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The Magic of the Babylonians in Islam: Discussion in the Context of al-Baqara 2:102

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Abstract

Magic (*sihr*) has constituted a significant point of theological, exegetical, and legal discussion within Islam. Although the Qurʾān refers to magic and related phenomena in several contexts, Q 2:102 has become the central locus of debate because of its references to Babylon, Solomon, the devils, and the two figures Hārūt and Mārūt. This article examines the debates surrounding Q 2:102 by situating the verse against the background of Babylonian magical culture and by tracing its reception in tafsīr, kalām, fiqh, and later Islamic cultural materials. It argues that discussions surrounding Babylonian magic do not merely preserve a collection of disagreements; rather, they reveal how different Islamic disciplines classified, restricted, and interpreted magic in accordance with their own epistemological and theological concerns. In tafsīr, the verse generated debates over the occasion of revelation, lexical interpretation, variant readings, and the identity of Hārūt and Mārūt. In kalām, the same verse became connected to divine permission, God’s creative act, causality, the reality of magic, the distinction between magic and miracle, and the impeccability of angels. In fiqh, it raised questions concerning the legal ruling on magic and the punishment of the magician. The study further shows that reports concerning Hārūt and Mārūt were often treated as Isrāʾīliyyāt and rejected as lacking creedal value, even as they continued to circulate in the Islamic literature and art. The article concludes that Q 2:102 functioned as a meeting point where Islamic disciplines negotiated the boundaries between revelation, transmitted reports, theology, law, and cultural imagination.

Keywords: Islam; Babylon; magic; al-Baqara 2:102; Hārūt and Mārūt



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1. Introduction

Humanity has long been fascinated by extraordinary states and metaphysical phenomena. Magic, as one of these metaphysical and extraordinary phenomena practiced for the purpose of attaining religious or worldly benefit, has likewise attracted sustained human interest; it has found a place in many belief systems, from small-scale tribal religions to Abrahamic religions. In Islam, the last of the Abrahamic religions, the issue of magic was also examined and became a disputed matter among Muslim scholars. In the Qurʾān, the primary source of Islam, concepts related to magic and similar phenomena are mentioned approximately sixty times across fifty verses. In the great majority of these verses, accounts state that many prophets entrusted with the mission of *al-risāla* (prophetic mission) were accused of being bewitched or of being magicians, that these accusations were

slandorous, and that deniers repeatedly fabricated such claims about the prophets (‘Abd al-Bāqī 1945, pp. 346–47). In terms of its varieties, the Qur’ān refers to three types of magic. The form of magic most frequently mentioned in the Qur’ān is that of the Egyptians, carried out through certain techniques and illusion. In the verses in this context, the events between Pharaoh’s magicians and Moses are generally recounted, and it is reported that Moses rendered them powerless through the miracles he performed. It is emphasized that Moses was not a magician; rather, by God’s grace, he overcame Pharaoh’s magicians, and the magic they performed was nothing but deception. [Q 7:106–107; Q 10:76–77; Q 26:31–48] Another type of magic mentioned in the Qur’ān appears in verse four of Sūrat al-Falaq. Although the word *sihr* itself is not used in the relevant verse, the term “النَّفَّاثَاتِ” (*al-naffāthāt*) in the verse means those who blow on knots. The people designated in this way practice a form of magic performed by reciting over cords, blowing on them, and tying knots. It is reported that this type of magic had been widely practiced since ancient times, was prevalent in Egypt, and that even during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad, sorcerers engaged in this practice (Ibn Khaldūn 2015, pp. 575–76). The final type of magic mentioned in the Qur’ān is that of the Babylonians. This form of magic, which was practiced by seeking assistance from celestial beings, is referred to in verse 102 of Sūrat al-Baqara as follows:

وَاتَّبَعُوا مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيَاطِينُ عَلَىٰ مُلْكٍ سُلَيْمٍ وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمٌ وَلَكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ عَلَىٰ الْمَلَكَيْنِ بِبَابِلَ هَارُوتَ وَمَارُوتَ وَمَا يُعَلِّمَانِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ حَتَّىٰ يَقُولَا إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا مَا يُفَرِّقُونَ بِهِ بَيْنَ الْمَرْءِ وَزَوْجِهِ وَمَا هُمْ بِضَارِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مَا يَضُرُّهُمْ وَلَا يَنْفَعُهُمْ وَلَقَدْ عَلِمُوا لَمَنِ اشْتَرَاهُ مَا لَهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ مِنْ خَلَقٍ وَلَبِئْسَ مَا شَرُّوا بِهِ أَنْفُسَهُمْ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

“They followed what the devils had been fabricating and saying about Solomon’s sovereignty. The truth is that Solomon did not become an unbeliever, but the devils became unbelievers, because they were teaching people magic and that which had been sent down in Babylon to the two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt. Yet these two angels would not impart any knowledge to anyone without first saying, ‘We are only a means of trial, so do not fall into unbelief!’ But from these two, they were learning that by which they would separate a man and his wife. However, they could not harm anyone with it except by Allah’s permission. Even so, they were learning what harmed them, not what benefited them. And they certainly knew full well that whoever purchased this (magic) would have no share in the Hereafter. How evil indeed was that for which they sold themselves, if only they had known.” [Q 2:102]

Throughout the verse, the Jews who claimed that Solomon had established his sovereignty through magic are criticized, and it is emphasized that although certain people practiced acts of evil through certain rituals and teachings that would cause social harm, these would have no effect without God’s permission. It is also stated that these people practiced this kind of magic by receiving certain forms of knowledge of the nature of magic from two angels in Babylon named “Hārūt and Mārūt.” From the early period onward, Muslim scholars disagreed on numerous issues raised by this verse. Particularly in the tafsīr sources, numerous linguistic and rational claims and discussions were included in the interpretation of the relevant verse concerning the occasion of revelation of the verse, the nature of magic, the ruling of magic in Islam, and who Hārūt and Mārūt were. The primary reason why the verse constituting the main subject of our study is associated with Babylon is that the expression “Bābil” is explicitly mentioned in the verse. However, there are disagreements as to which region is intended by the Bābil mentioned in the verse. Indeed, according to some reports, this refers to the region of Damavand within Iran’s borders. According to a report transmitted from ‘Ā’isha (d. 58/678), the Bābil intended in the verse is the city located in Iraq that served as the administrative center of the Chaldeans. In addition to these views, reports have also been transmitted stating that what is intended

here is Ra's al-'ayn, Nihāwand, or the Maghrib (North Africa) region. However, the view that the region intended in the verse is the Maghrib is regarded as weak (al-Ṭabarī 2010, vol. 1, p. 674; al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, p. 286). The views on this issue suggest that the Bābil mentioned in the verse refers to the city known in world history as Babylon and to the surrounding region. Therefore, to better understand the subject, it is essential to address magical practices in ancient Babylon and the relationship between Babylon and magic.

Babylon, one of the most ancient and greatest cities of ancient Mesopotamia, has a history of approximately two thousand years. During this period, Babylon, which hosted many kingdoms and civilizations, experienced two eras that represented the political and cultural apexes of history. The first of these was the reign of the Amorite ruler Hammurabi (d. 1750 BCE), who devised the oldest written legal codes in human history, and the other was the reign of the Chaldean king Nebuchadnezzar II (d. 561 BCE) (Oppenheim 1977, pp. 153–54). Throughout Babylon's history, it appears that the city was a rich center in terms of the culture of magic and divination, and that the Babylonians possessed extremely ancient magical traditions. Indeed, the Code of Hammurabi's opening provisions contain rulings on magic and magicians. According to these laws, if a man accuses another person of practicing magic against him and cannot prove it, the accuser is made to enter the sacred river. If the accuser drowns in the sacred river and cannot escape, the accused person takes possession of the accuser's house. If, however, the accuser escapes from the sacred river, this is deemed to prove the accusation, and the accused person is then executed. As a result, the complainant who successfully survives the ordeal of the sacred river takes possession of the house of the executed accused. These laws, which served as a kind of safeguard against magic and the evil designs of magicians, show that, from the earliest periods of Babylon, magic was regulated in legal terms (Lesêtre 1912, pp. 564–65). Various passages of the Old Testament also contain references to Babylon's association with magic. Within the framework of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams in the Book of Daniel, mention is made of Babylon's magicians, diviners, soothsayers, and astrologers [Daniel 1:2; 2:2, 4, 10–13]. The Book of Isaiah also states that the prophet Isaiah declared that Babylon would be driven into calamity, and that its magicians, diviners, and astrologers would be unable to prevent it [Isaiah 47:11–13].

The sources indicate that magical practices in Babylon were not a marginal or clandestine phenomenon, as in many other civilizations, but were carried out in an institutionalized manner with state support. In practice, only those forms of magic that were evil and detrimental to society were prohibited and regulated by legal provisions. Indeed, the magicians known as *āšipu* and *bārû*, who possessed expertise in foreseeing the future, subjugating demons, averting evil, and securing good through sacrifices and magical rituals, constituted an academic class by virtue of the institutional structure of magic and were regarded as persons of high status in society (Lesêtre 1912, p. 564; Abusch and van der Toorn 1999, p. 30). Moreover, although astral magic and divination were present to varying degrees in many Mesopotamian societies, they developed especially strongly in Babylon, to the extent that Babylon virtually became a center of astral magic. In later periods, Babylonian tradition—particularly astral magic—influenced the Hellenistic magical tradition. Indeed, many rituals and materials in the Hellenistic magical tradition show similarities to elements of the Babylonian magical tradition (Fahd 1966, p. 24; Reiner 1995, pp. vii–ix). The Babylonian religious literature that has survived to the present day also shows significant richness, especially in texts on magical and exorcistic rituals. These texts provide evidence that the Babylonians held a widespread belief in metaphysical beings that they believed exerted a certain influence over them. These texts suggest that such rituals were aimed at controlling spirits, averting the evils and consequences they might cause, and securing their benevolent intentions. According to the Babylonians, illnesses arose from

a malevolent spirit afflicting a person and harming him, either directly or indirectly. The remedy for this condition, in turn, consisted of applying previously practiced magical formulas and rituals, expelling the malevolent demonic spirit, and curing the illness (Harper 1901, pp. liv–lv). These rituals also rested on a religious foundation. The activities of the *āšipu* and exorcists were under the protection of the gods. These gods stood in opposition to the “night gods,” who were evil by nature and carried out evil. In the magical rituals of Babylon, *Enki (Ea)*, the god of creation and magic, occupied an important place, as did his sons *Utu (Shamash)* and *Marduk*. At the same time, the Babylonians assigned the most significant role in confronting evil to *Girra*, the god of fire. For the fire he represented was regarded as the greatest aid of magicians against the forces of darkness and evil. Taken together, these elements indicate that magic in Babylon rested on a religious foundation (Harper 1901, p. lx).

Babylon’s rich culture of magic and divination led its inhabitants to believe that, by observing both extraordinary and ordinary events, they could perceive signs of future events, both positive and negative. This, in turn, led to the widespread belief in Babylonian society that magical rituals should be used against unpredictable forces. The Babylonians did not possess a deterministic and absolute understanding of fate, for the people of Babylon did not hold that the calamity indicated by a correctly interpreted omen would occur with certainty. Rather, taking into consideration the possibility of its occurrence, they resorted to certain magical rituals. In this context, the most famous practices were the *namburbi* (deliverance/dissolution) rituals. The purpose of this ritual, performed to cut off the thread of evil and escape an evil fate, was to dissuade the god who had sent the ominous sign from this decision by appeasing his wrath, to cleanse the impurity believed to have attached itself to the person and their family by means of the evil omen, and to restore the person to their ordinary life by providing lasting protection against the reappearance of such ominous signs. Apart from this ritual, the existence of apotropaic magical rituals centered on birth and the infant shows that magic was employed even within the family, the smallest unit of society. This, in turn, indicates that Babylonian society was permeated by magic at official, civic, and domestic levels. (Abusch and van der Toorn 1999, pp. 123–24, 145–47).

In Babylon, magic has been influential not only in religious, political, and cultural structures but also within scientific disciplines. For example, medicine and magic were not sharply distinguished in Babylon. Indeed, as a natural manifestation of the belief that the ultimate cause of illnesses, beyond material factors, lay in evil spirits, the *āšipu* served not only as magicians but also as physicians. As a natural consequence of this situation, the *āšipu* determined which magical rituals were to be performed alongside medicinal treatments. The presence, in certain ancient texts, of both medical and magical prescriptions likewise indicates that medicine and magic were used together in Babylon and that they shared an intertwined structure at both practical and epistemological levels (Scurlock 2006, pp. 78–82). The fact that the ziggurats of ancient Mesopotamia, which functioned as both observatories and temples, possessed a character that served as a bridge between the earth and the heavens and symbolized humanity’s participation in the divine order, also indicates that magical rituals were performed in these sanctuaries, showing that magic exerted an influence in the architectural sphere as well (Bottéro 2001, pp. 116–17). When considered in general terms, it can be said that magic in Babylon was influential across many spheres—religious, political, social, cultural, and scientific—that it extended over a broad range, and that Babylon became a center of magic in the ancient world.

