

Eschatology and the Qur'an

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter offers a wide-ranging survey of the principal ideas in the Qur'an concerning 'the last things' or 'eschatology'. The focus here will be on the powerful imagery that the Qur'an employs in its portrayal of such things as the signs which herald the 'Hour' or the 'End of Time', namely the apocalyptic cessation of this world and the end of life on earth; the resurrection and judgement of the dead and their attendant reward or punishment in the afterlife; and the reign of God's eternal kingdom in a world-to-come. Emphasis will also be placed on the manner in which these key Qur'anic eschatological themes are approached in contemporary scholarship.

Keywords: afterlife, apocalypse, end-time/end of Time, eschatology, judgement/day of judgement/divine judgement, resurrection

THE apocalyptic cessation of this world, the end of human life, and resurrection of the dead, divine judgement, and God's ultimate and eternal kingdom of the heavens and the earth (Q. 2:107; 48:14) to be established in a world-to-come, are issues central to the Qur'anic message. Indeed, confidence in the truth of these 'last things', expressed on numerous occasions in Islam's sacred scripture, forms the foundation of several articles of Islamic faith. Eschatological statements of this kind underscore the recognition of God's unity or 'oneness' (*tawhīd*) and His omnipotence. They also provide the ground for Islamic creeds such as the belief in the immortality of the soul, in bodily resurrection and divine judgement, as well as in the existence of paradise and hell as real worlds. The eschatological developments heralded in the Qur'an are thus distinctive for their twofold function: on the one hand, they are related as crucial warnings of the approaching end of the world and of life as it is known. On the other, they convey great hope and joy, with their promise of a new beginning for all existence after Doomsday and the reality of eternal life and human fulfilment.

Throughout history the Qur'anic concepts of the final things have fuelled intense debates in the Muslim world about accountability for deeds in this life, as effected through reward and punishment in the next. Thus, the Qur'anic concepts of 'the end' lend dynamic

form and content to Muslim life, whether on religious, political, and cultural levels, or concerning individual, communal, and societal aspects. This is true of the eschatological theories advanced by Muslim scholars, and of related ideas current in Muslim 'lay piety' and in daily life. It applies to Sunnī, Shī'ī, and other Muslim identities past and present. Moreover, these ideas have also been critical points of encounter between the Muslim world and the 'West'.

Since E. Pococke's (1705) and Th. Arnold's (1746) treatments of the eschatology of Islam, probably the first such works of note in Western scholarship, a great number of studies have appeared in European languages, with various foci and approaches. Thematic overviews introduce the eschatology in the Qur'an, in the Sunna, and in the (p. 473) Muslim dogmatic, philosophical, and apologetic writings (Rüling 1895; Stieglecker 1959–62; and van Ess 1991–7: 4:521–34, 543–561). Other examinations analyse more specific topics, such as the individual spiritual life in the context of eschatology (Massignon 1922; Corbin 1971), Shī'ī eschatological views (Ayoub 1978; Sachedina 1981), and Sunnī interpretations (Smith and Haddad 1981). The eschatological discourses in Qur'anic exegesis (Böwering 1980); Islamic history (Donner 2010; more radically by Shoemaker 2012); Islamic mysticism (Schimmel 1975; Ernst 1985); the Qur'an; and Babi thought (Lawson 2011) have been assessed; and the characteristics of suras with overarching eschatological themes have received brilliant elucidation (Neuwirth 2011, 2017). The provocative argument that sees the birth of Islam as an apocalyptic movement (Casanova 1911–13) was taken up recently (Cook 2002) and the view that the Qur'an as a whole is an apocalyptic text (Lawson 2012, 2017 a, b). The geographical and religious implications of realms in the world beyond sensory perception, the legal dimensions of reward and punishment in the hereafter, and the diversity and specifics of eschatological concepts in the Qur'an and Islamic traditions have received in-depth attention (Rustomji 2009; Lange 2008, 2015; and Günther/Lawson 2017, the latter with an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary sources on Islamic eschatology and concepts of the hereafter, in major European languages as well as in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish).

The End of This World

The Qur'an says more, comparatively, about the end of the world, resurrection, final judgement, and a world-to-come than any other sacred scripture. No fewer than fifty-six suras from an early stage of Muḥammad's prophethood, and eleven suras revealed later in Medina, address eschatological issues in various ways. Themes range from the initial signs of 'the Hour', or the 'End Time', to divine judgement, to rewards or punishment in the afterlife. (Particularly explicit and evocative portrayals are found in Q. 23:101–18; 37:31–49 and 60–6; 39:68–75; 69:13–37; 70:1–35, and 76:12–22.) Although no clear chronological order of the 'final events' is given, the Qur'an does indicate clearly that there will be an absolute termination of all life and existence (*fanā'*), as 'everything will perish' (if only even temporarily) except God's face (Q. 28:88; 55:26–7), to be followed by

a second creation in the hereafter (Q. 29:20). (On 'the face (*wajh*) of God' as an image firmly rooted in the ancient Near Eastern heritage, see Rippin 2000).

