

ANIMALS IN ISLAMIC PARADISE AND HELL*

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1. According to the Qur'ān, animals constitute a community comparable to that of mankind (Cattle, 6:38¹); they prostrate themselves before God, as well as angels (the Bee, 16:49²). The sacred text of Islam mentions animals on numerous occasions and as many as seven *sūras* take their names from those of animals: the *sūra* of the Cow (2), Cattle (6), the Bee (16), the Ant (27), the Spider (29), the Charging Horses (100), and the Elephant (105). The Prophet Muḥammad held animals – and some of them especially – in deep affection, and recommended kind behaviour towards them. Some animals played a significant role in his own life: for instance the doves that saved him during his emigration from Mecca to Medina (the *hiġra*), by disguising his presence in the cave, or the spider which sealed the cave's opening with its web; or further still, the gazelle and the camel which implored his intercession; not to speak of al-Burāq, which carried him by night to Jerusalem and, from there, bore him on his further journey to heaven (*mi'rāġ*).

Other prophets before him experienced episodes in which animals were the protagonists. Examples of these are: the serpent which enticed Adam and Eve to commit the original sin in the Garden of Eden (fig. 1); the animals rescued by Noah in his Ark (fig. 2); Ṣāliḥ's she-camel killed by the unbelieving tribe of the Tamūd; the ram brought down to Abraham from heaven by the angel Gabriel to be sacrificed in place of his son Ishmael (fig. 3); the rod of Moses which was transformed into a serpent; the whale who swallowed Jonah; the hoopoe which, in the service of Solomon, the king of men, beasts and genies, carried his message to Bilqīs, the Queen of Sheba.

The Prophet Muḥammad condemned cruelty to animals. He taught that those who maltreated them would be condemned to Hell, whereas those who were caring to animals would receive heavenly recompense. There are a number of anecdotes on this subject. According to a *ḥadīṭ* cited by al-Buḥārī, on the authority of Abū Hurayra, the Prophet recounted that "while a man was walking along a road, he became extremely thirsty. He found a well and went down to drink from it. When he came up again, he found a dog eating wet ground due to its burning thirst. The man said to himself that the dog must have suffered as he had. He descended once

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¹ "No creature is there crawling on the earth, no bird flying with its wings, but they are nations like unto yourselves".

² "To God bows everything in the heavens, and every creature crawling on the earth, and the angels".

more into the well, filled his boot with water, carried it in his mouth and climbed back up. He let the dog drink and God the Highest recognized his benevolence and pardoned [his sins]³. According to another *ḥadīth*, on the authority of Abū Bakr, the Prophet was praying during an eclipse when he said: “[I saw] Hell close to me, so close that I shouted, ‘Oh my God! Am I among them [the damned]?’ [In the fire] there was a woman with a cat which was scratching her. I asked, ‘What has she done?’ They replied, ‘She imprisoned the cat until it died of hunger’”⁴. The Prophet was used to drying off the sweat of his horse with his shirt and he was particularly fond of cats, which he allowed to go wherever they wanted. In his sayings, he insists that cats do not defile the food they touch, and do not invalidate prayer if they pass in front of those who pray. But it is true that a very different attitude was adopted by the Prophet regarding dogs, snakes, and scorpions.

Generally speaking, as A. Bousquet observed, Islam reserves a very different position for animals to that of Christianity, which views animals, having no soul, as existing merely in utilitarian terms for man’s benefit. This is not the case in Islam, or Judaism⁵.

2. Sources

What is the place of animals in Islamic Paradise and Hell? Some sparse references can be found in the commentaries on the Qur’an⁶ and in collections of traditions, especially those by Muslim (d. 261/875)⁷, Ibn Mağā (d. 273/887)⁸, and at-Tirmidī (d. c. 279/893)⁹, who all dedicate specific chapters of their work to the *ḥadīths* relating to descriptions of Hell (*an-nār*, ‘the Fire’) and Paradise (*al-ğanna*, ‘the Garden’). The same can be said of the Stories of the Prophets (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā’*) by

³ al-Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb as-Šurb wa-l-musaqāḥ* (42), 9 (no. 2363); Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* II, 375 (no. 8849). In other versions it is a woman who gives the dog water (e.g. Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* II, 510, no. 10600).

⁴ al-Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb as-Šurb wa-l-musaqāḥ* (42), 9 (nos. 2364-2365); Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* II, 507 (no. 10563): the woman was condemned to eternal Hellfire for having tied the cat up without leaving it anything to eat and drink, thus forcing it to feed itself from nothing but a few insects until it died.

⁵ Bousquet 1958: *passim*. According to the Bible and the Talmud animals have a soul, their own form of wisdom, good and bad instincts, their own prayers and, it would seem, their own guardian angel (*ibid.*, 33-34). On the benevolent behaviour of the Sufis toward animals, see Ritter 1955:325-328.

⁶ In this essay I have based my research, above all, on the commentaries of al-Ṭabarī, al-Ḥāzin, al-Bağawī, ar-Rāzī, as-Suyūṭī and al-Qurtubī.

⁷ *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-Ğanna* (51); *kitāb al-Fitan wa-asrāt as-sā’a* (52), on the Day of Judgement and the signs of its coming.

