Islam on the Margins

Studies in Memory of Michael Bonner

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CHAPTER 5

Demons, Jinn and Figures of Evil in the Qurʾān

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For an historian of religions, especially of late antique religions, it is hard to overestimate the importance of demonology and its role in the human imagination. In Late Antiquity (and not only then), everyone believed in "demons" or in "spirits," and the control of—and the protection from—such beings (at least the malevolent ones, especially in some specific contexts, like wandering in liminal places, eating, having sexual intercourse, childbirth, etc.), was without any doubt a crucial concern for most people. Demons were indeed "the stars of the religious drama of late antiquity."[1] In various ways, demonology brings us as close as possible to the daily religious practices, and the most shared worldviews, of such ancient communities.

My goal in this paper is to give an overview of Qurʾanic demonology and determine its most salient characteristics. In doing so, I hope to shed some light, not only on Late Antique demonology, but also on the context and genesis of the Qurʾān itself.[2]

There are three kinds of "figures of evil" in the Qurʾān.[3]

1) Iblīs/Shayṭān
2) The demons (*shayāṭīn*)
3) The jinn (*jinn*)

Iblīs and Shayṭān are one and the same character (see below); demons and jinn are, in a way, the same beings, and in another way, they are not (how this is possible will be shown later); finally, jinn are ambivalent—there are, so to speak, Muslim jinn and non-Muslim ones.

1 Brown, *World of Late Antiquity* 54.

2 On this topic, see more generally Dye, Le corpus coranique.

3 For reasons of space, I leave aside the story of Hārūt and Mārūt (Q 2:102), which appears only once in the Qurʾān (even if the topic of illicit instruction is implicitly present elsewhere). See especially Reeves, Some Explorations; idem, Resurgent Myth; idem, Some Parascriptural; Crone, Book of Watchers; Reed, Fallen Angels.

1 Iblīs/Shayṭān

The name Iblīs,[4] except in two occurrences (Q 26:95; 34:20, featuring the formula *junūd iblīs*, "the soldiers of Iblīs"), always appears in connection with only one specific story, the prostration of the angels: see Q 2:34; 7:10–18; 15:26–43; 17:61–63; 18:50; 20:116; 38:71–85.

The story is well-known and has been studied by various scholars:[5] God orders the angels to prostrate before Adam, but one of them, Iblīs, refuses, because he was made of fire (*nār*), i.e. a noble stuff, and not of clay (*ṭīn*) or mud (*ṣalṣāl, ḥama'*), like Adam (Q 7:12; 15:32; 17:61; 38:76). Therefore, he is higher than Adam, and should not prostrate before him. Because of Iblīs' refusal, God curses him and banishes him from heaven. Sometimes a dialogue between the devil and God is added: once Iblīs is cursed, and the decision of his banishment is taken, he (successfully) negotiates with God the possibility of becoming a tempter for humans, until the day of Judgment (Q 7:14–17; 15:36–40; 17:62–63; 38:79–83).

The story of the prostration of the angels and the devil's refusal has undoubtedly Christian origins.[6] It first appears in a first-second century CE text (the *Life of Adam and Eve*, see §§ 11–17 of the Latin, Armenian and Georgian versions),[7] and is found in a series of later texts, like (among others) the *Questions of Bartholomew* (Greek, second-third century), the *Apocalypse of Sedrach* (Greek, probably third-fourth century), the Coptic *Encomium on Saint Michael the Archangel* (attributed to Theodosius of Alexandria, sixth century), and the Syriac *Cave of Treasures* (sixth century). Here is an excerpt from the Armenian version:

4 On the complex origin of this name, see Reynolds, A Reflection 680–682. The term most probably comes from Greek *diabolos*, through an Aramaic intermediary, and was later submitted to the well-known Qur'anic process of assimilating proper names to one another (Mūsā/ʿĪsā/Yaḥyā, Ismāʿīl/Ibrāhīm, Iblīs/Idrīs).

5 See e.g. Reynolds, *Qur'ān and its Biblical Subtext* 39–54; Pohlmann, *Entstehung des Korans* 85–152; Azaiez et al. (ed.), *Qur'an Seminar* 58–67; Tesei, Fall of Iblīs; Segovia, Encrypted Adamic Christology; Dye, Problème synoptique, 252–261. See also the commentaries of the relevant Qur'anic passages in Amir-Moezzi & Dye (ed.), *Coran des historiens*, vol. 2a & 2b.

6 On the history of this narrative, see Minov, Satan's Refusal. On the links with Enochic traditions, see Tesei, Fall of Iblīs.

7 The Greek version of the *Life* does not feature the episode of the prostration of the angels, but there are reasons to think that the text was originally written in Greek and that the Greek *Vorlage* of the *Life* mentioned this episode. See Stone, Fall of Satan 153–156.

> Satan also wept loudly and said to Adam. "All my arrogance and sorrow came to pass because of you; for, because of you I went forth from my dwelling; and because of you I was alienated from the throne of the cherubs who, having spread out a shelter, used to enclose me; because of you my feet have trodden the earth." Adam replied and said to him, "What are our sins against you, that you did all this to us?" Satan replied and said, "You did nothing to me, but I came to this measure because of you, on the day on which you were created, for I went forth on that day. When God breathed his spirit into you, you received the likeness of his image. Thereupon, Michael came and made you bow down before God. God said to Michael, "Behold I have made Adam in the likeness of my image." Then Michael summoned all the angels and God said to them, "Come, bow down to god whom I made." Michael bowed first. He called me and said, "You too, bow down to Adam." I said, "Go away, Michael! I shall not bow down to him who is posterior to me, for I am former. Why is it proper for me to bow down to him?" The other angels, too, who were with me, heard this, and my words seemed pleasing to them and they did not prostrate themselves to you, Adam. Thereupon, God became angry with me and commanded to expel us from our dwelling and to cast me and my angels, who were in agreement with me, to the earth; and you were at the same time in the Garden."[8]

Determining if the *Life of Adam and Eve* is originally Jewish or Christian does not matter much here, but it seems that the prostration of the angels was originally a Jewish motif which was specifically appropriated by Christian traditions, whereas Late Antique Rabbinic sources reversed the story. For example, according to *Genesis Rabbah* 8:10 (on Gen 1:26–27), when God created Adam in His image, the angels wanted to worship him by telling "Holy" before him, but God made Adam fall asleep: the angels understood that Adam was a mortal and refrained from an erroneous act of worship. The Qurʾān, on this point (and many others as well), has thus decidedly a Christian background, but the way the story is appropriated is very significant.

