

# MORE ON QUR'ANIC JINN

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In *Melita Theologica*, vol. XXXII, nos 1–2 (1981) there appeared a study of mine entitled “*On Qur’anic Jinn*”, in which I tried to answer two quests, namely: What are *jinn* really? What can we say about the God-*jinn* relationship? The present study is meant to be a continuation of that one. This time we propose to treat another two interesting and, I dare say, curious problems. Firstly we shall distinguish between three closely connected terms, namely: *jinn*, *satans*, and *angels*. Secondly we shall take a look into the *jinn*-man relationship.

## a) Root JNN in the Qur’ân

Root *JNN* is widely used throughout the Qur’ân. This is understandable because included under *JNN* we find the word “*janna*” (Paradise) which is used 66 times, and its plural “*jannât*” used 69 times. The word “*jinn*”, always defined either by the article or by the construct state, is to be found 22 times. Classical commentators sometimes interpret “*jinn*” to mean “*angels*”, sometimes *satans*, and at other times *spiritual beings*, antithetically paralleled with “*ins*” (*human beings*) and with which they form a specific group of creation: *the two weights of the earth (al-thaqalân)*. Ten times the Qur’ân makes use of the word “*jinna*”. In half that amount the word means “*madness*”, or better still, “*possession by jinn*”: Q. 7,174; 23,70; 34,8; 34,46 allude to the accusation of possession imputed to *Muhammad* by the unbelievers; while Q. 23,25 alludes to the same accusation imputed to Noah. The other five times “*jinna*” is equivalent to “*jinn*”, and it has likewise been given the aforementioned three interpretations. On seven occasions the Qur’ân uses the word “*jânn*”, meaning “*the father of the jinn*”, presumably *Iblîs*, the Devil, or it could be taken to designate the name of the *jinnî* species. On two out of these seven occasions, however, the noun has got nothing to do with “*jinn*” but with snakes. Q. 27,10 and 28,31 make an allusion to Moses’ behaviour in front of his staff being miraculously made to quiver like a living serpent (*ka-’annahâ jânn*).

Regarding the meaning of root *JNN* in the Qur’ân, *Penrice*<sup>(1)</sup> gives the following list of derivations:

1) *janna* – *yajinnu* (stative verb) – *to be covered*.

1. Cfr. *Penrice, John, A Dictionary and glossary of the Kor-ân with copious grammatical references and explanations of the text. . . .*, London, Curzon Press, 1976, under *JNN*.

- 2) *janna* – *yajunnu* (verb, used with preposition ‘*alâ*) – *to cover*.
- 3) *jinn* (collective noun) – *genii, demons, spirits, as opposed to men*.
- 4) *janna* (noun, plu. -ât) – *a garden, Paradise*.
- 5) *jinna* (noun) – *madness, frenzy*; used also in a collective sense, or as plural of *jinn, genii*.
- 6) *jânn* (noun, originally an active participle) – *a serpent, genius, demon*.
- 7) *al-jânn* (Q. 15,27) – *Abû l-jinn “the Father of the Devils”*; or part for the whole: *jinn* or *genii*.
- 8) *majnûn* (passive participle) – *mad, possessed of the Devil*.

The author also gives two other words deriving from the same root which do not interest us directly: *junna* (noun) – *a covering, cloak*; and *ajinna* (noun, plu. of *janûn*) – *anything covered, a foetus*.

