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Eschatological Visions in Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the Abrahamic Traditions (A Study of Shared Divine Origins)

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ABSTRACT

Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the Islamic *Miʿrāj* tradition share profound eschatological and apocalyptic parallels, reflecting a common spiritual and theological framework rooted in the monotheistic belief in a single, transcendent God. This paper explores the intersections between Dante's epic poem and Islamic, Christian, and Jewish eschatological and apocalyptic visionary literature, arguing that their similarities stem not merely from cultural exchange but from a shared divine origin. By examining the structured journeys through the afterlife, the presence of spiritual guides, the end-time signs and the symbolic imagery in both traditions, the study highlights the theological and spiritual unity that connects these narratives. The paper also addresses the contentious debate over Islamic influence on Dante's work, particularly through texts like *The Book of Muhammad's Ladder*, situating these discussions within the broader context of Abrahamic eschatology. Ultimately, this exploration reveals the interconnectedness of these religious traditions, offering fresh insights into the universal human quest to understand the divine, the afterlife, and the moral order of the cosmos.

Keywords: Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Islamic Miʿrāj, Abrahamic Faiths, Monotheistic Eschatology, Shared Divine Origin.

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1.Introduction

Dante's *Divine Comedy* stands as one of the most profound and intricate eschatological visions in Western literature. The epic poem recounts the poet's journey through the three realms of the afterlife—Inferno (Hell), Purgatorio (Purgatory), and Paradiso (Paradise)—guided by the Roman poet Virgil and his beloved Beatrice. While deeply rooted in Christian theology, the *Divine Comedy* notably exhibits striking parallels with Islamic eschatological traditions, particularly the Mi'raj.

These parallels have been widely examined and debated. However, a fundamental explanation for these similarities is often overlooked: the shared divine origin of these traditions. In fact, both Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the Mi'raj tradition draw upon a common eschatological framework, grounded in the monotheistic belief in a single, transcendent God as the Creator of the universe. This shared foundation has given rise to remarkable similarities not only between Islamic eschatology and Dante's *Divine Comedy*, but also with early Christian, Hebrew, and Iranian visions of the afterlife.

By analyzing these parallels, this paper argues that these shared elements are not merely the result of cultural exchange or influence, but rather reflect a deeper, unifying source. It also endeavors to reveal the theological and spiritual bonds that intertwine these traditions, offering fresh insights into the interplay between Dante's work and the eschatological visions of the Abrahamic faiths.

2. The question of Islamic Influence on Dante's *Divine Comedy*

The question of Islamic influence on Dante's *Divine Comedy* was first brought to light by the Spanish Arabist Miguel Asín Palacios during a speech at the Royal Linguistic Conference in Spain in 1919. That same year, Palacios published his groundbreaking work, *La Escatología Musulmana en la Divina Comedia* (*Islamic Eschatology in the Divine Comedy*), in which he boldly advanced the theory that Dante's epic poem was not entirely original but modeled on the Islamic Miʿraj—the Prophet Muhammad's visionary journey through the heavens. He argued that the striking parallels between the Miʿraj narratives and Dante's epic poem pointed to a direct connection, suggesting that the Islamic eschatological tradition served as a prototype for Dante's celebrated masterpiece.

This hypothesis reignited a heated scholarly debate and drew significant criticism from Dante scholars. Critics not only highlighted the lack of historical evidence but also argued that the parallels identified by Palacios were circumstantial and could be attributed to coincidence rather than direct influence. They contended that Dante's primary inspirations were deeply rooted in Christian eschatological visions, derived from the Bible, classical texts, and Christian visions.

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Unable to establish a direct historical link connecting Dante's *Divine Comedy* to a specific source or channel accessible in Italy, Palacios suggested that Dante might have become familiar with Islamic eschatology through oral traditions and possibly some lost written translations. This assertion foreshadowed an important discovery made just a few years later. In 1944, Ugo Monneret de Villard drew the attention of scholars to the Oxford and Paris codices, which were subsequently studied and transcribed by Enrico Cerulli and José Muñoz Sendino. Their work culminated in the publication of French and Latin editions of the *Book of Muhammad's Ladder* (also known as *Livre de l'eschiele Mahomet* or *Liber scalae Machometi*), a text detailing Muhammad's night journey (*Isra*) and ascension to heaven (*Miʿraj*). Despite these efforts, the original Arabic version of the text has never been found.

The Book of the Ladder (*Liber Scalae Machometi*), a medieval text detailing the Prophet Muhammad's celestial journey, was translated into Castilian, Latin, and French in 1264. The manuscripts Cod. Paris, Bibl. Nat. lat. 6065; Cod. Vat. lat. 4072; and Cod. Land, Misc. 534 have become the key surviving witnesses to the text's dissemination in the West. The missing original version of the text was translated from Arabic into Castilian under the patronage of Alfonso X (known as "the Wise"[1]) by a Jewish physician and scholar, Abraham Alfaquim. Based on the now-lost Castilian version, an Italian notary named Bonaventura da Siena, also under the orders of Alfonso the Wise, produced Latin and French translations in 1264. In 1949, the two versions were edited simultaneously by José Muñoz Sendino and Enrico Cerulli. Cerulli prepared the French edition using Cod. Land, Misc. 534 from the Bodleian Library in Oxford, while he based the Latin edition on Cod. Paris, Bibl. Nat. lat. 6064, incorporating variants from Cod. Vat. lat. 4072.

