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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*

There has been nearly a century of debate over the question of whether Dante's *Divine Comedy* may or may not have been influenced by Muslim accounts of Muhammad's heavenly journey, known popularly as his ascension or *mi'râj*. I personally am not interested in taking sides in this sometimes fiery debate, nor in stoking its flames. The discovery of *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder*¹ that was translated from Arabic into Old French and Latin in al-Andalus / Spain decades prior to the composition of Dante's work, as well as suggestive parallels between small portions of the *Divine Comedy* and certain narrates within earlier Islamic texts, does suggest that there may be merit to the notion that Dante was at least aware of these Islamic tales, whether or not he borrowed directly from any of them. This being as it may, until recently our knowledge of the different versions of Muhammad's *mi'râj* has not been sufficiently advanced to be able to discuss the Islamic side of the equation with any confidence. Discussion of the texts of Muhammad's *mi'râj* has been hampered by the large number of Islamic texts still available only in manuscript form, largely unstudied, unpublished, unedited, and untranslated.

Happily this situation has begun to change in recent years with the publication of significant editions, translations, and scholarly studies of key texts². The present study seeks to offer another modest contribution to this project of making the important Islamic texts available to a wider audience with a translation of an important Arabic thirteenth-century composite version of Muhammad's tour of the Garden of Paradise. This tour comes near the end of a detailed and extensive account of the Prophet's night journey to Jerusalem and his ascension through the heavens up to the throne of God. I will leave it

to others to debate specific parallels (if any) between this marvelous thirteenth-century Arabic text and Dante's masterpiece. My concern here, rather, is twofold: first, to make this text available to scholars from diverse fields who do not have access to Arabic or to the manuscript in question, and second, to propose that one or more texts like this one may well have served as the Arabic source(s) used in the production of the thirteenth-century Andalusian *Book of the Ladder*. Such sources appear to have been in general circulation throughout Islamdom, and perhaps even found their way into Christian-majority portions of the Mediterranean, beginning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries CE.

Arabic sources behind the extant manuscript versions of the *Book of Muhammad's Ladder* have yet to be determined with any certainty. However, in a popular study published several decades ago, Jamel Eddine Bencheikh suggests (correctly, I think) that versions of Muhammad's ascension ascribed to Ibn 'Abbas, especially those transmitted in the name of an elusive figure named al-Bakri, display remarkable parallels with portions of the *Book of Muhammad's Ladder*³. In my *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey*, I discuss in some detail what I see as correspondences between the latter and one of the earliest dated manuscripts of Bakri's *Report of the Ascension, Total and Complete*, found in Istanbul MS *Amcazade Husayin Pasha 95/2*⁴. In Appendix B of my work, I present an English translation of the majority of this important text, which appears to have been copied in Yemen around the year 1280 CE. Due to constraints of time and limitations in space in this previous publication, I did not translate the final folios of the manuscript in the Appendix, folios which detail Muhammad's tours of the Garden and the Hell Fire near the end of his heavenly journey.

Here, then, is a translation of the *Tour of the Garden* passages from this earliest dated Bakri narrative found in extant Arabic manuscripts of Muhammad's *mi'râj*. This portion of the story picks up after Muhammad's direct audience and face-to-face conversation with God at the divine throne⁵. After their intimate conversation and God's granting Muhammad the ability to intercede on behalf of members of his community, Muhammad is escorted back down to where Gabriel

waits for him. Gabriel embraces and kisses Muhammad, congratulating him for the high station that he reached, and for the intercession that he was granted⁶. Obeying God's command to take Muhammad on a tour of the Garden, Gabriel leads him on a visit through its various spaces, meeting its inhabitants and gazing upon its wonders. Multiple strands of narrative are woven together in Bakri's version, as can be seen the detailed (and disparate) reports of the Garden narrated in the voice of Muhammad in the account whose translation follows.

[71v] APPROACH TO THE GARDEN⁷

The Messenger of God said⁸: Gabriel took me by the hand and brought me to the Garden [of Paradise], and I found myself at a wall of gold at the extreme limit of distance, resplendence, exaltedness and height, raised high to wherever God, the exalted and great, wills. It was resplendent, its light brilliant like a pearl.

