

# THE ASCENSION OF THE PROPHET AND THE STATIONS OF HIS JOURNEY

# 1

THE MİRĀJ AND THE THREE SACRED CITIES OF ISLAM  
IN LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS  
IN THE OTTOMAN CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

editors

Ayşe Taşkent

Nicole Kançal-Ferrari



DERGĀH

# THE ASCENSION OF THE PROPHET AND THE STATIONS OF HIS JOURNEY

THE MI'RĀJ AND THE THREE SACRED CITIES OF ISLAM  
IN LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS  
IN THE OTTOMAN CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

---

## Volume 1

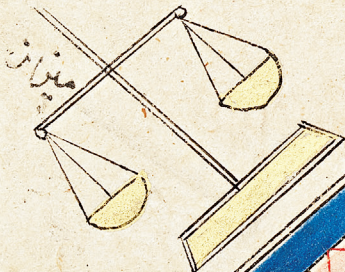
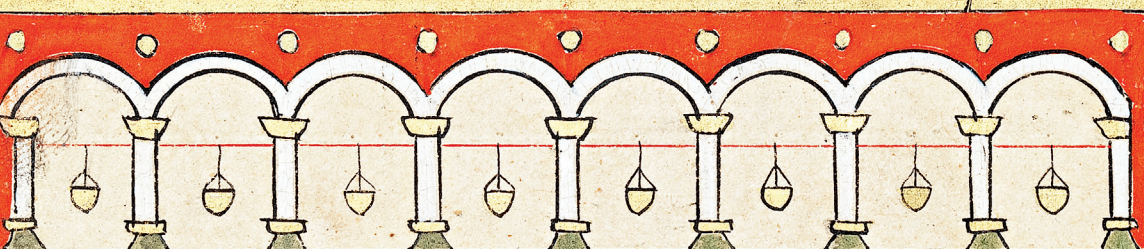
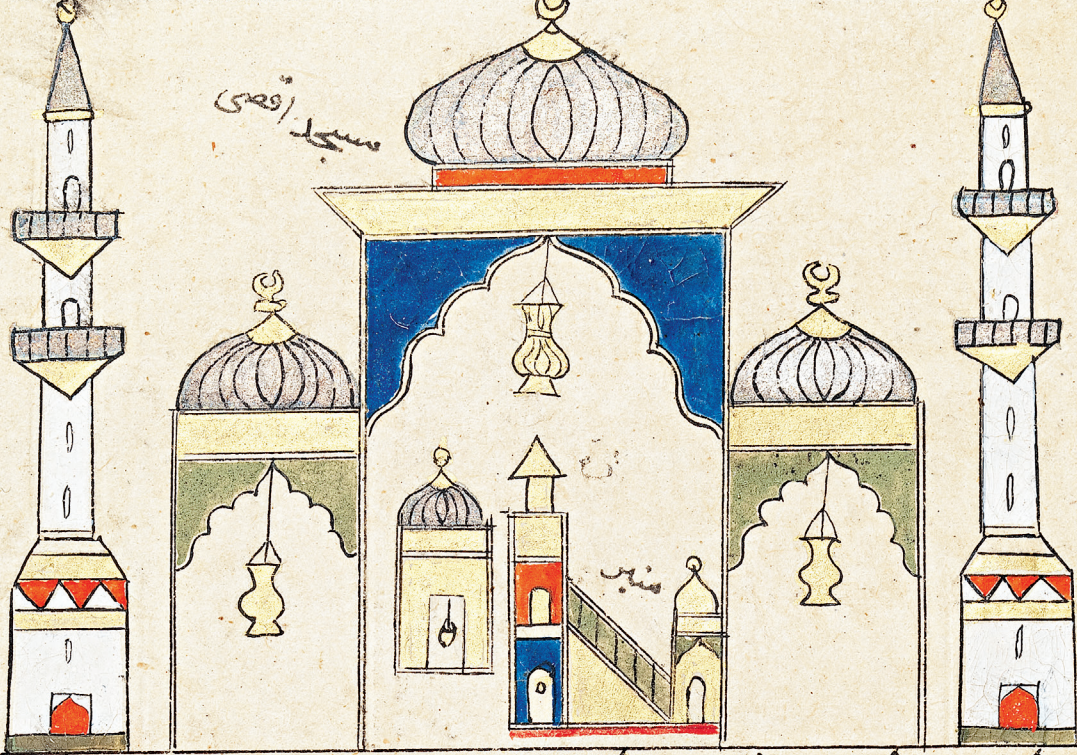
MADE POSSIBLE THROUGH THE SUPPORT OF THE



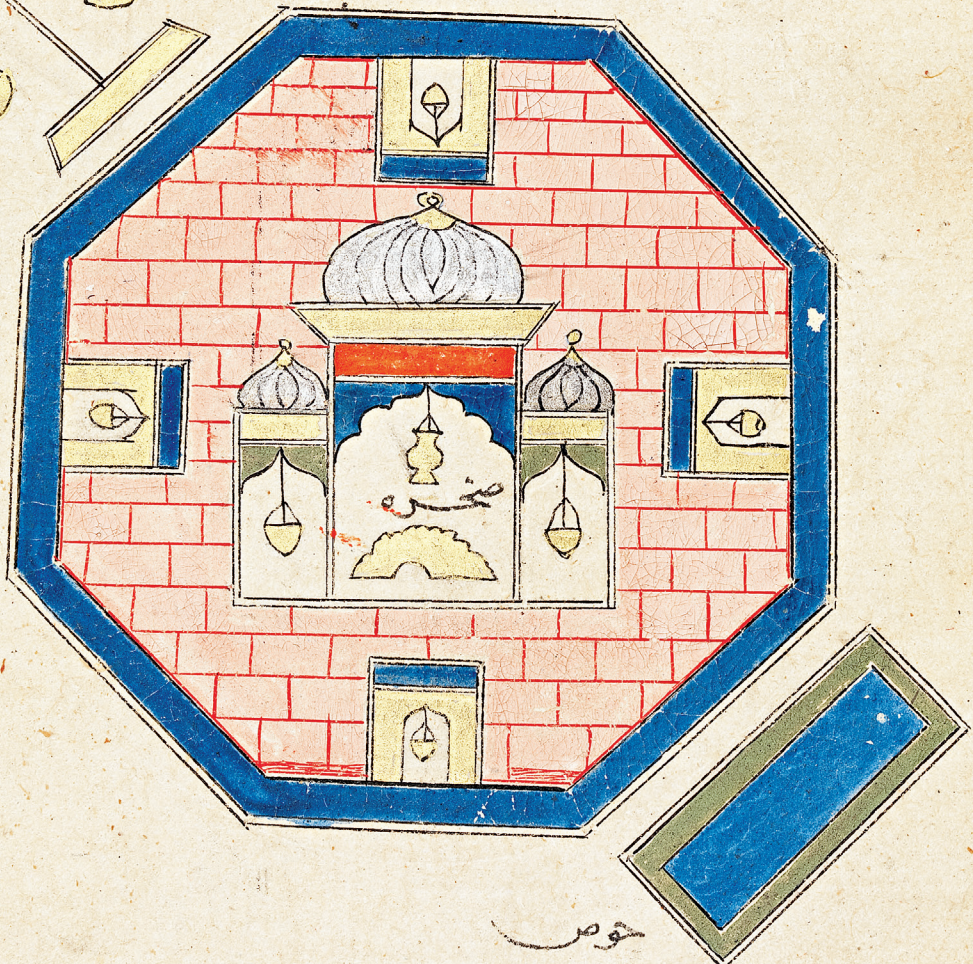
**REPUBLIC OF TURKEY**  
**MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND TOURISM**



مسجد اقصی



میزان



قوس

# **THE ASCENSION OF THE PROPHET AND THE STATIONS OF HIS JOURNEY**

THE MÍRĀJ AND THE THREE SACRED CITIES OF ISLAM  
IN LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS  
IN THE OTTOMAN CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

---

## **Volume 1**

**editors**

**Ayşe Taşkent**

**Nicole Kançal-Ferrari**

شیخ از فلک بر  
سین جان ملک





Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed, to show him of Our signs. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Seeing.

(Al-Isrā’/The Night Journey, 17:1)

1. By the star when it sets
2. indeed your companion is not astray
3. nor does he speak vainly.
4. It is nothing less than a revelation revealed
5. taught to him by a being of intense power
6. possessing strength. He straightened up
7. while he was on the highest horizon,
8. then he drew close and descended
9. and he was a distance of two bows or closer.
10. He revealed to his servant what he revealed.
11. The heart did not lie in what it saw.
12. Will you then argue with him about what he saw?
13. He saw him another time
14. at the Lote Tree of the Boundary
15. next to the Garden of the Refuge
16. when the Lote Tree was covered by what covered.
17. His vision did not stray, nor was it excessive.
18. He saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord.

