

“To Hell and back: a study of the concepts of Hell and  
intercession in early Islam”

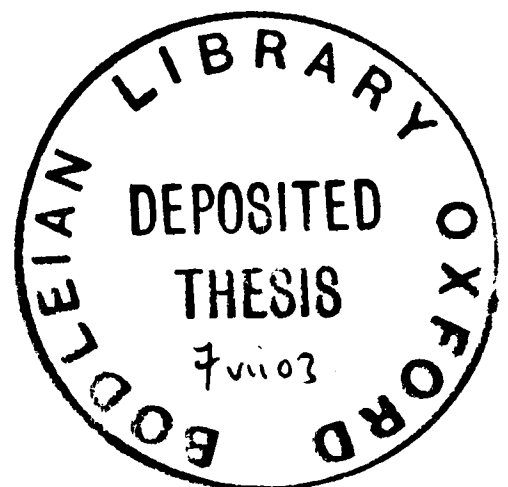
by

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*Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

*Hilary term 2002*



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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation is primarily a study of the idea of temporary Hell-fire punishment for the grave sinners of the Muslim community. The doctrine is taught by Islamic orthodoxy, both Sunnī and Shī‘ī, but its historical development has not been examined by modern scholars. The present study is offered as a preliminary investigation of this concept.

Probably under influence from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, the concept of temporary Hell-fire punishment found its way into the nascent Muslim theology of the early second century A.H. But at the time of its emergence (c. 700-750 A.D.), and for many decades afterwards, the idea faced resistance from ‘scripturalists’ within Muslim society who found no explicit support for it in the Qur’ān. Muslim traditionalists sought to reconcile it with the text of the Qur’ān, and eventually adopted it as a theological solution to the divisive and long-standing question of the fate of the Muslim grave sinner in the next world.

Within the early Muslim community, however, there also existed the belief, first attested on a Dome of the Rock inscription (c. 691-2 AD), of the eschatological intercession (*shafā‘a*) of the Prophet. The Qur’ān had not explicitly granted the Prophet such a privilege, but given the ‘monotheistic’ precedent of prophets and holy men as intercessors, and a widely-held esteem among pre-Islamic Arabs for the figure of the ‘intercessor’ (*shafī‘*), it was not long before Muḥammad was acknowledged as the intercessor *par excellence* on the Day of Resurrection. For the first 150 years, there were almost no discussions about the Prophet’s *shafā‘a*, but sometime between the second and third century A.H., the issue, according to the our Iraqi historical sources, became a point of controversy. This was probably because Muslim scripturalists, who had opposed the idea of temporary Hell-fire, were now resisting the traditionalist doctrine that the Prophet’s *shafā‘a* would help grave sinners exit from Hell.

## Acknowledgements

This study was made possible by an award from the Arts and Humanities Board of the British Academy (1997-2000). I would also like to acknowledge the support of Wolfson College and that of Dr J. Johns as advisor. Sincere thanks to Professor P. Crone for giving of her time generously. A debt of gratitude is due to Dr C. Robinson for reading the drafts, for his unfailing support, and for his friendship over the years.

Many thanks to Professors W. Madelung and T. Khalidi for feedback at the *viva voce*.

This lonely enterprise was enlivened by particular friendships over the years: P. B., S.

I., B. <sup>a</sup>M. and L. M., Gh. B.

*For inspiring the end, Lula*

## Conventions

For transliteration, the symbols used are those of the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, except for 'dj' and 'ḳ' which are rendered 'j' and 'q' respectively. With the exception of titles of works and cited phrases, the transliteration of passages of Arabic reflects elision and indicates sun and moon letters: *shafā'atu sh-shāfi'īn* or *yawmu l-qiyāma*.

The 'al' of surnames is dropped after the first occurrence. Bibliographic citations are given in full in first occurrence, but in short-form thereafter.

Dates are given in the usual combination Muslim (A.H.)/Christian (A.D).

Qur'ānic references are to the standard Egyptian version. Qur'ānic translations are, with minor modifications, from A. J. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted* (Oxford, 1955).

I use *ṣl'm* to transliterate the benediction *ṣallā Allāhu 'alayhi wa-sallam*.

I use 'traditionists' to mean those involved in the transmission of ḥadīth, and 'traditionalists' to denote those who argued for the authority of ḥadīth alongside the Qur'ān.

## Abbreviations

<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.</i>
<i>CHAL</i>	<i>Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Arabic literature to the end of the Umayyad period</i> , ed. A. F. Beeston et al. (Cambridge, 1983).
<i>EI1</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> , ed. M. T. Houtsma et al. (4 vols., Leiden and London, 1913-34).
<i>EI2</i>	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> , New edition, ed. H. A. R. Gibb et al. (Leiden and London, 1960-).
<i>IOS</i>	<i>Israel Oriental Studies</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JESHO</i>	<i>Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JSAI</i>	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>MS I</i>	I. Goldziher, <i>Muslim Studies</i> , vol. 1, trans. C. R. Barber and M. S. Stern (London, 1966).
<i>MS II</i>	<i>Id.</i> , <i>Muslim Studies</i> , vol. 2, trans. C. R. Barber and M. S. Stern (London, 1977).
<i>RCEA</i>	<i>Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe</i> , Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, ed. E. Combe et al. (1931-91)
<i>TG</i>	J. van Ess, <i>Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra</i> , (6 vols., Berlin-New York, 1991-95).
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft.</i>

*For Zais and Maha*

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# **INTRODUCTION**

## The Problem of 'Hell'

It is commonly acknowledged that the concept of Hell presupposes the concept of a 'moral' death, that is to say, a death that is not neutral but involves an appraisal of the individual's conduct in this life with immediate consequences for his next one.<sup>1</sup> The emergence of this idea of a 'moral' death seems to date back to ancient Egyptian texts (c. 2400 BC).<sup>2</sup> In due course, this (Egyptian?) idea would also surface among the writings of Greek philosophers reflecting on human fate, and would establish itself within the monotheistic traditions of the Near East.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, the appeal to most religious systems of a judgement of the dead has to do with the importance which such a concept attaches to 'moral' behaviour: people are encouraged to lead 'good' lives so that they may be rewarded accordingly in the next. Put differently, people would be discouraged from 'evil' conduct in this world if they believed that they would be requited for it severely in the next. The deterrent-factor, then, constitutes the principal function of the idea of Hell.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, however, sociologists have pointed out that the concept of Hell reflects human aspirations for a 'divine' justice, a 'final justice' that will redress the injustices committed in this world, making the idea of post-mortem retribution attractive for many religious thinkers.<sup>5</sup> But while most religious systems adopted the

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<sup>1</sup> Most recently, A. Bernstein, *The formation of Hell: death and retribution in the ancient and early Christian worlds* (Ithaca and London, 1993), pp. 3ff.

<sup>2</sup> S. G. F. Brandon, *The judgement of the dead* (London, 1967), pp. 6ff.

<sup>3</sup> "Hell", in *Late Antiquity: a guide to the postclassical world*, ed. G. Bowersock et al. (Cambridge: Mass., 1999); on the possible connection between the Egyptian 'weighing of the heart' and the miniature balances found in Mycenaean tombs, Brandon, *Judgement*, p. 79.

<sup>4</sup> D. P. Walker, *The decline of Hell: seventeenth-century discussions of eternal torment* (London, 1964), pp. 40f.

<sup>5</sup> M. Weber, *The sociology of religion*, trans. E. Fischoff (Boston, 1963), pp. 138-50.

idea of a judgement of the dead, the implication for the afterlife was not the same in all cases.

The most interesting difference for our purposes is that between religions which postulate metempsychosis or reincarnation (Hinduism, Buddhism and the Orphic-Gnostic cults) and those which do not (Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam). While both types anticipate a post-mortem requital of deeds, in the former group the judgement is only an interlude within a seemingly endless cycle of reincarnation. In the latter group, however, the judgement of the dead is a final act that determines the state of the individual for the rest of eternity. Consequently, although Buddhist Hell may turn out to be just as horrific as Christian Hell, certain ethical problems could only arguably plague a Christian Hell. One such problem is the concept of 'eternal' punishment.

Because the post-mortem judgement, as applied in the second group of religious systems presented above, is final, it raises certain ethical questions about the doctrine of eternal Hell. For example, is such retribution compatible with a benevolent and merciful God?<sup>6</sup> Should Hell-fire be retributive or rehabilitative? A debate over such issues has occupied Christians from the time of Origen (3<sup>rd</sup> century AD)<sup>7</sup> through to the 18<sup>th</sup> century and arguably to this day,<sup>8</sup> and has not been restricted to theological

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<sup>6</sup> P. C. Almond, *Heaven and Hell in enlightenment England* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 150f.

<sup>7</sup> "...God acts in dealing with sinners as a physician...the fury of his anger is profitable for the purging of souls. Even that penalty which is said to be imposed by way of fire is understood as applied to assist a sinner to health" (*De Principiis*, II.x. 4,6), in *The early Christian fathers*, ed. H. Bettenson (Oxford, 1969), p. 258; Augustine, on the other hand, construes Origen's teaching on Hell as 'lax', *City of God* (Loeb Classical, London, 1972), XXI. xvii.

<sup>8</sup> On the attitude of 20<sup>th</sup> century Christianity to eschatology, D. Fergusson, "Eschatology", in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, ed. C. E. Gunton (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 226-244.

circles.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, it is difficult to envisage a protracted debate over the harshness of Hell amongst Buddhists, since reincarnation will always be seen as a way out.

### A 'lesser' Hell

The translation of a judicial process to the afterlife, in the form of a judgement of the dead together with the idea of retribution, also meant that many of the usual modes of intervention within a judicial system were carried over into the afterlife: just as in this world one could assist accused loved ones or secure special treatment for those already condemned, so in the next world one could also aid one's beloved dead through their post-mortem trial.<sup>10</sup> And so, although the very articulation of post-mortem judgement through such imagery as the 'weighing of a soul' or mathematically-precise 'book-keeping'<sup>11</sup> supposedly implied that the judicial process of the next life, in contrast to that of this life, was not open to corruption,<sup>12</sup> some sort of intervention by the living on behalf of their dead was possible in most systems. The use of 'intercession' rituals, such as prayers for the dead and the belief in eschatological intercession were, in principle, more important to the religious systems which adopted a Final Judgement than those which anticipated cycles of reincarnation, though in practice there seems to have been little difference.<sup>13</sup> Not

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<sup>9</sup> Walker, *Hell*, esp. introduction; P. C. Davies, "The debate on eternal punishment in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English literature", *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 4 (1971), pp. 257-76.

<sup>10</sup> The projection of ideas from this life onto the next is illustrated amusingly by a (c.) 9<sup>th</sup>-century Buddhist account, "The Record of a Returned Soul", where a monk finds himself in purgatory because of an error in the register of names kept in the underworld offices: S. T. Teiser, "Having once died and returned to life: representations of hell in medieval China", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 48, ii, (1988), pp. 433-464, see pp. 447ff.

<sup>11</sup> On Zoroastrian book-keeping, see M. Boyce, *A history of Zoroastrianism: the early period* (Leiden, 1996), i, p. 237; for Qur'ānic book-keeping, see Q. 83/7-9, 18-20.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Brandon, *Judgement*, p. 193.

<sup>13</sup> Although cf. the intricate bureaucracy in medieval Chinese Buddhism designed to speed up the purgatorial journey of the dead one in the afterlife: S. F. Teiser, *The scripture on the ten kings: and the*

surprisingly, these practices form an essential part of Zoroastrian,<sup>14</sup> Judaeo-Christian,<sup>15</sup> and Muslim<sup>16</sup> devotions.

Such intercessions functioned well when the Final Judgement was envisaged as taking place immediately on the individual's death. But ever since the appearance of apocalyptic writing among the Jews (the earliest works dating from c. 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC),<sup>17</sup> there also existed the notion that a Final Judgement came after the end of the world on a Final Day; this created difficulties for the conception of the state of the dead, and raised the question of what happened upon death. The tension between the two judgements, an immediate and an apocalyptic, is reflected by New Testament passages some of which describe the dead as asleep (1 Thess. 4:13), while others seem to envisage an immediate judgement (Luke 16:22 and 23:43).

Christianity reconciled the difficulty of having two judgements by imagining the period from the point of a (Christian) person's death to the resurrection as a purgative interval which prepared the not-so saintly of the community for their final reunion with God.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, in Florence in 1438, this idea would be articulated as official

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*making of purgatory in medieval Chinese Buddhism*, in Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism no. 9 (Honolulu, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> M. Boyce, *Zoroastrians: their religious beliefs and practices* (London, 1979), p. 45: "probably Zoroaster with his insistence on the responsibility of each man for his own fate hereafter, reduced the number of traditional rites and observances performed on behalf of the newly departed spirit; but if so, long usage and family piety led to their revival, and intercession for the dead, with many prayers and offerings, became the general practice among his followers".

<sup>15</sup> On the Christian side, esp. mass for the dead; cf. "dead, prayers for the", *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, 1967), vol. 4, p. 671-73.

<sup>16</sup> Prayers for the dead in general, but also those performed by relatives and other worshippers in the mosque (*ṣalāt al-janāza*) before the casket of the dead person; for a survey, see C. E. Padwick, *Muslim devotions: a study of prayer manuals in common use* (Oxford, 1997, repr.).

<sup>17</sup> M. Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: an apocalyptic form in Jewish and Christian literature* (Philadelphia, 1983), pp. 8ff.

<sup>18</sup> Thus Tertullian (d. c. 220): "Why cannot you suppose that the soul undergoes punishment in the underworld, in the interval while it awaits the judgement, either of punishment or reward... Otherwise what will happen in that interval? Shall we sleep? But *souls* cannot sleep... Or do you think that nothing

Church doctrine under the label *purgatorium*.<sup>19</sup> Eternal Hell it seems was reserved entirely for the incorrigible: all Christians would attain salvation.

One of the principal ways in which such salvation could be attained was through the idea of intercession. Many of the major figures of the Old Testament had interceded with God on account of their special status as His prophets or messengers.<sup>20</sup> In the Christian tradition, quite apart from the very fact that Christ's death on the cross was construed as the ultimate 'intercessory' act, one that would atone for mankind's sins,<sup>21</sup> New Testament passages frequently refer to Christ as constantly interceding with the Lord.<sup>22</sup> But it is also a fact that 'intercession' causes tensions within this same monotheistic tradition, which result in the periodic condemnation of such practice by the religious authorities of that particular tradition. Thus, we find that while rabbinical discussions acknowledge the intercessory power of Abraham,<sup>23</sup> they will also tend to downplay its importance lest it should manifest itself as 'idolatry'.<sup>24</sup> When Byzantine Christianity experienced a 'monotheist reformation' in the first decades of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, this new-found enthusiasm was expressed through attacks on all traditional channels of intercession: saints, images, relics and even monks.<sup>25</sup> Although periods of iconoclasm had marked Christianity

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happens there?...(*De Anima*, 58): *Christian Fathers*, Bettenson, p. 161.

<sup>19</sup> J. Le Goff, *La naissance du purgatoire* (Paris, 1981), esp. ch. 1.

<sup>20</sup> Abraham's intercession for Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen.: 18:23ff; his prayers for Abimelech's wives to regain their fertility, Gen. 20:7; Samuel intercedes on behalf of Israel so that God may forgive them after their idol worship, 1 Sam. 7:5.

<sup>21</sup> 1 John 2:1.

<sup>22</sup> Rom. 8:26f., 34; Heb. 7:25f.

<sup>23</sup> *Babylonian Talmud*, B. *Erub.* 19a, where Abraham takes Israelites out of Hell after a brief period of punishment.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, B. *San.* 104a; in the Jerusalem Talmud, B. *Ber.* 9:13, where one should not, as is widely practised, invoke the angel Michael in prayers to God.

<sup>25</sup> J. J. Norwich, *A short history of Byzantium* (New York, 1997), pp. 111f.; P. Crone, "Islam, Judeo-

from its earliest days,<sup>26</sup> the fact that the 8<sup>th</sup> century outburst against icons and images may have been precipitated by the rise of Islam<sup>27</sup> is suggestive of a specifically monotheist tendency: the concern to maintain a distinction between the practice of invoking mediators and outright idolatry.<sup>28</sup> For, at least according to the Qurʾān, Islam was conceived as a monotheist reformation, an abandonment of previous idolatrous practices: iconomachy is implicit in the Qurʾān's condemnation of idols.<sup>29</sup> Even non-Muslims saw the 'message' of Muḥammad as a return to a 'purer monotheism'.<sup>30</sup> But despite the Qurʾānic emphasis on strict monotheism, Islamic practice reflected the same monotheist pattern of previous traditions: wide-spread acceptance and use of intercession,<sup>31</sup> together with periodic rejection of the idea.<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, with regard to salvation in the next world, Islamic theology, as it later crystallized, reflected many of the ideas current within the monotheistic tradition of the Middle East. Sunnī and Shīʿī creeds attest to the belief held by many Muslims that

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Christianity and Byzantine Iconoclasm", *JSAI* 2 (1980), pp. 59-95, see esp. pp. 63 (and n. 15 thereto), 70, 81.

<sup>26</sup> R. Macmullen, *Christianity and paganism in the fourth to eighth centuries* (New Haven and London, 1997), pp. 49ff.

<sup>27</sup> Norwich, *Byzantium*, p. 111; Crone, "Iconoclasm", pp. 59ff.

<sup>28</sup> The Jewish ambivalence towards intercession is for the same reasons, see J. Bowker, "Intercession in the Qurʾān and the Jewish tradition", *JSS* 11 (1966), pp. 69-82, esp. 76ff.

<sup>29</sup> Q. 14/35; 6/47; 21/57.

<sup>30</sup> R. Hoyland, *Seeing Islam as others saw it: a survey and evaluation of Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian writings on early Islam* (Princeton, 1997), pp. 535ff: a monk tells a Muslim that Muḥammad had, 'freed you from idolatry' (p. 538).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the creeds enumerated in appendix 1.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. a tract by Ibn Taymiyya, (Aḥmad b. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm, d. 1328), *al-Wāsiṭa bayna al-khalq wa'l-ḥaqq*, ed. M. al-Minyāwī (Cairo, n.d.) where he tries to define acceptable forms of intercession; cf. G. Rentz, "The Wahhābīs", in *Religion in the Middle East*, ed. A. J. Arberry (Cambridge, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 270-84; D. S. Margoliouth, *EII*, s.v. "wahhābiyya", 1086b: "3) it is *shirk* to introduce the name of a prophet, saint, or angel into prayer, 4) it is *shirk* to seek intercession from any but Allāh". Note the continuing controversy over the subject in Egypt. Recently, Muṣṭafā Maḥmūd published a short treatise condemning the wholesale acceptance of *shafāʿa*, particularly the *shafāʿa* of the Prophet to get the Muslim grave sinners out of Hell, in favour of a kind of *irjāʿ* on their fate (*al-Shafāʿa: muḥāwala li-fahm al-khilāf al-qadīm bayna al-muʿayyidīn wa'l-muʿaridīn*, in Kitāb al-Yawm series, Cairo, 1999); Azhar scholars promptly responded with a defence of the orthodox position on *shafāʿa*: see the response

all the members of the Muslim community belong to Paradise.<sup>33</sup> All those who profess membership of the Muslim faith through the credo ‘there is no god but God’, will be saved.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, any punishment in Hell which Muslim sinners may have to undergo would only be temporary. The Prophet himself would play an important role in the salvation of the community. On account of his eschatological intercession, Muslim sinners will get out of Hell. Much like the Christian sinner, the Muslim sinner would not be held in Hell forever.

### The ‘sinning believer’ in Islam

It is not often remarked, however, that the scheme of afterlife salvation, just mentioned above, was not implicit from the start, nor indeed was it necessary: Muslims, from the time of the inception of their community, had taken for granted the fact that their acceptance of the faith destined them for an eternal life in Paradise.<sup>35</sup> To belong to the community of believing Muslims was to belong with the ‘inhabitants of the Garden’ (*ahl al-janna*), as opposed to the ‘inhabitants of the Fire’ (*ahl al-nār*).<sup>36</sup> But for some 150 years after the death of the Prophet, Muslims, mainly in Iraq,<sup>37</sup> were involved in polemical discussions<sup>38</sup> about the status of the Muslim sinner.<sup>39</sup> The

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of (the imām) Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī: *al-Shafā‘a wa’l-maqām al-maḥmūd* (Cairo, 2000).

<sup>33</sup> See list of creeds in appendix 1.

<sup>34</sup> Or the *shahāda* as it is known: *lā ilāha illā Allāh*; it is commonly followed by *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*, ‘Muḥammad is the messenger of God’. But Muslim tradition frequently only cites the first part of the *shahāda*, probably for the sake of brevity, leaving the second part implicit.

<sup>35</sup> The Qur’ānic verses are too numerous to cite. See for example, s.v. *j-n-n* (*jannāt*) in M. F. ‘Abd al-Bāqī, *al-Mu‘jam al-mufahras li-alfāz al-qur’ān al-karīm* (Cairo, 1939, and several subsequent edns.: Beirut, 1992, for an edition with Qur’ānic text included).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. W. M. Watt, *The formative period of Islamic thought* (Edinburgh, 1973), p. 31.

<sup>37</sup> Our written sources for the period come mostly from Iraq, and it is there that the discussions we know about took place.

<sup>38</sup> This estimate is based on the date of a substantial Ibādī epistle that focuses on this question, and has been dated *ad* 184/800 by P. Crone and F. Zimmermann (*The epistle of Sālim ibn Dhakwān*, Oxford, 2001).

question that fuelled these polemical discussions was the attitude to be adopted towards ‘offenders’ or ‘opponents’ within the community.<sup>40</sup> The question of the status and other-worldly fate of the Muslim sinner came to the fore of theological discussions as a result of civil strife (36-73/656-692) that saw Muslims involved in physical conflict with one another.<sup>41</sup>

The earliest discussion of the question of the fate of the ‘not-so saintly’ of the Muslim community, or the grave sinners as they were later identified, seems to have taken place with reference to the events of the civil war of the year 37/657. The events of this civil war, or the *fitna* as it was later called, had a profound impact on the Muslim literary tradition.<sup>42</sup> It was these political events that informed, and arguably spawned, the theological debates surrounding the fate of the Muslim sinner which preoccupied theologians for most of the second and third centuries.<sup>43</sup> The question of the ‘sinner’ in Islam was, from the first instance, intertwined with political concerns: the political leader was the religious head of the Muslim community (sc. *imām*) whose duty it was to ensure that the community conducted itself according to the prescriptions of the divine law enshrined in the Qurʾān. Political differences had not

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<sup>39</sup> The Qurʾān makes a distinction between minor sins and grave sins (*kabāʾir al-ithm*), see Q. 42/37 and 53/32. Moreover, the Qurʾān guarantees the remission of all minor sins so long as the grave ones are avoided, Q. 4/31: *in tajtanibū kabāʾira mā tunhawna ʿanhu nukaffir ʿankum sayyiʾātikum wa-nudkhilkum mudkhalan karīman* (“If you avoid the heinous sins that are forbidden you, We will acquit you of your evil deeds, and admit you by the gate of honour”).

<sup>40</sup> Certain sins were considered grave (see n. 39 above), and if a sufficient number of individuals attested to this guilt, then punishment had to be carried out (e.g. Q. 24/6ff). In addition, certain verses in the Qurʾān suggest that it is a duty on every Muslim to ‘command what is right and forbid what is evil’: see now, M. Cook, *Commanding right and forbidding wrong in Islamic thought* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>41</sup> The dates cover the period from the Battle of the Camel to the first and second civil wars.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. G. Hawting (trans.), *The history of al-Ṭabarī (tārīkh al-rusul waʾl-mulūk) volume xvii: the first civil war* (Albany, 1996), xi-xv.

<sup>43</sup> See *EI2*, s.v. “Ṣiffin”: M. Lecker suggests that the battle was psychologically traumatic for the Muslim community, and one side’s efforts to justify its actions at the expense of the other was a source of polemical use of eschatological traditions.

only ideological but theological implications for the community. For the most part, the early Muslim sects that arose out of the civil conflicts of the first century were concerned with the ideological deviation engendered by schism. But the language employed to define and categorize such deviation, was the very language used to classify moral deviation. Thus, a political or ideological deviant could be called a *kāfir* ('unbeliever') for his rejection of a particular conception of the political community, and by extension his rejection of God's law. This did not mean, of course, that early Muslims were not concerned with moral offenders. But in their efforts to establish the nature of relations between (nominally) Muslim individuals in a community ruptured by internal disagreements, they were more immediately concerned with political allegiances.<sup>44</sup> As we shall see, one early current within Islam, which we may term 'secessionist', regarded political opponents as religious opponents, defined them using the relevant terms (sc. *kāfir*, 'unbeliever', or *mushrik*, 'polytheist') and excluded them from the community. In response, there developed other currents that proposed an anti-sectarian approach and did not deny membership of the Muslim community to any self-professing Muslim, even if that person were a political or ideological opponent. An outline of the events of the first civil war will provide the reader with a better context for the issues raised thus far and for the ensuing discussion.

The first civil war had broken out over rival claims to the leadership of the Muslim community. The conflict was principally between two factions, on the one hand a Syrian party led by the local governor Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān (r. 41-61/661-

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<sup>44</sup> The definition of these political relations would, naturally, have consequences for afterlife theology.

80) claiming revenge for their assassinated kin, the third caliph ‘Uthmān b. ‘Affān (r. 24-36/644-56), and on the other an Iraqi contingent under the leadership of the Prophet’s cousin and son-in-law, ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib (r. 36-41/656-61), the reigning caliph at the time. The confrontation never amounted to a full-scale war, and was probably no more than a series of skirmishes.<sup>45</sup> But when the Iraqis finally decided to make an advance, the Syrians gave serious thought to the likelihood of their defeat.<sup>46</sup> Ironically, the conflict was soon tipped in favour of the Syrians, because of a schism they helped precipitate among the Iraqis. Realizing that they would be facing superior numbers,<sup>47</sup> the Syrians contrived to hold off an Iraqi advance by raising copies of the Qur’ān and offering a compromise: two arbiters, one from each side, would seek a solution to the dispute with guidance from the Qur’ānic text.<sup>48</sup> Fearing that the basis of the arbitration agreement (the consultation of the Qur’ān for the purpose of resolving the dispute) would ultimately be ignored,<sup>49</sup> and that the resolution of the dispute would involve a measure of political connivance, which might not ultimately turn in favour of the Iraqi partisans (the Syrians seem to have had no intention of recognizing ‘Alī’s caliphate),<sup>50</sup> some of ‘Alī’s followers rejected the entire arbitration and seceded from his ranks; these were called Khārijites (*khawārij*). Their secession, Muslim sources relate, was marked by the slogan, *lā ḥukm illā li’llāh* (“no judgement

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Cf. T. Izutsu, *The concept of belief in Islamic theology* (Tokyo, 1965), pp. 1ff.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. M. A. Shaban, *Islamic history A.D. 600-750: a new interpretation* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 75.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. Wellhausen, *The religio-political factions in early Islam*, translated from the German (*Die religiös-politischen Oppositionsparteien im alten Islam*) by R. C. Ostle and S. M. Walzer (Amsterdam and Oxford, 1975), p. 1.

<sup>47</sup> Al-Ṭabarī, Muḥammad b. Jarīr (d. 923), *Tārīkh al-rusul wa’l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje et al. (Leiden, 1879-1901), I, 3328ff.

<sup>48</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, 3329ff.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. W. Madelung, *The succession to Muḥammad: a study of the early caliphate* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 244ff.

but God's"). The proclamation is based on verses from the Qurʾān (notably Q. 6/57 and 12/40) and likely reflected an early current of scripturalism among Muslims, which may be defined as the conviction that the Qurʾān alone should constitute the source of legal and ritual authority for the Muslim community.<sup>51</sup> That the insistence of at least some of the Iraqis on the Syrians being fought until they submitted, or were defeated, was a scripturalist stance, is brought out by some early documentary evidence for Khārijite views. In a mid-second (?) century religious epistle, commonly, but mistakenly,<sup>52</sup> identified as 'the second letter of Ibn Ibād to 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān',<sup>53</sup> the Khārijite author rebukes his Shī'ite correspondent's justification of 'Alī's conduct in the civil war (namely, 'Alī's acceptance of the arbitration and his refusal to resume hostilities against the Syrians) as a breach of God's stipulation that, "if two parties among the believers fall into dispute, make peace between them, but if one of them transgresses (further) against the other, then fight the one that transgresses until it returns to the command (*ḥukm*) of God" (Q. 49/9).<sup>54</sup> In other words, for these early secessionists, the Khārijites, at least insofar as can be discerned from the sources, arbitration in the matter of Mu'āwiya and the Syrians was an offence against God. They argued that where God provided judgements in His book, men

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. M. Hinds, "The Ṣiffīn arbitration agreement", *JSS* 17 (1972), pp. 93-113, esp. 100ff.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. G. R. Hawting, "The significance of the slogan *lā ḥukma illā lillāh* and the references to the *ḥudūd* in the traditions about the Fitna and the murder of 'Uthmān", *BSOAS* 41 (1978), pp. 453-63.

<sup>52</sup> M. Cook, *Early Muslim Dogma: a source-critical study* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 55; Cook was the first to draw attention to this surprisingly obvious fact.

<sup>53</sup> In *Kashf al-ghumma al-jāmi' li-akhbār al-umma*, attrib. to one Sirḥan b. Sa'īd al-Izkawī, British Library MS, Or. 8076, ff. 206b-212a (see forthcoming edition by present author), see f. 209b for the author's allusion to Q. 49/9.

<sup>54</sup> It must have been clear to the Iraqis that Mu'āwiya was not about to hand over authority to 'Alī; besides, the stipulation 'make peace between them' had actually been tried: Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, 3270ff.

were under obligation to follow these rulings without doubt or dispute.<sup>55</sup>

As we have already noted, up until the time of the Khārijite secession, Muslims had unanimously understood that their status as Muslims, in addition to conferring upon them automatic salvation, also clearly distinguished them from the only other categories that existed, people of the book (*ahl al-kitāb*) and pagans (*mushrikūn/kuffār*). When the Khārijite secession occurred, however, it was the first time that a substantial number of Muslims had not only chosen to separate themselves physically and ideologically from the rest of the community,<sup>56</sup> but also to take with them the label which had formerly belonged to the entire community: *mu'minūn* (believers). The Khārijites regarded the non-Khārijite acquiescence in the matter of Mu'āwiya and the Syrians as a rejection of God's law, and hence, of Islam as a whole. Seeing that their former coreligionists had rejected Islam, early Khārijites reclassified all non-Khārijites as *kuffār* or *mushrikūn*.<sup>57</sup> The legal consequences of such reclassification (since, *kuffār* or *mushrikūn* do not enjoy any legal protection according to Islam and have to be dissociated from, and are at risk of being killed) meant that the very terms *islām/imān* would become controversial, now that more than one group claimed this label.<sup>58</sup> And although the claims for this label were politically-inspired, it was inevitable from the outset that there would be fundamental implications for the theology of the afterlife: the label *islām* was necessary for

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<sup>55</sup> They argued that, for instance, one could not arbitrate in the case of illicit fornication, since God has clearly proscribed 100 lashes for the perpetrator (Q. 24/2), nor, similarly, can one arbitrate in the case of theft, as the thief should have his hand cut off (Q. 5/38); cf. Izkawī, *Kashf*, at f. 209b where the Khārijite author makes precisely these arguments.

<sup>56</sup> There was an earlier instance of secession, at the Battle of the Camel, but this conflict did not obviously produce any lasting religio-political identities.

<sup>57</sup> G. Levi della Vida in *EI2*, s.v. "Khārijites".

salvation in the hereafter. If one was not a Muslim, one was not guaranteed salvation in the next life.

Khārijism, however, was not the only sect that could be delineated during these early years of conflict within the Muslim community, for the events of the first century had also created the basis for another religio-political identity. Many of the Iraqis who had supported ‘Alī and remained with him after the Khārijite secession were already crystallizing into a faction of their own, insisting on ‘Alī’s rightful claim to the caliphate, and after the latter died, on the right of his progeny (sc. ‘Alids) to rule; it was this that provided the impetus for the formation of the movement identified as Shī‘ism.<sup>59</sup>

But it was particularly after the eruption of a second civil war (64-73/683-92) among the Muslim community that the theological discussions surrounding the question of ‘salvation-status’ seem to have become urgent. The Khārijite movement itself underwent internal schism, and these divisions were principally to do with the attitude to be adopted towards the rest of the community, that is, towards all non-Khārijites. While some Khārijites maintained the extremist position of deeming all non-Khārijites as being outside the Muslim community (and so devoid of any legal rights or protection), treating them as polytheists and idolaters destined for Hell,<sup>60</sup> other Khārijites were prepared to resume relations with non-Khārijite Muslims and

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<sup>58</sup> At the earliest stage there was no distinction between the two terms, being almost synonymous in the Qur’ān (cf. Wensinck, *The Muslim creed*, Cambridge, 1931, pp. 22f.).

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Watt, *Formative*, pp. 39f.: Watt refers to proto-Shī‘ites to mean the early adherents of the *shī‘at* ‘Alī movement, presumably before the formation of classical Shī‘ite doctrine.

<sup>60</sup> K. Lewinstein, “The Azāriqa in Islamic heresiography”, *BSOAS* 54 (1991), pp. 251-68.

developed quietist doctrines.<sup>61</sup> As a result, one of the earliest points of discussion to arise among Khārijites was the question of non-belligerence (*qu‘ūd*) or emigrating (*hijra*) to a Khārijite camp (both were Qur‘ānic concepts).<sup>62</sup> Some Khārijites began to draw a distinction between certain points of religious behaviour which threatened one’s membership in the community, and others that did not.<sup>63</sup> Among these points was the question of ‘grave’ sin. For these sins, God had prescribed punishments in the Qur‘ān, as we saw above, and where He had not stipulated punishment, He had not guaranteed forgiveness (in contrast to minor sins which were automatically forgiven). The question of grave sin, then, also became a fundamental issue in Khārijite ideology: to persist in grave sin was to ignore God’s law, and consequently, to forfeit one’s status as Muslim (together with one’s place in Paradise).

By the time of the second civil war, factionalism was endemic, especially given that yet another claim to the caliphate had been made by the son of a leading Meccan, ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr (d. 73/692).<sup>64</sup> This period had also been a defining one for the nascent Shī‘ite movement. For the supporters of the ‘Alid right to rule, there had been

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<sup>61</sup> T. Lewicki in *EI2*, s.v. “Ibāḍiyya”; J. C. Wilkinson, “The early development of the Ibāḍī movement in Baṣra”, in *Studies on the first century of Islamic society*, ed. G. H. A. Juynboll (Carbondale: Southern Illinois, 1982), pp. 125-44.

<sup>62</sup> One theory is that the epithet Khārijite (*khārijī/khawārij*) was a self-designation used by these secessionists with Q. 4/100 in mind (*wa-man yakhruj min baytiḥ muḥājiran ilā‘llāḥ wa-rasūlih*, “whoso goes forth from his house an emigrant to God and His Messenger”), by which the term acquires a positive value; but L. Veccia Vaglieri in his article, “Sulla denominazione ḥawārij”, *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* 26 (1951), pp. 41-46, argues that this was a secondary development reflecting the Khārijite attempt to transform an essentially perjorative label (*kharaja ‘alā*, ‘he seceded from’) that the rest of the Muslim community applied to this group; cf. now also, Crone and Zimmermann, *Sālim*, p. 275, and n. 39 thereto, who support the former theory, first stated by R. E. Brünnow, *Die Charidschiten unter den ersten Omayyaden* (Leiden, 1884). As for *qu‘ūd*, see esp. Q. 4/95 where the contrast is made, but also Q. 9/46, 83, 86.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Watt, *Formative*, p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> His father had been defeated by ‘Alī after a serious revolt, in which al-Zubayr together with Ṭalḥa, another leading Meccan, and the Prophet’s wife ‘Ā’isha rejected ‘Alī’s rule; al-Zubayr was killed in the aftermath of what came to be known as the Battle of the Camel: Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, 3218.

only failures, and a series of them: the killing of Ḥujr b. ʿAdī (51/671), a leading supporter of ʿAlī in Kufa; the massacre of al-Ḥusayn, son of ʿAlī, (d. 61/680); and the revolt (66-68/685-7) of al-Mukhtār<sup>65</sup> in the name of another of ʿAlī's sons, Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. c. 81/700). It was in response to the factionalism of both Khārijites and Shīʿites that Ibn al-Ḥanafiyya's son, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad (d. c. 101/719), is supposed to have composed a treatise exposing a doctrine known as *irjāʾ*,<sup>66</sup> which consequently gave rise to the epithet Murjiʿa. The adherents of this doctrine appealed to Muslim schismatics, primarily Khārijites, but also Shīʿites and others,<sup>67</sup> to suspend judgement on the rights and wrongs of those who had been involved in the first schism (sc. ʿUthmān and ʿAlī). For, the original Khārijite secession had been justified on the basis of the (wrong) behaviour of these men. But the Murjiʿite appeal was also intended for the Shīʿites (now more radical after the revolt of al-Mukhtār in the years 66-68/685-7) and those who defended and upheld the legitimacy of ʿUthmān's caliphate long after his death (the ʿUthmaniyya). In short, the Murjiʿites thought that if they could put an end to polemical discussions about the first civil war, then they could also put an end to the schism engendered by it. The Murjiʿite themselves, although anti-sectarian, were not, however, averse to engaging government tyranny should it arise: many Murjiʿites had taken part in the great anti-Umayyad rebellion of Ibn al-Ashʿath in the year 82/701.<sup>68</sup> But it was also the case that

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<sup>65</sup> G. R. Hawting in *EI2*, s.v. "al-Mukhtār b. Abī ʿUbayd al-Thaḳafī".

<sup>66</sup> For the text of this work, see J. van Ess, "Das *Kitāb al-irjāʾ* des Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya", *Arabica* 21, i, (1974), pp. 20-52.

<sup>67</sup> Such as the ʿUthmaniyya, who recognized the third caliph's rule, in contradistinction to Khārijites and Shīʿites, and who later made up a large part of those that came to be known as Sunnīs.

<sup>68</sup> W. Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 232ff.; Madelung suggested that the Murjiʿites were not abiding by their principles in joining the

their political doctrine, whether intentionally or not, gave rise to a theological one.<sup>69</sup> Just as the Khārijite classification of non-Khārijites as *kuffār* meant that all the latter were consigned to Hell, so the Murji'ite suspension of judgement on the this-worldly conduct of the protagonists of the civil war meant a suspension of judgement on their fate in the other world: one simply could not know if the protagonists of the first civil war had acted rightly or wrongly-- that decision would be left to God. Part of the difficulty in assigning these figures an other-worldly status was that the choice was too stark: eternal Hell or eternal Paradise. While acknowledging that 'Uthmān and 'Alī had in part been responsible for schism within the community, no Murji'ite was prepared to condemn these two as *kuffār*, since that meant consigning them to Hell, and Hell according to the Qur'ān was eternal.<sup>70</sup>

But while the Murji'ite doctrine of suspending judgement was in itself a perfectly viable option in the effort towards anti-sectarianism, it did not provide solutions to the situation in the present. Murji'ites remained politically active, as evidenced by the numerous insurrections they took part in,<sup>71</sup> and could themselves be held responsible for the problem they had set out to eradicate, namely, schism. On the one hand, they wanted to co-exist and have normative relations with all Muslims, but on the other, they were not prepared to sanction tyrannical behaviour. One solution was to remain

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rebellion (*loc. cit.*). Cook, on the basis of the anti-Murji'ite polemics of the Ibādī epistle, *sīrat Sālim*, showed that anti-Umayyad sentiment was indeed on the early Murji'ite agenda (*Dogma*, p. 43). See now the very detailed discussion of the Murji'ite movement by Crone and Zimmermann, *Sālim*, pp. 219ff.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Cook, *Dogma*, p. 32.

<sup>70</sup> This is clearly the dilemma expressed by Thābit Quṭna (d. 110/728), an early Murji'ite, in his poem (see al-Iṣfahānī, Abū'l-Faraj 'Alī b. Ḥusayn (d. 357/967), *Kitāb al-aghānī* (Cairo, 1924-74), vol. 14, p. 270); translated by S. S. Agha, "A viewpoint of the Murji'a in the Umayyad period: evolution through application", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8 (1997), pp. 26ff; see other Murji'ite poetry mentioned by Agha.

<sup>71</sup> See list in Agha, "Murji'a", pp. 30-35.

politically quietist; and it has been suggested that this attitude was already that of Ḥanafites, the adherents of a school of thought founded by an early Murji'ite, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767).<sup>72</sup> The other solution was to remain politically active. Thus, whether one tolerated or fought against them, a 'working' label was needed to deal with the Muslim sinners of one's community.<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, the Murji'ites came up with the label of *mu'min dāll* for the Muslim sinner.<sup>74</sup>

Up until the time that disagreements within the community manifested themselves in bloody violence, the straightforward scheme of Muslims in Paradise and others in Hell had sufficed. But such a scheme could not explain nor accommodate the internally-divided Muslim community. To kill a Muslim knowingly was to risk eternal Hell, and yet it was difficult to tell which of two Muslims fighting one another was the transgressor.<sup>75</sup> A rethink of the status of all those nominally-Muslim individuals who had engaged in conflict against one another was necessary; but the early community was not unanimous on the stance to adopt towards such ambiguous cases. One solution to the problem was to extend the label of 'believer' to all those who professed Islam, regardless of their behaviour (sc. *mu'min dāll* according to the Murji'ites). To pretend that one's 'behaviour' did not affect one's status as a 'believer' in this life was certainly viable, but to pretend that it still guaranteed his salvation in the next was simply untenable. The community had finally

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<sup>72</sup> Cook, *Dogma*, p. 33; but Ḥanafites were politically active at least as late as the end of the second century, and after the death of Abū Ḥanīfa, see W. Madelung, "The early Murji'a in Khurāsān and Transoxania and the spread of Ḥanafism", *Der Islam* 59 (1982), pp. 32-39.

<sup>73</sup> The dilemma evident in calling someone a 'believer', yet being prepared to shed his blood, is what pushed the early Murji'ite 'Awn b. 'Abdallāh (d. 110-12/728-30) to reject Murji'ism: Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 9, p. 139; the poem is translated by Agha, "Murji'a", p. 27.

<sup>74</sup> W. Madelung in *EI2*, s.v. "murdjī'a"; van Ess, *TG*, i, p. 201.

resigned itself to the reality that if it wanted to sustain some sort of harmony, both political and religious, it would have to tolerate many in its ranks who, while professing Islam, might not act in a way that obviously reflected their adherence to the faith. But such individuals could not be comfortably placed with the 'righteous' in the next life, less with hardened unbelievers. The only solution was to defer matters to God, and argue for the eventual salvation of all Muslims, even those that may have to endure some hell-fire punishment.

Consequently, although the early Muslim community was confronted with the ethical dilemma of having some of its members end up in (eternal) Hell-fire, it did not readily adopt the Christian solution of a purgatory after death to rehabilitate its sinners in time for the Final Judgement.<sup>76</sup> It would seem that the apocalyptic references in the Qurʾān to the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-qiyāma*), the Hour (*al-sāʿa*) and the Mustering (*ḥashr*) of people as they 'issue forth from their tombs as if woken from a sleep' (cf. Q. 36/51-52), did not favour the idea that people were in Hell immediately upon death.<sup>77</sup> And so although the 'sinful' dead might get a preview of their future eternal abode in the tomb,<sup>78</sup> this would not, ultimately, serve to mitigate their punishment: they could still end up in Hell eternally. The only solution would be to

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<sup>75</sup> Cf. Q. 4/93: "Whoso kills a believer wilfully, his recompense is Gehenna, therein dwelling forever, and God will be wroth with him, and will curse him, and prepare for him a mighty chastisement".

<sup>76</sup> Although, there are some indications that the punishment of the tomb might have been envisaged as purgative: see art. 23 of the *Fiqh Akbar II*; also in general see A. J. Wensinck and A. S. Tritton in *EI2*, s.v. "adhāb al-ḳabr"; Imāmī Shīʿism punishes the Muslim sinner in the tomb as a way of purgation, see M. J. McDermott, *The Theology of al-Shaikh al-Mufīd (d. 413/1022)* (Beirut, 1978), pp. 252f; see appendix 8.

<sup>77</sup> One frequently encounters statements to the effect, *huwa fī al-nār* or *huwa fī al-janna*, implying that people took up their eternal abodes upon death immediately; but the present tense could just as well be referring to the future, and I prefer to understand these statements in this latter sense. Either way, the case for a temporary Hell does not have to be invalidated, since it could be posited that people in hell might get out on the Day of Judgement.

work out how these sinners could be taken out of Hell, the qualification for them to merit this escape, and the means by which they could do so. It is this development that will be the focus of the present study.

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. *EI2*, s.v. “adhāb al-ḳabr”.

## A note on some of the source-material

Islamicists, for a while now, have had at their disposal the *tafsīrs* of Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767),<sup>79</sup> Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 104/722),<sup>80</sup> Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/788),<sup>81</sup> and ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī (d. 211/827).<sup>82</sup> When this study began, the intention had been to use these early *tafsīr* works as source-material for the early exegetical understanding of Hell and intercession.<sup>83</sup> This was in part stimulated by Rippin’s enthusiasm for these works<sup>84</sup> and Versteegh’s work on the development of early Arabic grammar,<sup>85</sup> and in part by what promised to be an opportunity to get behind, so to speak, the great *tafsīr* of al-Ṭabarī. However, the commentaries of Sufyān al-Thawrī and Mujāhid contain little of interest, at least for the purposes of this study. As for the commentary of ‘Abd al-Razzāq, I could not distinguish between it and his *Muṣannaḥ*, the latter being far more informative. But there are also problems of authenticity associated with these texts.<sup>86</sup> With Muqātil, however, the situation is somewhat different, since his recently published commentary

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<sup>79</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ed. A. M. Shihāta (Cairo, 1979-89).

<sup>80</sup> Mujāhid b. Jabr, *Tafsīr*, ed. A. al-Sūratī (Doha, 1976)

<sup>81</sup> Sufyān al-Thawrī, *Tafsīr*, ed. I. A. ‘Arshī (Beirut, 1983).

<sup>82</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan‘ānī, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān*, ed. M. M. Muḥammad (Riyad, 1989).

<sup>83</sup> See A. Rippin’s categorization of exegetical works in *EI2*, s.v. “tafsīr”.

<sup>84</sup> A. Rippin, “The Present Status of *Tafsīr* Studies”, *The Muslim World* 72 (1982), pp. 224-238. “employing early *tafsīr* texts in a larger framework or to demonstrate other themes has yet to progress very far [...] the development of grammar, of theology, of sectarian trends and of mysticism are all potentially traceable through a close analysis of these early works”.

<sup>85</sup> C. H. M. Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar & Qur’ānic Exegesis in Early Islam*. Leiden, 1993, see especially chapter 2.

<sup>86</sup> See Versteegh: “Grammar and exegesis: The origins of Kufan grammar and the *Tafsīr Muqātil*”, *Der Islam* 67 (1990), pp. 206-242. The author states (p. 207): “One look at the edition of Mujāhid’s *Tafsīr*-- and the same conclusion applies to the *Tafsīr* of Sufyān al-Thawrī-- suffices to show that these so-called commentaries are nothing more than a collection of quotations from later commentaries relating to individual verses without any internal cohesion. In the case of Muqātil we may be on somewhat more solid ground”; also on the transmissions from Mujāhid, see F. Leemhuis, “MS. 1075 *Tafsīr* of the Cairene Dār al-Kutub and Mujāhid’s *tafsīr*”, in *Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> congress of the Union Européenne*

is more likely to be an authentic transmission of his exegetical opinions. The work has a homogenous character in general, and certain theological presuppositions pervade the text.<sup>87</sup> In addition, the terms Muqātil uses to gloss certain Qur'ānic terms are repeated consistently throughout the text.

Nevertheless, the commentary of al-Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) remains indispensable for any study of exegesis.<sup>88</sup> One has to bear in mind that his commentary not only represents classical Sunnī Islam, it is also an exegetical affirmation of it.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, Ṭabarī's work contains lots of polemic against sectarian groups, although these last are sometimes left anonymous.<sup>90</sup> My study here of the development of the idea of temporary Hell and the traditionalist reinforcement of it by reference to the concept of eschatological intercession (*shafā'a*) has, to a large extent, been based on the exegetical narratives given by Ṭabarī to certain Qur'ānic verses.

Other early materials used are the *Muṣannaḥs* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī (d. 212/827)<sup>91</sup> and that of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849).<sup>92</sup> Given the acknowledged difficulties of using ḥadīth as historical source-material,<sup>93</sup> texts such as the *Muṣannaḥ* of 'Abd al-Razzāq provide some opportunity for progress in the field. Motzki's work on this material has shown that there could be less reason for scepticism than

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*des Arabisants et Islamisants: Amsterdam 1978*, ed. R. Peters (Leiden, 1981), pp. 169-80.

<sup>87</sup> Versteegh, *Grammar*, pp. 43, 52f., 56f. and 61.

<sup>88</sup> *Jāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qurān*, Cairo, 1954.

<sup>89</sup> T. Khālidī, *Arabic historical thought in the classical period* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 73-75.

<sup>90</sup> C. Gilliot, *Exégèse, langue, et théologie en Islam: l'exégèse coranique de Ṭabarī (m. 311/923)* (Paris, 1990), pp. 207, 276.

<sup>91</sup> 'Abd al-Razzāq b. Hammām al-Ṣan'ānī, *al-Muṣannaḥ*, ed. H. al-A'zamī (Beirut, 1970-72).

<sup>92</sup> 'Abdallāh b. Muḥammad b. Abī Shayba, *Al-kitāb al-muṣannaḥ fī'l-aḥādīth wa'l-āthār*, ed. M. A. Shāhīn (Beirut, 1995).

<sup>93</sup> For a useful summary of modern scholarship's approach to Muslim sources, see F. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic origins: The beginnings of Islamic historical writing* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 13ff.

previously thought, and while one does not have to accept the authenticity of each and every tradition-- let alone their *isnads*-- their content does provide a picture of the sort of discussions surrounding Qur'ānic issues which concerned the early community.<sup>94</sup> In a similar vein, Versteegh adds that, "the accounts of these discussions exhibit enough variation to show that they reflect actual practice";<sup>95</sup> or in our case, that they reflect actual controversies. Be that as it may, there are no hard and fast rules when it comes to working with the corpus of ḥadīth material. It seems that regardless of the method one uses to date the content of the ḥadīth, by using the names in the *isnād*, other ḥadīths will inevitably frustrate the entire methodology.<sup>96</sup> It is probably safer to use ḥadīths to infer geographical loci for given controversies, by looking at the individuals in the *isnād*, than to use them as dating tools. For what concerns this study, I have chosen to tread a 'methodological middle ground between Schacht and Shāfi'ī' (if it exists),<sup>97</sup> although I will invariably draw on the Schachtian model: the ḥadīth that goes back to a successor will command more attention than one to a companion, and so on.<sup>98</sup> This is not to say that no ḥadīths go back to the Prophet, undoubtedly legal and ritual ones cannot be swept under the 'Schachtian' surface; but certainly, ḥadīths of the sort of content that will be encountered in this study should be approached with more caution. Especially given that in our case the non-ḥadīth

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<sup>94</sup> *Id.*, "The *Muṣannaḥ* of 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Ṣan'ānī as a source of authentic *aḥādīth* of the first century A.H.", *JNES* 50 (1991), pp. 1-21.

<sup>95</sup> Versteegh, *Grammar*, p. 65.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Cook, *Dogma*, pp. 107ff.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. W. Madelung's criticisms of Cook's methodological 'premises' in his review of *Early Muslim dogma*, in *Journal of Theological Studies* 33, ii (1982), pp. 628-33.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. J. Schacht, *Origins of Muḥammadan jurisprudence* (Oxford, 1950), pp. 165ff, 253ff; cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, *Muslim tradition: studies in chronology, provenance and authorship of early ḥadīth* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 70ff.

material itself simply does not support what the ḥadīths purport. In sum, as far as possible I try to approach ḥadīths with reference to dating criteria external to the ḥadīths themselves.<sup>99</sup> For example, I use Muqātil as a *terminus a quo* for the emergence of an idea, and then I turn to Ṭabarī (who provides *isnāds*) to locate the ideas, and to see how the Sunnī exegetes accommodated them within the Qurʾānic text; I then use the *Muṣannaf* to see if the idea is attested, and if so, if it appears in the canonical collections, e.g. the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī (d. 257/870). It is on this basis that I derive a tentative chronology. Of course, in order to strengthen the chronology, datable theological treatises are used whenever possible.

Two final points remain. One has to do with the similarity between Sunnī and Shīʿite tradition on the subject of Hell. With few exceptions (noted at relevant points in this study) the ideas about temporary Hell-fire punishment which were taking shape from the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.H. onwards can be found in later mainstream Sunnī and Shīʿite tradition (of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H.). Both traditions eventually accepted only a temporary Hell-fire punishment for the sinners of their community. The only major difference is, as can be expected, the eschatological importance of the Imāms alongside that of the Prophet; but this was a natural consequence of the Shīʿite premise that the ‘unique characteristics’ of the Prophet were inherited by his progeny. The other point has to do with the use of the definition ‘traditionalist’ used in this study. Whereas ‘traditionist’ is simply a technical term used to denote anyone involved in the transmission of ḥadīth (sc. a *muḥaddith*), ‘traditionalist’ is a term used to refer to those who regarded religious knowledge as deriving not just from the Qurʾān, but

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<sup>99</sup> Cook, *Dogma*, p. 116.

from the body of traditions, i.e. ḥadīth (and also from the ‘consensus’, *ijmāʿ*).<sup>100</sup> I will argue that it was primarily these ‘traditionalists’ that were responsible for the doctrine under investigation here. Traditionalism had, by the second century of Islam, permeated almost all groups and sects in Muslim society: ḥadīth had become the principal mode for the expression of religious dogma by the mainstream schools of Islamic thought. The main proponents of traditionalism were the Ḥanbalīs and it will become evident that it was, in the main, the ideological movement represented by these latter that was responsible for the development and propagation of the ideas attributed to ‘traditionalists’ in this study.<sup>101</sup> In contrast, I will try to detect opposition to this ‘traditionalist’ approach with regard to the concepts of temporary Hell and *shafāʿa*, since the evidence suggests that some early Muslims preferred to read the Qurʾān ‘literally’, without recourse to other potential sources of exegesis: these I will call ‘scripturalists’. Although, the views of the later (classical) Murjiʿa cannot be very clearly distinguished from those of the traditionalists, at least not with regard to the concept of temporary Hell-fire for grave sinners, I will try to show, within the constraints of the evidence, that the earlier Murjiʿa would have espoused a much more ‘scripturalist’ approach to the idea of afterlife punishment for Muslim sinners.

