



**SEEING ANGELS (*RU'YAT AL-MALĀ'IKAT*) FOR NON-PROPHETS:
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS OF *KASHF* AND
KARĀMAH IN THE THOUGHT OF IBN HAJAR AL- HAITAMI AND
AL-GHAZĀLĪ**

**Ali Yusuf Muzaki¹, Muhammad Fatkhun Niam², Muhammad Syafiq³, Agus Salim⁴,
Muh. Fatihuddin⁵ Nur Hanan⁶**

^{1,2,3,4,5}Ma'had Aly Hasyim Asy'ari Tebuireng Jombang, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

⁶ UIN Sunan Ampel Surabaya, Jawa Timur, Indonesia

Email: ditaleni93@gmail.com¹, Fatkhunniamtbi@gmail.com²,

msyafiiq2276@gmail.com³, 01salim1308@gmail.com⁴, goesbreng04@gmail.com⁵,

nurhannan78@gmail.com⁶

Abstract: This study examines the discourse on the possibility of seeing angels by non-prophets from the perspectives of hadith and Islamic theology, focusing on the views of Ibn Hajar al-Haitami in *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* and its comparison with al-Ghazali in *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. The background of this research is grounded in the emergence of various spiritual experience claims within society that require scholarly clarification based on the Islamic intellectual tradition. This research is a library study employing a descriptive-comparative approach. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources and analyzed through stages of description, comparison, and interpretation. The findings indicate that Ibn Hajar al-Haitami and al-Ghazali both affirm that seeing angels by non-prophets is possible (*mumkin*) and falls within the category of saintly miracles (*karāmah*). However, they differ in their approaches: Ibn Hajar emphasizes the aspect of divine will within a hadith-theological framework, whereas al-Ghazali highlights inner spiritual purification through the concept of *kashf* within a Sufi paradigm. This study concludes that such phenomena do not contradict Islamic theology as long as they are understood within proper theological boundaries, and it provides a scholarly framework for addressing spiritual claims in society.

Keywords: Seeing Angels, Ibn Hajar al-Haitami, al-Ghazali, Hadith, *Karāmah*; *Kashf*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji wacana tentang kemungkinan melihat malaikat (*ru'yat al-malā'ikah*) oleh selain nabi dari perspektif hadis dan teologi Islam, dengan menitikberatkan pada pandangan Ibn Hajar al-Haitami dalam *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* serta membandingkannya dengan pemikiran al-Ghazālī dalam *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh munculnya berbagai klaim pengalaman spiritual di tengah masyarakat yang memerlukan penjelasan ilmiah berdasarkan tradisi intelektual Islam. Penelitian menggunakan metode kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan pendekatan deskriptif-komparatif. Data dikumpulkan dari sumber primer dan sekunder, kemudian dianalisis melalui tahapan deskripsi, komparasi, dan interpretasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Ibn Hajar al-Haitami dan al-Ghazālī sama-sama berpendapat bahwa melihat malaikat oleh selain nabi merupakan sesuatu yang mungkin (*mumkin*) dan termasuk dalam kategori *karāmah* para wali. Perbedaannya terletak pada titik tekan argumentasi. Ibn Hajar lebih menekankan aspek kehendak Allah dalam kerangka hadis dan teologi, sedangkan al-Ghazālī menitikberatkan penyucian batin melalui konsep *kashf* dalam paradigma tasawuf. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa fenomena tersebut tidak bertentangan dengan akidah Islam selama dipahami dalam batas-batas teologis yang benar, sekaligus menawarkan kerangka akademik untuk menelaah berbagai klaim pengalaman spiritual yang berkembang di masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Melihat Malaikat, Ibn Hajar al-Haitami, al-Ghazālī, Hadis, *Karāmah*, *Kashf*.

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of seeing angels is one of the theological discourses that has long been discussed within the Islamic scholarly tradition. The belief in the existence of angels as unseen beings who, in essence, cannot be perceived by humans has become part of the consensus in Islamic creed (Aisyah et al., 2024). Nevertheless, the question of whether someone other than a Prophet can see angels continues to generate differing opinions among scholars across generations. Some scholars consider it impossible except for the Prophets, while others allow for the possibility through certain spiritual experiences (Rouf, 2020). The Qur'an itself contains several accounts of angels appearing to humans in visible forms. Angels have appeared to Prophet Abraham, Prophet Lot, and Mary in forms that could be directly seen. In hadith literature, it is also described that Gabriel came to Prophet Muhammad in the form of a man before the companions (al-Bukhārī, 2020). These narrations indicate that angels can manifest themselves by the will of Allah. However, scholars differ on whether similar experiences can occur to non-Prophets after the cessation of revelation.

This debate is not only theoretical but also carries practical implications within the Muslim community. In Sufi traditions, for example, there are numerous reports and claims regarding spiritual experiences, such as encounters with angels or witnessing the unseen reality through *kashf* (spiritual unveiling). In the contemporary era, similar phenomena have resurfaced through various confessions of religious leaders and spiritual figures who claim to possess the ability to interact with angels. This situation demonstrates that discussions concerning *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* (seeing angels) remain relevant for study, particularly regarding the boundaries between spiritual experience, creed, and the authority of Islamic scholarship.

Recently, public discourse in Indonesia has been drawn to statements made by the religious figure Mama Ghufon Al Bantani, who claimed to be able to summon the Angel of Death (Izrā'īl) as well as the angels Munkar and Nakir. He further asserted that he could present these angels before certain individuals (Ahdori, 2024). Such claims illustrate that reports of extraordinary spiritual experiences can still gain acceptance among segments of society without critical examination grounded in authoritative Islamic sources. Therefore, a systematic study based on hadith and Islamic theology is necessary to provide a sound scholarly framework for understanding claims related to the unseen realm.