(Al-Najm/The Star, 53:1-17)

Dergâh Publishing: 957

History: 98

## THE ASCENSION OF THE PROPHET AND THE STATIONS OF HIS JOURNEY

THE MİRÂJ AND THE THREE SACRED CITIES OF ISLAM  
IN LITERATURE, MUSIC, AND ILLUSTRATED MANUSCRIPTS  
IN THE OTTOMAN CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT



### Volume 1

*The Ascension of the Prophet and the Stations of His Journey: The Mi'rāj and the Three Sacred Cities of Islam in Literature, Music, and Illustrated Manuscripts in the Ottoman Cultural Environment* (exhibition catalogue and companion volume)

#### Publication

Chief editors  
Ayşe Taşkent and Nicole Kançal-Ferrari

Book design  
Ersu Pekin

Proofreading and editing of the  
English texts  
Hugh Jefferson Turner

Proofreading of the terms in Arabic,  
Persian, and Ottoman Turkish  
Abdullah Uğur

Simplification of the poems in  
Ottoman Turkish  
Fatma Meliha Şen

Bibliography and footnotes  
Salim Fikret Kurgı

Index  
Hugh Jefferson Turner  
Selman Benlioğlu

Istanbul, December 2021  
ISBN 978-625-7660-64-8 (volume 1)  
ISBN 978-625-7660-63-1 (set)

© All rights reserved. No part of this  
book may be reproduced, stored in a  
retrieval system, or transmitted in any  
form or by any means without written  
permission from the chief editors.

Printing  
Mas Matbaacılık San. ve Tic. A. Ş.  
Hamidiye Mahallesi,  
Soğuksu Caddesi No: 3  
Kağıthane/İstanbul  
Phone: 0212 294 10 00  
book@masmat.com.tr  
Certificate No: 44686

This project was completed with the  
support of the Turkish Ministry of  
Culture and Tourism, but the ministry  
is not responsible for the content of  
this publication or the views herein  
expressed; that responsibility lies solely  
with the editors.

#### Front Cover Illustration

Ascension scene showing the constellations, signs of the zodiac, and the seven heavens  
Nizāmī, *Makhzan al-asrār* (Treasury of secrets), Isfahan, 1665. British Library, Add.  
6613, fol. 3r (BL3492771). © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/Bridgeman  
Images. Catalogue number 13, page 602.

#### Exhibition Project Team

Project directors and exhibition curators  
Ayşe Taşkent and Nicole Kançal-Ferrari

Exhibition layout and design  
Ersu Pekin

Architectural layout and design  
Melike D. Kadayıfçı

Translation into English  
Hugh Jefferson Turner

Translation into Bosnian  
Adnan Mulabdić

Translation into Arabic  
Seyyid Tarık Hakan

Visuals and correspondence  
Nicole Kançal-Ferrari and Sumiyo Okumura

Facsimile  
Mas Matbaacılık (Ufuk Şahin)

Graphic design and panels  
Ora Reklam Hizmetleri

Fabrication of the structural elements  
for the exhibition  
Astaş Alçı Dekorasyon (Fahri Kaplan)

#### Exhibition Itinerary

Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts,  
Istanbul, 13 May–30 June 2017

Brusa Bezistan Museum, Sarajevo,  
21 November–8 December 2017

Yunus Emre Institute, Jerusalem,  
12–29 April 2018

#### Notes to the Reader

The text contains references to both the  
Islamic and Gregorian calendars, with  
preference for the latter. Dates are given  
in the Islamic calendar in combination  
with the Gregorian only in reference to  
early centuries or at the preference of the  
author.

Diacritics in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish  
names and terms have been formatted  
according to the language of the original  
in accordance with the transliteration  
system suggested by the *International  
Journal of Middle East Studies*, except  
for longer poems in Ottoman Turkish,  
which have been rendered according to  
the version in Turkish preferred by the  
authors.

#### Illustration Credits

Illustrations in the exhibition and the printed volumes are courtesy of the  
following institutions:

Ankara Ethnography Museum  
Beinecke Library, Yale University, New Haven  
Benaki Museum of Islamic Art, Athens  
Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin)  
British Library (BL), London  
Chester Beatty Library (CBL), Dublin  
The David Collection, Copenhagen  
Free Library of Philadelphia  
Freer/Sackler Gallery, Vever Collection, Washington  
Haluk Perk Collection, Istanbul  
Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, the Norma Jean  
Calderwood Collection of Islamic Art  
Heidelberg University Library  
Istanbul University Library, Rare Books Library  
The Keir Collection of Islamic Art, on loan to the Dallas Museum of Art  
The Kremlin State Historical and Cultural Museum, Moscow  
Leiden University Library (UBL)  
Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA)  
Manisa Provincial Public Library (Manisa İl Halk Kütüphanesi)  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET)  
Museum of Islamic Art (Museum für Islamische Kunst), Berlin  
The Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul  
The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art  
National Library of France (Bibliothèque nationale de France) (BnF), Paris  
The New York Public Library, Spencer Collection  
The Princes Czartoryski Museum – The National Museum in Kraków  
Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York City  
Saxon State and University Library (Sächsische Landesbibliothek – Staats-  
und Universitätsbibliothek), Dresden (SLUB)  
Shahid Motahhari College Library (Kitabhāne-i Medrese-i Āli-yi Shahīd  
Motahharī), Tehran  
The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg  
Süleymaniye Manuscript Library, Hamidiye Collection, Istanbul  
Tehran Golestan Palace Museum Library  
Topkapı Palace Museum Library (TSMK)  
The University of Manchester Library, Rylands  
University of Michigan Library (Special Collections Library), Ann Arbor  
Victoria and Albert Museum, London (V&A)  
The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore

# Contents

---

## VOLUME 1

- 15 A. List of Illustrations: Articles
- 29 B. List of Illustrations: Catalogue
- 39 Preface
- 45–411 Part I**
- 47 Ayşe Taşkent  
*Isrāʾ* and *Miʾrāj* in Islamic Sources
- 63 Mustafa İsmet Uzun  
The Poetry of “Rising to the Level of God” in Turkish-Islamic Literature: *Miʾrāciyyes* and *Miʾrāc-nāmes*
- 119 Mehmet Arslan  
Verse *Miʾrāciyyes* and *Miʾrāc-nāmes*
- 145 Adnan Mulabdić  
The *Miʾrāj* in the Religious Tradition and the *Miʾrāciyye* in the Literary Culture of Bosnia and Herzegovina
- 165 Mahmud Erol Kılıç  
The Mystical Dimension of the *Miʾrāj*
- 171 Ayşe Taşkent  
Narratives on the *Miʾrāj* in Sufi and Philosophical Literature
- 181 Ayşe Taşkent  
Did Avicenna Write a *Miʾrāj-nāma*? A Structural and Content Analysis of the *Miʾrāj-nāma* in the Context of Avicenna’s Theory of Soul (*Nafs*) and Prophecy (*Nubuwwa*)  
— A Translation of the Persian *Miʾrāj-nāma*
- 223
- 243 Süleyman Erguner  
The Ascension of Our Music: The *Miʾrāciyye* and *Ḳuṭb-ı Nāyī ʿOsmān Dede*
- 275 Nuri Özcan  
The *Miʾrāciyye* of *Nāyī ʿOsmān Dede*
- 279 Christiane Gruber  
Journey to Inspiration: *Miʾrāj* Texts and Images
- 289 Christiane Gruber  
The *Miʾrāj-nāma*’s Afterlife in the Ottoman Palace Collection: Pictorial Stimulus and Verbal Ekphrasis

309	Nicole Kaňçal-Ferrari The Prophet's Turban and Celestial Crowns: Headgear in Ascension Scenes
329	Nicole Kaňçal-Ferrari The Wings of Angels: Representations of the Messengers between the Two Realms in Ascension Scenes
343	Ertuđrul Ertekin The Legend of 'Alī Appearing in the Form of a Lion during the <i>Mi'raj</i> and Its Reflection in Visual Culture: A Reading from the <i>Mi'rāçlama of Khaṭāyī</i>
365	Ayşe Taşkent Written and Visual Depictions of Burāq in Islamic Culture
385	Mehmetcan Akpınar Narratives on Burāq in Early Islamic Literature
391	Sumiyo Okumura The Saddlecloths of Burāq in <i>Mi'raj</i> Scenes
403	Nina Macaraig The Fragrant Journey Heavenwards: Incense Burners in <i>Mi'raj</i> Depictions

