

PARADISE AND HELL IN ISLAM
THE LITERARY ASPECT AS REPRESENTED IN
RISĀLAT AL-ĠUFRĀN

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Introduction

The Holy Qur'ān, the foremost authority for Muslims, stipulates three cardinal elements of belief: belief in Allah as the sole and only God, of His Messenger Muḥammad and of the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-ḥisāb*). The latter embodies three components: belief in the resurrection of the dead (*al-ba'ṭ* or *al-ma'ād*), belief in accountability (*al-ḥisāb*) that entails reward (*ṭawāb*) or punishment (*ʿiqāb*) and belief in the two realms of Paradise, as designated for the blessed, and of Hell, as assigned for the damned (Abū Farḥa 1998:132).

In the Holy Qur'ān, both Paradise and Hell are repeatedly mentioned under a variety of names and adjectives. They recur time and again in many verses. Paradise, for example, has many such names as: *ḡanna*, *firdaws*, *na'īm*, *dār al-muqāma*, etc., which are repeated approximately in more than 160 verses. Hell, on the other hand, is referred to as: *nār*, *ḡaḥīm*, *ḡahannam*, *saqar*, *sa'īr*, *lazā*, *ḥuṭama*, etc., and recur in more than 280 verses, i.e., a hundred times more than Paradise. The result of this rough statistical calculation, which shows the difference between the two numbers, is a clear indication that man tends to fall in self-indulgence, avoiding to resort to his reason and will to bring his earthly passions under control. Because of such deepening possibilities of evil in man's nature (*inna n-naḥṣa la-ammāratun bi-s-sū'* Q 12/53), man needed to be repeatedly reminded of the sufferings and torment that await him in the afterlife, if he insists on choosing the evil.

The inconceivable metaphysical realms of Paradise and Hell in the Holy Qur'ān are conveyed to man through earthly physical descriptions devised for his understanding. Hence, they are given a sort of verbal structural description out of which one can construct a clear conceivable picture in his mind.

Paradise

Paradise seems to have different spheres and ranks (*darağāt*) one above the other. The highest – *ʿazamu darağatan* (Q 20/75) – is assigned for the believers who worked righteous-good deeds (*al-muttaqūn*). Paradise is illustrated literally, for example, as a spacious area whose width measures that of the Heavens and the Earth: *wa-ğannatin ʿarḍuhā as-samawātu wa-l-arḍu* (Q 3/133; similar expression in 57/21). This area is a huge complex of gardens, the wall of which has gates (*mufattaḥatun lahum al-abwāb* Q 38/49-50) with gatekeepers (*ḥazanatuhā* Q 39/73), confines within it large dense trees with huge branches among which are *sidr* (lotus) and *ṭalḥ* (Q 56/28, 29). The first tree (*sidr*) looks like a jujube tree with nice fruit and fragrant leaves used as hair shampoo and the other (*ṭalḥ*) is large and fragrant (Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān*). There are as well groves of palm trees and vineyards (Q 2/266; 16/11,67; 23/19 etc.) as well as fruit trees like pomegranate (Q 55/68) and other delicious fruits for which they crave (Q 52/22; 77/42), in addition to olive trees (Q 16/11; 6/99). Aromatic plants or flowers are available (*rawḥ wa-rayḥān*) Q 56/89). All of this is irrigated with a network of underground flowing rivers: *tağrī min taḥtihā al-anhār* (many verses in many chapters are cited). Game is also provided (Q 52/22). Moreover, there are rivers of sweet drinking water, of fresh milk, tasty wine, and pure honey (Q 47/15), as well as gushing water springs (Q 36/34; 44/52) like Salsabīl (Q 76/18), and Tasnīm (Q 83/27). The drinks are mixed with camphor (*kāfir*) and ginger (*zanğabīl*) (Q 76/5, 17).

