

The Primordial Cycle Revisited: Adam, Eve, and the Celestial Beings

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According to the cosmogonic narrative in the Qurʾān, human life began with the creation of Adam and his mate, an event which is central for understanding the pivotal role of angels (*malāʾika*)¹ in Islam. This chapter will revisit the primordial cycle of stories that relate the position of humankind to that of the celestial beings, including Iblis and the serpent in Paradise, in the attendant typologies of the Qurʾānic narratives. These stories are part of an extended nexus of sacred events which appear in the context of the mythic repertoire of the monotheist scriptures, their extra-scriptural literatures, and folk-religious belief. Of special interest here are the visual depictions of these accounts, which incorporate and adapt a number of motifs and themes from the greater Islamic world. Miniatures from Islamic manuscripts dating from the late fourteenth to the early 17th century provide us with illustrations for some of the stories and reflect the interpretive lore surrounding these Qurʾānic narratives as it is elaborated in the genres of *taʾrikh* (*History*), the oral legendary traditions of the storytellers and itinerant preachers recorded in the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (*Tales of the Prophets*), and Sufi poetry. Attention is paid to the reciprocal relation between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literary cultures within the Islamic realm. These visual sources also reflect, and afford an insight into, a liberal borrowing of legends from earlier Jewish and Christian traditions and, thus, enrich the dynamics of the core events of the narratives.

God's dramatic final creative act takes centre stage in the Sūrat al-Ḥijr. Here God makes the body of man (*bashar*)² from earth-like clay and gives it life by breathing into it some of His own spirit (*ruh*) (Q 15:26-29; cf. 38:71-72). The jealousy of the angels had been roused prior to Adam's creation. As in the Talmudic exegesis of Genesis 1:2, God had declared to them his plan but they counselled against this potentially disobedient and sinful creation and offered reasons why God should not fashion humankind (Q 2:28-31; 15:28-38). The angels, spirits created of fire (*nār*) and "cold light" (*nūr*), thus reflecting the immateriality of God and expressing His divine glory, cried out in protest.³ They said, "How can You put someone there who will cause damage and bloodshed when we celebrate Your

¹ Terms in parentheses are Arabic unless otherwise specified.

² Adam is not named in the two earliest and longest Qurʾānic accounts found in *surās* 38 and 15; he is first identified by his Arabic name Ādam in Q 20:115-6. The latter was, of course, transferred from the Hebrew and other Semitic languages. See Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qurʾān* [1938], second edition, Leiden: Brill 2007, 50-51.

³ This notion can also be found in the Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Sanbedrin* 38a-b and *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshīt Rabbā*) 8:1.

praise and proclaim Your holiness?’ But He said, ‘I know things you do not’” (Q 2:30).⁴ God then announced His intention to appoint the man as His *khalīfa*, that is His ‘successor’ (Q 2:30) or ‘trustee’ (Q 6:165; 7:129) on earth.⁵ Ibn ‘Abbās’ (d. 68/687-688), the Prophet Muḥammad’s paternal cousin, is said to have explained that God named him Adam because He created him from the skin (i.e. surface) (*adīm*) of the earth.⁶

Adam’s presentation to the angels in Paradise is portrayed in an illustration from a manuscript of Farīd al-Dīn ‘Attār’s *Mantiq al-tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds or Speech of the Birds*) produced in 899/1494 in Shiraz, Iran (Fig. 1). The father of humanity and first prophet of Islam is depicted here in his glory. Ibn ‘Abbās’ interpretation is that God, “after having created Adam, took out of his loins all the spirits that He was about to create till the day of resurrection; He then made them bear witness that He was their Lord.”⁷ Hence, the spirits recognised God’s lordship prior to the creation of their bodies. Some of these primordial entities are said to have been invested with primordial light, which God created before all other things, including heaven and earth. The gift of prophecy was bestowed upon Adam immediately after his creation. According to the mystical tradition, this manifested itself in him as the pre-existent ‘light’, *nūr Muḥammadi*, a sign of special transcendence associated with Muḥammad’s prophethood.⁸

This prophetic light was believed to be God’s first emanation and the instrument of all the subsequent creation that began on the Day of the Covenant. As Muḥammad’s primogenitor, Adam was the first to have light on his forehead “like the moon on the night of a full moon.”⁹ This conception was elaborated upon by the 9th-century Islamic mystic Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), who spoke of the essence of Muḥammad as “a column of light,” a single and transcendent illumina-

⁴ All quotations from the Qur’ān in this chapter are drawn from the translation of M. A. S. Abdel-Haleem, *The Qur’an*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004.

⁵ See Q 33:72. For discussions regarding the possible meanings of the designation *khalīfa*, see Meir J. Kister, “Adam: A Study of Some Legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* Literature,” in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 13 (1993), 113-174, esp. 115-132.

⁶ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh al-rusul wa ’l-mulūk*, ed. and transl. Franz Rosenthal, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: General Introduction and From the Creation to the Flood*, vol. 1, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 1989, 259-260.

⁷ al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 9, 75, cited after Uri Rubin, “Pre-Existence and Light – Aspects of the Concept of Nūr Muḥammad,” in: *Israel Oriental Studies* 5 (1975), 67-68.

⁸ The mention of shining and light is of particular significance for the Shī‘ī tradition and for the concept of the light of Muḥammad (*nūr muḥammadi*), which was in Adam and transmitted from him to his progeny, and then through the generations to ‘Alī. See Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims*, Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press 1995, 37, and Rubin, “Pre-Existence,” 96-97, 62-119. See Johannes Pedersen, “Adam,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*E²*). Accessed 26 March 2018; and Roberto Tottoli, “Adam,” in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Third Edition (*E³*). Accessed 26 March 2018.

⁹ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta’rikh*, vol. 1, 47; al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*, ed. and transl., William M. Brinner, *Lives of the Prophets*, Leiden: Brill 2002, 47.

