

DOSSIER FOR THE STUDY OF MIGUEL ASÍN PALACIOS' *LA ESCATOLOGÍA MUSULMANA EN LA DIVINA COMEDIA*, PART 1, SECTIONS II, III AND IV*

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Abstract

This article closely examines sections II, III, and IV of Part 1 of Miguel Asín Palacios's *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*. Written in the early 1900s, this notable text sparked a scholarly discussion about possible Islamic influences on Dante's *Divina Commedia*, preceding the identification of the *Liber Scalae Machometi*, commonly known as the 'missing link'. The paper begins with an overview of the pertinent Qur'ānic verses, which shed light on the remote origins of this scholarly debate (Part 1, Section I). It then places the work in the context of early twentieth-century Spanish Arabists, who drew attention to the Islamic cultural heritage in Spain and Europe. The central focus is a comparative examination of the Arabic textual sources employed by Asín Palacios in Part 1, Sections II, III, and IV, together with the accompanying appendix. Over the years, his account of the progressive development of the *isrā'* and *mi'rāj* narratives has been widely questioned, primarily because of his erroneous attribution of a key source text: ch. 167 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*), entitled *Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*), composed by the Murcian philosopher and Sūfī master Ibn 'Arabī. Nevertheless, setting aside this misidentification, Palacios' investigation into the sources remains worthy of consideration and acknowledgment.

Keywords

Islamic afterlife beliefs; *isrā'*, *mi'rāj*; Miguel Asín Palacios; Dante

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I. Introduction

Due to space constraints, a much shorter version of this essay that only partially accounts for the collected documentation is forthcoming in the journal *Romanic Review*. Here I have decided to offer the entire dossier regarding the pioneering Part 1, Sections II, III and IV of *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*,¹ the famous work by Miguel Asín Palacios, which opened the question of possible Islamic sources for the *Divina Commedia* in the early 20th century, before the discovery of the *Liber Scalae Machometi*, the so-called missing link.² This literary question and historiographical problem became one of the most unaddressed and compelling in 20th century Dante studies and, more generally, in the cultural debate.

After an introductory outline of the scriptural data from the Qur'ānic texts where the remote origins of the relevant traditions are found (discussed by Asín Palacios in Part 1, Section I), and a presentation of the worldview of Spanish Arabic scholars at the beginning of the last century, who drew attention to the Islamic cultural heritage in Spain and Europe, I will check against the Arabic sources the analysis proposed by Miguel Asín Palacios in Part 1, Sections II, III and IV and its related Appendix. This part of Asín Palacios' book remains relevant even today, in contrast with other parts of the same work that now appear outdated. Even though the focus of my contribution is not Asín Palacios' comparison with Dante's *Divina Commedia*, but rather his meticulous analysis of the formation of increasingly complex cycles of legends of the *isrā'* (night journey) and *mi'rāğ* (ascent), I will present the main examples of the comparison suggested by Asín Palacios, who accumulates many analogies.

One may ask: what novelty does this contribution intend to add to the debate? The short answer, which is far too simple in relation to such a debated topic, is

¹ MIGUEL ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia. Seguida de la historia y crítica de una polémica*, Estanislao Maestre, Madrid 1943² (reprint Forgotten Books, London 2018).

² The known text with the closest structural parallels to the *Divina Comedia* – though their precise relation is still unclear, due to a lack of philologically reliable and compelling evidence – is the *Book of Muhammad's Ladder*, found by UGO MONNERET DE VILLARD. He discusses it in *Lo studio dell'Islam in Europa nel XII e nel XIII secolo*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1944 (Studi e testi, 110), a long essay published as an introduction to a study concerning the Florentine Dominican missionary Ricold of Monte Croce who went to Baghdad at the end of the thirteenth century and returned to Florence in 1301. For the first time, Monneret connects the two medieval Latin and French translations of the *Book of Muhammad's Ladder* to one another, noting that they were overlooked by Asín Palacios and including them in a broad cycle of translations from Arabic and Hebrew in Christian Spain. See below p. 162–163.

none. However, in the history of these studies, Miguel Asín Palacios's analysis of the progressive construction of the complex of legends of the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* has often been dismissed too quickly on the basis of his false assumption regarding the possible source-text at the origin of the knowledge of such a complex of legends in the Medieval West: Chapter 167 of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) entitled *Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda* (*The Alchemy of Happiness*) by the Murcian thinker and ṣūfī mystic Ibn 'Arabī. This notwithstanding, Miguel Asín Palacios' pioneering work on the sources still deserves to be highlighted.³

II. The Remote Origin of the Complex of Legends

In the *Qur'ān*, *Sūra* 17 (*The Night Journey*, also known as *The People of Israel*), v. 1, belonging perhaps to the late Meccan period, shortly before 622, the year of *hiğra*, we read of a *isrā'* that the Prophet Muḥammad is said to have undertaken from Mecca (the Holy Temple, *al-masğid al-ḥarām*) to Jerusalem (the Farthest Temple, *al-masğid al-aqṣā*) or to an immaterial temple in the celestial space:⁴

³ See MAXIME RODINSON, « Dante et l'Islam d'après des travaux récents », *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 140/2 (1951), p. 203–236.

⁴ See JAMEL EDDINE BENCHEIKH, *Le voyage nocturne de Mahomet*, preface de ANDRÉ MIQUEL, suivi de *L'aventure de la parole*, Imprimerie nationale, Paris 1988 (a rewriting of the Prophet Muḥammad's journey following some known versions, including the one attributed to Ibn 'Abbās); CLAUDE GILLIOT, « Coran 17, *isrā'* 1 dans la recherche occidentale. De la critique des traditions au Coran comme texte », in MOHAMMED ALI AMIR-MOEZZI (ed.), *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam: ascensions célestes et itinéraires spirituels*, Peeters, Louvain – Paris 1996, p. 1–26. For a synthesis of this important article, see MOHAMMED ALI AMIR-MOEZZI, « ME'RĀJ i. DEFINITION », *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2010, available at < <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/meraj-i> > [consulted 30 June 2025]. In 1844, considering the first verse of *Sūra* 17 to have no relation with either this part or the rest of the *Qur'ān* in general, GUSTAV WEIL, *Historisch-kritische Einleitung in den Koran*, Velhagen & Klasing, Bielefeld 1844, argued that this verse was probably added during the time of the first caliph Abū Bakr (r. 632–634). Weil stresses the polemical aspect of the tradition that uses the *mi'rāğ* narrative to prove the superiority of Muḥammad over prophets of the past and the supremacy of Islam vis-à-vis previous religions. By contrast, THEODOR NÖLDEKE, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Göttingen 1860, p. 135, and later FRIEDRICH SCHWALLY in THEODOR NÖLDEKE, FRIEDRICH SCHWALLY (eds.), *Geschichte des Qorāns, Zweiter Teil: Sammlung des Qorāns*, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig 1919, p. 85–88, argue for the authenticity of the verse narrating the Prophet's dream regarding his *isrā'* from Mecca to Jerusalem. As for the 'fable of ascension', it could only have been joined to this verse after the Prophet's death, most likely in reference to ecstatic celestial journeys reported in older Christian literature. According to ANTHONY ASHLEY BEVAN, « Mohammed's Ascension to Heaven », in KARL MARTI (ed.), *Studien zur semitischen Philologie und Religionsgeschichte: Julius Wellhausen zum siebenzigsten Geburtstag am 17. Mai 1914 gewidmet von Freunden und Schülern*, Verlag von Alfred Töpelmann, Giessen 1914, p. 49–61, the traditional interpretation of this verse rests on three assumptions: i. 'the servant' in the verse is really Muḥammad; ii. 'the further sanctuary' is Jerusalem; and iii. the journey was miraculous in nature. While the first two assumptions may seem plausible, the third is not demonstrable. Two years after the publication of Bevan's study, BERTRAM SCHRIEKE, « Die Himmelsreise Muhammeds »,

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي أَسْرَى بِعَبْدِهِ لَيْلًا مِنَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ إِلَى الْمَسْجِدِ الْأَقْصَى الَّذِي بَارَكْنَا حَوْلَهُ لِنُرِيَهُ مِنْ آيَاتِنَا إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ.

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.⁵

Then, *Suwar 53 (The Star)*, v. 1–18 and 81 (*The Darkening*), v. 19–25, indicate a heavenly or celestial *mi'rāj* (which literally also means ‘ladder’ or ‘stairway’) of the Prophet Muḥammad and his visits to Paradise and Hell.⁶

وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ ۝ ١ مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ ۝ ٢ وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۝ ٣ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ ۝ ٤ عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ ۝ ٥ ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ ۝ ٦ وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ ۝ ٧ ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ ۝ ٨ فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ ۝ ٩ فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ ۝ ١٠ مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ ۝ ١١ أَفَتَمَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ ۝ ١٢ وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ ۝ ١٣ عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ ۝ ١٤ عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ ۝ ١٥ إِذْ يَخْشَى الْيُسْرَىٰ ۝ ١٦ مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ ۝ ١٧ لَقَدْ رَأَى مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ ۝ ١٨

By the Star when it plunges, your comrade is not astray, neither errs, nor speaks he out of caprice. This is naught but a revelation revealed, taught him by one terrible in power, very strong; he stood poised, being on the higher horizon, then drew near and suspended hung, two bows'-length away, or nearer, then revealed to his servant that he revealed. His heart lies not of what he saw; what, will you dispute with him what he sees? Indeed, he saw him another time by the Lote-Tree of the Boundary nigh which is the Garden of the Refuge, when there covered the Lote-Tree that

Der Islam, 6 (1916), p. 1–30 argued that the *al-masjid al-aqṣā* is to be located in heaven. He argues that the identification of this ‘Further Mosque’ with Jerusalem derives from a tradition of Umayyad origin, invented during the rule of the Umayyad caliph ‘Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), with the aim of glorifying Jerusalem to the detriment of Mecca, which was governed by the anti-caliph ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Zubayr (d. 692). More recently, ANGELIKA NEUWIRTH has offered a detailed literary and philological analysis of verse 17:1 in « Erste Qibla-Fernste Masgid? Jerusalem im Horizonte des historischen Muḥammad », in FERDINAND HAHN et al. (eds.) *Zion-Ort der Begegnung (Festschrift für Laurentius Klein)*, Athenäum, Bodenheim 1993, p. 227–270, in particular p. 240–259. She argues that this verse narrates the spiritual experience of the Prophet Muḥammad’s *isrā’* to Jerusalem and is in perfect harmony with what follows. See also: JOSEF VAN ESS, « Vision and Ascension: Sūrat al-Najm and its Relationship with Muḥammad’s *mi'rāj* », *Journal of Quranic Studies*, 1/1 (1999), p. 47–62. For a more in-depth analysis of this verse, in particular regarding the destination of the night journey and the identification of the servant, as well as the stylistic and structural differences between this verse and the rest of the *sūra*, see MOHAMMED ALI AMIR-MOEZZI, GUILLAME DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, Tome 1: *sourates 1-26*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2019, p. 656–664.

⁵ ARTHUR JOHN ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, A Touchstone Book Published by Simon & Schuster, New York, NY 1996, vol. I, p. 302.

⁶ See VAN ESS, « Vision and Ascension: Sūrat al-Najm and its Relationship with Muḥammad’s *mi'rāj* », p. 47–62; MOHAMMED ALI AMIR-MOEZZI, *L’ascension céleste du prophète Muḥammad: note bibliographique*, in Id. et al. (eds.), *Pensée grecque et Sagesse d’Orient. Hommage à Michel Tardieu*, Brepols, Turnhout 2009, p. 47–61.

which covered: his eye swerved not, nor swept astray. Indeed, he saw one of the greatest signs of his Lord.⁷

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ ١٩ ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ ٢٠ مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ ٢١ وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ ٢٢ وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأَفْقِ الْمُبِينِ ٢٣ وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ ٢٤ وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ ٢٥.

Truly this is the word of a noble Messenger having power, with the Lord of the Throne secure, obeyed, moreover trusty. Your companion is not possessed; he truly saw him on the clear horizon; he is not niggardly of the Unseen. And it is not the word of an accursed Satan; where then are you going?⁸

Finally, in *Sūra* 84 (*The Rending*), v. 19, some authors found a reference to the description of the world of the hereafter in various overlapping or parallel degrees/levels:

لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَنْ طَبَقٍ.

you shall surely ride stage after stage.⁹

From these very scarce Qur'ānic references, a rich production of fantastic legends blossomed in Islam,¹⁰ often, but not only, in the form of Sayings of the Prophet (*aḥādīṭ*, plur. of *ḥadīṭ*) in which, as Asín Palacios writes,

la fecunda imaginación oriental prodigó sus más espléndidas galas llenando el inmenso horizonte, que el supuesto viaje nocturno le ofrecía, con variadísimos episodios y pintorescas escenas en número cuasi infinito. Un libro entero no bastaría a contener el estudio documentado de la completa evolución de todas las ramificaciones de la leyenda, nacidas como glosa de aquel insignificante versículo del Alcorán, bajo la forma de *ḥadīṭs* o tradiciones del Profeta, en cuya boca se pone la descripción pormenorizada de todas las maravillas que vio en su nocturno viaje.¹¹

What is the historical context in which these verses were immediately re-elaborated?

⁷ ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 244. See AMIR-MOEZZI, DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique, Tome 2: sourates 27-114*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2019, p. 1599-1606.

⁸ ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 326. See AMIR-MOEZZI, DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique, Tome 2: sourates 27-114*, p. 1990-1993.

⁹ ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 331. See AMIR-MOEZZI, DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II: *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique, Tome 2: sourates 27-114*, p. 2015-2016.

¹⁰ As one finds in different cultural and religious contexts. Compare for example the brief reference to Enoch walking with God in Genesis 5:24 or Paul's reference in 2 Corinthians 12: 1-9 to being taken up into the third heaven.

¹¹ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 10.

In 619, the year of sorrow (*‘ām al-ḥuzn*), almost tenth year after the first revelation, Prophet Muḥammad experienced the greatest sadness of his life: Ḥadīġa, his wife for twenty-five years, died. This loss was followed closely by the death of his uncle Abū Ṭālib ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the chief of the Banū Hāšim, who had supported and defended him since he was a young orphan. The new chief of the clan, Abū Lahab, under pressure from Banū Qurayš, was increasingly hostile to the Prophet Muḥammad, to the point of depriving him of all protection against tribal customary law. Hence, Prophet Muḥammad decided to go to al-Ṭā’if, a city located about 120 kilometers east of Mecca, on the caravan route to Yemen. The people there harshly rejected him and his message. This period of strong opposition immediately precedes the *hiġra* of 622, when Prophet Muḥammad accepted the invitation of a group of Hebrew residents of Yaṭrib, an area of palm-covered oases 325 kilometers north of Mecca, in search of someone who could reconcile their territories, which had been torn apart by fighting between the Aws and the Ḥazraġ, two rival clans of the Banū Qayla, in which the three main Jewish clans, Nadīr, Qurayza and Qaynuqā’, were also involved. In the face of these difficulties, the community bothered the Prophet Muḥammad with constant requests for miracles.¹²

In this context a *mi’rāġ* would have been the ultimate miracle, the manifest proof of the truthfulness of God’s messenger.¹³ According to the Kātib al-Wāqidī, Ibn Sa’d (d. 845), the *isrā’* probably took place on 17 Rabī’ I and the *mi’rāġ* on Ramadan of 621, even if, since tenth century, the *Laylat al-mi’rāġ* was celebrated during the night preceding 17 Raġab.¹⁴

¹² Miracles are explicitly rejected by the Prophet Muḥammad in the *Qur’ān*. See for example *Sūra* 13 (*Thunder*), v. 7 and 27: « The unbelievers say, ‘Why has a sign not been sent down upon him from his Lord?’ Thou art only a warner, and a guide to every people »; « The unbelievers say, ‘Why has a sign not been sent down upon him from his Lord?’ Say: God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides to Him all who are penitent » (ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, p. 268, 270–271). See AMIR-MOEZZI, DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, Tome 1: *sourates* 1–26, p. 558–559, 561–563. The *Ṣaḥīḥ* Muḥammad ibn Ismā’īl al-Buḥārī (d. 870) and the *Ṣaḥīḥ* Abū l-Ḥusayn Muslim ibn al-Ḥaġġāġ al-Naysābūrī (d. 875), for example, mention Muḥammad’s miracle of the splitting of the moon six and seven times (respectively).

¹³ *Qur’ān*, *Sūra* 17 (*The Night Journey*), v. 90–93: They say: « We will not believe thee till thou makest a spring to gush forth from the earth for us, or till thou possessest a garden of palms and vines, and thou makest rivers to gush forth abundantly all amongst it, or till thou makest heaven to fall, as thou assertest, on us in fragments, or thou bringest God and the angels as a surety, or till thou possessest a house of gold ornament, or till thou goest up into heaven; and we will not believe thy going up till thou bringest down on us a book that we may read. Say: ‘Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a mortal, a Messenger?’ » (ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, p. 312). See AMIR-MOEZZI, DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, Tome 1: *sourates* 1–26, p. 683–686.

¹⁴ IBN SA’D, MUḤAMMAD, *Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad ‘Umar, Maktabat al-Ḥāngī, al-Qāhira 2001, vol. I, p. 118.15; IBN SA’D, *Kitāb Al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kabīr*, transl. SYED MOINUL HAQ, HABIBUL KHAN GHAZANFAR, Pakistan Historical Society, Karachi 1967, vol. I, p. 245.

Very early the main evidence of a cluster of legends were grouped into three different accounts recorded in the *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya* by Ibn Hišām,¹⁵ in Qur'ānic commentaries such as the *tafsīr* by al-Ṭabarī (d. 923) – his *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān*¹⁶ based on *aḥādīṭ* collections by al-Buḥārī, by Muslim, and by Nasā'ī (d. 915) –, then in the works of the genre *dalā'il al-nubuwwa*, such as those by Aḥmad al-Bayḥaqī (d. 1066),¹⁷ and later in the works dedicated to the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* of the Prophet, subject of a religious literary genre called *kutub al-mi'rāğ*, such as the *al-Isrā' wa-l-mi'rāğ* falsely attributed to the Prophet's companion, Ibn 'Abbās (d. c. 686; see below).¹⁸

(i) According to the first account, probably the oldest, the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* are one single event: the celestial *mi'rāğ* took place during the span of a single night from Mecca to the Farthest Temple located in heaven. No other details are given.

(ii) According to the second account, v. 1 of *Sūra* 17 (*The Night Journey*) is linked to v. 60 of the same *Sūra* where the *isrā'* is called 'vision' (*ru'yā*):

وَإِذْ قُلْنَا لَكَ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ أَحَاطَ بِالنَّاسِ وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الرُّؤْيَا الَّتِي أَرَيْنَاكَ إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلنَّاسِ وَالشَّجَرَةَ الْمَلْعُونَةَ فِي الْقُرْآنِ وَنُخَوِّفُهُمْ
فَمَا يَزِيدُهُمْ إِلَّا طُغْيَانًا كَبِيرًا.

And when We said to thee, 'Surely thy Lord encompasses men', and We made the vision that We showed thee and the tree cursed in the Koran to be only a trial for men and We frighten them, but it only increases them in great insolence.¹⁹

¹⁵ 'ABD AL-MALIK IBN HIŠĀM, *Al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, MUṢṬAFĀ AL-SAQQĀ et al. (eds.), Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, al-Qāhira 1955, vol. I, p. 396–408.

¹⁶ ABŪ ĠĀ'FAR MUḤAMMAD IBN ĠARĪR AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ġāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān, ta'lif Abū Ġā'far Muḥammad ibn Ġarīr al-Ṭabarī*, 30 vols., Maṭba'at al-Kubrā al-Amīriyya, Būlāq 1905–1911, vol. XV, p. 3.6–14.7; vol. XXVII, pp. 26.7–36.7. The margins include the commentary by Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-Nisābūrī (d. 1021). For the different accounts see in particular vol. XV, p. 5.9–12: « The scholars differed regarding the manner in which God, the Blessed and Exalted, took His Prophet, peace be upon him, on a journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest mosque. Some said that God took him bodily and made him travel by night on al-Burāq from His Sacred House to His farthest House until He brought him there and showed him whatever He willed of His wondrous signs, lessons, and great dominion ». Al-Ṭabarī himself believes that the Prophet Muḥammad « was carried in body »; p. 13.22: « Others still said that he was led on a journey with his spirit and not with his body ».

¹⁷ AḤMAD IBN AL-ḤUSAYN AL-BAYḤAQĪ, *Dalā'il al-nubuwwa wa-ma'rifat aḥwāl sāḥib al-šar'a*, ed. 'ABD AL-MU'TĪ QAL'AGĪ, Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, Bayrūt 1985; vol. II, p. 354–405.

