

## PARADISE AS A PARABLE

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History, according to the three monotheistic religions, began with Adam's expulsion from paradise. It will end when the believers among the sons of Adam return to paradise. Between these two extremes, one mythical and the other eschatological, life upon earth is considered an interim, in which humanity strives to find the way back to paradise. In the miserable and chaotic terrestrial world, which is the inversion of paradise, political and spiritual leaders are necessary in order to establish a shadow of paradise upon earth and to guide the believers in the right way. The institutions of historical civilization, therefore, were ideally modeled on the image of paradise, while the image of paradise dialectically reflects human experiences, institutions, and yearnings. This dialectical relationship between two seemingly opposite worlds is a leading line in the Islamic arts, both literary and visual. When Muslim painters started to depict mythological subjects, in the early fourteenth century, they were certainly acquainted with Christian illustrations of the original sin. But surprisingly enough, not even one Islamic illustration of the episode is known to us. The only painting which reflects the Christian iconography, in al-Bīrūnī's *al-Ātār al-bāqiya*, is in fact an illustration of the Iranian myth of Meša, Mešana and Ahriman<sup>1</sup>.

This mixture of cultural traditions fits well into a pattern of syncretism in medieval Islamic literature. Depictions of the original sin are lacking in Islamic painting most probably because Muslim theologians underestimated its importance. Instead, they stressed Adam's regret and God's forgiveness (Kister 1993:149-155).

Most early illustrations of paradise, in the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries, are connected with the apocalyptic journey of Muḥammad to heaven, the *mi'rāğ*. Illustrated accounts, called *Mi'rāğ-nāme*, contain detailed depictions of the Prophet's prayer in *al-masğid al-aqṣā*, his ascent through the seven heavens to the presence of God, and finally his visits to paradise and hell, before his return to Mecca. In the famous fifteenth century *Mi'rāğ-nāme* from Herāt, paradise is represented by a cosmic tree, a series of screens or veils, a group of domed pavilions, and black-eyed virgins collecting flowers in paradisiacal meadows<sup>2</sup>. In a few later and more popular versions of the Muslim eschatology, the believers in paradise are seen embracing young

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced in Arnold 1932: pl. V; Soucek 1975: fig. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Paris, BNF, Ms. supp. turc 190, fols. 42a, 45b, 49b, 51a. Reproduced in Séguy 1977: pls. 36, 39, 42, 43.

beauties of both sexes<sup>3</sup>. But generally speaking, this erotic aspect of paradise is rarely depicted.

The most recurrent and interesting symbol of heaven and of the heavenly garden is a gate. In the earliest known depiction of the *mi'rāğ*, in Rašīd ad-Dīn's *Ġāmi' at-tawāriḥ*, Muḥammad is seen mounted on his fabulous steed Burāq at the gate of heaven. An angel offers him bowls of wine, water and sour milk to choose from. The Prophet wisely chooses the sour milk, thus assuring that his community will follow the right way to paradise<sup>4</sup>. The ancient Near Eastern motif of consuming food during the passage from one world to another here has a new interpretation. The choice of milk may symbolize the idea that earthly social groupings, which are based on blood relations, will be replaced in paradise by "milk" relations, that are bound on common education or ideology, and characterize religious associations<sup>5</sup>. When Muḥammad established his religious community, the *umma*, he intended it to supplant the pre-Islamic tribal system, thus bringing it closer to the heavenly paradigm. The iconography of this episode, especially the open gate of heaven, may reflect a Christian model of Christ descending to limbo to bring out Adam<sup>6</sup>. The eight gates of paradise – *abwāb al-ğinān* – are shown and identified, together with the heavenly pen and the book of acts, in the upper part of a typical eschatological map (Fig. 1), similar to the one discussed by Alexander Fodor in the second part of the Proceedings<sup>7</sup>. In this map, which first appeared in Ibn al-ʿArabī's *Futūḥāt al-ḥaramayn*, all the eight gardens are shielded by branches of the cosmic tree – *sidrat al-muntahā* or *šağarat at-tuba*<sup>8</sup>. The body of the Tuba' tree invades the eight gardens of paradise, the leafy summit or, sometimes, the inverted roots reach the abode of God. In some texts it is described as a tree of divine light, in others as the tree of knowledge or intelligence<sup>8</sup>. The drawing represents the topography of the events of the Day of Judgement, taking place simultaneously in *al-ḥaram as-šarīf* of Jerusalem and in a higher space, on the road between hell and paradise. A Crusaders' map of Jerusalem may have served as a model for an eighteenth century Ottoman drawing in which the gardens of paradise, summarized as a wall with eight gates, circumscribe