⁸ *Sunan, kitāb az-Zuhd* (37), *bāb* 38, *ṣifat an-Nār*; *bāb* 39, *ṣifat al-Ğanna*.

⁹ *Sunan, kitāb Ṣifat al-Ğanna* (39); *kitāb Ṣifat an-Nār* (40).

al-Kisā'ī (11th century) and at-Ta'labī (d. 427/1035)¹⁰, historical works by at-Tabarī (d. 314/923) and al-Mas'ūdī (d. 345/956), or those of a mystical or eschatological character such as *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* by Ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), the *Nihāya* by Ibn Kaṭīr (d. 774/1373), the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* and *ad-Durra al-fāhira* by al-Ġazālī (d. 505/1111), the *Risālat al-ḡufrān* by Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (d. 449/1058), or specific works on the Prophet's *mi'raġ* or on the Resurrection (*qiyām*). Later illuminated manuscripts (16th century), above all the Stories of the Prophets by the Persian writer an-Niṣābūrī (who probably lived during the 11th century), offer a lively visual representation of the most relevant episodes¹¹. Certain authors seem to know every corner of both Hell and Paradise, but the sources are not very explicit regarding the destiny of animals¹².

Commenting on Q 6:38, Muġāhid maintains that every species (*ġins*) known by an individual name constitutes an *umma*, whether they be domestic animals, wild animals, birds... or *genies*¹³. Even dogs are an *umma*, as the Prophet said (al-Ḥazin,

¹⁰ See Tottoli 2002, and cited references.

¹¹ In particular, see the Brosh and Milstein catalogue (1991), and the recent work edited by Milstein, Rūhrdanz & Schmitz (1999) in which approximately twenty *Qisas al-anbiyā'* in Persian by Ibrāhīm b. Ḥalaf an-Niṣābūrī, Muhammad Ġuwayrī, and Muhammad b. Hasan ad-Daydūzamī, dating back to the second half of the 16th century, in the Safavid style, are analysed. As the authors point out (5), the earliest known illustrations for the lives of the prophets were made for the historical work of at-Tabarī (as translated by Bal'ami), *ar-Rusul* (or *al-Umam*) *wa-l-mulūk* (Washington, FGA, no. 57.16, copied and painted ca. 1300 in the Mongol style of Iran); two fragments of *Ġami' at-tawāriḥ* by Rašīd ad-Dīn, copied in Tabriz in 714/1314 (Edinburgh University Library, Ms Ar. 20, and London, Khalili Coll.); and al-Bīrūnī's *al-Āṭar al-bāqiya*, copied in 1307 (Edinburgh U. L., Ms Ar. 161).

¹² al-Kisā'ī relates the description of Paradise and Hell on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās and Wahb b. Munabbih. God created Paradise (al-Ġanna, 'the Garden') subdividing it into seven gardens and Eden: 1. *Dār al-Ġalāl*, 'the home of the Majesty', made of white pearl; 2. *Dār as-Salām*, 'home of Peace', made of red ruby; 3. *Ġannat al-Ma'wā*, 'the garden of Refuge', made of green emerald; 4. *Ġannat al-Huld*, 'the garden of Eternity', made of yellow coral; 5. *Ġannat an-Na'im*, 'the garden of Delight', made of white silver; 6. *Ġannat Firdaws*, made of red gold; 7. *Ġannat al-Qarār*, 'the garden of Rest', made of pungent musk; and the last, *Ġannat 'Adan*, 'the garden of Eden', made of rosy pearl. Hell has seven doors, and behind each of them the damned are tortured in seventy thousand different ways. 1. *Ġahannam* (the door for believers alone, which will be destroyed when the last of them leaves to enter Paradise); 2. al-Lazā, 'the flaming fire' for the idolaters; 3. al-Ḥuṭama, 'the devouring fire' for Gog and Magog; 4. as-Sa'ir, 'the flame' for Satan (cf. Q 67:5); 5. as-Saqar, 'the infernal fire' for those who neglect prayer and the *zakāt* (cf. Qur. 74:43-44); 6. al-Ġahīm, 'the intense fire' for Jews, Christians, and Magians; 7. al-Hāwiya, 'the abyss', for hypocrites (*Qisas* I, 17-19). Numerous traditions place Hell beneath the seven earths and Paradise above the seven heavens. A descriptive table of the seven heavens and seven earths, on the basis of the works by al-Kisā'ī and at-Ta'labī, is provided by Fahd (1959:251, 254-255).

¹³ Fish, however, are not explicitly mentioned. Some commentators have confronted the problem; giving extensive significance to the term *dābba* — from the verb *dabba*, 'to move' — they not only include animals which move on the earth or fly in the sky, but also those which live in water. See ar-Rāzī, *Mafatih* XII, 222; al-Ḥāzin, *Lubāb* II, 131-132.