A relatively thorough knowledge of *The Book of the Ladder* appears to have been widespread during the medieval period. This is evidenced not only by its explicit citation in Robert Caracciolo's *Specchio della fede*[2] but also by the numerous summaries of Muhammad's journey to the otherworld found in a variety of theological, legal, historical, and literary works. These include San Pedro Pascual's polemical treatise *Sobre la secta mahometana*[3], canon law collections such

1 "El Sabio" in Spanish translates to "The Wise". Historically, this title is most commonly associated with Alfonso X of Castile, also known as (Alfonso el Sabio = Alfonso the Wise).

2 The Specchio della fede (translated as The Mirror of Faith) is a late 15th-century moral and theological treatise text written by the Italian Franciscan preacher and theologian Roberto Caracciolo.

3 Sobre la secta mahometana (translated as On the Sect of Muhammad) is a medieval theological and polemical work written by a Spanish bishop, theologian named San Pedro

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as *La Collectio Toletana*[4], historical accounts like Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada's *Historia Arabum*[5], and even poetic works such as Fazio degli Uberti's *Il Dittamondo*[6] . The recurring references to the narrative across such diverse genres highlight its significant influence on medieval Christian thought and its role in shaping perceptions of Islamic eschatology.

Despite this significant discovery, the debate surrounding Asín Palacios' theory remains both captivating and contentious. The interpretation of the striking connections between Islamic eschatology and Dante's *Divine Comedy* continues to divide scholars. While the argument citing a lack of historical evidence has lost much of its force, detractors of Asín Palacios argue that the parallels can be analyzed and understood without necessarily endorsing or rejecting his theory. They maintain that Dante drew inspiration primarily from the rich tradition of Christian otherworldly visions, asserting that the Western Christian tradition was sufficiently robust to provide Dante with the necessary creative material and, as a devout Christian, Dante had no need to turn to Islamic sources for inspiration.

Critics also emphasize that Dante lacked familiarity with the Arabic language and had no direct exposure to Islamic culture or texts, making it unlikely that he would have engaged deeply with Islamic eschatological narratives. Claudio Sánchez Albornoz, a prominent historian, encapsulated this skepticism, stating: "To accept the Islamic influence on Dante in this way, one must assume that Dante studied Islam so deeply that he embraced it" (Albornoz, 1974). This perspective underscores the enduring resistance to the idea of Islamic influence on Dante's work, rooted in both historical and cultural considerations.

Pascual. The text is a critical examination of Islam during the period of Muslim rule in Al-Andalus.

4 La Collectio Toletana (translated as The Toledo Collection) is a significant collection of texts related to the Christian-Muslim intellectual and theological exchanges in medieval Spain, particularly during the 12th and 13th centuries. This compilation is closely associated with the School of Translators of Toledo, whose mission is to promote the translation and study of scientific, philosophical, and theological texts from Arabic, Hebrew, and Greek into Latin and Romance languages.

5 Translated as History of the Arabs, this historical work was written by the Archbishop of Toledo Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada during the period of Christian reconquest of the Iberian Peninsula from Muslim rule.

6 Il Dittamondo is a 14th-century Italian poetic work composed by Fazio degli Uberti, between 1350 and 1367. Il Dittamondo mentions explicitly the Book of the Ladder .

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3. Eschatological Parallels between Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the *Miʿraj* Tradition

The word *al-Miʿrāj* derives from the Arabic root meaning "to ascend" and it is often interpreted as the "Ladder" or "Stairway" by which Muhammad ascended through the celestial realms. This journey is recounted in rich detail across a variety of Islamic texts, including the Qur'an, ḥadīth collections, and later mystical and literary works. In the Qur'an, the event is alluded to in *Surah al-Isrāʾ*[7] (17:1) while the specifics of the ascension are more elaborately described in the ḥadīth literature and sīrah (biographical) accounts.

The narrative of *al-Miʿrāj* has inspired scholars, theologians, poets, and renowned mystics, such as Ibn Arabi and Rumi, who reinterpreted it as a powerful symbol of divine revelation and the soul's eternal journey toward union with God. In their interpretations, the Miʿrāj became a metaphor for the infinite possibilities of spiritual enlightenment, a journey that every seeker of truth could aspire to undertake.

While the core elements of the story are widely accepted, variations exist in the details, with some accounts considered authentic (ṣaḥīḥ) and others regarded as apocryphal or embellished. *The Book of the Ladder (Kitāb al-Miʿrāj*) stands out as one of the most significant and richly detailed sources of eschatological knowledge in Islamic tradition. While the Qur'an and numerous ḥadīth collections provide foundational teachings on the end times, the Day of Judgment, and the signs preceding it, *The Book of the Ladder* delves deeper into the mysteries of the afterlife, the nature of God, and the soul's spiritual journey. This text offers a vivid and expansive narrative of the Prophet Muhammad's ascension (*al-Miʿrāj*), weaving together theological, mystical, and cosmological insights. It also provides detailed descriptions of the punishments and rewards awaiting individuals based on their deeds, offering a moral and ethical framework for understanding the consequences of human actions.