Within the Sunni theological tradition, the experience of seeing angels is generally understood as a form of *kashf* or *mukāshafah*, namely the unveiling of metaphysical realities through divine grace rather than through any human capacity to control the unseen realm. Al-Ghazali explains that knowledge acquired through *kashf* arises when the veil covering the heart is lifted, enabling a person to perceive realities that lie beyond

the reach of ordinary sensory perception (al-Ghazali, n.d.). Meanwhile, in Islamic doctrine, angels are understood as beings who are entirely submissive to God's command and who carry out the functions assigned to them by Him (Burge, 2025). Therefore, the claim that human beings can actively summon or invoke angels is difficult to sustain within the framework of classical Sunni theology.

The differences of opinion among scholars on this issue also reflect epistemological differences in understanding the relationship between spiritual experience, revelation, and religious authority. Some groups consider spiritual experiences possible through processes of soul purification and *kashf* (spiritual unveiling), whereas others are more cautious and emphasize the importance of verification based on the Qur'an, hadith, and the opinions of recognized scholars (*ulama mu'tabar*). Therefore, discussions regarding the possibility of seeing angels cannot be separated from simultaneous studies of hadith, creed, and Sufism.

In this context, Ibn Hajar al-Haitami (d. 974 AH), in his *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah*, serves as an important authority for examining the theological possibility of seeing angels by non-Prophets. As one of the leading Shafī'i scholars with recognized expertise in jurisprudence, hadith, and Islamic theology, Ibn Hajar addresses this issue by drawing upon the opinions of earlier authorities, particularly al-Ghazali and al-Halimi. His discussion is especially significant because it demonstrates how hadith scholarship, Ash'ari theology, and Sufi spirituality converge in explaining extraordinary spiritual experiences within the Sunni intellectual tradition (al-Haitami, n.d.).

Amid the prevalence of claims regarding spiritual experiences in the contemporary era including claims of seeing angels associated with the *karamah* (miraculous gifts) of saints a systematic study of hadith and creed based on authoritative Islamic scholarship (*mu'tabar*) is required. Without a solid foundation from the classical Islamic scholarly tradition, Muslim communities remain vulnerable to accepting claims that are neither scientifically nor religiously verified. In this context, the works of Ibn Hajar al-Haitami (d. 974 AH), particularly *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah*, become highly relevant for in-depth study.

Research on angels has indeed been conducted from various perspectives. Mursalim et al., in their study entitled "*The Existence of Angels from the Perspectives of Sufism and Philosophy*", explain that, from a Sufi perspective, angels may interact with certain humans, particularly Sufis who reach a certain spiritual level through *kashf* (spiritual unveiling). This study is relevant because it demonstrates the possibility of spiritual experiences related to angels, although it has not critically addressed the issue within the framework of hadith (Mursalim et al., 2024).

Another study was conducted by Arni through the research "*Sufi Kashf from the Perspective of Scholars in Banjarmasin*". This research explains that *kashf* is a spiritual ability to perceive the unseen reality through soul purification and intensive spiritual training. This study provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding the possibility of seeing angels in the Sufi tradition (Arni, 2009). Additionally, Abdul Rouf, in the study "*Angels in the Qur'anic Perspective (A Comparative Study of Tafsirs of al-Ṭabarī and Quraish Shihab)*", discusses the concept of angels based on classical and contemporary interpretations, particularly regarding the essence of angels and their

position within revelation. This research provides a normative basis concerning angels as unseen beings, but it has not specifically addressed the issue of seeing angels for non-Prophets (Rouf, 2020). Meanwhile, the research by Aisyah et al., entitled “*Belief in Angels from the Perspective of Islamic Education*”, focuses more on the concept of faith in angels within the framework of Islamic education and has not specifically addressed the issue of *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* (Aisyah et al., 2024).

Although previous studies have made significant contributions to explaining the concept of angels from the perspectives of Sufism, philosophy, Qur'anic exegesis, and Islamic education, several limitations remain that leave room for further research. The studies conducted by Mursalim et al. and Arni primarily focus on the spiritual dimension and the concept of kashf without critically engaging with the issue through hadith analysis. Meanwhile, Abdul Rouf's study concentrates on the construction of the concept of angels within Qur'anic exegesis, whereas Aisyah et al. emphasize the educational aspects of Islamic creed. Consequently, these studies have not specifically examined the issue of *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* (seeing angels) from an integrated perspective that combines hadith studies, Sunni theology, and Sufism. Furthermore, to the best of the author's knowledge, no previous study has specifically examined Ibn Hajar al-Haitami's views on the possibility of seeing angels by non-Prophets through an analysis of *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* while simultaneously comparing them with the thought of al-Ghazali, one of the principal authorities cited by Ibn Hajar in this discussion. Despite their significant positions within the Sunni tradition, both scholars offer distinctive approaches to understanding the relationship between spiritual experience, kashf, karāmah, and religious authority. Existing studies also tend to discuss spiritual experiences in a normative manner without relating them to contemporary claims regarding encounters or interactions with angels that continue to emerge within society.

Based on this research gap, the present article offers two principal novelties. First, it examines the concept of *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* through an interdisciplinary approach that integrates hadith studies, Islamic theology, and Sufism. Second, it provides a comparative analysis of Ibn Hajar al-Haitami's and al-Ghazali's views concerning the possibility of seeing angels by non-Prophets, while simultaneously placing their arguments in dialogue with contemporary phenomena involving claims of seeing or summoning angels within society. Accordingly, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive academic framework for assessing various claims of spiritual experiences related to the unseen realm in contemporary Muslim communities.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze Ibn Hajar al-Haitami's perspective in *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* regarding the possibility of seeing angels by non-Prophets, compare it with al-Ghazali's view as one of the authorities upon whom Ibn Hajar relies, and examine the relevance of both perspectives to contemporary claims of spiritual experience within Muslim society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of *Ru'yat al-Malā'ikah* (Seeing Angels)

The term *al-malā'ikah* is the plural form of *malak* and etymologically derives from *al-ulūkah*, meaning "message" or "mission." In Islamic theology, angels are understood as luminous beings created from light who faithfully carry out Allah's commands and are capable of assuming different forms by His permission. They reside in the heavens and perform the duties assigned to them without deviation. Accordingly, the Sunni theological tradition rejects interpretations that identify angels merely as celestial bodies or as the souls of righteous people, since such views lack support from authoritative revealed sources (*al-adillah al-sam'iyah*) (al-Syaikh, n.d.).