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<sup>100</sup> B. Abrahamov, *Islamic theology: traditionalism and rationalism* (Edinburgh, 1998), ix-x.

<sup>101</sup> See appendix 1, where the Ḥanbalī creeds seem to be the earliest ones to defend the doctrines of temporary Hell-fire and the intercession of the Prophet for grave sinners.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **The Qur'ān:**

### **Hell, intercession and salvation**

Since this dissertation is concerned with the concept of salvation, through the development of the idea of temporary Hell, we shall first begin by examining all relevant Qurʾānic material as it stands. This will give us an idea of the sort of views the early Muslim community is likely to have held, and will also provide the starting point from which the development of ideas posited in the Sunnī tradition can be charted.

### 1.1 ‘Hell’ in the Qurʾān

The reward offered to the believer and the threat of painful retribution for the unbeliever is central to the Qurʾānic conception of how action in this life determines the nature of the recompense in the next. The essential eschatological scheme may be summarized thus:<sup>1</sup> at an unknown point in time, unknown to all but God,<sup>2</sup> the world with all its inhabitants will come to an end with the blow of a cosmic trumpet, whereupon follows a second sounding at which point all mankind are resurrected to face the final reckoning.<sup>3</sup> Every soul is summoned to contemplate a record (*kitāb*) of its deeds and is given its eternal dispensation accordingly.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In secondary Muslim literature eschatological narratives tend to be chaotic and without order, as can be seen in al-Qurṭubī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *al-Tadhkira fi-ahwāl al-mawtā wa-umūr al ākhira*, ed. F. A. Zamarlī (Beirut, 1995); cf. W. Raven, “A *kitāb al-‘azama*: on cosmology, Hell and Paradise” in *Miscellanea Arabica et Islamica*, ed. F. de Jong (Leuven, 1993), pp. 135-42, see p. 137. The essential sequence of eschatological events is given by J. van Ess, *TG*, vol. 4, pp. 543ff; also L. Gardet in *EI2*, s.v. “ḳiyāma”, and U. Rubin in *EI2*, s.v. “al-sā‘a”. On the descriptions of the delights of Paradise and the torments of Hell during three phases of the Muslim tradition, S. el-Saleh, “La vie future selon le Coran”, in *Etudes Musulmanes* 13 (1971), traces the changing perceptions of the delights of Paradise and the torments of Hell through three classes of exegesis: traditional, rationalistic, and mystic; the author also describes the variation in detail in the descriptions of Paradise and Hell from the Meccan to Medinan periods; Smith, J. I. and Haddād, Y. Y., *The Islamic understanding of death and resurrection* (Albany, 1981). For an exposition of the persistently ‘carnal’ attitude towards the delights of Paradise, see A. al-Azmeh, “On the morphology of paradisiac narratives”, *Journal of Arabic Literature* 26 (1995), pp. 215-31.

<sup>2</sup> Q. 7/187.

<sup>3</sup> Q. 39/68-69.

<sup>4</sup> Q. 39/70.

The unbelievers, those of the 'left', are thrust violently into the fire of Gehenna (*nār jahannam*).<sup>5</sup> Bound in fetters and drenched in liquid pitch,<sup>6</sup> they suffer beatings with maces of iron,<sup>7</sup> gulp fetid boiling water,<sup>8</sup> taste festering blood<sup>9</sup> and consume bush of bitter thorn<sup>10</sup> in the midst of scorching-hot winds and shade of black smoke.<sup>11</sup> The believers, on the other hand, those of the 'right', spend the afterlife in gardens of Eden (*jannātu ʿadn*).<sup>12</sup> Reclining on jewel-encrusted thrones,<sup>13</sup> dressed in fine silk, arrayed in heavy brocade and adorned with silver bracelets,<sup>14</sup> they are waited on by stunningly beautiful youths who serve them the purest intoxicants,<sup>15</sup> while they take delight in virginal black-eyed beauties.<sup>16</sup>

The term *janna* ('garden') is by far the most common way of referring to Paradise in the Qurʾān. Only on four occasions do we find a different term for Paradise, although the sense is invariably that of a garden: *firdaws* (Persian *pairidaēza*, and Gk. *παραδεισος*)<sup>17</sup> is used once on its own (Q. 23/11) and once qualified by the plural *jannāt* (Q. 18/107: *jannāt al-firdaws*). The only other word used to refer to the Garden is *rawdā* which appears once on its own (Q. 30/15) and once in the plural where it qualifies *jannāt* (Q. 42/22: *rawdāt al-jannāt*).

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<sup>5</sup> Q. 52/13.

<sup>6</sup> Q. 14/49-50.

<sup>7</sup> Q. 22/21.

<sup>8</sup> Q. 14/16.

<sup>9</sup> Q. 38/57.

<sup>10</sup> Q. 88/6.

<sup>11</sup> Q. 56/42-43.

<sup>12</sup> Q. 98/8.

<sup>13</sup> Q. 56/15.

<sup>14</sup> Q. 76/21.

<sup>15</sup> Q. 56/17-18.

Hell is always a fire.<sup>18</sup> It is referred to either by generic terms such as *al-nār*, *al-‘adhāb* (‘punishment’) or *al-ḥarīq* (“burning”), or, by these same terms qualified variously: *nār jahannam*, *‘adhāb al-ḥarīq* or *‘adhāb al-nār*. Hell is also referred to by several nouns.<sup>19</sup> These nouns are the following: *jahannam*,<sup>20</sup> *hāwiya*,<sup>21</sup> *al-jahīm*,<sup>22</sup> *al-sa‘īr*,<sup>23</sup> *laḏā*,<sup>24</sup> *saqar*,<sup>25</sup> *al-ḥuṭama*.<sup>26</sup>

## 1.2 The ‘seven’ names of Hell

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<sup>16</sup> Q. 55/56.

<sup>17</sup> A. Jeffery, *The foreign vocabulary of the Quran* (Baroda, 1938), pp. 223-224, s.v. “firdaws”.

<sup>18</sup> Not inevitable perhaps, as what makes one type of punishment seem more “hellish” than another seems to be relative to the immediate environment. And although Scandinavians would just as readily be horrified by a “hell of fire”, it is interesting to note that Christian missionaries who worked in northern-most areas of Europe preached that “hell” was unimaginably cold. There is an instance in the *tafsīr* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq where excessive cold (*zamharīr*) is mentioned as one of the tortures of Hell, but this is almost certainly a secondary association based on the fact that where the term *zamharīr* makes its single appearance in the Qurʾān (76/13) it stands for one of two things which the people of Paradise will never have to bear (again): excessive heat and excessive cold (*lā yarawna fihā shamsan wa-lā zamharīran*). But cf. also the Talmudic teaching that snow forms one of several kinds of punishment that take place in Hell, “Gehinnom is half fire and half hail” (*Exod. R.* 51, 7) and “the Holy One...afflicts them with itching; after that with fire...and then with snow” (*p. Sanh.* 29b); cf. also Zoroastrian ‘Hell’, Dhalla, *Zoroastrian theology*, p. 279; Buddhist Hell can be cold too, “State of the Dead (Buddhist)” in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings et al. (Edinburgh, 1920), vol. 11, p. 831a.

<sup>19</sup> Other terms in the Qurʾān came to be associated with a vague ‘topography’ of Hell but feature very infrequently in tradition. These are given by T. O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names for Hell in the Qurʾān”, *BSOAS* 24 (1961), pp. 444-69.

<sup>20</sup> Occurs 77 times.

<sup>21</sup> Appears once in Q. 101/9.

<sup>22</sup> Occurs 26 times.

<sup>23</sup> Occurs 16 times.

<sup>24</sup> Once in Q. 70/15.

<sup>25</sup> Occurs 4 times, once: Q. 54/48 and 3 times: Q. 74/ 26, 27, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Twice, Q. 104/4f.

Islamicists have made etymological analyses of these 'names' for Hell, but, for reasons unknown, each scholar has tended to select one or two terms.<sup>27</sup> The only exception was O'Shaughnessy, whose article on the 'seven names' went some way to collecting all previous research on the derivation of these Qur'ānic terms together with the opinions of Muslim sources concerning them.<sup>28</sup> My concern here shall not be with yet another etymological analysis, although I shall summarize all such previous work, if only to have it all in one place. My own linguistic inspection of the terms added nothing new to O'Shaughnessy's work. On a geographical note, I have, however, come across a possible source of provenance for some of these terms, and this will follow the linguistic summary. When I do examine the names for Hell afresh, it will be for the purpose of finding out whether, in the way in which the Qur'ān uses them, they shed any light on the idea of 'temporary Hell'. As for the function, if any, of those terms during the period of Qur'ānic revelation, it will be shown, primarily from the evidence of the Qur'ān itself, that they constituted an element of literary variation and perhaps contributed to the general tone of mystery typical of the apocalyptic and eschatological passages of the Qur'ān.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the seven names, it should be pointed out that the number seven is somewhat arbitrary. Firstly, the notion that there are seven names for Hell is not strictly Qur'ānic but derived from the exegetical tradition and adopted in turn

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<sup>27</sup> Just as an example, Jeffery (*Vocabulary*) only looked at two of the names, *hāwiya* and *jahannam*. Since he makes no comment to that effect, we cannot be sure that he took the others to be native Arabic; certainly others did not. Full discussion ensuing.

<sup>28</sup> O'Shaughnessy, "The seven names", pp. 444-69.

by modern scholarship.<sup>29</sup> The likely origin for the idea of seven names is the Qurʾānic description of *jahannam*, by far the most common term for Hell,<sup>30</sup> as having seven gates.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the widespread fascination with the number 7, especially in the Near East,<sup>32</sup> it should be pointed out that the Jewish Gehinnom is also said to have seven names and seven levels.<sup>33</sup>

In fact, even the exegetical tradition is not always certain about the exact number of the names of Hell. Ṭabarī, for example, gives the following seven names for Hell: *jahannam*, *al-jaḥīm*, *laḏā*, *saqar*, *al-ḥuṭama*, *al-hāwiya* and *al-ḥāfira*; he has left out *al-sāḥira* and included *al-ḥāfira* (Q. 79/10). There is even the suggestion that the word *al-sāḥira* (Q. 79/14) might be another name for Hell.<sup>34</sup> It should be pointed out, however, that the preferred understanding of the last two names by the exegetes is that they represent features of the earth: *al-sāḥira* being the ‘surface of the earth’, and *al-ḥāfira*, a ‘dug-out earth’ or ‘grave’.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, these last two terms do not appear in an obvious

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<sup>29</sup> See O’Shaughnessy above, note 15.

<sup>30</sup> Out of the 111 references to the fire of Hell, *jahannam* features in 77 of them.

<sup>31</sup> Q. 15/43-44; 16/29; 39/72-71; 40/76.

<sup>32</sup> On the significance of the number 7 see Conrad, L. I., “Seven and the *tasbīr*: on the implications of numerical symbolism for the study of medieval Islamic history”, *JESHO* 31 (1988), pp. 42-73; for its importance in Semitic and Iranian traditions since at least Babylonian times, see A. Schimmel in *EI2*, s.v. “sab”, 662b: the author notes how Muslim tradition ascribes seven divisions to Hell but eight to Paradise.

<sup>33</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. I. Singer et al. (New York, 1901-06), s.v. “gehinnom”.

<sup>34</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 30, p. 34. Both words only appear once in the Qurʾān.

<sup>35</sup> Ṭabarī himself gives these meanings first, before suggesting that they might be names for Hell. In Lane’s summary of the Muslim opinions, only Ṭabarī has ‘Hell’ for *sāḥira* (E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, London, 1863-93, I.iv, p. 1452). Other authorities take the word to mean ‘sleepless, continuous’. Presumably, in its Qurʾānic context, this is a description of the Day of Resurrection/Judgement as it would appear for those who have been resurrected. It is interesting to note that the word appears in Yāqūt as a name for a location in Jerusalem (note: *al-bayt al-muqaddas*), *Jacut’s Geographisches Wörterbuch*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld (Leipzig, 1868), iii, p. 25. As for *ḥāfira*, Lane gives the meaning of ‘original state, the beginning of something’, which, applied to the Qurʾānic context, would mean ‘life on earth’, because on resurrection, people enquire “*aʾinnā la-mardudūna fīl-ḥāfira?*” (“Is it possible that we are returning to the way we were?”); no meaning of ‘Hell’ is given for it however (*Lexicon*, I.ii, p. 601).

context of ‘fire’ or ‘Hell’ as they are used in the Qurʾān, nor are they described as such. In contrast, the other seven terms are either explicitly related to a ‘fire’, or they denote Hell because of their juxtaposition in the text with Paradise. Still, an argument could be made in favour of *al-ḥāfira* or *al-sāhira* as possible names for Hell by analogy with the case of *hāwiya*. The term *hāwiya* does not obviously imply an association with ‘fire’,<sup>36</sup> and had the relevant verse of sūra 101 not been followed by the response *nārun ḥāmiya*, the term might not have been construed as a reference to Hell. In fact, the word preceding *hāwiya* is *ummuhu* (lit. ‘his mother is *hāwiya*’):<sup>37</sup>

Q. 101: *fa-ammā man thaqulat mawāzīnuhu* (6) *fa-huwa fī ʿishatin rāḍiya* (7) *wa-ammā man khaffat mawāzīnuhu* (8) *fa-ummuhu hāwiya* (9) *wa-mā adrāka mā hiya* (10) *nārun ḥāmiya* (11).

“Then he whose deeds weigh heavy in the Balance shall inherit a pleasing life, but he whose deeds weigh light in the Balance, he will be headlong into *hāwiya*, and how would you know what that is? A blazing Fire”.

Whether we understand ‘abyss’ or ‘perdition’ for *hāwiya*,<sup>38</sup> admittedly the concept is tantamount to Hell in the context of the afterlife, to which this *sūra* clearly refers (cf. *mawāzīn*: “the eschatological scales” of judgement). And although the possibility of the

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<sup>36</sup> Q. 101/8-11, “*fa-ammā man khaffat mawāzīnuhu, fa-ummuhu hāwiya, wa-mā adrāka mā hiya, nārun ḥāmiya*” (“And he whose scales are light, *hāwiya* is his mother, what do you know what *hāwiya* is, it is a fierce fire”). Indeed, *hāwiya* in Syriac suggests ‘abyss’ or ‘chasm’ (*hawtā*) (see O’Shaughnessy above, p. 449). In a similar vein, ʿAbd al-Razzāq (d. 823)← Maʿmar (d. 770)← Qatāda (d.735): *kāna al-rajul idhā waqaʿa fī amrin shadīd qālū, “hawāt bihi ummuhu”* (“When a person was afflicted by some grave matter, they would say: his mother has led him to perdition”) (*Tafsīr*, vol. 2, part ii, p. 392). The concepts of ‘perdition’ and ‘abyss’ bear some resemblance, though they might not be immediately associated with a hell-fire.

<sup>37</sup> Arberry translates it: “[he] shall plunge in the womb of the Pit: and what shall teach thee what is the Pit? A blazing Fire”.

<sup>38</sup> O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”, p. 450: cf. the Syriac *hawtā*.

interpolation of verses 10 and 11 has been convincingly dismissed,<sup>39</sup> it is still the case that only on account of the phrase *nārun ḥāmiya* does *hāwiya* qualify as a possible name for Hell.

In part because of the way in which the terms for Hell are distributed in the Qurʾān, and in the absence of any coherent Muslim views on the significance and function of these different names,<sup>40</sup> modern scholars have usually offered one of the following interpretations: 1) there is no evidence that a classification of seven infernal regions was in Muḥammad's thought, 2) Muḥammad probably meant to indicate the whole of Hell by each of the seven names, 3) Muḥammad's ideas on Hell apparently underwent a certain development and, 4) the use of the seven names in the Qurʾān for a future place of punishment offers a problem for which there is no satisfactory solution.<sup>41</sup>

In his own attempt at addressing the question of the names, O'Shaughnessy applied two criteria to his investigation. One of these was the foreign vocabulary of the Qurʾān. The other was the chronological arrangement of the sūras established by Nöldeke-Schwally, and later developed by Bell and Blachère.<sup>42</sup> The approximate chronological ordering of the names for Hell offered the following results: 1) the greatest variety in the use of the names was found in the first Meccan period. 2) Only in the first Meccan period

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<sup>39</sup> Jeffery, *Vocabulary*, pp. 285-86, points out that the unusually lengthened form of the feminine pronoun *hiyah* would not have been employed by an interpolator. O'Shaughnessy, "The seven names", p. 451, adds that since the sūra is one of the shortest and earliest, an interpolation would have been easily detected.

<sup>40</sup> We shall see below how the commentaries are inconsistent in their interpretations of the names; more importantly there is evidence of controversy within tradition about the significance of the names.

<sup>41</sup> O'Shaughnessy, "The seven names", p. 446.

<sup>42</sup> T. Nöldeke and F. Schwally, *Geschichte des Qorāns* (Leipzig, 1909-38), i, pp. 66ff; R. Bell, *The Qurʾān: translated with a critical re-arrangement of the Surahs* (Edinburgh, 1937-39); R. Blachère, *Introduction au*

do all seven names make an appearance, after that three of the names (*hāwiya*, *lazā*, *al-ḥuṭama*) do not reappear, and after the second Meccan period another name (*saqar*) also fails to re-appear. Thus, during the third Meccan and Medinan periods we are left with only three of the names for Hell: *al-jahīm*, *al-saʿīr* and *jahannam*. Moreover, only *jahannam* appears in all four periods. (3) The absence of the article, indefinite or definite, with some of the words suggests that they were used as proper names. (4) The occurrence of the interrogative *wa-mā adrāka* before three of the names (*hāwiya* in Q. 101/10, *al-ḥuṭama* in Q. 104/5, and *saqar* in Q. 74/27) suggests that the meaning of the words themselves or their application to Hell was not immediately evident to Muḥammad's audience.<sup>43</sup>

The following is a summary of what we know about the etymological background of the terms for Hell. It includes O'Shaughnessy's results, those of previous scholarship and some of my own modifications:

1) *hāwiya* (Q. 101/9) is the first term to appear in the Qurʾān according to the Meccan/Medinan chronology. Some hold that it is a Jewish-Arabic adaptation of the *hawwāh* of Is. 47:11 and Ez. 7:26 where it stands for 'desolation';<sup>44</sup> or it is a Christian borrowing from the Syriac *hawtā* meaning 'chasm' and denoting Hell after the passage in

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*Coran* (Paris, 1947). For a survey of these works see W. Montgomery Watt's revised edition to Bell's work: W. M. Watt and R. Bell, *Introduction to the Qurʾān* (Edinburgh, 1970).

<sup>43</sup> O'Shaughnessy, p. 449.

<sup>44</sup> C. C. Torrey, *The Jewish foundation of Islam* (New York, 1933), p. 51. This is strongly doubted by R. Paret, but with no offer of an alternative explanation: *Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* (Stuttgart-Berlin, 1971), p. 519.

Luke 8:31.<sup>45</sup> Neither passage, however, strictly links the term to hell-fire, which is what it certainly stands for in Q. 101/9-11.<sup>46</sup> Another suggestion is that the word is an Ethiopic derivation from a term which in one form means ‘red glow in the sky’, another ‘fire’ or ‘burning coal’.<sup>47</sup> As for the Muslim commentaries, Ṭabarī’s remark that it means ‘falling’ since it is related to the action of being hurled into the fire is clearly not satisfactory.<sup>48</sup>

2) *al-jahīm* is, chronologically, the second term for Hell to appear in the Qurʾān. It is also the second most common term for Hell after *jahannam* in the Qurʾān. O’Shaughnessy takes the term to be a syncopated form of the Ethiopic *gahannam* with the final syllable lengthened (*ī*) to fit the preferred Qurʾānic rhyming scheme in *īn/īm* (cf. *tasnīm* of Q. 83/27; *Ibrāhīm* in Q. 87/18; *sijjīn* of Q. 83/7-8; *Ilyāsīn* Q. 37/130 and numerous other instances).<sup>49</sup> The *faʿīl* pattern in nouns expresses sound and intensity,<sup>50</sup> both of which are associated with Hell in the Qurʾān.<sup>51</sup> Jeffery does not mention *al-jahīm*. Lane summarizes the exegetes and the lexicons by giving *al-jahīm* as ‘a fire burning intensely’,<sup>52</sup> which one can derive from the Qurʾān anyway.

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<sup>45</sup> O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”, p. 452.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Jeffery, *Vocabulary*, pp. 285-86; the poet Umayya b. Abī Ṣalt (d. c. 624) mentions it in this way, *Dīwān*, ed. A. Ṣalṭī (Damascus, 1974), p. 543 (no. 103, -yāʾ): *wa-lam takun...ilā al-nār hāwiyān* “and not like the one who is sent hurtling into the Fire”.

<sup>47</sup> Jeffery, *Vocabulary*, p. 286. This would better fit the Qurʾānic usage, but is firmly rejected by O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”, p. 450.

<sup>48</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 30, pp. 282f.: *kāna al-rajul idhā waqaʿa fī amrin shadīd qāla hawat ummuhu*; Abū ʿUbayda offers nothing: *Majāz al-Qurʾān*, ed. F. Sezgin (Cairo, 1954), ii, p. 101.

<sup>49</sup> O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”, pp. 452-53.

<sup>50</sup> W. Wright, *A grammar of the Arabic language* (Cambridge, 1967: 3<sup>rd</sup> edn.), ii, pp. 136-37.

<sup>51</sup> Q. 67/7-8: *idhā ulqaw fihā samiʿū lahā shahīqan wa-hiya tafūr takādu tamayyazu mina l-ghayḏ* (And when they are flung into it they hear it drawing breath as it blazes forth almost bursting in its fury); cf. O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”, p. 453.

<sup>52</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, I.ii, p. 384a.

3) *al-sa'ir* is chronologically the third term for Hell to appear in the Qur'ān.<sup>53</sup> The *Lisān* considers it as equal in meaning to *mas'ūr*, thus, basing it on the *fa'il* pattern and explains it as 'a fiercely kindled flame'.<sup>54</sup> A Hebrew cognate (*sa'ôr*, 'to roar/rage') has been pointed out, suggesting that the root is Arabic of primitive Semitic origin.<sup>55</sup> Most agree that it is a native Arabic formation.<sup>56</sup> Fraenkel notes that the term has nothing to do with the Aramaic Hebrew word for 'tax' or 'duty'.<sup>57</sup> The existence of a pre-Islamic idol, possibly associated with 'storms' (cf. Hebrew meaning above), with a name of the same root is known.<sup>58</sup>

4) *jahannam* is obviously of foreign origin: a quadrilateral, diptote feminine noun; it is generally acknowledged as coming from the Hebrew *gē-hinnōm*, 'the valley of Hinnom',<sup>59</sup> possibly via the Ethiopic *gahannam*,<sup>60</sup> which the Qur'ān also uses in a syncopated form (see *al-jahīm* above).

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<sup>53</sup> O'Shaughnessy, "The seven names", p. 455.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn Manzūr, Muḥammad b. Mukarram, *Lisān al-'arab* (Beirut, 1956), vol. 12, 84b-85a.

<sup>55</sup> O'Shaughnessy, "The seven names", p. 457; the author fails to note (p. 456) that the variant *su'ur* does actually appear in the Qur'ān (Q. 54/24, 47) when he takes issue with Schulthess who derived the meaning of 'heat' from a poem by Umayya b. Abī Ṣalt which uses *su'ur*. This latter form, however, seems to bear no direct semantic relation to *sa'ir*, and is usually translated as "distress" (*'anā'*) or "error" (*dalāl*), see Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 27, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> Nöldeke-Schwally, *Geschichte*, i, p. 89; O'Shaughnessy, "The seven names", p. 457; C. E. Bosworth in *EI2*, s.v. "sa'ir", 872a. Jeffery does not mention this term in his *Vocabulary*.

<sup>57</sup> S. Fraenkel, *Die Aramäischen Fremdwörter im Arabischen* (Leiden, 1886), p. 189.

<sup>58</sup> T. Fahd in *Le panthéon de l'Arabie centrale à la veille de l'Hégire* (Paris, 1968), p. 49, does not make the connection with the Qur'ānic occurrence of the root *s-'-r*.

<sup>59</sup> A. Geiger, "What did Muḥammad borrow from Judaism?", in *The Origins of the Koran*, ed. Ibn Warrāq (New York, 1998), pp. 167f.; Jeffery, *Vocabulary*, pp. 106-107 who also points out its existence in the Syriac and Armenian, although he states that the final *m* is missing in these latter whereas it is present in the Hebrew making this last the most likely source for the Arabic; C. Brockelmann, *Lexicon Syriacum* (Göttingen, 1928: 2<sup>nd</sup> edn.), p. 106b.

<sup>60</sup> Jeffery, *Vocabulary*, p. 106; O'Shaughnessy, "The seven names", p. 459.

5) *saqar* is not mentioned by Jeffery, and in all probability he might not have been able to resolve the issue of whether the term is of foreign origin or derived from the Arabic *s-q-r*, an action attributed to the sun when it inflicts extreme heat (cf. *saqarat-hu al-shams* or *saqarāt al-shams* in Lane).<sup>61</sup> This difficulty has been recognized by others.<sup>62</sup> Nöldeke considers *saqar* as a later substitution for *al-jaḥīm* in the two verses where the former appears, since *al-jaḥīm* is better suited to the rhyme scheme of the surrounding verses (rhyme scheme in *-īn*) but says nothing on its origin, neither does Jeffery.<sup>63</sup> While Paret himself does not offer a possible origin for the term he rejects the ‘substitution’ hypothesis of Nöldeke as inconclusive. Instead, he prefers to resolve the difficulty of the rhyme scheme by reading the four verses as two, so that Q. 74/38, *kullu nafsin bi-mā kasabat rahīna*, and 74/39, *illā aṣḥāb al-yamīn* become one verse ending in *-īn*; and Q. 74/42, *mā salakakum fī saqar* and 74/43, *qālū lam naku min al-muṣallīn* become another verse ending in *-īn*, dismissing the need for an arbitrary ‘substitution’ hypothesis<sup>64</sup> whilst preserving the term *saqar* in its place.<sup>65</sup> As regards provenance, O’Shaughnessy conjectures that it is a foreign word on the basis that it is a diptote, feminine and used as a proper noun. His reference to the Syriac *shegarā*, ‘raging fire’ or ‘flame’, which is used by St. Ephraem and which appears in the Syriac version of Daniel 3:22, seems to be an educated guess;<sup>66</sup> it may be the Arabic alternative for the Aramaic *s-j-r* which is also

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<sup>61</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, I.iv, p. 1379b-c.

<sup>62</sup> D. Gimaret in *EI2*, s.v. “saḡar”, p. 881a.

<sup>63</sup> Nöldeke-Schwally, *Geschichte*, iii, p. 78 n. 3.

<sup>64</sup> This hypothesis is adopted by O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”, p. 462.

<sup>65</sup> Paret, *Koran*, p. 494.

<sup>66</sup> O’Shaughnessy, “The seven names”, p. 463.

borrowed,<sup>67</sup> and which is phonetically very close to *s-q-r* anyway. I am able to offer a possible geographical source for the term (also for *lazā*) which might locate the term within the Meccan environs.<sup>68</sup>

6) *lazā* is also absent from Jeffery's survey of foreign words in the Qur'ān. Brockelmann has adduced the Syriac cognate *leṯā*, 'to sharpen or inflame', and accordingly asserts its Semitic origin.<sup>69</sup> The word itself (like *saqar* and *al-ḥuṭama*, see next) appears only once in the Qur'ān (Q. 70/15). The verb *talazzā* is found elsewhere in the Qur'ān to indicate the action of 'a fire' (Q. 92/14: *fa-andhartukum nāran talazzā*), and this perhaps drives the exegetes to establish the meaning of 'fierce blaze' for *lazā*.

7) *al-ḥuṭama* appears twice, in the same sūra: Q. 104/4f., "No, he shall be flung into *al-ḥuṭama* and how would you know what *al-ḥuṭama* is?". Grimme provides the most reasonable interpretation, it would seem, when he finds the essential meaning of 'crushing' in this word (although he thinks it is 'mysterious'), suggesting a terrible pain to those who endure it.<sup>70</sup> Jeffery makes no mention of it. Fraenkel offers no help either. Blachère derives it from the root meaning to 'consume',<sup>71</sup> which seems to mirror the exegetes who point out that *al-ḥuṭama* is an epithet given to a person that consumes large amounts of food. The application of 'consumption' to Hell is no doubt on account of the fact that it is imagined as devouring its inhabitants. This is suggested elsewhere in the

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<sup>67</sup> Cf. Brockelmann, *Lexicon*, p. 756a; Fraenkel, *Aramäischen*, p. 114.

<sup>68</sup> See below, pp. 36ff.

<sup>69</sup> Brockelmann, *Lexicon*, p. 365a.

<sup>70</sup> H. Grimme, *Mohammed* (Münster, 1892), i, p. 18, n. 1: "Ḥuṭama ist ein absichtlich dunkel gehaltener Ausdruck mit der Grundbedeutung 'Zermalmung'".

<sup>71</sup> Blachère, *Coran*, ii, p. 112, n. 4.

Qurʾān in the following address made by God to the Hell-fire, Q. 50/30, “On that day we shall ask *jahannam*: are you filled to the full?, whereupon it will ask: Is there anymore?”. The word is most definitely of native Arabic origin: the form *fuʿala* is a super-intensifier (*li-taʿkīd al-mubālagha*),<sup>72</sup> so that *al-ḥuṭama* becomes a ‘great pulverizer’.

According to the entries given by Yāqūt in his geographical dictionary, two, possibly three,<sup>73</sup> of the names for Hell may have originated around Mecca.<sup>74</sup> The term *saqar* appears as a name for a mountain, or a ravine according to al-Azraqī, just outside the town of Mecca.<sup>75</sup> As for *lazā*, it is mentioned in the pre-Islamic poetry of Hudhayl, according to Yāqūt, and is the name for a location somewhere in the lands of Juhayna in the direction of Khaybar<sup>76</sup> and is associated with extreme heat.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the descriptive epithet *nazzāʿatan liʿl-shawā* (“scorches off the skin”) given to the name *lazā* to refer to the intensity of its heat (Q. 70/16) is also given by Yāqūt (note: *nazzāʿatu al-shawā*) as a local site near the ravine of al-Ṣufā.<sup>78</sup>

It should be pointed out that the consonants *s-ʿ-r* also appear in Yāqūt, once in the form *siʿr* as a name for a mountain mentioned in the poetry of Khufāf b. Nudba, and

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<sup>72</sup> Wright gives the very case of *ḥuṭama* as an example of the *fuʿala* form, *Grammar*, ii, 139.

<sup>73</sup> I say possibly three because it depends whether the epithet *nazzāʿatan liʿl-shawā* of Q. 70/16 might have been intended as a name for Hell independent of the term *lazā* and not as a description of the latter. The verse Q. 70/16, however, is not usually considered ‘misplaced’.

<sup>74</sup> I am aware, however, that these names may have been applied subsequent to the revelation of the Qurʾān, and so are not pre-Islamic.

<sup>75</sup> Yāqūt, *Wörterbuch*, iii, p. 101; al-Azraqī, *Akhbār Makka wa-mā jāʿa fihā min al-āthār*, ed. R. S. Malḥas (Madrid, 1965), ii, p. 287 states that in the Jāhiliyya the mountain was called al-Sattār (al-Sitār?), though he also gives the impression that *saqar* was also a pre-Islamic name (see further along on the same page); a “valley” according to Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, III, 449.

<sup>76</sup> Yāqūt, iv, pp. 358, 478.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, ii, p. 614.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, p. 331; iv, p. 775; Azraqī, *Makka*, ii, pp. 228, 274.

again in the form *su'ayr* as a name for a pre-Islamic idol;<sup>79</sup> but this last could easily be read *sa'ir* in the absence of orthographic vocalization. In any case, the existence of Syriac and Hebrew cognates for the trilateral *s-ʿ-r*, as noted by O'Shaughnessy,<sup>80</sup> would confirm that the term is genuinely Arabic. Moreover, none of the variant codices give a different vocalization for it where it appears in the Qurʾān (Q. 4/11, 58; 17/99; 22/4; 25/12; 31/20; 33/64; 34/11; 35/6; 42/5; 48/13; 67/5; 67/10; 76/4; 84/12).<sup>81</sup>

The process by which geographical features are transferred to the geographical imagery of the afterlife is familiar from Jewish tradition: 'Gehinnom', the valley of Hinnom, to the south of Jerusalem became notorious on account of the child sacrifices performed there in worship of the god Moloch. Thus, by a figurative transformation the place came to symbolize Hell.<sup>82</sup> While there is no detail to suggest why *saqar* and *lazā*, geographical features of the Ḥijāz, should have become associated with Hell in Islam,<sup>83</sup> it does show that the process by which Judaism adapted Gehinnom to its afterlife might also have taken place in Islam.<sup>84</sup> One could then understand the Qurʾānic formula *wa-mā adrāka mā* not as an indication that Muḥammad's audience might have been ignorant of

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, iii, p. 94; cf. Ibn al-Kalbī, Hishām b. Muḥammad, *Kitāb al-aṣnām*, ed. A. Zakī (Cairo, 1965), p. 41.

<sup>80</sup> O'Shaughnessy, p. 456.

<sup>81</sup> A. Jeffery, *Materials for the history of the text of the Qurʾān: the old codices* (Leiden, 1937).

<sup>82</sup> *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (new edn.), vol. 5 (New York-London, 1903), s.v. "gehenna", pp. 582-84.

<sup>83</sup> Although presumably it is on account of the intense heat of these locations that the pre-Islamic Meccan poet Durayd b. al-Ṣimma (d. 603) chose to use them to describe a battle scene, *Shu'arā'a al-naṣrāniyya qabl al-islām*, ed. L. Cheikho (Beirut, 1967), p. 781: *wa-yarā ḥarban ashadda ʿalayhi min lazā saqar*.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. the reasoning behind the following comments of Saadia ben Joseph (882-942 A.D.) in *Kitāb al-amānāt wa'l-i'tiqādāt*, trans. S. Rosenblatt, *Saadia Gaon: the book of beliefs and opinions* (New Haven, 1948), p. 340: "Now the reward of the hereafter has been called 'garden of Eden' only because there does not exist in this world anything more magnificent than this garden in which God caused Adam to dwell. The future punishment, again, has been called 'Gehinnom' because the latter has been denominated by scripture as Tophta which is the name of a place in the valley facing the temple which is referred to as 'Topheth and

the names<sup>85</sup> (they could not have been as Meccans), but that they were being promised something they already knew was unpleasant: the case of *lazā* as a place of extreme heat.<sup>86</sup> In other words, the Qurʾān warned the Meccans that although they could easily retreat from the ‘inferno’ of their local geography in this world, in the next it would constitute their place of eternal abode.

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the valley of the son of Hinnom’ (Jer. 7:32)...[T]hus the garden of Adam came to serve as a byword for excellence, the land called Topheth, on the other hand, constitutes an example of baseness”.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. O’Shaughnessy p. 449f.

<sup>86</sup> See above n. 4; given the climate of the Meccan area, all ravines would be scorching in terms of heat, *saqar* included.

### 1.3 The nature of Hell

As we have seen above,<sup>87</sup> some of these of nouns (*hāwiya*, *al-ḥuṭama*, *lazā* and *saqar*) are used only once or twice in the entire scripture, and even then they are limited to the early Meccan period. Others, on the other hand, such as *jahannam*, *al-jaḥīm* and *al-saʿīr* are much more frequent. Apart from emphasizing different aspects of the cruelty and the intensity of the Hell-fire, however, the names do not seem to have any other significance. In the following selection of verses several of the names are used interchangeably to refer to Hell-fire, and so there is no indication which term, if any, refers to the ‘severest’ hell, or the ‘lightest’ hell for that matter:

1) Q. 40/49: *wa-qāla lladhīna fī n-nāri li-khazanati jahannam udʿū rabbakum yukhaffif ʿannā yawman mina l-ʿadhāb.*

“And those in the fire say to the keepers of *jahannam*: beseech your Lord that He may grant us a day’s respite from punishment”.

2) Q. 54/48: *yawma yushābūna fī n-nāri ʿala wujūhihim dhūqū massa saqar.*

“The day they are dragged through the fire on their faces: taste the touch of *saqar*”.

3) Q. 74/27-29: *wa-mā adrāka mā saqar lā tubqī wa-lā tadhar lawwāḥatun li-l-bashar.*

“How would you know what *saqar* is? It spares not and leaves nothing (unharmed); It chars away the skin”.

Q. 70/15-16: *kallā innahā lazā nazzāʿatan li-sh-shawā.*

“Indeed, it is *lazā*; it scorches off the skin”.

4) Q. 101/9-11: *fa-ummuhu hāwiya wa-mā adrāka mā hiya nārun ḥāmiya.*

“His mother shall be *hāwiya*, and how would you know what it is? It is a fierce fire”.

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<sup>87</sup> See above, 1.2, p. 28.

5) Q. 104/4-6: *kallā la-yunbadhanna fī-l-ḥuṭama wa-mā adrāka ma-l-ḥuṭama nāru llāhi l-mūqada.*

“No, he shall be thrown into *al-ḥuṭama*; and how would you know what *al-ḥuṭama* is? It is God’s fuelled fire”.

6) Q. 17/97: *maʿwāhum jahannam kullamā khabat zidnāhum saʿīran.*

“Their refuge shall be *jahannam*, each time it weakens we set it ablaze again”.

7) Q. 81/12-13: *wa-idhā l-jahīmu suʿirat wa-idhā l-jannatu uzlifat.*

“When *al-jahīm* is set ablaze, and the garden is brought near”.

8) Q. 42/7: *wa-tundhira yawma l-jamʿi lā rayba fīhi farīqun fī-l-jannati wa-farīqun fī-s-saʿīr.*

“So that you warn of the day of gathering, it is a certainty, one lot shall be in the garden, another in *al-saʿīr*”.

In sum, we can offer the following: the fire (*al-nār*) is identified by the proper noun *jahannam*, which seems to indicate that *jahannam* is the proper name for Hell (1); the fire is described as having particular aspects in two cases, *saqar* which chars the skin, and *lazā* which extracts the limbs by scorching them (2, 3); Hell is identified as *hāwiya* and described as ‘a fierce fire’ (4); Hell is identified as *al-ḥuṭama* and described as ‘God’s fuelled fire’ (5); the adjectival form of the root *s-ʿ-r* is used to intensify *jahannam* which suggests that *saʿīr* might not strictly speaking be a proper name but an adjectival form (*ism ṣifa*) (6); as with (6), the root *s-ʿ-r* is used to describe the action of setting the fire, *al-jahīm*, ablaze (7); and finally, through the juxtaposition of *al-janna* with *al-saʿīr*, it is implied that the latter is meant to indicate the entire Hell.

As far as the Qurʾān is concerned then, there are no obvious distinctions between the usage of the seven names. Indeed, all are used interchangeably to refer to the fire of Hell. All that can be concluded with regards to the seven names is that they may have provided

an element of literary variation within the Qurʾānic text. This is all the more probable since, as we have seen above, the greatest variety in the use of the names belonged to the earliest periods of Qurʾānic revelation.

#### 1.4 The grades of Hell

In three particular verses the Qurʾān does seem to suggest grades of punishment in Hell, although not in terms of duration but in severity:

Q. 4/145: *inna l-munāfiqīna fī l-darki l-asfali mina n-nār.*  
“The hypocrites shall be in the lowest depths of the Fire”.

This verse is one of very few that identify a particular category of sinners, however general the identification may be, with a particular level of punishment when warning of the promise of eternal torture. In another instance, the class of sinner is identified with historical characters:

Q. 40/46: *wa-yawma taqūmu s-sāʿatu adkhillū āla-firʿawna ashadda l-ʿadhāb.*  
“On the day the Hour is at hand administer to Pharaoh and his folk the severest of punishment”.

Just as there are degrees of merit for good deeds, there are degrees of retribution for evil deeds:<sup>88</sup>

Q. 46/18f.: *ūlāʾika lladhīna ḥaqqa ʿalayhimu l-qawlu fī-umamin qad khalat min qablihim mina l-jinni wa-l-ins innahum kānū khāsirīn wa-li-kullin darajātun mim mā ʿamilū wa-li-yuwaffiyahum ʿmālahum wa-hum lā yuẓlamūn.*  
“Such are the ones against whom the word has gone forth that they deserve the fate of bygone nations of men and jinn, they are the losers. And each one of them is given an (assigned) degree according to what they achieved. So that He may recompense their deeds and do them no injustice”.

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<sup>88</sup> Q. 3/161-63; 6/132.

What we can also see is that the degrees of punishment are not reflected in the use of the different names for Hell in the Qurʾān. Put differently, one cannot tell which exactly is the severest of the grades, or what is the name of a particular ‘level’ of Hell.

### 1.5 The duration of Hell

Another striking feature in the Qurʾānic descriptions of Hell is the emphasis of its eternity and the impossibility of escape. As was stated at the beginning of this chapter, Paradise and Hell are explicitly depicted as eternal abodes. Every occurrence of the active plural participle *khālidūn* (*khālidīn*) in the Qurʾān is in reference to the state of both, the people of Paradise and those of Hell:

Q. 2/39: *wa-lladhīna kafarū wa-kadhhabū bi āyātinā ūlāʾika aṣḥābu n-nāri hum fihā khālidūn.*

“Those who disbelieved and denied our signs are the people of the Fire, in it they abide eternally”.

Q. 2/82: *wa-lladhīna āmanū wa-ʿamilū ṣ-ṣāliḥāti ūlāʾika aṣḥābu l-jannati hum fihā khālidūn.*

“Those who believed and performed good deeds are the people of the Garden, in it they abide eternally”.<sup>89</sup>

The concepts of ‘eternal bliss’ and ‘eternal misery’ constitute important elements within the general message of the Qurʾān in that actions in the present life determine one’s fate in the next. Accordingly, emphasis is placed on the unfortunate predicament of those who,

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<sup>89</sup> There are many verses on Hell as an eternal abode: Q. 2/217, 257, 275; 3/116; 5/80; 7/36; 9/17; 10/27; 13/5; 23/103; 43/74; 58/17.

having forfeited the opportunity to attain bliss in the next world by ignoring God's messages in this world, face no possibility of a second chance to reverse their fate:

Q. 32/12,14: *wa-law tarā idhi l-mujrimūna nākisū ru'ūsihim 'inda rabbihim rabbanā abṣarnā wa-sami'nā fa-rji'nā na'malu ṣālihan innā mūqinūn (12) fa-dhūqū bi-mā nasītum liqā'a yawmikum hādihā innā nasīnākum wa-dhūqū 'adhāba l-khuldi bi-mā kuntum ta'malūn (14).*

“If you could see the criminals with their heads low before their Lord, [they say]: Lord, now we see and hear let us return so that we can do good...Taste of this day in which you are brought before us for you chose to forget and taste eternal punishment in return for what you did”.

The irreversibility of one's fate is underscored by the assertion that for those who end up in the Fire, there is no exit:

Q. 2/167: *kadhālika yurīhimu llāhu a'mālahum ḥasarātin 'alayhim wa-mā hum bi-khārijīna mina n-nār.*

“And thus God shows them their deeds which cause them painful regret and they shall not exit from the Fire”.

Q. 5/36f.: *inna lladhīna kafarū (36) lahum 'adhābun alīmun yurīdūna an yakhrujū mina n-nāri wa-mā hum bi-khārijīna minhā wa-lahum 'adhābun muqīm (37).*

“For those who disbelieved there is a painful torture, they wish to exit from the Fire but they shall not, and for them there will be an enduring torture”.

Q. 32/20: *wa-ammā lladhīna fasaqū fa-ma'wāhumu n-nāru kullamā arādū an yakhrujū minhā u'idū fihā wa-qīla lahum dhūqū 'adhāba n-nāri lladhī kuntum bihi tukadhdhibūn.*

“As for the corrupt, their refuge shall be the Fire, every time they wish to exit from it they are returned therein, and they are told: taste the punishment of the Fire which you used to deny”.

Nor is there any respite from what is an enduring and persistently cruel punishment:<sup>90</sup>

Q. 2/162: *khālidīna fihā lā yukhaffafu 'anhumu l-'adhābu wa-lā hum yunzarūn.*

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<sup>90</sup> Also Q. 2/86; 3/88; 16/85.

“They are eternally in it, the punishment shall not be lightened nor shall they be given respite”.

Even a plea from the inhabitants of the ‘inferno’ for a day’s respite is sarcastically received:

Q. 40/49f.: *wa-qāla lladhīna fī-n-nāri li-khazanati jahannam ud‘ū rabbakum yukhaffif ‘annā yawman mina l-‘adhāb (49) qālū fa-d‘ū wa-mā du‘ā’u l-kāfirīna illā fī dalāl (50).*

“And those in the Fire say to the keepers of *jahannam*, ‘Ask your Lord to give us at least a day’s respite from punishment’...[angels’ response:] ‘Go ahead then and ask, verily the plea of the unbelievers is misguided’”.

Nor is relief from punishment, through death, a possibility:

Q. 35/36: *wa-lladhīna kafarū lahum nāru jahannam lā yuqḍā ‘alayhim fa-yamūtū wa-lā yukhaffafu ‘anhum min ‘adhābihā.*

“The fire of *jahannam* is for those who disbelieved, no term shall be determined for them so that they may die nor is the punishment made any lighter”.

In contrast to damnation, the idea of salvation is expressed through God ‘delivering’ the believers by shielding them from Hell:

Q. 10/103: *thumma nunajjī rusulanā wa-lladhīna āmanū kadhālika ḥaqqan ‘alaynā nunjī l-mu’minīn.*

“Then We shall deliver Our messengers and those who believed. Even so, as is Our bounden duty, We shall deliver the believers”.

Q. 39/61: *wa-yunjī llāhu lladhīna -ttaqaw bi-mafāzatihim lā yamassuhumu s-sū’u wa-lā hum yaḥzanūn.*

“But God shall deliver those that were godfearing in their security; evil shall not visit them, neither shall they sorrow”.

As the Prophet is made to say, *najāt* is synonymous with Paradise in that it is the opposite of Hell-fire:

Q. 40/41: *wa-yā qawmī mā-lī ad‘ūkum ilā n-najāti wa-tad‘ūnanī ilā n-nār.*

“O my people, how is it with me, that I call you to salvation and you call me to the Fire”.

The significance of pointing out the Qur'ānic association of *najāt* with avoiding Hell-fire will become clear when we examine how the exegetes interpret the term.

Two verses, Q. 6/128 and 11/107, are particularly interesting. They became very important for the later exegetical argument in favour of a temporary, as opposed to an eternal, punishment in Hell; this is not because these Qur'ānic verses describe a different Hellish predicament from the other verses we have seen, but because they are followed by an obscure proviso:

Q. 6/128: *qāla n-nāru mathwākum khālidīna fihā illā mā shā'a llāhu inna rabbaka ḥakīmun 'alīm.*

“He will say: the Fire is your lodging, therein to dwell eternally, except as God wills; surely your Lord is All-wise and All-knowing”.

Q. 11/105-107: *fa-minhum shaqīyyun wa-sa'id (105) fa-ammā lladhīna shaqū fa-fī n-nāri lahum fihā zafīrun wa-shahīq (106) khālidīna fihā mā dāmati s-samāwātu wa-l-arḍ illā mā shā'a rabbuk inna rabbaka fa'ālun li-mā yurīd (107).*

“Some of them shall be wretched and some happy: as for the wretched they shall be in the Fire, for them there is moaning and sighing there: in it they shall dwell eternally so long as the heavens and earth endure except what your Lord wills, your Lord does what He desires”.

With regard to the question of the duration of Hell, there are two verses in which the Jews are accused of falsely believing that if they were to end up in Hell, they would only spend a short, purgative, period in it:<sup>91</sup>

Q. 2/80: *wa-qālū lan tamassanā n-nāru illā ayyāman ma'dūda qul attakhdhtum 'inda llāhi 'ahdan fa-lan yukhlifa llāhu 'ahdahu am taqūlūna 'alā llāhi mā lā ta'lamūn.*

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<sup>91</sup> This idea is attested in Rabbinical Judaism, A. I. Katsh, *Judaism in Islam: biblical and talmudic backgrounds of the Koran and its commentaries* (New York, 1954), p. 77 (sub Q. 2/74): certain sinners will only be punished from Passover to Pentecost, i.e. 7 weeks.

“And they say the Fire shall not touch us save a number of days. Say: ‘have you taken with God a covenant? God will not fail in His covenant; or say you things against God of which you know nothing?’”

Q. 3/24: *dhālika bi-annahum qālū lan tamassanā n-nāru illā ayyāman ma‘dūdāt wa-gharrahum fī dīnihim mā kānū yaftarūn.*

“That, because they said: ‘the Fire shall not touch us except for a number of days’; and the lies they forged have divided them in their religion”.

## 1.6 Intercession in the Qur’ān

The other salient feature of eschatological passages in the Qur’ān relating to Hell and the predicament of its inhabitants is the concept of intercession. This is expressed by the term *shafā‘a*, which is one *maṣḍar* of the root *sh-f-‘*, the other being *shaf‘*. The basic significance of the root is “the adding of one thing to another (single) thing to make a pair”.<sup>92</sup> Both *maṣḍars* occur in the Qur’ān, although *shaf‘* only once.<sup>93</sup> With the exception of this one occurrence of the verbal noun *shaf‘*, all other occurrences of the root *shf* appear in the context of intercession.<sup>94</sup> The majority of references to *shafā‘a* in the Qur’ān are explicitly made in the context of the Day of Resurrection; others are implicitly so, while one reference is to ‘intercession’ in this-worldly affairs.

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<sup>92</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, I.iv, p. 1571: so, a *nāqa shāfi‘* is a pregnant she-camel (p. 1572c).

<sup>93</sup> Q. 89/3: *wa’l-shaf‘i wa’l-watr* (By that which is even and that which is odd).

<sup>94</sup> The meaning ‘intercession’ emerges from the above primary value expressing ‘a pair(ing)’ by the very fact that before an ‘intercession’ is effected, two (individuals) are required (the one requiring the intercession and the person interceding for him). In other words, *sh-f-‘* includes the idea of ‘intercession’ as one significance within its semantic range, but is not limited to it. The form *shafī‘* is usually used to refer to an intercessor, and on account of this *fa‘īl* pattern, the term tends to reflect a quality which the person possesses (i.e. the capacity to intercede); *shāfi‘* also occurs but would be used to emphasize the action of interceding, as opposed to any inherent quality in the intercessor. In other words, while *shāfi‘* could only signify ‘the one who intercedes’, *shafī‘* could denote ‘the one who intercedes and is able to get a (positive) result’.

The view that the Qurʾān is largely hostile to concept of *shafāʿa*<sup>95</sup> is supported by its general portrayal of the predicament of people on the Day of Judgement: each person is on his own,<sup>96</sup> kin flee from one another,<sup>97</sup> ‘associates’ dissociate from one another,<sup>98</sup> no person bears another’s burden,<sup>99</sup> no soul can avail another neither by bargaining nor by intercession,<sup>100</sup> each soul is busy pleading for itself,<sup>101</sup> each shall be judged and recompensed according to what only he or she did.<sup>102</sup> But while there are strong denials of intercession in the Qurʾān, some verses clearly allow for the possibility of intercession on the Day of Resurrection. A small number of verses, however, sit somewhere in between, in that they neither reject nor permit the possibility of *shafāʿa*, but are intended to emphasize God’s sovereignty in all affairs. We shall group the verses accordingly:<sup>103</sup>

#### GROUP I

Outright denial of any intercession on the Day of Judgement (may be understood as part of the overall Qurʾānic insistence on a ‘pure monotheism’):

Q. 2/48: *wa-ittaqū yawman lā tajzī nafsun ʿan nafsīn shayʿan wa-lā yuqbalu minhā shafāʿatun wa-lā yuʾkhadhu minhā ʿadlun wa-lā hum yunṣarūn.* [M]

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<sup>95</sup> Most scholars seem to have this impression; cf. Wensinck, *Muslim creed* (Cambridge, 1932), p. 181; A. J. Wensinck and D. Gimaret in *EI2*, s.v. “shafāʿa”.

<sup>96</sup> Q. 23/101.

<sup>97</sup> Q. 80/34.

<sup>98</sup> Q. 2/166.

<sup>99</sup> Q. 6/164.

<sup>100</sup> Also Q. 2/123, 254.

<sup>101</sup> Q. 16/111.

<sup>102</sup> Q. 2/281.

<sup>103</sup> The brackets following the verses refer to the Meccan [K] or Medinan [M] provenance of the verse in question, according to the traditional chronological division of the Qurʾānic material.

“And beware of a day when no soul for another shall give satisfaction, and no intercession shall be accepted from it, nor any counterpoise be taken, neither shall they be helped”.<sup>104</sup>

## GROUP II

God's permission is required for intercession:<sup>105</sup>

Q. 2/255: *man dhā lladhi yashfa'u 'indahū illā bi-idhnihi*. [M]

“Whoso shall intercede [for another] before Him except by His permission”.

Q. 10/3: *mā min shafī'in illā min ba'di idhnihi dhālikumu llāhu rabbukum fa-'budūh*. [K]

“There is no intercessor except after His permission: That is your Lord Allah, so worship Him”.

Q. 34/23: *wa-lā tanfa'u sh-shafā'atu 'indahū illā li-man adhina lah*. [K]

“And intercession before Him is of no use except whom He permits.”

Q. 39/44: *qul li-llāhi sh-shafā'atu jamī'an*. [K]

“Say: with God lies (the power of) all intercession”.

Q. 6/51: *wa-ndhir bihi lladhīna yakhāfūna an yuḥsharū ilā rabbihim laysa lahum min dūnihi waliyyun wa-lā shafī'un la'allahum yattaqūn*. [K]

“And warn through it those who fear they shall be gathered before their Lord that they shall have no friend and no intercessor besides Him: that they might be god-fearing”.<sup>106</sup>

## Group III

Two points of interest emerge from the following group of verses, 1) intercession can only take place after certain conditions are satisfied, and 2) intercession is taking place but is being denied to some:

Q. 19/87: *lā yamlikūna sh-shafā'ata illā mani ttakhadha 'inda r-rahmāni 'ahdan*. [K]

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<sup>104</sup> Cf. Q. 2/123 [M]

<sup>105</sup> Jewish lore also recognizes that God's permission is required for any intercession, which does not mean, however, that intercession is not permitted. Thus, God revealed to Abraham His wish to destroy Sodom in order to have him intercede, see Katsh, *Judaism*, p. 174 (s.v. Q. 2/256).

<sup>106</sup> Similarly phrased, Q. 6/70; 32/4.

“They possess no (power of) intercession save those who made a covenant with the Most Merciful”.

