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# The *Book of Watchers* in the Qurʾān

Patricia Crone

Sura 2:102 informs us that the Jews follow the magic taught by demons (*shayāṭīn*) and ‘such things as were sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt,’ but that the latter two will not teach anyone without prior warning: ‘We are just a temptation [*fitna*], do not disbelieve,’ they will say. In explanation of this passage, the exegetes tell a gripping story about a woman named Anāhīd or Zuhra (i.e., Venus) or Bēdukht (daughter of God) who tricked two amorous angels into telling her the great name of God, or some other magic formula, which the angels had used to ascend to heaven. She then rose to heaven herself, where she became the star Venus. The two angels were left behind on earth and punished by being hung upside down in a well in Babylon where people would come to them for knowledge of magic. The exegetes add that angels had descended to earth with God’s permission to act as judges, because they were upset by the terrible behaviour of human beings and believed that they could do better even if they had to contend with passions. God decided to put them to the test and provided them with passions for purposes of the experiment. The woman proved them wrong by inducing them to drink wine, kill, and practise idolatry before making them reveal their secret formula to her.<sup>1</sup>

It is well known that both the Qurʾānic passage and the gripping story

\* I should like to thank Annette Reed for giving me a copy of her thesis (now a book), which taught me an enormous amount and inspired this article. I am also grateful to her, as well as to Michael Cook, Behnam Sadeghi, Shaul Shaked, Adam Silverstein and, last but not least, Joseph Witztum, for helpful comments on diverse versions of this article.

1 Numerous accounts are given in al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, I, Beirut 1988, pp. 452ff., ad 2:102, translated, along with other versions, in E. Littmann, ‘Hārūt und Mārūt,’ in *Festschrift Friedrich Carl Andreas*, Leipzig 1916, pp. 70–87; cf. also L. Jung, *Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan Literature*, Philadelphia 1926, pp. 126ff.; and A. Sh. Shahbazi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London–Boston 1982–, s.v. *Hārūt and Mārūt*; add al-Kalbī, cited in early Persian *tafsīr* (Abū Bakr ‘Atīq Nīshābūrī, *Tafsīr-i Sūrābādī*, I, ed. S. Sīrjānī, Tehran 1381 [2002], pp. 105f.; Lahore Tafsīr, facsimile edition and Russian translation by F. I. Abdullaeva, *Tolkovanije korana [Lakhorskij tafsīr]*, Moscow 2001, pp. 42f. = pp. 79ff.); cf. also the long version attributed to Abū

are developed from the account of the fallen angels in the so-called *Book of Watchers*, a work attributed to the antediluvian figure Enoch (great-grandfather of Noah). It is perhaps not so well known that this book is reflected more than once in the Qur'ān. A further example has recently been identified by John Reeves.<sup>2</sup> In what follows, I propose another two examples and discuss the identity of 'Uzayr, who should perhaps be seen as a fifth. The interest of all four or five examples lies in the light they throw on the religious milieu in which the Qur'ān arose and the relationship of the Qur'ān (and indeed the exegetical tradition) with an old debate in the Near East about how sin came into the world.

### THE FALLEN ANGELS

Genesis 6:2–4 informs us that in the antediluvian past there were giants (*nephilim*) on earth and that at that time 'sons of God' consorted with 'daughters of men,' siring mighty heroes (*gibborim*); thereafter the wickedness of man led to the flood. This passage has its roots in an ancient Near Eastern myth about rebellion in the pantheon, and it was to generate a vast number of narratives itself. In fact, it is one of those cases where we can follow the history of a couple of motifs and their endless transmigrations from the dawn of history until today, seeing them meander like a huge river with a mass of constantly shifting arms and canals over the literary landscape of western Eurasia. It is quite an awe-inspiring sight.<sup>3</sup> Here, however, we need to zoom in on the rivulet constituted by the *Book of Watchers*.

The *Book of Watchers* is the first of five or more separate works which together make up the Ethiopic Book of Enoch (known as 1 Enoch).<sup>4</sup> It is based on the assumption that the biblical 'sons of God' are angels, the

Ja'far, i.e., Muḥammad al-Bāqir, in al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, I, Beirut 1991, pp. 65–67. Some versions omit the motif regarding God's name or other magic formulas.

2 See J. C. Reeves, 'Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qur'ān,' in idem (ed.), *Bible and Qur'ān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Atlanta 2003, pp. 43–60, especially pp. 52ff.

3 Nobody has tried to draw a picture of the entire river, but for a fine account of the already much-ramified section from the ancient Near East to Augustine, see N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*, Princeton 1987. For the ancient Near Eastern roots, see also P. D. Hanson, 'Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6–11,' *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 96 (1977), pp. 195–233.

4 1 Enoch stands for the Enoch book in Ethiopic, 2 Enoch for that in Old Church Slavonic,

normal understanding of the term in antiquity,<sup>5</sup> and it casts the angels as sinners. They are guilty of transgressing both sexual and epistemic boundaries, for not only do they take human wives, as Genesis says, but they also teach them sorcery and other illicit sciences, and the outcome is disastrous. They have giant offspring (the *gibborim* and *nephilim*, identified), and it is these giants who wreak all the havoc on earth that causes God to send the flood, without the damage ever being fully repaired; for though the rebellious angels are bound and jailed, while their giant offspring are killed by obedient angels sent against them, their wicked activities continue due to evil spirits that have issued from them. The message of the book is that superhuman forces rather than human beings are responsible for the existence of evil on earth; God sent the flood to rid the earth of the dreadful giants, not to punish humans, who suffer as innocent victims of superior powers.<sup>6</sup>

Aramaic fragments of this book, apparently dating from the second century BCE and suggesting that the book itself goes back to the third century BCE, have been found at Qumran, along with fragments of related works, such as the Book of Giants.<sup>7</sup> Substantial Greek portions are also extant, partly in an Egyptian papyrus dating from perhaps the fifth or sixth century CE, and partly in extracts by the ninth-century Byzantine author George Syncellus.<sup>8</sup> The Ethiopic version, which preserves the book in full, is a translation made on the basis of a Greek original between the fourth and sixth century CE.<sup>9</sup> There are also numerous references to and retellings

3 Enoch for that in Hebrew (more properly called *Sefer Hekhalot*). Watchers are a certain category of angels. For editions and translations, see below, notes 7–9.

- 5 Cf. P. S. Alexander, 'The Targumim and Early Exegesis of "Sons of God" in Genesis 6,' *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 23 (1972), pp. 60f.
- 6 See Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (above, note 3), pp. 167, 169f.; cf. also J. J. Collins, 'The Origin of Evil in Apocalyptic Literature,' in his *Seers, Sibyls and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, Leiden 1997, pp. 292–299; M. Delcor, 'Le mythe de la chute des anges et de l'origine des géants comme explication du mal dans le monde dans l'apocalyptique juive,' *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, 190 (1976), pp. 3–53; and the interesting discussion in S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, Princeton 2001, pp. 77ff.
- 7 *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4*, ed. and transl. J. T. Milik, Oxford 1976; *The Book of Giants from Qumran*, ed. and transl. L. Stuckenbruck, Tübingen 1997.
- 8 M. Black (ed.), *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece*, Leiden 1970. The Egyptian manuscript (Codex Panopolitanus) is sometimes dated to the eighth century or later.
- 9 *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments*, ed. and transl. M. A. Knipp, Oxford 1978. There are later editions and translations, too. *The Book*

of the book in Jewish, Christian, pagan, Manichaean and other Gnostic literature.<sup>10</sup>

It used to be thought that the Enoch literature and other pseudepigraphic works originated in sectarian or socially marginal circles, but this is no longer the prevailing view; the *Book of Watchers* seems to have been regarded as authoritative by many Jews down to the second century CE. Then the rabbis turned against it, however. The second-century rabbi Simeon b. Yo-hai cursed all those who explained the 'sons of God' as angels: In his view, they were sons of judges. Some said they were called 'sons of God' because they lived long and easy lives.<sup>11</sup> The Aramaic targums duly translated 'sons of God' as 'sons of judges' (Neophyti) or 'sons of nobles' (Onqelos and Pseudo-Jonathan; similarly the Samaritan targum), while Symmachus, a Jewish or Jewish Christian translator of the Bible into Greek active in the late second or early third century, opted for 'sons of the powerful'.<sup>12</sup> Thereafter they were explained as human beings of one kind or another by all the main commentators on the Bible, Qaraites included.<sup>13</sup> The protagonists of

*Book of Watchers* covers Chaps. 1–36 and has been used in this article in the translations of E. Isaac in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I: *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, New York 1983, pp. 5–89; and of G. W. E. Nickelsburg and J. C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: A New Translation*, Minneapolis 2004.

<sup>10</sup> See Jung, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 1); B. J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, Philadelphia 1952; F. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sinflut?* Vienna 1966; J. C. VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs and Enoch in Early Christian Literature,' in J. C. VanderKam and W. Adler (eds.), *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 1996; A. Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature*, Cambridge 2005; G. A. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, Leiden 1984, especially Chaps. 2 and 8; J. C. Reeves, *Heralds of That Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions*, Leiden 1996, pp. 183–206; idem, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of the Giants Traditions*, Cincinnati 1992; and idem, 'Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Manichaean Literature: The Influence of the Enochic Library,' in idem (ed.), *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, Atlanta 1994. For what appear to be reflections of the Watchers story among the Mandaeans, see J. J. Buckley, *The Mandaeans*, Oxford 2002, p. 8. For the pagans, see below, notes 34, 38, 40f.

<sup>11</sup> *Genesis Rabba*, 26:5, discussed, inter alia, by Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), p. 91; Alexander, 'Targumim and Early Exegesis' (above, note 5), pp. 61f.; Reed, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 208ff. The idea that they were sons of judges has a long and fascinating history of its own, rooted in Psalms 82.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander, 'Targumim and Early Exegesis' (above, note 5), pp. 64, 70f.; Reed, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 213ff.; J. Fossum, 'The Angel of the Lord in Samaritanism,' *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 46 (2001), p. 53, note. Ps.-Jonathan also has a passage in which they are angels; see below, note 14.

<sup>13</sup> Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 149ff. Sa'adya Gaon duly has *banū*



the story appear here and there in rabbinic literature, but with little trace, before the rise of Islam, of their angelic descent or sexual misconduct, let alone their illicit teaching.<sup>14</sup>

The Christians stuck to the story of the fallen angels for another century or two, impressed by its capacity to account for the prevalence of pagan cults and all the sins with which idolatry was held to go in tandem. The angels and their demonic offspring had enslaved mankind by teaching men murder, war, adultery, magic and other terrible things, not least worship of themselves in the guise of pagan deities, Justin Martyr (d. 165) explained, developing 1 Enoch 15, 8 and 19. The angels had taught humans astrology, magic, metallurgy, cosmetics, and idolatry, as Clement of Alexandria (d. ca. 215), Tertullian (d. after 220) and Lactantius (d. ca. 320) said.<sup>15</sup> Philosophically inclined Christians such as Origen (d. ca. 255) interpreted the story allegorically,<sup>16</sup> but even he held the angels to have taught humans astrology.<sup>17</sup> That they and their demonic offspring were responsible for idolatry and diverse forms of illicit knowledge came to be a generally accepted Christian view. It was also as false gods and demons that the angels passed into Manichaean literature.<sup>18</sup>

By the third century, however, the Christians, too, had begun to turn

*l-ashraf* (Saadiyah Ben Joseph al-Fayyūmī, *Version arabe du pentateuque*, Paris 1893, p. 12) and elsewhere dismisses the idea of angels fornicating as a monstrous invention; see idem, *The Book of Theodicy*, I (English transl. by L. E. Goodman), New Haven–London 1988, p. 6 and especially p. 28 in the original pagination.

