The Intermediate Worlds of Angels
Islamic Representations of Celestial Beings in Transcultural Contexts

Edited by Sara Kuehn
Stefan Leder
Hans-Peter Pökel

Orient-Institut Beirut
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Table of Contents

Notes on Contributors 7

Introduction 11

Part I: Angels in Relation to Near and Middle Eastern
Polytheistic Traditions

Nada Hélou
Les origines hellénistiques de la représentation
des anges dans le Christianisme ancien 49

Christian Robin
Les anges de l'Arabie antique 69

Aziz al-Azmeh
Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings 135

Stephen Burge
"Panangelon": Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism:
A Case Study Exploring Meteorological Angels
in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's *Al-Ḥabāʾik fī akhbār al-malāʾik* 153

Part II: Nature, Substance and Significance of Angels
in Monotheistic Traditions

Sara Kuehn
The Primordial Cycle Revisited:
Adam, Eve, and the Celestial Beings 173

Glenn Peers
Angelic Anagogy:
Silver and Matter's Mire in Late Antique Christianity 201

Marlène Kanaan
Création et êtres angéliques d'après un manuscrit arabe inédit:
L'Hexaéméron du Pseudo-Épiphane de Salamine 219

Johann Hafner
Where Angels Dwell:
Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity 229

Frederick Colby
Uniting Fire and Snow:
Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel 'Ḥabīb'
in Medieval Versions of Muḥammad's Ascension 251

Part III: Approaches to Angels in Islamic Contexts

Roberto Tottoli
The Carriers of the Throne of God:
Islamic Traditions Between Sunnī Angelology and Shīʿi Visions 273

Sebastian Günther
"As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands" (Qurʾān 6:93):
The Work of Heavenly Agents According to Muslim Eschatology 307

Godefroid de Callatay
The Ikhwān as-Ṣafāʾ on Angels and Spiritual Beings 347

Stefan Leder
Angels as Part of Human Civilisation:
Ibn Khaldūn's Conciliating Approach 365

Karin Rührdanz
Zakariyyāʾ al-Qazwīnī on the Inhabitants of the Supralunar World:
From the First Persian Version (659/1260-61) to the Second Arabic
Redaction (678/1279-80) 385

Anna Caiozzo
L'ange et le roi dans la culture visuelle de l'Orient médiéval:
Le cas des miniatures du Shahnāma de Firdawsī de Ṭūs 403

Qurʾānic Quotations 421

Index 423

Introduction: Angels and Their Religious and Cosmological Contexts

Sara Kuehn (Vienna) / Stefan Leder (Halle) / Hans-Peter Pökel (Beirut)

The belief in numinous intermediary beings has been, and remains, an important element in many systems of religious thought and imagination. Often referred to as 'angels', these figures primarily function as elusive envoys 'between' heaven and earth, and are conceived of as crossing the boundaries between the human realm and the divine cosmos. Their intermediating function, as well as the ambiguous nature that follows from their status as spiritual beings continues to raise fundamental questions.

Alongside the ubiquitous and growing modern fascination with the esoteric in recent years, academic interest in angels, particularly in the context of Islamic culture, has also increased. However, much remains to be done to elucidate the various definitions of angels and the contexts from which they emerged. As a central part of religious belief, the discourse on angels touches upon the concept and content of religion itself. Beyond the many attempts to define religion as a means for understanding the world, it is often assumed that believers[1] construe the world in terms of a dichotomy between a sacred and a profane space. Recent research in Religious Studies has suggested that the sacred/profane distinction is a perspective superimposed from the outside and is not necessarily relevant for the believers themselves, who mostly consider the unity of all creation to be an essential part of their world view. Just like the configuration of transcendence and immanence, imagined as separate spatial entities, the distinction of the sacred and the profane is, rather, a strategy of the observer that is used to explain religious belief from an external and, presumably, non-religious perspective.[2] As

1 For a definition of the concept of 'believer', see Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth. The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them*, Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press 2005, 2.

2 Hans G. Kippenberg, "Einleitung. Zur Kontroverse über das Verstehen fremden Denkens," in: *Magie. Die sozialwissenschaftliche Kontroverse über das Verstehen fremden Denkens*, Hans G. Kippenberg and Brigitte Luchesi, eds., (Suhrkamp Wissenschaft, 674), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1987, 9-51, here: 41. Many attempts are problematic insofar as they exclude the personal experiences and explanations of believers themselves and are merely reflections of the beholders within a theoretical system. It is often not religion itself that is considered or explained but the functional aspect and its relation to religion and religious practice in societies. See also Hans G. Kippenberg and Kocku von Stuckrad, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft. Gegenstände und Begriffe*, Munich: Beck 2003, 13; Robert Alan Segal, "Sacred and Profane," in: *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, vol. 3, Robert Alan Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad, eds., Leiden, Boston: Brill 2015; Wessel Stocker, "Transcendence and Im-

Andrei Pleşu has noted, the construction of dichotomies, or binary *Weltentwürfe*, is also a result of a certain fear of the space in between the worlds.[3] According to Pleşu, this in-between space constitutes the *Lebenswelt* of individuals and thus determines how individuals conceive of the world and of their life therein. Transitioning through this space resembles following a path that leads from one point to another and involves traversing distances in spatial, as well as in temporal, terms. Reflecting on this space allows a deeper consideration of the intermediate worlds (*Zwischenwelten*) and the way in which they appear in human imagination, and also allows for a fusion of spatial and temporal indicators through a unique synthesising activity.

It might be helpful to consider religion as a "network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many different sacred figures together,"[4] mirroring the nature and character of the relations that hold between humans. This approach is not primarily interested in institutionalised religion or in religious practices but, rather, focuses on the human being and its experiences as they relate to the other world. In the context of cosmological worldviews, this human experience, the way that human beings locate themselves within the cosmos and engage with it, mirrors how sacred figures function as agents within the cosmos.[5] These figures are commonly located in the world beyond, imagined as the world above, an invisible and inaccessible space of imagination that is the counterpart to the earth. This realm is considered as the spatial extension of the sky and as the visible threshold between heaven and earth.[6] The imagination of heaven as an inaccessible space seems to emerge from the perception of the sky and its phenomena.

Thomas Ruster considers the human experience of the sky as essential for the understanding of heaven as a cypher for transcendence.[7] In the early modern period, in particular, heaven was often equated with God and not considered to be a part of the accessible world.[8] In late antique and medieval theological dis-

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manence," in: *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion*, vol. 3, Robert Alan Segal and Kocku von Stuckrad, eds., Leiden, Boston: Brill 2015, 513-520.

3 Andrei Pleşu, *Das Schweigen der Engel*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2008, 20-21.

4 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 2.

5 Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 2.

6 Thomas Ruster, "Gott und der Himmel. Warum ihre Unterscheidung im Christentum notwendig ist," in: *Parallelwelten. Christliche Religion und die Vervielfachung von Wirklichkeit*, Johann Evangelist Hafner and Joachim Valentin, eds., (ReligionsKulturen, 6), Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2009, 162-180, here: 164-166.

7 For the gaze to heaven ('Blick zum Himmel'), see also Lumpen and Bietenhard, "Himmel," 205.

8 Ruster, "Gott und der Himmel," 164-167. For heaven and sky (which are both implied in the German term "Himmel"), see Adolf Lumpe and Hans Bietenhard, "Himmel," in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum. Sachwörterbuch zur Auseinandersetzung des Christentums mit der antiken Welt*, vol. 15, 1991, 173-212. Lumpe and Bietenhard mention that it was also common in pre-historic times for the divine to not necessarily be understood as connected

course, experience of the higher spiritual world was instead equated with the cognition of angels as imagined intermediary beings. This knowledge was considered to be 'angelic' and therefore required an ontological stage that resembled the ontology of angelic beings. Since the ontological status of angels was, for the Early Church, superior to that of humankind, due to their closer proximity to God, it was also logical that angelic knowledge should exceed the limitations of human understanding.

Erik Peterson argued from another perspective in 1925 that heaven is a part of creation and needs to be distinguished from the creator. Moreover, mystical experience and religious knowledge that leads to proximity to God and participates in heavenly knowledge was, for Peterson, part of the metaphysical order of the world. He argued that the praise of God is an intrinsic part of creation and both an important task of angels and a part of their knowledge.[9]

Due to their ability to pass the thresholds between heaven and earth, the ontological status and the functions of angels is highly ambivalent. With respect to both status and function, Pope Gregory I (540-604) refers in his *Homelia in Evangelium* to a dual nature of angels, namely that they administer (Latin *ministrare*) but also assist (Latin *ad-sistere*), in the original meaning of staying close to a divine authority.[10] This second function includes the task of surrounding and carrying the throne of God, which is located above the heavenly cosmos, thus privileging them through their proximity to God, as discussed by Roberto Tottoli in this volume.[11] Within this cosmos, stars, celestial phenomena, and spheres are related to angels in a hierarchy.[12] The importance of these aspects is exemplified in the *Summa theologica* of the scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), who relates the double function of assisting and administering to contemplation, liturgical praise, and the sacral governance of the Church, emphasising the importance of angelic beings by their mirroring of ecclesiastical structures.[13] In addition, Aquinas continues a late antique tradition that connected the celestial with the ecclesiastical hierarchies, a concept that Pseudo-Dionysius Are-

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with the heaven. The divine forces were rather located on earth; see Lumpen and Bietenhard, "Himmel," 189.

9 See Ruster, Gott und der Himmel, 162-164; Erik Peterson, "Der Lobgesang der Engel und der mystische Lobpreis," in: *Zwischen den Zeiten* 3 (1925), 141-153.

10 Giorgio Agamben, *Die Beamten des Himmels. Über Engel gefolgt von der Angelologie des Thomas von Aquin*, Berlin: Verlag der Weltreligionen 2007, 37.

11 This is the case for accounts in the Old Testament in which angels do not function primarily as envoys or messengers but as celestial beings surrounding the throne of God; see Johann Ev. Hafner, *Angelologie*, (Gegenwärtig Glauben Denken. Systematische Theologie, 9), Paderborn: Schöningh 2010, 19f.