Lubāb II, 132; al-Bağawī *Maʿālim*, II, 132). All animals know the Lord, they bear witness to His unity, they give praise to Him and one day will meet Him. They are also creatures of God, they understand each other and are familiar with each other, they search for food and fear danger, they are male and female, they die, and on the day of the Resurrection they will be judged by God, just like human beings (*ibid.*). All of this is written in the Book, the 'Preserved Tablet' (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*) on which was written all that has been and will be until the Day of Resurrection¹⁴. Sufyān b. ʿUyayna, in a rather malicious spirit towards his fellow men, affirms that the word *umma* should be understood as "every species of animal or bird, and also people who behave like them: whether they be as aggressive as lions, as voraciously hungry as pigs, whether they bark like dogs, or whether they be as proud as peacocks"¹⁵.

The Angel of Death takes the soul (*rūḥ*) of animals, just as with men¹⁶. God will judge domestic animals, and will punish those which use their horns to hurt other animals without horns, and then he will separate wild animals and birds. The Lord will say to them "Be as dust!", and the earth beneath them will become flat¹⁷. Fortunately, on the day of the Last Judgement, the angels will intercede. On that day, eight angels will hold up the Throne of God (Q 69:17). Each of them has four faces (*suwar*): the first face, of human appearance, will intercede for the sustenance of human beings; the second, like that of a bull, will intercede for domestic animals; the third, like that of a lion, for wild beasts; and the fourth, like that of an eagle, for birds (fig. 4)¹⁸.

Islam absorbed both the Semitic and the Iranian influences which circulated in the ancient Near East. Monstrous animals, such as the winged Serpent, which wraps itself around God's Throne, or the Bull ar-Rayyān and the Whale al-Bahmūt, which hold up the seven earths, enter into Islamic cosmogonical myths, and find further development in Qur'ānic commentaries, in historical and cosmographical works, and in the Stories of the Prophets¹⁹. When the angel ad-Dīk, in the form of a cockerel, praises God in Paradise, all the cockerels on the Earth respond, calling the faithful

¹⁴ Cf. Q 85:22.

¹⁵ Cited by al-Qurtubī, *Ġāmi'* VI, 420.

¹⁶ as-Suyūṭī, *Durr* III, 12, on the authority of Anas b. Mālik.

¹⁷ al-Ğazālī, *Durra*, Ar. text 70, French transl. 60; the passages is followed by Q 4:42. Cf. Ibn Kaṭīr, *Nihāya* II, 44-47; at-Tabarī, *Ġāmi'* VII, 188-189; az-Zamahšarī, *Kaṣṣaf* II, 17; al-Qurtubī, *Ġāmi'* VI, 420; as-Suyūṭī, *Durr* III, 12, on the authority of Abū Hurayra.

¹⁸ al-Kisā'ī, *Qisaṣ* I, 7; cf. Cerulli 1949: § 55. According to al-Qazwīnī (*Agā'ib*, 42), the whole figure of each angel either takes the form of the eagle, the bull, the lion, or a human being. Before the Day of Judgement there were only four angels that held up the Throne, as in biblical tradition (cf. *Ezekiel* 1:10, 10:14).

¹⁹ See Fahd, 1959 and cited references; and also Tottoli, 1989.

to prayer (fig. 5)²⁰. "The Beast (*ad-dābba*) which came out from the Earth" will devour the damned with its thirty thousand mouths²¹.

3. Paradise

al-Ġāhiz mentions the opinion of Abū Ishāq that animals also have feelings and suffer, and will enjoy the mercy of God. Just as there are no differences between Muslim or pagan children who go to Paradise, neither shall there be for domestic or wild animals, which will enter as 'pure spirits', in the form that God chooses for them. Others seem to maintain that, over and above any theological questions, the placement of animals in the hereafter will be based on aesthetic criteria: beautiful animals in Paradise, and ugly ones in Hell. "[The sight] of all the ugly ferocious beasts, domestic animals, reptiles, insects (*hamaḡ*, 'mosquitoes') that God has created will make [the damned] suffer in Hell, whereas all [the animals] of pleasant appearance will delight [the elect]. In this way gazelles, horses, peacocks, and pheasants will gratify the friends (*awliyā'*) of God in Paradise with their beautiful presence" (al-Ġāhiz, *Ḥayawān* III, 395). The Prophet himself said one day that in Paradise whatsoever the soul most yearns for and whatsoever the eyes most appreciate will be found. But it is not only for their beauty and graceful movement that these animals will find their place in Paradise, beside the seductive houris, the *ḥūrī l-'īn* with their big dark eyes, and the ever-virgin wives²², but also for their relationship to men and prophets.

Islamic Paradise is a large garden, in which the aspirations of people used to the restrictions of hard life in the Arabian deserts will find their realization. The following *ḥadīṡ* is significant. Abū Hurayra recounts that one day a horse-rider (*min ahl al-ḥayl*) asked the Prophet if there were horses in Paradise. "There are horses with golden saddles and reins" – Muḥammad replied – "and with golden wings; they take the rider wherever he wants". Another Bedouin, a camel-rider (*min ahl al-ibl*), got up and asked if there were any camels. "Certainly, like the stars" – the Prophet replied – "with hooves, wings and reins of gold". A third person, a palm-grower (*min ahl an-naḥl*), asked if there were palms. "The palms in Paradise" – said Muhammad – "have golden trunks and roots; their leaves are like the most precious fabrics and their dates are sweeter than honey". Then, a fourth Bedouin (*min ahl al-bādīya*) got up and said:

²⁰ al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṡ* I, 66-67; ad-Damīri, *Ḥayāt* I, 490-491; as-Suyūṭī, *Ḥabā'ik*, 65-67; Cerulli 1949: § 69, 168. As the Prophet said, even the croaking of the frog is a song of praise to God, given that it recalls the verse of its progenitor which was in the water close to His Throne before the creation of the heavens (ad-Damīri, *Ḥayāt* II, 648, s.v. *diḡda'*).

