It was [also] said that the reason why Iblīs perished was that before Adam, the jinn were on earth. God sent Iblīs to act among them as judge (qāḍī). He did so with fairness (bi-l-ḥaqq) for a thousand years, so that he eventually was called “arbiter” (ḥakam). God called him thus and revealed to him his name. At that, he became filled with haughtiness. He became self-important and caused terror, hostility, and hatred among those to whom God had sent him as arbiter. This is assumed to have caused them to fight so bitterly on earth for two thousand years that their horses waded in the blood of [those killed].1

The imagery of Muslim eschatology has long been neglected by historians, who regarded it as folkloric and without historical significance. Scholars have recently begun to take a renewed interest in eschatological thought. The Muslim conception of the hereafter is now better understood thanks to Christian Lange’s study of punishment in the Muslim imagination. In describing the map of hell, its creatures and the tortures they inflicted to the condemned,2 Lange followed the footsteps of major contributions to the history of Occidental representations, such as Le Goff’s original history of the Purgatory in the 1980s.3 Le Goff argued that the imagery of the afterlife was closely linked to terrestrial judicial realities. “The other world was supposed to correct the inequalities and injustices of this one.”4 Similarly, Lange highlights the importance of high-ranking Muslims, whether they be religious scholars or rulers, who appear in the eschatological ḥadīth related to hell. The interpreta-
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The question of such traditions, however, is problematic. Lange suggests that traditions promising punishment of unjust rulers in the hereafter can be interpreted as encouraging an attitude of political quietism in this world. On the other hand, he also shows that eschatological traditions express anger and resentment against the state apparatus, and that they potentially embody criticisms against the social and political status quo.5 I have elsewhere argued that traditions describing qāḍīs in hell were put into circulation by traditionalists insisting on the personal responsibility of judges, and that they had to be interpreted within the framework of a broader discourse that highlighted the necessity of judicial independence of qāḍīs.6

Literature depicting qāḍīs in the afterlife is of particular interest, for they represent one of the main categories of officials described as appearing before God on Judgment Day. In a striking reversal of fortune, the earthly judge becomes the defendant before the supreme Judge. In this paper, I will mainly draw on biographical dictionaries and chronicles referring to Muslim courts of the ninth and tenth centuries CE to cast a question on the social use of this image. Whereas Le Goff argues that justice in the hereafter largely mirrors the model of earthly justice,7 I shall attempt to show that the representation of God’s justice was in fact used as a religious expedient to reform the behavior of the judiciary and of the judicial organization. My argument is that allusions to eschatological indictments of Muslim judges went beyond literary and theoretical dimensions; they also had direct impact on judicial practices. Incessant reminder of how judges will themselves be judged on Judgment Day played an important role in the shaping and re-shaping of Islamic courtrooms.

1 Introductory Remarks: Courtrooms as Gateways to Hell

Since early Islam, Muslim jurists regarded courts as more than just a place where earthly disputes were resolved. They were places where the spiritual destiny of people appearing before the qāḍī was also at stake. According to certain jurists, litigants should not comply with wrongfully entered verdicts by a judge. For example, if a divorced woman failed to prove her case against her husband and the qāḍī judged that she was still married to the man who had divorced her, the husband would be committing fornication (zīnā) if he continued

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5 Lange, Justice, 161.
7 Le Goff, La naissance du Purgatoire, 297–98.