The theme of ascension resonates across various religious traditions, including the mystical practices of Judaism (e.g., Merkabah mysticism) and Christianity (e.g., the ascension of Christ). The striking eschatological parallels between Dante's Commedia and Islamic tradition, particularly the *Miʾraj*, suggest a potential connection between Dante's work and this Islamic narrative. Both texts depict profound spiritual journeys in which the protagonists transcend the earthly realm to

7 "Glory be to the One Who took His servant ʿMuḥammadʾ by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose surroundings We have blessed, so that We may show him some of Our signs. Indeed, He alone is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing."

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explore the afterlife, reflecting a universal human quest to understand the divine and the mysteries of existence.

Indeed, beyond their profound insights into the rewards awaiting the righteous and the punishments destined for the wicked—as well as their transformative nature, guiding those who experience the ascension closer to God—these narratives share a variety of striking eschatological parallels :

a/ The guiding figure :

A key shared motif between Dante's *Divine Comedy* and the Miʿraj tradition is the presence of a spiritual guide. In the *Commedia*, Dante is led through the afterlife by two central figures: Virgil, who guides him through Hell and Purgatory, and Beatrice, who takes over in Paradise. Similarly, in the Miʿraj, the Prophet Muhammad is accompanied by the angel Gabriel (Jibril), who escorts him from the beginning of the *Isra* (night journey) to the culmination of the *Miʿraj* (ascension). Gabriel acts as an intermediary who facilitates Muhammad's encounters with earlier prophets—such as Adam, Jesus, John the Baptist, Joseph, Enoch, Aaron, Moses, and Abraham—as they traverse the seven heavens.

b/ The Structured Ascent in Dante's *Commedia* and the Miʿraj :

Another striking parallel lies in the structured progression through multiple realms or levels of existence, a feature that underscores both Dante's *Commedia* and the Islamic narrative of the *Miʿraj*. In the *Commedia*, this progression is meticulously articulated through the concentric circles of Hell (*Inferno*), the ascending terraces of Purgatory (*Purgatorio*), and the celestial spheres of Paradise (*Paradiso*). Each realm is intricately detailed, with its own unique characteristics, inhabitants, and symbolic significance.

Similarly, the *Miʿraj* recounts the Prophet Muhammad's ascent through the seven heavens**,** each level distinguished by its specific attributes and celestial beings. This hierarchical framework reflects a shared cosmological vision of the afterlife as a graded journey toward divine proximity and spiritual enlightenment. In both traditions, the soul's ascent symbolizes a process of gradual purification and transcendence**,** emphasizing the transformative path from earthly imperfection to heavenly perfection.

c/ Encounters with Spiritual Guides and Prophetic Figures :

Both narratives also feature encounters with significant religious figures, which serve to deepen and enrich the spiritual and moral dimensions of the journey. In the *Commedia*, Dante meets a range of figures from Christian history and theology,

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العدد (120) مايو 2025

including saints, sinners, and biblical personalities, each of whom imparts lessons on faith, morality, and divine justice. In the Miʿraj, Muhammad encounters earlier prophets, such as Adam, Moses, and Abraham, who offer theological insights and reinforce the continuity of the prophetic tradition.

d/ The spiritual and transformative nature of both narratives:

Both narratives emphasize the transformative power of spiritual journeys, wherein the protagonists transcend the earthly realm, and gain revelations that reshape their understanding of the divine and the self. If Dante's journey in the Commedia is seen as an allegory for the soul's progression from sin to salvation, it shares this symbolic depth with the Mi'raj, which represents a spiritual ascent in the soul's quest for divine truth and enlightenment.

In fact, in both cases, the journeys culminate in profound personal transformation. Dante emerges with a deeper comprehension of divine justice, moral responsibility, and ultimate truth after traversing Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad's Mi'raj concludes with heightened spiritual insight into divine will and cosmic order, revealing God's majesty and justice. This transformation highlights the universality of the human search for enlightenment, as both Dante and Muhammad symbolize the soul's striving toward God.

All these parallels reveal a shared fascination with the afterlife as a structured, transformative journey guided by divine wisdom and populated by figures who embody spiritual truths. Whether through direct influence or shared cultural heritage, these motifs mark the profound connections between Christian and Islamic eschatological traditions and underline the universality of the human quest to comprehend the divine, the afterlife, and the moral order of the universe.

4. The Shared Eschatological Framework of the Abrahamic Faiths

The parallels between the two narratives are undeniably striking and warrant a deeper exploration into the layered and interconnected nature of eschatological narratives across religious traditions across religious and cultural boundaries. The theory of the *Miʿrāj*'s potential influence on Dante's *Commedia* not only highlights these connections but also opens the door to more complex and nuanced questions about cross-cultural exchanges in medieval literature. Below, we outline four pivotal points that encapsulate the core aspects of this intricate discussion. Each point emphasizes the complexity of tracing the origins and transmission of these narratives, shedding light on the broader dynamics of cultural and religious interplay. Let us briefly examine these key points:

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العدد (120) مايو 2025

a. The Miʿrāj as a Potential Source for Dante's Commedia : Given the chronological anteriority of the Miʿrāj (dating to the 7th century, compared to Dante's 14th-century work), some scholars argue that the Islamic narrative may have served as a source or inspiration for Dante. This possibility is bolstered by the historical context of medieval Europe, where Islamic texts and ideas were transmitted through translations and cultural exchanges, particularly in regions like Al-Andalus and Sicily, which served as bridges between the Islamic and Christian worlds. These interactions suggest that Dante could have been indirectly exposed to Islamic eschatological traditions, enriching the thematic and structural parallels between the *Divine Comedy* and the Miʿrāj.

b. Christian Legends as Potential Sources for the Miʿrāj : Christian apocalyptic and visionary literature, such as the Apocalypse of St. Peter, the Visio Sancti Pauli, the Vision of Adamnán, and the Vision of Tungdalo, predate both the Miʿrāj and Dante's Commedia. These texts share thematic and structural similarities with the Miʿrāj, including journeys through the afterlife, encounters with angels and saints, and vivid depictions of heaven and hell. Some scholars argue that these Christian legends may have influenced the development of the Miʿrāj, particularly during the early Islamic period when interactions between Christian and Islamic communities were frequent.

c. The Talmud and Merkabah Mysticism as Common Sources **:** The Talmud and Merkabah mysticism, which explore themes of celestial ascent and divine visions, are considered potential sources for both the Miʿrāj and Christian apocalyptic literature. These Jewish mystical traditions, which predate both Islam and Christianity, may have served as a shared foundation for later eschatological narratives, reflecting a common heritage of spiritual and visionary literature.

d. Zoroastrian Eschatology as the Origin of the Miʿrāj : The origins of the Miʿrāj can be traced even further back to Iranian Zoroastrian eschatology, particularly the *Ardā Virāf Nāmeh*, a text that describes the journey of the righteous Virāf through the afterlife. This narrative features a guided tour of heaven and hell, moral judgments, and encounters with divine beings—elements that closely resemble the Miʿrāj. This connection suggests that the Miʿrāj may have inherited and adapted earlier Zoroastrian motifs, which were then transmitted to other religious and literary traditions

We can now better understand the challenges of tracing the origins of the parallels between the various eschatological narratives discussed. Blochet's argument in *Sources Orientales de la Comédie Divine* (1901) posits that the roots of Dante's Commedia should be sought not in the Islamic Miʿrāj but in the earlier

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Iranian eschatology of the *Ardā Vīrāf Nāmeh*, which shares striking thematic and structural parallels with Dante's work, including the division of the afterlife into distinct realms, moral judgments, and encounters with divine beings. Blochet suggests that the biblical Apocalypse (e.g., the Book of Revelation) acted as an intermediary, transmitting Iranian eschatological motifs into Christian tradition, which Dante later drew upon.

While Blochet emphasizes Iranian influence, the existence of a well-established Jewish eschatology predating any potential Iranian impact complicates this narrative. Scholars like Neher (1972) argue that Jewish eschatological traditions, particularly those rooted in pre-Exilic texts (e.g., the prophetic books of the Hebrew Bible), represent an independent and earlier development. The biblical Apocalypse, as seen in the Book of Revelation, can thus be viewed as a natural evolution of this Jewish eschatological framework rather than a direct adaptation of Iranian ideas. This interpretation draws attention to the continuity and internal development of Jewish thought, which later influenced both Christian and Islamic traditions.

The Talmud, particularly its mystical and eschatological elements, provides some of the earliest hints of analogies among the three monotheistic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). However, while the Talmud reflects a rich tradition of Jewish eschatology, there is no definitive evidence that it directly influenced the *Ardā Vīrāf Nāmeh*. Instead, the Talmud and Zoroastrian eschatology may represent parallel developments, each shaped by their unique cultural and religious contexts. The absence of direct influence does not diminish the significance of the Talmud as a repository of early eschatological ideas, but it does complicate efforts to establish a linear chain of influence from Zoroastrianism to Judaism and beyond.

The interplay between these traditions suggests a more nuanced and layered process of influence and adaptation. Rather than a straightforward transmission of ideas from one tradition to another, eschatological motifs likely emerged through a complex web of cross-cultural interactions, shared archetypes, and convergent developments.

While the relationship between *the Ardā Vīrāf Nāmeh* and Jewish apocalyptic literature remains only partially understood, the profound connection between Christian and Jewish palingenesis carries significant theoretical implications. Within both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic traditions, three recurring patterns of revelation can be discerned, as noted by Couliano (1989):

- **a.** Manifestations through dreams or visions, such as in Daniel 7–8.
- **b.** Revelations experienced during rapture, where biblical figures like Abraham and Moses are guided by angels (e.g., Gabriel, Michael).
- **c.** Personal ambition, a defining feature of Merkabah literature.

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العدد (120) مايو 2025

These patterns find resonance also in Islamic thought, where Muhammad's ascension to the 'Lotus of the Boundary' reflects earlier Judeo-Christian traditions and in the sufi literature this ascension is lived as both a personal and mystical journey, emphasizing the soul's quest for divine proximity and spiritual enlightenment.

The Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—are deeply interconnected by their monotheistic belief in a single, omnipotent God who is the creator and sustainer of the universe. This shared theological foundation also shapes their eschatological visions, which explore the ultimate destiny of humanity and the cosmos. Each of these traditions offers a rich and intricate tapestry of eschatological teachings, detailing the events of the end times, the culmination of history in the Day of Judgment, and the final fate of the world

5. End Times and Eschatological Visions: Shared Apocalyptic Motifs in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam"

The Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—extend their focus beyond the afterlife to encompass the events and revelations that will characterize the end of the world. Each of these traditions foretells a series of catastrophic events preceding the world's culmination, marked by shared themes such as moral decay, cosmic upheaval, and unmistakable signs heralding the Day of Judgment. These parallels not only emphasize the interconnectedness of the three faiths but also highlight their shared vision of ultimate accountability, divine justice, and the restoration of cosmic order. Indeed, the predicted signs serve as profound reminders of the transient nature of worldly life, urging believers to prioritize faith, righteousness, and spiritual preparation for the final reckoning.

6.1. **The end times shared motifs**

Concerning the visions of the end times, four recurring patterns of convergence emerge across the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam:

a. Divine Judgment: The shared belief in Divine Judgment emphasizes that God is actively involved in human affairs both during life and in the hereafter. In all the three faiths, human deeds are under divine supervision, and every individual is held accountable on the Day of Judgment : the righteous are promised rewards, while punishment awaits the wicked.

b. The Afterlife: The three faiths describe the realms of the other world such as heaven and hell emphasizing that the soul's fate is determined by its adherence to divine law.

c. The Returning Messiah: Islamic and Christian eschatology share striking similarities regarding the return of a messianic figure. According to Islam, Jesus (*Isa*)

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will return before the End Times, will defeat the false messiah (*Dajjal*) and establish peace. Similarly, in Christianity, Jesus will return to defeat the Antichrist and establish His eternal kingdom. Both traditions emphasize a final battle between good and evil, the resurrection of the dead, and the establishment of a new, just order.

d. Signs of the End Times: The Abrahamic faiths share remarkable parallels regarding the Signs of the End Times :

A striking parallel among the three monotheistic traditions is the appearance of a beast or creature as a significant eschatological figure preceding the end of the world and the final judgment. This figure is mentioned in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 13:11-18), in Jewish apocalyptic visions (e.g., the Book of Job, Job 40:15-24), and the Qur'an (*Surat an-Naml*, 27:82)[8].

Another catastrophic sign leading to the final judgment found in both the Qur'an and the Bible is the blowing of the trumpet, which signifies the onset of the final judgment and the end of the world. In the Book of Revelation, the blowing of the trumpet is part of a sequence of divine judgments referred to as the Seven Trumpets. Each trumpet, blown by an angel, heralds specific apocalyptic events leading to the establishment of God's eternal kingdom. Similarly, *Surat al-Qaf* (Chapter 50) describes this sign saying that the angel Israfil sounds the trumpet, signaling the end of the world and the resurrection of the dead for judgment.

The emergence of Gog and Magog (*Yajuj* and *Majuj* in Islamic tradition) as key figures associated with the end times is a further significant apocalpytical event shared by the Book of Revelation and the Qur'an. In the Book of Revelation (20:7-10), after the thousand-year reign of Christ, Satan is said to deceive Gog and Magog, who will then gather their forces for a final battle against the saints and the holy city of Jerusalem. Their ultimate defeat marks the culmination of divine judgment and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth. Similarly, in the Qur'an, Gog (*Yajuj)* and Magog (*Majuj)* are depicted as destructive forces that spread corruption and chaos across the Earth. Their emergence is a sign of the approaching end times. Both scriptures portray these tribes as symbols of chaos and opposition to divine order, whose defeat signifies the triumph of God's will and the ushering in of a new, eternal reality.

6.2. **The shared eschatological motifs**

The profound shared origins of the Abrahamic religions are also vividly reflected in the striking convergences found within their eschatological visions. If we consider,

8 "And when the word befalls them, We will bring forth for them a creature from the earth speaking to them, [saying] that the people were, of Our verses, not certain [in faith]"

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Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

for example, the concept of the guiding figure during otherworldy journey, it must be said that this a recurring motif within the visions.Whether an angel, Christ, or another divine being, this figure acts as the ideal mediator between the pilgrim and God, facilitating his understanding of the inscrutable and often terrifying aspects of the realms. The guide serves as an essential figure in the visionary's journey, fulfilling multiple roles: interpreter of enigmatic visions, revealer of divine knowledge, and comforter in the face of overwhelming revelations

In Ezekiel's vision of the restored temple (Ezekiel 40–48)[9], the guiding figure is an angel, a role similarly assumed by an angelic being in the Book of Daniel (Daniel 7:15–28)[10] and in the *Visio Pauli*[11]. In contrast, the *Apocalypse of Peter* depicts Christ himself as the guide, leading Peter and his disciples through a vivid and transformative vision of Judgment Day.

This shared motif of a guiding figure in apocalyptic and visionary literature reinforces the idea of the divine source of these revelations. Across traditions, the presence of a mediator serves as a testament to the transcendent nature of these visions, framing them as more than mere human imaginings. Instead, they are portrayed as expressions of God's plan and sovereignty, communicated through divine intermediaries to chosen individuals.

