Type: Book Chapter

Illustrations

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Illustrations

SECTION 7

Papyrus Leiden I 384. A lion couch scene with the name Abraham directly beneath it. The instructions to the text say to "[write these] words together with this picture," indicating that the Egyptians thought the two were associated.

Mural from the Dura Europos synagogue depicting Abraham with the sun and moon. Some have interpreted this scene as Abraham turning his back on the heavenly bodies. In some of the extracts in this book, Abraham rejects astronomy, while in others, he teaches it to the Egyptians and the Phoenicians. In the Book of Abraham, God teaches the patriarch about the universe so that Abraham in turn can teach the same to the Egyptians.

From a 1741 Passover prayer book (Haggadah) produced in Germany. This illustration depicts Abraham destroying the town's idols, which have been made by his father, Terah. In the background townspeople worship at a smoldering altar. Many of the Muslim extrabiblical traditions tell the story thus: When Abraham's people went out to celebrate a festival to their gods, Abraham stayed behind and destroyed the idols in their temple. In the Jewish stories, Abraham destroys the idols that his father keeps. In both cases, when questioned, Abraham explains that the idols have quarreled and destroyed each other.

From a fourteenth-century Hebrew prayer book, the Catalán Haggadah, this scene depicts Abraham being saved from the fiery furnace by an angel. Nimrod watches from his throne. The extrabiblical traditions explain that Abraham was cast into the fire because he would not worship idols; in the Book of Abraham, the patriarch is almost sacrificed on an altar for the same reason.

This illustration is a seventeenth-century copy of an illumination from the Cotton Genesis, a late fifth-century Greek manuscript. In it, God extends his right hand to bless Abraham and instruct him to go to Haran. In the Bible, Abraham leaves for Haran with his father, while in the Book of Abraham, Abraham leaves and Terah later follows him. The extrabiblical traditions are somewhat divided on this point as well. In some, Abraham leaves without his father, and in others, they go together.

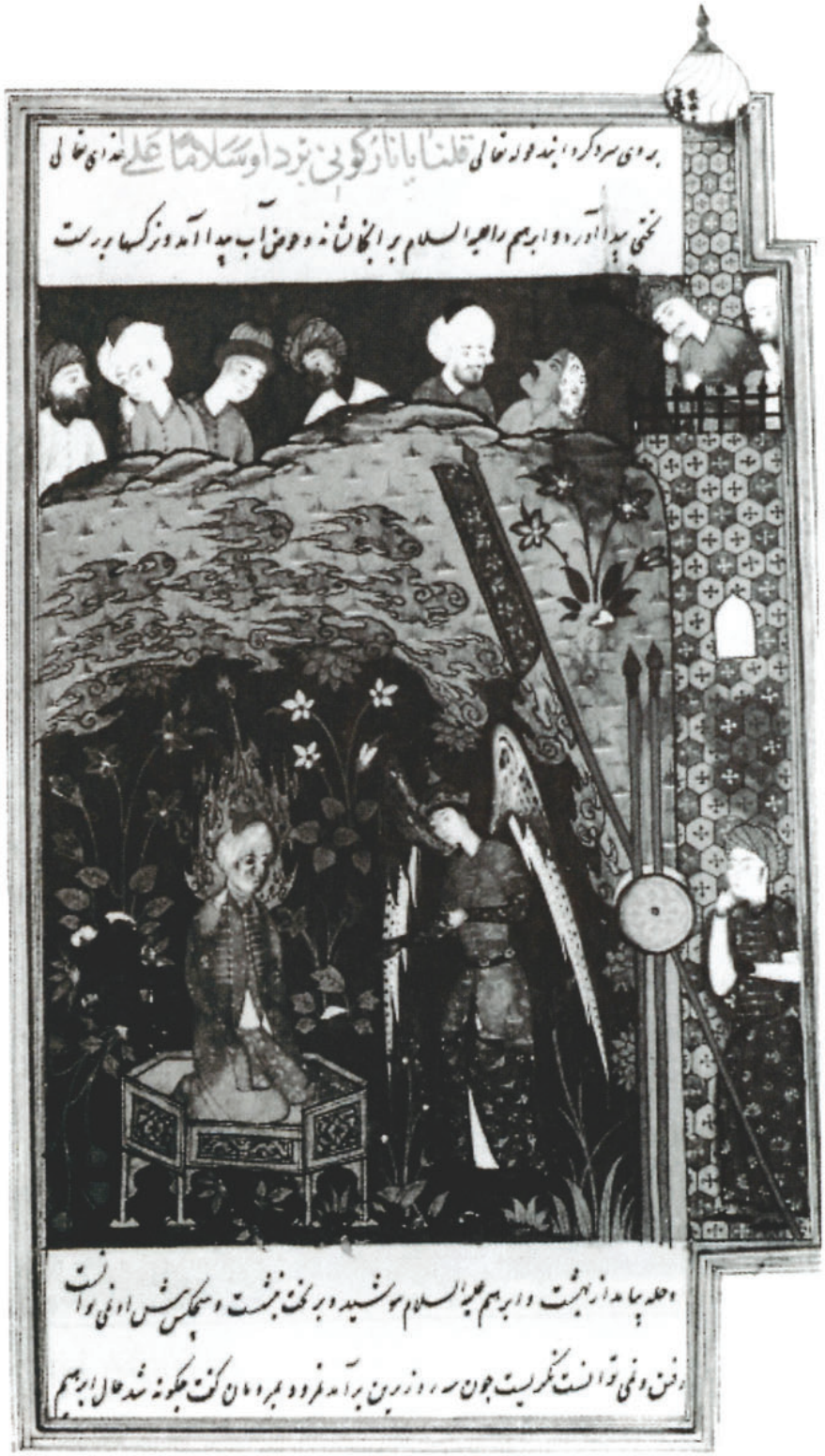
Sculpture of Abraham at the twelfth- to thirteenth-century Cathedral of Notre Dame at Chartres, north portal, central bay. The sculpture is of the Akedah, the sacrifice of Isaac, but Abraham's stance, with face lifted reverently toward the heavens, is representative of his entire life: he was a prophet who literally spoke with God. Abraham's relationship with God is borne out in the Bible, in the Book of Abraham, and in extrabiblical tradition.

