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THE *BOOK OF WATCHERS* IN THE QURʾĀN*

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Sura 2:102 informs us that the Jews follow the magic taught by demons (*shayāṭīn*) and "such things as were sent down to the two angels at Babylon, Hārūt and Mārūt", but that the latter two will not teach anyone without warning them first: "we are just a temptation (*fitna*), do not disbelieve", they will say. In explanation of this passage the exegetes tell a gripping story about a woman named Anāhīd or Zuhra (i.e. Venus) or Bēdukht (daughter of God) who tricked two amorous angels into telling her the great name of God, or some other magic formula that the angels had used to ascend to heaven, whereupon she rose to heaven herself; there she became the star Venus, while the two angels were left behind on earth and punished by being hung upside down in a well in Babylon, where people would come to them for magic knowledge. The exegetes add that angels had descended to earth with God's permission to act as judges because they were upset by the terrible behaviour of human beings, believing that they could do better than humans even if they had to contend with passions; God decided to put them to the test and provided them with passions for purposes of the experiment; and the woman proved them wrong by inducing them to drink wine, kill and practise idolatry before making them reveal their secret formula to her.[1]

It is well known that both the Qurʾānic passage and the gripping story are developments of the account of the fallen angels in the so-called Book of Watchers, a work attributed to the antediluvian figure Enoch (great-grandfather of Noah). It is perhaps not so well known that this book is reflected more than once in the Qurʾān. A second example has recently been identified by John Reeves.[2] In what follows I propose another two and discuss the identity of ʿUzayr, who should perhaps be seen as a fifth

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[1] Numerous accounts are given al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, Beirut 1988, i, 452ff, *ad* 2:102, translated along with other versions in E. Littmann, 'Hārūt und Mārūt', in *Festschrift Friedrich Carl Andreas*, Leipzig 1916, 70-87; cf. also L. Jung, *Fallen Angels in Jewish, Christian and Mohammedan Literature*, Philadelphia 1926, 126ff; *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, s.v. 'Hārūt and Mārūt' (Shahbazi); add al-Kalbī, cited in early Persian *tafsīr* (Abū Bakr ʿAtīq Nīshābūrī, *Tafsir-i Sūrābādī*, ed. S. Sīrjānī, Tehran 1381 [2002], i, 105f; Lahore Tafsīr, facsimile edition and Russian translation by F. I. Abdullaeva, *Tolkovanije korana (Lakhorskhij tafsir)*, Moscow 2001, 42f = 79ff); cf. also the long version attributed to Abū Jaʿfar, i.e. Muḥammad al-Bāqir, in al-Qummī, *Tafsīr*, Beirut 1991, i, 65-67. Some versions omit the motif regarding God's name or other magic formula.

[2] See below, note 76.

example. The interest of all four or five examples lies in the light they throw on the religious milieu in which the Qurʾān arose and the relationship of the Qurʾān (and indeed the exegetical tradition) with an old debate in the Near East about how sin had come into the world.

The fallen angels.

Genesis, 6:2-4, informs us that in the antediluvian past there were giants (*nephilim*) on earth and that at that time "sons of God" consorted with "daughters of men", siring mighty heroes (*gibborim*); thereafter the wickedness of man led to the flood. This passage has its roots in an ancient Near Eastern myth about rebellion in the pantheon, and it was to generate a vast number of narratives itself. In fact, it is one of those cases where we can follow the history of a couple of motifs and their endless transmogrifications from the dawn of history until today, seeing them meander like a huge river with a mass of constantly shifting arms and canals over the literary landscape of western Eurasia. It is quite an awe-inspiring sight.[3] Here, however, we need to zoom in on the rivulet constituted by the Book of Watchers.

The Book of Watchers is the first of five or more separate works which together make up the Ethiopic Book of Enoch (known as 1 Enoch).[4] It is based on the assumption that the Biblical "sons of God" are angels, the normal understanding of the term in antiquity,[5] and it casts the angels as sinners. They are guilty of transgressing both sexual and epistemic boundaries, for not only do they take human wives, as Genesis says, they also teach them sorcery and other illicit sciences, and the outcome is disastrous. They have giant offspring (the *gibborim* and *nephilim*, identified), and it is these giants who wreak all the havoc on earth that causes God to send the flood, without the damage ever being fully repaired; for though the rebellious angels are bound and jailed while their giant offspring are killed by obedient angels sent against them, their wicked activities continue due to evil spirits that have issued from them. The message of the book is that super-human forces rather than human beings are responsible for the existence of evil on earth; God sent the flood to rid the earth of the dreadful giants, not to punish humans, who suffer as innocent victims of superior powers.[6]

Fragments of this book, apparently dating from the second century BC and suggesting that the book itself goes back to the third century BC, have been found at

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[3] Nobody has tried to draw a picture of the entire river, but for a fine account of the already much ramified section from the ancient Near East to Augustine, see N. Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*, Princeton 1987. For the ancient Near Eastern roots, see also P. D. Hanson, 'Rebellion in Heaven, Azazel, and Euhemeristic Heroes in 1 Enoch 6-11', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96, 1977, 195-233.

[4] 1 Enoch stands for the Enoch book in Ethiopic, 2 Enoch for that in old Church Slavonic, 3 Enoch for that in Hebrew (more properly called Sefer Hekhalot). The thee works are different compositions, not the same work in different languages. Watchers are a certain category of angels. For editions and translations, see below, notes 7-9.

[5] Cf. P. S. Alexander, 'The Targumim and Early Exegesis of "Sons of God" in Genesis 6', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 23, 1972, 60f.

[6] Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth*, 167, 169f; cf. also J. J. Collins, 'The Origin of Evil in Apocalyptic Literature', in his *Seers, Sybils and Sages in Hellenistic-Roman Judaism*, Leiden 1997, 292-99; M. Delcor, 'Le mythe de la chute des anges et de l'origine des géants comme explication du mal dans le monde dans l'apocalyptique juive', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 190, 1976, 3-53; and the interesting discussion in S. Schwartz, *Imperialism and Jewish Society*, Princeton 2001, 77ff.

Qumran, along with fragments of related works such as the Book of Giants.[7] Substantial Greek portions are also extant, partly in an Egyptian papyrus dating from perhaps the fifth or sixth century CE and partly in extracts by the ninth-century Byzantine author George Syncellus.[8] The Ethiopic version, which preserves the book in full, is a translation made on the basis of a Greek original between the fourth and the sixth century CE.[9] There are also numerous references to, and retellings of, the book in Jewish, Christian, pagan, Manichaean, and other Gnostic literature.[10]

It used to be thought that the Enoch literature and other pseudepigraphic works originated in sectarian or socially marginal circles, but this is no longer the prevailing view; the Book of Watchers seems to have been regarded as authoritative by many Jews down to the second century CE. Then the rabbis turned against it. The second-century rabbi Simeon b. Yohai cursed all those who explained the "sons of God" as angels: in his view they were sons of judges. Some said they were called "sons of God" because they lived long and easy lives.[11] The Aramaic targums duly translated "sons of God" as "sons of judges" (Neophyti) or "sons of nobles" (Onqelos and Pseudo-Jonathan; similarly the Samaritan targum), while Symmachus, a Jewish or Jewish Christian translator of the Bible into Greek active in the late second or early third century, opted for "sons of the powerful".[12] They were explained as human beings of one kind or another by all the main commentators on the Bible, Qaraites included, thereafter.[13] The protagonists of the story

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[7] J. T. Milik (ed. and tr.), *The Books of Enoch: Aramaic Fragments of Qumrân Cave 4*, Oxford 1976; L. Stuckenbruck (ed. and tr.), *The Book of Giants from Qumran*, Tübingen 1997.

[8] M. Black (ed.), *Apocalypsis Henochi Graece*, Leiden 1970. The Egyptian manuscript (Codex Panopolitanus) is sometimes dated to the eighth century or later.

[9] M. A. Knipp (ed. and tr.), *The Ethiopic Book of Enoch in the Light of the Aramaic Dead Sea Fragments*, Oxford 1978. There are later editions and translations too. The Book of Watchers covers chapters 1-36 and has been used in this article in the translations of E. Isaac in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigraphica*, vol. i, New York 1983, 5-89; and G. W. E. Nickelsburg and J. C. VanderKam, *1 Enoch: a New Translation*, Minneapolis 2004.

[10] Cf. Jung, *Fallen Angels*; B. J. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, Philadelphia 1952; F. Dexinger, *Sturz der Göttersöhne oder Engel vor der Sintflut?*, Vienna 1966; J. C. VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs and Enoch in Early Christian Literature', in J. C. VanderKam and W. Adler (eds.), *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, Minneapolis 1996; A. Y. Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: the Reception of Enochic Literature*, Cambridge 2005. G. A. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, Leiden 1984, esp. chs. 2 and 8; J. C. Reeves, *Heralds of that Good Realm: Syro-Mesopotamian Gnosis and Jewish Traditions*, Leiden 1996, 183-206; id., *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony: Studies in the Book of the Giants Traditions*, Cincinnati 1992; id., 'Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Manichaean Literature: the Influence of the Enochic Library', in id. (ed.), *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, Atlanta 1994. For what appears to be reflections of the Watcher story among the Mandaeans, see J. J. Buckley, *The Mandaeans*, Oxford 2002, 8. For the pagans, see below, notes 34, 38, 40f.

[11] *Genesis Rabba*, 26, 5; discussed, inter alia, by Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 91; Alexander, 'Targumim and Early Exegesis', 61f; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 208ff. The idea that they were sons of judges has a long and fascinating history of its own, rooted in Psalms 82.

[12] Alexander, 'Targumim and Early Exegesis', 64, 70f; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 213ff; J. Fossum, 'The Angel of the Lord in Samaritanism', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 46, 2001, 53n. Ps.-Jonathan also has a passage in which they are angels, cf. below, note 14.

[13] Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 149ff. Saʿadiya Gaon duly has *banū 'l-ashrāf* (Saadiyah Ben Joseph al-Fayyūmī, *Version arabe du pentateuque*, Paris 1893, 12), and elsewhere dismisses the idea of angels mating as a monstrous invention (id., *Iyov: ʿim targum e-ferush Seʿadiya ben Yosef*, ed. Y. D. Qafaḥ,

appear here and there in rabbinic literature, but with little trace, before the rise of Islam, of their angelic descent or sexual misconduct, let alone their illicit teaching.[14]

The Christians stuck to the story of the fallen angels for another century or two, impressed by its capacity to account for the prevalence of pagan cults and all the sins with which idolatry was held to go in tandem. The angels and their demonic offspring had enslaved mankind by teaching them murder, war, adultery, magic and other terrible things, not least worship of themselves in the guise of pagan deities, Justin Martyr (d. 165) explained, developing 1 Enoch 15, 8 and 19. The angels had taught humans astrology, magic, metallurgy, cosmetics, and idolatry, as Clement of Alexandria (d. c. 215), Tertullian (d. after 220) and Lactantius (d. c. 320) said.[15] Philosophically inclined Christians such as Origen (d. c. 255) interpreted the story allegorically,[16] but even he held the angels to have taught humans astrology.[17] That they and their demonic offspring were responsible for idolatry and diverse forms of illicit knowledge came to be a generally accepted Christian view. It was also as false gods and demons that the angels passed into Manichaean literature.[18]

By the third century, however, the Christians too had begun to turn against the story, and the Enoch literature in general.[19] The "sons of God" were not angels, it was now said, but rather righteous men, more precisely descendants of Seth who had been seduced by lascivious women descended from Cain in the period between the expulsion from Paradise and the flood. First encountered in Julius Africanus (fl. c. 200, a Syrian despite his name), this version of the story was to prevail in Greek and Syriac literature, and indeed in Catholic and Protestant interpretation up to modern times.[20] In short, the responsibility for evil was shifted from superior powers to humans themselves. In line with this, the origin of evil increasingly came to be located at the beginning of human

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Jerusalem 1972f, 27f (ch. i, §6) = *The Book of Theodicy*, tr. L. E. Goodman, New Haven and London 1988, 155f.

