

Roads to Paradise

Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam

VOLUME 1

Foundations and Formation of a Tradition
Reflections on the Hereafter
in the Quran and Islamic Religious Thought

Edited by

Sebastian Günther
Todd Lawson

With the Assistance of

Christian Mauder



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“God disdains not to strike a simile” (Q 2:26)

The Poetics of Islamic Eschatology: Narrative, Personification, and Colors in Muslim Discourse

Sebastian Günther

Dedicated to Professor Dr. Manfred Fleischhammer
on the Occasion of his 88th birthday, 22 July 2016

The belief in life after death, in an apocalyptic end of historical time, salvation, and God’s ultimate and eternal “kingdom of the heavens and the earth” (Q 3:189, 42:49, 57:5) constitutes the foundation for several articles of Islamic faith.¹ It underscores the belief in the One and Almighty God, and is manifested in such basic tenets of Islamic faith as the belief in the immortality of the soul, in bodily resurrection, divine judgment, and the existence of paradise and hell as real, physical worlds.²

The Quran speaks of death and resurrection, of the end of this world, and of the world to come more than any other major scripture, and it does so in a remarkably explicit and evocative manner.³ These eschatological statements in the Quran are reiterated – and some are significantly expanded – in various branches of medieval Arabic-Islamic scholarly literature. The latter include the literature of Islamic prophetic traditions, Quranic commentaries and certain

1 The quotation in the title of this article was taken from T. Khalidi’s translation of the Quran. All other quotations from the Quran follow A. Arberry’s rendering, unless indicated otherwise. For the translation of individual Quranic terms, I also consulted Abdel Haleem’s English and Paret’s German translations.

2 The various “orthodox” (Sunni) eschatological approaches agree that there is a resurrection of the body. The human “soul” (*nafs*, or *rūh*, the “spirit that proceeds from God,” depending on the definition of the term) rejoins the resurrected body and is, thus, immortal. According to these views, however, a soul would not be immortal without a resurrected body. For a discussion of this issue, see Marmura, *Soul: Islamic concepts*; Homerin, *Soul*; Sells, *Spirit*; and Netton, *Nafs* (which includes *rūh*). See also Wensinck, *Muslim creed* 129–30, 195, 268.

3 Eschatological events are described, above all, in Quran 23:101–18; 37:35–47 and 60–6; 39:68–75; 69:13–37; 70:1–35 and 76:12–22. Cf. also Stieglecker, *Glaubenslehren* 749–55; Chittick, *Muslim eschatology* 132 and M. Abdel Haleem’s contribution to the present publication.

theological-dogmatic and spiritual-mystical texts, as well as the *‘ulūm al-ākhirā* literature, the genre of Arabic writing expressly devoted to Islamic eschatology.

The first part of the present study identifies and discusses certain key ideas and images of eschatology evident in the Quran; the second examines their recurrence and elaboration in the literature of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and the biography of the Prophet Muḥammad (*sīra*). In addition to the Quran itself, our main sources for examination are the famous *al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ* (Compilation of authentic prophetic traditions) by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) and *Sīrat al-nabī* or *al-Sīra al-nabawīyya* (The biography of the Prophet), by Muḥammad b. Ishāq (d. 150/767–8), a text revised and published two generations later by ‘Abd al-Malik b. Hishām (d. 218/833). In the third part of this study, we turn to what may be called the classical eschatological literature of Islam. Following a brief appraisal and classification of this genre, special attention is given to *al-Durra al-fākhira fī kashf ‘ulūm al-ākhirā* (The precious pearl revealing the knowledge of the hereafter), a work commonly attributed to the authoritative Sunni theologian and mystic Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). This book stands out in the eschatological literature for its particularly imaginative narrative descriptions of death, resurrection, and the various aspects and events of divine judgment. Moreover, it is exceptional in that it presents these themes in its own, particularly well-crafted framework of discussion and analysis – a fact that has significantly contributed to its great popularity among Muslims until today.

Thus we hope to show that the Quranic visions of the apocalyptic end of the present world and of the timeless duration of the hereafter – along with the creative development of these ideas by major Muslim scholars – provide unique insights into the perceptions of pious Muslims throughout history concerning the final destiny of humankind. Analyzing the wealth of images and symbols, the highly poetic language, and the complex web of arguments, all embedded in the often remarkably refined narrative structures of Arabic eschatological texts, may help us to better understand the ways in which descriptions of the next world, understood both (and sometimes simultaneously) as literal *and* figurative references to the hereafter, are instrumental for Muslim authors in communicating, vivifying, and reinforcing fundamental articles of Islamic faith.

1 Eschatology and Afterlife in the Quran

The Quran is very clear about the cycle and final objective of ‘life coming into being,’ ‘death,’ ‘being brought back to life at the day of resurrection,’ and ‘eternal existence.’ In Surat *al-Baqara* (“Chapter of the Cow”), the question is

raised: “How [can] you disbelieve in God, seeing you were dead and [God] gave you life, then He shall make you dead [again and], then He shall give you life; then unto Him you shall be returned?” (Q 2:28). God is the one who “calls unto Paradise – and pardon – by His leave” (Q 2:221). Yet, paradise and eternal happiness are promised only to those who obey God and his Messenger, to those who are righteous, truthful, and who bear witness to the truth (Q 4:69):

On the Day [of Judgment when] the Trumpet is blown, and when We shall muster the sinners... (Q 20:102–104). [On] that day their excuses will not profit the evildoers, nor will they be suffered to make amends (Q 30:55–7). [But for] God’s friends, no fear shall be on them,... for them [there] is good tidings in the present life and in the world to come (Q 10:62–4).

Numerous Quranic statements warn in powerful ways of the apocalypse associated with *al-sā‘a* (“the hour”), as the Quran calls the all-decisive *eschaton* (from Greek ἔσχατα, “the final things”) on several occasions. Other names for “the hour” are *al-ḥāqqa* (“the indubitable” or “inevitable [reality of the hour],” Q 69:1–3), *al-wāqī‘a* (“the occurring [hour of terror],” Q 56:1) and *ghāshīya* (an “overwhelming [hour of punishment],” Q 12:107). An especially evocative description of the arrival of “the hour” is included in Sura 81, *al-Takwīr* (“Shrouded in Darkness”). Here humankind is warned:

When the sun shall be darkened,
 when the stars shall be thrown down,
 when the mountains shall be set moving,
 when the pregnant camels shall be neglected,
 when the savage beasts shall be mustered,
 when the seas shall be set boiling,
 when the souls shall be coupled,
 when the buried infant shall be asked for what sin she was slain,
 when the scrolls shall be unrolled,
 when heaven shall be stripped off,
 when Hell shall be set blazing,
 when Paradise shall be brought nigh,
then shall [every] soul know what it has produced (Q 81:1–14).

According to Muslim tradition, two Quranic chapters – Sura 32 (*al-Sajda*, “The Prostration”) and Sura 76 (*al-Dahr*, “The Time”; also known as *al-Insān*, “Man”) – were given a certain preference by the Prophet Muḥammad in prayer because “they contain reminders of creation, the return to God, the creation of

Adam, the entry into Paradise and Hell, and mention of things past and things yet to come whose occurrence is on a Friday.⁴ These Suras conspicuously emphasize both the belief in God and the adherence to an ethical lifestyle as preconditions for divine reward:

As for those who believe, and do deeds of righteousness, there await them the Gardens of the Refuge, in hospitality for what they were doing. But as for the ungodly, their refuge shall be the Fire; as often as they desire to come forth from it, they shall be restored into it, and it shall be said to them, ‘Taste the chastisement of the Fire, which you cried lies to.’ And We shall surely let them taste the nearer chastisement, before the greater; haply so they will return [to the right path] (Q 32:19–21).

The Quranic rhetorical device of directly addressing the audience intensifies the impact that such eschatological warnings have on their recipients. Other such references draw a similarly vivid, but highly appealing mental picture of the afterlife:

And if you were to look around, you would see bliss and great wealth: they will wear garments of green silk and brocade; they will be adorned with silver bracelets; their Lord will give them a pure drink. [It will be said], “This is your reward. Your endeavors are appreciated.” (Q 76:20–2). [But] We have prepared chains, iron collars, and blazing Fire for the disbelievers . . . (Q 76:4).⁵

The pictographic style of the Quranic passages on paradise and hell thus serves to reaffirm Muslims in their faith, while it also has the potential to make a lasting impression on those who have not yet accepted Islam; those who must be convinced before they adopt the Islamic religion. The explicit prospect of the eternal delights and happiness to be granted the faithful in the hereafter on the one hand, and the description of how the wicked will agonize in hell on the other, perfectly fulfill the dual mission of reassuring Muslim believers and calling upon non-Muslims to convert to Islam.⁶

4 لما اشتملتا عليه من ذكر المبدأ والمعاد وخلق آدم ودخول الجنة والنار وذلك مما كان ويكون في يوم الجمعة; cf. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Zād al-ma’ād* 202–3; trans. in Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Provisions*, trans. At-Tamimi 28. Note here the eschatological nature of Friday itself.

5 Trans. Abdel Haleem.

6 See also Subtelný, *The Jews* 56–9 (on the ascension narrative as a missionary text). For the question of the duration of paradise and hell, see Abrahamov, *The creation* 87–102.