²¹ Cerulli 1949: § 182 sqq. Cf. Q 27:82. The *dābba* recalls, in certain aspects, the Beast of John's Apocalypse.

²² On sexuality in Islamic Paradise refer to, in particular, Al-Azmeh 1995.

“Oh messenger of God! Are there Bedouins in Paradise?” The Prophet replied: “By He who sent me [to bring] the Truth! They will live wherever they wish above dunes of musk and ruby in Paradise!”²³

The notes that follow are intended to illustrate a few legends which grew up on the subject of some of these animals²⁴.

3.1 Horses

When the angels heard the description of the horse, they exclaimed, “Oh Lord, we are your angels, we exalt your name and praise you. What do you have in store for us?” God created speckled horses for them, with robust necks like those of the camels of Bactriana. One was sent down to the Earth, and when it put down its hooves, it neighed. The angels said “it is a blessed animal, and its neigh will fill the hearts of the unbelievers with terror!” When God showed Adam all his creatures and taught him their names, He asked him to take the animal of his choice. Adam chose the horse, which God created ‘Arab’²⁵. The horse was named Maymūn, and had a body of camphor, musk and saffron, and wings of pearl and precious stones²⁶. Even the angels of the sixth heaven, who made up God’s army, had their own horses (fig. 6)²⁷. Gabriel’s horse was called Hayzūm (fig. 7)²⁸. Ibn ‘Abbās recounts that during the battle of Badr, the blow of a whip was heard in heaven, together with the cry, “Come on Hayzūm!” An infidel fell, hit by the invisible blow, his face disfigured²⁹.

²³ Ibn Habīb, *Wasf*, 58-59, no. 167; *La descripción*, 108. According to some sources, sheep and goats will also have a place in Paradise; the Prophet, in fact, would have said that “sheep are among the animals of Paradise” and that “goats should not be maltreated as they too are among the animals of Paradise” (al-Qurtubī, *Tadkīra*, 566-567; Ibn Kaṭīr, *Nihāya* II, 328, from Ibn Maḡa and al-Bazzār).

²⁴ On Arab legends in general see Basset 1926: III, and the more recent Knappert 1985. For the comparison with Jewish traditions see Ginzberg’s groundbreaking work, *Legends of the Jews*, as well as the essays of Grünbaum, Speyer, Sidersky, and Heller.

²⁵ See ‘Alī b. Dāwūd, *Aqwāl*, 99-100. According to another tradition, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās, the Lord asked Adam to choose between the horse and al-Burāq, the Prophets’ mount. Given that al-Burāq was barren, Adam chose the horse. See al-Baḡṣī, *Rasāḥāt*, 4-5.

²⁶ See al-Kisā’ī, *Qīṣaṣ* I, 35; aṭ-Taḡlabī, *‘Arā’is*, 28-29. When Adam was banished from Eden, Maymūn reproached him for his sin and refused to obey him. ‘Alī b. Dāwūd, like other Yemeni Rasūlīd sovereigns, had a horse of the name Maymūn (*Aqwāl*, 349).

²⁷ See Cerulli 1949: § 41. In the fourth heaven even the angels themselves could be found in the form of a horse (cf. al-Qazwīnī, *Aḡā’ib*, 45; Fahd 1971:162).

²⁸ See *Furusiyya* I, fig. III.III, from *K. al-baytara*.

²⁹ Ibn Hišām, *Sīra* I, 633; Muslim, *Saḥīḥ, kitāb al-Ġihād* (32), 18 (no. 1763); ‘Alī b. Dāwūd, *Aqwāl*, 335-336.

It is believed that the martyrs who fall on God's road during the Holy War (*ḡihād*), will ride winged horses in Paradise³⁰.

The most beautiful riding animal remains, nonetheless, the mythical al-Burāq (fig. 8), upon which the Prophet performed his night journey (*isrā'*) to the Masḡid al-Aqṣā and rose to Heaven (*mi'rāḡ*)³¹. The first exegetes describe it, based on the words of the Companions of Muhammad, as a white beast (*dābba*), bigger than a donkey but smaller than a mule, reserved for the Prophets, which, thanks to its wings, reached the horizon with a single jump³². Storytellers and later exegetes enriched the description of al-Burāq with many fantastical details, which can also be found in late iconographical sources. al-Quṣayrī (d. 465/1072) writes, in his *Mi'rāḡ*, that al-Burāq "had a human face and the cheek of a horse; the [drops] of its sweat were made of pearl and red coral; its forelock was made of luminous ruby; its ears were of green emerald; its burning eyes shone like Venus and Mars; its fetlocks were patched in white..."³³. In other versions, al-Burāq has a feminine face and the tail of a peacock³⁴. Just as Muḥammad excels over all other men, its beauty is greater than that of all the other animals in Paradise (al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ* I, 33-34). Thanks to its nobility (*karāma*), it will follow the Prophet in Heaven: in fact, on the day of the Last Judgement, Muḥammad will arrive on al-Burāq.