In this Persian miniature (probably influenced by Buddhist iconography), Abraham sits tranquilly in the flames, which have turned to leaves and flowers around him. The serenity of his posture and gaze is reminiscent of a statement he makes in one Muslim tradition that "those seven days in the midst of the fire were the finest of my life" (p. 461). At the right, the devil and Nimrod look on in astonishment. The upper portion of the painting depicts the sacrifice of Ishmael.

Kai Kāʾūs and his flying machine. The national epic of Iran, the Shanameh (written in the tenth century), tells of Kai Kāʾūs, a king of Iran who built a flying machine in order to subdue the heavens to his will. In several of the Muslim traditions about Abraham, Nimrod has the same machine built—with four eagles to bear him aloft—in order to fly to heaven and kill Abraham's God.

This miniature, from a late sixteenth-century Ottoman Turkish manuscript, portrays Abraham in an attitude of prayer. He has been catapulted into a raging fire that has been miraculously transformed into a verdant garden. Nimrod (at the top right with a feather in his turban) watches from a tower. The servants who worked the catapult also watch in amazement. Ibn Bishr, along with many other Muslim writers, notes that God first makes the fire cold, and then "[builds] from the cold around [Abraham] a green garden" (p. 323).

This early seventeenth-century Shiraz Persian miniature depicts Abraham sitting on a prayer rug after having been catapulted into the fire which has been transformed into a garden. Nimrod (at the top left with a feather in his turban) and his servants watch from a tower. In Muslim traditions, Gabriel brings a prayer rug or carpet from paradise; according to al-Rabghūzī, Abraham sits on the rug, and the "the fire burn[s] away Abraham's fetters. Then Abraham [stands] up to perform ritual prayer on the rug" (p. 444).



Another sixteenth-century Persian miniature with Abraham on a throne platform, sitting in the midst of a fire that has been turned into a garden. In this depiction, Abraham sits quietly, hands in his lap, apparently conversing with an angel. In Ibn al-Athīr's history, "God sent the angel of shade in the form of Ibrāhīm to sit in the fire next to [Ibrāhīm] to keep him company" (p. 425).

This Persian miniature also shows Abraham in the fire, on a throne platform with the angel Gabriel at his side. Abraham has his hands raised in supplication toward heaven while Gabriel is reaching toward the patriarch. This scene depicts the oft-repeated Muslim tradition of a conversation that takes place between Abraham and Gabriel. After Abraham is catapulted into the fire, Gabriel meets him and asks, "O Ibrāhīm, are you in need?" Abraham answers, "From you, no! . . . God can protect me, for He is an excellent Trustee" (Al-Thaʿlabī, p. 365) God then turns the fire into a paradisiacal garden.