We can disregard some details and focus on the *roles* the stories are supposed to play. In this regard, the Qurʾān is particularly close to its Christian subtexts. This story is, above all, an etiological myth, about the existence of evil in the world. Once evil is considered as the consequence of the action of Satan—because of him, men diverge from the right path (troubles began early, with

8 The Life of Adam and Eve, Armenian version 12.1–16.1, in Anderson and Stone, *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* 10–12.

Adam's Fall)—, it is necessary to explain how and why Satan, who was created originally as good (as everything is supposed to be in God's creation), behaves the way he does. In other words: *how* is it possible for the devil to tempt humans, and *why* does he display such an enmity to humans?

Christian versions of the story explain why the devil wants to tempt humans and makes them err, recording, for example, a dialog wherein Satan explains to Adam that his enmity towards humanity is simply the consequence of the fact that, because of him, he was expelled from heaven (see e.g. the *Life of Adam and Eve* 12–13, quoted above). More generally, Syriac homiletic literature, even when it does not mention the episode of the prostration of the angels, insists on Satan's envy towards Adam as the driving force in his behaviour.[9] The Qur'ān, on the other hand, is much more allusive: it only tells that Iblīs "prided himself" (*istakbara*, Q 2:34; 7:13; 38:75), and blamed God for misleading him (Q 7:16).

The Qur'ān does not contain any dialogue about the "why," but it has a dialogue about the "how," which, as far as I know, is absent from the Christian versions of the story[10] (but an exhaustive examination of the Late Antique homiletic literature would be welcome). Once cursed and expelled, Satan asks God's permission to be a tempter for humans, until the Day of Judgment (Q 7:14–17; 15:36–40; 17:62–63; 38:79–83). Here the Qur'ān makes an explicit theological point: if Satan tests and tempts humans, it is only because God grants him this possibility—until, of course, God fills hell with Satan, the demons, and the humans who followed them.

Another crucial dimension of the story pertains to the problem of the hierarchy between men and angels: angels should be superior to men, since they were created earlier, from a nobler stuff, and are closer to God's throne. The episode of the prostration of the angels reverses this hierarchy. Christian versions are all based on the idea that Adam was created as God's image, and that he is an antetype (not an antitype) of Christ: the angelic prostration before Adam anticipates the angelic worship of Christ (Heb 1:6). The debates about the prominence of this "Adamic Christology" in the Qur'ān, and the various

9 See Narsai, *On the Making of Creatures* 1:221–240 and *On the Making of Adam and Eve, and on the Transgression of the Commandment* 4:101–125, in Gignoux, *Homélies de Narsai sur la création*, 540–541, 616–617; Jacob of Serugh, *Hymn on the Creation of Man* 126–128, in Boulos Sony, Hymne sur la création 196–198.

10 There are parallels, however, in other Biblical and parabiblical narratives: e.g. Job 1:6–27, where God allows Satan to tempt Job (see Q 38:41); *Jubilees* 10:1–14 and the negotiation between Mastema, the head of demonic entities, and God. See Tesei, Fall of Iblīs 71–73.

subtexts involved, do not concern us here.[11] The way the Qurʾān modifies the story, however, is very relevant.

Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann has provided excellent arguments for the following intra-Qurʾanic chronology: Q 38:71–85 > 15:26–43 > 7:11–24 > 20:115–123 > 2:30–38.[12] There is one story, rewritten or alluded to several times, and slightly modified. For example, the idea that God had breathed His spirit into Adam is present only in the two earliest versions (Q 38:72; 15:29) but vanishes in the later ones. This is highly significant, since in the Christian narratives, the angels bow down *because* Adam was created in God's image. Strikingly enough, however, the Qurʾān does not mention the reason behind God's command. Should we suppose that the absence of such a reason is simply derived from the very allusive character of the Qurʾanic corpus, and that it was unnecessary to tell the audience what they already knew perfectly well about Adam as *imago dei*? That would make sense for the narratives in suras 15 and 38. However, the idea that Adam was created in God's image (and so deserved to see the angels bow down to him) arguably became, at some point, so sensitive for the author(s) of the corpus that it was better to remain silent about it.[13]

In fact, only the latest version of the story, namely Q 2:30–33 (a narrative partly based on Jewish traditions,[14] which is unparalleled in the Qurʾān), implicitly gives some rationale behind the angels' prostration: since the angels do not know how to answer the question raised by God (about the names of the animals), while Adam was given the answer, the angels appear inferior to Adam. This is done, however, at the expense of Adam too: in the Bible, it was he who named the animals (Gen 2:19–20), whereas in the Qurʾanic version, it is God who teaches him the names of animals. The text insists therefore on a gap between God and Adam, who receives all his knowledge from God only.

In other words, there is a story of Christian origins, which is progressively "de-christianized" *inside* the Qurʾanic corpus itself. This leads to some contradictions: for example, in suras 15 and 38, God orders the angel to prostrate just

11 See Reynolds, *Qurʾān and its Biblical Subtext* 51–54; Segovia, Encrypted Adamic Christology 916–922.

12 See Pohlmann, *Entstehung des Korans* 114–153, and also Witztum, Variant Traditions. Two words of cautions are in order here. First, the chronology of the pericopes does not necessarily mirror the chronology of the whole suras. Second, it is a relative chronology. Like Pohlmann, I do not endorse the usual Meccan/Medinan partition, which presupposes that all the Qurʾanic texts record Muḥammad's preaching.