[14] Cf. *Babylonian Talmud*, Niddah 61a; Yoma 67b; Deuteronomy Rabbah 11,10 (guilty of sexual misconduct, but no mention of their illicit teaching); Targum Ps.-Jonathan (the *nephilim* were "Šemḥazai and Azael, these fell from heaven", taken by Alexander to antedate the suppression of the angelic interpretation, 'Targumim and Exegesis', 70f; followed by A. Y. Reed, 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah to Uzzah, Azzah, and Azael: 3 Enoch 5 (§§7-8) and Jewish Reception-History of 1 Enoch', *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 8, 2001, 123n; differently Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 213f, now seeing it as a later insertion). They reappear as angels in Sefer Hekhalot (3 Enoch), 5, also assigned to a late date by Reed ('From Asael and Šemiḥazah', 132ff; *Fallen Angels*, 256f).

[15] VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs', 44-54, 68-70, 85.

[16] Origen, *Contra Celsum* (tr. H. Chadwick, Cambridge 1953), 5, 55, based on Philo, *On the Giants*, 2, cf. L. R. Wickham, 'The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men: Genesis VI 2 in Early Christian Exegesis', in J. Barr and others, *Language and Meaning. Studies in Hebrew Language and Biblical Exegesis*, Leiden 1974, 142ff;VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs', 54-59, 81f.

[17] Origen, *Philocalia* (tr. G. Lewis, Edinburgh 1911), 23:6.

[18] Cf. the Psalms of Thomas IV (210.1 and 210:10), in T. Säve-Söderberg, *Studies in the Coptic Manichaean Psalm-Book*, Uppsala 1949, 127.

[19] Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 74ff; Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth*, 349ff; Wickham, 'Sons of God and the Daughters of Men', 135-47; VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs', 59f, 100f; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 194ff.

[20] Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 78ff; Dexinger, *Sturz*, 106ff; A. F. J. Klijn, *Seth in Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Literature*, Leiden 1977, 61ff; Africanus in VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs', 80f; Brock (tr.), *St Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns on Paradise*, Crestwood NY 1990, I, 11 and the note thereto (pp. 81, 189).

history, in the disobedience and expulsion of the devil and his hosts from heaven on the one hand and the sin and expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise on the other, as opposed to in the voluntary descent of the angels from heaven in the period before the flood. For all that, the Book of Watchers continued to be read by Greek and Syriac Christians. Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) even defended the Enoch book of which it formed part, convinced of its antediluvian origins; and unlike their Byzantine counterparts, Syriac chroniclers rarely use disclaimers about the reliability of the Jewish pseudepigrapha when they cite them.[21]

One reason why the Jews turned against the story is that angels, both pure and fallen, were getting out of control. There is a fair amount of evidence for veneration or actual worship of angels among the Jews of the first centuries CE,[22] sometimes involving the angels in general and sometimes a principal angel cast as mediator between God and mankind; speculation about such an intermediary had probably contributed to the rise of Christianity, and devotion to angels and/or an angelic viceregent (notably in the form of Metatron) continued in Judaism after the first two centuries, too.[23] Gnostics also operated with the notion of an intermediary, but they postulated that he was evil and filled the void between the all too distant God and mankind with demonic beings, convinced, like the pseudonymous Enoch, that human beings were victim of superior forces of evil beyond their control. Gnostic myths abound in sexual union by seduction or rape between evil archons and primordial humans, now by direct retelling of the Watcher story,[24] now by distant echo of it (or independently), and the result is sometimes called abortions (Hebr. *nephalim*, an alternative understanding of the *nephilim* of Gen. 6:1).[25] A similar filling up of divine space was underway in the "underworld" of Platonism, as Dillon calls the confluence of Gnostic, Hermetic and Chaldaean thought characteristic of late antique paganism.[26] That humanity is at the mercy of unfathomable forces of the universe is also the key conviction behind late antique magic, devoted to the control of such forces by manipulation of the angels in charge of them.[27]

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[21] Cf. W. Adler, 'Jacob of Edessa and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha in Syriac Chronography' in J. C. Reeves (ed.), *Tracing the Threads. Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, Atlanta 1994, 145; S. Brock, 'A Fragment of Enoch in Syriac', *Journal of Theologial Studies* 19, 1968, 626-31.

[22] How far the angels were actually worshipped is controversial, cf. L. T. Stuckenbruck, 'The Angelic Refusal of Worship: the Tradition and its Function in the Apocalypse of John', *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* 1994, 695f; id., *Angel Veneration and Christology*, Tübingen 1995; differently M. Simon, 'Remarques sur l'angélolâtrie juive au début de l'ère chrétienne', *Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres*, Comptes Rendus 1971, Javier-Mars, Paris 1971. It is with reference to excessive regard for angels that Alexander explains the change in Judaism ('Targumim and Early Exegesis', 68f).

[23] A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*, Leiden 1977; N. Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate. Angelic Vice Regency in Late Antiquity*. Leiden 1999; D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Philadelphia 2004, chs. 5-6; for Metatron, see below, notes 96f.

[24] Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 32 (note 54), 33, 35-7; Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony*, 75f, 81.

[25] Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, chs. 2, 8 (casting the Watcher story as the key to Gnosticism altogether); Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony*, 71f.

[26] R. Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary*, Leiden 1989, 8f; cf. J. Dillon, *The Middle Platonists*, London 1977, 384.

[27] H. D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation*, Chicago and London 1986, xlvii; cf. also S. Shaked, 'Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21, 1997, 104.

The rabbis reacted to these developments by both rejecting the story of the fallen angels *and* belittling the angels as a class.[28] (A similar reaction is observable on the part of the Samaritans.)[29] The rabbis did not have an answer to the problem of evil, which was acute thanks to the political disasters of the first and second centuries and the Christianisation of the Roman empire that had followed them. Rather, they coped with it by closing the door on the world outside and crediting evil, like everything else, to God while at the same time making Him so homely and familiar a figure that everything He did seemed bearable. It was not the case that there were "two powers in heaven", let alone "many ruling powers in heaven"; rather, God and Israel formed a tightknit family, whatever the ups and downs. Personal morality was what mattered, not the uncontrollable developments in the world of gentiles: evil was now dealt with primarily as an "evil inclination" (*yetzer ha-ra'*) in the human heart.[30]

The Christians, meanwhile, had split the godhead into three and allowed for an almost autonomous realm of evil, setting them well on the way in the Gnostic direction; but they saved their Biblical concept of the deity by casting God as the ultimate creator of the evil realm, while at the same time absolving him of responsibility for it by recourse to the concept of free will. The devil they placed in charge of the evil realm had a long history entwined with that of the fallen angels, who accompanied him in the transfer of the decisive fall from the period before the flood to the beginning of human history.[31] Pseudo-Enoch's explanation of the flood was discarded.

To both Jews and Christians, eliminating Enoch's fallen angels was all the more desirable in that the idea of angels copulating with women had come to feel offensive.[32] Angels were superior beings. Besides, they had no passions, and even if they did, they had no bodies. How could they desire the corporeal, let alone cause human reproduction? The whole story was perverse and absurd, Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444) insisted, stressing that the "sons of God" mentioned in Genesis were *not* to be understood as angels. "Is it not probable that many will be discouraged by this and choose sensuality.....if we believe that even the very angels fell subject to passion?", he asked.[33]

Meanwhile, the story of the "sons of God" had been taken up by pagans. Some adduced it in polemics against Christianity, arguing, as did Celsus (c. 170), that it showed Jesus not to have been the only angel to have come, or, as did Julian the Apostate (d. 363), that it proved Moses to have believed in many gods without knowing anything about Jesus. [34] (To late antique pagans, gods and angels were interchangeable, and Christ was commonly envisaged as an angel in early Christianity.[35]) Others read the story as an

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[28] Noted by Bamberger, *Fallen Angels* 92.
[29] Fossum, 'Angel of the Lord', 52f.
[30] Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, esp. 49, 57, 95, 101f; E. E. Urbach, *The Sages*, Jerusalem 1975, ch. 15.
[31] For all this, see Forsyth, *Satan and the Combat Myth*, 222ff and *passim.* The Watcher story began to be connected with that about Adam and Eve already in the first century BC.
[32] That they cannot sin is affirmed already by the Jew in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*, 79,1.
[33] Wickham, 'Sons of God and Daughters of Men', 135-38. Wickham's further argument regarding the role of Christology is opaque to me.
[34] Celsus in Origen, *Contra Celsum* (tr. H. Chadwick, Cambridge 1953), 5, 52; Julian, *Against the Galilees*, 290B-E, in W. C. Wright (ed. and tr.), *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, Cambridge Mass. and London 1913-23, iii, 400-3.
[35] For a classic work, see J. Barbel, *Christos Angelos*, Bonn 1941; for a more recent one, see C. A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christianity*, Leiden 1998. Like Jewish angel veneration/worship, it is best attested in the first two centuries CE, but surfaces thereafter too (cf. S. J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of*

account of the origins of the occult sciences. It was after all to the fallen angels that astrologers, alchemists, soothsayers, diviners, magicians and their likes were believed to owe their knowledge, as they themselves were well aware. A Syriac, i.e. pagan or Christian, incantation bowl against "all the evil magical arts" (presumably written by someone who saw his own magic as beneficent) refers to "angels that reveal the mysteries of their lord".[36] Zosimus (c. 300), a Hermetic alchemist from Panopolis, where the book of Enoch was still read in the fifth or sixth century, [37] says that the holy scriptures mentions angels who descended from heaven and mated with women, teaching them "all the arts of nature", and that they were punished for this since these arts were bad arts "of no benefit for the soul"; he adds that Hermes, too, talked about these events in his *Physika*, and that indeed they are mentioned in almost every exoteric or esoteric treatise. He is clearly pleased by the Biblical and Hermetic agreement on the angelic origin of the arts of nature, however lacking in benefit to the soul they might be.[38]

Zosimus' claim that the story had gone into esoteric works accords with a remark by Jacob of Edessa (d. 708), according to which Athanasius of Alexandria (d. 373) had proscribed the Enoch literature because heretics had incorporated it in their secret books.[39] There are in fact traces of 1 Enoch in the Hermetic literature,[40] and among the Hermetic works that Zosimus may have in mind is a small treatise known as *Isis the prophetess to her son Horus*. In this work, Isis tells of how one of the angels (or, according to one version, a prophet or angel) caught sight of her and wanted to make love with her, which she refused to do unless he would tell her about the preparation of gold and silver first; the angel said that this was beyond his ability, but sent another angel, Amnael, who also wanted to make love with her and who was eventually persuaded to part with his secrets. (Whether he got his payment is not stated.)[41]

As de Ménasce observes, in Isis' account the Watcher story seems to have fused with an Indian myth regarding two *ashvin*s, twin Vedic gods who roam about in the world of mortals and try to seduce a married woman, but merely succeed in rejuvenating her old husband instead.[42] In this story as in Enoch, the events lead to the appearance of temptations on earth, here by the distribution of intoxicating substances in drinks, women, gambling and sports; and this story, too, would have appealed to the practitioners

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the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption, Oxford 2002, ch. 3 and Appendix A, translating an Ethiopic work preserving a fifth-century Syrian narrative).