- 14 Cf. BT *Niddah* 61a and *Yoma* 67b, and *Deuteronomy rabba* 11:10, where they are guilty of sexual misconduct, but there is no mention of their illicit teaching. According to Targum Ps.-Jonathan, the *nephilim* were ‘Šemḥazai and Azael, these fell from heaven,’ a reading taken by Alexander in ‘Targumim and Exegesis’ (above, note 5, pp. 70f.) to antedate the suppression of the angelic interpretation; in this he is followed by A. Y. Reed in ‘From Asael and Šemḥazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azael: 3 Enoch 5 (§§7–8) and Jewish Reception-History of 1 Enoch,’ *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 8 (2001), p. 123, note; but according to Reed in *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 213f., this is a later insertion. They reappear as angels in *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 Enoch) 5, also assigned to a late date by Reed, ‘From Asael and Šemḥazah,’ pp. 132ff.; *Fallen Angels*, pp. 256f.
- 15 VanderKam, ‘1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs’ (above, note 10), pp. 44–54, 68–70, 85.
- 16 Origen, *Contra Celsum* (English transl. by H. Chadwick), Cambridge 1953, pp. 5, 55, based on Philo, *On the Giants*, II; cf. L. R. Wickham, ‘The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men: Genesis VI 2 in Early Christian Exegesis,’ in J. Barr et al., *Language and Meaning: Studies in Hebrew Language and Biblical Exegesis*, Leiden 1974, pp. 142ff.; VanderKam, ‘1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs’ (above, note 10), pp. 54–59, 81f.
- 17 Origen, *Philocalia* (English transl. by G. Lewis), Edinburgh 1911, 23:6.
- 18 Cf. Psalms of Thomas IV (210:1 and 210:10), in T. Säve-Söderbergh, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book*, Uppsala 1949, p. 127.

against the story, and the Enoch literature in general.<sup>19</sup> The 'sons of God' were not angels, it was now said, but rather righteous men, more precisely descendants of Seth who had been seduced by lascivious women descended from Cain in the period between the expulsion from Paradise and the flood. First encountered in Julius Africanus (fl. ca. 200, a Syrian despite his name), this version of the story was to prevail in Greek and Syriac literature, and indeed in Catholic and Protestant interpretation up to modern times.<sup>20</sup> In short, the responsibility for evil was shifted from superior powers to humans themselves. In line with this, the origin of evil increasingly came to be located at the beginning of human history, in the disobedience and expulsion of the devil and his hosts from heaven on the one hand, and the sin and expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise on the other, rather than in the voluntary descent of the angels from heaven in the period before the flood. For all that, the *Book of Watchers* continued to be read by Greek and Syriac Christians. Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) even defended the Enoch book of which it formed a part, convinced of its antediluvian origins, and, unlike their Byzantine counterparts, Syriac chroniclers rarely used disclaimers about the reliability of the Jewish pseudepigrapha when they cited them.<sup>21</sup>

One reason why the Jews turned against the story is that angels, both pure and fallen, were getting out of control. There is a fair amount of evidence for veneration or actual worship of angels among the Jews of the first centuries CE,<sup>22</sup> sometimes involving the angels in general and sometimes

19 Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 74ff.; Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (above, note 3), pp. 349ff.; Wickham, 'Sons of God and the Daughters of Men' (above, note 16), pp. 135–147; VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs' (above, note 10), pp. 59f., 100f.; Reed, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 194ff.

20 Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 78ff.; Dexinger, *Sturz* (above, note 10), pp. 106ff.; A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, Leiden 1977, pp. 61ff.; Africanus in VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs' (above, note 10), pp. 80f.; and S. Brock, *St. Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, Crestwood, NY 1990, hymn I, 11 (p. 81) and the note thereto (p. 189).

21 Cf. W. Adler, 'Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Syriac Chronography,' in Reeves, *Tracing the Threads* (above, note 10), p. 145; and S. Brock, 'A Fragment of Enoch in Syriac,' *Journal of Theological Studies*, 19 (1968), pp. 626–631.

22 How far the angels were actually worshipped is controversial. See L. T. Stuckenbruck, 'The Angelic Refusal of Worship: The Tradition and Its Function in the Apocalypse of John,' *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, 1994, pp. 695f.; idem, *Angel Veneration and Christology*, Tübingen 1995; differently M. Simon, 'Remarques sur l'angéolâtrie juive au début de l'ère chrétienne,' *Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*, 115 (1971), pp. 120–134. It is with reference to excessive

a principal angel cast as mediator between God and mankind; speculation about such an intermediary had probably contributed to the rise of Christianity, and devotion to angels and/or an angelic vice-regent (notably in the form of Metatron) continued in Judaism after the first two centuries, too.<sup>23</sup> Gnostics also operated with the notion of an intermediary, but they postulated that he was evil, and they filled the void between the all-too-distant God and mankind with demonic beings, convinced, like Pseudo-Enoch, that human beings were victims of superior forces of evil beyond their control. Gnostic myths abound in sexual union by seduction or rape between evil archons and primordial humans, in direct retellings of the Watcher story<sup>24</sup> or in distant echoes of it (or independently); the result is sometimes called ‘abortions’ (Hebrew *nephalim*, an alternative understanding of the *nephilim* of Gen. 6:1).<sup>25</sup> A similar filling up of divine space was underway in the ‘underworld’ of Platonism, as Dillon calls the confluence of Gnostic, Hermetic and Chaldaean thought characteristic of late antique paganism.<sup>26</sup> That humanity is at the mercy of unfathomable forces of the universe is also the key conviction behind late antique magic, devoted to the control of such forces by manipulation of the angels in charge of them.<sup>27</sup>

The rabbis reacted to these developments by both rejecting the story of the fallen angels *and* belittling the angels as a class.<sup>28</sup> (A similar reaction can be seen among the Samaritans.<sup>29</sup>) The rabbis did not have an answer to the problem of evil, which was acute, thanks to the political disasters of the first and second centuries and the Christianisation of the Roman empire

regard for angels that Alexander explains the change in Judaism, in idem, ‘Targumim and Early Exegesis’ (above, note 5), pp. 68f.

- 23 A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, Leiden 1977; N. Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate: Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity*, Leiden 1999; D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia 2004, Chaps. 5–6; for Metatron, see below, notes 96f.
- 24 Stroumsa, *Another Seed* (above, note 10), p. 32, note 54, and pp. 33, 35–37; Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony* (above, note 10), pp. 75f., 81.
- 25 Stroumsa, *Another Seed* (above, note 10), Chaps. 2, 8 (casting the Watcher story as the key to Gnosticism altogether); Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony* (above, note 10), pp. 71f.
- 26 R. Majercik, *The Chaldaean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Leiden 1989, pp. 8f.; cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, London 1977, p. 384.
- 27 H. D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago–London 1986, p. xlvi; cf. also S. Shaked, ‘Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia,’ *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 21 (1997), p. 104.
- 28 Noted by Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), p. 92.
- 29 Fossum, ‘Angel of the Lord’ (above, note 12), pp. 52f.

that had followed them. Rather, they coped with it by closing the door on the world outside and attributing evil, like everything else, to God, while at the same time making Him so intimate and familiar a figure that everything He did seemed bearable. It was not the case that there were 'two powers in heaven,' let alone 'many ruling powers in heaven'; rather, God and Israel formed a tight-knit family, whatever the ups and downs. Personal morality was what mattered, not the uncontrollable developments in the world of gentiles: Evil was now dealt with primarily as an 'evil inclination' (*yetzer hara*) in the human heart.<sup>30</sup>

The Christians, meanwhile, had split the godhead into three and allowed for an almost autonomous realm of evil, setting them well on the way to the Gnostic direction. However, they saved their biblical concept of the deity by casting God as the ultimate creator of the evil realm, while at the same time absolving Him of responsibility for it by recourse to the concept of free will. The devil they placed in charge of the evil realm had a long history entwined with that of the fallen angels, who accompanied him in the transfer of the decisive fall from the period before the flood to the beginning of human history.<sup>31</sup> Pseudo-Enoch's explanation of the flood was discarded.

To both Jews and Christians, eliminating Enoch's fallen angels was all the more desirable in that the idea of angels copulating with women had come to feel offensive.<sup>32</sup> Angels were superior beings. Besides, they had no passions, and even if they did, they had no bodies. How could they desire the corporeal, let alone cause human reproduction? The whole story was perverse and absurd, Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) insisted, stressing that the 'sons of God' mentioned in Genesis were *not* to be understood as angels. 'Is it not probable that many will be discouraged by this and choose sensuality ... if we believe that even the very angels fell subject to passion?' he asked.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, the story of the 'sons of God' had been taken up by pagans. Some adduced it in polemics against Christianity, arguing, like Celsus (ca.

30 Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), especially pp. 49, 57, 95, 101f.; E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Jerusalem 1975, Chap. 15.

31 For all this, see Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth* (above, note 3), pp. 222ff. and passim. The Watcher story began to be connected with the story of Adam and Eve as early as the first century BCE.

32 That they cannot sin is already affirmed by the Jew in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 79, 1.

33 Wickham, 'Sons of God and Daughters of Men' (above, note 16), pp. 135–138. Wickham's further argument regarding the role of Christology is opaque to me.

170), that it showed Jesus not to have been the only angel to have come; or, like Julian the Apostate (d. 363), that it proved Moses to have believed in many gods without knowing anything about Jesus.<sup>34</sup> (To late antique pagans, gods and angels were interchangeable, and Christ was commonly envisaged as an angel in early Christianity.<sup>35</sup>) Others read the story as an account of the origins of the occult sciences. It was, after all, to the fallen angels that astrologers, alchemists, soothsayers, diviners, magicians, and their like were believed to owe their knowledge, as they themselves were well aware. A Syriac – i.e., pagan or Christian – incantation bowl against ‘all the evil magical arts’ (presumably written by someone who saw his own magic as beneficent) refers to ‘angels that reveal the mysteries of their lord.’<sup>36</sup> Zosimus (ca. 300), a Hermetic alchemist from Panopolis, where the book of Enoch was still read in the fifth or sixth century,<sup>37</sup> says that the holy scriptures mention angels who descended from heaven and mated with women, teaching them ‘all the arts of nature,’ and that they were punished for this, since these arts were bad arts ‘of no benefit for the soul.’ He adds that Hermes, too, talked about these events in his *Physika*, and that, indeed, they are mentioned in almost every exoteric or esoteric treatise. He is clearly pleased by the biblical and Hermetic agreement on the angelic origin of the arts of nature, however lacking in benefit for the soul they might be.<sup>38</sup>

The claim by Zosimus that the story had gone into esoteric works ac-

34 Celsus in Origen, *Contra Celsum* (English transl. by H. Chadwick), Cambridge 1953, pp. 5, 52; Julian, *Against the Galilees*, 290B–E, in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, ed. and transl. W. C. Wright, III, Cambridge, MA–London 1913–1923, pp. 400–403.

35 For a classic work, see J. Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, Bonn 1941; for a more recent one, see C. A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christianity*, Leiden 1998. Like Jewish angel veneration/worship, it is best attested in the first two centuries CE, but surfaces thereafter, too; cf. S. J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford 2002, Chap. 3 and Appendix A, translating an Ethiopic work preserving a fifth-century Syrian narrative.

36 J. Teixidor, ‘The Syriac Incantation Bowls in the Iraq Museum,’ *Sumer*, 18 (1962), p. 53.

37 On the date of Codex Panopolitanus see above, note 8, and the text there.

38 Zosimus, quoted by Syncellus in R. P. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, I, Paris 1944, p. 256; in J. Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, London 1970, p. 179; in Stroumsa, *Another Seed* (above, note 10), pp. 139f. (whose translation I have followed); and in VanderKam, ‘1 Enoch, Enoch Motifs’ (above, note 10), pp. 83f. For Zosimus’s position, see D. Stolzenberg, ‘Unpropitious Tinctures: Alchemy, Astrology & Gnosis according to Zosimus of Panopolis,’ *Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences*, 49 (1999), p. 28 (I owe this reference to Albert de Jong).

cords with a remark by Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), according to which Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) proscribed the Enoch literature because heretics had incorporated it into their secret books.<sup>39</sup> There are, in fact, traces of 1 Enoch in the Hermetic literature,<sup>40</sup> and among the Hermetic works that Zosimus may have had in mind is a small treatise known as *Isis the Prophetess to Her Son Horus*. In this work, Isis tells of how one of the angels (or, according to one version, a prophet or angel) caught sight of her and wanted to make love with her. She refused unless he would tell her about the preparation of gold and silver first; he said that this was beyond his ability, and he sent another angel, Amnael, who also wanted to make love with her and was eventually persuaded to part with his secrets. (Whether he got his payment is not stated.)<sup>41</sup>

As de Ménéasce observes, in Isis's account the Watcher story seems to have fused with an Indian myth regarding two *ashvins*, twin Vedic gods who roam about in the world of mortals and try to seduce a married woman but merely succeed in rejuvenating her old husband.<sup>42</sup> In this story, as in Enoch, the events lead to the appearance of temptations on earth, here through intoxicating substances in drinks, as well as through women, gambling and sports; and this story, too, would have appealed to the practitioners of the arts of nature, for the *ashvins* were physicians to the celestials and practitioners of the healing arts. The hypothesis that their adventures had fused with those of the fallen angels would account for three otherwise puzzling features of Isis's version: there are only two angels in it, as opposed to the two hundred in the *Book of Watchers*;<sup>43</sup> it only features one particular woman, as opposed to women in general; and the woman now obtains her secret knowledge by *not* mating with the celestial beings. It is presumably the same quasi-Indian version which is reflected in rabbinic

39. Adler, 'Jacob of Edessa' (above, note 21), p. 145.

40. Cf. M. Philonenko, 'Une Allusion de l'Asclepius au livre d'Hénoch,' in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, II, Leiden 1975, pp. 11–63.

41. Festugière, *Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, I (above, note 38), pp. 256–260 (two versions); Lindsay, *Origins of Alchemy* (above, note 38), pp. 194f. (amalgamated); cf. also M. Idel, 'The Origin of Alchemy According to Zosimos and a Hebrew Parallel,' *Revue des Etudes Juives*, 145 (1986), pp. 117–124.