Accordingly, paradise is identified in the Quran as the *jannat naʿīm* (“garden of bliss and pleasure,” Q 56:89). Its dwellers rest on “couches lined with brocade” (Q 55:54), on “green cushions and lovely rugs” (Q 55:76). They will be offered to “eat and drink with wholesome appetite!” (Q 69:24). Paradise is a *rawḍa yuḥbarūn* (a “garden, in which they will delight,” Q 30:15).⁷ Even more evocative Quranic descriptions of paradise refer to “purified spouses” (Q 2:25); “wide-eyed maidens, restraining their glances” (Q 37:48; 55:56); and maidens “untouched beforehand by man or jinn.” Likewise, “young boys serving wine” are mentioned on more than one occasion (Q 56:17; 76:19).⁸

The Quranic paradise is the *jannat al-khuld* (“garden of eternity,” Q 25:15). It is “recompense and homecoming,” “promised to the God-fearing” (Q 25:15) and to “those who suffered hurt in [God’s] way, and fought, and were slain” (Q 3:193). “They shall have what they desire, dwelling [therein] forever” (Q 25:15–6). This “is a promise binding upon thy Lord” (Q 25:16). The unbelievers and sinners, however, will go to hell where “boiling water and the roasting” in the fire (Q 56:88–94) await them. They will experience a symbolic ‘second death,’ the death of the soul; as the Quran states, they “have lost their souls, dwelling [in hell] forever” (Q 23:104).

The Quran provides uniquely detailed descriptions of the geography of the world beyond human sensory perception. As for the structure of the heavens, for example, it is recurrently stated that God created “seven heavens” (Q 67:3) or “firmaments” (Q 78:12). Hell, in turn, is said to have “seven gates” (Q 15:44). Later writings on eschatological issues echo this idea in their development of the concept of seven celestial abodes of paradise and seven abodes of hell.⁹

7 Interestingly, regarding the rewards of another life, Plato in his *Republic* also alludes to the basic concepts of future bliss, where the blessed rest “on couches at a feast, everlastingly drunk, crowned with garlands; their idea seems to be that an immortality of drunkenness is the highest meed of virtue.” (Cf. Plato, *The republic*, book ii, 52).

8 As for the issue of the meaning of the Quranic expression *hūr ʿīn* (a term traditionally understood as “wide-eyed [maidens] with a deep black pupil” or “white skinned women,” denoting the “virgins of paradise,”) see Jarrar, Houris 456–7, as well as S. Griffith’s contribution to the present publication. Furthermore, see Beck, *Eine christliche Parallele* 398–405.

9 For example, al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* iv, esp. 520 (on paradise), 515 (on hell); al-Maqdisī, *Ṣifāt* 68; see also Kinberg, *Paradise* 12–5 (with a discussion of the names and numbers of paradise gardens); Gwynne, *Hell* 419. In contrast, an oft-quoted tradition associated with the Prophet Muḥammad states that God created “Two gardens [of paradise] whose vessels and their contents shall be of silver, and also two gardens whose vessels and their contents are of gold.” Cf. al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance*, trans. Winter 234–5; al-Qāḍī, *Muhammedanische Eschatologie*, trans. Wolff 189–92. See also the Quranic notion, “And besides these shall be two [other] gardens” (Q 55:62). For the possibility of the dual indicating the plentitude of

In elucidation of the Quranic realms of paradise, prominent medieval Muslim scholars such as Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Qāḍī (fl. probably fifth–sixth/eleventh–twelfth centuries) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) offer two different explanations.¹⁰ According to these authors, the expressions *janna* and *dār al-jinān* refer to the original “garden” of paradise; the primordial garden in which Adam and his wife lived until they were seduced by Satan and expelled from paradise when God commanded them to “descend” (Q 2:35–6). However, the Quran commentator and historian al-Ṭabarī also states that the imperative *ihbiṭū*, “descend” or “get down,” is ambiguous, as it implies not only the physical climbing-down from a mountain into a valley but also the descent from paradise onto earth.¹¹ Interestingly, the modern historian of religion, Mircea Eliade (1907–86) suggests in this context as well that Adam and Eve’s *descent* from paradise to earth is a symbol for *the fall* of humankind and the *severance* of its direct communication with the divine.¹² Along similar lines, Muslim scholars offer an alternative

gardens, rather than the number two, see A. Neuwirth’s contribution to this volume. However, it is noteworthy as well that the concept of the “seven heavens” is already known from the mysteries of the ancient Indo-Iranian god Mithra. Likewise, the “seven realms of paradise” are found in the rabbinical literature; cf. Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 39.

- 10 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Hādī al-arwāḥ* 27–49 (on the different opinions regarding the garden of paradise in which Adam lived), 76–82 (on the names of paradise and their meanings; here twelve Quranic names of paradise are given, four of which appear to be synonyms for certain of the seven main abodes; these additional names are: *dār al-muqāma* (“abode of everlasting life,” Q 35:35); *maqām amīn* (“secure station,” Q 44:51), *dār al-ḥayawān* (“abode of [true] life,” Q 29:64), *maq’ad al-ṣidq* and *qadam al-ṣidq* (“abode of confidence,” Q 54:55; “abode of sure footing [with the Lord],” Q 10:2); al-Qāḍī, *Daqā’iq al-akhbār* 40–1. For Ibn al-Qayyim, see Holtzman, *Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah*. On the “seven planetary divinities” of the Babylonians, and the possible development of this idea (via Persian and gnostic sources) into the concept of the “seven heavens” evident in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen* 11–7. See also I. Hehmeyer’s contribution to the present publication.
- 11 Al-Ṭabarī begins his comments on *ihbiṭū*, an imperative masculine plural, by stating that it relates to the meaning of “someone descended [*habaṭa*] to such-and-such a region or to such-and-such a valley, when he settles down in that [place]”; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi’ al-bayān* i, 534 (on Q 2:36); al-Ṭabarī, *The commentary*, trans. Madelung i, 257–9). However, the location and nature of the garden that Adam and Eve left – whether it is atop a mountain or in heaven, and whether it is identical with the (Biblical) garden of Eden or not – are matters of dispute among Muslim theologians. For a brief discussion of this issue, see al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance*, trans. Winter 235, note A.
- 12 Eliade, *Images* 157.

explanation for this term when they state that the word *janna* can also be a designation for the first and lowest ‘heavenly’ domain of paradise.

Amongst the many other names referring to gardens of paradise are: *dār al-salām* (“abode of peace”), *jannāt al-maʿwā* (“gardens of refuge”);¹³ *jannāt al-khuld* (“gardens of eternal retreat”), and *jannāt al-naʿīm* (“gardens of comfort and happiness”). Furthermore, the term *ʿadn*, the high domain of “equilibrium and perpetuity,” is believed to be the Quranic equivalent of the Biblical garden of Eden.¹⁴ Finally, there is *jannāt firdaws* or *al-firdaws*, according to most commentators the seventh, highest, largest, and most beautiful garden of paradise, where the throne of God floats and where the rivers of paradise, which run through all the gardens of paradise, rise.¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī maintains that a huge tablet made of golden-green crystal, with all the deeds of humanity inscribed on it, is located here, as is the gigantic heavenly lote tree, *sidrat al-muntahā*, which marks the boundary “beyond which none may pass” (Q 53:14).¹⁶

In Islamic mysticism, then, this location and the lote tree, “being a tree at which the knowledge of every person reaches its limit,” stand for the mystery itself. It is the place where “the spirits of the believers are gathered . . . in the form of green birds which fly freely in paradise until the Day of Resurrection, stamped (*marqūm*) with [the seal] of [God’s] good pleasure (*riḍā*) and satisfaction (*riḍwān*).”¹⁷ Furthermore, the lote tree is linked to the “Muḥammadan Light” (*nūr muḥammadī*), created “within a column of light” (*nūran fi ʿamūd al-nūr*) a million years before creation, with the essential “characteristics of

13 Kinberg, Paradise 12–20.

14 The motif of the garden is present throughout the Bible, beginning with the statements that “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed” and “. . . the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen 2:8 and 15; Marks (ed.), *The English Bible: King James version* i, 17–8).

15 According to Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), *ʿadn* is the highest of the heavens, or their citadel (*qaṣaba*). Other traditions, however, cited for example by Abū Bakr al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066), indicate that *firdaws* is the highest of all the heavens. Cf. al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance*, trans. Winter 235, note B. On the rich vocabulary in the Quran in reference to the hereafter and the various opinions found in Muslim traditions on its structure and specifics, see Kinberg, Paradise 12–20; and Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 23–6.

16 See also Rippin, *Sidrat al-Muntahā* 550.

17 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, trans. Keeler and Keeler 273. Al-Tustarī states also, “On the other hand the spirits of the disbelievers are gathered at *sijjīn* beneath the lowest earth, under the cheek of Satan, may God curse him, branded with hostility (*adāwa*) and wrath (*ghaḍab*).” For the lote tree, see also Chittick, *The Sufi path of love* 220–3; and Vitestam, *As-sidra(-t?) al-muntahā* 305–8 (on the grammar of the expression). For the image of birds in paradise as representing the martyrs, see also A. Afsaruddin’s contribution to this volume.

faith" (*ṭabā'ir al-īmān*). It is this light which appeared to God "a million of years before [the act of] creation," as the early mystic Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) explains.¹⁸

Remarkably, these ideas were taken up again by 'Abd al-Rahīm al-Qāḍī, a scholar, of whose life almost nothing is known except that he apparently lived in the fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth century. At the very beginning of his popular account of *Daqā'iḳ al-akhbār fī dhikr al-janna wa-l-nār* (The meticulous accounts referring to paradise and hell), al-Qāḍī expressly refers to the *nūr Muḥammad* (the "Light of Muḥammad"), also called *al-rūḥ al-a'zam* ("the mightiest spirit") as the first of all of God's creations. This reference is an indication of this author's strong mystic inclinations, rather than an attempt on his part to disseminate in his book knowledge of the origin of the universe as commonly propagated in Sunni circles (according to which, for example, God created the heavens and the earth in six days).¹⁹

The Mu'tazilite exegete Jār Allāh al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) explains further that the heavenly lote tree represents the ultimate limit of all knowledge; even the knowledge of the angels ends here and no one knows what lies beyond. It is perceived to be the place of absolute spiritual peace and fulfillment.²⁰

2 Visionary Journeys to the Hereafter in the *Ḥadīth* and *Sīra* Literature

Both the corpus of prophetic traditions (*ḥadīth*) and the literature of the Prophet Muḥammad's biography (*sīra*) include abundant information on the hereafter. The accounts of Muḥammad's famous "journey by night" (*isrā'*) from the Sacred Mosque (in Mecca) to the Furthest Mosque (in Jerusalem; see also Q 17:1) and his "ascension to heaven" (*mi'rāj*) from the Temple Mount are arguably and by far the most prominent examples in this regard. Several other traditions in the *ḥadīth* literature, however, although closely connected to the *mi'rāj* story in terms of general theme and outline, present a somewhat different account of a prophetic vision of the hereafter. These *ḥadīth* texts reveal

18 Al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, trans. Keeler and Keeler 77, 213. See also Rubin, Pre-existence and light, esp. 83–104 (on the substance of Muḥammad as light).

