

1.2.2 'Sitting on the Throne' and the Omnipresence of God

In the Quran, the throne is the most prominent symbol of God's power; usually God does not have a crown or a sceptre.¹ This probably explains why the so-called throne verse 2:255 was particularly attractive to Muslim piety; it is found on an inscription probably dating to the second century and now preserved in the museum in Amman.² Anyone reciting it after every prayer will be prevented only by death from entering into paradise immediately, a hadith assures us.³ In fact, the throne is only one of several topics on which this comparatively long verse touches; furthermore, the word used here is *kursī* rather than the more usual 'arsh.⁴ However, rather like sura 112, this verse came to be seen as a kind of profession of faith. Theodore Abū Qurra⁵ as well as 'Ammār al-Baṣrī⁶ regarded the idea of the throne as a core concept of Muslim thought.⁷

There is no room in the present study in which to unfold the range of popular ideas that grew up around this core.⁸ Judaism had already assumed that the throne, like God, consisted of light; hair-splitters imagined that the divine light generated a light reflex in the primal ocean out of which the throne would be fashioned.⁹ In the Shī'a we find the idea that its light is refracted: it is red, green, yellow and white – presumably in contrast to the pure white colour of

1 The Umayyad caliphs did not usually wear a crown either (cf. Eliran VI 418f.). Mughīra b. Sa'īd's locating the sublime name on top of God's crown was based on a Jewish idea (see vol. I 471f. above). The same may be true of the hadith on p. 435 above.

2 Munajjid, *Dirāsāt fī ta'rikh al-khaṭṭ al-'arabī* 115.

3 Sic! Suyūṭī, *La'ālī* 11 230ff. with further instances.

4 The exegetes did indeed sometimes interpret this as a stool instead of a throne (cf. Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* 3v 398f. no. 5789ff.); see also p. 460 below. However, in the Aramaic of the Book of Daniel, *korsē* denotes the 'throne'. In general see Vitestam, 'Arsh and Kursī. An Essay on the Throne Tradition in Islam, in: Living Water. Festschrift Løkkegaard 369ff.

5 Cf. REI 46/1978/129.

6 *Burhān* 77, -6ff.

7 Both are Christians; a Jew would probably not have perceived a great difference. The significance of the throne verse for the anthropomorphists was emphasised by Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Faḍl* 149, 15f. Regarding its exegesis in Ṭabarī and Naysābūrī cf. Monnot in: MIDEO 15/1982/119ff.

8 Cf. Fahd in: *Sources orientales* 1 246ff.; Corbin, *Et son trône était porté sur l'eau*, in: In Principio 293ff. Regarding Muqātil b. Sulaymān cf. Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique* 69; regarding Suyūṭī Heinen, *Islamic Cosmology* 77ff. Dhahabī collected a wealth of material in his *K. al-'ulūw lil-'Alī al-Ghaffār*.

9 Scholem, *Jüdische Mystik* 123; in general see B. Ego, *Gottes Thron in Talmud und Midrasch*, in: Philonenko, *Le trône de Dieu* 318ff. In the study cited on p. 448, n. 9 above, O'Shaughnessy also refers to Jewish sources.