Q. 20/109: *yawma'idhin lā tanfa'u sh-shafā'atu illā man adhina lahu r-rahmānu wa-rādiya lahu qawlan.* [K]

“On that day no intercession shall be of any use except the one (whose intercession) the Most Gracious permits and is satisfied with”. [K]

Q. 21/26-28: *wa-qālū ttakhadha r-rahmānu waladan subhānahu bal 'ibādun mukramūn (26) ya'lamu mā bayna aydīhim wa-mā khalfahum wa-lā yashfa'ūna illā li-man irtadā (28).* [K]

“And they say: the Most Gracious has taken a son, praise be to Him, they are but honoured servants; He knows what is between their hands and what is behind them and they intercede only for those with whom He is pleased.”

Q. 43/86: *wa-lā yamliku lladhīna yad'ūna min dūnihi sh-shafā'ata illā man shahida bi-l-ḥaqqi wa-hum ya'lamūn.*

“Those whom they call beside Him possess no (power of) intercession except those who knowingly bear true witness”. [K]

Q. 53/26: *wa-kam min malakin fī s-samāwāti lā tughnī shafā'atuhum shay'an illā min ba'di an ya'dhana llāhu li-man yashā'u wa-yardā.* [K]

“How many angels are there in the Heavens whose intercession is of no avail unless God permits whom He wishes and is pleased with?”.

In the following, the suggestion seems to be that *shafā'a* is taking place, but for some it is simply not forthcoming:

Q. 6/94: *wa-mā narā ma'akum shufa'ā'akumu lladhīna za'amtum annahum fikum shurakā' laqad taqatṭa'a baynakum wa-ḍalla 'ankum mā kuntum taz'umūn.* [K]

“We do not see with you your intercessors, those you asserted to be associates with you; the bond between you is now broken; that which you ever asserted has now gone astray from you”.<sup>107</sup>

Q. 10/18: *wa-ya'budūna min dūni llāhi mā lā yaḍurruhum wa-lā yanfa'uhum wa-yaqūlūna ḥā'ulā'i shufa'ā'unā 'inda llāh.* [K]

“And they worship others beside God who can neither harm nor benefit them and they say: these are our intercessors before God”.

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. Q. 26/100.

Q. 30/12-13: *wa-yawma taqūmu s-sā'atu yublisu l-mujrimūn wa-lam yakun lahum min shurakā'ihim shufa'ā'*. [K]

“The day when the hour is at hand the criminals shall be in despair and among their associates they shall find no intercessors”.

Q. 36/23: *a-attakhidhū min dūnihi ālihatan in yuridni r-rahmānu bi-ḍurrin lā tughnī 'annī shafā'atuhum shay'an wa-lā yunqidhūn*. [K]

“Should I take beside Him other gods? If the Most Gracious wishes that harm befalls me, their intercession will avail me not and nor will they save me”.

Q. 40/18: *mā li-z-zālimīna min ḥamīmin wa-lā shafī'in yuṭā'*. [K]

“The transgressors have neither close friend nor successful intercessor”.

Q. 74/48: *fa-mā tanfa'uhum shafā'atu sh-shāfi'in*. [K]

“The intercession of those who intercede is of no good to them”.

One verse does not properly fit into any of the above groups, as it seems to be referring to intercession in this world:

Q. 4/85: *man yashfa' shafā'atan ḥasanatan yakun lahu naṣībun minhā wa-man yashfa' shafā'atan sayyi'atan yakun lahu kiflun minhā*. [M]

“Whoso intercedes in a good cause will have the reward thereof, and whoso intercedes in an evil cause, shares in its burden”.

We may leave this last verse to one side, since all the exegetes agree that it refers to the social behaviour of people in this life, and does not involve eschatological intercession.<sup>108</sup>

As regards the remaining verses, it is not being suggested here that the order in which the Qur'ānic verses have been grouped should reflect a particular chronology, but clearly one can discern more than one attitude towards the idea of *shafā'a*. It is also interesting to note that out of the 26 Qur'ānic verses that mention eschatological *shafā'a*, whether to reject or hint at some possibility of it, 21 are Meccan; and of the remaining 5, 4 belong to

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<sup>108</sup> Thus, Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 394, glosses the verse: *man yashfa' shafā'atan ḥasanatan li-akhīhi al-muslim bi-khayr*; Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 5, p. 186: *hiya shafā'at al-nās ba'duhum li-ba'd*; likewise the Shī'ite tradition, Ṭabrisī, *Majma'*, iii, p. 128f.

the Medinan *sūrat al-baqara* (Q. 2).<sup>109</sup> Now, those verses that do allow for the possibility of eschatological *shafā'a*, principally those of group III, do so provided certain conditions are fulfilled. The conditions, however, for such intercession to take place are not entirely clear (e.g. *man ittakhadha 'ahdan*), but we may be able to make some educated guesses. To start with, Q. 53/26 makes it clear that angels have the power to intercede, but that this could only happen with God's permission. Certainly, elsewhere in the Qur'ān angels are described as asking God to forgive believers (*yastaghfirūn li-*).<sup>110</sup> Also, according to the earliest exegetical tradition, it is angels that are meant by those verses that allow for the possibility of intercessors.<sup>111</sup> Belief in the intercession of angels was widespread in late-antiquity and it has recently been cogently argued that it was on account of their adoration of angels, and not pagan idols, that pre-Islamic Meccans were branded as *mushrikūn*, 'associanists', by the Qur'ān.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, this last has support from a well-known story about three pre-Islamic divinities, al-Lāt, Manāt and al-'Uzzā, preserved in Muslim tradition and known as the incident of the 'satanic verses'.<sup>113</sup> For what concerns us, it suffices to point out that the Qur'ān's polemic against these entities, mentioned in *sūra* 53/19ff, issues from the fact that those who adore them think that these entities have

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<sup>109</sup> It has been suggested that the more lenient attitude towards *shafā'a* reflects a more flexible attitude towards Jews and Christians as their traditions envisaged some sort of intercession, E. Riad, "*Shafā'a* dans le Coran" *Orientalia Suecana* 30 (1981), p. 49.

<sup>110</sup> Q. 40/7 and 42/5. I argue below that *istighfār* is subsumed by *shafā'a*, so that the terms may be synonymous; see ch. 4.1.2.

<sup>111</sup> Thus, Muqātil on Q. 20/109 (*Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 42); also on Q. 21/26-28 (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 75), and Q. 43/86 (*ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 806)

<sup>112</sup> G. Hawting, *The idea of idolatry and the emergence of Islam* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 52-54, 130ff. Although, I am not sure why one cannot worship angels and simultaneously adore them in stone representations.

<sup>113</sup> Summary of incident is given in appendix 7.

the power to intercede with God, something which the Qurʾān is quick to reject (53/26). The Qurʾān adds that these entities are mere names, which God had not invested with any authority (53/23). Clearly, the issue here is that of God's sovereignty: God invests with authority whom He will, and no one can intercede except with His permission. Nevertheless, judging by the number of Qurʾānic verses that polemicize against the belief in the intercessory powers of celestial entities,<sup>114</sup> it seems that these practices were widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia.<sup>115</sup>

### Chapter summary

We may summarize the results thus far as follows. Hell in the Qurʾān is a punishment of fire for unbelievers, associanists and other 'evil'-doers. There are several terms, arguably seven, but not necessarily, that are used to refer to Hell-fire. The most frequent term used is *jahannam*, familiar from Jewish and Christian eschatology (sc. Gehenna). Most of the other terms would seem to have been limited to the shorter and, probably, principally Meccan revelations. Although there is the notion of graded punishment, as is evidenced by the 'hypocrites' being in the lowest level, this cannot be linked to any particular term(s) for Hell. What can be said with some certainty, however, is that salvation is associated with being spared the punishment of Hell. Where Hell is described, it would seem to be, with the exception of two elusive provisos, an eternal punishment. Finally, there are some passages that allow for the possibility of intercession, and indeed some

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<sup>114</sup> For the idea that there was this belief in a celestial hierarchy made up of one god and lesser divinities, see W. M. Watt, "Belief in a 'High God' in pre-Islamic Mecca", *JSS* 16 (1971), pp. 35-40; U. Rubin, "al-Ṣamad and the high God: an interpretation of sūra CXII", *Der Islam* 61 (1984), pp. 197-217.

suggest that it may take place on the Day of Judgement, although only in the case of certain individuals for whom God allows this intercession; and apart from angels, there are no other class of intercessors mentioned by the Qurʾān.

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<sup>115</sup> Ultimately, reliable evidence for pre-Islamic religious practices is very meagre, if at all forthcoming, cf. J. ʿAlī, *Tārīkh al-ʿArab qabl al-Islām* (Beirut, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 37ff.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **The Early Community:**

#### **Views on salvation**

In what follows, I shall attempt to gauge as far as possible the pre-classical views held by the Muslim community on the subject of salvation and damnation in the hereafter.<sup>1</sup> I will look at evidence pertaining to Khārijites and Murji'ites, both of whom were involved in debates about the fate of the sinner in the next world. Shī'ite material will also be considered here, not least because the Shī'ite conception of salvation is substantially different from the Khārijite one, and although during the period investigated here (roughly the years 40-133/660-750), Shī'ism was still in its formative stages of dogmatic development, it could be clearly delineated from the other religio-political movements of early Islam. One should add that at this early stage one cannot yet speak of Sunnism proper, and so it would be useful to attempt to see what elements were eventually absorbed by Sunnism from these early religio-political movements when it came to formulate its classical conception of the salvation of the Muslim community.<sup>2</sup>

## **2.1 The early community**

The earliest Islamic understanding of Paradise and Hell was that they were permanent destinations for the believer and unbeliever respectively. When the Khārijites condemned ʿUthmān, ʿAlī and Muʿāwiya as *kuffār*, they were well-aware that it meant the latter went to Hell forever. But when the Murji'ites hesitated over the status of persons in this world, they were suggesting that the other-worldly status of these individuals could not be known. Thus, a sinning believer, or a believing sinner, could end up in Paradise or

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<sup>1</sup> By pre-classical I mean before the crystallization of Sunnism, and certainly before the rise to prominence of ḥadīths; roughly speaking this is the period 660-750

<sup>2</sup> Cf. P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's caliph: religious authority in the first centuries of Islam* (Cambridge, 1986), pp. 2f. that Sunnīs and Shī'īs likely began with the same conception of the caliphal office.

Hell, depending on how God judged him; but certainly if he went to either it would be forever.<sup>3</sup> The arbitrary nature of such other-worldly consignment disquieted traditionalists, it seems, who sought to retain the validity of professing the faith for the afterlife. In other words, unlike the early Murji'ites who could not be sure if 'faith' would be of any use to the Muslim grave sinner in the next world, the traditionalists contrived to secure eventual salvation for all those of the Muslim community who had at least professed the oneness of God (*tawhīd*), something akin to what the early Christian fathers had done in the case of those who had been baptized by the Church. Of course, one could hope for God's clemency towards the Muslim grave sinners on the Day of Judgement and hope that they may be granted entry to Paradise; but because grave sins could land one in Hell, the Muslim grave sinner, despite his belief in God, could certainly end up in Hell. And since Hell was eternal, he would be there forever.

In historical terms, the scheme of believers in Paradise and unbelievers in Hell, then, represented the earliest theology of afterlife held by the Muslim community. This hypothesis is supported by some of the earliest poetry preserved in the tradition, that attributed to the various Khārijite rebels. And it should be noted, however, that the portrayal of the Khārijites by the mainstream Muslim tradition, as the earliest source of schism, is problematic. The *jamā'ī* tendency of the later historical tradition, in its portrayal of the early community as one that followed an established orthodoxy from which the Khārijites broke away, means that the Khārijite movement is depicted as an

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<sup>3</sup> Every occurrence of the active plural participle *khālidūn* (or *khālidīn*) in the Qur'ān is in reference to the other-worldly predicament of mankind (and *jinn*), be they in Paradise or in Hell.

anomaly within the larger community previously unified by this 'orthodoxy'.<sup>4</sup> That there were differences of opinion between those who rebelled against 'Alī and the remainder of the Iraqi contingent is evidenced by the rebellion itself. But the extremism which the Khārijites are traditionally accused of must, at the time of their rebellion, have been confined to very specific questions (the question of how much authority is to be accorded sources other than scripture-- that is, is it always clear whether a problem may be solved through recourse solely to scripture-- and the question of the rightful leadership of the community). To this extent, it follows that their views on many other matters, afterlife destinations included, might have been shared by many Iraqis, and by extension, the community at large.

### **2.1.1 The Khārijites**

As has been stated, it was the Khārijites who forced the issue of the status of the sinning believer to the fore after their secession from the Iraqi population in general at the time of the first civil war (37/657). It makes sense, then, that, in investigating the views of the early Muslim community towards the idea of salvation or damnation in the hereafter, we should begin with the Khārijites. For, if the Khārijites forced a re-consideration of the status of the rest of the Muslim community in this life, they necessarily forced a re-consideration of their status in the next one. In other words, they faced a choice of sending their 'Muslim' opponents to eternal Hell, or accommodating

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. K. Lewinstein, "Making and unmaking a sect: the heresiographers and the Ṣufriyya", *Studia Islamica*

them in another way. As it happens the majority of Khārijites consigned the rest of the Muslim community to Hell in the next world, which for the Khārijites was in line with the fact that their opponents had ceased to be believers, and in accordance with the Qurʾānic stipulations, they could not go anywhere but Hell.<sup>5</sup> Despite our meagre evidence, the assumption that there was no such concept as temporary Hell is implicit in all of the material that we can ascribe to Khārijites.<sup>6</sup> The poetry ascribed to them in the tradition certainly bears out this assumption. The ‘fortunate’ is the one who avoids Hell on the Day of Judgement and is sent to Paradise, as the following line by the famous Khārijite poet and orator, and the last leader of the splinter group of Azraqites, al-Qaṭarī b. al-Fujāʿa (d. 78-9/697-8) declares:<sup>7</sup> [ṭawīl]

*fa-law shahidatnā yawma dhāka wa-khaylunā  
 tubīḥu mina l-kuffāri kulla ḥarīmī  
 raʿat fityatan bāʿū l-ilāha nufūsaḥum  
 bi-jannāti ʿadnin ʿindahu wa-naʿīmī*

“If she had witnessed us on our horses that day licensing every forbidden act with respect to the unbelievers, she would have seen a group of young men selling their souls to God in exchange for gardens of Eden and bliss up above”.

Or the following verse by Yazīd b. Ḥabnāʿ:<sup>8</sup> [basīṭ]

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76 (1992), pp. 75-96.

<sup>5</sup> I shall deal with any exceptions shortly. I am also aware of the ubiquitous Qurʾānic assurances of God’s mercy, which other early Muslims might have taken to mean that one did not have to go to Hell; and I am not suggesting that the Khārijites were unaware of these verses, but they knew that God’s forgiveness would operate only in the case of ‘believers’: the Khārijites simply rejected that their opponents could remain ‘believers’.

<sup>6</sup> I do not take the ascription to Najda b. ʿĀmir of a ‘different hell’ (*ghayr al-nār*) as a temporary Hell, discussion in ch. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *Iṣfahānī, Aghānī*, vol. 6, p. 148; see G. Levi della Vida, in *EI2*, s.v. “Qaṭarī b. al-Fudjāʿa”.

<sup>8</sup> Al-Mubarrad, (Muḥammad b. Yazīd, d. 898), *al-Kāmil*, ed. M. A. al-Dālī (Beirut, 1986), vol. 3, p. 1355, Mubarrad identifies Yazīd as an Azraqite Khārijite; identified as a Khārijite by al-Marzubānī (Muḥammad b. ʿImrān, d. 994), *Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. F. Krankow (Cairo, 1935), p. 106; for the verses cited above, see

*inna sh-shaqiyya lladhī fi n-nāri manziluhū  
 wa-l-fawzu fawzu lladhī yanjū mina n-nāri  
 wa-khayru dunyā yunassī sharra ākhiratin  
 wa-sawfa yunbiʿunī l-jabbāru akhbārī*

“Verily the unfortunate one is the one whose dwelling will be the Fire, and true victory belongs to the one who escapes from the Fire; good things of this world make one forget the evil in the next and, indeed, the Mighty shall inform me of my doings”.

This ‘fortunate’ one will do so, however, purely on account of his deeds and nothing else, as (Abū Bilāl) Mirdās b. Udayya (d. 61-2/680-1) anticipates:<sup>9</sup> [basīṭ]

*wa-qurribat li-ḥisābi l-qisṭi aʿmālī*  
 “My deeds are soon to be held to a just reckoning”.

No amount of money, friendship or kin can avail the person on that day, as al-Ṭirimmāḥ

b. Ḥakīm (d. 110-121/728-738?) asserts:<sup>10</sup> [khafīf]

*yawma lā yanfaʿu l-mukhawwila dhā th-thar  
 -wati khillānuhū wa-lā waladuh  
 thumma yuʿtā bihi wa-khaṣmāhu waṣṭa-l  
 -jinni wa-l-insi rijluhū wa-yaduh  
 khāshīʿa ṭ-ṭarfi laysa yanfaʿuhu tham-  
 ma amāniyyuhū wa-lā ladaduh*

“On a day he who takes friends and hoards fortunes shall be availed by neither friend nor child; he is then brought forth and in the midst of men and jinn he shall find his arm and leg his adversaries, looking humbled, with neither his fancies nor his vehement disputations of any use to him”.

In the following lines, we see Ṭirimmāḥ’s conviction that salvation can only be attained

*Kāmil*, vol. 1, p. 138; I. ʿAbbās, *Dīwān Shiʿr al-Khawārij* (Beirut, 1982), p. 98, n. *supra* n. 79) thinks that the verses belong to Yazīd and not, as Mubarrad suggests (*Kāmil*, vol. 1, p. 138), his brother Ṣakhr.

<sup>9</sup> A famous leader of the Basran Khārijites from the tribe of Tamīm. He was massacred along with other Khārijites by the then governor of Basra, ʿUbaydallāh b. Ziyād, who had been previously defeated by them at Āsak, see G. Levi della Vida, in *EI2*, s.v. “Mirdās b. Udayya”; verse cited by ʿAbbās, *Khawārij*, p. 64; also in al-Jāḥiẓ, Abū ʿUthmān ʿAmr, *al-Ḥayawān*, ed. ʿA. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1943), vol. 5, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Dīwān al-Ṭirimmāḥ*, ed. I. Ḥasan (Damascus, 1968), pp. 197f.; on the Khārijite poet, see F. Krenkow and

by “selling oneself” for God’s cause:<sup>11</sup> [basīṭ]

*laqad shaqītu shaqā’an lā-nqīṭā’a lahū  
in lam afuz fawzatan tunjī mina n-nāri  
wa-n-nāru lam yanju min raw‘ātihā aḥadun  
illā l-munību bi-qalbi l-mukhliṣi sh-shārī*

“I will have been wretched forever in distress if I am not successful in attaining deliverance from the Fire; and none other than the one who repents with the sincere heart of one who has sold himself (to God) can be delivered from the frights of the Fire”.<sup>12</sup>

In a similar vein, another Khārijite exhorts his comrades to risk their lives in the way of God; Mu‘ādh b. Juwayn al-Ṭā’ī (d. 43/663) proclaims:<sup>13</sup> [ṭawīl]

*alā ayyuhā sh-shārūna qad ḥāna li-mri’in  
sharā nafsahū li-llāhi an yatarahḥalā  
wa-yā laytanī fikum u‘ādī ‘aduwwakum  
fa-yasqiyānī ka’sa l-maniyyati awwalā*

“O those who sell themselves, the time has come for a man who has sold his soul to God to depart; o would that I were among you fighting the enemy, that I may drink first from the cup of death”.

For the Khārijites, there are only two predicaments in the next world, one is either sent to Paradise or to Hell (cf. Q. 42/7); thus, the Basran Khārijite ‘Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān al-Sadūsī (d. 84/703) declares:<sup>14</sup> [munsariḥ]

*lā yastawī l-manzilāni thamma wa-lā-l*

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T. el-Achèche in *EI2* (supplement no. 4), s.v. “al-Ṭirimmāḥ b. Ḥakīm al-Ṭā’ī”.

<sup>11</sup> *Dīwān*, p. 253.

<sup>12</sup> The Khārijites were known as *shurāt* (sing. *shārī*) on account of Q. 9/111, where God ‘buys’ the souls of believers, who die for His cause, in exchange for eternal bliss, see G. Levi della Vida in *EI2*, s.v. “khāridjites”.

<sup>13</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 36; Mu‘ādh fought at the battle of Nukhayla and survived, only to be killed later by Mu‘āwiya’s governor of Kufa, al-Mughīra b. Shu‘ba (see H. Lammens in *EI2*, s.v.), as a result of his involvement in the revolt of the Khārijite al-Mustawrid b. ‘Ullāfa in 663 (Wellhausen, *Factions*, pp. 30ff).

<sup>14</sup> ‘Abbās (*Khawārij*, p. 188, n. 1) thinks that these verses might belong to another Khārijite; but not as Muslim sources have thought to Umayya b. Abī Ṣalt; see J. W. Fück in *EI2*, s.v. “Imrān b. Ḥiṭṭān”.

-a'mālu lā tastawī ṭarā'iquhā  
 humā fariqāni firqatun tadhulu-l  
 jannata ḥaffat bihim ḥadā'iquhā  
 wa-firqatun minhumū laqad dakhalū  
 n-nāra fa-shānathumū marāfiqihā

“The two abodes are not equal, nor is the way to good deeds like that to bad ones. They are two groups, one enters Paradise and is surrounded by its gardens; the other one enters the Fire and is disfigured by its places”.

The famous Khārijite Ṣāliḥ b. Muṣarriḥ (d. 76/695), whose rebellion was put down by al-Ḥajjāj in 76/695,<sup>15</sup> exhorts his men to martyr themselves and join their brethren in the next world.<sup>16</sup>

*fa-tayassarū raḥimakum llāhu li-jihād ḥādhihi l-aḥzābi l-mutaḥazziba wa-a'immati ḍ-ḍalāli z-ḥalama wa-li-l-khurūji min dāri l-fanā' ilā dari l-baqā' wa-l-liḥāqi bi-ikhwāninā l-mu'minīn...fa-bī'ū llāha anfusakum...tadhulū l-jannata āminīn...*

“Go, make preparations, may God have mercy on you, to fight these sects set in their heresy and these unjust leaders of error, and to leave the abode of transience for the abode of immortality and to catch up with our brothers the believers...so sell God your souls...so that you may enter the Garden and be safe”.

Two Khārijite works of the second to third century further support our contention that the Qur'ānic scheme of eternal Paradise or Hell prevailed among the early Muslim community. In the epistle mistakenly identified as the ‘second letter of Ibn Ibād to ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān’, the Khārijite author informs his Shī'ite correspondent that God predestines men to Paradise or Hell.<sup>17</sup> The possibility that temporary Hell was an accepted alternative would have surely presented a problem for the Khārijite author, not

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<sup>15</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 882ff; Wellhausen, *Factions*, pp. 69f.

<sup>16</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 883f.

<sup>17</sup> Izkawī, *Kashf*, f. 207a.

because God cannot predestine a temporary Hell-fire punishment, but because the Khārijite author would not have glossed over such an important issue. The emphasis placed on the individual and his actions is a salient characteristic of these and other Khārijite poems: the Khārijite warrior willingly goes into battle in the hope that he may die as a martyr, so that God rewards him with eternal Paradise.<sup>18</sup> This Khārijite religious zeal is supported by Qurʾānic descriptions of the reward for those who give up their lives ‘for God’, and for this reason probably reflects early Muslim attitudes:

Q. 9/111: *inna llāha shtarā mina l-muʾminīna anfusahum wa-amwālahum bi-anna lahumu l-janna yuqātilūna fī sabīli llāh fa-yaqtulūna wa-yuqatalūna... fa-stabshirū bi-bayʿikumū lladhī bāyaʿtum bihi wa-dhālika huwa l-fawzu l-ʿazīm.*

“God has bought from the believers their selves and their possessions in return for the gift of Paradise; they fight in the way of God; they kill and are killed... so rejoice in the bargain you have made with Him; that is the mighty triumph”.

The principle of eternal reward in exchange for giving one’s life up for God is based on the idea that it is the individual’s actions or behaviour that determine his fate in the next life. This conception of salvation is the one that most clearly comes out in the Khārijite poetry.<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to this conception there seems to have been another conception among the early community, which interpreted salvation as contingent upon the reverence of a

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<sup>18</sup> On this aspect of Khārijite poetry, as opposed to the poetry of other religio-political factions, see ʿAbbās, *Khawārij*, pp. 22-37; also cf. A. Ḥusayn, *Shiʿr al-Khawārij: dirāsa fanniyya mawḍūʿiyya muqārīna* (Amman, 1986), pp. 159ff.

<sup>19</sup> Also, in the so-called second letter of Ibn Ibād, the Khārijite author rebukes his Shīʿite correspondent for thinking that affiliation with an imām from the Prophet’s family (this is implicit in the Khārijite’s citation of a ḥadīth that has the Prophet warn his daughter Fāṭima and the Banū Hāshim in general not to presume upon his kinship on the Day of Resurrection, see *Kashf al-ghumma*, f. 211b.). The author also adds the Qurʾānic statement *li-kulli imriʾin mā ʾktasab*, cf. Q. 24/11: *li kulli mriʾin minhum mā ʾktasaba mina l-ithm*: “every

'charismatic' figure. This last concept was at a later stage uniquely identified with Shī'ite dogma, but at the earliest stage, that is to say, well before the formation of Sunnīsm, it would probably have been shared by a large section of the Muslim community. There are numerous attestations in the historical tradition that bear out this alternative conception of how salvation worked.

### 2.1.2 The Shī'ites

In historical terms, it might be argued that Shī'ism, as a dogmatic movement, crystallized well after Khārijism. But it should be said that whereas Khārijism clearly defined its sect-status by distancing itself physically as well as ideologically from the rest of the Muslim community, nothing comparable can be attributed to those who, at an early stage, took part in some form or other of *tashayyū'*.<sup>20</sup> The Shī'ites of the pre-heresiographical tradition, i.e. those that had not yet come under the influence of Mu'tazilism, do not seem to have involved themselves in discussions surrounding the status of sinning believers.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the early Khārijites and the early Murji'ites, we do not possess evidence for the earliest Shī'ite views on the Muslim grave sinner. For one thing, the peculiar nature of the Shī'ite movement probably did not favour such discussions. The diffuse nature of the groups that participated in pro-ʿAlid causes, their disappearance and reappearance depending on the political climate would not have

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one of them shall have the sin that he has earned (charged to him)".

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Goldziher, *MS II*, pp. 110ff.

<sup>21</sup> In the heresiographical tradition, however, we find Shī'ites using the same polemical labels against their opponents (sc. *mushrikūn*). But this is a late development, and not a reflection of 1<sup>st</sup> and early 2<sup>nd</sup> century polemics. For some examples of the late tradition, see I. Friedlaender, *The heterodoxies of the Shī'ites* (New

allowed for any continuity in doctrine,<sup>22</sup> there must have been many who venerated the descendants of the Prophet. But such persons might not have necessarily formed the basis for the later dogmatic Shī'ite movement, and might just as plausibly have become Sunnīs.<sup>23</sup>

One doctrine, it seems, was shared by all those who were dogmatic supporters of the 'Alid imāms:<sup>24</sup> they all agreed that recognition of the 'Alid imām was a prerequisite for salvation.<sup>25</sup> While the entire Muslim community probably agreed on the importance of the imām for salvation,<sup>26</sup> his importance seems to have been conceived of in different ways. For some early Muslims, like the Khārijites, it was affiliation to the 'divinely-guided' community, one made up of 'charismatic' individuals, and not to a 'divinely-guided' imām that ensured salvation.<sup>27</sup> For adherents of the latter, the imām was essential for the salvation of the community only insofar as he was a leader who enjoined the duties of religion (*farā'id*);<sup>28</sup> but if he could no longer carry out these duties, he could be

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Haven, 1909), pp. 137ff.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. R. P. Buckley, "On the origins of Shī'ī ḥadīth", *The Muslim World* 88, ii, (1998), pp. 165-84, p. 168.

<sup>23</sup> Of course, there were individuals from very early on who simply took it for granted that the Prophet's descendants had an 'inherent' right to rule, cf. Madelung, *Succession*, pp. 311ff.

<sup>24</sup> By that I mean those who were prepared to fight and die for the 'Alids, and not just those who may have had some reverence for the descendants of 'Alī.

<sup>25</sup> McDermott, *Theology*, pp. 120f: according to imāmīs, whoever dies without having known the Imām of his age dies like one in the time of Jāhiliyya.

<sup>26</sup> Crone and Hinds, *God's caliph*, pp. 33ff.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Watt, *Formative*, pp. 36f; repeated in his *Islamic philosophy and theology* (Edinburgh, 1985), p. 4; although Crone and Hinds (*God's caliph*) argue that the imām was necessary for salvation in all cases.

<sup>28</sup> W. Madelung in *EI2*, s.v. "imāma", the expected duties of the imām were: 1) to guard the faith against heterodoxy, 2) to enforce the law and justice between disputing parties 3) to dispense legal judgements 4) to protect the peace in the Muslim community 6) to conduct *jihād* 7) to collect taxes 8) to delegate authority. Some Muslims would argue against the necessity of the imām, thus some, but not all, of the Mu'tazila, e.g. al-Aṣamm, see again *EI2*, s.v. "imāma"; also the 9<sup>th</sup> century Najdiyya, see P. Crone, "A statement by the Najdiyya Khārijites on the dispensability of the Imāmate", *Studia Islamica* 88 (1998), pp. 55-76.

dispensed with promptly.

In contrast, we find that from the earliest times certain Shīʿites are accused by their opponents of thinking that mere affiliation with an imām would secure for them salvation in the next life.<sup>29</sup> It is noteworthy in this respect that one of the earliest known polemics against the “Shīʿa” has a Khārijite accuse the former of falsely hoping for salvation through mere affiliation to a descendant of the Prophet.<sup>30</sup> Abū Ḥamza al-Mukhtār b. ʿAwf, an Ibādī rebel who seized Mecca or Medina, or both, sometime in the year 130-31/747-8,<sup>31</sup> accuses the Shīʿites of claiming that their association with their leaders avails them of good works and saves them from the punishment for bad deeds. In other words, what Abū Ḥamza’s slander suggests is that for the Shīʿites their recognition of the imām from among the progeny of Muḥammad (*bayt min al-ʿarab*) and their affiliation to his political and religious claims gives them access to a particular quality of the imām: his power to ‘cancel’ their evil deeds.<sup>32</sup> This power, as our Khārijite demagogue affirms, was construed as automatic in this world and in the next, so that on earth Shīʿites could afford the odd turpitude, while in the next world such misbehaviour would be promptly passed

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<sup>29</sup> Perhaps the prototype for this idea existed from the beginning, among the earliest followers of the Prophet; for example, the poet Qays b. Nushba al-Sulamī described the Prophet in the following way: *aʿnī ibnu ʿĀminata l-amīn wa-man bihi arjū s-salāmata min ʿadhābi l-hūn* (“I mean the son of ʿĀmina, the trusted one, through whom I hope to be safe from an evil torture”), in Ibn Shabba, *Tārīkh al-madīna al-munawwara*, ed. A. M. Dandal et al. (Beirut, 1996), vol. 1, p. 332.

<sup>30</sup> See appendix 2 for the text.

<sup>31</sup> See Ch. Pellat in *EI2*, s.v. “al-Mukhtār b. ʿAwf”.

<sup>32</sup> This ability seems to be innate, so to speak, cf. the *abdāl* of Syria, “by whose power rain falls, enemies are vanquished, and the people of al-Shām are spared punishment” (*al-abdāl...yusqā bihim al-ghayth wa-yuntaṣar bihim ʿalā al-ʿdāʾ wa-yuṣraf ʿan ahl al-sham bihim al-ʿadhāb*, Ibn ʿAsākir, ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 1175), *Tārīkh madīnat Dimashq*, ed. A. Shīrī (Beirut, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 279ff: it is interesting that *sh-f-ʿ* does not appear in descriptions of what the *abdāl* can do. The Shīʿites attribute similar qualities to their imāms, although they also attribute *shafāʿa* to them too.

over.<sup>33</sup> The sermon is probably one of the earliest attestations within the tradition for a Shī'ite theology of faith, which we can regard as authentic with some degree of confidence. But it is also important to note the language used by Abū Ḥamza. The Shī'ite affiliation to the imām spares them (*tunjīhim*) punishment in Hell; we already noted how the Qur'ān had associated *najāt* with those who are spared Hell, as opposed to being taken out of it. And it is not just from opponents of the Shī'ites that we learn of the necessity of 'attaching' oneself to the imām in order to be saved in the next world, it is a point made by leading Shī'ite poets.<sup>34</sup>

This latter conception would become the hallmark of dogmatic Shī'ism, and we point it out here because it is important for the later development of the idea of intercession. Needless to say, it was within this second (Shī'ite) conception of salvation, and not that represented by Khārijism, that the idea of 'intercession' (*shafā'a*) would find popular appeal, since it presumed that the 'charismatic' leader possessed unique traits: the ability to intercede on behalf of his followers was among these traits. Khārijites, for that matter, never accepted the idea of intercession.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> That this is part of the Shī'ite conception of belief and duty is professed by the Shī'ites themselves, see for example Ibn Shahrāshūb (*Manāqib al Abī Ṭālib*, Najaf, n.d., vol. 3, p. 2) where a Prophetic ḥadīth is related on the authority of Ibn 'Umar that, "love of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib is a good deed that cannot be cancelled by a misdeed, and animosity to him is a misdeed that cannot be erased by any good deed" (*ḥubb 'Alī ḥasana lā taḍurr ma'ahā sayyi'a wa-bughḍuh sayyi'a lā tanfa' ma'ahā ḥasana*); also that love of 'Alī "eats away sins" (*ḥubb 'Alī ya'kul al-dhunūb*), vol. 3, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> See appendix 3 for examples.

<sup>35</sup> See refs. and discussion in ch. 5.2.

### 2.1.3 The Murji'ites

Finally, in our investigation of pre-classical views on salvation and Hell, we may turn to the other group that emerged in the wake of the civil wars of the first century, the Murji'ites. For these, unfortunately, our documentary evidence is meagre, but what does exist is certainly revealing. We have referred to the two poems attributed to Thābit Quṭna (d. 110/728) and ʿAwn b. ʿAbdallāh (d. betw. 110/728 and 112/730). It is above all the poem of the former that really provides the clues to Murji'ite ideology.<sup>36</sup> [basīṭ]

*nurjī l-umūra idhā kānat mushabbihatan  
wa-naṣduqu l-qawla fī man jāra aw ʿanadā  
al-muslimūna ʿalā l-islāmi kulluhumū  
wa-l-mushrikūna ashattū dīnahum qidadā  
wa-lā arā anna dhanban bālighun aḥadan  
mi-n-nāsi shirkan idhā mā waḥḥadū ṣ-ṣamadā  
kullu l-khawāriji mukhtin fī maqālatihī  
wa-law taʿabbada fīmā qāla wa-jtahadā  
ammā ʿAliyyun wa-ʿUthmānun fa-innahumā  
ʿabdāni lam yushrikā billāhi mudh ʿabadā  
yujzā ʿAliyyun wa-ʿUthmānun bi-saʿyihimā  
wa-lastu adrī bi-ḥaqqin ayyatan waradā  
Allāhu yaʿlamu mādhā yaḥdurāni bihī  
wa-kullu ʿabdin sa-yalqā llāha munfaridā*

“We defer (judgement) in matters that are dubious, and say the truth about the tyrant or the erring one. All Muslims belong in Islam, but the polytheists have made their religion that of differing sects;<sup>37</sup> and I do not think that a sin makes people polytheists so long as they profess the oneness of the One of eternal refuge; every Khārijite errs in his belief, even if in saying it he seeks to get closer (to God) and strive (piously); as for ʿAlī and ʿUthmān, they were two servants who had never associated anyone with God since they began to worship; ʿAlī and ʿUthmān shall be rewarded according to their efforts, but I know not to which one they have gone (sc. Paradise or Hell); God knows what they will bring with them, and every servant shall

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<sup>36</sup> *Aghānī*, vol. 14, p. 270.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Q. 72/11, where the *jinn* describe themselves as made up of differing sects (of good and bad): *kunnā tarāʾiqa qidadan*.

encounter God on his own”.

The main points made by Thābit, and may be regarded as early Murjiʿite doctrine, are the following: 1) One is to accept as ‘believers’ those who so profess, even though their behaviour might indicate otherwise (i.e. one should exclude ‘works’ from the definition of faith); 2) The minimum requirement to belong to the community of Muslims is to profess that God is one, and not to associate anything or person with Him; 3) The Khārijites are wrong to condemn as polytheists those who commit sins, and 4) ‘Alī and ‘Uthmān might have been wrong, but we, the Murjiʿites, prefer to defer judgement on their fate in the next world, since only God can know what recompense they deserve. Though Thābit does not say as much, he clearly feels that it is impossible to tell the fate of certain people, especially those that profess belief in God, and yet are implicated in wrong-doing. Part of the difficulty of the matter, as expressed in the poem, is that there are only two permanent destinations, Paradise or Hell. ‘Alī and ‘Uthmān were directly or indirectly responsible for the internal divisions plaguing the Muslim community, and as such they did not obviously merit eternal Paradise. Yet, the alternative was eternal Hell, and they certainly did not, according to Murjiʿites like Thābit, merit that either.

Poetry is not the only evidence that Murjiʿites were perplexed by the fate of Muslim grave sinners and preferred to leave judgement on their fate to God. An early Murjiʿite dogmatic work is the *Kitāb al-irjāʿ* attributed to one of ‘Alī’s grandsons, al-Ḥasan b. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya (d. c. 92/710). This short treatise is an exposé of Murjiʿite doctrine, and what is interesting about it for our purposes is that it too takes for granted the fact that Paradise and Hell are eternal abodes. Indeed, one is advised to practice *irjāʿ*

precisely because a judgement on the other-worldly fate of figures, at once esteemed and denigrated within the Muslim community, was impossible. The work itself has been variously dated to around 73/692,<sup>38</sup> 75/694,<sup>39</sup> and possibly to after 102/720<sup>40</sup>

The *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l-muta‘allim* is the other early Murji‘ite work, which Schacht ascribed to Abū Muqātil al-Samarqandī (d. 208/823), and dated to around 133/750<sup>41</sup> The treatise consists of a dialogue between master and disciple, in which answers are given to some controversial questions about the nature of faith and the consequences of sin; it is also very hostile to Iraqī traditionists<sup>42</sup> (not fortuitously, considering the Ḥanbalīte dislike for the later Murji‘a).<sup>43</sup> One important exchange between the master and disciple is on the issue of which sins necessitate punishment in Hell:<sup>44</sup>

(Question): “Apart from polytheism, are there sins which are punished with certainty (*al-batta*), or are all or some of them forgiven?”

(Answer): “No sin but polytheism is punished with certainty; we know that some are [or may be] forgiven, but we do not know which, and we do not know whom Allah will want to forgive. Reference is made to Q. 4/31: “If you avoid the heinous sins (*kabā’ir*) that are forbidden you, We will acquit you of your evil deeds”, and to Q. 4/48: “God forgives not that aught should be with Him associated; less than that He forgives to whomsoever He will”).”

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<sup>38</sup> Madelung, *Qāsim*, p. 229.

<sup>39</sup> Van Ess, “Das *Kitāb*”, pp. 20-52.

<sup>40</sup> As regards the dating of these early theological treatises, van Ess is inclined to accept their authenticity and dates them to the period 690-710; but Cook is generally more cautious in his dating and suggests 720-749, *Dogma*, pp. 88 (for the *Kitāb al-irjā’*), and pp. 154ff (for his general approach to dating).

<sup>41</sup> J. Schacht, “An early Murci‘ite treatise: the *kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l-muta‘allim*”, *Oriens* 17 (1964), pp. 96-117.

<sup>42</sup> Schacht, “Murci‘ite”, p. 101.

<sup>43</sup> For an example of such animosity, see the biographical entry in Muḥammad b. Abī Ya‘lā, *Ṭabaqāt fuqahā’ al-ḥanābila*, ed. A M. ‘Umar (Cairo, 1998), vol. 1, pp. 51f.

<sup>44</sup> Cited from Schacht’s translation, “Murci‘ite”, p. 108, question no. 14.

When the disciple asks if there is a sin which is punished with certainty in Hell, the presupposition is that if you go to Hell you go there forever, and that is the reason behind the question. If the notion of temporary Hell had been accepted by the Murji'ite author of this text, he would have phrased the question, for example, thus: "Apart from polytheism, are there sins which are punished with *eternity*?"

There are, then, two points to be deduced from the above passage. Firstly, certain Iraqi Murji'ites of the second century believed that if you went to Hell, you went forever. Secondly, and as the Qur'ānic verses referred to by the master in his response clearly attest, this type of *irjā'* was based on the premise that so long as a person did not commit *shirk*, there was a chance God would forgive him before he got to Hell. But there was also a chance that He would not, for God had not given a guarantee of forgiveness for certain sins (cf. grave sins in Q. 4/31); and if He did not forgive him, but chose to send him to Hell, it would be forever. In another exchange in the *Kitāb al-ʿālim*, the disciple asks if when a believer commits grave sins he becomes an enemy of God. The master replies that the believer does not, so long as he does not abandon *tawhīd*.<sup>45</sup> For the master, *tawhīd* is the minimum requirement for the possibility, not the guarantee, of salvation.

Our coverage of early Murji'ite theology of faith may be completed by reference to the so-called *Fiqh akbar I*. This statement of Ḥanafī dogma was discussed by Wensinck and dated by him to the middle of the second century.<sup>46</sup> Madelung considers it to be representative of the views of those adherents of *irjā'* during roughly the same period,

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<sup>45</sup> Schacht, "Murci'ite", p. 109.

that is 81-133/700-750.<sup>47</sup> J. van Ess has twice remarked on the problems associated with its authorship and date of composition.<sup>48</sup> It is fair to assume that this creed predates the *Fiqh absaṭ* attributed to the Ḥanafite scholar Abū Muṭīr al-Balkhī (d. 199/814), in which many of the former's articles may be found, and probably originated within Ḥanafite circles during the second half of the second century.<sup>49</sup> It is silent on the fate of sinners in the next world. The assumption is still that Hell is eternal for those sent there. This is evidenced by the inclusion of an article that states that, “we do not consider anyone to be an infidel on account of sin; nor do we deny his faith”.<sup>50</sup> The motivation behind this statement is to counter the Khārijite dogma that (political) sin made one an infidel, since everyone agreed that infidels were in Hell eternally. The difference between the Khārijites and the adherents of the above creed is that the latter preferred to co-exist even with those that belonged to a different religio-political persuasion (sc. the anti-sectarian ideology of *irjāʾ*).<sup>51</sup>

## **2.2 Eternal Hell and Eternal Paradise**

The view that one either went to eternal Paradise or eternal Hell in the afterlife was not confined to the Khārijites, Murjiʿites, or the Shīʿites for that matter. It was simply taken for granted. Numerous discussions of the afterlife between individuals from the

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<sup>46</sup> *Creed*, pp. 102ff.

<sup>47</sup> *Qāsim*, p. 235.

<sup>48</sup> “Kritisches zum *Fiqh Akbar*”, *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 54 (1986), pp. 327-338; *TG*, vol. 1, pp. 207ff.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Cook, *Dogma*, p. 30, and n. 21 thereto.

<sup>50</sup> Wensinck, *Creed*, p. 103.

<sup>51</sup> Khārijites did not mind co-existing with sinners from within their own community (of Khārijites), but some Khārijites, such as the Azāriqa, would not tolerate non-Khārijites, regardless of whether they were

first 150 years or so, as recorded in Muslim sources, presuppose that in the next life one either went to Paradise or to Hell.<sup>52</sup> For example, there is the famous incident between the caliph ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 66-86/685-705) and some Khārijites, where both sides claim the label of *ahl al-janna*: implying that there was no alternative.<sup>53</sup> The Kufan traditionist al-Fuḍayl b. ‘Iyād (d. 188/803) recalls a discussion in Basra between an ascetic and Mālik b. Dīnār (d. 124/741 or 131/748), in which the choices as regards the afterlife are described in no vague terms: either Paradise or Hell.<sup>54</sup> In a similar vein, the caliph ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (r. 99-102/717-20) in a *khutba* is said to have reiterated this other-world reality.<sup>55</sup> When on one occasion the caliph Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170-194/786-809) was reminded that there are only two possible abodes in the next life, he was moved to tears.<sup>56</sup> In a *khutba* following the end of the pilgrimage, the caliph al-Maʿmūn (r. 198-218/813-33) is said to have enumerated before his audience the sequence of eschatological events: after death comes the resurrection, then the scales, then the reckoning, then retaliation, then the eschatological bridge, followed by punishment or

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sinner or not.

<sup>52</sup> My reliance on mostly Khārijite poetry is simply on account of its frequent use of the paradise/hell motif. But other non-Khārijite early poetry reflects similar conceptions of salvation, only it does not make as frequent use of it; for example, see Umayya b. Abī Ṣalt (d. c. 3/624), *Dīwān*, pp. 494ff (no. 88, rhyme: -*mīm*), and p. 542 (no. 102, -*yāʾ*), where the poet hopes God will forgive him his sins.

<sup>53</sup> Mubarrad, *Kāmil*, vol. 3, p. 1433.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn ‘Abd Rabbih, *al-‘Iqd al-farīd*, vol. 2, p. 100: *fa-qāla Mālik b. Dīnār mā huwa illā ṭāʿata llāhi awi n-nār fa-qāla Muḥammad bnū Wāsiʿ mā huwa [illā?] kamā taqūl laysa illā ʿafwa llāhi awi n-nār qāl Mālik sadaqt.*

<sup>55</sup> *Jamharat khutab al-‘Arab*, ed. A Z. Ṣafwat (Beirut, 1985), ii, p. 209: *amā taʿlamūna annahu laysa bayn l-jannata wa-n-nāra manzila...wa annakum ṣāʿirūn ilā iḥdāhumā.*

<sup>56</sup> *Jamharat*, iii, pp. 99f.

reward.<sup>57</sup>

The documentary evidence for early Muslim theology, i.e. theology that dates to before 184/800, is simply not substantial.<sup>58</sup> On the one hand, some of these works are not concerned with such questions.<sup>59</sup> On the other, those which might have reason to discuss such questions do not.<sup>60</sup> Particularly note-worthy is the absence of such a discussion in three epistles on the question of free will.<sup>61</sup> In fact, the only way to explain the silence of our early religious epistles on the question of temporary Hell-fire, is simply to assume that the idea was not around at the time of their composition. Finally, it should be said that the few pieces of evidence from the late first to mid-second century do support the hypothesis offered here that the early Muslim community assumed that if one went to Hell, it was for all eternity: this was precisely the problem. If it were generally held that one could escape from Hell, then the debate over the fate of the Muslim grave sinner that began after the first civil war (*post* 37/657) would not have lasted as long as it did (until about 184/800).<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> *Jamharat*, iii, pp. 122f.: *wa-innahu l-ḥaqq lā l-kadhib wa-mā huwa illā l-mawt wa-l-ba'th wa-l-mīzān wa-l-ḥisāb wa-l-qisāṣ wa-s-ṣirāt thumma l-ʿiqāb wa-th-thawāb fa-man najā fa-qad fāz wa-man hawā yawma'idhin fa-qad khāb al-khayru kulluhu fī l-janna wa-sh-sharru kulluhu fī n-nār.*

<sup>58</sup> See Cook's list in his preface to *Dogma*, ix.

<sup>59</sup> For example, the so-called '1st letter of Ibn Ibād to 'Abd al-Malik' (see Cook, *Dogma*, pp. 57ff).

<sup>60</sup> J. van Ess, "Das *Kitāb*"; the *Risāla fī'l-qadar* of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, ed. H. Ritter, "Studien zur Geschichte der islamischen Frömmigkeit", *Der Islam* 21 (1933), pp. 67-83: for example, an opportune moment to bring up the issue of temporary Hell or the salvation of Muslim grave sinners would have been at p. 73.9;

<sup>61</sup> Since many of the discussions in these epistles turn on the premise that God has already preordained people in Paradise and Hell, the idea that people will exit from Hell interferes with such a scheme, even if we allow for the argument that God could also preordain such a fate: in any case, there is no suggestion of this last in any of the epistles: see the two anti-qadarite epistles published by J. van Ess, *Anfänge Muslimischer Theologie* (Beirut, 1977).

<sup>62</sup> The composition date for the epistle of Sālim b. Dhakwān (Crone and Zimmermann, *Sālim*, p. 299), where the question of the fate of the Muslim grave sinner is as relevant as ever; certainly, there is no

### 2.3 The traditionists (*ahl al-hadīth*)

We have seen that all the evidence of the first and early second century concurs with the Qur'ānic attitude towards salvation in the next world. Muslims reflected upon the question of the hereafter and the fate of sinners, and were motivated by a concern to avoid Hell, knowing it to be an abode of eternal torment. It was understood that salvation was about being spared Hell in the next world. As late as the middle of the second century many Muslims still took for granted that anyone sent to Hell would be there forever. At the same time we have an abundance of ḥadīths to the effect that people can get out of Hell,<sup>63</sup> sometimes without any obvious intervention, aside from God's own mercy,<sup>64</sup> sometimes through intercession.<sup>65</sup> It seems that as this body of traditions circulated more widely, the exegetical tradition sought support for the idea of temporary Hell from the text of the Qur'ān. The exegetical tradition's eagerness to defend the soundness of this idea stemmed not merely from their general tendency to defend the authority of traditions, Prophetic or other, but also because the concept of temporary Hell would spell the end of the protracted debate about the fate of the sinning believer. The next chapter will discuss the 'making' of this temporary Hell by the traditionalists.

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assumption that temporary Hell is an option.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Māja, Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad b. Yazīd (d. 273/886), *al-Sunan*, ed. M. F. 'Abd al-Bāqī (Cairo 1954), vol. 2, p. 1443, (no. 4315).

<sup>64</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, Aḥmad (d. 241/855), *al-Musnad*, ed. A. M. Shākir (Cairo, 1948-80), vol. 6, no. 4337.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 16, no. 8516.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **The making of temporary Hell**

We may begin with the earliest reliable sources of such traditionalist activity, the commentary of the well-known exegete Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) and the *Muṣannaf* of the traditionist ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 212/827).

### 3.1 Temporary Hell and the early exegetical tradition

In his exegesis to a verse which describes *jahannam* as having seven gates,<sup>1</sup> Muqātil states that the Fire (*al-nār*) is made up of layers one on top of the other (*ba‘duhā asfalu min ba‘d*) with increasing intensity the further down one goes. The order of the gates with their names is given as:

- 1<sup>st</sup> gate: *jahannam*
- 2<sup>nd</sup> gate: *lazā*                      ↓ Increasing intensity of fire
- 3<sup>rd</sup> gate: *ḥuṭama*
- 4<sup>th</sup> gate: *sa‘īr*
- 5<sup>th</sup> gate: *jaḥīm*
- 6<sup>th</sup> gate: *hāwiya*
- 7<sup>th</sup> gate: *saqar*

This scheme is reproduced by ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 212/827), but with the additional remark that the term *al-nār* is the generic term for the Fire:

‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ma‘mar← al-A‘mash. He said: the names of the gates of *jahannam* are *ḥuṭama*, *hāwiya*, *lazā*, *saqar*, *jaḥīm*, *sa‘īr*, *jahannam* and “the Fire” is the (name for the) whole thing (*asmā’ abwāb jahannam: al-ḥuṭama wa’l-hāwiya wa-lazā wa-saqar wa’l-jaḥīm wa’l-sa‘īr wa jahannam wa’l-nār hiya jummā’*).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 430 on Q. 15/44. This order, however, is not sustained throughout his commentary. In his exegesis to Q. 74/35, the last three gates are re-ordered thus: *saqar* (5<sup>th</sup>), *jaḥīm* (6<sup>th</sup>) and *hāwiya* (7<sup>th</sup>) (vol. 4, p. 498) (Ṭabarī reproduces this order in his *Tafsīr*, vol. 14, p. 35). This last would seem to be Muqātil’s preferred arrangement since with regards Q. 4/145 (viz. *the hypocrites are in the lowest level of the Fire*), he states that the lowest level is *hāwiya* (vol. 1, p. 417). Similarly, the place of *jaḥīm* as the 6<sup>th</sup> gate is confirmed in his exegesis to Q. 69/31 (vol. 4, p. 424).

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2 part i, p. 349; cf. Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, p. 73, no. 34115: Abū’l-Aḥwaṣ←Abū Ishāq←Hubayra←‘Alī: *abwāb al-nār ba‘duhā fawqa ba‘d*.

The preference for *nār* as a name for the entire infernal structure is probably intended to resolve the difficulty that the term *jahannam* should indicate both the entire body of Hell and at the same time its uppermost layer, or one of its gates; the difficulty, of course, is created by the fact that according to the Qurʾān only *jahannam* has gates, and seven at that. It is probably the case that the early exegetical tradition took *jahannam* as *the* name for Hell, especially since of the 111 references to Hell-fire, *jahannam* occurs 77 times; and the fact that it is the word for Hell in the Judaeo-Christian tradition supported this conception. What the exegetes then did was to look for seven names to give the seven gates mentioned by the Qurʾān (Q. 15/44). In other words, according to such a scheme, Hell is *al-nār* with seven layers bearing the names *jahannam*, *lazā*, *al-ḥuṭama*, *al-saʿīr*, *saqar*, *al-jaḥīm* and *al-ḥāwiya*; this is a scheme generally adopted by later Sunnī authorities.<sup>3</sup>

But the difficulty with such an infernal scheme is the architectural misrepresentation of having gates one on top of the other (as the commentators would have the seven hells), when one usually conceives of gates as being different points of entry to one structure at one horizontal level. There is evidence to suggest that there was some dispute over this issue. In a ḥadīth preserved in the *Muṣannaḥ* of Ibn Abī Shayba (d. 235/849) one detects a marked concern to explain that the gates of Hell are indeed on top of each other:<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855), *al-Radd ʿalā al-zanādiqa waʾl-jahmiyya* (Cairo, 1973), p. 15; ʿAbdallāh b. ʿUmar b. Muḥammad al-Bayḍāwī (d. 791/1388), *Anwār al-tanzīl wa-asrār al-taʾwīl*, (Beirut, 1970), iii, p. 170 : *al-muwaḥḥidūn al-ʿuṣāt* are in the first Hell, the Jews in the second, Christians in third, Sabians in fourth, Magians in fifth, polytheists in sixth and the hypocrites in seventh.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Abī Shayba, *al-muṣannaḥ*, vol. 7, p. 73, no. 34116; cf. Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 14, p. 35.

Ismā‘il b. ‘Ulyā←Abū Hārūn←Ḥiṭṭān b. ‘Abdallāh: ‘Alī said: *atadrūna kayfa abwābu n-nār? qālū: na‘am, naḥwa hādhihi l-abwāb, qāla: lā, wa-lākinnahā hākadhā, fa-waṣafa aṭbāqan ba‘dahā fawqa ba‘d* (“Do you know what the gates of Hell look like? Yes, they are like these doors. No, they are like this: and he described them like layers one on top of the other”).