19 Al-Qāḍī, *Daqā'iḳ al-akhbār* 2. See also Peterson, Creation 472–80, esp. 476, with the Quranic references for God's creation of the heavens and the earth in six days and of humankind; the article also addresses the question of whether the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* is Quranic or not.

20 Wanes, Tree(s) 360.

a sophisticated narrative composition which serves to effectively perpetuate Quranic concepts of the afterlife while at the same time blending into them – *and hence Islamizing* – a considerable number of extra-Quranic ideas.

2.1 *Al-Bukhārī's al-Ṣaḥīḥ: The Prophet's Dream of Paradise and Hell*

The compilation *al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ* by the third/ninth-century scholar al-Bukhārī, the most authoritative among Sunni Muslims, includes two accounts of the Prophet's visit to the hereafter. One of these particularly elaborate narratives is included in the section titled the "Kitāb al-Janā'iz" (Book of demise and funerals); the other is part of the "Kitāb Ta'bīr al-ru'yā" (Book of dream interpretation).

Initially just an assortment of bits and pieces of information, this account of the Prophet's vision of the hereafter grew through the oral communication process to become a multifaceted story with salient features of fictional literature.²¹ It tells of a dream that the Prophet Muḥammad had one night, and then shared with the attendees of a gathering. In this dream, Muḥammad travels to the hereafter, which in this text is called *al-arḍ al-muqaddasa*, "the holy land." He is accompanied on his visionary journey by the archangels Gabriel and Michael, who show him various domains and regions of the hereafter. At the end of the account, the angels explain to Muḥammad the meanings of the places they had visited.

More specifically, the account is as follows: Muḥammad first visits hell, where he is shown two men, one sitting and the other standing. The standing man holds an iron hook in his hand and pushes it so deep into the mouth of the sitting man that it reaches the back of that man's throat. The torturer then pulls the hook, tearing out one side of the seated man's mouth, and then does the same to the other side. But the mouth of the tortured man heals immediately, and the torturer repeats this act of violence, inflicting the same wounds on the sitting man again and again. In the next location which Muḥammad visits with his two heavenly companions, he is shown a man who is lying flat on his back, while another man crushes the supine man's head with a rock. When the man's crushed head returns to normal, the torturer crushes it again and again. At yet another location, as Muḥammad relates, there was

21 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iii, 623–4, no. 1386; see also xiv, 479–81, no. 7047. An even more elaborate version of the account of the Prophet Muḥammad's visionary journey to the hereafter is given in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*. For these references, along with an English translation and an analysis of this *ḥadīth*, see Günther, Fictional narration 455–63.

a hole like an oven with a narrow top and wide bottom. Fire was kindling underneath. Whenever the flames went up, the people [in the huge oven] were lifted up so high that they were almost blown out [of the hole], and whenever the fire died down, the people went down into the hole again. There were men and women, all of them naked.²²

Next, the Prophet sees a man standing in the middle of a river of blood and another man standing on the river bank with stones in front of him. Whenever the man in the river of blood tried to reach the riverbank, the man standing there would throw “a stone in his mouth, thus causing him to retreat to his former position.”

Continuing on, the Prophet is now taken to a very different domain: paradise. First, he finds himself in “a garden of lush green, with a huge tree, and an old man and some children sitting near its trunk.” Then Muḥammad is asked to climb up the tree and enter a most beautiful house, inhabited by men, women, and children. But Muḥammad is once again requested to climb higher. He now reaches a house superior to and more stunning than the one he had seen before. This location houses both old and young people.

When he arrives at this highest point of his visionary journey to the hereafter, the two angels explain to Muḥammad the meanings of the different locations and scenarios they had shown him. They tell him that the first domain, hell, is where “sinners are punished for their misdeeds.” Of the person whose cheek was continuously being torn open, they say, “he was a notorious liar” in his life on earth. The one whose head was being crushed repeatedly was “a man whom God had taught the Quran but who used to sleep at night [instead of reciting the scripture] and not live according to the Quran’s teachings during the day.” Furthermore, the people burning in the fire of the big oven were adulterers, and the man in the river of blood a usurer.

As for the second domain, paradise, “the old man sitting at the base of the tree is Abraham (the first Muslim who built the Ka’ba, according to Muslim tradition), and the children around him are the offspring of humankind.” The first blissful house in heaven is “the abode of common believers” and the second, “the abode of the martyrs.”

The extent to which these highly symbolic descriptions dwell on Quranic imagery of the afterlife is remarkable. And yet this *ḥadīth* clearly did not simply adopt Quranic ideas and images of the hereafter to incorporate them into its own story. Rather, it appears to have transformed them such that they became significant constituents of a full-fledged work of imaginative literature in the

22 Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* iii, 623; trans. in Günther, Fictional narration 456–7.

service of an eschatological narrative. Thus the “poeticization” of perceptions of the hereafter emerged as a most effective tool for religious instruction: First, the literary communication of information on the hereafter provides detailed knowledge of the existence, structure, and purpose of a world that humans are unable to perceive with their senses. Second, it strengthens people’s belief in a life after death, and in paradise and hell as physical places of divine reward and punishment. Third, the fictionalized presentation of the hereafter effectively communicates important principles of Islamic faith and practice, including the significance of – and reward for – martyrdom as well as the Muslim obligation to recite the Quran on a regular basis. Furthermore, they relate key principles of human ethics, such as the injunctions against lying, committing adultery, and practicing usury.

The *ḥadīth* of Muḥammad’s visionary journey to the hereafter concludes with the two angels showing the Prophet of Islam his seat in paradise. However, when Muḥammad attempts to place himself on this seat, the angels tell him that his lifetime is not yet complete and that his seat will await him in the future. This final episode subtly yet clearly conveys the orthodox Islamic creed that every thing and every action has been predestined by God, including each person’s lifespan. If seen from this perspective, the Prophet’s vision of the hereafter (as presented in al-Bukhārī’s *ḥadīth* compendium) serves as a powerful means for instructing and reassuring Muslims of several religious teachings essential to Islam.

2.2 *Ibn Hishām’s Sīra: The Prophet’s Ascension to Heaven*

The previous *ḥadīth* on Muḥammad’s vision of the hereafter is clearly related to the famous *mi’rāj* story, according to which Muḥammad climbed up to heaven on a ladder, visited seven celestial spheres, and was eventually initiated as a prophet. However, these two stories differ from one another in such major points as literary structure, content, and objective.²³

As is known, the most popular *mi’rāj* account is part of the earliest *Sīrat al-nabī* by the aforementioned historian Ibn Ishāq, a text revised and published two generations later by Ibn Hishām. According to this biographical and hagiographical source, Muḥammad traveled in one night from Mecca to the “furthest place of worship, whose precincts God has blessed” (Q 17:1). In Ibn Ishāq’s biography this “furthest place of worship” is expressly identified as the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; it is from here that Muḥammad ascended to heaven before being taken back to Mecca that same night.

23 See also R. Tottoli’s and K. Rührdanz’s contributions to the present publication.

Ibn Ishāq's account of Muḥammad's night journey and ascension to heaven, however, also records that among the first Muslims there was a larger number of people who were unwilling to believe in such miraculous journeys and, for this reason, renounced Islam. The response to these apostates was, according to Ibn Ishāq, already given in the Quran, where God confirmed to Muḥammad that: "The vision We showed you [on your Night Journey (as this reference is traditionally understood)] was only a test (*fitna*) for people, as was the cursed tree [mentioned] in the Quran. We warn them, but this only increases their insolence (Q 17:60)."²⁴ The dogmatic significance of the *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* story is even more explicit in the *'aqida* or dogmatic literature, which lists the belief in Muḥammad's night journey and his ascension to heaven among the Islamic creeds.²⁵

The ascension through heavenly spheres, combined with the idea that such blissful journeys begin at the highest place of what is thought to be the center of the world, is a well-known feature of several ancient cultures, including the Vedic religion of India and the Roman mysteries of the Sun-god Mithras.²⁶ Thus, the idea is not necessarily uncommon and certainly not unknown in the milieu of ongoing interreligious debates so characteristic of the medieval Muslim world. In the case of Islam, however, it is remarkable that the ancient concept of a privileged person traveling to heaven for the purpose of religious

24 وما جعلنا الرؤيا التي أريناك إلا فتنة للناس والشجرة الملعونة في القرآن ونخوفهم فما يزيدهم
إلا طغيانا كبيرا – Trans. Abdel Haleem. This quotation concludes the passage in the *Sīra*,
where it is reported that Abū Bakr, the later caliph, was the one who confirmed the truth-
fulness of Muḥammad's account of his night journey and who was, thereafter, called Abū
Bakr *al-Ṣiddīq*, "the Truthful"; cf. Ibn Hishām, *Sīra* i, part 2, 367.