[36] J. Teixidor, 'The Syriac Incantation Bowls in the Iraq Museum', *Sumer* 18, 1962, 53.

[37] Cf. the date of Codex Panopolitanus (above, note 8).

[38] Zosimus quoted by Syncellus in R. P. Festugière, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, i, Paris 1944, 256; in J. Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, London 1970, 179; in Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 139f (whose translation I have followed); in VanderKam, '1Enoch, Enoch Motifs', 83f. For Zosimus' position, see D. Stolzenberg, 'Unpropitious Tinctures: Alchemy, Astrology & Gnosis according to Zosimus of Panopolis', *Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences* 49, 1999, 28 (I owe this reference to Albert de Jong).

[39] Adler, 'Jacob of Edessa', 145.

[40] Cf. M. Philonenko, 'Une Allusion de l'Asclepius au livre d'*Hénoch*', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, Leiden 1975, ii, 11-63.

[41] Festugière, *Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, i, 256-60 (two versions); Lindsay, 194f (amalgamated); cf. also M. Idel, 'The Origin of Alchemy according to Zosimos and a Hebrew Parallel', *Revue des Etudes Juives* 145, 1986, 117-24.

[42] P. J. de Ménasce, 'Une légende indo-iranienne dans l'angélologie judéo-musulmane: à propos de Hārūt et Mārūt', *Etudes Asiatiques* 1, 1947, 10; *Mahābhārata*, III (Vana Parva), 123-5.

of the arts of nature, for the *ashvin*s were physicians to the celestials and practitioners of the healing arts. The hypothesis that their adventures had fused with those of the fallen angels would account for three otherwise puzzling features of Isis' version: there are only two angels in it, as opposed to the two hundred in the Book of Watchers;[43] it only features one particular woman, as opposed to women in general; and the woman now obtains her secret knowledge by *not* mating with the celestial beings. It is presumably the same quasi-Indian version which is reflected in rabbinic allusions to the story in which the angels form a pair.[44] It is in any case this version which lies behind the Gnostic story of a woman called Norea, Noria, Noraia, Horea, Orea, Nuraita or the like, who resisted the attempts of the wicked archons to seduce her, to be rescued by Eleleth, a holy angel who revealed the truth to her.[45] (This seems to be the only form in which the Gnostics took a positive interest in the teaching of the Watchers, which they normally condemn, in so far as they mention it at all.)[46] It is also in this form that it was familiar to Muslim exegetes: two angels court one woman, who tricks them into parting with their secrets without mating with them. Though the rabbis and the churchmen had not succeeded in killing the story, they had clearly managed to relegate it to the fringes of respectable society. It was now mainly among pagans, Gnostics and devotees of the occult that it flourished, outside the mainstream communities or, if within them, in the somewhat marginal circles of alchemists, diviners and magicians.[47] It must have been from such circles that it passed to the Qurʾān.

The fallen angels in the Qurʾān.

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[43] 1 Enoch, 6. There are only 60 or 70 of them in Celsus (*Contra Celsum*, 5, 52).

[44] *Babylonian Talmud*, Yoma 67b (Azael and Uzza), *Deuteronomy Rabba* (11:10: Azah and Azael), and a probably late insertion in Targum Ps.-Jonathan (Azael and Šemḥazai, cf. above, note 14); similarly the much later 'Midrash on Šemḥazai and Azael' (ed., tr. and discussed on the basis of four versions in Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 321-39; also discussed in Reed, *Fallen Angels*, 258ff), and a late midrash on the virgin Istahar who is turned into a star as a reward for her resistance to sin (S. Liebermann, 'After Life in Early Rabbinic Literature', *Harry Austryn Wolfson Jubilee Volume*, English section, ii, Jerusalem 1965, 497).

[45] B. A. Pearson, 'The Figure of Norea in Gnostic Literature', *Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Gnosticism, Stockholm 1973*, Stockholm and Leiden 1977, 143-52; Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 53-55, 140f.

[46] The Watchers revealed the arts in the world and the mysteries of heaven to men, teaching them all they had seen in heaven, hell and on earth, according to Mani (*Kephalaia*, 92:24-31, in Reeves, *Jewish Lore in Manichaean Cosmogony*, 81); they taught magic, idolatry, and bloodshed, according to 'On the Origins of the World' (*The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, ed. J. M. Robinson, Leiden 1988, II, 5, 123). Most Gnostic works retell the story of the Watchers in recognizable form without saying anything about their teaching, see the 'Valentinian Exposition' (op. cit., XI, *2*, 38); the 'Apocryphon of John' (op. cit., II, *1*, 29); Agapius' summary of Awdi's doctrine in Agapius, *Kitāb al-ʿunwān* (ed. and tr. A. Vasiliev in *Patrologia Orientalis* VII, 1911, 564; cf. H.-C. Puech, *En quête de la Gnose*, Paris 1972, 275f); and the survey in VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs', 70-76.

[47] Just how marginal (or disreputable) these circles were, from the point of view of churchmen and rabbis, I do not know. But recourse to magicians and soothsayers was condemned at a synod of 576 (A. V. Williams, 'Zoroastrians and Christians in Sasanian Iran', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 78, 1996, 43; cf. 45 for similar condemnations on the Zoroastrian side), and though the rabbinic attitude is more nuanced, they come across as basically hostile too (cf. Urbach, *The Sages*, 97ff; B. Kern-Ulmer, 'The Depiction of Magic in Rabbinic Texts: the Rabbinic and the Greek Concept of Magic', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 27, 1996, 289-303).

In the Qurʾānic passage on Hārūt and Mārūt as in the Isis story, the angels form a pair, but they are not guilty of any sexual sins; they merely teach people magic. So too do the demons (indeed, the passage can be taken to say that the demons teach magic which they have learnt from the angels), but it is only the demons who render themselves guilty of *kufr* thereby. The angels are cast as agents of God: they warn their customers not to render themselves guilty of *kufr*, explaining that their own function is to test their faith (*innamā naḥnu fitna*); and what they teach is something sent down to them. Why angels should be teachers of magic, and how they came to be in Babylon, we are not told; nor are we told how, if at all, they relate to the demons. There is no suggestion that the latter are their giant sons; and though the false angels/gods of the *mushrikūn* are sometimes explained as demons (*jinn*) in the Qurʾān,[48] it is nowhere suggested there either that they were the offspring of angels.

The problem that preoccupies the Qurʾān in the passage on Hārūt and Mārut is that some People of the Book (i.e. Jews or Christians) prefer magic to the truth. In the preceding verse it complains that a party of the People of the Book react to the fact that a messenger has come to them from God by throwing the book behind their backs (2:101); they prefer to follow that which the demons related to Solomon, i.e. magic.[49] Solomon was not an unbeliever (even though he used magic),[50] we are assured, but the People of the Book clearly are, for they disregard the advice of Hārūt and Mārūt not to turn infidel by using their services. From the two angels they learn "that with which to split up a man and his wife" (just as in the Book of Watchers the angels teach the daughters of men "to make hate-inducing charms", 1 Enoch, 9:7), and thereby they forfeit their share in the hereafter (2:102). We clearly find ourselves right in the middle of Jewish magic, a well attested phenomenon, and one in which speculation about Solomon is well known to have played a role.[51] Famed in antiquity, it is represented in the Greek magical papyri from Egypt, dating from the second century BC to the fifth century CE (though these texts are generally pagan),[52] in Aramaic amulets mainly from Palestine, in incantation bowls from Sasanian Iraq,[53] in the Hekhalot literature, reflecting the period c. 200-800 CE,[54] in

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[48] Q. 6:100; 34:40f; 37:158. *Jinn* are not normally demons, but rather spirits who may or may not be evil, but in the Qurʾān the word seems to be used almost synonymously with *shayāṭīn*.

[49] According to many exegetes, the demons did not relate things to Solomon, but rather against him. *Talā ʿalayhi* normally means "he related/recited to somebody", but the verse is problematic because it has them relate things *ʿalā mulk Sulaymān* rather than *ʿalā 'l-malik Sulaymān*. Some exegetes tried to solve the problem by understanding the *ʿalā* as adversarial (against the kingship of Solomon) ; others read it as chronological (at the time of Solomon's kingdom). Since none of these constructions really click, it seems more likely that *mulk* is in need of emendation.

[50] Or, in the understanding of the exegetes, even though the demons maligned him by calling him a magician rather than a prophet.

[51] Cf. P. Torijano, *Solomon the Esoteric King: from King to Magus*, Leiden 2002, esp. 119ff, 192ff.

[52] Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*, xli, xlv.

[53] See (for example) the introduction to J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations from Late Antiquity*, Leiden 1985.

[54] Cf. P. Schäfer, 'Merkavah Mysticism and Magic', in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After*, ed. P. Schäfer and J. Dan, Tübingen 1993; id., 'Jewish Magic in Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages', *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 41, 1990, 76-79.

manuals for sorcerers reflecting the period from late antiquity onwards,[55] and in the Geniza.[56] In Mesopotamia and Iran the great majority of incantation bowls were made by Jews, often for clients bearing Iranian names, suggesting that magic was regarded as something of a Jewish specialisation there;[57] and it must have been from a region within the Iranian sphere of influence that the story passed to the Qurʾān, for Hārūt and Mārūt are Haurvatāt and Ameretāt, two of the Zoroastrian divine beings known as *amesha spenta*s [58] and it is in Bābil that the Qurʾān places them.

De Ménasce conjectured that it was via the Manichaeans that the angels passed into the Qurʾān, on the grounds that it was probably Mani who gave the angels Iranian names, just as he (or his disciples) renamed the giants.[59] But such evidence as we have goes against this suggestion. In Genesis, the angels and giants are anonymous; in the Book of Watchers they have acquired names, and here the leading angel is called Shemiḥazah while the one who reveals the divine secrets is called Asael (ʿśʾl), also rendered Azael (ʿzʾl) and Azazel (ʿzʾzl – a name which conflated him with the devil**)**.[60] The fragments of Mani's *Book of Giants* do indeed iranianise the names of two giants as Sām and Narīmān, but they just adapt Šemḥazai as Šahmīzād;[61] and though we do not know how Azael's name was rendered, the fragments operate with two hundred Watchers (now demons) rather than two.[62] It is more likely to have been via magic that the angels were renamed, given that it is in the context of magic that the Qurʾān mentions them. Artat Amurtat (presumably from Haurvatāt and Ameretāt) figures among the *nomina barbara* in magical texts from Iraq.[63]

Tafsīr.

It is a striking fact that although the Qurʾān gives the angels Iranian names and says very little about them, the exegetes effortlessly recognized them as the fallen angels from the Watcher story. The Iraqi exegete al-Kalbī (d. 763) even knew their pre-Iranian names. In his version there are three angels, as also in the Sefer Hekhalot (3 Enoch), perhaps by development of the three (or four) angels who observe the misbehaviour of the giants from heaven in the Book of the Watchers.[64] Sefer Hekhalot called them Uza, Aza and

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[55] Cf. M. Gaster (ed. and tr.), *The Sword of Moses: an Ancient Book of Magic*, London 1896; reprinted in his *Studies and Texts*, New York 1928, i (translation) and iii (text); M. A. Morgan (tr.), *Sepher Ha-Razim: the Book of Mysteries*, Chico CA 1983; Torijano, *Solomon*, 198ff, with further references.