12 Peter Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen. Untersuchungen zur rabbinischen Engelvorstellung*, (Studia Judaica. Forschungen zur Wissenschaft des Judentums, 8), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 1975, 23-26.

13 Agamben, *Die Beamten des Himmels*, 42f.

opagita had already elaborated in the late fifth century in his Περὶ τῆς Οὐρανίας Ἱεραρχίας.[14]

The state of the research

Angels have received a great deal of attention across a range of disciplines, including Jewish and Biblical Studies, Theology, and Religious Studies. Beliefs, imageries, and conceptualisations of the monotheistic and pagan traditions of the Near and Middle East–Judaism, Christianity, and to some extent also Zoroastrianism and other religious systems such as Gnosticism, Manichaeism, and Mandaeanism–are in many ways important for the contextual understanding of the emergence of Islam and its nascent Islamic angelology. Studies of angels in Jewish and Christian contexts have shown that monotheistic representations of 'angelic beings' are often related to Biblical traditions and other Near and Middle Eastern traditions. They continue, reject, or reinterpret earlier ideas about celestial beings that seem to have been closely comparable to 'angels' with regard to their imagined ontology and functionality. Biblical and Religious Studies have shown that relating textual and iconographic representations of angels to a broader context of shared traditions in the Near and Middle East is a promising approach for providing insights into the nature of these enigmatic beings.[15] The angels of monotheistic traditions should not only be studied by way of comparison with each other, but also, more broadly, against the background of the celestial beings that fulfil similar functions in other religious traditions. This comparative approach to angels has inspired Christian theologians to contextualise issues such as the divinely inspired order of the world and the role played by angels when they serve as a vital link between God and humankind.

When angels belong both to humankind and the divine, and are part of the imagined space between the visible sky and an invisible heaven, how do they then relate to the spatial conceptions of a religious worldview? If they are conceived as created beings distinct from humans–for they do not share the same conditions as humankind–how, then, can they help us to reflect on the Here and the Hereafter?

Even though angels as such are not known in ancient Near and Middle Eastern religions, similar concepts of intermediating figures existed, such as the messenger

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[14] Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *Über die himmlische Hierarchie*, Günter Heil, ed. and transl., (Bibliothek der griechischen Literatur, 22), Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1986. For an analysis of the work in its late antique intellectual context, see also Wiebke-Marie Stock, *Theurgisches Denken. Zur Kirchlichen Hierarchie des Dionysius Areopagita*, (Transformationen der Antike, 4), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2008.

[15] See, for example, the volume *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., (Yearbook, Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007.

gods that "have always been an integral part of the Syro-Palestinian pantheon and its hierarchy."[16] Their role as intermediating beings goes beyond providing guidance and protection and is an important feature of the Mesopotamian and Iranian religious contexts, in which celestial creatures as representatives of a divine sphere were often portrayed in an ambivalent shape that combined both human and animal characteristics.[17]

The question of whether angels are limited to monotheistic religions or whether they can be compared to the celestial beings that have similar functions in non-monotheistic religious systems has stimulated discussions about the definition of angels, their functional aspects, and the terminology itself. The term 'angel' is a derivative of the Latin *angelus*, which goes back to the original Greek term *angelós* or *aggelós*. The Greek term means, broadly, 'the messenger' and does not distinguish between human and divine types. It was a fundamental endeavour of religious and philosophical thought in late antiquity, as will be elicited in what follows, to distinguish clearly between human and divine spheres and to elucidate the means and mediums of communication between these spheres.[18]

Religious Studies has tended to categorise angels not as messengers but, more abstractly, as in-between-beings (*Zwischenwesen*). For the understanding of angels in the Christian tradition, in particular, this in-between status is helpful since angels are seen as being below God on the ontological scale but above human beings. They belong to the transcendent even if they are not divine. In accordance with the Christian understanding of angels, Johann Hafner systematically distinguishes between lower and higher degrees of transcendence, the highest of which belongs to the divine alone.[19] Transcendence, Hafner argues, can only be understood as a *mysterium* and religion communicates transcendence always as a mystery. Hafner thereby emphasises the problematic contingency in the sense of the efficacy (*Wirksamkeit*) of the holy for the real world.

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[16] Matthias Köckert, "Divine Messengers and Mysterious Men in the Patriarchal Narratives of the Book of Genesis," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 51-78, here: 73.

[17] For instance, the 'fravashis' or departed spirits in the Zoroastrian tradition have often been compared to guardian angels in Abrahamic traditions. Since the nineteenth century they have been adopted as such by the Zoroastrians themselves; see Jenny Rose, *Zoroastrianism. An Introduction*, London, New York: Tauris 2011, 29.

[18] As a consequence, systematic approaches have reconsidered the terminology and attempted to avoid the word 'angel' in favour of terms that emphasise the 'connecting aspects' of celestial beings. Since the term 'angel' bears an intrinsic dualistic moral evaluation in its assumption of good and evil, Gregor Ahn defines angels as "border crossers" (*Grenzgänger*); Gregor Ahn, "Grenzgängerkonzepte in der Religionsgeschichte. Von Engeln, Dämonen, Götterboten und anderen Mittlerwesen," in: *Engel und Dämonen. Theologische, anthropologische und religionsgeschichtliche Aspekte des Guten und Bösen*, Gregor Ahn and M. Dietrich, eds., Münster: Ugarit 1997, 1-48, here: 9f. An overview of the different positions is provided by Hafner, *Angelologie*, 13-19.

[19] Hafner, *Angelologie*, 21f.

Transferring this Christian perspective on angels to other religious beliefs is, unsurprisingly, problematic. For instance, although angels are, according to the Qur'ān, an essential part of God's creation, their ontological status is conceived to be lower in relation to humankind, as indicated in the narrative of the fall of Iblīs (Q 2:32). Even though the belief in angels is a central tenet of the Islamic faith (Q 2:285; 4:136; 2:98; 2:177), as has been emphasised in a recent *fatwā* (legal opinion) of the al-Azhar University in Cairo,[20] scholarly research on angels in Islam is still at a very early stage.

Many early studies of angels in Islamic thought investigated the influence of older traditions on Islamic beliefs, often from a polemical perspective. An early scholar in the field, William Robertson Smith (1846-1894), approached the topic of demons and angels in the framework of Semitic religions from an anthropological perspective, insofar as he considered the appearance of natural spirits in the form of animals to be a fundamental part of Bedouin belief.[21] Robertson Smith and others have to be understood in the context of the early development of Religious Studies that took place in the nineteenth century. Following in the footsteps of Erasmus of Rotterdam (ca. 1466-1536) and Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842), early scholars of Religious Studies began to apply the methods of classical philology and source-critical reading to the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible.

20 See http://www.dar-alifta.org/Foreign/ViewFatwa.aspx?ID=7996.

21 Robertson Smith argues that demons (Arabic *jinn*) were banished from Hebrew religion and mainly play a part in "poetical imagery," although they also appear as *she'īrīm* ('haired ones') or as nocturnal goblins or monsters (Hebrew *līlīt*). Wellhausen alludes to the close relation of celestial creatures to the Arabic *jinn*; Julius Wellhausen, *Reste arabischen Heidentums*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1961, 135. Smith emphasises the vitality of nature, which appeared in the ancient Semitic culture in a close connection with totemism, especially in the imagination of demons as animals with some human characteristics. Smith saw some relation to totemism in ancient Arab paganism insofar as some "direct evidence of kinship or brotherhood between human communities and animal kinds" can be asserted. Smith also relates this idea to holy places or sanctuaries, for these are not inhabited by a single deity but by "a plurality of sacred denizens" and by animals which have "demoniac attributes." Interestingly, Smith notes that the Hebrew plural noun *elōhīm* was later understood as a singular; for the linguistic problems concerning the plural noun *elōhīm* in relation to the singular *el*, see Wellhausen, *Reste*, 144f. With regard to human attributes, Smith discerns an explanation for the conception of an anthropomorphic god or goddess in this development. The 'indeterminate plurality' of the *elōhīm* then appears in the conception of angels, that is as the sons of *elōhīm* (*bnē ha-elōhīm*), as they appear, for instance, in Gen. 6:2; see especially William Robertson Smith, *The Religion of the Semites. The Fundamental Institutions*, New York: Meridian Books 1959, 118-139 and 441-446. For the relationship of Elohim and Jahwe as manifestations of the holy, see also Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy. An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and Its Relation to the Rational*, John W. Harvey, transl., Oxford: Oxford University Press 1971, 74f. On Robertson Smith, see Jacques Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches to the Study of Religion. Aims, Methods and Theories of Research*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Anthology*, (Religion and Reason, 3), The Hague, Paris: Mouton 1973, 150-159, and Hans G. Kippenberg, "William Robertson Smith (1846-1894)," in: *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft. Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, Axel Michaelis, ed., Munich: Beck 1997, 60-76.

Julius Wellhausen (1844-1918) was one of the foremost representatives of this approach and broke new ground by applying philological methods to source reading. The initial stage of this development centered on a philological approach that was based on the assumption that language and religion had undergone parallel developments. At roughly the same time, the theoretical approach of the British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) emerged. Tylor saw animism as a form of "primitive religion," which he considered to be the "origin" of religious belief and to contain the essential content of the concept of religion as a whole.[22] Tylor argued for an evolutionary model of religion and believed in the existence of certain survivals of primitive religions, which he was convinced could be found in more developed forms of religious beliefs as well. In contrast to sociological approaches to the study of religion, Tylor developed the idea that the essential content of religion is the belief in spiritual beings.[23]

Wellhausen, in turn, suggested that demons in general are not different from deities; at least in the early history of Semitic religions, this distinction seemed to be meaningless for believers.[24] He argued that demons–in contrast to deities–have no individuality since demons are normally not mentioned by name[25] but that they resemble humans insofar as they primarily represent their tribe or their genus. In the field of nineteenth-century Religious Studies, the relationship between humans and deities was especially important for scholars trying to conceptualise the essential differences between Semitic and non-Semitic religions. While, in at least some religions of Graeco-Roman antiquity, gods and humans resembled one another in both literary and iconographic depictions, it was thought that only in the Semitic religions could one find the concept of absolute transcendence. Wellhausen assumed that humans and demons complement each other, since they are the only two possible forms of beings in the world, as is also pointed out in the Qur'ān (Q 55:31). Even if demons do not have the same physiological conditions as human beings, they–unlike angels–are considered to be beings related to the earthly sphere who follow the laws and conditions that apply to living beings.[26]

One of the first monographs to deal with angels in a specifically Islamic context was published in 1908 by Walther Eickmann.[27] As a pioneering scholar in

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22 Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches*, 209-219; see also Kippenberg, "Einführung," 12. On the belief in demons and spiritual beings, specifically on the Arabian Peninsula in pre-Islamic times, see A. S. Tritton, "Spirits and Demons in Arabia," in: *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 4 (1934), 715-727.