¹⁸ IDA ZILIO-GRANDI, *Il viaggio notturno e l'ascensione del profeta nel racconto di Ibn 'Abbās*, Einaudi, Torino 2010. Alongside this work, we can also mention the *Kitāb al-mi'rāğ* by ABŪ L-QĀSIM 'ABD AL-KARĪM AL-QUŠAYRĪ ['ABD AL-KARĪM IBN HAWĀZIN AL-QUŠAYRĪ, *Kitāb al-mi'rāğ*, in 'A. Ḥ. 'ABD AL-QĀDIR (ed.), *Dār al-kutub al-ḥadīṭa*, Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadīṭa, al-Qāhira 1964], probably written in response to the *Mi'rāğ-nāma* attributed to his contemporary Avicenna.

¹⁹ ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, p. 309. See AMIR-MOEZZI, DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, Tome 1: sourates 1–26, p. 675, albeit with no reference to the 'vision' (*ru'yā*).

So, the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* were not conceived as something that took place in the state of wakefulness and the physical world, but in sleep as a sort of vision occurring in Prophet Muḥammad's mind (*ru'yā*), or as a truthful dream. It seems that many intellectuals and philosophers supported this interpretation still at the end of the twelfth century. Faḥr-al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209) in his *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr aw mafātīḥ al-ğayb* felt obliged to defend the doctrine of a physical journey which he considered 'orthodox'.²⁰

(iii) According to the third account – the one reconstructed by Miguel Asín Palacios – the main elements, albeit with many variations, are the following. One Friday night, while Prophet Muḥammad is asleep, he is awakened by the archangel Ġibrīl (Gabriel), accompanied (or not) by the angel Mīkā'il (Michael) and a third mysterious character, to begin a journey in several stages. After having his heart cleansed of doubt and idolatry, he makes an *isrā'* at the speed of lightning, mounted (or not) upon a winged animal with an angelic or female human face named *Burāq* (lit. 'lightning'), from Mecca (from the Ka'ba, or from his own house, or from the house of Umm Hānī, the sister of his cousin and son-in-law 'Alī) to the Farthest Mosque in Jerusalem to lead the prayer of God's messengers, the Prophets who had preceded him, in the site of Abraham's intended sacrifice of Ishmael, where the Dome of the Rock (*Qubbat al-ṣaḥra*) would later be built. Accompanied by Ġibrīl, who answers his many questions, he climbs a steep mountain to the Earthly Paradise and sees Hell below Jerusalem, shaped like a funnel formed by levels into which the damned are placed. The location of Hell is problematic: some authors present it as visible from some astronomical heaven, others from the terrestrial world. From the top of the mountain, the Prophet Muḥammad then begins to cross the astronomical heavens, starting with that of the Moon, where he meets Ādam (Adam) and the ideas of all earthly creatures. Proceeding up to the seventh heaven, he meets various Prophets in their celestial dimension, including 'Īsā (Jesus), Yaḥyā (John the Baptist), Yūsuf (Joseph), Idrīs (Enoch), Hārūn ibn 'Imrān (Aaron), Mūsā ibn 'Imrān (Moses) and Ibrāhīm (Abraham), though Ibrāhīm, Mūsā and 'Īsā are the most frequently mentioned. Then the Prophet Muḥammad reaches the Lotus of the Utmost Boundary (*sidrat al-muntahā*), beyond which the angel Ġibrīl can no longer accompany him. The Lotus of the Utmost Boundary blossoms at the right hand of God's invisible Throne (*al-'arṣ*) and is the limit (*intihā'*) of knowledge to which man can aspire as a creature. Here Muḥammad passes through darkness, silence, and frost to a mysterious light surrounded by spheres of shining angels, in whose presence he becomes a mere perception and is able to see God, who gives him His message: the promise of the joys of Paradise to the righteous and the threat of torment to the wicked. Finally, the Prophet Muḥammad descends to

²⁰ See FAḤR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ, *Mafātīḥ al-ğayb*, Dār iḥyā' al-turāṭ al-'arabī, Bayrūt 1995, vol. VII, p. 293–297. GUY MONNOT, *Le commentaire de Rāzī sur le voyage nocturne*, in AMIR-MOEZZI (ed.), *Le voyage initiatique en terre d'Islam*, p. 62–64.

Jerusalem and returns to Mecca. The next day, he recounts what he had seen in the presence of Umm Hānī, who in turn tells Mālik, one of the Prophet's companions, from whom the tradition originated, was authenticated and spread. This became the Sunni orthodox account, according to which the *isrā'* and the celestial *mi'rāğ* took place in the real world and in a state of full consciousness. It was a miracle aimed at proving the Prophetic mission of Muḥammad.²¹

The narrative of the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* extended far beyond the circles of traditionists and theologians, flourishing in the literature of the *mirabilia* ('*ağā'ib wa ġarā'ib*), in popular literature, and in poetry. To take but one example, the Egyptian poet, grammarian and calligrapher al-Būṣīrī (d.1294) wrote the *Qaṣīdat al-Burda* (the *Poem of the Mantle*) or *al-Kawākib al-Durriyya fī madḥ ḥayr al-barriyya* (*Resplendent Stars in Praise of the Best of Creation*),²² a composition of 175 verses in praise of the Prophet Muḥammad, who is said to have cured him of his paralysis by appearing to him in a dream and wrapping him in his cloak, the *burda*. The news of al-Būṣīrī's miraculous recovery spread throughout the court of the Mamlūk sultan and among the people, earning the poet the reputation of a saint. His poetic compositions were said to have thaumaturgical properties, such that his verses were written on amulets and recited at the washing of the dead and funerals to invoke divine mercy for the dead.

سَرَيْتَ مِنْ حَرَمٍ لَيْلًا إِلَى حَرَمٍ
كَمَا سَرَى الْبَذْرُ فِي دَاجٍ مِنَ الظُّلَمِ
وَبِتَّ تَرْقَى إِلَى أَنْ بُلْتَ مَنْزِلَةً
مِنْ قَابِ قَوْسَيْنِ لَمْ تُدْرِكَ وَلَمْ تُرَمِ
وَقَدَّمْتُكَ جَمِيعَ الْأَنْبِيَاءِ بِهَا
وَالرُّسُلُ تَقْدِيمَ مَخْدُومٍ عَلَى خَدَمِ
وَأَنْتَ تَخْتَرُقُ السَّبْعَ الطَّبَاقَ بِهِمْ
فِي مُوَكَّبٍ كُنْتَ فِيهِ الصَّاحِبَ الْعَلَمِ
حَتَّى إِذَا لَمْ تَدْعُ شَأْوًا لِمُسْتَبِقِ
مِنَ الدُّنْيَا وَلَا مَرْقَى لِمُسْتَبِقِ

You travelled by night from one sacred place to yet another, / Just as the full moon travels across the pitch-black sky / That night you ascended until you reached a station of nearness / Only two bows-lengths distant, a station never before attained or even hoped for / Thus all the Prophets and Messengers gave precedence to you, / The precedence of a master over those who serve him, / You traversed the Seven Heavens with them, / And you were the standard bearer – leading their procession,

²¹ For a synopsis of all the elements of the *mi'rāğ* narrative see BENCHEIKH, *Le voyage nocturne de Mahomet*.

²² MUḤAMMAD IBN-SA'ĪD AL-BŪṢĪRĪ, *Kawākib al-durriyya fī madḥ al-bariyya*, ed. VINCENZ ROSENZWEIG VON SCHWANNAU, Anton Schmid, Wien 1824.

/ Until you left no greater goal for the seeker of eminence / and proximity, Nor any higher station for the one seeking elevation.²³

III. Spanish Arabic Studies at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

The two journeys of Prophet Muḥammad and Dante were first compared by the Spanish Priest and Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios. On 29 January 1919, during the ceremony of his public installation at the Royal Academy of Madrid, Asín Palacios read an excerpt from his volume which would be published that same year as *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*. The highest ecclesiastical and civil authorities were present; it was not only an academic, or scientific conference, but an institutional occasion of the highest prestige, where the cultural policy of Spain as a nation was developed and celebrated. This publication opened the so-called question of the possible Arabo-Islamic sources of the *Divina Commedia*. At stake was not only the originality of the *Divina Commedia* but its originality as a symbol of Medieval Christianity considered independent of any imitative process of other models. Asín Palacios writes in his introduction to the volume:

La tesis de este libro que, seguramente, sonará en algunos oídos a sacrilegio artístico o hará dibujar quizá la sonrisa de la ironía en los labios de no pocos que todavía creen en la inspiración del artista como fenómeno preternatural, independiente de todo estudio imitativo de modelos ajenos.²⁴

The volume suggested the pervasive presence of foreign sources in Dante's work, which were considered controversial due to their non-European and Muslim origins. But with this work, the Spanish abbot placed himself in a precise intellectual path aimed at demonstrating the « transitivity of the frontiers of migrating ideas, the intrinsic circulation of cultural material as a place of the constitution of civilizations », as Andrea Celli writes in his study of Spanish Arabism.²⁵

²⁴ SUZANNE PINCKNEY STETKEVYCH, *The Mantle Odes. Arabic Praise Poems to the Prophet Muḥammad*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010, p. 127–128, v. 107–111.

²⁴ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 3.

²⁵ CELLI, *Figure della relazione. Il Medioevo in Asín Palacios e nell'arabismo spagnolo*, Carocci, Roma 2005, p. 52. See the critical remarks in STEFANO RAPISARDA, « Arabismo al revés. A proposito di un recente libro su Asín Palacios e l'arabismo spagnolo », in A. FABIANI, *España al revés. Atti del primo convegno di studi interdisciplinari*, Ragusa Ibla 4–5 aprile 2006, in *Quaderni di Dipartimento di Filologia Moderna dell'Università di Catania*, Catania 2008, p. 103–114. See also STEFANO RAPISARDA, « La Escatología musulmana di Asín Palacios nella cultura italiana contemporanea. Una ricezione ideologica? », in CLAUDIO GIUSEPPE ANTONI, *Echi letterari della cultura araba nella lirica provenzale e nella Commedia di Dante. Atti del Convegno internazionale (Università degli Studi di Udine, 15–16 aprile 2005)*, Campanotto Editore, Pasian di Prato 2006 (Zeta Università, 96), p. 159–190.

In the aftermath of the First World War, when Europe was faced with an estimated fifteen to seventeen million deaths and the possibility of annihilation, Spain experienced a period of political and social uncertainty, during which the country sought to define its national identity, including the process of coming to terms with its Arabo-Islamic historical legacy.

This legacy was the central theme of the research of another important Spanish Arabist, Julián Ribera y Tarragó (1858–1944),²⁶ a student of Francisco Codera Zaidín (1836–1917),²⁷ who was a professor of Greek, Arabic, and Latin at the Universidad Central in Madrid and the director of the *Bibliotheca arabico-hispana* project.²⁸

In 1887, at the age of twenty-nine, Julián Ribera y Tarragó became Professor of Arabic at the University of Zaragoza, where he taught Miguel Asín Palacios, a young seminarian, as a student. From 1904, he was professor at the Universidad Central in Madrid, first of the History of Jews and Muslims and then, from 1913 until his retirement, of Spanish-Arabic Literature. He writes:

La más ridícula postura que puede adoptar un español es la de empeñarse en servir a España negándose a aceptar las influencias que ésta ha recibido durante los siglos en que estuvo en lucha contra el islamismo. ¡Como si no hubiera sido la Europa

²⁶ EMILIO GARCÍA GÓMEZ, « Don Julián Ribera y Tarragó », *al-Andalus*, 2 (1934), p. I–VIII; BERNABÉ LÓPEZ GARCÍA, « Julián Ribera y su taller de arabistas: una propuesta de renovación », *Miscelánea de Estudios Árabes y Hebraicos*, 22–23 (1983–1984), p. 111–128.

²⁷ JAMES THOMAS MONROE, *Islam and the Arabs in Spanish Scholarship. Sixteenth Century to the Present*, E.J. Brill, Leiden 1970; MANUELA MANZANARES DE CIRRE, *Arabistas españoles del siglo XIX*, Instituto Hispano-Árabe de Cultura, Madrid 1972.

²⁸ The *Bibliotheca arabico-hispana* is a series of ten published volumes that appeared in Madrid between 1882 and 1895, including the most famous biographies of scholars in Islamic Spain. The ten published volumes are the following: vol. I–II: IBN BAŠKUWĀL, ḤALAF IBN ‘ABD AL-MALIK, ABEN-PASCUALIS, *Assila (Dictionarium biographicum) ad fidem codicis Escorialensis Arabice nunc primum editit et indicibus locupletissimis instruxit Franciscus Codera*, Apud J. de Rojas, Matriti 1882–1883; vol. III: AL-ḌABBĪ, AHMAD IBN YAḤYĀ IBN AHMAD IBN ‘AMĪRA, *Desiderium quaerentis historiam virorum populi Andalusiae (Dictionarium Biographicum) ab Adh-Dhabbī scriptum ad fidem codicis escorialensis arabice nunc primum ediderunt, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Julianus Ribera*, Apud J. de Rojas, Matriti 1885; vol. IV: IBN AL-ABBĀR, MUḤAMMAD IBN ‘ABD ALLĀH, *Almôcham de discipulis Abu Ali Assadafi (i.e. al-Muḡam fi aṣḥāb al-Qāḍī al-Imām Abi ‘Alī al-Ṣadafi), (dictionarium ordine alphabetico) ab Aben al-Abbar scriptum ad fidem codicis escorialensis arabice nunc primum edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Zaydin*, Apud J. de Rojas, Matriti 1885–1886; vol. V–VI: IBN AL-ABBĀR, MUḤAMMAD IBN ‘ABD ALLĀH, *Complementum libri Assilah (dictionarium biographicum) ab Aben al-Abbar scriptum, partem, quae superest, ad fidem codicis escorialensis arabice nunc primum edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Zaydin*, Apud Michaellem Romero, Matriti 1886–1889; vol. VII–VIII: IBN AL-FARADĪ, ‘ABD ALLĀH IBN MUḤAMMAD, *Historia virorum doctorum Andalusiae (Dictionarium biographicum) ab Aben al-Faradhi scripta ad fidem codicis Tunicensis Arabice nunc primum edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera. Accedunt duo fragmenta inedita ex Aben Pascualis Assila*, Typographia La Guirnalda, Matriti 1891–1892; vol. IX–X: MUḤAMMAD IBN ḤAYR, *Index librorum de diversis scientiarum ordinibus quos a magistris didicit Abu Bequer ben Khair ad fidem codicis escorialensis arabice nunc primum edidit, indicibus additis Franciscus Codera et Zaydin et J. Ribera Tarragó*, In typ. fratrum Comas, Caesaraugustae 1894–1895.

entera la que se hubiese dejado influir, a veces más profundamente que la misma España! Los traductores de Toledo, la Escolástica, las escuelas de Medicina y otras ciencias en Europa, se dieron mucha más prisa en admitir la ciencia árabe que la propia Península; y no sólo en el campo en las disciplinas profanas, sino hasta en la teología y en la mística (Alberto Magno, Santo Tomás, Lulio, etc.).²⁹

In this intellectual and ideological framework, Julián Ribera y Tarragó investigated the fortune of the Islamic culture of al-Andalus not only in the formation of Spanish historical and literary culture and identity, but also in other literary traditions. In *El cancionero de Abencuzmán*, he studied the collection of poems (*diwān*) of the Cordovan poet Ibn Quzmān (d. 1160) and compared them with later Castilian and Provençal lyric poetry. When he presented this study in his inaugural speech at the Royal Academy of Spain in 1912, he insisted on the importance of studying Arabic sources for the reconstruction of Spanish medieval history, as well as the fusion of Islamic and Christian cultures, the contributions of the former to the latter, and the need to implement Arabic studies in Spain.³⁰ At that time there were only three chairs in the universities of Madrid, Zaragoza, and Granada.

In *La Música de las Cantigas*³¹ Ribera y Tarragó emphasized the importance of the Andalusian Arabic musical synthesis for the development of the medieval music of troubadours and Minnesänger between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries:

Las canciones, se sabe por experiencia, viajan con la velocidad de una golondrina, trasmigrando de ciudad en ciudad, de nación en nación, de Oriente a Occidente, pasando por todos los climas de la tierra [...].³²

Nació la música árabe, no por generación espontánea ni por raptos líricos personales, sacándola de la nada, sino por directa imitación de las melodías persas y bizantinas, las cuales fueron aprovechadas, juntamente con la música instrumental, y con los mismos instrumentos con que se ejecutaban en esos pueblos vecinos conquistados. [...] La Música, como voladora golondrina, vino de Persia y Bizancio a revolotear y a posarse algún tiempo en los arenales de la península árabe, donde hasta entonces no había anidado.³³

²⁹ JULIAN RIBERA Y TARRAGÓ, « El arabista español », in *Disertaciones y Opúsculos. Edición colectiva que en su Jubilación del Profesorado le ofrecen sus discípulos y amigos, 1887–1927. Con una introducción de Miguel Asín Palacios*, vol. I: *Literatura, historia y cultura araba, lo científico en la historia*, Maestre, Madrid 1928, p. 484–485.

³⁰ JULIÁN RIBERA Y TARRAGÓ, *Discursos leídos ante la Real Academia Española en la recepción pública del señor D. Julian Ribera y Tarragó el día 26 de mayo de 1912*, Imprenta Ibérica – Estanislao Maestre, Madrid 1912.

³¹ JULIÁN RIBERA Y TARRAGÓ, *La música de las Cantigas. Estudio sobre su origen y naturaleza con reproducciones fotográficas del texto y transcripción moderna*, Real Academia Española – RAE, Tipografía la Revista de Archivos, Madrid 1922.

³² RIBERA Y TARRAGÓ, *La música de las Cantigas*, p. 12.

³³ RIBERA Y TARRAGÓ, *La música de las Cantigas*, p. 27.

La música como pájaro volador alejose de aquellas regiones [...]. Felizmente no se ha perdido. La Antigua música árabe, como golondrina viajera, voló de Oriente y penetró en la península Española, en la misma época de su formación clásica; aquí moró, anidó y crió durante muchos siglos, cariñosamente atendida, hasta que, después de haberse inventado la notación musical europea moderna, quedó fijada y escrita en tal forma, que hoy se podrá leer y aun ejecutar de manera semejante a como se ejecutó en el siglo X.³⁴

Finally, we may note his reading of the figure of the Majorcan Ramon Llull as a Christian *ṣūfī*:

Aquel despegó suyo de toda orden monástica o regular; aquella profesión de solitario eremita en la que exclusivamente sirve a su *Amado*; aquel andar desnudo y pobre, discurriendo de tierra en tierra, predicando unas veces por calles y plazas, en formas rudas, a grandes y pequeños, proponiendo que se taña por las noches un caracol para que las gentes cuiden de hacer examen de conciencia, a riesgo de que le tachen de fatuo y loco, y otras evangelizando por montes y valles, yendo a merced del Cielo que le mantiene; aquel abandonarse en una Cueva a la extática contemplación, en compañía de su *Amado*, sin las soledades en que se encontraba en la humana sociedad: todo eso lo hacían por las costas de África, por él visitadas, multitud incontable de morabitos moros de su tiempo.

Aquel su criterio especial científico en el que toda ciencia se tiene por infusa o por iluminación de Dios, y se presenta sin aparato erudito, y en el que la fe es superior al entendimiento y la verdad es principio común a ambos, y el entendimiento sube por una escala donde la fe le precede, y en ésta se apoya aquél para penetrar os secretos de Dios; aquella disposición unitaria de la ciencia, donde todo, alto y bajo, sensible e intelectual, se armoniza, reduciéndose las mayores discordancias y antinomias: todo esto lo profesaban y decían los morabitos musulmanes bastantes años antes de que él naciera. [...]

Aquel método especial didáctico que se tiene como innovación introducida por el Doctor Iluminado, por el que todo se enseña en verso, incluso la lógica, y todo se vulgariza en prosa por medios figurativos, no en forma especulativa y abstracta, sino con representaciones gráficas, con esquemas, círculos concéntricos, excéntricos, cuadrados, etc., para que entre por los ojos en la inteligencia de las muchedumbres, era método peculiar y característico de los sufíes musulmanes coetáneos de Lulio.³⁵

³⁴ RIBERA Y TARRAGÓ, *La música de las Cantigas*, p. 53.

³⁵ JULIÁN RIBERA Y TARRAGÓ, *Orígenes de la filosofía de Raimondo Lulio*, in *Disertaciones y Opúsculos*, vol. I, p. 159–161.

Miguel Asín Palacios's *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* is fully embedded within this tradition of studies.

The author's biography is well known,³⁶ and it is thus sufficient to recall here a few essential data. Born in Zaragoza, he took priestly vows at the age of twenty-four and graduated in theology in his hometown. In 1896, he obtained his doctorate from the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy under the supervision of Julián Ribera y Tarragó. In 1903, he obtained the chair of Arabic at the Universidad Central in Madrid. Later he directed the Royal Spanish Academy. He was close to the Spanish royal house, becoming the ecclesiastical officer of King Alfonso XIII in 1914. His closeness to the king is evidenced by correspondence with the king's personal secretary, Emilio María de Torres, spanning from 1922 to 1935, beyond the year of Alfonso XIII's deposition and retreat to Rome in 1931. Among many cultural initiatives, he founded the School of Arabic Studies in 1932 and promoted Arabic studies through the journal *al-Andalus* beginning in 1933. Decades later it was renamed *al-Qantara*. At the end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939, he became deputy director of the Higher Council for Scientific Research. He retired from the university in 1944, the year of his death.

