

Introduction

According to legend, after the caliph ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb’s (r. 13–23/634–44) conquest of Jerusalem in the year 16/637, one of his soldiers, a man named Shurayk b. Khabāsha al-Numayrī, went to fetch water from a well on the Temple Mount. As al-Wāsiṭī (d. ca. 360/970), a preacher in the al-Aqṣā mosque, relates in his hagiography of Jerusalem, *The Virtues of the Holy City* (*Faḍā’il Bayt al-Muqaddas*),

suddenly the bucket fell from [Shurayk’s] hands, and so he descended [into the well] to search for it. A man appeared to him in the well and told him to follow him, taking him by the hand and ushering him into the Garden. Shurayk took leaves [from a tree in the Garden]. Then the man led him back, and [Shurayk] exited [the well]. He went to his companions and told them about it. His story was brought before ʿUmar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, who said: “Shall a man from this community enter the Garden while he is alive among you? Look at the leaves! If they have withered, they are not from the Garden. If they haven’t withered, they are.” ... And indeed, the leaves had not withered.¹

Shurayk is said to have kept the leaves he brought from his subterranean visit to paradise, guarding them in his personal copy of the Qur’ān until his death, and to have been buried with them, placed delicately between his chest and the burial shroud covering his corpse, when he was laid to rest in the Syrian village of al-Salamiyya.² Some thirteen centuries later, between 1938 and 1942, archaeologists excavated what appeared to be the remains of the well inside the al-Aqṣā mosque.³ To this day, one can see, to the left of the entrance to the mosque, the stairway leading down into the vast system

¹ Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il*, 93–4 (#154: *Ḥadīth al-waraqāt*). The story also appears in Maqdisī, *Muthīr al-gharām*, 58; Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab*, I, 339; Suyūṭī, *Durr*, I, 136. For the little biographical information that is available for al-Wāsiṭī, see ʿUlaymī, *Uns*, II, 482.

² Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il*, 94 (#155); Maqdisī, *Muthīr al-gharām*, 46.

³ See Hamilton, *The structural history*, 63–4.

of tunnels below the Temple Mount, a mysterious subterranean maze in which, according to Muslim tradition, flow the rivers of paradise.⁴

The “Story of the Leaves” (*ḥadīth al-waraqāt*), as it is known, encapsulates a tension that underpins conceptualisations of the otherworld across a wide spectrum of Islamic religious discourses. The idea that the boundary between this world (*al-dunyā*) and the hereafter (*al-ākhirā*) cannot be traversed, except after death, is etched deeply into Muslim thought. ‘Umar’s reticence is a case in point. Though seemingly aware of the ancient prophecy that “a man shall enter the Garden alive, walking on his two feet,”⁵ he remains sceptical. In fact, according to one version of the story, when ‘Umar first hears about Shurayk’s miraculous journey,⁶ he consults his advisor Ka‘b al-Aḥbār, a Jewish convert to Islam and an authority on the Bible. Ka‘b confirms the correctness of Shurayk’s claim. Still, ‘Umar insists on further proof.

After all, does not the Qur’ān state that behind the dead, “there is a barrier (*barzakh*) until the day that they shall be raised up” (23:100), sealing off the otherworld from this world? In fact, according to a notion that circulated widely in Islamic literature, not even the imagination, that most transgressive of human faculties, is capable of crossing this barrier. In the collections of sayings (hadiths) traced to the prophet Muḥammad, from the early centuries of Islam onwards, it is affirmed time and again that God prepares for His servants in paradise “that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived.”⁷ This is an apophatic statement that is also found in the Gospel, as well as in Talmudic and Christian Syriac literature.⁸ Muslims

⁴ Cf. the cover image. For the rivers of paradise underneath the Temple Mount, see Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il*, 67 (#108), 68 (#110); Ibn al-Murajjā, *Faḍā’il*, 268, 6–8 (#407). See further Shalem, “Bīr al-waraqā,” 58; Kaplony, *The Ḥaram*, 359, 512. Cf. Psalm 46:5; Ezekiel 47:1–12.

⁵ Yāqūt, *Buldān*, s.v. al-Qalt, IV, 386b, reports from Ka‘b al-Aḥbār (d. between 32/652 and 35/655) that the prophecy is already found in the scriptures of the Jews. There is no such prophecy in the Hebrew Bible, although Ezekiel 47:1–12 is vaguely reminiscent. Most authors appear to attribute the prophecy directly to the prophet Muḥammad. See, e.g., Shams al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (writing around 875/1470), *Ithāf al-akhissā’*, quoted in Le Strange, *Palestine under the Muslims*, 198.

⁶ Cf. this and other versions of the story in the translation of Le Strange, “Description of the Noble Sanctuary,” 270–2; Shalem, “Bīr al-waraqā,” 50–61.

⁷ Hammām, *Ṣaḥīfa*, 25 (#31); Ibn al-Mubārak, *Musnad*, 73 (#121); Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *bad’ al-khalq* 8 (b. *mā jā’a fī ṣifat al-janna*), II, 324; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-janna* 2, IV, 2174; Tirmidhī, *Jāmi’*, k. *al-janna* 15 (b. *mā jā’a fī sūq al-janna*), IV, 685; Hannād b. Sarī, *Zuhd*, I, 47 (#1); Abū Nu‘aym, *Ṣifat al-janna*, 36–7 (#8), 41–2 (#16), 135–48 (##109–24); Ibn al-Kharrāṭ, *‘Āqiba*, 313; Qurtubī, *Tadhkira*, II, 165–6; Suyūṭī, *Budūr*, 488; Lamaṭī, *Ibrīz* (tr. O’Kane/Radtke), 901; Ashqar, *Yawm*, III, 117. Cf. CTM, s.v. kh-ṭ-r, II, 48a; Graham, *Divine word*, 117–19. G. H. A. Juynboll (*ECH*, 57), pinpoints the Kufan *mawla* and traditionist Abū Mu‘āwiya Muḥammad b. Khāzim (d. 194–5/810–11) as an important launch pad for the tradition in Muslim circles, even though the hadith is likely to have circulated earlier, as is suggested by the examples of Hammām (d. 131/749 or 132/750) and Ibn al-Mubārak (d. 181/797).

⁸ While in Paul (1 *Corinthians* 2:9), the eschatological content of the adage is only alluded to, the Babylonian Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 99a, XXIV, 671) refers it explicitly to Eden and the

of the early centuries of Islam sought to anchor the adage in their own scripture and in the exemplary lives of the Prophet and his Companions. Thus, the Companion ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd (d. 32/652–3?) reportedly taught that “in the Torah it is written: ‘God has prepared for those who draw their sides away from the couches that which no eye has seen, no ear has heard and no human mind has conceived, that which no angel or messenger knows about.’” The expression “those who draw their sides away from the couches” (*alladhīna tatajāfā junūbuhum ‘an al-maḍāji‘*) refers to the pious who perform nightly vigils instead of sleeping. An addendum to the adage in its original form, the phrase is taken *verbatim* from the Qur’ān (32:16) and from there projected into Jewish scripture. As ‘Abdallāh b. Mas‘ūd continues, after reading this verse, “we would recite: ‘No soul knows what joy (*qurrat a‘yun*) is hidden away for them’ (Q 32:17).”⁹

It is undeniable, however, that the Qur’ān pictures paradise and hell in intimately concrete and worldly terms.¹⁰ In a canonical hadith, one reads that “the Garden is closer to you than the strap of your sandal, and so is the Fire.”¹¹ This remarkable tradition echoes the Qur’ānic verse that declares God to be closer to man than his jugular vein (50:16), but raises the notion to a cosmological level. While the “jugular vein” verse emphasises the bond that connects God with individual believers, the “sandal” hadith extends this relationship of intimacy more generally speaking to the relationship between the otherworld and this world, between the “world of the hidden” (*‘ālam al-ghayb*) and “the world of witnessing” (*‘ālam al-shahāda*, cf. Q 6:73). The otherworld, in this view, cuts through earthly reality in the way in which the strap of the sandal penetrates the cavity between the toes of the foot. The image is vivid and palpable. It suggests that this world and the otherworld are intertwined, that there is a measure of immanence of the divine in creation.¹²

In al-Wāsiṭī’s account of the “Story of the Leaves,” the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb, though inclining towards the transcendentalist view that this world and the next are two fundamentally different realms of existence, is proven wrong. The leaves Shurayk brings back from his tour of paradise,

world to come, as does the Syrian Church Father Aphrahat (d. ca. 345) in one of his homilies. See Aphrahat, *Homilies*, 357–8. For further references in Christian literature, see Wilk, “Jesajanische Prophetie.” On the question of “material eschatology” in Talmudic literature, see Costa, *L’au-delà*, 287–94.

⁹ Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, IX, 137; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-janna* 5, IV, 2175.

¹⁰ See Q 13:35, where the Qur’ān speaks of the “picture of paradise” (*mathal al-janna*). Certain exegetes understood *mathal* as “likeness,” not as “picture,” thus “making the concrete descriptions of Paradise the representation of an inexpressible reality.” See EI2, “Djanna,” II, 447a–452a, at 448a (L. Gardet); Poonawala, “Ismā‘īlī *ta’wīl*,” 212.

¹¹ Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-riqāq* 29 (b. *al-janna aqrabu ilā aḥadikum*), IV, 194; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, I, 287, 413, 442. See CTM, s.v. *sh-r-k*, III, 117a.

¹² Unsurprisingly, Sufi authors were particularly fond of the “sandal” hadith. E.g., Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār (d. 627/1230) quotes it in his *Asrār-nāmeḥ*. See Ritter, *Meer*, 187.

“looking like the leaves of the Syrian peach tree, as big as the palm of a hand and with a pointed head,”¹³ do not wither. They partake of eternal life, thus demonstrating beyond doubt that Shurayk really has crossed the boundary between the here and the hereafter, and that humans, “while they are alive among you,” can reach out beyond the imperfections of this world and connect with an otherworld in which humankind’s spiritual and material potentialities are realised and lived to the full. As I argue in this book, the story of Shurayk’s traversing the divide between *dunyā* and *ākhirā* is not as exceptional as it may seem at first sight. Rather, it is indicative of a much broader theme, a nostalgia for immanence and a sense of realised eschatology that has its point of departure in the Qur’ān and from there runs through an impressive range of Islamic religious discourses and practices.

Reconceptualising the *Dunyā/Ākhira* Divide

Islam shares with Christianity the story of Adam’s and Eve’s eating from the forbidden tree in paradise, the primordial sin resulting in the Fall of humankind and banishment from the garden of Eden. Paradise, accordingly, is lost and will be regained only at the end of time by those whom God chooses or by those who deserve to be saved on account of their beliefs and actions. Those whom God does not elect, or those who fail to accumulate enough merit in the time that elapses between the Fall and Judgement, conversely, go to hell. Historical time begins with the Fall from the primordial garden; it is followed by three major successive eras of world history: the pre-Islamic period, a time of ignorance (*jāhiliyya*) that is sporadically illuminated by the appearance of prophets; the Islamic period, in which God’s revelation is available, though not to all of humanity; and the apocalypse (the “history of the future,” in Franz Rosenthal’s phrase¹⁴), which ushers in the end of the world, and the end of history. At Judgement, history is abolished; eternity begins; *al-ākhirā* replaces *al-dunyā*. This sequence is what may be called the diachronic mode of conceptualising the relationship between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā* (see Chart 1).

Augustine of Hippo’s (d. 430) doctrine of original sin was a dominant idea in the history of Christian thought.¹⁵ In Islam, the notion had far less purchase. No Muslim scholar would have absolved Adam and Eve from blame, but there was a clear tendency among exegetes to make light of Adam’s sin.¹⁶ Evil in Islam, as Gustav von Grunebaum suggested, is “accidental”

¹³ Wāsiṭī, *Faḍā’il*, 94 (#155); Maqdisī, *Muthār al-gharām*, 46.

¹⁴ Rosenthal, *History*, 23.

¹⁵ Segal, *Life after death*, 584–5; Benjamins, “Paradisiacal life.” However, writing a century after Augustine, the Eastern Church Father Jacob of Serugh (d. 521) could still maintain that “Adam sinned, but God did not curse him, for He loved him and did not hate him.” See Jacob of Serugh, *Quatre homélies*, 12.

¹⁶ Kister, “Adam,” 149. Cf. Anawati, “La notion de ‘péché originel’,” 31.