### b) Jinn, satans, and angels

We must now try to define and distinguish between the apparently three different spiritual beings mentioned in the Qur’ân: *jinn, satans, and angels*. If we have to fix the semantic area of the word “*jinn*” from that which the lexicographers say about this term, we would conclude that “*jinn*” is a general term which includes every kind of invisible and spiritual being. We can have a general idea of this reasoning from the list of derivations of the root *JNN* given by *Penrice*. In fact this term is used in antithetical parallelism with the term “*ins*” which designates the visible human being. On the other hand, we know that the believers in *jinn* divide the world of the spirits into two sections: (a) the lower spirits (*al-arwâh al-sufliyya*); (b) celestial spirits (*al-arwâh al-falakiyya*).<sup>(2)</sup> Bearing this in mind, we would logically conclude that according to the scholars cited by the commentators, two are the kinds of spirits that exist, and the unique proper distinction between these two sorts of spirits is to be expressed by the terms: “*lower spirits*” and “*celestial spirits*”. “*Jinn*” is a general term which embraces both categories, and “*satan*” is a general term which embraces the evil ones among the lower spirits and mankind. But, at the same time, the word “*jinn*” is also improperly applied to the lower spirits (the whole for the part). This is done to distinguish the lower spirits from the celestial spirits which are otherwise called “*angels*” (*malâ’ika*), and which are presumably impeccable.<sup>(3)</sup>

This theory is corroborated by what is said in the commentaries. The authors of *al-Manâr* say that *Iblîs* and the satans are definitely “*jinn*”, but the angels are also “*jinn*” because they are invisible.<sup>(4)</sup> *Râzî* holds that it is

2. *Teuma, Edmund, O.F.M.Conv., On Qur’anic Jinn*, in: *Melita Theologica*, vol. XXXII, nos. 1 – 2 (1981), p. 45.
3. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 8, p. 22 – 23.
4. Cfr. *al-Manâr*, vol. 7, p. 645 – 646.

most probable that the satans are a section of the *jinn*: any wicked *jinnî* is called a satan.<sup>(5)</sup> *Alûsî* refers to scholars who hold that spiritual beings are of three kinds: (a) the good ones, i.e. the angels; (b) the bad ones, i.e. the satans; (c) the medium ones, i.e. the "*jinn*", a category which includes good and evil spirits.<sup>(6)</sup>

But there seem to be further differences between *jinn* and satans: the common *jinn* are able to beget, they eat, drink, and die just like human beings, but the satans are similar to the wind, they cannot beget, neither do they eat nor drink nor die.<sup>(7)</sup> Common *jinn* breed by the reunion of air in the womb of the female just as breeding in human beings takes place by the reunion of water (for sperm) in the womb. They are divided into twelve tribes and in other subdivisions. They wage war against each other. It is also thought that common *jinn* are of three general kinds: (a) some have wings and are able to fly; (b) some are similar to snakes and dogs; (c) some others are just free to move about where they will. Satanic *jinn* are presumably out of this scheme.<sup>(8)</sup>

Not all scholars cited by the commentators, however, agree that any evil *jinnî* is a satan, even though he might be physiologically different from other common *jinn*. In the commentary to Q. 6,112 two theories crop up. "So We have appointed to every Prophet an enemy – satans of men and *jinn*, revealing tawdry speech to each other . . ." (Q. 6,112). Some interpret the problematic phrase "*satans of men and jinn*" saying that *Iblîs* divided his offspring into two sections: one has the duty to tempt mankind and the other to tempt the *jinn*. This would mean that satans and *jinn* are two different groups altogether, and among the satans there are those who tempt only men and others who tempt only *jinn*. But others say, and according to *al-Manâr* this is the right interpretation, that there are satans both among mankind and among *jinn*.<sup>(9)</sup> What is more, satans of mankind are more powerful than satans of the *jinn*. Says *Mâlik b. Dînâr*: "The satan of mankind is more powerful upon me than the satan of the *jinn*, because when I take refuge with God, the satan of the *jinn* goes away from me, while the satan of mankind comes to me and drives me towards rebellion while I am fully conscious".<sup>(10)</sup> The two classical satans, one of the *jinn* and the other of mankind, are *Iblîs* and *Qâbîl* (Cain). *Iblîs* is the origin of infidelity and disobedience, in fact he refused to execute God's command when He ordered him to bow down before Adam (Q. 2,34 and 18,50). Cain murdered his brother Abel (*Hâbîl*) without justice, thus giving origin to the second grave sin of humanity. These two satans seem to be leading their

5. Cfr. *Râzî*, vol. 19, p. 180–181.

6. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 8, p. 22–23.

7. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 14, p. 32–33; vol. 8, p. 5.

8. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 14, p. 32–33.

9. Cfr. *Tabarî*, vol. 8, p. 3–6; *Râzî*, vol. 13, p. 154–156; *Baydâwî*, vol. 1, p. 398; *Alûsî*, vol. 8, p. 5; *al-Manâr*, vol. 8, p. 5.

10. Cfr. *Zamaksharî*, vol. 2, p. 46.

followers in the attempt to leading men and *jinn* astray. In fact Q. 114,6 may be interpreted that the slinking whisperer (*al-waswās al-khannās*) seducts both *jinn* and men: “. . . who whispers in the bosom of people, of *jinna* and men”.<sup>(11)</sup> Moreover, in Q. 41,29 it is said that on Judgment Day the unbelievers will pray God, saying: “Our Lord, show us those (two satans) who led us astray, both *jinn* and men, and we shall set them underneath our feet . . .” Commentators agree that these two satans must be *Iblīs*, a *jinnī*, and *Qābil*, a human being.<sup>(12)</sup> While personally agreeing with this interpretation of Q. 41,29, *Rāzī* points out that some of his students who incline towards rationalism retain that these two satans are nothing else but “lust and anger”, so that the prayer to the Lord that He may help man to put lust and anger underneath his feet would amount to the very essence of holiness.<sup>(13)</sup>

Another term similar to “satan” is “*ifrīt*” which is used only once in the Qur’ān, in 27,39, where it is said that “an *efreet of the jinn*” promised to bring to Solomon the throne of the queen of Sheba even before he would rise from his seat. This term designates a bold and audacious fellow, and like “satan”, it may be applied to both *jinn* and men.<sup>(14)</sup> All the commentators agree with this and say that the “*efreet of the jinn*” mentioned in this verse was a leader of the *jinn*, a strong satan, a wicked or rebellious satan. Where the commentators do not agree, however, is when they try to assign names to this particular *efreet*. *Kawzan*, *Dhakwān*, *Sakhr*, and *Kūzī* are all supposed names of this *jinnī*.<sup>(15)</sup>

There remains the question of *Iblīs*: is he an angel or a *jinnī*? I have already treated this question in: *Melita Theologica* vol. XXXI no. 2 (1980), to which study I refer the reader. Closely connected to the quest about *Iblīs* is that about the impeccability of angels. The impeccability of angels is proved by the fact that they are God’s messengers (Q. 35,1) and as such they must be impeccable: “God knows well where to place His message” (Q. 6,124).<sup>(16)</sup> But, on the other hand, Q. 2,102 makes an allusion to the legend of the two angels of Babylon, *Hārūt* and *Mārūt*. In the legend it is narrated that these two angels were sent to Babylon on trial to see whether they are able to live without sinning. But they soon committed adultery and murder,

11. Cfr. *Tabarī*, vol. 30, p. 356; *Zamakhsharī*, vol. 4, p. 658; *Rāzī*, vol. 32, p. 199; *Baydāwī*, vol. 2, p. 673. The fact that satans try to mislead even their companions among the *jinn* is admitted by some commentators, cfr. *Rāzī*, vol. 13, p. 154 – 156; *Baydāwī*, vol. 1, p. 398; *Alūsī*, vol. 8, p. 5.
12. Cfr. *Tabarī*, vol. 24, p. 113 – 114; *Zamakhsharī*, vol. 4, p. 155; *Baydāwī*, vol. 2, p. 388; *Alūsī*, vol. 24, p. 106 – 107.
13. Cfr. *Rāzī*, vol. 27, p. 120.
14. Cfr. footnote<sup>(2)</sup>, p. 43.
15. Cfr. *Tabarī*, vol. 19, p. 161 – 162; *Zamakhsharī*, vol. 3, p. 289; *Rāzī*, vol. 24, p. 197; *Baydāwī*, vol. 2, p. 199; *Alūsī*, vol. 19, p. 183.
16. Cfr. *Rāzī*, vol. 2, p. 211 – 238.

so they were punished.<sup>(17)</sup> Now, if *Hârût* and *Mârût* are really believed to be angels, one has to conclude that the Qur'ân itself is not dogmatic regarding the impeccability of angels.