In *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia* Miguel Asín Palacios systematically compares Dante's work to the otherworldly realms described in the Arabic traditions of the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* of the Prophet Muḥammad. Following a principle of accumulation, he points out an impressive series of coincidences that lead him to formulate three hypotheses:

1. The structural topographic precursor of the *Divina Commedia* may be found in the Muslim traditions of the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* of the Prophet Muḥammad.

³⁶ See EMILIO GARCÍA GÓMEZ, « En la jubilación de don Miguel Asín », *al-Andalus*, 6 (1941), p. 265–270; EMILIO GARCÍA GÓMEZ, « Don Miguel Asín (1871–1944). Esquema de una biografía », *al-Andalus*, 9 (1944), p. 267–291; ÁNGEL GONZÁLES PALENCIA, « Don Miguel Asín Palacios (1871–1944) », *Arbor*, 4–5 (1944), p. 3–30; MONROE, *Islam and the Arabs*, p. 174–195; JOSÉ VALDIVIA VÁLOR, *Don Miguel Asín Palacios. Mística cristiana y mística musulmana*, Hiperión, Madrid 1992; DOLORES OLIVER PÉREZ, « Recuerdos de Miguel Asín », *Endoxa: Series Filosóficas*, 6 (1995), p. 11–35; JOAQUÍN LOMBA, « Don Miguel Asín Palacios, pionero del arabismo », *Turia*, 31(1995), p. 125–138; MIGUEL CRUZ HERNÁNDEZ, « D. Miguel Asín Palacios, arabista e islamólogo, a los cincuenta años de su muerte », *Cuadernos de Aragón*, 24 (1997), p. 21–29; FERNANDO RODRÍGUEZ MEDIANO, *Humanismo y progreso. Pidal Gómez-Moreno, Asín. Romances, monumentos y arabismo*, Nivola Libros y Ediciones, Madrid 2002; JOSÉ VALDIVIA VÁLOR, « Miguel Asín Palacios un hombre de nuestro tiempo », in José Valdivia Válor (ed.), *Siete sabios de ayer y de hoy*, Editorial Pre-Textos, Valencia 2004, p. 117–145; MANUELA MARÍN, « Arabismo e historia de España (1866–1944). Introducción a los epistolario de Julián Ribera Tarragó y Miguel Asín Palacios », in EAD. et al., *Los epistolario de Julián Ribera Tarragó y Miguel Asín Palacios. Introducción, Catálogo e Índices*, Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid 2009, p. 11–439, in particular p. 44–59.

2. Accordingly, we should investigate Dante's direct or indirect knowledge of Muslim literary texts. In particular, we should analyze the otherworldly visions narrated by the satirical poet Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī (d. 1057),³⁷ and, most importantly, the mystical-philosophical and eschatological narrative of the Andalusian Murcian thinker and ṣūfī Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240).³⁸

The first text of al-Ma'arrī is the *Risālat al-Ġufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*), composed around the year 1033 in response to a *Risāla* he had received from a

³⁷ Abū l-'Alā' Aḥmad ibn 'Abdullāh ibn Sulaymān al-Ma'arrī was born in 973 in Ma'arra, today known as Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān, in Syria. He contracted smallpox at the age of four, which left him with impaired hearing and weak eyesight, as he himself states in a letter addressed to the head of Fatimid propaganda, Abū Naṣr ibn Abī 'Imrān al-Mu'ayyad fī l-Dīn: « God knows that I am hard of hearing and of sight, this fate having befallen me when I was four years old, so that I cannot distinguish between the House and its inhabitants. Then to this was added a whole train of disasters, so that my figure came to resemble a curved branch, and finally I have in my latter years become crippled and unable to rise » [DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH, « Abu 'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī's Correspondence on Vegetarianism », *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 34/2 (1902), p. 317, p. 296.17–297.1 (Arabic text)]. Between 1008 and 1010, he was in the capital Baghdad but, unable to find patronage, became disappointed by the clientelistic dynamics. After only eighteen months, on his way back to Syria, he learned of his mother's death, which was followed by the deaths of his brothers. This harsh life experience rooted his pessimism and led him to take an ascetic turn, characterized by isolation, as evidenced by letter VIII of the Margoliouth collection: « And my soul did not consent to my returning till I had promised it three things — seclusion as complete as that of al-Fanīk in the constellation of the Bull; separation from the world like that of the egg-shell from the chick; and to remain in the city even though the inhabitants fled through fear of the Greeks » [See DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH, *The Letters of Abu'l-'Alā of Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān edited from the Leyden Manuscript, with the Life of the Author by al-Dhahabī and with translation, notes, indices, and biography*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford 1898, p. 43, p. 34.18–20 (Arabic text)]. He was called *rahm al maḥbisayn* (hostage of two prisons): his blindness and his house, and died in 1058. For the biography of al-Ma'arrī, see DAVID SAMUEL MARGOLIOUTH, « Biography of Abu'l-'Alā al-Ma'arrī », in *Id.*, *The Letters of Abu'l-'Alā of Ma'arrat al-Nu'mān*, p. XI–XLIII. Al-Ma'arrī wrote works in both poetry and prose. Relevant for our purposes is the *Risālat al-Ġufrān* (*The Epistle of Forgiveness*); See AL-MA'ARRĪ, *L'épître du pardon*, ed. VINCENT-MANSOUR MONTEIL, Gallimard, Paris 1984.

³⁸ Abū 'Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn 'Alī Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī was born in Murcia in 1165 to the family of a minor official and received the standard education of a scholar, without any particular attention to religious topics. In early adolescence, he underwent a visionary conversion through the intervention of the Qur'ānic Ṭisā, which led to a revelation (*futūḥ*) of his soul towards the divine realm. Shortly after, around 1180, his father introduced him to Averroes. Ibn 'Arabī recounts an elliptical conversation in which he explains to the philosopher the limits of rational perception. Ibn 'Arabī studied Islamic sciences with numerous masters in al-Andalus and North Africa. In 1201, he left the Muslim West to perform the pilgrimage to Mecca and did not return. He traveled extensively in Iraq and Anatolia, finally settling in Damascus in 1223, where he mentored disciples and wrote prolifically until his death in November 1240, twenty-five years before Dante's birth. Among his many talented disciples, the most influential was his stepson Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (1210–1274), who began the process of systematizing his teachings and clarifying his perspective in dialogue with contemporary philosophy, even initiating a correspondence with Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.

certain ‘Alī ibn Maṣṣūr al-Ḥalabī, known as Ibn al-Qāriḥ, a traditionist and grammarian whose aim was to dispel the bad opinion that al-Ma‘arrī had formed of him and to solicit financial support. Ibn al-Qāriḥ’s letter boastfully displays his own learning and orthodoxy by criticizing poets and scholars as heretics, implicitly challenging al-Ma‘arrī’s religious views. In response, al-Ma‘arrī writes *The Epistle of Forgiveness*, showcasing his own erudition with two main aims. The first is theological: to demonstrate God’s infinite mercy. The second is literary-critical: he addresses a series of exegetical issues by narrating a satirical encounter in the realms of the afterlife between Ibn al-Qāriḥ and Arabic *literati* from both pre-Islamic and Islamic eras, including the poetess al-Ḥansā’, Imrū’ al-Qays, and the Christian court poet al-Aḥṭal. The *Epistle* is divided into two parts: the first describes the imaginary journey of Ibn al-Qāriḥ, now deceased, through the Gardens of Paradise and his encounters with numerous poets and scholars whose sins had been forgiven, despite their licentious lifestyles, ignorance of the true religion, and heresy. Then, Ibn al-Qāriḥ travels to Hell, where he speaks with Iblīs and various penitent poets before returning to the Gardens of Paradise for eternity. Here Ibn al-Qāriḥ is an old, pedantic grammarian who pesters the blessed and the damned with inappropriate questions about literature to display his philological erudition. In the second part of the epistle, al-Ma‘arrī responds directly to Ibn al-Qāriḥ, discussing heresy and heretics, but making no allusion to financial support. Although one may read al-Ma‘arrī from a literary-critical perspective, the *Epistle of Forgiveness* also appears as a critique of the mass of popular material and hedonistic representations of Islamic Paradise deriving from the *Qur’ān*, rather than the traditions of *isrā’* and *mī’rāḡ*.³⁹ It is an oversimplification to consider *The Epistle of Forgiveness*, as Asín Palacios does, « una hábil imitación literaria de las versiones más sobrias de la leyenda del *isrā’* ». ⁴⁰ However, al-Ma‘arrī’s use of Islamic eschatology from the *Qur’ān*, including the legend of the *isrā’*, as a

³⁹ See for example *Qur’ān*, 56 (*The Terror*), v 1–38: « When the Terror descends (and none denies its descending) abasing, exalting, when the earth shall be rocked and the mountains crumbled and become a dust scattered, and you shall be three bands – Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right!) Companions of the Left (O Companions of the Left!) and the Outstrippers: the Outstrippers those are they brought nigh the Throne, in the Gardens of Delight (a throng of the ancients and how few of the later folk) upon close-wrought couches reclining upon them, set face to face, immortal youths going round about them with goblets, and ewers, and a cup from a spring (no brows throbbing, no intoxication) and such fruits as they shall choose, and such flesh of fowl as they desire, and wide-eyed houris as the likeness of hidden pearls, a recompense for that they laboured. Therein they shall hear no idle talk, no cause of sin, only the saying ‘Peace, Peace!’ The Companions of the Right (O Companions of the Right!) mid thornless lote-trees and serried acacias, and spreading shade and outpoured waters, and fruits abounding unfailing, unforbidden, and upraised couches. Perfectly We formed them, perfect, and We made them spotless virgins, chastely amorous, like of age for the Companions of the Right. A throng of the ancients and a throng of the later folk » (ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. II, p. 254–255).

⁴⁰ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 90.

narrative framework could indicate how widespread and popular the legend was at this time. It may also be the first audacious attempt to present a common man as the protagonist of a journey towards religious and spiritual perfection.

The most interesting of the allegorical-mystical adaptations of the *isrā'* and *mi'rāğ* legends,⁴¹ according to Asín Palacios, is Ibn 'Arabī's *Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda* (*Alchemy of Happiness*), chapter 167 of the *Kitāb al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*Book of the Meccan Revelations*).⁴² Four texts by Ibn 'Arabī draw inspiration from the account of the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ*, three of which recount his personal journeys to the afterlife in different ways.⁴³ In the *Kīmiyā' al-sa'āda*, however, his description of the *mi'rāğ* is impersonal: a character with prophetic qualities presents himself to two individuals eager to ascend the degrees of *mi'rāğ* to obtain happiness. The first candidate, a theologian, blindly entrusts himself to the hands of the prophet-guide, while the second, a philosopher, begins his journey with an act of pride, declaring that he can obtain the beatific vision of God's throne on his own, using his reason. The two travelers retrace the stages of the Prophet Muḥammad's *mi'rāğ*, beginning with the astronomical heavens. Whereas the theologian is received by the prophets, from whom he receives clear teachings superior to those obtainable by natural reason, the philosopher, distant from his companion, limits himself to conversing regarding problems of physics with the intelligences that move the heavens according to the emanationist cosmology of the Arabic Neoplatonic Aristotle. When they reach the end of the astronomical heavens, the philosopher is forced to stop while his companion proceeds. Philosophical reason alone can only guide man in the first stages of his journey in search of happiness, in the practice of moral and intellectual virtues; it cannot elevate him to the

⁴¹ These are based on the model of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī from the ninth century, who attributed to himself a real *mi'rāğ*, but in spirit, to God's Throne through the same stages as the Prophet Muḥammad: see REYNOLD ALLYN NICHOLSON, « An Early Arabic Version of the *Mi'rāğ* of Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī », *Islamica*, 2 (1926), p. 402–415.

⁴² It consists of 37 volumes, divided into 560 chapters, which will fill an estimated 15.000 pages in its modern edition. Regarding the editions of this work, see < <https://ibnarabisociety.org/futuh-at-al-makkiyya-printed-editions-claude-addas/> > [consulted 12 June 2026]. Chapter 167 has been translated into French (MOHYIDDIN IBN 'ARABĪ, *L'Alchimie du Bonheur Parfait traité d'alchimie spirituelle*, transl. STÉPHANE RUSPOLI, Berg International, Paris 1981) and Italian (MUHYĪ-D-DĪN IBN 'ARABĪ, *L'alchimia della felicità*, transl. MASSIMO JEVOLELLA, Boroli Editore, Como 1999). Currently, there is no complete translation of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, but Eric Winkel is working on one, and information on how to access his translation can be found on < <http://www.ibnarabisociety.org/infopdf/futuh-at-winkelannouncement.pdf> > [consulted 12 June 2026].

⁴³ In 1198, he composed in Fez the *Kitāb al-isrā'* (*The Book of the Night Journey*). In Konya, seven years later, he wrote the epistle *Risālat al-Anwār* (*The Epistle of Lights*). In this epistle, addressed to a friend, he describes his mystical *mi'rāğ* through the levels of being and knowledge to reach the vision of the Lord, the highest degree of human perfection. Chapter 327 of the *Kitāb al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* again recounts the Murcian mystic's experience of ascent in detail. His ascent, which is not only mystical but projected towards the attainment of gnosis, concludes with the return to the world of created beings endowed with knowledge.

sublime spheres of Paradise, a symbol of the theological virtues unattainable without illuminating grace.⁴⁴

3. The transmission of Muslim eschatology to the West must have occurred in the eleventh century during the Islamic domination of Spain and Sicily.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See JAMES WINSTON MORRIS, « The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabī and the Mi'rāj », *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 107 (1987), p. 629–652; 108 (1988), p. 63–77; ID., « Ibn 'Arabī's spiritual Ascension », in MICHAEL CHODKIEWICZ (ed.), *Les Illuminations de La Mecque*, Sindbad, Paris, 1989, p. 351–381.

⁴⁵ In this perspective the new study FREDERIK STEPHEN COLBY, *Muhammad's Ascension in Muslim Spain: Elaborations and Contestations of the Mirāj in the Eleventh- to Twelfth-Century Maghrib*, Suny Press, Albany, New York 2025, is absolutely relevant. He analyzes the particular features and four major players or authors in the western tradition of the complex of legends regarding the Prophet Muhammad's ascent: the Mālikī muḥaddiṭ and qāḍī in Granada and Ceuta, 'Iyād (d. 1149) in his *al-Šifā' bi-ta'rīf ḥuqūq al-muṣṭafā* (*The Cure through Coming to Know the Rights of the Pure Prophet*); the contemplative and Qur'ān exegete Ibn Barraḡān, the 'Gazālī of al-Andalus' (d. 1141) in his earlier and lengthier commentary *Tanbīh al-afhām* (*Reminder of Understandings*) and his shorter and later commentary *Idāh al-ḥikma* (*Wisdom Deciphered* or *The Unseen Discovered*); the contemplative Ibn Qaṣī al-Rūmī (d. 1151) in his *Ḥal' al-na'layn wa-iqtibās al-nūr min mawḍi' al-qadamayn* (*The Removing of the sandals and capture the light from where your feet are*), particularly the part (?) entitled *The Removing of Removing*; the renowned scholar in Islamic disciplines Suhaylī (d. 1185) in his commentary on Ibn Hišām's recension of Ibn Ishāq's *Sīrat Rasūl Allāh* known as *al-Rawḍ al-unuf fī šarḥ al-sīra al-Nabawiyya* (*The Foremost Meadows Doors in the Explication of the Prophetic biography*). Concerning these narratives, Colby observes: « Engagement with official Sunnī reports of Muhammad's ascension from the standard collections of 'sound' hadith was noted in this works, as was to be expected given the Sunna-based emphasis of the Mālikī legal method that predominated throughout al-Maghrib and that experienced something of a resurgence of attention under the afore-mentioned Amazigh dynasties. A result of this study that may be less expected, however, was the broad engagement of both Muslim and non-Muslim sources with less official and more detailed versions of the story of Muhammad's ascension often attributed to the Prophet's cousin Ibn 'Abbās (see below p. 142–149), that flourished in this cultural context » (p. 113). These narratives show that Muhammad's ascension was a topic of vivid polemical debate in al-Andalus not only in an intrareligious cultural and political debate (see for example the 'Hanging Sword' anecdote with respect to the civil strife in al-Andalus), but also in an interreligious polemic from both Iberian Christian and Iberian Hebrew perspectives, as evidenced respectively by the twelfth chapter of the anonymous anti-Muslim *Liber Denudationis* composed in Arabic between 1085 and 1132 and translated into Latin, and the writings of Abraham Ibn Ezra, such as the *Ḥay ben Meqitz* (see the topic of the 'Favor of the Prophets' narrative in which Prophet Muhammad has the preeminent favor given to him by God with respect to the previous prophets).

IV. The Pioneering Part 1, Sections II, III, and IV of *La escatología musulmana* en la *Divina Comedia*

In the opening part of *La escatología musulmana en la Divina Comedia*, Asín Palacios collects the Muslim traditions of the *isrā'* and the *mi'rāğ* of Prophet Muḥammad and distinguishes them into three different cycles.

IV.1. The first cycle

(1) The first comprises six sayings of the Prophet (*aḥādīṭ*) datable between the ninth and twelfth centuries in which the Prophet Muḥammad, in the first person, speaks of a simple *isrā'* on earth without *mi'rāğ*. Asín Palacios divides these into two redactions.⁴⁶

(1.A) The first redaction (A) is composed of two *aḥādīṭ* narrated by Sa'īd ibn Manṣūr (d. 842), among others, and reported as n. 2835 and n. 3089 in the Sunni collection of 46,000 sayings entitled *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afāl* (*Treasures of the Doers of Good Deeds*) by 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Muttaqī al-Hindī, who lived between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.⁴⁷ The following is n. 2835:

⁴⁶ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 10–18.

⁴⁷ 'ALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afāl*, Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-Nizāmiyya, Ḥaidarābād 1896, vol. VII, p. 248.9–22 n. 2835; p. 280.22–32 n. 3089. Cfr. ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 424–427. Saying n. 3089 is not reported by Asín Palacios in his book:

عن سُلَيْم بن عامر أبي يحيى الكَلَابِي قال: حدثني أبو أمامه البَاهِلِي قال: سَمِعْتُ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يَقُولُ: "بَيْنَا أَنَا نَائِمٌ إِذْ أَتَانِي رَجُلَانِ فَأَخَذَا بَضِيعِي وَأَتَيَا بِي جِبْلًا وَعَرَا فَقَالَا لِي: اصْعِدْ. فَقُلْتُ: إِنِّي لَا أَطِيقُهُ. فَقَالَا: إِنَّا سَنُسَهِّلُهُ لَكَ. فَصَعِدْتُ حَتَّى إِذَا كُنْتُ فِي سَوَاءِ الْجِبَلِ إِذَا أَنَا بِأَصْوَاتٍ شَدِيدَةٍ فَقُلْتُ: مَا هَذِهِ الْأَصْوَاتُ؟ قَالَ: هَذَا عَوَاءُ أَهْلِ النَّارِ. ثُمَّ انْطَلَقَ بِي فَإِذَا أَنَا بِقَوْمٍ مُعَلَّقِينَ بِعَرَاقِيهِمْ مُشَقَّقَةً أَشْدَاقَهُمْ تَسِيلُ أَشْدَاقَهُمْ دَمًا. قُلْتُ: مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هُمُ الَّذِينَ يَفْطُرُونَ قَبْلَ تَحَلُّةِ صَوْمِهِمْ". فَقَالَ أَبُو أَمَامَةٍ: خَابَتْ الْيَهُودُ وَالنَّصَارَى. فَقَالَ سُلَيْمٌ: لَا أَدْرِي أَشَيْنًا سَمِعَهُ أَبُو أَمَامَةٍ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَمْ شَيْنًا مِنْ رَأْيِهِ. ثُمَّ انْطَلَقَ بِي فَإِذَا أَنَا بِقَوْمٍ أَشَدَّ شَيْءَ أَنَا بِقَوْمٍ أَشَدَّ شَيْءَ انْتِفَاحًا وَنَتْنَةً رِيحًا وَأَسْوَأَ مَنْظَرًا. قُلْتُ: مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هَؤُلَاءِ قَتَلُوا الْكَفَّارَ. ثُمَّ انْطَلَقَ بِي فَإِذَا أَنَا بِقَوْمٍ أَشَدَّ شَيْءَ انْتِفَاحًا وَأَنْتَنَةً رِيحًا وَأَسْوَأَ مَنْظَرًا كَأَنَّ رِيحَهُمُ الْمَرَا حِيضٌ. قُلْتُ: مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هَؤُلَاءِ الزَّانِيُونَ وَالزَّوَانِي. ثُمَّ انْطَلَقَ بِي فَإِذَا بِنِسَاءٍ تَنْهَشُ ثَدْيِيهِنَّ الْحَيَاتِ. قُلْتُ: مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هَؤُلَاءِ اللَّاتِي مَنَعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ الْبَانِيَهُنَّ. ثُمَّ انْطَلَقَ بِي فَإِذَا بِغُلَمَانٍ يَلْعَبُونَ بَيْنَ نَهْرَيْنِ. قُلْتُ: مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هَؤُلَاءِ ذُرَارِيَّ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ. ثُمَّ أَشْرَفَ بِي شَرْفًا فَإِذَا بِنَفَرٍ ثَلَاثَةِ يَشْرِبُونَ مِنْ خَمَرٍ لَهُمْ. قُلْتُ: مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هَؤُلَاءِ جَعْفَرُ وَزَيْدُ وَابْنُ رَوَاحَةَ. ثُمَّ أَشْرَفَ بِي شَرْفًا آخَرَ فَإِذَا أَنَا بِنَفَرٍ ثَلَاثَةٍ. قُلْتُ: مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ؟ قَالَ: هَذَا إِبْرَاهِيمُ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَهُمْ يَنْتَظِرُونَكَ.