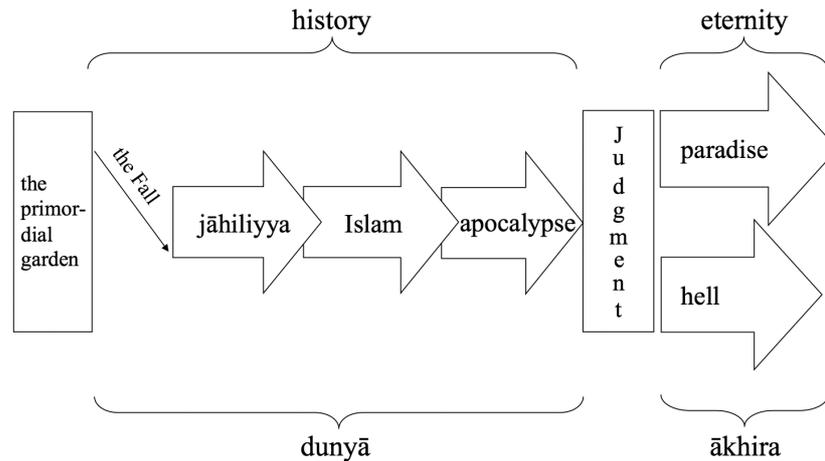


CHART 1. The *dunyā/ākhirā* relationship: The diachronic view.

rather than a “structural” given of human nature.¹⁷ Adam’s and Eve’s departure from paradise was frequently painted by Muslim artists, especially in the later centuries, but depictions of Eve handing the fatal fruit to Adam remain to be found.¹⁸ A Persian painting from around 700/1300 shows the primordial couple first and foremost as victims of the devil’s cunning, and thus minimises their guilt.

Arguably, this is a perspective rooted in the Qur’ān. Whatever the degree of their own responsibility, Adam and Eve are said to have received God’s forgiveness immediately after their expulsion (20:122–3). They did not pass on any essential, inherited human depravity to their descendants. As the Qur’ān affirms, “every soul only bears its own burden” (6:164). In Islam, therefore, the fall, or rather the descent, from paradise does not signify an ontological shift from a state of grace to one of sin and damnation but rather, a momentary loss of divine favour. Humankind’s connection with the otherworld may require repair, but it is not severed completely. The door between this world and the otherworld remains ajar.

Similarly, the world that humankind inhabits is not a place of corruption. In the Qur’ān, “the earthly manifestation of creation is not a cursed place of punishment and suffering; rather, it shows a clear affinity with paradise.”¹⁹ What is more, this optimism is not restricted to the Qur’ān. There are numerous traditions of Islamic religious thought that lean in the direction of an accessible paradise. They speak of objects, substances, or beings that move to and fro between this world and the otherworld. One category of such go-betweens is select individuals who travel to the otherworld and back.

¹⁷ Von Grunebaum, “Observations,” 119. See also Anawati, “La notion de ‘péché originel’,” 37.

¹⁸ Milstein, “Paradise as a parable,” 147.

¹⁹ Neuwirth, *Koran*, 439, 744–8.

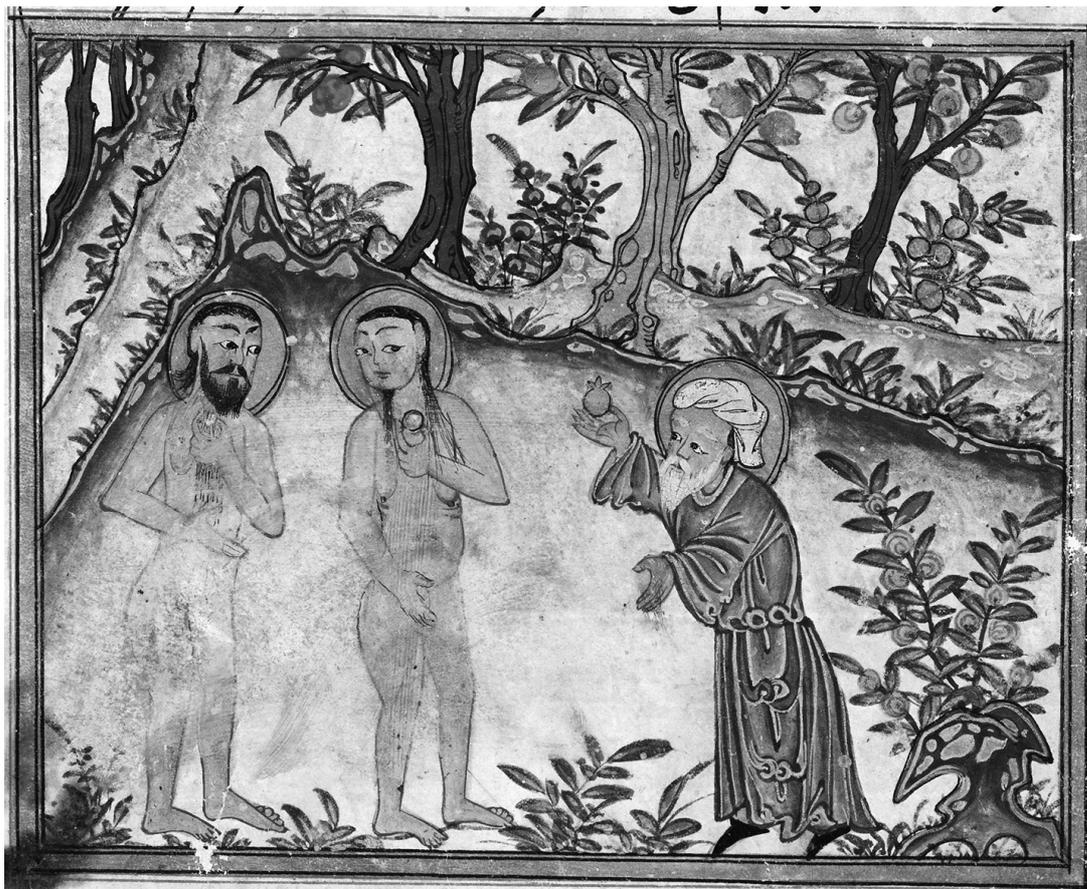


FIGURE 1. The devil tempts Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of the forbidden tree. From al-Birūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya* (*The Chronology of Ancient Nations*). Tabriz/Persia, 707/1307–8. Edinburgh University Library, Centre for Research Collections, MS Edinburgh Or. 161, fol. 48v.

This concerns, most famously, the prophet Muḥammad during his Ascension (*mi'rāj*), but there are others, too. In the popular genre of *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* (*Tales of the Prophets*), the prophet Idrīs, the Islamic Enoch, is said to have toured paradise and hell. The same goes for Bulūqiya, a figure that harkens back to the Babylonian Gilgamesh.²⁰ A number of visionaries and mystics in the history of Islam claimed to have emulated the Prophet's heavenly journey (and less frequently, his *descensus ad inferos*).²¹ There are also examples of ordinary human beings going on otherworldly journeys. Shurayk, the hero of the "Story of the Leaves," is one of them. In the *Arabian Nights* one occasionally comes across narratives about the exploits of heroes who reach paradise or hell, or earthly utopias and dystopias that resemble them closely.²² In one of the *Nights'* most famous tales, "The

²⁰ Dalley, "Gilgamesh." On these narratives of otherworldly journeys, see the following text, pp. 112–9.

²¹ See the following text, pp. 227–8.

²² For paradise in the *Arabian Nights*, see Ott, "Paradies"; eadem, "Paradise, Alexander, and the *Arabian nights*." For travels to the underworld, see Fudge, "Underworlds."



FIGURE 2. The prophet Muḥammad approaching the gate of heaven during his ascension. From Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-tawārīkh* (*The Comprehensive History*). Tabriz/Persia, ca. 705/[1306] or 714/[1314–15]. Edinburgh University Library, Centre for Research Collections, MS Edinburgh Or. 20, fol. 55r.

Second Qalandar's Tale," the hero stumbles upon the entry to a subterranean paradisiacal cave, complete with a heavenly maid, cushioned couches, and wine.²³ Lastly in this category, dream visions allowed for an easy way to travel to the otherworld and back again. The Islamic literature on dreaming is vast, and frequently features visions of, and conversations with, the dead in paradise and hell.²⁴

Other types of go-betweens include liquids, winds, sounds, smells, and material objects that move between the otherworld and this world, or flow from one to the other. The Nile, Euphrates, and the two eastern Turkish rivers Sayḥān and Jayḥān, for example, are said to spring from the al-Kawthar well in paradise.²⁵ Pleasant fragrances are wafted into this world from paradise; in fact, all perfume originates in Eden.²⁶ The sweet scent of babies (*rīḥ al-walad*) comes from paradise.²⁷ Salutary plants are likewise thought to

²³ *The Arabian nights*, I, 73–5.

²⁴ See Kinberg, "Interaction," 295–301; Schimmel, *Die Träume des Kalifen*, 198–200; Katz, "Dreams," 190; Sirriyeh, *Sufi visionary*, 57–67. On al-Ghazālī's view of the "reality" of dreams, see Moosa, *Al-Ghazālī*, 74–5. A modern, ironic take on this theme is Zahāwī, *Thawra*. Cf. the following text, pp. 279–80.

²⁵ Qurtubī, *Tadhkira*, II, 167–8; Majlisī, *Biḥār*, VIII, 352; Nābulusī, *Ahl al-janna*, 49–50.

²⁶ See Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*, 65, and the references given there. On the scent of paradise entering the world through the tombs of saints, see Diem and Schöller, *The living and the dead*, II, 90–6. The most prominent example is, of course, the tomb of the Prophet in Medina. See, e.g., Būṣīrī, *Burda*, 13 (v. 58).

²⁷ Nābulusī, *Ahl al-janna*, 51.

derive from the heavenly realms.²⁸ Adam is said to have taken seeds from the Garden with him and to have planted them in India, thus bringing nutmeg (*shajar al-ṭīb*) into the world.²⁹ According to another tradition, the date-palm, the first plant to have grown on the face of the earth, came to this world from heaven.³⁰ Every pomegranate contains at least one seed that is from paradise.³¹ In Shi'ism, one finds the notion that Abū Ṭālib, the father of the first Imam 'Alī (d. 40/661), used to eat pomegranates, “and from it 'Alī was born”³² – who then passed on this heavenly seed to his progeny, the Imams.

As for sounds, it is true that revelation, according to standard doctrine, has come to an end with Muḥammad, the “seal of the prophets” (*khātam al-anbiyā'*). However, acoustically, Arabs, and with them all Muslims, continue to be connected to the otherworld. Arabic, after all, is the language Adam and Eve spoke in paradise, and brought with them to earth.³³ According to the Egyptian polygraph, al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505), the famous exegete of early Islam, Ibn 'Abbās (d. ca. 68/687–8), taught that Adam's language in paradise was Arabic. “However, when Adam disobeyed his Lord, God deprived him of Arabic, and he came to speak Syriac. Then, however, God restored Adam to His grace and gave Arabic back to him.”³⁴ Muslims are made particularly aware of this primordial linguistic bond with God when listening to the Qur'ān, the “recitation” (Arab. *qur'ān*) of the divine text located on the “preserved tablet” (*lawḥ mahfūz*, Q 85:21) in heaven, an act first performed by the prophet Muḥammad and by his Muslim followers ever since. In this perpetual global concert of simultaneous voices, a piece of the otherworld is present all the time among Muslim audiences, the “recitation” functioning rather like a ceaseless radio transmission that people can tune into at their leisure.³⁵ “God Himself,” affirms the Ḥanbalī theologian Ibn al-Farrā' (d. 458/1065), “recites through the tongue of every Qur'ān reader,” so that “when one listens to the Qur'ān recitation of a reader, one hears it from God.”³⁶ In Islam perhaps more than any other tradition, to

²⁸ In addition to the examples provided in the following text, see *ibid.*, 52 (truffle and honeydew).

²⁹ Fākihī, *Akhhār Makka*, I, 90 (#23).

³⁰ Bahrānī, *Nuzhat*, 294. Cf. Nābulusī, *Ahl al-janna*, 52, according to which pressed dates (*'ajwa*) are “the fruit of paradise.”

³¹ Ṭabarānī, *al-Mu'jam al-kabīr*, X, 263.

³² Bahrānī, *Nuzhat*, 98.

³³ Cf. Goldziher, *History of grammar*, 44–5; Loucel, “L'origine du langage,” 167–8.

³⁴ Suyūṭī, *Muzhir*, I, 30 (tr. Czapkiewicz, *Views*, 66). Similarly in Ibn Ḥabīb (d. 239/853), *Ta'rikh*, 27–8; Tha'labī, *Kashf*, IX, 177 (*ad* Q 55:4), from an anonymous source.

³⁵ On the concept of a Qur'ānic *lingua sacra*, which is closely related to the doctrine of the inimitability (*i'jāz*) of the Qur'ān, see Wansbrough, *Qur'anic studies*, 85–118. According to the early exegete Muqātil b. Sulayman (d. 150/767), those Muslims who are not native speakers of Arabic are washed in two rivers situated at the entry to the eternal garden. One purifies their bodies, the other purifies their heart, so that they emerge with bodies as beautiful as that of the prophet Joseph, with hearts like that of the prophet Job, and speaking Arabic like Muḥammad. See Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, IV, 532 (*ad* Q 76:21).