I asked, Gabriel, what is that? He replied, Muhammad, that is the shape of the Garden, its height being [the distance of a journey of] a thousand years. No angel nor devil nor jinn rises up to it, nor does anyone set foot in it, for God protects it from his creatures. He made the [divine] throne to serve as the roof of the Garden. Between himself and all of the angels he created, God made a thousand veils, except for the base of the throne, for it is the closest of his creation to him, and the greatest in terms of size. God chose [the Garden] for his friends, and he chose its vicinity for himself, designating them through his mercy. [The Garden] is veiled and protected, its gate is locked, and no one has entered into it before you, o master of creation!

GATES OF THE GARDEN

Then Gabriel brought me forward to the first gate [72r], on which is written, There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of

God; [his is] a sinful community whose inheritance is forgiveness. We will find what we have done; we will profit through what we have advanced [as an investment].

Then Gabriel struck the ring-shaped knocker of the gate, and Ridwan⁹, Guardian of the Garden, said, Who is it? He replied, Gabriel. He said, And who is with you? Gabriel replied, Muhammad, Messenger of God. So he opened the gate and we entered.

[I saw that] the gate had two portals of gold, its breadth being a hundred years for a zealous rider. On the gate was a ring-shaped knocker made out of emerald, its light brilliant like a pearl, the intensity of its light nearly blinding the sight of the one who looks at it.

The Guardian of the Gardens Ridwan said to me, Greetings to you, Muhammad, welcome! You indeed are the most blessed of lovers [of God], and your arrival is the most blessed of arrivals! Congratulations to you for the blessing your lord has given you. Rejoice, Muhammad, with the pleasure of God and his blessing, for I see goodness in you and in your community. Indeed, most of the Garden is for you and your community. Goodness is for them¹⁰ because of that. And congratulations to them for your intercession on the day of resurrection!

I saw with Ridwan, Guardian of the Garden, seven hundred commanders, each of whom had with him seven hundred (72v) thousand angels, all of them being the soldiers of Ridwan. He glorified God saying in his glorification: Glorified be the creator of the light, glorified be the greatest creator, glorified be the generous giver, glorified be the one who presents to the one who obeys him the blessed Garden, glorified be the creator of the Garden and its blessedness as a reward for the obedient!

I saw angels who were the keepers of the veils. It was as if [creatures'] intellects would become dazzled from the mere image of them, and it was as if spirits would exit [their bodies] out of the

pleasantness of their fragrance. Moreover, it was as if people's sight would become blinded from the intensity of the brightness of their light. I became overwhelmed from the pleasantness of fragrance and the brilliance of my vision, for [a time] that God only knows.

Gabriel said to me, Muhammad, steady yourself by the command of your lord so that you may witness what he has given you and your community in the Garden.

Then Gabriel said to [Ridwan], God has commanded you to show Muhammad the Garden and all that is in it, and what God prepared for him and his community.

Ridwan got up from his seat and took me by the hand, and he showed me the gates of [the Garden]. I found over the first gate was written, There is no god but God, Muhammad is the Messenger of God.¹¹ Over the second gate (73r) was written, One who is snatched from the Fire and is brought into the Garden has truly attained. The life of the world is nothing but the delightful object of deception¹². Over the third gate is written, For such as this, the workers work¹³. Over the fourth gate is written, This is the garden which we bequeathed to our servants who are pious¹⁴. Over the fifth gate is written, This is the abode of the afterworld, which we made for those who do not want elevation on earth, sewing corruption; it is what follows for the pious¹⁵. Over the sixth gate: As for one who feared standing before his Lord and restrained the soul from desire, this Garden is a refuge¹⁶. Over the [seventh] gate is written, Enter it in peace, secure¹⁷. Over the eighth: For the one who fears standing before his Lord are two gardens¹⁸.

Then he brought me into the Garden and laid out before me all of its comforts and all that was in it. Were I to struggle my hardest to describe for you one tenth of it, I could not do it, even were I to pass away my whole life in its description.

FIRST DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE GARDEN

I saw the wall of the garden¹⁹ constructed out of alternating bricks made of gold, silver, (73v) pearl, gems, sapphire, and green topaz. Its mortar was made out of every color of the most pungent musk and camphor. The wall was the height of seventy days of travel. One can see its exterior from its interior and its interior from its exterior, like a gleaming glass.