---

## VOLUME 2

427	A. List of Illustrations: Articles
441	B. List of Illustrations: Catalogue
<b>451–579</b>	<b>Part II</b>
453	Mustafa Sabri Küçükaşcı The Starting Point of the <i>Mi'raj</i> : Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām in History
471	Nebi Bozkurt Muslims' First Qibla: Al-Masjid al-Aqşā
477	Nebi Bozkurt The Jerusalem Leg of the <i>Mi'raj</i> : The Dome of the Rock
483	Mustafa Sabri Küçükaşcı Al-Masjid al-Nabawī and the Tomb of the Prophet throughout History
501	Nicole Kaňçal-Ferrari Expression of Longing and the Creation of Spatial Sanctity: Holy Sites Represented in Prayer Spaces in Islamic Lands
519	Sabiha Gölođlu Linking, Printing, and Painting Sanctity and Protection: Representations of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem in Late Ottoman Prayer Books
541	Zeynep Atbaş Islam's Sacred Cities: Portrayals of Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem in Examples from the Topkapı Palace Collection
571	Zeren Tanındı An Illustrated <i>Ḥac Vekālet-nāme</i>

**581–704 Part III: Catalogue**

- 582 Invitation to the *Mi'rāj*
- 585 The *Siyer-i Nebī* (Life of the Prophet)
- 588 The Night Journey (*Isrā'*) from the Ka'ba to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā
- 592 The Prophet's Arrival in Jerusalem
- 598 The Prophet through the Seven Heavens
- 604 The Stages of the Prophet's Celestial Journey
- 610 The Noble Throne
- 612 Classical *Mi'rāj* Scenes
- 642 Ascension Scenes with a Lion
- 662 The Journey with Burāq and Angels
- 668 The Prophet's Return to Mecca
- 674 Bringing the Holy Sites to Life in Islamic Culture
- 678 The Depiction of the Ka'ba in Historical Books and Literary Works
- 682 The Depiction of the Ka'ba in Geographical Manuscripts
- 686 The Depiction of the Holy Sites in Pilgrimage Guides and Prayer Books
- 700 The Depiction of the Holy Sites in Pilgrimage Scrolls
- 
- 707 Bibliography
- 749 Index



Ayşe Taşkent\*

\* Assistant professor, Istanbul University-Cerrahpaşa.

## Narratives on the *Mi'rāj* in Sufi and Philosophical Literature

Ascension, or *mi'rāj*, is a person's ascending from the material realm to the realm beyond earthly space, or being transported from earth to the supernatural realm.<sup>1</sup> Narratives of the ascension of prophets or select individuals to the spiritual realm exist in various religious traditions.<sup>2</sup> In these narratives, the ascension occurs during individuals' life on earth—that is, while they are still living—and they are raised by certain spiritual beings or supernatural means from the material world to the spiritual realm or heavens.<sup>3</sup> In Islam, the Prophet Muḥammad's ascension to the spiritual realm is referred to as the event of *isrā'* and *mi'rāj*. This is believed to have been a miraculous journey that the Prophet experienced both spiritually and physically, one that interrupted the order of nature and was a miracle unique to him alone. In addition to the

event of the ascension appearing in the Qur'an in certain verses of suras al-Isrā' and al-Najm, there are also many reports regarding the event in *tafsīr*, hadith, and *siyar* sources. These verses and hadith prove that the *mi'rāj* occurred and that it was an event unique to the Prophet alone. In addition, classic Islamic sources speak of some prophets ascending to the spheres of heaven either before or after their death. The Qur'an refers directly to the ascensions of the prophets Idrīs (Enoch), 'Isā (Jesus), and Ibrāhīm (Abraham), and indirectly to the ascensions of the prophets Adam, Yaḥyā (John), Yūsuf (Joseph), and Hārūn (Aaron). Some have also drawn a parallel between Prophet Muḥammad's *isrā'* journey—that is, his night journey to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā—and Mūsā's (Moses) ascending Mount Sinai.<sup>4</sup> However, taking into consideration the ascension in the form explained

---

1 See Mahmud Erol Kılıç, "The Mystical Dimension of the *Mi'rāj*," in this volume.

2 A. E. Affifi, "The Story of the Prophet's Ascent (Miraj) in Sufi Thought and Literature," *The Islamic Quarterly: A Review of Islamic Culture* 2, no. 1 (1955): 23.

3 In religious terms, there are four different conceptions of departure from the earth and ascension to the metaphysic realm or heavens. The first is that at death, the soul departs the body and the earthly realm and ascends to the celestial realm. The second is the ascension of certain select individuals to the celestial realm both physically and spiritually before their death. The third, in gnostic religions, is associated with a divine savior that descends from the celestial realm to earth and returns to the celestial realm after fulfilling their duty. These three conceptions of ascension are distinct from the concept of *mi'rāj*, which is the ascension experienced by Prophet Muḥammad. Şinasi Gündüz, Yavuz Ünal, and Ekrem Sarıkçıoğlu, *Dinlerde Yükseliş Motifleri ve İslam'da Miraç* (Istanbul: Vadi Yayınları, 2016), 17–18; Nimet Yıldırım, "Fars Edebiyatında Metafizik Yolculuklar," *Doğu Esintileri: İnanoloji, Fars Dili ve Edebiyatı Araştırmaları Dergisi* 2 (2014): 195; Henry Eugenie Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (Irving, TX: Spring Publications, 1980), 8:168. See the explanations in Miguel Asin Palacios, "Adaptations from the Legend, Mainly Mystical Allegories," in *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (London: Frank Cass, 1968), 76–91; Affifi, "The Story of the Prophet's Ascent," 23–24.

4 The verses in question include "And We raised him [Idrīs] to a high station" (Maryam, 19:57); "O Jesus, indeed I will take you and raise you to Myself" (Āli Imrān, 3:55); "Rather, Allah raised him [Jesus] to Himself" (Al-Nisā, 4:158); "And thus

below, we see that these ascensions were different from that of the Prophet Muḥammad. The features that distinguish the ascension of the Prophet from other ascensions is that he passed through the following five stages: (1) ascension from the earth to the metaphysical realm; (2) experience of the ascension and the metaphysical realm; (3) receiving the divine message in the metaphysical realm; (4) returning to the earth; and (5) conveying the divine message to the people.<sup>5</sup>

As a miracle of the Prophet Muḥammad, the *mi'rāj* is classified as an experience unique to him alone, one that believers cannot experience physically, only spiritually.<sup>6</sup>

In the history and literature of Sufism (*al-taṣawwuf*), many Sufis experienced an event similar to the ascension of the Prophet. The first to have done so was Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 848?).<sup>7</sup> Many others followed in the subsequent centuries, including Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kharaqānī (d. 1033), Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 1240), and the shaykh of the Shaṭṭārī order Muḥammad Ghaws (d. 1563).<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, according to Sufis, the Prophet Muḥammad ascended both physically and spiritually, whereas Sufis made this journey only spiritually.<sup>9</sup> The Prophet's night journey was the first example of an ascension that can only be experienced by distinguished individuals, spiritual guides, and the learned; and in Sufi theology, the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet is considered as a path to be followed, a model to be taken as an example.

Many poets, philosophers, and Sufis of the Islamic world, from various orders and occupations, were inspired by the event of *mi'rāj* to produce

various forms of literature, narrations, allegoric and symbolic adaptations, and religious and Sufi narratives. These extensive works, compiled under the title *mi'rāj-nāma* or *mi'rājīyya* in literature and music, have been the topic of various symbolic narrations of a similar theme in both independent and non-independent philosophical, Sufi, and literary works. In works compiled particularly by Sufis, the ascension was dealt with from a Sufi perspective. Sufis sometimes directly expounded the phases of the Prophet's ascension, sometimes compared the ascension and the perfection of the human soul, and sometimes narrated the metaphysical journey of a soul disassociated from the material world in a symbolic language. Authors that addressed the ascension from a Sufi perspective either explained the phases of the ascension from the Sufi perspective or adapted the meaning of the ascension to Sufi thought. Some Sufis wrote books on their own ascensions.

Many of these works describe and portray a person distanced from the heavenly realm and trapped in the cage of the body and his experiences on the journey of ascension to the heavenly realm and on the return journey, during which his asceticism is tested by traps of carnal desire and other trials.<sup>10</sup>

In literary works on the ascension to the metaphysical realm, poets and authors compiled works inspired by the *mi'rāj* that were written in symbolic form and that featured metaphors and symbols from the Prophet's ascension.<sup>11</sup> A case in point is Ḥakīm Sanā'ī Ghaznawī's (d. 525/1130) *Sayr al-'ibād ilā Ma'ād* (Journeys of servants to

did We show Abraham the realm of the heavens and the earth" (Al-An'am, 6:75). Also see Gündüz et al., *Dinlerde Yükseliş Motifleri*, 84–86.