2. Debates and Interpretations Concerning Magic Within the Framework of Q 2:102

Although many verses in the Qur'ān address the phenomenon of magic, most debates concerning magic in Islam have occurred within the framework of Q 2:102. Indeed, exegetical works from the early period to the present reveal numerous disagreements and claims concerning the occasion of revelation of the relevant verse, the varieties and reality of magic, its legal ruling, and the two angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, whom exegetical tradition describes as having taught magic to people in Babylon. In addition, there are also disagreements concerning the historicity of the narrative recounted in the verse. In short, the interpretations of Q 2:102 constitute a compendium of disagreements. Indeed, the modern Shī'ī scholar al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d. 1981), taking these disagreements in the context of the verse as his point of departure, calculated the possible interpretations regarding the verse and stated that this number corresponded to 1,260,000 ($4 \times 3^9 \times 2^4$) (al-Ṭabāṭabā'ī 1997, vol. 1, pp. 230–31). The principal focus of the first section of our study will be the debates on magic within the context of the verse. The discussion first addresses the occasion of the revelation of the verse, then turns to debates concerning the nature and reality of magic. The final subsection presents the views on the Islamic legal ruling concerning the type of magic mentioned in the verse.

The other section of the study will address the interpretations concerning Hārūt and Mārūt. On the literal level, the verse explicitly states that Hārūt and Mārūt were two angels and that people learned magic from them. However, the matters mentioned in the verse concerning these two appear to conflict with the idea of the impeccability of angels, as expressed in verse six of Sūrat al-Taḥrīm and as the principal view of Islamic scholars on the subject. Accordingly, many exegetes and theologians advanced various claims about whether Hārūt and Mārūt, as described in the verse, were angels or belonged to another category of being. Although the issue of the impeccability of angels lies at the root of these debates, many of the claims were built upon linguistic evidence about the recitation of the words in the verse. In addition, whether the hadiths transmitted concerning Hārūt and Mārūt were influenced by Isrā'īliyyāt¹ became a matter of polemic as well. The final section of this study likewise examines the debates concerning the nature and ontological category of Hārūt and Mārūt, as well as the influence of Isrā'īliyyāt within the corpus of transmitted reports.² This article argues that Q 2:102 did not merely generate isolated disagreements about magic; rather, it became a central interpretive site in which different Islamic disciplines framed the problem of magic according to their own methods and concerns. Tafsīr focused on the wording of the verse, its occasion of revelation, variant readings, and transmitted reports. Kalām connected the verse to broader questions of divine causality, human agency, the reality of magic, the distinction between magic and miracle, and angelic impeccability. Fiqh, in turn, transformed the problem into a question of legal classification and punishment. Thus, the debates surrounding Babylonian magic reveal how Islamic scholarly tradition negotiated the boundaries between scriptural interpretation, theology, law, and cultural reception.

2.1. The Occasion of Revelation of the Verse and Lexical Debates

The principal occasion of the revelation of Q 2:102 is to criticize and refute the Jews who attributed sorcery and unbelief to Solomon, and the verse stands as an argument against them. Indeed, exegetical reports relate that the Jews turned away from the Book of God and pursued the falsehoods fabricated by the devils, claiming that Solomon had attained his sovereignty through magic. The verse, however, emphasizes that Solomon did not fall into unbelief; rather, those who pursued magic and taught it to others did so (Muqātil b. Sulaymān 2002, vol. 1, pp. 126–27; al-Māturīdī 2005, vol. 1, p. 188; al-

Zamakhsharī 1997, vol. 1, p. 305; Ibn Taymiyya 2011, vol. 1, pp. 283–84). Some reports state that during Solomon’s reign, books of magic were hidden beneath his throne, and that after his death, the human and jinn devils found them, or that they themselves wrote them and secretly concealed them in the place where Solomon used to pray. After Solomon’s death, they brought out these books and said to the people, “This is the book that was sent down to Solomon from God. He concealed it from us.” In this way, they insinuated that the extraordinary acts performed by Solomon—such as bringing animals and jinn under his command—had been carried out through magic; that is, that he had established his sovereignty through magic. Some reports also relate that Āṣaf b. Barakhyā, who was Solomon’s scribe or vizier, wrote down all the commands he received from him and stored them beneath his throne. After Solomon’s death, however, the devils brought out these books, inserted words about magic and unbelief into the lines, and thereby altered them. They then said to the people, “Solomon ruled you by means of these books; you too should learn what is outlined in them.” The ignorant among the Jews also believed these falsehoods and, by attributing unbelief to Solomon, turned away from the book of their prophet and followed what the devils taught, namely, magic. Al-Kalbī (d. 146/763) stated that this situation continued until the sending of the Prophet Muḥammad, and that God Most High revealed this verse to make clear that Solomon was innocent of this matter and that a slander had been cast against him (al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, pp. 269–70; Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 2, pp. 346–47).

Although there is a common view among Muslim scholars that the occasion of the revelation of Q 2:102 was to respond to the Jews’ slanders against Solomon, certain disagreements have arisen over the wording of the verse. Indeed, although exegetes generally agree that the pronoun “they” in the phrase “وَاتَّبَعُوا” (and they followed) at the beginning of the verse refers to the Jews, they disagree over which Jews the verse identifies. According to al-Suddī (d. 127/745), Zayd b. Aslam (d. 136/754), and Rabi’ b. Anas (d. 140/757), the pronoun “they” refers to the Jewish scholars in Medina during the time of the Prophet Muḥammad. When the Prophet invited the Jews to Islam, they entered into dispute with him based on the Torah. However, when the commandments in the Torah accorded with the Qur’ān in enjoining obedience to the Prophet Muḥammad, they resorted to the writings that the devils had fabricated concerning Solomon. They continued their dispute by adhering to them. This verse was revealed in response to that event. According to Ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687), Ibn Jurayj (d. 150/767), and Ibn Ishāq (d. 151/768), however, those intended here are the Jews who lived in the time of Solomon. The Jews who lived in that period learned magic from the devils and followed their falsehoods concerning Solomon (al-Tabarī 2010, vol. 1, pp. 656–57; al-Jishumī 2019, vol. 1, p. 521). As stated in the aforementioned narrations, after Solomon’s death, the belief that he had attained his sovereignty through magic, together with the falsehoods spread by the devils, became widespread among the Jews, and they came to desire acquiring such power. In addition, having lost their noble qualities as a result of living in captivity throughout their history, the Jews turned to arts such as magic and talismans. They came to believe they could improve their future through them, so much so that magic gained a degree of prevalence among the Jews unmatched by any other nation (Maudūdī 1993, vol. 1, p. 98). When the Prophet appeared and mentioned Solomon among the prophets, the Jews of Medina said, “Are you not astonished at what Muḥammad says? He supposes that Solomon, the son of David, was a prophet, whereas he was a sorcerer king.” God Most High then revealed this verse, declaring that their words were slander (al-Tabarī 2010, vol. 1, p. 658). Although the verse was revealed with reference to the Jews of Medina who opposed the Prophet Muḥammad and slandered Solomon, according to the majority of scholars, the expression “they” encompasses all Jews, from those living in the time of Solomon to those living in the

time of the Prophet. Indeed, in Arabic, it is a commonly employed rhetorical device to say of those who follow the path of their forefathers that they have committed the very offenses their forefathers committed. Moreover, it is not appropriate to confine the expression to only one of the meanings it conveys while excluding the others, for there is no determining factor that would necessitate such a restriction (al-Ṭabarī 2010, vol. 1, p. 658; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 219–20).

Another point of debate in the verse concerns the term “تَتْلُوا” (*tatlū*). The verb from which it is derived, namely “تَلَا” (*talā*), carries in Arabic the meanings of reading, reflecting, and following. In addition, in its verbal-noun form as used in the verse, it is also employed with the meanings of narrating and fabricating falsehoods (Ibn Manẓūr n.d., vol. 1, pp. 443–45). Muslim scholars likewise disagreed over which of these meanings the term conveys in the verse. According to the first interpretation, the word carries its primary sense of “reading” (*al-tilāwa*), and this interpretation renders the phrase as “what the devils recited concerning Solomon” (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 220). Another view takes this expression in the sense of “following” and “complying with.” Since reading something also entails accepting and following it, proponents of this view consider the more comprehensive meaning preferable. They therefore understand the verse to mean: “They followed that which the devils followed” (al-Jishumī 2019, vol. 1, p. 519; Yazır 1992, vol. 1, p. 364). The final view construes the term in the sense of “fabricating” and “telling lies.” Scholars who adopt this interpretation base their preference on the presence of the *ḥarf al-jarr* (particle governing the genitive) “على” (*‘alā*) after the word. When this expression occurs with this *ḥarf al-jarr*, it assumes a negative sense and denotes “fabricating falsehoods.” According to scholars who adopt this view, the verse means: “They followed what the devils had fabricated” (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 1, p. 350; al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1997, vol. 1, p. 232). Alongside these views, a more comprehensive opinion holds that the term can plausibly convey both “reading” and “following” (al-Ṭabarī 2010, vol. 1, pp. 659–60; al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 68).

It appears that the question of which category of beings is encompassed by the term “الشَّيَاطِين” (*al-shayāṭīn*) in the continuation of the verse became a disputed matter among scholars. Three views came to the fore regarding who is intended by this term. According to the first interpretation, what is meant by this expression is the jinn devils belonging to the category of unseen beings (al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, p. 271; Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 1, p. 351; al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1997, vol. 1, p. 232). Another view, attributed to the Mu‘tazilī theologians, is that these were corrupt human beings who had become devil-like in character and led others astray from the right path. Such people were described by the relevant term in the verse because they had abandoned the sacred and pursued satanic teachings (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 220). The final and more comprehensive view holds that the term refers to both human and jinn devils. According to this interpretation, the verse points to all the forces of evil that cooperated to slander Solomon’s sovereignty and undermine his authority (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 64, 68; Yazır 1992, vol. 1, p. 364; Maudūdī 1993, vol. 1, p. 98). The view attributed to the Mu‘tazilī scholars, and also preferred by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), appears to reflect a more distinctly theological concern than the other views. Indeed, reports transmitted in connection with this issue relate that the devils altered the writings beneath Solomon’s throne or replaced them with books of magic. Those who adopt this view maintain that these people were not jinn, but rather human beings of an evil and hypocritical disposition. Although human acts can be carried out in secret, they can still be perceived by the senses. The acts performed by unseen beings, however, do not appear in the physical world. If it is accepted that the term “devils” in the verse refers to jinn devils, the conclusion follows that they would be capable of corrupting the books and sacred laws of the prophets. This, in turn, would lead to the consequence that no sacred

law could be trusted and that objections could be raised against all religions (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 221).

Another issue in the verse that has been subject to differing interpretations is the meaning of the term “mulk.” Although the Qur’ān refers to the afflictions and divine trials experienced by many prophets, the Solomon narrative places less emphasis on the hardships he endured than on the sovereignty and miracles bestowed upon him.³ Indeed, some verses relate that Solomon was able to control natural phenomena and exercise dominion over animals and unseen beings [Q 21:81–82; Q 27:16–17, 20; Q 34:12–13; Q 38:36–37]. In addition to the Qur’ān, the Old Testament also contains—despite certain negative portrayals—accounts indicating that Solomon possessed great sovereignty [1 Kings 11:3]. There is also an indication of this in the expression “عَلَىٰ مُلْكٍ سُلَيْمَانَ” (*‘alā mulk Sulaymān*) in Q 2:102. However, differences of opinion among Muslim scholars are evident regarding what the term “mulk” encompasses in this expression (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 221; al-Ṭabāṭabā’ī 1997, vol. 1, p. 230). Indeed, according to some, what is intended here is Solomon’s material dominion and sovereignty, for the Jews slandered him by claiming that he had attained his political power not through miracles but through magic (Ateş 1988, vol. 1, p. 204). Another view holds that what is intended here is Solomon’s prophethood (Maudūdī 1993, vol. 1, p. 95). Another, more comprehensive view holds that the expression in question encompasses not only Solomon’s sovereignty but also his prophethood. In our view, this opinion is more sound, for there is no determining factor in the expression that would require adopting such a specific distinction. In addition, if it is accepted that Solomon attained his sovereignty through magic, the conclusion follows that he did not acquire this power through divine assistance and that what he performed was not of a miraculous nature. This, in turn, indirectly leads to the denial of his prophethood. Therefore, to construe the expression in question in only one direction is also problematic from a logical point of view, whereas a holistic understanding appears more accurate.