³⁶ Ibn al-Farrā', *Mu'tamad*, 186, quoted in Böwering, *Mystical vision*, 95.

borrow Michel de Certeau's phrase, "the sacred text is a voice."³⁷ By this voice, practitioners gain access to paradise. "Every verse of the Qur'ān," writes al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) in his celebrated *opus magnum*, the *Revivification of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*), "is a degree (*daraja*) in paradise and a light in your houses."³⁸

The point is not, however, that the world of the here-and-now, in Islam, is in all respects paradisiacal. No such reductionist notion is proffered here. In this book, rather, traditions that resolutely place the primordial and eschatological paradise in the distant past and future are given equally full attention.³⁹ Further, it would be fallacious to underestimate the important place that hell occupies in the Muslim religious imagination.⁴⁰ In fact, hell, as the "sandal" hadith tells us, is as closely intertwined with this world as paradise. To illustrate this point with just one example, according to the Qur'ān, there grows at the bottom of hell the poisonous tree of *Zaqqūm*, which sprouts fruits "like the heads of devils" (*ka-ru'ūs al-shayāṭīn*, 37:65). Some Muslim exegetes understood this expression figuratively, or simply accepted the existence of such a tree in hell without further inquiring into the matter.⁴¹ Others, however, argued that "head of devils" was the name of a disgustingly bitter tree growing in the Tihāma region in Yemen.⁴² There was some debate about this, but according to the fifth/eleventh-century exegete al-Tha'labī, the most well-known answer to the question was the latter, that is, that *Zaqqūm* is a hellish plant simultaneously found in this world and the other.⁴³ Hell and the world inhabited by human beings, in other words, overlap.

Certain animals, in particular snakes and scorpions, were believed to shuttle back and forth between the earth and the hellish netherworlds.⁴⁴ Hellish sounds, such as the crashing noise of a stone hitting hell's floor, were heard by the Prophet and his Companions.⁴⁵ Suggesting an analogy to the four rivers of paradise, the Prophet allegedly held the view that hell-water

³⁷ De Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, 137. In Qur'ānic studies, the phenomenon of the divine immanence in and during the recitation of the text is analysed by Neuwirth, *Koran*, 166–72, 178–81. See also Graham, *Beyond the written word*, 81, 87, 103–4; idem, "Qur'ān as spoken word"; Kermani, *Gott ist schön*, 212–32.

³⁸ Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, 450.

³⁹ An intriguing typology of three paradises in medieval Christianity is sketched by Christoph Auffarth, who writes that "[i]n addition to the primordial paradise on the one hand and the eschatological paradise on the other, there is yet another paradise type in the Middle Ages, one which is neither closed off, nor in a distant future of uncertain reality." See Auffarth, "Paradise now," 169.

⁴⁰ See Lange, "Introducing hell in Islamic Studies."

⁴¹ Samarqandī, *Tafsīr*, III, 135.

⁴² Ibn al-Jawzī, *Zād al-masīr*, VII, 62.

⁴³ Tha'labī, *Kashf*, VIII, 146. Cf. Hamadhānī, *Maqāmāt*, 218 (*al-Maqāma al-Dīnāriyya*).

⁴⁴ For an example, see Wellhausen, *Reste*, 153. See also Jilī, *Insān*, 246.

⁴⁵ Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-janna* 31 (*b. fī shiddat ḥarr nār jahannam*), IV, 2184–5; Suyūṭī, *Budūr*, 424. See *CTM*, s.v. w-j-b, VII, 140a.

leaks into the world, warning against bathing in hot mountain springs, “for they flow from hell.”⁴⁶ The most extreme heat in summer is no other than the heat of hell, which has escaped to the surface of the earth, while the most extreme cold in winter is breathed into the world from the reservoir of extreme cold in hell.⁴⁷ In more abstract terms, a hadith asserts that “fever flows from hell (*al-ḥummā min fayḥ jahannam*).”⁴⁸ The list could be continued, but a more thorough discussion of these and other examples is reserved for the chapters to follow. Here, I use these instances to highlight what I see as a key theme of Islamic eschatological literature, a theme that runs like a thread through this book: the disappearing boundary between this world and the otherworld. By this formulation I mean the perceived proximity, spatial, temporal, and conceptual, of *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā*, as well as the openness of Islamic traditions towards the idea of “realised eschatology” in the full, utopian *and* dystopian sense, not just in that of the optimistic feeling of “paradise now.”

At this point, let us pause and note that important objections can be raised against approaching the history of Islamic eschatology along such lines. Arguably, the boundary between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā* is far from passable, the opposite of what I claim in many places in this book. In fact, the radical difference between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā*, it might be countered, is a fundamental a priori of the Islamic tradition. One scholar, for example, has suggested that the rigorous distinction between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā* is as constitutive for Islam as the mind/body dyad is for the intellectual history of the West (the mind/body distinction, supposedly, played a lesser role in Islam).⁴⁹ Islam tends to be characterised, not least by Muslim thinkers, as the most antimythological of the Abrahamic faiths, as *that* tradition which has most efficiently wedded the concept of the sacred with that of transcendence, thereby banishing the magical and mythical from this world. Statements to this effect abound. The Arab Muslim conquerors, writes Patricia Crone, “disseminated a religion that drained the world of divinity to concentrate it in a single transcendental God.”⁵⁰ In the words of Josef van Ess, “Islam does not know the idea of a mediating instance.... All bridges are torn down: there are no sacraments, no images to be worshipped, no church music. God is transcendent.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Majlisī, *Bihār*, VIII, 486.

⁴⁷ Tottoli, “The Qur’an,” 144. The Prophet is said to have allowed the delay of the *ḡuhr* prayer in the case of great afternoon heat, “for the severity of the heat flows from hell (*shiddat al-ḡarr fayḥ min jahannam*).” Cf. Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *mawāqīt al-ṣalāt* 9 (b. *al-ibrād bi-l-ḡuhr*), I, 173, and passim in Bukhārī and other canonical collections. See CTM, s.v. f-y-ḡ, V, 214a.

⁴⁸ Daylamī, *Firdaws*, II, 156; Nābulusī, *Ahl al-janna*, 75–7.

⁴⁹ Winter, “Islamic attitudes,” 37.

⁵⁰ Crone, *Nativist prophets*, 276.

⁵¹ Van Ess, *Christentum und Weltreligionen*, 110.

It is undoubtedly the case that mainstream Islamic theology, in order to safeguard God's unique alterity, shows a strong concern to preserve the ontological gap that separates Creator from creation. The scholastic theologians of Islam, the *mutakallimūn*, consistently stress the impossibility of crossing the divide between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā*; they deny that transcendence within the boundaries of this world can be achieved; and they generally reject theories of divine indwelling in creation (*ḥulūl*) or any other kinds of immanentist or anthropomorphist thought. However, as I suggest in this book, this attitude is undermined from within the Islamic tradition by a rich storehouse of currents of thought, images, and practices that make the boundary between *al-dunyā* and *al-ākhirā* appear rather thin and permeable.

This book argues that the idea of an utterly removed otherworld in the Islamic tradition deserves to be nuanced and qualified in important respects. To quote van Ess again, "it only sounds *to us* as if God [in Islam] is remote or impersonal." For Muslims, van Ess maintains, God is "the one towards whom everything is directed and who takes care of everything; He is the Lord and the All-Merciful."⁵² It is relevant in this context that the Muslim literature on the otherworld often stresses that God does not reside *in* paradise, but *above* it. Thus, even if Muslim religious authors generally hold that there can be no direct access to God, and certainly none in this life, many of them allow for multiple ways of exploring God's two antechambers: paradise and hell. As Crone observes, faced with the idea of an utterly transcendent, unfathomable God, "believers direct[ed] their attention to lesser emanations of manifestations of God, who function[ed] as intermediaries between the divine and the human worlds; it is thanks to these intermediaries that there can be communication between the two otherwise incompatible networks."⁵³

As noted previously, a plethora of Muslim traditions conceive of the two otherworldly abodes as being proximate both in a spatial and a temporal sense. Paradise and hell, according to a certain (and as I argue, widespread) view in Islam, cannot be fixed in time; they are everywhen.⁵⁴ I further submit that in many instances of Islamic eschatological thought, this world and the otherworld do not simply coexist in time. Instead, there is a continuum between the two, a relationship of synchronicity, in the Jungian sense of a meaningful coincidence.⁵⁵ As will become clear in the course of this book,

⁵² Ibid., 110–11.

⁵³ Crone, *Nativist prophets*, 453. To my mind, Crone distinguishes somewhat too neatly between Iranian immanentism and Muslim transcendentalism, but on the whole her nuanced discussion of the struggle of the two concepts in the history of Islam is a monumental achievement. See esp. *ibid.*, 453–72.

⁵⁴ I borrow this expression from anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner. See Stanner, "The Dreaming," 58.

⁵⁵ Cf. Jung, "On synchronicity," 206. Cf. Fritz Stolz's suggestion to conceive of the various "paradises" of religious history as "counterworlds" (*Gegenwelten*). See Stolz, "Paradiese und Gegenwelten," esp. 21. For pertinent comments on the tangible immediacy of counterworlds

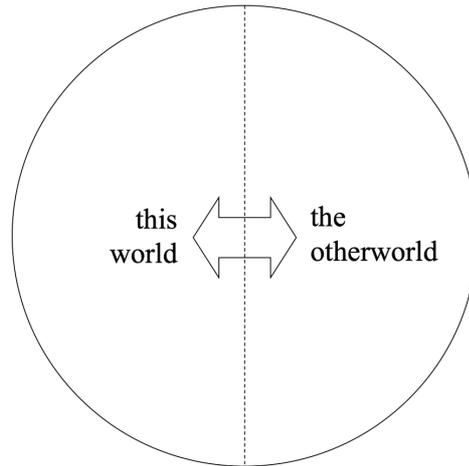


CHART 2. The *dunyā/ākhirā* relationship: The synchronic view.

it is therefore often misleading to speak about the Islamic otherworld in terms of a “*hereafter*,” an “*afterlife*,” an “*afterworld*,” or a “world to come.” Notions about what happens *after* death and resurrection of course do exist in Islam, but equally strong, perhaps even stronger, is a sense that the otherworld is in a continuous and intimate conversation with the world of the here-and-now (see Chart 2).

Propinquity, then, not distance, is the baseline of this book on the Muslim paradise and hell. In this, I take inspiration from recent theorising in comparative religion. As Thomas Tweed observes, “[religions] draw on tropes, artifacts, and rituals to produce teleographies, representations of the ultimate horizon and the means of crossing it.”⁵⁶ Tweed’s notion of teleography applies well to this book, given that much of the discursive, material, and practical traditions that I survey in the chapters that follow do just that: they point out ways of, and impediments to, traversing the perceived divide between ordinary and ultimate reality. Considered within these parameters, eschatology is concerned not with “the last things,” the literal meaning of its etymological origin, the Greek *τὰ ἔσχατα*, but with “the ultimate things” and how to reach them; not with what is over there far away, but with that which is (almost) here, that which most matters *now*. Religions, ventures Tweed, “do not deal with *the beyond*, as most interpreters suggest”; rather, “[*t*]he *near* is religion’s domain.”⁵⁷ Tweed here picks up on an idea of Bruno Latour, who writes that “religious talk” is not about “the far away, the above, the supernatural, the infinite, the distant, the transcendent, the mysterious, the misty, the sublime, the eternal,” but about a

in the context of ancient Egypt, but taking a broad view of religious history in general, see Assmann, *Tod und Jenseits*, 1–25, at 21–2.

⁵⁶ Tweed, *Crossing and dwelling*, 151.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 157.

“transform[ation of] the listeners in being close and present.”⁵⁸ Tweed develops this insight further by stressing the importance of “crossing,” that is, to-and-fro movement between here and there. “Religions,” he writes, “move between what is imagined as the most distant horizon and what is imagined as the most intimate domain ... they travel vertically back and forth between transcendence and immanence. They bring the gods to earth and transport the faithful to the heavens.”⁵⁹

Conceiving of the Islamic otherworld as that which is most close, in other words, fits in with recent theorising about the dynamic, boundary-crossing propensity inherent to religious cosmographies. Islamic eschatology, I argue in this book, speaks to a wide and variegated array of the most intimate and immediate human fears, hopes, and desires. What is more, interpretations of the otherworld along these lines are not limited to peripheral areas and periods in Islamic religious history, such as late-medieval monism, nor can such interpretations easily be reserved to messianic movements, Sufism, gnosticism, Neoplatonism, or Illuminationism, Islamic currents of thought that affirm, potentially at least, the immanence of the divine in the world. The examples presented in the preceding text, for example, are taken from widely available traditional Sunni and Shi'i sources. As we survey the various teleographies in Islam in the course of this book, more evidence to this effect will come to the fore.