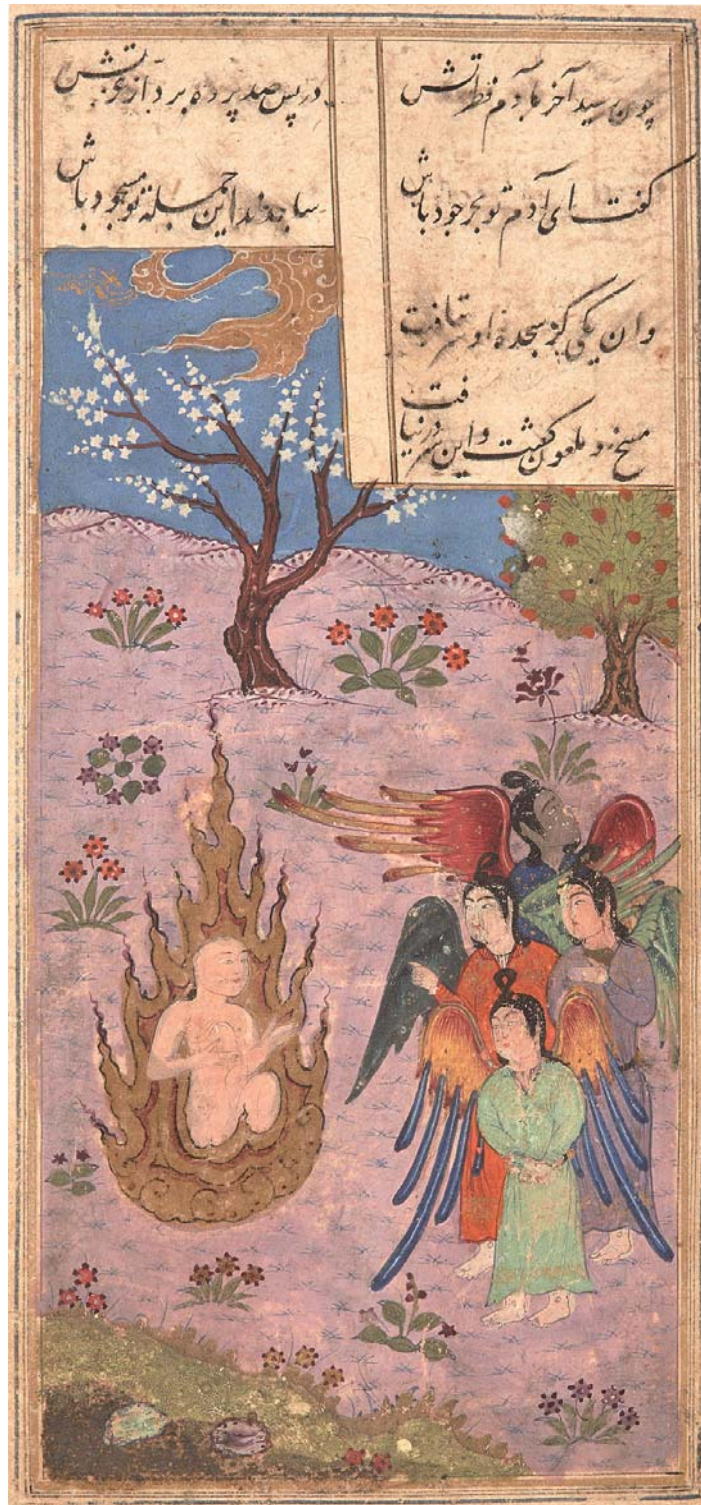


Fig. 1: The angels face Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Mantiq al-tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*) of Farid al-Din 'Attar. Iran, Shiraz, 899/1494. Krakow, National Museum in Krakow/The Princes Czartoryski Museum, BCz 3885 II Rkps Saf 93. Photograph © National Museum in Krakow.

tion which had emanated from God Himself and which had bowed down before him a million years before the pre-eternal covenant between humans and God. This light, al-Tustarī states, has been disseminated in “particles of uncreated certitude” in the hearts of the “intimate elect.” Tustarī’s notions continued to influence Sufi thinkers, as well as painters, for centuries to come.

Early Muslim sources¹⁰ were familiar with the Rabbinic traditions that Adam was clad in “clothes” of light in Paradise¹¹ and that he was exquisitely beautiful.¹² This concept of primordial and creative light, used to symbolise God and His message through prophecy, eventually gave rise to the flame-shaped halo as an attribute of those who spoke with prophetic authority. A miniature included in the *Mantiq al-ṭayr* shows Adam, before the first woman was created, literally engulfed in flaming light (Fig. 1). It portrays a scene that begins with the presentation to the angels of the first man fashioned by God and which leads to an angelic rebellion.

The painting features four angels discussing the prototypical human being. Their body language reveals a tension, or even a form of rivalry, between the angels and the prototype of the newly created human race. The angels all seem to share, albeit to a lesser degree, the defiant reaction of Iblīs, who stands at the back haughtily turning his head away. According to tradition, God made Iblīs beautiful¹³ and he is depicted as such here. He is portrayed with his characteristic darker skin to denote his impending fall, but he has wings and wears the contemporary ‘angelic hairstyle,’ a loop of hair tied on top of the head.¹⁴

The Qurʾān reports that God taught Adam, but not the angels, the names of all things (*al-asmāʾa kullabā*, Q 2:31), at which point they recognised the exalted status of the first man and obeyed God’s command to venerate him (Q 2:34): “When We told the angels, ‘Bow down before Adam’, they all bowed. But not Iblīs, who refused and was arrogant: he was one of the disobedient.”¹⁵ When God questioned

¹⁰ Such as Yaʿqūbī 1, 5, cited after Rubin, “Pre-Existence,” 96.

¹¹ This is related to the notion of “God putting on the garment of light” in *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshīt Rabbā*) 3:21 (cf. 20:12 on Genesis 3:4), which owes much to Philo’s *De Fuga et Inventione* 110, and which, according to Alexander Altmann (“A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation,” in: *Journal of Jewish Studies* 7/3-4 (1956), 195-206, esp. 201-202), “is another way of saying that God revealed His Logos [or Wisdom] by the light which radiated from it.” For a discussion of the motif of garments of light in the Syriac *Meʿārath gazzē*, see Alexander Toepel, *Die Adam- und Seth-Legenden im syrischen “Buch der Schatzhöhle”*: eine quellenkritische Untersuchung, Louvain: Peeters 2006, 159.

¹² al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 47; al-Maqdisi, *al-Badʿ*, cited after Kister, “Ādam,” 139. Cf. *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kabāna*, ed. and transl. Braude and Kapstein, 101.

¹³ al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 249.

¹⁴ Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz, and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of “Qisas al-Anbiyāʾ”*, Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers 1999, 28.

¹⁵ References to the prostration of the angels before Adam appear in seven different *sūras* (chapters) in the Qurʾān (Q 2:34; 7:11-12; 15:28-33; 17:61-2; 18:50; 20:115-6; 38:71-8). Angelika Neuwirth, “Qurʾān, Crisis and Memory. The Qurʾānic Path towards Canonization as Reflected in the Anthropogonic Accounts,” in: *Crisis and Memory in Islamic Societies*, Angelika Neuwirth and Andreas Pflitsch, eds., Würzburg: Ergon 2001, 118-119, 125-126.

Iblis about his defiance, Iblis' response, given in two parts, focused on the inferior material nature of Adam. First, he stated that he would not bow down to a mortal made of clay (Q 15:33; cf. 7:12; 17:61; 38:76). He then went on to underline the superiority of his own essence, proclaiming (Q 7:12; cf. 38:72), "I am better than him: You created me from fire and him from clay." Parallels with this episode can be found in extra-Biblical literature such as the pseudoepigraphical *Life of Adam and Eve*¹⁶ and the Syriac *Me'ārath gazzē (Book of the Cave of Treasures)*.¹⁷

The earliest known depiction of the adoration of the angels dwells on Iblis' rebellion. Al-Kisā'ī, one of the early authors of the *Tales of the Prophets*, recorded just before 1200, relates that since "Iblis' worship was greater than that of any of them, God raised him to the heaven of the earth, where he worshipped God for a thousand years and was called The Worshipper who was known to hold an exalted station among the angels," for "God has given his servant an ability to obey God such as He has given to no [other] angel."¹⁸ In a late 14th-century Persian depiction of the scene from a manuscript of the 12th-century Persian cosmographer al-Tūsī al-Salmānī's *'Ajā'ib al-makblūqāt (Wonders of Creation)*, copied by Aḥmad Harawī in 790/1388, Adam is not shown at all (Fig. 2). The actual protagonist in the image is the defiant angel, depicted as standing upright behind two others who kneel on their prayer rugs,¹⁹ their heads turned to look at him with astonishment. The text above the miniature reads, "When the angels saw Iblis, they were afraid, and performed another prostration before Adam."

In this composition the celestial rebel is presented as a winged angel, his hands hidden under his long sleeves, following a common pictorial convention

According to Gabriel Said Reynolds (*The Qur'ān and Its Biblical Subtext*, London: Routledge 2010, 51), reading the Qur'ānic story of the angelic prostration in the light of related Biblical and post-Biblical traditions suggests that the angels are prostrating themselves to the glory of God within Adam. For other explanations, see, for instance, Roberto Tottoli, "Muslim Attitudes towards Prostration (*sujūd*): I. Arabs and Prostration at the Beginning of Islam and in the Qur'ān," in: *Studia Islamica* 88 (1998), 5-34; Cornelia Schöck, "Adam and Eve," in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 1, Jane D. McAuliffe, ed., Leiden: Brill 2001, 22-26, and Cornelia Schöck, *Adam im Islam: ein Beitrag zur Ideengeschichte der Sunna*, Berlin: Schwarz 1993, 23-24.