In the continuation of the verse, the expression “وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ وَلَكِنَّ الشَّيَاطِينَ كَفَرُوا” (“Solomon did not become an unbeliever; rather, the devils became unbelievers”) likewise emphasizes that Solomon, contrary to what the devils claimed, was not a magician, that he derived all his power and authority from God, and that he was a prophet subject to the divine message. Some tafsīr works state that this part of the verse serves not only to refute the accusation of sorcery against Solomon, but also to reject imputations that the Old Testament ascribes to him, such as his excessive fondness for women and his worship of idols [1 Kings 11:1–10] (Maudūdī 1993, vol. 1, p. 98). Although scholars agree that the expression in question means that Solomon did not fall into unbelief, but rather that the devils who attached this stigma to him did, they offered different explanations for why the devils fell into unbelief. According to the first claim in this context, the principal reason for the devils’ unbelief was their accusation that Solomon practiced sorcery. They deceived the ignorant masses by claiming that Solomon, too, practiced magic—which God had forbidden—and that such practice was permissible. In doing so, they accused him of sorcery and unbelief, neither of which befitted his prophetic mission (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 64; al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār 1969, vol. 1, p. 103; Riḍā 1947, vol. 1, p. 324). The majority of scholars accept another view: the devils fell into unbelief because they taught people forbidden magic and practiced it themselves (al-Māturīdī 2005, vol. 1, p. 189). Indeed, God explains the reason for their unbelief in the continuation of the verse: “يُعَلِّمُونَ النَّاسَ السِّحْرَ” (“They were teaching people magic”) (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 221). Since the lexical debates in the remainder of the verse concern Hārūt and Mārūt, later sections of the study address them.

2.2. Debates on the Nature, Types, and Reality of Magic

In terms of its lexical meaning, the term magic (“سحر”) denotes that whose cause is hidden and subtle, in which satanic agency is involved, and which affects and deceives the eye (Ibn Manẓūr n.d., vol. 3, p. 1951). In addition to this, when the first letter of the word bears a *fatha*, it is used in the sense of “food.” Once food is swallowed, it becomes concealed, and it can no longer be traced. Within this context, it is related that the celebrated pre-Islamic poet Imru’ al-Qays (d. 540) said as follows:

“وَنُسَخَّرُ بِالطَّعَامِ وَبِالشَّرَابِ” (“We are nourished by food and drink.”). (al-Farāhīdī 2003, vol. 2, p. 220)

Another distich transmitted from Labīd b. Rabī‘a (d. 40/661) is as follows:

“فَإِنْ تَسْأَلِينَا فِيمَ نَحْنُ فَإِنَّا ... غَصَافِيرُ مِنْ هَذَا الْأَنَامِ الْمُسَخَّرِ”

(“O beloved, if you should ask in what condition we are, we are like sparrows among these creatures, nourished as they are”). (al-Farāhīdī 2003, vol. 2, p. 221)

Scholars understand Imru’ al-Qays’s expression as bearing two meanings. The first, as given above, is nourishment. The other is as follows: “We become ill, and our condition changes just as the condition of one subjected to magic changes.” In both cases, the term in question points to the meaning of “concealment.” The same meaning is also present in Labīd’s distich. In addition, it is also possible that the term “المُسَخَّرِ” is used in the sense of “those who breathe,” that is, “those possessing lungs.” Even when this usage is preferred, the meaning of “concealment” does not disappear. For this word, which is used to denote the region between the lungs and the windpipe, is likewise related to the meaning of concealment (al-Jassās 1992, vol. 1, p. 50; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 222).

In religious terminology, however, magic is the general designation for every act that is hidden and performed by means of certain devices, techniques, and skills to present things in a form other than what they are, to dazzle the eyes, and to deceive (al-Bāqillānī 1958, p. 73; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 222). The form of magic that takes the shape of sleight of hand and illusion is also designated by the term “شُعْبَذَة” (*sha’badha*), which means conjuring. This type of magic is attributed to Pharaoh’s magicians and to certain deceitful individuals among the Qarmatians (al-Bāqillānī 1958, p. 74). *Sha’badha* is a more specific form of magic. Every *sha’badha* is magic, but not every magic is *sha’badha* (al-‘Askarī 2005, p. 287). The term “تَمْوِيَه” (*tamwīh*) is also used for the aspect of magic that consists of deceiving and making a thing appear, by certain methods, as other than what it truly is. This word denotes the process by which base metals are coated so that they can be taken for precious metals such as gold and silver (al-‘Askarī 2005, p. 258).

When the term magic is used in Islam in its absolute sense, it denotes a meaning for which its practitioner is condemned. Indeed, the Qur’ānic verses revealed concerning Pharaoh’s magicians—“They bewitched the people’s eyes ...” [Q 7:116] and “It appeared to him, because of their magic, that their ropes and staffs were moving swiftly ...” [Q 20:66]—constitute evidence for this point. For they dazzled and deceived people’s eyes by making something unreal appear as though it were real, and thus deserved blame for what they did (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 222). Nevertheless, scholars also note that when they use the term magic in a qualified sense—that is, with a particular condition—it can carry a positive meaning. Indeed, the sound hadith sources report that the Prophet, in praise, described powerful eloquence and rhetoric as magic (al-Bukhārī, “al-Nikāḥ”, 48; Muslim, “al-Jum‘a”, 47). A person can simplify a complex matter through fine expressions and eloquent speech and thereby bring its true nature to light (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 222). Scholars consider this among the licit forms of magic (*siḥr ḥalāl*). However, powerful rhetoric is employed to dazzle the eyes and make truth appear as falsehood, which falls into the category of condemned magic. Nevertheless, the Prophet’s designation of eloquent speech as magic

has been deemed problematic by scholars. Indeed, one might raise the following objection: “The subject matter of magic is to conceal what is manifest and to deceive. Yet a person who seeks to explain what is hidden, or the truth, through eloquent expressions does not aim to conceal the truth, but rather to reveal it. How, then, can this be regarded as magic?” Such an objection is answered as follows: even if a person intends to reveal the truth, the expressions of one who does not possess strong eloquence can fail to gain acceptance and go unheard. By contrast, the words of one whose expressive power is strong, though seeking to explain the same truth, are heard, well-received, and, by virtue of their elegance, incline people toward themselves. In this way, their expressions resemble magic that affects hearts. For this reason, such speech has been called magic not in the literal sense, but in the metaphorical sense. Moreover, people endowed with powerful rhetoric can make what is evil appear beautiful and what is beautiful appear ugly. Since magicians likewise make reality appear other than it truly is through their acts, the Prophet likened eloquent speech to a kind of magic (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 52; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 222–23).

In works composed in the Islamic world, both on bibliography and on the classification of the sciences (history of science), magic is described as a kind of science. In such works, alongside magic, the talismanic sciences are also included within the discussion, and the status of these sciences is treated under a single heading as “the sciences of magic and talismans.” The prevailing view is that the Sharī‘a regards these sciences as morally reprehensible, abandoned, and unreliable, for they are sciences that harm both the practitioner and the one subjected to them, and that lead human beings to ruin in both worldly and otherworldly life. Any benefit these sciences may possess is as nothing when compared with the harm they cause (al-Ghazālī 2005, pp. 38–39, 49). Engagement with these sciences requires turning toward the stars and unseen beings as a condition, and magicians perform acts that please spiritual and satanic beings, yet are contrary to the Sharī‘a, to bring them under their subjugation (Ibn al-Nadīm 1985, p. 641; Ibn Khaldūn 2015, p. 572).

Just as many works were written on magic in Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, and Indian cultures, so too were many works composed on it in Islam. Indeed, from the early periods of Islamic history onward, many individuals took an interest in magic, wrote works on it, and contributed to the development of a literature in this field. Scholars especially note that authors composed many works on magic in Babylon and Egypt, that translators rendered only a small portion of these works into Arabic, and that these sources nourished the Islamic literature on magic (Ibn Khaldūn 2015, p. 573). Aḥmad ibn Mustafā Ṭāshkubrīzāda (d. 958/1561), one of the celebrated scholars of the Ottoman period, states that magic has four traditions: the Indian, Babylonian, Greek, and Hebrew-Coptic-Arabic, and mentions the well-known works composed on these traditions. He further states that the most important work composed in the Islamic world on Babylonian magic, and one that served as a source for the literature of magic, is *al-Filāḥa al-Nabaṭiyya*⁴, attributed to Ibn Waḥshiyya (d. 4th/10th century?) (Ṭāshkubrīzāda 1985, vol. 1, pp. 314–15).⁵

Since Muslim scholars commonly defined magic as an act whose cause is hidden and as the practice of making something appear other than it truly is, they debated which acts should be classified as magic and how many types should be distinguished within this category. Indeed, some scholars, taking magic as their point of departure, specified which acts fall within its scope (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 91–92; al-Jishumī 2019, vol. 1, p. 527), while others turned to a categorization based not so much on magic itself as on the ranks of magicians and their psychic or spiritual powers (Ibn al-‘Arabī 1999, vol. 6, p. 338; Ibn Khaldūn 2015, p. 574). The prevailing view regarding the types of magic, however, is the eightfold classification set forth by al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) and systematized by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. According to this classification, magic can be divided into eight types. These are:

1. Magical and talismanic practices carried out based on belief in the stars and the spiritual entities of the planets, in the idea that good and evil proceed from the celestial bodies, and in the notion that celestial powers are the creators of events on earth. This type of magic is called Babylonian or Chaldean magic (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 52–53; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 223).

2. The magic of those endowed with strong imagination and powerful souls. In this type of magic, a person produces effects upon others by employing their own spiritual energy and will, together with the faculty of imagination. Practices such as the evil eye, hypnosis, and suggestion can be included within this type of magic. Psychological factors occupy an important place in this form of magic. Magicians who practice this kind of magic strengthen their souls by undergoing certain ascetic disciplines and exercises and by purifying themselves of bodily desires. In this way, they can produce effects upon others without using any instrumental or material means (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 225–27; Ibn Khaldūn 2015, p. 574).

3. The magic that is performed by seeking assistance from jinn and spiritual beings. This form of magic, also referred to as *‘azā’im*⁶, is practiced by magicians who claim to be in communication with jinn and certain celestial beings, and who assert that, by using amulets and talismans, they bring these beings under their subjugation and compel them to carry out whatever they desire. It also appears that this type of magic was widespread among the Arabs during the Jāhiliyya period (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 56). Although there are differences of opinion regarding the existence of this type of magic and no strong rational proofs are available, it is not possible to reject it in categorical terms. Historical accounts indicate that some individuals have brought about such effects through rituals and practices such as *ruqya* (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 227–28).

4. The type of magic that is based on the deception of the senses, sleight of hand, and distraction, and is designated as imagining, illusionism, and conjuring. Human perception can err in the process of apprehending things. For example, when a person traveling on a ship looks toward the shore, they imagine that the ship is stationary and that the shore is moving. Objects in water appear broken or larger than they actually are when viewed from outside. Falling rain appears as a vertical line. Such cases lead the mind to conclude that, for certain reasons, the eye sees a thing contrary to its actual state. Moreover, when the mind is occupied with one thing, a person’s capacity for perception diminishes, and the senses weaken. Conjurers likewise perform by exploiting these human weaknesses. Thus, while preoccupying people with one thing, they perform another act by means of sleight of hand. In this way, something appears before people that they cannot perceive, leaving them in astonishment (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 55; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 228–29).

5. The magic which is carried out by means of certain geometric measurements, mechanical instruments and devices, and artistic artifices leaves people in astonishment. Statues that produce sounds through calculations and mechanisms can be cited as examples of this type. The portraits produced by Greek and Indian painters, in which the viewer cannot distinguish whether what may likewise be included within this type of magic. Pharaoh’s magicians’ making such implements appear to be real serpents by using rods filled with mercury and leather tubes also falls within the scope of this type (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 56; al-Bāqillānī 1958, p. 74). According to al-Rāzī, such practices do not, strictly speaking, belong to the category of magic, since they depend on subtle calculations; anyone who masters these subtleties can produce such acts. Nevertheless, he notes that people conventionally describe such performances as magic because they perceive them as such (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 229).

6. This type of magic involves the use of certain narcotic substances, mind-clouding agents, and drugs. When malicious individuals expose people to such substances or feed

them intoxicating foods, these substances impair their perception and prevent their minds from functioning properly. As a result, they may come to regard acts to which they would never consent in their normal lives as ordinary, and they may reach a state in which they can no longer distinguish right from wrong. People then describe such persons as bewitched. (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 58; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 230). Within the context of this type of magic, an example can be found in the claim that Ḥasan Ṣabbāḥ (d. 518/1124), one of the leaders of the Bāṭinī movement, made his devotees drink hashish (cannabis) and showed them paradise in this world, thereby securing their absolute obedience to himself. In addition to this, magicians who practice this type of magic drug certain animals by means of substances and later, in a concealed manner, administer an antidote, restoring them to their former lively state. Those who witness this, however, imagine that the animal had first been dead and was then brought back to life by the magician (al-Bāqillānī 1958, p. 74).

7. Another type of magic consists of binding the heart. In this type of magic, the magician claims to possess knowledge of certain powers and to be in communication with celestial beings. If a person who witnesses these claims is weak-minded and deficient in discernment, they believe what the magician says and are deceived by their own heart. In this way, fear arises in that person. Once fear comes into being, that person's sensory faculties become inoperative, and the magician can manipulate them at will (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 230). In this type of magic, too, psychological factors come to the fore.

8. Carrying tales among people, sowing discord between them and setting them against one another, and engaging in malicious gossip are also regarded as falling within the category of magic (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 58; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 230).

Among the types of magic mentioned, the first three possess a metaphysical and supernatural dimension, whereas the others have ontological reality and rest on certain mathematical and psychological factors. From the perspective of Babylonian magic, the magical practices of ancient Babylon incorporated many of the types of magic described above, particularly an intertwined version of the first and third types. Indeed, it is evident that stars and planets occupied an important place in Babylonian magical culture and that astral magic was of particular significance. In addition to this, the Babylonians' belief that certain celestial beings lay behind the events that occurred, together with their efforts to communicate with these beings and shape the future, also supports this view.