From Sulaym ibn 'Āmir Abū Yahyā al-Kalāī who said: Abū Umāmah al-Bāhilī narrated to me saying: I heard the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) say: « While I was sleeping, two men came to me and took me by the arm. They brought me to a rugged mountain and said to me, 'Climb'. I said, 'I cannot'. They said, 'We will make it easy for you'. So, I climbed until I reached the top of the mountain, where I heard loud screams. I asked, 'What are these screams?'. He replied, 'This is the howling of the people of Hell'. Then they took me further and I saw people hanging by their tendons, their mouths torn, blood flowing from their mouths. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those who break their fast before it is permissible'. Abū Umāmah said, 'May the Jews and Christians fail'. Sulaym said, 'I don't know if Abū Umāmah heard this from the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) or if it was his own opinion'. Then they took me further and I saw people extremely swollen, with the foulest odor and the worst appearance. I

إني رأيت ربي فأخذ بيدي فانطلق بي حتى أتاني جبلاً طويلاً وعراً فقال لي: ارق، فقلت: لا أستطيع. فقال: إني سأسهله لك. فإنه كلما رفعت قدمي وضعتها على درجة حتى استويينا على رأس الجبل فانطلقنا فإذا نحن برجال ونساء مُشَقَّقَةً أَشَدَّاهُمْ فقلت من هؤلاء قال هؤلاء الذين يقولون ما لا يفعلون ثم انطلقنا فإذا نحن برجال ونساء سَمِرَتِ أَعْيُنُهُمْ وَأَذَانُهُمْ قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ يَرُونَ أَعْيُنُهُمْ مَا لَا يَرُونَ وَيَسْمَعُونَ أَذَانَهُمْ مَا لَا يَسْمَعُونَ ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا وَإِذَا نَحْنُ بِنِسَاءٍ مَعْلَقَاتٍ بِثَدْيِيهِنَّ مُصَوَّبَةٍ رُؤُوسُهُنَّ يَنْهَشُنَّ ثَدْيِي الْحَيَاتِ قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ هَؤُلَاءِ اللَّاتِي يَمْنَعْنَ أَوْلَادَهُنَّ مِنَ الْبَانِهِنَّ ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا وَإِذَا نَحْنُ بِرِجَالٍ وَنِسَاءٍ أَقْبَحَ شَيْءٍ مَنْظَرًا وَأَقْبَحَ لِبَوسًا وَأَنْتَنَ رِيحًا كَأَنَّمَا رِيحُهُمُ الْمَرَايِضُ قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ هَؤُلَاءِ الزَّانِبُونَ وَالزَّانَاةُ ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا فَإِذَا نَحْنُ بِقَوْمٍ أَشَدَّ انْتِفَاحًا وَأَنْتَنَ رِيحًا قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ هَؤُلَاءِ مَوْتَى الْكَفَّارِ ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا فَإِذَا نَحْنُ نَرَى دَخَانًا وَنَسْمَعُ عَوَاءً قُلْتُ مَا هَذَا قَالَ هَذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ فَدَعَانَا ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا فَإِذَا نَحْنُ بِرِجَالٍ نِيَامُ تَحْتَ ظِلَالِ الشَّجَرِ قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ هَؤُلَاءِ مَوْتَى الْمُسْلِمِينَ ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا فَإِذَا نَحْنُ بِغُلَّامٍ وَجَوَارٍ يَلْعَبُونَ بَيْنَ شَجَرَتَيْنِ قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ هَؤُلَاءِ ذُرِّيَّةُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا فَإِذَا نَحْنُ بِرِجَالٍ أَحْسَنَ شَيْءٍ وَجْهًا وَأَحْسَنَ لِبَاسًا وَأَطْيَبَ رِيحًا كَأَنَّ وَجُوهَهُمُ الْقَرَاطِيسُ قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ هَؤُلَاءِ الصَّادِقُونَ وَالشَّهَدَاءُ وَالصَّالِحُونَ ثُمَّ انْطَلَقْنَا فَإِذَا نَحْنُ بِثَلَاثَةِ نَفَرٍ يَشْرَبُونَ خَمْرًا وَيَغْنُونُ قُلْتُ مَا هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ ذَاكَ زَيْدُ بْنُ حَارِثَةَ وَجَعْفَرُ وَابْنُ رَوَاحَةَ التَّفْتِ إِلَيْهِمْ فَقَالُوا قَدْ نَالَكُ قَدْ نَالَكُ ثُمَّ رَفَعْتُ رَأْسِي فَإِذَا ثَلَاثَةُ نَفَرٍ تَحْتَ الْعَرْشِ قُلْتُ مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ ذَاكَ أَبُوكَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ وَمُوسَى وَعِيسَى وَهُمْ يَنْتَظِرُونَكَ.

I saw my Lord, and He took my hand and set off with me until He brought me to a long, rugged mountain. He said to me, 'Climb'. I said, 'I cannot'. He said, 'I will make it easy for you'. And so, every time I lifted my foot, He placed it on a step until we reached the top of the mountain. Then we set off, and we came upon men and women with split mouths. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those who say what they do not do'. Then we continued and came upon men and women whose eyes and ears were nailed. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those whose eyes see what they should not see, and whose ears hear what they should not hear'. Then we proceeded and came upon women hanging by their breasts, their heads lowered, with snakes biting their breasts. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the women who deny their children their milk'. Then we proceeded, and we came upon men and women with the ugliest appearance, the most repulsive clothing, and the foulest smell, as if their odor was that of latrines. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the adulterers and adulteresses'. Then we moved on, and we came upon people who were even more swollen and foul-smelling. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the deceased unbelievers'. Then we proceeded, and we saw smoke and heard howling. I asked, 'What is this?'. He replied, 'This is Hell, so let us leave it'. Then we moved on, and we came upon men sleeping under the shade of trees. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He

asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the slain unbelievers'. Then, they took me further and I saw people even more swollen, with a fouler odor and worse appearance, their smell was like that of latrines. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the adulterers and adulteresses'. Then they took me further and I saw women whose breasts were being bitten by snakes. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are those who denied their children their milk'. Then they took me further and I saw children playing between two rivers. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the offspring of the believers'. Then they took me up to a high place and there were three people drinking their wine. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are Ġa'far, Zayd, and Ibn Rawāḥa'. Then, they took me up to another high place and there were three people. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and 'Īsā, and they are waiting for you' ». Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

replied, 'These are the deceased Muslims'. Then we proceeded, and we came upon young boys and girls playing between two trees. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the offspring of the believers'. Then we moved on, and we saw men with the most beautiful faces, the finest clothing, and the most pleasant fragrance, their faces like parchments. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are the truthful ones, the martyrs, and the righteous'. Then we continued, and we came upon three individuals drinking wine and singing. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'These are Zayd ibn Ḥārīṭa, Ġa'far, and Ibn Rawāḥa'. I inclined myself towards them, and they said, 'You have attained, you have attained'. Then I raised my head, and there were three figures beneath the Throne. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'That is your father Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and 'Īsā, and they are waiting for you'.

Asín Palacios observed several analogies between this text and the prologue of *Inferno* and *Purgatorio* in the *Divina Commedia*. In both cases, the main character (Prophet Muḥammad in the *aḥādīṭ*) is the narrator. The journey takes place at night after the main character wakes from a deep sleep, accompanied by an unknown guide. The first stage consists of ascending a steep and inaccessible mountain and the protagonist places his feet in the footsteps of the guide. The three main dwellings of the hereafter broadly coincide in both texts, but the protagonist visits them in a different order and there are many differences of detail. Prophet Muḥammad visits Purgatory first, where he encounters in sequence hypocrites who do not act according to their words, those who are impure in their sight and hearing, mothers who have not nourished their own children, those who break their fast before the proper time (only in n. 3089), adulterers and adulteresses, and unbelievers. Then he sees Hell, the proximity of which is revealed by a tumult of angry voice, but which, unlike Dante, he is not allowed to visit. Finally, he sees Paradise, where he encounters the Muslims, the offspring of believers, the righteous, martyrs and saints of Islam, Zayd ibn Ḥārīṭa,⁴⁸ Ġa'far ibn Abū Ṭālib⁴⁹ and 'Abd Allāh ibn Rawāḥa,⁵⁰ and beneath God's throne, Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and 'Īsā. In both texts, the guide satisfies the traveler's curiosities and, faced with the traveler's discouragement, offers his help.

(1.B) Redaction B of the first cycle comprises four *aḥādīṭ* reported by al-Buḥārī, Muslim and Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 855), who were among the most authoritative *muḥaddithūn* in Sunni Islam of the 9th century, as well as Alī ibn 'Umar al-Dāraquṭnī

⁴⁸ He was an adopted son of the Prophet Muḥammad who appointed him general of his armies in various military expeditions. He died on the battlefield of Mu'ta in 629. He is explicitly mentioned in *Qur'ān*, *Sūra* 33 (*The Confederates*), v. 37.

⁴⁹ He was a cousin of the Prophet Muḥammad and one of the first companions to convert to Islam who died in the battle of Mu'ta.

⁵⁰ A descendant of the pre-Islamic poet Imru' al-Qays, he was himself a poet and secretary of the Prophet Muḥammad. He died in the battle of Mu'ta.

(d. 995) and ‘Alī ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Hibat Allāh Ibn ‘Asākīr al-Dimašqī (d. 1176). They are n. 3083, n. 3084, n. 3085 and n. 3091 of the collection *Treasures of the Doers of Good Deeds*.⁵¹

Asín Palacios assumes as a model *ḥadīṭ* n. 3083, indicating in the footnotes how it differs from the other three *aḥādīṭ*, which he calls respectively a, b, and c. *Ḥadīṭ* n. 3083 explicitly states that the Prophet Muḥammad is taken by two guides (or angels) to Jerusalem, where the visions of the afterlife, whose interpretations will be revealed to the traveler at the end of the journey, begin. The punishments are by analogy or contraposition, here occurring in the limbs that were the instruments of sin. The most specific analogies with Dante are the punishment of adulterers, which strongly recalls the punishment of the lustful in Dante’s *Inferno* V, v. 28–39 (tormented by an infernal storm that never ceases) and the punishment of usurers, which recalls the punishment of simonists in *Inferno* XII, v. 46–48; 100–102:

فانطلقت معهما فإذا بيت مَبْنِيٌّ على بناء التَّنُّورِ أعلاه ضَيِّقٌ وأسفله واسعٌ تُوقَدُ تحته نار فيه رجال ونساء عرا
فإذا أوقِدَتْ ارتفعوا حتى يكادوا أن يخرجوا فإذا خُمِدَتْ رجعوا فيها فقلت ما هذا قالوا لي انطلق فانطلقت فإذا نهر
من دم فيه رجل وعلى شاطئ النهر رجل بين يديه حجارة فيقبل الرجل الذي في النهر فإذا أراد أن يخرج رمى
في فيه حجراً فرجع إلى مكانه ففعل به ذلك فقلت ما هذا قالوا لي انطلق.⁵²

I set off with them, and there was a house built like an oven, narrow at the top and wide at the bottom. A fire was lit beneath it, with naked men and women inside. When the fire intensified, they rose up until they almost came out, and when it subsided, they returned into it. I asked, ‘What is this?’. They replied to me, ‘Move on’. So, I moved on, and there was a river of blood with a man in it, and on the bank of the river there was a man with stones in front of him. The man in the river would come forward to get out, but the man on the bank would throw a stone into his mouth, forcing him back to his place. This kept happening to him. I asked, ‘What is this?’. They replied to me, ‘Move on’.

Redaction B presents further noteworthy affinities, such as Ibrāhīm’s bosom, which is comparable to limbo in *Inferno* IV, and the majordomo of Hell, who is comparable to Minos in *Inferno* V, vv. 4-5:

⁵¹ ‘ALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-‘ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afāl*, vol.VII, p. 278.18–279.1 n. 3083; p. 279.2–21 n. 3084; p. 279.22–280.11 n. 3085; p. 281.3–35 n. 3091. Cfr. ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 14–18, 427–430.

⁵² ‘ALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-‘ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-afāl*, vol.VII, p. 278.23–26 n. 3083.

فانطلقت معهما فإذا روضة خضراء إذا فيها شجرة عظيمة وإذا شيخ في أصلها حوله صبيان.⁵³

So, I set out with them, and behold, there was a green garden with a huge tree in it, and at its base there was an old man surrounded by children.

وإذا رجل قريب منه وبين يديه نار فهو يحثها ويوقدها.⁵⁴

And a man was near him, and in front of him there was a fire, he was stirring it and igniting it.

There is an attempt at a *mi'rāğ*, which however cannot yet be realized for the Prophet Muḥammad:

ثم قالوا لي ارفع رأسك فرفعت فإذا كهيفة السحاب فقالوا لي وتلك دارك فقلت لهما دعاني أدخل داري فقالا إنه قد بقي لك عمر لم تستكملة فلو استكملة دخلت دارك.⁵⁵

Then they said to me, 'Raise your head', so I raised it, and there was something like a cloud. They said to me, 'That is your home'. I said to them, 'Let me enter my home'. They replied, 'You still have some life remaining that you have not completed. If you had completed it, you would have entered your home'.

IV.2. The second cycle

(2) The second cycle distinguished by Asín Palacios includes *aḥādīṭ* dating from the ninth to twelfth centuries, in which the Prophet Muḥammad narrates, again in the first person, his *mi'rāğ*, rather than his *isrā'* (as in the first cycle), through the celestial spheres up to the throne of God.⁵⁶ Asín Palacios subdivides these *aḥādīṭ* into three distinct redactions.

(2.A) Redaction A includes those *aḥādīṭ* handed down by al-Buḥārī (n. 3887)⁵⁷ and by Muslim in short form (n. 173),⁵⁸ both dating back to the ninth century. Asín Palacios uses as an example the later version reported by 'Alī ibn Muḥammad Ḥāzin al-Bağdādī (1279/1280–1341) in his *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-ğalīl al-musammā lubāb*

⁵³ 'ALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-af'āl*, vol.VII, p. 278.26–27 n. 3083.

⁵⁴ 'ALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-af'āl*, vol.VII, p. 278. 27 n. 3083.

⁵⁵ 'ALĪ IBN ḤUSĀM AL-DĪN MUTTAQĪ AL-HINDĪ, *Kanz al-'ummāl fī sunan al-aqwāl wa-l-af'āl*, vol.VII, p. 278.34–279.1 n. 3083.

⁵⁶ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 18–58.

⁵⁷ ṢAḤĪḤ AL-BUḤĀRĪ, *Kitāb Manāqib al-'Ansār (Merits of the Helpers in Madina)* n. 63, ḥadīṭ 3887, Chapter 42: *Al-Mi'rāğ*, <https://sunnah.com/bukhari:3887> [consulted 30 June 2025].

⁵⁸ ṢAḤĪḤ MUSLIM, *Kitāb al-Īmān (The Book of Faith)* n. 1, ḥadīṭ 172, Chapter 75: *Fī ḍikr al-Masīḥ ibn Maryam wa-al-Masīḥ al-dağğāl (Mentioning al- Masīḥ Son of Mariam and al-Masīḥ al-dağğāl)*, < <https://sunnah.com/muslim:172> > [consulted 30 June 2025].

Chapter on mentioning the *ḥadīṭ* of the *mi'rāṣ*,
its related *aḥkām*, and what scholars have said about it

Qatāda⁶¹ narrated to us from Anas ibn Mālik⁶², from Mālik bin Ṣa'sa'a, that the Prophet of Allāh, peace be upon him, told them about the night he was taken on a journey, saying:

While I was in the *ḥaṭīm*⁶³ – or perhaps he said in the *hiṣr* – lying down, and in a state between sleep and wakefulness – when someone came to me and said – and I heard him say –, 'Cut open from here to here'. I asked my companion al-Ġārūd,⁶⁴ who was by my side: 'What does he mean by this?'. He said: 'From the suprasternal notch to the pubic area' – I heard him say 'from his jugular notch to his pubic area'. Then he extracted my heart and brought a basin of gold filled with faith. My heart was washed, filled and put back in its place. Then I was brought a white beast, smaller than a mule but larger than a donkey. Al-Ġārūd asked: 'Was it the Burāq, oh Abū Ḥamza?'⁶⁵ Anas replied: 'Yes. The animal's step (was so wide that it) reached the farthest point within sight'. I was made to ride on it. Then Ġibrīl, peace be upon him, departed with me until we came to the lowest heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened. When I entered, there was Ādam. He said: 'This is your father Ādam, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous son and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ġibrīl ascended with me till we reached the second heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened. When I entered, there were Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā who were cousins. He said: 'These are Yaḥyā and ʿĪsā, greet them'. I greeted them, and both returned my greetings to me. Then they said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ġibrīl ascended with me till we reached the third heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. The gate was opened. When I entered, there was Yūsuf. He said: 'This is Yūsuf, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ġibrīl ascended with me till

⁶¹ Qatāda ibn al-Nu'mān (c. 581–c. 644) was one of the companions of the Prophet Muḥammad and a member of the Anṣār.

⁶² Anas ibn Mālik ibn Naḍr al-Ḥazraġī al-Anṣārī (c. 612–c. 712), also known as Abū Ḥamza, was another companion of Prophet Muḥammad.

⁶³ The *ḥaṭīm* is the semi-circular wall or enclosure (*hiṣr*) directly in front of and facing the Ka'ba, the cubical building at the center of the *masġid al-ḥarām* in Mecca. It is part of the sacred precinct surrounding the Ka'ba.

⁶⁴ Ġārūd ibn Mu'allā was a companion of Prophet Muhammad and the head of 'Abd al-Qays tribe.

⁶⁵ See note 62.

we reached the fourth heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!' The gate was opened. When I entered, there was Idrīs. He said: 'This is Idrīs, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ġibrīl ascended with me till we reached the fifth heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. When I entered, there was Harūn. He said: 'This is Harūn, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. Then Ġibrīl ascended with me till we reached the sixth heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. When I entered, there was Mūsā. He said: 'This is Mūsā, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous brother and the righteous Prophet'. When I left him (i.e. Mūsā) he wept. Someone asked him 'What makes you weep?' Mūsā said 'I weep because a young man who was sent after me will have more of his nation enter Paradise than of my nation'. Then Ġibrīl ascended with me till we reached the seventh heaven. He asked for it to be opened. It was asked: 'Who is this?'. He replied: 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked: 'Who is with you?'. He replied: 'Muḥammad'. It was asked: 'Has he been sent for?' He replied: 'Yes'. It was said: 'Welcome to him, what an excellent visit his is!'. When I entered, there was Ibrāhīm. He said: 'This is your father Ibrāhīm, greet him'. I greeted him and he returned the greeting, then he said: 'Welcome to the righteous son and the righteous Prophet'. Then I was raised to the Lote-Tree of the Utmost Boundary. Its fruits were like the jars of Haġr and its leaves were as big as elephants' ears. He said: 'This is the Lote-Tree of the Utmost Boundary'. There were four rivers, two hidden and two visible. I asked: 'What are these, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied: 'The two hidden are rivers in Paradise, and the two visible are the Nile and the Euphrates'. Then I was raised to the Much-Frequented House (*al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr*). Then I was brought a vessel of wine, a vessel of milk, and a vessel of honey. I chose the milk. He said: 'This is the natural disposition (*fiṭra*) that you and your community are on'. Fifty prayers were prescribed for me every day. I returned and passed by Mūsā, who asked me: 'What have you been ordered?' I replied: 'Fifty prayers a day'. He said: 'Your community won't be able to handle that. By God, I have indeed tested people before you and dealt with the Tribe of Israel most strenuously. Return to your Lord and ask for a reduction for your community'. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and it was reduced by ten. I returned to Mūsā and he said the same. I went back and I was prescribed five prayers every day. I returned to Mūsā and he asked: 'What have you been ordered?' I replied: 'Five

prayers every day'. He said 'Your nation cannot manage five prayers every day, and I have tested people before you and dealt with the Tribe of Israel most intensively. So, return to your Lord and ask Him to reduce it for your nation'. (Muḥammad) said: 'I asked my Lord until I felt ashamed, but I accept and submit'.