The concept of *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* refers to the experience of seeing angels, either through direct visual perception or through forms manifested by Allah's permission. Although angels normally belong to the unseen (*ghayb*), the Qur'an and authentic hadith describe several occasions in which they appeared in visible forms. One of the best-known examples is the Ḥadīth of Jibrīl, in which the Angel Jibrīl appeared before the Prophet Muḥammad in the form of an unknown man and was later identified by the Prophet himself (Muslim, n.d.). These textual sources indicate that the appearance of angels occurs solely by Allah's will and does not alter their essential nature as unseen beings. This understanding represents the dominant Sunni theological position and provides the normative foundation for scholarly discussions concerning *ru'yat al-malā'ikah*.

The Concepts of *Karāmah* and *Kashf*

Within the traditions of Sunni theology and Sufism, *karāmah* and *kashf* are closely related concepts frequently used to explain extraordinary spiritual experiences among the *awliyā'* (friends of Allah). Although both concern the metaphysical realm, they differ in meaning and function. Understanding these concepts is therefore essential for explaining the theological possibility of *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* by individuals other than the Prophets (Arif, 2020).

Terminologically, *karāmah* refers to an extraordinary event (*khāriq li al-'ādah*) granted by Allah to His righteous servants without any claim to prophethood or challenge comparable to prophetic miracles (*mu'jizāt*). Within the Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamā'ah tradition, *karāmah* is regarded as both theologically and legally possible (*jā'iz*) because it occurs exclusively through Allah's will rather than through any independent power possessed by the saint (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Meanwhile, *kashf*, literally meaning "unveiling," denotes the removal of the spiritual veil covering the heart, enabling a person to perceive unseen realities through divine grace rather than through sensory observation or rational inquiry. In *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*, al-Ghazali explains that *kashf* results from spiritual purification (*tazkiyat al-naḥs*) and closeness to Allah, through which the heart becomes receptive to divinely bestowed knowledge (*al-'ilm al-ladunnī*) (Fahrezi, 2025). Consequently, *kashf* is understood as a personal spiritual experience and cannot independently establish Islamic legal rulings.

Thus, while *karāmah* refers to the extraordinary event itself, *kashf* explains the inner spiritual process through which such experiences may occur. Together, these

concepts provide the principal theological and mystical framework for understanding the possibility of seeing angels by non-prophets.

Previous studies on angels and related spiritual experiences can generally be grouped into three themes.

The first group examines angels from theological, philosophical, and exegetical perspectives. Mursalim et al. (2024) discuss the existence of angels through Sufism and philosophy, arguing that highly purified Sufis may interact with angels through *kashf*. Likewise, Rouf (2020) analyzes the concept of angels through a comparative study of the Qur'anic interpretations of al-Ṭabarī and Quraish Shihab, emphasizing their ontological status as unseen beings. These studies clarify the theological understanding of angels but do not specifically address the possibility of seeing angels through a hadith-based analysis.

The second group focuses on *kashf* and spiritual experience. Arni (2009) explains *kashf* as the capacity to perceive unseen realities through spiritual purification and sustained devotional practice. This perspective provides an important theoretical basis for understanding extraordinary spiritual experiences but does not examine their relationship with the hadith tradition concerning encounters with angels.

The third group discusses angels within the context of Islamic education. Aisyah et al. (2024) examine belief in angels as part of Islamic educational discourse, focusing primarily on strengthening students' understanding of the pillars of faith rather than addressing the theological implications of *ru'yat al-malā'ikah*.

Although these studies have enriched discussions on angels from the perspectives of Sufism, philosophy, Qur'anic exegesis, and Islamic education, several important gaps remain. Existing studies either emphasize the spiritual dimension of *kashf*, theological discussions on angels, or educational perspectives without integrating hadith studies, Sunni theology, and Sufism into a single analytical framework. Furthermore, no previous study has specifically examined Ibn Hajar al-Haitami's position on the possibility of seeing angels by non-prophets through a systematic analysis of *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* while comparing it with al-Ghazali's explanation of *kashf* and *karāmah*. Existing literature also tends to discuss spiritual experiences in normative terms without relating them to contemporary claims of encounters with angels that continue to emerge in Muslim communities.

Based on these gaps, this study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, it reconstructs Ibn Hajar al-Haitami's theological position concerning *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* based on *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah*. Second, it compares his perspective with al-Ghazali's concepts of *kashf* and *karāmah*. Third, it offers an integrated theological framework for evaluating contemporary claims of encounters with angels within the broader Sunni intellectual tradition.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative library research design to examine the theological discourse on *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* (seeing angels) in the Sunni intellectual

tradition. A library research approach is appropriate because the primary data consist of classical Islamic texts and scholarly literature rather than empirical field observations. Qualitative document analysis enables researchers to explore concepts, meanings, and theological arguments through the systematic examination of documentary sources (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

The study adopted a descriptive-comparative approach. The descriptive stage was used to reconstruct the views of Ibn Hajar al-Haitami and al-Ghazali concerning the possibility of seeing angels, whereas the comparative stage identified similarities, differences, and the epistemological foundations underlying their respective arguments. To strengthen the analysis, the study also employed the perspectives of *'ulūm al-ḥadīth* to assess the use and argumentative function of the relevant hadiths, together with a normative-theological (*kalāmī*) approach grounded in the Ash'arī tradition to interpret concepts such as *karāmah*, *kashf*, and spiritual experience.