<sup>3</sup> For example, in a manuscript of *Aḥwāl al-qiyaḥa*, Philadelphia, The Free Library, Rare Book Department, Lewis Ms. O. T7, reproduced in Milstein 1990: fig. 2.

<sup>4</sup> On this miniature, see Blair's paper in this volume.

<sup>5</sup> This subject was treated by Kurin (1984: esp. 210-214).

<sup>6</sup> This iconography often depicts Christ stepping over two open door flops. E.g., a thirteenth century mosaic in Torcello.

<sup>7</sup> An Ottoman manuscript of *Kitāb al-ma'rifa*, London, The British Library, Or. 12964, fol. 23b.

<sup>8</sup> On the tree of paradise and its artistic expressions, see Milstein 1999:35-39.

the domain of the Divine (Fig. 2)<sup>9</sup>. There are eight gates because paradise in Islam is often said to be divided into eight gardens, one above the other. In architectural terms the number eight makes an octagon, a form common in Byzantine memorial monuments. This form was already adopted by Islam for its earliest monumental shrine, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. A typical drawing of the Dome of the Rock in Ottoman pilgrims' guides always includes symbols of the Last Judgement, of paradise, and of hell. In the sixteenth century drawing reproduced here, (Fig. 3), a beautiful domed pavilion in the lower left corner is identified by a Persian inscription as *dār-i bibišt* – the door of paradise. A well on the lower right is labelled *dār-i dauzah* – the door of hell, and the inverted triple-arch above the octagonal plan of the Dome of the Rock is said to be *dār-i taht-i rabb al-‘alamīn* – the door of God's throne. The gate to paradise, then, is said to be in Jerusalem, and is linked with the Day of Judgement<sup>10</sup>.

However, in the refined and cultivated courtly circles of Iran, the strong influence of Sūfī ideology transformed paradise into a quest for mystical love, and placed its gate within the heart. In the metaphorical language of Sūfī poetry a locked gate separates the Sūfī lover from his divine beloved, whose abode is a palace within a paradisiacal garden. The mounted lover in a late fourteenth century *dīwān* is obliged to remain in the uncultivated land, outside the carefully tended garden, as long as the gate remains closed to him<sup>11</sup>. According to the Sūfīs no one, not even the most prodigious lover, can open the door by himself. Therefore in many illustrations to Sūfī poetry an inscription above the door reads: *Yā muḥabb al-abwāb, iftaḥ lanā al-bāb* – Oh you who open doors, open the door for us<sup>12</sup>.

An open gate leading into a garden became a recurrent symbol in both Iranian and Ottoman miniature painting, especially in illustrations of Sūfī themes, or tales of the prophets. In a few frontispieces or endpieces for *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, a company of scholars or Sūfīs is seen studying or meditating in a paved open court, in front of a garden gate (Fig. 4)<sup>13</sup>. When a similar gathering takes place inside a mosque, a *madrasa*, or a *zāwīya*, the open gate is replaced by a *mihṛāb*. In real architecture the *mihṛāb* is a niche without a window in the innermost wall of the prayer hall, but in the miniatures an opening in the *mihṛāb* offers a view of a blossoming garden, thus

<sup>9</sup> Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. Or. quart 1837, fol. 10b. Medieval maps of Jerusalem often depict a round wall with several gates. See, for example, Vilnay 1963:52, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Haifa, The National Maritime Museum, Inv. No. 4576, fol. 49a. The manuscript is discussed in Milstein 2001.

<sup>11</sup> *Dīwān* of Ḥwāḡa Kirmānī. London, The British Library, Add. 18113, fol. 26b, reproduced in Gray 1977:46.

<sup>12</sup> See Milstein 1977:365-367.