13 For a vindication of a non-harmonizing reading of Qurʾanic parallel passages, see Dye, Problème synoptique 245–252.

14 See Reynolds, *Qurʾān and its Biblical Subtext* 46–48.

after Adam is created (following the narrative of the *Life of Adam and Eve*), whereas in sura 2, the prostration takes place after the exchanges between God, Adam and the angels. This latter version reminds one of the *Cave of Treasures* 2:10–24, where God creates Adam in his likeness, but does not yet command the angels to bow down. It is only once several creatures bow down to Adam when they hear him pronouncing their names and once the angels hear God proclaim that he has made Adam king and ruler of the creation (in Q 2:30, he is made *khalīfa*, "vice-regent"), that the angels bow down.[15]

Another interesting feature in the Qur'anic appropriation of this story concerns the nature of Iblīs, who is, of course, an angel (*malāk*) (Q 2:34; 7:11; 15:30–31; 17:61; 20:116; 38:74). However, in Q 18:50–51, Iblīs is identified as "one of the jinn" (*min al-jinn*).[16] This statement (which looks like a later addition) is strange, and one wonders if it should imply that the jinn are a subgroup among the angels. However, since the angels are supposed to be good, their core activity being praying and glorifying God (Q 7:206; 39:75; 40:7; 42:5; this is a Biblical motif, see e.g. Isa 6:3), this passage might try to neutralize a theologically delicate idea (an angel who does not glorify God) by making Iblīs a jinn.[17]

Another shared point between the Qur'ān and Christian traditions pertains to the name of the devil. Clearly, Iblīs and Shayṭān are one and the same character—Iblīs while he is still in paradise, Shayṭān after his fall (Q 2:36–38; 7:20–23; 17:64–65; 20:117–123).[18] A change of name is also present in some Syriac traditions (see *Cave of Treasures* 3:6), which explain that the devil took other names (Saṭanā, Shēdā, Daywā) after he disobeyed God and was expelled from Paradise.

The general Qur'anic image of the devil (al-Shayṭān), in line with his deleterious behavior in the fall of Adam, is no surprise: he is the clear enemy (of

15 See Segovia, Encrypted Adamic Christology 918.

16 See also Q 15:27, which mentions the creation of the jinn and is immediately followed by the episode of the prostration of the angels.

17 See Bjerregaard Mortensen, Commentaire de la sourate 18 (*al-Kahf*) 712–713.

18 About the name Shayṭān: there is an Arabic root, SH-Ṭ-N, which means "fetching water from a well by means of a bucket and a rope," and Arabic *shayṭān* means "rope" and, metaphorically, "serpent, snake." This *shayṭān* has etymologically nothing to do with the *shayṭān* of the Qur'ān, even if the homonymy is a good device for equating Satan and the snake in the Garden. The word *shayṭān* for "devil" certainly comes from Geez *säyṭan* ("devil, demon, adversary," pl. *säyaṭən*, *säyaṭənat*, itself coming from Aramaic *sāṭānā* and Hebrew *śāṭān*). In Geez and Arabic, this is a common name, not a proper name like Iblīs. Note also Geez *rəgum*, "cursed" (*säytanä rägimo*, "by cursing Satan"): it makes sense to understand *al-Shayṭān al-raǧīm* not as "the stoned Satan," but as "the cursed Satan." On these issues, see Kropp, The Ethiopic Satan.

man), the "manifest foe" (Q 2:168; 6:142; 7:22; 12:5; 17:53; 43:62); a tempter (Q 2:36; 7:20, 27); someone who leads astray (Q 4:60, 120; 47:25), making bad things for humans enticing in their eyes (Q 16:63; 27:24), or making humans forget the signs and the remembrance of God (Q 6:68; 58:19). He is an ungrateful and rebellious being (Q 17:27; 19:44), someone who provokes strife between men (Q 17:53). There is also a reminder which is often repeated: "do not follow the steps of Satan" (Q 2:168, 208), "do not be friends or followers of Satan and his comrades" (Q 4:38, 76, 83, 119), and of course, "seek refuge and protection—from Satan—in God only" (Q 3:36; 15:17; 16:98).

Very significantly, the Qur'ān follows the standard Christian conceptualisation of the devil, where the *satan* is not only, like in the Old Testament, the opponent, the adversary—referring almost always to a human being, not a supernatural one (except in 1 Chr 21:1; Jb 1–2; Zac 3:1–2), but above all the *enemy* of God, of the believers, and more generally of man, the "homicide right from the beginning," since, by leading Adam to disobey, he introduced death into the human race (e.g. Jn 8:44; Rm 5:12), the *tempter par excellence* (e.g. Mc 1:12–13; Mt 4:1–11; Lk 4:1–13; 1 Jn 3:8; 1 Cor 7:5), the *liar* (e.g. Jn 8:44), and the *instigator* of evil deed, and also of evil knowledge.[19]

19 It is a *topos* from the heresiographical literature that the devil and the demons are the beings who teach heresies. This *topos* is based, among other texts, on Tim 4:1: "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons." Two examples in the Christian literature, among many. First, Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 40.1–2: "The question will arise: by whom is to be interpreted the sense of the passages which make for heresies? By the devil, of course, to whom pertain those wiles which pervert the truth, and who, by the mystic rites of his idols, vies even with the essential portions of the sacraments of God." Second, Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer*. IV.41.2: "Since, therefore, all things were made by God, and since the devil has become the cause of apostasy to himself and others, justly does the Scripture always term those who remain in a state of apostasy sons of the devil and angels of the wicked one (*maligni*). For [the word] son, as one before me has observed, has a twofold meaning: one [is a son] in the order of nature, because he was born a son; the other, in that he was made so, is reputed a son, although there be a difference between being born so and being made so. For the first is indeed born from the person referred to; but the second is made so by him, whether as respects his creation or by the teaching of his doctrine. For when any person has been taught from the mouth of another, he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter [is called] his father. According to nature, then—that is, according to creation, so to speak—we are all sons of God, because we have all been created by God. But with respect to obedience and doctrine we are not all the sons of God: those only are so who believe in Him and do His will. And those who do not believe, and do not obey His will, are sons and angels of the devil, because they do the works of the devil." On the long story of demonology and illicit instruction, see Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History* 160–189.