25 See, for example, one of the earliest creeds as included in the *Fiqh akbar* II, ascribed
to Abū Ḥanīfa (80–150/699–767), the epitome of the Ḥanafī school of law; this creed is
translated in Wensinck, *Muslim creed* 197. See furthermore Ghulām Khalīl's *Kitāb Sharḥ
al-sunna* 7b–8a.

فعليك بالتسليم والإقرار... والإيمان بأن رسول الله، صلى الله عليه وسلم، أُسري به إلى
السماء؛ وصار إلى العرش وكلم الله، تبارك وتعالى؛ ودخل الجنة؛ وأطلع إلى النار؛ ورأى
الملائكة؛ ونُشرت له الأنبياء؛ ورأى سُرَادِقَاتِ العرش والكرسي وجميع ما في السموات
وما في الأرضين في اليقظة. حمله جبريل على البُرَاق حتى أداره في السموات. وفُرِضَتْ له
الصلاة في تلك الليلة؛ ورجع إلى مكة في تلك الليلة، وذلك قبل الهجرة.

Ghulām Khalīl's (d. 275/888) treatise seems to be the oldest surviving authorial text on
Islamic dogma; cf. Jarrar and Günther, *Ergebnisse* 16.

26 In the mystery cults, the Greek form of this god's name, Mithras, was predominant. See
also Eliade, *Images* 48–9.

initiation is reformulated and very creatively incorporated into the Islamic belief system.²⁷

Another significant aspect is the way that both the *mi'rāj* story in the biographical literature and the narrative of Muḥammad's dream journey to the hereafter in the literature of prophetic traditions emphasize the pivotal role of the Holy Land and Jerusalem. Al-Bukhārī's account of Muḥammad's sojourn in the hereafter even suggests that the Holy Land is the place where the gates to both heaven and hell are located. This point is taken up again in the Muslim eschatological literature where it is stated that on the day of resurrection Isrāfīl, "the burning one" of the four Islamic archangels, "blows the Trumpet on the Rock of the Blessed House," i.e., Jerusalem, signifying the revivification of the already resurrected but still dead bodies and the beginning of divine judgment.²⁸ This narrative concurs with the idea expressed in the Bible (and in pre-Biblical Semitic thought), that Jerusalem is "the seat of the future paradise," while in the Jewish tradition the very abode of the wicked – hell – is located directly below the walls of Jerusalem.²⁹

The reappearance and transformation of these ancient apocalyptic concepts concerning the Holy Land and Jerusalem in the Muslim tradition bears witness to a remarkably dynamic process of cross-cultural fertilization of apocalyptic ideas that must have taken place during the first three centuries of Islam. This view is supported by modern scholarship which suggests that Jewish converts to Islam, in addition to storytellers, preachers, scholars of the prophetic tradition, historians, and Quran commentators, were apparently the main transmitters of Jewish lore to Muslim tradition.³⁰

27 See also Widengren, *The ascension*, esp. 77–85 (on hermetic-gnostic literature in Arabic); Widengren, *Muḥammad*, esp. 55–95 (on relevant Mandaean, Manichean, Christian, and Shi'i perceptions).

28 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 42; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 46. The Arabic term in question is *bayt al-maqdis* or, more commonly, *bayt al-muqaddas*, an Arabic synonym for Jerusalem that refers to the Hebrew name for the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, *bēt ha-miqdash*.

29 Montgomery, *The holy city* 24, 28, and 32. See also van Ess, *Theologie* iv, 389 and 395 (on Jerusalem as the seat of paradise on earth); and van Ess, *Vision and ascension* 47–62. See also the more recent work by Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem*, esp. 63, 78–81, 103–7 (on early Muslim traditions from the eighth century and earlier claiming, for example, that the gates of paradise will be opened over Jerusalem, but referring also to the idea that the part outside Jerusalem's eastern wall is to be identified with hell); see also the recent study by Stager, *Jerusalem as Eden* 36–47.

30 On the sanctity of Jerusalem in Islam and its unique role in Islamic eschatological literature, see Livne-Kafri, *Jerusalem in early Islam* 382–403, esp. 382. On the importance and

3 Death, Resurrection, and Judgment in Eschatological Writings

3.1 *Classical Genres of Arabic Writing on Eschatology and the Hereafter*

The different kinds of classical Arabic writing expressly devoted to Islamic eschatology and the hereafter are still little known to Western readers. The great popularity of these books in the Islamic world, however, attests to the importance of scholarly *and* imaginative treatments of topics such as death, eschatology, and the hereafter for Muslims throughout history, and shows how firmly rooted these eschatological ideas are in Muslim life and culture.³¹

The expression *ʿulūm al-ākhirā* (“branches of knowledge of the hereafter”) is used by Muslim scholars in reference to Arabic writings devoted to Islamic eschatology in the broadest sense of the term. It serves best as the generic term for Arabic-Islamic eschatological literature as such. This genre can be divided into four sub-categories: (1) The literature of *al-fitan wa-l-malāḥim* (“dissensions and fierce battles”). This specific designation is often found in book titles of “a kind of Islamic apocrypha that combines historical commentaries with eschatological stories.”³² These works deal with the “the signs and conditions of the *eschaton*” (*ashrāt al-sāʿa*), while they also address “the crucial affairs taking place prior to the day of resurrection” (*al-umūr al-ʿizām allatī takūnu qabla yawm al-qiyāma*), as the renowned religious scholar and jurist Abū l-Fidāʾ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) determined.³³ But this literature also includes treatments of the *barzakh* (Q 23:100), the intermediate state between death and resurrection. Furthermore, there are (2) writings that focus on *al-qiyāma* (“the resurrection”) and the events taking place on judgment day, complemented by (3) works that deal exclusively with *al-janna wa-l-nār* (“the garden and the fire”) and offer specific and quite elaborate descriptions of the various domains of paradise and hell. (4) The sub-category *al-adab al-ukhrawī*, the belletristic

criticism of preachers (*wuʿāz*, sing.: *wāʿiz*) and storytellers (*quṣṣās*, sing.: *qāṣṣ*) as authorities of the (oral) transmission of religious knowledge in pre-modern Islamic society, see Berkey, *Popular preaching* 23–37, 46–59, 65–6, 71, 83–8, 95; and Athamina, *Al-Qasas*, esp. 64–5.

31 For a discussion of the spectrum of Muslim works devoted to “heavenly journeys,” see Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 15–56. See also the insightful study by Tottoli, *Muslim eschatological literature* 452–77. On death rites and related beliefs about the afterlife among Muslim communities, see also Halevi, *Muhammad’s grave*, esp. 197–233.

32 El-Hibri, *Parable and politics* 16. See also the discussion of this literature in Cook, *Studies in Muslim apocalyptic* esp. 230–68 (on the idea of “moral apocalypse” in Islam, in connection with political events, religious establishments, and certain attitudes toward cities).

33 Ibn Kathīr, *Kitāb al-Nihāya* 3.

“literature on the hereafter,”³⁴ occupies a special place among the writings on “knowledge of the hereafter.” These books stand out for their fiction-like and entertaining character of presentation, and their refined literary style. Perhaps the most pioneering examples of this literature are the *Risālat al-ghufrān* (‘The epistle of forgiveness’) by the famous philosophical poet and writer Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī (d. 449/1057) and *al-Risāla al-Kāmilīyya fī l-sīra al-nabawīyya* (‘The treatise of Kāmil on the Prophet’s biography’) by Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 687/1288), a brilliant physician and philosopher.³⁵ However, while al-Ma‘arrī wrote a kind of Arabic *Divine Comedy*, in which a poet visits paradise and there encounters pre-Islamic poets whose paganism God had “forgiven,” Ibn al-Nafīs composed what could be called a theological science fiction narrative. Remarkably, the final two chapters of Ibn al-Nafīs’ work attempt to offer a scientific explanation of the religiously significant scenarios of the apocalypse.

3.2 *Al-Ghazālī’s al-Durra al-fākhira*

3.2.1 Contents and Structure

One of the truly remarkable classical Arabic texts exclusively devoted to Islamic eschatology is *al-Durra al-fākhira fī kashf ‘ulūm al-ākhirā* (‘The precious pearl revealing the knowledge of the hereafter, mentioned earlier’), a work traditionally ascribed to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī.³⁶ This treatise was drafted after

34 Cf. Ṭulbā, al-Ramz fī l-adab al-ukhrawī 90–1; Ṭulbā, Adab al-riḥla 283.

35 See also M. Hegazi’s contribution on al-Ma‘arrī in the present publication.

36 The authenticity of the *The precious pearl* as an original work by al-Ghazālī is a matter of debate in modern scholarship. While some scholars (such as M. Asín Palacios, W. Montgomery Watt, and H. Lazarus-Yafeh) doubt its authenticity, others (such as I. Goldziher and, more recently, M. Smith) argue in favor of it. Contemporary Muslim scholars generally hold the view that it is an original work of al-Ghazālī’s. I would argue in favor of the latter view, for several reasons: Apart from the fact that al-Ghazālī’s full name is given at the beginning of the book, a number of indications within the text itself support the perception that *The precious pearl* is indeed a work from al-Ghazālī’s pen. These indications include: (a) At the end of chapter 3, the author notes, “all of these [issues in question here] we have already discussed in the *Kitāb al-Ihyā’*,” i.e., al-Ghazālī’s *magnum opus*. Moreover, (b) at the end of the book the author states, “we have mentioned the story [of so-and so] . . . in the *Kitāb al-Ihyā’*.” (c) The author of *The precious pearl* finally also suggests that this work represents a “purposefully drafted abridged version” (*wa-qaṣadnā al-ikhtisār*) of the treatment of ideas already dealt with “in other works” (*fī ghayri hādha l-kitāb*); cf. al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 109. Nonetheless, these pieces of information are far from conclusive and the possibility still remains that a third party familiar with the *Ihyā’* could have constructed them. An in-depth stylistic analysis of *The precious pearl* would need to be undertaken in order to come to a more definite judgment about the authorship of this book. Based on the technical observations

al-Ghazālī's multi-volume *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (The revitalization of the studies of religion, or perhaps better: Invigoration of the knowledge of religion) and appears to be an extract of the latter's fortieth and last book. In contrast to the more complex, scholarly treatment of death and afterlife in the *Ihyā'*, the straightforward and literary style of *The Precious Pearl* indicates that the latter was composed for a wider, more general readership.