The question of whether magic has a reality and an external counterpart in the world has sparked disagreement among Muslim scholars. According to the overwhelming majority of Ahl al-Sunna, magic does possess an external reality (al-Ash'arī 1929, p. 12; al-Ghazālī 2005, p. 39; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 225, 228, 230–31). According to this view, magic is not merely a product of illusion and imagination, but an effect that arises as the result of certain causes, even if it does not belong to the intrinsic nature of things. Certain rituals and talismans can affect hearts and bodies, bring about illness and death, and sow discord among people. Moreover, Q 2:102 and the statement in Sūrat al-Falaq, "And I seek refuge in God from the evil of those who blow upon knots," are Qur'ānic proofs indicating the reality of magic (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 231; Ibn Qudāma 1997, vol. 12, p. 299). The Ash'arī theologian al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) likewise held the view that magic possesses a reality, provided that the distinction between magic and miracle is properly understood. For although a magician does not possess the power to alter the essential nature of bodies—for example, by bringing the dead back to life or transforming a human being into an animal—he can nonetheless produce effects such as causing illness, bringing about death, and sowing discord among people through certain hidden means (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 77, 91). In addition to the Qur'ānic verses, al-Qurṭubī cites sound hadith reports stating that a Jew named Labīd b. al-A'ṣam cast a spell upon the Prophet to support the view

that magic possesses an objective reality (al-Bukhārī, “al-Ṭibb,” 46; Muslim, “al-Salām,” 43). He further maintains that denying the real existence of magic would entail rejecting the definitive proofs found in the Qur’ān and the Sunna and would therefore constitute unbelief (al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, pp. 276–77).⁷

The Mu‘tazila school, along with certain scholars affiliated with Ahl al-Sunna, such as al-Jaṣṣāṣ, held that magic has no real existence (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 58–59; al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār 2006, p. 46; al-Jishumī 2019, vol. 1, pp. 226–27).⁸ According to this view, although forms of magic grounded in ontological reality—such as those performed by means of certain narcotics and mechanical devices—may possess a reality, forms of magic directed toward the metaphysical sphere have neither real existence nor any actual effect. Indeed, those who claim to practice such forms of magic and those who believe in their existence thereby fall into unbelief. The principal basis upon which those who deny the reality of magic adopted this view is the possibility that the institution of prophethood might otherwise be undermined. For if the existence of magic were accepted, it would not be possible to distinguish between the miracles of the prophets and the extraordinary deceptions of magicians (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 60; al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār 1969, vol. 1, p. 102). In addition, according to certain reports, a Jewish sorceress used certain materials to cast a spell on the Prophet and placed them in a well; the Prophet was then affected by this magic. Thereafter, when the spell was removed from that place, the Prophet was freed from its effect and recovered. God, in refuting the unbelievers who alleged that the Prophet had been bewitched, says: “The wrongdoers said to the believers, ‘You are only following a man who has been bewitched’.” [Q 25:8]. According to al-Jaṣṣāṣ, these and similar reports alleging that the Prophet was subjected to magic were fabricated by unbelievers to deceive ignorant people and to diminish the value of the miracles of the prophets. Moreover, if the Prophet had truly fallen under the influence of magic, as these reports describe, then the claim of the wrongdoers condemned in the verse mentioned above would have been confirmed (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 60; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 231). The verses [Q 20:66–69] stating that the magic performed by Pharaoh’s magicians was mere illusion and that magicians can never attain success likewise constitute Qur’ānic proofs indicating that magic has no real existence (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 52, 60). Modern exegetes such as Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) and Rashīd Riḍā held that the verses dealing with magic, above all Q 2:102, do not indicate the existence of magic. In many places, the Qur’ān recounts events experienced by earlier communities. These narratives in the Qur’ān were revealed not to provide historical information or to secure belief in the events of those communities, but rather to impart instruction and admonition (Riḍā 1947, vol. 1, pp. 324–25). In addition to the textual proofs, ordinary life in the external world also indicates that magic has no real existence. If magicians truly possessed the powers they claim, they would be able to transform base metals into gold, put an end to the rule of kings, and take their place. By virtue of the powers they possessed, no harm would befall them, nor would they feel any need to defend themselves against those who sought to kill them. Some scholars argue that ordinary experience offers no evidence of such phenomena. On the contrary, they characterize such practitioners as belonging to the most wretched and impoverished strata of society and as people who resort to every possible means to obtain money. On this basis, this line of argument concludes that the claims of magicians are groundless and that what people call magic amounts to nothing more than deception (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 58–59; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 223–24).

Within the framework of the term “إِذْنٌ” (*permission*) in the expression “وَمَا هُمْ بِضَارِّينَ بِهِ مِنْ أَحَدٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ” (“Yet they cannot harm anyone thereby except by God’s permission”) in Q 2:102, Muslim scholars debated whether the effects attributed to magic should be understood as real occurrences created by God or as phenomena explained

through illusion, deception, or other secondary causes. According to theologians affiliated with the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools, magic has no inherent efficacy; rather, its effects occur only through the will and power of God (al-Māturīdī 2005, vol. 1, p. 192; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 230, 239–40). Indeed, it is rationally impossible for created beings to perform an act outside the sphere of their own power. That is, one person cannot perform an act on another person. Likewise, a magician cannot produce any effect on a person by means of the magic they perform. However, when the magician carries out the rituals connected with their magic, God, in accordance with His decree (*qadā’*) and determination, may bring about in the person subjected to that magic certain effects such as illness, aversion, and death. The expression in the verse in question also indicates this point (al-Bāqillānī 1958, 88–90). According to the Mu‘tazilī theologians, however, what is meant by the term “إِذْنٌ” (*permission*) in the verse in question is not God’s will, but His knowledge. According to this view, attributed to Abū Bakr al-Aṣamm (d. 200/816), one of the early scholars of the Basran Mu‘tazila, the expression “إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ” means “إِلَّا بِعِلْمِ اللَّهِ” (“except within God’s knowledge”). It is inconceivable that God should will and create the evil act of magic (al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār 1969, vol. 1, p. 100; al-Jishumī 2019, vol. 1, pp. 525–26). In our view, the main point of these disagreements lies not so much in magic as in the conceptions held by the theological schools regarding human acts and the divine will. Indeed, according to the schools of Ahl al-sunna, God is the one who wills and creates all human acts in their entirety. The human being’s position in the act consists only in *kasb* (acquisition). God wills and creates an act in relation to His servant’s *kasb*. All acts, whether good or evil, rest upon God’s creative will (*takwīnī*) and legislative will (*tashrī‘ī*). However, whereas in the case of good acts both His creative and legislative wills are operative, in the case of evil acts, only His creative will is operative. Accordingly, magic, which is regarded as forbidden, also falls within the scope of God’s creative will and depends upon His creation. According to the Mu‘tazila, by contrast, human beings are the creators of their own acts. Moreover, in accordance with the principle of divine justice they adopted, it is inconceivable that God would will evil.⁹ In sum, debates over the effects of magic stem from differences in sectarian theological views. These discussions regarding the effect of magic show that magic is not an absolute and irresistible power, but rather a means of trial that occurs through God’s will and creation. The expression in the verse in question likewise provides a theological assurance by indicating that the power of magicians does not originate from themselves. It confirms that the true source of magic’s effect is God alone.

As noted earlier, the focal point of the disagreements concerning the reality of magic is the possibility that magic might be confused with the miracles of the prophets. This is also the principal concern of those who deny the existence of magic. As a natural consequence of this concern, the scholars who accepted the existence of magic likewise sought to set forth the differences between magic and miracle. The most comprehensive and systematic views on this matter belong to al-Bāqillānī. According to him, although magic and miracle resemble one another at first glance in being extraordinary, they differ in many respects. First of all, magic and miracles diverge in terms of source and agency. Miracles belong solely to God’s power: He creates them to confirm the truthfulness of His prophet, while created beings—whether angels, humans, or jinn—remain incapable of producing them. A miracle comes about not through the power of the prophet, but directly through the act of God. Magic, by contrast, is a human act performed by establishing communication with certain beings or by using specific techniques, instruments, and narcotic substances (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 8–9, 19–20, 74). A miracle is bestowed (*wahbī*), whereas magic is acquired (*kasbī*). A miracle cannot be attained through a particular *riyāda* (discipline) or effort. It is neither an art nor a technique, but a divine grace granted by God to the prophet He has sent to prove his prophethood. No magician, no matter how advanced his knowledge

and technique may be, can produce an act of the kind that belongs to a miracle. Whereas a miracle requires no instrument or prior preparation, magic, by contrast, depends upon talismans, certain mechanical and chemical instruments, and specific times to render it effective (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 56–57, 73–74). Another fundamental distinction between miracle and magic concerns their effects upon the essential nature of things. A magician cannot bring inanimate beings to life, heal someone born blind, make animals speak, or cause the sun to rise from the west, for such acts entail a change in like things and beings. Nor can acts such as ascending to the sky without any means, traversing great distances in a short time without mediation, or lifting mountains be accomplished by magic. Such acts depend solely upon God’s creation, can be performed only by prophets, and serve for them as proofs and miracles (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 71–73, 91).

There are also theological and teleological differences between magic and miracle. One of the most fundamental elements distinguishing miracles from magic is *taḥaddī* (challenge) and the claim to prophethood. A miracle occurs when a person claiming prophethood challenges his opponents by saying, “Produce the like of what I have done,” to prove his prophethood. In the case of magic, however, there is no such challenge or claim to prophethood (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 46–48). Hypothetically, even if a prophet were to claim that he would perform acts of the sort that a magician might perform—such as saying, “I shall separate a husband from his wife,” or “I shall cause this healthy person to fall ill”—and then carried them out, scholars would still not classify such acts as miracles. For an act to qualify as a miracle, it must exceed the power of created beings, accompany a claim to prophethood, and occur immediately after the claimant challenges his opponents (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 93–94). In addition, if a magician were to come forward claiming prophethood, God would prevent him in one of two ways. First, since God knows that the magician will lay claim to prophethood through the magic he performs, He either causes him to forget entirely how to perform magic or prevents the effect of his magic. In this way, the magician’s magic is nullified, and it becomes evident that he is a *mutanabbī* (false prophet). Alternatively, when the magician challenges people and claims prophethood by performing an extraordinary act, other magicians who are more skillful than him would soon produce the like of what he has performed or something even better. Thus, it becomes clear that he was lying in his claim. For a miracle is a divine grace—an extraordinary act that cannot be brought about by any effort or technique and lies beyond the scope of created beings’ power (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 94–96). A miracle, in addition to proving a prophet’s prophethood, also serves the purpose of directing the people addressed by that prophet toward goodness and reforming them. Magic, by contrast, is generally practiced to sow discord among people, harm them, and secure worldly benefit. Whereas the prophets are persons endowed with the attribute of *‘iṣma* (infallibility), standing under God’s command and protection, magicians are, for the most part, immoral and evil-natured (al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 37–38, 74–76; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 239). These views, which maintain that the magician cannot perform the acts carried out by the prophets and that, even if he were to claim prophethood, God would not create an extraordinary event at his hand, demonstrate that there is a sharp distinction between magic and miracle and, in particular, provide a theological safeguard for the institution of prophethood.

2.3. Interpretations Concerning the Ruling on Magic and the Magician

Islamic scholars classify magic among morally reprehensible and abandoned sciences and consider it a major sin. There is consensus among Muslim scholars that practicing magic is forbidden, and that deeming it licit leads to unbelief. The statements in Q 2:102 to the effect that those who practice and resort to magic will have no share in the Hereafter, together with certain sound hadiths transmitted from the Prophet, constitute evidence for

this point (al-Bukhārī, “al-Waṣāyā,” 23; Muslim, “al-Īmān,” 145). Although a general view emerged among scholars that the practice of magic is restricted, there is disagreement over the status of learning magic. Indeed, according to some scholars, learning magic, like practicing it, is also forbidden (Ibn Qudāma 1997, vol. 12, p. 300). Those who defended this view likely approached the issue within the framework of *sadd al-dharāʿiʿ* (the prohibition of acts that certainly or most probably lead to objectionable consequences in the Sharīʿa), regarding the practice of magic as a potential cause of sin and unbelief. The other view, accepted by al-Bāqillānī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, is that learning magic is not an objectionable or sinful act. For magic is a science, and knowledge is, by its very essence, a good thing. The statement in verse nine of Sūrat al-Zumar, “Say: Are those who know equal to those who do not know?”, also points to this. If magic is not known, no distinction can be made between magic and miracle. It is necessary to know that a miracle is indeed a miracle. That by which something necessary can be known is itself necessary. Therefore, although practicing magic is sinful, knowing and learning magic is not sinful; rather, it is necessary. It is inconceivable that learning something necessary should be forbidden (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 231–32). Moreover, a person who knows magic becomes sinful not by learning it, but by practicing it. If knowing magic were forbidden, then, as related in Q 2:102, the angels would neither have taught magic to people nor would God have permitted them to teach it (al-Bāqillānī 1958, p. 82).