42. P. J. de Ménéasce, 'Une légende indo-iranienne dans l'angélogie judéo-musulmane: À propos de Hārūt et Mārūt,' *Etudes Asiatiques*, 1 (1947), p. 10; *Mahābhārata*, III (Vana Parva), pp. 123–125.

43. 1 Enoch 6. There are only sixty or seventy of them in Celsus; see *Contra Celsum* (above, note 16), pp. 5, 52.

allusions to the story in which the angels form a pair.<sup>44</sup> It is in any case this version which lies behind the Gnostic story of a woman called Norea, Noria, Noraia, Horea, Orea, Nuraita, or the like, who resisted the attempts of the wicked archons to seduce her, to be rescued by Eleleth, a holy angel who revealed the truth to her.<sup>45</sup> (This seems to be the only form in which the Gnostics took a positive interest in the teaching of the Watchers, which they normally condemned, insofar as they mentioned it at all.)<sup>46</sup> It is also in this form that it was familiar to Muslim exegetes: Two angels court one woman, who tricks them into parting with their secrets without mating with them. Though the rabbis and the churchmen had not succeeded in killing the story, they had clearly managed to relegate it to the fringes of respectable society. It was now mainly among pagans, Gnostics and devotees of the occult that it flourished, outside the mainstream communities or, if within them, in the somewhat marginal circles of alchemists, diviners, and magicians.<sup>47</sup> It must have been from such circles that it passed to the Qurʾān.

- 44 BT *Yoma* 67b (Azael and Uzza), *Deuteronomy rabba* 11:10 (Azah and Azael), and a probably late insertion in Targum Ps.-Jonathan (Azael and Šemḥazai, see above, note 14); similarly, the much later 'Midrash on Šemḥazai and Azael' (edited, translated, and discussed on the basis of four versions in Milik, *Books of Enoch* [above, note 7], pp. 321–339; also discussed in Reed, *Fallen Angels* [above, note 10], pp. 258ff.), and a late midrash on the virgin Istahar, who is turned into a star as a reward for her resistance to sin (S. Liebermann, 'After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature,' *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, II, English section, Jerusalem 1965, p. 497).
- 45 B. A. Pearson, 'The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature,' *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm 1973*, Stockholm–Leiden 1977, pp. 143–152; Stroumsa, *Another Seed* (above, note 10), pp. 53–55, 140f.
- 46 The Watchers revealed the arts in the world and the mysteries of heaven to men, teaching them all they had seen in heaven, in hell and on earth, according to Mani, *Kephalaia*, 92:24–31, in Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony* (above, note 10), p. 81; they taught magic, idolatry and bloodshed, according to 'On the Origins of the World,' in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, II, 5, 123, Leiden 1988. Most Gnostic works retell the story of the Watchers in recognizable form without saying anything about their teaching; see, in *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, the 'Valentinian Exposition' (XI, 2, 38) and the 'Apocryphon of John' (II, 1, 29); see also Agapius's summary of Awdi's doctrine in Agapius, *Kitāb al-ʿunwān*, in *Patrologia Orientalis*, ed. and transl. A. Vasiliev, VII (1911), p. 564; cf. H.-C. Puech, *En quête de la Gnose*, Paris 1972, pp. 275f.; and the survey in VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs' (above, note 10), pp. 70–76.
- 47 Just how marginal (or disreputable) these circles were, from the point of view of churchmen and rabbis, I do not know. But recourse to magicians and soothsayers was condemned at a synod of 576 (A. V. Williams, 'Zoroastrians and Christians in Sasanian Iran,' *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 78 [1996], p. 43;

## THE FALLEN ANGELS IN THE QUR'ĀN

In the Qur'ānic passage on Hārūt and Mārūt, as in the Isis story, the angels form a pair, but they are not guilty of any sexual sins; they merely teach people magic. So, too, do the demons (indeed, the passage can be read as saying that the demons teach magic which they have learnt from the angels), but it is only the demons who render themselves guilty of *kufr* thereby. The angels are cast as agents of God: they warn their customers not to render themselves guilty of *kufr*, explaining that their own function is to test people's faith (*innamā nahnu fitna*), and what they teach is something sent down to them. Why angels should be teachers of magic, and how they came to be in Babylon, we are not told; nor are we told how, if at all, they relate to the demons. There is no suggestion that the latter are their giant sons, and though the false angels/gods of the *mushrikūn* are sometimes explained as demons (*jinn*) in the Qur'ān,<sup>48</sup> it is nowhere suggested there, either, that they are the offspring of angels.

The problem that preoccupies the Qur'ān in the passage on Hārūt and Mārūt is that some People of the Book (i.e., Jews or Christians) prefer magic to the truth. In the preceding verse it complains that a party of the People of the Book react to the fact that a messenger has come to them from God by throwing the book behind their backs (2:101); they prefer to follow that which the demons related to Solomon, i.e., magic.<sup>49</sup> Solomon was not an unbeliever (i.e., even though he used magic),<sup>50</sup> but the People of the Book are clearly unbelievers, for they disregard the advice of Hārūt and Mārūt not to become infidels by using their services. From the two angels they learn 'that with which to split up a man and his wife' (just as in the *Book*

cf. p. 45 for similar condemnations on the Zoroastrian side), and though the rabbis made some concessions, their attitude comes across as basically hostile, too (cf. Urbach, *The Sages* [above, note 30], pp. 97ff.; B. Kern-Ulmer, 'The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: The Rabbinic and the Greek Concept of Magic,' *Journal for the Study of Judaism*, 27 [1996], pp. 289–303).

48 Q. 6:100; 34:40f.; 37:158.

49 According to many exegetes, the demons did not relate things to Solomon, but rather against him. *Talā 'alayhi* normally means 'he related/recited to somebody,' but the verse is problematic because it has them relate things '*alā mulk Sulaymān* rather than '*alā 'l-malik Sulaymān*. Some exegetes tried to solve the problem by understanding the '*alā* as adversarial (against the kingship of Solomon); others read it as chronological (at the time of Solomon's kingdom). Since none of these constructions really click, it seems more likely that *mulk* is in need of emendation.

50 Or, in the understanding of the exegetes, even though the demons maligned him by calling him a magician rather than a prophet.



of *Watchers* the angels teach the daughters of men 'to make hate-inducing charms,' 1 Enoch 9:7), and thereby they forfeit their share in the hereafter (2:102). We clearly find ourselves right in the middle of Jewish magic, a well-attested phenomenon, and one in which speculation about Solomon is well known to have played a role.<sup>51</sup> Famed in antiquity, it is represented in the Greek magical papyri from Egypt dating from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE (though these texts are generally pagan);<sup>52</sup> in Aramaic amulets, mainly from Palestine; in incantation bowls from Sasanian Iraq;<sup>53</sup> in the Hekhalot literature, reflecting the period from ca. 200 to 800 CE;<sup>54</sup> in manuals for sorcerers, reflecting the period from late antiquity to Sasanian times;<sup>55</sup> and in the Geniza.<sup>56</sup> In Mesopotamia and Iran the great majority of incantation bowls were made by Jews, often for clients bearing Iranian names, suggesting that magic was regarded as something of a Jewish speciality there,<sup>57</sup> and it must have been from a region within the Iranian sphere of influence that the story passed to the Qurʾān, for Hārūt and Mārūt are Haurvatāt and Ameretāt, two of the Zoroastrian divine beings known as *amesha spentas*,<sup>58</sup> and it is in Bābil that the Qurʾān places them.

De Ménéasce conjectured that it was via the Manichaeans that the angels passed into the Qurʾān, on the grounds that it was probably Mani who gave them Iranian names, just as he (or his disciples) renamed the giants.<sup>59</sup> But such evidence as we have does not support him. In Genesis the angels and giants are anonymous; in the *Book of Watchers* they have acquired names,

51 Cf. P. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: From King to Magus*, Leiden 2002, especially pp. 119ff., 192ff.

52 Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri* (above, note 27), pp. xli, xlv.

53 See, e.g., the introduction to J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations from Late Antiquity*, Leiden 1985.

54 Cf. P. Schäfer, 'Merkavah Mysticism and Magic,' in idem and J. Dan (eds.), *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After*, Tübingen 1993; idem, 'Jewish Magic Literature in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages,' *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 41 (1990), pp. 76–79.

55 Cf. *The Sword of Moses: An Ancient Book of Magic*, ed. and transl. M. Gaster, London 1896; reprinted in his *Studies and Texts in Folklore, Magic, Mediaeval Romance, Hebrew Apocrypha and Samaritan Archaeology*, vols. I (translation) and III (text), New York 1928; *Sepher Ha-Razim: The Book of Mysteries*, transl. M. A. Morgan, Chico, CA 1983; Torijano, *Solomon* (above, note 51), pp. 198ff., with further references.

56 *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, ed. and transl. P. Schäfer and S. Shaked, Tübingen 1994.

57 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (above, note 53), p. 18.

58 De Ménéasce, 'Une légende indo-iranienne' (above, note 42), pp. 10f.

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 16f.

and here the leading angel is called Shemiḥazah, while the one who reveals the divine secrets is called Asael (ʿsʾl), also rendered Azael (ʿzʾl) and Azazel (ʿzʾzl) – a name which conflates him with the devil.<sup>60</sup> But while the fragments of Mani's *Book of Giants* do indeed iranianize the names of two giants as Sām and Narīmān, they just adapt Šemḥazai as Šahmīzād,<sup>61</sup> and though we do not know how Azael's name was rendered, the fragments operate with two hundred Watchers (now demons) rather than two.<sup>62</sup> It is more likely to have been via magic that the angels were renamed, given that it is in the context of magic that the Qur'ān mentions them. Artat Amurtat (presumably from Haurvatāt and Ameretāt) figures among the *nomina barbara* in magical texts from Iraq.<sup>63</sup>

## TAFSĪR

It is a striking fact that although the Qur'ān gives the angels Iranian names and says very little about them, the exegetes effortlessly recognized them as the fallen angels from the Watcher story. The Iraqi exegete al-Kalbī (d. 763) even knew their pre-Iranian names. In his version there are three angels, as also in *Sefer Hekhalot* (3 Enoch), perhaps a development from the three (or four) angels who observe the misbehaviour of the giants from heaven in the *Book of Watchers*.<sup>64</sup> *Sefer Hekhalot* called them Uza, Aza and Azael (ʿwz', ʿz' and ʿzʾl) and the like, with Azael as the stablest element.<sup>65</sup>

60 Cf. the useful survey in *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch*, transl. M. Black, Leiden 1985, p. 121; and see below, notes 128–132. The form Azazel arose by identification of the fallen angel with the demonic figure to whom a sin-laden scapegoat was sent on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16).

61 W. B. Henning, 'The Book of Giants,' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 9 (1943–1946), p. 60; W. Sundermann, 'Ein weiteres Fragment aus Manis Gigantenbuch,' in his *Manichaica Iranica*, II, ed. C. Reck et al., Rome 2001, p. 496 (of the original pagination).

62 Henning, 'Book of Giants' (above, note 61), pp. 68f., 71; W. Sundermann, 'Mani's "Book of the Giants" and the Jewish Books of Enoch: A Case of Terminological Difference and What It Implies,' in his *Manichaica Iranica*, II (above, note 61), p. 42 (of the original pagination).

63 Shaked, 'Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia' (above, note 27), pp. 110, 113.

64 1 Enoch 9; cf. O. S. Wintermute, 'Jubilees,' 7:21–26, in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, II: *Expansions of the Old Testament and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works*, New York 1985; cf. below, note 83 and the text there.

65 Reed, 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah' (above, note 14), p. 122 and note 64. P. Alexander

An Aramaic incantation bowl which also operates with three angels on the theme of ʿz (and which invokes pagan, Jewish, and Christian divinities alike) calls them Azael, Azael, and Az(a)ziel (ʿzʹl, ʿzʹl, ʿzzyʹl), where the second Azael should perhaps be understood as Azzael, Uzael, or the like.<sup>66</sup> Other bowls, which have only two ʿz names, call them Aza and Azael (ʿzʹ, ʿzʹl).<sup>67</sup> Al-Kalbī calls them ʿAzā, ʿAzāyā, and ʿAzazīl (ʿzʹ, ʿzʹyʹ, ʿzzyʹl). One of them failed to make the descent, he says, while the other two bore the additional names of Hārūt and Mārūt.<sup>68</sup> Al-Kalbī and other exegetes also knew the events to be associated with Enoch (now called Idrīs).<sup>69</sup>

As the exegetes tell the story, however, it is not about angelic revolt or the origin of sin. Rather, it is about how tough it is to be a human being: Even the angels lost control of themselves when they experienced the enormous surge of sexual passion. Cyril of Alexandria's warnings notwithstanding, this plainly did not serve to encourage immorality, but on the contrary to warn against smug self-confidence; and if the angels came out badly in the story, it only went to show that they had no reason to feel superior. The exegetes thus linked the story with the theme, familiar from rabbinic literature, of rivalry between angels and human beings: The story put the angels in their place.<sup>70</sup> Though the exegetes went out of their way to stress that angels were not *normally* endowed with passions, some continued to find the story offensive, and construed Hārūt and Mārūt as human beings by reading *malikayn* ('two kings') for *malakayn* ('two angels') at Q. 2:102, or they read the verse as saying that magic was *not* sent down to

transliterates the names as ʿUzzah, ʿAzzah, and ʿAzaʿel in his translation of 3 Enoch, 4 and 5, in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I (above, note 64), pp. 258, 260.