<sup>13</sup> A frontispiece to *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 1226.

representing paradise<sup>14</sup>. In fact, the *mihrab* as a directional mark for the prayer symbolizes the direction of the right way, that is paradise. The paved open court and the garden of the previous miniature are repeated in another context – the expulsion from paradise. The same gate, which in the Sūfī assembly suggests a direction from the court into the garden, here leads in the opposite direction – out of the garden (Fig. 5)<sup>15</sup>. Adam, Eve, Satan and his accomplices are seen going out of the garden to the paved court, and out again through the pavilion gate. We see, then, that the gate of paradise, being a symbol of passage between the two worlds, can open in two directions. Adam and Eve went out, but being pardoned by God, they were shown the way back. In spite of his sin Adam received as a gift the black stone of the Ka'ba, and Gabriel taught him the rites of the *ḥaḡḡ* (Milstein *et al.* 1999:109; Kister 1993:159).

In the biblical myth Adam and Eve became aware of their nakedness after eating from the forbidden fruit. In a common Muslim version, on the contrary, Adam was endowed with royal robes, a crown and a throne as soon as he was brought into paradise. The angels in paradise were ordered to prostrate themselves before him, because he was a deputy of God – a *ḥalīfa*. Iblīs/Satan, who refused to bow before Adam, was punished by banishment from the presence of God in paradise, and he swore to revenge himself by leading the human race astray<sup>16</sup>. Persian miniatures which depict Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself vary in their interpretations of this act according to the artists' religious affinities. Besides the common iconography which depicts Iblīs as a sinner, a few paintings by extremist Sūfī circles reveal another point of view. Mainly in manuscripts of *Maḡālis al-ʿuṣṣāq*, Satan in Muslim garb is seen kneeling on a prayer rug, worshipping God. These Sūfīs, following the celebrated al-Hallāḡ, claimed that Iblīs was a true monotheist, who refused to prostrate himself before anyone but God. They even argued that the true lover of God, Iblīs, was gladly prepared to be banished from paradise, if this was the will of his beloved God<sup>17</sup>. This iconography, however, is limited to the manuscripts of certain Sūfī circles; other manuscripts depict the adoration of the angels, with or without the presence of Iblīs. In an illustration for a *Fal-nāme* from Ṣafawid Iran, Satan and his company are pushed to the back, outside paradise<sup>18</sup>. In some Ottoman miniatures Satan is not even present. There the real subject of the painting is

<sup>14</sup> E.g. Milstein 1990: figs. 6, 21.

<sup>15</sup> *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Diez A Fol. 3, fol. 13b.

<sup>16</sup> On the origins of the legends, see Sidersky 1933:15; Nagel 1960-; Pedersen 1960-; Altman 1944-45; Milstein *et al.* 1999:106-17. Some illustrations of this episode are discussed and reproduced in Milstein 1986.

<sup>17</sup> Milstein 1986:551. For illustration, see BNP, SP. 1559, fol. 10b; Schimmel 1975:194.

<sup>18</sup> A royal Ṣafawid *Fal-nāme*, Sacklar Gallery, D. C., S 86.0251, reproduced in Milstein 1995: fig. 2.

apparently Adam in court, as a deputy of God, a model of a ruling prophet<sup>19</sup>. This Ottoman insistence on the absence of Iblīs echoes an early Islamic interpretation of Adam's status as a substitute (*halīfa*) of God upon earth, based on Qur'ān 2:30. In this verse God says to the angels "I am setting in the earth a deputy". The term *halīfa* was a pivotal point of disagreement in the Sunnite-Šī'ite dispute about Ali's right to be the successor of the prophet Muḥammad (Kister 1993:116-128; Rubin 1975:79).