Abū l-Fidāʾ Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373) strongly opposes this view, which does not regard the learning of magic as reprehensible or objectionable. According to him, the statements contain many errors. If, by the statement “learning magic is not a reprehensible thing,” what is meant is that it is “not rationally reprehensible,” then the Muʿtazilī scholars oppose this. If, however, what is meant by this expression is that it is “not reprehensible from the standpoint of the Sharīʿa,” then many Qurʾānic verses dealing with the subject of magic, above all Q 2:102, present magic as an evil and loathsome thing. Moreover, it is not an appropriate approach for those who adopt this view to cite verse nine of Sūrat al-Zumar as evidence for their claim. The verse in question contains praise not for those who possess blameworthy forms of knowledge, such as magic, but for those who are learned in the religious sciences. The view that magic must be known as a miracle to be understood, and even that learning it is necessary, is erroneous and invalid. The greatest miracle given to the Prophet is the Qurʾān. It is not possible to claim that understanding the Qurʾān as a miracle depends upon the science of magic. Indeed, although many Muslim communities—above all, the first three generations of Islam—neither knew nor learned magic, they nonetheless recognized that the Qurʾān was a miracle and could distinguish it from anything else. Accordingly, it is a mistaken view to regard magic, which falls within the category of morally reprehensible and abandoned sciences, as the basis for understanding miracles and to deem its learning licit (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 1, pp. 366–67). As can be seen, the scholars who hold the view that learning magic is licit approach the issue from a more rational perspective, grounding their claims in rational propositions based on the necessity of understanding miracles. The opposing view, by contrast, gives priority chiefly to textual proofs and seeks to prevent a potentially sinful act.

In addition to the learning of magic, there are also differences of opinion regarding the ruling on counteracting magic by means of magic itself (*al-nushra*). According to a report transmitted by al-Bukhārī (al-Bukhārī, “al-Ṭibb,” 49), Saʿīd b. al-Musayyab (d. 94/713) regarded this as permissible, and scholars such as al-Shaʿbī (d. 104/722), al-Muzanī (d. 264/878), and Ibn Baṭṭāl al-Qurṭubī (d. 449/1057) also adopted this view. According to al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728), however, *nushra* is reprehensible (al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 1, p. 281). Some scholars, however, do not permit the removal of magic by means of magic and maintain that the greatest remedies for dispelling it are the recitation of *al-*

Mu‘awwidhatān (Sūrat al-Falaq and Sūrat al-Nās), and that no magic can persist in the face of them. Indeed, in many reports transmitted from the Prophet (al-Bukhārī, “Faḍā’il al-Qur’ān,” 14; al-Tirmidhī, “al-Da‘awāt,” 117; al-Nasā’ī, “al-Isti‘ādha,” 37), these sūras are described as possessing a protective effect against many evils, magic above all. Accordingly, it is not permissible to seek the assistance of a magician to break magic; rather, one must seek refuge in God by reciting these sūras (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 1, p. 372).

Among Muslim scholars, in addition to magic itself, the ruling concerning the magician was also discussed, and debates arose as to whether they are merely a malefactor or an unbeliever. It appears that Islamic scholars issued different rulings concerning the magician, depending on the type of magic involved, and that they focused on the ruling of unbelief with respect to those forms of magic that constitute an assault upon God’s divinity and lordship. There is consensus that magic is forbidden and that the magician is *fāsiq* (malefactor). However, some magicians, depending on the kind of magic they practice, can be both *fāsiqs* and unbelievers. The first type of magic that can be mentioned in this context is the form designated as “Babylonian magic.” In this type of magic, one holds the belief that celestial bodies influence the governance of the world and that they are the creators of good and evil, thereby associating partners with God. There is no disagreement that the magician who practices this type of magic is an unbeliever (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 53–54). Another type of magic is practiced on the belief that magicians, by means of their psychic (spiritual) power, create life and power and can alter the nature of beings. There is likewise consensus that the practitioners of this type of magic are unbelievers (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 232). Magic performed with the assistance of unseen beings, and designated as *‘azā’im*, can likewise be mentioned in this context. The magician who practices this type of magic utters words that amount to associating partners with God, venerates and worships these beings to draw near to them, and adopts an attitude that demeans sacred values. By virtue of the acts they perform to carry out their magic, they pass out of the religion and are regarded as unbelievers (Kātib Chalabī 2021, vol. 4, pp. 693–95). Magicians who practice forms of magic other than the aforementioned types—such as the recitation of *ruqya*, illusionism and conjuring, the use of certain mechanical and chemical instruments, the administration of certain narcotic drugs, tale-bearing, and the binding of people’s hearts—are not designated as unbelievers. For magicians who practice such forms of magic, there is no effective cause entailing unbelief. If no element of unbelief is present in their belief, they are not called an unbeliever, but only a *fāsiq* on account of the unlawfulness of the acts they perform. However, some scholars, al-Jaṣṣāṣ above all, accuse the magician of unbelief regardless of category, to prevent the spread of magic in society and to generalize the Qur’ānic designation of unbelief (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 65).¹⁰

In addition to the creedal status of magicians, many debates also arose concerning their legal status, the religious status of their magic, and the penal sanctions to be applied to them. Depending on their religion, gender, and the outcome of the magic they practice, Islamic jurists issue different rulings regarding the magician. Thus, according to Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Imām Mālik (d. 179/795), the magician falls into unbelief by virtue of what they do, is deemed comparable to a *zindīq*¹¹, and incurs the death penalty. This view is based on certain reports transmitted to the effect that the magician is to be executed (al-Tirmidhī, “al-Ḥudūd,” 27), as well as on the rulings concerning the magician attributed to some Companions, foremost among them ‘Umar (d. 23/644) (Ibn Qudāma 1997, vol. 12, p. 302; al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, pp. 278–80). According to al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820), however, the magician is not executed merely for practicing magic. If the magician says, “I practice magic with the intention of killing a person, and the magic I perform generally takes effect,” they are executed not because they practiced magic, but by way of *qīṣās* (retaliation). However, if a magician says, “I practice magic to kill a person; sometimes it is

effective, and sometimes it shows no effect,” this is evaluated within the category of *shibh al-‘amd* (quasi-intentional homicide), and *diya* (compensation) must be paid for the deceased (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 63; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 233). The matters mentioned above apply to the Muslim magician. Regarding *dhimmī* magicians belonging to Ahl al-kitāb, Abū Ḥanīfa maintained that they should be executed just like Muslim magicians, whereas contradictory rulings are transmitted from al-Imām Mālik. The first ruling holds that if the magicians repent and enter Islam, they are not to be executed. The Muslim magician falls into unbelief and is executed because he has departed from the religion on account of his magic. The *dhimmī* magician, however, is already in a state of unbelief independently of the act of magic itself. Accordingly, their *dhimmī* status is not nullified. They are asked to repent, and their repentance consists of returning to Islam. If they accept this, they are not executed. The *dhimmī* magician is sentenced to death only if they cause harm to Muslims. This view is based on the fact that the Prophet did not order the execution of members of Ahl al-kitāb who were found to have cast magic upon him. Nevertheless, reports are also transmitted from al-Imām Mālik to the effect that such a person should be executed by way of *ḥadd* punishment (a fixed legal punishment prescribed in Islamic law) even if they repent and embrace Islam. The other transmitted view corresponds to the Ḥanafī position. In addition to these issues, jurists also issued different rulings based on the magician’s gender. According to Abū Ḥanīfa, if the magician is male, the authorities execute him regardless of his religion, whereas the ruling differs in the case of a female magician. Thus, even if a female magician—whether Muslim or *dhimmī*—confesses to practicing magic, the authorities do not execute her. Rather, they imprison and beat her until it becomes clear that she has abandoned the practice of magic (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 61–62; al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 78–79; al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, pp. 278–80).

There are differences of opinion regarding whether the magician’s repentance is to be accepted and whether it removes the worldly punishment (execution). According to the Ḥanafī and Mālikī schools, the magician is regarded as being in the position of a *zindīq*; their sincerity is not trusted, and their repentance is not deemed valid. As can be seen, this ruling treats the magician as standing even below the apostate who has renounced the religion, for the apostate is granted the right to repent. According to those who adopt this view, apostates deserve execution only when they persist in unbelief. When they repent and return to Islam, not only is unbelief lifted from them, but the death penalty is also dropped. Magicians, however, in addition to falling into unbelief by practicing magic, deserve to be executed by way of *ḥadd* because they spread corruption and disorder on earth. Their situation resembles that of those who wage war against the state’s established order. Just as the repentance of those who rebel against the legitimate state order is not accepted and their punishment is not waived, so too is the case with the magicians. Among the Ḥanafīs, these rulings apply to all magicians without distinction between Muslim and *dhimmī*, whereas, as noted earlier, the Mālikīs transmitted various rulings concerning the *dhimmī* magician (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 65–66; al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, pp. 278–80). A view transmitted from the Ḥanbalīs also states that the magician is not to be invited to repent. For magic is a form of knowledge that takes possession of the heart. Even if the magician repents verbally, they cannot uproot magic from their hearts. Accordingly, the potential danger present in them never truly disappears. Moreover, although many reports have been transmitted from the Companions to the effect that magicians are to be executed, no report has been transmitted indicating that they are to be invited to repent (Ibn Qudāma 1997, vol. 12, p. 303).

According to al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī and a view transmitted from the Ḥanbalīs, the magician’s repentance is valid. For magic is not a sin greater than *shirk* (polytheism). If even the polytheists are called to repent, then magicians must be asked to repent as well. If

magicians are unbelievers, then, once they embrace Islam, both their conversion to Islam and their repentance become valid (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, pp. 63, 66–67; Ibn Qudāma 1997, vol. 12, p. 303). Scholars such as al-Imām al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) and al-Bāqillānī also concur with this view. To disregard the repentance of magicians is an erroneous approach. Indeed, magicians are among those most deserving of having their repentance accepted. For by virtue of the technical knowledge they possess concerning magic, magicians are the very people who know best the difference between miracle and magic. Ordinary people perceive an act of a miraculous kind merely as something extraordinary, whereas magicians can grasp the technical impossibility of the event that occurs. For this reason, magicians are among the groups most disposed to faith (al-Māturīdī 2005, vol. 1, p. 194; al-Bāqillānī 1958, pp. 59–60). In this context, the verses concerning the magicians who fell to the ground in prostration and repented when confronted by the miracle of Moses’s staff can serve as an example [Q 20:70–73]. For by virtue of their technical knowledge of magic, they realized that what Moses had performed was not akin to the acts they themselves carried out, and by this means they repented and came to faith.

A general assessment of the rulings concerning magicians shows that the great majority of jurists believe that magicians should be executed because they harm the social order. As noted earlier, the jurists regarded magicians as standing even below apostates and deemed their repentance invalid. This view may reflect the perception of magic as a crime committed against both God and society. For apostates, by turning away from religion, they sin only against God. When they repent, that sin is removed. Magicians, however, in addition to falling into unbelief by committing acts of magic, cause corruption in society through their deeds, violate the rights of others, and thus deserve to be executed by way of *ḥadd*. The jurists probably issued such rulings by taking the peace of Islamic society as their point of departure and aiming to deter the practice of magic. Similarly, some scholars, including al-Imām al-Shāfi‘ī, approached the issue from a more individual-centered perspective. Those who adopted this view regarded magicians, by virtue of their technical knowledge, as potential believers and accepted the validity of their repentance. Moreover, their adoption of this view may have been influenced by the many Qur’ānic verses indicating that God is forgiving toward His servants and has not closed the door of repentance. In sum, it appears that there were many disagreements in the Islamic world regarding the ruling on the magician, that no clear and definitive view emerged, and that the ruling changed depending on various conditions.

3. Hārūt and Mārūt

Hārūt and Mārūt are the names of two angels mentioned in Q 2:102, who are believed to have taught magic to people in Babylon during the time of Solomon. Although no information is provided about them in the Qur’ān beyond the mention of their names, detailed accounts concerning these beings are found in tafsīr and historical sources, especially in the hadith corpus. In this section of our study, we shall first address, in broad outline, the etymology of these names, similar narratives in other religions, and reports concerning Hārūt and Mārūt; we shall also examine the reflections of these reports in Islamic culture. We shall then analyze the debates concerning Hārūt and Mārūt within the context of the verse.