¹⁶ The origins and dating of *The Life of Adam and Eve* are uncertain. It was probably written during the period between 100 and 300 CE. According to some scholars, it was originally a Jewish text and later went through various Christian redactions. Today it is preserved in six fragmentary versions in Greek, Latin, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic, and Coptic. See James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, New York, NY: Doubleday 1985, 249-295, esp. *Life* 12:1-16:3.

¹⁷ The Syriac version probably dates between the 5th and 6th centuries CE, the Arabic version to the 8th century CE. Cf. Clemens Leonhard, "Observations on the Date of the Syriac Cave of Treasures," in: *The World of the Aramaeans, III: Studies in Language and Literature in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers and Michael Weigl, eds., Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2001, 255-292, esp. 288.

¹⁸ al-Kisā'ī, *Qisṣat al-anbiyā'*, ed. and transl. Wheeler M. Thackston, *Tales of the Prophets*, Chicago, IL: Kazi Publications 1997, 22.

¹⁹ On the question of whether the act of prostration implies worship, see Tottoli, "Prostration," 5-34.



Fig. 2: Two angels turn back and see with alarm that Iblis will not bow down before Adam. Painting from a manuscript of *ʿAjāʾib al-makblūqāt* (*Wonders of Creation*) of al-Ṭūsī Salmānī. Iran, *Rabīʿ al-awwal* 1 790/10 March 1388. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 332, fol. 209r. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

for expressing religious respect. Shortly after the events depicted here, Iblis was accused of rebellion, cast out of heaven, and called “accursed” (*rajīm*) (Q 7:13; 7:18; 15:34-35; 38:77) because he had refused to obey God’s command to bow down to Adam. Nevertheless, God grants him his request to play an active role in humankind’s destiny as the tempter or seducer (Q 7:16-7; cf. 15:39-45; 17:62-65; 38:82-5) who performs the task of testing as many humans as he can until the day of judgement and the resurrection.

Adam’s preeminent position in the cosmic order was supported not only by the scriptural text but also by the canonical *ḥadīth*, or prophetic tradition, which states that God created Adam “according to His form” (*‘alā ṣuratihī*),²⁰ a formulation that echoes the Biblical tenet in Genesis 1:6 that God created man in God’s own image.²¹ As Josef van Ess makes clear in his studies of early Islamic theology, conceptions of God in this period could take a distinctly human form and scale. In general, emphasis was placed on God’s beauty being that of a beardless man at the apex of his youth.²² Theologians even argued that, when he came to create the first human, God looked into a mirror.²³

Adam is represented as a beautiful beardless youth²⁴ in a 15th-century illustration in the *Majma‘ al-tāwārikh* (*Gathering of Histories*) of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū (d. 833/1430),²⁵ painted in Herat in Iran, which shows a group of crowned angels humbly prostrating themselves before the first man.²⁶ The regally dressed figure, crowned

²⁰ Gauthier H. A. Juynboll, *Encyclopedia of Canonical Hadīth*, Leiden: Brill 2007, 33.

²¹ ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *al-Muṣannaf*, no. 17952, and cf. no. 17950: “He created Adam’s face in His image.” Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, Kitāb al-Istī‘dḥān*, *bāb* 1: God created Adam in the form of the Merciful (*‘alā ṣūrat al-rahīmān*). Also Ibn Qutayba, *Kitāb ta’wīl*, 278; cited after Kister, “Ādam,” 138. Cf. Josef van Ess, *The Youthful God: Anthropomorphism in Early Islam*, Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University Department of Religious Studies 1989, 10.

²² Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1997, 377-383; van Ess, *The Youthful God*, 10. Cf. Garth Fowden, *Quṣayr ‘Amra: Art and the Umayyad Elite in Late Antique Syria*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press 2004, 200-201.

²³ Van Ess, *The Youthful God*, 10; W. Montgomery Watt, “Created in His Image: A Study in Islamic Theology,” in: *Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society* 18 (1959-1960), 38-49.

²⁴ Cf. Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, 69, 86.

²⁵ Painting from a manuscript of *Majma‘ al-tāwārikh* of Ḥāfiẓ-i Abrū (comprising Ṭabarī’s *Tā’rikh al-rusul wa l-mulūk* by Abu ‘Alī Bal‘ami), painted ca. 828-36/1425-33 in Herat, Iran, and preserved in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, B.282, fol. 16r. The translation of the Arabic inscription at the lower part of the page reads, “...and He said to get out of the form of the angels and to get into the form of the disappointed Iblis, God Almighty wanted the angels to understand the virtue of Adam, he is knowledgeable while the angels are not, this virtue is due to his action and not his origin or essence and in the Qur’ān God Almighty said...” See Eleanor Sims, Boris Il’ič Maršak, Ernst Grube, *Peerless Images: Persian Painting and Its Sources*, New Haven, CN: Yale University Press 2002, 263-264, fig. 180.

²⁶ Yet in a 15th-century Central Asian painting from a folio in Farid al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Mantiq al-tayr*, now in the Linden-Museum, Stuttgart, Adam, as a mature bearded man, receives the prostrations of the angels, with the exception of Iblis who here again preserves his angelic at-

but not haloed, is shown standing on a royal throne (Persian *takht*) to the right, talking to four prostrated angels who are labelled “the powerful angels” in red ink by the later accompanying Ottoman Turkish inscription. The angels are shown bent over with their foreheads on the ground and their hands extended towards Adam with their palms up, adopting a posture usually performed by the practicing Muslim during the obligatory ritual prayer to God. “Adam, the vehement,” as he is described in the same hand, is portrayed as arguing with Iblis, identified by the accompanying inscription as “the accursed devil (*shayṭān*).”²⁷ In stark contrast to the angels, who have long wings and are clad in colourful robes, Iblis is shown to have lost his heavenly status due to his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam. Half-hidden behind a large tree he is portrayed as a horned black demon with flaming eyes, naked but for a short red skirt, with a pair of short wings, tail, and clawed feet. He, in turn, is pointing with the index finger of his left hand at the open mouth of a red-cloured wriggling serpent, while with his right hand he grasps his long white beard in a gesture that communicates that he is swearing an oath.²⁸ Iblis’ black colour symbolises the diabolisation of the *angelus rebellans* and marks him as one of the unbelievers and denizens of Hell. His depiction is in stark contrast to that of Adam and the angels, who appear as radiant white-skinned beings, a colour usually used to denote the higher principle. The painting is thus marked by a clear distinction between good and evil. This figure of Shayṭān arises from the shadows of the combat myths of the ancient Near East, in which good and evil are symbolised, even incarnated, in figures which are in perpetual binary opposition to each other.²⁹ Elements of these interpretative traditions are amalgamated within

tributes. Johannes Kalter and Margareta Pavaloi, *Erben der Seidenstrasse – Usbekistan*, (Linden-Museum Stuttgart, Ethnologisches Museum Berlin), Stuttgart: Mayer 1995, 106, fig. 168.

²⁷ In the Qurʾān, the terms Iblis and al-Shayṭān are synonymous. However, the latter occurs only in connection with the temptation and fall of the first couple. See Andrew Rippin, “Shayṭān,” in: *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EP²*). Accessed 26 March 2018. Reynolds (*The Qurʾān*, 40) argues that, as shown in Sūrat al-Baqarah (2:34 vs. 2:36; cf. 7:11 vs. 7:20; 20:116 vs. 20:120), the devil in heaven is called Iblis but after his banishment he is named Shayṭān, the tempter. For a discussion of the transmission of the word Iblis into the Arab and Islamic milieu, see Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, “One More Time on the Arabized Nominal Form Iblis,” in: *Studia Orientalia* 112 (2012), 55-70, esp. 60-61. For an important discussion of “the *shayṭāni* aspect of Iblis” fusing both *dramatis personae* in *surā* 38, see Neuwirth, “Qurʾān, Crisis and Memory,” 134. *Ḥadīth* traced back to Ibn ʿAbbās, moreover, connect the name ʿAzāzil with that of Iblis before his expulsion (George Vajda, “Azāzil,” in: *EP²*), whereas al-Thaʿlabī (*ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 56) states that God changed his name from ʿAzāzil to Iblis. For an elaboration of the motif of the fallen angel ʿAzāzil in Shīʿa Islam, see Bärbel Beinhaus-Köhler, “Die Engelsturz motive des *Umm al-Kitāb*. Untersuchungen zur Trägerschaft eines synkretistischen Werkes der häretischen Schia,” in: *The Fall of the Angels*, Christoph Auffarth and Loren Stuckenbruck, eds., (Studies in Biblical Narrative 6), Leiden: Brill 2004, 161-175.