I saw in it palaces of sapphire with battlements of topaz, palaces of silver with battlements of red gold, palaces of white pearl [...] ²⁰. And I saw palaces that shone like the light of the sun, and palaces that shone like the light of the moon. In every one of these palaces were seventy abodes, and in each abode were seventy enclosures, and in each enclosure were seventy houses²¹, and in each house seventy beds of gold. On each bed were seventy robes decorated with pearls and gleaming sapphires. On each bed was one of the dark-of-eye [maidens]²².

Each one of [these maidens] had seventy brocaded necklaces and seventy robes of silk. Each of their garments was stuffed with camphor. On the head of each of them (74r) was a diadem of white silver set with red and yellow pearls, green topaz and emeralds, pearls and sapphires. Above [each of] the diadems was a crown of red gold with seventy supports, on each support was a sapphire gleaming as if it were a star. Whenever a servant of theirs moved in her robes, one saw musk emit behind the robes and clothes.

[...] What was between each seat²³ was a bed of gems, a combination of sapphires alternating with topaz. The floor of each palace was of musk and camphor and ambergris.

I saw rivers flowing in it, rivers of water that was not putrid, rivers of milk whose taste did not change, rivers of pure honey, and rivers of wine that was delicious to those who drank it²⁴. Among them were rivers of a strong pure wine, rivers of al-Salsabil²⁵, of al-Tasnim²⁶, and

of al-Zanjabil²⁷. These rivers ran around the borders of the Garden, and [their beds] were made of hollow pearl, with pebbles of pearl, sapphire and topaz. The grass of the rivers was saffron.

I saw in [the Gardens] (74v) trees of red gold that [were so enormous that their] shade blocked one's vision. Their roots were of silver and their branches were trimmed with pearls, sapphires and topaz. Their leaves were brocaded necklaces, fine green brocade, along with silk and brilliant embroidery. One single leaf from these trees would cover the world and all that is in it. Their fruits were like filled jugs, and the insides of the fruits were honeycomb and other types of edible foods. When a friend of God takes [a fruit] from them, another one appears to take its place, through God's power.

I saw in it horses and she-camels of pearl and sapphire. The horse mares²⁸ were of ruby, and had wings of green topaz and saddles of white pearl. [They had] stirrups of topaz and emerald, reigns of glistening pearl, and a bridle of silk. The she-camels had wings of ruby and halters of silk.

I saw in it birds, each bird being as if [the size of] an enormous Bactrian camel. The most beautiful of the birds captured the sight of whoever happened to gaze at it, amazing them with its beauty and fineness.

I saw in it cities of sapphire, topaz, pearl (75r) and gems. Each city was like [the size of] the world from its east to its west.

SECOND DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE GARDEN

(75r. l.1) Next I traveled through the Garden together with Ridwan and my brother Gabriel, and then I saw a [type of] tree that had leaves of yellow, green and white, as well as leaves of gold, gems and all colors of topaz (which I am not able to describe because of their beauty and fineness). The beauty of its colors was blinding. Its fruits

were more tasty than honey and more fragrant than pungent musk. There was camphor under the trees.

I gazed into [this Garden] and saw in it open lands and plains containing jugs of musk and ambergris. It contained pastures and many fertile lands, the like of which has never been seen. I found in it the most fragrant lilies I had ever encountered. It also had every type of sweet-smelling fruit.

I saw that in it were horses of various colors pastured in that meadow. They raised their heads and looked at me, and then their tails became troubled and they shied away from me. Some of them called to the others with a neighing that was like the sound of bells, the most pleasing sound I ever heard. I gazed at (75v) those horses while they were running. Their footfalls made streams of ambergris of fragrant musk to flow, which raised up to the west of Paradise and its walled gardens. I gazed at the beauty of their colors, and found them sorrel-haired, red-haired, yellow-haired, white-haired and black-haired, indeed [horses] of every color, such as I am powerless to describe. He said of that, There is no god but He, alone, having no partners in his dominion.

Ridwan walked with us until we came to a group of beasts of every color on their skins that God created, such that I cannot describe. Ridwan walked with us among beasts, and when the beasts saw me, they gave me the greeting of peace. I saw among them every type of beast except the monkey, the dog, and the pig.