3.1. Etymology and the Reflections of the Narratives Concerning Hārūt and Mārūt in Islamic Culture

There are disagreements regarding the origin of the terms Hārūt and Mārūt, which are not of Arabic origin (al-Jawālīqī 1990, p. 629). Indeed, according to scholars such as Arthur Jeffery (d. 1959), these words derive from the terms “Haurvatāt” and “Ameretāt” found

in the Avesta, the sacred text of Zoroastrianism. In later periods, these terms assumed the forms “Khurdād” and “Murdād” in Persian (Jeffery 1938, p. 283). Of “Haurvatāt” and “Ameretāt,” which are regarded as female angels and as two of the “Amesha Spentas” of Zoroastrianism, the former represents the attribute of perfection of Ahura Mazdā, while the latter represents the attribute of immortality (Vajda 1971, p. 237). There are also views suggesting that the two flower deities in Armenian religious terminology, “Hawrot” and “Mawrot,” are likewise related to these two terms, that they assumed different forms in various languages, and that they appear in the Qur’ān as Hārūt and Mārūt (Boyce 1989, p. 998). Although there are views associating other terms—especially the Zoroastrian concepts of “Haurvatāt” and “Ameretāt”—with Hārūt and Mārūt, there are also opinions maintaining that such associations do not go beyond a mere similarity of expression. In addition, the Slavonic version of the Book of Enoch, an apocryphal text, relates that God Elohim appointed two angels named “Ariukh” and “Pariukh” to preserve the Book of Enoch (Morfill and Charles 1896, p. 48). Some scholars regard these two angels as a different version of Hārūt and Mārūt. However, they also note that this story does not resemble the relevant narrative in the Qur’ān (Demirci 1997, p. 262).

Although the Qur’ān does not provide any information concerning Hārūt and Mārūt, many reports about them have been transmitted, and these reports have been included in tafsīr sources. Although there are numerous reports transmitted on this matter in different versions, the main story found in the majority of the reports concerning Hārūt and Mārūt can be summarized as follows: The angels were astonished by the sins and corruption committed by human beings on earth and complained to God about them. Thereupon, God Most High addressed the angels, saying: “I have given human beings desire and am testing them. If I were to test you as well, you too would do what they do.” When the angels replied, “We would refrain from what they do and remain obedient to You,” God Most High asked them to choose from among themselves two angels whom He would subject to trial. The angels then chose Hārūt and Mārūt. These two angels were sent down to the earth on the condition that they would not commit fornication, drink wine, worship idols, or take a life. For a certain period, they remained true to their pledge and lived in accordance with truth and justice. One day, however, they encountered an exceptionally beautiful woman and desired to be with her. In return for granting their wish, the woman demanded that they worship an idol, drink wine, and commit murder. At first, they resisted. Later, however, they succumbed to their desire for the woman and, considering drinking wine to be the lightest sin, became intoxicated. Acting under the influence of intoxication, Hārūt and Mārūt eventually both lay with the woman and worshipped an idol. They also killed a man who saw them while they were committing fornication so that he would not inform others. When the effect of the intoxication passed, they realized the gravity of their wrongdoing and sought to ascend to heaven, but they were unable to do so. According to this report, the woman involved in the episode learned from them the supplication of *al-ism al-a‘zam* (Greatest Name of God), ascended to heaven, and was transformed into the star Zuhra (Venus). The angels in heaven also became aware of the condition of Hārūt and Mārūt. God Most High then gave these two angels the choice between the punishment of this world and the punishment of the Hereafter. According to these reports, they said, “The punishment of our God in the Hereafter is indeed severe!” and therefore chose the punishment of this world. The reports further state that the angels were exiled to Babylon and that they will suffer punishment until the Day of Resurrection, suspended upside down in a well—or, in some versions, in a cave. Whenever people come to them to learn magic, the reports add, the angels do not teach them without first warning: “We are only a means of trial, so do not fall into unbelief!”¹²

Among Muslim scholars, the view has become prominent that these narrations concerning Hārūt and Mārūt are unacceptable and constitute Isrāʾīliyyāt. When examined from the perspective of hadith methodology, it becomes clear that none of the narrations related to this subject appear in authentic sources, possess a complete *isnād* (the chain), or reach the level of *marfūʿ* (hadith reports whose chain of transmission goes back to the Prophet Muḥammad). Moreover, many of these narrations were transmitted by Kaʿb al-Aḥbār (d. 32/653), who is associated with Isrāʾīliyyāt (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 1, pp. 355, 357, 360). According to many Islamic scholars, methodological concerns are not the only grounds for rejecting these reports; rational and scriptural proofs also invalidate the narratives they contain. First, these scholars cite numerous Qurʾānic verses attesting to the angels' impeccability. They further argue that the accounts claiming that the two angels were given a choice between worldly punishment and punishment in the Hereafter are erroneous. In their view, the angels should instead have been given the option to choose between repentance and punishment. For God has not closed the door of repentance even to those who associate partners with Him. On this basis, these scholars maintain that, within the framework of rational and transmitted proofs, it does not seem possible that God would act restrictively toward two angels. Beyond all this, they regard as manifestly erroneous the claim that these two angels continued to teach magic to people while still undergoing punishment (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 237–38). The Ashʿarī theologian Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawwānī (d. 908/1502) also criticizes the relevant narrations through the story of the woman who deceived the angels. According to him, these narrations are neither acceptable nor reasonable, and there is no evidence from the Qurʾān or the Sunna to confirm them. Moreover, how can it be conceived that God would raise to the heavens and transform into a star a *fājira* (immoral woman) who committed fornication and led the angels into sin? Furthermore, the fact that these two angels could not ascend to heaven also involves a rational contradiction, for that woman ascended to heaven by learning the supplication of the *al-ism al-aʿẓam* from the angels. Therefore, all these proofs indicate that the stories concerning Hārūt and Mārūt are fabricated and false (al-Afghānī and ʿAbduh 2002, pp. 111–12).

There is further evidence supporting the association made by Islamic scholars between the narrations concerning Hārūt and Mārūt and Isrāʾīliyyāt. Indeed, many of the narrations transmitted on this subject appear in the Midrash corpus with minor variations. In summary, the Midrash narrates the following: after the flood of Noah, God Elohim becomes angered that human beings do not abandon idolatry. Two angels named “Azael” and “Semyaza” (in some sources “Azza” or “Uzza”) tell Elohim that His creation of human beings was a bad act because of the corruption they cause on earth. They promise that, if they were sent down to the earth, they would spread His judgment among humankind. Thereupon, God sends them down to the earth. After descending to the world, Semyaza falls in love with a girl named Ester. Ester tells Semyaza that she will not be with him unless he teaches her the words by which he can raise her to heaven. Because of his love for her, Semyaza teaches her these words, and in this way, Ester ascends to heaven and is transformed into a star. Thereafter, these two angels marry human women. In the Book of Enoch, it is related that these two taught magic to human beings. Although the stories on this matter are common, the names vary from one narrative to another. Scholars state that the main purpose of these stories in the Midrash is to explain the marriage of the sons of God to human women mentioned in the Old Testament [Genesis 6:2–4] (Davidson 1971, pp. 63, 65, 203, 265; Demirci 1997, p. 262). In view of all these accounts, together with the fact that Kaʿb al-Aḥbār, a Jewish convert to Islam, transmitted many of the narrations found in Islamic sources, one may argue that the reports concerning Hārūt and Mārūt drew on Isrāʾīliyyāt and represent a different version of the accounts found in Jewish sources.

Although the narrations concerning Hārūt and Mārūt were not accepted among Muslim scholars and were regarded as *Isrāʾīliyyāt*, they appear to have been reflected in Islamic culture and art. Based on the narrations concerning Hārūt and Mārūt in the *dīwān* literature (the classical Ottoman poetic tradition), the view became predominant that these two angels were the source of magic. Within the framework of the characters and narratives found in these stories, *dīwān* poets developed various *talmīḥ* (allusion) and *tamthīl* (analogy). It is stated that the principal aim of the poets in employing such *talmīḥ* (allusion) and *tamthīl* (analogy) was to embellish their couplets and to attain an eloquent style through rhetorical devices.¹³ Hārūt and Mārūt were also treated in the *ʿajāʾib al-makhlūqāt* (Wonders of Creation) literature, a genre peculiar to the Islamic literature. As in the *dīwān* literature, the narrations transmitted about them were taken as the basis in this genre as well, and even information going beyond these reports was provided. Indeed, Zakariyyā al-Qazwīnī (d. 682/1283), who authored one of the most important examples of this genre, relates that Hārūt and Mārūt reproached Adam when God expelled him from Paradise, that they met Zuhra, and that after sinning on earth, they came to Idrīs and asked him to seek God's forgiveness on their behalf. Al-Qazwīnī also mentions their physical characteristics and describes them as having small bodies and a bluish color, while suffering punishment upside down, naked, and bound in chains up to their calves (al-Qazwīnī 2006, pp. 62–63, 176, 400). Beyond literary culture, Hārūt and Mārūt also occupy an important place in Islamic arts. Miniature painting, in particular, includes depictions of Hārūt and Mārūt that correspond to the narratives reported (e.g., Figures 1 and 2).¹⁴



Figure 1. (Kalender Paşa n.d., p. 16b).

A general assessment suggests that scholars and cultural producers approached the narrations concerning Hārūt and Mārūt from two distinct perspectives. Islamic scholars, especially exegetes, included these narrations in their works but regarded them as *Isrāʾīliyyāt* and rejected them; to substantiate their views, they advanced both textual and rational proofs. Islamic poets and artists, by contrast, did not discuss the source or authenticity of these narrations but viewed them as elements that enhanced their art and drew

people's attention. In sum, although scholars did not accept the stories concerning Hārūt and Mārūt within a scholarly framework, Islamic culture transformed them into an artistic element.



Figure 2. (Ukkāsha 1983, p. 213).

3.2. Debates in the Context of the Verse

In the Islamic literary tradition, many debates have arisen regarding the figures of Hārūt and Mārūt mentioned in al-Baqara 2:102, particularly in the context of *qirā'āt* (readings) variations in the verse, linguistic analyses, and interpretations of their ontological identity. The focal point of the lexical and grammatical discussions concerning Hārūt and Mārūt is the phrase “وَمَا أُنْزِلَ عَلَى الْمَلَكَيْنِ.” These discussions focus especially on the word “الْمَلَكَيْنِ” (*malakayn*) and the particle “مَا” (*mā*) in this phrase. There are two *qirā'āt* regarding the pronunciation of the word *malakayn*, and depending on the preferred *qirā'a*, the ontological identity of Hārūt and Mārūt changes directly. The first *qirā'a* is “malakayn” (two angels). This is the prevalent *qirā'a* preferred by the majority of scholars, in which the letter *lām* is read with *fatha*. It is stated that, in the context of *tafsīr* and narrations, this is the stronger *qirā'a*. According to this reading, Hārūt and Mārūt are two angels sent down from heaven. However, there are also views maintaining that by the word “malakayn” what is intended is Gabriel and Michael, or other angels (al-Zajjāj 1988, vol. 1, p. 183; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 236). The statements in the verse, however, make the view that the expression “malakayn” refers to Hārūt and Mārūt more persuasive, while the other views remain weak. Another *qirā'a* is the recitation “malikayn” (“two kings”), in which readers pronounce the letter “ل” (*lām*) with *kasra*. Reports attribute this recitation, among the *Salaf al-sāliḥ* (pious Predecessors), to Ibn ‘Abbās, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abzā (d. 70/689), al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim (d. 105/723), and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. Based on this *qirā'a*, some scholars explain the expression “malikayn” as referring to two persons in Babylon engaged in magic, two powerful sinners, or two kings, according to ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abzā refers to David and Solomon. Abū l-‘Āliya al-Riyāḥī (d. 90/709) also reports that, when ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abzā recited this verse, and he explained it as follows: “Magic was not sent down to those

two kings (David and Solomon). They were men who knew faith and unbelief, and magic, too, is unbelief. They used to warn most severely against unbelief.” (Ibn Abī Ḥātim 2017, vol. 1, pp. 355–56; al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, p. 286).

Those who adopt the *qirāʾa* “malikayn” have presented many arguments in support of their view. According to them, reading the relevant expression in the verse as “malakayn” (“two angels”) would run counter to the verse in Sūrat al-Anʿām: “Had We sent down an angel, the matter would have been settled, and then they would not have been granted respite.” [Q 6:8]. Apart from this, if God had indeed sent down two angels, they would have had to be sent either in human form or in their own form. If they had been sent in human guise while still being angels, this would have meant concealing the truth from human beings and leaving them in ignorance. Such an act is not permissible for God. If this were permissible, it would follow that every person seen in the external world might in reality be not a human being, but an angel from among the angels. On the other hand, if it is assumed that God did not cast these two angels into human form, then the statement, “Had We made him an angel, We would have made him in the form of a man,” [Q 6:9] would likewise show this view to be untenable. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī offers criticisms of the arguments advanced by those who adopt this view. According to al-Rāzī, Q 2:102 is *ʾāmm* (general). The recitational form in which the letter “ل” (*lām*) in the expression in question is read with *fatha* is a *mutawātir qirāʾa* and is therefore *khāṣṣ* (specific). Since the *khāṣṣ* takes precedence over the *ʾāmm*, the *qirāʾa* “malakayn” is more preferable than the *qirāʾa* “malikayn.” In addition, God sent down those two angels in human form. The duty incumbent upon those who live in the time of the prophets is not to assume from the outset that the one they see in human form is necessarily a human being. Indeed, during the time of the Prophet, Gabriel also appeared as Dihya al-Kalbī. When the Companions saw Dihya, they did not state with certainty whether he was Dihya or Gabriel (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, pp. 236–37).