The Prophet Muḥammad is in the enclosure of the mosque in Mecca, probably asleep. Ġibrīl appears to him alone or accompanied by other angels and performs a purification ritual to prepare the Prophet for the *mi'rāğ*. The *mi'rāğ* begins from the temple of Mecca via the mount Burāq. The stages of the *mi'rāğ* are ten: the first seven correspond to the numbered astronomical heavens.⁶⁶ The scene at each heaven continues to repeat itself. In each heaven, the Prophet Muḥammad meets a prophet: Ādam, Yaḥyā and Īsā, Yūsuf, Idrīs, Harūn, Mūsā, Ibrāhīm. The eighth stage consists of the vision of the Lote Tree of the Utmost Boundary, of fabulous proportions and features, from whose roots spring the two hidden rivers of Paradise and the two visible rivers that irrigate the earth, the Nile and the Euphrates. In the ninth stage, the Prophet Muḥammad visits the Much-Frequented House. Then he receives the order of the five prayers every day.⁶⁷

Asín Palacios draws, albeit cursorily, the following connections between this account and the *Divina Commedia*: the guiding role of Ġibrīl in the *mi'rāğ*, comparable to that of Beatrice in Dante's *Paradiso*; the stages of each ascent proceed through the astronomical heavens, despite the differing in number and the degree of precision with regard to Ptolemaic astronomy; and the encounter with the Prophets in each heaven.⁶⁸

(2.B) Redaction B is an anonymous account, found in the *Al-Isrā' wa-l-mi'rāğ* (p. 122 and p. 133 note 45 in this document) attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d. ca. 686), cousin and companion of the Prophet Muḥammad. Undoubtedly apocryphal, this attribution endowed the text with powerful authority in Sunni Islam.⁶⁹ It focuses primarily on the *mi'rāğ* but includes Muḥammad's infernal vision in the *isrā'*, and thus represents a first attempt to merge the two. Asín Palacios reproduces the Arabic text from a photographic reproduction of the MS. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 882, f. 84r-87r, focusing primarily on its presentation of

⁶⁶ On the mention of the seven heavens see *Qur'ān*, *Suwar 2 (The Cow)*, v. 29; 17 (*The Night Journey*), v. 44; 23 (*The Believers*), v. 86; 41 (*Distinguished*), v. 12; 65 (*Divorce*), v. 12; 67 (*The Kingdom*), v. 3; 71 (*Noah*), v. 15.

⁶⁷ The account given by Asín Palacios is enriched with elements that are not present in the source he mentions.

⁶⁸ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 21-23.

⁶⁹ According to Asín Palacios, the text was probably compiled by Ishāq ibn Wahb, an Egyptian traditionist of the ninth and tenth century, as in the case of other *aḥādīṭ* attributed to Ibn 'Abbās. Even today the dating and attribution of this text are very problematic. See BENCHEIKH, *L'aventure de la parole*, p. 284; FERNANDO CISNEROS, *El Libro del viaje nocturno y la ascension del Profeta*, El Colegio de México, Ciudad de México 1998, p. 39-40; COLBY, *Narrating Muḥammad's Night Journey*, p. 4, 165-167.

Hell.⁷⁰ In this account, Ġibrīl accompanies the Prophet Muḥammad up to either the third heaven (in the Leiden manuscript) or the fifth (in edited versions), where he meets the guardian of Hell, a fiery angel with a terrible face and appearance who, sitting on a stool, prepares his instruments of torture. The Prophet Muḥammad would like to see Hell, to satisfy his curiosity. Although the guardian denies him access, God's command comes from above, allowing the Prophet to peer through a narrow opening in the gate, from which a burning cloud of fire and smoke comes out.

فلم أرفي الملائكة أعظم منه خلقه كالحال الوجه شديد البطش ظاهر الغضب لو أشرف على أهل الدنيا لمتوا قال النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم فلما سلمت عليه رد علي السلام وهو مُغَضَّبٌ فجزعت منه لقلة تبسمه قال جبريل لا خوف عليك هذا الملك خلق من غضب الجبار منذ خلقه الله تعالى ما ضحك ولا تبسم يزداد غضبه في كل يوم على من ليس في قلبه رحمة ينتقم من العصاة والجبارين وأهل الكبائر فقلت يا مالك اكشف عن أطباق جهنم لأنظر إليها فقال لا تستطيع النظر إليها وهذه النداء يا مالك لا تُخَالِفْ له أمراً فعند ذلك فُتِحَ له باب جهنم مقدار خرم الإبرة فخرج منها هج ودخان لو دام ساعة لأظلمت السموات والأرض فنظر فيها فإذا هي سبع طباق بعضها فوق بعض فلم أستطيع النظر إليها لشدة عذاب الكفار والمشركين⁷¹.

I have not seen among the angels any greater in creation than him, with a grim face, severe in might, visibly angry. If he had looked upon the people of the world, they would have died. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said: 'When I greeted him, he returned the greeting while angry, and I was frightened by his lack of smiling'. Ġibrīl said: 'Do not fear. This angel was created from the wrath of the Almighty. Since God the Exalted created him, he has never laughed nor smiled. His anger increases every day toward those who have no mercy in their hearts. He takes vengeance on the disobedient, the tyrants, and those who commit major sins'. I said: 'Oh Mālik, uncover the layers of Hell so I may look at them'. He replied: 'You cannot bear to look at them'. And then came the call: 'Oh Mālik, do not disobey this command'. At that, he opened the gate of Hell the size of a needle's eye. A blaze and smoke came out which, would have darkened the heavens and earth if it had lasted for an hour. We looked inside and saw seven layers, one above the other. I could not bear to look at it due to the severity of the punishment for the unbelievers and polytheists.

⁷⁰ See ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 23–30, 432–437. The version proposed by Asín Palacios is more primitive than the one presented in ZILIO-GRANDI, *Il viaggio notturno e l'ascensione del profeta*, p. xl, whose Italian translation is based on the main printed editions. For a comparison with Dante's *Divina Commedia* see MARIA PICCOLI, « Viaggio nel regno del ritorno. Davanti a Dio, davanti all'uomo », in ZILIO-GRANDI, *Il viaggio notturno e l'ascensione del profeta*, p. 73–102 and MARIA PICCOLI, « Le visiones occidentali anteriori alla Commedia e la tradizione dell'Isrâ' wa' l Mi'râj. Intertestualità o poligenesi? », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 191–241.

⁷¹ See ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 432.6–11.

In relation to this version, it is perhaps appropriate to dwell on Asín Palacios' observations on the similarities with Dante's design. The scene recalls the fiery hurricane that illuminates the scene when Dante is about to take his first steps in Hell (*Inferno* V, v. 1–33, in particular v. 31–33: « La bufera infernal, che mai non resta, mena li spirti con la sua rapina; voltando e percotendo li molesta »). The figure of the guardian recalls Minos, to whom Virgil says, « Non impeder lo suo fatale andare » *Inferno* V, v. 22, as well as Charon, Pluto, Phlegyas, the demons at the gates of the city of Dis, the Minotaur, and the demons of the fifth *bolgia* of the eighth circle. The Muslim Hell appears to be made up of seven layers descending in proportion to the gravity of the sins and their respective punishments. Each layer contains various overlapping dwellings, corresponding to different moral subcategories of sinners. Here the Prophet observes the first layer and its fourteen dwellings, whose torments, according to Asín Palacios, are echoed in Dante's *Inferno*, as I have tried to summarize in the following table.

Hell in Redaction B, the <i>Al-Isrā' wa-l-mi'rāğ</i> attributed to Ibn 'Abbās (d. ca. 686), found in MS. Leiden, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 882, fol. 84r–87r (See Asín Palacios, <i>La escatología musulmana</i> , p. 432–434)	<i>Divina Commedia</i>
Snakes and scorpions torture the bodies of tyrants, wicked guardians, and usurers on various overlapping or parallel layers. مَحْبُوسٌ فِي تِلْكَ الصَّنَادِيقِ رِجَالٌ وَنِسَاءٌ وَعِنْدَهُمْ حَيَاتٌ وَعَقَارِبٌ وَهُمْ يَتَصَارَخُونَ قُلْتُ يَا مَالِكُ فَمَا كَانَ ذَنْبُ هَؤُلَاءِ فِي الدُّنْيَا قَالَ كَانُوا يَظْلِمُونَ النَّاسَ وَيَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ وَيَتَكَبَّرُونَ وَيَتَجَبَّرُونَ وَلَا يَنْبَغِي الْكِبْرِيَاءَ وَالْجَبَرُوتَ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى ثُمَّ نَظَرْتُ فَرَأَيْتُ أَقْوَامًا مُشَافِرِهِمْ كَمُشَافِرِ الْكَلَابِ وَالْإِبِلِ وَالزَّيْبَانِيَةِ تَقْمَعُهُمْ بِمَقَامِعٍ مِنْ نَارٍ وَتَدْخُلُ تِلْكَ الْحَيَاتُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ فَتَقْطَعُ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ وَتَخْرُجُ مِنْ أَدْبَارِهِمْ فَقُلْتُ مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَأْكُلُونَ أَمْوَالَ الْيَتَامَى ظُلْمًا إِنَّمَا يَأْكُلُونَ فِي بُطُونِهِمْ نَارًا وَسَيَصْلُونَ سَعِيرًا ثُمَّ نَظَرْتُ وَإِذَا يَقُومُ بَطُونُهُمْ كَأَمْثَالِ الْجِبَالِ تَغْلِي حَيَاتٌ وَعَقَارِبٌ كُلَّمَا أَرَادَ أَحَدُهُمْ أَنْ يَقُومَ سَقَطَ عَلَى وَجْهِهِ مِنْ عَظْمٍ بَطْنُهُ قُلْتُ مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ أَكَلُوا الرِّبَا. (Asín Palacios, <i>La escatología musulmana</i>, p. 433.1–9) Imprisoned in those boxes are men and women with snakes and scorpions, and they are screaming. I said, 'Oh Mālik, what was their sin in the world?'. He replied, 'They used to oppress people and consume their wealth unjustly, and they were arrogant and tyrannical, while power	<i>Inferno</i> XXIV v. 79–105 Noi discendemmo il ponte da la testa/ dove s'aggiugne con l'ottava ripa,/ e poi mi fu la bolgia manifesta: e vidivi entro terribile stipa di serpenti, e di sí diversa mena che la memoria il sangue ancor mi scipa. Più non si vanti Libia con sua rena;/ ché se chelidri, iaculi e faree/ produce, e cencri con anfisibena, né tante pestilenzie né sì ree/ mostrò già mai con tutta l'Etìopia;/ né con ciò che di sopra al Mar Rosso èe.

and tyranny befit only God the Exalted'. Then, I looked and saw people whose lips were like those of dogs and camels, and the guards were suppressing them with maces of fire. Those snakes were entering their mouths, cutting their intestines, and coming out of their rear ends. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'Those who consume the wealth of orphans unjustly; they are only consuming fire into their bellies, and they will be burned in a Blaze'. Then, I looked and saw people whose bellies were like mountains, boiling with snakes and scorpions. Whenever one of them tried to stand, he fell on his face due to the enormity of his belly. I asked, 'Who are these?' He replied, 'The usurers'.	Tra questa cruda e tristissima copia/ corrëan genti nude e spaventate,/ senza sperar pertugio o elitropia: con serpi le man dietro avean legate;/ quelle ficcavan per le ren la coda/ e 'l capo, ed eran dinanzi aggroppate. Ed ecco a un ch'era da nostra proda,/ s'avventò un serpente che 'l trafisse/ là dove 'l collo a le spalle s'annoda. Né O sì tosto mai né I si scrisse,/com'el s'accese e arse, e cener tutto/ convenne che cascando divenisse; e poi che fu a terra sì distrutto,/la polver si raccolse per sé stessa/ e 'n quel medesmo ritornò di butto. (The description of the serpents that torture the damned continues in canto XXV)
Slanderers who claw their faces with bronze nails ثم رأيت رجالاً ونساءً مُعَلَّقِينَ بِالسَّنَائِبِ مِنْ نَارٍ وَلَهُمْ أَظْفَارُ مِنْ نَحَاسٍ يَخْمَشُونَ بِهَا وَجُوهَهُمْ قُلْتُ مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ الَّذِينَ يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَيَمْشُونَ بِالنَّمِيمَةِ وَيَرْمُونَ الْفِتْنَ بَيْنَ النَّاسِ وَيَقْعُونَ فِي أَعْرَاضِهِمْ. (Asín Palacios, <i>La escatología musulmana</i>, p. 433.10–13) Then I saw men and women hanging by their tongues with hooks of fire, and they had nails of copper with which they were scratching their faces. I asked, 'Who are these?' He replied, 'Those	<i>Inferno XXIX, v. 73–90</i> Io vidi due sedere a sé poggiate,/com'a scaldar si poggia tegghia a tegghia,/dal capo al piè di schianze macolati; e non vidi già mai menare stregghia/ a ragazzo aspettato dal signorso,/ né a colui che mal volontier vegghia, come ciascun menava spesso il morso/

who bear false witness, spread gossip, sow discord among people, and slander them'.	de l'unghie sopra sé per la gran rabbia/ del pizzicor, che non ha più soccorso; e sì traevan giù l'unghie la scabbia,/ come coltel di scardova le scaglie/ o d'altro pesce che più larghe l'abbia. 'O tu che con le dita ti dismaglie',/ cominciò 'l duca mio a l'un di loro,/ "e che fai d'esse talvolta tanaglie, dinne s'alcun Latino è tra costoro/ che son quinc'entro, se l'unghia ti basti/ eternalmente a cotesto lavoro'.
A rabid thirst tortures the drunkards ثم نظرت فرأيت أقوامًا يستغيثون من العطش فتأتيهم الزبانية بأقداح من نار فإذا تناولوها سقط لحم وجوههم من حرّها فإذا شربوها قُطِعَتْ أمعاؤهم وخرجت من أديبارهم قلت من هؤلاء قال شرّاب الخمر. (Asín Palacios, <i>La escatología musulmana</i>, p. 433.16-18) Then I looked and saw people crying out in thirst. The guards of Hell came to them with cups of fire. When they took them, the flesh of their faces fell off from the heat. When they drank from them, it cut their intestines and came out from their rear ends. I asked, 'Who are these?' .He said, 'The drinkers of wine'.	<i>Inferno</i> XXX, v. 58–69 'O voi che sanz'alcuna pena siete,/ e non so io perché, nel mondo gramo',/ diss'elli a noi, 'guardate e attendete a la miseria del maestro Adamo;/ io ebbi, vivo, assai di quel ch'i' volli,/ e ora, lassol, un gocciol d'acqua bramo. Li ruscelletti che d'i verdi colli/ del Casentin discendon giuso in Arno,/ facendo i lor canali freddi e molli, sempre mi stanno innanzi, e non indarno,/ ché l'immagine lor vie più m'asciuga/ che 'l male ond'io nel volto mi discarno. <i>Inferno</i> XXX, v. 118–129

	'Ricorditi, spergiuro, del cavallo',/ rispuose quel ch'avëa infiatà l'epa;/ 'e sieti reo che tutto il mondo sallo!'. 'E te sia rea la sete onde ti crepa',/ disse 'l Greco, 'la/ lingua, e l'acqua marcia/ che 'l ventre innanzi a li occhi sì t'assiepa!'. Allora il monetier: 'Così si squarcia/ la bocca tua per tuo mal come suole;/ ché, s'i' ho sete e omor mi rinfarcia, tu hai l'arsura e 'l capo che ti duole,/ e per leccar lo specchio di Narcisso,/ non vorresti a 'nvitar molte parole'.
The wicked sons submerged in fire and tortured by demons with iron hooks every time they ask for forgiveness ثُمَّ رَأَيْتُ رِجَالًا وَنِسَاءً يُعَذِّبُونَ فِي النَّارِ. قَدْ وُكِّلَتْ بِهِمْ زِبَانِيَّةٌ بِمَقَامِعٍ مِنْ حَدِيدٍ كُلَّمَا اسْتَغَاثُوا يَقْمَعُونَهُمْ وَيَطْعَنُونَهُمْ بِرِمَاحٍ مِنْ نَارٍ فِي بَطُونِهِمْ وَيَضْرِبُونَهُمْ بِسِيَاطٍ مِنْ نَارٍ فَلَمْ أَرِ أَحَدًا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِبَائِرِ أَشَدَّ عَذَابًا مِنْهُمْ قُلْتُ مَنْ هَؤُلَاءِ قَالَ الْعَاقُونَ وَالْذِيهِمْ. (Asín Palacios, <i>La escatología musulmana</i>, p. 433.25-28) Then I saw men and women being tormented in the fire. They were guarded by angels with iron maces. Whenever they cried out for help, the angels would suppress them, stab them with spears of fire in their bellies, and strike them with whips of fire. I had not seen anyone among the people of major sins suffering more severe punishment than them. I asked, 'Who are these?' He replied, 'Those who are disobedient to their parents'.	<i>Inferno XXI, v. 1–21</i> Così di ponte in ponte, altro parlando/ che la mia comedia cantar non cura,/venimmo; e tenavamo 'l colmo, quando restammo per veder l'altra fessura/ di Malebolge e li altri pianti vani;/ e vidila mirabilmente oscura. Quale ne l'arzanà de' Viniziani/ bolle l'inverno la tenace pece/ a rimpalmare i legni lor non sani, ché navicar non ponno – in quella vece/ chi fa suo legno novo e chi ristoppa/ le coste a quel che più viaggi fece;

	chi ribatte da proda e chi da poppa;/ altri fa remi e altri volge sarte;/ chi terzeruolo e artimon rintoppa –: tal, non per foco ma per divin'arte,/ bollia là giuso una pegola spessa,/ che 'nviscava la ripa d'ogne parte. I' vedea lei, ma non vedëa in essa/ mai che le bolle che 'l bollor levava,/ e gonfiar tutta, e riseder compressa. <i>Inferno XXII, v. 16–30</i> Pur a la pegola era la mia 'ntesa,/ per veder de la bolgia ogne contegno/e de la gente ch'entro v'era incesa. Come i dalfini, quando fanno segno/ a' marinar con l'arco de la schiena/ che s'argomentin di campar lor legno, talor così, ad alleggiar la pena,/ mostrav'alcun de' peccatori 'l dosso/ e nasconde a in men che non balena. E come a l'orlo de l'acqua d'un fosso/ stanno i ranocchi pur col muso fuori,/ sì che celano i piedi e l'altro grosso, sì stavan d'ogne parte i peccatori;/ ma come s'appressava Barbariccia,/così si ritraén sotto i bollori.
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The martyrdom of the assassins who, although stabbed by demons, continuously revive to reiterate their torment ثم رأيت أقواماً تُذَبِّحُهُم الزبانية بسكاكين من نار كلما ماتوا عادوا كما كانوا قلت من هؤلاء قال الذين يقتلون النفس التي حَرَّمَ اللهُ ظُلماً. (Asín Palacios, <i>La escatología musulmana</i>, p. 434.1-3) Then I saw people being slaughtered by the guardians of Hell with knives of fire. Every time they died, they returned to their original state. I asked, 'Who are these?'. He replied, 'Those who kill people that God has forbidden to be killed, unjustly'.	<i>Inferno</i> XXVIII, v. 34–42 E tutti li altri che tu vedi qui,/ seminator di scandalo e di scisma/ fuor vivi, e però son fessi così. Un diavolo è qua dietro che n'accisma/ sì crudelmente, al taglio de la spada/ rimettendo ciascun di questa risma, quand'avem volta la dolente strada;/ però che le ferite son richiuse/ prima ch'altri dinanzi li rivada.
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(2.C) Redaction C of the second cycle is closely related to B, but in this version, when the gate of Hell opens, the Prophet Muḥammad is terrified by the flames, smoke, and stench emerging from it and begs Ġibrīl to have it closed again.⁷² It is particularly interested in the episodes of the *mī'rāğ* occurring beyond the seventh heaven. As described by Asín Palacios, it is extremely baroque and polished, characterized by repetitions, hyperboles, and ample use of the metaphorical imagery of light, color, and music. It is contained in the apocryphal collection of *aḥādīṭ* reported in the *Kitāb al-La'ālī l-Maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīṭ al-mawḍū'a* (*The Book of Artificial Pearls Concerning Fabricated Traditions*) by Ġalāl al-Dīn al-Ṣuyūṭī, an Egyptian polymath and *muḥaddīṭ* known as the *Ṣayḥ al-Islām* (d. 1505). He reports the account by the traditionist Ibn Ḥabān (d. 965).⁷³

Al-Ṣuyūṭī's report begins with the image of a rooster with green down and white feathers as the pedestal of God's Throne, intoning a prayer to God. Asín Palacios compares this to Dante's eagle in the heaven of Jupiter (*Paradiso* XIX):

ابن حبان حدثنا محمد بن سدوس النسوي حدثنا حميد بن زنجويه حدثنا محمد بن خدّاش حدثنا علي بن قتيبة عن ميسرة بن عبد ربه عن عمر بن سليمان الدمشقي عن الضحاك عن ابن عباس مرفوعاً لما أُسْرِيَ بي إلى السماء رأيت فيها أعاجيب من عباد الله خلقه ومن ذلك الذي رأيت في السماء ديك له زغب أخضر وریش أبيض بياض ريشه كأشدّ بياض. رأيت قطّ وزغبه تحت ريشه أخضر كأشدّ خضرة رأيتها قطّ وإذا رجلاه في تخوم الأرض السابعة السفلى ورأسه تحت عرش الرحمن ثاني عنقه تحت العرش له جناحان في منكبيه إذا نشرهما جاوزا المشرق والمغرب فإذا كان في بعض الليل نشر جناحيه وخفق بهما وصرخ بالتسبيح الله يقول سبحانه الملك

⁷² See ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 31–58, 437–439.