²⁸ Susan Aykut, *Hairy Politics: Hair Rituals in Ottoman and Turkish Society*, Adelaide: Charles Strong Memorial Trust 2000, 17.

²⁹ This is reflected, in particular, in a system that has two warring camps of spiritual beings, headed by the Zoroastrian God and Devil, fighting for the loyalty of human beings. Both

the Qurʾān. As Angelika Neuwirth has pointed out, this figure's multiple affiliations as *jinn*, as Iblis-Shayṭān, and as one of the angels suggests that – in keeping with pre-Qurʾānic mystical thought – angels and demons share important features in the Qurʾān and are closely related to one another.³⁰

Roughly a century later, in a late 16th-century miniature from a manuscript of *Majālis al-ʿUshshāq* (*The Assemblies of Lovers*) by the Timurid mystical poet Amir Sayyid Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Gazurgāhī, perhaps painted in Shiraz, Iran, Adam, still lifeless and naked, is depicted as lying on the earth in the centre of a circle of prostrated angels while Iblis kneels on a prayer rug, zealously worshipping God (Fig. 3).³¹ Here Iblis maintains his absolute devotion to God alone. Despite his status as rebellious figure, Iblis is something of an ambiguous figure and has sometimes been praised for his exceptional fidelity, especially in the Sufi tradition of Islamic mysticism, for his willingness to accept banishment from heaven rather than bow to anyone but God. Iblis' complex character is reflected in the *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsin* of the mystic Maṣṣūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), in which he is portrayed as the ultimate monotheist who will bend the knee to none other than God, even in defiance of God's own divine command. For this absolute devotion, or in spite of it, he is severely punished.³²

A painting from a manuscript of the eminent 12th-century Iranian poet Ilyās ibn Yūsuf Niẓāmī's *Khamsa* (*Five Poems*), illustrated in late 16th-century Shiraz,

are primal spirits who came together in the beginning to create life and death (Yasna 30:3-5). The "Evil One" declares to God: "I shall destroy you and your creatures forever and ever. And I shall persuade all your creatures to hate you and to love me" (Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, Leiden: Brill 1975, 46). Ideas of this complex dualism and the related eschatology were developed in differing ways in post-Exilic Jewish texts and intertestamental literature. In conformity with his gnostic role, *al-shayṭān* is the permanent opponent of humankind. He is the personification of evil, wholly dark, and wholly cursed. Cf. also Alexander Altmann, "The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends," in: *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, N.S., 34/4 (1945), 371-391, esp. 376-378.

³⁰ Angelika Neuwirth, "Cosmology," in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, vol. 1, Jane D. McAuliffe, ed., Leiden: Brill 2001, 440-458.

³¹ The upper part of the page bears couplets in Persian, the translation reading, "Such beauty no one has and at once they pressed their faces against the ground and with faint tongue they said, 'The arch of your eyebrows is forever the *qibla* of the souls. You are facing towards a heart and my heart is oriented toward you.' The Angel because of the attribute (did not?) fall prostrate to Adam. That the flower is moulded from your soil." The lower part of the page features Qurʾānic citations and Persian verses stating, "...so the angels fell prostrate, all of them together (Sūrat al-Ḥijr 15:30); Save Iblis (Sūrat al-Ḥijr 15:31, partial), he of grandeur, pride (in Persian). He was arrogant and did not fall down to the ground to bow and soon the birds of the cosmos were reaping the seeds."

³² On the mystic dimension of Iblis, see Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblis in Sufi Psychology*, Leiden: Brill 1983, esp. 122-134, as well as Benedikt Reinert, *Die Lehre vom tawakkul in der klassischen Sufik*, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 1968, esp. 78-79, 166.



Fig. 3: The angels bow before Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Majālis al-ʿUshshāq* (*The Assemblies of Lovers*) of Gazurgāhi. Iran, perhaps Shiraz, ca. 982/1575. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 1559, fol. 10v. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Iran,³³ portrays Adam lying lifeless on the ground, encircled by the prostrated angels. His entire body radiates or emanates flames of light, his prophetic essence, indicating that God has already breathed His spirit into him.³⁴ The renowned 10th-century Arab geographer and traveller Abu 'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusain al-Mas'ūdi reports that when God created Adam, He informed the angels of Adam's superior knowledge "and thus God made Adam into a *mihṛāb*, a Ka'ba, a gateway and a *qibla* towards which the pure spirits and the angels bowed down."³⁵ Iblis, however, rather than being shown on a prayer rug, is shown at a distance. Grey-skinned and half-naked with a white beard, he is portrayed standing with his arms folded across his breast, his hands pointing towards the shoulders, a posture which in a Sufi context signifies abject humility and respect.

In the *Testament of Abraham* (ch. 8, rec. B), a pseudepigraphic text of the Old Testament composed in the 1st or 2nd century CE, Adam is identified as "sitting upon a throne of great glory" encircled by a multitude of angels. According to the 12th-century Persian writer Abū Ishāq al-Nishāpūri, seven days after Adam's creation God sent from Paradise a throne of red gold studded with pearls, as well as silk clothes and a crown. Seven hundred angels are said to have encircled Adam in orderly ranks, according him the obeisance he was due. His throne was erected where the Holy Mosque of Mecca now stands and the seat of the throne was placed where the Ka'ba is now.

In a Persian illustration dated ca. 978/1570, perhaps from a manuscript of al-Nishāpūri's *Qisas al-anbiyā'* (*Tales of the Prophets*),³⁶ a crowned, royally dressed and youthful Adam with a flaming halo is shown seated on a tall throne surrounded by a host of bedazzled angels. Some of the angels are depicted as descending from heaven offering trays filled with light in commemoration of his receipt of the Prophet's gift, which is literally poured over him (Fig. 4).³⁷ Meanwhile, others offer

³³ Made in ca. 987-993/1580-85 in Shiraz, this painting from a *Khamsa* of Niẓāmī is now in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, B.146, fol. 14r. See Lâle Uluç, *Turkman Governors, Shiraz Artisans and Ottoman Collectors: Sixteenth Century Shiraz Manuscripts*, Istanbul: Türkiye İş Bankası 2006, fig. 143.

³⁴ A closely related scene, but without radiating light, is portrayed in the *Majālis al-'ushshāq* of Gāzurgāhī, painted in Shiraz, Iran. A copy, dated ca. 982/1575, is preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 776, fol. 11v. Another, dated ca. 987/1580, can be found in the Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H. 829, fol. 6v. Rather than being shown on a prayer rug, Iblis is here represented, half hidden in the back, with his finger in his mouth, the traditional pose of astonishment. See Uluç, *Turkman Governors*, fig. 142.

³⁵ Mas'ūdi, § 45, cited after Leigh N. B. Chipman, "Adam and the Angels: An Examination of Mythic Elements in Islamic Sources," in: *Arabica* 49/4 (2002), 449.

³⁶ Writings belonging to the genre of the *Tales of the Prophets* adapt Old Testament scripture and recast it in a Muslim context.