But what is the purpose of such a scheme? The answer is given away in a slightly garbled passage preserved by Muqātil and appended to Q. 104 (*sūrat al-humaza*), although it is not a direct exegesis to the *sūra*:

*wa-dhālika anna sh-shaqīyya idhā dakhala n-nāra, tāfa bihi l-malaku fī abwābihā fī alwāni l-‘adhāb wa-futiḥa lahu bābu l-ḥuṭama wa-hiya bābun min abwābi jahannam, wa-hiya nārun ta‘kulu n-nāra min shiddati ḥarrihā, wa-mā khamadat min yawmi khalaqahā llāhu, ‘azza wa-jall, ilā yawmi yadkhuluhā, fa-idhā futiḥa dhālika l-bābu waqa‘ati n-nāru ‘alayhi fa-aḥraqat-hu, fa-tuḥriqu l-jilda wa-l-laḥma wa-l-‘aṣaba wa-l-‘azma wa-lā tuḥriqu l-qalba wa-lā l-‘ayna wa-huwa mā yu‘qalu bihi wa-yubṣar...wa-dhālika annahu idhā kharaja l-muwaḥḥidūna min l-bābi l-‘alā wa-hiya jahannam.*

“When the wretched one enters the Fire, an angel flies him through its gates, containing all sorts of punishments, and the gate of al-Ḥuṭama is opened for him, and that gate is one of the gates of Jahannam, whose fire is so intense that it devours other fire and it has been burning incessantly from the moment God, the almighty and lofty, created it to the moment he [the wretched one] enters it. When that gate is opened and the fire catches him, it engulfs him burning his skin, his flesh, his nerves and his bones except for his heart and his eyes for with these one is aware and one is able to see...and so when *al-muwaḥḥidūn* [sc. those who professed the oneness of God] exit through the uppermost gate which is Jahannam”.<sup>5</sup>

The passage continues beyond the above citation to describe how the doors of Hell are finally nailed closed, so that no one can ever leave. The interesting detail for our purposes is the brief line describing the *muwaḥḥidūn* exiting from Hell through its uppermost gate *jahannam*. In other words, the reason for the scheme of the gates, as proposed by Muqātil and the *Muṣannaf* traditions, is to establish the idea that

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<sup>5</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, pp. 839-840.

*jahannam* is an 'exitable' section of Hell; it resembles something akin to an escape hatch, simply because it constitutes the top layer. This is given away by a classical ḥadīth, which identifies a group of people in Hell as *jahannamiyyūn* (i.e. those of *jahannam*), and what distinguishes this group is that they are eventually released from Hell.<sup>6</sup>

Muqātil identifies those who get out of Hell (*al-jahannamiyyūn* in the ḥadīth) as *al-muwaḥḥidūn*. The heresiographical tradition identifies Muqātil as one of the Murjī'a who extends to the *muwaḥḥidūn* a special status.<sup>7</sup> Now, one of the earliest representations we have of Murjī'ite theology is the *Kitāb al-ʿālim wa'l-mutaʿallim*, which we have already discussed. The reader will remember that this Murjī'ite treatise was dated by Schacht to the second half of the second century,<sup>8</sup> which, as it happens, is as close as we can get to Muqātil (d. 150/767). As van Ess has noted,<sup>9</sup> the author of the treatise uses three categories to classify people in the next life: *ahl-janna* is for the Prophet and whoever was mentioned by him as belonging to Paradise (sc. *ʿashara mubashshara*), *ahl al-nār* is strictly for the *mushrikūn* or *kuffār*, while *al-muwaḥḥidūn* is reserved for all other Muslims. All those other Muslims will then include some whose record of deeds may not merit them Paradise, or may even land them in Hell. Gilliot has remarked on Muqātil's theological disposition, stating that although the

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<sup>6</sup> Al-Bukhārī, Muḥammad b. Ismāʿīl (d. 257/870), *Kitāb al-jāmiʿ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. L. Krehl, (Leiden 1864-1908), vol. 4, pp. 243-44 (=riqāq 51), and pp. 467-68 (=tawḥīd 25); al-Baghawī, al-Ḥusayn b. Masʿūd (d. 516/1122), *Maʿālim al-tanzīl*, eds. M. Siwār et al. (Beirut, 1987), vol. 2, pp. 402-403; the ḥadīth is known to Shīʿites too: al-Ṭabrisī, Abū ʿAlī al-Faḍl b. al-Ḥasan (d. 548/1153), *Majmaʿ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qurʾān*, eds. H. R. al-Maḥallātī et al. (Beirut, 1986), vol. 2, pp. 910f. for Q. 3/192, and vol. 5, p. 299 for Q. 11/105-108.

<sup>7</sup> Al-Ashʿarī, Abū'l-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl (d. 324/935), *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. H. Ritter (Istanbul, 1929-33), p. 151.6ff.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 100.

<sup>9</sup> J. van Ess, *TG*, i, p. 201.

dogmatic statements ascribed to him by the heresiographical tradition cannot always be substantiated,<sup>10</sup> his commentary does betray such tendencies.<sup>11</sup> Versteegh has also noted certain traits peculiar to Muqātil's exegesis, in particular with regard to the way in which Muqātil provides glosses and paraphrastic comments in the text of his commentary. Most of the time, these lexical explanations have to do with clarifying the Qurʾānic text at points where Muqātil feels the reader might not be aware of the intended meaning. Sometimes, however, his paraphrasing is not merely intended to convey the full grammatical sense of the verse, but also seems to disguise-- as Versteegh has it-- 'ideological motives'.<sup>12</sup> The fact that Muqātil applies the same method of paraphrasing whenever there is any reference to religion or to believers, which he explains with the terms *tawḥīd* or *ahl al-tawḥīd/al-muwahḥidūn*<sup>13</sup> respectively, is particularly worthy of note. Although Versteegh himself does not say as much, it is clear that Muqātil's preference for the term *tawḥīd* is a consequence of his views on Hell and eternal punishment. For Muqātil, *islām* and *imān* are one and the same thing, reducible to the belief in the oneness of God (sc. *lā ilāha illā allāh*). Although the identification of Muqātil as an extreme Murjiʿite is intended as a

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<sup>10</sup> Ashʿarī (*Maqālāt*, p. 151.6ff) accuses him of believing that God does not (eternally?) punish a *muwahḥid*; Ibn Ḥazm, ʿAlī b. Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-faṣl fīʾl-milal waʾl-ahwāʾ waʾl-niḥal* (Beirut, 1986), vol. 4, p. 205, attributes to him the saying that where there is faith a sin can do no harm; this is also al-Shahrastānī's accusation, *al-milal waʾl-niḥal*, A. A. Muḥannā and A. Fāʿūr (Beirut, 1990), p. 165, "a sin does not harm the one who professes God's oneness and believes in it (*ṣāḥib al-tawḥīd waʾl-īmān*)".

<sup>11</sup> C. Gilliot, "Muqātil, grand exégète, traditioniste et théologien maudit", *Journal Asiatique* 279 (1991), pp. 39-85; Muqātil's background in Balkh would have predisposed him to Murjiʿism; on the spread of Murjiʿism in Balkh, see Madelung, "Murjiʿa".

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Versteegh suggests that, "the constant replacement of *muslimūna* in the text of the Qurʾān with *mukhliṣūna*...has to do with the fact that according to Muqātil there can be no real Muslims before the mission of Muḥammad", *Grammar*, p. 213. On the grammatical side, Muqātil almost always replaces *laʿallā* with *likay* or *fasada* with *ʿamila al-maʿāṣī*, to cite but a few examples (a full list is given by Versteegh, pp. 211f.).

derogatory label,<sup>14</sup> it is nevertheless compatible with what Muqātil's exegeses reveal, namely, that so long as an individual professed the oneness of God he would eventually be saved. And if he were to end up in Hell, he would be able to get out. This classification is evident in the commentary of Muqātil. For example, in his exegesis to the following verses:

Q. 39/71,73: *wa-sīqa lladhīna kafarū ilā jahannama zumaran...wa-sīqa lladhīna ittaqaw rabbahum ilā l-jannati zumaran.*

“And those who disbelieved are led forth in batches to jahannam...while those who feared their Lord are led forth in batches to the Garden”.

Muqātil interprets *kufr* in this verse specifically as a rejection of *tawḥīd* (*alladhīna kafarū bi'l-tawḥīd*).<sup>15</sup> It is important to bear in mind the way in which the distinct fates of the believers and the unbelievers are juxtaposed in these verses. Muqātil is making the point that the unbelievers are those who reject *tawḥīd*, for the very reason that in his mind the other group are those who profess *tawḥīd*: they are the *muwaḥḥidūn* or the *ahl al-tawḥīd*. In the case of Muqātil, the connection between *tawḥīd* (monotheism) and *īmān* (belief) is not one that should be glossed over. It is this link which establishes the basis for his understanding that certain people will be able to get out of Hell, and that these people will be the sinning believers of the Muslim community.

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<sup>13</sup> The term *tawḥīd* means to proclaim the oneness of God as in the *shahāda* thus *muwaḥḥid*; in this discussion *tawḥīd* has nothing to do with the Muʿtazilite term concerning God's attributes (D. Gimaret in *EI2*, s.v. “tawḥīd”).

<sup>14</sup> Extreme Murjiʿism was applied by the Sunnīs to those who held the view that ‘belief’ was mere profession of faith, to the exclusion of works; cf. M. Plessner and A. Rippin in *EI2*, s.v. “Muqātil b. Sulaymān”, but the authors' remark that there is no evidence of Murjiʿite theological leanings in any of Muqātil's work is clearly inaccurate.

<sup>15</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, pp. 688-89.

The exegesis to Q. 74/39-42 is another example of how Muqātil's theological ideas determine his understanding of the Qur'ān. Here, he takes the opportunity to distinguish between the fates of two groups of people who end up in Hell, the run-of-the-mill non-believers (who remain in Hell) and the sinning believers (who are able to get out of Hell):

*illā aṣḥābi l-yamīn fī jannātin yatasā'alūna 'ani l-mujrimīn mā salakakum fī saqar.*

“Except for those of the right hand, they enquire amongst each other in the gardens about the criminals, [wondering] what has landed you in *saqar*?”

Muqātil comments that the situation described in the above verses takes place when God has brought out the *ahl al-tawḥīd* from the Fire, and the other believers (those already in Paradise) wonder why some people have remained in the Fire.<sup>16</sup> In other words, Muqātil understands *mā salakakum* as “what has kept you in *saqar*?”, and not as the natural reading would be “what has landed you in *saqar*?”. Muqātil wants to establish that it is possible to get out of Hell, precisely because, according to his reading of Q. 74/39-42, some people (believers) do get out of Hell and chide those who are still there. Those who get out are able to mock others who remain stuck in Hell because they professed *tawḥīd*. Evidently then, there is something to be said for the mere profession of *tawḥīd*: it can get you out of Hell. It is not always clear, however, that those taken out of the Fire are actually taken out of *jahannam*, as can be seen in the case of Muqātil's exegesis to Q. 74/39-42. Indeed, in many instances in which one encounters a ḥadīth or exegesis to the effect that people can get out of Hell, whether in the commentaries or ḥadīth collections, the word *al-nār* is the term used to

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<sup>16</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 499.

refer to Hell. What this seems to suggest is that once it was established that one could get out of Hell-- by getting out of *jahannam*-- it was no longer necessary to refer to this Hell in such cases using the name *jahannam*; or else this original idea was simply lost.<sup>17</sup>

Further examples of Muqātil's conviction that eternal stays in Hell are not for those who profess *tawḥīd* come in his exegesis to two sets of verses, the obscurity of which we noted above (ch. 1.5). The first is Q. 6/128:

*qāla n-nāru mathwākum khālidīna fihā illā mā shāʿa llāhu inna rabbaka ḥakīmun ʿalīm.*

“He says: the Fire is your abode, in it you shall be for all eternity, except what God wills, your Lord is wise and all-knowing”.

Muqātil states that the proviso, *illā mā shāʿa llāh*, is intended for those who professed the oneness of God (*al-muwaḥḥidūn*): *wa-istathnā ahl al-tawḥīd annahum lā yukhalladūna fihā*.<sup>18</sup> Instead of reading the proviso as a confirmation of God's ability to do what He pleases, Muqātil takes it to stand for a specific eventuality, the time when the *muwaḥḥidūn* are taken out of Hell. This he does in the case of a second set of verses, the only other place in the Qurʾān where the proviso appears in a context of Hell-fire punishment. But what is interesting about this set of verses is that, unlike Q. 6/128, the proviso in Q. 11/105-108 is also used to describe the situation in Paradise:

*fa-minhum shaqīyyun wa-saʿīd (105) fa-ammā lladhīna shaqū fa-fī n-nāri lahum fihā zafīrun wa-shahīq (106) khālidīna fihā mā dāmati s-samāwātu wa-l-arḍ illā*

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<sup>17</sup> For example, in Ṭabarī's *Tafsīr* there is a description of how the angel Gabriel is commanded by God to go and extract someone from Hell after it had been shut up for ages (vol. 30, p. 294f.); although the description is in the exegesis of sūra 104, in which the term *ḥuṭama* for Hell occurs, the word used to refer to Hell is simply, *al-nār*.

<sup>18</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 589.

*mā shāʿa rabbuk inna rabbaka faʿālun li-mā yurīd* (107) *wa-ammā lladhīna suʿidū fa-fi l-jannati khālidīna fihā mā dāmāti s-samāwātu wa-l-arḍ illā mā shāʿa rabbuk ʿaṭāʿan ghayra majdhūdh* (108).

“Some of them are wretched and some are fortunate: as for the wretched they shall be in the Fire, for them there is sighing and wailing there: in it they shall dwell eternally the length the heavens and the earth endured except what your Lord wills, your Lord does what He pleases: as for the fortunate, they shall be in the Garden, in it abiding eternally for the length the heavens and earth endured, except what God wills, a gift uninterrupted”.

Muqātil says that the *illā mā shāʿa rabbuk* in both the contexts of Hell and Paradise is a reference to the *muwaḥḥidūn: fa-istathnā al-muwaḥḥidīn alladhīna yakhrujūna min al-nār*.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the first verse describes the eternity of punishment for the ‘wretched’ in Hell and then makes an exception for those who will not be in Hell eternally: the *muwaḥḥidūn*. The appearance of *illā mā shāʿa rabbuk* in the second verse, relating to the people of Paradise, becomes a reiteration of what was intended by the same proviso in the preceding verse about Hell. Clearly, the exegesis is intended to defend the plausibility of the idea of temporary Hell. Admittedly, the verses are problematic because of the occurrence of the *istithnāʿ* with reference both to the people of Hell and those of Paradise. But either we accept the ‘exception’ in both cases or look for an alternative in both cases. In other words, one presumably has to read *illā mā shāʿa allāh* either as a simple emphatic intended to convey the message that God can do what He wishes, or as a proviso to the predicament of both those in Paradise and those in Hell: people might exit from Paradise as well as Hell. The last part of the verse about Paradise, *ʿaṭāʿan ghayra majdhūdh* (“a gift uninterrupted”) makes the former reading, that is to say that God can do what He pleases, the more natural one.

We will re-encounter this type of schematic reading of Qur'ānic verses in Ṭabarī's commentary, and it is there that the context of these polemics becomes clear. For all that Muqātil has provided us with the clues to the development of a temporary Hell, his method of exegesis is peculiar to him: the absence of any traditions for the most part means that we cannot get beyond the commentary itself. As such, all that the evidence from Muqātil can show is that by the time he was putting together his commentary, *ante* 150 A.H./767 A.D., the idea of temporary Hell for Muslims was already around. Put differently, by the middle of the second century some traditionalists in Iraq were proposing that belief should be defined merely by profession of *lā ilāha illā allāh*, since that requirement ensured exit from Hell.

We may recapitulate as follows. We have seen how through the conception of a Hell vertically in seven layers, there was an attempt to interpret *jahannam* as the uppermost level, which in turn meant that it was an 'exitable' hell. In the opinion of the exegetes, this became a suitable place for a particularly controversial group of individuals: the *ahl al-tawḥīd* or more precisely (on account of them ending up in Hell) the grave sinners of the Muslim community. However, once it was established that it was possible to get out of Hell, it no longer mattered whether that part of Hell was called *jahannam* or simply *al-nār*. The notion of a purgative Hell in the form of *jahannam* had served its purpose by establishing that for Muslim sinners Hell would be temporary; the notion that *jahannam* was the purgative Hell must have been abandoned soon after.

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<sup>19</sup> *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 298-299.

But before turning to the classic commentary of Ṭabarī, there are some clues given in the intervening period. For, between Muqātil (d. 150/767) and Ṭabarī (d. 311/923) are some two hundred years of controversy, and we can detect some of this controversy in the *Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 212/827).

### 3.2 Temporary hell and the early controversy

Although Muqātil takes it for granted that people can exit from Hell, more specifically, that the Muslim sinners will exit from Hell, there is evidence to suggest that the issue of a temporary Hell was controversial. At least, by the time ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 212/827) was compiling his *Muṣannaf* (c. 143-184/760-800), the question of whether one could exit from Hell was still being contested. In the *Muṣannaf* we find the following chapter heading: *Bāb man yakhruju min al-nār*.<sup>20</sup> The section contains nine traditions which summarily depict scenes from the Day of Resurrection in which people (sometimes unidentified) are able to exit from Hell. That this group of traditions is a focus of polemic is clear by the content and phrasing of the narratives.

The first ḥadīth concerns the question, allegedly put to the Prophet, of whether people will be able to see God on the Day of Judgement (sc. *ru’yat allāh*).<sup>21</sup> This was a point of controversy in early Islamic theology.<sup>22</sup> More interesting is the fact that the ḥadīth continues, without interruption, and relates how a bridge is cast over Hell

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<sup>20</sup> *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, p. 407.

<sup>21</sup> *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, no. 20856, pp. 407ff.

<sup>22</sup> See D. Gimaret in *EI2*, s.v. “ru’yat allāh”; J. van Ess, *TG*, iv, pp. 411-415.

(*jahannam*), which all have to cross. The entirely unrelated narrative, unrelated to the vision of God that is, also describes how the Prophet is the first to cross the bridge, the path of which is now strewn with large thorns, thus making the crossing even more miserable. Many people are seized by the flames of the fire (on account of their sins) as they attempt to cross. This establishes that at this point people are in Hell-fire, and so the narrative promptly picks up again:

*ḥattā idhā faragha llāhu mina l-qadā'i bayna 'ibādihi wa-arāda an yukhrija mina n-nāri man arāda an yarḥam mimman kāna yashhadu an lā ilāha illā llāh amara l-malā'ikata an yukhrijūhum fa-ya'rifūnahum bi-'alāmāti āthāri s-sujūd wa-ḥarrama llāhu 'alā n-nāri an ta'kula mini bni Ādama athara s-sujūd.*

“When God finishes judging his servants, and wishes to take out of the Fire those whom He wants to forgive, those who had professed ‘there is no god but God’, He orders the angels to take them out, and they (the angels) distinguish them on account of the marks left on them from prostration; God has forbidden that the Fire should consume the mark of prostration on the son of Adam”.

The juxtaposition of this narrative alongside another that constitutes a known controversy within the same ḥadīth should not be simply overlooked. But before we address the remaining ḥadīths of this section, we should note the main point of the ḥadīth above: when God has completed the Judgement and consigned people to Paradise and Hell, He decides to take out of Hell all those who professed His oneness and commands the angels to take them out (note how the angels recognize them from among the rest of the inhabitants of Hell because of the prostration marks on their foreheads which God had forbidden the Fire to consume: in contrast to Muqātil, it is being suggested that ‘works’ alongside profession of God’s oneness are necessary for salvation).

The remaining ḥadīths reiterate the same message, namely that, one can escape from Hell. In one of the traditions the Prophet is made to say:<sup>23</sup>

(‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ma‘mar← Qatāda, and from Thābit← Anas that the Prophet said): *inna aqwāman sa-yakhrujūna mina n-nāri qad aṣābahum saf’un mina n-nāri ‘uqūbatan bi-dhunūbin ‘amalūhā thummā la-yukhrijannahumu llāhu bi-fadli rahmatihi fa-yadkhulūna l-janna.*

“Certain people will exit from the Fire after they have been scorched by fire as a punishment for some sins which they had committed, but after that God by His mercy takes them out”.

The point of this ḥadīth is that people may end up in Hell on account of their sins, but will only stay there the length of time necessary to expunge the sins. As if one has failed to realize that the issues here are controversial, a third ḥadīth confirms this by listing other similarly contested issues: ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is made to say, “after you (have passed) there will come those who will not believe in stoning (*rajm*), or the (coming of) the false Messiah (*dajjāl*), or the basin (*al-ḥawḍ*), or the punishment in the tomb (*‘adhāb al-qabr*) and they will not believe that a people will be able to exit from the Fire”.<sup>24</sup> The next ḥadīth, a Prophetic one, simply states that “people will get out of Hell” (*inna qawman sa-yakhrujūna min al-nār*).<sup>25</sup> It is clear then that the purpose of this group of ḥadīths is to stamp out any objections to the idea of a Hell from which one can exit. Particularly interesting are two anecdotes included in this section of the *Muṣannaf*. In the first, the concept of temporary Hell is disputed in a dialogue and the identity of the disputants is given:

‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ma‘mar← al-Ḥakam b. Abān heard ‘Ikrima say, “When God has finished dispensing judgement to His creatures, He brings out a book from underneath the Throne in which is written ‘My mercy overrides My wrath and I

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<sup>23</sup> *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, no. 20859, p. 411.

<sup>24</sup> *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, no. 20860, p. 412.

<sup>25</sup> *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, no. 20861, p. 412.

am the Most Merciful'. And so a number of people are let out of Hell equivalent to the number of those in Paradise- or he said: twice the number of those in Paradise...Somebody then said to 'Ikrima: Abū 'Abdallāh! But God says: They wish to exit the Hell-fire but they shall not. He responded: How dare you! Those are the ones who are its true inhabitants" (*ūlā'ika ahlukā alladhīna hum ahlukā*).<sup>26</sup>

The appearance of 'Ikrima (d. 106/724) in the dispute is particularly interesting. He was the *mawlā* of Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687), and his student, and is said to have resided in Basra. More importantly, the biographers record that he sympathized with some Khārijite opinions.<sup>27</sup> The Khārijites, of course, were a problem for the traditionalists, and for the Murji'ites at that, because they had maintained that the Muslim who was in 'error' (i.e. by not belonging to a Khārijite community) forfeited his status, and thus, his salvation. Whereas the early Murji'ites accorded this Muslim sinner the dubious label of *mu'min ḍāll* (not to extend him salvation necessarily but to keep him within the community in this life), the later Murji'ites, particularly the traditionalists among them (sc. Muqātil), contrived to save him in the next life as well. If the accusations of Khārijite sympathies on 'Ikrima's part can be sustained, then the point of the story is immediately evident. With all his Khārijite sympathies 'Ikrima at least knew how to interpret Q. 5/37 'properly': only those who 'belong in' Hell are in it forever (the question of who 'properly' belongs in Hell is one we shall return to). For now, it suffices to note that the story aims to discredit Khārijite intransigency on the fate of

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 11, no. 20858, p. 411.

<sup>27</sup> Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*, ed. S. al-Arna'ūṭ et al. (Beirut, 1981-88), vol. 5, pp. 18-21: 'Alī b. al-Mudaynī accuses him of being a Najdite. Mālik does not mention him in his *Muwatta'* because he considered him to have been a Ṣufrite. 'Aṭā' (b. Abī Rabāḥ), on the other hand, considers him to have been an Ibādī, while Abū Maryam thinks he might have been a Bayhasī; Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau (Leiden, 1904), II.ii, p. 133.; see also Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb al-tahdhīb* (Beirut, 1968), vol. 7, p. 267, where his Ṣufrism is ascribed to his North African background.

Muslim sinners in the next world: some Muslims may go to Hell in the next world, but because they do not really belong there, they shall exit from it.

The second interesting anecdote, from the point of view of identities revealed, is the following:

*qultu li-Jābir bni ʿAbdallāh: araʿayta hādhihi l-āya \*yurīdūna an yakhrujū mina n-nāri wa-mā hum bi-khārijīna minhā\* wa-anta tazʿam anna qawman yakhrujūna mina n-nār. qāl: ashhadu anna hādhihi l-āya nazalat ʿalā rasūli llāhi, ṣlʿm, fa-āmannā bihā qabla an tuʿmina bihā wa-ṣaddaqnā bihā qabla an tuṣaddiqa bihā wa-ashhad annī samiʿtu rasūla llāhi, ṣlʿm, yaqūl, “mā [read amā?] ukhbiruka anna qawman yakhrujūna mina n-nār” fa-qāla Ṭalq: lā jaram wa-llāhi lā ujādiluka abadan.*

ʿAbd al-Razzāq← Maʿmar← someone← Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb said: I said to Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh: “You know the verse ‘They wish to exit the Hell-fire but they shall not’ (Q. 5/37), nevertheless, you claim that some people will get out of Hell”. He replied: “I swear that this verse was revealed to the Prophet (ṣlʿm) and that we believed in it before you, and believed it before you, and I swear that I heard the Prophet say: What if I were to tell you that certain people will get out of Hell?” Ṭalq then said: “Of course, I shall not argue with you, by God.”<sup>28</sup>

Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb (d. betw. 90-100/708-718) was a Baṣran whose Murjiʿism was of sufficient concern to the biographical tradition that the preservation of this anecdote seems to be a deliberate effort to establish his Sunnī credentials. Ṭalq was also well-known for his asceticism and this positive trait might have given added motive to present him as a rehabilitated Murjiʿite.<sup>29</sup> Ṭalq took part in the revolt of Ibn al-Ashʿath (c. 82/701) and was among those who were given sanctuary by ʿUmar b. ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz when the latter was governor of the Ḥijāz. Others who sought refuge there included

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<sup>28</sup> *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, no. 20862, p. 412.

<sup>29</sup> Abu Nuʿaym al-Iṣbahānī, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ wa-ṭabaqāt al-aṣfiyāʾ* (Cairo, 1932-38), vol. 3, pp. 63-66.

prominent traditionists such as Mujāhid (d. 104/722), Sa‘īd b. Jubayr (d. 95/713),<sup>30</sup> ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 114/732) and ‘Amr b. Dīnār (d. 126/743). Unimpressed by the light-handed treatment afforded to the Irāqīs by the governor of the Ḥijāz, al-Ḥajjāj persuaded the then-caliph al-Walīd b. ‘Abd al-Malik to remove ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz and assign in his place Khālīd al-Qasrī. The latter then managed to arrest the Iraqī rebels. As native Ḥijāzīs, ‘Aṭā’ and ‘Amr called in their Meccan connections and were subsequently set free (Madelung suspects them to have been Murji‘ites of sorts).<sup>31</sup> These last had clearly sympathized with the Irāqīs, Sa‘īd and Ṭalq, and as Meccans there would have been no reason to arrest them. As it happens, all were students of Ibn ‘Abbās whose circle is often associated with *irjā’*.<sup>32</sup> The others were dispatched to al-Ḥajjāj. Ṭalq died on the way, while Sa‘īd was executed and Mujāhid remained in prison until al-Ḥajjāj died a year later. If we accept the authenticity of the anecdote as going back to the time of Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb (the above events may have provided the occasion for Ṭalq’s encounter with an ageing Jābir b. ‘Abdallah (d. 78/697), most probably in one of the latter’s seminars in Medina),<sup>33</sup> then what we have here is evidence that difficult theological questions were already being tackled in

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<sup>30</sup> Madelung has noted Sa‘īd’s Murji‘ism: the fact that Sa‘īd belonged to the enigmatic circle of Ibn ‘Abbās’ pupils which, Madelung remarks, was associated with *irjā’* seems to confirm the identification (*Qāsim*, p. 231, and n. 19 thereto). His Murji‘ism is also suggested by the following exchange with al-Ḥajjāj, *Ḥajjāj*: What do you say regarding ‘Alī, is he in Paradise or Hell? *Sa‘īd*: If I were to enter either, I would be able to see its inhabitants and then I would know. *Ḥajjāj*: What about the caliphs? *Sa‘īd*: I am not responsible for them. *Ḥajjāj*: Which of them do you admire most? *Sa‘īd*: The one most satisfactory to my Creator. *Ḥajjāj*: And that is? *Sa‘īd*: Knowledge of that rests with Him. *Ḥajjāj*: Are you refusing to tell me the truth? *Sa‘īd*: I would hate to lie to you (Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 4, pp. 330f).

<sup>31</sup> Madelung, *Qāsim*, p. 233.

<sup>32</sup> Madelung, *Qāsim*, p. 233, “Aus diesem Kreis ist offenbar das Irjā’ hervorgegangen”, and in note 33, “Es ist wohl kein Zufall, daß der Mekkaner Murġi‘it ‘Abd al-Maġīd b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz b. Abī Rawwād gerade von Ibn al-‘Abbās das Wort überliefert: ‘Die Qadariten sind Ungläubige, die Schiiten Verworfenne, die Ḥarūriten Neuerer. Die Wahrheit wissen wir nur bei den Murġi‘iten’ ”.

Islam soon after the second civil war, and more importantly, that early Murji'ites, like Ṭalq, did not know about temporary Hell. If we reject the authenticity of the anecdote, then we might suppose that the retrojection of second and third century polemics surrounding temporary Hell and *shafā'a* onto this Hijāzī scene are simply intended to show that, as far as the traditionalists were concerned, there could be no debate on this issue since, as Jābir asserts, it was settled during the time of the Prophet. Unfortunately, it will be the Islamicist's historical and methodological approach that will determine how he or she weighs up the evidence.

The implication of an early Murji'ite finding the idea that one can exit from Hell a novelty, as Ṭalq does, is in itself very interesting and will be taken up in the discussion.<sup>34</sup> The point to note for now is that the idea that one could exit from Hell was not widely known by the beginning of the second century, not even by Murji'ites. This Ṭalq story, however, reappears in a much later work, the *Hilya* of Abū Nu'aym (d. 430/1038). Here, although the verbal exchange and the purpose of the story are almost identical to those in the *Muṣannaf* version, there is an added twist. Ṭalq narrates:<sup>35</sup>

*kuntu min ashaddi n-nāsi takdhīban bi-sh-shafā'a hattā laqītu Jābir bni 'Abdallāh fa-qara'tu 'alayhi kulla āyatin fī-kitābi llāhi aqdiru 'alayhā yadhkuru llāhu fihā khurūja ahli n-nār. fa-qāla: yā Ṭulayq yā Ṭulayq a-tarāka aqra' li-kitābi llāhi wa-a'lam bi-sunnati rasūli llāhi, ṣl'm, minnī? qultu: lā. qāla: fa-ttaḍa'tu lahu. fa-qāla: inna lladhī qara'ta 'alayya hum ahlukā humu l-mushrikūn wa-lākinna hā'ulā'i qawmun aṣābū dhunūban fa-'udhhibū bihā thumma ukhrijū. qāla: thumma madda yadayhi ilā udhunayh. fa-qāla: ṣamtan in lam akun sami'tu*

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<sup>33</sup> See Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, Aḥmad b. ʿAlī, *al-Iṣāba fī tamyīz al-ṣaḥāba* (Cairo, 1969), vol. 2, p. 45, where we are told that Jābir had a study circle (*ḥalaqa*) in Medīna towards the end of his life. Jābir is reportedly the last of the Prophet's companions to die in Medina, at the age of 94.

<sup>34</sup> See ch. 5.

<sup>35</sup> Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, vol. 3, pp. 66.

*rasūla llāhi, ṣlʿm, yaqūl, “ukhrijū mina n-nāri baʿda mā dakhalūhā” wa-naḥnu naqraʿu lladhī qaraʿta ʿalayya.*

Abū ʿAmr b. Ḥamdān← al-Ḥasan b. Sufyān← Shaybān b. Farrūkh← al-Qāsim b. al-Faḍl← Saʿīd b. al-Muhallab← Ṭalq said:

“No one used to be more vehement than myself in denying *shafāʿa*, until, that is, I met Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh. I recited to him every single verse from God’s Book I could remember in which God refers to (the status of) those who (want to) exit from Hell. He (Jābir) said to me: O Ṭalayq, O Ṭalayq! Do you think you know the Book of God and the sunna of His Prophet, ṣlʿm, better than I do? I responded humbly: No. He said: Those whom you mentioned (i.e. in the verse) are the ones who belong there in it, like the *mushrikūn*. As for the others, they are people who have committed sins and who have been punished for them in it (sc. Hell) and then have been taken out. He (Jābir) then placed his hands on his ears, and said: Silence. I verily heard the Prophet, ṣlʿm, say, ‘they are taken out of Hell after they have been in it’ when we used to discuss that same verse that you recited”.

In terms of afterlife punishment, this version in Abū Nuʿaym is making the same point as the one in ʿAbd al-Razzāq, except that now *shafāʿa* is being used to get people out of Hell. In addition, the point is made explicit that some people end up in Hell only for the length of time required to expiate certain sins. What is crucial to this version of the Ṭalq story is the use of the term *shafāʿa*: the reason why Ṭalq rejects *shafāʿa* is precisely because it was being used to get people out of Hell. It is the idea of temporary Hell that Ṭalq finds puzzling. Indeed, *shafāʿa* appears here because by the time this version was in circulation, *shafāʿa* was the principal method by which people exited from Hell. Put differently, by the time this version was being circulated, the traditionalists were concerned to establish the idea of a temporary Hell by reinforcing it with *shafāʿa*. Indeed, if Ṭalq had wanted to contest *shafāʿa* he should have recited to Jābir all those verses in the Qurʾān which explicitly attack *shafāʿa*, and not, as he does, those verses which describe how people cannot exit from Hell.<sup>36</sup> In

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<sup>36</sup> The verses are Q. 2/167; 5/37; 22/22; 32/20.

short, it would have made better sense for him to start his story by saying: *kuntu min ashadd al-nās takdhīban bi-qawm yakhrujūna min al-nār*.

Therefore, somewhere between the time of ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* (c. 184/800) and Abū Nu‘aym’s compilation (c. 391/1000), judging by the Ṭalq story, *shafā‘a* had become associated with people exiting from Hell. Also, we have reason to suspect Abū Nu‘aym’s version. For one thing, in the Cairo Khānjī edition of Abū Nu‘aym’s *Hilya* the editor adds in a footnote to the story that the word *bi’l-shafā‘a* appears in the margin of an alternative manuscript. Here are the first two lines of the Arabic:<sup>37</sup>

*Ṭalq: kuntu min ashaddi n-nāsi takdhīban bi-sh-shafā‘a ḥattā laqītu Jābir bna ‘Abdillāh fa-qara’tu ‘alayhi kulla āyatin fī-kitābi llāh aqdiru ‘alayhā yadhkuru llāhu fihā khurūja ahli n-nār\**

The asterisk marks the editorial footnote and where in one of the manuscript the sentence would have read: *khurūj ahl al-nār bi’l-shafā‘a*. That *shafā‘a* should have been associated with getting out of Hell is not a point which one should take for granted as we have noted. Moreover, ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*, which preserves the alternative Ṭalq story, is the older of the two works and more likely to have preserved the original version, regardless of whether it goes back to Ṭalq or not. Moreover, in ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* there are other traditions which state that people get out of Hell, but in none of them do they do so through *shafā‘a*: in the *Muṣannaf* the controversy revolves around the issue of exiting from Hell.<sup>38</sup> As a work of Sunnī traditionalism, ‘Abd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf* would have been concerned to make this

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<sup>37</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, *Hilya*, vol. 3, p. 66.

<sup>38</sup> See *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, pp. 411-413: nos. 20859, 20860, 20861 and 20863.

point to Khārijite and Murji'ite opponents. This is evidenced by the fact that the *Muṣannaf* preserves two stories, cited above,<sup>39</sup> in which the doctrine that people can escape from Hell have for their protagonists a suspect Khārijite (sc. 'Ikrima) in one and a known Murji'ite (sc. Ṭalq) in the other. If the *Muṣannaf* had been concerned to make the point to Mu'tazilites, it would undoubtedly have had a story in which getting out of Hell was linked to the *shafā'a* of the Prophet: exactly the situation in Abū Nu'aym's version. By the time Abū Nu'aym (d. 430/1038) was composing his biographical work, the issue of getting out of Hell had for a long time been one of controversy between the Mu'tazila and the traditionalists.<sup>40</sup> Consequently, the traditionalists were introducing *shafā'a* in order to reinforce the idea of an 'exitable' Hell. For one thing, this is suggested by the fact that in the *Muṣannaf*, the ḥadīth of the type '*sa-yakhruju qawmun yukadhdhibūna bi*' does not count *shafā'a* among its list of items which the 'people will deny'.<sup>41</sup> In later ḥadīth works, however, *shafā'a* is included.<sup>42</sup>

### **3.3. Temporary Hell in classical exegesis: the verses**

#### **3.3.1 Q. 5/37**

The Ṭalq-Jābir debate over people exiting from Hell is reflected by a similar report preserved in the commentary of Ṭabarī. 'Ikrima (d. 106/724), who we saw was also

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<sup>39</sup> See *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, pp. 411-12, nos. 20858 ('Ikrima story) and 20862 (Ṭalq story).

<sup>40</sup> A. Wensinck and D. Gimaret in *EI2*, s.v. "shafā'a".

<sup>41</sup> No. 20860.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad*, vol. 1, no. 156.

involved in a debate over the meaning of Q. 5/37,<sup>43</sup> in this instance transmits a debate between Nāfi' (d. 66/685) and Ibn 'Abbās (d. 68/687):<sup>44</sup>

Yazīd al-Naḥwī ← 'Ikrima ← Nāfi' b. al-Azraq said to Ibn 'Abbās:  
'Not only are you blind in your eyes, but also in your heart, how can you claim that people can get out of Hell, when God has said: And they shall not exit from it (*wa-mā-hum bi-khārijīna minhā* (Q. 5/37)). Ibn 'Abbās said: Be careful! Read what preceded it, it is talking about the unbelievers'.

It should be pointed out that the figures of Nāfi' and Ibn 'Abbās loom large in the exegetical tradition. For one, Nāfi' is the Khārijite villain *par excellence* and his appearance in the tradition usually reflects a polemical situation.<sup>45</sup> Also, Ibn 'Abbās himself is a larger-than-life figure in the Muslim historical tradition, which views him as the father of Qur'ānic exegesis: he is frequently a mouthpiece for both Sunnī<sup>46</sup> and, as has been recently shown, Shī'ī traditionalist dogma.<sup>47</sup> In addition, a body of literature exists, known as the *Masā'il Nāfi' b. al-Azraq*, which is supposedly a series of philological questions relating to the Qur'ān that Nāfi' posed to Ibn 'Abbās: Nāfi' asks Ibn 'Abbās about a Qur'ānic word, to which Ibn 'Abbās provides an answer and supports it by adducing poetry (*shawāhid*).<sup>48</sup>

Given the problems posed by this literary relic and the fact that we have already seen two similarly constructed dialogues over Q. 5/37 (one between Ṭalq and Jābir

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<sup>43</sup> See *Muṣannaf*, no. 20858.

<sup>44</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, p. 228.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. A. Rippin, "Ibn 'Abbās's *al-lughāt fi'l-qur'ān*", *BSOAS* 44 (1981), pp. 15-25.

<sup>46</sup> C. Gilliot, "Portrait 'mythique' d'Ibn 'Abbās", *Arabica* 32 (1985), pp. 127-84, esp. pp. 178ff; A. Rippin, "*Tafsīr Ibn 'Abbās* and criteria for dating early *tafsīr* texts", *JSAI* 18 (1994).

<sup>47</sup> W. Madelung, "'Abd Allāh b. 'Abbās and Shī'ite law", in *Law, Christianity and Modernism in Islamic society: proceedings of the eighteenth congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants*, eds. U. Vermeulen and J. M. F. van Reeth (Leuven, 1998), pp. 13-25.

<sup>48</sup> On the problems relating to the internal content of this body of *Masā'il* and its transmission, see I. J. Boullata, "Poetry citation as interpretive illustration in Qur'ān exegesis: *Masā'il Nāfi' ibn al-Azraq*", *Islamic studies presented to Charles J. Adams*, eds. W. B. Ḥallāq and D. P. Little (Leiden, 1991), pp.

and another between ʿIkrima and someone else), the authenticity of this encounter between Nāfiʿ and Ibn ʿAbbās will again depend on the reader’s methodological approach to early Islamic history. In any case, whether authentic or not, the anecdote shows once more the way in which the traditionalist exegetical approach managed to distinguish the status of Muslim sinners from that of unbelievers in Hell. In Ṭabarī’s commentary below, we shall come across further instances of Ibn ʿAbbās and Nāfiʿ disputing the issue of Hell. It seems unjustified to doubt the historicity of Ibn ʿAbbās’ encounters with Nāfiʿ, but it is hard to be sure of the precise content of their discussions. For the sake of simplicity, however, I shall refer to both of them by name when discussing their arguments, fully aware that such arguments might have been attributed to them by others at a later date.

### 3.3.2 Q. 11/107

In Ṭabarī’s commentary the majority of the exegeses offered for Q. 11/105-108 state that people will get out of Hell. At the same time, Ṭabarī concedes that there were differences of opinion among the exegetes with regards to the proviso, and it is among these differences that we can detect the identity of some of the dissenters. We shall first group the exegetical opinions as Ṭabarī does. The first group take the proviso to be a reference, exactly like Muqātil did, to the *ahl al-tawḥīd* whom God will take out of Hell after they have spent some time in it.<sup>49</sup>

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27-40. The 188 questions have been published by ʿĀʾisha ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, *al-Iʿjāz al-bayānī li’l-qurʾān wa-masāʾil ibn al-Azraq* (Cairo, 1971), pp. 278-507.

<sup>49</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 12, pp. 116-18.

(a) ‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ma‘mar← Qatāda: It has been related to us that some people will be scorched by fire on account of some sins, but then they are taken into the Garden.

(b) Bishr← Yazīd← Sa‘īd← Qatāda: It has been related to us that some people will be scorched by fire on account of some sins, but then God by virtue of His grace will take them into Paradise; those people are called *al-jahannamiyyūn*.

(c) Shaybān b. Farrūkh← Abū Hilāl← Qatāda who recited the verses (Q. 11/106-107) and then said: Anas told us that the Prophet said, “a people will get out of Hell”; and then Qatāda said: we do not say what the people of Ḥarūrā’ say.

(d) Mu‘āwiya← ‘Āmir b. Jashib← Khālid b. Ma‘dān: of *lābithīna fihā aḥqāban* (Q. 78/23)<sup>50</sup> and of *khālidīna fihā illā mā shā’a rabbuk* (Q. 11/107) that they both refer to the *ahl al-tawhīd*.

The first point of interest is that the Basran (Qatāda, d. 117/735) and the Syrian (Khālid b. Ma‘dān, d. 103/721) traditionists agree on the concept of temporary punishment for the Muslim sinners of their community. Moreover, in the case of the Basrans the point seems to reflect local grievances, since Qatāda makes use of the exegetical occasion to take a swipe at the Khārijites, who rejected the idea of a temporary Hell. In fact, in Basra it was not just the Khārijites who did not believe in a temporary punishment in Hell, but other traditionists too. These appear next in the summaries of exegetical narratives given by Ṭabarī, and though they also understand that the proviso is intended as a reference to *ahl al tawhīd*, they believe that it means God will forgive them outright without punishing them in Hell first:

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<sup>50</sup> This verse is understood by some traditionists, Syrians and Irāqīs, as indicating a finite stay for those in Hell on account of the use of the term *ḥuqb*, ‘an age’; opinions vary as to the duration of a *ḥuqb*, but the suggestion seems to be that it is finite. Consequently, there is a tendency to associate it with the sinners from among the *ahl al-qibla* and to encourage the view of a temporary Hell. Not all the traditionists agree, however, and some understand *aḥqāban* as denoting an infinite period (Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 30, pp. 9ff).

(a) ‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ibn al-Taymī← his father← Abū Naḍra← Jābir (b. ‘Abdallāh) or Abū Sa‘īd (al-Khudrī) or another companion: this statement *illā mā shā’a rabbuka innā rabbaka fa‘alun limā yurīd* (Q. 11/107) applies to the Qur’ān as a whole. Wherever it says *khālidīna fihā* in the Qur’ān, it also applies;<sup>51</sup> I heard Abū Mijlaz say, “that is what is due to him, but if God wills it He will waive his punishment”.

What is interesting is that the only persons who appear under this second category of opinion are Baṣrans. The last person in the *isnād* before the confused part is Abū Naḍra (d. 106/724), a Baṣran traditionist.<sup>52</sup> The implication of the statement *ta’tī ‘alā l-qur’āni kullihī* seems to be that some did not take the proviso to have precise content, i.e. that it is a specific reference to the *ahl al-tawhīd* who are punished temporarily in Hell. What they seem to be suggesting is this: one has always known that God does what He pleases and on this occasion, or any occasion where *illā mā shā’a allāh* appears, there can be no difference. What the adherents of this opinion were not about to concede, it seems, was that God would punish some people in Hell temporarily. This opinion is further supported by the statement of another Baṣran traditionist, Abū Mijlaz (d. 106/724), whose exegetical opinion we shall encounter again.<sup>53</sup> What Abū Mijlaz says is that the one whom the verse (107) condemns to Hell eternally is deserving of that punishment: if God decides to subject him to it, then it was his proper due. On the other hand, God could, if He so wished, forgive him and not punish him at all, in Hell or otherwise (and this is Abū Mijlaz’ understanding of the *istithnā’*).

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<sup>51</sup> *qāla: hādhihi l-āya ta’tī ‘alā l-qur’āni kullihī. yaqūl: ḥaythu kāna fī l-qur’ān “khālidīna fihā” ta’tī ‘alayhi. qāla: wa-sami‘tu Aba Mijlaz yaqūl: huwa ‘adhābuhu fa-in shā’a llāhu tajāwaza ‘an ‘adhābihī (Tafsīr, vol. 12, p. 118).*

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 10, pp. 302f.: his full name is al-Mundhir b. Mālik b. Qiṭ’a, and was widely recognized as a *thiqa*.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, VII.i, p. 157.

In sum, the Sunnī traditionist exegetes, with the exception of some noted Basrans, attempted to find justification for the idea that one can exit from Hell. The verses of *sūrat Hūd*, discussed above, provide clear evidence of the Sunnī exegetical tradition's attempt to find authority for the idea of temporary punishment for Muslim sinners. This process, however, can be detected in the exegetical narratives to other Qur'anic verses.

### 3.3.3 Q. 19/71

In this instance, a polemical confrontation over the question of Hell involves, once again, Ibn 'Abbās and Nāfi'. Ibn 'Abbās is concerned to make the point that *all* will have to pass through Hell before going to Paradise: the exegetical strategy behind this will soon become clear. The point of contention revolves around the interpretation of the root *w-r-d* as it appears in *sūrat Maryam*:

*fa-wa-rabbika la-naḥshurannahum wa-sh-shayātīna thumma la-nuḥdirannahum ḥawla jahannama jithiyyan (68) thumma la-nanzi'anna min kulli shī'atin ayyuhum ashaddu 'alā r-raḥmāni 'itiyyan (69) thumma la-naḥnu a'lamu bi-lladhīna hum awlā bihā ṣiliyyan (70) wa-in minkum illā wāriduhā kāna 'alā rabbika ḥatman maqdiyyan (71) thumma nunajjī lladhīna ttaqaw wa-nadhāru z-zālimīna fihā jithiyyan (72).*

“By thy Lord, We shall muster them and the Satans, then we shall parade them about Jahannam hobbling on their knees. Then We shall pluck forth from every party whichever of them was the most hardened in disdain of the All-merciful; then We shall know very well those most deserving to burn there. Not one of you there is, but he shall go down to it; that for thy Lord is a thing decreed, determined. Then We shall deliver those that were godfearing; and the evil-doers We shall leave there, hobbling on their knees.”

The *isnād* to the exchange which provides the first exegesis to the meaning of *wurūd*, and which involves Ibn 'Abbās and Nāfi', stops at the Meccan 'Amr b. Dīnar (d.

126/743). At this point he relates the incident second-hand from alleged eye-witnesses:<sup>54</sup>

‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ibn ‘Uyayna← ‘Amr said: ‘I was told by those who heard Ibn ‘Abbās dispute with Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq:

Ibn ‘Abbās: *wurūd* means *dukhūl*.

Nāfi‘: No, it does not.

Ibn ‘Abbās recites Q. 21/98 (*innakum wa-mā ta‘budūna min dūni llāh ḥaṣabu jahannama antum lahā wāridūn*): Is that not *wurūd*?. He then recited Q. 11/98 (*yaqḍumu qawmahu yawma l-qiyāmati fa-awradahumu n-nāra wa-bi’sa l-wirdu l-mawrūd*): Is this not *wurūd*? As for you and I, we shall both enter it, who knows whether we will get out or not. I certainly cannot see you getting out of it, not while you deny it. Nāfi‘ laughs.

In a second exegesis the exchange between Ibn ‘Abbās and Nāfi‘ continues thus:<sup>55</sup>

al-Qāsim← al-Ḥusayn← Ḥajjāj← Ibn Jurayj← ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ said that Abū Rāshid al-Ḥarūrī (sc. Nāfi‘ b. al-Azraq) on hearing this (i.e. discussion of *wurūd*) said: They do not hear the slightest sound from it (*lā yasma‘ūna ḥasīṣahā*, cf. Q. 21/102).

Ibn ‘Abbās: Woe unto you! Are you crazy? What about His words He (sc. Pharaoh) will go before his people on the Day of Judgement and lead (*wrd*) them into Hell-fire, woeful indeed is this leading and the place led to (Q. 11/98) and We shall drive the criminals to Hell like thirsty cattle driven to water (Q. 19/86) and Not one of you but will go towards it (Q. 19/71), by God those before us used to pray, ‘God, take me out of the Fire unhurt and send me to Paradise safe and sound’.

What the English renditions fail to convey is the fact that Ibn ‘Abbās is concerned to make the point to Nāfi‘ that the root *wrd* implies ‘entry’ and nothing less. The problematic aspect of these verses is significant for an understanding of how the traditionalists dealt with the issue of temporary Hell. According to the traditionalists, one could exit from Hell. It is clear from Arberry’s translation that he understood

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<sup>54</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, pp. 108f.; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, ii, p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 6, p. 109; this one is not preserved in ‘Abd al-Razzāq.

*wurūd* as ‘going down to’, without necessarily implying ‘entering’.<sup>56</sup> This meaning of ‘approaching with the intention of reaching the edge of’ should stand as the preferred meaning since otherwise the verse would mean that all people, believers included, will have to enter Hell and only afterwards would they be saved and admitted into Paradise (*thumma nunajjī alladhīna ittaqaw*). Not only does it seem bizarre that the *ahl al-janna* should pass through Hell on their way to Paradise, but it also presupposes that *najāt* means ‘being saved by being taken out of’ and not ‘being saved by being protected from’; two Qur’ānic stipulations, however, militate against such a presupposition. For one, it is clearly stipulated in other Qur’ānic verses that once in Hell, one could not hope to get out.<sup>57</sup> For another, we have noted several verses to the effect that salvation constitutes being *spared* Hell,<sup>58</sup> and not being rescued from it after having been consigned to it. In fact, none of the above Qur’ānic occurrences of the root as cited by Ibn ‘Abbās require that the meaning strictly be ‘entry’; each of the verses uses the sense of ‘going towards’ in different scenarios: Q. 21/98 describes how those who worship others besides God will be sent off to (end up as fuel for) Hell (that they will enter Hell is implicit in their fate as evildoers but *not* in the verb), Q. 11/98 depicts Pharaoh leading his followers towards Hell, while Q. 19/86 relates how ‘the criminals’ are herded towards Hell ‘like cattle to a watering-pool’. That aside, it should be noted that all of the verses cited by Ibn ‘Abbās in defence of *wurūd* meaning ‘entry’ specifically address ‘malefactors’; in particular, this is brought out by

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<sup>56</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, I.viii, p. 2935: “came to it or arrived at it, whether he entered it or not; he approached with his camel a watering pool”; cf. the O.T. Hebrew opposing pairs ירד (*yrd*), “to descend” and עלה (*‘lh*), “to go up”, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, eds. E. Jenni and C. Westermann, trans. from the German by M. E. Biddle (Peabody: Mass., 1997), pp. 883ff.

<sup>57</sup> See above, note 78.

<sup>58</sup> See above, 1.5, pp. 41f.

the fact that *wāridūn*, applied to those sent off to Hell, in Q. 21/98 is contrasted three verses later by *mubʿadūn* (Q. 21/101) for those destined for Paradise. Moreover, the use of the root *w-r-d*, primarily used of camels being driven to a watering pool,<sup>59</sup> sits better with a reference to the people of Hell since the Qurʾān itself makes derogatory comparison between the predicament of these in Hell and camels.<sup>60</sup> For once, it seems, Ibn ʿAbbās himself does not read ‘what has preceded it (sc. the verse)’.<sup>61</sup>

Nāfiʿ, however, does put up some resistance to Ibn ʿAbbās’ exegesis and this comes out in the second exchange cited above. This second exchange begins rather abruptly in that it starts immediately with Nāfiʿ stating, ‘they do not hear the slightest sound of it’ (*lā yasmaʿūna ḥasīṣahā*). Presumably, this is part of the same exchange taking place between Nāfiʿ and Ibn ʿAbbās, but is given as a separate tradition by Ṭabarī. What Nāfiʿ is referring to is the following sequence of verses of *sūrat al-Anbiyāʾ*:

*Innākum wa-mā taʿbudūna min dūni llāhi ḥaṣabu jahannam antum lahā wāridūn (98) law kāna hāʾulāʾi ālihatan mā waradūhā wa-kullun fihā khālidūn (99) lahum fihā zafīrun wa-hum fihā lā yasmaʿūn (100) inna lladhīna sabaqat lahum minnā l-ḥusnā ūlāʾika ʿanhā mubʿadūn (101) lā yasmaʿūna ḥasīṣahā wa-hum fī-mā shtahat anfusuhum khālidūn.*

“Surely you and that which you worshipped apart from God are fuel for Jahannam; you shall go down to it. If those had been gods, they would never have gone down to it, yet every one of them shall abide therein forever. There shall be sighing therein for them and naught they shall hear. But as for those unto whom already the reward has gone forth from Us, they shall be kept far from it neither shall they hear any whisper of it, and they shall dwell forever in that their souls desired”.

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<sup>59</sup> See n. 44 above.

<sup>60</sup> Q. 56/54-55: *fa-shāribūna ʿalayhi mina l-ḥamīm fa-shāribūna shurba l-hīm* (“And drink on top of that from boiling water, lapping it up like thirsty camels”).