<sup>5</sup> For a description of the experience of ascending to the metaphysical realm, see Gündüz et al., *Dinlerde Yükseliş Motifleri*, 18.

<sup>6</sup> The general opinion that "prayer is the *mi'rāj* of the believer" is the best example of this. As the five daily prayers were made obligatory on the night of ascension, this became the symbolic representation of the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet. See Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr*, 1:226; Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, 10:453; Suyūṭī, *Sharḥ Sunan Ibn Māja*, 1:313. Also see Simon O'Meara, "The Space between Here and There: The Prophet's Night Journey as an Allegory of Islamic Ritual Prayer," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 15, no. 3 (December 2012): 235.

<sup>7</sup> For the Turkish translation of the treatise that narrates Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī's ascension, see Abdülkerim Kuşeyrî, *Kitabü'l-Mirac: Hakk'a Yükseliş*, trans. Cevher Caduk (Istanbul: İlhaf Yayinevi, 2011), 151–59.

<sup>8</sup> Hasan Çiftçi, *Şeyh Ebu'l-Hasan-i Hârâkânî Nuru'l-ulum ve Münacatı* (Kars: Şehit Ebu'l-Hasan Harakani Derneği, 2004), 1:165; James Winston Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Miraj, Part 1," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987): 629–52; James Winston Morris, "The Spiritual Ascension: Ibn 'Arabi and the Miraj, Part 2," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 108 (1988): 63–77; Carl W. Ernst, "Şettârî Sufilikte Mihne ve Temkin Tavrı," trans. Ulvi Murat Kılavuz, *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 12, no. 1 (2003): 345–64.

<sup>9</sup> There are different methods of ascension in examples from different religious traditions. The first is the "spiritual ascension," and ascensions are often primarily a spiritual experience. The second is the "inner ascension." In the event of *mi'rāj*, the individual experiences this as a spiritual (inner) ascension rather than a physical (outward) ascension. This is a journey toward the realm of a person's own faculties and senses and the discovery of the divine realms and existences in his inner world. The third is a "spiritual and physical" ascension. According to traditional opinion, the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet Muḥammad was both spiritual and physical. Gündüz et al., *Dinlerde Yükseliş Motifleri*, 21–24.

<sup>10</sup> Muharrem Yıldız and Mehmet Mekin Meçin, "Dinlerde İç Yolculuklar: Riyazetin Kökenine Dair," *Tarih Okulu Dergisi (TOD)* 7, no. 17 (March 2014): 221–51.

<sup>11</sup> See Yıldırım, "Fars Edebiyatında Metafizik Yolculuklar," 177–212.

their place of return), a compilation of short poems with a philosophical and Sufi theme. In that work, the poet narrates the journey of a soul through various phases and its ultimate return to its essence. After describing the levels of the soul, Sanā'ī describes in detail the visions experienced on this spiritual journey, during which the soul encounters the spiritual guide of the intellect ('*aql-i pīr*). The elderly guide encountered by the poet on his journey is the disguised form of the universal intellect ('*aql-i kull*). The *pīr*/intellect guides him to the most illuminated path leading to the place of *ma'ād*, or return. According to Sanā'ī, ascension is nothing but a return from the realm of darkness that has captured the soul to the divine source or final station. Sanā'ī's main source of inspiration in this work was narrations of the Prophet Muḥammad's journey to the heavens. According to many literature critics, another of Sanā'ī's sources was Ibn Sīnā's (d. 428/1037) philosophical and symbolical *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān*. Sanā'ī's *Sayr al-'Ibād wa-l-ma'ād*, in turn, went onto inspire other major works written in this field, such as Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār's *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*.<sup>12</sup> European critics also suggest that it was one of Dante's (d. 1321) inspirations in writing the *Divine Comedy*.<sup>13</sup>

Prior to Sanā'ī, the theme of metaphysical journey was related in *Risāla al-Ghufrān* by Abū al-'Alā al-Ma'arrī (d. 1057),<sup>14</sup> who was known as the "philosopher of poets and poet of philosophers." The work, written in epistolary form, was interpreted as a subtle repetition of the Prophet's journey to the heavens. While the first part of this two-part work describes a supernatural journey to the hereafter, the second part contains literary criticism regarding the ideas and verses of certain poets known to be liberals or atheists. Ma'arrī's journey was similar to the Prophet Muḥammad's, but this work departs from Sufi treatments of the ascension by attributing the experience to a

common sinner. Because the work adopted a style based on secular irony and was bold and ridiculing in its narration, it was classified as a work that exceeded the boundaries of decency, and it is the only known example of its kind.<sup>15</sup>

A similar narration of a metaphysical journey is *Miṣbāḥ al-arwāḥ*, attributed to the famous quatrain poet Awḥad al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. 635/1238)<sup>16</sup> but widely believed to have been co-authored by his contemporary Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Bardsīrī. This work describes the journey of a poet and an elderly *pīr* who taught him knowledge and their travels through certain regions, cities, and stations (*maqām*). The poet departs from Kirman and heads toward Egypt. Accompanied by the guide of knowledge, the poet reaches the cities of *al-nafs al-ammāra* (the commanding soul/the inciting *nafs*), *al-nafs al-lawwāma* (the self-accusing soul), and *al-nafs al-muṭma'inna* (the soul at peace), and, finally, the station of Sidrat al-Muntahā. The traveler, who must continue the journey alone after this point, proceeds on his journey through the cities of *al-nafs al-rāḍiyya* (the contented soul/the pleased *nafs*), *al-nafs al-marziya* (the pleasing soul), and *nafs al-'āshiqā* (the loving soul). The poet meets Prophet Muḥammad in the city of *nafs al-faqr* (the soul of indigence) and enters the final city, called *nafs al-fāniyya* (the soul of annihilation), and the narration concludes with the description of this city.<sup>17</sup> These "cities" are adaptations of the Sufi concept of the seven levels (*al-aṭwār al-sab'a*) the soul must pass through to be purified from evil attributes and be adorned with the divine attributes:<sup>18</sup> *al-nafs al-ammāra* (the commanding soul/the inciting *nafs*),<sup>19</sup> *al-nafs al-lawwāma* (the admonishing soul/the self-accusing *nafs*),<sup>20</sup> *al-nafs al-mulhima* (the inspiring soul/the inspired *nafs*), *al-nafs al-muṭma'inna* (the tranquil soul/the *nafs* at peace), *al-nafs al-raḍiyya* (the contented soul/the pleased *nafs*),<sup>21</sup> *al-nafs al-marḍiyya* (the approved soul/the pleasing

12 See Yıldırım, "Fars Edebiyatında Metafizik Yolculuklar," 192–93.

13 Miguel Asin Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, trans. Güneş Ayas (Istanbul: Okuyan Us Yayınları, 2010).

14 For a Turkish translation, see Ebu'l-Alā el-Ma'arrī, *Gufran Risalesi*, trans. Nevzat H. Yanık and Selami Bakırcı (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları, 2017).

15 Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, 91–92. For comparisons of Ma'arrī's work and *The Divine Comedy*, see Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, 105–8. Also see Yıldırım, "Fars Edebiyatında Metafizik Yolculuklar," 191.

16 Jāmī and some other writers transmitted by him attributed Shams al-Dīn al-Kirmānī's work *Miṣbāḥ al-Arwāḥ* to Awḥad al-Dīn. See Nihat Azamat, "Evhadüddin-i Kirmānī," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1995), 11:518. Also see Yıldırım, "Fars Edebiyatında Metafizik Yolculuklar," 195.

17 Yıldırım, "Fars Edebiyatında Metafizik Yolculuklar," 196–97.

18 Süleyman Uludağ, "Nefis," in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2006), 32:528.

19 Ethem Cebecioğlu, *Tasavvuf Terimleri ve Deyimleri Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: Ağaç Kitabevi Yayınları, 2009), 199.

20 Süleyman Uludağ, *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü* (Istanbul: Kabcacı Yayınevi, 2001), 274; Cebecioğlu, *Tasavvuf Terimleri*, 474.