23 See Karl-Heinz Kohl, "Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917)," in: *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft. Von Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade*, Axel Michaels, ed., Munich: Beck 1997, 41-59, here: 50-52.

24 Waardenburg, *Classical Approaches*, 138-149.

25 According to Wellhausen, a major difference between demons and deities is that only the latter have names.

26 Wellhausen, *Reste*, 148f.

27 Walther Eickmann, *Die Angelologie und Dämonologie des Korans im Vergleich zu der Engel- und Geisterlehre der Heiligen Schrift*, Leipzig: Eger 1908.

the field, Eickmann focused on the Qur'ān and compared the available representations of angels and demons with those in the Bible. He emphasised that both the Bible and the Qur'ān provide instruction about angels as well as demons.[28] Eickmann's work was soon followed by a study by Paul Eichler, who also paid attention to the category of devils (Arabic *shayāṭīn*) in the Qur'ān. Eichler understood devils as spiritual beings and argued that neither the Bible nor the Qur'ān provide a formally elaborated picture of these beings.[29] He was a vehement critic of Eickmann's approach, arguing that the Qur'ān merely describes spiritual beings by referring to earlier traditions, and thus advocates the avoidance of any notion of a specific Qur'ānic angelology or demonology.[30]

Scholarship on angels in Islam has often been concerned with the question of how far earlier traditions influenced Qur'ānic and later Islamic representations. This approach is closely related to the so-called Babel-Bible-controversy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century which, for the first time, put the authenticity of Biblical traditions into question. This critical view was supported by the increasing awareness of similar Mesopotamian traditions, which were said to have been plagiarised by the Old Testament. The idea of plagiarism and even epigonism provided an influential framework for Islamic and Qur'ānic studies that attempted to undermine the notion that the Qur'ān was a serious seventh-century document embedded in a shared cultural tradition of Near and Middle Eastern cultures. Earlier studies that focus on a 'Qur'ānic angelology' are often problematic because they assume a linear development from animism to monotheism.[31] Overcoming these polemical attitudes and somewhat overemphasising the influence of earlier traditions, scholars have, more recently, tried to understand the broader context of the intricate relationships between traditions that share a mutual heritage and that exploit representations that might be either similar or different.

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28 Eickmann, *Angelologie*, 56.

29 Paul Arno Eichler, *Die Dschinn, Teufel und Engel im Koran*, Doctoral Thesis, Leipzig, Lucka: Berger 1928.

30 Eichler, *Die Dschinn*, 1.

31 Examples of this problematic approach include, for instance, Joseph Chelhod, *Les structures du sacré chez les Arabes*, (Islam d'hier et aujourd'hui. Collection, 13), Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose 1964, especially 67-92. While not focusing on angels specifically, Toufic Fahd, too, follows a comparable line of thought, even though he considers the religious history of early Islam within a broad cultural context; see Toufic Fahd, *La divination arabe. Études religieuses, sociologiques et folkloriques sur le milieu natif de l'Islam*, Leiden, Boston: Brill 1965. Also, Alford T. Welch, "Allah and Other Supernatural Beings. The Emergence of the Qur'anic Doctrine of *Tawḥīd*," in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 47 (1979), 733-758; and Jacques Waardenburg, "Changes of Belief in Spiritual Beings, Prophethood and the Rise of Islam," in: *Struggles of Gods. Papers of the Groningen Work Group for the Study of the History of Religions*, Hans G. Kippenberg, ed., Berlin: Mouton 1984, 259-290.

With regard to the concept of idolatry and its relationship to a 'Qur'ānic angelology', Gerald Hawting sees the Qur'ān as referring to the worship of angels and interprets the 'daughters of God'[32] as angels as well.[33] He argues that the Qur'ān is directed at other monotheists and not at the Meccan pagans. The pagan background of the concept of angels is discussed by Patricia Crone, who points out that the Meccan detractors of the Prophet Muḥammad clearly conceptualised the messenger (Arabic *rasūl*) as an angel in human shape with wings. This pagan understanding of the messenger was "coterminous with Greek *angelos* or Hebrew *mal'ākh*, both of which originally meant an angel and a messenger of the mundane kind."[34] Crone concludes that the humanity of the Prophet presented an obstacle that prevented the Meccans from recognising him as a messenger of a divine authority.

The importance and the impact of late antiquity, understood as an epistemic space, and its implication for the development of religious history is also emphasised by Angelika Neuwirth, who argues that the revelation of the Prophet Muḥammad is related to the shift in the interaction between the supernatural and the natural world. The concept of intermediation and of intermediate beings seems to be a specifically late antique development in which gods and deities were 'translated' into the status of angels as intermediators between the worlds. The cohesion of the earliest listeners of the Qur'ān, who heard the words from Muḥammad, was secured through an idea of containment (*Beherrschung*) of the real world.[35] For the Qur'ān itself and its Meccan and Medinan revelations, Neuwirth connects the pagan intellectual background of the early community of listeners with the importance of the Bible in its interpreted form: since the early Meccan surahs can be understood as a 'Biblisation' of the pagan worldview, one can see the Medinan surahs as an Arabisation of the Biblical worldview. Hence, according to Neuwirth, in order to understand the Qur'ān and its conceptual paradigm, it is necessary to consider the ancient pagan traditions as well as the monotheistic traditions.[36] An

32 See the contributions in this volume by Christian Robin, "Les "anges" (*shams*) et autres êtres surnaturels d'apparence humaine dans l'Arabie antique," and Aziz El-Azmeh, "Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings."

33 Gerald R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam. From Polemic to History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999. For a critical review of Hawting's approach, see Stephen Burge, *Angels in Islam, Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's* al-Habā'ik fi akhbār al-malā'ik, (Culture and Civilization in the Middle East, 31), London: Routledge 2012, 11-12.

34 Patricia Crone, "Angels Versus Humans a Messengers of God. The View of the Qur'ānic Pagans," in: Patricia Crone, *The Qur'ānic Pagans and Related Matters. Collected Studies in Three Volumes*, vol. 1, Hanna Siurua, ed., (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, 129), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2016, 102-124, here: 109.

35 Angelika Neuwirth, *Die koranische Verzauberung der Welt und ihre Entzauberung in der Geschichte*, (Veröffentlichungen der Papst-Benedikt XVI.-Gastprofessur an der Fakultät für Katholische Theologie der Universität Regensburg), Freiburg: Herder 2017, 42f, 45f.

36 Neuwirth, *Die koranische Verzauberung*, 231-238, 239-256.

impressive study of the relationship between Judaism and early Islamic religious history has been provided by Steven Wasserstrom,[37] and this approach is continued by Stephen Burge, who has delivered the most comprehensive monograph yet on angels in Islam. Burge's study of the work of al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) reveals the extreme fluidity of beliefs and images related to angels and offers insight into a wide range of theological and philosophical positions.[38] To this survey must be added Pierre Lory's recent exploration of the place of humankind in the cosmos vis-à-vis the angels, the *jinn*, and the animals in the spiritual anthropology of Islam. His main focus is the Sufi Tradition, including the teachings of Ibn al-ᶜArabī (d. 638/1240). However, he also treats Sunnī approaches to these matters and, in this context, explains the view of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), who believed that human reason may deduce the existence of angels.[39]

Relations between heaven and earth: some considerations on cosmology in Islam

Orders of existence and representations of a structured cosmos are a core feature of religious thought in the attempt to explain the world and its existence in the form of cosmogonies. The etymology of the Greek term *cosmos* is unclear. However, early Greek sources, such as Homer's epics, reflect a universal order that evaluates the actions of the individual.[40] In contradistinction to the Greek concept, Hebrew, as well as other Semitic languages, does not have a single unifying term but describes the world as a whole as consisting of heaven and earth. In Hellenised Judaism, the conceptualisation of heaven imagined as an ontological plurality of spatially ordered spheres[41] seems to appear for the first time in the *Testamentum Levi*. This idea is also mentioned in the Qur'ān (Q 41:12; 12:71) and deeply informs the Islamic understanding of sacred space.

In his commentary to the *Book of Genesis*, the *Decalogue of the Thora*, Pseudo-Philo of Alexandria (d. 40 CE) understands the cosmos to be a universal order that is reflected in scripture. The Greek *nomos* (Hebrew *torah*) and the cosmos form a unity and only the fulfillment of the Mosaic laws are, according to Pseudo-Philo, an expression of life in harmony with nature and creation itself.[42]

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37 Steven M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew. The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1995, esp. 167-205.

38 Burge, *Angels in Islam*.

39 Pierre Lory, *La dignité de l'homme face aux anges, aux animaux et aux djinns*, Paris: Albin Michel 2018.

40 Dietmar Wyrwa, "Kosmos," in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, Georg Schöllgen et al., eds., vol. 22, Stuttgart: Hiersemann 2005, 614-762, here: 616.