The Muslim Eschatological Imagination

The Muslim paradise and hell, as the various chapters in this book illustrate, have manifold functions. They put words and images to fears of misery and hopes of happiness; they serve to inculcate a catechism of sins and virtues, offering taxonomies of the morally good and bad; they provide allegories for intellectual and spiritual fulfilment and failure; they are structured reflections of earthly utopias and dystopias, as well as blueprints for the creation of various paradises and hells on earth. First and foremost, however, they are theatres of and for the imagination. Herewith a second major theme of this book, in addition to the synchronicity of *dunyā* and *ākhirā*, is announced.

The stuff of the imagination, in Jacques Le Goff's phrasing, is “created rather than reproduced from external objects.”⁶⁰ In this sense the imagination neither produces mere copy-images of worldly phenomena, nor is it equal to free-floating fancy. Rather, by a process of *bricolage*, the imagination combines elements of “external objects” into novel, often marvellous images. The Muslim paradise and hell are filled with a plethora

⁵⁸ Latour, “Thou shall not freeze-frame,” 32.

⁵⁹ Tweed, *Crossing and dwelling*, 158.

⁶⁰ Le Goff, “Introduction,” 1.

of such images.⁶¹ Literal translations of the Islamic term *al-janna* as “the Garden” and *al-nār* as “the Fire,” the way I see it, fail to capture this versatile, image-making capacity of the Muslim eschatological imagination.⁶² *Al-janna* is much more than a garden: there are large rivers in it, walls and buildings made of precious stones, and tall dunes of musk, but also fabulous tents, pavilions, and palaces, not to mention the extravagant luxury items enjoyed by its inhabitants, including embroidered couches and cushions, multicoloured brocaded garments, translucent cups of silver and gold, and so forth. There is no *nudisme eschatologique* in the Muslim paradise.⁶³ Likewise, *al-nār* is much more than a fire: its craggy landscape is filled to the brim with unwholesome plants, monstrous animals, and infernal architecture. Fire is not, as has been asserted, the “source of all suffering” in *al-nār*.⁶⁴ In fact, fire is no more than the most basic element in an arsenal of tortures and punishments perpetrated upon the damned. In sum, to translate *al-janna* as “paradise” and *al-nār* as “hell,” as I choose to do in most instances, appears justified, as both terms sketch out a much broader horizon than that captured by their literal meaning, “the Garden” and “the Fire.”⁶⁵

The concept of the imagination has a checkered history in Western thought,⁶⁶ and herein lies another potential objection to the agenda of this book, or at the very least, to certain chapters of it. Why bother with the imagination? The imagination, writes anthropologist Amira Mittermaier, “was eyed with suspicion throughout the history of Western philosophy because it ... could ... play with sense impressions, creating images of non-existent things – a danger that could be circumvented only by reason’s firm grip on the imagination.”⁶⁷ Hobbes, for example, considered the imagination to decay sense.⁶⁸ Western scholars have viewed traditional Islamic eschatology, one of the most fertile areas for the imagination in Islamic religious

⁶¹ The pages devoted to eschatology in Chebel, *L’imaginaire arabo-musulman*, 157–65, only give a faint impression. Also the various contributions in Arkoun, Le Goff, Fahd, and Rodinson, *L’étrange et le merveilleux*, do not address the (post-Qur’ānic) eschatological imagination in Islam. This may have to do with the fact that scholarship on the marvellous in Islam has largely focused on ‘*Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt* (*The Marvels of Creation*), a genre that tends to bypass paradise and hell. It should be noted, however, that the ‘*Ajā’ib al-makhlūqāt* tradition is not merely a “literature of the marvellous.” See von Hees, “The astonishing.” It is also not entirely inimical to religious cosmography. See Saleh, “Paradise in an Islamic ‘*ajā’ib* work.”

⁶² This, notwithstanding the title of her work, is also noted by Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, 63.

⁶³ Cf. Eliade, “Les Américains en Océanie et le nudisme eschatologique.”

⁶⁴ El-Saleh, *Vie future*, 51.

⁶⁵ For Arab. *firdaws*, usually described in the literature as a layer, or compartment *within* paradise, I prefer to use the proper name “Firdaws” in translation.

⁶⁶ See Mainusch and Warning, “Imagination”; Iser, *Das Fiktive*, esp. 292–411.

⁶⁷ Mittermayer, *Dreams that matter*, 16.

⁶⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 23, quoted in Mittermayer, *Dreams*, 16. Cf. Iser, *Das Fiktive*, 296–7.

thought, with similar suspicion. “The whole basic view of ultimate origins and the hereafter,” wrote Fritz Meier, “is hidden in Islamic literature behind a decorative structure of baroque traditions.”⁶⁹ At the end of the nineteenth century, the Orientalist aristocrat, the Baron Carra de Vaux, wondered at the “bizarre marvels” and “puerile legends” of Islamic eschatology. While acknowledging that there are expressions of the marvellous (*merveilleux*) also in the Christian tradition, Carra de Vaux concluded that “we have come to realize to what degree the marvellous [of Islamic eschatology] lacks in spontaneity, life and richness.... The superiority of the Christian marvellous (*le merveilleux chrétien*) is overwhelming.”⁷⁰

At the same time, from the eighteenth century onwards, and prominently in the Age of Romanticism, the imagination has been framed not as dangerous and decadent, but as a positive, creative faculty; according to Samuel Coleridge (d. 1834), it is even the hallmark of poetic genius.⁷¹ There have been few willing or daring enough to suggest that the Islamic eschatological imagination bears the traces of such poetic genius. Thomas Carlyle (1840), taking his inspiration from Goethe, was a harbinger of this view,⁷² but his ideas have found few followers. Perhaps it takes an outsider to the field of Islamic studies like John Casey, an Oxford scholar of literature, to grant Islamic eschatology an “extraordinary ... capacity to find arresting visual images for scarcely graspable ideas.”⁷³ One of the few strong voices emerging from within Islamic Studies is that of Aziz al-Azmeh, who detects in the Muslim traditionist literature on paradise “a canon which imagines the unimaginable, delights in beholding it, and glories in the possibility of possessing it and of endlessly repeating its possession and enjoyment....”⁷⁴ As for hell, it is no exaggeration to say that it is pictured equally sumptuously, a gigantic, intricate mechanism of endless punishment and pain.

To what an extent such characterisations are accurate or indeed appropriate, readers must decide for themselves. Let us add the significant point here that Muslims of all colours and persuasions have, throughout Islamic history, characterised the otherworld as that which is truly and fully real (*ḥaqq*).⁷⁵ The Qurʾān provides an important anchor for this idea, poetically

⁶⁹ Meier, “The ultimate origin,” 103. Cf. the similar comments of Gardet, *Dieu*, 314, 325; Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding*, 86n71.

⁷⁰ Carra de Vaux, “Fragments,” 5, 25–6.

⁷¹ Iser, *Das Fiktive*, 292–331.

⁷² Carlyle attests the Islamic paradise and hell a “bursting earnestness” and “fierce savage sincerity.” See Carlyle, “The hero as prophet,” 86. Cf. Goethe’s *Buch des Paradieses* in his *West-östlicher Divan*, I, 127–36.

⁷³ Casey, *After lives*, 144.

⁷⁴ Al-Azmeh, “Rhetoric for the senses,” 218. See also Sebastian Günther’s more recent comments on the “richness of symbolic imagery, metaphors and colors so distinctive to [Muslim] eschatological texts.” See Günther, “God disdains not to strike a simile (Q 2:26).”

⁷⁵ Cf. Arkoun, “Peut-on parler,” 1–2.

announcing that “this lower life (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) is but sport and play, but the other abode: that is truly life (*la-ḥiya l-ḥayawān*)” (29:64). Thus, to borrow again from Le Goff, what is perceived by the Islamic eschatological imagination is “the whisper of a world more real than this one, a world of eternal truths.”⁷⁶

While there was a broad consensus among the scholars of Islam that the otherworld is real, the modality of this realness was the subject of much debate. It is striking that, from the time of Avicenna in the fourth/tenth century onwards, the imaginative faculty (*al-quwwa al-wahmiyya*) slowly but inexorably comes to play a central role in Muslim understandings of the otherworld. For the exegete al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), imagining (*takhyīl*) is a mode of revelatory speech aimed at capturing fathomless realities, it is the “visualisation of an abstract notion such as God’s majesty and omnipotence in a comprehensive picture.” In the words of a rhetorician of a later century, *takhyīl* is the “depicting [of] the essence of something, so that it might be assumed that it has a form that can be seen with the eyes.”⁷⁷ For the followers of the “Shaykh of Illumination” (*shaykh al-ishrāq*), al-Suhrawardī of Aleppo (d. 587/1191), the imagination (*khayāl*) becomes the favoured organ for giving the individual access to the hereafter, providing insight into the “realities” of the otherworld.⁷⁸

Readers are referred to later chapters, particularly Chapters 5 and 6, for a fuller discussion of the intricate relationships between the imagination, epistemology, ontology, and eschatology in Islam. Here, let me note that in the academic study of religion, the imagination has long been divested of the stigma of pertaining to “popular” or “irrational” religion. Not only is there a tendency to see the imagination not as an irrational but rather, as a kind of a pararational faculty.⁷⁹ Also the distinction between high and popular religion has increasingly come under criticism, a criticism that in recent decades has also had a tangible impact on Islamic studies.⁸⁰ To study the variegated eschatological imaginaries in Islam is therefore not so much an exercise in rewriting the history of Islamic religion from the bottom up but rather, of

⁷⁶ Le Goff, “Introduction,” 6. The continuity of this notion into contemporary Muslim religious thought and practice has recently been highlighted by Amira Mittermaier. See Mittermaier, *Dreams that matter*, 19.

⁷⁷ See Heinrichs, “*Takhyīl*,” 13–4, referring to Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf*, IV, 137–8 (*ad* Q 39:67: “On the Day of Resurrection, the earth in its entirety will be His handful, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand”); Ibn al-Zamlakānī, *Tibyān*, 178.

⁷⁸ On the history of the imagination in Islam, as well as its multiple permutations, primarily in Arabic poetics, see van Gelder and Hammond (eds.), “*Takhyīl*.”

⁷⁹ Cognitive philosophers sometimes assert that mental images represent objects in a manner not much different from linguistic descriptions, and vice versa. See Tye, “Imagery,” 704a. Mohamed Arkoun comments that “one must not oppose the notion of reason with that of the marvellous (*merveilleux*) or the imagination but try to see how they function in parallel (*d’une façon corrélative*).” See Arkoun, “Peut-on parler,” 53.

⁸⁰ See, e.g., Berkey, *Popular preaching*, 9–12; Karamustafa, *God’s unruly friends*, 9–11; Shoshan, “High culture and popular culture.”

paying proper attention to the history of the Muslim imagination, a concept that transcends the dichotomies of high/low and rational/irrational religion. Al-Ghazālī, a wildly imaginative writer if ever there was one in Islam,⁸¹ may be invoked here as a prime example of an author combining an interest in imaginary worlds with “rational” thought, and doing so prominently in the area of eschatology.⁸²

As others have suggested,⁸³ it is not implausible that the drive to create graphic images of the otherworld was channelled in Islam into a great mosaic of literary traditions, for the reason that the figurative arts were not an available medium of expression. The least one can say is that it would be wrong to dismiss the Muslim eschatological imagination and the kind of literature it produced as “nursery-tales for the lower-classes,”⁸⁴ the result of “geriatric libidinousness,”⁸⁵ or of a proclivity, tinged by a sadistic fascination with violence, towards the “bizarre.”⁸⁶ “The imagination nourishes man and causes him to act,” writes Le Goff, “[i]t is a collective, social, and historical phenomenon ... [a] history without the imagination is a mutilated, disembodied history.”⁸⁷ The imagination may occasionally give birth to monsters, but then, monsters are worth studying, given that “perhaps what makes monsters horrifically *unheimlich* is that we see ourselves in them.”⁸⁸ Paradise and hell, in this perspective, may not be such foreign places after all. And, to quote Jonathan Z. Smith, “if we do not persist in the quest for intelligibility, there can be no human sciences, let alone, any place for the study of religion within them.”⁸⁹

Premodern Views of the Islamic Otherworld among Non-Muslims

There is also a history of the Christian and the Western imagination of the Muslim paradise and hell, and this history deserves to be surveyed in the

⁸¹ Cf. Moosa, *Al-Ghazālī*, 69. According to Moosa, al-Ghazālī “push[ed] reason into a conversation with the poetic imagination.” See Moosa, *Al-Ghazālī*, 186.

⁸² See the following text, pp. 186–9.

⁸³ Nwyia, *Exégèse*, 102; Wild, “Lost in philology?,” 643. Cf. al-Azmeh, “Preamble,” 30: “[F]igural representation reigned supreme in classical Arabic culture in the form of literary and linguistic representation but was not confined to this. It displayed itself equally in ... verbal accounts of dreams and visions.”

