



ZEREN TANINDI ARMAĞANI | FESTSCHRIFT

İslam Dünyasında
Kitap Sanatı ve Kültürü
Art and Culture of Books
in the Islamic World



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EDİTÖRLER / EDITORS
ASLIHAN ERKMEN
ŞEBNEM TAMCAN PARLADIR

DANIŞMAN / SUPERVISOR
SERPİL BAĞCI

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Burāq in Islamic Pictorial Traditions

Although mentions of Burāq, the Prophet Muhammed’s flying steed, appear in many Arabic-language texts, it is especially in Persianate paintings made after 1300 CE that the most vivid elaborations of this flying steed occur.¹ Pictorial sources thus shed light on the imagination of Burāq in various Islamic cultural spheres during and after the medieval period. Within various literary and artistic traditions, this mythical animal has fulfilled a number of functions, including as proof of the righteousness of Islam, as confirmation of Muhammed’s prophetic appointment and high status, and as an animal emissary and proxy of the Prophet. At turns, it also may embody the faith or propel a sectarian discourse, the latter most especially via the use of other animal metaphors.

Among the many depictions of Burāq, the earliest extant painting appears in Rashīd al-Dīn’s universal encyclopedia entitled *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* (Compendium of Chronicles), made in Tabriz in 706/1306-7 (**Figure 1**).² In the textual section accompanying the ascension (*mi’rāj*) painting, the author does not describe Burāq in any detail. However, the artist shows the cloaked Prophet atop his centaur-like steed while holding it by its torso. Burāq’s speckled body resembles that of a horse, its human head bears a crown, its human arms hold a closed codex, and its tail transforms into an angel bearing a sword and shield. There to greet the Prophet and Burāq appear two winged angels: the first bears a golden cup on a tray and the other emerges with a second cup from a door in the blue heavens. This depicted episode can be identified as the “testing of the cups,” when Muhammed selects and drinks milk. Fulfilling an initiatic purpose, Muhammed’s correct choice confirms his prophetic status and enables him to ascend to God.³

- 1 For a detailed description of Burāq, see Christiane Gruber, “Al-Burāq,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd edition (2015), *Brill Online Reference Works*: <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3>; and Thomas Arnold, *Painting in Islam: A Study of the Place of Pictorial Art in Muslim Culture* (New York: Dover Publications, 1965), 117-122, pl. LIII.
- 2 Sheila Blair, *A Compendium of Chronicles: Rashid al-Din’s Illustrated History of the World*, Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art (London: Nour Foundation, 1995); Christiane Gruber, “Signs of the Hour: Eschatological Imagery in Islamic Book Arts,” *Ars Orientalis* 44 (2014): 40, 43-44, fig. 1; David Talbot Rice, *The Illustrations to the “World History” of Rashīd al-Dīn*, ed. Basil Gray (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1976), 110, fig. 36.
- 3 On the “testing of the cups,” see Frederick Colby, *Narrating Muhammed’s Night Journey: Tracing the Development of the Ibn ‘Abbas Ascension Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 81-82 and 135-136.

Figure 1:

The Prophet Muhammed riding Burāq toward two angels, Rashīd al-Dīn, *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* (Compendium of Chronicles), Tabriz, 706/1306-7. EUL, Or. Ms. 20, f. 55r. (Gruber, "Signs of the Hour:" p. 40, fig. 1).



The war-like angel emerging from the tip of the flying beast's tail may embody the apocalyptic Angel of Death. Nearly contemporary to the Rashīd al-Dīn's text, the Latin translation of a now-lost Arabic-language ascension narrative, the *Liber Scale Machometi* (Book of Muhammed's Ladder), records that the Prophet encountered the Angel of Death (*Malik al-Mawt*) after his prayer in Jerusalem and before his entry into the first heaven.⁴ The Angel of Death informs the Prophet that God gave him the duty to separate men's souls from their bodies. In the Ilkhanid painting, the inclusion of the sword and shield makes it possible that Burāq's caudal appendage represents the Angel of Death, ready to extract the souls of men.