21 Cebecioğlu, *Tasavvuf Terimleri*, 475.

*nafs*),<sup>22</sup> and *al-nafs al-kāmila/al-nafs al-ṣāfiyya* (the perfected/purified soul).<sup>23</sup>

One of the most excellent poetic accounts inspired by the night journey and ascension is Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s (d. 618/1221) book *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* (Conference of the birds).<sup>24</sup> In this work, ‘Aṭṭār relates the compelling and difficult journey of the birds in the Kingdom of Birds beyond the peak of Mount Qaf to find Simurgh, the legendary bird of the kings.<sup>25</sup> The main theme in *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*—and similar works written in Persian, Arabic, and Turkish literature—is the journey of the soul and the traveler progressing through certain *maqāms* or stations toward the ultimate goal of *fanā fi al-ḥaq* (annihilation of the self in reality) or *fanā fi Allah* (annihilation of the self in god). Although Farīd al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s (d. 618/1221) *Mantiq al-Ṭayr* was the most famous of this type of narration, the earliest such works were *Risāla al-Ṭayr* (Treatise of the birds), written by Ibn Sīnā, and the later work *Risāla al-Ṭuyūr*, by Aḥmad al-Ghazzālī (d. 520/1126).<sup>26</sup> Such treatises of birds, also known as cycles of birds, continued to be written by Islamic scholars, especially in the Middle Ages, with famous examples including Shahāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī’s (d. 587/1191) *Risāla al-Ṭayr* (Treatise of the birds)<sup>27</sup> and *Ṣafīr-i Sīmurgh* (Call of the Simurgh),<sup>28</sup> and later Najm al-Dīn Rāzī’s (d. 654/1256) *Risāla al-Ṭuyūr*<sup>29</sup> and Ibn al-‘Arabī’s (d. 638/1240) *Anqa Mughrib* (Book of the fabulous gryphon).<sup>30</sup> In addition to these, the most excellent examples of symbolic spiritual journeys are Suhrawardī’s symbolic and didactic narrations *‘Aql-i Surkh* (The red intellect) and *Āwāz-i Par-i Jebrail* (The chant of Gabriel’s wings). All of these

stories describe the re-ascension of a person from the cage of his body to the heavenly realm from which he previously departed, and the adventures he experiences on his return journey.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to his *Risāla al-Ṭayr*, Ibn Sīnā wrote two other works in a somewhat different symbolic style: *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān*<sup>32</sup> and *Salāmān and Absāl*. Both *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* and *Risāla al-Ṭayr* are based on the theme of a spiritual ascension and journey. While the story of *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* portrays the general framework of the journey, *Risāla al-Ṭayr* has been interpreted as the story of actualizing this journey. While the journey of *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* was devised on a horizontal east-west axis or according to directional coordinates, *Risāla al-Ṭayr* adapted this narration to a vertical journey. The birds escape from their cage and, fleeing the material world, they pass over nine mountains and reach the Almighty King’s palace. In the case of *Salāmān and Absāl*, this journey focuses on the worldly phase of the same journey. When the themes of the journeys in both stories are combined with the similar themes in the story of *Salāmān and Absāl*, one is left with the stages of the soul’s journey.<sup>33</sup> In the *mi‘rāj-nāma* attributed to Ibn Sīnā, this journey, which was carried out both horizontally (on an east-west axis) and vertically (the ascension of the birds to the skies), combines the philosopher’s symbolic narrations with the narration of the Prophet’s ascension. His *mi‘rāj-nāma* combines the horizontal and vertical journeys in the other narrations (the *isrā’* journey from Mecca to Jerusalem and the *mi‘rāj* ascension from Jerusalem to the spheres of the heavens) with the horizontal and vertical journeys in the philosopher’s other narratives,

22 Cebecioğlu, 474.

23 Cebecioğlu, 474.

24 Feridü’l-din Attar, *Mantiku’t-Tayr: Kuşların Diliyle*, trans. Mustafa Çiçekler (Istanbul: Kaknüs Yayınları, 2015).

25 This work, written in 1187 and also known as *Mantiq al-Ṭayr*, *Maqāmāt al-Ṭuyūr*, *Maqālāt al-Ṭuyūr*, or *Ṭuyūr-nāma*, is a *mathnawī* that symbolically explains the belief of *waḥda al-wujūd*. The birds in this *mathnawī* represent travelers. Hudhud is the mentor, that is, the guide. Simurgh (thirty birds=phoenix) is the manifestation of God. See M. Nazif Şahinoğlu, “Attār, Feridüddin,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1991), 4:95–98.

26 İbn Sīnā, Sühreverdī, A. Gazālī, and N. Rāzī, *İslam Felsefesinde Sembolik Hikâyeler 1*, trans. and ed. Derya Örs et al. (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1997).

27 Şehabeddin Sühreverdī, “Risâletü’t-tayr: Kuşlar Hikâyesi,” in *Cebrail’in Kanat Sesi*, trans. Sedat Baran (Istanbul: Sufi Kitap, 2016), 101–8.

28 Şehabeddin Sühreverdī, “Safīr-i Sīmurgh: Anka Kuşunun Sesi,” in *Cebrail’in Kanat Sesi* (Istanbul: Sufi Kitap, 2016), 41–56.

29 Necm-i Rāzī, “Risâletü’t-Tuyūr,” in *İslam Felsefesinde Sembolik Hikâyeler 1* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2004), 211–25.

30 Mahmud Erol Kılıç, “Muhyiddin İbnü’l-Arabî’nin Kuşları,” in *İslam Felsefesinde Sembolik Hikâyeler 1* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2004), 243–46. Regarding the symbolism of birds, see Mahmud Erol Kılıç, *Şeyh-i Ekber: İbn Arabî Düşüncesine Giriş* (Istanbul: Sufi Kitap, 2017), 269–72.

31 Yıldız and Meçin, “Dinlerde İç Yolculuklar,” 240.

32 İbn Sīnā, *Ḥayy bin Yaqzān: Keşifler*, trans. Şerafeddin Yaltkaya (Istanbul: Büyüyen Ay Yayınları, 2017).

33 Corbin, *Avicenna*, 165–68; Peter Heath, *Allegory and Philosophy in Avicenna* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 170–71; Seyyid Hüseyin Nasr, *İslâm Kozmoloji Öğretilerine Giriş*, trans. Nazife Şişman (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1985), 290–301. See also Fatma Turğay, “İbn Sīnā’nın Sembolik Hikâyelerinde Ahlak Felsefesi” (master’s thesis, Marmara University, 2006).

offering a philosophical commentary in the form of an allegorical tale.<sup>34</sup>

Al-Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl (d. 587/1191) wrote *Al-Qiṣṣa al-Ghurba al-Gharbiyya* (Recital of Occidental exile) to reveal the truths he believed to be hidden in Ibn Sīnā's symbolic narrations.<sup>35</sup> The journey begins in the material world and the darkness that entraps the individual, and it ends in the "East of the lights" (the place of one's true birth), which represents his fundamental abode, enlightenment, and spiritual truth. This work is one of the nine symbolic works written by Suhrawardī, most of which are accounts of the pursuit of a person lured from the realm of spirituality (the eastern kingdom of light) to the carnal/material world (the western realm of darkness).

In addition to literary, philosophical, and symbolic narrations, the *mi'rāj* has also been a source for many Sufi works on the ascension to the metaphysic realm.<sup>36</sup> The event of *mi'rāj*, the tale of how the Prophet reached the divine presence by transcending the levels of the heavens, was the prototype for the spiritual journey/*sayr u sulūk* for Sufis in *taṣawwufī* thought.<sup>37</sup> Sufis adopted the methods and principles of the Prophet's *mi'rāj* for their own path. *Sayr u sulūk* is defined as the journey in the phase of a person's existence, and this journey involves the stages of a spiritual ascension (*urūj, mi'rāj*) and descent/return to earth (*nuzūl, rujū*). Although the terms "ascension" and "descent" in Sufi works are allegoric, many Sufis have given accounts of their own *urūj*/ascensions.<sup>38</sup>

In Sufi literature, many Sufis have described *mi'rāj* as a journey on the path to the ultimate peak,

a journey during which one escapes egoistic desires and progresses through the stations to reach the divine presence. Sufis writing in this vein include Bāyazīd Bisṭāmī (d. 234/848), Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 297/909), Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), 'Abd al-Qādir al-Gaylānī (d. 561/1165–66), and 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428).<sup>39</sup> Bāyazīd-i Bisṭāmī was the first Sufi to relate the Prophet's experience of the *mi'rāj* as the Sufi practice of a spiritual ascension, and he was later followed by other Sufis.<sup>40</sup> Bāyazīd-i Bisṭāmī had a dream where he ascended to the heavens, and when he reached the worldly firmament, a green bird that spread its wing for him ascended in flight until it reached the station of the angels.<sup>41</sup> Although each of the stations was revealed to him in the most spectacular form, he was also tested with illusions as he ascended through the spheres of heaven.<sup>42</sup> After traversing the realms of angels and tyrants and oceans of light, al-Bisṭāmī reached the Footstall (of God) on ascending to the seventh level of heaven. There, arrived at the 'Arsh (Throne) and saw the Messenger of God. His ascension ends with the advice he received from the Prophet (on counseling and calling his people to God upon his return).<sup>43</sup>

Another text on the ascension is the *Laṭā'if al-Mi'rāj* written by al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021).<sup>44</sup> Yet another is the *Kitāb al-Mi'rāj* (Book of ascension) by al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072). In the latter, al-Qushayrī explains the stages of ascension and includes the Sufis' views on this subject. Indeed, it was the first work to provide answers on debates regarding the Sufis' ascension. In one part of the work, al-Qushayrī takes up the following questions:

34 See Ayşe Taşkent, "Did Avicenna Write a *Mi'rāj-nāma*? A Structural and Content Analysis of the *Mi'rāj-nāma* in the Context of Avicenna's Theory of Soul (*Nafs*) and Prophecy (*Nubuwwa*)," in this volume.