⁷³ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'ālī al-Maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīṭ al-mawḍū'a*, al-Adabiyya, al-Qāhira 1899, vol. I, p. 33–42.

القدّوس سبحانه الله الكبير المتعال لا إله إلا هو الحيّ القيوم فإذا فعل ذلك سبّحت دبكة الأرض كآيا وخفقت بأجنحتها وأخذت في الصّراخ فإذا سكن ذلك الديك في السماء سكنت الديكة في الأرض⁷⁴.

Ibn Ḥabān narrated to us from Muḥammad ibn Sadūs al-Nasawī, from Ḥumayd ibn Zangawayh, from Muḥammad ibn Ḥidāš, from 'Alī ibn Qutayba, from Maysara ibn 'Abd Rabbihi, from 'Umar ibn Sulaymān al-Dimašqī, from al-Ḍaḥḥāk, from Ibn 'Abbās, who attributed it to the Prophet: 'When I was taken on the night journey to the heavens, I saw wonders among God's servants and His creation. Among what I saw in the sky was a rooster with green down and white feathers. The whiteness of its feathers was the most intense white I had ever seen, and its down under the feathers was the most intense green I had ever seen. Its feet were in the depths of the seventh lowest earth, and its head was under the Throne of the Most Merciful, with its neck bent under the Throne. It had two wings on its shoulders that, when spread, extended beyond the east and the west. At a certain point in the night, it would spread its wings, flap them, and cry out glorifying God, saying: 'Glory be to the Holy Sovereign, glory be to God, the Great, the Exalted. There is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Self-Subsisting'. When it did this, all the roosters on earth would glorify God, flap their wings, and begin to crow. When that rooster in the sky became quiet, the roosters on earth would become quiet.'

Then the Prophet Muḥammad sees an angel half made of snow and half of fire, who invites the believers to unite their hearts into one. Asín Palacios compares it to the angels who fly with their wings in Dante's mystical rose.

ثم مررت بخلق عجب من العجب من الملائكة نصف جسده ممّا يلي رأسه ثلج والآخر نار ما بينهما رُتق فلا النار تذيب الثلج ولا الثلج يطفئ النار وهو قائم ينادى بصوت له رفيع جداً يقول سبحانه ربّي الذي كفت برد هذا الثلج فلا يطفئ حرّ هذه النار، سبحانه ربّي الذي كفت حرّ هذه النار فلا تذيب هذا الثلج اللهم مؤلفاً بين الثلج والنار ألف بين قلوب عبادك المؤمنين⁷⁵.

Then I passed by a wondrous creation among the angels: half of its body from the head down was snow, and the other half was fire, with no separation between them. The fire does not melt the snow, nor does the snow extinguish the fire. It stands calling out in a very loud voice, saying: 'Glory to my Lord who has restrained the cold of this snow, so it does not extinguish the heat of this fire. Glory to my Lord who has restrained the heat of this fire, so it does not melt this snow. O God, You who have united snow and fire, unite the hearts of Your believing servants'.

Then he encounters the angel of death seated on a throne, who rule the reins of the universe and is constantly engaged in taking souls. The entire world and everything within it are between his knees, while he fixes his gaze on a tablet of

⁷⁴ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'ālī al-Maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīṭ al-mawḍū'a*, vol. I, p. 63.9–20.

⁷⁵ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'ālī al-Maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīṭ al-mawḍū'a*, vol. I, p. 64.4–8.

light on which are discernible lines of writing. The angel of death is the most hardworking of the angels.⁷⁶

A generic *mi'rāḡ* – well narrated in other redactions – continues up to the sixth heaven, covering for each heaven a distance of five hundred years. The Prophet Muḥammad has a vision of a multitude of Cherubim moving like waves of the sea. Their bodies are covered with a thousand wings and faces with which they intone a timorous song of praise to God across the spheres, the words of which, for their sonority, seem to shatter the skull. Then the Prophet Muḥammad is led by Ġibrīl to the seventh heaven where he encounters new angelic creatures whom he is able to see through an 'energy' that comes to him from God, but his guide warns him not to speak of what he will see from this point on.

ثم جاوزناه ومررت بملانكة كثيرة لا يحصى عددهم إلا الله الواحد الملك القهار منهم من له وجه كثيرة بين كتفيه الله أعلم بعدها ثم وجوه كثيرة في صدره وفي كل وجه من تلك الوجوه أفواه وألسن وهم يحمدون الله ويسبحونه بتلك الألسن كلها فرأيت من خلقهم وعبادتهم الله أمرًا عظيمًا فجاوزناهم من سماء إلى سماء حتى بلغنا بقوة الله إلى السماء السادسة فإذا خلق كثير فوق وصف الواصفين يمج بعض كثيرة وإذا كل ملك منهم ممثلي ما بين رأسه ورجليه وجوه وأجنحة وليس من فم ولا رأس ولا وجه ولا عين ولا لسان ولا أذن ولا جناح ولا يد ولا رجل ولا عضو ولا شعر إلا يسبح الله بحمده ويذكر من آلائه وثنائه بكلام لا يذكره العضو الآخر رافعين أصواتهم بالبكاء من خشية الله والتحميد له وعبادته لو سمع أهل الأرض صوت ملك منهم لماتوا كلهم فرغًا من شدة هولاء، قلت يا جبريل من هؤلاء، قال سبحان الله العظيم هؤلاء الكروبيون عن عبادتهم الله وتسبيحهم له وبكائهم من خشية خلقوا كما ترى لم يكلم واحد منهم صاحبه إلى جنبه قط ولم يروا وجهه ولم يرفعوا رؤوسهم إلى السماء السابعة منذ خلقوا ولم ينظروا إلى ما تحتهم من السموات والأرضين خشوعًا في جسمهم وخوفًا من ربهم [...] ثم جاوزناهم فحملني جبريل فأدخلني السماء السابعة فأبصرت فيها خلقًا وملانكة من خلق ربهم لا يؤذن لي أن أحدثكم عنهم ولا أصفهم لكم، ثم أخبركم إن الله أعطاني عند ذلك مثل قوة أهل الأرض وزادني من عنده ما هو أعلم به ومن على الثابت وحدد بصري الرؤية نورهم ولولا ذلك ما استطعت النظر فقلت سبحان الله العظيم الذي خلق مثل هؤلاء، قلت يا من هؤلاء يا جبريل فأخبرني وقص على من شأنهم العجب ولم يؤذن لي أن أحدثكم عنهم.⁷⁷

Then we passed him and came upon numerous angels, their number known only to God, the One, the King, the Subduer. Among them were those with many faces between their shoulders, God knows their number, and many faces on their chests. On each of these faces were mouths and tongues, all praising and glorifying God. I saw from their creation and worship of God a most great order. We passed them from heaven to heaven until we reached, by God's power, the sixth heaven. There was an abundance of creation beyond the description of describers, surging into one another in multitude. Each angel was filled from head to toe with faces and wings. There was no mouth, head, face, eye, tongue, ear, wing, hand, foot, limb, or hair that did not glorify God with His praise and mention His blessings and praise with words not repeated by another part, raising their voices in weeping from fear of God and praising Him and worshipping Him. If the people of Earth heard the voice of one of these angels, they would all die from the intensity of its terror. I said, 'Oh Ġibrīl, who are these?' He replied, 'Glory be to God, the Great. These are the Cherubim. They

⁷⁶ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'āl al-Maṣnū'a fī l-ahādīṭ al-mawḍū'a*, vol. I, p. 64.11–16.

⁷⁷ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'āl al-Maṣnū'a fī l-ahādīṭ al-mawḍū'a*, vol. I, p. 66.6–68.8.

were created as you see for the worship of God, glorifying Him and weeping from fear of Him. Not one of them has ever spoken to his companion beside him, nor have they seen each other's faces. They have not raised their heads to the seventh heaven since they were created, nor have they looked at what is below them of the heavens and earths, out of humility in their bodies and fear of their Lord'. [...] Then we passed them, and Ġibrīl carried me and brought me into the seventh heaven. There I saw creations and angels from the creation of their Lord that I am not permitted to tell you about or describe to you. Then I inform you that God gave me at that time the strength of all the people of Earth and increased me from Himself with what He knows best and granted me steadfastness and sharpened my vision to see their light. Without that, I could not have looked. I said, 'Glory be to God, the Great, who created such as these'. I asked, 'Who are these, oh Ġibrīl?' He informed me and related to me wonders of their affairs, but I am not permitted to tell you about them.

Ġibrīl leads him by hand into the proximity of God, Whose description is the main theme of this redaction. Seventy ranks of angels stand in the heights of light in this second heaven. The Prophet Muḥammad ascends beyond and encounters another seventy ranks. This repeats until he reaches seven groups of seventy angelic ranks that rotate around God's Throne singing His praises. The Prophet Muḥammad expresses his amazement.

فلقد خُيِّلَ إِلَيَّ أَتَى قَدْ نَسِيتُ كُلَّ مَا رَأَيْتُ مِنْ عَجَائِبِ خَلْقِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي دُونَهُمْ وَلَمْ يُؤَذِّنْ لِي أَنْ أَخْبِرْكُمْ عَنْهُمْ وَلَوْ كَانَ أَذِنَ لِي فِي ذَلِكَ لَمْ أَسْتَطِعْ أَنْ أَصِفَهُمْ لَكُمْ وَلَكِنْ أَخْبِرْكُمْ أَنْ لَوْ كُنْتُ مَيِّتًا قَبْلَ أَجَلِي فَرَعًا مِنْ شَيْءٍ لَمِتُّ عِنْدَ رُؤْيَتِهِمْ وَعَجَائِبُ خَلْقِهِمْ وَدَوَى أَصْوَاتِهِمْ وَشِعَاعُ نُورِهِمْ، وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى قَرَّانِي لِذَلِكَ بِرَحْمَتِهِ وَتَمَامِ نِعْمَتِهِ وَمَنْ عَلَى الْإِثْبَاتِ عِنْدَ مَا رَأَيْتُ مِنْ شِعَاعِ نُورِهِمْ وَسَمِعْتُ دَوَى أَصْوَاتِهِمْ بِالتَّسْبِيحِ وَخَدَّدَ بَصَرِي لِرُؤْيَتِهِمْ كَيْ لَا يُخْطِفَ مِنْ نُورِهِمْ⁷⁸.

I felt as if I had forgotten everything I had seen before of the wonders of God's creation below them. I am not permitted to tell you about them, and even if I were allowed, I would not be able to describe them to you. But I inform you that if I were to die before my appointed time out of fear from anything, I would have died upon seeing them, the wonders of their creation, the resonance of their voices, and the radiance of their light. But God strengthened me for that with His mercy and the perfection of His favor and granted me steadfastness when I saw the radiance of their light and heard the resonance of their voices glorifying Him. He sharpened my vision to see them so that I would not be blinded by their light.

Then the Prophet Muḥammad ascends, crossing seven seas. One is of radiant flames and brilliant light, with a terrifying roar and clamor. Another is like lofty peaks in the air, with snow of intense whiteness that radiates like the sun and thunders like flowing water. This is followed by another sea of fire, more intense than the first, with waves surging like mountains, and another sea of water that surges like firm mountains, one above the other, where he sees wondrous angels

⁷⁸ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'āl al-Maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīṭ al-mawḍū'a*, vol. I, p. 69.7–13.

beyond any description thus far. The water falls short of their knees, while their heads reach up to the Throne of the Lord of Might. Then follows a sea of light that outshines all the others, its light surpassing all light, submerging all fire, and outshining all radiance. Its brilliance nearly blinds him. While he is ascending, he sees angels surrounding God's Throne, standing in tight rows, and he emphasizes how this extraordinary sight made him forget all the previous wonders. He is forbidden from describing these angels, and even if allowed, he could not do justice to them. They glorify God with powerful voices, affirming His uniqueness and greatness. When the angels speak, a brilliant light emerges from their mouths, so intense that it could burn all creation below if not for God's decree. The Prophet Muḥammad asks Ġibrīl about these angels, and Ġibrīl identifies them as various classes of Cherubim, created by God in ranks and forms that transcend human comprehension. The Prophet Muḥammad and Ġibrīl then ascend faster than an arrow and the wind toward the Throne of the Lord of Glory. Upon witnessing the Throne, the Prophet realizes that all the creation he has witnessed before pales in comparison to its magnificence.

ثم جاوزناهم بإذن الله متصعين في جَوْ عَلَيَّينَ أسرع من السهم والريح بإذن الله وقدرته حتَّى وصلنا إلى العرش ذي العِزَّة العزيز الواحد القهار، فلما نظرت إلى العرش فإذا ما رأيته من الخلق كله قد تصاغر ذكره وتهاون أمره وأتضع خطره عند العرش، وإذا السماوات السبع والأرضون السبع وأطباق جهنم ودرجات الجنة وستور الحجب والنار والبحار والجبال التي في عَلَيَّينَ وجميع الخلق والخلقة إلى عرش الرحمن كحلقة صغيرة من حلق الدرع في أرض فلاة واسعة تبهاء لا يُعْرِفُ أطرافها من أطرافها وهكذا ينبغي لمقام ربِّ العِزَّة أن يكون عظيمًا لعظم ربوبيته وهو كذلك وأعظم وأجل وأعز وأكرم وأفضل وأمره فوق وصف الوصفين وما تلهج به ألسن الناطقين⁷⁹.

After we had left the Cherubim behind, by the permission of God we continued to ascend through the celestial ether, faster than an arrow and the wind, thanks to the divine omnipresence that allowed us to do so, until we reached the throne of the Glorious, the Unique, the Victorious. But, as I directed my gaze toward the Throne, I felt that all the created things I had seen were diminishing in my spirit, losing their value and lowering themselves when compared to the Throne. The seven heavens, the seven earths, the seven layers of Hell, the degrees of Paradise, the various veils, lights, seas, and mountains that exist in the celestial heights – in a word, the entire creation – appeared to me, when compared to the Throne of the Merciful, as something like a small ring among all those that make up a coat of mail, lost in the midst of a vast desert land whose limits are unknown. This is how the station of the Lord of Might should be – great due to the greatness of His Lordship. And it is so, even greater, more majestic, mightier, nobler, more excellent, and His affair is beyond the description of describers and what the tongues of speakers can express.

On a green crown (*rafrāf*) with hands to protect his eyes the Prophet Muḥammad leaves Ġibrīl and is raptured to the presence of God, Whom he now sees with his heart. God brings him closer and makes him witness to His revelation. The Prophet

⁷⁹ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'ālī al-Maṣnū'a fi l-aḥādīṭ al-mawḍū'a*, vol. I, p. 73.20–74.5.

Muḥammad experiences an emotion that erases all his fear. Immediately after, there is a conversation between God and His servant to whom He entrusts his Prophetic mission. God says to the Prophet that He has taken him, Muḥammad, as a close friend as He did with Ibrāhīm, that He has spoken to him directly as to Mūsā, that He has given him the opening of the Book and the closing verses of *Sūrat al-Baqara* (*The Cow*),⁸⁰ which were from the treasures of His Throne, that He has sent him to the white, black, and red people of the earth, to the *ġinn* and the humans, and that He had not sent a prophet to all of them before him. He goes on saying that He made the earth, its land and sea, pure as a place of prostration for him and his nation. He has sent down to him the master of all books, a guardian over them, a *Qur'ān*. After this the Prophet Muḥammad begins his descent and reflects on his vision.

فإذا إلهي قد تَبَّتَ بصري في قلبي وإذا أنا أبصر بقلبي ما خلفي كما أبصر بعيني ما أمامي، فلما أكرمني ربِّي برويته أخذ بصري.⁸¹

Behold, my God had strengthened in my heart the intuitive energy, in such a way that I now saw with my heart what was behind me, just as with my carnal eyes I saw what was in front of me. The fact was that God, in granting me the grace of His vision, had sharpened my sight.

The Prophet Muḥammad remains absorbed in the complete and luminous contemplation of creation and listens to the harmonious concert of the angelic hierarchies: the voices of the Cherubim and those above them, and the sound of the Throne and the veils around him glorify God. The sounds are varied, some creaking, some rumbling, some roaring, some resonating, some crashing, all different from each other, some louder than others. Ġibrīl satisfies the Prophet's final curiosities, and they both descend faster than an arrow and the wind until they enter the gardens of Paradise.

⁸⁰ See *Qur'ān* 2 (*The Cow*), v. 285–86: « The Messenger believes in what was sent down to him from his Lord, and the believers; each one believes in God and His Angels, and in his Book, and His Messengers; we make no division between any one of His Messengers. They say, 'We hear, and obey. Our Lord, grant us Thy forgiveness; unto Thee is the homecoming. God charges no soul save to its capacity; standing to its account is what it has earned, and against its account what it has merited. Our Lord, take us not to task if we forget, or make mistake. Our Lord, charge us not with a load such as Thou didst lay upon those before us. Our Lord, do Thou not burden us beyond what we have the strength to bear. And pardon us, and forgive us, and have mercy on us; Thou art our protector. And help us against the people of the unbelievers » (ARBERRY, *The Koran Interpreted*, vol. I, 71–72). See AMIR-MOEZZI, DYE, *Le Coran des Historiens*, vol. II, *Commentaire et analyse du texte coranique*, Tome 1: *sourates 1–26*, p. 110.

⁸¹ AL-ṢUYŪṬĪ, *Kitāb al-La'āl al-Maṣnū'a fī l-aḥādīth al-mawḍū'a*, vol. I, p. 76.6–8.

The last part of this version presents an exaggeratedly materialistic description of the Garden or Islamic Paradise,⁸² probably juxtaposed with the preceding in homage to popular ideas at the time and to form a contrast with the legend as rewritten heavily from the perspective of Arabic Neoplatonism and the Philosophy of Illumination (*hikmat al-iṣrāq*).

Asín Palacios highlights the similarities between this version and the *Divina Commedia* in terms of the dematerialization of Paradise achieved through the metaphors of sound and light, whose intensity increases throughout the *mī'rāḡ*. More specific connections include: (1) the imagery of an arrow and the wind for the speed of the *mī'rāḡ* and, respectively, for Dante and Beatrice's passage from the first to the second sphere and for the souls that fly to meet them in the sphere of Venus;⁸³ (2) the image of the whirlwind for the souls that appear to him in the heaven of Saturn;⁸⁴ (3) the impossibility of description and the traveller's inability to report what he sees;⁸⁵ (4) the Prophet Muḥammad's initial bewilderment at each successive stage of the *mī'rāḡ* until God sharpens his sight by conferring on him a new power;⁸⁶ (5) Ġibrīl's continuous intercession for the Prophet Muḥammad until the moment when they separate, along with the latter's continuous turning to thank God for the benefits granted to him;⁸⁷ (6) the vision of the luminous divine essence in concentric circles of angels;⁸⁸ (7) the physiological phenomena of ecstasy.⁸⁹

Redaction C of the second cycle, in many respects close to redaction B, was quite widespread from the twelfth century in al-Andalus, as evidenced by the discovery in a mine in the vicinity of Granada of MS. Madrid, Real Academia, Codera (Gayangos) 241, f. 1–8, a manuscript containing a fragment of the *mī'rāḡ*

⁸² For an example of a materialistic description of the Garden or Islamic Paradise, see FREDERICK STEPHEN COLBY, « A Thirteenth Century Composite Account of Muhammad's Visit to Paradise. Translation and Commentary on the Tour of the Garden in Amcazade Huseyin Pasha 95/2 », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 169–189, in particular p. 171–183.

⁸³ See *Paradiso* VIII, v. 22–24; V, v. 91–93.