Burāq also holds a closed codex in its hands. The book almost certainly represents the "correct path" (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) mentioned in the *Qur'an*'s opening chapter (*al-Fātiḥa*) and emphasized by Rashīd al-Dīn in his chapter on the ascension. More specifically, it probably represents one of the so-called gifts granted to the Prophet on the night of the ascension, in this case the *Qur'an* as a whole or as comprised of its individual chapters. The painting's symbolism therefore becomes more apparent: the Prophet straddles his winged beast, pulled between the forces of righteousness and the lure of evil. Here then, Burāq not only carries the Prophet but embodies the path towards faith, leaving behind death and destruction. The flying beast of burden in essence functions as an animal allegory for righteousness and its ultimate reward: salvation in the afterlife.

While only one painting of the Prophet's ascension appears in Rashīd al-Dīn's universal history, the theme of the *mi'rāj* proved of continued interest to patrons, writers, and artists. Indeed, during the Ilkhanid and Timurid periods, entire "Books of Ascension" (*Mi'rājnāmas*) were dedicated to the theme of Muhammed's miraculous flight through the skies. It is chiefly within these medieval illustrated bio-apocalypses that an increasingly standardized iconography of Burāq is developed. The details that stand out in these manuscript paintings are: first, the steed no longer bears a human torso and arms; second, it is never shown holding any objects; and third, its tail is never again depicted as a warrior angel. Instead, its caudal appendage resembles that of a horse, ox, or peacock.

The earliest extant illustrated "Book of Ascension" dates from the first decades of the

⁴ Gisèle Besson and Michèle Brossard-Dandré, trans., *Liber Scale Machometi (Le Livre de l'Échelle de Mahomet)* (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1991), 112-116, and 121.

fourteenth century. Only eight paintings survive today, in cropped format and with later Safavid attributions.⁵ However, despite this fragmentary corpus, the paintings indicate that at this time ascension narratives and images describe and depict Muhammed's ascent through the celestial spheres on the back of the Angel Gabriel and *not* Burāq. Put simply, Gabriel is the celestial carrier of the Prophet, while Burāq remains his terrestrial vehicle.

Only one painting in the series of Ilkhanid *mi'rāj* paintings includes a depiction Burāq (**Figure 2**). Here, the human-headed steed appears in the lower left corner, within a larger composition showing the Prophet arriving in Jerusalem, undergoing the "testing of the cups," and serving as a prayer leader to the Abrahamic prophets who have gathered in a building that represents the Dome of the Rock. In this painted scenario, Burāq remains marginalized in favor of two other major narrative thrusts: namely, Muhammed successfully passing initiation into prophetic status through his selection of the cup of milk as well as his appointment and his approval as the final "seal of all prophets."

In addition, since Burāq only appears in this painting and none of the others that depict Muhammed ascending through the skies, it is logical to assume that the steed only carried the Prophet from Mecca to Jerusalem, where it remained in wait for Muhammed's return from the skies in order to take him back to Mecca.

This hypothesis is in turn supported by textual sources that state that Gabriel tied Burāq to a column in the "Jerusalem mosque," and the "trace of the rein will remain on that column until the Resurrection."⁶ Still other narratives describe the so-called "tethering ring of Burāq" (*alqat al-Burāq*) in Jerusalem, itself a ring "used by the prophets."⁷ And finally, a late thirteenth-century Persian "Book of Ascension" text records Muhammed as stating upon his return from the celestial spheres: "Then Gabriel took me back [to Jerusalem]. Burāq was standing in the same place. I mounted Burāq and set off toward Mecca."⁸

The latter Persian *Mi'rājnāma* text also describes Burāq in the following words: "It was like a horse, smaller than a mule and bigger than a donkey. Its face was like a human's face, and its ears were like the ears of an elephant. Its rump was like the rump of a horse, its feet were like the feet of a mule, and its tail was like the tail of a bull. Its head was of ruby, its wings of pearl, its rump of coral, its ears of emerald, and its belly of red coral."⁹ Without a doubt, the depiction of Burāq in the Ilkhanid painting shows strong parallels with this textual description insofar as the steed's emerald-green ears are of elephantine size, its body is red like coral, and its wings are white as pearl.