Another issue on which the lexical debates are concentrated concerns the particle “ما” (*mā*). These disagreements are based on the syntactic functions of this particle within the sentence. Although many claims have been advanced regarding the particle “ما,” it appears that two views have come to the fore. The first of these is that the particle “ما” is an *al-ism al-mawṣūl* (relative pronoun). The overwhelming majority of those who adopt this view hold that there is nothing objectionable in God’s sending down magic to the angels, and that what is forbidden is not the learning of magic, but its practice. Although those who hold this view maintain that the particle is a relative pronoun, they differ concerning the *ʿatf* (coordination) in the sentence. In this context, three views have been put forward:

1. This expression is *maʾtūf* (conjunct) to the preceding word *sihr*. When it is understood in this way, the meaning becomes as follows: “They teach people magic and that which was sent down to those two angels ...”.

2. It is *maʾtūf* to the expression “مَا تَتْلُوا الشَّيَاطِينُ”. On this understanding, the meaning is as follows: “They followed what the devils said as a slander against Solomon’s sovereignty and that which was sent down to those two angels ...”.

3. The particle “ما” is in the genitive position from the standpoint of syntax and is *maʾtūf* to the expression “مَلِكٌ سُلَيْمَانٌ”. According to this view, attributed to the Muʿtazilī theologian Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī (d. 322/934), the meaning of the verse is as follows: “They followed what they falsely and slanderously said concerning Solomon’s sovereignty and that which was sent down to those two angels ...” (al-Ṭabarī 2010, vol. 1, pp. 667–68; al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 235).

Another view holds that the particle “ما” is used in the sense of *naḥy* (negation). According to this view, the particle is *maʾtūf* to the expression “وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمَانُ” (“Solomon did not become an unbeliever”), and the verse thus means: “Solomon did not become an unbeliever, and nothing like magic was sent down to those two angels ...” (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3,

p. 235; al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, p. 282). This view was preferred chiefly by scholars who held that Hārūt and Mārūt were not angels and that magic was not sent down to them either. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), by affirming the view that this particle is a relative pronoun, criticizes its being understood in the sense of *nafy*. If the particle is taken in the sense of *nafy*, two possibilities arise. Either it will be said that the two angels referred to are Hārūt and Mārūt, while it is also claimed that no magic was sent down to them. Yet in such an interpretation, the statement in the continuation of the verse, “Those two would not impart any knowledge to anyone without saying, ‘We are only a means of trial, so do not fall into unbelief,’” becomes meaningless. Or else Hārūt and Mārūt would have to be those persons to whom the devils taught magic. In this context, if Hārūt and Mārūt are accepted as two angels, it would have to be said that they learned magic from the devils and fell into unbelief, which is contrary to Islamic doctrine regarding angels. Moreover, the statement in the continuation of the verse, “Do not fall into unbelief,” also stands in contradiction to this. Alternatively, it would have to be accepted that Hārūt and Mārūt were two human beings to whom the devils taught magic. On this assumption, however, magic would have had to come to an end with the death of Hārūt and Mārūt. Yet, as is evident, the existence of magic has continued. This assumption, therefore, is likewise invalid. In sum, it is more correct to say that the particle in question is not *nafy* but a relative pronoun (al-Ṭabarī 2010, vol. 1, p. 669). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī likewise holds that this particle is a relative pronoun and states that, unless there is evidence to the contrary, the expression in question should be *ma ‘īṭf*, not to a more remote element, but to the word nearest to it (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 236).

Within the framework of the lexical analyses and *qirā’a* differences in Q 2:102, different views emerged concerning the identity of Hārūt and Mārūt. The first of these is the view that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels, a position adopted by many Muslim scholars, foremost among them al-Ṭabarī, al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. According to this view, the linguistic context in the verse and the *mutawātir qirā’a* indicate that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels. In addition, these two angels were probably sent down to teach people that magic is evil, or to put them to the test (al-Zajjāj 1988, vol. 1, pp. 183–84; al-Zamakhsharī 1997, vol. 1, pp. 305–6). Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī set forth the most comprehensive arguments on this matter. According to him, there are many reasons why these two angels were sent down to teach magic:

1. There is no doubt that, in that period, magic and sorcery had greatly increased. Magicians challenged people by performing forms of magic previously unseen and laid claim to prophethood. For this reason, God sent down two angels to restrain these liars. This is one of the most important purposes, indicating that the sending down of the two angels was directed toward human welfare.
2. These two angels were sent down to explain the epistemological difference between miracle and magic. Knowing that a miracle is distinct from magic requires knowing the nature of magic as well. If magic is not known, it is likewise impossible to understand miracles. For this reason, it is possible that God sent two angels to explain the nature of magic.
3. In those times, it may have been regarded as *mubāh* (permissible) or *mandūb* (recommended) to practice magic for the purpose of creating division among those opposed to God and bringing together those devoted to Him. God, therefore, sent two angels to teach magic for this purpose. However, it is possible that the ill-disposed people of that period misused the magic they learned from these two angels for the opposite end.
4. To know everything is good. When magic is forbidden, it must be something known and conceivable, for it is not possible to prohibit something that cannot be conceived. Accordingly, God may have sent two angels to teach what magic is.

5. In that period, the jinn may perhaps have been performing various forms of magic that human beings were unable to withstand. For this reason, God may have sent these angels so that human beings might stand against the jinn and be assisted against them.

6. It is also rationally and religiously permissible that these angels served to make human moral responsibility more difficult and to constitute a trial for them. To teach a person something that would lead them to worldly pleasures and power and then subsequently forbid it is, from the perspective of the self, a very difficult test. Yet by enduring this, one can obtain a greater reward in the life to come. There are examples of this kind in the Qur'ān. Thus, as God says in Q 2:249, "God will test you with a river. Whoever drinks from it is not of me, and whoever does not taste it is of me." He tested ʿĪlūt's army about drinking from the river. The teaching of magic to people by these two angels may likewise have been a trial of this kind.

Within the framework of all these explanations and possibilities, al-Rāzī states that it is rationally possible that God sent two angels named Hārūt and Mārūt for the purpose of teaching magic (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 238).

Another view concerning the identity of Hārūt and Mārūt is that they were human beings (two kings or impostors), or that magic was not sent down to them. This view was transmitted in the earliest period of Islam from Ibn 'Abbās, 'Abd al-Raḥmān b. Abzā, al-Ḍaḥḥāk b. Muzāḥim, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; in the early period, it was adopted by Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī, and in the modern period by scholars such as Muḥammad 'Abduh, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī (d. 1914), and Rashīd Riḍā. The scholars who adopt this view hold that Hārūt and Mārūt could not have been angels, based on linguistic differences in the verse in question and on theological sensitivities, such as the impeccability of angels. Although Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī accepted that Hārūt and Mārūt were two angels, he denied that magic was sent down to them and advanced certain arguments in support of his view:

1. If magic had been sent down to these angels, then the one who sent it down to them would have been God Most High. Yet magic is a futile act, belonging to the category of unbelief. Such a thing is not befitting the majesty of God.

2. The verse states explicitly that teaching magic is unbelief. If it is accepted that the angels taught magic, then it would follow that they were unbelievers. This, however, is contrary to the principle of the impeccability of angels.

3. Just as it is not permissible for the prophets to teach magic, so too it is not permissible for these angels.

4. An act such as magic, which is regarded as unbelief, is attributed only to unbelievers and the immoral. How, then, could it possibly be attributed to God, who has forbidden magic and declared that He will punish those who engage in it? The order that God has established in the world (*sunnat Allāh*) has manifested itself in the nullification of magic. Indeed, the statement in the Moses narrative, "What you have produced is magic, and God will surely render it void," indicates this point (al-Ḥafḥānī 1921, p. 8).

Within this framework, Abū Muslim al-Ḥafḥānī interprets the verse as follows: just as the devils attributed magic to Solomon and his sovereignty, so too they attributed to magic that which had been sent down to those two angels. Just as Solomon was innocent of this imputation, so too were these two angels free from such an attribution. For what was sent down to these two angels was nothing other than the Sharī'a and the call to goodness. The real reason why they said, "إِنَّمَا نَحْنُ فِتْنَةٌ فَلَا تَكْفُرْ" ("We are only a means of sedition, so do not fall into unbelief") was likewise to reinforce adherence to that which had been sent down to them. Some people heeded this warning, whereas others deviated from it. Moreover, according to Abū Muslim, in the expression "فَيَتَعَلَّمُونَ مِنْهُمَا" ("They were learning from the two"), the *tathniya* (dual) pronoun does not refer to Hārūt and Mārūt, but rather to the

words “unbelief” and “sedition” in the preceding expression. According to this context, the expression means: “People were learning from unbelief and sedition, through these, that by which they would separate husband and wife.” (al-Isfahānī 1921, p. 9).

Al-Rāzī criticizes Abū Muslim’s views from several angles. He responds to Abū Muslim’s first view as follows: describing something is sometimes performed to encourage it and at other times to warn against it. Indeed, the poet’s statement, “عَرَفْتُ الشَّرَّ لَا لِلشَّرِّ لَكِنِ لِلتَّوْقِيَةِ” (“I learned evil not for the sake of evil, but to guard myself against it”) points to this. His second view is also erroneous. For magic does not consist of a single form. The kind of magic described in the verse as unbelief is this: the devils fell into unbelief because they taught magic to those who claimed that the stars were divine, and because their purpose in teaching it was to substantiate this belief. Abū Muslim’s statement, “Just as it is not permissible for the prophets to teach magic, so too it is not permissible for the angels to teach it,” likewise does not constitute a conclusive proof, for it is possible that the principal aim in teaching magic was to emphasize that it is false. His final view is also problematic, for there is a difference between practicing an act and teaching it. It is possible that acting by means of magic was forbidden. Yet teaching it to draw attention to its corrupt and harmful nature would be commendable and even required (al-Rāzī 1981, vol. 3, p. 236).

In addition to the early period, there are also scholars among the modern ulema who hold the view that Hārūt and Mārūt were not angels. It appears that the scholars who adopt this view construe the expression “angel” in the verse not in its literal sense, but in a figurative one. For example, Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, by taking the particle “ما” in the sense of *naḥy*, states that the devils (according to al-Qāsimī, evil-natured human beings) claimed that magic had been sent down to Hārūt and Mārūt, whom they called angels, although nothing had in fact been sent down to them. In his view, these two were merely two men in Babylon who sought to present themselves as persons of virtue and piety and who attained social prestige because they taught people magic. People, in turn, were satisfying their psychological and spiritual needs through what they learned from them. For this reason, they likened them to angels or to two kings. People’s favorable opinion of them reached such a degree that it came to be imagined that they were two angels who had descended to earth and received revelation from God. Moreover, the fact that certain verses [Q 6:8; Q 25:7] in the Qur’ān also emphasize that no angel other than the prophets could descend to earth to teach human beings anything, and that the requests of those who made such a demand were rejected, likewise supports this view (al-Qāsimī 2002, vol. 1, pp. 365–66). Muḥammad ‘Abduh and Rashīd Riḍā likewise held a similar view. Hārūt and Mārūt were meeting the familial needs of the people in the society in which they lived, and for that reason, they were held in great esteem by society. Thus, they were likened to kings and, on account of their praised qualities, were regarded as being in the rank of angels. It is therefore possible that the expression “angel” in the verse was used metaphorically in this context (Riḍā 1947, vol. 1, p. 327). Apart from these views, there is also an interpretation to the effect that Hārūt and Mārūt were two angelic human beings who, by virtue of the good they had performed, attained the degree of receiving inspiration from the angels. Because the people of Babylon were engaged in magic, the foundational knowledge upon which magic rested was revealed to these two righteous men in Babylon. Yet this inspiration was not for evil; rather, it was for the sake of knowing it and protecting people from it. While teaching this knowledge to people, these two would say it was a means of trial and that, if misused, they would fall into unbelief. Nevertheless, despite these warnings, some people misused what they had learned (Ateş 1988, vol. 1, pp. 203, 207).

Apart from the views mentioned above, two distinct interpretations emerged within the framework of the view that Hārūt and Mārūt were not angels. One of these belongs to Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), and the other to al-Qurṭubī. Ibn Ḥazm, by taking the particle

“ما” in the verse in the context of negation, adopts the view that nothing was sent down to Hārūt and Mārūt, and mentions two possibilities concerning them. According to him, these two were not angels, but two beings from among the jinn who taught magic to people. In the verse, the expressions Hārūt and Mārūt occur as *badal* (apposition) to the word “devils.” In this context, the meaning that emerges is: “But those devils, Hārūt and Mārūt, fell into unbelief.” (Ibn Ḥazm 1996, vol. 3, p. 305, vol. 4, p. 63). Ibn Ḥazm relates their saying, “We are only a means of sedition; do not fall into unbelief,” to accounts in the verses [Q 8:48; Q 59:16] that describe the words Satan utters to lure people into his trap (Ibn Ḥazm 1996, vol. 4, p. 63). Another possibility is that these two were angels to whom God had sent down the true Sharī‘a. Thereafter, just as God abrogated the Sharī‘a of Moses and Jesus, He may also have abrogated what He had sent down to them. Yet the devils became unbelievers because they continued to teach the abrogated Sharī‘a. Their being a means of sedition is likewise religiously possible. For sedition has not only a dimension of unbelief and deviation, but also a dimension of goodness and guidance. There are many statements in the Qur’ān to this effect. For example, the verses “Moses said: This is nothing but Your trial/sedition ...” [Q 7:155] and “Know that your wealth and your children are but a trial/sedition for you, and that with God there is a great reward” [Q 8:28] point to this matter. In addition to these, the statement in Sūrat al-Muddaththir [Q 74:31] that the number of the angels charged with Hell is a sedition also indicates that sedition has two opposite dimensions. Accordingly, those who heeded the warning of these two angels, “We are only a means of sedition; do not fall into unbelief,” attained guidance, whereas those who did not listen fell into error and failed the trial (Ibn Ḥazm 1996, vol. 3, pp. 305–6). Although Ibn Ḥazm mentions two possibilities concerning Hārūt and Mārūt, his discussion appears to favor the first view (Ibn Ḥazm 1996, vol. 4, p. 62).