According to Muqātil b. Sulaymān, Moses asked al-Ḥidr which animal he liked the most. He replied "I like the horse, the donkey, and the camel, because they are the mounts of the Prophets"³⁵.

Heavenly horses are of noble race, they are slender and graceful. According to a tradition, on the authority of Abū Ayyūb, "they are, together with camels, the only

³⁰ See Ghali 1919:165.

³¹ Qur'ān, *The Night Journey*, 17:1: "Glory be to Him, who carried His servant by night from the Holy Mosque to the Further Mosque the precincts of which We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. He is the All-hearing, the All-seeing".

³² This is how it is described in the authoritative works of Ibn Hiṣām (*Sīra* I, 397), Ibn Sa'd (*Tabaqāt* I, 214), al-Ṭabarī (*Ḡami'* XV, 3), as well as in the collections of *ḥadīth* by al-Buḥārī and Muslim. According to Ibn 'Abbās and Abū Sa'īd al-Ḥudrī it was a mount "similar to yours", and according to Abū Hurayra it was a 'horse'. A significant number of ancient traditions are related by as-Suyūṭī in the extensive chapter dedicated to the *isrā'* in his *Ḥasa'is* (II, 252-298).

³³ Quṣayrī continues: "it had wings of an eagle from which pearly drops would fall; a silvery cow's tail, bones of jet (black amber); a saddle-cloth studded with ruby and coral; his breath (*naḥās*) was like that of humans; it had wings as round as the moon; it was bigger than a donkey but smaller than a mule; it had emerald hooves cloven like those of a cow; a silver belly; a neck, breast, and back of dazzling gold; it [covered the distance] between the sky and the ground; with one jump it could reach the horizon" (*Mi'rāḡ*, 44).

³⁴ A thorough analysis on al-Burāq can be found in Piemontese 1974 and 1980. For a synthesis of fictional elements in the late Islamic tradition see al-Halabī (d. 1044/1635), *Sīra* II, 78-79.

³⁵ But he hates the buffalo and the bull. Cited by al-Ḡahiz, *Ḥayawān* VII, 204.

animals (*bahā'im*) in Paradise" (Ibn Kaṭīr, *Nihāya* II, 327-328). The Prophet himself described them as winged horses, made of red ruby, which do not leave any excrement; they will welcome the elect when they enter Paradise, carrying them before God, and from then on will bear them on their visits to each other (*ibid.*, 330, 334).

3.2 Camels

Some camels have also been given a place of privilege in Islamic tradition. If Muhammad mounts al-Burāq on his journey towards Paradise, his daughter Fāṭima will mount his favourite she-camel, al-ʿAdbā', and the prophet Ṣāliḥ the "camel of God", slain by the unbelieving Tamūd (Q 11:61-68)³⁶. According to Ṣīʿī sources, ʿAlī will ride beside them on a camel of light, dressed in green cloth, whose reins are of ruby and gold (al-Kāṣānī, *Tafsīr* II, 119).

Muḥammad describes camels in Paradise as animals of red ruby with topaz reins. The popular story of the pious camel which asked help from the Prophet Muḥammad has contributed towards the rise in prestige of this animal. Tamīm ad-Dārī recounts that one day he was sitting close to the Prophet, when a camel arrived in haste; it stopped beside Muḥammad and neighed. The Prophet told it to express itself with sincerity, given that God had granted safety to all who took refuge near him. Understanding the camel's words, the Prophet explained to those present that the camel had fled because it feared that its owners wanted to kill it. The owners found them, and the Prophet spoke to them about its complaint: "after having been in their service for years, now they wanted to slaughter me". They confirmed it to be true. So Muḥammad paid them a hundred dirham and let the camel go. It neighed repeatedly. On the fourth neigh the Prophet began to cry, understanding that the camel had invoked God that evil should not spread among the Arabs — something that, as the angel Gabriel had revealed to him, was destined to occur³⁷.

3.3 Gazelles

As we have seen, al-Ġāḥiz places the gazelle in Paradise by virtue of its beauty. The grace of this animal has always inspired Arab poets and writers, who have seen it as a metaphor of the beloved. The gazelle is also a devout animal, known for its great affection towards its offspring. Here too the Prophet once interceded to save it (fig. 9). Some Bedouins had captured a gazelle and had tied it to the pole of their tent. Muḥammad passed by their encampment and the gazelle asked him to act as a

³⁶ See ad-Damīrī, *Hayāt* I, 165.