Al-Ghazālī relies heavily on two sources in *The Precious Pearl*, often by way of literal quotation: the Quran and the prophetic traditions. In particular, al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ* is frequently quoted either by title or by the name of its compiler. Thus, *The Precious Pearl* addresses in great detail three of the four main eschatological themes: death, the transformation or transcendence of history, and judgment day. The fourth theme, the final consignment to paradise or hell, although repeatedly referred to in the book, does not receive any specific treatment. One can define the main topics of *The Precious Pearl* as follows:

- (i) THE PRIMORDIAL COVENANT: God's preordination – each mortal is fated to enter paradise or hell; the divine breath of life in the womb;
- (ii) DYING: the soul's departure from the body;
- (iii) DEATH OF THE BLESSED: the soul's journey through seven heavens to the throne of God and its return to the lifeless body; personification of the good person's deeds;
- (iv) DEATH OF THE WICKED: interrogation in the grave; personification of the bad person's deeds; instructions from the deceased to the living;
- (v) EVENTS IN THE GRAVE: *barzakh*, the intermediate state between death and resurrection;
- (vi) DAY OF RESURRECTION: (a) the arrival of "the hour" and destruction of the earth; (b) the trumpet's first blast – the signal of the day of resurrection; revivification of the earth and resurrection; (c) the trumpet's second blast, heralding the arrival of God's throne; the seeking of the resurrected for the messengers' intercession with God; (d) the proclamation that the

presented here, however, one may be inclined to perceive this book as being authored by al-Ghazālī himself until the opposite has been proven conclusively. I draw attention to these considerations, despite the fact that the questions which certain modern scholars have raised about the book's authenticity are not of primary concern to our present study, simply because for many centuries of Islamic history *The precious pearl* has been held by Muslims to be an authoritative example of Islamic eschatological writing. For more details on this discussion, see Smith in al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 5–6. A French translation of *al-Durra al-fākhira* was published by Gautier (1878) and a German translation by Brugsch (1924).

Prophet Muḥammad alone can intercede; the arrival of paradise and hell as special personified entities at the place of judgment; setting up the Balance; (e) the determination of the status of the prophets and their respective communities; (f) individual reckoning and judgment of peoples' deeds; entrance of the judged into paradise or hell; (g) God's rolling-up of the heavens and earth.

- (vii) **AUTHORIAL CONCLUSION:** contextualization of the importance to acquire knowledge of the hereafter.³⁷

3.2.2 Pictorial Language and Dogmatic Teachings

3.2.2.1 *Death and What Happens Next*

Al-Ghazālī commences his “disclosure of the knowledge of the hereafter” by stating that the Quranic idea that *kullu nafsin dhāʾiqatu l-mawt* (“every soul will taste death”), is “attested in His book in three places, for God desired three deaths for the world.”³⁸ On a cosmic level, the author explains that these three kinds of death refer to the tripartite structure of the universe:

- a) “the earthly world” (*al-ʿālam al-dunyawī*) inhabited by humans, animals, and plants;
- b) “the dominion of power” (*al-ʿālam al-malākūtī*) inhabited by the angels and jinn; and
- c) “the dominion of might” (*al-ʿālam al-jabarūtī*) inhabited by the highest angels (*al-muṣṭafawn min al-malāʾika*), including: the cherubim (*al-karūbiyyūn*), other spiritual beings ruling the celestial spheres (*rūḥāniyyūn*), the bearers of God's throne, and the companions of the pavilion of God.

All three worlds will be destroyed and will vanish on doomsday, the *yawm al-dīn*, before God establishes his eternal “kingdom of the heavens and the earth.”³⁹ On a more specific level, the tripartite structure of the universe, along with the divine determination of three major eschatological events, serve as a framework for the author's division of the book into three thematic segments: (1) death on earth, (2) the transcendence of history, and (3) judgment day.

As for the fundamental questions of life and existence in this world, the author begins his discussion of the matter with a reference to the traditional Islamic view that “life is not identical with the soul.” Rather, it is said to be

37 See also Smith in al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 13–6.

38 Q 3:185; 21:35; 29:57; but see also 44:56.

39 For the various names of doomsday in the Quran, see Günther, Day, times of 500.

“a combination of soul and body.” Death occurs when the soul is separated from the body. Then, the fortunate soul, which is the size of a bee and bears human characteristics, slips out of the body “like the jetting of water from a water-skin” and is received by two angels “with beautiful faces, wearing lovely clothes and sweet-smelling fragrances” who wrap the soul in sublime silk. But the soul of the profligate “squeaks out like a skewer from wet wool.” Ugly, black-garbed guardians of hell squeeze it out of the body and wrap it in sackcloth while it “shudders like quicksilver.” The unfortunate soul also bears human characteristics, but is the size of a locust. In the hereafter, the size of the profligate soul is larger than the one of the believer. At this stage, the dying person imagines that his belly is filled with thorns. His forehead sweats, his eyes see falsity, and his body turns yellow due to the magnitude of his suffering. Hearing is the last faculty that the dying person loses. After leaving the body, the soul loses none of the intelligence or knowledge it acquired on earth.⁴⁰

Immediately after the person has passed away, angels take the fortunate soul to the seven heavens until they reach the throne of mercy. The description of this journey of the soul to the heavens instructs the reader in several fundamental teachings of Islamic faith and practice. For example, it conveys the idea that each of the first ‘five heavens’ through which the soul ascends represents one of the ‘five pillars of Islam.’ Hence, arriving at the first heaven correlates to the utterance of the Muslim profession of faith, and to sincere belief. The second heaven signifies correct performance of the ritual prayers. The third stands for sharing one’s wealth and living a decent, God-fearing life. The fourth relates to the observance of fasting and other dietary regulations of Islam; and the fifth to the performance of the pilgrimage “without pretense or hypocrisy.” Continuing the journey, the arrival at the sixth heaven is equated with genuine piety toward one’s parents. Finally, reaching the seventh heaven corresponds to praying all night, giving alms in secret, and providing for orphans. Having arrived at the seventh heaven, the souls of the most pious and of the martyrs remain at this supreme location until judgment day. All other souls, however, return to earth to be reunited with their respective bodies.⁴¹

These basic religious teachings are presented in an exquisitely wrought narrative framework, and the reader is familiarized with this religious knowledge through hints and subtle suggestions rather than straightforward dogmatic instruction. The refined rhetoric of these passages, together with their imaginative pictorial language and the systematic presentation of arguments, further enhances the persuasiveness of the theological principles contained

40 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 2–11; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 19–25.

41 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 11–4; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 26–7.

therein.⁴² The measured exposition of information guides the reader through *The Precious Pearl*, and the gradual process of becoming acquainted with the arguments on both the rational and poetic levels helps him or her eventually accept these creeds and live by them.

On this didactically well-prepared ground, al-Ghazālī continues in this vein by contrasting the destiny of the fortunate soul with that of the profligate's soul. It is suggested that the soul of the wicked will be transported, like the fortunate soul, to the first heaven, but shall be denied entry (Q 7:40). In fact, it will fall from heaven and be dropped by the wind in a far distant place (Q 22:31). When it reaches earth, the guardians of hell take charge of it.⁴³

3.2.2.2 "Life" in the Grave

All souls are reunited with their bodies before burial. The soul attaches itself at "the breast from the outside" (*bi-ṣadr min khārij al-ṣadr*) of the body of the deceased and, together in the grave, body and soul await the day of resurrection.⁴⁴ Until that day the deceased experience various degrees of reward and punishment in the grave, including views of paradise and visions of hell, depending on whether the person lived a pious or a sinful life on earth (Q 40:46).

The reader of *The Precious Pearl* further learns that there are four kinds of people of the tomb: There are those whose bodies become dust and whose individuality fades away; the souls of these people are doomed to wander in the realm below the earthly heaven until the arrival of "the hour." Then there are those whom God allows to slumber until judgment day; those whose souls, after a period of only three months in the grave, mount the green birds that fly with them to paradise where they remain until the day of resurrection; and finally those who, instead of going directly to paradise, may opt to remain on earth until "the hour" comes – on earth they circle through the three worlds. This opportunity, however, is reserved to prophets and saints alone.

Only for the third group among the people of the tomb is a further characterization offered, with a reference to a canonical prophetic tradition. According to this tradition, "the soul (*nasama*) of the believer is a bird perched on the trees of the garden." Furthermore, "the spirits of the martyrs (*arwāḥ al-shuhadā'*) are

42 "Rhetoric is the use of organized arguments to promote the acceptance of a point of view that may lead to a course of action. Although its principal purpose is persuasion, rhetoric also professes the aims of truth and aesthetic value," as suggested by Back, *Rhetoric as communication* 130.

43 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 7, 11, 18; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 23, 25–6, 29–30.