In the midst of these peaceful idyllic surroundings, beautiful houses (*masākin tayyiba* Q 9/72; 61/12; 66/11), lofty palaces (*ğuraf* Q 29/8; 39/20; 34/37), tents (*hiyām* Q 55/72) and canopies or domed structures containing sofas or divans (*arāʾik* Q 36/56) are erected for the blessed. Such abodes are furnished with beautiful rugs spread on the floors (*zarābī mabṭūta* Q 88/16) topped with small cushions set in rows (*namāriq masfūfa* Q 88/15). Some of the rugs are of green colour (*raḫraf*) with beautiful bolsters (*ʿabqarī*) (Q 55/76). The mattresses (*furūš*) on which the blessed lean are lined with thick brocade (*istabraq*) (Q 55/54), some of which are raised (*marfūʿa*) Q 56/34), or set on thrones encrusted with precious stones (*surūr mawḍūna* Q 56/15). The blessed are provided as well with gold and silver utensils such as plates (*ṣiḥāf*) and cups (*akwāb*) (Q 43/71), as well as carafes (*abārīq*) and glasses (*kaʿs*) (Q 56/18).

They are dressed in the finest attire of silk (*ḥarīr* Q 22/23; 35/33) and in thin green as well as thick brocade (*sundus wa-istabraq*) Q 18/31; 44/53; 76/21), wearing bracelets, some made of silver (Q 76/24) and others of gold (Q 22/23; 18/31; 35/33) and bejewelled (bedecked) with pearl strings (*luʾluʾ* Q 22/23; 35/33).

It is worth selecting from the Holy Qur'ān two scenes that give a clear picture of such peaceful, eternal atmosphere of inexhaustible joy and timelessness. In the first, the blessed, especially the righteous, sit in gardens of dense trees and water springs leaning, with their pure and chaste mates, on mattresses lined with thick brocade (*hum wa-azwāḡuhum fi zilālin °alā l-arā'ik muttaki'ūn*) Q 36/56), surrounded by trees whose fruits are within reach (*qutufuhā dāniya* Q 55/46-60). Nearby are other dense gardens and two water springs, with palm trees and pomegranates. In the midst are tents furnished with green carpets (*raḡraf*) on which sit fair young girls with beautiful eyes (*ḡūrun*) leaning on nice bolsters (*°abqarī*) (Q 55/62-76).

The other scene portrays the inhabitants of Paradise facing each other (*mutaqābilīn*) on thrones encrusted with precious stones while lads (*ḡilmān*) serve them drinks with cups, carafes and glasses filled from flowing fountains of clear drinks (*ma°īn*) that neither cause headache nor intoxication (*la yuṣadda°ūn °anhā wa-lā yunzifūn*). They are surrounded by trees of delicious fruits they choose (*yataḡayyarūn*) and accompanied by beautiful-eyed young girls (*ḡūr °ayn*) as a reward for their good deeds. No frivolity or nonsense and no obscene words (*lā ... laḡwan wa-lā ta'īman*) are uttered in their conversation, where one keeps hearing the words of peace (*salāman salāman*) repeatedly. (Q 56/10-26; 37/40-49).

Hell

It is an abyss (*ḡābiya*) with unlimited size as it keeps on asking for more fuel (*taḡūl ḡal min mazīd*) (Q 50/30) consisting of people and stones (*waḡūduḡā an-nās wa-l-ḡiḡāra*) (Q 66/6). It has a wall with seven closed gates (*sab°at abwāb*) (Q 15/44) with 19 robust well-built gatekeepers (*ḡazana*) (Q 39/71; 40/49; 67/8; 66/6; 74/26-30). Within the walls there is an extremely deep pit (*ḡahannam*) (mentioned around 77 times) with an unsubsiding, ever-burning (*sa°īr*) (c. 16 verses) and constantly blazing fire that breaks and destroys anything it encounters (*ḡuṡama*) (Q 104/4-5). Such fire, with a blaze (*lahab*) and spits of sparks (*ṡarar*) as high as castles and as big as black camels (*ḡimālat ṡufr*) (Q 77/33), melts everything whether bodies or souls (*saḡar*) (Q 54/48; 74/26). Its drinking water and rain is burning hot (*ḡamīm*) (Q 22/19; 44/48). While Paradise has ascending levels and degrees (*daraḡāt*), Hell, on the other hand, has different descending levels (*darakāt*), the lowest of which is kept for the hypocrites (*inna l-munāfiḡīna fī d-darak al-asfal min an-nār*) (Q 4/145). This verse suggests that Hell's physical structure corresponds to a moral hierarchy. °Abdarraḡmān b. Aslam said: "The steps of Paradise ascend upwards and those of Hell descend downwards" (al-Aṡḡar 1986:25).