The theory of the impeccability of angels is somewhat modified by scholars when the problem of *Iblîs* is tackled. *Qâdî 'Iyâd* says that a group of thinkers believe in the impeccability of those angels who are messengers (*rusul*) and *muqarrabûn*,<sup>(18)</sup> but they do not say anything about the impeccability of other categories of angels. Moreover, some *Sûffî* believe that the angels of the earth are not impeccable, so that *Iblîs* must have been one of them.<sup>(19)</sup> Some try to solve the problem in yet another way: angels are not impeccable, even if the major part of them are so. It is the same thing when it is said that mankind is faultless but the major part of mankind is not.<sup>(20)</sup>

### c) Jinn and men

*Jinn* and men are very often taken together to form a pair of created beings that share the same fate. It is perhaps in this sense that they are called "*al-thaqalân*" – the two weights (of the earth).<sup>(21)</sup> Both *jinn* and men were created by God by means of different constitutive elements, fire and clay, but by the same creative act of God.<sup>(22)</sup> Since they are God's creatures, they both depend upon the will of the Most High. "*O tribe of jinn and men, if you are able to pass through the confines of heaven and earth, pass through them! You shall not pass through except with an authority*" (Q. 55,33). These are the Lord's words addressed to the "two weights" on Judgment Day. Some think that they mean that neither *jinn* nor men can travel to the borderlines of heaven and earth so as to weaken God's power, except with an authority from God himself. Others interpret this journey to the confines of heaven and earth as a way to flee from death, but death is willed by God and there is no way to escape it. Others have it that *jinn* and men cannot know what is going on in heaven and on earth unless God wills it. Still others say that the verse simply means that one can by no means do

17. Cfr. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islâm*, p. 134–135.

18. "*Al-muqarrabûn*" are angels who were "brought near" to God (Q. 4,172); they praise God day and night without ceasing (Q. 21,20). Other terms are sometimes used to designate these angels, such as "*al-'alawiyûn*" and "*al-qarrûbiyyûn*" (*Baydâwî*) deriving perhaps from Hebrew *Kerûb* (plu. *-îm*). The same term in the singular (*muqarrab*) is also applied to Jesus (Q. 3,43). Cfr. *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islâm*, p. 318–320.

19. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 15, p. 268–270.

20. Cfr. *Baydâwî*, vol. 1, p. 68–70; *Alûsî*, vol. 1, p. 209–213.

21. Cfr. Q. 55,31. There are several proposals explaining the expression "*al-thaqalân*", among which: *jinn* and men are called the two weights "because God favoured them over the rest of created animals granting them distinction and intelligence" or "because they weigh like loads upon the earth." For further explanations cfr. *Lisân al-'Arab*, vol. 13, p. 92–93.

22. Cfr. Q. 15, 26–27; 55, 14–15.

away with God's authority and will; and this is the essential meaning which also embraces the other three interpretations.<sup>(23)</sup>