While the painting does not elaborate on the greater symbolism of Burāq, the Persian *Mi'rājnāma* text explains to the reader how he or she must interpret this flying beast. For

5 Christiane Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension: A Persian-Sunni Devotional Tale* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); Richard Ettinghausen, "Persian Ascension Miniatures of the Fourteenth Century," in *Convegno di Scienze Morali Storiche e Filologiche, Symposium on Orient and Occident during the Middle Ages, May 27–June 1, 1956* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1957), 360–383 (Republished in idem, *Islamic Art and Archaeology: Collected Papers*, ed. Myriam Rosen-Ayalon, 244–268 [Berlin: G. Mann Verlag, 1984]).

6 Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, 43.

7 Abdul Ḥamīd Ṣiddīqī, trans., *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 1 (Lahore: Sh. Muhammed Ashraf, 1971-75), 101.

8 Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, 73.

9 Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, 39.

Figure 2:

The Prophet Muhammed meeting with the Abrahamic prophets and undergoing the “testing of the cups” at the Dome of the Rock, *Mi’rājnāma* (Book of Ascension), probably Tabriz, ca. 1317-35 TSMK, H. 2154, f. 62r. (Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, 2010, color pl. 3).



example, the anonymous author describes Burāq refusing to let the Prophet mount it, at which time Gabriel shouts: “O Burāq, be compliant. By God, no prophet as blessed and more cherished by God has ever mounted you before.” Burāq then lowers its head and whispers something into Gabriel’s ear. The author continues: “Gabriel said to me, ‘Burāq says, “He cannot mount me unless he agrees to ask God to forgive my shortcomings.” The Prophet agrees to this condition, upon which Gabriel addresses the Prophet, commanding him to: “Mount, o Muhammed, so that all the blessings of Burāq may be completed and so that the blessing of the prophets may be upon you.”¹⁰ In this case and others, Burāq clearly functions as a kind of vessel that contains and receives *baraka*, as

well as a witness and supplicant to the Prophet’s capacity for intercession on the Day of Judgement. According to Islamic eschatological thought, it is therefore one of the rare animals that can reach salvation in the afterlife, itself a reward usually reserved for righteous human beings.

Last but not least, in the conclusion to his *Mi’rājnāma* text, the anonymous Persian author further elaborates on the greater meanings -or what he calls “wisdoms” (*hikmas*)- of Burāq. The most important “wisdom” of the flying steed appears encapsulated in one final exchange, in which it asks the Prophet to: ‘Brand me with your mark.’ Muhammed asked, ‘What brand should I place?’ Gabriel said, ‘Place your hand on Burāq’s forehead and pet it from its head to its tail.’ While Muṣṭafā was petting it, the words ‘Muhammed, Muhammed’ appeared from below his hand. Then Burāq strutted and pranced boastfully and said, ‘Who is like me? The name of Muṣṭafā is upon me.’ The author then continues his narrative, directly addressing his readers to offer them a moral lesson. He states: “The steed upon which is written the name Muṣṭafā is more honoured than earthly creatures. O you who are of the religion of Muṣṭafā, follow the law of Muṣṭafā. O you who are created in the shape of the name of Muṣṭafā, it is appropriate for you to be prouder than others in the whole world.”¹¹

In his concluding remarks, the author of the *Mi’rājnāma* text strives to drive home several important messages through the metaphor of Burāq. Chief among these are that Muhammed’s name is imprinted on the beast’s body thanks to an intimate physical exchange. Touched, petted, and branded with Muhammed’s personal name, Burāq thus becomes the ultimate animal proxy for

¹⁰ Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, 39-40.

¹¹ Gruber, *The Ilkhanid Book of Ascension*, 78.

the Prophet. Moreover, this blessed name-mark represents the Prophet's entire faith community, which is called upon to be proud thanks to divine selection and guidance. Here and in a number of other texts and images, Burāq functions as the animal surrogate for the Prophet and the entire Islamic *umma*, itself chosen, august, and capable of ascending into salvation.

At the same time as Burāq maintained a multitude of possible symbolic meanings in Islamic religious thought, its iconography in manuscript paintings remained relatively stable from about 1400 until today. The flying steed appears quite similar in Timurid and Safavid paintings, ranging from the famous illustrated *Mi'rājnāmas* of ca. 1436-1460 to the many single-folio paintings included in Persian epic and romantic tales made as illustrated manuscripts in Iran during the sixteenth century.¹² In Safavid images in particular, Burāq carries Muhammed not just between Mecca and Jerusalem but also through the heavens until paradise, hell, and the domain of God. It is hence inextricably connected to the Prophet since it does not physically separate from him at all over the course of his chief miracle.