41 Wyrwa, "Kosmos," 638. For conceptions of the seven heavens in Hellenised Judaism, see also Wyrwa, "Kosmos," 646f.

42 Wyrwa, "Kosmos," 652f.

Neither in late antique Christianity nor in Islam was there a single or a continuous tradition of cosmological speculation. Rather, different schools of thought that followed a Hellenistic, or specifically Ptolemaic, worldview became important for speculations about the nature of space.[43] Claudius Ptolemy (d. 160) understood the universe primarily as a geocentric entity with nine heavenly spheres that were concentrically arranged around the earth. He followed the speculations about the heavens offered by Aristotle, who had identified fundamental differences between a terrestrial and a celestial realm. Aristotle thought of what we might call 'the universe' as a great sphere consisting of two parts: a lower and an upper region demarcated by the sphere of the moon. The sphere of the moon is what humans perceive as the sky and it functions as the threshold between heaven and earth. While matter on earth is mainly made up of the four elements – earth, air, fire, and water –, heavenly matter is thought to consist of a 'more precious element', namely aether, the element from which the stars are also made.[44] In his *Problemata Physica*, Aristotle treats heaven and earth as "connected to one another," a supposition which he inferred by reference to their analogous natures.[45]

Aristotle's explanation caused some difficulties for later interpreters because he placed the moving planets within the same sphere as the fixed stars. The assumption of motion arose from his observation that the planets varied in their brightness and that nearer things were brighter than those further away. This resulted in the question of why the distance from the earth of the moving planets increased or decreased. Such a motion must be impossible, later interpreters concluded, since the distance of the sphere of the fixed stars from the central earth must, logically, remain constant.[46]

This worldview, and its modified versions, became accessible to a broader public through the translation of Hellenistic sciences into Arabic and came to be the "most widely accepted view of the universe among educated Muslims."[47] Although

43 Wyrwa, "Kosmos," 702f. On conceptions of space, see also Shlomo Pines, "Philosophy, Mathematics and the Concepts of Space in the Middle Ages," in: Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Arabic Versions of Greek Texts and in Medieval Science*, (The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, 2), Jerusalem, Leiden: The Mages Press, Brill 1986, 359-374.

44 Ingrid Hehmeyer, "The Configuration of the Heavens in Islamic Astronomy," in: *Roads to Paradise. Eschatology and Concepts of the Hereafter in Islam*, vol. 2, *Continuity and Change. The Plurality of Eschatological Representations in the Islamicate World*, Sebastian Günther and Todd Lawson, eds., (Islamic History and Civilization. Studies and Texts, 136/2), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2017, 1083-1098, here: 1087.

45 *The* Problemata Physica *Attributed to Aristotle. The Arabic Version of Ḥunain ibn Isḥāq and the Hebrew Version of Moses ibn Tibbon*, L. S. Filius, ed., (Aristoeles Semitico-Latinus, 11), Leiden, Boston: Brill 1999, 653.

46 Hehmeyer, "The Configuration of the Heavens," 1088.

47 Ahmet T. Karamustafa, "Cosmographical Diagrams," in: *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, 1, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1992, 71-89, here: 71a, 73a. On the translation movement, its history, and the continuity of antique knowledge in Muslim cultures, see Franz Rosenthal, *Das Fortleben der Antike im Islam*, Zürich: Artemis

the works of Ptolemy preserved in the *Almagest* appeared in several translations in ninth-century Baghdad[48] (in addition to translations of Aristotle's work),[49] it is worth mentioning that Muslim scholars also revised and rethought Hellenistic views of the cosmos.[50] In developing a celestial geography, Arab scholars often compared the earth and the firmament of the sky with the figure of an egg (Arabic *bayḍa*), understanding the earth as the yolk at its center.[51]

The translation and transmission of the knowledge of earlier civilisations was of particular importance during the ʿAbbāsid dynasty as it allowed the caliphs to present themselves as the legitimate successors of the Mesopotamian and Sasanian kings. As Dimitri Gutas points out, this was also significant for the translation of astrological works into Arabic, since ordination by the stars signified God's command and therefore fulfilled both a political and an ideological function.[52] Ingrid Hehmeyer has demonstrated that this idea and the image of the seven heavens had been prevalent in ancient Iran and in Mesopotamia.[53] In this context, it is noteworthy that the Arabic term *falak*, which denotes the celestial sphere(s) and occurs

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1965, and Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbāsid Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th Centuries)*, London, New York: Routledge 1998.

48 Of these four translations, two are still extant, see Emilie Savage-Smith, "Islamic Celestial Globes and Related Instruments," in: Francis Maddison and Emilie Savage-Smith, *Science, Tools and Magic*, Part 1, *Body and Spirit, Mapping the Universe*, (The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art, 12, 1), London: The Nour Foundation 1997, 168-185, here: 176f.

49 See Gerhard Endreß, *Die arabischen Übersetzungen von Aristoteles' Schrift De Caelo*, Doctoral Thesis, Egelsbach, Cologne: Hänsel-Hohenhausen 1965.

50 Hehmeyer, "The Configuration of the Heavens," 1093f. with examples. An impressive description of the earth as well as the celestial sphere–though not relating to angels–has survived from eleventh-century Egypt as the *Book of Curiosities*, see *An Eleventh-Century Guide to the Universe. The Book of Curiosities*, Yossef Rapoport and Emilie Savage-Smith, eds. and transl., (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 87), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2014, esp. 332-338. See also Roshdi Rashed, "Cinématique celeste et géométrie sphérique," in: Roshdi Rashed, *Les mathématiques infinitésimales du IXe au XIe siècle*, vol. 4, *Ibn al-Haytham. Astronomie, géométrie sphérique et trigonométrie*, London: Al-Furqān 2006, 1-45.

51 Eilhard Wiedemann, "Bemerkungen zur Astronomie und Kosmographie der Araber," in: Eilhard Wiedemann, *Aufsätze zur arabischen Wissenschaftsgeschichte*, 1, Wolfdietrich Fischer, ed., (Collectanea, 6/1), Hildesheim, New York: Olms 1970, 80-86.

52 Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, 45f. See also Michael Cooperson, "Al-Ma'mūn, the Pyramids, and the Hieroglyphs," in: *'Abbāsid Studies*, 2. *Occasional Papers of the School of 'Abbasid Studies, Leuven, 28 June – 1 July 2004*, John Nawas, ed., Leuven: Peeters 2010, 165-190; Syed Nomanul Haq, "Moments in the Islamic Recasting of the Greek Legacy: Exploring the Question of Science and Theism," in: *God, Life and the Cosmos: Christian and Islamic Perspectives*, Ted Peters, Muzaffar Iqbal, and Syed Nomanul Haq, eds., Aldershot: Ashgate 2002, 153-172.

53 Hehmeyer, "The Configuration of the Heavens," 1089f. For Zoroastrian astronomy and the description of celestial phenomena and their association with theological issues, see Antonio Panaino, "On the Dimension of the Astral Bodies in Zoroastrian Literature. Between Tradition and Scientific Astronomy," in: *Studies in the History of the Exact Sciences in Honour of David Pingree*, Charles Burnett, Jan P. Hogendijk, Kim Plofker and Michio Yano, eds., (Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science. Texts and Studies, 54), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2004, 267-286.

several times in the Qur'ān (for instance, Q 21:34; 36:40), can be traced back to Sumerian and Akkadian origins.[54]

The major intellectual traditions within Islamic culture that produced cosmological models were the fields of philosophy, mysticism,[55] and the sciences.[56] These traditions imbued the universe with a meaning and purpose that was related to human beings, especially their souls, and gave significance to the question of why it is important for believers to relate themselves to the divine. By contrast, scholars of religious sciences were often hesitant to construct 'comprehensive cosmologies' as a result of intellectual speculation, a fact that may have been due to the meager information provided by the Qur'ān on this topic. A further reason might be found in scriptural exegesis because the hermeneutics of scripture always had to strike a balance between an allegorical and a literal understanding, in particular with regard to ambiguous verses or terms in the Qur'ān that were open to interpretation.[57]

Even though there is no systematic cosmology in the Qur'ān, the text nevertheless mentions the seven heavens (Q 2:29; 17:44; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15; 78:12). However, only the first of these heavens is described, with the passage telling us that it is "adorned with the beauty of the stars" (Q 37:6; 41:12; 67:5).[58] The universe presented in the Qur'ān is a "hierarchical, multilayered complex that stretches from the throne of God on top through the seven heavens in between down to the seven earths at bottom."[59] It is important to remember that the Qur'ān mentions Muḥammad's night journey (Arabic *isrāʾ*) and his ascension to heaven (Arabic *miʿrāj*), which in later Islamic literature is often described as a transportation through the seven heavens to paradise.[60] His guide in the miraculous *isrā'* was reportedly the angel Gabriel (Arabic Jibrīl or Jibrāʾīl; Q 17:1; cf. 1 Enoch, chaps. 14ff). In some Islamic traditions, Gabriel accompanies Muḥammad

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54 Willy Hartner, "Falak," in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Second Edition (*EI²*). Accessed 26 March 2018.

55 William C. Chittick, *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul. The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World*, Oxford: OneWorld 2007, 87, and Ian Richard Netton, *Allāh Transcendent. Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*, Richmond: Curzon 1989, 72f (al-Kindī), 106f, (al-Farābī), 162-172 (Ibn Sīnā), 256-320 (mysticism).

56 Emilie Savage-Smith, "Celestial Mapping," in: *The History of Cartography*, vol. 2, 1, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies*, J. B. Harley and David Woodward, eds., Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press 1992, 12-70.

57 Karamustafa, "Cosmographical Diagrams," 72a.

58 Karamustafa, "Cosmographical Diagrams," 71bf.

59 Karamustafa, "Cosmographical Diagrams," 72a.

60 Frederick S. Colby, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey. Tracing the Development of the Ibn 'Abbās Ascension Discourse*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press 2008, and Frederick S. Colby and Christiane Gruber, eds., *The Prophet's Ascension. Cross-Cultural Encounters with the Islamic Mi'rāj Tales*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010.

on his *miʿrāj* into the various levels of heaven and to the divine threshold from where the Prophet goes on to the Throne of God.[61]

The present volume

This volume mostly consists of the proceedings of the conference 'Angels and Mankind. Nature, Role and Function of Celestial Beings in Near Eastern and Islamic Traditions', which took place at the Orient-Institut Beirut, Lebanon (2nd to 4th of July 2015). Focusing on an interdisciplinary approach to angels and their Near and Middle Eastern religious milieu, with its Jewish, Christian, and Islamic contexts, the contributions revolve around conceptualisations of similarities-*in*-difference. The conference attempted to contextualise conceptions of angelic beings in Islamic traditions from a vertical and a horizontal perspective. The vertical perspective considers representations of angelic beings historically by referring to similar concepts in earlier traditions. The horizontal perspective relates Islamic conceptualisations to coexisting interpretations in monotheistic traditions and to different confessional approaches within the Islamic framework itself.