The primary sources were *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* by Ibn Hajar al-Haitami and *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* by al-Ghazali, which constitute the principal references for examining their theological arguments regarding *ru'yat al-malā'ikah* (al-Ghazali, n.d.; al-Haitami, n.d.). Secondary sources consisted of scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and previous studies related to angels, *kashf*, *karāmah*, Islamic theology, and hadith studies (Anwar, 2020).

Data were collected through documentation techniques, including identifying relevant literature, reading the selected sources intensively, extracting passages related to the research topic, classifying the data according to major themes, and critically reviewing the arguments presented in both primary and secondary sources (Ismail, 2020; Mustaqim, 2019). Particular attention was given to discussions concerning the possibility of seeing angels, the concept of spiritual perception, and the theological reasoning employed by both scholars.

The data were analyzed through four interconnected stages. First, the descriptive stage reconstructed the arguments of Ibn Hajar al-Haitami and al-Ghazali based on their original works. Second, the comparative stage identified convergences and divergences in their theological reasoning, utilization of hadith, and epistemological assumptions (Fithoroini, 2021; Kabbani, 2023). Third, the interpretative stage examined the theological implications of both perspectives for contemporary discussions on spiritual experiences within Muslim society. Finally, the findings were synthesized to formulate a coherent analytical framework concerning the relationship between *ru'yat al-malā'ikah*, *karāmah*, and *kashf*. These analytical stages are consistent with qualitative document analysis, which emphasizes description, interpretation, and meaning construction from documentary evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed source criticism and cross-textual verification by comparing the primary texts with relevant classical and contemporary scholarship. The consistency of interpretations was also examined within the broader framework of Sunni theological thought to ensure that the analysis remained faithful to the original intellectual context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The Concept of Angels in the Perspective of Islamic Creed

From the perspective of Islamic creed, angels are unseen beings created by Allah SWT from light (*nūr*), as understood in various narrations and explanations by scholars. The existence of angels falls under the category of *sam'iyāt* (unseen matters known through revelation), and thus their primary basis is derived from the Qur'an and hadith, as well as the scholarly interpretations and explanations (Rhamdani et al., 2023). In Islamic thought, angels belong to the domain of *al-ghayb* (the unseen), referring to realities that are inaccessible to ordinary human perception and can only be known through divine revelation or exceptional spiritual experience (El-Aswad, 2020).

Some narrations suggest that the creation of angels occurred in stages according to the will of Allah rather than simultaneously. One narration attributed to Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī relates the origin of creation to the "Light of Prophet Muhammad," which was subsequently divided into several parts, from which various cosmic entities, including the 'Arsh (Divine Throne) and the angels, were created. According to this narration, the angels who bear the 'Arsh were created before the other angels. Although the authenticity of this narration has been debated among hadith scholars, Ibn Hajar al-Haitami cites it in *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* as part of his broader discussion on the creation and nature of angels (al-Haitami, n.d.).

ظاهر السنّة أنّ الملائكة لم يخلقوا دفعة واحدة؛ فقد أخرج عبد الرزاق بسنده عن جابر بن عبد الله الأنصاري رضي الله عنهما قال : قلت: يا رسول الله ! بأبي أنت وأمي؛ أخبرني عن أول شيء خلقه الله قبل الأشياء؟ قال : يا جابر إن الله خلق قبل الأشياء نور نبيك محمد ﷺ من نوره ، فجعل ذلك النور يدور بالقدرة حيث شاء الله ، ولم يكن في ذلك الوقت لوح ولا قلم ، ولا جنة ولا نار ، ولا ملك ولا سماء ، ولا أرض ولا شمس ولا قمر ، ولا إنس ولا جني ! ، فلما أراد الله تعالى أن يخلق الخلق قسم ذلك النور أربعة أجزاء؛ فخلق من الجزء الأول القلم ، ومن الثاني اللوح ، ومن أجزاء فخلق من الأول حملة العرش ، ومن الثاني الكرسي ، ومن الثالث الثالث العرش ، ثم قسم الجزء الرابع أربعة باقي الملائكة

Nevertheless, the narration concerning *Nūr Muḥammad* (the Light of Muhammad) has been a subject of debate among hadith scholars regarding the validity of its chain of transmission and its original sources. Therefore, in explaining the nature of the creation of angels, a more authoritative and widely accepted narration is the hadith recorded by Imam Muslim in *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*:

حَدَّثَنَا مُحَمَّدُ بْنُ رَافِعٍ، وَعَبْدُ بْنُ حُمَيْدٍ، قَالَ عَبْدُ: أَخْبَرَنَا، وَقَالَ ابْنُ رَافِعٍ: حَدَّثَنَا عَبْدُ الرَّزَّاقِ، أَخْبَرَنَا مَعْمَرٌ، عَنْ الزُّهْرِيِّ، عَنْ عُرْوَةَ، عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، قَالَتْ: قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ: «خُلِقَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ مِنْ نُورٍ، وَخُلِقَ الْجَانُّ مِنْ مَارِجٍ مِنْ نَارٍ، وَخُلِقَ آدَمُ مِنْ مِمَّا وُصِفَ لَكُمْ

The angels were created from light, the jinn were created from a smokeless flame of fire, and Adam was created from that which has been described to you. (Muslim, n.d.)

This hadith is one of the most authoritative narrations concerning the origin of the creation of angels and serves as a primary foundation in Islamic theology regarding their nature and existence. The content of the hadith affirms that angels possess a distinct substance of creation that differs from other creatures. While the jinn were created from fire and humankind from earth, angels were created from light. This difference in the substance of creation reflects the unique characteristics and functions assigned to each

creature within the cosmic order established by Allah SWT. From a theological perspective, the creation of angels from light is understood as a symbol of purity, obedience, and complete submission to the commands of Allah. This understanding is consistent with Qur'anic descriptions of angels as beings who never disobey Allah and who faithfully carry out whatever they are commanded to do.