2 The *shayāṭīn*

Besides the character of al-Shayṭān, there is the demon "in general," *shayṭān*, or the demons, the *shayāṭīn*. This is the same word—either in a collective/indefinite use, or in the plural. The Qur'anic demons pursue the same agenda as the devil and behave like him. A few ideas come up regularly:

First, the demons (like Satan) are liars (Q 26:221–223). They lure and deceive the unbelievers:[20]

> Say: "Shall we call on what does not benefit us nor harm us, instead of God (alone), and turn back on our heels after God has guided us?—Like the one who the demons have lured on the earth, (and he is) confused, though he has companions who call him to the guidance …" (Q 6:71)
>
> Don't you see that We have set the demons on the unbelievers to confound them with confusion? (Q 19:83)

Second, the unbelievers have a close relationship with demons:

> And when they fall in with those who believe, they say: We believe; but when they go apart to their demons they declare: Lo! we are with you. (Q 2:14).

In other words, the demons are the *allies* (or, according to another possible translation, the *patrons*) of the unbelievers, as if the demons and the unbelievers had concluded a pact:

> Surely We have made demons allies (*awliyā*) of those who do not believe (Q 7:27; see also 7:30; 41:25; 43:36).

According to the dualistic (and deeply eschatological) worldview of the Qur'ān, the believers, therefore, should fight the unbelievers, who are the allies of the demons (Q 4:76). Of course, both the unbelievers and the demons will end up together in hell (Q 19:68).[21]

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20 I follow Droge's translations, with minor modifications at times.

21 In late antique Christianity, fighting the demons, their seduction and temptation, involved various devices, including unceasing prayer (see e.g. Bitton-Ashkelony, Demons and Prayers; idem, 'Neither Beginning nor End'). It is significant that prayer is used for fighting demons in the Qur'ān (Q 3:36; see also Q 113 and 114, which might be understood as referring to demonic beings of some sort), and that the Qur'ān refers to unceasing prayer: see

In addition to these basic and recurrent ideas about demons, some verses introduce other points, like the idea that demons can enter the body while one is eating illicit food:

> Do not eat that over which the name of God has not been mentioned. Surely it is wickedness indeed! Surely the demons inspire their allies, so that they may dispute with you. If you obey them, surely you will be associators (*mushrikūn*) indeed! (Q 6:121)

The presence, in the same verse, of such a dietary rule, immediately followed by a remark about demons and associators, suggests that eating illicit food means associating oneself with (having commerce with, or submitting to) the demons. This evokes a famous passage from the New Testament, namely 1 Cor 10:19–21:

> Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

Of course, Paul takes issue here with eating food consecrated to idols (that is, banqueting in temples), rather than eating food not consecrated to God (there should theoretically be a third category, namely food neither consecrated to God nor to the idols). However, this kind of concern does not remain marginal in the Christian tradition. For example, some decades after the beginning of the Arab conquests, Athanasius of Balad, patriarch of Antioch between 683 and 687, writes:

> For a terrible report about dissipated Christians has come to the hearing of our humble self. Greedy men, who are slaves of the belly, are heedlessly and senselessly taking part with the pagans in feasts together, wretched

Q 20:33–34 and especially Q 108, a sura which, according to some interpretations, means that the prayer has the power to defeat the devil. This is in any case the reading of Luxenberg, *Syro-Aramaic* 292–295, and Kropp, Commentary of Q 108. Martin Baasten, who convincingly argues for a similar reading of Q 108, denies, however, that *šāni'aka* ("your adversary," v. 3) refers specifically to the devil (see Baasten, Syriac Reading 378). My own impression is that even if the term could have a broader meaning, the devil remains the adversary *par excellence*, and it is therefore tempting to think that he is targeted (or at least is among the targets) in this sura.

> women mingle anyhow with the pagans unlawfully and indecently, and all at times eat without distinction from their sacrifices. They are going astray in their neglect of the commandments and rules of the apostles who often would cry out about this to those who believe in Christ, that they should distance themselves from fornication, from what is strangled and from blood, and from the food of pagan sacrifices, lest they be by this associates of the demons and of their unclean table.[22]

Three points at least are particularly noteworthy about this text. First, it associates eating illicit food with having commerce with demons and pagans, exactly like 1 Cor 10:19–21 and Q 6:121. Second, its commandments and rules come from Acts 15:29, a verse which is also found behind the Qur'anic commandments themselves (e.g. Q 5:5). Third, it condemns Christians who share meals (and have sex) with those who might be called, somewhat anachronistically, the "Muslims." This text, therefore, aims at building, or strengthening, community boundaries. This is precisely what Q 6:121 is doing, with similar arguments. There is an additional ambiguity in the Qur'ān since the term *mushrikūn* (associators) remains quite vague and open to reinterpretation. The Qur'ān and Athanasius, anyway, share here the same worldview, and use similar rhetoric.

Two further aspects of Qur'anic demonology, to which we shall return in the next section, deserve a special mention. One pertains to the character of Solomon. Like Jewish and Christian traditions, the Qur'ān describes him as a master of demons:[23]

> And to Solomon (We subjected) the wind, blowing strongly at his command to the land which We have blessed (…). And among the demons, (there were) those who dived for him, and did other work besides; and We were watching over them. (Q 21:81–82, see also Q 38:36–38)

It is often thought that the Qur'ān alludes here to the building of the Temple of Jerusalem, where Solomon subdues the demons and makes them build the Temple. The earliest attestation of this story is found in the *Testament of Solomon*, a first or second (maybe early third) century CE Christian text, com-

22 Athanasius of Balad, *Lettre du bienheureux patriarche Athanase: qu'aucun chrétien ne doit manger* (*une partie*) *des sacrifices des Arabes qui dominent maintenant*, in Nau, Littérature canonique 128–129.