⁸⁴ Carra de Vaux voices doubts that heavyweight scholars like al-Ghazālī and al-Suyūṭī really believed in the traditions about the physical aspects of the *barzakh*. See Carra de Vaux, “Fragments,” 6. Eklund, however, rightly comments that “[i]t would be to misjudge orthodox Islam if we were to ascribe to it a European view of life after death as a nursery-tale for the lower classes.” See Eklund, *Life between death and resurrection*, 28.

⁸⁵ I borrow this term from al-Azmeh, “Rhetoric,” 224, who is likewise critical of the idea.

⁸⁶ Cf. Meier, “The ultimate origin,” 104; Carra de Vaux, “Fragments,” 5.

⁸⁷ Le Goff, “Introduction,” 5.

⁸⁸ Beal, *Religion and its monsters*, 196.

⁸⁹ Smith, “The devil in Mr. Jones,” 120.

introduction to this book, even though for reasons of space, we must do so in giant steps. It is no exaggeration to say that the Islamic otherworld, from the earliest times of Christian-Muslim relations, was a favoured battlefield for polemics. “It was the Islamic paradise,” writes Norman Daniel, “which, more than any other theme, summed up the Christian notion of Islam. It was always thought to prove the contention that this was no spiritual religion.”⁹⁰ Christian criticism focused on three aspects of Islamic eschatology in particular: the carnality of the Islamic paradise, which was seen contrary to the pure, spiritual afterlife preached in Christian doctrine; Islamic salvific optimism, which was interpreted to facilitate a permissive attitude of moral laxity; and the treatment of women in the hereafter (although this particular criticism appears to have come about only from early modern times onwards).

One should note at the beginning that Christian theologians of Late Antiquity, sometimes also of later periods, were not completely opposed to the idea that there were sensual pleasures in the afterlife. Irenaeus of Lyon (*fl. ca.* 140–200), for example, described a paradise full of them. In Ephrem’s (d. 373) *Hymns of Paradise*, which, as I show in Chapter 1, display important intertextual parallels with the Qur’ān, the blessed enjoy food and drink. Also in the paradise of Renaissance theologians there are corporal delights. Later, Swedenborg (d. 1772) even imagined the angels praising conjugal intercourse in heaven.⁹¹ The asceticism of Christian monasticism, combined with Augustine’s doctrine of original sin, however, led to a broad repudiation of bodily pleasure and sexuality in this life as well as the next; paradise, in mainstream Christian thought, was declared to be above it, and thus, devoid of it.⁹²

Christian theologians living under Islamic rule, such as Job of Edessa (d. 708), John of Damascus (d. 749), and Theodor Abū Qurra (d. 823), as well as the Byzantine theologians who read their works, mocked and criticised the somaticity of the Muslim paradise.⁹³ Already in the alleged correspondence between the Armenian king Leo III (r. 717–41) and the caliph ‘Umar II (r. 99–101/717–20), parts of which go back to the early second/eighth century, Leo rebukes ‘Umar “for saying that the inhabitants of paradise eat, drink, wear clothes and get married.”⁹⁴ A Christian school teacher in Basra

⁹⁰ Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 172–6, at 172. For a study of this view in Victorian England, see Almond, *Heretic and hero*, 44–9.

⁹¹ MacDannell and Lang, *Heaven*, 47–68, 124–44, 219–20.

⁹² There is, of course, an enormous body of literature on this topic. See, e.g., Brown, “Late antiquity,” 235–312, esp. 297ff.; Le Goff, “The repudiation of pleasure”; Ciulianu, “The body reexamined.”

⁹³ *TG*, IV, 556; Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 487–8; Lamoreaux, “Abū Qurra.”

⁹⁴ The correspondence is contained in chapters 13 and 14 of the eighth- or ninth-century Armenian chronicle of Łewond. See Łewond, *History*, 70–1. Cf. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 495; Greenwood, “Correspondence.”

is reported to have provoked the Muslim judge of the city, Iyās b. Mu‘āwiya (d. 122/740), with the statement that if the inhabitants of paradise eat, they must also defecate. Iyās responded that, like fetuses in their mother’s womb, bodies in paradise have the ability to ingest everything, without the need to excrete.⁹⁵ This is an argument that left traces in some of the earliest hadith collections. In a tradition preserved in the *Scroll* (*ṣahīfa*) of Hammām b. Munabbih (Egypt, d. 131/749 or 132/750) one learns that the inhabitants of paradise do not spit, blow their nose, or defecate.⁹⁶ Later elaborations of this theme add that digestion in paradise is by way of a light sweat.⁹⁷

In the west of the Islamic world, in early third/ninth-century al-Andalus, the abbot Speraindeo of Cordoba and his student Paulus Alvarus wrote biting polemics against Islam in which they defamed the Islamic paradise as a brothel (*lupanar*) and claimed that Muḥammad had “promised as a gift for those who believe in him harlots for the taking, scattered about in the paradise of his god.”⁹⁸ Meanwhile, in the east, a contemporary of Alvarus, the Iranian convert ‘Alī b. Rabbān al-Ṭabarī (d. ca. 240/855) defended the Muslim paradise by pointing out that the wine of paradise is also mentioned in Matthew 26:29: “I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it again with you in the kingdom of heaven.”⁹⁹ The Muslim theologian Ḥumayd b. Bakhtiyār (Iraq, fl. middle of third/ninth c.) wrote a defence against Christian attacks entitled *Against the Christians on Felicity and Eating and Drinking in the Hereafter, and against Whoever Teaches in Opposition to This*.¹⁰⁰ The Baghdadi littérateur al-Tawḥīdī (d. 414/1023) reports that when a Christian pontificated that in his paradise, there was no drink, food, or sex, a Muslim theologian laconically commented: “What a sad affair!”¹⁰¹

Christian writers of the time of the crusades eagerly picked up on the theme of the sensuality of the Islamic paradise, fanning the Crusaders’ “obsession with Muslim concupiscence.”¹⁰² From the widely read polemicist Petrus Alfonsi (d. after 1116) to the abbot of Cluny, Peter of Cluny (d. 1156), the bishop of Paris, William of Auvergne (d. 1249), and the Majorcan

⁹⁵ See Wakī, *Akhhār al-quḍāt*, I, 373, quoted in *TG*, II, 130. See also Aguadé, “*Inna lladī ya’kulu*.”

⁹⁶ Hammām, *Ṣahīfa*, 35 (#86).

⁹⁷ Qurṭubī, *Tadhkira*, II, 197; Suyūṭī, *Budūr*, 536, 554, 590; Majlisī, *Bihār*, VIII, 332, 347, 356, 365; Baḥrānī, *Ma‘ālim*, III, 121, 135.

⁹⁸ See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 229; Tolan, *Saracens*, 86; Coffey, “Contesting the eschaton in medieval Iberia,” 99, 102; Wolf, “Muhammad as antichrist,” 11.

⁹⁹ See Ibn Rabbān, *K. al-Dīn wa-l-dawla*, 201, quoted in Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, 499. The technique of using biblical quotations to prove the correctness of Islamic paradise notions is already used in (Pseudo-)‘Umar II’s letter to Leo II. See Roggema, “Letter of ‘Umar.”

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, “Ḥumayd.” Cf. *TG*, IV, 132–3. Ḥumayd’s text is lost.

¹⁰¹ See Tawḥīdī, *Imtā‘*, III, 192, quoted in *TG*, IV, 557.

¹⁰² Housley, “The crusades and Islam,” 202.

missionary Ramon Llull (d. ca. 1315), influential Christian theologians of the high Middle Ages penned refutations of Islam in which the Muslim afterlife was a favourite target of criticism.¹⁰³ The bull *Quia maior* of Pope Innocent III (d. 1216), which launched the Fifth Crusade, proclaimed that “the false prophet Muhammad ... seduced many men from the truth by worldly enticements and the pleasures of the flesh.”¹⁰⁴ A century later, still writing under the impression of the failure of the crusades, the Dominican monk and missionary from Florence, Riccoldo da Monte Croce (d. 1320), belittled Islam as the “easy and wide road” (*lata et spatiosa via*) towards salvation, invoking Matthew 7:13–14: “The gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many, for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”¹⁰⁵ In the Renaissance, following the fall of Constantinople, attacks continued unabated. Pope Pius II (d. 1464), in a letter to the Ottoman sultan, Mehmet II (d. 1481), scoffed that the Muslim paradise was “the paradise of an ox or an ass, not of a man.”¹⁰⁶ Little, in fact, had changed since the days of Petrus Alfonsi, with the alleged cupidity of the prophet Muḥammad still serving as the explanation for the promise of carnal pleasure in the Islamic paradise.¹⁰⁷ Martin Luther (d. 1546) fumed: “How drowned is this Mahmet in woman’s flesh, in all his thoughts, words, works. On account of his lust, he can neither speak nor act due to his lust, everything has to be flesh, flesh, flesh.”¹⁰⁸ Despite the fact that European scholars of the centuries following Luther became increasingly aware of the spiritual, immaterial dimensions of Islamic eschatology, “in the West, the image of a Paradise intended to satisfy male sensuality predominated.”¹⁰⁹

The first truly informed scholarly attempt to come to terms with Muslim eschatology is found in chapter 7 of the *Notae miscellaneae* of Edward Pococke (d. 1691), the first Laudian Chair of Arabic at Oxford. Pococke appended the *Notae* to his annotated edition-*cum*-translation of a part of Maimonides’s Mishnah commentary, the *Porta Mosis* (1655).¹¹⁰ Unlike

¹⁰³ On the works of Peter of Cluny, *Contra sectam Saracenorum*; William of Auvergne (d. 1249), *De fide et legibus* (ch. 19); and Llull, *Libre del gentil i dels tres savis*, see CMR, s.v.v. Peter of Cluny; William of Auvergne; Ramon Llull. See also Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 172–6.

¹⁰⁴ See Phillips, *Holy warriors*, 216.

¹⁰⁵ On *lata et spatiosa via*, see Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 177–80. On Riccoldo and other Dominican missions, see Tolan, *Saracens*, 233–55. This, one might add, came not so long after the preacher Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) had promised that Christians would be able to buy paradise “cheaply,” by signing up to carry the cross. See Tolan, “Sermons.”

¹⁰⁶ Pius II, *Epistola ad Mahomatem II*, 61. Cf. Bisaha, *Creating East and West*, 150. Ironically, part of Pius II’s fame rested on the fact that he had authored an erotic novel (*The tale of the two lovers*, 1444) when still a layman.

¹⁰⁷ Tolan, *Petrus Alfonsi*, 31.

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Bobzin, *Koran*, 143n285; Wild, “Lost in philology?,” 631.

¹⁰⁹ Almond, *Heretic and hero*, 45.

¹¹⁰ Pococke, *Notae*, 223–301.

previous descriptions of the Muslim paradise and hell, which were based on a selective reading of the Qurʾān or simply regurgitated the received polemical tradition, Pococke availed himself of numerous Arabic manuscripts, many of which he had collected during his years of travel in Turkey and the Near East. In the *Notae*, he refers, among other works, to the Ashʿarite theological summa, the *K. al-Mawāqif* of al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), to the Qurʾān commentaries of al-Bayḍāwī (d. 674/1275?) and al-Jalālayn (Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī [d. 864/1459] and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī), to the writings of al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), but also to texts from the Islamic sceptical and philosophical tradition, such as al-Maʿarrī's (d. 449/1058) *Epistle of Forgiveness (Risālat al-ghufrān)* and various treatises of Avicenna (d. 428/1037), including his *Book of Origin and Return (K. al-Mabdaʾ wa-l-maʿād)*.

Pococke begins his account with a nod to the Islamic philosophical tradition, referring to Avicenna's *Book of Healing (K. al-Shifāʾ)*, in which it is stated that the wise (*al-ḥukamāʾ*) desire intellectual felicity, not corporeal bliss, "nay, they ignore the latter, and if it is given to them, they belittle it."¹¹¹ Pococke then sets out to describe what he sees as the "orthodox" Muslim view, discussing, first, Muslim notions of the interrogation and torture in the grave (he suspects a Jewish influence); secondly, resurrection (he rehearses al-Ghazālī's argument that God can resurrect even the bodies of those who were eaten by wild animals); thirdly, the question of where souls reside between death and resurrection (in various localities: al-ʿIlīyyīn in heaven, the well of Zamzam in Mecca, Sijjīn below the earth, or the valley of "Borhut" in Hadramawt); fourthly, the apocalypse (he mentions Gog and Magog, the Mahdī, and so forth); fifthly, judgement (he notes that animals are judged, too); and, finally, hell and paradise. The Islamic hell, Pococke relates, is divided into seven layers, of which the top layer is home to the *jahannamiyyūn* ("Gehennales" in his phrase), the only group of sinners for whom punishment is not eternal.¹¹² In paradise, however, there is the tree of Ṭūbā, from which spring the rivers Salsabīl and Tasnīm. The heavenly maidens ("candidas megal[o]y[talm]ys" in Pococke's learned translation of the term *ḥūr ʿīn*, "white ones, with big eyes") give pleasure to the believers, next to their earthly wives. The blessed drink wine, which does not inebriate.¹¹³

After listing many more such particulars of the Islamic paradise and hell, Pococke concludes his account by highlighting that "the greatest pleasure in paradise," according to Islam, is the heavenly concert (*samāʿ*) of the believers in God's palace. He states that Muslims agree that the ultimate pleasure

¹¹¹ Ibid., 225. The notion that the "wise men" of Islam, such as Avicenna, had turned their backs on their religion because of the sensuality of the Islamic afterlife was a *topos* of Christian polemics. See Daniel, *Islam and the West*, 173; Tolan, *Saracens*, 240.