While contemporary Western scholarship has a continued strong interest in an analytical 'mapping' of the Qur'anic hereafter (Rustomji 2009; Günther 2011), comparing these findings with statements in the Bible and other religious traditions (Bijlefeld 2004; Tubach et al. 2010), and a fresh scrutiny of major perceptions of Qur'anic eschatology based on their own merits (Günther/Lawson 2017), the focus has shifted to include the study of the characteristic and definitive structure of eschatological discourse in the Qur'an (Neuwirth 1984, 2011, 2017), the interrelation of apocalyptic and epic literary (p. 474) topics and motifs in Qur'anic eschatology (Lawson 2014, 2017 a, 2017b, and the understanding of eschatological themes in the Qur'an as foundational for the origins of Islam (Cook 2003, 2005; Donner 2010, 2017). Similarly innovative research has been done on the ways in which an individual's or a community's actions and existence on earth will be judged in the hereafter in relation to human existence in the here and now (Lange 2008, 2015), and the implications of Islamicate eschatological discourses for inter-religious dialogue (Khalil 2013).

The Final Hour and its Signs

Numerous Qur'anic statements warn of the '**the Hour**' (*al-sā'a*), as the Qur'an frequently calls the all-decisive *eschaton* (from Greek ἔσχατα, 'the final things'). Other designations include *ghāshiya* (an 'overwhelming [hour of disaster and punishment]', Q. 12:107), *al-wāqi'a* ('the occurring [hour of terror]', Q. 56:1), *al-ḥāqqa* ('the indubitable' or 'inevitable [reality of the hour]', Q. 69:1-3), and *al-qāri'a* ('[the hour of] the crashing blow', Q. 101:1).

An especially evocative description of the signs and '**conditions of the Hour**' (*ashrāt al-sā'a*) is included in *Sūrat al-Takwīr* (81) ('Shrouded in Darkness'), a Qur'anic chapter revealed in Mecca. Here humankind is warned:

¹When the sun is shrouded in darkness, ²when the stars are dimmed, ³when the mountains are set in motion, ⁴when pregnant camels are abandoned, ⁵when wild beasts are herded together, ⁶when the seas boil over, ⁷when the souls are sorted into classes, ⁸when the baby girl buried alive is asked ⁹for what sin she was killed, ¹⁰when the records of deeds are spread open, ¹¹when the sky is stripped away, ¹²when hell is made to blaze ¹³and paradise brought near: ¹⁴then every soul will know what it has brought about.

The Qur'an indicates that God has already determined the time of the Hour's occurrence; and that He is 'delaying it only for a specified period' (Q. 11:104). It is certain that the Hour 'draws near' (Q. 54:1). In fact, 'its signs are already here' (Q. 47:18). However, because God alone knows when exactly it occurs (Q. 43:85; 41:47) the Prophet Muḥammad was commanded to say: 'I do not know whether what you have been warned about is near, or whether a distant time has been appointed for it by my Lord' (Q. 72:25). In other words, the exact point in time when the Hour will occur is unknown to humankind; it may

be in the near future or in a far-distant time. Muḥammad warns of severe punishment awaiting those who persist in blasphemy (Q. 10:70)—in which he is like Noah, warning of the Deluge (Q. 26:115; see also *Sūrat Nūḥ* [71]), or Moses and other messengers and prophets after him, who were sent to give their people 'a clear warning' of the torment to come 'on a painful Day', if they do not abandon their sinful ways and worship only God (Q. 11:25–6).

(p. 475) In modern scholarship, O'Shaughnessy (1969, 1991), for example, places the Qur'anic references to death (and killing) in a wider eschatological context and compares them with biblical concepts. Meier (1971) emphasizes the unique centrality of the eschatological concept of 'the Hour' for the Islamic religion, while Stieglecker (1959–62: 747–55) and Smith (2002) expose the characteristics of the signs and conditions of 'the Hour'.

Signs of the End Time in History

Muslim scholarship elaborates considerably on Qur'anic end-time scenarios of this kind. In the hadith literature—the prophetic tradition—for example, the Prophet Muḥammad is quoted as saying, 'The Hour and I have been sent like these two—and he pointed to [or 'joined'] his index and middle fingers' (Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, 3:124; see also Bashear 1993: 75–99). Thus Muḥammad is often seen as the quintessential 'apostle of the end of time', because the world's inexorable move towards the Day of Judgement began with the advent of his prophethood (Donner 2010: 78; and, with a number of controversial ideas, Shoemaker 2012: 118–36).