The same conclusion can be drawn as to the Abramic faiths' alignment on eschatological imagery and symbolism. For example, the symbolism of birds reflects a profound and shared spiritual imagination. The use of symbolic imagery in *The Book of the Ladder* and its potential connection to Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* underscores the profound interconnectedness of religious and literary traditions. In *The Book of the Ladder,* for instance, the depiction of a gigantic rooster singing praises to God—uttering the phrase "Benedictus sis tu, Domine Deus..."[12] — serves as a powerful symbol of devotion. Through its act of singing, the rooster embodies the virtue of piety, highlighting the spiritual significance of praise and worship[13]. This invites comparisons to the symbolic and allegorical eagle found in

9 serving as a conduit for divine knowledge leads Ezekiel to a high mountain in Israel and reveals to him a detailed vision of the future temple.

10 the guiding figure is an angel who intervenes to comfort and instruct Daniel and interprets his vision of the four beasts.

11 in the Visio Pauli an angel guides Paul and leads him through the three Heavens and Hell.

12 Which translates ("Blessed are You, Lord God...")

13 In Islamic eschatological narratives, the Rooster is described as a celestial creature that beats its wings while proclaiming, "Le halla hilalla," a phrase translating to "There is no God but God.", that encapsulates the core of Islamic monotheism.

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www.jalhss.com
editor@jalhss.com
Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In *Paradiso*[14], the eagle is portrayed as a celestial being singing praises to God. Theis eagle holds significant symbolic resonance in the Bible (e.g., in Exodus 19:4 and Isaiah 40:31).

Similar celestial beings are often depicted in Christian tradition as creatures of great spiritual significance. For example, in the *Slavonic Book of Enoch* (XV, 1-2)[15], the Chalkydri are celestial beings with birdlike features serving as attendants to the divine throne and in *Adamnan's vision*, three immense and majestic birds encircle the Throne of God. The theme of birds as symbols of divine worship is also prominent in Irish visionary literature, such as the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* [16](The Voyage of Saint Brandanus) where a multitude of birds is depicted as singing praises to God.

These accounts exemplify the shared motifs that permeate Jewish, Christian, and Islamic visionary traditions, revealing a profound commonality rooted in the belief in a divine origin and purpose. Across these traditions, celestial beings—whether the *Chalkydri* of the *Slavonic Book of Enoch*, the birds of the *Navigatio Sancti Brandani*, or the rooster and eagle in Islamic and Christian eschatological literature—serve as powerful symbols of the unity of creation in its worship of the Creator. Through their songs, gestures, and radiant presence, these celestial beings embody the idea that all of existence, from the highest heavens to the natural world, is called to glorify God in a harmonious chorus of praise.

The motif of coincidentia oppositorum (the coincidence of opposites) is another recurring theme in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic visionary traditions. This concept, particularly exemplified by the juxtaposition of fire and snow (or ice)**,** serves as a powerful symbol of divine omnipotence and the ineffable nature of God's creation. It intensifies the idea that God's power transcends human understanding and that His creation harmonizes even the most seemingly contradictory forces.

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14 (Par, XIX, 34-39):
Like a falcon that, freed from its hood,
moves its head and claps its wings,
showing its eagerness and making itself beautiful,
so I saw that emblem, which was woven
of praises of divine grace,
with songs such as are known by those who rejoice up there.

15 Here, there is a vivid depiction of heavenly creatures (the Phoenicians and Chalkydri) expressing their praise for God through the act of beating their wings and through songs: "Then the creatures called Phoenicians and Chalcidras sang. Therefore, every bird beat its wings, exulting over the giver of light, and they sang a song at the command of the Lord."

16 Similarly, in the Navigatio Sancti Brandani (The Voyage of Saint Brendan), the birds are described as proclaiming their devotion through a combination of sounds and actions: "...sent forth sounds with their mouths and with their wings, saying: Praise the Lord, all you who are his angels, praise him, you who are his virtues."

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Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

In the Midrash[17], it is recounted that when God gave the Torah on Mount Sinai, He surrounded the mountain with both fire and snow. This imagery of coexistence of fire and snow appears also in *The Book of the Ladder* : the Prophet Muhammad encounters in hell "an angel of fire and snow, but he was made in such a way that fire did not melt snow, nor snow extinguish fire." This description vividly illustrates the coexistence of opposites, emphasizing the divine order that governs even the most contradictory forces. The same motif appears in early Christian apocalyptic literature, particularly in *The Book of Enoch* (Chapter 14), where Enoch describes a house he visits as paradoxically "hot as fire and cold as ice." This juxtaposition of fire and ice emphasizes the otherworldly and mysterious qualities of the divine realm, where the ordinary rules of nature do not apply. These examples illustrate how the *coincidentia oppositorum* reflects the belief that God's creation is a manifestation of His infinite power and wisdom, capable of sustaining and reconciling even the most opposing forces.