A particular focus of the conference was the goal of bringing together the textual and visual worlds associated with these beings. In doing so, the aim was to engage in a dialogue between literary scholars and art historians in order to further encourage joint study of the comparative and interpretative possibilities contained within literary texts and their pictured narratives and related visual culture. The aim was to engage with the image and the discursive spaces that it generates in order to reveal aspects of the relationship between text and image, as well as with the information that can be extracted from its representational iconography and visual vocabulary.[62] The conference was organised by the Orient-Institut Beirut in association with the University of Balamand and was co-funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG). It was convened by Sara Kuehn, Stefan Leder, and Hans-Peter Pökel.

The volume discusses intellectual conceptions of the most varied types of numinous beings that mediate and intercede between the divine sphere and humanity, as well as serving as higher powers. It explains the nature, role, and function of angels (Arabic *malak*, pl. *malāʾika*, literally 'envoys', from the root *l-ʾ-k*) in creation accounts, in the revelatory experience, in ascension accounts, in the transmission of knowledge, as witnesses, in reward and punishment, and in eschatology, as well as examining the metaphorical uses of these beings. The concept of

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61 Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of Isḥāq's* Sirat Rasūl Allāh, London: Oxford University Press 1967, 181-187.

62 Oleg Grabar, "Seeing Things: Why Pictures in Texts?," in: *Seeing Things: Textuality and Visuality in the Islamic World*, Oleg Grabar and Cynthia Robinson, eds., (Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle Eastern Studies, Princeton Papers), vol. 8, 2001, 1-4; William John Thomas Mitchell, "What Do Pictures "Really" Want?," *The MIT Press* 77 (1996), 71-82.

celestial creatures that intermediate between a seen and an unseen sphere, and the representation of these creatures as in-between-beings, is studied here as a transcultural and transconfessional phenomenon, even if the depictions might differ in specific cases.

The first part of this volume engages with the exploration of angels in relation to Ancient Near and Middle Eastern, Hellenistic, and late antique concepts of intermediating beings in the centuries before Islam and during the early Islamic period. The contributions shed light on the role played by angels in the development towards the supreme god proclaimed by Muḥammad as Allāh. The second part elaborates on the nature, substance, and significance of angels in Christian and Islamic traditions. The third and final part of the volume focuses on Islamic interpretations of how angels operate as agents between heaven and earth and on their role in Islamic conceptions of celestial space in relation to Neoplatonic conceptions of the world.

Part I: Angels in relation to Near and Middle Eastern polytheistic traditions

In the late fourth century BCE, Alexander the Great opened the land routes from Greece to India with substantial military and cultural expeditions. These had a lasting effect as they resulted in the creation and consolidation of an empire that stretched from Egypt to India and the cultural traditions of which involved a symbiosis between Greek and Near and Middle Eastern cultures. These cultures had interacted long before the time of Alexander's conquests. However, the conquests initiated a Hellenising process that led to an intense interaction between the Central Asian provinces and Mediterranean cultural and religious traditions. Glen Bowersock is one of several scholars to point out that the common elements of which Hellenism was comprised were "a medium not necessarily antithetical to local or indigenous traditions. On the contrary, [they] provided a new and more eloquent way of giving voice to them."[63] The wide distribution of *angelós* veneration is perhaps best understood in the light of Hellenism as a symbiosis of Greek and ancient Near and Middle Eastern cultural heritage that supported a communication between Greek and local traditions within a cosmopolitan context.[64] The Greek and Aramaic languages, as *linguae francae* of large parts of these regions, provided a common means of expression for regional, linguistically dissimilar, cults of *angeloi*, serving to create a synergy of distinct but similar phenomena.[65]

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63 Glen W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press 1990, 7.

64 Cf. Rangar Cline, *Ancient Angels: Conceptualizing Angeloi in the Roman Empire*, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2011.

65 In pre-Christian times, the term was used to identify the functions of certain 'messengers of the Gods' such as Hermes, see, for instance, Nathaniel Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate:*

Etymologically, the Greek word *angelós* denotes a human or divine 'messenger', while the term *daimón*, which became its counterpart in Christian theological speculation, meant a specifically supernatural spirit or a being.[66] The Septuagint Greek translation of parts of the Hebrew Bible, which began in the third century BCE and was completed by 132 BCE in Alexandria, can be seen as a major endeavour of Hellenised Judaism. The text, parts of which later became canonical for the Early Church, uses *angelós* to translate the Hebrew term *malʾakh*, denoting specifically the messenger of God.[67]

In the Old Testament, messengers often appear in an anthropomorphic shape as beautiful men and even as a theophany of YHWH. It is the content of their message that inspires their listeners to understand them as messengers related in some way to a divine authority, an interpretation that, interestingly, mostly takes place once the messenger has vanished.[68] The terminological distinction of angels on the basis of their mission became a late antique concern that is prominent in the re-narration of Biblical history from Adam to Saul in the *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, which was, for a long time, ascribed to Philo of Alexandria (d. 40 CE). By applying the Latin terms *nuntius* and *angelus*, Pseudo-Philo distinguishes human messengers from their divine counterparts. He establishes a 'super-human otherness'[69] of angels that is reflected in the difference of their general appearance from the shape of mere humans.[70]

Literary and archaeological evidence suggests that angels (Latin sg. *angelus,* pl. *angeli*) played a significant role in later Roman religion.[71] In *Les origines de la*

Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity, Leiden, Boston: Brill 1999, 164-167. At the same time, Canaanite, Mesopotamian, and Iranian depictions of intermediating beings existed as *malʾakhīm*, *kherūbīm*, and *seraphim.* On Cherubim and Seraphim in a Biblical context, see Friedhelm Hartenstein, "Cherubim and Seraphim in the Bible and in the Light of Ancient Near Eastern Sources," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature, Yearbook 2007), Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 155-188. On the importance of Aramaic or Arabo-Aramaic, see Ernst Axel Knauf, "Arabo-Aramaic and ʿArabiyya. From Ancient Arabic to Early Standard Arabic, 200 CE–600 CE," in: *The Qurʾān in Context. Historical and Literary Investigations into the Qurʾānic Milieu*, Angelika Neuwirth, Nicolai Sinai, Michael Marx, eds., (Texts and Studies on the Qurʾān, 6), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2010, 197-254. On the development of a Greek-Jewish terminology associated with a 'new angelology' set against Biblical angelology, see Michael Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien des jüdischen Engelglaubens in vorrabinischer Zeit*, (Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum, 34), Tübingen: Mohr 1992, esp. 10-113.

66 Cf. Johann Michl, "Engel I (heidnisch)," in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 5, 54-60.

67 Hafner, *Angelologie*, 13.

68 Köckert, "Divine Messengers and Mysterious Men in the Patriarchal Narratives of the Book of Genesis."

69 Christopher Begg, "Angels in Pseudo-Philo," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 537-553, here: 548.

70 Begg, "Angels in Pseudo-Philo," 549.

71 Cf. Cline, *Ancient Angels*.

représentation des anges dans le christianisme ancien, Nada HELOU examines the visual representations of angelic beings in early Christian iconography in the late antique Mediterranean world, which she compares with third- to sixth-century Eastern Roman and Mesopotamian artefacts. These, in turn, benefitted from the rich and established repertoire of ideas and images of *angeli* and other divine beings present in the late antique world, especially the Hellenistic East of the Roman Empire, which functioned as a meeting place for the iconographic traditions of the Near and Middle Eastern cultural traditions.

Hellenism was not only significant for the core regions of the Ancient Near and Middle Eastern civilisations. The Arabian peninsula was also, at least in part, privy to Hellenistic cultural transformation. While the northern parts of the peninsula had close connections to the Byzantine and Sasanian empires until the seventh century, Old South Arabia was a point of contention between the Sasanian empire and the Christian-Ethiopian culture of Aksum, supported by the Byzantine emperors until it finally became a target of early Muslim conquests in 632.[72]

In the first half of the fifth century, the polytheistic South Arabian tradition was rejected during the reign of the Ḥimyarite king Malkīkarib Yuhaʾmin (c. 400–c. 445 CE) of ancient Yemen. It was around this time that pagan formulae in South Arabian inscriptions were replaced by monotheistic expressions using the term *raḥmān*, which indicates that, at least for the elite, the belief in one deity (absorbing other deities) had become prevalent.[73] As another name of God, al-Raḥmān is used frequently in parallel to Allāh in the Qurʾān. The Arabian polytheism (Arabic *shirk*) of Muḥammad's time, sometimes described as henotheism, involved a belief in the existence of many deities alongside a single supreme God. A distinctive feature of Arabian *shirk* was 'angel worship'. The Arabs believed that the angels were

72 Klaus Schippmann, *Geschichte der alt-südarabischen Reiche*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1998, 55-74, esp. 72-74. For the conquest of the Yemen, see Hugh Kennedy, *The Great Arab Conquests. How the Spread of Islam Changed the World We Live in*, London: Weidenfeld, and Nicholson 2007, 24-27, 43f.