¹¹² Pococke, *Notae*, 278–9.

¹¹³ Ibid., 281–2, 288.

in paradise is “what no eye has seen and no ear has heard, and no mind has conceived.”¹¹⁴ Pococke also draws attention to the fact that in a certain reading of Avicenna, the corporeal delights and torments of the Islamic afterlife are no more than the imaginings of the soul in its postmortem state. However, this philosophical interpretation, Pococke assures his readers, is considered “heretical” by orthodox Islam. In the end, Muslims are left to believe “what even mad Orestes himself would swear were the words of a madman.”¹¹⁵ Islamic views of the afterlife, in Pococke’s final assessment, are “as different as can be from what the Christians believe”; they are “plainly ridiculous, nay, absurd.”¹¹⁶

Despite their polemical conclusion, Pococke’s *Notae* are unprecedented in the wealth of detail and insight they offer, and as such continued to form the basis of the Western knowledge of Islamic eschatology for almost two centuries. For example, the substantial section on eschatology in George Sale’s (d. 1736) introduction to his English translation of the Qur’ān (1735) is largely based on Pococke.¹¹⁷ Echoing Pococke, Sale writes that the Christian doctrine of the afterlife exhibits “none of those puerile imaginations which reign throughout that of Mohammed, much less any of the most distant intimation of sensual delights, which he was so fond of,” quoting Matthew 22:34 to the effect that Christians “in the resurrection neither marry nor are given in marriage, but will be as angels of God in heaven.”¹¹⁸

While Sale’s understanding of the Muslim hereafter is largely modelled on that of Pococke, there is, next to Pococke’s, another groundbreaking early modern contribution to the Western understanding of Islamic eschatology, that of the Dutchman Adriaan Reland (d. 1718). A professor of Oriental languages at Utrecht University,¹¹⁹ Reland is the author of *De religione Mohammedica* (1705), a watershed work on Islamic beliefs and practices that was translated in the eighteenth century into French, German, English, and Spanish, earning a place on the index of forbidden books of the Catholic Church. In *De religione Mohammedica*, Reland reacts against the work of Gisbertus Voetius (d. 1676), professor of theology at Utrecht and nemesis of René Descartes.¹²⁰ Voetius, who to his credit had initiated the study of Arabic at Utrecht, translated and recommended for study polemical works written against Islam, such as the *Confusio sectae Mahometanae* of the Spanish

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 291.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 293: *quod ipse non sani esse hominis non sanus juret Orestes*, a quote from the *Third Satire* (v. 118) of the Latin satirist Persius (d. 62). See Persius, *Satires*, 112.

¹¹⁶ Pococke, *Notae*, 299.

¹¹⁷ Sale, “Preliminary discourse,” 98–111.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 109.

¹¹⁹ On Reland and his work, see van Amersfoort and van Asselt, *Liever Turks dan Paaps?*, 23–8; Vrolijk and van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies*, 65–72.

¹²⁰ On Voetius’s view of Islam, see van Amersfoort and van Asselt, *Liever Turks dan Paaps?*, 19–23.

convert Juan Andrés/Johannes Maurus (Valencia, *fl. ca.* 1487–1515), “a theological polemic which emphasized the differences between Islam and Christianity, such as ... the ‘sensual’ Islamic idea of the afterlife.”¹²¹

The second part of Reland’s *De religione Mohammedica* is devoted entirely to a refutation of false charges against Islam.¹²² Based on a careful reading of Arabic primary sources, Reland shows that Islam is not the *via lata et spatiosa* of which Riccoldo wrote. He demonstrates that Muslims *do* reckon with punishment of Muslim sinners in hell (§ 9); that it is erroneous to believe that corporeal pleasures are viewed as the “highest pleasure” of the Islamic paradise – Reland stresses the importance of the beatific vision in Islam and draws attention to Muslim metaphorical interpretations of the paradisiacal delights (§ 17); and that the view that women do not enter the Islamic paradise cannot be upheld (§ 18).¹²³

Reland’s remarkable impartiality becomes vividly evident when one compares his deliberations with those of certain French *philosophes* writing a couple of decades later. For instance, in his *Lettres persanes* (1721), Montesquieu (d. 1755) has his fictional hero, a prince from Isfahan, muse that “women are of an inferior nature to ours, and given that our prophets tell us that they do not enter paradise, why should they bother reading a book [i.e., the Qur’ān] whose sole purpose is to learn what the path to paradise is?”¹²⁴ Diderot, in an article of the *Encyclopédie* published in 1765, affirms that “for those [women] they [Muslim men] gather in their serails, paradise is closed,” reproducing a pernicious prejudice found in the sixteenth-to-eighteenth-century French literature on Islam, as well as in some later European imaginings of the Islamic heaven.¹²⁵ Elsewhere in the *Encyclopédie*, it is stated that “Mahomet had to do with a people strongly given to sensual pleasures; therefore he deemed it necessary to limit eternal felicity to an unlimited ability to satisfy their desires in this regard.”¹²⁶

In sum, as concerns Western understandings of the Islamic paradise and hell, the Enlightenment was a two-edged sword: on the one hand, scholars with access to the primary sources written in Arabic and other Oriental languages began to reconsider long-held polemical assumptions; on the other,

¹²¹ See Vrolijk and van Leeuwen, *Arabic Studies*, 64, who note that Voetius’s *Disputatio de Mohammedanismo* (1648) cites the *Confusio* many times.

¹²² Reland, *De religione Mohammedica*, 125–272 (*Lib. II agens de nonnullis, quae falso Mohammedanis tribuuntur*).

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 174 (§ 9), 199–205 (§ 17), 205–8 (§ 18).

¹²⁴ Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, 92 (Lettre XXIV).

¹²⁵ *Encyclopédie*, s.v. Houris, (*Hist. mod.*), VIII, 327 (Diderot). See Smith, “Old French travel accounts,” 230–2. Also Byron, in the *Bride of Abydos* (1813), writes of a Muslim paradise forbidden to women. See Reeves, *Muhammad in Europe*, 219. At the end of the nineteenth century, according to Pautz, *Muhammeds Lehre*, 212n3, the question was still “on occasion raised.”

¹²⁶ *Encyclopédie*, s.v. Alcoran ou Al-Coran, (*Theol.*), I, 250 (unknown author [1751]).

the enlightened critique of religion resulted in an entrenchment of common perceptions of the Islamic otherworld as exceedingly sensual, permissive, and misogynist. As we will have occasion to show, the discursive polarity between the spiritual eschatology of Christianity and the carnal eschatology of Islam, which is embedded in larger imaginary distinctions between the rational West and the sensual East, lingers to this day.

Modern and Contemporary Scholarship on Paradise and Hell in Islam

Modern Western scholarship on Islamic eschatology begins with the edition of two popular medieval Arabic manuals of eschatology. In 1872, Prussian-born Moritz Wolff, a rabbi in Sweden, edited and translated (into German) the anonymous *Daqā'iq al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* (*Subtle Traditions about the Garden and the Fire*),¹²⁷ while in 1878, the Swiss professor of Hebrew at Lausanne, Lucien Gautier (d. 1924), published, accompanied by a translation, *al-Durra al-fākhira* (*The Precious Pearl*), a text commonly attributed to al-Ghazālī.¹²⁸ The text edited by Wolff, in particular, exerted a considerable influence on Western Islamic studies, seeing numerous re-editions and translations into a variety of languages.¹²⁹ J. B. Rūling, in his *Beiträge zur islamischen Eschatologie* (1895), originally a doctoral dissertation defended at Leipzig University, attempted a thematic overview of “Qur’ānic, dogmatic-Sunnaic and philosophical-apologetic” eschatological thought in Islam, noting that in Pococke’s classic account, these three dimensions tend to get mixed up.¹³⁰ Rūling’s study, though not without merit, is marred by the narrow textual basis on which it rests, as well as by its author’s sanctimonious attitude. He judges, for example, that to trace the minutiae of Muslim theological eschatology is “without meaning or interest” and suggests that Muḥammad, “while borrowing much from Christianity did not understand its deep moral view (*sittliche Auffassung*).”¹³¹ Baron Carra de Vaux, in a study published in the same year as Rūling’s, could also not do without such judgemental posturing. Though offering valuable insights, he feels compelled to dismiss the eschatological imagery

¹²⁷ This was originally Wolff’s PhD dissertation. Wolff published the text under a different title, *Aḥwāl al-qiyaṃa*. Cf. idem, “Bemerkungen zu der Schrift Aḥwāl al-ḳiyāme.” *ZDMG* 52 (1898), 418–24. For other editions of this text, under a variety of titles, see *Daqā'iq al-akhbār*. Wolff’s choice of title is misleading, as the work should not be confused with the Ottoman *Aḥwāl-i qiyāmat*, of which there are a number of spectacularly illustrated manuscripts. See, e.g., Ms. StaBi Or. Oct. 1596. Cf. the study by Yıldız, *Aḥwāl-i ḳiyāmet*. There is also an Ottoman eschatological poem with the same title. See Flügel, *Handschriften*, III, 140, referring to ms. Vienna KK Hofbibliothek 1700, fols. 31v–48r.

¹²⁸ Ghazālī, *Durra*. See the following text, pp. 107–8.

¹²⁹ Cf. Tottoli, “Muslim eschatological literature.” See also the following text, pp. 108–12.

¹³⁰ See Rūling, *Beiträge*, 2.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

of Islam as profoundly “inferior” to the Christian one, lacking as it does in spontaneity and the capacity to devise original images.¹³²

Rudolf Leszynsky, in his 1909 Heidelberg dissertation on the *Book of Renunciation* (*K. al-Zuhd*) of the third/ninth-century Egyptian traditionist, Asad b. Mūsā, is appropriately critical of the attitudes shown by the likes of Rüling and Carra de Vaux. The task of the scholar of Islamic eschatology, Leszynsky declares, is to develop a historical understanding of the genealogy and gradual unfolding of Muslim ideas about the afterlife. This, in his view, depends crucially on the comparison with the eschatological ideas of other religious traditions, particularly Judaism and Christianity. For example, the notion, or what Leszynsky refers to as the “dogma of our day,” that Muḥammad’s views of paradise and hell result from his “fiery (*überschäumende*) phantasy,” loses much of its plausibility as soon as one considers Judeo-Christian precedents, which are no less phantastical.¹³³ In the 1920s, the scholarly search for the origins of Islamic eschatology seems to have manifested itself primarily in studies of the Judeo-Christian background of Qur’ānic eschatology, such as those of the Swedish historian of religion, Tor Andræ (1923–5), and, particularly, of the Jewish German Orientalist, Josef Horowitz (1923), who combined the search for precedents with a processual reading of the Qur’ān as reflecting four phases in the development of Muḥammad’s predication.¹³⁴ However, despite some exceptions,¹³⁵ this line of research had few followers in twentieth-century scholarship. A number of reasons account for this, but one cannot help wonder whether the lack of interest in Qur’ānic eschatology had to do with a twentieth-century scholarly aversion against seeing Muḥammad as the fervently eschatological prophet he was, a “warner” (*nadhīr*) who preached the imminent end of the world, preferring instead to portray him, in line with much of the Islamic tradition, as a social and ethical reformer who laid the lasting bases for Islamic civilisation. Only in recent decades has this trend been challenged anew and, in some instances, reversed.¹³⁶

More continuous attention has been given to Islamic eschatology understood as a discipline of dialectic theology, or *kalām*, an area of Muslim

¹³² Carra de Vaux, “Fragments,” 6, 26. Also Ataa Denkha, in a recent study, concludes that “Christianity possesses a way of thinking about this topic that is more open and flexible.” See Denkha, *L’imaginaire du paradis*, 340.

¹³³ Leszynski, *Mohammedanische Traditionen*, 4. Leszynsky’s edition of Asad’s *K. al-Zuhd* is superseded by the 1976 edition of the same text by Raif Georges Khoury.

¹³⁴ Andræ, *Ursprung*; Horowitz, “Das islamische Paradies.”

¹³⁵ See, e.g., the thorough though somewhat mechanical studies of O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”; idem, *Eschatological themes*.

