

## Chapter 1

# Neither of the East, nor of the West

Then He said to me: “Light is a veil and darkness is a veil. You’ll be aware of what is the most beneficial at the line between them. Follow this line closely—and if you arrive at the point in which it originates, make it disappear in the sunset prayer.”

—Ibn ‘Arabī<sup>1</sup>

The surah *al-Baqarah* attests that both *the East and the West belong to God. Wherever you turn is the face of God* (Qur’an 2:115). The Akbarian school of Islamic mysticism followed this ayah to the letter. Akbarians were well aware that God’s face sometimes takes a hideous form. However, they also maintained that ugly things can lead to beautiful outcomes.<sup>2</sup> Reprehensible forms of existence were seen among Akbarians as an opportunity for spiritual growth as well as a threat. A prominent supporter of the Akbarian school in Timurid Persia was even rumored to have said: “I turn away from God who doesn’t disclose Himself in a cat or dog!”<sup>3</sup> This book examines the face of God reflected in jinn doppelgangers. These cat-eyed jinn were said to prefer to disclose themselves in the form of a black dog.

### 1.1. Ibn ‘Arabī and the Marvels of Existence

The Akbarian school follows the teaching of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī. A member of the Tayy aristocracy, Ibn ‘Arabī was born

in Spain in 1165 AD. However, he spent half of his life traveling through the Middle East, and he died in Damascus in 1240 AD. For this reason, he was once compared to a blessed tree that is neither of the East nor of the West since it equally belongs to both.<sup>4</sup> Medieval scholars principally acknowledged Ibn ‘Arabī as a *muhaddith*, a specialist in the Islamic normative tradition. Later on, he was also recognized as a mystic and poet—and the greatest of all Muslim philosophers.<sup>5</sup> By his own account, he wrote over 250 works, 84 of which survive today. The significance of these works cannot be overstated. Such was the impact of his teachings that Takeshita divided the Islamic cultural history to the period before and after Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>6</sup> The major, divisive role he played in Islamic culture is attested by the vast body of polemical literature he inspired. To his followers, Ibn ‘Arabī was the Greatest Shaykh (*al-shaykh al-’akbar*), the Reviver of Faith (*muhyiddin*), and the Seal of Sainthood (*khatam al-wilāya*). In the eyes of his detractors, Ibn ‘Arabī was an infidel who neglected jihad so that he could battle with evil spirits and his soul instead.<sup>7</sup> Al-Sīnūbī said: “His school of thought (*madhhab*) is a great calamity. Believers, hold fast to Sharia so that you avoid being misled . . . The author of *Fuṣūṣ* [i.e. Ibn ‘Arabī] was one of the greatest scholars and the leader among shaykhs at first. Then, towards the end of his life, he became the leader of infidels like the Devil himself, who was first the leader and the first among angels and then became the first among infidels.”<sup>8</sup>

The enmity towards Ibn ‘Arabī among the early modern scholars tends to be associated with Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 1328) rising influence in Syria and Egypt. In spite of the fact that the orthodoxy of Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings had been questioned before Ibn Taymiyya’s time, Ibn Taymiyya’s refutations still played a major role in shifting the public opinion against Ibn ‘Arabī.<sup>9</sup> On his side, Ibn Taymiyya was convinced that Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings opposed the basic principles of Islam. He furthermore accused Ibn ‘Arabī of seeing God in every living being and every form of existence. Hinting that evil, ugliness, and imperfection were also God—and of God—such claims were unacceptable for Ibn Taymiyya. In contrast, Ibn ‘Arabī maintained that the world of nature is imbued with the Divine presence. His teachings were chiefly based on a *ḥadīth qudsī*, which reads: “I was a hidden treasure and I loved to

be known. Hence, I created the world to make Myself known.”<sup>10</sup> Whereas most medieval jurists agreed that the *ḥadīth qudsī* has a dubious chain of transmissions, Ibn ‘Arabī claimed he received the assurance of its soundness by the means of revelation (*kashf*).<sup>11</sup> He found further support to his teachings in the surah *Fuṣṣilat*: *We will show them Our signs on the horizons and within themselves until it becomes clear to them what is true* (Q 41:53). The joint authority of the Qur’an, *sunnah*, and Ibn ‘Arabī’s mystical insights thus led him to the conclusion that the Divine is always imminent within the mundane.

He created us only to worship Him and to know Him. If we gaze, it is upon Him; if we hear, it is from Him; if we use our intelligence, it is towards Him; if we reflect, it is upon Him; if we know, it is Him; if we have faith, it is in Him. For it is He who is revealed in every face, sought in every sign, gazed upon by every eye, worshipped in every object of worship and pursued in the invisible and the visible.<sup>12</sup>