I continued to gaze at what God created for his friends and the obedient. I looked (76r) upon the different-colored birds as they flew up to the palaces of Paradise. No one bird resembled any other. They were praising God with beautiful voices. When the birds flew, one encountered a perfumed breeze whose fragrance [carried] a distance of five hundred years. I witnessed in Paradise what no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what has never been conceived in the hearts of humanity.

THIRD DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE GARDEN

(76r l.6) *I saw cities, [including] a city on which grew tall palm groves, among which were elevated palaces that sparkled. In them were houses constructed of alternating silver and gold bricks. In them were erected beds decorated with pearls and sapphires. I saw on them pillows lined up, as well as splendid garments, silk embroidered garments, and brocaded silk garments such that I am not able to describe. In [the houses] were shining spheres²⁹, as well as ewers of gold and silver equal to the number of stars in the sky.*

I saw in [the houses] rivers running between the beds, yet neither their insides nor their outsides became soaked. I gazed on an enormous angel and [another] massive thing.

(76v) *I passed on with Ridwan and Gabriel, and I looked down on a river called The River of Living Things, whose width was the distance of five hundred years and its length that of a thousand years. On its banks were pavilions of pearl and sapphire, and tents of pearl and topaz. God created the dark-of-eye [maidens] in those pavilions, and their bodies were built out of light until he completed their creation. He produced their breasts out of musk, and he honored them with their hair and other [sensual things] that he possesses, thus to increase their beauty, goodness, and perfection. The angels say to [each of] them, You were created for so-and-so son of so-and-so. When she is complete, the guardian angel gives her ornaments and clothing, as well as a crown³⁰. She dresses and exits from beneath the pavilion. The light from her face radiates in front of her a distance of five hundred miles, then her light is dimmed with sapphires and gems. Every one of her joints is ornamented in red gold and white silver. The first words she speaks are when she says, The faithful ones achieved prosperity...³¹ Goodness is for³² the one with whom the lord of the worlds is pleased. We are for him and he is for us. When (77r) she says this, an angel approaches her and says to her, For whom are you? She replies, For so-and-so son of so-and-so, friend of the lord of the worlds.*

And how does she recognize her spouse? Everyone in the Garden knows the unseen, through God's permission. None among the people of the heavens and the earth know it, except the inhabitants of the Garden, who know for whom God created them. Thus, your servants in the Garden know you better than your servants on earth.

The faithful one faces all of what is in his possession [in the Garden], just as one of you faces all of what is in your abodes, [that is.] when he comes from the journey of his death, he comes face to face with everything that God prepared for him from among stewards, maidservants and wives, and all his horses, beasts, birds of prey, leopards, and [other] birds, and even his trees. He looks at a date [on one of his trees] and doesn't speak. He says to himself, This is not mine, it's not my property. He is brought to a branch from that date tree and then he says, It is your business, o friend of God; who is more knowledgeable about me than myself? I am indeed a friend of God. Thus [the branch] says, The one who is pleased with us through your proximity informed us what you love, and what your heart loves. That is [God's] saying, And its bunches of fruit will hang low³³.

(77v) He brings [such fruits] to them without questioning. Indeed the believer will eat the fruit, and while it is in his mouth, if he were to desire for it to be a different taste, it will transform into the very taste that his heart had desired. Moreover, when he says to the tree from which he took the date, What informed you about me, that I wanted this taste, so that you changed your flavor in my mouth? then it will reply in a loud voice, The one who informed us of your purity, he is the one who informed us what was in your own self.

If a believer gazes at a bird flying in the Garden and desires it, it will appear in his possession just as he desired it, in whatever color he wished. He will eat a meal from it. Then the bird will fly off, just as it had been in the first place. The friend of God will ask it, Who informed you what was in my heart? and it will reply, The one who is pleased with you through our proximity, for indeed of the people of the Garden the nearest [to God] in station is he who gazes in his

kingdom the distance of a thousand years and considers its furthest extreme the same as he considers its nearest. In that way he gazes on his wives, servants, palaces, and whatever God has prepared for him.

The most favored (78r) of those in the Garden gazes on his lord twice each day. And if a man in paradise becomes captivated by a dark-of-eye [maiden], as God wills, and when one of them desires a son in paradise, [the son's] gestation, birth and coming into age takes place in a single hour, just as he desired him³⁴.