The *jinn* are intelligent spiritual beings and as such they should be retained responsible for their behaviour. Like human beings they therefore merit recompense for their obedience to God or punishment for disobedience. This is *Mâlik's* theory on the moral responsibility of *jinn* which is based on parallel comparison with men's moral responsibility. If it is known that man merits recompense or punishment for obeying or disobeying God, then it must be the same with *jinn*. Moreover, Q. 72,11 puts the following discourse in the mouth of *jinn*: "*And some of us are the righteous, and some of us are otherwise; we are sects differing.*" This verse made scholars believe that the *jinn* are divided into sects just as is the case with human beings, so that among the *jinn* there are those who are Jews, others who are Christians, some who are adherents of Mazdaism (*majûs*), and some are polytheists. Of course, there are the righteous *jinn*, the Muslims. Q. 55, 56.74, then, seem to imply that some *jinn* enter Paradise. All this would mean that *jinn* are capable of making a fundamental option for or against God, and therefore it follows that they are held morally responsible. But *Abû Hanîfa* does not agree with this theory.<sup>(24)</sup> He says that no recompense is offered to *jinn* other than liberation from fire, after which they are rendered dust like the beasts. They will never enter heaven. The majority, however, holds *Mâlik's* theory, owing to its better logic.<sup>(25)</sup>

But the fact that *jinn*, like men, are morally responsible for their actions becomes clear from some other passages of the Qur'ân. Q. 46, 31 affirms that if the *jinn* believe in God's message, He will forgive them some of their sins and protect them from a painful chastisement. While Q. 72,17, still referring to the *jinn*, proclaims: "... *And whosoever turns away from the Remembrance of his Lord, He will thrust him into chastisement rigorous.*" But this is only a re-echoing of Q. 72, 14 – 15: "*And some of us have surrendered, and some of us have deviated (wa-innâ minnâ l-muslimûn wa-minnâ l-qâsitûn). Those who have surrendered sought rectitude; but as for those who have deviated, they have become firewood for Gehenna!*" This indicates that a *jinnî*, just like his human counterpart, is a prospective candidate to enter either eternal bliss or eternal damnation.<sup>(26)</sup>

Some authors hold that on entering fire the *jinn* do not suffer as much as men owing to the fact that they were created from fire.<sup>(27)</sup> *Alûsî* makes an important distinction when he treats the question of the *jinn's* apparent

23. Cfr. *Tabarî*, vol. 27, p. 136 – 138; *Alûsî*, vol. 27, p. 97.

24. The references to *Mâlik* and *Abû Hanîfa* made here are just recollections reported by the commentaries.

25. Cfr. *Tabarî*, vol. 27, p. 151; *Zamaksharî*, vol. 4, p. 246 – 248; *Baydâwî*, vol. 2, p. 432; *Râzî*, vol. 28, p. 31 – 33 and vol 30, p. 153; *Alûsî*, vol. 27, p. 103.

26. Cfr. also: Q. 6,128; 7,38; 7,179; 11,119; 32,13; 41,25; 46,18.

27. For more on the creation of *jinn* see: footnote<sup>(2)</sup>, p. 43 – 45.

privileged position in hell. He makes it clear that the part created from fire is the body, while the part punished in hell is the spirit and that was not created from fire. So that the punishment of the spirit in a fiery container is to be considered equal in vigour to the punishment of the spirit in a clay container.<sup>(28)</sup> The same argument is brought forward in *al-Manâr*: the fact that the *jinn* were originally created from a smokeless fire does not postulate that they do not sense the pains of fire as is often imagined. There is a great difference between the reality of the human species and the reality of clay from which the first man was created. Upon this difference must the *jinn* be analogically compared.<sup>(29)</sup>

Evil *jinn* and men are appointed "enemies to every prophet" (Q. 6,112), and are able to lead other *jinn* and men astray (Q. 41,29).<sup>(30)</sup> And according to Q. 17,88: "If men and *jinn* banded together to produce the like of this Koran, they would never produce its like, not though they backed one another."