66 D. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity*, London 2003, no. M163:18 (§5). The clients want their opponent punished in the same way that ʿzʹl w-ʿzʹl w-ʿzzyʹl, who transgressed the command of their lord, were pressed under the mountain with their faces downwards by angels sent against them.

67 See below, notes 116f. There are also manuscripts of *Sefer Hekhalot* that have only two ʿz names, again ʿzʹ/ʿzh and ʿzʹl; see Reed, 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah' (above, note 14), p. 122.

68 Abū Bakr ʿAṭīq, *Tafsīr-i Sūrābādī*, I (above, note 1), p. 105; Abdullaeva, *Lakhorskij tafsīr* (above, note 1), pp. 42f. = pp.79ff.

69 The angels descend to earth in the time of Idrīs (al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, I [above, note 1], p. 458, citing al-Rabīʿ; al-Māwardī, *Tafsīr*, I, ed. Kh. M. Khidr, Kuwait 1982, p. 142; Qazwīnī in Jung, *Fallen Angels* [above, note 1], p. 130); as in the *Book of Watchers* (13:4), they ask him to intercede for them (Kalbī in Abdullaeva, *Lakhorskij tafsīr* [above, note 1], p. 44 = p. 81).

70 See P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, Berlin 1975; Reeves, 'Some Explorations' (above, note 2), pp. 52ff.

the two angels.<sup>71</sup> (The story of the sons of Seth seduced by the daughters of Cain was well known, but not as an alternative to the Watcher story, which had changed too much by now for the two to be interchangeable.)<sup>72</sup> Rationalists such as the Mu'tazilite Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī (wr. ca. 355/966) objected to it in much the same terms as Cyril of Alexandria: How could spirits without bodies have passions or make love?<sup>73</sup> For all that, the story retained its popularity. Indeed, it returned to the world of high culture, and not only for Muslims, but also for Jews, who liked the Muslim version of the story, even though their own exegetes continued to identify the biblical sons of God as human beings.<sup>74</sup> The story proved extremely long-lived, too. In 1915, an Indian Muslim in Germany wrote a summary of the story of Hārūt and Mārūt in Persian for the Orientalist Littmann: It now involved two women to match the two angels; the women had become singers and dancers, and both ended up as planets. That apart, the story was much as it had been told by al-Kalbī and his likes over a thousand years earlier.<sup>75</sup>

#### OTHER ECHOES

As Reeves notes, however, there seems to be a second reflection of the

71 See Jung, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 1), pp. 126f., 128f., 135, 139. The reading *malikayn* is reported for al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī and Ibn 'Abbās (Ibn Khālawayh, *al-Mukhtaṣar fi shawādhidh al-Qur'ān*, ed. G. Bergsträsser, Paris 2005 [first published Leipzig 1934], p. 8), al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzahim (*Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk*, assembled and edited by M. Sh. A. al-Zāwayī, Cairo 1999, p. 161, no. 68), Sa'īd b. Jubayr, al-Zuhrī, and others ('A.-L. al-Khaṭīb, *Muḥjam al-qirā'āt*, I, Damascus 2000, p. 164, drawn to my attention by Joseph Witztum).

72 Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, I, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al., Leiden 1879–1901, pp. 168ff. (English transl. by F. Rosenthal, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, I, Albany 1989); al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh*, I, ed. M. Th. Houtsma, Leiden 1883, pp. 5ff.; Jung, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 1), pp. 124ff.

73 Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Bad' wa'l-tārīkh*, III (ed. and French transl. by C. Huart), Paris 1899–1919, p. 15 (Jung, *Fallen Angels* [above, note 1], p. 128). Similarly Sa'adya Gaon, *Version arabe du pentateuque* (above, note 13).

74 Cf. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), pp. 113ff. and pp. 119ff.; Reed, *Fallen Angels* (above, note 10), Chap. 7; E. G. Hirsch, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York [1964], s.v. *Fall of Angels*.

75 Littmann, 'Hārūt und Mārūt' (above, note 1), pp. 70ff. Hārūt and Mārūt also passed into English literature, both serious and lighthearted; in Sir Rider Haggard's *Ivory Child*, published in 1916, they are African magicians who are announced by the butler as 'Mr. Hare-root and Mr. Mare-root.' See Shahbazi, in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. *Hārūt and Mārūt* (above, note 1); I owe this reference to Mohsen Ashtiany.

*Book of Watchers* in Q. 2:30, on God's creation of Adam.<sup>76</sup> In the Qur'ān, as in the Jewish and Christian literature of the time, it is at the dawn of human history that sin comes into the world, thanks to an arrogant angel (related to the same ancient Near Eastern myth of rebellion in the pantheon as that behind Genesis 6:2–4) who is expelled from heaven and proceeds to seduce Eve, representing the daughters of men. There had been much interaction between the biblical story of Adam and Eve and that about the sons of God and the daughters of men, as developed by later authors, and motifs originally associated with the flood had been transferred to the time of the creation.<sup>77</sup> In the Qur'ānic account of the arrogant figure, here known as Iblīs, the fact that he is envisaged now as an angel (Q. 7:11; 15:28–31, 17:61, 38:73) and now as a demon (*min al-jinn*, Q. 18:50) is presumably an Enochic legacy. But it is in the account of God's creation of Adam that we encounter a more direct reflection of the *Book of Watchers*.

In Q. 2:30, God tells the angels that he intends to create Adam, which is also what he does in rabbinic accounts (but not in Christian ones);<sup>78</sup> and here as there the angels object to God's plan. Both versions, in other words, pick up the theme of rivalry between angels and humans. In the rabbinic accounts, the angels sometimes object to God's plan on the grounds that mortals are useless and weak (cf. Ps. 8:5, 144:3–4);<sup>79</sup> at other times, they object that he is all falsehood and discord,<sup>80</sup> or they enquire what his deeds will be like,<sup>81</sup> or God tells them that man will be righteous without telling them that he will be wicked, too.<sup>82</sup> In the Qur'ān, the angels object to the creation of a being who 'will do corruption in the earth and shed blood,' and God overrules them, saying that He knows what they do not. Here, as there, God knows something that He is not telling the angels, but here it is the angels who know about the wicked men of the future, and there is a new stress on bloodshed. As Reeves says, this would appear to reflect Gen. 6:11–13, on the generation of the flood, which 'corrupted the earth' and 'engaged in violence.' In the retelling of that passage in the *Book of Watch-*

76 Reeves, 'Some Explorations' (above, note 2), pp. 52ff.

77 See the references in note 31 above.

78 Origen is exceptional in holding the same opinion on the Christian side; see R. McL. Wilson, 'The Early History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1.26,' *Studia Patristica*, 1 (1957), p. 420. The Christians typically see God as addressing Christ, the Logos.

79 Thus Reeves, 'Some Explorations' (above, note 2), p. 53.

80 *Genesis rabba* 8:5, where the angels are divided over the question.

81 BT *Sanhedrin* 38b, where God responds by destroying them until He gets the answer He wants.

82 *Genesis rabba*, 8:4.

ers, three or four angels observing the earth from heaven see 'much blood being shed upon the earth, and all the oppression being wrought upon the earth.'<sup>83</sup> The events leading to the flood having been transferred to the beginning of human history, the angelic objections are now made not on the basis of observation of the earth in the time of Enoch, but rather by way of foresight at the time of Adam's creation. The angels no longer comment on the terrible behaviour of giants in the pre-flood generation, but rather on that of all-too-fallible humans in general. ('Corruption in the earth' is denounced in many other passages, too.) In the Qur'ān, as in the rabbinic literature, however, God overrules the angels, putting them in their place: For all their faults, humans have a special place with Him.

ei In the exegetical literature, the transfer of the events from the flood generation to human prehistory had other repercussions. The *Book of Watchers* presents the righteous angels as descending to earth to fight the giant offspring of their fallen colleagues. In the exegetical and historical literature of the Muslims, the giants have become an angelic tribe of spirits (*jinn*) who lived on earth, to which the angel and/or spirit Iblīs, the future devil, was sent to serve as their judge; or he was the ruler of heaven and earth at the time, until he grew arrogant and disobeyed; or the *jinn* became infidels and caused corruption on the earth, whereupon Iblīs was sent against them with an army of angels, which caused him to become arrogant and rebel.<sup>84</sup> These events are sometimes used to explain Adam's status as *khalīfa* (deputy or successor): Adam succeeded or replaced those angels or spirits on earth, we are told. The implicit message is that Adam's title did *not* mean 'deputy of God on earth'; in other words, the caliphs could not invoke Qur'ānic support when they styled themselves deputies of God, as they did from 'Uthmān onwards. One part of the story thus came to be associated

83 I Enoch 9; cf. *Jubilees* 7:21–26, both adduced by Reeves, 'Some Explorations' (above, note 2), pp. 53f. There are three angels in Isaac's translation (Michael, Surafel and Gabriel), four in that of Nickelsburg and Vanderkam (Michael, Sariel, Raphael and Gabriel). Reeves's alternative suggestion that Q. 2:30 alludes to Cain's murder of Abel is less persuasive. Cf. also his 'Sefer 'Uzza wa-'Aza(z)el: Exploring Early Jewish Mythologies of Evil,' an account of a monograph in process, at [http://www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/jcreeves/sefer\\_uzza\\_waazazel.htm](http://www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/jcreeves/sefer_uzza_waazazel.htm).

84 For an accessible survey, see Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḫh* (above, note 72), pp. 79–85; for many others, in which the fallen angels (complete with the name 'Azāzīl) are easily recognized, see M. J. Kister, 'Legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* Literature: The Creation of Ādam and Related Stories,' in A. Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, Oxford 1988, pp. 88ff.

with a wholly new set of burning problems, once again in connection with political changes.<sup>85</sup>

There could be a third reflection, or more precisely development, of a theme from the Watcher story in the Qur'ānic stress on the fact that the angels only descend at the command of God, or with His permission. In Q. 19:64, unnamed speakers, generally assumed to be the angels, declare: 'we do not descend [*natanazzalu*] except at the command of your (sg.) Lord'; they add that everything belongs to Him and that He does not forget. The next verse spells out the implications: 'So worship (sg.) Him, the Lord of heaven and earth and everything between them.' In 97:4, the night of *qadr* is identified as the night during which the angels and the spirit descend (*tanazzalu*) with God's permission.<sup>86</sup> Neither passage has anything to do with the Enoch story (19:64f. comes not long after the mention of Enoch's elevation to an exalted place, 19:56f., but it does not seem to be connected with it, or indeed, with anything that precedes or follows it). The insistence that the angels descend only with God's permission, or at His command, is nonetheless striking, especially in 97:4, where there does not seem to be any reason to stress this. (The exegetes claim that the obscure 19:64 was a response to Muḥammad's impatience at a time when Gabriel had long stayed away.) In 65:12, it is simply God's command that descends (*yatanazzalu*), without reference to the angels or the spirit serving as its bearers: In all three passages, we are reminded that the only power in the universe is God. The same point is also made in polemics against the alleged angels of the polytheists: Whether they are genuine angels falsely worshipped, demons, or empty names, they have no power (e.g., 7:191–193, 21:42f., 36:23, 74f.); it is only with God's permission that they can act (53:26).

Rebellious angels who descended from heaven of their own accord were problematic from this point of view. In fact, attempts to cast the Watchers as obedient until their encounter with human females had been made well before the rise of Islam. In Jubilees (ca. 150 BCE) they come down 'to teach the sons of man, and perform judgement and righteousness on

85 Cf. Kister, 'Legends in *tafsīr*' (above, note 84), pp. 85f.; W. al-Qāḍī, 'The Term "*khalīfa*" in Early Exegetical Literature,' *Die Welt des Islams*, 28 (1988), especially pp. 399f., 410f.; P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge 1986, pp. 6–19; cf. also P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (American title: *God's Rule*), Edinburgh 2004, pp. 40f.