A number of Safavid ascension paintings also include one new major iconographic addition: namely, a lion figure hovering above the Prophet and Burāq (**Figure 3**).¹³ In these paintings, the leonine figure represents the angelic form of Imam 'Ali, who is described in Shi'i-inclined ascension



Figure 3: Ascension painting depicting the Prophet Muhammed riding Burāq toward 'Ali as a leonine angel, al-Nīshāpūrī, *Qīṣas al-Anbiyā'* (Stories of the Prophets), possibly Shiraz, ca. 1550-1600 TSMK, H. 1228, f. 152v. [Ayşe Taşkent and Nicole Kançal-Ferrari (ed.), *The Ascension of the Prophet and the Stations of His Journey in the Ottoman Cultural Environment: The Miraj and the Three Sacred Cities of Islam in Literature, Music, and Illustrated Manuscripts* (Istanbul: Klasik Publications, 2020), 615, fig. 54].

texts as pre-existent in the celestial spheres and whose *walāya* (vicegerency) is divinely revealed to the Prophet on the night of his *mi'rāj*.¹⁴ Furthermore, ascension texts argue for 'Ali's God-like status and thus superiority to Muhammed, itself a sectarian argument made clear in these paintings by the artists who decided to position

12 For the two Timurid illustrated *Mi'rājnāmas* of ca. 1436-1460, see Eleanor Sims, "The *Nahj al-Faradis* of Sultan Abu Sa'id ibn Sultan Muhammed ibn Miranshah: An Illustrated Timurid Ascension-Text of the 'Interim Period,'" *Journal of the David Collection* 4 (2014); Christiane Gruber, *The Timurid Book of Ascension (Mi'rājnama): A Study of Text and Image in a Pan-Asian Context* (Valencia: Patrimonio Ediciones, 2008); Marie-Rose Séguy, *The Miraculous Journey of Mahomet: Miraj Nameh, BN, Paris Sup Turc 190*, trans. Richard Pevear (New York: George Braziller, 1977).

13 Rachel Milstein, Karin Rührdanz and Barbara Schmitz, *Stories of the Prophets: Illustrated Manuscripts of Qisas al-Anbiya'* (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 1999), 214-216 (Ms. T-8).

14 Raya Shani, "The Lion Image in Safavid *Mi'rāj* Paintings," in *A Survey of Persian Art*, 18, ed. Abbas Daneshvari (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers, 2005) 265-426; and Christiane Gruber, "When *Nubuvvat* Encounters *Valayat*: Safavid Paintings of the Prophet Muhammed's *Mi'rāj*, ca. 1500-1550," in *The Art and Material Culture of Iranian Shi'ism: Iconography and Religious Devotion in Shi'i Islam*, ed. Pedram Khosronejad (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 46-73.

Figure 4:

Burāq among the angels, al-Surūrī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt* (Wonders of Creation), Ottoman lands, ca. 1550-1600 LBL, Add. 7894, f. 61r. © The British Library Board.



the lion above both Muhammed and Burāq.

It thus can be said that Safavid ascension paintings became “Shi’ified” through new motifs, including the lion. With not one but two animals present in the scene, the paintings’ viewers are invited to decipher each beast according to

the protagonist it represents. Without a doubt, the bestial figure of ‘Ali-as-Lion benefits from supreme standing as it grants power to the dyad Muhammed-cum-Burāq. While this type of scene does not represent an animal battle scene *per se*, the composition certainly insinuates a jousting for authority through the pictorial deployment of zoological metaphors.