<sup>61</sup> See above, Ibn ʿAbbās rebukes Nāfiʿ for not reading the verse preceding Q. 5/37

Nāfi'c's point, against Ibn 'Abbās, is that *wurūd* does not mean 'entry', and that the people of Paradise are protected from Hell. For Nāfi'c, then, *wurūd* would mean what we expect it to mean, and that is, 'going towards and reaching the edge of': the clincher for Nāfi'c would have been to adduce Q. 28/23 which describes how Moses reaches the watering pools at Midyan by using the root *w-r-d*; this clearly shows that *wurūd* means 'approaching and finally reaching the edge of': it does not mean that Moses entered the pools.

As a Khārijite, Nāfi'c finds the suggestion that believers will enter Hell, for whatever reason, simply preposterous. We will come to why Ibn 'Abbās does not opt for the obvious reading like Nāfi'c shortly. Clearly, Nāfi'c wants to show Ibn 'Abbās that elsewhere in the Qur'ān where God uses *wurūd*, He is pointing to the predicament of the people of Hell, especially since God simultaneously assures that those unto whom already the reward has gone forth shall be distanced from Hell and shall not hear the faintest sound from it. Again, to Nāfi'c it is incomprehensible why everyone should be sent to Hell and only afterwards would the 'godfearing' be saved. The confusion which ensues from, and actually allows for, Ibn 'Abbās' reading is the sequence of the two verses in sūrat Maryam and the abrupt change of pronominal address in the Arabic:

*wa-in minkum illā wāriduhā kāna 'alā rabbika ḥatman maqḍiyyan (71) thumma nunajjī lladhīna ttaqaw wa-nadharu ḷ-ḷālimīna fihā jithiyyan (72).*

The unexpected change of address from the third person plural, in which God describes what He will do to the criminals and their satans, to that of the second plural gives the impression that now God is including others in His address, namely the

readers, that which would inevitably include believers. Added to this, the *thumma* of the following verse connects the *najāt* of those ‘who were godfearing’ (*alladhīna ittaqaw*) with the immediately preceding context: the *wurūd* that ‘everyone’ (*wa-in minkum*) has to experience. Not only that, the second verb of verse 72 is *n-dh-r* which implies that something is left behind and is not included in the *najāt*.

In sum, if the *in minkum* is read as a continued address to those of the preceding verse, i.e. the malefactors (and unexpected change of pronominal address is not uncommon in the Qur’ān), the *wurūd* is not a point of contention, whether it means ‘going towards’ or ‘entering’ we know that, either way, those addressed will end up in the Hell-fire. If, on the other hand, we are to read the change of address to a second person plural literally, so that it would invariably include believers as part of a general audience, then the pressure is squarely placed on the exact meaning of *wurūd*. For Nāfi<sup>c</sup>, who clearly does not take *wurūd* as meaning ‘entry’, there is no inherent difficulty in the verses. For Ibn ‘Abbās, the difficulties of the Qur’ānic text provide the opportunity for exegetical manoeuvring. Besides, here was an opportunity to put a Khārijite in his place. The point behind Ibn ‘Abbās’ understanding of *wurūd* is that it introduces the idea of people being able to get out of Hell, precisely by having everyone (Muslims included) literally go through Hell; it is also a dogmatic response to Khārijite insistence that once you went to Hell you could not get out, or put differently, that Hell was an eternal abode for all its inhabitants.

There is still a third exegetical option. This ensues from a subtle change of vocalisation to the *thumma* by reading the first consonant with a *fathā*. Ibn Mas‘ūd has

an alternate reading of *thamma*.<sup>62</sup> Now, verses 71 and 72 would have the following meaning:

*wa-in minkum illā wāriduhā kāna ‘alā rabbika ḥatman maqḍiyyan (71) thamma nunajjī lladhīna ttaqaw wa-nadharu ṣ-ṣālimīna fihā jithiyyan (72).*

“Not one of you there is but shall go down to it; that for Thy Lord is a thing decreed, determined. There We shall deliver those who were godfearing and leave the evildoers there hobbling on their knees”.

The advantage of this reading is that it does not have to explain why the believers might end up in Hell; it is a reading one can imagine Nāfi‘ would have preferred. The problem is once Ibn ‘Abbās decided to interpret *wurūd* as ‘entry’, and as a result, included believers in Hell, traditionalists were forced to come up with a way out for them. These efforts can be detected in the traditions which follow the *wurūd* polemic in Ṭabarī’s commentary. One Syrian tradition suggests that when the people of Paradise are secure in their garden-abodes they wonder what had happened since God had promised them ‘entry into the Fire’ (*wurūd ‘alā al-nār*). The prompt reply arrives that they had indeed passed through the Fire, but since it was extinguished (*khāmida*) they did not realize they had gone through it.<sup>63</sup> The heavy presence of Meccan exegesis is obvious in the case of these traditions: the first one is transmitted by ‘Amr b. Dīnār (d. 126/743), the second is related by ‘Aṭā’ b. Abī Rabāḥ (d. 113/731), and a third by Mujāhid (d. 104/722).<sup>64</sup> But there were also some Iraqis who were of the

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<sup>62</sup> Jeffery, *Materials*, p. 59; cf. Bayḍāwī, *Anwār*, iv, p. 13.

<sup>63</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 16, p. 109: al-Ḥasan b. ‘Arafa← Marwān b. Mu‘āwiya← Bikār b. Abī Marwān← Khālīd b. Ma‘dān: *qāla ahlu l-janna ba‘da mā dakhālū l-jannata alam ya‘idnā rabbunā l-wurūd ‘alā n-nār? qāla: qad marartum ‘alayhā wa-hiya khāmida (aw qāla: jāmida)*. Cf. Zoroastrian ‘Hell’: “...and for him who is righteous, it will seem as if he is walking through warm milk; and for him who is wicked, it will seem as if he is walking in the flesh through molten metal”, Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, i, p. 242.

<sup>64</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 16, p. 110.

opinion that *wurūd* meant ‘entry’.<sup>65</sup> Others, however, held that *wurūd* did not refer to the believers, but that God intended the unbelievers. Subscription to this last view included ‘Ikrima, another of Ibn ‘Abbās’ pupils, but true perhaps to his Khārijite leanings, he seems to agree with Nāfi‘ rather than his master on this issue. Another option favoured by some Basrans (Ma‘mar b. Rāshid, d. 154/770 and Qatāda, d. 117/735) was to interpret *wurūd* as the crossing over of *jahannam*.<sup>66</sup> This in turn leads to suggestions that *wurūd* for believers means one thing, and that is ‘crossing over’, while for the unbelievers it means ‘entering’.<sup>67</sup> Consequently, because it is at this ‘crossing’ that the believers are most in need of help, in traditional exegesis it becomes a physical point where *shafā‘a* takes place; here, however, *shafā‘a* involves asking God to make the traverse safe.<sup>68</sup>

Attempts to maintain *wurūd* as meaning ‘entering’, and so to bolster the idea that it is possible to get in and get out of Hell, can be discerned in an exchange between the Prophet and Ḥafṣa reported by the wife of Zayd b. Ḥāritha, Umm Mubashshir, which follows on the tail of the exegetical narratives to Q. 19/71-72. The Prophet, while he is in Ḥafṣa’s house, remarks that he hopes that not one of those who were present in the Battles of Badr or al-Ḥudaybiyya should end up in Hell. Ḥafṣa is quick

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<sup>65</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 16, p. 110.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*; cf. popular eschatology regarding the *ṣirāt* (the figurative ‘path’ of *sūrat al-Fātiḥa*) a bridge over Hell which all have to cross to get to Paradise, those who belong in Hell fall by the wayside, while those of Paradise cross safely. The idea makes its first ‘orthodox’ appearance in the *Fiqh Akbar II* (Wensinck, *Creed*, p. 232). Cf. Zoroastrian descriptions of eschatological judgement noteworthy: the individual’s judgement takes place on arrival at the ‘Bridge of the Separator’ (*Činvatō Pərətu*). The idea is that this crossing can either lead to the House of Song (paradise) or the House of Lies (hell); some versions of this myth state that the damned soul will find the bridge intraversable as it, the bridge, constricts to an impossible degree and so the soul falls off and plunges into the depths of Hell (Boyce, *Zoroastrianism*, i, p. 237).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 16, p. 112: *fa-yuslaku bihim ‘alā ṣ-ṣirāti wa-fīhi ‘ullayq* [thorn-bush?] *fa-‘inda dhālika yu’dhanu bi-sh-shafā‘a fa-yamurru n-nāsu wa-n-nabiyyūn yaqūlūna Allāhumma sallim sallim.*

to point out that God had said *wa-in minkum illā wāriduhā*, at which point the Prophet reminds her that He had also said *thumma nunajjī lladhīna ittaqaw wa-nadharu ẓ-ẓālimīna fihā jithiyyan*.<sup>69</sup>

### 3.3.4 Q. 3/192

One of the ways in which the traditionalists found support for the idea of a temporary Hell is by making a distinction between those who ‘merit’ Hell, and as a result go there eternally (commonly identified as *ahl al-nār alladhīna hum ahluhā*), and those who do not merit such a label, but who might have to endure a temporary chastisement in Hell as a sort of rehabilitation before being allowed into Paradise. We can see this at work in the interpretation of Q. 3/192. The verse is a short supplication to God, spoken from the point of view of the believers, to guard them from Hell, since those whom God sends to Hell are ‘disgraced’:

*rabbanā innaka man tudkhili n-nāra fa-qad akhzaytahu wa-mā li-ẓ-ẓālimīna min anṣār.*

“Lord, those whom You send into the Fire are verily disgraced; indeed, the unjust have no supporters”.

As in the case of *wurūd*, it is the subtle interpretation-- or reinterpretation one might say-- of a term, which semantically is clear enough, that provides the traditionalists with an argument in support of the notion of a temporary Hell. Already in Muqātil’s commentary we can sense an effort to make the distinction between ‘eternity’ in Hell and ‘temporarity’ in Hell. Muqātil finds it necessary to state that the meaning of the

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<sup>69</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 16, p. 112.

verse is that he whom God sends eternally to Hell has been disgraced by Him.<sup>70</sup> In Ṭabarī, on the other hand, the traditionalist effort is much more conspicuous. The meaning of the root *kh-z-y* is “to disgrace, render base or despicable, or to shame”.<sup>71</sup> What the first exegesis given by Ṭabarī offers is the reassurance that *kh-z-y* does not apply to a believer. Why? Because a believer is not really disgraced even if he has to endure some punishment in Hell before going to Paradise: God only disgraces the hardened unbelievers, i.e. *mushrikūn* or *kuffār*. The effect of this interpretation is to support the idea that there is a temporary Hell after all. Other exegetical narratives suggest that the verse refers specifically to those who ‘do not exit from the Fire’:<sup>72</sup>

Abū Hilāl← Qatāda← Anas: *rabbanā innaka man tudkhili n-nāra fa-qad akhzaytahu*: “Who stays there eternally (*man yakhlud*)”.

‘Abd al-Razzāq← al-Thawrī← a man← Ibn al-Musayyab: “It refers only to those who do not exit from it (*hiya khāṣṣa li-man lā yakhruju minhā*)”.<sup>73</sup>

Ḥajjāj← Ibn Jurayj: (*huwa man yakhludu fihā*).

It is important to note that most of the exegetical narratives only go back to a companion or the following (‘successor’) generation (*tābi‘ūn*), which might suggest a strong case for their authenticity. A more interesting exegetical narrative is the following where al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī is questioned about the reality of *shafā’a* in the light of the above verse, and another verse from the Qur’ān (Q. 5/37), to which al-Ḥasan responds affirmatively by stating that there are people who belong to Hell and who cannot get out of it. Others, al-Ḥasan continues, have been sent there by God on

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<sup>70</sup> Muqātil, vol. 1, p. 321: *ya‘nī man khalladtahu fī-n-nāri fa-qad ahantahu*.

<sup>71</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, I.ii, p. 735.

<sup>72</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 211.

<sup>73</sup> Also in ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 142.

account of some sins they had committed. But God then releases these individuals, since He knows that they had believed in him:<sup>74</sup>

al-Muthanna← Abū'l-Nu'mān 'Ārim← Hammād b. Zayd← Qubayṣa b. Marwān← al-Ash'ath al-Ḥimlī: *qultu li-l-Ḥasan, yā Abā Sa'īd ara'ayta mā tadhkur mina sh-shafā'a ḥaqqun huwa? qāla: na'am ḥaqq. qāl: qultu yā Abā Sa'īd ara'ayta qawla llāhi ta'ālā [cites Q. 3/192 and 5/37] qāl: fa-qāla lī: innaka wallāhi lā tastaṭī'u 'alayya shay'an inna li-n-nāri ahlan lā yakhrujūna minhā kamā qāla llāh. qāl: qultu yā Abā Sa'īd: fīman dakhalū thumma kharajū? qāl: kānū aṣābū dhunūban fī d-dunyā fa-akhadhahumu llāhu bihā fa-adkhalahum bihā thumma akhrajahum bimā ya'lam fī qulūbihim mina l-īmāni wa-t-taṣḍīqi bih.*

“I said to al-Ḥasan: O Abū Sa'īd, is it true this *shafā'a* that you are talking about? He said: Yes. I said: But Abū Sa'īd, what about what God says (sc. in Q. 3/192 and 5/37)? He said: By God, do not think you can outdo me (with that argument); Hell has inhabitants who never get out, as God says. I said: So, why then are some sent there and then get out? He said: on account of sins they committed in this life, for which God requited them and sent them to Hell; but knowing that they in their hearts had faith and professed belief in Him, He then takes them out of it.”

The attribution of the views expressed in the above narrative to al-Ḥasan might provoke suspicion, since attempts to give prestigious authority to a particular view by ascribing it to a well-known authority is widely recognized by Islamicists.<sup>75</sup> While there is no direct citation of ḥadīth above, the explanation given by Ḥasan is so similar to traditionist explanations of why not all those that go to Hell stay there permanently, that one has to wonder whether Ḥasan had actually come by his explanation through ḥadīth. On the one hand we know that Ḥasan preferred not to give too much weight to ḥadīth,<sup>76</sup> and on the other, the view ascribed to Ḥasan above is not entirely incompatible with what is known of his own views; which of the two one rests with

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<sup>74</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 211.

<sup>75</sup> Juynboll, *Tradition*, p. 85.

<sup>76</sup> Cook, *Dogma*, p. 120.

will depend on the modern scholar's own methodological approaches to Muslim history. In any case, there are several interesting points to be gleaned from the narrative. First, al-Ḥasan knows the 'scripturalist' reading of Q. 3/192 and Q. 5/37, and is ready to counter it (as he so unabashedly claims: *lā tastaḥḥu 'alayya shay'an*). Second, he also knows that the issue at stake is sinning believers, since we are told that it is on account of this that they merit both Paradise and Hell. Finally, the reasoning that God takes them out of Hell because He knows that in their hearts they professed belief in Him is classical Sunnī doctrine. This doctrine is a fusion of two elements: 1) belief in God (regardless of conduct, i.e. without 'works') deserves the status of *mu'min* (Murji'ite) and 2) God takes monotheists out of Hell (traditionalist). The combination of the two elements is precisely what we see in the exegesis of Muqātil b. Sulaymān, and this combination was later absorbed by classical Sunnīsm.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.3.5 Q. 7/46

Although the *a'rāf* passage is not obviously linked to the idea of temporary Hell, it does establish the basis for it by connecting two elements. The first is the notion that the fate of a group of people on the Day of Judgement will not be decided by their deeds, since their deeds cancel out. The second is that the Prophet's intercession will be used to get them out. It is a combination of these two elements that provides the context for the salvation of Muslim sinners on the Day of Judgement, and also paves the way for the possibility of a 'purgative' period in Hell. Muqātil (d. 150/767) identified this group, whose fate could not be decided through their deeds, as being from the Muslim community who eventually will be saved and allowed entry into

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. W. Madelung, "Early Sunnī doctrine concerning faith as reflected in the *Kitāb al-imān* of Abū

Paradise thanks to the intercession of the Prophet.<sup>78</sup> The Qur'ānic verses with which Muqātil is concerned are from *sūrat al-A'rāf*, Q. 7/46-49, and centre on the elusive meaning of the *sūra*'s title:

Q. 7/44, 46-49: *wa-nādā aṣḥābu l-jannati aṣḥāba n-nāri an qad wajadnā mā wa'adanā rabbunā ḥaqqan fa-hal wajadtum mā wa'ada rabbukum ḥaqqan qālū na'am* (44)<sup>79</sup> *wa-baynahumā ḥijābun wa-ʿalā l-ʿrāfi rijālun yaʿrifūna kullān bi-simāhum wa-nādaw aṣḥāba l-jannati an salāmun ʿalaykum lam yadkhulūhā wahum yaṭmaʿūn* (46) *wa-idhā ṣurifat abṣāruhum tilqāʾa aṣḥābi n-nāri qālū rabbanā lā tajʿalnā maʿa l-qawmi z-zālimīn* (47) *wa-nādā aṣḥābu l-ʿrāfi rijālan yaʿrifūnahum bi-simāhum qālū mā aghnā ʿankum jamʿukum wa-mā kuntum tastakbirūn* (48) *a-hāʾulāʾi lladhīna aqsamtum lā yanāluhumu llāhu bi-rahmatin dkhulū l-jannata lā khawfun ʿalaykum wa-lā antum taḥzanūn* (49).

“The inhabitants of Paradise will call to the inhabitants of the Fire: ‘We have found that which our Lord promised us true; have you found what your Lord has promised you true?’, ‘Yes,’ they will say. And between them is a veil, and on the Heights are men knowing each by their mark and they call to the inhabitants of Paradise: ‘Peace be upon you’, they have not entered it though they are eager to. And when their eyes are turned towards the inhabitants of the Fire they shall say, ‘Our Lord, do not Thou assign us with the evil-doing people’. And those of the Heights shall call to certain men they know by their sign: ‘Your amassing has not availed you, neither your haughtiness. Are these the ones you swore God would never reach with mercy?’ ‘Enter Paradise; no fear upon you, nor shall you sorrow’”.

The stumbling-block for the exegetes seems to be the interpretation of ‘those of the heights’ (*aṣḥāb al-ʿrāf*). Almost all the exegetical authorities agree that the *ʿrāf* itself is some sort of lofty partitioning between Paradise and Hell, and this sense derives from *ʿurf*.<sup>80</sup> The Meccans (Mujāhid, d. 104/722), the Kufans (al-Shaʿbī, d. 104/722) and the Basrans (Qatāda, d. 117/735) all take *aṣḥāb al-ʿrāf* to be a reference

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ʿUbayd al-Qāsim b. Sallām (d.224/839)”, *Studia Islamica* 32 (1970), p. 235.

<sup>78</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, pp. 39-40: “*aṣḥāb al-ʿrāf* are from the *umma* of Muḥammad whose good and bad deeds are equally balanced so they are imprisoned on the *ṣirāʾ* because of their sins, but then they enter the Garden thanks to the intercession of the Prophet”.

<sup>79</sup> I include verse 44 to give the reader the context for *ʿrāf* of verse 46.

<sup>80</sup> Lane, *Lexicon*, I.v, p. 2015a.

to those whose good deeds and bad deeds have balanced out and as a result, 'logically', they merit neither Paradise nor Hell.<sup>81</sup>

(Mujāhid, 1<sup>st</sup> opinion): *al-aʿrāf hijāb bayn al-janna wa'l-nār.*

(al-Suddī): *huwa al-sūr.*

(Mujāhid, 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion): *hum qawmun ghazaw fī sabīli llāh ʿuṣātun li-ābāʾihim fa-qutilū fa-aʿtaqahumu llāhu mina n-nāri bi-qatlihim fī sabīlihi wa-ḥubisū ʿani l-janna bi-maʿṣiyat ābāʾihim fa-hum ākhir man yadkhuli l-janna.*

“Those of the *aʿrāf* are a people who went on raids in the name of God but were disobedient to their parents. When they were killed, God withheld them from Hell-fire on account of their having been killed for Him, but He also bars them from entering Paradise because they had been disobedient to their parents: they are the last people to enter Paradise”.

The only dissenting opinion on the interpretation of ‘those of the heights’ is that of the Basran Abū Mijlaz (d. 106/724).<sup>82</sup> Ṭabarī does not seem to have much regard for his opinion, since he relegates Abū Mijlaz’s opinions to the end of the exegetical narratives offered for the verses in question. That Abū Mijlaz’s opinion was a dissenting one is evidenced by the sheer quantity of traditions which are transmitted on his authority. While on average one narrative is accorded to each of the standard traditionists (Meccan, Kufan, other Basran), no less than seven narratives are reproduced on the authority of Abū Mijlaz, in each one a different person disputing his opinion.<sup>83</sup> He states that the term *aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf* is a reference not to humans (*banū Ādam*), who by their deeds have deserved neither damnation nor salvation as the other authorities will have it, but instead to angels who are watching the eschatological drama from high above. We shall take the side of Abū Mijlaz for the sake of

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<sup>81</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, pp. 188f.

<sup>82</sup> Lāḥiq b. Ḥumayd al-Sadūsī al-Baṣrī, see al-Ṣafaḍī, *al-wāfi bi'l-wafāyāt*, ed. H. Ritter et al. (Istanbul, 1931-), vol. 24, p. 392.

argument, and offer the reader a guided rendering of the *al-rāf* verse based on his suggestion:

*wa-baynahumā hijābun wa-‘alā l-‘rāfi rijālun ya‘rifūna kullān bi-sīmāhum...*

“And between them [those of Paradise and those of Hell] there is a veil, and atop the Heights there are men [angels] who recognize each [of the people of Paradise and the people of Hell] by their mark,”

*wa-nādaw aṣḥāba l-jannati an salāmun ‘alaykum lam yadkhulūhā wa-hum yaṭma‘ūn...*

“And they [the angels] call to those of Paradise saying “peace be upon you”; they [the people of Paradise] have not entered it yet, but they are eager,”

*wa-idhā ṣurifat abṣāruhum tilqā’a aṣḥābi n-nāri qālū rabbanā lā taj‘alnā ma‘a l-qawmi ḡ-ḡālimīn...*

“And when they [the people of Paradise] turn their eyes towards those of Hell, they say: ‘Lord, do not assign us with the evildoing lot’,”

*wa-nādā aṣḥābu l-‘rāfi rijālan ya‘rifūnahum bi-sīmāhum qālū mā aghnā ‘ankum jam‘ukum wa-mā kuntum tastakbirūn a-hā’ulā’i lladhīna aqsamtum lā yanāluhumu llāhu bi-rahmatin dkhulū l-jannata lā khawfun ‘alaykum wa-lā antum taḥzanūn*

“And those atop the Heights [the angels] call to certain men [of those in Hell] they know by their signs, and they say to them, “Your amassing has not availed you, nor your haughtiness; are these the ones you swore God would never reach with mercy? Enter Paradise, fear not and be not sorrowful”.

As it happens, Abū Miḡlaz’s instinct that it is angels who are meant by the term *aṣḥāb al-‘rāf* receives support from other instances in the Qur’ān. For one, the angels are commonly portrayed as the ones who receive the consignments of people destined for both Hell and Paradise; they are the celestial ‘ushers’ who welcome the ‘fortunate’ into Paradise,<sup>83</sup> and the divine scourge who rebuke the ‘damned’ before submitting them to

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<sup>83</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, pp. 193f.

<sup>84</sup> Q. 16/32: *alladhīna tatawaffāhumu l-malā’ikatu ṭayyibīn yaqulūna salāmun ‘alaykumu dkhulū l-jannata bimā kuntum ta‘malūn*; also Q. 13/24; 39/73.

eternal torture.<sup>85</sup> Consequently, they could very plausibly be the voice behind the benediction (*salāmun ʿalaykum*) of verse 46, the rebuke of verse 48, and both the rhetorical question and the good tidings of verse 49.

In short, the reading which results from taking the *aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf* to be angels is far less tortuous than that of the other exegetical traditions. Indeed, if we are to read *aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf* as people awaiting ‘final sentencing’, which is not impossible, we have to make one difficult adjustment. The issue turns on who exactly is delivering the words of verse 49: ‘Are these the ones you swore God would not reach with mercy? Enter Paradise, fear not and be not sorrowful’. The direct speech indicated by the interrogatory *a-* before *hāʾūlā* suggests that the verse is continuing a live address from a preceding verse. Verse 48, it just so happens, does indeed end with a statement made in direct speech: ‘They say: nothing has your amassing availed you, nor your haughtiness’. In other words, the voice of verse 49 is the voice of verse 48. Yet if the voice of verse 48 is that of the men waiting in limbo for a decision on their final destination, as our exegetes would have it, the difficulty is immediately apparent: the men of verse 48 are now talking about themselves and have granted themselves entry into Paradise. Of course, we do not have to assume a continuance of speech between verses 48 and 49, but it is easier to do so. Predictably, the exegetes have God as the voice of verse of 49.

Although Abū Mijlaz’ reading is unpopular, the identification of *aṣḥāb al-aʿrāf* with angels does offer an arguably simpler reading of the *aʿrāf* passage. The problem is that in the first mention of *aʿrāf* (verse 46), the term *aṣḥāb* is not used, instead the

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<sup>85</sup> Q. 4/97; 8/50; 16/28-29; 7/37; 39/71.

Qurʾān identifies them as *rijāl*. The objection the exegetes, including Ṭabarī, sustain is that Abū Mijlaz has inadvertently accorded angels a masculine gender. Abū Mijlaz is quick to point out, however, that this is exactly what angels must be if they are not female. The subtlety in Abū Mijlaz' defence is that the Qurʾān had on frequent occasion made biting remarks against those who claim that the angels were female.<sup>86</sup>

Once again, it is the Basran identity of our dissenter that is noteworthy here. Apart from the fact that he does not opt for the somewhat difficult reading of the *arāf* passage by understanding anything other than angels for 'those of the heights', Abū Mijlaz does not seem party to standard traditionalist methodology: the adducing of Qurʾānic support for the concept of temporary punishment in Hell and the occasion therein provided to introduce as doctrine, belief in intercession, first and foremost that of the Prophet, which provides the guarantee of salvation for that group of sinners whose fate seems to be uncertain.

In the case of the *arāf* passage, their fate is not uncertain at all, for judging by the Qurʾānic text, regardless of whether one takes angels or humans for *aṣḥāb al-arāf*, the group in question are granted entry into Paradise (Q. 7/49). Nevertheless, the narrative surrounding the exegesis of the *arāf* produces suggestions by the exegetes as to how those 'detained' on the 'heights' are eventually forgiven and allowed into Paradise. In this case, we have a long tradition (henceforth, the prophets' tradition) related by the

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<sup>86</sup> Q. 17/40; 35/150; 43/19; 53/21, 27.

Kufan exegete al-Suddī (d. 128/745), which establishes Muḥammad as the intercessor *par excellence* on the Day of Judgement:<sup>87</sup>

(Muḥammad b. al-Ḥusayn ← Aḥmad b. al-Mufaḍḍal ← Asbāṭ ← al-Suddī) relates how when the consignments have been made to Hell and Paradise, those detained on the *ʿrāf* are granted permission to ask for intercession (*udhina lahum fī-ṭalab al-shafāʿa*). They make the first plea to Ādam who, considering himself unworthy of such an honour, directs the desperate group to go and seek the intercession of Abrahām; the pattern is repeated and they ask Moses, and in turn Jesus until, finally, they turn to Muḥammad, finding him the only one of sufficient stature and confidence to beseech God on their behalf.

### Chapter summary

We may now summarize the exegetical evidence. The denial of exit from Hell in Q. 5/37, the *istithnāʿ* verses of Q. 11/107, the *wurūd* verses of Q. 19/71, the interpretation of *kh-z-y* in Q. 3/192, and the *ʿrāf* of Q. 7/46 constitute the principal Qurʾānic passages used by the traditionalists in order to establish the concept of a temporary Hell. But there are a few other, shorter, exegetical statements which further support this traditionalist ‘hermeneutical project’. For instance, in Q. 78/21: *innā jahannama kānat mirṣādān li-ṭ-ṭāghīna maʿāban lābithīna fihā aḥqāban* (“Verily, Jahannam is an ambush, for the insolent a resort, therein to tarry for ages”), we find the traditionalists attempting to work out the precise length of a *ḥuqb*.<sup>88</sup> Some, though, point out that *aḥqāban* means ‘in cycles’ so that the punishment never comes to end, while others say one punishment comes to an end, but a new one takes its place.<sup>89</sup> But the most interesting comment is that, according to the Syrian traditionist Khālid b.

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<sup>87</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 8, p. 199; the tradition can also be found in the classical collections, see Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 2, pp. 1442f. (no. 4312); al-Tirmidhī, Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā (d. 280/893), *Ṣaḥīḥ* (Bulāq, 1875), ii, p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 30, p. 6; fantastic figures are suggested, a *ḥuqb* is 80 (next-world) years, a year being 360 days with each day being 1000 years (=28, 800, 000?).

<sup>89</sup> On account of their being many ‘types’ of punishment in Hell, see Q. 38/56-58.

Maʿdan (d. 103/721), the verse in question refers to the *ahl al-qibla*; in Khālid's opinion the verse can be taken together with *illā mā shāʿa rabbuk* (sc. the *istithnāʿ* of Q. 6/128 and 11/107) as references to the sinners of the Muslim community (*al-muwahhidūn min ahl al-qibla*).<sup>90</sup>

As for the implications the material examined in this chapter has for dating, then the following can be offered. At the time of Muqātil (c. 133/750) the idea of Muslim sinners getting out of Hell was already around, but it is difficult to say how widely accepted the idea was, even among traditionalists. By the time of ʿAbd al-Razzāq (c. 184/800), however, the idea was part of the traditionalist manifesto, and it was facing opposition from non-traditionalist circles. The traditions in the *Muṣannaf* are efforts to iron out that opposition. At the same time, we see the intrusion of traditions which focus on the Prophet's eschatological intercession. This intercession, however, had developed separately from temporary Hell (the Prophet's intercession was an older idea)<sup>91</sup> and by 184/800, as the evidence of the *Muṣannaf* suggests, it functioned in various ways: in order to protect the Muslim community from Hell, or so that God would forgive the sins of the Muslim community (such ḥadīth probably came into circulation after the civil wars, when the community was internally divided). But by 184/800 it was still not explicitly associated with Muslim sinners exiting from Hell: tradition was still trying to establish authority for a temporary Hell. And it is in response to the resistance their effort met with that eventually the Prophet's *shafāʿa* would be used to get the sinners out of Hell. The emergence, and subsequent transformation, of the very *jahannamiyyūn* tradition testifies to this development. The

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<sup>90</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 30, p. 7 (lines 33-35).

*Muṣannaf* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq (d. 212/827) establishes that a ‘people’ will exit from Hell. By al-Bukhārī’s time (d. 257/870) these ‘people’ have become identified as *jahannamiyyūn*.<sup>92</sup> By the time Ibn Māja (d. 273/886) and al-Tirmidhī (d. 285/898) had put together their ḥadīth collections, however, this ‘Muslim purgatory’ had found an authoritative articulation: *la-yakhrujanna qawmun min ummatī min al-nār bi-shafā‘atī yusammawn jahannamiyyīn*, “verily a group from my community shall exit from the Hell-fire thanks to my intercession and they shall be known as the ‘people of *jahannam*’.”<sup>93</sup> The next chapter will be concerned with the early history and development of the concept of *shafā‘a*.

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<sup>91</sup> See next chapter, 3.2.

<sup>92</sup> Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, “riqāq”, no. 6559 and “tawḥīd”, no. 7450.

<sup>93</sup> Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 2, pp. 1443f., no. 4315; Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ii, p. 99 (line 15).

## **CHAPTER 4**

**The intercession of the Prophet:**

**the early history**

It seems reasonable to suggest that the idea of eschatological intercession in Islam could not have developed without the acceptance and establishment first and foremost of the doctrine of the Prophet's intercession.<sup>1</sup> Given that the Prophet's *shafā'a* also played such an important role in the salvation of the most controversial group of sinners, the grave sinners (*ahl al-kabā'ir*), it will be the object of this chapter to chart the early history of this concept and examine its significance among the early Muslim community.

#### 4.1 The Prophet as 'intercessor': the evidence

The earliest secure attestation of the Prophet's *shafā'a* comes from a mosaic inscription inside the Dome of the Rock.<sup>2</sup> The mosaic inscription also contains the foundation text, which dates the building to the year 72/691-92.<sup>3</sup> This securely datable piece of evidence is crucial for two reasons: 1) it is very early for an idea that would eventually be used to support the idea of a temporary Hell for Muslims, by getting them out of it, and 2) despite the fact the *shafā'a* of the Prophet was proclaimed as early as 72/691, it receives little or no mention in any serious discussions of the afterlife in the first 150 years or so, and yet at some point in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.H., however, it becomes controversial. Finally, with the exception of the *shafā'a* of Muḥammad section, the remainder of the text of the inscription is wholly traceable to the text of the Qur'ān. Thus, we encounter either paraphrased Qur'ānic verses,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. L. Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme* (Paris, 1967), p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix 4.

<sup>3</sup> There is some debate over whether the above date refers to the commissioning of the building or its completion, S. Blair, "What is the date of the Dome of the Rock?" in *Bayt al-maqdis: 'Abd al-Malik's Jerusalem*, part 1, J. Raby and J. Johns eds., Oxford Series in Islamic Art and Archaeology IX (Oxford,

conflations or usage of Qurʾānic terms (it is indeed surprising in light of this fact that little attention has been paid to the *shafāʿa* inscription by modern scholars).<sup>4</sup> I shall return at the end of this chapter to discuss the implications of the text of the *shafāʿa* inscription and the significance of its location in the Dome of the Rock.

#### 4.1.1 The early poems

The idea of the Prophet as eschatological intercessor appears in some early Islamic poems.<sup>5</sup> The following are the earliest attestations I have come across:

(a) These lines are attributed to the bedouin companion Sawād b. Qārib of the tribe of Sadūs. He had been a *kāhin* and reportedly had a vision of the coming (or the call to mission) of Muḥammad:<sup>6</sup> [ṭawīl]

*fa-ashhadu anna llāha lā rabba ghayruhū*  
*wa-annaka maʾmūnun ʿalā kulli ghāʾibī*  
*wa-innaka adnā l-mursalīna wasīlatan*  
*ilā llāhi yā bna l-akramīna l-atāyibī*  
*fa-murnā bimā yaʾtika min waḥyi rabbīnā*  
*wa-in kāna fīmā jīʾta shaybu l-dhawāʾibī*  
*fa-kun lī shafīʿan yawma lā dhū shafāʿatin*  
*bi-mughnin fatīlan ʿan Sawādi bni-Qāribī*

“I bear witness that there is no Lord apart from God, and that you are trustworthy in every matter that is hidden. From among the sent ones, you are the closest way to God, o son of the best and most noble. Order us (to follow) the revelation which comes to you from our Lord, even if what you bring should make one’s

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1992), pp. 59-87.

<sup>4</sup> To my knowledge only two scholars have given it thought: J. van Ess notes it (*TG*, i, p. 11), and comments on the idea of *shafāʿa* (*TG*, iv, pp. 543ff). I shall take up his comments later in this chapter. O. Grabar is the only other scholar to have made a remark, albeit a brief one. He sees in the mosaic inscription, “a striking resemblance to the Christian liturgy as it was practised at the time...praises in part from the holy texts...are followed by requests for God’s infinite mercy in granting salvation at the time of judgement by an invocation to an intercessor”, *The shape of the holy: early Islamic Jerusalem* (Princeton, 1996), p. 65.

<sup>5</sup> Some have been discussed by O. Farrukh, *Das Bild des Frühislam in der arabischen Dichtung von der Hiğra bis zum Tode ʿUmars*, Ph.D. thesis (Leipzig, 1937), pp. 57f.

<sup>6</sup> Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr, Yūsuf b. ʿAbdallāh, *al-Istīʿāb fī maʿrifat al-aṣḥāb* (Hyderabad, 1918-19), ii, pp. 582f: *kāna yatakahhan fī l-jāhiliyya wa-kāna shāʿiran thumma aslam*. His pre-Islamic activities seem to have been a source of embarrassment, and ʿUmar b. al-Khāṭṭāb used to make fun of him for having been a *kāhin*.

hair go white. Be an intercessor for me on a day when no intercessor is of any use to Sawād b. Qārib”.

(b) Māzin b. Ghaḍūba of the tribe of Ṭayy was also a *kāhin*. He is reported to have learned about the Prophet through an idol, which he used to guard. He then travelled from ‘Umān to Ḥijāz to see the Prophet, and asked him to pray for him since he had spent a wanton life of wine and women; the Prophet prayed for him.<sup>7</sup> [ṭawīl]

*ilayka rasūla llāhi khabbat maṭiyyatī  
tajūbu l-fayāfi min ‘Umāna ilā l-‘arjī  
li-tashfa‘a lī yā-khayra man waṭi‘a l-ḥaṣā  
fa-yaghfira lī rabbī fa-arji‘a bi-l-faljī  
ilā ma‘sharin jānabtu fī llāhi dīnahum  
fa-lā dinuhum dīnī wa-lā sharjuhum sharjī.*

“My camel trots towards you o Messenger of God, making its way through the deserts from ‘Umān to the valley (sc. Mecca?), so that you may intercede for me, you who are the best to tread this earth, so that my Lord might forgive me and I might return triumphant to a people whose religion through God I steer clear of; neither is their religion my religion, nor is their kind my kind”.

(c) ‘Abbās b. Mirdās (d. c. 24/644, or soon after), we are told, was also involved with the cult of the *kuhhān*: he took over the custodianship of an idol his father used to guard after the latter died. ‘Abbās abandoned the idol when it foretold him of Muḥammad’s prophethood:<sup>8</sup> [ṭawīl]

*amīnan ‘alā l-furqāni awwalu shāfi‘in  
wa-ākhiru mab‘ūthin yujību l-malā‘ikā*

“He in whose trust the *furqān* (sc. Qur’ān) has been placed, who is the first of the

<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, ‘Izz al-Dīn, *Usd al-ghāba fī ma‘rifat al-ṣaḥāba* (Cairo, 1869-71), vol. 4, pp. 269f, where Māzin himself relates: *kuntu asdinu ṣanaman yuqālu lahu Nājir bi-qarya min arḍ ‘Umān fa-‘atarnā dhāta yawmin ‘indahū ‘atratan, wa-hiya dh-dhabīha, fa-sami‘tu ṣawtan min al-ṣanam: yā Māzin isma‘ tusarr, ḡahara khayr, wa-baṭana sharr, bu‘itha nabī min Muḍar, bi-dīni llāhi l-kubar, fa-da‘ naḥītan min ḡajar, taslam min massi saqar...*; also Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 9, p. 30.

<sup>8</sup> *Dīwān*, ed. Y. al-Jabbūrī, (Beirut, 1991), p. 120 (in 1968 edn., p. 94); on ‘Abbās, see Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 14, pp. 302ff (p. 305 for the above verse); also Ibn Ḥajar, *Iṣāba*, vol. 5, p. 330; Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *Istī‘āb*, ii, pp. 487-89; Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd*, vol. 3, pp. 112f.

intercessors and the last of those sent to respond to the angels”.

(d) ‘Abdallāh b. Rawāḥa (d. 8/629) fought alongside the Prophet in most of the main battles, except for the conquest of Mecca; he was killed at Muṭa.<sup>9</sup> [basīṭ]

*innī tafarrastu fika l-khayra aʿrifuhū  
wa-llāhu yaʿlamu an mā khānanī l-baṣarū  
anta n-nabiyyu wa-man yuḥram shafāʿatahū  
yawma l-ḥisābi fa-qad azrā bihi l-qadarū  
fa-thabbata llāhu mā ātāka min ḥasanin  
tathbīta Mūsā [read: naṣran?] ka-lladhī naṣarū*

“I have recognized in you good and I know it, and God knows my eyes have not deceived me. You are the Prophet, and whoso is denied your intercession on the day of reckoning, then Fate has truly ill-treated him. May God then make fast the excellence He has given you, the way He did with Moses, and may He give you assistance the way He gave (him, sc. Moses?) assistance.”

The authenticity of literary material preserved in secondary sources is always open to question, but the fact that these poems are not set in any polemical context, and seem to serve no tendentious value, should inspire confidence in them.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, they are sufficiently few and scattered across a range of source-material that one would be doubting their authenticity without good reason.

There are two other poetic attestations of the Prophet’s *shafāʿa*, and these come from Ḥassān b. Thābit (d. c. 55/674?). Again, as with much of the reportedly early Islamic material, problems of authenticity plague the *sīra* poetry and in particular, the poetry ascribed to Ḥassān b. Thābit. For one, all editions and manuscripts of the

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<sup>9</sup> Ibn al-Athīr, *Usd*, vol. 3, p. 157 for the verses; on ‘Abdallāh in general, see A. Schaade in *EI2*, s.v.; also Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, III.ii, p. 79; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 5, p. 212; al-Marzubānī, Muḥammad b. ‘Imrān (d. 994), *Muʿjam al-shuʿarāʾ*, ed. F. Krankaw (Cairo, 1935), p. 126, where Ibn Rawāḥa praises the Prophet and the house of Hāshim.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. G. H. A. Juynboll, “On the origins of Arabic prose: reflections on authenticity”, in *Studies*, ed. Juynboll, pp. 161-75.

*diwān* of Ḥassān derive from a collection dictated by Ibn Ḥabīb who died one hundred and fifty years after Ḥassān.<sup>11</sup> For another, by the time Ibn Ḥabīb had put together the anthology, assuming some of the poetry does derive from Ḥassān, recent history had included the murder of ʿUthmān, three civil wars and the turbulent years up till the ʿAbbāsīd seizure of power in 133/750. Throughout these events many factions- Zubayrids, Umayyads, Khārijites, Shīʿīs and ʿAbbāsīds, would have benefited from claiming to be close to the Prophet, whether by kinship or companionship, and by claiming to preserve his memory most faithfully. It is no surprise, therefore, to find among the collection of poetry attributed to Ḥassān poems which are biased variously in favour of the Anṣār, the Shīʿa or the ʿAbbāsīd propagandists of the Umayyad period.<sup>12</sup> The first poem is supposed to have been composed on the occasion of the Battle of Badr:<sup>13</sup> [ṭawīl]

*wafaw yawma badrin li-r-rasūli wa-fawqahum  
zilālu l-manāyā wa-s-suyūfu l-lawāmiʿū  
daʿā fa-ajābūhu bi-ḥaqqin wa-kulluhum  
mutiʿun lahū fī kullī amrin wa-sāmiʿū  
fa-mā baddalū ḥattā tawāfaw jamāʿatan*

<sup>11</sup> Ḥassān's death date is suspicious to U. Rubin, *The eye of the beholder*, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 5 (Princeton, 1995), p. 214.

<sup>12</sup> W. N. ʿArafāt, "A critical study of the poems ascribed to Ḥassān b. Thābit", Phd dissertation (London, 1954). In his abstract, the author remarks that the collection of poems attributed to Ḥassān are, "forgeries by narrators mostly in an attempt to reconstruct past events, but according to their own idea of what Ḥassān's contribution must be; poems intended to whitewash personalities of the past prepared by their descendants and deliberately ascribed to Ḥassān because of his prestige; poems of slander or poems on other occasions whose authors were not known and which were ascribed to Ḥassān because of his reputation...because they fit in, somehow, with the accepted idea of his life, such as poems mentioning Ghassānids or a piece connected with travelling or poems with a very pronounced religious colour which would suit him in the role of the poet of the Prophet". The problem with ʿArafāt's approach of eliminating pretty much most of what is ascribed to Ḥassān runs the risk of eliminating so much poetry that nothing can be left to Ḥassān. At the same time, with so few genuine poems attributable to Ḥassān, it becomes difficult to glean a style which might mark Ḥassān as a poet, and which is one of the criteria by which ʿArafāt claims he can tell the poems apart (see opening lines of abstract in dissertation).

<sup>13</sup> No. 130, *Dīwān Ḥassān b. Thābit*, ed. W. N. ʿArafāt (London, 1971), vol. 1, p. 267 (= no. 132 in ʿArafāt's dissertation, p. 176).

*wa-lā yaqṭaʿu l-ājāla illā l-maṣārīʿū*  
*li-annahumū yarjūna minhu shafāʿatan*  
*idhā lam yakun illā n-nabiyyīna shāfiʿū*

“They were loyal to the Messenger on the day of Badr while over them hovered the shadows of death and brilliant swords; he called and they responded with truth, all of them obeying and listening to him in every matter; they did not falter and stood complete together, for, terms (of life) are only severed at death; from him they hoped for intercession, where only prophets can intercede”.

In his study of Ḥassān’s poetry, ‘Arafāt dismissed this poem as a late forgery. His first bone of contention is with the opening phrase. According to ‘Arafāt, the frequent appearance of the introductory *a-lā yā la-qawmin* in the *sīra* poetry is cause for suspicion. There is another contradiction in the poem. In line 4 we are told that the martyrs at Badr have taken up their abodes in ‘the Gardens’, i.e. they are now being sustained by God in Paradise; that is the expected reward for those who ‘are slain in God’s way’.<sup>14</sup> Yet, in line 8.1 we are told that they are willingly fighting on the Prophet’s side because they hope as a result of this that he will intercede for them, especially since ‘only the prophets can intercede (line 8.2)’. Why and when should the Prophet intercede for them? Poetic licence aside, there is an obvious clash between the two concepts. Those who die in battle are not expecting intercession, they have been promised Paradise with all the sensual pleasures it has to offer; they cannot be fighting to qualify for intercession, there is no incentive in that. For ‘Arafāt, however, the mere mention of *shafāʿa* is just another indication that the poem is a forgery.<sup>15</sup> Even if line 8 were an interpolation, mere mention of *shafāʿa* in a verse should not preclude

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Q. 3/169.

<sup>15</sup> ‘Arafāt does not explicitly note the clash in imagery between lines 4 and 8, but he does doubt the poem’s authenticity on much the same point, namely that the concept of intercession was a later development in Islam. He also quite rightly says that its mention in the poem contradicts “the idea...prevalent among Muslims during the life-time of the Prophet, when they expected, not

authenticity: the Dome of the Rock inscription is indisputable evidence that the concept of the Prophet's *shafā'a* is already around by the year 71/690, if not earlier.<sup>16</sup>

With 'Arafāt's argument, we would have to explain away the presence of the Prophet's *shafā'a* in all the other poems that we noted.<sup>17</sup> The second poem that mentions *shafā'a* by Ḥassan is concerned with the Battle of Uḥud:<sup>18</sup> [ṭawīl]

*amāma rasūli llāhi lā yakhdhulūnahū  
lahum nāṣirun min rabbihim wa-shaftī'ū  
wafaw idh kafartum yā Sakhīnu bi-rabbikum  
wa-lā yastawī 'abdun 'aṣā wa-muṭī'ū*

“Before the Messenger of God, they do not disappoint him, they have a supporter from their Lord and an intercessor; they were loyal when you Sakhīn rejected your Lord, the obedient servant is not like the disobedient one’.

'Arafāt sees a difficulty in reading the second hemistich of line 8, since it would seem to refer to God.<sup>19</sup> But this is not as surprising as 'Arafāt might posit, since God is thus described in the Qur'ān, where the epithet *shaftī'* claimed by Him is emphatic of His absolute sovereignty.<sup>20</sup> Apart from the early poems mentioned above, the *shafā'a* of the Prophet appears, seemingly randomly, in narratives in the historical tradition

intercession, but the promised reward for their deeds” (Ph.D. thesis, p. 176).

<sup>16</sup> I say earlier because for it to be included together with Qur'ānic material may presuppose that it formed part of popular Muslim belief, and for it to become so it could not have happened overnight.

<sup>17</sup> See poems (a), (b), (c), and (d) from Farrukh above.

<sup>18</sup> No. 173, *Dīwān Ḥassān*, p. 337f. (= no. 175 in 'Arafāt, Ph.D. thesis, p. 189); I cite the poem only from its relevant lines, from line 7 onwards.

<sup>19</sup> 'Arafāt on line 8.2: “Who is the supporter and who is the intercessor? If, as one expects, the latter refers to the Prophet, then it is difficult on grammatical as well as logical grounds to refer the term ‘supporter’ to him as well. If the ‘supporter’ is God Himself, this will be a rather violent interpretation of the construction as it stands, and there will remain the difficulty of fitting the term ‘intercessor’...even forgetting that the idea of intercessor is a later development in Islam, the term is quite inappropriate here”. 'Arafāt dismisses this poem as a later forgery on account of some very obvious signs of inferior workmanship and ‘padding’ (Ph.D. thesis, pp. 196-198).

<sup>20</sup> See Q. 6/51, 70; 32/4: *laysa lahum min dūnihi waliyyun wa-lā shaftī'*, “They have no friend or intercessor besides Him”.

relating to first and early second century.<sup>21</sup> While these attestations tell us that the idea must have been around from very early on, they do not explain its origin, and we must, therefore, turn to the text of the Qurʾān again.

#### **4.1.2 The Qurʾān on Muhammad: *shafāʿa* and *istighfār***

It should first be pointed out that in some of the *shafāʿa* verses of the Qurʾān, intercession is depicted as taking place,<sup>22</sup> and these probably provided the Sunnī exegetical tradition with at least the premise for the arguments they would make in support of the Prophet’s *shafāʿa*.<sup>23</sup> But although the *shafāʿa* of the Prophet is mentioned in the exegetical narratives to some of these *shafāʿa* verses, mostly in the form of ḥadīths, it is not actually adduced from any one of them. The exegetical tradition instead chose to look for other verses from which the Prophet’s *shafāʿa* could be adduced. The most commonly-cited verse, and possibly the oldest one, is Q. 17/79.

The verse reads as follows:

*wa-mina l-layli fa-tahajjad bihi nāfilatan laka ʿasā an yabʿathaka rabbuka maqāman maḥmūdan.*

“And as for the night, keep vigil a part of it, as a work of supererogation for thee; it may be that thy Lord will raise thee to a laudable station”.

On the face of it, the verse is no more than an enjoinder to the Prophet to devote nightly vigil to prayer and recitation of scripture, after which God might reward him with a ‘status worthy of praise’ (*maqām maḥmūd*). Nevertheless, as early as Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 767) it seems that some took the verse to refer to the Prophet’s privilege

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<sup>21</sup> For these attestations, see appendix 5.

<sup>22</sup> In particular, group III.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Gardet, *Destinée*, pp. 154-56, 311.

to intercede on the Day of Judgement;<sup>24</sup> this verse was also interpreted by one early authority, Mujāhid b. Jabr (d. 722), to be a reference to God placing Muḥammad next to him on the throne (‘*arsh*) on the Day of Judgement,<sup>25</sup> although a second opinion attributed to Mujāhid explains Q. 17/79 as a reference to the Prophet’s *shafā‘a*. Clearly, the anthropomorphic implications of Mujāhid’s first explanation was not always acceptable to some Sunnī authorities.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the connection between the two interpretations is much more obvious than it may seem at first. In some of the traditions that describe the Prophet’s intercession on the Day of Resurrection, he is made to prostrate himself beneath the Throne (‘*arsh*) and thereupon ask to intercede for his community;<sup>27</sup> the site beneath the Throne is associated with God’s mercy according to one early ḥadīth: after God finishes judging all of His creatures, He takes out a book from underneath the Throne in which is written, “My mercy precedes My wrath”.<sup>28</sup> In other versions, the Throne is simply not mentioned, only that the Prophet goes to the place where God is (presumably to avoid the anthropomorphic suggestion that God ‘sits’ like humans do).<sup>29</sup> In general, however, both Sunnīs and Shī‘ites attribute the Prophet’s *shafā‘a* to Q. 17/79;<sup>30</sup> but there are indications that other verses

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<sup>24</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 546.

<sup>25</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 15, p. 145.

<sup>26</sup> Although it was defended by Ḥanbalites. In the year 931 Ṭabarī himself was said to have got into a serious quarrel with a group of Baghdādī Ḥanbalites when, in a discussion of Q. 17/79, he denied this anthropomorphic interpretation in favour of the *shafā‘a* interpretation; although these Ḥanbalites did not deny *shafā‘a*, they insisted on the ‘enthronisation’ interpretation and apparently this led to street fighting in Baghdad, which had to be broken up by the police, see Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī’l-tārīkh* (Beirut, 1979), vol. 8, p. 213; noted by C. Gilliot, *Exégèse*, p. 249.

<sup>27</sup> See Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ii, pp. 70f. (=qiyāma); cf. Heb. 8:1f. where Jesus is described as sitting on the right of God’s throne constantly interceding for his followers.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 11, p. 411 (no. 20858); note the version in Bukhārī uses *dār* (abode) as opposed to ‘*arsh*, see *Ṣaḥīḥ*, vol. 4, pp. 464f. (=tawḥīd, 97).

<sup>29</sup> See for example the version in Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, vol. 2, p. 1442, zuhd (37), (no. 4312).

<sup>30</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 15, p. 144ff; ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, i, p. 386; Tirmidhī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, ii, p. 193;

were also adduced.<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note Ṭabarī's remark that the Prophet's intercession would be for the purpose of alleviating the anguish experienced by people on the Day of Judgement.<sup>32</sup>

As we have seen, the Qur'ān says nothing explicitly about the role of Muḥammad as an intercessor. But it seems logical to suppose that the Qur'ān was not about to make an explicit reference to the Prophet having *shafā'a*, and that sat comfortably with the generally modest portrayal of Muḥammad in the Qur'ān.<sup>33</sup> And yet the Qur'ān was hardly discouraging a conception of Muḥammad as *shafī'* when it made statements to the effect that he had been sent as a 'mercy' (*rahmatan li'l-ʿālamīn*) to the world.<sup>34</sup> In addition, the Prophet is on frequent occasions enjoined to ask forgiveness for others so that God may forgive them: *istighfār* may be taken as synonymous<sup>35</sup> with *shafā'a*.<sup>36</sup>

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on the Shī'ite side, al-Faḍl b. Hasan al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153), *Majma' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-qur'ān*, ed. H. Maḥallātī et al. (Beirut, 1986), vol. 6, p. 671; Ibn Bābūya (d. 381/991), *Kitāb al-Mawā'iz*, ed. A. ʿUṭarīdī (Tehran, 1985), p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> See the first anecdote in ch. 5.2.

<sup>32</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 15, p. 144.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Q. 46/9: *qul mā kuntu biḍ'an mina r-rusul wa-mā adrī mā yuḥ'alu bī wa-lā bikum in attabi'u illā mā yūḥā ilayya wa-mā anā illā nadhīrun mubīn* ("Say: I come as no innovating messenger nor do I know what will be done with me or with you I only follow that which is revealed to me, I am but a clear warner"); Q. 3/144: *wa-mā Muḥammad illā rasūl* ("Muḥammad is but a messenger"). Cf. also Goldziher, *MS II*, pp. 278ff.