To marvel at God’s creation was seen as an act of piety in medieval Islam. This is to be attributed to the fact that the Qur’an instructs believers to *observe carefully all that is in the heavens and on earth* (Q 10:101). Hence, al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) maintained that the best way to gain knowledge of God is by observing the things He created and by contemplating the wonders (*‘ajā’ib*) of His works.<sup>13</sup> Wonders and the state of wonder were identified as the roots of philosophical inquiries by Plato and Aristotle.<sup>14</sup> Descartes noted that wonder is the first of passions. Its roots are novelty and ignorance. Like Descartes, al-Qazwīnī (d. 1283) pointed out that humans tend to lose the ability to wonder as they grow older and accumulate knowledge and experience. Al-Qazwīnī furthermore observed that the perfect symmetry of a beehive will in most cases prove to be insufficient to arouse a genuine interest in natural philosophy. The wonders of nature are more likely to inspire religious devotion. This is especially the case with fantastic beasts and strange plants which, according to al-Qazwīnī, can always induce the tongue to sing praises of God.<sup>15</sup> Comparable teachings could also be found

among scholastics. For example, Thomas of Chobham (d. 1236) taught that the world was created to serve as a book of lessons to mankind. “There is no creature,” Chobham recorded, “which may not preach that the God who created it is powerful and that the God who gave it its order and form is wise and that the God who conserves it in being is merciful. And—speaking in a wider sense—there is no creature in which we may not contemplate some property belonging to it which may lead us to imitate God or some property which may move us to flee from the Devil.”<sup>16</sup> The quoted excerpt from Chobham’s *Summæ arte prædicandi* evokes al-Jāhīz’s (d. 868) definition of zoology. Al-Jāhīz defined zoology as a branch of religious studies, whose goal is to demonstrate the existence of God by focusing on the wisdom inherent in His creation.<sup>17</sup> Like Ibn ‘Arabī, he taught that the world was created in such a way that even the movement patterns of worms in the ground can point a way to God.<sup>18</sup> He nevertheless advised his students against limiting their spiritual practices to witnessing the marvels of nature. Ibn ‘Arabī identified two major risks with this approach. The first risk is the result of the great diversity and vastness of the world of nature. Ibn ‘Arabī feared this plenitude could distract a Seeker, causing them to lose sight of their primary objectives.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, he held the beauty of nature in high regard. The Islamic normative tradition speaks of the Beautiful God—and Ibn ‘Arabī believed that some of His beauty is reflected in the world He created. “Whoever loves God for His beauty, which is nothing other than the beauty which can be contemplated in the universe, [let him remember that] God gave it existence in accordance with His own form, so that in this same way, he who loves the world for its beauty loves God alone, since Divine reality has no place of transcendence and manifestation except the cosmos.”<sup>20</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī referred to the Islamic normative tradition to underline that God is beautiful, merciful, and kind. However, He was also described as the Deceiver (*al-Mākir*), the One who Leads Astray (*al-Mudhill*). These Names are also embodied in the world He created. The possibility of encountering embodiments of these Names was identified as the second, greater risk with seeking God among the marvels of existence. For Ibn ‘Arabī believed there are species in the universe which seek to obstruct a Seeker from reaching unity with the Divine.<sup>21</sup> One of these species are jinn.

## 1.2. *Hic sunt dracones!* Jinn Studies—the State of Field

Jinn were regularly featured in zoological compendiums and travel literature (*'adab al-rihlāt*) as of the ninth century AD. Al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) even claimed to have found records of the jinn folk in the works of Aristotle and Mani.<sup>22</sup> However, this is likely to be attributed to the faulty translations he read. The earliest examples of jinn narratives had been transmitted among Bedouins before the onset of Islam. These were the tales of poetic contests, wondrous encounters, and monsters lurking at the frontiers of society, at the far edge of the world. Throughout the centuries, Bedouins of the old Arabia have feared the power of jinn to mislead and enrapture. With the rise of Islam, old legends have changed in tone and content. Nevertheless, jinn narratives continue to challenge the common notions of what is spirit, animal, miraculous, and mundane. In this regard, jinn are the epitome of Park's definition of marvels of nature. Marvels, Park noted, share a common tendency to cluster at the margins of the known world. Jinn fulfill this criterion. As al-Mas'ūdī (d. 956) explained: "Many people believe that *nasnās* [a subspecies of one-legged jinn] live in China and other distant kingdoms. Whereas some people say that *nasnās* can be found in the East, others claim that they can be found in the West. People of the East claim that *nasnās* live in the West and the people of the West claim that they live in the East. Every nation speaks of the existence of jinn in countries far distant from their own."<sup>23</sup>

Invisible and incorporeal, jinn inhabit the visible, material world. Their natural habitat was thought to be the direct outcome of Divine retribution. God, the All-Merciful, was not particularly merciful towards jinn. Having grown tired of their sins, He first had them exiled to the most isolated corners of Earth. Later on, jinn were also found to be guilty of eavesdropping at heaven's door and recounting Divine secrets to humans. As a punishment, God confined jinn to the world of gross matter.<sup>24</sup> Jinn are, however, closer in nature to the spiritual World of Malakūt (*'alām al-malakūt*) and the World of Jabarūt (*'alām al-jabarūt*). Ibn 'Arabī thus had them described as strangers to the world of nature.<sup>25</sup> The material world was referred to in Ibn 'Arabī's works as the East, the place of the rising Sun. Contrasting the East, the West stands for all that is hidden and unseen (*al-ghayb*). Ibn 'Arabī's perception