Having eaten from the forbidden fruit, Adam lost his kingly status. The crown, the throne and the royal robes flew away from him, declaring that they refused to adorn a sinner. In al-Kisā'ī's words, "As soon as Adam ate of the wheat, the crown flew away from his head, his signet rings were scattered, and all the clothes and jewelry that were on him and on his wife left them, saying that they could be used only by faithful servants of God. The throne, too, flew in the air and cried 'Adam has sinned'. Everything in paradise and all the angels from all directions reproached him, until he was obliged to flee" (al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ* 40). The inhabitants of paradise wanted to kill him, and several illustrations depict one of them raising a stick against Adam (pls. 5-6)<sup>20</sup>. The authors of the later Persian *qiṣaṣ* literature, who wish to stress Adam's spiritual attributes rather than the fall, tell that all those who were in paradise intended to attack Adam, but when they saw the prophetic light radiating from his forehead, they said: "This light has not disappeared, and therefore no one is allowed to raise his hand against him." The presence of other people in paradise, and the introduction of this rather strange legend suggests that the image may be a metaphor dealing with the ever present question in Islamic political history – when does a ruler lose his right to lead the community. According to this myth, the right to rule is in the hand of God. The origins of the composition may be in the Šī'ite regime of Ṣafawid Iran. In the context of a heated conflict between the Ottomans and the Ṣafawids, the position of the community with regard to a disgraced ruler may reflect dynastic propaganda or debates among partisans of this or that dynasty. Beside Adam, Eve, and Iblīs, the other sinners were the serpent, who introduced Satan into paradise, and the peacock, who introduced Satan to the serpent. The peacock's sins were pride and vanity, linking him with some ancient Near Eastern myths of descent into Hades. In all the Islamic illustrations of the episode, Satan and the other two accomplices follow Adam and Eve on their way out, but in several paintings the first

<sup>19</sup> Illustration in Christie's catalogue 1976:24. Here Adam is represented standing on a typical Ottoman *minbar*, instead of a throne. The illustration may be based on an early tradition, according to which Adam was given a *minbar*, as in al-Kisā'ī, *Qiṣaṣ* 29. A *minbar* instead of a throne suits the notion of the Ottoman sultans as caliphs.

<sup>20</sup> Another example, Istanbul, TSMK H. 1225, fol. 14b, illustration in Milstein *at al.* 1999: fig. 2.

couple is seen riding the serpent, before it lost its legs, and the peacock (Fig. 6)<sup>21</sup>. We cannot engage here in a detailed interpretation of the symbolism of these two animals, which are prominent in Salḡūq architecture and in all media of Islamic art. I can only suggest that the serpent and the peacock symbolise desires, and that riding them may mean that Adam and Eve were carried along by their desires or, conversely, had to learn to control them<sup>22</sup>. Satan in this painting is seen as young and handsome, with wings like an angel, apparently due to the heterodox Ṣūfī views of the artist. When they left paradise, the first man and woman took with them a few gifts or remembrances, each of which is an aspect of the future civilization. The ears of corn, which Eve is seen holding, are a symbol of food production and material culture; a rod from paradise, which later passed to Moses, is a symbol of the true religion, and in some circles a magical sign; a seal-ring, one of Adam's royal insignia, and later given by heaven to King Solomon, represents the power of kingship. The ears of corn occupy a central place in an illustration by an Ottoman court painter, thus presenting the expulsion from paradise not as the catastrophic end of a golden age, but as the beginning of a new civilization<sup>23</sup>. In this later historical age kings play a crucial role, and the Ottoman sultans based their claims of legitimacy on Adam and his kingly progeny. The ottoman sultans, who appropriated the title *halifa* after the conquest of the holy cities in Arabia, supported their claim by attributing their lineage to Adam. Thus we find in a royal Ottoman manuscript of *Zubdat at-tawārīḥ* an illustration of Adam and Eve and their progeny<sup>24</sup>. This image refers to an early tradition, according to which God showed Adam his famous ascendants, among whom the two most frequently illustrated were King David and the Prophet Muḡammad. The sultans, in their writings and their arts, constantly referred to the two lines of their spiritual ancestors, the prophetic and the royal, both originating in the figure of Adam. In this light the image of the angels' adoration of Adam, without the presence of Iblīs, can be explained as a portrayal of Adam in the role of a ruler. In this frame of reference several illustrations depict Ṣīt (Seth) and Idrīs, the children of Adam who received *maṣāḥif* – copies of the Holy Book – from heaven, and who taught humanity the skills of reading and tailoring. Idrīs, the Muslim name for the biblical Hanoch or the Christian Enoch, entered paradise while still alive, and managed to remain there for eternity (Huart 1960-; Vajda 1960-). Some illustrations depict him in a garden, surrounded by angels, and tailoring a coat (Fig.