<sup>34</sup> Q. 21/107: *wa-mā arsalnāka illā rahmatan li'l-ʿālamīn*. It is also noteworthy that in one of the earliest testimonies of the Prophet's call to mission, especially as he himself conceived of it, comes in a Greek apologetic work, composed in ca. 634, known as the *Doctrina Jacobi*: the Prophet says that he has been given "the keys to paradise", as has been noted by P. Crone and M. Cook, *Hagarism: the making of the Islamic world* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 4, nn. 5-6; for a discussion of the authenticity and date of the text, see Hoyland, *Islam*, pp. 55ff.

<sup>35</sup> As in all other religions, both polytheistic and monotheistic, prayers for others are one principal form of 'intercession', see s.v. "intercession", *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. J. Hastings (Edinburgh and New York, 1908-26), vol. 7, pp. 382-88.

<sup>36</sup> Note in this respect the function of angels as intercessors in the Qur'ān: Q. 42/5: *wa'l-malā'ikatu yusabihūna bi-ḥamdi rabbihim wa-yastaghfirūna liman fi'l-arḍ* ("And the angels proclaim the praise of their Lord and asking forgiveness for those on earth"); cf. also the Jewish belief in the intercessory function of angels in general and rabbinical reservations about the popular practice of invoking angels in prayers: *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, pp. 595f.

Q. 24/62: *wa-staghfir lahumu llāh.*  
“And ask God to forgive them”.

Q. 4/64: *wa-law annahum idh ḡalamū anfusahum jāʿūka fa-staghfarū llāha wa-staghfara lahumu l-rasūlu la-wajadū llāha tawwāban raḡīman.*

“If, when they wronged themselves, they had come to thee, and prayed forgiveness of God, and the Messenger had prayed forgiveness for them, they would have found God turns (towards them) in compassion”.

In fact, the Prophet’s effective intercessory power through *istighfār* was part of the attraction of joining the faith.<sup>37</sup> On one occasion some Medinese did not come out in aid of the Prophet in a military expedition and so, as punishment, the divine command was that their dead would never receive his prayers, which, of course, meant that they would not receive any *istighfār*.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, one of the criticisms made by the Qurʾān against the ‘hypocrites’ (*al-munāfiqūn*) is that they purposely ignore what seems to be a way for them to attain salvation. Their ‘haughtiness’ prevents them from approaching the Prophet so that he may pray for (assured) forgiveness for them:

Q. 63/5: *wa-idhā qīla lahum taʿālaw yastaghfir lakum rasūlu llāhi lawwaw ruʿūsahum wa-raʿaytahum yaṣuddūna wa-hum mustakbirūn.*

“And if it is said to them, ‘Come now and God’s Messenger will ask forgiveness for you’, they twist their heads and you see them turning their faces away in haughtiness”.

The Prophet’s intercession involves prayer for others which provides comfort for them, but also the Prophet mediates by accepting alms from those in need of divine clemency:

Q. 9/103: *khudh min amwālihim ṣadaqatan tuṭahhiruhum wa-tuzakkīhim bihā wa-ṣalli ʿalayhim innā ṣalātaka sakanun lahum wa-llāhu samīʿun ʿalīm.*

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<sup>37</sup> Q. 3/31: *qul in kuntum tuḡibbūna llāha fa-ttabiʿūnī yuḡbibkumu llāhu wa-yaghfir lakum dhunūbakum wa-llāhu ḡhafūrun raḡīm* (“Say: if you love God, follow me and God will love you and forgive your sins, for He is All-forgiving and All-compassionate”); cf. Goldziher, *MS I*, p. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Q. 9/84: *wa-lā tuṣalli ʿalā aḡadin minhum māta abadan wa-lā taqum ʿalā qabriḡ* (“Do not ever pray over any of them when they die and stand not over their graves”).

“Take of their wealth a freewill offering, to purify them and to cleanse them, and pray for them; your prayers are a comfort for them; God is All-hearing and All-knowing”.

Muslim tradition also records that the Prophet used to go out to visit the grave of his mother to perform *istighfār* for her, and that he had even asked God to allow him this intercession on her behalf (*an yushaffi‘anī fihā*), but was denied it.<sup>39</sup> We may support our hypothesis of the close relation between *istighfār* and *shafā‘a* with recourse to a well-known incident in the traditional biography of the Prophet.

Our justification for the correlation between *istighfār* and *shafā‘a* comes from a well-known incident in the traditional biography of the Prophet. The incident is the one that describes the circumstances surrounding the death of the Prophet’s uncle, Abū Ṭālib. This incident is interesting because it is the only place in the *sīra* in which the Prophet’s eschatological *shafā‘a* is mentioned. We have already seen that the biographical and historical tradition relates that the Prophet had on different occasions tried to discourage his relations from retaining any hope for special treatment in the next world, at least not by reason of their kinship to the Messenger of God. Hoping that Abū Ṭālib might react more sensitively to his pleas than other leading Qurashīs, the Prophet tries to secure a deathbed conversion from his uncle:<sup>40</sup>

Prophet: O Uncle, why don’t you say it (i.e. *lā ilāha illā llāh*), so that I can intercede for you on the Day of Judgement?

Abū Ṭālib: My dear nephew, by God were it not that I fear they shall slander you and the sons of your father after I die, and that Quraysh would claim I only said it because I lay in fear of death, I would surely have said it, if only to make you content.

(Al-‘Abbās sees Abū Ṭālib’s lips move as he gave his last breath, draws near to

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<sup>39</sup> Ibn Shabba (d. 875), *Madīna*, vol. 1, p. 79 (no. 357): *hādha qabr Āmina bint Wahb al-Zuhriyya Umm rasūl Allāh wa-innī sa’altu rabbī an yushaffi‘anī fihā fa-abā ‘alayya.*

<sup>40</sup> Ibn Hishām, *Sīra*, ii, p. 50.

catch what the latter was saying).

Al-‘Abbās: By God O nephew, he has indeed said that which you have asked of him!

Prophet: I heard nothing.

The ‘moral’ of the story is, of course, that those who profess the *shahāda* will enjoy access to the Prophet’s *shafā‘a*, but in the absence of this profession, no *shafā‘a* can be forthcoming, not even on account of kinship (or even the Prophet’s sympathy). For Sunnī tradition, the problem with Abū Ṭālib was that he never professed Islām.<sup>41</sup>

The version of Abū Ṭālib’s death in Ibn Sa‘d is to the same effect but is worded slightly differently. Instead of the Prophet saying that he will intercede (*sh-f-‘*) for his uncle, if the latter professed the *shahāda*, he is made to say something akin to ‘I will bring it up before God’.<sup>42</sup> The overall impact of the versions is the same: the Prophet tries to do what he can for his uncle. The verbal subtlety belongs to Ibn Sa‘d’s version, which does not use the term *sh-f-‘* but achieves the same objective by relating how the Prophet would perform *istighfār* for Abū Ṭālib until God forbade him to pray forgiveness for polytheists (*mushrikūn*). Not only as guardian of the young Prophet Muḥammad, but also because he was the father of ‘Alī, the afterlife fate of Abū Ṭālib in the tradition would inevitably undergo a slight modification. Indeed, only a few lines later in Ibn Sa‘d’s account we read that al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib asks the

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<sup>41</sup> Note how in the ḥadīth compilations Abū Ṭālib is frequently identified as the one in Hell who has the lightest punishment with only his sandals on fire, see Ibn Abī Shayba, *Muṣannaf*, vol. 7, p. 74 (no. 34124); also see Ibn Sa‘d below, note 135.

<sup>42</sup> Ibn Sa‘d, *Ṭabaqāt*, I, i, p. 77: *ya ‘amm qul lā ilāha illā llāh, kalimatun ashhadu laka bihā ‘inda llāh*; al-Dhahabī (*Tārīkh: Sīra*, p. 230) has a slightly different wording: (Ma‘mar← al-Zuhrī← Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab← His father) *yā ‘amm qul lā ilāha illā llāh uḥājji laka bihā ‘inda llāh*. It is interesting to note that al-Dhahabī preserves what seems to be a later tradition (p. 232), the way it reproduces the term *shafā‘a* might suggest that it was composed after the doctrine of *shafā‘a* had been accepted into mainstream theology (Ibn Ishāq← al-‘Abbās b. ‘Abdallāh b. Ma‘bad← some of his relatives [?]): *ay ‘amm qul lā ilāha illā llāh astahillu laka bihā sh-shafā‘a*; for another see p. 236.

Prophet if his, the Prophet's, *istighfār* has been of any avail to Abū Ṭālib: the Prophet promptly replies that Abū Ṭālib is suffering in a very shallow part of the Fire, and that had he not interceded, he would have been in the lowest level of the Fire.<sup>43</sup> Evidently, the Prophet's *istighfār* worked for the next world too.<sup>44</sup> A third version of events is preserved by the historian al-Yaʿqūbī.<sup>45</sup> In this last, the Prophet is not actually present at his uncle's death bed, as Ibn Hishām's version has it.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, a few lines later in Yaʿqūbī the Prophet is made to say that God had promised him (the salvation of) four people: his father, mother, uncle and a brother he had before Islam.<sup>47</sup>

### 4.1.3. The Prophet's *shafāʿa* and the Shīʿites

#### 4.1.3.1 The poems

The Shīʿites are a convenient bridging point to our next discussion of the early history of the Prophet's *shafāʿa*, since the concept is abundantly attested in Shīʿite tradition. The Prophet's *shafāʿa* figures prominently in verses by well-known Shīʿite

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<sup>43</sup> Ibn Saʿd, *Ṭabaqāt*, I.i, p. 79.

<sup>44</sup> Tradition goes to surprising lengths in order to establish the Prophet's *shafāʿa*, and to emphasize its effectiveness. It is related that when the daughter Abū Lahab, one of few individuals named by the Qurʾān as belonging to Hell, complained to the Prophet that she was the object of much stigma on account of her being *ibnat ḥaṭab al-nār*, the Prophet reassured her that his intercession will save all his blood relations at the Last Judgement, see U. Rubin, "Abū Lahab and Sūra CXI", *BSOAS* 42 (1979), p. 21, n. 52.

<sup>45</sup> *Tārīkh*, II, p. 35.

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Saʿd does include a version in which the Prophet is told about the death of his uncle, but that is just one among many versions. In Yaʿqūbī only one version exists, that mentioned above.

<sup>47</sup> Rubin sees the story of Abū Ṭālib's death as a 'pagan' as a deliberate effort by the Sunnite traditionists to frustrate Shīʿite attempts to secure a virtuous image for ʿAlī's father (*The Eye of the Beholder*, p. 153). The peculiar situation of Abū Ṭālib as defender of Islam and as someone who died a pagan left its mark on the historical tradition: some accounts of his death attempt to convey the impression that Abū Ṭālib had inwardly accepted Islam, for an analysis of these accounts, see F. Donner, "The death of Abū Ṭālib", in *Love and death in the ancient Near East: essays in honour of Marvin H. Pope*, eds. J. H. Marks and R. M. Good (Guildford: Connecticut, 1987), pp. 237-45. Not all Shīʿites were, however, concerned with 'rehabilitating' the image of Abū Ṭālib, cf. the case of the Shīʿite poet al-Kumayt, in Madelung, "*Hāshimiyyāt*", p. 8.

poets. In addition to the *shafā'a* of the Prophet, the Shī'ites in accordance with their veneration of the House of Muḥammad, extend the privilege of eschatological intercession to the rest of Muḥammad's family. The following verses are by the well-known Shī'ite poet, Di'bil b. 'Alī al-Khuzā'i (d. 246/860):<sup>48</sup> [wāfir]

*shafī'i fi l-qiyāmati 'inda rabbī  
Muḥammadu wa-l-waṣiyyu ma'a l-batūlī  
wa-ṣibtā Aḥmadīn wa-banū banīhī  
ūlā'ika sādatī ālu r-rasūlī*

“My intercessor at the Resurrection before my Lord (is) Muḥammad, and the trustee and the virgin, and the two grandsons and their sons, these are my masters, the clan of the Messenger”.

Another well-known Shī'ite poet is al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī (d. 173/789):<sup>49</sup> [kāmil]

*baytu r-risālati wa-n-nubuwwati wa-lladhī  
-na na'uddhum li-dhunūbinā shufa'ā'ā*

“The house of the Message and prophethood, those whom we count as intercessors for our sins”.

Here, Ḥimyarī denies that the Prophet will intercede for those who have made enemies of the family of the Prophet:<sup>50</sup> [sarī']

*lā hum 'alayhi yaridū ḥawḍahū  
ghadan wa-lā huw fihimū yashfa'ū*

“Neither they will approach his basin tomorrow, nor will he intercede for them”.

The intercession of the *āl Muḥammad* is a reality:<sup>51</sup> [ṭawīl]

*idhā ana lam ahwa n-nabiyya wa-ālahū*

<sup>48</sup> *Dīwān Di'bil b. 'Alī al-Khuzā'i*, ed. A. I. al-Dujaylī (Beirut, 1972), p. 262; on the poet himself, see L. Zolondek in *EI2*, s.v. “Di'bil”.

<sup>49</sup> *Dīwān al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī*, ed. Sh. H. Shakar (Beirut, 1966), p. 53 (no. 5); Ḥimyarī was a radical Shī'ite (cf. W. Kadi in *EI2*, s.v. “al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī”) belonging to the Kaysāniyya sect, which crystallized around the figure of 'Alī's son Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafīyya (d. 81/700).

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 274.

*fa-man ghayruhum lī fī l-qiyāmati yashfaʿū*

“If I do not love the Prophet and his family, who other than them will intercede for me at the Resurrection”.

The poet hopes for the intercession of the family of the Prophet:<sup>52</sup> [wāfir]

*nuḥibbu Muḥammadan wa-nuḥibbu fihī  
banī abnāʾihī wa-banī abihī  
fa-abshir bi-sh-shafāʿati ghayra shākkīn  
mina l-mūṣā ilayhi wa-min banihī  
fa-inna llāha yaqbalu kulla qawlin  
yudānu bihī l-waṣiyyu wa-yartaḍihī*

“We love Muḥammad, and on account of him we love his grandsons and the sons of his father (sc. Hāshim), and so look forward to intercession without a doubt from the trustee and his sons, for, God accepts and is satisfied with every word with which belief in him is expressed”.

The following lines come from one of the Hāshimiyyāt of the Kufan al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī (d. 126/743). In an elegy of the Prophet’s progeny, Kumayt mentions their special quality, their ‘intercession’:<sup>53</sup> [wāfir]

*wa-tawkāfu d-dumūʿi ʿalā ktiʾābin  
aḥalla d-dahru mawjiʿahu ḍ-ḍulūʿā  
li-fuqdāni l-khadārimi min Qurayshin  
wa-khayri sh-shāfiʿīna maʿan shafīʿā*

“The tears trickle in sorrow, time has settled its pains in my chest; for the loss of the most excellent of the men of Quraysh, and the best intercessor”.

Among the Prophet’s unique qualities Kumayt lists *shafāʿa*, expressed here by the epithet *ṭālibu*.<sup>54</sup> [munsariḥ]

*wa-l-ḥāshiru l-ākhiru l-muṣaddiqu li-l*

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 468.

<sup>53</sup> J. Horowitz, *Die Hāshimijāt des Kumait* (Leiden, 1904), p. 151; on Kumayt, see J. Horowitz and Ch. Pellat in *EI2*, s.v. “Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī”; on his brand of Shīʿism, extended to the Banū Hāshim at large, see W. Madelung, “The Hāshimiyyāt of al-Kumayt and Hāshimī Shīʿism”, *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989), 5-26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 85f.; note however that *al-shāfiʿu* appears as a variant reading in at least one MS (p. 86).

-awwali fīmā tanāsakha l-kutubū  
wa-r-rākibu ṭ-ṭālibu l-musakhkharatu r-  
rīḥu lahū nāṣirīna wa-r-ruʿubū

“The last gatherer (i.e. of his nation on the Day of Judgement), the one who confirms the first (revelation, i.e. of Moses), just as it has been related from one Book to another; and the one comes riding (i.e. as opposed to walking), the one who asks (i.e. to intercede with God), the one to whom the winds and the terrifying (angels?) were made subservient in order to assist him.”

The poems cited above suggest that Shīʿites were trying to claim that only those who venerated the Prophet and his family could have access to his intercession and that of his descendants on the Day of Judgement. Indeed, it is interesting that in possibly one of the oldest collections of Shīʿite ḥadīth, the Prophet is made to say that his descendants (*ahl baytī*) will enjoy access to his intercession.<sup>55</sup> This suggests that the idea of the Prophet’s *shafāʿa* was older than Shīʿism, and that the Shīʿites, because of their veneration of the Prophet and his family, would try and lay an exclusive claim to it. In fact, Sunnī tradition would later try and limit this claim by having the Prophet assert that no relative of his should expect special treatment merely on account of their kinship to him. It is interesting that there is only one instance of the Prophet rejecting the notion of his intercession in the entire Sunnī exegetical tradition, and that this one instance comes in the form of a warning that the Prophet gives to his clan with regard to the Day of Judgement.

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<sup>55</sup> *Kitāb Sulaym b. Qays al-Hilālī* (d. 76/695), ed. M. B. al-Anṣārī al-Zanjānī (Qumm, 1994), vol. 2, p. 687: *ayyuhā n-nās inna shafāʿatī la-yarjūhā rujāʿukum a-fa-yaʿjizu ʿanhā ahlu baytī? mā min aḥad walladahu jaddī ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib yalqā llāha muwaḥḥidan lā yushrik bihi shayʿan illā adkhalahu l-janna wa-law kāna fīhi mina dh-dhunūbi ʿadad al-ḥaṣā* (“O people, if the most hopeful among you hope for my intercession, why should my own clan not have access to it? Each one of those born from my grandfather ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, who meets God proclaiming His oneness and associating nought with Him, shall enter Paradise even if his sins were as many as the pebbles of the earth”).

#### 4.1.3.2 Q. 26/216 and anti-Shī'ite exegesis

The Prophet is ordered by God to give this warning in a Qur'ānic verse, Q. 26/216 (henceforth, the *‘ashīra* verse). What is also interesting about this verse is that nowhere does the term *shafā‘a* appear. The reason for this must be that the Sunnīs intended to subvert Shī'ite claims to special treatment, on account of their descent or affiliation to the Prophet's bloodline, without denying the fact that the Prophet had been granted the privilege to eschatological intercession, something which they had actually insisted on in their exegesis to Q. 17/79, as we have already seen, and which, judging by the evidence of the Dome of the Rock and early literary attestations many early Muslims accepted.<sup>56</sup>

The *‘ashīra* verse itself simply commands the Prophet to “warn his nearest of kin” (*wa-andhir ‘ashīrataka l-aqrabīn*) of the impending Last Day. Three layers, so to speak, of exegetical narratives usually accompany this verse. In one, the Prophet summons all the clans of Quraysh to warn them of a real punishment in the next world. In another, ‘Alī is the focus of the tradition for providing the only source of moral support for the Prophet in the face of abuse from his Qurashī disparagers.<sup>57</sup> But it is in the third layer of exegesis that we find traditions in which the Prophet is made to reject the idea of intercession. The term *shafā‘a* itself does not appear in the wording of the traditions, but it is obvious that this is exactly what the Prophet is being made to denounce, namely the idea that, on account of their kinship to the him, the Prophet's closest relations might be protected from Hell-fire in the next world. This contradiction between the acknowledged *shafā‘a* of the Prophet (cf. Dome of the

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<sup>56</sup> See ch. 3.4, p. 97.

Rock) and the Prophet's own rejection of intercession might easily be historically plausible: the Prophet never made claims to any special privilege on the day of judgement, but later tradition accorded him the claim to eschatological intercession. The fact, however, that the first exegesis relates only that the Prophet summoned the entire clan of Quraysh and warned them of the coming of the Day and God's chastisement, seems to suggest that the specific naming of individuals conceals a polemical purpose. Rubin's remarks that the exegesis to the *ashira* verse has anti-Shī'ite echoes are certainly well-placed here.<sup>58</sup> His suspicion of the exegetical traditions stems in part from the fact that the *ashira* verse, together with the *sūrat al-Shu'arā'* as a whole, belongs to the Meccan period. But it is nearer his death, and not at the beginning of his prophetic mission, according to Ibn Sa'd, that the Prophet pronounces the following admonition, which begins with an address to a crowd and then focuses on two female kin:<sup>59</sup>

*innī wa-llāhi lā yumsiku n-nāsu 'alayya bi-shay'in, lā uhillu illā mā aḥalla llāhu fī kitābihi wa-lā uḥarrimu illā mā ḥarrama llāhu fī-kitābihi yā Fāṭima bnat Muḥammad yā Ṣafiyya 'ammat rasūli llāh i'malā limā 'inda llāhi fa innī lā ughnī 'ankumā mina llāhi shay'an.*

“By God, no one can hope to pin any misdeed on me, I have only made lawful what God has made lawful, and have forbidden only that which God has forbidden in His book. O Fāṭima daughter of Muḥammad, O Ṣafiyya aunt of the Messenger of God, strive for that which God has, for I can avail you naught against God”.

Interestingly enough, Muqātil (d. 150/767) does not preserve the ‘individual-address’ traditions, but only a short statement to the effect that the Prophet warned the two

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<sup>57</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 19, pp. 66-69.

<sup>58</sup> U. Rubin, *The eye of the beholder: the life of Muḥammad as viewed by the early Muslims: a textual analysis* (Princeton, 1995), p. 133.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Sa'd, *Ṭabaqāt*, vol. 2, p. 46.

clans of Banū Hāshim and Banū al-Muṭṭalib since they were brothers and the sons of ‘Abd Manāf.<sup>60</sup> Muqātil’s gloss, then, would seem to represent the closest requirement to the Qur’ānic verse without recourse to polemic, since *‘ashīra* usually refers to the sons/siblings from the same father. By the time of Ṭabarī’s commentary, however, a distinct anti-Shī‘ite slant had been added to the exegesis of the verse, and judging by its absence from Muqātil’s commentary we may suggest that the anti-Shī‘ite polemic belongs to the early ‘Abbāsīd period.<sup>61</sup> The following are four versions of, more or less, the same report provided as historical background to the *‘ashīra* verse by Ṭabarī:<sup>62</sup>

Aḥmad b. al-Miqdām← Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān← Hishām b. ‘Urwa← his father← ‘Ā’isha← Prophet: *yā Ṣafīyya bint ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, yā Fāṭima bnat Muḥammad, yā banī ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib innī lā amliku lakum mina llāhi shay’an, salūnī min māli mā shi’tum.*

“O Ṣafīyya, daughter of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, O Fāṭima, daughter of Muḥammad, O sons of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I have nothing with which to protect you from God, as for my money, take from it what you desire”.

Yūnus b. ‘Abd al-A‘lā← Salāma← ‘Aqīl← al-Zuhrī← Sa‘īd b. al-Musayyab and Abū Salama b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān← Abū Hurayra, that the Prophet said: *yā ma’shara Quraysh ishtarū anfusakum mina llāh, lā ughnī ‘ankum mina llāhi shay’an, yā banī ‘Abd Manāf lā ughnī ‘ankum mina llāhi shay’an, yā ‘Abbās bin ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib lā ughnī ‘anka mina llāhi shay’an, yā Fāṭima bnat rasūli llāh lā ughnī ‘anki mina llāhi shay’an.*

“O people of Quraysh, buy your selves from God, I can avail you nothing against Him, O sons of ‘Abd Manāf, I can avail you nothing against God, O ‘Abbās b. ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I can avail you nothing against God, O Fāṭima daughter of the Messenger of God, I can avail you nothing against God”.

al-Ḥasan← ‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ma‘mar← Hishām b. ‘Urwa← his father, that the Prophet said: *yā Fāṭima bnat Muḥammad, yā Ṣafīyya bnat ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib,*

<sup>60</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 3, p. 281.

<sup>61</sup> Although the absence of this exegesis from Muqātil’s commentary may be precisely because of its anti-Shī‘ite slant: he is sometimes accused of being a Zaydī politically (see Plessner and Rippin in *EI2*, s.v. ‘Muqātil b. Sulaymān”).

<sup>62</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 19, pp. 66-69.

*ittaqū n-nāra wa-law bi-shiqqi tamratin.*

“O Fāṭima daughter of Muḥammad, O Ṣafīyya daughter of ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, guard against Hell-fire even by (giving) half a date (i.e. as *ṣadaqa*).”

‘Abd al-Razzāq← Ma‘mar← Qatāda, that the Prophet said: *yā banī Hāshim alā lā alfiyannakum ta’tūnī taḥmilūna d-dunyā wa-ya’tī n-nāsu yaḥmilūna l-ākhirā, alā inna awliyā’ī minkum l-muttaqūn, fa-ttaqū n-nāra wa-law bi-shiqqi tamratin.*

“O sons of Hāshim, do not let me find you (on the day of judgement) bearing (the sins of) this world while others come bearing (the good deeds for) the hereafter; my friends are the god-fearing among you, so guard against Hell-fire even by (giving) half a date.”

If one takes a *‘ashīra* to be the smallest genealogical unit coming after the *faṣīla*, then the Qur’ānic enjoinder, with particular emphasis on the closest kin (*al-aqrabīn*), would most likely be addressing the Banū Hāshim, and this is indeed what the above exegeses suggest. But it is also noteworthy that Fāṭima makes a frequent, if not consistent, appearance in these traditions. The only other female individual included is Ṣafīyya, the Prophet’s aunt and the mother of al-Zubayr. This distinct preference for female characters, apart from giving poignancy to the gravity of the Prophet’s warning, is intended to reject any claims to ‘special treatment’ made on account of kinship to the Prophet, primarily for the Shī‘ites, but in view of the mention of Ṣafīyya, also possibly for the Zubayrids at one point in time. It is through Fāṭima that al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn become idealized as ‘holy’: that is their link to the Prophet. This explains why the tradition prefers to concentrate on Fāṭima. The result is that the Shī‘a are denied a strong claim to preferential treatment: if the Prophet could do nothing for his own daughter, what on earth could he do for the Shī‘ites? It is interesting in this respect that a historian like al-Ya‘qūbī (d. 266/879) does not include the third group of traditions, which warn the individuals of Banū Hāshim of Hell. Ya‘qūbī’s Shī‘ite sympathies presumably prevent him from including these last

traditions. All that he offers by way of commentary is that when the *‘ashīra* verse was revealed, the Prophet went to the top of al-Marwa, summoned the various sub-clans of Quraysh, prepared a feast for them, and proceeded to warn them of the impending Hour of Reckoning, which yielded nothing but mockery from the enemy clans championed by Abū Lahab.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, Shī‘ite *tafsīr* of the *‘ashīra* verse does not include the traditions mentioned by the Sunnī exegetes above at all.<sup>64</sup>

This is possibly as much as we can say about the concept of the Prophet’s intercession during the earliest period. In view of the importance of the Dome of the Rock inscription, and its implications for the next chapter’s discussion, I would like to conclude this chapter with a more detailed analysis of the building and its significance; especially given the fact that it is the only inscription documented that proclaims the *shafā‘a* of the Prophet, and at such an illustrious location.

## **4.2. The Prophet’s *shafā‘a* and the non-Muslim context**

### **4.2.1 The Dome of the Rock inscription**

Since the mosaic inscription was founded at the same time as the Dome of the Rock, the reasons for its construction may shed some light on the significance of the *shafā‘a* inscription. Modern scholars still disagree on the reasons why ‘Abd al-Malik

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<sup>63</sup> Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh*, vol. 2, pp. 27-28. Bayḍāwī (*Anwār*, vol. 2, p. 167) does not care to include the traditions explicitly warning specific individuals within the clans to “save themselves from the Fire”, but is satisfied with a general admonition made by the Prophet to the entire Quraysh from the top of Ṣafā.

<sup>64</sup> Ṭabrisī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, pp. 322f.

built the Dome of the Rock, and this is in part due to the nature of the material relating to its construction and historical reports about its early significance. However, there are generally two perspectives through which one may approach this question.<sup>65</sup> One is Muslim-Christian and the other is intra-Muslim. We may begin with the former.

The fact that the war against the Byzantines was as much ideological as it was physical, makes the Dome of the Rock a powerful expression of Muslim supremacy in a traditionally Christian land.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, the majority of scholars seem to favour an interpretation of the Dome of the Rock as an expression of Islam's supremacy over its Abrahamic sister religions.<sup>67</sup> The substantial Qur'ānic passages which form the bulk of the mosaic inscription are ones that focus on the nature of Jesus, i.e., the Qur'ānic refutations of the Christian belief in the divinity of Christ. Considering that Christ for his followers is the intercessor *par excellence*, the proclamation of the *shafā'a* of Muḥammad at the end of a series of Qur'ānic passages denying Christ's divine nature constitutes an apt conclusion to the text of the mosaic inscription.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, seeing the Dome of the Rock merely through a Muslim-Christian perspective may be exaggerating 'Abd al-Malik's concern with the Christian enemy,<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> There is actually no reason why the Dome of the Rock could not have been constructed with more than one purpose in mind.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. K. Y. Blankinship, *The end of the jihād state: the reign of Hishām ibn 'Abd al-Malik and the collapse of the Ummayds* (Albany, 1994), pp. 28ff, on 'Abd al-Malik's concern with the Christian threat within and without.

<sup>67</sup> S. D. Goitein, in his "The historical background of the erection of the Dome of the Rock", *JAOS* 70 (1950), pp. 104-8, was one of the earliest proponents of the idea that the building was meant to rival Christianity on its own soil; O. Grabar in *EI2*, s.v. "Ḳubbat al-Ṣakhra"; C. Kessler, "'Abd al-Malik's inscription", p. 11 n. 20, 12; P. Crone, "The rise of Islam in the World" in *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*, ed. F. Robinson (Cambridge, 1996), p. 14; E. Whelan, "Forgotten witness: evidence for the early codification of the Qur'ān", *JAOS* 118, i (1998), pp. 2-14.

<sup>68</sup> See appendix 4.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. G. Hawting, *The first dynasty of Islam: the Umayyad caliphate A.D. 661-750* (London and New York, 1986), pp. 60f.

or even misunderstanding it.<sup>70</sup> One should bear in mind that ‘Abd al-Malik was waging a war on two fronts against the Zubayrids, and the intra-Muslim rivalry for the leadership of the community would have constituted a greater concern than the Christian enemy. Indeed, the earliest explanation for the Dome of the Rock given by Muslim tradition puts the building squarely within the intra-Muslim conflict of the late first century. Ya‘qūbī (d. 266/879) informs us that ‘Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (r. 66-87/685-705), concerned with the loss of the allegiance of Syrian pilgrims to Mecca, then under the control of ‘Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr, built the Dome of the Rock as an alternative to the Ka‘ba.<sup>71</sup> This theory went out of fashion for a while,<sup>72</sup> but has since been reiterated.<sup>73</sup> If, as tradition has it, ‘Abd al-Malik wanted to provide Muslims from his province with a place of alternative pilgrimage, then the proclamation of the *shafā‘a* of the Prophet ‘for his community on the Day of Resurrection’ on such a site may be seen as at once endowing the place with authority, by attaching such an important concept to the building, and as a sort of olive branch to the rest of the Muslim community, for so long now internally divided.

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<sup>70</sup> That the *shafā‘a* of the Prophet should only be forthcoming to Muslims is a natural assumption, but only from later sources. It is possible that Muslims in greater Syria imagined that the Prophet would intercede for all monotheists. The Qur’ān said that the Prophet had been sent to ‘all people’ (cf. Q. 21/107), and cf. van Ess (*TG*, i, pp. 30f.) on this point. It is interesting to note that one question put to Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) was whether Jews and Christians were included in Muḥammad’s community, and so whether he would intercede for them. Naturally, the suggestion is rejected by him as preposterous, see Khallāl, Aḥmad b. Muḥammad (d. 311/923), *Aḥkām ahl al-milal min al-jāmi‘ li-masā’il al-imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal* (Beirut, 1994), no. 1: *al-yahūd wa n-naṣāra a-hum min ummati Muḥammad? a-yashfa‘ li l-yahūd wa n-naṣāra??*

<sup>71</sup> Ya‘qūbī, *Tārīkh* (Najaf, 1939), iii, pp. 7f; Goldziher adopted this view, *MS II*, pp. 35ff.

<sup>72</sup> S. D. Goitein argued that Ya‘qūbī’s account was polemical on account of his pro-Shī‘ite bias, and is merely taking a swipe at the Umayyads: “Dome of the Rock”.

<sup>73</sup> A. Elad, “Why did ‘Abd al-Malik build the Dome of the Rock? A re-examination of the Muslim sources”, *Bayt al-maqdis*, Raby and Johns (eds.), pp. 33-58; esp. the reference to the sermon of the Ibādī rebel Abū Ḥamza (brought to Elad’s attention by M. Cook), where the rebel slanders ‘Abd al-Malik for building over the rock in such way that the “rough (Arab) Syrians go to it on pilgrimage” (p. 49). Elad does not note that the Arabic suggests that the Ibādī rebel already knew of the special status of the rock;

One final point remains to be said with regard the Dome of the Rock inscription. It has been suggested that the *ḥaram* site, on which the Dome of the Rock stands, was associated with the site of the Resurrection and the Final Judgement.<sup>74</sup> the general conception of the Ḥaram site, especially the names given to its points of entry: the gate of Isrāfīl (traditionally the one who blows the trumpet for the resurrection), the gate of the Prophet, the gate of mercy (*bāb al-raḥma*) and the gate of the divine presence (*bāb al-sakīna*).<sup>75</sup> Even though it is difficult to be sure if these associations already existed at the time of Islam's arrival in Syria and Palestine,<sup>76</sup> they do provide a most fitting context for the proclamation of the Arabian Prophet's eschatological intercession.

I would suggest that the *shafā'a* inscription meant no more than that the Muslim community hoped to be reunited with their Prophet on the Day of Resurrection, and for him to speak on their behalf at the Judgement.<sup>77</sup> The formulation of the *shafā'a* inscription itself sits very comfortably with the supplications found in Islamic inscriptions of the earliest period (roughly 81-236/700-850): the petition most

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‘Abd al-Malik's mischief being that he exploited this, or exaggerated it.

<sup>74</sup> Muqātil b. Sulaymān (d. 150/767) believed that *bayt al-maqdis* would be the site of the Resurrection and Judgement, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, pp. 514f.; see also M. Rosen-Ayalon, *The Early Islamic Monuments of al-Ḥaram al-Sharīf: an iconographic study* in Qedem no. 28: Monographs of the Institute of Archaeology (Jerusalem, 1989), pp. 46ff; Grabar and Nuseibeh, *Dome of the Rock*, pp. 51ff.

<sup>75</sup> A. Elad, *Medieval Jerusalem and Islamic worship: holy places, ceremonies, pilgrimage* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 78-119.

<sup>76</sup> Apart from Muqātil's, all other works, in which such ideas are attested, are late: Ibn al-Murajjā b. Ibrāhīm al-Maqdisī, *Faḍā'il bayt al-maqdis wa'l-khalīl wa-faḍā'il al-Shām*, ed. O. Livne-Kafri (Shafa'Amr, 1995); Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Wāḥid al-Maqdisī (d. 643/1245), ed. M. M. al-Ḥāfiẓ (Damascus, 1985), pp. 50ff; cf. J. van Ess, "Abd al-Malik and the Dome of the Rock: an analysis of some texts", *Bayt al-maqdis*, eds. Raby and Johns, pp. 89-103.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Q. 4/41: *fa-kayfa idhā ji'nā min kulli ummatin bi-shahīd wa-ji'nā bika 'alā hā'ūlā'i shahīd yawma'idhin yawaddu lladhina kafarū wa-‘aşaw r-rasūla law tusawwā bihimu l-arḍu wa-lā yaktumūna llāha ḥadīthan* ("How then shall it be, when We bring forward from every nation a witness, and bring thee to witness against those? Upon that day the unbelievers, those who have disobeyed the Messenger, will wish that the earth might be levelled with them; and they will not conceal from God one tiding").

frequently encountered is of the type that asks God for mercy or forgiveness and is then extended to the rest of the Muslim community.<sup>78</sup> The fact that the Dome of the Rock building was erected in Jerusalem, the focus of so many associations with the prophets of Judaism and the figure of Christ, made it almost imperative that the name of the Prophet Muḥammad should likewise be invoked on behalf of the newly-arrived Islamic *umma*. It may well be that the supplication is simply an expression of Muslim piety in a site which had long been revered by Jews and Christians: now it was time for the Muslims to make their piety felt there. Whatever the real significance of the *shafā'a* inscription was, as it sat advertised in the Dome of the Rock in the year 72/691, it is sufficient testimony to the early belief in the Prophet's eschatological intercession.

#### **4.2.2 Intercession, temporary Hell and Judeo-Christian influence**

It seems to me that although the concept of the Prophet as *shafī'* might have been born in a 'native' Arabian milieu (i.e. that the epithet of *shafī'* was not necessarily applied to the Prophet because Jews and Christians in the Ḥijāz might have applied the same epithet to their holy men or prophets),<sup>79</sup> when the concept found its way into the Syrian provinces, as is evidenced by the Dome of the Rock, it was undoubtedly shaped and coloured by similar ideas about intercession in Jewish and Christian traditions that were now to be found all around.<sup>80</sup> Some scholars have pointed out that this foreign influx into Islamic tradition was already substantial by the first half of the

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. R. Hoyland, "The content and context of early Arabic inscriptions", *JSAI* 21 (1997), pp. 77-102, esp. 79ff.

<sup>79</sup> See my argument for a theory of 'native' origin in appendix 6.

<sup>80</sup> As opposed to being borrowed *en bloc* from Jewish tradition, as some have suggested: I. Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der Islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden, 1952), p. 169; T. Andrae, *Die person*

second century, and the fact that the stories circulated were principally about prophets and the practices of holy men would support the above suggestion about the later development of *shafā'a*.<sup>81</sup> That Muslim tradition itself associated these ideas with Jews and Christians, the *ahl al-kitāb*, is suggested by Muslim biographical literature. In his entry on Ka'b al-Aḥbār (d. 32/652), Abū Nu'aym preserves some ḥadīths about *shafā'a*.<sup>82</sup> In one, Ka'b describes the uniqueness of Muḥammad's predicament on the Day of Judgement. While all the Prophets (Abraham, Moses and Jesus) are concerned for their own well-being (*lā as'aluka illā nafsī*), Muḥammad is concerned for his community (*umma*). God responds to his request and Muslim grave sinners (*ahl al-kabā'ir*), who had been sent to Hell for their sins and who had been derided by polytheists for ending up in Hell despite their belief in God and His Messenger, are taken out of Hell and sent to Paradise under the label of *jahannamiyyūn*.<sup>83</sup> In another ḥadīth, Jesus helps someone get out of the 7<sup>th</sup> gate of Hell, which represents the worst level.<sup>84</sup> And in another tale, Moses, on the occasion of God speaking to him, is told of all of the events on the Day of Resurrection, and how the intercession of prophets is

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*Muhammeds in Lehre und Glauben seiner Gemeinde* (Stockholm, 1918), p. 235.

<sup>81</sup> G. Vajda in *EI2*, s.v. "isrā'īliyyāt", states that narratives of this kind were perhaps already being utilized by al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 728); with regards to *shafā'a* as a topic of these Jewish traditions, M. J. Kister, "Ḥaddithū 'an banī Isrā'īl wa-lā ḥaraj", *IOS* 2 (1972), pp. 215-39, "the themes covered [...] include stories about prophets and their warnings, about sins committed [...] about supplications of prophets and pious men, saints and martyrs" (p. 211-12); cf. O. Livne-Kafri, "Early Muslim ascetics and the world of Christian monasticism", *JSAI* 20 (1996), pp. 105-29, on the intercessionary role of Muslim ascetics through prayer as mirroring that of their Christian counterparts (p. 128).

<sup>82</sup> But already in Ibn Ḥanbal's *Musnad*, the *shafā'a* of Muḥammad for his community- ḥadīth is narrated through Ka'b, see vol. 14, pp. 132f. (no. 7700): 'Abd al-Razzāq← Ma'mar← al-Zuhrī← al-Qāsim b. Muḥammad, "Abū Hurayra and Ka'b were together once, and so Abū Hurayra began to relate traditions from the Prophet to Ka'b, and Ka'b would then tell Abū Hurayra about the scriptures (*al-kutub*); so Abū Hurayra then said that the Prophet said: for every Prophet has been granted (the fulfilment of) a supplication, I have retained mine in order to intercede for my community on the Day of Resurrection."

<sup>83</sup> Abū Nu'aym, *Hilya*, vol. 5, pp. 373-4.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 6, pp. 10-12.

followed by that of martyrs, righteous believers and even angels.<sup>85</sup> The association of much of this kind of material with the (semi-legendary) figure of Ka‘b al-Aḥbār<sup>86</sup> by Muslim tradition, as it was being recorded in the early second century,<sup>87</sup> shows the extent to which Judaeo-Christian religious ‘folklore’ had penetrated Islam: the attribution of such traditions to figures like Ka‘b makes the traditions authoritative.<sup>88</sup> Similar material can be found attributed to Wahb b. Munabbih (d. betw. 110 and 114/728 and 732), another important figure in the early Islamic story-telling tradition.<sup>89</sup> According to one ḥadīth transmitted by him, when the Prophet was nearing death, the angel Gabriel brought him the following good tidings: *anta awwal shāfi‘ wa-awwal mushaffa‘ yawma al-qiyāma* (“You are the first to intercede and be granted their intercession on the Day of Resurrection”).<sup>90</sup> Other figures from the Judeo-Christian tradition are included as intercessors on the Day of Resurrection, “the first to intercede on the Day of Resurrection will be Gabriel, the Holy Spirit, followed by Abraham, and then Moses or Jesus”; the ḥadīth then describes how it is Muḥammad who has the last and most successful intercession.<sup>91</sup> Muslim tradition would in due course accord Muḥammad the pride of place in the hierarchy of eschatological intercession performed by the principal figures of the Abrahamic monotheist tradition.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 41.

<sup>86</sup> See M. Schmitz in *EI2*, s.v. “Ka‘b al-Aḥbār”.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. A. A. al-Dūrī, *Baḥth fī nash‘at ‘ilm al-tārīkh ‘ind al-‘Arab* (Beirut, 1960), pp. 25ff. on the effect of converts like Wahb b. Munabbih on the historical tradition.

<sup>88</sup> On similar material and its provenance, see H. T. Norris, “Fables and legends in pre-Islamic and early Islamic times”, in *CHAL*, pp. 381-86.

<sup>89</sup> A south Arabian storyteller of Persian descent, classed among the experts of *isrā‘iliyyāt*, stories about Jews and Christians; it is unlikely that he converted from Judaism as Muslim tradition claims, but was probably born a Muslim. His knowledge of such stories derives in all likelihood from Jews and Christians in his native Ṣan‘ā’, see J. Horowitz in *EI1* or R. G. Khoury in *EI2* on him; R. G. Khoury, *Wahb b. Munabbih* (Wiesbaden, 1972), gives his death date as no later than 114/732 (p. 198).

<sup>90</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilya*, vol. 4, p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Andrae, *Die person*, pp. 235f.

This is reflected in the ḥadīth which has the Prophet proclaim, “I am the first to intercede on the Day of Judgement, and I say it not out of (false) pride”.<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Muslim tradition would go as far as suggesting that only Muḥammad’s intercession was, ultimately, useful before God on the Day of Resurrection.<sup>93</sup>

### Chapter summary

It is clear that the idea of the Prophet’s eschatological *shafā‘a* was around from the earliest days of Islam. If the poetic attestations are to be taken as authentic, then already during his lifetime some Muslims believed that the Prophet could intercede with God on the Day of Resurrection. By 72/691, this concept had been proclaimed in the Dome of the Rock, probably as a reflection of the influence of similar ideas current in Christian piety. Whatever the extent of the influence of Judaeo-Christian ideas about temporary Hell and intercession on Islam, and undoubtedly that influence existed, the development of these concepts within Muslim tradition was peculiar to the ethical problems the latter had to deal with on the question of the fate of the Muslim sinner. Muslim theologians, be they Murji’ites, Mu‘tazilites, Shī‘ites or Sunnīs would debate the fate of the Muslim sinner for most of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D., and arguably into the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is with this later period, the period in which classical Sunnīsm began to take shape that we shall be concerned in the next chapter.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, zuhd: 37, no. 4308.

<sup>93</sup> As is implied by the ‘tradition of the prophets’ (cited in ch. 3.3.5).

## **CHAPTER 5**

**Theology and Hell:**

**the community of compromise**

Three groups were involved in the controversy over Hell and *shafā'a* in the classical period: Murji'ites, Mu'tazilites and Shī'ites. We shall consider each of these in turn, before turning to the question of larger Iraqi context of the controversy over temporary Hell and *shafā'a*.

### 5.1.1 The Murji'ites

The reader will remember that according to the early Murji'ite Thābit Quṭna (d. 110/728), anyone who professed Islam should be considered a Muslim. This doctrine, as we have already seen, was primarily directed against the sectarianism of Khārijites, who refused to grant non-Khārijites the legal status of Muslim, and hence, held it lawful to kill them. For Murji'ites, this was objectionable to say the least, and their willingness to grant political opponents from within the Muslim community legal status was intended to protect Muslims from being killed indiscriminately. But when it came to the next world, the Murji'ites, true to their philosophy, refused to ponder the fate of these Muslim sinners, preferring to defer such matters to God. By the time Muqātil was putting together his commentary, the Murji'ite ideology had been extended to include the afterlife. We saw how according to Muqātil, no monotheist will remain in Hell eternally, and certainly not the grave sinners of the Muslim community.<sup>1</sup> The Murji'ism of Thābit Quṭna stipulated that if one professed *islām* (through *tawhīd*), one retained one's status as Muslim, regardless of one's 'behaviour'. The Murji'ism of the *Kitāb al-ʿālim* claimed that so long as one did not fall into polytheism, one could still end up in Paradise. The *Kitāb al-ʿālim* had taken Thābit's view of faith and applied it to the next life: if one professed God's oneness, one had a

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<sup>1</sup> See above, ch. 3.2.

good chance of being saved. Small step, then, it is to the Murji'ism of Muqātil according to which all who profess the oneness (*muwahhidūn*) of God will eventually be saved, even if they should end up in Hell first. The fact that Muqātil accepted the idea of temporary Hell is merely a reflection of the extent to which ḥadīth had been accepted by all sections of Muslim society: Murji'ites long before Muqātil had accepted ḥadīth, and consequently, the idea of temporary Hell (as we saw with the Ṭalq-Jābir anecdote in ch. 3).

But Muqātil's views on temporary Hell should not be taken necessarily as representative of the earliest concerns of Murji'ism. It is certainly true that the label *murji'a* was a polemical one. For one, not all Murji'ites could be distinguished from later Sunnīs.<sup>2</sup> Abū Ḥanīfa is a case in point. A well-known Murji'ite, he is also the eponym of one of the four schools of classical Sunnī Islam. But whereas later Sunnīs adopted the idea of temporary Hell, Abū Ḥanīfa never explicitly adopted such a doctrine, let alone that the *shafā'a* of the Prophet would help certain sinners exit from Hell.<sup>3</sup> Sunnī traditionalist animosity towards the Murji'ites is reflected in a Prophetic tradition, which excludes Murji'ites, together with Qadarites (sc. proto-Mu'tazilites), from those to whom the intercession of the Prophet will be forthcoming.<sup>4</sup> Further examples of Sunnī polemic against Murji'ism on the issue of the Muslim sinner's other-worldly fate comes from one of Sunnism's greatest advocates, Ibn Qutayba (d.

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<sup>2</sup> Watt, *Formative*, pp. 139f.

<sup>3</sup> J. van Ess assumes that Abū Ḥanīfa stipulated a temporary punishment for Muslim sinners (*TG*, vol. 1, p. 198), but this is not made explicit in any work reliably ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfa, and anyway, as shall be argued below, it is not implied necessarily by the Murji'ite theology of faith. The arguments presented in the *Kitāb al-ʿālim* further support my contention.

<sup>4</sup> "Two kinds in my community to whom my intercession shall not be extended: the Qadarites and the Murji'ites", Ibn Qutayba, ʿAbdallāh b. Muslim (d. 276/889), *Kitāb taʾwīl mukhtalif al-ḥadīth* (Cairo, 1908), p. 97; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, p. 384.

276/889).<sup>5</sup> In his polemical work on the discrepancies in the traditions, two issues come to light regarding belief in temporary Hell and intercession.<sup>6</sup> The author makes two consecutive accusations, one against the Murji'a, and the other against their opponents:<sup>7</sup>

“The Murji'a try to justify their own stance by citing as proof the traditions (of *the ahl al-ḥadīth*) which state:

1. Whosoever proclaims that there is no god but God shall be in Paradise, even if he should fornicate or commit theft.
2. Whosoever proclaims that there is no god but God faithfully, shall enter Paradise and the Fire shall not touch him.
3. I have set aside my intercession for the grave sinners of my community”.<sup>8</sup>

“The one who opposes them justifies his opposition by citing as proof the following traditions:

1. He who fornicates cannot be a believer while he commits fornication, neither can he who commits a theft be a believer while he does so.
2. There shall come out of the Fire one who has been scarred by it.
3. There shall come out of the Fire a people who have been completely charred by it and shall be reborn just as a seed shoots up through the earth”.

Firstly, the way in which Ibn Qutayba deals with Murji'a and their opponents in his introductory section makes it clear that the Murji'a, or at least a group of them, believed that God necessarily sent the grave sinner to eternal Paradise. Secondly, it seems that the Murji'a took advantage of the *kabā'ir* ḥadīth to justify their own position by claiming that the traditionalists themselves admit that the grave sinners will be forgiven (because the Prophet will intercede for them). None of this means, however, that these Murji'ites believed that the grave sinner will be taken out of Hell. But whereas the traditionalists guaranteed salvation to grave sinners by insisting that

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. G. Lecomte, *Ibn Qutayba (mort en 276/889): l'homme, son oeuvre, ses idées* (Damascus, 1965), pp. 232ff on Ibn Qutayba as a good representative of anti-Khārijite and anti-Murji'ite Sunnī traditionalism, especially with regard to points of eschatology.

<sup>6</sup> 'Discrepancies' according to the sectarians, of course, not according to traditionalists like Ibn Qutayba: the purpose of this work is precisely to show that there are no discrepancies within the corpus of ḥadīth.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Ta'wīl*, p. 4.

even the Muslim who went to Hell would eventually get out, a group of early Murji'ites (sc. Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb, although he later changed his mind, as we saw from his counter with Jābir b. 'Abdallāh) held that a sinner could only be saved by God completely forgiving him his sins, since whoever went to Hell went there forever. Accordingly, if God wished to forgive him, He would without punishing him in Hell. The idea that He would send him to "Hell and back" was non-sensical to this group of early Murji'ites. For them, and for the Khārijites before them and the Mu'tazilites after them (and in affinity with the Qur'ānic verses we have noted) there was no 'sojourn' in Hell, only eternity.

Clearly, by the time Ibn Qutayba was writing, the Murji'ite theology of faith had come to be perceived, mainly by the traditionalists, as potentially encouraging a gratuitous disregard for one's moral conduct, since it seemed to emphasize the profession of faith at the expense of 'works'. What these Murji'ites were saying was that they would not condemn people to Hell for their grave sins: God could, in His mercy, forgive them. But by saying this, however, they were in no way stipulating the possibility of any temporary punishment in Hell. Just because one was prepared to say that grave sinners could end up in Paradise, it did not necessarily mean that one envisaged they would be punished in Hell beforehand. For the Sunnī traditionalists, the Murji'ite willingness to accept the belief, and subsequently the possibility of the other-worldly salvation, of individuals merely on profession of faith was unacceptable. This meant that an overt tyrant like al-Ḥajjāj might very well end up in

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<sup>8</sup> This is the Prophet speaking: *a'dadtu shafā'atī li-ahl al-kabā'ir min ummatī.*

Paradise, avoiding Hell altogether.<sup>9</sup> But this was only one deduction, just as it was the Sunnī deduction, from the Murjiʿite precept that believers remained believers despite occasional or frequent aberrancy. It is certain that no early Murjiʿite could have spoken so favourably in the case of al-Ḥajjāj, particularly given that part of the insurrection of Ibn al-Ashʿath had Murjiʿites among its ranks, whom al-Ḥajjāj persecuted to the death. Nevertheless, that someone like al-Ḥajjāj could end up in Paradise in the next world, without necessarily being requited for his actions, was one possible implication of the Murjiʿite doctrine of faith, since it implied the rewarding of faith to the exclusion of acts.<sup>10</sup> It was this very implication of the Murjiʿite doctrine of faith that Sunnī traditionalists could not tolerate: Muslim sinners, the Sunnī traditionalists would argue, will go to Paradise but their actions would first be requited in Hell. In the end, Sunnī doctrine on faith subverted the Murjiʿite one by simply subsuming it in its definition of what constituted *imān*: ‘belief’ was made up of acknowledgement of God’s oneness and ‘works’.<sup>11</sup>

### 5.1.2 The Muʿtazilites

In Ṭabarī’s commentary, the exegetical narratives to certain *shafāʿa* verses of the Qurʾān clearly indicate that the subject of intercession was a source of controversy between Sunnī orthodoxy and Muʿtazilism. To begin with, strong Qurʾānic denials against *shafāʿa* are explained away as references to particular groups or individuals

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Ṭawūs’ (d. 105/723) famous complaint (Maʿmar← Ibn Ṭawūs← Ṭawūs): “I am amazed by our brothers in Irāq, they call al-Ḥajjāj a believer (pointing to the Murjiʿa), they call him a believer with his belief intact despite his tyranny, shedding of blood and slandering of companions”, in Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 5, p. 44.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Madelung, *EI2*, s.v. “murdjiʿa”.

<sup>11</sup> Madelung, “Early Sunnī doctrine”.

who will have no access to any intercession. So, for the Qur'ānic denial of *shafā'a* in 2/48 (see above, group I), Ṭabarī explains that this denial is directed against Jews, who made claims to the effect that they were God's 'beloved', and that God would permit their patriarchs to intercede on their behalf.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Ṭabarī insists that although the verse seems to be a general rejection of intercession, i.e., that *shafā'a* will not be allowed for anyone, it has to be understood as a specific reference (sc. to the Jews), since ḥadīths have come down which have the Prophet say: "my intercession will be for the grave sinners of my community (*shafā'atī li-ahl al-kabā'ir min ummatī*)", and, "every prophet has been guaranteed (the fulfillment of) one supplication, I have reserved mine for my community so that I may intercede for them, and it shall be forthcoming to each one of them, so long as he does not commit *shirk* against God".<sup>13</sup> Ṭabarī also adds that, "this is not the place to go into detail over the subject of *shafā'a* and *al-wa'd wa'l-wa'id* ('the promise and the threat')". This last was one of the fundamental doctrines of the Mu'tazilites, which stipulated that, on account of the 'threat' made against him in the Qur'ān, every unrepentant Muslim guilty of grave sins will be punished eternally in Hell.<sup>14</sup> Mu'tazilites must have been cautious about the acceptance of the doctrine of *shafā'a*, especially when it was applied to the grave sinner; this was deemed inconsistent with their doctrine of God's justice and retribution, whereby men were absolute authors of their actions, and would be requited according to their individual deeds.<sup>15</sup> However, Mu'tazilite thinkers, most

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<sup>12</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 1, p. 267f: *nahnu abnā'u allāh wa-aḥibbā'uhu wa-awlād anbiyā'ihi wa-sa-yashfa'u lanā 'indahū ābā'unā*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*: *laysa min nabīyyin illā wa-qad uṭīya da'watan wa-innī ikhtaba'tu da'watī shafā'atan li-ummatī wa-hiya nā'ilatun inshā'a allāh minhum man lā yushrik bi'llāhi shay'an*.