The people of the Garden enjoy themselves with praising and glorifying and sanctifying [God], just as the [appetitive] self enjoys [physical pleasures on earth]. [In the Garden,] they do not spit, nor blow their noses, nor urinate, nor defecate their food. Belching takes place like the sweating of musk. Their combs are of gold, and the thing they perfume their clothes with is musk.

I saw the dark-of-eye [maidens], how they were created in those pavilions. In each day, a great number of them are created, no one knows [their exact number] except God. I said, Gabriel, God never created a creation more noble nor more numerous than they. Gabriel responded, O Ahmad, and the dark-of-eye shares resemblances with the hidden pearl³⁵.

FOURTH DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE GARDEN

Ridwan and Gabriel laid out before me the Garden – all of it – on that night. It consists of eight gardens³⁶:

The first of them is called The Abode of Greatness³⁷, (78v) and it is made out of white pearl.

The second of them is The Abode of Peace³⁸, and it is made out of ruby.

The third is The Garden of the Refuge³⁹, and it is made out of green topaz.

The fourth is The Garden of Perpetuity⁴⁰, and it is made out of yellow coral.

The fifth is The Garden of the Blessing⁴¹, and it is made out of white silver.

The sixth is The Garden of Paradise⁴², and it is made out of red gold.

The seventh is The Garden of Stability⁴³, and it is made out of fragrant musk.

The eighth is The Garden of the Perpetual Abode⁴⁴, and it is made out of pearl, and it is above the gardens, honored above all [other] gardens.

The gardens are eight, and their gates are of gold studded with gems. On every one of its gates is written, There is no god but God.

The first is for those who pray (salat). The second for those who fast (sawm). The third for those who pay a pure offering (zakat) out of the goodness of their souls. The fourth is for those who command the good and avoid the forbidden. The fifth is for the one who denies oneself passionate desires. The sixth is for those who go on the pilgrimage (hajj) and those who visit [the holy shrines outside the Hajj season, on `umra]. The seventh is for those who undertake struggle (jihad) in the path of God. The eighth is the gate of The Excess⁴⁵, [for those] who withhold their gazing (79r) into forbidden places, yet they know the good, and they will see [their] parents and relatives.

In each of these gardens are forests of palm trees and fruit trees, as numerous as the stars in the sky, or the pebbles [on the ground], or

more. The number of all the palaces is known only to God. Gabriel and Ridwan said to me: Muhammad, these are the palaces of your companions. This palace is for so and so, and this one for so and so, [indicating them to me one by one] until not one of them remained.

Gabriel and Ridwan brought me [to a place] and said to me, Muhammad, this is the pool that God gave to you in Paradise, and its name is Abundance⁴⁶. I gazed upon it and I found its size like [the size of] all that was between the heaven and earth. Its water was whiter than snow, more sweet than honeycomb, and more redolent than pungent musk. On the bank of the river were hollow pearls. Its gravel was made of pearls, and its pebbles were composed of pearls and sapphires. Its soil was musk, and its grass was saffron, and on it were cups the number of the stars in the sky. Gabriel said to me, Good wishes to you for what God gave you, and good wishes to your community [for] your intercession. One who drinks of this pool will never thirst thereafter.

I looked at its banks and saw tents made out of pearl, (79v) coral, gems and pure gold. In them were the wives among the dark-of-eyes, and upon them were crowns. I heard them saying, We are the [blessed ones], for we are never unhappy; we are the contented ones, for we never show displeasure; we are the clothed ones, for we are never naked; we are the young ones, for we never grow old; we are good for⁴⁷ the one who is ours, and we for him⁴⁸. [I] said: Gabriel, what are these voices? I have never heard a voice more sweet than that! He replied: Muhammad, these are the voices of the dark-of-eye [maidens]. Would you like to gaze upon them? I said, Yes!

So Gabriel commanded the angels, and they raised the doors of the tents, [allowing me to] gaze upon them. I had to look at them a second time, for I was gazing at a type of creature that was indescribable. Their faces were more intensely white than milk, and their faces radiated beams of light. I noticed that their veils were as if they were the wings of eagles. Their hair struck their legs and their backsides as if it were sapphire mixed with topaz. Each one of them had a retinue of

seventy companions. Each had seventy articles of clothing of different colors. One can see the marrow of their thighs from underneath those clothes. Glory be to God, who created them and shaped them!