<sup>21</sup> *Qisaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 1225, fol. 14b.

<sup>22</sup> Rūmī, *Matnawī* III, no. 4035.

<sup>23</sup> Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 1703, reproduced in Milstein 1995: fig. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Istanbul, Museum for Turkish and Islamic Art, Inv. 1973, fol. 18b. Discussion and illustration in Renda 1977: fig. 3; and Renda 1976:195, fig. 26.

7)<sup>25</sup>. In the Near Eastern civilizations clothes have always been regarded as the first and foremost symbol of culture, status and initiation. In the Iranian myth, the invention of garments was attributed to the first king, Gayumarth, who in a complex syncretism was integrated by Muslim writers with Adam, Seth, and Idrīs (Hartman 1966:266-273).

An example of this confused identity can be seen in a fourteenth century isolated miniature, most probably from a Book of Kings<sup>26</sup>. It depicts King Gayumarth and his court in the mountains, in a period which according to Iranian mythology represents the golden age of harmonious relationships between nature, human beings, and animals, in other words a lost paradise. In this semi-paradisiacal age Gayumarth founded civilization by establishing the institution of kingship and by introducing the robe. He and his people wore animal skins, but his son and heir to the throne invented weaving. King Gayumarth, then, has some points in common with the Muslim Adam and his sons. An owner of this painting identified the hero erroneously, and wrote the name Adam next to the image of Gayumarth. A later owner disagreed and added the name of Seth. We have seen that the concepts of paradise and of earthly kingdom interchange and enrich each other in Islamic painting. But painting in Islam was a limited medium, reserved to courtly circles. The public medium being architecture, Muslim rulers invested their monumental buildings with religious and political messages. For example, following the tradition of the Dome of the Rock they further developed the symbolic octagonal ground plan in palaces and especially in funerary architecture. Topped by a dome, which symbolizes heaven, a mausoleum represents paradise and is often called *rawḍa* or *rawza* – that is to say “a garden”. Royal palaces in Iran were called *bešt bihišt* – eight paradises, and were planned as a complex of eight radial units. This royal and funerary architecture, often combined with a large quadrangled garden around a central pool, probably influenced the painters who depicted paradise, and therefore in the fifteenth century *Mi‘rāḡ-name* illustration, the black-eyed beauties of paradise are depicted within an octagonal pavilion<sup>27</sup>.

To sum up, the image of paradise is based upon terrestrial forms and institutions. Like a mirrored image, it is an inverted form, the contradiction of this world, and yet it reflects a certain material reality. While at the same time gardens and royal tombs were invested with the ideal image of paradise as a means of conferring political legitimacy<sup>28</sup>, Abū l-‘Alā’ al-Ma‘arrī used the image of a heavenly voyage

<sup>25</sup> *Qisaṣ al-anbiyā’*, Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 1227, fol. 21b.

<sup>26</sup> Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 1253, fol. 55b, reproduced in Ipsiroglu 1966: pl. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Fol. 51, reproduced in Séguy 1977: pl. 43.

<sup>28</sup> This phenomenon is discussed by Jonathan Bloom in this volume.

as a poetic pretext for his literary ideas and criticism. In this paper I have tried to show that like al-Ma'arrī, some painters may have invested their illustrations of paradise with concrete historical references or modeled them on terrestrial realities. Thus a material object, the gate, heavily loaded both with political, moral and spiritual symbolism, became a necessary part of the artist's image of paradise.

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1. The topography of the Day of Judgement, London, the British Library., Or. 12964, fol. 23b.