Another proponent of this view, al-Qurṭubī, maintains that the particle “ما” in the verse conveys *naḥy* and is *ma‘ṭūf* to the expression “وَمَا كَفَرَ سُلَيْمٌ”. He is also of the opinion that the expressions Hārūt and Mārūt are *badal* (apposition) for the word “الشَّيَاطِينُ” (devils) at the beginning of the verse. According to him, the word “الْمَلَكَيْنِ” does not refer to Hārūt and Mārūt, but to Gabriel and Michael, since the Jews claimed that magic had been sent down to them. This verse, in turn, serves as a refutation of their claims. Al-Qurṭubī, who holds that there is *taqdīm* and *ta’khlīr* here, understands the verse to mean as follows: “Solomon did not become an unbeliever, and nothing was sent down to those two angels (Gabriel and Michael). Rather, the devils, Hārūt and Mārūt, who taught magic to people in Babylon, became unbelievers.” Following these views, al-Qurṭubī states that this explanation is the most suitable and the soundest among the interpretations of the verse, and that no regard should be paid to the other meanings (al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, p. 282).¹⁵ Al-Qurṭubī explains the fact that the expressions Hārūt and Mārūt are in the form of *tathniya* (dual), while the term for which they serve as *badal* (apposition) is plural, in three points:

1. In the Arabic language, a plural expression can sometimes be used even for a word that is in the form of *tathniya*.
2. Since Hārūt and Mārūt held a leading position in the teaching of magic, these two were mentioned to emphasize them, while those who followed them were not mentioned.
3. The fact that Hārūt and Mārūt in particular are singled out among the devils is meant to emphasize that they went to extremes in disobedience. A similar usage is also found in the statement in Sūrat al-Raḥmān [Q 55:68]: “In both of them are various fruits, date-palms, and pomegranates.” (al-Qurṭubī 2006, vol. 2, p. 283).

4. Conclusions

Although Q 2:102 was revealed primarily to refute the slanders directed against Solomon, it became the focal point of debates over magic in Islam. The discussions sur-

rounding the verse show that magic possesses a multilayered structure and that, in Islamic thought, it was not approached through a simple, one-dimensional perspective on existence or non-existence; rather, it was examined within the frameworks of religious ontology, epistemology, sectarian commitments, and *fiqh*. The linguistic interpretations shaped around the letters and words of the verse, as well as the efforts of scholars to reinterpret it in light of language, logic, and creedal principles, likewise confirm this. It is evident that magic in Islam does not fall into a single category; rather, many practices, such as conjuring, psychological suggestion, astral magic, and communication with unseen beings, were included within its scope. While some of these types of magic were regarded as unbelief because of the beliefs and rituals they involved, others were not treated within that scope but were seen only as vain and evil. Whereas the forms of magic not considered within the scope of unbelief rest upon certain ontological and epistemological factors, the forms of magic deemed unbelief possess a more pronounced metaphysical dimension. From the perspective of Babylonian magic, ancient Babylonian magical culture included many types of magic, yet practices associated with unbelief appear to have been more prevalent. Babylon also emerged as an important historical center of astral magic and influenced many civilizations in this respect. This influence reached such a level that the Islamic literature came to attribute this type of magic to Babylon, which relied on belief in the spirituality of the stars and their effects on the world. In addition, the ancient Babylonian belief that unseen beings affected human life led to the emergence and spread of rituals and practices aimed at communicating with them. During these rituals, practitioners sought assistance from many gods and directed acts of veneration toward unseen beings. In light of all this, one may argue that Babylonian magical culture rested upon a polytheistic foundation. This foundation stands in opposition to monotheism in general and, in the Islamic context in particular, to the belief in *tawhīd* (unity). Accordingly, one may state that Babylonian magical practices contained elements of *shirk* and unbelief to a considerable degree and that, among the types of magic described in the Qur'ān, they constitute the most problematic form from the standpoint of Islamic creed.

Many disagreements also arose over Hārūt and Mārūt, the two angels who, according to the verse, taught people in Babylon magic. The accounts concerning Hārūt and Mārūt rendered concrete the tensions that emerged in Islamic thought within the framework of the conception of angels. In the verse, these two angels teach people magic, and people then misuse it; this raises the question of how such accounts were to be reconciled with the Islamic principle of the impeccability of angels. Within this framework, some scholars adhered to the apparent sense of the verse, whereas others advanced different views based on religious principles, *qirā'a* differences, and linguistic analyses. Thus, the question of Hārūt and Mārūt ceased to be merely a narrative in the Qur'ān and became the center of profound debates concerning the ontological status of angels and the nature of divine trial. Although scholars have stated that the reports transmitted on this subject derive from Isrā'īliyyāt, the Islamic literature nevertheless incorporated them. These reports influenced Islamic culture and art. In the religious context, however, scholars came to regard the narratives contained in these reports as unacceptable and devoid of creedal value. Indeed, unlike Judaism and Christianity, Islam does not recognize a doctrine of fallen angels. One may therefore argue that such narratives entered the Islamic literature from the aforementioned religions. As a result, the corpus of reports concerning Hārūt and Mārūt lacks a genuine religious foundation and, within the Islamic literature and art, served primarily as a cultural motif.

As a result of the debates concerning Hārūt and Mārūt, two views come to the fore regarding the category of being to which they belong. The first is that they were angels. The majority of scholars adopt this view, and it is evident that, in the overwhelming majority

of tafsīr works and translations, the verse has been interpreted in accordance with this view. The other view is that they were not angels. Although this view has existed since the earliest years of Islam, it became especially widespread in the modern period. In recent years, although there have been studies on Q 2:102 and Hārūt and Mārūt maintaining that they were angels, the great majority either share the view that they were not angels or refrain from expressing a definite opinion.¹⁶ This study argues that the view identifying Hārūt and Mārūt as angels is more persuasive, since it better accords with the wording and immediate context of Q 2:102. The principal argument advanced by those who hold that they were not angels is that angels were not created with the potential to sin. Yet the matter may be interpreted as follows: when evil is not possible in the case of angels, goodness cannot properly be spoken of on their behalf either. Goodness and evil are two opposite concepts that complement one another. When one is absent, the other has neither meaning nor value. Accordingly, the Qur’ānic proofs concerning the impeccability of angels can be interpreted to mean that “Angels cannot go beyond God’s command.” It is therefore possible that these two angels descended to earth in accordance with God’s command and taught magic to human beings. The evidence discussed above suggests that what was sent down to the two angels was not magic itself, but knowledge concerning the nature of magic. It is likely that, in a society in which magic was widespread, these two were teaching people knowledge concerning the true nature of what magicians were performing, so that they might not deceive them. Teaching such knowledge to protect people from the harms of magic is a good act and does not undermine the presumption of the impeccability of angels. The historical context likewise supports this view. Indeed, it is evident that in Babylon, magic permeated every aspect of society, from political authority to family life, and that magicians constituted an aristocratic class held in esteem by society. In such a society, where magicians had multiplied and gained power, it is plausible that two angels were sent to warn and protect people. In addition to this, the grammatical analyses of the verse and the well-known *qirā’a* also strengthen the view that these two were angels. The immediate context of the verse also indicates this. Before they were teaching magic to people, Hārūt and Mārūt say: “We are only a means of trial; do not fall into unbelief!” The reason they say this may be that people could misuse the knowledge they taught. Moreover, if, as those who hold the opposing view claim, these two were not angels but two ill-disposed men, then, far from issuing such a warning before teaching magic, they ought rather to have made insinuations aimed at leading people astray and spreading magic throughout society. In addition to this possibility, this study adopts the view held by many scholars that the two angels were sent down either to teach human beings the distinction between miracle and magic or to test them.

In summary, the disagreements that arose within the context of Q 2:102 are central to understanding the place of the phenomenon of magic in Islamic thought. The polemics surrounding the verse constitute one of the most concrete manifestations of Muslim scholars’ efforts to reconcile transmitted and rational principles. In addition to this, the fact that it possesses an interdisciplinary character touching upon tafsīr, kalām, and fiqh, that the historical background exerts an influence upon the various interpretations, that linguistic analyses develop within the framework of creedal preferences, and that the reports related to the subject are approached from a critical perspective all indicate that the verse possesses a multilayered character.

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Notes

- ¹ The term *Isrā'īliyyāt* refers to Jewish and broader Judeo-Christian narrative materials that entered the Islamic exegetical, hadith, and historiographical literature, particularly in relation to the Qur'ānic stories.
- ² On Hārūt and Mārūt, see also (Jung 1926, pp. 295–310).
- ³ The names of twenty-five prophets are mentioned in the Qur'ān. While the lives of some are referred to only briefly, those of others are narrated in detail. In these narratives, particular emphasis is placed on the hardships and trials they endured during their mission of proclamation. In this context, the denial of Noah by his people [Q 29:14], Jacob's suffering from the pain of separation from his son for many years (Q 12:86), Joseph's being cast into a well by his brothers and remaining in prison for many years [Q 12:15, 20, 35], Job's illness [Q 21:83; Q 38:41], and Muhammad's being subjected to many forms of harm and mistreatment during his proclamation [Q 6:33; Q 52:29; Q 108:3] can be cited as examples.
- ⁴ For the critical edition of the work, see (Ibn Waḥshiyya 1993). There are debates regarding the attribution and provenance of the work in question to Ibn Waḥshiyya. For further information, see (Sezgin 1967, vol. 4, pp. 326–27, vol. 7, pp. 77–79).
- ⁵ For a broader discussion of the Islamic literature on magic, see (Ullmann 1972, pp. 364–93).
- ⁶ For a broader discussion of *'azā'im*, see (Tāshkubrīzāda 1985, vol. 1, pp. 342–43).
- ⁷ The overwhelming majority of scholars who accepted the reality of magic did not consider the denial of its reality to constitute unbelief. However, al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) held that definitive proofs establish this matter and that its denial therefore leads to unbelief.
- ⁸ Sources report that the majority within the four major schools of Ahl al-sunna accepted the existence of magic. In contrast, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) is said to have denied its reality. However, during our investigation, no explicit statement was found in Abū Ḥanīfa's principal works indicating that he denied the reality of magic. It is possible that this view was transmitted from him orally. For a more detailed discussion, see (Ibn Hubayra 2009, vol. 2, p. 325).
- ⁹ For a broader discussion of the views of the kalām schools concerning human acts and the divine will, see (al-Ṣābūnī 1969, pp. 111–15, 122–26).
- ¹⁰ Although al-Jaṣṣāṣ regards all acts falling within the category of magic as unbelief, he states that magicians who engage in forms of magic possessing ontological reality and based on natural artifices are not to be considered unbelievers if they confess that the acts they perform consist merely of trickery and deception. His view on this matter should be evaluated not at the creedal level, but within the framework of *ḥadd* punishments, for such acts can be performed not only by magicians but also by other people. Accordingly, if they make such a confession, they are not judged with the ruling of unbelief; rather, the treatment applied to other people who engage in such acts is applied to them as well (al-Jaṣṣāṣ 1992, vol. 1, p. 64).
- ¹¹ A term used in the Islamic theological and legal literature for a heretic or for someone accused of concealing unbelief while outwardly professing Islam.
- ¹² For more detailed information on the narrations concerning Hārūt and Mārūt, see (Ibn Kathīr 1999, vol. 1, pp. 353–61; al-Suyūṭī 2011, vol. 1, pp. 238–55).
- ¹³ For further information on Hārūt and Mārūt in the *dīwān* literature, see also (Kardaş 2013, pp. 29–46; Aslan 2015, pp. 485–516).
- ¹⁴ For further information on Hārūt and Mārūt in the art of miniature painting, see also (And 2010, pp. 280, 284; Duran and Doğan 2024, pp. 135–53).
- ¹⁵ Similar reports concerning this view of al-Qurṭubī were also transmitted by al-Ṭabarī and Ibn Abī Ḥātim (d. 327/938). See also (al-Ṭabarī 2010, vol. 1, p. 665; Ibn Abī Ḥātim 2017, vol. 1, p. 355).
- ¹⁶ Studies maintaining that Hārūt and Mārūt were angels (Reeves 2015; Prakoso 2020; Turan 2024; Atoillah et al. 2025); Studies maintaining that Hārūt and Mārūt were not angels, or refraining from expressing a definite view (Bedir and Tunçbilek 2002; Fatiş 2013; Parlak 2014; Sarıkcıoğlu 2014; Aydın 2020; Burge 2021; Mustika 2023).

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