ‘Angelic Verses:’

Of course, many if not all mentions of Gabriel, the messenger *par excellence*, usually belongs to this category, however a separate section was made for angels with personal names in 3.2.12 and 3.2.13. We will review here other cases of angels messengers, starting with Abraham’s guests in (51:24) who are identified as angels by Tustarī and Qushayrī,⁴ where numbers are given: it could be either 12 different angels, or Gabriel accompanied by 7 other angels, or 3 angels. However Sulamī offers only

¹ Ibn Barrajān 2, 894.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 421.

³ Sulamī, vol 2, 281. The same report is given by Baqlī (Baqlī, vol 3, 352).

⁴ Tustarī, 208; Qushayrī, vol 3, 465-566.

reports around the concept of “honoured ones” (*mukramīn*) in these verses,¹ even though in another one of the quranic versions of the story of Abraham’s guests (11:69-73), Sulamī does identify angels through a report attributed to al-Tirmidhī (d. ca. 320/938) and another anonymous one.² On these verses Qushayrī explains that Abraham did not recognise them as angels in the beginning, because they appeared as men, and the commentary elaborates on the etiquette of preparing food for guests (seen in 2.2.3), and it is when Abraham’s guests did not touch the food that he recognised them for what they were,³ adding an interesting detail at this end of the commentary (seen previously in 2.3.1):

*“It was said in that time that angels did not descend openly except for punishment; so when they restrained themselves from taking food and he understood they were angels, he became afraid that they had been sent for the punishment of his people.”*⁴

Similarly on this part, (11:69-74), Baqlī identifies angels who frighten Abraham.⁵ A few verses later, (11:81), Qushayrī also identifies the messengers sent to Lot as angels with the recurrent theme of terrifying angels. They need then to state their good intentions to Lot in words, as the commentary shows: “Do not worry, for they did not come to you with evil intentions, and indeed we are the messengers of your Lord come to destroy them.”⁶

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 275-276.

² Sulamī, vol 1, 321.

³ Qushayrī, vol 2, 145-146. This echoes an earlier commentary of Qushayrī on (8:9) as appearing as men.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 2, 146. See also a similar commentary and confirmation of Abraham’s guests as angels, as well as Lot’s guests, on (15:51-65) in Qushayrī, vol 2, 275-276.

⁵ Baqlī, vol 2, 127-130.

⁶

“لا عليك فإنهم لا يصلون إليك بسوء، وإنما رسل ربك جننا لإهلاكهم.” Qushayrī, vol 2, p.149. He adds the reason why Lot’s wife is among the punished: she suggested to Lot’s people to commit fornication with the angel. A similar commentary on the

On the version of the story of Abraham in (15:51-60) and the story of Lot in (15:61-65), Ibn Barrajan 1 unsurprisingly identifies the messengers as angels, however by showing an awareness of the biblical Hebrew ambiguity (seen in chapter 1), he mentions that if the Torah mentions “men” (*rijāl*), they are actually angels.¹

The verse (16:2) is commented on by Sulamī with the precision that persons receiving the inspiration from angels or the Spirit are persons who attained the “station” (*maqām*) of prophecy, and their situation might come about with affliction (*balāʿ*), or mercy (*rahma*). He follows this by a more mystical report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’: whoever converses with the angel in his “secret self” (*fī sirrihi*) will receive “details on the Unseen” (*khaṣāʾiṣ al-ghayb*), and the angel will “open his soul to a way for gazing upon of the Nearness.”² Furthermore, on (53:4) Sulamī gives a report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī (d. ca. 320/923) with the additional precision that general people (*al-ʿamma*) can receive “revelation” (*waḥy*) from the “Saints” or “Friends of God” (*awliyāʾ*), while the human messengers (*rusul*) receive it from the angels.³ However back on (16:2), Qushayrī explains that angels descend with the revelation (*waḥy*) and message (*risāla*) to the prophets, while they also descend with “determination” (*taʿrīf*) and inspiration (*ilhām*) to the “mystics spoken to” (*muḥaddathūn*). In this case, as Qushayrī then concludes, different people can interact with angels, but contrary to prophets, “they are not commanded to speak about it, and not burdened with bearing a message to the

angels source of fright, on the same Lot story, is to be found in Qushayrī, vol 3, 96. Baqlī similarly identifies angels in Lot’s story.

¹ Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 3, 268 and 270. Ibn Barrajan 2 and Baqlī identify angels here as well (Ibn Barrajan 2, 444; Baqlī, vol 2, 296-297).

² “*yafuḥu li-rūḥihi ṭarīqan ilā al-ishrāf ʿalā al-qurb*,” Sulamī 362.

³ Sulamī, vol 2, 284.

creation.”¹ We note here a variation regarding revelation: Qushayrī makes a linguistic distinction between revelation (for prophets) and inspiration (for others), angels being behind both, while Sulamī does not distinguish prophetic revelation from non-prophetic revelation, the distinction marked by the angels who are behind prophetic revelation, and not behind the non-prophetic one.

On (16:2) Baqlī relays different reports, including those of the “master” (al-Qushayrī) with the same idea of angels sent to many different people but not with the same mission and then distinguishes some degrees of revelation: on the heart degree angels transmit secrets (*asrār*) to the masters of the hearts (*arbāb al-qulūb*); then on the spiritual degree, revelation can also be about the Attributes (*al-ṣifāt*), in which case it is done according to the different spirits’ trajectories in the world (*‘alā qadr sīrihi fī ‘ālamihā*); and finally on the innermost secret’s degree the revelation of the Essence is direct, with no mediators (*al-wasā’iṭ*).² On (22:75), Baqlī adds an interesting detail regarding mystics: in the function of messenger, angels are the intermediaries sent to prophets, prophets the intermediaries sent to the masses, and the Friends of God are for the Friends of God only,³ which sets them apart of the dynamic between prophets and general people, giving a somewhat elite understanding of themselves, which runs through mystical writings often by the Arabic term “*khāṣṣa*” or “*khawāṣṣ*”.

On (3:42), Qushayrī and Baqlī consider the capacity of Mary to see and interact with angels as part of her distinction above all other women, although Qushayrī notes

¹ Qushayrī, vol 2, 285. This characteristic, of interactions with angels without a mission of transmission of message, defines this category of mystics “*muḥaddathūn*,” because angels speak to them (see also Lory, *La dignité de l’homme*, 206).

² Baqlī, vol 2, 308-309.

³ “*al-malā’ika wasā’iṭ al-anbiyā’, al-anbiyā’ wasā’iṭ al-‘umūm wa-l-awliyā’ li-l-awliyā’ khāliṣa*,” Baqlī, vol 2, 546.

that she might have been able to hear the angels only, and not see them.¹ However, with the commentary of Sulamī on (16:2) seen previously, this would second the theory, seen in Chapter 1, that classifies the Virgin Mary in the ranks of prophets.

An interesting case is the verse (77:1), part of the “alluding angel verses” that could be interpreted as messenger angels in Chapter 1, and how a sufi commentary might draw different interpretations from it: Tustarī confirms that these “envoys” (*mursalāt*) are angels, while simultaneously also being understood as the believers’ spirits.² Thus we have a clear case of two juxtaposed exoteric and esoteric interpretations, complementing each other beyond an apparent contradiction. The esoteric interpretation of Tustarī takes over for the following verses (77:3-6).³ Qushayrī also identifies angels in this surah opening, angels sent with “good command” (*al-ma’rūf min al-amr*), angels separating the permitted (*al-ḥalāl*) from the forbidden (*al-ḥarām*), and angels sending the revelation to prophets.⁴ The commentary of Ibn Barrajān 1 reflects his preferred themes: the two first verses are angels in charge of meteorological events (associated with compassion), the third is about angels taking care of existing things such as plants and animals, and the fourth verse is about angels delivering the revelation.⁵

In the general notion of messenger, we might also mention the comment on (41:31-32) where Qushayrī identifies the subject “We” (*naḥnu*) as possibly meaning angels who descended upon the believers in (41:30), while the other possibility would

¹ Qushayrī, vol 1, 242; Baqlī, vol 1, 150.

² Tustarī, 261.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, 670-671.

⁵ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 428.

be the direct speech of God with the “We” of majesty.¹ This open interpretation is another example of how angels are either given as the literal explanation for the metaphorical “We” of majesty, or how they are subsumed within the idea of God on a cosmological level, with very little to no ontological independency in action, especially in their important role of messenger. Lastly, on (53:43), Ibn Barraĵān 1 does not consider Pharaoh asking of Moses to see angels accompanying him as proof of God’s power as suggested in Chapter 1, but for the angels to bear the news brought by Moses,² underlying thus this primary function of messenger associated with seeing angels.

3.2.10 The Messenger Function in the ‘Non-Angel Verses:’

On the theme of angels sent to different prophets, Tustarī on (75:29) briefly mentions Jacob and an angel bearing good tidings to him, the pangs of death easy for him to bear;³ on (20:51), Sulamī mentions an anonymous report interpreting this verse as an angel sent by God to Abraham telling him: “Oh Abraham, God is indeed commanding you to know Him with your heart;”⁴ on (24:11), Qushayrī brings up the stories of Abraham and Lot, highlighting that Lot could not know that his guests were angels until they informed him.⁵ Conversely, a different light is cast on the relationship between prophets and angels in Ibn Barraĵān 2, with an eschatological *ḥadīth* mentioned whereby the Dajjāl will be accompanied by two angels looking like prophets.⁶

On (6:130), Ibn Barraĵān 1 touches briefly on the possibility of God sending jinn Messengers to the jinn, and not only human ones. In his opinion, this verse is open to

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 329-330.

² Ibn Barraĵān 1, vol 5, 93.

³ Tustarī, 258.

⁴ Sulamī, vol 2, 8.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 2, 597.

⁶ Ibn Barraĵān 2, 259.

such an interpretation, but he refutes the possibility of jinn Messenger sent to humans, for two reasons: they would not have given a message that is important to man and they could not have been seen by us, which is a condition for messenger and envoys (*wadhālik shart fī al-mursil wa-l-mubligh*), and because the guides (*a'imma*) are humans, not jinn, after their father has been tried by God and refused.¹ This raises the question about angels: they are not seen by most people, and if they are, it is in a human form, so their selective visibility is not enough to disqualify them as messengers. They are still more trustworthy than jinn, who are disqualified for this position in the islamic cosmology because of their kinship to Satan.

In Ibn Barrajan 2, a brief description is given of God giving his command to the angels, who then convey it from one heaven to another until reaching the “Boundary” (*munṭahā*, a word usually associated with the Lote-tree, *sidrat al-munṭahā*), which is the place of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) and message (*risāla*).² This boundary is presented as the interface between the angelic realm and the human one, point of contact for the transmission of messages.

On (20:25), angels are used to show the special place of messengerhood in Ibn Barrajan 2, attributed to the Prophet: in the “clear book” (*al-kitāb al-mubīn*), God gave the angels a “description” (*waṣf*) that “distinguished them from others” (*abānahum ‘an siwāhim*), in the same way that God made a “description” of those who were taught the book, in distinction to those who were not taught it and who are “in a state of slavery (*riqq*) and nothing more.”³

¹ This is an obvious reference to Iblīs, considered as father of the jinn in islamic cosmology (“*ikhtabara Allāh abāhum al-mublis al-mal ‘ūn fa-abā*,”) Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 2, 278.

² Ibn Barrajan 2, 241.

³ Ibn Barrajan 2, 487-488.

On the non-necessity for an angel messenger, Muḥammad is distinguished among the prophets, as Qushayrī comments on (4:162): during the *miʿrāj*, God gave commands to Muḥammad about the prayers without the mediation of Gabriel (*wāsiṭat Jibrīl*).¹ We will see in Chapter 3 that other angelic functions than messengerhood are highlighted in the *miʿrāj* accounts. Similarly, Baqlī on (5:111) explain that the “revelation” (*waḥī*) sent to the messengers is both “specific” (*khāṣṣ*) and “general” (*ʿāmm*), the specific one being sent without mediation, and the general one being sent through the mediation of Gabriel. The specific one has different levels (*marātib*): the revelation of the Acts (*waḥī bi-l-fiʿl*), the revelation of the Attributes (*waḥī bi-l-ṣifa*), and the revelation of the Essence (*waḥī bi-l-dhāt*).² The presence and role of Gabriel is then the transmission to those who cannot receive a specific revelation, as a help for understanding a divine message or reality for which, if made specific, the ontological existence of Gabriel is not required anymore.

3.2.11. An Overlooked Cosmological Function: Angels as Testers.

Tustarī on (2:102), states that Hārūt and Mārūt did not act without the prior knowledge of God of their actions, knowledge “which precedes the occurrence of the act of the one doing it,” thereby encompassing God’s knowledge and Will on all the angels once again, including these two who were seemingly independently willed.³

On this verse, Qushayrī sees these two angels as a lesson to creation, with similar consequences to listening to Satan: “*To creation, they became sedition (fitna), even a lesson, for to whoever listens to their sayings, without considering their ignorance, their*

¹ Qushayrī, vol 1, 389-390.

² Baqlī, vol 1, 337.

³ Tustarī, 22.

affliction befalls them as well as their distress in the next world.”¹ However for Ibn Barraġān 1 Solomon and the two angels Hārūt and Mārūt are absolved by God (*barra’ a Allāh*) from what the satans were doing. This included following wrongly the guidance the angels came with, attributing to them and to Solomon a sorcery that God had not allowed.² He elaborates later on this theme: these angels were sent with knowledge of the Names and what this required (*‘ilm al-asmā’ wa-mā taqtaḏīhi*), as well as cures against sorcery (*dawā’ min al-siḥr*). As for their declaration “We are only a trial so do not disbelieve”, Ibn Barraġān 1 says it was directed to knowledgeable people, meaning “Do not deviate and do not turn away from the path so that it does not turn away from you” (*lā tazugh wa-lā ta’dil ‘an al-ṭarīq fa-ya’dul bika*). This was in a context where deviation and *fitna* was said to be widespread, when these knowledgeable people were learning from these angels arts they twisted, such as learning “what separates the husband from the wife instead of what is required of affection, generosity and friendship in God,” and such other contrary things to which they added sorcery (*wa-yuḏīfūn ilā dhālik siḥr*). Indeed what the angels taught was very close to their twisted contrary: “Indeed the reverse way was close to this, that expressed the opposite.”³ In the same comment, the author mentions the satans learning from the angels what they

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“صارا للخلق فتنة بل عبرة، فمن أصغى إلى قيلهما، ولم يعتبر بجهلها تعلّق به بلانها، وأصابه في الآخرة عنائها.” Qushayrī, vol 1, 110.

² Ibn Barraġān 1, 248-249. In a following but separate section, Ibn Barraġān 1 further refutes that Solomon used “sorcery” (*siḥr*), since this is not from God, and rejects the widespread story of Solomon’s power contained in his ring, attributing this to falsified stories (Ibn Barraġān 1, vol 1, 250). Though he keeps calling them angels throughout his long commentary of the verse, he also raises the possibility that instead of “two angels” (*malakayn*), it might have been “two kings” (*malikayn*), with the reading of a different of vowel on the *lām* (*kasra* instead of *fatha*), according to the reading of Ibn ‘Abbās and one ‘Abd al-Raḥmān.

3

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

Ibn Barraġān 1, vol 1, 255-256.

turned into error (*dalāl*) such as star-spiritualism (*rūḥāniyyat kawākib*), which is among the things “They would learn that which harmed them and brought them no benefit” in the verse.

Another test put to humanity is seen via the other function given by some commentators on the verses discussing the sending of visible angels, as part of the credo (seen in 2.2.2). On (6:8-9), Ibn Barrajān 1 elaborates on the meaning of God’s decision to send human messengers to humanity, and that had the messenger been an angel, He would still have made him appear in human form (something which is echoed in the story of Abraham’s guests). Although these verses have a function in defining the islamic credo, the commentator stresses here what the test posed by the human appearance, and how one should not stop at appearances: human messengers have the appearance of humans (*ẓawāhiruhum bashariyya*), but the inside of angels (*bawāṭinuhum malakiyya*), thus drawing there a first parallel with exoteric/esoteric dichotomy of knowledge typical sufi discourse. By using the literal sense of both words (*bāṭin/ẓāhir*), it also blurs the frontier between human and angelic messengers. Following this idea, the commentator explains that external appearance does not indicate the sincerity of the messengers (*ṣidqihim*), and if one stops at their outward aspect, then one lacks faith in them and in what they brought. This test put to anyone listening to a messenger is further drawn by the commentator with a second exoteric/esoteric comparison with the quranic text itself, which poses a similar test to its reader or listener: there are clear verses (*āyāt bayyināt li-l-‘ilm*) and others ambiguous, the “appearance” or exoteric aspect of which does not correspond to their “inside” or esoteric aspect (*mutashābihāt ẓawāhiruhā bi-khilāf bawāṭinuhā*). If one then does not reflect and research this internal side of the verse, then one cannot reach the higher

knowledge (*rafi‘ al-‘ilm*) and the degree of certainty (*darajat al-yaqīn*), and one is left to be “at best a teacher or a reciter.”¹ Angelic characters and their possible appearance to men’s eyes in human form help here the author in elaborating the function of test of faith posed to humanity as a whole concerning prophets and their claims, on a first level. On a second level it presents another test, in illustrating what separates a normal believer from a mystic in their approach to the quranic text and its message.² It also incidentally alludes to the commentator’s ideas about occupations and social hierarchies of his time.

3.2.12. The case of Gabriel and Michael, and Other Named Angels in ‘Angelic Verses.’

In Chapter 1 we have seen that in the Qur’ān few angels were given names, such as Gabriel, Michael,³ *Hārūt*, *Mārūt*, and possibly *Mālik*. The commentaries mention the first two numerous times - the highest number of references going to Gabriel - in different reports and *ḥadīth* that we cannot list here for reasons of space and relevance, as most of these mentions are reiteration of their roles in the quranic text, and have been studied by Burge (for the *ḥadīth*). However the commentaries, drawing from other religious sources, confirm or give additional names, an “exegetical increase” of angels noted by Burge, who wrote a detailed chapter on the ways angels can be named in

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“وأعلى رتبة أن يكون دارسا وقارنا

Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 2, 203.

² The Qur’ān as a “litmus test” in Ibn Barrajan’s works is researched in detail by Yousef Casewit, where he also explains that his approach of the “ambiguous” verses (or “consimilar/differentiated” so use Casewit’s translation) is different than most sufi scholars from the islamic east. See Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*, 206-244.

³ Gabriel is usually spelled “*jibrīl*” in these commentaries, except for a brief mention in Baqlī where it is written “*jibrā’īl*” (Baqlī, vol 2, 12). We also note that most commentaries we have seen use the common *rasm* for Michael (*mīkā’īl*) and not the quranic one (*mīkāl*).

Islamic tradition.¹ He writes that there are four ways angels are named in Islam: “1) use of the suffix *-īl*; 2) function names using the formula ‘the angel of X’; 3) function names formed without *malak*; and 4) other miscellaneous names of varied or disputed origins,”² noting later that function names tend to be preferred in Islamic texts.³ Sachiko Murata remarks that the mention of angels’ personal names are usually followed by the formula used for prophets (other than Muḥammad), “Peace be upon him” (*‘alayhi al-salām*), which might also occur after a mention of the common name “angel(s).”⁴ This has been most often the case across these commentaries.

In Qushayrī on (79:5), an unknown report identifies here specific angels: Gabriel descending with the Revelation, Michael descending with rain and plants, Seraphiel (*Isrāfīl*)⁵ descending with the surahs (*ṣuwar*), and the Angel of Death coming to take souls (he is not given a name).⁶

In both commentaries of Ibn Barrajān 1 and Ibn Barrajān 2 on (2:33-34), we find the idea that angels are being named on “their truths and the truths of their being brought to existence,” such as *Riḍwān* and *Mālik*, who are thus identified as angels.⁷ Later on we learn that Gabriel and Michael have alternative names, respectively ‘*Abd-*

¹ Burge, *Angels sin Islam*, 31-51.

² *Ibid.*, 33.

³ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴ Murata, “The Angels,” 326.

⁵ I follow here the suggestion of Burge, who identifies *Isrāfīl* with the Seraphiel of the Jewish traditions, ‘chief of the Seraphim’, while Wensick proposed that *Isrāfīl* derived from the word “seraphim” itself (*Ibid.*, 35, ft. 37), and Günther translates this name by “Raphael”, although both etymologies and Biblical roles do not seem to match, (Günther, “‘As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Qur’ān 6:93)”; It would also seem that the Islamic Seraphiel shares some characteristic with the angel Sandalphon in the Talmud (Pagani, “La controversia sui meriti relativi degli uomini,” ebook).

⁶ Qushayrī, vol 3, 682.

⁷

“على حقائقهم وحقائق ما أوجدوا له.”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 1, 185

Allāh and *‘Abd-al-Raḥmān*.¹ In Ibn Barrajān 2 we similarly find angels named according to “that for which they exist,” and Gabriel, like Iblīs, is said to be an angel of fire, referring to the angelic tribe mentioned in 2.2.4.² This might be a way to oppose symbolically the main satan, who has a name (Iblīs), to the main angel among angels, also bearing a personal name (Gabriel). On (35:1), Ibn Barrajān 1 also mentions the existence of Seraphiel.³

In the case of Gabriel, regarding the verse (26:193-194), the “Trustworthy Spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*) is identified as Gabriel in Sulamī, where Gabriel is said to make the Prophet a “warner” (*mundhir*) and not a “realiser” (*muḥaqqiq*), because “what is caught from the Truth” (*mā talqufuhu min al-ḥaqq*) is not known by any creature, be it jinn, human or angel, and “had Gabriel made him witness it, [Gabriel] peace-upon-him would have burned.”⁴ Sulamī also identifies very briefly Gabriel through a report attributed to Ja‘far in (53:8) which is part of the verses associated with the *mi‘rāj* story.⁵ Qushayrī also identifies Gabriel in both of these cases, (26:193) and (53:8),⁶ with added details on (26:192-193) of Gabriel’s movements; first he ascends “to heaven and listens to his Lord, memorising [the message], then he descends, and transmits the message to

¹ Ibn Barrajān 2, 186. This is found later in Suyūṭī with a small variation: Michael is named *‘Ubayd-Allāh* while Seraphiel is the one named *‘Abd al-Raḥmān* (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 34).

² Ibn Barrajān 2, 130-133; Gabriel as an angel of fire is also found in some Jewish texts (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 251).

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 436.

⁴

”لو شاهد فيه جبريل لاحترق عليه السلام.”

Sulamī, vol 2, 81.

The mention of angels, especially the ones with specific names, are often accompanied by the phrase “*alayhi al-salām*”, and since the only other possible subject of the sentence here was the Prophet, which mention is always followed by the longer “*ṣallā Allāh ‘alayhi wa-l-sallām*”, then Gabriel was the obvious subject here. Gabriel burning in case of witnessing the Truth/God is a recurring motif, seen also in the next chapter.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 2, 284.

⁶ Qushayrī, vol 3, 18 and 481-483: see 2.2.4 on Gabriel in the “*mi‘rāj*” verses (53:4-18).

the messenger.” In the process, he appears (*yatamaththalu*) to Muḥammad at times so that he listens to him, or he brings the verses directly upon his heart at other times (*yūridu Jibrīl dhalik ‘alā qalbihi*). Ibn Barraḡān 1 identifies Gabriel in (53:5) only, while identifying the Prophet in (53:8).¹ On (26:192-195), Baqlī also identifies Gabriel, as “mediation” (*wāṣīta*) of the sacred,² though he does not do so throughout (53:4-18), where his interpretation is mystical, and the rare mentions of angels or Gabriel are given by reports attributed to previous mystics only.³

Regarding the debate with the previous monotheisms, as seen in 2.2.1., the commentary of Qushayrī on (2:97-98) relates that Jews considered Gabriel an antagonist to them, for had it been Michael bringing the revelation, they would have believed.⁴ This is a common motif,⁵ which we also find in Ibn Barraḡān 1, although “they” is not explicitly identified as the Jews, the same verse elicit a similar commentary:

*“It came to that they said to God’s Messenger: ‘Had he not been bringing you the divine inspiration, we would have followed you’; and they said: “‘Because he brings pain and he is our enemy among the angels’”.*⁶

¹ Ibn Barraḡān 1, vol 5, 208.

² Baqlī, vol 3, 53.

³ Baqlī, vol 3, 356-360.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 1, 108.

⁵ This is probably related to his role of destructor of Sodoma in Jewish traditions (Burge, *angels in Islam*, 106); it could also be seen as the championing of Gabriel in face of the Christians who adopted Michael as their main archangel (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 345; Keck, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle-Ages*, 4).

⁶

“جاء أنهم قالوا لرسول الله: لولا أن الذي يأتيك بالوحي هو جبريل لا أتبعناك، قالوا: لأنه يأتي بالعذاب وهو هدونا من الملائكة.”

Ibn Barraḡān 1, vol 1, p.240.

On (81:19), Sulamī identifies the noble messenger (*rasūl karīm*) as Gabriel in an implicit manner, as he does not mention his name but through an unknown report says “He made him a envoy (*safīran*) between Him and His Prophets.”¹

In a similarly classical manner, Qushayrī identifies Gabriel in (19:17-26) with “Our Spirit” (*rūḥunā*) and the “messenger of your Lord” (*rasūl rabbiki*) sent to Mary,² and so does he in the “Spirit” in (70:4),³ as well as in (97:4) where Qushayrī indicates that it could also be an unnamed archangel or “great angel” (*malak ‘azīm*).⁴ This is one of the very rare allusions to Gabriel in these Sufi commentaries on this groups of verses (97:1-5) about the “Night of Power,” during which many other islamic writings explain that Gabriel brought the complete Revelation.⁵ Ibn Barrajan 1 also sees in (19:17) Gabriel, “or an angel from the angels of the wombs.”⁶ Interestingly, Baqlī on (19:17-26) does not see in “Our Spirit” the archangel Gabriel, but the light of God connecting with the light of her spirit (*nūr rūḥihā*) “after it appeared as an image of Jesus.”⁷ Here the Spirit would either be an apparition as a human prophet, symbol of her future son in the narrative, or it could be seen as a metaphor for her elevated spiritual state and distinction.

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 375. Qushayrī and Ibn Barrajan 1 also identify Gabriel here (Qushayrī, vol 3, 694. Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 5, 456).

² Qushayrī, vol 2, 423

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 628.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, 751. This is a rare instance of a phrase that could be translated as “archangel,” as in the great majority of cases in the primary sources of this study, only “angel” is used as a common category name.

⁵ For an overview of the exegesis around these verses, with a focus on Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944/ 1537), see Arnold Yasin Mol, “Laylat al-Qadr as Sacred Time.”

⁶ Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 3, 479.

⁷

“بعد أن تمثل لها بصورة عيسى.”

Baqlī, vol 2, 456.

3.2.13 The Case of Named Angels in the ‘Non-Angel Verses:’

On (2:1), Tustarī identifies the letter *lām* with Gabriel (*Alif* with God and *mīm* with Muḥammad). We find this reported in Sulamī as well,¹ and in Qushayrī as an anonymous report among the different interpretations offered.² On (11:40), Tustarī mentions a story involving Gabriel and Muḥammad, where Gabriel acts as messenger between God and the Prophet,³ where God offers to the Prophet the choice between the granting of paradise to a portion of his nation and the right to intercession. After several exchanges through Gabriel, the prophet obtains intercession for two-thirds of his nation.⁴ While usually only angels are able to intercede on behalf of humans as seen in chapter 1 (and always with God’s permission), this narrative extends this favour to the prophet, an idea repeated by Tustarī on (14:34).⁵

If some commentaries relay the usual exoteric dogma surrounding the revelation,⁶ other comments give curious details, such as the commentary of Qushayrī on (32:8-9) that alludes to the verse (35:1) by describing Gabriel as the “peacock of the angels” (*ṭāwūs al-malā’ika*).⁷ Baqlī relates the same phrase, with the same allusion to (35:1), in a report attributed to “the Master”, which confirms that he means al-Qushayrī by this title. Reminiscent of the Yezidi belief system,⁸ this peacock figure is among many representations of angels with animal figures (some prophetic *mi’rāj* narratives include

¹ Tustarī, 13; Sulamī, vol 1, 47.

² Qushayrī, vol 1, 53.

³ On 12:42 Tustarī mentions Gabriel again as messenger between God and Joseph while the latter is in prison (Tustarī, 96). This seems to be the main role in which we find Gabriel, such as in the commentaries of 89:1-4 (Tustarī, 282) and 113:2 (Ibid., 318).

⁴ Tustarī, 92.

⁵ Tustarī, 103.

⁶ For example Sulamī, vol 1, 42.

⁷ Qushayrī, vol 3, 140.

⁸ Victoria Arakelova, Garnik S. Asatrian, *The Religion of the Peacock Angel, the Yezidis and Their Spirit World* (London: Routledge, 2014).

a rooster angel). Burge already noted that while angels are described in human form in the Qur'ān, Islamic traditions give them many different forms,¹ such as the bearers of the Throne seen previously.

There are other well-known examples of the involvement of Gabriel in the Prophet's life: on (74:1-2), Qushayrī relates the first apparition of Gabriel, floating in the air (*fa-badā lahu fī al-hawā*), and how this caused the Prophet to flee and envelop himself in a garment (mentioned in these verses).² Then Qushayrī understands (81:23) as Muḥammad seeing Gabriel on the “clear horizon” mentioned in the verse, during the night of the *Mi'rāj*.³ On (15:47), Qushayrī mentions that God ordered Gabriel to clean and purify Muḥammad's heart,⁴ a well-known episode in Islamic religious literature - although not mentioned in the Qur'ān as we have seen in Chapter 1. On (94:1), the verse usually associated with the heart purification, Ibn Barrajān 1 adds the story of two angels attending to this work, one of them being Gabriel, and he times this event during the night of the *isrā'* and *mi'rāj*.⁵

Beyond these ‘classical episodes’, some new roles are attributed to Gabriel: Sulamī on (7:199) interestingly presents Gabriel as an interpreter (*mufassir*) to the Prophet, the latter asking him the meaning of the verse he just transmitted.⁶ Another role is found in the comment of Baqlī on (34:23) presenting Gabriel in the role of

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 56.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 647.

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 694.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 2, 273.

⁵ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 511. In Ibn Barrajān 2, only two angels are mentioned, not Gabriel, and the purification consists in “extracting the portion of Satan from his heart” (Ibn Barrajān 2, 860). There are many variations of the chronology of these different events: the heart purification is sometimes situated in Muḥammad's childhood, sometimes during his adulthood with the *mi'rāj* (see chapter 3 and the works of Vuckovic and Colby).

⁶ Sulamī, vol 1, 261.

interpreter to the rest of the angels: these are receiving the “speech of Truth” (*kalām al-ḥaqq*) and become in such a state of awe (*hayba*) that they do not comprehend this speech, and ask Gabriel what it means. The last part of the verse would be an allusion to Gabriel’s answer, and he is then described as being “of the people of wakefulness and mastery of mystical knowledge.”¹

Regarding the relationship between Gabriel and the other prophets, on (12:24) Tustarī interprets the story of Joseph as a conflict between his “natural self” (that desired Zulaykha), and his “divinely and protected self” which witnesses the “proof of hid Lord” mentioned in the verse, “this being that the angel Gabriel came in the form of Jacob biting on his finger, upon which Joseph headed for the door while seeking forgiveness.”²

On (7:22), Qushayrī mentions an appearance of Gabriel, away from his role as messenger, just after Adam was excluded from Paradise, and a short description of the toils he has to endure on earth. We see Gabriel asking a question to Adam, by quoting (20:118), “Is this what you were told by “that thou shalt neither hunger therein, nor go naked?,” a verse describing the state of Adam in Paradise. The angel seems to be asking this to Adam as if he himself were discovering the meaning of living on earth, seemingly ignoring all of the physical world and its consequences, wondering about what God had meant when He told Adam he would go hungry and naked.

On (7:148), Qushayrī mentions Gabriel and Michael, as a rebuke to the people of Moses who took up the worshipping of the golden calf: no-one would agree to this

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Baqlī, vol 3, 153-154.

² Tustarī, 95.

“من أهل الصحو والتمكين في المعرفة.”

where they to “behold Gabriel and Michael and the Throne, or the earth, or the jinn, or humanity.”¹

Another example of the exoteric explanation of the “We” of majesty is given using Gabriel: mentioning a grammatical point, Qushayrī on (21:91) argues that the descent of Gabriel is conjoint to God, for example in this verse where “We breathed into her Our spirit” means to Qushayrī that Gabriel was in charge of this, on God’s command.²

As for other angels, few personal names are added by the commentaries: these are mainly Azrael (‘*Azrā`īl*’),³ Seraphiel, *Munkar* and *Nakīr*, and *Riḍwān*.

On Azrael, angel of death,⁴ there is a mention by Tustarī in the commentary on (39:68).⁵ He does not hold any particular role in this commentary, however paradoxically enough this commentary is about the mortality of angels (see the cosmological function). In Ibn Barrajan 2, Seraphiel is mentioned with a particular role given to him, presented as according “to the book called Torah:” after the downfall of Adam, Seraphiel is placed with a “spear of fire” (*rumḥan nāriyyan*) in front of the “tree of life” (*shajarat al-ḥayāt*) so that no-one pick up its fruits. The spear means to the author “piercing” (*ta`n*), and the interpretation (*ta`wīl*) of the tree of life means what is

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“ولا من لاحظ جبريل وميكائيل والعرش أو الثرى، أو الجن أو الورى.”

Qushayrī, vol 1, 570.

² Qushayrī, vol 2, 521.

³ On this name, see Stephen R. Burge, “ZR`L, The Angel of Death and the Ethiopic *Apocalypse of Peter*,” in *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigraphia* 19 (2010):217-224.

⁴ For an overview of the Angel of Death in other Sunni sources, see Günther, ““As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Qur`ān 6:93),” 314-322.

⁵ Tustarī, 173.

“permitted” (*mubāḥa*) in Paradise, and its restriction in this world means “faith” (*īmān*) and acting in obedience (*al-‘amal bi-ṭā‘atihi*).¹

On (47:1), Tustarī mentions Munkar and Nakīr by name, questioning souls,² which seems to be an early example of the last stage in naming these angels in islamic traditions, as explained by Arent J. Wensinck: the first stage consists in the absence of any angel mentioned, then the mention of an angel, then two angels, and lastly these two angels are given the names Munkar and Nakīr.³ The etymological origins of these names is not clear, and variations exists in other texts.⁴

We also find comparisons between prophets, caliphs and angels, as if the angels distinguished by personal names served in distinguishing their possibly human equivalents on earth, in a building process of Sunni political legitimacy already seen in the cosmological function: on (24:35), the “verse of Light”, Sulamī presents an anonymous report giving a parallel between four named archangels and the first four caliphs: “In this verse the light of the heavens is four: Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Azrael, peace upon them. The light of the earth is Abu Bakr, Omar, Othman, and Ali, may God be pleased with them.”⁵ Tottoli wrote more extensively on the Throne-bearers and how they are used for legitimacy purposes between Sunni and Shia trends: Sunni texts present a similar picture as that of these commentaries, while Shia texts will give

¹ Ibn Barraḡān 2, 322.

² Tustarī, 193.

³ Wensinck, “Munkar wa-Nakīr,” E.I.²

⁴ Such as “Nākūr,” and sometimes a third one, Rūmān, is associated to them, see Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 46; For more on these two angels in other Sunni sources, see Günther, “‘As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Qur’ān 6:93),” 325-331.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 2, 52.

the equivalence of these angels to the Prophet's family, or mention that their names are inscribed on the Throne.¹

Regarding such comparisons with prophets, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions (43:59) when commenting on the 19th surah, elaborating on Jesus and other exceptional men. He discusses their number before saying that some of them are “in the footsteps of” particular figures. This phrasing translates literally as “on the hearts of,” such as in “on the heart of the Prophets” (‘*alā qulūb al-anbiyā*’), while others are “on the heart of” Gabriel, Michael and Seraphiel. Others yet are simply described as having hearts that resemble the hearts of the angels (*ashbahat qulūbu-hum qulūb al-malā’ika*). To the commentator these men are indicated by the verse (43:60).² We should note that this phrasing, “on the heart of,” will be used widely by Ibn ‘Arabī, as seen in Chapter 4, which is one indication among many of Ibn Barrajān’s influence on him.

As for *Riḍwān*, the angel who came to be associated with Paradise in Islamic traditions, although not presented as an angel in the Qur’ān,³ he is mentioned in the commentary of Qushayrī on (7:43) that gives a brief cosmological organisation: *Riḍwān* is given the charge of organising Paradise, while the Throne is in the keeping of a certain “group” (*jumla*), the keys of the Kaaba are given to Banī Shayba, and the purification of the hearts, subject of this verse, is taken care of by God himself.⁴ Interestingly, *Riḍwān* and the “group” are not described as being angels, and this is only implied by the quranic context and the general islamic cosmology. In Ibn Barrajān 2, *Riḍwān* the keeper of Paradise (*khāzin al-janna*) is also mentioned in his commentary of the 36th surah (seen in 3.2.6). However, he does not qualify him clearly as an angel

¹ Tottoli, “The Carriers of the Throne of God,” 276-282.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 3, 484.

³ A development of Islamic tradition also noted by Burge (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 74).

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 1, 535.

either, and only the context of the death of a believer and the angel of death coming at the same time can imply that he might also be one, in addition to the more general context of understanding the guardians of Paradise and Hell as angels.¹

3.2.14. A Function of Cosmological Enrichment: Angels and the Jinn, Iblīs, and Other Beings in ‘Angelic Verses.’

This function grows out of the last part of Chapter 1, on the relationship between angels and jinn, and more generally the reorganisation of the Unseen world brought by the Qur’ān. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this function might help the readership or audience targeted by the commentaries in recreating an islamic cosmology in their imagination, by updating whatever non-islamic and pre-islamic notion they might have had to integrate it into the new cosmology. Examples of this function can be found in previous examples, such as the angels of torment and compassion in 2.2.1, and the bearers of the Throne in 2.2.4: the Quranic text does not describe the bearers, however islamic tradition give them zoological shapes inspired from Biblical texts. More especially when this enrichment relates to the Unseen, it might help readers and listeners seeking mystical explanations to events, and reflecting about inner and more spiritual matters - of which the angels are foremost representatives.

Iblīs/Satan :

In Chapter 1 we have seen that the quranic text leaves an ambiguity on Iblīs: angel or jinn? A grammatical point suggested that the word “jinn” might have designated any creature of the Unseen, including angels. Here, Ibn Barraĵān reverses this definition, and considers the angels composed of two tribes: one of fire and one of light, so on the

¹ Ibn Barraĵān 2, 586.

identity of Iblīs or Satan, Ibn Barraġān 1 classifies Iblīs as an angel in the commentary of (2:30-34),¹ while on (15:30-31), Ibn Barraġān 2 clearly states that Iblīs is “of the jinn, that is to say of the angels created from scorching fire,”² having previously said that all angels of light had bowed, as did all angels of fire except Iblīs.³

On a inner level, Tustarī explains on (2:30) that Satan is “a partner with the natural self (*nafs al-jibilla*) regarding the desires that it has which have nothing to do with God”.⁴ Similarly Sulamī in the commentary on (18:50) mentions a report attributed to Yaḥyā b. Mu‘ādh (d. 257/871) on the danger of following a path “apart from God,” that leads to being unable to discern “who is your enemy from who is your protector, and the state of approach from the state of turning away.”⁵

Satan and angels share the same conduit of communication, as in Qushayrī (seen in 2.2.1), whereby the same way that God allows to “convey the whisperings of Satan to the hearts, He conveys the thoughts of the angel.”⁶ This implies angelic capacities to Satan, as being able to operate on the same level than angels, on the heart level. On God allowing Satan's action, Qushayrī goes further on (7:11), implying that Iblīs' acts were planned by God, and even taught to Him. The author writes as if God was addressing Himself to humans, ending his commentary on how Iblīs' opposition followed “because of what was left of his disposition in you, and from what We taught him of jealousy of

¹ Ibn Barraġān 1, 188

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Ibn Barraġān 2, 314.

³ Ibn Barraġān 2, 133

⁴ Tustarī, 17

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Sulamī, vol 1, 412.

⁶ Qushayrī, vol 1, 607.

“كان من الجن أي من الملائكة المخلوقين من نار السموم.”

“من يعاديه ويواليه، وحال إقباله من حال إدماره.”

you, and his adversity to you.”¹ Qushayrī presents this idea in another way on (50:27): a “companion” (*qarīn*) is either a guardian angel claiming that he did not push him [his human companion] to commit a fault (*mā a ‘jaltu-hu ‘alā al-zilla*), or Satan claiming that he [the human being] chose to act on his whispering on his own free will (*fa ‘ala - bi-ikhtiyārihi*).²

On a more metaphysical level, on (15:28-31), Baqlī presents a long discussion comparing physical elements with concepts, whereby he associates Iblīs with the quality of “force” or “compulsion” of God (*al-qahr*) and his making out of fire (*nār*) as opposed to the quality of “compassion” (*al-raḥma*) associated with clay (*tīn*) and water of which men are made. He then address the interpretation of Iblīs being made of this “compulsion” that rendered him blinded (*maḥjūb*) to what the rest of the angels were seeing in Adam, or being so staunch a monotheist that he simply refused to bow to any other than God, by refuting that “if his sight had been correct, he would not have paid attention to the means,” the “means” being Adam as created being.³ Similarly on (2:30-34), Baqlī explains that Iblīs refused to bow because he did not see the “secret of God” (*sirru-llāh*) in Adam, as the angels did.⁴ Before Baqlī, on (15:30-31), Sulamī also gives a report attributed to Abū ‘Uthmān (d. 298/910) according to which God opened the angels' eyes to the particularities of Adam (*khaṣā’iṣ Ādam*) while he blinded Iblīs, which led him to rebel.⁵

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”ثم لاحق خلفه بما بقي عرق منه فيكم، ثم ما أَلَمنا به من مكان يحسدكم ويعاديكم.”

Qushayrī, vol 1, 521.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 452-453.

³

Baqlī, vol 2, 288-290.

⁴ Baqlī, vol 1, 43.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 1, 354.

”ولو كان نظره صحيحا لم يلتفت إلى الوسائط.”

On temptation, Qushayrī on (7:20) gives an interesting interpretation of the story of the temptation Adam and Eve by Satan, showing a desire for angelic status for particular reasons: they wished to become angels not because the angelic rank was superior to humankind's, but because angels do not suffer from passions or the fate of death.¹ This temptation by Satan is quite an interesting reversal of expectations: Adam and Eve are not tempted by more passions, but by a state of no-passion, which resonates with a particular mystical path, such as the ones of the world-renouncing hermits. This is the contrary dynamic to the stories later attached to the verse of *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*, angels tempted away from their angelic state to the human one full of passions. Here man aspires to no-passion while being in a state of passion and mortality, which is divinely prescribed and desired for man - while angels are destined to a state of no-passion and immortality, although some of them are tempted by the human state. Interestingly, in the verses (25:7-8) and Qushayrī's commentary, we find this same idea where the Prophet is disqualified in the eyes of the disbelievers for being a man subject to desires (*shahawāt*).² We will see that this seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy between the angelic and the human finds a solution in some esoteric comments in 2.2.9.

Going back to (15:28-31), Qushayrī first offers a mystical comparison to Satan's pride, to explain the possible errors one might fall in on the mystical path: "And thus it is for one whose states are veiled (*hujiba 'an aḥwālihi*), one claims to being good, while remaining in the darkness of perplexity (*ḥayra*)."³ Qushayrī further mentions that Iblīs refused only one bow, arguing that he would not bow to any other than God.³ This 'extreme monotheist' stance of Iblīs and its paradoxical implications have been studied

¹ Qushayrī, vol 1, 524.

² Qushayrī, vol 2, 628.

³ Qushayrī, vol 2, 270.

by Mohammed Rustom on the defence of Iblīs by ‘Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), who called the Devil “the teacher of angels.”¹ On (17:61), Qushayrī writes that the refusal to bow to anyone but God is an act of ignorance on Satan’s part (*kāna dhalik jahlan minhu*): if he really knew God, he would have obeyed,² while on (18:50), Qushayrī reiterates the reason given by Sulamī earlier for Satan’s refusal: he could not see past the physical aspect of Adam, and so thought himself better than him.³ Lory sees in Qushayrī’s comments that angels may refuse spiritual advancement.⁴ All these examples are echoed in the study of Sara Kuehn on the relationship between Satan and Adam, and the bow of angels through different pictorial illustrations of Islamic texts.⁵ To conclude, Iblīs/Satan unsurprisingly fits the archetypal role of the challenger, the most well-known example of the angelic testing function.

Jinn:

We do not find much new information about jinn in Tustarī, Sulamī and Qushayrī. On (34:40), Ibn Barraĵān 1 reiterates that the jinn were a category of angels (*wa-min al-malā’ika ayḍan: al-jinn*), and that the Sabeans (*ṣābi’a*) were worshipping angels.⁶ In Ibn Barraĵān 2 on (15:30) the angels of the “fiery tribe” (*al-qabīl al-nārī*) were designated by God as the “*jānn*” in (15:27),⁷ an alternative form of the word of jinn.

Ibn Barraĵān 1 on (2:102) elaborates on the relationship between jinn and Solomon who had full power over them, a power not given to anyone else after him. He

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

² Qushayrī, vol 2, 356.

³ Qushayrī, vol2, 401.

⁴ Lory, *La dignité de l'homme*, 214.

⁵ Kuehn, “The Primordial Cycle Revisited.”

⁶ Ibn Barraĵān 1, vol 3, 430.

⁷ Ibn Barraĵān 2, 442.

had the power to subjugate them and jail them, to take from them oaths that they do not overpower humans, to kill some of them, to banish them and make them work for the benefit of God’s servants. The commentary adds that the goal of this quranic story is for “God to declare that jinn cannot access information from the Unseen,” illustrating once again the shift brought in the Unseen in the islamic cosmology. Ibn Barrajan 1 further mentions that those jinn who might have had such an access were killed by Solomon, and that after Solomon’s death they remained unaware of it for a while, as a consequence of not being able to access news from the Unseen.¹ This contradicts somehow that until the late pre-islamic period jinn were seen to have kept this role of mediator, well after Solomon’s time, however it might serve the purpose to anchor and validate the islamic cosmological organisation as prefigured in the Jewish tradition and religion, as a feature of a monotheist cosmology, possibly in parallel to the jinn's expanded powers in non-monotheistic traditions.

Regarding this role of mediator, Ibn Barrajan 1 on (37:7) explains the process of the transmission of messages in pre-islamic times, seemingly using interchangeably “jinn” and “satans:”

“The jinn listens to the word, and the shooting star throws him away, and the satan transmits the word to his follower, and this one transmits it to his follower, and so on until it reaches the jinn that transmits it to the priest (...) with little understanding and confusing of the report.”²

¹ Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 1, 249.

²

“فيسمع الجني الكلمة ويقذفه الشهاب، ويُلقى الشيطان الكلمة إلى وليه ثم يلقيها ذلك إلى دونه كذلك حتى تبلغ إلى الجني الذي يلقيها إلى الكاهن (...) بقلة الإفهام وتشويش التبليغ.”

Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 4, 490.

On (72:8-9), Ibn Barrajān 1 continues elaborating on the heavens guarded by angels against the jinn, with a story about jinn finding the Prophet in the market of ‘Ukāz and commenting to each other that he is the cause of them no longer being able to listen to the heavens.¹

On (15:28-31), Baqlī mentions that God created from fire (*nār*) “the jinn and the *jānn*”, as well as Iblīs, creating a difference between men and *jānn* such as there is between water, clay and fire. Following is the long commentary mentioned above, associating water and clay with God’s mercy (*rah̄ma*) on his human servants, while fire is linked to God’s torment (‘*adhāb*) on his jinn servants, and the difference between their constitutive elements and associated qualities are at the origin of the “dispute” (*mukhālafā*) between both species.²

New Beings:

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

“This means the keepers of Hell whose feet are on earth and heads in the heaven of this world. They are called the Zabāniya from the word zabn, meaning the act of pushing away, for they push the people of Hell back on their tracks, using their arms and feet. When Abū Jahl heard the mention of the Zabāniya he fled to his people, upon which they asked him, ‘Have you become afraid oh him [the Prophet]? He replied, ‘No, but I fear the Zabāniya for I do not know who they are’.”³

¹ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 395-396.

² Baqlī, vol 2, 286-287.

³ Tustarī, 296.

Qushayrī on his part does not offer any further commentary on what kind of beings this word indicates,¹ nor does Ibn Barrajān 1.² However Ibn Barrajān 2 might imply that they are angels, of the guardian kind, following a verse taken as a metaphor (20:46): Moses and Aaron are “under Our eyes, that is our guardians and our angels, such as His saying calling his circle ‘So let him call his cohorts. We shall call the guards of Hell’.”³

Lastly, another ill-defined angelic group that appears in post-Quranic traditions is the Cherubim (*karrūbiyyim*; sometimes *kārūbiyyim*). This word is not found in the Qur’ān, but seems to be often used in later religious writings such as these commentaries and the texts studied in the next chapters, with varying forms (which happens also for names such as Gabriel), an example of increase by integration of previous and contemporary religious traditions. In these commentaries, the word is not used as a synonym for another group, the angels “drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*), which is a word that we do find in the quranic text. Islamic tradition most often interpret these “drawn-near” as a group of angels, an example of exegetical expansion: as seen in the previous chapter, these “drawn-near” are not qualified as angels, so we sometimes find other interpretations of this word than a class of angels. The confusing between these “drawn-near” and the Cherubim is sometimes found in some studies,⁴ however both

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 749.

² Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 522-523.

³

”بأعيننا أي حفظتنا وملانكتنا، كقوله عز وجل فيدعو ناديه سندعو الزبانية.”

Ibn Barrajān 2, 690. This implication works only if we take the “and” (*wa*) in “*ḥafazatinā wa-malā’ikatinā*” as being inclusive, especially given the predominant role of guardianship given to angels, but could also be read as a separate group, and the *zabbāniya* then would remain these unknown creatures as in Tustarī.

⁴ For example Godefroid de Callatay translates “*al-muqarrabūn*” as Cherubim, even though most islamic texts use the two different words in different manners (Godefroid de Callatay,

have a different etymological origin: the Cherubim seem to be of Babylonian origin, the word from the Akkadian “kārību” or “kurību,” while the beings seemed to have been the Biblical equivalent to the Sphinx or more generally the winged protectors of Near-Eastern mythologies;¹ while the “drawn near” is an Arabic term found in the Qur’ān, with a clear meaning of the Arabic Q-R-B root, and which could allude to any type of creature (as seen in 2.2.4, it can be understood as “Friends of God”).

2.2.15 The Cosmological Enrichment Function in the ‘Non-Angel Verses:’

Little can be added about Iblīs/Satan from the non-angel verses. On (2:257), Tustarī reiterates the power of Satan over the human self, “for Satan cannot overpower man except through desire (*hawā*) of his lower self.” According to Tustarī as well, on (58:10), a secret conversation (*najwā*) is what Satan does to the natural self (*nafs al-ṭab*’), accompanying this by a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet says that there is a touch of madness (*lamma*) that comes from both the angels and Satan.² On (41:37), Qushayrī implies that Iblīs is an angel, within a brief recounting of his refusal to bow to Adam.³ It seems that this was the generally accepted view, possibly as an influence of the Christian tradition of the ‘fallen angel’, which explains the inclusion of jinn as a sub-group of angels, rather than what might have been the case in pre-islamic Arabia, the angels as a sub-group of jinn, or a fully separate group of beings in the Unseen.

“The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ on Angels and Spiritual Beings,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 347-364.)

¹ For example related to the winged protectors such as found in the palace of Sargon (Nada Hélou, “Les origines hellénistiques de la représentation des anges,” 64); For the etymology and a detailed review of the Biblical Cherubim, see Mettinger, “Cherubim,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

² Tustarī, 224.

³ Qushayrī, vol 3, 333.

Regarding the jinn, on (25:28) Tustarī interestingly shows that jinn can help and have a role of protector to humans “whose prayer is good”:

“Such a person will be stirred during sleep at the prayer times so that he awakes. This is done by his brothers among the jinn who have befriended him. They may also accompany him when he travels and give him priority over themselves.”¹

On the communication with the Unseen in (26:221-223), Qushayrī draws the reader’s attention to the subject of these verses, the satans descending on the disbelievers (*kuffār*) and the pre-islamic priests (*kuhhān*).² However the exact identity of these “satans” (*al-shayāṭīn*) is not given, whether they are jinn or otherwise. An example of important comments outside of the angels verses is the commentary of (72:1) by Qushayrī, giving an interesting story that the reader could have expected later in the commentary on (72:8-9):

“It is said that the jinn were traveling to the sky listening to the speech of the angels, then memorised it, and then transmitted it to the pre-islamic priests (kahana). They would then add or remove [information from] it... And thus it was during the period between our Prophet, peace and prayers be upon him, and Jesus, Peace be upon him. So when our Prophet was sent, Peace and prayers be upon him, and they were stoned with shooting stars, Iblīs understood that something had happened and his armies fled. Then nine of them came into the heart of a palm tree and they listened to the recitation of the Prophet and they believed. They went to their people and said: “Indeed we heard a great recitation, that guides to good sense, so we believed in it...”³

Within the commentary on the 26th surah, Ibn Barrajan 1 mentions (58:32) to explain that “the ladder is for the satans” (*al-ṣullam li-l-shayāṭīn*) and “the stairs for the

¹ Tustarī, 140.

² Qushayrī, vol 3, 22.

³

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

Qushayrī, vol 3, 637.

angels” (*al-ma ‘ārij li-l-malā’ika*), using the words for “scales” that is used for the *mi ‘rāj*, or the heavenly ascent of the prophet.¹

As we have seen earlier, Ibn Barrajan 1 understand jinn as a category of angels, however he also further explains that the jinn are “the satans” (*al-shayāṭīn*) with characteristics that are closer to humans than angels, on commenting (21:8) where God denies sending Prophets who do not eat or drink (implying angel-like) : “And the jinn, who are the satans, eat food, and drink and and breed, and they have spouses and children, they are not eternal until Judgment Day, except Iblīs, may God curse him.”² This may be seen as an example of a conflating of satans and jinn, a darkening stance brought by a commentator going beyond the Quranic message, as noted by Lory.³

The relationship between angels and jinn become more complex on a separate section within Ibn Barrajan 1’s commentary of the sixth surah. Quoting the different verses regarding the jinn, he explains that all those who are named “jānn” are made from “scorching fire” (*nār al-samūm*) and these are angels prepared for “the retribution of the people of torture” (*mujāzāt ahl al- ‘adhāb*), while Iblīs is made from “smokeless fire” (*mārij min al-nār*) - that is fire (*nār*) and “bitter cold” (*zamharīr*) - as are the “infallible angels” (*al-malā’ika al-ma ‘šūmīn*). He states then that he created “angels of compassion” (*malā’ikat al-raḥma*) from “pure light” (*khāliṣ al-nūr*) dedicated to rewarding the obedient, and further down the text the *jānn* mentioned in (55:15) are said to be the children of Iblīs, among them believers and disbelievers.⁴

Concerning the “Spirit” (*rūḥ*), we have seen in the previous section (2.2.7), that is understood to be Gabriel in many cases, but this is not always the case. This is one of

¹ Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 4, 219.

² Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 1, 251.

³ Lory, *La dignité de l’homme*, 222.

⁴ Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 2, 244-245.

the different beings, or concepts, of the world of the Unseen which relationship to angels is not always clearcut.

In commenting some verses of the third surah, Ibn Barrajan 1 discusses the notion of “Spirit” by bringing up different “angel verses”, such as (78:38), (16:2), (19:17), (21:91), (38:72) and (17:85), as well as the “angel of the wombs” (seen in 2.2.1) breathing the Spirit where it needs to be sent. These verses are given different interpretations in different contexts, and the Spirit may mean Gabriel in some cases such as (19:17), or something less defined, which Ibn Barrajan 1 talks about in a more esoteric manner, with the breathing of the Spirit done to someone that the context could either mean Adam, Jesus or Muhammad:

“God named it “Spirit”, and we previously said that its adding to him was a distinction in creation and command and sovereignty, and satisfaction of him and all that is alive, so the angel of the wombs breathed into him the Spirit, or what is meant by this, and the Attributes of God that the existence of things expressed, and witnessing Him through these [Attributes] are the witnesses such as Power, Knowledge, Will, Life, Hearing, Vision and others, and the Spirit spoke through these [Attributes] the Noble Qur’ān by bringing it into existence as a indication of the Highest Spirit [God]”¹

However later, on (17:85), Ibn Barrajan 1 takes up again the definition of the “Spirit” descending with the Lord’s “command” (*amr*). While each and all creatures are made existent by Command (*fa-qad awjada li-kulli khalq amran*), the commentator also relates a report attributed to ‘Alī according to which the Spirit is an angel with seven thousands heads, each head with seven thousands tongues speaking seventy languages, praising God; another report attributed to Ibn ‘Abbās according to which the Spirit is an

1

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

Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 1, 542.

angel, with no other qualifications; and an anonymous report according to which “the universe is made of ten parts; nine parts of it are the Spirit, and one part is the rest”.¹ This preponderance given to the spiritual over the physical, and by naming it “Spirit,” will be echoed later in the “Breath of the All-Merciful” and the preponderance of the Imaginal dimension over the physical one with Ibn ‘Arabī.

Further down, quoting other verses mentioning the Spirit, the commentator talks about the “holy Spirit” (*rūḥ al-quds*), the “Trustworthy Spirit Gabriel” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn Jibrīl*), “the believers sharing mutual love in the Spirit of God” (*al-mu`minūn yataḥabbūn bi-rūḥ Allāh*), and other instances of the various appearances of the Spirit.² Overall, these discussions on the Spirit somehow leaves the reader with the impression that it can take on different forms, and serves in a more abstract manner the same functions as that of the angels: a conduit or mediator between God and His prophets or elected people, or as the spiritual element common to angels and distinguished humans.

However, within a long commentary on (17:85) Baqlī tellingly avoids defining the Spirit, the same way he avoided describing the angels, as “None have access to its identity except its creator,” and it is “made evident” by God (*bayyanahā*) only to Prophets and Friends.³

On the equally ambiguous concept of “companion” (*qarīn*) inherited from pre-islamic and more generally late-antique imaginaries, Ibn Barraĵān 1 mentions (43:36) and (41:25) and the angelic verses (41:30-31) within his commentary on (4:38) and its mention of Satan as companion to discuss this notion, which he does not define as of only one kind. It is first associated with a “satan” as mentioned in the verse (43:36), a

¹ “*inna al-khalīqa kulla-hum ‘ashara aqsām; fa-tis‘a aqsām min-hā al-rūḥ, wa-qism wāḥid sā’ir dhālik*,” Ibn Barraĵān 1, vol 3, 414-415.

² Ibn Barraĵān 1, vol 3, 317

³ “*wa-lā yaṭṭali ‘u ‘alā māhiyyati-hā illā ṣāni‘ihā*,” Baqlī, vol 2, 383.

companion that can be either good (*ṣāliḥ*) or corrupted (*fāsid*), and that remains with the person after death, “in the domain of the *barzakh* and after the resurrection (*ba‘th*).” This companion is of the same creed than the person, with the same moral traits, and it can be a satan, an angel, or a jinn, adding that “the companion of the Prophet [was] an angel and a believer jinn.”¹ The jinn, even if a believer, will usually entices to quick temper, eagerness, and bursts of anger, while the angel will lead to forbearance, equanimity, gentleness, good behaviour and compassion. After death, the commentator says that these companions will oppose each other.² We might see here the symbolisation of two pre-islamic concepts that are hard to translate, but which seem to have been thus conveyed into the new islamic cosmology and its values: the angel symbolises here human *ḥilm* (“magnanimity” or “chivalry”), while the jinn symbolises human *jahl* (usually translated as “ignorance”, but combined with their propensity to temper, it becomes close to the norse-originated concept of “berserk”, a quality that could be positive in battle, for example).³

Later, on (41:25), Ibn Barraḡān 1 discusses the presence of the companions once again, presenting similar ideas: to each person a jinn, in a relationship where the human is the “guide” (*imām*) while the companion his follower (*tābi‘*). The consequence of this is that when the person converts to islam, his jinn companion does too, and if the person becomes corrupt again, then his companion is excused and replaced by a corrupt one.⁴

1

“قرين النبي ملك و جن مؤمن.”

Ibn Barraḡān, vol 2, 49. Grammatically, it is not clear wether the subject is one companion who is both angel and jinn, or if they rare two different beings.

² Ibn Barraḡān 1, vol 2, 49.

³ Bernd Roling, "Northern Anger: Early Modern Debates on Berserkers," in *Discourses of Anger in the Early Modern Period*, ed. by Karl A. E. Enenkel, Anita Traninger (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 217-237.