In Islamic creed, belief in angels is one of the six pillars of faith (*arkan al-iman*) that every Muslim is required to affirm. Allah SWT says:

لَيْسَ الْبِرُّ أَنْ تُولُّوا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةِ وَالْكِتَابِ وَالنَّبِيِّينَ

"Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is [in] one who believes in Allah, the Last Day, the angels, the Book, and the prophets." (Qur'an, al-Baqarah [2]:177).

According to Ash'ari theology, angels are beings created from light (*nūr*), free from physical needs such as eating and drinking, and incapable of disobeying Allah, as they continuously fulfill His commands (al-Nasafi, n.d.). Imam al-Nasafi, in *'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyyah*, further explains that angels are capable of assuming different forms and manifesting themselves in various appearances, as demonstrated in several Qur'anic narratives and Prophetic traditions.

From these narrations, it can be understood that, in Islamic creed, angels possess several key characteristics: they are created from light, exist in great and continually increasing numbers, have specific tasks assigned by Allah, and remain in perpetual obedience without disobedience. Furthermore, there are indications of hierarchy among angels, such as the angels who carry the *'Arsh* (Divine Throne), who hold a special status.

Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī's Perspective in *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* on Seeing Angels for Non-Prophets

1. Biography of Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and the *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah*

Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī, whose full name was Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn 'Alī ibn Hajar al-Haitamī al-Sa'dī al-Anṣārī, was born in Egypt in 909 AH and passed away in Makkah al-Mukarramah in 974 AH. He is widely recognized as one of the leading Shāfi'ī scholars of the tenth century AH, whose scholarship encompassed jurisprudence (fiqh), hadith, theology ('aqīdah), and Sufism. His major works include *Tuhfat al-Muhtāj bi Sharḥ al-Minhāj* (jurisprudence), *al-Zawājir* (ethics), and *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah*, a collection of legal and theological opinions grounded in hadith scholarship (van Arendonk & Schacht, 1971).

Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah is a collection of legal opinions (*fatwas*) by Ibn Hajar al-Haitami, organized thematically to address a wide range of issues concerning Islamic theology, worship, social transactions (*mu'āmalah*), and various religious questions that emerged in the society of his time (al-Haitami, n.d.). One of the distinguishing features of this work is its extensive reliance on Prophetic traditions, which are frequently examined in terms of both their chains of transmission (*sanad*) and textual content (*matan*). This methodological approach has made *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah* an important reference within the Shāfi'ī tradition of hadith-based legal scholarship.

2. Ibn Hajar's Views on Seeing Angels

In *Fatāwā Ḥadīthiyyah*, Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī explicitly addresses the issue of seeing angels for non-Prophets on page 140. He begins the discussion by quoting a hadith about the angels Raqīb and 'Atīd, who record human deeds, and then expands it into a broader discourse regarding the possibility of seeing angels. The text of the fatwa is as follows:

أَنْفُوا أَفْوَاهَكُمْ بِالْأَجْلَالِ؛ فَإِنَّهَا مَجْلِسُ الْمَلَائِكَةِ الْكَرِيمِينَ الْحَافِظِينَ، وَإِنَّ مَذَاهِمَهُمَا الرَّيْقُ، وَقَلَمُهُمَا اللِّسَانُ

Clean your mouths with a toothpick, for the mouth is the seat of two noble angels who record deeds; indeed, their ink is saliva and their pen is the tongue" (al-Haitami, n.d.).

After quoting this hadith, Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī states that it does not have a strong chain of transmission (*lam yarid lahu khabarun wa lā atharun*). Nevertheless, he continues the discussion by citing the view of al-Halimi, who posits that angels can assign the two recording angels to multiple people simultaneously at different times and places, because angels have the ability to be present in multiple locations at once. Furthermore, Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī cites the opinions of al-Ghazali and other scholars who assert that seeing angels is possible (*mumkin*) for the friends of Allah (*awliyā'*). He emphasizes: *Original Text of Ibn Hajar's View on Ru'yat al-Malā'ikat*.

وَاخْتَارَ الْحَلِيمِيُّ تَعَدُّ الْمَلَائِكَةِ السُّؤَالِ وَتَسْمِيَّتِهِمْ بِذَلِكَ، وَيُرْسَلُ لِكُلِّ وَاحِدٍ اثْنَانِ كَمَا فِي كِتَابَةِ أَعْمَالِهِ. وَمِنْهَا ذَكَرَ الْغَزَالِيُّ وَآخَرُونَ: أَنَّ رُؤْيَا الْمَلَائِكَةِ الْآنَ مُمَكِّنَةٌ الْمَلَائِكَةِ بِهَا مَنْ يَشَاءُ مِنْ أَوْلِيَائِهِ

"Al-Halimi adopts the view that the angels assigned to record human deeds are numerous and named accordingly, and that two angels are sent to each person as in the recording of deeds. Among them, al-Ghazali and other scholars mention that seeing angels today is possible, and Allah honors with this anyone He wills among His friends (awliyā')." (al-Haitami, n.d.).

3. Analysis of Ibn Hajar's Hadith

In establishing his opinion, Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī refers to several hadiths and *athar*, including a narration from Ibn 'Abbas regarding the angel Gabriel, which he cites as evidence that angels have been seen by non-Prophets in certain contexts:

Hadith from Ibn 'Abbas (Hasan):

لَمَّا رَأَى ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ قَالَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ: «لَنْ يَرَاهُ خَلْقٌ إِلَّا أَنْ يَكُونَ نَبِيًّا» وَلَكِنْ يَكُونُ ذَلِكَ آخِرَ عُمرِكَ

"When Ibn 'Abbas saw him (Gabriel), the Prophet ﷺ said: 'No creature will see him except that he is a Prophet,' yet that will occur at the end of your life."

Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī analyzes this hadith carefully. He states that the Prophet's words to Ibn 'Abbas, "that will occur at the end of your life," indicate that seeing angels by non-Prophets is not absolutely impossible, but rather depends on Allah's will and the *karāmah* (spiritual grace) granted to His chosen servants.

Similarly, Ibn Hajar cites a narration from Aishah (RA) transmitted by Yazid ibn Arqam, which reinforces that seeing angels has occurred within the historical reality of Islam. Ibn Hajar emphasizes that such visions are not miracles exclusive to the Prophets, but rather fall under the category of *karāmah*, which can occur for the friends of Allah (*awliyā'*) by His permission.

The Ability of Angels to Manifest Themselves

Within the Islamic scholarly tradition, there is a consensus that angels have the ability to assume forms that can be perceived by humans (*al-tashakkul bi al-ṣūrah al-mubṣarah*). This is evidenced by various authentic narrations in the Qur'an and hadith. One such instance is when the angel Gabriel appeared to Prophet Muhammad ﷺ in the form of a man dressed in pure white, as narrated by Imam Muslim from 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭab. Similarly, the Qur'an records that the angel Gabriel once appeared to Maryam in the form of a perfect human being (Qur'an, Maryam [19]:17).

However, the point of debate among scholars is not the angels' ability to manifest themselves, but a more specific question: can humans other than Prophets, particularly the friends of Allah (*awliyā'*), see angels as the Prophets see them? This question forms the core focus of this study, as explicitly discussed by Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī in his *Fatāwā Hadīthiyyah*.

Differences in Seeing Angels for Prophets and Non-Prophets

Within the Ash'ari creed tradition, scholars distinguish between two categories of seeing angels. The first is the *true vision* (*ru'yah ḥaqīqiyyah*), which involves seeing angels in their original forms. This category is believed to be exclusive to Prophets and Messengers, as they possess inner and sensory faculties strengthened by Allah SWT through revelation and miracles (Tuḥfat al-Murīd Sharḥ Jawharat al-Tawḥīd, n.d.).

The second category is symbolic vision or vision in a transformed form (*ru'yah bi al-tashakkul*), in which angels appear in a form perceivable by ordinary human senses. This distinction in categorization serves as the foundation for both Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazali in constructing their respective arguments, which will be explored in depth in the following sub-chapter. Thus, this sub-chapter functions as a theoretical framework supporting the entire comparative analysis in this study.

Theological Position of Ibn Hajar al-Haitami

Ibn Hajar al-Haitami asserts that seeing angels for non-Prophets is *mumkin* (possible), not impossible, and falls under the category of *karāmah* for the friends of Allah (*awliyā'*). This view is based on several narrations, including the hadith transmitted from Ibn 'Abbas via al-Hakim, as well as reports (*athar*) from Aishah binti Abu Bakr, which serve as supporting evidence. According to him, such occurrences can only happen by Allah's will to His chosen servants (*man yashā' min awliyā'ih*).

Nevertheless, Ibn Hajar maintains a distinction between the experiences of Prophets and the friends of Allah in seeing angels. Prophets see angels within the context of revelation and prophetic miracles, while the friends of Allah may see angels as a form of *karāmah*, a gift from Allah. Thus, Ibn Hajar al-Haitami positions himself in a moderate stance in line with the Ash'ari-Sufi tradition, recognizing the possibility of seeing angels for non-Prophets as part of the *karāmah* of saints, while preserving theological boundaries that distinguish between prophethood and sainthood.

Al-Ghazali's Perspective on Seeing Angels for Non-Prophets

To understand al-Ghazali's perspective on seeing angels, it is first necessary to comprehend the concept of *kashf*, which serves as the epistemological foundation of his thought. Al-Ghazali divides human knowledge into two main channels: knowledge

acquired through the senses and reason (*'ilm al-hiss wa al-'aql*), and knowledge acquired through inner illumination (*'ilm al-mukāshafah*) (al-Ghazali, n.d.). According to him, the latter type of knowledge enables a person to unveil realities beyond the reach of ordinary senses, including the vision of angels. Al-Ghazali explains in *Iḥyā'*:

اعْلَمْ أَنَّ الْقَلْبَ مِرْآةٌ مَجْلُوءَةٌ، فَإِذَا صَفَا الْقَلْبُ وَخَلَصَ مِنَ الْكُذُورَاتِ انْجَلَتْ فِيهِ صُورُ الْمَلَكُوتِ كَمَا تَنْجَلِي الصُّورُ فِي الْمِرْآةِ

"Know that the heart is like a polished mirror. When the heart becomes clear and free from impurities, the images of the spiritual realm (malakūt) will appear within it just as images appear in a mirror." (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

From this statement, it is clear that al-Ghazali considers the purification of the heart as the primary prerequisite for witnessing the realities of the unseen world, including angels. This differs from Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī's approach, which emphasizes Allah's will (*mash'iyah*) as the determining factor, although the two perspectives are not substantially contradictory.

1. Al-Ghazali's View on the Possibility of Seeing Angels

Al-Ghazali explicitly states that seeing angels is possible for humans other than Prophets, particularly for those who have reached the highest spiritual ranks among the friends of Allah (*awliyā'*). He emphasizes that Prophets see angels through prophetic power (*nubuwwah*), whereas saints (*awliyā'*) can see them through sainthood (*wilāyah*) and perfect inner purity (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Furthermore, al-Ghazali divides the levels of perception of the unseen realm into three degrees: First Degree: Vision through true dreams (*ru'yā ṣāliḥah*), which can be experienced by any righteous Muslim. Second Degree: Vision through *kashf* while awake (*mukāshafah fī al-yaqẓah*), specific to saints who have purified their hearts. Third Degree: Direct and real vision (*ru'yah ḥaqīqiyyah*), exclusive to Prophets and Messengers.