³⁷ An oral version of the story, in 36 quatrains, was published by Basset (1902). Popular printed versions also exist, including the story of Muhammad and the gazelle, of the title *Qissat al-ḡamal wa-l-ḡazāla wa-muḡīzāt an-nabī*. These legends are referred to in the collections of *hadīṭ* and in the hagiographic works on the Prophet (e.g. as-Suyūṭī, *Ḥaṣā'is* II, 95 sqq).

mediator for its freedom, to give it enough time to feed its young. The Prophet did so, and gave his word that it would return. When the gazelle did return, Muḥammad asked for it to be freed, because it had been sincere. The Bedouins duly freed it and the gazelle skipped into the desert, professing the unity of God and the truthfulness of the mission of its Prophet (*ṣābāda*)³⁸. There is no doubt that such a pious animal should merit a place in Paradise.

3.4 Dogs

When Adam and Eve, thrown out of Eden, wandered on the earth, they were pursued by wild beasts and reptiles, on the instigation of Satan. Adam begged God to give him someone who would protect him, and the Lord asked him to choose an animal. Adam chose the dog; he stroked its head and the dog frightened off the wild beasts. Thus was the friendship and familiarity between men and dogs born (Sibt Ibn al-Ġawzī, *Mir'āt* I, 205). Nonetheless, only the dog Qitmir – according to some it was called Rayyān, Maṣīr, Basīr, Raqīm or some other name – which accompanied the seven sleepers in their cave (Q, *The Cave*, 18:9 *sqq.*)³⁹ (fig. 10). will go to Paradise. Some young people (three, five, or seven) fled during pagan times in order not to abandon their faith in the only true God, and they took refuge in a cave. With them was a dog, which kept guard. Only God knows how long they slept in their cave. The Qur'an says: "Thou wouldst have thought them awake, as they lay sleeping, while We turned them now to the right, now to the left, and their dog stretching its paws on the threshold" (18:18). Commentators have added many details to this story, which is rather brief in its Qur'anic version, and have included historical and geographical information. The dog was either a hunting dog or a shepherd's dog, with a stone and sky-coloured coat. Ka'b al-Aḥbār tells that the young people chanced upon a dog, which started to bark. They sent it away, but it kept coming back to them. The dog raised its forepaws towards heaven, as if it were someone invoking [God], and said, "Do not fear! I love those that love God the Highest. Sleep and I shall keep guard." It stretched out its paws near the mouth of the cave, but it too, like the young people, was overcome by sleep⁴⁰.

³⁸ For an Egyptian oral version, see our essay "Muḥammad, l'ebreo e la gazzella" (1981), in which references to different versions are made. Also see note 44.

³⁹ The legend of the People of the Cave recalls the story of the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus. Massignon dedicated an extensive essay to this legend (1963).

⁴⁰ al-Qurtubī, *Ġāmi'* X, 370. Most Qur'anic commentators dedicated many pages to this story; see among others at-Tabarī, *Ġāmi'* XV, 197-223; ar-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ* XXI, 101-108; al-Ḥāzin, *Lubāb* IV, 191-198; as-Suyūṭī, *Durr* IV, 233-240. The nephew of Ġalāl ad-Dīn ar-Rūmī had a dog which was said to have descended from Qitmir, the dog that belonged to the People of the Cave. It also bore the name Qitmir and participated in the dances of the Mevlevi Dervishes (Boratav 1975:324).

The behaviour of the Prophet Muhammad was not benevolent towards dogs. Despite having spent his childhood with the Banū Sa'd, with his Bedouin wet-nurse Halīma, he was neither a Bedouin, nor a shepherd, nor a hunter, and therefore had no familiarity with dogs to be able to appreciate their qualities. Like his fellow-citizens from Mecca, the dogs he was used to were probably those in packs that ravaged inhabited areas. For this reason he ordered them to be killed. But he mitigated his order when considering that they also constituted a community (*umma*) created by God⁴¹, limiting the order to the killing of black dogs only. These are considered to be the worst of all dogs, and above all, according to popular opinion, in close relationship to Satan⁴². Dogs are a source of impurity, for they defile the food they touch and invalidate prayer⁴³. According to a frequently cited *ḥadīth*, on the authority of Abū Ḥalīfa, "Angels do not enter a house where there is either a dog or a representation (*ṣūra*)" (al-Buḥārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb Bad' al-ḥalq* (59), 17 (no. 3322)). Nonetheless, those that are useful to man, such as sheepdogs, hunting dogs or dogs that guard fields are tolerated⁴⁴.

3.5 Other animals

Notwithstanding what al-Ġāhiz has mentioned regarding the peacock and the pheasant, both of which delight the elect in Heaven, I have found no mention of this made by other authors. As far as the peacock is concerned, it is treated with ambivalence: people appreciate its beauty, but are diffident about it, given its role with Satan in the Garden of Eden. It is other birds of Paradise that the exegetes speak of. They refer to large birds, with necks as wide as that of a camel, with seventy thousand feathers of different colours, that live on the banks of the river al-Kawṭar, whose waters are "whiter than milk and sweeter than honey". The elect, when they see these birds, will long for them, and they will fall before them already roasted, to

⁴¹ According to a legend, the dog was in fact created from the part of the earth that Iblīs had spitted on, which was removed by the angels just before the creation of Adam. See Basset, 1926: III, 12, from al-Qalyūbī's *Nawādir*.