4

In the next page of his commentary on the angel verse (41:30), he describes then the companions (*quranā'*) of the righteous people (*ahl al-ṣalāh*) as angels: once again jinn are presented as being a sub-group of angels.¹ This would mean that the righteous people are paired with infallibly good angels, while general people, who are at risk of falling into bad habits, are paired with jinn (or angels of fire, according to Ibn Barrajān), who can be equally good or bad. This give a spiritual illustration to the reader of his or her own actions, which might have both origins and consequences into the Unseen, as much as the inhabitants of that Unseen might influence the reader's actions and decisions.

Lastly on jinn and angels, later within the commentary of the 27th surah, Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions (6:38) to explain that the wings mentioned in this verse are for animals only (*bahā'im*), needing them to fly, as “angels and jinn do not need any wing to ascend or descend,”² though this goes against what is affirmed in (35:1). On (37:11), Ibn Barrajān 1 qualifies both angels and jinn as beings “who reason” (*man ya'qil*),³ although angels are not usually given independence of thought or action from God (this questions the capacity of reasoning in link to other intellectual dispositions: reason/intellect (*'aql*) is different from reflection/thought (*fikr*), and can be decoupled from free-will), and that oftentimes the grammatical plural used for angels is the one used for “non-reasoning” beings such as most animals (the plural in feminine singular).

“فَعَفِي مِنْهُ وَقَبِيضٌ لَهُ قَرِينٌ فَاسِدٌ مُفْسِدٌ.”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 47.

¹ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 48.

²

“إِذِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالْجِنُّ لَا يفتَقِرُونَ فِي الصُّعُودِ وَالنُّزُولِ إِلَى الْجَنَاحِ.”

Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 233.

³ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 491.

This is yet another example of the confusion and ambivalence, intended or not, surrounding angels.

Two particular categories of new beings are mentioned by the commentaries of Ibn Barrajān, that are not found in the Qur'ān, at least not with these names: the *Ḥinn* and the *Binn*. Ibn Barrajān 1 mentions the existence of these beings in a section discussing angels and jinn within the commentary of the sixth surah. They seem to be created from both elements of Hell (*jahannam*) and water, and they can be of mineral, plant or animal (*al-jamād wa-l-nabāt wa-l-ḥayawān*), attracted (*ḥanna*) or averse (*bāna*) to humans, hence their names.¹ Ibn Barrajān 2 on the angel verse (2:30-34) mentions *ḥinn* and *binn* again: according to one interpretation offered by Ibn Barrajān 2, these are creatures, or “animals” (*dawābb*), sent by God on Earth before man - the *ḥinn* yearning for Adam, and the *binn* wrecking havoc - following which the questioning of angels regarding those corrupting the earth and shedding blood was targeting these category of creatures, and not humankind as in most quranic commentaries.²

Finally, in his commentary of the 52nd surah, Ibn Barrajān 2 interestingly suggests that contrary to many interpretations, the *zabāniya* are guardian angels sent to guard persons such as Moses and Aaron, so “do not be afraid, for you are under Our eyes, that is to say our guardians and angels.”³ From the usual frightening keepers of Hell, they become here angelic guardians to the two prophets.

3.2.16 The Symbolic Function: An Esoteric (bāṭinī) Meta-Function in ‘Angelic Verses.’

¹ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 2, 248.

² Ibn Barrajān2, 124-125

³ Ibn Barrajān 2, 690.

This function is not listed in Chapter 1, and seems to stem from the nature of the Sufi commentary in general. This meta-function was hinted at in different places throughout the previous sections (such as the commentaries on (70:4) by Tustarī and Sulamī in 2.2.4), and it appears more clearly through a second level of reading, when noticing that many of the “angel verses” are given a *bāṭinī* or esoteric interpretation either as the only type of interpretation, or as a second interpretation following an exoteric one. The angels then stand for spiritual experiential metaphors, and do not necessarily appear as ontological characters. They are metaphorical tools directly used for a function outside the text, a symbolic or esoteric meta-function: they are used to explain a quranic verse in relevance to the author’s and/or readers’ spiritual experience, or to explain concepts for which angels become allegories or symbols - while the angels are not representing characters inside the text anymore.

This section will show different examples of this, starting with a first part where the angels used as allegorical metaphors: in the commentaries just mentioned on (70:4) where angels are presented as an allegorical metaphor for the deeds of humanity ascending to God, and the Spirit as an allegorical metaphor for the “intuition of the self.” Another example of alternative exoteric and esoteric commentaries are to be found in Qushayrī on (79:1-5),¹ and we have seen in the messenger function that Tustarī does the same to the verse (77:1) where angels can be understood as such, beings sent by God with His Command, or as metaphors for the spirit of the believers receiving an inspiration. Tustarī then offers esoteric-only explanations on the following verses (77:2-6).²

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 681-682.

² Tustarī, 261.

The most ‘angelic’ of all verses, (35:1) whose main subject are the angels with the only quranic description of them, also gives way to different metaphors. Following our first mention of (35:1) in Qushayrī and how this verse illustrates the double attitude a believer should have towards the acts of God (see 3.2.5), Qushayrī gives in a second part of its commentary a list of esoteric interpretation on God’s increasing creation as He wills.¹ Baqlī also makes of this verse mystical allegories, playing on the number of wings:

“He gave the angels wings of knowledge according to the stations’ degrees, giving preference to some over others as in His verse “two, three, and four”, and the saintly spirits have wings, of which there is the wing of Knowledge (ma‘rifa), the wing of Oneness (tawhīd), the wing of Love-Affection (maḥabba), the wing of Desire (shawq); and with the wing of Knowledge you fly to the world of Attributes (ṣifāt), with the wing of Oneness you fly to the world of Being (dhāt), with the wing of Love-Affection you fly to the Witnessing (mushāhada), and with the wing of Desire you fly to the Communion (wiṣāl).”²

He then relates reports from other mystics with variations on this metaphorical approach, and a report attributed to al-Junayd elaborating on the increase of “creation as He wills” in the hearts of the mystical knowers (*al-‘arīfīn*).³

On a credo verse (3:80), angels are similarly ignored by Sulamī while the verse is given different esoteric commentaries, such as a report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī in which angels symbolise an unnecessary veil (object of worship demanded by unbelievers in the verse): “Would He command you to veil yourself from the Truth after

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 190-191.

²

“جعل للملائكة أجنحة المعرفة على مراتب المقامات، فضّل بعضهم على بعض في ذلك في قوله {مثنى وثلاث ورباع}، وللأرواح القدسية أجنحة، منها جناح المعرفة، ومنها جناح التوحيد، ومنها جناح المحبة، ومنها جناح الشوق، فبجناح المعرفة تطير إلى عالم الصفات، بجناح التوحيد تطير إلى عالم الذات، وبجناح المحبة تطير إلى المشاهدة، وبجناح الشوق تطير إلى الوصال.”

Baqlī, vol 3, 156.

³ Ibid.

you gazed upon the Truth, or to cut yourself from the Truth by following something else?”¹

In the comment on (19:17), Sulamī reports a saying attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ saying that the “Spirit” (*rūḥ*) should be understood as “light” (*nūr*) from which Jesus was created.²

Similarly, on (50:21) where many understand guardian angels, Baqlī gives only a mystical metaphor: the “driver” as the “desire of the soul of the mystical knower” (*shawq nafs al-‘ārif*) for “the beauty of the Truth” (*jamāl al-ḥaqq*) and the “witness” is the witnessing of this desire (*mushāhadat shawqihi*), further witnessing that he is a “Friend drawn near” (*waliyy muqarrab*) by using this adjective mostly given to angels in exoteric commentaries.³

On the commentary of Sulamī on (53:4-18), apart from a brief discussion on receiving inspiration (seen in 2.2.5) and a mention of Gabriel, these verses are given a sufi interpretation. For instance (53:10) in the report attributed to [Ja‘far] al-Ṣādiq given by Sulamī, the verse becomes a metaphor for a mystical relationship between two lovers and how they keep secret what is between them.⁴

Similarly Qushayrī on (32:11) seems to give an apparent ontological existence (or at least a metaphorical one), to the Angel of Death for those only whose hearts are unaware:

“Had their hearts not been unaware, the souls would not have been taken by the Angel of death; indeed the Angel of death does not have any effect on anyone, and does not move freely by himself, and what is obtained from the dead is specific to the power of Truth. However they were unaware of the witnessing of the truths of the Lord so He spoke to them

¹ Sulamī, vol 1, 105-106.

² Sulamī, vol 1, 423.

³ Baqlī, vol 3, 334.

⁴ “*lam yuṭli ‘ā ‘alā sirrihimā aḥadan siwāhumā,*” Sulamī, vol 2, 285.

on the level of their understanding (...), and all are spoken to with what they may bear according to their strength and weakness”.

This clearly implies that the Angel of death is not independent from God, and his name or representation only serves in communicating God’s speech on the level of those who need this metaphor at the moment of death.¹

On (33:9-10), verses that could allude to armies of angels send by God, Qushayrī only gives a general spiritual interpretation, whereby God relieve the believers from hardships without them noticing.²

On (37:1-10), Sulamī sees in (37:6) stars adorning the sky as “the hearts of his friends [adorned by] the stars of gnosis.”³ We have seen in 2.2.4 that Qushayrī first identifies angels for the four first verses of this same group, however he builds on the exoteric interpretations with esoteric-symbolic ones, which become the predominant type of commentary given for (37:5-7), whereby “[God] adorned the hearts with the lights of monotheism, and if Satan draws close to them, they will stone him with the stars of their knowledge.”⁴ On these verses Baqlī gives a mystical interpretation only.⁵

For the verses (79:1-5), part of the “alluding angelic verses”, Tustarī interprets “the racing ones” (*al-sābiqāt*) not as angels, but as the spirits of the believers racing to

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“لولا غفلة قلوبهم وإلا لما أحال قبضة أرواحهم على ملك الموت، فإن ملك الموت لا أثر منه في أحد، ولا له تصرّفات في نفسه، وما يحصل من التوقّي فمن خصائص قدرة الحق. ولكنهم غفلوا عن شهود حقائق الرب فخاطبهم على مقدار فهمهم (...) وكلّ يخاطب بما يحتمل على قدر قوّته وضعفه.”

Qushayrī, vol 3, 140-141.

2

“كم بلاء صرفه عن العبد وهو لم يشعر.”

Qushayrī, vol 3, 154.

3

“وقلوب أوليائه بكواكب المعرفة.”

Sulamī, vol 2, 176.

4

“زيّن القلوب بأنوار التوحيد، فإذا قرب منها الشيطان رجمها بنجوم معارفهم.”

Qushayrī, vol 3, 227-228.

⁵ Baqlī, vol 3, 476-477.

“to be the first to respond to the Angel of Death out of longing (*shawq*) for their Lord.”¹ On these same verses, much later, Baqlī also gives his personal interpretation on these, not identifying any angels, but the spirits (*arwāḥ*), breaths (*anfās*) or intellects (*‘uqūl*).² Similarly Baqlī sees in angels symbols for human spirits in (13:13): “The angels are the spirits of the mystical knowers when they are annihilated by the splendor of His greatness.”³ He later gives another interpretation closer to the one given by Qushayrī in 2.2.4 (angels crying tears of blood for the mystics), while also mentioning a report from a previous mystic as illustrated by 2.2.4⁴ And lastly on (25:21), Ibn Barrajān 1 gives only one short comment on the seeing of the angels in the verse, that signifies to him death.⁵

In this second part, we will see how this meta-function is also seen in another use of the angels, whereby the commentary given is purely mystical, bypassing the angels altogether - reflecting, on a meta-level, on the non-necessity of angels as mediators. We had seen this for the Prophet when in direct connection with the divine, for Gabriel as the exoteric symbolisation of this communication for some commentators, or for the episodes when Gabriel was not needed, for other commentators. Thus on (35:1), Sulamī similarly elaborates in a mystical way on the meaning of “increasing creation as He wills” (*yazīd fī al-khalq mā yashā’*), such as the “mystical knowledge of God” (*ma’rifat Allāh*) in a report by Ibn ‘Aṭā’, or “the Love-

¹ Tustarī, 265.

² Baqlī, vol 3, 381.

³

“والملائكة أرواح العارفين وهي فانية من إجلال عظمتة.”

Baqlī, vol 2, 226.

⁴ Baqlī, vol 2, 226-227.

⁵ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 4, 183.

Affection in the hearts of the believers” (*maḥabba fī qulūb al-mu`minīn*) in an anonymous report, without referring once to the angels in themselves.¹

On the verse (3:18) that defines the basic islamic credo, Sulamī presents different mystical interpretations on the *shahāda*, with numerous reports from previous mystics, including one from Tustarī,² according to which God’s witness of His self followed by the witnessing of His creatures means that he had full knowledge of everything before the existence of everything. Over the three pages, angels are mentioned only once, briefly, in the report attributed to Ja‘far, as a paraphrase to the credo: “angels and the possessors of knowledge” attest to God’s own *shahāda*.³

On different verses that are usually taken to be alluding to angels, we have an example of exclusively mystical interpretations with Sulamī giving reports such as the reports attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’, Ja‘far, and al-Junayd on (41:12),⁴ al-Wāsiṭī on the “watcher” in (50:18), and Sulamī himself with al-Wāsiṭī on the “driver” and the “witness” in (50:21).⁵

On commenting (78:38) Sulamī once again bypass the obvious subject of angels to an ‘educational’ interpretation of the verse on the etiquette of speaking, by both himself and a report attributed to Abū ‘Uthmān.⁶ On this same verse, Qushayrī goes on directly and gives an esoteric commentary discussing the “awe” (*hayba*) that people will feel on the Last day, pointing out the difference with the “elite” (*khawāṣṣ*) who are permanently witnessing this awe.⁷

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 157.

² Which can be found in Tustarī, 43.

³ Sulamī, vol 1, 90-93.

⁴ Sulamī, vol 2, 216.

⁵ Sulamī, vol 2, 267.

⁶ Sulamī, vol 2, 369.

⁷ Qushayrī, vol 3, 679.

On (89:22) Sulamī presents a report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī commenting on the divine Might, angels not needed to explain this (or turning angels thus into metaphors for this concept). He also presents reports of unknown origins discussing the notion of time and place to underline the incommensurability of the divine.¹

On (8:9), Sulamī does not mention angelic help. Reports and discussions are about asking help from God, and one attributed to al-Naṣrābādhī (d. 367/978) that is particularly mystical: the self (*nafs*) calls for help for eternity and health, while the heart (*qalb*) calls for help in face of his fear of change (*taqlīb*).²

On (33:43), Sulamī give a report attributed to one Abū Bakr b. Ṭāhir, which ignores the angels, bypassing these mediators or helpers, to go on elaborating on the meaning of God’s prayers on his servants.³ On this same verse, Qushayrī gives several esoteric meanings to God’s prayers and the angels, as the verse’s theme of darkness and light lends itself easily to such a type of interpretation.⁴

On (2:210), Qushayrī explains that this demonstration of God’s power (*naḥdh qudratuhu fīmā yurīd*) is not necessary to the hearts of monotheists, who do not require the interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of this verse and similar verses, since “the Truth Exalted He be, is above any move or impermanence, of specific location in place and time.”⁵ Angels are then an unnecessary part of the demonstration of God’s power, as their representation is still linked to notions of temporality and space. Similarly on (33:9-10) Qushayrī sees in these allusions of unseen armies either help averting afflictions (33:9)

¹ Sulamī, vol 2, 394.

² Sulamī, vol 1, 257-258.

³ Sulamī, vol 2, 149.

⁴ Qushayrī, vol 3, 165.

⁵ Qushayrī, vol 1, 172.

or afflictions being inflicted upon some (33:10), discussing God’s acts directly, without mentioning the possible angels involved here.¹

On the credo verse (4:136), Qushayrī gives different reports, all paraphrasing in different ways what a believer should believe in, and the last report employs a mystical vocabulary by which believers are said to be often “witnessing the Truth not the Reality of the Essence” (*shāhid al-ḥaqq lā ḥaqīqat al-dhāt*),² reiterating the incommensurability of God.

Another such example by Qushayrī, echoing the theme of angels having access to the heart of men in Tustarī on (50:18), is found in his commentary on (2:248) elaborating on the fact that if the “tranquility” (*sakīna*), borne by the angels in the Ark, was situated in a particular place and time in the time of the people of Israel (*banū Isrā’īl*), in the tabernacle (*tābūt*) and the staff of Moses (‘*aṣā Mūsā*), then God “has deposited the *sakīna* of this [muslim] nation in their hearts.”³ This could be seen as a particular variation of this meta-function: something regarded as a literal event and possessing an ontological existence is turned by an islamic mystic into a metaphor for a spiritual reality, transposing an exoteric cosmological detail (that need angels to bear it) into a spiritual one (which is placed directly into the hearts, rendering angels unnecessary), and thereby also claiming a certain superiority of the islamic concept of “*sakīna*” over the Jewish one. Another distinction between two groups of humans and the use and need of angels for the “lower” group is made by Qushayrī in his commentary on (82:10-11): the sight of the writing angels is meant as a source of fright

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 153.

² Qushayrī, vol 1, 374. This reminder of a final access to one "interface" of the divinity, and not its whole, could be both understood as a warning against what al-Qushayrī saw as wild claims from some Sufis, and an idea that is to be found in Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, among others.

³ Qushayrī, vol 1, 192.

to humans, in case they seek to rationalise and question the divine (*iṭṭilā' al-ḥaqq*). Had they known better, that is, were they not questioning the existence of God this way, it would have been better for them than seeing angels.¹

Lastly, on the theme of death, the angel of death mentioned in the verse (16:32) elicit from Baqlī a long list of mystical metaphors about death, without mentioning angels or physical death - metaphors which he attributes to “the master” (*al-ustādh*).²

In this third part, we will see that angels are also used in a more metaphysical level. Both Ibn Barrajān 1 and Ibn Barrajān 2 contain similar reflections of the metaphysical sort. The metaphysical discussion on the "names" taught by God to Adam is found first in Ibn Barrajān 1, for example in a section within the commentary of the seventh surah, where he says that “all creatures have dedicated angels, specifically and generally,” and Adam taught the angels “their own names, so he called them all with the name corresponding to what he [the angel] was in charge of among the existent things.”³ On (2:30-34) Ibn Barrajān 2 launches into a similar and longer commentary around the naming of things that God teaches Adam about, the question of the angels serving the purpose of prompting the discussion around the names.⁴ Here Adam gives the angels their names not with the goal of “separating them from each other, but with the goal of giving them names corresponding to that for which they exist,” or names corresponding to their ontological existence, such as Iblīs is named for his desperation

¹ Qushayrī, vol 3, 297-298.

² Baqlī, vol 2, 317.

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«لكل مخلوقاته ملائكة موكلون به فخاصّ وعمّ (...) بأسماء أنفسهم فأنبأ كلّ باسمه المطابق لما وُكِّل إليه من الموجودات.» Ibn Barrajān 2, vol 2, 306.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 2, 124-133.

(*iblāsīhi*).¹ This idea is extended to all the names taught to Adam, names corresponding to abstract concepts, things and creatures, receiving names corresponding to their existence. The whole discussion is rather philosophical in nature, evoking a process of “bringing into consciousness” started by God through the teaching of the names. Through this process, angels discover the infinite knowledge of God and what has been imparted of it to Adam that, however partial, remains superior to their own. This knowledge also corresponds to a kind of realisation of their own existence by creatures and things, thanks to the process of receiving the names that corresponds to their realities. In this way, angels are closer to symbolising philosophical concepts, relationship or dynamics, which foreshadows the understanding of Ibn ‘Arabī of the divine Attributes and Names.

On these same verses (2:30-34), Baqlī, as we have seen in the cosmological function, considers that angels are prideful and faulty, whereby the creation of Adam teaches them to be modest, something which is drawn as a general example to readers (as seen in the praxis function), and by ordering them to bow to Adam, angels are made to see the “secret of God” (*sirru-llāh*) in Adam, while Iblīs did not see it, so he refused to bow.² Baqlī further states, with a highly mystical terminology, that God also taught Adam “the names of the stations that are the stairs of the states (*madārij al-ḥālāt*).”³ Similarly on these themes of “secret” and Adam, Baqlī on (7:11) describes the angels bowing to Adam because “his image is the locus of the standing (*istwā*)” of the light of the Attributes (*ṣifāt*), “his form is the locus of the standing of the lights of the Acts

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“ليست أسمائهم عنده للتفرقة بعضهم من بعض فيما هنالك، إنما أسمائهم مطابقة لما وجدوا له.”

Ibid, 128.

² Baqlī, vol 1, 43.

³ Baqlī, vol 1, 42.

(*af'āl*),” “his spirit the locus of the standing of the lights of the love-affection (*maḥabba*),” and “his secret the locus of the fixation of the lights of science (*ilm*) and the knowledge (*ma'rifa*).” Adam becomes thus a mean of service-hood to the angels (*wāsiṭa fī al-'ubūdiyya*).¹

The creation of Adam allows angels to access God and His capacities through this manifestation in a way, an idea which he repeats elsewhere in the commentary on (15:28-31),² angels participating in, if not representing, the self-realisation of the divine through man.

Lastly, this fourth part explores another specific type of metaphor given to the angels, found in the comment of the verses (6:8-9): these are about angels not sent down with the Prophet or, if they were, angels would have been obscured with human-like appearance. We have seen that this blurs boundaries in the commentaries, between who is human and who is angelic. The very short commentaries of Qushayrī seen in the theological function show that external proof is nothing to those who are unconvinced at first: conviction must come from within. On (6:9) that mentions this sending of angels by God in the appearance of men, “thus obscuring to them that which they themselves obscure”, Qushayrī writes: “Who does not consider his innermost self as sacred, [God] obscures his affair (*labbasā amrahu*).”³ Angels, like the innermost self, is thus to be perceived internally and without needing an external appearance.

We have seen in 3.2.11. how Ibn Barrajān 1 uses these angels obscured by God in (6:8-9) as a test to humanity, and then draws a comparison with the mystical approach to the quranic text and how the higher knowledge and certainty can be reached

¹ Baqlī, vol 1, 418.

² Baqlī, vol 2, 286-290.

³ Qushayrī, vol 1, 462.

only by going beyond the appearance/exoteric to reach the inside/esoteric.¹ On the same verses, Ibn Barraĵān 2 reiterates that had angels been sent to humanity as messengers they would have looked human-like (echoing Abraham’s story seen in the messenger function), elaborating on the nature of the universe: messengers sent to humanity are angelic inside (*bawāṭīnuhum malakiyya*) and human on the outside (*ẓawāhiruhum bashariyya*), as is the universe composed of different elements on its outside (*al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ ẓāhiruhu*), of which the inside is the “Evident Real” (*bāṭīn dhālika mā huwa al-ḥaqq al-mubīn*).²

On these same verses (6:8-9), Baḳlī uses a mystical vocabulary, with his habitual flowery style, to comment on those able to see or feel angels, where “the people of the Truth” (*ahl al-ḥaqīqa*) would see in the face of the messenger what was not in the “face of people of the Kingdom” (*wujūh ahl al-malakūt*) of “the illumination’s brilliance of the attributes of the light of eternity” (*sanā ishrāq ṣifāt nūr al-azal*). He adds a precision on (6:9), that the “mystical seekers” (*murīdīn*) cannot see “the people of the Kingdom” (*ahl al-malakūt*), that is the angels, except by “feeling” (*al-mithāl al-ḥissī*), and were they able to see them, they would only see them in human form, which is “the locus of obscuration” (*mawqī‘ al-iltibās*). He also adds that those who cannot see angels because God obscures “for them that which they themselves obscure” suffer only from their “ruse sent back on their neck” (*wa-yurja ‘u kaydu-hum ‘alā a ‘nāqihim*). For him, the verse may also have a further meaning for the “people of

¹ Ibn Barraĵān1, vol 2, 203.

² Ibn Barraĵān 2, 282. In this sentence, the universe is designated by “*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*”, on which Böwering remarks that “another important feature of Ibn Barraĵān’s writings as a whole, as well as the *Īdāh* in particular, is his doctrine of *al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi al-samawāt wa-l-arḍ*, that is, “The Reality By Virtue of Which the Heavens and Earth are Created.” This idea has its roots in the writings of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā and finds an echo in the works of the Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers.” (Ibid., 42).

the Truth” when the “station of treachery and cunning in desire and love-affection” (*maqām al-khidā‘ wa-al-makr fī-l-‘ishq wa-l-maḥabba*) means that they commit association in their love (*min shirkihim fī al-‘ishq*).¹

3.2.17 The Symbolic Function in ‘Non-Angel Verses:’

This part is necessarily short, as mystical commentaries bypassing angels can only be identified in “angel verses”. However we do find some uses of angels to point out a spiritual or mystical concept or reality in “non-angel verses.” Tustarī on (6:125) gives a long commentary, which upon mentioning the stations (*maqāmāt*) and degrees (*darajāt*) a believer might reach, he quotes the angelic verse (37:164) where the unknown speakers are usually identified as angels with a verse (6:132) to justify the use of these words.

While not being exactly a metaphor, the angels are used to illustrate the specificity of mystics as a group, likened thus to angels such as in the commentary of Tustarī on (78:11), giving an esoteric interpretation of “livelihood” (*ma‘āsh*) which seems to set apart a certain elite from the masses (*‘awāmm*):

*“That is, the lights of the heart and its illumination (tanwīr) through Our remembrance (dhikr), are the livelihood (‘aysh) of the spiritual self (nafs al-rūḥ) and the intellect (‘aql), as they are the livelihood of the angels. However, the other kind of livelihood is the way of the generality of people (‘awāmm).”*²

Echoing the angels circumambulating the Kaaba illustrating the verse (114:4), Tustarī identifies on (52:4) the quranic Inhabited House (*bayt ma‘mūr*) with a House in

¹ Baqlī, vol 1, 347-348. These ideas are repeated in the comment on (25:7) where Baqlī adds that human qualities are not contrary to prophethood, as the body is the vessel (*markab*) leading ultimately to gnosis (*ma‘rifa*), (Baqlī, vol 3, 26-27).

² Tustarī, 263.

the 4th or 7th heaven to which angels make a pilgrimage.¹ On the esoteric side however, he further states that this “*bayt*” is actually the heart of the mystics:

*“In its inner meaning, it refers to the heart; the hearts of mystics are frequented (ma‘mūra) by His gnosis (ma‘rifa), His love (maḥabba) and intimacy (uns) with Him. It is to this [the mystic’s heart] that the angels make pilgrimage, for it is the House of the Realisation of God’s Oneness (bayt al-tawḥīd).”*²

On another parallel between angels and hearts, we find the interpretation of (48:4) in Sulamī by a report attributed to al-Tustarī: on the exoteric side God’s armies in heaven are the angels (*junūduhu fī al-samā’ al-malā’ika*), and His armies on earth are the raiders (*junūduhu fī al-arḍ al-ghuzāt*), while on the esoteric side “The armies of the heavens are the hearts and the armies of the earth are the selves”.³ Interestingly, in Tustarī we find the same commentary with the difference that the armies of the heavens are prophets, not angels, with a greater elaboration on the esoteric interpretation, and how it is preferable for the heart to overpower the self.⁴

Regarding this simultaneity of exoteric and esoteric interpretations, and the place of angels in this nexus, we find Sulamī commenting on (27:6) with a report attributed to Abū Bakr bin Ṭāhir, for whom “One who is Wise, Knowing” (*ḥakīm ‘alīm*) is Gabriel. To him, Gabriel transmitting the Qur’ān is only the exoteric aspect of an inner event: “*Indeed you receive the Qur’ān from the Truth, in reality, even when you are taking it on the outside by the mediation of Gabriel, God - Exalted he be - said ‘The*

¹ Ibn Barraḡān 1 relates the same interpretation on this verse, mentioning only the 7th heaven, Ibn Barraḡān 1, vol 5, 199.

² Tustarī, 210.

³

“جنود السماوات القلوب و جنود الأرض النفوس.”

Sulamī, vol 2, 255.

⁴ Tustarī, 196.

*Compassionate taught the Qur'ān'.*¹ This echoes the dichotomy already seen between the direct divine message and the message given by a mediator: here Sulamī juxtaposes the esoteric understanding to the usual exoteric understanding of this event, something that we will also appear in the following chapters.

Another parallel is drawn between angels and human souls on the commentaries on (85:1-3), in both Tustarī and Sulamī, which contains the same report attributed to Tustarī with one variation: the “witness” is understood as an angel (in Tustarī the one mentioned in 50:21) or several angels (in Sulamī), and the “witnessed” is understood as being the Day of Resurrection (in Tustarī), or humanity (*al-insān*) (in Sulamī).² Although diverging on this exoteric interpretation, both versions converge on the esoteric one: the “witness” is the spiritual self (*nafs al-rūḥ*) and the “witnessed” is the “natural self” or “lower self” (*nafs al-ṭab'*).³

Additionally, among the many mentions of meteorological angels, we need to mention Ibn Barrajān 1's commentary on (77:1-2) (also seen in the cosmological and messenger functions), where the angels in charge of the winds and the clouds are simultaneously in charge of spreading God's compassion.⁴ This denotes a recurrent literary theme where clouds, rain, and wind carry a positive connotation, contrary to heat and the sun,⁵ reflecting geographical realities. Similarly, commenting on (57:16) Ibn Barrajān 2 compares the revivification of the earth by God after its death with the

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“إنك لا تتلقف القرآن من الحق حقيقة وإن كنت تأخذه في الظاهر عن واسطة جبريل قال الله تعالى ﴿الرحمن علم القرآن﴾.” Sulamī, vol 2, 85.

² Among the many unknown reports he gives on the verse (85:3), Qushayrī gives a variation on this one: the witness is an angel, but it can also be humanity, witnessing itself. (Qushayrī, vol 3, 710).

³ Tustarī, 276, and Sulamī, vol 2, 385.

⁴ Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 428-429.

⁵ A few pages earlier the sun is described as part of the torment inflicted upon those going to Hell (Ibn Barrajān 1, vol 5, 405).

revivification of the hearts by remembrance (*dhikr*) and the seeking of knowledge (*ṭalb al-‘ilm*) from God, His messengers, His angels, and His signs (*āyāt*).¹

On commenting (39:17), Baqlī speaks about the callings from the inner part of the servant (*bāṭinihi*) where the “apprehensions of the self” (*hawājīs al-naḥs*), the “whisperings of Satan” (*waswās al-shayṭān*), and the “thoughts of the angel” (*khawāṭir al-malak*) compete. The first one calls for his interests, the second to disobedience, and the last one to devotion.²

On the specific metaphor of Satan as the “ego” or “lower self,” we find the commentary of Qushayrī on (7:12), a verse about Iblīs claiming “I am better than him” (*anā khayran minhu*) when speaking about Adam.³ Sulamī gives different reports giving all mostly esoteric interpretations: an anonymous one lays the fault on Iblīs, by claiming he was better than man because he was created of fire, in that “he did not know and was not certain that the preference (*al-ḥaḍl*) came from the One giving the preference (*al-muḥḍil*) and not from the matter (*al-jawhariyya*).” Other reports focus even more interestingly on the word “I” (*anā*): one anonymous says that Iblīs was cursed when he uttered this very word; the report attributed to al-Wāsiṭī links this to the ascetic’s life, “He who wears the shirt of asceticism is clasped by the ‘I’” (*man labisa qamīṣ al-nusk khāṣarahu anā*); the report attributed to Ibn ‘Aṭā’ takes this verse to explain that “if the Truth takes over the innermost of something, it defeats it and there is no preference left for any but [the Truth].”⁴ On (7:29), Sulamī describes Iblīs’ inborn nature (*khilqa*) as beginning by disbelief (*kufr*) and dispute (*khilāf*), before he was brought by God among

¹ Ibn Barraḡān 2, 742.

² Baqlī, vol 3, 208.

³ Qushayrī, vol 1, 522.

⁴ “*li-anna al-ḥaqq idhā istawlā ‘alā sirr shay’ qaharahu fa-lam yatrūk fīhi ḥaḍlan li-ghayrihi,*” Sulamī, vol 1, 221-222.

the angels and the “drawn near” (*muqarrabīn*), and then sent back again to what he started from.¹

Regarding angels as metaphysical concepts, in a separate section in the commentary of the sixth surah, Ibn Barrajan 1 comments on (34:23) and elaborates on the general cosmology of angels as seen in the cosmological function section. However he presents a brief paragraph that is more esoteric and philosophical in nature, about the “Meanings of the universe” (*ma‘ānī al-khalīqa*) being more numerous than its “Essences” (*dhawāt*).² This “meaning” (*ma‘nā*) cannot be always translated this way: this multiform and multi-use word in a philosophical context might translate different concepts inherited from the Greek, such as “entity” or “idea.”³ Ibn Barrajan gives examples of actions that can be done on an entity, or a concept, such as “attracting” (*jādhīb*), “pushing” (*dāfi‘*), “dividing” (*muqsim*), and the commentator then compares these to “angels in charge” (*al-malā’ika al-muwakkalīn*) who are more numerous than the Meanings, “since to every Meaning there is a Pusher, a Taker, and a Maintainer” (*idh li-kulli ma‘nā dāfi‘ wa-qābiḍ wa-māsik*): so to each Meaning, there are several angels taking care of it. Angels are thus symbols for movements putting the universe in motion. He later takes the examples of the alluding verses (77:1-5) and (79:1-5) as examples of these notions.⁴ For instance in (79:1-2) he elaborates on the angels of death

¹ Sulamī, vol 1, 227.

² Baqlī, vol 2, 242-243.

³ Kermani, *God is Beautiful*, 203-204; Leaman, “Ma‘nā,” E.I.²; We will see in chapter 4 that its derived adjective “ma‘nawī” with Ibn Arabī might be best translated as “ideational.”

On “meaning” and its different meanings, we might mention here the mystical take by James S. Cutsinger on modern myths as those produced by the Inklings to illustrate his comprehension of angels: to him angels make man realize that the world is full of meaning, so it crushes his ego (James S. Cutsinger, “Angels in Inklings,” *Mythlore* 19, no. 2 (1993): 59-60.)

⁴ Ibn Barrajan 1, vol 2, 242-243; vol 5, 428-429, 442. Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) writes similarly, in a more literal manner, that everything needs several angels, and that the natural faculties (attracting, pulling, etc), are done by angels (Murata, “The Angels” 335).

taking souls and others in charge of growing plants or tearing off “matters” and “meanings” that have grown too many in certain situations.¹

3.3. Concluding Thoughts.

This chapter showed that angels in the sufi *tafsīr* were among the main actors of the cosmological Unseen (*ghayb*) as both the theological Kingdom (*malakūt*) and the eschatological afterlife (*ākhirā*). These commentaries represented them in the same roles as those found in the quranic text inducing the same functions,² albeit with more details and nuances at times, and adding some new specific roles at other times.

These additional details and roles, as well as the way the commentators sometimes used the presence of angels for drawing parallels and mystical or metaphysical reflexions, led to the adding of two new functions: first the function of cosmological enrichment through an elaboration of relationships between angels and other beings such as the jinn, *ḥinn*, *binn*, and other undefined concepts such as the Spirit (*rūḥ*). This function is related to the “exegetical inflation” noted by Burge, mobilising Olyan’s work on Jewish writings (as seen in the introduction of the chapter), ordering and detailing a general cosmology and religious history. This is also related to the use of *isrā’iliyyāt*, which are elements of the midrashim (Jewish commentaries) used by Muslim scholars to explain specific or unclear aspects of the Quranic text and sacred

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”تكثر المواد والمعاني غير المرادة لذلك المراد، فتنزع النازعات من الملائكة.”

Ibn Barrajān, vol 5, 428-429.

² As a reminder: a narrative function (secondary characters helping or fighting humanity); a theological function (defining aspect of the islamic credo); a religious praxis function (illustrating the believer’s expected actions); a cosmological function (angels as part of establishing a new world-view); a classic cosmological function (angels as messengers); an overlooked cosmological function (angels as testers); and the case of Gabriel and Michael.

history,¹ although Burge consider the influence of *isrā'iliyyāt* rather limited in islamic angelologies, appearing mostly in some specific names.²

Secondly, the last function added seems to be specific to Sufi or mystical types of commentaries: the meta-function of angels as symbols for spiritual states and concepts. This was alluded to and might have been remarked upon by the reader throughout the previous functions in individual examples, and shown more systematically in the last sections (the symbolic function) in four different variations: 1) we have seen angels used as allegorical metaphors standing for the representation of esoteric or “inner” concepts (e.g. human deed, spirit), events (e.g. death) or meaning (e.g. attitude of the believer); 2) angels were remarked by their absence in the commentary on some verses, as a way of pointing out the non-necessity of their presence (as metaphors in the text) or existence (as characters for revelation or inspiration) for the mediation with the divine, this function ‘in negative’ outlining the direct divine communication of the Sufi experience; 3) the particular metaphysical and mystical representation of angels in the works of Ibn Barrajān where angels stands as particular symbols for writing about divine Names, Acts of creation, and Meanings, as tools of God in His creative act and its maintenance, which announces in part a similar use of angels in Ibn ‘Arabī’s works; and 4) a specific esoteric sign where the physical/exoteric relationship between the appearance of angels and that of humans

¹ Goldziher list three different types of *isrā'iliyyāt*: one that completes a biblical theme in the Qur’ān, one that includes as stories classified as “the time of the Banū Isrā’īl” even if they do not involve Jewish characters, and one that covers miraculous folk stories partly of Jewish origins. See Vajda, “Isrā’iliyyāt,” E.I.² See also Roberto Tottoli, “Origin and use of the Term Isrā’iliyyāt in Muslim Literature,” *Arabica* 46, no. 2 (1999): 193-210.

For more on the relationship between Judaism and the Quranic text, see Meir M Bar-Asher, “Premiers contacts entre Juifs et Arabes en Arabie avant l’avènement de l’islam,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, vol 1, (Paris: Cerf, 2019), 295-329.

² Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 47-49.

serves in explaining the test of faith posed to people in general, as well as the mystical state of being of a specific group of people, both exoterically and esoterically, such as the prophets, the righteous, and the mystical knowers.

This symbolic function of angels becomes an example of the fourth principle of Islamic esotericism listed by Saif, the “trans-linguistic principle that demands the use symbols and allegory.”¹ The discussion on the “symbolic” in this context of religious commentaries brings to mind the four levels of interpretation that are applied on monotheist scripture. In Islam, there is a saying attributed to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661) according to which there is no Quranic verse that does not have four meanings (the last two being difficult to translate): an exoteric (*zāhīr*), an esoteric (*bāṭin*), a limit (*ḥadd*), and an ascent (*maṭlaʿ*). This echoes another saying, attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq who “claimed the Qurʾān is composed of four things: expressed matters (*ʿibārāt*), allusions (*ishārāt*), subtle references to the transcendent realm (*laṭīf*) and absolute truths or references to an absolute reality (*ḥaqāʾiq*). The first of these is the literal meaning of the text intended for ordinary people (*ʿawām*), the second is the allegoric meaning for the elite (*khawāṣṣ*), the third is the secret meaning intended for the spiritual elite or ‘Friends of God’ (*awliyāʿ*), and the fourth comprises the highest doctrines understood only by prophets (*anbiyāʿ*).”²

Even though literary and conceptual comparisons between languages and religions can only lead so far without raising discussions of relevancy due to the particularities of each tradition and the complexity of translation, both linguistic and cultural, these sayings call to mind in turn the parallel tradition of interpretation in

¹ Saif, “What is Islamic Esotericism?,” 46.

² Elias, “Sufī tafsīr reconsidered,” 41-42.

Judaism and Christianity. Indeed Wansbrough noted it with the Christian tradition started by the fathers of the Church such as Origen (d. 253 AD) and Cassian (d. 435 AD): literal exegesis (*ẓāhir* and *historia*), symbolic (*bāṭin* and *allegoria*), prescriptive (*ḥadd* and *tropologia*), spiritual (*maṭlaʿ* and *anagoge*).¹ To this we can add the Jewish interpretative tools of plain meaning (*pshat*), hint/allegory (*remez*), homiletic exposition (*drash*), and mystical/symbolic (*sod*).²

The questions would be then: assuming that the equivalences thus established are working, is the symbolic function in this chapter an illustration of the symbolic “*bāṭin/allegoria/remez*” level, or of the spiritual “*maṭlaʿ/anagoge/sod*” level of reading? This is further complicated by the fact that the first (symbolic) might equate a concept of the second (*anagoge*) for some authors such as pseudo-Denys the Areopagyte (6th century). Indeed to him *anagoge* is a symbol using a representation that is completely unlike what it represents, taking the example of the animal-looking bearers of the Throne,³ a tool to help the mind on its way to “un-represent” the highest spheres and the divine. Our best answer so far would be then that the commentators here use both the symbolic “*bāṭin/allegoria/remez*” tool and the spiritual “*maṭlaʿ/anagoge/sod*” tool, depending on each example (with the possibility that one example might be classified in both). For the sake of simplicity, we conflate then both levels of readings under the simpler denomination of “symbolic function,” used for the authors studied in this chapter, when they comment on Quranic verses in what could be qualified as esoteric (*bāṭin*).

¹ John E. Wansbrough, *Quranic Studies*, 243.

² Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 430.

³ Denys L’aréopagyte, *La hiérarchie céleste*, ed. Günter Heil, trans. Maurice de Gandillac (Paris: Cerf, 1958, 2020), LXXX-XCI, 77-85.

This symbolic function can also be compared to one angelic type listed by Burge in his typology of islamic angels: 1), angels of abstract concepts; 2) cosmological angels; 3) angels of specific things and places; 4) other angels.¹ We could argue that the three last types could be found in the Qur'ān in some measure throughout our listed functions, whether on the level of roles or on the level of functions arising from these roles. However the first one, “angels of abstract concepts,” cannot correspond to an angelic role, but to a function which arises primarily of the interpreting act of the text, or at least out of a particular reading of the text - the Quranic text itself does not state that the Angel of Death stands for the abstract notion of Death.² As such, this “abstract” type overlaps with the symbolic function that sees in angels signs, both in the sense of quranic *āyāt* and in a larger symbolic sense.

Through these functions, we have also seen what different styles of quranic commentary might be encountered, and how an individual author makes sense of islamic cosmology and enriches it. These comments lead to the renewal of the cosmology first presented by the Qur'ān: it further islamises cosmology through the re-use of pre-islamic concepts re-ordered in a new way. An example of this is the reversal of what “jinn” could have meant in pre-islamic times as seen in Chapter 1 (any being of the Unseen including angels): in Ibn Barraĵān’s time of islamic al-Andalus, “angel” now means all beings of the Unseen, including the jinn.³ These commentaries anchor and enrich the quranic text in a specific time and place, exposing it to particular transversal interests and debates, such as the ongoing inter- and intra-religious conversation, the

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 39.

² Burge affirms that abstract angels such as the Angel of Death was common in many religious traditions of the Middle-East, however he does not seem to make the distinction between what a text says in and of itself (such as the Qur'ān), and what texts say of other texts (such as commentaries), inducing a necessary distance and interpretative possibility (see *Ibid.*, 39-40).

³ This echoes the thesis of another quranic commentator, al-Zamakhsharī.

physical world and its necessities, the defining of what being Sufi or mystic means and what a Sufi's aspirations should be.

Further research on other commentaries, of the different types of *tasfīr* sub-genres, would be interesting in a comparative purpose: would the cosmological enrichment function be greater? Would these other types contain any function specific to them?

Such a comparative research could also help us in evaluating to what extent the symbolic function, as seen here, is particular to Sufi commentaries. From our readings, allegorical angels do exist elsewhere, such as in philosophical writings: philosophers seem to identify angels with Intellects,¹ al-Farabī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) identifying ten Intellects. The latter further identifies the Holy Spirit with Gabriel and the Tenth Intellect, and angel being more generally the symbol of an immortal intellect, an intermediary entity (*jawhar wasīṭ*) between God and terrestrial bodies on the three different planes of reason (*'aqlī*), soul (*nafsī*), and body (*jismānī*).² These identifications seem to become more complex in other metaphysical trends such as that exemplified by the writings of the Brethren of Purity (*Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*),³ or in texts from various Shia and Ismaili trends.⁴ However from our cursory understanding of these readings, angels then appear only as one type of metaphor, allegories acting more as a translation of

¹ Jadaane, Fehmi, "La Place Des Anges," 30-32.

² Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods used for its Study by the Ikhwan Al-Safa', Al-Biruni, and Ibn Sina* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1964), 268; Murata, "The Angels," 328-329; Olga Lizzini, "L'angelologia filosofica di Avicenna."

³ de Callatay, "The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* on Angels and Spiritual Beings;" Olga Lizzini, "L'angelologia nelle epistole dei Fratelli della Purezza : l'esempio della natura," in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ebook.

⁴ For example, Gabriel as a multivalent demiurge character, see Erdal Gezik, "How Angel Gabriel Became our Brother of the Hereafter (on the Question of Ismaili Influence on Alevism)," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, no. 1 (2016): 56-70; Angels related to "creative light" in Shiism in Gardet, "Les anges en islam."

concepts from a philosophical or metaphysical language into an islamic one, more than the construction of a specific concept of angels.¹

As such, if further research showed a greater mention of angels in more typically Sunni *tafsīr* this would confirm the particularity of this last function of angels seen here of Sufi *tafsīr*.² Indeed these do not contain as many angels as expected since they become at times unnecessary to be even mentioned, symbols in negative for spiritual states and concepts, while the exoteric-minded reader of another type of *tafsīr* would require a greater numbers of mediators - more angels, as ontological beings existing to be involved in the process of building an islamic cosmology and managing its elements.

¹ Burge goes so far as writing that angelic hierarchies in Islamic philosophy is an “afterthought - an attempt to graft Qur’ānic and *ḥadīth*-based beliefs into an otherwise alien philosophical system” (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 97-98).

² More literal readings of the role of angels after death, as studied by Günther, seems to point this way (Günther, “‘As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands’ (Qur’ān 6:93),” 307-346.)

CHAPTER 4

ROLE AND FUNCTIONS OF ANGELS IN THE SUFI *MI'RĀJ*

4.1. Introduction: Prophetic Model and Sufi Mimesis.

4.3.1 The “Heavenly ascension” or *mi'rāj* in Islam:

Mi'rāj literature is an aspect of islamic apocalyptic literature that has been built upon a few verses of the Qur'ān. These became the basis to what came to be known as the night journey of the Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Jerusalem - which is the *isrā'* - and his heavenly ascension - which is the *mi'rāj* proper. *Isrā'* in Arabic is rather clear in its meaning of night travel, as the Quranic verse associated with this narrative in *sūrat al-isrā'* seems to be clear as well:¹

“Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer.”
(17:1)

¹ Nathaniel Miller has convincingly argued that interpreting this verse as a “night journey” is more out of fidelity to the Prophetic *sīra* than anything else, as exegesis and classical lexicography kept alternative meaning of this word, and his own philological analysis showing that it is probably of Sabaic origin, with the meaning of “To travel through the uplands” or “To send a royal expedition.” See Nathaniel Miller, “Yemeni Inscriptions, Iraqi Chronicles, Hijazi Poetry: A Reconstruction of the Meaning of *Isrā'* in Qur'an 17:1,” *Journal of the royal Asiatic Society*, online (2020). Interestingly, such an alternative sense is kept in one of the saying listed by Sulamī in his collection of sayings on the Prophetic *mi'rāj*, see Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn al-Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension: Early Mystical Sayings on Muhammad's Heavenly Journey*, ed. Frederick S. Colby (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2006), 35.

For a review on western scholarship on this verse, see Claude Gilliot, “Coran 17, *isrā'*, 1, dans la recherche occidentale. De la critique des traditions au Coran comme texte”, in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam: ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels*, ed. M. Amir Moezzi (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1996), 1-26. For a recent literary study of this verse, which aims at showing the mythopoeic process built on it, see Neuwirth, “From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple.”

However the *mi'raj*, a word whose literal meaning is stairs or ladder, has come to designate the heavenly ascension through the heavens to God, and is linked most notably to Quranic verses that are more elusive in their meaning, in *sūrat al-najm* (53):

“By the star, when it sets / your companion has neither strayed nor erred / nor does he speak out of caprice. / It is naught but a revelation revealed, taught him by one of awesome power. / Possessed of vigor, he stood upright / when he was upon the highest horizon. / Then he drew nigh and came close, / till he was within two bow’s length or nearer. / Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed. / The heart lied not in what it saw. / Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw? / And indeed he saw him another time, / at the lote tree of the boundary, / by which lies the Garden of the refuge, / when there covered the lote tree that which covered. / The gaze swerved not; nor did it transgress. / Indeed, he saw the greatest of the signs of his Lord.” (53:1-18)¹

Thus, if the Qur’ān seems to allude to the night journey,² the reference to the *mi'raj* story is less clear,³ even if we take into consideration other verses such as Q 70:3-4 describing God as the “Lord of the heavenly stairs” on which angels descend and ascend. The *mi'raj* narrative will be mainly found later in the *ḥadīth* and the *sīra* in greater detail.⁴ Some accounts speak of stairs, and others of Burāq, the legendary mount of the Prophet that replaces the stairs in some cases.⁵ This is how the *mi'raj* stories were progressively elaborated and extended in islamic religious literature until it could be

¹ To this two main Quranic sources, sometimes another verse is added (81:15-24), where most commentators understand the vision of Gabriel in the early stages of the revelation to Muḥammad, others understood this as a vision of God, see Frederick S. Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey: Tracing the Development of the Ibn ‘Abbas ascension Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 16-17.

² For an literary analysis of the mythopoeic process that grew out of this verse in muslim tradition, leading to the questioning of what “the Farthest Mosque” might actually have meant in the Qur’ān, see Neuwirth, “From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple.”

³ The verses 53:1-18 have been interpreted in various ways by early muslim exegetes who debated whether Muḥammad saw Gabriel or God, see Joseph Van Ess, “Le Mi’raj et la vision de Dieu dans les premières spéculations théologiques en islam,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’islam*, ed. M. Amir Moezzi (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1996), 27-56.

⁴ See *ḥadīth* collections by al-Bukharī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), Abu Dā’ūd (d. 275/888), al-Tirmidhī (d.279/892), al-Nasā’ī (d. 303/915), as well as the *sīra* of Ibn Hishām (d. 219/834).

⁵ Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys, Earthly Concerns: The Legacy of the Mi’raj in the Formation of Islam*. (New York, Routledge, 2005), 44-50.

argued that it became a literary genre in itself,¹ with an elaboration on religious figures such as prophets and angels.

On Jewish apocalyptic literature, John J. Collins in his referential study writes that “the constant element is the presence of an angel who interprets the vision or serves as guide on the otherworldly journey.”² Ithamar Gruenwald also notes that angels are important in attesting the veracity of a vision in such literature.³ As such, this literary genre in the Islamic context unsurprisingly and clearly echoes previous apocalyptic literature and ascension narratives in the region, in both Jewish and early Christian literature,⁴ showing roots into a late-antique milieu, similarly to what Neuwirth argues for the Quranic text itself. It also has motifs rooted in Arabian folklore,⁵ which, added to the Judaic and Christian references, would have created a narrative both familiar to its

¹ Roberto Tottoli, "Muslim Eschatology and the Ascension of the Prophet Muḥammad: Describing Paradise in Mi'rāj Traditions and Literature," in *Roads to paradise : eschatology and concepts of the hereafter in Islam*, ed. Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson (Leiden, Brill, 2017), 875.

² John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 6.

³ Ithamar Gruenwald, *Apocalyptic and Merkeveh Mysticism: Studies in Apocalypticism, Merkeveh Mysticism, and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 58.

⁴ Aside from the study by Collins, see also Mary Dean-Otting, *Heavenly Journeys, A Study of the motif in Hellenistic Jewish Literature* (Frankfurt/Berne/New York, 1984); Muriel Debié, "Les apocalypses syriaques," in *Le Coran des historiens*, 543-586.

This resonance shows in the *mi'rāj* narratives themselves, where the Prophet meets Idrīs among other prophets, and Idrīs is often identified with Enoch, one of the main sources of biblical ascension narratives (Vajda, G., "Idrīs", E.I.²) And while this "Judeo-Christian echo" could have served for legitimacy purposes by inscribing the Prophet's ascension within an older prophetic tradition, in the same way that the *isrā'iliyyāt* would have served to explain obscure contextual points to Quranic narratives or Prophetic narratives, this aspect has become today conversely an argument against the legitimacy of *mi'rāj* for some modern Muslim thinkers (for instance see Ronald P. Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension in Islam: The Reception of Religious Narrative in Sunni, Shi'i and Western Culture*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 34-36).

⁵ Peter Webb, "The Familiar and the Fantastic in Narratives of Muḥammad's Ascension to the Heavenly Spheres," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 15, no. 3 (2012): 249-250. Webb analyses this as bringing more familiarity to the audience as a point of departure to the story for an easier identification with its hero, however given the evolution of Islamic societies within the first centuries of Islam and the shift from the Arabian peninsula to the great cities outside of it, this Arabian outlook would not necessarily have felt very familiar to a Muslim audience of the 4th century, and instead could be analysed more as a narrative technique to legitimise the narrative as "Arabian," and as such differentiated from the Jewish and Christian ones.

audience as a legitimate monotheistic narrative, while at the same time differentiated from the other two monotheistic creeds by its Arabian aspect.¹ The *mi'raj* narratives could be analysed like other apocalyptic narratives, on a historical level, as the mythical (and mystical) translation of real political expectations in times of uncertainty that had remained unanswered.²

The prophetic *mi'raj* can be included within the wider utopian literature genre, as argued by Peter Webb in an interesting comparison with western travel narratives containing fantastical elements,³ in which he analyses the Prophetic ascension narrative as “plausible fiction.” By this he means that its factual reality is not as important as the message that authors try to convey through these stories to their audience: the main character of the story comes back to his country trying to bring and implement the utopia, in the “here and now,”⁴ the way the Prophet brings back the number of prayers for believers, in order to organise their physical and spiritual lives, helping them with the descriptions of what is to come as reward for a faithful life.

The Prophetic *mi'raj* presents many variations, as elaborated by different authors in Quranic commentaries or works dedicated to this theme,⁵ although two great trends of sources for constructing the narrative could be roughly differentiated: the “official” or “canonical” version based on the Sunni *ḥadīth*, and a “para-official” alternative version, widely circulated, based on what Colby calls the “Ibn ‘Abbās

¹ For more detailed discussion on the function of building religious legitimacy through the *mi'raj*, see Colby, *Narrating's Muḥammad Night's Journey*, 87, and Brooke Olson Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*.

² Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “Le Shi'isme et le Coran,” in *Le Coran des historiens*, 921-967 (see especially “Entre l'apocalypse et l'empire,” 939-957).

³ He calls this “utopian travel rubric,” constructed narratively as such: a familiar beginnings, remarkable journey, and fantastic arrival (before the hero returns home). See Webb, “The Familiar and the Fantastic,” 242.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁵ Schrieke, Horovitz, Bencheikh, Knappert, Robinson, “Mi'raj,” E.I.²

narrative,” and used mainly in Shia accounts.¹ Regarding the ascension narratives presented in this chapter, we will see that Ibn ‘Arabī’s account follows the “canonical” framework, while al-Biṣṭāmī follows the “Ibn ‘Abbās” framework, characterised by the presence of many angels.

The first, or “canonical,” version, mostly based on the Sunni canonical *ḥadīth* compilations, usually follows the main following narrative structure: departing from Mecca and stopping at Jerusalem (during the *isrā’*) on the mythical mount al-Burāq, Muḥammad is then taken by the archangel Gabriel through the seven heavens, meeting the different previous prophets (Adam, Jesus and John the Baptist, Joseph, Idrīs, Aaron, Moses, Abraham), before arriving at the Lote-tree, where he continues alone to meet God at the Throne.² Sometimes different other episodes of Muḥammad’s life are collated with this story, such as the episode of the cleansing of his heart by two or more angels as preparation for the travel that we find in the *sīra*, and which has been analysed has an initiation and purification process, necessary for a successful ascension.³ Another initiation scene is often included, where Gabriel appears then in the function of the “testing angel”, with the trope of the offering scene where he has to choose between a cup of wine and a cup of *laban*. The Prophet chooses the *laban*, on which Gabriel

¹ Of course reality is more complex, authors using both sources and agreeing on many aspects while differing on others, such as al-Qushayrī who tend to favour the canonical Sunni *ḥadīth* but nonetheless includes narratives that other Sunni authors would discard and that Shia authors would use (see below).

² For more details and the different sources used in this version of the narrative, see Schrieke, Horovitz, Bencheikh, Knappert, Robinson, “Mi‘rādī”, E.I.²; Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, and the first chapter of Buckley, *The Night Journey*. The order of the prophets here is the one seen in Ibn Ishāq’s account (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 55-56); Neuwirth notes that the presence of prophets in different spheres is not so much a Quranic concept than a reminiscence of the planetary deities familiar in antiquity (Neuwirth, “From the Sacred Mosque to the Remote Temple,” 388).

³ Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 17-25; Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, *The Intermediate World of Angels*, 32.

compliments him, telling him that he chose the “natural disposition” (*fiṭra*) for his community. This scene, with variations, exists in many accounts, at the beginning of the journey as an initiation episode, while other accounts situates this scene near the end of the narrative as a confirmation episode.¹

Other details may vary: for instance Muḥammad uses stairs instead of Al-Burāq; Muḥammad meets some of the prophets in Jerusalem, or he meets them in different orders of presentation, albeit all serve the same legitimising process by both validating islam within the monotheist history, and placing Muḥammad as the favoured one above all other prophets.² Additionally, in most cases, the *miʿrāj* includes a specific scene with Moses who encourages Muḥammad to discuss with God the reduction of the numbers of prayers from fifty a day to five a day, which underlines the great importance of this narrative for one of the major islamic practices. What interests us here is that Gabriel appears in these narratives clearly in a role of guide and teacher, showing Muḥammad the different heavens, Paradise and Hell,³ arranging for him to meet prophets and other angels, and answering his questions. Vuckovic analyses Gabriel here as an elite teacher, and part of the legitimising process by being a link between previous monotheisms and the Qurʾān, since he is one of the two named angels found in both the Bible and the Qurʾān.⁴ This teaching role thus mainly fulfils the function of expanding the islamic cosmological representation, as well as the praxis function (other angels shown as

¹ Ibid., 26-29.

² Ibid., 41-73.

³ The touring of Hell is an example of an Ibn ʿAbbās trope integrated in Sunni narratives, see Christiane J. Gruber and Frederick Stephen Colby, *The Prophet's Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Miʿraj Tales* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 11-26. The touring of Hell or the “underworld” is a trope found in many traditions, even outside the Middle-East (Ana Iriarte Diez, “al-Nuzūl ilā al-jaḥīm fī al-asāṭir wa-l-qīṣaṣ al-shaʿbiyya: dirāsa muqārana bayna al-ḥaḍāra al-islāmiyya wa-ḥaḍārat al-māyā,” *Al-Mashriq* 90, n°2 (2016), 597-627.)

⁴ Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 32-39.

submissive and praising God), and more generally reinforces the credo function (the (in)accessibility and ineffability of God, who only Muḥammad may approach).

The second, or “para-official,” Ibn ‘Abbās version, seen as unorthodox by some classical and modern scholars, is not taken into account as often as the first group of sources in studies on the prophetic *mi‘rāj*. However Colby traced its history and use in parallel to the more well-known Sunni canonical sources in his book, and shows its importance and influence on the general *mi‘rāj* literature,¹ an influence where the many angelic apparitions have a role in illustrating the wonders of the Unseen.² Indeed this particular narrative is especially rich in angels, illustrating a complexification of islamic angelology:³ according to this narrative structure, Muḥammad first meets four angels (the guardian of Hell Mālik, Azrael, a “half-fire half-snow” angel, and the Rooster angel),⁴ and he then ascends through the heavens, meeting ever more angels, before meeting God. It is only when descending again towards Earth that he meets other prophets.⁵ He has written a longer piece on the particular case of the “Half-fire half-snow angel,” sometimes called Ḥabīb, who appear as one angel or several angels

¹ Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey*. The use of the name Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687) refers to the Prophet’s cousin, who became such a famed scholar that his status made him the subject of many attributions of prophetic traditions and Quranic commentaries, whether deemed authentic or not by later scholars. Among these attributions are many of what will be called “*isrā’iliyyāt*,” and the primitive version of this *mi‘rāj* narrative (Ibid., 31). Traces of this narrative will thus be found for example in the Quranic commentary of al-Tha‘labī (427/1035) (Ibid., 108-111).

² See for example the influence of the expanded Ibn ‘Abbās narrative attributed to the near-legendary figure of Abū al-Ḥasan Bakrī, its influence in the Islamicate east, and on different authors such as Avicenna and Ibn ‘Arabī (Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey*, 126-164).