³⁷ The miniature is framed above and below with inscriptions, the translation of the upper section (in Persian with parts of Sūrat Al-Baqarah, verse 34) reads, "All stepped forward with the foot of submission and then laid the forehead of indignation on the ground, save Iblis. He refused and waxed arrogant, and was among the disbelievers. Indeed he was for-

praise or bow their heads and prostrate themselves in worship. Raising his right index finger, Adam addresses a turbaned and richly dressed Iblis who likewise lifts his right index finger, the mutual gestures signifying intense discussion. The painting mirrors the motif of a contest setting Adam/Humankind against an angelic being in order to establish which of them is the superior created entity.

In another instance, in a late 16th-century miniature which also illustrates a manuscript of al-Nishāpūrī's *Qisās al-anbiyā'*, Adam's mate (*zawj*) (who just as in the story of the fall in Genesis 3 is also not named in the Qur'ān)³⁸ is depicted as sharing both the throne and the prophetic status with Adam. The first couple is framed by adoring angels, some prostrating themselves, some looking on, while a grey-skinned Iblis stands half-hidden in the background.³⁹ In a composition from a mid-16th-century dispersed manuscript of the *Fāl-nāma* (*Book of Omens*), painted either in Tabriz or Qazvin in Iran, the enthroned and regally dressed primordial pair appears to be enjoying Paradise by taking part in a royal banquet, served by sixteen lavishly adorned angels.⁴⁰ Flaming nimbi radiate from the primordial couples' crowned heads.⁴¹ The medieval author al-Kisā'ī writes that "grapes and fruits of Paradise were offered to them, and they ate."⁴² The winged creature closest to the throne carries a golden tray supporting a silver wine bowl. Further down, an angel offers a golden ewer while a second angel holds a tray laden with pomegranates.

The theme of feasting (though food and beverage differ) is similarly described in the Babylonian Talmud (Sanhedrin 29:4), which states that Adam "sat in the Garden of Eden, and the angels roasted flesh for him, and prepared cooling wine." The emphasis is on the "celestial banquet," an image used to describe the primordial covenant, mentioned earlier, understood from the Qur'ānic words in which God addresses the pre-created souls of the progeny of Adam with a critical question – "Am I not your Lord?" – to which they reply that they bear witness (*shahidnā*) (Q 7:172). They thereby assume the contractual obligation to profess monotheism once born into earthly existence. This is acknowledged by the angels

bidden from entering Paradise and cursed eternally and expelled..." And continues in the lower part of the page, the translation of the Persian inscription reading, "...from the court of the Eternal Refuge. So was the gentleness of the *mibrāb* that the medicine consisted of looking at your face. If the angel does not bend his head, he will be cursed. The storytellers said that Adam in Paradise was not keen on anything and that he became the *mabram* of completeness..."

³⁸ Traditions, however, confirm her name as Eve or Ḥawwā'. The names of the first human pair are thus the same as in Judaism and Christianity.

³⁹ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 54, fol. 23; unpublished.

⁴⁰ The text of the *Fāl-nāma* is attributed to the sixth Shī'a *imām* Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 147/765). Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., S1986.254; Massumeh Farhad and Serpil Bağcı, *Falnama: The Book of Omens*, London: Thames & Hudson 2009, 96-97, cat.no. 12.

⁴¹ Cf. al-Kisā'ī, *Qisās*, 35.

⁴² al-Kisā'ī, *Qisās*, 35-36.



Fig. 4: Adam enthroned in Paradise with Iblis in the upper left corner. Perhaps from a manuscript of the *Qisas al-anbiya'* (*Tales of the Prophets*) of al-Nishāpūri. Iran, perhaps Qazvin, ca. 978/1570. Paris, Louvre Department of Islamic Art, MAO 375. Photograph © Musée du Louvre, dist. RMN – Grand Palais / Raphaël Chipault.

as they bow to the first father and the mother of humankind. One of the angels kisses Adam's right foot.⁴³ A grey-faced, bearded Iblis looks on dismayed from the upper right.

Combining what is said in the Qur'ān with the extra-Qur'ānic traditions, we can construct a composite picture of the events surrounding Adam's expulsion from Paradise. God had instructed Adam and his partner, known in the extra-Qur'ānic literature as Eve, to inhabit Paradise and had given them only a single restriction (Q 2:35): "do not go near this tree, or you will both become wrong-doers!" The first pair of humans were then tested. Tradition informs us that Iblis-Shayṭān constructed a stratagem to enter the serpent (which does not appear in the Qur'ān itself) in order to tempt the humans to violate the divine command and approach the forbidden tree.⁴⁴ Iblis-Shayṭān induced the pair to eat from this "tree of eternity (*khuld*)" (Q 20:120), whispering (*waswasa*) to them that the restriction had only been made to deny them eternal life and the status of angels (Q 7:20-21).⁴⁵ After receiving this promise of immortality from the serpent, Adam and his mate broke the divine covenant and "both tasted of the tree." Shayṭān thus succeeded in depriving them of their heavenly glory (Q 7:27). Immediately after this transgression, the primal couple were transformed: they apprehended their nakedness⁴⁶ and, thus, their sexuality and immediately covered themselves with leaves (Q 7:22).⁴⁷ The 9th-century compiler of *qiṣaṣ* literature and authoritative Qur'ān exegete Abū Ja'far al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) explains that, by tempting them in this way, Iblis wished to reveal to them their "secret parts," which had been hidden from them. This he knew "from his reading of the books of the angels."⁴⁸ Interestingly, tradition tells us that the only food the angels can

⁴³ One of the routine ritual gestures, the veneration of the feet of prophets, saints, and rulers, was commonplace in the medieval Iranian world and beyond.

⁴⁴ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, vol. 1, 275-276; al-Kisā'i, *Qiṣaṣ*, 38.

⁴⁵ In another account, he tempts by offering to take them to the Shajarat al-Khuld and "a kingdom that will not decay" (Q 20:120). In the *Kitāb al-Majāll* (*Book of the Rolls*) it is said that Allāh plants the Tree of Life in the midst of Paradise and, later, that Eve and then Adam eat fruit from "the forbidden tree." Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Apocrypha Arabica*, (Studia Sinaitica 8), London: C. J. Clay and Sons 1901, 8-9 (Arabic and English).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of cultic nudity in the ancient world, often associated with the symbolism of the new life or rebirth of an initiate, see Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," in: *History of Religions* 5/2 (1966), 217-238, esp. 218-222. It is also of interest that in the Hebrew *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* a certain tonal association can be observed between Adam seeing himself naked (Hebrew *arom*) after he had eaten from the tree, on the one hand, and the serpent, of whom it is said in Genesis 3:1 that it was "*arum*," smarter, than all the animals of the field, on the other. See *Pirke de-Rabbi Elieser: nach der Edition Venedig 1544 unter Berücksichtigung der Edition Warschau 1852*, ed. and transl. Dagmar Börner-Klein, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter 2004, XXXIV.

⁴⁷ The notion that Adam and his partner dressed in fig leaves after their transgression is of Biblical origin. *Genesis* 3:7; cf. *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshit Rabbā*) 19:6; al-Tha'labī, *Arā'is al-majālis*, 52.

⁴⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫ*, vol. 1, 276.

eat is fruit, because they are immortal.⁴⁹ Iblis' actions can thus be seen as an inversion of the traditional behaviour of an angel.