Images of a veiled Prophet ascending to the heavens atop Burāq are also a staple of sixteenth-century Ottoman illustrated manuscripts, among them universal histories and the multi-volume *Siyer-i Nebi* (Biography of the Prophet).¹⁵ At this time, the flying steed also appears within al-Surūrī’s *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt* (Wonders of Creation), an abridged Turkish translation of al-Qazwīnī’s Arabic-language text. Several illustrated Ottoman copies of this Turkish literary work in the marvels genre were made after 1550; these often include depictions of Burāq in the text’s section that describes angelic beings (*malā’ika*) (Figure 4).¹⁶ While the steed’s wings resemble the attributes of its accompanying (human-shaped) angels, it is nevertheless differentiated by means of a microscopic detail that might escape the viewer’s initial gaze: that is, the black outline of a tiny flaming bundle on its saddle. This detail no doubt functions as a metaphor for the Prophet, whose presence is otherwise omitted in this lively angelic scene.

As the centuries pressed on, Muhammed’s body continues to disappear from depictions of his own ascension. This physical occlusion is typical of paintings made in the Indian subcontinent from the seventeenth century onward.¹⁷ For example, one

¹⁵ Zeren Tanındı, *Siyer-i Nebi: İslâm Tasvir Sanatında Hz. Muhammed’in Hayatı* (İstanbul: Hürriyet Vakfı Yayınları, 1984), 38.

¹⁶ Norah Titley, *Miniatures from Turkish Manuscripts: A Catalogue and Subject Index of Paintings in the British Library and British Museum* (London: British Library, 1981), 69, cat. no. 60; and Glyn Munro Meredith-Owens, *Turkish Miniatures* (London: British Museum, 1963), 26.

¹⁷ In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Kashmiri paintings, the Prophet’s physical body is replaced with a flaming gold



Figure 5:

Burāq composite piece, probably Golconda, Deccan, India, ca. 1660-80, MMA, 1992.17. <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/453334>.

single-page watercolor work made ca. 1660-80 CE depicts Burāq as a female composite figure (**Figure 5**).¹⁸ On the one hand, the artist of this pictorial puzzle-piece emphasizes the mythical creature's facial features, black hair locks, and jeweled necklace through the use of opaque pigments. On the other, Burāq's body includes a range of animals executed in subtle forest green and terracotta hues. The viewer's eye must labor to detect the fish, lions, dragons, rabbit, gazelle, elephant, eagle, and other birds inhabiting the physical outline of this mythical creature. Moreover, Burāq's tail no

longer represents the Angel of Death, as is the case in the Ilkhanid painting; instead, a knotted caudal appendage turns into a dragon biting the tale of a lion, the latter attacking the backside of a gazelle. A pictorial subject of its own, Burāq in this case does not simply serve as the Prophet's specially-appointed, flying creature. Much more significantly, it transforms into an "all-creature" topped by the beauty and logic of humanity.

While Muhammed tends to be omitted within Indian manuscript paintings and single-page compositions, he nevertheless is found represented

bundle. See Karin Ådahl, "A Copy of the Divan of Mir 'Ali Shir Nava'i of the Late Eighteenth Century in the Lund University Library and the Kashmiri School of Miniature Painting," in *Persian Painting from the Mongols to the Qajars: Studies in Honour of Basil W. Robinson*, ed. Robert Hillenbrand, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 9 and 11, figs. 8 and 11.

18 Marthe Bernus-Taylor, *L'Étrange et le merveilleux en terres d'Islam* (Paris: Musée du Louvre, 2001), 289, fig. 191.

Figure 6:

The Angel Gabriel presents Burāq to the Prophet Muhammed, *Mi'rājnāma* (Book of Ascension), Iran, ca. 1850. Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Pers. Ms. 8, f. 20r. [Christiane Gruber and Avinoam Shalem (ed.), *The Prophet Between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), p. 127, pl. 20].