³ He supposes that this focus on angels might either indicate “a complement” to the canonical versions, or that the communities in which this narrative circulated placed a great importance on angels as part of a “successful ascension,” putting it in parallel to Jewish narratives (the mention of Cherubim, *karūbiyyūn*, being of course an indication) and to other ascension narratives built on this framework such as al-Bisṭāmī’s (Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad’s Night Journey*, 36-37).

⁴ In another later version attributed to Ja‘far al-Ṣādiq, Muḥammad is met by Gabriel, Michael and Seraphiel, who bring to him Al-Burāq (Ibid., 107).

⁵ Ibid., 31-35.

depending on the version: present in a Jewish ascension story with Moses and the angel Metatron, this curious angel is also mentioned in Sunni writings, by authors such as al-Qushayrī. He might represent many things, which we can list under the theological and praxis functions (such as God’s ability to reconcile contraries and a disunited people, or being a pious model); he is also an archetype of the liminal, a symbol of boundary-crossing which is one of the main concepts of the *mi’rāj* narratives.¹

This Ibn ‘Abbās narrative usually further includes a dialogue, or intimate colloquy, between God and Muḥammad about the “good rewards” (*ḥasanāt*) and “scales” (*darajāt*) or expiations (*kaffārāt*), a dialogue which is generally presented as an explanation for the debate of the Highest Council (of angels). While this debate is primarily concerned with the status of Adam and the reaction of angels in many Quranic commentaries, when included in this ascension narrative the debate becomes a didactic dialogue illustrating pious behaviour.² This dialogue was analysed by Colby as a battleground in the heart of proto-Shia and proto-Sunni debates and appropriation for legitimacy purposes, a trope which was erased later by canonical Sunni accounts, but not effectively so, since it reappears in the works of Sunni authors such as Al-Qushayrī.³

¹ Colby, “Uniting Fire and Snow: Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel ‘Habīb”

² Ibid., 22-23. He also detects in this scene a possible echo in Jewish literature (Ibid., 91).

³ Frederick S. Colby, “The Early Imami Shi‘i Narratives an Constestation over Intimate Colloquy Scenes in Muḥammad’s *Mi’rāj*,” in *The Prophet’s Ascension: Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi’raj Tales*, ed. C.J. Gruber and F.S. Colby (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 141-156. This scene has been considered as “nowhere to be found in the earliest *mi’rāj* literature” by Daniel Gimaret, who took into account only the canonical *ḥadīth*. He writes in his article on the medieval latin translation of the *mi’rāj* (the *Liber Scali Machometi*) that it contains this dialogue, considering it a trace of a disappeared Arabic text that would appear only with al-Qushayrī in the 4th/11th century - the Ibn ‘Abbās version actually already existed, however orally, as Colby argues, and it would have circulated independently in the 3rd/10th century, used by storytellers, however its extant textual traces are

Thus we find in this narrative the same angelic functions than in the canonical version: angels in the cosmological function, albeit with more details than the canonical version (as tools for describing the heavens, Paradise and Hell), as well as in the praxis and credo functions, derived from their teaching and didactic roles (answering the Prophet's many questions about angels and the realities of the Unseen, the prompt for his dialogue with God on good actions and expiations, and the (in)accessibility of God symbolised by the Lote-tree and its praising angels).¹

The passage through the Lote-tree seems to be common to almost all narratives, based on the verse 53:16 seen previously, and usually the Prophet is seen as the only being who may go beyond it, contrary to all other creatures, including Gabriel and the other angels. It is usually located near the "garden of the refuge" (*jannat al-ma'wā*) mentioned in Q 53:15, and two other Quranic references, the "House Inhabited" (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*), and another paradisiac tree (*Ṭūbā*).² There are also descriptions of it with angels perching on it like birds. The Lote-tree, on the historical level, could be related to the *zizuphus* genus, probably the one used for Jesus' crown of thorns, and more interestingly here, a plant traditionally used for marking the boundaries of a property - the same role which it seems to hold in the ascension narratives, albeit on a metaphysical level. The Lote-tree is also often associated with the four rivers of

indeed preserved in later works (Daniel Gimaret, "Au coeur du mi'rāj, un ḥadīth interpolé," in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam: ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels* (Louvain: Peeters Publishers, 1996), 67-82; Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night's Journey*, 49.).

¹ See a full translation of the Ibn 'Abbās primitive version in Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey*, 175-193.

² Lange, "Lote Tree", E.I.³; Hannah Bigelow Merriman, "The Paradox of Proximity to the Infinite: An Exploration of sidrat al-muntaha, 'The Lote Tree Beyond Which None May Pass'," *Religion and the Arts* 12, no. 1 (2008), 336-337; Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey*, 19-22.

Paradise (see Chapter 4), which can also be seen as the separation between the physical or exoteric (the two earthly rivers) and the spiritual or esoteric (the two unseen rivers), or a metaphor for God's manifest and unmanifest nature,¹ the "landmarked end of the Universe,"² which exegetes have variously situated in "the sixth heaven, in the seventh heaven, above the seventh heaven, or next to or beneath the throne of God."³ This is the limit between all creatures (including angels), and what cannot be represented: Gabriel can only show the way to Muḥammad, in his role of companion and guide, and point by his own ontological limitation to what is beyond, and that which only Muḥammad can access.⁴ In this, the character of Gabriel fulfills different functions seen in the Qur'ān: illustrating one aspect of the Credo (God beyond description, in his unmanifest nature), helping Muḥammad, and showing him and the reader more details of Islamic cosmology, not provided by the Quranic text.

Similarly, in the Twelver Shia sources of the *mi'rāj* studied by Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, angels are also seen in the credo function, legitimising an aspect of the Shia dogma by stressing the importance of 'Alī: in the *tafsīr* of Furāt al-Kūfī (d. 300/912), a narrative attributed to Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (d. 31 or 32/652-3) presents angels talking to Muḥammad in the seventh heaven, explaining to him that they had asked God to see 'Alī, to which God responded by creating an angel identical in form to

¹ Merriman, "The Paradox of Proximity," 333-334. The four rivers of paradise also seems to be a late-antique motif, as it is mentioned also in one of the apocalyptic Syriac narratives on Alexander the Great, possibly the narrative that constitutes the main sources of the Quranic narrative on Dhū-l-Qarnayn (Debié, "Les apocalypses syriaques," 566-567).

² Webb, "The Familiar and the Fantastic," 254.

³ There is an echo of this motif in Enochian literature as well. See Lange, Christian, "Lote Tree", E.I.³.

⁴ This is related to *ḥadīth* that Colby says is not part of the Sunni canon, although used by Sufis, linked to the *mi'rāj*: Gabriel would burn up if he looked at God, but the Prophet can. This motif is also found in Jewish lore on the Merkabah and the burning light of the Throne (Sulamī, *Subtelties of Ascension*, 53).

‘Alī so that they could look at him whenever they wished to see the terrestrial ‘Alī.¹ In the praxis function, the scene related to the numbers of prayers given to Muḥammad (common with Sunni sources), is followed by Gabriel or another unnamed angel teaching him the exact call to prayer.²

4.3.2. *The Sufi Mi‘rāj:*

The Sufi retelling of the prophetic ascension:

Mi‘rāj literature then took on a particular importance in Sufi literature, as shown by the transmission of the tradition surrounding the prophetic *mi‘rāj* by different Sufis authors such as al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) collecting sayings of Sufi masters on this theme in his *Laṭā‘if al-mi‘rāj*,³ or the retelling of the complete *mi‘rāj* by his student al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) in his *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj*.⁴ The importance of this genre shows also in the specific sub-genre explored in this chapter: accounts of personal *mi‘rāj*, such as the testimonies of Ibn ‘Arabī and the obvious use of the *mi‘rāj* pattern to illustrate the acquisition of knowledge that a spiritual seeker should be pursuing.

The prophetic *mi‘rāj* serves as a model for Sufi *mi‘rāj* narratives, and as such the re-telling of the prophetic one by Sufi authors indicate different sources and

¹ Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, “L’Imām dans le ciel. Ascension et initiation (aspects de l’imāmologie duodécimaine III)”, in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’islam*, 105-107. The role of angels in proto-Shii sources and the legitimising process they are used for is also studied by Colby (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 65-68); an example of the angels’ wider use reflecting religious legitimacy debates was seen in Chapter 2 with the Throne Bearers (see also Tottoli, “The Carriers of the Throne of God”). Colby also wrote on the ways Sunni works reuse these sources by making angels look like Abū Bakr instead of ‘Alī (Colby, “The Early Imami Shi‘i Narratives,” 149.) For an overview of the *isrā’* and *mi‘rāj* in Twelver Shia sources, see Buckley, *The Night Journey*, 139-176.

² Buckley, *The Night Journey*, 167-170.

³ Colby considers this collection as authentic and probably written before al-Qushayrī’s book, although there is no clear-cut proofs (Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension*, 20-23).

⁴ ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj*, ed. Luīs Ṣalībā (Jbeil: Dār wa-maktaba Bīblīūn, 2011).

tendencies. For example Sulamī uses some Ibn ‘Abbās sources,¹ and while al-Qushayrī mainly uses the classical sunni *ḥadīth*, he also uses parts of the Ibn ‘Abbās narrative (such as the dialogue between God and Muḥammad, seen previously), possibly within the context of competing versions presented by Sunni and Shia authors, and the re-appropriation of some sources by the Sunni al-Qushayrī in face of their use by Shia authors.²

Regarding the prophetic ascension, its modalities were the object of an ongoing debate in the early centuries of islam, which is reflected in al-Qushayrī’s book. He was one of the earliest authors to bring arguments from non-religious science to defend the belief in the prophetic *mi‘rāj* as a physical journey,³ and so he discusses in his book *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj* the degrees of belief in the heavenly ascension,⁴ from those who refute the bodily ascension to those who believe that the Prophet ascended both in body and spirit, which is al-Qushayrī’s position.⁵ He then explains that the Sufi *mi‘rāj* such as al-Biṣṭāmī’s differs from the Prophet’s in that it is performed only in spirit and not in body. This is supported by the vocabulary in the text, where the narrator uses the words “*nawm*” (sleep) and “*ru’ya*” or “*ra’aytu*” to describe his visions, so this “true vision”

¹ There are for examples three characteristic of the Ibn ‘Abbās narratives in Sulamī: Muḥammad seeing God, Muḥammad having a conversation with God, and the touring of both Hell and Heaven (Sulamī, *The Subtelties of the Ascension*, 9.)

² Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 116-123; Gimaret, “Au coeur du mi‘rāj,” 81.

³ Buckley, *The Night Journey*, 75-76.

⁴ al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj*, 123-124.

⁵ It seems that al-Qushayrī was reacting to Avicenna’s position among others (such as mu‘tazilites and Shias), who considered the *mi‘rāj* as spiritual only. (Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, “Avicenne, al-Qoṣeyri et le récit de l’échelle de Mahomet,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’islam*, 173-198). The bodily ascension is also Al-Rāzī’s position (Guy Monnot, “Le commentaires de Rāzī sur el voyage nocturne,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’islam*, 57-65.) The “in spirit” interpretation seem to have been gradually abandoned by exegetes, while the *mi‘rāj* narrative became more systematised, and the “in body” interpretation became the standard position. For a review of the different positions and their main proponents, see Buckley, *The Night Journey*, 59-138.

would be seen during his sleep, in spirit and not in body. This is also the position taken by Ibn ‘Arabī, a position that might reflect the will of imitating the prophet while not claiming equality with him in his prophetic qualities of physical ascension, and which reflects the settlement of the debate by Ibn ‘Arabī’s time.

This “true vision” of Sufis is closely related to dreams, and their importance as means of providing knowledge in the islamic world, since “*ru`ya*” and “*manām*” can be synonyms, of divine origin and “extension of prophecy.”¹ On sufi dreams, Erik Ohlander tells us that:

*“First dreams and dreaming were seen to serve an epistemic function, namely communicating knowledge not readily available otherwise. (...) Second, dreams and dreaming were seen to serve a practicable purpose, namely as an experiential element of wayfaring on the mystical path. Finally, dreams were made to serve as a marker of claims to status and authority, in particular in relation to the assertion that among all the self-identified ṭawā’if comprising the Muslim body politic it is the Sufīs who fulfill the function of post-prophetic heirship for the umma itself.”*²

As we will see, this prophetic heirship appears clearly in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī, but also implicitly in other Sufi writings related to the *mi`rāj*.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s retelling of the prophetic ascension in the *Futūḥāt* follows the Sunni canonical framework, which Ibn ‘Arabī, as a *ḥadīth* scholar, does not seem to try and depart too much from.³ Gabriel, as in many other non-Sufi prophetic ascensions accounts, is seen accompanying and teaching Muḥammad, touring him through the

¹ Kinberg, “Dreams,” E.I.³

² Erik Ohlander, *Sufism and Society: Arrangements of the Mystical in the Muslim World, 1200–1800*, (London, Routledge, 2012), 206-207.

³ This “Sunni stance” of Ibn ‘Arabī has to be nuanced of course, as he also uses elsewhere *ḥadīth* that are not often used by non-Sufi exegetes, such as the famous *ḥadīth qudsī* “I was a treasure...” - it would seem that *ḥadīth qudsī* in general were primarily used by mystics, see Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*, 39.

heavens. He also appears in the function of the “testing angel”, with the trope of the offering scene a cup of wine and a cup of *laban*.¹

However Gabriel and angels are presented in the first paragraph with clear functions coloured with Ibn ‘Arabī’s particular vocabulary: intra-textually Gabriel is sent to Muḥammad to show him God’s signs, he is identified to the Trustworthy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*), and brings with him al-Burāq, which he describes as a “mount of the isthmus” (*dābba barzakhiyya*),² thus clearly setting this key figure of the *mi‘rāj* story in the “Imaginal dimension” that includes physical reality, but also all of the Unseen world, including the world of dreams.³ This could mean that things are physically done without appearing so in the strict physical world. This is a slightly different approach in the debate of “ascension in body or in spirit:” Ibn ‘Arabī settles this by implying that is was both, reminding the reader that “spiritual” in its wider sense (or imaginal sense), includes the body: the Prophet travelled in body with the help of imaginal beings taking shape in the Imaginal world, all this taking place beyond our strict physical perception of events.⁴

Extra-textually, Ibn ‘Arabī also states that Gabriel being sent to the Prophet is like the giving of wings to angels in general, which is “*to teach us the fixation of the causes that He set in the world.*”⁵ Angels are used here from the first paragraph on the

¹ Muḥyī al-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A‘lā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2013), vol. 9, 98.

² *Ibid.*, vol. 9, 97.

³ See Chapter 4 for a presentation of this concept.

⁴ He writes later that the Prophet actually did thirty-four different night journeys (*arba‘a wa thalāthūn marra alladhī usriya bihi*), one of them “in body, and the rest in spirit” (*bi-jismihi wa-l-bāqī bi-rūḥihi*), which seems like another way of answering “both” to the debate of “body or spirit” (Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, vol 9, 102.)

This *barzakh* position is held today by both Sunni and Imāmī scholars (Buckley, *The Night Journey*, 119-127.).

5

prophetic ascension, in their creedal function, by teaching, and as an allegorical comparative to present a metaphysical concept, and echo of the debate on God as the ultimate cause for everything in the cosmos, of which modalities were an object of debate in the early centuries of Islam.¹

The personal mystical ascension of Sufis:

The importance of *mi'raj* as a model in Sufi writings is summarised by Böwering: “For the *Ṣūfīs*, the night journey and ascension of the Prophet became the prototype of the soul's itinerary to God as it rises from the bonds of sensuality to the height of mystical knowledge.”² Or as Su'ād al-Ḥakīm is lending to the Sufi understanding, aside from the physical journey of the Prophet, Sufis would have appropriated this word for themselves with multiple meanings: “The word “*mi'raj*” represents a movement of elevation (*taraqqī*); not only a sensible elevation or an elevation in the heavens, but this word carries intellectual meanings, such as the progression (*tadarruj*) of the soul's cleansing on one hand, and the progression in the verification of knowledge on the other hand.”³ These narratives seem to be good examples of apocalyptic literature that “provides a rather clear example of language that is expressive rather than referential, symbolic rather than factual.”⁴

العالم” في وضعها التي الأسباب بثبوت “ليعلمنا

Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, vol. 9, 97.

¹ Mentioned in chapter 2, the debate started in *mu'tazili* circles, and the questions revolved around whether creatures could be at the origin of secondary causes, whether God left them a full freedom of choice or whether everything was caused by God at every instant, the latter being the Ash'arī position, see Ulrich Rudolph, “Occasionalism,” online.

² Gehrard Böwering, “*Mi'raj*,” *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, online.

³

“وجد الصوفية أن لفظ “معراج” يصور حركة الترقى، وهو ليس حصراً على الحركة الحسية أي الترقى في السماوات، بل يحمل هذا اللفظ معاني عقلية، كالترج في التطهير النفسي من ناحية، أو التدرج في التحقق بالعلوم من ناحية ثانية.”
Muḥyī-l-dīn Ibn 'Arabī. *Kitāb al-isrā ilā maqām al-asrā*. Su'ād al-Ḥakīm (ed.), (Beirut, Dandara li-l-ṭibā' wa-l-nashr, 1988), 28.

⁴ Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination*, 21.

Böwering further suggests that the prophetic *mi'raj* also interested Sufis in that it provided images complementing the traditionally aural and oral religious practices, enriching their spiritual experience,¹ while Paul Ballanfat considers the *mi'raj* as a Sufi trope, the “*metaphor of the mystical experience, the atopy of words referring to another topology,*” lending an aspect of initiation and sanctification to the Sufi’s experience and narrative.² This sanctification aspect is important in that the Friend of God becomes “truthful” (*ṣiddīq*), as the nickname given to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq for having been the first in believing the Prophet after his own *mi'raj*, and like Abū Bakr was presented as a legitimate successor at the head of the muslim community, so the Friend is at the head of the Sufi community. Ballanfat further pushes the comparison by explaining that this sanctification makes of the Friend among his followers “*as the prophet in his community,*” becoming thus, in Ballanfat’s words, an “*angelos.*”³

This spiritual journey may also means the ‘decomposition’ of one’s self in order to achieve the full unity with God (usually known as *fanā' wa-baqā'* or “annihilation and abiding [in God]”),⁴ and a ‘re-composition’ on the way back to the world: the spiritual seeker in a state of return to the world is internally different, rearranged,

¹ Thus the representation of supreme Name of God in visions, as well as God’s vision by Muḥammad after the Lote-tree, took a special importance for the early Sufi authors, such as al-Tustarī, al-Sulamī, and al-Wāsiṭī. See Gerhard Böwering, “From the Word of God to the Vision of God: Muḥammad’s Heavenly Journey in Classical Ṣūfī Qur’ān Commentary,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’Islam*, 205-222.

² Paul Ballanfat, “L’*échelle des mots dans les ascensions de Rūzbihān Baqlī de Ṣīrāz*”, in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’Islam*, 268-269.

³ Ibid., 275-278. For the role of Abū Bakr’s testimony in the validation of the *mi'raj* in islamic history, see Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 89-90.

⁴ Mojaddedi, “Annihilation and Abiding in God,” E.I.³; However Knysh explains that there are two definitions usually attached to *fanā'*: annihilation of the self or “falling away,” or expanded selfhood (Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 309-310).

because of the knowledge gained.¹ This travel as quest for mystical knowledge - reflecting a well known *ḥadīth* on travel for the quest for knowledge - will be illustrated here by both al-Bisṭāmī's and Ibn 'Arabī's accounts.²

Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874–5 or 234/848–9), also known as Bāyāzīd al-Bisṭāmī (or al-Basṭāmī), is an important early Sufi figure from what is now north central Iran. He is known only through the works and sayings attributed to him, first orally transmitted, as he became an important reference for later Sufis, becoming overtime an example of the “ecstatic” Sufi as compared to the “sober” type such as al-Junayd,³ however there is no existing work directly authored by him.⁴ He is mentioned numerous times in Ibn 'Arabī's writings, and notably in Ibn 'Arabī's own *mi'rāj* account where al-Bisṭāmī is the only name given of those he meets when he arrives at the stage of the divine presence.⁵ Rūzbihān Baqlī, who has authored a compilation the ecstatic expressions (*shaṭaḥāt*) attributed to different Sufi masters (including al-Bisṭāmī), interprets his mystical ascension narratives as a purely mystical experience, a renewed *fanā'* process.⁶

Ibn 'Arabī, a major mystic figure presented in more detail in the next chapter, lived a few centuries later (12th-13th century), came from the other side of the islamic

¹ James Morris, “The spiritual Ascension : Ibn 'Arabī and the Mi'rāj Part I,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107, no. 4 (1987), p.641. This return is seen as the ‘perfection’ of the spiritual travel in Ibn 'Arabī's writings, according to Chodkiewicz, who calls this double travel “the double stairs,” title of his detailed chapter on the initiatory travel according to Ibn 'Arabī (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 151-184).

² Michel Chodkiewicz, in an article about the centrality of travel and its spiritual dimension in Ibn 'Arabī's writings, explains in a short semantic analysis how Islamic common religious words remind the believer of his condition of traveller (such as *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*, *sharī'a*, *sālik*, *ṭarīqa*), (Michel Chodkiewicz, “Le voyage sans fin”, in *Le voyage initiatique*, 239-250).

³ Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 52.

⁴ Mojaddedi “al-Bisṭāmī, Abū Yazīd (Bāyāzīd),” E.I.³ ; Roger Deladrière “Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī et son enseignement spirituel,” *Arabica* XIV, n°1 (1967): 76-89.

⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 9, 137-138.

⁶ Pierre Lory, “Le mi'rāj d'Abū Yazīd Basṭāmī,” in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'islam*, 234.

world (the west), and on the contrary is well-known for his numerous writings, some of them that have been preserved are written by his hand. Between both of their lives, the islamic world had evolved, the field of theology had become systematised, and prophetic traditions in more fixated forms, as the diversity of prophetic ascension accounts show. However in Ibn ‘Arabī’s time, al-Biṣṭāmī had become a near-legendary reference for mystics, and as such is mentioned by name in the *Futūḥāt* more than any other mystic:¹ Ibn ‘Arabī seems to have considered him highly despite his dislike of ecstatic expressions (*shaṭāḥāt*), and that many were attributed to al-Biṣṭāmī. He considered him an example of a man having achieved the state of “no attributes,” or union with the divine through the complete discarding of any feature of the self that could stand in the way to God,² using al-Biṣṭāmī to corroborate his own teachings.³

Al-Biṣṭāmī is a reference for another famous Sufī figure seen in Chapter 2, Rūzbihān Baqlī, who has commented twice this *mirāj*, in Arabic and in Persian.⁴ He is also the author of a particular work that deserves a mention in this chapter, “The Disclosure of Secrets and the Discovery of the Lights” (*Kashf al-asrār wa-mukāshafat al-anwār*),⁵ which reads like a journal of his own ascension visions throughout his life, from his adolescence to his fifties, visions steeped in references to the prophetic *mi‘rāj*. This does not present a single ascension narrative, but a multiplicity of ascensions,

¹ Binyamin Abrahamov, “Ibn al-‘Arabī and Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī,” *Al-Qantara* 32, no. 2 (2011), 370.

² *Ibid.*, 377-378.

³ *Ibid.*, 385.

⁴ In Arabic in *Mantiq al-asrār* and in Persian in *Sharḥ-i shaṭḥiyyāt*. Paul Ballanfāt argues that he is one of the Sufī masters who gave a great importance to the prophetic *mi‘rāj* (Ballanfāt, “L’*échelle des mots*,” 265).

⁵ Translated into English: Ruzbihān ibn Abi al-Nasr Baqlī, *The Unveiling of Secrets: Diary of a Sufī Master*, trans. Carl W. Ernst (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Parvardigar Press, 1997).

scattered scenes corresponding to different moments of the basic *mi'raj* narrative, without a single order.

Ballanfat analyses this work as an ascension of words, where its textual overflow in itself indicates the mystic's own experience, his state of being subsumed in the divine, while their ambiguity and paradox are also an indication for the seeker to understand the divine signs.¹ He also sees the influence of al-Bisṭāmī's *mi'raj* in the aspects of angels and prophets met on his way,² however this could also be the influence of the Ibn 'Abbās narrative circulating at the time, and not necessarily only al-Bisṭāmī's account. There are also signs of influence from Shia sources, where angels encourage Baqlī in crossing an ocean that only 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib had crossed.³

Angels are indeed very much present in Baqlī's ascension scenes, mostly in the classical roles seen in Chapter 1, and sometimes as short metaphors, such as the "angelic realm" that mean death.⁴ He sees various prophets and Sufi masters in the higher heavens, including al-Bisṭāmī,⁵ and various angels, including Gabriel, described as the most beautiful.⁶ His unrestrained style gives more detailed descriptions than other ascension narratives, lending different strong show of emotions to angels (such as laughing, longing, weeping).⁷ It might also gives us clues on what features were

¹ Ballanfat, "L'échelle des mots," 267-268. He explains that this over-exposition or description of mystical bursts, as well as its presentation in a journal form, is unlike most of mystical accounts that avoid describing divine realities too closely. Thus contrary to the ascetic and understated style of al-Bisṭāmī that we will see later, where the negation of attributes reflects the *tawḥīd*, here Ballanfat explains that the exuberance of Rūzbihān reflects the "eye of the multiple" (*'ayn al-jam'*) which accomplishes the *tawḥīd* of "no motif" paradoxically maintaining all the motifs (Ibid., 286).

² Ballanfat, "L'échelle des mots," 269.

³ Baqlī, *The Unveiling of Secrets*, 17.

⁴ Ibid., 82.

⁵ Ibid., 81, 106.

⁶ Ibid., 17.

⁷ Ibid., 17, 47, 69, 115.

regarded as beautiful in Baqlī's time: angels are "dressed like brides,"¹ "like beautiful women with tresses,"² while they are also described in several places as looking "like Turks."³ Ballanfat notes that the Khidr is the initiator of Rūzbihān, the way Gabriel was for the Prophet,⁴ and the way Jesus was for Ibn 'Arabī,⁵ and the green bird for al-Biṣṭāmī: once again in this initiatory step, Gabriel seem to be sent to prophets only, regardless of the fact that Baqlī sees him in the heavens alongside Muḥammad .

This chapter will now go into the details of the accounts of Al-Biṣṭāmī and Ibn 'Arabī, which have in common a complete ascension journey attached to them, following the prophetic narrative.

4.2. The *Mi'rāj* of Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī:

4.2.1. *Presentation*:

The text used here is one of various accounts of al-Biṣṭāmī's *mi'rāj*, and seemingly the oldest,⁶ their variety being a first sign among several pointing to an orality and oral transmission of the text as seen in the next section. This version is the longest and the only one to follow the classic structure of the *mi'rāj* form from one heaven to another up towards God, while the others are closer to scattered episodes, similar to Rūzbihān Balqī's account.⁷ This particular retelling of a *mi'rāj* accomplished by a sufi personality, like the other accounts around al-Biṣṭāmī, is possibly one of the

¹ Ibid, 47.

² Ibid., 23.

³ Ibid., 17-18, 31. These numerous descriptions may be seen to act like the grammatical variations noted in chapter 2 for describing angels beyond a masculine/feminine dichotomy.

⁴ Ballanfat, "L'échelle des mots," 272.

⁵ Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des saints*, 85.

⁶ Reynold A. Nicholson, "An early Arabic version of the *Mi'rāj* of Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī," *Islamica* 2, (1926), 403; Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*, 249-257 (which includes the text of the *mi'rāj* based on Reynold Nicholson's edition).

⁷ For these different accounts, see Lory, "Le *mi'rāj* d'Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī," 223-237.

earliest Sufi works on the *mi'raj* theme,¹ although there are doubts as to whether the historical al-Biṣṭāmī actually claimed having lived a personal ascension, or if he is even at the origin of this narrative at all.² Al-Biṣṭāmī rather has gained importance as a near-legendary figure in later writings, a status underlined by the act of attributing writings and experiences to him, and as such, Pierre Lory argues that a genuine mystical experience of spiritual elevation might have been turned into a “proper” *mi'raj* through retellings of it.³ Although Lory finds the style of this particular retelling very different from the style usually attributed to writing of al-Biṣṭāmī, which might suggest that it is indeed far from being authentic, it also denotes a popular hagiography that was circulating at the time as a secondary “ascension profile” besides a first one destined for “more advanced Sufis.”⁴ This denotes the importance of a particular and popular example feeding the religious imaginary of the early centuries, and what kind of representations circulated at the time.

It is part of the legacy of the *mi'raj* stories developed around the Prophet, in the sense of “legacy” developed by Denise Spellberg⁵ and used by Vuckovic in her study on the Prophet’s *mi'raj*,⁶ concluding that “‘Legacy’ engages the history of

¹ Nazeer el-Azma, “Some Notes on the Impact of the Story of the Mi’raj on Sufi Literature,” *Muslim World*, vol. 63 (1973): 93.

² Böwering, “From the Word of God to the Vision of God,” 208; Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*.

³ Lory, “Le mi’raj d’Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī,” 224.

⁴ Ibid., 231, 236. An example of this first profile are the three short narratives compiled by Sarrāj (378/988) which Pierre Lory deems “serious in the choice of his information.” (Ibid., 224).

⁵ Denise A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of ‘A’isha bint Abi Bakr* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994).

⁶ “Legacy (...), is what is created after an individual’s life is lived; it is the record of creative expression and reflections in the hands of many others reflecting on the life of a given individual. A focus on legacy recognizes that scholarship and hermeneutics have their own histories; the scholarly enterprise is not protected from the vicissitudes that surround other methods of text production. Thus, legal texts, Qur’anic interpretation, *Hadith* collection, and biographies (...) are evaluated as human, authored, and *invested* accounts.” Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 12.

interpretation and focuses on how particular historical actors in particular historical moments construct meaning and use the mi 'rāj as but one way to create, confirm, and redefine community and ideology.”¹

As such, the “invested account” of al-Biṣṭāmī’s *mi 'rāj* can also be seen more particularly as the first known example of the legacy of a number Sufi *mi 'rāj* stories that were to come. Reinforcing the legitimization process of this account in the Sufi community is the fact that this narrative is attributed to a well-known religious figure who lived in what Vuckovic calls the classical period of Islamic historiography, set between the first and third Hegirian centuries (125 A.H.-300 A.H.), a period during which different prophetic *mi 'rāj* narratives and *ḥadīth* were put in written form, before their ‘canonification” in the 4th century.² Reading Biṣṭāmī’s *mi 'rāj* through this lens can tell us more about major Sufi figures’ representations, the communities revolving around them in their wake, and how they defined themselves - all of which could be more interesting to the reader than the factual occurrence of this story and whether the historical al-Biṣṭāmī is at the origin of this account.

Its singularity lies in that it paves the way for several subsequent works dealing with *mi 'rāj* stories, whether authored by, or attributed to, different sufi personalities of which Ibn ‘Arabī’s is the most well-known example,³ or the more numerous writings by

¹ Ibid., 124.

² Ibid., 3; Webb, “The Familiar and the Fantastic,” 240-241; Pavlovitch, “Ḥadīth,” E.I.³

³ Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm in her presentation of *Kitāb al-isrā* by Ibn ‘Arabī mentions a writing by Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya detailing the characteristics of a Sufi *mi 'rāj* or « true vision » (*ru 'ya ṣahīha*) which suggests that there were several accounts of personal mystical ascension existing, however so far only that of al-Biṣṭāmī and Ibn ‘Arabī are known to us. See Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 32; Lory, “Le mi 'rāj d’Abū Yazīd Bastāmī,” 223-237. Some of Sulamī’s sayings also suggest that mystics did personal ascensions, although very few written traces remain to our knowledge (Sulamī, *The Subtelties of Ascension*, 18). We know however at least of one other author of ascension narratives, although not following the prophetic *mi 'rāj* framework strictly, that is Rūzbihān Baqlī.

other Sufi authors taking the prophetic *mi'raj* as a starting point of their reflexion. In this as in other aspects, al-Bisṭāmī's stature, built overtime, makes him a model or herald, as per the saying that al-Hujwirī (d. 464/1072) attributes to Al-Junayd: "*Abū Yazīd is among us is as Gabriel's position is among the angels.*"¹

The Sufi *mi'raj* as a journey done in spirit while the body is sleeping is supported by the vocabulary in this account, where the narrator uses the words "*nawm*," "*ru'ya*" or "*ra'aytu*" to describe his visions, so this "true vision"² would be seen during his sleep, in spirit and not in body.

The story is presented as narrated by a certain Abū al-Qāsim al-ʿĀrif, whose identity remains otherwise unknown, relating what al-Bisṭāmī told him. Al-Bisṭāmī travels through the seven heavens³ up to the Seat (*kursī*) after the 7th heave, then to the Throne (*ʿarsh*) where he finally meets God. At every heaven, he meets angels, of different kinds and groups, some of whom are given names. Each time they invite al-Bisṭāmī to share in their activities such as praying, or offer him unspecified but seemingly endless possessions - thus the angels sound like they are complimenting him each time on arriving at such a level (one of the seven heavens), while at the same time tempting him into staying there and not going further on his journey. However, each time al-Bisṭāmī understands that he is being subject to a test and states that he wants to go further. First he is taken to the first heaven by a green bird, then to the second and

1

“أبو يزيد منا بمنزلة جبريل من الملائكة.”

Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. ʿUthmān al-Hujwirī, *Kashf al-mahjūb*, al-juzʿ al-awwal, ed. Badī ʿJumʿa (Cairo: al-Majlis al-ʿĀli li-l-Thaqāfa, 2007), 317.

² Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Dreams & Visions in the World of Islam: A History of Muslim Dreaming and Foreknowing*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), 1.

³ There are usually seven heavens in this type of literature, based on the Qurʾān (67:3), which can be seen as an islamic adaptation of the hellenistic cosmological structures (made of 9 heavens) used by Muslim authors (Jaadane, “La place des anges,” 28-29; Kuehn, Leder, Pökel, “Introduction,” *The Intermediate World of Angels*, 20).

third by a vision (*ru'ya*), while between the third and seventh heavens, it is an angel who takes him by the hand to accompany him further. At the 7th heaven, a last call asks al-Biṣṭāmī to stop because he arrived at the “Boundary” (*al-muntahā*),¹ however he goes on. After the 7th heaven, al-Biṣṭāmī is turned into a bird and given wings, so that he does not require any angelic help in order to travel to the Seat (*kursī*),² where the angel dedicated to it will also be testing him. However al-Biṣṭāmī keeps on flying to the Throne (*‘arsh*), where other angels are present, the *karūbiyyīn* and the bearers of the Throne. These test him yet again. However al-Biṣṭāmī keeps his intent focused and finally God calls to him and draws him near, “nearer than the soul is to the body” (*aqrab min-hu min al-rūḥ ilā al-jasad*).³ He then meets prophets, and the text ends with a section on the veracity of the event, which essentially argues that it is useless trying to convince people who do not believe in it in the first place, an argument supported by prophetic sayings and Quranic verses on the matter.

4.2.2. Analysis:

The first remark is that the structure follows that of the Ibn ‘Abbās account of the Prophetic *mi‘rāj*, with the noticeable presence of angels during the ascension, and the meeting of prophets *after* the meeting with God. This reflects the remark of Lory on the two strands of Bistamian ascension narratives above: this *mir‘āj* of popular strand is

¹ Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj*, 254. This seems to be an elliptic allusion to the Lote-tree of the boundary, that is usually situated on this heaven, as seen previously.

² In other accounts, he is also said to be turned into a bird, or describes his ascension using the verb from the same root than “*mi‘rāj*” (*‘urrija bi-rūḥihi*) while going through the *malakūt*. See Lory, “Le mi‘rāj d’Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī,” 226-227.

³ Ṣalībā, *Kitāb al-mi‘rāj*, 256. The translations from the text are taken from Nicholson’s article (Nicholson, *An early Arabic Version*, 402-415). This phrase echoes the quranic verse (50:16) : “We did indeed create man, and We know what his soul whispers to him; and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.”

built in the same way than the more popular Ibn ‘Abbās version of the prophetic ascension narrative (‘more popular’ as opposed to the more ‘learned’ canonical version, which does not exclude the latter’s wide circulation as well).

Regarding the form, at first analysis, the narrative is rather effortless and direct in its language, compared to the other accounts and mentions attributed to al-Biṣṭāmī, which suggests an oral transmission.¹ As such, this could indicate a wider circulation - with readers or listeners of a more popular milieu - than the readers of the *tafsīr* seen in the previous chapter. Its cosmology and its angels in their variations might represent interesting continuities and differences, a glimpse into another subgroup of readers’ imagination.² The formula at the beginning, “*qāla Abū al-Qāsim al-‘Ārif*,” in the fashion of an *isnād* in the *ḥadīth*, a literary genre based on oral transmission before it was consigned in written collections, supports this suggestion.

On second analysis, the oral-formulaic analysis comes to mind when reading this text. From the Oral Literary theory first developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord³ on the Iliad and Odyssey epics, and more recently applied by Andrew Bannister to the Quranic text,⁴ this analytical tool can be used to evaluate how, and to what extent, a text is rooted in oral performance before being written down. According to this theory,

¹ Similarly, the Ibn ‘Abbās ascension narrative was also the object of dismissal because of a style too simple or “monotonous” to be authentic by some scholars, as well as containing signs of orality as analysed by Colby (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 29, 43.)

² Burge notes similarly that “traditional material, both the various collections of ḥadīth in Islam and the Jewish midrashim, often reflect a popular expression of beliefs about angels, which is corroborated by similar beliefs found in magical incantation texts and studies of Jewish and Muslim folklore.” (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 68).

³ Albert Bates Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1960), Vol. 24. For a brief overview of this theory and its influences on later scholarship, see Carl Lindahl, “Singers and Tales in the 21st Century: The Legacies of Milman Parry and Albert Lord,” *Fabula* 52 (2012), 302-307.

⁴ Andrew G. Bannister, *An Oral-Formulaic Study of the Qur’an* (Lanham, Lexington Books, 2014).

reciters used a set of formulas and themes to help them memorise long narratives. These formulas, whether single and repeated word for word, or in a systematic arrangement of very similar ones, are repeated throughout the narration and may be rearranged according to the reciter's situation and narrative decisions during the performance. This supposes that the wording of such narratives were then not as fixed in their wording as the resulting written texts later became.

With this in mind, one can identify elements marking the text as orally based from the first reading of this *mi'rāj* story. Indeed we find a repetition of several sentences and phrases, in similar places at each stage of the narrative. For instance, the following formula: "What I desire is other than what Thou offerest me" (*murādī fī ghayr mā ta'riḍu 'alayya*)¹ which is repeated 9 times, and this at the end of each heavenly visit. We also find the sentence "all the while I knew that He was testing me therewith" (*fa-fī kulli dhālika 'alimtu annahu bihā yujarribunī*) repeated at each heavenly stop, or the offer of endless possessions, which is repeated in slightly different forms in each heaven:² for example "Then He continued to offer me a Kingdom such as no tongue can describe" (*thumma lam yazal ya'riḍu 'alayya min al-mulk mā kallat al-alsun 'an na'tihi*) in the 7th heaven, and "of the grandeur of His kingdom such gifts as no tongue can describe" (*'uẓma mamlakatuhu mā kallat al-alsun 'an na'tihi wa-waṣfatihī*)³ when he arrives at the Throne.

¹ This phrase echoes the discussion of Ibn 'Arabī in the *Futūḥāt* on al-Biṣṭāmī, where he interprets his will (*irāda*) as an absence of will, as per the saying attributed to al-Biṣṭāmī, "I will not to will" (*urīdu an lā urīda*). See Abrahamov, "Ibn al-'Arabī and Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī," 384.

² The trope of the refusal of worldly goods is also found in other accounts attributed to al-Biṣṭāmī, as an illustration of his intransigent and ascetic character. See Lory, "Le mi'rāj d'Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī," 231.

³ Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*, 255.

In terms of content, it shares the common themes and characters of prophetic *mi'raj* stories, especially within the Ibn 'Abbās framework. For instance al-Bisṭāmī meets with the prophets after meeting God and not before, with a special emphasis on Prophet Muḥammad, the only one mentioned by name. Vuckovic showed in her study of prophetic *mi'raj* narratives that his meeting with different previous prophets such as Moses or Jesus served the purpose of legitimising and defining the identity of the Muslim community as a distinct group.¹ Here, al-Bisṭāmī could likewise be seen as deriving religious legitimacy from his encounter with the Prophet Muḥammad, but in this case the legitimacy of Sufis within the wider Muslim community is what is at stake, as it is in Sufi circles that this narrative might have benefitted from a wider transmission than in any other circle. This also confers a special aspect to the identity of the Sufi community among Muslims, an initiation process peculiar to mystics, that might have been construed as a sort of elite identity. This is alluded to at the beginning of the text, which states that such an ascension experience cannot be lived by the lay people (*'āmmat al-nās*), even though they are presumably also Muslim.

The characters and roles of the angels constitute a particularly interesting aspect of this heavenly journey, which, apart from a green bird,² are the only protagonists met by al-Bisṭāmī during his ascension until his encounter with God. Although on his way to God he meets many angels, if not all of them, there is interestingly no mention of the Archangel Gabriel, although others are identified by names: some angels bear

¹ Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 59-73.

² The colour green has a particular importance in Islam: it is associated at times with Gabriel in the *ḥadīth*, it is also the colour of the Prophet, of Paradise, of life, probably related to its importance in Zoroastrianism, but its importance and use is quite distinct from the Judeo-Christian tradition, green becoming then a particular Islamic symbol (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 64-65).

strange-sounding names of the theophoric kind, such as *Lāwīdh*, *Niyā'īl*, *Bariyā'īl*.¹ It might be possible to infer from Gabriel's absence that al-Biṣṭāmī considers him as specific to prophets, and not mystics or Sufi masters.

In the text, angels are frequently associated with the word *nūr*, from the first heaven where the angels comments that their visitor is “of humanity, not of light” (*ādāmī lā nūrī*), which accords with a well-known *ḥadīth*² about the creation of angels as made from *nūr*, while they are associated with various words of the semantic field of light: lantern (*qandīl*), daylight (*ḍaw*), their faces the light of the sun (*ḍiyā' al-shams*), heavens shining from their light (*nūr tabruqu minhu al-samawāt*), each angel having a “standard of light” (*liwā' min nūr*). Another classical aspect of angelic representation in the text is that al-Biṣṭāmī finds all of them praying, praising God, guarding the heavens, bearing the Throne.

Regarding details and variety, the description of angels remain somewhat cursory, in line with the rest of the objects and landscapes he traverses. This elliptic style fits with what Lory notices of al-Biṣṭāmī's different accounts, noting his ascetic character in refusing to describe or talk about celestial topography.³ However, here are the main descriptions we can glean through the text: in the first heaven, angels are described as standing upright, their feet in the stars;⁴ they fly back and forth between the earth and the second heaven a hundred thousand times each day, looking at the Friends

¹ These names are not found among the theophoric names listed by Burge from al-Suyūṭī's collection of *ḥadīth*, although they sound similar, as if adapted from Hebrew names (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 34-38).

² See *Saḥīḥ muslim*, *ḥadīth* n°2996.

³ Lory, “Le mi'rāğ d'Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī,” 233.

⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi'rāj*, 250.

of God, other bowing down in nests of trees of light;¹ an angel of the third heaven is described as having four faces, one facing the earth, warning about the Last Day, another crying while looking up to the heavens, another his right towards other angels in praise, and the last face on his left sending “his hosts” (*junūdahu*) in all corners of the heavens to praise God, and he shows al-Biṣṭāmī one of his wings of which each feather bears a lantern brighter than the sun;² the angels in the fourth heaven are covered by a generalizing sentence, “all the angels, of all attributes, forms, and descriptions, came to me and saluted me;”³ in the fifth heaven, angels’ heads are in the sixth one and they salute the traveller in different languages, and they are surprised when al-Biṣṭāmī responds to them in the same languages;⁴ the angels of the sixth heaven are only described as the “desiring angels” (*al-malā’ika al-mushtāqīn*);⁵ and the description of the angels in the seventh heaven insists on their great numbers and their size.⁶

Thus throughout the text, the descriptions of the angels’ appearances and acts are positive and correspond in general to the picture given of them in the previous chapters, coherent with their quranic representation. However, when al-Biṣṭāmī refuses their offers of gifts and riches, they are sometimes described negatively by him, appearing to him “like mosquitoes” (*ka-l-ba’ūḍa*). This gives an alternative impression of angels, one slightly different from the classically pure beings obeying God in a simple and straightforward manner, as seen in Chapter 1, where they are repeatedly

¹ Ibid., 251. This motif of angels in nests recalls the similar scene of the Prophet and Gabriel in nests of the Lote-tree.

² Ibid., 251-252.

³

“جميع الملائكة بصفاتهم وهيأتهم ونعوتهم قد جاؤوني ويسلمون عليّ.”

Ibid., 252.

⁴ Ibid., 253.

⁵ Ibid., 254.

⁶ Ibid., 254.

presented as obedient with no will of their own, and assisting believers in their worship by God's permission. Had they kept this role, one would suppose that they would only encourage al-Biṣṭāmī in his mystical travel. However one of their primary roles in this text, aside from the traditional ones, is seemingly to test the travellers on their path to God, and the narrative starts by al-Biṣṭāmī clearly stating that "he was tested" (*umtuḥintu*).¹ Angels thus actively try to entice al-Biṣṭāmī to riches, or even to what is considered and appear as perfectly good actions such as praying alongside them, although this implies that he would not be able to go farther and remain at the level of whatever heaven he finds himself in when offered this option.

Only when al-Biṣṭāmī, understanding that God is acting through them by understanding the nature of the test (remaining attached to one particular station of the journey) and when he insists on traveling on, does an angel appear to accompany him to the next heaven.² As such, angels are still obeying God through their actions, albeit in an unorthodox manner by testing the traveller on the spiritual path. They become His instruments of testing, over any other function, both in the text, and extra-textually as illustration to the spiritually-oriented reader. This function gives more depth to the interactions between angels and humans, which goes beyond their most well-known function of discreet helpers and models of religious praxis: here the spiritual traveller has to disobey to such a model, or at least not to be influenced by what is seen as desired orthodox devotions (such as prayer). In this these angels also differ singularly from the angels' roles in the prophetic *mi'rāj* itself where angels are not seen as testing Muḥammad in any way, and are usually described as "submissive," classical guides

¹ Ibid., 249.

² This idea of "straight on the aim, not wanting anything else" echoes different sayings in Sulamī's collection (Al-Sulamī, *the Subtelties of the Ascension*, 41-43, 101).

accompanying the Prophet in his journey,¹ with the possible exception of for the initiation scene involving Gabriel offering the Prophet different drinks to choose from.

These particular angelic actions echo a similar but often overlooked angelic “testing” function found in the quranic text (2:102), with Hārūt and Mārūt seen in the previous chapters. These particular characters challenge humanity with ambivalent if not dangerous teachings, although this is done with God’s permission.² The example of these testing angels in a *mi’rāj* narrative seems rather singular, and not particularly noticed in secondary literature.

During his ascension through the heavens, we also notice an aspect of the symbolic function: after each test presented by some angels, once successfully passed, another angel appears to accompany him. Angels then come to reflect the narrator’s spiritual progress, and how one has to both gain and surpass their attributes. We have here an example with their two main attributes, both in the text and in general as seen in the previous chapters: light, and wings. For instance al-Bisṭāmī’s own “light of [his] desire” (*diyā’ shawqī*)³ surpasses that of angels and of the world, after having been described, as seen in the summary, as having wings himself when he arrives at the Seat. He no longer needs the help of an angel, almost becoming himself as one (as a bird), or at least, gaining their main Quranic attribute (the wings). He crosses “veils after veils” (*hujuban ba’d hujub*)⁴ towards God, while other angels are described once again as annoying mosquitoes.

¹ Buckley, *The Night Journey and Ascension*, 1-18; as seen in the introduction, angels as guides is a typical motif of apocalyptic literature.

² Thus angels here, in their testing function, correspond to the category of “angels of abstract concepts” listed by Burge, while in the text as characters, they are examples of “cosmological angels” and “angels of specific things.” See Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 39.

³ Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi’rāj*, 255.

⁴ Al-Qushayrī, *Kitāb al-mi’rāj*, 255.

This testing function of angels in this heavenly journey could reflect the need to confront even essentially good creatures such as angels if one is to meet God: they test the spiritual incentive to travel on and not settling down, even though “settling down” might sound more comfortable and even praiseworthy (such as praying alongside angels) in a traditional islamic setting. This might illustrates some core aspects of the Sufi ethos, suggesting a never-ending quest for God, never satisfied by what could appear to most people as “good enough” or desirable, remembering that one is “on this earth as a stranger or a wayfarer.”¹

To conclude this section and the ‘pioneer’ status of the account attributed to al-Biṣṭāmī, reminds us that for the Sufi community:

“Explicitly or implicitly, the impact of the story of the mi‘rāj on Sufi literature was powerful, in terms of expression, structure and form, and in symbology and allegory. The story symbolized the Sufi path with its complex order of stages and states and provided the mystics with a frame of reference for their experiences and contemplations. (...) They used its allegorical power to express the themes of communion with God and regeneration of the soul, and so popularized their beliefs in order to convert the masses to their faith.”²

This last part could appear in contradiction to what a superficial reading of al-Biṣṭāmī’s *mi‘rāj* indicated regarding “*‘āmmat al-nās*”, however thinking about the Ibn ‘Abbas model narrative that al-Biṣṭāmī’s account seems to follow, its audience might have been indeed also ‘popular,’ and as such this representation of an elite spiritual experience a call enjoining everyone and anyone to follow the narrator’s path, so that its audience felt like they could also be part of this special journey, through an imagery readily understood, mostly constructed around “tester angels.” This type of Sufi

¹ From the well-known *ḥadīth* “Be on this earth as a stranger or a wayfarer” (*kun fī-l-dunyā ka’annaka gharīb aw ‘ābir sabīl*) (see *Ṣaḥīḥ* Bukhārī, n° 6079).

² El-Azma, “Some Notes on the Impact of the Story of the Mi‘rāj”

literature seems then to be a particular example of the function Vuckovic saw in the prophetic *mi'rāj*, that of a reinforcement of the Quranic moral code, while “giving an alternative route for constructing a communal moral code within a fantastic tale,”¹ and an exemplary model of utopian literature, as seen in the first section of this chapter.

4.3. The *Mi'rāj* of Ibn 'Arabī.

4.3.1. Presentation

The account of Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual ascension is mainly found in two different places of his writings, a short work dedicated to this event only, *Al-isrā' ilā-l-maqām al-asrā'* (seemingly an early work),² and the chapter 367 of the *Futūḥāt*.³ James Morris mentions two other sources, the *Kitāb al-anwār*, and the chapter 167 of the *Futūḥāt*. However these are less relevant here in that the *Kitāb al-anwār* focuses more on the practicalities of the spiritual journey, that is the preparation to and return from the journey,⁴ while chapter 167 is covered in Chapter 4, as it uses the framework of the ascension through the heavens for Ibn 'Arabī to expose his general cosmology, more than for narrating a personal journey.⁵

However, while the first account contains a first part dedicated to the preparation of the spiritual seeker for this particular experience, the second source starts with a brief retelling of the Prophet's Ascension, seen in the first part of the chapter. The author reiterates that his own ascension is only a spiritual one, not a journey done in body as

¹ Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 97.

² Muḥyī-l-dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā' ilā al-maqām*. He wrote this account at the age of 34 in H. 594, while still in the Maghreb region, before travelling to the east (ibid., p.34).

³ Chapter 367 (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol 9, 96-139).

⁴ As Vuckovic points out, Sufis need to train for this journey, where prophets do not, as they are elected for it and prepared for it by celestial beings without having to take an active part in it (Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 129).

⁵ Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension,” 632-633.

that of the Prophet. He further explains that this type of spiritual journey is the particularity of the Friends of God (*awliyā*'), receiving knowledge through the the embodiment of "meanings"¹ in the Imaginal world: "*To the Friends of God spiritual isthmus-like night journeys, where they look upon embodied meanings in images perceived by the imagination; they are given knowledge about what these images contain of meanings.*"² This is part of their inheritance (*irth*),³ related to their spiritual inspiration, which is not to be assimilated to a new prophecy, as he explains elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* (see Chapter 4).

Both accounts are quite similar regarding the visits of the different heavens and their respective prophets: he meets Adam in the first heaven, the Messiah/Jesus in the second one, Joseph in the third one, Idrīs in the fourth one, Hārūn in the fifth one, Moses in the sixth one, and Abraham in the seventh one, before arriving to the "House Inhabited" (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*) and the "Lote-tree of the boundary" (*sidrat-al-muntahā*). Each stop of the way gives way to a discussion and revealing of knowledge. In his second account, the order of heavens and prophets is the same, with the difference that he also meets John (*Yaḥyā*) in the second heaven, and later in the fifth.

¹ This word, *ma'ānī* (sing. *ma'nā*), seen in chapter 2 with Ibn Barraḡān, is also to be related here to the adjective *ma'nawī* seen in in Chapter 4 on the *Futūḥāt*, where Ibn 'Arabī uses it in the sense of "abstract meaning, ideational", or even "supra-sensory". Morris translates it as "spiritual realities" (Morris, "Spiritual Ascension," 638).

² "أما الأولياء فلهم إسرائيات روحانية برزخية، يشاهدون فيها معاني متجسدة في صور محسوسة للخيال، يعطون العلم بما تتضمنه تلك الصور من المعاني."

Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol 9, 102.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām*, 33.

4.3.2. Analysis.

The general analysis of Ibn ‘Arabī’s ascension journey and its connection to his overall metaphysics and ontology has been studied by James Morris who sees in this account a highly symbolic presentation of the framework of the *Futūḥāt*,¹ while Vuckovic analyses his use of the *mi‘rāj* as a way of exposing his perceived place in the world and ideas without being charged of heresy (by making his own journey purely spiritual and not physical).² As we have seen, contrary to that of al-Biṣṭāmī, his narrative follows the first or canonical profile of prophetic narrative ascension: Ibn ‘Arabī evolves throughout the heavens, meeting a different prophet each time, according to the order shown in the Sunni *ḥadīth* based prophetic accounts. He converses with them, thus illustrating a different aspect of knowledge that one has to gain on the way. He is ‘coloured’ by the Names of God: as seen in Chapter 4, God acts through his Names on His creation, which are the ‘colourings’ (*talwīnāt*) in the soul of the seeker.³

Thus the seeker has to travel without cease: “*So the Truth makes the Friend travel at night through His Beautiful Names, and to others of His Names, all these being divine Names; he knows the changing of his states, and the states of the whole world; and [he knows that] this change is what the source of these Names provoke in us.*”⁴ This

¹ Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension,” p.630-632.

² Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 125-128.

³

”فهي في الحق أسماء, وفيها تلوينات, وهي عين الشئون التي هو فيها الحق“

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9. p.105.

⁴

”فإذا أسرى الحق بالولي في أسمائه الحسنی، إلى غير ذلك من الاسماء، وكلّ الأسماء إلهية، علم تقلبات أحواله، وأحوال العالم كلّه، وأنّ ذلك التقلب هو الذي أحدث فينا عين تلك الأسماء“

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9, 106.

is done in order to become conscious of His signs within him.¹ The idea of change and travelling is clear in this paragraph,² suggesting that one should not remain in a particular state, and has to journey on, a narrative dynamic that echoes Al Bisṭāmī's narrative. The goal of the journey is understood as accomplishing the status of "Perfect Man" that fully mirrors the divine Reality, achieving that for which the world was created.³

The first impression on reading Ibn 'Arabī's *mi'rāj* account in the *Futūḥāt* is that contrary to the rest of this work, angels are not very present, as if illustrating that seeing angels is the privilege of prophets, as seen in the previous chapters. In an even narrower sense, seeing angels seems to be the privilege of major prophets only: one of these rare explicit mentions happens in the second heaven, where John the Baptist tells Ibn 'Arabī that probity or righteousness (*ṣalāḥ*) came to him through good news (*bushrā*) and to his cousin Jesus through angels.⁴ Another prominent function of angels here is the praxis function: the classical obedient feature, desired as "the first attribute of the servant" (*al-ṣifa bi-l-'abd awlā*), a feature to be acquired if the servant wants to have his prayers answered: angels obey God at all times, and anything they ask for is answered.⁵

On closer inspection however, we realise that he describes different beings or objects that could be defined elsewhere as angels or angelic in nature (including in his earlier account of the *Kitāb al-isrā* as we will see). Chodkiewicz highlights an important

¹ Ibn 'Arabī explains a few paragraphs later that nothing distinguishes a spiritual traveller from other beings, except in that his visions of the Signs, which are everywhere at all times, becomes unveiled. He becomes thus conscious of the Signs of God (Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, 9, 107).

² Ibn 'Arabī repeatedly uses the verb "asrā", to travel by night, as used in the Quranic verse (17:1) related to the *isrā*, thus reminding every time the reader of this journey in spirit, and dream.

³ Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension," p.640. Morris explains that the concept of "Perfect Man" is particularly developed in the first chapter, on Adam, of the *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam* (Ibid., 645).

⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, vol. 9, 114.

⁵ Ibid., 133.

aspect of Ibn ‘Arabī’s *mi‘rāj*, which explain the apparent absence of angels: a parallel is drawn whereby the traveller who follows the steps of the prophets will meet prophets in his ascension through the celestial spheres, while the follower of the philosophers will meet the angel of each sphere: the first one receives the spiritual knowledge, the second one cosmological knowledge only.¹ Thus angels for the spiritual traveler become implicit, if not both invisible and unnecessary, while at the same time very much visible and present for others. Moreover, we will see in chapter 4 that philosophers acquire only a partial knowledge, so angels here become associated with partial knowledge and vision, in line with the representation of angels in the Qur’ān where they admit their ignorance.

There are several examples of such implicit angelic elements, aside from the rare explicit ones. An example is given when Ibn ‘Arabī arrives at the 7th heaven, meeting Abraham and the celestial Kaaba, which Morris describes as the particular “*cosmological transition between the material world and the “paradisiac” realm of the highest spheres, as the Heart of the voyager.*” This is the moment where Ibn ‘Arabī sees the “Inhabited House” (*al-bayt al-ma‘mūr*), which seems to be identified with the celestial Kaaba: he clearly refers to the *ḥadīth* of the 70,000 angels entering it, never returning, which he then implicitly compares to as many veils of light and darkness that God places between Him and His servant, so that His servant is not “burned up by the splendors of His Face” (*aḥraqat subuḥāt wujhi-hi*) in a direct vision of Himself.² Angels

¹ Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 162.

² James Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension : Ibn ‘Arabī and the Mi‘rāj Part II,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108, no.1 (1988), 69; and Ibn ‘Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, vol. 9., 127. See also Ibn ‘Arabī, Muḥyī-l-dīn, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 99, where in the same scene Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm refers to this *ḥadīth* and al-Tustarī’s explanation of the internal (*bāṭin*) dimension of the “Inhabited House” is the heart of the mystical knower, towards which the angels come in pilgrimage.

then act here as intermediaries between man and God, more in the role of protectors of man for the sake of man's ontological integrity than classical messengers. They could be described as messengers here only in that they signal to the seeker that he has come near God, veils pointing to His presence.¹

This step of the journey comes before the "Lote-tree of the Boundary," the importance of which is also seen in Ibn 'Arabī's general cosmology in Chapter 4. Christian Lange reminds us that: "*In the falsafa tradition and in Ṣūfism, accordingly, the Sidrat al-muntahā [Lote-tree of the Boundary] symbolises the furthest limit of ordinary human comprehension of the divine and also the point at which the elect enter into special proximity to God.*"²

Ibn 'Arabī writes then: "*When I left him [Abraham], I arrived at the Lote-tree of the Boundary. I stood then in the midst of its terrestrial branches and its farthest branches, which were enveloped by the lights of the deeds, and in which sang the birds of the souls of those doing the deeds, as [the Lote-tree] is in the form of Man.*" He then mentions the four rivers of knowledge, referring to another part of the *Futūḥāt*, and writes that he was appointed the "supports of the cushions of the mystical knowers" (*muttaka'āt rafārīf al-ārīfīn*) before being transformed in light (*nūran*) and vested in a vestment (*khul'a*) the likes of which he had never seen.³ This last scene echoes a motif

The reference to and Ibn 'Arabī's use of the *ḥadīth* of the 70,000 angels is seen in Chapter 4.

¹ By way of religious comparison, we can further mention here the interesting relationship between veils and angels, whereby here angels are here assimilated to veils here, as the pseudo-Denys the Areopagyte, known for his Christian angelology, writes that an "allegorical veil" does not add anything to the truth, but is required by human frailty, keeping the gaze from the divine glare. See Denys L'aréopagyte, *La hiérarchie céleste*, 75, ft. 1.