Although nothing in the Qur'an explicitly points to historical events that would indicate the advent of the beginning of the end of the world, it is stated that the Hour of the End Time will occur suddenly and quickly (Q. 7:187). An earthquake will shake the world so severely that 'every nursing mother will think no more of her baby, every pregnant female will miscarry, you will think people are drunk when they are not' (Q. 22:2).

Other Qur'anic statements specify certain 'major signs of the Hour' (*alamāt al-sā'a al-kubrā*): (1) Gog and Magog, two savage peoples whom Alexander the Great (Dhū'l-Qarnayn) had constrained by a huge iron barrier, will be released and 'race down from every slope' (Q. 18:93–9; 21:96; cf. also Ezek. 38:39). (2) God will bring 'a creature out of the earth (*dābbat al-arḍ*), which will tell them that people had no faith in Our revelations' (Q. 27:82; cf. also Rev. 13:13–16 and other parallels in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and minor prophets). Moreover, (3) the sky will bring forth 'clouds of smoke' (Q. 44:10) and (4) Jesus will appear as 'a portent of the hour' (Q. 43:61), alternatively, the pronoun *hu* can also be seen as referring to the Qur'an. The advent of the Antichrist (Dajjāl) and his killing by Jesus as signs of the approaching Hour are not mentioned in the Qur'an. These ideas are based on prophetic traditions, as is the oft-quoted eschatological view that at the dawn of the Last Day, the sun will rise in the West. (For the Jewish and Christian background of these ideas, see esp. Robinson 2001; the understanding of political events and movements in early and later Islamic history as typically apocalyptic in nature, and the ideological concerns prompting apocalyptic concepts in Islam, are advanced by Cook 2002; while

Stowasser 2004 and 2014: 25–30, examines messianic claims and the end time in the Islamic calendar).

The appearance of a messianic figure, the *mahdī* or Guided One, who 'redeems' Islam, is significant in both Sunnī and Shī'ī sources of later times, even though the term *mahdī* as such does not appear in the Qur'an. Furthermore, in Shī'ī beliefs the *qā'im* or 'one who will arise' (eventually identified as the *mahdī*) renews the lost sense of the sacred, (p. 476) and spreads justice and equity throughout the world (Ghaemmaghani 2017). After the *mahdī*'s death, either of natural causes or, according to some traditions, killed by the forces of darkness, a period of turmoil and chaos follows before the world collapses and the Day of Resurrection occurs.

The Hereafter

The Day of Judgment and its Many Names

The remarkable variety of Qur'anic designations for the Last Day illustrates both its general importance and the thematic scope of the 'events' which Islam's revealed scripture associates with it. It is called 'the Day of Doom' (*yawm al-dīn*, e.g. Q. 1:4; 13 times), 'the Day of Resurrection' (*yawm al-qiyāma*, e.g. Q. 2:85; 70 times), 'the Last Day' (*al-yawm al-ākhir*, e.g. Q. 2:8; 38 times), 'a mighty/dreadful day' (*yawm 'azīm*, Q. 6:15; 10 times), 'a great day' (*yawm kabīr*, Q. 11:3), 'a painful day' (*yawm alīm*, Q. 11:26; 43:65), 'an encompassing, inevitable day' (*yawm muḥīt*, Q. 11:84), 'a tempestuous day' (*yawm 'āṣif*, Q. 14:18), 'a day herein shall be neither bargaining nor befriending' (*yawm lā bay' fīhi wa-lā khulla/khilāl*, Q. 2:254; 14:31), the 'Day of the Appointed Time' (*yawm al-waqt al-ma'lūm*, Q. 15:38; 38:81), 'an [everything] destroying day' (*yawm 'aqīm*, Q. 22:55), 'a hard day' (*yawm 'asir/'asīr*, Q. 54:8; 74:9), 'an appointed day' (*yawm ma'lūm*, Q. 56:50); 'a frowning and wrathful day' (*yawm 'abūs qamṭarīr*, Q. 76:10); 'a hard grievous day' (*yawm thaqīl*, Q. 76:27); and 'the Promised Day' (*al-yawm al-maw'ūd*, Q. 85:2), yet this is but a sampling of the many terms used in the Qur'an for this concept (Günther 1988).

The Blast of the Trumpet

Resurrection and divine judgement will be signalled by the blast of the divine Trumpet (*nāqūr* in 74:8; *ṣūr* in other suras). 'When the Trumpet is sounded a single time, when the earth and its mountains are raised high and then crushed with a single blow, on that Day the Great Event will come to pass' (Q. 69:13–15). On this Day of the Crushing Blow, 'people will be like scattered moths and the mountains like tufts of wool' (Q. 101:4–5). 'Wild beasts are herded together' and 'the seas boil over' (Q. 81:5–6). 'The mountains... will float away like clouds' (27:88). They will be blasted into dust and 'leave a flat plain with no peak or trough to be seen' (Q. 20:105–107).