I said, Gabriel, these [are] perfect blessings, so praise be to God who (80r) granted us this blessing and favor. To him is the praise and the thanks. Gabriel, leave me here, and do not make me go out into the world. He replied, Muhammad, be cheery of mind and glad of eye, for of all this, nothing will you lose, and with God is the increase. All of it is for you and for your community⁴⁹!

TEST OF CUPS AND EXIT FROM THE GARDEN

While I was thus [speaking] with Gabriel, I suddenly met Ridwan, Guardian of the Gardens. He is an angel the likes of which I have never seen among the angels in might, nor more handsome in form, nor more pleasant of fragrance. I desired to look at him a second time, and saw that he had four cups on his palm⁵⁰. He said to me: Muhammad, I have been ordered to have you drink from these cups, except for what you find distasteful from them, o best of creation. He gave me a cup, and its taste was of rose water, its fragrance was of musk, and its sweetness was the sweetness of sugar; so I drank from it and enjoyed it. Gabriel and Ridwan smiled, and they said to me: Muhammad, this is water, and God has made it a purifying drink. He gave me the second cup, and its taste was of milk smoother than butter, its sweetness the sweetness of sugar, and its fragrance like the fragrance (80v) of musk. So I drank from it. Gabriel and Ridwan smiled and said to me: Muhammad, this is milk which God made for you and for your community as a good permissible [drink] until the day of judgment. Then he gave me the third cup, and I found its taste was of honey [...So I drank from it]⁵¹. Gabriel and Ridwan smiled and said to me: This is honey, it contains medicine, and God made it as a medicine for your community. It is for you and your community as a good, permissible [drink] until the day of judgment. Then he gave me the fourth cup, and its fragrance arose up through the garden, and I

had never smelled anything more beautiful. I looked at its fine color and I wanted to drink it, but there was a throbbing in my heart, so I left it. Gabriel and Ridwan smiled and said to me: Muhammad, this is the drink of Paradise: it is forbidden to you and to your community in the world, but it is the drink [of those] in Paradise.

Then I passed on, and Ridwan said goodbye and congratulated me and my community. Then Gabriel said to me, Indeed God commanded me to bring you into the heat of the Fire. Its terrors remain [merely] in the imagination until you gaze on those from among your community who enter it. So caution them about [this] great matter. The Prophet replied, O Gabriel, do what God ordered you to do....⁵²

It is not difficult to prove that the remarkable text translated above offers a composite account, for it contains several different descriptions of the same event (e.g. Muhammad's first encounter with Ridwan), different descriptions of the same otherworldly features (e.g. the rivers of the Garden or its palaces), and different descriptions of the same heavenly creatures (e.g. the birds of the Garden or the houris). It is as if the compiler Bakri or one of his later transmitters or copyists was so eager to create a *complete and total* version of Muhammad's journey that he did not worry about any potential internal contradictions within the resulting text. Such contradictions result from the way the text strings together the disparate narrative strands without editing them so that they would join seamlessly. The text does not precede the separate reports with a chain of transmission to help a scholar authenticate each hadith in question or to verify its origins, probably out of a concern for smoothing the entire narration for oral delivery. Despite this lack of authenticating *isnad* chains, I inserted section headings in the translation above at the places where the narrative appeared to repeat material or to begin with a new type of report. The composite nature of this *mi'râj* account is not at all unique in Islamic ascension texts, but it is a feature that is worth examining more closely.

The same type of composite ascension text appears in other Islamic *mi'râj* works from around the same period, texts that resemble the *Bakri Reshaped Ibn 'Abbas Ascension Narrative* to a greater or lesser degree. Indeed, while it is beyond the scope of this study to advance detailed comparisons between these texts, the Tour of the Garden translated above deserves to be studied alongside the parallel passages in *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder* and *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, each of which offers a thirteenth-century composite version of Muhammad's journey from a different geographic region: SW Europe, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Iranian Plateau⁵³. The broad diffusion of this particular version of the narrative of Muhammad's night journey and ascension in the twelfth-century CE makes even more intriguing the conjecture that a version of this text had been circulating (in oral or written form) in different parts of the Mediterranean during Dante's era.