It is worth introducing an overall scene of the conditions of the damned in Hell. The sinners enter in a state of blindness, dumbness and deafness (*umyan wa-bukman wa-ṣumman*) (Q 17/97). Some of them are dragged on their faces (Q 54/48) with reins around necks (*aḡlāl*), chains (*salāsīl*) in hands (Q 40/71; 76/4), bound in fetters (*asfād*) (Q 14/49) and beaten with iron maces (*maqāmi^c min ḥadād*) (Q 22/21). Their skin is roasted or cooked (*tanduḡ*) (Q 4/56). Their faces stirred (*tuqallab*) in fire (Q 33/66) and swept with intense flames until they become dull-grey (*kāliḥūn*) (Q 23/104). Boiling water (*al-ḥamīm*) pours over their heads melting their skins, and the contents of their stomachs (Q 22/19-20). They are clothed with fire (*tiyābun min nār*) (Q 22/19) or with bitumen (*qatran*) (Q 14/50). Their mattresses (*mihād*) and blankets (*ḡawāṣin*) are of live coal (Q 7/41). Their food is live coal or fire (Q 2/174; 4/10), thorny bushes (*ḡarṯ*) which neither nourishes nor satisfies hunger (Q 88/6-7), and the awful fruit of the *zaqqūm* tree (Q 37/62-67) which boils inside stomachs like molten brass (*muhl*) (Q 44/43-46; 56/52-53). They quench their burning thirst with hot drinks (*ṣarāb min ḥamīm*) (Q 6/70; 56/54; 38/57). With such overwhelming torture, the damned keep asking the Hell gatekeepers to alleviate their torture (*yuhaffif^c annā yawman min al-^cadāb*) (Q 40/49), and calling the people of Paradise to supply them with proper foods and drinks: *aḡḡū ^calaynā min al-mā* (Q 7/50).

Islamic religion permeates almost all corners of a Muslim's life. It is not a mere religion but also a way of life. The Holy Qur'ān, which deals with the spiritual side in man's life and his religious observances, also regulates man's life with laws, rules and a set of values which, if observed, will earn him an eternal life in Paradise. Those who choose otherwise will be destined to punishment in Hell waiting patiently for Allah's forgiveness.

The Qur'ānic portrayal of Paradise and Hell, which is used as an instrument of encouragement to moral virtues and a device of deterrence from earthly vices, has influenced all Muslims in varying degrees. It inspired many men of letters, poets, philosophers, thinkers, mystics and others.

The above-mentioned general introductory picture of both Paradise and Hell, according to what is portrayed in the Qur'ān, is meant to show how far it influenced the repertoire of Arabic literature in terms of concepts, language, images and expressions. One can say here that men of letters, poets and other writers had found within their reach a treasure of raw material ready for them to use.

It seems that such descriptions whetted the imagination of Abū l-^cAlā' al-Ma^carrī (366-449 A.H./973-1057 A.D.), one of the most renowned among Muslim intellectuals whose work *Risālat al-ḡufrān* (*Epistle of forgiveness*) is the best example of such Qur'ānic influence. I singled it out in this paper to represent the literary aspect of Paradise and Hell in Islam.