¹³⁶ On this point, see the excellent discussion by Shoemaker, *The death of a prophet*, 14–15, 120–36. See now also Lawson, “The music of apocalypse.” The forthcoming study of Carlos Segovia on *The Quranic Noah and the making of the Islamic Prophet* also appears to contribute to this line of inquiry, but I have not been able to see it in time.

thought that involves discussions of soteriology (doctrines of virtues and sins, repentance, intercession of the saints, and God's salvation and damnation) as well as of the ontology of the afterworld, that is, its mode of reality. The standard reference work in the field is *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme* (1967) of the Catholic French priest, Louis Gardet, a study that is based on late-medieval Sunni theological *summae* in which centuries of eschatological thought in Islam are conveniently synthesised.¹³⁷ Only a couple of years after the appearance of Gardet's classic study, his student in Paris, Soubhi El-Saleh, published *La vie future selon le Coran* (1971). El-Saleh, a graduate of Azhar University who in later years became a professor at the Lebanese University in Beirut and a prominent contributor to Muslim-Christian dialogue, does not provide the detail and depth of analysis shown by Gardet; nonetheless his work remains the most useful survey of Islamic eschatology to date.¹³⁸ Focusing on traditionist-literal, rational, and mystical exegesis of Qur'ānic eschatology, El-Saleh introduces readers to a broad range of traditions of afterlife thought in Islam, surpassing Pococke's and Rūling's earlier attempts at a comprehensive treatment of the topic. The standard textbook on Islamic eschatology in English, Jane Smith's and Yvonne Haddad's *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* (1981, republished 2002), by contrast, presents a less varied picture, focusing primarily on traditionist (i.e., hadith based) and *kalām* discussions, and conflating Ash'arī, Māturīdī, Salafī, and popular doctrines. What is novel and valuable in Smith and Haddad's account is that it includes important typological observations about the modern permutations of Muslim eschatological thought.¹³⁹

As well-balanced and thoroughly researched as the work of Smith and Haddad is, it also showcases a number of blind spots of twentieth-century Western scholarship on the Islamic hereafter. First of all, there is a tacit assumption that Islam, at least in its "orthodox" Sunni form, offers its adherents a supreme degree of salvation certainty. Already Ignaz Goldziher, in 1920, wrote about the "pure optimism" of Muslim soteriology.¹⁴⁰ According to Gustav von Grunebaum's classic formulation (1969), Islam does away with the idea of original sin and reduces salvation to obedience to an all-powerful God, thus making salvation "a door that is easily unlocked."¹⁴¹ According to Smith and Haddad, not just the *kalām* tradition but also "popular belief chose

¹³⁷ Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*. Gardet's volume should be read alongside TG, which contains a wealth of information particularly on the early centuries. Other useful surveys of eschatology in Sunni *kalām* include Stieglecker, *Glaubenslehren*, 730–98; Martin, *La vie future*.

¹³⁸ El-Saleh was murdered in 1986, a victim of the Lebanese civil war.

¹³⁹ Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding*, 127–46.

¹⁴⁰ Goldziher, *Richtungen*, 160.

¹⁴¹ Von Grunebaum, "Ausbreitungs- und Anpassungsfähigkeit," 15.

to see that all but the most sinful will be saved by Muḥammad's intercession and God's mercy at the final time."¹⁴² Paradise, in consequence, is assigned a far more central role in Islamic eschatology than hell. While the precise degree to which the certainty of salvation characterises the Islamic tradition remains a subject worthy of study, despite all generalisations to the contrary, the fact is that hell has fallen almost completely through the grid of Western scholarship on Islam.¹⁴³ The only book-length study of the Muslim hell, a 1901 Basel dissertation by Jonas Meyer (*Die Hölle im Islam*), is largely a paraphrase of certain sections in a medieval eschatological manual, *al-Takhwīf min al-nār* (*Causing Fear of the Fire*) of Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī (d. 795/1393). As such, it offers little analysis. On the whole, the study of Islam has tended to privilege notions of spiritual ascent over the descent into the nether regions of the otherworld. Perhaps this is because the notion that the god of Islam is essentially merciful has proven more palatable to liberal scholars of religion than the terrifying spectre of a punisher deity. The Muslim hell is a messy, sometimes shockingly violent place, an interpretive challenge that few have been interested in meeting head-on. It is telling that the entry on paradise (1965) in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (1954–2005) counts eleven columns in the printed edition, while hell (written in the same year) is awarded less than one column.¹⁴⁴

Secondly, much of the scholarly literature on Islamic eschatology suffers from a lack of historical argument, or takes too narrow a view of what is historically relevant. For El-Saleh, for example, Muslim eschatological thought ends more or less with Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240); after him, there is only “total decadence” (*décadence totale*).¹⁴⁵ Smith and Haddad divide the entire history of Islamic eschatology into “classical” and “modern.” This rather dramatically overstates the break between “classical” and “modern” Islamic thought, while failing to see the important continuities that connect the precolonial and postcolonial periods. It also makes “classical” Islam into one homogenous, static block, only shaken into movement by the encounter with (Western) modernity, a view that seems increasingly vulnerable to criticism.

¹⁴² Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding*, 81.

¹⁴³ Exceptions include Lange, “Islamische Höllenvorstellungen”; idem, *Justice, punishment*, 101–75; idem, “Where on earth is hell?”; Thomassen, “Islamic hell.” Some further studies dealing with aspects of hell in the Quran are discussed in Chapter 1 of this book. See also Hamza, “To hell and back,” which deals specifically with the emergence of the doctrine of the temporary punishment in hell of Muslim sinners.

¹⁴⁴ *El2*, s.v. *Djanna* (L. Gardet); s.v. *Djahannam* (L. Gardet). The entry on “al-Nār” (1995) deals exclusively with fire as one of the four elements. The more recent *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān* (2001–6) shows a more balanced approach, but still favours paradise (sixteen columns) over hell (twelve columns). See *EQ*, s.v. Paradise, 12a–20a (L. Kinberg); *ibid.*, s.v. Hell and Hellfire, II, 414a–420a (R. W. Gwynne).

¹⁴⁵ El-Saleh, *Vie future*, 120.

Thirdly and finally, there is a tendency to privilege Sunni traditionism and *kalām* over mystical, philosophical, and literary expressions of Muslim eschatology, including those of a non-Sunni provenance. To be fair, Smith and Haddad explicitly acknowledge that their study is limited to the Sunni tradition, due to “the wealth of material ... and in the interests of feasibility”; and they encourage “other scholars” to study “Shi‘i thought as well as philosophical and mystical interpretation[s]” of the Islamic afterlife.¹⁴⁶ Such methodological restraint deserves applause; nonetheless, the title of Smith’s and Haddad’s work misleadingly promises its readers that they will learn about “*the* Islamic understanding of death and resurrection.” Be that as it may, as things stand, there are to date no synthetic, book-length studies in any Western language of either Shi‘i eschatology, or philosophical and mystical conceptions of paradise and hell in Islam.¹⁴⁷

Scholarly explorations of the literary aspects of the Islamic paradise and hell have fared somewhat better. This is primarily due to the 1919 landmark study of the Spanish Jesuit, Miguel Asín Palacios, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina comedia*, quite possibly the most erudite contribution to the study of Islamic eschatology in the twentieth century.¹⁴⁸ Asín uses the tools and methods of literary criticism to bring to the surface the striking structural similarities that exist between accounts of otherworldly journeys in Islam and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Famously, Asín concludes that Dante must have known the Islamic sources, and used them. While containing much valuable information gleaned from an impressive range of primary sources, Asín is interested, first and foremost, in the comparison with Dante’s work, and with the genre of otherworldly journeys in particular. This largely restricts his attention, as far as Islamic traditions are concerned, to the various versions of the Ascension (*mi‘rāj*) of the prophet Muḥammad. Since the days of Asín, a comparatively large body of scholarship on the *mi‘rāj* has accumulated, although few scholars have focused on the paradise and hell sections of the narrative; recent studies, however, have begun to redress this situation.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding*, xii.

¹⁴⁷ There are, of course, important articles devoted to aspects of these fields. Readers are invited to turn to the first paragraphs of the relevant chapters of this book for references.

¹⁴⁸ Asín, *Escatología*. A partial English translation appeared in 1926. One should consult Asín’s work in conjunction with Enrico Cerulli’s two follow-up volumes (1949, 1972), in which Cerulli builds up an impressive amount of evidence in support of Asín’s suggestion. For a history of the controversy following the first publication of Asín’s book, see the appendix to the revised edition (“Historia y crítica de una polémica”). See also Kennedy, “Muslim sources of Dante?”; Kremer, “Islamische Einflüsse”; Strohmaier, “Die angeblichen und die wirklichen orientalischen Quellen”; and the recent discussion by Attar, “An Islamic *paradiso*?”

¹⁴⁹ See, in particular, Colby, “Fire in the upper heavens”; Tottoli, “Muslim eschatology”; idem, “Tours of hell”; Vuckovic, *Heavenly journeys*.

As for scholarly engagements with Muslim narrative eschatology in the form of hadith,¹⁵⁰ two studies deserve special mention. Franz Rosenthal, in “Reflections on Love in Paradise” (1987), unabashedly and soberly discusses the preponderance of somatic and sexual imagery in Muslim eschatology, noting “the extreme delicacy with which rationalists ... had to approach metaphysical problems” and providing a *sangfroid* assessment of the gender imbalances in the Muslim hereafter.¹⁵¹ While Rosenthal should be given credit for laying to rest a long tradition of high-brow dismissal of, and moral indignation over, Muslim narrative eschatology,¹⁵² Aziz al-Azmeh, in “Rhetoric for the Senses: A Consideration of Muslim Paradise Narratives” (1995), goes a step further, celebrating the “cognizance of desire” in Islamic paradise narratives, while also emphasising that “the pleasures of Paradise are polymorphous and engage *all* the senses, although genital carnality is a pronounced element.”¹⁵³ Al-Azmeh, who writes from the perspective of Lacan-inspired literary studies, focuses his attention on the aspect of the “spectacular” of Muslim paradise narratives, but he also lists a whole range of additional ways of studying the “aesthetics of reception of these narratives.” Among the topics deserving scholarly attention, he not only names the “insertion [of these narratives] in social and temporal instances of pietistic practice and belief, in preachers’ art, their relative weight and location in the imaginary life of various times, places, and socio-cultural locations, their relation to non-canonical materials,” but also “the metaphorical use of Paradise to articulate mundane matters” and “the ironical and irreverent pronouncements on the descriptions of Paradise.” Finally, he flags up the importance of studying “the literary genres in which paradisiacal narratives are inserted,” the “structural study of these narratives as myths [and] in terms of psychoanalytical categories,” as well as “motifemic analysis and cross-cultural comparison.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ On fictional narrativity and the imagination as a characteristic of hadith literature, see Günther, “Fictional narration.” For a literary analysis of select aspects of Qur’ānic and hadith-based eschatology, see idem, “God disdains not to strike a simile (Q 2:26).”

¹⁵¹ Rosenthal, “Reflections on love,” 249, 252.

¹⁵² Continuing earlier dismissals into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Berthels wrote that “the houris [in Islam] are a sensual reification (*Versinnlichung*) of Zoroastrian spiritual beings ... degraded (*herabgedrückt*) to accord with a primitive people of the desert.... In the orthodox commentaries and popular traditions, the sensual details increase, such that the image becomes almost repugnant to European taste. The heavenly bride eventually becomes a kind of eternal young prostitute.” See Berthels, “Die paradisischen Jungfrauen,” 268. Max Weber called the Islamic paradise “a soldier’s sensual paradise.” See Turner, *Weber and Islam*, 139.

¹⁵³ Al-Azmeh, “Rhetoric of the senses,” 215, 217 (emphasis is mine). Also written in the Lacanian tradition is Ibrāhīm Maḥmūd’s *Jughbrāfiyyat al-maladhbāt: al-jins fi l-janna* (‘The geography of pleasures: Sex in paradise’) from 1998, a veritable encyclopaedia of the pleasures of the senses in paradise, a sprawling, garrulous meditation on Muslim traditionist literature.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Azmeh, “Rhetoric of the senses,” 219–20.