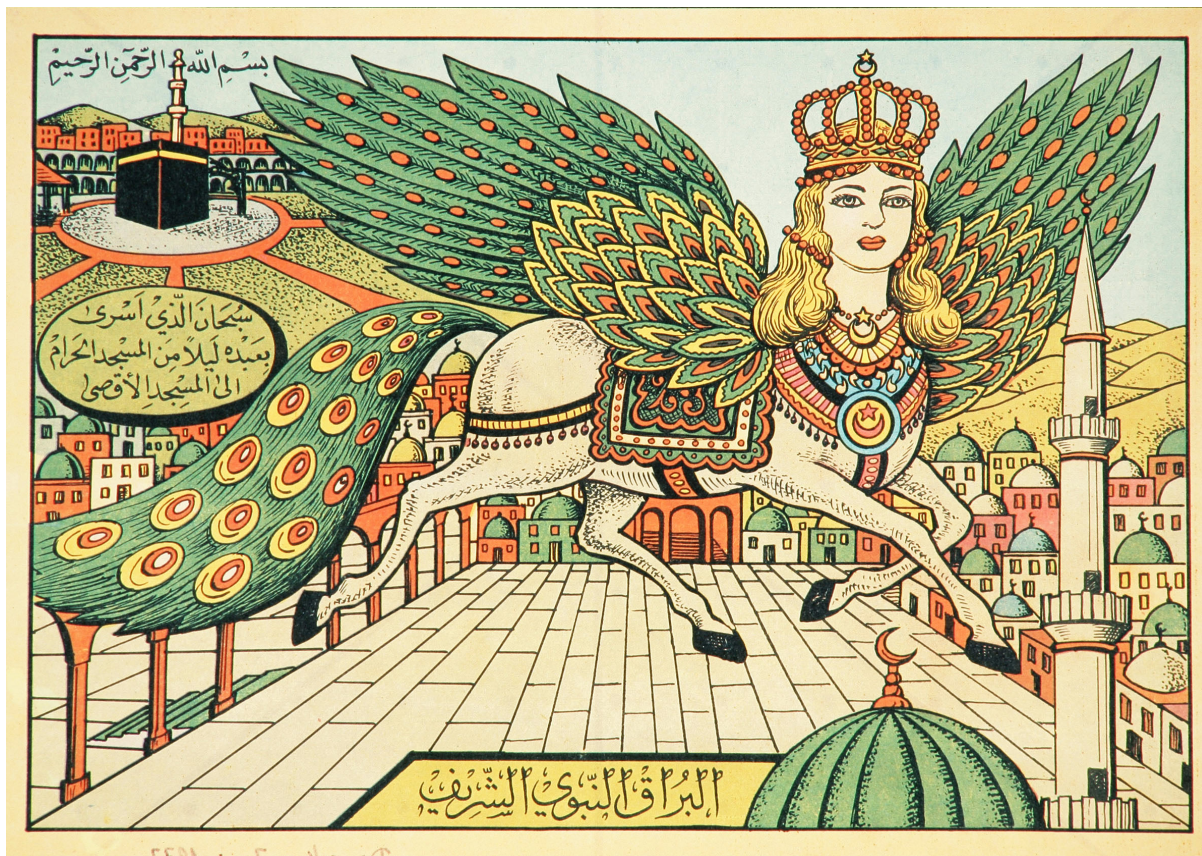


Figure 7:
Printed poster of Burāq,
Syria, ca. 1940-70.
Image courtesy of
Elisabeth Puin.

in Qajar pictorial arts of the nineteenth century. For example, a Qajar illustrated *Mi'rājnāma* depicts the arrival of Gabriel and Burāq in Mecca, which marks the beginning of the Prophet's celestial journey (Figure 6).¹⁹ While the painting is non-sectarian in its pictorial language, the accompanying text includes a lengthy description of the flying steed.²⁰ In this section, the anonymous Qajar author notes that Burāq's forehead is branded with an inscription that reads "*Alī walī Allāh*" ('Ali is the vicegerent of God).²¹ This Qajar-period Shi'i epigraphic *walāya* replaces the Ilkhanid-period

"Muhammed, Muhammed" imprimatur on Burāq's body, in the process coopting the flying beast to praise the supremacy of the Imam rather than the prophecy of Muhammed. Evidently, Burāq was put to the service of intra-religious supercessionary discourses within Islamic ascension texts and images.

Moving forward to the twentieth century, a number of images of Burāq were produced as printed posters, especially in Syria, Pakistan, and India. In these modern graphic arts, the steed functions as a proxy for the Prophet, who altogether

19 Maryam Ekhtiar, "Infused with Shi'ism: Representations of the Prophet in Qajar Iran," in *The Prophet Between Ideal and Ideology: A Scholarly Investigation*, ed. Christiane Gruber and Avinoam Shalem (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 102-104.

20 *Mi'rājnāma* (Book of Ascension), Iran, ca. 1850 CE, Beinecke Rare Books and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Pers. Ms. 8, folios 17v-19r.