Note

- 1 A number of contemporary translations have been made of *The Book of the Ladder*. I have found particularly useful G. Besson and M. Bossard-Dandre's edition, *Le Livre de l'Échelle de Mahomet, Le Livre de Poche*, Librairie générale française, Paris 1991. I have also made use of the English translation from the Old French by R. Hyatte entitled *The Prophet of Islam in Old French: The Romance of Muhammad (1258) and The Book of Muhammad's Ladder (1264)*, Brill, Leiden 1997. Instead of referring to this work by specific page number, in what follows I will cite the particular chapter(s) of the work, since those chapters are common to most of the editions of the work that a reader might consult.
- 2 A complete list of recent publications in this subject area is beyond the scope of this article, but the reader is directed to the bibliographies contained in the recent books by myself and also by C. Gruber, as well as the volume of essays that C. Gruber and I edited jointly entitled *The Prophet's Ascension*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 2010.
- 3 *Le Voyage nocturne de Mahomet*, Imprimerie Nationale, Paris 1987.

- 4 See F. Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey*, State University of New York Press, Albany 2008, Chapter 8 and especially Chapter 9.
- 5 Ivi, pp. 226-234, Appendix B, "Part 4: The Divine Audience."
- 6 Ivi, p. 234, fol. 69r. I have chosen to omit a translation of the section of the manuscript between fols. 69r and 71v, for they do not advance the Ibn 'Abbas version of the story as recorded by al-Bakri, but rather transmit other conflicting reports, such as that ascribed to Muhammad's wife 'Aisha alleging the impossibility of seeing God without perishing, and thus suggesting that the object of his vision was merely the angel Gabriel, appearing in his original created form at the Lote Tree (69r-69v).
- 7 These section headings (presented in all capital letters) are not in the original manuscript; I have added them into this translation for ease of reference.
- 8 The portion translated here derives from Istanbul MS Amzcazade Hüsayin Pasha 95/2, fols. 71v-80v. The formula *The Messenger of God said* or *The Prophet said* is repeated throughout this text as a feature of authentication, and as a product of oral transmission of multiple reports. It has been removed in this translation, as have other formulaic phrases, for the sake of rendering the text in a form that flows more smoothly in modern prose.
- 9 The term *ridwan* (*pleasure* or *contentment*) appears multiple times in the Qur'an, especially in connection to God (e.g. Q 3:15, 3:162, 3:174, 9:72, 57:27, etc.), but not explicitly as the proper name of the angelic guardian of the Garden. However it may well be passages such as Q 9:21, *And the lord gives them good tidings of his mercy, and contentment [Ridwan], and gardens for them in which are enduring blessings*, that led some post-qur'anic texts such as this one to consider Ridwan as a proper name for an angel presiding over the gardens.
- 10 Within the translation, I use italics to indicate a direct or indirect allusion to a passage from the Qur'an. Here the text draws on the qur'anic phrase *Goodness is for them (al-tuba lahum)* from Q 13:29.
- 11 This is the Muslim declaration of bearing witness, known as the *shahada*, one of the five Islamic *pillars*.

- 12 Q 3:185.
- 13 Q 37:61.
- 14 Q 19:63.
- 15 Q 28:83.
- 16 Q 79:40-41.
- 17 Q 15:46.
- 18 Q 55:46.
- 19 Compare the hadith report recorded by Tirmidhi, cited by N. Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire*, Columbia University Press, New York 2009, p. 72. While not dealing explicitly with non-canonical *mi`raj* texts such as the one translated here, Rustomji's work provides a useful overview of elements of the Garden that are described in the Qur'an, as well as select accounts from official hadith collections and eschatological literature. This description of the Wall also appears in *The Book of the Ladder*, Chapter 30.
- 20 There appears to be an ellipsis in the text at this point, with some of the original text missing in this version.
- 21 The trope of using multiples of seventy to indicate abundance can be found in numerous religious texts, including those that pre-date Islam. For an early instance of this trope in a *mi`raj* text, see what I have called the *Primitive Version* of the Ibn 'Abbas ascension narrative, translated in F. Colby, *Narrating Muhammad's Night Journey ... cit.*, Appendix A.
- 22 These *dark (hur)* or *dark-of-eye (hur al-'ayn)* maidens appear repeatedly in this text as companions for the righteous in the Garden, and allusions to these female companions are found in multiple places in the Qur'an, for example Q 52:20, 44:54, 55:72, 56:22 etc. For a discussion of these so-called *houris*, see N. Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire ... cit.*, pp. 94-96; J.I. Smith and Y. Haddad, *Women in the Afterlife: The Islamic View as Seen from the Qur'an and Tradition*, "Journal of the American Academy of Religion" 43 (1975), pp. 39-50.