[56] P. Schäfer and S. Shaked (eds. and trs.), *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, Tübingen 1994.

[57] Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 18.

[58] De Ménasce, 'Une légende indo-iranienne', 10f.

[59] De Ménasce, 'Une légende indo-iranienne', 16f.

[60] Cf. the useful survey in M. Black (tr.), *The Book of Enoch or 1 Enoch*, Leiden 1985, 121, and below on the forms in the magic bowls. The form Azazel arose by identification of the fallen angel and the demonic figure to whom a sin-laden scapegoat was sent on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16).

[61] W. B. Henning, 'The Book of Giants', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 9, 1943-6, 60; W. Sundermann, 'Ein Weiteres Fragment aus Manis Gigantenbuch', in his *Manichaica Iranica*, ed. C. Reck and others, ii, Rome 2001, 496 (of the original pagination).

[62] Henning, 'Book of Giants', 68f, 71; W. Sundermann, 'Mani's "Book of the Giants" and the Jewish Books of Enoch', in his *Manichaica Iranica*, ii, 42 (of the original pagination).

[63] Shaked, 'Popular Religion in Sasanian Babylonia', 110, 113.

[64] 1 *Enoch* 9; cf. *Jubilees* (tr. O. S. Wintermute in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ii, New York 1985), 7:21-26.

Azael (ʿwzʾ, ʿzʾ and ʿzʾl) and the like, with Azael as the stablest element.[65] An Aramaic incantation bowl which also operates with three angels on the theme of ʿz (and which invokes pagan, Jewish and Christian divinities alike) calls them Azael, Azael, and Az(a)ziel (ʿzʾl, ʿzʾl, ʿzzyʾl), where the second Azael should perhaps be understood as Azzael or Uzael or the like.[66] Other bowls which only have two ʿz names call them Aza and Azael (ʿzʾ, ʿzʾl).[67] Al-Kalbī calls them ʿAzā,ʿAzāyā, and ʿAzazīl (ʿzʾ, ʿzyʾ, ʿzzyl). One of them failed to make the descent, he says, while the other two bore the additional names of Hārūt and Mārūt.[68] Al-Kalbī and other exegetes also knew the events to be associated with Enoch (now called Idrīs).[69]

As the exegetes tell the story, it is not about angelic revolt or the origin of sin. Rather, it is about how tough it is to be a human being: even the angels lost control of themselves when they experienced the enormous surge of sexual passion. Cyril of Alexandria's warnings notwithstanding, this plainly did not serve to encourage immorality, but on the contrary to warn against smug self-confidence; and if the angels came out badly in the story, it only went to show that they had no reason to feel superior. The exegetes thus linked the story with the theme, familiar from rabbinic literature, of rivalry between angels and human beings: the story put the angels in their place.[70] Though the exegetes went out of their way to stress that angels were not *normally* endowed with passions, some continued to find the story offensive and construed Hārūt and Mārūt as human beings by reading *malikayn* ("two kings") for *malakayn* ("two angels") at Q. 2:102, or they read the verse as saying that magic was *not* sent down to the two angels.[71] (The story of the sons of Seth seduced by the daughters of Cain was well

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[65] Reed, 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah', 122 and n64. P. Alexander transliterates the names as ʿUzzah, ʿAzzah and ʿAzaʾel in his translation of 3 Enoch, 4 and 5 (in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. i, New York 1983, 258, 260).

[66] D. Levene, *A Corpus of Magic Bowls: Incantation Texts in Jewish Aramaic from Late Antiquity*, London 2003, no. M163:18 (§5). The clients want their opponent punished in the same way that ʿzʾl w-ʿzʾl w-ʿzzyʾl, who transgressed the command of their lord, were pressed under the mountain with their faces downwards by angels sent against them.

[67] Cf. below, notes 120f. There are also manuscripts of Sefer Hekhalot which only has two ʿz names, again ʿzʾ/ʿzh and ʿzʾl (cf. Reed, 'From 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah', 122).

[68] Abū Bakr ʿAtīq, *Tafsir-i Sūrābādī*, i, 105; Abdullaeva, *Lakhorskhij tafsir*, 42f = 79ff.

[69] The angels descend to earth in the time of Idrīs (Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, i, 458, citing al-Rabīʿ; al-Māwardī, *Tafsīr*, ed. Kh. M. Khiḍr, Kuwait 1982, i, 142; Qazwīnī in Jung, *Fallen Angels*, 130); as in the *Book of Watchers* (13:4), they ask him to intercede for them (Kalbī in Abdullaeva, *Lakhorskhij tafsir*, 44 = 81).

[70] Cf. P. Schäfer, *Rivalität zwischen Engeln und Menschen*, Berlin 1975; J. C. Reeves, 'Some Explorations of the Intertwining of Bible and Qurʾān', in J. C. Reeves (ed.), *Bible and Qurʾān: Essays in Scriptural Intertextuality*, Atlanta 2003, 52ff. Cf. also S. Stroumsa, '"What is man": Psalms 8:4-5 in Jewish, Christian and Muslim Exegesis in Arabic', *Henoch* 14, 1992.

[71] Cf. Jung, *Fallen Angels*, 126f, 128f, 135, 139. The reading *malikayn* is reported for al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī and Ibn ʿAbbās (Ibn Khālawayh, *al-Mukhtaṣar fī shawādhdh al-Qurʾān*, ed. G. Bergsträsser, Paris 2005 (first published Leipzig 1934), 8), al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzaḥim (*Tafsīr al-Ḍaḥḥāk*, assembled and edited by M. Sh. A. al-Zāwaytī, Cairo, 1999, 161, no. 68), Saʿīd b. Jubayr, al-Zuhrī and others (ʿA.-L. al-Khaṭīb, *Muʿjam al-qirāʾāt*, i, Damascus 2000, 164 (drawn to my attention by Joseph Witztum).

known, but not as an alternative to the Watcher story.)[72] Rationalists such as the Muʿtazilite Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī (wr. c. 355/966) objected to it in much the same terms as Cyril of Alexandria: how could spirits without bodies have passions or make love?[73] For all that, the story retained its popularity. Indeed, it returned to the world of high culture, and not only for Muslims, but also for Jews, who liked the Muslim version of the story even though their own exegetes continued to identify the Biblical sons of God as human beings.[74] The story proved extremely longlived, too. In 1915 an Indian Muslim in Germany wrote a summary of the story of Hārūt and Mārūt in Persian for the Orientalist Littmann: it now involved two women to match the two angels, the women had become singers and dancers, and both ended up as planets; that apart, the story was much as it had been told by al-Kalbī and his likes over a thousand years earlier.[75]

Other echoes.

As Reeves notes, there seems to be a second reflection of the Book of Watchers in Q. 2:30, on God's creation of Adam.[76] In the Qurʾān as in the Jewish and Christian literature of the time, it is at the dawn of human history that sin comes into the world, thanks to an arrogant angel who is expelled from heaven and proceeds to seduce the daughters of men in the form of Eve. There had been much interaction between the Biblical story of Adam and Eve and that about the sons of God and daughters of men as developed by later authors, and motifs originally associated with the flood had been transferred to the time of the creation.[77] In the Qurʾānic account of the arrogant figure, here known as Iblīs, the fact that he is envisaged now as an angel (Q. 7:11; 15:28-31; 17:61; 38:73) and now as a demon (*min al-jinn*, Q. 18:50) is presumably an Enochic legacy. But it is in the account of God's creation of Adam that we encounter a more direct reflection of the Book of Watchers.

In Q. 2:30 God tells the angels that he intends to create Adam, which is also what he does in rabbinic accounts (but not in Christian ones);[78] and here as there, the angels object to God's plan. Both versions, in other words, pick up the theme of rivalry between angels and humans. In the rabbinic accounts the angels sometimes object to God's plan on

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[72] Cf. al-Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh al-rusul wa'l-mulūk*, ed. M. J. de Goeje and others, Leiden 1879-1901, i (tr. F. Rosenthal, *The History of al-Ṭabarī*, i, Albany 1989), 168ff; al-Yaʿqūbī, *Taʾrīkh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma, Leiden 1883, i, 5ff; Jung, *Fallen Angels*, 124ff.

[73] Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa'l-taʾrīkh*, ed. and tr. C. Huart, Paris 1899-1919, iii, 15 (Jung, *Fallen Angels*, 128). Similarly Saadiya Gaon (above, note 13).

[74] Cf. Bamberger, *Fallen Angels*, 113ff and 119ff; Reed, *Fallen Angels*, ch. 7; *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. 'fall of angels'.

[75] Littmann, 'Hārūt und Mārūt', 70ff. Hārūt and Mārūt also passed into English literature, both serious and lighthearted; in Sir Rider Haggard's *Ivory Child*, published in 1916, they are African magicians who are announced by the butler as "Mr. Hare-root and Mr. Mare-root" (*Encyclopaedia of Iran*, s.v. 'Hārūt and Mārūt'; I owe this reference to Mohsen Ashtiany).

[76] Reeves, 'Some Explorations', 52ff.

[77] See the references given above, 3, 31.

[78] Origen is exceptional in holding the same opinion on the Christian side (R. McL. Wilson, 'The Early History of the Exegesis of Gen. 1.26', *Studia Patristica*, i, 1957, 420). The Christians typically seeing God as addressing Christ, the Logos.

the ground that mortals are useless and weak (cf. Psalms, 8:5; 144:3-4);[79] at other times they object that man is all falsehood and discord,[80] or they enquire what his deeds will be like,[81] or God tells them that he will be righteous without telling them that he will be wicked too.[82] In the Qurʾān they object to the creation of a being who "will do corruption in the earth and shed blood", and God overrules them, saying that he knows what they do not. Here as there, God knows something that he is not telling the angels, but here it is the angels who foresee the wickedness of mankind, and there is a new stress on bloodshed. As Reeves says, this would appear to reflect Genesis, 6:11-13, on the generation of the flood who "corrupted the earth" and "engaged in violence", as retold in the Book of the Watchers: here three or four angels observing the earth from heaven see "much blood being shed upon the earth, and all the oppression being wrought upon the earth".[83] The events leading to the flood having been transferred to the beginning of human history, the angelic objections are now made, not on the basis of observation of the earth in the time of Enoch, but rather by way of foresight at the time of Adam's creation, and they no longer comment on the terrible behaviour of the giants in the pre-flood generation, but rather on that of all too fallible humans in general. ("Corruption in the earth" is denounced in many other passages, too.) In the Qurʾān as in the rabbinic literature, however, God overrules the angels, putting them in their place: for all their faults, humans have a special place with Him.