35 For translations of this work in Turkish, see "Ruhun Yolculuğu," in *İslam Felsefesinde Sembolik Hikâyeler 1*, trans. İsmail Yakıt (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2004), 97–108; "Batı'ya Yolculuğun Hikâyesi," in *İslam Filozoflarından Felsefe Metinleri*, trans. Mahmut Kaya (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2003), 519–28; "Batı'ya Yolculuk," in *Cebrail'in Kanat Sesi*, trans. Sedat Baran (Istanbul: Sufi Kitap, 2016), 147–56.

36 Affifi, "The Story of the Prophet's Ascent," 26–27.

37 Affifi, 23.

38 Nazeer el-Azma, "Some Notes on the Impact of the Story of the Miraj on the Sufi Literature," in *Sufism: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, ed. Lloyd Ridgeoni, vol. 1 (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2008), 34–35; Yusuf Bilal Kara, "Miraçın Tasavvufî Boyutu," in *IV. Türkiye Lisansüstü Çalışmaları Kongresi: Bildiriler Kitabı IV*, ed. Hümeýra Dinçer and Ümit Güneş (Istanbul: İlimi Etüdler Derneği, 2015), 137–50; Necdet Tosun, "Süflerin Miracı," *Altınoluk Dergisi* 293 (2010): 48; Salih Sabri Yavuz, *İsrâ ve Mirac* (Istanbul: Pınar Yayıncılık, 2011), 138–39.

39 El-Azma, "Some Notes," 1:34–35; Kara, "Miraçın Tasavvufî Boyutu," 137–50; Tosun, "Süflerin Miracı," 48; Yavuz, *İsrâ ve Mirac*, 138–39.

40 El-Azma, "Some Notes," 1:34–35; Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, 79; Corbin, *Avicenna*, 8:168; Heath, *Allegory*, 109; Affifi, "The Story of the Prophet's Ascent," 27.

41 Abdülkerim Kuşeyrî, *Kitâbü'l-Mirac: Hakka Yükseliş*, ed. Ali Abdullah Abdülkadir, trans. Cevher Saduk (Istanbul: İlkhaf Yayınevi, 2011), 152.

42 Kuşeyrî, *Kitâbü'l-Mirac*, 158. See el-Azma, "Some Notes," 1:34–35; Corbin, *Avicenna*, 168; Heath, *Allegory*, 109. See also Christiane Gruber, "Journey to Inspiration: *Mi'rāj* Texts and Images," in this volume.

43 Kuşeyrî, *Kitâbü'l-Mirac*, 158.

44 Frederick S. Colby, "The Subtleties of the Ascension: Al-Sulamī on the *Mi'rāj* of the Prophet Muhammad," *Studia Islamica* 94 (2002): 167–83; Abu Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī, *The Subtleties of the Ascension: Early Mystical Sayings on Muhammad's Heaven*, ed. and trans. Frederick S. Colby (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2006).

“Is the ascension of Friends of God (saints) permissible? What are your views on the claims of a group of people that Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī and others experienced ascension?” He responds in the affirmative. In a section titled “Explanation regarding the Ascension of Saints (*walī*),” al-Qushayrī cites al-Sarakhsī to argue that ascension to the heavens in the state of sleep or semi-sleep is a frequent and normal event for those at the beginning of *al-sayr al-sulūk*, or spiritual journey. In making this argument, al-Qushayrī built on the work of Bāyazīd al-Bisṭāmī, and contributed to the ascension literature by offering evidence that it is possible for a *walī* (friend of God) to experience spiritual ascension.<sup>45</sup>

In his *Kashf al-Mahjūb* (Revelation of the veiled), al-Hujwirī (d. 465/1072?) defines ascension as the state of being “close.” Al-Hujwirī, like al-Qushayrī, explains that while the ascension of the prophets was physical, a saint/friend of God can be spiritually absorbed in the state of ascension and knowledge of the ascension can be instilled in his heart.<sup>46</sup> While the saint is rewarded with closeness to God as he progresses through the stations, on his return from the state of spiritual intoxication (*mast*) to the normal state of sobriety (*ṣaḥw*), the divine proof/signs are embedded in his heart.<sup>47</sup> Al-Hujwirī highlights the major difference between the person who reaches such a *maqām*/station with his mind/soul, and the person (prophet) who reached this *maqām* both spiritually and physically.<sup>48</sup>

The work *Ma‘ārij al-quds fī madārij ma‘rifat al-nafs*,<sup>49</sup> attributed to Ḥujjat al-Islām al-Ghazzālī

(d. 505/1111), begins with a description of the soul (*nafs*) and details the ascension of the soul stage by stage on the journey toward knowing itself and its Lord. In *Mi‘rāj al-Sālikīn* (Ascension of the wayfarer), al-Ghazzālī analyzed the *mi‘rāj* as the ascension of the human soul through the *maqāms*; he also explained the means through which the soul knows the Creator, and the ladder that ascends to His knowledge. The ascension begins for those who distance themselves from the tangible realm and enter the path toward traversing the stations of ascension and approaching the level of divinity.<sup>50</sup> *Al-Sirāj al-Wahhāj fī Layla al-Mi‘rāj*, compiled from sections on the *mi‘rāj* in ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Gaylānī’s (d. 561/1165–66) *Al-Ghunya*,<sup>51</sup> explains all the stages of the *mi‘rāj* journey, beginning from Gabriel’s invitation to the Prophet to accompany him on the ascension. Separate chapters were also allocated to the ascensions of the prophets Mūsā (Moses) and Yūnus (Jonah).

The most spirited and most appealing of the allegoric and *taṣawwufī* adaptations of the ascension in Sufi thought appear in the following works of Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 638/1204):<sup>52</sup> *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, *Risāla al-Anwār* (Treatise of light),<sup>53</sup> and *Shajara al-Kawn* (Tree of existence).<sup>54</sup>

In his *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (chapter 376), al-‘Arabī transmits the *mi‘rāj* journey as it is related in classic sources, citing the relevant verses of the Qur’an as evidence.<sup>55</sup> He distinguishes the ascensions of the prophets and saints, and states that the *mi‘rāj* of prophets was performed both

45 Kuşeyrî, *Kitâbü’l-Mirac*, 85–86.

46 Hücvirî, *Keşfu’l-mahcûb: Hakikat Bilgisi*, trans. Süleyman Uludağ (Istanbul: Dergâh Yayınları, 1982), 359. Also see Kara, “Miraçın Tasavvufî Boyutu,” 147; Affifi, “The Story of the Prophet’s Ascent,” 26.

47 Affifi, “The Story of the Prophet’s Ascent,” 23–27, 35–36. While *mast* denotes a state of drunkenness, in *taṣawwufī* literature it refers to a Sufi’s losing his worldly senses and being entranced, or to the state of spiritual intoxication. *Ṣaḥw*, or sobriety, refers to the Sufi’s leaving this state of spiritual intoxication. See Uludağ, *Tasavvuf Terimleri Sözlüğü*, 329, 411.

48 Yavuz, *İsrâ ve Mirac*, 138–39.

49 İmam Gazâlî, *Hakikat Bilgisine Yükseliş: Meâricü’l-Kuds (Ma‘arîj al-quds fī madârij marifat al-nafs)*, trans. Serkan Özburun (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 1995).

50 Hücçetü’l-İslâm İmâm-ı Gazâlî, *Miṣkatü’l-envâr (Nûrlar Feneri)*, trans. Süleyman Ateş (Istanbul: Bedir Yayınları, 1994), 25.