23 On the figure of Solomon, see. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King*; Verheyden (ed.), *The Figure of Solomon*.

posed in Greek, which uses material from first century Palestinian Judaism.[24] However, other Biblical texts allude to Solomon's building activity:

> So Solomon rebuilt Gezer and lower Bethhoron and Baalath and Tamar in the wilderness, in the land of Judah. (1 Kg 9:18)
>
> [Solomon] built Tadmor in the wilderness. (2 Chr 8:4)

Initially, the Biblical text probably referred to Tamar, in southern Judah, but the popular imagination identified the Tadmor/Tamar with Palmyra, in the Syrian desert.[25] It is therefore not impossible that the Qur'ān might refer here to the building of Palmyra.

The other story is cosmological. According to the Qur'ān, the sky is protected from demons:

> Certainly We have made constellations (*burūj*) in the sky and made them appear enticing for the onlookers, and We have protected them from every accursed demon (*shayṭān rajīm*), except any who listen surreptitiously, then a clear flame (*shihāb*, i.e. a comet) pursues him (*fa-ʾatbaʿahū shihābun mubīn*). (Q 15:16–18, see also Q 37:6–7; 41:12; 67:5)

The idea that heaven, more precisely the lower heaven (since there are seven heavens (Q 2:29; 17:44; 23:86; 41:12; 65:12; 67:3; 71:15)), is decorated with the stars is found elsewhere in the Qur'ān (Q 21:32; 25:61; 37:6). One passage explains why heaven should be protected from demons:

> Certainly We have made the lower heaven appear enticing by means of the splendor of the stars (*kawākib*), and We have made them a means of protection from every rebellious demon (*shayṭān mārid*), (so) they do not listen to the Exalted Assembly, but they are pelted from every side, driven off—for them is a perpetual chastisement—, except for the one who snatches a word, then a piercing flame pursues him (*fa-ʾatbaʿahū shihābun thāqib*). (Q 37:6–10)

This passage has been examined in detail in a recent study by Patricia Crone, so I will not delve too much into it[26] and will only highlight a few elements.

24 See Duling, Testament of Solomon, especially 939–943 on the language and the dating.

25 See Pinckney Stetkevych, Solomon and Mythic Kingship 9–10.

26 Crone, Commentary of Q 37:6–11 (QS 32).

The idea that demons try to penetrate the heavens and are then repelled by the stars or the divine beings is Zoroastrian (*Dādestāni dēnīg* 36:15 ff.). There are, however, notable differences between the Zoroastrian cosmological myths and the Qur'ān. For example, the Zoroastrian cosmology divides the sky into three parts: the bottom third is connected to darkness and Ahriman, the middle third is where stands the human race—and where it has to fight demons—, the top third is where Ohrmazd resides, and where demons are not allowed to enter. More significantly, there is a substantial difference concerning the fixed and the mobile heavenly bodies: the fixed stars represent Ohrmazd, whereas the mobile comets and planets are part of the evil forces of Ahriman. In the Qur'ān, the comets are, on the contrary, the weapons used by God to chase demons away.

The possible Zoroastrian origin of this cosmological picture has therefore been mediated by other traditions. The demons' attempt to listen to the council of God, on the other hand, recalls the *Testament of Solomon* (20:11–13):

> Then I [Solomon] ordered Ornias to be brought to me again and I asked him: "Tell me how you know that the young man will die in three days." He responded: "We demons go up to the firmament of heaven, fly around among the stars, and hear the decisions which issue from God concerning the lives of men. The rest of the time we come and, being transformed, cause destruction, whether by domination, or by fire, or by sword, or by chance."[27]

Here again, there are significant differences: in the Qur'ān, demons are not celestial or astral beings, whereas, in the *Testament of Solomon*, demons reside in stars, or are heavenly bodies (*Test. Sol.* 18:1–5). Moreover, in the *Testament of Solomon*, demons are not chased away: they are simply unable to ascend, and they fall down "like leaves from a tree" (*Test. Sol.* 20:14–17).

Given the nature of the evidence, and the fact that stories about demons are liable to circulate and be transformed in a wide variety of contexts (confessional and popular), it would be unwise to look for a specific textual source for such Qur'anic ideas, at least as our investigations stand at present.

27 Duling, Testament of Solomon 983. A similar idea (demons try to know or guess the future) is found elsewhere, for example in the *Babylonian Talmud*, Gittin 68a.

3 The Jinn

Let us now have a look at the jinn. Jinn are well-known characters from pre-Islamic Arab mythology.[28] Numerous studies have described the pre-Islamic beliefs about these beings, which can be summarized as follows.[29]

Jinn are spirits. They are not made from flesh and blood, but they are physical: they can eat and drink, and they can be wounded or killed. They are normally invisible, yet they are said to take various shapes (generally a wild animal, sometimes a domestic one).[30] They can be male or female and have human sexual partners (and even marry them); they also can have offspring. Like humans, they are divided into clans and tribes: in a word, their society mirrors the human society. They can be of various types (*ʿifrīt*, *ghūl*, *mārid* …). Their abode is often the desert, and more generally liminal places (old ruins, graveyards, dark places, places of filth like latrines). However, they can be found too in areas rich in water and vegetation (trees, thickets, springs and wells, though the association of spirits with springs and wells seems more common in Syria and Palestine than in Arabia), and in wasteland. They might be present in human habitations, where they would generally appear as snakes.