The *Risālat al-ġufrān*, a highly enjoyable literary masterpiece of the 11th century, is a unique imaginative work of literature that deals with an imaginary journey after death to the realms of Paradise and Hell, in an excitingly vivid and witty narration. al-Ma^carrī is considered a pioneer in Arabic literature in venturing to fashion such an imaginary topic of the afterlife in the most attractive narrative style (al-Ḥabbābī 1988:29). Some scholars see that the *Epistle* is inspired by the nocturnal journey of Prophet Muḥammad to the Heavens (*al-mi^crāġ*), where he, according to Ḥadīṭ (Ibn Kaṭīr, *Tafsīr* IV, 239-278) met with some of his peers, the late Prophets, whereas al-Ma^carrī meets through Ibn al-Qāriḥ, some of the poets and philologists like him (pre-Islamic and Islamic)¹. This epistle appears to be written or dictated² as an introduction to al-Ma^carrī's reply to a letter which he had received from ^cAlī b. Maṣṣūr, known as Ibn al-Qāriḥ, a man of letters from Aleppo (*Risāla* 191). This introductory epistle, al-Ma^carrī's reply to Ibn al-Qāriḥ's letter, is the apparent reason behind this work of literature. Yet, the real objective is al-Ma^carrī's urge for fame which drives him to present his literary skill, his beliefs and contemplations in a creative work of literature, using the dialogues he formulated as a vehicle for raising linguistic and moral issues. Through such device he displayed his wide knowledge and philological excellence. He, as well, implicitly presents his ideas and beliefs in addition to his critical views about the social corruption, the ideological conflicts, and the political situation in his time. To realize this, al-Ma^carrī picked up, from the Qur'ānic images and vocabulary what suited his subject, and arranged his ideas, in his own style according to his taste and objectives, within a refined literary framework out of which he created a fantastic narration of this imaginary journey. The majority of the characters he created to serve the linguistic purpose are pre-Islamic and Islamic poets and philologists (al-Ma^carrī, *Risāla* 72). The dialogues he composed to reflect his own philological ideas and religious beliefs revolve around linguistic and moral issues. The setup he constructed for the stage consist of Paradise and Hell scenes borrowed from Qur'ānic and poetic images and vocabulary.

Owing to the conflicts at that period between the intellectuals and the theologians, al-Ma^carrī did not want to get himself directly involved in this risky imaginary journey to the afterlife. To avoid clash and confrontation with fanati-

¹ It is worth mentioning here that the 13/14th century epic, Dante's *Divina commedia*, is also inspired by the *isrā' wa-l-mi^crāġ* of Prophet Muḥammad. A comparison between the two works has been carried out in many studies (cf. Asin Palacios 1980:66-87). In addition to the general framework and the spirit of both works, which try to emphasize Allah's mercy and forgiveness, both deal with the moral quality of man's actions on earth which puts him either in Paradise or Hell.

² Since al-Ma^carrī lost his sight in his childhood.

cal theologians, he chose Ibn al-Qāriḥ – the man to whose letter al-Maʿarrī is writing a reply – to represent him in this trip. Nevertheless, one feels through the course of the journey, that al-Maʿarrī is hiding behind Ibn al-Qāriḥ, who shadows him, prompting his ideas in the topics he tailored for the dialogues between Ibn al-Qāriḥ on one side, and the poets, philologists and other characters in Paradise and Hell on the other. To al-Maʿarrī, Ibn al-Qāriḥ fits this mission quite well, being morally eligible to enter Paradise (*Risāla* 60) and being professionally qualified, as a man of letters (*Risāla* 5), to run the intellectual linguistically oriented conversations.

al-Maʿarrī imagines Ibn al-Qāriḥ in Paradise, sitting under huge shady trees, the roots of which are irrigated with water canals replenished by al-Kawṭar river³. Water, milk and wine are all scooped from the rivers with gold cups and emerald carafes (*Risāla* 61). The utensils on the banks of these rivers are fashioned in the shape of cranes, peacocks and geese (*Risāla* 64). Such images are drawn from poetry where one reads in a verse:

*ka'anna abārīq al-mudāmati baynahum
iwazzun bi-a'lā l-taffi ʿūḡu al-ḥanāḡiri*

carafes of wine that circulate among them
are like geese with bent necks (*Risāla* 63).

In the wine rivers swim fishes made of gold, silver and precious stones (*Risāla* 72).

Allah has selected for Ibn al-Qāriḥ an entourage of men of letters (mostly poets) meeting in a harmonious amicable atmosphere, free of malice and hatred, enjoying the pleasant idyllic surroundings, and the delicious foods and tasty drinks (*Risāla* 72-73). The components of the scene are almost copied literally from the Qurʾānic descriptive images of Paradise yet with few poetic additions.