73 Cf. Christian Robin, *L'Arabie antique de Karib'īl à Mahomet: nouvelles données sur l'histoire des arabes grâce aux inscriptions*, Aix-en-Provence: Edisud 1992, 144-146. In accordance with Jacques Ryckmans, Hermann von Wissmann considers the formula "rḥmnn bʿl smyno" ('Lord of Heaven') to be Jewish of the monotheistic period of South Arabia; see Hermann von Wissmann, *Zur Geschichte und Landeskunde von Alt-Südarabien*, (Sammlung Eduard Glaser III. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasse. Sitzungsberichte, 246), Wien: Böhlau 1964, 358f. Since the question of whether this monotheism was Christian or Jewish has not been decided, Klaus Schippmann has suggested considering a third possibility, namely an autochthonous form of monotheism whose followers he interprets as the *ḥunafāʾ*; see Schippmann, *Geschichte*, 101. For the religious situation in Old South Arabia, see also Schippmann, *Geschichte*, 97-102, and Theresia Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam. Verbreitung und konfessionelle Zugehörigkeit. Eine Hinführung*, (Eastern Christian Studies, 7), Leuven: Peeters 2007, 111-136. Hainthaler relates the development of monotheistic belief in Old South Arabia to the advent of the Byzantine mission that took place in the late fourth century BCE; see Hainthaler, *Christliche Araber vor dem Islam*, 114.

the 'daughters of God' (Q 53:19-22; 6:100; 16:57; 37:149) and that they could function as intercessors (Arabic pl. *shufaʿāʾ*, sg. *shafīʿ*) of some sort (Q 10:18). God might be approached through them and they could be called upon to bless the believers.[74] Christian ROBIN takes up this question in his chapter on *Les anges de l'Arabie antique*, in which he explores the pre-Islamic concept of supernatural beings by focusing on ancient South Arabian epigraphic and iconographic representations in the context of other pre-Islamic (specifically Nabataean) Hellenised Semitic cultures. This broader approach helps to contextualise references to the cult of the 'daughters of Allāh' in the Muslim exegetical tradition of Q 53 and the tangled Meccan passages about a 'cult of angels' (Arabic *ʿibādat al-malāʾika*).

Prevalent beliefs about intermediating spiritual beings, in particular those beliefs concerning the Qurʾānic *malāʾika*, are discussed in Aziz AL-AZMEH's *Paleo-Muslim Angels and Other Preternatural Beings*. Al-Azmeh, who was the keynote speaker at the Beirut conference, builds upon his recent study *The Emergence of Islam in Late Antiquity*. In his contribution, he addresses aspects of 'preternatural' beings from the period in which the Qurʾānic community emerged and clearly distinguishes between the later Muslim theological speculations about angels and their depiction in the multi-religious late antique environment of the Qurʾān. He thereby focuses on the socio-religious and political phenomena of the history of the early Muslim community, which he aptly terms 'Paleo-Muslim'. The dynamic process of religious development is elaborated upon by considering pre-Islamic cultic practices of worship and sacrifice as a primary indicator for the belief in the efficacy of the divine. Deities, *jinn*, and angels tended to shade into each other functionally during the early stage of the transformation from henotheism and monolatry to a strict monotheism (Arabic *tawḥīd*). The development of the idea of a unique supreme God was, then, a result of the absorption of functions which were otherwise attributed to different deities and other divine beings in line with the evolving taxonomy of the preternatural. With reference to the inner-Qurʾānic evidence, Al-Azmeh shows that the elabo-

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[74] Q 53:19-20 mentions three such local deities by name: al-Lāt, al-ʿUzzā, and Manāt. The same chapter clarifies their role by stating, "And how many an angel is there in the heavens whose intercession avails naught, save after Allāh grants leave unto whomsoever He will and unto the one with whom He is content? Truly those who believe not in the Hereafter name the angels with female names" (Q 53:26-27). That the three goddesses, and perhaps others, are in fact angels who can function as intercessors is further clarified in Q 53:19-20: "And they have made the angels, who are servants of al-Raḥmān, females. … They say: 'Had al-Raḥmān willed, we would not have worshipped them'." See Mohammed Shahab Ahmed, *The Satanic Verses Incident in the Memory of the Early Muslim Community: An Analysis of the Early* Riwāyahs *and Their* Isnāds, Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton University, 1999, 182, published as *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2017, 181. See also Christian Robin, "Les Filles de dieu de Saba' à la Mecque: réflexions sur l'agencement des panthéons dans l'Arabie ancienne," in: *Semitica* 50 (2001), 113-192; Christian Robin, "À propos des « Filles de dieu » Complément à l'article publié dans *Semitica* 50, 2001, 113-192," in: *Semitica* 52-53 (2002-2007), 139-148.

rate distinctions between angels, *jinn*, and God, as well as the gap between transcendence and immanence, were virtually meaningless for, and in the context of, the seventh-century environment of the Qurʾān. Rather, they are, Al-Azmeh argues, a result of later Muslim theological reflection.

Islamic angelology, both when seen within the theological framework of monotheism and when treated as a 'throw-back' to an earlier, polytheistic system that underwent a process of revision, is discussed in Stephen BURGE's *"Panangelon": Angelology and Its Relation to Polytheism. A Case Study Exploring Meteorological Angels in Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's* Al-Ḥabāʾik fī akhbār al-malāʾik. Burge argues that, especially in the field of 'popular' beliefs, there remained certain elements of Near and Middle Eastern polytheistic cultures which were subsequently Islamised to lesser or greater degrees. He focuses on 'meteorological' angels and on the question of the extent to which they function as not fully determined personifications of natural powers, rather than as "clear cut personalities." He analyses a selection of Muslim traditions on meteorological angels that include references to storm gods in ancient Near and Middle Eastern religions and shows that, while there are indeed connections to ancient Near and Middle Eastern deities, the depictions of the meteorological angels are also the result of Muslim exegetical elaboration. The continued use of older mythological motifs to describe and explain meteorological phenomena was, thus, hermeneutically harmonised with a Muslim worldview.

Part II: Nature, substance, and significance of angels in monotheistic traditions

The Qurʾānic creation accounts reflect the distinct natures of humans and angels and their differing types of knowledge. By teaching Adam the names of all things (Arabic *al-asmāʾ*) (Q 2:30-32), God made the angels aware of the limits of their knowledge, despite their belonging to a higher ontological order than that to which humankind belongs. Muslim commentators read this Qurʾānic account as a demonstration of a unique human capacity that was lacking in the angels. Angels were no longer objects of worship within the Muslim conceptual framework but became a part of God's creation that humbly worships and attends to him as obedient servants (cf. Q 4:170-171).[75] Islamic mystics as early as Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 283/896) deliberated over the Qurʾānic phrase "I am placing a viceroy upon the earth" (Q 2:30) and compared contemplative prayer (Arabic *dhikr*) to the life (Arabic *ḥayāt*) of the angels, who could not survive if they did not worship God.[76] Al-Tustarī considers angels as models for the contemplative life and

[75] Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic* Weltanschauung, Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust 2002, 8-10.

[76] Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qurʾānic Hermeneutics of the Ṣūfī Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 283/896)*, Berlin: De Gruyter 1980, 204.

invisible guides to the mystic's heart. He describes the act of remembrance in prayer (*dhikr*) as the re-actualisation of God's presence in the mystic's innermost being, comparing this state of recollection to the constant celestial celebration of God's commemoration (Arabic *tasbīḥ*) on the part of the angels and holding that this praise is their mode of being, their very sustenance (Arabic *rizq*).[77]

Sara KUEHN's chapter, *The Primordial Cycle Revisited: Adam, Eve, and the Celestial Beings*, with which the second section begins, carries out an extensive examination of the visual and textual sources for the position of humankind vis-à-vis the angels. These sources, she suggests, should be seen as part of an extended nexus of sacred events in the context of a pluricultural mythic repertoire derived from the monotheist scriptures, extra-scriptural literatures, and folk-religious beliefs. By considering the reciprocal relationship between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim literary traditions, Kuehn demonstrates the engagement of both Muslim writers and painters in interpreting a narrative that is central for the understanding of the pivotal role played by angels in the Abrahamic traditions.

A particularly important role is played in this context by the angel Gabriel (Hebrew 'Man of God'), who serves as a central figure for all three monotheistic religions. Representing nations and individuals and natural phenomena, Gabriel not only belongs to the order of Archangels, acting as the ruler of paradise, as well as of the serpents and the cherubs (Enoch 20:7), but is often also the revealer (Daniel 8:16; 9:21) and a messenger from God to man (*Bereshīt Rabbā* 48; 78; Luke 1:19, 26-28).[78] In the Qur'ān, the name Jibrā'īl appears in the Medinan surahs and is always presented as belonging to an agent of revelation (Q 2:97).[79] Prominent *ḥadīth* reports and visual traditions, as well as much of the modern scholarship, have almost universally associated Gabriel (Arabic Jibrāʾīl, Hebrew Gabrīʾēl) with the inspiration and divine revelation of Muḥammad. The spirit (Arabic *rūḥ*) is generally

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77 Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence*, 201.

78 Cf. Hans Klein, "The Angel Gabriel According to Luke 1," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 313-323; see also Christoph Berner, "The Four (or Seven) Archangels in the First Book of Enoch and Early Jewish Writings in the Second Temple Period," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 395-411, esp. 406-408. For the *angelus interpres*, see also Karin Schöpflin, "God's Interpreter. The Interpreting Angel in Post-Exilic Prophetic Visions of the Old Testament," in: *Angels. The Concept of Celestial Beings. Origins, Development and Reception*, (Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature. Yearbook 2007), Friedrich V. Reiterer, Tobias Nicklas, Karin Schöpflin, eds., Berlin, New York: De Gruyter 2007, 189-203. On the *angelus interpres* in Rabbinic tradition, see Schäfer, *Rivalität*, 10-12, 20-22 and 57-59.

79 Arthur Jeffery, *The Foreign Vocabulary of the Qur'ān*, with a Foreword by Gerhard Böwering and Jane Dammen McAuliffe, (Texts and Studies on the Qur'ān, 3), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2007, 100f; also, Josef Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin, Leipzig: De Gruyter 1926, 107.

taken to be a reference to this Archangel. Cognate with the Hebrew *rûaḥ* (wind, breath, and, by resemblance, spirit; mentioned in the Old Testament as a vehicle of divine intervention in human affairs; 1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16), this term comes from the same Arabic root as *rīḥ*, 'wind', which is precisely the meaning of the Latin *spiritus*. Both of these terms are related to the late antique concept of the *pneuma* as an equivalent to the *logos*.[80] The spirit or *rūḥ* comes down from or rises up through one realm after another. It comes down as the breath of life into Adam, the primordial human being (Q 15:29; 32:9; 38:71-72). Similarly, we read that God blew (Arabic *nafakha*) of His *rūḥ* into Mary (Arabic Maryam) for the conception of Jesus (Arabic ʿĪsā ibn Maryam) (Q 21:91; 66:12). Here *rūḥ* equates with *rīḥ* and means 'breath of life', the creation of which belongs to God, in accordance with Genesis 2:7 (cf. Job 27:3 and 33:4; Ezekiel 37:5; John 20:22). Importantly, there is an implicit association between the conception of Jesus and the breath that is bestowed upon Adam.