In the exegetical literature the transfer of the events from the flood generation to human pre-history had other repercussions. The Book of Watchers presents the righteous angels as descending to the earth to fight the giant offspring of their fallen colleagues. In the exegetical and historical literature of the Muslims, the giants have become an angelic tribe of *jinn* who lived on earth, where the angel and/or *jinn* Iblīs, the future Devil, was sent to serve as their judge, or he was the ruler of heaven and earth at the time until he grew arrogant and disobeyed; or the *jinn* became infidels and caused corruption in the earth, whereupon Iblīs was sent against them with an army of angels, which caused him to become arrogant and rebel.[84] These events are sometimes used to explain Adam's status as *khalīfa* (deputy or successor): Adam succeeded or replaced those angels or spirits on earth, we are told. The implicit message is that Adam's title did *not* mean "deputy of God on earth", or in other words that the caliphs could not invoke Qurʾānic support when they styled themselves deputies of God, as they did from ʿUthmān

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[79] Thus Reeves, 'Some Explorations'. 53.
[80] *Bereshit Rabba* 8, 5, where the angels are divided over the question.
[81] *Babylonian Talmud*, Sanhedrin 38b, where God responds by destroying them until he gets the answer he wants.
[82] *Bereshit Rabba*, 8, 4.
[83] 1 *Enoch* 9; cf. *Jubilees*, 7:21-26, both adduced by Reeves, 'Some Explorations', 53f. There are three angels in Isaac's translation (Michael, Surafel and Gabriel), four in Nickelsburg and Vanderkam's (Michael, Sariel, Raphael and Gabriel). Reeves' alternative suggestion that Q. 2:30 alludes to Cain's murder of Abel is less persuasive. Cf. also his 'Sefer ʿUzza wa-ʿAza(z)el: Exploring Early Jewish Mythologies of Evil', an account of a monograph in process, at http://www.religiousstudies.uncc.edu/jcreeves/sefer_uzza_waazazel.htm.
[84] For an accessible survey, see Ṭabarī, *Taʾrīkh*, 79-85; for many others, in which the fallen angels (complete with the name ʿAzāzīl) are easily recognized, see M. J. Kister, 'Legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* Literature: the Creation of Ādam and Related Stories', in A. Rippin, *Approaches to the History of the Interpretation of the Qurʾān*, Oxford 1988, 88ff.

onwards. One part of the story thus came to be associated with a wholly new set of burning problems, once again in connection with political changes.[85]

There could be a third reflection, or more precisely development, of a theme from the Watcher story in the Qurʾānic stress on the fact that the angels only descend at the command of God, or with His permission. In Q. 19:64 unnamed speakers, generally assumed to be the angels, declare that, "We do not descend (*natanazzalu*) except at the command of your (sg.) Lord", adding that everything belongs to Him and that He does not forget, with the next verse spelling out the implications: "so worship (sg.) Him". In 97:4 the night of *qadr* is identified as the night in which the angels and the spirit descend (*tanazzalu*) with God's permission.[86] Neither passage has anything to do with the Enoch story. (19:64f comes not long after the mention of Enoch's elevation to an exalted place, 19:56f, but it does not seem to be connected with it, or indeed with anything that precedes or follows it.) The insistence that the angels only descend with God's permission, or at His command, is nonetheless striking, especially in 97:4, where there does not seem to be any reason to stress it. (The exegetes claim that the obscure 19:64 was a response to Muḥammad's impatience at a time when Gabriel had long stayed away.) In 65:12 it is simply God's command that descends (*yatanazzalu*), without reference to the angels or the spirit who serve as its bearers: in all three passages we are reminded that the only power in the universe is God. The same point is also made in polemics against the alleged angels of the polytheists: whether they are genuine angels falsely worshipped, demons, or just empty names, they have no power (e.g. 7:191-3; 21:42f; 36:23, 74f); it is only with God's permission that they can act (53:26). Rebellious angels who descended from heaven of their own accord were problematic from this point of view. Well before the rise of Islam, however, there were some who claimed that the Watchers had descended to the earth with God's permission. In Jubilees (c. 150 BCE) they come down "to teach the sons of man, and perform judgement and righteousness on earth".[87] In the Jewish Christian Pseudo-Clementine Homilies (c. 300 CE) we are expressly told that they asked for permission to descend, here as in *tafsīr* because they are upset by human ingratitude to God and wish to convict and punish the guilty, that is to act as judges.[88] And in Sefer Hekhalot the angels who descend no longer seem to include the wicked ones at all: it is the ministering angels who come down from heaven, they do so to execute God's will on earth, and their descent is placed in the quasi-Paradisical period after the fall familiar from the Christian story of the sons of Seth and daughters of Cain; that those who taught mankind sorcery were also angels by origin is left unstated.[89] In line with this, the Qurʾān nowhere says that Hārūt and Mārūt had defied God. Since their status as angels is accepted, they are presented as obedient even as teachers of sorcery (2:102). What is

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[85] Cf. Kister, ' 'Legends in *tafsīr* and *ḥadīth* Literature', 85f; W. al-Qāḍī, 'The Term "khalīfa" in early exegetical literature', *Die Welt des Islams* 28, 1988, esp. 399f, 410f; P. Crone and M. Hinds, *God's Caliph. Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam*, Cambridge 1986, 6-19; cf. also P. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (American title *God's Rule*), Edinburgh 2004, 40f.

[86] My thanks to Joseph Witztum for drawing this passage to my attention.

[87] *Jubilees*, 4:15.

[88] Clement of Alexandria (attrib.), *The Homilies* (tr. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, xvii, Edinburgh 1870), VIII, 12; the entire passage on the angels is translated in VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs', 76-78. On the work, see A. Y. Reed, '"Jewish Christianity" after the "Parting of the Ways"', in A. H. Becker and A. Y. Reed (eds.), *The Ways that Never Parted*, Tübingen 2003.

[89] *Sefer Hekhalot*, 5.

stressed is that they cannot harm anyone "except with God's permission". But the repeated reminders in other contexts that angels do not descend without being ordered or permitted to do by God are likely to be inspired by familiarity with claims to the contrary.

Finally, in the Qurʾān, 33:33, the following words are addressed to the wives of the Prophet: "stay in your houses and do not make a display, like that of the first Jahiliyya (*al-jāhiliyya al-ūlā*)". The reference here would seem to be to the women who had been taught to beautify themselves by the angels (1 Enoch 8:1), an innovation which was singled out for particular reprehension by Tertullian in number of writings: the angels were responsible for the means of "womanly ostentation" such as jewelry and eye-make up; it was on account of the angels that they had to be veiled, he claimed.[90] The Book of Watchers, as also Jubilees and Christian works, sees the flood as the first global disaster to overtake mankind, prefiguring the last judgement.[91] In 1 Enoch the flood is explicitly called "the first end".[92] That the first end should have been preceded by the first period of ignorance/barbarism is a natural inference, and the Christians seem to have made it too, though the one example I have come across lacks the eschatological perspective.[93] Some exegetes duly assign the first Jahiliyya mentioned in the Qurʾān to the period before the flood, either between Adam and Noah or between Idrīs and Noah, explaining it with reference to a story of the people of the mountain versus those of the plains (i.e. a version of the Christian story which replaced the sons of God and daughters of men with Sethians and Cainites).[94]

The overall impression conveyed by these references is that the Watcher story formed part of the general background against which the Qurʾān was revealed. The story clearly did not come directly from the Book of Watchers. The fact that there are only two fallen angels in the Qurʾān, that they bear Iranian names and are located in Bābil, that the angelic comments on human misbehaviour are set in the time of Adam rather than that of Enoch, that they are associated with the theme of rivalry between angels and humans, and that Enoch's own time had apparently come to be known as the first Jāhiliyya, all this goes to show that the material had long circulated, in written and/or oral form, in circles which continued to revere the Enoch tradition, but which also participated in developments among mainstream Jews and Christians. Three of the four Qurʾānic allusions come in Medinese suras (2:30, 102; 33:33); the fourth, which is not so much an allusion as further thought about angelic descent, comes in Meccan ones (19:64; 97:4).

ʿUzayr.

The possibly fifth example appears in the 9:30, another Medinese sura, in which the Jews are famously accused of regarding a certain ʿUzayr as the son of God:

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[90] VanderKam, '1 Enoch, Enochic Motifs', 51, 68; cf. also 66, on Clement of Alexandria.

[91] J. C. VanderKam, 'The Righteousness of Noah', in G. W. E. Nickelsburg (ed.), *Ideal Figures in Ancient Judaism*, Chicago 1980, 25f.

[92] 1 Enoch, 93,4.

[93] Epiphanius identifies the first sect as Barbarism (*barbarismos*), which lasted from Adam to Noah, marked by Adam's fall, Cain's fratricide, and the introduction of sorcery, witchcraft, licentiousness, adultery and iniquity in the time of Jared, Enoch's father (*Panarion*, book I, ed. H. Kroll, Leipzig 1915; tr. F. Williams, Leiden 1987, Proem, I, 3, 1; Anacephalaeosis 1, 1; sect 1).

[94] Cf. Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ*, xii, 4f. For the Sethians and Cainites, see the references above, note 20.

> "The Jews say, ʿUzayr is the son of God; the Christians say, the Masīḥ is the son of God. That is what they say with their mouths, imitating the unbelievers before them. God curse them, how deluded they are".

In the Qurʾān, a son or daughter of God is always an allegedly divine being, usually Christ (as here) or the gods/angels worshipped by the so-called polytheists (*mushrikūn*), so the charge that is being levelled against the offending parties here is deification of created beings. Even when the Jews and Christians are accused of calling themselves sons of God, the implicit charge is of deification: the retort includes the point that the Jews and Chritians are just human beings created by Him (*bashar mimman khalaqa*, 5:18). Of course, the Jews and Christians did not deify themselves, nor is the author of the accusation likely to have thought that they did: he is simply being polemical. But here at least we know where he got his polemical ammunition from (ultimately Deut. 14:1; Psalms 82:6; John 1:12). The same cannot be said in the case of ʿUzayr.

The exegetes almost unanimously identify ʿUzayr as Ezra,[95] and modern commentators usually follow suit; but the Jews did not call Ezra the son of God, let alone deify him, as they themselves pointed out. This was well known to the exegetes, who responded by postulating that a *small* group of Jews had worshipped Ezra as the son of God in Medina at the Prophet's time, or that just *one* man had done so, or alternatively that all of them had done so in the *past*, when Ezra had restored the Torah to them, but that they had since stopped, or that they were still doing it *somewhere else*: the Jewish denial of the charges could thus be discounted.[96] Similar suggestions have been made by modern scholars too.[97] But the Jews were surely right to remain unpersuaded.

Polemics are not of course a genre conducive to accuracy, but polemical charges do need a sting in order to hurt, and it is hard to see where it was in this particular case. The passage proved more of a liability to the Muslims themselves than it did to the Jews. It thus seems unlikely that Ezra was meant, but what is the alternative?

One of the more interesting suggestions is by Newby. According to him, ʿUzayr is indeed Ezra, but only in name; in substance he is Enoch, with whom, in Newby's view, he had come to be identified thanks to the fact that both of them were scribes who had been translated directly to heaven instead of dying; Enoch in his turn was identified with the angel Metatron, who was regarded as "the lesser YHWH" in circles cultivating merkaba mysticism; and as Metatron he was chief of the angels who were known as "sons of God" (and whose appellation had somehow rubbed off on him?); the term "son of God" could in any case be applied to any righteous men. "It is easy, then, to imagine that among the Jews of the Ḥijâz who were apparently involved in the mystical speculations associated with the *merkâbâh*, Ezra, because of the traditions of his

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[95] For an exception, see below, note 108.

[96] Cf. M. Ayoub, 'ʿUzayr in the Qurʾan and Muslim Tradition' in W. M. Brinner and S. D. Ricks (eds.), *Studies in Islamic and Judaic Traditions*, Atlanta 1986, 11ff; H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Intertwined Worlds: Medieval Islam and Bible Criticism*, Princeton 1992, 51ff; J. Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Leiden 2001-6, s.v. 'Ezra' (Abu-Rabiʿ).