We must not overlook the profound symbolic power of the number seven, a recurring and deeply significant motif in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic visionary traditions. In the Torah, the number seven is intimately linked to the Shabbat, the sacred seventh day of rest and worship. The creation narrative in Genesis 2:2–3 explicitly highlights this connection, stating that God rested on the seventh day after completing the work of creation in six days. This symbolic use of the number seven appears also in Christianity and Islam. In fact, this sacred number recurs prominently in The Book of Revelation, where it is associated with seven churches (Revelation 1:4), seven seals (Revelation 5:1), seven trumpets (Revelation 8:2), and seven bowls of God's wrath (Revelation 16:1). Further highlighting its symbolic weight, the Revelation of John (7:2) vividly evokes the image of a seven-headed dragon, deepening the mystical resonance of this number. In Islam, the Qur'an (7:54)[18] emphasizes that Allah created the heavens and the earth in six days and established His throne above the seven heavens (65:12)[19]. The significance of the number is further reinforced in Islamic

17 The Midrash is a classical Jewish exegetical text

18 " Indeed, your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne. He covers the night with the day, [another night] chasing it rapidly; and [He created] the sun, the moon, and the stars, subjected by His command. Unquestionably, His is the creation and the command; blessed is Allah, Lord of the worlds"

19 "It is Allah who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them so you may know that Allah is over all things competent and that Allah has encompassed all things in knowledge."

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Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

rituals, such as the Hajj pilgrimage, during which Muslims circle the Kaaba seven times and walk between Safa and Marwa seven times.

The number seven also appears prominently in eschatological and moral frameworks across the three faiths: the Islamic tradition describes seven layers of hell (*Jahannam*) and seven levels of heaven (*Jannah*), signifying the stratification of divine justice and mercy in the afterlife. The number seven is also associated with the seven oft-repeated verses [20] of the Qur'an, frequently recited in prayers. These verses are believed to carry immense spiritual significance, symbolizing the essence of divine worship and guidance. In the Christian tradition, the number is associated with the seven deadly sins and the seven virtues representing moral completeness, offering a framework for ethical living and spiritual reflection.

In addition to the themes already discussed, it is important to note that the eschatological visions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are richly interwoven with recurring motifs and imagery, as exemplified by the portrayal of angels with extraordinary, supernatural dimensions. These depictions emphasize the vastness, multiplicity, and incomprehensible nature of celestial beings, serving to magnify the infinite majesty of God and the transcendent essence of the divine realm. Striking parallels emerge across these traditions, particularly in the descriptions of angels found in texts such as the *Revelation of Moses***,** the Miʿrāj narratives of Islam, and other apocalyptic writings.

The description of the angel in the *Revelation of Moses*, as noted by Ioan P. Couliano (1989), is a striking example of numerical amplification used to convey the awe-inspiring and otherworldly nature of celestial beings. This angel, residing in the third heaven, is depicted as having a height equal to a 500-year journey, with 70,000 heads, 70,000 mouths in each head, 70,000 tongues in each mouth, and the ability to offer 70,000 praises.

Similarly, the Book of the Ladder presents angels whose descriptions bear a remarkable resemblance to those found in the *Revelation of Moses*. In the first heaven of Paradise, the Prophet encounters angels whose dimensions and attributes are depicted in equally elaborate, multiplicative terms. These angels number 70,000, each possessing 70,000 heads. Every head is adorned with 70,000 faces, each face contains 70,000 mouths, and each mouth is equipped with 70,000 tongues. Each tongue, in turn, is said to know 70,000 languages and to praise the Lord 70,000 times daily. This intricate and expansive imagery mirrors the purpose of the *Revelation of Moses*: to emphasize the infinite and incomprehensible nature of the divine realm and the boundless capacity of celestial beings to glorify God.

20 called in arabic the Sab'ul-Mathani.

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editor@jalhss.com
Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* employs a strikingly similar approach in its portrayal of celestial beings, particularly in *Paradiso*. In this final canticle, Dante describes the Eagle, a powerful symbol of divine justice, as an entity composed of countless souls from Jupiter's celestial sphere[21]. The Eagle's grandeur and majesty are depicted as surpassing human comprehension, embodying the infinite wisdom and justice of God. Dante's use of numerical amplification aligns closely with the techniques found in Jewish and Islamic eschatological texts, such as the *Revelation of Moses* and the Miʿrāj narratives. Like these traditions, Dante employs expansive and multiplicative descriptions to evoke the ineffable nature of the divine.

6. The Shared Divine Origin

On the basis of what has been discussed so far, it is legitimate to conclude that, despite variations in representation and narrative details, the Abrahamic traditions converge on a central eschatological theme: the promise of an ultimate reckoning, where the faithful are rewarded with eternal bliss, and those who reject the divine message face admonishment. This Eschatology (with a capital *E*) serves as a unifying framework across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, articulated through the teachings of their respective prophets—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. It reflects a shared vision of divine justice, the accountability of human actions, and the hope of eternal communion with the divine.

The realms of the underworld in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam further exemplify this profound unity, as they are all understood to be creations of the same God. Whether depicted as Sheol, Hell, Paradise, Gehenna, or Jahannam, these otherworldly realms serve a consistent divine purpose: to reflect the justice, mercy, and will of the Creator. They function as symbolic spaces where divine retribution and reward are meted out, reinforcing the moral and ethical imperatives central to each tradition.

The striking parallels in eschatological visions across these traditions have given rise to two competing theories regarding their evolution. The first theory posits a process of historical and theological influence and transmission among the three Abrahamic traditions. According to this view, the striking similarities in their apocalyptic visions

21 Then, as when burning logs are struck,
innumerable sparks rise up,
by which fools often take their omens,
so there seemed to rise from there more than a thousand
lights, and they soared, some much, some little,
as the sun that kindles them decrees;
Dante, Paradiso, XVIII.100–105.