of the East and the West corresponds to the Qur'anic notions of *zāhir* and *bāṭin*. Having analyzed the etymology of these terms, Lory pointed out that whereas the term *zāhir* refers to *zahr* (the human back), the term *bāṭin* is etymologically linked to the word *baṭn* (belly). Lory cautioned that the visible, apparent aspect of human lives is actually "the backside of reality, the less interesting part of it. The 'belly' of reality, the organism that gives life to it, is hidden from perception and common sense."<sup>26</sup> The invisible jinn were described in Ibn 'Arabī's works as the creatures of *barzakh*. Ibn 'Arabī used this term as a synonym for the intermediate World of Jabarūt. However, the term *barzakh* could also stand for the borderlines between black and white, life and death, positive and negative, known and the Unknown. In other words, *barzakh* is a border between two extremes, where their seemingly irreconcilable attributes are balanced out and combined with one another. Neither of the East, nor of the West, jinn populate borders between shade and sunlight.<sup>27</sup> A successful contribution to jinn studies can thus be seen as an act of exploring (and breaching) boundaries. As Nathan explains:

If religion builds groups, participates in the foundation of social spaces and contributes to the intelligence of those who are weak and destitute, the world of jinn engages those who venture into the exploration of margins, of the reverse side, of the lines of lines. Religion establishes order; the world of the jinn recovers those excluded from this order, heals them, and reintegrates them into the world. If religion builds the walls, the world of jinn digs cracks in them, constantly explores the faults, enlarges the cavities and proposes ways of settling in permanently.<sup>28</sup>

Jinns' ambiguous nature matches Park's second main criterion for determining what constitutes marvels of nature. Apart from their tendency to nest at the frontiers of society, "they [also] constitute a distinct ontological category, the preternatural, suspended between the mundane and the miraculous."<sup>29</sup> The third, additional criterion was brought forth by Bynum, who argued that the very function of wonders is predicated upon an uncanny reality as one "can only marvel at something that is, at least in some sense,

there.”<sup>30</sup> On his side, Ibn ‘Arabī was adamant that jinn exist. He also believed that people who have no knowledge of the Unseen will come to an evil end. That said, throughout the centuries, there were several notable attempts to challenge the existence of jinn. For instance, al-Jāḥiẓ believed that jinn narratives reflect Bedouins’ fear of deserts (*bilād al-waḥsh*), solitude (*‘infirād*), and isolation from their fellow men (*bu‘d min al-‘ins*). In wilderness, consumed with fear of the unknown, a Bedouin’s imagination would play tricks on him, causing him to hear the whispers of jinn:

Young people grow up with these ideas and children become familiar with them through the course of the upbringing. Once a man finds himself alone in the middle of night, in the middle of vast deserts, he would remember these stories. If he is of a lying sort and likes to boast, he could even write poems about the experience. He would say: “I saw a ghoul.” Or: “I talked to a *si‘lāh*.” Later on, he would say: “. . . and I had it killed!” He could then take things further by saying: “I befriended it.” Going even further, one could say: “Actually, I married a jinni” [. . . However, only Bedouins and the uneducated indulge themselves with such poems and tales.<sup>31</sup>

Al-Jāḥiẓ maintained that most jinn sightings can be dismissed as fabrications or delusions of the feeble-minded. Notable attempts to provide a rational explanation for jinn encounters were also conducted by Ibn Qutaybah (d. 889) and Ibn Rushd (d. 1198).<sup>32</sup> These attempts mostly fell on deaf ears. Convincing the world that he does not exist was said to be the greatest ruse of the Devil in Christianity. In contrast, jinn were thought to be prone to afflicting humans who doubted their existence with madness, sometimes killing them in retribution.<sup>33</sup> It goes without saying that the wrath of the jinn folk would not be a major impediment to skeptics questioning their existence. Their main cause for concern was the fear of being accused of idolatry. For instance, Ibn Ḥazm (d. 1064) proclaimed: “The one who denies the existence of jinn or comes up with interpretations denying them a place in the external world is a disbelieving polytheist (*kāfir mushrik*), whose blood and wealth can be lawfully claimed (*ḥalāl al-dam wal-māl*).”<sup>34</sup> Ibn Ḥazm’s stand

was based on the fact that the Islamic normative tradition affirms the existence of jinn. To question their existence would thus mean challenging the authority of the Qur'an and *sunnah*. Throughout the centuries, few skeptics had the courage to do so. As a result, as early as the seventh century AD, jinn became an integral part of the Islamic worldview.<sup>35</sup>