86 My thanks to Joseph Witztum for drawing this passage to my attention.

earth.<sup>87</sup> In the Christian Jewish Pseudo-Clementine homilies (ca. 300 CE), we are expressly told that they asked for permission to descend, as in *tafsīr*, because they were upset by human ingratitude to God and wished to convict and punish the guilty, that is, to act as judges.<sup>88</sup> And in *Sefer Hekhalot*, the angels who descend no longer seem to include the wicked ones at all: It is the ministering angels who come down from heaven. They do so to execute God's will on earth, and their descent is placed in the quasi-paradise period after the fall, familiar from the Christian story of the sons of Seth and the daughters of Cain. That those who taught mankind sorcery were also angels by origin is left unstated.<sup>89</sup> In line with this, the Qur'ān nowhere says that Hārūt and Mārūt defied God. Since their status as angels is accepted, they are presented as obedient, even as teachers of sorcery (2:102). What is stressed here is that they cannot harm anyone 'except with God's permission.' How they came down to Babylon we are not told. But the repeated reminders in other contexts that angels do not descend without being ordered or permitted to by God are likely to have been inspired by familiarity with claims to the contrary.

Finally, in Q. 33:33, the following words are addressed to the wives of the Prophet: 'Stay in your houses and do not make a display, like that of the first Jahiliyya [*al-jāhiliyya al-ūlā*].' The reference here would seem to be to the women who had been taught to beautify themselves by the angels (1 Enoch 8:1), an innovation which was singled out for particular reprehension by Tertullian in a number of writings. The angels were responsible for the means of 'womanly ostentation' such as jewellery and eye makeup; it was on account of the angels that women had to be veiled, he claimed.<sup>90</sup> The *Book of Watchers*, like Jubilees and Christian works, sees the flood as the first global disaster to overtake mankind, prefiguring the last judgement.<sup>91</sup> In the Epistle of Enoch, another part of 1 Enoch, the flood is

87 *Jubilees* 4:15.

88 Clement of Alexandria (attrib.), *The Homilies* (English transl. by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson; Ante-Nicene Christian Library, 17), Edinburgh 1870, VIII, p. 12; the entire passage on the angels is also translated in VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs' (above, note 10), pp. 76–78. On the *Homilies*, see A. Y. Reed, "'Jewish Christianity' after the "Parting of the Ways,'" in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted*, Tübingen 2003.

89 *Sefer Hekhalot*, 5.

90 VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs' (above, note 10), pp. 51, 68; cf. also p. 66, on Clement of Alexandria.

91 J. C. VanderKam, 'The Righteousness of Noah,' in G. W. E. Nickelsburg (ed.), *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism*, Chicago 1980, pp. 25f.



explicitly called ‘the first end.’<sup>92</sup> That the first end should have been preceded by the first period of ignorance/barbarism is a natural inference, and the Christians seem to have made it too, though the one example I have come across lacks the eschatological perspective.<sup>93</sup> Some exegetes duly assign the first Jahiliyya mentioned in the Qurʾān to the period before the flood, either between Adam and Noah or between Idrīs and Noah, explaining it with reference to a story about the people of the mountain versus those of the plains (i.e., a version of the Christian story in which the sons of God and the daughters of men are replaced with Sethians and Cainites).<sup>94</sup>

The overall impression conveyed by these references is that the Watcher story formed part of the general background against which the Qurʾān was revealed. The story clearly did not come directly from the *Book of Watchers*. The fact that there are only two fallen angels in the Qurʾān, that they bear Iranian names and are located in Bābil, that the angelic comments on human misbehaviour are set in the time of Adam rather than that of Enoch, that they are associated with the theme of rivalry between angels and humans, and that Enoch’s own time had apparently come to be known as the first Jahiliyya – all this goes to show that the material had long circulated, in written and/or oral form, in circles which continued to revere the Enoch tradition, but which also participated in developments among mainstream Jews and Christians. Three of the four Qurʾānic allusions come in Medinese suras (2:30, 102, 33:33); the fourth, which is not so much an allusion as a further thought about angelic descent, comes in Meccan ones (19:64, 97:4).

#### ‘UZAYR

The possible fifth example appears in Q. 9:30, another Medinese sura, in which the Jews are famously accused of regarding a certain ‘Uzayr as the son of God: ‘The Jews say, ‘Uzayr is the son of God; the Christians say, the

92 1 Enoch, 93:4.

93 Epiphanius identifies the ‘first sect’ as Barbarism (*barbarismos*), which lasted from Adam to Noah, marked by Adam’s fall, Cain’s fratricide and the introduction of sorcery, witchcraft, licentiousness, adultery and iniquity in the time of Jared, Enoch’s father; see Epiphanius, *Panarion*, Book I, ed. H. Kroll, Leipzig 1915 (English transl. by F. Williams, Leiden 1987), Proem, I, 3, 1f.; Anacephalaeosis I, 1, section 1.

94 Cf. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, VII, pp. 4f. For the Sethians and Cainites, see the references in note 20, above.

Masīḥ is the son of God. That is what they say with their mouths, imitating the unbelievers before them. God curse them, how deluded they are.'

In the Qur'ān, a son or daughter of God is always an allegedly divine being, usually Christ or the gods/angels worshipped by the pagans, so the charge that is being levelled against the offending parties here is deification of created beings. Even when the Jews and Christians are accused of calling themselves sons of God, the implicit charge is of deification: The retort includes the point that the Jews and Christians are just human beings created by Him (*bashar mimman khalaqa*, 5:18). Of course, the Jews and Christians did not deify themselves, nor is the author of the accusation likely to have thought that they did: he is simply being polemical. But here, at least, we know where he got his polemical ammunition from (ultimately Deut. 14:1, Ps. 82:6, John 1:12). The same cannot be said in the case of 'Uzayr.

The exegetes almost unanimously identify 'Uzayr as Ezra,<sup>95</sup> and modern commentators usually follow suit; but the Jews did not call Ezra the son of God, let alone deify him, as they themselves repeatedly pointed out. This was well known to the exegetes. They responded by postulating that a *small* group of Jews had worshipped Ezra as the son of God in Medina in the Prophet's time; or that just *one* man had done so; or, alternatively, that all of them had done so *in the past*, when Ezra restored the Torah to them, but that they had since stopped; or that they were still doing it *somewhere else*. The Jewish denial of the charges could thus be discounted.<sup>96</sup> Similar suggestions have been made by modern scholars, too.<sup>97</sup> But the Jews were surely right to remain unpersuaded.

Polemics is not, of course, a genre conducive to accuracy, but polemical charges do need a sting in order to hurt, and it is hard to see where it was in this particular case. The passage proved more of a liability to the Muslims themselves than it did to the Jews. It thus seems unlikely that Ezra was meant, but what is the alternative?

One of the more interesting suggestions is by Newby. According to him, 'Uzayr is indeed Ezra, but only in name; in substance he is Enoch,

95 For two exceptions, see below, note 108.

96 Cf. M. Ayoub, "'Uzayr in the Qur'an and Muslim Tradition,' in W. M. Brinner and S. D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, Atlanta 1986, pp. 11ff.; H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, Princeton 1992, pp. 51ff.; I. M. Abu-Rabi', *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Leiden 2001–2006, s.v. *Ezra*.

97 Cf. below, notes 102f. Cf. also V. Comerro, 'Esdras est-il le fils de Dieu?' *Arabica*, 52 (2005), pp. 166f., 170–172, where other modern suggestions are noted.

with whom, in Newby's view, he had come to be identified, because both of them were scribes who had been translated directly to heaven instead of dying. Enoch in his turn was identified with the angel Metatron, who was regarded as 'the lesser YHWH' in circles cultivating *merkaba* mysticism; and as Metatron he was chief of the angels who were known as 'sons of God' (and whose appellation might somehow have rubbed off on him?). The term 'son of God' could in any case be applied to any righteous man. 'It is easy, then, to imagine that among the Jews of the Ḥijâz who were apparently involved in the mystical speculations associated with the *merkâbâh*, Ezra, because of the traditions of his translation, because of his piety, and particularly because he was equated with Enoch as the Scribe of God, could be termed one of the *Bene Elohîm*.'<sup>98</sup>

This is a bit complicated. If I have understood Newby correctly, he sees the Qur'ân as taking issue with Jewish speculation that 'perhaps – God forbid – there are two powers in heaven,' as disapproving rabbis put it.<sup>99</sup> The second power was a principal angel, envisaged in some circles as Metatron, the angel who is a transfigured version of Enoch in *Sefer Hekhalot*,<sup>100</sup> and the relevant part of this work may be pre-Islamic.<sup>101</sup> So far, so good, but as the complications suggest, the evidence does not quite fit. The Qur'ân does not speak of Metatron or Enoch or even Idrîs (the name under which Enoch usually figures in the Islamic tradition), but rather of 'Uzayr – and getting Ezra into position as the second power in heaven is hard work. One can try with reference to 4 Ezra (= 2 Esd., 3–14, in the Apocrypha) 14:9, where God promises Ezra that 'you shall be taken up from among men, and henceforth you shall live with my Son and with those who are like you, until the times are ended.'<sup>102</sup> It sounds as if Ezra is being promised angelifica-

98 G. D. Newby, *The History of the Jews of Arabia from Ancient Times to Their Eclipse under Islam*, Columbia, SC 1988, pp. 59–61.

99 See the references given above, note 23.

100 3 Enoch 3–16; cf. Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate* (above, note 23), pp. 35f., 53.

101 In an early article, P. S. Alexander placed the material about Enoch and Metatron in *Sefer Hekhalot* (Chaps. 3–16) in the period of ca. 450–850, but he has since dated the entire work in its present form to probably the sixth/seventh century; see idem, 'The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch,' *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 28 (1977), pp. 159, 164, and 'From Son of Adam to Second God: Transformations of the Biblical Enoch,' in M. E. Stone and T. A. Bergren (eds.), *Biblical Figures Outside the Bible*, Harrisburg, PA 1997, pp. 104f. Cf. also J. Dan, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, Tel Aviv 1975, pp. 122, 124 (ca. sixth century CE). For further references, see Reed, 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah' (above, note 14), p. 108, note 10.

102 Cf. B. M. Metzger, 'The Fourth Book of Ezra: A New Translation and Introduction,' in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I (above, note 9), pp. 516–519.

tion similar to Enoch's here, and the work probably did originally end with his assumption to heaven.<sup>103</sup> For this reason, 4 Ezra figures in the attempts of several scholars to solve the problem of 'Uzayr, sometimes along with the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra.<sup>104</sup> But it is the messiah, not Ezra, who is here called the son of God.<sup>105</sup> Scholars who focus on the Ezra literature accordingly have to postulate either that there was a hitherto unknown Jewish sect which elevated Ezra to divine sonship,<sup>106</sup> or else that Muḥammad simply got his information wrong.<sup>107</sup> That Muḥammad got something wrong is also required by the hypothesis that in substance 'Uzayr is Malachi.<sup>108</sup> Newby wisely refrains from going down that road.

Metatron and Enoch were not called sons of God either, however. This

- 103 Cf. R. A. Kraft, "'Ezra' Materials in Judaism and Christianity,' in H. Temporini and W. Haase (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der Neueren Forschung*, Part II: *Principat*, 19.1: *Religion*, Berlin 1979, p. 129. The text refers casually to 'before he was taken up' (8:19); Ezra is told to divest himself of his human nature (14:14); and the work, in eastern versions (including the Syriac, given in the margin in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible), concludes with his assumption.
- 104 Cf. M. E. Stone, 'Greek Apocalypse of Ezra,' in Charlesworth, *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, I (above, note 9), pp. 561–579. Here Ezra actually gets to heaven, but apparently only on a temporary basis, since the text ends with his death and burial (7:14f.).
- 105 The son also appears in 4 Ezra 7:29, on 'my son the Messiah.'
- 106 J. Horowitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin–Leipzig 1926, pp. 127f.; H. Speyer, *Die biblischen Erzählungen im Qoran*, Gräfenhainischen n.d. (preface dated 1931), p. 413. Even if such a sect had existed, it is hard to believe that it should have come to Muḥammad's attention without being known to the Jews themselves. For comparable suggestions without reference to the Ezra literature, see D. Marcus, H. Z. Hirschberg and A. Ben-Yaacob, in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*<sup>2</sup>, Detroit 2007, s.v. *Ezra* (a Yemeni sect postulated by Ibn Ḥazm); J. Walker, 'Who is 'Uzair?'' *The Moslem World*, 19 (1929), pp. 303–306 (the Samaritans made up the charge).
- 107 Cf. D. Künstlinger, "'Uzair is der Sohn Allāhs,' *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*, 35 (1932), pp. 381–383, suggesting that Muḥammad mistook the name of the book for the name of the son of God mentioned in it. For another hypothesis requiring him to mistake something, cf. Ginzberg in the following note.
- 108 This theory was already being advocated in medieval times. Al-Biqā'ī (d. 885/1480), in *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsūb al-āyāt wa 'l-suwar*, VIII, Hyderabad 1969–1984, p. 439, cites the Jewish convert al-Samaw'al al-Maghribī for the view that 'Uzayr is not Ezra in the sense of the restorer of the Hebrew Bible. Al-Maghribī's own view was that 'Uzayr, whom he calls 'al-'Uzayr,' is Eleazar (cf. his *Iḥām al-yahūd*, ed. M. 'A. al-Sharqāwī, Cairo 1986, p. 152), but al-Biqā'ī says that 'Uzayr is the prophet Malachi (who is identified with Ezra in the Talmud [Megilla 15a] and elsewhere). The same suggestion was made, apparently independently, by L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, VI, Philadelphia 1909–1938, p. 432. Since Malachi (which means 'my angel') is

is why Newby claims both that Metatron was chief of the fallen angels known as 'sons of God,' and that any righteous man could be thus called. But the first claim appears to be a straightforward mistake. To the extent that Metatron was Enoch, he was indeed associated with the fallen angels known as sons of God, but he was not their chief; moreover, Metatron per se did not have any connection with the fallen angels, nor is there any evidence that the label 'son of God' was ever transferred to him. As for the second claim, back in Graeco-Roman times, any righteous man could be known as a son of God.<sup>109</sup> The rabbis are said at some point to have extended the sonship to every Israelite, or indeed, every human being. This does not actually solve the problem, however, for what the Jews are being accused of in Q. 9:30 is not calling all Israelites or human beings sons of God (à la Q. 5:18), but, rather, using the expression of one specific figure. And if it had been possible to speak of Enoch/Ezra as a son of God in circles cultivating *merkaba* mysticism, why were the Jews so unanimously puzzled by the Qur'ānic charge?