<sup>14</sup> D. Gimaret in *EI2*, s. v. "mu'tazila", p. 786b.

<sup>15</sup> Wensinck, *Creed*, p. 61f.; Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. c. 200/815) is an early example: *TG*, vol. 3, p. 54.

notably among them Abū'l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf (d. 227/841),<sup>16</sup> did eventually accept some sort of eschatological intercession.<sup>17</sup> It is very likely that they did so on account of the widespread belief in intercession among the Muslim community and the proliferation of Prophetic traditions to that effect. But although they accepted the doctrine of eschatological intercession, they fiercely opposed the idea that it would be on behalf of the unrepentant grave sinners of the Muslim community. Instead, Muʿtazilites held that the intercession of the Prophet could only be on behalf of grave sinners who had repented before dying; otherwise, the Prophet's intercession was primarily for minor sinners, or in order that God may increase the reward of believers.<sup>18</sup> It is likely that these stipulations were intended to counter the Sunnī doctrine of *shafāʿa* for unrepentant grave sinners, since such efforts seemed to win the scorn of Sunnī dialecticians like al-Ashʿarī. Responding to Muʿtazilites, Ashʿarī would argue: minor sins were automatically forgiven by God, provided that grave ones were avoided (cf. Q. 4/31), and if intercession was meant to increase the reward of believers, then the Prophet was more worthy of receiving such a reward; but how could any Muslim intercede for the intercessor *par excellence*, the Prophet himself?<sup>19</sup>

Muʿtazilite exegetes also took issue with the Sunnī interpretation of Qurʾānic

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<sup>16</sup> Van Ess, *TG*, vol. 3, p. 290.

<sup>17</sup> It is noteworthy in this respect that in the brief section relating to incidents during the *miḥna*, Abū'l-ʿArab Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Tamīmī in his *Kitāb al-miḥan* (p. 451) reports that when al-Maʾmūn 'tested' (*imtaḥana*) a certain *muḥaddith* by the name of Abū Mushir al-Dimashqī, the interrogee was required, in the presence of the illustrious Muʿtazilites Bishr b. al-Muʿtamir and Thumāma b. al-Ashras, to deny the following: vision of God (*ruʾyatu-llāh*) on the Day of Judgement, the punishment in the grave, that the scales (*al-mawāzīn*) would be in the palms of God, and that Paradise and Hell were already created. The account fails to mention *shafāʿa*, however, which suggests that it was not yet a point of contention between Muʿtazilites and traditionalists.

<sup>18</sup> ʿAbd al-Jabbār al-Asadabādī (d. 415/1024), *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, ed. A. ʿUthmān (Cairo, 1965), pp. 688ff.; D. Gimaret, *La doctrine d'al-Ashʿarī* (Paris, 1990), pp. 497ff, on al-Baqillānī.

<sup>19</sup> Ashʿarī, *al-Ibāna ʿan uṣūl al-diyāna* (Cairo, n.d.), pp. 65ff.

verses to support the idea of temporary Hell. This is true of Q. 6/128 and 11/106ff (the *istithnā'* verses), which, as we saw, provided traditionalists with their most powerful argument for the concept of a temporary Hell.<sup>20</sup> Muʿtazilite exegetes like al-Jubbāʿī (d. 303/915) explained that the proviso (*istithnā'*) of these verses did not refer to the period spent in Hell, but to the period from the time that people are resurrected to the point of their judgement; otherwise, people in Hell are there permanently.<sup>21</sup> The Muʿtazilites were aware that Sunnī traditionalists used such verses to support their ideas about temporary Hell, and much like the case with the doctrine of *shafāʿa*, the Muʿtazilite arguments were primarily concerned to counter Sunnī arguments put forth in support of the notion that unrepentant grave sinners could eventually exit from Hell.<sup>22</sup>

### 5.1.3 The Shīʿites

What of the Shīʿites in this debate about Hell and intercession? The heresiographical tradition informs us that they construed a special relationship with their imām. In Ashʿarī's manual of Islamic sects, an interesting remark comes in his section on a subgroup of the Shīʿa, the Rāfiḍīs.<sup>23</sup> This subgroup believed that the divine threat (*al-waʿīd*) of eternal Hell applied to those who opposed them

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<sup>20</sup> See above, ch. 3.3.2

<sup>21</sup> D. Gimaret, *Une lecture Muʿtazilite du Coran: le tafsīr d'Abū ʿAlī al-Djubbāʿī (d. 915)* (Louvain, 1994), p. 326 for Q. 6/128, and pp. 472f. for Q. 11/106ff.

<sup>22</sup> ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ*, p. 675, explains that the phrase *mā dāmat al-samāwāt wa'l-arḍ* in reference to the duration of punishment in Hell (Q. 11/106ff) cannot be taken as an indication that the punishment of some of those who are sent to Hell, i.e. Muslim sinners, will end, as the Sunnīs have it, but that it simply means that punishment in Hell will last a very long time. In other words, he understands the phrase as a metaphor for eternity: no one can exit from Hell.

<sup>23</sup> The term Rāfiḍīs, however, can apply to the proto-Imāmiyya or any number of Shīʿite sects; the Imāmī heresiographers claim that the term goes back to the time of Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) who together with his adherents were given the name Rāfiḍīs after the latter dissociated from a certain Mughīra b. Saʿīd (executed in 119/737). The Rāfiḍīs are so called because they rejected the legitimacy of the imāmates of both Abū Bakr and ʿUmar and instead claim that the Prophet had actually nominated

(*mukhālifihim*), but did not take it to be applicable to those who were in agreement with them. For these last, if God decides to punish them in Hell it would only be temporarily, after which He will send them to Paradise. They further stipulated that whatever offences (towards God) the Shī'a had committed, their Imāms will implore God on their behalf who will then forgive them. As for offences committed by the Shī'a towards their Imāms, the Imāms will overlook. Finally, with respect to offences committed between the Shī'a and (other) people, they (sc. the Imāms) will intercede for them (sc. the Shī'a) with them (sc. the other people) so that the (other people) will forgive them (sc. the Shī'a).<sup>24</sup> Evidently, according to these Shī'ites there was much to be gained by recognizing the Imāms, or, in other words, by being a Shī'ite: the Shī'ite would have access to the intercessory powers of the Imāms. Not only will the intercession of the Imāms guarantee God's forgiveness for Shī'ite sins, but it will also offer the Shī'ite the opportunity to have an offence committed towards a non-Shī'ite forgiven: the non-Shī'ite on the other hand does not have access to this kind of intercession and is consequently much more indebted to the Imāms on the Day of Judgement than any Shī'ite offender may be indebted to a non-Shī'ite.<sup>25</sup>

The Shī'ite imām's capacity to intercede receives polemic attention in a work by the Mu'tazilite al-Khayyāṭ, writing c. 269/882. He accuses the Rāfiḍīs of claiming that

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(*naṣṣ*) 'Alī as imām after him (E. Kohlberg in *EII*, s.v. "al-Rāfiḍa").

<sup>24</sup> Ash'arī, *Maqālāt* (pp. 54-55): *yuthbitūna l-wa'ida 'alā mukhālifihim wa-yaqūlūna annahum yu'adhdhabūna wa-lā yaqūlūna bi-ithbāti l-wa'idi fī-man qāla bi-qawlihim, wa-yaz'amūna anna llāha subḥānahu yudkhilluhum l-jannata wa-in adkhalahumu n-nāra akhrajahum minhā wa-rawaw fī-dhālika 'an a'immatihim anna mā kāna bayna llāhi wa-bayna sh-shī'ati mina l-ma'āṣi sa'alū llāha fihim fa-ṣafaha 'anhum wa-mā kāna bayna sh-shī'ati wa-bayna l-a'immati tajāwazū 'anhu wa-mā kāna bayna sh-shī'ati wa-n-nāsi mina l-maḥālimi shafa'ū lahum ilayhim ḥattā yaṣfahū 'anhum.*

<sup>25</sup> I thank Professor Madelung for making the last section of the above passage (n. 24) clear to me.

the descendants of ‘Alī have the power to intercede for whomsoever they wish.<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy in this respect that even when Shī‘ism came under the influence of Mu‘tazilite thought, it rejected one of the latter’s basic tenets, that of ‘the promise and the threat’ (*al-wa‘d wa’l-wa‘īd*); they maintained belief in the Prophet’s intercession, which they argued would save the grave sinners of their community from eternal punishment.<sup>27</sup>

In his apologetic of Ash‘arite theology, the way in which Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1175) describes the orthodox Ash‘arite position on the doctrine of *shafā‘a*, makes it seem (falsely) that Rāfi‘ites always understood that the power to intercede was an intrinsic quality of the Imām, just as it had been that of the Prophet.<sup>28</sup> According to Ibn ‘Asākir, it was because the Mu‘tazilites rejected intercession and because the Shī‘ites always took it for granted that, for him, Ash‘arī’s proposition, namely, that *shafā‘a* was a privilege accorded to the Prophet in order to save the grave sinners of the Muslim community on the Day of Judgement, made so much sense.<sup>29</sup> Ash‘arī also relates that another group believed in the *shafā‘a* of the Prophet as a means of exiting from Hell. On the question of the other-worldly fate of the Muslim sinner, Ash‘arī

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<sup>26</sup> Abū’l-Ḥusayn b. ‘Uthmān al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-intiṣār*, ed. A. N. Nader (Beirut, 1957), p. 111 (of Arabic edn.): *wa-yūhimūnahum anna l-ma‘āṣī lā taḍurruhum wa-anna l-wāḥida minhum yashfa‘ fī-man arāda an yashfa‘ fih* (“And they make them falsely believe that sins can do them no harm, and that each one of them (sc. the imāms) can intercede for whosoever he wishes”).

<sup>27</sup> W. Madelung, “Imāmism and Mu‘tazilite theology”, in *Le Shī‘isme imāmite*, ed. T. Fahd (Paris, 1979), pp. 16, 28. It should also be said that among the Shī‘ites the question of ‘grave sinners’ does not seem to figure prominently: recognition of the imām tends to be a safeguard against punishment in the hereafter. Consequently, the issues that concern the Shī‘ites are those such as the identity of the imām, the nature of his esoteric knowledge or the nature of his existence after his death, see al-Nawbakhtī, al-Ḥasan b. Mūsā (*floruit* 288-301/900-913), *Firaq al-Shī‘a*, ed. M. Ṣādiq (Najaf, 1938).

<sup>28</sup> Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn kidhb al-muftarī fī-mā nusiba ilā al-imām Abī’l-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī* (Damascus, 1928), p. 151: *wa-kadhālika qālat r-rāfi‘a anna li-r-rasūli ṣalawātu llāhi ‘alayhi wa-salāmuh wa-li ‘Alīyyin ‘alayhi s-salām shafā‘atan min ghayri amri llāhi ta‘āla wa-lā idhnihi ḥattā law shafa‘ā fī-l-kuffāri qubilat wa-qālati l-mu‘tazila lā shafā‘ata lahu bi-ḥāl fa-salaka raḍiya llāhu ‘anhu [sc. al-Ash‘arī] ṭarīqatan baynahumā fa-qāla bi-anna li-r-rasūli shafā‘atun maqbūlatun fī-l-mu‘minīna l-*

states that a subgroup of the Murji'a believed that God would send the grave sinner to Hell, but that the latter would then be taken out and admitted into Paradise, thanks to the intercession of the Prophet.<sup>30</sup> At the same time, and as Ash'arī himself points out, one of the beliefs that distinguished the *ahl al-ḥadīth* from the 'heretics' was their belief in the intercession of the Prophet for the grave sinners of the Muslim community.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, this subgroup of the Murji'a is no other than the *ahl al-ḥadīth*, who had made use of the Murji'ite doctrine of faith, but had improved upon it through recourse to temporary Hell and the *shafā'a* of the Prophet. Indeed, we have seen throughout, but particularly on account of the exegetical narratives given by Ṭabarī to certain Qur'ānic verses, that, in the main, it was the *ahl al-ḥadīth* who were arguing for the idea of a temporary Hell supported by the *shafā'a* of the Prophet. And it is not just the Sunnī heresiographical tradition that imputes such beliefs to the *ahl al-ḥadīth*. An Ismā'īlī heresiographical work of the 4<sup>th</sup> century A.H./10<sup>th</sup> century AD, attributed to the Ismā'īlī *dā'ī* Abū Tammām, singles out the *ahl al-ḥadīth* for their belief in *shafā'a*.<sup>32</sup>

## 5.2 Iraqi Scripturalism

In light of the fact that the controversy, indeed most of the evidence, presented in this study mainly derives from sources belonging to the Iraqi historical tradition, it might be worthwhile considering the hypothesis that whereas Muslims in the Ḥijāz and Syria experienced a continuity of religious experience with nascent Islam, or at

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*mustahiqqīna li-l-ʿuqūbati yashfaʿ lahum bi-amri llāhi taʿāla wa-idhnihi.*

<sup>29</sup> Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 293.10; cf. also his *Ibāna*, cited above, n. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 149.15 (to p. 150.1): *inna allāha yudkhillu n-nāra qawman mina l-muslimīn illā annahum yakhrujūna bi-shafāʿati rasūli llāhi, ṣl'm, wa-yaṣīrūn ilā l-janna lā maḥāla.*

<sup>31</sup> Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 293.10.

<sup>32</sup> W. Madelung and P. E. Walker eds., *An Ismā'īlī heresiography: the 'bāb al-shayṭān' from Abū*

least had contact with individuals that personally knew the Prophet, Muslims in Iraq were beginning from scratch, so to speak.<sup>33</sup> Iraqis would have had to work out most of their theology from the Qurʾān, and prior to the inflow of ḥadīth on a large scale, they probably had little recourse to prophetic or for that matter caliphal *sunna*. This would explain why scripturalist (and later, rationalist) elements appear frequently in Iraq, whether these were Khārijites, (early) Murjiʿites or Muʿtazilites.<sup>34</sup> We may now turn to a discussion of the evidence of Iraqi ‘scripturalism’ with regard to the subject of exiting from Hell and *shafāʿa*.

The idea that one could not exit from Hell was itself a ‘scripturalist’ stance: the Qurʾān seemed to say, explicitly at least, that no person could hope to exit from Hell. Now, scripturalism had been the hallmark of the Khārijite movement from its very inception,<sup>35</sup> and not surprisingly, the Khārijites are frequently singled out for their rejection of the idea of temporary Hell and *shafāʿa*; similarly, the Muʿtazilites are known to have rejected the idea that sinners would exit from Hell and accepted only a very strict application of *shafāʿa*.<sup>36</sup> In fact, one heresiographer tells us that it was precisely because *shafāʿa* was used to get sinners out of Hell that both groups rejected

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*Tammām's kitāb al-shajara* (Leiden, 1998), p. 43 (=Arabic, p. 36, lines 1-3).

<sup>33</sup> Needless to say, it is beyond the scope of this study to examine the differences between Iraqi Islam and Ḥijāzī-Syrian Islam, but the controversy presented in this study does tentatively suggest that Islam had a different impact in Iraq from the other provinces due to its social make-up at the time of the conquests; this last idea was suggested to me by Professor P. Crone.

<sup>34</sup> Modern scholarship has drawn attention to the tension in early Islam between those who insisted solely on scripture as a source of religious authority and others who wanted to observe the authority of traditions alongside scripture: Schacht, *Origins*, pp. 41f.; on the possibility that Jewish tradition influenced Islam on this issue, see Crone and Cook, *Hagarism*, pp. 30-32. In any case, this tension seems to have lasted well into the 9<sup>th</sup> century: M. Cook, “Anān and Islam: the origins of Karaite scripturalism”, *JSAI* 9 (1987), pp. 161-82.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hawting, “Slogan”.

<sup>36</sup> Gimaret, *EI2*, s.v. “muʿtazila”, (786b).

such beliefs.<sup>37</sup>

As far as our documentary evidence is concerned, the Khārijites do not seem to have expressed any views on temporary Hell or the *shafāʿa* of the Prophet; in any case both concepts only had implicit support from the Qurʾān. Of the earliest Khārijite sects, the Azāriqa, the Ibādīyya, and the Şufriyya, none are known to have expressed any views on the issue of eschatological intercession; presumably, they had no need for it. Their views accorded with the earliest conception of Paradise and Hell by the Muslim community: a believer went to Paradise for all eternity, while the unbeliever burnt in Hell for eternity, each according to his deeds. It is true that Najda b. ʿĀmir (d. 73/692), the eponym of the other Khārijite sub-sect, the Najdiyya, is supposed to have proposed a temporary eschatological punishment other than Hell-fire for the sinners from among his followers, after which they would be permitted entry into Paradise.<sup>38</sup> But he proposed such an alternative simply because he knew there was only one Fire in the hereafter, that is, the ‘Hell’ described in the Qurʾān: it was eternal and one could not exit from it.<sup>39</sup> Early Murjiʿism was no less scripturalist in its view of the fate of sinners in the next world: their view was supported by the Qurʾān. Certainly, the Qurʾān had promised Paradise and Hell for the believer and the unbeliever respectively, but it had also clearly stated that certain people will be deferred to the judgement of God, who might forgive or punish them as He saw fit.<sup>40</sup> The Qurʾān had

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<sup>37</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl*, pp. 366f.

<sup>38</sup> Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, 91.3: *wa-tawallaw aṣḥāba l-hudūdi wa-l-jināyāti min muwāfiqihim wa-qālū lā nadrī laʿalla llāha yuʿadhdhibu l-muʾminīna bi-dhunūbihim fa-in faʿal fa-innamā yuʿadhdhibuhum fī-ghayri n-nāri bi-qadari dhunūbihim wa-lā yukhalliduhum fī l-ʿadhāb thummā yudkhilluhumu l-janna*; also noted by Abū Tammām, *Ismāʿīlī*, p. 36 (=Arabic pp. 22f.).

<sup>39</sup> See chapter 1.5.

<sup>40</sup> Q. 9/106: *And others are deferred to God's commandment, either He punishes them or He turns towards them; God is All-knowing and All-wise.*

also made it clear that Hell, like Paradise, was eternal for those in it. Khārijites and Muʿtazilites also held a conception of the Muslim grave sinner's fate in the next world that was very close to the one implied by verses in the Qurʾān: the Khārijites called him a *mushrik* or *kāfir*, which, effectively, sent him to Hell eternally, while the Muʿtazilites refused to guarantee the unrepentant grave sinner salvation, much like the Qurʾān had done (Q. 4/31). To this extent, the Muʿtazilites had been preceded ideologically by the Khārijites, since the genesis of the latter was based specifically on the insistence that the Qurʾān should constitute the sole source of religious authority.<sup>41</sup> It is noteworthy that both the Khārijite and Muʿtazilite movements developed in Basra. What makes Basra stand out in this respect was that whereas in Kufa discussions concerning the fate of the Muslim grave sinner had been overwhelmed and permeated by traditions and traditionalism, in Basra, it seems, such discussions could always prompt a scripturalist stance. Nevertheless, Basra would soon follow suit with Kufa, and by the middle of the second century we begin to see the effects of the permeation of traditions on previously scripturalist movements. For example, while early Murjiʿites, like Ṭalq b. Ḥabīb, had to be informed by the likes of Jābir b. ʿAbdallāh that grave sinners would exit from Hell through *shafāʿa*, Iraqi Murjiʿites by the late second century were already assuming that the *shafāʿa* of the Prophet was the best guarantee that these sinners would avoid Hell in the next world. Murjiʿism by this point had adopted traditions about the *shafāʿa* of the Prophet to support their original idea that God could, in His infinite mercy, forgive unrepentant Muslim grave sinners altogether and send them to Paradise: God's mercy from now on would involve the

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<sup>41</sup> Schacht, *Origins.*, p. 258; Muʿtazilites, of course, recognized the sunna of the Prophet as

intercession of His Prophet.

In the following anecdote preserved by Abū Nu‘aym under the biography of Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya, it is the fate of the unrepentant grave sinner that forms the focus of the discussion. I shall reproduce the Arabic before offering an interpretation of the story:<sup>42</sup>

Abū Bakr al-Ṭalhī← Ja‘far b. Muḥammad b. ‘Imrān← Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yazīd al-Baṣrī← ‘Amr b. ‘Āṣim← Ḥarb b. Shurayḥ:  
*qultu li-Abī Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn: ju‘iltu fidāka, ara’ayta hādhihi sh-shafā‘ata lladhī tuḥaddithu bihā ahlu l-‘Irāq, a-ḥaqqun hiya? qāla: shafā‘atu mādhā? qultu: shafā‘atu Muḥammad, ṣl‘m! qāla: ī wa-llāhi! ḥaddathanī ‘ammī bnū Muḥammad bin ‘Alī bni l-Ḥanafiyya ‘an ‘Alī, raḍiya llāhu ‘anh, anna rasūla llāhi, ṣl‘m, qāla, “ashfa‘u li-ummatī ḥattā yunādīnī rabbī ‘azza wa-jall, ‘a-raḍīta yā Muḥammad?”, fa-aqūlu, ‘na‘am yā rabbī raḍītu”* [returns to Ḥarb and Abū Ja‘far] *thumma aqbala ‘alayya fa-qāla: innakum taqūlūna yā ma‘shara l-‘Irāq inna arjā āyatīn fī kitābi llāhi, ‘azza wa-jall, \*yā ‘ibādiya lladhīna asrafū ‘alā anfusihim lā taqnatū min raḥmati llāh inna llāha yaghfiru dh-dhunūba jamī‘an\*. qultu: innā la-naqūlu dhālik. qāla: lākinnā ahla l-bayti naqūlu inna arjā āyatīn fī kitābi llāhi, ‘azza wa-jall, \*wa-la-sawfa yu‘ṭika rabbuka fa-tarḍā\* wa-hiya sh-shafā‘a.*

“I asked Abū Ja‘far Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥusayn.

Ḥarb: For the love of God, this *shafā‘a* which the people of Irāq have been talking about, is it really true?

Abū Ja‘far: Which *shafā‘a*?

Ḥarb: The *shafā‘a* of the Prophet, ṣl‘m.

Abū Ja‘far: Of course it is, by God! My uncle Ibn Muḥammad b. ‘Alī b. al-Ḥanafiyya reported on the authority of ‘Alī, may God exalted be satisfied with him, say that the Prophet, ṣl‘m, said, “I shall intercede on behalf of my community such that God will call to me asking, ‘Are you satisfied, Muḥammad?’, and I shall say, ‘Yes, my Lord, I am’.

He [Abū Ja‘far] then turned towards me.

Abū Ja‘far: You people of Irāq say that the verse which gives most hope (*arjā*) from the book of God is, Say: O servants who have been prodigal against yourselves, despair not of God’s mercy; surely God forgives all sin...(Q. 39/53).

I said: Yes, we certainly do.

He said: But we the people of the House (*ahl al-bayt*) say that the verse which gives most hope in God’s book is, Your Lord shall give thee, and thou shalt be satisfied (Q. 93/5), and this is (the proof for) *shafā‘a*”.

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authoritative, but less so than human reason (*‘aql*) and the Qur’ān.

<sup>42</sup> Abū Nu‘aym, *Ḥilya*, vol. 3, p. 179.

We shall leave the question of the internal ascriptions of the narrative momentarily and work out what the theology involved is. We can assume that Ḥarb, the person who relates the story, is an Iraqi since his own concern, as expressed to al-Ḥusayn's grandson the Imām Abū Ja'far Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. betw. 114-117/732-735), is that talk about *shafā'a* had become rife among his fellow countrymen. Judging by the tone of his question, Ḥarb's concern seems to be that many Iraqis had become quite partial to the idea, while he, Ḥarb, on the other hand is not sure what evidence may be adduced in support of this idea. The *isnād* contains at least two Basran transmitters before the first link, Ḥarb. One is explicitly identified, as Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Yazīd al-Baṣrī. The other is 'Amr b. 'Āṣim, whom Abū Nu'aym identifies as a Basran *thiqa*. This is confirmed by al-Dhahabī who says that 'Amr heard Shu'ba b. al-Ḥajjāj (d. 160/776), a known Basran traditionist.<sup>43</sup> Ḥarb himself is identified by Ibn Ḥajar as a Basran who had had contact with some prominent Basran traditionists.<sup>44</sup> He is also very likely a Shī'ite, and this explains his concern to consult the Imām about *shafā'a*.<sup>45</sup> Abū Nu'aym's gloss that this entire story is otherwise unknown, and at that, is only related from 'Amr b. 'Āṣim from Ḥarb suggests that its preservation in the work of Abū Nu'aym served some polemical purpose at some point in time.

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<sup>43</sup> Dhahabī, *Siyar*, 10, p. 256: 'Amr b. 'Āṣim al-Qaysī al-Baṣrī (d. 213/828).

<sup>44</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 2, p. 224: identifies him as Ḥarb b. Surayj (not Shurayḥ) b. al-Mundhir al-Minqarī Abū Sufyān al-Baṣrī. He does not seem to have taken a very active role in transmission, but he did transmit from some important figures, among them, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Ayyūb al-Sakhtiyānī, Abū Ja'far al-Bāqir, Ibn Abī Mulayka, Qatāda and Nāfi' the client of Ibn 'Amr; al-Mizzī, Jamāl al-Dīn Yūsuf, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā' al-rijāl* (Beirut, 1985), vol. 5, p. 522.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Rijāl*, ed. M. Ṣ. Āl Baḥr al-'Ulūm (Najaf, 1381/1961), mentions him as a transmitter from both Muḥammad al-Bāqir, where he is identified as al-Ḥārith b. Shurayḥ al-Minqarī (p. 117, no. 44), and from Ja'far al-Ṣādiq, where he appears under the name Ḥurayth b. Shurayḥ al-Baṣrī (p. 181, no. 268).

The other point has to do with Abū Ja‘far’s remark to Ḥarb that, “you people of Iraq say that the verse in God’s book which gives most hope (*in arjā āyatin fi-kitābi llāh*)”. Although the term *rajā’* is related to that of *irjā’*, it is the latter which is commonly known as the term with which the movement of the Murji‘a was associated, since it deferred ‘final-status’ judgement to God. The former term (*rajā’*) is familiar from the sort of Murji‘ite theology expounded by the *Kitāb al-‘ālim wa’l-muta‘allim*. It is because the early Murji‘a conferred ‘believer-status’ on Muslim sinners in this world on mere profession or acknowledgement of the faith, that led their opponents to deduce that the Murji‘a were in effect suggesting this would ensure the salvation of all Muslim sinners in the next world; the early Murji‘ites were saying nothing of the sort. In short, the use of the term *rajā’* is more likely to be used by opponents of the Murji‘a. Indeed, Madelung posits that the term, “was often imputed by opponents to the Murji‘a from an early date”.<sup>46</sup> This makes sense, given that the deliberate misunderstanding of Murji‘ite doctrine stemmed from opposition to the movement, which itself must be as old as the movement itself. The use of the term *rajā’* in the anecdote above, then, would suggest that we are probably dealing here with anti-Murji‘ite polemic. This is not surprising since the anecdote, like that of Ṭalq, is preserved in a Sunnī work. Neither anecdote is revelation to a Sunnī audience: neither getting out of Hell nor the *shafā‘a* of the Prophet is news to someone familiar with the body of ḥadīth literature.

The episode informs us that both the Imām Abū Ja‘far and Ḥarb’s fellow Iraqis agree in principle: there are Qur’ānic verses which can be adduced in favour of the

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<sup>46</sup> Madelung, *EI2*, s.v. “mur<sub>d</sub>ji‘a”.

idea that God forgives all manner of sin. The disagreement between the two parties was simply over the scriptural basis of this forgiveness. Abū Ja‘far’s exposition of the verse which, strictly from his perspective, is the one Ḥarb’s fellow Iraqis adduce to countenance their point about God’s clemency (Q. 39/53) strongly suggests that they are Murji‘ites,<sup>47</sup> because we have seen that the early Murji‘a generally believed that God would either ‘punish forever’ or, so to speak, ‘forgive forever’.<sup>48</sup> Q. 39/53 does not make laxists of the Murji‘ites (although it did in the eyes of their opponents). It merely confirmed the doctrine that while one risked eternal punishment by committing grave sins, it was not at all automatic that one actually went to Hell in the next world since God could forgive one altogether.

Now that we may assume Ḥarb’s fellow Iraqis to be Murji‘ites, we can further point out that their adoption of *shafā‘a*, as a mechanism through which God forgives grave sinners, sits well with our theory about the absorption of (*shafā‘a*) traditions by the previously scripturalist Murji‘ites towards the middle of the second century (cf. the Murji‘ite-traditionalist attitude of Muqātil b. Sulaymān, d. 150/767). For the predecessors of the above-mentioned Basran Murji‘ites, the likes of Ṭalq, the idea of *shafā‘a* as a way of escaping from Hell was novel, and, at first glance, arguably objectionable, not because it helped sinners get into Paradise, since for them God would do that with or without involving His Prophet; it would have seemed objectionable because the Prophet’s *shafā‘a* was being associated with (unrepentant) grave sinners getting out of Hell and this would have offended the scripturalist

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<sup>47</sup> In fact, the very accusation that the Murji‘a were laxists can, Madelung says (“mur<sup>u</sup>ḍji‘a”), be taken as evidence of anti-Murji‘ite polemics.

<sup>48</sup> See above ch. 2.1.3, pp. 72f, where it is Q. 4 verses 31 and 48 that are adduced in support of the idea

tendencies of the early Murji'a: nothing in the Qur'an explicitly stated that sinners could exit from Hell. However, with time the Murji'a could not resist the large-scale intrusion of ḥadīths and, after all, the new teaching (*shafā'a* to get sinners out of Hell) perfectly suited the theological stance that had marked them from their birth: it was simply too severe to condemn all Muslim sinners, however incorrigible, to everlasting Fire.

As for the dating of the episode, the validity of the *isnād* can only be sustained if we take the *ʿan* in Abū Jaʿfar's claim that his uncle<sup>49</sup> heard the story "on the authority of" his grandfather, the caliph ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib (d. 40/660). We may summarize by saying that the anecdote reflects early debates between traditionalists and Murji'ites in Iraq about the status of the grave sinner in the next world. Ḥarb, probably in reaction to Murji'ite ponderings on the subject, had sought a definitive answer to the question, and he along with his fellow Iraqis is taught the classical traditionalist doctrine of both Sunnī and Shīʿī Islam, direct from the mouth of an ʿAlid imām, Muḥammad al-Bāqir.

We shall cite one other anecdote that clearly shows the tension between scripturalism and traditionalism in Iraq:<sup>50</sup>

Muḥammad b. ʿAbdallāh al-Anṣārī← Ṣurad b. Abī'l-Manāzil← Shabīb b. Abī Faḍāla al-Mālikī related:

"On one occasion, soon after this mosque, the *jāmi'* mosque, was built, ʿImrān b. Ḥuṣayn (d. 53/672) was sitting in it. Some people brought up the subject of *shafā'a* with him.

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that God can forgive even the unrepentant grave sinner.

<sup>49</sup> Muḥammad b. al-Ḥanafiyya had two sons, Abū Hāshim (d. 98/716-7) and al-Ḥasan (d. c. 81/700); it is more likely that the latter is meant in the above story on account of his well-known defence of the doctrine of *irjā'*.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Bayhaqī, Aḥmad b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 458/1065), *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, ed. ʿA. M. ʿUthmān (Cairo, 1969), vol. 2, pp. 25f.; another version actually gives us the complaint brought against ʿImrān b. Ḥuṣayn: Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim, Aḥmad b. ʿAmr (d. 287/900), *al-Sunna*, ed. B. F. al-Jawābira (Riyad, 1998), vol. 1, p. 556 (no. 836): *yā Abā Nujayd innakum la-tuḥaddithūnā bi-aḥādīthin mā najidu lahā aṣlan fī l-qurʾān* ("You tell us ḥadīths that have no basis in the Qurʾān").

One of these said to him: O Abū'l-Nujayd, you (*innakum*) relate to us ḥadīths which have no basis in the Qur'ān.

‘Imrān became angry and said to this man: have you read the Qur'ān?

The man replied: Yes.

(‘Imrān): Have you found there (stipulated) that *ishā'* prayer is four (*rak'as*), that the *maghrib* prayer is three, that the *ghadāt* prayer is two, that the *zuhr* prayer is four, and that the *‘aṣr* prayer is four?

(Man): No.

(‘Imrān): So, whom did you receive this information from? Did you not receive it from us? And did we not receive it from the Prophet of God, *ṣl'm*?

[...] <sup>51</sup>

He ‘Imrān said: You have heard God saying in His book, “And that which the Prophet brings to you, take it, and that which he forbids you, leave it” (Q. 59/7). And so, we have taken from the Prophet of God, *ṣl'm*, things which you do not know. He (‘Imrān) then mentioned *shafā'a*.

(‘Imrān): Did you not hear that God says to certain people, “What has landed you in *saqar*; they say, “we were not among those who prayed” (Q. 74/42-43)-- to where He says, “and we used to deny the Day of Judgement, until the inevitable came to us, and the intercession of intercessors is of no use to [us] (Q. 74/46-48)”. <sup>52</sup>

Shabīb then said: so, I heard ‘Imrān say that intercession avails except (in the case of) what you have heard. <sup>53</sup>

‘Imrān b. Ḥuṣayn al-Khuzā'i (d. 53/672) was a well-known Basran traditionist. It is also interesting to note that he is reported to have remained neutral and abstained from fighting alongside ‘Alī or ‘Ā'isha-- presumably at both the Camel and Ṣiffīn. <sup>54</sup> The import of the anecdote ascribed to ‘Imrān is clear: not everything can be derived from the text of the Qur'ān, and so one needs Prophetic traditions to know the full ritual and practical elements of Islam. In short, we have here an argument for traditionalism.

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Imrān proceeds at length in the same style of argument to refute his disputant, mentioning other rituals and duties, e.g. the *ḥajj* and the *zakāt*, for which the Qur'ān had not provided the details, but which people nevertheless perform in an established custom. I omit this section and proceed to the end where *shafā'a* becomes the issue of debate.

<sup>52</sup> Note: 1) the narrator says “God says to certain people”, whereas in the Qur'ān it is the believers in Paradise who make the inquiry as to the predicament of those in Hell (*saqar*), see Q. 74/40ff., 2) the narrator uses the 2<sup>nd</sup> person (*fa-mā tanfa'ukum shafā'at al-shāfi'in*) instead of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person used in the Qur'ān (*fa-mā tanfa'uhum shafā'at al-shāfi'in*).

<sup>53</sup> *sami'tu 'Imrān yaqūl al-shafā'a nāfi'a dūna mā tasma'un*. In other words, it does not avail those 'who do not pray nor feed the wretched, and who wade (in vain dispute) with waders and deny the Day of Judgement' (as per Q. 74/43-46).

<sup>54</sup> Dhahabī, *Siyar*, vol. 2, pp. 508-12; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb*, vol. 8, p. 126.

This argument was at times made even when the ḥadīth transmitted by a companion had not been heard directly from the Prophet, as was the case in one incident involving the famous Anas b. Mālik (d. 179/795). The famous jurist was heard relating a Prophetic ḥadīth and was asked whether he had actually received the ḥadīth from the Prophet. Anas became furious and retorted that, “not everything that we narrate to you (*nuḥaddithukumuhu*) we got from the Messenger of God, but nor do we (sc. the *ahl al-ḥadīth*) contradict each other.”<sup>55</sup>

## EPILOGUE

The early history of the community shows that Muslims only gradually and at a secondary stage adopted as dogma the idea that sinners could go to Hell temporarily. This gradual tendency toward a mitigated Hell was one solution to the problem of contending with the fanaticism of early Khārijites on the divisive definition of *imān*, but without having to concede to the Murjiʿite tendency to emphasize faith over works. In due course, this solution would also dissolve the seeming ambiguity of the Muʿtazilite teaching on the fate of the Muslim grave sinner, whom they assigned an intermediate position (*manzila bayn al-manzilatayn*);<sup>56</sup> this meant that the unrepentant grave sinner could be tolerated as a ‘believer’ in this world, but that in the next he or she would be punished eternally in Hell. Once it was established by the traditionalists that even unrepentant Muslim sinners would be guaranteed escape from Hell through the intercession of the Prophet, the final word had been cast on the issue of the grave

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<sup>55</sup> Ibn Abī ʿĀṣim, *Sunan*, vol. 1, p. 557 (no. 837): *mā kull mā nuḥaddithukumuhu samiʿnāhu min rasūli llāhi wa-lākin lam yakun yukadhhibu baʿḍunā baʿḍan*.

<sup>56</sup> Watt, *Formative*, pp. 229f.

sinner.<sup>57</sup> And since the issue of the fate of the Muslim sinner had, to a large extent, fuelled the early Islamic movements of *khurūj* and *irjāʿ*, once the issue had been resolved, both Khārijism and Murjiʿism declined in political relevance, becoming historic relics of interest primarily to heresiographers.

The notion that a Muslim may end up in Hell, and hence end up there forever, could not, according to the traditionalists, reflect the political reality of the community in this world. The concern for the fate of Muslims in the next world followed logically from concern for their fate in this world, but the emphasis on their other-worldly fate was naturally a secondary development. This is not to say that Muslims were not working out theology from an early stage, but certainly the evidence of the debate we have seen, betrays a scheme in which the idea that Muslims would go to a temporary Hell, and also later that they were assured salvation through the effective intercession of the Prophet, was making its way through theological circles sometime in the mid-second century. That is probably when we would expect the idea to have started circulating: the shift in emphasis from concern of the fate of Muslims in this world to their fate in the next must reflect a political reality. The political stabilization of the community under the ʿAbbasids would prompt such a shift in emphasis.

By the mid 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslim community had endured four civil wars: the theology of the afterlife as held by the earliest Muslims was no longer an adequate one. The new reality was that regardless of one's religio-political beliefs, coexistence with others from the *ahl al-qibla* was unavoidable. The idea that the community could not be purged from persistent offenders, grave sinners and their like, must have

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<sup>57</sup> T. Nagel, *Geschichte der Islamischen theologie*, trans. T. Thornton (Princeton, 2000), pp. 149-52.

remained offensive to the religious sensibilities of large sections of devout society. The only way round this problem, of course, was simply to understand that this was the divine will-- at least it was so from the point of view of the Sunnī scholars (the ‘*ulamā*’) concerned to establish their religious authority, and who needed to negotiate their power status *vis-a-vis* the caliph. Since the community was a divinely-guided one, it was God’s will that one lived amidst sinning believers and wrongdoers, and only He could judge the latter justly and requite them effectively. This would take place in the next world. In this world, however, one could not always pass judgement satisfactorily on such ‘misguided’ individuals; and even if one could, one was not always in a position to follow that judgement through with the relevant punishment. Of course, the concern remained that of defining relations with the worst of offenders, the polytheists or the unbelievers. Consequently, some credit had to be given to the profession of faith that ‘there is no God but Allāh’ (*lā ilāha illā-llāh*). This proclamation permitted peaceful coexistence within the community in this world, but it did not invalidate reprehensible behaviour: one could still be requited for one’s sins. This had always been the case, but now one would also be rewarded for one’s acknowledgement of God and His oneness. Temporary Hell was the solution to the ‘theological’ headaches caused by the need to maintain the distinction between believer and unbeliever in this life and in the next, despite the untoward behaviour of many believers: it was possible to acknowledge the existence of a ‘divinely-guided’ community of believers in the face of sectarianism and under repressive government.

It is interesting to compare the situation of the early ‘Abbasid period with that of the first and second civil wars, when the hope for a restoration of ‘righteous’ government was still a possibility. The political climate of the early period did not

require any compromises in theology, especially since the rise to power of the ‘Abbāsids gave hope to many political groups that a ‘righteous’ caliphate could be set up: no one needed to suggest that grave sinners would get out of Hell, or that they remained believers despite their sins. The Khārijite movement, as has been pointed out, was an example of the early attitude: their branding of non-Khārijites as *kuffār* or *mushrikūn* meant that they could engage the latter in battle without worrying about their fate in the afterlife. It is not by accident that there are almost no discussions of the concept of getting out of Hell, whether through *shafā‘a* or otherwise, amongst any Khārijites both in reports about them or in their own early works.

Somewhat similarly, the earliest Murji‘a had no qualms about ‘bad’ Muslims in this world ending up in eternal Hell in the next; traditionalists, however, did. After several rupturous civil wars, many traditionalists, just like the Murji‘a before them, were concerned to maintain the cohesion of the community in this world, and so they were prepared to concede the label of believer to a member of the community who by his behaviour fell quite short of that label. They preferred not to brand sinners or unjust rulers labels like *kuffār*, which would then mean that one had a duty to take up arms against them, or dissociate from them by emigrating to another place; this had been the ‘Achilles heel’ of the early Khārijites, who constantly forced themselves to adopt a political (and hence religious) stance towards non-Khārijite members (i.e. opponents) of the Muslim community. Inevitably, this was a cause for rupture and schism wherever they went. It is telling in this respect that Ibādī Khārijites allowed relations with others from among the Muslim community (the *ahl al-qibla*), who might have had no affiliation to the Ibādī cause, even allowing intermarriage with the

latter.<sup>58</sup> Not all Khārijites were as tolerant. But it is also interesting that of all the Khārijite sects, the Ibādīs are the only ones who have survived to this day. It is certain that part of the reason for this was that Ibādīs, like Shīʿites and Sunnīs, maintained relations with their political and ideological opponents from within the Muslim community, and on points of dogma were much more tolerant than their Khārijite predecessors.<sup>59</sup> That it was impossible to maintain such a fanaticist definition of who was or was not a believer is evidenced by the case of Najda b. ʿĀmir. At one point Najda controlled central Arabia, Baḥrayn, the Persian Gulf, east ʿUmān and the Ḥaḍramawt in Yemen. A Khārijite in principle, he fell out with Nāfiʿ b. al-Azraq over the issue of *quʿūd* ('non-belligerence'). Najda preferred to coexist with those from among his community who chose not to wage war alongside him.<sup>60</sup> Nāfiʿ, in contrast, did not tolerate such passivity among his followers: he also never managed to control as much territory as his counterpart.

In a sense all the religio-political movements of early Islam were different responses to one problem: how does one deal with disagreement within the community, and the political stand-offs this disagreement gives rise to? The murder of ʿUthmān, the third caliph, was the first cause for a military stand-off within the early Muslim community. It had long-lasting consequences for the political history of the community for the simple reason that not everyone had been satisfied with his ascent to the caliphal office (Shīʿites would argue that the dissatisfaction goes back earlier to the caliphate of Abū Bakr). Had there been unanimous satisfaction with ʿUthmān's

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<sup>58</sup> Cf. Watt, *Formative*, p. 23.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. A. K. Ennami, "Studies in Ibādism", Phd. dissertation (Cambridge, 1971), pp. 202ff; *Kashf al-ghumma*, Tunis MS (03182), f. 483.11: Ibādīs accepted the doctrine of the Prophet's eschatological

nomination, his death might have faded away, like the murder of ‘Umar, as nothing more than an unfortunate memory in the early history of the community: a pious old man murdered by a band of rogues. The fact that a military engagement ensued at the Battle of the Camel between leading members of Quraysh, and the fact that this was followed soon after by a civil war with one group (the Umayyads) claiming that the death of their kin had not been avenged, and that somehow certain contenders to the caliphal office (Banū Hāshim led by ‘Alī) had turned a blind eye; the fact that the two earliest political sectarian movements would define their religio-political stance with reference to the caliphate (the Shī‘ites rejecting that of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar and ‘Uthmān, and the Khārijites rejecting that of ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī); and the fact that Murji‘ism was defined by its refusal to pass judgement on two early political figures, ‘Uthmān and ‘Alī, all meant that the problem of the ‘right’ imām had plagued the community from the moment of Muḥammad’s death.

And the danger of political stand-offs was that they frequently implied military stand-offs: one could only give force to one’s choice of ruler by being prepared to fend off rivals. Now, the first consequence of a military stand-off is the possibility that a believer’s blood may be shed, and this created problems for the theology of the afterlife. Such a turn of events was not only unacceptable because one could not have two rival communities of believers (the believers were one community destined for Paradise as a single entity), but also because God had set out clearly in the Qur’ān the damnation and castigation which someone who kills a believer would suffer.<sup>61</sup> It is

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intercession but, like Mu‘tazilites, limited it to minor offenders.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, p. 91.3.

<sup>61</sup> Q. 4/93.

against this that we can understand the earliest secessionist movements: when the Khārijites seceded from ‘Alī’s camp they were not testing God’s threat in the Qur’ān; they were fully convinced that they were abandoning a potentially hostile camp which was not one of believers, and which threatened their, the Khārijites’, salvation. The Khārijites, then, set themselves apart by labelling their enemies, or those who did not join their ranks, *kuffār* or *mushrikūn*, and by waging war against them. Not even a Khārijite would risk killing others knowing them to be believers (cf. God’s threat in Q. 4/93). That in itself explains why some Khārijites applied these labels to those (*qa’ada*, ‘non-belligerents’) who did not engage militarily against their opponents, since by not engaging the non-belligerent elements they were, in effect, undermining their own religio-political stance. In the same way that they justified taking up the sword against those whom they saw as unbelievers, they had to explain the position of those who refused to do so: they did so by applying to these latter the very labels of *kuffār* or *mushrikūn*. Ultimately, there could only be one group of believers.

### **Thesis summary**

Based on the evidence presented in this study, it is unlikely that the *shafā’a* of the Prophet as it is supplicated for in the mosaic inscription in the Dome of the Rock was associated with the temporary-Hell fire punishment. Otherwise, we would be hard pressed to explain why Muslim thinkers waited 200 years before taking issue with the question of *shafā’a*, and Muslim sinners (*ahl al-kabā’ir*) escaping Hell. Indeed, the only way to explain why from the late third century onwards, *shafā’a* became controversial is to see it as a result of two processes: 1) the spread of the belief in *shafā’a*, especially through numerous Prophetic ḥadīths and its association with the

idea of temporary Hell; 2) the rise to prominence of Muʿtazilite thought which emphasized individual responsibility and, more importantly, which rejected the salvation of the unrepentant grave sinner. Of the early theological treatises we examined in ch. 2, none offered much insight into the question of temporary Hell. Considering that most of these works belong to the late first or early second century, their silence sits well with our own datable evidence: we can only document the controversy from ʿAbd al-Razzāq’s *Muṣannaf*, i.e. from c. 153/770 (the death date of Maʿmar b. Rāshid, from whom ʿAbd al-Razzāq transmits frequently) to 212/827 (the date of ʿAbd al-Razzāq’s death).<sup>62</sup> The other-world scheme implicit in all of these works is one of eternal Hell or eternal Paradise. We noted, however, that already at the time of the earliest (documented) exegetical work (sc. Muqātil), the idea of monotheists exiting from Hell was known, but that the idea of exiting from Hell was not accepted by those who read the Qurʾānic verses literally, as the traditions in the *Muṣannaf* of ʿAbd al-Razzāq attest. We also noted that, judging by the evidence of the Dome of the Rock inscription (c. 72-3/691-2), it was widely-held from an early stage that the Prophet would intercede for his community on the day of judgement. With the onset of the classical exegetical tradition (sc. Ṭabarī, d. 311/923), we begin to see how the traditionalists found Qurʾānic support for the idea of temporary Hell, while the *shafāʿa* of the Prophet was used to reinforce this idea.

To reiterate then, a provisional chronology of temporary Hell and *shafāʿa* may be something along these lines: from the early first century, the idea that the Prophet would intercede on the day of judgement was a popular one. At this early stage there

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<sup>62</sup> Even Cook’s more cautious dating of these works to the late Umayyad period sits well with our

is no evidence for the existence of the idea of temporary Hell, and the *shafā'a* of the Prophet on behalf of his community was probably envisaged as reassurance that no Muslim would end up in Hell. However, from the early second century, in response to the problem of the otherworldly fate of the Muslim sinner, some theologians (*ahl al-ḥadīth*) were proposing a compromise solution: the ultimate salvation of all those who professed the oneness of God from among the Muslim community. They argued, on the basis of numerous Prophetic ḥadīths, that the punishment of these sinners in Hell, if it took place, would only be temporary.<sup>63</sup> With the rise to prominence of prophetic traditions from about the second half of the second century, the idea of the Prophet's eschatological *shafā'a*, took on added significance, as is evidenced by the juxtaposition of *shafā'a* traditions alongside traditions about 'exiting from Hell'. It is with the crystallization of the classical tradition (c. 236-288/850-900), however, that the association of the Prophet's *shafā'a* and the temporary punishment of the Muslim sinner became complete.

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evidence from the *Muṣannaf*.

<sup>63</sup> Judging by the evidence of the *Muṣannaf* of 'Abd al-Razzāq (d. 212/827) and the transmitter Ma'mar b. Rāshid (d. 153/770). The only other early figures to whom statements in favour of temporary Hell are attributed are the traditionist Abū Bakr Hishām al-Dastawā'ī (d. 153/770) (van Ess, *TG*, vol. 2, p. 61), and Bishr b. Ghiyāth al-Marīsī (d. 218/833), see Shahrastānī, *Milal*, p. 166.

# **Appendices**

## APPENDIX 1

### The Classical Muslim creeds

In a Ḥanbalī creed dated to c. 236/850, possibly dictated by Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) himself:<sup>1</sup>

[11] Belief in the intercession of the Prophet for (a group of) people being brought out of Hell, and in the intercession of intercessors.

[13] When there is no intercession remaining for someone, God says, 'I am the most Merciful', and He inserts His hand into Jahannam and takes out from it what only He can reckon; if He wills, He takes them all out'.<sup>2</sup>

In a later Ḥanbalī creed, it is asserted:<sup>3</sup>

[7] Intercession on the day of resurrection is a reality. People will intercede for other people so that they do not enter Hell; and people will be taken out of Hell by the intercession of the intercessors. People will be taken out of Hell after entering it and spending in it what (time) God willed; they are then taken out of Hell. (Other) people will be in it everlastingly and for ever. These are the people of idolatry and counting false, and denial and unbelief in God.<sup>4</sup>

The so-called 'testament of Abū Ḥanīfa' is an anonymous work from his school, and must date to *post* 236/850; probably to *circa* 288/900 in view of the following statement, which only begins to appear in later ḥadīth compilations such as those of Ibn Māja (d. 273/886) and al-Tirmidhī (d. 285/898):<sup>5</sup>

[25] The intercession of our Prophet Muḥammad is a reality for all the People of Paradise, even for him who had committed a great sin.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. H. Laoust, *La profession de foi d'Ibn Baṭṭa* (Damascus, 1958), xv.

<sup>2</sup> W. M. Watt, *Islamic Creeds: a selection* (Edinburgh, 1994), pp. 30-31; the creed article numbers in brackets correspond to Watt's.

<sup>3</sup> See n. 2 above.

<sup>4</sup> Watt, *Creeds*, p. 36.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60; also discussed by Wensinck, *Creed*, pp. 125ff., although his dating of this creed to before

In a late Ḥanafī creed, known as the *Fiqh Akbar II*, dated to c. 391/1000:<sup>6</sup>

[20] The intercession of prophets is a reality. The intercession of our Prophet on behalf of believers who have committed sins, even great sins and deserved punishment, is certainly real.

Al-Ash‘arī (260-324/873-935) states in his creed:<sup>7</sup>

[26] They, the people of sunna and ḥadīth, assert the intercession of the Messenger of God, and that it is on behalf of the grave sinners of his community.

[31] They, the people of sunna and ḥadīth, believe that by reason of the intercession of the Messenger of God, God will bring out a group of monotheists from Hell, according to what has been related from the Messenger of God.

Al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 322/933), a Ḥanafī from Egypt, writes, “the following is an exposition of the creed of the people of sunna and the community according to the school of jurists of the religious body, Abū Ḥanīfa, Abū Yūsuf al-Anṣārī and Abū ‘Abdallāh al-Shaybānī:

[11] The intercession which He has kept in store for them is a reality, as it is narrated in the ḥadīths.<sup>8</sup>

[25] Those who commit grave sins are in Hell, but not everlastingly if, when they died, they were monotheists, even though after they met God they did not repent and acknowledge (their sins). They are in the sphere of God’s will and judgement...then in His mercy, and at the intercession of intercessors among the people obeying Him, He removes them from Hell and raises them to His Paradise.”<sup>9</sup>

The following is taken from the creed of the Mālikī jurist al-Qayrawānī (c. 316-386/928-996):<sup>10</sup>

[19] He whom God has punished in Hell is taken out from it by Him because of his faith and is brought into Paradise.

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Ibn Ḥanbal (see p. 178) is not generally accepted.

<sup>6</sup> Wensinck, *Creed*, pp. 188ff.

<sup>7</sup> Watt, *Creed*, p. 44.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 70f.

[20] Through the intercession of the Prophet for the grave sinners of his community, God takes him (the grave sinner) out of Hell.

The following is the creed of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111):<sup>11</sup>

[23] He (the person of faith) should also believe that monotheists will be taken out of Hell after punishment. As a result, by the grace of God, no monotheist will remain in Jahannam and no monotheist will be everlastingly in Hell.

[24] He should also believe in the intercession of the Prophets, then of the scholars, then of the martyrs, then of the other believers...He who remains of the believers without an intercessor will be taken out by God's grace. No believer will be everlastingly in Hell, but will be taken out from it provided there is an atom's weight of faith in his heart.

This next statement is taken from the creed of al-Nasafī (461-537/1068-1142), the famous Māturīdī scholar of Samarqand:<sup>12</sup>

[19] The intercession of the Messengers and of the elite is established for the case of those committing grave sins. Those believers who commit grave sins do not remain everlastingly in Hell.