⁴² aṣ-Ṣibli, *Ākām*, 41. On the transformism of Iblīs, see Calasso 1971:86-87.

⁴³ Five animals are considered to be 'impious' (*fāsiq*) by Muslims: the mouse, the scorpion, the snake, the rabid dog, the raven (Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad* I, 257, no. 2329). Other *ḥadīths* provide different lists, e.g. Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, kitāb al-Ḥaḡḡ* (15), 9 (no. 1198).

⁴⁴ Bedouins give great consideration to this animal. See al-Ġāhiz, *Ḥayawān* II, 192. The poet Ḥatīm at-Tayy had trained his dog to wag its tail as a welcome to newcomers; the heroine āat al-Himma used to say that "dogs have become our companions, having eaten our food" (cited by Lyons 1995: I, 29). On the behaviour of Arabs towards dogs see the remarks of Rex Smith in Ibn al-Marzubān, *Fadl*, ch. IV.

then return, with God's permission, alive and kicking(!)⁴⁵ According to certain traditions, other birds, which are white or green in colour, also exist in Paradise, feeding themselves on the fruits of its trees. In fact, these would be the souls of the martyrs (*shuhadā*) who, having fallen in the Holy War (*ḡihād*), take on this form in Paradise⁴⁶.

The Prophet said that "All the flies (*dubāb*) are destined for Hell, except bees"⁴⁷. Bees are in fact inspired by God in so perfectly constructing their cells, and in the production of their honey, which provides "healing for all men"⁴⁸. According to Ibn 'Abbās, Muhammad said that during his ascension to Heaven the angel showed him the four rivers of Paradise, respectively rivers of water, milk, wine, and "clarified honey" (*ʿasal muṣaffā*) (Q 47:15). Commentators, however, explain that this honey is not bee's honey, with its all its impurities, but is directly created by God⁴⁹.

4. Hell

The bird dearest to Satan – relates Ibn 'Abbās – was the peacock; the most detested was the cockerel, which, with is crow, calls the believers to prayer (al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣas* I, 66). The disgrace of the peacock was that of having been involved, together with the serpent, in the punishment which followed the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The peacock was lord of the birds, as the serpent was lord of the beasts. Originally, the serpent was in the shape of a camel, with four hooves, a tail of extraordinary colours and a crest of pearl. Satan, jealous of Adam, stayed at the door of Eden for seven hundred years, until the peacock left. He then played on its vanity, causing the peacock to be moved by his lament. The peacock asked for help from the serpent, which opened its mouth and Satan got in. Thus he was able to get past the guardian angel Ridwān through the door of Eden. Satan induced Eve to sin

⁴⁵ at-Tirmidī, *Sunan*, 39, 10, no. 2542; Ibn Kaṭīr, *Nihāya* II, 264; al-Qurtubī, *Tadkira*, 564; Ibn Ḥabīb, *Wasf*, 31, *Descripción*, 79. The Qur'ān limits itself to saying that the elect will eat "as much meat of delicate birds as they want" (The Terror, 56:21).

⁴⁶ See aṣ-San'ānī, *Musannaf* V, 263-265 (nos. 9553-9558).

⁴⁷ al-Ġāhiz, *Hayawān* III, 393; ad-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt* II, 339. Bees are also called *dubab al-ʿasal*, 'honey-flies'. It is one of the animals whose killing is forbidden by the Prophet, the others being the ant, the frog, the bird *surad*, and the hoopoe (ad-Damīrī, *Ḥayāt* I, 647; II, 349; cf. Ibn Ḥanbal, *Sunan* I, 347, no. 3241).

⁴⁸ Q, The Bee, 16:68-69: "And thy Lord revealed (*awhā*) unto the bees, saying: 'Take unto yourselves, of the mountains, houses, and of the trees, and of what they are building. Then eat of all manner of fruit, and follow the ways of your Lord easy to go upon' Then comes there forth out of their bellies a drink of diverse hues wherein is healing for men. Surely in that is a sign for a people who reflect." On traditions related to bees, see our essay "Api e miele" (1999), with its extensive bibliography.

⁴⁹ See ar-Rāzī, *Mafātih* XXVIII, 54-55; al-Qurtubī, *Ġāmi'* XVI, 237; aṣ-Suyūtī, *Durr* VI, 54-55.

next to the Tree of Eternity, and God dismissed them all from the Garden (fig. 1).⁵⁰ The serpent was transformed into the reptile that we all know, and was forced to slither on its belly. The angels pulled off the feathers of the peacock and Gabriel cursed it and dismissed it from Eden for all eternity. Nonetheless, people have been inspired with love for the peacock, and they never kill it.⁵¹ A still crueller fate was reserved for the serpent, the worst enemy of man, and numerous *ḥadīṭs* of the Prophet recommend that it should be killed.

According to one legend, when they were all dismissed from Eden, they wept. The tears of the serpent that fell onto the earth gave birth to the scorpion, whereas those that fell onto the sea gave birth to the crab; on the earth, those of the peacock turned into bugs, whereas on the sea its tears became leeches. Iblīs also cried: his tears turned into thorns on the earth, and crocodiles in water.⁵² The serpent fell to Iṣfahān, and the peacock to Babel.