21 *Ibid.*, folio 19r.

vanishes from view (**Figure 7**).²² The Syrian poster illustrated in **Figure 7**, for instance, includes a note identifying a female Burāq as the “noble steed of the Prophet” (*al-burāq al-nabawī al-sharīf*) alongside a representation of the Ka’ba in Mecca and a cartouche containing the Qur’anic verse of the night journey (Q 17:1).²³ While this image is ecumenical in its visual and textual lexicon, other posters of Burāq include iconographic details that were mustered to support the Shi’i cause. Among them, some posters include Dhū’l-Janāh, the horse Husayn rode into the Battle of Karbala. Such compositions couple the Prophet Muhammed and Imam Husayn as embodied by their respective mounts. Joining the elevated rank of Burāq, the leonine ‘Ali and Husayn’s Dhū’l-Janāh thus come together to form a triad of heroic quadrupeds according to a Shi’i sacred worldview.

In contemporary Islamic paintings of Burāq, abstraction and metaphor are further preferred over optical literalism. For example, the Egyptian self-taught painter Ṣalāḥ Ḥassūna, who is known for producing religious images using a vernacular style and vivid palette, has explored the theme of the Prophet’s ascension as well (**Figure 8**). In his painting, the *mi’rāj*’s course from Mecca to Jerusalem and onward through the skies is shown through kinetic gold lines linking the Ka’ba to the Dome of the Rock and beyond the arc of the firmament.²⁴ Led by legions of angels represented as if figurines cut out of white paper, the Prophet-embodied in the calligram “Muhammed” - rides on the back on Burāq, now shown as a horse instead

of hybrid creature. Rather than bearing wings, its body is imprinted with the words “Messenger of God” (*rasūl Allāh*), thereby completing the second clause of the *shahāda*. For Ḥassūna, then, this painting is not an occasion for depicting the Prophet or a fanciful way to imagine his flying steed. To the contrary, it provides a pictorial meditation on his faith’s foundational creed as it connects to the sacred geographies of Islam both in this world and the next.

From the beginning of Islam until today, Burāq has played a pivotal role in Islamic pious imagination. Whether in texts or images, the flying steed has fulfilled a great number of symbolic roles: it is one of the many proofs of Muhammed’s prophecy; it is an animal allegory of the right path; it is a vehicle testifying to the physical reality of one of the Prophet’s chief miracles; it is an apocalyptic beast to whom is granted intercession and salvation; it is the animal emissary and stand-in of Muhammed; and it is a beast metaphor for the declaration of the faith, the latter at times sectarian in its iteration. Last but not least, while Burāq may indeed have pre-Islamic precursors in sphinxes, centaurs, and other hybrid and/or apocalyptic animals,²⁵ it nonetheless came into its fullest, and most varied, of forms in post-medieval Islamic pictorial traditions.

22 Elisabeth Puin, *Islamische Plakate: Kalligraphie und Malerei im Dienste des Glaubens*, 2 (Dortmund: Verlag für Orientkunde, 2008), 544 (J-7). Also see Pierre and Micheline Centlivres, *Imageries populaires en Islam* (Geneva: Georg, 1997), esp. p. 46.

23 “Burāq” is a gender non-specific term. However, the two most frequently used Arabic words to describe the steed— namely, *dābba* (beast of burden or quadruped) and *baghla* (mule)— are linguistically feminine terms. Thus, it appears that the terms *dābba* and *baghla* eventually gave rise to the idea that Burāq was a female creature or else bore female attributes.

24 Sandra Gysi, *Geschichten, Bilder: die Welt des Salah Hassouna* (Zurich: Völkerkundemuseum der Universität Zürich, 2005).

25 Edgar Blochet, “Études sur l’histoire religieuse de l’Iran, II: l’ascension au ciel du Prophète Mohammad,” *Revue de l’Histoire des Religions* 40 (1899), 206-208.



Figure 8:

The Prophet's ascension on a horse-shaped Burāq, watercolor painting by Şalāh Ḥassūna, Egypt, 2004. Private Collection, Zurich, Switzerland. [Christiane Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammed in Islamic Texts and Images* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018), 344, 6.14].