Given that the Jews simply did not recognize the sin they were accused of, it seems more likely that the identification of 'Uzayr as Ezra is mistaken. This possibility was rejected by both Horovitz and Künstlinger, but their own suggestions work no better than Newby's.<sup>110</sup> Where do we go from there?

Newby must be right that we are up against something to do with angel worship. This could admittedly be questioned on the grounds that Q. 9:30 presents the Jewish view of 'Uzayr and the Christian view of Christ as parallel errors, suggesting that both parties were guilty of deifying human beings. But the parallelism lies in the fact that both are deifying *created* beings. Worship of Christ and angels is also put on a par in 4:172: 'The Mes-

nowhere called a son of God, Ginzberg asks whether Muḥammad confused 'messenger [i.e., angel] of God' with 'son of God.' (I owe almost all of this to Joseph Witztum.)

- 109 E. G. Hirsch, *Jewish Encyclopedia*, New York [1964], s.v. *Son of God*, with reference to Wisdom of Solomon 2:13, 16, 18; Ecclesiasticus 4:10; cf. also Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 145; idem, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, I, 92; and Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1, 22, 2, where Jesus would deserve to be called son of God for his wisdom alone even if he were wholly human. Cf. also G. Dellling, 'Die Bezeichnung "Söhne Gottes" in der jüdischen Literatur der hellenistisch-römischen Zeit,' in J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks (eds.), *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl*, Oslo 1977, pp. 18–28.
- 110 Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen* (above, note 106), p. 167, note to p. 127; Künstlinger, 'Uzair is der Sohn Allāhs' (above, note 107), p. 382; cf. above, notes 106f., for their suggestions.

siah, Jesus son of Mary does not disdain being a servant of God, nor do the angels who are drawn near [*al-malā'ika al-muqarrabūn*]. Like Christ, the angels wrongly deified by the pagans were actually 'righteous servants,' or this is one view of them in the Qur'ān (Q. 21:26, 43:19; elsewhere they are demons or empty names). That the one was a human being and the others angels was immaterial, and so it would have been in the case of the Jews.

If we persist in the search for a human being called 'son of God' by the Jews, we are unlikely to get beyond the conclusion that Muḥammad simply got something wrong. If we are prepared to consider the possibility that he knew what he was talking about, the only way in which Jews could plausibly be accused of polytheism was with reference to their 'logos theology,' as Boyarin calls it, or in other words, their veneration of a divine power, personified as an angel, as an intermediary between God and mankind.<sup>111</sup> 'To this *logos*, His archangel, the Father of all has given the special prerogative to stand on the border and separate the creature from the creator,' as Philo (d. 50 CE) expressed it, happily referring to the *logos* as 'the second God' and 'son of God.'<sup>112</sup> The Christians duly took Philo to have been a Christian *avant la lettre*, but it is now recognized that such ideas were widespread in Judaism, especially in the first two centuries CE, but apparently much later, too. In *Sefer Hekhalot*, a composite work which may date in its present form to the sixth/seventh century,<sup>113</sup> it is Enoch-Metatron who is the second God, or more precisely 'the lesser God,' as Newby observes. The trouble is that no form of the intermediary is known ever to have been called anything like Ezra.

Some eighty years ago, however, Casanova proposed that 'Uzayr is a misreading of Azael.'<sup>114</sup> He made this suggestion in a brief communication without developing the thesis, and perhaps for this reason it fell flat: in effect, he simply substituted one strange name for another, with perfunctory reference to rabbinic sources. Even in our present state of knowledge, it has to be said that the thesis has its problems. But as Wasserstrom says, it deserves to be revived,<sup>115</sup> if only for a proper hearing.

111 See the reference given in note 23 above.

112 Philo, *Who Is the Heir of Divine Things*, 205; idem, *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, II, 62 (second God); idem, *On Husbandry*, 51 (firstborn son).

113 See note 101 above.

114 P. Casanova, 'Idrīs et 'Ouzair,' *Journal Asiatique*, 205 (1924), pp. 356–360 (opting for the form 'Uzi'el).

115 S. M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew: The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton 1995, p. 183.

If ʿUzayr is a misreading (or mishearing) of Azael, the force of the passage would be that the angelic intermediary venerated by the Jews was actually an evil figure, a demon trying to mislead them. This works well in that it is also one of the reactions to the pagan worship of angels/deities in the Qurʾān: On the day of judgement God will ask the genuine angels, ‘Was it these who worshipped you?’ and the angels will reply, ‘Glory be to you. You are our friend [*walī*], not these. Rather, they worshipped the demons [*jinn*]’ (34:40f). Or again, ‘they have made the demons [*jinn*] partners of God, though He created them, and falsely credit Him with sons and daughters, without knowing anything about it’ (6:100).<sup>116</sup> The charge is all the more plausible in that Azael was an ambivalent figure. Though he was widely known as a fallen angel, a Greek amethyst lists Ichtyus, identified as Christ by the *chi-ro* sign, with Raphael, Renel and Uriel on one side and Michael, Gabriel and Azael on the other.<sup>117</sup> In the Aramaic magical texts he is sometimes a fallen angel,<sup>118</sup> sometimes an anti-demonic power along with the archangels Michael and Raphael. One amulet goes so far as to include him among ‘the holy angels who stand in front of the throne of the Great God’;<sup>119</sup> one bowl text invokes Aza and Azael (ʿzʾ w-ʿzʾl) as well as Metatron against the demons;<sup>120</sup> and another, directed against Jewish, Arab, Persian, Indian, Greek and Roman sorceries, and of disputed date, invokes God, ‘who sent Aza, Azael and Metatron [ʿzʾ w-ʿzʾl w-myʾttrwn], the great prince of His throne.’<sup>121</sup> Here Metatron takes the place of the third member

116 Compare also 37:158: ‘They have set up a genealogical relationship (*nasab*) between Him and the *jinn*.’ Contrast 21:26 and 43:19: ‘They say, “al-Raḥmān has produced children,” but they are servants raised to honour (*ʿibād mukramūn*); ‘they have made the angels, who are servants of the Raḥmān, females.’

117 J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, I, London 1964, p. 122, citing F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d’Archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, I, Paris 1924, cols. 2088f., s.v. *Anges* (where no date is offered).

118 Thus in the reference given above, note 66.

119 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (above, note 53), pp. 68f., amulet 7:3–7:5; compare 1:1–3; eidem, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations from Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem 1993, pp. 62f., amulet 19:17–19:23; cf. also Milik, *Books of Enoch* (above 7), p. 131.

120 C. H. Gordon, ‘Aramaic Incantation Bowls,’ *Orientalia*, 10 (1941), pp. 279f. (Ashmolean, no. 1932, 620), transliterated as ‘Azza and ‘Azza’el.

121 C. H. Gordon, ‘Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums,’ *Archiv Orientalni*, 6 (1934), pp. 328–330 (Baghdad Museum bowl no. 6519:11), transliterated as ‘Azzā and ‘Azzā’el. Gordon dates this bowl to after the Arab conquests on the grounds that it mentions ‘Shīʿite’ sorceries in line 9, but Shaked reads ‘Arab’ sorceries and regards it as probably pre-Islamic; see S. Shaked, ‘Jews, Christians and Pagans in the

of the ʒ trio, normally Azael or Azazel. One would dearly like to know what the Qur'ān has in mind when it holds the Jews and Christians who credit God with a son to be imitating 'the unbelievers before you [*alladhīna kafarū min qablu*]: Is this another reference to the 'first Jahiliyya,' now singled out for polytheism rather than the female immodesty that prevailed at the time? There does not seem to be any way of telling.

☞ If Casanova's emendation is accepted, sura 9:30 would reflect much the same environment as the passage on Hārūt and Mārūt and carry much the same message: 'the Jews say that Azael is a son of God,' i.e., the Jews prefer a figure associated with magic to the messenger who has been sent to them. The next verse tells us why: they, i.e., the Jews and the Christians, 'have taken their learned men [*aḥbār*] and monks [*ruhbān*] as their lords [*arbāban*] apart from God, and al-Masīḥ son of Mary' (9:31). This can hardly be a restatement of the claim that they deify 'Uzayr and Christ, for Christ does not belong in the category of *ruhbān*, and he is mentioned again as a separate object of deification. It is equally implausible that the Jews should be accused of deifying an 'Uzayr from among their *aḥbār* and *ruhbān*, while the Christians deify Christ, for *ruhbān* are always Christian figures in the Qur'ān. Most probably, then, this verse attacks the authorities to which the Jews and Christians owe their horrendous beliefs: They elevate their own authorities to the position of God by following them in defiance of God, as represented by the Messenger. That they deify al-Masīḥ appears to be mere repetition, possibly because it was the only genuine charge, and one that the Messenger often took issue with. 'They were commanded only to worship one God,' the verse continues, presumably meaning in the past, and now also through the Messenger whom they ignore. Both groups hope to extinguish the light of God with the enormities they utter with their mouths, the Messenger says (9:32), using a phrase elsewhere associated with those who dismissed Jesus as a magician (61:6, 8). In short, here, as in 2:102, the key issue seems to be the Messenger's own authority.

On this reading, the charge against the Jews would not reflect ignorance or misunderstanding of a Jewish belief, but rather anger and the polemical exaggerations that this tends to induce. The observer knew very well that the Jews did not really worship an angel, righteous or fallen, as the son of God; had he genuinely believed that they did, he would have argued against it as frequently as he did against the sonship of Jesus, not just on a



single occasion. He is claiming that idolatry is what the beliefs of his stubborn opponents really amount to. How literally did he intend the charge? It could be argued that all he resented was the expression 'son of God,' having heard Azael described as such on some occasion: Metaphorically meant or otherwise, it was wrong to say such things.<sup>122</sup> If this is all he meant, his reaction would be comparable to that of the third/fourth-century Palestinian rabbi who was offended by the passage in Daniel in which Nebuchadnezzar observes in amazement that the three youths in the fiery furnace are unharmed, and that they have been joined by a fourth 'like the son of God,' i.e., an angel (Dan. 3:25). The rabbi claimed that an angel came down and slapped Nebuchadnezzar on the mouth for presuming that God had a son.<sup>123</sup> What he meant was presumably no more than that one should not say anything conducive to the blurring of the boundaries between Jews and Christians (though he, too, could have been worried by Jewish 'logos theology').

That the Qur'ānic observer was only bothered by words is at first sight suggested by his dismissal of claims regarding 'Uzayr and Christ as '[just] something they say with their mouths [*dhālika qawluhum bi-afwāhihim*]' (9:30), a phrase elsewhere used in comparing a man's wife to his mother for purposes of repudiation, and in calling someone else's son one's own by way of adoption (33:4). But the latter passage is not, in fact, about words alone. What 33:4 rejects is the opponents' belief that the words create or reflect something real, whereas the *truth* is that they are only words (similarly 18:4f., 24:15, 61:1–8). Similarly, the truth about the angels/gods deified by the pagans is that they are just names (when they are not angels falsely worshipped or mere demons, 7:70f., 53:23). It is only when opponents are held to say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, or to have even worse thoughts in their hearts than in their mouths, that a distinction between mere words and actual beliefs is postulated (3:118, 3:167, 5:41, 9:8, 48:11f). In the passage on 'Uzayr and al-Masīḥ the opponents do not simply use an offensive expression; they go so far as to reject the Messenger for the sake of the belief expressed by it. This is why they are accused of deifying their leaders, too, and also why they are told that God has sent the Messenger with guidance and the religion of truth to make it prevail, even though the *mushrikūn* may dislike it (9:33). The intertextual reference

122 This possibility was suggested to me by Behnam Sadeghi.

123 Alexander, 'Targumim and Early Exegesis' (above, note 5), pp. 61f., with reference to JT *Shabbat* 6:9, 39b, *ad fin.*

to the Jews who dismissed Jesus as a magician (in its turn conjuring up the polytheists who dismissed the Messenger as a magician) also shows the issue to be divine authority, this time along lines similar to the passage on Hārūt and Mārūt: The Jews go for the wrong leaders, preferring the very magic that they wrongly impute to the genuine Messenger. In 5:17–18, where only the Christian belief in a son of God is mentioned, both the Jews and the Christians are once more accused of deification, not of their leaders, but rather of themselves: As Comerro observes, the concept of *shirk* extends to any form of authority other than that of God represented by Muḥammad.<sup>124</sup> Here, too, the passage culminates in the claim that 'our messenger has come to you' (5:19).