⁸⁴ See *Paradiso* XXII, v. 99.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Paradiso* I, v. 4–9; X, v. 43–47; XXIII, v. 55–59; XXX, v. 19–22; XXXI, v. 136–138; XXXIII, v. 55–56, 90, 106, 121–123, 139, 142.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Paradiso* III, v. 128–129; XIV, v. 77–78, 82; XXV, v. 118–121; XXIII, v. 28–33, 76–84, 118–119; XXVIII, v. 16–18; XXIX, v. 8–9; XXX, v. 46–51, 55–60; XXXIII, v. 52–54, 76–84 which I quote as paradigmatic example: « Io credo, per l'acume ch'io sofferesi/ del vivo raggio, ch'i' sarei smarrito,/ se li occhi miei da lui fossero aversi./ E' mi ricorda ch'io fui più ardito/ per questo a sostener, tanto ch'i' giunsi/ l'aspetto mio col valore infinito./ Oh abbondante grazia ond' io presunsi/ ficcar lo viso per la luce eterna,/ tanto che la veduta vi consunsi! ».

⁸⁷ Cf. *Paradiso* II, v. 29–30; X, v. 52–54.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Paradiso* XXVIII, v. 57–63, 93–94, 97–99.

⁸⁹ Cf. *Paradiso* XXXIII, v. 57–63, 93–94, 97–99.

from Muḥammad's encounter with Azrā'īl, the Angel of Death in the fourth heaven up to the divine Throne.⁹⁰

IV.3. The third cycle

(3) Finally, the third cycle is comprised of a single redaction, a synthesis and fusion of all the previous ones, presenting a continuous narrative in which Muḥammad's visits to Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise follow one another.⁹¹ For this redaction, we have a date *ante quem* in the ninth century, since the great commentator al-Ṭabarī cites it in his already mentioned exegetical work of the *Qur'ān*, the *Ġāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl āy al-Qur'ān* (XV, 3.6–14.7). In his commentary al-Ṭabarī records two long composite narratives, a report on the authority of the early companion of Muḥammad, Abū Hurayra, and another report on an early authority among the *ṣaḥāba* named Abū Sa'īd Ḥudrī. A peculiar element of interest of the third cycle is the allegorical-moral richness of the episodes of temptation faced by the Prophet Muḥammad during the *isrā'*. These include the voice of the Devil and an old woman, a symbol of the caducity of world, who invites him to abandon his path which. According to Asín Palacios, this scene is similar to Dante's vision in the fifth circle of Purgatory (*Purgatorio* XIX, v. 7–36; 55–60):

فسار رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فإذا هو بعجوز ناءٍ عن الطريق أي على جنب الطريق قال أبو جعفر ينبغي أن يقال نائية ولكن أسقط منها التائيث فقال ما هذه يا جبرئيل قال سريا محمد فسار ما شاء الله أن يسير فإذا نداء يدعوهُ مُنْتَحِيًا عن الطريق يقول هَلَمْ يا مُحَمَّد قال جبرئيل سريا مُحَمَّد فسار ما شاء الله أن يسير قال ثُمَّ لقيه خلق من الخلائق فقال أحدهم السلام عليك يا أَوَّل والسلام عليك يا آخِر والسلام عليك يا حاشِر فقال له جبرئيل اردد السلام يا مُحَمَّد قال فردَّ السلام ثُمَّ لقيه الثاني فقال له مثل مقالة الأولين حتَّى انتهى إلى بيت المقدس فغرضَ عليه الماء واللبن والخمر فتناول رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم اللبن فقال له جبرئيل أصبت يا مُحَمَّد الفطرة ولو شربت الماء لغرقت أَمَتَكَ ولو شربت الخمر لغويت وغوت أَمَتَكَ ثُمَّ بُعِثَ له آدم فمن دونه من الانبياء فَأَمَّهُم رسول الله – صلى الله عليه وسلم تلك الليلة ثُمَّ قال له جبرئيل أَمَا العجوز الَّتِي رأيت على جانب الطريق فلم يبق من الدنيا الا بقدر ما بقى من عمر تلك العجوز وأما الَّذِي أراد أن تميل إليه فذاك عدو الله إبليس أراد أن تميل إليه وأما الَّذين سَلَمُوا عليك فذاك إبراهيم وموسى وعيسى.⁹²

The Messenger of God, peace be upon him, set out, and there he saw an old woman beside the road, or on the side of the road (Abū Ḡa'far said it should have been said *nā'iya* – feminine for distant/remote, but the feminine form was dropped) so he asked, 'What is this, oh Ġibrīl?'. He replayed, 'Walk on, oh Muḥammad'. So, he proceeded as far as God willed him to proceed. Suddenly, there was a voice calling him off the road, saying, 'Come, oh Muḥammad'. Ġibrīl prompted, 'Walk on, oh Muḥammad'. So, he proceeded as far as God willed him to proceed. Then he met some of the created beings, and one of them said, 'Peace be upon you, oh First One!

⁹⁰ For a general introduction and English translation, see FREDERIK STEPHEN COLBY, « Appendix: Translation of Real Academia de la Historia MS Codera 241 », in Id., *Muḥammad's Ascension in Muslim Spain*, p. 28–33, p. 119–124.

⁹¹ See ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 59–66, 439–443.

⁹² ABŪ ḠA'FAR MUḤAMMAD IBN ḠARĪR AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ġāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. XV, p. 5.34–6.10.

Peace be upon you, oh Last One! Peace be upon you, oh Gatherer!' Ġibrīl said to him, 'Return the greeting, oh Muhammad'. So, he returned the greeting. Then the second one met him and said to him the like of what the first ones had said, until he reached *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem). Water, milk, and wine were presented to him, and the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, took the milk. Ġibrīl said to him, 'You have attained the natural disposition, oh Muḥammad. If you had drunk the water, you would have drowned, and your nation would have drowned. If you had drunk the wine, you would have gone astray, and your nation would have gone astray'. Then, Ādam and the Prophets after him were sent to him, and the Messenger of God, peace be upon him, led them in prayer that night. Then Ġibrīl said to him, 'As for the old woman you saw beside the road, nothing remains of this world except what remains of that old woman's life. As for the one whom you were about to incline toward, that was the enemy of God, Iblīs, who wanted you to incline toward him. As for those who greeted you with peace, they were Ibrāhīm, Mūsā, and ʿĪsā'.

In the second part of the account, al-Ṭabarī presents hellish punishments, some similar to and some different from those described in the texts of the other cycles:

ثم أتى على قوم تُرْضِخُ رؤوسهم بالصخر كلما رُضِخَتْ عادت كما كانت لا يفتر عنهم من ذلك شيء فقال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل قال هؤلاء الذين تنتال رؤوسهم عن الصلاة المكتوبة ثم أتى على قوم على أقبالهم رقاع وعلى أدبارهم رقاع يسرحون كما تسرح الإبل والغنم ويأكلون الضريع والزقوم ورضف جهنم و حجارتها قال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل قال هؤلاء الذين لا يؤتون صدقات أموالهم وما ظلمهم الله شيئاً وما الله بظلام للعبيد ثم أتى على قوم بين أيديهم لحم نصيج في قدور ولحم آخرنيء قدر خبيث فجعلوا يأكلون من النّيء ويدعون النصيج الطيب فقال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل قال هذا الرجل من أمّتك تكون عنده المرأة الحلال طيباً فتأتي امرأة خبيثة فيبسبب عندها حتى يصبح والمرأة تقوم من عند زوجها حلالاً طيباً فتأتي رجلاً خبيثاً فتبسبب معه حتى تصبح قال ثم أتى على خشبة في الطريق لا يمر بها ثوب إلا شقته شيء إلا خرّفته قال ما هذا يا جبرئيل قال هذا مثل أقوام من أمّتك يفعدون على الطريق فيقطعونه ثم قرأوا ولا تقعدوا بكل صراط توعدون وتصدون عن سبيل الله ثم أتى على رجل قد جمع حزمة حطب عظيمة لا يستطيع حملها وهو يزید عليها ويريد أن يحملها فلا يستطيع ذلك ثم أتى على قوم تكون عنده أمانات الناس لا يقدر على أدائها وهو يزید عليها ويريد أن يحملها فلا يستطيع ذلك ثم أتى على قوم تُفرضُ ألسنتهم وشفاههم بمقاريض من حديد كلما قرّضت عادت كما كانت لا يفتر عنهم من ذلك شيء قال ما هؤلاء يا جبرئيل فقال هؤلاء خطباء الفتنة من أمّتك الذين يقولون مالا يفعلون ثم أتى على حجر صغير يخرج منه نور عظيم فجعل النور يريد أن يرجع من حيث خرج فلا يستطيع فقال ما هذا يا جبرئيل قال هذا الرجل يتكلم بالكلمة العظيمة ثم يندم عليها فلا يستطيع أن يردّها ثم أتى على واد فوجد ريحاً طيبة باردة وفيه ريح المسك وسمع صوتاً فقال يا جبرئيل ما هذه الريح الطيبة الباردة وهذه الرائحة التي هي كريخ المسك وما هذا الصوت قال هذا صوت الجنة تقول يا ربّ أنتي ما وعدتني فقد كثرت غرفي واستبرقي وحريري وسندي وعقري ولؤلؤي ومرجاني وفضتي وزهبي وأكوابي وصحافي وأباريقي وفواكهي ونخلي ورماني ولبنّي وخمري فأتني ما وعدتني فقال لك كلّ مسلم ومسلمة ومؤمن ومؤمنة ومن آمن بي وبرسلي وعمل صالحاً ولم يشرك بي ولم يتخذ من دوني أنداداً ومن خشيني فهو آمن ومن سألني أعطيته ومن أقرضني جزيته ومن توكل على كفته إني أنا الله لا إله إلا أنا لا أخلف الميعاد وقد أفلح المؤمنون وتبارك الله أحسن الخالقين قالت قد رضيت ثم أتى على واد فسمع صوتاً منكراً ووجد ريحاً منتنة فقال ما هذه الريح يا جبرئيل وما هذا الصوت قال هذا صوت جهنم تقول يا ربّ أنتي ما وعدتني فقد كثرت سلاسل وأغلال وسعيري وجحيمي وضريعي وغساق عذابي وعقابي وقد بعد

قعرى واشتدَّ حرِّي فأتني ما وعدتني قال لك كلَّ مشرك ومشركة وكافر وكافرة وكلَّ خبيث وخبيثة وكلَّ جبار لا يؤمن بيوم الحساب قالت قد رضيت قال ثمَّ سار حتَّى أتى بيت المقدس⁹³.

Then he came upon a people whose heads were being smashed with rocks, and whenever they were smashed, they returned to their former state, without any respite from that. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied, 'These are those whose heads are turned away from the prescribed prayers'. Then he came upon a people on whose fronts and backs were hooks, being driven as camels and sheep are driven, eating *al-ḍarī* (a bitter, thorny plant), *al-Zaqūm* (a tree in Hell), the pavement of Hell, and its stones. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied, 'These are those who do not pay the obligatory charity on their wealth, though God has not wronged them in anything, for God is not unjust to His servants'. Then he came upon a people in front of whom were raw meat in pots and rotten, foul-smelling meat. They were eating the rotten meat and leaving for the good raw meat. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied, 'This is a man from your nation who has a lawful, pure wife, but he goes to an impure woman and stays with her until morning. And the woman gets up from her lawful husband and goes to an impure man and stays with him until morning'. Then he came upon a piece of wood on the road that would tear any garment that passed by it and rip anything that came near it. He asked, 'What is this, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied, 'This is the example of some people from your nation who sit on the road and cut it off'. Then he recited, 'And do not sit on every path, threatening and barring from God's way those who believe in Him' [*Qur'ān*, 7 (*Sūrat al-A'raf*), v. 84]. Then he came upon a man who had gathered a huge pile of firewood that he could not carry, yet he was adding more to it. He asked, 'What is this, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied, 'This is a man from your nation who has people's trust that he is unable to fulfill, yet he keeps adding more, intending to carry it, but he cannot do so'. Then he came upon people whose tongues and lips were being cut with scissors of iron, and whenever they were clipped, they returned to their former state, without any respite from that. He asked, 'Who are these, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied, 'These are the preachers of discord from your nation, who say what they do not do'. Then he came upon a small enclosure from which a huge bull emerged. The bull tried to return from where it had come out but could not. He asked, 'What is this, oh Ġibrīl?' He replied, 'This is a man who utters a grave word, then regrets it, but cannot take it back'. Then he came upon a valley where he found a pleasant, cool breeze, and the fragrance of musk, and he heard a voice. He said, 'Oh Ġibrīl, what is this cool, fragrant breeze, this scent like musk, and this voice?' He replied, 'This is the voice of Paradise', saying, 'Oh Lord, give me what You have promised me, for my chambers have increased, as have my fine silk, my silk brocade, my silk, my carpets, my pearls, my coral, my silver, my gold, my cups, my plates, my ewers, my fruits, my palm trees, my pomegranates, my milk, and my wine. So, give me what You have promised me'. God said, 'For you is every Muslim man and woman, every believing man and woman, and whoever believes in Me and My messengers, does righteous deeds, does not associate partners with Me, does not take others as equals to Me, and whoever fears Me – they are safe. Whoever asks Me, I will give them. Whoever

⁹³ ABŪ ĠĀ'FAR MUḤAMMAD IBN ĠARĪR AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ġāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. XV, p. 6.18–7.14.

lends to Me, I will repay them. Whoever puts his trust in Me, I will suffice them. I am God, there is no god but Me. I do not break the promise, and the believers have certainly succeeded. Blessed is God, the Best of creators'. The Paradise said, 'I am satisfied'. Then he came upon a valley where he heard an offensive sound and found a putrid odor. He asked, 'What is this smell, oh Ġibrīl? And what is this sound?' He replied, 'This is the voice of Hell', saying, 'Oh Lord, give me what You have promised me, for my chains have increased, as have my shackles, my blazing fire, my Hellfire, my thorny plants, my pus, my punishment, and my torment. My depth has become vast, and my heat has intensified. So give me what You have promised me'. God said, 'For you is every polytheist man and woman, every disbeliever man and woman, every wicked man and woman, and every tyrant who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning'. The Hell said, 'I am satisfied'. Then he traveled until he came to *Bayt al-Maqdis* (Jerusalem).

Upon arriving at *al-masġid al-aqṣā*, the Prophet ties his horse to a rock, enters, and prays with the angels. Then he meets the souls of previous Prophets who praise God. Prophet Ibrāhīm praises God for making him a close friend, giving him a great kingdom, and saving him from the Fire. Prophet Mūsā praises God for speaking to him directly (as uncreated word in the burning bush), enabling the destruction of Pharaoh's people, and guiding his community with truth and justice. Prophet Dawūd (David) praises God for giving him a great kingdom, teaching him the Psalms, subjugating iron, mountains, and birds to him, and granting him wisdom. Prophet Sulaymān (Salomon) praises God for subjugating the winds, *ġinn*, humans, and birds to him, favoring him over others, and giving him an unmatched pure kingdom. Prophet ʿĪsā praises God for making him His Word, creating him like Ādam, teaching him scriptures, giving him the ability to create life, cure the blind and lepers, revive the dead, and protecting him from Satan. Finally, Prophet Muḥammad praises God for sending him as a mercy to humanity, revealing the *Qur'ān*, making his community the best and most moderate one, relieving his burdens, and making him the final Prophet and intercessor on the Day of Resurrection. The narration continues describing Prophet Muḥammad's ascent through the fifth, sixth and seventh heavens. In the fifth, he meets Prophet Hārūn surrounded by the Children of Israel. In the sixth, he sees Prophet Mūsā weeping out of humility before God. In the seventh heaven, he meets Prophet Ibrāhīm with a swollen face, sitting by the gate of Paradise, along with people of different spiritual states bathing in a purifying river.

ثُمَّ صُعِدَ بِهِ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ السَّابِعَةِ فَاسْتَفْتَحَ جِبْرِئِيلُ فَقِيلَ مِنْ هَذَا قَالَ جِبْرِئِيلُ قَالُوا وَمَنْ مَعَكَ قَالَ مُحَمَّدٌ قَالُوا أَوْقَدْ أُرْسِلَ إِلَيْهِ قَالَ نَعَمْ قَالُوا حَيَّاهُ اللَّهُ مِنْ أَخٍ وَمِنْ خَلِيفَةٍ فَنَعَمْ الْأَخُ وَنَعَمْ الْخَلِيفَةُ وَنَعَمْ الْمَجِيءُ جَاءَ قَالَ فَدَخَلَ فَإِذَا هُوَ بِرَجُلٍ أَشْمَطٍ جَالِسٍ عِنْدَ بَابِ الْجَنَّةِ عَلَى كُرْسِيٍّ وَعِنْدَهُ قَوْمٌ جُلُوسٌ بِيضُ الْوُجُوهِ أَمْثَالُ الْقَرَّاطِيْسِ وَقَوْمٌ فِي أَلْوَانِهِمْ شَيْءٌ فَقَامَ هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ فِي أَلْوَانِهِمْ شَيْءٌ فَدَخَلُوا نَهْرًا فَاعْتَسَلُوا فِيهِ فَخَرَجُوا وَقَدْ خَلَصَ مِنْ أَلْوَانِهِمْ شَيْءٌ. ثُمَّ دَخَلُوا نَهْرًا آخَرَ فَاعْتَسَلُوا فِيهِ فَخَرَجُوا وَقَدْ خَلَصَ مِنْ أَلْوَانِهِمْ شَيْءٌ فَصَارَتْ مِثْلَ أَلْوَانِ أَصْحَابِهِمْ فَجَاؤُوا فَجَلَسُوا إِلَى أَصْحَابِهِمْ فَقَالَ يَا جِبْرِئِيلُ مِنْ هَذَا الْأَشْمَطُ ثُمَّ

من هؤلاء البيض وجوههم ومن هؤلاء الذين في ألوانهم شيء وما هذه الأنهار التي دخلوا فجاءوا وقد صفت ألوانهم قال هذا أبوك إبراهيم أول من شبط على الأرض وأما هؤلاء البيض الوجوه فقوم لم يلبسوا إيمانهم بظلم وأما هؤلاء الذين في ألوانهم شيء فقوم خلطوا عملاً صالحاً وآخر سيئاً فتأبوا فتأب الله عليهم وأما الأنهار فأولها رحمة الله وثانيها نعمة الله والثالث سقاها ربهم شراباً طهوراً⁹⁴.

Then he ascended with him to the seventh heaven, and Ġibrīl asked for the gate to be opened. It was asked, 'Who is this?' He replied, 'Ġibrīl'. It was asked, 'And who is with you?' He said, 'Muḥammad'. They said, 'Has he been sent to?' He replied, 'Yes'. They said, 'May God greet him, from a brother and a successor. What an excellent brother, and what an excellent successor, and what an excellent coming he has come with!'. He entered and saw a man with a swollen face, sitting by the gate of Paradise on a chair, and with him were people sitting, their faces as white as paper, and others whose colors were different. Those whose colors were different stood up, entered a river, bathed in it, and they came out with their colors purified. Then they entered another river and bathed in it, and they came out purified of whatever colors they had, becoming like the colours of their companions. Then they entered another river and bathed in it, and they came out purified of whatever colors they had. They came and sat with their companions. He asked, 'Oh Ġibrīl, who is this man with the swollen face, and who are these whose faces are white, and who are these who have some color, and what are these rivers that they entered and then came out with their colors purified?' He replied, 'This is your father Ibrāhīm, the first to have a swollen face on earth. As for those whose faces are white, they are a people who did not mix their faith with wrongdoing. As for those who have some color, they are a people who mixed righteous deeds with other evil deeds, so they repented, and God accepted their repentance. As for the rivers, the first is God's mercy, the second is God's blessing, and the third is where their Lord gave them a purifying drink to drink.

Asín Palacios observes similarities between this passage and Dante's three purifications in different streams of water at beginning and end of the *Purgatorio*, prior to his entries into purgatory and the celestial abodes (*Purgatorio* I, v. 94–96, 127–129; XXXI, v. 100–103; XXXIII, v. 127–129, 142–145). The first purification occurs when he leaves Hell. Virgil, advised by Cato, washes Dante's face. As a result of this first bath, his cheeks regain the natural color they had been deprived of by tears. The second and third purifications occur shortly before leaving Purgatory, when Matelda and Statius successively immerse Dante in the waters of Lethe and Eunoe, whose respective virtues erase the memory of sin and renew the soul's supernatural energy towards the good, disposing it to enjoy celestial glory.⁹⁵

Regarding this version, Asín Palacios writes:

⁹⁴ ABŪ ĠĀ'FAR MUḤAMMAD IBN ĠARĪR AL-ṬABARĪ, *Ġāmi' al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur'ān*, vol. XV, p. 8.30–9.7.

⁹⁵ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 65–66.