Now, 'the sun is shrouded in darkness, ... the stars are dimmed' (Q. 81:1–2); the moon is eclipsed and 'the sun and the moon are brought together' (Q. 75:8–9). The sky 'turns

crimson, like red hide' (Q. 55:37). The sky will be like molten brass (Q. 70:8). It 'sways back and forth' (Q. 52:9) and will eventually be torn apart (Q. 78:18), apparently so that the angels will be 'sent down in streams' (Q. 25:25).

(p. 477) Resurrection

In stark contrast to the Qur'an's image of pre-Islamic Arabia where the belief in one life and one death prevailed, the Qur'anic creed that those 'turned to bones and dust, shall ... be raised up in a new act of creation' (Q. 17:49) offers comfort, and the hope that death is not the end, but a new beginning. Moreover, the Qur'anic assurance of resurrection underscores God's omnipotence, as the dead shall be revived even 'if you were [as hard as] stone, or iron, or any other substance you think hard to bring to life' (Q. 17:50-1). 'God is certainly able to bring [the dead] back to life' (Q. 86:8), since He is 'the one who created you from clay and specified a term [for you] to live and another fixed time [for you to be resurrected]' (Q. 6:2). He 'is the One who originates creation and will do it again [at the end of time]' (Q. 30:27). God causes a human being 'to die and be buried'. But 'when He wills, He will raise him up again' (Q. 80:21-22).

Proof of such divine miracles in the hereafter is, according to the Qur'an, plain to see in the here and now. The cycle of nature is mentioned to illustrate this: 'there is a sign ... in the lifeless earth: We give it life and We produce grain from it . . . ; We have put gardens of date palms and grapes in the earth, and We have made springs of water gush out of it' (Q. 36:33-34). In fact, this is an easy undertaking for God, as the Qur'an insists, since 'creating and resurrecting all of you is only like creating or resurrecting a single soul' (Q. 31:28).

The Qur'an supports the idea that human bodies will be recreated in the shape they had on earth. Those who doubt the resurrection should remember that God 'created you from dust, then a drop of fluid, then a clinging form, then a lump of flesh, both shaped and unshaped' (Q. 22:5). Moreover, man should know that God 'can reshape his very fingertips' (Q. 75:4) on the day when 'when souls are sorted into classes' (Q. 81:7) before they are reunited with their respective bodies.

On that Day of Resurrection, **the disbelievers'** hearts will tremble and eyes will be downcast' (Q. 79:8-9). Their 'eyes will stare in terror. They will rush forward, craning their necks, unable to divert their eyes, a gaping void in their hearts' (Q. 14:42-43). The sinful will be gathered sightless, not remembering how long they stayed on earth (or in the grave) (Q. 20:102-104; 46:35). The **believers**, though, and in fact 'all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good'—here expressly including Jews, Christians, and Sabians—'will have their rewards with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve' (Q. 2:62). Along these lines, the disbelievers among the jinn as well are said to be doomed to hell (Q. 6:128; 11:119; 32:13), while it is implicit that the believers among the jinn will go to paradise.

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As for the **signs** signalling resurrection, the Qur'an states that revivification of the dead will take place 'when the earth is levelled out, casts out its contents, and becomes empty' (Q. 84:3-4). It will occur 'on the Day when the blast reverberates and the second blast follows' (Q. 79:6-7). Resurrection is immediately connected to a single blast of the Trumpet in most Qur'anic passages. Only Q. 39:68 specifies that, when the Trumpet will be sounded for the first time, 'everyone in the heavens and earth will fall down senseless (p. 478) except those God spares'. Then, the Trumpet 'will be sounded once again and they will be on their feet, looking on'.

With the awakening of the dead, a 'caller' (archangel Isrāfil, or archangel Gabriel, according to some exegetes) 'will call from a nearby place' (the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, as later Muslim tradition indicates) so that the dead come out from their graves (Q. 50:41).

Reckoning

On the Day of Reckoning, eight angels 'will bear the throne of your Lord above them' (Q. 69:17). The resurrected will be called to the place of judgement by an angel called 'the summoner from whom there is no escape' (Q. 20:108). 'Each person will arrive attended by one [angel] to drive him on and another to bear witness' (Q. 50:21), so that the resurrected line up to eventually meet their Lord (*liqā'* Allāh, as in Q. 6:31). God Himself will conduct the reckoning (*ḥisāb*) of each person. He will do so individually and instantly, as He 'is swift in reckoning' (Q. 2:202).