وانك ليحون وحي دار التعميم بيمنده بر منتهما مكان معين در كيم استده  
 ساكن اولوب ه جنت لوي كرمك استايكجه ديلا ايسه اياقلا ايله  
 كزوب يوزوب ه واكر ديلا ايسه انواع جواهر ايله بزقش بيجه  
 بيك نوردن قناتلوي وارد كيم هر بر سينك طولي وعرضلويك ذكر كيم  
 غيرمكن در انلرا ايله اوچوب جنتلوي كرمك الله تعالى اكاخي اولقدر قوه  
 وقدرت وعظمت و بر مشدر كيم كهك زهر سبي واردر كه حق تعالى بولونك  
 جنتلوي خازني اولان هر حوتانك وصفي اين ايله ه لا يعلم الغيب الا الله تعالى



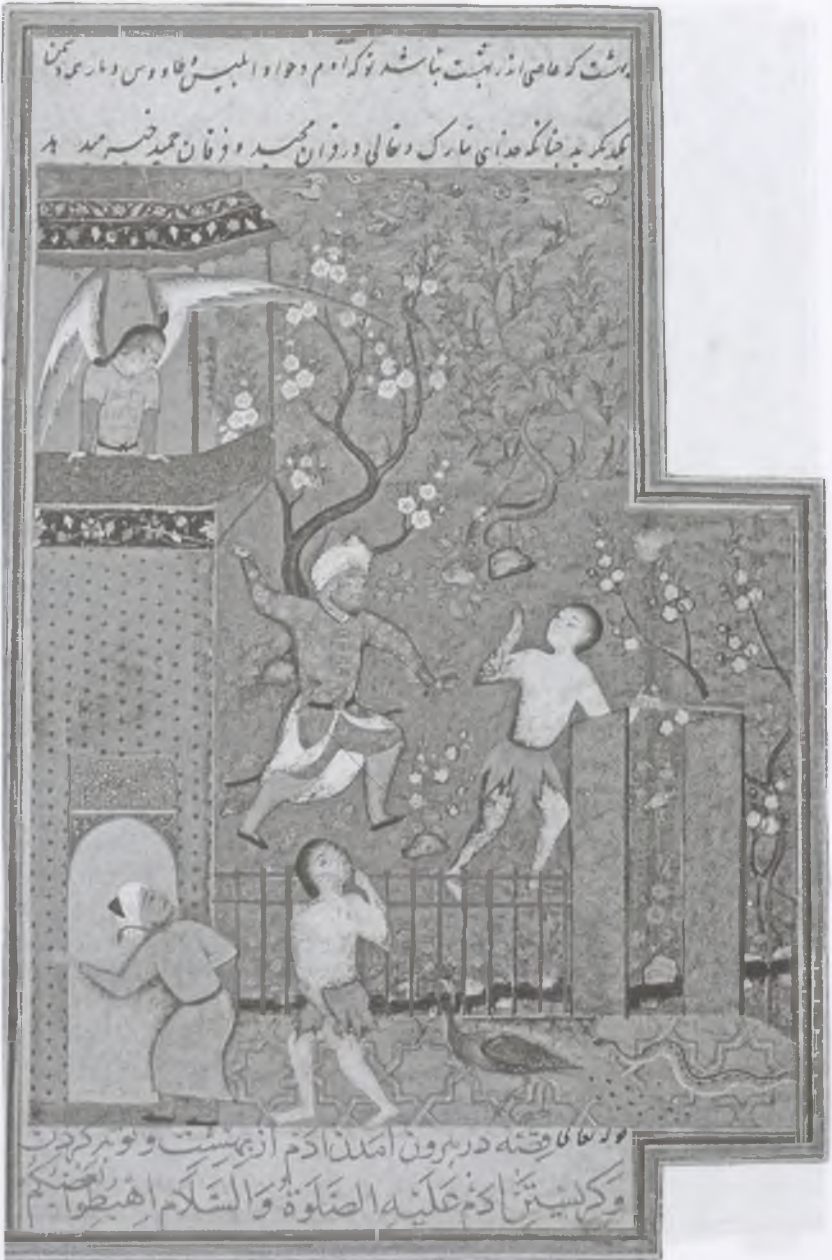
جنت كه ايله كيم يوز درجه  
 تا ايله انور على الله درجه انور  
 بجان ايله ملك كيم يوز



3. Al-Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, Haifa, The National Maritime Museum, Inv. No. 4576, fol. 49a.



4. A frontispiece to *Qışaṣ al-anbiyā'*, Istanbul, Topkapı Sarayı Müzesi, H. 1226.



5. Expulsion from Paradise. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Diez A Fol. 3, fol. 13b. 14b.



6. Expulsion from Paradise, Istanbul, Topkapi Saray Museum, H. 1225, fol. 14b.