Jinn can interfere in many ways in human life. They are responsible for mysterious phenomena (noises in the night or the desert, mirages), they cause illness or madness—a *majnūn* (madman) is someone possessed by a jinn. They disturb sexual functions (impotence, sterility), and can even abduct people. On the other hand, jinn possess secret knowledge and can inspire soothsayers,

28 Arabic *jinn* (as a collective), *jinnī* (as a singular), *jānn* (as a collective and singular). Much ink has been spilled on the etymology of the word. Medieval lexicographers, followed by some modern scholars, give it a purely Arabic origin and derive it from *janna*, "to cover, hide, veil," the *jinn* being therefore a "hidden, mysterious being." Other scholars see it as a loanword, related to Geez *gänen*, "demon," or rather, according to what is perhaps the most widespread hypothesis, to Aramaic *genyā*, feminine *genīṭā*, "demon" (also Aramaic *genyāṭā*, "pagan shrines," and "female divinities" as well): see Albright, Review 318–321; idem., Islam 292–293. Relying on his etymological analysis, Albright also argues that "the *jinn* themselves were probably introduced into the Arabic folklore in the Late pre-Islamic period" (Islam 292). It is possible (but not certain) that the word *jinn* is a late pre-Islamic loan from the Aramaic linguistic and cultural area, but it is hard to believe that the notion of "(benevolent or malevolent) spirit" was unknown in Arabia before that time.

29 The following paragraphs take up Dye & Reynolds, Commentaire de la sourate 72 (*al-Jinn*) 1856–1858. For more references on the topic, see Wellhausen, *Reste* 147–159, 211–214; Eichler, *Dschinne, Teufel und Engel*; Tritton, Demons and Spirits; Henninger, Beliefs in Spirits; Tengour, *L'Arabie des djinn*. I closely follow Henninger, Beliefs in Spirits 26–38.

30 Can they also take a human form? It is the case in present-day Islam, but it is hard to know if it was so for pre-Islamic jinn. See Henninger, Beliefs in Spirits 29.

poets, and musicians. In short, jinn appear as mysterious and powerful beings, quite unpredictable, which can be harmful (if hostile) but sometimes helpful (if friendly), and against whom protection would be highly desirable. In many ways, they are similar to the demons and spirits of many other folklores—for example the demons of Late Antique Judaism.[31]

Some of these characteristics of the jinn can be found in the Qur'ān, like the ideas that poets, magicians, or soothsayers are possessed (*majnūn*) and inspired (see the polemics against God's messengers: Q 15:6; 26:27; 37:36; 44:14; 51:39, 52; 52:29; 54:9; 68:2, 51; 81:22; and the so-called *taḥaddī* verses: Q 10:38; 11:13; 17:88–89; 52:34), or that jinn can be involved in sexual assault (Q 55:56, 74; possibly Q 19:18)—all these passages display an unambiguous negative attitude towards the jinn. However, the Qur'anic pericopes about the jinn do not even try to reflect the intended audience's conception of the jinn: their aim is simply to *implement* a certain number of new or different beliefs and attitudes about the jinn. The Qur'ān displays a very consistent and monolithic rhetorical purpose, which amounts to a systematic demonization of the jinn: from dangerous but, from a moral point of view, rather neutral beings, they become *almost* always amoral and bad creatures, powerless in comparison to God—in short, they simply look like the demons, *as viewed by Christianity*.

In other words, the way the Qur'ān treats jinn perfectly mirrors a well-known fact in the history of religions, namely how Christianity reinterpreted a whole category of beings (sometimes called the *Zwischenwesen*[32] or *Mittelwesen*,[33] the "interstitial" or "intermediary" beings which occupy a space between men and God, like *daimones*, spirits, monsters and, in some cases, the deities of polytheism) as belonging specifically to the realm of evil. The existence of such beings was an accepted and widespread cultural fact in Antiquity. What the Qur'ān is doing about the jinn—following what mainstream Christian discourse did about *Zwischenwesen* or *Mittelwesen*—is to *demonize* them, to acknowledge their existence, and at the same time provide a new description and characterization, which partly follows the traditional understanding of the jinn, but partly replaces it with new ideas and assessments: the jinn are now the actors of new stories, they are integrated into a new cosmology and a new image of the world; they are located inside a new hierarchical framework.[34] Listing what

31 See Bohak, Conceptualizing Demons.

32 On this concept, see e.g. Sonik, Mesopotamian Conceptions.

33 See Eichler, *Dschinne, Teufel und Engel* 30–32.

34 My claim about such a process of demonization/infernalization of the jinn is not original. See Crone, Commentary of Q 37:6–11 (QS 32) 310, and O'Meara, From Space to Place. My discussion differs from theirs in various respects, however.

the Qurʾān tells about the jinn, and comparing it to what it tells about Shayṭān or the demons, will make that clear.

First, according to the Qurʾān, unbelievers ascribe associates (*shurakāʾ*)—the jinn—to God (Q 6:100). They are also said to worship the jinn (Q 34:41) or to assert a parenthood (*nasab*) between God and the jinn (Q 37:158). Yet there is absolutely no evidence that it was an Arabian practice to worship jinn, or that jinn were put on a similar level as the deities of the Arabian pantheon(s). The Qurʾān performs here a re-description, a reinterpretation, of practices, in order to condemn them. In this case, the rhetorical strategy is limpid—and it fits the typical Christian (especially missionary) *topos*: (real or imaginary) polytheist practices are assimilated to idol worship, idol worship is then described as demon worship (see Dt 32:17; 1Cor 10:20; Ps 106:37; Ba 4:7), which is designated here as jinn worship.

Second, jinn, like humans (and like any creature with reason and choice), are answerable for their sins and will be judged at the end of times (Q 6:128, 130; 7:38; 41:25, 29; 55:39). This puts them on a par with demons since demons will be judged too (Q 19:68). Like demons, unbeliever jinn are doomed to Gehenna (Q 7:179). Such passages highlight the power of God on the creation (Q 51:56), and stress that all creatures, including demons or jinn, are powerless before God.

Third, men are wrong in seeking refuge with jinn:

> True, there were persons among mankind who took shelter with persons among the jinn, but they increased their foolishness (*rahaq*), and they thought, like you, that God will not raise up anyone. (Q 72:6)

In short, the jinn are not only bad allies, since they provide no help, but they do even worse: they drive people into error by denying resurrection. It is exactly the same with demons: the demons are the allies of the unbelievers (Q 2:14; 7:27, 30; 41:25; 43:36), and they are liars (Q 26:221–223) who lure the unbelievers (Q 6:71; 19:83).