In short, 9:30 is directed not just against the offensive expression 'son of God,' but also against actual beliefs held by Jews and Christians and the leaders under whom they upheld those beliefs. As far as the Jews are concerned, it has to be said that the charge was a brilliant polemical move, for it was one to which they could only reply, 'yes, but ...': Yes, the fallen angels were described as sons of God in the Bible and the *Book of Watchers*; yes, Azazel was one of them; and yes, it was to him that humans owed their knowledge of magic, in which he was often called upon. *But* the implication that he was worshipped in the same way that the Christians worshipped Christ was not true at all. With so complicated a defence, the audience will have inferred that there was something to the charge. It just so happened that a scribe was a bit too fast in copying the name of the demonic figure, or, alternatively, that the name had come to sound too much like Ezra's. Consequently, far from persuading later readers that the Jews had sold their souls to the devil, the verse persuaded Jews and Christians that Muḥammad was an ignoramus: His scripture was full of errors; the Jews did not regard 'Uzayr as the son of God, as the Christians said in polemics of their own.<sup>125</sup>

There are no problems with Casanova's theory on the linguistic front. In Arabic, Azazel ('Azā'ēl) would be written 'Az(ā)īl. The main difference between that (ʒyl) and 'Uzayr (ʒyr) in early Arabic script would be the size of the final letter.<sup>126</sup> If the change took place in written transmission and the copyist was transcribing from Arabic to Arabic, all we would need to put things right would be to postulate a minor scribal mistake. But the change could also have been effected orally, given that the shift from *l* to *r* is com-

124 Comerro, 'Esdras' (above, note 97), p. 170.

125 Al-Jāhiz, 'Al-Radd 'alā 'l-naṣārā,' in his *Rasā'il*, III, ed. 'A.-S. M. Hārūn, Cairo 1979, pp. 303f., 333f., 343; cf. also pp. 346f.

126 See B. Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts*, Atlanta 1993, pp. 59, 95.

mon in Semitic languages.<sup>127</sup> In that case all we need to postulate is that Azael was pronounced as something like Ozael/Ozaer. We do, in fact, find Uzael (‘wzʾl), Uziel (‘wzyʾl) and related forms, both on undatable magic amulets from the Syria region and in texts on incantation bowls from Iraq.<sup>128</sup>

But one could also suggest other ways of achieving the same result. For example, an angel by the name of ‘Azriel (‘wzyʾl) figures on amulets and magic bowls.<sup>129</sup> He has no independent existence and is nowhere identified as the son of God. However, as yet another bearer of a name on the theme of ‘z, he could easily have been treated as another manifestation or associate of Azael, as in fact he seems to be in the trio Azael, Azriel, and Ariel (all righteous).<sup>130</sup> The diminutive would presumably be ‘Uzayrʾil, but the ʾil would have been rejected on the grounds that God had nothing to do with him, leaving the contemptuous ‘Uzayr. Or, as Comerro suggests, the name Azariah (‘zryh) could be lurking in the background. It was borne by one of the three youths who were thrown into the fiery furnace and saved by the angel described by the awed Nebuchadnezzar as ‘like the son of God.’<sup>131</sup> As it happens, it was also the pseudonym adopted by the archangel Raphael in Tobit, in which Raphael teaches Tobias to make medicine and drive away a demon, which Raphael then binds (Tobit, 8:11). Curing by binding demons is what most of the magic bowls of Iraq were designed to achieve. They often invoke Raphael. Given the premium on invoking as many powers as possible, the chances are that they invoked him under the name of Azariah too, thereby causing him to join the list of angels/sons of

127 See E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar*, Leuven 1997, p. 135 (my thanks to Adam Raziell for arguing the case for oral transmission and mentioning this work).

128 C. H. Gordon, ‘Aramaic Incantation Bowls’ (above, note 120), p. 123 (no. 5:7); J. B. Segal (ed. and transl.), with a contribution by E. C. D. Hunter, *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum*, London 2000, nos. 040A:6, 048A:36, 109M:10 (my thanks to Dr. Hunter for drawing this work to my attention); Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (above, note 53), pp. 40f. (amulet 1:1); cf. pp. 218f. (magic book from Islamic times, 2, 5); eadem, *Magic Spells and Formulae* (above, note 119), pp. 62f., 66 (Palestinian amulet 19:23).

129 J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, Philadelphia 1913, p. 154 = p. 156, no. 8:14; Gordon, ‘Aramaic Incantation Bowls’ (above, note 120), p. 123 (no. 5:7); Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (above, note 53), pp. 40f. (amulets 1:13). Cf. also E. A. W. Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions*, London–New York 1930, pp. 277f. My thanks to Shaul Shaked for noting the possible relevance of this angel.

130 Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls* (above, note 53), pp. 68f. (amulet 7:3).

131 Dan. 1:6f.; 3:20–3:25; Comerro, ‘Esdras’ (above, note 97), pp. 172f., with exegetical traditions that actually identify ‘Uzayr as one of Daniel’s companions.

God whose names are variants on the theme of ʿ. In fact, it could have been Azariah-Raphael who generated the above-mentioned Azriel.

Very few of the angels and demons invoked in magic texts had stable personalities, and strange-sounding names proliferated, but to disapproving observers such as the rabbis, the names on the theme of ʿ invariably conjured up fallen angels or even the devil himself. The chances are that the same was true for the Messenger. In whatever form he may have heard the name of the offending son of God, he will have understood him as a rebellious angel and used him to unmask the wayward beliefs of the Jews: What they so stubbornly rejected him for was a demon.

If this is accepted, one would assume the transmission to have taken place via Iraq, as in the case of Hārūt and Mārūt. Of course, ʿUzayr could have entered via a different channel, but the Ethiopic *Book of Watchers* uses the forms Asael and, more commonly, Azazel,<sup>132</sup> making Ethiopia unlikely as a source for our verse. The form Azael is attested in both Syria and Iraq. In Greek it is attested in the fifth/sixth-century Codex Panopolitanus and the ninth-century Syncellus, in both of which it is the only form used (*Azaēl*); in the Christian(-Jewish?) amethyst, and in two magical texts from Egypt, the one dating from the fourth century, the other from the sixth or seventh century.<sup>133</sup> In Aramaic it appears on a Palestinian amulet,<sup>134</sup> in rabbinic sources<sup>135</sup> and on incantation bowls.<sup>136</sup> The related forms Uzael, Uziel and Azriel also appear in both Syria and Iraq.<sup>137</sup> We know from Justinian that there were Jews on the Byzantine side who denied that 'the angels exist as God's work and creation,' i.e., they held the angels to be uncreated (and thus divine), but whether they venerated a principal angel is not said.<sup>138</sup> It is in the Babylonian *Sefer Hekhalot* that the identification of Enoch/Metatron as the lesser God is attested, in circles associated with magic, just as it is

132 Black, *Book of Enoch* (above, note 60), p. 121.

133 Above, notes 8, 118; *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, ed. and transl. K. Preisendanz, II, Leipzig 1928–1931, nos. xxxvi, 174 (also Aziel); xlv, 3.

134 Above, note 119.

135 Cf. above, note 44.

136 Cf. above, notes 66, 120, 121.

137 Cf. above, notes 128–130.

138 Justinian (legislating in 553), Novella 146, *Peri Hebraiōn*, in A. Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation*, Detroit–Jerusalem 1987, pp. 406f. = p. 409. Practically all the voluminous literature on this novella is about Justinian's regulation of the language to be used in the synagogue. That he also legislates against Jews who deny the resurrection and the last judgement, as well as the createdness of the angels, seems to have passed virtually unnoticed.

here that the magical texts associate Azael with Metatron.<sup>139</sup> It is also on an Iraqi bowl text that we encounter the actual expression ‘sons of God’ in conjunction with (but not clearly identified as) Azael, Azael, and Azaziel.<sup>140</sup> One would thus assume Iraq to have been the source.

#### PROBLEM

So far, Casanova’s hypothesis seems to work wonders, but it raises one intractable problem: Why did the exegetes not recognize Azael behind his new name? The nearest we get to it is Muqātil’s claim that ‘Uzayr was described in the Pentateuch (*tawrāt*), by which, of course, he could simply have meant somewhere in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>141</sup> It is all the odder in that the exegetes effortlessly recognized the fallen angels behind their Iranian names of Hārūt and Mārūt.

It has to be stressed that the exegetical reaction to ‘Uzayr is peculiar even if we discard Casanova’s hypothesis, for given that the early exegetes knew very well that Jews did not deify Ezra, one would have expected them at the very least to have discussed the person intended before settling on the identification of Ezra and ‘Uzayr. Maybe they did. In the fragments of a Greek translation of the Qur’ān made before 870, possibly in Umayyad Syria, the Jews are accused of saying that *Israel* is the son of God.<sup>142</sup> In this formulation the charge makes perfect sense. In the so-called prayer of Joseph, Jacob declares himself to be ‘Israel, an angel of God and a ruling spirit ... the firstborn of every living thing’ (compare Colossians 1:15,

139 See the references given in notes 100, 120, and 121 above.

140 Thus the curse text mentioned above, note 66. In this text (which mixes Jewish, Christian, and pagan elements), the ‘lower foundation’ of the universe is occupied by seven ‘sons of God’ (*bny ’lhy*), who keep the universe together with seven powerful words; see Levene, *Corpus* (above, note 66), M163:9 and commentary). By origin, they are presumably a new version of the fallen angels, but whether the magician sees them as such is not clear. He proceeds to speak of the ‘sons of glory’ (line 13) and thereafter about the trio Azael, Azael and Azaziel, pressed under a mountain with their faces downwards (line 18). Levene thinks that the ‘sons of glory’ may be identical to the ‘sons of God’ (commentary to line 13), but he does not say whether he thinks the same could be true of the trio.

141 Comerro, ‘Esdras’ (above, note 97), p. 168, citing Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ad 112:1.

142 C. Høgel, ‘An Early Anonymous Greek Translation of the Qur’ān: The Fragments from Niketas Byzantios’ *Refutatio* and the Anonymous *Abjuratio*,’ *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 7 (2010), p. 71.

17, on Christ), as well as 'the archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief captain among the sons of God.'<sup>143</sup> This angel is also familiar from Christian, Manichaean and other Gnostic writings as well as from rabbinic texts.<sup>144</sup> But the Muslim exegetes do not seem to preserve any memory of this reading, and it is hard to see how *Isrā'īl* could have been misheard or misread as 'Uzayr. Maybe the Syrians had improved on the Qur'ānic text because it did not make sense to them. However this may be, all exegetes on record accepted that the Qur'ān spoke of 'Uzayr and unhesitatingly identified this figure as Ezra. As early as 170/786, in an inscription, a certain Sa'īd pronounces Muḥammad, Jesus and 'Uzayr, along with all created beings, to be *marbūbūn*, servants of God.<sup>145</sup> Apparently, the exegetes had grown up with the idea that Ezra was intended. If so, one wonders if Muḥammad did as well. 'God does not command you to take the angels and prophets as lords,' we are told in Q. 3:80: Did 'Uzayr belong in the category of prophets rather than that of angels to the speaker of those words? If he did, we are back where we started: How could the author of the Qur'ān claim that the Jews called Ezra the son of God?

✦ Either the Messenger's understanding is peculiar, or else that of the exegetes is: In effect, Casanova's hypothesis merely shifts the problem from the one to the other. It has to be said, however, that this is not the only occasion on which the exegetes settled, without discussion or disagreement, on what to a modern scholar looks like an obvious mistake; and in the other example, Q. 24:33, there can be no doubt that they did so in a departure from authorial intentions.<sup>146</sup> Of course, exegetes are everywhere in the habit of disregarding authorial intentions: They make of the revelation what they need. But they do not usually do so with complete lack of

143 Prayer of Joseph, fragment A, translated by J. Z. Smith in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigraphica*, II, New York 1985, p. 713; cf. the editorial introduction; and cf. Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 146, where the *logos* is God's firstborn and Israel.

144 For a succinct overview, see E. R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics*, Albany 1995, 4ff, where the (pre-Islamic) rabbinic material is discussed.