In a farther step, Ibn al-Qāriḥ goes for a ride on a dromedary, created of rubies and pearls, crossing dunes of amber and densely forested lands (*Risāla* 74), where he first meets a number of pre-Islamic poets like al-Aʿšā, whose sight was restored (*Risāla* 75-77), Zuhayr b. Abī Sulmā who looks young, and ʿAbīd b. al-Abraṣ who was tortured in Hell for a while and then released. The first, known for his indulgence in drinking wine, was saved because of his belief in the Prophet Muḥammad and his message which is demonstrated in one of his poems (*Risāla* 75-77). Each of the last two poets is given a palace in Paradise (*Risāla* 77-79). The first was granted forgiveness as a reward for a verse in which he says:

³ A river of Paradise mentioned in Q 108/1.

*falā taktumunna llāha mā fī nufūsikum
li-yahfā wa-mahmā yuktami llāhu ya'lamu*

never try to hide your intentions from Allah
who knows whatever is hidden within your minds (*Risāla* 77-79).

The third attained forgiveness for his verse:

*man yas'al an-nās yahrimūhu
wa-sā'il Allāh la yahīb*

he whoever asks help from people will not get it,
but he who asks it from Allah will not be failed (*Risāla* 79).

Labīd b. Rabī'ah and an-Nābiġa aḍ-Ḍubyānī as well as the Christian °Adī b. Zayd and others were granted forgiveness because of their good deeds and due to their belief in God rather than idols. al-Ma°arrī declares, by choosing to give the above mentioned pre-Islamic poets forgiveness, his belief in Allah's divine mercy and forgiveness (*Allāh ġafūrun raḥīm*), which gave such poets a chance to attain a place in Paradise for their good intentions, contrary to the view of the fanatical theologians of his time who place them in Hell (al-Ḥabbābī 1988:24).

The encounter begins with interrogations posed by Ibn al-Qāriḥ, about their credentials that made them worthy of Allah's forgiveness. It is followed by recitals of poetry, intimate conversations, and linguistic arguments, not to mention the dinking party complemented by music and singing performed by a school of geese transformed into beautiful young girls (*Risāla* 93). The gathering thrilled the group and prompted Ibn al-Qāriḥ to thank Allah, through reciting a verse from the Qur'ān (35/34-35), for settling them in Paradise where there is no sorrow, toil, nor sense of weariness (*Risāla* 100). It is worth mentioning here that Ibn al-Qāriḥ (*i.e.* al-Ma°arrī) quotes the Qur'ān in many instances during the conversations.

Ibn al-Qāriḥ continues his ride, after the dispersal of the gathering, and encounters a group of five poets from the Qays tribe, who were partially blind (one-eyed), and now have the most beautiful eyes among the dwellers of Paradise (*Risāla* 107). Abū l-°Alā' must have imagined himself here with his sight restored, putting an end to the utter darkness that surrounded him since his early childhood. Each of the poets narrated his experience before entering Paradise. One of them, °Amr b. Aḥmar, described the chaotic scene of Resurrection, through quoting the Qur'ān (22/2), after which he indulged in a lengthy linguistic conversation with Ibn al-Qāriḥ (*Risāla* 108-112). Ibn al-Qāriḥ summoned another to whom he recounted his story, beginning with his presence at the Day of Judgment until his entrance to Paradise which took six months, in the most

vivid and expressive language (*Risāla* 114-122). He describes his anxiety while standing by the gate of Paradise trying to bribe the gatekeeper Raḍwān by praising him with poems to let him enter. Finally, Allah's forgiveness was granted to him after he had managed to reach Prophet Muḥammad who saw the stamp of repentance on the register of his deeds.

Before his visit to Hell, Ibn al-Qāriḥ thought of organizing a banquet for the pre-Islamic and Islamic poets, linguistics and philologists, as well as those who appreciate literature. All kinds of meat and game were served in silver bowls and plates on gold tables (*Risāla* 126-128). The banquet was followed by a drinking party with singing and dancing (*Risāla* 130-132). After having retreated, Ibn al-Qāriḥ sat with two beautiful young girls of Paradise, one of whom had perfumed breath and the other a skin as white as camphor. Both turned out to be two worldly women. One was from Aleppo, whose husband divorced her because of her stinking breath, and the other was a black girl from Baghdad, who used to serve at Dār al-ʿIlm (*Risāla* 134-136). Then an angel passed and led Ibn al-Qāriḥ to gardens where he was asked to open any fruit he chooses, from which a beautiful girl sprang out to be at his disposal. Ibn al-Qāriḥ was supposed to fashion the girl into the form he prefers (*Risāla* 137).