Y como la época de esta redacción fundida non es posterior a la de las fragmentarias, precisa concluir che la fantasía colectiva de los tradicionalistas musulmanes debió muy pronto decidirse a realizar la tal fusión y esto por motivos artísticos más che por razones teológicas, es decir, para saciar la piadosa curiosidad de los fieles che anhelarían un relato total, integrado del viaje nocturno y de la ascensión, más que con el fin de justificar lógicamente la varia e contradictoria muchedumbre de versiones fragmentarias sobre un mismo hecho.⁹⁶

After his keen reconstruction of these three narrative cycles in their various redactions, Asín Palacios examines their influence on representations of the afterlife in Christian legends that flourished from the eleventh century onward, which were already considered official sources of Dante's design.⁹⁷ He argues that before Dante wrote his masterpiece, there already existed throughout Christian Europe a very rich collection of popular poetic representations of the afterlife influenced by the eschatological literature of Islam, and concludes as follows:

Dante Alighieri aparéesenos ahora dependiendo del islam, por la concepción de su poema, en dos sentidos: indirectamente, por los elementos islámicos que existen en las leyendas de sus predecesores cristianos; directamente, por los elementos islámicos que, sin existir en dichas leyendas, existen en la *Divina Comedia*.⁹⁸

Finally, Asín Palacios raises the question: through which channels could Dante have had access to such literature? He is convinced that the Islamic traditions of the afterlife from Eastern and Western Islam reached Christian Europe through merchants, pilgrims, crusaders, missionaries, Norman adventurers, slaves, Jewish merchants, prisoners, scholars and travellers. He also believes that Spain played a

⁹⁶ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 62.

⁹⁷ See ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 271–353. His examination is admittedly carried out on the basis of secondary literature, including the following studies in particular: ARTURO GRAF, *Miti, leggende e superstizioni del Medio Evo*, Loescher, Torino 1892–1893; ALESSANDRO D'ANCONA, *I precursori di Dante*, Sansoni, Firenze 1874; CHARLES LABITTE, « La Divine Comédie avant Dante », in *Oeuvres de Dante Alighieri*, Charpentier, Paris 1858; ANTOINE-FRÉDÉRIC OZANAM, « Des sources poétiques de la Divine Comédie », in *Oeuvres complètes d'Orzanam*, t. V, Lecoffre, Paris 1859. Among Christian legends he considers: (i) Legends about infernal visions, including the *Vita Sancti Macarii Romani* (seventh to ninth century), the *Visio Sancti Pauli* based on 2 Cor 12:1–4 (eleventh to thirteenth century), the *Visio Tugdali* (dating to the second half of the twelfth century, as the Irish monk was still alive in 1149), the *Visio Alberici* (Montecassino, thirteenth century), the *Tractatus de Purgatorio Sancti Patricii* (second half of the twelfth century), the *Sólarljóð*: the Scandinavian Song of the Sun in the Edda (eleventh century), the *Visio Thurkilli* (thirteenth century), the *Visio Joachimi abbatis* (twelfth century), a *Visio* of the so-called Singer of Reggio Emilia (thirteenth century); (ii) Legends of sea voyages, including the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* (eleventh century), the *Legend of the Three Monks of the Chion Monastery* (fourteenth century), the German *Legend of the Cistercian Monk Felix* (fourteenth century), and the *Legend of the Young Prince* (after the twelfth century).

⁹⁸ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 353.

dominant role in this process, as can be observed from documents citing the legend of the *mi'rāğ* produced in the Iberian Peninsula between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, including:

- the *Historia arabum* of the Archbishop of Toledo Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada composed between 1170 and 1247, which contains redactions 2.A and 2.B of the *mi'rāğ* narrative.
- the vernacular *Crónica general* or *Estoria d'Espanna* commissioned by King Alfonso the Wise between 1260 and 1268, which includes the same accounts, apparently taken from the *Historia arabum*.
- the vernacular *Impuñacion de la seta de Mahoma* (or *Sobre la seta mahométana*) attributed to the Catalan Mercedarian friar of Valencia and later Bishop of Jaén, San Pedro Pascual (b. 1227, martyred in Granada on 6 December 1300). This text was written in Granada during a period of imprisonment and survives in MS. Madrid, Real Biblioteca del Monasterio de San Lorenzo de El Escorial, árabe h.II.25, dating back to the sixteenth century. It contains a citation of a text entitled *Elmiregi*, *Elmeregí*, *Miragi* or *Miraj*. Asín Palacios believes this latter to be an Arabic text, but it is actually the summary of an Arabic-Castilian translation of the *Liber Scalae Machometi*, the so-called 'missing link'. Chapter VIII of this text, the *Libro del parayso e del infierno*, contains an account of the *mi'rāğ* accompanied by mocking comments, which indirectly goes back to redaction 2.C and 3. As bishop, Pascual was in Rome between 1288 and 1292 at the papal court and there gave his *Impuñacion* to pope Nicolas IV. In 1302 Dante himself arrived in Rome as an ambassador for Florence.
- In addition, Asín Palacios highlights the fact that the Guelph Brunetto Latini, Dante's trusted master, of whom he says « m'insegnavate come l'uom s'eterna » (*Inferno* XV, v. 85) wrote the allegorical-didactic poem *Tesoretto* and the encyclopaedic *Tesoro*, both of which are rich in references to Islamic philosophical, mystical and religious culture. Furthermore, around 1259–1260 Brunetto was an ambassador at the court of King Alfonso the Wise, who was elected emperor of Germany and thus capable of opposing the Ghibellines supported by King Manfred of Sicily.⁹⁹

Asín Palacios' study was published in 1919, two years before the celebrations of the six-hundredth anniversary of Dante's death. The initial reaction of scholars was one of bewilderment. He recounts the debate between orientalists and Dantists in

⁹⁹ ASÍN PALACIOS, *La escatología musulmana*, p. 355–398.

his later rebuttal, *Historia y crítica di una polémica* (1924), and responds to the main observations and criticisms that were raised against him.¹⁰⁰

From 1924 to 1949 there was almost silence, until it was broken by a new discovery, five years after the death of Asín Palacios.¹⁰¹ Working independently, without knowing one another until the end, the Spaniard Jose Muñoz Sendino and the Italian Enrico Cerulli, found French and Latin versions of redaction 2.C according to Asín Palacios' classification in two codices respectively preserved in MS. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laudensis Misc. 537 (late thirteenth century) and MS. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Lat. 6064 (late fourteenth century).¹⁰² Muñoz Sendino published his findings in *La escala de mahoma*¹⁰³ and Cerulli in *Il libro della scala e le fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia*.¹⁰⁴

From the first sheet of both manuscripts, it appears that in 1264 King Alfonso X the Wise, having mistaken redaction 2.C for a sacred text of Islam, commissioned a translation of it from Arabic into vernacular Castilian by the Jewish physician, Abraham Alfaqúm (*al-ḥakīm*). Although no manuscripts of either this version or his Arabic source have come down to us, a paraphrase of the former is preserved in the *Libro del parayso e del infierno* of San Pedro Pascual's *Impuñación de la seta de Mahoma*. From this vernacular Castilian version, the notary Bonaventura da Siena, a Tuscan Ghibelline exile at the court of Alfonso, derived (faithfully?) both the Latin version, the *Liber Scalae Machometi*, and the vernacular French version, the *Livre de l'Eschièle Mahomet*. These two versions spread throughout Europe and could have reached Italy. Additionally, Cerulli found another manuscript containing the Latin version dated to the fourteenth century in MS. Roma, Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, Lat. 4072, which also includes the *Collectio Toletana*, a collection of texts pertaining to Islam, which Peter the Venerable, Abbot of Cluny, commissioned and had translated in 1141–1143 and diffused throughout Europe.¹⁰⁵ The testimony establishing the closest connection between the *Liber Scalae Machometi* discovered

¹⁰⁰ Asín Palacios republished *La escatología musulmana* with the *Historia y crítica di una polémica* as an appendix in 1943: *ibid.*, p. 469–611. For a synthetic overview, see SABINA BACCARO, « Dante e l'Islam. La ripresa del dibattito storiografico sugli studi di Asín Palacios », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 35–73.

¹⁰¹ See note 2.

¹⁰² This manuscript was known to Monneret who could not consult it because of the World War II.

¹⁰³ JOSÉ MUÑOZ SENDINO, *La escala de Mahoma*, Dirección General de Relaciones Culturales, Madrid 1949.

¹⁰⁴ ENRICO CERULLI, *Il Libro della Scala e la questione delle fonti arabo-spagnole della Divina Commedia*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1949. Volume 150 of the same series (*Studi e testi*) was Ugo Monneret de Villard's study, for which see note 2. See ANDREA CELLI, « Gli studi di Enrico Cerulli su Dante », *Doctor Virtualis*, 12 (2013), p. 13–33.

¹⁰⁵ Regarding the presence of the Latin translation (the *Liber Scalae Machometi*) in a class of codices at the end of *Collectio Toletana*, see MARIA CORTI, « La Commedia di Dante e l'Oltretomba islamico », *Belfagor*, 50/3 (1995), p. 307–308.

by Cerulli and Dante is its literal citation in the *Dittamondo* (V, XV and V, XIII) of Fazio degli Uberti, a Tuscan poet of the generation following Dante.¹⁰⁶

However, the conclusions of the two scholars differ. Whereas Muñoz Sendino took a maximalist approach, suggesting that the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* served as a model for Dante, Cerulli took a reductionist approach. He rejects this hypothesis, emphasizing instead the role of biblical sources antecedent to Qur'ānic traditions, such as Jacob's ladder for the luminous ladder Dante encounters in the sphere of Saturn, and scholastic influences, which had assimilated Avicenna and al-Ġazālī, for the immaterial punishments in Dante's *Inferno*. Although he did not deny the possible influence of Qur'ānic traditions on the *Divina Commedia*¹⁰⁷ – detected with respect to the cosmography and topography of places, the role of

¹⁰⁶ See ALESSANDRO D'ANCONA, «La leggenda di Maometto in Occidente», *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, 13 (1889), p. 199–281, in particular p. 266–267. See in addition LUCIANO GARGAN, «Biblioteche bolognesi al tempo di Dante. I libri di un frate converso domenicano (1312)», in RAFFAELLA BERTAZZOLI et al. (eds.), *Studi per Gian Paolo Marchi*, ETS, Pisa 2011, p. 475–487, who demonstrates that the *Liber Scalae Machometi* circulated in Bologna during the early 1300s, as evidenced by its presence in the inventory of books belonging to a Bolognese Dominican converso in 1312.

¹⁰⁷ In a later study, ENRICO CERULLI, *Nuove ricerche sul Libro della Scala e la conoscenza dell'Islam in Occidente*, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1972 (Studi e testi, 271), Cerulli finds a precise reference to the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* in the *Setenario*, an unfinished draft of an encyclopedia by Alfonso X the Wise. He cites Amador de los Ríos' thesis that this work influenced the *Tresor*, indicating more than a merely diplomatic exchange between Alfonso the Wise and Brunetto Latini. See also MARIA CORTI, *La felicità mentale*, Einaudi, Torino 1988³, p. 96–109, who wonders why in the second book of the *Tresor*, begun in Toledo in September 1260, Brunetto Latini uses, for Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, not Robert Grosseteste's translation from Greek, but the *Translatio Alexandrina* or *Summa Alexandrinorum*, an Arabic-Latin translation by Hermann the German in 1244, as can be seen from the explicit of some codices. Likewise, in the fourth book of the *Convivio*, Dante, following in Brunetto's footsteps, uses the Arabic-Latin compendium, although in some cases he refers directly to the *Tresor*. According to CORTI, «La Commedia di Dante», p. 301–314, Brunetto encountered the *Nicomachean Ethics* in Toledo through the Arabic-Latin translation of Hermann the German, who himself returned to Spain between 1260 and 1266 as Bishop of Astorga. She also argues that the idea itself of a 'tesoro' as an encyclopedia of knowledge was suggested to Brunetto by the *Setenario* by Alfonso X, who became king in 1252. The *Setenario* was conceived as a philosophical-ethical premise for the *Libro de las Leyes* (the *Partidas*), which Brunetto quotes in *Tresor* I, 1, 6: «Et nostre empereres dist el Livre de Loi que commencement est grignour partie de la chose». According to JAIME FERRERO ALEMPARTE, «Hermann el Alemán traductor del siglo XIII en Toledo», *Hispania Sacra*, 35 (1983), p. 9–56, 'nostre empereres' could refer to Alfonso X shortly after 1260, who was elected emperor in Frankfurt in 1257, though it was not confirmed by the Pope. Another sign of the close bond between Alfonso and Brunetto is the translation of the *Tresor* commissioned by Alfonso's son Don Sancho, which perhaps already existed in a previous translation commissioned by Alfonso himself, as the vast manuscript tradition would seem to support (Ibid. p. 17). Brunetto was evidently a man of *curiositas* who read the important works of Alfonso and remained in contact with Castilian culture from 1261 to 1266, during in his time in France. He certainly knew the *Liber Scalae Machometi* translated in Toledo by Bonaventura da Siena.

the guide, the punishments inflicted on the damned –, he compared it to the Arabic-Spanish column of Almeria inserted in the historically and artistically Christian structure of the Cathedral of Pisa (i.e. the marble capital of Fath originally placed on the tympanum of the north transept now preserved in the Museum of the Opera del Duomo).

V. Conclusion

Even if at times it seems that Dante was inspired by earlier texts, the assumption that a single work may be fully identified as his source is perhaps untenable. What texts did Dante know? What could he have read? How can we assess his indirect influences, mediated through other sources? At what point does a text known to Dante rise to the level of a source of inspiration?¹⁰⁸ In her study « La Commedia di Dante e l'Oltretomba islamico », ¹⁰⁹ Maria Corti stresses the importance of (i) thematic sequences belonging to the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* found with the same structural and architectural layout and in the same order in the *Divina Commedia*, looking for possible intertextuality between the two texts (e.g. X offers a structural model to Y without necessarily being its source, because a summary of X has been read or an oral narration has been heard by the author of Y).¹¹⁰ She

¹⁰⁸ See PICCOLI, *Viaggio nel regno del ritorno*, p. 73–102.

¹⁰⁹ CORTI, « La Commedia di Dante », p. 309 ff.

¹¹⁰ For example, Muḥammad, speaking in the third person, like Dante, is in a deep sleep when Gabriel awakens him; on the journey to Jerusalem, three voices/temptations try to stop him, but the guide explains, encourages, and offers the traveller new theological notions, also serving to present cultural observations; Muḥammad and his guide ascend a stairway to the heaven of the moon, where luminous angels move (cf. *Paradiso* XXI, v. 32; XXII, v. 72); to access the Islamic heaven, the righteous must cross a bridge enveloped in flames (cf. *Purgatorio* XXVIII); Muḥammad finds a great garden with an enormous tree under which the blessed sit, two springs originate from a source at the foot of the tree and become rivers, and the blessed drink from one and immerse themselves in the other to receive, after ablution, God's grace (cf. *Purgatorio* XXVIII and XXIX); a procession arrives on camels with fur like red and white silk, wearing gold around their necks and precious stones, while the angels riding them invite the blessed to follow them to the throne of God, who reveals His face (cf. *Purgatorio* XXXI, v. 145); Muḥammad's guide changes in Paradise: Gabriel gives way to Ridwān, the angel who guards the gates of heaven; the eight heavens traversed by Muḥammad present the metaphysics of light: God is light, light is joy, and splendor and joy define the celestial nature (cf. *Paradiso* XXVI, v. 1–100); faced with such splendor, Muḥammad loses his sight but sees with his heart (cf. *Paradiso* XXVI, v. 1; XXXIII, v. 61–63); the luminous angelic hosts, moving in circles, become music and song (cf. *Paradiso* XXI, v. 59; XXI, v. 136–138; XXXI, v. 131; XXXII). On the categories of 'interdiscursivity', 'intertextuality' and 'direct source' see MARIA CORTI, « Dante and Islamic Culture », in JAN M. ZIOLKOWSKI (ed.), *Dante and Islam*, Fordham University Press, New York 2015, p. 45–63. See also MASSIMILIANO CHIAMENTI, « Intertestualità Liber Scale Machometi-Commedia? », in SIMONA FOÀ, SONIA GENTILI (eds.), *Dante e il locus inferni. Creazione letteraria e tradizione interpretativa*, Bulzoni, Roma 1999 (Studi e testi italiani, 4), p. 45–51.

also highlights (ii) extended and isomorphic correspondences among thematic and formal sequences (language, similes, and metaphors) to argue that the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* is a possible source of the *Divina Commedia*.¹¹¹

Current research is generally oriented toward finding more firmly grounded philological evidence regarding the relationship between the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder* and the *Divina Commedia*.¹¹² However, even after a century, reconsidering Asín Palacios's reconstruction of the formative phase of the *isrā'* and *mī'rāḡ* complex of legends remains significant with respect to the interdiscursivity – direct data which are not found in a literal source, but circulate in the culture of the time – and, at least in part, the intertextuality at play here.¹¹³ Asín Palacios' research shows the importance of considering broader cultural influences and narrative structures when examining potential connections between texts, rather than focusing exclusively on direct textual borrowings. Ideas and narrative patterns can be transmitted through cultural osmosis, summaries, and oral

¹¹¹ These correspondences, which concern Hell, are the following: seven descending terraces with the *habitat*io dyaboli at the bottom; a terrible wind dominating the first ledge and the bottom; a giant chained devil (*Inferno* XXXI, v. 86–88); a gloomy atmosphere that prevents Muḥammad from distinguishing the reality he encounters; there is a correspondence between the *habitat*io dyaboli and the city of Dis: a fortress surrounded by ditches, with walls and black towers from eternally burning fire, a door opens in the fortress through which the damned enter, and seven others through which demons pass (*Inferno* VIII, v. 70–115); there are analogies between the seventh, eighth, and ninth *bolge* in the *Inferno* and the fourth and fifth ledges of the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder*, with a final list of sins starting with the sewers of discord (cf. the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder*, paragraph 199, where Gabriel speaks about those « qui verba seminant ut mittant discordiam inter gentes ». Dante puts the same words in the mouth of Muḥammad (*Inferno* XXVIII) and repeats in verse 35 the metaphor of the 'seminator' of scandal and schism); Muḥammad reflects on the contrapasso (cf. *Inferno* XXVIII, v. 142).

¹¹² See ABDERRAZAK HALLOUMI, « Le Livre de l'Eschiele Mahomet », un manuel d'islamologie au XIII^e siècle, *Préface de Martin Aurell et Éric Palazzo*, Classiques Garnier, Paris 2024, p. 551 (« Histoire culturelle », 26), including the review of STEFANO RAPISARDA in *Medioevo Romano*, 49/2 (2025), p. 444–446.

¹¹³ See RODINSON, *Dante et l'Islam d'après des travaux récents*, p. 222: « Voici un exemple qui semble frappant: on sait que les devins dans la 4^e bolgia du 8^e cercle de l'enfer sont punis en ayant la tête retournée vers l'arrière, leur cou étant 'tordu' de sorte que les pleurs de leurs yeux coulent sur leurs fesses (*Inferno*, XX, v. 11 ss.). L'explication du supplice est donnée par Dante lui-même (ibid., 38–39): parce qu'ils ont voulu voir trop en avant, ils seront forcés à regarder en arrière. C'est fort logique et conforme au système de peines qu'a adopté Dante. Mais, dans le Coran (IV, 50), Dieu menace les Juifs qui n'auront pas cru en lui de 'tourner leurs visages vers l'arrière' et une explication courante des commentateurs arabes médiévaux est qu'ils auront la tête et le cou retournés, précisément comme les damnés dantesques. Asín Palacios (*La escatología musulmana*, p. 155–157) a recueilli divers textes légendaires ou théologiques attestant que cette idée était courante en Islam. Dante a-t-il réinventé cet étrange supplice? Ce n'est pas absolument impossible, mais la coïncidence est bien troublante et le cheminement de la pensée à partir d'une métaphore (voir en avant, d'où peine consistant à regarder en arrière) n'est pas si naturel que l'hypothèse d'un récit d'origine musulmane parvenu aux oreilles ou aux yeux du poète, récit suggérant une image plastique nette et originale éminemment propre à s'imposer à l'esprit d'un tel visionnaire, ne soit une hypothèse bien tentante ».

traditions, influencing literary works in ways that may not be immediately apparent through traditional source analysis. In the introduction to the Italian translation of Asín Palacios' work, published in 1994, Carlo Ossola suggests, among the lines of research to which he calls the scholars of the *Divina Commedia*, a more in-depth study of Latin and Romance texts that, in addition to the *Book of Muḥammad's Ladder*, conveyed Islamic elements to Dante, as well as a more open study of Spanish-Arabic Romance culture for the proper understanding of Dante's use in the *Paradiso* of the metaphysics of light for which Thomas already proclaimed himself indebted to Arabic philosophy. To conclude *Galeotto non fu il libro e chi lo scrisse* (*Inferno* V, v. 137).

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