According to the Scriptural account, as soon as the primordial Adam and his partner ate of the forbidden fruit they were deprived of the celestial shining dress (cf. Q 7:20, 22, 27),⁵⁰ said to have been fashioned from "human fingernail,"⁵¹ which enrobed them "in glory and majesty" (Psalm 104:1).⁵² These mythic garments belonged to the hidden divine realm,⁵³ for after the removal of the pair from the realm of divinity their "garments of glory" were replaced by "garments of skin." It is interesting in this context that the Aramaic *Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan* (on Genesis 3:21) suggests that the leather garments God created for the first couple were made of the skin shed by the serpent, a notion also found in the Hebrew *Pirqē de-Rabbī Eli'ezer*, an 8th- or 9th-century Haggadic-Midrashic work which integrates elements from Islamic folklore.⁵⁴

In the mythical drama of the primordial fall, the heavenly prototype was cast down from heaven into the earthly world and thus became an earthly being, the mortal Adam. In an illustration from a dispersed manuscript of the great 15th-century Persian poet 'Abd al-Rahmān Jāmī's *Nafahāt al-uns* (*Breaths of Fellowship*), probably painted in mid-17th century Bukhara, Adam is shown literally engulfed in flames of light and glory (Fig. 5). The depiction of the heavenly Adam accords

⁴⁹ 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 226; al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 277. Cf. Schöck, "Adam and Eve," 25; Rippin, "Shayṭān," 525.

⁵⁰ They actually lost the angelic bodies they had once possessed. It is worth noting that 2 *Enoch* attributes also to Adam an *angelic* status before his fall and allows him to reign on earth like a king.

⁵¹ *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēshīt Rabbā*) 196 (on *Genesis* 3:21), which is dated to ca. 450 CE, refers to the first couple's clothing as "smooth as fingernail, beautiful as pearl." *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (on *Genesis* 3:7 and 21) describes them as created with clothing of fingernail (*ṭuprā*). See also Hanneke Reuling, *After Eden: Church Fathers and Rabbis on Genesis 3:16-21*, Leiden: Brill 2005, esp. 253-61; Gary A. Anderson, "The Garments of Skin in Apocryphal Narrative and Biblical Commentary," in: *Studies in Ancient Midrash*, James L. Kugel, ed., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001, 101-143. Al-Tha'labī (*Arā'is al-majālis*, 47) likewise relates that Adam's original skin was like fingernails; cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 1, 276.

⁵² Cf. *Book of Job* 40:10.

⁵³ See note 11 *supra*.

⁵⁴ It states that "from the skin [of Leviathan] the Holy One, blessed be He, made garments of glory for Adam and his helpmate," Chapter 20, ed. and transl. Börner-Klein, 212. Cf. Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 5, Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America 1925, 103; Nissan Rubin and Admiel Kosman, "The Clothing of the Primordial Adam as a Symbol of Apocalyptic Time in the Midrashic Sources," in: *The Harvard Theological Review* 90/2 (1997), 170. It is interesting to note Abraham ibn Ezra's comment on *Genesis* 3:21 in this connection, who says: "... others say there was an animal who was of anthropoid form, and God issued a command and it [the animal] shed its skin." John C. Reeves, "Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān," in: *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, John C. Reeves, ed., Leiden: Brill 2004, 57, note 50.



Fig. 5: The descent of Adam to earth. Painting from a dispersed manuscript of ‘Abd al-Rahmān Jāmi’s *Nafahāt al-uns* (*Fragrances of Intimacies*). Attributed to Farhād. Probably Bukhara, ca. 1060/1650. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: The Art and History Collection, LTS1995.2.61. Photograph © Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

with the description in a *ḥadīth* which states that, “the Prophet Muḥammad said: I saw my Lord as a beardless youth with curly hair in a green robe.”⁵⁵ This depiction echoes another tradition, mentioned earlier, according to which God created Adam “in his image.” After his descent from Paradise to earth, the mortal Adam in his human body is shown in a humble posture with eyes cast down, wearing a headdress given to him by the angel Gabriel in memory of his lost dignity. The painting is framed by an inscription reading, above, “As Adam’s honourable figure was adorned with this robe, half a day,” and below, “there he resided in Paradise for the equivalent of five hundred years whence he was sent to this world.”

Ottoman miniatures of the second half of the 16th century and the early 17th century portray both Adam and Eve after their act of disobedience as naked apart from leafy loincloths but surrounded by flaming nimbi.⁵⁶ The angelic host watch the departure of the first couple through the gate of Paradise, depicted as a tall tower. Outside the gate, Iblis is shown cowering next to the peacock and the serpent, who have also been expelled from Paradise.⁵⁷ The scene foreshadows the impending enmity between the first couple, on the one hand, and the serpent and Iblis, on the other (Q 20:123).⁵⁸ The same scene is featured in the *Fāl-nāma* manuscript of Ahmed I, attributed to Ḥasan Pāshā, who painted it in early 17th-century Istanbul.⁵⁹ Interestingly, it portrays Eve as holding an ear of grain in her right hand, for like Jewish and Christian interpreters before them, Muslim commentators also speculated about the species of the ‘forbidden fruit’ in Paradise. Aside from grain, the forbidden fruit appears in other traditions as a stalk of wheat, a vine, or some other sort of plant.⁶⁰ Following the primordial pair are, once again, the serpent and the peacock – a motif we will return to below.

⁵⁵ Van Ess, *The Youthful God*, 10.

⁵⁶ Cf. al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis*, 52. This scene is depicted in a painting from a manuscript of Kāshifī’s *Rawḍat al-shubadā’* (*Garden of the Martyrs*), translated by Fuḍūli al-Baghdādī and dated to the second half of the 16th century, now in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément turc 1088, fol. 9v; or in an illustration from a manuscript of Fuḍūli al-Baghdādī’s *Ḥadiqāt al-Su‘adā* (*Garden of the Blessed*), painted by ‘Azīz Allāh al-Ḥusaynī al-Kāshānī in 1010/1602-3 in Baghdad, New York, Brooklyn Museum, 70.143, fol. 14.

⁵⁷ al-Kisā’ī, *Qisās*, 20. For an insightful discussion of the Islamic-period peacock in Paradise and in its broader context, see Christiane Tortel, “Le paon, de l’Inde ancienne à l’époque islamique. Histoire illustrée d’une chute,” in: *Semitica et Classica* 3 (2010), 195-210, esp. 198-201. On the serpent in Paradise which was singled out to become the pawn of Iblis, see Sara Kuehn, *The Dragon in Medieval East Christian and Islamic Art*, Leiden: Brill 2011, 9, 127.

⁵⁸ al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis*, 52, 54.

⁵⁹ Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H.1703, fol. 7v. Farhad and Bağcı, *Fahnama*, 297.

⁶⁰ In Jewish tradition it is mainly mentioned as grape or fig or wheat (*Berakot* 40a; *Genesis Rabbā* (*Berēsbit Rabbā*) 15:7). Christian and Muslim traditions add further possibilities (al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 183-185; al-Tha‘labī, *‘Arā’is al-majālis*, 51). See Ishāq ibn Bishr, *Mubtada’*, 44a, cited after Schöck, *Adam im Islam*, 109-110; cf. Schöck “Adam and Eve,” 25; Rippin, “Shayṭān,” 525.

A late 16th-century Persian miniature depicts the couple rather differently, showing them as barefooted and bareheaded but clothed in white garments.⁶¹ It is possible that these clothes might represent the garb of sinners and penitents, who wore a shroud as an act of penance when they were begging for forgiveness. Concomitantly, white is also, of course, the colour of mourning and purification in Islamic tradition, as seen most prominently during the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. It thus seems most likely that the primal couple is shown wearing the *ibrām*, the pilgrims' dress that enables entrance to the sacred space around the Ka'ba, thereby signifying the ritual purity of the first humans. In addition, both are shown with diaphanous face coverings. In his collection of tales of the pre-Islamic prophets, al-Kisā'i records that Adam was the first to be taught the pilgrimage rites by the angel Gabriel, including the seven-fold circumambulation (*tawwāf*), after building the earthly Ka'ba in Mecca.⁶² Adam was instructed that he should follow the example of the angels, who had worshipped the Ka'ba for two thousand years before his creation, and "offer prayer as he had seen the angels do." Once Adam had finished his worship, "Gabriel said: This is sufficient for you, Adam! You are absolved, your repentance has been accepted, and your wife has also been absolved."⁶³ Yet, in spite of this invocation of the first couple's spirit of repentance and their consequent receiving of divine forgiveness, the painting shows the serpent and the peacock lurking just behind them, thus symbolising that, in the eyes of the painters, the pair did not in fact receive full forgiveness for their sins after all.