Al-Azmeh's list is a mouthful. In recent years, a number of studies have begun to fill in the slots in the analytical grid sketched out by al-Azmeh. Thomas Bauer, for example, has traced the genealogy of the genre of the Islamic "Books of the Dead" (2002); Brooke Olson Vuckovic has proposed a reading of *mi'rāj* narratives about the otherworld in the light of the social divisions and hierarchies of medieval Islamic society (2005); Brannon Wheeler, in a remarkable monograph, has studied the ideological underpinnings of the paradise myth centred on the sanctuary in Mecca (2006); Zoltán Szombathy has analysed metaphorical usage of paradise and hell in classical Arabic poetry and belles-lettres (2008).¹⁵⁵ In various publications, I have examined eschatological narratives through the lens of the structuralist analysis of myth, the psychology of religion, as well as the study of ritual (2008, 2009, 2011, forthcoming).¹⁵⁶ Nerina Rustomji's *The Garden and the Fire* (2009) explores overlaps between the materiality of the Sunni "canonical" or "mainstream"¹⁵⁷ afterlife and Islamic material culture on earth, a theme that I also pursue in this book, particularly in Chapters 5 and 8. Recently, Ataa Denkha, in *L'imaginaire du paradis et de l'au-delà dans le christianisme et l'islam*, has attempted the kind of "cross-cultural comparison" al-Azmeh calls for.¹⁵⁸

Shortly after this book went to press, two edited volumes devoted to the Islamic paradise and the Islamic hell saw the light of the day.¹⁵⁹ In as much as the manifold contributions to these two collections were available to me, and with the kind permission of authors, I have referred to them in this book as forthcoming. However, I have not been able to incorporate every single chapter. In sum, although the small body of scholarship on Islamic eschatology has substantially increased in the last decade or so, much remains to be done. As Alan S. Segal rightly remarks in his recent magisterial history

¹⁵⁵ Bauer, "Islamische Totenbücher"; Vuckovic, *Heavenly journeys*; Wheeler, *Mecca and Eden*; Szombathy, "Come hell or high water."

¹⁵⁶ Lange, *Justice*, 101–75; idem, "Where on earth is hell?"; idem, "Sitting by the ruler's throne"; idem, "The 'eight gates of paradise'-tradition."

¹⁵⁷ Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, xvi.

¹⁵⁸ Denkha, *L'imaginaire du paradis*. As in the case with Rustomji, Denkha's grasp of the primary and secondary sources is patchy. E.g., Denkha fails to mention Rosenthal's and al-Azmeh's fundamental studies, nor does she seem to have consulted Ebrahim Moosa's *Ghazālī and the poetics of imagination* or Christiane Gruber's various publications on the illustrated *mi'rāj* manuscripts, despite the fact that both the concept of the imagination and the figurative depictions of paradise and hell in Islamic art are central concerns of her work. Rustomji misses references to Bauer's "Islamische Totenbücher," Gardet's *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, Horowitz's "Das islamische Paradies," and most of the German scholarship, including Andræ's *Ursprung*. As for primary sources, the bibliographies and notes show that only a fraction of the available material has been considered.

¹⁵⁹ Günther and Lawson (eds.), *Roads to paradise*; Lange (ed.), *Locating hell*. Another recent collection of papers on the Islamic paradise and hell (though mostly on the former) is Dévényi and Fodor (eds.), *Proceedings* (2008, 2012).

of the afterlife in Western religions, “Islamic views of the afterlife are just as rich and manifold as in Judaism or Christianity, but ... different in some important ways.” This leads Segal to conclude that the study of “the whole tradition” is an important desideratum of scholarship.¹⁶⁰ Taking Segal by the word, this book aims to provide as full an account of the history of the Islamic paradise and hell as is presently possible on the basis of the published and unpublished primary sources, as well as the scholarship produced on the topic in the major modern research languages. Of course, there are limits to this undertaking. I am sure to have missed some books, particularly when written in languages to which I have only restricted access (such as Russian or Turkish). In other cases, I also decided against including some sources. On the whole, however, I am confident that what I offer here is the most complete overview of Islamic eschatology hitherto available in the literature.

Overview of Chapters and Note on Illustrations

I recommend general readers start their journey through this book not at the beginning, in Chapter 1, but plunge instead into the middle, that is, Chapter 4, where stock is taken of the vast reservoir of images and ideas about paradise and hell in late-medieval Muslim hadith literature. Similar surveys, more or less systematic and concise, exist in the scholarly literature, but none is based on the four authoritative sources that I put under the magnifying glass here, and none offers an integrated discussion of both Sunni and Shi'i traditions. I present the material gleaned from these four Sunni and Shi'i eschatological compendia under five main headings: paradise and hell between death and resurrection; time and space in the Muslim otherworld; animals and nonhuman beings in paradise and hell; the bodies of the human inhabitants of the otherworld; and sins and virtues of the blessed and the damned. This serves, I hope, to lay bare the core concerns that structure these texts.

Chapters 1 to 3, which may be read next, trace the genealogy of Islamic narrative eschatology, the pretexts, so to speak, to the panoptic vision of paradise and hell that I sketch in Chapter 4. Chapter 1 looks at the discourse of paradise and hell in the Qur'an. First, it outlines the phenomenology of paradise and hell in the Qur'an, treating the text as if it were an analogously related, internally consistent unity, in order to take stock of the repertoire of images and ideas about the otherworld that the Qur'an has in store. In a second step, I advance hypotheses regarding the gradual inner-Qur'anic development of eschatological themes. This serves to complicate the assumption of the analogous consistency of the text, be it eschatological or otherwise. Thirdly and finally, I trace the Qur'an's intertextual relations with the literatures of the Late Antique Near East. This allows me, at the end the chapter, to draw some fresh conclusions about what I see as a salient characteristic

¹⁶⁰ Segal, *Life after death*, 639.

of Qur'ānic eschatology, namely, its propensity to conceive of this world and the otherworld as a synchronic whole, a *merismos*. In my view, the Qur'an thus facilitated, rather than hampered,¹⁶¹ the development of immanentist eschatological thought in Islam.

Chapters 2 and 3, which should be read in tandem, tell the history of several literary genres of narrative eschatology in Islam. There is, on the one hand, the traditionist, hadith-based literature on paradise and hell, a genre that developed its own formal and qualitative standards and whose long-term continuity through the centuries deserves notice (Chapter 2). As I show, it is possible to distinguish between three different phases of expansion and contraction of this genre, marked by shifting views about what kind of hadiths could legitimately be included and what not. On the other hand, we are faced with copious amounts of eschatological texts written in a hortatory and popular vein (Chapter 3). While the former, hortatory type uses narratives about paradise and hell primarily in order to cultivate a proper pious mixture of hope and fear and to inculcate correct moral conduct in the believers, the latter, popular tradition is concerned with the awe-inspiring and the marvellous of the Islamic otherworld. Often, it is quite simply a question of telling a good story. It is in this chapter that I deal with the well-known eschatological manuals such as the *Subtle Traditions about the Garden and the Fire* or *The Precious Pearl*, first edited by Moritz Wolff and Lucien Gautier (see preceding text); also the various ascension tales in Islam, as well as a number of other often-told stories about the otherworld, are discussed here. On the whole, Chapters 1 through 4, which together form Part I of this book, trace the gradual growth of the increasingly differentiated Muslim narrative literature of the otherworld.

Part II examines the various theological, mystical, and philosophical accounts of paradise and hell, as well as the innerworldly, material manifestations of the Muslim otherworld. In the course of the chapters in Part II, a diverse spectrum of alternative visions of the otherworld gradually comes into relief. This serves to demonstrate that there is no single Islamic understanding of paradise and hell, a fact that on occasion troubled Muslim scholars. Some even felt propelled to insist that all deviations from their normative view of the otherworld amounted to a distortion of the faith. Clad in the form of an apocalyptic hadith, it was averred that the antichrist (*dajjāl*) appearing at the end of time “will bring a paradise and a hell, and his hell is paradise, and his paradise is hell.”¹⁶² Chapters 5 and 6 deal with theological and philosophical teleographies in Sunni and Shi'i traditions. Chapter 5

¹⁶¹ Crone, *Nativist prophets*, 462.

¹⁶² Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, k. *al-ḥitan* 104 (b. *dhikr al-dajjāl*), IV, 2249; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, k. *al-ḥitan* 33 (b. *ḥitan al-dajjāl*), III, 448; Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, V, 383, 397. See CTM, s.v. *j-f-l*, I, 351a.

critically revisits three common characterisations of Sunni theological eschatology: first, that it stresses the utter transcendence of the otherworld in both space and time; secondly, that it is supremely optimistic, promising easy salvation for believers; and thirdly, that its conception of the otherworld is unfailingly materialistic. I end this chapter with a consideration of the gradual rise of the idea of an “imaginable” (*khayālī*) otherworld, excavating its roots in the thought of Avicenna in the fourth/tenth century and passing through al-Ghazālī in the fifth/eleventh and al-Suhrawardī in the sixth/twelfth century. Chapter 6 pursues this theme of a “World of Image” (*‘ālam al-mithāl*) into late-medieval Shi‘i eschatology, but then moves back in time to tell the history of Twelver-Shi‘i traditionist and systematic, *kalām*-style literature on the otherworld. I also devote some space to the flowering of eschatological hadith in eleventh/seventeenth-century Akhbārī Shi‘ism, concluding this chapter with a survey of the philosophical eschatology of the Isma‘ilis.

Chapter 7 presents a sevenfold typology of Muslim renunciant and mystical interpretations of the otherworld. The only previous attempt to do something similar that I am aware of, a chapter in El-Saleh’s *La vie future selon le Coran*, remains fundamental, but I feel that a recalibration of El-Saleh’s findings is overdue. It is true, as El-Saleh asserts, that the mystics of Islam never explicitly deny the corporeality of the afterlife, but more relevant and indeed more interesting, I believe, is the question of the *relative* importance they attribute (or do not attribute) to this physicality. Furthermore, I disagree with El-Saleh when he states that the Sufis’ intense preoccupation with the otherworld results in a diminution, in their eyes, of the status of the world of the here-and-now. Sufis of various periods speak eloquently of the ways in which this world and the otherworld are intertwined, or mirror each other. In addition, it deserves our attention that ethical and interiorising eschatologies flourished in Sufi milieus, and not only in the centuries up until Ibn al-‘Arabī, but also in later times, in which the concept of the imagination played an ever more important role. On both accounts, it seems to me, El-Saleh is hostage to a modern reflex, that is, to see Sufi-inspired eschatology, particularly in its late-medieval manifestations, as inimical to the fundamental principles and values of modernity.

The concluding Chapter 8 is an exploration of the manifold innerworldly manifestations of paradise and hell in Islamic topography, architecture, and ritual. As I argue, paradise and hell were not only models of, but also served as models for, human society on earth. I discuss a number of places, buildings, and rituals that were assimilated, and sometimes equated, with places, buildings, and rituals in paradise and hell, and thereby provided with otherworldly layers of meaning. It is perhaps in this area of concrete cultural production that the theme of “eschatology now,” the slippage between this world and the otherworld, which runs like a baseline through the chapters of this book, becomes most tangible. At the same time, the observations

and conclusions drawn in this chapter are the most tentative and speculative of this study; for eschatological interpretations of the kind presented here never impose, only suggest themselves. It should also be noted that the question of *cui bono* is notoriously difficult to decide in all cases. In certain instances, it is possible that multiple parties stood to benefit from the presence of paradise and hell on earth.

Finally, in the Epilogue I review some of the major transformations of the traditional Muslim picture of paradise and hell in the modern and contemporary period. I have kept this section deliberately short. This is because, on the one hand, I tend to see more continuities than discontinuities in the modern and contemporary Muslim discourse on paradise and hell. On the other hand, a full discussion of eschatology in Islamic (post-)modernity would have required me to delve into a vast sea of additional texts and traditions. This would inevitably have led to a further swelling of the manuscript, which has already become worryingly more voluminous than what I intended in the beginning. This is not to say that it would not be worthwhile to write a study of modern and contemporary Islamic eschatology, examining its various types, concerns, and sensibilities; but this is a project for another time. In the Conclusion, therefore, I only highlight some salient contributions to the Muslim discourse on paradise and hell in the last two hundred years or so, and end by offering some synthetic reflections.

To conclude this Introduction, a note on illustrations. The tradition of depicting paradise and hell in Islamic figurative arts is not particularly rich, certainly not when compared to the European history of painting the otherworld. As suggested previously, more creative energy was poured into linguistic representations of the two otherworldly abodes. Nonetheless, there is an unbroken tradition of such depictions from at least the eighth/fourteenth century onwards, including diagrammatic and topographical representations of paradise and hell. I have thought it appropriate to include a number of examples, some of which are well known, others less so. These examples are derived from illustrated manuscripts of the prophet Muḥammad's Ascension (*mi'rāj*), of the popular genre known under the title of *The Stories of the Prophets* (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*), of the so-called *Books of Omen* (*Fālnamas*), of the *Marvels of Creation* (*'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt*), and of hajj guidebooks (*Ḥajjnāmas*).¹⁶³ I should like to note that I have not chosen these images for their artistic merits, which, not being an art historian, I am ill positioned to judge anyway. While these images doubtlessly deserve a proper art historical analysis, a comprehensive study of paradise and hell in Islamic figurative art remains to be written.

¹⁶³ Interested readers should further refer to the following works, in which most of the known images are published: And, *Minyatür*; idem, *Minyatürlerle*; Blair and Bloom, *Images of paradise*; Farhad, *Falnama*; Milstein, Rührdanz, and Schmitz, *Stories of the prophets*; Séguy, *The miraculous journey*. For a recent overview, see also Gruber, "Signs of the Hour."