The natural habitat, social structures, and anatomy of the jinn folk have been discussed within a great variety of scientific disciplines. From the Balkan Peninsula to Zanzibar and Indonesia, theologians, jurisprudents (*fuqahā'*), historians, philosophers, and zoologists have contributed to jinn studies. As of the nineteenth century, jinn were diligently studied with regard to folk medicine and popular religion. Zwemer, Meier, and Hadromi-Allouche subsequently expanded these studies by examining how jinn were described in Islamic orthodoxy and in classical literature. However, al-Zain dismissed most studies on the topic as unsophisticated and naïve, describing one of them as "simply quotation upon quotation of Qur'anic verses and prophetic tradition, hadith that mention jinn and demons without any interpretation or analysis whatsoever."<sup>36</sup> Contemporary Arab and Muslim studies, al-Zain maintained, expand on works of their predecessors—but rarely innovate.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, the Islamic normative tradition also served as the foundation of al-Zain's works on jinn. This was unavoidable in the light of the fact that the Qur'an and *sunnah* are the primary sources in Islamic studies—to the point where some scholars argued that it would be improper to ponder about jinn beyond what Allah and His Messenger have informed us of them.<sup>38</sup> Medieval and early modern works on jinnealogy<sup>39</sup> thus rarely ventured beyond the Islamic normative tradition. Contemporary scholarly inquiries are often hindered by a general discomfort of researchers when dealing with the topic. "Jinn are perceived by Westerners as both slippery and pagan or superstitious," Badeen and Krawietz observed.<sup>40</sup> *Kitāb 'ākām al-marjān*, the earliest surviving work on jinnealogy by Badr al-Dīn al-Shiblī (d. 1367), thus was dismissed by Zwemer as "a door to a world of grovelling superstition and demonolatri."<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Nawfal noted, Muslim scholars find jinn fascinating but repugnant. Nawfal believed this is to be attributed to the fact that humans associate jinn with hell, suffering, and torment.<sup>42</sup> The fact that classical works on jinnealogy are yet to be



tracked down, cataloged, and placed in context was identified by Schöller as the main reason for the general lack of progress in jinn studies.<sup>43</sup> Whereas jinn have received little scholarly attention, they play a fairly important role in the daily lives of Muslims. Padwick, however, noted that people still tend to speak of jinn by allusions so as not to draw their attention.<sup>44</sup> It was always easier to ignore jinn than to tackle them directly.

### 1.3. Jinn Narratives and the Scope of the Present Study

This book was originally envisioned as an in-depth study of the widespread notions of jinn in Muslim cultures and societies. However, all too soon it became clear that no book could provide a comprehensive overview of jinn narratives. The sheer volume of written sources makes this task impossible.<sup>45</sup> We therefore decided to limit our research to jinn doppelgangers (*qarīn*, pl. *quranāʾ*). “Among all the superstitions in Islam, there is none more curious in its origin and character than the belief in the *Qarin* or *Qarina*,” reads the opening sentence of Zwemer’s research paper “The Familiar Spirit or *Qarina*.”<sup>46</sup> Zwemer’s pioneering research on jinn doppelgangers begins with a cursory overview of the relevant hadith and ayahs. This was intended as a general introduction for his study on Egyptian folklore. Zwemer published his findings in 1919. A handful of studies have been published on the topic since, with each of them focusing on oral traditions.<sup>47</sup> Having compared the notions of jinn in oral and written traditions, Nünlist concluded that no separate demonology evolved in folk religion.<sup>48</sup> Whereas this is the case with most subspecies of jinn, Nünlist’s observation is factually incorrect with regard to *quranāʾ*.

In the Islamic normative tradition and in writings of the elite, a *qarīn* was generally understood to be a jinni companion and a doppelganger of human beings. Each *qarīn* was thought to be conceived at the same time as its human. When a child is born, a *qarīn* enters its heart, “the way air fills an empty bowl.”<sup>49</sup> A *qarīn* will whisper to the child from then on, tempting it to indulge in its passions and to follow its whims. But if a human—in spite of the *qarīn*’s efforts—proves to be pious, honorable, and just, their *qarīn* will convert to Islam and guide them through the mysteries

of life. An evil jinni thus becomes the follower of a noble imam. Possible antecedents and origins of these beliefs are a matter of debate among scholars. For instance, Fahd, Hoyland, Nasser, Basharin, and Gallorini maintained that the belief in doppelgangers was widespread in pre-Islamic Arabia. Gallorini furthermore argued that the pre-Islamic legends of quranā' have served as a direct inspiration for the Islamic notions of angels and jinn.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, van Vloten surmised that the belief in quranā' postdates the rise of Islam. Van Vloten believed that the Prophet came up with the stories of wicked doppelgangers as a part of his efforts to curb the social influence of seers.<sup>51</sup> Seers and poets of old Arabia have been suspected of keeping close and friendly relations with the jinn folk. Zādih (d. 1495) noted that "divination is the way human souls communicate with the souls of jinn."<sup>52</sup> The Prophet argued it would be pointless to honor a seer for the accuracy of their predictions since they rely on jinn for help: "Every word they say which happens to be true is what a jinni stealthily snatched [from heavens] and poured into the ears of his friend. A seer then mixes that word with one hundred lies" (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* #7561). It is, however, doubtful whether the ethereal companions of Bedouin seers can be universally identified with quranā'. For instance, Wellhausen argued that, before the onset of Islam, the common people were not generally presumed to have a jinni companion. It was only through subsequent generalizations that people were led to believe that each person has a qarīn of their own.<sup>53</sup> Zwemer's work on doppelgangers proposed two alternative theories explaining the origins of the notions of qarīn in writings of the elite. His first theory argued that the belief in quranā' was inspired by the animistic religions of pre-Islamic Arabia and Egypt.<sup>54</sup> This theory was likely based on Smith's disputed work on the Bedouin animistic cults. Since jinn prefer to disclose themselves in animal form, Smith argued that the jinn folk can be identified as an animal species, each of which was worshipped by a certain tribe. For instance, quranā' were known for their tendency to appear in the form of a black dog.<sup>55</sup> Henninger and Westermarck later demonstrated that Smith's theory is inconclusive. As a result, Zwemer's first theory received little scholarly attention.<sup>56</sup> His second theory had a greater impact in the field. This theory argued that the antecedents of the belief in quranā' can be found in *Pert Em Heru, The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, and in the ancient Egyptian belief in *ka* doubles.