On that Day, 'the evildoers' excuses will be of no use to them: they will not be allowed to make amends' (Q. 30:57). But for those who are on God's side, who believe and are conscious of God, 'for them there is good news in this life and in the Hereafter—there is no changing the promises of God' (Q. 10:62-4).

Deeds and actions executed in this world will be reckoned as registered in heavenly books by 'watchers, noble recorders who know what you do' (Q. 82:11-12). Apparently, each person has his or her individual record, which will be brought out for each and 'spread wide open' so that he or she will be commanded 'read your record' (Q. 17:13-14). Nations also have a 'book' of their own, and on the Day of Reckoning, every community will be seen kneeling, 'summoned to its record', and be told, 'Today you will be repaid for what you did' (Q. 45:28). While the mouths of people shall be sealed up, 'their hands will speak' to God, and 'their feet bear witness to everything they have done' (Q. 36:65). Even the earth will bear witness. 'People will come forward in separate groups to be shown their deeds;' they will see the smallest good and the smallest evil they had done (Q. 99:6-8). Eventually, it is said, angels and prophets will bear witness for individuals and entire communities, respectively (Q. 2:143; 16:89).

The divine balance (*mīzān*) will be erected, and 'the weighing of deeds will be true and just. Those whose good deeds are heavy on the scales' will prosper, and 'those whose good deeds are light' will have lost their souls. Disbelievers in God and His messages 'will remain in hell' (Q. 7:8-9; 23:103; 23: 43-74; 101:6-9).

Judgement and Retribution

The Day of Judgement is a day of uncompromised ruling and final verdict, but it is apparently also a time of festive celebration and the triumph of divine power and justice.

(p. 479) 'The earth will shine with the light of its Lord; the Record of Deeds will be laid open; the prophets and witnesses will be brought in' so that divine judgement may begin. 'Fair judgment will be given between them: they will not be wronged and every soul will be repaid in full for what it has done' (Q. 39:69–70). Hence, whoever arrives at the place of judgement (*maqām*) with a good deed will be 'rewarded with something better'. Such persons will be 'secure from the terrors of that Day' and enter paradise. Yet, anyone coming with evil deeds 'will be cast face downwards into the Fire' (Q. 27:89–90).

Consistent with the overall division of humankind and jinn into three classes—the disbelievers (Q. 55:41–5), the ordinary believers (55:62–77), and the best of the believers (55:46–61)—on the Day of Judgement people will be grouped in three classes: 'those on the Left' who will go to hell; 'those on the Right' who will go to paradise; and 'those in front—ahead indeed' in terms of faith and good works, who will be the first to enjoy the bliss of paradise (Q. 56:7–10).

Jews and Christians, along with the ancient monotheistic community of the Sabians, and the Zoroastrians (called Magians in the Qur'an) will also be resurrected and judged alongside the Muslims (Q. 22:17). In fact, 'all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good' need not fear nor grieve, since God will reward them (Q. 2:62). Other Qur'anic statements similarly stress that all the monotheists may hope for paradise as long as they are virtuous and do good during their earthly lives (Q. 2:111–112). Furthermore, Jesus is quoted in the Qur'an as appealing to the Jews to 'worship God, my Lord and your Lord' so that they may be spared from hell and permitted entrance into the Garden (Q. 5:72). Belief in all of God's messengers is an essential precondition for entering paradise, because 'God will give [due] rewards to those who believe in Him and His messengers' (Q. 4:152). The idolaters, however, will be doomed to the torments of hell (Q. 2:165, 167; Günther 2017).

The bridge (or pathway) set up above and across hell, over which the faithful will reach paradise, is not expressly mentioned in the Qur'an. The expression *ṣirāṭ al-jaḥīm* is used in later Islamic tradition to speak, often in elaborate terms, of a bridge spanning over the Fire, which believers will cross effortlessly while all others slip downward into hell. This 'straight path' or 'bridge' (*ṣirāṭ*) (cf. Q. 1:6–7) appears to be a reflection of a pre-Islamic Zoroastrian concept (Tisdall 1905: 217, 251–3; for a general discussion, see Saleh 2010: 665–70).