The Qurʾān associates *spirit* with the unseen realm of the angels, and refers to Gabriel, the angel of revelation, as *al-rūḥ al-amīn*, the Trustworthy Spirit. Gabriel is thus represented as a personification of divine agency and even functions as a "figure on the nature of cognition itself."[81] Hence, even though the Qurʾānic conception of spirit is multifaceted, elusive, and resists being limited to any single entity, it is associated above all with the angel Gabriel. An identification of the spirit with Gabriel is also found in the New Testament, when the seven angels standing before God (Revelation 8:2, 6) are named the seven spirits (Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6). The spirit, or *rūḥ*, is invoked and plays a unifying role in creation, in the sending down of the prophetic revelation, and in the eschatology of the day of reckoning (Arabic *yawm al-dīn*, the Day of Judgement). As the time before time (creation) is essentially an enigma, so too are the end of time and the time of reckoning. The spirit functions as the agent that brings together the eternal and the temporal (Q 70:1-9). These three liminal or interstitial moments, points of contact between the eternal and the temporal realms, imply, at the same time, an insemination, a conception, and a birth.

The non-Qurʾānic legend of the purification of Muḥammad's heart by angels, often specified as the archangels Gabriel and Michael (Arabic Mikāʾīl, Q 2:97-8), is

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80 For a discussion of the difficult term *pneuma*, interpreted as an equivalent of 'spirit Christology' ('Geistchristologie'), see Bogdan Gabriel Bucur, *Anglomorphic Pneumatology. Clement of Alexandria and Other Early Christian Witnesses* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae. Texts and Studies of Early Christian Life and Language, 95), Leiden, Boston: Brill 2009, esp. XXV-XXIX. The synonymous use of *pneuma* and *logos* is especially evident in the work of Clement of Alexandria, see Bucur, *Angelomorphic Pneumatology*, 75-79. On its relation to aether, which was considered as the place of the souls in early Christian thought, see J. H. Waszink, "Aether," in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 1, Stuttgart: Hiersemann 1950, 150-158.

81 Gisela Webb, "Gabriel," in: *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*, vol. 2, Jane Dammen McAuliffe, ed., Leiden, Boston: Brill 2002, 278f.

richly textured in later Muslim traditions. It carries, perhaps, an echo of a prophetic initiation reminiscent of the Biblical prophets, as found, for instance, in Ezekiel 1-3 and Isaiah 6, as well as of other anthropologically analogous paradigms, many of which involve an ascension. Indeed, this rite of passage is sometimes associated with Muḥammad's heavenly journey (*miʿrāǧ*) and with Qurʾān 17:1.

The depiction of angels in Byzantine tradition, and particularly the depiction of the Archangel Michael, is explored in Glenn PEERS' *Angelic Anagogy, Silver and Matter's Mire in Late Antique Christianity*. Peers focuses specifically on the embodiment of icons and iconographical depictions in order to explain how objects navigate the space between the sacred and the profane. The object's underlying matter is not the image itself but, rather, the viewer's imaginative carnality, his/her corporeal presence before the object which puts his/her body into relation with the icon. Peers focuses on objects and primarily Greek texts from approximately 550-650 CE. He emphasises that this span of time can stand as an example for other periods and that the issues discussed are important for understanding Byzantine and Eastern Christian concepts of the relationship between humans and the material world and, consequently, the divine. His discussion of alchemical thought further helps to explain how the qualities of matter determine the experiences of bodies and how they receive guidance on becoming close to the divine. Peers builds upon the late antique scientific system, as represented by Aristotelianism and Platonism, which helps to explain the mechanics of the cosmos in terms of a combination of classical physics and its later Christian metaphysical adaptation.

In *Création et Êtres Angéliques d'après un Manuscrit Arabe inédit. L'Hexaéméron du Pseudo-Épiphane de Salamine*, Marlène KANAAN provides insights into a pseudo-epigraphic apocryphal commentary on the *Book of Genesis* preserved in a seventeenth-century Greek manuscript. The text provides a paraphrased description of the *Hexaemeron* and, in many instances, follows the Ethiopian *Book of Jubilees*. It describes the heavenly agents and their functions within the hierarchical structures of the divine order. By referring to Rabbinic literature, Kanaan explains that this apocryphal work can be related to a syncretistic fourth-century Palestinian context and that the author of the work was actively engaged in the attempt to harmonise Christian ideas with both Jewish literature and late antique philosophy.

A critical approach to the celestial space as the imagined dwelling place of angelic beings is developed through a juxtaposition of Jewish, Gnostic, and Christian late antique traditions. Focusing on the second and third century CE, Johann Ev. HAFNER's *Where Angels Dwell: Uranography in Jewish-Christian Antiquity* reflects on angelology as a driving force for speculations about the borders of the universe and the potential multiplicity of worlds in a late antique context. In contradistinction to the scholarly assumption that the increasing transcendence of

a distant God requires more angels in order to bridge this distance, Hafner rigorously demonstrates that it was in fact the huge diversification of angels that was understood as elevating God to greater and greater transcendent heights, which were, in turn, associated with a heaven above a visible sky. This thesis shows that the tendency to further differentiate angelic functions across hierarchical spheres, in order to warrant God's transcendence, resulted in a concomitant spatial expansion of the heavens as a reflection of earthly structures.

Frederick COLBY's chapter focuses on the accounts of Muḥammad's *miʿrāj* that describe his encounter with a fantastic angel whose body is composed half of fire and half of snow (or ice). In *Uniting Fire and Snow: Representations and Interpretations of the Wondrous Angel 'Ḥabīb' in Medieval Versions of Muḥammad's Ascension*, he compares a variety of Muslim references to this angel found in middle period Muslim ascension narratives, as well as a brief reference to a similar angel in the Rabbinic 'Ascension of Moses', arguing that the Muslim tradition concerning this angelic figure is not related to the Rabbinic narrative. A close reading of the Muslim references, however, reveals the important function that this angel plays in *miʿrāj* texts themselves, namely that of counseling the Muslims to heal rifts within their own communities and within themselves.

Part III:
Approaches to angels in Islamic contexts

The final part of this volume considers the interpretation of angelic beings within the framework of Muslim traditions and follows the horizontal approach. It is dedicated, in particular, to the bi-directional functionality of angels. In their relation to the divine, angels are mostly imagined as servile assistants and as agents who carry out divine commands. In their relation to humankind, by contrast, angels are conceived of as figures of authority who, in following the divine commands, have a supporting, protecting, or punishing function. Even more, angels become visible as intermediary agents due to the functions they fulfil, and this visibility enables them to pass over the threshold between the worlds. The focus on the functionality of angels in this part of the volume is even related to hermeneutical questions, allowing an allegorical understanding that interprets them as cosmic forces that are able to influence the dynamic balance of the world and the actions of human beings.

The Muslim interpretation relies on hierarchical cosmological schemes, the structure of heaven, and the idea of the seven heavens, which were all, as mentioned above, already familiar in their outline to the ancient peoples of the Near and Middle East. According to the Qurʾān, the seven heavens were created (Q 41:12; cf. 23:17; 78:12) as layers, one above the other (Q 67:3; cf. 71:15). From His throne (Arabic *ʿarsh*) in the seventh heaven, God controls and directs the cosmos (Q 7:54) and the affairs of the world (Q 10:3, 31; 13:2; 32:5). He

sends down commands through angels and the Spirit, and these ascend back to Him with reports (Q 22:5; 70:4; 34:2; 57:4; 97:4). We are told here that one day of the ascension of the angels equals one thousand years of 'earthly' time (Q 32:5, cf. 22:47). Similarly, in Qurʾān 70:4, the phrase "a day whose measure is fifty thousand years" is understood to refer to either the Day of Resurrection or the distance between heaven and earth, as well as indicating the disparity between time in the spiritual realm and time in this world. In the seventh heaven, or above it, the angels sing the praise of God (Q 39:75; 40:7; cf. 69:17; 42:3) and seek forgiveness for the believers (Q 40:7). The *ʿarsh* is encircled by the angelic carriers (Q 39:75), who move in serried ranks (Q 89:22; cf. 37:1). Angels also hold up God's stool (Arabic *kursī*), which contains the heavens and the earth (Q 2:255).

Islamic tradition, consisting of early exegetical material and reports – mostly very succinct – concerning the lives of the Prophet and those close to him, sustains and mirrors dogmatic dynamics and different understandings of history. Roberto TOTTOLI's abundantly documented study, *The Carriers of the Throne of God: Islamic Traditions Between Sunnī Angelology and Shīʿī Visions*, elucidates this point in its treatment of traditions regarding the carriers of God's Throne in Sunnī and Shīʿi traditions. In some traditions, angels appear to be interchangeable with those foundational figures who belonged to the family of the Prophet, particularly in the early Islamic imaginings of the carriers of the Throne. The Qurʾānic and Islamic concepts of the Throne of God, which find striking parallels in Biblical and Rabbinic tradition, in particular those traditions relating to Ezekiel, developed into a vivacious plurality of visions representing the symbolic eminence of the Throne and the hierarchical order of those who carry it or dwell in its direct proximity. An obvious sectarian rivalry runs through early traditions. Sunnī traditions emphasise the role played by angels in carrying the Throne, with these beings giving proof of their adoration and of God's majesty as they do so. Shīʿi traditions, by contrast, favour the central figures of Shīʿat ʿAlī, confirming their closeness to God and their entitlement to lead, although this tendency becomes milder over time and the angels can be seen resuming their place around the Throne in later texts. Despite these changes in its attendants, the significance of the Throne itself as the representation of the essence of the true religion, the author suggests, did not wane. There were other, more subtle means that could be used to express a claim to priority, such as the depiction of the names of the Prophet's family as written on the throne. Tottoli's discussion is not, however, solely restricted to the powerful carriers of the Throne. It also embraces a wide range of reports that refer to the religious distinction and merits of those beings who are said to be close to it, such as the souls of the martyrs depicted as hanging from the Throne. The story Tottoli tells is inclusive, draws upon a wide range of sources, and is largely uninterested in whether the single tradition is valid and generally accepted among its Muslim audience. He

thus offers a comprehensive depiction of the many shades and expressions related to this significant representation of the world beyond.