On the authority of Budge, Zwemer identified *ka* as “an abstract individuality or personality [of a man, which is] endowed with all his characteristic attributes.”<sup>57</sup> Among the prominent supporters of this theory were Hornblower, Blackman, Ridgeway, and al-Shamy. These four scholars argued that the belief in *ka* doubles still exists in Egypt as a variant of the belief in *quranā*<sup>3</sup>. Al-Shamy linked the Islamic concept of a *qarīn* being born at the same time as its human to the ancient Egyptian reliefs depicting the god Khnum modeling a royal child and its *ka* simultaneously, so that the two could be born together.<sup>58</sup> Al-Safi’s field research offered further evidence that *ka* and *qarīn* are indistinguishable in folk religion.<sup>59</sup> However, this cannot be taken as a definitive proof that the prophet Muhammad was familiar with the ancient Egyptian religion. For, as Meier pointed out, comparable beliefs in companion spirits can also be found in Mazdeism, Manicheism, and in the works of Plato, Plutarch, and Virgil, each of whom might have been an (in)direct source of inspiration for the Prophet.<sup>60</sup> Whereas the existence of *jinn* was almost universally acknowledged in Islamic culture, the belief in *doppelgangers* met with firmer opposition. For instance, al-Suyūṭī (d. 1505) argued it would be impossible for a *jinni* to enter the human heart. His reasoning was based on the fact that the spiritual substances *jinn* are made of cannot be mixed with coarse human bodies:

Physicians maintain that nothing can enter a human being, by which is meant all the inhabitants of the earth. He replied: “That is a mere babble, for the Prophet has said: ‘Verily the Devil runs within a human being just as his blood runs within him.’” But I, the author of this work, maintain that the bodies of *jinn*s are subtle bodies and that it is impossible for the humors of *jinn*s to mix with human souls in the manner that blood and phlegm mix in human bodies with all their impurities.<sup>61</sup>

Here it ought to be taken into consideration that al-Suyūṭī did not doubt the existence of *jinn*. This is evident from his *Laqṭ al-marjān fī ’aḥkām al-jānn*, which was envisioned as a comprehensive study on the *jinn* folk. Al-Suyūṭī’s skepticism was only reserved for *quranā*<sup>3</sup>. Somehow, al-Suyūṭī found it easier to study (and oppose) monsters lurking at the frontiers of society than to face the devil

within the human heart. Most scholars, however, relied on the authority of hadith to affirm the existence of quranā'. For instance, a sound hadith informs us that the Prophet taught that each of his followers "has a qarīn from among the jinn."<sup>62</sup> Another well-cited hadith reads: "the Devil runs in the blood-stream of Adam's descendants" (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim* #1188). The Qur'anic revelation also contains several references to quranā', e.g. that God will assign evil companions (quranā') to those who are forgetful of their Lord (Q 41:25, 43:36). "I had a companion (qarīn) on the Earth," says one of the inhabitants of the paradise in the surah *aṣ-Ṣāffāt*, "who used to say: 'Are you one of those who believe that we will be brought to judgement after we die and become dust and bones?' God will then ask if you'd care to see [his fate]—and lo and behold, one will see his qarīn in the midst of hellfire and say: 'By God, you almost had me ruined!'" (Q 37:51–56). Another ayah, however, implies that each person's qarīn will testify against them on the Judgment Day (Q 50:27). Surah *an-Nisā'* explicitly identifies quranā' as evil spirits: *He who takes a devil as his companion (qarīnan)—what an evil companion he has!* (Q 4:38). The belief in quranā' appears to have been widespread in the Arab Middle East as late as the twentieth century. Conducted in 1924, Padwick's field research indicates no jinn were as feared among the common folk as quranā'.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, jinn doppelgangers remain among the least studied subspecies of jinn. This is especially the case when written traditions are concerned.

Oral traditions have received more scholarly attention. Evil doppelgangers of the Islamic normative tradition were gradually transformed in folk imagination into the demoness Qarīna: succubus, seductress, and murderer of pregnant women and children. Whereas each doppelganger was thought to be conceived at the same time as its human, Palestinians believe that Qarīna is as old as the world. Canaan thought that the belief in Qarīna among the common folk was inspired by the tales of Lilith, the first wife of Adam. Like Lilith, Qarīna has been accused of causing miscarriages. She thus was known as the Puerperal Demoness.<sup>64</sup> Her other names are 'Umm al-Ṣibyān and Tābi'a.<sup>65</sup> Folktales typically describe Qarīna as an old woman, gray of hair, with fiery eyes and merged eyebrows. She would sometimes appear as a dark woman cradling a human figure in her arms.<sup>66</sup> When disclosing herself in animal form, Qarīna often resembles a cow (figure 1.1).