44 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 33.

residing in the crops of the green birds (*fi ḥawāṣil ṭuyūr khudr*) perched on the trees of the garden.”⁴⁵ Remarkably, this association of the soul with a bird calls to mind the ancient Egyptian tradition, on the one hand, that the soul is a bird, *Ba*. On the other hand, the archetypal representation of the soul as a bird is also evident in Islamic mysticism. For example, in the *Risālat al-ṭayr* (Treatise of the birds) the polymath Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037) suggests that humans may achieve salvation based on their own work and efforts. The epistle with the same title traditionally ascribed to al-Ghazālī, however, contends that a person’s salvation depends on his faith.⁴⁶

3.2.2.3 *Resurrection and Divine Judgment*

Al-Ghazālī’s account of death (as the cessation of all biological functions of life) and life in the tomb (as the intermediate state of the deceased) culminates in the final and lengthiest part of his book: a dramatic portrayal of the resurrection and divine judgment. Through the visualization of these powerful, overwhelming events the author underscores once again several core issues of Islamic religious faith and ethics, with one theme always at the center of the focus: the unconditional acceptance of *tawḥīd*, the belief in God the One, Almighty.

Most impressive here are certain passages in *The Precious Pearl*, in which the author paraphrases the catastrophic occurrences described in the Quran. In *The Precious Pearl* he states that as a result of these apocalyptic events everything in both the material and spiritual worlds – in fact all forms of existence – will be destroyed by God and will vanish. In “this scene of stark emptiness . . . like before creation,” to quote Jane I. Smith, there will be nothing but God:

Then God extols His own praise as He so desires; He glorifies His eternal existence and His lasting power and never-ending dominion and victorious omnipotence and boundless wisdom. Three times He asks, “To whom

45 Ibid.; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 40.

46 See Faris, Al-Ghazzali’s epistle of the birds 46–53. Other works of later times relevant to this context are the mystical epic of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār (d. 617/1220), *Mantiq al-ṭayr* (*The Speech [sometimes “logic”] of the birds*, also rendered as *The conference of the birds*), and various poetic treatments of the soul as a “bird” by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (“the Martyr”); cf. Günther, *Paradiesvorstellungen* 27–8, 51 (esp. note 63) and the contribution by K. Föllmer in this publication.

belongs the Kingdom this day?" No one answers Him so He answers Himself, saying, "To God who is one alone, victorious!"⁴⁷

For the day of judgment, al-Ghazālī suggests, God will create a new, "second earth which is an earth white with silvery light," just as the Quran proclaims it:

[Upon] the Day [of Resurrection] – when the earth is turned into another earth, the heavens into another heaven, and people all appear before God, the One, the Overpowering – you [Prophet] will see the guilty on that Day, bound together in fetters, in garments of pitch, faces covered in fire (Q 14:48–50).⁴⁸

The divine balance made of two scales will be set up for judgment; the scale to the right of the throne is made of light, and the one to the left of darkness. All the deeds of humans will be precisely weighed on these scales, and even the person's hands and feet will testify to his or her actions. God will judge each person individually – a key idea of divine judgment known in ancient Egypt as well, where it was believed that the soul was individually examined in the presence of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead.⁴⁹

Al-Ghazālī evokes the idea that, on that day of reckoning (*yawm al-ḥisāb*, Q 38:16, 26, 53; 40:27), God commands that paradise be adorned and brought near those resurrected and awaiting judgment. Paradise will offer "lovely fresh breezes, the most fragrant and delicious imaginable" that invigorate the soul and give life to the heart. But God will also command that hell be brought near, a hell "which walks on four legs and is bound by seventy thousand reins." In spite of its reins, hell will break free and storm, "clattering and thundering and moaning," toward the crowd of people at the place of judgment. Everybody will fall on their knees, even the messengers. The Prophet Muḥammad alone will, by the command of God, seize hell by its halter and command it to retreat.⁵⁰ This image of the Prophet Muḥammad subduing hell emphatically highlights the unique power and supremacy of the Prophet of Islam over all the rest of God's creation. At the same time, it evokes the image of Jesus who, in Matthew 16:18,

47 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 39; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 44–5; see also Smith and Haddad, *The Islamic understanding* 72.

48 The quotation from the Quran follows Abdel Haleem's translation. See also al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 54; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 54–5.

49 MacGregor, *Images* 58–60; Hornung, *Im Reich des Osiris* 215, 220–4.

50 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 67–8; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 61–2.

promises that his community (lit., “my church”) will not be overcome even by the strongest parts of hell (lit., “the gates of hell”).

3.2.2.4 *Colored Banners and Prophetic Leaders*

Muslims believe that the Prophet Muḥammad – being a sign of “mercy for the world” and “a bearer of glad tidings and an admonisher to all human-kind” (*raḥmatan li-‘ālamīn; kāffatan li-l-nās, bashīran wa-nadhīran*; Q 21:107; 34:28) – represents the peak and the ultimate conclusion of God’s continuing revelations, which had been communicated through a long line of prophets and messengers. This idea is echoed beautifully in a dramatic passage at the end of *The Precious Pearl*, where al-Ghazālī describes the scenario on judgment day when the fortunate are assembled in groups, assigned to certain prophets, and prepared to be led into paradise.

This passage highlights the ethical characteristics and merits of certain pre-Islamic messengers and prophets (as the Islamic tradition views them), for the purpose of doctrinal instruction. The exposition begins by stating that, after the disobedient and wrongdoers have been pushed into the vaults of hell, only those who submit to the will of God (*muṣlimūn*), the doers of good works (*muḥsinūn*), those who know [God] (*‘arifūn*), those who affirm the revelation (*ṣiddīqūn*), the martyrs (*shuhadā’*), the righteous (*ṣāliḥūn*), and the messengers (*mursilūn*) remain at the place of judgment. From among the God-fearing, the fortunate will be grouped according to degree of merit and suffering on earth, and a prophet will be assigned to each group as their leader.

THE BLIND, it is stated, are those most worthy to look upon God first. They are awarded a **white** banner (*rāya*), put into the hands of the Arabian Prophet Shu‘ayb. THE PEOPLE OF AFFLICTION AND WITH INFIRMITIES, those characterized by patience, forbearance, and knowledge, are awarded a **green** banner, put in the hands of the Prophet Job (Ayyūb). THE PEOPLE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, whose patience, forbearance, and knowledge are similar to that of the aforementioned group, are awarded a **red** banner, put in the hands of the Prophet Joseph (Yūsuf). THE LOVERS OF GOD, who have the same characteristics as the two groups mentioned before and who, in addition, were never annoyed with any earthly circumstances, are given a **yellow** banner, put in the hands of Aaron (Hārūn). THOSE WHO WEEP OUT OF THE FEAR OF GOD, the closest to the martyrs and the religious scholars, are given a **multicolored** banner “because they wept for different reasons”; their banner is put in the hands of Noah (Nūḥ). THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS – the ink of whose toil is outweighed only by the blood of the martyrs – are first given a **saffron** banner, put in the hands of John (Yaḥyā). But one of the scholars requests that God allow the scholars, as had been confirmed in a prophetic tradition, to intercede

on judgment day for those who helped them during their times of hardship on earth. Upon receiving this request, God awards the religious scholars a **white** banner in place of the saffron. This white banner is then placed in the hands of Abraham (Ibrāhīm), for Abraham was the one granted the most revelations and wisdom. **THE POOR**, for whom life on earth was “a prison,” are awarded a **yellow** banner, placed in the hands of Jesus (‘Īsā). Finally, **THE RICH**, to whom God enumerates their God-given riches so many times that it takes Him five hundred years, are awarded a **multicolored** banner, put in the hands of Solomon (Sulaymān).⁵¹ On that day, the messengers, prophets, and religious scholars are seated on thrones of various heights, each according to his rank, with the messengers, as the only lawgivers, seated on the highest thrones.

This magnificent panorama of events and the meticulous categorization of eight different groups of believers rewarded with admittance to paradise – in addition to their association with banners of specific colors and their assignment to certain prophets – certainly appeals to readers of *The Precious Pearl*. It offers a vision that stimulates the imagination on several levels: First, the detailed portrayal of the various groups – addressing their physical attributes (such as their bodily challenges and disabilities), intellectual and spiritual characteristics (degrees of sincerity of belief and depth of religious knowledge), and socio-economic situations (living in hardship or wealth) – is universal. This depiction reflects a broad spectrum of the social stratification found in particular in religiously-based societies. Second, the association of certain groups with specific colors is suggestive not only because colors generally play a significant role in Muslim civilization, but more importantly, the Quran teaches that colors, hues, and shades are divinely created. They are intended to express and celebrate the diversity of God’s creation. Colors and hues are considered to be signs of God, which He granted to humankind and to all living beings so that they may perceive, distinguish, and learn.⁵²

51 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 85–9; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 70–6.

52 “Surely in that are signs for a people who consider. And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and earth and the variety of your tongues and hues. Surely in that are signs for all living beings” (Q 30:22). See also Q 39:21 and 35:28. It is to be noted as well that the Quran mentions only five colors as such: white, black, yellow/gold, red, and green. Blue as a “true color” is absent, although it occurs in Q 20:102 where it describes eye color and denotes evil. Cf. Rippin, *Colors* 363. The best color, of course, is the “dye of God” (*ṣibghat Allāh*), not specified as to chromatic wavelength, at Q 2:138.