Paradise and Hell

The Qur'an provides uniquely detailed descriptions of the geography of the world beyond human sensory perceptions. As for the structure of the heavens, it is recurrently stated, for example, that God created 'seven heavens' (Q. 67:3) or 'firmaments' (Q. 78:12). Hell, in turn, is said to have 'seven gates' (Q. 15:44). Paradise is said to consist of a multitude

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of luscious gardens, with lovely trees, an endless supply of food, and lofty buildings provided for believers (Q. 25:75; 29:58; 39:20). Green, the dominant colour of lavish garden landscapes, thus became a symbol in Islam of paradise itself, with all its delights (p. 480) and tranquillity. Other distinct features include invigorating beverages: water, a symbol of life in the Qur'an (Q. 21:30), is represented by heavenly rivers of fresh water, 'forever pure', and by 'rivers of milk forever fresh, rivers of wine, a delight for those who drink, and rivers of honey clarified and pure' (Q. 47:15), along with the numerous springs and fountains in the many gardens of paradise (Lawson 2008; Subtelny 2008). For the etymology of the word 'paradise' and its conception as a garden in the Bible and the ancient Near East, see Bremmer (2008: 36–55).

The generic name in the Qur'an for paradise is *janna* (used more than 66 times, including the dual *jannatān*, 4 times; plus 3 instances of the plural *jannāt*). Traditionally, *janna* is linked to the Hebrew word *gan* (Gen. 2:8), meaning 'garden' or 'enclosure', while more recent studies note that the Arabic root of the verb j-n-n indicates 'being covered and protected', and the related word *junna* means 'shield' and *jinn*, something 'unseen' (Kinberg 2004: 12–15).

Other names referring to paradise are 'abode of peace' (*dār al-salām*), 'gardens of refuge' (*jannāt al-ma'wā*), and 'gardens of comfort and happiness' (*jannāt al-na'īm*). In addition, the high domain of 'equilibrium and perpetuity' (*ʿadn*) is believed to be the Qur'anic equivalent of the biblical Garden of Eden. Finally, there is, according to most commentators, the seventh, highest, largest, and most beautiful garden of paradise, *jannāt firdaws* (or just *al-firdaws*), where the throne of God floats and the rivers of paradise rise, to run through all gardens of paradise. According to Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), however, *ʿadn* is the highest of the heavens, or its citadel (*qaṣaba*) (Günther 2011).

The Qur'anic paradise is 'the garden of bliss' (*jannat na'īm*, Q. 56:89), whose dwellers rest on 'couches lined with brocade' (Q. 55:54), on 'green cushions and lovely rugs' (Q. 55:76). The inhabitants of paradise will be invited to 'eat and drink with wholesome appetite!' (Q. 69:24), as paradise is a 'garden, in which they will delight' (*rawḍa yuḥbarūn*, Q. 30:15). This Qur'anic idea of reward in another life resembles the ancient Greek concept of eternal bliss, where the virtuous and blessed rest 'on couches at a feast, everlastingly drunk, crowned with garlands' (an image found, for example, in Plato, *The Republic*, book ii, p. 52).

Paradise in the Qur'an is also named 'the gardens of eternal retreat' (*jannat al-khuld*, Q. 25:15). It is 'recompense and homecoming', 'promised to the God-fearing' (Q. 25:15) and to 'those who suffered hurt in [God's] way, and fought, and were slain' (Q. 3:193). 'They shall have what they desire, dwelling [therein] forever' (Q. 25:15–16). This 'is a promise binding upon thy Lord', as the Qur'an confirms (Q. 25:16).

More evocative Qur'anic descriptions of paradise famously refer to 'purified spouses' (Q. 2:25) waiting in paradise as rewards for the believers. They are described as 'wide-eyed maidens, restraining their glances' (Q. 37:48; 55:56), and as maidens 'untouched beforehand by man or jinn'. However, the actual meaning of the Qur'anic expression in question

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here, *ḥūr 'īn*, traditionally understood as 'wide-eyed [maidens] with a deep black pupil' or 'white skinned women', denoting 'virgins of paradise', has been discussed controversially in modern scholarship (Luxenberg 2007: 247–83 suggested the meaning 'white grapes' instead; for refutations of this reading, see Jarrar 2002 and Griffith 2017). Likewise, 'young boys serving wine' are mentioned on more than one occasion (p. 481) (Q. 56:17; 76:19) to add to the image of a place where every desire of the body and wish of the mind will come true.

Hell is most frequently termed 'the Fire' (*al-nār*) in the Qur'an. Other designations are 'place (or state) of pain and torment' (*jahannam*; *gehenna* in Greek, and *gêhinnōm* in Hebrew) and, similarly, 'intense Fire' (*jahīm*). It is also termed 'abyss' (*hāwiya*), 'fierce blaze' (*sa'īr*), 'brightly burning, raging Fire' (*lazzā*), 'hot-burning Fire' (*saqar*), and 'crushing Fire' (*ḥuṭām*). Hell is the location of the 'Fire prepared for the disbelievers, whose fuel is men and stones' (Q. 2:24). Here, scalding water will be poured over the heads of the disbelievers, 'melting their insides as well as their skins; there will be iron crooks to restrain them; whenever, in their anguish, they try to escape, they will be pushed back in and told, "Taste the suffering of the Fire" ' (Q. 22:19–22). Hell is an evil place, the site of agonizing torment, and burning in the flames (Q. 56:88–94). Hellfire is guarded by nineteen angels, while God made their number 'a test for the disbelievers' (Q. 74:30–1). The tree of Zaqqūm, which grows at the heart of the blazing Fire and has fruits shaped like devils' heads, will be the food for the sinners: hot 'as molten metal, it boils in their bellies like seething water' (Q. 37:62–8; 44:43–6). The unbelievers and sinners will experience in hell a symbolic 'second death', the death of the soul; as the Qur'an states that they 'have lost their souls, dwelling [in hell] forever' (Q. 23:103).