51 Abdülkâdir-i Geylânî, “Miraç Gecesinde Işık Saçan Kandili/es-Sirâcü’l-vehhâc fī leyleti’l-Mi‘râc,” *Hakkın Nuruna Miraç: Peygamberin İlahî Yolculukları* (Istanbul: Hayykitap, 2011), 59–98. This work was previously translated into Turkish and published as *Üç Aylar ve Faziletleri*, trans. Mustafa Güner (Ankara, 1975); and *Üç Aylar ve Mübarek Geceler*, trans. Hasircızâde (Istanbul, 1984).

52 Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, Part 1,” 629–30.

53 İbn Arabî, *Nurlar Risalesi*, trans. Mahmut Kanık (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2011), 11–58. For the ascension of saints and prophets, see İbn Arabî, *Nurlar Risalesi*, 26; Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, Part 1,” 629–30, 632.

54 See İbn Arabî, “İttihâd’ül-Kevnî Risalesi ya da İnsanlık Ağacı ve Dört Rûhânî Kuş,” in *Nurlar Risalesi* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2011), 59–93. The treatise, which begins with two poems, later changes into a narrative of the seven levels of the ascension, at each of which is a prophet. See İbn Arabî, “İttihâd’ül-Kevnî Risalesi,” 75, 79.

55 İbn Arabî, *Futūḥât-ı Mekkiyye*, trans. Ekrem Demirli (Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2014), chapter 367, 8:98–136; Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, Part 1,” 633; Affifi, “The Story of the Prophet’s Ascent,” 35.

physically and spiritually.<sup>56</sup> In his philosophy, Ibn al-‘Arabī interprets the ascension as two arcs, the arc of descent (*qaws al-nuzūl*) and arc of ascent (*qaws al-‘urūj*), and views these as the means whereby a person may observe God in his own soul.

In his *Kitāb al-Isrā’ ilā al-Maqām al-Asra’*,<sup>57</sup> Ibn al-‘Arabī adapts the *mīrāj* to the ascension of Sufis and saints who ascend to certain stations and levels of the seven heavens, each of which is associated with the name of a prophet.<sup>58</sup> The traveler (*sālik*) is prepared for his spiritual ascension through various motifs used in classic narrations during the preparation process of the night journey (*isrā’*), including Burāq, Gabriel, Rafrāf, and the opening of the traveler’s chest. On this spiritual journey, the traveler ascends by mounting the Burāq of Purity (*ikhlaṣ*). Accompanied by the Messenger of Success (*tawfiq*) and beginning with the lowest heaven, he progresses through all the spheres of heaven and completes his ascension.<sup>59</sup> At the beginning of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s book, he explains that he set out from the land of al-Andalus (Andalusia) on the journey to Jerusalem and encountered a youth of spiritual qualities who was sent as his guide. As he ascended from Jerusalem to the heavens, his guide was replaced a new one, the Envoy of Divine Mercy; accompanied by this new guide, he traversed the spheres of heaven and came before God.<sup>60</sup>

In Ibn al-‘Arabī’s conception, the levels of heaven are associated with particular prophets, and each is part of the arc of ascent. These levels of heaven and the prophets they are associated with are as follows: the Level of Governorship (Adam), Level of Scriptures (‘Īsā), Heaven of Testimony (Yūsuf), Level of Command (Idrīs), Level of Guardianship (Hārūn), Level of Theology (Mūsā), and Level of Intent (Ibrāhīm). According to Ibn al-‘Arabī, the lowest heaven is ascribed to the prophet Adam, as this is the beginning of the ascension, with the human leaving the body, and Adam is commemorated as the father of humanity

(*ab al-bashar*). Subsequently, the mentioning of ‘Īsā (Jesus) in terms of the course of the journey indicates the spiritual nature of the ascension. When the traveler encounters the prophet Yūsuf (Joseph) in the third heaven, the prophet relates certain things about himself that are revealed in the Qur’an, including the prophet’s imprisonment and the accusations of slander he faced. This level of heaven is believed to be where the traveler is first able to see the divine light, which is associated with the beauty of Yūsuf. In the fourth heaven, classified as the heart of all the heavens and represented with the symbol of the sun, the traveler meets Idrīs (Enoch). The fifth heaven is linked to Hārūn (Aaron) because he was described as a caliph. In *al-Futūḥāt*, Ibn al-‘Arabī conferred with prophet Mūsā (Moses) in the sixth heaven about prayer and the vision he witnessed when he requested to see God. Abraham (Ibrāhīm) is depicted as leaning against al-Bayt al-Ma‘mūr (the Inhabited House). This station is called the Heaven of Intent, because friendship with God is the main objective. While describing the Sidrat al-Muntahā and the four “rivers” (the Qur’an, Torah, Psalms, and Gospels) in *Kitāb al-Isrā’*, Ibn al-‘Arabī says an angel lifted him to the highest station at the *qāba qawsayn* (distance of two bows).<sup>61</sup>

Ascension to the heavens is also addressed in another chapter of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (chapter 167) under the heading “Knowledge on the Alchemy of True Happiness.”<sup>62</sup> This remarkably appealing and interesting chapter compares the journeys of a philosopher and a Sufi. In the first stage of the journey, these two travelers, who set out at the same time to search for knowledge of their Creator, reach perfection and prosperity of the soul by escaping physical desires. At this stage, the doctrines of philosophy and religion have close similarities: both travelers manage to escape from the bonds attaching them to the world, and they eliminate the destructive effects of physical

<sup>56</sup> Nihat Keklikli, *İbn’ül Arabî’nin Eserleri ve Kaynakları İçin Misnak Olarak El-Futūḥāt El-Mekkiyye* (Ankara: T. C. Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1990), 100–112; Affifi, “The Story of the Prophet’s Ascent,” 632.

<sup>57</sup> Muhyiddin İbn Arabî, *Risaleler 2*, trans. Vahdettin İnce (Istanbul: Kitsan Yayınevi, 2005), 2:2, book “Kitābu’l-Esrā’ İlä Makāmi’l-Esrā’,” accessed March 14, 2020, [https://archive.org/stream/MuhyiddinbnArabiNinRisaleleri2/Muhyiddin-İbn-Arabi-nin-Risaleleri-2\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/MuhyiddinbnArabiNinRisaleleri2/Muhyiddin-İbn-Arabi-nin-Risaleleri-2_djvu.txt). See also Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, Part 1,” 631–33.

<sup>58</sup> El-Azma, “Some Notes,” 35. See also Affifi, “The Story of the Prophet’s Ascent,” 23–27, 35–36; Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, 80; İbn Arabî, *Fütūḥât-ı Mekkiyye*, 8:98–136.

<sup>59</sup> İbn Arabî, *Risaleler 2*.

<sup>60</sup> İbn Arabî, *Risaleler 2*. For the differences between Bāyazîd al-Bisṭāmî and Ibn al-‘Arabî, see Affifi, “The Story of the Prophet’s Ascent,” 36–37.

<sup>61</sup> Sadık Acar, “İbn Arabî’de Miraç Fenomeni” (master’s thesis, Marmara University, 2016); Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, Part 1,” 629–30, 644–51.

<sup>62</sup> İbn Arabî, *Fütūḥât-ı Mekkiyye*, 8:33–67; Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, Part 1,” 632–33; Morris, “The Spiritual Ascension, Part 2,” 63–74; Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, 82–87.

desires. Then the actual ascension based on the *mi'rāj* of the Prophet begins. The first seven stages are equivalent to the seven planetary spheres: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Both travelers ascend to the heavens at the same speed and visit these levels of heaven in order. During the ascension, the philosopher mounts Burāq, a sacred animal that carried the Prophet (here representing the allegoric expression of intelligence), while the Sufi rides on Rafrāf, the cushion or mattress that carried the Prophet to the 'Arsh al-A'lā (Divine Throne).