Sebastian GÜNTHER's detailed survey of the role of angels in Muslim eschatology, *"As the Angels Stretch Out Their Hands" (Qur'ān 6:93): The Work of Heavenly Agents According to Muslim Eschatology*, focuses on classical eschatological texts, the works of al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350). Günther also draws attention to parallels in Rabbinic, Iranian, and ancient Egyptian traditions, showing that the highly imaginative descriptions of angels and their functions in Islam can be understood as reverberations and transformations of earlier traditions, which undergo a "resourceful adoption" to the Islamic context, as the author puts it. Angels carry out a wide range of quite specific functions and duties during the distinct stages of the complex events that take place at death and in the post-death journey taken by both body and soul. The scenario includes inter alia the way in which angels are engaged with the biological death of humans, the dragging of the soul out of the body, the accompanying of the soul on the initial journey to the heavens and the subsequent return to the body, the interrogation of the dead in the grave, and the many duties fulfilled by angels at the resurrection and final judgement. The visitation and interrogation of the dead in the grave by the angels Munkar and Nakīr[82] is a unique aspect of Muslim angelology.

With the wide range of functions performed by angels in the eschatological context, they appear as assistants, helping to perform or to prepare something that they do not, themselves, bring about. In this role, serving on the one hand as subalterns while on the other they act as agents who exercise a degree of control over human beings, they also have to perform acts of considerable severity, including the threatening and punishing of individuals. Since they are able to move freely between the physical world of the human being and the celestial world of the divine, their role is an intermediary one. A possible interpretation of the eschatological schema which emerges in Günther's chapter is that it accentuates the fundamental dichotomy between earth and heaven, and between good and bad.

Both the tenets of faith and the metaphysical tradition adopted by Arab philosophy from Neoplatonism are seminal for the broad dimensions of the Islamic conception of angels. The intermediary position of man as standing between beast and angel is a topos that provides evidence for the general notion of a hierarchically structured creation. A dualism between evil and good celestial beings also pervades the Islamic discourse on the world beyond the earth. In the intellectual world of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ* ('Brethren of Purity', established c. 373/983), whose teachings constitute the starting point for a series of studies in this part of the vol-

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82 Ian Richard Netton, "The Perils of Allegory: Medieval Islam and the Angels of the Grave," in: *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, Ian Richard Netton, ed., vol. 1, Leiden, Boston: Brill 2000, 417-427.

ume, "angels are thought to be found in the chests of believers, and demons in the chests of infidels."[83] In his *The Ikhwān as-Ṣafāʾ on Angels and Spiritual Beings*, Godefroid DE CALLATAŸ discusses the astral determinism and the importance of the world of spirits in the teachings of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*. This aspect of their thought is related to an undercurrent running through their teachings that is also exemplified by the ubiquity of angels and which ultimately derives from their application of emanation theory. At the same time, these thinkers obviously endeavour to establish a harmonious relationship between Neoplatonic ideas, on the one hand, and, on the other, the Islamic teachings laid out in the Qurʾān and the Prophet's teachings (Arabic *ḥadīth*). This connection appears most strikingly when *ḥadīth* material is used to explain the link between angels and the spheres of the celestial vault. As the author suggests, both trends seem to merge in a spiritual philosophy that attempts to teach one how to become an angel. The human being exhibits flagrant limitations and deficiencies when compared to angels, whereas angels, with their elaborate hierarchy, correlate with the planets and spheres and their corresponding astrological implications. The author also briefly directs attention towards the intellectual background of the Brethren and, specifically, their tendency to consider astrology and the natural sciences as essential approaches for understanding the relations between angels and the heavenly spheres. One may add that in their epistles (*rasāʾil*), the Brethren also refer to the Ṣābians from Ḥarrān, who practiced an intensive cult of astral worship, but they may only have made use of certain Ṣbian symbols in a purely allegorical manner. This extreme form of astral determinism also informs many passages of the epistles in which the theories are reported as part and parcel of the Brethren's own teaching. De Callataÿ suggests that the correlation of heavenly spheres and angels as it is maintained in the epistles must be understood in the light of the astrological implications that spheres and planets have according to the Brethren's teaching.

The teachings of the *Ikhwān al-Safāʾ* intersect in interesting ways with aspects of Ibn Khaldūn's (d. 808/1406) discussion, as Stefan LEDER shows in his *Angels as Part of Human Civilisation. Ibn Khaldūn's Conciliating Approach*. Man's intermediary position between beasts and angels reappears here, and the author construes the idea of connectivity between human and angelic spheres – including revelation – by reference to the well-defined and hierarchical ascending order of different spheres. In this vein, the uninterrupted and continuous connection allows motion between the spheres and provides the possibility that human beings, in particular prophets who comply with specific requirements, may exchange their human status for that of the next higher order of beings, the angels. Yet Ibn Khaldūn is not involved in teaching how individual human faculties could be developed so that they may connect to the spiritual world. His focus is

83 For the translation see: Yasmine F. Alsaleh, "'Licit Magic': The Touch and Sight of Islamic Talismanic Scrolls," Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard University 2014, 41. Ikhwān, *Rasāʾil ikhwān al-ṣafāʾ*, 4:425.

on civilisation as it is advanced by man as a social being. His analytical approach identifies the principles that make it possible to achieve this level of civilisation, including the faculties and limitations of human cognition. He relates these principles to the particular instances of social organisation and human activity that characterise civilisation. In accordance with his general stance, which emphasises the importance of religion for the organisation of society, he is careful to balance philosophy and religion. Both the explications regarding the nature of the soul, which enables access to the sphere of supreme cognition, the sphere of angels, and the Islamic teaching on revelation and God's interference with certain individuals, the prophets, are acknowledged and related to each other. When Ibn Khaldūn insists on the rational deducibility of the angelic sphere, metaphysics bridge the gap between human civilisation and the world beyond. That angels seem, from this perspective, to be reduced to no more than their epistemic functionality underscores Ibn Khaldūn's rationalist outlook. His focal point, Leder argues, remains man and his God-willed capacities, which include access to the world beyond. The question of the sources to which Ibn Khaldūn's discussion is indebted cannot be settled at this point with certainty. However, we can say, at the very least, that he was deeply immersed in the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic heritage of Islamic philosophy.

The final two contributions in this part of the volume refer to illustrated books and reflect on the intricate relationship between the discursive and visual representation of angels. The famous encyclopaedia of natural history compiled by Zakariyyāʾ al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), which was also indebted to the astrological and philosophical explanations of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, is extant in Persian and Arabic versions produced by the author himself. From her autopsy of the manuscripts, Karin RÜHRDANZ presents new insights into their chronological order in her chapter *Zakariyyāʾ al-Qazwīnī on the Inhabitants of the Supralunar World: From the First Persian Version (659/1260-61) to the Second Arabic Redaction (678/1279-80).* Rührdanz demonstrates that the amendments and additions applied to the chapter on angels in the first Arabic version, dedicated to al-Juwaynī, himself a famously erudite individual, might have been motivated by the author's wish to display his erudition and understanding of the spiritual and moral agency of angels, and of their activities within nature. The illustrations belonging to the oldest manuscript of the second Arabic redaction show angels as winged figures, often with a human shape. The artist follows, interprets, and simplifies their verbal description. These pictures later became a model for the depiction of the marvelous creatures. Confronting the reader with the image of angels inevitably made them, as Rührdanz suggests, more real, creating a reality, one is tempted to add, in the image's own figurative terms.

The composite multilayered source of the *Shāh-nāme* (*Book of Kings*), completed in the early eleventh century, combines elements of different beliefs wherein an-

cient Iranian Zoroastrian traditions take pride of place.[84] Our volume closes with Anna CAIOZZO's *L'ange et le roi dans la culture visuelle de l'Orient médiéval: Le cas des miniatures du Shahnāma de Firdawsī de Ṭūs,* which focuses on this heritage by discussing the association of the angel with royalty in the visual culture of the *Shāh-nāme* and in the context of other Islamic illustrated manuscripts. A focal point here is the development of the motif of winged figures, more generally referred to in scholarly literature as Nike (Victory), which can be recognised in the *victoriae* set into the spandrels of the monumental rock-cut arch at Tāq-i Bustān, built by the Sasanian king Khusraw II Parwīz (590-628).[85] This, in turn, inspires the interpretation of angels as guardians and saviours of kings, followed by a brief discussion of the role of angels in esoteric or secret sciences, such as magic. Caiozzo shows that angels serve as guarantors of the divine order by demarcating different types of royalty, an intervention which is associated with the appearance of the inspired sage who, little by little, takes precedence over these manifestations of the world beyond.

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We hope that this volume will shed new light on textual and visual representations of the numinous intermediating beings in Islamic traditions that are typically referred to as angels. Our aim has been to situate interpretations of these entities within their broader transcultural contexts so as to throw them into relief and expose new details and nuances of the ways in which they have been understood. 'Islamic angelology' has the potential to be a fertile new interdisciplinary field of study that explores broad conceptions of transcendence and immanence and the relationship between human existence and religious ideas.

During the conference, and even more so during the preparation of this volume, we became increasingly aware of the richness of our topic. It is our conviction that the Islamic belief in angels should not be understood in a vacuum but, rather, in relation to the earlier traditions of divine mediation and the imaginations of the cosmos that were adapted or rejected in the subsequent Islamic traditions. Studying angels in Islam from a comparative perspective can, thus, help us to identify and understand continuities of tradition beyond Islamic belief, as well as specific developments within.

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84 Cf. Kolsoum Ghazanfari, *Perceptions of Zoroastrian Realities in the Shahnameh: Zoroaster, Beliefs, Rituals*, Berlin: Logos-Verlag 2011.

85 Johanna Domela Movassat, *The Large Vault at Taq-i Bustan: A Study in Late Sasanian Royal Art*, Lewiston: Mellen 2005.

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