In another version of the first couple's flight from Paradise featured in a folio from a dispersed mid-16th-century manuscript of the *Fāl-nāma*,⁶⁴ Adam rides a huge four-legged dragon (reflecting the close relation between the serpent and its larger relative) while his mate is mounted on a peacock (Fig. 6).⁶⁵ They are pursued by a gatekeeper in courtly dress and turban who wields a long stick with which he prods them to hurry them along. The scene is framed by rows of angels above and below who watch the spectacle.

⁶¹ Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, Per 231, fol. 13b.

⁶² al-Kisā'i, *Qisās*, 61-62, 66. See al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 295; al-Tha'labī, *Arā'is al-majālis*, 60. In a Midrashic context, wrapping oneself in white clothing conveys an air of holiness and of resemblance to the angels; Rubin and Kosman, "The Clothing," 155-174. See also Kister, "Ādam," 169-170.

⁶³ al-Kisā'i, *Qisās*, 61-62, 66.

⁶⁴ The same scene is also featured in a copy of Abū Ishāq al-Nishāpūrī's *Qisās al-anbiyā'*, painted either in Safavid-period Iran or in Ottoman-period Turkey (in the late 980s/1570s to early 990s/1580s), now in Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi Kütüphanesi, H.1228, fol. 3r. It is worth noting that Iblis preserves his angelic attributes in this miniature: he is lavishly dressed and has beautiful long wings which he uses to fly, his hands directed towards heaven in an expression of pronounced bewilderment. Farhad and Bağcı, *Fahnama*, 213, cat.no. 65.

⁶⁵ al-Tha'labī, *Arā'is al-majālis*, 50-51.



Fig. 6: Adam and Eve expelled from Paradise. Folio from a dispersed manuscript of the *Fāl-nāma* (*Book of Omens*) of Ja'far al-Šādiq. Iran, Tabriz or Qazvin, mid-960s/1550s. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase Smithsonian Unrestricted Trust Funds, Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program, and Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, S1986.251. Photograph © Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

Why would Adam and his partner be shown riding these beasts? Their being mounted on these creatures points to a symbolic meaning that is not mentioned in the texts. Although the serpent is not mentioned in the Qurʾān, later traditions give it a prominent role in the mythical drama of the temptation and fall of humankind. For example, in the *Life of Adam and Eve*⁶⁶ God prevents Iblis from entering Paradise to seduce Adam, so Iblis beguiles both the serpent and the peacock, persuading them to assist him in his goal. In exchange for the promise of eternal life, Iblis is able to enter the pre-historical Garden⁶⁷ hidden in the serpent (either in its mouth or in its belly) and to speak through the creature's mouth in order to tempt the first couple to eat the forbidden fruit. According to other accounts, the serpent speaks at Iblis' command.⁶⁸ The serpent is usually described as having once been the most beautiful of all the animals, only losing its legs and assuming its eventual shape after the fall as the result of God's punishment. Al-Kisāʾī also records that the serpent's "speech was exaltation of God, the Lord of the Universe" and that "God had created her two thousand years before he created Adam."⁶⁹

It is noteworthy that this imagery was also known in the Jewish tradition. The *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliʿezer* – which was written in the 8th- or 9th-century but preserves earlier apocryphal material⁷⁰ – states that Samael (who is identified with Satan in Wisdom 2.24 and the Palestinian Targum on Genesis 3:6) came to Eden riding on a serpent.⁷¹ The Talmud describes the wicked king Nebuchadnezzar as riding a lion and holding in his hands a serpent as a bridle.⁷² We thus have a clear association between the fallen angel Iblis-Shayṭān, the serpent, and the peacock, as well as an indirect connection to the serpent's great mythological relative, the dragon. The 11th-century *Shāh-nāma* (*Book of Kings*), which records the ancient history of Iran, relates that the mythical king Ṭahmūrath (the third Pishdadian king and certainly one of the greatest kings of Iran) used Iblis as a mount.

⁶⁶ Emil Kautzsch, *Die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen des Alten Testaments*, Tübingen: Mohr 1900, 521.

⁶⁷ al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 50-51; al-Kisāʾī, *Qisās*, 36-39. See the Syriac *Meʿārath gazzē* 22; Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 14:11; Bar Hebraeus, *Tārīkh mukhtaṣar al-duwāl*, 7. According to another tradition in *3 Baruch* [in Greek] 9:7, Samael "took the serpent as a garment" in order to deceive Adam.

⁶⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, 107.

⁶⁹ al-Kisāʾī, *Qisās*, 38.

⁷⁰ See Anna Urowitz-Freudenstein, "Pseudepigraphic Support of Pseudepigraphical Sources: The Case of 'Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer,'" in: *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, John C. Reeves, ed., Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1994, 35-53.

⁷¹ Chapter 21, ed. and transl. Börner-Klein, 222. See Arnold M. Goldberg, "Kain: Sohn des Menschen oder Sohn der Schlange?" in: *Judaica* 25 (1969), 203-221; Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem: Magnes Press 1975, 167-169; Whitney S. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblis: Narrative Theology in the Qurʾān*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2011, 86.

⁷² *Sabbath* 150a.

Clearly, the association which led to this religious iconography was very much part of the repertoire of visual expressions in the medieval Iranian world.

In Sufi iconography, the riding by a mystic of a dangerous animal, using a serpent as a bridle and sometimes also holding another serpent as a whip, is commonly used as metaphor for the need of the senses for an intelligent rider (generally, Reason or Intellect) who can guide them to master their base soul (*nafs*),⁷³ often symbolised as a serpent or dragon. Mounting, in this context, symbolises mastering and taming. Sufis understand the tempter, Iblis, as operating from within the human body, even if he sometimes takes on forms that seem to be external to it. The Qurʾān speaks of forces of temptation as “the slinking whisperer – who whispers into the hearts of people” (Q 114:4-5). The 13th-century Iranian mystic Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār (d. 618/1221) tells a parable of Iblis and his little son al-Khannās, “One Who Slinks Away.”⁷⁴ The name is derived from verse 4 of Sūrat al-Nās, in which the whispering of the evil one (*al-waswās al-khannās*) is used as a designation for Iblis (Q 114:4).⁷⁵ In this mythic narrative, Iblis uses a stratagem to gain access to the human spirit:⁷⁶

[One day Adam went off to work and Iblis came to visit Eve, bringing along his little son, al-Khannās.] Iblis said, ‘Something important has come up. Please watch my son until I come back’. Eve agreed and Iblis went on his way. When Adam came back, he asked, ‘Who is this?’ She said, ‘It is the child of Iblis; he has been left in my care’. Adam reproached her, ‘Why did you agree?’ He flew into a rage, killed the child, chopped him into pieces, and hung each piece from the branch of a tree. Iblis came back and asked, ‘Where is my child?’ Eve told the whole story: ‘He has been cut into pieces and each piece has been hung from the branch of a tree’. Iblis called out to his child and he was joined back together. Alive once again, he stood before Iblis.

The same scenario is repeated twice, with Adam growing more and more desperate and devising more elaborate ways of killing Iblis’ little son. In the end:⁷⁷

[he] fried him; he ate half himself and gave Eve the other half to eat. ... When Iblis returned and asked for his child, Eve recounted the whole tale: ‘He killed him and fried him; I ate half and Adam half’. Iblis said, ‘This was exactly my intention, in order that I might have access to man’s interior! Since his breast is now my abode, my goal is achieved.’

⁷³ See Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 64-69, 185.