Although both travelers reach the gates of heaven at the same time, they are welcomed in a totally different manner. While the traveler that followed the Prophet—that is, the Sufi—was met by prophets in each of the heavens, the philosopher was asked to wait until he was received by the spirits of the celestial bodies in the cosmologies of Neo-Platonism and Ibn Sīnā. Ibn al-'Arabī ingeniously includes many elements of his own theological system in his work, and this allegoric narration becomes an encyclopedia of philosophical, theological, and esoteric sciences related in the form of dialogues with the prophets.<sup>63</sup> In this way, while Adam explains the productive effects of the divine attributes to the traveler who follows the Prophet, he explains the phenomenon of the realms beneath the Moon to the philosopher.<sup>64</sup> The philosopher is met by the celestial bodies of Mercury in the second heaven, whereas the other traveler is welcomed by the prophets 'Īsā (Jesus) and Yaḥyā (John). He converses with them regarding miracles and the mystical qualities of certain words and phrases, including *amr bi kun* (the command of "Be!"; i.e., referring to the expression God "says 'Be' and it is" mentioned ten times in the Qur'an).<sup>65</sup> Differences of this kind between the results obtained by both travelers continue throughout the entire journey. In the heaven of Venus, the prophet Yūsuf (Joseph) describes the mystery of the order, beauty, and harmony of the universe and also explains the art of interpreting poetry and dreams.<sup>66</sup> In the heaven

of the Sun, the prophet Idrīs (Enoch) explains astronomic factors and esoteric interpretations of day and night.<sup>67</sup> In the heaven of Mars, the prophet Hārūn (Aaron) explains how the people of different religious communities are treated. In the heaven of Jupiter, Ibn al-'Arabī conveys his own ideas on philosophy in the words of the prophet Mūsā (Moses).<sup>68</sup> Finally, in the heaven of Saturn, leaning against the wall of al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr, the prophet Ibrāhīm (Abraham) describes life in the hereafter to the traveler. During this process, the downhearted philosopher waits in the dark residence of the spiritual entity of Saturn, deeply regretting the path he chose. Holding the traveler by the hand, Ibrāhīm leads him to al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr.<sup>69</sup> Here the second stage of the ascension begins.

The traveler leaves al-Bayt al-Ma'mūr and continues to ascend, whereas his friend remains below and waits for him. Apart from two levels, the levels in this second part of the ascension comprise scenes pertaining to Sufism and theology. Ascending to Sidrat al-Muntahā, the traveler comes across the four rivers (the Torah, Psalms, Gospels, and Qur'an). On his ascent to the Heaven of Fixed Stars in the last stage of heaven—that is, the Heaven of Zodiacs, where there are thousands of mansions of paradise—the traveler finds all the wonders and magnificence resulting from the properties of this sphere. Immediately after this, he ascends to the Footstall.<sup>70</sup> There, fascinated by the magnificent harmony of the celestial bodies and indefinable luminance gleaming from the Throne, he learns from God the mysteries of the perpetuity of the rewards and punishments in life in the hereafter. In a state of bewilderment, he suddenly realizes that he has ascended to the Divine Throne, the symbol of God's boundless mercy. He sees the Throne being carried by five angels and three prophets (Adam, Ibrāhīm, and Muḥammad),<sup>71</sup> and he learns from them the mystery of the universe, which is inscribed on the Divine Throne. The remaining levels all belong to the spiritual realm. Finally, the traveler is taken to 'Amā (the Cloud), which signifies the primitive manifestation and the prime matter

63 Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, 79–80.

64 İbn Arabî, *Fütûhât-ı Mekkiyye*, 8:41–42.

65 İbn Arabî, 8:43–44.

66 İbn Arabî, 8:45.

67 İbn Arabî, 8:46–47.

68 İbn Arabî, 8:48–53.

69 İbn Arabî, 8:56.

70 İbn Arabî, 8:60.

71 İbn Arabî, 8:61.

common to the Creator and creation.<sup>72</sup> In a state of ecstasy, the traveler reaches the conclusion of his *mi'rāj*, grasping the ineffable mysteries of the divine essence and its attributes, both those relating to the absolute and those relating to creatures.<sup>73</sup>

Although the most appealing narrations symbolizing the Sufi ascension were written by Ibn al-ʿArabī, many Sufis after him wrote about their own spiritual ascensions and their experiences on this journey. In works written on the *mi'rāj*, there is an ineluctable sense of Akbarī influence.<sup>74</sup> The Iranian scholar, poet, and founder of the Rukniyya order ʿAlā al-Dawla Simnānī (d. 736/1336)<sup>75</sup> described an ascension in his work *Sirr bāl al-bāl li-dhaw al-ḥāl*.<sup>76</sup> There, his soul first travels through earth, air, water, and fire, then begins its journey to the planets. Another author, ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Jīlī (d. 832/1428), associates the *mi'rāj* with the ladder of ascension and describes the ascension as a journey from the physical to the divine realm. The first stage of ascension begins when the traveler effaces the influences of the tangible realm. When a Sufi abandons all the elements of his creation (earth, air, water, and fire), he is spiritually raised to the worldly heavens.<sup>77</sup> Sayyid Muḥammad Nūrbakhsh (d. 1464), founder of the Nūrbakhshīyya order, also wrote a prosaic *mi'rājnāma*.<sup>78</sup> Yet another author, Imām Rabbānī (d. 1034/1624), relates in his *Mabda' wa Ma'ād* an experience he had on one of his spiritual ascensions<sup>79</sup> and also states that during *al-sayr al-sulūk*, or spiritual journey, it is possible to depart from the universe. According to Rabbānī, “The Prophet departed from the universe and escaped the condition of time and space pertaining to this world; he saw Yūnus (Jonah) in the belly of the fish, Nūḥ (Noah) while the floods occurred, the

people of paradise in paradise, and the people of hell in hell.” Imam Rabbānī explains that during his own spiritual journey, he also escaped the conditions of time and space in this realm and witnessed the moment when the angels prostrated before Adam.<sup>80</sup>

Another author that addressed the Sufi dimension of the ascension was Shah Walī Allah al-Dihlawī (d. 1176/1762). In his *Hujjat Allah al-bāligha* (The profound evidence of Allah), he, like other Sufi followers, explained the Sufi meanings of the symbols featured in the ascension. According to Shah Walī Allah, the ascension took place in the realm of *barzakh* between the visible realm and the imaginal realm. In view of this, each of the symbols that appeared in the ascension had to be interpreted individually. While the opening of the Prophet’s chest was interpreted as a victory of the angelical lights and enlightenment, mounting Burāq was interpreted as him governing his *nafs al-nāṭiqā* (rational soul) and *nafs al-ḥaywāniyya* (animal soul). The significance of the night journey to al-Masjid al-Aqṣā was that this was the “center of the manifestations of the divine presence,” the “gathering place of the prophets,” and the “place that received the blessings of al-Mala al-āʿlā,” or the Highest Assembly. Dihlawī describes all the motifs, including Sidrat al-Muntahā, al-Bayt al-Maʿmūr, and Raḥraf, and explains both the Sufi and symbolic meanings of these motifs.<sup>81</sup>

In conclusion, narrations on the celestial journey and spiritual ascension of the Prophet in philosophic and Sufi literature presented this journey as a prototype; in the context of the miracle of the *mi'rāj*, every poet, philosopher, and Sufi reconstructed and interpreted the narrative of the ascension using their own concepts and symbols.

<sup>72</sup> Ibn Arabī, 8:64.

<sup>73</sup> Palacios, *Dante ve İslam*, 82–87.

<sup>74</sup> Palacios, 82–87.

<sup>75</sup> For Abū al-Makārim Rukn al-Dīn Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Simnānī (d. 736/1336), see M. Nazif Şahinoğlu “Alāüddeve-i Simnānī,” in *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslām Ansiklopedisi* (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 1989), 2:345–47.

<sup>76</sup> ʿAlā al-Dawla Simnānī’s work *Sirr bāl al-bāl li-dhaw al-ḥāl* (Nuruosmaniye Library, no. 5007, fols. 1v–33v; Istanbul University Library, AY, no. 564, fols. 143v–162v) is a treatise that explains his journey in the spiritual realm.

<sup>77</sup> Yavuz, *İsrā ve Mirac*, 142–43.

<sup>78</sup> Jamshid Jalali Shayjani, “Muhammad Nurbakhsh’s *Risala-yi Mirajīya*: Critical Edition,” in *Israq Islamic Philosophy Yearbook* (Moscow: Nauka-Vostochnaya Literatura), 5:306–31.

<sup>79</sup> Tosun, “Süflerin Miracı,” 48.

<sup>80</sup> While explaining his own ascension and descent on the spiritual journey, Rabbānī relates that with the guidance of Imam ʿAlī, he first ascended from the divine attributes to the level of the one who was his teacher and guide (Prophet Muḥammad); then, with the help of Bahā al-Dīn Naqshband, he reached the level of the Muḥammadan Reality; following this, he ascended to even higher levels with the assistance of the spirits of ʿUmar, Alā al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār, Prophet Muḥammad, and ʿAbd al-Qādir Gaylānī. On his return journey, he visited the shaykhs of the Chishtīyya, Kubrawīyya, and Suhrawardīyya orders and received guidance from them; but when he reached the final point of the descent, the heart (*qalb*), he ascended once again before he reached stability, rose to a higher level than he had previously, and then descended to the heart once again, where he reached stability. Tosun, “Süflerin Miracı,” 48.

<sup>81</sup> Dihlawī, *Hujjat Allah al-bāligha*, ed. Shaykh Muḥammad Sharīf Sukkar (Beirut: Dār al-Iḥyā al-ʿUlūm, 1990), 1:200.