² Lange, "Lote Tree", E.I.³

³

“فلما فارقت جنت سدرة المنتهى. فوقفت بين فروعها الدنيا والقصوى، وقد غشيتها أنوار الأعمال، وصدحت في ذرى أفنانها طيور أرواح العاملين، وهي على نشأة الإنسان.”

of the Prophetic *mi'raj* in Sulamī,¹ as well as a motif in antique Jewish and Christian literature,² while the whole episode contains several implicit angelic references: the lights, the deeds, and less intuitively so in translation, the “cushions”.

The deeds represented as lights (*anwār*) and birds representing the souls of those originating these deeds reminds the reader of what is seen in Chapter 2 and will be seen in Chapter 4, where angels are either described as transporting the good deeds of believers to the higher spheres, or these deeds being described themselves as angels, created by men through their deeds and words.³ Similarly, Ibn 'Arabī considered elsewhere in the *Futūḥāt* the human soul as angelic, part of the “Governing angels” (*malā'ikat al-tadbīr*) in one of his typologies.⁴ Thus, this excerpt then is implicitly filled with angels or angel-like beings, illustrating the destination of good deeds and their good souls. Another interesting aspect of this passage is the Lote-tree described as being in human form, with branches reaching out everywhere throughout the cosmos (on Earth and in the celestial spheres, not restricted to one or the other heavenly sphere), which is not unlike other archetypal ‘trees of life’ in other cultural contexts.⁵ It also

Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9, 127, and for another and complete translation, see Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, II,” 70-71.

¹ Muḥammad being clothed of light is a non-Sunni trope, another example where Sufi authors seem to find sources of inspiration in Shia-connoted sources (Sulami, *The Subtleties of the Ascension*, 17); In another saying, attributed to al-Junayd, Muḥammad is clothed in “lights,” stripped of his own “attributes” (*ṣifāt*), and clothed in God’s Attributes, a situation in which Gabriel would have burned (Ibid., 71).

² “Vestments of light” are considered as the symbol of knowledge, see Marlène Kanaan, “Création et êtres angéliques d’après un MS arabe inédit: l’Hexaéméron du pseudo-Epiphane de Salamine,” in *The Intermediary Worlds of Angels*, 224; The angel Michael clothes Henoah of “vestments of glory” in order to make him as an angel, in the second book of Henoah (Hamdović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 262-263).

³ See 2.4, “General relationship between angels and humans” in Chapter 2; In the Ibn 'Abbās narrative of the prophetic *mi'raj*, the Lote-tree is described as being full of angels praising God in different ways and tongues (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 190).

⁴ See 4.2.1., “Creation of angels, typology and meaning” in Chapter 4.

⁵ The most obvious examples coming to mind if the tree of life in Judaism, and the world-tree in Nordic mythology.

relates to another book of Ibn ‘Arabī, “The Universal Tree” (*shajarat al-kawn*), which the author uses as a running metaphor to expose his cosmology both external and internal to the human being, mentioning parts of the prophetic *mi‘rāj*, as well as angels whose roles (similar to those seen in chapter 1 and 4) help us understand that the tree symbolises Adam, and illustrate the supremacy of Muḥammad in the hierarchy of beings.¹

The phrase “supports of the cushions of the mystical knowers” also refers, as do many phrases in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, to a particular Quranic verse (55:76) describing believers in Paradise.² The word translated here by “cushions” (*rafārif*, sing. *rafrāf*) is compared by Ibn ‘Arabī to the celestial equivalent of a litter (*miḥaffa*) in his description of the prophetic ascension.³ Additionally, Morris qualifies it as an “angelic vehicle,”⁴ which is justified in that it replaces Gabriel in the prophetic *mi‘rāj*, the angel guide who cannot go farther than the Lote-tree.

However the word “*rafārif*” is actually related to “flapping its wings”, when used as a verb (*rafrāf*) for a bird, or the idea of “shimmering” or “glimmering.”⁵ This suddenly reminds the reader of the lexical field attached to angels and their two main

¹ Muḥyī al-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, *Shajarat al-kawn*, ed. Riyād al-‘Abdallah (Beirut: al-Markaz al-‘arabī li-l-kitāb, 1984), 42, 88-89, 90-91.

² “They recline upon green cushions and beautiful wonders.”

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9. p.100, where this cushion is brought to the Prophet by an angel, in a scene where Gabriel explains that he cannot go farther (idea present in many accounts), illustrating the Quranic verse 37:164.

⁴ Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, II,” 71. He later draws a link between this “couch” (*sarīr*) and “Those drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*), which, without defining them as angels, are by definition those who are drawn the closest to God (Ibid., 76, f. 212).

⁵ See the translations given by many bilingual dictionaries, such as the Hans Wehr. The Doha historical dictionary also gives the meaning of “to flap its wings,” aside from another well-known one, used in many translations of the Qur’ān, where *rafrāf* means a type of carpet, coloured in green. It also gives the meaning of “the extremities of a thing, hanging.” On a side-note, the name of Lote-tree itself in Arabic (*sidrat al-muntahā*) is related to the lexical field of light, as the root “S-D-R” in the verbal form means “to dazzle.”

attributes, light and wings. The use of this word, at this stage of the journey, right before being transformed into light, would be seen as the ultimate metonymy, keeping only the two most well-known attributes of angels to describe the spiritual process of being transported into the divine Presence. This textual metonymy describes thus both a symbolic process, and extra-textually an actual removal of all elements that could be seen as intermediaries between the seeker and God. We find a similar textual process in the other account, where Ibn ‘Arabī writes that the self of “the spiritual young man”¹ became veiled to him (*iḥtajaba ‘annī dhātuhu*), leaving with him his attributes (*ṣifātuhu*).²

Regarding this other and earlier account, the *Kitāb al-isrā’*, the reader will find mostly the same references, and at times clearer angelic mentions supporting the later, and more symbolic *mi‘rāj* account.

In the category of implicit angelic references, Ibn ‘Arabī uses an angelic attributes to describe his own actions, such as his description of “being given the wings of determination” (*ansha’ a lī jināḥ al-‘azm*) with which he flies (*tirtu*) towards the Seat (*al-kursī*).³ At a later stage he uses clearer implicit references: “So I smoothed down the wings of the subtelties (*al-laṭā’ if*), mounting the back of the cushions (*al-rafārif*), and I flew in the atmosphere of knowledge (*al-ma‘ārif*), these being three hundred cushions, called “the Most Noble Highest Council” (*al-mala’ al-a’lā al-ashraf*).”⁴ Given the near

¹ This spiritual young man, related to or assimilated here to the “universal soul” (*al-rūḥ al-kullī*) or “the eye of certainty” (*‘ayn al-yaqīn*) by Su‘ād al-Ḥakīm, is also described as an angel-like guide that Ibn ‘Arabī mentions in different places of his writings.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā’ ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 68.

³ *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴

“فسويث جناح اللطائف، وامتطيت متون الرفارف، وطرت في جو المعارف، وإذا هي تلتماية رفر، وتُدعى بالملأ الأعلى الأشرف.”

systematic interpretation of the Highest Council as being that of angels in the other chapters, and elsewhere in Islamic literature, this clearly links if not assimilates these “cushions” to angelic beings. Another example is using one alternative name to what he calls “angel” elsewhere, such as Nūn and the Pen,¹ in the more allegorical part of the “secret conversations” of his account.

In the category of explicit references, when arrived at the “Inhabited House,” he quotes and comments on the Quranic verses linked to the *mi‘rāj*, before exposing clearly a key difference between humans and angels that we find in the *Futūḥāt*: “The angels took hold of the single leg [of the Seat], while the mystical knowers took hold of both legs of the Unseen (*al-ghā‘iba*) and the Seen (*al-shāhida*).”² As seen in Chapter 4, this is a way of explaining that angels inhabit the unseen, or *bā‘īn* dimension, while human beings have potentially access to both - the goal of the mystic is in any case to “see with two eyes,” to use another phrase of Ibn ‘Arabī,³ the capacity to accomplish oneself in both physical and spiritual dimensions, or alternatively intellectually and spiritually.

Pursuing farther, a new stage of the journey unfolds, of which parts are called “secret conversations” (*munājāt*) or intimate colloquies, which appear as a summary of the *mi‘rāj* and its teachings in its different aspects. This echoes the intimate colloquy seen earlier between Muḥammad and God in the Ibn ‘Abbās narrative, and as such this

Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 128. The cushions and wings are once more associated within a long list of different associated concepts in *Ibid.*, 165.

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 153. We see in Chapter 4 that these are called angels, but also in the prophetic ascension, when he sees the angels recording every act of God’s servants, and that “every pen is an angel” (*Futūḥāt*, vol 9, 100.)

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 101.

³ A similar phrase and general idea is found a bit later (*Ibid.*, 130.)

reflects the influence in Sufi writings of the “para-official” sources imbedded in the official sources of even a Sunni *ḥadīth* scholar such as Ibn ‘Arabī

In the first one, “the secret conversation of the two arcs” (*munājāt qāb qawsayn*), he is met by an angel bringing him a stairs (*sullam*) which he uses to ascend, before the angel brings him to the “two arcs,” and then departing enshrouded in his wings.¹ This very rare example of an explicit angel starting a renewed *mi‘rāj* is interesting, mirroring the appearance of Gabriel to the Prophet. Al-Ḥakīm points to this as the representation of the Truth that is always limited by one’s representations given by one’s religion and belief, however advanced the seeker is:² here the angel would then be the only possible imaginal representation at the start of the initiation, within the islamic representation of such a process. Even presented as an ontological being, the angels are ultimately a metaphor, here of initiation.

In another such “secret conversation,” a conversation like a self-realisation of the seeker as theophany, Ibn ‘Arabī speaks similarly with the “the doctrinal Truth” (*al-ḥaqq al-i‘tiqādī*), not unlike the “Special face” (*al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*) seen in his other writings, with which one believer interacts with his Lord, this face differing from one believer to another according to his limitations. During this conversation, the teaching function of angels appears in a reversed manner, by the Truth calling his seeker “Teacher of angels,” with the implicit Quranic reference to Adam teaching them the Names.³

¹ Ibid., 133.

² Ibid., 133, f.4.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 166. This reference and the related scenes and concepts such as the refusal of Iblīs to bow because man’s clay veiled his interior is elaborated later, in the part called “Adamic Signs” (*al-ishārāt al-ādamiyya*), p.189.

The last notable angelic apparition is in the very short part called “The Joseph Signs” (*al-ishārāt al-yūsufiyya*). In a question about why he was sold at such a cheap price, an answer is given: for man to know his state of need. Then if the price is raised, this will be because of an additional attribute (*ṣifa*) on his self (*‘alā dhātihī*) given to him by the “Highest Angel” (*al-malak al-a‘lā*).¹ The context does not identify this angel,² but given the story of Joseph in the Qur’ān, where he is likened to an angel by the women seeing him, this rare explicit angelic reference gains more weight. Thus even though Joseph resembled an angel, he was still sold at a cheap price. However a real angelic attribute given to a person, even a prophet, makes this person dearer. The gaining of attributes is thus implicitly shown as desirable, which means more than “looking like,” and this is done by the mediation of an angel.

Reiterating the metaphorical idea of the Sufi ascension, in a form recurrent in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, Morris refers to the “Heart” (*qalb*) as the goal and seat of the journey: “*The heavens of this journey, the prophets and angels who populate them, the Temple or the Throne where the final “unveiling” takes place - all of these, he insists, are so many places of the Heart.*”³ In the beginning of his account, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that it is the “ordering of the journey from the world of the cosmos to the world the “*illī*” station” (*tartīb al-riḥla min al-‘ālam al-kawnī ilā al-mawqif al-illī*), which al-Ḥakīm explains is related to the suffix “-īl” in angels’ theophoric names (such as Mikā’īl), and that as such this *illī* station means “the station of angelic spiritualities” (*mawqif rūḥāniyyāt al-malā’ika*).⁴

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 204.

² If this is a transcription error, and a *kasra* should have been used instead of the *fatha*, we would have an equally unidentified “Highest King” (Pharaoh? God?).

³ Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, I,” 630.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *Al-isrā ilā al-maqām al-asrā*, 53.

The goal would be for man to become angel-like, or at least reach an angelic station, after going through all other stages, stations and Names, and then going through the angelic ones as well until retaining in the end only the angelic attributes of wings and light, as the utmost limit of human capacity of describing the last stretch of the journey towards God.¹

4.4. Conclusion:

Where angels in *ḥadīth* are used to underline their role in the believer's daily life, angels in *mi'raj* stories inform the reader on their roles in their personal and communal eschatological future.² As noted with Jewish apocalyptic texts, this type of literature encourages the "literary expansion" of angels, as a way of searching for new ways to access divine revelation.³ These *mi'raj* narratives participate in the re-appropriation of Quranic terms, that Neuwirth calls a "mythologizing exegesis," whereby these terms are taken out of their original context and re-wrapped in new images and new meanings,⁴ if not, a given meaning to words that have lost their original ones.⁵ In the case of angels, we can also find this process in examples around words from another language, such as *karūbiyyūm* (Cherubim), explained in the Ibn 'Abbās *mi'raj* narrative by an Arabic root, K-R-B, which produces an explanation whereby

¹ This idea of angels accompanying humans souls on their way to God's presence before disappearing is also a theme in early Christian writers, such as Clement of Alexandria (d. 215 AD) and Origen (d. 253 AD), (Daniélou, *Angels and Their Mission*, 91-92).

² Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 87.

³ Hamidović, *L'insoutenable divinité*, 137.

⁴ Angelika Neuwirth, "From Sacred Mosque to Remote Temple," 398.

⁵ Such as *sijjīn* and *zabāniyya* (Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey*, 202-204).

these angels are “those who worry,” giving thus rise to a new description of a category of angels, an enrichment of islamic cosmology.¹

We have seen that while al-Bisṭāmī’s account reflected the popular strand of ‘para-official’ Ibn ‘Abbās prophetic *mi‘rāj*, Ibn ‘Arabī’s narrative was mainly built on the model of the Sunni official strand, albeit with elements from the Ibn ‘Abbās narrative. Both strands of prophetic *mi‘rāj* serve legitimacy purposes as well as didactic purposes, through angels and prophets, whether the legitimising process was based on the Sunni canonical sources² or the legitimacy was lent to (relatively) marginalised elites with the Ibn ‘Abbās narrative.³ This is reflected in the Sufi *mi‘rāj* narrative, using one or the other source models, or both.

The Ibn ‘Abbās framework, both prophetic and bistamian, includes a developed angelology, and the narrator meets only them on his way to God, so they come to clearly symbolise functions seen in Chapter 1 (the praxis and credo functions, or more generally a didactic function), as well as a particular testing function. However the canonical framework highlights the presence of prophets on the way of the narrator towards God, and angels are much less present: Gabriel takes on all these functions in the prophetic narrative, while they are mainly implicitly present in Ibn ‘Arabī’s narrative. These Akbarian subtle allusions are detected by a careful reading of his works, and this only underlines the fact that he presents to the reader the metaphorical functions of angelic presences, possibly assuming that his reader is already well aware of their Quranic basic functions and presence.

¹ Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 178.

² Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 9-13.

³ Colby, *Narrating Muhammad’s Night Journey*, 170-173; see also examples of saying in al-Sulami, *The Subtelties of the Ascension*, 41-43.

These implicit references are found in both narratives, when the narrators draw near the highest heavenly places, where wings and light become their attributes. Al-Biṣṭāmī shows that one cannot stay put on any one of the heavens in the company of angels, as Ibn ‘Arabī show that one cannot remain at the station of any one particular Name: one must journey on, until all that remains is light and wings. In the Sufi narratives, these replace both Gabriel and Burāq as respectively celestial guide and vehicle of the Prophetic ascension: indeed these are also both winged and both related to the concept of light (Gabriel as angel, Burāq as meaning “lightning”).¹ This stripping down to two implicit attributes, wings and light, acts as a textual metonymy, symbolising the spiritual process towards *fanā’* and the un-representation of the divine, and the extra-textual reality the author might have wanted to convey, the letting go of ontological existence to achieve unity with his Creator.

Angels have become symbols of “signs” on the way, educative, challenging or allusive ones, signalling in these different ways the spiritual traveller that he is on his way towards God, on his ennobling travel.² This indication of having to travel beyond the angelic presences is a renewed motif already found in the some sayings on the Prophetic *mi‘rāj*,³ however the angelic signs of the Sufi narratives are more clearly textual symbols, or at least, as much so as they are presented as ontological beings.

¹ Burāq can be compared to the bird into which al-Biṣṭāmī transforms himself, both symbolizing the spirit (*rūḥ*), symbol of its archetype (Ṣafā Ismā‘īl Ibrāhīm, “Ṣuwar al-unthā fī al-mi‘rāj al-nabawī wa-l-ṣūfī,” (Master thesis, American University of Beirut, 2017), 19-24, 43-44.)

² This travel via the celestial ascension, as the Biblical Enoch or Idrīs, can be seen as the reverse dynamic of the fall of Adam (Chodkiewicz, “Le voyage sans fin,” 244).

³ For example the saying attributed to al-Junayd on Gabriel who would burn if he was clothed in “lights” and in God’s attributed like the Prophet, implying that only humans, or at least the Prophet, may go beyond the angelic realm (Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension*, 53; *Ibid.*, 71).

Thus Sufis add their variation on the “plausible fiction” of the prophetic narrative, as analysed by Webb, whereby the hero of the narrative comes back from his fantastical journey with an utopia to implement, and an example for others to follow. However Sufi ascension narratives are even closer to the definition of Webb’s utopian travel rubric, because *“once the remarkable elements are amplified, the possibility of the journey’s physical repetition is replaced with only a metaphorical possibility. Readers (...) can now only complete the mission by learning from the text’s utopian message and recreating the ideal community on the real ground of the familiar world.”*¹ Indeed if the believer is most of the time enjoined to believe in the factual travel of Muḥammad (which Peter Webb does not seem to take into account), Sufi narratives offer a metaphorical, “dream” version of this narrative for believers to reproduce and more particularly to the mystic. However in Ibn ‘Arabī’s case, the “metaphorical” would be replaced by the “imaginal,” the nuance being that this is a reality greater than the physical/spiritual divide.

As a last remark, when clearly mentioned in these Sufi ascension narratives, angels appear as both ontological beings, sent by God to this world and the different heavens, while being symbols for the spiritual realities of the greater Unseen world beyond the physical one, realities of both the human soul (i.e. the good deeds on the Lote tree) and outside of it (i.e. testing situations on the way to the higher planes). In these narratives, they correspond fully to what Lizzini writes on angels, “beings of the frontier” indicating both the distinction and the conjunction between the two worlds, the

¹ Webb, “The Familiar and the Fantastic,” 245.

Dunyā and the *Ghayb*.¹ This seems to be an additional reading to the prophetic *mi'raj* where angels fulfil their Quranic roles and functions, represented as full 'real' beings. As such, this creative and interpretative reading of the prophetic *mi'raj* could be considered as a particular parallel example of the larger *tafsīr* works on the Quranic texts seen in the previous chapter.

These Sufi narratives also differ from the allegorical function angels seem to have in other ascension narratives or interpretations of it by non-Sufi authors, such as some Ismailis who identify angels with the elected souls,² or angels as being the goal of human evolution,³ or more generally, as seen in the previous chapter, the example of Avicenna equating Gabriel with the “agent intellect,” the “initial Command” as well as the Holy Spirit, while the other angels are equated with the “power of mental spirits,” the spirits of different spheres, and souls when detached from their bodies.⁴ They may be all this,⁵ but they are also the symbols of stations to be gained and overcome, “signposts” on the way to God.

In other words, angels in Sufi *mi'raj* narratives seem to be used for legitimacy and group formation purposes the same way prophetic *mi'raj* did for the wider Islamic

¹ Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia islamica : il Corano e la tradizione,” in *Angeli, Ebraismo, Cristianesimo, Islam*, ed. Giorgio Agamben, Emanuele Coccia (Vicenza: Neri Pozza Editore, 2011), ebook.

² This seems to be the position of the *Ikhwān al-ṣafā*, who also identify the state of sainthood as “angelic,” and another Ismaili author, ‘Āmir bin ‘Āmir al-Baṣrī (7th/13th) describing the prophetic ascension, writes that he did so thanks to “his angelic capacity,” see Yves Marquet, “L’ascension spirituelle chez quelques auteurs ismailiens”, in *Le voyage initiatique en terre d’Islam*, 117-132; on the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*, see also the references in Chapter 2, “concluding thoughts.”

³ “Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to say that the search for means by which to acquire the status of angels is the most fundamental objective of what the Brethren called the ‘spiritual philosophy’ (*al-falsafa al-rūḥāniyya*) and, therefore, is the principal *raison d’être* of the corpus itself.” (de Callatay, “The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā*’ on Angels,” 347).

⁴ De Fouchécour, “Avicenne, al-Qoṣeyri et le récit de l’échelle de Mahomet,” 173-198.

⁵ Lizzini, “L’angelologia islamica,” ebook.

community at large,¹ and in the same way philosophers such as Avicenna have done for imported foreign concepts via an straightforward allegorical process.² However Sufi authors do this by departing slightly from a one-dimensional ontological use of angels (prophetic *mi' rāj*) or a one-dimensional metaphorical use of angels (philosophical *mi' rāj*). They accomplish it by keeping both these positions while maintaining an ambiguity with a multidimensional or simultaneous 'multi-symbolic' use of angels: they become textual metaphors and extra-textual symbols as well as well-identified ontological beings as per the basic islamic doctrine, while any one of these understanding does not contradict or cancel the others out, but completes them.

¹ Vuckovic, *Heavenly Journeys*, 75-121.

² Aaron W. Hughes, "Mi' rāj and the language of Legitimation in the Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophical Traditions: A Case Study of Avicenna and Abraham ibn Ezra," in *The Prophet's Ascension*, 174-180.

CHAPTER 5

ANGELS IN *AL-FUTŪḤĀT AL-MAKKIYYA* BY IBN ‘ARABĪ¹

5.1. Biographical details and presentation of the work:

Focusing on the angels in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 645/1248) will serve as a case-study of a particular work, which impact is not negligible on the subsequent islamicate mystical and religious writings. Although some authors might stress the importance of Ibn ‘Arabī’s works in islamic thought and beyond mainly through a positive lense,² others point out that its reception was mixed at best, or at least very highly debated - and indeed this kind of impact is in itself significative.³

Other works than his opus magnum *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* could have been selected (aside from his *mi‘rāj* account seen in the previous chapter), or other similar highly impactful works by other authors such as *Ihyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn* by al-Ghazālī (d. 449/1058), however our restriction to this work, apart from the constraint of time, was due to the following reasons: first, if many works by Ibn ‘Arabī have long been studied, the *Futūḥāt* are not always systematically used “in depth” due to its size; secondly, and

¹ There are two scholars known as Ibn ‘Arabī, contemporaries and both of Andalusian of origin: Abū Bakr Ibn ‘Arabī is known as a *faqīh* (d. 543/1148) and the other one, known as Muhyī al-dīn Ibn ‘Arabī, our author here, is known as a mystic (d. 560/1165), however he called himself “Ibn al-‘Arabī.”

² This is the case of some western scholars, such as Henri Corbin and William Chittick.

³ Alexander D. Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1999). “From the 7th AH/ 13th CE centuries onward practically every Muslim thinker of note took it upon himself to define his position vis-à-vis the controversial Sufī master” (Ibid., 1). Such harsh critics as Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) can even be seen as useful to make sense of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teaching and genealogy of thought (Ibid., 107-108).

most importantly, the angelic system was more developed in this work than in any other of Ibn ‘Arabī’s numerous writings, to the best of our knowledge.¹ Moreover, angels in Ibn ‘Arabī’s works have not been the main subject of any research, except from an article by Gisela Webb which gives a good insights on the matter.²

This gives us the chance to approach a particularly detailed cosmology than usual, increasing our chances to find an original use of angels in its narrative - if not to find a particularly detailed solidifying process of a known Islamicate cosmological view - in the context of a society that is about to change greatly. Indeed Ibn ‘Arabī was born in and lived the first part of his life in al-Andalus, with what this means of influences and differences in regards to the Eastern part of the islamicate world, where he traveled and settled until the end of his life.³ Ibn ‘Arabī passed away just before the end of the Abbasid Caliphate (officially in 892/1258), after having left his home of al-Andalus equally in turmoil with the Reconquista. A new multiform era is emerging in the islamicate territories, and Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings may be presented as an example of a testimonial compilation of knowledge rooted in a sophisticated cultural and political era that is about to be transformed.⁴

¹ For an updated overview of Ibn ‘Arabī’s manuscripts and works, expanding on Osman Yahia’s recension, see Jane Clark, Stephen Hirtenstein, “Establishing Ibn ‘Arabī’s Heritage, first findings from the MIAS Archiving Project”, *Journal of Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabī Society* 52, (2012):1-32.

² Gisela Webb, "Hierarchy, Angels, and the Human Condition."

³ For a condensed biography of Ibn ‘Arabī, see Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī in the later Islamic Tradition*, 6-16. For a longer biography see Claude Addas, *Ibn ‘Arabī ou la quête du soufre rouge*, (France, Gallimard, 1989). Ibn ‘Arabī’s mysticism was marked in general by al-Andalus, where mysticism was not so institutionalized in *tarīqas* as in the East (Ibid., 91). An noted Andalusī influence noted by Addas is Ibn Barraĵān’s thought: for instance the concept of “divine reality from which all things are created” (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*) seen in Chapter 2 (Ibid., 77); further influence of Ibn Barraĵān on Ibn ‘Arabī has been more recently studied by others, see Casewit, *The Mystics of al-Andalus*; Gracia López-Anguita, “Ibn ‘Arabī’s Metaphysics in the Context of Andalusian Mysticism: Some Akbarian Concepts in the Light of Ibn Masarra and Ibn Barraĵān,” *Religion* 12, no. 1 (2021), online.

⁴ Ibid., 249.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s works are mostly philosophical, metaphysical and mystical in nature,¹ and they do reflect the characteristically neo-platonic view of the universe found in many islamic Sufi writings.² However reading the *Futūḥāt* also resembles reading through a more classically Sunni religious encyclopaedia: for example the first four books are dedicated to the five pillars of religious practice, discussing its details in a rather classical exoteric way, its esoteric interpretations presented last. This reading also show Ibn ‘Arabī’s formation as a *ḥadīth* scholar, educated by well-established scholars,³ *ḥadīth* being the second major source of his references alongside the Qur’ān throughout the *Futūḥāt*. Different passages of his writing gives the idea of a well-established scholar living close to centres of power, both far from the sulfurous

¹ He is presented as a philosopher in many Western works, although Ibn ‘Arabī himself distance himself somewhat from this category, Addas explaining that he was not very well-versed in the philosophical works in circulation in his time, and mentioning an episode in the *Futūḥāt* that reflects his views: in a *mi‘rāj* narrative, the believer access all different sciences in each spheres, while the angels in charge reveal to the philosopher only a part of this knowledge (Addas, Ibn ‘Arabī, 135, 138). In the very beginning of the *Futūḥāt* a section called “One should not say that a Sufi is a Philosopher” also sets the tone (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, 1,151). Saif further presents him as an example of “revelatory esotericism” as opposed to more philosophically infused “intellectual esotericism” exemplified by the Brethren of Purity (Saif, “What is Islamic esotericism?,” 37-44).

² For instance a paragraph explains how the Creator gave existence to the “lightest” of beings (the Intellect or Pen, which is divine creative light) to the most dense of creation (the elements), adding in the process so many mediators or veils on the way, between Creator and created (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 209. 7,221).

Referring to the work of Abū ‘Alā ‘Afīfī, Addas writes that Ibn ‘Arabī’s neo-platonism is closer to that of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā than to that of the Andalusī Ibn Masarra (Addas, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, 81).

³ Ibid., 124-128. This is rarely highlighted in Western studies although noted by many classical muslim scholars (Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, 46). Regarding *ḥadīth*, Graham writes that al-Naysabūrī (d. 533/1138) and Ibn ‘Arabī seem to be the first ones to single out the *ḥadīth qudsī* by a special name (the “divine *ḥadīth*” or *ḥadīth ilāhī*, pl. *aḥādīth ilāhiyya*), see Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic word*, 57. These *ḥadīth* constitute an interesting continuity between Qur’ān proper and *ḥadīth*, and Graham explains that mystically-minded scholars were the most interested in them, and not so much ‘mainstream’ theologians (Ibid., 39). He further argues that these *ḥadīth* reflect an early stage of islamic literature, and as such grounds the roots of Sufi piety “in early Muslim spirituality and the prophetic-revelatory event itself” (Ibid., 109-110). This of course brings to mind a famous *ḥadīth qudsī* associated with Ibn ‘Arabī in many publications about him, according to which God says “I was a treasure and I wished to be known.”

reputation he gained later, and from the figure of the hermit/ascetic Sufi master.¹

Similarly, he gives more weight to words found in the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth* to build his Sufi vocabulary.² Regarding his use of Sufi vocabulary, Addas writes that difficulties and misunderstandings arise from the fact that Ibn 'Arabī uses it also in a non-technical way, and not from the difficulty of the words themselves or from their unknown origins,³ a difficulty which is reflected in this chapter in his sometimes ambiguous way of defining of angels.

Interestingly, the writing of the *Futūḥāt* is presented by Ibn 'Arabī as inspired to him, following an encounter near the Kaaba with the “young man” (*fatā*), sometimes qualified as an angel.⁴ The writing of this work took thirty years, and he revised it once afterwards.⁵ The edition used here is the Yemeni edition of the *Futūḥāt*,⁶ which seem to be the best critical edition so far, in thirteenth volumes, although it is not yet as widely used as the older editions. For this reason, references first states the chapter given by

¹ For instance, his city sophistication and preferences can be detected in such sentences as “the desert people are external/exoteric (*ẓāhir*), and the city people are internal/esoteric (*bāṭin*)” (Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 462. 10,373.); while angels provide a good example of his preference for the respect of the religious law: after mentioning the tradition of angels being incommoded by bad odors, Ibn 'Arabī reports that this was not actually true according to a personal conversation with the divine during his sleep, however, when waking up, he decides that following the law on this matter is still preferable.” (Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 265.) His attitude, that could be both very traditional and anti-literal, may be seen as an echo of that of al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892), see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism, a Short History*, 105-113.

² Ibid., 247. Su'ād al-Ḥakīm wrote a dictionary of Sufi terms as used by Ibn 'Arabī: Su'ād al-Ḥakīm, *al-Mu'jam al-ṣūfī, al-ḥikma fī ḥudūd al-kalima* (Beirut: Dandara li-l-Ṭibā'a wa-l-Nashr, 1981).

³ Ibid., 248-249. He re-uses vocabulary pre-established by known scholars such as al-Tustarī and Junayd.

⁴ This dangerously close comparison to the tradition of quranic Revelation by Gabriel is discussed by Addas (Addas, *Ibn 'Arabī*, 241-243), the corresponding chapter in Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 1. 1,197.

⁵ He started writing it in Mecca in 599/1202, and finished it in Damascus in 629/1231, and decided to revise it in 632/1234 by correcting some parts of it, during reading sessions with friends and students. For more details see the presentation by the editor 'Abd al-'Azīz Sulṭān Maṅṣūb in Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 1. 49-50.

⁶ Muḥyī al-dīn Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (Cairo: al-Majlis al-A'lā li-l-Thaqāfa, 2013).

Ibn ‘Arabī in his text (called *bāb*, the total number of which is 560) because these are the same in all editions, followed by the volume and the page number of the Yemeni edition.¹

Before reviewing some of the numerous occurrences of angels, a very brief attempt at presenting some of the main concepts of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology is needed, in order to better apprehend the situation of angels within it. These concepts will also be discussed throughout the chapter as the need arises.

An apophatic dimension of theology has always been an element shared by semitic monotheisms in diverse ways, and in Ibn ‘Arabī’s case, this apophatic or negative theology remains classically islamic in that it subordinates the total immanence of creation, immanence that is only relatively existent or relatively real compared to the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*).² However Ibn ‘Arabī’s numerous writings, stressing and detailing this immanence and its infinite theophanies (*tajalliyāt*) might have led to misunderstandings by later commentators,³ possibly equating the textual preponderance of this immanence over transcendence with a cosmological and ontological preponderance of immanence over God’s transcendence. This immanence and its imaginal powers, however, have

¹ Due to unforeseen material circumstances, we have had to use the two existing Yemeni editions: the references to the first 9 volumes are from 2nd edition of 2013, printed in Cairo, and the references to the last 4 volumes are from the first 2010 edition. For a review of the Yemeni edition, see Eric Winkel, “Review of ‘Abd al-‘Azīz Sulṭān al-Manṣūb (ed): *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*,” *Journal of Islamic Studies*, 24, no. 1 (January 2013), 80–82. Winkel has also started working on the first complete translation of this edition into English.

² This relativity and God’s absoluteness is illustrated in different instances, such as on human actions: Ibn ‘Arabī gives the phrase “the good deeds of the pure are the bad deeds of those drawn near” (*ḥasanāt al-abrār sayyi’āt al-muqarrabīn*) as an example of the relativity of all deeds in regard to God and to each rank of creatures. The quality of a deed depends thus on a given perspective as well as who does it, Ibn ‘Arabī adding an absolute reference in that anything coming from God is good, “however displeasing or pleasing [this deed is]” (*sā’a dhālika am sarra*), (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*. 472. 10,438.)

³ Related to this is his later reputation as proponent of the concept of oneness of being (*wahdat al-wujūd*), (Knysh, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, 13-14). See also Mohammed Rustom, “Is Ibn ‘Arabī’s Ontology Pantheistic?,” in *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 2 (2006), 53-67.

primal importance to Ibn ‘Arabī only insofar as it is a means of journeying towards the unknowable God, the way his Names points to the Essence without being themselves the Essence.¹

In Ibn ‘Arabī’s overall worldview, God is One in Himself, called the Essence, independent from His creation, while He is called the Divine (or the Lord or any one of His Names) when considered in relation to his creation and each creature. These creatures are all so many locus of His self-manifestation, or theophanies (*tajalliyāt*), or His Acts, realised or in potential.² We have thus “the Essence, the Divinity, and the Cosmos; or Being, the Barzakh, and existence.”³ Within a neoplatonic-like spectrum, or the “Unlimited Imagination” (*al-khayāl al-mutlaq*), we see God as Being above all and originator of all things, as “He”, followed by everything that is “He/not He:” the world of spirits, then the world of imagination, then the corporeal world, and then nothingness (or non-existence).⁴ All existent things that are not God have the quality of “possibility” (*imkān*).⁵

¹ Ibid., 67. See also Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75. 4,271 on there being two types of relationship of contemplating God by His creatures, the transcendental (*tanzīh*) and the descent into Imagination as example of similarity (*tanazzal ilā al-khayāl bi-ḍarb min al-tashbīh*).

² William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, (SUNY, Albany, 1989), 5. Elsewhere, Chittick also links this distinction to transcendence and immanence: “When we consider God, we look at the Essence Itself or at the Divinity. In the first case we declare that He is absolutely incomparable and unknowable, and in the second we say that He is somehow similar to the cosmos. (...) God in Himself and God in His self-disclosure” (Ibid., p.357). This book and the following one, *The Self-Disclosure of God* (SUNY, Albany, 1998) are very detailed overviews to the main metaphysical concepts found in the *Futūḥāt*.

³ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 357. Using the concepts seen in Chapter 1 (part 1.2), we could further compare with the late antique ‘Remote High God’ *Deus Otiosus* (the Essence/ the Being), ‘Governing God’ *Deus Actuosus* (the Divinity/ the Barzakh), and creation (Cosmos/ Existence); We could also relate the difference between Essence and Divinity with the idea of a Creator-God and a Salvation-God common in other traditions (Agamben, “Introduzione”) although for Ibn ‘Arabī the second is an aspect of the first (and only) one.

⁴ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 16. Chittick explains elsewhere that “nothingness” does not exist as such except by “supposing the impossible” in imagination.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 381. 9,547.

Compared to the more classical three worlds encountered in Chapter 2, the world of spirits is the “Spiritual world” or *Malakūt*, also “High world;” the world of imagination is the “world of Power” or *Jabarūt*, also “Middle world;” and the corporeal world is the “Dominion” or *Mulk*, also “Lower world.”¹

This brings us to different key concepts. The first one is that of “Imagination” (*khayāl*), which is especially relevant, as this is the main point of contact between humans and angels, as beings between the divine and the terrestrial and conduits between worlds. “Imagination” can have several meanings for Ibn ‘Arabī, especially in the phrase “world of Imagination” (*‘ālam al-khayāl*), which englobes the cosmos and corporeal world.² There are three types of imaginal dimensions: the “Unlimited Imagination” seen above as a maximalist concept which contains all degrees of existence; the “Discontinuous Imagination” (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*) which is separated from the human viewer and ontologically different from him, and the “Continuous Imagination” (*al-khayāl al-muttaṣil*) which comprises the commonly known human faculty of imagination and the soul.³ This also illustrates the concept of isthmus (*barzakh*), as Chittick writes: “*Imagination is fundamentally an intermediate reality; a*

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,225. Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* 73. 5,52. With the nuance that the *Jabarūt* may include the other two within the “Unlimited Imagination.”

² Corbin calls this word of Imagination the “Imaginal” or *mundus imaginalis*, in order to distinguish it from the mainstream understanding of the word “imagination” in modern western languages, see Henri Corbin, *L’imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d’Ibn ‘Arabī* (Paris: Entrelacs, 1958, 2021).

³ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 116-117. This is also how dreams and prophetic visions are distinct: most dreams pertain to Continuous Imagination, while prophetic visions pertain to Discontinuous Imagination (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 332). The Continuous Imagination, which corresponds most to the common understanding of the word “imagination,” is also probably how many other authors employ it, such as al-Fārābī (d. 338/950) who explains that it is situated between the sensitive world and reason (Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia di al-Fārābī: il cosmo, l’anima, l’uomo,” in *Angeli*).

*such, it is defined by saying that it is neither this nor that, or both this and that. Hence it is a barzakh, or the barzakh par excellence.”*¹

The whole cosmos is generally seen by Ibn ‘Arabī as synonym to “Unlimited Imagination”, whereby every created thing is somewhat imaginal in relation to God: philosophically speaking every created thing is a “possible thing,” and religiously speaking “in state of poverty towards God”, that is, relatively existent only, more or less close to the “Real.” Imagination seems to be a concept used in a singular manner by Ibn ‘Arabī, within the wider islamic theological and metaphysical thought,² and closely linked to the world and actions of angels, as we will see in this chapter.

These levels of Imagination are related to the levels or modes of existence and other key concepts: the concept of theophany (*tajallī*) governed by the Names of God, theophanies and Names that happen or are present within one or more level of the Unlimited Imagination. In these levels of imagination appear the forms, shapes, images, or even symbols (all meanings that can be inferred in English from the Arabic word *ṣūra*): in its wider sense, everything has a form, human (fixed) and angels (variable) alike, as an external signifier of their signified that Ibn ‘Arabī calls “meaning” (*ma‘nā*).³

¹ Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p117.

² Chittick writes, on the importance of imagination for Ibn ‘Arabī in human cognition: “As far as Ibn ‘Arabī is concerned, although the Muslim philosophers theorized about imagination and understood that it has a tremendous power to control the world of forms, they never quite grasped its significance for acquiring knowledge. For them, as for the Kalām authorities, true knowledge had to come by way of reason. However, as the Shaykh demonstrates repeatedly, reason is unsuited to gain positive knowledge of the divine, because its reality is to declare God incomparable and to deny His similarity. Hence it can know for certain only what He is not, not what He is.” (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 345). Put it in another way, where an author such as al-Ghazalī restrains himself in writing within the premises of negative theology and leaving the details of “tasting” to the reader’s own experience and imagination, Ibn ‘Arabī writes over-flowingly on what Imagination meant to himself, and what it made him see and understand of God’s creation, stepping into the potentially dangerous waters of positive theology and thus exposing himself to criticism.

³ In this chapter, we translate *ṣūra* mainly as “image”, “shape”, or “form,” and the adjective *ma‘nawī* as “ideational” instead of “meaningful,” which use in English is too large to translate

The second key concept of isthmus (*barzakh*) also varies depending on the context where it is used. Ibn ‘Arabī writes: “A *barzakh* is something that separates (*fāsil*) two others things while never going to one side (*mutaṭarrif*), as, for example, the line that separates shadow from sunlight.”¹ As such, the soul can be seen as an isthmus between body and spirit;² the world of Imagination seen as an isthmus between the world of spirits and the corporeal world; and in a maximalist version, the Supreme Isthmus (*al-barzakh al-a‘lā*) is equal to the Unlimited Imagination,³ everything other than God, dependent on Him.

A third key concept is that of theophany (*tajallī*),⁴ which is characterized by its uniqueness (a given theophany is never repeated), and by its appearance on different levels of existence and *loci* of manifestation, from the more abstract and non-physical to the most physical: “It comprises the images that are ideational, spiritual, angelical, natural, and elemental.”⁵ Such an image (*ṣūra*) is the manifestation of an entity (‘*ayn*), and while this image (or form) dies, the entities do not.⁶ These images are also classified into three different types of bodies: the corporeal or elemental body (*jism ‘unṣurī*),

adequately this particular adjective in this context (see 2.2.9 on this word). For a summary on the idea that “everything is a sign of God,” see William Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, (SUNY, Albany, 1998), 3-6, and on the forms and meanings (Ibid., 27-29).

¹ Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, 177. See also Salman Bashier, *Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Barzakh: The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*. State University of New York Press, 2004.

² Or as Ibn ‘Arabī writes, the particular soul (*al-naḥs al-juz’iyya*) is born of nature (*al-ṭabī‘a*) that is its mother, and of the Divine Spirit (*al-ruḥ al-ilahī*) that is its father (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 108. 5,238).

³ Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, p.125.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī came to be widely known for his use of this term. Chittick translates it as “Self-disclosure of God”, however the shorter “theophany” seems to us to translate this concept adequately, regardless of its particular uses in the history of the Christian religious tradition (see Weßler, Werner, Jörg, Scriba, “Theophany,” *Religion Past and Present*, online).

⁵

”قدمنا أن تجلياته تختلف لأنه تعمّ الصور المعنوية، والروحانية، والطبيعية، والعنصرية.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,257.

⁶ Chittick, *The Sufī Path of Knowledge*, 96.

which contains also the corporeous or imaginal body (*jasad khayālī*), and the body of light (*jism nūrī*) (these echo the three worlds above).¹ The complexity lies in that these images can be combined into one single theophany - man being the most complete one, encompassing all of these levels of manifestation, when becoming “the Perfect Man” once the spiritual journey is accomplished. Theophanies are unequal between themselves (depending on the clarity of its relationship to God, or to use a well-known phrase, depending on how the cup colors the water), although these theophanies all proceed from the same source and - to a certain extent only - are similar to it (since only God is “really real”).²

We also find in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings a complex hierarchy of relationships and correspondences between humans beings, angels, prophets and their names, the divine Names and Attributes. We will see that any of these may cover different realities, or that each of these realities might be apprehended in different ways - a multiplicity that might have led Webb to wonder whether Ibn ‘Arabī is not trying “*to destabilize the concept of hierarchy through the use of hierarchy.*”³

Central to this complexity is his hierarchy of Prophets and Friends of God (*awliyā’*) which both organizes the universe and symbolizes different stages and states that one may reach, all the way to the level of Perfect Man.⁴ Elements of this hierarchy are not new by the time of Ibn ‘Arabī, however they are systemized in a sort of “global

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 14. 1,463. “Corporeal” and “corporeous” are adjectives used by Chittick to distinguish physical bodies from imaginal bodies.

² Addas, *Ibn ‘Arabī*, 331. See also Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 52-57.

³ Webb, *Hierarchy*, 245.

⁴ This system is summarized and explained in Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*. This author regards this “doctrine of sainthood” as the key to one of the two main aspects of Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, the initiatory aspect (the other one being metaphysical), (*Ibid.*, 58).

doctrine” that surpasses previous descriptions.¹ The main new element brought by Ibn ‘Arabī might be his use of the concept of “the seal of the saints,” although it has been mentioned by al-Tirmidhī (d. 892/278) before him.² At the top of this hierarchy is the Muhammadan Reality, of which all other prophets are particular reflections.³ Each prophet have partial or total inheritors, and this is also true for angels (one can be an inheritor of a particular angel),⁴ and although the inheritance of Muhammad’s sainthood ends with Ibn ‘Arabī, the inheritance of other prophets is open until the end of times.⁵

5.2 Building on the angelic quranic functions.

Reading the *Futūḥāt* makes it a good example of enrichment of islamic cosmology by the sheer length of the work, while its systematization, rendered clearer by comparing different works of Ibn ‘Arabī, is less obvious and parts of which might appear sometimes confusing.⁶ Distinguishing the symbolic function of angels in the text, as seen in Chapter 2, from the other classical quranic functions is even more

¹ Ibid., 96-99.

² Ibid., 121-122. Ibn ‘Arabī’s answers to the questions of al-Tirmidhī occupies a good part of the 4th volume as well as the beginning of the 5th of the *Futūḥāt*, part of the legitimization process of Ibn ‘Arabī’s own status.

³ Ibid., 70. Reflected into the microcosm, Muhammad stands for the rationally speaking soul while other prophets stand for the soul’s spiritual faculties (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 288); On the macrocosm, this Muhammadan Reality is related to the “Muhammadan Light,” which is the “Cosmic Imam” in Shia cosmology, and stands for the “plenary manifestation of divine Names and Attributes, the sum of all that can be known in God, the real *Deus Revelatus*” (Amir-Moezzi, “L’imam dans le ciel,” in *Le voyage initiatique*, 116). It seems that the Muhammadan Light is a concept first developed by al-Tustarī, a concept of preexistence found in early Christian writers as well, see Geneviève Gobillot, “Quelques stéréotypes cosmologiques d’origine pythagoricienne chez les penseurs musulmans au Moyen-Age (II),” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 219 (2002), 161-192.

⁴ Ibid., 83. In his well-known *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ‘Arabī presents 27 such prophetic models, however there are many more, 124.000 of them according to a ḥadīth (ibid, 92).

⁵ Ibid., 119.

⁶ Such an example is the sainthood system in Ibn ‘Arabī, as explained by Chodkiewicz in *Le sceau des saints*, where the author draws on the *Futūḥāt*, and the *Fuṣuṣ al-ḥikam* among other works, in order to make sense of a system which parts are sometimes understood as contradictory or upsetting some basic islamic beliefs.

difficult than the situation of the quranic commentaries previously seen. This separation between the quranic functions on one hand, and the symbolic function on the other hand, has been done in order to make this particular cosmological enrichment clearer, more than out of a real difference of functions in nature. Indeed, Ibn ‘Arabī himself states that all mentions of cosmological realities in his works aims at pointing the reader or the listener to the equivalent in his or her internal realities: the cosmological macrocosm pointing to the human microcosm.¹ This “as above so below” silver lining renders the whole works of Ibn ‘Arabī mystical in function and nature, beyond perceived description of ontological realities - and thus any mention of angels by Ibn ‘Arabī should be seen as mystical in function to some degree, however pragmatic or mundane some of them are.

We will explore in this first part the enrichment brought by Ibn ‘Arabī building on most of the classical quranic functions given to angels as seen in the first two chapters. We will first study the cosmological function and its enrichment,² and then we will see some other functions.³ The most relevant examples will present a basic picture for exploring the next part on the mystical function.

5.2.1 The cosmological function.

Creation of the angels, typology and meanings:

Ibn ‘Arabī uses the well-known *ḥadīth* usually presented to supply the noted absence of the angels’ creation in the Qur’ān: angels are made of light (*nūr*) while jinn

¹ Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 127; Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 78. 5,116.

² Which correspond to the fourth and eighth functions in Chapter 2.

³ Which correspond to the first, second, third, fifth, and seventh functions in Chapter 2.

are made of fire (*nār*), Ibn ‘Arabī later describing them as “spirits breathed into lights” (*arwāḥ manfūkha fī anwār*).¹ Thus before jinn and humans, God created angels, giving them each a “knowledge of what He wanted to enlighten in the world” (*‘ilm mā yurīdu imḍā’ahu fī al-‘ālam*), and giving them the governance of the cosmos, or “universal body” (*al-jism al-kull*).² Following this passage, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that God created a first sphere (*al-falak al-awwal*), and then started creating angels, first of all creatures or “entities” (*a’yān*), mentioning specific numbers: 35 angels to start with, to which He added 16 others, and from among them Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel and Azrael.

Afterwards He created 974 angels and gave them orders, and then:

*“He created more angels to be the upholders of the Heavens and the Earth for His service; for there is no place in Heaven or Earth that does not have an angel in it, and the Real keeps creating angels from the breaths of the world as long as they keep breathing.”*³

This description of a world completely overflowing with angels brings us to Ibn ‘Arabī’s angelic three main typologies (Appendix 3.1 provides a comparative chart for greater clarity, with comparisons to the angelologies from Ṣadr al-dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274) and Sa‘īd al-dīn al-Farghānī (d. ca 700/1300)⁴ who are both followers of Ibn ‘Arabī - their angelologies clearly bear his mark). Indeed, the creation of angels from the “breaths of the world” recalls first another passage by Ibn ‘Arabī where he gives one

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 12. 1,425. Thus angels’ bodies are natural, although not elemental (*‘unṣurī*) because not made out of the four elements (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 280).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 7. 1, 399-400. These would correspond to the angels of the second category seen later, dedicated to the service of creatures and the cosmos.

³

“وخلق الله ملائكة هم عُمَّار السماوات والأرض لعبادته؛ فما في السماء والأرض موضعٌ إلا وفيه ملكٌ، ولا يزال الحقُّ يخلق ملائكة ما داموا متنفسين.” من أنفاس العالم

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 7. 1, 402.

⁴ I use the classifications drawn by Murata in her article, where she writes that al-Farghānī’s angelology is “fresh enough to warrant a summary,” although it is hardly different from that of Ibn ‘Arabī’s, whom she mentions briefly without describing his angelology (Murata, “The Angels,” 334). Indeed al-Farghānī’s typology corresponds to Ibn ‘Arabī’s second typology.

of his angelic classifications: the first two types correspond to two categories seen below, that is the Enraptured angels (*al-malā'ika al-muhayyama*) and the angels in service of the world, which he also call here the Elemental angels (*al-malā'ika al-'anāšir*); while the third type that is brought to mind here is “the angels created from the actions of the servants and their breaths” (*al-malā'ika al-makhlūqa min a'māl al-'ubbād wa-anfāsihim*), and these correspond to what is in the heart of the one who breathes.¹ Elsewhere he writes that these angels born of the breaths of men is the latest creation of God, and that very few of his (spiritual) companions know of it,² and yet elsewhere Ibn 'Arabī writes that the strongest of these angels are the angels created from the breaths of women.³

Then Ibn 'Arabī gives two other typologies that are worded in slightly different manners. Although ultimately coherent, they leave an interesting ambiguity on this category of “angels of breaths” in particular. He explains in a second typology that God created three categories of spirits (*arwāḥ*) according to their overall roles: a first category fully dedicated to Him, unaware of the other two (clearly equivalent to the Enraptured angels), a second category that is given the governance of a natural body (*mudabbira ajsāman ṭabī'iyya*) and this concerns creations such as humans and animals, and a third category “dedicated to our service [humans]” (*musakhkhara la-nā*), which could mean the usual angels (and the elemental angels above). Indeed, even though he

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1,463, Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 558. 11,262. Elemental angels seem to be a concept found in antiquity and early Christianity as well (Agamben, “Introduzione”).

²

“(...) ومملك مخلوق من نفس إنسان. وهذا الملك آخر موجود طبيعي، ولا يعرف ذلك من أصحابنا إلا القليل، فكيف من ليس من أهل الإيمان والكشف.”

Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,568. Elsewhere he gives once a slightly different version: illustrating the interaction between the physical world and the Unseen, breaths become the mother of angels, the father being “normal” angels needing the physical dimension for reproduction (Ibid., 292. 7,245).

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,354.

does not write the word “angel”, the paragraph describing this third category corresponds to the usual roles given to angels in islamic traditions.¹

In another chapter, devoted to the “angelic *walāya*,”² Ibn ‘Arabī presents a third typology: three “kinds” (*ṣanf*) of angels. If the Enraptured angels remain the same, a first group fully turned to God, the previous second and third categories are switched here: the third category of spirits above corresponds to the second kind of angels here, “the dedicated angels” (*al-malā’ika al-musakhkhara*), whose head is The Pen (or First Intellect, see next section), and although they originally come from the same plane as the Enraptured angels, they are directed by God to help the believers. As for the third kind here, “the governing angels” (*malā’ikat al-tadbīr*) which he describes at the end of the chapter as being “the speaking souls” (*al-nufūs al-nāṭiqā*), they correspond to the second category of spirits in the previous paragraph, and to the third type (the “angels of breaths”) mentioned earlier.³

An interesting parallel arises then out of these three typologies: these “governing ones” can mean particular angels of breaths that are the latest creation of God (in the first typology), they can also mean humans in the second case (second category of spirits), while they are presented as more “classical” angels in the third case (third kind of angels). This superposition of meanings crystallises well the ambiguous relationship

1

“وأرواح أخر مسخرات لنا، وهم على طبقات كثيرة. فمنهم الموكّل بالوحي والإلقاء، ومنهم الموكّل بالأرزاق، ومنهم الموكّل بقبض الأرواح، ومنهم الموكّل بإحياء الموتى، ومنهم الموكّل بالاستغفار للمؤمنين والدعاء لهم، ومنهم الموكّلون بالغراسات في الجنة جزاء لأعمال العباد.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 310. 7,445.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 154. 5,409-415. This third typology seems to be the typology that Lory uses in his chapter on angels and mystics (Lory, *La dignité de l’homme*, 205).

³ This tripartite classification is reflected also in one of his classification of knowledge or sciences (*ulūm*) with a similar hierarchy: the science of the divine (*al-ilāhiyyāt*), the science of the Higher Spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-‘ulwiyya*), and the science of the created natural things (*al-muwalladāt al-ṭabī’iyya*), (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4,382).

between humans and angels explored later, and their shared spiritual constitution. These governing angels are also a category that does not fit in Webb's classification of angels in Ibn 'Arabī's writings,¹ although this category is the most original of his angelic representations.

However some of these angelic roles are not eternal, allowing a fluctuation between categories: angels dedicated to the intercession on behalf of humans, for instance, will go from being of the third category of spirits to be of the first category when God's compassion will encompass everything and intercession is not needed anymore. They will then even cease to be designated by the name "angels", joining the pure spirits in eternal adoration like those of the first category.²

Other remarks on the creation of angels and meanings of the word:

Ibn 'Arabī insists throughout his work on the ontologically-built obedience of angels to God, quoting verses such as 66:6 numerous times, and once using it to counter what he considers as misguided interpretations of the verse involving Hārūt and Mārūt.³ This obedient image is challenged by their questioning attitude towards God at the creation of Adam. Ibn 'Arabī explains that this is because of another ontologically-built feature of angels that makes them wish good for itself (*lam turid al-khayr illā li-nafsihā*), and aim for the highest ranks (*al-ṭam ' fī a 'lā al-marātib*),⁴ in contrast to the mysterious freedom of choice given to man. Elsewhere, Ibn 'Arabī comments 13:15 by

¹ She writes that Ibn 'Arabī's writings fall into three categories: angels as effusion of God, comparators to humans, and apparition of angels or angels-like creatures to Ibn 'Arabī (Webb, *Hierarchy*, 246).

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 349. 8,328. He calls elsewhere these lights "material light" (*nūr māddī*). Their nature of light make them the closest of the creatures to the divine lights (Ibid., 90. 5,182).

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 49. 2,89. Obedience is such a fundamental trait of the angels that Ibn 'Arabī writes that "among his servants he chose the angels", the way he chose "God" out of His Names, Ibid., 90. 5,168.

⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 70. 3, 361.

explaining that this full obedience of angels is also shared by minerals (*al-jamādāt*), while all other creatures retain the existential possibility of obeying God voluntarily or “under compulsion” (*karhan*).¹

Yet another important remark on the creation of angels is that they are part of the natural world, “under the rule of Nature” (*taḥt ḥukm al-ṭabī‘a*), and as such prone to dispute (*ikhtiṣām*), in reference to 38:69.² Angels are made of “material light frames” (*al-hayākil al-nūriyya al-māddiyya*) perceived by the senses, and were they to be stripped of these frames, there would not be any dispute or fight (*lā khiṣām wa-lā nizā‘*) because there would not be made of any compound (*tarkīb*) which is proper to the natural world.³ Indeed these compounds are made by natural elements (*ṭabā‘i‘*) containing oppositions (*li-mā fihā min al-taḍādd*).⁴ This touches upon a particular understanding of the relationships between the divine Names that we will see in the next part of this chapter.

As for the meaning of the word “angel” (*malak*) in the chapter on the station of “angelic prophecy” (*al-nubuwwa al-malakiyya*),⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī presents another layer of meaning to it. For him it means exactly “messenger,” using the etymology of the root “M-’-L-K,” adding that this role of messengerhood (*al-risāla*) is given to many different types of creatures: the noble spirits (those generally called “angels”, including by Ibn ‘Arabī in his works), but also jinn and men. This definition is reiterated or suggested in

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,559. This is a reference to the verse 13:15.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 70, 3.361, and *Ibid.*, 290. 7,230.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,524.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 306. 7,314. See also *Ibid.*, 336. 8,124. If angels are considered as natural, they are not “elemental” (made of any of the four elements): elemental bodies (*‘unṣurī*) are natural bodies (*ṭabī‘ī*), however not all natural bodies are elemental (such as angels and spheres). *Ibid.*, 178. 5,628.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 157. 5,424.

numerous places: angels that are not sent anywhere retain the name of “spirit.”¹ Conversely, if some men can be qualified as angels by function of messengerhood, angels can also be qualified as prophets, and this is the case for all angels around the Throne, and some individual angels of the Seat, the Heavens, and the Stairs (*‘urūj*), the last of whom is Ismael the angel of the terrestrial Heaven.² This definition of angels might explain the infrequent allusions to angels made of something else than light;³ and it also justifies the ambiguity regarding Satan in the quranic text. Indeed he was not an angel in the sense of “noble spirit” made of light (though he was still considered of the “highest spirits”, *al-arwāḥ al-‘ulwiyya*), but he was an angel in the sense that he was also given the function of messengerhood, as part of the group “angels/messengers.” He was then cut off from this function, from being an angel, when he refused to bow down to Adam.⁴ The mark of this angelic function is the wings: these are given only to those spirits who are messengers, “*the envoys from the Presence of the Command to its Creation.*”⁵

Confusingly, the word “angel” is also used for realities perceived as other: the “spirituality of a planet” (*rūḥāniyyat kawkab*) is an angel of its corresponding heaven which puts the planet in movement.⁶ Elsewhere Ibn ‘Arabī also calls “angels” the worlds of the created spheres (*falak*) according to each sphere’s nature, in which are

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 206. 6,415. For example the phrase “this is what the angel descends with, or what the human messenger brings” reflect such an understanding of “angel” (Ibid., 366. 9,74).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 157. 5,425.

³ For example Ibn ‘Arabī questions whether the angel of death is made of “blends” (*akhlāt*) as are made the bodies of animals (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 348. 8,315).

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 157. 5, 420, 424-425, and Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,176.

⁵

“ما جعل للأرواح أجنحة إلا للملائكة منهم: لأنهم السفراء من حضرة الأمر إلى خلقه.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,229.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 167. 5,476.

created yet other angels in the service of all begotten things (*al-muwalladāt*) in the elemental plane (*‘ālam al-‘anāšir*). These things all possess their own souls (*nufūs*) proceeding from the “Universal Soul” (*al-nafs al-kulliyā*),¹ which parallels the idea of multiple spirits breathed into creatures, proceeding from the greater “Spirit.”²

Indeed, “Spirit” is another confusion-inducing word. Closely related to angels, “the Spirit” (*al-rūḥ*) includes them all, while at the same time it is also chosen *from* among the angels,³ as well as being what is breathed *into* them, as it is breathed into all creatures - a Spirit which is ascribed to God (*muḍāf ilayhi*), and which is often synonymous to the “Breath of the All-Merciful” (*nafs al-raḥmān*).⁴ He takes up again the functional meaning of “angel” in another example: these individual spirits born out of the “Holy Spirit” (*rūḥ al-quds*) are called properly angels once they are sent, and if they are not sent, they remain referred to as the “Spirit.”⁵

Finally, we find sometimes in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings the ambivalence of the word “jinn” noted in Chapter 1. Although he usually makes a clear difference between angels and jinn, the fact that they are both invisible to man, “hidden by the veil” (*masturūn bi-*

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 295. 7,301. This idea of angels in the service of each living thing, however tiny, was seen in Chapter 2, itself an echo of a notion found in Jewish and Christian traditions.