Fourth: there are two different stories, which are narrated several times in the Qurʾān, sometimes involving the demons and sometimes the jinn. These stories are not indigenous to Western Arabia, and in principle, they should involve demons only. The first one concerns Solomon and his building activities. As we saw in various passages (Q 21:81–82; 38:36–38), the Qurʾān explains that Solomon subdues the demons and makes them erect a building. The same story is mentioned elsewhere in the Qurʾān, this time with the jinn in the starring role:

> And to Solomon (We subjected) the wind, its morning was a month's (journey), and its evening was a month's (journey), and We made a spring of molten brass to follow for him. And among the jinn, (there were) those who worked for him by the permission of his Lord. Whoever of them turns aside from Our command—We shall make him taste the punishment of the blazing (Fire). (Q 34:12)

Solomon's command over the jinn is also referred to in verses 22–25 of a famous pre-Islamic poem by al-Nābighah al-Dhubyānī (active 570–600 CE)—a panegyric to the king of al-Hirāh, al-Nuʿmān ibn al-Mundhir (r. 580–602). Al-Nābighah praises his patron and claims that no one compares to him

> (22) Except for Sulaymān, when God said to him: "Take charge of my creatures and restrain them from sin.
> (23) And subdue the jinn, for I have allowed them to build Tadmur with stone slabs and [lofty] columns.
> (24) Then whoever obeys you, reward his obedience in due measure and guide him on righteousness' path.
> (25) And whoever defies you, chastise him with a chastisement that will deter the evil-doer."[35]

There was, therefore (at least if we consider that the gist of the poem is authentic), a pre-Qur'anic Arabian legend featuring Solomon and the jinn building Palmyra. It is thus possible (but not necessary) that the Qur'anic passages speaking of the demons working for Solomon refer to the same event (and not the building of the Temple). Moreover, Jewish and Christian traditions describe Solomon as a master of the demons, and he is also described, in the Qurʾān (like in al-Nābighah's poem), as a master of the jinn:

> Gathered before Solomon were his forces—jinn, and men, and birds—and they were arranged (in rows). (Q 27:17, see also 27:39)

The second example pertains to the issue of demons trying to listen to the divine council, or the Exalted Assembly (*al-mala' al-ʾaʿlā*) (Q 15:16–18; 37:6–7; 41:12; 67:5). The jinn try to do the same:

35 Arabic text and English translation in Pinckney Stetkevych, Solomon and Mythic Kingship 7–8. On the whole poem, see idem, *The Poetics of Islamic Legitimacy* 1–47.

> And that we touched the sky and found it filled with harsh guards and piercing flames. And that we used to sit there on seats to listen (in), but whoever listens now finds a piercing flame (*shihāb*) lying in wait for him. (Q 72:8–9)

Demons and jinn are thus used interchangeably. Jinn behave like demons—even in stories, like the one on the divine council, where they are not supposed to have anything to do.

The formula "we used to sit there on seats to listen (in)" (*wa-ʾannā kunnā naqʿudu minhā maqāʿida li-s-samʿi*) is certainly significant. It means that the jinn, *before*, had the opportunity to listen to the divine council. The most obvious implication is that the jinn *were* angels and are now *fallen angels* of some kind. It does not imply that the Qurʾān relies here on specific traditions from the Book of Enoch—this could only imply that the demons are the offspring of the fallen angels or are conflated with the fallen angels (and so are the jinn, who are assimilated to demons). This might make sense, since Satan (a fallen angel, for sure) is also described as a jinn in the Qurʾān.[36] It seems therefore that demons, jinn, and fallen angels are not always clearly distinguishable,[37] and in a way, they need not be, since the point of the Qurʾān is not to provide a consistent and comprehensive demonology, angelology or cosmology: it is rather to reinterpret and demonize the *Zwischenwesen* or *Mittelwesen*.

This demonization, however, knows a significant exception. In two places (Q 46:29–34; 72:1–15), the Qurʾān mentions jinn who are believers.[38] In sura 46, some jinn, who had listened to the Qurʾān, or the predication (*yastamiʿūna l-qurʾān*), come back to their people (the other jinn), warn them about the Last

36 See Tesei, The Fall of Iblīs 73–76, and especially p. 75 on the conflation between demons and fallen angels in the Christian post-Enochic traditions. On the debates concerning the identification of jinn and fallen angels, see Commentary of Q 72 (QS 41), in Azaiez et al. (ed.), *Qurʾan Seminar* 385–398.

37 Hawting, in Azaiez et al. (ed.), *Qurʾan Seminar* 391. The stuff the angels and jinn are made of is a good example. According to the Qurʾān, angels are made of fire, *nār* (Q 7:12; 38:76). This is perfectly consistent with the Biblical and para-Biblical conception of the angels: see e.g. Ps 104:4; Exod 3:2; Ezek 1:4. Jinn are also made of fire: "and He created the jinn from a smokeless flame of fire (*wa-ḫalaqa l-jānna min mārijin min nār*)" (Q 55:15). In Q 15:27, in a passage which refers to Iblīs—an angel, but described also as a jinni—, the Qurʾān states: "and We created the jinn before from a scorching fire (*wa-l-jānna ḫalaqnāhu min qablu min nāri s-samūm*)." We should recall that the idea that jinn are made of fire (*nār*) and angels of light (*nūr*) is not Qurʾanic: it is a later exegetical development.

38 The two passages are interdependent. I leave for another occasion a detailed examination of their relationships.

Judgment, and enjoin to follow the call of God. In sura 72,[39] some jinn say they had listened to an "amazing preaching/recitation" (*innā samiʿnā qurʾānan ʿajaban*): they become believers, give up any kind of association to God (Q 72:2–3) and express faith in the resurrection (Q 72:7). They thus testify against their fellow jinn, who remain on the evil—demonic—side, and also against their past selves, when they still were unbelievers. In other words, jinn—like humans—are divided into different sects (Q 72:11): there are good jinn, who answered the call of God and submitted to Him, and bad ones, who are doomed to Gehenna (Q 72:13–15).