[97] Cf. below, note 106. Cf. also V. Comerro, 'Esdras est-il le fils de Dieu?', *Arabica* 52, 2005, 166f, 170-72, where other modern suggestions are noted.

translation, because of his piety, and particularly because he was equated with Enoch as the Scribe of God, could be termed one of the *Bene Elohîm*".[98]

This is a bit complicated. If I have understood Newby correctly, he sees the Qurʾān as taking issue with Jewish speculation that "perhaps -- God forbid -- there are two powers in heaven", as disapproving rabbis put it.[99] The second power was a principal angel, who was envisaged in some circles as Metatron, the angel who is a transfigured version of Enoch in Sefer Hekhalot,[100] a work of which the relevant part is assumed to be pre-Islamic.[101] So far, so good, but as the complications suggest, the evidence does not quite fit. The Qurʾān does not speak of Metatron or Enoch or even Idrīs (the name under which Enoch usually figures in the Islamic tradition), but rather of ʿUzayr -- and getting Ezra into position as the second power in heaven is hard work. One can try with reference to IV Ezra (= 2 Esdras, 3-14, in the Apocrypha), 14:9, where God promises Ezra that "you shall be taken up from among men, and henceforth you shall live with my Son and with those who are like you, until the times are ended".[102] It sounds as if Ezra is being promised angelification similar to Enoch's here, and the work probably did originally end with his assumption to heaven.[103] For this reason IV Ezra figures in the attempts of several scholars to solve the problem of ʿUzayr, sometimes along with the Greek Apocalypse of Ezra.[104] But it is the messiah, not Ezra, who is here called the son of God.[105] Scholars who focus on the Ezra literature accordingly have to postulate either that there was a hitherto unknown Jewish sect which elevated Ezra to divine sonship[106] or else

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[98] G. D. Newby, *The History of the Jews of Arabia from ancient Times to their Eclipse under Islam*, Columbia SC 1988, 59-61.

[99] See the references given above, note 23.

[100] 3 Enoch, 3-16; cf. Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate*, 35f, 53.

[101] Alexander placed the material about Enoch and Metatron (chs. 3-16) in the period c. 450-850 in an early article (P. S. Alexander, 'The Historical Setting of the Hebrew Book of Enoch', *Journal of Jewish Studies* , 28, 1977, 159, 164); but he has since dated the entire work in its present form to probably the sixth/seventh century CE ('From Son of Adam to Second God', in M. E. Stone and T. A. Bergren, *Biblical figures outside the Bible*, Harrisburg, PA, 1997, 104f); cf. also J. Dan, *The Ancient Jewish Mysticism*, Tel Aviv 1975, 122, 124 (c. sixth century CE). For further references, see Reed, 'From Asael and Šemiḥazah', 108, note 10.

[102] Cf. B. M. Metzger (tr.), 'The Fourth Book of Ezra', in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, i, New York 1983, with an introduction.

[103] Cf. R. A. Kraft, '"Ezra" Materials in Judaism and Christianity', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt: Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der Neueren Forschung* (ed H. Temporini and W. Haase), II (*Principat*), 19.1, Berlin 1979, 129. The text casually refers to "before he was taken up" (8:19); Ezra is told to divest himself of his human nature (14:14), and the work concludes with his assumption in eastern versions, including the Syriac (given in the margin in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible).

[104] Cf. M. E. Stone, 'Greek Apocalypse of Ezra', in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, i, New York 1983. Here Ezra actually gets to heaven, but apparently only on a temporary basis, since the text ends with his death and burial (7:14f).

[105] The son also appears at IV Ezra, 7:29, on "my son the Messiah".

[106] J. Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, Berlin and Leipzig 1926, 127f; H. Speyer, *Die Biblischen Erzählungen im Quran*, Gräfenhainischen n.d. (preface dated 1931), 413. Even if such a sect had existed, it is hard to believe that it should have come to Muḥammad's attention without being known to the Jews themselves. For comparable suggestions without reference to the Ezra literature, see H. Z. Hirschberg, 'Ezra', in *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (a Yemeni sect postulated by Ibn Ḥazm); J. Walker, 'Who is ʿUzair?', *The Muslim World* 19, 1929, 303-6 (the Samaritans made up the charge).

that Muḥammad simply got his information wrong.[107] That Muḥammad got something wrong is also required by the hypothesis that in substance ʿUzayr is Malachi.[108] Newby wisely refrains from going down that road.

Metatron and Enoch were not called sons of God either, however. This is why Newby claims both that Metatron was chief of the fallen angels known as "sons of God" and that any righteous man could be thus called. But the first claim appears to be a straightforward mistake. To the extent that Metatron was Enoch, he was indeed associated with the fallen angels known as sons of God, but he was not their chief; nor is there any evidence that the label "son of God" was ever transferred to him. As for the second claim, it was back in Graeco-Roman times any righteous man could be known as son of God.[109] The rabbis are said to have extended the sonship to every Israelite, or indeed every human being, at some point, but this does not actually solve the problem; for what the Jews are being accused of in Q. 9:30 is not calling all Israelites or human beings sons of God (à la Q. 5:18), but rather of using the expression of one specific figure; and if it had been possible to speak of Enoch/Ezra as a son of God in circles cultivating merkaba mysticism, why were the Jews so puzzled by the Qurʾānic charge?

Given that the Jews simply did not recognize the sin they were accused of, it seems more likely that the identification of ʿUzayr as Ezra is mistaken. This possibility was rejected by both Horovitz and Künstlinger, but their own suggestions work no better than Newby's.[110] Where do we go from there?

Newby must be right that we are up against something to do with angel worship. This could admittedly be questioned on the grounds that 9:30 presents the Jewish view of ʿUzayr and the Christian view of Christ as parallel errors, suggesting that both parties were guilty of deifying human beings. But the parallelism lies in the fact that both are deifying *created* beings. Worship of Christ and angels is also put on a par in 4:172: "The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary does not disdain being a servant of God, nor do the angels who are drawn near (*al-malāʾika al-muqarrabūn*)". Like Christ, the angels wrongly

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[107] Cf. D. Künstlinger, 'ʿUzair is der Sohn Allāhs', *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 35, 1932, 381-3, suggesting that Muḥammad mistook the name of the book for the name of the son of God mentioned in it. For another hypothesis requiring him to mistake something, see Ginzberg in the following note.

[108] This theory was advocated already in medieval times. Al-Biqāʿī (d. 885/1480), *Naẓm al-durar fī tanāsub al-āyāt wa 'l-suwar*, Hyderabad 1969-84, viii, 439, cites the Jewish convert al-Samawʾal al-Maghribī for the view that ʿUzayr is not Ezra in the sense of the restorer of the Hebrew Bible. Al-Mahghribī's own view was that ʿUzayr, whom he calls "al-ʿUzayr", was Eleazar (cf. his *Ifḥām al-yahūd*, ed. M. ʿA. al-Sharqāwī, Cairo 1986, 152), but al-Biqāʿī says that ʿUzayr is the prophet Malachi (who is identified with Ezra in the Talmud (Megilla 15a) and elsewhere). The same suggestion was made, apparently independently, by L. Ginzberg, *Legend of the Jews*, Philadelphia 1909-38, vi, 432. Since Malachi (which means "my angel") is nowhere called a son of God, Ginzberg asks whether Muḥammad confused "messenger (i.e. angel) of God" with "son of God". (I owe almost all of this to Joseph Witztum.)

[109] *The Jewish Encyclopaedia*, New York [1964], s.v. 'son of God', with reference to Wisdom of Solomon, 2:13, 16, 18; Ecclesiasticus, 4:10; cf. also Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 145; id., *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, I, 92; Justin Martyr, *Apology*, 1, 22, 2, where Jesus would deserve to be called son of God for his wisdom alone even if he were wholly human. Cf. also G. Delling, 'Die Bezeichnung "Söhne Gottes" in der jüdischen Literatur der hellenistic-römischen Zeit', in J. Jervell and W. A. Meeks (eds.), *God's Christ and His People: Studies in Honour of Nils Alstrup Dahl*, Oslo 1977, 18-28.

[110] Horovitz, *Koranische Untersuchungen*, 167, note to p. 127; Künstlinger, 'ʿUzair is der Sohn Allāhs', 382; cf. above, notes 106f, for their suggestions.

deified by the pagans were actually "righteous servants", or this is one view of them in the Qurʾān (Q. 21:26; 43:19; elsewhere they are demons or empty names); that the one was a human being and the others angels was immaterial, and so it would have been in the case of the Jews. If we persist in the search for a human being called "son of God" by the Jews, we are unlikely to get beyond the conclusion that Muḥammad simply got something wrong. If we are prepared to consider the possibility that he knew what he was talking about, the only way in which Jews could be plausibly be accused of polytheism was with reference to their "logos theology", as Boyarin calls it, or in other words their veneration of a divine power, personified as an angel, as an intermediary between God and mankind.[111] "To this *logos*, His archangel, the Father of all has given the special prerogative to stand on the border and separate the creature from the creator", as Philo (d. 50 CE) expressed it, happily referring to the *logos* as "the second God" and "son of God".[112] The Christians duly took Philo to have been a Christian *avant la lettre*, but it is now recognized that such ideas were widespread in Judaism, especially in the first two centuries CE, but apparently much later too. In Sefer Hekhalot, a composite work which may date in its present form to the sixth/seventh century,[113] it is Enoch-Metatron who is the second God, or more precisely "the lesser God", as Newby observes. The trouble is that no form of the intermediary is known ever to have been called anything like Ezra.

Some eighty years ago, however, Casanova proposed that ʿUzayr is a misreading of Azael.[114] He made the suggestion in a brief communication without developing the thesis, and perhaps for this reason it fell flat: in effect, he simply substituted one strange name for another, with perfunctory reference to rabbinic sources. Even in our present state of knowledge it has to be said that the thesis has its problems. But as Wasserstrom says, it deserves to be revived,[115] if only for a proper hearing.

If ʿUzayr is a misreading (or mishearing) of Azael, the force of the passage would be that the angelic intermediary venerated by the Jews was actually an evil figure, a demon trying to mislead them. This works well in that it is also one of the reactions to the pagan worship of angels/deities in the Qurʾān: on the day of judgement God will ask the genuine angels, "Was it these who worshipped you?", and the angels will reply, "Glory be to you. You are our friend (*walī*), not these. Rather, they worshipped the demons (*jinn*)" (34:40f). Or again, "they have made the demons (*jinn*) partners of God, though He created them, and falsely credit Him with sons and daughters, with knowing anything about it" (6:100).[116] The charge is all the more plausible in that Azael was an ambivalent figure. Though he was widely known as a fallen angel, a Greek amethyst lists Ichtys, identified as Christ by the *chi-ro* sign, with Raphael, Renel, and Uriel on one side and

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[111] See the reference given above, note 23.

[112] Philo, *Who is the Heir of Divine Things*, 205; *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, ii, 62 (second God); *On Husbandry*, 51 (firstborn son).

[113] Cf. above, note 94.

[114] P. Casanova, 'Idrîs et ʿOuzaïr', *Journal Asiatique* 205, 1924, 356-60 (opting for the form ʿUziʾel).

[115] S. M. Wasserstrom, *Between Muslim and Jew. The Problem of Symbiosis under Early Islam*, Princeton 1995, 183.

[116] Compare also 37:158: "They have set up a genealogical relationship (*nasab*) between Him and the *jinn*". Contrast 21:26 and 43:19: "They say, 'al-Raḥmān has produced children', but they are servants raised to honour (*ʿibād mukramūn*); "they have made the angels, who are servants of the Raḥmān, females".