# تابعة / ام الصبيان

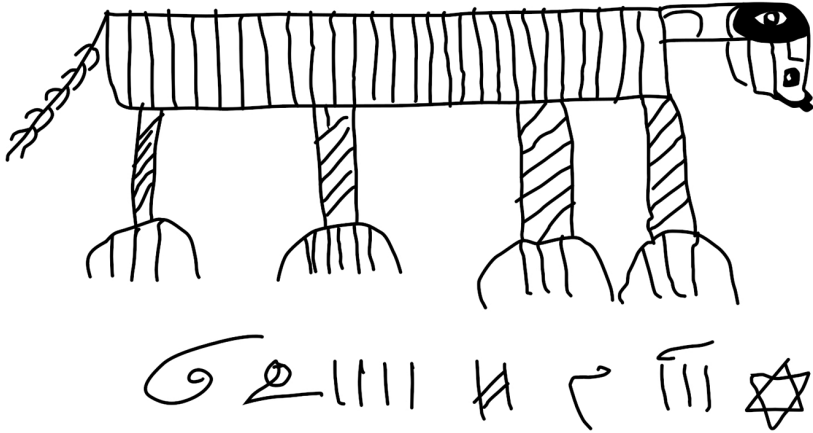


Figure 1.1. The animal form of the demoness Tābi‘a/‘Umm al-Šibyān. Drawing by the author based on ‘Abū Jāmūs, al-Qur‘ah al-kubrā (MS USJ 00277), ff. 38.

This is not to say that Qarīna was incapable of assuming a beautiful form when it suited her. Albeit evil, this demoness would sometimes fall in love with humans. She would then appear to her lovers as a beautiful woman. But if a man were to reject her advances, Qarīna would make him sterile. In Iraqi folklore, some men were even rumored to have been married to Qarīna. Strange dreams and nocturnal emissions were often attributed to the encounters with their demonic spouse.<sup>67</sup> It is doubtful whether Qarīna can be identified as a jinni: folk tales are inconclusive in this regard. Even so, the natural habitat and behavior of this demoness have little in common with jinn doppelgangers, as described in the Islamic normative tradition. The main difference between a qarīn and Qarīna is reflected in the fact that Qarīna’s cruelty is not reserved for a single person. Jinn are disgusted with menstrual blood which seems to attract Qarīna—which is another major difference between a qarīn and Qarīna.<sup>68</sup> Garbage heaps, hearths, thresholds, and latrines were all said to be Qarīna’s domain. In Egypt, there is belief that, past nightfall, Qarīna dwells in the body

of a cat (figure 1.2). Zwemer noted that, for this reason, neither Copts nor Muslims would dare to beat or injure a cat after dark.<sup>69</sup>

In contrast, a qarīn lives only in the bloodstream of humans. With the notable exceptions of Syrian and Dagestani folklore, folk traditions have mostly substituted a qarīn for Qarīna.<sup>70</sup> Discrepancies between the oral and written tradition led Winkler to dismiss written



Figure 1.2. 'Umm al-Šibyān assuming the form of a cat. Source: MS Or 506. David Eugene Smith Collection at RBML, Columbia. Used with permission.

sources on the topic as misinterpretations of the Qur'an. Winkler believed that the term *qarīn* in the Qur'an only meant to denote polytheists: mortal men who worshipped gods of old Arabia. He argued that all later-date accounts of jinn doppelgangers—including the *sunnah!*—can be rejected as “Yiddish,” foreign elements imported from Babylonia.<sup>71</sup> In his otherwise detailed overview of folktales, customs, and the rituals performed to keep familiar spirits in check, Winkler deliberately ignored doppelgangers so that he could focus on the demoness. The present study adopts the opposite approach: we decided to give precedence to jinn doppelgangers, written traditions, and Ibn ‘Arabī’s works in particular.

The role of jinn in Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings remains one of the least studied aspects of Akbarian Sufism until today. Although he was sympathetic to folk piety, Ibn ‘Arabī adhered to the Islamic normative tradition in his writings. Hence, he identified *qarīn* as a devil (*shayṭān*) within the blood and hearts of humans.<sup>72</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī wrote on jinn in substantial detail, documenting the character and behavior of this species. However, by his own admission, Ibn ‘Arabī was less interested in amassing curious tales than in interpreting them.

The story of ‘Amr al-Jinnī, God have mercy of him, is very famous. ‘Amr was killed by a whirlwind, he was seen in a whirlwind, he was scattered by it and left for dead. He died soon afterwards; only to be integrated as a worshipper among the jinn. If we were to write a book consisting of quoted reports and stories, we would have mentioned some of it—a glimpse perhaps! However, this book was intended for the understanding of meanings (*ma‘āna*). You should look in literary histories and in poetry for jinn stories instead.<sup>73</sup>

Even though Ibn ‘Arabī’s works contain information on social structures, anatomy, and culture of the jinn folk, these were not his main research interests with regard to *quranā*. Ibn ‘Arabī’s inquiries on doppelgangers mostly focused on the problem of evil, predestination, and the step-levels of spiritual elevation. These issues belong to the science of meanings (*‘ilm al-ma‘āna*), which builds and expands on the Islamic normative tradition in search of the

meanings of the Divine Names like *al-Mudhill*, the One Who Leads Astray. Jinn doppelgangers were seen as an embodiment of this Name in Akbarian Sufism.<sup>74</sup> The figure of an evil jinni tempter did not exist alone or in isolation in Ibn ‘Arabī’s writings. Throughout the centuries, whispers of *quranā’* have served as a common excuse for excessive behavior in Muslim cultures and societies. Jinn doppelgangers were regularly blamed for impure thoughts, dark impulses, and human sins in general. The reasoning behind these narratives was simple: assuming that doppelgangers are the true cause of the evil committed by humans would imply that humans are inherently good by nature. Human tendency for blame-shifting thus led to *quranā’* being used as scapegoats for personal shortcomings. Such was also the fate of other subspecies of jinn.