Given all of this, it is of no surprise that Hell is full of snakes and scorpions (fig. 11). It would seem that these animals already cause suffering to the damned in their tombs, where ninety-nine snakes continually bite infidels. They are as big as camels, whereas scorpions are as big as mules⁵³. Some think, being so ugly, that they are created by Satan and not by God. al-Ġazālī mentions a *ḥadīṭ* of the Prophet, according to which there are seventy thousand valleys in Hell with as many offshoots, and in each one of these there is an equal number of snakes and scorpions that torment infidels and hypocrites⁵⁴.

We can only hope not to be among their number...

⁵⁰ The piece above is a synthesis of the narrations by al-Kisā'ī and al-Ta'labī. We have dedicated an extensive essay to snakes and scorpions (1990-1991), to which further reference can be made for a more in-depth analysis.

⁵¹ al-Kisā'ī, *Qisāṣ* I, 44, 50. But the peacock transmitted vanity to men. When Adam planted the vine, Satan killed a peacock, together with other animals, on its roots, so that it would absorb the blood. Drinking the wine, men become vain (ad-Damīri, *Ḥayāt* II, 651). The figure of the peacock assumes greater importance in the traditions, whose elements recall Mesopotamian and Iranian myths, related by al-Suyūṭī: at the beginning of time God created the Tree Yaqīn (*yaqīn*, 'certitude'), then the Muhammadan Light, like pure pearl, in the form of a peacock. He placed it on the Tree and glorified it for seventy thousand years. Then He created the Mirror of Life, and put it in front of the peacock, which, when it saw the reflection of its splendid image, it became ashamed and prostrated itself before God. The Lord created the angels, the Throne, the Table, the Quill, the stars, the Prophets, and all the creatures, from the exudation of that Light (*Durar*, 1). In certain Iranian traditions an ambiguous relationship between Iblīs and the peacock can be noted. The latter, in fact, was not only a mediator between Iblīs and the snake in entering Eden, but actually conducted Satan into the Garden (see Capezzone 1992:39 *sqq.*).

⁵² Related by Basset 1926: III, 13, from al-Qalyūbī's *Nawādir*.

⁵³ Ibn Ḥanbal, *Musnad* IV, 191, no. 17681; Ibn Kaṭīr, *Nihāyat* II, 159; al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyā'* IV, 517; also see al-Ġāhiz, *Ḥayawān* IV, 300: "cats are hostile to all the creatures of Satan, such as snakes, scorpions..."

⁵⁴ *Iḥyā'* IV, 515. According to Ibn Kaṭīr (*Nihāyat* II, 159), the *ḥadīṭ* is apocryphal.

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Fig. 1. Adam, Eve, the serpent, the peacock, and Satan in the Garden of Eden (Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, R. 1536: Naysâbüri, *Qisas al-anbiya'*, copied by 'Alâ' ad-Dîn Mansûr, 987/1579, f. 16b; ref. Milstein, Rührdanz & Schmitz 1999, fig. 40; Esin 1963, pl. 9).



Fig. 2. Noah and the animals in the Ark (Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, B. 250: ad-Daydüzamî, *Qisas al-anbiya'*, 983/1575-76, f. 45b; ref. Milstein, Rührdanz & Schmitz 1999, pl. XXVI).



Fig. 3. The ram offered by the Angel Gabriel to Abraham (Istanbul, Museum for Turkish and Islamic Art; unknown painter, 991/1583; ref. Esin 1963, pl. 15, detail).



Fig. 4. One of the four-faced angels who will hold up the Throne of God (*Mirāj Nāmeḥ*, f. 32b, pl. 30)



Fig. 5. The angel ad-Dik and Muḥammad on al-Buraq (*Mirāj Nāmeḥ*, f. 11, pl. 9).



Fig. 6. An angel in the fourth heaven in the form of a winged horse (St. Petersburg, Institute for Oriental Studies, ar. E.7: al-Qazwīnī, *ʿAḡāʾib al-mahlūqāt*, Baghdad 14th. cent., f. 39; ref. *Chevaux*, fig. 179, p. 217, detail).



Fig. 7. Hayzūn, the horse of Angel Gabriel (Istanbul, University Library, no. 4689, 9th/15th cent.; ref. Nasr 1976, pl. 10).



Fig. 8. al-Burāq, the mythical mount of Prophet Muhammad
(Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi H. 2152, f. 98b; ref. Grube 1980, pl. 14B).



Fig. 9. The Prophet Muhammad hearing the complaint of the gazelle (Istanbul, Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, painted by Seyyid Süleyman Kasım Paşa, 18th cent.; ref. Esin 1963, pl. 34).



Fig. 10. The dog Qitmīr in the cave with the Seven Sleepers (Los Angeles, C. & R. Benkaim Collection; Sa'dī, *Kulliyāt*, Shiraz 16th cent.; ref. Brosch & Milstein 1991, pl. 47).

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Fig. 11. The Prophet Muhammad looking at the snakes and scorpions which torture the arrogant and the presumptuous in Hell (*Mirāj Nāmah*, f. 67b, pl. 58).