We can note here that the “Universal Soul” seem to be also used by the Brethren of Purity, who identify it to angels dedicated to creatures and the maintenance of creation (so they would identify here angels with creatures that Akbarian angels are in charge of), (Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia nelle epistole dei Fratelli della Purezza”). However the comparison with the Brethren’s angelology and cosmology in detail would merit another study.

² We find here again the second and third categories of spirits presented in the beginning of this section: humans and other creatures (second category) and angels dedicated to them (third category).

³ As “The Spirit” is also identified as an angel, in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 5. 1,379, and the one chosen out of all the angels the same way “God” is chosen out of all His Names, in *Ibid.*, 90. 5,168.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 90. 5,176.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 206. 6,415.

l-hijāb) justify that angels be called “*jinn*,”¹ or by the variant form “*jānn*,”² while the interior of man is also described as being in reality “*jānn*.”³ At other times, his writings remind the reader that there are indeed other spiritual creatures, mostly left without a name, than the ones called “angel.”⁴

Cosmological hierarchies: celestial and spiritual hierarchies.⁵

Using a court-like description of roles, Ibn ‘Arabī describes as closest to God the “Enraptured angels” (*al-malā’ika al-muhayyama*), then the Cherubim (*al-karūbiyyīn*) as gatekeepers (*ḥājib*), among which we find the angel Nūn, vizier or “head of the divine divan” (*ra’s al-dīwān al-ilāhī*). To him is given the “knowledge of His creation” (*‘ilm fī khalqihī*) or complete knowledge.

On a standing (*manzila*) below Nūn is another angel, the archetypal scribe angel, called “the Pen” (*al-Qalam*), who receives parts of Nūn’s knowledge, and these make up 360 “sciences of completion” (*‘ulūm al-ijmāl*), subdivided in as many particular sciences (*‘ulūm al-tafṣīl*). The Pen is also in charge of writing on the Tablet (*lawḥ*) everything that happens in the cosmos until the Last Day, and which corresponds to

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,175-176.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 345. 8,261.

³

“فإن باطن الإنسان جانٌّ في الحقيقة”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,304. Ibn ‘Arabī echoes the etymological debate surrounding the root “J-N-N” seen in Chapter 1 by explaining that angels (as spirits of light) are also called by the name “*jinna*”, as are the *jinn* (*wa-ka-dhālika tasmīyat al-malā’ika jinna, wa-ka-dhālika al-jinn*), because this goes back to being “hidden from view” (*al-istitār*), though the modes of hiding are not one and the same, see *Ibid.*, 388. 10,48. This also appear in another paragraph which describe the angels born of the spheres as hidden like the foetuses in their mothers’s wombs (the word for *jinn* being of the same root than foetuses, *ajinna*, in Arabic) before coming to the physical world (*Ibid.*, 59. 12,96).

⁴ See for instance Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,557: “What descend from the angels and the spiritual forces in the clouds” (بما ينزل من الملائكة والقوى الروحانية في الضباب).

⁵ Further summaries are provided in Annex 3.2 for greater clarity.

these 360 sciences.¹ Webb sees in this particular description, and the elevated position of the angel Nūn, symbol of the “Breath of the Compassionate” as distinct to Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology: this angel comes as the first emanation of Being, instead of the Intellect, usually symbolized by the Pen, as in other authors’ cosmologies.²

The Enraptured angels exist on another plane of existence, as they are not part of this physical creation (*al-khalq*), physical creation which is the “breath of the All-Merciful” (*nafs al-rahmān*) that allows the forms of all that is not God (*al-qābil li-ṣuwar kulli mā siwā Allāh*).³

In a chapter devoted to the bearers of the Throne, Ibn ‘Arabī quotes a saying attributed to Ibn Masarra al-Jabalī (d. 319/931):⁴ “*The borne Throne is the Dominion, and it is delimited by body, spirit, nourishment, and rank*”, before elaborating on this, paralleling “body” with “forms” (or images), and “rank” with “promise and threat”: “*Adam and Seraphiel for the forms, Gabriel and Muhammad for the spirits, Michael and Abraham for the nourishments, and Mālik and Riḍwān for the promise and the threat.*”⁵ However, in the same chapter, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that for now only four

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 60. 2, 159-200. Enraptured angels are a good example of categories of unclear limits in the works of Ibn ‘Arabī, as they are elsewhere described as not being angels, but “purified spirits” (*arwāḥ muṭahhara*) in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 177. 5,571, so close to God that they are not aware of the existence of the rest of the cosmos and its creatures, “they do not know other than God (*lā ‘ilma lahum bi-ghayr Allāh*), *Ibid.*, 295. 7,293. Yet elsewhere, the Enraptured angels are described as being the Cherubim, see *Ibid.*, 75. 4,313.

² Webb, *Hierarchy*, 247-248.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 558. 11,243. The Pen and the Tablet are also part of this other plane of existence, at least initially (as we have seen previously that they might also be part of the dedicated angels). However the Enraptured angels, also called “the Higher ones” (*al-‘ālīn*) are invariably described as being the closest to God, away from the Cosmos, not angels by function, and not aware of the Cosmos: they were not concerned by the order given by God to the angels to bow down to Adam, hence God ask the Devil whether he considered himself part of the “Higher ones.” (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 361. 8,567-568).

⁴ The first Muslim mystic from al-Andalus known to us by his writings, see Ebstein, “Ibn Masarra,” E.I.³

⁵

bearers of the Throne are present, and that they will become eight on the Last Day, mentioning once again Ibn Masarra to describe the forms of these other four, a description already seen in Chapter 2: one in human form, one as a lion, one as an eagle, and the fourth as a bull.¹ We will see in the next section the parallels with human bearers, and in the next part the mystical aspect drawn from these 4 and 8 bearers.

Regarding another celestial category, often quoted with the Cherubim and which sounds similar in Arabic, is the category of “Those Drawn Near” (*al-muqarrabīn*). These concern the general category of the “Friends of God” (*awliyā’ Allāh*), which are composed of angels, messengers, prophets, Friends, and believers, and they all may reach the stations of Those Drawn Near by the act of prayer.² Besides the Cherubim and Those Drawn Near, other groups are the “Zealots” (*al-mu’takafūn*), the “Isolated” (*al-mufarradūn*), and “those who are taken away from themselves for what the Real showed them of His Majesty” (*al-ma’khūdhūn ‘an anfusihim bi-mā ashhadahum al-Ḥaqq min jalālihi*). These categories are included with the Enraptured Angels, which main characteristic is that they are unaware of the rest of the creation. They also represent a station (*maqām*), on which members of a particular human category, the “Solitaries” (*afrād*) are to be found, because they do not see anything else than the Real.³

“روينا عن ابن مسرة الجبلي من أكبر أهل الطريق علما وحالا وكشفا: “العرش المحمول هو الملك، وهو محصور في جسم وروح وغذاء ومرتبة” فآدم وإسرافيل للصور، وجبريل ومحمد للأرواح، وميكائيل وإبراهيم للأرزاق، ومالك ورضوان للوعد والوعيد.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1,462-463.

The bearers of the Throne are presented in more detail in the next part.

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1,464. Ibn ‘Arabī discusses the Throne (*al-‘arsh*) and the Seat (*al-Kursī*) and their attendant angels in a similar manner as previously seen in the other chapters (Ibid., 198. 5,272-277.)

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 47. 2,58-9.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 295. 7,293.

This category of “solitaries” is very important in the cosmological hierarchy of Ibn ‘Arabī. Also called “People of Numbers (*ahl al-a‘dād*), these solitaries are of unchanging number at any given time, succeeding each other in order to keep these numbers. There are seven “Replacements” (*abdāl*), made up of four “Pegs” (*awtād*), two imams, one “Pole” (*quṭb*). Then we have twelve “Captains” (*nuqabā’*), eighty “Nobles” (*nujabā’*), one “Disciple” (*ḥawārī*), forty “Of the month of Rajab” (*rajabiyyūn*). There are also two “Seals” (*khatm*) for all of time: one sealing the *wilāya* of Muhammad (identified with Ibn ‘Arabī himself), and one sealing the general *wilāya* (identified with Jesus).¹

Continuing with these “People of numbers”, there are three hundred souls “on the heart of Adam” (*‘alā qalb Ādam*), forty persons “on the heart of Noah,” seven “on the heart of the Friend Abraham,” five “on the heart of Gabriel,” three “on the heart of Michael,” and one “on the heart of Seraphiel.”² The phrase “on the heart of” is similar to the other widely used phrase by Ibn ‘Arabī “on the feet of” (*‘alā qadam*), and describes an inheritance as seen in the introduction,³ a “station” (*maqām*), or a “way” (*tariqa*), which corresponds to either prophets or particular angels. We could formulate this as a ‘mode of being.’ Here the persons who are on a ‘Gabriel mode’ are described as having “as many sciences as Gabriel has forces represented by his wings,” while the ‘Michael mode’ means simplicity, smiling, softness of character, and compassion.⁴ The ‘Seraphiel mode’ corresponds to a person that “reunites the two sides” (*jāmi‘ li-l-*

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 22. 1,550, Ibid., 75. 4,278-282. The Pole is seen as the highest position of all, to whom angel, jinn, and humans give allegiance (*mubāya‘a*). See the section where Ibn ‘Arabī also mention a book he has written on this matter (Ibid., 270. 7,10), and the chapters on “the four Pegs” and “the supreme degree of walāya” by M. Chodkiewicz (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 95-120).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75. 4,282-291.

³ Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 83.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75. 4,290.

tarafayn), and Ibn ʿArabī tells us that Abū Yazīd al-Bīṣṭāmī and Jesus both corresponded to this mode.¹

This whole hierarchy can be further complexified: one person can hold several of these modes of beings, and progress from one to another and cumulate them.² There is also an overlap to keep in mind, as one person can be the archetype of a role for others as well: Jesus was "on the heart of Seraphiel", while some of Ibn ʿArabī's shaykhs were themselves "on the heart of Jesus". Elsewhere, Ibn ʿArabī touches on this subject again in the chapter on the "*position of the Gabrielan mystical knower*,"³ giving more names of angels concerned, which he calls "the advanced angels" (*al-malā'ika al-muqaddamīn*) or heralds. He explains that the men and women who are on any of these modes leave traces (*athar*) corresponding to these angels' ranks, as they are under their watch and command.⁴

There are many more categories, beyond the scope of this chapter. We will only note here that these other solitaries seem to be part of the greater group called "The people of the world of breaths" (*rijāl ʿālam al-anfās*), which reminds us of the angels of breaths, although the link between these two remain unclear. We will mention only the ten "men of the Unseen" (*rijāl al-ghayb*), who Ibn ʿArabī describes elsewhere as having the power to act and move in the Unseen world (*al-ghayb*) and in the spiritual world (*al-malakūt*). They also have the power to call on the spirits of the spheres (*arwāḥ al-kawākib*) though not the spirits of angels (*arwāḥ al-malā'ika*) - as this remains God's

¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75. 4,291.

² This echoes a similar journey of the soul after death in Christian patristic literature: a soul learn from an angel, before moving on and learning from another one higher up, and so on (Daniélou, *The Angels*, 91).

³ *fī maʿrifat manzīl al-ʿarīf al-jibraʿīlī*, Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 303. 7,375.

⁴ *Ibid.*

prerogative.¹ They are also called this way because when they pray, their state (*ḥāl*) brings them where angels do not go (this is discussed in the next part). Ibn ‘Arabī also mentions two types of men of the Unseen in their way of “appearance” (*ẓuhūr*): men who are invisible from the higher spirits (*al-arwāḥ al-‘ulā*) but visible to God, and men who are invisible from (our) visible world (*‘ālam al-shahāda*), but visible in the “higher world” (*al-‘ālam al-‘ulā*).²

All these solitaries are followed by “The men of unlimited number” (*rijāl alladhīn lā yaḥsuruhum ‘adad*), and this category seem to cover all kinds of mystically-oriented persons (of which “the Sufis” are interestingly only one category), and their visible and invisible roles in maintaining the greater order of the world.³

On the Jinn:

Keeping in mind that at times “*jinn*” or “*jānn*” can be used for any creature of the Unseen, including angels, and that “angel” can also be used for a function and not a type of beings as seen above, Ibn ‘Arabī devotes a chapter to the “smokeless fiery spirits” (*al-arwāḥ al-mārijīyya al-nāriyya*) that we usually define as jinn. He explains that jinn are a isthmus (*barzakh*) between “an embodied spirit” (*rūḥ mujassam*) and a “spirit without locus” (*rūḥ bilā ayn*). They are made of fire and air (*hawā’*), fire being considered the higher of the four elements (*arkān*), though water (*mā’*) is more powerful - this is given as a reason for the refusal of bowing down to Adam. The predominance of the fire element allows the jinn to change shapes, a faculty which they share with angels, while they share with humans the choice of being obedient or

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 25. 1,569. This is an example of the ambiguity around the definition of angel, as we have seen that Ibn ‘Arabī calls the spheres “angels” at times, and at other times angels are only in charge of them.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75. 4,293.

³ Many pages are dedicated to detailing this denominations (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 4,268-367.)

disobedient (*fa-minhum al-ṭā'ī wa-l- 'āṣī mithlanā, wa la-hum al-tashakkul fī al-ṣuwar ka-l-malā'ika*). Both humans and jinn are often designated by Ibn 'Arabī with the quranic “the two heavy ones” (*al-thaqalān*). We cannot see them except by disclosure from God to some of his servants, this change of shape taking place in the Imaginal world. If we were able to perceive what the “shaping force” (*al-quwwa al-muṣawwira*) in the “imagined imagination“ (*al-khayāl al-mutakhayyil*) made of us, we would see that we also have different shapes.¹ However one can recognize a jinn, whatever its shape, by the “tune” (*nighma*) it has, which does not change.²

He then goes on describing the process of jinn reproduction, from their first unique ancestor, a “male-female” (*khunthā*) reproducing itself, multiplying then by interpenetration (*tadākhul*). The resulting ambiguous nature of jinn is described as an isthmus between male and female, as they are between men and angel, which is also due to a lack of female force (*quwwat al-unūtha*) as much as a lack of male force (*quwwat al-dhukūriyya*) preventing them from being fixed as one or another. Ibn 'Arabī then describe their feeding habits (from bone) and their wars, before returning to the process of their creation, when angels from the seven heavens were ordered to prepare the elements for this event. The jinn, once created, are temporarily the only ones present in the “world of natures” (*'ālam al-ṭabā'i*). They discover in themselves a sense of pride and importance (*'izza wa- 'uẓma*) which remains unexplained until they have a point of comparison when man is created, and one of them, al-Ḥārith (another name for Iblīs), despises him immediately.³ Ibn 'Arabī makes it clear, as he does throughout his work, that individual jinns are called “satans” only when they choose disobedience, as al-

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9. 1, 423-4.

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 283. 7, 145-146.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9. 1, 426-7.

Hārith becomes Iblīs only when God “confused him” (*ablasahu*) - otherwise they retain the denomination “jinn.”¹

However Ibn ‘Arabī does warn the reader that sharing company with spirituals from the jānn (*al-ruḥāniyyūn min al-jān*) rarely ends well, because their fiery nature give them instability and a curiosity that takes over them too rapidly - while keeping company with angels will help in getting more knowledge about God, this knowledge itself being the assurance of having really been in company of angels. He also qualifies jinn as the most ignorant of God among all natural creatures, and because of that one should take care about information provided by them, referring to their listening of the heavens. He also mentions that a man interested in jinn will wish to learn the sciences of plants, stones, names and letters from them, sciences which he calls “natural magic” (*al-sīmyā’*), a science frowned upon by the different divine laws (*al-sharā’i’*).² In general, this similarity between this type of sciences and what Ibn ‘Arabī writes about of the sciences of Names and letters mirrors the parallel between the partial information transmitted by the jinn from the heavens and what angels transmit of ‘trustworthy’ information: it might look and sound similar, using the same vocabulary, but one is incomplete while the other is complete.³ This also hints at the variety of what is called today “occult sciences,” which were not quite disregarded by religious scholars.¹

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9. 1,428, *Ibid.*, 198. 6,354. For instance, Ibn ‘Arabī explains elsewhere that an angelic impulse (*ilqā’ malakī*) is always pleasing God and good on the long term though it might be temporarily “bitter” (*murr*), while a satanic impulse is always pleasing to the self, but bitter in retribution - noting that a satanic impulse is not a “fiery” one (*nārī*) because among jinn are good ones “giving good impulse” (*man yulqī al-khayr*), (*Ibid.*, 113. 5,255.)

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 51. 2,102-104.

³ “Natural magic” or *al-Sīmyā’* is mentioned in an influential work in Arabic of pseudo-Plato, “The Book of the Tables of the Jewels” (*Kitāb Alwāḥ al-jawāhīr*), which involves the letters of the alphabet and angels (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 103), thus conflating what Ibn ‘Arabī tries to separate somewhat; In another influential occult work, “The Goal of the Sage” (*Ghāyat al-ḥakīm*) attributed to Maslama al-Qurṭubī (d. 397/1007), it is also opposed to alchemy

On Iblīs:

We have seen in the section dealing with the creation of angels that Satan was considered as an angel per his function (messenger), but not per his nature (jinn), which explains for Ibn ‘Arabī his ambiguous status in the Qur’ān as seen in chapter 1. Adding to what was previously said about him, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that he is not only of the natural world, but also “elemental” (‘*unṣurī*) which explains his pride preventing him to be like the angels, a pride found with the jinn.² As such, Iblīs gains a particular angelic function: being the “messenger of discord,” part of God’s unknowable plan.

Ibn ‘Arabī refutes the view that Satan was the first jinn, explaining that he was only one of them, and more exactly “the first wretched of the jinn” (*awwal al-ashqiyā’ min al-jinn*).³ He was sent to be part of the “lower world” (‘*ālam al-sufī*), and from there he may come to men by the “lower positions” (*al-manāzil al-sufliyya*) which are the four horizontal directions (right, left, behind, front).⁴ Although angels can act as expected as protectors against Satan,⁵ he is capable of playing “make-believe” at the

(*al-kīmyā’*), science of the bodies, while *al-sīmyā’* is the science of the celestial bodies (Ibid., 144-151). I translate *al-sīmyā’* as “natural magic” in the context of Ibn ‘Arabī, as it seems more appropriate this way, however with time this word came to signify more often “science of letters and magical squares” (Ibid., 304). Coulon also notes that many of the concepts used by al-Qurṭubī have been used by others later, including Ibn ‘Arabī (Ibid., 147). The difference thus presented by Ibn ‘Arabī between full knowledge and partial knowledge (natural magic) must have sounded like walking a very fine line to some of his readers.

¹ On the contrary, most of them included these in their writings, even though this has long been disregarded in western studies. See Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Introduction: De-Orienting the Study of Islamic Occultism,” *Arabica* 64, no. 3-4 (2017): 287-295; Liana Saif, Francesca Leoni, Matthew Melvin-Koushki, Farouk Yahya, *Islamicate Occult Sciences in Theory and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2020); Comparing the lives of the Andalusians Ibn Masarra (d. 931/319) and Maslama al-Qurṭubī Coulon writes that mystics could be more politically problematic than theologians versed in the occult sciences (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 158).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,354.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9. 1,429.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 16. 1,486. Even though one would expect *al-‘ālam al-sufī*, it is written *‘ālam al-sufī*.

⁵ For instance, angels stand between the prophet and Iblīs in a scene where the prophet talks with Iblīs, confirming both of their roles that are ultimately both in God’s hands: the Prophet

highest of the states, including when one reaches the Lote tree, by glamouring (*talbīs*) everything.¹

Discussing the importance of maintaining ranks in prayer, Ibn ‘Arabī reminds the reader that both satans and angels “are at the doors of the hearts” (*‘alā abwāb al-qulūb*),² and that satans are sent by God on His order, inflicted upon man (*musallaṭūn ‘alā al-insān*).³ In the chapter on pilgrimage, Ibn ‘Arabī gives an interesting portrait of the devil, who has a place called “*‘urna*” on Arafat: “*Iblīs goes on pilgrimage every year, his place (being) crying on what he missed of obeying his Lord, while being forced to seduce even though this is out of his choice, justified by his oath to his Lord.*”⁴ His this same passage, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that a pilgrim has to be above the devil’s place (*mawqif Iblīs*) as a symbol of this last one’s distance (*bu‘d*) from God.

At the Last Day, when Hell ceases to be what it is, quietened and brought within the precincts of the Gardens (*ḥaḏā’ir al-jinān*), the secret of Iblīs and his followers is made clear (*ittadaḥa sirr Iblīs*), that their behavior were prescribed by a pre-established decree (*qaḏā’ sābiq*).⁵

Ibn ‘Arabī also writes often about “satans” (*shayāṭīn*) in the plural form, and he explains in the chapter devoted to satanic thoughts that they are of two sorts: physical

guides on the right path and the devil induces into error (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 68. 2,268; See also *Ibid.*, 73. 4,513.)

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 283. 7,149.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 2,595.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,176.

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“فإن إبليس يحجّ في كل سنة، وذلك موقفه يبكي على ما فاتته من طاعة ربه. وهو مجبور في الإغواء، وإن كان من اختياره، إيراداً لقسمة برّيه.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4, 146.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 5. 1,380.

satans (*hissī*), and ideational satans (*ma 'nawī*). Of the physical ones, we also have two further sorts, human and jinn.¹

Cosmological topography:

Topographically, Ibn 'Arabī has drawn up several diagrams concerning the cosmos, its planes, places, and creatures, which are reported in Annex 4. Overall, the cosmos is comprised of the “Highest Council” (*al-mala' al-a'lā*) made of creatures of light, and the “Lowest Council” (*al-mala' al-asfal*) made of elemental creatures, and between them the isthmus that also comprises them both, making them a “more complete world” (*akmal al- 'ālam man jama'a baynahumā*).²

We can also mention the overlap of what he calls the nine spheres (*aflāk*) which seem to correspond ultimately to the seven heavens. The physical Seen world (*'ālam al-shahāda*) accounts for three spheres because it has three dimensions: it is an isthmus (*barzakh*), with an external (*zāhir*), and an internal (*bāṭin*) dimensions. Then the world of Power (*Jabarūt*) is another sphere by being itself an isthmus, while its external dimension is the internal dimension of the Seen world. However it also has its own internal dimensions, which is another sphere. This other sphere is the Spiritual World (*Malakūt*), which, as an isthmus, accounts for the 6th sphere. Its external dimension is the internal one of the world of Power, while its own internal dimension is the 7th

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 55. 2,125.

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 387. 10,40. One could draw a parallel with the *Malakūt* and *Mulk* seen in the introduction, with the *Jabarūt* between them, that might also include them both. He further uses a grammatical comparison: this more complete world containing the Highest and Lowest Council, spirit and nature, is a world containing an "active name" (*ism fā'il*) and a "name acted upon" (*ism maf'ūl*). Ibn 'Arabī adds elsewhere a “Middle Council” (*al-malā' al-awsaṭ*), which seems to represent the spiritual world below the constellations (sublunar world), while the Higher Council is the one beyond that (Ibid., 558. 11,210). Lory writes that exegetes are usually embarrassed by the idea of this Highest Council and its dispute, with what it might imply of decision-sharing with God and disagreement (Lory, *La dignité de l'homme*, 180-181), but Ibn 'Arabī does not seem to mind using this term, and we will see that angelic disputes have an important role in his theodicy.

sphere.¹ This is why he mentions 9 spheres: each of the three worlds present themselves three aspects, and the overlap of their two intersections (Seen world with *Jabarūt*, *Jabarūt* with *Malakūt*) turn their nine aspects into seven separate planes.²

Angels circle this physical world in ranks, described as the “upholders of the earthly Heaven” at times (‘*ummār al-samā’ al-dunyā*’),³ and elsewhere the upholders of all seven Heavens.⁴ They are either regarded as in charge of, or as the spirits of, the constellations (*burūj*) which bear the names of these angels. They are also said to inhabit the “diaphanous bodies” (*al-ajrām al-shaffāfa*) swimming in the heavens.⁵ The fact that they never move from these constellations make them the “twelve imams” of the world.⁶

Similarly to other authors, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that angels have a fixed station and their power is given by the number of their wings. He later discusses at length the descend and ascent of angels using stairs (*ma‘ārij*), although different from the stairs used by the human messengers, which echoes a biblical motif, is seen in the chapter on the *mi‘rāj*.⁷

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,215.

² This tripartite cosmos, build on nine spheres, has been seen in Chapter 2, with the Mulk/Shahāda/Dunyā as the first world, and the Malakūt and the Jabarūt as the two others. This was used by other authors, and Günther writes that this idea reached its zenith with Ibn ‘Arabī (Günther, “As the Angels Stretch Out their Hand’,” 315 ft. 23).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 64. 2,194. As widely understood in islamic traditions, they guard this heaven against the “disbelievers of the jinn” (*kuffār min al-jinn*) who come and listen to what is said (Ibid., 198. 6,310).

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 348. 8,310.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,270, and Ibid., 348. 8,309 (this is a common late-antique motif).

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 371. 9,337. This comes in a long discussion of astrological themes, and explain the number 12 by the 4 pillars of the Throne times the 3 “mansions” (*manāzil*) of the world: physical world (*dunyā*), intermediary or isthmus (*barzakh*), and the next world (*al-ākhirā*).

⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 314. 7,486-487. Elsewhere, he writes however that “the highest of them is the one who has the least wings, and the least winged of them is who has two wings” (Ibid., 357. 8,479).

In these heavens, the oft-mentioned “House Inhabited” (*al-bayt al-ma‘mūr*) is described as upheld by 70,000 angels, angels born of “water drops from the river of life provided by the flow of the Trustworthy Spirit,”¹ and we will see in the next part how this become a mystical metaphor. Created in the same manner, the Trustworthy Spirit is identified with Gabriel. In this same chapter, the Lote-tree (*sadrat al-muntahā*) is also described, parts of it similar as that of chapter 2, “this is where end all the actions of the children of Adam” (*tantahī a‘māl banī Ādam*).² The Lote-tree is referred to in numerous parts of the *Futūḥāt*, once as the point from where flows the four rivers of Paradise, out of which God made the Nile and the Furat flow out.³

Regarding Hell, Ibn ‘Arabī devotes a chapter to it, giving a complex eschatological vision of what parts of the world and who will be sent to Hell, as well as its type of torments, such as the “felt fire” (*nār ḥissiyya*) touching the senses, and the “emotional fire” (*nār ma‘nawiyya*) touching the heart.⁴ In the matter of angels, we find the quranic *ḡabāniyya* classically identified with angels,⁵ although the hierarchy and topography is not always clear. Ibn ‘Arabī describes his own visit to Hell, through his “visions of the Unseen” (*ru‘yā ḡhaybiyya*): it has 7 doors guarded by 7 angels of whom

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“أما اختياره البيت المعمور فلأنه مخصوص بعمارة ملائكة يُخَلَقون كل يوم من قطرات ماء نهر الحياة الواقعة من انتفاض الروح الأمين.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 90. 5, 173. Later we will see the same number of angels passing through its door, never returning. These angels born of a river is a motif in the Talmud as well: angels created each day for praise, and returning to the river of fire whence they come (Agamben, “Introduzione”).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6, 291-2.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 348. 8, 310-311. The other two are called *Sīḥūn* and *Jīḥūn*. In one of his *mi‘rāj* accounts however, these last two are given different names: he writes that the Nile and the Furat are the two “external/exoteric” rivers (*ḡāhirān*), called the Nile of the Book and the Furat of the Sunna, while the two “internal/esoteric” rivers (*bāḡinān*) are “Unity” (*al-Tawḥīd*) and “Graciousness” (*al-Minna*) (Ibn ‘Arabī, *Kitāb al-isrā*, 137).

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 61. 2, 173.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 61. 2, 166.

he forgot the names, except for the one called Ismael (*Ismā'īl*), and an eighth door kept closed, which is the veil from the vision of God (*al-ḥijāb 'an ru'yat Allāh*).¹ We also find “one hundred police” (*mi'a darak*), and “Followers” (*wulāt*), among them angels, in charge of Hell under the supervision of Mālik, the guardian (*khāzin*).² Ibn 'Arabī explains that these angels are part of the angels of Paradise and its guardian Ridwān, both kinds of angels “helping” (*imdād*) those of Paradise and Hell in the same way,³ which suggest a difference of intentions and results and not a difference of nature, or ultimately not even a difference of topography. It also reminds the reader of Ibn 'Arabī's originality in seeing Hell as a temporary place of torture for its inhabitants, where the angels of torment will also end up encompassed by God's infinite compassion.⁴

Lastly, in our physical world, Ibn 'Arabī writes that some places leave a mark (*ta'thīr*) in those of “subtle hearts” (*al-qulūb al-laṭīfa*) for being or having been occupied by “honored angels” (*al-malā'ika al-mukarramīn*) and “sincere jinn” (*al-jinn al-ṣādiqīn*), as well as particular mystical figures such as Abū Yazīd al-Bīṣṭāmī.⁵

As above so below:

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 61. 2,170. Ibn 'Arabī mentioning that he forgot the angels' names is rare and might appear as innocuous, but it might be less so when Najm al-dīn Kubrā (d. end of 12th century) in *Fawā'ih al-jamāl* considers that knowing the names of the *jinn* and the angels is one of the marks of sainthood (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 49).

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 61. 2,174. These angels are given names: al-Qā'im, al-Ḥāmid, al-Nā'ib, al-Sādin, al-Jābir, and the rest of the Followers as well: al-Ḥā'ir, al-Sābiq, al-Mātiḥ, al-'Ādil, al-Dā'im, and al-Ḥāfiẓ. Two paragraphs later, however, Ibn 'Arabī explains that all those in charge of Hell are of an unknown number.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 61. 2,174.

⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 343. 8,224, Ibid., 344. 8,234. This consideration on the finitude of Hell is seen as heterodox, although it is shared by other authors such as al-Baqlī (Coppens, “Sufī Qur'ān Commentaries,” 113-114).

⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 4. 1,340.

An example of equivalences between different creatures, functions and concepts is given in the chapter on the “science of the domain of the positions” (*ilm manzil al-manāzil*) on the number 19: there are 19 positions (*manāzil*) and each of them represent a kind of being (*ṣanf*), one of them being the angels; this number also stands for the 14 single letters found in the opening of some suras, added to the 5 groups in which they are distributed; the 19 angels of Hell; the 12 constellations and the 7 brightest stars (*al-darārī*); the 19 letters of the bismillah; the 12 Captains (*nuqabā*) and the 7 Replacements (*abdāl*). “The writing, ’s ‘Arabī Ibn of leitmotiv a Illustrating ¹ compassion of God encompasses everything,” the 19 angels of torment guarding Hell are faced by “Nineteen Compassions” (*al-tis ‘a ‘ashara raḥma*) that encompasses them, as a hope for those sent to Hell.²

Other examples of such comparisons, that could be understood as literal or metaphorical, are statements such as “*the spirits of the Replacements (abdāl) are the notables of the angels,*”³ “*The etiquette of the Friends of God is the etiquette of the angelic spirits;*”⁴ or seeing the human station (*manzila*) of the Solitaries as the equivalent of the angelic station of the Enraptured angels.⁵

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 22. 1,549-550. See also the long description of the “captains” (*nuqabā*) of the different spheres and heavens, and “Friends” (*wūlāt*) distributed in twelve constellations “like the towers of the wall of Medina” (*mithla abrāj suwar al-madīna*), (Ibid., 60. 2,160-161).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 343. 8,251. Indeed Ibn ‘Arabī constantly refers to 7:156 (“My Mercy encompasses all things”), and 40:7 (angels saying “Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge”), see for instance Ibid., 188. 6,111.

³ “أرواح الأبدال أعيان الأملاك.”
Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 559. 12,18.
⁴

“فآداب الأولياء آداب الأرواح الملكية.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 445. 10,294.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,417. The comparison is sometimes on the level of chapters, such as the two chapters on human *walāya* and angelic *walāya* following each other (Ibid., 153,154.)

Mentioned above, the four angels bearers of the Throne (*al-‘arsh*), associated to prophets, are also paralleled by four human bearers “on the level of the Compassionate” (*‘alā mustawā al-rahmān*), of whom Ibn ‘Arabī is part. Each bearer is given in charge of one of the four pillars (*qawā’im*), and Ibn ‘Arabī is given the most favoured one.¹ These four pillars are furthermore associated with the four angles of the Kaaba.²

Regarding religious practices, angels are also seen as paralleling human practices: angels, jinn, and humans are described as undergoing the pilgrimage every year,³ and in one of his poems, Ibn ‘Arabī describes angels as having done the pilgrimage to Earth before Adam did;⁴ angels forms ranks for prayer as believers do,⁵ and quoting a *ḥadīth* which does not seem to be referenced elsewhere, he writes that God is in the heavens as He is on earth, and the Highest Council beseech Him as humans do.⁶

Such correspondences between angels, planets, prophets, and other creatures and concepts run throughout the *Futūḥāt*, and cannot be fully laid out here, however it is important to keep in mind the pervasiveness of this correspondence system pattern in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings, as is the case for many other authors.⁷

A shared teaching role:

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 371. 9,333-4.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 16. 1,493. The Syrian angle is associated with Adam, the Iraqi angle is associated with Abraham, the Yemeni angle with Jesus, and the angle of the Black stone with Muhammad. In another mystical description of the Kaaba contains an “angelic angle” (*al-rukn al-malakī*) which is the Yemeni angle (*Ibid.*, 72. 4,11-12).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4,16, see also Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4,98.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4, 263.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 2,587, and 2,596.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,133.

⁷ As seen in the introduction. See the example of ‘Azīz Nasafī (d. before 700/1300) who links heavens, planets, organs, angels and the angels’ charges in the universe (Murata, “The Angels,” 336.)

A last notable role endorsed by humans and angels alike, linked to one of the central ideas of transmitting knowledge, is that of teaching. Ibn ‘Arabī mentions that angels were the students of man, referring to the scene of the creation of Adam, marking man as “of more complete constitution,” or of vaster knowledge, but not marking him as superior to angels.¹ Elsewhere Adam is shown as teaching to the angels a new glorification, when circumambulating the Kaaba, the “hawqala” (*lā ḥawla wa-lā quwwata illā bi-llāh*), given by God to him from “a treasure under the Throne” (*min kanz min taḥt al-arsh*).²

This teaching role is sometimes reversed, as when Ibn ‘Arabī mentions the different *ḥadīth* of Gabriel teaching men their religion,³ described as the teacher (*mu‘allim*) and master (*ustādh*) of the Prophet and the messengers.⁴ Angels are also seen as providing knowledge to the clarified souls,⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī also writing: “*Angels are the masters of the sons, and they are the students of the first of the fathers.*”⁶

5.2.2. Functions of Angels in the Relationship to Humans, Spirits and Other Beings:

After reviewing what corresponded to the cosmological functions in the previous chapters, we will review here the three first functions, which could be seen as

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,557. Echoing a comparison seen in Chapter 2, Adam is made a *qibla* for angels, as well as a teacher (Ibid., 369. 9,265.)

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 178. 6,48, Ibid., 379. 9,577, Ibid., 476. 10,453.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 36. 1,662, Ibid., 363. 9,10.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 224. 6,513, Ibid., 369. 9,266.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 344. 8,237.

⁶

“الأملك أستاذو الأبناء، وهم تلامذة أول الأباء.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 559. 12, 101. However, a few pages later, he nuances this vocabulary by writing that angels do not descend as teachers, but “as speakers” (*mukalliman*), (Ibid., 559. 12,107).

the functions of common or daily angelic interactions with the human world. Angels tend here to be classically represented by Ibn ‘Arabī.

We will first review the discussion around the relationship between Adam and angels, which overlaps many functions as in the previous chapters: in a mystical take on the story of Adam’s creation, and answering the 45th question attributed to al-Tirmidhī on how to obtain precedence on angels, men are seen as superior to angels in that God gave Adam the “Names demanded by these Disclosures in which I chose to reveal Myself to My servants” (*al-asmā’ allatī taqtaḍthā hadhihi al-tajalliyyāt allatī atajallā bihā li-‘ibādī*).¹

However this particular superiority does not mean that men are better than angels, as the angelic rank is still superior to the human rank: this means that man is of a more complete constitution” (*akmala nash’atan*) than that of angels.² In a particular passage, Ibn ‘Arabī even relates a scene in which he asks the Prophet himself to put an end to this particular dispute around the preference or merit (*faḍl*) between angels and humans: the Prophet answers to him that “angels are better” (*inna al-malā’ika afḍal*).³

So we have a double relationship, and the resolution of the debate seems to lie for Ibn

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4, 465. Echoing some explanations in Chapter 2 to this event, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that the misunderstanding of the angels when facing Adam is due to their lack of an “esoteric” or “internal” dimension (*bāṭin*), so being made only of an external dimension, they cannot guess Adam’s internal one, see Ibid. 73. 4,454. They also see in Adam the composition of contrary elements which announces strife (*mukhālaḥa*) which angels would like to avoid, see Ibid., 560. 12,421.

The idea that angels possess partial knowledge of God has been seen before in Chapter 2, and is also found in other traditions (see for example Kanaan, “Création et être angéliques,” 222-224).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4, 557. Or as he puts it elsewhere: “Man is of a more complete constitution, angel is of a more complete position” (*al-insān akmala nash’atan, wal-malak akmala manzila*), (Ibid., 71. 3,511). See also Ibid., 358. 8,499. Being the last type of creature created, and the most complete one, this is why God gave humans the Deputyship (*khiḷāfa*) of the earth, Ibid., 10. 1,435. For a discussion on the comprehensiveness typical to man as opposed to the limited natures of angels, see Webb, *Hierarchy*, 250-251.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,438. The argument endorsing this statement by the Prophet is the *ḥadīth* according to which any human invoking (*dhikr*) God, God invokes him “in a better assembly” (*mala’ khayra minhum*). See the section on the praxis function below.

‘Arabī in the perspective given by qualities of each being: while man is “more complete” (*akmal*), angel is “better” (*afḍal*).¹

Interestingly, Ibn ‘Arabī makes a difference between a human being born in a community that received a messenger, and a human born into a community that did not. In the first case, the child is born with “two companions” (*qarīnayn*), an angel and a demon, as per a known tradition already seen in Chapter 2; while in the second case, the child does not have any companions, and is behaving according to his own nature and directly guided by God. He further explains that anything good or bad coming from the child is caused by his angel or his demon, and does not concern the child, but is aimed at the person(s) taking care of the child: thus a human being gains responsibility in his behavior, in relation to the divine or the self, only at the age of reason.²

While they are also “of the intellect” (*‘aqlī*), contrary to humans angels do not think, because thought/reflection (*fikr*) is of the “natural elemental rule” (*ḥukm al-ṭab‘ al-‘unṣurī*),³ and from this thinking force (*al-quwwa al-mufakkira*) derives the “imaginative force” (*al-quwwa al-mūṣawwira*) that is specific to the human genre⁴ (this is also related to what we saw in the previous section: angels have natural bodies, but not elemental). As he writes elsewhere: “*As much as the imagination of man is not in*

¹ Murata mentions Ibn ‘Arabī’s position in her article as well, although she explains it in another way: angels are superior to mankind “as the microcosm,” while they are inferior to man when he is the “Perfect Man” (Murata, “The Angels,” 341-342). We could venture that the quality of being “more complete” may indicate this potentiality of humanity of becoming at the stage of “Perfect Man” indeed.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 298. 7,325. In the case of prophets and Friends, these demonic companions cannot access to them of influence them, and the *qarīn* of the Prophet even became muslim (Ibid., 69. 3,160).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4, 342. However this is not necessarily linked to knowledge (*‘ilm*), since angels are repeatedly described as being more knowledgeable of God than men (as seen in the next part). On these different modes of acquiring knowledge, see also Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 159.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,241.

want of images, so is the essence of angels not in want of shapes.”¹ The richness of this particularity of humanity, thought or mental reflexion, is mirrored in the selves of angels, their essence, that can take as many shapes as men are able to imagine shapes. Angels thus appear as receptors modelled by men’s active imagination.

On the other hand, angels share with humans and jinn, by virtue of being spirits governing bodies, that the divine Disclosure (*tajallī*) is hidden from them by the “veil of the Unseen” (*hijāb al-ghayb*), contrary to the rest of creatures. However angels receive knowledge from God by divine notification (*al-ta’rīf al-ilahī*) while jinn and humans obtain it through insight (*nazar*) and inquiry (*istidlāl*).² Another difference that will be explored in the next section is that angels are created and placed in a fixed station, while human can gain (*kasb*) one or more.³

The narrative function: helping angels, fighting angels.

Ibn ‘Arabī covers the classical helping roles of this function in his chapter on “angelic *wilāya*,” echoing what have been previously seen in the other chapters. He also mentions there quranic vocabulary provided by the “ambiguous verses,” interpreting them fully as concerning angelic realities.⁴

1

”وكما لا يخلو خيال الإنسان عن صورة، كذلك ذات الملك لا تخلو عن صورة.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 305. 7,397.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 317. 7, 522.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 314. 7,486.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 154. 5,409-415. For example “*al-ṣāffāt*” and “*al-mursalāt*.” These angelic roles are also talked about in relationship to the element of water in *Ibid.*, 198. 6,316-7. We find also other classical roles such as different instances of helping angels ordered to urge someone about not doing a reprehensible act (*Ibid.*, 398. 10, 101. Similar scene in *Ibid.*, 558. 11,255, and *Ibid.*, 560. 12,628.)

God has angels interceding for everyone on Earth “in general” (*‘umūman*) and for the believers “specifically” (*khuṣūṣan*),¹ while the Prophet intercedes for everyone including angels.² Similarly, while prophets intercede for the believers “by sight” (*‘an nazar*), that is believers convinced by proof, these believers themselves will intercede for those who are believers by tradition (because of education and family), while angels intercede “for all who have noble traits of character in this world, even if they are not believers.”³ Within the mystical vocabulary of Ibn ‘Arabī, the Moses Presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-mūsawiyya*) is described as an opening door to the intercession for angels,⁴ and as an example of his stress on compassion, he mentions the *ḥadīth* of intercession illustrating the remaining compassion after all intercessions are done.⁵

Regarding the fighting angels, we can mention here angels sent to Badr to fight along the prophet, described as being from the 3rd Heaven, the creatures of which are characterized by warrior-like qualities;⁶ facing Satan and his armies, God has armies of angels;⁷ angels are dedicated by God to watch over those who fight between themselves (*al-mutashāḥinīn*) until they settle, and intercede and pray for them.⁸

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 560. 12,592. They are usually described as asking forgiveness for those on earth, as in *Ibid.*, 342. 8,210.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1,454. In answering the 73rd question of al-Tirmidhī, Ibn ‘Arabī states that the Prophet intercedes for all creatures in a particular order: first angels, then the other prophets, the Friends, the believers, animals, plants, and minerals or inanimate objects (*jamād*) last, (*Ibid.*, 73. 4,506). This order is echoed in *Ibid.*, 64. 2,208.

³ “وأما الملائكة فتشفع فيمن كان على مكارم الأخلاق في الدنيا, وإن لم يكن مؤمناً”
Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 374, 9,417.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 337. 8,133.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 392 10.72, *ḥadīth* n°11463 from *Masnad Aḥmad*:

إن الله يقول: شفعت الملائكة وشفع النبيون والمؤمنون وبقي أرحم الراحمين

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 12. 1,455.

⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 383. 9,581-2.

⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 117. 5.268. This could be seen as a heightened awareness of strife within the islamic empire.

We also find angels in the role of scribes: in a saying attributed to the Prophet, angels are witnesses of the good deeds of the servant, while God is the watcher (*raqīb*) of what is inside his heart.¹ Angels do not write down what a human does or thinks until he says it (*lā yaktub ḥattā talaffaẓa bihi*).² Echoing a similar concept in Chapter 2, these deeds are then taken with the angels up to the Heavens. Another detail is added to the role of the angels scribes: when the speaker speaks with God in his mind at this moment, the spoken word is seen by the angel as a light thrown by the speaker, a light which the angel picks up and keeps until the Last Day.³

Regarding a new role seen in chapter 2, Ibn ‘Arabī also writes about the angels of the wombs: angels in charge of “bringing about the forms in the wombs” (*inshā’ al-ṣuwar fī al-arḥām*),⁴ they “turn around the drops [in the wombs] from one state to another” (*fa-yuqallibūn al-nuṭaf min ḥāl ilā ḥāl*) as per the divine order.⁵ However he takes care to remind the reader elsewhere, commenting the verse 3:6, that God is the ultimate form-maker (*al-muṣawwir*) and not the angel.⁶

Among other classical roles, we find angels guiding humans souls in Paradise to “their palaces” (*quṣūrihim*) because these are drunk on the vision of God (*sukr al-ru’ya*) and lost by “the plentifulness of good on their way” (*limā zāda-hum min al-khayr fī ṭarīqi-him*);⁷ angels guarding Medina against the Dajjāl in apocalyptic times;⁸ he also

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 560. 12,681. This *ḥadīth*, partially paraphrased here, is referenced in the index, however it does not appear to have been recorded by one of the other classical *ḥadīth* scholars.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 417. 10,204, *Ibid.*, 544. 11,141, *Ibid.*, 560. 12,427.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 544. 11,141.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 7. 1,407.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 371. 9,309.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,184.

⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 65. 2,235. This seems to refer to a *ḥadīth* not referenced elsewhere.

⁸ Mentioning a *ḥadīth* (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 4,259.)

mentions Jesus coming back in Eastern Damascus supported by two angels.¹ A last note regarding this function regards a curiously sadistic *ḥadīth* (which does not seem to be referenced elsewhere), involving a lack of help from angels: God orders the angel not to answer the request of someone for a time, because He loves hearing his voice.”²

The theological function: angels illustrating the credo:

As characters supporting or illustrating the islamic credo, angels are seen throughout the *Futūḥāt*, in similar roles as those found in Chapter 2: for instance in the context of the shahāda,³ or in reference to the coming of angels on Judgment Day.⁴ In the chapter on the shahāda, in a comment on the verse 3:18, angels are seen as the second ones attesting to God’s oneness after Himself, along with “Those who know” (*ūlī al-‘ilm*) as “partners” of God adjoined to Him by the letter “waw”, however this partnership is in testimony and testimony only (*wa-lā ishtirāk hunā illā fī al-shahāda qaṭ‘an*).⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī wants here to avoid any literal reading of his metaphor and delimit strictly the function of angels in illustrating the credo.

Within the answer to the 96th question from the list attributed to al-Tirmidhī on the *ẓāhir* and the *bāṭin*, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that “*the standing of the prophets, in which they take from the Unseen by way of faith from the angels, is the standing of the*

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 366. 9,62;9,69. This is a motif also found in Christian patristic literature: Daniélou, *The Angels and Their Mission*, 35.

²

“وقد روينا أن الله يقول للملك : “لا تقض حاجة فلان في هذا الوقت، فأبى أن أسمع صوته.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 349. 8, 323.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, index chapter. 1,161, and *Ibid.*, 68. 2,330.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 64. 2,194. They are also seen in charge of the “warning” (*indhār*) at the last day in the verse 16:2, a verse described as the “Unity of warning” (*tawḥīd al-indhār*), *Ibid.*, 198. 6,198.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 67. 2,246. He calls this verse a treasure for the hearts of the gnostics (*Ibid.*, 72. 4,13.) In a similar passage, God testifies that the angels and “those who know” testify to Him of His Oneness (*Ibid.*, 198. 6,186.).

believers in which they take from the prophets,”¹ showing the classical role of angels in the monotheistic credo and the faith relationship and positions between angels, prophets, and believers. Similarly, in arguing for the monotheistic idea, Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates on the error of worshipping all kinds of things and creatures, from angels to stones, plants or jinn,² even though these did not claim divine status for themselves.³ God’s ultimate power and unknowability is also illustrated in a comment on the 44th sura, Ibn ‘Arabī writing that not even angels are safe from “God’s cunning” (*makr Allāh*).⁴ Implicitly, humankind should not think itself capable of perceiving all of God’s intention. Related to this matter, the answer to the 111th question attributed to al-Tirmidhī, “What is the act of bowing down?,” Ibn ‘Arabī clears the ambiguity around the bowing down to Adam: angels bow down to the “rank of knowledge” (*martaba al-‘ilm*) and not to his “constitution” (*nash’a*), which they share with men,⁵ and which would be contrary to the monotheistic credo.

The religious praxis function:

Angels are also used in the classical manner of the *tafsīr* as models for religious practices, for encouraging these practices,⁶ and illustrating discussions on the minutiae

1

“ومنزلة الأنبياء في ما يأخذون من الغيب بطريق الإيمان من الملائكة (هي) منزلة المؤمنين مع ما يأخذون من الأنبياء.” Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4.541.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 325. 7.594.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 331. 8.68.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 340. 8.173.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4.548.

⁶ For instance see a typical commentary on quranic verses, with prayers of angels made for believers of good behavior in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 2.412. Another example is a *ḥadīth* explaining that if believer prays for his brother without him knowing, the angels will do likewise back to him in Ibid., 69. 2,540 (this is the *ḥadīth* n°4912 in *ṣaḥīḥ muslim*), and in Ibid., 73. 4, 537.

of these practices.¹ Angels are deemed superior to men in their devotion (*‘ibāda*) because their constitution (*nash’a*) does not allow them to do otherwise,² which also implies that they do not have any particular merit.

On the practice of prayer and invocation, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions a *khābar* whereby whoever invokes Him in an assembly, God invokes him in a better one, which Ibn ‘Arabī describes as being possibly the angels, of “those drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*), “the Cherubim in particular that He has dedicated to His Presence” (*al-karūbiyyīn khāṣṣatan, alladhīn ikhtaṣṣahum li-ḥaḍratihī*). He then explains that of all devotional acts, prayer (*ṣalāt*) is the one that adjoins the believer to the “stations of those drawn near” (*maqāmāt al-muqarrabīn*). In the same passage Ibn ‘Arabī writes as if God is talking to angels of “those drawn near,” showcasing the valor of the human believer who managed to attain the same station than them through his devotions despite all the hardships that God has put in his way, and which the angels themselves never experienced, once again underlying their lack of merit in their practice. The angels ask then God that they be given to him.³

Furthermore on prayer, commenting the verse 96:7, Ibn ‘Arabī reiterates that bowing down (*al-sujūd*) is the devotion that was ordered to “angels and all creation” (*al-malā’ika wa-l-khalq ajma’ūn*), bringing them “the Nearness” (*al-qurba*);⁴ Satan cannot approach someone in state of bowing down (*sujūd*);⁵ angels cannot pray for evil

¹ For instance a *ḥadīth* involving Gabriel praying with the Prophet to discuss the times of prayer in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 2.427

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,567. Their adoration is a common role to all angels, including between the angels of torment (*malā’ikat al-‘adhāb*) and the angel of felicity (*malā’ikat al-na’īm*), *Ibid.*, 320, 7, 542.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 47. 2,58-9. Angels are also said to attend sessions of invocations or “remembrance” (*jalsāt dhikr*) though its members cannot see them (*Ibid.*, 388. 10,50.)

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 48. 2,78.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,78.

(*fa-inna al-malak la yad'ū bi-l-sharr*), and their prayers are always answered both because of their purity, and because the object of their prayers is other than themselves;¹ discussing a *ḥadīth*, Ibn 'Arabī explains that angels attached to humans accomplish their turnover by descending and ascending during the morning and afternoon prayers;² during prayer, each man is an imam to the angels who come and pray behind him, "as they bowed down to their father Adam" (*kamā sajadū li-abīhim Ādam*);³ and lastly, among the benefits of bowing down during prayer, someone doing it correctly gain a "fragrance" (*naḥḥa*) as angels do, because of one's "specific angelness" (*min ḥaythu malakiyyatihi al-khāṣṣa*). If not, then this devotional act is not considered done,⁴ the angelic fragrance becoming thus the validating criteria of one's prayer. In this particular passage, the reciprocity between men and angels are underlined once again: where angels are shown to pray behind men in some cases, here men pray on the angels' guidance (*iqtidā'an bi-sujūd al-mala' al-a'lā wa-bi-hadiyhim*).

In the chapter dealing with ritual purification (*wuḍū'*), Ibn 'Arabī reminds the reader of a prophetic saying according to which the heart is the seat of the "touch" (*lamma*) of both Satan and the angels, the last one being of course purifying.⁵ In the same chapter regarding purification and washing, Ibn 'Arabī writes about etiquette (*adab*), mentioning a *khābar* whereby angels are pushed away by anyone who lies,

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 70. 3,325. Ibn 'Arabī reminds us often that the object of their prayers is usually humanity, such as in his comment on 33:43 around the prayers of God and angels on the believers (Ibid., 69. 3,231-2.)

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 2,576. The *ḥadīth* mentioned is n°1001 in *ṣaḥīḥ muslim*.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 347. 8,288.

⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,142. This particular example seems to concern specifically the bowing down done after reciting the end of the 7th sura, mentioning the angelic bowing down.

⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 57, 2,136, and Ibid., 68. 2,327. The purification of the heart by the angel's touch is repeated in Ibid., 68. 2,344. Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabī says that God created an angel dedicated to the heart (*khālaqa al-malak al-muwakkal bi-l-qalb*), facing at this level a satan, in Ibid., 264. 6,640.

pointing that lies are “putrescence” (*natan*) which hurts equally angels and humans because the human spirit is of the same constitution as that of angels.¹

As an example of the attention given to details in all aspects related to the devotions asked of a believer, there is a paragraph discussing the repeating of the first part of the shahāda three times in a go, in the call to prayer (*adhān*) of the “Baṣra school” (*madhhab al-baṣriyyīn*): the first is meant for “the visible world” (*‘ālam al-shahāda*), the second for “the world of Power” (*‘ālam al-jabarūt*), and the third for “the spiritual world” (*‘ālam al-malakūt*).² Concerning the call to prayer, Ibn ‘Arabī mentions elsewhere that if the heart is present to God, the angel's touch is not needed to remind the believer of the call to prayer.³

In discussing alms (*zakāt*), Ibn ‘Arabī explains that such good deeds (*‘amal*) done by someone take the shapes of angels that ask for forgiveness on behalf of this person until the Last Day.⁴ In the part on “the night of Destiny” during Ramadan, the 97th sura and its descent of angels (done together and not individually) are used to explain that communal devotions are preferable.⁵

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 68. 2,361. This *khbar* is found in Tabarānī’s *al-mu‘jam al-kabīr*, 57. This is mentioned again in *Ibid.*, 71. 3, 477, and the lack of purification (*ighṭisāl*) also drives away angels (*Ibid.*, 560. 12,489.) A more prosaic case is given in the last chapter, in the prophetic counsels (*al-waṣāyā al-nabawiyya*), whereby angels abhor seeing food stuck in the teeth (*Ibid.*, 560. 12, 610.) Another example of angels associated with acts of purification and invocation is found in the last part of the chapter (*Ibid.*, 560. 12,602.) For a reevaluation of the importance of ritual purity in Islam via a study of such *ḥadīth* on angels, see Burge, “Impurity / Danger!”

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 2,445

³

“فحضور القلب مع الله يغني عن إعلام الملك بلمّته التي هي بمنزلة الأذان والإقامة للإسماع.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3, 165.

⁴

“وهو قول النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فيما يُخلَق من الأعمال من صور الأملاك إنه “يستغفر له ذلك الملك إلى يوم القيامة.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 70. 3,405. This *ḥadīth* does not seem to be referenced by other scholars.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 71. 3,563.

In a story attributed to al-Shiblī, in a series of question between him and an unknown person, there is a mention of the “glorification of the angels” (*takbīr al-malā’ika*) which seems the required glorification used during the pilgrimage.¹

Regarding more particular aspects of islamic practices, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that the “amen” (*amīn*) is hidden after the last verse of the first sura, because “it is an unseen element from the Spiritual world“ (*li-annahu ghayb min ‘ālam al-malakūt*). Whoever says amen in agreement with this “protection of the angels” (*ta’mīn al-malā’ika*) will be satisfied,² a protection which becomes in another passage, the “protection of the Spirit” (*ta’mīn al-rūḥ*).³ Similarly, in the last part of *Futūḥāt*, one of the counsels (*waṣāyā*) is a *ḥadīth* presented with its *sanad* that goes back through the Prophet to Gabriel, then interestingly Michael, followed by Seraphiel, to whom God says that whoever can recite the bismillah and the first sura in one breath is forgiven, avoid Hell, and meet Him.⁴

Commenting on the etiquette of funerals, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that it is not recommended to accompany the procession while riding or crying out loud, out of respect for the angels present.⁵ When prayers are done over the deceased, angels respond likewise over to those praying.⁶

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4,42.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,234. A similar reflexion is found in *Ibid.*, 73. 4,547, and *Ibid.*, 356. 8, 459.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 5. 1, 382. Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates also on the importance of “amen” echoed by the angels in *Ibid.*, 69. 2,526. Commenting further on the first quranic sura, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that angels bow down after the end of the verse 1:5 (“from Thee we seek help”), while the prideful ones refuse (*Ibid.*, 5. 1,381.)

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 560. 12, 526-7. It is uncharacteristically presented with its *sanad*, and seems to have been personally collected by Ibn ‘Arabī in 601 (Herigian) from one Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī bin Abī al-Faṭḥ, whose father was known as al-Kanārī.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,201. In the same passage, a *ḥadīth* is mentioned showing that the prophet, like angels, accompanied the procession of a jewish funeral, which brings to attention once more to the reader the self-inscription of islam within the previous monotheistic traditions.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,208.

Narrative figures urging the reader to adopt a correct behavior and searching for knowledge, angels are also shown to be following such persons, placing themselves in their service, and asking for forgiveness on their behalf.¹ Among the counsels attributed to the Prophet given to Abū Hurayra, is the recommendation not to frighten anyone lest the angels frighten you on the Last Day, and the salutation of a muslim to another implies that angels pray on him seventy times.² Then the Prophet himself is given counsel by Gabriel, when God asks him whether he wants to be a prophet-king or a prophet-servant: the Prophet turns then to Gabriel for advice, and Gabriel suggests choosing to be prophet-servant.³

Regarding more mystical practitioners, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that angels and the “scholars of Unveiling and Testimony” (*‘ulamā’ al-kashf wa-l-shuhūd*) share two modes of devotions: the devotion "of the self" (*‘ibāda dhātiyya*), and the devotion “of command” (*‘ibādat amr*), the first one being that of the people and paradise.⁴ Similarly, Ibn ‘Arabī counsels a spiritual seeker, practicing silence (*ṣamt*) whether while journeying or in a retreat, not to pay attention or talk with animals, jinn or any one of the Highest Council.⁵ The three worlds are also put in relation with the three dimensions of faith in the practice of asceticism (*zuhd*): asceticism as “*muslim*” pertains to the restraining oneself from the physical in the Dominion, asceticism as “*mu`min*” pertains to restraining oneself from the self in the world of Power, and asceticism as “*muḥsin*” pertains to restraining oneself from anything other than God in the Spiritual world, and

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 560. 12, 530. An example of a classical appearance of angels on this theme is the *ḥadīth* involving Gabriel on the importance of taking care of one’s neighbour. (Ibid., 72. 4,95.)

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 560. 12, 631. The number seventy and its declinations (seventy thousand, etc), is strongly associated with angels throughout the *Futūḥāt*.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 560. 12,663. This *ḥadīth* does not seem to be references elsewhere.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 370. 9.270.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 53. 2,114.

this is the removing of the veil for the “sect” (implying “the people on the spiritual path”).¹

5.2.3. *Other functions: messenger-hood and the named angels:*

These two other functions, corresponding to the fifth and seventh one in Chapter 2, also concern angelic interaction with the human world, albeit in a more exceptional manner, or involving particular angels.

Messengers:

We have seen in the part on the creation of angels that the function of messenger-hood was identical to the word “angel” in many instances, while sometimes Ibn ‘Arabī writes “angelic messenger” and “human messenger” to make the distinction between the creatures “angel” and “human.”² He also writes that humans messengers are of a limited number, while angelic messengers are unlimited (*ghayr maḥṣūrīn*).³ Moreover, these angelic messengers are responsible for both the “legislative prophecy” (*nubuwwat al-tashrī‘*) as given to the prophets and messengers only, and the “general prophecy” (*al-nubuwwa al-‘amma*) as given to the Friends and others.⁴

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 93. 5,193-194.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,236. In another work, he draws a parallel between Gabriel, the “messenger of the internal/esoteric” (*rasūl al-bāṭin*) and Muḥammad the “messenger of the external/exoteric” (*rasūl al-zāhir*), see Ibn ‘Arabī, *Shajarat al-kawn*, 71.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,413. Ibn ‘Arabī reminds the reader of the difference between a Message, which brings the divine law, and Revelation, which is brought to everything and everyone (Ibid., 73. 4,429-430).

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 132. 5,320, and similarly in Ibid., 559. 12,234. In this Ibn ‘Arabī refutes Al-Ghazālī’s view, according to whom the difference between prophets and Friends is the descent of the angels (for prophets only) while Friends receive only inspiration and not angels (Ibid., 364. 9,30).