- 23 *Seat (kursi)* not mentioned previously with regard to the palaces, indicating instability in the text in this section, and a possible lacuna, indicated in the translation by an ellipses.
- 24 Q 47:15, although the quotation here reverses the order in which the rivers of wine and the rivers of honey are described in the Qur'an, yet the exact wording in each is maintained.
- 25 The name of a fountain given in Q 76:18.
- 26 A name for liquid mixed with the heavenly wine found in Q 83:27.
- 27 A name for some liquid, perhaps an extract or drink made from ginger, that mixes with the heavenly drink in the Garden, as described in Q 76:17.
- 28 In what follows in the rest of this paragraph, *horse mare* is rendered in Arabic in the singular, as is *she camel*, but the sense from the introduction to the paragraph clearly conveys that the meaning here and throughout the paragraph is plural, so I have translated it that way.
- 29 The word here is *kawaakib*, the same word used for planetary bodies. The context suggests, however, that what is intended here is some sort of household item, such as cups (*akwaab*).
- 30 Compare *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder*, Chapter 46.
- 31 These are the words of the first verse of the sura known as *al-Mu'minun*, Q 23:1. From the context, the citation of the first verse implies that other verses of this sura would have been spoken by the maidens as well, for instance, one might surmise that Q 23:1-11 is intended, a passage speaking of the faithful and their deeds by which they come to inherit Paradise (*al-firdaws*, mentioned in Q 23:11).
- 32 Oblique reference to the phrase *tuba lahum* of Q 13:29.
- 33 Q 76:14.
- 34 This detail appears to be drawn from a hadith report recorded by Tirmidhi, as discussed by N. Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire ...* cit, p. 86.

- 35 Q 56:22-23.
- 36 The names of the first six of these gardens are exactly identical (with one small transposition) with the names of the gardens in *The Book of the Ladder*, Chapter 34.
- 37 *Dar al-Jalal*, not explicitly qur'anic.
- 38 *Dar al-Salam*, cited in Q 6:127 and 10:25.
- 39 *Jannat al-Ma'wa*, Q 53:15; cf. Q 79:41.
- 40 *Jannat al-Khuld*, Q 25:15.
- 41 *Jannat al-Na'im*, Q 26:85 and 56:89 and 70:38.
- 42 *Jannat al-Firdaws*, Q 18:107 and 23:11.
- 43 *Jannat al-Qarar*; cfr. *Dar al-Qarar*, Q 40:39.
- 44 *Jannat 'Adn*, listed in the Qur'an always in the plural, *gardens of 'Adn*, Q 9:72, 13:23, 16:31, 18:31, 19:61, 20:76, 35:33, 38:50, 40:8, 61:12, 98:8.
- 45 *al-Mazid*, Q 50:35.
- 46 *al-Kawthar*, Q 108:1.
- 47 In this phrase *tuban li-man*, once again one finds an echo of the qur'anic phrase *Goodness is for them* (*al-tuba lahum*) from Q 13:29.
- 48 Clearly this narreme draws on the hadith report recorded by Tirmidhi as quoted in N. Rustomji, *The Garden and the Fire ...* cit., p. 96; a parallel passage appears in *The Book of the Ladder*, Chapter 35.
- 49 Compare *The Book of the Ladder*, the end of Chapter 38.
- 50 Compare *The Book of the Ladder*, Chapter 52, where four similar cups are offered to Muhammad, and he likewise drinks the first three but leaves the fourth without drinking it.

- 51 The intermediate formulaic steps are missing for the description of the third cup, that of honey. Presumably the original manuscript described something of the taste and smell of this drink, as with the other drinks Muhammad is offered in this narreme.
- 52 What follows in the manuscript is the portion of the narrative detailing Muhammad's tour of the Fire, a translation of which I plan to publish in the near future.
- 53 See C. Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension: A Persian-Sunni Devotional Tale*, I.B. Tauris, London 2009.