This is a significant difference between jinn and demons: there are no believers among demons, and none of them will be saved. In another passage, the Qur'ān endorses such a distinction between demons and jinn, making demons the bad counsellors of humans and jinn alike:

> In this way We have assigned to every prophet an enemy—demons of the humans and jinn (*shayāṭīn al-ʾinsi wa-l-jinn*)—some of them inspiring others with decorative speech as a deception. (Q 6:112)

4 Conclusion

This overview of the Qur'anic figures of evil reveals some significant elements concerning the context and genesis of the Qur'ān. It is often difficult, not to say pointless, to look for precise written sources for many of the passages which have been studied here. But some things are clear: first, Hārūt and Mārūt evoke the story of the fallen angels according to Enochic traditions (Jewish, Christian or Manichaean origins are theoretically possible), while the names of the angels are derived from Iranian names (Haurvatāt, Ameretāt): this suggests, somewhere in the process of transmission and appropriation, an influence from the Iranian area; second, the story of Iblīs and the prostration of the angels, in Late Antiquity, is *specifically* Christian, and it is progressively and partly de-christianized in its latest Qur'anic versions; third, the Qur'anic image of Satan and the demons follows the standard Christian conceptualisation of the devil, with some elements possibly related to the Iranian world: this would point to the Church of the East; fourth, the resolute process of demonization of *Mittelwesen* like the jinn fits well with Christian (especially missionary) rhetoric.

39 On this surah, see Dye & Reynolds, Commentaire de la sourate 72 (*al-Jinn*).

Even if the Qur'ān should be situated at a crossroad of multiple Late Antique traditions, one cannot fail to notice here the significance of a substantial Christian background.[40] How should we account for this? Should we understand the Qur'anic demonological discourse as the discourse of a charismatic leader from a non-Christian (and also non-Jewish and non-Manichaean) background, who, once he gained knowledge on such topics, for example through informants disseminating oral narratives, or through his travels, would decide to preach this kind of demonology and "reform" his polytheist community? It is one thing, however, to be acquainted by hearsay with various traditions; it is another one to design a reform project which is so consistent and so similar to the well-oiled Christian missionary rhetoric. Is it then the discourse of someone living in a setting where are found various religious communities, like Christians, Jews, and polytheists, and who planned to reform and convert the polytheists to a "monotheistic" worldview? The problem of this hypothesis, though, is well-known: since the basis of this demonological discourse is massively Christian, this reformer should logically be a (literate) Christian—but we have no evidence of a substantial Christian presence in Mecca.[41]

I would be tempted, therefore, to sketch a different scenario. We should think outside the box and stop seeing the *production* and *reception* of the Qur'anic texts as a phenomenon circumscribed to Mecca and Medina in Muḥammad's time. We should rather conceive the development of the Qur'anic corpus—in the production of the initial texts, their reception, their rewriting(s), the reception of their rewriting(s)—as most probably involving more diverse actors. In other words, this development might be described as a process of interaction—more precisely a process of appropriation (including subversion) of a *non-autochthonous* discourse by the community responsible for the production of the Qur'anic codex.[42]

Already before the seventh century, some stories—for example those of Solomon and the jinn—had begun to be acclimatized and adapted to Arabian folklore. However, following the previous analyses, we should posit, at an initial stage, a Christian proselyte, or missionary, discourse (possibly coming from al-Ḥīra or the Beth Qaṭrayē?)—something quite plausible in the context of late sixth and early seventh century Arabia. It accounts for the core of the Qur'anic discourse on the figures of evil, which is, in its contents, mainly Christian, in its form, deeply shaped by the usual *topoi* of missionaries addressing their targets

40 See more generally Dye, Le corpus coranique 764–771.

41 See Dye, Le corpus coranique 772–776.

42 See Dye, Le corpus coranique 777–785.

(in what it tells, and what it does not tell), and which reinterprets and translates the beliefs and attitudes of the targeted community into a new idiom. But these (non-autochthonous) texts were subjected to a process of appropriation, rewriting and reinterpretation by (what would ultimately become) the Qur'anic community. This can lead to a modification of the initial message like, for example, the progressive de-christianization of the story of Iblīs and the prostration of the angels.[43] But perhaps the most striking example concerns the rescue of the jinn, these prevalent figures of Arabian folklore. We saw a significant reversal, and a remarkable ambivalence. If, as seems to be the case, the demonization of the jinn belongs to a Christian proselytising discourse, which is largely endorsed by the Qur'ān, then the salvation of *some* jinn, who express their new faith with a formula which displays anti-Christian overtones (Q 72:3: "He has not taken a consort or son," *mā ttakhadha ṣāḥibatan wa-lā waladan*), should be seen as a *subversion* of the discourse demonizing the jinn.

The Qur'anic texts, as we know them, are the final product of this kind of process, which should sound quite familiar to anyone versed in anthropology.[44] Most significantly, the indigenous interpretations of the originally non-autochthonous texts are not given by the mission, but "are *made* by converts themselves in a process of appropriation (often against the meanings missionaries intended to evoke)."[45] The term "convert" would certainly not fit the context of the Qur'ān, but the general process described could. I suggest we should investigate more closely the prehistory and the history of the formation of the Qur'anic corpus with this kind of model in mind.

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43 There are other examples of this kind of phenomenon in the Qur'anic corpus. One concerns ascetic passages which have been partly rewritten to produce a more lenient meaning. See Dye, Ascetic and Nonascetic Layers.

44 I have in mind, for example, the work of Africanists who have studied the reception of Christian missions in Africa. See e.g. Peel, Syncretism; Meyer, Beyond Syncretism.

45 Meyer, Beyond Syncretism 57.

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