The pictorial style of the Qur'anic passages on paradise and hell perfectly fulfils its dual mission of reassuring Muslim believers on the one hand, and urging non-Muslims to convert to Islam on the other (see also Subtelny 2010: 56–9).

The Qur'an stresses that strict adherence to an ethical lifestyle is a precondition for divine reward, while disbelief and immoral behaviour lead straight to hell: paradise is the realm of eternal happiness promised to those men and women who obey God and his Messenger; to those who are righteous, truthful, and who bear witness to the truth (Q. 4:69), while hell is the abode of the damned, the site of physical torment, and 'a foul resting place' (Q. 3:12) for unbelievers, evildoers, and the wicked.

Whether paradise and hell, and thus divine reward and punishment, are eternal was a question of much concern to medieval Muslim scholars and seems to be answered in the positive: for example, the Qur'an states that evildoers will be punished in hell and 'remain in it eternally' (*khālidīna fīha*, Q. 3:88) and they will suffer a 'lasting torment' (*'adhab muqīm*, Q. 5:37). Similarly, God will admit the fortunate into paradise and it shall be their 'everlasting Home' (Q. 35:35) where 'they will remain forever' (Q. 4:57, 98:8) (see also Abrahamov 2002: 87–102).

Based on the respective Qur'an references, the various majoritarian (Sunnī) theological approaches share a belief in resurrection of the body. The spirit (*nafs* or *rūh*, depending on definition), which proceeds from God, rejoins the resurrected body and both become immortal (cf. Sells 2006: 116; Wensinck 1932: 129–30, 195, 268). The belief in bodily resurrection, where body and soul are reunited, is of principle theological and philosophical significance: it is seen as a powerful sign of God's omnipotence; it supplements and supports the overall human trust in the hereafter as a physical world; and it provides a basis for the idea of 'physical' reward and punishment of the resurrected in the hereafter. In addition, the return (*ma'ād*, Q. 28:85) of the soul to the body is interpreted (p. 482) also as the return from annihilation into existence and the return to life after death in general, as, for example, the Ash'arī theologians 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355) and Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī's (d. 793/1390) reason in their examinations of certain Mu'tazilī and philosophical objections to this concept.

The classical Islamic philosophers, in turn, embrace the Qur'anic concept of paradise as a 'state of bliss'. Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037), for example, postulates a 'lower level of paradise' awaiting the souls of the virtuous, non-philosophical majority, where they will experience the physical delights promised in the Qur'an. The highest, the 'intellectual paradise', with the eternal light of God's infinite knowledge and goodness, will be attainable only to the souls of those who, in their earthly existence, pursued philosophy and worshipped the source of all truth, God.

Individual Death and Post-Mortem Existence

The Qur'an is quite clear about the course and final objective of life: birth, death, resurrection, and eternal reality. These are among the clearest manifestations of God's eternal existence, omnipotence, and mercy, allowing the question: 'How can you ignore God when you were lifeless and He gave you life, when He will cause you to die, then resurrect you to be returned to Him?' (Q. 2:28). Likewise, the unbelievers will appeal to God on the Day of Judgement, saying 'Lord, twice You have caused us to be lifeless and twice You have brought us to life' (Q. 40:11), a passage explained by one of the most popular exegetes, al-Bayḍāwī (d. c.719/1319), as divine 'signs' indicating that God creates human beings dead before granting them life in this world. When God causes humans to die, they experience lifelessness for the second time—until resurrection, which marks the beginning of their second life, this one eternal (al-Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, on Q. 40:11; Rüling 1895: 8).

The Qur'an says little about individual human death. It is indicated that death is a distressing process, one which every person will experience, helplessly and individually, 'as the angels stretch out their hands' to the souls of the dying (Q. 6:93–94), and that the soul of the dying person 'comes up to his throat' (Q. 56:83).