Viewed in light of the indications provided by both the Quran and certain classical Muslim scholars on the symbolic meaning of colors, the colors mentioned in *The Precious Pearl* offer quite interesting insights.⁵³

White, as an achromatic color with zero saturation, is commonly associated with brightness, innocence, purity, and a fresh beginning. In his doctrine of photisms, the Persian mystic Najm al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 654/1256) states, “light visualized is *white light*; it is a sign of Islam.” He also states that the color white and white or silvery light represent wholesomeness and, consequently, Islam as the supreme representation of peace and harmony. Al-Rāzī’s concept, however, is already tangible in al-Ghazālī’s description of the post-apocalyptic “earth white with silvery light,” that is, the state of the earth when existence reaches fulfillment and eternal peace on a cosmic scale. The consistency of al-Ghazālī’s views with those of al-Rāzī is even more clearly evident in the assignment of white banners to THE BLIND, “the worthiest to first look at God,” since it connotes the perception of innocence and purity. But the white color of the banner may also be understood simply as pointing to the blind themselves, as the eyes of sightless persons often become white. In addition, the assignment of THE BLIND to the eloquent preacher and prophet Shu‘ayb, “the one who shows the right path,” as his name indicates, further highlights the ethical virtues of THE BLIND and their elevated worthiness of divine reward.

Likewise, the white banners assigned to THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS bring to mind the Biblical and Islamic idea of “white” representing both light and enlightenment. This view is reinforced by al-Ghazālī himself when he states in *The Precious Pearl* that THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS were assigned to the Prophet Abraham, because Abraham is “the one to whom the most revelations

53 Based on these and other statements on colors in the Quran – in addition to the meanings of colors in ancient Arabic poetry and in the Greek theories of color as they became known to the Arabs in early Islam especially through eminent Arab authors and translators such as ‘Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī (third/ninth century) and Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 260/873) – certain medieval Muslim scholars devoted much thought to hues and shades of color. These considerations are included in works of classical Islamic philosophers, especially al-Kindī (d. 356/873), al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and, above all, Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198), as much as in those of philologists, natural scientists, theologians, and mystics. On colors in the Islamic context, see, above all, Corbin, *Man of light* 131–43; furthermore, Fischer, *Farb- und Formbezeichnungen* 27–54 (on individual colors), 233–382 (on the meanings of colors and the system of color terminology in pre-Islamic poetry); Morabia, *Lawn* 698–707; Müller, *Die Farben des Koran* 117–45 (on the meaning – and the chronological development in the use – of color terms in the course of the Quranic revelation); Rippin, *Colors* 361–5; Scarcia Amoretti, *Lunar green and solar green* 337–43; and Spies, *Al-Kindī’s treatise* 247–59.

[and wisdom] were given.” Consequently, the color white supersedes the color **saffron** (a tone of golden yellow, as discussed above), the color that was assigned to THE RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS before it was replaced by white.⁵⁴

In the Quran, **green** connotes freshness, relaxation, and luxuriousness. It is reminiscent of nature, vegetation, and lush gardens, often in explicit reference to the gardens of paradise. It carries the notion of earthy humidity, but also the virtue of being salutary for the vision and other senses as it sets the mind at peace. Green is generally seen in Islam as the color of paradise. In Islamic mysticism, the color green is more specifically “the sign of the life of the heart” while the *visio smaragdina*, “the outburst of green,” represents a specific degree of “visionary apperception” or perception of new experience in relation to past experience (a crucial activity in Sufi learning and for spiritual advancement). Association of THE PEOPLE OF AFFLICTION AND WITH INFIRMITIES with the color green not only appears to convey the notion of calm and reward for those who experienced great suffering on earth, but also offers them an immediate prospect of the freshness and wholeness of paradise. The Prophet Job, described in the Quran as one who was afflicted by great suffering but who never lost faith in God (Q 21:83), appears to embody both the archetype and the natural leader of all those in pain and distress.

Red refers in the Quran to the multicolored nature of God’s creation (Q 35:27–8). However, it also conveys such qualities as intensity, high visibility, and distinctiveness. Some of these meanings apparently live on in Islamic mysticism, where the “red light” is the dominant note in the mystical vision, and is in fact both an image and a cause of “nostalgia and a burning desire” to unite with the divine. Yet the color red also stands for the sun, fire, and heat in general. Thus, association of THE PEOPLE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS with a color of the radiance and intensity of red, and with the Prophet Joseph who is admired in Islam for his particularly strong commitment to God and his exceptional righteousness (of which the Quran, in Sura 12:4–102, speaks in the most detailed of its narratives on Biblical figures), clearly marks those in this group as particularly strong believers.

Yellow (often synonymous with gold) is associated in the Quran with brightness, shininess, and purity. For the mystics, yellow is “the sign of the fidelity of faith.” But it also indicates a “lessening of activity.” THE LOVERS OF GOD in al-Ghazālī’s account perfectly express these notions, especially as they appear to be in a state of constant, glowing spiritual devotion. However, THE LOVERS

54 In contrast, the “black light” (Pers.: *nūr-e siyāh*) was extolled by certain mystics of later times as “a very delicate spiritual state into which the mystic enters just before *fanā’* (annihilation)”; cf. Izutsu, *Paradox* 300–2.

OF GOD represent the great passion which believers find in their affection for God on the one hand, and the reduction of all worldly activities to a minimum on the other. At the same time, they are patient and “never annoyed with any earthly circumstances,” as al-Ghazālī confirms. The leader of THE LOVERS OF GOD, Aaron, the brother and companion of Moses and himself a prophetic messenger (Q 10:75–6; 21:48), is viewed in the Quran as someone who almost sacrificed his life in a zealous effort to urge the Israelites to believe in God, instead of making the calf of gold and succumbing to idolatry. Aaron thus seems to be the perfect choice as the leader of THE LOVERS OF GOD.

Multicoloredness is the result of an effective blending of colors. While in the Quran the multiplicity of colors, hues, and shades is “evidence for God’s handiwork in creation”⁵⁵ and for that creation’s diversity in appearance, in Islamic mysticism the beauty of the rainbow’s multicolored spectrum is viewed as a wholesome representation of all the spiritual heavens; that is, the inner heavens of the soul and the seven planes of existence. This kind of distinction through diversity is evident in THOSE WHO WEEP OUT OF THE FEAR OF GOD who wept “for different reasons,” as al-Ghazālī states. Due to their intense fear of God, they are led by Noah, viewed in Islam as a prophet and messenger whose message was refused by the wicked and sinful people despite his God-inspired warning, “. . . truly, I fear for you the chastisement of a dreadful day” (Q 7:59).

The dual notion of purity and reward recurs when THE POOR are awarded a banner of **yellow**, a color we encountered earlier. The leader of THE POOR, Jesus, often mentioned in the Quran as a messenger and the one who announced Muḥammad’s coming (Q 61:6), is particularly venerated by Muslim ascetics and mystics for his poverty, humility, and detachment from worldly life – a view given much consideration by al-Ghazālī in both his monumental scholarly opus, *The Revitalization of the Studies of Religion*, and his later writing, *The Precious Pearl*.⁵⁶

Finally, the **multicolored** banner assigned to THE RICH seems to refer to the large range of their treasures. Their representative and leader, Solomon, is considered in Islam to be a prophet and divinely appointed king. God bestowed on him many riches and abilities, but he nonetheless reigned justly and remained grateful and faithful to God throughout his life (Q 27:15–9).

55 See also Rippin, *Colors* 361.

56 See also Zwemer, *Jesus Christ in the Ihya*, esp. 148.

3.2.2.5 *Personifications of Deeds and Ideas*

The great wonders of the day of judgment continue as every thing and every concept existent on earth appears in human form. The Quran appears as a man with a beautiful face and figure. Similarly, the Islamic religion, *dīn*, emerges as a person – an idea somewhat resembling *daēnā*, the female personification of the “visionary soul” (who guides the deceased along a narrow path to the other world) in Zoroastrianism.⁵⁷ The world comes into sight as a hoary old woman and people are told: “This is the world, over which you used to envy and hate each other!” Likewise, Friday, the day of the Muslim communal prayer, approaches “in the image of a bride being led in procession, as lovely as can be.”⁵⁸

Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that these personifications of things and ideas are to be understood literally, even though acceptance of such an understanding in the here and now may be difficult. He insists that these personifications are not merely symbolic and explains that, with their physical representation in the material world, expressions such as earth, Islam, the Quran, prayer, fasting, and patience refer to real and solid things, while by their innermost nature, they belong to the spiritual world. Therefore, the Quran exists “as a person” and Islam “as something spiritual” through the will of Almighty God. Whosoever recognizes this truth will encourage a literal understanding of the scripture and a spiritual approach to the world. This is why literalists would never speak of the “creation of the Quran,” as the rationalist sect of the Jahmīs does. The author of *The Precious Pearl* maintains that the Jahmīs (apparently a derogatory or code word for Mu‘tazilīs) are ignorant of the spiritual reality of existence and in error when they argue, “the soul is annihilated at death.”⁵⁹

57 According to the *Hādōxt Nask (Book of scriptures)*, a Middle Persian text composed prior to the fourth century CE, the personified Daēnā, the mobile and seeing soul, appears to the deceased at “the end of the third night,” at the dawn of the fourth day, after he or she had passed away. Daēnā will be carried to the deceased by a wind from the south. Daēnā will have the shape of a maiden. She is of lovely appearance, has white arms and firm [lit., high] breasts. She is strong, tall, and beautiful. Daēnā is noble and looks like a 15-year-old. Altogether, she is more stunning than the most beautiful creature. See Piras (ed., trans. and comm.), *Hādōxt Nask* 69–70, 82–94. I am very grateful to Dr. Kianoosh Rezanian, Göttingen, for drawing my attention to these passages in *Hādōxt Nask* 2:7 and 2:9. See also Kellens, *Hādōxt Nask*.

58 See al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 107–9; al-Ghazālī, *Die Kostbare Perle* 116–7; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 87–8.

59 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 109; al-Ghazālī, *Die Kostbare Perle* 117; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 88.