Michael, Gabriel, and Azael on the other;[117] and in the Aramaic magical texts he is sometimes a fallen angel[118] sometimes an anti-demonic power along with the archangels Michael and Raphael. One amulet goes so far as to include him among "the holy angels who stand in front of the throne of the Great God";[119] one bowl text invokes Aza and Azael (ʿzʾ*w*-ʿzʾl) as well as Metatron against the demons;[120] another, directed against Jewish, Arab, Persian, Indian, Greek and Roman sorceries, and of disputed date, invokes God, "who sent Aza, Azael and Metatron (ʿzʾ *w*-ʿzʾl *w-myṭṭrwn*), the great prince of His throne".[121] Here Metatron takes the place of the third member of the ʿz trio, normally Azael or Azazel. One would dearly like to know what the Qurʾān has in mind when it holds the Jews and Christians who credit God with a son to be imitating "the unbelivers before you" (*alladhīna kafarū min qablu*): is this another reference to the "first Jāhiliyya", now singled out for its polytheism rather than the female immodesty that prevailed at the time? There does not seem to be any way of telling.

If Casanova's emendation is accepted, sura 9:30 would reflect much the same environment as the passage on Hārut and Mārūt, and carry much the same message: "the Jews say that Azael is a son of God", i.e. the Jews prefer a figure associated with magic to the messenger who has been sent to them. The next verse tells us why: they, i.e. the Jews and the Christians, "have taken their learned men (*aḥbār*) and monks (*ruhbān*) as their lords (*arbāban*) apart from God, and al-Masīḥ son of Mary" (9:31). This can hardly be a restatement of the claim that they deify ʿUzayr and Christ, for Christ does not belong in the category of *ruhbān*, and he is mentioned again as a separate object of deification. It is equally implausible that the Jews should be accused of deifying an ʿUzayr from among their *aḥbār* and *ruhbān*, while the Christians deify Christ, for *ruhbān* are always Christian figures in the Qurʾān. Most probably, then, this verse attacks the authorities to which the Jews and Christians owe their horrendous beliefs: they elevate their own authorities to the position of God by following them in defiance of God as represented by the Messenger. That they deify al-Masīḥ appears to be mere repetition. "They were commanded only to worship one God", the verse continues, presumably meaning in the past and now also through the Messenger whom they ignore. Both groups hope to extinguish the light of God with the enormities they utter with their mouths, he says (9:32), using a phrase elsewhere associated with those who dismissed Jesus as a magician (61:6, 8). In short, here as in 2:102 the key issue seems to be the Messenger's own authority.

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[117] J. Daniélou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity*, London 1964, i, 122, citing F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, i, Paris 1924, s.v. 'anges', col. 2088f (where no date is offered).

[118] Thus in the reference given above, note 66.

[119] Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 68f, amulet 7:3-5; compare 1:1-3; *Magic Spells and Formulae*, 62f, amulet 19:17-23; cf. also Milik, *Books of Enoch*, 131.

[120] C. H. Gordon, 'Aramaic Incantation Bowls', *Orientalia* 10, 1941, pp. 279f (Ashmolean, no. 1932,620), transliterated as ʿAzza and ʿAzzaʾel.

[121] C. H. Gordon, 'Aramaic Magical Bowls in the Istanbul and Baghdad Museums', *Archiv Orientální* 6, 1934, 328-30 (Baghdad Museum bowl no. 6519:11), transliterated as ʿAzzā and ʿAzzâēl. Gordon places this bowl after the Arab conquests with reference to the "Shīʿite" sorceries in line 9; but Shaked reads "Arab" sorceries and regards it as probably pre-Islamic (S. Shaked, 'Jews, Christians and Pagans in the Aramaic Incantation Bowls of the Sasanian Period', in A. Destro and M. Pesce (eds.), *Religions and Cultures*, Binghamton 2001, 72f).

On this reading, the charge against the Jews would not reflect ignorance or misunderstanding of a Jewish belief, but rather anger and the polemical exaggerations that this tends to induce. The observer knew very well that the Jews did not really worship an angel, righteous or fallen, as the son of God: had he genuinely believed that they did, he would have argued against it as frequently as he did against the sonship of Jesus, not just on a single occasion. He is claiming that idolatry is what the beliefs of his stubborn opponents really amount to. How literally did he intend the charge? It could be argued that all he resented was the expression "son of God", having heard Azael described as such on some occasion: metaphorically meant or otherwise, it was wrong to say such things.[122] If this is all he meant, his reaction would be comparable to that of a third/fourth-century Palestinian rabbi, who was offended by the passage in Daniel in which Nebuchadnezzar observes in amazement that the three youths in the fiery furnace are unharmed and that they have been joined by a fourth "like the son of God", i.e. an angel (Dan. 3:25): the rabbi claimed that an angel came down and slapped Nebuchadnezzar on the mouth for presuming that God had a son.[123] What he meant was presumably no more than that one should not say anything conducive to the blurring of the boundaries between Jews and Christians (though he too could have been worried by Jewish "logos theology").

That the Qurʾānic observer was only bothered by words is at first sight suggested by the fact that he dismisses the claims regarding ʿUzayr and Christ as "(just) something they say with their mouths" (*dhālika qawluhum bi-afwāhihim*)" (9:30), a phrase elsewhere used of comparing one's wife to one's mother for purposes of repudiation and calling somebody else's son one's own by way of adoption (33:4). But the parallel passage is not in fact about words alone. What 33:4 rejects is the opponents' belief that the words create or reflect something real, whereas the *truth* is that they are only words (similarly 18:4f; 24:15; 61:1-8). Similarly, the truth about the angels/gods deified by the pagans is that they are just names (when they are not angels falsely worshipped or mere demons, 7:70f; 53:23). It is only when opponents are held to say with their mouths what is not in their hearts, or to have even worse thoughts in their hearts than in their mouths, that a distinction between mere words and actual beliefs is postulated (3:118, 167; 5:41; 9:8; 48:11f). In the passage on ʿUzayr and al-Masīḥ the opponents do not simply use an offensive expression; they go so far as to reject the Messenger for the sake of the belief expressed by it. This is why they are accused of deifying their leaders too. The intertextual reference to the Jews who dismissed Jesus as a magician (in its turn conjuring up the polytheists who dismissed the Messengers as such) also shows the issue to be divine authority, this time along lines similar to the passage on Hārūt and Mārūt: the Jews go for the wrong leaders, preferring the very magic that they wrongly impute to the genuine Messenger. In 5:17-8, where only the Christian belief in a son of God is mentioned, both the Jews and Christians are once more accused of deification, not of their leaders, but rather of themselves: the concept of *shirk* extends to any form of authority other than that of God represented by Muḥammad, as Comerro observes.[124]

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[122] This possibility was suggested to me by Behnam Sadeghi.
[123] Alexander, 'Targumim and Early Exegesis', 61f, with reference to *Jerusalem Talmud*, Shabbat, 6, ad fin.
[124] Comerro, 'Esdras', 170.

Here, too, the passage culminates in the claim that "Our messenger has come to you" (5:19).

In short, 9:30 is directed, not just against the offensive expression "son of God", but also against actual beliefs held by Jews and Christians and the leaders under whom they upheld them. As far as the Jews are concerned, it has to be said if the reference is indeed to Azael, the charge was a brilliant polemical move, for it was one to which the Jews could only reply, "yes, but.....": yes, the fallen angels were described as sons of God in the Bible and the Book of Watchers; yes, Azael was one of them; and yes, it was to him that humans owed their knowledge of magic, in which he was often called upon; *but* the implication that he was worshipped in the same way that the Christians worshipped Christ was not true at all. What with so complicated a defence, the audience will have inferred that there was something to the charge. It merely so happened that a scribe was a bit too fast when he copied the name of the demonic figure, or alternatively that the name had come to sound too much like Ezra's, so that far from persuading later readers that the Jews had sold their souls to the devil, the verse persuaded the Jews and Christians that Muḥammad was an ignoramus: his scripture was full of errors, the Jews did not regard ʿUzayr as the son of God, as the Christians said in polemics of their own.[125]

There are no problems with Casanova's theory on the linguistic front. In Arabic, Azael (ʿAzāʾēl) would be written ʿAz(āʾ)īl. The main difference between that (*ʿzyl*) and ʿUzayr (*ʿzyr*) in early Arabic script would be the size of the final letter:[126] if the change took place in written transmission and the copyist was transcribing from Arabic to Arabic, all we need to put things right would thus be to postulate a minor scribal mistake. But the change could also have been effected orally, given that the shift from *l* to *r* is common in Semitic languages:[127] in that case all we need to postulate is that Azael was pronounced as something like Ozael/Ozaer. We do in fact find the forms Uzael (*ʿwzʾl*), Uziel (*ʿwzyʾl*), and related forms, both on undatable magic amulets from the Syria region and in texts on incantation bowls from Iraq.[128]

One could also suggest other ways of achieving the same result. For example, an angel by the name of ʿAzriel (*ʿzryʾl*) figures on amulets and magic bowls.[129] He has no independent existence, and is nowhere identified as the son of God, but as yet another bearer of a name on the theme of ʿz, he could easily have been treated as another manifestation or associate of Azael, as in fact he seems to be in the trio Azael, Azriel, and

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[125] al-Jāḥiẓ, 'al-Radd ʿalā 'l-naṣārā', in his *Rasāʾil*, ed. ʿA.-S. M. Hārūn, iii, Cairo 1979, 303f, 333f, 343, cf. also 346f.

[126] Cf. B. Gruendler, *The Development of the Arabic Scripts*, Atlanta 1993, 59, 95.

[127] Cf. E. Lipiński, *Semitic Languages: Outline of a Comparative Grammar*, Leuven 1997, 135 (my thanks to Adam Raziel for arguing the case for oral transmission and mentioning this work).

[128] H. Gordon, 'Aramaic Incantation Bowls', *Orientalia* 10, 1941, 123 (no. 5:7); J. B. Segal (ed. and tr.), *Catalogue of the Aramaic and Mandaic Incantation Bowls in the British Museum*, with a contribution by E. C. D. Hunter, London 2000, nos. 040A:6, 048A:36, 109M:10 (my thanks to Dr Hunter for drawing this work to my attention); Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 40f, (amulet 1:1); cf. 218f (magic book from Islamic times, 2, 5); J. Naveh and S. Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations from Late Antiquity*, Jerusalem 1993, 62f, 66 (Palestinian amulet 19:23).

[129] J. A. Montgomery, *Aramaic Incantation Texts from Nippur*, Philadelphia 1913, 154 = 156, no. 8:14; Gordon, 'Aramaic Incantation Bowls', 123 (no. 5:7); Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 40f (amulets 1:13). Cf. also E. A. W. Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions*, London and New York 1930, 277f. My thanks to Shaul Shaked for noting the possible relevance of this angel.

Ariel (all righteous).[130] The diminutive would presumably be ʿUzayrʾīl, but the *ʾīl* would have been rejected on the grounds that God had nothing to do with him, leaving the contemptuous ʿUzayr. Or, as Comerro suggests, the name Azariah (*ʿzryh*) could be lurking in the background. It was borne by one of the three youths who were thrown into the fiery furnace and saved by the angel described by the awed Nebuchadnessar as "like the son of God".[131] As it happens, it was also the pseudonym adopted by the archangel Raphael in Tobit, in which Raphael teaches Tobias to make medicine and drive away a demon, which Raphael then binds (Tobit, 8:11). Curing by binding demons is what most of the magic bowls of Iraq were designed to achieve. They often invoke Raphael. Given the premium on invoking as many powers as possible, the chances are that they invoked him under the name of Azariah too, thereby causing him to join the list of angels/sons of God whose names are variants on the theme of ʿz. In fact, it could have been Azariah-Raphael who generated the above-mentioned Azriel.