Within this framework, al-Ghazali situates the possibility of seeing angels for the friends of Allah at the second degree, that is, through *kashf* while awake. This vision is not ordinary sensory perception but an inner vision that occurs when the heart of a saint reaches a certain level of clarity, so that the "mirror of the heart" can reflect the images of the spiritual realm (*malakūt*).

2. Evidence Used by al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali bases his view on several sources of evidence. First, he refers to historical events recorded in the Qur'an and hadith, where the companions of the Prophet witnessed angels in various events, such as the Battle of Badr, when Allah sent angels to aid the Muslims (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

Second, al-Ghazali refers to the Sufi scholarly tradition, which records the spiritual experiences of saints in witnessing the *malakūt*. He asserts that these experiences are not mere illusions or hallucinations but realities that can be epistemologically validated within the framework of *'ilm al-mukāshafah* (knowledge of spiritual unveiling).

وَقَدْ وَفَّقَ ذَلِكَ لِجَمَاعَةٍ مِنَ الصَّحَابَةِ مِنْ أَوْلِيَائِهِ، وَلَمَّا رَأَى ابْنُ عَبَّاسٍ جِبْرِيلَ قَالَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ لَهُ: كَرَّمَكَ اللَّهُ تَعَالَى

"And this (seeing angels) has occurred to a group of companions who are among the friends of Allah. And when Ibn ‘Abbas saw Gabriel, the Prophet ﷺ said to him: ‘Allah Ta‘ala has honored you’" (al-Ghazali, n.d.).

3. Theological Conclusion of al-Ghazali

Al-Ghazali holds that seeing angels for non-Prophets is mumkin (possible) and has indeed occurred in the historical reality of Islam. However, he imposes strict epistemological conditions: such visions can only occur for those whose hearts have attained perfect purity and clarity through the processes of takhallī (emptying oneself of negative traits), taḥallī (adorning oneself with praiseworthy traits), and tajallī (manifestation of Divine Light). In other words, al-Ghazali situates the vision of angels within a systematic and measured spiritual journey, rather than as an experience that occurs arbitrarily.

Comparative Perspective of Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazali and Its Implications

1. Systematic Comparison Table

After presenting the views of each scholar in depth in the previous sub-chapters, the following provides a systematic comparison between Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazali based on the key aspects relevant to this study:

Table 1. Detailed Comparative Analysis of Ibn Ḥajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazālī on the Discourse of Ru’yat al-Malā’ikah

Aspect	Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī	Al-Ghazali
Basic Position	Seeing angels for non-Prophets is mumkin (possible) and falls under the category of karāmah for the friends of Allah (awliyā’).	Seeing angels for non-Prophets is mumkin and has historically occurred among the companions who were friends of Allah (awliyā’).
Evidence	Hadith of Ibn ‘Abbas (narrated by al-Hakim), athar from Aishah (RA), and the view of al-Halimi on the angels who record deeds.	Qur’anic verses (QS. Ali Imran: 123–124), hadith of Ibn ‘Abbas, and the Sufī scholarly tradition recorded in Sufī literature.
Approach	Hadith-creed (ḥadīthī-kalāmī), based on analysis of the sanad and matan of hadith, reinforced by theological argumentation.	Sufism-creed (ṣūfī-kalāmī), based on the epistemology of kashf and ‘ilm al-mukāshafah integrated with Ash‘ari creed.
Conditions for Occurrence	Entirely dependent on Allah’s will (mash’iyyah Allāh) upon whomever He wills among His friends, without explicitly stated inner conditions.	Dependent on the purity and clarity of the heart (ṣafā’ al-qalb) through systematic and gradual processes of takhallī, taḥallī, and tajallī.
Nature of	Can be sensory (as experienced by	Emphasizes inner vision through

Vision	Ibn ‘Abbas) or in a transformed form (tashakkul).	kashf while awake (mukāshafah fī al-yaqzah), not merely ordinary sensory perception.
Difference from the Prophet	The Prophet sees through revelation and miracles; saints see through karāmah. Both are clearly distinguished in creed.	The Prophet sees through nubuwwah; saints see through wilāyah and kashf. Both are equally considered a gift from Allah.
Context of Writing	Fatwas that answer concrete societal questions about spiritual phenomena, normative-legal in nature.	Discussion within the framework of Sufism and spiritual development, pedagogical and educational in nature.

2. Analysis of Similarities and Differences

In general, there is a strong convergence between the views of Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazali in the discourse on seeing angels by non-Prophets. Both agree that this phenomenon is *mumkin* (possible) and does not contradict Islamic creed. They also both refer to the narration of Ibn ‘Abbas seeing the angel Gabriel as historical legitimacy. Furthermore, both situate this experience within the framework of sainthood (*wilāyah*), not prophethood (*nubuwwah*), thereby avoiding any problematic theological implications. Another point of convergence is their shared scholarly background in Ash‘ari creed and Shafi‘i jurisprudence, which provides a common foundation for their thought.

However, there are significant differences in approach and emphasis. Ibn Hajar emphasizes Allah’s will (*mashī’ah*) as the primary factor for the occurrence of the phenomenon, using a *ḥadīthī-kalāmī* approach that starts from hadith evidence and builds theological constructions. Meanwhile, al-Ghazali highlights the importance of heart purification (*ṣafā’ al-qalb*) through a *ṣūfī-kalāmī* approach, deriving from *kashf* experiences and then reinforced by textual evidence (*dalil naqli*). In terms of orientation, Ibn Hajar tends to adopt a normative approach in addressing societal questions, whereas al-Ghazali takes a pedagogical approach, providing a systematic spiritual framework such as the stages of *takhallī*, *tahallī*, and *tajallī*.