⁷⁴ This narrative had featured in Sufi mystical writings over the centuries. ʿAṭṭār locates its origins in an account of the 9th-century mystic Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlī al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932) who, in turn, relates the story on the authority of Wahb ibn Munabbih (d. 110-116/726-734). For the story titled “The dispelling of the Devil’s insinuations” in al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī, *Naḥwādīr al-Uṣūl fī Maʿrifat Ahādīth al-Rasūl*, see Zohar Hadromi-Allouche, “The Death and Life of the Devil’s Son: A Literary Analysis of a Neglected Tradition,” in: *Studia Islamica* 107/2 (2012), 157-158. For an examination of related *ḥadīth* reports, see Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 60-63; and Hadromi-Allouche, “Devil’s Son.”

⁷⁵ The text from al-Tirmidhī’s *Naḥwādīr al-Uṣūl* is referred to by al-Qurṭubī in his exegesis to *sūra* 114, *Tafsīr*, vol. 20, 261-262, cited after Hadromi-Allouche, “Devil’s Son,” 159.

⁷⁶ *Tadkhirāt al-awliyāʾ*, 529-31, quoted in Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 63; Bodman, *The Poetics*, 12-13.

⁷⁷ *Tadkhirāt al-awliyāʾ*, 529-31, quoted in Awn, *Satan’s Tragedy*, 63; Bodman, *The Poetics*, 13.

‘Aṭṭār’s didactic story of the primeval cannibalism of the first parents of humankind offers a clear parallel to Iblis’ initial subterfuge through which he enticed Adam and his partner to eat from the forbidden tree. The ingestion of human flesh echoes the eating of the fruit in Paradise. Through the absorption of the food, the tempter dwells forever in the human body, seductively whispering his temptations. An association with the serpent is alluded to here, as Zohar Hadromi-Allouche has pointed out, in the name of al-Khannās, which has a certain tonal semblance to the Arabic *ḥanash* or the Hebrew *naḥash*, both of which mean “snake.”⁷⁸

It should come as no surprise, then, that the ingesting of ambivalent creatures that reflect the ambiguity of good and evil is also recorded in Jewish texts, such as the *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kahāna*, a 5th- or 6th-century collection of Haggadic Midrash.⁷⁹ Here we read that God Himself captured the Biblical monster, Leviathan, who is sometimes featured in tandem with another monster named Behemoth, which had first been pursued unsuccessfully by the angels. In the *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kahāna*, God is depicted as the host of a banquet during which, after a final confrontation with the beast, he exposes the defeated creature. He then slaughters the monster and sloughs off Leviathan’s impervious skin in order to make *sukkāb* [that is, awareness of God’s presence], which will serve to protect the righteous from the fire of the Day of Judgment.⁸⁰ This ‘skin of Leviathan’ which, like the ‘garments of light’ discussed above, emanates heavenly glory and celestial splendour, was also used to clothe Adam and his partner in *Genesis* 3:21.⁸¹ On the Day of Judgement, a canopy will be erected over the righteous and they will then feast upon the flesh of the vanquished beast’s head, the greatest of delicacies, at the eschatological banquet.⁸²

⁷⁸ Hadromi-Allouche, “The Death,” 177.

⁷⁹ Cf. early Jewish tradition as found in, for example, the 1st-century-CE pseudepigraphical apocalyptic texts *4 Ezra* (6:49-52), *2 Baruch* (*Syriac Apocalypse*) (29:4), *1 Enoch* (60:7-10,24), as well as in later apocalyptic writings (ca. 200-500 CE) such as the *Apocalypse of Abraham* (10:10, 21:4) and the *Ladder of Jacob*; see Michael Mulder, “Leviathan on the Menu of the Messianic Meal: The Use of Various Images of Leviathan in Early Jewish Tradition,” in: *Playing with Leviathan: Interpretation and Reception of the Monsters from the Biblical World*, Koert van Bekkum, Jaap Dekker, Henk van de Kamp and Eric Peels, eds., Leiden: Brill 2017, 117-129.

⁸⁰ *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kahāna*, supplement 2.4, ed. and transl. William G. Braude and Israel J. Kapstein, *R. Kahana’s Compilation of Discourses for Sabbaths and Festal Days*, Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society 2002, 623-628.

⁸¹ K. William Whitney, *Two Strange Beasts: Leviathan and Behemoth in Second Temple and Early Rabbinic Judaism*, Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2006, 137, note 114. See Ginzberg, *The Legends*, vol. 5, 42, note 123. See also note 53 *supra*.

⁸² Just like the manna which Israel ate in the wilderness, Leviathan’s head will prepare them to receive instruction in the Torah from God. See *Pēsiqta dē-Rab Kahāna*, ed. and transl. Braude and Kapstein, 627, note 27.

This blessed messianic meal is described in the 9th-century Midrash *Alpha Beta dē-Rabbi Aqiba*.⁸³

The motif of a feast with the consumption of the monster(s), which can be associated with the fallen angel (or his little son), became a symbol of future blessings to be bestowed upon the chosen of God. Rather than mythically representing Iblis-Shayṭān's permanent interior presence within humankind through the ingestion of the demonic at the emergence of creation, the latter imagery symbolises, conversely, the ultimate victory over these forces on the day of resurrection.

With this we have come full circle. The divergent interpretative traditions of the primordial cycle that are found in the visual and textual sources show that the first couple and their progeny always have a choice. In the Qur'ānic context, *fitnah* ('test' or 'trial'), often initiated by the fiery spirit Iblis-Shayṭān, encourages human beings to make the right decision, thus sparing them the terrors of eschatological judgment.⁸⁴ The role of the serpent in the Biblical Paradise, at least as it is reflected in extra-Qur'ānic lore, thus parallels the role of Iblis-Shayṭān in serving as a personification and projection of desire and seduction. The serpent/Iblis-Shayṭān thus stand as symbols for the temptation of humankind.⁸⁵ Hence, on a microcosmic level, humankind is prompted to mount or digest their base instincts and thereby master and tame them. By doing this they can honour the divine "burden of trust (*al-amana*)" (Q 3:72-73), the binding primordial covenant between God and humankind that was placed upon them in anticipation of the final consummation when God will speak to the saved.

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Fig. 1: The angels face Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Mantiq al-tayr* (*The Conference of the Birds*) of Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār. Iran, Shiraz, 899/1494. Krakow, National Museum in Krakow/The Princes Czartoryski Museum, BCz 3885 II Rkps Saf 93. Photograph © National Museum in Krakow.

Fig. 2: Two angels turn back and see with alarm that Iblis will not bow down before Adam. Iran, *Rabī' al-awwal* 1 790/10 March 1388. Painting from a manuscript of *'Ajā'ib al-makblūqāt* (*Wonders of Creation*) of al-Ṭūsī Salmānī. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits,

⁸³ The traditions that this Midrash contains are, of course, much more ancient than the date of its final redaction. *Alpha Beta dē-Rabbi Aqiba*, *BHM* 3, 33-34, cited after Whitney, *Leviathan and Behemoth*, 179-180.

⁸⁴ The prediction of a chosen community, the righteous believers, as opposed to those that dishonour the divine-human covenant, the wicked unbelievers, is referred to in at least seven *surās* (15:26-48; 38:67-85; 20:115-123; 17:61-65; 18:50-51; 7:10-25; 2:28-39; sequence of the *surās* as suggested by Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory," 126). See Richard Gramlich, "Der Urvertrag in der Koranauslegung (zu Sure 7, 172-173)," in: *Der Islam* 60/2 (1983), 205-230; Neuwirth, "Qur'ān, Crisis and Memory," 118-119, 125-126.

⁸⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1967, 257-259.

Supplément Persan 332, fol. 209. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

- Fig. 3: The angels bow before Adam. Painting from a manuscript of the *Majālis al-ʿUshshāq* (*The Assemblies of Lovers*) of Gazurgāhī. Iran, perhaps Shiraz, ca. 982/1575. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits, Supplément Persan 1559, fol. 26. Photograph © Bibliothèque nationale de France.
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