Seemingly uniform, jinn narratives are far from monolithic. With each of them being a product of its time and location, these narratives reflect the changing social, political, and cultural realities of Muslim societies. However, one could speak of a general tendency to use jinn as examples of immoral conduct. Natural habitat, taxonomy, and social structures of the jinn folk were of minor concern for ‘*ulamā’*. Religious scholars mostly relied on jinn stories to highlight what constitutes a socially (un)acceptable behavior. Similar tendencies can also be observed in popular culture. Grisly descriptions of jinn sightings in folklore and literature were chiefly intended as a control mechanism, with their purpose being to deter deviances from social and religious norms. Contrasting the scholastic notions of moral evil, jinn attacks were not generally perceived as a form of Divine retribution in Muslim cultures and societies.<sup>75</sup> Jinn were, however, said to be attracted by human vanity, envy, lust, and avarice. As a result, jinn narratives emphasize the necessity of (1) upholding a proper moral conduct and (2) adhering to certain religious practices which, when properly executed, would presumably keep jinn at bay. Believers were advised to be chaste, dress modestly, and eat only with their right hand, for whoever eats with their left hand, the Devil eats with them.<sup>76</sup> “Jābir reported that the Prophet said: ‘Do not visit women whose husbands are away from home, for the devil [i.e. *qarīn*] circulates in your blood.’ We asked whether this applies to him as well and he said: ‘To me as well, but God helped me against it and made me safe from harm.’” (*Mishkāt al-Maṣābīḥ* #3119).



By the late ninth and the early tenth century, jinn were strongly associated with sexual depravity, illicit magic, and idolatry. The fear of Otherness, anti-Semitism, and misogyny emerge as implicit biases in jinn narratives. For example, jinn were rumored to frequent synagogues, where they would inflict believers with a magnificent sense of self-importance and pride, causing them to be prone to loneliness and quick to anger.<sup>77</sup> Churches were also said to be their turf. From time to time, the church jinn would make Christians forget human speech and refuse all guidance.<sup>78</sup> However, their preferred method of corrupting believers was to rely on women. Capricious, vile, and vain, women were said to be close in nature to jinn. Like doppelgangers, women were closely associated with yearnings and corruption of the lower soul. They were thus seen as natural allies of the jinn who sought to orchestrate the demise of pious men.<sup>79</sup> Nevertheless, like Jews and Christians, jinn were allowed to hold properties in Muslims states and cities.<sup>80</sup> Jinn narratives can thus be read as meditations on the society's reception of its foreign Other. Whatever one's persona rejects in Islamic culture has been cast on qurana'. Apart from negative character traits, the fear of sickness, injuries, and forces of nature were also projected on jinn.<sup>81</sup> In folk narratives, jinn were typically described as mischief-makers and bogies. As such, they were also regularly blamed for damaged clothes, souring milk, and troubled marriages in general. These trends were satirized in *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity* (ar. *Rasā'il 'ikhwān al-safā*), where jinn jurists challenge human beings to bring forward a single person who has seen a jinni committing such deeds. One of these jurists said to the jinn king Bīwarāsp the Wise:

You must know, then, that there are good and bad jinn, both Muslims and unbelievers, some pure and some profligate, just as there are among humans. The better jinn show indescribable loyalty to their leaders and kings, far beyond anything known to mortals of Adamite race. They follow their kings as the stars in the heavens follow that greatest of luminaries, the Sun . . . . Another sign of how well the jinn obey their leaders is what certain humans have found in traversing waste and desert places: if one descends into a wadi where he

fears bewitchment by the jinn, and he hears their cries and clamor all about, he has but to call on their leaders and kings for protection and recite a verse or a word from the Qur'an, the Torah, or the Gospels, seeking in it protection from them and from any harm or hindrance wrought by them, and they will not disturb him as long as he remains in that place. So well do the jinn obey their chiefs that if some rebel jinni troubles an Adamite with madness, terror, confusion, or panic, and a human enchanter calls for help from the leader of that jinni's tribe, or from their king or his forces, they throng and rally around, doing just as they are commanded and forbidden with that person.