Finally, the Ash'arite theologian from Shirāz, al-Ījī (c. 680-756/1281-1355) states:<sup>13</sup>

[19] The Muslim who has committed a grave sin does not abide everlastingly in Hell, but finally goes to Paradise...intercession is a reality in the case of those to whom the Merciful has granted it. The intercession of the Messenger of God is for those of his community who have (committed) grave sins; he intercedes on their behalf and his request is not refused.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

## APPENDIX 2

### The sermon of Abū Hamza al-Khārijī

The following section is from one version of the sermon:<sup>1</sup>

*wa-ammā ikhwānunā min hādhihi sh-shī'a fa-laysū bi-ikhwāninā fī-d-dīn...shī'atun  
zāharat bi-kitābi llāh wa-a'lanat l-firyatu 'alā llāhi lā yarji'ūna ilā naẓarin nāfidhin fī  
l-qur'ān wa-lā 'aqlin bālighin fī l-fiqh wa-lā taftīshin 'an ḥaḳīqati ṣ-ṣawāb qad  
qalladū dīnahum ahrā'ahum wa-ja'alū dīnahum 'aṣabiyyatan li-ḥizbin lazimūhu wa-  
atā'ūhu fī jamī'i mā yaqūluhu lahum ghayyan kāna aw rushdan aw ḍalālatan aw  
hudān yantazirūna d-duwal fī raj'ati l-mawtā wa-yu'minūna bi-l-ba'thi qabla s-sā'ati  
wa-yadda'ūna 'ilma l-ghaybi li-makhlūq lā ya'lamu aḥaduhum mā fī dākḥili baytihi  
bal lā ya'lamu mā yanṭawī 'alayhi thawbuhu aw yuḥwīhi jismuhu yanqimūna l-  
ma'āṣiya 'alā ahlihā wa-yu'lamūna idhā zāharū bihā wa-lā ya'rifūna l-makhraja  
minhā jufātun fī d-dīn qalīlatun 'uquluhum qad qalladū ahla baytin mina l-'arabi  
dīnahum wa-za'amū anna muwālātihim lahum tughnīhim 'ani l-a'māli ṣ-ṣāliḥa wa-  
tunjīhim min 'iqābi l-a'māli s-sayyi'a...*

“As regards these brethren of ours from this “party”, they are not our brothers in religion...(they are) a “party” who have put the Book of God behind its back (read: *zāharat bi?*) and has proclaimed calumny against God. They have no recourse to penetrative inquiry of (what is in) the Qur'ān, nor any extensive reason from understanding, nor do they search for the truth of the right way. They have entrusted their religion to those prattlers from among them, and they have made their religion the zealous partisanship of a band to whom they adhere. They obey it (sc. the band) in everything it tells them, regardless of whether it is sensible or erroneous, misguided or well-guided. They await turns (of fortune) at the return of the dead, believing in a resurrection before the Hour, and alleging that a (mere) creature has knowledge of divine secret; when not one of them knows what (that creature hides) inside of his own house, less, what his garment covers or what his body contains. They are hostile to those who commit sins, yet they conspicuously commit them, not knowing a way out of them. They are uncouth in religion and short of understanding. They have entrusted their religion to a house from among the Arabs, claiming that their friendship to them avails them of (the need for) good deeds and delivers them from the punishment due to evil deeds”.

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<sup>1</sup> Iṣfahānī, *Aghānī*, vol. 23, p. 243.

### APPENDIX 3

#### The Shī'ite concept of salvation in poetry

Thus, al-Kumayt b. Zayd al-Asadī (d. 126/743) professes:<sup>1</sup> [ṭawīl]

*ilā n-nafari l-bīḍi l-ladhīna bi-ḥubbihim  
ilā llāhi fīmā nābanī ataqarrabū  
banī Hāshimin raḥṭi n-nabiyyi fa-innanī  
bihim wa-lahum arḍā mirāran wa-aghḍabū*

“To those pure ones by whose love I seek favour with God when I am afflicted, the sons of Hāshim, the kin of the Prophet, for I am satisfied with them and I stand up for them time and again”.

In fact, Kumayt is derided by two groups of people precisely for his love for the family of the Prophet:<sup>2</sup> [ṭawīl]

*fa-ṭā'ifatun qad akfaratnī bi-ḥubbikum  
wa-ṭā'ifatun qālū musī'un wa-mudhribū  
fa-mā sā'anī takfīru hātayka minhumū  
wa-lā 'aybu hātayka llatī hiya 'aybu*

“On account of my love for you, some have branded me an unbeliever, while others say (that I am) a wrong-doer and a sinner, but their branding me an unbeliever does me no harm, nor is that which they deride me for anything to be ashamed of.”

In the same way, one finds that poems by al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī (d. 173/789) frequently emphasize that it is the love of Muḥammad's progeny that is the key to salvation:<sup>3</sup> [kāmīl]

*baytu r-risālati wa-n-nubuwwati wa-lladhī  
-na na'uddhum li-dhunūbinā shufa'ā'ā  
innī 'aliqtu bi-ḥubbihim mutamassikan  
arjū bi-dhāka mina l-ilāhi riḍā'ā*

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<sup>1</sup> J. Horovitz, *Die Hāshimijāt des Kumait* (Leiden, 1904), p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35f.

<sup>3</sup> *Dīwān al-Sayyid al-Ḥimyarī*, ed. Sh. H. Shakar (Beirut, 1966), p. 53, no. 5.

“The house of the message and prophethood, and of those whom we count as intercessors for our sins; I am devoted and attached to their love, by this I hope for God’s satisfaction”.

Again, the same point is made by Ḥimyarī:<sup>4</sup> [khafīf]

*kadhaba z-zā'imūna anna 'Aliyyan  
lan yunajjī muḥibbahu min hanātī  
qad wa-rabbī dakhaltu jannata 'adnin  
wa-'afā lī l-ilāhu 'an sayyi'ātī*

“They lie those who claim that ‘Alī shall not deliver the one who loves him (i.e. who loves ‘Alī) from evil; by my Lord, I will have entered the Garden of Eden and God will have forgiven me my misdeeds”.

For a third example, we have the following verses:<sup>5</sup> [basīt]

*yā āla Yāsīna yā thiqātī  
antum mawāliyya fī ḥayātī  
wa-'uddatī idh danat wafātī  
bikum ladā maḥsharī najātī*

“O family of Yāsīn, o trustworthy ones, you are my friends in life and the ones I count on when death draws near; through you I will be delivered when I am called to the Gathering”.

On this occasion, the poet goes so far as to say that those who seek other than the family of Muḥammad will actually end up in Hell:<sup>6</sup> [kāmil]

*innā nadīnu bi-ḥubbi āli Muḥammadin  
dīnan wa-man yuḥbibhumū yastawjibī  
minnā l-mawaddata wa-l-walā'a wa-man yurid  
badalan bi-āli Muḥammadin lā yuḥbabī  
wa-matā yamut yaridi l-jaḥīma wa-lā yarid  
ḥawḍa r-rasūli wa-in yaridhu yuḍrabī*

“We profess love of Muḥammad’s family a religion for us, and he who loves them will warrant our love and friendship, and he who wants other than the

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<sup>4</sup> *Dīwān*, p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61f.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

family of Muḥammad shall not be loved, and after he dies he will be taken towards Hell-fire and shall not approach the Messenger's basin, and if he were to approach it he will be smitten".

Similarly:<sup>7</sup> [kāmil]

*wa-ilayhimū ṭarabī wa-fihimu bughyatī*  
*wa-bihim u'ammilu fī l-jināni khulūdā*

"It is with them that I rejoice and in them lies my desire, and through them I hope for an eternity in the Gardens".

In another couplet, we are told that the imām guards from Hell-fire:<sup>8</sup> [basīṭ]

*huwa l-imāmu lladhī narjū n-najāta bihī*  
*min ḥarri nārin 'alā l-a'dā'i musta'irī*

"The imām through whom we seek deliverance from the heat of a Fire ignited over enemies".

Although accusations of Shī'ism against him are unfounded, the same idea is expressed by the famous Tamīmī poet al-Farazdaq Hammām b. Ghālib (d. 110/728):<sup>9</sup>

[basīṭ]

*min ma' sharin ḥubbuhum dīnun wa-bughḍuhumū*  
*kufrun wa-qurbuhumū manjan wa-mu'taṣamū*  
*yustadfa'u s-sū'u wa-l-balwā bi-ḥubbihimū*  
*wa-yustarābu bihi l-iḥsānu wa-n-ni'amū*

"From a company whose love is (itself) religion and hatred of them is unbelief, and being near them is safety and a haven, through their love evil and affliction are kept at bay, and goodness and blessings are brought together".

Note also the verses by the famous Shī'ite poet Kuthayyir 'Azza (d. 105/723):<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Dīwān*, p. 170.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 239.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Marzubānī, Muḥammad b. 'Imrān, *Akhbār shu'arā' al-Shī'a*, ed. M. H. al-Amīnī (Beirut, 1968), p. 66 (no. 14); on him, see R. Blachère in *EI2*, s.v. "Farazdaq"; also al-'Āmilī, Muḥsin al-Ḥusaynī, *A'yān al-Shī'a*, ed. H. al-Amīn (Beirut, 1951-), vol. 51, pp. 63ff.

<sup>10</sup> *Dīwān Kuthayyir 'Azzā*, ed. I. 'Abbās (Beirut, 1971), p. 494; on the poet, see I. 'Abbās in *EI2*, s.v.

[kāmīl]

*in imraʿan kānat masāwiʿuhū  
ḥubba n-nabiyyi la-ghayru dhī ʿatbi  
wa-banī Abī Ḥasanin wa-wālidihim  
man tāba fī l-arḥāmi wa-ṣ-ṣulbī  
atarawna dhanban an nuḥibbahumū  
bal ḥubbuhum kaffāratu l-dhanbī*

“If a person’s bad traits were his love of the Prophet, then he is not to be blamed; nor if it were (love) of the sons of Abū Ḥasan and their father, those who were good when they were in the loins and in the womb; do you think it a sin that we love them? Nay, their love is what purges sin.”

The Shīʿite poet Diʿbil b. ʿAlī al-Khuzāʿī (d. 246/860) also conveys the same ideas in

his verse:<sup>11</sup> [ṭawīl]

*fa-kayfa wa-min annā yuṭālabu zulfatan  
ila llāhi baʿda ṣ-ṣawmi wa-ṣ-ṣalawātī  
siwā ḥubbi abnāʿi n-nabiyyi wa-rahṭihī  
wa-bughḍi banī z-zarqāʿi wa-l-ʿabalāti*

“How and from where other than fasting and prayer can one seek closeness to God, if not by loving the sons of the Prophet and his kinsfolk, and hating the sons of Zarqāʿ (sc. mother of Marwān b. al-Ḥakam) and the children of ʿAbla (sc. Umayyads)”.

According to Diʿbil it is love of the family of the Prophet that ensures a place in

Paradise:<sup>12</sup> [ṭawīl]

*fa-innī mina r-rahmāni arjū bi-ḥubbihim  
ḥayātan ladā l-firdawsi ghayra batātī*

“Through their love I hope from the Merciful One a life in Paradise uninterrupted”.

Again, being ‘attached’ to the progeny of the Prophet, to the exclusion of others,

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“Kuthayyir”.

<sup>11</sup> *Dīwān*, p. 126..

brings eventual salvation:<sup>13</sup> [kāmīl]

*wa-qṭaʿ ḥibālata man yurīdu siwāhumū  
fī ḥubbihim taḥlul bi-dāri najāti*

“Sever the net of those who seek other than them, for, by loving them you shall end up in the abode of deliverance”.

Other verses attributed to Diʿbil are the following:<sup>14</sup> [ṭawīl]

*laqad āmanat nafsī bikum fī ḥayātihā  
wa-innī la-arjū l-amna ʿinda mamātī  
idhā lam nunājī llāha fī ṣalawātinā  
bi-asmāʾihim lam tuqbalī ṣ-ṣalawātī*

“My soul has been safe through you during life, and I hope for it security also in death, for, if we do not whisper their names during prayers to God, our prayers are not accepted”.

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>14</sup> Al-Marzubānī, *Akḥbār*, p. 101.

## APPENDIX 4

### The Dome of the Rock mosaic inscription

The mosaic inscription runs along the outer and inner faces of the octagonal arcade inside the Dome, and it ends with a foundation inscription of 72 A.H., which secures the date of the construction of the building to the year 691-92 A.D. Beginning at the inner face of the octagonal arcade, from the south side:<sup>1</sup>

**S:** “There is no god but God alone, without partner. To Him belongs sovereignty and to Him belongs praise. He gives life and death; He is omnipotent [conflation of Q. 64/1 and 57/2]. Muḥammad is the servant of God and His messenger.

**SE:** God and His angels make blessings on the Prophet. O you who believe, make blessings on him and pray him peace [Q. 33/56]. May God bless Him and the peace and compassion of God be upon him. O people of the Book: do not exaggerate in your religion

**E:** and say only the truth about God. The Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, was but a Messenger of God, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. So believe in God and His messengers, and say not ‘three’, desist

**NE:** it is better for you. God is only one god. Exalted He is- that he should have a son! His is all that is in the heavens and on the earth. And God suffices as a guardian [cf. Q. 4/171]. The Messiah will never disdain to be

**N:** God’s servant, nor will the favoured angels. Whoever disdains to serve Him and is proud, He will gather them all before Him [Q. 4/172]. Oh God, bless Your messenger and Your servant Jesus son of Mary. Peace be on him the day he was born, and the day he dies, and the day he shall be raised alive [cf. Q. 19/33]. Such was Jesus son of Mary, (this is) the statement of the truth concerning which they are in doubt. It does not befit God that He should take a son. Glory be to Him.

**W:** When He decrees a thing, He only says to it ‘Be’, and it is. God is my lord and your lord. So serve Him. That is a straight path [cf. Q. 19/34-36]. God bears witness that there is no god but Him, as do the angels and the men of knowledge. He acts with justice. There is no god but Him

**SW:** the all-mighty, the all-wise [Q. 3/18]. Religion with God is Islam. Those who were given the scripture only differed after knowledge came to them, out of envy between them. As for whoever denies the signs of God, then God is swift to call to account [Q. 3/19]”.

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<sup>1</sup> The entire mosaic inscription can be examined in C. Kessler’s reproduction, “Abd al-Malik’s inscription in the Dome of the Rock: a reconsideration”, *JRAS* 1 (1970), pp. 2-14, see pp. 4-9; also E. Whelan, “Forgotten witness: evidence for the early codification of the Qur’ān”, *JAOS* 118, i (1998), pp. 4-5 for a translation of the inscriptions; Hoyland also translated the text of the inscription, *Islam*, p. 697.

The inscription continues on the south-east corner of the outer arcade:<sup>2</sup>

**S:** “In the name of God, the Merciful the Compassionate. There is no god but God alone. He has no associate. Say, ‘He is God the one, the eternal. He did not beget nor was He begotten, there is none equal to Him’ [Q. 112]. Muḥammad is the messenger of God. May God give him blessing.

**SW:** In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no god but God alone. He has no associate. Muḥammad is the messenger of God. God and His angels make blessings unto the Prophet.

**W:** O you who believe, make blessings on him and pray him peace [Q. 33/56]. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no god but God alone. Praise be

**NW:** to God who has not taken a son, and who has no partner in dominion, nor any partner through humbleness. Magnify him greatly [Q. 17/111]. Muḥammad is the messenger of God

**N:** may God and His angels and His messengers make blessings on him, and the peace and compassion of God be upon him. In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no god but God alone. He has no associate.

**NE:** To Him belongs sovereignty and to Him belongs praise. He gives life and death, and He is omnipotent [conflation of Q. 64/1 and 57/2]. Muḥammad is the messenger of God, may God bless him and **accept his intercession on the Day of Resurrection for his community.**<sup>3</sup>

**E:** In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. There is no god but God alone. He has no associate. Muḥammad is the Messenger of God, may God bless him. This dome was built by the servant of God

**SE:** ‘Abd [*Allāh the Imām al-Maʾmūn, Commander*]<sup>4</sup> of the Faithful, in the year seventy two. May God accept it from him and be pleased with him. Amen, Lord of the worlds, to God belongs praise”.

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<sup>2</sup> Item no. 9 of *RCEA*, vol. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Wa-taqabbal shafāʾatahu yawm al-qiyāma fī ummatihi* (this supplication can actually be seen in the photograph stills in O. Grabar and S. Nuseibeh, *The Dome of the Rock* (New York, 1996), p. 98, upper left corner of page).

<sup>4</sup> Brackets enclose the poorly-executed substitution of ‘Abd al-Malik’s name by that of al-Maʾmūn.

## APPENDIX 5

### Attestations of the Prophet's *shafā'a*:

Other early attestations of the Prophet's *shafā'a* can be found in the historical narratives. The following are the only ones known to me:

(a) In an exhortative speech to the Kufans (year 61/680), Zuhayr b. al-Qayn al-Bajālī cries:

*fa-wa-llāhi lā tanālu shafā'atu Muḥammadin, ṣl'm, qawman haraqū dimā'a dhurriyatihī wa-ahla baytihī wa-qatalū man naṣarahum wa-dhabba 'an ḥarīmihim.*<sup>1</sup>

“By God, the intercession of the Muḥammad shall not be forthcoming to people who shed the blood of his progeny and his family and who kill those who aid them and protect their womenfolk”.

(b) A man of the Banū Tamīm called ‘Abdallāh b. Ḥawzah is involved in an aggressive exchange with al-Ḥusayn (c. year 61/680):

*qāla yā Ḥusayn yā Ḥusayn fa-qāla Ḥusayn mā tashā'? qāla abshir bi-n-nār qāla kallā innī aqdimu 'alā rabbīn raḥīmīn wa-shafī'in muṭā'.<sup>2</sup>*

“He said: Ḥusayn, Ḥusayn! The latter replied: What do you want? He said: Expect Hell-fire! He (al-Ḥusayn) said: Not quite! I expect to meet a merciful Lord and an intercessor who is accepted (sc. the Prophet)”.

(c) While the poet Jamīl (-Buthayna, d. 82/701) lies on his deathbed, a certain ‘Abbās

b. Sahl enters upon him:

(Jamīl): “What do you say of someone who has never touched alcohol, never fornicated, never committed theft, never killed anyone and who bears witness that there is no god but Allāh?”

(‘Abbās): “I imagine that he has attained salvation and I wish for him that he be in Paradise. Who is this person?”

(Jamīl): “Myself”.

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<sup>1</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 332.

<sup>2</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 337.

(‘Abbās): “By God, I cannot imagine that after twenty years of trying to seduce Buthayna (with poetry) you could be so sure (about salvation)!”.

(Jamīl): “I am (about to be) in the first day of the next world and am in the last day of this world. May I never attain the intercession of Muḥammad (lā nālatnī shafā‘atu Muḥammad), peace and blessings be on him, if I ever laid my hands on her in wrongful intent”.<sup>3</sup>

(d) After the severed head of al-Ḥusayn is brought to the Umayyad court, a companion of the Prophet is outraged when he sees the caliph Yazīd mutilating the head:

Abū Barza al-Aslamī said, “Are you poking Ḥusayn’s mouth with your cane? Take your cane away from his mouth! How often have I seen the Messenger of God kiss it. As for you, Yazīd, know that on the Day of Resurrection you will come forth and have Ibn Ziyād as your advocate (*shafi‘*). But this man (i.e. Ḥusayn) will have Muḥammad as his advocate.” Then he got up and turned away.<sup>4</sup>

(e) Qays b. ‘Abbād al-Ḍab‘ī (d. 85/704), a Basran who had joined Ibn al-Ash‘ath’s rebellion, was asked by ‘Ubaydullāh b. Ziyād:

“What do you think of al-Ḥusayn b. ‘Alī?”, to which he replied, “his grandfather will be his advocate, but as for you, your advocate will be your father”. Ibn Ziyād is infuriated by the response.<sup>5</sup>

(f) ‘Abdallāh b. Wāl al-Taymī at the grave of the recently buried al-Ḥusayn:

‘By God, I believe that, of all Muḥammad’s community, al-Ḥusayn, his brother and his father are the best means (*wasīla*) to God on the Day of Resurrection”.<sup>6</sup>

The historical background for the following poems is the battle of Karbalā’ (61/680),

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<sup>3</sup> Ibn Kathīr, Ismā‘īl b. ‘Umar, *al-Bidāya wa’l-nihāya fī’l-tārīkh* (Cairo, 1932-39), vol. 9, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 383; I have followed I. K. A. Howard’s translation here, *The History of al-Ṭabarī: an annotated translation*, vol. XIX (New York, 1990), p. 176.

<sup>5</sup> Abū’l-‘Arab Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Tamīmī, *Kitāb al-miḥan*, ed. Y. W. al-Jabbūrī (Beirut, 1983), p. 367: *mā taqūl fī l-Ḥusayni bni ‘Alī? ammā huwa fa-yashfa‘ lahu jadduhu wa-ammā anta fa-yashfa‘ laka abūk.*

<sup>6</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, II, 547.

in which al-Ḥusayn was killed:<sup>7</sup>

(1) al-Ṭirimmāḥ b. ‘Adī al-Ṭā’ī (*floruit c. 81/700*):<sup>8</sup> [sarī’]

*yā nāqatī lā tazja’ī min zajrī  
wa-mḏī binā qabla ṭulū’i l-fajrī  
bi-khayri fityānin wa-khayri s-safri  
āli rasūli llāhi āli l-fakhrī  
l-mājidi l-ḥurri r-raḥibi ṣ-ṣadri  
aṣābahu llāhu bi-kulli khayri  
ibni amīri l-mu’minīna ṭ-ṭuhrī  
wa-ibni sh-shafī’i min ‘adhābi l-qabrī*

“She-camel of mine, do not fear my constant prodding, and carry us along before dawn breaks, with the best of men and travellers, to the House of the Prophet, the House of glorious and unshackled pride, and generous of heart. May God target him with all the best, the son of the Commander of the Faithful, the pure one, and the son of the intercessor against the punishment in the grave”.

(2) al-Ḥurr b. Yazīd al-Tamīmī (killed with al-Ḥusayn at Karbalā’ in 61/680):<sup>9</sup> [ṭawīl]

*huwa l-mawtu fa-ṣna’ [foot missing] mā anta ṣāni’ū  
fa-anta bi-ka’si l-mawti lā budda jāri’ū  
wa-ḥāmi ‘an ibni l-muṣṭafā wa-ḥarīmihī  
la’allaka talqā ḥaṣda mā-anta zārī’ū  
laqad khāba qawmun khālafū llāha rabbahum  
yurīdūna hadma d-dīni wa-llāhu shāri’ū  
yurīdūna ‘amdan qatla āli Muḥammadin  
wa-jadduhumū yawma l-qiyāmati shāfi’ū*

“Death shall come, so do to yourself what you will. For, you shall surely swallow from the cup of death. You are defending the son of the elect one and his women, perchance you shall reap what you here sow. Failed are those who have opposed God their Lord, they want to destroy the religion, while God makes things manifest. They intentionally want to kill those from the House of the Prophet, even though their grandfather is the intercessor on the Day of Judgement”.

(4) Anon.:<sup>10</sup> [wāfir]

*atarjū ummatun qatalat Ḥusaynan*

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<sup>7</sup> In the following section taken from a collection of Shī’ite poetry, I do not always cite the poems in their entirety, only the verses which are of interest; consequently, I sometimes omit intervening verses retaining only enough to clarify the sense and context of the verses which interest us.

<sup>8</sup> *Dīwān ash’ār al-tashayyu’*, p. 224.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

*shafā'ata jaddihī yawma l-ḥisābī*  
*fa-lā wa-llāhi laysa lahum shafī'un*  
*wa-hum yawma l-qiyāmati fī l-ʿadhābī*

'Do a people who have killed al-Ḥusayn hope for the intercession of his grandfather on the Day of Reckoning. Nay, by God, they shall have no intercessor, and on the Day of Resurrection they shall be in chastisement'.

Some attestations come from late Shīʿite sources:

(5) Masʿūd b. ʿAbdallāh al-Qāynī:<sup>11</sup> [kāmil]

*lā budda an tarida l-qiyāmata Fāṭimā*  
*wa-qamīṣuhā bi-dami l-Ḥusayni mulattakhū*  
*waylun liman shufaʿāʿuhū khuṣamāʿuhū*  
*wa-ṣ-ṣūru fī yawmi l-qiyāmāti yunfakhū*

'Fāṭima shall surely appear in the Resurrection with her garment drenched in the blood of al-Ḥusayn. Woe to any whose advocates shall be his enemies when the trumpet is blown on the Day of Resurrection'.

(6) Anon.:<sup>12</sup> [basīṭ]

*ḥasbu lladhī qatala l-Ḥusaynā*  
*mina l-khasārati wa-n-nadāmā*  
*inna sh-shafīʿa ladā l-ilāhī*  
*khaṣīmuḥu yawma l-qiyāmā*

"It suffices of regret and loss for him who killed al-Ḥusayn (i.e. by way of punishment) that the intercessor before God on the Day of Resurrection shall be his enemy".

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<sup>11</sup> Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 108, also here for Fāṭima's intercession in particular.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Shahrāshūb, *Manāqib*, vol. 3, p. 109.

## APPENDIX 6

### On the origin of the idea of Muhammad as *shafī*

Just because Muslim tradition associated the Prophet's *shafā'a* with prevailing monotheist ideas, the designation of the Prophet a *shafī* does not have to issue from this same source. In other words, the proclamation of the Prophet *shafī* in the Dome of the Rock, even though it fitted the 'monotheist language' of the Syro-palestinian milieu,<sup>1</sup> might not have been born within this same language. Even if we are prepared to accept the idea that the Umayyads, or their court theologians, introduced the idea of the Prophet's intercession to the Syrian and Palestinian Muslims,<sup>2</sup> we have to presume that the idea was as old as Islam itself, i.e., that it went back to the Ḥijāz. What the Marwānids had done was simply to publicize the concept in a context that suited their immediate milieu: establishing the place of Muḥammad among the list of monotheist prophets in the 'land of prophets', and declaring the Arabian prophet's supremacy over these predecessors.

Certainly the model for the 'religious' man, for whom the label *shafī*, 'intercessor', would not have been out of place, could be found before and during the time of the Muḥammad's prophethood: be it the 'holy' man of late antiquity,

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. A. D. Khoury, *Polemique Byzantine contre l'islam: viii<sup>e</sup>-xiii<sup>e</sup> S.* (Leiden, 1972), p. 43, points to the influence of Christianity on Islam, suggesting that after the Prophet's death Muslims were concerned to establish certain 'credentials' for Muḥammad like those of Jesus, so that Muḥammad was 'Christianized', while Jesus was 'Islamicized'. This tendency, however, had already been noted by Goldziher (*MS II*, pp. 382ff.), although he identified it as a later development, the earliest conception of the Prophet being quite the opposite (*ibid.*, pp. 278f.), be it in the Qur'ān or in the *khaṣā'iṣ* material, such as can be found in the ḥadīth collections.

<sup>2</sup> The question of the relationship between rulers and traditionists has been posed in a different context by M. Lecker, "Biographical notes on Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī", *JSS* 41 (1996), pp. 21-63, esp. 25ff.

frequently sought on account of his ‘talent’ for intercession,<sup>3</sup> or Middle eastern monks who, “as mediators could conciliate God with their prayers”,<sup>4</sup> or indeed, the Jewish rabbi of the 5<sup>th</sup> century (A.D.) whose “participation in God’s holiness and...power” meant that he was a “mediator of salvation.”<sup>5</sup> But to what extent can we be sure of the intrusion of such figures into the Ḥijāz?<sup>6</sup> It seems very unlikely that the phenomenon of monotheist ‘holy men’ was unknown,<sup>7</sup> and yet the lack of direct historical evidence prevents a definitive historical verdict.<sup>8</sup> In any case, it is among Muḥammad’s earliest followers, those of his native milieu, that we would expect the label of *shafīʿ* to have emerged.

I suggest that it was not the association of Muḥammad with the figure of the ‘holy man’, less the stories about monotheist prophets, that prompted his early followers to call him a *shafīʿ*,<sup>9</sup> but a different social dynamic altogether. This dynamic stems from the way tribesmen perceived their leaders. Considering that Islam emerged from a

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<sup>3</sup> P. Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity” in *Society and the Holy* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 122, 126f., 127 n. 119, 136-145.

<sup>4</sup> J. Neusner, *Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism in Talmudic Babylonia* (Atlanta, 1990), p. 164; also p. 166.

<sup>5</sup> J. Neusner, *Talmudic Judaism in Sasanian Babylonia: essays and studies* (Leiden, 1976), pp. 53-55, 57 and rabbis as “mediators of salvation”, p. 77.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, there were Jewish communities in the Ḥijāz: G. D. Newby, *A history of the Jews of Arabia: from ancient times to their eclipse under Islam*, Columbia, 1988, pp. 49ff.), but it is impossible to know the nature of religious interaction between them and the Arabs.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. I. Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the sixth century* (Washington, 1995), vol. 1, pp. 850-7, suggests that the Christian penetration into the Ḥijāz is difficult to gauge and can only have left faint traces in Mecca and Medina; but cf. Q. 24/37: *rijālun lā tulhīhim tijāritun wa-lā bayʿun ʿan dhikri llāhi wa-iqāmi ṣ-ṣalāti*, suggests that monotheist practice of the Christian type was not unknown.

<sup>8</sup> C. F. Robinson, “Prophecy and holy men in early Islam”, in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: essays on the contribution of Peter Brown*, eds. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward (Oxford, 1999), pp. 241-62.

<sup>9</sup> If language is any clue to culture-specific ideas, then we should point out that *sh-f-ʿ* has no cognates in Hebrew or Aramaic, or Syriac for that matter, and it does not seem to be a calque on any other semitic root; it would be useful to know what Jews or Christians used in pre-Islamic Arabia to express the verb ‘to intercede’ when translating biblical stories into Arabic, but no such evidence survives, since if any such exchange took place it was oral and periphrastic at most, see M. Polliack, *The Karaite tradition of Arabic Bible translation* (Leiden, 1997), pp. 3f.: the oldest Arabic translation of the New Testament

tribal society, the qualities associated with the office and person of the tribal chief would have naturally been assumed by Muḥammad when he became the head of the fledgling Muslim community. After all, it is acknowledged that within the ‘psyche’ of a tribe, little distinction is made between political and religious leadership since both are seen to reside in the figure of the tribal chief;<sup>10</sup> even when the tribal chief’s political authority has been eroded he remains a sacred figure, undoubtedly on account of his power to intervene in and resolve disputes.<sup>11</sup> In pre-Islamic Arabia, this veneration was frequently articulated by the root *sh-f-ʿ* (*shafiʿ*). The person who could intercede in disputes, effect prisoner-exchanges and arrange otherwise impossible meetings, was as much admired for this quality as he was sought for those services. For, the semantic range of the Arabic root *sh-f-ʿ* allows for more than just the significance of ‘intercessor’.<sup>12</sup> The pre-Islamic poetry suggests that ‘intercession’ is only performed by those of sufficient stature, i.e., those who are able, on account of special status or kinship, to get to the individual with whom the intercession is

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dates to 859 A.D., the Mt. Sinai MS, codex 151.

<sup>10</sup> J. Chelhod, *Introduction a la sociologie de l’Islam: de l’animisme a l’universalisme* (Paris, 1958), esp. ch. 2: (pp. 50-51) on the veneration of the tribal ancestor whose name is invoked at the moment of attack in order to secure his intervention and is thereafter repeated as a sort of battle-cry; (pp. 54, 61f.) on the chief as the supreme guide in everything, including religion.

<sup>11</sup> E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *The Nuer: a description of the modes of livelihood and political institutions of a Nilotic people* (New York, Oxford, 1940), pp. 5f, 163f. So venerated is this role of ‘mediator’ within tribal societies that, at least in modern times, it is known to pass on to another figure associated with the tribe who might otherwise perform strictly religious rituals: the case of a N. W. Pakistani tribe where a saint exists alongside the chief and must be present in any mediation: F. Barth, *Political Leadership among the Swat Pathans*, London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology no. 19 (London and New Brunswick, 1959), pp. 96-103, 134.

<sup>12</sup> In an early Arab Christian composition the verb *w-s-t* is used to refer to Christ as the mediator between men and God: *wa’l-masīḥ huwa al-wasīṭ baynanā wa-bayna allāh* (S. Kh. Samīr, “The earliest Arab apologetic for Christianity (c. 750 A.D.)” in *Christian Arab apologetics during the ‘Abbāsīd period (750-1258)*, Leiden, 1994, p. 97); modern Arabic bibles, of course, use *sh-f-ʿ*. But note how in present-day Middle East *w-s-t* is used to refer to mediation in secular affairs, while *sh-f-ʿ* is restricted to the religious, especially the Shīʿite imāms, see A. Rassam, “*Al-tabaʿiyya*: power, patronage and marginal groups in northern Iraq”, in *Patrons and clients in Mediterranean societies*, eds. E. Gellner and J. Waterbury (London, 1977), pp. 157- 66.

addressed (frequently the tribal chief).<sup>13</sup> To be able to intervene as a *shāfi* was considered praise-worthy.<sup>14</sup> There are numerous examples in the historical and literary tradition, and we will make do with one or two. The high regard with which those who ‘intercede’ are held, is suggested by the following lines of the poet al-A<sup>ʿ</sup>shā (d. c. 4/625):<sup>15</sup> [sarī<sup>ʿ</sup>]

*wa-sh-shāfi<sup>ʿ</sup>ūna l-jū<sup>ʿ</sup>a ʿan jārihim  
ḥattā yurā ka-l-ghuṣuni n-nāḍirī*

“And those who join themselves to (the predicament of) the refugee so that he is freed from hunger, and becomes as radiant as the green branch”.

In a similar spirit al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī (*floruit* 580-600 A.D.) praises the men of the Ghassānid court who had helped him effect the release of several of his fellow tribesmen from Rabī<sup>ʿ</sup>a and Muḍar; they are praised for giving him otherwise impossible access to an audience with the king:<sup>16</sup> [ṭawīl]

*wa-li-llāhi ʿaynā man raʿā ahla qubbatin  
aḍarra li-man ʿādaw wa-akthara nāfi<sup>ʿ</sup>ā  
wa-ʿzama ahlāman wa-akthara sayyidan  
wa-afdala mashfū<sup>ʿ</sup>an ilayhi wa-shāfi<sup>ʿ</sup>ā  
matā talqahum lā talqa li-l-bayti ʿawratan  
wa-lā ḍ-ḍayfa mamnū<sup>ʿ</sup>an wa-lā j-jāra ḍāʿi<sup>ʿ</sup>ā*

“Joyous are the eyes which see bedouins, while injurious to their enemies, most useful, most wise, most supreme, the best of those with whom intercession may be sought and the best of intercessors (themselves). Whenever one encounters them one finds no home deficient, no visitor unwelcome and no refugee in misery”.

Al-Farazdaq (d. 110 or 112/728 or 730) composed the following eulogy of Naṣr b.

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<sup>13</sup> Note how in this respect when later Muslims sought scriptural proof for Muḥammad’s *shafāʿa*, they decided on Q. 17/79, which says that God will raise the Prophet to a ‘praise-worthy station’ (*maqām maḥmūd*); evidently, they believed it was a laudable status. Cf. the Muʿtazilite ʿAbd al-Jabbār’s remark that “the effect of intercession (*shafāʿa*) is to raise the status of the one who performs it, and is proof of the latter’s standing with the one with whom the intercession is sought”, *Sharḥ*, p. 688.

<sup>14</sup> E. Riad, “*Shafāʿa* dans le Coran”, *Orientalia Suecana* 30 (1981), pp. 37-62, esp. p. 40; Riad has collected a good number of pre-Islamic occurrences of the root *sh-f-ʿ*.

<sup>15</sup> *Dīwān al-A<sup>ʿ</sup>shā*, (Beirut, 1960), p. 38, line 19 (= line 51 of “Alqam lā tafah”).

Sayyār al-Laythī:<sup>17</sup> [ṭawīl]

*wa-anta mru'un in tus'ali l-khayra tu'tihī  
jazīlan wa-in tashfa' takun khayra shāfi'ī*

“You are one who when asked of his charity gives it in abundance, and who if he intercedes is an excellent intercessor.”

The following verses come from al-Mutanabbī (d. 355/965), eulogizing 'Alī b. Aḥmad al-Ṭā'ī:<sup>18</sup> [ṭawīl]

*ghamāmun 'alaynā mumṭirun laysa yuqshi'ū  
wa-lā l-barqu fihī khallaban ḥīna yalma'ū  
idhā 'aradat ḥājun ilayhi fa-nafsuhū  
ilā nafsihī fihā shafi'un mushaffa'ū*

“(He is) a cloud of rain over us that does not disperse, nor is its lightning without water when it flashes; if (a person's) requirements are brought before him, then his own self will intercede with him in these things, and its intercession will be accepted (i.e. his generosity is such that it requires no intercessor)”.

In other words, the occurrence of the epithet *shafi'* in the early poems addressing the Prophet, might suggest a new poetic standard in which mention of the Prophet and the asking for his forgiveness replaced what, hitherto, had been the eulogizing of a tribal noble.<sup>19</sup> If, then, one can suppose that the 'tribal' paradigm played a role in determining the conception of the new *umma*, at least in the sense that Muḥammad's message would to some extent reflect the language of the tribe and be understood through it,<sup>20</sup> then the 'office' of *shafi'* could easily be transferred from this world to the

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<sup>16</sup> *Diwān al-Nābigha al-Dhubyānī*, ed. S. Fayṣal (Beirut, 1968), p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Dīwān al-Farazdaq*, ed. A. Fā'ūr (Beirut, 1987), p. 357.

<sup>18</sup> *Dīwān al-Mutanabbī* (Beirut, 1958), p. 31.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. M. J. Kister, “The *sīrah* literature”, *CHAL*, pp. 352-66: “poems in praise of the Prophet preserve elements of the laudatory poems addressed to tribal leaders. The contents of the eulogies of the Prophet differ, however, in some respects; they especially stress his prophetic mission, emphasize his spiritual qualities, praise the new religion [...] stress the moral values of Islam, often coupling them with the old ideas of tribal pride and boasting” (p. 358).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. T. Monroe, “The poetry of the *sīrah* literature”, *CHAL*, pp. 368-73: “the old techniques and themes were placed at the service of new religious ideals defended by a new political and religious community” (p. 369).

scene of the Day of Judgement. When Muḥammad warned his followers that God threatened unbelievers with Hell-fire punishment in the next world, he also proclaimed, “answer God’s summoner and believe in Him, and He will forgive you some of your sins and protect you from a painful chastisement (Q. 46/31)”; just as Muḥammad could bring threats from the Divine, he could also bring assurances of salvation.<sup>21</sup> The hierarchical organization within tribal life together with its communalistic mode of existence and the dependence of the individual on the larger group for his well-being, to which the bedouin was so accustomed,<sup>22</sup> meant that the earliest followers of the Arabian revelation would waste no time in seeking out a *shafīʿ*, an individual of such standing with the supreme God that he would be able to avert the threat of eternal fire: Muḥammad was their only choice.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. J. Wach, *The sociology of religion* (Chicago and London, 1944), p. 337, “he who voices the will of the gods is also trusted to convey the feelings and thoughts of their servants to the gods [...] the more irrational the demand, the more risk is involved, and the higher is the prestige of the successful mediator”.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. van Ess on the idea of Muḥammad’s *shafāʿa*, “{...}das war kommunalistisch gedacht; denn von einer Strafe kann unter diesen Umständen keine Rede mehr sein”, *TG*, iv, pp. 543ff.

<sup>23</sup> Q. 3/31: “Say if you love God, follow me, and God will love you, and forgive your sins”; cf. Q. 3/132; 4/69; and 4/80: “He who obeys the Messenger, obeys God”.

## APPENDIX 7

### The ‘satanic verses’

In the commentary to Q. 6/94 (“And we do not see with you your intercessors, those you asserted to be associates with you”, see group III above, p. 52), Ṭabarī states that this verse was revealed in the case of a certain al-Naḍr b. al-Ḥārith, who used to claim that Allāt and al-‘Uzzā would intercede for him with God on the Day of Resurrection.<sup>1</sup> Now, the identification of al-Naḍr is less important, for our purposes, than that of Allāt and al-‘Uzzā. These entities or lesser divinities were identified as idols by Muslim tradition, and became infamous for their association with the so-called ‘satanic verses’ affair.

Allāt and al-‘Uzzā are known to Muslim tradition as two of three (the other being, Manāt) main pre-Islamic deities or idols worshipped in Mecca.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes all three appear together in tradition, at other times only Allāt and al-‘Uzzā are mentioned. Tradition relates that on the occasion of the revelation of three of the verses of sūrat *al-najm*, the Prophet did not recite the third verse according to the way the angel Gabriel had apparently instructed him. Thus, the Prophet is said to have uttered: “And have you seen Allāt and al-‘Uzzā and Manāt the third the other? **These are the high-flying cranes (*al-gharānīq al-‘ulā*) and their intercession is to be hoped for (*inna***

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<sup>1</sup> Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr*, vol. 7, p. 278f.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn al-Kalbī, *Aṣnām*, p. 19: *wa-kānat Quraysh taṭūfu bi-l-ka‘ba wa-taqūl: wa-llāti wa-l-‘Uzzā wa-Manāti l-thālithati l-ukhrā fa-innahunna l-gharānīqu l-‘ulā wa-inna shafā‘atahunna la-turtajā [...] kānū yaqūlūna banātu llāhi wa-hunna yashfa‘na ilayh. For a very recent discussion of the story, see G. Hawting, *The idea of idolatry and the emergence of Islam: from polemic to history*, (Cambridge, 1999), esp. ch. 6.*

*shafā'atahunnā turtajā*)".<sup>3</sup> But sūra 53/21ff, as it is in the Qur'ān, runs thus: "Is it that there are males for you and females for him? (21) That would be an unfair division (22) They are only names which you and your fathers have given them, God has not revealed any authority regarding them (23)". The reason for the 'misunderstanding' is traditionally explained by the Prophet's longing to reach out to the Meccans who had thus far resisted the new religion. In fact, we are told that the Meccans were so gladdened by the revelation (which we are supposed to understand as a recognition of the power of their deities) that even al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra, traditionally an inveterate enemy of the Prophet, was won over. Shortly after this incident, the angel Gabriel returned to rebuke Muḥammad for allegedly reciting what had not been revealed to him, and this caused great anguish to the Prophet, who now feared God's retribution. However, a divine reassurance that "this happens to all Prophets when they, egged on by Satan, wish for something which God has not sanctioned (cf. Q. 22/52)",<sup>4</sup> was followed by an abrogation of the 'satanic' verses by the 'proper' verses. The leadership of Quraysh returned to their previous intransigence and hostilities were resumed.<sup>5</sup>

The historicity of this incident is almost impossible to establish. On the one hand, we have an incident which, in so far as it compromises the image of the Prophet and yet one which never formed a point of contention among early Muslim scholars,<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The bold indicates the 'satanic verses'; on the significance of the term *gharānīq*, see I. Lichtenstadter, "A note on the *gharānīq* and related Qur'ānic problems", *IOS* 5 (1975), pp. 54-61; on the wider context of these three goddesses, see R. W. J. Austin, "*Al-Gharānīq al-'Ulā*- The twilight of the Arabian goddess", in *A Miscellany of Middle Eastern Articles in memoriam of Thomas Muir Johnstone 1924-83*, ed. A. K. Irvine et al. (Harlow: Essex, 1988), pp. 15-21.

<sup>4</sup> This verse runs as follows, "And We have not sent a messenger or a prophet before you but that when he desireth something Satan casts into his desire but God abrogates that which Satan casts and establishes firm his signs (*āyāt*) God is All-knowing All-wise".

<sup>5</sup> The entire leadership of Quraysh is said to have prostrated on hearing the verses, while the incapacitated Mughīra pressed a handful of sand to his forehead instead (Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, I, pp. 1192-6).

<sup>6</sup> Shahab Ahmed has argued precisely this point, namely, that even as late as the 14th century, a feisty

would plausibly reflect a historical reality. On the other hand, the fact that the incident never appears in Muslim commentaries under the relevant verses (Q. 53/19ff) where one would expect it to appear, but as an exegetical gloss to Q. 22/52, which as we have seen was revealed to comfort the Prophet after he had become aware of the satanic interference, raises the historian's suspicion.<sup>7</sup> But certainly, the story must reflect some underlying historical reality, at least, in the way in which it marks the Prophet's break with his pagan past through a final defiance of his Meccan detractors; henceforth, no compromise could be hoped for between Muḥammad and the Meccan elite, and the old religious practices would be rejected. But what is interesting for our purposes is that 'intercession' constituted a central element in these religious practices. It is true that the issue which the Prophet uses to break with his Meccan counterparts is the denial of the intercessory powers of Allāt, 'Uzzā and Manāt but, presumably, only because that was precisely why the Meccans worshipped these deities. The problem with Allāt, 'Uzzā and Manāt is that they were Meccan 'inventions', as the Qur'ān itself testifies.<sup>8</sup> The verses were duly retracted (sc. abrogated) and the Prophet resolved to disappoint the Meccan Quraysh by telling them that they could have no say in the new religion. Consequently, the language of the Qur'ān with regard to *shafā'a* would now remain ambiguous: Q. 53/26, "And how many are the angels in

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scholar like Ibn Taymiyya regarded the 'satanic verses' incident as a vindication of the message of the Qur'ān, something which 20<sup>th</sup> century Muslim modern orthodoxy finds difficult to digest, *Studia Islamica* 87, ii, (1998), pp. 67-124; see his Phd. dissertation for fuller discussion, "The Satanic verses incident in the memory of the early Muslim community: an analysis of the early *riwāyahs* and their *isnāds*", (Princeton University Phd., 1999).

<sup>7</sup> As Hawting has noted (*Idolatry*, pp. 134f.), this argument has been used by John Burton as proof for the inauthenticity of the incident since, according to Burton ("Those are the High-Flying Cranes", *JSS* 15 (1970), pp. 246-265), it serves to vindicate the theory of *naskh*. It is hard to see, however, such a peculiar story being concocted for this purpose.

<sup>8</sup> Q. 53/23: *in hiya illā asmā'un sammaytumūhā antum wa-abā'ukum mā anzala llāhu bihā min sulṭān.*

the heavens but their intercession is of no use unless God has permitted whomsoever He desires and has found acceptable.” By rejecting the lesser deities of the Meccans, the Qurʾān maintained the ‘pure’ monotheism that had characterized its central message. And by allowing for some intercession without naming those who might hold such a privilege, the Qurʾān successfully reconciled what, judging by the ‘satanic-verses’ incident, to the monotheistic or pagan-religious milieu of Ḥijāz must have been a given: intercession. The followers of the Qurʾānic motto *wa-lā taziru wāziratun wizra ukhrā* and those others who had been accustomed to living in a world where the religious landscape was one of intermediaries and intercessors were both brought into the fold of Islam.

## APPENDIX 8

### The punishment of the tomb<sup>1</sup>

The *‘adhāb al-qabr* is not strictly speaking the equivalent of the Roman Catholic idea of purgatory. For one, the latter serves to prepare its sinners for the eternal reward by cleansing them in an infernal torture that begins at the point of death, so that at the time of the end of the world they have been completely rehabilitated. In Islam, the sinner would not be rehabilitated in the tomb, he could still end up in Hell after the Resurrection.

We may begin with what the Qurʾān has to say on the matter. Here again, as with the idea of a temporary Hell, it seems that tradition exercised its exegetical muscle and deduced an element of eschatology not explicitly provided by the Qurʾān. The punishment in the tomb is usually supported by tradition with reference to one of the following verses:

Q. 8/50: *wa-law tarā idh yatawaffā lladhīna kafarū l-malāʾikatu yaḍribūna wujūhahum wa-adbārahum wa-dhūqū ‘adhāba l-ḥarīq.*  
“If thou couldst only see when the angels take the unbelievers, beating their faces and their backs: Taste the chastisement of the burning”.

Our earliest opinion is transmitted from Mujāhid (d. 104/722), who does not deal with the *dhūqū ‘adhāb al-ḥarīq* section at the end of the verse, and takes the beating to be that inflicted by the angels on the unbelievers as the latter fought against the Prophet in the Battle of Badr.<sup>2</sup> Muqātil (d. 150/767) seems to suggest that the reference is to

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<sup>1</sup> For a thorough account of this concept, the reader is referred to the following work: R. Eklund, *Life between death and resurrection according to Islam* (Uppsala, 1941).

<sup>2</sup> Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, p. 266. The Qurʾān describes in verses 3/123-25 how God provided extra assistance

the Day of Resurrection when the unbelievers are sent to Hell.<sup>3</sup> It is in Q. 9/101 that Muqātil makes his first reference to punishment in the tomb. The verse itself is ambiguous:

Q. 9/101: *wa-mimman ḥawlakum mina l-ʿrābi munāfiqūna wa-min ahli l-madīnati maradū ʿalā n-nifāq lā taʿlamuhum naḥnu naʿlamuhum sanuʿadhdhibuhum marratayn thumma yuraddūna ilā ʿadhābin ʿazīm.*

“And some of the Bedouins who dwell around you are hypocrites; and some of the people of the City are grown bold in hypocrisy. Thou knowest them not; but We know them, and We shall chastise them twice, then they will be returned to a mighty chastisement”.

Muqātil explains that the ‘two chastisements’ are when at the point of death, the angels beat their faces and backs and then in the tomb when Munkar and Nakīr take over.<sup>4</sup> This is incoherent to say the least because usually it is understood that Munkar and Nakīr are the very angels who do the questioning and the beating. The only other verse that usually serves as a possible allusion to the punishment in the tomb is:

Q. 52/47: *wa-inna li-lladhīna ḡalamū ʿadhāban dūna dhālika wa-lākinna aktharahum lā yaʿlamūn.*

“And there surely awaits the evildoers other chastisement, but most of them know it not”.

For Mujāhid, the ‘other’ chastisement is simply interpreted as ‘hunger’ which God inflicts upon the evildoers in this world<sup>5</sup>. It is clear that at least by Mujāhid’s time (d. 104/722) the punishment in the tomb had not gained wide-spread acceptance, not even among traditionists. Muqātil also has nothing to say about this verse except that it was a reference to those (evildoers) who were killed at Badr, so that death at Badr was one punishment but that there also awaited them another punishment in the form of Hell in

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for the outnumbered Muslim contingent by sending them 3000 or 5000 angels to fight alongside them.

<sup>3</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 121.

<sup>4</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 193.

the next world<sup>6</sup>. It seems fair to say then that at the time of Mujāhid's death, the idea of *‘adhāb al-qabr* was not yet popular. By Muqātil's time, the idea had spread, but the details of what went on inside the tomb were confused. Interestingly, the first appearance of any sort of eschatological belief in the creeds comes in the one entitled *Fiqh Akbar I*, which Wensinck dated to c. 133/750.<sup>7</sup> The article states that, “whoso sayeth I do not know the punishment of the tomb belongeth to the sect of the Djahmites, which goeth to perdition”.

The archaeological evidence also suggests that the idea was already spreading from the middle of the second century A.H. In early Islamic epigraphy, the first mention of the punishment of the tomb comes from an Egyptian epitaph dated to 180/796. The inscription is intended as a supplication for relief for the dead person in his tomb and asks that God make his tomb more spacious and spare him the punishment of the tomb.<sup>8</sup> The epitaph inscription suggests that part of the punishment in the tomb consisted in being constricted (*ḍagħṭat al-qabr*) in it, since it asks God to make the tomb wider. The archaeological evidence also suggests that one's state in the tomb was a kind of preview of his future eternal abode, that is, where he would end up on the Day of Judgement. On an epitaph from al-Fuṣṭāṭ, dated to 216/831, we find a supplication to God to make the dead person's tomb “like a garden from among those of Paradise”.<sup>9</sup>

Wensinck noted that the concept of *‘adhāb al-qabr* underwent three processes as

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<sup>5</sup> Mujāhid, *Tafsīr*, p. 626.

<sup>6</sup> Muqātil, *Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> See article no. 10 in discussion of *Fiqh Akbar I* (Wensinck, *Creed*, p. 104).

<sup>8</sup> RCEA, no. 58: ...*wa-wassi‘ ‘alayhi madākhilahu wa-qihī ‘adhāba l-qabr...*

<sup>9</sup> RCEA, no. 204: ...*wa-ʾal qabrahu ‘alayhi rawḍatan min riyāḍi l-janna...*

evidenced by the development of the idea in the creeds.<sup>10</sup> In the earliest creed (c. 133/750), as we have seen above, all that is described is that there is a punishment in the tomb.<sup>11</sup> In the next earliest creed (c. 184-205/800-820), we have mention of a punishment as well as an interrogation by two individuals, angels of sorts, named Munkar and Nakīr.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in the creed known as *Fiqh Akbar II*, and which according to Wensinck is, “the embodiment of the final position of the community in relation to Mu‘tazilism: reached through mainly the efforts of one man, al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935)”,<sup>13</sup> we find the interrogation by Munkar and Nakīr, the pressure (*ḍagħṭa*) and punishment in the tomb all part of the post-mortal experience.<sup>14</sup> What is interesting about the article in this last creed is that it affirms the punishment in the tomb not just for all unbelievers but also in the case of some sinners who ‘belong with the faithful’. In other words, the idea was that this punishment was somehow purgative.<sup>15</sup>

It is, indeed, curious that both Christianity and Islam adopted the idea of punishment after death that was a prelude to the eternal punishment after the Last Judgement, since the scripture of both traditions would suggest the opposite belief. After all, the idea of the cosmic trumpet blast which would herald the apocalyptic end of the world and then the resurrection of all to face their reckoning sits more

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<sup>10</sup> A. J. Wensinck and A. S. Tritton in *EI2*, s.v. “adhāb al-ḡabr”.

<sup>11</sup> Wensinck, *Creed*, p. 104, article 10.

<sup>12</sup> Wensinck, *Creed*, p. 129, articles 18 and 19.

<sup>13</sup> Wensinck, *Creed*, pp. 246-47.

<sup>14</sup> Wensinck, *Creed*, p. 195-96, article 23.

<sup>15</sup> Watt is not quite convinced by his own (reasonable) argument that if the denial of the punishment in the tomb attributed to the Jahmiyya by the *Fiqh Akbar I* is indeed an attack from Ḥanafite circles then it suggests that conservative Ḥanafites were interested in keeping sinning believers within the community of ‘believers’, so that although they would be destined for Hell, they would undergo some punishment beforehand (*Formative*, p. 146). This argument, of course, suggests that the idea of a temporary Hell was not yet accepted, at least not among Ḥanafites of that period, c. 133/750, since if it was they would not need to stipulate the concept of the punishment in the tomb.

comfortably with the idea of an 'awakening call', and becomes irrelevant if people are envisaged as being either in Hell or in Paradise after death. Moreover, in the scriptures of both religious traditions, it is suggested that upon death people enter a state of somnolence:

1 Thess. 4:13, But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Qur'ān 36/51-52, "And the Trumpet shall be blown; then behold, they are sliding down from their tombs unto their Lord. They say: Alas for us! Who roused us out of our sleeping-place?"

This contradiction was not overlooked by Muslim scripturalists who rejected the idea of punishment in the tomb, just as they rejected the idea of temporary Hell; among these were the Khārijites and Mu'tazilites.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *Faṣl*, pp. 366f.; also the famous Mu'tazilite Ḍirār b. 'Amr (d. c. 200/815) rejected punishment in the tomb, just as he rejected intercession, see van Ess, *TG*, vol. 3, p. 54.

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