Very few of the angels and demons invoked in magic texts had stable personalities, and strange-sounding names proliferated, but to disapproving observers such as the rabbis, the names on the theme of ʿz invariably conjured up fallen angels, or even the devil himself. The chances are that the same was true for the Messenger. In whatever form he may have heard the name of the offending son of God, he will have understood him as a rebellious angel and used him to unmask the wayward beliefs of the Jews: what they so stubbornly rejected him for was a demon.

If this is accepted, one would assume the transmission to have taken place via Iraq, as in the case of Hārūt and Mārūt. Of course, ʿUzayr could have entered via a different channel, but the Ethiopic Book of Watchers uses the forms Asael and, more commonly, Azazel,[132] making Ethiopia unlikely as a source for our verse. The form Azael is attested in both Syria and Iraq, in Greek in the fifth/sixth-century Codex Panopolitanus and the ninth-century Syncellus, in both of which it is the only form used (*Azaēl*); in the above-mentioned (Jewish-?) Christian amethyst, and in two magical texts from Egypt, one dating from the fourth-century, the other from the sixth or seventh;[133] in Aramaic on a Palestinian amulet,[134] in rabbinic sources,[135] and on incantation bowls.[136] The related forms Uzael and Uziel also appear on both sides.[137] We know from Justinian that there were Jews on the Byzantine side who denied that "the angels exist as God's work and creation", i.e. they held the angels to be uncreated (and thus divine), but whether they venerated a principal angel is not said.[138] It is in the Babylonian Sefer

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[130] Naveh and Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls*, 68f (amulet 7:3).
[131] Dan. 1:6f; 3:20-25; Comerro, 'Esdras', 172f, with exegetical traditions which actually identify ʿUzayr as one of Daniel's companions.
[132] Black, *Book of Enoch*, 121.
[133] K. Preisendanz (ed. and tr.), *Papyri Graecae Magicae*, Leipzig 1928-31, ii, nos. xxxvi, 174 (also Aziel); xlv, 3.
[134] Above, note 119.
[135] Cf. above, note 44.
[136] Cf. above, notes 66, 120f.
[137] Cf. above, note 128.
[138] Justinian (legislating in 553), Novella 146, *peri Hebraiōn*, ed. and tr. A. Linder, *The Jews in Imperial Legislation*, Detroit and Jerusalem 1987, 406f = 409. Practically all the voluminous literature on this novella is about Justinian's regulation of the language to be used in the synagogue. That he also legislates

Hekhalot that the identification of Enoch/Metatron as the lesser God is attested, in circles associated with magic, just as it is in Babylonia that magical texts associate Azael with Metatron.[139] It is also on an Iraqi bowl text that we encounter the actual expression "sons of God" in conjunction with (but not clearly identified as) Azael, Azael, and Azaziel.[140] One would thus assume Iraq to have been the source.

Problem.

So far, Casanova's hypothesis seems to work wonders, but it raises one intractable problem. Why did the exegetes not recognize Azael behind his new name? The nearest we get to it is Muqātil's claim that ʿUzayr was described in the Pentateuch (*tawrāt*), but he could of course simply have meant somewhere in the Hebrew Bible in general rather than the Pentateuch in particular.[141] It is all the odder in that the exegetes effortlessly recognized the fallen angels behind their Iranian names of Hārūt and Mārūt.

It has to be stressed that the exegetical reaction to ʿUzayr is peculiar even if we discard Casanova's hypothesis, for given that the early exegetes knew very well that Jews did not deify Ezra, one would have expected them at the very least to discuss the person intended before settling on the identification of Ezra and ʿUzayr. Maybe they did. In the fragments of a Greek translation of the Qurʾān made before 870, possibly in Umayyad Syria, the Jews are accused of saying that *Israel* is the son of God.[142] In this formulation the charge makes perfect sense. In the so-called prayer of Joseph, Jacob declares himself to be "Israel, an angel of God and a ruling spirit…the firstborn of every living thing" (compare Colossians 1:15, 17, on Christ), as well as "the archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief captain among the sons of God".[143] This angel is also familiar from Christian, Manichaean and other Gnostic writings as well as from rabbinic texts.[144] But the Muslim exegetes do not seem to preserve any memory of this reading, and it is hard to see how Isrāʾīl could have been misheard or misread as ʿUzayr. Maybe the Syrians had improved on the Qurʾānic text because it did not make sense to them. However this may be, all exegetes on record accepted that the Qurʾān spoke of ʿUzayr and unhesitatingly identified this figure as Ezra. As early as 170/786 certain Saʿd pronounces Muḥammad,

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against Jews who deny the resurrection, last judgement and the createdness of the angels is hardly ever discussed.

[139] See the references given above, notes 100, 120f.

[140] Thus the curse text mentioned above, note 66. In this text (which mixes Jewish, Christian and pagan elements), the "lower foundation" of the universe is occupied by seven "sons of God" (*bny ʾlhy*), who keep the universe together with seven powerful words (Levene, *Corpus*, M163:9, and commentary). By origin, they are presumably a new version of the fallen angels, but whether the magician sees them as such is not clear. He proceeds to speak of the "sons of glory" (line 13) and thereafter about the trio Azael, Azael, and Azaziel, pressed under a mountain with their faces downwards (line 18). Levene thinks that the "sons of glory" may be identical with the "sons of God" (comm. to line 13), but does not say whether he thinks the same could be true of the trio.

[141] Comerro, 'Esdras', 168, citing Muqātil b. Sulaymān, *Tafsīr*, ad 112:1.

[142] C. Høgel, 'An Early Anonymous Greek Translation of the Qurʾān: the Fragments from Niketas Byzantios' *Refutatio* and the anonymous *Abjuratio*', *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 7, 2010, 71.

[143] Prayer of Joseph, fragment A, tr. J. Z. Smith in J. H. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigraphica*, vol. ii, New York 1985, 713, cf. the editorial introduction; Philo, *On the Confusion of Tongues*, 146, where the *logos* is God's firstborn and Israel.

[144] For a succinct overview, see E. R. Wolfson, *Along the Path: Studies in Kabbalistic Myth, Symbolism and Hermeneutics*, Albany 1995, 4ff, where the (pre-Islamic) rabbinic material is discussed.

Jesus and ʿUzayr along with all created beings, to be *marbūbūn*, servants of God, in an inscription.[145] Apparently, the exegetes had grown up with the idea that Ezra was intended. If so, one wonders if Muḥammad had as well. "God does not command you to take the angels and prophets as lords", we are told in Q. 3:80: did ʿUzayr belonged in the category of prophets rather than that of angels to the speaker of those words? If he did, we are back where we started: how could the author of the Qurʾān claim that the Jews called Ezra the son of God?

Either the Messenger's understanding is peculiar or else that of the exegetes is: in effect, Casanova's hypothesis merely shifts the problem from the one to the other. It has to be said, however, that this is not the only occasion on which the exegetes settled without discussion or disagreement on what to a modern scholar looks like an obvious mistake; there is another example in Q. 24:33, and here there can be no doubt that they did so in departure from authorial intentions.[146] Of course, exegetes are everywhere in the habit of disregarding authorial intentions: they make of the revelation what they need. But they do not usually do so with complete lack of hesitation or disagreement, least of all when they know their interpretation to be problematic. The problem of ʿUzayr could well lie in the early history of Muslim exegesis rather than in the understanding of the Prophet, or in other words that Casanova may still have the better hunch. Until that can be shown, however, the verdict on his theory must be "not proven". That the accusation in 9:30 refers to Jewish veneration of an angelic viceregent remains the most plausible solution; how this being acquired the name of ʿUzayr remains unclear.

Conclusion.

Though Azael's presence in 9:30 remains conjectural, the four other echoes of the Book of Watchers have at least done something to relate the Qurʾān to a well-documented context on the fringes of the Arab world in late antiquity. Relating the Qurʾānic material to earlier traditions could be said to be one of the most pressing needs for historians of the rise of Islam.[147] This has now come to be generally recognized, after a long hiatus in which origins tracing had a bad name. One can see why it fell into disrepute. Back in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century there was a tendency for Western scholars to envisage Muḥammad as picking up bit and pieces of religious lore from his Jewish, Christian and diverse other neighbours without much understanding of what they meant, in order to mix them all up and then use them in altogether different contexts in Mecca and Medina. Much work was done on where he had picked up his bits and pieces, but given the magpie model, it did not seem illuminating: what did it matter whether this came from Christianity and that from Judaism, or somewhere else if it had all been denatured in the process of transmission? More recent scholars not unnaturally found the interest of the ideas to lie less in their origin than in their meaning in the new contexts to

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[145] Y. D. Nevo, Z. Cohen and D. Heftman (eds. and trs.), *Ancient Arabic Inscriptions from the Negev*, i, Midreshet Ben Gurion, Negev, 1993, 54 (no. ST 640(34), cf. plate 34. (My thanks to Haggai Ben Shammai for this reference.)

[146] Cf. P. Crone, 'Two Legal Problems bearing on the Date of the Qurʾān', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 18, 1994 (reprinted in ead., *From Kavād to al-Ghazālī*, Aldershot 2005), 3ff, on the *kitāb* understood as a manumission document, though the context dictates that it is a marriage document.

[147] Cf. F. E. Peters, 'The quest of the Historical Muhammad', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, 1991, 292f.

which Muḥammad applied them. Origins-tracing never seemed to further our understanding of anything, merely to harp on the theme of the "parasitic dependence" of Islam on earlier religions, as Reeves says.[148]

But religious (and all other) ideas do grow out of earlier ideas, by tiny incremental changes; even revolutionary changes are achieved by very small steps; and though the older literature never showed these steps, merely a haphazard collection of information and mistakes, as if Islam had arisen by misunderstanding, there was more than prejudice to the picture it presented. The Orientalists were reacting to the fact that it was, and remains, extremely difficult to overcome the sense that Islam arose in a world apart. The tribal societies evoked in pre-Islamic poetry, the *ayyām*, Ibn Hishām or al-Wāqidī are so utterly different from the Near East described in Greek, Syriac, Aramaic, Coptic or Iranian works that one automatically classifies ideas which can be shown to have originated in the non-Arabian Near East as "foreign elements", or in other words as features appearing out of their normal context, so that they have to be explained by mechanisms such as traders accidentally picking up this and that on their journeys.

What we see in the Qurʾānic treatment of the fallen angels in the four (possibly five) passages examined here, however, is not the impressions of a passer-by who had picked up some ancient story without much sense of what it meant to his informants. What we see is the story in the context to which it had come to belong by late antique times, complete with the magic practices it was held to explain and the angry sense of being outflanked by disreputable people that the situation induced in the observer. Wherever or whenever the encounter(s) took place, the observer is *engaging* with the tradition as it looked at his time, not simply plundering it, let alone getting things wrong. Looking back, we can follow the tradition he grappled with till it disappears in the dawn of history; looking forward, we can see what it came to mean to his many followers thereafter down until today. Islam here grows by imperceptible steps, however drastic the observer's reaction, out of the environment that was before it, creating a new one as it does so. It would be enormously illuminating if we could see the entire book in this way.

[148] Cf. Reeves in his introduction to his *Bible and Qurʾān*, ix.