The nature and moral character of human beings are the opposite. Their obedience to their lords and monarchs is mostly hypocritical grasping for money, investments, prizes and rewards. Once they are denied what they've been looking for, they engage in open defiance and rebellion, they shed their outward allegiance and bring strife, war, bloodshed and destruction to the land. Their treatment of their prophets and apostles of their Lord is no different. They reject their calls, denying obvious truths and proofs, and demanding miracles of them out of sheer perversity . . . The vast majority of humans are rude and blind. Even worse, human beings aren't satisfied 'til they assert their claim, with no proof or argument whatsoever, that they are rulers and that all others are their slaves.<sup>82</sup>

For this reason, the jurists concluded, jinn fled the realms of men and ran into deserts and wastelands. But the children of Adam "sought them everywhere and tried to catch them with every magic trick, witchcraft and sorcery they knew."<sup>83</sup> Since the surah *Saba'* hints that God granted Solomon the ability to control jinn (Q 34:12–13), attempts to emulate Solomon's feats have mostly met with mild reprovals. Instructions on how to summon and enslave jinn commonly appear in Sufi literature and occult manuals. Ibn 'Arabī rejected these and similar practices on the grounds that Solomon asked God to grant him the power that is

befitting of him alone. God fulfilled his request by granting him the power over jinn. Although the prophet Muhammad was also said to have possessed this power, Ibn ‘Arabī maintained that the Prophet refrained from using it out of respect for Solomon.<sup>84</sup> The less courteous among Ibn ‘Arabī’s students were, however, warned that jinn cannot help them with their spiritual endeavors. Since God had them confined to the world of gross matter, jinn have no knowledge of Him. Hence, Ibn ‘Arabī argued that only the lowest of Seekers, with no other means at their disposal, would throw in their lot with jinn. In contrast, wise men avoid the company of these creatures. Were a jinni to approach a Seeker of its own volition, Ibn ‘Arabī advised to ignore it.<sup>85</sup> However, there is one species of jinn whose company cannot be avoided: a qarīn, the Devil Within. Like any other jinni, a qarīn has no knowledge of the Divine. Nevertheless, a Seeker can (in)directly benefit from their doppelganger by studying it.

#### 1.4. Jinn Studies—The Benefits of Knowledge

Jinn studies were not motivated by unbridled curiosity in the Akbarian school. As a general rule, the direct contact and interactions with jinn were condemned among Akbarians. The main reason behind their inquiries into quranā’ was a sense of self-preservation, for there was a general understanding among Sufis that most doppelgangers will seek to harm a Seeker if they can. Ibn ‘Arabī believed that ignorance, denial, and fear of the Unknown are the greatest weapons at their disposal. This is why a qarīn must be subdued with knowledge.<sup>86</sup> Today, it is generally assumed that the knowledge of doppelgangers falls under the scope of jinnealogy. Ibn ‘Arabī, however, maintained that only the uninitiated adhere to classifications of sciences. In contrast, People of God (*’ahl allah*) realize that all things are connected and cannot be studied apart from one another. Jinn studies are thus (also) concerned with knowledge of the Creator. This knowledge was identified by Ibn ‘Arabī as the source of all felicity. He furthermore argued that God created the universe “only so that the universe might get to know Him.”<sup>87</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī taught that true and useful knowledge always points a way to God. Jinn studies are not an exception in this regard. Whereas

most living beings have inherent knowledge of God, humans and jinn were created in a state of ignorance.<sup>88</sup> They were thus ordered to seek Him—with doppelgangers standing in their way. Jinn doppelgangers—and evil jinn in general—were commonly referred to in the Akbarian school and in the Islamic normative tradition as a veil (*hijāb*) between the Creator and the created. For instance, a sound hadith attests that flying jinn form a veil between God in heaven and humans. The same hadith reports that evil jinn hover in front of the eyes of humans, preventing them from witnessing marvels of heaven and earth. God-fearing jinn were also said to be their target.<sup>89</sup> Even so, Ibn ‘Arabī argued that contemplating a veil (jinn) can teach the veiled (humans) about the One who veils (God). “Some creatures are veils over other creatures. Even though veils are signifiers, they are signifiers by way of undifferentiation for the cosmos. In other words, the whole existence is nothing but a veil, the veiled and the One who veils.”<sup>90</sup>

Among other things, jinn doppelgangers signify that the knowledge of God is inexhaustible.<sup>91</sup> Each Seeker, no matter how advanced, will always find new issues to contemplate with regard to Him. The reason why He created quranā’ is one such issue. Both Akbarians and the ‘*ulamā*’ assumed that God is omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent. Ibn ‘Arabī furthermore claimed that God is first and foremost kind. But although it is in His power to end all suffering, He assigned evil jinn to torture humans and lead them to sin. However, the fact that innocents suffer does not mean that God is unjust—Ibn ‘Arabī made this clear.<sup>92</sup> Seekers were, however, advised to verify Ibn ‘Arabī’s teachings for themselves, rather than taking his word for granted. In other words, one ought to study quranā’ to verify that God is merciful and just. To achieve this feat, a Seeker must comprehend the meaning of the Divine Name *al-Mudhill* and come to terms with its embodiments. Apart from doppelgangers, evil humans, the lower soul, and Iblis the Devil were identified as the main embodiments of this Name.<sup>93</sup> They all exist because God wants them to exist. Ibn ‘Arabī’s reasoning as to why jinn were created also mirrors his attempts to expound on the problem of evil in Islam.

Not only did Ibn ‘Arabī try to make sense of evil—but he also went on to show how humans, jinn, and even the Devil himself might be saved from it. No other Seeker, Ibn ‘Arabī boasted, has