Although the author feels very strongly about the rejection of any metaphorical approach to the Quran, he presents his views carefully and rationally when he says:

I have been on guard against all allegorical interpretations of the *ḥadīth* and disclaimed those who reject it. In the same way I have avoided describing the balance, considering the speech of those who describe it by similes to be an error, and have relegated it to the concerns of the spiritual (*malakūti*) world. For good and evil actions and the weights of accidents cannot be gauged for certain but by the spiritual (*malakūti*) balance.⁶⁰

Of course, one must bear in mind in this context that the personification of ideas and deeds, put forward so firmly in *The Precious Pearl*, is neither unique to al-Ghazālī nor to orthodox Islam. Also, several ancient mythologies tended to personify ideas and powers (as divinities), or view death as a living being. In certain Biblical texts, too, death is personified as a malevolent power and paralleled with hell.⁶¹

At the end of *The Precious Pearl*, al-Ghazālī straightforwardly addresses his readers by calling upon them to be immune to error. Here he instructs the true believers to strictly “follow the path of the *sunna* and avoid the innovations occurring in the *sharīʿa*,” the divinely revealed law, since only those who follow the example of the Prophet and live a life that is in accordance with the prophetic tradition may hope for salvation and eternal happiness in paradise.

4 Conclusions

We hope that our voyage through examples from four very different categories of classical Arabic texts – the Quran, the literature of prophetic traditions, the biography of the Prophet, and the eschatological literature – contributes to an illustration of the true wealth of ideas and depictions of the hereafter considered by the majority of Muslims to be authoritative and, indeed, foundational to the Islamic religion and way of life. In conclusion, a few additional observations are in order.

First, the remarkably vivid imagery and symbolic language of the Quranic references to paradise and hell evoke intensive sensory perceptions that

60 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra al-fākhira* 69–70; al-Ghazālī, *The precious pearl* 63.

61 See, for example, Jes 28:15, 18; Jer 9:20; Hab 2:5; 1 Cor 15:26; Rev 6:8; 20:13–4.

stimulate both the mind and the heart. These often highly poetic descriptions help to establish, whether openly or implicitly, a direct connection between two distinctly different realms: the present world and the hereafter. As a result of this process taking place in the mind, plain textual representations of the afterlife appear to be transformed into a clearly delineated, though dynamic, geography of the unseen. Abstract concepts of a supernatural reality, inaccessible to conventional means of knowledge acquisition, thus become something concrete, tangible, and comprehensible to the human mind. The explicit pictorial language in the eschatological passages of the Quran, which we discussed in the first part of this study, empathically calls to mind that what humans may experience after death is entirely different from life in this world. However, as noted by Muhammad Asad (d. 1992), an influential Muslim translator and commentator of the Quran, the Quranic similes, allegories, and parables for the hereafter also lead to “a kind of ‘visualization’ of the consequences” resulting from deliberate action, or omission thereof, in this world.⁶² Moreover, as Sayyid Quṭb (1906–66), the prominent Muslim theorist and author of perhaps the most popular Quran commentary in the contemporary Muslim world, observed, by “palpable fancied images,” the artistic portrayal, representation, or depiction in the Quran (*al-taṣwīr al-fannī fī l-Qurʾān*) “designates intellectual meanings, psychological states, perceptible events, visual scenes, human types, and human nature. It then elevates these images it draws, and grants them living presence or regenerating power . . . As for events, scenes, stories and sights, it renders them actual and immediate, pulsating with life and dynamism.”⁶³

Analysis of the range of ideas and stylistic devices in the Quran relevant in our thematic context – from eschatological and apocalyptic ideas at the one end to concepts of eternal life and salvation on the other – is obviously pivotal to a better understanding of the Quranic revelation as such. In fact, examination of the eschatological ideas in the Quran may even allow a fuller appreciation of certain spiritual motivations animating Muḥammad’s prophetic mission. This seems to be particularly true when we consider that Western scholars researching the Quran have only just begun to study the interconnection between apocalypse and salvation in Islam in more depth.⁶⁴

62 Asad (trans.), *The message* 990. For the definition, use, and interpretation of these rhetorical devices in the text and context of the Quran, see Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen* 426–38 (on simile); Beamont, *Simile* 13–8; Gilliot and Larcher, *Language and style* 109–35, Heath, *Metaphor* 384–8; and Zahniser, *Parable* 9–12.

63 Quṭb, *Taṣwīr* 36; Boullata’s translation (slightly adjusted), cf. his *Literary appreciation* 356.

64 See, in particular, the pioneering studies by Cook, *Studies in Muslim apocalyptic* 1–33 (introduction), and T. Lawson, *Duality, opposition and typology in the Qurʾān*, esp. 25–6 and

Second, similes, allegories, and complex verbal pictures are certainly not unusual in religious texts. This is evident, for example, in the many parables and allegorical narratives in the Bible. Nonetheless, the vivid descriptions of paradise and hell in the Quran, along with the remarkably elaborate and imaginative eschatological narratives by later Muslim scholars deserve special attention for the descriptive diction and style with which they emphasize the inescapable consequences for all those who fail to heed the Quran's passionate warnings of the final cosmic apocalypse. But even more than these powerful rhetorical or narrative features that address the mind and the emotions, it is the richness of symbolic imagery, metaphors, and colors so distinctive to these eschatological texts that effectively facilitates two fundamental objectives of the Quranic message as understood by generations of Muslims: the one is *missionary in its nature*, as non-Muslims are called upon to understand that acceptance of the Quranic message and Islam means salvation and eternal life; and the other is *dogmatic in its essence*, as it provides Muslims with reaffirmation of, and instruction in, Islamic doctrine. The latter point was highlighted by Abū 'Alā' al-Mawdūdī (1903–79), one of the most important though controversial Islamist thinkers of the twentieth century, but also by Sayyid Quṭb, just mentioned. While al-Mawdūdī emphasized, for example, that “graphic scene[s] of the life in the Hereafter” have been depicted in the Quran “in order to warn the disbelievers of the consequences of the rejection of the Articles of Faith,” Quṭb noted that for Muslims, belief in the afterlife, paradise and hell is inseparably connected to belief in God, and denial of an afterlife is considered blasphemy in orthodox Islam.⁶⁵

Third, it must be emphasized that in their writings medieval Muslim authors of eschatological works have very creatively blended Quranic concepts with extra-Quranic materials. These extra-Quranic eschatological elements are evidently part of a *pool of ideas and images* fostered by various cultures and religions of the ancient and medieval Near and Middle East. In other words, the *openness* and *integrative attitude* of Islamic civilization in classical times

35–41 (on “Typological Figuration and the Apocalypse of Reunion”); Lawson, *Apocalypse* 38–9; and Lawson, *Gnostic apocalypse and Islam*, esp. 1–20 (introduction).

65 This idea is present throughout al-Mawdūdī's and Quṭb's commentaries. Al-Mawdūdī, for example, states in his explanation of Sura 6 (note 136), “to believe in ‘meeting with one's Lord’ means . . . [to] be convinced that a life of responsibility based on the belief in the life of the Hereafter is far better than an irresponsible life based on its rejection . . .” (cf. also [al-]Mawdūdī, *Towards understanding* ii, 295, the wording in the printed edition differs slightly from the online version); see also Quṭb, *In the shade* vi, 254 (on Q 7:169–70).

toward the multifaceted cultural heritage of the wider Mediterranean world, including the apparent capacity of Muslim scholars to assimilate, Islamize, and thus revivify certain ancient ideas and symbols concerning the ultimate destiny of humanity must be identified as an important factor that has helped, throughout the centuries, to attract interest, capture imagination, and persuade people to adopt Islam as their religion and way of life. This insight applies in particular to the fascinating descriptions of the hereafter we have examined here from such highly authoritative texts as those by Ibn Ishāq/Ibn Hishām, al-Bukhārī, and al-Ghazālī.

Fourth, the classical books on Islamic eschatology, of which al-Ghazālī's *The Precious Pearl* is a particularly popular example, highlight two principal ideas: (a) through death the soul is freed from the body and returns to heaven where its origins lie and where it truly belongs; and (b) death means awakening and becoming alert rather than falling asleep or into agony. This leads ultimately to the conclusion that the present world is in a state of sleep, and is awakened to *reality* and becomes *cognizant* only in the hereafter, when it is in a state that abides eternally in the presence of God. While these views – mirroring the famous prophetic saying that “People are asleep and when they die they awake”⁶⁶ – are salient features throughout al-Ghazālī's *The Precious Pearl*, they become even more evident in the writings of later Muslim scholars, especially in those of the mystics, of whom the influential Persian “existential” philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050/1640) is probably the most prominent.⁶⁷

Yet, one distinguishing feature in both the Quranic passages and the classical Arabic texts on Islamic eschatology examined here, and the one that perhaps stands out the most, is the human longing to *come full circle* and to *return to paradise* – an idea which appears to be as deeply rooted in Islam as it is in other major religions.

66 The Arabic original of this famous saying reads: *الناس نيام فإذا ماتوا انتبهوا*. It is attributed sometimes to the Prophet Muḥammad, other times to ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/661), the fourth “rightly-guided caliph.” Al-Ghazālī quotes it on several occasions in his *Ihyā’*, without, however, giving an *isnād* (cf., for example, al-Ghazālī, *The remembrance* 124, with references to al-Shawkānī's *al-Fawā'id* and al-Suyūṭī's *Durar*). This saying is not included in the six most widely accepted (Sunni “canonical”) compendia of *ḥadīth*.

67 See also H. Landolt's and M. Rustom's contributions to the present publication.

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FIGURE 9.1 The Prophet Muḥammad's Night Journey to Heaven, miniature from *Yūsuf wa-Zulaykha* by the poet-theologian Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492), Bukhara 1095/1683–84, fol. 10 recto, reproduced with kind permission of The David Collection, Copenhagen/Denmark.

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