These differences are not contradictions but rather complementary perspectives (*ikhtilāf tanawwu’*). Ibn Hajar addresses the possibility from a theological standpoint, while al-Ghazali explains the spiritual mechanism. Together, they form a comprehensive understanding of the possibility of seeing angels within Sunni Islamic tradition. From the comparative table above, several fundamental points of agreement should be highlighted: Both agree that seeing angels for non-Prophets is possible (*mumkin*) and does not contradict proper Islamic creed. Both refer to the historical event of Ibn ‘Abbas seeing Gabriel as empirical evidence that such visions have occurred within Islamic history. Both situate the vision within the context of sainthood (*wilāyah*) and distinguish it clearly from prophethood (*nubuwwah*), ensuring no theological issues arise from this

acknowledgment. both operate within the Ash‘ari creed and Shafi‘i jurisprudential tradition, grounding their conclusions in a common scholarly lineage.

3. Integration of Hadith, Creed, and Sufism as a Model of Study

This comparison demonstrates that hadiths concerning unseen phenomena cannot be understood solely literally, but must be contextualized within the proper framework of creed and Islamic epistemology. Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī illustrates how a hadith scholar can integrate critical *sanad* analysis with theological reasoning to produce a balanced understanding of unseen matters and spiritual experiences. In this context, Dayan Fithoroini, in his article “*Textual and Contextual Hadith of the Prophet (Analysis of Muhammad Syuhudi Ismail’s Thought)*” published in *Nabawi: Journal of Hadith Studies*, explains that understanding hadiths should not stop at textual meaning alone but must also consider context, purpose, and the underlying scholarly construction (Fithoroini, 2021).

Such an integrative approach is evident in the thought of both Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazali, who combine elements of hadith, creed, and Sufism in explaining the possibility of seeing angels for non-Prophets. Within this framework, both scholars jointly affirm the theological legitimacy of the *karāmah* of saints in the Ash‘ari creed tradition. This provides a balanced scholarly foundation for Muslims to approach spiritual phenomena, avoiding two extreme attitudes: total rejection, which tends toward rationalistic reductionism, and blind acceptance without scholarly or theological verification. This study also shows that integrating hadith, creed, and Sufism produces a more comprehensive understanding than approaches that rely on a single discipline alone (Azra, 2013). Such an integrative model remains highly relevant for contemporary Islamic studies in Indonesia (Mustaqim, 2019).

Critical Analysis and Author’s Perspective: The Epistemological Unity of *Mukāshafah* and *Karāmah*

Based on the comparative analysis, the differences between Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazali are more accurately understood as differences in epistemological approach rather than substantive disagreement. These differences are not *ikhtilāf taḍādd* contradictory and mutually exclusive but *ikhtilāf tanawwu‘*, meaning variations in scholarly expression and perspective that are complementary (Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, *I‘lām*). Ibn Hajar interprets the phenomenon of non-Prophets seeing angels as a form of *karāmah*, an extraordinary gift granted by Allah to His friends (*awliyā‘*). On the other hand, al-Ghazali understands this phenomenon as the result of *mukāshafah*, an inner unveiling arising from the clarity and perfection of the heart. The author maintains that both terms essentially refer to the same spiritual reality but are constructed through different scholarly frameworks: Ibn Hajar employs a hadith-and-creed approach, while al-Ghazali articulates it through Sufism and spiritual epistemology.

Based on the foregoing analysis, this study argues that the differences between Ibn Hajar al-Haitami and al-Ghazali strengthen rather than weaken the coherence of their conclusions. Although they employ different scholarly approaches, both arrive at the same theological position regarding the possibility of seeing angels by non-Prophets. Ibn Hajar primarily addresses the normative-theological dimension by examining whether

such experiences are theologically possible and permissible within the framework of Sunni doctrine (al-Haitami, n.d.). In contrast, al-Ghazali focuses on the epistemological dimension by explaining how such experiences may occur through spiritual purification and the process of *kashf* (al-Ghazali, n.d.). Rather than representing contradictory perspectives, their approaches complement one another by addressing different aspects of the same theological issue. Accordingly, Ibn Hajar provides the normative and theological foundation, whereas al-Ghazali explains the spiritual mechanism through which such experiences may occur. This complementary relationship demonstrates the integration of hadith, theology, and Sufism in constructing a coherent understanding of extraordinary spiritual experiences within the Sunni intellectual tradition.

Table 2. Comparative Epistemological Framework of Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazālī on Ru'yat al-Malā'ikah

Scholar	Question Addressed	Method/Approach	Term Used
Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī	Is it possible?	Hadith + creed	<i>karāmah</i>
Al-Ghazali	How does it occur?	Sufism + epistemology	<i>mukāshafah</i>

Thus, the most important finding of this study is that the discourse on seeing angels in Sunni Islamic tradition, which has often been read as two separate narratives—hadith and Sufism—is in fact a unified epistemological discourse when read integratively. This integrative reading provides a fair and comprehensive framework for contemporary Muslims: recognizing the possibility of the phenomenon as a legitimate part of Islamic tradition, as emphasized by Ibn Hajar, while also providing strict and measured standards for spiritual verification, as formulated by al-Ghazali. This represents the original contribution of the study to the development of hadith and creed studies in Indonesia.

"Ibn Hajar and al-Ghazali are speaking about the same reality: one calls it karāmah, the other calls it mukāshafah. Together they construct a robust Islamic epistemological framework: Ibn Hajar lays its legal foundation, while al-Ghazali provides its spiritual guidance."

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that both Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī and al-Ghazali recognize the possibility of seeing angels for non-Prophets as part of the *karāmah* of saints, and not in contradiction with Islamic creed. Ibn Hajar al-Haitamī bases his view on hadith and Ash'ari theology, emphasizing that such occurrences happen solely by Allah's will to His chosen servants, while al-Ghazali emphasizes the Sufi dimension through the concepts of *kashf* and inner purification as the means of unveiling the unseen realm. Comparing the two perspectives demonstrates that classical Islamic scholarship allows for spiritual experiences while maintaining theological boundaries that distinguish the *karāmah* of saints from the miracles of Prophets. Consequently, this study contributes to the development of hadith, creed, and Sufism studies, while providing a scholarly foundation for approaching spiritual claims within contemporary Muslim society.

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