Ibn ‘Arabī adds elsewhere that while the general prophecy lasts even in the next world, in Paradise and Hell, legislative prophecy is specific to the physical world, and ends in the next world (Ibid., 158. 5,328). Similarly, contrary to legislative prophecy which ended with Muhammad, general prophecy does not end (Ibid., 73. 4,416). He also nuances elsewhere the importance and meaning of the word “Revelation” received by the Friends, by calling it

Angels descending with the Revelation to different prophets is of course mentioned often, with the two modes of descent of the angel seen in Chapter 2: directly on the heart, or physically by being perceived by one or more of the five senses.¹ He mentions elsewhere that if the angel does not take a specific shape, his message becomes his shape.² The revelation is like a voice (*ṣawt*) from the interior to the exterior, likened by the Prophet as “a chain on rocks” (*silsila ‘alā al-ṣafwān*),³ a phrase that Ibn ‘Arabī uses frequently, which may either be God’s speech striking down the angels, or the Revelation at its strongest as when associated with Moses, or with Gabriel and the effect it has on the Prophet.⁴

Commenting 18:68, Ibn ‘Arabī reiterates that revealed divine laws are transmitted by the angel called “Trustworthy Spirit” (*al-rūḥ al-amīn*), the Holy Spirit,⁵ or simply the Spirit,⁶ which is usually identified with Gabriel.⁷ Elsewhere, echoing the multilayered meaning of the Spirit seen earlier, he describes it at some point as the “foremost of the angels” (*qā’im muqaddam al-jamā’a [al-malā’ika]*),⁸ elsewhere as the “messenger of the messengers” (*rasūl al-rusul*), while the definition of Spirit shifts when it is involved in the quranic verses where God speaks at the first person singular: then the source of Revelation (*‘ayn al-wahī*) is the source of the Spirit, and its deliverer

“subtleties” (*raqā’iq*) of Revelation and not a full Revelation which remains a prophetic prerogative (Ibid., 310. 7,446), and insisting that what he call general prophecy only confirms the details of the legislative one, and if any revealed details goes against it, then it has been inspired by something else than an angel (Ibid., 310. 7,448).

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 14. 1,467. Elsewhere he describes the descent on the heart as the angels marking the heart and the self or the soul (*nafs*) reading what is marked (*marqūm*), (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 340. 8,179).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 559. 12,225.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,146.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 350. 8,342. See a similar description in Ibid., 518. 11,70.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,464.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 31. 1,611.

⁷ For example in Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 42. 2,21.

⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 371. 9,352.

is God Himself. Thus this Spirit is not the source of the angel as much as it is the message, unknown to the angels, because this Spirit, by not being incarnated in light like them, cannot be perceived even by them.¹

In a small chapter, on the “knowledge of the angelic message” (*maʿrifat al-risāla al-malakiyya*), Ibn ʿArabī details the course of the message, from the moment of God’s given decision, to its implementation on earth:² He reveals it to the closest angel near the Seat, and the message is passed down from angel to angel through the Heavens. Interestingly, he likens this angelic transmission to the “breaking down of the Word” (*inqisām al-kalima*). The Word goes from a unity (*aḥadiyya*) through seven stages (mirroring the seven heavens), before being broken down at the Lote Tree, and then transmitted through the Heavens and down. This relationship between angels and the concept of words and names will be made more evident in the next part. The message thus transmitted to earth by the “angel of water” (*malak al-māʾ*) is then distributed to the “angels of the touches” (*malāʾika al-lammāt*) who have access to the hearts. Then begins the battle with the satans, who have the same access and are capable of presenting deceptively similar messages. On the angels of water, Ibn ʿArabī elaborates: this is the medium through which they communicate revelation (in its general sense), and so all animals know it in their innermost secret (*al-sirr*), while the “two heavy ones” (men and jinn) do not - implying that this is why they also need revealed Laws. This transmission by water, however imperfect, explains also why people like or dislike other people instinctively.

¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 287. 7,189-190. Though not known to angels, this Spirit is still considered as a mediator (*wāsiṭa*) between God and the receiver in *Ibid.*, 559. 12,105, and this even though this Spirit could sound similar to the angels in the shape of their message seen above.

² Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 160. 5,435-437. Its general outline is shared in many islamic cosmologies, such as that of the Brethren of Purity (Gardet, “Les anges en islam,” 223).

This general transmission by the angels of the touches explains, Ibn ‘Arabī tells us, “the wise politics for the good of the world” (*al-siyāsa al-ḥikamiyya li-maṣāliḥ al-‘ālam*) that happen in societies who have lost their prophets or did not receive a divine Law: angels come with inspiration (*ilhām*) and touches, guiding people by their thoughts (*afkārīhim*), although not by their innermost secrets (*asrārihim*).¹

Gabriel and others named angels :

Gabriel is the angel name appearing most oftn, which is a quite common case in islamic writings. Classically referred to as “specialized in prophecy” (*al-makḥṣūṣ bi-l-inbā’*) from the very beginning of the *Futūḥāt*,² he is the master of the “station of human messengerhood” (*maqām al-risāla al-bashariyya*).³ Ibn ‘Arabī also classically identifies him as the angel sent to Mary, and insists on his fatherhood to Jesus - Jesus is thus seen as half-human half-angel,⁴ allowing him to reject the Trinity dogma. He is also mentioned many times around the notion of “good behavior” (*iḥsān*).⁵ Another recurrence concerning Gabriel is his appearance as Diḥya (d. ca. 50/670), who was said to be the most beautiful man of his time (*ajmal ahl zamānihi*).⁶ A possible explanation for this systematic appearance of Gabriel is given elsewhere by Ibn ‘Arabī, regarding the difficulty of perception of the spiritual world for humans. In a particular paragraph

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 160. 5,436-437, and *Ibid.*, 73. 5,18 where he calls this wisdom “objective moral law” (*al-nāmūs al-waḍ’ī*). A similar passage is presented in *Ibid.*, 369. 9,267, where this inspiration in absence of revealed Law is breathed by “the holy divine Spirit in (the) soul” (*wa-yanfuthu al-rūḥ al-ilāhī al-qudsī fī rūḥihi*).

This “moral law”, *nāmūs*, is a word inherited from the Greek and platonic writings, which gained a rich history in Arabic; it is interestingly also sometimes used as a personal name for Gabriel (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 101; “N-M-S” in *Lisān al-‘Arab*).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, Presentation, 1,88. It appears in different forms, *jibrīl* here, or more rarely *jibra’īl* as in *Ibid.*, 1,95.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 159. 5,433.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,179, *Ibid.*, 557. 11,164.

⁵ For example Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,152, *Ibid.*, 70. 3,260, *Ibid.*, 73. 5,37.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 560. 12,435.

in the chapter on the jinn, he explains that a perceived shape is “bound by the gaze” (*yuqayyiduhu al-başar*) in a way that does not allow it to change from this given shape, as it acts like a veil (*sitr*) allowing the eye to follow it. If the shape changes, it becomes “unseen” to the viewer (*ghāba ‘anhu*), the same way a flame disappears if the candle is taken away.¹ So *Diḥya* would be then the only way for humans to see and apprehend Gabriel, once he has appeared as such.

Another angel mentioned by name is Seraphiel (*Isrāfīl*), whose role in the resurrection is blowing the trumpet twice: one to annihilate the *barzakhī* forms of the life that just ended, and the second one to make the new forms come to life.² Then we also find *Ridwān* the keeper of Paradise, and *Mālik* the keeper of Hell, who is annihilated at the Last Day when Hell is transformed;³ the four main angels Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel, and Ismael mentioned together in the context of their beings models for gnostics to be “on the heart of” one of them;⁴ *Hārūt* and *Mārūt* in the context of the “dwelling” (*manzil*) of their science, the science of magic (*siḥr*);⁵ although unnamed in most of his textual appearances, we find *Azrael* taking up souls,⁶ and not being able to go back without a soul once he has appeared to humans,⁷ described as a “strange angel” (*malak gharīb*) of the seventh Heaven;⁸ *Azazel* (*‘azāzīl*), the Light, and the Spirit among

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 9. 1,426.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 64. 2,206. This exact role is given to Michael in Christian patristic literature (Daniélou, *The Angels*, 108).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 148. 5,380. He means here *Diḥya* b. Khalīfa al-Kalbī, companion of the Prophet, see Lammens, Pellat, “*Diḥya*,” E.I.²

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,320.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 271. 7,19.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 348. 8,315.

⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4,35. This illustrates the common theological understanding that death is unchangeable, with a nuance in *ḥadīth* that *Azrael* showed deference for only one human being, *Muḥammad* (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 78, 97), which can be seen as a case of credo function, for legitimacy purposes.

⁸ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 348. 8,315.

the list of angels governors of modes of being mentioned earlier;¹ and the angels of the grave described as frightening (*fazī*'), though they are not given names in the *Futūḥāt*.²

Ibn 'Arabī mentions the suffix “eI” (*al-ill*) as a divine name added to angels and spirits, giving the example of Gabriel, Michael and “Abdael” (*'abda'il*). We have also seen in the previous chapter that he makes of this suffix a spiritual station, a first example of the symbolic function given to angels, which is the subject of the following section.

5.3. The Symbolic Function: the Mystical Meta-Function of Angels:

If Ibn 'Arabī sometimes talks about humans, jinn, and angels through the lens of common themes or experiences (as we will see theophanies being veiled to them), or such as possessing all three the potential of becoming mystical knowers (*al-'arīfīn*) leaving their bodies,³ they also appear in their differences. In this work, angels appear more often as a counterpoint for highlighting differences between them, as seen in the previous part.⁴ Angels are then used to diversify the cosmological landscape and situate different planes of existence, while they are used as metaphors at other times, and it would seem, both functions may appear both at the same time.

Indeed Ibn 'Arabī oftentimes describes humans with angelic adjectives, and we have seen that he seems to entertain a particular superposition of potential meanings

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 303. 7,375. Interestingly, Azazel in Islamic tradition is usually seen as a fallen angel or a jinn (Vajda, “‘Azāzīl,” E.I.²) however here he is part of a list with archangel names such as Gabriel and Michael, of the Highest Council.

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,170.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 8. 1,412-413.

⁴ See also Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,177. Men share with jinn the potential of being happy (*sa'īd*) so believers (*mu'mīn*), or unhappy (*shaqiyy*) so disbelievers (*kāfir*), while angels are happy/believers only. Elsewhere, Ibn 'Arabī reminds us of the classical distinction: angels have only divine will (*irāda ilāhiyya*) and no desire, while humans and jinn have natural will and desire (Ibid., 378. 9,490).

around humans in the creation, with the matter of the “governing spirits:” they may be spirits, angels, or capable of creating angels out of their breaths. We had seen in the first part of this chapter that this ambivalence could also involve the jinn, whereby the interior of man could be understood as “jānn.” While this ambivalence might be found in different degrees and various forms in many islamicate works, it is found quite clearly in a work attributed to Maslama al-Qurṭubī, “The Goal of the Sage” (*Ghāyat al-hakīm*),¹ an author that has probably been influential for Ibn ‘Arabī.²

Ibn ‘Arabī seems to maintain this ambivalence deliberately: on one hand, in a paragraph commenting a *ḥadīth* about the pilgrimage, this seems to be an ontological reality, where he first compares humans hands to the wings of birds, reminding then the reader that the interior of man (*bāṭin al-insān*) is his spirit, and “*is in reality a governing angel, which is the third type of angels.*” And because God created all angels with wings, he further states: “*Let us know definitively that our spirits - by their being angels whose station is the governing of elemental bodies - possess wings, and that these natural bodies were made as veils between us and them, so that we cannot see them.*”³

On the other hand however, a few other paragraphs clearly suggests that this is meant as a metaphor only, except for the cases of humans receiving the function of messenger. In a paragraph discussing the meaning of “angel” as the function of messenger as well as mentioning the “angels of the breaths,” he states that:

¹ He writes that jinn can be part of human nature when anger is too great, and that angels can be created by a “look,” existing both inside humans and outside in the Highest Council (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 153-154).

² (Ibid., 147).

³

“ولمّا كان باطن الإنسان - وهو روحه - ملكاً في الحقيقة من ملائكة التدبير، وهم النوع الثالث من الملائكة. وقد أخبر الله - تعالى - عن الملائكة أنهم ذورا أجنحة، وما خصّ ملكاً من ملك. فنعلم قطعاً أنّ نفوسنا، من حيث هي من الملائكة الذين مقامهم تدبير هذه الأجسام العنصرية، أنهم ذور أجنحة، وجعلت هذه الأجسام الطبيعية حجاباً دوننا، عن إدراكنا إيّاهما.”
Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4,237. This is followed by the example of Gabriel, who appeared as a man, wings invisible to all.

“Any spirit who is not given a message is a spirit, and we do not say of him “angel”, except as a metaphor. Such are the spirits created from the breaths of the believers and those invoking God: God creates from their breaths spirits who ask forgiveness on the behalf of the one invoking Him until the Last Day, and so does He out of all their praiseworthy deeds in which are their breaths.”¹ He is even more explicit elsewhere, when talking about the impossibility of changing one’s genus or kind (*ṣanf*) within the Creation, using angel then as a kind and not as a function. He states that “One is never twofold within a single disposition, nor does one ever belong to two different positions within a single position: man can never be angel, nor angel be man, or messenger be anything else.”²

We have thus a being presented simultaneously as a governing spirit to a physical body, or a governing angel to a physical body, while metaphorical angels are born out of the breaths of this being. How is the reader to solve these apparent contradictions?

5.3.1 Angels as men, men as angels, and access to the unseen:

1

“وكلّ روح لا يعطي رسالة، فهو روح، لا يقال فيه: مَلَك، إلا مجازاً. كالأرواح المخلوقة من أنفاس المؤمنين، الذاكرين الله: يخلق الله من أنفاسهم أرواحاً يستغفرون لصاحب ذلك الذكر إلى يوم القيامة، وكذلك من أعمالهم كلها المحمودة، التي فيها أنفاسهم.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 155. 5,420. He ends the paragraph with an example of such a metaphor for “angel,” with the mention of a personal vision of the Prophet explaining that angels are created from the prayers of the faithful around the Kaaba. As for the more general creations proceeding from men’s deeds (and not only the praiseworthy ones) Ibn ‘Arabī writes elsewhere that they can be turned into angels, spirits, bodies, or isthmuses (Ibid., 188. 6,106).

2

“فلا يجتمع اثنان في ميزاج واحد أبداً، ولا يجتمع اثنان في منزلة واحدة أبداً: فلا يكون الإنسان مَلَك أبداً، ولا الملك إنساناً، ولا الرسول غيره أبداً.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 314. 7,484.

There is a particular mirroring between men and angels: angels are only “external” (*ẓāhir*) creatures in the Unseen, without an internal aspect, so they cannot perceive the “internal” (*bāṭin*) dimension of man beyond his external aspect of clay (one of the reasons why angels questioned the creation of Adam).¹ Conversely man usually cannot perceive angels, creatures of the Unseen that are “*bāṭin*” to the human point of view. Only after death, in the Otherworld, does the internal aspect of humans appear externally, thus reaching the same level of “externality” as angels, in the non-physical world.²

This is why, after reminding the reader about the obscuring (*istitār*) of jinn, angels, and Paradise to men, as well as the ontological and etymological link between these three creations as belonging to the Unseen, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that usually angels and demons see humans “visibly with their eyes” (*shuhūdan ‘ayniyyan*) while we humans see them “by faith and not by sight” (*īmānan lā ‘aynan*).³ Elsewhere, angels, jinn, and humans are said to be unable to access the Unseen except in the case of physical miracles, which Ibn ‘Arabī calls “the breaking of habits” (*kharq al-‘awā’id*).⁴ Of course the extent of this access or lack thereof is different to each of these beings: angels access more of the Unseen than jinn do, while jinn themselves have more access to the Unseen than humans do. This access to the Unseen is related to the theory of Ibn ‘Arabī on theophanies: these happen permanently and they are seen externally by all creatures, except for those gifted of speech, that is, men, jinn, and angels - “*because theophanies to them are from behind the veil of the Unseen.*”⁵ An exception is that of

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 340. 8,177. This idea is also found in Chapter 2.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 518. 11,72.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 388. 10,48-49.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 297. 7,311-312.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 317. 7,522: *fa-inna al-tajallī lahum min khalf ḥijāb al-ghayb.*

the mystical knowers, to whom theophanies are visible and permanent as well: they know the who and why of the subject of a given self-disclosure, however the how remains God's knowledge alone.¹

Another exception than miracles to the rule of invisibility of angels to the "average" human being in the writings of Ibn 'Arabī are the five thousands angels sent to the battle of Badr, which were visible to the army of believers.² Yet another exception, due to "piercing vision" (*nufūdh al-baṣar*) is the case of Ibn 'Abbās and Aicha who both saw Gabriel without him meaning to be seen by any other than the Prophet, with whom he was conversing.³ This might reflect the ever-growing specific regard held of the first generation of muslims who were in contact with the Prophet, as if this gave them a particular access to spiritual dimensions, translated here by being able to see angels where they should not habitually have been able to.

More generally in Ibn 'Arabī's writings, only prophets and Friends of God have the capacity to access the Unseen in a systematic manner, as if reflecting their capacity of knowing themselves, their "interior" (*bāṭin*). Being able to perceive the Unseen indicates a higher spiritual position, as the men of Unveiling (*ahl al-kashf*) do not even need to practice seclusion in order to gain the capacity of seeing "the higher spirits and the spirits of fire" (*al-arwāḥ al-'ulwiyya wa-l-arwāḥ al-nāriyya*).⁴ However Ibn 'Arabī also writes that seclusion allows its practitioner only to be near the Spiritual world (*al-malakūt*), with access only to the Dominion (*al-mulk*) and the Imaginal world (*al-*

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 276. 7,79.

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 154. 5,412.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 366. 9,73.

⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 78. 5, 118. This capacity of understanding God's Self-disclosures seem indeed to be the prerogative of the "people of Unveiling" (Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, 52-57).

jabarūt),¹ where angels manifest themselves out of the Spiritual world. We might also mention here the specific category of humans, the ten men called “the men of the Unseen” (*rijāl al-ghayb*) from the cosmological hierarchies presented in the previous part. These are noted for their discretion, talking in whispers, possibly named thus for their capacity in veiling themselves from human sight, or from being of the good jinn, or even from nourishing themselves from the Unseen world and not from the physical world.²

Elsewhere Ibn ‘Arabī mentions that some mystical knowers (*‘arifīn*) say that the “constitution of the next world” (*nash’a al-ākhirā*) reverses the rules: the spirit becomes more powerful than the body, hence they can change shape however they like, “the same way angels do today with us” (*kamā al-yawm ‘indānā al-malā’ika*);³ some people recognize a “spiritual” (*ruḥānī*) by its shape, that may or may not resemble a human being, and which might appear externally from the viewer (*min al-khārij*), or internally (*min al-dākhl*), while conversely: “all angels know man if he becomes spiritual, and he appears to them as one of them, or by a foreign shape unknown to them.”⁴

Answering the 58th question of the list of questions attributed to al-Tirmidhī, Ibn ‘Arabī uses the verses 6:9 and 17:95 to explain that “man learn of his self and his rank only by the form,” that is, the human form as vision or shape, as opposed to the formless spiritual, and so angels are not sent in another form or shape than the human

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 78. 5, 120.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4, 291-292.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 293. 7, 278.

⁴

”والملائكة كلهم يعرفون الإنسان إذا تروحن، وظهر فيهم بصورة أحدهم، أو بصورة غريبة لم يروا مثلها”
Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 311. 7, 460. We have translated the neologism “*tarawwahnā*” as “becoming spiritual.”

one.¹ Thus the general rule remains that in the physical world, angels will appear as humans, and humans will appear in the Unseen as angels. Both kinds may take another shape than their own in the world that is not their own, however in their own world, both appear as they are: Gabriel in the Unseen will appear as Gabriel and not as another angel, and a given man in the physical world will only appear there as himself.²

Of the external angelic apparitions, the most well-known is Gabriel, appearing as *Diḥya al-Kalbī*, as seen previously, with the possible explanation that his continual appearance in this same shape was due to the limitations of the physical world and vision. However, this limitation of human vision seems to be the reflection of a limitation of belief as well, touching on the testing function of angels, as Ibn ‘Arabī writes that the Prophet’s companions did not give their true gaze (*naẓar ṣaḥīḥ*) its due (*ḥaqqahu*), or the divine matter its due: thus by seeing only *Diḥya* and not understanding it was Gabriel, they were “*believers who did not believe*,”³ and did not see that Gabriel’s body was not a physical body but an imaginal body (*jasad mutakhayyal*).⁴ Taking elsewhere as examples two *ḥadīth* about the appearance (*tamaththul*) of Paradise and Gabriel to the Prophet, Ibn ‘Arabī explains that: “*the appearance of something is not the thing itself, but its semblance*.”⁵

1

”فمعرفة الإنسان بنفسه ومرتبته لا تُعلم إلا من الصورة.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,489. He also writes, as an example of these verses: “one does not reap other than the fruit of his deeds.”

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 311. 7,458-459. He writes elsewhere more extensively about these apparitions, as prophets or as angels (Ibid., 198. 6,248-250).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 381. 9,543: *al-ṣādiqūn alladhīn mā ṣadaqū*.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 178. 5,624.

5

”وتمثل الشيء ما هو عين الشيء، بل هو شبيهه.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 126. 5,300. Though a visual apparition might not be equal to its full meaning, Ibn ‘Arabī uses comparisons with physical phenomenon to make the reader

Where does these perceptions of the Unseen take place, whether internal or external to the observer's gaze? In the Imaginal world, of which the Unseen is often synonymous, but also only a part of it, with the physical world being another part. In this great isthmus, angels are able to take shape in this space of Discontinuous Imagination (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*) where jinn also change shape at their will. In this dimension, they appear to men as an "imagined thing" (*al-mutakhayyal*), part of the human faculty of Continuous Imagination (*al-khayāl al-muttaṣil*), which is itself included in the bigger Unlimited Imagination.¹ This is the space where imaginal bodies contained within elemental bodies can encounter other imaginal bodies, as well as the bodies of light.

This capacity of imagination is typical to man, as seen in the previous part, deriving from his "thinking force" (*al-quwwa al-fikriyya*). This is underlined in a passage stating that spirits cannot take shape (*ṣūra*) except in a shape that is already present in the natural world, and this taking shape happens according to their essence (*taṣawwur dhātiyyan*) and not out of an imaginative force that remains the prerogative of humanity.² This human particularity of having visions is possible only for the "elemental animal constitution,"³ excluding thus angels.

He also explains where such visions take place: from the "presence of the felt senses" (*ḥaḍra al-maḥsūsāt*) to the "presence of Continuous Imagination", which is situated in the front of the brain (*muqaddam al-dimāgh*) - from which emanates the Spirit in charge of the images of the Limited Imagination. This angel thus delivers what

understand the transformative process: "water is transformed into vapor, as angels turn into human form, and so are the theophanies." (Ibid., 370. 9,371).

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 177. 5, 572-3.

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,241. See also Ibid., 311. 7,455. If the shape changes, it is sign that it is of jinn origin, from an elemental origin, and so not to be trusted (Ibid., 198. 6,357).

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 188. 6,112: *al-nash'a al-unṣuriyya al-ḥayawāniyya*.

images God wishes to show, that can appear within man's imagination (in the narrow sense), and these images can be allegorical, such as a bird representing an angel.¹ This physical dimension of angelic interaction is also mentioned elsewhere, characterised by the body becoming cold afterwards.² This confirms the interesting aspect seen before in the angel/human relationship: while angels can be responsible for visions, or be a vision themselves in the imaginal world, only humans are able to receive visions, as if their constitution itself gave them a kind of depth for this possibility of reflexion.

This imaginal dimension is also that of sleep (*nawm*), in which angels, jinn, and the "interior of man" (*bāṭin al-insān*) appear, all three in forms (*ṣuwar*) that become external in this imaginal dimension. In this same paragraph, Ibn 'Arabī explains that these forms are nourished by both the nourishment of the senses (*rizq ḥissī*) and by "ideational" nourishment (*ma'nawī*), which is the nourishment of sciences, theophanies, and states (*al-'ulūm, al-tajalliyyāt, al-aḥwāl*).³

The imaginal may be relevant to the physical senses, however not always, as seen in a discussion around the *ḥadīth* where Gabriel enjoins people to worship God as if they saw Him. It is taken by Ibn 'Arabī as another example of the intermediary of imagination to help the believer: worshipping God as if imagining Him is acceptable. Immanence via imagination is not forbidden, while the physical embodiment of God is (as felt by the 5 senses, *maḥsūsan*). Ibn 'Arabī notes that the proper of imagination is to

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 188. 6,104. This comes within the long chapter dedicated to visions, too long to be summarized here. He classifies visions, their rank, their context of apparition. He also says that visions reflect the personal states of the one having them, and that we are all part of God's own vision.

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 310. 7,448.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1,465. Elsewhere Ibn 'Arabī makes a difference between visions while awake (*ru'ya*) and while asleep (*ru'yā*), the last one being the beginning of Revelation (Ibid., 188. 6,99). The state of sleep is of a great importance, as he also writes "All existence is sleep, and its wakefulness is sleep" (*fa-l-wujūd kulluhu nawm, wa-yaqzatuḥu nawm*), (Ibid., 188. 6,111).

give a shape to what is shapeless, by “*an internal sense between the intellect and the sensible.*”¹ In a similar passage, the shapes appearing in this intermediary dimension, allowing the apparition of creatures that are not possible in the physical plane, are qualified as “corporeous” (*jismānī*).²

5.3.2. Different degrees of communication with the divine:

Referring to God’s two hands creating Adam and to the fundamental concept of image/shape (*ṣūra*) between men and angels seen above, Ibn ‘Arabī also writes: “*Spirits and images are between angels and humanity. Humanity for the directness of the two hands, angels are the coming and going between the eye and the eye, from non-place to place, from place to non-place, from place to place, and from non-place to non-place.*”³ This curious-sounding sentence covers the whole messenger function of angels in the universe, between all kinds of existent things (those that are situated, and those that are not, in the imaginal world), and the coming and going between places might possibly include between men. It also refers to a key concept of the two eyes, symbol of the two types of knowledge necessary to reach God according to Ibn ‘Arabī: the eye of reason (that may grasp the concept of divine transcendence), and the eye of imagination (that may perceive images, symbols of partial divine immanence).⁴ These two types of knowledge are also presented elsewhere as knowledge of realization helped by the

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,201: *ḥiss bāṭin bayna al-ma‘qūl wa-l-maḥsūs*.

Imaginal images are opposed to what Ibn ‘Arabī understood of what Christians did (seeing God in physical images), which they did rightfully so, he writes, until Muhammad came with a new Law (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceanu des saints*, 84; *Futūḥāt*, 36. 1,660-669).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 463. 10,396.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 559. 12,16-17.

⁴ Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, 246, 362.

signs/verses and suras, and knowledge given in the externalized shapes of human spirits.¹

Echoing the section above, Ibn ‘Arabī explains the relationship to God between men and angels with the interior/exterior dimensions: the relation of humans to the Truth (*nisbat al-insān ilā al-ḥaqq*) is through their internal direction (*jihat bāṭinihi*), while the angels’ is through the external direction (*jihat ḡāhirihi*), although humans will have access to God through both directions after death,² thus sharing with angels the same mean of communication with God.

Regarding the fundamental mediating role of angels, Ibn ‘Arabī uses some Names of God, “the First” and “the Last,” to describe that God (as First) is in relationship with man, (the Last) creature to come into existence, and the mediation between the two having been given to angels. Because angels are mediators and as such can only be enclosed into something larger, they were not given the Deputyship (*khilāfa*), given to man for his completeness.³ The all pervasive presence of the divine is also illustrated by the description of four angels coming from four different directions (East, West, above and below) asking each other “Where do you come from?”, all responding: “From God.”⁴

However, on the narrower subject of human prophecy, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that it can be transmitted “*without an angelic spirit between God and his servant*,”⁵ which seems to be different from one of the two ways of the transmission angelic message,

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 277. 7.84.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,454.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 405. 10,129.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4, 57.

⁵

“من غير روح ملكي بين الله وبين عبده.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 156. 5,421.

from the interior and exterior as seen previously. We have also seen that sometimes the message may be itself the angel's shape. Elsewhere, direct communication is reached once the veil of angels and prophet is removed.¹ He also writes: “*When the knowledge vivifies the hearts, as the spirits vivify the bodies in their entirety; the knowledge was named Spirit, which the angels brought down on the hearts of the servants of God and its reception, as they [the hearts] were vivified by it without mediation for the servants.*”² This establishes a direct communication, helped by the angels, who are presented variously as helpers.

Beyond the mediation of angels, he makes the difference between three forms of communication from the divine, the angelic mediation being only one of them: first the “revelation” (*wahī*) in a narrow sense, which is communicated to the heart without mediation, secondly a speech given via an image or form (*ṣūra*) such as the burning bush for Moses, and thirdly the speech given via an angelic messenger. However these are not necessarily exclusive, as he then explains that Revelation may begin with a vision (*ru'yā*) during sleep, and then moves on by imagination to the external apparition of an angel.³ This divine communication or connexion, from the Unseen, can also be

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 559. 12,287.

²

“ولمّا كان العلم تحيا به القلوب كما تحيا بالأرواح أعيان الأجسام كلّها: سُمّي العلم روحا، تنزل به الملائكة على قلوب عباد الله وتلقيه، وتوحي به من غير واسطة في حقّ عباد أيضا.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 368. 9,143.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 188. 6,100-101. He also writes that an angel called “Spirit” is in charge of these visions. Elsewhere, he marks the difference again between prophets and Friends, where prophets see angels, while Friends see spiritual subtleties in the shape of men or animals (Ibid., 310. 7,448).

done in a specific mode so that the message is inaccessible to other men and angels, Ibn ‘Arabī calling this modality “of the special face” (*min al-wajh al-khāṣṣ*).¹

Commenting on the grammatical aspect of the verse 33:56, Ibn ‘Arabī writes about another type of connection with the divine, through prayer which singles out the Prophet: he explains that the prayer of God on the Prophet is done via the station of the prayer of angels on him, so that the prayer of God and angels is as one in regards to the Prophet, while the prayer on the believers is done by God and the angels separately, (although it also includes the Prophet.)²

Lastly, angels also appear as mere metaphors for direct communication: elsewhere he refers to the divine delivery (*ilqā’*) and reception (*talaqqī*) by man via nine spheres, referring to the seven spheres seen in the previous part: nine spheres for the three dimensions of each of the three worlds (*mulk/shahāda, Jabarūt, and Malakūt*) conflated into seven as explained in the previous part, or corresponding to the seventh heavens to which are added the Throne and the Seat. From the “truthful nine” (*al-tis ‘a al-ḥaqqiyya*) to the “created nine” (*a-tis ‘a al-khalqiyya*) is all Truth extended, and when these subtleties meet, we call this meeting “angel” (*kān al-malak dhāk al-ijtimā’*).³

As seen in Chapter 1 and 2, this aspect of the mystical meta-function could be seen as the esoteric aspect of the credo and messenger functions. Angels as a symbol accentuate the divine transcendence (*tanzīh*), invisible beings pointing to the All-powerful and unknowable divine, as opposed to men, shaped in God’s image, pointing to the most complete theophany (*tajallī*) in this world, a symbol of His immanence

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 492. 10,495. This is related to the concept of “preparedness” (*isti ‘dād*) for perceiving theophanies: God discloses Himself to an individual according to his personal capacity (Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, 91).

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,232-233.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,214-215.

(*tashbīh*). However this mediation role that can be removed entirely at times, as if angels were metaphors too cumbersome for comprehension to be left in the text, for instance when described as veils to be removed, or as allegories for the ninefold contact between men and the divine.

5.3.3. *Angels and mystical states, practices, and the mystical view of man:*

Metaphors for mystical states, situations, evolution for humanity:

Mirroring the hierarchy of obedience seen in the previous part, angels and minerals (or inanimate things) are also first on the scale of knowledge of God (*al-‘ilm billāh*), because of their lack of reasoning faculties and desire (*lā ‘uqūla lahum wa-lā shahwa*). They are then followed by plants, animals, and humans are last.¹ This relationship is also seen in two other references to the bowing down of the angels to Adam. The first one, seen in the previous part, where this act is explained as a bowing down to the rank of knowledge (*martabat al-‘ilm*) and nothing else,² and the second one showing a circularity of devotion, Ibn ‘Arabī writing in a chapter on the “Presence of humility” as if God was saying to humanity: “*If you take pride on the bowing down of the angels to your father, then I did order you to bow down to the Kaaba, for the Kaaba is dearer than you if your pride is in the bowing down, because you are in your selves*”

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 326. 8,15, and also *Ibid.*, 326. 8,15. Ibn ‘Arabī reminds the reader in numerous places that angels are more knowledgeable of God, for example in *Ibid.*, 69. 3, 155. Another interesting scene illustrates the superiority of knowledge of angels, from the Prophet’s approach of Heaven with Gabriel: the angel passes out while the Prophet remains awake, and the passing out of Gabriel illustrates his knowledge of the situation, while the Prophet remained awake because he was more ignorant of it (*Ibid.*, 73. 4, 553, and *Ibid.*, 300. 7,344.). This reminds also of the *ḥadīth* seen in previous chapters, where Gabriel would burn up if he looked at God while the Prophet would not.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,548.

more noble than the angels that have bowed down to you, that is, to your father.”¹ The Kaaba is afterwards precisely described as an inanimate object (*al-ka‘ba al-jamādiyya*): men are better than angels and inanimate objects only when they also humble themselves when facing them.

This lack of knowledge, linked to the particular situation of humanity as individual humans, was hinted at previously in the cosmological hierarchy: the main difference between angels and men is that the first have fixed stations while man is capable of moving through stations and states, upwards and downwards. Arrived at an elevated spiritual stage, men and angels stand together as “those drawn near” (*al-muqarrabūn*) as seen in the previous part, and Ibn ‘Arabī often quotes the verse 3:18 in this context to show the particular criteria of knowledge,² while angels’ stations serve as measure for the progress of man.³ For if a person may lack knowledge at a point in time, he may gain all of it at another - and this potentiality is the fundamental difference with the rest of the cosmos, including angels. For instance, in the chapter where Ibn ‘Arabī comments on the power of angels represented by their wings and how their represent their stations: he explains that these wings are used to descend while they will use their nature (*ṭab‘*) to ascend, contrary to birds that use their wings to ascend and their nature to descend, using this analogy for the impossibility of going beyond one’s station:

1

“إن كنتم اعتزرتم بسجود الملائكة لأبيكم، فقد أمرتكم بالسجود للكعبة، فالكعبة أعزّ منكم إن كان عزّكم للسجود، فإنكم في أنفسكم أشرف من الملائكة التي سجدت لكم، أي لأبيكم.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 558. 11,290.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75. 4,328. Here he considers knowledge (*ma‘rifa*) is seen as a higher degree than that of faith (*īmān*). Commenting elsewhere the same verse, the knowledgeable ones can include men, jinn, archetypes (*ummuhāt*) and created things (*al-muwalladāt*), (Ibid., 73. 4,415).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 1. 1,205.

“The wings of angels for descending below their station, and the wings of the bird to ascend beyond its own station; this for each existent thing to know their incapacity, and that it is not possible for one to act beyond one’s God-given capacity.”¹

Nuancing the previously seen position of angels as being “better” than men, confirmed by the Prophet to Ibn ‘Arabī, his cosmological hierarchy includes the concept of the “Perfect Man” (*al-insān al-kāmil*) as the highest position (*makānan*), above that of the First Intellect,² so above that of the first angel. It is then a matter of achieving that state, and facing the difficulties induced by the human condition, as illustrated in different commentaries on religious practices, where Ibn ‘Arabī presents this as a dialogue between God and His angels, seen previously: the angels did not do anything to be in their elevated state, however humans beings achieving this spiritual state is somehow superior in that they owe it to their own merit while entrenched in all sort of constitution-induced contradictions.³ Humans have also a wider range of spiritual experiences than angels: if men are of a more complete constitution while angels of a more complete position, “humans are more complete in taste than angels” (*al-insān ajma‘a bi-l-dhawq min al-malak*).⁴ Echoing this is another comparison, where Ibn ‘Arabī states that what is in the next world (*al-ākhirā*) is in the physical world, and that the physical world is more complete than the next world.⁵

Angels and spiritual practices:

1

“وأجنحة الملائكة للنزول إلى ما دون مقامها، والطائر جناحه للعلو إلى ما فوق مقامه، وذلك ليعرف كل موجود عجزه، وأنه لا يتمكن له أن يتصرف بأكثر من طاقته التي أعطاه الله إياها.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 314. 7,486.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 371. 9,362. He then can even be the arbiter in the dispute of the Highest Council (Ibid., 558. 11,509).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 48. 2,58, Ibid., 72. 4,203-204. This recalls the representation of angels as devoid of desires seen in Chapter 2.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 71. 3,511.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 126. 5,300.

Additionally to what was seen in the previous part, within the long chapter on prayer and its practice and meaning, a man performing his prayers is said to be on earth in body, and in heavens intellectually (*bi-‘aqlihi*), “so he is an angel-human and a human-angel.”¹ This representation of body on earth, and mind (‘*aql*) with the angels, with the addition of the spirit as a veil, is also the description of the lovers of God from an unknown Yemeni master in a *khobar* attributed to Dhū al-Nūn. Ibn ‘Arabī then comments that this is because minds have the attributes of bindness (*taqyīd*) the way angels are bound to their stations.² Similarly, Ibn ‘Arabī comments once on the differentiation by knowledge between humans and angels: humankind will attain the knowledge of God that angels have only when they get rid of their humanity on the natural level, and return to a state of breathed spirit;³ being familiar with angels is a sign of success (*falāḥ*) for the renunciant.⁴ This seems to run counter to the concept of Perfect Man, and humanity being more complete than angels as seen above, however one might consider that here the case is only when the focus is kept on the physical dimension of humanity, in a fixed station, below plants and animals, aspiring to be on a par with angels as if this was the end-goal. However the “real end-goal” might be beyond angelic planes.

Elsewhere, this comparison and end-goal are indeed surpassed: among the men of the Unseen, Ibn ‘Arabī discusses a saying attributed to Sahl bin ‘Abdallāh (al-Tustarī) according to which when praying these men travel with angels: Ibn ‘Arabī replies that angels cannot follow them and do not know where these men go.⁵ This is

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 69. 3,143: *fa-huwwa al-malak al-basharī wa-l-bashar al-malakī*.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 178. 6,31-32.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 375. 9,447.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 274. 7,53.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,293.

reiterated elsewhere: angels can descend upon any heart, except those of the mystical knowers, who are nowhere for them to find, illustrating the verse 42:11.¹

Ibn ‘Arabī seems then to illustrate the dynamic of the spiritual journey, where good practices bring one to the level of angelic stations first (men-angel, non-physical spirit), before moving on in the journey, which can take you beyond angelic knowledge. This “beyond” is illustrated elsewhere by the lengthy title of a chapter: “*Whoever made of his heart My house, and emptied it of anything else than Me, nobody knows what I give him; so do not liken it to the Inhabited House, because this is the house of My angels, not My house, and this is why I did not make Moses live in it.*”²

Angels and the spiritual environment of mystical men:

Among the spiritually-minded men, Ibn ‘Arabī writes a chapter about the mystical knowers which he describes as “the arrived ones” (*al-wāṣilīn*), and their two categories: those who come back (by choice or by force), and those others that do not, and remain among the Enraptured angels and the Cherubim, in a state of total consummation (*istihlāk*). He explains that the complete inheritor of the Friends (*al-wārith al-kāmil min al-awliyā’*) is the one who received an internal divine self-disclosure making him understand what came to the Prophet, and thus making him stand in the “station of the angel” (*maqām al-malak*) sent to Muhammad, one of the renovators (*muḥaddathīn*) of the *umma*. After this point, he is sent back by God to the

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,230.

²

“من جعل قلبه بيتي، وأخلاه من غيري، ما يدري أحدٌ ما أعطيه، فلا تشبهوه بالبيت المعمور، فإنه بيت ملائكتي، لا بيتي، ولهذا لم أسكن فيه خليلي إبراهيم.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 405. 10,125. Elsewhere, this heart of the servant is likened to the Thrones, that only the angel in the shape of a human can help encompassing by saying the *hawqala* and teaching it to the others angels-bearers (Ibid., 476. 10,453). Humans being able to journey above the angelic domain is also a motif found in Christian patristic literature (Daniélou, *The Angels*, 83-84).

creation (*raddahu Allāh ilā al-khalq*) as a guidance on the revealed Law,¹ becoming then of the “ones who came back” (*al-rāji‘ūn*).²

Recalling the hierarchies of the “men of unlimited numbers”, we have seen Ibn ‘Arabī explaining that these men follow a mode of being (“on the heart of”) corresponding to particular angels and prophets, having a thus “known station” (*maqām ma‘lūm*) - although contrary to angels, they are not restricted to one only and may cumulate several of these modes of being. These particular men and women may thus be in relationship both with angels, as modes of being, and names, such as the Pole who is linked to the name “Muḥammad”, “Aḥmad”, and “‘ Abdallāh.”³ Among the angels, “the great and the greatest” (*al-kabīr wa-l-akbar*) of these are, in increasing order: Ismael, Gabriel, Michael, Seraphiel,⁴ and we have seen that there are five followers to Gabriel, three to Michael, and one to Seraphiel.⁵ Some of these men also have a distinctive knowledge about the angels created out of the breaths of men, as mentioned in the previous section.⁶

These Friends share with the prophets a special relationship with angels: “(...) and from here descend the angels on the hearts of the messengers among humans with the legislative Revelation, and on the hearts of the Friends with the *ḥadīth* and inspiration.”⁷ However differences remain between prophets and Friends: only people

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 45. 2,43-48.

² Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 118.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 270. 7,9. As a reminder, in the previous part, the Replacements (*abdāl*) are compared to “the notables of the angels” (Ibid., 559. 12,18.)

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 75. 4,320.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,269, 4,290-291.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 4,568.

⁷

“ومن هنا تنزل الملائكة على قلوب الأرسال من البشر بالوحي المشروع، وعلى قلوب الأولياء بالحديث والإلهام.” Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,263. This could underline the special place held by Ibn ‘Arabī of the science of *ḥadīth*.

on the rank of prophets and messengers can see angels descending on them, while Friends and people of God may see angels but not their “delivery” (*ilqā'*) if it is directed towards them, or they may see the delivery but not the angel bringing it.¹ Elsewhere he maintains that only prophets and messengers are able to see angels, while others only feel his trace (*yuḥissu bi-atharihi*),² or formulated in another way, only those who are both solitaries and prophets may see the “*theophany in the lights of the spirits.*”³

Ibn 'Arabī also speaks about the “gifts” (*karāmāt*) of select people, and as for other such concepts, he makes a difference between the common gifts, which induce visible miracles, and the “ideational gifts” (*al-karāmāt al-ma'nawiyya*) which are the only ones that cannot be corrupted by cunning (*makr*), while they are much more visibly discreet, if not invisible, such as maintaining good religious practices and being pure of heart. As a symbol of this purity, Ibn 'Arabī writes that these gifts are shared with the angels “drawn-near” and the select people of good (*al-muṣṭafūn al-akhyār*).⁴

Lastly, human thoughts are classified by adjectives: divine, angelic, egoist (*nafsī*), and satanic, and Satan appear to prophets externally because he does not have access to them from their interior. So all prophets have only three kind of thoughts: divine, angelic and from the self, and no satanic thought. This particularity can be shared by some Friends.⁵

Angels between the physical and the symbolic:

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 268. 6,655.

² Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 353. 8,414.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 206. 6,415: *al-tajallī fī anwār al-afrād*.

⁴ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 184. 6,88. This recalls the distinction made about what the angels Hārūt and Mārūt brought and how it was turned into sorcery (*sihr*), mixing darkness and light (Ibid., 271. 7,21).

⁵ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 55. 2,125 - 128; Ibid., 72. 4,11-12. These thoughts are elsewhere described as realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) (Ibid., 2. 1,305).

The spiritual symbol is also translated in physical and geographical terms regarding Iblīs and his spot on mount Arafat: he symbolizes remoteness from God (*bu'd*) because of his disobedience, though he is not expelled from this highly meaningful place of Arafat because he does have some knowledge (*ma'rifa*).¹

Conversely, moving from the physical to the symbolic, the oft mentioned “House Inhabited” (*bayt ma'mūr*) was mentioned with its 70,000 angels. It was first described as if it was a physical place somewhere in the cosmos (whether in the physical or imaginal worlds), however Ibn 'Arabī quickly draws a parallel with a mystical representation of man. There are 70,000 angels passing through the doors of this House, angels created by the emanations of Gabriel: “*and in the same number of these angels are the thoughts of the sons of Adam. There is no believing person, or otherwise, who does not have seventy thousand thoughts per day, and which are not felt by anyone except the People of God.*”² These angels then meet with the angels created from the “thoughts of the heart” and ask forgiveness till the Last Day. Ibn 'Arabī then writes that the angels created from someone whose heart is upheld (*ma'mūr*) with the invocation of God are different from the angels created from other persons, adding that angels created of thoughts take the shape or image (*ṣūra*) of these thoughts.³

This recalls the ambiguous category of angels in Ibn 'Arabī's typologies, “the governing ones,” that could be understood as angels, humans, or angels of breaths. We

¹ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4, 146.

²

“ويعدد هؤلاء الملائكة، في كل يوم تكون خواطر بني آدم. فما من شخص مؤمن، ولا غيره، إلا ويخطر له سبعون ألف خاطر في كل يوم، ولا يشعر بها إلا أهل الله.”

Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,293.

³ Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,293. In this same chapter, this House Inhabited is said to correspond to the celestial Kaaba. This Kaaba was also seen in his *mi'rāj* accounts as standing as a cosmological transition between the material worlds and the highest spheres (Morris, *Spiritual Ascension*, II, 68).

find other descriptions of such angels: similar to angels created from thoughts, breaths, and acts, are the angels created from the words of men. They constitute an angelic representation which lends itself to a very good metaphor where Ibn ‘Arabī presents the mechanics of repentance. Ibn ‘Arabī first writes: “*Know that there is no word uttered by the servant from which God does not create an angel. If this [word] is good then it is an angel of compassion, and if the [word] is bad then it is an angel of vengeance.*”¹ He then explains that if the person repents, these angels of vengeance are turned into angels of compassion (with modalities: if the repentance is about one word only, then it concerns only the corresponding angel, if the repentance is general, then all angels of vengeance ever uttered are changed into angels of compassion).

Among these human-born angels, another possible type of allegory to be mentioned here are the angels or spirits born out of a spiritual intercourse between two persons, while other such breaths (*anfās*) born out of intercourse between humans and houris create shapes which Ibn ‘Arabī explains is similar to the creation of angels born from the breaths of those invoking God.² This clearly comes within a type of islamic discourse of the exalted human creature, as an elaboration of a “*Muslim spiritual anthropology vis-à-vis perceived tendencies in Christian, Zoroastrian, and even certain Muslim doctrines to devalue the body, matter, and world.*”³

1

“واعلم أنه ما من كلمة يتكلم بها العبد، إلا ويخلق الله تلك الكلمة ملكاً. فإن كانت خيراً كان ملك رحمة، وإن كانت شراً كان ملك نقمة.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 287. 7,194.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 369. 9,158-159. This comes within descriptions of different types of intercourse involving spiritual elements and concepts, and their results.

³ Webb, *Hierarchy*, 249.

Taking all these angels into account, and recalling what Ibn ‘Arabī says about them (angels born of human breaths) as being the last creation of God,¹ this category of angels illustrates well the ambiguity of the third category of angels seen in the previous part. They are often presented in a way that sounds both literal and metaphorical, and as such they could be seen both as the cosmological fruit of the most complete of creatures (man), as well as the metaphor or symbol of the human dynamic, the movement of man on his journey towards perfection. Thus angels are not be used in the usual way to mark the ontological distinction between them and men, as a way to highlighting negatively and cosmologically the special place of man in creation, but they become here allegories for the gift of change and potential realization which are typically human.

5.3.4. Angels as philosophical and religious symbols.

Symbols for concepts and objects:

Seen in previous part, the vocable “angel” can be used for different objects and realities, such as a sphere, a planet, a creature that was given a messenger function, a being (spirit of light), most of them sharing an idea of movement and spirituality.

Another concept which is designated by angel, whether an angel from the Enraptured angels or from the Cherubim in that plane beyond our cosmos, is the “First Intellect”

(*al-‘aql al-awwal*).²

In a metaphysical view of the angels Pen and Tablet, Ibn ‘Arabī writes that from this First Intellect proceeds the Tablet, containing the 360 “theophanies” (*tajalliyāt*)

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73 4,568.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1,463-4. He also writes that what he calls “Muhammadan reality” is what the First Intellect is for others (Ibid., 3. 1,327.)

which correspond to the “360 sciences,” seen in the previous part.¹ This first example shows the permanent superposition of meanings given to a concept or an object throughout Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings. To each concept correspond different meanings or perceived realities, the appearance of the concept changing whether it is considered metaphysically (a First intellect, a science) or spiritually (an angel, a disclosure).

We also find this superposition of meanings, or “*simultaneous layer of intended associations*” as Webb puts it,² concerning the Bearers of the Throne that we have seen in the previous part. There are four of them until the Last Day, when they become eight, or more precisely there are four known bearers, and four invisible who become known at the Last Day (four prophets, or three prophets and one angel). These eight bearers of the Throne are also described as realities (*ḥaqā’iq*): Gabriel and Muhammad, Adam and Seraphiel, Michael and Abraham, and Riḍwān and Mālik.³ These four couples of bearers are also paralleled by four human representatives, succeeding each other on earth so that there is always four of them at any one time. These bearers, whether angels or prophets, stand for certain concepts: the way the Throne stands for Dominion (this world), its bearers stand for body/form, spirit, nourishment, and rank/promise-threat.⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī explains that these four principles are the four visible ones in this world, or “external” ones (*ẓāhir*), while they stand for the eight Ascriptions (*nisab*) describing the Real when they become eight visible at the Last Day: Life, Knowledge, Power, Will,

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1,464.

² Webb, “Hierarchy,” 247.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 167. 5,501.

⁴ Adam and Seraphiel (body/form), Gabriel and Muhammad (spirit), Michael and Abraham (nourishment), Riḍwān and Mālik (rank/promise-threat), (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 167. 5,501).

Speech, Hearing, Seeing, and Comprehension (this last one through the previous three senses).¹

On a higher metaphorical level, the Throne can be borne only by the human-looking angel and his saying the *hawqala*, a formula taught by Adam to the angels. Then while remaining God's Throne, apart from creation, the Throne also becomes all at the same time God's house and part of the believer's heart, angels then compared to Names circling it as they would the Throne:

*“When God gave existence to the Perfect Man, He gave him a heart like the Throne, and made it His house. No-one in the world is capable to bear the heart of the believer; because they are incapable of bearing the Throne. [The Throne] is in one of the corners of the believer's heart, which he does not feel nor does he know of the presence of a Throne, because of its lightness on him, and He made His Beautiful Names circle this heart, as the angels circle the Throne, and made its bearers: Divine Knowledge, Life, Will, and Speech, four [of them].”*² As Webb noted the special simultaneity of meanings for the Throne, whereby *“Ibn ‘Arabī is suggesting that the*

1

“وهذه الثمانية للنسب الثمانية التي يوصف بها الحق. وهي: الحياة والعلم والقدرة والإرادة والكلام والسمع والبصر - وإدراك المظموح والمشموم والملموس بالصفة اللائقة به، فإن لهذا الإدراك بها تعلقاً، كإدراك السمع بالمسموعات والبصر بالمبصرات، ولهذا انحصر الملك في ثمانية، فالظاهر منها في الدنيا أربعة: الصورة والغذاء والمرتبان، ويوم القيامة تظهر اليوم وهم” وسلم عليه الله صلى فقال، {ثَمَانِيَةٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَوْقَهُمْ رَبِّكَ عَرْشٌ وَيَخْمَلُ} ثمانية بجميعها للعيان، وهو قوله - تعالى - بالملك. “العرش تفسير هذا، “أربعة

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 13. 1.466. The four first Attributes, “Life, Knowledge, Will, Power,” are also linked to four archangels in al-Farghānī’s angelology, and calls them the Four Pillars of Divinity (Murata, “The Angels,” 333).

2

“فلما أوجد الله الإنسان الكامل جعل له قلباً كالعرش، جعل بيتاً له. فما في العالم من يطبق حمل قلب المؤمن، لأنهم عجزوا عن حمل العرش. وهو في زاوية من زوايا قلب المؤمن، لا يحسن به ولا يعلم أن ثم عرشاً، لجفته عليه، وجعل أسماءه الحسنی تحف بهذا القلب، كما تحف الملائكة بالعرش، وجعل حملته: العلم الإلهي، والحياة، والإرادة، والقول، أربعة.”
Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 476. 10,453.

*human heart if the symbol and paradoxical container of the “uncreatedness” and infinite possibility within the human possibility.”*¹

Angels and the Names:

Regarding the concept of names, aside from the notable angels given proper names, we have to keep in mind the other angels seen in the previous part who seem to embody, as an allegory, some other names and concepts, such as the Pen, the Tablet, and Nūn, as well as angels created from words that become their names.² Echoing Ibn Barrajān and the *ḥadīth* tradition seen in Chapter 2, we also find a mention of a meteorological angel: thunder is the voice of the angel called by this name (*ra‘d*), praising God, and made of air as we are made of water.³

However here the focus will be on what islamic tradition calls “the divine Names” (traditionally numbered at 99), which are what makes Adam favoured over the angels, the Names standing then for the all-encompassing knowledge.⁴ These Names are differently understood in islamic traditions but we can draw here a parallel here with the understanding of theophoric names of angels in first mystical Jewish writings, whereby they make angels so close to the divine that they become divine Names, loosing their ontology to become an aspect of God.⁵

The world of isthmuses (*‘ālim al-barāzikh*), which is also the “world of Power” (*jabrawūt*), is the “station of the divine Names” (*maqām al-asmā’ al-ilāhiyya*),⁶ the dynamic of this world being both vector and symbol of the relationship of the Names

¹ Webb, “Hierarchy,” 249.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 287. 7,194-195.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,315.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 206. 6,417. See also the chapter “The Names of God” in Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 33-46.

⁵ Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 261.

⁶ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 120. 5,278.

with the cosmos. Divine Names have a great importance for Ibn ‘Arabī, which he describes as being messengers, alongside angels and humans;¹ while he writes elsewhere that the gaze can only perceive the Names in the traces (*athar*) that they leave, these traces being their image (*ṣūra*).² Each Name acts as a kind of archetype,³ each having the governance (*ḥukm*) of some creatures, for example the Name “The Solitary” (*al-fard*) govern the people called the Solitaries (*al-afrād*) seen previously, people who are the terrestrial reflection of the Enraptured angels.⁴

Thus God creates all things according to His Names,⁵ and here is a first way of understanding the relationship between angels and the Names, as keepers of their innermost secret and of their attached realities: “*He created as many realities as there are Names of His Truth, and he brought out as many dedicated angels as the number of his creations. He thus gave a Name to each reality from among His Names, that worship Him and know Him, and he made an angel to each innermost secret of these realities, who serves Him and attend to Him.*”⁶ This parallels what was seen above: the gnostic arriving towards God in a state of consummation, like the Cherubim and the Enraptured angels, is also said to be a Name of Essence (*ism dhātī*) that does not indicate anything else than God, as an indicator of the Essence.⁷

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 348. 8,313.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 211. 6,451.

³ William Chittick, “Ibn ‘Arabī’s Myth of the Names,” in *Philosophies of Being and Mind: Ancient and Medieval*, ed. James T.H. Martin (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1992), 207-219.

⁴ Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 112.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 206. 6,412.

⁶

“ثم أنشأ - سبحانه - الحقائق على عدد أسماء حقه، وأظهر ملائكت التسخير على عدد خلقه. فجعل لكل حقيقة اسماً من أسمائه، تبعده وتعلمه، وجعل لكل سر حقيقة ملكاً، يخدمه ويلزمه.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, Introduction. 1,90.

⁷ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 45. 2,46.

Echoing the the representation of angels born out of breaths, acts, and words, Ibn ‘Arabī often comes back to the explanation of the verse 38:69 and its dispute of the angels. The reason can be explained through the Names, through another understanding of the relationship between Names and angels. Here angels are seen as worldly albeit subtle emanations of the Names, some of which are sometimes contrary in meaning to others, thus creating dissonance: “*The origin are the opposed divine Names, henceforth this opposition is found in the world.*”¹ Elsewhere, Ibn ‘Arabī explains this dispute in a slightly different manner: some angels are created for particular domains or “divisions” (*muqassamāt*) and so cannot perceive unity (*aḥadiyya*) by virtue of their constitution, while other angels are created for Unity (*tawḥīd*) and unities (*waḥdāt*) - so whenever these two groups meet, they fight because cannot understand each other’s functions, although they are all part of the “Universal Soul” (*al-naḥs al-kulliyya*).² This dispute is also reflected in their questioning of God regarding Adam: one of the reasons given previously was that angels cannot see the interior of man, but another is that they see in him conflicting realities.³ Another example of disputing angels is one related by Ibn ‘Arabī that echoes a similar story seen in Chapter 2: a man coming from a bad village wanted to repent and move to a good village, and died on the way, so the angels “soldiers of the Name the Compassionate” fought with the angels “soldiers of the Name The Vengeful” over his fate.⁴

Ibn ‘Arabī also writes that God created angels on the Name “The Powerful” (*al-qawiyy*), and *jinn* on the name “The Subtle” (*al-laṭīf*), and uses this to illustrates that in

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العالم. ” في التقابل سرى هنالك ومن المتقابلة الإلهية الأسماء “ والأصل

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 154. 5,414. See also *Ibid.*, 374. 9,427.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 371. 9,335-336.

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 177. 5,564.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 310. 7,351.

some cases, one Name contains traits from another, such as “The Powerful” contains “the Subtle” since angels are also made of subtle matter like the *jinn*.¹ Angels and other higher spirits are also said to proceed from the Name “The Alive” (*al-ḥayy*).² Men, on the other hand, are created on the Name “The Assembler” (*al-jāmi*), which contains both the “divine image” (*al-ṣūra al-ilāhiyya*) and the “cosmic image” (*al-ṣūra al-kawniyya*), on both the external and internal aspects.³ However these Names might vary or be added to others: elsewhere he explains that humans are created as visible out of the Name “The Visible” (*al-Zāhir*), while *jinn* are created out of the Name “The Invisible” (*al-Bāṭin*).⁴ As for Iblīs, he was created under the rule of the Name “The Far-away” (*al-baʿīd*),⁵ as he is characterized by drawing away from God - and a demonic inspiration drawing a human away while an angelic one draws him near.

This difference, between angels presented as creatures attached or dedicated to Names and their realities, keeping their innermost secret, and their being proceeding from them directly, echoes the difference between angels as ontological characters or simple narrative comparators to humans (highlighting man’s characteristics and journey), and their being born out of human breaths, words, and acts, as direct metaphors for human experiences.

¹ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,357. On the angels created from “The Powerful,” see from the beginning of the sub-chapter p.353.

² Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 132. 5,323-324. This discussion brings to mind the notion of archangels as being “the greatest words” in Shihāb al-dīn al-Suhrawardī’s angelology, although his system sounds more comparable to the philosophical categories (the latest great word being Gabriel, as he is the Tenth Intellect for Ibn Sīnā), see Murata, “The Angels,” 329; Mohammed Rustom, “Storytelling as Philosophical Pedagogy: The Case of Suhrawardī,” in *Knowledge and Education in Classical Islam, Religious Learning between Continuity and Change*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2020) 404-416. A more detailed comparison with Ibn ʿArabī, and the roles of Names and languages in regards to the concept of angels could be interesting.

³ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,359. He elsewhere writes that man contains all realities, including angels (Ibid., 3. 1,308.)

⁴ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 356. 7,457.

⁵ Ibn ʿArabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 72. 4,146.