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editor@jalhss.com
Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

can be attributed to a flow of ideas—from Judaism to Christianity, from Christianity to Islam, and directly from Judaism to Islam. This interconnectedness is rooted in the fact that each religion did not emerge in isolation but rather as a continuation and culmination of earlier religious traditions. The scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam form a cohesive narrative of divine guidance, with each subsequent tradition building upon and refining the revelations that came before it. For example, the Qur'an explicitly acknowledges the Torah and the Gospels as earlier revelations, while presenting itself as the final and complete expression of God's message. From Adam onward, God's guidance is understood to have been conveyed through a succession of prophets across different eras and cultures, with Islam representing the ultimate stage in this progressive revelation. In this framework, Christianity and Judaism are seen as earlier, integral phases within the unfolding divine plan, each contributing to the broader tapestry of monotheistic faith.

The second theory, by contrast, emphasizes the unique divine source as the key to understanding the unity of these eschatological visions. According to this perspective, the otherworldly realms described in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are inherently equal because they are all manifestations of God's singular will and creative power. This interconnectedness is the expression of the shared spiritual heritage and continuity among these faiths, rooted in a common foundation of divine truth. From this vantage point, Islam's eschatological concepts are not merely influenced by earlier traditions but reflect a profound continuity with the religious truths that preceded it. Differences in their descriptions—whether of paradise, hell, or celestial beings—are seen as the result of human interpretation, cultural context, and the limitations of language, rather than any fundamental distinction in divine purpose. This perspective highlights the idea that the core message of divine justice, the accountability of human actions, and the hope of eternal communion with the divine remains consistent across the three faiths.

However, the eschatological visions found in apocalyptic texts are not always uniform or free from human influence. These texts often bear the marks of their authors' ideologies, theological agendas, and cultural contexts. Over time, imaginative additions by storytellers and doctrinal modifications by theologians have shaped and altered the narratives, making it increasingly challenging to distinguish authentic texts from apocryphal ones.

For example, *The Book of the Ladder* (*Kitāb al-Miʿrāj*) is widely regarded as an apocryphal book, enriched with imaginative elements that may have been influenced by distant Iranian visionary traditions. This text diverges significantly from the more

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editor@jalhss.com
Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

authentic account of the Miʿrāj traditionally attributed to Ibn Abbas[22] and compiled by Muhammad Ibn Ishaq in his *Sirat al-Rasul*[23] (Biography of the Prophet). The Ibn Abbas version, which has been translated into German by G. Weil in 1864 and into English by A. Guillaume in 1955, is considered a cornerstone for understanding the Prophet's ascension within Islamic tradition. Its relative simplicity and alignment with core Islamic teachings stand in contrast to the more elaborate and fantastical elements found in *The Book of the Ladder*.

7. Conclusion

The discourse we have developed remains intentionally broad and suggestive, rather than exhaustive or definitive. It is clear that our aim is not to reduce the intricate and multifaceted phenomenon of eschatological thought to a simplistic expression of unity of the three Abrahamic religions. Such an approach would overlook the rich diversity and complexity inherent in these traditions. Nevertheless, the common source hypothesis offers a valuable framework for deepening our understanding of the connections between *The Divine Comedy* and Islamic eschatology. This perspective does not preclude other interpretations or theories but rather complements them, inviting further exploration and dialogue.

While many scholars have identified motifs in *The Divine Comedy* and Christian visionary literature that can be traced to Iranian, Hellenistic, and even Egyptian sources, it is important to acknowledge that revelations about the afterlife were not limited to the biblical scriptures or the Qur'an. Across cultures and epochs, divine messages concerning the nature of existence, the afterlife, and the ultimate destiny of humanity were conveyed through prophets, messengers, and sacred texts. This suggests a broader, more universal dimension to eschatological thought which transcends the boundaries of any single religious tradition.

A unifying theme across various apocalyptic traditions—whether Egyptian, Greek, Iranian, or Abrahamic—is the profound belief that time is inextricably linked to eternity. These traditions share the conviction that human history is not a random or chaotic sequence of events but is imbued with structure, purpose, and meaning in relation to its ultimate End. This End is not seen as a product of chance or arbitrary fate but as the fulfillment of a divine plan, a cosmic narrative that underscores the moral and spiritual dimensions of human existence (McGinn, 1979). This shared

22 Abdullah ibn Abbas was a cousin of the Prophet Muhammad and the major narrator of the Miʿrāj

23 The Sīrah is one of the most important sources of Islamic history and provides a comprehensive account of the Prophet's life, from his birth in Mecca to his death in Medina.

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Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

eschatological framework highlights the enduring human quest to understand the nature of life, death, and the divine, as well as the interconnectedness of religious and cultural expressions across time and space.

In this context, *The Divine Comedy* emerges not merely as a product of its Christian milieu but as a work that resonates with and reflects broader, cross-cultural eschatological themes. By situating Dante's masterpiece within this wider tapestry of apocalyptic thought, we gain a richer appreciation of its eschatological, philosophical, and literary dimensions, while also recognizing the enduring relevance of these questions across human history.

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Volume (120) May 2025
العدد (120) مايو 2025

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