On his way to have a glance at the people in Hell, Ibn al-Qāriḥ passes by the Jinns' Paradise (*ḡannat al-ʿafārīt*), talks to them and to a few animals as well (*Risāla* 138-148).

From the furthest end of Paradise, Ibn al-Qāriḥ watches the poet al-Ḥuṭayʿa. From that point overlooking Hell, he saw the poetess al-Ḥansāʿ watching her brother Ṣaḥr in Hell standing as a mountain with flames emerging from his head, just as she had described him in one of her poems as "a standard with fire at its top" (*kaʿannahu ʿalamun fī raʿsihi nār*) (*Risāla* 148-149).

Ibn al-Qāriḥ watched Satan (Iblīs) with the varying types of torture inflicted on him. He also saw the sufferings of some pre-Islamic poets, like the drunkard Baššār b. Burd who praised Iblīs (*Risāla* 150), Imraʿ al-Qays (*Risāla* 152-158), ʿAntara b. Šaddād whom he pitied (*Risāla* 159), ʿAmr b. Kulṭūm (*Risāla* 162), Ṭarafa b. al-ʿAbd with whom he sympathizes (*Risāla* 165), Aws b. Ḥaḡar who gave up Allah's forgiveness (*Risāla* 167), and al-Aḡṭal who erred twice, once in not embracing Islam, and then in being a boon-companion of the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd known for his indulgence in lust (*Risāla* 172). In spite of their horrible situation of torture, Ibn al-Qāriḥ (shadowing al-Maʿarrī) did not spare a chance of discussing their poetry and some of the problematic linguistic issues.

Leaving Hell behind and returning to his place in Paradise, Ibn al-Qāriḥ encountered Adam on the way and had a lengthy conversation with him. Adam told Ibn al-Qāriḥ that he was speaking Arabic in Paradise, and when he de-

scended to the Earth he spoke Syriac, and now – in Paradise – he switched back to Arabic (*Risāla* 180-182).

Finally, Ibn al-Qāriḥ returned to Paradise from his trip to Hell and found the beautiful young girl, who had sprung out to him from the fruit he had broken, waiting for him. She followed him crossing dunes of amber and musk (*Risāla* 187).

In this peaceful state, he remembered the wine intoxication that creeps gradually in body and mind. He chose a drink that gives the nice relaxing feeling without losing the wits. When elated, he leaned on a mattress of green thin brocade, ordered the beautiful young girls surrounding him to put the mattress on top of a throne made of emerald or gold. The girls grasped the gold rings at the corners of the throne carrying Ibn al-Qāriḥ to his house in the abode of eternity. Wherever he passes branches of fruit trees dangle down for him to pick whatever he desires. All the way, he was greeted by the people of Paradise all uttering praise to Allah for his Grace (*Risāla* 189-191).

As seen from the above, al-Ma^carrī derived the settings, the images and the language from both the Qur’ān and Arabic literature. Even the basic idea of the journey in the *Risāla* is inspired from the journey of the Prophet Muḥammad to the Heavens, *al-isrā’ wa-l-mi^rrāğ*.

In literature, men of letters, prose writers and poets tried to create a Paradise in words and images. In art, artists and craftsmen portrayed it in colours and design. Architects on the other hand, fashioned Paradise in concrete terms on Earth. Breathtaking buildings with gardens emulating Paradise were constructed for caliphs and emperors, and are still built for kings and high-ranking officials. Among the extant Islamic paradisiacal buildings and gardens are, among others, the Alhambra in Spain, and the Taj Mahal in India. We come across detailed description of Islamic architectural wonders in Islamic books of history and literature. Some ^cAbbāsīd palaces in Baghdad adopted names given to Paradise in the Qur’ān, such as Qaṣr al-Firdaws (“the Paradise Palace”) (Ibn az-Zubayr, *Hadāyā* 152) and Qaṣr al-Ḥuld (“the Abode of Eternity Palace”) (*Ibid.* 121).