Angels and the Letters of the Alphabet:

Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates on the archetypal divine command “Be!” (*kun*), by using cosmological symbols: this word made of two visible letters although it is constructed of three letters - the third (middle) letter *waw*, being erased. This letter, “such as an isthmus” (*barzakhiyya*) and “spiritual” (*ruḥāniyya*) is given a status as that of the angel: leaving a mark even though the source of this mark is gone.¹ This is a first example of Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings on the letters and their esoteric meaning, which might have been influenced by Maslama al-Qurṭūbī, probable author of “the Goal of the Sage.”² The “science of letters” has a long history in Islamic literature, and we outline here only its relationship with angels in the *Futūḥāt*.³

Early in the *Futūḥāt* he discusses the distribution of letters between creatures and cosmological ranks and concepts: letters are distributed between the three worlds and their respective *barzakh* between them,⁴ while in parallel letters are also distributed between creatures. For instance, to the jinn are allocated the *sīn* and the *shīn*, while angels receive 18 letters: *bā’*, *jīm*, *dāl*, *hā’*, *wāw*, *ḥā’*, *ṭā’*, *yā’*, *kāf*, *mīm*, *fā’*, *qāf*, *rā’*, *tā’*, *thā’*, *khā’*, *dhāl*, and *zā’*.⁵ In this chapter comes the discussion mentioned earlier about

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“...”) ولماذا حُذفت الكلمة الثالثة المتوسطة البرزخية التي بين حرف الكاف وحرف النون، وهي حرف الواو الروحانية، التي تُعطي ما للملك في نشأة المكون من الأثر، مع ذهاب عينها؟”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 176. 5,483

² Known in the West as the “Picatrix.” See Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 143-169.

³ On the “science of letters” in Ibn ‘Arabī, Denis Gril, “La science des lettres,” in *Les illuminations de la Mecque*, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997, 2021), 165-282; There is also a dissertation which I was not able to access (Carmela Crescenti, “ilm al-ḥurūf ou la science des lettres: métaphysique de la langue et des lettres selon la doctrine d’Ibn ‘Arabī,” PhD dissertation, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2009). On lettrism in Islamic literature in general see Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 156-157; Matthew Melvin-Koushki, “Afterword: Conjuncting Astrology and Lettrism, Islam and Judaism,” *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft* 12, no. 1 (2017): 89-97.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,225.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,214.

the nine spheres of divine delivery, and human reception, associating thus the human/divine encounter with letters. This idea is encountered later in other terms: the Seraphiel reality, an ascription to the Real (*muḍāfa ilā al-ḥaqq*), blows into the images, and “*the secret of the Real between the two is the meaning between the blower and the receiver, as the link from the letters between the two words.*”¹

Elsewhere, he writes that the world of spirits proceeds from the spoken letters, the world of the senses from the numerical letters, and the world of the intellect in the Imaginal from the letters of reflexion (or “thought-letters”); all of these entering in the constitution of the Names of the Names.² Later, in a discussion around some of the divine Names, he explains that some angels are called by the name of the letters of which they are the spirits, giving the letters their power of action: “*For do not imagine that the letters function by their shape, but by their spirits (...).*”³ Thus does Ibn ‘Arabī also presents the lone letters in the beginning of some quranic suras: they are the shapes of angels whose names are those letters, and if they are spoken aloud, it is equivalent to calling upon these angels who come and attend to the speaker.⁴ Similarly the position of the First Intellect in the Compassionate Soul is said to be that of the letter *hamza* in the human alphabet.⁵

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“سرّ الحق بينهما هو المعنى بين النافخ والقابل، كالرابط من الحروف بين الكلمتين.”
Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,305.

2

“فمن الحروف اللفظية يوجد عالم الأرواح، وعن الحروف الرقمية يوجد عالم الحسن، وعن الحروف الفكرية يوجد عالم العقل في الخيال، ومن كلّ صنف من هذه الحروف تتركب أسماء الأسماء.”
Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 73. 5,34.

3

“فلا تتخيّل أن الحروف تعمل بصورها وإنما تعمل بأرواحها.”

Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,304-305.

⁴ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,306.

⁵ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 198. 6,240.

5.4. Conclusion:

All functions of angels were not represented, as we chose to highlight the most relevant ones. Indeed the function of angels as testers or challengers was not a function much represented in this work, other than in a way seen in the previous chapters (with the invisibility of angels and the character of Satan). It can be seen perhaps also as secondary effect of other functions: the mystical function is somehow a challenging one, as it challenges the believer to have faith in the Unseen and its angels, and the mystical knower not to fall in its different traps.

At any rate, this mystical meta-function of angels as metaphors and/or as imaginal realities used to convey different mystical concepts and states is the greatest function given to them by Ibn ‘Arabī, towering above all others. The question then remains whether these religious vocable of angels are literary metaphors, such as the allegory of “The Pen”, “The Tablet”, probably used as such in metaphysical texts philosophical in nature, or whether they are to be understood in a more mythical understanding, if not as ontological realities not fully comprehensible by our mere five senses and our intellect, not quite a ontological creature such as plant or stone, but nonetheless more real than simple metaphors for intellectual concepts? Simultaneity seemed to be the key to this question throughout the *Futūḥāt*.

On this question, Burge notes an irreconcilability between the nature of angels as understood by philosophers and the people of *ḥadīth*, while estimating a failure in some attempts to reconcile both: “*However, when the question of whether angels have bodies or are incorporeal is raised there is open hostility between the ḥadīth-based and philosophical perspectives. The two positions are mutually incompatible. Some attempts were made to try to reconcile the two positions, such as al-Suhrawardī’s philosophy of*

illumination, but these were ultimately unsuccessful. This was an area where the ḥadīth-based theologians had to maintain the corporeality of angels, in direct conflict with the philosophical tradition.”¹ This is where Ibn ‘Arabī also seems to attempt at a reconciliation of both, in his own way:² angels are both an ontological reality, as well as being multiple symbols or metaphors for philosophical concepts, metaphysical abstract realities, and the spiritual states of the mystical seeker.

Indeed, as both creatures and metaphors, angels appeared as representing singular names or divine Names, simplicity, directness with the divine, fixity, obedience, mediation, partial perfection, contrasting with the values associated to humanity: complexity, change, accumulation, multifaceted beings, completion, potentiality of complete perfection. Angels are seen as pure direct emanations from God, while humans possess a distinctive self-reflexion, or thought capacities.³ Humans are capable of seeing angels when well advanced on their spiritual journey towards God, God who communicates at times with them through angels: a circular double dynamic, both external and internal to the human being. Angels could ultimately symbolize the dynamic between the human self and God, the dynamic that made possible for this treasure that wanted to be known, if we are to use the famous *ḥadīth*.

The use of angels in relation to the divine Names also point to the particular theodicy of Ibn ‘Arabī. On one hand we have the example of Jaadane who notes that al-

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 102. As seen in the conclusion of Chapter 2 and 3, angels are oftentimes considered as one-dimensional allegorical symbols for philosophical and metaphysical concepts.

² His style of writing as been seen as “mythic-visional,” “using symbolic images that evoke emergent associations rather than fixed realities,” see Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism*, 166-167 (he refers to Marshall Hodgson and Osman Yahia respectively). As for the success or failure of this attempt, this is a theological judgment that is best left for the believer to decide.

³ On this distinction, Lory writes that humans are more defined by their status (which may change) while angels are defined by their nature (Pierre Lory, “Les anges dans l’islam.”)

Ghazālī does not answer the existence of diseases and other problems if angels are really in charge of everything;¹ of pre-islamic traditions that might have used them to deflect the direct involvement of God in events and acts perceived as bad as seen in Chapter 1; and of Shihāb al-dīn al-Suhrawardī who will elaborate a progressive darkening of divine emanation through the wings of Gabriel.² On the other hand, we have Ibn ‘Arabī who defines the origin of evil as both of divine origin (as all things are), and induced by the angels’ nature and pure obedience to what they were created for, that is, their nature corresponding to the Names or missions that might be contrarian between themselves, and leading to their “dispute.”

Thus we have seen that most functions are classically represented in the angelic narratives, and it would seem at first that rather than presenting a very original cosmology, Ibn ‘Arabī presents an islamic cosmology in great detail, that regroup different trends and concepts found in other works, while expanding on them, giving a more complex picture of them with a mythical and symbolic dimensions. This is certainly the case for the “angels of breaths.” Indeed, this peculiar phrase was briefly mentioned in chapter 2 (as angels created by acts and breaths), in a *tafsīr* that did not offer any lengthy explanation about it, and as such this phrase is comparable to the fate of the phrase “seal of the saints:” it existed before Ibn ‘Arabī, but it acquired a textual and theological substance and greater complexity with him.

¹ Jaadane, “La place des anges,” 54-55.

² His use of Gabriel as an archetypal character seems to cover most angels and their function in Ibn ‘Arabī, the Enraptured ones for the right wing of Gabriel, and the others for the left: “The right wing is made of pure light and is totally disengaged (*mujarrad*) from creation and connected to God, who is Absolute Being. But the left wing displays a trace of darkness, like the spots on the face of the full moon. It represent’s Gabriel own’s personal existence, which has one side turned away from God and toward nonexistence. When a shadow falls down from Gabriel’s mottled left wing, this lower world of falsehood and deception comes into existence.” (Murata, “The Angels,” 329.)

In her article on angels in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī, Webb wondered if he was not trying to upset and destabilize the concept of hierarchy through the use of hierarchy, differentiating itself from more usual and traditional hierarchies in islamic theological writings.¹ What we saw then was on the contrary a rather coherent presentation of a complex cosmological hierarchy, highly detailed while being overall similar to other islamic mystical cosmological hierarchies seen in Chapter 2.

In this aspect, Ibn ‘Arabī is singular by giving us a detailed celestial hierarchy, and an interesting comparison can be drawn with the writing of pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagyte, an early Christian theologian and philosopher, author of the treaty called *On the Celestial Hierarchy*,² that was later widely used in Christian writings and traditions.³ Also marked by late antique neo-platonic thought, he presents a tripartite hierarchy (see Appendix 4.2) which seems to echo that of Ibn ‘Arabī, although only the first categories of both authors seem to match both in names and roles (Ibn ‘Arabī’s Enraptured Angels and Cherubim are matched by pseudo-Dionysus’ Seraphim and Cherubim). Both authors have also dressed particular human hierarchies, as an echo of

¹ Webb, “Hierarchy,” 245.

² The identity of this author is still subject to debate. It is supposed that he hailed from the Syrian area, during the late 5th century to early 6th century, see Denys L’Aréopagyte, *La hiérarchie céleste*, v-xix. This constitutes one of the best studies and translation of this treaty. Olga Lizzini notes that this treatise was translated into Arabic, but it does not appear to have influenced particular muslim writers - the neo-platonic influence on islamic cosmological representations was widespread through varied textual genealogies (Olga Lizzini, “L’angelologia islamica”).

As way of comparative studies done on authors of different religious traditions, we mention here an interesting one between Ibn ‘Arabī and Meister Eckhart on the concept of logos and Perfect Man/Nobleman: Robert J. Dobie, *Logos and Revelation, Ibn ‘Arab, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010).

³ Although angelologies were hinted at before him, he was the first to give a full-fledged angelic hierarchy, and like many other texts it has influences of neo-platonism (L’Aréopagyte, *La hiérarchie céleste*, lvii, lxiv). His was especially popular in the Middle-Ages, used by many authors such as John Scotus Eriugena (d. ca. 877) and Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 323).

the celestial ones: they do not compare in the details, but seem to hold the same spiritual functions within humanity. While pseudo-Dionysus presents another triad (Deacons, Priests, Bishops), Ibn ‘Arabī presents a highly complex one with many categories (Replacements, Imams, Pegs, Nobles, etc) which gives a less strict hierarchical relationships between each of its members and the general society. Ibn ‘Arabī’s hierarchy does not seem to claim a particularly defined social or religious ascendance like that of the Christian clergy in society, although their spiritual function seem to be of the same value within society. In this, we have here two examples of spiritual hierarchies reflecting two different and particular aspects of the two religious traditions: celestial and spiritual hierarchies matching the social-religious Christian defined order on one hand, and the celestial and spiritual hierarchies reflecting potential and realised stations or positions within the social-religious Islamic group on the other hand. Further detailed comparison with other islamic angelologies could yield interesting outcomes, illustrating different cosmological representations in the islamic world.¹

However Webb rightly noted that hierarchical motifs “*seek to simultaneously articulate ontological, cosmological, and cosmogonic truths about the Divine Essence and Its self-disclosure in/of the world while speaking of personal-existential realities and potentialities.*”² Indeed, Ibn ‘Arabī shows a particular use of angelic functions:

¹ Among such other authors are the Brethren of Purity (ca. 4th/10th century), al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), Shihān al-dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191), al-Ghazālī (d. 504/1111), Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406). For the outline of some of these angelologies, see Murata, “The Angels;” Stephen R. Burge, “The Provenance of Suhrawardian Angelology,” *Archiv Orientalní*, 76, no. 4 (2008): 435-457; Jaadane, “La place des anges;” Stefan Leder, “Angels as Part of Human Civilisation, Ibn Khaldūn’s Conciliating Approach,” in *The Intermediate Worlds of Angels*, 365-384. Another interesting comparison could be made with angelologies in works more occult in nature, such as the longer version of the *Shams al-Ma‘ārif* by al-Būnī (d. 622/1225), contemporary of Ibn ‘Arabī, and an author also influenced by Ibn Barrajān (Coulon, *La magie en terre d’islam*, 212, 226).

² Ibid, 246.

angels as characters who both exist as comparators to the situation of human beings and their unique potentiality of transformation and movements through spiritual stations in the cosmos, and angels as symbols for their spiritual practices and the result of these practices. Chief examples of this second role, angels as symbols, are the angels which Webb did not identify as a category, the “governing ones” and its angels born of breaths, act, and words.

Moreover, beyond an apophatic theology that Webb identified in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī,¹ the Mystical Theology of pseudo-Dionysus the Aeropagyte help us here as well in analyzing Akbarian angels as pointing to a silent theology, which is beyond cataphasis (positive theology, immanence) and apophasis (negative theology, transcendence).² Indeed, in the writings of Dionysus the Aeropagyte cataphatic theology is represented by the dynamic flowing from God to humans, going through Names and concepts, while apophatic theology is represented by the movement going from humanity to God, through subtler states and beings such as angels.³ Thus on one hand, angels in Ibn ‘Arabī standing for both Names, concepts, as well as existing as perfected and subtler aspects of humanity, combine both theologies or dynamics, while on the other hand they also seem to be symbolizing this curious ambiguity of human-born

¹ Webb, “Hierarchy,” 251.

² “(...) Negative theology remains a discursive process of the intellect, while mystical theology is situated beyond discourse. (...) Negative theology cannot but refers to a positive theology which it limits and corrects in its formulations. Mystical theology on the contrary does not refer to either of these processes which it supposes nonetheless. It is pure immaterial experience where senses and intellect are radically excluded.” (L’Aréopagyte, *La hiérarchie céleste*, xxx-xxxii).

³ Jean-Yves Leloup, *Un obscur et lumineux silence, La Théologie mystique de Denys l’Aréopagite*, (Albin Michel, Paris, 2013), 76-85. The writings of Dionysus the Areopagyte first corresponded to a neo-platonic type, however with his *Mystical Theology*, Leloup writes, he breaks away from duality, towards a “He/not He” representation of the divine, and beyond (towards *henosis*, a greek word that is very similar to the idea of *wiṣāl* in Arabic and Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings). See also L’Aréopagyte, *La hiérarchie céleste*, xxv-xxxii.

realities (breaths, words, acts), the latest of all God's creation. As such they seem to be pointing to something beyond the first dichotomy, and thus one could see in these angels a symbol of a silent theology, accompanying the reader on the journey towards and beyond the “He/not He” God, when there remains but light and wings of them, before disappearing into the unsaid.

The simultaneity of meanings to a word such as “angel” or “Throne” finds a general example in the chapter on seclusion, with the word “man:” Ibn ‘Arabī writes that “Man is a small world, and the world is a great man” (*fa-l-insān ‘ālam ṣaghīr wa-l-‘ālam insān, kabīr*).¹ He puts in in a another way at the beginning of the *Futūḥāt*, “*The human Presence is like the divine Presence, or rather it is the very same thing, composed of three levels: the Dominion, the Spiritual world, and the world of Power,*”² locus of the manifestation of Names, assembler of all realities (including the angelic one), born of heaven and earth.³

More than being a simple metaphor, however, these quotes could point to an ontological reality, an islamic “multiverse,” considering the overlap and situation of these three worlds and their creatures, as seen in the cosmological function part: the *Malakūt* is contained within the *Jabarūt* which is itself contained in the *Mulk*, or physical world. We have seen that it creates nine spheres, equating the nine points of contact between the human and the divine, a contact which Ibn ‘Arabī calls “the angel.”

¹ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 78. 5,116.

² Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 2. 1,214, and this is echoed by another statement about the physical world being the more complete mirror of the Otherworld (Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 126. 5,300).

³ Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 3. 1,408, Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt*, 208. 6,412. Chodkiewicz mentions another work, *Anqā’ al-mughrib*, where Ibn ‘Arabī explains that “everything of the external world” he is speaking about is for the reader to search its correspondence inside of himself (Chodkiewicz, *Le sceau des saints*, 127). Showing his affiliation to Ibn ‘Arabī, Murata writes on Qūnawī that “angels correspond to the spiritual faculties of the Perfect Man, who is the prototype of both mankind and universe” (Murata, “Angels,” 333).

One might also consider here the particular place of Imagination in Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology, where it potentially makes of metaphors and images (*ṣuwar*) phenomenons more real than mere literary metaphors: they are both true and not true, the way the universe is both “He and not He,” depending on the context and perspective.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

“The facts of our fallen life demand instead that the message be written in the very substance, in the body, of the messenger - indeed, that the message be the messenger, and he the message. It is essential moreover that the messenger’s body be such as to resist our efforts to define or explain it. For the purpose of this instruction is precisely to teach us the inadequacy of all our usual categories - so as to compel renewed attention to the arousing of our drowsed souls. We need, in a word, an angel.”¹

Angels and angel-like beings were common to many religious traditions, however they have now mostly become conflated with monotheism. Angels have evolved from messengers in the “antique way” as independent beings from other gods, to divine manifestations or emanations from God in monotheisms.² The Qur’ān does not give a clear intra-angelic hierarchy, however it gives clear functions to angels as characters within the cosmology it presents: exclusive intermediaries of the Unseen between the heavens and the human world. From then on, islamic spirituality could “only be envisaged in connection with the angels, who are intertwined with all dimensions of human life as seen by Islam.”³

Through the literary analysis of angels as characters, we have found seven functions, based on their many roles in both verses mentioning them, and verses that might allude to them: 1) a narrative function in relation to the other characters within the Quranic text, 2) a theological function, angels helping in defining the islamic credo, 3) a religious praxis function, angels illustrating the expected actions of the believer, 4)

¹ James S. Cutsinger, "Angels and Inklings," 59.

² Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 77.

³ Sachiko Murata, "The Angels," 343.

a cosmological function, angels as part of the establishment of a new world-view, 5) the messenger function, part of the previous one, angels for transmitting divine scripture and actions, 6) the testing function, another part of the cosmological one, whereby angels test the faith of the believer, inside and outside the text, 7) the particular case of the named angels, illustrating the continuity with other monotheistic traditions as much as its redefining in a new context.

Angelika Neuwirth wrote on the Quranic text:

“The Qur’ān’s charging the empirical world with text-referentiality can hardly be overestimated. It induces a biblicization of Arabian episteme. The reverse movement is equally distinctive: it is the Arabization of biblical concepts. What is striking is that both processes operate with a hermeneutical tool that was current in the Late Antique reckonings with heritage texts but which was obviously new in the Arabian context: the hermeneutics of a complex typology. (...) For the sake of simplicity, it will be classified in our context as (1) the simple figure of re-enactment, the repetition of a biblical incident or a biblical experience in the life of the community; (2) the more intriguing figure of promise and fulfilment in which a biblical promise becomes real in the history of the community; and (3) the psychologically-charged figure of mythopoiesis, the discovery of biblical precedents as underlying established communal practices.”¹

Applying this typology to the case of the Quranic angels as seen in the first chapter, we could say that angels, by their functions, participate in all three typologies: 1) the first chapter has shown how angels are an example of a link, a figure of re-enactment of Biblical and non-Biblical figures in previous cosmologies, both local and foreign; 2) as a figure of fulfilment, angels help the readers, as much as the seekers on the spiritual path, in reaching an eschatological promise via the spiritual path, which may or may not include the physical dimension, and 3) angels participate in a mythopoeic process, part of the construction of Islamic cosmology(ies), with different

¹ Neuwirth, “The Qur’ān’s Enchantment of the World,” 133-134.

angels, in different shapes and forms,¹ coming to enrich the imaginaries of authors, readers, and believers.

This mythopoeic process is further reached through the cosmological enrichment function seen in second, third and fourth chapters. This additional function, arising from the Quranic cosmological function, appears naturally out of the expanding principle of commentary. Taking the case of the verse 17:1, which concerns the third chapter, Neuwirth further writes that this mythopoeic process arises from a decoupling of the Quranic text from its immediate context, which precedes a "mythologizing exegesis," the re-appropriation of Quranic terms, often undefined terms whose original contextual meaning have been lost over time, and re-wrapped by these commentarial narratives in new images and new meanings.² From this double process, angels in the three last chapters are used for illustrating expanding divine signs, characters taken from the Quranic text further adapted, mixed, detailed, to be present at all times and all places in daily life and the believer's imagination.

As for the spiritual and eschatological re-enactment (second figure listed by Neuwirth), this is reached by a particular function of angels in Sufi texts, which we called the symbolic function. This implies different literary devices (metaphors, ellipses) and interpretations (allegorical, symbolic). This also shows through the different texts of the second, third and fourth chapters, albeit in more or less developed forms. As Aaron Hughes writes, the commentary genre tries to make the Qur'ān relevant to a particular space and time,³ and Sufi commentaries, in their strictest sense (second chapter) and wider sense (third and fourth chapters) use angels to make a

¹ For an example of pictorial representations of angels, see Anna Caiozzo, "L'ange et le roi dans la culture visuelle de l'Orient médiéval," in *The Intermediary Worlds of Angels*, 403-420.

² Neuwirth, "From Sacred Mosque to Remote Temple," 398.

³ Hughes, "The Stranger at the Sea".

spiritual journey based on the Quranic message relevant and actual to the mystically inclined reader and practitioner.

This symbolic function remains discreet and scattered throughout the Sufi commentaries of the second chapter, showing through some sayings attributed to diverse Sufi masters, through the lack of commentary on angelic verses, or the apparition of angels in commentaries on verses that do not concern them, and the literary devices that might be used by authors when writing about them. In a way they corroborate and validate the invisibility of angels, both in the text and outside of it, encouraging the depersonalisation of the means of divine revelation. This gives an overall impression of pervasive angelic presence, more or less visible, more or less metaphorical, an instrument that may be used in a myriad of ways inside and outside the text, by both commentator and reader.

However the symbolic function shows in a more systematic and sustained manner through the particular roles held by angels in the *mi'raj* narratives: as guides and challengers along the celestial ascension of the different narrators, they come to symbolise stations and liminal signs on the road towards God. Whether as ontological presence, or as a metonymy of light and wings, the angel is the last tangible and (in)visible sign before one arrives to the spiritual journey's end, to the ineffable God.

In the fourth chapter, the symbolic function seems to be fully deployed through what seems to be as close to a systematic angelology as Sufi texts of this period seem to present. Ibn 'Arabī's angelology in the *Futūḥāt* thus lends itself to comparison with

other angelologies, both inside and outside the Islamic world,¹ which could be an object for further research. As with many other cosmologies, his is infused with neo-platonism, and angels come to fill all the Quranic functions, along with the two additional functions found in the second and third chapters. The symbolic function remains however the one showing in a somewhat original way, because of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theory of *mundus imaginalis*. Where a neo-platonic world-view might imply a separation between the physical (imperfect) world and the spiritual-ideal (perfect) world, Ibn ‘Arabī includes the physical world is potentially perfect, as locus of theophanies, and as included within the wider Imaginal world, which itself gives access to the spiritual dimension. Additionally, both Imaginal and spiritual worlds could be understood at the same time external and internal to man, by his characteristic of being “more complete” than angels. Angels thus gain multiple realities: they are the ontological beings presented in the Qur’ān as part of the global salvation history, they put the universe in motion on the macro and micro levels; but they are also internal realities and symbols of spiritual advancement, of metaphysical concepts, of spiritual stations (*maqāmāt*) and states (*aḥwāl*), of divine Names, of the letters of the alphabet and their factual power. They are both exoterically present and esoterically present, outside and inside the text, to humankind. The ultimate conflation of this multiple presence is when Ibn ‘Arabī maintains the ambiguity around the identity of the governing angels, by metaphor: the human spirit is and is not an angel, producing angels by its breath, words, and deeds.

¹ Within monotheistic traditions, it seems that while both Islam and Christian authors have tried to develop angelologies, Jewish authors did not do so nearly as much (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 317.)

Ibn ‘Arabī’s work also illustrate the continuation of divine communication with humankind, even after the closing of Revelation by scripture¹ - general revelation, he writes, does not end, and angels are here to maintain it. Angels as symbols also come to illustrate other key concepts of Ibn ‘Arabī’s cosmology, such as his theodicy and God’s infinite compassion: by incarnating contrarian Names, angels enter into disputes impacting physical reality, however in the end, even the terrible guardians of Hell will be turned into angels of compassion.

Like angels in the *mi‘rāj* narratives, Ibn ‘Arabī’s angels in the *Futūḥāt* also stand for signposts, virtues to acquire, pointing the way. Human spirit starts low and elevates itself, realising its potentiality up until being above that of angels and their “known ranks,” reaching to the state of Perfect Man. The answer to the relationship between man and angel is the goal, and not the rank, as seen with the *mi‘rāj* narratives: man symbolises mobility and angels fixity - although this fixity is itself subject of ambiguity. Angels are indeed prone to changing shapes and forms, human and non-human, visible or not to the eye and to the text, where they can be talked about as a plural or singular, feminine or masculine.

Further research comparing more systematically all these different Sufi texts with Sunni works not qualified as Sufi, and with other works, qualified as philosophical, Shia, and others (keeping in mind that these categories may intersect on many levels), would be helpful to determine whether this multi-layered symbolic function is specifically Sufi, or, when in common with others, how they use this function. Although

¹ This idea is shared with Jewish mysticism (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 141-142.)

Burge estimates that Sufi angelologies are not so different from non-Sufi ones,¹ our supposition for now is that the symbolic function in Sufi works has the particular characteristic of multiplicity, of layering: at all times, they hold angels at different level of realities, textual, ontological, allegorical, metaphorical (metonymy, etc), imaginal.

We may note for now that while some see a coherence in Sufi angelology not present in general Islamic exegesis,² these texts rather showed that as announced in the introduction in the words of Burge, there are as many angelologies as there are authors. However, a certain coherence could be created through the symbolic function: by the co-existence of several layers of reality (from the ontological to the symbolic, by metaphor or the textually non-existent), the coexistence of contrarian perspectives become possible.

Angels in these Sufi texts seem not to be as defined and systematised as they are in comparable Christian literature, and this serves a theological purpose: angels as symbols of the power and unknowability of God, escaping attempts at fixed hierarchies and categories.³ Even the one who is closest to a systematic hierarchy (Ibn ‘Arabī) remains purposefully paradoxical, with angels as metaphor and not metaphor, in parallel to the conception of the universe as “He/not He,” with overlapping definitions (angels equal or do not equal human spirits) to maintain ambiguity and tension.

¹ Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 8. Although he writes later that Ibn ‘Arabī’s angelology is heterodox when compared to *ḥadīth*-based angelologies, we have found that the symbolic function distinguishes it most, however his general and wide use of *ḥadīth* makes it hard to pin-point heterodoxy in the details.

² Lory, *La dignité de l’homme*, 201.

³ For instance, even though Burge uses ‘archangel’ in his works (*ra’īs al-malā’ika*) for Gabriel and Michael, and it would seem to be the translation into Arabic of the Greek word in Christian texts (Burge, *Angels in Islam*, 39, f.65), we have not found this category in the primary sources of this study, even in the developed angelology of Ibn ‘Arabī. As general categories, only Cherubim, Muḥayyamūn and Muqarrabūn seem to denote a particular angelic category, rather variable. As noted before, we could see here a sign of an equalitarian thrust which also translates, at least in Sunni Islam, by the lack of established clergy.

To summarize, we note that in many traditions, there is a tension between two different goals represented by angels: where some texts present “becoming an angel” as an end-goal,¹ other texts present the reaching of an angelic state as a temporary goal, a step towards God, an overtaking of this step, becoming an angel or at an angelic level into order become something more afterwards.² Sufi literature represented here, by the use of the symbolic function, seem to illustrate this second option more often.

As a conclusion to this literary study, we will refer again to Lawson’s analysis of the Qur’ān as epic: he ventures in translating “*walī*” by “hero” instead of the usual “saint,” or “Friend of God” as we have used here.³ This gives an interesting perspective on the Sufi texts we have studied: the *walī* (and aspiring *walī* reader) as a hero on his mystical quest for God, following the steps of the original Quranic epic - a quest where angels are among the main supporting cast to all protagonists, helpers or challengers to believers and non-believers alike, filling numerous roles and functions in the text. Outside the text, for the aspiring hero-*walī*, they continue to fulfil their main function given to them by Sufi authors, the symbolic function of pointing the way to God on multiple levels of both readings and realities outside the text.

¹ In the Islamic tradition, the Brethren of Purity are an example (de Callatay, “The Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’ on Angels”), and this is also the general conclusion of Louis Gardet on the place of angels in Islam (Louis Gardet, “Les anges en Islam,” 226-227). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Henoah becoming an angel is another such example (Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 262-263).

² Hamidović, *L’insoutenable divinité*, 265.

³ Lawson, “The Qur’ān and Epic,” 81-82.

APPENDIX 1

Verses in *Mushaf* Order.

Each verse or group of verses is presented in English translation (from the Study Quran), followed by the text in Arabic. In **bold black** are the verses citing angels by word; in non-bold black, verses accompanying verses to the previous ones for clarity purposes; in grey, verses usually interpreted to be angels, although they are not named or described as such.

2:30 - And when thy Lord said to the angels, "I am placing a vicegerent upon the earth", they said, "Wilt Thou place therein one who will work corruption therein, and shed blood, while we hymn Thy praise and call Thee Holy?" He said, "Truly I know what you know not."

2:31 - And He taught Adam the names, all of them. Then He laid them before the angels and said, "Tell me the names of these, if you are truthful."

2:32 - They said, "Glory be to Thee! We have no knowledge save what Thou hast taught us. Truly Thou art the Knower, the Wise."

2:33 - He said, "Adam, tell them their names." And when he had told them their names He said, "Did I not say to you that I know the unseen of the heavens and the earth, and that I know what you disclose and what you used to conceal?"

2:34 - And when We said to the angels, "Prostrate unto Adam," they prostrated, save Iblis. He refused and waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers.

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَن يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَاءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ
2:30 - وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ قَالَتْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ

2:31 - وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هَؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

2:32 - قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ

قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالُوا مَا أُنْبَأُهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ قَالَتْ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ
2:33 - وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ

2:34 - وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى وَاسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

2:97 - Whosoever is an enemy of Gabriel: he it is who sent it down upon thy heart by God's Leave, confirming that which was there before, and as a guidance and glad tiding for the believers.

2:98 - Whosoever is an enemy of God, His angels and His messengers, and Gabriel and Michael: God is indeed the enemy of the disbelievers.

2:97 - قُلْ مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِجِبْرِيلَ فَإِنَّهُ نَزَّلَهُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ مُصَدِّقًا لِمَا بَيْنَ يَدَيْهِ وَهُدًى وَبُشْرَى لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ

2:98 - مَنْ كَانَ عَدُوًّا لِلَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَجِبْرِيلَ وَمِيكَالَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ عَدُوٌّ لِلْكَافِرِينَ

2:102 - And they followed what the satans recited against the kingdom of Solomon. Solomon did not disbelieve, but the satans disbelieved, teaching people sorcery and that which was sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt. But they would not teach anyone until they had said, “We are only a trial, so do not disbelieve.” Then they would learn from them that by which they could cause separation between a man and his wife. But they did not harm anyone with it, save by God's Leave. And they would learn that which harmed them and brought them

no benefit, knowing that whosoever purchases it has no share in the Hereafter.

Evil is that for which they sold their souls, had they but known.

وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُو الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكِ سُلَيْمَانَ ۖ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَٰكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ ۖ وَمَا أُنزِلَ
عَلَىٰ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ ۗ فَيَعْلَمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا
يُفْرَقُونَ بِهِ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَرَوْجِهِ ۗ وَمَا هُمْ بِضَارِينَ بِهِ مِنَ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَيَعْلَمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ ۗ وَقَدْ عَلِمُوا
2:102 - لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلَاقٍ ۗ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا شَرَوْا بِهِ أَنفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

2:161 - Indeed, those who disbelieve, and die disbelievers, upon them shall be the curse of God, the angels, and mankind all together.

2:161 - إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَمَاتُوا وَهُمْ كُفَّارًا أُولَٰئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

2:177 - It is not piety to turn your faces toward the east and west. Rather, piety is he who believes in God, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets; and who gives wealth, despite loving it, to kinsfolk, orphans, the indigent, the traveler, beggars, and for [the ransom of] slaves; performs the prayer and gives the alms; and those who fulfill the oaths when they pledge them, and those who are patient in misfortune, hardship, and moments of peril. It is they who are the sincere, and it is they who are the reverent.

لَيْسَ الْبِرَّ أَنْ تُوَلُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَٰكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ
وَأَتَى الْمَالَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ ذَوِي الْقُرْبَىٰ وَالْيَتَامَىٰ وَالْمَسَاكِينَ وَابْنَ السَّبِيلِ وَالسَّائِلِينَ وَفِي الرِّقَابِ وَأَقَامَ الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَى الزَّكَاةَ
وَالْمُوفُونَ بِعَهْدِهِمْ إِذَا عَاهَدُوا ۗ وَالصَّابِرِينَ فِي الْبَأْسَاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَحِينَ الْبَأْسِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا ۗ وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ

2:177 - الْمُتَّقُونَ

2:210 - Do they wait for naught less than that God should come in the shadows of clouds, with the angels, and that the matter should have been decreed? And unto God are all matters returned.

2:210 - هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ فِي ظُلَلٍ مِنَ الْغَمَامِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَقُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ ۗ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ

2:248 - And their prophet said to them, “Truly the sign of his sovereignty shall be that the ark come to you bearing tranquility from your Lord and a remnant left by the House of Moses and the House of Aaron, borne by the angels. Truly that is a sign for you, if you are believers.”

وَقَالَ لَهُمْ نَبِيُّهُمْ إِنَّ آيَةَ مُلْكِهِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ التَّابُوتُ فِيهِ سَكِينَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَبَقِيَّةٌ مِّمَّا تَرَكَ آلُ مُوسَىٰ وَآلُ هَارُونَ تَحْمِلُهُ
2:248 - الْمَلَائِكَةُ ۗ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَةً لِّكُمْ إِن كُنْتُمْ مُّؤْمِنِينَ

2:285 - The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, as do the believers. Each believes in God, His angels, His Books, and His messengers.

“We make no distinction between any of His messengers.” And they say, “We hear and obey. Thy forgiveness, our Lord! And unto Thee is the journey’s end.”

أَمَّنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۗ كُلٌّ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ ۗ
2:285 - وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ۗ غُفْرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ

3:18 - God bears witness that there is no god but He, as do the angels and the possessors of knowledge, upholding justice. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise.

3:18 - شَهِدَ اللَّهُ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَأُولُو الْعِلْمِ قَائِمًا بِالْقِسْطِ ۗ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

3:39 - Then the angels called to him while he was praying in the sanctuary, “God gives thee glad tidings of John, confirming a word from God, noble and chaste, a prophet, form among the righteous.”

فَنَادَتْهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُوَ قَائِمٌ يُصَلِّي فِي الْمِحْرَابِ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكَ بِيَحْيَى مُصَدِّقًا بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَسَيِّدًا وَحَصُورًا وَنَبِيًّا مِّنَ الصَّالِحِينَ 3:39

3:42 - And [remember] when then angels said, “O Mary, truly God has chosen thee and purified thee, and has chosen thee above the women of the worlds.

3:43 - O Mary! Be devoutly obedient to thy Lord, prostrate, and bow with those who bow.”

3:42 - وَإِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَاكِ وَطَهَّرَكِ وَاصْطَفَاكِ عَلَى نِسَاءِ الْعَالَمِينَ

3:43 - يَا مَرْيَمُ اقْنُتِي لِرَبِّكِ وَاسْجُدِي وَارْكَعِي مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ

3:45 - When the angels said, “O Mary, truly God gives thee glad tidings of a Word from Him, whose name is the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, high honored in this world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought nigh.

3:46 - He will speak to people in the cradle and in maturity, and will be among the righteous.”

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِّنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ 3:45

3:46 - وَيُكَلِّمُ النَّاسَ فِي الْمَهْدِ وَكَهْلًا وَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

3:80 - And he would no command you to take the angels and the prophets as lords. Would he command you to disbelief after your having been submitters?

3:80 - وَلَا يَأْمُرُكُمْ أَنْ تَتَّخِذُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ أَرْبَابًا أَيَأْمُرُكُمْ بِالْكَفْرِ بَعْدَ إِذْ أَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ

3:87 - They are those whose recompense is that upon them shall be the curse of God, the angels, and mankind all together,

3:88 - abiding therein; the punishment shall not be lightened for them, nor shall they be granted respite,

3:89 - except those who repent after that, and make amends, for truly God is Forgiving, Merciful.

3:87 - أُولَئِكَ جَزَاؤُهُمْ أَنْ عَلَيْهِمْ لَعْنَةُ اللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

3:88 - خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ الْعَذَابُ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ

3:89 - إِلَّا الَّذِينَ تَابُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ ذَلِكَ وَأَصْلَحُوا فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ

3:124 - Remember when thou saidst unto the believers, “Is it not enough for you that your Lord should support you with three thousand angels sent down?”

3:125 - Yea, if you are patient and reverent, and they come at you immediately, your Lord will support you with five thousand angels bearing marks.

3:124 - إِذْ تَقُولُ لِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ أَلَنْ يَكْفِيَكُمْ أَنْ يُمِدَّكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِثَلَاثَةِ آلَافٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُنَزَّلِينَ

3:125 - بَلَىٰ ۗ إِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَيَأْتُوكُمْ مِنْ فُورِهِمْ هَذَا يُمِدِّدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِخَمْسَةِ آلَافٍ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُسَوِّمِينَ

4:97 - When the angels take the souls of those who were wronging themselves, [the angels] say, “In what state were you?” They say, “We were weak and oppressed in the land.” [The angels] will say, “Was not God’s earth vast enough that you might have migrated therein?” These shall have their refuge in Hell - what an evil journey’s end!

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ تَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ ظَالِمِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ قَالُوا فِيمَ كُنْتُمْ قَالُوا كُنَّا مُسْتَضْعَفِينَ فِي الْأَرْضِ قَالُوا أَلَمْ تَكُنْ أَرْضُ اللَّهِ
4:97 - وَأَسِعَتْ فَنَهَاجِرُوا فِيهَا فَأُولَئِكَ مَا لَهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ وَسَاءَتْ مَصِيرًا

4:136 - O you who believe! Believe in God and His Messenger, and the Book He sent down upon His Messenger, and the Book He sent down before. Whosoever does not believe in God and His angels and His Books and His messengers and the Last Day has wandered far astray.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي نَزَّلَ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَالْكِتَابِ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِاللَّهِ
4:136 - وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ وَرُسُلِهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ فَقَدْ ضَلَّ ضَلَالًا بَعِيدًا

4:166 - But God Himself bears witness to that which He has sent down unto thee - He sent it down with His knowledge - and the angels bear witness. And God suffices as a Witness.

4:166 - لَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَشْهَدُ بِمَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْكَ أَنْزَلَهُ بِعِلْمِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَشْهَدُونَ وَكَفَى بِاللَّهِ شَهِيدًا

4:172 - The Messiah would never disdain to be a servant of God; nor would the angels brought nigh. Whosoever disdains His service, and is arrogant, He will gather them unto Himself all together.

لَنْ يَسْتَنْكِفَ الْمَسِيحُ أَنْ يَكُونَ عَبْدًا لِلَّهِ وَلَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ وَمَنْ يَسْتَنْكِفْ عَنْ عِبَادَتِهِ وَيَسْتَكْبِرْ فَسَيَحْشُرُهُمْ إِلَيْهِ
4:172 - جَمِيعًا

6:8 - And they would say, “Why has not an angel been sent down unto him?” Had We sent down an angel, then the matter would be decreed, and they would be granted no respite.

6:9 - Had We made him an angel, We would have sent him as a man, thus obscuring for them that which they themselves obscure.

6:8 - وَقَالُوا لَوْلَا أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ ۖ وَلَوْ أَنْزَلْنَا مَلَكَ لَفُضِيَ الْأَمْرُ ثُمَّ لَا يُنظَرُونَ

6:9 - وَلَوْ جَعَلْنَاهُ مَلَكَ لَجَعَلْنَاهُ رَجُلًا وَلَلَبَسْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ مَا يَلْبَسُونَ

6:50 - Say, “I do not say unto you that with me are the treasuries of God; nor do I know the unseen; nor do I say unto you that I am an angel. I follow only that which is revealed unto me.” Say, “Are the blind and the see equal? Will you not, then, reflect?”

قُلْ لَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ ۚ إِنِّي أَنْتَبِعُ إِلَّا مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيَّ ۚ قُلْ هَلْ يَسْتَوِي

6:50 - الْأَعْمَىٰ وَالْبَصِيرُ ۗ أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ

6:61 - And He is Dominant over His servants. He sends guardians over you, till, when death comes unto one of you, Our messengers take him, and they neglect not their duty.

6:61 - وَهُوَ الْفَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ ۖ وَيُرْسِلُ عَلَيْكُمْ حَفَظَةً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَكُمْ الْمَوْتُ تَوَفَّتْهُ رُسُلُنَا وَهُمْ لَا يُفِرُّونَ

6:93 - Who does greater wrong than one who fabricates a lie against God, or says, “It has been revealed unto me,” though naught had been revealed unto him, and one who says, “I will send down the like of what God has sent down”? If thou couldst see when the wrongdoers are the throes of death, and the angels stretch forth their hands, “Yield up your souls! This day shall you be recompensed with the punishment of humiliation for having spoken untruth against God, and for waxing arrogant against His signs.”

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنِ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ قَالَ أُوحِيَ إِلَيَّ وَلَمْ يُوحَ إِلَيْهِ شَيْءٌ وَمَنْ قَالَ سَأُنزِلُ مِثْلَ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَوْ تَرَى إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَاسِطُو أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرَجُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ الْيَوْمَ تُجْرَوْنَ عَذَابَ الْهُونِ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَقُولُونَ
6:93 - عَلَى اللَّهِ غَيْرَ الْحَقِّ وَكُنْتُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهِ تَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

6:111 - Even if We were to send down angels unto them, and the dead were to speak to them, they would still not believe, unless God wills. But most of them are ignorant.

وَلَوْ أَنَّنَا نَزَّلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ وَكَلَّمَهُمُ الْمَوْتَى وَحَشَرْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ قُبُلًا مَا كَانُوا لِيُؤْمِنُوا إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَجْهَلُونَ
6:111 - أَكْثَرَهُمْ يَجْهَلُونَ

6:158 - Do they wait aught but that the angels should come upon them, or that thy Lord should come, or one of the signs of thy Lord should come? On the day that one of the signs of thy Lord does come, believing will be of no avail to any soul that did not believe beforehand and did not earn some goodness in its belief. Say, "Wait! We, too, are waiting."

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ رَبُّكَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ بَعْضُ آيَاتِ رَبِّكَ يَوْمَ يَأْتِي بَعْضُ آيَاتِ رَبِّكَ لَا يَنْفَعُ نَفْسًا
6:158 - إِيْمَانُهَا لَمْ تَكُنْ أَمَنَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ أَوْ كَسَبَتْ فِي إِيْمَانِهَا خَيْرًا قُلِ انْتَظِرُوا إِنَّا مُنْتَظِرُونَ

7:11 - Indeed, We created you, then We formed you, then We said unto the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam." And they all prostrated, save Iblis; he was not among those who prostrated.

7:11 - وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ صَوَّرْنَاكُمْ ثُمَّ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ لَمْ يَكُنْ مِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ

7:20 - Then Satan whispered to them, that he might expose to them that which was hidden from them of their nakedness. And he said, “Your Lord has only forbidden you this tree, lest you should become angels, or among those who abide [forever].”

فَوَسْوَسَ لَهُمَا الشَّيْطَانُ لِيُبْدِيَ لَهُمَا مَا وُورِيَ عَنْهُمَا مِنْ سَوَاتِمِهِمَا وَقَالَ مَا نَهَاكُمَا رَبُّكُمَا عَنِ هَذِهِ الشَّجَرَةِ إِلَّا أَنْ تَكُونَا
7:20 -مَلَكَيْنِ أَوْ تَكُونَا مِنَ الْخَالِدِينَ

8:9 - When you sought succor from your Lord, He responded to you, “I shall aid you with a thousand angels rank upon rank.”

8:9- إِذْ تَسْتَغِيثُونَ رَبَّكُمْ فَاسْتَجَابَ لَكُمْ أَنِّي مُمِدُّكُمْ بِالْفِئَةِ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُرَدِّفِينَ

8:12 - Behold, thy Lord revealed unto the angels, “Truly I am with you; so make firm those who believe. I shall cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. So strike above the neck, and strike their every fingertip.”

إِذْ يُوحِي رَبُّكَ إِلَى الْمَلَائِكَةِ أَنِّي مَعَكُمْ فَثَبِّتُوا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا ۚ سَأَلْتِي فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الرُّعْبَ فَاضْرِبُوا فَوْقَ الْأَعْنَاقِ
8:12 -وَاضْرِبُوا مِنْهُمْ كُلَّ بَنَانٍ

8:50 - And if only thou couldst see when the angels take those who disbelieve, striking their faces and their backs, and [saying], “Taste the punishment of the burning!

8:51 - This is for what your hands sent forth, and because God wrongs not His servants.”

8:50 -وَلَوْ نَرَىٰ إِذْ يَنْفَخُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۗ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ

8:51 -ذَلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ

9:26 - Then God sent down His Tranquility upon His Messenger and upon the believers, and sent down hosts who you saw not, and punished those who disbelieved. And that is the recompense of the disbelievers.

ثُمَّ أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ سَكِينَتَهُ عَلَى رَسُولِهِ وَعَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَأَنْزَلَ جُنُودًا لَمْ تَرَوْهَا وَعَذَّبَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۚ وَذَلِكَ جَزَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ

9:26

11:12 - Perchance thou mightest omit some of that which We have revealed unto thee, and thy breast might be constrained because they say, “Why has no treasure been sent down upon him, or an angel not come with him?” Thou art only a warner, and God is Guardian over all things.

فَلَعَلَّكَ تَارِكٌ بَعْضُ مَا يُوحَىٰ إِلَيْكَ وَضَائِقٌ بِهِ صَدْرُكَ أَنْ يَقُولُوا لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْهِ كَنْزٌ أَوْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ مَلَكٌ ۗ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ نَذِيرٌ

11:12 - وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَكِيلٌ

11:31 - I say not unto you that with me are the treasures of God; nor do I know the Unseen. And I say not that I am an angel; nor do I say of those who are despicable in your eyes, ‘God will not give them any good’ - God knows best what is in their souls - for when I would indeed be among the wrongdoers.”

وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ عِنْدِي خَزَائِنُ اللَّهِ وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ وَلَا أَقُولُ إِنِّي مَلَكٌ وَلَا أَقُولُ لِلَّذِينَ تَزْدَرِي أَعْيُنُكُمْ لَنْ يُؤْتِيَهُمُ اللَّهُ خَيْرًا

11:31 - وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا فِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ ۗ إِنِّي إِذَا لَمِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ

11:69 - And indeed Our messengers came to Abraham with glad tidings. They said, “Peace.” “Peace,” he said, and he hastened to bring them a roasted calf.

11:70 - Then when he saw that their hands reached not toward it, he conceived a fear of them. They said, “Fear not. Verily we have been sent unto the people of Lot.”

11:71 - And his wife was standing there and she laughed. Then we gave her glad tidings of Isaac, and after Isaac, of Jacob.

11:72 - She said, “Oh, woe unto me! Shall I bear a child when I am an old woman, and this husband of mine is an old man? That would surely be an astounding thing.”

11:73 - They said, “Do you marvel at the Command of God? The Mercy of God and His Blessings be upon you, O People of the House! Truly He is Praised, Glorious.”

11:69 - وَلَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالِ سَلَامٌ فَمَا لَبِثَ أَنْ جَاءَ بِعِجْلٍ حَنِيذٍ

11:70 - فَلَمَّا رَأَى أَيْدِيَهُمْ لَا تَصِلُ إِلَيْهِ نَكِرَهُمْ وَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَى قَوْمِ لُوطٍ

11:71 - وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحِكَتْ فَلَبَسَ رَائِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ مِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ

11:72 - قَالَتْ يَا وَيْلَتَى أَأَلِدُ وَأَنَا عَجُوزٌ وَهَذَا بَعْلِي شَيْخًا إِنَّ هَذَا لَشَيْءٌ عَجِيبٌ

11:73 - قَالُوا أَتَعْجَبِينَ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ رَحِمَتُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ عَلَيْكُمْ أَهْلَ الْبَيْتِ إِنَّهُ حَمِيدٌ مَجِيدٌ

11:77 - When Our messengers came to Lot, he was distressed on their account and felt himself powerless concerning them. and he said, “This is a terrible day!”

11:77 - وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالَ هَذَا يَوْمٌ عَصِيبٌ

11:81 - They said, “O Lot! We are envoys of thy Lord. They shall not reach thee. So set out with thy family during the night, and let none of you turn around, save

thy wife; surely that which befalls them shall befall her. Indeed, the morning shall be their tryst. Is not the morning nigh?"

قَالُوا يَا لَوِطُ إِنَّا رُسُلُ رَبِّكَ لَنْ يَصِلُوا إِلَيْكَ فَأَسْرَبَ أَهْلَكَ بِقِطْعٍ مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ وَلَا يَلْتَفِتُ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا أَمْرًا تَكْتُمُهُ مِصْرِيهَا مَا
11:81 - أَصَابَهُمْ إِنَّ مَوْعِدَهُمُ الصُّبْحُ ۚ أَلَيْسَ الصُّبْحُ بِقَرِيبٍ

12:31 - So when she heard of their plotting, she sent for them, and prepared a repast for them, and gave each of them a knife. And she said [to Joseph], "Come out before them!" Then when they saw him, they so admired him that they cut their hands and said, "God be praised! This is no human being. This is naught but a noble angel!"

فَلَمَّا سَمِعَتْ بِمَكْرِهِنَّ أَرْسَلَتْ إِلَيْهِنَّ وَأَعْتَدَتْ لَهُنَّ مُتَّكًا وَأَتَتْ كُلَّ وَاحِدَةٍ مِّنْهُنَّ سِكِّينًا وَقَالَتِ اخْرُجْ عَلَيْهِنَّ فَلَمَّا رَأَيْنَهُ أَكْبَرْنَهُ وَقَطَّعْنَ أَيْدِيَهُنَّ وَقُلْنَ حَاشَ لِلَّهِ مَا هَذَا بَشَرًا إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا مَلَكٌ كَرِيمٌ
12:31

13:11 - For him there are attendant angels¹ to his front and to his rear, guarding him by God's Command. Truly God alters not what is in a people until they alter what is in themselves. And when God desires evil for a people, there is no repelling it; and apart from Him they have no protector.

لَهُ مُعَقِّبَاتٌ مِّنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُعَيِّرُ مَا بِقَوْمٍ حَتَّىٰ يُعَيِّرُوا مَا بِأَنْفُسِهِمْ ۗ وَإِذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ
13:11 - بِقَوْمٍ سُوءًا فَلَا مَرَدَّ لَهُ ۗ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ وَالٍ

¹ This is a choice from the translators of the Study Quran: in the Arabic text the word is *mu'azzibat*, not *malā'ika*.

13:13 - The thunder hymns His praise, as do the angels, in awe of Him. He sends forth the thunderbolts and strikes therewith whomsoever He will. Yet they dispute concerning God, and He is severe in wrath.

وَيُسَبِّحُ الرَّعْدُ بِحَمْدِهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ مِنْ خِيفَتِهِ وَيُرْسِلُ الصَّوَاعِقَ فَيُصِيبُ بِهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَهُمْ يُجَادِلُونَ فِي اللَّهِ وَهُوَ شَدِيدٌ
13:13-المخال

13:23 - Gardens of eden that they shall enter along with those who were righteous from among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny; and angels shall enter upon them from every gate.

13:23-جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ

15:6 - And they say, “O you unto whom the Reminder has been sent down, truly you are possessed.

15:7 - Why do you not bring us the angels, if you are among the truthful?”

15:8 - We do not send down the angels, save in truth, and were We to do so, they would be granted no respite.

15:6-وَقَالُوا يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِي نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الذِّكْرُ إِنَّكَ لَمَجْنُونٌ

15:7-لَوْ مَا تَأْتِينَا بِالْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنْ كُنْتَ مِنَ الصَّادِقِينَ

15:8-مَا نُنزِّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِلَّا بِالْحَقِّ وَمَا كَانُوا إِذًا مُنظَرِينَ

15:28 - And [remember] when they Lord said unto the angels, “Behold! I am creating a human being from dried clay, made of molded mud;

15:29 - so when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating.”

15:30 - Thereupon the angels prostrated, all of them together,

15:31 - save Iblīs. He refused to be with those who prostrated.

15:28 - وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّن صُلْبٍ مِّن حَمَإٍ مَّسْنُونٍ

15:29 - فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

15:30 - فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ

15:31 - إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَى أَن يَكُونَ مَعَ السَّاجِدِينَ

15:51 - And tell them of the guests of Abraham,

15:52 - when they entered upon him and said, “Peace!”, He said, “Verily of you we are afraid.”

15:53 - They said, “Be not afraid. Truly we bring thee glad tidings of a knowing son.”

15:54 - He said, “Do you bring me glad tidings when old age has befallen me? So of what do you bring me glad tidings?”

15:55 - They said, “We bring thee glad tidings in truth; so be not among those who despair.”

15:56 - He said, “Who despairs of the Mercy of his Lord, save those who are astray?”

15:57 - He said, “What is your errand, O messengers?”

15:58 - They said, “We have been sent unto a guilty people,

15:59 - save for the family of Lot. We shall surely save them, all together,

15:60 - except for his wife; We have determined that she is indeed among those who lagged behind.”

15:61 - So when the messengers came to the family of Lot,

15:62 - he said, “Verily you are an unfamiliar folk.”

15:63 - They said, “Nay, but we bring thee that which they used to doubt.

15:64 - And we bring thee the truth, and surely we are truthful.

15:65 - So set out with thy family during the night, and follow behind them, and let not any of you turn around, but go forth wheresoever you are commanded.”

15:51 - وَتَبَيَّنَهُمْ عَنْ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ

15:52 - إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ إِنَّا مِنْكُمْ وَجِلُونَ

15:53 - قَالُوا لَا تَوْجَلْ إِنَّا نُبَشِّرُكَ بِغُلَامٍ عَلِيمٍ

15:54 - قَالَ أَبَشَّرْتُمُونِي عَلَىٰ أَنْ مَسَّنِيَ الْكِبَرُ فِيمَ تَبَشِّرُونَ

15:55 - قَالُوا بَشِّرْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ فَلَا تَكُن مِّنَ الْفَانِطِينَ

15:56 - قَالَ وَمَنْ يَقْنَطُ مِن رَّحْمَةِ رَبِّهِ إِلَّا الضَّالُّونَ

15:57 - قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكُمْ أَيُّهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ

15:58 - قَالُوا إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَىٰ قَوْمٍ مُّجْرِمِينَ

15:59 - إِلَّا آلَ لُوطٍ إِنَّا لَمُنَجُّوهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

15:60 - إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ قَدَّرْنَا إِنَّهَا لَمِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ

15:61 - فَلَمَّا جَاءَ آلَ لُوطٍ الْمُرْسَلُونَ

15:62 - قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّنْكَرُونَ

15:63 - قَالُوا بَلْ جِئْنَاكَ بِمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَمْتَرُونَ

15:64 - وَأَتَيْنَاكَ بِالْحَقِّ وَإِنَّا لَصَادِقُونَ

15:65 - فَاسْرِبْ بِأَهْلِكَ بِقِطْعِ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ وَاتَّبِعْ أَدْبَارَهُمْ وَلَا يَلْتَفِتْ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ وَامْضُوا حَيْثُ تُؤْمَرُونَ

16:2 - He sends down angels with the Spirit from His Command to whomsoever He will among His servants, “Give warning that there is no god but I, so reverence Me!”

16:2 - إِلَّا أَنَا فَاتَّقُونِ - يُنَزِّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةَ بِالرُّوحِ مِنْ أَمْرِهِ عَلَىٰ مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِهِ أَنْ أَنْذِرُوا أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ

16:27 - Then on the Day of Resurrection He will disgrace them and say, “Where are my partners on whose account you were defiant? Those who were given knowledge will say, “Surely, this day, disgrace and evil are upon the disbelievers” -

16:28 - those whom the angels took while they were wronging themselves. Then they will offer submission, “We were not doing any evil.” Nay, but God knows best that which you were doing.

ثُمَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُخْزِيهِمْ وَيَقُولُ أَيْنَ شُرَكَائِيَ الَّذِينَ كُنْتُمْ تُشَاقِقُونَ فِيهِمْ ۖ قَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ إِنَّ الْخِزْيَ الْيَوْمَ وَالسُّوءَ
16:27 - عَلَىٰ الْكَافِرِينَ

16:28 - الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ ظَالِمِي أَنفُسِهِمْ ۖ قَالَفُوا السَّلَامَ مَا كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ مِنْ سُوءٍ ۖ بَلَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

16:31 - They shall enter the Gardens of Eden with rivers running below. Therein shall they have whatsoever they will. This does God recompense the reverent,

16:32 - those whom the angels take while they are in a state of goodness. They will say, “Peace be upon you! Enter the Garden for that which you used to do.”

16:33 - Do they await aught but that the angels should come upon them, of that the Command of thy Lord should come? Those before them did likewise. And God wronged them not, but they wronged themselves.

16:31 - جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا يُجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ لَهُمْ فِيهَا مَا يَشَاءُونَ ۖ كَذَٰلِكَ يَجْزِي اللَّهُ الْمُتَّقِينَ

16:32 -الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ يَقُولُونَ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ
هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ أَمْرٌ رَبِّكَ ۚ كَذَلِكَ فَعَلَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۗ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ
يَظْلِمُونَ 16:33

16:49 - And unto God prostrates whatever crawling creatures or angels are in the heavens or on the earth, and they do not wax arrogant.

16:49 -وَلِلَّهِ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ ذَابَّةٍ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

17:40 - Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females from among the angels [for Himself]? Surely you speak a monstrous word!

17:40 -أَفَأَصْنَعَكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِالْبَنِينَ وَاتَّخَذَ مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنَاثًا ۚ إِنَّكُمْ لَتَقُولُونَ قَوْلًا عَظِيمًا

17:61 - And when We said unto the angels, “Prostrate before Adam”, they all prostrated, save Iblis. He said, “Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?”

17:61 -وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ قَالَ أَأَسْجُدُ لِمَنْ خَلَقْتَ طِينًا

17:90 - And they say, “We shall not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth for us from the earth,

17:91 - or till you have a garden of date palms and grapevines, and you make streams gush forth in the midst of it,

17:92 - or till you make the sky fall upon us in pieces, as you have claimed, or you bring God and the angels before us,

17:93 - or till you have a house of gold ornament, or you ascend to Heaven. And we shall not believe in your ascension till you bring down unto us a book we can read.”

Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a human being, a messenger?

17:94 - And nothing hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save what they said, “Has God sent a human being as messenger?”

17:95 - Say, “Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as messenger.”

17:90 - وَقَالُوا لَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لَكَ حَتَّى تَفْجُرَ لَنَا مِنَ الْأَرْضِ يَنْبُوعًا

17:91 - أَوْ تَكُونَ لَكَ جَنَّةٌ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَعِنَبٍ فَتُفَجَّرَ الْأَنْهَارَ خِلَالَهَا تُفَجِّرًا

17:92 - أَوْ تُسْقِطَ السَّمَاءَ كَمَا زَعَمْتَ عَلَيْنَا كِسْفًا أَوْ تَأْتِيَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ قَبِيلًا

أَوْ يَكُونَ لَكَ بَيْتٌ مِّنْ رُّحْرَفٍ أَوْ تَرْقَى فِي السَّمَاءِ وَلَنْ نُؤْمِنَ لِرُقِيِّكَ حَتَّى تُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْنَا كِتَابًا نَقْرُؤُهُ ۗ قُلْ سُبْحَانَ رَبِّي هَلْ

17:93 - كُنْتُ إِلَّا بَشَرًا رَسُولًا

17:94 - وَمَا مَنَعَ النَّاسَ أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا إِذْ جَاءَهُمُ الْهُدَىٰ إِلَّا أَنْ قَالُوا أَبَعَثَ اللَّهُ بَشَرًا رَسُولًا

17:95 - قُلْ لَوْ كَانَ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَلَائِكَةٌ يَّمشُونَ مُطْمَئِنِّينَ لَنَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْهِم مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ مَلَكًا رَسُولًا

18:50 - When We said unto the angels, “Prostrate before Adam”, they prostrated, save Iblis. He was of the jinn and he deviated from the command of his Lord. Will you then take him and his progeny as protectors apart from Me, though they are an enemy unto you? How evil an exchange for the wrongdoers!