Last but not least, *jinn*, like men, are able to have sexual intercourse. Q. 55, 56.74 speak about the maidens of Paradise allotted to those who enter it, "untouched before them by any man or *jânn*." But even on this point the commentators discuss. The fact that the *jinn* have seed and offspring is quite evident, for, says *Râzî*: "What is the use of mentioning the *jânn* (in this context), once it is known that he has no sexual intercourse?" The true problem, however, is whether a *jinnî* can have sexual intercourse with a human being. Once it is known that in both verses the Qur'ân excludes previous sexual intercourse with the maidens of Paradise to both men and *jinn*, it seems likely that a *jinnî* can "touch" a female of mankind.<sup>(31)</sup> But are the maidens of Paradise all human beings? Not necessarily, for, says *Damra b. Habîb*: "The fact is that none of mankind will touch human females, and none of the *jinn* will touch *jinnî* women before their respective husbands." But *al-Tibrîsî* holds that both the maidens of Paradise assigned to the *jinn* and those assigned to men are *houris*. It is not contrary to reason that in Paradise God created *houris* that resemble human women for mankind, and other *houris* that resemble *jinnî* females for *jinn*. All *houris*, however, are of one sort; they only differ in outward appearance. *Al-Sha'bi* and *al-Kalbî* hold that those "maidens restraining their glances" (Q. 55, 56.74) are women of this world whom no creature has ever touched since they entered Paradise. But others insist saying that in Paradise man will be allotted his faithful (Muslim) wife who was his on earth, and in addition he will be given other faithful women besides her. Likewise, a *jinnî* will be allotted his faithful *jinnî* wife and other faithful *jinnî* women. This seems to be the prevailing opinion of scholars:

28. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 9, p. 105.

29. Cfr. *al-Manâr*, vol. 9, p. 418-419.

30. Cfr. footnote<sup>(2)</sup>, p. 45-46.

31. Cfr. *Râzî*, vol. 29, p. 130.

the *houris* that God assigns to the faithful, be he human or *jinnî*, is something that befits him and that his spirit desires.<sup>(32)</sup>

We have seen that to all essentials the reality “*jinn*” is very similar to the reality “*man*”. The *jinn*, as presented by the Qur’ân, seem to be an invisible version of mankind, a sort of shadow world. Both classes are God’s creatures, and they both have to strive to attain their aim in Paradise, serving God in this world (Q. 51,56). But we have also seen that owing to their invisible and mysterious character, the *jinn* were sometimes feared by man. It was this sort of awesome fear that made the *jinn* impose themselves on man and make him believe in their supposed omnipotent power over creation.<sup>(33)</sup> The *jinn*’s claim to greatness, however, was proven false. “*And when We decreed that he (Solomon) should die, naught indicated to them (the jinn) that he was dead but the Beast of the Earth devouring his staff; and when he fell down, the jinn saw clearly that, had they only known the Unseen (al-gayb), they would not have continued in the humbling chastisement*” (Q. 34,14). Apart from their claim that they were able to protect mankind from harm, the *jinn* also claimed unjustly that they knew the unseen (*al-gayb*). But it was a false claim, although some think that *jinnî* leaders are effectively in a position to know what man cannot know, but this does not mean that they know the hidden secrets of creation which are known to God alone.<sup>(34)</sup> The fact is that the Qur’ân states clearly that some *jinn* strived to gain the upperhand on mankind: they considered it a great adventure to oppress man. This misgiving, second only to their inciting man to serve idols, is perhaps one of the greatest sins they ever committed.

We have furthermore seen in this study, although indirectly, what kind of recompense is expected by Muslims in Paradise. At first sight, it seems very far apart from the mystical union with the Creator which forms the hope of any good Christian. But perhaps with a thorough scientific study of both the Muslim and Christian interpretation of Paradise, one could see that both these concepts are not very much apart from each other after all. They can be presenting the same essential idea in different poetic images.

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32. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 27, p. 103; *Tabarî*, vol. 27, p. 151; *Zamâkhsharî*, vol. 4, p. 360; *Baydâwî*, vol. 2, p. 487.  
 33. Cfr. footnote<sup>(2)</sup>, p. 46–49.  
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 34. Cfr. *Alûsî*, vol. 22, p. 113; *Baydâwî*, vol. 2, p. 285–286.



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