Yet, special attention and emphasis was given to the emulation of the gardens of Paradise. For instance, *ğannat al-^carīf*, in Granada, with its trees, water streams is a living example. Abbasid palatial gardens of the 11th century are cited by Ibn az-Zubayr. For example, the Ğawsaq Palace of Caliph al-Muqtadir (r. 295-320/908-932) was built “... between two gardens (*bustānayn*), in the center of which was a pool thirty cubits long, built of Qalṭī lead surpassing polished silver. Opposite to this garden lay a grove (*bustān*) with 400 palm trees, all of the same height, each coated from base up to the beginning of its top with carpentered teak wood. The majority of these palm trees bore wonderful dates. The grove was surrounded by large citron trees, all bearing fruits” (Ibn az-Zubayr, *Hadāyā* 152).

The same Caliph was invited in the year 312/924 to the farm (*bustān*) of his uncle who “sealed off its streams, and coated some of them with lead and tossed into them fifty thousand *raṭls* of ice; then he made water and drinks flow into them. Food was placed on the banks of the streams in small decorated, round baskets lined with leather. He suspended on all of the farm’s trees roasted lambs, chickens, fowl, pullets, partridges and other birds” (Ibn az-Zubayr, *Hadāyā* 152). Muslim architects and landscapers tried their best to make of a garden a small Paradise. The Iranian and Indian gardens are living examples of such emulation, and the full embodiment is realized in the Taj Mahal gardens.

Moreover, the luxurious furnishings and utensils that adorned the Islamic palaces were given special attention. Weavers, especially in court workshops, used their talents and skill in weaving the most beautiful carpets, silk and brocade curtains, wall hangings, cushions and bedcovers. They spent months and years in fashioning all types of jewellery in gold, silver and precious stones. Goldsmiths made various objects of gold and silver as well as precious stones and rock crystal such as tables, trays, bowls, plates, cups, etc. Such luxurious furnishings and utensils remind us of those used by the dwellers of Paradise mentioned in the Holy Qur’ān.

To conclude this paper, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the description of Paradise and Hell in the Holy Qur’ān is not necessarily as literal as it seems to be, and it could be very far from man’s interpretations since his intellect cannot go beyond the physical sphere. The metaphysical is beyond his reach as reason’s sphere of operation is limited.

It is worth noting here that due to the active movement of translation into Arabic, during the late 8th and 9th centuries, Muslims were exposed to the Greek rational approach and many theologians, philosophers and especially scholastics were influenced by it. This influence became more evident during the 10th and 11th centuries, i.e. the time of al-Ma^carrī, where debates among conflicting trends of thought, dealing with theology and philosophy, were prevailing. al-Ma^carrī, like many others, was confronted with his faith (Islam) and reason (of Greek philosophy). The conflict between both, which occupied his soul and mind, resulted in a sort of scepticism which was manifest in his poetry. Although he sounds, in his *Epistle of Forgiveness* which is mostly inspired by the Holy Qur’ān, like a good Muslim believer, his scepticism and doubts of the whole concept of Paradise and Hell shine through the lines. For instance, he says: Nobody came to me since his death to tell whether he dwelt in Paradise or in Hell⁴.

This conflict between faith and reason had even resulted in a tone of sarcasm about such topic. One scholastic of the 10/11th century, Abū Ishāq an-Naṣībī, ex-

⁴ *Mā ḡā’anī aḥadun yuḥabbir annahu fī ḡannatin mud māta aw fī n-nār.*

pressed his doubts in a sarcastic way by wondering how the dwellers of Paradise do not get bored with such a static, dull and carefree way of life (at-Tawḥīdī, *Hulāṣa* 171). al-Ḥayyām in his *Rubāʿiyyāt* constantly questions the possibility of an afterlife as he said:

“Who said that there will be a hell?
Who’s been to hell, who’s been to heaven?” (*Rubāʿiyyāt* 48).

He said as well:

“Nobody, heart, has seen heaven or hell;
Tell me, dear, who has returned from there” (*Rubāʿiyyāt* 69).

This topic forms a big question mark in man’s life, and will continue to do so until he dies whereby he will experience life-after-death personally, but will not be able to come back to tell us about his experience.

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