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ كَانَ مِنَ الْجِنِّ فَفَسَقَ عَنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّهِ ۗ أَفَتَتَّخِذُونَهُ وَذُرِّيَّتَهُ أَوْلِيَاءَ مِن دُونِي

18:50 - وَهُمْ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ ۗ بَشَرٌ لِّلظَّالِمِينَ بَدَلًا

19:17 - And she veiled herself from them. Then We sent unto her Our Spirit, and it assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man.

19:18 - She said, "I seek refuge from thee in the Compassionate, if you are reverent!"

19:19 - He said, "I am but a messenger of thy Lord, to bestow upon thee a pure boy."

19:20 - She said, "How shall I have a boy when no man has touched me, nor have I been unchaste?"

19:21 - He said, "Thus shall it be. Thy Lord says, 'It is easy for Me'" And [it is thus] that We might make him a sign unto mankind, and a mercy from Us. And it is a matter decreed.

19:22 - So she conceived him and withdrew with him to a place far off.

19:23 - And the pangs of childbirth drove her to the trunk of a date palm. She said, "Would that I had died before this and were a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!"

19:24 - So he called out to her from below her, "Grieve not! Thy Lord has placed a rivulet beneath thee.

19:25 - And shake toward thyself the trunk of the date palm; fresh, ripe dates shall fall upon thee.

19:26 - So eat and drink and cool thine eye. And if you seest any human being, say, 'Verily I have vowed a fast unto the Compassionate, so I shall not speak this day to any man.'"

19:17 - فَأَتَّخَذَتْ مِنْ دُونِهِمْ حِجَابًا فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا فَتَمَثَّلَ لَهَا بَشَرًا سَوِيًّا

19:18 - قَالَتْ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِالرَّحْمَنِ مِنْكَ إِنْ كُنْتَ تَقِيًّا

19:19 - قَالَ إِنَّمَا أَنَا رَسُولُ رَبِّكِ لِأَهَبَ لَكِ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا

19:20 - قَالَتْ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لِي غُلَامٌ وَلَمْ يَمْسَسْنِي بَشَرٌ وَلَمْ أَكُ بَغِيًّا

19:21 -قَالَ كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ هُوَ عَلَيَّ هَيِّنٌ وَلِنَجْعَلَهُ آيَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَرَحْمَةً مِنَّا ۗ وَكَانَ أَمْرًا مَّفْضِيًّا

19:22 -فَحَمَلَتْهُ فَانْتَبَذَتْ بِهِ مَكَانًا قَصِيًّا

19:23 -فَأَجَاءَهَا الْمَخَاضُ إِلَىٰ جِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ قَالَتْ يَا لَيْتَنِي مِتُّ قَبْلَ هَذَا وَكُنْتُ نَسِيًّا مَّسِيًّا

19:24 -فَنَادَاهَا مِن تَحْتِهَا أَلَا تَحْزَنِي قَدْ جَعَلَ رَبُّكِ تَحْتَكِ سَرِيًّا

19:25 -وَهُزِّي إِلَيْكِ بِجِذْعِ النَّخْلَةِ تُسَاقِطُ عَلَيْكَ رُطْبًا غَنِيًّا

19:64 - “We descend not, save by the Command of thy Lord. Unto Him belongs that which is before us and that which is behind us, and whatsoever lies between that, and thy Lord is not forgetful —

19:65 - the Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them. So worship Him and be steadfast in His worship. Dost thou know any who can be named alongside Him?”

19:64 -وَمَا نَنْزِلُ إِلَّا بِأَمْرِ رَبِّكَ ۗ لَهُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِينَا وَمَا خَلْفَنَا وَمَا بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ ۗ وَمَا كَانَ رَبُّكَ نَسِيًّا

19:65 -رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فَاعْبُدْهُ وَاصْطَبِرْ لِعِبَادَتِهِ ۗ هَلْ تَعْلَمُ لَهُ سَمِيًّا

20:116 - And when we said unto the angels, “Prostrate yourselves before Adam,” they prostrated, save Iblīs; he refused.

20:116 -وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ اسْجُدُوا لِآدَمَ فَسَجَدُوا إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ أَبَىٰ

21:26 - And they say, “The compassionate has taken a child.” Glory be to him! Nay, but they are honored servants.

21:27 - They precede Him not in speech, and they act according to His Command.

21:28 - He knows that which is before them and that which is behind them, and they intercede not, save for one with whom He is content. They are wary, for fear of Him.

21:29 - And whosoever among them would say, "Truly I am a god apart from Him," such will We requite with Hell. Thus do we requite the wrongdoers.

21:26 - وَقَالُوا اتَّخَذَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَلَدًا ۗ سُبْحَانَهُ ۗ بَلْ عِبَادٌ مُّكْرَمُونَ

21:27 - لَا يَسْتَفِئُونَ بِالْقَوْلِ ۖ وَهُمْ بِأَمْرِهِ يَعْمَلُونَ

21:28 - يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُشَفَعُونَ إِلَّا لِمَنْ أَرَادَ أَنْ يُنصَبَ ۚ وَهُم مِّنْ حَشِيَّتِهِ مُشْفِقُونَ

21:29 - وَمَنْ يُقُلْ مِنْهُمْ إِنِّي إِلَهٌ مِّنْ دُونِهِ فَذَلِك نَجْزِيهِ جَهَنَّمَ ۚ كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي الظَّالِمِينَ

21:103 - The greatest terror will not grieve them, and the angels will receive them.

"This is your Day, which you were promised."

21:103 - لَا يَحْزَنُهُمُ الْفَرَعُ الْأَكْبَرُ وَتَتَلَقَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ هَذَا يَوْمُكُمْ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

22:75 - God chooses messengers from among the angels and from among mankind.

Truly God is Hearing, seeing.

22:75 - اللَّهُ يَصْطَفِي مِنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا وَمِنَ النَّاسِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ بَصِيرٌ

23:24 - But the notables who disbelieved among his people said, "This is only a human being like ourselves, desiring to set himself above you. And had God willed, He would have sent down angels. We heard not of this from our fathers of old.

23:25 He is but a man possessed. So wait concerning him, for a time."

فَقَالَ الْمَلَأُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ قَوْمِهِ مَا هَذَا إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُكُمْ يُرِيدُ أَنْ يَتَفَضَّلَ عَلَيْكُمْ وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً مَا سَمِعْنَا بِهَذَا

23:24 - فِي آبَائِنَا الْأُولِينَ

23:25 - إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا رَجُلٌ بِهِ جِنَّةٌ فَنَرَبَّصُوا بِهِ حَتَّىٰ حِينٍ

25:7 - And they say, “What ails this Messenger, who eats food and walks in the markets? Why is there not an angel sent down unto him to be a warner with him,

25:8 - or no treasure cast unto him, or no garden for him from which to eat?” And the wrongdoers say, “You follow naught but a man bewitched.”

25:7 - وَقَالُوا مَا لِي هَذَا الرَّسُولِ يَأْكُلُ الطَّعَامَ وَيَمْشِي فِي الْأَسْوَاقِ لَوْلَا أَنْزَلَ إِلَيْهِ مَلَكٌ فَيَكُونُ مَعَهُ نَذِيرًا

25:8 - أَوْ يُنْفِقَ إِلَيْهِ كَنْزٌ أَوْ تَكُونُ لَهُ جَنَّةٌ يَأْكُلُ مِنْهَا وَقَالَ الظَّالِمُونَ إِنْ تَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا رَجُلًا مَسْحُورًا

25:21 - And those who hope not to meet Us say, “Why have not the angels been sent down unto us, or why have we not seen our Lord?” Indeed, they have waxed arrogant in their souls and were greatly insolent.

25:22 - On the Day they see the angels, there shall be no glad tidings for the guilty that Day. An they will say, “A barrier, forbidden!”

- وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ لَا يَرْجُونَ لِقَاءَنَا لَوْلَا أُنزِلَ عَلَيْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ نَرَىٰ رَبَّنَا لَقَدِ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فِي أَنفُسِهِمْ وَعَتَوْا عُتُوًا كَبِيرًا

25:21

25:22 - يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ لَا بُشْرَىٰ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُجْرِمِينَ وَيُقُولُونَ جِزًا مَّحْجُورًا

25:25 - And the Day when the heavens are split open with clouds and the angels are sent down in a descent,

25:26 - that Day the true sovereignty will belong to the Compassionate, and that will be a difficult Day for the disbelievers.

25:25 - وَيَوْمَ تَسْفُقُ السَّمَاءُ بِالْغَمَامِ وَنُزِّلَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ تَنْزِيلًا

25:26 - الْمَلَكُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ لِلرَّحْمَنِ وَكَانَ يَوْمًا عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ عَسِيرًا

26:192 - And truly it is a revelation of the Lord of the worlds,

26:193 - brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit,

26:194 - upon thine heart - that thou mayest be among the warners -

26:195 - in a clear, Arabic tongue.

26:192 - وَإِنَّهُ لَتَنْزِيلُ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

26:193 - نَزَّلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ

26:194 - عَلَى قَلْبِكَ لِتَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُنذِرِينَ

26:195 - بِلِسَانٍ عَرَبِيٍّ مُبِينٍ

29:31 - And when Our envoys came unto Abraham with glad tidings, they said, “We shall surely destroy the people of this town; truly it people are wrongdoers.”

29:32 - He said, “Verily, Lot is in it.” They said, “We know better who is in it.

Assuredly We shall save him and his family, save for his wife; she is among those who lagged behind.”

29:33 - And when Our envoys came unto Lot, he was distressed on their account; yet he was constrained from helping them. And they said, “Be not afraid, nor grieve. We shall surely save thee and thy family, save for thy wife; she is among those who lagged behind.

29:34 - Truly we shall bring upon the people of this town a torment from Heaven for having been iniquitous.”

29:31 - وَلَمَّا جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بِالْبُشْرَى قَالُوا إِنَّا مُهْلِكُوا أَهْلَ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ بِإِذْنِ أَهْلِهَا كَانُوا ظَالِمِينَ

29:32- قَالَ إِنَّ فِيهَا لُوطًا ۖ قَالُوا نَحْنُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ فِيهَا لَنُنَجِّيَنَّهُ وَأَهْلَهُ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَهُ كَانَتْ مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ
وَلَمَّا أَنْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُنَا لُوطًا سِيءَ بِهِمْ وَضَاقَ بِهِمْ ذَرْعًا وَقَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ وَلَا تَحْزَنْ إِنَّا مُنْجُونَكَ وَأَهْلَكَ إِلَّا امْرَأَتَكَ كَانَتْ

29:33- مِنَ الْغَابِرِينَ

29:34- إِنَّا مُنْزِلُونَ عَلَىٰ أَهْلِ هَذِهِ الْقَرْيَةِ رِجْزًا مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْسُقُونَ

32:11 - Say, “The Angel of death, who has been entrusted with you, will take you; then unto your Lord shall you be returned.”

32:11- قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ

33:9 - O you who believe! Remember the Blessing of God upon you when the hosts came upon you and We sent against them a wind and hosts that you saw not - and God sees whatsoever you do -

33:10 - when they came upon you from above you and below you, and when eyes swerved and hearts reached into throats, and you thought many things regarding God.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ جَاءَتْكُمْ جُنُودٌ فَأَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا وَجُنُودًا لَّمْ تَرَوْهَا ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ بِمَا

33:9- تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرًا

33:10- إِذْ جَاءَكُمْ مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ وَمِنْ أَسْفَلَ مِنْكُمْ وَإِذْ زَاغَتِ الْأَبْصَارُ وَبَلَغَتِ الْقُلُوبُ الْحَنَاجِرَ وَتَظُنُّونَ بِاللَّهِ الظُّنُونَا

33:43 - He it is Who blesses you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out of darkness into light. And He is Merciful unto the believers.

33:43- هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّيٰ عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۗ وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا

33:56 - Truly God and His angels invoke blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him, and greetings of peace!

33:56 - إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

34:40 - Upon the Day when He will gather them all together, then He shall say unto the angels, “Were these the ones worshipping you?”

34:41 - They will reply, “Glory be to Thee! Thou art our Protector, apart from them!” Nay, they worshipped jinn, most of them believing in them.

34:40 - وَيَوْمَ يَحْشُرُهُمْ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يَقُولُ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ أَهَؤُلَاءِ إِبْرَائِيمَ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ

34:41 - قَالُوا سُبْحَانَكَ أَنْتَ وَلِيِّنَا مِنْ دُونِهِمْ بَلْ كَانُوا يَعْبُدُونَ الْجِنَّ أَكْثَرُهُمْ بِهِمْ مُؤْمِنُونَ

35:1 - Praise be to God, Originator of the heavens and the earth, Who appoints the angels as messengers, of wings two, three, and four, increasing creation as He will.

Truly God is Powerful over all things.

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ ؕ

35:1 - إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

36:28 - And after him We did not send down a host from Heaven against his people; nor would We send down.

36:28 - وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ جُنْدٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا كُنَّا مُنْزِلِينَ

37:1 - By those ranged in ranks,

37:2 - and the drivers driving,

37:3 - and the reciters of a reminder,

37:4 - truly your God is One,

37:5 - Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatsoever is between them, and Lord of the east.

37:6 - Truly we adorned the lowest heaven with an ornament, the stars,

37:7 - and a guard against every defiant satan.

37:8 - They listen not to the Highest Assembly, for they are repelled from every side -

37:9 - cast out, and theirs shall be a punishment everlasting-

37:10 - save one who snatches a fragment as a piercing flame pursues him.

37:1 - وَالصَّافَّاتِ صَفًّا

37:2 - فَالزَّاجِرَاتِ زَجْرًا

37:3 - فَالتَّالِيَاتِ ذِكْرًا

37:4 - إِنَّ إِلَهُكُمْ لَوَاحِدٌ

37:5 - رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَرَبُّ الْمَشَارِقِ

37:6 - إِنَّا زَيْنًا السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ

37:7 - وَحِفْظًا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَارِدٍ

37:8 - لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى وَيُقَذَّفُونَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ

37:9 - دُحُورًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَاصِبٌ

37:10 - إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ

37:150 - Or did We create the angels female, while they were witnesses?

37:150 - أَمْ خَلَقْنَا الْمَلَائِكَةَ إِنَاثًا وَهُمْ شَاهِدُونَ

37:164 - “There is none among us, but that he has a known station.

37:165 - And truly we are those who are ranged [in ranks].

37:166 - Truly we are those who glorify.”

37:164 - وَمَا مِنَّا إِلَّا لَهُ مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ

37:165 - وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الصَّافُونَ

37:166 - وَإِنَّا لَنَحْنُ الْمُسَبِّحُونَ

38:71 - [Remember] when thy Lord said unto the angels, “Behold! I am creating a human being from clay.

38:72 - When I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My Spirit, fall down before him prostrating.”

38:73 - Then the angels prostrated, all of them together.

38:74 - Not so Iblīs. He waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers.

38:71 - إِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلَائِكَةِ إِنِّي خَالِقٌ بَشَرًا مِّن طِينٍ

38:72 - فَإِذَا سَوَّيْتُهُ وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِن رُّوحِي فَقَعُوا لَهُ سَاجِدِينَ

38:73 - فَسَجَدَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ كُلُّهُمْ أَجْمَعُونَ

38:74 - إِلَّا إِبْلِيسَ اسْتَكْبَرَ وَكَانَ مِنَ الْكَافِرِينَ

39:71 - And those who disbelieve will be driven unto Hell in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, “Did not messengers from among you come to you, reciting unto you the signs of your Lord and warning you of the meeting with this your Day?” They will say, “Yea, indeed!” But the Word of punishment has come due for the disbelievers.

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِلَىٰ جَهَنَّمَ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا فَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا أَلَمْ يَأْتِكُمْ رُسُلٌ مِّنكُمْ يَتْلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ

39:71 - آيَاتِ رَبِّكُمْ وَيُنذِرُونَكُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَكِنْ حَقَّتْ كَلِمَةُ الْعَذَابِ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ

39:73 - And those who reverence their Lord will be driven to the Garden in throngs, till when they reach it, its gates will be opened and its keepers will say unto them, “Peace be upon you; you have done well; so enter it, to abide [therein].”

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا
39:73 - خَالِدِينَ

39:75 - And thou shalt see the angels encircling all around the Throne, hymning the praise of their Lord. Judgment shall be made between them in truth, and it will be said, “Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds.”

وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ وَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ
39:75

40:7 - Those who bear the Throne and those who dwell nigh unto it hymn the praise of their Lord and believe in Him and seek forgiveness for those who believe: “Our Lord, Thou dost encompass all things in Mercy and Knowledge. Forgive those who repent and follow Thy way, and shield them from the punishment of Hellfire.

40:8 - Our Lord, make them enter the Gardens of Eden that Thou hast promised them and those among their fathers, their spouses, and their progeny who were righteous. Truly Thou art the Mighty, the Wise.

40:9 - And protect them from evils deeds. Whomsoever Thou shielded from evil deeds on that Day, upon him hast Thou had mercy. And that indeed is the great triumph.”

الَّذِينَ يَحْمِلُونَ الْعَرْشَ وَمَنْ حَوْلَهُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيُؤْمِنُونَ بِهِ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا رَبَّنَا وَسِعْتَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ
40:7 - رَحْمَةً وَعِلْمًا فَاغْفِرْ لِلَّذِينَ تَابُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا سَبِيلَكَ وَقِهِمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

40:8 - رَبَّنَا وَأَدْخِلْهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدْتَهُمْ وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ وَذُرِّيَّاتِهِمْ ۗ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

40:9 - وَقَهُمُ السَّيِّئَاتِ ۖ وَمَنْ تَوَى السَّيِّئَاتِ يَوْمَئِذٍ فَقَدْ رَحِمْتَهُ ۗ وَذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

40:49 - And those who are in the Fire will say to the keepers of Hell, “Call upon your Lord to relieve us from the punishment for a day.”

40:50 - They will reply, “Did not your messengers bring you clear proofs?” They will say, “Yea, indeed.” They will say, “Then make supplications!” but the supplication of the disbelievers is naught but astray.

40:49 - وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ فِي النَّارِ لِخَزَنَةِ جَهَنَّمَ ادْعُوا رَبَّكُمْ يُخَفِّفْ عَنَّا يَوْمًا مِّنَ الْعَذَابِ

40:50 - قَالُوا أَوَلَمْ تَكُ تَأْتِيكُمُ رُسُلُكُمْ بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ ۚ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ ۗ قَالُوا فادْعُوا ۗ وَمَا دُعَاءُ الْكَافِرِينَ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ

41:12 - Then He decreed that they be seven heavens in two days and revealed to each heaven its command. And We adorned the lowest heaven with lamps and a guard. That is the Decree of the Mighty, the Knowing.

41:13 - So if they turn away, then say, “I warned you of a thunderbolt, like the thunderbolt of ‘Ād and Thamūd:

41:14 - when messengers came unto them from before them and behind them, [saying], ‘Worship none but God,’ they said, ‘Had our Lord willed, He would have sent down angels; so truly we disbelieve in that wherewith you have been sent.’”

فَقَضَاهُنَّ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ فِي يَوْمَيْنِ وَأَوْحَىٰ فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا ۗ وَزَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ وَحِفْظًا ۗ ذَٰلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ

41:12 - الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ

41:13 - فَإِنِ اعْرَضُوا فُؤُلٌ أَنْذَرْتُكُمْ صَاعِقَةً مِّثْلَ صَاعِقَةِ عَادٍ وَثَمُودَ

إِذْ جَاءَتْهُمْ الرُّسُلُ مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا تَعْبُدُوا إِلَّا اللَّهَ ۗ قَالُوا لَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّنَا لَأَنْزَلَ مَلَائِكَةً فَإِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ

41:14 - كَافِرُونَ

41:30 - Truly those who say, “Our Lord is God”, then stand firm, the angels will descend upon them, [saying], “Fear not, nor grieve, and rejoice in the Garden that you have been promised.

41:31 - We are your protectors in the life of this world and in the Hereafter; therein you shall have whatsoever your souls desire, and therein you shall have whatsoever you call for:

41:32 - a welcome from One Forgiving, Merciful.”

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

41:30

41:31 نَحْنُ أَوْلِيَاؤُكُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ ۖ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَشْتَهِي أَنْفُسُكُمْ وَلَكُمْ فِيهَا مَا تَدْعُونَ

41:32 -نُزُلًا مِّنْ غَفُورٍ رَّحِيمٍ

41:38 - And if they wax arrogant, then those who are with thy Lord glorify Him night and day, and they never weary.

41:38 -فَإِنْ اسْتَكْبَرُوا فَالَّذِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ يُسَبِّحُونَ لَهُ بِاللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْأَمُونَ

42:5 - The heavens are well-nigh rent asunder from above, while the angels hymn the praise of their Lord and seek forgiveness for those on earth. Yea! Truly God is the Forgiving, the Merciful.

تَكَادُ السَّمَاوَاتُ يَنْفَطَّرْنَ مِنْ فَوْقِهِنَّ ۗ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَيَسْتَغْفِرُونَ لِمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَفُورُ

42:5 -الرَّحِيمُ

43:19 - And they have made angels, who are servants of the Compassionate, females. Did they witness their creation? Their witnessing shall be recorded, and they will be questioned.

43:19 - وَجَعَلُوا الْمَلَائِكَةَ الَّذِينَ هُمْ عِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ إِنَّا تَأْتُوا بِخَلْقِهِمْ سَتُنَكِّتُ شَهَادَتُهُمْ وَيُسْأَلُونَ

43:51 - And Pharaoh called out among his people, saying, “O my people! Is not the sovereignty of Egypt mine, and do these streams not flow beneath me? Do you not, then, see?

43:52 - And I not better than this one who is vile and can scarcely speak plain?

43:53 - Why, then, have armlets of gold not been cast upon him, and why do angels not accompany him?”

43:51 - وَنَادَى فِرْعَوْنُ فِي قَوْمِهِ قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ أَلَيْسَ لِي مُلْكُ مِصْرَ وَهَذِهِ الْأَنْهَارُ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِي أَفَلَا تُبْصِرُونَ

43:52 - أَمْ أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِّنْ هَذَا الَّذِي هُوَ مَهِينٌ وَلَا يَكَادُ يُبِينُ

43:53 - قُلُوا لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ اسْمُ الرَّحْمَنِ الْكَرِيمِ أَمْ جَاءَ مَعَهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مُقْتَرِنِينَ

43:60 - Had We willed, We would have appointed angels among you, succeeding one another upon the earth.

43:60 - وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ مَلَائِكَةً فِي الْأَرْضِ يَخْلُقُونَ

43:74 - Truly the guilty shall abide in the punishment of Hell.

43:75 - It will not be lightened for them, and therein will they despair.

43:76 - We did not wrong them; rather, it is they who were the wrongdoers.

43:77 - And they will call, “O Mâlik, let thy Lord put an end to us.” He will reply, “You will surely remain.

43:78 - We did indeed bring you the truth, but most of you were averse to the truth.”

43:79 - Or have they devised anything? Truly it is We Who devise.

43:80 - Or do they suppose that We hear not their secret and their secret converse? Yea, and Our envoys are present with them, recording.

43:74 - إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي عَذَابٍ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدُونَ

43:75 - لَا يُفْتَرُ عَنْهُمْ وَهُمْ فِيهِ مُنْسَوْنَ

43:76 - وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَكِنْ كَانُوا هُمُ الظَّالِمِينَ

43:77 - وَنَادَوْا يَا مَالِكُ لِيَقْضِ عَلَيْنَا رَبُّكَ قَالَ إِنَّكُمْ مَا كُنْتُمْ

43:78 - لَقَدْ جِئْنَاكُمْ بِالْحَقِّ وَلَكِنْ أَكْثَرَكُمْ لِلْحَقِّ كَارِهُونَ

43:79 - أَمْ أَبْرَمُوا أَمْرًا فَإِنَّا مُبْرِمُونَ

43:80 - أَمْ يَحْسِبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلْنَا لَدَيْهِمْ يَكْتُبُونَ

47:27 - Then how will it be when the angels seize them, striking their faces and their backs?

47:27 - فَكَيْفَ إِذَا تَوَفَّيْنَاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ

48:7 - And to God belong the hosts of the heavens and the earth, and God is Mighty, Wise.

48:7 - وَلِلَّهِ جُنُودُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ عَزِيزًا حَكِيمًا

50:17 - When the two receivers receive, seated on the right and on the left,

50:18 - no word does he utter without a ready watcher beside him.

50:17 -إِذْ يَتَلَقَى الْمُتَلَقِيَانِ عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ قَعِيدٌ

50:18 -مَا يَلْفُظُ مِنْ قَوْلٍ إِلَّا لَدَيْهِ رَقِيبٌ عَتِيدٌ

50:21 - Then every souls comes, with it a driver and a witness:

50:22 - “You were indeed heedless of this. Now We have removed from you your cover; so today your sight is piercing.”

50:23 - And his companion says, “This is what I have ready.”

50:24 - “Cast you both into Hell every stubborn disbeliever,

50:25 - every hinderer of good, every transgressor, every doubter

50:26 - who has set up another god along with God. Cast him into the severe punishment.”

50:27 - His companion will say, “Our Lord, I did not make him rebel; rather, he was far astray.”

50:21 -وَجَاءَتْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَعَهَا سَائِقٌ وَشَهِيدٌ

50:22 -لَقَدْ كُنْتُمْ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هَذَا فَكَتَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

50:23 -وَقَالَ قَرِينُهُ هَذَا مَا لَدَيَّ عَتِيدٌ

50:24 -الْأَقْبَا فِي جَهَنَّمَ كُلَّ كَفَّارٍ عَنِيدٍ

50:25 -مِّنَّاعٍ لِّلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ مُّرِيبٍ

50:26 -الَّذِي جَعَلَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ فَأَلْقَيْنَاهُ فِي الْعَذَابِ الشَّدِيدِ

50:27 -قَالَ قَرِينُهُ رَبَّنَا مَا أَطْعَمْتُهُ وَلَكِنْ كَانَ فِي ضَلَالٍ بَعِيدٍ

51:1 - By the scatterers as they scatter,

51:2 - and by those that bear a burden,

51:3 - by those that course with ease,

51:4 - and by those that apportion the Command,

51:1 - وَالذَّارِيَاتِ ذُرُوءًا

51:2 - فَأَلْحَامَاتِ وَفُرَا

51:3 - فَأَلْجَارِيَاتِ يُسْرًا

51:4 - فَأَلْمُقْسِمَاتِ أَمْرًا

51:24 - Hast thou heard tell of Abraham's honored guests,

51:25 - when they entered upon him and said, "Peace!" he said, "Peace - an unfamiliar folk."

51:26 - Then he went quietly to his family and came with a fattened calf.

51:27 - He placed it close to them, saying, "Will you not eat?"

51:28 - Then he conceived a fear of them. They said, "Fear not!" and gave him glad tidings of a knowing son.

51:29 - Then his wife came forward with a loud cry; she struck her face and said, "A barren old woman!"

51:30 - They said, "Thus has thy Lord decreed. Truly He is the Wise, the Knowing."

51:31 - He said, "What is your errand, O messengers?"

51:32 - They said, "We have been sent unto a guilty people,

51:33 - to send upon them stones of clay

51:34 - marked by thy Lord for the prodigal."

51:24 - هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ ضَيْفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ

51:25 - إِذْ دَخَلُوا عَلَيْهِ فَقَالُوا سَلَامًا قَالَ سَلَامٌ قَوْمٌ مُنْكَرُونَ

51:26 - فَرَاعَ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ فَجَاءَ بِعِجَلٍ سَمِينٍ

51:27 - فَقَرَّبَهُ إِلَيْهِمْ قَالَ أَلَا تَأْكُلُونَ

51:28 - فَأَوْجَسَ مِنْهُمْ خِيفَةً ^ط قَالُوا لَا تَخَفْ ^ط وَبَشَّرُوهُ بِغُلَامٍ عَلِيمٍ

51:29 - فَأَقْبَلَتْ امْرَأَتُهُ فِي صَرَّةٍ فَصَكَّتْ وَجْهَهَا وَقَالَتْ عَجُوزٌ عَقِيمٌ

51:30 - قَالُوا كَذَلِكَ قَالَ رَبُّكَ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْعَلِيمُ

51:31 - قَالَ فَمَا خَطْبُكُمْ أَيُّهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ

51:32 - قَالُوا إِنَّا أُرْسِلْنَا إِلَى قَوْمٍ مُجْرِمِينَ

51:33 - لِنُرْسِلَ عَلَيْهِمْ حِجَارَةً مِّن طِينٍ

51:34 - مُسَوَّمَةً عِنْدَ رَبِّكَ لِلْمُسْرِفِينَ

53:4 - It is naught but a revelation revealed,

53:5 - taught him by one of awesome power.

53:6 - Possessed of vigor, he stood upright

53:7 - when he was upon the highest horizon.

53:8 - Then he drew nigh and came close,

53:9 - till he was within two bows' length or nearer.

53:10 - Then He revealed to His servant what He revealed.

53:11 - The heart lied not in what it saw.

53:12 - Do you then dispute with him as to what he saw?

53:13 - And indeed he saw him another time,

53:14 - at the lote tree of the boundary,

53:15 - by which lies the Garden of the refuge,

53:16 - when there covered the lote tree that which covered.

53:17 - The gaze swerve not; nor did it transgress.

53:18 - Indeed, he saw the greatest of the signs of his Lord.

53:4 - إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ

53:5 -عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى

53:6 -ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَى

53:7 -وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَى

53:8 -ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّى

53:9 -فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَى

53:10 -فَأَوْحَى إِلَى عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَى

53:11 -مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَى

53:12 -أَفَتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَى

53:13 -وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَى

53:14 -عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَى

53:15 -عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَى

53:16 -إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَى

53:17 -مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَى

53:18 -لَقَدْ رَأَى مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَى

53:26 - And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession avails naught, save after God grants leave unto whomsoever He will and unto the one with whom He is content?

53:27 - Truly those who believe not in the Hereafter name the angels with female names.

53:26 -وَكَمْ مِّن مَّلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَرْضَى

53:27 -إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ لَيُسَمُّونَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ تَسْمِيَةً الْأُنثَى

66:4 - If you both repent unto God... For your hearts did certainly incline, and if you aid one another against him, then truly God, He is his Protector, as are Gabriel and the righteous among the believers; and the angels support him withal.

إِن تَتُوبَا إِلَى اللَّهِ فَقَدْ صَغَتْ قُلُوبُكُمَا وَإِن تَظَاهَرَا عَلَيْهِ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ مَوْلَاهُ وَجِبْرِيلُ وَصَالِحُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ ظَهِيرٌ 66:4

66:6 - O you who believe! Shield yourselves and your families from a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, over which are angels, stern and severe, who do not disobey God in what He commands of them and who do what they are commanded.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا وَقُودُهَا النَّاسُ وَالْحِجَارَةُ عَلَيْهَا مَلَائِكَةٌ غِلَاظٌ شِدَادٌ لَا يَعْصُونَ اللَّهَ مَا أَمَرَهُمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا يُؤْمَرُونَ 66:6

68:1 - *Nūn*. By the pen and that which they inscribe,

68:2 - though are not, by the blessing of thy Lord, possessed.

68:1 - ن وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ

68:2 - مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ

69:17 - And the angels shall be at its sides; that Day eight shall carry the Throne of thy Lord above them.

69:17 - وَالْمَلَكُ عَلَى أَرْجَائِهَا وَيَحْمِلُ عَرْشَ رَبِّكَ فَوْقَهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ ثَمَانِيَةٌ

69:30 - Take him and shackle him.

69:31 - Then cast him in Hellfire.

69:32 - Then put him in a chain whose length is seventy cubits.

69:30 -حُدُوهُ فَعُلُوهُ

69:31 -ثُمَّ الْجَجِيمِ صُلُوهُ

69:32 -ثُمَّ فِي سِلْسِلَةٍ ذَرْعُهَا سَبْعُونَ ذِرَاعًا فَاسْلُكُوهُ

69:40 - truly this is the speech of a noble messenger,

69:41 - and not the speech of a poet. Little do you believe!

69:40 -إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ

69:41 -وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَاعِرٍ قَلِيلًا مَّا تُؤْمِنُونَ

70:4 - Unto Him ascend the angels and the Spirit on a day whose measure is fifty thousand years.

70:4 -تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ

72:8 - ‘We reached out to Heaven and found it filled with mighty sentries and flaming stars.

72:9 - We used to sit in places thereof to listen, but whosoever listens now finds a flaming star lying in wait for him.

72:8 -وَأَنَّا لَمَسْنَا السَّمَاءَ فَوَجَدْنَاهَا مَلْبِنَاتٍ حَرِسًا شَدِيدًا وَشُهُبًا

72:9 -وَأَنَّا كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْهَا مَقَاعِدَ لِلسَّمْعِ فَمَنْ يَسْمَعِ الْآنَ يَجِدْ لَهُ شِهَابًا رَصَدًا

72:25 - Say, “I know not whether that which you are promised is nigh or whether my Lord has appointed a term for it;

72:26 - Knower of the Unseen, He does not disclose His Unseen to anyone,

72:27 - save to the one whom He approves as a messenger. Then He dispatches before him and behind him a guard,

72:28 - that He may know that they have indeed conveyed the messages of their Lord.

And He encompasses whatsoever is with them and keeps a numbered count of all things.”

72:25 - قُلْ إِنْ أَدْرِي أَقْرَبُ مَا تُوعَدُونَ أَمْ يَجْعَلُ لَهُ رَبِّي أَمَدًا

72:26 - عَالِمُ الْغَيْبِ فَلَا يُظْهِرُ عَلَىٰ غَيْبِهِ أَحَدًا

72:27 - إِلَّا مَنْ ارْتَضَىٰ مِنْ رَسُولٍ فَإِنَّهُ يَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ رَصَدًا

72:28 - لِيَعْلَمَ أَنْ قَدْ أَبْلَغُوا رَسُولَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ وَأَحَاطَ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ وَأَحْصَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ عَدَدًا

74:31 - And We have appointed none but angels as wardens of the Fire; and We have not appointed their number save as a trial for those who disbelieve, to grant certainty to those who have been given the Book and increase in faith those who believe; and those who were given the Book and the believers will not doubt; and that those in whose hearts is a disease and the disbelievers will say, “What does God desire by this as a parable?” Thus does God lead astray whomsoever He will and guide whomsoever He will. And none knows the hosts of thy Lord but He. It is but a reminder unto mankind.

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً ۗ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِّلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَيَرْدَادَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِيمَانًا ۗ وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ ۗ وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِم مَّرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَٰذَا مَثَلًا ۗ كَذٰلِكَ يُصِِّلُ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي مَن يَشَاءُ ۗ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ ۗ وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِّلنَّاسِ

77:1 - By those sent forth in succession!

77:2 - By the storming tempests!

77:3 - By the spreaders spreading!

77:4 - By the discerners discerning!

77:5 - And by those who bring forth the Reminder,

77:6 - to excuse or to warn,

77:7 - surely what you are promised will befall.

77:1 - وَالْمُرْسَلَاتِ عُرْفًا

77:2 - فَالْعَاصِفَاتِ عَصْفًا

77:3 - وَالنَّاشِرَاتِ نَشْرًا

77:4 - فَالْفَارِقَاتِ فَرْقًا

77:5 - فَالْمُؤَيَّنَاتِ ذِكْرًا

77:6 - عُدْرًا أَوْ نُذْرًا

77:7 - إِنَّمَا تُوعَدُونَ لَوَاقِعٌ

78:38 - That Day the Spirit and the angels stand in rows, none speaking, save one whom the Compassionate permits and who speak aright.

78:38 - يَوْمَ يَعُودُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا ۗ لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أُذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا

79:1 - By those that wrest violently,

79:2 - by those that draw out quickly,

79:3 - by those that glide serenely,

79:4 - by those that race to the fore, outstripping,

79:5 - and by those that govern affairs!

79:1 - وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا

79:2 - وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا

79:3 - وَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْعًا

79:4 - فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْعًا

79:5 - فَأَلْمَدِيرَاتِ أَمْرًا

80:11 - Nay! Truly this is a reminder -

80:12 - so let whosoever will, remember it -

80:13 - on pages honored,

80:14 - exalted and purified,

80:15 - in the hands of scribes,

80:16 - noble and pious.

80:11 - كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذِكْرَةٌ

80:12 - فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ

80:13 - فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ

80:14 - مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ

80:15 - بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ

81:19 - Truly it is the speech of a noble messenger,

81:20 - possessed of strength, before the Possessor of the Throne, of high rank,

81:21 - obeyed, trustworthy withal.

81:19 - إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ

81:20 - ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ

81:21 - مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ

82:10 - And yet truly over you there are guardians,

82:11 - noble, writing,

82:12 - knowing what you do.

82:10 - وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ

82:11 - كِرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ

82:12 - يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ

83:18 - Nay, truly the book of the pious is in 'Illiyūn.

83:19 - And what will apprise thee of 'Illiyūn?

83:20 - A book inscribed,

83:21 - witnessed by those brought nigh.

83:18 - كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيِّينَ

83:19 - وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عِلِّيُّونَ

83:20 - كِتَابٌ مَّرْقُومٌ

83:21 - يَشْهَدُهُ الْمَقَرَّبُونَ

86:4 - Over every soul there is a guardian.

86:4 - إِنَّ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ

89:21 - Nay, but when the earth is ground up, grinding upon grinding,

89:22 - and your Lord comes with the angels, row upon row;

89:23 - and Hell is brought forth that Day - that Day man will remember; yet whence

will that remembrance avail him?

89:21 - كَلَّا إِذَا دُكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا

89:22 -وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا

89:23 -وَجِيءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى

96:18 - We shall call the guards of Hell.

96:18 -سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ

97:4 - The angels and the Spirit descend therein, by leave of their Lord, with every command.

97:4 -تَنَزَّلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ

APPENDIX 2

List of Verses Mentioned in Each *Tafsīr*.

First column: following the code in the list of verses of Chapter 1, first are listed the verses making clear mentions of angels (in **bold black**; and non-bold black for the accompanying verses completing their meaning), then the verses that usually suggest the presence of angels (in grey).

Other columns: the cases in grey with the symbol ✓ designate the commentaries that engage with angels as characters or at least mention them, as opposed to commentaries discussing other subjects than the angels, for the cases left in white with the symbol ✓.

The cases left in blank are verses which received no commentaries (or which commentary has been lost to us). The interrogation mark indicates unclear commentaries.

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
First Group						
2:30	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2:31		✓	✓	✓		✓
2:32		✓	✓	✓		✓
2:33			✓	✓		✓
2:34			✓	✓	✓	✓
2:97			✓	✓		

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
2:98			✓	✓		
2:102	✓		✓	✓		
2:161	✓		✓			
2:177	✓	✓	✓		✓	
2:210		✓	✓			✓
2:248			✓			
2:285		✓	✓			✓
3:18	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3:39		✓	✓	✓		✓
3:42			✓	✓		✓
3:45			✓	✓	✓	✓
3:80		✓	✓	✓		✓
3:87			✓	✓		✓
3:124			✓	✓		
3:125			✓	✓		
4:97		✓	✓			
4:136		✓	✓	✓		
4:166			✓	✓	✓	
4:172		✓	✓			✓
6:8			✓	✓		✓
6:9		✓	✓	✓		✓
6:50		✓	✓			✓
6:93		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6:111			✓			
6:158			✓	✓		
7:11		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7:20	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
8:9		✓	✓	✓		✓

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
8:12			✓	✓		
8:50			✓	✓	✓	
11:12			✓			
11:31			✓			
12:31			✓	✓		✓
13:13	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
13:23		✓	✓			✓
15:6			?	✓		?
15:7			✓	✓	✓	
15:8			✓	✓	✓	
15:28		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15:29		✓	✓	✓		✓
15:30		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
15:31		✓	✓	✓		✓
16:2		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16:28			✓	✓		
16:32		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16:33			✓	✓	✓	✓
16:49			✓	✓	✓	
17:40			✓	✓	✓	
17:61		✓	✓	✓	✓	
17:92			✓			✓
17:93 ?			?	?		✓
17:94 ?			?	?		✓
17:95			✓	✓		✓
18:50		✓	✓			
20:116			✓			
21:103		✓	✓	✓		✓

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
22:75			✓	✓	✓	✓
23:24						
25:7		✓	✓			✓
25:8			✓	?		?
25:21			✓	✓		
25:22			✓	✓		
25:25			✓	✓	✓	
32:11			✓	✓		✓
33:43		✓	✓	✓		✓
33:56		✓	✓	✓		✓
34:40			✓	✓		
34:41				✓		
35:1		✓	✓	✓		✓
37:150			✓			
38:71		✓	✓	✓		✓
38:72		✓	✓	✓		✓
38:73		✓	✓	✓		✓
38:74			✓	?		✓
39:75			✓	✓	✓	✓
41:14						✓
41:30	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
41:31		✓	✓	?	✓	✓
41:32		✓	✓	?		✓
42:5			✓	✓	✓	✓
43:19				✓	✓	
43:53				✓		
43:60			✓	✓	✓	
47:27					✓	

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
53:26			✓	✓		
53:27			✓	✓		
66:4			✓			
66:6	✓	✓	✓			
69:17	✓			✓	✓	
70:4	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
74:31		✓	✓	✓		
78:38		✓	✓	✓		✓
89:22		✓	✓	✓	✓	
97:4	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Second Group						
6:61			✓	✓		✓
9:26			?	?		✓
11:69		✓	✓	?		✓
11:70		✓	✓	?		✓
11:71			?	?		?
11:72			?	?		?
11:73		✓	?	?		?
11:77			✓	?		?
11:81		✓	✓	?		✓
13:11	✓	✓	✓	?		✓
15:51			✓	✓		
15:52			✓	✓		
15:53			✓	✓		
15:54		✓	✓	✓		✓
15:55			✓	✓		✓
15:56			✓	✓		✓
15:57			✓	✓		✓

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
15:58			✓	✓		✓
15:59			✓	✓		✓
15:60			✓	✓		✓
15:61			✓	✓		✓
15:62			✓	✓		✓
15:63			✓	✓		✓
15:64			✓	✓		✓
15:65				✓		✓
19:17		✓	✓	✓		✓
19:18			✓	✓		✓
19:19			✓	✓		✓
19:20			✓	✓		✓
19:21		✓	✓	✓		
19:22			✓	✓		
19:23		✓	✓	✓		
19:24			✓	✓		
19:25		✓	✓	✓		
19:26	✓	✓	✓	✓		
19:64			✓	?		?
19:65		✓	✓	?		?
21:26 ?			?	?		?
21:27 ?		✓	?	?	✓	?
21:28 ?		✓	?	?	✓	?
21:29 ?			?	?		?
26:192			✓			✓
26:193		✓	✓			✓
26:194			?			✓
26:195			?			✓

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
29:31			?	?		
29:32			?	?		
29:33			?	?		
29:34			?	?		
33:9			✓	✓		
33:10			✓	✓		
36:28			✓			
37:1			✓	✓		✓
37:2			✓	✓		✓
37:3			✓	✓		✓
37:4		✓	✓	✓		✓
37:5			✓	✓		✓
37:6		✓	✓	✓		✓
37:7			✓	✓		✓
37:8			✓	✓		✓
37:9			✓	✓		✓
37:10			✓	✓		✓
37:164		✓	✓	✓		✓
37:165		✓		✓	✓	✓
37:166		✓		✓		✓
39:71		✓	✓	✓		
39:73		✓	✓	✓		✓
40:7	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
40:8		✓	✓			✓
40:9			✓			✓
40:49			✓	?		
40:50			✓	?		
41:12		✓	✓	✓		✓

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
41:38			?	?		✓
43:74			✓			✓
43:75			✓			✓
43:76			✓			✓
43:77			✓			✓
43:78			✓			✓
43:79			✓			✓
43:80		✓	✓			✓
48:7			?	?		✓
50:17			✓	✓		
50:18	✓	✓		✓		
50:21	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
50:22	✓	✓	✓	✓		
50:23			✓	?		
50:24			✓	?		
50:25			✓	?		
50:26			✓	?		
50:27			?	?	?	
51:1		✓	✓	✓		✓
51:2			✓	✓		✓
51:3			✓	✓		✓
51:4			✓	✓		✓
51:24	✓	✓	✓			
51:25						
51:26		✓	✓			
51:27						
51:28						
51:29		✓				

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
51:30						
51:31						
51:32						
51:33						
51:34						
53:4		✓	✓	✓		✓
53:5			✓	✓		✓
53:6			✓	✓		✓
53:7			✓	✓		✓
53:8		✓	✓	✓		✓
53:9		✓	✓	✓		✓
53:10		✓	✓	✓		✓
53:11		✓	✓	✓		✓
53:12		✓	✓	✓		✓
53:13			✓	✓		✓
53:14		✓	✓	✓		✓
53:15			✓	✓		✓
53:16			✓	✓		✓
53:17			✓	✓		✓
53:18		✓	✓	✓		✓
68:1		✓	✓	?		?
68:2			?	?		?
69:30	✓		✓	?		?
69:31			✓	?		?
69:32	✓		✓	?		?
69:40			✓	?		?
72:8			✓	✓		
72:9			✓	✓		

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
72:25				✓		✓
72:26		✓		✓		✓
72:27				✓		✓
72:28		✓		✓		✓
77:1	✓		✓	✓		✓
77:2			✓	✓		✓
77:3	✓		✓	✓		✓
77:4	✓		✓	✓		✓
77:5	✓		✓	✓		✓
77:6	✓		✓	✓		✓
77:7	✓		✓	✓		✓
79:1			✓	✓		✓
79:2			✓	✓		✓
79:3			✓	✓		✓
79:4	✓		✓	✓		✓
79:5			✓	✓		✓
80:11		✓	✓	✓		✓
80:12			✓	✓		✓
80:13			✓	✓		✓
80:14			✓	✓		✓
80:15			✓	✓		✓
80:16			✓	✓		✓
81:19		✓	✓	✓		
81:20			✓	✓		
81:21			✓	✓		
82:10			✓	✓		
82:11		✓	✓	✓		
82:12			✓	✓		

Quranic Verses	T. al-Tustarī	T. al-Sulamī	T. al-Qushayrī	T. Ibn Barrajān 1	T. Ibn Barrajān 2	T. R. Baqlī
83:18	✓		✓	✓		?
83:19			✓	✓		✓
83:20			✓	✓		✓
83:21			✓	✓		✓
86:4	✓		✓	✓		
96:18	✓		✓	✓		

APPENDIX 3

3.1. The three angelic and spiritual typologies of Ibn ‘Arabī, with a comparison to that of al-Qūnawī, al-Farghānī, and a reference to pseudo-Dionysus the Areopagyte:

Underlined are the categories of angels that I call “ambivalent,” which can be considered as including human spirits, or involving the human essence in a way or another.

Typology n°1	Typology n°2	Typology n°3	Typology of al-Qūnawī	Typology of al-Farghānī
Enraptured Angels	Spirits fully dedicated to God	Enraptured Angels	Cherubim (Enraptured ones; Inhabitants of the Invicibility such as Gabriel and Holy Spirit)	Angels with no locus of manifestation (Enraptured Angels).
Elemental Angels	<u>Spirits given the governance of a natural body</u> (↓) ¹	Dedicated Angels	Governing Angels (those of heavenly spheres and those of earthly things).	<u>Angels attached to one locus of manifestation (Governing angels, and human spirits)</u>
<u>Angels created of actions and breaths of the servants</u>	Spirits dedicated to the service of humanity (↑) ²	<u>Governing Angels</u>	<i>No third category.</i>	Angels with or without locus of manifestation (such as messengers, winged angels)

¹ This type is presented as the second type of spirits in the text, however its description matches that of the third categories of angels in the other typologies.

² This type is presented as the third kind in the text, however its description matches that of the second categories of angels in the other typologies.

Pseudo-Dionysus' Angelic Hierarchies:

1 - Seraphim; Cherubim; Thrones (closest to God)

2 - Dominations; Virtues; Powers

3 - Principalities; Archangels; Angels (closest to humanity)

3.2. Further Angelic and Human spiritual hierarchies of Ibn ʿArabī:

(In order of closeness to God):

1 - Enraptured Angels → Cherubim, including the Angel Nūn (has complete knowledge of creation); Those Drawn Near; Zealots; Isolated; the “Taken Away.”

2 - Angel “The Pen” (has partial knowledge from Nūn, and it equals 360 sciences and subdivisions; he is in charge of the Tablet, writing everything happening in the cosmos). Originally from the Enraptured, but singled out on a plane below that of the Enraptured Angels.

The Solitaries, or the People of Numbers: a human hierarchy on the station of the different Enraptured angels groups. Same number at any one time, by succession (except for the 2 Seals).

→ 7 Replacements: 4 Pegs, 2 Imams, 1 Pole

→ 12 Captains

→ 80 Nobles

→ 1 Disciple

→ 40 Rajabiyyūn

→ 2 Seals: 1 Seal of Muḥammad (= Ibn ʿArabī), 1 Seal of the general *wilāya* (= Jesus).

→ 300 souls “on the heart of Adam”

→ 40 persons “on the heart of Noah”

→ 7 persons “on the heart of Abraham”

→ 5 persons “on the heart of Gabriel”

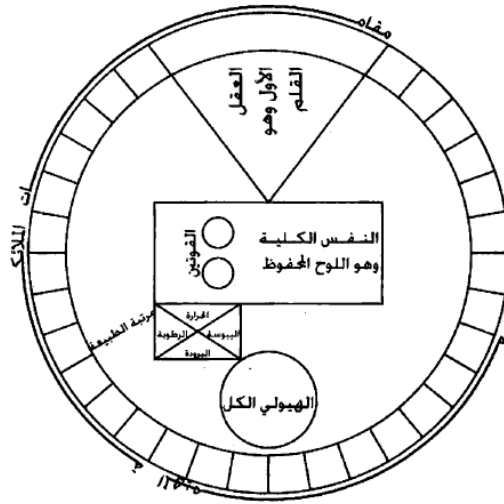
→ 3 persons “on the heart of Michael”

→ 1 person “on the heart of Seraphiel”

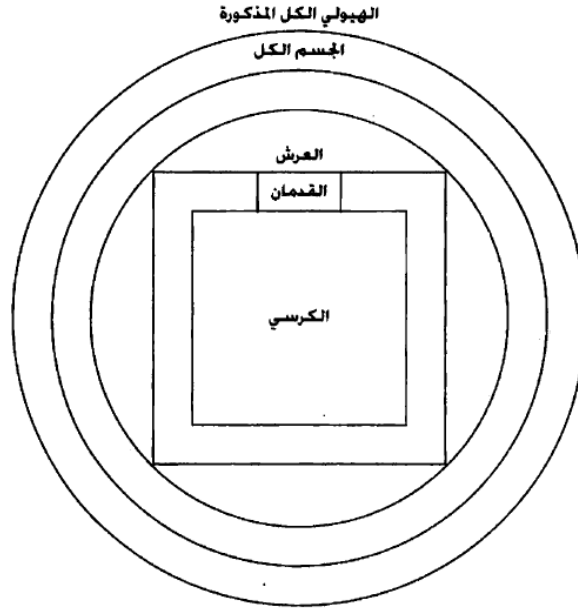
APPENDIX 4

Cosmological diagrams of Ibn 'Arabī (*Futūḥāt*, 9.319-327).

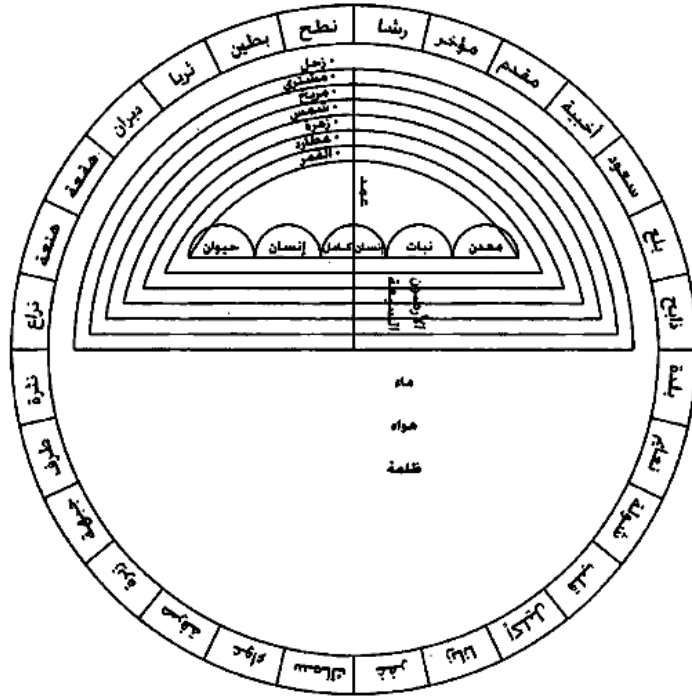
صورة' العلماء وما يحوي عليه إلى عرش الاستواء، فإن موضع صور الأشكال ضيق هنا، لا يتسع لصور ما نريد تشكيلاً واحدة؛ فإنه لو اتسع كان أئين للناظر فيه



ومن ذلك صورة عرش الاستواء، والكرسي، والقدمان، والماء الذي عليه العرش، والهواء الذي يسك الماء، والظلمة



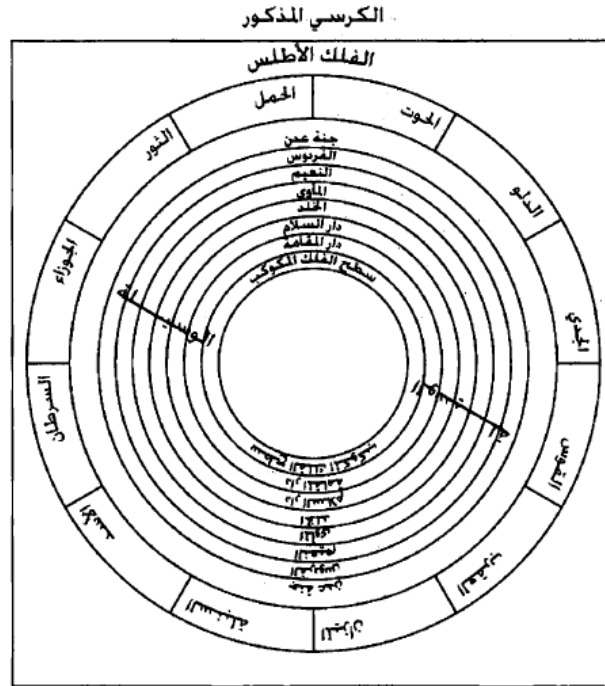
ومن¹ ذلك صورة الفلك المكوّكب، وقباب السماوات، وما تستقرّ عليه؛ وهو الأرض والأركان الثلاثة، والعقد الذي يمسك الله به القبة، والمعدن، والنبات، والحيوان، والإنسان



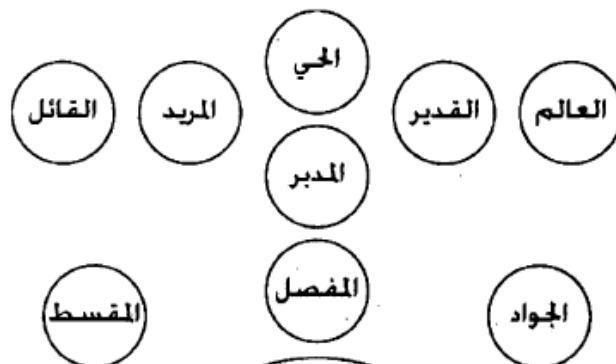
ومن¹ ذلك صورة جهنّم، وأبوابها، ومنازلها، ودركاتها



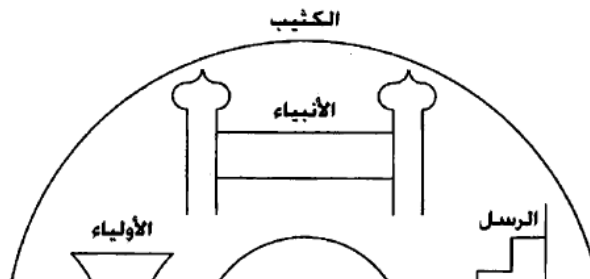
ومن ذلك صورة الفلك الأطلس، والجنات، وسطح فلك الكواكب، وشجرة طوبى



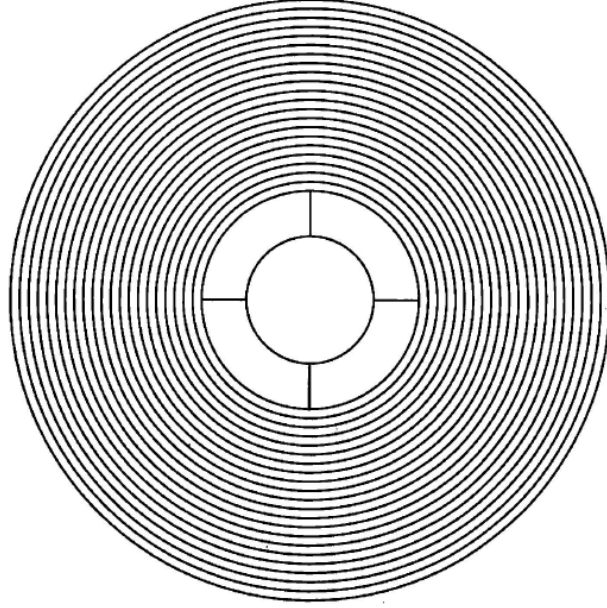
ومن ذلك صورة حضرة الأسماء الإلهية، والدينا، والآخرة، والبرزخ



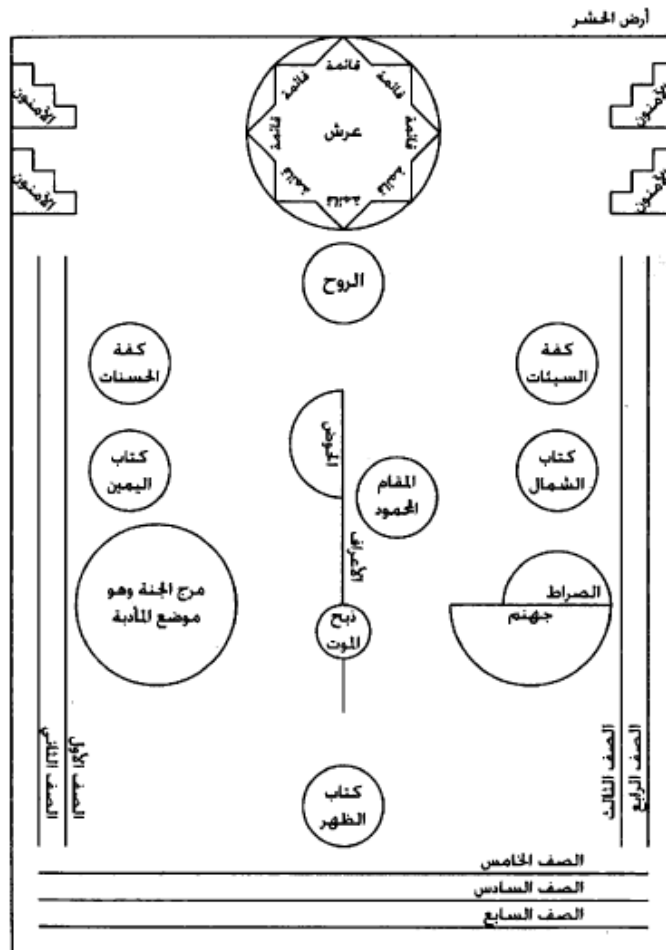
ومن ذلك صورة كتيب الرؤية، ومراتب الخلق فيه



ومن ذلك صورة العالم كله، وترتب طبقاته روحا وجسما، وعلوا وسفلا



ومن ذلك صورة أرض الحشر، وما يجوي عليه من الأعيان والمراتب؛ وعرش الفصل والقضاء وحملته، وصفوف الملائكة



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