145 *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions from the Negev*, ed. and transl. Y. D. Nevo, Z. Cohen and D. Heftman, I, Sede Boqer 1993, p. 54, no. ST 640(34); cf. plate 34. My thanks to Haggai Ben Shammai for this reference.

146 Cf. P. Crone, 'Two Legal Problems Bearing on the Date of the Qur'ān,' *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 18 (1994), pp. 3ff. (reprinted in eadem, *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī: Religion, Law and Political Thought in the Near East, c. 600–c.1100*, Aldershot 2005), on the *kitāb* understood as a manumission document, though the context dictates that it is a marriage document.

hesitation or disagreement, least of all when they know their interpretation to be problematic. This suggests that the problem of ʿUzayr lies in the early history of Muslim exegesis rather than in the understanding of the Prophet, or in other words, that Casanova had the better hunch. Until that can be shown, however, the verdict on his theory must be ‘not proven.’ That the accusation in 9:30 refers to Jewish veneration of an angelic viceregent remains the most plausible solution; how this being acquired the name of ʿUzayr remains unclear.

#### CONCLUSION

Though Azael’s presence in 9:30 remains conjectural, the four other echoes of the *Book of Watchers* have at least done something to relate the Qurʾān to a well-documented context on the fringes of the Arab world in late antiquity. Relating the Qurʾānic material to earlier traditions could be said to be one of the most pressing needs for historians of the rise of Islam.<sup>147</sup> This is now coming to be generally recognized, after a long hiatus in which origin tracing acquired a bad name. One can see why it was rejected. Back in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a tendency for Western scholars to envisage Muḥammad as picking up bits and pieces of religious lore from his Jewish, Christian, and diverse other neighbours without much understanding of what they meant, in order to mix them all up and then use them in altogether different contexts in Mecca and Medina. Much work was done on where he had picked up his bits and pieces, but given the magpie model, it did not seem illuminating: What did it matter whether this came from Christianity and that from Judaism or somewhere else, if it had all been denatured in the process of transmission? More recent scholars, not unnaturally, found the interest of the ideas to lie less in their origin than in their meaning in the new contexts to which Muḥammad applied them. Origin-tracing never seemed to further our understanding of anything, but only to harp on the theme of the ‘parasitic dependence’ of Islam on earlier religions, as Reeves says.<sup>148</sup>

But religious (and all other) ideas do grow out of earlier ideas, by tiny incremental changes. Even revolutionary changes are achieved by very

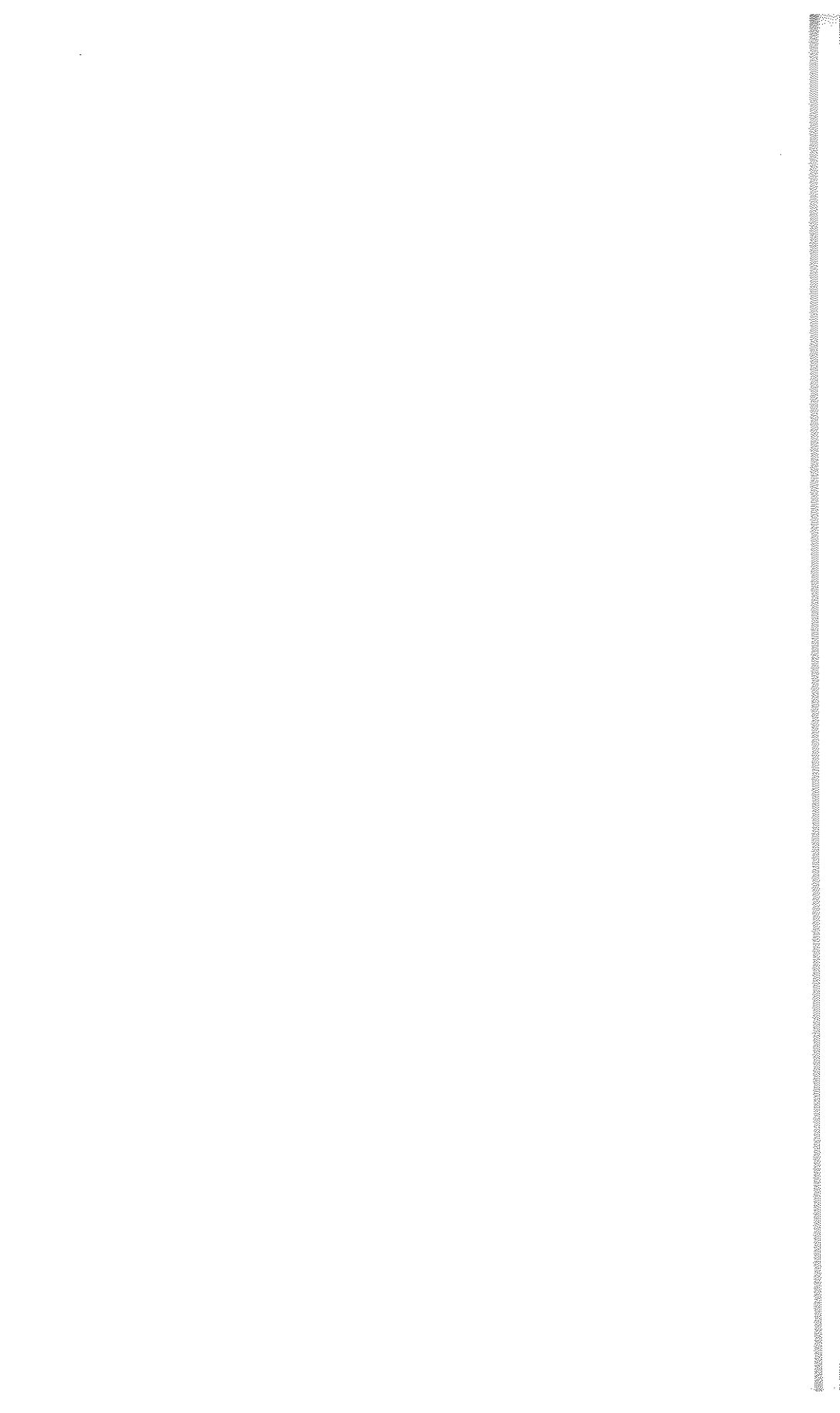
147 See F. E. Peters, ‘The Quest of the Historical Muhammad,’ *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 23 (1991), pp. 292f.

148 Reeves, *Bible and Qurʾān* (above, note 2), Introduction, p. ix.

small steps, and though the older literature never showed these steps – merely a haphazard collection of information and mistakes, as if Islam had arisen by misunderstanding – there was more than prejudice to the picture it presented. The Orientalists were reacting to the fact that it was, and remains, extremely difficult to overcome the sense that Islam arose in a world apart. The tribal societies evoked in pre-Islamic poetry – the *ayyām*, Ibn Hishām, or al-Wāqidī – are so utterly different from the Near East described in Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, Coptic or Iranian works that one automatically classifies ideas which can be shown to have originated in the non-Arabian Near East as ‘foreign elements,’ or in other words, as features appearing out of their normal context, so that they have to be explained by mechanisms such as traders accidentally picking up this and that on their journeys.

What we see in the Qur’ānic treatment of the fallen angels in the four (possibly five) passages examined here, however, is not the impressions of a passerby who had picked up some ancient story without much sense of what it meant to his informants. What we see is the story in the context to which it had come to belong by late antique times, complete with the magic practices it was held to explain and the angry sense of being outflanked by disreputable people that the situation induced in the observer. Wherever or whenever the encounter(s) took place, the observer is *engaging* with the tradition as it looked in his time, not simply plundering it, let alone getting things wrong. Looking back, we can follow the tradition he grappled with until it disappears in the dawn of history; looking forward, we can see what it came to mean to his many followers thereafter down until today. Islam here grows by imperceptible steps, however drastic the observer’s reaction, out of the environment that came before it, creating a new one as it does so. It would be enormously illuminating if we could see the entire Qur’ān in this way.





## PREFACE

The present volume is the product of a conference held in 2005 at the Institute for Advanced Studies (now the Israel Institute for Advanced Studies) in Jerusalem to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the passing of Shlomo Pines (1908–1990). The colloquium held in his memory was conceived to reflect as far as possible the manifold areas of his interest and the masterly ingenuity of his scholarship. Even by assembling a fairly large team of scholars, however, it was impossible to cover the full scope of his scholarly oeuvre. The conference's theme, which is also the title of the present volume, aimed at highlighting the common thread linking the diverse contributions to it: prominent examples of contact between cultures in antiquity and in the Medieval period. This theme also highlights Pines's particular talent for spotting covert connections between diverse literary and cultural expressions.

The papers assembled in this volume give a glimpse of the many fascinating insights that can be obtained by examining interactions between religious traditions and schools of thought. The participants, some of them Pines's former students and all of them contributors to the field of cross-cultural studies, sought to explore meaningful areas in the transmission of literary and intellectual content across the boundaries of religions and cultures.

One such area, addressed by many of the articles in this volume, is that of contacts between Islam on the one hand and Judaism and Christianity on the other, especially in the field of science. Two papers, by Haggai Ben-Shammai and Patricia Crone, deal with the meaning of Koranic terms that seem to reflect Jewish and Christian concepts – a discussion from which the Koran passages in which these terms appear gain some depth of meaning. The influence exerted by Ibn Sīnā on Maimonides in relation to the notion of prayer and intellectual worship is the topic of Steven Harvey's contribution.

Sarah Stroumsa's paper is concerned with the so-called translation movement, which yielded the translation of Greek philosophical works into Arabic, often through the intermediary of a translation into Pahlavi or Syriac. Stroumsa suggests some corrections to the new view of this movement recently framed by Dimitri Gutas.

The studies by Warren Zev Harvey and Josep Puig Montada pursue connections between Jewish thinkers and the philosophical schools developed in Islam and Christianity. Harvey argues that Ḥasḏai Crescas should in a

sense be understood as belonging both to the Muslim tradition and to the contemporary school of Christian philosophy. Puig Montada demonstrates that Eliahu del Medigo maintained his adherence to Averroes while conducting a dialogue with the Latin authors who tried to solve the difficulties of harmonizing Christian doctrine and faith with Aristotle's philosophy.

Two more papers deal with the transmission and diffusion of knowledge between and within the dispersed Jewish communities of the Middle Ages. Gad Freudenthal discusses how two outstanding twelfth-century scholars, Abraham Ibn Ezra and Judah Ibn Tibbon, served as intermediaries propagating the scholarship developed in Muslim Spain and bringing it to the Jewish communities of Christian Europe. James T. Robinson traces the propagation of philosophical ideas in the Jewish communities of southern France. The two works selected to illustrate this trend, Jacob Anatoli's *Malmad hatalmidim* and Menahem ben Solomon haMe'iri's *Commentary on Proverbs*, show a degree of Jewish openness to Christian philosophical wisdom. Anatoli quotes in his biblical exegesis from the works of Christian thinkers, and these quotations are borrowed again by Me'iri.

Tzvi Langermann, dealing with a Hebrew composition preserved in a manuscript kept in the Vatican, unearths an early layer of Jewish philosophical speculation in the author's polemic against the claim for the eternity of the world. Yehuda Liebes, who has already dealt elsewhere with Solomon Ibn Gabirol's famous philosophical poem 'I Love You,' here provides a likely clue to the origin of the riddle at its heart, in the second of Plato's Epistles.

The article by Shaul Shaked deals with the transfer of popular wisdom from a Zoroastrian source into Islam, via a translation into Arabic. The Arabic text is preserved in an anthology of wisdom works from various sources prepared by Miskawayhi, a prolific Arabic author of Persian descent. Absorption of wisdom from various sources, including the adoption of pre-Islamic Iranian lore by Islamic literati, was a typical trait of Islamic literature in its formative period.

The editors hope that this collection of essays will contribute to a better understanding of the enormous movement of borrowing and translation in which Muslims, Christians and Jews took part in the early centuries of the Islamic era and well into the Medieval period.

Our thanks go out, first of all, to the participants in the conference and in this volume, both for the quality and sparkle of their contributions and for their patience and cooperation in a publication process that took much

longer than expected. It is our hope that the final outcome will be found to have been worth the effort. We wish to thank Deborah Greniman, Senior Editor of English-Language Publications in the Publications Department of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, for expertly bringing the preparation of the copy to a successful conclusion. We are grateful to Miriam Himmelfarb, whose initial round of copy editing created a uniform book out of a diverse assemblage of papers, and to Esther Rosenberg, whose skilled proofreading uncovered the last remaining errors. Tali Amir, Director of the Academy's Publications Department, skillfully oversaw the volume's preparation.

We remember with gratitude the late Professor Haim Tadmor, Vice President of the Israel Academy, for agreeing to include this book among the publications of the Israel Academy in its Humanities series. Prof. Yohanan Friedmann, former Chairperson of the Academy's Publications Committee, was also instrumental in advancing the publication of this book.

The Editors

Jerusalem, December 2012