The Condition of the Soul

There is much contemplation among medieval Muslim scholarship regarding the state of human existence between the moment of death and resurrection. Not untypically for medieval Muslim thought, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) notes that the death of the individual is 'a minor return' to God, while that of the Universal Soul is 'the major return towards the Creator'. He supports this with reference to the prophetic saying, 'As soon as one dies, (p. 483) Doomsday begins for him' (al-Ghazālī, *Mysteries*, 21). Al-Ghazālī explains furthermore that death occurs when the soul is separated from the body. Immediately after death, two angels 'with beautiful faces, wearing lovely clothes and sweet-smelling fragrances' receive the fortunate soul. They take it to the seven heavens, as far as the Throne of Mercy, before they return it to earth. In contrast, ugly, black-garbed guardians of hell will receive the soul of the profligate, and transport it to the first heaven where it will be denied entry (Q. 7:40). It will fall from heaven and be dropped by the wind in a far-distant place (Q. 22:31) so that the guardians of hell take charge of it. Eventually, all souls will be reunited with their respective bodies before burial. Each soul will attach itself to the deceased's 'breast from the outside' (*bi-ṣadr min khārij al-ṣadr*) and, thus reunited in the grave, body and soul shall await the Day of Resurrection (al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra*, 31; al-Ghazālī, *Pearl*, 32). Until that Day, the deceased experience scenes of paradise or visions of hell, depending on whether they had lived a pious or a sinful life on earth (Q. 40:46). Only 'the souls, or spirits, of the martyrs (*arwāḥ al-shuhadā'*) are allowed to remain at the highest heaven. They reside here in the crops of the green birds (*fī ḥawāṣil tuyūr khudr*), perched on the trees of the garden, to await the Hour'. The spirits of the believers, in turn, 'are gathered ... in the form of green birds which fly freely in paradise until the Day of Resurrection, stamped (*marqūm*) with [the seal] of [God's] good pleasure (*riḍā*) and satisfaction (*riḍwān*)' (al-Ghazālī, *al-Durra*, 33; al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr*, 273; Günther 2019).

Existence in the Grave and the *Barzakh*

The Qur'an is ambiguous about the state in which the dead await resurrection. While there are clear differences between the living and the dead, it seems that the dead retain their senses in the grave to some degree, as the Qur'an insists that God can make anyone He wills hear His message, even those in their graves (Q. 35:22). However, there is little textual evidence in the Qur'an regarding the 'life in the grave' as expanded upon in later Islamic literature. Nothing explicit is mentioned here, except angels of punishment who appear and strike the disbelievers' faces and backs so that they may taste, while still in their graves, the torture that awaits them in the Fire (Q. 8:50). Yet, while believers and disbelievers alike remain in their graves until resurrection, martyrs are exempt from this waiting because 'those who are killed in God's cause are ... alive' (Q. 2:154). Only once does the Qur'an mention the *barzakh* in the sense of an intermediate state or place in which the dead bridge the time between death and resurrection, stating that 'a barrier stands behind such people [i.e. the unbelievers, on the Day of Judgement] until the very Day they are resurrected' (Q. 23:100). It is only later that Muslim scholarship significantly elaborates on various concepts of the *barzakh*, assigning it such meanings as (a) a 'time barrier' between death and resurrection which prevents the dead from returning to the

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world of the living, (b) a 'time gap' (of forty years) between the first and the second blast of the Trumpet on the Day of Resurrection, and (c) a physical 'location' or 'grave' where (p. 484) the dead await resurrection, with the possibility of initial reward or punishment prior to Judgement Day, expressly including 'glimpses' of paradise and hell (Ibn al-Ḥabīb, *Waṣf*, 89–90, 104–7; see also Eklund 1941; Zaki 2001; and Rebstock 2003).

Contemporary liberal Muslim thinkers such as the Egyptian philosopher Ḥasan Ḥanafī (b. 1935), for instance, take the perceptions of an 'ideal world' expressed in the Qur'an concerning the hereafter as metaphors for their visions of an Islam-oriented civil society. In this spirit, the French-Moroccan publicist Nadia Tazi (b. 1953) utilizes them in her feminist critique of Islam (see Mas 2017). Although such ideas are exceptional among modern Muslim intellectuals, their innovative quality shows that the eschatological concepts in the Qur'an continue to play a vital role in the contemporary world not only as the foundation of conventional Muslim faith and spirituality, but also as powerful factors in an ever-expanding vision for the growth and development of culture and society. This highlights once again that references to the hereafter in Islam's sacred scripture retain their unparalleled authority and energy, not only because they are read by Muslims as sacred indicators of the grand finale and peak of humankind's long history of revelations, expected in a far-distant future. Rather, throughout history the Qur'anic promises of humankind's 'return' to God, along with the divine assurance of eternal life, justice, and complete fulfilment, appear to have a vital and definitive impact on Muslim life in the here and now.

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